

## Are Christian Doctrines Anti-Jewish?

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### Intro:

When I first was challenged to investigate the claims of Christianity, my knee-jerk reaction was: “That’s not for Jews!”

Most Jewish people today would react similarly because we’re taught that the teachings of Christianity are not compatible with Judaism. Putting it another way, many of us feel that believing in Christianity is not a Jewish thing to do. Baptism, Communion, the Triune God, et cetera, all seem alien to most Jewish people today.

I’m going to devote the remainder of this essay to investigating whether or not the teachings of Christianity are in fact contrary to Jewish teachings. We will find that not only are they compatible, but the teachings of Christianity are found in the Hebrew Bible!

### Baptism:

New Testament times started historically with the advent of John the Baptist. The historian Luke records that “in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar... the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness” (Luke 2:1,3). This is the first major event dividing Old Testament times, or Hebrew Scripture times, from New Testament times. Something new was going on. But the important question to ask is this: was something *not* Jewish going on?

**“ The facts show that baptism was not a new idea thought up by John.”**

John was baptizing people. “Baptism” comes from a Greek word that literally translates: “to dip<sup>1</sup>.” So I ask you, is it un-Jewish to baptize?

Moise Rosen writes in his book, *Y’Shua*: “Another use of symbolic purification by water became part of early Jewish tradition. It was immersion, or *tevilah*, for Gentile converts to Judaism... Although the only Biblical requirements for entrance into the covenant was circumcision, baptism became an added requisite. No one knows exactly when or by whom the requirements were changed to include baptism, but it was before the time of Jesus, as we learn from the debates on the subject of proselyte baptism between the rabbinic schools of Shammai and Hillel, both contemporaries of Jesus.<sup>2</sup>”

The facts show that baptism was not a new idea thought up by John. It existed before the time of Jesus as a symbolic gesture of entering the Jewish covenant community. If John did anything new, he introduced baptism *to* Jewish people, to symbolically show their desire to be a part of the eternal covenant community.

### Jesus:

Jesus’ public ministry began with his baptism by John. The Bible records, “And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all. And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day” (Luke 4:14-16).

**“ Jesus did nothing in act or word that would separate him from his Judaism.”**

Every indication here tells us that Jesus intended in every way to remain Jewish. He stayed in Nazareth, a Jewish town, “where he had been brought up,” and he went into the Synagogue, the Jewish place of worship. Significant is that he went on the Sabbath, and that it was “his custom.” Jesus evidently had an amount of fame, because we are told that “there went out a fame of him through all the region round about.” Again, where did he teach? On the street somewhere? In a private home? No. The scripture is very clear, “he taught in their synagogues,” the Jewish synagogues, and the reaction of the crowd? He was “glorified of all.”

I realize that this may seem pointless, proving Jesus’ Judaism that is, but there are many who define Judaism as *not* believing in Jesus. Be clear, Jesus did nothing in act or word that would separate him from his Judaism.

At the end of His life, Jesus was asked by the Roman governor if he was the king of the Jews?

It is important to note that Jesus does not here forsake His Judaism. “King of the Jews?” he could have said. “Forget them. I’m here to start a new religion. Forget Judaism!” But that’s not at all what he said. He very appropriately said, “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil” (Matthew 5:17).

### New Covenant:

Certainly the teaching of the new covenant must be incompatible with Judaism! After all, the Jews were a covenant people, so to bring up a *new* covenant sounds *non-Jewish*; but is it?

**“ the Jewish prophet Jeremiah promised the new covenant 600 years before Jesus!”**

“And [Jesus] took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you” (Luke 22:19-20).

Now that the scene is set, we’ve read it, we know what he said, let’s ask: is this teaching about the new covenant somehow *non-Jewish*?

Certainly any student of Jewish ways at the time would have been very familiar with the thirty-first chapter of Jeremiah's prophecy. The Hebrew writer Jeremiah, writing approximately six hundred years before Jesus<sup>3</sup>, taught, "Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD... for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jeremiah 31:31-33,34).

