

Paul and the Early Church Fathers

Examining the early Synagogue/Church Schism

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“And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.”¹

Was this Apostolic counsel respected? What of the Messianic Communities “when its founders were fallen asleep? Was the Spirit of Truth really able to guide the faithful into all truth, and to keep them in the truth?”² In the previous article we examined how of a Roman Tax, called the *Fiscus Judaicus*, provided a strong motivation for many of the early Gentile believers in Yeshua to define their faith in a new and non-Jewish way. Yet it should seem obvious that this could not have been possible without at least the tacit cooperation of its leadership. So we must ask whether or not Paul’s injunction to entrust the truth to reliable mean was realized. What happened within the various Communities throughout Asia Minor to cause them so quickly to turn from the Hebrew character of their faith? In this article we will examine the development of the early Messianic communities throughout the Diaspora and trace when, how and why communities developed along side the Messianic synagogues whose leaders constructed a Christian Faith that became hostile to its Jewish roots.

Did Paul Plant Churches?

The seeds of this Synagogue/Church Schism can be seen from the very beginning of Paul’s missionary efforts. The book of Acts gives us Paul’s methods for spreading the Good News.

When they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures (Tanakh), explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. “This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ, ” he said. *Some of the Jews* were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did *a large number of God-fearing Greeks* and not a few prominent women. (Emphasis added)³

¹ II Timothy 2:2. The Holy Bible, New International Version, (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Zondervan Publishing House, © 1995).

² Rev. Alexander Roberts & James Donaldson, Eds. “Introduction”, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, Early Church Fathers, Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume I, (Calvin College, 1998).

³ Acts 17:1-4.

From Perga they went on to Pisidian Antioch. On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down. After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the synagogue rulers sent word to them, saying, "Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak." Standing up, Paul motioned with his hand and said: "Men of Israel and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me.... "From this man's (David) descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as he promised.... "Brothers, children of Abraham, and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent.... "We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm.... "Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the Law of Moses.... As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath. When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God.⁴

Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. But when the Jews opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized....So Paul stayed for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.⁵

From these passages in the book of Acts it is clear that Paul's method for spreading the Good News was to first go to the Synagogue of each town. There he found both ethnic Jews and God-fearing Gentiles. It is significant that Paul speaks, not to the Biblically unlearned, but to people (both Jew and Gentile) who knew and appreciated the Tanach—people who were already well grounded in the Scriptures and submitted to its authority. For as James said, "For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath."⁶

So the notion of Paul engaging in "Church Planting" is very misleading since it implies that he was attempting to bring a new religion to the community. Clearly, Paul never intended to start any new religion nor did he wish to set up alternative places of worship. Rather, he went to the Synagogue and preached a very Torah centered message to a very Torah centered people. Paul's whole emphasis was that the Gospel fulfilled the promise given to Abraham—therefore it was only within the context of the Covenants and those promises that it was possible to fully understand Paul's message. Apart from an understanding of the Tanach, Paul's message would be easy to distort, as we soon shall see. In fact Paul states very clearly what the Gospel or Good News is:

⁴ Acts 13:14-43.

⁵ Acts 18:4-11.

⁶ Acts 15:21.

"We tell you *the good news*: What God promised our fathers he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm.... "Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the Law of Moses...."⁷

And again he states:

For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy....⁸ [For] theirs [Israel] is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.⁹

So if we accept Paul's own testimony and his message, we must conclude that he saw the Gospel as the fulfillment of the Covenant promise. The one flowed easily and entirely out of the other. For Paul there was no discontinuity or juxtaposition between the Tanach and the Gospel.

Reaction to Paul's Message

As stated earlier, the seeds of the schism between the Synagogue and what would eventually develop into the Church, were sown in the early misinterpretation of Paul's message. His two primary opponents were members from within Traditional Judaism and those of what came to be called the "Circumcision Group." Paul's message was clear, justification before HaShem could be found only through trusting faith in the Messiah whom He had sent—Yeshua of Natzeret. And this free gift of God was open to all—both Jew and Gentile alike. Further, the Gentile was justified as a Gentile without becoming a formal Proselyte.

