

## The Tripartite Salvation Paradigm

### *Israel and the church – a 3 part harmony*

#### Introducing the paradigm:

Below is a summary of my understanding of the relationship between Israel and the church.

It has been developed over a considerable period of time as I have sought to understand the Bible, the role of Israel and the place of Gentiles in God's plans.

While I have always rejected Replacement Theology, it has been a considerable struggle to determine how to read and interpret the many NT scriptures that are principally used to support this false and heinous doctrine.

The Jewish Annotated NT introduced me recently to a number of Jewish theologians such as Mark Nanos (check out at [www.marknanos.com](http://www.marknanos.com)), Amy Jill-Levine and Pamela Eisenbaum (for example, '*Is Paul The Father Of Misogyny And Antisemitism?*' - <http://www.crosscurrents.org/eisenbaum.htm>), who have an incredible amount of insight to offer on this challenging issue.

I am also, as always, most indebted to the impressive scholarship of Frank Selch (his book 'Replacement Theology' should be required reading on this issue). Along with Frank Selch, a number of friends and especially other Gentile followers of Yeshua/Jesus on Facebook have helped me to recognize that Paul was and remained a Torah observant Jew<sup>1</sup>.

Appreciating that the Apostle Paul always spoke from within the mindset of a Hebraist and within the Judasim of his day (called proto-Judaism by Prof David Flusser), is vital when trying to come to terms with the many seemingly contradictory and, at times, even anti-Torah sentiments that many scholars have argued he made. I have already written in some depth on this in my articles 'The Apostle Paul: Disciple or Fraud' and 'Circumcision: A Step of Obedience' (both available from [www.circumcisedheart.info](http://www.circumcisedheart.info)).

I believe that it is from within the Judaism of his day that the Apostle Paul argues for a new approach to how Gentiles can enter into the family of God, which until his day had essentially only contained Israelites, the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

#### The Family of God:

Paul, in coming to believe that Yeshua was indeed the Messiah, has recognized that the great Day of the Lord is about to dawn when 'all Israel will be restored' (Ezek 38,39).

We can see his appreciation that the Messianic Age has dawned, and that the Coming Age is imminent, by his comments in Romans 8:18-25:

*<sup>18</sup> For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. <sup>19</sup> For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. <sup>20</sup> For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope*

*<sup>21</sup> that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. <sup>22</sup> For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.*

*<sup>23</sup> And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. <sup>24</sup> For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? <sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.*

Paul has seen, thanks in part to learning of the resurrection of Yeshua and the move of the Spirit, that the 'resurrection' (redemption of our bodies) and new creation were close at hand. Note also here his use of the terms 'sons of God' and 'children of God' and that he is applying these terms to his readers in Rome (mostly Gentile followers of Yeshua). He also uses terms like 'brothers' or 'my brothers' to accentuate this family aspect (when referring to his fellow Israelites he usually adds a qualifier to make this further distinction clear).

Paul, who is already a member of Abraham's family also understands that from Isaiah 49 and other prophecies that people from many nations (Gentiles) need to come into Abraham's family if the Coming Age (the Kingdom of God and the New Creation) is to fully dawn, as God had told Abraham that he would be a father of many nations (Gen 17:4).

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<sup>1</sup> Professor Mark Nanos has written extensively on how Paul should be seen as a Torah observant Jew.

Despite the fact that Abraham had had many other children along with Isaac and was thus already the father of many nations; in the Second Temple Period; in Paul's day, Abraham was considered that patriarch of the 'Jews'<sup>2</sup> only.

So Paul saw the crucifixion and resurrection as somehow<sup>3</sup> opening up the door so that Gentiles could enter into Abraham's family through Yeshua the Messiah. At the same time, he saw that they needed to remain people from many nations and not become Jewish and therefore not part of Israel, for the prophecies to be fulfilled.

So how could these Gentiles come into the family of God; into the family of Abraham and yet not become Jewish. Part of the answer is 'grafting'. A graft of an orange onto a lemon tree means that orange can be supported and grow to maturity through the nutrients from the root of the tree but it remains an orange!

Paul therefore saw that Israel remains Israel and he believed that 'all Israel' would be saved (Romans 11:26 & Isaiah 59), and that many gentiles would also enter the Kingdom.

The 'olive tree graft' analogy<sup>4</sup> that Paul uses can help us see his understanding of how Gentiles are accepted into the family of God. In Romans 11 Paul states that Gentile believers (wild olive shoots or branches) are grafted into Israel (the cultivated olive tree), so that they are now part of the family of Abraham and are truly 'children of God'. So when Paul states that 'there is now neither Jew nor Gentile, ... male nor female ...' (Gal 3:28-29), Paul is speaking of a unity in the family and purposes of God. Men still retain their gender, the grafted 'orange' tree branch still remains an 'orange', and the Gentiles still remain Gentile, etc.

As I intend to demonstrate, the Apostle Paul does not see Gentile believers as becoming part of Israel when 'grafted' into the 'cultivated olive tree' but rather he sees them as becoming part of the 'family of Abraham' (which previously was a designation the only applied to the Jewish people) and therefore 'children of God'.

Clearly, if this assessment and paradigm is correct, then the church is not Israel and cannot ever be, or replace Israel. The 'church' (believers in Yeshua as Messiah) is/are part of the family of God but not the whole family. As Paul states in Romans 3:29, God is not just the God of the Jews but the Gentiles as well.

To be explicit, the 'family of Abraham', are the children of Abraham through the 'promise' (through the Spirit), but this means both the natural sons and daughters of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as well as the Gentiles who enter via the 'libation' (Ps 2:6) of Yeshua<sup>5</sup>. How this works will be developed later.

This family of 'saints' is then made up of three groups;

- 1) faithful Israelites;
- 2) faithful Israelites who are also followers of Yeshua; and
- 3) faithful Gentile followers of Yeshua.

Under my definition of these groups, all three have 'circumcised hearts'<sup>6</sup>. Groups 1 and 2 together are 'all' Israel; Groups 2 and 3 together are the true 'Church'. My Group 3 here is not the 'church' we see today. The Christian Church as commonly understood, contains a great diversity of beliefs and practices, many of which are very clearly anti-Torah, anti-Semitic and amazingly include practices that are in direct conflict with Yeshua's very words! Within this great mess of conflicting doctrines and practices though there are many who are faithful to Torah and obedient to the ethics and commands of Yeshua. Therefore Group 3 cannot possibly include those who consciously and explicitly hold to and proclaim the doctrine of the divinity of Yeshua. Most of today's Hellenistic Church in fact is most likely NOT part of the Group 3 that I am presenting in this paradigm.

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<sup>2</sup> The term 'Jews' from Judeans is generally used to apply not just to the tribe of Judah but to all the 12 sons and tribes of Jacob.

<sup>3</sup> This is not as simple as might first appear. I will come back to this issue later.

<sup>4</sup> This analogy is much more subtle and complex than it might appear. Prof Mark Nanos presents a brilliant analysis in 'Broken Branches': A Pauline Metaphor Gone Awry? – see <http://www.marknanos.com/BrokenBranches-8-1-08.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> I will expand on 'promise' and on 'libation' in the main section of this article.

<sup>6</sup> "Why does G-d use the term a 'circumcised heart'? It is because circumcision involves removing a covering. We (the writer is an orthodox Jew) believe that every human being was born with the heart of G-d. When G-d breathed His breath into Adam, every single human being had the heart of G-d placed within him. But what have we done? Since our youth we have covered this heart with our own ego, our won needs, and our selfish desires. We have covered or hearts and separated ourselves from true equilibrium. This is why G-d asks us to uncover our heart - to uncover the heart of G-d that is already beating inside. In this way we re-kindle what is most natural to us. ... having a relationship with G-d is essentially returning to what is most natural. The Hebrew word for repentance, 'teshuvah' means 'to return'. This is a return to the original state of affairs, being in harmony with what was always meant to be. It is not something new to be attained, nor is it some higher state of consciousness. It is returning to what is already ingrained within every single soul and in every single heart. It is about re-establishing the divine connection set in place at creation." – 'The Teacher and The Preacher- a dialogue' Moshe Avraham Kempinski p37

Note also that I have included the term 'faithful' as regardless of proclamation of faith or ethnic heritage, a person with an uncircumcised heart is precluded from the Coming Age.

This is why in all of Paul's writings he speaks in 'family' terms and describes the Gentiles he is witnessing to as brothers and sisters, as now members of the 'family of Abraham'.

This is also why he informs that Gentiles that they are not to become proselytized Jews, though clearly that are called to be obedient to the Torah of God as it relates to Gentiles (essentially, the 10 Words plus the Noahide Laws of Acts 15).

### **The Historical Development of the Tripartite Salvation Paradigm:**

#### **Abraham:**

The traditional take on the story of Abraham is that he has only one miraculous son, Isaac.

It is clearly through Isaac that the nation of Israel is formed. It is through the Hebrew Scriptures which focus on the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that we learn of God's interactions with the 12 tribes of Israel and it is from these tribes that the Almighty informs Moses he will select a prophet (Deut 18) who will come and 'speak' perfectly, in word and deed, the call and plans of God for His Creation.

What we generally miss though is that the story of Abraham's first son Ishmael was also miraculous. In fact, as Rabbi Moshe Reiss points out so powerfully<sup>7</sup>, Abraham had two chosen sons, and that it was God Himself, through his angels who saved both young men from death. Even the descriptions of these 'rescues' are very similar.

When Hagar and Ishmael are in danger of dying from thirst we read, '*an angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said*' (Gen. 21:17). When Abraham is about to kill Isaac we read, '*an angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven and said*' (Gen. 22:11)<sup>8</sup>.

Both Ishmael and Isaac were offered sacrificially by Abraham. Abraham approves Sarah's demand for the expulsion of Ishmael, but does not give Hagar sufficient food and water (Gen 21:14).

Hagar was a slave-woman still, even though a wife of Abraham (being a son of a slave-woman did not disqualify Ishmael from being in the family of Abraham - four of Jacob's children, Dan, Naphtali, Gad and Asher are sons of slaves – Bilah and Zilpah – but still the fathers of four of the tribes of Israel). So quite ironically, Abraham both 'frees' Hagar and Ishmael, while at the same time apparently disinheriting them. God though informs Abraham that he will make a nation from Ishmael (Gen 21:13), so we can see that the 'disinheritance' is far from total.

When the angel of God speaks to Hagar in the wilderness of Beersheva, he speaks to her as an independent person, no longer as the slave of Sarah or the wife of Abraham. Also her son Ishmael, while being loved by his father and being Abraham's first born, having been circumcised and an heir for well over a decade, he is here (at least for the purposes of the future dealings of God with Israel) considered an outsider, an other, a Gentile in effect. Note also that Ishmael is still in the picture. We read in Genesis 25 that both he and Isaac buried Abraham when he died. We read also of the genealogy of the children of Ishmael and also of the death of Ishmael.

In the whole of the Torah, the Five Books of Moses, these are the only two children, named by God before their births (Gen 16:11 & 17:19).

So it seems fair to conclude that Abraham had two chosen sons. The rest of the story (of the Hebrew Scriptures) though focuses on the children of the 'promised' son, Isaac.

Before continuing our historical development of the paradigm here, let us jump forward though to the Apostle Paul's allegory about Hagar and Sarah and their two sons.

