



From the 4th Century to the Reformation

By Steve Cohen

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Hugh Schonfeld's *A History of Jewish Christianity* records that in the fourth century such fear of the Jews existed that the church thought it necessary to outline the boundaries of inter-relationships between Jewish people and church members.

The sixty-fourth Canon stated:

If any clergyman entered a synagogue of the Jewish people, or the heritage (the Nazarenes) to pray, let the clergyman be deposed. If a layman, let him be excommunicated. If any bishop, Presbytery, or Deacon, or any of the list of the clergy, keeps the fast or festivals with Jewish people, or receives from them any of the gifts of their feasts (unleavened bread, etc.), let him be deposed, or if a layperson, excommunicated. And if any person, whether clerical or faithful, shall take food with a Jewish person, he is to abstain from our communion that he may learn to amend his ways.

Further, we find that a Jewish person who came to faith and wanted to be baptized had to not only profess faith in following Jesus, but in renouncing everything Jewish. He had to renounce fasts, festivals, feasts, new moons, holy days, circumcision, etc. Only after renouncing anything Jewish could he make a profession of faith. And, should this Jewish person revert to any of his folly, "may his soul be cast into hell as an anathema." Quite a dramatic change of attitude in just a few centuries!

Initial methods of proclaiming the Good News were simple and effective: the preaching of the word, meeting with people one-on-one, sharing and breaking of bread house to house. In this way, others who wished to come to find out about this Good News had an opportunity to sit down and to openly and honestly consider the claims of the Scriptures and the claims of Messiah in light of their Jewish heritage and traditions.

Unfortunately, during the dark ages from the fourth century to the age of the Reformation, there are no bright spots in the work of Jewish evangelism. Rather, we find nothing but a continuous, cancerous and negative view by the church against Jewish people.

Christians attempted to convert Jewish people, but at times the methods used were anything but Christ-like — threatening death, expulsion from the community or country, or taking away of all one's possessions. Some Jewish people were made second-class citizens within their adopted country. These were not Biblical means of evangelism! But they occurred often and left a trail of Jewish bloodshed mourned even today. We must condemn unbiblical, unethical methodologies and simultaneously expand Biblical, ethical Gospel proclamation so that others will hear the Gospel before it is too late.

James Parks has written an excellent book, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue*, available through Hermon Press. This book details the nature of the relationship between Jewish believers and Gentile believers from the time of the early church until modern times. It begins when Christianity was still considered a Jewish sect to the time it became firmly established. It depicts an unpleasant history, but one important for believers to know why Jewish people face so many barriers and fears when hearing the Gospel.



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For More Information

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