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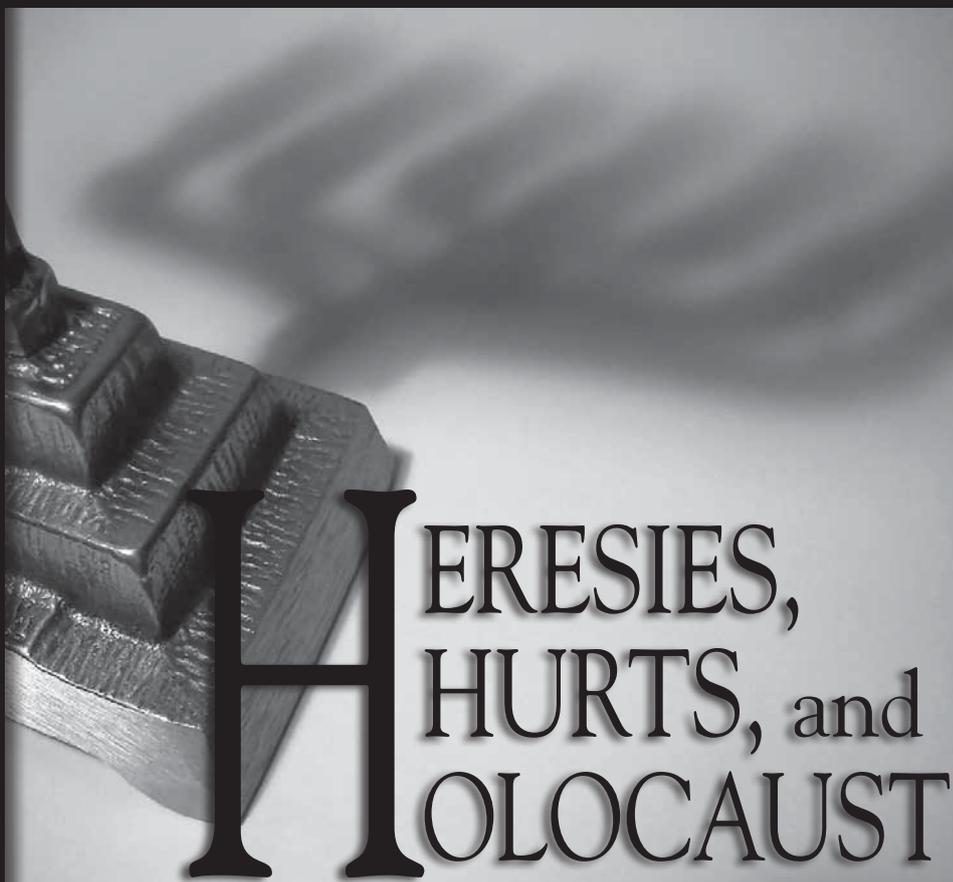
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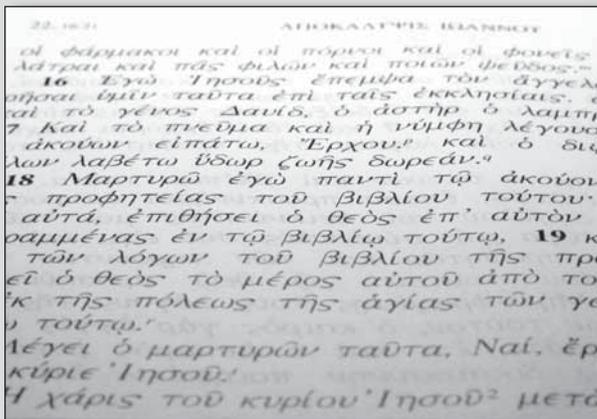
Israel Teaching Letter

Vol. # 770904



WHEN A CHRISTIAN becomes more involved with Israel, the Jewish people, and learning about the Jewish roots of our Christian faith, we discover that a dark evil lives in our Christian closet: a legacy of hatred toward the Jewish people that culminated in discrimination, persecution, exile, and death, and included horrific events such as the Crusades, the Inquisition, the Pogroms, and the Holocaust.

Have you ever wondered what the Church might have avoided if we had kept our Jewish roots? It makes for an interesting study, which is the focus of our teaching this month.



I don't think it is an accident that the Scriptures came to us in both Hebrew and Greek... There is also truth revealed in the tension and balance between Hebrew and Greek language and thinking.

As I begin, let me give a couple of disclaimers. First, a modern religious Jew might not automatically agree with all I'm about to say. Dr. Marvin Wilson has a quote that I really like. He says that in the first century of the Common Era, i.e., the first century AD, two new religions were born: Christianity and modern Judaism. The reason that Dr. Wilson says this is because Judaism in the time of Yeshua (Jesus), when the Temple stood, was necessarily different from the Judaism of today. Judaism in the time of Yeshua and during the Temple era had many different elements. In our New Testament, we read about the Sadducees, Pharisees, and Essenes. Today, there are no Sadducees or Essenes. We read about the Temple and about the priests and their perspective. Today, there is neither a Temple nor a priestly group within Judaism making sacrifices or instructing and leading. So Judaism 2,000 years ago was different than it is today. While I do believe that the concepts I'll discuss still echo within modern Judaism, I nevertheless feel certain some Jewish readers might not agree with my conclusions.

