

The twin problems affecting the early church

And the corresponding problems today

Introduction

It is becoming common, even in some Reformed Baptist circles, to have a certain view of the early church. This view postulates that the church drifted from its sound apostolic roots when it became less Jewish and more Greek, and especially when it began to criticise Jews. It names Gnosticism as the greatest problem, but criticises the early church fathers for being too inspired by Greek rhetoric and for following Greek academic principles.

Some Jewish writers have outlined a view of Biblical and church history to support this case, following Jewish Root false teachers such as Jacob Prash. One example is the book, *How the church lost the truth*, by Steve Maltz. In reality, their overview is selective and twisted and some of their criticisms of early theologians exaggerated and misunderstood.

Now this could simply be dismissed as of little importance, except for the fact that the same mistake is being made by many others regarding the current situation. That is, many conservative Christians are justly critical of the neo-Gnosticism of the Charismatic Movement, and then jump on the Jewish Root bandwagon, only to fall into an equal set of errors. The appeal to a distorted view of church history and false Biblical exegesis paves the way for establishing deception in the church today.

What is the truth about these matters?

The two chief problems affecting the apostolic church.

While there were a host of difficulties faced by the apostles, such as spiritual desertion, super-spirituality, misuse of spiritual gifts, apostasy, outright sin, mistaken theology, and so forth, there were two identifiable theological movements which continued to plague the development of the early church. These were based on:

- a centring upon Judaism (Judaising), which came first, and
- a syncretism with occultism and mysticism (Gnosticism), which came later.

The Judaisers

There are several NT passages that address this problem, and two whole letters.

Acts

The very first church synod met in order to deal with the demands of Judaisers that new converts must submit to the Law of Moses. 'And certain men came down from Judaea and taught the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved. ... keep the law"' (Acts 15:1, 24). In Acts 15 we have a report as to how this demand was repudiated. In the letter sent to the churches it said,

Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, 'You must be circumcised and keep the law' -- to whom we gave no *such* commandment -- it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, ... For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that

you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Acts 15:24-29

Abstaining from immorality is a Biblical command for all time, coming from the moral law. Abstaining from food offered to idols was to prevent confusion in contacts with Gentiles, as Paul explains in 1 Corinthians. Avoiding non-kosher food was simply to smooth out relationships between Gentile and Jewish Christians in the early church, particularly in Jerusalem. It was not a universal command but something to deal with a current problem.

The basis of the Judaizing problem was the false demand to keep the Mosaic Law as it stood; the demand to concentrate on the Torah¹. The basis of the repudiation was that this is not part of the Gospel. The Mosaic Law was a temporary² external, fleshly, administration of death³ that magnified man's inability and sin⁴ and pointed to the need for Christ.⁵ Christians do not keep it as it has been cancelled.⁶

Moral obligation to God is not just external action but internal motivation (not just murder but hating).⁷ The law of Christ is the spiritual application of the moral law (which is subsumed and codified in the Mosaic Law) in a believer's new nature, which the Spirit enables believers to obey.⁸ The focus of law is now Christ; the standard of human obligation to God is Christ; the measure of human righteousness is Christ.⁹ Any supposed law which deviates from Christ is anathema; this includes all forms of Jewish law keeping.

As believers obey Christ and walk in the Spirit, they keep the law. We do not need an external code of written law,¹⁰ but we need to obey Christ by following his words (law) and seeking the help of the Spirit to obey them.¹¹ His key commandment is to love God and one another,¹² which was also the essence of the moral law subsumed in the Mosaic Law.¹³ The key danger of Judaizing is that it diverts people from Christ to a fleshly, earthly form. God's will is that, 'that in all things He may have the pre-eminence' (Col 1:18).

¹ Acts 15:24.

² Gal 3:19 - What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, **till the Seed should come**. Heb 9:9-10. - It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience -- concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed **until the time of reformation**.

³ Rm 7:10 - the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death. 2 Cor 3:6-7, 9 - who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for **the letter kills**, but the Spirit gives life. But **if the ministry of death**, written and engraved on stones ... **The ministry of condemnation**.

⁴ Rm 5:20 - the law entered that the offence might abound.

⁵ Gal 3:24 - the law was our tutor [the steward who took the master's children to school] to bring us to Christ.

⁶ Rm 10:4 - For Christ is the end of the law. Heb 7:12, 18, 8:13 - For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law. ... For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness. ... In that He says, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete.

⁷ Matt 5:21-22 - You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire.

⁸ Jer 31:33 - But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: **I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts**; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Gal 5:18 - if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Rm 8:4 - That the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

⁹ Eph 4:13 - till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Col 1:28 - that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.

¹⁰ 2 Cor 3:3 - you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart.

¹¹ 1 Jn 5:3 - For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments.

¹² Jm 2:8 - If you really fulfil the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself," you do well.

¹³ Lev 19:18 - you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the LORD. Rm 13:10 - Love does no harm to a neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilment of the law. Gal 5:14 - For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself."

However, the decision of the Jerusalem synod, even though affirmed by several apostles, was not followed by the Judaisers, who increased their activity.

Though there are significant traces of apostolic teaching against Judaizing in various letters, the problem is addressed head on in Galatians and Hebrews. Galatians deals with the false doctrine of the Judaisers seeking to deceive a Gentile church, while Hebrews is more related to stopping Christian Jews falling back into following Judaism instead of Christ. The problems resulting from focusing upon Judaism and Jewish things were huge in the apostolic church, requiring the major part of two whole apostolic letters. Modern Jewish-centred teachers always ignore these letters. Now it would take far too much space to expound these thoroughly, but a few salient points may be summarised from them. First we need to consider some of the passing mentions of the Jewish problem.

The circumcision

We find frequent mentions of the problems caused by Jews and Judaisers in the apostolic letters. Paul sometimes criticises these people under the opprobrium of ‘the circumcision’; for instance,

For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, **especially those of the circumcision**, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not ... Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, not giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men who turn from the truth. ... even their mind and conscience are defiled. They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work. Titus 1:10-16

This is very sharp indeed, and borne out of the unremitting problems Paul faced with Judaisers damaging his flock. Teachers who lead people into Judaism are to be rebuked sharply and their mouths stopped because they deceive people.

Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, *from* a good conscience, and *from* sincere faith, from which some, having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk, desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm. 1 Tim 1:5-7

This is clearly a reference to the Judaisers who teach a focus upon the *Torah*. Paul says that they have strayed from the faith and don’t even understand what the law is for.

Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation! For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. Phil 3:2-3

Again this points to Judaisers who are to Paul enemies of the true circumcision, those with circumcised hearts and who follow Christ (Col 2:11). Notice his anger since he calls them dogs (a phrase used by rabbis against Gentiles) and evil workers. Notice also the irony; rabbis call Gentiles ‘dogs’ and spurn them; Judaisers follow rabbinic ideas; Paul, under divine inspiration, calls Judaisers ‘dogs’. This is God’s description of those who turn Christians from Christ to Jewish ideas and a wrong view of the *Torah*.

There are many more cases where the context establishes that it is Judaisers who are in view when the apostles severely criticise false teachers, even if they are not mentioned specifically; but we must press on.

Galatians

The book of Galatians was written to a group of churches in the region of Galatia, a Roman province within what we now know as Turkey. The people in central Galatia were Gallic Celts (hence Galatians) who had settled the region in the 3rd century BC. In the south were the cities Paul had evangelised on his first missionary journey, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. In the north were the cities he evangelised on his second missionary journey, including Ephesus. The exact city locations he wrote to cannot be certainly established (though it is probably the southern cities), but what is sure is that Paul wrote regarding problems that had affected a number of churches in Asia Minor.

So, though Galatians is a short letter and one of Paul's first writings, its readership was probably bigger than any of Paul's' other letters. The problem he addressed was a wide-ranging, serious issue. What is it?

The key doctrinal issue expounded is justification by faith; what it takes to make a man stand legally righteous before God without condemnation (Gal 3:11). The heresy he confronts is the growing tendency of legalist Jews to force Gentile Christians to follow the Mosaic Law (*Torah*). This is a focusing upon Judaism and Israel which, at its worst, says that justification requires obeying the *Torah*, and in its more moderate form, diverts Christians from Christ by getting them to follow certain parts of the *Torah* in addition to faith.

Paul's reaction to these false teachers is serious:

- He wishes that they would castrate themselves (Gal 5:12).
- They deserve judgment (Gal 5:10).
- They persecute the true church of Christ like Ishmael persecuted Isaac (Gal 4:29) and should be cast out (Gal 4:30, 5:11).
- This error is not from God; therefore it is satanic (Gal 5:8).

The reason for this condemnation is because focusing on Israel and Judaism is:

- Turning from Christ (Gal 1:6).
- Following a different Gospel (Gal 1:6).
- A perversion of the Gospel (Gal 1:7).
- Is cursed (Gal 1:8-9, 3:10).
- Brings Christians into bondage (Gal 2:4, 4:9, 24, 5:1).
- Is foolish (Gal 3:1, 3).
- Is a bewitchment, i.e. a satanic temptation or charm (Gal 3:1).
- Is turning to weak and beggarly elements (Gal 4:9).
- A hindrance (Gal 5:7).