#### **Gal 4:22-31:**

Almost universally commentators and most readers would be easily led to believe that the two covenants contrasted

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<sup>7</sup> 'The Actions of Abraham: A Life of Ethical Contradictions' by Rabbi Moshe Reiss - <http://www.moshereiss.org/articles/ZABRAMETHICS.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Rabbi Reiss points out that 'The only difference is in one case God is referred to as Elohim in the other as YHVH.' This difference may also be indicative of the different relationship the Almighty has with the Jewish people (as YHVH) and with the rest of the world (the Gentiles) and the God (Elohim) of Creation.

here are the Mosaic covenant and the New Covenant through Messiah Yeshua.

While this is a possible understanding, the issue is that it seems so at odds with so much of Paul's letters such as Romans and in particular Romans 9 where he speaks so strongly of Gentiles being grafted into the cultivated Olive Tree.

Are we to read that here in Galatians, Paul has had a change of heart and now wants to denigrate the cultivated Olive Tree and equate it to Ishmael's son-ship? This seems highly unlikely!

What some scholars instead argue is that this discussion is a comparison between 2 different groups of gentile proselytes and two different pathways or attempts to become son's of The Most High God.

Contextually, it is important to appreciate that the Apostle Paul in this letter, is primarily addressing Gentiles. Josephus [Antiquities, 16.62] testifies that many Jews resided in Ancyra in Galatia [but that] the majority in the Galatian churches were Gentiles.

A number of passages help establish this historical fact.

*Gal 1:13-14 For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers.*

Here Paul appears to be informing his Galatian listeners regarding his previous state and in using terms like 'among my people' it seems clear he is speaking to others who are 'not my people', that is to Gentiles.

*Gal 4:18-19 It is always good to be made much of for a good purpose, and not only when I am present with you, my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!*

Note here also that Paul refers to his readers as 'my little children' – as 'apostle to the Gentiles', this also indicates that those he is addressing are Gentiles.

*Gal 4:8-9 Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?*

Again, the phrase 'formerly, when you did not know God' would also appear to indicate that his listeners were not Jews and had therefore previously been ignorant regarding YHVH.

I recommend that you read the whole of Galatians in one sitting and see that the context both before and after the challenging section of Gal 4:22-31 is focused on circumcision (a metonym, or shorthand, for becoming Jewish) and, as already indicated, is speaking to gentiles about the issue of circumcision. Another term that Paul uses for the process of becoming Jewish is '*works of the law*' (see Gal 3:10 for example). Paul is arguing in Galatians that Gentiles, in accepting the Messiahship of Yeshua and in learning about the One True God, they should NOT become Jewish proselytes.

So in this context, in Galatians 4:22–31, the Apostle Paul makes a commentary on the story of Ishmael and Isaac.

*22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. 23 But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise. 24 Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. 25 Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. 26 But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. 27 For it is written, "Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labour! For the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband." 28 Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. 29 But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now. 30 But what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman." 31 So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.*

Unfortunately, this Galatians passage is often misunderstood as a contrast between the new covenant and the old covenant, between Christians and Jews.

What I believe Paul is doing here is comparing Ishmael to the Galatian Gentiles who had accepted the dogma that they must undergo a ritual proselyte conversion through means of circumcision in order to be reckoned covenant members with Israel. Like Ishmael, Paul says that they are "born according to the flesh;" (Galatians 4:23) specifically, the circumcision of their flesh. That is, their entry into the Kingdom is via a ritual, via a work rather than via faith in the saving power and redemptive act of the Messiah. This had been the way most God-fearers had joined the 'family of

God', which was represented by Israel.

According to the rabbinic dogma, a proselyte through ritual conversion is called a "son of Abraham." Ishmael was indeed a son of Abraham, but he was not the 'promised' son of Abraham. Instead, he was a son by nature and by law.

Paul then compares those Galatian proselytes to children birthed from the covenant at Mount Sinai, where the Torah (law) was given. They are sons of Hagar and "under the law" or more clearly 'under the works of the law' because they have predicated or based their salvation upon observing a "work of the law;" that is, circumcision and the other procedures required to become Jewish proselytes. These Galatian proselytes were attending the synagogues in Galatia where the Apostle Paul's letters were being read. They were not necessarily also believers in Yeshua as the Messiah.

In this analogy, the Apostle Paul compares Isaac to the believing Gentiles who predicate or base their salvation and covenant status upon faith. Isaac is the son of the promise and God's chosen heir of Abraham through which he will establish Israel. As such, these believing Gentiles are the sons of Sarah, Abraham's "son by the free woman through the promise" (Galatians 4:23).

They are sons of Sarah in that they have based their salvation upon faith in the promise of God.

Therefore, the two covenants being contrasted are not the New Covenant and the Mosaic/Sinai Covenant. They are the Abrahamic covenant and the Sinai covenant, both of which are parts of Torah.

**Furthermore, the contrast is not between Jews and Christians, it is between Gentile believers who choose to undergo ritual conversion to Judaism and Gentile believers who do not.**

Paul says of those who rely on faith and the 'circumcision' of Yeshua (Col 2:11), "And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise." (Galatians 4:28)

Note that most of the older manuscripts and even most of the newest translations read 'these women are two covenants', NOT 'these women are the two covenants'. The difference here is that the addition of the word 'the' implies a contrast is being made between the Mosaic covenant and the New or more accurately Re-newed Covenant through the Messiah.

Note also the reference in the quote "Rejoice, O barren one ..." is to Isaiah 54. This is a psalm about the great restoration of the Jewish people to their God and to their Land.

For Paul to use this reference to the future blessing of Israel and then proceed to denigrate Israel just doesn't make any sense at all (if the traditional understanding is employed).

If rather, Paul is speaking of how Gentiles who are 'children of promise' will share in this great blessing of Israel's, because they have been grafted into the cultivated olive tree, then it makes sense that Paul would quote this uplifting and encouraging passage, particularly to any believers facing persecution as the Philippians were and as the Galatians at this time were also, most likely from Jews of the mind and zeal that was in Paul before his recognition of the Messiah (Gal 1:23).

So trying this allegory together with my earlier comments on Abraham's two chosen sons, we see here that the Apostle Paul appears to be arguing that Gentile believers can come into the 'family of Abraham' just as Ishmael and his descendants were part of the family of Abraham and children of God, without needing to become Israelites.

In fact, a Jewish Midrash argues that after Sarah died, Abraham remarried Hagar and thus Ishmael would indeed have received some part of the physical inheritance of Abraham. Midrash Gen. Rabbah 61:4 argues that Keturah (Gen 25:1) was actually Hagar.

In the same sense then, Gentile followers of Yeshua receive an inheritance in becoming part of the 'family of Abraham' and children of God, even though they need not become Jewish.

#### From Moses to Yeshua:

In the Tanakh, from the time of the exodus from Egypt, up to and including the time of Yeshua, we see that the Israelites are called to show love and respect for the alien/stranger in their midst and that God-fearers amongst them may undergo the 'works of the law' and become Jewish, to then be part of the promises to the people of Israel.

While there is no a lot of detail on how Gentiles can find salvation (outside of becoming part of Israel), there are some Scriptures that address this question to some degree and certainly great Rabbi's like Hillel addressed this issue.

For example, in Isaiah 56 it may appear that Gentiles could be accepted by HaShem without becoming Jews as we read in Isaiah 56:6-7, "*Also the foreigners who join themselves to Yahweh, to minister to him, and to love the name of*

*Yahweh, to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath from profaning it, and holds fast my covenant; even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples."*

However, the 'New International Bible Commentary' (General Editor F.F Bruce), argues though, that the to 'join or bind to God' in verse 6 implies 'circumcision' i.e. becoming proselytes. If so, then the foreigners here, these Gentiles have become proselytized Jews, as they have not just been obedient to the Sabbath and the 10 Words, but to all the 613 commandments of the covenant.

Rabbi Hillel, the Elder (born 65 BCE) had a great influence of the ethics of Yeshua. There is also a Talmudic story that three God-fearers came to Hillel to seek the path of salvation and he said to these Gentiles *"what is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor: that is the whole Torah; the rest is commentary; go study"* (BT Shabbat 31a). These Gentiles eventually converted and became proselyte Jews.

We also see in the life and saying of Yeshua that he came for the lost sheep of Israel; for the unrighteous amongst his brethren. He appears to have had little direct interest in preaching to the Gentiles, though he still demonstrated a love for the stranger and called upon his fellow Israelites to show the Gentiles the same compassion.

Thus the story from Moses to Yeshua focuses on the Jewish people. If they were to live right before Him, they would be the light to all the nations and both fulfill their own calling, but also announce the Name to be Glorified to all peoples and all nations.

When the Apostle Paul has his Damascus revelation though, he was most likely the first apostle and one of the first Israelites to fully appreciate how Gentiles could, through Messiah, become full members of the family of God, just not guests of Israel<sup>9</sup>, but full and equal members, though with some different expectations.

It is important to consider the Jewish attitude and understanding throughout both Biblical times and through to day.

These excerpts from an article 'Jewish Attitudes Toward Proselytes' by Valerie S. Thaler at myjewishlearning.com shed some light on these questions.

*"In the biblical era, the notion of a full religious conversion as we know it today did not yet exist. Joining the Israelite population meant following a specific set of communal practices without necessarily adopting Israelite ritual laws. Central to this process was a commitment to monotheism, the factor which most set pagans apart from Hebrews. Those Gentiles who were members of Israelite society were known as gerim (strangers or foreigners), and the Bible repeatedly emphasizes the obligation to welcome such people.*

*In addition, after the Sinaitic revelation, the prophets enjoined the Israelites to uphold Jewish ritual and moral teachings, and to expose the problems inherent in paganism. However, this message is not to be confused with actively seeking converts.*

*Jews have never believed that one had to be Jewish to achieve salvation. Jewish tradition holds that a special covenant between God and Noah established moral precepts for non-Jews (the Noahide Laws). If Gentiles observed these commandments (refraining from murder, theft, and idolatry, among others things), they would receive a portion in the World to Come. Jews in biblical times were open to prospective proselytes, but they did not see it as their mission to convert Gentiles. ... In the Second Temple Period many individuals converted to Judaism. The vast majority of these proselytes made the decision to become Jewish on their own. Judaism's belief in one God was particularly appealing, as was the tenor of the Hebrew liturgy. ... In the Talmudic era (about 200-800 C.E.), formal rituals were established to welcome proselytes into the Jewish religion, suggesting that conversion to Judaism was still a relatively widespread phenomenon. The Hebrew word ger was now understood to refer to "one who had converted to Judaism" instead of a "stranger" or "foreigner."*

Thaler also indicates that, at least in the Middle Ages, the convert did not always enjoy equal status: *"... The Zohar (the classic work of kabbalah, medieval Jewish mysticism) strikes a different chord. The Zohar emphasizes the superior position of the born Jew in relation to the proselyte."*

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<sup>9</sup> Rabbi Moshe Reiss appears to share this understanding: *"While Jews believed that Righteous Gentiles would enter the Kingdom of God Paul recognized that they would be considered (at least by most religious Jews) as second class citizens."*  
[http://www.moshereiss.org/christianity/03\\_hillel/03\\_hillel.htm](http://www.moshereiss.org/christianity/03_hillel/03_hillel.htm)

So it appears that when the Apostle Paul arrives on the scene, righteous Gentiles could, by following the Noahide Laws gain a place in the Age to Come, or they could become proselytized Jews. I believe the Apostle Paul sees a 'new way', a way opened up by the Messiahship and resurrection of Yeshua.

