

Why should my Church study about her Jewish Roots?

A Message for Pastors

There are many important reasons why Christians should learn about the Jewish Roots of the Christian faith. But before we discuss them, let me address one common concern that many pastors rightfully have about this subject. When we talk about "Jewish Roots," we are NOT teaching that Christians should come under the law of Moses, because "we are not under the law, but under grace" (Romans 6:14), or that Christians should appropriate modern Jewish worship traditions, such as wearing a prayer shawl (Tallit), or head covering (Kippah), or putting on phylacteries (Tiffillim). We ARE teaching the restoration of the authentic Biblical "faith once delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). This faith is the "Faith of Abraham," (Romans 4:16) perfected and made available to the whole world by the birth, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus, the Jewish Messiah. Christian faith, as practiced in far too many places today, does not reflect Biblical Jewish heritage. In many, if not most places, "Christianity" reflects the influences of non-Biblical belief systems, various human "religious" traditions, and worldly cultures. All around the world, the Holy Spirit is moving upon believers to explore their historic Biblical Jewish Roots to determine how God would have the Body of Christ reclaim this inheritance. This reclamation includes studying (a very Jewish and scriptural activity) the proper place of the Old Testament, including the Law, in our lives (1 Timothy 2:15). After all, the same Apostle who wrote that "Messiah is the end of the law for righteousness" (Romans 10:4), also wrote that the law is "... holy, spiritual and good." (Romans 7:12 & 14) He also testified that his "inner man delighted in the law" (Romans 7:22) and that its study has the ability to train believers in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16).

What do I mean by "Jewish"?

This "Abrahamic" faith was, and still is, essentially "Jewish." It is not Babylonian, Greco-Roman, European, African, Asian, or American. It was birthed by the G-d of Israel when he made a covenant with the Chaldean, Abram, and "converted" him to the Hebrew "Abraham." Via his son Jacob's subsequent conversion and name change, his descendants became known as "Israelites." G-d eventually established His covenant with the entire nation of Israelites, through the Torah giving ministry of Moses. As historical events unfolded, the whole nation took on the name of the preeminent tribe from which their kings were drawn and their future Messiah would come - Judah. Israelites eventually became known as "Jews" (2 Kings 16:6). The divine revelations recorded in the Old Testament give us the foundations of our "Messianic" (i.e. Christian) faith. These Hebrew Scriptures, in conjunction with the New Testament, also written by Jewish hands that were inspired by this same G-d, contain G-d's commandments and divine instructions for righteous human relationships and spiritual guidelines for establishing and maintaining a personal relationship with G-d himself.

The divine influence of these "Jewish Scriptures" created a definitive culture and world view that was unique among all the nations and religions of the ancient world. This distinctly "Jewish" culture and world view, because it is based on, and is the fruit of, these recorded revelations of the G-d of Israel, is the only one acceptable for anyone who believes in the Jewish Messiah. Not only are we converted in our spiritual relationship with G-d, but we should also be converted from our old worldly cultures and world views. Those philosophies, traditions or cultural dynamics that previously influenced us, should now be rejected when they are contrary to the authority of these "Jewish" Scriptures. The apostle Paul, in Romans 11:18, makes this concept clear to gentile believers in the messiah. When anyone repents of their sins and receives Jesus as savior and Lord, they are grafted into Israel's olive Tree and are made a partaker of the rich root of that "Jewish" tree. They are made "partakers of the promise" and become "fellow citizens of the commonwealth of Israel" (Ephesians 2:19). Simply stated, gentile Christians, by faith in Jesus Christ, have been grafted into a "Jewish" religion that has its own distinct spiritual realities, commandments, culture and world view.

This "Faith" and "History"

This "faith" has undergone many permutations in its journey among the nations throughout history. It has been pummeled by politicians, mangled by mean-spirited theologians, stained with the blood of the martyrs, and renewed and revived by redeemed saints. Through all of this long history the essential "Jewishness" of the faith has been generally obscured, purposefully hidden and consistently vilified. I believe that this has been the well defined strategy of the devil to accomplish two powerfully destructive ends.

First, he wanted to create a non-scriptural religion that he could influence anyway he wanted to. By removing the Church from the authority of the Scriptures he was able to bring the Church under the judgment promised by God if she disobeyed the clear apostolic command of Romans 11:18-21, (do not be arrogant against the branches...you can be cut off also). By successfully accomplishing this end he was able to remove the engrafted wild branches from the anointed roots of Israel's Olive Tree. Once this was successful the Church could now easily come under the influence of numerous nefarious doctrines of demons. The history of the Church attests to the success of this strategy.

