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Each study in this series tackles a 'Christian' doctrine that has arisen after the great schism of the late first century, which saw the Hellenistic church separate from its Hebraic brethren and began to introduce a Hellenistic perspective on the text of the New Testament.

I believe that most of these 'introduced' doctrines can be traced back to a failure to recognize some Hebraism that is embodied in the words spoken by Yeshua and/or his disciples.

Each study can be read separately. They are not dependent on one other and the order of reading is not at all crucial. As a result though there are some passages they may be a little repetitive, when reading the whole book as one.

Doctrinal Pitfalls of Hellenism

and the Failure to View the Bible through Hebraic Eyes

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Study 1: Replacement Theology

In the case of the anti-Semitic Christian doctrine of Replacement Theology there are a number of very clear failures in understanding some significant phrases, and Hebraic understandings, that principally developed from the study of the Tanakh.

Two core examples are the misapplication of the terms 'Israel of God' and 'Israel of the flesh', along with a misappropriation of terminology addressed at pagans, to instead, address it at Israel.

Replacement Theology – an insidious, dangerous, unholy and blinding doctrine:

Replacement Theology is the Christian belief that the church has replaced Israel.

There appear to be three main consequences to this 'Christian' doctrine that the Church has replaced Israel.

Firstly, this doctrine argues that 'Israel' now no longer exists, other than as the Church¹, and that any other 'Israel' such as the State of Israel is an imposter, and therefore an enemy of God because this other entity, this other 'Israel', has set itself up as a counter to the Israel that is the Church².

The second main consequence of this doctrine is that all the promises to Israel (both given in the New Testament and the Tanakh), are now seen as promises to the Christian Church, and not to any physical Israel, or any physical descendants of Israel who might have otherwise thought they were part of Israel and privy to these promises. Of course, in this Church developed doctrine, the judgements for disobedience called upon 'Israel' are conveniently ignored (the 'Church' in its arrogance can not imagine it might now potentially find itself the recipient of not just all of the blessings, but the curses as well!).

The third and perhaps saddest of these consequences is well summed up by Frank Selch in his book *'Replacement Theology: An Anti-Semitic Phenomenon or a Spiritual Conspiracy of Cosmic Proportions?'*³, where he writes: *"What is clear from the beginning of Christianity is that the Gentile elements managed to eliminate the Jewish believers from any meaningful fellowship with them. There can be no question that over the centuries Biblical teachings were replaced with philosophical musings steeped in Greek thinking - especially our understanding of the meaning and significance of Torah."*

This separation is so bad, in part, because the Church and its members have no idea how much they are missing out on. This division has meant that much of Christianity is not even aware of the incredible depth and breadth of Jewish understanding of the Almighty and how to have a full and meaningful relationship with Him⁴. Where Christianity could have learned so much from its 'elder brother'; from the 'cultivated root' of the natural Olive Tree planted by the Almighty, Christianity has instead been very dismissive of the 'cultivated root' and its deep and long-standing wisdom.

¹ Or, as some confused Christians will argue, Israel is now Jesus, or 'Jesus is Israel'!

² This naturally leads to the anti-Zionist position, which I will discuss in another of these studies.

³ For a more in-depth treatment of Replacement Theology, especially its historical development, I strongly recommend this book.

⁴ For some evidence for this lack of wisdom, consider a quote from Frank Selch's book: *"Vast sectors of the Christian world think nothing of whitewashing or downplaying Biblical injunctions, e.g. hatred, murder and gross sexual immorality by leaders and laity alike, yet will point with glee at the disobedience of the Jews, and their rejection of Jesus - as justification for their exile (c/f. Jer.50:7). How was it that slavery flourished particularly in Protestant nations until a little over 100 years ago and Evangelicals fought the hardest to let go of their unpaid servants? Why is it that Apartheid was strongest in a nation characterized by Calvinist Christianity? How was it that in the early days of settlement in Australia, some Church-goers would gather to worship God on a Sunday morning and afterwards relax by shooting Aborigines for sport. And the list goes on and on...."*

Further this rejection of the real Israel has also exacerbated many of the evils of anti-Semitism, as well as, in many ways, robbing the Jewish people of the God-given mandate to be a *'light unto the Gentiles'*. That is, all peoples have suffered from this erroneous Replacement Theology, not just the real Israelites but also the Gentile church and the whole Gentile world, whose ignorance of God has only been compounded by this most unhelpful 'replacement' and consequential separation.

It is perhaps not at all surprising that such a 'replacement' doctrine needed to be developed by the Hellenistic church after it had severed its roots with the family of Israel that it has been grafted onto, and through which it had developed a relationship with the very special son of Israel, Yeshua.

I believe that the Gentile Church needed to develop this doctrine in an attempt to reduce the many internal conflicts in its belief system, which otherwise stood to, if not condemn it, at least bring its foundational beliefs into serious question.

For example, one of these foundational texts of Hellenistic Christianity is the New/Renewed Covenant of Jeremiah 31. This text most emphatically states that this 'new covenant' will be with the House of Israel *"Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, ..." Jeremiah 31:31*

Unless the church can usurp the place of Israel and/or Judah here, it would appear it cannot lay claim to this prophecy.

Investigating Replacement Theology:

In order to determine the validity of Replacement Theology as a Biblical doctrine, there are two main approaches we can take.

First, we can try to ascertain if this doctrine developed historically AFTER the early first century (late Second Temple Period), and if the development was only embryonic until some decades or more after the life of the first disciples of Yeshua, then only developing into its fully fledged form some centuries later. While some historical evidence may not be clear-cut and unequivocal, it can perhaps improve our appreciation with the respect to the second approach.

The second approach is to go back to the New Testament and evaluate all the scriptures that are used today to argue for this doctrine. Are they clear; are they unambiguous; are they direct and explicit, or is there other ways in which these same 'scriptural proof-texts' can be interpreted that are most consistent with the Tanakh, the foundational text of the New Testament?

Historically:

A number of books provide detailed evidence of the historical development of this doctrine, one of the most clear and succinct being Frank Selch's which I have already alluded to and referenced.

Some have argued that its origins can be traced back to Emperor Constantine's time (306-337 CE). For example, Walter C. Kaiser (*Distinguished Professor of Old Testament and Director for the Foundation of Biblical Ethics at Gordon-Conwell Theological School, Massachusetts*) writes:

“Replacement Theology⁵ is not a new arrival in the theological arena, for it probably has its origins in an early political-ecclesiastical alliance forged between Eusebius Pamphilius and the Emperor Constantine”⁶

I believe though that the evidence and beginnings of this doctrine go back much further in history. The seeds were surely sown with the arrival of Alexander the Great in Israel around 332 BCE. From this moment Hellenism began to impact and significantly influence many of the Jewish people, not only in the Diaspora but also in the Land of Israel. By the time of Yeshua, the ‘Hellenists’ (Jewish people who followed Greek customs⁷) were common. In fact, this section of the Jewish community is mentioned in Acts (see both Chapters 2 & 6) where we find that the Apostle Stephen is put in charge of caring for those Hellenists who had accepted the Messiahship of Yeshua and joined the community of believers. The evidence is that the cultural background of this Hellenists meant that they have a much lower affinity and loyalty to the Land of Israel in any Biblical sense. For them, any argument that they need not be fully compliant with the Temple customs and other rites of the religion of Israel, was likely to have a more sympathetic hearing.

We can easily imagine that this group of believers, especially those not living in Israel (where some of them were seen as second-class citizens according to Luke in Acts), could more readily have been willing to shake off the authority of the Jewish leaders and the Temple/Sanhedrin/Synagogue-focused hierarchy and instead try to break free from such Jerusalem centred authority. It appears such was already occurring in Rome when the Apostle Paul wrote to them. We see some hint of this in his exhorting the ‘stronger’ Gentile believers to bear with their ‘weaker’ Jewish community members.

The Jewish theologian, Professor Mark Nanos has helped clarify this situation in Rome that the Apostle Paul was responding to. To help set the scene, consider this excerpt from Pamela Eisenbaum’s review on ‘Mystery of Romans’⁸

“Both Jews and gentiles have their unique role to play in God’s plan for world history—what biblical scholars commonly call salvation history. Paul’s understanding of “salvation history” appears in Romans 9—11, chapters so variously interpreted that Nanos’ attempt to gain clarity is most welcome. He identifies a two step plan, the first step achieves salvation for gentiles, the second redeems Israel, i.e., the Jewish community.

Step One:

Because many Jews did not accept the gospel Paul preached, Paul proclaimed Christ to the gentiles. Nanos correctly points out that Paul believed the advent of Christ had signaled the end of the age. And, according to the prophets, the end of the age meant the ingathering of the nations, i.e., when the peoples of the world would finally recognize and worship the one, true God. It was Israel’s job “to be a light to the nations” (Isaiah 49:5-6), so Paul took it upon himself to preach the good news to the gentiles. Paul’s mission then, in proclaiming to the nations the message of Christ having died and been raised, was to inaugurate this eschatological moment. The fact that many of Paul’s Jewish peers did not believe in Jesus and did not believe in the validity of Paul’s mission was not a problem for the Apostle; on the contrary, Jewish resistance was part of the plan. Since part of Israel rejected Paul’s message, there was greater opportunity to reach out to the other peoples of the world.

⁵ Also known as ‘supersessionism’.

⁶ See ‘Has the Church Replaced Israel?: A Theological Evaluation’ By Michael J. Vlach p28

⁷ Zondervan’s Pictorial Biblical Dictionary defines Hellenists as, “Non-Greeks who spoke Greek...Jews who made Greek their tongue, and with it often adopted Greek ideas and practices”. The Hellenistic Jews (also) differed from the Hebrews in that their native language was not Aramaic or Hebrew, but Greek. Also see <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts%201-28&version=NASB#fen-NASB-27103eq>

⁸ See my article ‘The Mystery of Romans: A Torah and Shema Centric View’ which summaries the great work of Prof. Nanos - <http://www.charismacomputers.com.au/The%20Mystery%20of%20romans%20a%20torah%20and%20shema%20centric%20view.pdf>

Step Two:

*The ingathering of the nations provokes Israel's jealousy, and, as a result, leads to repentance and restoration. Thus, in Paul's words, "all Israel shall be saved" (Romans 11:26). In the typical reading of Romans, Israel's jealousy derives from the other nations currying favor with God. For Nanos, Israel is jealous of Paul's missionary success. Once Paul persuades the known world to embrace monotheism in the form of the worship of Israel's God, then the other Jews will recognize this as the ingathering of the nations, embrace Paul's mission and message, and together Jew and Gentile will be saved. Of course, salvation here does not mean personal salvation, but the inauguration of a new era of peace, tranquility, and justice. By interpreting Romans 9—11 this way, Nanos bolsters his contention that **Paul's dispute with other Jews is not focused on the validity of Judaism or the practice of Jewish law**. It is rather a dispute about God's timetable. Paul believes the end of the age is imminent; it is time for the ingathering of the nations. His opponents just think they are at a different point in history."*⁹ - Pamela Eisenbaum (Associate Professor of Biblical Studies and Christian Origins at the Iliff School of Theology, Denver, Colorado)

Paul's great discussion of the 'weak' and the 'strong'¹⁰ is shown by Nanos to mean something very, very different from what it is normally taken to mean. Nanos demonstrates that the word translated 'weak' is really a word chosen by Paul to mean 'stumbling'. Paul sees the Diaspora Jews in Rome who have not accepted that Yeshua is the Messiah as 'stumbling' over this truth. If they accept this truth, Paul believes it will greatly strengthen them (in part, in that they will be filled with joyous expectation that the Coming Age, the great time when the 'lion' will lay down with the 'lamb' is about to dawn).

So in contrast to these 'stumbling' non-Messiah-Yeshua-believing Jews, the 'strong' Gentile believers, who have been given the great grace and joy to learn about the Almighty and His Son, are in danger through a poor and perhaps even arrogant attitude, of not helping the 'stumbling', but rather by their actions actually further 'pushing' them so that they don't just 'stumble' but may fall and be 'destroyed'.

The 'strong' are pictured as walking alongside and on the same path (to God), with their 'stumbling' brothers. It may not take much of a 'push' to allow the 'stumbling' to fall rather than the 'strong' showing humility and gratitude and offering a helping hand, so that those 'stumbling' may be helped to properly 'stand' and also then be strengthened in recognizing that the Messianic Age has dawned.

Such a picture of 'stumbling' and the implied options available to those who are walking beside the stumbling ones is painted in Lev 19:14 *"You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the LORD."*

Nanos then goes on to emphatically demonstrate that Paul is speaking to these 'strong' Gentile believers about their non-Messiah believing Jewish brothers when he tells him: *"Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother."* - Romans 14:13

There is historical evidence here then that around 45-60 CE the early Messianic believers in Rome were attending the synagogues and thus mixing with both Yeshua believing Jews and those who rejected the argument that he was the end-times Messiah. There is also evidence, from the epistle to the Romans, that the Gentile members of the community of believers had a degree of arrogance, perhaps in part as a result of their ignorance of the full prophecies of the Tanakh that the Apostle Paul was trying to share with them. In their ignorance and arrogance then, they were in a sense beginning

⁹ "The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul's Letter" Reviewed by Pamela Eisenbaum – at www.marknanos.com

¹⁰ For more on this aspect of the 'strong' and 'weak' (or stumbling) see my article 'Romans 15 and Gentile Inclusion' - <http://www.charismacomputers.com.au/Christian%20site/Romans%2015%20and%20Gentile%20inclusion.pdf>

to marginalize the Jewish people in their communities who didn't share their faith in who Yeshua was.

I contend that this was much more likely the real beginnings of Replacement Theology.

Now consider how the fall of Jerusalem in 66-70 CE, and the failure of the Bar Kochba revolt around 133-135 CE would most probably have been viewed by these 'arrogant' Gentile believers, not just in Rome, but throughout the known world. They would most likely have viewed these events as confirmation that they were correct in their 'stronger' and Hellenistic approach and that the Almighty really was rejecting Judaism, and therefore in turn, natural Israel¹¹. Because the Apostle Paul had not asked these Gentile believers to convert to Judaism and become full 'Torah Observant Jews' as he was, this may well have contributed to their misinformed understanding¹².

The division that was recorded in Luke's Acts of the Apostles (a division already in place even before Gentiles joined the community of believers from around 45 CE onwards¹³), between the Hebraic Jews on one side, and the Hellenistic Jews now with the Gentile believers on the other side, now become a very serious schism, or perhaps better labeled metaphorically as a chasm.

To further aggravate this growing schism at least in the Roman world, where Judaism was considered a legal religion (which in part involved the payment of a 'Temple tax' so that the Diaspora Jews did not have to worship the Roman 'deities'/idols), the Hellenistic/Gentile 'church' had no such privileged status and increasingly was unable to argue, because of its growing separation, that it was still part of Judaism¹⁴. That such a situation would have led to some animosity amongst the Hellenistic church members is clear from the future reality that when 'Christianity' became the official religion of Rome, these Hellenistic Christians would pass retributive laws against the Jews in their communities.

The antagonism of these early 'Christians' towards Israel and the Jews is clearly reflected in the writings of the early Church Fathers. Quoting a '*Bridges for Peace*' article from 2002:

"For example, Justin Martyr (c. AD 160) in speaking to a Jew said: "The Scriptures are not yours, but ours."

Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyon (c. AD 177) declared: "Jews are disinherited from the grace of God."

Tertullian (AD 160-230), in his treatise, "Against the Jews," announced that God had rejected the Jews in favour of the Christians.

In the early 4th century, Eusebius wrote that the promises of the Hebrew Scriptures were for Christians and not the Jews, and the curses were for the Jews. He argued that the Church was the continuation of the Old Testament and thus superseded Judaism. The young Church declared itself to be the true Israel, or "Israel according to the Spirit," heir to the divine promises. They found it essential to discredit the "Israel according to the flesh" to prove that God had cast away His people and transferred His love

¹¹ While it's much easier for us with hindsight, to see that these events were the beginning of yet another exile, as had been prophesied, those living through these times, especially Gentiles, would not have seen this fulfillment of prophecy so easily. See my '*Israel: Return in Belief or Unbelief*' for more on this aspect -

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

¹² For more on the Apostle Paul's Torah observant status please see my book '*Defending the Apostle Paul: Weighing the Evidence*' - <http://www.amazon.com/Defending-The-Apostle-Paul-ebook/dp/B009TLLK0U/>

¹³ From the time of the Cornelius' House event - the common consensus is that this occurred around 45 CE.

¹⁴ The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, after travelling through Israel in 50-60 CE/AD saw Israel as composed of 4 groups, namely the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Essenes and the Zealots. He did not mention the 'Christians' or 'Nazarenes' as a separate group. Thus any division between the Hebraists and Hellenists was at this time still an internal point of contention and had not yet 'split' the church.

to the Christians.

Already at the Church Council in Elvira (Spain) in AD 305, declarations were made to keep Jews and Christians apart, including ordering Christians not to share meals with Jews, not to marry Jews, not to use Jews to bless their fields, and not to observe the Jewish Sabbath.

Imperial Rome, in AD 313, issued the Edict of Milan, which granted favour to Christianity, while outlawing synagogues. Then, in AD 315, another edict allowed the burning of Jews if they were convicted of breaking the laws. As Christianity was becoming the religion of the state, further laws were passed against the Jews:

The ancient privileges granted to the Jews were withdrawn. Rabbinical jurisdiction was abolished or severely curtailed.

Proselytism to Judaism was prohibited and made punishable by death. Jews were excluded from holding high office or a military career.

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

... more examples of anti-Jewish bias in Church literature written by church leaders:

Hilary of Poitiers (AD 291-371) wrote: "Jews are a perverse people accursed by God forever."

Gregory of Nyssa (died AD 394), Bishop of Cappadocia: "the Jews are a brood of vipers, haters of goodness..."

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

At the end of the 4th century, the Bishop of Antioch, John Chrysostom, the great orator, wrote a series of eight sermons against the Jews. He had seen Christians talking with Jewish people, taking oaths in front of the Ark, and some were keeping the Jewish feasts. He wanted this to stop.

In an effort to bring his people back to what he called, "the true faith," the Jews became the whipping boy for his sermon series. To quote him, "the synagogue is not only a brothel and a theater; it is also a den of robbers and a lodging for wild beasts. No Jew adores God... Jews are inveterate murderers, possessed by the devil, their debauchery and drunkenness gives them the manners of the pig. They kill and maim one another..."¹⁵

This should be sufficient at this stage to suffice as an historical overview of how the doctrine 'Replacement Theology' developed.

We are now ready to investigate the writings of the New Testament to try to definitively establish how much scriptural validity this doctrine can muster. Again, we are seeking to establish if its 'proof-texts' are clear, direct, explicit, unambiguous and most importantly, consistent with the Tanakh, foundational text of the NT. In doing so, I will also introduce some other Hebraisms, the ignorance of which have helped promulgate this doctrine.

Scripturally:

¹⁵ From http://www.therefinersfire.org/replacement_theology.htm quoting a 09/05/2002 "Bridges for Peace" article.

Before we consider the NT scriptures that speak to the issue of Israel and the Jewish peoples' eternal relationship with the Almighty, let us consider what the Hebrew Bible states clearly and emphatically on this issue. We in fact read in the Tanakh, that the Land of Israel is promised as an everlasting possession for the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Genesis 17:8 *"I will give to you and to your **descendants** after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an **everlasting possession**; and I will be their God."*

Gen 17:19 *"But God said, "No, but Sarah your wife will bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him for an **everlasting covenant** for his **descendants after him**."*

Gen 48:4 *"and He said to me, 'Behold, I will make you fruitful and numerous, and I will make you a company of peoples, and will give this land to your **descendants after you for an everlasting possession**.'"*

As the Almighty promised the Land of Israel to the Jewish people, it should not come as a surprise that He states *"The eyes of the Lord... are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year"* (Deuteronomy 11:12) and that it is a *"Very, very good land"* (Numbers 14:7); and *"a blessed land"* (Deut. 33:13); and *"the beauty of all lands"* (Ezekiel 20:6).