For many within Traditional Judaism this message appears to have gone over like a lead balloon. First of all, Paul states that... "Through him (Yeshua) everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the Law of Moses...."¹⁰ For them the question was this: Why is faith in this Yeshua necessary for justification before God since we are already Covenant heirs and already have a means for our atonement on Yom Kippur? For these individuals Paul was supplying the answer to a question they never thought to ask. As they saw it, they were already "in" and didn't see the need for this "Gospel." But Paul clearly preached that apart from Yeshua, all were guilty of sin and in need of forgiveness—forgiveness found only through Yeshua. This "Gospel" seemed to be placing them on the same level as the Gentile. How could HaShem

⁷ Acts 13:32-39.

⁸ Romans 15:8,9.

⁹ Romans 9:4,5.

¹⁰ Acts 13:39.

view His Covenant People as no more special than the Nations? To many who had grown up in the Synagogue, who were proud of their pedigree and level of Torah observance, this was a very offensive message indeed. “[So] when the Jews [Judeans?] opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, ‘Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.’”¹¹

The other opponents of Paul also continued to be a source of frustration throughout his ministry. This party, known as the Circumcision Group and made up largely of Pharisees (see Acts 15), responded differently than those who rejected his message outright. For them the Messiahship of Yeshua was not in question. Neither was His atoning sacrifice at issue. God had fulfilled his Covenant Promise to redeem His people and provide them with salvation. The key term for them, however, was “His People.” For the Circumcision Group “His People” meant Jews and only Jews. In response to Paul’s message they would say,

[For] *ours* [Israel] is the adoption as sons; *ours* the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. *Ours* are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ.

Therefore, if the Gentiles wanted “in” they must become Jews by formal conversion. This is clearly borne out from Acts 15. “Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: ‘Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, *you cannot be saved.*’” The key point here is not whether the Gentiles should follow Torah as a matter of halachah. Rather, it was being taught as a salvation/justification issue. And it was this group, which was the target of Paul’s wrath in his letter to the Galatians. However, he was never thoroughly successful in overcoming this group since years later he was still fighting the same battle. He wrote polemically to Titus, “For there are many rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision group.”¹²

For the God-fearing Gentiles, however, Paul’s Gospel was clearly welcome news. For to them Paul was saying that,

...Formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (that done in the body by the hands of men)--remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. *But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.*

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. *His purpose was to create in himself one new man out*

¹¹ Acts 18:6.

¹² Titus 1:10.

*of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.*¹³

What is critical for our discussion is that through Yeshua, Gentiles became members of the Covenant and citizens of God's Israel. As Paul would explain in Romans 11, the Gentiles were now being grafted into the olive tree of Israel. Therefore, it was the Gentile who was expected to adapt to the rules and obligations of Israel—not the other way around. Paul's message placed Gentiles and Jews into the same Torah Covenant and the same Promises. Gentiles were now expected to conduct themselves as good members of this Covenant.

Paul's Messianic Communities

In practical terms, however, the new rules being applied to this Jew/Gentile relationship would require accommodations on both sides. In some cases whole synagogues accepted Paul's message and would become what we would term as a Messianic Community. In other cases it is also clear that only some Jews and God-fearing Gentiles accepted the message. In those cases Paul set-up alternative synagogues—often very close to the first. It is interesting to note that in archeological excavations one cannot differentiate between synagogue and “church” in these earliest years. It is only later that we find structures developing that are characteristically “Christian.”

Therefore, the communities that Paul initially established should be seen as the first-fruits fulfillment of God's promise throughout the Tanach to join Israel and the nations for worship and service to Himself. They were, in a sense a “mixed-multitude” of Jews and God-fearing Gentiles worshiping in a characteristically Jewish fashion. And, at least initially, these Messianic communities seemed to have been fairly successful under this arrangement.

Paul, of course, could not be everywhere at once, nor would he always be alive to help in the running of these communities. Therefore, the appointment of trustworthy leaders who could oversee these communities was of tremendous importance. What then were the criteria for choosing leadership and what kinds of formal structures do we find Paul establishing?

Paul's method for establishing leadership among the new congregations was fairly simple. We can judge by his own writings that the system he set up was one of multiple overseers with deacons (shammashim). His exhortation to Timothy¹⁴ well represents his vision for the Messianic Communities. The terms overseer and elder overlap throughout

¹³ Ephesians 2:11-18.