Paul's argument is that the Old Covenant has been cancelled by Christ's atonement and resurrection. The fleshly way of looking at things has gone. No longer is the covenant kingdom about external things like: Israel, the land, feasts, diet, circumcision, the offerings or the Mosaic Law. The covenant promises to Abraham (which preceded Moses, Gal 3:17) are fulfilled in Christ. In fact, the promise of Abraham becoming a father of nations is fulfilled in those who are united to Christ, believers of all nations; **'Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham'** (Gal 3:7). If you have faith in Christ you are a son of Abraham and an heir of God's covenant promise to him. If you are a Jew but do not have faith you have no place in the Abrahamic covenant. Though Judaisers deny this, it is an oft repeated statement by Paul (Gal 3:9; Rm 4:11-16, 24, 9:7-8).

Christ is the fulfilment of the Abrahamic Covenant. He is the promised Seed of Abraham (Gal 3:16). The Covenant is fulfilled in the work of Christ, not in anything human, such as Israel. The Covenant is not established by law (*Torah*) but by God's promise to Abraham (Gal 3:18). The Mosaic Law was temporary, to magnify sin, to show righteousness and to point towards Christ (Gal 3:19, 23-24). Once faith came, the Mosaic Law was no longer needed (Gal 3:23-25); following the *Torah* now is bondage (Gal 4:9, 24-25). Christians are sons of God through faith in Christ (Gal 3:26). The covenant is now universal, there is no privilege in being Jewish, that system has gone, what counts is being united with Christ (Gal 3:27). In Christ (that is in the church, the body of Christ) there is no national status or social rank, but one life; thus there is no Jew, no Greek, no slave, no free citizen, but one body which is the seed of Abraham in Christ (Gal 3:28-29, 4:28). Those sons also have the Spirit (Gal 4:6) because to be in the covenant means to be full of the Spirit, baptised by the Spirit into Christ (Gal 3:27).

Thus turning from Christ, the covenant and the Spirit, to focusing on an earthly nation (Israel) and a cancelled religious system (Mosaic Law) is severely condemned by Paul. It is turning from the Spirit (Gal 5:18). Thus Paul fears for the salvation of those who return to celebrating feasts and Sabbaths (Gal 4:10-11, 20) and he states that this return is bondage to slavery (Gal 4:9, 24). Paul's pain at seeing the Galatians backsliding into Judaism was like the pains of childbirth (Gal 4:19).

Paul then uses the example of circumcision to show that if you follow the law (*Torah*) you will gain no spiritual benefit from being a Christian (Gal 5:2). The same applies to all aspects of law-keeping (Sabbaths, feasts, fasting, Jewish observances).¹⁴ So Paul explains that if you want to follow bits of the Mosaic Law, you have to be committed to all of it (Gal 5:3) and thus have no salvation because the law doesn't save. Such people have fallen from grace and estranged from Christ (Gal 5:4). Those who focus on Israel and Judaism always persecute the true church of Christ (Gal 5:11); the justification by faith which comes from the cross is a constant offence to legalising Jews.

This is the message of Galatians. It is very clear and sustained throughout several chapters. And yet messianic Christians seem to ignore every word in it. In Galatians the work of false Judaising teachers was thoroughly and effectively condemned. The teaching of Galatians is the antidote to a focus upon Judaism and Israel.

1 Thessalonians

For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judaea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Judeans, who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men, forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up the measure of their sins; but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost. 1 Thess 2:14-16

Notice what Paul says about the Jews (Judaeans). Far from the attitude which Jewish Root teachers demand towards fleshly Israel, Paul says,

- They killed their own prophets.

¹⁴ Gal 4:19-11 - But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? You observe days and months and seasons and years. I am afraid for you, lest I have laboured for you in vain. Note here that Paul uses a rising scale to cover all Jewish feasts: 'days' (Sabbaths, fasts), 'months' (new moon), 'seasons' (the great feasts, e.g. Passover, Weeks), 'years' (sabbatical year, Jubilee). All these, he says, are 'weak and beggarly elements'; i.e. elementary basics of religion which have now passed with the arrival of the reality in Christ and the passing of the Old Covenant.

- They killed the Lord Jesus.
- They persecuted the apostles.
- They do not please God.
- They are contrary to all men.
- They forbid apostles to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved.

He then finalises his condemnation by saying that they must always to fill up the measure of their sins and wrath has come upon them to the uttermost.

Now if anyone today said these things Jewish Root teachers would label them anti-Semite, vicious, ungodly and so forth; but this is the apostle Paul. They would say that we should never mention that Jews killed the Lord; but Paul does say this and uses it as condemnation against them; his denunciation fits the pattern of their sin. The passages in the early church fathers which condemn Jews (and which are constantly paraded by messianic Jews as evidence of their anti-Semitism) exactly parallels what Paul says here and elsewhere. The early fathers were no different than Paul in condemning the sins of the Jews.

It cannot be avoided! Jesus and the apostles condemned the Jews for their rejection of God, their killing of the prophets, their rejection of Christ, their condemning Christ to death (even though the Romans applied it) and their rejection of the Gospel. These things are facts and cannot be ignored. Contrary to Jewish Root claims:

- Jesus prophesied that the chief priests (chosen representatives of the people) and the scribes (secretaries of state) condemned him to death not the Romans, ‘**the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death**’, (Matt 20:18).
- According to the apostles, it was Jews who condemned Jesus to death, ‘**Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death**’, (Acts 2:23).
- The historical narrative says that Jews in the Sanhedrin (the highest Jewish court whose decrees were binding on all Jews) condemned Jesus to death, ‘**Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "What further need do we have of witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy! What do you think?" And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death**’, (Mk 14:63-64).
- It was all the Jews present at Jesus’ trial who were willing to fully accept the blame for Jesus’ death throughout their generations, ‘**And all the people answered and said, "His blood be on us and on our children."**’ (Matt 27:25).

The denial of all this and the claim that Romans were to blame is ludicrous. The Biblical facts are clear to see. Jesus said this, the apostles said it also, and therefore for Christians to affirm this is correct. Stephen’s accusation is serious,

*You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers *did*, so *do* you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept *it*.* Acts 7:51-

53

There it is; Scripture, through the inspired mouth of Stephen and the inspired pen of Luke, says that the Jews were murderers of Christ and the prophets. The indictment of the early fathers by messianic writers is false.¹⁵ Steve Maltz criticises Justin Martyr for saying, ‘*All this has happened to you rightly and well. For you slew the Just One and his prophets before him, and now you reject, and dishonour those who set their hopes on Him, and God*

¹⁵ For example Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 93 or Origen, *Against Celsus*.

Almighty.¹⁶ Yet this virtually paraphrases what Stephen said in Acts 7:51-53 and Paul in 1 Thess 2:14-16. By all means criticise the fathers for their errors, but not when they copy the apostles. If you are going to call Justin an anti-Semite, then you are also calling Paul, Stephen (and also God, the inspirer of Scripture) an anti-Semite.

Now, I am not suggesting that the charge of murderer should be a clarion call for us today. I am not suggesting that Christians become Jew-bashers, just as they should not centre on criticising any particular nation. Christians are to love all men, even their enemies. Christians are to witness to all men as opportunity is given, and this includes Jews. What I am saying is that when messianic teachers claim that Jews did not murder the Lord they are either lying or have not read their Bible carefully enough.

Hebrews

Having summarised Galatians, there is no space here to fully summarise all of Hebrews. However, those who seek to follow Jewish things need to read this book, which is another sustained argument warning people not to stray into following Judaism but to focus on Christ. Over and over the apostle seeks to admonish believers to go on, to press on despite problems and persecution and not go back to the beggarly elements of Judaism. If they do there is no other salvation and they will be lost.

The course of his argument is to show that Christ is better than all the expressions of the *Torah*. He is the Son of God sent to manifest the very character of God. He is better than angels,¹⁷ better than Moses,¹⁸ better than the High Priest,¹⁹ and even better than the Tabernacle itself,²⁰ which was a shadow, or illustration, of his ministry.²¹ Christ didn't serve the external forms but went into heaven itself, with his own blood, to make remission for sins.²² Human priestly activity deals with the shadow, the ceremonial, the symbol; Christ is the reality, the true. If we are in Christ we do not need the symbol any more; we have the reality.²³

In fact, the writer establishes that even the priesthood is finished in its Mosaic form.²⁴ Christ is not a priest after the Levitical order of Aaron, he does not function like earthly priests using sacrifices in a symbol of God's dwelling (the Tabernacle) year by year and

¹⁶ Maltz, Op. cit. p136.

¹⁷ Heb 1:4 - having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.

¹⁸ Heb 3:3 - For this One has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses.

¹⁹ Heb 7:23-28 - Also there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing. But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. ... For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, appoints the Son who has been perfected forever. Heb 10:1 - For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect.

²⁰ Heb 9:11 - But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation.

²¹ Heb 8:5 - [Priests] who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things.