Further the Tanakh declares that *"For the Lord will comfort Zion; He will comfort her waste places, and will make her wilderness like Eden..."* (Isaiah 51:3) and that all are called to *"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem and for the welfare of all its inhabitants. They shall prosper that love thee."* (Psalm 122:6)

These statements, promises and prophecies were given to Abraham and his descendants through the prophets of Israel. These men understood these statements in a very real, literal and permanent manner. There was a Land of Israel; it was/is a very blessed piece of the Earth's real estate and Israel would possess it and forever (though not without times of exile as punishment for her transgressions).

The Land of Israel is God's Land, which He gave to the Jewish people; and together they are the *'apple of His eye'*¹⁶ (Zechariah 2:8).

There are a great many scriptures that declare that The Land of Israel is God's Land and remains so. For example, even in a yet to be fulfilled end times prophecy, it is still described as God's Land: *"For behold, in those days and at that time, When I bring back the captives of Judah and Jerusalem, I will also gather all nations, And bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; And I will enter into judgment with them there on account of My people, My heritage Israel, Whom they have scattered among the nations; They have also divided up **My land**. (Joel 3:1-2)*

It was an absolute miracle that the State of Israel was re-formed in 1948. This miracle was a unique event in the history of the world – see <http://www.aish.com/jl/h/cc/48960356.html> and the fulfillment of prophecy – see Deut 30:35 *"The Lord will restore you from captivity, and have compassion on you, and will gather you again **from all the peoples** where the Lord your God has scattered you. **If your outcasts are at the ends of the earth**, from there the Lord your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you back. And the Lord your God will bring you into the land which*

¹⁶ *"... Jerusalem will be inhabited as villages without walls, because of the multitude of men and livestock in it. For I," says Yahweh, "will be to her a wall of fire around it, and I will be the glory in the midst of her. Come! Come! Flee from the land of the north," says Yahweh; "for I have spread you abroad as the four winds of the sky," says Yahweh. "Come, Zion! Escape, you who dwell with the daughter of Babylon." For thus says Yahweh of Armies: "For honor he has sent me to the nations which plundered you; for he who touches you touches **the apple of his eye**." – Zec 2:4-8*

your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it." and Ezekiel 34:13- 16 *"And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, **and will bring them to their own land**; I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, in the valleys and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them in good pasture, and their fold shall be on the high mountains of Israel. There they shall lie down in a good fold and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I will feed My flock, and I will make them lie down," says the Lord GOD. "I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick; but I will destroy the fat and the strong, and feed them in judgment."* and Ezek 36:23 *"For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land."*

Not only is the Land of Israel a special and eternal possession, but the people of Israel, set apart through a number of special rites and practices, are also promised a permanent and eternal relationship with the Almighty.

Gen 17:13 *"The slave born in your house and the person bought with your money must be circumcised; thus my covenant will be in your flesh as **an everlasting covenant**."*

Many seem to imagine that all these eternal promises were made null and void somehow. Part of this false understanding may be where we read in Isaiah 50 a comment that may appear to state that God has 'divorced' His people. This is a rhetorical statement. The Tanakh tells over and over that the Almighty will send His People into exile for a season, but that He will eventually return and restore them.

In Deuteronomy 30 we read that God will not only return the Jews to their land, but that he will 'circumcise their hearts' so that they will be 'saved':

"4 If your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of the heavens, from there will Yahweh your God gather you, and from there he will bring you back:

*5 and Yahweh your God **will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it; and he will do you good, and multiply you above your fathers.***

***6 Yahweh your God will circumcise your heart, and the heart of your seed, to love Yahweh your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, that you may live."** – Deut 30:4-6*

This is just one of many passages in the Tanakh that demonstrate that God has not finished with the Jews and Israel and that the church has not replaced Israel.

Another good example is Jeremiah 16:14-15: *"However, the days are coming," declares the LORD, "when men will no longer say, 'As surely as the LORD lives, who brought the Israelites up out of Egypt,' but they will say, 'As surely as the LORD lives, who brought the Israelites up out of the land of the north and out of all the countries where he had banished them.' For I will restore them to the land I gave their forefathers"*

Consider also passages like Jeremiah 33:

1. The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah a second time,...

*4 For thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, **concerning the houses of this city and the houses of the kings of Judah** that were torn down ...*

6 Behold, I will bring to it health and healing, and I will heal them and reveal to them abundance of prosperity and security.

7 I will restore the fortunes of Judah and the fortunes of Israel, and rebuild them as they were at first.

8 I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against me, and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me.

9 And this city shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and a glory before all the nations of the earth who shall hear of all the good that I do for them. They shall fear and tremble because of all the good and all the prosperity I provide for it. **For I will restore the fortunes of the land as at first, says the Lord. ...**

12 "Thus says the Lord of hosts: In this place that is waste, without man or beast, and in all of its cities, there shall again be habitations of shepherds resting their flocks.

13 In the cities of the hill country, in the cities of the Shephelah, and in the cities of the Negeb, in the land of Benjamin, the places about Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, flocks shall again pass under the hands of the one who counts them, says the Lord.

20 **"Thus says the Lord: If you can break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night will not come at their appointed time,**

21 then also my covenant with David my servant may be broken, ...

24 "Have you not observed that these people are saying, 'The Lord has rejected the two clans that he chose'? Thus they have despised my people so that they are no longer a nation in their sight.

25 Thus says the Lord: If I have not established my covenant with day and night and the fixed order of heaven and earth, 26 then I will reject the offspring of Jacob and David my servant and will not choose one of his offspring to rule over the offspring of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For I will restore their fortunes and will have mercy on them."

Or consider 2 Samuel 23: 1-7:

"1 Here are David's last words: "This is the speech of David the son of Jesse, the speech of the man who has been raised up, the one anointed by the God of Ya'akov, the sweet singer of Israel.

2 "The Spirit of Adonai spoke through me, his word was on my tongue.

3 The **God of Israel** spoke; the Rock of Israel said to me, 'A ruler over people must be upright, ruling in the fear of God;

4 like the morning light at sunrise on a cloudless day that makes the grass on the earth sparkle after a rain.'

5 **"For my house stands firm with God —he made an everlasting covenant with me.** It is in order, fully assured, that he will bring to full growth all my salvation and every desire.

6 "But the ungodly are like thorn bushes to be pushed aside, every one of them. They cannot be taken in one's hand;

7 To touch them one uses pitchfork or spear-shaft, and then only to burn them where they lie."

And from Isaiah 45:14-17,25:

" 14 Here is what YHVH says: "The earnings of Egypt, the commerce of Ethiopia, and men of stature from S'vav will come over to you and become yours; they will come in chains and follow you. They will prostrate themselves before you; they will pray to you: 'Surely God is with you; there is no other, other gods are nothing.'"

15 Truly, you are a God who hides himself, God of Israel, Saviour!

16 The idol-makers will be ashamed, disgraced, all of them; they will go dishonoured together.

17 **But Israel, saved by YHVH with an everlasting salvation, you will never, ever, be ashamed or disgraced. ...**

25 but all the descendants of Israel will find justice and glory in YHVH.

The most central and important portion of Israel is the 'mountains of Israel' (essentially the area today known as Judea and Samaria). Ezekiel prophecies in Ezek 36:

"1 "And you, son of man, prophesy to the mountains of Israel and say, '**O mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord.**

2 Thus says the Lord God, "Because the enemy has spoken against you, 'Aha!' and, 'The everlasting heights have become our possession,'

3 therefore prophesy and say, 'Thus says the Lord God, "For good reason they have made you desolate and crushed you from every side, that you would become a possession of the rest of the nations and you have been taken up in the talk and the whispering of the people."'"

4 Therefore, O mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord God. Thus says the Lord God to the mountains and to the hills, to the ravines and to the valleys, to the desolate wastes and to the forsaken cities which have become a prey and a derision to the rest of the nations which are round about,

5 therefore thus says the Lord God, "Surely in the fire of My jealousy I have spoken against the rest of the nations, and against all Edom, who appropriated My land for themselves as a possession with wholehearted joy and with scorn of soul, to drive it out for a prey."

6 Therefore prophesy concerning the land of Israel and say to the mountains and to the hills, to the ravines and to the valleys, "Thus says the Lord God, 'Behold, I have spoken in My jealousy and in My wrath because you have endured the insults of the nations.'

7 Therefore thus says the Lord God, 'I have sworn that surely the nations which are around you will themselves endure their insults.

8 But you, O mountains of Israel, you will put forth your branches and bear your fruit for My people Israel; for they will soon come.

9 For, behold, I am for you, and I will turn to you, and you will be cultivated and sown.

10 I will multiply men on you, all the house of Israel, all of it; and the cities will be inhabited and the waste places will be rebuilt.

11 I will multiply on you man and beast; and they will increase and be fruitful; and I will cause you to be inhabited as you were formerly and will treat you better than at the first. Thus you will know that I am the Lord.

12 Yes, I will cause men—My people Israel—to walk on you and possess you, so that you will become their inheritance and never again bereave them of children.'...

19 Also I scattered them among the nations and they were dispersed throughout the lands. According to their ways and their deeds I judged them ...

22 "Therefore say to the house of Israel, '**Thus says the Lord God, "It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went.**

23 I will vindicate the holiness of My great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst. Then the nations will know that I am the Lord," declares the Lord God, "when I prove Myself holy among you in their sight.

24 For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land.

25 Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.

26 Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

27 I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.

28 You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God."

There are many prophecies in the Tanakh that declare the exile(s) of the children of Israel, but also, their ultimate return to the Land, to a physical place, NOT a spiritual entity.

Hosea 3: 45 "For the children of Israel shall abide many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar, without ephod or teraphim. **Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They shall fear the LORD and His goodness in the latter days.**

Jeremiah 3:14-17

14 *"Return, O backsliding children," says the LORD; "for I am married to you. I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion.*

15 *And I will give you shepherds according to My heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding.*

16 *"Then it shall come to pass, when you are multiplied and increased in the land in those days," says the LORD, "that they will say no more, 'The ark of the covenant of the LORD.' It shall not come to mind, nor shall they remember it, nor shall they visit it, nor shall it be made anymore.*

17 *"At that time Jerusalem shall be called The Throne of the LORD, and all the nations shall be gathered to it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem. No more shall they follow the dictates of their evil hearts."*

Jeremiah 23: 3-4

3 *"But I will gather the remnant of My flock out of all countries where I have driven them, and bring them back to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase.*

4 *I will set up shepherds over them who will feed them; and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, nor shall they be lacking," says the LORD."*

This is a far from exhaustive list of scriptures from the Tanakh. It should be abundantly clear that Israel will always be a special Place and People in the 'heart' of the Almighty!

In the quotes in the section on the historical development of Replacement Theology, we read how Eusebius wrote that the Church was *"... the true Israel, or "Israel according to the Spirit".*

Today, it appears that most Christians have taken Eusebius' argument on board and also believe that the church is the 'true Israel', or 'spiritual Israel', or the 'Israel of God'.

The 'Israel of God':

"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 Richardson¹⁷ 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 who used this term) 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 he was addressing in Galatians 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 problems¹⁸.

¹⁷ 'Israel in the Apostolic Church' by Dr Peter Richardson (2005)

¹⁸ Vital to understanding the context here is the appreciation of the reality that the term 'works of the law' was a term used by the Apostle Paul to refer to the rites of proselytization to Judaism. I discuss this in my book on Paul, but have also included a detailed analysis of this term on my website – see <http://www.charismacomputers.com.au/Works%20of%20the%20Law.pdf>

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 tree (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 into 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 YHVH 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,

YHVH 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'.

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

In the Eusebius quote, you will also note a reference to 'Israel 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 Ezekiel 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!¹⁹). Thus, the use of the term 'Israel of the spirit' by Christian theologians or preachers is an inference, not a reference to any explicit use of this term.

Replacement Theology argues that the use of this term, 'Israel of the flesh' is referring to the Jewish people who have rejected the belief that Yeshua is the Messiah and have therefore (according to this argument of Hellenistic Christianity) lost their salvation and are condemned.

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:

¹⁹ See *'Israel: Return in belief or unbelief'* -

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

"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' of "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.

1 Corinthians 10:

*"18 Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar?
19 What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything?
20 No, I imply that what **pagans** sacrifice they offer to demons **and not to God**. I do not want you to be participants with demons."*

The Apostle Paul here is most clearly arguing against pagan sacrifices, not Jewish ones! He is not arguing that Israel, or the people of Israel, or 'Israel according to the flesh' is in any way wrong or redundant or 'replaced'. He is arguing that when they sacrifice, they do so to God and that this is good²⁰ (in contrast to the pagans being participants with demons, which is bad).

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).

The 'Olive Tree' allegory:

Before we look at a number of other passages that are taken to mean that the church is now Israel or that somehow the Almighty has rejected Israel, it is important to investigate if there are any very clear, explicit and positive passages in the New Testament that indicate how the church has joined or attached itself to Israel, rather than 'replaced' Israel.

One of the clearest portions of the NT in this regard is Romans 9-11. This portion is summed up best in Romans 11:13-24.

*"13 But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry,
14 if somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them.
15 For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?
16 If the first piece of dough is holy, the lump is also; and if the root is holy, the branches are too."*

²⁰ In the correct context and with a 'circumcised heart', the Almighty does desire sacrifices: *"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. Do good to Zion in your good pleasure; build up the walls of Jerusalem; then will you delight in right sacrifices, in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings; then bulls will be offered on your altar. – Psalm 51:17-19*

17 But if some of the branches were broken off, **and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree,**
 18 **do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you."**
 19 You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in."
 20 Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear;
 21 for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either.
 22 Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off.
 23 And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.
 24 **For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree?"**

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).

Appreciating that the Apostle Paul always spoke from within the mindset of a Hebraist and within the Judaism 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*'²¹

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*' (Ezekiel 38,39).

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

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

²¹ *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.* ²² *For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the*

²¹ Both available from www.circumcisedheart.info

pains of childbirth until now.

²³ 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. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? ²⁵ 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, but living/sharing with Jewish communities and attending Jewish synagogues each Sabbath to hear the words of Moses, etc.). 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 49²² 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).

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'²³ only.

So Paul saw the crucifixion and resurrection as somehow²⁴ 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 fully 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! It does not become a lemon or replace any existing lemons (and I am not suggesting that Jews are lemons!).

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' analogy²⁵ 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.

²² See 'Isaiah 49: A Commentary' - <http://www.charismacomputers.com.au/Isaiah%2049%20-%20a%20commentary.pdf>

²³ 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.

²⁴ I discuss this in a number of articles such as my 'Tripartite Salvation Paradigm' article.

²⁵ 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>

Men still retain their gender, the grafted 'orange' tree branch still remains an 'orange', and the Gentiles still remain Gentile. Israel still remains Israel and Gentiles who don't convert, still remain Gentiles.

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 that only applied to the Jewish people) and therefore 'children of God'. In coming to believe in Yeshua as the Messiah, the Gentiles are no longer 'alienated' from the 'commonwealth of Israel' (Eph 2:12), but become part of this community under father Abraham.

Clearly, if this assessment and paradigm is correct, then the church is not Israel, and cannot ever 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 – an offering) of Yeshua.

In summary then, the 'olive tree graft' allegory should make it explicitly and emphatically clear that Israel can not be 'replaced' by the church. Perhaps this is why many Christian Bible Seminaries appear to gloss over this section of Romans.

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 Gentile converts who are arguing that gentile 'Messiah-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.²⁶).

²⁶ This term is often misapplied. It has a negative connotation, in Christian commentary, but most importantly, Judaizers are not Jews. These comments by Mark Nanos are informative: "*Judaizing*" in the Greek texts upon which this terminology is based does not refer to something that Jews do, such as Jews who promote the practice of Judaism or conversion. The referent for the verb "to judaize" is non-Jews. It refers reflexively to behavior that a non-Jew

In verses 18-19 Paul goes on to say of these 'Judaizers': *"For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of the Messiah. Their end is destruction ... "*

Is Paul really saying that these 'Messiah-followers' are 'enemies of the cross of the Messiah' 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 impetuous 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, 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, that in expressing ethnic prejudice, Jews called non-Jews 'dogs'. In fact, the evidence is that where the Tanakh or other Jewish writings that pre-date Paul, such as the Hellenist Philo did refer to 'dog's it was not as a slur on any people by inferring a negative association, or if it was, those people were not singled out as Gentiles²⁷.

Thus the common argument that Paul is reversing this expression cannot be valid (and in fact, if it were, such malicious and derogatory language should be condemned). Rather, there was in Philippi a cult or philosophical group, called in English the 'Cynics', which is based on the Greek word for dogs.

undertakes when seeking to become a Jew (a proselyte), or to behave like a Jew. A proselyte is a judaizer, one who has Judaized (proselytized). It could perhaps apply to Jews who had abandoned Judaism and returned (in this case actually "re-judaizing"), but otherwise it simply does not properly refer to the actions of Jews toward seeking non-Jewish converts, or to persuading non-Jews to behave more Jewishly. – 'Paul's Reversal of Jews Calling Gentiles 'Dogs' (Philippians 3:2): 1600 Years of an Ideological Tale Wagging an Exegetical Dog?' by Mark D. Nanos – <http://www.marknanos.com/Phil3Dogs-Reverse-1-17-08.pdf>

²⁷ "Philo, *Dreams* 1.49: "for as it is said that those dogs which are calculated for hunting can by exerting their faculty of smell, find out the lurking places of their game at a great distance, being by nature rendered wonderfully acute as to the outward sense of smell; so in the same manner the lover of instruction tracks out the sweet breeze which is given forth by justice...." (transl. Yonge).... In the case of the Tanakh, the term "dogs" is employed occasionally as a general put down for rivals of various sorts, for sinners and fools, including fellow Jewish (or better: Israelite) ones (e.g., Deut. 23:19; Judg. 7:5; 1 Sam. 17:43; 2 Sam. 3:8; 9:8; 16:9; 2 Kgs. 8:13; Ps. 22:16 [LXX 21:16]; 59:6, 14; Prov. 26:11; Isa. 56:10-11; also Sir. 13:18). In the case of Israelite "dogs," it refers to "other" Israelites, those who do not behave like Israelites should, usually political rivals. ... The psalmist writes: "For dogs are all around me; a company of evildoers encircles me. My hands and feet have shriveled" (Ps. 22:16 [LXX 21:17] NRSV). It is common to interpret this text to refer to non-Jews, but that is far from certain (here, or as applied by the Gospel writers to Jesus; cf. Matt. 27:39-44; Mark 15:29-32; Luke 23:35-37). Many psalms focus on rivalries with fellow-Israelites, especially David's rivalries, e.g., with Saul (cf. Ps 59); cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 7.207-10) or Absalom (cf. 2 Sam. 16:9!). This psalm lacks sufficient specificity to identify the opponents. Dogs and lions are used to colorfully communicate how savage is the attack upon the psalmist, not to identify someone specifically as dogs, or lions, for that matter. If not directed at Israelite rivals, at most, it is a political polemic toward the surrounding kingdoms and their armies which threaten his own, but not Gentiles or even Gentile nations per se. The psalmist does not call Gentiles dogs." – *ibid*

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 distasteful²⁸. 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, but rather, an act that brought a form of healing, as it declared that the male child was now an Israelite and a member of God's family.

Let us look at Philippians 3:18-19 *"For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Messiah. 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 16:12,16, 19-21: *"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 python²⁹ 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 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 Philippians 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.