Paul still saw that the natural sons of Jacob were to continue to undergo and observe circumcision, etc., but the new members of the family from the many nations did not need to, and in fact, for obvious reasons, should not get circumcised and become Jewish.

In this way, even the food laws remain for Israel, that is for all Jews, but they are not always obligatory for gentile followers of Messiah Yeshua.

This was the dawning of a new relationship; between Jew and Gentile. While this new relationship had been foretold in the Tanakh (OT), it was to most of Israel a mystery. It required considerable impetus from the Almighty to even be considered, such as the Cornelius House and the Damascus Road events.

This new reality, this inclusion of Gentiles into the family of God through the 'circumcision of Yeshua' (Col 2:11) results in both Jew and Gentile becoming 'new creations' and a 'new man' through their coming inheritance as citizens of the Kingdom.

When fully considered and thought through, I believe this understanding removes most of the seeming contradictions apparently present in the NT, especially in the epistles of Paul.

#### **Challenges from Christian Orthodoxy and some difficult NT Scriptures:**

Contrast this Tripartite Salvation Paradigm with the traditional Christian perspective which argues that the 'Church', comprised predominately of Gentiles, are the 'true Israel' and hence have replaced Israel in God's plans and in the Coming Age. This 'Christian' perspective argues that all Jews are no different to non-Jews in that, if they do not accept that Yeshua is the Messiah, then they are not 'saved' and therefore have no part in the Coming Age.

This despite that fact that the Bible clearly includes many Israelites within the designation of those who are 'saved' who did not even know of Yeshua, let alone accept him as the Messiah (For example, the 'saints' of the Tanakh).

Many, if not most, Christian scholars argue that with the coming of the Messiah Jesus there was a 'change in Torah' that meant from this point on or from this time forward 'salvation'<sup>10</sup> could only be found through 'belief in Christ'.

Some of their typical comments and some brief responses are listed below:

*'The book of Hebrews ... speaks of "a change in Torah."'*

Response:

The revelation here of a new Priesthood that for a time replaces the Levitical priesthood is a change of sorts, but not a removal or negation or annulment of any of the Torah that refers to righteousness and obedience. The 10 Words and the Noahide Laws have not been annulled here. The Levitical priesthood is only temporarily suspended as it will be re-enacted in the Coming Age (see Malachi 3).

*'(The Apostle) Paul changed the Torah in Gen 17 which said that all Gentiles (and of course Israelites) in the covenant have to be circumcised.'*

Response:

Israelites still need to be circumcised. Even the Apostle Paul made this very clear (1 Cor 7:18). Only Gentiles who wish to become Jews (that is proselytized) need to still be circumcised (the process involved here is called '*the works of the Law*'<sup>11</sup>).

Paul spoke against this approach for Gentiles as he wished to maintain the distinction so that prophecy could be fulfilled. Thus, the new way for Gentiles to enter the family of God does not negate Gen 17 at all. This did of course introduce some tensions, as these Jewish 'boundary markers' ('works of the Law') helped to keep Israelites separated from Gentiles (for example the food laws).

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<sup>10</sup> The term 'salvation' or being 'saved' has different meanings, especially within Judaism. The term is used in the context here to mean that a person who is 'saved' has 'eternal life'.

<sup>11</sup> See for example 'The New Perspective on Paul' - by James D. G. Dunn (p 8)

Thus, if Gentiles were now to be part of the same 'family' and socially part of the same community, the eating arrangements would cause some potential friction. Paul addresses these issues though. Part of his answer, with respect to meals, is for the Gentile believers to respect the Jewish requirements and essentially comply with them, at least when in 'mixed' company.

*'Jesus "abolished" some Torah in Eph. 2:15.'*

Response:

Ephesians 2:15 has nothing to do with Torah! The 'law of commandments in dogmas (or ordinances)' clearly cannot mean the Torah! (unless you believe Paul was contradicting himself). It most likely refers to the 'traditions of men' or parts of the Oral Law such as the dogma that if a Gentile crossed over the wall separating the Court of the Gentiles into the Court of the Jews in the temple that they should be killed. This was never a command from God.

*"That the Apostle Paul changed Torah is well known to all scholars of Paul."*

Response:

This is not what the latest scholarship on Paul indicates at all. The 'New Perspective on Paul' (see the works of James D G Dunn and NT Wright for example) introduced the understanding that Paul was in fact not Hellenistic after all but a Torah observant Jew. Since then many scholars, such as Prof Mark Nanos, have strongly demonstrated that Paul was Torah observant<sup>12</sup>.

There is also though, a significant move in modern biblical scholarship to reduce the Judaism (Hebraic)/Hellenism divide where the Apostle Paul is portrayed (depending on the author's perspective) as on one side or the other of this divide.

Rather, the new thesis and argument is along the lines that the first century world was more nuanced than this and that Israel was profoundly Hellenized at this time, while at the same time acknowledging that there were sects that were very apocalyptic (and rejected Hellenism) such as the Essenes, who are seen by some as an older sibling of Christianity.

In the case of the Apostle Paul, it appears<sup>13</sup> that he only wrote in fluent Greek; that he was very familiar with Greek philosophical arguments as well as both sectarian and Pharisaic Jewish modes of argument and thought.

It is my contention, from the evidence I have presented in a number of articles, that Paul was most definitely Hebraic in thought and biblical orientation, though from his upbringing and education, extremely well versed in the culture of his day, both Judaism and the pagan, Hellenistic cultures of his world.

If both Yeshua and Paul were Torah observant, then they would not have contemplated arguing for any change in Torah. In fact, they would be understandably horrified at the thought, enough to proclaim when this argument was put to them, exactly what Yeshua proclaimed when he said: *'I did not come to destroy Torah, but to fulfill (properly interpret and enact<sup>14</sup>) it'* (Matt 5:17).

In fact, a well known orthodox but controversial Rabbi, Shmuley Boteach has just published a book 'Kosher Jesus' which argues that Jesus (Yeshua) was a wholly observant, Pharisaic Rabbi who fought Roman paganism and oppression and was killed for it. The man that Boteach presents would never have contemplated changing, and hence, in Pharisaic understanding, destroying Torah. Yeshua's acceptance of his death on the cross demonstrated his total obedience to the Almighty and His will as revealed in the Tanakh. Yeshua has said, 'No greater love has a man than to lay down his life for a friend' (John 15:13).

The NT regardless of its degree of inspiration and authority does not stand alone but builds on the foundation of the Tanakh. Thus, when we consider how people are 'saved', we need to tread very carefully when arguing for a new criteria that cancels the old.

Certainly, we can see how additional methods or 'ways' might be possible, but any new 'ways' that make the old no longer valid just don't fit with the view of the Creator that the Tanakh gives us.

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12 Of course, many would agree that Yeshua was a Torah observant Jew, and if the Apostle Paul was a faithful witness to Yeshua we could expect him to be the same. A new book "Kosher Jesus" by orthodox Chabad Rabbi Shmuley Boteach argues that Yeshua was a wholly observant, Pharisaic Rabbi.

13 This seems a simple conclusion, but it is actually a very complex question. Considering where he grew up and his excellent education, it certainly seems conceivable that he was capable of writing in good Greek, though there are good theological reasons for surmising that he first wrote in Hebrew. This question though is not relevant to the paradigm being presented here.

<sup>14</sup> See 'Siblings of the King' for a fuller explanation of this.



Thus, if Christian scholars argue that 'SINCE the coming of Jesus' a new way of salvation has been introduced that invalidates any previous way(s), rather than adding to it/them, they are clearly arguing for a fundamental change in Torah, not just in temple practices (which had changed in the past with the exiles etc., but these changes were never seen as cancelling or annulling Torah).

Instead consider how Yeshua lived and acted. Almost everything that Yeshua does or says involves repentance and 'doing the will of the Father'.

As an example, the family of Zaccheus are 'saved', without needing to believe Yeshua is the Messiah or that Yeshua needed to be crucified to pay the price for their sin.

We learn from the Tanakh and from Yeshua that HaShem wants us to have 'circumcised hearts' which is all about how we love Him and our neighbour.

#### More on Circumcision or 'the works of the Law':

In Genesis 17, physical circumcision is a 'token' of the commandment, a representation of the Abrahamic covenant. Thus as a token or representation is does not preclude the possibility of some other token also having the same effect.

Look at what the Apostle Paul states in 1 Corinthians 7:18-19: "*Was someone already circumcised when he was called? Then he should not try to remove the marks of his circumcision. Was someone uncircumcised when he was called? He shouldn't undergo b'rit---milah (circumcision). **Being circumcised means nothing, and being uncircumcised means nothing; what does mean something is keeping God's commandments***" – CJB

While Paul is using the Hebraism of parallelism in verse 19, he is also stating that he didn't see physical circumcision as a commandment of God. So he is not changing the commandments but his whole approach is to show that another 'token' is acceptable for entering into the Abrahamic covenant.

As I stated in my Circumcision article<sup>15</sup>, I believe that when Paul writes in Colossians 2:11---12 "*Also it was in union with him that you were circumcised with a circumcision not done by human hands, but accomplished by stripping away the old nature's control over the body. **In this circumcision done by the Messiah, you were buried along with him by being immersed; and in union with him, you were also raised up along with him by God's faithfulness that worked when he raised Yeshua from the dead.***" (CJB), that **Yeshua's circumcision is our (Gentiles) 'circumcision'**.

Remember<sup>16</sup> that 'circumcision' is the removal of a covering. Yeshua has overcome the 'Yetzer HaRa', the 'old nature's control over (the flesh or) the body' through laying down his life for his fellow man, so that we too can bury our 'evil inclination' with him and be raised with him to our new status as children of God; as members of Abraham's family and as 'new creations'.

So I don't believe Paul reversed anything or changed the commandments at all (as he himself implies in his 1 Cor 7:19 statement).

The Tripartite Salvation Paradigm clearly stands in opposition to the Replacement Theology doctrine that the Church is now Israel or at least 'spiritual Israel'. Some of the Scriptures that relate to this issue are discussed below. These are NT verses that are often used to argue that the Church has to varying degrees (depending on the Christian theologian stating the case) 'replaced' (natural) Israel and the Jewish people in the heart and plans of the Almighty.

#### 1 Corinthians 10:18 - Israel of/after or according to the flesh:

'Israel of the flesh' is a much used and maligned term. Many, in falsely applying this term, also argue that it implies there is a contra 'Israel of the Spirit'.

The term 'Israel of the Spirit' or 'spiritual Israel' is not in either the Tanakh or the NT. Ezekiel does prophesy that Israel will be given a new Spirit in Ezek 11, but this prophecy refers to the return of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel (which is of course being fulfilled before our very eyes!<sup>17</sup>).

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<sup>15</sup> 'Circumcision – a Step of Obedience' – at [www.circumcisedheart.info](http://www.circumcisedheart.info)

<sup>16</sup> see footnote 6 on Page 2 – quote from Moshe Kempinski

<sup>17</sup> See 'Israel: Return in belief or unbelief' @

<http://www.charismacomputers.com.au/Christian%20site/Israels%20Return%20in%20belief%20or%20unbelief.pdf>

Thus, the use of the term 'Israel of the spirit' by Christian theologians or preachers is an inference and I will endeavour to show that this inference is based on a faulty understanding and is therefore an invalid inference.

The generally accepted argument in Hellenistic Christianity is the Replacement Theology and anti-Semitic belief that 'Israel of the flesh' means the Jewish people who have rejected the belief that Yeshua is the Messiah (Jesus Christ) and have therefore (according to this argument of Hellenistic Christianity) lost their salvation and are condemned.