²² Heb 7:27 - [Christ] who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. 9:11-14 - But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

²³ Heb 9:23 - Therefore it was necessary that the copies of the things in the heavens should be purified with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

²⁴ Heb 7:12 - For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law.

never actually purging sin; but Christ is a priest after the order of Melchizedek.²⁵ In fact as a descendant of Judah Christ could not even be a legitimate Levitical priest.²⁶ But as a Melchizedekan priest he is forever established by an eternal, immortal, holy quality of life and his priesthood continues forever. His single, once-for-all sacrifice has brought in the New Covenant and ended all the forms of religion temporarily established in the Mosaic Law which pointed to it.

Thus the law (*Torah*) is cancelled, that is all the forms of the Mosaic Law.²⁷ It does not achieve spiritual goals and was passing away at the time of the writer, but passed away forever in 70 AD when the temple was destroyed. This was God's action to declare that Judaism was finished forever. Its forms have ceased. There is no more officiating priesthood, no sacrifices and no temple altar on which to pour blood. Without these the religion based on Mosaic Law could not continue. What continued as Judaism was no longer something of God but something developed by men (rabbinic, or Pharisaic Judaism). When Christians are tempted to follow Judaism or Messianic Christianity today they are following something established by fleshly men not by God; indeed it is something cursed by God and another Gospel.

Thus we see overwhelming evidence that Judaising was a serious problem to the apostles and combating it exercised them greatly. How odd, then, that messianic teachers completely ignore all this!

The Gnostics

There are a few passages where traces can be seen addressing the issues brought up by Gnosticism throughout the NT; though it is thought that Colossians and 1 John have this particularly in mind.

What is Gnosticism?

A full treatment of this subject is too large to include here; we will try to be concise and summarise. Gnosticism is similar to the modern New Age Movement in that it was a mystical religious movement comprising very many sects and variations. Manichaeism is one sect formed by Mani (216-275). Like the New Age it was adaptable, ecumenical, wide ranging and ultimately based on occult principles. It flourished particularly in the 2nd century AD but incipient forms were already plaguing the church in the apostolic period

²⁵ Heb 7:11, 14-17, 20-21 - Therefore, if perfection were through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need was there that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be called according to the order of Aaron? ... For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood. And it is yet far more evident if, in the likeness of Melchizedek, there arises another priest who has come, not according to the law of a fleshly commandment, but according to the power of an endless life. For He testifies: "You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek." ... And inasmuch as He was not made priest without an oath (for they have become priests without an oath, but He with an oath by Him who said to Him: "The LORD has sworn And will not relent, 'You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek' ").

²⁶ Heb 7:14 - For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood.

²⁷ Heb 7:18-19, 8:7-13 - For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, for the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God. ... For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. Because finding fault with them, He says: "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when 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 when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. None of them shall teach his neighbour, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." In that He says, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

but no one knows how it originated. Many early church fathers attributed the heresy to Simon Magus while others attribute it to Jews rankled by the Acts 15 decision. The theology arose from pre-Christian pagan philosophies arising in Babylon, Egypt, Syria and Macedonia.

The world of the Gnostics is a dualism between good and evil and this is illustrated in their concept of God. There was a transcendent, holy God but also an ignorant, evil demiurge, who was the creator. Thus the material creation is evil, the spirit world is good. Salvation is by escaping the material world and becoming spiritual to roam the cosmos.

God sent a redeemer who brings salvation from the evil world through a secret knowledge. In those destined to be saved, the knowledge awakens disciples and frees them at death to be united with God. Since salvation was through knowledge, not actions, a wide range of behaviour resulted. Some were libertines who lived debauched lives; others became ascetics and misogynists ('women originated evil').

The basic foundation of Gnosticism is that salvation is experienced through a secret knowledge (Gk. '*gnosis*') passed on by adepts. Only leaders have this special knowledge and 'mystery religion' was a term often used to describe this faith since disciples had to be initiated into the mystery through receiving this knowledge. The truth is a mystery, revealed only to the initiated ones. Truth isn't rational or objective but is subjective and revealed through initiation into a mystery by mystical rites, creating an elitist group with higher knowledge. Full enlightenment was by a continual ascent up a never-ending path, requiring constant new experiences of revelation. Souls that attained perfect knowledge after death were risen with Christ and ascended to glory; those who did not reach perfection in this life had to pass through various stages after death to reach glory. This is the first suggestion of the Roman idea of Purgatory.

Meetings were a blend of mysticism and ritual by which leaders imparted this special knowledge. Rituals included: hymns, repetitive chanting, drugs, meditation, ecstatic experiences and so on. Many aspects were similar to practices now found in the Charismatic Movement and New Age variations. There was also an emphasis upon a series of mediating angels (aeons) to aid the disciple and an ascending scale of spirituality arising from revelatory experiences. One of the aeons (Sophia) gave birth to the demiurge creator god. There were also archons or world-governing deities created by the demiurge, and as such, were evil. The souls of those who died ascended to the realms of light but first had to pass the archons. They could not pass them without password slogans and magical incantations, this necessitated having the secret knowledge of these things while still alive.

The redeemer of Gnosticism is usually a docetic Christ; the highest aeon. This is a Christ figure who is not really human but just appears to be so. Being sent from the spiritual world of heaven he cannot really be material or he would be evil. Some writers even talk about Christ as being a phantasm rather than flesh, while others merely say that Christ brought a special kind of heavenly manhood down from the spirit world. This doctrine is known separately as Docetism.

Essentially Gnosticism is a syncretism of Platonic dualism, Christianity, Hindu-type ideas about unity with God and a sensual world, plus occult mysticism. It can also be seen that there are many comparisons with Charismatic ideas. Key Gnostic leaders included Marcion (d. 160 AD), Menander (2nd c.) and Valentinus (2nd c.) who were 'Christian' Gnostics; who established their own heretical 'Christian' sects. Disciples of Valentinus included: Ptolemy, Heracleon and Theodotus. Cerinthus (2nd c.) was unusual in that he tried to combine Ebionism with Gnosticism. His doctrine of Christ followed Gnostic ideas but he also added

Jewish premillennialism. Other Gnostics were, Basilides and his son Isidore, and Carpocrates and his son Epiphanes, based at Alexandria.

A final point is that Jewish writers over-simplify their description of Gnosticism by claiming that it is Greek over against Jewish Christianity or Judaism. This is untrue. Though some Gnostics arose in Macedonia, most Gnostic ideas arose in Babylon, Egypt and Syria. Gnostics flourished in towns where many Jews lived, such as Alexandria and Antioch, and many Jews became Gnostics; there was even a form of Gnostic Ebionism (see later). With its syncretistic approach to religion, it is unwise to say that Gnosticism was Greek or anything else; it was a vivid mixture of religious ideas from several sources.

Gnosticism attacked in the NT?

Unlike Judaising, there is no outright anti-Gnostic teaching occupying a whole book or even a large part of a book, but there are a few passages that may allude to it. Chief among these are:

For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ *as coming in the flesh*. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but *that* we may receive a full reward. Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds. 2 Jn 1:7-11

Most commentators do not doubt that John is here referring to Docetism for he says that these heretics deny that Jesus came in the flesh. The doctrine of Christ asserts that the Son came down from heaven and took on human flesh in the incarnation. As a result, the Son had two natures, one human and one divine. The need for incarnation was so that the Son could take on the sins of men and die in their place. Thus Christ had to be a genuine human being in his human nature.

Of course Gnostic Docetists deny this. For them anything human is evil and the redeemer sent from heaven could not take on flesh. They assert he only appeared to be human, but was, in reality, a spirit being. Here John proclaims that anyone teaching this is a heretic and must be shunned. Sadly a few foolish people in history have held such a view from earliest times up to today.

Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in *false* humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind. Col 2:18

Though it is less than certain that Gnostics are in view, this surely applies to them. Gnostics held a complex mythology of angels and a stairway of ranks leading up to God. The worship of angels applies as a criticism of Gnosticism. However, the criticism of Paul here also points to Judaisers who worshipped angels as the giver of the law, a problem that had occurred since before the Babylonian exile. This problem of worshipping angels continued long in Phrygia (where Colosse and Laodicea were), resulting in a ruling by the Council of Laodicea (360 AD) 'against the 'Angelici' or 'invokers of angels.' Augustine also wrote against them. The Talmud contains worship of angels.²⁸

Some commentators find an incipient form of Gnosticism attacked in the Pastoral Epistles.

²⁸ *Seder Tephillot*, Ed. Basil fol. 222. 2. and fol. 335. 1. *Zohar* in Gen. fol. 97. 2. & in Exod. fol. 24. 3. See also *Tobit*, xii. 15; Philo, in lib. *de Somn.*; Josephus, *War.* lib. ii. cap. 8, sec. 7.

Interim conclusion

There were two chief movements that caused a problem for the apostolic church, Gnosticism and Judaizing. The most significant danger of the two, and the one that receives the biggest critical emphasis in the NT, was the problem of drifting into Judaism. The NT has a huge amount of material warning believers not to flirt with Judaism in any form; the current large following of messianic Christianity proves that people are not reading their Bible; indeed one feature of this movement is to emphasise the OT and derogate the NT. Since the NT is the full expression of Christ's teaching for believers and the explanation of the OT, this is a serious mistake.

