

# Judaizers and Gentilizers

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Dear brothers and sisters in Christ *Yeshua*:

It can be arguably said that the Apostle Paul might be one of the most misunderstood characters in the Bible. He is considered one of the chief builders of the early church and most significant purveyor of the gospel to the Gentiles. And yet, it was Christ's apostle, Peter who is considered Rome's first monarchical bishop. From him, and by one-man, apostolic succession (monarchical episcopacy) was presumed to continue through every church generation.<sup>i</sup>

Paul and Peter were both martyred in Rome (Figure 1), and both have shrines built in their memory. The Vatican, a small state within a city, is centered around a massive Basilican church constructed above Peter's shrine. Paul, on the other hand, is buried at the Basilica San Paulo Fuori le Mura, a formerly malaria infested plain that lay a mile beyond the walls of the city.



Figure 1 - Paul's Journey to Rome 60 A.D. (Rose Publishing)

Having been raised in the Rabbinic-Pharisaic tradition, some even claiming he had sat at the feet of Gamliel,<sup>ii</sup> Paul of Tarsus (Hebrew name Shaul or Saul) is considered one of the most scholarly men of his time. And, he inherited an additional privilege—Roman citizenship.

This duality gave Paul a unique perspective and even association. Paul could enter the great halls of the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, but he was also widely accepted among the Jewish communities scattered throughout the Roman Empire. Later, as Paul turned his ministry towards the Gentiles, he would be accused of being a heretic for turning the Jewish people away from the Law of Moses and turning the Hellenist Christians away from their Hebraic foundation.

Some early Christian thinkers, such as Marcion (140 A.D.), used Paul's writings to help pull Christianity away from its Jewish roots. Others accused Paul of being an anti-Semite and Jew hater for helping to create a new religion, called Christianity, that is not only separate from

Judaism but has been and remains to some degree, antagonistic and even hostile towards the Jewish people.

Paul's zealousness for Jewish Law and tradition placed him as a prominent leader of the Jewish resistance that would forcibly oppose this new rising sect of Judaism (Yeshua followers). Later in Antioch (the Capital of Syria), they would be called Christians.

Paul was powerfully transformed on his way to Damascus (Figure 2), where he intended to persecute the Jewish Christians who lived there.<sup>iii</sup> And, here is where Paul's real conflict began—one between the strict adherence to the Law for Jewish believers, and the other for the Gentiles who were now being saved through their simple faith in Christ.

Jews living in and around Jerusalem and Judea were by-in-large Aramaic speaking, while many living outside Judea and Samaria spoke predominately Greek, the international language of its time.<sup>iv</sup> The Greek way of life, called Hellenism, also began to spread from Asian minor into the Middle East under the conquests of Alexander the Great. Many of the Jews living in the diaspora had assimilated into certain aspects of Hellenist culture.

The story of Chanukah (167-160 B.C.) reveals the early division within Israel between the Jewish Aristocracy in Jerusalem and the priestly zealots. One group was growing comfortable and complacent with the Greek culture and economic prosperity, while the other clung to the theocratic traditions that been handed down from Moses and Aaron. In the end, the traditional zealots won, at least for a season.

During the Roman invasion of Israel in 63 B.C., the Jews were once again divided. Some accepted Roman Rule and were content living under Roman authority if they had the freedom to practice their traditional Jewish customs. Others revolted against the Romans, leading many



Figure 2 - Paul's Early Years (Rose Publishing)

thousands to be slaughtered and crucified. These revolts eventually led to the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D., and the near destruction of Jerusalem in 135 A.D.

Amid this political turmoil, was a small but growing family of Yeshua followers. Their message was much different as they followed the command of Yeshua: *"Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's"* (Matthew 22:21, NKJV).<sup>v</sup> These Messianic Jews often lived in isolation from their surrounding populations, choosing to dwell in this world but not be conformed to it.<sup>vi</sup>

The early church in Jerusalem held strictly to the Law and traditions of Moses. For this reason, and because they largely blended into their surrounding Jewish populace, they were relatively unscathed from persecution that came from the Jewish religious leaders. Unscathed, that is, until the stoning of Stephen, a Hellenist, who was falsely accused by another group of Hellenists, that he spoke to the Jews against observing the Law of Moses.<sup>vii</sup>

This disturbance appears to have instigated severe persecution of the Hellenist Christians by the Jewish leaders—Paul was one of them.<sup>viii</sup> A growing number of these Christians were Gentile converts, called "God-fearers," from the Hellenist populations that occupied communities outside Judea and Samaria.<sup>ix</sup> From historical accounts, these Hellenist communities appeared more receptive to the message of the gospel.

