



## **One New Man Study – Lesson Six**

### **From The First Church Council To Constantine: A Conspiracy To Divide The Church**

“The church is under a curse to some degree because it has denied its heritage.” Anti-Semitism did not happen by accident. It was part of a very deliberate plan to separate the church from anything Jewish. The first church was Jewish. If a Gentile wanted to follow the Messiah, he had to convert to Judaism. Then Peter had a revelation that Gentiles did not have to become Jews to be saved (Acts 10). The Jerusalem Council meeting determined that Gentiles did not have to be circumcised. There were only four easily followed requirements. They were to: <Acts 15>

1. Abstain from things polluted by idols
2. Abstain from sexual immorality
3. Abstain from things strangled
4. Abstain from blood

This opened the door to widespread church growth among the Gentiles. So many Gentiles were saved that the Jewish believers then became a minority. The first Jewish followers of Jesus were called Nazarenes. They practiced traditional Judaism and were widely accepted by non-believing Jews. Early in the second century their numbers reached 400,000.<sup>[1]</sup>

In the book of Acts, the early church fathers said to Paul:

***Acts 21:20 - And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many <tens of> thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law:***

The Nazarenes acceptance by traditional Jews came to a halt in D 135 when Rabbi Akiba declared that Bar Kochba was the Jewish Messiah. His followers hoped he would lead them to victory over the Romans. The Nazarenes refused to fight because they believed Jesus was the true Messiah rather than Bar Kochba. They were branded traitors, not because they believed in Jesus, but because they wouldn't join Bar Kochba's armed struggle. Bar Kochba and his followers were quickly slaughtered by the Romans. Afterward, the Jews were banned from Jerusalem.

History shows that as the center of the Christian faith moved from Jerusalem to ROME, it became increasingly adoptive of pagan customs and philosophies rather than God-ordained practices and beliefs in the Bible. At the same time Christianity became increasingly Anti-Jewish. In A.D. 196, when no Jewish

believers were present, a church council meeting in Caesarea changed the celebration of Jesus' resurrection from the third day of Passover (First fruits, Lev. 23:9-11; 1 Cor. 15:4, 20-23) to Sunday, during the feast of the pagan fertility goddess, Ishtar. In the fourth century, the Council of Nicea made the change official. The decision was based on the premise that it was not proper for the church in her celebrations to be connected with the "cursed Jewish nation" that crucified Him. Today, the holiday is known as EASTER (from Ishtar). This is where we get our modern practice of Easter bunnies and eggs. These are the vestiges of Ishtar (the fertility goddess) worship<sup>1</sup>

## A. The Sabbath Issue

Another reform by the Council of Nicea (headed by the Roman Emperor Constantine) "institutionalized" the switch of the day of Christian worship from Saturday to Sunday. As with Easter, the change had actually started much earlier. In fact, by the middle of the second century, Sunday, the day devoted to the sun god, largely replaced Saturday, the day devoted to the One True God.

The Sabbath was the first element of creation that God had sanctified, or set apart, in remembrance of His creative power. That God had rested on the Sabbath day was a biblical fact. Nevertheless, the change was made and justified by the church leaders and not initially on the basis of the resurrection. The primary rationale for the observance of Sunday was to commemorate the first day of creation. <sup>2</sup>The resurrection of Jesus was only a secondary issue. Many of the church leaders who originally changed the Sabbath day were very Anti-Semitic.

Tertullian thought that God had always hated the Sabbath. The Epistle of Barnabas (apocryphal literature from the first century AD) denies altogether that God had ever given the Sabbath as a commandment to be kept. Justin Martyr (d. AD167) considered the Sabbath to be a highly deserved curse on the Jewish people. Martyr lectured Trypho the Jew by saying: "It was the reason of your sins and the sins of your Fathers that, among other precepts, God imposed upon you the observance of the Sabbath as a mark." This "mark" was to "single them out for punishment they so well deserved for their infidelities."<sup>3</sup>

Instead of recognizing the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath, the Sabbath was seen as part of a curse of the law, upon what many called "that hated and despised race – the Jews." The post-apostolic church instituted another day of worship to separate themselves from all things Jewish. This anti-Judaism was reflected in the Replacement Theology (belief that the church has replaced Israel) of the early writers of the Hellenized church.

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<sup>1</sup> Gruber, Dan. *The Church And The Jews*. Destiny Publishing, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

Constantine, a Roman Emperor who came to power early in the fourth century (AD 306-337), was a master politician. He tried to satisfy heathens and Christians by modifying pagan customs and festivals and giving them Christian meanings. The group he didn't like was the Jews since they had rebelled against Rome. And the church was more than willing to follow Constantine's lead in order to avoid persecution. Christians were prohibited from worshiping on Saturday and observing Passover, upon the threat of excommunication or worse. Constantine expressed the anti-Judaic sentiments of the bishops of the Christian world when he wrote:

*"Let us therefore have nothing in common with this odious people, the Jews, for we have received from our Savior in a different way...Strive and pray continually that the purity of your souls may not be sullied by fellowship with the customs of these most wicked men...All should unite in desiring that which sound reason appears to demand in avoiding all participation in the perjured conduct of the Jews."*<sup>4</sup>

## **B. Christmas**

Another major change started in early church history was the celebration of Christmas. Today it is the most hallowed religious holiday next to Easter. But was Jesus born on December 25<sup>th</sup>? We know He was not according to Luke 2:8. Shepherds would not have been out in the field watching their flocks at NIGHT in Bethlehem in December (winter season) because it would have been too cold.