Additionally this view argues that 'Israel of the Spirit' (their inferred entity) is the Christian Church (which includes Jews who have believe in 'Jesus') and it is only this entity which is 'saved'.

To address this issue it is instructive to look at all the occurrences in the Bible of these two terms.

The term 'Israel of the flesh' does not occur in the Tanakh (OT). It is found in 1 Cor 10:18 with various translations, many of which are also interpretations.

For example:

*"Consider the people of Israel: ..." (NIV)*

*"Consider the people of Israel: ..." (ESV)*

*"Look at the nation Israel; ..." (NASB)*

*"Behold Israel after the flesh: ..." (KJV)*

*"See Israel according to flesh: ..." Darby*

*"Consider Israel according to the flesh. ..." (WEB)*

Many Christian scholars argue that the term Israel 'of', or 'according to the flesh' here implies that there is an 'opposite' 'Israel of the Spirit'. This approach leads to a rejection of (natural) Israel, but that is not the context of 1 Cor 10:18 at all. In fact, if you look at verses 19 & 20 you should see that 'Israel of the flesh' is being spoken of in a positive way in contrast to the Gentiles. The Gentiles sacrifice to idols which does them no good and Paul contrasts this with Israel who are involved in beneficial sacrifices to the Almighty.

The almost identical term to 1 Cor 10:18 is used by Paul in Romans 9:3 *"my kinsmen according to the flesh"* where he again speaks positively of Israel and does not suggest they are replaced by an 'Israel of the spirit'.

Paul does speak of 'stumbling' but he does not mean a loss of salvation here (as after all, Paul goes on to make central to his message the affirmation that "all Israel will be restored" in Romans 11:26).

In fact in Romans 9-11 Paul articulates a 2 step plan for redemption. The first step (his preaching on the Kingdom and the Messiah) brings salvation to the gentiles and then the (projected or anticipated) jealousy engendered in Israel by the nations relationship with God brings restoration and redemption to Israel.

I also think it important to appreciate that Paul does not speak predominately of personal salvation in all of this but that, as he saw the Coming Age as imminent, he was focused on this new era of peace and justice and how he could help inaugurate it through the in-gathering of the nations (who must remain distinctly non-Israel for prophecy to find fulfilment).

If we also consider the Apostle Peter, the Apostle to the Jews and his comments in 1 Peter 2 it makes sense that he is speaking primarily to Jewish followers of Yeshua. Could the Gentiles followers in these communities he addresses, also have been included and therefore considered priests? Yes, in the sense that all who put their trust in the Almighty are then 'priests' or mediators between man and God as they are to be 'lights' for God in the communities in which they live.

Certainly, as Rev 5:10 makes clear, in the Coming Age (the Millennial Kingdom) **all** of Abraham's family will be part of the Kingdom of God and priests to the mortal world they are to witness to.

The 'Israel of God' - Gal 6:16:

*"And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God." - Gal 6:16, ESV.*

This term is unique in the Bible. Thus warning bells should immediately go off when someone tries to base doctrine on

it. Dr Peter Richardson<sup>18</sup> did a very comprehensive historical study of this term and the associated 'replacement' doctrines and states that the adoption by Christianity of Jewish prerogatives and attributes, and in particular with its assumption of the name 'Israel' took place over a long period. In fact, Richardson argues that the equating of the Church as the 'true Israel' does not occur, until the mid-second century in the works of Justin Martyr.

Clearly then, in the Apostle Paul's time no-one (including Paul!) saw this term as meaning that Christianity was the 'Israel of God'.

Further though, look at the context. If Paul was referring to these Gentile converts as Israel, it would undermine his effort to persuade them to remain non- Israelites by resisting the offer of proselyte conversion to resolve their identity problems.

Paul emphasizes that God has included them by way of the Messiah into Abraham's family, but he does not declare them to be members of the family of Israel. Rather, it is likely that Paul is reflecting a sentiment not unlike that expressed in Romans 11 toward his fellow 'natural' Israelites, looking for a day when there will be peace among them, rather than division.

While the whole Galatians epistle focuses on the circumcision/proselyte issue, at this point in Gal 6, Paul is not seeking to represent the fate of some of Israel, but to warn the wild olive (the gentiles) of the fate it/they will meet, if it/they are unfaithful. An allegory intended to condemn Gentile arrogance can't suddenly become a source for descriptions of Jewish exclusion and replacement.

Rather, in the context that the Apostle Paul sees the coming restoration of all through the Messiah's appearance and the prophetic inclusion of Gentiles in the Kingdom, it may well be that Paul is in some ways reflecting on Psalm 126 which foresees a time when all Israel will be properly and truly called the 'Israel of God'.

Ps 126:1-2

*"When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream.  
Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then they said among the nations,  
The LORD has done great things for them."*

Surely we can apply this Psalm to Israel today, to the miracle of 1948 and 1967, etc. In Paul's day the Land of Israel was the 'Israel of God' because the Messiah had come. Today, as Israel again awaits the Messiah, the State of Israel is truly once again 'The Israel of God'.

Phil 3:3: 'We are the real circumcision':

The most common interpretation of Philippians 3 is that it is a polemic against either 'the circumcision' (the Jewish people) or, even more commonly, against 'Judaizers' (a term used to define those arguing that gentile 'Christ-followers' need to take on all the markers of Jewishness, that is, that they need to undertake '*the works of the law*' and be circumcised, etc).

Given the very common Hellenistic mindset, with which most Christians and Christian scholars uncritically approach this text with, it is not at all surprisingly how it is then understood in this way. In fact, I suspect it would be very difficult for any Gentile believer attending a typical (Hellenistic) church in today's world to see this text in any other way.

The traditional view though is both anti-Semitic and supportive of Replacement Theology.

In case this is not clear consider two quotes by Gerald F. Hawthorne, in the Word Biblical Commentary (1983) on Philippians 3:2. His comments are typical of Christian commentaries on this passage.

Hawthorne states: *"The Jews were in the habit of referring contemptuously to Gentiles as dogs—unclean animals with whom they would not associate if such association could be avoided.... Paul now hurls this term of contempt back "on the heads of its authors."* and *"to Paul the Jews were the real pariahs that defile the holy community, the Christian church, with their erroneous teaching."*

To try to give pause for some serious reflection and reconsideration then, let us assume for a moment that the Apostle Paul is attacking 'Judaizers' here (remembering that these were people who had accepted Jesus/Yeshua as the Christ/Messiah but were arguing for circumcision, etc). In verses 18-19 Paul goes on to say of these 'Judaizers':

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<sup>18</sup> 'Israel in the Apostolic Church' by Dr Peter Richardson (2005)

*“For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction ... ”*

Is Paul really saying that these ‘Christ-followers’ are ‘enemies of the cross of Christ’ and that ‘their end is destruction’! Surely not! Surely, there must be something wrong here with this traditional interpretation.

Hopefully, this shocking statement (within this contextual understanding) will give you the impetus to look a little deeper here. Consider the context again. Paul's letter was sent to a Romanized city, populated by many Romans and peoples from many other lands; with very strong social stratification. They were very much an agricultural and thus highly inter-dependent city where many cults were practiced and many gods, including Egyptian gods, were worshiped.

Into this pagan mix, consider that the Apostle Paul was a Torah observant Jew (as I argue in a number of other articles in some depth), had arrived to establish and support groups practicing Judaism with a belief that Yeshua was the Messiah (though the Gentiles within these groups were encouraged by Paul and the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 to remain Gentiles and not become proselytized Jews). Here though Paul is communicating with these groups by letter.

In this context then, Paul is declaring opposition to and revulsion toward the idolatrous cults that abounded here. He is also trying to encourage the Gentile believers to no longer have their worldview and behaviour shaped by the Roman social world in which they have grown up; but that, this now marginalized group, acquire the worldview and behaviour of those who follow the ‘divine instructions’ (Torah) of the One God, that is the Jews within their midst.

With this perspective let us look at a few of the terms used by Paul. For example, consider v2 *“Look out for the **dogs**, look out for the **evildoers**, look out for those who **mutilate the flesh**.”*

For a start there is no literary evidence from the Second Temple Period or afterwards that in expressing ethnic prejudice, Jews called non-Jews ‘dogs’. Thus the common argument that Paul is reversing this expression cannot be valid. Rather, there was in Philippi a cult or philosophical group, called in English the ‘Cynics’, which is based on the Greek word for dogs. As a means to demonstrate what they saw as the errors of the society of their day they tried to outdo all others in offensive animal type behavior. That is in the type of behaviour by dogs that we generally find repulsive or at least distasteful. There is much in a dog’s behaviour that we can and should emulate such as their friendship and loyalty.

Consider also the story of Elijah and the prophets of Baal. These prophets were clearly ‘evil doers’ and also mutilators of the flesh (see 1 Kings 18). Isn’t it more likely then that Paul was comparing the local pagans and cults as similar to the prophets of Baal? In fact, Paul does compare himself with Elijah and invoke these very images of ‘evil workers’ and ‘mutilators’ in Romans 11:1-5. Remember also that the Torah makes it clear that mutilation of the flesh is not to be practiced by the Jews. See for example Lev 19:28 *“You shall not make any cuts on your body for the dead or tattoo yourselves: I am the LORD.”* and therefore, there is no way that Judaism considered circumcision as a form of ‘mutilation’ of the flesh.

Let us look at v18-19 again: *“For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, **their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame**, with minds set on earthly things.”* and in particular the terms ‘*their god is their belly*’ and ‘*they glory in their shame*’, which are used to identify the people, behaviour and cults that Paul is condemning.

Consider the events described by Luke in Acts 16:12-40:

*“12 and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. ...*

*16 As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling....*

*19 But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers.*

*20 And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city.*

*21 They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice.*

The slave girl is said to have a spirit of python<sup>19</sup> from the cult of Apollo (the special god for Augustus, who won the battle for him at, of all places Philippi). This divination was also called ‘belly talking’, and could thus be described as a ‘*god in their belly*’. The Cynics doggish behaviour involved behaving in the most animalistic and shameful manner (when

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<sup>19</sup> see ‘pneuma pyhona’ at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unclean\\_spirit](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unclean_spirit)

practiced by people) to expose what they saw as the hypocrisy of their society. Thus this group of local pagans could be described as 'glorifying in their shame'.

Now we are ready to look again at verse 3-17. In Phil 3:3 it now appears that Paul is contrasting these local pagan practices and beliefs with the Way (Ps 119) of the Jews (note also in the story from Acts 16 that he was accused of pushing Jewish customs), which involved 'serving God by spirit' instead of putting their faithfulness in the flesh as these pagan cults do.

It is also important to remember that when Paul speaks favourably of the Abrahamic covenant, that it was the Abrahamic covenant that enshrined male circumcision as an eternal marker of faithfulness.

Now, I think a re-reading of the whole chapter should indicate that, in speaking of his historical high standing within the Judaism of his day, Paul is including his addressees, the Gentile 'Christ-followers' of Philippi, into the Jewish community, but then even further elevating his and their status because they have recognized and embraced the Messiah of Israel and are endeavouring to live with the same faithfulness as Yeshua to the One True God.

Let us turn specifically to verse 3-7:

*"3 For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit<sup>20</sup>, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh,*

*4 though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: 5 circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee;*

*6 concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.*

*7 But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ."*

So now hopefully it should be clear than when Paul states 'we are the circumcision' (note he does not say 'we are the spiritual circumcision' or 'the true circumcision' or the circumcision of the heart'), he is NOT stating that the Church of God is now the circumcision and has replaced the people of Israel as 'the circumcision'.

