

The Cantor Comment: Did the Jews Really Reject Jesus?

Many assume that the Jewish rejection of Yeshua was universal. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The first congregation was exclusively Jewish, as it was birthed in Jewish Jerusalem. The first heralds of the message of salvation by faith in Yeshua were all Jewish. And when Shaul (Paul) returns to Jerusalem he finds, nearly 30 years since the Shavuot (Pentecost) outpouring, the revival is still roaring.

Tens of Thousands of Messianic Jews

Shaul returns to Jerusalem in 57 or 58 CE to meet the Jewish apostles. The gospel has gone all over the known world. He meets with Jacob (the artist mistakenly know as James), the brother of Yeshua and the main leader of the Jerusalem community. Jacob and the elders give Shaul a great report concerning the work of the Gospel in Jerusalem.

Then they said to Paul: “You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law.” (Acts 21:20, NIV)

There are two eye-openers here and a mistranslation. First, they report to Shaul that the revival is continuing in power and bearing much fruit. However, it is even better than what you are reading because the Greek word translated *thousands* is *myriads*. The English translation of this word is *myriads*. One myriad is *ten thousand*. Myriads, plural, are *tens of thousands*.

Dr. Stern’s translation of this verse is more accurate:

“They also said to him, ‘You see, brother, how many tens of thousands of believers there are among the Judeans, and they

are all zealots for the Torah.'" (Acts 20:21, JNT)

Zealots for the Torah

Not only does Dr. Stern's translation bring out the fact that tens of thousands of Jews or Judeans (Jews who lived in the areas surrounding Jerusalem) had embraced Yeshua, but it suggests something that would have sent shockwaves throughout the Middle Ages during the Crusades and Inquisitions! "They (the tens of thousands of Jewish believers) are *zealots for the Torah!*"

For those who believe that Yeshua came to start a new religion apart from Judaism, this is dumbfounding. Jacob is not reporting this to Shaul as a problem, but as something good. In Yeshua, the Law had meaning. Paul himself says of the Torah in Romans:

"So then, the Torah is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good ...We know that the Torah is spiritual..." (Rom. 7:12 and 14, NIV)

These were Jewish believers on fire for God and zealous for the Torah. Now keep in mind, when people today think of the Torah, they often conjure up images of black hats, long black coats and endless, tedious ritual. Most of modern-day Judaism is not following the Torah but traditions built upon the Torah and a supposedly secret Oral Law that Moses was also given on Sinai.

Forsaking Jewish Calling Equaled False Teaching

To further illustrate this point, take a look at what Jacob and the other leaders were concerned about:

"(The Jewish believers) have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs. What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come, so do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow. Take these

men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everyone will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law.” (Acts 21:21-24)

The Jewish believers were concerned that Shaul was *teaching a heresy*, that Jews who embrace Yeshua are no longer called to live in accordance with the Torah. Furthermore it confirms that Shaul himself was “living in obedience to the law.”

Amazingly the very idea that caused deep concern among the apostles (that a Jewish believer would forsake his Jewish calling) eventually became Church policy in the Middle Ages. At that time, not only were Jews who came to faith *not* encouraged to continue to live as Jews, they were *forbidden* to do so! Acts records that Shaul, Jacob and the other apostles affirmed that it is wrong to teach Jewish believers to forsake Jewish life and calling, but the Church of the Middle Ages made it doctrine!

Calling, Not Justification

To be clear, they continued to live as Jews as a matter of *calling* (see Rom. 11:29), not in order to gain salvation: “Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because ‘the righteous will live by faith.’” (Gal. 3:11)

Here in Acts 21 they gave Paul a plan in order that it would be clear to everyone that “you yourself are living in obedience to the Torah.” Paul, nobody’s pushover, went along with the plan to prove what is true, that he, while not under the condemnation of the Law, desired to live according to God’s pattern for Israel.

The point is this: Not only was there a massive revival in Jerusalem with signs, wonders and miracles, but these Jews continued to live as Jews. If you had walked up to John, Jacob, Peter, or any other of the leaders of the Jerusalem

revival and said, "Praise God. How does it feel to be free of the Torah and Judaism and to be a Christian?"—they would not have known what you were talking about. All they understood was that they had found the Jewish Messiah. What could be more Jewish than that? Then they may have asked, "What is a Christian?" as they referred to themselves as *believers*.

May revival return to Israel until "...all Israel is saved" (see Rom. 11:26).

The Oral Law, or Oral Tradition, is believed to have accompanied the written Torah that Moses received on Sinai. The Oral Law was supposedly given in order to know how to live out the written Torah. It is believed that Moses passed this down to Joshua and so forth and so on. However, there couldn't have been an Oral Law because in the time of King Josiah, they had lost the written Law and didn't even know what Passover was, much less an Oral Tradition. When the Book of the Law was recovered, they had to start from scratch. If there ever had been an Oral Tradition, it had long been gone.

Strangely, the Oral Law has now been written down in the Mishna and Talmud. It is probable that the religious Jews in the time of Yeshua did not actually believe that the Oral Law came from Sinai, as it was merely referred to as 'The Traditions of the Elders.' Yeshua Himself rebuked the Pharisees for putting these traditions above the Word of God. (see Mark 7:9)

Furthermore, concerning the idea of an Oral Law, we find in Exodus 19:8 that "When Moses went and told the people all the LORD's words and laws, they responded with one voice, 'Everything the LORD has said we will do.'"

"Moses then wrote down everything the LORD had said" (Ex. 24:24). This passage says that God shared all his laws and Moses wrote them down. There was no secret Oral Tradition. The children of Israel were told to obey all that was written.

(see Deut. 30:10, 31:9, 24, 26, and Josh. 1:8)

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). Ron 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, will be released on April 16th. Follow him at @RonSCantor on Twitter.