



Replacement Theology Transfers the Covenants to the Church but Concludes Cursing Remains with the Jews; Anti-Semitism of Early Church Fathers

How Do Replacement Theologians Argue Their Case? They Say:

“To be a son of Abraham is to have faith in Jesus Christ. For them, Galatians 3:29 shows that sonship to Abraham is seen only in spiritual, not national terms: ‘*And if you be Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.*’”

Rebuttal: While this is a wonderful inclusionary promise for Gentiles, this verse does not exclude the Jewish people from their original covenant, promise and blessing as the natural seed of Abraham. This verse simply joins us Gentile Christians to what God had already started with Israel.

Comment: The context of Galatians 3:29 is salvation. The Abrahamic covenant contained an eternal life clause. Abraham’s fulfillment of this clause is noted in Genesis 15:6, “Abraham had believed in the Lord and it was credited to his account for the imputation of righteousness.”

Paul’s reference in Galatians 3:29 addresses the fact that all receive access to God’s promise of eternal life through faith alone in Christ alone. Gentiles through faith become the *spiritual* seed of Abraham. This does not imply that the *genetic* seed of Abraham are no longer the object of God’s promise of a millennial client nation populated by Jews.

“All the promises made to Israel in the Old Testament, unless they were historically fulfilled before the coming of Jesus Christ, are now the property of the Christian Church. These promises should not be interpreted literally or carnally, but spiritually and symbolically, so that references to Israel, Jerusalem, Zion and the Temple, when they are prophetic, really refer to the Church.” Therefore, they teach that the New Testament needs to be taught figuratively, not literally.

Rebuttal: New Testament references to Israel clearly pertain to Israel, not the Church. Therefore, no promise to Israel and the Jewish people in the Bible is figurative, nor can they be relegated to the Church alone. The promises and covenants are literal, many of them are everlasting, and we Christians can participate in them as part of our rebirth, not in that we took them over to the exclusion of Israel.

Comment: Wagner’s rebuttal addresses the subject we have been noting in detail in our study of biblical hermeneutics. When the covenants to national Israel are usurped by the church then, with regard to prophecy, Israel is reduced to a status quo with all Gentile nations and Jews become members of just another religious community no better or worse than Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, or Wiccans.

We have examined in detail how the literal system of hermeneutics was the original method of biblical analysis in the second century. By the early fifth century the literal system came into conflict with the allegorical system that was promoted by the School of Alexandria. However, we have only noted briefly how many of the professors in both schools became anti-Semitic. Wagner addresses this problem in the next section of his paper:

How did the Position of the Early Church Fathers Affect the Church?

Let us look at a brief history of the first four centuries of Christianity, which established a "legacy of hatred" towards the Jewish people, which was against the clear teaching of the New Testament.

In the first century AD, the church was well-connected to its Jewish roots, and Jesus did not intend for it to be any other way. After all, Jesus is Jewish and the basis of His teaching is consistent with the Hebrew Scriptures. Before the First Jewish Revolt in AD 66, Christianity was basically a sect of Judaism, as were the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes les-sēnz’.

Separation between Judaism and Christianity began as a result of religious and social differences. According to David Rausch in his book, *A Legacy of Hatred* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1984], there were several contributing factors:



- 1) the Roman intrusion into Judea, and the widespread acceptance of Christianity by the Gentiles, complicated the history of Jewish Christianity;
- 2) the Roman wars against the Jews ... destroyed the Temple and Jerusalem; and,
- 3) the rapid acceptance of Christianity among the Gentiles led to an early conflict between the Church and Synagogue. Paul's missionary journeys brought the Christian faith to the Gentile world, and as their numbers grew, so did their influence, which ultimately disconnected Christianity from its Jewish roots

Many Gentile Christians interpreted the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem as a sign that God had abandoned Judaism, and that He had provided the Gentiles freedom to develop their own Christian theology in a setting free from Jerusalem's influence.

After the Second Jewish Revolt (AD 133-135) put down by the Roman Emperor Hadrian, theological and political power moved from Jewish Christian leaders to centers of Gentile Christian leadership such as Alexandria, Rome, and Antioch. It is important to understand this change, because it influenced the early Church Fathers to make anti-Jewish statements as Christianity began to disconnect itself from its Jewish roots.

As the Church spread far and wide within the Roman Empire, and its membership grew increasingly non-Jewish, Greek and Roman thought began to creep in and completely change the orientation of Biblical interpretation through a Greek mindset, rather than a Jewish or Hebraic mindset. This would later result in many heresies, some of which the Church is still practicing today.