I believe when he states 'we are the circumcision' he is speaking to his Gentile audience and identifying himself with his fellow Jewish followers of Yeshua, who could all boast in their heritage but no longer do so because they have seen the Messiah, the King of Israel and instead boast in him.

He is thus encouraging his Gentile audience that they now may also have great confidence that through the Messiah, they have now been grafted into the 'circumcision', the chosen people of God.

With this understanding of this chapter, it is no longer seen as seriously anti-Semitic. Also, it can no longer be used as an argument for Replacement Theology, which is exactly what is normally promoted through the traditional understanding and perspective<sup>21</sup>.

The Jewish theologian, Prof. Mark Nanos, addresses the issues of Phil 3:3 extremely well. He argues that the solution lies in seeing Paul's work as the writings of a Torah observant Jew from an inter/intra Jewish position.

This is brilliantly summed up in this quote from one of his articles below: *"Scholars should consider approaching the historical and rhetorical situations for interpreting Paul's texts on thoroughly inter/intra-Jewish instead of inter/intra-Christian models, and they should be careful not to mix them, which can undermine the effort. There is good historical reason to explore these approaches, since Paul and the other early believers in Jesus were Jewish and understood what they were doing to be Jewish.*

***I think it likely that they thought of themselves in terms of a coalition, a Jewish subgroup or subgroups engaged in a temporary task on behalf of Israel, and not founding a new religion or sect that was in some way less Jewish.***

*These approaches (and they) have a better chance of yielding the desired ideological benefit, to the degree that they consistently recognize the issues at dispute in Paul's letters did not revolve around the question of whether or to what extent Jewish norms such as Torah applied, but to how they applied to the new reality he claimed his groups represented; namely, the dawning of the age to come within the present age, so that Israelites and members of the*

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<sup>20</sup> or, as some codices have it, 'who serve God the Spirit,' or 'the Spirit of God'

<sup>21</sup> For a much more in-depth presentation I recommend "Judaizers"? "Pagan" Cults? Cynics?: Reconceptualizing the Concerns of Paul's Audience from the Polemics in Philippians 3:2, 18-19" by Prof Mark Nanos – see <http://www.marknanos.com/Cynics-In-Phil3-May11.pdf> as well as "Paul's Reversal of Jews Calling Gentiles 'Dogs' (Philippians 3:2): 1600 Years of an Ideological Tale Wagging an Exegetical Dog" also at marknanos.com. I am very indebted to Prof Mark Nanos for much of the argument here on Philippians as well as on Romans 11.

*nations worshipped the Creator God of all humankind as one, however, remaining both Israelites and representatives of the nations when doing so.*

*When the shared term is Jewishness, as it is in intra-Jewish terms, the contrast shifts from discussing whether there is something problematic with Jewishness, to whether or not a person or group believes in Jesus Christ, and the associated claims for what difference that makes. In other words, unlike when the shared term is Christ, the difference between two groups does not fall along a line differentiating levels of respect for Jewish identity and Torah, since Jewishness is likely upheld to be essential by Jewish groups.*

*Imagining the dispute between and within Jewish group boundaries keeps the focus on the meaning of faith in Jesus for themselves, and others, as Jewish groups. Another benefit of this conceptualization is that difference is respected. The intra-Jewish construction allows the historical participants as well as the interpreter to respect that having a different opinion about the meaning of Jesus Christ or of appeals to him to legitimate social change within Jewish groups need not represent value judgments that one decision or the other is better, just different.*

*As I understand Paul, he upheld the Jewish notion that, although social (and biological) differences remain in the present age, that is, there remains Jews and non-Jews in Christ, the discrimination usually associated with such differences should not prevail, just as is expected to be the case in the age to come, when even the wolf and the lamb will dwell together.*

*This seems to me to be a sensible and noble ideal for how to approach each other today in Jewish/Christian relations' terms, whether sharing his belief that this age has dawned in Jesus Christ, or not."<sup>22</sup>*

*- from <http://www.marknanos.com/SBL-03-Inter-Christian-Prob.pdf>*

Returning briefly to the first phrase in Phil 3:3 'We are the circumcision ...', note here that Paul did not write, "we are the Christians," or "the Christ-followers," or even "the church"!

Prof Mark Nanos points out that the traditional Christian interpretation of Philippians 3 fails to answer a number of questions, including the following:

1. *"Why would he identify himself and his audience as "the circumcision" without qualifying the term if he meant to degrade this specifically Jewish rite as merely "mutilation" in the preceding statement?*
2. *And when Paul does qualify it in the following explanation, why does he do so in positive terms, as representative of marking those who live unto the Lord as the circumcised ones?*
3. *Moreover, in v. 5, why does he choose to include his own circumcision at eight days old in his catalog of honored identity alongside of righteousness according to Torah, perpetuating the historical Jewish perspective on this particular cut as something wholly different than mutilation, but also not as if he has changed its usage to signify something spiritual or broadly applied to all Christ-followers? "*

After 'we are the circumcision' in v3, there are 3 parts; 'serving God in/by spirit'; 'glorying in Messiah' and 'not trusting in, or persuading by flesh'. These are all terms that other Jewish groups could also claim (both then and now in fact, appreciating that the term Messiah – or Anointed One, can be applied to other men besides Yeshua).

So I believe that the Apostle Paul in stating '*We are the circumcision*' is stating a claim that the group to which he belongs is a Jewish group, but (in the context of the whole epistle) one which acknowledges Yeshua as the Messiah. This group is contrasted most strongly with non-Jewish, non-Messiah following based identities and ways of living.

The Apostle Paul applies the 'circumcision' label and rite to his group. Paul's language here reflects the Maccabean approach, as seen in a number of verses in 1 and 2 Maccabees such as 1 Macc 2 "45: *Then Mattathias and his friends went round about, and pulled down the altars: 46: And what children soever they found within the coast of Israel uncircumcised, those they circumcised valiantly.*"

As I argued in my 'Circumcision: A Step of Obedience?' article, Paul, like the Pharisees (in Acts 15) uses circumcision here as a metonym for Judaism. What is new though is that Paul (and the Jerusalem Council) argue that Gentiles are part of this Jewish community, this 'Pauline Judaism' (i.e. Jewish halacha)' to use Mark Nanos' term without needing to be physically circumcised and become Jewish. Paul believes they should be accepted into the fellowship of the synagogue as members of equal standing. In the same way that women are included in the 'circumcision group' though not literally circumcised, Paul is also including the non-Jewish and non-circumcised followers of Yeshua in this group.

In verse 4-14, Paul indicates that he is still a Jew, that he still most faithfully practices Judaism, but that he does not see

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<sup>22</sup> see also <http://www.marknanos.com/Phil3Dogs-Reverse-6-27-07.pdf>

the social advantage that this would normally give him as of any great value compared with the equal standing that all followers of Yeshua as the Messiah, both 'circumcised' Jews and 'non-circumcised' Gentiles now share.

### 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16

I recently re-read this passage and it almost literally jumped out at me that:

- 1) in no way did the Apostle Paul write this, and
- 2) that it was written after 70 CE (- the original letter was written circa 51 CE).

Why is this important and what does this mean? Firstly the passage in question (many include v 13 as well):

*13 And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.*

*14 For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did **from the Jews,***

***15 who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind***

***16 by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved—so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But God's wrath has come upon them at last!***

These verses are wrong, in that 'the Jews' (i.e. all Jews at the time) did not kill Jesus, though some of the Jewish leaders were clearly complicit in his death. Also the latest evidence indicates that synagogue 'expulsions' ('drove us out') did not occur until well after 70 CE (remember this is supposedly the Apostle Paul speaking here in or very close to the year 51 CE. These verses are also very exaggerated and anti-Semitic, for example in labeling all Jewish people as killers. On top of all this, the author appears to glorify in the suffering of the Nation of Israel. It appears that the last part of verse 16 is most probably a reference to the Fall of Jerusalem. If so, this would also indicate the author was not the Apostle Paul, a Pharisee who loved his people and his nation, who was most proud to be part of the 'circumcision'.

No wonder I know plenty of committed God-fearers; as well as Torah observant Jews; and even followers of Yeshua, who reject the Apostle Paul as a fraud and a traitor to the faith of Israel, the proto-Judaism of his time!

So let's look a little more deeply at this passage. After much scholarly research and debate, especially 'form-critical' work 1 Thess 1:10 has been generally accepted as the end of the 'thanksgiving' section and 1 Thess 2:17 as the beginning of the 'apostolic parousia'. Also then, 1 Thess 2:1-12 has emerged as the initial section of the 'body' of this letter, leading quite naturally to 2:17 and leaving 1 Thess 2:13-16 as an intrusion, that is, as not 'fitting in'; as not an original portion of the letter.

Scholars have argued that this is a more plausible explanation than seeing 1 Thess 2:13 as the beginning of a second letter that has been joined to the first letter by a later editor. Some scholars<sup>23</sup> have shown that the content of 1 Thess 2:15-16 appears contemporary with the perspective of several post-70 CE Matthean passages.

That is, these scholars have given a good argument that this added portion was written some 20+ years (post 70 CE) after the original epistle.

It has been mainly through modern linguistic techniques that scholars have been able to more conclusively show that 1 Thess 2:13-16 was not part of the original letter and was added by a different author. As I am no linguist, I will not attempt to even explain how this is done. For those who wish to follow-up on this though, I recommend '1 Thess 2:13-16: Linguistic Evidence for an Interpolation' by Daryl Schmidt, Journal of Biblical Literature (June 1 1983).

A dissenting view argues that, given that there are no ancient manuscripts which exclude these verses; that they can be seen in some ways to fit logically and stylistically into the epistle's context; and that the strong language here is consistent with other statements by Paul against his opponents, the Pauline authorship of this text should be presumed.

It is also possible that 'the Jews' being referred to here was not the whole nation of Israel, but just the Judeans. These possibilities, even if correct, would in no way change the shocking historical impact of these strongly anti-Semitic words.

In summary then, some consensus has been established that the content of 1 Thess 2:13-16 does not fit well into 1 Thessalonians, nor into Pauline thought in general, and that formally this section intrudes into the overall structure of the whole letter. Also, the linguistic evidence suggests that it did not come from the same author as the rest of the letter, but is rather built around an amalgamation of Pauline expressions.

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<sup>23</sup> Pearson for example – see Birger Pearson: '1 Thessalonians 2:13-16: A Deutero-Pauline Interpolation' HTR 64 -1971

Scholars therefore politely call it an interpolation (- added text into a passage). I think it would be fairer and probably more accurate to call it a corruption; a sinister, evil, inexcusable perversion.

Why? Because it is passages like this in the NT that have directly led to false understandings and interpretations of scripture; which in turn have been used to justify a great many pogroms and evil perpetuated against the Jewish people over the last 1900+ years.

It is because of corruptions of the NT like 1 Thess 2:14-16 that minimally result in 'Replacement Theology' and anti-Semitic attitudes and behaviour. Believing that the vitriolic and virulent words here are Scripture and hence reflect the mind of God leads some otherwise decent and well-meaning Christians to take a stance that is very un-godly and unhelpful to say the least.

I see Christian scholars, even scholars of considerable standing, who believe that they are not anti-Semitic and don't subscribe to Replacement Theology (for example, that the 'Israel of God' is the church) and yet appear to read this text without flinching!

