



Replacement Theology

Part II

The Fertile Soil for Replacement Theology

First Century

In the first century AD, the Church was well connected to its Jewish roots. Jewish believers regarded themselves as being under the umbrella of Judaism. They were viewed as just another sect of Judaism. The leaders in the early Church were all Jewish with Jerusalem at its center. As more Gentiles became believers in Jesus, first, through Peter and then the missionary work of Paul and Barnabas, a potentially divisive argument arose:

- Must Gentiles first become Jews before they can become Christians?
- Do Gentiles have to observe the Mosaic Law after they become Christians?

The conflict was settled at the Jerusalem Council by James, the brother of Jesus, the acknowledged leader of the Church at that time. (see Acts 15:1-35)

Second Century

Jewish leadership/influence continued the rest of the first century. Two significant events in the second century occurred that signaled a shift in their role in the Church. As rapid expansion of missionary activity successfully took place within the Gentile world (Asia Minor) the demographics of the Church changed. It became multi-ethnic with Jews being vastly outnumbered and their influence diminished as more Gentiles assumed positions of leadership.

- Eventually, leadership would be centered in Gentile cities like Antioch, Alexandria and Rome. The Church came under influence of the Greek/Roman worldview. Rome would take pre-eminence under Constantine in 312 C.E.
- The growing numbers of Gentile believers did not carry an identification with and an appreciation for the richness and strength of the Hebraic roots of the Christian faith, so a disconnect with those roots began to take place.

The earliest of Church Fathers reflect this disconnect in some of their teachings. Justin Martyr (100 – 165 C.E.) considered to be the first who articulated the idea of Replacement Theology wrote: "... the Jews have forfeited the Scriptures, and the prophets are now the property of the Church." Melito of Sardis (died 180 C.E.) accused the Jews of being Christ killers. Tertullian,

in his treatise "Against the Jews," in the same century, announced that God had rejected the Jews in favor of the Christians.

The second event that marked a shift from Jewish to Gentile came out of the Bar Kochba revolt, the last great rebellion of the Jews against the Roman Empire in 132-136C.E. The Messianic¹ Jews did not support the revolt and refused to fight, as the Jewish leader of the revolt, Simon Bar Kochba, laid claim to messiahship. His stature was supported by the highly revered Rabbi Akiva. Bar Kochba became the hope of the Jews. However, when the Roman Emperor Hadrian destroyed Jerusalem and exiled all Jews from the city there was no differentiation by the Romans between Messianic Jews and the rest of the Jewish community.

The divide between the two communities was sealed and the disconnect of believing Jews to the rest of the Jewish community was severed. It would impact Christian theology for centuries.

A New Way to Interpret Scripture

With Gentile leadership over the Church established by the end of the second century, Church Fathers faced a problem: What were they to do with the Old Testament? They had to use hundreds of Old Testament scriptures in proving the messiahship of Jesus, yet, Scripture also spoke of a future when Israel and the Jewish people would have a significant end time role. So they embraced a new method of reading and interpreting Scripture that was first introduced by biblical scholar and philosopher, Origen of Alexandria, in the third century. This allegorical interpretation greatly influenced later Church leaders. The Greek/Roman influence perspective denied the literal interpretation of scripture unless the particular text *clearly* indicated otherwise.

"In allegory, the Old Testament could be made a 'Christian' document. Through their efforts to spiritualize, typologize, and christologize the text, the early Church Fathers were able to find abundant Christian meaning in the Old Testament. Christ, or New Testament thought, was read *into*, rather than *out of*, the biblical text in some of the most obscure places....The transferring of the Jewish scriptures to the 'new' Israel meant clothing them in Christian terms."² The historical literal meaning of the texts were now reinterpreted and open to error.