Second, in drawing some conclusions about ways the Church could have avoided certain mistakes if we had stayed connected to our Jewish roots, my other disclaimer is that I am not suggesting that if we were all Jewish everything would be perfect either. In fact, what I am actually suggesting is what you will see in 1 Corinthians 1:22-25, "For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men."

Let me propose a different way of thinking about these verses from what you may have thought before. Part of what this verse is telling us is that the Hebraic (or Jewish) way of thinking is different from the Greek (or Western) way of thinking. The two are very different. The premise I am operating on is that our faith is most enlightened and best refined when we take the tension between Greek thought and Hebraic thought and put God's Word in between the two. I don't think it is an accident that the Scriptures came to us in both Hebrew and Greek. I think we can potentially go off the deep end if we go so far in learning and loving our Hebrew roots that we think, "If only we were all Jewish and practicing Jewish rituals everything would be wonderful," or "Greek isn't as good as Hebrew," and forget that there is also truth revealed in the tension and balance between Hebrew and Greek language and thinking.

Later, I will discuss to some extent the tension of the middle ground. However, since the historical Church has leaned largely to the Greek side of thinking, most of what you are going to read will illustrate how we might have avoided some of the problems we find in the Church had we remembered our Hebrew roots.

A Parable

Let me start by giving you a context in which to think about this. I'm going to share a story, actually a parable.

Once upon a time, long, long ago, there were two brothers. The elder brother was much older, and as is typical of an elder sibling, he viewed it as his job to protect the rights and traditions of the family—to be the leader. The younger brother came up with some new and somewhat different ideas. The older brother didn't like this. As typically happens between brothers, the two brothers fought. And as usually occurs, the older brother was bigger and stronger, and there were times that he hurt the younger brother. But as happens in a family, the younger brother grew and eventually became just as strong as the older brother. Now there is another thing about these brothers

that you need to know. They lived in a far-away land ruled by an evil dictator. While they had battles between the two of them, their real problem and challenge was the evil dictator that ruled over them.

Then, as the brothers grew, a strange thing happened. The younger brother married the daughter of the dictator! Suddenly, the younger brother went from being persecuted by the dictator to now being part of the family of the dictator. As time went on, the older brother would have been happy to forget the feud. He had bigger problems. But the younger brother never forgot the feud. Both sides may have forgotten why the feud started, but the younger brother remembered the feud. As the younger brother gained power and authority as part of the dictator's family, he started to exercise that authority to hurt and persecute the elder brother.

This didn't go on only during the years while the older and younger brothers were still alive, but it also continued from generation to generation. In the United States, we have a somewhat parallel story concerning the Hatfield/McCoy feud in the Blue Ridge Mountains and how eventually all both families knew is that they were supposed to kill each other, but they couldn't quite remember why. Regarding our parable family, their descendants continued this feud between the two brothers for centuries and for millennia. The older brother was named Jacob (Israel, the Jewish people) and the younger brother is us (Gentile Christians). We have inflicted great hurt and harm on our older brother and have never forgotten the tension of those early days.

Heresies

Now let's look at some of the many heresies that have affected the historical Church. I assure you that I am not going to review every single one of them in detail. We may think that there were one or two big heresies; however, there were many, and they caused great strife and even battles in the Church. The following list is from the first four centuries of the emerging Church. Believe it or not, there were many more in later years as well. Look at the brief description of each one and see if you can find a theme among them:

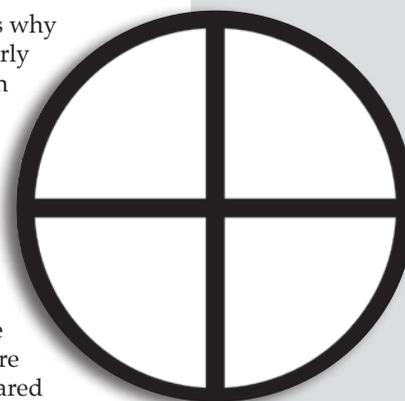
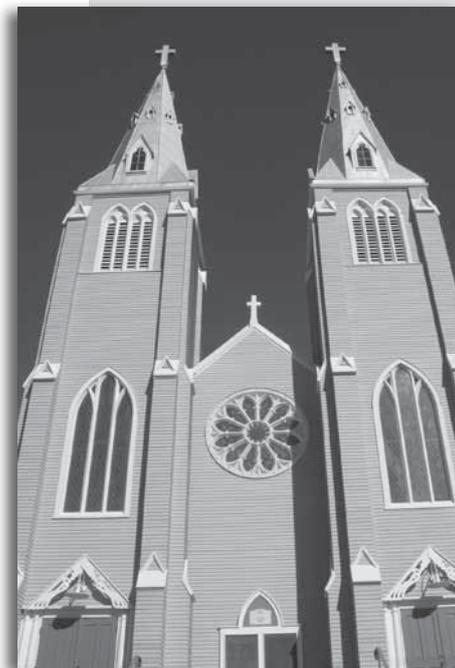
- **Adoptionism**—God granted Yeshua powers and then adopted Him as a Son.
- **Albigenses**—Believed in reincarnation and two gods: one good and other evil.
- **Apollinarianism**—Yeshua's divine will overshadowed and replaced the human.
- **Arianism**—Yeshua was a lesser, created being.
- **Docetism**—Yeshua was divine, but only seemed to be human.
- **Donatism**—Validity of sacraments depends on the character of the minister.
- **Gnosticism**—Dualism of good and evil and acquiring special knowledge for salvation.
- **Kenosis**—Yeshua gave up some divine attributes while on earth.
- **Modalism**—God is one person in three modes.
- **Monarchianism**—God is one person.
- **Monophysitism**—Yeshua had only one nature: divine.
- **Nestorianism**—Yeshua was two persons.
- **Pelagianism**—Man is unaffected by the fall and can keep all of God's laws.
- **Socinianism**—Denial of the Trinity; Yeshua is a deified man.
- **Tritheism**—the Trinity is really three separate gods.