¹⁴ I Timothy 3-5.

the letter to Timothy, while the requirements for deacons are essentially the same as those for elders and overseers minus the requirements for teaching. Ordination seems to have been conducted rather unceremoniously through the “laying on of hands” by a group of established elders. As to the exercise of power, there is never any hint of the use of force. Paul exhorts, pleads, and persuades, but he never implies any legitimate use of force. We see Paul using the metaphors of family to best describe the relationship of leaders to their congregations. He refers to himself as a “father” to his offspring in the faith. Or as a mother who suffers the pains of childbirth for her children.¹⁵ There is nothing of the kind of heavy-handed, top-down leadership that will develop later. In short, it seems to have been a congregational oriented leadership structure—very much the kind of leadership Paul would have been familiar with from the Synagogue.

So we find that at the close of the Second Temple period two religious communities existed side by side. One was the traditional Jewish synagogue, made up of Jews and God-fearing Gentiles, professing love and devotion to HaShem and His Torah yet not convinced of the Messiah ship of Yeshua of Natzeret. The other community—the Messianic Community, was very closely patterned after the former. It too was made up of both Jews and God-fearing Gentiles (though the demographic is heavily weighted towards the Gentiles), it too professed love and devotion to HaShem and His Torah. This Messianic Community, however, embraced Yeshua as the fulfillment of Jewish Messianic expectations. For anyone who wished to worship the One True God in community, these assemblies were the only two options. What Paul could not have known in the early 60’s CE, however, was that dramatic events were about to unfold which would forever change the course of the Messianic Movement.

The Next Generation

[For] when the sacred band of the apostles had in various ways reached the end of their life, and the generation of those privileged to listen with their own ears the divine wisdom had passed on, then godless error began to counter the preaching of the truth by preaching the knowledge falsely so called.¹⁶

What Paul could not have known in the last years of his life was that the Jewish nation would revolt against Rome, plunging not only the Jewish nation, but also the Jewish Faith itself into a fight for survival. By this time, 70 CE, Paul, Peter, James--all the Apostles were gone, only John was left and the story of the early Messianic Communities was about to take a dramatic turn.

¹⁵ Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P Martin, Daniel G. Reid, Ed. *Church Order and Government, Dictionary of Paul and his Letters*. (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, © 1993), pp.132-133.

¹⁶ G. A. Williamson, trans. *Eusebius, The History of the Church*. (New York: Penguin Books, © 1989), p. 96.

There had always been opposition to Yeshua and His message from the Temple establishment. Between the time of Yeshua's ascension and the eve of the Jewish War, the various Jewish parties existed together in an uneasy tension. We find that in the book of Acts there was a short-lived persecution of the Messianic Community, but most Jews appear to have considered it to be a legitimate party within Judaism and that its survival was viable. However, on the eve of the Jewish War an event occurred, which marked a major, turn in the road. The historian Hegesippus describes the event as follows:

"James, the brother of the Lord, succeeded to the government of the Church in conjunction with the apostles. He has been called the Just by all from the time of our Savior to the present day, for there were many that bore the name of James.

He was holy from his mother's womb; and he drank no wine nor strong drink, nor did he eat flesh. No razor came upon his head; he did not anoint himself with oil, and he did not use the bath.

He alone was permitted to enter into the holy place, for he wore not woollen but linen garments. And he was in the habit of entering alone into the temple, and was frequently found upon his knees begging forgiveness for the people, so that his knees became hard like those of a camel, in consequence of his constantly bending them in his worship of God, and asking forgiveness for the people.

Because of his exceeding great justice he was called the Just, and Oblias, which signifies in Greek, 'Bulwark of the people' and 'Justice,' in accordance with what the prophets declare concerning him.

Now some of the seven sects, which existed among the people and which have been mentioned by me in the Memoirs, asked him, 'What is the gate of Jesus?' and he replied that he was the Savior. On account of these words some believed that Jesus is the Christ. But the sects mentioned above did not believe either in a resurrection or in one's coming to give to every man according to his works. But as many as believed did so on account of James. Therefore when many even of the rulers believed, there was a commotion among the Jews and Scribes and Pharisees, who said that there was danger that the whole people would be looking for Jesus as the Christ. Coming therefore in a body to James they said, 'we entreat you, restrain the people, for they are gone astray in regard to Jesus, as if he were the Christ. We entreat you to persuade all that have come to the feast of the Passover concerning Jesus; for we all have confidence in you. For we bear witness, as do all the people, that you art just, and do not respect persons.