The two chief heretical movements affecting sub-apostolic church.

There were many heretical attacks on the early church, such as Apollinarianism or Arianism, which troubled the church for a time but which were effectively contended against by good theologians, church councils and credal statements. There were also some radical sects that exhibited extreme ideas such as Montanism. However, there are two chief sources of heretical ideas which plagued the church for centuries and which carried the seeds for future manifestations of error up to the present day. Unsurprisingly, they are the same essential errors we find in the apostolic period.

Ebionism

After the fall of Jerusalem many Essenes from the Qumran community joined the Jewish Christian church and their growing influence eventually caused a split. Some just followed a Jewish emphasis, remaining more or less orthodox but adding the legal observance of Sabbath keeping and circumcision. Others, THE COMMON EBIONITES, became more radical and heretical. These exalted the law above Christ, demanded the necessity of law-keeping for salvation, rejected Paul's writings and had a false view of Christ, denying the virgin birth. They taught that Christ was an elected man who was united with the eternal Son at his baptism and became higher than angels, but not divine; the Spirit departed from Christ at the crucifixion. This Christ was a teacher but not a Saviour and had appeared in OT history many times. Many Ebionites were vegetarian.

A sub group was THE ELCHASAITES [Elcesaites, Elkasaites]. In the early 3rd century a Syrian heretic called Alcibiades, came to Rome, claiming to have a book given by angelic revelation which he said had been received from Parthia by a just man named Elchasai, who is said to have ministered around 101 AD. The book is a syncretism of Jewish ideas, Christian theology, astrology and magic. Circumcision is demanded; Christ is a mere man, though born of a virgin; and rebaptism was practised.

Another splinter group was THE Gnostic EBIONITES. These insisted that keeping the Mosaic Law was only necessary for Jewish Christians. They also denied the pre-existence of Christ but affirmed the virgin birth. Some identify the Elchasaites with the Gnostic Ebionites, though it seems that there were several variants.

Ebionism is derived from a Hebrew word meaning 'poor'. The Qumran influence also resulted in the adoption of some Gnostic ideas, such as dualism, vegetarianism and hatred of sacrifices and they wrote their own Gospel (*The Gospel of the Ebionites*), just as the Gnostics did. Their Judaizing methods continued to plague the early church but gradually dwindled after 135, finally vanishing during the Muslim conquest of Syria. Like Modern Judaisers, they had a premillennial view of the end. Variations of Ebionism continued in

some places and there is a community claiming to be the modern version of it [ebionite.org]. Their manifesto is typical of the old Ebionites,

The Ebionite Community is the living continuation of the Jewish religious movement of Jesus. Christianity is the religion of Paul and others, and not part of the biblical faith and revelation of the God of Israel nor is it of Jesus. (Please note that we have used "Jesus" to clarify for our Christian readers. We call him Yeshua or Yahshua, and will use Yeshua from this point on in the site.) We declare the man Paul of Tarsus, the false teacher against the mark of Covenant and God's Torah, to be outside of the Way taught by Yeshua, the anointed, son of Maria and Yosef. The Ebionite Community is the only real "mission to the gentiles." We call upon the gentiles to repent, to abandon paganism and the perverse testament, and enter into true covenant through Torah, circumcision, and immersion.

In the sub-apostolic period in the Near East, Ebionism was a major problem.

Gnosticism

Like the modern variants, it is difficult to summarise this system in this period since there were very many variants of it, from the outright occult, non-Christian cults to semi-Christian sects. There were Greek mystery religion clubs that were a syncretism of Greek ideas and eastern religious systems, but then there were churches that claimed to be Christian but which followed outright Gnostic principles. One of these were the groups led by the heretic Marcion, who held key Gnostic principles (such as dualism, the demiurge and Docetism) but did not follow its mythological theory of redemption. This shows the variation within the ranks of Gnostics.

The threat of Gnosticism to the early church, particularly in the second century, was severe. The movement was widespread throughout the Roman Empire affecting secular cults as well as Christian sects. The danger of unwise believers falling into deception became all too common as Gnostic ideas became commonplace; they even produced their own heretical gospels. The problem was that the name of Christ was taught but with a completely non-Christian meaning. Doctrines such as salvation, redemption, Christ, God, angels, godliness, knowledge, truth etc. were all mentioned, but with heretical content. Folk who did not properly investigate the teachings behind the claims could easily fall into deception.

Then, apart from the heretical doctrine, there was the focus upon mysticism. The claims of an authoritative teacher to have special knowledge and a special experience from God, was alluring to some, especially if he was a powerful speaker. Many fell into mystical experiences through believing that these special emissaries from God had knowledge not available to others. Having believed the lies and falling for the mystical experience (which was just like practices in Hindu sects) a person would find themselves far from the truth, far from Christ and living without law.

One of the key means of making a Gnostic disciple was for the adept to confer a mystical experience upon the novice by the laying on of hands, and thus imparting 'knowledge'. This is widely practised in Hindu sects and became common in the 1970s when Guru Maharaj Ji preached across the UK. As people submitted to his claim of being an avatar, or incarnated Saviour, they would have hands laid on them to receive knowledge and their personality changed. In truth this was the passing on of a demonic force which made the disciple passive and controllable. I personally witnessed many people become little more than zombies as a result of this. Gnosticism worked in the same way. Once a person had this

revelatory mystical experience they were sucked in to the system which was hard to escape from.

Defenders of Christian theology against Gnostic errors in this period include Irenaeus (130-200), Tertullian (160-225) and Hippolytus (170-236).

Interim conclusion

The doctrine of Christ is the touchstone between these two errors and highlights the faults in both. Ebionism stated that Christ was an ordinary human being, a man, who was later joined to the eternal Christ at his baptism. So he was a man who later was transformed into a spiritual being who was not God. Gnostics affirmed the very reverse. To them Christ was eternal and divine and never ever became a man in the flesh, because flesh is material and evil.

So in the immediate post-apostolic age there were again two key errors, the danger of falling into mysticism and antinomianism on the one hand and the danger of concentrating upon Judaism and legalism on the other. In this period Gnosticism was the bigger and more pervasive problem.

The two chief problems affecting the modern church.

So far we have noted that there are two chief deceiving temptations for Christians, to be drawn into mysticism on the one hand or to succumb to legalism on the other. Historically, these two temptations were subsumed into religious movements; mystical Gnosticism and legalistic Christian Judaism. In the modern world there is no difference; these two deceptions are powerfully with us deceiving the church.

A focus upon Israel

In this category are various sorts of groups, almost all of which derive from a Dispensational theological position. These include the Jewish Root Movement and messianic Christianity, but there are many more variants, some quite extreme. It is tragic that they all ignore the example of Paul who divested himself of his Judaism and became as a Gentile (Gal 4:12; Phil 3:8) but today many Gentile Christians are seeking to become Jewish, a reversal of the divine order. God's demand is that we stay as we are regarding culture (1 Cor 7:20-24) recognising that there is no national distinction in the body of Christ (Gal 3:28; Col 3:11). National distinctions, whether Jewish or anything else, are part of the world's system – which is something believers are supposed to be dead to (Gal 6:14).

Believers who are not Jews do not need to adopt any Jewish forms; to do so is to take on fleshly, worldly practices at the expense of following Christ, which becomes bondage. Jews who become Christians should focus upon Christ and not Judaism, rejoicing that they have found faith in a universal Gospel just like their forefather Abraham.

Summary of false messianic teachings

There is no space here to enumerate all the rogue Jewish Root teachings or explain its history. For more information see my book, *'The Veil of Moses'*. The following sub-headings are typical Jewish Root claims.

THE NEW COVENANT WAS MADE WITH ISRAEL, NOT GENTILES.

This is completely false. The New Covenant is the outworking of the covenant made with Abraham. Christ is the head of the covenant and is the Seed of Abraham. Now even the Abrahamic Covenant was not made with a Jew since Abraham was, at that time, a

Sumerian Gentile who was uncircumcised (Acts 7:2). His household was circumcised long after the promise of being a father of many nations and after God mentioned the word 'covenant'. Notice that the covenant includes many nations, not just one nation.

Paul explains this in Galatians,

Just as Abraham 'believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.' Therefore know that *only* those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, *saying*, 'In you all the nations shall be blessed.' So then those who *are* of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.
Gal 3:6-9

What do we see here?

- Abraham was righteous by faith not lineage.
- Only those who have faith like Abraham are sons of Abraham.
- The Gospel is the same as the New Covenant. Therefore when God made a covenant with Abraham he was preaching the Gospel to Abraham.
- The Gentiles would have faith and share in this covenant.
- The outworking of the Covenant (Gospel) would be to all nations not just one.
- Those who have the gift of faith are blessed in the Covenant made with Abraham.

This is simply what Paul has stated, as you can see. It directly opposes what Jewish Root teachers claim.