None of these teachings are part of normative Christian theology, which is why they are called heresies. What is common in each? I suggest that all the early heresies debated and wrestled with the nature of God. They also wrestled with the question: "Who is Yeshua?" In fact, today we can see some of these old teachings reappearing, from time to time, in a new sect or cult.

Gnosticism

For our purposes, I want to cover just two of these major early heresies in more detail. Let's start with the Gnostics or Gnosticism. Here are their basic teachings: They believed that Yeshua never had a human nature or human body. He couldn't, because they viewed humanity as evil. There never was a man named Yeshua; there was a theophany of God that appeared to look like Yeshua. He was a phantom or apparition with no real body, which is typical of all the variations of Gnosticism. The real way to figure this all out is through

We have inflicted great hurt and harm on our older brother and have never forgotten the tension of those early days.



getting secret knowledge. In this regard, let's look more closely at perhaps the largest and most dangerous of the Gnostic sects: Marcianism. It's amazing that a Christian faith that originated in Judaism could have evolved into this, but Marcianism swept across large areas of the early Church in the second and third centuries AD.



Marcian, a Roman Emperor from 450 to 457

Its adherents rejected the writings of the Old Testament. They said that there is a "good" God and a "bad" God; and that the God of the Old Testament is a "bad" God, and the prophets of the Old Testament were evil. Then, there was a "good" God who was now going to destroy them. Strangely enough, they also accepted astrology as part of Christianity, and the Marcions believed that astrology was a way to get to know what God was saying. While the Old Testament wasn't a valid source of knowledge about God, they said, you could look at the stars.

Let me ask you: "Would this heresy have come about if the Church had stayed true and connected to our early Jewish roots, which honored the revelation of God through the Hebrew Scriptures?" I suggest there are several reasons why Gnosticism never would have taken root if we had stayed connected to our Jewish roots.

First of all, who were the early disciples? They were all Jewish believers. What was their experience with Yeshua? Their experience was walking with Yeshua, eating with Yeshua, being in the boat with Yeshua, seeing Yeshua sleep, hearing Yeshua say, "I won't drink of the cup again until I drink of it with you in My kingdom" (Matt. 26:29). There was no debate in the earliest Church whether Yeshua was a real man. There is no debate in the early record of Judaism; there was no witness who came forward and said, "Oh, the resurrection couldn't have happened because Yeshua wasn't a real man." There was debate about the resurrection, but there was never a debate about Yeshua being a real man.

With regard to the validity of the Tanach, the Old Testament, Yeshua Himself said that He did not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets. In Matthew 5:18, He says that not one jot or tittle will pass away from the Law until heaven and earth pass away. Yeshua said that He came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets. If we had stayed at all close to our Jewish roots, this heresy that almost swept the Church onto a false and unbiblical path would never have been able to gain ground. Astrology could not be part of a biblical religion, because the Old Testament teaches clearly that we aren't to worship the stars, that they were created. If the Church had stayed close to its Jewish roots, we never would have had this heresy of Marcianism.

The heart of Judaism is focused on what man does in this world today. It's functional and about practice. It's about sanctifying the world through our lives. There is no teaching that the earth is evil or that the world is bad. God created the earth as good. Now there is Jewish teaching that there is both good and evil; as we have in Christianity. We live in a fallen creation; but it is a creation that began as good, and it is fallen man's inclination to do evil that spoils it. However, in Judaism, there is nothing about creation or physicality that in and of itself is always evil, and Jews and Christians believe God is going to redeem what is good and use us as part of the redemptive process. In fact, this is our responsibility before God. Our faith should not just be some vague, ethereal spirituality, but should be demonstrated in our lives and action.

As I leave Gnosticism, you may think that is just curious old stuff, and it is not something you need to hear about. Yet it is not just something of yesteryear, because it still exists today. Today, it is called Christian Science, and today it is called the New Age Movement. On the West Coast in the United States, in particular in Oregon and California, people are seeking to combine New Age, astrology, and a form of Christianity. These modern heresies have roots in early Gnosticism. Even without the mix of New Age and astrology with Christianity—which is obviously wrong—there are a few well-meaning, bona fide Christians who spend less time in God's Word for direction and more time "sensing the Spirit," who ostensibly gives them "new revelation" and even "personal guidance," some of which is not biblical and can open the door to major problems when this direction is contrary to Scripture. We still have to be careful today.

The Old Testament teaches clearly that we aren't to worship the stars, that they were created. If the Church had stayed close to its Jewish roots, we never would have had this heresy.