**“ [Jesus] did not come to forsake his Jewish roots, but rather to give them meaning.”**

Notice what is promised here: a new covenant. But why? What was wrong with the old one? Well, the Scriptures say that nothing was wrong with the old covenant; the problem was in the fact that the people were unable or unwilling to follow it. It is in no contradiction to Judaism to talk about a new covenant. In fact, the Jewish prophet Jeremiah promised the new covenant 600 years before Jesus!

### **Broken Messiah:**

But what about all that business about Jesus' body being broken for them? I propose that it was in no way *non*-Jewish for Jesus to mention that, after all, it was the prophet Isaiah, who, talking about the coming Messiah, said that he would be "wounded for our transgressions... bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5).

Jesus claimed to be the fulfillment of Judaism. He did not come to forsake his Jewish roots, but rather to give them meaning.

### **The Trinity:**

**“ Time and again we have seen that there is no Biblical contradiction to being both a Jew and a Christian.”**

Christians not only believe Jesus to be the Messiah, but also the second person of the Trinity. Many Jewish people will object to this. According to Judaism, Jesus cannot be God!

Given Deuteronomy 6:4, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one<sup>4</sup>," a very well-known verse recited in Temples weekly, it seems that Rabbi Stanley Greenberg's words are true when he says, "Monotheism, an uncompromising belief in one God, is the hallmark of the Hebrew Bible."<sup>5</sup> But we need to ask, is that *really* true? Let's look closer and use the original language as a tool to more accurate understanding.

Historian Arnold Fruchtenbaum writes:

The main argument lies in the word 'one,' which is the Hebrew word, *echad*. A glance through the Hebrew text where the word is used elsewhere can quickly show that the word *echad* does not mean an absolute 'one' but a compound 'one.' For instance, in Genesis 1:5 the combination of evening and morning comprise one (*echad*) day. In Genesis 2:24 a man and a woman come together in marriage and the two "shall become one (*echad*) flesh." In Ezra 2:64 we are told that the whole assembly was as one (*echad*), though, of course, it was composed of numerous people. Ezekiel 37:17 provides a rather striking example where two sticks are combined to become one (*echad*). Thus, use of the word *echad* in Scripture shows it to be a compound and not an absolute unity.

There is a Hebrew word that does mean an absolute unity and that is *yachid*, which is found in many Scripture passages, (Genesis 22:2,12; Judges 11:34; Psalm 22:21; 25:16; Proverbs 4:3; Jeremiah 6:26; Amos 8:10; Zechariah 12:10), the emphasis being on the meaning of "only." If Moses intended to teach God's absolute oneness as over a compound unity, this would have been a far more appropriate word.<sup>6</sup>

Time and again we have seen that there is no Biblical contradiction to being both a Jew and a Christian.

### **Pentecost:**

Pentecost was when God's Holy Spirit came down from heaven to live in the hearts of the believers<sup>7</sup>. This must be it! That's not Jewish! But is it? Peter, the leader of the Jewish Christians, explained this by quoting the Jewish prophet Joel, who wrote, "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit... that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered" (Joel 2:28-29, 32).

**“ Right from the beginning of this new covenant movement, it was clear that it was a movement established by Jews, based on Jewish Scriptures, and taught to Jewish people.”**

Peter, like Jesus before him and John before him, was able to appeal to Hebrew Scripture to back up everything he taught. If what Peter was preaching at Pentecost was *non*-Jewish, then the Jewish prophet Joel must also be *non*-Jewish, a statement no Rabbi would agree to. In fact, it is significant that Peter opened up his speech by addressing the crowd, "Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem" (Acts 2:14).

Right from the beginning of this new covenant movement, it was clear that it was a movement established by Jews, based on Jewish Scriptures, and taught to Jewish people.

## Gentiles:

It's interesting to note that a council had to be formed to discuss whether or not non-Jewish people, or *Gentiles*, could truthfully be a follower of Jesus without being Jewish. This we find in Acts chapter 10. For the purpose of context, I should explain that at this early point in the history of the new covenant church, it was actually against Jewish law for a Jew to associate himself with a Gentile or to visit him<sup>8</sup>. But Peter was invited to the house of Cornelius, a Roman, a *Gentile!* Peter was now in a tricky situation; on the one hand, customs told him not to be in the presence of non-Jewish people, but on the other hand, they honestly wanting to know about the Jewish God.