Paul specifically argues that the Covenant (Gospel) with Abraham was not to Jews in Romans,

Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also, and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised. For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect.
Rm 4:9-14

Note this carefully:

- The blessing of the covenant is upon Jews and Greeks equally, those elect amongst them who have faith (circumcised and uncircumcised).
- When God appeared to Abraham and preached the Gospel, Abraham was not a Jew, not circumcised.
- Abraham is the father of all those who believe (the root of our faith which he mentions later, much misunderstood by Jewish Root teachers – see later), Jews and Gentiles.
- The promise of the Covenant was not to Abraham's seed via the law (i.e. not according to the flesh, not of natural descent); that is not to fleshly Jews.
- The promise was to all those who have faith (i.e. the elect who are given faith to believe in Christ).

THE ROOT OF THE CHURCH IS ISRAEL

For if the firstfruit *is* holy, the lump *is* also *holy*; and if the root *is* holy, so *are* the branches. 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. Rm 11:16-18

Just consider this for a moment, after all that we have read concerning Paul's view of the law, Jews and Judaising, is it possible to think that he can suddenly teach that fleshly Israel is the supporting root of the church?

Paul has been at pains, in this letter, to teach about justification by faith and has had much to say, in framing his doctrine, about Abraham as the foundation of faith; the first to hear the true Gospel and to see Christ (Jn 8:56); the first to be proclaimed righteous on account of his faith (cf. Isa 51:1-2). Christ is the true root of our faith in the sense of being the church's foundation, but within the structure of Paul's argument (which in chapters 9-11 is about election not Israel) the root here is the faith of Abraham in Christ – the basis of the covenant.²⁹ Paul's argument is that the first-fruit of Israel was Abraham. His family was the first to obey God in circumcision to signify Jewishness. 'The first-fruit is holy' refers to the righteousness of Abraham by faith, already discussed in chapter 4-5.

The branches that flow from this root, from the same faith of Abraham, are also holy. Jews who had no faith were broken off from the covenant and Gentiles who did have faith were grafted in. This was true in the OT (Naaman, Rahab) as well as in the NT (Gentile churches). Only those who have faith stay on the tree, Jews and Gentiles.

There is no sane way to see Israel as the root here without eisegesis (reading stuff into Scripture); the very error that Jewish Root teachers harp on about. If Israel is the root, what are the branches? It can't be both the root and the branches as Paul differentiates between them. But Jewish Root teachers want both the root and the branches to be Israel. It is important to understand here that Paul keeps changing between natural Israel according to the flesh and spiritual Israel according to election (which is the theme of chapters 9-11). [Paul does this elsewhere also, 'For they are not all Israel who are of Israel' (Rm 9:6); i.e. not everyone is elect Israel who are Jewish ('of Israel'). Here Paul uses the term 'Israel' to refer both to the whole elect and Jews.] Thus care must be taken when reading the word 'Israel' and not always taking it literally.

Context is crucial in understanding the Bible. The greater context of the letter is to explain the Gospel to Romans, not to write a treatise on Israel. The immediate context is chapters 9-11, which is an argument about election, not about Israel. Paul uses Israel as an illustration of election, based upon the root of Israel's election – the divine calling of Abraham and faith as the outcome of that calling. Those with faith are elect, those without faith are left in sin – whether Jews or Gentiles.

THE CHURCH IS NOT SPOKEN OF IN JEWISH TERMS OR AS ISRAEL

This is almost laughable as there are hundreds of occasions when Scripture does exactly this. The full number of elect is actually called Israel at least twice.

For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who *are* natural *branches*, be grafted into their own olive tree? ... blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved. Rm 11:24-26

Paul has made great pains to explain that the Gentile church has been grafted in to this olive tree; the branches of the tree are the ones saved, the church, which included Jews and

²⁹ See Appendix Two.

Gentiles, and then Paul calls this tree 'Israel' in symbolic terms. The tree that is the saved people with faith, the elect, are all 'Israel'. Paul keeps interchanging between natural branches and wild branches, between natural Israel and spiritual Israel. The blindness affects natural Israel, the 'all Israel' is all the elect, the whole church, Jews and Greeks.

Paul has already stated clearly that not all natural Israel will be saved, but only a remnant (Rm 9:27) so when he says 'all Israel will be saved' he is referring to the full number of the elect, Jews and Gentile.

John Calvin on this verse:

I extend the word Israel to all the people of God. ... This interpretation seems to me the most suitable, because Paul intended here to set forth the completion of the kingdom of Christ, which is by no means to be confined to the Jews, but is to include the whole world. The same manner of speaking we find in Galatians 6:16. The Israel of God is what he calls the Church, gathered alike from Jews and Gentiles; and he sets the people, thus collected from their dispersion, in opposition to the carnal children of Abraham, who had departed from his faith.

This is also implied in the adverb 'so' in 'and so all Israel will be saved'. This does not mean a millennial kingdom after the time of the Gentiles has finished; there is no mention of this here. 'So' is an adverb of manner, not of time and means that all Israel (all the elect) are saved in the same manner, by faith.

But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God. Gal 6:14-16

The context is not about natural Israel but the household of faith (v10); there is no reason for Paul to suddenly introduce a new subject – natural Israel. 'The Israel of God' is also a phrase not used of natural Israel. This refers to the fulness of the elect, the whole church. In fact Paul has just said that the world (including the concept of nations) has been crucified to him and that circumcision (the sign of Jewishness) means nothing. He is not interested in nations on the earth, whether Israel or anything else, he is concerned here with the elect who have faith. In fact, as most commentators point out, the word 'and' should be translated 'even' (Greek *kai* – which has several meanings). The 'all' who follow this rule are those who are new creatures in Christ, both circumcised (Jews) and uncircumcised (Gentiles). If *kai* meant 'and', then Israel would not be in the new creation and the verse would contradict Rm 11 and his earlier argument in Galatians. The 'Israel of God' must mean either the church (as most commentators have taken it, apart from Dispensationalists) or alternatively, it may mean the elect of Israel who get saved in the future (though this is a weaker interpretation).

The best explanation of these two uses of the word Israel is that it refers to the whole church; it is all the elect that is in view. Many commentators throughout history have taken this view since Dispensationalism (the theological system that gave rise to Jewish Root ideas) did not begin until 1830 from a heretical and occult source in London.³⁰ Only after Dispensationalism took root did such interpretations begin to arise, particularly with JN Darby.

³⁰ Edward Irving's church which scandalised London due to its extreme Charismatic nature. Some basic ideas (a secret rapture) emanated from a sick young Scottish girl under the power of the occult. Premillennialism is ancient and Jewish, and in church history it was a minority view emphasised by the Nazarites, but Dispensationalism did not begin before 1830.

Even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? As He says also in Hosea: "I will call them My people, who were not My people, And her beloved, who was not beloved. And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, '*You are not My people,*' There they shall be called sons of the living God." Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, The remnant will be saved." Rm 9:24-

27

Paul is speaking about predestination and uses Israel to illustrate his point throughout chapters 9-11. Here he states that God chose some to be a vessel for glory, this is the church comprising Jews and Gentiles. Those who were not part of God's people (Gentiles) now are. As a result Israel has grown to be like the sand of the sea because it is full of spiritual Jews - saved Jews and Gentiles. Hence Gentile Christians are called Israel here in verse 27. This passage is specifically about people who were not God's people originally (Gentiles) who now are God's people; and the inclusive title for all God's people (Jews and Gentiles) is Israel, a 'prince with God'.

In Matt 18:17 Jesus talks about church discipline. If a person rejects this discipline he is to be treated like a 'Gentile'. Jews at the time divided mankind into Jew and Gentile, those outside the fellowship of the church are to be treated as Gentiles, therefore, those inside the church are as Israel.

Regarding expressions once applied to Israel but now applied to the church, from the thousands of examples we will supply a few below:

- Beloved of God - Rm 9:25; Eph 5:1; Col 3:12; 1 Jn 3:1.
- Children of God - Jn 1:12, 11:52; Rm 8:14, 16; 2 Cor 6:18; Gal 3:26.
- The House of God - 1 Tim 3:15; Heb 13:2, 5, 6, 10:21; 1 Pt 4:17.
- The Kingdom of God - Rm 14:17; 1 Cor 4:20; Col 1:13, 4:11; Rev 1:6.
- The people of God - Rm 9:25; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 4:12, 5:3; 2 Thess 1:10.
- The Vineyard of God - Lk 20:16.
- The Bride of God - 2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:31-32.
- The Children of Abraham - Rm 4:11, 16; Gal 3:7, 29, 4:23, 28, 31.
- The Chosen people - Col 3:12; 1 Pt 2:9.
- Israel - Gal 6:15-16; Eph 2:12, 19; Rm 9:24-27.
- The adoption (Rm 9:4) is now in the church (Rm 8:15-16).
- The glory (Rm 9:4) is now in the church (Rm 8:18; 2 Cor 3: 10-18).
- The covenant (Rm 9:4) is now with the church (Eph 2:12-13).
- Worshipful service to God (Rm 9:4) is now with the church (Rm 12:1; Phil 3:3; Jn 4:21-23).
- The promises (Rm 9:4) are the church's in Christ (2 Cor 1:20; 2 Pt 1:2-4; Gal 4 :28).