Stonehenge a form of New Age

Arianism

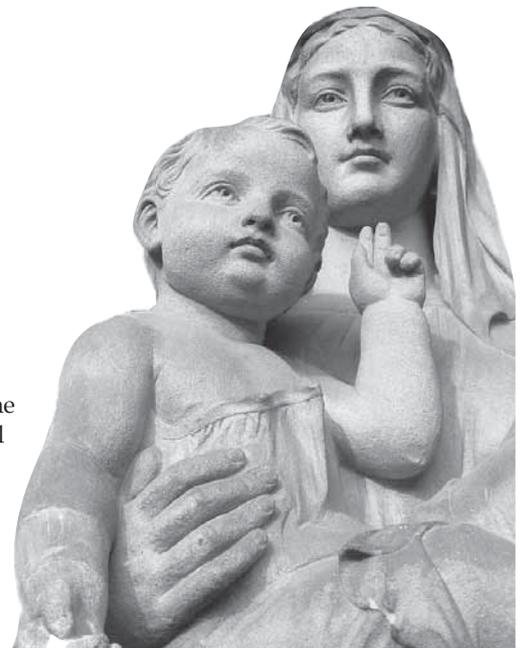
Let me go to the next major heresy—Arianism. This became so pervasive in the 300s that it, too, almost swept the Church and would have defined the Church until this day. Arianism is kind of the reverse of Gnosticism. In Arianism, Yeshua is a created being, like the angels. Some variations of Arianism taught that Yeshua was an ordinary man. Either way, the concept was that God was too pure to have actually appeared on earth. This denied Yeshua as divine and said, in one form or another, that God adopted Yeshua as His son, either as a special created being or just as a special man who lived righteously. It taught that we can all be like Yeshua, since He was only adopted by God and was not divine.

If we had stayed true to our Jewish roots, we never would have gone down that road. You may ask, “First you tell me, if we had stayed close to our Jewish roots, we wouldn’t have accepted that Yeshua wasn’t a man, as the Gnostics said. Now you are telling me that we wouldn’t have accepted that Yeshua was only a man, as the Arians said, if we had stayed close to our Jewish roots. How can it be both?”

This is where I tell you that if we had stayed close to our Jewish roots, we would have had to battle with that tension, which I mentioned at the beginning. We wouldn’t have been able to run away on either side. That’s what 1 Corinthians is talking about: Jews look at things one way; Greeks look at things another way. God reveals Himself in both. If we had stayed connected, we wouldn’t have been able to go off the road into a deep ravine on either side. We wouldn’t have been able to accept Gnostic heresy, which said that Yeshua wasn’t a real man, because we would have stayed close to the early witnesses who knew He was real, not just some phantom. Neither would we have been able to go off to the other side and say that He was just a special man. Judaism says only God can forgive sins and perform the miracles that were witnessed in Yeshua’s life. We have this recorded in Luke in the New Testament, when they lowered the paralytic through the roof. What does Yeshua first say in Luke 5:20? He tells the paralytic that his sins are forgiven. What did the Pharisees say? They said that only God can forgive sins, and questioned how a “man” could say what Yeshua said. If we had stayed close to our Jewish roots, we would have had to wrestle and say, “Wait a second, we know He is a man. If we accept that He has the authority to forgive sins—if indeed He is the one who can redeem us—then He has to be God.” As we broke away and forgot our Jewish heritage, we became like a train that breaks loose from its tracks and can go anywhere. We didn’t have to wrestle with this tension and went headlong off the tracks in many different directions.

Again, you might say that this is interesting, but Arianism is just an old thing and not relevant for today. Except that this heresy is very similar to the teachings today of both Mormonism and Jehovah’s Witnesses: They both teach that Yeshua was a special, created being, and if we all do the right things, we can become like Him and someday rule a world, just as Yeshua will rule the earth.

These are the ancient heresies that never completely died and are coming to life once again. The old adage that says, “If you don’t know history, you’re destined to repeat it,” has probably never been more true than it is today. We live in a time of exponentially expanding knowledge. We know so much, in terms of medicine, science, and technology, that no one in our parents’ or grandparents’ generation had a clue about. And yet, we have forgotten so much of the basic learning and knowledge concerning the Scriptures and truth. We must guard the Word of God in our hearts. In order to avoid falling into “new / old” heresies, we need to be students of the Word. And I would submit that studying it from a Hebraic-roots perspective will help us gain a better understanding of the truth of God’s Word. It must be contextualized into the language, customs, and style of the times and the people through whom God chose to reveal His Word: the Jewish people, whom God appointed to codify and deliver His Word to the world.



If we had stayed close to our Jewish roots, we wouldn’t have accepted that Yeshua wasn’t a man, as the Gnostics said... We wouldn’t have accepted that Yeshua was only a man, as the Arians said.



Joseph Smith Jr.
founder of Mormonism

Hurts

Now I want to talk about hurts. Some of you may think of these hurts as more heresies. I wouldn't argue with you on that, but I have deliberately chosen to call them hurts. When you see where we went wrong, you will understand where and how the Church has caused great hurt.

I want to begin with two verses. Ephesians 4:3 says "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." And Colossians 3:15 says, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful."