"Christians were taught that the promises concerning Israel that had not yet been fulfilled should be allegorically applied to the church. This did violence to the text because it rejected the natural reading of the scripture in context. The meaning was "spiritually" divorced from the intention of the author and the understanding of the intended audience. Text after text about Israel's ultimate re-gathering to the Land and the ultimate glory that would be received were twisted to mean something else. The justification was that the New Testament speaks of the Church in terms that were used for ethnic Israel in the Hebrew Bible. However, these texts do

¹ Messianic Jews will be used to describe ethnic Jews who believe in Jesus as Messiah

² Marvin. R. Wilson, *Our Father Abraham*, (Grand Rapids, MI 49503, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1989) p. 97

not speak of Israel's replacement, but rather that the Church by analogy, has parallel meaning to Israel."³

The fruit of this kind of interpretation nullified the prophetic call on the Jews, the ultimate re-gathering of them to their ancient homeland, and reduced Jerusalem to simply a physical city with no future spiritual significance. Furthermore, portions of the Gospels where Jesus condemned the hypocrisy of the religious leaders of His day were now interpreted as His condemning all things Jewish. Jesus and Scripture were being gentilized! The Greco-Roman thought had totally displaced Hebrew influence by the end of the third century.

Constantine and the Church

The 4th century conversion of Roman Emperor Constantine to Christianity deepened the separation of the Christian Church from her Jewish roots. He had declared Christianity the religion of the empire, and decreed all other religions, including Judaism, as illegal. "But the new state religion endorsed Replacement Theology. This meant the end of formal persecution of Christians, but it also meant the beginning of persecution of the Jewish people in the name of the Church!"⁴

In the Council of Nicea, called by Constantine, the 318 attending Gentile bishops established Sunday as the Sabbath and separated Easter from the Jewish Passover. Other days observed by the Church were synchronized to secular, often pagan, observances. Jews were not permitted to live in Jerusalem and conversion to Judaism was a criminal offense. Finally, Jewish converts to Christianity were required to reject all Jewish practices, all Jewish identity, and disassociate from all Jewish contacts. Rejection of Jewish roots led to rejection of Jews. Rome became the recognized religious center of Christendom.

The period from Constantine to the first Crusade in 1086 C.E. is known as the Dark Ages. Rising hostility against the Jews was empowered by honored voices in the Church hierarchy. St. John Chrysostom, a revered preacher, and theologian, in a series of eight sermons declared: "Although such beasts [Jews] are unfit for work, they are fit for killing... fit for slaughter... the synagogue is not only a brothel and a theater; it is also a den of robbers and a lodging for wild beasts.... Jews are inveterate murderers, possessed by the devil, their debauchery and drunkenness gives them the manners of the pig."

Disconnect to Loathing

Increasingly, Christian liturgy and rites often reinforced anti-Jewish hostility. Disconnect to Jewish roots gave way to judgement, and judgement gave way to loathing for the Jew. "In 414,

³ Daniel C. Juster, Th.D., "The Replacement Theology Challenge Today", April 4, 2008
<http://www.tikkunministries.org/newsletters/dj-apr08.php>

⁴ Merrill Bolender, *When the Cross Became a Sword* (Indianapolis, Indiana 34478, Merrill Bolender-Psalms 71:18, 2011) p. 34

what might be termed history's first large-scale pogrom occurred... in Alexandria. A historian of the time says the Jewish settlement there was destroyed."⁵ The Church grew to have a powerful influence over the State. In time, the interests of the Church and State were often indistinguishable. Over the next 700 years, decrees by the Church further restricted the rights of Jews. Marriages between Christians and Jews were prohibited, building synagogues was restricted, and in 1078, the Jews were forced to pay taxes in support of the Church, just to name a few. While there were moderate voices in the Church calling for tolerance toward the Jews, unfortunately, they were too few to change the course.

The merging of Church and State became evident with the Crusades: Two hundred years of holy wars during which "holy warriors" marched on the Holy Land to rid it of Moslem infidels. In the wake of the campaigns across Europe to Palestine, a trail of Jewish blood and destroyed communities marked their travels. The seeds of disconnect with our Hebraic roots, first planted in the second century, created the fertile soil for pogroms⁶, blood libels, blame for the black plague that wiped out one-third of European population, expulsions, the Spanish Inquisition and murderous campaigns in communities across Europe.