With Paul's transformation, persecution ended for a season, and peace and prosperity settled on the churches around Jerusalem.<sup>x</sup> However, during this time, a new conflict entered this dispersed Christian community. Were these new Gentile converts required to adopt the Law and traditions of Moses and become fully observant Jews (proselytes) to receive salvation?

The answer, as we know from scripture, was no. Instead, four simple laws were given to them: abstain from eating blood or anything sacrificed to idols, do not strangle an animal, and refrain from sexual immorality. The giving of these laws suggests that Gentile believers were not granted permissibility to become lawless. However, it also did not merit or condition their salvation.

Neither Jew nor Greek is required to fulfill any Law to receive the gift of salvation, except to receive the "life-giving Law of the Spirit,"<sup>xi</sup> *"For the letter [of the written Law] kills, but the Spirit gives life"* (2 Corinthians 3:6). And this written Law kills, not because it is now regarded as irrelevant under the new covenant. No, it kills because it requires the work of man to save the soul, and not the Spirit of God to make him a new creation in Christ where God's Law is now written in our hearts and minds.<sup>xii</sup>

Despite the decision to settle the matter of the Law for the Gentiles in the Council of Jerusalem (Figure 3), Paul continued to face theological challenges within the churches now established throughout Turkey, Greece, and Rome—some of which he helped plant himself.

One group, called Judaizers, continued to press for the complete conversion of Gentile believers to the Law of Moses. Another group, primarily centered in Rome, desired to distance itself from



its Hebraic foundation, eventually establishing a new Christian religion under the Roman Catholic Church that would be completely set apart from anything Jewish. Lastly, Paul faced conflict with Gnostic Christians who went around teaching there was no physical resurrection.

Paul now recognized that God's plan of salvation was not dependent upon any human effort to fulfill God's written Law or the traditions of man, i.e., the "works of the Law." God's plan was exclusively based on His unmerited grace found in Christ Jesus, "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ" (Galatians 2:16). And yet, he was also unwilling to offend anyone for their adherence to any law or custom, unless of course, it contradicted the Council of Jerusalem's decision regarding the Gentiles.<sup>xiii</sup>

Paul wrote, "To the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law" (1 Corinthians 9:20-22). Paul became all things to all men that he might save some of them.

We further read in scripture that Paul was not against the Law, for he knew the Law of God is perfect. He not only taught Christians from the Law, but he strictly observed the Law himself when he was with his Jewish brethren.<sup>xiv</sup> For this reason, he referred to the Law as our tutor or instructor that was intended to bring us to Christ.<sup>xv</sup> But the Law was also God's commandments and statutes for Israel.<sup>xvi</sup> Yeshua, of course, preached to the Jewish people from the Law, affirming He never came to change it, but to fulfill it.<sup>xvii</sup> However, Paul was specifically called to the Gentiles, who were not under the law. And yet, he still taught them from the Law of Moses.<sup>xviii</sup>

For this reason, Paul disputed against the Hellenists who tried to persuade the Jewish people to abandon the Law of Moses.<sup>xix</sup> While the "curse of the Law"<sup>xxx</sup> was removed in Christ for those who believe in Him, Israel's obligation to obey God's Law remains eternally binding. Not as a means of salvation, but in the place of corporate responsibility and stewardship for the foundation of God's Kingdom that one day will be established here on earth. Paul said, "What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles [written word, which included the commandments] of God" (Romans 3:1-2).