During meetings I enjoy asking attendees, "Tell me, what is your home church?" Often, it is amazing to hear all the different denominations and traditions we come from, which is a wonderful thing. Except it is also really a sad thing. It is part of the hurt in the body of Christ that we have split ourselves in so many different ways, at so many different times. I could list many Bible verses from the New Testament where we are called to love one another and stand in unity. Christians are not very good at it. My observation is that all hurts in the Church come from two sources. There is either division over leadership, or there are divisions over theology. I put theology second intentionally, because I believe most divisions over theology wouldn't happen if we didn't divide over following a leader. One leader says this and another leader that, and they both can't be right, so we have to split. Let's look at how this tendency to divide comes from a Greek mindset, instead of a Hebrew mindset.



Greek Thinking

- I. Hierarchy and structure borrowed from Rome
- II. King is direct line to God
- III. Resolve the unknown
- IV. Incorporate local customs
- V. Truth divides

Hebraic Thinking

- I. God alone is the ultimate authority
- II. Authority of prophet exceeds authority of king
- III. Revel in the unknown
- IV. Remain separate and unique
- V. Truth equals paradox

Hurt #1: Creating Worldly Structures

First of all, based on Greek thinking, Western thinking, or Roman thinking, most of the Church adopted a hierarchy structure that was borrowed from Rome. In Hebraic thinking, God alone is the ultimate authority. What happens when we adopt Greek thinking? What does that structure look like? We take such words as "overseer" or "bishop" from the New Testament, and we translate them into a structure that looks like the Roman structure, with a hierarchy that is separate from and superior to the congregants. In fact, Constantine was the first emperor to have bishops wear the same dress as members of the imperial family. Constantine encouraged the early Church bishops to dress like and look like royalty. That never would have been a concept within Hebraic thinking, where God alone is the ultimate authority. Many of us as Protestants might thoughtlessly say, "Well, thank goodness, I'm not a part of the Roman Catholic Church where that structure exists." I would give you two thoughts on that. First of all, every Western Christian comes out of that heritage. For 1,500 years, that was the structure of the Western Church, with the pope in the role of the emperor, and with the bishops in the role of governors or sub-commanders underneath the "emperor." That is our common heritage as Western Christians. But secondly, I would suggest to you that although almost every denomination of Western Christianity has apparently decided that it doesn't like the idea

Constantine



of one leader, such as a pope, it has nevertheless put a council in place, or a synod, or a leader. We have changed some of the language and style, but we still have this very top-down, authoritarian structure in almost every aspect of Western Christianity, Catholic or Protestant.

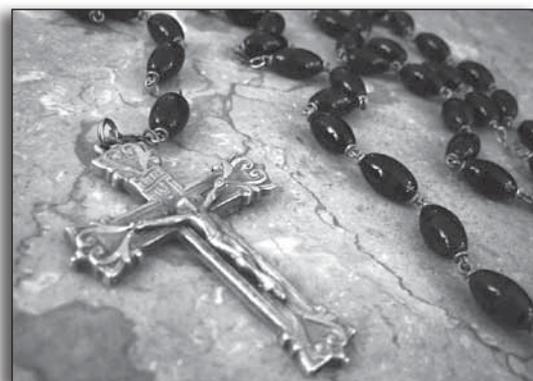
What are the results? In Greek thinking, the king has a direct line to God. What do you think that means? What does that look like? If you think back to the Roman emperors, who did they claim to be? They claimed to be a god. In Hebraic thinking, this would have clearly been blasphemy. In Hebraic thinking, we can find many examples where it is clear that the authority of the prophet was at least equal to—and, I would argue, even exceeded—that of kings, when it was evident that they were speaking on behalf of God. Probably the best example in ancient Israel was when the prophet Nathan came to David and challenged him regarding his sin with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12). In no other part of the ancient world would such a person have even gotten in the door, let alone lived long enough to finish such a challenge to the king. But in ancient Israel, there was an understanding that the authority of the prophet was equal to or greater than the authority of the king.

How did that Greek-thinking structure get translated into the Church? It really was a pretty simple transition. OK, we don't have emperors anymore who are "God," so who replaces that direct voice for Him? It's the leadership of the Church. The most extreme example can be found in Roman Catholicism, where you have the pope. Interestingly, only in the 1850s did this get formalized in Vatican I, which said that the pope, when he speaks "ex cathedra" (from the chair), actually speaks unquestionably for God. What he says in such a case has more authority than anyone else, any council, or any other group. Now again, you may say to yourself, if you happen not to be a Catholic, "I am glad I am not a Catholic." But if you look at your own denominational hierarchy, there is a tendency to have one person, group, leadership council, synod, or whatever set the "truth" for your church or denomination. Judaism is much more comfortable with multiple heads, who can offer their understanding on this or that matter. If I asked you today who is the leader of Judaism, you wouldn't be able to answer that question because there is not one person who is the acknowledged leader of Judaism. Even in Israel, where there is a chief rabbi, there are two chief rabbis, one Sephardic and one Ashkenazic, and nobody thinks that is particularly unusual. It's OK to have different opinions and not everything has to be neatly packaged in its tightly defined box.

