

A Messianic Jew Goes to Rome

Two thousand years ago Paul, a Messianic Jewish rabbi, concerned about how the Jewish believers were being treated by Roman believers, penned a letter to them. Last week, I had the surreal and amazing privilege of teaching part of that letter at a church in Rome.

Chiesa Cristiana Evangelica, or Evangelical Christian Church (ECC), invited me to come there and teach on Jewish roots. Rome is dominated by Catholics. Evangelicals (Bible-believing Christians) make up only slightly more than 2 percent of Italy's population, while Roman Catholics comprise nearly 90 percent.

Most evangelical churches are small and very traditional. However, ECC is large and full of life.

Fear and Trembling

As I prepared to minister, I felt a tinge of fear. After spending the past two years working on *Identity Theft*, which had me researching the history of the Roman Catholic Church, I knew that I was not supposed to simply preach a normal message. I had to address the sins of Rome. In fact, I felt quite strongly that I was to preach to "Rome" from Romans 11.

In Romans 11, Paul pleads with the Roman church to stop judging their Jewish members. They had developed a belief that the Jews were under God's judgment and no longer had a unique calling.

Paul says:

"I ask then: Did God reject His people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. God did not reject His people, whom He foreknew" (vv. 1-2).

“Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious” (v. 11).

“I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and in this way, all Israel will be saved” (vv. 25-26).

“For God’s gifts and His call [to Israel] are irrevocable” (v. 29).

Furthermore, he warns the Romans that if they continue in their judgments, they would be judged: “Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but tremble. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you either. Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in His kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off” (vv. 20-22).

Paul challenges the Roman believers that part of their calling is to reach the Jewish people by “provoking them to jealousy.”

Sadly, the Roman church (which would soon become the headquarters of institutionalized Christianity) did not provoke Israel to jealousy, but instead developed theologies that claimed the following:

St. Augustine: Believed that the Jews deserved death but were destined to wander the earth to witness the victory of the church over the synagogue.

Eusebius: Taught that the promises of Scripture were meant for the Gentiles and the curses were meant for the Jews. The church was the “true Israel.”

John Chrysostom: “It is every Christian’s duty to hate the

Jews. ... God hates the Jews and I hate them too!"

These beliefs led to persecutions, expulsions, inquisitions and even murder.

Too Bad Statues Can't Talk

The Roman Church outright rejected the teachings of the man whose statue stands outside St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican. I felt that my task was to challenge these dear Roman believers to repent on behalf of the sins of their fathers against the Jews. From there, I challenged them to embrace the words of Paul and begin to be a blessing to Israel.

Fortunately, they received the word with gladness. The pastor led them in a prayer of repentance, and we blessed them by chanting the *birchat hacoahanim*—the priestly blessing from Numbers 6.

The pastor now wants to gather several churches together and have us come back to do a three-day seminar on the Jewish roots of the gospel. Praise God! If this revelation could seep into the Roman Catholic Church, it could lead to revival in Rome!

It is very easy to hate on Rome, but God entrusted some of the most awesome portions of Scripture to this city. She does have a special call to "provoke Israel to jealousy."

Didn't Make Friends in Hell

The enemy didn't take this lying down. Immediately after this special evening, he began attacking. Within two days, right before we left for the airport (we were with a group of 30 Israelis), our bus was robbed! Computers, cameras, passports, cash and much more were all stolen.

No worries—Yeshua is Lord. We are still going back in the near future! But I see now how much we need the body of Christ to cover us in prayer. We are just too weak as humans, and this is a spiritual battle. We are so grateful to you, who cover us

in prayer, as we share this message to more and more believers.

Ron Cantor is the director of Messiah's Mandate International in Israel, a Messianic ministry dedicated to taking the message of Jesus from Israel to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Cantor also travels internationally teaching on the Jewish roots of the New Testament. He serves on the pastoral team of Tiferet Yeshua, a Hebrew-speaking congregation in Tel Aviv. His newest book, *Identity Theft*, was released April 16. Follow him at @RonSCantor on Twitter.

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