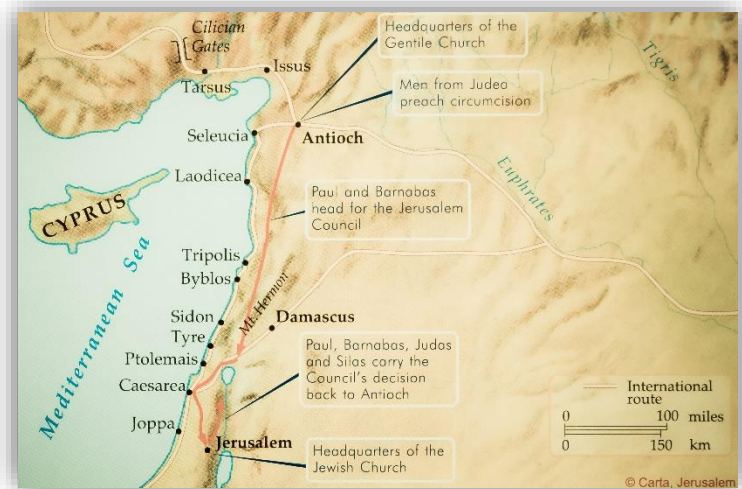


Figure 3 - The Jerusalem Council 50 A.D. (Rose Publishing)

Before Paul's transformation, it was his zeal for Israel and their Mosaic Law that led him to persecute anyone who tried to pervert the Law by drawing Israel away from it. It is written, *"But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has spoken in order to turn you away from the Lord your God... to entice you from the way in which the Lord your God commanded you to walk"* (Deuteronomy 13:5).

And now, Paul was defending the Gentile Christians from the heavy burden of the Law that the Judaizers were demanding of them. For this, Paul was effectively torn between two worlds: one for the salvation of his people, the Israelites, who were still fiercely still clinging to the Law, and the other for the salvation of the Gentiles who were saved by their pure and simple faith in Christ.

In response to the Judaizers, Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians:

*"Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love"* (Galatians 5:1-6).

But then Paul began to observe another extreme and opposite phenomenon developing within the church in Rome. They went far beyond rejecting the Law of Moses. They began to reject the very foundation of their faith that God had established through the Patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, this foundation that, one day, would be essential for the Kingdom of God. Ironically, while Paul wrote to the church in Rome, he never visited the church or had any part in its establishment. Historians disagree on the origins of the Roman church, although speculation is Hellenists who immigrated to the city established it.<sup>xvi</sup>

One thing, however, remains clear from scripture. The church in Rome was rejecting its biblical foundation. And for this, Paul wrote to the Romans:

*"And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, 'Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in.' Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either"* (Romans 11:17-21).

*"For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved..." (Romans 11:25-26).*

Paul was boldly appealing to the Romans not to reject the foundation of their faith, recognizing that the Kingdom of God belonged to Israel. But now, God had also called the Gentiles into the Kingdom and was giving them a place that rightfully belonged to the Jewish people. Yeshua warned the Jewish leaders for their arrogance and lack of faith when He said, *"Many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."* (Matthew 8:11-12).

Therefore, Paul also warned the Gentiles not to boast or become arrogant against the Jewish people. And arrogance is precisely what the church in Rome did. By the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, there was already a substantial Catholic (*Katholikos/ē*) meaning "universal" church established in Rome. The two other major centers at the time were in Antioch (modern-day Syria), and Alexandria, Egypt.

Arguments between the eastern and western Christian centers surrounding observance of the Passover, as well as heretical theologies introduced by Gnostic Christians from Alexandria, culminated in the first Council of Nicaea (situated in modern-day Turkey) in 325 A.D., the first ecumenical council of the Christian church.<sup>xxii</sup>

It is interesting to note that not one Jewish leader was invited to this council. Emperor Constantine Augustus convened the council to settle these disputes within the church, and to unite his empire under the banner of Christianity. His letter to this newly formed, and now more powerful united Catholic church reads (in part) as follows:

*"First of all, it appeared an unworthy thing that in the celebration of this most holy feast [Passover] we should follow the practice of the Jews, who have impiously defiled their hands with enormous sin, and are, therefore, deservedly afflicted with blindness of soul. For we have it in our power, if we abandon their custom, to prolong the due observance of this ordinance to future ages by a truer order, which we have preserved from the very day of the passion until the present time. Let us then have nothing in common with the detestable Jewish crowd, for we have received from our Savior a different way... still it would be incumbent on your judgments to strive and pray continually that the purity of your souls may not seem in anything to be sullied by fellowship with the customs of these most wicked men... therefore, it was needful that this matter [of the Passover observance] should be rectified, so that we might have nothing in common with that nation of parricides who slew their Lord..."*