It is way past the hour! It is time that Christians recognized that many of their doctrines are not only wrong but lead to great evil because they have been developed through a Hellenistic mindset. It is time for Christians to reject Hellenistic Christianity and begin to learn to view the Bible with Hebraic eyes and as a result to more accurately and honestly see the One True God and His eternal purposes and plans.

Even if the Tripartite Salvation Paradigm is not the most accurate model of God's salvation plan, all decent, ethical and moral people everywhere should reject the message of 1 Thess 2:14-16.

#### Ephesians 2:11-18

While scholars seriously question whether the book of Ephesians was written by the Apostle Paul, they question even more the understanding that it was a letter addressing a specific group and a specific issue. Without the opening and closing sections (1:1-2 and 6:21-24) Ephesians reads more like a sermon or exhortation addressed to Christian communities in general.

First let us look at Eph 2:11-12 to Eph 2:19-21

*11 Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called the uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—*

*12 remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, **alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ...***

*19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, 20 Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.*

Note that in verse 12 that Paul tells these Gentiles that prior to learning about the Messiah and coming into the faith, they were separated from the commonwealth of Israel (i.e. they were 'aliens' or 'strangers'). Note here that Paul is not applying the category of 'aliens' to ANY Jewish people. Note also that therefore, by inference, all (commonwealth) of Israel are part of the covenants (note also the plural in covenants) of promise, and that this in turn implies that the commonwealth of Israel have both hope in this world and a relationship with the Almighty.

Paul goes on to argue that the crucifixion of Yeshua somehow allowed these 'aliens' (Gentiles) to come into the family of God ('the household of God' in v19) and gain both hope and God. Note also that while these Gentile believers are now no longer separated from Israel, the Apostle Paul does not say they are Israel. Citizens of the household of God, and therefore children of Abraham, but not 'sons of Israel', not Israelites.

In Ephesians 1:1, Paul is speaking to both Jew and Gentile who now 'love God'. In Eph 2:11 though, he changes who he is addressing, to specifically address the Gentile believers who have become 'saints'. So in verse 15, Paul is speaking directly to Gentile believers when he states:

*"For he is our peace; the one making the both one; destroy(ing) the enmity in his flesh and the dividing wall which separates, putting an end (to) the law of commandments in dogmatics; in order to create in himself one out of two into one (brand) new man – making peace. And reconciling both in one body to God through the cross putting to death the enmity."* (translated from the earliest Greek Manuscripts by Frank Selch)

We can see two significant objects here; the 'dividing wall' and 'the law of commandments in dogmatics'. I believe the



Apostle Paul is arguing here that Yeshua's crucifixion somehow removed the 'wall' as well as some regulations that separated Jew and Gentile. I believe the wall was the flesh (circumcision vs un-circumcision – the physical difference and barrier) and 'the law of commandments in dogmatics' the 'traditions of men' NOT any part of the Holy Scriptures, especially NOT the Ten Words.

Matthew Janzen has a good insight on the 'dividing wall': *"... Paul alludes to a "middle wall of partition" between Jew and Gentile. This was a literal wall that Paul uses in a figurative sense to make his point. The Jews decreed, (they made a dogma), which stated that if a Gentile crossed over the wall separating the Court of the Jews from the Court of the Gentiles surrounding the temple, that they would be immediately killed. This was not a commandment of Yahweh. In fact, Yahweh never even commanded such a wall to exist. That dogma created a hatred between the two peoples which Messiah destroyed creating one new man and so, making peace."*<sup>12</sup>

Alternatively, just consider for a moment that here in Eph 2 the apostle Paul did mean the 10 Words and all that defines the Jewish people as God's chosen, was done away with to create the new man, why then does Paul go on to say in v19-22 that we (Gentiles) are now no longer strangers but fellow citizens of the household of God, etc. a household built on the apostles and prophets who spoke for and in the covenants of the Tanakh.

Paul is consistent here with Romans in alluding to our being grafted into the cultivated Olive Tree, not in removing their identity.

#### 1 Peter 2:9-10

*"9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellence of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light:  
10 who in time past were no people, but now are God's people, who had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy"*

Look at Deut 7:6 *"For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth."* And, even more specifically, Ex 19:5-6: *"Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel."*

This is very similar language and in making the, seemingly obvious, inference that Peter is speaking to Gentile believers here, it seems clear he is now calling them Israel. Let us delve a little deeper though. The passage in Deuteronomy makes it clear that it was God who separated the Jewish people (made them holy) to Him. It was nothing they did and therefore there was nothing they could do to lose this holiness and special designation.

In the Exodus passage, it may appear that the designation and holiness is now dependent upon Israel's obedience. Moses though spoke these words to Israel and they were fulfilled. Since that day they have been times when the nation as a whole did walk in disobedience and were removed from the Land and from being a nation for a season. The Almighty would always bring them back though. He has once again brought them back (in 1948) and there can be little doubt that this designation is valid to this very day. Thus, Israel remains to this day THE holy nation and kingdom of priests. No other 'nation' can take this mantle.

So when we look again at the 1 Peter passage, we see no reference to the audience that Peter is addressing here as becoming part of this holy nation and they can't possibly have replaced them in this eternal covenant.

So it seems there are two possibilities. Either Peter is speaking to Jewish believers or using these terms as an allusion or allegory in some sense.

Let us consider these choices:

Look at the introduction of this epistle in 1 Peter 1 in both 'Young's Literal Translation (YLT) and the Orthodox Jewish Bible (OJB):

*"Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the choice sojourners of the dispersion of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia," (YLT)*

*"Shimon Kefa a Shliach of Rebbe, Melech HaMoshiach Yehoshua to HaBechirim (the Chosen ones [2:4,6 9]), to the Exiled ones of the Golus, Sojourners living as aliens in the Diaspora, scattered in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia," (OJB)*

The terms 'dispersion' and 'Diaspora' refer to Jewish people scattered amongst the nations. Peter was the Apostle to the Jews and it appears here that he is in fact addressing Jewish believers not Gentile believers.

In fact, 1 Peter 1:10-11 is perhaps one of the clearest indications as to who Peter is primarily addressing in this letter.

1 Peter 1:10 -11 *"Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of the Messiah in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the subsequent glories."*

The prophets of the Tanack did not prophesy to, or for, the gentiles but to and for Israel. It was always to Israel that the Messiah, the great Prophet and Redeemer was to come. Yeshua himself stated unequivocally that he had come for the 'lost sheep of the House of Israel'. Not for gentiles, at least not directly, unless they were to bind themselves to Israel.

If you compare your favourite translation with the Orthodox Jewish Bible version of 1 Peter 2:9-10, you can clearly see many references from the Tanakh that in their original context were most definitely speaking of/to Israel:

*But you are an AM NIVCHAR ("a chosen people" YESHAYAH 43:20; SHEMOT 6:7), a MAMLECHET KOHANIM ("a kingdom of priests, royal priests" Ex 19:6), a GOY KADOSH ("a holy nation" Ex 19:6), an AM SEGULLAH ("a people of treasured possession" Ex 19:5; Mal 3:17), for this purpose: that you may declare the wondrous deeds of the One who gave you the kri'ah (calling) and summoned you out of choshech into his marvelous ohr [Isa 43:21; 42:12]. 10You, who once were LO AMI ("not My people" Hos 1:9) but now AMI ATAH ("My people you are" Hos 2:25), the AM Hashem ("the people of G-d"), the ones having not received rachamim, but now having received rachamim (Hos 2:25).*

In any serious approach to the Bible, we need to first read Scripture in its original context and determine to whom the writer/prophet was speaking. Only once this is clearly identified and understood, can we then look to see if there may be a further (greater?) application of this Scripture to another time and place and people. A great many errors have been introduced into the 'Christian' movement through scholars like Augustine taking an allegorical approach to the Tanakh and ignoring the foundational and core message.

This approach is most noticeable amongst those who argue for Replacement Theology. They are very quick to apply some scriptural reference in the Tanakh, that was most definitely given to the people of Israel and instead somehow imagine that the Jewish people have forfeited this Scripture and that it instead was given to the 'church'. The Almighty may have punished in people (Israel) for a season and at various times through history, but He has never forsaken them because it is 'for His Name's sake' that He remains eternally committed to His promises to them. This is why they are back in their Land, His 'Holy Land', today<sup>24</sup>.

1 Peter was apparently written around 63 AD, just before the Roman siege of Jerusalem. If the Apostle Peter was like Yeshua aware of the terror that was to come upon Jerusalem and Israel in 70 CE, his warnings in 1 Peter fit the context of preparing the Jewish believers for the trials to come. Therefore, the conclusion that the Apostle Peter is arguing in 1 Peter 2:9-10 that the 'church' has replaced Israel is not valid.

#### The Gospel of John:

It is very difficult to address and challenge any doctrine of Christianity because many have a very long heritage and a sizable following. Whether they are in truth contradictory and mistaken, it is always a difficult for all men and women to be called to re-assess and re-consider their cherished views. This is perhaps nowhere more evident than with the Gospel of John.

While the Synoptics, the Gospels of Luke, Mark and Matthew can be read as historical narratives, the Gospel of John calls for an evaluation of the events of Yeshua's life, death and resurrection on a different level and in a very different way. For example, those who try to defend the Hellenistic Christian doctrine of the Trinity always use the Gospel of John as the main source of scripture from which they try to defend this erroneous doctrine.

While we may wish to consider all the books of the New Testament as separate from, and not impacted by, the culture, events and personalities of the time and place in which they were written this is not the reality. Whatever the original versions may have said, the redacted versions that we have certainly show this influence. This contextual reality is evident in John's Gospel.

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<sup>24</sup> For more on the Land issue see my article 'Israel: Return in belief of unbelief' at [www.circumcisedheart.info](http://www.circumcisedheart.info)

While scholars generally agree that starting with the epistles of Paul, all the books of the NT were first composed between 49 CE and 68 CE, with the Gospel of John, the epistles of John and the Book of Revelation written in the late 80's to mid 90's<sup>25</sup>.

The Great Revolt of 66-70 CE stands between these books. Without doubt, the followers of Yeshua in the early days had all been Jewish with the addition of the Gentiles only beginning around 45 CE (the Cornelius house event). With the Destruction of the Temple in 70 CE and the killing of some 1 million Jews in Israel, Roman hostility toward Judaism and Jewish religious movements was very high. Even before 70 CE, the Roman Emperor Nero (Emperor from 54 to 68 CE) persecuted Christians.

Into this Roman culture with a great hostility towards all things Jewish, John writes a Gospel which (in the translations we have) tries to appeal to a Roman audience. Yeshua is presented as the ruler of the world ('I have overcome the world'), the King even before his death and resurrection, he is presented as a strong champion who does not suffer through the trials of his execution (unlike the descriptions in the Synoptic Gospels). More significantly though is the very strong anti-Semitic emphasis, to the point where John has Yeshua stating that those Jews who delivered him to the Romans, to Pilate to be sentenced to death, had committed a greater sin than those who sentence him and execute him<sup>26</sup>!

While the redaction of the NT over the last 1900+ years has introduced an anti-Semitic flavour and phraseology to virtually every book, John's Gospel then perhaps stands out as the most blatantly anti-Semitic of all.