**“ Jesus is a Jew for Jews, but if the Gentiles want to be included, that's okay too.”**

Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:)... To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.

While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 10:34-36,43-45).

It is clear that Peter in no way compromised the Judaism of Jesus. It was as if his attitude could be paraphrased as: *hey, Jesus is a Jew for Jews, but if the Gentiles want to be included, that's okay too.*

**“ a council had to be formed to discuss whether or not non-Jewish people, or Gentiles, could truthfully be a follower of Jesus.”**

Jesus Himself taught this same way. Matthew records that a Samaritan woman, a Gentile, approached him to heal her daughter. His answer was very clear: “I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 15:24). Jesus eventually did heal the girl because of her faith, but it was only after making it clear that Jesus was sent to save first Israel. Even the Apostle Paul, a man who proudly called himself a “Hebrew of the Hebrews<sup>9</sup>” wrote in his letter to the church in Rome that the Gospel is “the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the [Gentile]” (Romans 1:16, emphasis mine).

## Paul:

With that we segue to discuss the Apostle Paul.

Historian Bruce Shelley writes: “No man-other than Jesus, of course- has shaped Christianity more than Saul (or, as Christians came to say, Paul, a name more familiar to the ear of Greek-speaking people).<sup>10</sup>” It was Paul who wrote thirteen of the twenty-seven New Testament books. It was Paul who spread Christianity throughout Asia, establishing more churches than any of the other Apostles. So let's ask of Paul what we've asked of John, Jesus, and Peter: Did his teachings conflict with Judaism?

**“ like John, Jesus and Peter, Paul's theology was strongly based on Jewish Scripture.”**

Paul's letter to the church at Rome begins this way:

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, (Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures,) Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead. (Romans 1:1-4)

Here Paul tells five significant details about the message he was teaching. First, it was “promised afore by [God's] prophets.” This is significant because like John, Jesus and Peter, Paul's theology was strongly based on Jewish Scripture. In fact, the second point is that this gospel is promised “in the holy scriptures.” Given that Paul wrote to the Romans circa 58 A.D.<sup>11</sup>, and the first New Testament Canon was not established until circa 140 A.D.<sup>12</sup>, a full New Testament “official” canon until 397 A.D.<sup>13</sup>, then one can safely conclude that what Paul meant when he said “holy scripture,” was in fact the thirty-nine books of the recognized Hebrew Canon. Paul was not departing at all from Jewish Scripture; on the contrary, he depended on it.

Point three about the Gospel is that it is about God's Son. Well, what about His Son? Point four is that God's Son's would be a descendant of David. This is of strong significance since it was well known that the Messiah would come from the ancestry of David. (Psalm 132:11; Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15; Isaiah 11:10). This is also important because Jesus was descended from David (Matthew 1:1-16, Luke 3:23-38). The fifth point is that all of these claims are proved true by Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Referring to his future resurrection, Jesus himself in three places called it the “sign of Jonah,<sup>14</sup>” once again depending on Hebrew Scriptures for the significance.

**“ All who study Paul's life will find him a Jewish Apostle preaching the Jewish Gospel to both Jewish and Gentile listeners, about the Jewish Messiah.”**

Referring to his message, Paul says that “it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the [Gentile.]” (Romans 1:16, emphasis mine). Please note that in no way did Paul back off from the position that the gospel of Christ came first for the Jew. This is reminiscent of the story discussed earlier when the Samaritan (Gentile) woman wanted healing from Jesus and he replied that he came first for the lost sheep of Israel (Matthew 15:24). Paul’s position in the letter to the Romans is a peculiar one to the twentieth century reader. To us, Christianity is a *Gentile thing*. How odd it is for us today to hear of a Jew who trusts Christ. I hope I am proving that it was in fact the other way around in Biblical times. Listen to the language Paul used:

**“ We must conclude that there is no teaching in the New Testament that contradicts Biblical Jewish teaching.”**

Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also: Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith. (Romans 3:29-30)

Paul was actually defending that it was okay for Gentiles to believe in Jesus too. Over the past 2,000 years this has completely reversed!