*"I myself have undertaken that this decision [to change the observance of the Passover to one Sunday per year] should meet with the approval of your wise judgment... Receive, then, with all willingness this truly divine injunction, and regard it as in truth the gift of God. For*

*whatever is determined in the holy assemblies of the bishops is to be regarded as indicative of the divine will. As soon, therefore, as you have communicated these proceedings to all our beloved brethren, you are bound [by Roman Civil Law] from that time forward to adopt for yourselves and to enjoin on others the arrangement above mentioned.*<sup>xxiii</sup>

And so, here we read of the Gentilizers, those who would take the extreme, opposite position of the Judaizers, that Christ not only rejected Israel and the Jewish people, but that He intended to create for Himself a new religion, called Christianity, and a new family to replace Israel, called the church.

Constantine and the church at Rome were seeking to establish their own unique identity in Christ apart from the Jewish people. And yet, Paul reminded them that it was *they* who were grafted in amongst the children of Israel and not the reverse. The Gentiles were to become sharers of the same promises that were inherently and at one time, exclusively reserved for the natural seed of Abraham—the sons of Israel.

Notice also how Constantine took both the Law of Moses and the Jewish traditions of the oral Law that were celebrated in the Passover, and he created a new ceremonial law for the church that was suddenly bound by Roman Civil Law. This meant that breaking any law ordained by the church could be faced with civil penalties; those penalties later included being put to death for violating man's superimposed law.

I find it interesting how the Lord warned the Jewish people that the prince of this world, who is Satan, would attempt to change God's Law and His calendar.<sup>xxiv</sup> How fitting that Satan would also attempt to corrupt the church into violating these two ordinances by separating the church from its Hebraic foundation.

Because of the zeal of some Messianic Jews and Christians to see the church restored to its biblical foundation, the modern-day Hebrew Roots movement<sup>xxv</sup> has also created further division within the church. But God is going to restore His church, for He has promised to return for a bride that is without spot or wrinkle.<sup>xxvi</sup> And since the covenants and the Law were given to the Jewish people, the full restoration of the church is predicated on the restoration of Israel. Therefore, the Gentiles should seek after what now inherently belongs also to them, including the feasts of the Lord and other sacraments that God has ordained as holy.

This restored church will be a new expression never seen in the earth—one new man—every tribe, tongue, people, and nation redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, worshiping our King with a new song.<sup>xxvii</sup> Yes, a new expression, but established on a foundation, this is ancient of days. *"Therefore every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old"* (Matthew 13:52).

We are living in a period in what theologians call "the dispensation of grace." This time of grace is simply God overlooking, for a season, the deficiencies of man living in a fallen world with corruptible bodies that are tainted by sin and sinful nature inherited from Adam. *"Truly, these*

*times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained..." (Acts 17:30-31).*

There is a time coming when the Lord will begin to move on His church, and reveal through His Spirit from deep within our souls, a hunger and desire to see the Kingdom of God established here on earth as it is in heaven.<sup>xxviii</sup> The eyes of those who are blind will be opened, for the Lord has promised, *"These also who erred in spirit will come to understanding, And those who complained will learn doctrine" (Isaiah 29:24).*

It is written, *"Now it shall come to pass in the latter days That the mountain of the Lord's house Shall be established on the top of the mountains, And shall be exalted above the hills; And all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, To the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths.' For out of Zion shall go forth the law, And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Isaiah 2:2-3).*

Yes, in the latter days before the return of Christ, He will establish the mountain of the Lord's house, which is His church, on top of all the families of the earth. It shall be established in Jerusalem, just as it was in the first century so that the Apostolic word of the Kingdom decreed by Yeshua will go forth from Jerusalem to all the nations of the earth.<sup>xxix</sup> The church will come full circle, returning to her foundation, and this promise will be fulfilled before the Lord returns.