²⁸ Some have argued that Yeshua was intimating the Gentiles were 'dogs' when he spoke to the Syro-Phoenician woman (Mark 7:24-27). Firstly, this text post-dates Paul's Philippian letter and thus is not prior Jewish textual evidence for his application of the term to Gentiles. Further there are a significant number of possibles in how to explain this narrative. Again to quote Nanos: *"She is a Canaanite, a perhaps affectionately appreciated, or alternatively, especially despised neighbor who looks to a future Davidic dynasty, and also one who is a woman. The context of this language appears to be political and specific. It does not likely represent a generalized degradation of Gentiles per se as dogs."* - ibid

²⁹ Simon J Kistemaker argues that 'pneuma pyhona' meant "she had a spirit called Python." *'The Book of Acts'; Simon J Kistemaker, New Testament Commentary*

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 'Messiah-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 Spirit³⁰, rejoice in Messiah Yeshua, 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 the Messiah."*

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 commonwealth of 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 perspective³¹.

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

³⁰ or, as some codices have it, 'who serve God the Spirit,' or 'the Spirit of God'

³¹ 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.

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 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.*³²

- 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

³² see also <http://www.marknanos.com/Phil3Dogs-Reverse-6-27-07.pdf>

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 lay claim to. In fact, not only back then, but also even now in fact, if we appreciate 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, is an observance of the way (halacha) without needing to be physically circumcised and become Jewish.

The Apostle 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 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 – an interpolation:

Another problematic portion of the NT is 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 epistle to the Thessalonians 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 Messiah Yeshua 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 scholars³³ 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 as 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

³³ Pearson for example – see Birger Pearson: *'1 Thessalonians 2:13-16: A Deutero-Pauline Interpolation'* HTR 64 -1971

not come from the same author as the rest of the letter, but is rather built around an amalgamation of Pauline expressions.

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 New Testament 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.

The Dividing Wall - Ephesians 2:11-18

Specifically, Eph 2:11-12 and 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 Messiah, **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 Messiah Yeshua himself being the cornerstone,

21 in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

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.

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 (the commonwealth) of Israel are part of the covenants (note also the plural in covenants³⁴) 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.

³⁴ There is no such thing as the 'Old Covenant', but there are many covenants that YHWH made with Israel – see 'Righteousness Before Messiah' for details - <http://www.charismacomputers.com.au/Righteousness%20before%20Messiah.pdf>

Paul goes on to argue that the crucifixion and resurrection of Yeshua (it was a banner, or ensign, a miraculous event – see Isaiah 11:10) that 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’ or 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.”*³⁵

Alternatively, just consider for a moment that here in Ephesians 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.

A Royal Priesthood - 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”

³⁵ From <http://www.ministersnewcovenant.org/>

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 Tanakh 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 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 his 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', today³⁶.

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 actuality, contradictory and mistaken or not, it is always a difficult challenge for any man and woman 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.

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 now have certainly show this influence. This contextual reality is evident in John's Gospel.

³⁶ For more on the Land issue see my article 'Israel: Return in belief of unbelief' at www.circumcisedheart.info

While scholars generally agree that starting with the epistles of Paul, all the books of the New Testament were first composed between 49 CE and 68 CE, with the Gospel of John, the epistles of John and the Book of Revelation written possibly written in the late 80's to mid 90's³⁷.

Without doubt, the followers of Yeshua in the early days had all been Jewish with the addition of the Gentiles only beginning, some 12-15 years after the resurrection, at 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.

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'*), and 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 sentenced him and execute him³⁸!

While the redaction of the New Testament 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 adultery³⁹) 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.

³⁷ See *'Chronological and Background Charts of the NT'* by H Wayne House (p 16). There is though also strong scholarly support for the Book of Revelation, to have been written as early as 65-66 CE.

³⁸ John 19:11 *'Jesus answered, "You would have no power at all against me, unless it were given to you from above. Therefore he who delivered me to you has greater sin."*

³⁹ For details see my article 'The Pericope Adulterae' at <http://www.charismacomputers.com.au/The%20Pericope%20Adulterae.pdf>

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 Rienhartz argues John has Yeshua accusing either all Jews, or at least some of the Pharisees, and not just the Jewish leadership of being children of the devil. Many of these same Jews were most likely 'blameless before Torah' like the Apostle 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.

John 20:31 *"...but these are written so that you may believe that Yeshua 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 repeating⁴⁰ this revelation.

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.

Another passage of the Apostle Paul's epistles that is very often used to promote some degree of 'Replacement Theology' is Galatians 4:22-31.

The Hagar/Sarah allegory - Galatians 4:22-31:

*"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.*

Almost universally Christian commentators and even the Christian 'man in the street' will jump to the conclusion that, as 'Christians are 'free' and that the reference to Mt Sinai must refer to the 'Old

⁴⁰ It is possible that John's Gospel was written as late as 96 CE, some 60+ years after the resurrection event.

Covenant', those within Judaism must be the slaves who need to be 'cast out'!

As part of this cursory, but seriously flawed interpretation, they assume that the two covenants contrasted here are the Mosaic covenant and the New Covenant through Messiah Yeshua, and that the Mosaic covenant is being 'cast out' by the Apostle Paul! Again, a serious pre-supposition of Replacement Theology.

As I have already mentioned though, the Letter to the Galatians has a central theme of 'circumcision' as a metonym for the rites of proselytization (to becoming Jewish). In summary, the Apostle Paul is arguing in this letter that Jews remain Jewish and Gentile believers remain Gentile⁴¹.

So, if these Christian arguments mentioned are correct, we are being asked to believe that right in the middle of Paul's dissertation on Jews remaining Jewish, and Gentile believers remaining Gentiles, he suddenly contradicts himself and sets out to denigrate the cultivated Olive Tree (which he has spoken so positively about in Romans 9-11), and its Mosaic Covenant and instead equate it to Ishmael's son-ship, where it appears Abraham failed in not trusting God? This seems highly unlikely!

What some scholars instead argue is that this discussion is a comparison between 2 different groups of Gentile believers 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 Messiah 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 YHWH.

To repeat, 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 Galatians 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*

⁴¹ For a great book on Galatians, please see 'The Irony of Galatians' by Mark Nanos

*the law*⁴² (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. 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, etc.’ 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. This is in no way denigrating the acceptability of this choice, only that it does not satisfy the eschatological requirements of the dawning of the Coming Age that the Apostle Paul is so passionate about.

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 these God-fearing Galatian proselytes, to children birthed from the covenant at Mount Sinai, where the Torah (law) was given. They are sons of Hagar and are “*under the law*”, or more clearly and correctly are ‘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. They are trusting in the Gospel message that the Apostle Paul has shared regarding Yeshua and the Coming Age; they are trusting that Yeshua is the ‘shoot of Jesse’ of Isaiah 11 and therefore, the ‘ensign’ that they can trust in.

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.

⁴² <http://www.charismacomputers.com.au/Works%20of%20the%20Law.pdf>

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 I believe 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.

So again, this passage, like all the others discussed, is not advocating any form of Replacement Theology.

Counter Arguments:

I believed I have now addressed the historical development of ‘Replacement Theology’ and looked at the main NT scriptures that have typically been used to argue for this erroneous doctrine.

Now let us look at a few of the typical arguments presented by Hellenistic Christian preachers, theologians, and Bible students to support this doctrine. Many of these arguments show a very clear lack of Hebraic understanding; are often quiet ambiguous, as they have not seen the internal contradictions that often abound in their arguments, but are also quite often, legalistic, rigid and damning of any who would dare to disagree with them.

Counter Argument #1:

Take this short quote from a website article that argues that: *“Modern versions have already broadened the way for multitudes to accept **counterfeit scriptures**. Fundamentalists have been the last stronghold of orthodoxy, determined to resist the apostasy and persistently holding to the KJV based on the Received Text. However, now there is evidence that Fundamentalists, like many Evangelicals and Charismatics, are coming under the baleful influence of the **Hebrew Roots Movement**.”* (which they argue is ‘*a stepping stone to the occult*’)⁴³! – from <http://watch.pair.com/peshitta.html>

Quote:

“Until this glorious revelation of Jesus Christ to the remnant of Israel, the proper attitude of the Christian Church toward the Jews during the present dispensation is clearly stated in Scripture, as expounded in William R. Newell's commentary on Romans 11:

⁴³ A typical argument of Hellenistic Christianity is to view the King James Version as totally without error, even though most scholars today accept that many ‘modern versions’ are actually closer to the original texts.

*"In Acts 28, Paul **officially shuts the door to national Israel**. 'Well spake the Holy Spirit through Isaiah the prophet unto your fathers,'-- quoting this Isaiah Six and declaring: "Be it known therefore unto you, that this salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles: they also will hear."*

*"Since this awful use of Isaiah 6, **the gospel has no Jewish bounds or bonds whatever!** And it is presumption and danger, now, to give the Jews any other place than that of common sinners! 'No distinction between Jew and Greek,' says God. Those that preach thus, have God's blessing. Those that would give any special place whatever to Jews, since that day, do so contrary to the gospel; and we fear, for private advantage. Tell Jews the truth! Their Messiah was offered to their nation, and rejected. **And God is not offering a Messiah to Israel now, but has Himself rejected them:** all except a 'remnant,' who leave Jewish earthly hopes, break down into sinners only, and **receive a sinner's Savior, not a 'Jewish' one!** Then they become 'partakers of a heavenly calling.'*

*"We dare not believe in any of the modern reports of national Jewish 'turning to the Lord.' They will go into yet greater darkness (after the **Rapture of the Church**). There will be the former evil spirit of idolatry "taking with itself seven other spirits more wicked than itself," entering in and dwelling this present evil generation of Israel (Matt. 12.45). Do not be deceived. At our Lord's coming, and not until that beleaguered nation sees 'the sign of the Son of Man in Heaven' (Matt. 24.30),--which will be that 'looking upon Him whom they pierced' of Zechariah 12, will they have faith.*

"...their fall was made the occasion of salvation to the Gentiles; and this again is to provoke them to jealousy'---that they may be saved. God's manifest blessing to Gentiles causes the careless, self-satisfied Jew to awake,--first to ridicule Gentile testimony; then,--seeing the reality of Divine visitation to the despised Gentile, to arouse to a deep jealousy.

*"How amazingly different Paul's method of 'provoking the Jews to jealousy,' from that pursued by many Jewish mission workers today. The Jew must have a 'special' place as a Jew. In some quarters they are even organizing 'Jewish assemblies,' and in other quarters advocating 'the literary method of approaching Israel.' All this, we cannot but feel, is **abominable kow-towing to Jewish flesh**, and hinders their salvation. Jews now are common sinners, who have for the present been set aside nationally, and must come to rely, as individual sinners, hopelessly guilty and helpless, upon the shed blood of Christ, an upon Him risen from the dead. It is an awful thing to make present day 'Jewish' claims when God says Jews are, for the present, no different from Gentiles, before God: but are just--sinners!"⁴⁴.*

If I have helped you, the reader to at least appreciate a little, the enormous error and seriously unhelpful sense and lack of humility evident in this quote above, then I am most pleased to have moved you at little closer to a more truthful and intimate appreciation for the God of Israel, whose promises to the Jewish people are unchanging and eternal.

You will note the reference to Acts 28, which gives some of the details of Paul's arrest and house imprisonment in Rome. In Acts 28:17 the Apostle Paul states: "...*Brothers, though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers,...*". Note here, the Paul declares he is blameless before Israel and even its traditions and that he also calls these Jewish elders in Rome his brothers. He argues with his Jewish brethren about Yeshua, and even manages to convince some. He then ends his argument and speaks strongly (in quoting Isaiah 6) against those of his people who reject the truth that Yeshua is the Messiah and that the Coming Age is dawning. What these Christians fail to appreciate is that such vehement criticism was common between the various factions within

⁴⁴ William R. Newell, Romans, Kregel Classics, Grand Rapids, MI, 1994, p. 415. -- quoted at <http://watch.pair.com/peshitta.html>

Pharisaism, and was considered a normal part of discourse⁴⁵.

To suggest that somehow God, through these few words of the Apostle Paul, had '*shut the door on natural Israel*' and that the gospel now had no Jewish connection or bonds whatsoever, and that the Messiah wasn't even Jewish now ('*a sinner's Savior, not a 'Jewish' one*') is simply beyond reason! The Apostle Paul, or even 'Jesus in Paul' as some Christian theologians like to argue, have no authority to completely remove the eternal promises that the Almighty repeatedly made to Israel. To suggest that God has rejected the Jewish people, is an argument with absolutely no Scriptural support, and further, an argument not borne out by the history of the Jewish people, whom the Almighty had kept separate to Him, through millennia of suffering and trials to, in these last days, bring them back into His Land⁴⁶.

Further evidence of how the Hellenistic mindset leads Christians astray is the reference to the totally unbiblical doctrine of the Rapture of the Church⁴⁷.

Counter Argument #2:

The following list of New Testament Bible verses followed by some statements (supposedly inferred from the NT quotes), was posted to the Facebook forum titled '*Truth Triumphs Tradition*':

"John 12:49; John 14:24; Matthew 5:21-22; Matthew 5:27-28; Matthew 5:33-35; Matthew 5:38-39; Matthew 5:43-44; Matthew 12:5-6; Matthew 17:11-12; Luke 5:21-22; Luke 6:1; Luke 13:14; John 8:3-7

Jesus replaced the Jewish law of Thou shalt not kill with being angry with a brother without cause being a danger of judgment.

Jesus replaced the law of performing and oath unto the Lord with not swearing at all.

Jesus replaced the law of an eye for an eye with forgiveness.

Jesus replaced the law of hating your enemy with loving your enemy.

Jesus replaced the law of the temple with Himself.

Jesus replaced the prophecy of Elias returning (still observed in the Jewish feast of Passover by the empty seat) by saying Elias has already come.

Jesus replaced the law of having to go through a Levitical priest and/or offering a sacrifice for sin by forgiving sins Himself in the name of His Father.

Jesus replaced the law of doing no work on the Sabbath day by both healing and having His disciples work on the Sabbath day.

Jesus replaced the law of stoning an adulteress with forgiveness.

To say there was no replacement theology would be the equivalent of saying Jesus was not the messiah.

So why was Israel replaced with Christianity? Because the Jews rejected Jesus.

Had they not, His replacement theology would have been through the Jews themselves."

In my response, I have given the NT verses quoted (mostly using the *Complete Jewish Bible* as an alternative modern version which, while still far from perfect, is a much better translation than the flawed KJV⁴⁸).

⁴⁵ I discuss this type of dialogue in various discussions on Yeshua's arguments about 'fulfilling Torah vs destroying Torah' – see 'The Times of Yeshua' for example - <http://www.charismacomputers.com.au/The%20Times%20of%20Yeshua.pdf> (p4)

⁴⁶ The most brilliant book on the Jews is 'A History of the Jews' by Paul Johnson. This book is an absolute must read!

⁴⁷ See <http://focusonthekingdom.org/articles/rapture.htm> for a little detail

⁴⁸ As already intimated, there is a great deal of evidence to demonstrate many significant errors in the KJV. Surprisingly though, the Old Testament portion is reasonably faithful to the Hebrew text of the Tanakh, and was even used by many Jewish groups for many years as a suitable

Thus in the section following you will see the relevant verse quoted and then some short comment on it's relevance to the question of 'Replacement' and the issue of Replacement Theology (RT):

John 12:49 "for I have not spoken on my own initiative, but the Father who sent me has given me a command, namely, what to say and how to say it."

To even list this statement of Yeshua which so emphatically declares that RT is a false doctrine, just shows how little understanding those who argue for this doctrine have, and how easily they are misled.

Yeshua was an observant Jew who made it clear that his brethren were to obey the 10 Words and Sh'ma⁴⁹ when he declared what the two greatest commandments were. He also made it clear that his family, his mother, brothers and sisters, were those who do the will of his Father (Matt 12:50), and all his hearers knew where that 'will of his Father' was recorded and detailed! And that is, in the Tanakh; in the writings of Moses, and the Prophets of Israel.

There is absolutely no hint of any replacement here, rather a call to repent and turn back to the God of Israel, their Father who had declared His covenants and commandments to Israel through the Tanakh.

John 14:24 "someone who doesn't love me doesn't keep my words -- and the word you are hearing is not my own but that of the Father who sent me."

This is more of the same! Firstly, note that Yeshua speaks about 'keeping his words' which are the Father's Words, which is Torah! Thus, he is not saying you must believe IN him, but IN his words, which are the Words of God in the Torah and Tanakh.

Most Jewish scholars have no trouble with the sayings of Yeshua (with a few significant differences where they argue that serious redaction has taken place, and in particular, with the very questionable Gospel of John⁵⁰).

In fact, to demonstrate this reality, Prof David Flusser has stated in his books⁵¹; having spent his entire life devoted to studying Yeshua and in particular, his life as described through the Synoptic Gospels; that all the words of Yeshua could have been compiled from Jewish writing before his time (including the Tanakh of course).

Matthew 5:21-22 "you have heard that our fathers were told, 'do not murder, and that anyone who commits murder will be subject to judgment. But I tell you that anyone who nurses anger against his brother will be subject to judgment; that whoever calls his brother, 'you good-for-nothing!' will be brought before the Sanhedrin; that whoever says, 'fool!' incurs the penalty of burning in the fire of gei-hinnom!"

Yeshua is giving mid-rashic⁵² commentary on the 10 Words. He is doing exactly what Moses did, expanding on the explicit and original statement of the 10 Words, just as Moses did. He is making it clear that true obedience to the 10 Words can only be achieved from a circumcised heart (again as Moses, Ezekiel and Jeremiah had said before him). There is nothing really new here, just a clarification of the true intent and deeper meaning of the 10 Words.

English translation. Some of the reasons for this are cited on this website - <http://www.sbl-site.org/publications/article.aspx?articleId=185>

⁴⁹ Deuteronomy 6:4-9; & Deuteronomy 11:13-21; & Numbers 15:37-41

⁵⁰ The Jewish theologian, Prof Adele Reinhartz has written a great book that tries to find grounds for commonality between Christianity and Judaism within the confines of this gospel. See '*Befriending The Beloved Disciple: A Jewish Reading of the Gospel of John*'.

⁵¹ See for example 'Jesus', 'Judaism of the Second Temple Period: Sages and Literature, vol. 2' and 'The Sage from Galilee: Rediscovering Jesus' Genius'.

⁵² A Rabbinic interpretation and commentary on a text from the Hebrew Scripture.

Those arguing for some replacement here need to therefore set up a new Sanhedrin⁵³ as well!

Perhaps some Christians will argue that this part of the quote is allegory, whereas the first part was not! Christianity in general has no Sanhedrin, so it can't be part of the 'New' way that Yeshua has supposedly set up with this statement.

Matthew 5:27-28 "you have heard that our fathers were told, 'do not commit adultery.' but I tell you that a man who even looks at a woman with the purpose of lusting after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

Another of the 10 Words and another explanation of the true reality that a heart-led obedience is needed. Yeshua makes it clear, as Moses in fact had before him, that the real challenge to avoiding the sin of adultery is controlling the fleshly heart, and directing the direction and focus of the 'eye' of the mind. Judaism understands from the Tanakh that man has two hearts, and two inclinations, an inclination to do good and an inclination to do bad.

This Hebraic concept of 'Yetzer HaRa' and 'Yetzer HaTov' (the evil inclination and the good inclination⁵⁴) relates to the choice of the will to be faithful to God rather than follow the natural 'lusts of the flesh'. Thus any natural descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, still need to make the choice to follow the good heart rather than the fleshly heart. All who have 'circumcised hearts' are then aligning their 'fleshly heart' with their 'spiritual heart', and will inherit the Kingdom of God.

Paul calls the Torah spiritual in a number of places such as 1 Cor 10:3 and Romans 7:14. So for example, when Paul writes in 1 Cor 15:44 *"It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body."* he is speaking primarily on an individual basis of this choice that we all have – whether to be 'born from above', that is to follow our good inclination, to circumcise our hearts and have the 'faith of Yeshua'⁵⁵ which is the 'faith/faithfulness of Abraham', or to remain alienated from God.

This choice applies to every individual, once the One True God is revealed to them.

Matthew 5:33-35 "Again, you have heard that our fathers were told, 'do not break your oath,' and 'keep your vows to YHVH.' but I tell you not to swear at all -- not 'by heaven,' because it is god's throne; not 'by the earth,' because it is His footstool and not 'by Jerusalem,' because it is the city of the great king."