To help appreciate this aspect of John's Gospel, it is enlightening to read the words of Jewish theologians who have taken the time to try to have an in-depth relationship with this Gospel. One such Jewish expert is Adele Reinhartz, Full Professor, Department of Classics and Religious Studies, University of Ottawa. Here is a short summary of some of her thoughts from her book *'Befriending the Beloved Disciple: A Jewish Reading of the Gospel of John'* (2001):

*"The Jews are from the outset portrayed as the people who reject Jesus (1.11), persecute him (5.16), seek his death (8.40), expel believers from the synagogue (9.22), plot Jesus' death (9.49-52), and persecute his followers (16.2). Furthermore, both the Gospel narrator and the Johannine Jesus employ dualistic language that contrasts Spirit and flesh, light and darkness, life and death, salvation and eternal damnation, God and Satan, belief and non-belief. Those who believe Jesus to be the Messiah and Son of God are firmly associated with the positive element in each pair, whereas those who reject him — epitomized by —the Jews! —are associated with the negative elements. The most extreme example appears in John 8, in which Jesus declares to his Jewish audience: —You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father's desires (8.44). This accusation has contributed to anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism from ancient times to the present day."*

Let us consider her comment on John 8:44. As almost all NT Biblical scholars accept that John 8:1-11 (the story of the woman caught in adultery<sup>27</sup>) should not be in the Gospel of John, we can start at John 8:12 to try to determine who Yeshua was speaking to in verse 44. We then read that he is speaking to 'the Jews' which includes some Pharisees, and even the Jews that believed in him. Nowhere does the text state that he was addressing the Jewish leadership; the Sadducees and Temple priests. The Pharisees whom he addressed were not the Jewish leadership. In fact many of the Pharisees were his followers.

Thus, as Prof Reinhartz argues John has Jesus accusing either all Jews or at least some of the Pharisees and not the Jewish leadership of being children of the devil. Many of these same Jews were most likely 'blameless before Torah' like Paul and therefore righteous and 'saved'!

There is something clearly problematic here. Let us look though at John's self-declared purpose for writing this Gospel. It was to demonstrate and declare that Yeshua was the Messiah, and that this revelation would bring about salvation for his readers.

Jn 20:31 *"...but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."*

It would appear then that John's core message was to declare that the Jewish Prophet and Messiah had arrived. This message is, in the first instance, a purely Jewish revelation. It was the Jewish people who had been promised a deliverer, a saviour. It was therefore to the Jewish people that John was first declaring and repeating<sup>28</sup> this revelation.

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<sup>25</sup> See *'Chronological and Background Charts of the NT'* by H Wayne House (p 16)

<sup>26</sup> John 19:12

<sup>27</sup> For details see my article 'The Pericope Adulterae' at <http://www.charismacomputers.com.au/The%20Pericope%20Adulterae.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> It is believed that John's Gospel was written around 96 CE, some 60+ years after the resurrection event.

To use John's Gospel then to argue that the church has replaced Yeshua's fellow Israelites, is clearly invalidated by this context and purpose, unless the original autograph of this Gospel was not after-all inspired by the Almighty.

Given these issues then, I suggest some caution be taken in understanding the statement of Yeshua in John 14:6<sup>29</sup> to mean that salvation and eternal life (or life in the Coming Age) is the sole, exclusive preserve of only those who accept that Yeshua is the Messiah.

#### The Jerusalem Council:

I have written at some length on the Jerusalem Council in my 'Circumcised: A Step of Obedience?' article. I have summarised some of this article below.

Why was the edict of the Jerusalem Council needed? If Gentile God-fearers were still to undertake the 'works of the law' to become full Jewish proselytes, and fellow citizens of the Kingdom of God, then the whole incident was totally unnecessary and would not have occurred.

The fact that the Jerusalem Council saw it necessary to have their conference and make their ruling shows that things had changed. The events at Cornelius's house were one of the 'new' events that indicated the change. The vision from God, that Peter had on the roof of Simon the Tanner's house (Acts 10) also indicates that the Almighty recognized the need to help Peter see that a new way was now here.

The fact, that the question of 'circumcision'<sup>30</sup> even needed to be discussed was also evidence that the apostles saw that a new path was open.

So if a new path required this Council and edict, clearly it was not just a set of suggested initial rules, through which Gentiles on first coming in fellowship with the commonwealth of Israel, might find acceptance while they studied and prepared themselves for full entry into the Jewish family by proselytization. Paul made it very clear that he did not wish to see Gentiles become proselytized Jews.

It is also illuminating to consider how great Jewish scholars who have spend some time studying the influence of Christianity on Judaism view the events of Acts 15. One good example is Yehezkel Kaufmann, an orthodox Jew who believes the resurrection of Yeshua was a myth, and who was a highly respected Professor at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem.

He writes: *"The origin of gentile Christianity was a religious and historic event, not a new religious concept. Religious Judaism longed for the return of the gentiles but, because of its historic experience and the continued dominance of idolatry among the gentiles, did not think that the gentiles would repent. Christianity, as a messianic movement, held at first to this historic messianic judgment of the nation Israel and refrained altogether from preaching the gospel to gentiles. But the gentiles were, so to speak, "evangelized" of themselves. They were deeply moved by the Christian mystery and received the glad tidings which had not been announced for them. It was this messianic acceptance among the "gentiles," that is, the judaizing gentiles — those "God-fearers" who had not yet become fully Jews — which turned Christianity from its original course.*

*To the early Nazarenes, this Christian movement was a sign that God had not destined all the uncircumcised to perdition; thus their exclamation: "Then God has given even the heathen repentance and the hope of life!" (Acts 11:18). The idea that God desired the turn of the non-Jews to the faith of Israel had long been established in Israel. But that God had addressed the gospel of the kingdom of heaven also to the gentiles, that he might baptize them with the "holy Spirit" and work "wonders" among them — these things were altogether new.*

*And in them, something else was implied: God has baptized these "God-fearers" who do not observe the commandments, **these uncircumcised gentiles**, with "the holy Spirit"; in this, he has given a sign that the "kingdom of heaven," which was vouchsafed only to the righteous few of this generation, is given also to those gentiles who believe in Jesus even though they do not observe the commandments. Therewith, Christianity began to function as the revelation of a new covenant, a new, divinely revealed distinct testament whereby, without dependence on the old, the*

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<sup>29</sup> Jn 14:6 "Jesus said to him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

<sup>30</sup> Remember that circumcision is being used here as a metonym for the works of the law' i.e. procedures to become Jewish.

*proselytes could be received of the God of Israel. The triumphant future of Christianity is foreshadowed in the baptism of Cornelius and his company.”* p 158 ‘Christianity And Judaism: Two Covenants’ By Yehezkel Kaufmann

Clearly Kaufmann saw the ‘baptism of Cornelius’ event as one example that something had changed and that the physically uncircumcised could become citizens of the Kingdom. Note his reference to Acts 11:18, which at least to Kaufmann, seems to confirm this.

More importantly though, let us consider for a moment though the impact over time of the Jerusalem Council’s edict.

If it was indeed just a starting point for relationship and membership of the Commonwealth of Israel, we would expect to see historical evidence (if attainable), of the Gentile followers of Yeshua embracing circumcision and all 613 mitzvot (commandments).

Alternatively, if this edict was not just a starting point then there would be no evidence that the Gentile followers over time got circumcised. Rather what evidence we might find should show that they essentially remained obedient to the 10 Words and the 4 Noahide Laws and other ‘relational’ Torah commands, including the Feast Days, but did not take up all the ceremonial and situational commandments.

The investigation of what transpired after the Jerusalem Council of 49 CE though, is made very difficult by two factors:

1. The real paucity of original documentation from 61 CE to around 100 CE, and
2. the significant shift in the Gentile Churches doctrinal position which began during this time as was well entrenched as early as 120-160 CE.

In support of Point One above, Adolf von Harnack has stated: *“The greatest gap in our knowledge consists in the fact, that we know so little about the course of things from about the year 61 to the beginning of the reign of Trajan [98]. The consolidating and remodeling process must, for the most part, have taken place in this period. We possess probably not a few writings which belong to that period; but how are we to prove this? How are they to be arranged? Here lies the cause of most of the differences, combinations and uncertainties; many scholars, therefore, actually leave these 40 years out of account, and seek to place everything in the first three decennia of the second century.”* Adolf von Harnack, History Of Dogma, p.144

The change or doctrinal shift highlighted in point two is seen in this astounding quote from Clement, the Bishop of Rome (88-98 CE): *“If Christ the Lord who saved us, being first spirit, then became flesh, and so called us, in like manner also shall we in this flesh receive our reward.”* (2<sup>nd</sup> Clement 9.5). Here we see that the false doctrine of ‘pre-existence’ came into the church at a relatively early date.

These two factors then, make it difficult to establish with any great certainty the full facts on this challenging issue<sup>31</sup>. Despite this, I believe the evidence highlighted below is still reasonably strong.

It might also be helpful to understand what were the accepted conditions for Gentiles to become proselytized Jews in the middle of the first century of the Common Era?

*“It would appear, according to the Talmud, that on the occasion of admitting proselytes, strictly so called, into the Jewish communion, three things were necessary: (1) circumcision; (2) baptism, i.e. a bath with a view to Levitical purification; and (3) a sacrifice (literally, a gracious acceptance of blood).*

*In the case of women only the last two were required. After the destruction of the temple, as a matter of course the sacrifice was discontinued also.”* - Emil Schurer “A History Of The Jewish People In The Time Of Jesus Christ”

It is interesting to note then that after 70 CE, Gentile women need only submit to baptism (mikvah) to be accepted into the Jewish commonwealth. Until around 45 CE with the move of the Spirit at Cornelius’s house, almost all believers had been Jewish or Jewish proselytes (called ‘Nazarenes’<sup>32</sup> by Kaufmann above).

Now they faced the challenge of accepting Gentiles. This led to the Jerusalem Council (circa 49 CE).

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<sup>31</sup> Alex Hall has written a fascinating short summary of von Harnack’s ‘History of Dogma’. It is well worth a read – see <http://www.christianmonotheism.com/media/text/Alex%20Hall%202007.pdf> for a pdf version.

<sup>32</sup> Ray A Pritz in ‘Nazerene Jewish Christianity’ argues that the Nazarenes were the Christian sect that most faithfully maintained the doctrines of the first disciples and apostles.

What follows is some of the relevant evidence from this time on.

The fourth book of the Sibylline oracles, composed around 80 CE, and considered by most to be of Jewish origin, and paraphrasing Schurer ("A History Of The Jewish People In The Time Of Jesus Christ") "*contains an address to the Gentiles, in which prominence is given only to the worship of the true God and the belief in a future judgment, and most significantly instead of requiring the converted Gentile to be circumcised, states that only a mikvah (bath of purification or baptism) is necessary.*"

I personally find his assessment a little strained. You can read this 'book' here:

<http://www.elfinspell.com/SibyllineOraclesBk4.html>.

Emil Schurer also suggests that some minimal observance of the ceremonial laws was common among Gentile 'God-fearers': "*The result of this was that to almost every one of the Jewish communities of the dispersion there was attached a following of "God---fearing" Gentiles who adopted the Jewish (i.e... the monotheistic and imageless) mode of worship, attended the Jewish synagogues, but who, in the observance of the ceremonial law. restricted themselves to certain leading points, and so were regarded as outside the fellowship of the Jewish communities. ... Now if we ask ourselves what those points of the ceremonial law were which these Gentiles observed, we will find them plainly enough indicated in the passages already quoted from Josephus, Juvenal, and Tertullian. All three agree in this, that it was the Jewish observance of the Sabbath and the prescriptions with regard to meats that were in most general favour within the circles in question.*" P314 Schurer "The Jewish People in the Times of Jesus"

What does this tell us? It tells us that Gentiles such as at Colosse were obeying the edict of the Jerusalem Council and were also observing the Sabbath. That is, it does indeed appear that they were effectively obeying the 10 Words and the 4 Noahide Laws, at least as a minimum and yet were not obeying all ceremonial laws. Note also no mention of physical circumcision.