The nations will flow up to Jerusalem to learn of God's Law and His ways, and the church will teach the nations how to obey the Law that was given to Israel to steward for a season until every nation comes under the Law of God. For Christ, will rule all the nations with a rod of iron, and the government of God's Kingdom will rest upon His shoulder.<sup>xxx</sup>

And, when Christ finally returns to the Mount of Olives, which is opposite the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, *"Everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles" (Zechariah 14:16).*

For the Lord, has promised, *"The sons of the foreigner Who join themselves to the Lord, to serve Him, And to love the name of the Lord, to be His servants—Everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, And holds fast My covenant—Even them I will bring to My holy mountain, And make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices Will be accepted on My altar; For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations" (Isaiah 56:7).*

Amen!

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<sup>i</sup> MacCulloch, Dairmaid. Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years. Penguin Books. 2009.



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<sup>ii</sup> Acts 5:34. Gamaliel the Elder (/gə'meɪliəl, -'mɑː-, ˌgæmə'liːəl/; also spelled Gamliel; Hebrew: רבן גמליאל הזקן "Rabban Gamliel HaZaken"; Koinē Greek: Γαμυλιήλ ὁ Πρεσβύτερος), or Rabban Gamaliel I, was a leading authority in the Sanhedrin in the early first century CE. Wikipedia.

<sup>iii</sup> Acts 9:1-6.

<sup>iv</sup> Walker, Williston, Norris, A. Richard, Lotz, W. David, and Handy, T. Robert. *A History of the Christian Church, Fourth Edition*. Scribner.

<sup>v</sup> All Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Bible (NKJV) unless otherwise noted, Thomas Nelson Inc., 1982.

<sup>vi</sup> Romans 12:2.

<sup>vii</sup> Acts 6:8-15, 8:1.

<sup>viii</sup> Acts 8:3.

<sup>ix</sup> Acts 11:20-21.

<sup>x</sup> Acts 9:31, 12:1.

<sup>xi</sup> The "life-giving Law of the Spirit" is in Christ, for He is not only the embodiment of the whole Law that He fulfilled on the cross, but He is also the embodiment of all truth; this truth being Christ crucified for our sin and resurrected so that we might have eternal life in Him, and this truth being that He is the door and the only way to our Heavenly Father and the Kingdom of God (John 14:6).

<sup>xii</sup> Jeremiah 31:33.

<sup>xiii</sup> Watson, Francis. *Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles: A Sociological Approach*. Society for New Testament Studies, Monograph Services 56. Cambridge University Press. 1989.

<sup>xiv</sup> Ephesians 6:2. Philippians 3:5.

<sup>xv</sup> Galatians 3:24.

<sup>xvi</sup> Taylor, Justin. What Does the Word "Law" Mean in the Bible? TheGospelCoalition.org.

<sup>xvii</sup> Matthew 5:17.

<sup>xviii</sup> Romans 11:13.

<sup>xix</sup> Acts 9:29.

<sup>xx</sup> The "curse of the Law" is the penalty for breaking God's Law. It is physical and spiritual death, for the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). All humanity, including Israel, has been under this curse since the fall of man. God revealed, through Israel, the punishment for this curse to all who disobey God, to the Jew first who disobeyed the Law of Moses, and now to the Jew and the Greek who reject Christ. And, God has revealed how this curse, this sting of death is removed for all who are now in Christ, both Jew and Gentile (1 Corinthians 15:55).

<sup>xxi</sup> MaGee, Greg. The Origins of the Church at Rome. Bible.org.

<sup>xxii</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Pavao, Paul. Decoding Nicea: The Appendices. Christian History for Everyman. Christian-History.org.

<sup>xxiv</sup> Daniel 7:25.

<sup>xxv</sup> The Hebrew Roots Movement is a religious movement that advocates for the return and adherence to the first century walk of faith and obedience to the Torah by seeking a better understanding of the culture, history, and religion-political backdrop of that era which led to the core differences with both the Jewish, and later, the Christian communities. Wikipedia.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Ephesians 5:27.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Revelation 5:9.

<sup>xxviii</sup> Matthew 6:10.

<sup>xxix</sup> Acts 1:8.

<sup>xxx</sup> Revelation 12:5, 19:15. Isaiah 9:6.