Again this is just a more detailed and comprehensive explanation of the passages quoted from Lev 19:12; Numbers 30:2 and Deut 23:21. Moses had said not to take God's Name in vain; not to discredit it in any way. So to swear on the 'Heavens or the Earth' is to swear on God's handiwork and thus to implicitly swear on God. Similarly, to swear on the 'apple of God's eye' Jerusalem, is by implication also to 'swear on God'. This is not a NEW commandment, simply a more complete explanation of the existing one.

⁵³ The KJV uses the word 'council' here (Sanhedrin literally means 'sitting together'), but is referring to this Jewish court of judges that was set up in every town in Israel. The Great Sanhedrin in Jerusalem has some 71 judges/sages.

⁵⁴ In Hebrew the singular for 'heart' (pronounced 'lev') is לב and the plural 'hearts' is sometimes spelt in more than one way such as לבבך or לבבם or לבבות. If you look at the Sh'ma (starting at Deut 6:4) in a Hebrew Bible such as Hebrew-English Tanakh (Varda Books 2009) you will see the plural, לבבך, in both verses 6 and 7. This literally translates into English as: *"And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all your hearts, and with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words, which I command you this day, shall be upon your hearts ..."*

So some debate occurred within Israel religious scholars over the centuries about why the plural? The Talmud relates that we have two hearts, a yetzer hatov and a yetzer hara (meaning 'good and evil inclinations' or a 'fleshly heart' and a 'spiritual heart').

⁵⁵ See 'The Faith of Jesus' - <http://www.charismacomputers.com.au/Christian%20site/The%20Faith%20of%20Jesus.pdf>

Matthew 5:38-39 "You have heard that our fathers were told, 'eye for eye and tooth for tooth'⁵⁶.' but I tell you not to stand up against someone who does you wrong. On the contrary, if someone hits you on the right cheek, let him hit you on the left cheek too!"

Matthew 5:43-44 "You have heard that our fathers were told, 'love your neighbors -- and hate your enemy.' but I tell you, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you!"

I think it best to let Professor David Flusser answer these ones:

"The Essene discovery that evil can be overcome with good has proved a mighty weapon in the history of the world. As we shall see, this idea was developed further by Jesus, and adopted by Christianity—even independently of Jesus' doctrine of love. The rule, "Do not resist one who is evil" (Matt. 5:39), has also penetrated into modern times. It reached Gandhi, who learned of it through Christianity and grafted it into ancient Indian ideas. This originally Essene idea thus helped to liberate India by passive resistance.

History has shown that an enemy can be overcome by goodness, even if one does not love him, and even if he becomes no better as a result of the good that is done to him. This was what the Essenes wanted; but it is hard to fulfill these two conditions. It is only human nature to begin to love the one for whom we are doing good. More importantly, when we genuinely do good for someone — even though we might only love them a little — as a rule, they become a better human being.

Those groups which occupied the fringe of Essenism outgrew the Essene theology of hate, and eventually began to affirm these same consequences of doing good to one's enemy. In the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, especially in the Testament of Benjamin (100-200 BCE), the loving conquest of the sinner becomes an important moral imperative:

'The good man has not an eye that cannot see; for he shows mercy to all men, sinners though they may be, and though they may plot his ruin. This man, by doing good, overcomes evil, since he is protected by the good

If, then, your minds are predisposed to what is good, children, wicked men will live at peace with you, the profligate will reverence you and turn towards the good, and the money-grubbers will not only turn their backs on the things they have been striving for, but even give what they have got by their money-grubbing to those who are in distress . .

His good mind will not let him speak with two tongues, one of blessing and one of cursing, one of insult and one of compliment, one of sorrow and one of joy, one of quietness and one of tumult, one of hypocrisy and one of truth, one of poverty and one of wealth; but it has a single disposition only, simple and pure, that says the same thing to everyone.

It has no double sight or hearing; for whenever such a man does, or says, or sees anything, he knows that the Lord is looking into his soul in judgment. And he purifies his mind so that he is not condemned by God and men. But everything that Beliar does is double and has nothing single about it at all.' ”⁵⁷

Again, this theology was clearly not created by Yeshua, given that it was recorded in Jewish writings before Yeshua was born. He explained and lived it better than anyone before or since, but these words were not the founding words of a new religion. Rather, they were a call to return to the 'old'

⁵⁶ Often such verses as used to argue that the Torah was very legalistic – this is simply a misunderstanding of how this 'measure for measure' is actually understood – see <http://www.charismacomputers.com.au/measureformmeasure.pdf>

⁵⁷ 'The Sage from Galilee: Rediscovering Jesus' Genius' D Flusser (p71)

one, the 'old wine', to return to the true religion of Israel, to the proper worship of God Almighty, YHVH.

Matthew 12:5-6 + 7-8 ""Or haven't you read in the Torah that on Shabbat the priests profane Shabbat and yet are blameless? I tell you, there is in this place something greater than the Temple! If you knew what 'I want compassion rather than animal-sacrifice' meant, you would not condemn the innocent. For the son of man is lord of the Shabbat!"

Flusser shows very convincingly that the phrase here 'son of man' refers to human beings, not Yeshua specifically.

To quote him in part: *"On that occasion, Jesus said, among other things, "The Sabbath was created for man, not man for the Sabbath. So, man is lord even of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27-28). Literally, "the son of man." Here it means simply "man." This was already recognized in the seventeenth century by the famous Dutch scholar, Hugo Grotius in his commentary on Matt. 12:8."* (Jesus, 2001). So Flusser is saying that all men, not just our Messiah have dominion over the Sabbath – why then would we remove or move it!!

Some scholars have argued that this change is recorded in the NT and have quoted Acts 10 and Gal 2, and possibly Romans 14:5 as evidence. Yet, there is absolutely no explicit mention of the weekly Sabbath in either Acts 10 or Gal 2. Some also argue that for a Gentile convert to keep the Sabbath would be to become or partake of something that was a national identity marker, rather than being a 'new man in Messiah'.

In the times that the Apostle Paul was writing though, the great majority of Gentiles converts were already 'God-fearers' and so would have been observing the Sabbath (to the accepted degree at least of attending the synagogue each Shabbat as this was where they would have been hearing the words of Moses, etc.). Thus, this question or perspective would have been irrelevant to them.

So what was the '**something**' there (not someone) which was greater than the temple? Perhaps it was human love for one another! Certainly this verse in no way indicates a new religion or new law/Torah!

What makes this even more definitive is that the weekly Sabbath had always been created for man's benefit; for man to have dominion over it, that is to gain life from it, not to be some form of bondage or legalism!

Matthew 17:11-12 "He answered, "on the one hand, Eliyahu is coming and will restore all things; on the other hand, I tell you that Eliyahu has come already, and people did not recognize him but did whatever they pleased to him. In the same way, the Son of Man too is about to suffer at their hands."

How does this suggest a new religion? Well look back at the original set of statements in the text I am responding to. Note the writer said: *"Jesus replaced the prophecy of Elias (Eliyahu) returning (still observed in the Jewish feast of Passover/Pesach by the empty seat) by saying Elias has already come."*

The problem is that Yeshua also said 'on the one hand, Eliyahu (Elias/Elijah) is coming and will restore all things ...'. Have all things been restored? No, so Elijah is still to come after all. Malachi 4 is still to be fulfilled. Again, this is no 'new' law. John the Baptist (or Immerser) came in the spirit of Elijah, but he was not Elijah.

Luke 5:21-22 "the Torah-teachers and the Pharisees began thinking, "Who is this fellow that speaks such blasphemies? Who can forgive sin except God?" but Yeshua, knowing what they were thinking, answered, "why are you turning over such thoughts in your hearts?"

If Yeshua is (the new) God and he replaced the old God, as per Marcion⁵⁸, then he may well have replaced Judaism!

In reality though, this verse has nothing to do with any 'replacement of Judaism' and Torah – it was simply that Yeshua understood that God had given him some authority, as the Messiah.⁵⁹

Luke 6:1 "One Shabbat(Sabbath), while Yeshua was passing through some wheat fields, his disciples began plucking the heads of grain, rubbing them between their hands and eating the seeds. Some of the Pharisees said, "Why are you violating Shabbat?"

Yeshua was accused of violating Shabbat, but he didn't. If he had he would have sinned⁶⁰.

Rather, this is an instance where the Greek translators poor understanding of Hebraic customs and commandments, meant that errors were made.

It was accepted that on the Sabbath it was permissible to pick up fallen heads of grain and rub them between the fingers. According to Rabbi Yehuda, also a Galilean like Yeshua, it was even permissible to rub them in one's hand. Some of the Pharisees though found fault with Yeshua's disciples for most likely behaving in accordance with their Galilean tradition.

That is, it is most probable that these Galileans, picked the fallen heads of grain, rubbed them together and ate them. But what we read in Greek (see Matt 12:1-2⁶¹ in the footnote) is that they 'plucked' the heads of grain.

It seems fairly clear then, that when the original Hebrew account (written by someone who knew the customs and even the local differences in interpretation) was translated into Greek, the translator, not knowing these customs, and perhaps trying to make the scene more colourful, added the statement about plucking the wheat and thus introduced the one and only act of transgression of the Torah recorded in the synoptic Gospels⁶².

Luke 13:14 "but the President of the synagogue, indignant that Yeshua had healed on Shabbat, spoke up and said to the congregation, "there are six days in the week for working; so come during those days to be healed, not on Shabbat!"

Again, Yeshua did not sin, he did not violate the Sabbath. Rather, he explains how healing the whole man is just as acceptable on the Sabbath as circumcising the 8 day old baby boy.

Yeshua here is both condoning a practice that had developed and expanding it in an intriguing way. The practice had been developed that if a boy's 8th day from birth was the Sabbath, the person (a 'mohel') performing the circumcision was allowed to break the Sabbath by carrying the tools required through the village and performing the ritual. It was considered that when this conflict between the requirements of observing the Sabbath and of circumcising a male child on the 8th day were in conflict the circumcision took precedence. If however the child was ill on his 8th day since birth (which say was the Wednesday) and he was not well until the Saturday, the Sabbath, the ruling was that now, the

⁵⁸ Marcion believed that the wrathful God of the Hebrew Bible was a separate and lower entity than the all-forgiving God of the New Testament – see Irenaeus, *'Against Heresies'*. While some may argue that as the church rejected Marcion, his doctrines are irrelevant. The reality though is that the church did adopt a significant portion of his understandings and especially his anti-Semitism. He rejected the books of Matthew, Mark, Acts and Hebrews, and even some of Luke, mainly because they spoke favourably of the Jews. The God (of the OT) is Dead Theology and the 'Jesus Only' churches can to some degree be traced back to him. His influence was especially strong in the Eastern churches.

⁵⁹ See my article on The Goal of Messiah' - <http://www.charismacomputers.com.au/The%20Goal%20of%20Messiah.pdf>

⁶⁰ In fact, this text indicates Greek corruption as I detail in my book, 'The NT: The Hebrew Behind the Greek' - <http://www.amazon.com/The-New-Testament-Hebrew-ebook/dp/B009XQ0NQU/>

⁶¹ Matthew 12:1-2 "At that time, Jesus went on the Sabbath day through the grain fields. His disciples were hungry and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. But the Pharisees, when they saw it, said to him, "Behold, your disciples do what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath."

⁶² See M. Kister, "Plucking on the Sabbath and Christian-Jewish Polemic," *Immanuel* 24-25 (Jerusalem, 1990), pp. 35-51

Sabbath took precedence and so the circumcision would not be performed until a later day.

Yeshua by his comments appears to condone this approach to the potential conflict between these mitzvot (commandments). However, Yeshua also argues that, given this ruling, why should he be condemned for healing the whole man on the Sabbath. The clear understanding being that circumcision was a form of healing (not only a token or marker but a positive commandment), perhaps primarily because it was a mark of entry into the family/tribe of Israel.

Again, this is not a new Torah (instructions from God), but a more complete and rational interpretation.

John 8:3-7 "The Torah-teachers and the Pharisees brought in a woman who had been caught committing adultery and made her stand in the center of the group. Then they said to him, "Rabbi, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in our Torah, Moses commanded that such a woman be stoned to death. What do you say about it?" They said this to trap him, so that they might have ground for bringing charges against him; but Yeshua bent down and began writing in the dust with his finger. When they kept questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "the one of you who is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her."

It is almost universally agreed, by NT Bible Scholars and translators, that this famous story of the adulterous woman brought to Yeshua is not an original part of John's gospel.

The NIV Bible Commentary (Editor FF Bruce) writes: *"It is certain that these verses are a later insertion into the original work. They are omitted by the best authorities for the text, though one group of MSS places them after Luke. 21:38. ..."*

So to try to use this passage to argue for any form of 'Replacement Theology' is really skating on thin ice!⁶³

Having now addressed each of the passages in the New Testament that were listed as supporting Replacement Theology, it should be clear that not one of these passages, or sayings of Yeshua can in anyway be taken to imply that "Israel (was) replaced with Christianity"!

This argument is totally without foundation. In fact, as already stated, Paul's letter to the Romans, chapters 9-11 alone should suffice.

Consider also Lamentations 2, especially verses 5-6 *"Adonai became like an enemy; he swallowed up Israel, swallowed up all its palaces, and destroyed all its strongholds. For the daughter of Y'hudah he has multiplied mourning and moaning. He wrecked his tabernacle as easily as a garden, destroyed his place of assembly. ADONAI caused Israel to forget designated times and Shabbats. In the heat of his anger he rejected both king and priest."*

The prophet (probably Jeremiah) who wrote this had witnessed the destruction of the first Temple on Mt. Moriah in Jerusalem. This had occurred some 600 years before Yeshua. If God had removed Israel from his affections, then He did it when he destroyed the first Temple, and exiled the people. Reading this chapter, you could easily be convinced that Israel had no hope at this time.

The fact that Israel was a nation again though, in the times of Yeshua should indicate that he did not discard or replace Israel in 586 BCE. So why should we think the events of any other time, or even of the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE would mean any different? After all, the Almighty had shown that his covenants with Israel were eternal.

⁶³ I have written a little more about this passage in an article 'Cast the First Stone - The Pericope Adulterae' – see <http://www.charismacomputers.com.au/The%20Pericope%20Adulterae.pdf>

Counter Argument #3:

One of the more fanciful, though in some ways ingenious arguments for Replacement Theology comes from a Pastor David Curtis, who certainly comes across as a genuine and sincere man.

Pastor David Curtis states that the '*Old Covenant produced unrighteousness*.'⁶⁴

There is no 'Old Covenant', but many Covenants! Again I refer you to my 'Righteousness Before Messiah' article for details on this issue.

Also to suggest that these eternal covenants that the Almighty made with Israel produced 'unrighteousness' is totally erroneous. People (Jewish or otherwise) choose to act un-righteously, a Covenant does not produce it, only Christians with poor understanding from a Hellenistic perspective would argue this.

In the linked article, David Curtis also totally misunderstands both the terms '*under the law*' and '*works of the law*' used by the Apostle Paul.

Under the law:

"For many, the difficulty in understanding Paul has been exacerbated by inaccurate translations. For example, the KJV has for Romans 3:19, "Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." Yet, the Greek manuscripts do not convey this meaning at all. The English phrase translated "under the law" here should read "in the law", for the Greek text reads en to nomo, not upo nomon ("under law"). This verse addresses the question, to whom does the Torah speak. Contrary to the KJV, the Torah does not speak to those who are "under the law." The Torah speaks to those who live within its framework, to those who are "in the law." The English phrase "under the law" should not appear in this verse. Such poor and inconsistent translations mislead the innocent reader and make it very difficult for him to understand Paul's meaning.

Another example of a poor translation hampering understanding may be found in the NIV at Romans 2:12. The NIV has, "All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law."

However, the KJV, in this case more accurately has, "For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law." The NIV employs the phrase "under the law", yet the Greek text clearly reads en nomo meaning, "in law", not upo nomon, meaning "under law." The problem with man is sin. As stated in the Prophets, "But your iniquities have separated between you and your Elohim, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear" (Isaiah 59:2). Sin is the problem. And sin pertains to everyone, to those "without [knowledge or understanding of] Torah" (anomos, anti-Torah) and to those "in [connection with] the Torah" (en nomo). In one sense, those who have been blessed with the knowledge and wisdom of Torah are no better off than those who have been ignorant of it or than those who have opposed it. When someone sins they fall short of the glory of God.

We find the first legitimate use of the English phrase "under the law", correctly derived from upo nomon, in Romans 6:14-15. "For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. What then? Shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? Elohim

⁶⁴ See http://www.bereanbiblechurch.org/transcripts/romans_new/7_1-6.htm

forbid.” In the context of the chapter, Paul is explicitly clear in his denunciation of being “under the law” as an appropriate state for the righteous. He contrasts the condition with being “under grace.” The word “under” carries the meaning of “controlled by” as in Romans 3:9 and 7:14 where Paul writes that all men are naturally “under” or “controlled by” sin. This is the condition in which we find ourselves (when we let our fleshy heart rule).

The word also implies a burden or something to which we are in subjection or slavery. In this context, the phrase “under the law” (upo nomon) could be understood as being subject to the penalties of or punishment for violating Torah or being subject to a system of perverting the Torah into a legalistic system for supposedly earning or meriting one’s own salvation.” -Stephen Allen⁶⁵

Obedience to Torah is a response (after seeking forgiveness for sin and repenting) to the saving grace of God. Thus such obedience does not bring salvation, but is an expectation of an individual who is saved.

David Curtis then goes on to argue that keeping the 10 Words is sinning! But then he later does some sleight of hand to suggest that you can keep 9 of them because Yeshua and Paul said you could!

Next Curtis, because of a clear lack of any depth of study into Hebraic thought, totally misunderstands and misapplies the term ‘*in the flesh*’ (I have already discussed this error).

But worse, Curtis thinks that the Torah died in 70 AD! He states: *“When did the Mosaic Law die? I know it DIDN’T DIE, but when did it come to an end? First century Jewish believers died to the Law, but in A.D. 70 THE LAW DIED with the destruction of the Jewish temple”.*

He first states that Law/Torah didn’t die, and then that it did! If the end of the Temple meant the end of the Torah, then how come there was no Temple for the first 400+ years of the Mosaic Covenant/Torah; how come the Torah didn’t die after Solomon’s Temple was destroyed (again see an earlier discussion of this issue above)?

Pastor David Curtis seems to me to be a perfect example of the very sincere and studious Christian who seeks to rightly divide the Word of God, yet because he has not sought to view the Bible through Hebraic rather than Hellenistic eyes he has arrived at many false conclusions based on many faulty premises such as the doctrine of ‘original sin’; the misunderstanding of what ‘*works of the law*’ means, and many other Hebraisms that the Bible is replete with.

Counter Argument #4

The long history of Replacement Theology in the church and the almost unthinking acceptance of its veracity has lead many to uncritically accept arguments that assume such veracity even if the person presenting the argument might otherwise explicitly reject many of the implications of Replacement Theology. Here is a very good example of this. I had been debating an article published by the Christian scholar, David Maas.

As part of the exchange of viewpoints he wrote an email, which included this quote: *“Jesus warned against pouring new wine into old wine-skins. Attempts to domesticate the Christ of scripture by pouring the new wine of the Spirit into the old wine-skins of Second Temple Judaism are doomed to fail. If they do not burst the old skins the sweet wine of the Spirit will be turned into the vinegar of the*

⁶⁵ From a website that is no longer active – it was ‘crawled’ in 2007 and can be seen at the Internet Archive here - <http://web.archive.org/web/20071020103505/http://www.haderek.ca/articles/paul/underthelaw.htm> (Thanks Guy Bearman!)

death-dealing letter of the Law (2 Corinthians 3:6)." – David Maas, (from email correspondence on Oct 15, 2011).

