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COLLEGE



TEXTBOOK (ACADEMIC VERSION) JEWISH ROOTS OF CHRISTIANITY

COURSE: JEWISH ROOTS OF CHRISTIANITY (HT500)

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JEWISH ROOTS OF CHRISTIANITY

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Adapted from a manuscript by Barbara Richmond

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LESSON ONE

Why Study the Jewish Roots of Christianity?

“Remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you.” -

Romans 11:18 NASB

On the day of Pentecost in the city of Jerusalem, the community of believers that we now commonly call the Church was born. It came by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in fulfillment of the promise of Jesus just before His ascension. This community was intrinsically Jewish, its members steeped in the teaching, the culture and the traditions of Judaism. This was the same Judaism that Jesus Himself followed when He walked this earth, the Judaism that had been created on the shoulders of Ezra, Moses and Abraham. While there may be numerous religions on the face of the earth besides Christianity, only one other was created by the same God we worship as Christians. Like Christianity, Judaism was born in the heart of God. Christianity is essentially Jewish,

having been birthed from the root of Judaism. The Bible is not about things Jewish or Christian. It is about things divine, eternal and universal and therefore applicable to all. However, understanding it correctly requires, even demands, a deep awareness and comprehension of the people, nation and culture through whom God chose to reveal His ways and His Word. Therefore, the more biblical you become, the more you will understand the Jewish nature of Scripture.

Since the fourth century the Church has been divested of her Jewish heritage, and consequently significant issues of biblical interpretation, doctrine and theology have been handicapped. Catholic scholar Edward H. Flannery said,

“An over-Hellenized, over-Latinized Christianity needs a re-Judaizing process to bring it back to its founding Jewish roots and renew it more in keeping with its own inherent ideals.”

God chose the Jewish people for three express purposes. We read in **Deuteronomy 7:6–8 (NIV)**:

For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous

than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh King of Egypt. Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands.

First of all, God desired to reveal His own character to and through man, and to do so, He chose a people with whom He could have a relationship. In the eleventh chapter of Leviticus, He repeated His desire that a people should be formed who would be holy as He is holy. As other nations would observe their special relationship or example, the intended result was for all the nations of the earth to come to a saving and fulfilling family relationship with God Himself.

Second, He chose the Jewish people to write and pre-serve the Scriptures. His revealed instructions, the Torah, were given to Moses. God commanded Moses in **Exodus 34:27**, *“Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel” (NIV)*. To prophet after prophet, the same instruction was given. They were commanded to write and preserve the commandments and instructions of the Lord that the people would remember and obey.

Third, through this nation God would send Messiah into the world. Numerous times throughout Israel's history, God encouraged them with the same promise: a Deliverer would come to bring salvation and redeem His people from their sins. This promise was perfectly fulfilled in Yeshua, Jesus the Messiah. Jesus was born in Bethlehem of the tribe of Judah, of the lineage of King David, and was raised in an observant Jewish home. He perfectly fulfilled the Torah of His Father (what we today call the Law) and ministered as a Jewish Rabbi.

At the very foundation of this nation of people is an everlasting covenant with Abraham, a covenant initiated by God Himself. The reader would do well to spend some time reading and meditating on the Scriptures found in Genesis 12 through 17. This covenant between God and Abraham was and is binding, unconditional, everlasting and literal. It includes the three-fold provision of **land (Gen. 15:18, Num. 34:1–12, Josh. 1:1–4, Ez. 47:15–20)**, establishment as a nation (**Gen. 17:18–19, 22:17, 28:13–14, 35:10–12, II Sam. 7:12–13**) and supernatural blessings (**Gen. 22:18, Jer. 31:31–34, Zech. 12:8–10, 13:1, 8–9**).

If we believe that *“God is not a man that He should lie” (Num. 23:19 NASB)*, then it is reasonable and biblical to recognize that the covenant God made with Israel cannot be broken or revoked.