"The Latrean Councils of A.D. 1179 and A.D. 1215 ordered Jews to live in separate quarters and to wear distinctive dress. This paved the way for ghetto living and the yellow badge required prior to and during the time of the Nazi Holocaust."⁷



Reformation Falls Short

Three hundred years later, Martin Luther, recognized as a great reformer confronting the massive corruption in the Church, also became one of the most bitter of anti-Semites. Disappointed when Jews would not convert under his tutelage, he turned against them. In his writings, he called Jews worse than devils, ritual murderers, and parasites. He recommended Jewish synagogues and schools be burned, their homes destroyed, and writings confiscated. Four centuries later, Luther's animosity against the Jews found full expression in Germany's Adolf Hitler.

"Destruction of European Jews between 1933 and 1945 appears to us now as an unprecedented event in history.... Yet if we analyze this singularly massive upheaval, we discover that most of what happened in those twelve years had already happened before. The Nazi destruction process did not come out of a void; it was the culmination of a cyclical trend....

⁵Edward Flannery, *The Anguish of the Jews: Twenty-three Centuries of Antisemitism* (Stimulus Books) p. 60

⁶ Pogroms: an organized often officially encouraged massacre of a particular ethnic group, in particular that of Jews in Russia or eastern Europe. In 1791 Russia's Catherine the Great first isolated the Jews in a defined area referred to as the Pale. This concentration of Jews made them easy targets for ongoing cycles of pogroms and anti-Semitic riots by enflamed mobs. Blood libels is the accusation that Jewish people used the blood of Christians, particularly Christian children, in religious rituals, especially in the preparation of Passover bread. While it first appeared in the Middle Ages the outrageous lie continues to be promoted today.

⁷ Don Finto, *Your People Shall Be My People* (Ventura, California, Regal Books, 2001) p. 90

- The missionaries of Christianity had said in effect: ‘You have no right to live among us as Jews.’
- The secular rulers who followed had proclaimed: ‘You have no right to live among us.’
- The German Nazis at last decreed: ‘You have no right to live.’⁸

The Lie Continues – Fulfillment Theology

Today Replacement Theology continues to infect the Church, presented in a body of belief called Fulfillment Theology. In this teaching, all the promises in Scripture are not replaced by the Church, but by Jesus, Himself. In Him, through His redemptive work, all of the promises that were ever made to the Jews and for the land are completed. Because the *irrevocable* calling upon Israel was already fulfilled with the coming of Jesus, there is no further special redemptive call on the Jews or Israel. Those who embrace Fulfillment Theology argue that it is not Replacement Theology, but, in fact, the end result is the same: the denial of the future role of Israel and the Jewish people in the culmination of the age and the restoration of all things.

There is an emerging movement among a growing number of Evangelicals who are sympathetic to the Palestinians and the narrative of an aggressive Israel. It, too, denies Replacement Theology. Messianic leader, Shira Sorko-Ram, writes in the June 2016 issue of the Maoz Israel Report: “Now, an entire movement among Palestinian Christians, promoted at Christ at the Checkpoint Conferences in Bethlehem, has risen up to join hands with Islam for the purpose of delegitimizing, isolating and destroying Israel with an enhanced version of Replacement Theology. Palestinians have gone much farther. They have created what is labeled as Palestinian Liberation Theology. According to them, Jesus was not a Jew. He was a Palestinian. Israel has no historical or theological right to exist. Rather, according to the rewritten scriptures, the Palestinians are the chosen people.”

Replacement Theology, Supersessionism, Fulfillment Theology or Palestinian Liberation Theology, all are different names for the same gross error that nurtures the disconnect from our Hebraic roots. They continue to reinforce the pain, hurt, and suspicion of the global Jewish community towards Jesus and the Body of Christ. Sadly, the Cross, that was to bring reconciliation to the world, has become a sword wielded by deceived people dipped in the innocent blood of Jews for centuries. It is time to right the error.

See Part III

The Biblical Response to Replacement Theology

⁸ Paul Hilberg, *Destruction of European Jews* (New York, NY 10003 Holmes & Meier Publ. Inc, 1985) p. 9