I was of course familiar with the 'wineskins' analogy that Yeshua had used, but here for the first time I critically examined the common consensus that I had shared, perhaps only because it had been used to reach a conclusion I rejected. Here is part of my response at the time:

When I read this statement, it struck me very forcefully, how emphatically this 'wineskins' statement of Yeshua was been used to support a very strong doctrine of 'Replacement'. That is, that the church has replaced Israel in God's affections and plans.

David Maas is very clear here in equating the Jewish religion of Yeshua's day (what he terms 'Second Temple Judaism') that adhered to the Hebrew Scriptures (The Tanakh), with the 'old wineskin', and Christianity as the 'sweet (new) wine of the Spirit'. Here he also very clearly equates this so-called 'Old Covenant' (Second Temple Judaism) with the 'letter of the Law' and the so-called 'New Covenant' of Christianity with the 'Spirit of the Law'.

This 'Replacement Theology' whether intention or not (surely most 'Christians' who support it are not intentionally anti-Israel and against the Jewishness of Yeshua), has resulted in a great deal of anti-Semitism which has ultimately led to great persecutions and pogroms against the Jewish people.

In fact, it could be argued that the misunderstanding of this parable has been instrumental in much evil ('bad fruit') against the Jewish people and helps explain why when Jewish lovers of the Almighty look at the 'fruit of the tree' of Christianity, they do not see 'good fruit' but bad, and consequently reject the messenger because of the falsehood of the message. In this vein you may wish to revisit Matthew 7:16-20, Luke 13:6-9 and then John 15:2-16.

In seeking commentary where this parable was first used to argue that the church had replaced Israel and Judaism, I found that it appears to have been first proposed by the seriously anti-Semitic Marcion (85 – 160 CE) in his ultimately successful efforts to separate Christianity from Judaism.

So, thanks to Mr. Maas comment, which I found very disturbing, I was interested in returning to, and reconsidering this parable.

Thanks to the incredible work of the late Professor David Flusser (Hebrew University, Jerusalem) and the Jerusalem School of Synoptic Research, I now understood that the Gospel of Luke was most likely written before the Gospels of Mark and Matthew, and these well before John's gospel.

Therefore it seemed sensible to start in Luke (Luke 5:36-39):

*"He also told them a parable: "No one tears a piece from a new garment and sews it on an old garment; otherwise the new will be torn, and the piece from the new will not match the old. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the new wine will burst the skins and will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed. But the new wine must be out into fresh wineskins. And no one after drinking old wine desire new wine, but says **'The old is good'**." (Some manuscripts, such as the KJV have **'The old is better'**) – The Jewish Annotated New Testament*

I had read and listened to this scripture a great many times and even heard preachers speak on it but I had amazingly missed the last sentence where Yeshua said the old wine is better! You may need to do a double take yourself here. Yeshua states that it is the old wine, **not** the new wine in new wineskins **that is better!**

It is also perhaps worth noting some different ways verse 39 is translated into English:

"... And no one who has ever tasted fine aged wine prefers unaged wine." – The Message

"Of course, nobody who has been drinking old wine will want the new at once. He is sure to say, 'The old is a good sound wine.'" – JB Philips

"And no one, after drinking old wine wishes for new; for he says, 'The old is good enough.'" - NASB

I am not sure though that these translations bring anything new or more helpful to the simple comment that the 'old wine is better'.

When we turn to the two references to this same parable in Mark (2:22) and in Matthew (9:17) we find this last sentence missing. Without this concluding sentence it is much easier to interpret this parable as Marcion and David Maas have. Perhaps this part of the parable was excluded from the Gospels of Matthew and Mark deliberately by copyists or translators, for this very reason.

It should not take much reflection then, to see that this parable can in no way be suggesting that the 'sweet (new) wine' of Christianity is somehow superior to the old wine of Judaism. If these were the two concepts and approaches being compared, it would mean that Yeshua was saying that Judaism was better!

So now, we need I think to ask, is this what the parable is suggesting or is it something a little more subtle?

The late Dr Robert L Lindsey (a Baptist Pastor and student of Prof. Flusser) argues most convincingly in his book *'Jesus, Rabbi and Lord'* (see Chapter 19) that all throughout the Gospel of Luke the structure of each narrative is three fold:

- 1) An incident in Yeshua's life is related;
- 2) this is followed by a teaching discourse by Yeshua; and
- 3) which then concludes with 2 parables.

Consider how this 'wineskins' parable fits with this approach. We see in Luke 5:27, that the tax collector (Matthew Levi the possible author of the Gospel of Matthew or at least the original Hebrew 'History of Yeshua') has prepared a great feast for Yeshua. A number of the Pharisees and scribes question Yeshua about spending time with these 'sinners' (the tax collectors had chosen their unrighteous occupation which meant they had chosen to separate themselves from community welfare and fellowship with their 'healthy' or righteous brethren).

Yeshua then makes the classic statement, or teaching, that the healthy do not need a doctor. He was saying here, as he had elsewhere, they he had come to call the unrighteous, the 'lost sheep of Israel' back to the Covenantal relationship that the family of Israel had with their Father, the Almighty.

It is in this context that he gives the two parables; the parable about sewing a piece of new cloth onto an old garment and the wineskins parable. In this context, I would argue that the 'old wine is better' refers to those of Israel who have been, and remain in, communion with the God of Israel. That is the healthy sheep of Israel that are not lost (the mainstream Jewish 'man in the street' represented in the religious context by the Pharisees - Yeshua himself being essentially a Pharisee⁶⁶).

⁶⁶ See 'Jesus' by Flusser, or the discussion of this point in my 'The Times of Yeshua' article.

They are 'better' or 'good enough' because they have a developed intimacy with the Almighty, which the Jewish tax collectors and other sinners, through no longer walking right with God ('halacha'), have turned their backs on.

In calling these 'sinners' back to the Father, Yeshua sees them as like new wine needing a different treatment and approach (new wineskin), which he offers.

The same can surely be said when many years later, Gentiles would be accepted into the Kingdom of God, the movement of Yeshua. They would also need a 'new' or different approach, as they would not have grown up with the 'oracles of God', with anything like the knowledge of the Tanakh and mitzvot (commandments) that the Jewish people have from birth.

This 'new wineskin' essentially encompasses the Ten Commandments plus the four Noahide Laws as detailed in Acts 15. I have dealt in a little detail with the edicts of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) in my article '*Circumcision – A Step of Obedience?*'.

This parable⁶⁷ has nothing to do with a comparison between living under the '*letter of Torah (Law)*' or the '*Spirit of Torah*'⁶⁸.

So, the conclusion presented by David Maas, with its strong 'Replacement Theology' pre-suppositions, was based on a faulty reading of this analogy or parable. Once again we see that this doctrine is invalidated on closer inspection of the relevant Scriptures.

Counter Argument #5: The Birkat HaMinim (The Heretic Blessing –or 'curse')⁶⁹

Some have argued that this Jewish synagogue prayer or 'blessing' has a portion that specifically targets the followers of Yeshua of Nazareth. They also argue that it was first written late in the first century and that it helped create the division, which became a schism or chasm, between Judaism and Hellenistic Christianity. If this were so, then the contention is that the Jews brought some of the Replacement Theology implications upon their own heads, and may have even been the main instigators of the whole split (remembering that for the first few decades the followers of Yeshua were not considered a separate religion, or even a separate sect of Judaism, but very much a Jewish group, that only started to add Gentile God-fearers to its community after the events of Cornelius' House and the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15, around 45-49 CE).

Some apparent support for the claim can be found in a Rabbi Rashi commentary on a version of the *Birkat HaMimim* that it included a description that some of these '*mimim (heretics) were 'disciples of Jesus the Notzri*'. As Ya'akov Y. Tepler who references this argument in his '*Birkat HaMinim: Jews and Christians in Conflict in the Ancient World*' (p 56) points out though, that by the time of Rashi, some 900 years later, there were versions that could well have included these words. In the reference he uses he refers to a commentary by Rashi on the Babylonian Talmud portion Megillah 17b⁷⁰, where there is no reference to Jesus or to the Notzri.

⁶⁷ For a much more in-depth look at the 'wineskins' parable I highly recommend '*The Old is Better: Parables of Patched Garment and Wineskins as Elaboration of a Chreia in Luke 5:33-39 about Feasting with Jesus*.' By Anders Eriksson - <http://www.ars-rhetorica.net/Queen/VolumeSpecialIssue2/Articles/Eriksson.pdf>

⁶⁸ I have dealt with this issue elsewhere. See for example, '*Siblings of the King: Living in the Will of the Father*'. The well-known scholar James DG Dunn also discusses these very commonly misunderstood phrases in 'The Theology of Paul the Apostle'.

⁶⁹ Thanks to Guy H Bearman for suggesting that a discussion of this argument would be helpful.

⁷⁰ See English translation here <http://halakhah.com/pdf/moed/Megillah.pdf> (p 69)

Both David Flusser (see below) and Marvin Wilson in 'Our Father Abraham' (p 65-70), indicate this 'blessing' was first written before Yeshua's day. Also any changes made at Javneh/Jamnia around 80-90 CE, appear not to have specifically addressed Yeshua or his followers at all.

In his '*Judaism and the Origins of Christianity*', Professor Flusser has a chapter on 'The Jewish-Christian Schism' (see p617-644). As his comments are so helpful to this discussion I have included some excerpts that hopefully give a good overall sense of how Flusser (and I in agreement with him) see the relevance of this 'blessing'.

"The Jewish-Christian Schism":

The Jewish origin of Christianity is an historical fact. It is also clear that Christianity constituted a new community, distinct from Judaism. Thus, Christianity is in the peculiar position of being a religion which, because of its Jewish roots, is obliged to be occupied with Judaism, while a Jew can fully live his Jewish religious life without wrestling with the problems of Christianity. From its very beginnings, Christianity understood itself more or less as the heir of Judaism and as its true expression, at the same time that it knew itself to have come into existence through the special grace of Christ.

As the vast majority of Jews did not agree with their Christian brethren in this claim, Christianity became a religion of Gentiles to whom, from the second century on, it was forbidden to fulfill the commandments of the Law of Moses — a book which was, at the same time, a part of their Holy Scriptures.(!)

*Already then the majority of Christians thought that the Jewish way of life was forbidden even to those Jews who had embraced Christianity, an attitude which later became the official position of the Church. **While antisemitism existed before Christianity, Christian anti-Judaism was far more virulent and dangerous.***

... It is essential to realize that Christians are explicitly mentioned in only two texts of Birkath ha-Minim, which were found in the Cairo Genizah and are remnants of the old Palestinian rite. These two texts speak about "the Christians (nozrim, i.e., Nazoraeans) and the heretics (minim)." Thus, it is evident that the term for "Christians" was added to an older text, which spoke only about heretics. This was probably done in order to stress that the term "heretics" (minim) refers mainly to Christians.

This addition was made before the year 400, as both Jerome and Epiphanius expressly state that the Jews curse "the Nazoraeans" in their synagogues. When Justin earlier asserts that the Jews curse those who believe in Christ, this may also mean that both the Jews and the Christians in his days understood Birkath ha-Minim as being directed against the Christians, even if the word itself did not then appear in the benediction: in the second century Christians were the strongest and most numerous group among those considered as heretics by the Synagogue.

That the reference to Christians in Birkath ha-Minim is secondary is confirmed by its appearance in only the two fragments of the Palestinian rite mentioned. In all other rites, both those from Christian lands and from non-Christian, oriental countries, where no Christian censorship was at work, only the term Minim (heretics) appears, but never 'nozrim' (Christians).

This indicates that the word "Christians" was not added to the blessing by an authoritative decision, because if it were, it would not be absent in most rites. Birkath ha-Minim is thus older than Christianity. It was originally coined against dissidents, apostates and traitors — including those who delivered Jews to the Gentile government — and similar wicked men who separated themselves from the Jewish collectivity, a group which at one time probably also included the Essenes...

... We now examine what we can know about anti-Jewish feelings among the first Christians of Jewish stock. Because the majority of the Jews did not accept the new message, there is a very high probability that tension with and even hatred of the Synagogue existed among some Jewish Christians. Their fellow Jews did not accept what appeared to them to be obviously true. The rejection of the Christian message surely caused a growing aggressiveness on the part of Jewish Christians, and this was probably one of the reasons why, especially in the early Jamnia period at the end of the first century, anti-Christian feelings arose among the rabbis.

As a consequence of the disappointment of Jewish Christians with the Synagogue, there were probably some Jewish Christians who invented the accusation that the Jews were guilty of the death of Jesus.

Then the prophecy of Jesus was fulfilled (Mt. 10:17-18): "And be on your guard, for men will hand you over to their courts, they will flog you in the synagogues, and you will be brought before governors and kings, for my sake, to testify before them and the heathen" (Cf. I Thess. 2:14).

Nothing about such persecutions is known from Rabbinic literature, but the tension itself against Christians is attested there, as is also the close connection between the rabbis and the Jewish Christians. **The strangest thing is that in the early Rabbinic sources, until the end of the second century, nothing is said against the person of Jesus or against the faith he had elicited.** Even the argument that he was a sorcerer only appears later (Mt. 12:24 and parallel passages do not seem to be decisive). Earlier we hear only that some rabbis opposed exorcisms in his name.

According to a legend in the Babylonian Talmud (Gittin 56b-57a), the spirit of Jesus said to Aquila, before he became a proselyte, that Israel is beloved by God; he said that he had been condemned because he had spoken against the words of the Jewish sages. This is, as far as I know, the only possibly-authentic instance in which Jesus' position in Judaism is defined — but even there his solidarity with Israel is stressed, but it is not altogether clear that this passage really is old.

The lack of any criticism of the faith of Jesus and of the principles of Christian religion in rabbinic literature prior to the end of the second century cannot be easily explained.

Christians are as strongly rejected as other heretics, but no specific arguments are adduced against them in that period, while at the same time other, unknown groups are designated heretical on the ground of false doctrines of theirs which are specifically mentioned. Does this mean that the rabbis rejected Jewish Christians, not because of the special content of their faith, but because of their opposition to the synagogue?

If so, these Jewish Christian heretics did not profess the developed Christology of the Gentile Church. This assumption is strengthened by the fact that, from the end of the second century, we read in Rabbinic literature polemics against such Christian articles of faith as the idea that God had a son.

These new polemics were evidently not directed against Jewish Christian heretics but against the Christian Church, and it is interesting to see that these objections were, as far as we can see, never directed against any specific group, but only against such articles of faith as are opposed.

All this shows that neither Jesus nor Jewish Christians were attacked because of their faith.

Later, when Rabbinic Judaism came into contact with the Gentile Christian Church, Gentile Christianity was perceived, not as a Jewish problem, but as an expression of a false theological attitude of foreigners.

It seems that the opposition against Jewish Christians arose mainly on a social and national level; but even so, I do not think that the departure of Christians to Pella in the year 68 was a decisive factor which heightened the tension, for others also opposed the Jewish war. The situation was probably different in the Bar-Kokhba War, not only because the entire Jewish nation was then mobilized, but also because of the strongly messianic character of that war, and the inability of Christians to accept Bar Kokhba as the Messiah. This explains the persecution of Christians by Bar Kokhba.

Justin Martyr writes (I Apology 1.31) that the Jews "count us (Christians) foes and enemies; and, like yourselves (pagans) they kill and punish us whenever they have the power...

... For in the Jewish war which raged lately, Barchochebas, the teacher of the revolt of the Jews, gave orders that the Christians alone should be led to cruel punishments, unless they would deny Jesus the Messiah and utter blasphemies." Justin's evident exaggeration is caused by his equation of the pagan persecutions ("like yourselves") of the Christians with those carried on by Jews. The notion that Christians were compelled by Bar Kokhba to blaspheme Jesus is almost certainly taken from the Roman practice of investigating Christians.

Already Pliny the Younger (Epistles X 96:5) asserts that those who were suspected of being Christians were asked to blaspheme Christ, in order to prove whether the accusation against them was true or not. The same method was applied by the Romans during the Jewish war against the Essenes (Josephus, Wars 11:152, cf. 11:145): they were tortured "in order to induce them to blaspheme against the lawgiver."

Thus, the historical kernel of Justin's comment is that Jewish Christians had to deny that Jesus is the Messiah, but not to blaspheme Jesus. As is well known, Bar Kokhba himself was believed to be the Messiah, but even so it seems to be improbable that he forced others to accept this belief. We know from Eusebius' Chronicles that Bar Kokhba punished Christians because they refused to fight together with him against the Romans. They evidently refused to do so because of their belief that the Messiah had already come and that he had not now returned in Bar Kokhba.

It seems to me that in this way the punishment of the Christians by Bar Kokhba and their belief that Jesus was the Messiah were connected. But even here, the political and not the religious aspect was decisive...

Conclusions:

Our task has been to show the centrifugal forces which caused the estrangement of Christianity from Judaism, and not the origin of Christian anti-Judaism as such, although we cannot avoid the conclusion that all that happened later was linked with the beginning.

The saying that "each tree is known by its own fruit" (Luke 6:43) is not utterly wrong, and it is not too exaggerated, as we find that Christianity is the religion which did the greatest injury to the Jews.

When we read Christian sources from the apostolic and subapostolic age with open eyes, we find there almost all the later major anti-Jewish motifs, at least in nuce, which indicates that the later development was not only an unhappy deviation.

One of the surprising findings of my research is that those texts in the Gospels expressing opposition to the Synagogue or to Jews, or accusing the Jews of having caused Jesus' death, or even those passages which express enmity towards "normative" Judaism, cannot be retranslated literally

into Hebrew or Aramaic: they are styled in Greek⁷¹.

This means that enmity of Palestinian Jewish Christians against other Jews, while it may have existed, cannot be proven, and that those passages were written by Gentiles or, so to speak, by Jewish "Gentile" (i.e., Hellenistic) Christians.

We must conclude that the opposition to Jews and to Judaism is primarily, or even exclusively, a function of the emergence of Gentile Christianity, and that this tension, or even abhorrence, was a factor which fostered the birth of Christianity as an independent Gentile religion. At the beginning of our article, we tried to show why it was almost impossible for all of Jewry to have become Christian. On the other hand, the origin of Christianity is Jewish, and many of the first Gentile Christians were close to Judaism; Jesus and his disciples were observant Jews: therefore Christianity had to solve the problem of why the Jewish people did not embrace Christianity.

The separation of Christianity from Judaism was brought about by heightening the centrifugal tendency, which produced opposition to and even hatred of Jews in Gentile Christians.

The Jewish origin of Christianity and the failure of Christianity to convert the Jewish people to the new message was precisely the reason for the strong anti-Jewish trend in Christianity; this explains the disharmony between the old and new community, which is probably unique in the history of religions. All this is obviously only one side of the relationship between the two.

However, my task here has not been to describe the common heritage of Judaism and Christianity, but to explain the separation of the two. Tension towards Judaism was an historical necessity for Christianity, in order to become a world religion for former pagans — a need which no longer exists.

Today, Christianity can renew itself out of Judaism and with the help of Judaism. Then it will become a humane religion."

I hope these excerpts from Flusser's book, while perhaps giving a little bit disjointed message, will at the very least give the Gentile Christian reader some pause for serious reflection on how they perceive the Jewish people and Judaism generally.

While there are most likely many more counter arguments, I trust I have addressed the main ones, and shown that they do not bear the weight of closer scrutiny from a Hebraic perspective.

Conclusion:

In conclusion then, I have tried to give a cursory overview of how I believe this Replacement Theology doctrine developed and in doing so, shown by inference, that it could not possibly have been a belief that Yeshua and the first disciples and Apostles would have supported, but that it was developed by Hellenists through a philosophical and Hellenistic perspective, rather than from a Hebraic and Biblical perspective.

I have also tried to address the main Scriptural 'proof-texts' from the New Testament, to show that when properly understood; when approached from a Hebraic worldview; they are in no way implying any 'replacement' of Israel in the affections of the Almighty.