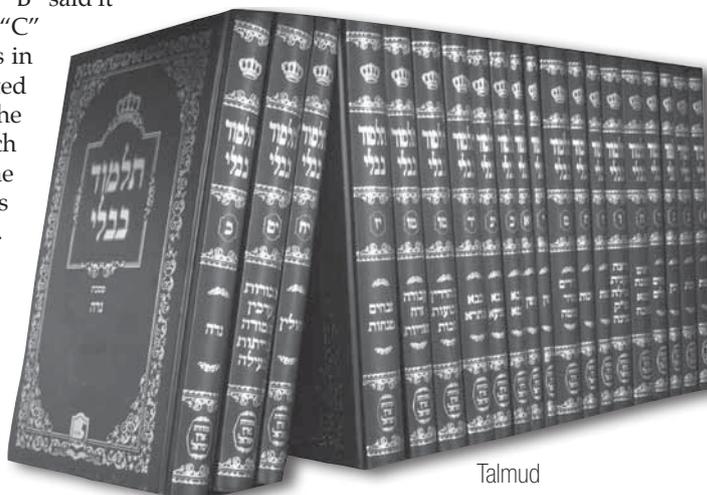
Hurt #2: My Truth is the Correct Truth

If you haven't read or studied the Talmud, it is a Jewish commentary that is not like most of our Western Christian commentaries. It is not a "here is what God said" book of rules. The Talmud is a series of rabbinical interpretations. There is a passage in the middle of the page. Then around it, there are comments by Rabbi "A," who said it meant this. Then Rabbi "B" said it meant that. Then Rabbi "A" replies to Rabbi "B," or even Rabbi "C" or "D" offers his interpretation. And what did the Jewish sages in the Middle Ages do? They took these interpretations and debated about them again as they searched for the true meaning of the passage. In fact, sometimes they came up with new views, which today are held in nearly equal honor to the interpretations in the Talmud. The Talmud is really like one commentary that contains several rabbinical comments from different traditions over time. This would be similar to someone taking a Baptist commentary, a Lutheran commentary, and a Pentecostal commentary, and placing them around each page of the Scripture, so you could read the way different parts of Christianity explain and think about the same text.

We wouldn't do that in our Greek-thinking churches, because we believe our group has a corner on the truth, regardless of what other denominations think. And we often hold to "our interpretation" so strongly that we battle one another



Rabbis Yona Metzger & Shlomo Amar



Talmud

Photo by Isranet

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It wouldn't occur to a Jewish mind to think, "How do I incorporate this local custom into Judaism?" They would think, "I'm going to practice my practice."

over the "meaning," which divides us. Personally, I think some passages of Scripture are deliberately vague to cause us to think, have tension, talk, pray, debate, and work to find their use and meaning in our everyday life. It is good to wrestle with some of these truths, so that they mean more to us. Yet Christians often attack each other with their version of the truth, rather than learning from one another that there might be more than one way to express the prism of God's Word in our lives.

In Greek thinking, we feel the need to resolve the unknown in absolute terms. In our Western process, for example, we might ask, "Is salvation predetermined or a decision we make?" We need an answer, and if your answer is not the same as mine, then your answer must be wrong. If it is an answer that is so deep that we can't understand it, it scares us and then we look to find someone who does understand and can explain it to us. We want everything in a neat box. Judaism does not do that. Judaism enjoys accepting some of the unknown. Dwight Pryor talks about Judaism being "theonomic." Judaism focuses on what you should do to please God, not on what you need to know. Christianity is centered on theology. We have our books of systematic theology. Judaism, on the other hand, has a great tolerance for "we don't know, it doesn't matter." All that matters is what we are going to do about it. It's up to God to figure it out. I think many of the splits we have in Christianity trace back to breaking unity in diversity. I think most of those hurts wouldn't have happened if we had had a little more Jewish understanding and said it was OK that we really didn't know some things, it was OK that so-and-so thought one way and we thought another way, as long as we agreed fundamentally on the basic truths and what should we do about them and how we should walk in faith as Yeshua commanded us.

Hurt #3: Syncretism—Watering Down the Faith

In Greek thinking, as the Christian faith spread, we looked at the new cultures into which we went and asked, "What's good here?" Then we determined if we should incorporate it, put our standard upon it, and spread it across the empire. The question was, "What are we going to do with a local custom? Is it so good that we need to integrate it or is it something we need to squash?" Judaism doesn't think that way, and you can see this around the world in Jewish communities. Consider the ultra-Orthodox Hasidic Jews. The Hasidim are not very interested in trying to figure out what a modern American or Englishman or Australian would do about this or that custom or practice. They are not at all ashamed or uncomfortable that they are different. They believe they are called of God to be different. It wouldn't occur to a Jewish mind to think, "How do I incorporate this local custom into Judaism?" They would think, "I'm going to practice my practice."

How does this play out in Christianity? When Rome was pagan, there were statues of the emperors that were statues of the gods. When Rome became Christian, what happened? In many ways, we just replaced the statues of emperors with statues of the saints. If we had stayed tied to our Jewish roots, we never would have had those issues because we never would have gone that way. The Bible tells us not to make graven images, so had we kept our Hebraic-thinking orientation, we would have smashed those statues and been done with them, not incorporated them. It would never have occurred to us to try to fit them into Christianity. However, it would have occurred to us that we were supposed to be different, and that's OK. In the New Testament, Yeshua even tells us, "[You] are not of the world, even as I am not of it" (John 17:16).

Hurt #4: Divide and Conquer

Finally, let me add the last thing in this section, which I think is the hardest and has caused the most divisions. In Greek thinking, there is a right and there is a wrong. So, if you don't agree with me, you're wrong and we need to break fellowship. Examine the major things that separate denominations around the world. I say this at some risk. I hope you can accept what I am saying in love.