The worst accusation that could be made against Paul is that he was including Gentiles into the things of Judaism. But even that was not new! The Jewish prophet Isaiah, writing hundreds of years before Paul, prophesied this about God’s plan: “I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth” (Isaiah 49:6).

Even in Paul’s argument that we are justified by faith and not by works, Paul uses the example of the Patriarch Abraham to prove his point. Paul devoted a whole chapter to Abraham (Romans 4). I conclude that there is no departure from Judaism in Paul’s theology.

If there were any doubts about Paul’s loyalty to his Judaism, he testified about himself, “Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee” (Philippians 3:5). Paul unashamedly called himself a “Hebrew of the Hebrews.” If there were a contradiction to being both Jewish and believing in Jesus as Messiah, then Paul was unaware of that contradiction. All who study Paul’s life will find him a Jewish Apostle preaching the Jewish Gospel to both Jewish and Gentile listeners, about the Jewish Messiah.

**“ People act as if Christianity is a new religion which just sprang up two thousand years ago, but it is not new, it is simply a continuation. It is a fulfillment. It is a next step. It is the proof that the covenant with Abraham is true. It is Jewish<sup>16</sup>.”**

## Conclusion:

We must conclude that there is no teaching in the New Testament that contradicts Biblical Jewish teaching. Any Jewish person who honestly looks at the Scriptures and sees that they were fulfilled by a Rabbi from Nazareth approximately two thousand years ago can feel very secure in the fact that he or she is still Jewish and has not become a Gentile.

Historian Hugh J. Schonfield comments regarding the Jewish believers in relation to Jewish non-believers right after the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, “Their life remained unaltered; they worshipped in the synagogues with their fellow Jews, and were distinguished only by their adherence to the Galilean Wonder-Worker, whose claims they no doubt pressed as occasion offered.<sup>15</sup>”

I conclude with a quotation by author Edith Schaeffer. She says, “People act as if Christianity is a new religion which just sprang up two thousand years ago, but it is not new, it is simply a continuation. It is a fulfillment. It is a next step. It is the proof that the covenant with Abraham is true. It is Jewish.<sup>16</sup>”

## Endnotes:

- 1 Vine, W.E., *Vines Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, Fleming H. Revell Company, 1981, p. 99
- 2 Rosen, Moise, *Y’Shua, The Jewish Way to Say Jesus*, Moody Press, Chicago, IL, 1982, p. 79
- 3 *The Ryrie Study Bible*, Moody Press, Chicago, IL, 1986. “Introduction to the Book of Jeremiah,” p. 1008
- 4 “The Holy Scriptures,” Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia
- 5 Greenberg, Stanley, Rabbi of Temple Sinai in Philadelphia. As quoted by Fruchtenbaum in his article “Jewishness and the Trinity,” *Issues Vol. 1:8*, Purple Pomegranate, San Francisco, CA, p. 3
- 6 Fruchtenbaum, Arnold, “Jewishness and the Trinity,” pp. 7-8; Scripture references are from the New King James Version of the Holy Bible (Thomas Nelson Publishers)
- 7 *Acts 2:2-4*
- 8 *Acts 10:28*
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- 10 Shelley, Bruce, *Church History in Plain Language*, Word Books, Inc., 1982, p. 32
- 11 *Ryrie*, “Introduction to the Letter of Paul to the Romans,” p. 1541
- 12 McDowell, Josh, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict: Volume 1*, Here’s Life Publishers, Inc., 1990, p. 37
- 13 *Ryrie*, “How We Got Our Bible,” p. 1783
- 14 *Matthew 12:39; 16:4; Luke 11:29-30*
- 15 Schonfield, Hugh J., *The History of Jewish Christianity: From the First to the Twentieth Century*, Duckworth, London, 1936, p. 19
- 16 Schaeffer, Edith, *Christianity Is Jewish*, Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, IL, 1975, p. 121