⁷¹ As I discuss in my book 'The NT: The Hebrew Behind the Greek', Flusser argues that this technique of re-translating the NT text back into Hebrew or Aramaic enabled a good indication to be made, as to which portions were original, and which were later redactions by Gentile redactors. Thus, he is arguing here that any verses in the NT that appear to argue against the Jewish people and 'normative Judaism', or against the synagogue, or even to argue that the Jewish people were responsible for Yeshua's death, are all redactions or interpolations. They are not part of the original NT scriptures.

Given the very significant anti-Semitic implications of this doctrine, I pray that this article has convinced the reader (if not already convinced) of the insidious nature of this great error and therefore of the need for all seekers of Truth to stand against any promotion, whether explicit or unintentional, of this doctrine.

To fight against this doctrine is to fight against the evil of anti-Semitism⁷² that it has helped to promote.

For my latest on the error of the Church replacing Israel, please see

['Is Israel replaced by a new 'Body of Christ' or do we have Gentile inclusion in the Abrahamic Family'](#)
at circumcisedheart.info.

⁷² Anti-Semitism as a phenomenon (though only given this title in the late 1800's) existed long before the time of Yeshua and possibly as early as 500 BCE, according to Prof. Paul Johnson in his seminal work already referred to. From early days it appears to have been promoted by Greek intellectuals. With Constantine's impact in making Hellenistic Christianity the state religion, it appears that these Greek intellectuals were avoided even greater resources to promote anti-Semitism. Replacement Theology was surely a great fit.

Study 2: Universalism

I believe that most of these 'introduced' doctrines can be traced back to a failure to recognize some Hebraism that is embodied in the words spoken by Yeshua and/or his disciples. In the case of this Christian doctrine of Universalism, this Hebraism is the use of 'hyperbole', such as the word 'all' as an exaggeration for effect, rather than a scientifically asserted 100%.

Universalism: *Either the best news ever or a sad and dangerous delusion?*

Christianity has many problems. Since the separation of the Gentile Church from its Jewish brethren around the years 70-110 CE, Christianity lost its rudder, namely The Tanakh (Old Testament) and its custodians, the Jewish people, and instead became a melting pot of pagan ideas and gods. It also lost the ability to correctly read its own core, and even took to editing of the New Testament to promote the introduction and establishment of the pagan preferences of its pagan leaders⁷³.

Fast forward to today and we see many sincere Christians trying to address the contradictions and falsehoods that now riddle this once so powerful movement of God. Many Christians acknowledge the contradictions of the Apostles letters with themselves, their contradictions with the Gospel accounts; the contradictions especially of the Gospel of John with the Torah; that is, the Books of Moses, and so on.

I don't believe these contradictions existed at all when these books and letters were first penned. However, there have been many clear and verifiable corruptions of the New Testament writings over the last 1900+ years, and I would suggest a great deal more that are not easily discerned or proven.

The outcome and impact of these contradictions and distortions can be seen in the rise of over 38,000 denominations; the establishment of new movements such as the Emergent Church; and various other 'answers'.

Amongst the possible answers to these apparent contradictions and challenges is 'Universalism'⁷⁴, the belief that all people alive today and that ever lived will ultimately find salvation (or already have it) and will all one day live life eternal.

If this doctrine is true then it could be considered the best news that most of humanity could ever hear. This would then provide the opportunity to live forever without any need to believe anything, or to act in any proscribed manner. An amazing, and free 'get out of jail card'!

Of course the implication in this is that because this gift appears to require nothing of those who receive it, namely humanity, it would appear that anyone may act without fear of consequence⁷⁵, and thus succumb to any and all lusts that they may have. If this is true, then it offers an open door to licentiousness, and this would seem to be in direct conflict with the Apostle Paul's exhortation in Romans: *"Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness."* (Romans 6:12-13).

⁷³ This is a huge and significant issue in itself, so I will leave for another time, as I don't wish it to overshadow the discussion on Universalism.

⁷⁴ "We believe ... that, therefore, no human being will be condemned or allowed to suffer pain and separation forever." - <http://www.christianuniversalist.org/about/beliefs/> and "We believe in universal salvation, the idea that there is no such thing as eternal hell or annihilation because God has planned the universe to produce a positive outcome for all people of all times."

⁷⁵ Seems to seriously challenge the Apostle Paul's cry to 'work out your salvation with fear and trembling'. (Phil 2:12 & Ps 2:11)

Peter also warns against deception that encourages the lusts of the flesh: *“For, uttering great swelling words of emptiness, they entice in the lusts of the flesh, by licentiousness, those who are indeed escaping from those who live in error; promising them liberty, while they themselves are bondservants of corruption; for a man is brought into bondage by whoever overcomes him.”* (2 Peter 2:18)

Why has the doctrine of Universalism become a popular ‘new way’ amongst some in the Gentile Church?

Partly this has occurred thanks to a new player who has emerged. He is Rob Bell, a very well known Pastor and member of the ‘Emergent Church’. Rob Bell has now written a book, “Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived”. This book asks many questions of traditional Christianity and in some ways argues for the doctrine of Universalism. From reading some reviews of his book it is my understanding that Rob Bell is not entirely sure about Universalism and therefore sees himself as a ‘hopeful Universalist’.

Rob Bell does ask an important question, namely: “Will God’s grace and love eventually compel all to turn to him or not?” Part of his answer appears to be an argument for a great many second chances. I will address this option as part of my response to Universalism.

I am convinced however, that if Pastors and other Christians like Rob Bell properly understood the Hebraic nature of the Bible, both the TaNaK and the New Testament, the doctrine of Universalism would never have entered their heads. This doctrine is, in part, an attempt at a solution to a problem, which arises as an implication of the false doctrine of continuous punishment for the unrepentant in Hell.

The obvious implication arrives from the basic sense of justice and love that God has given mankind. Many who consider this doctrine find it impossible to imagine that a just and loving God would condemn people to a continuous eternity of extreme pain and suffering in the ‘fires’ of Hell regardless of their sins. Such a God seems cruel and therefore unloving to say the least. He also seems unjust as no sin by a ‘mortal man’, however evil is eternal. That is, if the punishment should fit the crime in some way, then an everlasting punishment disproportionate to any sin, which because of the mortal nature of man must be limited in time and impact, seems lacking in appropriate justice⁷⁶.

There are of course a number of possible answers to this apparent inconsistency. I will not address all these ‘solutions’ except to say that I believe that the Bible essentially teaches the doctrine of ‘annihilation’, that is that the unrepentant will be punished on the Day of Judgement, but that that punishment is limited in time and scope and after it these ‘unrepentant sinners’ simply cease to exist.

Regardless of the full and biblical answer to this question, the issue being addressed here is that Universalism appears to have only become a doctrine of consideration because of the invalid acceptance by the ‘church’ of the false doctrine of ‘eternal punishment’ as outlined above.

I am sure therefore that many who seek in Universalism the solution to the contradictions or injustices they see, are led here by what they perceive as a rational and logical analysis of Scripture. I suspect though that many are also led to this doctrine by a fervent desire to find a way for their ‘lost’ family members or friends to join them in eternity or even to find a way to eternity that does not require the development of such characters traits as repentance, discipline, obedience and justice.

⁷⁶ A teaching of Judaism, derived from the TaNaK is that God’s justice is generally in the form of ‘measure for measure’ – see <http://www.charismacomputers.com.au/measureformmeasure.pdf>

Many appear to see Universalism as the natural consequence of the fact that God is love and that His love, being all-powerful, must overcome all obstacles and 'win' every human being into His Kingdom. This certainly appears to be the thinking of Rob Bell and other Universalists I have debated this doctrine with.

Instead, I will endeavour to elucidate below how I believe Universalism is a doctrine that, fully embraced means people can actually turn their back on God, and on responsibility, obedience and faithfulness and instead follow whatever hedonistic desires their fleshly heart wishes.

Rather than being the pinnacle approach of a loving God; and the supreme testimony for those who sincerely love God, Universalism could then also be the hope of fools; the hope of the unrepentant, and selfish denier of the Holy God.

Understanding God:

God is a just God. Some of the scriptures that declare this are:

Isaiah 30:18 *"For the LORD is a God of justice ...".* Isaiah 61:8 *"For I the LORD love justice,"*

Gen 18:19 *"... (the) way of the LORD, (is) to do righteousness⁷⁷ and justice".*

Deut 10: 17-18 *"For ADONAI your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, mighty and awesome God, who has no favorites and accepts no bribes. He secures justice for the orphan and the widow; he loves the foreigner, giving him food and clothing.*

Deut 32:4 *"The Rock, His work is perfect; For all His ways are justice; A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, Just and right is He."*

2 Samuel 8:15 *"And David reigned over all Israel; and David executed justice and righteousness unto all his people."*

David was a man after God's own heart - 1 Sam 13:14; Acts 13:22, and we see him here described as being a man of justice and righteousness. Thus, this is further confirmation that justice and righteousness are central attributes of God.

1 Kings 3:9-12, 28 *"Therefore, give your servant an understanding heart able to administer justice to your people, so that I can discern between good and bad - for who is equal to judging this great people of yours?" What Solomon had said in making this request pleased Adonai. God said to him, "Because you have made this request instead of asking long life or riches for yourself, or your enemies' death, but rather asked for yourself understanding to discern justice; I am doing what you requested. I am giving you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has never been anyone like you, nor will there ever again be anyone like you. ... All Isra'el heard of the decision the king had made and held the king in awe, for they saw that God's wisdom was in him, enabling him to render justice properly."*

Isaiah 1:27-28 *"Zion shall be redeemed with justice, And they that return of her with righteousness. But the destruction of the transgressors and the sinners shall be together, And they that forsake the LORD shall be consumed."*

⁷⁷ Righteousness, in English this word is derived from 'right' and 'wise' and in Hebrew 'tzedakah' meaning righteousness, justice or fairness. To be right is to be true, to act with truth. It also is used to refer to 'charity', that is to supporting the poor – this can be seen in the Deuteronomy 10 reference as well.

Luke 11:41-43 *"But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, **and pass by justice and the love of God.** These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone."*

It should be clear from a little reflection upon these scriptures that God is a God of justice and righteousness or mercy.

In fact, Judaism has always maintained from its understanding of the TaNaK, that God's justice is tempered by mercy, with these two qualities perfectly balanced. Of the two names of God most commonly used in the TaNaK, one refers to his quality of justice and the other to his quality of mercy. The two names were used together in the story of Creation, showing that the world was created with both justice and mercy⁷⁸.

With God's justice comes his righteousness. With his justice comes his mercy. Thus God's love cannot be divorced from his justice.

As parents we learn that exercising love towards our children without justice, leads only to rebellion. If we don't teach them that there are consequences to wrong actions; if we only love them and never discipline them, they reject our love and instead see it as indifference. Yes, we need to be empathetic in allowing the consequences of their actions to play out, but if we truly love them and wish them to grow, we know that consequences and discipline are needed for learning to occur. Yeshua himself learned obedience as a child.

Luke 2:51-52 *"So he went with them to Nazareth and was obedient to them. But his mother stored up all these things in her heart. And Yeshua grew both in wisdom and in stature, gaining favor both with other people and with God."*

It is interesting and enlightening to observe that people like Rob Bell may use the thought that, a man like Mahatma Gandhi not being in 'heaven' but in 'hell' (based on typical Christian understanding), as an idea that invokes a sense of injustice in the listener or reader. Rob Bell appears to try to invoke this sense of injustice in order to offer Universalism as a more just belief.

However, this very argument shows a lack of knowledge of what is meant by justice and the justice of the Almighty. Even in two of the scriptures quoted above, namely Isaiah 1:27-28 and Luke 11:41-43, we see that there are consequences to rejecting God's way and that these consequences can be fixed and permanent (if sinners/transgressors are destroyed and consumed, normal language and contextual usage informs us that this is a permanent state of affairs).

To delve deeper into the justice of God and what it means in this context let us turn to the book of Amos.

Firstly, Amos as a prophet sent by God, was a man apparently unmoved by the shocking doom he was obliged to pronounce, but a man so loyal to the truth and against error that he saw the justice in the prophecies he was given.

Amos presents God as a God of justice. He spoke to a nation and people who, for the great part, thought their relationship with God was based on religious observance more than on ethical living. It was a time when the ethics of the Decalogue, the 10 Words had somehow lost their primacy.

⁷⁸ For more on this point see

<http://globaltruthinternational.com/2012/12/27/les-miserables-reconciling-gods-attribute-of-justice-with-mercy/>

Amos declares that as righteousness is a vital element in God's character, God will not only demand it in those who profess to be his followers, but also will enforce the demand. Amos declares that sacrifices and offerings in and of themselves are not enough. God demands ethical behaviour (see Amos 2:6–8, 3:10, 4:1, 5:7,10–15,24, 6:1–6,12, 8:4). It is a demand for justice, which, in its simplest and most natural form, includes honesty, integrity, purity, and moral compassion or mercy.

This is not legal justice as it demands the utmost consideration of the poor and weak. It is moral justice. Amos promises life and prosperity (Amos 5:4 *"For thus says the LORD to the house of Israel: Seek me and live"*) to those who meet this demand, while all disaster is due to the wrath of Yahweh against those who fall short of this requirement (Amos 3:6 *Is a trumpet blown in a city, and the people are not afraid? Does disaster come to a city, unless the LORD has done it?*).

The sentence of destruction, that Amos brought was not wholly unconditional. Amos pointed out a way of escape, a that was via repentance. This can be seen also in Isaiah 1:27-28 *"Zion shall be redeemed with justice, And they that return of her with righteousness. But the destruction of the transgressors and the sinners shall be together, And they that forsake the LORD shall be consumed."*

Redemption only comes after repentance. Repentance means to return to God. Only some, even only some of Israel choose to return.

This is a fact of the nature of mankind, both on a spiritual and physical level. We see the physical reality in the return from Babylonian exile, and from the worldwide exile in 1948. There were estimated to be around a million Jews living in the Babylonian empire, yet only 42,000 returned — only about 5% of those that went into exile 70 years earlier went back. The remaining 95% remained in Babylon. The same thing happened in 1948 when the state of Israel was declared. There were about 12 million Jews in the world at that time and only 600,000 or some 5% settled the land. The rest, around 95% preferred to stay in exile.

Note here that if God is to exercise his mercy along with his justice, then repentance is needed. That is, God does not do it all; God never forces or coerces anyone to return to him. He does though, always offer the choice why there is still breath in our bodies.

Does the Love of God overwhelm His justice?

We have been considering the justice of God and are investigating it to better appreciate it's place in the love of God. Part of the question asked by Universalism is 'does the love of God overwhelm his justice?'. This question is probably better phrased as 'does the mercy and grace of God overwhelm his justice?'

If we consider the definition of justice, we will see that part of this definition is the administration of punishment and reward. There is therefore a sense in which justice is the fair or equitable outcome of our actions. If good, then proper justice brings reward; if bad then justice brings punishment.

Immediately, you may respond with 'what about grace?'. Grace, or 'unmerited favour' can mean that we get reward even when we don't deserve it. For example, we read in scripture that *'... God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, the Messiah died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, (how) much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.'* (Romans 5:8-10)

Without entering the minefield of issues that Romans 5 can bring out, it may be seen here that God's grace offers a way, it offers reconciliation, but we still need to respond to it. This response is what the Apostle Paul is referring to when he states that 'we are saved by his (Yeshua's) life'.

As I have already indicated, wherever we find God's justice we tend to see his mercy at work as well. It is through the mercy of God that we are granted grace. Grace does not remove God's justice but as Amos and Isaiah (see 1:27-28 above) indicate, God's grace allows us to perform repentance (to return – teshuva).

It may be that there is some degree of dynamic tension between justice and mercy, at least as we view these attributes of God. We also experience the dilemma of these two seemingly contradictory approaches in our role as parents. Perhaps, it is of benefit if you are a parent, to consider times when you have struggled to execute justice after one of your children has been involved in some misdemeanour. You have instead been half-hearted with the justice and only wanted to show mercy or grace (with our own children, displaying mercy generally seems the easier path!). If you have experienced this challenge a few times you may also have discovered that first exercising justice before displaying grace or mercy, has always been of greater benefit to your child and especially to enhancing your relationship with them. It also has the added benefit of developing their character and fortitude.

Some may argue that God's grace is so great that his justice and righteousness must somehow be subservient to his grace. Let us consider two of the greatest acts of the grace of God that we know about.

1) The Exodus:

While the return from Egypt had been foretold by God to Abraham, it was also grace⁷⁹ that saved the Jewish people out of Egypt but then they agreed to live by the Ten Commandments, the 10 Words (See '*Passover and Freedom*' for more on this - <http://luke443.blogspot.com/2011/04/passover-and-freedom.html>).

2) Yeshua:

While most would be very familiar with the grace of God extended through Yeshua, it is vital also to recognize that having received this grace, Yeshua himself told us that to be fellow citizens of the Kingdom of God, that is, to be part of his family, his brothers and sisters then we must "... *do the will of my Father in heaven* ..." (Matthew 12:50). Or as John put it in Rev 14:12 "*Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and have the faith of Jesus.*" Again, we see the need for action on our part – God's grace must be accepted and acted upon.

Salvation – An Act of God Alone?

Many Universalists though seem to argue that salvation is totally an act of God; that there is nothing we could or can do that will change God's love and his desire to 'save' us. They argue therefore that 'free will' is an illusion⁸⁰; that nothing we do or don't do, will in anyway affect the love of God and his decision to redeem every single human being who ever lived.

Another component of the Universalists argument is that while some may die unrepentant, Universalism argues that in the next life (or lives), these unrepentant sinners will ultimately experience the full love of God and turn back to him and be saved.

⁷⁹ Exodus 33:6 *For how then will it be known that Your people and I have found grace in Your sight, except You go with us? So we shall be separate, Your people and I, from all the people who are upon the face of the earth."*

⁸⁰ The denial of 'free will' is a common implication of Social Darwinism and its societal effect has been disastrous.

In addressing this argument then, we need to consider both;

- 1) the involvement of a man in his own salvation, and
- 2) the reality of the next life or lives and whether the unrepentant will get another chance or even a lifetime of chances/choices.

In terms of man's involvement in his own salvation consider the story of Zaccheus. When Zaccheus and his household received salvation, was it because of the presence of Yeshua in his house, or was it because he repented?

Yeshua visited houses and people, many of whom did not repent. When Yeshua said Zaccheus and his household had received salvation, by inference there were others who did not. Have they since received salvation? Perhaps some, but there is no evidence at all, that all Jewish people let alone all mankind alive in the first century of the Common Era did receive salvation.

Thus God's grace in offering a way to be in eternal relationship with Him does not mean that all are forced to; many if not most reject God's grace - that is, they use their freewill NOT to repent, not to turn back from sin.

What about all those in Zaccheus' household? Did Yeshua mean that ALL of them were saved at that instance, when Zaccheus repented and displayed the fruits of his repentance?

I don't believe so - when the leader of the household repented so completely, his example would have ultimately led most of his household to follow suit. But again, not necessarily all. Yeshua's statement that 'salvation has come to this household' is clearly a generalisation and such a generalisation is a typical Hebraism (in the same sense that when one Pharisee accused another of 'destroying Torah' because he believed the Pharisee had some point of doctrine wrong. This typically very strong and exaggerated statement in an argument – still common in Yeshivas today – was given with the understanding that getting some even minor point of Torah wrong could impact the whole of Torah. Similarly, the Pharisee accused may reply as Yeshua did, 'No, I am fulfilling Torah'⁸¹).

The Hebraism of Hyperbole:

This all leads us quite naturally into the use of the word 'all', as in 'All Israel shall be saved' (Romans 11:26). Universalists are quick to seize upon the word 'all' here and amazingly expand it to not just include all of Israel, but all of the world's people, and not just all of those alive at the time this prophecy is fulfilled, but all people of all ages who ever walked upon the earth!