All these things were not transferred to the church from Israel, the church is now Israel as the seed of Abraham.

REPLACEMENT THEOLOGY

This is the charge that Reformed theology teaches that, through spiritualising OT texts, Israel is now the church; i.e. the church has replaced Israel. By following the Dispensational idea that all Scripture, including prophetic passages, should be taken literally (a position that doesn't hold up), Jewish Root teachers claim that Reformed theology is mistaken.

Now you won't find 'replacement theology' as a locus of systematics in Reformed literature because it is never mentioned. Furthermore, genuine Reformed theology does not apply

the importance of what Israel stands for to the church but to Christ. The fulfilment of all the OT types and prophecies are in Christ. The focus is Christ not the church. The church is a beneficiary of the promises because it is in Christ, but the centre of the promises is Christ (Gal 3:19). Christ is the Seed of Abraham and the fulfilment of all the covenant promises, but his children, his body is the seed only in a secondary sense (Rm 4:16, 9:8).

There is no doubt that Christ is the fulfilment of all God's plans regarding salvation, not Israel. How can anyone think otherwise? Israel did not achieve salvation, Christ did; thus all the promises are found fulfilled in Christ, not Israel. The church is the beneficiary of these promises because it is in Christ – and the church comprises Jews and Gentiles. This Biblical theology is not anti-Jewish, just anti sinner, anti those who go to hell. Jews are included in the elect, but not because they are Jews but because they have faith.

We have shown that there are many passages which apply titles and promises to the church that were formerly applied to Israel, which proves my argument here. Other examples include: that true Israelites and believers are part of the same olive tree (Rm 11:17-24). Note also that James addresses his letter to Jews but clearly has in mind believers (Jm 2:1). Peter applies OT passages referring to the exclusive Jewish people of God to the church (1 Pt 2:10 c.f. Hos 1:10; Ex 19:5-6); as does John (Rev 1:6 c.f. Ex 19:5); also the church is the true circumcision (Phil 3:3).

The idea of replacement theology is a bogeyman to scare gullible believers who have not studied their Bibles carefully enough. It is a red herring. This poverty-stricken argument proves how weak the case of Jewish Root theology is. The scandal is why do so many people (predominantly women) fall for it? Israel was a temporary feature of God's plan, which was always for the whole world. Along with the Old Covenant, which ruled over Israel, this whole system has been cancelled in order to culminate in the New Covenant, which is universal in scope comprising the elect from all nations with equal status.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first [i.e. in time] and also for the Greek. Rm 1:16

For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. Gal 3:28

There is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave *nor* free, but Christ *is* all and in all. Col 3:11

This equality of nations is crystal clear and there is no excuse for suggesting that Israel is different or more prominent in any spiritual sense at all. Anyone who says there is a distinction between Jews and Greeks, and that Jews are God's special people, is denying what the Lord Jesus specifically says through Paul:

For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. Rm 10:12

THE GENTILE CHURCH IS ANTI-SEMITIC

Really, this war cry of Jewish Root teachers must be silenced as gross slander. It just isn't true. Certainly there have been some whose radical criticism became anti-Semitic, but this does not apply to everyone. In the same way there have been Jews who said vicious things about Goyim (Gentiles); even recently the media reported that a rabbi stated that Gentiles and their children could be killed under certain circumstances. Though this provoked outrage, the Israeli government did not condemn him. So some people on both sides have said cruel things. So what's new? All men are sinners.

The question is, ‘does Protestant theology innately imply anti-Semitism?’ No it does not. Genuine Reformed theology is not concerned with nationalistic matters at all but with the elect. It teaches that the Christian is dead to the world and worldly things, such as supporting or denouncing a particular nation. The Reformed Christian is concerned with being a pilgrim journeying towards a heavenly city, not with establishing kingdoms on this world. From Calvin to today writings supporting evangelising and helping Jews could be advanced much more than finding some writings condemning them. These negative writings usually resulted from some local situation where Jews were at fault.

Even Martin Luther, castigated as inspiring Hitler’s Final Solution, was good to Jews, providing safe-conduct warrants for those travelling in his community and helping those in need. His later denunciation of Jews was in response to their hindrance of the Reformation, treachery and usury in Germany. He did not hold Jews responsible for the death of Christ; as he wrote in a hymn, *‘We dare not blame ... the band of Jews; ours is the shame.’* His anger against Jews was stirred up by Judaisers in Moravia and he responded like Paul did. Remember Paul called Judaisers ‘evil-workers’ and ‘dogs’ and labelled their Jewish emphasis as ‘fables’.

Luther reacted to threats against the church and the progress of the Reformation as if it was, in reality, orchestrated personally by the Devil himself. As such, he felt that vehement opposition was necessary to rid the community of such anti-Christian evil. Even so, later in life, Luther confessed that his reaction to the Jews was excessive. He also wrote vituperatively against the Peasants when they threatened national stability in an uprising in 1525, but he was not against peasants per se, having come from peasant stock himself. After the revolt he pleaded the case of the peasants and his whole life was dedicated to edifying the working man. In general the peasants loved him. Historical context is important to get to the truth, not just taking selective quotes.

Jewish Root teachers, as often evidenced in their writings, use selected evidence taken out of context to make a sharp point and ignore evidence against them. It is unbalanced and poor scholarship. As they misread Scripture, so they misread history.

So, the chief doctrines of the Jewish Root Movement are false and result from misinterpreting Scripture. Any focus upon Israel, Judaism or anything else is an affront to Christ. We must look to Christ; set our minds on heaven where Christ is seated (Col 3:1-2) and follow him (Matt 4:19; Jn 12:26), not Jewish matters.

A focus upon mysticism

Gnosticism is alive and well lurking within the Charismatic Movement. It is reasonable to call this group neo-Gnostic since many of the principles they adopt are similar to the ancient Gnostics. The flowering of Gnostic mysticism is in the Charismatic and Pentecostal Movements. Now few Charismatics are dualists (matter = evil, spirit = good) but many other features of Gnosticism are found in their ranks. These include: an extraordinary knowledge that is available from their leaders resulting in a special experience of the Spirit that is not known by all; leaders as intermediaries to God; a claim that only they have the truth and that everyone else is misled; necessity for constant new spiritual experiences; passing on spiritual experiences by touch of a leader; a focus upon angels as intermediaries; repetitive chanting; antinomianism and mysticism in general.

Now since all these features are understood and have been discussed many times, we do not need to prolong this paper with a fresh evaluation of them here. Suffice to say that

modern Charismaticism is Gnostic. Now there are other churches that are also Gnostic, especially those in the Inter-Faith movement which ally with New Age ideas, but the most common form of modern Gnosticism is manifested in Charismatic churches.

Conclusion

It is my contention that, as was the case in the apostolic church, the modern church is facing a threat from two opposite directions. The first is the widespread neo-Gnosticism of the Charismatic Movement, and the other is the centring upon Jewish things and Judaism exhibited in a number of movements. Both these threats are deceptions designed by the enemy to distract Christians away from the truth in Christ. Gnosticism tends to focus people upon their subjective feelings and develop a mystical approach, while the messianic movements get believers to concentrate upon external dead Jewish forms. The crucial problem is that both take attention away from Christ on to something else that has no life.

Many of the claims made by messianic writers on the historic origins of the church are simplistic, exaggerated or just plain wrong. It is wrong to say that Gnosticism just Greek; that is an over-simplification which is misleading. It is poor scholarship to omit any mention of the apostolic attacks on the Judaisers, which was their chief problem. It is wrong to say that Greek thinking and academic principles caused harm to the early development of theology; in fact it added clarity and clear distinctions in method. In any case it was necessary in order to contend against the increasing use of Greek methodology and precision by heretics. It is also false to say that early Christianity was Jewish in its thinking and procedure and that the NT is Jewish. In fact almost all the letters are addressed to Gentiles, and at least two of the Gospels are specifically addressed to Gentiles (Luke to Theophilus and John to his church at Ephesus). Neither is there any evidence of an original NT text in Hebrew; the NT text was written in Greek, the universal language and culture ordained by God for the better dissemination of the Gospel.

To say that Gnosticism and Greek thinking ruined the early church and drove it away from its Jewish roots is just plain false. The true church did not adopt Gnostic principles but strongly contended against them as the writings of the fathers clearly reveals. The father's criticism of Jews is not racist but contention against the wide-ranging Ebonite views prevailing at the time and also against the immoral practices of Jews (such as usury and perjury) in various nations.