It makes sense that Jesus was born about the time of Sukkoth (Feast of Tabernacles). This feast is referred to as "The Season Of Our Joy." What greater joy than the fact Messiah has tabernacled or came to dwell IN MAN? Scripture tells us that the law, which includes biblical festivals, is a "shadow of the good things to come" (Hebrews 10:1). Sukkoth foreshadows the dwelling of God with man.

***John 1:14 - And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.***

***Hebrews 10:1 - For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.***

The Feast of Tabernacles provides a much better picture of Jesus than Christmas. Where did Christmas come from? Babylonian pagans believed the sun was god. The winter solstice began on December 21<sup>st</sup> and represented the death of the sun. December 25<sup>th</sup>, the sun's climb in the sky and a wild celebration of its "rebirth" took place. This rebirth celebration was in honor of the incarnation

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

of the sun god and his mother, the “queen of heaven.” To draw pagans into Christianity, the Roman Catholic Church proclaimed December 25<sup>th</sup> to be the birthday of the Messiah, although this is not mentioned in Scripture. The festival was called “Christ’s Masse” and was later shortened to “Christmas.”<sup>5</sup> The early Puritans knew this history and did not celebrate Christmas.<sup>6</sup>

It is no coincidence that when the Jewish biblical heritage of the church was replaced with paganism, intimacy with God was watered down. The church went from everyone doing the works of Jesus to professional clergy leading a congregation of spectators. The supernatural power of God was replaced with the politics and traditions of men. When the church walked away from its biblical Jewish roots, it abandoned God’s pattern. The original “church split” was the division of the Jew and Gentile. It was a literal divorce. And God hates divorce. When we remove the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile, we will break the curse off the church and clear the way for the SECOND widespread revival. This revival will do more than usher in souls. It will signal and herald the return of Messiah Jesus to Planet Earth.

*Malachi 2:16 - For the Lord, the God of Israel, saith that he hates putting away: for one covered violence with his garment, saith the Lord of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously.*

*Ephes. 2:12-17 - That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: [13] But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. [14] For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; [15] Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; [16] And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: [17] And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh.*

Study Questions:

1. The first church was \_\_\_\_\_. If a \_\_\_\_\_ wanted to follow the Messiah, he had to convert to Judaism.
2. Constantine, a Roman Emperor who came to power early in the fourth century (AD 306-337), was a master politician and tried to satisfy \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ by modifying \_\_\_\_\_ customs and festivals and giving them \_\_\_\_\_ meanings.
3. The Feast of \_\_\_\_\_ provides a much better picture of Jesus than Christmas.
4. By the middle of the \_\_\_\_\_ century, \_\_\_\_\_, the day devoted to the sun god, largely replaced \_\_\_\_\_, the day devoted to the One True God

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

5. The Jerusalem Council meeting determined that Gentiles did not have to be circumcised
6. There were only four easily followed requirements. They were to: Abstain from things polluted by \_\_\_\_\_ ;Abstain from \_\_\_\_\_ immorality; Abstain from things \_\_\_\_\_ ; Abstain from \_\_\_\_\_.
7. When the church walked away from its biblical \_\_\_\_\_ roots, it abandoned God's pattern
8. The original "church split" was the division of the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. It was a literal divorce
9. It makes sense that Jesus was born about the time of \_\_\_\_\_ (Feast of Tabernacles). This feast is referred to as "\_\_\_\_\_"
10. To draw pagans into \_\_\_\_\_, the Roman Catholic Church proclaimed \_\_\_\_\_ to be the birthday of the Messiah, although this is not mentioned in Scripture.
11. The festival was called "Christ's Masse" and was later shortened to "\_\_\_\_\_." The early \_\_\_\_\_ knew this history and did not celebrate Christmas.
12. Tertullian thought that God had always hated the \_\_\_\_\_
13. Scripture tells us that the law, which includes \_\_\_\_\_ festivals, is a "shadow of the good things to come" (Hebrews 10:1).
14. The first Jewish followers of Jesus were called \_\_\_\_\_.
15. The Nazarenes acceptance by traditional Jews came to a halt in \_\_\_\_\_ when Rabbi Akiba declared that \_\_\_\_\_ was the Jewish Messiah
16. The Nazarenes practiced traditional \_\_\_\_\_ and were widely accepted by non-believing Jews. Early in the second century their numbers reached \_\_\_\_\_.
17. The Nazarenes refused to fight because they believed \_\_\_\_\_ was the true Messiah rather than Bar Kochba.
18. History shows that as the center of the Christian faith moved from Jerusalem to \_\_\_\_\_, it became increasingly adoptive of pagan customs and philosophies
19. Babylonian pagans believed the \_\_\_\_\_ was god. The winter solstice began on December 21<sup>st</sup> and represented the \_\_\_\_\_ of the sun.
20. December 25<sup>th</sup> became a wild celebration of the sun's climb in the sky, or of its \_\_\_\_\_.
21. When we remove the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile, we will break the \_\_\_\_\_ off the church and clear the way for \_\_\_\_\_.
22. Under Constantine, Christians were prohibited from worshipping on \_\_\_\_\_ and observing \_\_\_\_\_, upon the threat of excommunication or worse.