Second, we see the real goal that the devil is seeking to accomplish is directly related to the success of this first part. By corrupting the Church via these doctrines that robbed the Church of her place in the anointed roots of Israel's olive tree, the Church, as history so clearly testifies, lost the demonstrative power of the Holy Spirit. This power was one of the crucial ingredients necessary to provoke Israel to Jealousy. Paul himself told us that the "Jews require a sign" (1 Cor. 1:22). Having no power to manifest such "signs," the Jewish people would not be provoked to faith in Jesus as the Messiah. Since such provocation is intended to promote their faith in Jesus, which in turn, according to Romans 11:15 means the resurrection of the dead, which occurs at the time of the second coming of Christ. So we can see that this strategy is primary intended, not just to rob the Church of her inheritance in the rich root of this heritage, but in fact to try to block the return of the Lord by preventing the Jewish people from coming to faith in Jesus.

Historical Separation

As you know from your studies of church history, the Body of Christ has been experiencing a slow but steady restoration of biblical truths: the message of salvation by faith, the priesthood of all believers, the bible as the sole authoritative source of doctrine, its translation into the language of the people, baptism by immersion upon the confession of faith, the restoration of the gifts of the holy spirit, Church government based on anointing rather than institutional promotion, the restoration of all the equipping ministries of Ephesians 4, the commitment to fulfill the great commission, and many others.

These truths had to be restored because they were replaced by various "doctrines of demons" that had infiltrated and corrupted the Church throughout the centuries. I believe that one of the major reasons for the restoration of the Church to her Jewish Roots is so that the Church can be restored to her biblical relationship and responsibility to the Jewish people. The call upon the Church to provoke Israel to Jealousy is one of the truths of the New Testament that has historically been almost totally rejected. In thinking that they had to make the gospel more palatable to gentile audiences, men of good intentions, misdirected in their zeal to preach the Gospel, de-Judaized their message, and by doing so, opened themselves to the demonic doctrine of "replacement theology." This had the dual effect of separating the Church from her Roots in Israel's Olive Tree and promoting a spirit of arrogance toward the Jewish people. The Church no longer saw herself as part of the Jewish people or part of G-d's plan to provoke Israel to jealousy. Instead she grew into a "counterfeit imperialistic theocracy" that lost its authentic spiritual testimony and the ability to make genuine born-again disciples. Authentic spirituality was replaced by a hierarchical system of political and militaristic schemes that forced "loyalty" to a "Church" instead of genuine spiritual rebirth and new life. The more the Church rejected her "Olive Tree connection," the more she grew into institutionalized sacramentalism, hierarchicalism, spiritual darkness and unbelief. As time went by, what started as a Messianic Jewish faith based on the Scriptures and the power of G-d, became a thoroughly gentilized "Christianity" based on political and militaristic power and Church traditions that were in many instances nothing more than a "christianized paganism."

All things Jewish were slowly rejected and in some circumstances ultimately forbidden. The true Church was tragically compromised, once compromised, I believe that history shows she came under the judgment of G-d for disobeying the apostolic command not to be arrogant toward the unbelieving natural branches. Unable to provoke the Jews to faith in Christ, the devil inspired her to provoke the Jews to wrath, and further entrenched unbelief by centuries of malicious and incessant persecution. The Jewish people were branded in such ways as to sanctify their persecution, suffering, and even death. They were the innocent victims of hate filled theologies that bred spiritual disaster for the church and calamities for the natural sons of Abraham. This was a satanic strategy to keep the true gospel away from the Jewish people and thereby keep Jesus from returning, because their re-grafting into their own Olive Tree means the resurrection of the dead, which takes place when Jesus returns (Romans 11: 15).