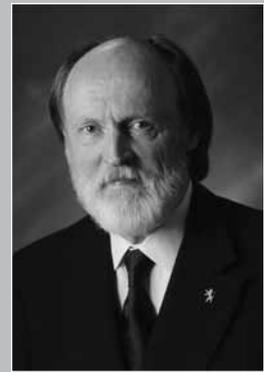
We divide the Protestant Church based on how you choose to pray and practice. Fortunately, I think there is growing unity regarding practice and increasing tolerance of one tradition toward another. But we have had lots of rules on who can share fellowship with us and who cannot. The rules tell us the way to do it, and if you don't



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do it this way, you are excluded. Hebraic thinking would not do that. Hebraic thinking would wrestle with the issues. However, it would not suggest that the right way to deal with a difference is to push things under the table. The right way to deal with the difference is to wrestle with what the Word really has to say and to maintain dialogue among people who love the Lord their God with all their heart and all their soul and all their strength. Judaism is much more comfortable with the idea that truth can be paradox. I think this is one of the wonderful things coming up out of the Hebraic-roots movement in the Church. I think it is one of the reasons God is bringing this rediscovery of Jewish roots and the richness of rabbinic teaching into Christianity, because it is starting to help us see truth in paradox.

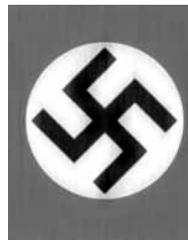
The teacher Graham Cook has a phrase I really love, “Every great truth about God is a paradox.” Dwight Pryor has said, “If you think you just have a good, simple illustration that totally explains the Trinity, you’re almost certainly wrong.” God wouldn’t be God if He wasn’t beyond all we can know and understand. That doesn’t mean that we can’t know things about Him; it doesn’t mean that there aren’t truths that are easy to know and are absolute. But I am saying that as Western Christians, we are really uncomfortable if there is a bit more mystery or paradox in a Bible passage than we can explain. But with God, there is a lot more than we can explain, because His Word reflects His omnipotence and omniscience, which are beyond our complete comprehension. Judaism would have left us much more comfortable with that.



Dwight Pryor

Holocaust

I have talked about how we might have avoided some heresies, how we might have avoided some hurts. Let’s talk about the Holocaust. When we use the word “Holocaust,” we talk about the almost complete destruction of the Jews in Europe during World War II. Jews usually refer to this as the Shoah, which means “catastrophe” or “calamity.” Christians and most general books refer to it as the Holocaust. Do you know what the Holocaust really means? “Holocaust” is a word meaning “burnt offering.” I don’t understand how God’s chosen people could have experienced something that terrible. That’s one of those truths that God understands beyond what I understand. I do understand that it was a terrible thing that happened. Having recently celebrated the 60th anniversary of D-Day in the U.S., we may quickly jump to think that we have a wonderful tradition remembering how Americans went to battle Nazi Germany to bring freedom back to the world. I think we do have that wonderful history, and I do think we should celebrate it. But sadly, that is not the only tradition that we own.



Christians pioneered most of the anti-Semitic practices in Nazi Germany—even true Christians who were misguided. It was Christians who first had the Jews wear a yellow badge to distinguish them. It was Christians who first invented the ghettos and forced Jews to live in one area. It was Christians who first confiscated Jewish property and initiated rules that Jews couldn’t own real estate and engage in certain professions. It was Christians who came forward and said Christians cannot marry Jews. Much of that was during the era when the Church was one under the umbrella of the Roman Catholic Church in the West. However, this tradition of persecuting Jews often found even more virulent expression under Protestant influence. If you are a Western Christian; you own a piece of that.

As an example, one Protestant leader, Martin Luther, is at best a very mixed bag. In his early days, he wrote a really nice tract





saying that given the way Christianity had presented itself to the Jews, if he were a Jew himself, he would rather become a pig than a Christian. In fact, Luther was teased when he was young because he studied the Jewish scholars and teachers to glean their insights into the Old Testament. Unfortunately, Luther, as he got older, didn't stay quite so nice in his ideas and wrote a terrible book called *On the Jews and Their Lies*, which was later picked up and studied by a man who wrote another book—*Mein Kampf*. That man was Adolph Hitler.

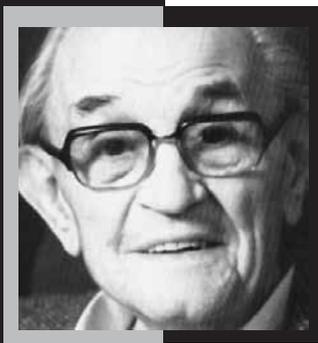
Sadly, Luther also believed in the divine right of kings. You will remember I mentioned earlier that according to this Western way of thinking, the king is the direct line to God. Luther wrote another book called *Against the Robbing and Murdering Peasants*. It wasn't against robbing and murdering peasants. It was against the peasant.

It said that kings have the right to determine the life and future of lowly peasants. That thinking became very popular in central Europe. It became something that set the stage for a dictatorship such as Nazi Germany to come along and be accepted by the German people. If the government says it, then we have to do it. I could go on and on through the rest of our Christian traditions and, unfortunately, we all own a piece of what enabled the Holocaust to grow and bloom in "Christian" Europe.