Thus, given the time since the Jerusalem Council to the writings of Josephus, Juvenal, and Tertullian (160-220 CE), it would appear that the Jerusalem Council edict had not been just a starting point towards total Torah and Jewish observance.

Kaufmann also saw Christianity as removing physical circumcision and yet retaining a 'baptism'<sup>33</sup> as a 'rite of conversion': *Christianity's innovation was baptism as the specific rite of conversion. The perplexity of the Nazarene community resembles in some respect that of the time of Ezra and Nehemiah and the succeeding generation, when the concept of religious conversion was in process of formulation. The Christian solution to the question of conversion derives from the change in Judaism. It was both formally and in substance the Jewish principle that without the faith of Israel there is no salvation. To this concept the Christian church now attached new rites centered in the life and person of Jesus.* – 'Christianity And Judaism: Two Covenants' Kaufman p150

It would appear that up until the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, the followers of Yeshua had been considered just another sect of the 'proto-Judaism' of the time.

There is a significant amount of evidence that the followers of Yeshua were in many ways indistinguishable from other faithful Jews. In "Judaism A Very Short Introduction" (p 20) Norman Solomon states: "**... up to 50-60 AD there was no dividing line between Judaism and Christianity, Jesus indeed never thought of himself as preaching a religion other than Judaism or Torah ... if you asked Jesus or his disciples what religion they were, they would have replied Jewish**".

Even the Jewish historian Josephus, after travelling through Israel in 50-60 AD saw Israel as composed of 4 groups, namely the Pharisees, the Saducees, the Essenes and the Zealots. He did not mention the 'Christians' or 'Nazarenes' as a separate group.

Many scholars argue that it was the destruction of the Temple coupled with the flight of Christians to Pella, and the establishment of the new 'Sanhedrin' council<sup>34</sup> at Yavneh that led to the split of the Church from it's Jewish roots.

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<sup>33</sup> It is important to recognize that mikvahs (purification baths or 'baptisms') were a very important aspect of religious life, of 'halacha' in Israel.

<sup>34</sup> Many biblical scholars believe that the "Birkat ha-Minim" benediction introduced by the Yavneh council, was aimed at removing Christian participation in the synagogues, and this coupled with the increasing Hellenistic influence within the church, led to the church separating from its roots and losing its Way.

Pritz argues that these Christians who fled the impending destruction of Jerusalem prior to its fall in 70 CE were Nazarenes: *“One event which would seem to provide the first link between that Jerusalem congregation and the Jewish Christianity of patristic writings is the reported flight to Pella of the Decapolis. This move to Pella was undertaken, according to Epiphanius, by the sect known as the Nazoraioi (Nazarenes). Or, as Epiphanius would rather express it, the Nazarenes were the descendants of those Jerusalem believers who fled to Pella.”* - ‘Nazarene Jewish Christianity’ by Ray A. Pritz

If Pritz and Kaufmann are correct and the Nazarenes were the most faithful sect of the growing Christian community then this may muddy the waters a little and bring contra evidence to my contention regarding circumcision as Pritz states: *“In addition to this second-hand information, that the Nazarenes still existed in his day, Augustine supplies us with the following information about the sect:*

- 1) *they profess to be Christians and confess that Christ is the Son of God;*
- 2) *they practice baptism;*
- 3) *they keep the old law, specifically including*
  - a. *circumcision,*
  - b. *Sabbath observance, and*
  - c. *food restrictions such as abstinence from swine; and*
- 4) *they are few in number.”* P 78

Given that the followers of Yeshua had grown to at least 10’s of thousands in the early years, the information that they were few in number seems questionable. Also, as Pritz goes on to state, Augustine’s ‘facts’ also seem questionable:

*“However: The statement that they are few in number, coming as it does after Augustine's uncertainty as to whether they still exist, gives the impression that it is not so much a statement of known fact as it is a reasonable assumption based on their obscurity. He himself has not encountered them and knows very few who have, therefore they cannot be (or ever have been) a very populous group. Likewise the assertion that they abstain from eating swine's flesh could well be a conclusion Augustine has drawn on his own. He knows that they keep the Law and are "Jews and nothing else," as Epiphanius says. He may logically infer that these Jewish Christians will not eat swine. It should be remembered that neither Epiphanius nor Jerome nor indeed any other writer brings this charge against the sect.*

We can also see here that if they were only Jewish believers then of course we would expect them to still practice circumcision. So essentially, we gain little from this information and there appears little else in Pritz’s book that further elucidates the gentile circumcision question.

Ignatius of Antioch, was apparently a student of John the Apostle and the third Bishop of Antioch. Writing to the Philadelphians sometime between 98 and 117 CE he states: *“His disciples said to him, "is circumcision useful or not?" He said to them, "If it were useful, their father would produce children already circumcised from their mother. **Rather, the true circumcision in spirit has become profitable in every respect.**”* - Chapter 6, ‘Ignatius to the Philadelphians’

Whether his statement here was factual or not and whether it was in full agreement with the apostles is rather difficult to ascertain. Ignatius for example was apparently one of the first to push for a change of the Sabbath to the first day of the week.

More conclusive information appears to be presented by Origen (around 203-216 CE) and Eusebius (around 300 CE) and Emperor Julian (around 350+ CE). Below are some revealing quotes from ‘Jews, Pagans And Christians In Conflict’ By David Rokeah: *“... Origen exhibited great restraint and curtailed his exchange of words with the Jew by saying: "It is not now on the agenda to explain the rationale of circumcision, which was begun by Abraham and forbidden by Jesus, who did not wish that his disciples should practice the same....”*

*Reading the Historia Ecclesiastica (by Eusebius) reveals that the central conflict and polemic between Jews and Christians were those of the period that preceded the revolt of 66-70 C.E. Afterwards, the Historia Ecclesiastica included almost no comments on the Jews, whereas citations from the addresses of Christian apologists to the Roman emperors and also quotations taken from the Acts of the martyrs abounded....*

*From the Jews' point of view, the limits of a debate were not exceeded, and the Jews therefore saw no need to compile polemical treatises against the Christians.”*

*Circumcision, and unleavened bread during Passover: On these matters, Julian notes: Now I must consider this other question and ask them, for what reason do you not circumcise yourselves? They reply that Paul declared that circumcision of the heart but not of the flesh was bestowed upon Abraham because he believed. He said nothing more about the circumcision of the flesh, and we should accept the not impious words proclaimed by him and Peter.*

*Julian also disputed the right of the Christians to abolish circumcision on the basis of an allegorical interpretation and showed that, according to the Torah, the foreskin of the flesh must be circumcised (Contra Galilaeos, 351 A-B)."*

While Origen, Eusebius and Julian were all Hellenists not Hebraists, this information does still appear reasonable, and thus these men do give some support for the argument that physical circumcision had not been a rite of conversion for Gentiles coming into the church.

Certainly physical circumcision was no longer part of 'Christianity' by 130 CE. The evidence is fairly strong that followers of Yeshua did not take part in the Bar Kochba revolt of 132 CE. A significant part of the rationale behind this revolt was the Roman order to ban circumcision. Also by reason of the Messianic character of the movement it was quite impossible for Christians to take part in it. They could not in essence deny their own Messiah by recognizing the leader of the political revolution as also a Messiah (he was declared the Messiah by the great Rabbi Akiva).

It was only under Emperor Antoninus Pius (Roman Emperor from 138 – 161 CE) that the Jews were again allowed to circumcise their children. Jewish writings which refer to the circumcision prohibition, affirm also that even the observance of the Sabbath and the study of Torah had been forbidden.

Interestingly when Emperor Antoninus Pius removed the circumcision prohibition, he only removed it for native Jews. It still remained in place for Gentiles.

It would therefore appear reasonable that if male Gentile converts to Christianity had been getting circumcised as a matter of faith and obedience, then this prohibition would have caused significant problems as it did for the Jewish population and would have been recorded. No such recordings of Christian revolts or protests are currently known.

Tertullian (160 -220 CE) noted that the Christians do not abstain from forbidden foods, celebrate the Jewish festivals, or practice circumcision. Therefore Tertullian's comments appear to be in some conflict with the earlier quote made by Emil Schurer in "The Jewish People in the Times of Jesus", where Schurer indicates that the Gentile believers outside of Israel were in fact partaking in the Jewish Feast Days and restricting themselves regarding meats (as per the Jerusalem Council). Of course, Schurer is referring to the few decades after the crucifixion and Tertullian is making his comments on the situation some 100 years later when we know that the Hellenistic influence had become very strong and pervasive. Thus, these quotations seem to confirm the loss of true Christianity around this time as it was replaced by Hellenistic Christianity which then introduced such falsehoods as pre-existence and the Trinity.

To summarise then, the evidence presented here is limited and requires some conjecture, and therefore it is not conclusive. Overall though, it would appear to support the contention that male Gentile converts were not expected to get physically circumcised.

### **Conclusion:**

I have tried to address to some degree what I see as the myopic, distorted and contradictory view that Hellenistic Christianity has presented to the world of a 'Christ' (Messiah) who is not only God Himself but the only way to God.

Yeshua never presented himself as divine and his whole life and death was a life of light, a life that demonstrated how to live, not what to intellectually believe. He called for a life of faithfulness to the God of Israel. In this sense he was in many ways no different to the many great prophets of Israel that had gone before him or to the many Rabbi's amongst the Pharisees with whom he had a great deal in common. He called for repentance, for obedience to Torah. He did not start a new religion centred on himself, but only declared what his Father, the God of Israel told him to declare and tried to point all his Jewish brethren back to their God and Father.

Yeshua knew he was the Messiah, the King of the Coming Age. For his fellow countrymen and women to join him as his brothers and sisters and mothers (his family), in the Coming Age, he very simply stated: "*For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.*"(Matt 12:50)



It was the Apostle Paul who saw that Gentiles could enter into this relationship, this family of Abraham, without becoming Jewish. At the same time though, Paul saw that those of his fellow Jews who had been given the revelation of the Messiahship of Yeshua were in a privileged position in being given the both the knowledge that the Coming Age was about to dawn, but also the opportunity to reach out as 'lights' to the Gentiles, to bring this great news to them as well.

He saw his fellow Israelites who did not recognize Yeshua as having simply stumbled<sup>35</sup> (but having not fallen) in their walk, but he knew with great confidence that all faithful Israelites remained part of the Almighty's family and were assured of their place in the Coming Age.

So I believe that the Apostle Paul saw the children of God, the 'family of Abraham', as consisting of three groups:

- 1) faithful Israelites;
- 2) faithful Israelites who are also followers of Yeshua; and
- 3) faithful Gentile followers of Yeshua.

All three of these groups are men and women with circumcised hearts. The sooner these groups, especially Groups 2 and 3 who compose the true church, are able to recognize and accept each other, the sooner true progress will be made and anti-Semitism excluded from amongst God's people.

Paul Herring

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[www.circumcisedheartinfo](http://www.circumcisedheartinfo)

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<sup>35</sup> *"They did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be!" Romans 11:11*