Do therefore persuade the multitude not to be led astray concerning Jesus. For the whole people, and all of us also, have confidence in you. Stand therefore upon the pinnacle of the temple, that from that high position you may be clearly seen, and that all the people may readily hear your words. For all the tribes, with the Gentiles also, are come together on account of the Passover.'

The aforesaid Scribes and Pharisees therefore placed James upon the pinnacle of the temple, and cried out to him and said: 'Thou just one, in whom we ought all to have: confidence, forasmuch as the people are led, astray after Jesus, the crucified one, declare to us, what is the gate of Jesus.'

And he answered with a loud voice, 'Why do you ask me concerning Jesus, the Son of Man? He himself sits in heaven at the right hand of the great Power, and is about to come upon the clouds of heaven.'

And when many were fully convinced and gloried in the testimony of James, and said, 'Hosanna to the Son of David,' these same Scribes and Pharisees said again to one another, 'We have done badly in supplying such testimony to Jesus. But let us go up and throw him down, in order that they may be afraid to believe him.'

And they cried out, saying, 'Oh! oh! the just man is also in error.' And they fulfilled the Scripture written in Isaiah, 'Let us take away the just man, because he is troublesome to us: therefore they shall eat the fruit of their doings.'

So they went up and threw down the just man, and said to each other, 'Let us stone James the Just.' And they began to stone him, for he was not killed by the fall; but he turned and knelt down and said, 'I entreat you, Lord God our Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'

And while they were thus stoning him one of the priests of the sons of Rechab, the son of the Rechabites, who are mentioned by Jeremiah the prophet, cried out, saying, 'Cease, what are you doing? The just one is praying for you.' And one of them, who was a fuller, took the club with which he beat out clothes and struck the just man on the head. And thus he suffered martyrdom. And they buried him on the spot, by the temple, and his monument still remains by the temple. He became a true witness, both to Jews and Greeks, that Jesus is the Christ.¹⁷

It is clear from this text that Hegesippus is telling his readers that Second Temple Judaism was hardly monolithic. He mentions seven sects or parties in addition to the Messianic or Nazarene Party. He states that the main opposition came from those who did not believe in the resurrection or in a final judgment. It seems clear, therefore, in addition to some Pharisees, which are specifically mentioned, that Hegesippus must be referring to the Sadducees and the High Priestly leadership. Moreover, the sole issue was whether or not Yeshua was the Messiah—the “door.” He also seems to indicate that even James expected Yeshua’s immediate return and thus the city was in an uproar. Nevertheless, by putting James to death, these influential Jewish leaders were showing categorically that they would stubbornly refuse any concessions, compromise or accommodations with the Messianic Party.

After the destruction of the Jewish Temple in 70 CE, Judaism was forced to redefine itself apart from its traditional Temple rituals. What developed was an assembly of sages at Yavneh under the leadership of R. Yohannan Ben Zakkai who was able to gather around himself a number of surviving sages. They formed a college of seventy-one elders, who were willing to face the countless problems arising from the new situation. It would take some time for its moral authority to be acknowledged by the surviving Jewish

¹⁷ Eusebius, pp. 58-60.

communities, but by the end of the century this Yavneh Academy would become the recognized center of the religious as well as the national life of the Jewish people.¹⁸

Pharisaism, which was previously one of many competing parties, found new expression in Rabbinic Judaism. It suddenly blossomed when an entirely new social and political context began to threaten the survival of Israel. Jewish pluralism had expired in the flames of the Catastrophe. The Pharisees had won by default.¹⁹ These Rabbis made themselves the standard and touchstone for Orthodoxy. Whatever sect did not agree with them was branded "min." Rabbinic Judaism defaulted to Orthodox Judaism.²⁰

It was, therefore, at Yavneh that official Judaism redefined itself in such a way as to exclude Messianic Judaism from its newly defined orthodoxy. Perhaps the single clearest example of official opposition to the followers of Yeshua is found in the Birkat Ha Minim. There were multiple versions, but for our discussion the Palestinian version found in the Cairo Geniza is the most direct. It simply reads, "And for apostates let there be no hope; and may the insolent kingdom be quickly uprooted, in our days. And may the Nazarenes and heretics (*minim*) perish quickly; and may they be erased from the Book of Life; and may they not be inscribed with the righteous."

In the wake of this rise of Formative Judaism, the Nazarenes (Christians) were forced out of the synagogues by modification of one of the standard prayers.