Through the years the Church has held a doctrine termed Replacement Theology. This doctrine says that God gave up on the Jewish people after they refused the Messiah; He discarded Israel and “replaced” them with the Church. I take serious and strong exception to this doctrine for the following reason: This is not a Jewish issue; it is not a Christian issue; it is a matter of the integrity of God Himself. For the sake of discussion, let us say that because of Israel’s sin, God in fact threw them away and created the Church in their place. If this be true, then a just God would be required, in light of the sin in the Church throughout its history, to throw the Church away and move on to a third plan. Preposterous! If this were the case, we have no foundation for our faith in God’s eternal Word. Replacement Theology is an attack upon the integrity of Almighty God and as such is unbiblical and deceptive.

God never replaced Israel and He never will. His own integrity demands that He be faithful to His covenant with Abraham which He Himself said was “FOREVER.” Prophetic events of the last century, particularly the last half-century, bear out this truth. The state of Israel exists in the Middle East today, but not primarily because the Jewish people needed a homeland. The supremely important reason for the existence of a political, geographical state called Israel today is to demonstrate to the nations of the world that God keeps covenant. When God makes a promise, He will fulfill it. The

Scriptures prophesying a national restoration for Israel outnumber the Scriptures prophesying the resurrection of Jesus Christ!

What then should be our position as followers of Jesus Christ today? Bible believers have five biblically-based opportunities as far as the nation and people of Israel are concerned.

1. **Psalm 22:6–9** invites us to pray for the peace of Jerusalem. This invitation carries with it a promise that those who love her (Jerusalem) will prosper.
2. According to **Genesis 12:3** we have the opportunity to bless the seed of Abraham as one means of receiving the blessings of God in our own life. It was not Abraham or any other Jewish leader, but God Himself Who said to Abraham, *“I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you.”*
3. In light of the command to bless and not curse, the Bible-believing Church has another opportunity. It is the opportunity to oppose every form of anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism by speaking the truth concerning Israel and its people. A detailed study of the ninth, tenth and eleventh chapters of the Book of Romans makes this responsibility eminently clear.
4. In **Isaiah 40:1–2**, we are encouraged to comfort, support and encourage the people of Israel. Why? No people on earth have suffered more rejection,

persecution and degradation from so many nations and people groups as the Jews. The Holocaust of the twentieth century is but one example of repeated attempts throughout history to destroy the Jewish nation and remove them from the face of the earth. Comfort and encouragement are certainly in order. Sincere and genuine expressions of support and love are necessary and vital if we ever hope to communicate effectively with our Jewish friends and neighbors regarding Yeshua, the Messiah.

5. This same prophet Isaiah outlines a fifth opportunity in the sixtieth and sixty-first chapters of his book. We have an opportunity to support the nation of Israel and the re-gathering of the Jewish people to their land. There are numerous ways to express this support. Certainly, prayer is of the utmost importance. Second, financial gifts to ministries who are aiding and facilitating the return of Jews to the land of Israel is another. Third, numbers of Christians have found tremendous joy and fulfillment in volunteering themselves for short or long-term service with ministries serving the nation of Israel and its people. Organizations including, but not limited to, the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem, Bridges for Peace, Ebenezer Emergency Fund, On Wings of Eagles, and many more, devote their resources and energies to being a part of the fulfillment of biblical prophecy in our day.

Whether or not we as individuals are in a position to give financially or to volunteer personally, all of us are able to pray! All of us are able to have a heart like Ruth. This young woman from Moab chose to follow her Jewish mother-in-law to Israel rather than stay in her own homeland and family. It was this insightful young woman who spoke these immortal words which ring through the centuries as a clear call to Christians today: *“Your people shall be my people and your God, my God.”*

If you are unfamiliar with the history of the relationship between the Jewish people and the Church, please read the book by Michael Brown, *“Our Hands Are Stained with Blood.”* It will enlighten and challenge you with a knowledge and perspective of this vital issue. We who call ourselves disciples of the Jewish Rabbi, Yeshua, whom we have come to know as Jesus, are very much in need of understanding this matter.

Finally, if you have never visited the land of Israel, let me encourage you to make it a matter of prayer to do so. More times than I can count I have heard the same testimony from Christians who journeyed with me through the land that Jesus called home: *“My life and my reading of the Scripture will never be the same.”* It is true: a trip to Israel is not a vacation; it is a life-changing experience. It is an investment in your relationship with your God. I invite you to join me on one of my trips or to go with your own pastor or other ministry with which you are acquainted.