The antagonism of the early Christians towards the Jews was reflected in the writings of the early Church Fathers.

In the early 4th century, Eusebius \yü-sē' bē-us\ wrote that the promises of the Hebrew Scriptures were for Christians and not the Jews, and the curses were for the Jews.

In A.D. 321, Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the Empire to the exclusion of all other religions. This signaled the end of the persecution of Christians, but the beginning of discrimination and persecution of the Jewish people.

Imperial Rome, in A.D. 313, issued the Edict of Milan, which granted favor to Christianity, while outlawing synagogues. As Christianity was becoming the religion of the state, further laws were passed against the Jews:

- The ancient privileges granted to the Jews were withdrawn.
- Proselytism to Judaism was prohibited and made punishable by death.
- Jews were excluded from holding high office or a military career.

These and other restrictions were confirmed over and over again by various Church Councils for the next 1,000 years.

In A.D. 321, Constantine decreed all business should cease on "the honored day of the sun." By substituting Sunday for Saturday as the day for Christian worship, he further advanced the split. This Jewish Shabbat/Christian Sunday controversy also came up at the first real ecumenical Council of Nicea (A.D. 325), which concluded Sunday to be the Christian day of rest, although it was debated for long after that.

After 321, the writings of the Church Fathers changed in character. No longer was it on the defensive and apologetic, but aggressive, directing its venom at everyone "outside of the flock," in particular the Jewish people who could be found in almost every community and nation. During this period, we find more examples of anti-Jewish bias in Church literature written by church leaders:

Hilary of Poitiers \pwä-tyä\ (A.D. 291-371) wrote: "Jews are a perverse people accursed by God forever."

Gregory of Nyssa \ni' sa\ (died A.D. 394), Bishop of Cappadocia \ka' pa-dō' sha: "the Jews are a brood of vipers, haters of goodness..."



St. Jerome (A.D. 347-407) describes the Jews as "... serpents, wearing the image of Judas, their psalms and prayers are the braying of donkeys."

At the end of the 4th century, the Bishop of Antioch, John Chrysostom (Golden Tongued), the great orator, wrote a series of eight sermons against the Jews. He had seen Christians talking with Jewish people, taking oaths in front of the Ark, and some were keeping the Jewish feasts. He wanted this to stop. In an effort to bring his people back to what he called, "the true faith," the Jews became the whipping boy for his sermon series.

Chrysostom was known for his fiery preaching against what he saw as threats to his flock, including wealth, entertainment, privilege and outward adornment. Another unfortunate contribution Chrysostom made to Christian anti-Semitism was to hold the whole Jewish people culpable for the killing of Christ.

In the fifth century, the burning question was: If the Jews and Judaism were cursed by God, then how can you explain their existence?

Augustine tackled this issue in his "Sermon against the Jews." He asserted that even though the Jews deserved the most severe punishment for having put Jesus to death, they have been kept alive by Divine Providence to serve, together with their Scriptures, as witnesses to the truth of Christianity.

The monarchs of the Holy Roman Empire utilized the services of Jews in (the) enterprise (of) usury, or money-lending. The loaning of money was necessary to a growing economy. However, usury was considered to endanger the eternal salvation of the Christian, and was thus forbidden. So, the church endorsed the practice of lending by Jews, for according to their reasoning, their Jewish souls were lost in any case. Much later, the Jewish people were utilized by the Western countries as trade agents in commerce, and thus we see how the Jewish people found their way into the fields of banking and commerce.

So, by the Middle Ages, the ideological arsenal of Christian anti-Semitism was completely established. This was further manifested in a variety of precedent-setting events within the Church, such as Patriarch Cyril, Bishop of Alexandria, expelling the Jews and giving their property to a Christian mob. During this early period, the virulent judeo-phobia was primarily limited to the clergy who were always trying to keep their flocks away from the Jews. However, later, the rank and file, growing middle class would be the main source of anti-Semitic activity.

The result of these anti-Jewish teachings continued onwards throughout Church history, manifesting itself in such events and actions as the Crusades, the accusation of communion host desecration and blood libel by the Jews, the forced wearing of distinguishing marks to ostracize them, the Inquisition, the displacement of whole Jewish communities by exile or separate ghettos, the destruction of synagogues and Jewish books, physical persecution and execution, the Pogroms. Ultimately, the seeds of destruction grew to epic proportions, culminating in the Holocaust, which occurred in "Christian" Europe.

The error of Replacement Theology is like a cancer in the Church that has not only caused it to violate God's Word concerning the Jewish people and Israel, but it made us into instruments of hate, not love in God's Name.