Martin Neimoller, in this famous quote, said, "They came for the Communists and I didn't object for I wasn't a Communist; they came for the Socialists and I didn't object because I wasn't a Socialist. They came for the labor leaders and I didn't object for I wasn't a labor leader. They came for the Jews and I didn't object for I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for me and there was no one left to object."

We have moved from the second and third century of Christianity to the modern era. Now I am moving 60 years ahead from World War II to today. Does any of this have any relationship to us today? Is Neimoller's quote just something we wish we would have said 60 years ago, or does it relate to us today, whether we are Jews or Christians?

There have been more Christian martyrs in the past 100 years than in all the previous centuries combined. In Sudan alone, over two million Christians have either been



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murdered or sold into slavery under Islamic law, Sharia. Sooner or later, if you interact lovingly with the Jewish community, you will be asked, "How can Christians develop this love and care for Jews around the world and help the Jews in the former Soviet Union escape from poverty and persecution and not give a hoot about their brother and sister Christians whose children are being kidnapped and sold into slavery in other parts of the world?" To me, these two things fit together. I don't know how you can have a heart for one without a heart for the other. Israelis also asked Christians this in 1982, when Israel went to war in Lebanon to help Christians under the yoke of Palestine Liberation Organization terror there and the Christian world did nothing. Christians answered concerning Lebanon, "Oh, those aren't real Christians, just Christians in name only from birth." There is that Greek thinking again, saying, "They are not my kind of Christian—like me!" Jews, on the other hand, help fellow Jews because they are Jews and sort out the rest later. They are a family.

Are Christians and Jews being persecuted in just one isolated place today? No, just last May, a Pakistani Christian was attacked and killed by a policeman in Pakistan because he was a Christian. He was accused of sharing the gospel with someone. And in August, there were attacks on churches in Iraq. Persecution continues today. As Christians, we did not act in the Holocaust to save the Jews, and today, we are doing far too little to help Christians around the world, regardless of their denomination.

So What Does This Mean to Us?

In closing, let's go back to the parable of the two brothers that I opened with. I think two wonderful things are happening. Within the Church, many of us are waking up to realize that because of a family feud 2,000 years ago, we (the younger brother who married the dictator's daughter and gained power and numbers) have continued to feud with our older brother because he punched us in the nose once when we were kids. We have not only continued the feud of punching each other in the nose; we've done terrible, terrible things and, in doing them, we have lost our history. We have lost the family recipes. We forgot what we did for the family holidays. We forgot the teachings, the pictures, and the stories about great, great, great, great grandma and grandpa, a family we have been grafted into (Romans 11). We minimized two-thirds of what we claim as our Scriptures. But a really good thing is happening today: God is touching our hearts to rediscover our extended family and to make peace.

A second thing is happening. Wise and wonderful leaders in both brothers' families are coming to realize that we have more in common than we have differences. I am not suggesting that we forget the differences; they are important. In my natural family, I have many cousins. They are different from me in some ways, and some of those ways are important. But they are still my cousins. The people and nation of

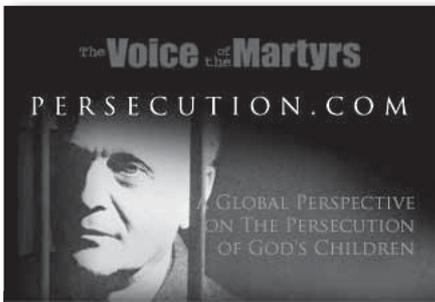


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Richard and Sabina Wurmbrand



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Israel, if you are a Gentile Christian, are your cousins, and we are coming to realize that the persecution to come is not coming against the older brother alone. In the growing waves of persecution, Christians and Jews will be seen as one group, the People of the Book. The forces of evil won't care if I don't like my cousin. In some Palestinian literature you will see a phrase: "first the Saturday people and then the Sunday people." This evil force of fanatic Islam is not just going to be content to persecute the older brother. They see us as a family, even if we have forgotten to do so. We need to stand together; we need to stand with our Christian and Jewish brothers and sisters who are being persecuted.

I first visited Israel as a college student in 1974, when I came to know and love the land and people of Israel. But it also turned out that there was a Romanian pastor who had just recently been released from prison and was in Israel. He was an interesting guy, he was a Lutheran pastor, but he was also Jewish. He was just beginning to start a little ministry. His name was Richard Wurmbrand, and the ministry he started was Voice of the Martyrs. I had the privilege to meet him and hear him speak. To me, in my personal experience, a love for Israel and the Jews and a heart for the persecuted Church fit hand in hand, because I came to both of them at the same time. That would be my hope and prayer for all of you: that our love for our Jewish brothers and sisters might deepen, that we might realize and remember that they are our family. We are the adopted kids who should look to them with joy and honor that we get to be a part of the family. Let's not forget our cousins who are experiencing terrible things, and let's not fool ourselves. The forces that are rising to come against us are coming against both sides of our family, the older brother's kids and the younger brother's kids.

I would like to close, not on a negative note, but recalling that there are three things we can do. One, we can learn from the past. Second, we can act; there are things we can do to reach out to the descendants of the older brother. We can support them, recognize that we're grafted into that family, rediscover our heritage, look up the old family recipes, figure out what the holidays were, and find great joy in all of this. And third, we can pray for one another, because God always hears His kids and answers us.

Rev. Jim Solberg
National Director, Bridges for Peace USA



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