Jews were not expelled from nations or from chief cities (such as Rome) because they killed Christ, but because they had a damaging effect on society. Claudius had generally treated Jews in the empire well, and was not opposed to them in principle, but expelled the Jews from Rome in 49 AD. We are not told why but it would have been a political not religious decision. As usury (lending money for profit) was originally forbidden by the Catholic Church, Jews (who were not included in this law) made fortunes by money-lending. In time they gained a reputation for extortion and sharp practice and became hate figures. In 1287 Edward I expelled all Jews from England until their formal return in 1655. Jews were also expelled from other countries such as Spain, France, Germany and Portugal. The reasons in each case appear to be complex and varied, however, the genuine Christian church was not to blame and money-lending was often involved. In fact it was under a Christian Lord Protector (Oliver Cromwell) that Jews were allowed to return to a Christian Commonwealth in England. Jewish Root teachers who hate Cromwell seem to ignore this fact. Jews were tolerated in Christian Reformed (Calvinistic) Holland as well as England's Puritan (Calvinistic) Commonwealth. It seems that toleration and persecution of Jews had much more to do with mercantile commercialism than anything else. The Jews

ability to supply credit was sometimes welcomed and, when it became extortion, led to reviling.

The over-simplification, poor scholarship, exaggeration and misrepresentation of certain Jewish Root teachers is scandalous, as I have already had cause to critique in my book, *'Was the Reformation Good News'*. It seems to be a method adapted for the gullible and those not well versed in history. Those who read 'Christian' messianic writings need to bear this in mind and not be deceived.

The growth of Jewish Root groups was spurred on by the wild, ungodly excesses of the Toronto Experience and the attraction of confused believers to Jewish Root ideas is obvious. Having been damaged in a Charismatic church and having had eyes opened to the dangers of its inherent occult practices, folk sought a more fundamental and Biblically based group. The claim of messianic teachers to promote a more original, Biblical, godly and safe teaching is attractive. To folk weak in Biblical doctrine and previously abused in churches, this claim seems genuine. In fact, it is only jumping from the frying pan to the fire.

Far from being Biblical it utterly fails to understand the chief Biblical hermeneutic³¹ that the Old Covenant forms are dead, cancelled and completed in the New Covenant. It fails to understand the newness of what Jesus brought in at the cross.³² It makes people look back to law (*Torah*) instead of grace in Christ; to fleshly Jewishness instead of the Spirit.³³ Its separation of Jew and Gentile relies upon Dispensational theology which is not only unorthodox but only arose recently, in historical terms, having never been witnessed throughout church history until the mid-19th century.

There is an alternative to both mystical Charismaticism and messianic Christianity – and that is simply Biblical Christianity meeting in Biblical churches. That is, traditional Protestant theology, which some call Calvinism or Reformed theology,³⁴ and meeting under NT guidelines – in a house with mutual encouraging ministry centred upon the Lord's Supper.

Scripture quotations are from The New King James Version
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³¹ Rule of interpretation.

³² New life, new creatures, new teaching, new wineskins, new covenant, new commandment, new man, new name, new song, new Jerusalem, new heaven, new earth, 'all things new'.

³³ Some Jewish Root teachers merely focus people upon the *Torah*, but some lead people to accept the wicked *Talmud* (which is full of immoral ideas and blasphemies) and other Pharisaic rabbinic sources, such as *Midrash* and other oral teachings.

³⁴ The following denominations were all founded upon Calvinistic theology: Presbyterianism, most Independents, Anglicanism, Reformed (Particular) Baptists, Congregationalists and even the Brethren until Darby took them into Dispensationalism.

Appendix One

The Platonism of the early church fathers

The prevailing Hellenistic culture

The first point is to observe that God, in his sovereign providence, established Greek culture as the setting for apostolic teaching and the establishment of the early church. The Gospel was not initially preached in a Hebrew culture, nor in a Roman (Latin) one, but in a pervading Greek civilisation. For this reason the NT was written in colloquial Greek, not Aramaic or Hebrew, and most of the people and churches addressed were Gentiles (only Matthew, James and Hebrews are more particularly addressed to Christian Jews).

Though the New Covenant church was born in the Roman Empire, the prevailing culture was still Greek, being established in the Mediterranean and Near East by the development of the previous Greek Empire under Alexander the Great. The universal language was Greek, not Latin and this was recognised by the Jews when they arranged for a Greek OT to be produced (the Septuagint or LXX) in the 3rd century BC. The whole canon being translated into Greek by 132 BC. It is this translation that is frequently used by the apostles in the NT, not one of the various local Hebrew texts. Jews in Judaea did not even speak Hebrew but Aramaic, a Syrian dialect; but for global commercial activity they spoke and wrote Greek. Many Jews were dispersed throughout the Roman Empire and they would have spoken Greek, as Paul did in Tarsus. Their education was also influenced by Greek ideas (note Paul's repeated reference to the Greek poets³⁵).

This continued for many decades after the establishment of the church, so that it was entirely natural for the early church fathers to write in Greek, the lingua franca. It was only with Tertullian (170-220) that theologians began to write in Latin and it was centuries before Latin became the universal academic language; though even Tertullian began his writings in Greek, but these have not survived. The Latin writings appeared around 196-212. So for two hundred years the prevailing Greek culture and language dominated theological writings; this was not only logical but was ordained by God for good reasons.

Greek logic

It was the Greeks who established all the fundamental principles of education and logic. The Greek language was suited to this being very expressive and able to exhibit very subtle nuances of thought; very different to the Hebrew language, which is quite rough by comparison. It was the Greeks who established the principles of arithmetic, geometry, geography, astronomy, science, logic, medicine, rhetoric and philosophy, which became the bedrock of modern civilisation. The flowering of the Renaissance much later was due to the resurgence of classical Greek culture following the rediscovery of old manuscripts once lost.

There is nothing sinister or wrong with the early church fathers (theologians) writing in Greek or using Greek principles of logic to write. They were trained in Greek schools and taught with Greek methods because they were the best that were available. Jewish Root critics who castigate them for this are being foolish in the extreme. Some take this further by using slander, such as Jacob Prasch; for instance by accusing Augustine of being a Manichaean. This is like calling Paul a Pharisee because he was trained as one before his conversion. Just as Paul repudiated his Jewish training as dung (Phil 3:5-8), so Augustine

³⁵ Note, for instance, his reference to Epimenides of Gnosus (c. 600 BC) in Titus 1:12, a Cretan poet.

also denied his earlier Manichaeism. This sort of misrepresentation is typical of Jewish Root teachers.³⁶

Jewish Root principles of thought³⁷

All logical teaching follows some sort of academic guidelines and interpreting principle. Jewish Root teachers follow rabbinic ideas unashamedly; notice the emphasis of Jacob Prasch on rabbinic Midrash. Now rabbinic ideas are the outworking of the Babylonian Talmud; indeed modern Judaism is the construction of the Babylonian Talmud; this is accepted by the Jewish encyclopaedia.³⁸ Note that the Talmud itself teaches this: *'be more careful in the observance of the words of the Scribes than in the words of the Torah'*.³⁹ So do authoritative modern Jews: [The Talmud] *'is still the supreme authority in religion'*.⁴⁰ [The Talmud is] *'the central pillar supporting the entire spiritual and intellectual edifice of Jewish life'*.⁴¹ *'The modern Jew is the product of the Talmud'*.⁴²

Christians need to understand that this is nothing like the Judaism that flourished at the time of Christ which was a plethora of various competing traditions (such as of the Pharisees, the Sadducees or the Essenes). What ultimately prevailed after the destruction of the temple was that the Pharisees – the very enemies of Christ – became established as the foundation of Judaism. It was these who developed the later rabbinic tradition summarised in the teaching of the Babylonian Talmud. The Talmud then became the essential foundation of Judaism having much more authority than the *Torah*. The majority of modern religious Jews and rabbis are influenced by the Talmud far more than the *Torah*.

Modern Judaism is, therefore, dominated by the very legalistic traditions of the Pharisees that Jesus condemned. Judaism is the culmination of ideas arising from the sect which most opposed the Lord. After the destruction of the temple in 70 AD, it was the Pharisees who reconstructed Judaism, *'Pharisaism shaped the character of Judaism and the life and thought of the Jew for all the future... The study of [the Talmud] is essential for any real understanding of Pharisaism'*.⁴³ Modern Judaism is largely Pharisaism, however, some rabbinic literature dates back before the Pharisees held sway.⁴⁴

Now the Talmud is a very wicked and extreme work. Some of its contents are so foul that they cannot be repeated here, but the Talmud supports and defends crimes such as perjury and even paedophilia. However, for Christians, the worst problem with the Talmud is that it is violently opposed to Christ and full of blasphemies, for instance:

- Jesus is said to be boiling in excrement in hell.⁴⁵
- Jesus was conceived illegitimately during menstruation.⁴⁶

³⁶ For example the serious lies told by Jacob Prasch about the Reformers. See my book, *'Was the Reformation a Good Thing?'*

³⁷ Part of this is taken from my paper, *'What Supporters of the Jewish Root Movement Need To Know About Dispensationalism and Judaism'*.

³⁸ The only exception to this regards the Karaite sect which developed in the 8th century and which rejects man-made writings.

³⁹ Erubin, 21b

⁴⁰ *The Jewish Encyclopaedia*, Vol 12, p26.

⁴¹ Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, Daily News, Los Angeles, 13 March 1990, p10.

⁴² Dr. Isaac H Wise, Commentary on the Talmud; quoted in Griffin p31.