This effectively excluded them from synagogue worship and continuing participation in Jewish life -- their enthusiasm for corporate prayer would be understandably dampened if in doing so they prayed for their own damnation. From that time onward the break between Judaism and Christianity was final; as far as the synagogue was concerned, the Church was banned.²¹

Anything so severe as the modification of worship liturgy would require a set of hand carried instructions for the Diaspora synagogues. A likely reconstruction of these instructions is as follows:

It contained a formal denial of the truth of the Christian account of the teaching and resurrection of Jesus. Christianity was a denial of God and of the Law. It was based on the teaching of Jesus, who was a deceiver, and who had been put to death by the Jews. His disciples had stolen His body, and then pretended that He had risen again from

¹⁸ Vincent Martin, A House Divided: The Parting of the Ways Between Synagogue and Church (New York: Paulist Press © 1995), p. 109.

¹⁹ ibid. p. 112.

²⁰ Philip S. Alexander, "A Parting of the Ways from a Rabbinic Jewish Perspective," Jews and Christians, the Parting of the Ways: A.D. 70 to 135, Ed. James D. G. Dunn, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), p. 7.

²¹ Julius Scott, Glimpses of Jewish Christianity from the End of Acts to Justin Martyr, from an unpublished paper presented at ETS meeting, November 1997.

the dead and was the Son of God. It was therefore impossible for Jews to have anything to do with such teaching, and His followers should be formally excommunicated.²²

So we see that by the turn of the century, Yavneh was pursuing a policy of unity and conformity not found in the Second Temple period. Moreover, this policy of orthodoxy formalized a rule of strict exclusion of Yeshua's followers who were now commonly becoming known as Christians.

With the followers of Yeshua effectively shut out of the "mainline" Synagogues, missionary work was no longer possible among Torah observant people. From now on the audience would be a pagan audience. As Eusebius states:

[Belonging] to the first stage in the apostolic succession.... [They] spread the message still further and sowed the saving seed of the Kingdom of Heaven far and wide through the entire world.... Ambitious to preach to those who had never yet heard the message of the faith and to give them the inspired gospels in writing. Staying only to lay the foundations of the faith in one foreign place or another, appoint others as pastors, and entrust to them the tending of those newly brought in, they set off again for other lands and peoples with the grace and cooperation of God....²³

Eusebius' remarks tell us a great deal as to how and when the "Church" turned from its Hebrew roots to become the Hellenistic Catholic Church of the second century and beyond. First of all, he tells us very clearly that the evangelists went to those who had never yet heard the Word of God. These were apparently pagans who lacked any upbringing or training in Torah. Without any training or knowledge of Torah, they would have been completely incapable of discerning the validity of their message. Unlike the Berians, whom Paul commended because they tested his message against the Torah, these people had no such way of guarding themselves.

Secondly, after staying only long enough to lay a minimal foundation before moving on, care and leadership of these new converts was put into the hands of men who were, themselves, new converts—violating one of Paul's most basic tenants. "He (the overseer) must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil."²⁴ Eusebius even tells of how one young man was chosen for "leadership training" based on his "excellent physique, attractive appearance, and ardent spirit."²⁵ So then, not only were these men untrained in the Torah, there is no indication that they ever would receive Torah instruction, even after their conversion. Therefore, being left with no formal Bible and perhaps only a single copy of a gospel account, they were left to fend for themselves as they tried to teach their new churches how to walk a godly halachah.

²² Martin, p. 154.

²³ Eusebius, p. 100.

²⁴ I Timothy 3:6.

²⁵ Eusebius, pp. 83-84.

Also disconcerting is a comment made by Eusebius regarding Peter's evangelistic methods. We are told that he used to "adapt his teachings to the occasion, without making any systematic arrangement of the Lord's sayings...."²⁶ In other words, Peter would at times "wing it" when speaking to his audience. How much Peter may have spoken off the cuff is impossible for us to know. However, what is critical to our understanding is that the early Church Fathers viewed his methods of playing to the crowd as perfectly acceptable. This prompts us to ask how the early evangelists may have presented the Gospel to a pagan culture bereft of any knowledge of the Torah. How could these men possibly instruct their new flocks in a Torah of which they themselves had no knowledge?

One has only to scan down the lists of early Church Bishops to see names such as Xystus, Hero, Telesphorus, Eros, Theophilus, and on it goes. The information we have of these early leaders shows that they were all utterly deficient in Torah training. Rather, their training was in Hellenist Philosophy and it was through the eyes of a Greek philosopher that they interpreted and developed their new Christian religion.