This is clearly an abuse of normal language idioms. For example, if I were to say that '*all of my Christmases had come at once*' you would appreciate that I was using hyperbole. If I was to say that '*all of New Zealand will be thrilled when the All Blacks win the World Cup this year*', you would appreciate, when given time to consider it, that this is exaggeration, no matter how Rugby mad New Zealand is. You would certainly not for a moment think that the Kiwis, who now rest in the grave would also be thrilled, as you know that the '*dead know nothing*' (Ecc 9:5).

⁸¹ There is clear evidence (see "Jesus" by Prof David Flusser) as to what a Pharisee or a man with a Pharisaic mindset, like Yeshua meant when he made this statement that he did not come to destroy 'Torah' but to fulfill it. Flusser explains that to 'fulfill the Torah' was to correctly interpret and enact it and to 'destroy the Torah' was to interpret it incorrectly. Thus it was apparently quite common for Pharisees in arguments with each other to shout 'You are destroying the Torah!' or 'I am fulfilling Torah!'

Two examples that I think illustrate this well are Gal 6:2 and Romans 13:10. Try reading these passages and replacing 'fulfill' with 'correctly interpret and enact' and hopefully you will see what I mean: Gal 6:2 *Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.* Romans 13:10 *Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.* This context is of course perfectly in harmony with God's pronouncement to Moses that he would send a Prophet who would perfectly declare the Torah (that is, who would 'fulfill' it).

But even more than this, it is clear that the Apostle Paul did not even mean every single member of the Commonwealth of Israel when he made this prophecy.

How do we know this?

Because he was quoting from the Tanakh. He quoted a number of passages including Isaiah 59:20-21 which states:

"Then a Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Ya'akov who turn from rebellion." So says ADONAI. "And as for me," says ADONAI, "this is my covenant with them: my Spirit, who rests on you, and my words which I put in your mouth will not depart from your mouth or from the mouth of your children, or from the mouth of your children's children, now or ever," says ADONAI.

Note here that 'those in Ya'akov (Jacob) who turn from rebellion' are the ones that are saved. Not every single soul. Just as in the return from Babylon and the 1948 return, not all, as in every single soul, returned. Similarly, not all will find redemption.

Why, we may ask, do even those, the Jewish people who have known the God of their Fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, refuse to return to him?

Consider the Babylonian exile for example. As Rabbi Spiro points out (paraphrasing):

"The destruction of the Temple and the exile to Babylon must have been a tremendous shock to the Jewish people. For a start they were living with the constant presence of God. His presence was always accessible at the Temple. Miracles occurred there daily and could be witnessed by anyone.

For example, whichever way the wind was blowing, the smoke of the sacrifices always went straight to heaven. Feeling spiritual today is nothing compared what it was like to feel spiritual in the Temple. With such intense spirituality it was clear that God was with the Jewish people.

The same thing could be said for the land. One miracle that the land exhibited was that every six years there was a bumper crop so that the Jews could take the seventh year -- the sabbatical year -- off from labor. It was amazing..."⁸²

And yet, despite this, after the 70 year exile only some 5% of the Jewish people decided to return to the Land of Israel!

Perhaps, some of our less impressive human traits explain this, such as our lethargy and inertia (especially as they were treated quite well for a time in Babylon). Perhaps, the hardship of the journey and re-establishing themselves again over-rode their desire to experience the presence of God again?

I suspect that fact that the King of the Universe hides himself to some degree is also a significant factor. Let me elaborate and begin with an analogy.

A young King saw a beautiful but poor peasant girl and was taken by her grace, her beauty and her joy. He desired to get to know her better and perhaps win her heart. He did not want to command her obedience or to intimidate her, but wanted her to love him for himself.

Yet if he faced her in all his finery and authority and with all his royal assembly and displayed the great breadth and majesty of his Kingdom, he would have little hope of getting to know her on level terms, of getting to develop a mutual and balanced relationship.

⁸² Rabbi Ken Spiro 'History Crash Course #23: Babylonian Exile' <http://www.aish.com/ij/h/cc/48938087.html>

He must therefore disguise himself. Not in any dishonest or devious manner, but simply to find a way to let her see the man behind the Kingdom, in the hope that she might connect with his true self, his values, his character and natural beauty.

This is perhaps an analogy for how God interacts with us. He hides himself to some degree, he sets a distance between himself and us. Without such disguise, such 'hiding', we would be overwhelmed, and our relationship with the Almighty could not develop with the simplicity and normalcy that successful courtship requires.

The Almighty has 'hidden' himself from us to such a degree that he calls on us to seek him and that only by seeking him with all our hearts, minds, strength and soul will we find him.

Consider Proverbs 2:1-5

*"1. My son, if you will receive my words, and store up my commandments within you;
2 So as to turn your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding;
3 Yes, if you call out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding;
4 If you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures:
5 then you will understand the fear of Yahweh, and find the knowledge of God."*

We can see here that the Almighty calls us to receive his words and by meditating of his words and commandments we will be obedient to them. We see here that we need to seek with great diligence as God's treasures are hidden.

Luke 11:9 *"And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you."*

Also Jeremiah 29:13 *"And you shall seek me, and find me, when you shall search for me with all your heart."*

This verse in itself is extremely powerful and I believe sums up the truth that, while God may be hidden⁸³, He can be found and we can enter into a relationship with the Creator and King of the Universe. Our King calls for our whole heart. So perhaps, in putting the onus on man to seek his King, the King of the Universe has accepted that not all will seek Him and not all will find Him.

If this is a true reflection of the path to God, then Universalism cannot possibly be part of God's plan.

One of the passages that speaks of the **restoration of all things** on the Day of the Lord is in Ephesians 1. But to show that this doesn't mean the salvation of all people from all time, Paul goes on to say in the same epistle: *"For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), **has no inheritance in the kingdom of the Messiah and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.**"* Eph 5:5-6.

The Apostle Paul is referring to the end of this age, and yet there are still 'sons of disobedience'.

⁸³ For more on this fascinating concept of 'The King who hides' see <http://luke443.blogspot.com.au/2011/04/king-who-hides.html>
<http://luke443.blogspot.com.au/2011/04/king-who-hides-some-followup.html>
<http://globaltruthinternational.com/2012/09/25/i-will-hide-that-i-will-hide/>
<http://globaltruthinternational.com/2012/09/27/cosmic-hide-and-seek/>
<http://globaltruthinternational.com/2012/11/03/god-is-your-shadow/>

A Universalist may argue that during the Millennial Kingdom, they will see the light and repent? Will the 'King who hides' reveal himself much more in the Coming Age? Perhaps, but again, where is the evidence that the presence of the King of the Universe or the physical presence again of his Son, the Messiah will significantly change the hearts and minds of the unrepentant?

Resurrection Issues:

The bigger problem with this way out, with the argument that the 'unsaved' will be overwhelmed by the love of God in the Coming or Millennial Age, is that most of them won't be there. Those who die unrepentant are not resurrected to face judgment until the end of the Millennial Age. The resurrection is to take place in two stages; a resurrection of the 'saved' before the millennium and a resurrection of the unsaved at its termination (Rev 20:4-5)⁸⁴.

Some argue that judgment is restorative, that is, that when we make mistakes, when we sin and are judged and disciplined as a result of those mistakes or sin, we often learn to change and therefore are 'restored' to righteous behaviour. There is no doubt that judgment can sometimes bring restoration, if it results in repentance. The problem for Universalism though is the false hope that with enough lives and enough 'judgments' eventually restoration for all will occur. This is a false hope because scripture teaches us that 'after death, then judgment'⁸⁵ and that those who die unrepentant will not be given a life in the Coming Age, but will be resurrected to face judgment after this time.

Yes, God has infinite love and infinite power but He still doesn't force us against our will. Consider 1 Thess 4:3: *'For this is the will of God: your sanctification, that you abstain from sexual immorality.'* Clearly, many of us have failed on this in our past, and many today practice sexual immorality. Is God's will therefore less than infinite and all powerful?

Of course not. Is His greatness somehow reduced by our impurity and failure? Again no. It is God himself who sets himself limits, such as the limit implied by his nature of truth. God cannot lie. Similarly, God cannot be unjust.

Remember the words of Ya'akov (James) *'Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.'* Works as a result of faith show that free-will needs to be exercised after salvation is gained. Free-will by definition implies that it is possible to reject God.

The 'restoration of all things' is coming, but that means a world where all will be in harmony with God, and this is not what Universalism argues for.

The Father, in loving us with perfect love, chooses to give us the choice, not to make that choice for us. Only we can repent, God will not make us repent. Even if he gave us a thousand lifetimes to live, he would still give us a seemingly 'attractive' alternative so that there is a real choice to be made. Some will always choose the fake, the instant gratification of worship of the creation over the true joy of worshipping and loving the Creator and living in proper relationship with Him.

The bigger problem is though, that nowhere does the Bible indicate we will get a thousand lifetimes. We only get one. Why else would Paul say to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. After the resurrection, then the judgment. Why even bother with judgment, if all are saved, if none are found guilty? A just God implies the necessity of a judgment. If the case is a forgone conclusion, then a 'trial' and judgment is superfluous.

⁸⁴ There are passages elsewhere that hint at such a partial resurrection (Luke 14:14, 20:35, 1 Thess 4:16, Phil 3:11, 1 Cor 15:23) or a resurrection in two stages (Daniel 12:2, John 5:29).

⁸⁵ Hebrews 9:27 *"And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment,"*

Is a judgment coming?

Read Revelation and tremble – when the time of Revelation has arrived, the die is cast, the photographic film has been hung up to dry, the judgment has arrived. It is too late to change your mind. Is the doctrine of Universalism of comfort now? Or is the delusion it imparts too horrible to contemplate?

Another common misunderstanding when reading the Bible with Hellenistic glasses and not understanding the Hebraic mindset, is to fail to understand the Jewish concept of salvation, especially when speaking nationally or corporately.

The Tanakh demonstrates that ‘salvation’ is first and foremost a national or corporate/tribal consideration and therefore not exclusively personal.

A couple of points that may help illustrate this are the ‘scapegoat’ which was sent into the wilderness to atone for the sins of all Israel⁸⁶. Also, the once yearly entrance of the High Priest into the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement/Covering) was also a corporate plea for mercy for all Israel. It is a day (actually the completion of the previous 10 ‘Days of Awe’) when Israel takes responsibility for its failures and essentially says to God; ‘God it’s not your fault’. Yom Kippur is a corporate day of reconciliation. All in Israel who have spent the previous 10 days repenting, making restitution, cleaning their houses, etc., can now be assured that all their past sins are covered. They can enter the ‘New Year’ secure in their relationship with the Almighty⁸⁷.

Both these examples show the corporate nature of Israel’s relationship with God and hence the understanding that when some of Israel is restored to God and returned to the Land, all of Israel is restored.

The Apostle Paul shares this understanding in Romans 9-11.

Thus, to speak of salvation was to speak of the restoration of national Israel. This then meant their rescue from national enemies; the restoration of peace amongst the tribes; the inauguration of the Coming Age or Kingdom of God; freedom from foreign occupation; the restoration of the Temple; the return to the Land of Israel, etc.

There were many prophecies to this end such as Ezekiel’s during the Babylonian exile. Two of Ezekiel’s ‘restoration’ prophecies are:

Ezek 36:8-12

“But you, O mountains of Israel, shall shoot forth your branches and yield your fruit to my people Israel, for they will soon come home. For behold, I am for you, and I will turn to you, and you shall be tilled and sown. And I will multiply people on you, the whole house of Israel, all of it. The cities shall be inhabited and the waste places rebuilt. And I will multiply on you man and beast, and they shall multiply and be fruitful. And I will cause you to be inhabited as in your former times, and will do more

⁸⁶ Lev 16: 21-22 And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness. The goat shall bear all their iniquities on itself to a remote area, and he shall let the goat go free in the wilderness.

Lev 16:17 No one may be in the tent of meeting from the time he enters to make atonement in the Holy Place until he comes out and has made atonement for himself and for his house **and for all the assembly of Israel.**

⁸⁷ See my article on ‘The Day of Trumpets & the Return of the King’ for more details on this.

good to you than ever before. Then you will know that I am the LORD. I will let people walk on you, even my people Israel. And they shall possess you, and you shall be their inheritance, and you shall no longer bereave them of children.

Ezek 39:25-29

"Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Now I will restore the fortunes of Jacob and have mercy on the whole house of Israel, and I will be jealous for my holy name. They shall forget their shame and all the treachery they have practiced against me, when they dwell securely in their land with none to make them afraid, when I have brought them back from the peoples and gathered them from their enemies' lands, and through them have vindicated my holiness in the sight of many nations. Then they shall know that I am the LORD their God, because I sent them into exile among the nations and then assembled them into their own land. I will leave none of them remaining among the nations anymore. And I will not hide my face anymore from them, when I pour out my Spirit upon the house of Israel, declares the Lord GOD.

While these prophecies were fulfilled in part at least, in the initial return from Babylon and in the 1948 return, as I have already indicated, only some 5% returned. To the Hebraic understanding though, if some of the 'family', the tribe or nation are restored or 'saved' then all are. Because of the much less individualistic understanding of salvation and their relationship to God, they view any move of God that impacts them corporately, as impacting them all. They understood that they live on in their children, and their family. So when we read 'all Israel will be saved' or all will be restored, it means that even if only a few of Israel are 'saved' or 'restored', then this statement is true⁸⁸.

And so hopefully, it may now be clear that where any passages in Scripture appear to a Western or Hellenistic perspective to be referring to the salvation of all people, of each and every single human being, then this is not at all the case.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, I hope I have shown that when Scripture is understood within the proper context and appropriate Hebraic mindset, Universalism is simply and emphatically not an option. Rather than potentially being the best news ever for all mankind, Universalism effectively argues that all eternal decisions have been taken out of human hands and given to God, because his love overpowers and overwhelms any free choice that man or woman may make. The implication of this essentially Calvinistic doctrine, is that man is free from considering that his actions have eternal consequences and therefore man is free to follow his lusts, his 'yetzer hara'⁸⁹ and therefore to reject the greatest commandment of all, the Shema of Israel.

The consequences of accepting this doctrine and its implications could have a most disastrous effect on an otherwise righteous truth seeker.

Pastor Rob Bell & 'Love Wins':

Rather than do a review of Rob Bell's arguments or his book 'Love Wins', I think some good reviews have already been written.

⁸⁸ This is not in conflict with the Apostle Paul's statement that 'For they are not all Israel, that are of Israel.' (Romans 9:6). There are always some in the 'family' that refuse to repent and seek the Almighty. The family is saved, even when some of them refuse salvation. Thus while some Israelites may be born 'children of Abraham', they can still turn their back on their heritage and their one true God and Father.

⁸⁹ Judaism teaches that man has two inclinations, one toward negativity (*yetzer haRa – the evil inclination*) and one toward positivity (*yetzer haTov – the good inclination*). That is, that we have a good heart that desires to do good and a 'fleshy' heart that easily succumbs to the lusts of the flesh. Part of the proof for this is in the Shema, in the verse, "Love God with all your *hearts*" (Deut. 6:5). The word "hearts" here is in the plural in Hebrew. This means that we must serve God not only with our 'yetzer haTov', but even with our 'yetzer haRa'. The Apostle Paul discusses this so powerfully in Romans 7.

So please see below some links to a few reviews which will give you a fair idea of his arguments and some of the difficulties with them (I have not read every word of these reviews and blogs and clearly don't agree with everything they say, but I found these reviews helpful in gaining a deeper insight of Universalism).

1. *'God Is Still Holy and What You Learned in Sunday School Is Still True: A Review of "Love Wins"'* - by Kevin DeYoung @ <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevindeyoung/2011/03/14/rob-bell-love-wins-review/>
2. *'Love has already won'* Dr. Michael Youssef @ <http://www.onenewsnow.com/Perspectives/Default.aspx?id=1318164>
3. *'Exploring Love Wins'* by Scot McKnight @ <http://www.patheos.com/community/jesuscreed/2011/04/13/exploring-love-wins-6/#more-15702>
4. *'Final thoughts on Rob Bell's Love Wins'* by Ben Irwin @ <http://benirwin.wordpress.com/2011/04/05/final-thoughts-on%C2%A0rob-bells-love%C2%A0wins-1/>

Study 3: Preterism

I believe that most of these 'introduced' doctrines can be traced back to a failure to recognize some Hebraism that is embodied in the words spoken by Yeshua and/or his disciples. In the case of this Christian doctrine of [Preterism](#), the Hebraism of 'hyperbole' (as so clearly misunderstood with the development of Universalism), and the Hebraic appreciation of the primacy of the Tanakh both appear to be seriously neglected. It even appears that Preterists fail to recognize that when Yeshua spoke the words 'it is written', he was referring to, and endorsing the Tanakh, not the, as yet non-existent, New Testament.

Preterism: Not Even On Judaism's Radar

It may be a doctrine in some sense birthed out of Judaism, but the 'parent' doesn't even seem aware that it has this 'child'⁹⁰.

Christians most commonly come to the study of the Almighty and His Scriptures from a very narrow and closed perspective. Sadly, they very rarely recognize how narrow and restricted this perspective is.

Some discover, as their knowledge of the Almighty and His ways matures a little, that the Bible (whether we mean the Tanakh - the Old Testament, or the so-called New Testament, or both), needs to be read and studied from a Hebraic perspective to have any real hope of properly appreciating the truths revealed therein.

But it is actually much worse than this.

Christians, through the very nature and central doctrines of the 'Christian' vision of the Creator and His creation, unfortunately are seriously hamstrung by this very restricted worldview, even as they begin to appreciate some of the realities that a Hebraic perspective reveals to them (such as the importance of the Hebraic principle of agency⁹¹ when considering the very nature of the God of Israel).

Such a restricted and blinkered view of the Creator and His creation leads many Christians, and principally Christian students of the Bible to amazingly far-fetched and fanciful doctrines such as Preterism (also given the title '*fulfilled eschatology*'). For the definition of this term, please see [Appendix 1](#).

Before I demonstrate how far-fetched; how contrived and fanciful this worldview is, I think it very wise to pause for a moment and instead reflect on how Jewish scholars within the traditional fold of

⁹⁰ For those reading this chapter who have engaged in much study of the writings of Preterists, you will not find a lot of detailed engagement with their detailed interpretations of such issues as the 'time-related' prophecies. This is because I am arguing here that if the 'core' is rotten, the whole apple is as well; if the 'foundations' are weak and seriously flawed, then you are unlikely to find much truth in the 'building' and conclusions. This chapter attempts to properly engage with the foundational pre-suppositions of Preterism.

⁹¹ In Hebrew thought, the "first cause" is not always distinguished from "intermediate" or "secondary" causes. The principal is not always clearly distinguished from the agent, the one commissioned to carry out an act on behalf of another. Sometimes the agent, standing for the principal, is treated as if he or she were the principal himself, though this is not literally so. Principal and agent remain two distinct entities or persons but they act in complete harmony. The agent acts and speaks for his/her principal.

While you may not at first be aware of it, this principal is frequently seen in Scripture and especially in the NT. For example, Matthew speaks of a conversation between a centurion and Yeshua (Matt. 8:5-13), yet Luke tells us that the centurion did not in fact literally meet with Yeshua. He instead had sent some Jewish elders and then some other friends to Yeshua with his requests (Luke 7:1-10).

Rabbinic Judaism (who can trace their historical and theological lineage back over 3,800 years to Father Abraham) approach the Bible and it's central messages and doctrines.

To do this I will quote a little from Rabbi Yisroel Blumenthal.

Rabbi Blumenthal has some harsh words to say about Christianity. He however freely acknowledges that there are many great, sincere and loving people within Christendom. Blumenthal though, by approaching Christianity from the theological foundations that Christianity came forth from, is able to demonstrate very emphatically some fundamental errors in Christianity's central doctrines.

He also gives a very simple and yet powerful 4-Step approach to analyzing the central claims of Christian and Jewish doctrines.