⁴³ *The Jewish Encyclopaedia*, article on Pharisaism, p666, p474.

⁴⁴ See articles Pharisees and Rabbinic Traditions & Writings in *'Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels'*, IVP, (1992).

⁴⁵ *Gittin*, 57a, 56b.

⁴⁶ *Kallah*, 1b (18b).

- Jesus is called a fool.⁴⁷
- Jesus is said to be a magician / sorcerer.⁴⁸
- Jesus is said to be a bloody and deceitful man.⁴⁹
- Mary was an adulterous prostitute.⁵⁰
- Christians are described as murderers, idolaters,⁵¹ or dung⁵² and accused of bestiality⁵³.
- Christians were only created to serve Jews day and night and belong to Jews.⁵⁴
- Christians are worse than dogs.⁵⁵
- Incest is considered a 'light' sin compared to accepting Christianity.⁵⁶
- Jews must avoid Christians, even if they are wounded and need a doctor, or even to learn from a teacher.⁵⁷
- Jews are to injure Christians in every way possible, even killing them.⁵⁸ Jews who do good to Christians will not be resurrected.⁵⁹ Jews can steal from Christians.⁶⁰
- Jews can deceive Christians by pretending to be one.⁶¹
- Jews can lie in order to condemn a Christian.⁶²
- Jews must always try to deceive Christians.⁶³

The Talmud's instruction to deceive others needs amplification. It is for this reason that Jews have been historically reviled and often ejected from countries wholesale. The *Kol Nidre* ('all vows') prayer teaches that all vows can be ignored, all pledges rescinded, all obligations refused and all commitments lied about, if this prayer is prayed first:

He who desires that none of his vows made during the year shall be valid, let him stand at the beginning of the year, and declare 'every vow which I make in the future shall be null'. His vows are then invalid provided that he remembers this at the time of the vow.⁶⁴

So, the background principle of Jewish Root teachers, who anathematise Greek logic and discipline, is the Judaism of the Talmud with all its evils.

Greek academic principles used by early theologians

The early fathers used Greek systems of logic because it was the best available. Indeed, throughout history, including the Reformers, all used Greek principles of logic to establish their method. This is not to be berated but applauded since,

⁴⁷ *Schabbath*, 104b; *Sanhedrin* 67a.

⁴⁸ *Toldoth Jeschu*, *Sanhedrin* 43a.

⁴⁹ *Gittin* 56b.

⁵⁰ *Sanhedrin*, chap 7, 106b, *Iebhammoth*, last chapter.

⁵¹ *Abhodah Zarah* 22a, *Iore Dea* 153.2, Maimonides *Vide Infra*, Chap2, p42, *Perusch* 78c. Christians are called by various names in the Talmud, such as *Akum*, *Goim*, *Notsrim*, *Abhodah Zarah*, *Obhde Elilim*, *Minim*, *Edom*, *Amme Haarets*, *Apikorosim*, *Kuthrim*, *Nokhrim*. Jews see Gentiles as covering all 'Christian' people.

⁵² *Abhodah Zarah* 22b

⁵³ *Abhodah Zarah* 15b, 22.

⁵⁴ *Midrasch Talpioth* 225d; A Rohl, *Die Polem.* p20

⁵⁵ Rabbi Schelomo Iarchi on Deut 14:21. *Iebhammoth* 61a.

⁵⁶ *Abhodah Zarah* 17a.

⁵⁷ *Iore Dea* 155.1, 153.1.

⁵⁸ *Iore Dea* 158.1; *Orach Chaiim* 330.2. *Choschen Ham.* 425.5, 388.15; *Abhodah Zarah* 26b; *Zohar* 1.25a, II.43a, I.38b,39a; *Sepher Or Israel* 177b; *Ialkut Simoni* 245c. n. 772.

⁵⁹ *Zohar* 1.25b,

⁶⁰ *Babha Bathra* 54b; *Choschen Hammischpat* 156.5, 183.7, 266.1. *Babha Kama* 113b.

⁶¹ *Iore Dea* 157.2 Hagah.

⁶² *Babha Kama* 113a,b. *Kallah* 1b, p18.

⁶³ *Zohar* 1.160a.

⁶⁴ *Nedarim*, 23a-23b.

The two philosophies (Platonism and Aristotelianism) contain more of truth than all the other systems that do not draw from them, or are opposed to them. They contain a representation of the powers and functions, the laws, operations, and relations of the human mind, that is nearer to the actual matter of fact, than can be found in other alien and differing systems. ... [even though] Neither Platonism nor Aristotelianism is free from grave errors. Plato, in some places, certainly, teaches a defective theory of moral evil. ... Aristotle incorrectly fosters pantheism. Yet both of these systems, taken together as a whole, were antagonistic to the atheism, the materialism, and even the polytheism of the pagan world.⁶⁵

Platonism and Aristotelianism differ only in form not in substance; they give similar answers to the principle human questions, such as those regarding rationality, the immortality of the mind in distinction from matter, the importance of the senses, moral law and the principles of knowledge etc. These principles were useful in the ancient world. The fact that the disciples of Plato took his method and thinking into imaginative theosophy and Gnosticism, and the disciples of Aristotle degenerated into the hair-splitting of the Scholastics, and that these were a corrupting influence, is without doubt. But these errors emerged from a concentration on minor aspects of the philosophical method to the exclusion of others.

The chief importance of these philosophical principles was that they were not pagan like the rest of the world. Theologians took these principles and adapted them to make them more elevated and spiritual. Indeed, this was necessary because attacks on the church were beginning to be formed by secular and pagan critics who also employed Greek philosophical principles.

The Christian apologist is compelled to study, and employ this same general system of speculation, for his own higher purposes. He perceives that a system of philosophy like the Platonic is favourable to the principles of ethics and natural religion; that it does not, like the Epicurean, undermine all morality and religion; and therefore insists, and with right, that so far as it can properly go, it is not unfriendly to the system of revealed truth.⁶⁶

But it must be borne in mind that the early fathers still discriminated between the teachings of Plato and those of Scripture. Augustine finds the principle of the *logos* in Plato but not of the incarnate *Logos*. He finds the doctrine that God is the light of mankind in Plato, but not that God in the flesh died for the ungodly. Still, the theologians that exerted the most influence in forming and establishing Christian orthodox doctrine (such as the Trinity or the person of Christ) had been disciplined Greek intellectual methods, such as Athanasius, Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus. Without the tremendous work of these great men, educated by Greek philosophy, we would not have had the defence of truth against many errors (such as Arianism) nor the establishment of orthodoxy as found in the great ecumenical creeds. It was their Greek training that produced the sharpness of distinction and the subtlety of discrimination of thought necessary to establish true doctrine and discover the weakness in errors. The almost forensic clarity and exact care of ancient credal statements is due to this education in Greek philosophy.

⁶⁵ WGT Shedd, *A History of Christian Doctrine*, T & T Clark (1872) p53-56.

⁶⁶ Shedd, *op.cit.* p63.

It is churlish of modern Jewish Root teachers to be disparaging of such men. While they propagate error and divert people from Christ and onto Moses, they attack the very men who established the bedrock of genuine Christian doctrine for centuries. Men like Basil or Athanasius did more to defend the faith and contend against error (with all their Greek thinking) than these modern Jewish false teachers have ever done.

Appendix Two

COMMENTATORS ON RM 11:16-18.

Albert Barnes (Moderate Presbyterian): *In this place **the reference is doubtless to Abraham and the patriarchs, as the root or founders of the Jewish nation.** If they were holy, it is to be expected that the distant branches, or descendants, would also be so regarded.*

Adam Clarke (Arminian): ***the chief reference is to the ancestors of the Jewish people, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob;** and, as these were devoted to God and received into his covenant, all their posterity, the branches which proceeded from this root, became entitled to the same privileges.*

Jamison, Fausset & Brown (Anglican): ***the argument of the apostle is, that as the separation unto God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, from the rest of mankind, as the parent stem of their race*** ...

Matt. Henry (Puritan): *Now the believing Gentiles partake of **this root: he also is a son of Abraham** (Luk 19:9), the blessing of Abraham comes upon the Gentiles (Gal 3:14).*

Geneva Bible Notes (Reformers): *The nation of the Jews being considered in their head and **root, that is, in Abraham.***

William Hendriksen (Presbyterian): ***The root symbolise[s] Abraham.***

RCH Lenski (Lutheran): ***the root denote[s] Abraham, with whom the covenant was made, or Abraham, Isaac and Jacob taken together.***

Everett F Harrison (Presbyterian): *The 'olive root', **the patriarchal base** established by God's covenant.*

FL Godet (Swiss Reformed): *Their very origin – that is to say, by **the call of Abraham.** ... We must therefore, with the majority of commentators, take these holy first fruits as **the patriarchs.***

FF Bruce (Brethren): *we should think of **the patriarchs as constituting the root** of the tree.*

John Calvin (French Reformer): ***he bids us to look back to Abraham and the patriarchs.***

No serious commentator in history before 1830 considered that Israel the nation or Judaism was the root. The root is God's calling of Abraham and the covenant with the patriarchs, which rested upon faith in Christ.