The impact of this can be seen very early in the Churches development among the pagan peoples. Three areas where we can clearly see the early Church turning aside from Paul's instruction are in the areas of the "Lord's Supper", Sabbath observance, and Church hierarchy.

The distortion of the Lord's Supper came very early on. Of course, the first occasion for this event came during the third cup in Yeshua's Passover Seder. Later, in Paul's letter to the Corinthian Church (chapter.5) he also admonishes his flock to keep this same observance. Yet, as early as 107 CE, we see the Christian Church developing a whole separate theology and cult around this observance. No longer is the practice associated with the Passover meal (which itself was eventually formally abolished), rather it is given an entirely new name, the *Eucharist*. The celebration of the Eucharist was to be given magical powers and strictly controlled. For example, it was to be considered valid only when it was held under the bishop or someone to whom he had committed it. It was given the status of transubstantiation [for] the Eucharist **is** the Flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ.²⁷ And that "this same Bread is the medicine of immortality, the antidote against death, and everlasting life in Jesus Christ."²⁸ With this we see all the primary elements of a Catholic Mass as early as 107 CE.

With respect to changing the day of worship from the Sabbath to Sunday, this too came very early on. We see in the writings of Ignatius, in the Letter of Barnabas, and in

²⁶ Eusebius, p. 104.

²⁷ A. Roberts, J. Donaldson ed., "Ignatius, Letter to the Smyrnaeans." The Ante-Nicene Fathers Volume I. (Albany, OR: AGES Digital Library, 1999). Chapters 7-8.

²⁸ A. Roberts, J. Donaldson ed., "Ignatius, Letter to the Ephesians," Ch. 20.

the Epistle of Mathetes, written around 107, 100 and 130 CE respectively, that Sunday was considered the proper day of worship.

Consequently, if the people who were given to obsolete practices faced the hope of a new life, and if these no longer observe the Sabbath, but regulate their calendar by the Lord's Day, the day, too, on which our Life rose by His power and through the medium of His death....²⁹

Finally He said to them; Your new moons and your Sabbaths I cannot away with. Ye see what is His meaning; it is not your present Sabbaths that are acceptable [unto Me], but the Sabbath which I have made, in the which, when I have set all things at rest, I will make the beginning of the eighth day which is the beginning of another world. Wherefore also we keep the eighth day for rejoicing, in the which also Jesus rose from the dead, and having been manifested ascended into the heavens.³⁰

But again their scruples concerning meats, and their superstition relating to the Sabbath and the vanity of their circumcision and the dissimulation of their fasting and new moons, I do [not] suppose you need to learn from me, are ridiculous and unworthy of any consideration.³¹

So clearly the Church leadership was advocating a change in proscribed worship days. Yet what is even more disturbing is how the Church put teeth into this policy, for without the ability to coerce the people into this change it could not have lasted. How was this done? By creating a hierarchical top-down structure that kept the people “in line.”

You must all follow the lead of the bishop, as Jesus Christ followed that of the Father; follow the presbytery as you would the Apostles; reverence the deacons as you would God's commandment. Let no one do anything touching the Church, apart from the bishop. Let that celebration of the Eucharist be considered valid which is held under the bishop or anyone to whom he has committed it. Where the bishop appears, there let the people be, just as where Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church. It is not permitted without authorization from the bishop either to baptize or to hold an agape; but whatever he approves is also pleasing to God. Thus everything you do will be proof against danger and valid.³²

Let no one deceive himself: unless a man is within the sanctuary, he has to go without the Bread of God. Assuredly, if the prayer of one or two has such efficacy, how much more that of the bishop and the entire Church! It follows, then: he who absents himself from the common meeting, by that very fact shows pride and becomes a sectarian; for the Scripture says: God resists the proud. Let us take care, therefore, not to oppose the bishop, that we may be submissive to God.³³

²⁹ A. Roberts, J. Donaldson ed., “Ignatius, Letter to the Magnesians,” Ch. 9.

³⁰ A. Roberts, J. Donaldson ed., “The Letter of Barnabas,” Ch. 15.

³¹ A. Roberts, J. Donaldson ed., “The Letter of Mathetes to Diognetus,” Ch .4.