Practical benefits for your Church

By recognizing that we are practicing a Jewish faith, as opposed to a traditional "Christian" one, we are freed from the historic, cultural and demonic entanglements that have robbed Christians of their scriptural inheritance for centuries. Whenever "tradition" stands in the way of renewal, whenever the voice is heard that says, "we don't do that in our Church," with the implication that our Church has a more holy or sacred tradition, a "Jewish Roots" orientation answers, "we are following the scriptures and obeying the revelation of G-d, not the traditions of men, no matter how old or ingrained they are!" After all, no Christian tradition is older than the Hebrew scriptures. Every aspect of our Christian life begins to be analyzed by this Jewish Roots orientation. Are we doing what we are doing in our Church or spiritual life because of our culture, our traditions, or because of our human philosophies? Is what we are doing according to the Word of G-d? Are we worshipping G-d the way he desires to be worshipped, the way the Scriptures teach He is to be worshipped, or the way we have been taught by our traditions? Are we in fact actually worshipping or merely have a "song service" (and we wonder why there is such a minimal presence of the Holy Spirit in most churches). Are we praying according to the spiritual principles of the Scriptures or according to our own human understanding. How many Christian are frustrated in their prayer lives? Is it because they have never been taught to pray according to the Bible? So many Christians are in fact victims of satanic strategies that have replaced the teachings of the Hebrew scriptures with various non-scriptural traditions that the G-d of Israel neither respects, receives, nor responds to.

Let me reiterate, I am not saying that Christians should adopt Jewish traditions or try to imitate unbelieving Jews in their modern day religious practices. But a Jewish Roots understanding will insist on a scriptural basis for everything we do, say, and believe. Not only will we be encouraged to study the Scriptures, but we will also be encouraged to understand how the Jewish people throughout history have understood them, and be freed to glean from them riches of our own inheritance "among them" (Romans 11:17). This is something that satan is desperately afraid of. He is terrified of the prospect of true believers entering into honest study of the

Scriptures with the Jewish people. He knows the powerful witness that will be able to go forth, as well as the great treasures that will be opened to the Church.

A Jewish Roots understanding will cause your people to be more assiduous when they read the scriptures, by creating a mentality that says, "I want to know the truth...not the traditions of men." This will cause them, if they want to be disciples of the kingdom of G-d, to really dig into the word and truly "study to show themselves approved."

Many pastors ask, "Why is it important to say 'Jewish' instead of just 'Scriptural' or 'spiritual'? why is it necessary to continually put the word Jewish into our vocabulary?" It is important because of G-d's plan to use the Church to provoke natural Israel to jealousy. The Lord desires to restore to the Christian Church a mentality that causes her to be very self-conscious of the Scriptural fact that she has been grafted into a Jewish covenant, is believing in the G-d of Israel, is saved by the Jewish Messiah and is believing and obeying the Jewish scriptures. With the restoration of this mentality, of this understanding, the Church can begin to pray and act in such a way that her relationship with the Jewish people and the nation of Israel will finally, after so many centuries, take the form and shape that G-d intended from the beginning.

A Jewish Roots mentality also creates a barrier preventing demons from bringing their doctrines into the lives of your peoples. No other world view or philosophy - either natural or spiritual - than that which is according to the scriptures is accepted. We learn how to study together - with tolerance and mutual respect so that "iron can really sharpen iron." We test our personal or corporate interpretations and applications of the scriptures by examining the fruit it bears. Is it causing the individual to know G-d in a greater way and manifest more fruit of the Spirit? Jesus said, "You shall know them by their fruit"(Matt. 12:33)

By studying the Jewish Roots of the Christian faith, we gain a richer understanding of the Bible, of the person and ministry of Jesus, and the writing of the Jewish rabbi and apostle Paul. We can gain insight into the forms of worship and community life that the early church practiced, as we understand how the Jewish believers brought their Old Testament faith, traditions, and practices into the church. We can gain

insight into how the early believers understood the practical dynamics of living out their faith in a hostile pagan world. We gain vital spiritual lessons as we study the Old Testament. We learn about the attributes of G-d, his nature and his ways with men. These studies will mature our walk with G-d. We will not be deceived into following a G-d that is constructed after our own imaginations or human traditions. Rather we learn how to relate to the G-d of Israel, as we study how He has dealt redemptively with real people, our spiritual ancestors by faith. We gain insight into the plans and purposes of G-d, as we study his dealings with the Jewish people and their responses to his laws, prophets and judgments. Among many other themes, we gain true understanding into the dynamics of faith, without which it is impossible to please G-d, and we learn about the true nature of covenant and how central this theme is to the purposes of G-d and his relationship to us.

G-d, who never changes, has left us a tremendous legacy in the Hebrew scriptures. This legacy, and the ministry fruit it is intended to produce, is lost to us when we fail to study our Jewish Roots and develop the Biblical relationship with the Jewish people G-d intends our churches to have.

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