³² A. Roberts, J. Donaldson ed., “Ignatius to Smyrnaeans,” Ch. 8.

³³ A. Roberts, J. Donaldson ed., “Ignatius to Ephesians,” Ch. 5.

Avoid the noxious weeds. Their gardener is not Jesus Christ, because they are not the planting of the Father. Not that I found any division in your midst; but I did find that there had been a purge. Surely, all those that belong to God and Jesus Christ are the very ones that side with the bishop; and all those that may yet change their mind and return to the unity of the Church, will likewise belong to God, and thus lead a life acceptable to Jesus Christ. Do not be deceived, my brethren: if a man runs after a schismatic, he will not inherit the kingdom of God; if a man chooses to be a dissenter, he severs all connection with the Passion.³⁴

Take care, then, to partake of one Eucharist; for, one is the Flesh of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and one the cup to unite us with His Blood, and one altar, just as there is one bishop assisted by the presbytery and the deacons, my fellow servants. Thus you will conform in all your actions to the will of God.³⁵

Once men like Ignatius usurped the authority of the Torah in their churches, all hopes for Torah observance in these congregations was lost. From Ignatius' writings (107 CE) it is clear that the model for Church government closely mirrored that of the Roman government. Authority emanated from Jesus Christ to the Bishop, then to the elders and deacons. Sense the Bishop presumably spoke for Christ who is God's Son, to oppose the Bishop was to oppose God Himself. The Eucharist, baptizing and common assembly were only to be done when and where the Bishop designated, and since Ignatius clearly indicated that each of these practices were necessary for salvation, one was forced to obey the commands of the Bishop or forfeit his soul. Therefore, since the Bishops had ruled Sunday to be the proper day of communal assembly and that only on that day were the sacraments to be effectually enjoined, one could only be saved by worshiping on Sunday. With this the bishops trampled God's Torah and His Covenants under their feet.

What is more, unity was to be observed, it seems, at all costs. For Ignatius could not have been more clear when he said that those who dissented from the Bishop severed all connection with Christ's Passion and could not inherit the Kingdom of God. Yet, this kind of unity was the theme of both the Church and the Synagogue during this time. The writings of the Church fathers are permeated with admonitions for unity and conformity to their new orthodoxy. But as we have seen, so were the Rabbis. Each side was threatening excommunication to anyone who dissented. One side embraced Torah, yet rejected the Living Word. The other side embraced "Jesus Christ", yet rejected the very Torah that He embodied. And somewhere between these two polar opposites the Messianic faithful struggled to survive.

In conclusion we see that the break between the Messianic synagogue and the Hellenistic Church in large measure came when, through the influence of the Yavneh Rabbis, the Jewish Synagogues closed their doors to the Gospel and defined a normative Judaism that was antithetical to that Gospel. When this avenue was closed, the second

³⁴ A. Roberts, J. Donaldson ed., "Ignatius to Philadelphians," Ch. 3.

³⁵ A. Roberts, J. Donaldson ed., "Ignatius to Philadelphians," Ch. 4.

and third generation Messianic communities were forced to evangelize among the pagans. Once these formally pagan Gentiles flooded into the congregations or set up competing assemblies, Messianic communities were soon overwhelmed by the influences of these new members. Claiming to speak for God, newly appointed bishops began to arrogantly condemn a Covenant, a People, and a Torah about which they knew almost nothing. They castigated the Jews as the most wicked of people who received the signs of Sabbath and circumcision, not as a blessing, but rather for means of divine affliction and punishment.³⁶ As these groups broke away from Messianic Judaism, intimidation, coercion and sheer numbers seems to have been the prime factors that enabled their views to become normative Christian theology.

As disciples of Yeshua our task—our passion must be to follow the truth wherever it leads us. For what was said of the Torah so long ago still stands: “Your word, O LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens.”³⁷ “[HaShem] remembers his covenant forever, the word he commanded, for a thousand generations, the covenant he made with Abraham, the oath he swore to Isaac. He confirmed it to Jacob as a decree, to Israel as an everlasting covenant.”³⁸ Let us, therefore, fulfill the words of Deuteronomy Chapter 30 by returning to His Torah with all our hearts so that times of refreshing might at last come from the Lord.

³⁶ A. Roberts, J. Donaldson ed., Justin Martyr, “Apology.”

³⁷ Psalm 119:89.

³⁸ Psalm 105:8-10.