The 4-Step Approach:

In an article 'Contra-Brown'⁹², Rabbi Blumenthal explains his 4-Step approach:

"Scripture is a lengthy and complex document. The message of scripture cannot be found in the reading of specific isolated passages. Rather, the true message of scripture emerges from an understanding of the totality of scripture. When any given doctrine is presented as a scriptural teaching, there are four basic criteria that should be applied to determine if the doctrine is truly scriptural.

- 1) We must ask ourselves if the doctrine in question is **fully supported** by scripture. Does scripture support all of the main points of the doctrine? Or are there significant gaps which the proponents of the doctrine must fill in? Does scripture provide **comprehensive support** for the doctrine in question?*
- 2) Another quality we must look for in our examination of the given doctrine is **clarity**. Is the scriptural support claimed for the doctrine **clear and unambiguous**? Or are there other possible interpretations of the passages marshaled on behalf of the doctrine in question.*
- 3) A third criteria by which we should judge a specific doctrine is the **directness** of the scriptural support. Are the passages quoted to sustain the theory addressing the issue in a **direct and straightforward** manner? Or is the scripture discussing another issue altogether.*
- 4) Finally we must ask if the scriptural support for the doctrine is **consistent**. After evaluating the doctrine for comprehensiveness, for clarity and for the direct nature of the support – we must then ask if scripture ever provides a conflicting teaching that is as comprehensive, clear and direct as are the passages cited in support of the doctrine in question.*

When we apply these criteria ... the scriptural support for (many of) the doctrines of Christianity is fragmentary, vague, indirect and inconsistent."

Rabbi Blumenthal is arguing here that some doctrines of Christianity are:

- 1) *fragmentary*, that is they do not have full and comprehensive support;
- 2) *vague*, that is they are not clear and unambiguous;
- 3) *indirect*; that is the passages used to support these doctrines are not direct and straightforward; and
- 4) *inconsistent*; that is these doctrines are based on and present conflicting and inconsistent evidence and implications.

⁹² <http://jewsforjudaism.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/Contra-Brown.pdf>

I will now try to use this approach to again⁹³ address the Christian doctrine of Preterism.

If this doctrine is as central and significant as Preterists would have us believe, we should expect to observe that it has comprehensive support from Scripture. That is, that it is a clear theme of Scripture from Genesis onward and not just a revelation from the New Testament.

If it were a clear and significant doctrine in the Hebrew Bible, the Tanakh, or even an implied concept, we could easily point to passages that directly and unambiguously speak to this doctrine. If this were the case, we would also expect it to be a doctrine addressed by mainstream Jewish and Judaic thought.

Instead though, there is not a single direct mention of this doctrine on any leading Jewish theological sites. It is not addressed at all on the very comprehensive site **aish.com** or at **chabad.org** for example⁹⁴. In fact, having searched through a significant number of the top Jewish sites, I can find no direct reference to this doctrine at all. Surely, if it were even hinted at in the Tanakh, some Jewish scholars would have written a book or two, or at least an article on it. The silence is deafening.

These sites address many Christian doctrines, and not only those which are common to both Christianity and Judaism. Perhaps, the failure to address Preterism is because they can not see even a shred of support for this doctrine anywhere in either their Scriptures or other ancient Jewish writings and historical evidence?

This is perhaps even more damning an indictment of the non-scriptural nature of this doctrine, when we consider that Preterism argues for the validity of a number of originally Jewish, rather than Christian doctrines.

Rabbinic Judaism (and the 'proto-Judaism' of the first century of the Common Era) has always acknowledged that the world will eventually experience a day of great judgment (the ultimate Yom Kippur or Day of Atonement⁹⁵), after which there will be a Coming Age; a 'World to Come'; a true Kingdom of God⁹⁶ when the righteous will be resurrected to life eternal and true peace, the Shalom (peace) of the Almighty will be established over the entire world.

They have always understood the Tanakh to teach that this Kingdom of God will be ruled by a very special man, a descendent of King David.

Preterism, in arguing that all the 'end-times' prophecies that relate to these events were actually fulfilled in the terrible tragedy of the fall of Jerusalem⁹⁷ in 70 CE, argues that the resurrection of the righteous occurred at this time and that the Kingdom of God has been established from this time and that this very special man, (Jesus) has ruled the earth from this time.

⁹³ See an earlier short article on Preterism I wrote some years ago - <http://www.charismacomputers.com.au/Christian%20site/Preterism.pdf>

⁹⁴ Other leading Jewish sites that have I have found no mention of Preterism on are www.Simpletoremember.com, <http://www.outreachjudaism.org/> & <http://www.beingjewish.com/>

⁹⁵ For more on this most significant day listen to this Podcast - http://aubreyandpaul.podomatic.com/entry/2012-09-22T19_55_36-07_00

⁹⁶ For more on the Coming Age read 'Resurrected to Life' - <http://www.charismacomputers.com.au/Christian%20site/Heaven%20Booklet%20April%202007.pdf> or listen to the Podcast - <http://www.charismacomputers.com.au/OneGod/Conference08/paul1%20the%20KoG.WMA>

⁹⁷ I believe that it is an insult to the memory of this great massacre of the Jewish people to suggest that this tragedy was actually the greatest event in the history of mankind (which is the implication if Preterism were true). The Jewish people acknowledge that the fall of Jerusalem was in part a punishment from the Almighty because of the great failure to live by Torah (see Lev 19:18). The Talmud states: "Why was the Second Temple destroyed? Because of 'sinat chinam', senseless hatred of one Jew for another." To suggest that the Almighty would use such an event to also bestow the greatest blessing He offers mankind is ambiguous, and contradictory and suggests He is capricious to the extreme!

Surely, if these events had occurred, events that Judaism has looked and prayed for, for so long, not only the Jewish scholars, but all Jews and in fact all men and women over the entire face of the planet would know about it.

The reality; the absolute, unquestionable and undeniable reality is that the righteous have not been resurrected. Not in 70 CE, not in any following year up to this point in time in 2013!

For example, Abraham, Moses and King David do not walk amongst us. There is no true peace in this world; a world that murders 50+ million of it's most innocent every year. There is no theocratic government led by a Jewish 'Anointed One' (Messiah). When the Messianic rule arrives, when the world is ruled from Jerusalem and true shalom is undeniably present there will be no doubt in anyone's mind. It is abundantly clear that, at this point in history and in no age or time since 70 CE has there been a theocratic rule over the entire world.

So when we consider Preterism in light of the 4-step approach that Rabbi Blumenthal advocates, we find that it is fragmentary, far from clear and unambiguous; indirect to the extreme in it's lack of scriptural evidence; not at all straightforward; and most inconsistent in it's implications.

In reality, Preterism is not even on the radar of most well-informed and perceptive people with an evidence-based and reasonably accurate world-view⁹⁸.

So you might well ask, how can otherwise intelligent, sincere and studious people come to believe and advocate such an erroneous doctrine?

A Preterist Presents His Case:

I would argue that it is just another classic example of how limited and restricted the standard Christian worldview is. As I intimated in the introduction to this article, a failure to approach the New Testament from a Hebraic and historically contextual vantage point leads to many very false conclusions.

But even more, a failure to begin with the foundational truths that the Tanakh emphatically teaches, before then seeking to understand what additional revelation the NT may provide is even more calamitous⁹⁹. This is quite clearly the approach that Preterists employ.

To demonstrate how far out the worldview and perspective of Preterists generally is I would like to briefly critique a little of a Preterist's attempt to persuade orthodox Jews of the possible merit of this doctrine. Following is an excerpt from a blog post on a Preterist website by a 'Marcus Booker'.

This is a copy of a comment he apparently posted on a Jewish site (my brief comments are in brackets):

"As for what I believe concerning Jesus, I will tell you. Whether you believe the apostles or not, this message is what they proclaim. Jesus systematically shows how he supersedes the law."

(Immediately, he has lost his readers – to even suggest that it is possible that a man, a human being

⁹⁸ I would argue that any world-view that is not birthed from, and largely based on, the Tanakh must be seriously flawed. Both the revelation of nature and the revelation of mankind point directly to the God of Israel as the Creator of this Universe and the true Father of humanity. Any attempt to create a world-view based on an interpretation of the New Testament as the central foundation, rather than the Tanakh, must by its very nature be a 'castle in the air', an unsupported imagining.

⁹⁹ For some more thinking on this issue and an alternative approach see my article 'Living the Dream: Final Thoughts and New Beginnings' @ <http://luke443.blogspot.com.au/2011/02/living-dream-final-thoughts-and-new.html>

could 'supersede' the Law (Torah) is totally beyond the pale).

He is the covenant incarnate, the word made flesh (Booker is here promoting the doctrine of the Trinity – again, his orthodox Jewish readers would award him little credibility for this understanding of the nature of the Almighty that Judaism totally rejects).

The law, in all of its particulars, is fulfilled in him. (The argument that Yeshua 'fulfilled the law' in the sense promoted here is not an accurate interpretation of the NT passages that address this issue¹⁰⁰).

He is the circumcision, the temple, the holy days, etc.

He is the nation itself and its restoration (This is clearly an over-extended metaphor which is used by many anti-Zionist Christians - as most Preterists must surely be – again, such a statement would find little sympathy, even amongst many Christians). *He is its Messiah.*

Jesus appealed to an original righteousness off of which the law was patterned. The law, then, was a copy and shadow of something better (a pattern given to Moses), which he was about to reveal fully. (Here we see some serious misunderstanding of the writings of the Apostle Paul, including the well-known and very often misinterpreted Colossians 2:16¹⁰¹).

For those who disobey, G-d does not heed their prayers, He hates their new moons and sabbaths, and their fragrant incense is a stench. In the days of the prophets, many in Israel pretended to obey G-d through their adherence to these shadows; their deeds were done to be seen by men. In truth, however, these things and rules which state "Do not handle; do not touch" have no value at restraining fleshly indulgence. (The serious failure to understand what it is about the observance of 'new moons and sabbaths' - observances that God Himself instituted - that He does not condone is compounded here by applying the Apostle Paul's reference to pagan practices – 'do not handle, do not touch ...' as if this were a reference to Jewish and Biblical practices¹⁰².)

The Pharisees in the first century also took comfort in their idols, which they served and of which they boasted. As the apostles document, these men (like Cain) harshly persecuted the assembly (their brother Abel), killing many as had their fathers who killed the prophets. Vindication and victory would come with much longsuffering. G-d would bring great tribulation and judgment upon their persecutors who had blasphemed true righteousness.

(His poor historical understanding is also evident here when he falsely accuses the Pharisees of the Second Temple Period and first century CE – while Judaism acknowledges that there was far too much 'senseless hatred of one Jew for another', the Pharisees were not generally involved in this hatred, persecution and killing. In Yeshua's day, a great many Pharisees were moved to follow Yeshua¹⁰³).

Thus would end the law, which became an idol and brought death because its children had made void the covenant. (The Torah is everlasting and the Mosaic covenant is everlasting. Nowhere does the Tanakh, nor the NT argue that the Torah will ever be 'ended' or removed and done away with!)

¹⁰⁰ The late Prof. David Flusser explains in his seminal book 'Jesus' that to 'fulfil the Torah' was to correctly interpret and enact it and to 'destroy the Torah' was to interpret it incorrectly. It was apparently quite common for Pharisees in arguments with each other to shout 'You are destroying the Torah!' or 'I am fulfilling Torah!'

Two examples that I think illustrate this well are Gal 6:2 and Romans 13:10. Try reading these passages and replacing 'fulfil' with 'correctly interpret and enact' and hopefully you will see what I mean:

Gal 6:2 *"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the Torah of Messiah."*

Romans 13:10 *"Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of Torah."*

This context is of course perfectly in harmony with God's pronouncement to Moses that he would send a Prophet who would perfectly declare the Torah (that is, who would 'fulfil' it).

¹⁰¹ See my article 'Colossians 2:16 and the Sabbath' for more on this - in particular, the misapplication of the 'shadow' reference - <http://www.charismacomputers.com.au/Col%202%20and%20the%20Sabbath.pdf>

¹⁰² I give more detail on this as well in my Col 2:16 article.

¹⁰³ For a little more on this see 'The Times of Yeshua' - <http://www.charismacomputers.com.au/The%20Times%20of%20Yeshua.pdf>

G-d would cast out Hagar and her son so that the son of the free woman would receive the inheritance (as per Paul's teaching in writing the Galatians). (I address this serious misunderstanding of the Hagar/Sarah allegory in Galatians in a number of articles, as well as in my book, 'Defending the Apostle Paul: Weighing the Evidence'¹⁰⁴)

Anyway, following the apostles' midrash is the key to understanding their message. What they meant by a "new covenant" was not identical to what Jeremiah meant. They spoke not of physical restoration in the land but of a heavenly gathering of the elect into a "better fatherland." (While the writer may actually have displayed some understanding in describing the Apostle's writings as 'midrash', to suggest that the Tanakh and the Jewish people of the that era did not understand that prophetic 'restoration' to be a physical restoration, and return from the Diaspora to the Land of Israel, just again demonstrates his serious lack of a proper and adequate understanding. The re-establishment of the State of Israel in this current age is also proof of his serious error¹⁰⁵).

This was the everlasting life of which they spoke, not Psalm 133's "life age-lasting" which was in the [physical] land. It is in this context that the apostles speak of a resurrection of the just and unjust that was about to occur. They speak like Ezekiel in the valley of dry bones. (His blindness and very restricted worldview means that his eyes have been closed to the fulfillment of this prophecy over the last 65+ years! The resurrection and restoration is both spiritual and physical).

Resurrection equals the recovery of the "hope of Israel," which had perished. It is life again into the land. Yet the apostles speak of the spiritual sphere." - Marcus Booker - <http://planetpreterist.com/content/preterism-meets-judaism>

As you may now recognize, I believe that Preterism is a fantasy born out of a very flawed 'Christian' worldview. A worldview that has developed from a Hellenistic and anti-Zionist mindset, that has failed very seriously to recognize what and where the true foundations lie.

In this article I have tried to give a little of an overview to the faulty presumptions and false foundations that underpin Preterism.

For a little more on the specifics, please see the appendices to this chapter.

Conclusion:

So in conclusion, I hope you can now appreciate why Preterism is not viewed by Judaism with any seriousness at all, and even if acknowledged at all, the 'parent' see's this doctrine of its 'child', as a 'childhood fantasy' and nothing more.

It has also been pointed out to me that Preterism is a belief system that removes much hope. While living in the moment (that is, not burying your head in the sand and ignoring the lives and stresses that surround you) and living righteously before the Almighty in this current age is vital, whenever the burden, or the pain seems almost too much to bear, the hope (*'the certain expectation'*) of a Coming Age when we will be healed and whole, can give great encouragement and the strength to persevere.

¹⁰⁴ The book is available from Amazon – see <http://www.amazon.com/Defending-The-Apostle-Paul-ebook/dp/B009TLLK0U/> or see the article 'Works of the Law' at <http://www.charismacomputers.com.au/Works%20of%20the%20Law.pdf>

¹⁰⁵ 'Israel: Return in Belief or Unbelief' - <http://www.charismacomputers.com.au/Christian%20site/Israels%20Return%20in%20belief%20or%20unbelief.pdf> and 'Isaiah 49: A commentary' - <http://www.charismacomputers.com.au/Isaiah%2049%20-%20a%20commentary.pdf>

To contrast this with Preterism, consider the following lists of characteristics/situations that we will see in the New Universe, and note which, if any of these are currently present.

These lists are from a presentation I gave in 2008 to the National Conference of Christian Restoration Fellowship (Aust.)¹⁰⁶:

7 characteristics of the New Creation – the new heavens & earth:

- *Radically different creation laws and constants, (Romans 8:20-23)*
- *No evil, no death, no decay; (2 Peter 3:10-14)*
- *No regrets, no grief, no pain; (Rev 21:4; Isa 25)*
- *No darkness, no shadows, possibly no sun and no stars, and yet light everywhere; (Isa 60:18-23)*
- *Possibly a different dimensionality i.e the ability to move in more than the current 4 dimensions; (equal to angels), (Luke 20:36)*
- *Unimaginable splendor, joy, beauty, peace, and love; (1 Cor 2: 9-10; Luke 6 23)*
- *Wholly meaningful and satisfying work. (Rev 22:3; John 5:17)*

7 things that we will be, as we will be in the likeness of Yeshua:

- *Immortal beings of glory; (Matt 13:43; Dan 12:3)*
- *Completely & fully alive and capable – no handicaps; no depression; no sin around us so no need for sorrows or grief; no longer will we see innocent blood being shed and feeling impotent and unable to adequately respond;*
- *Able to enjoy eating without needing to for sustenance;*
- *Able to travel in some extra-dimensional manner that allows us to be transported from one location to another instantly and even move through locked doors or walls;*
- *Able to communicate with our ‘ministering spirits’; the ‘messengers of God’ (angels); (Luke 20:36)*
- *Inexhaustible creativity – without tiring; without exhaustion; without aging and loss of faculties;*
- *Identified by a new name; something that most likely will fully identify our uniqueness and our value before our heavenly Father;*

7 things that we will experience in the Kingdom of God & New Universe:

- *Fellowship with God & see God in His fullness; see God face to face! (Rev 22:4)*
- *Touch and communicate face-to-face with our Messiah;*
- *A place of no regrets, no grief, no pain; (Rev. 21:3-4)*
- *Reunion with long dead, departed loved ones;*
- *Meet & converse with the hero’s of the faith, from Abraham to the Apostle Paul; (Luke 20:37-38)*
- *Rewards – for over-comers; for profitable servants; (Luke 6:23; 1 Cor 3:12-15; Rev 2:23)*
- *Power, possessions and pleasures! (Matt 6:19-21; Matt 19:27-30)*

7 things that we will do in the Kingdom of God & New Universe:

¹⁰⁶ Text: <http://www.charismacomputers.com.au/OneGod/Conference08/KoG%20National%20Conference%202008%20paper%201.pdf> and audio: <http://www.charismacomputers.com.au/OneGod/Conference08/paul1%20the%20KoG.WMA>

- *Glorify and worship our God and our Messiah and have fellowship with them;*
- *Have authority over the new creation; (Luke 19:17; Acts 5:13)*
- *Eat and have many banquets – for pleasure and relationships; (Isaiah 49)*
- *Create – cook, compose, write, paint, carve, build;*
- *Play music, games, sport; and laugh – joy, fun, excitement!*
- *Travel and experience new wonders of our infinitely awesome God;*
- *Continually learn more about our God, who can never be exhausted!*

How many of these points are available to the righteous today? Are any of these points fully available to those supposedly 'spiritually resurrected' from 70 CE (according to Preterism)? Does the current age offer such hope?

Appendix 1: Definitions:

Hellenism:

While Hellenism essentially means Greek culture and philosophical approach, it means much more as well, because it stands in sharp contrast to the Hebraic mindset and approach.

In terms of Hellenism's impact on Judaism and Christianity, the seeds were sown with the arrival of Alexander the Great in Israel around 332 BCE. From this moment Hellenism began to impact and significantly influence many of the Jewish people, not only in the Diaspora but also in the Land of Israel.

By the time of Yeshua, the 'Hellenists' (Jewish people who followed Greek customs) were common. In fact, this section of the Jewish community is mentioned in Acts (see both Chapters 2 & 6) where we find that the Apostle Stephen is put in charge of caring for those Hellenists who had accepted the Messiahship of Yeshua and joined the community of believers.

The evidence is strong that the cultural background of this Hellenists meant that they have a much lower affinity and loyalty to the Land of Israel in any Biblical sense. For them, any argument that they need not be fully compliant with the Temple customs and other rites of the religion of Israel, was likely to have a more sympathetic hearing.

Hellenism also over time introduced the allegorical approach (made famous by Augustine) to the study and interpretation of Scripture.

Hellenism had Pythagorean and Platonic philosophies at its core, but it also embraced some Egyptian and Persian cults which included the practice of asceticism. Asceticism is not a Biblical, Torah based approach, even though the Essenes practiced it to some degree.

Hellenism rejected and replaced many of the Torah practices of Israel and so with the overthrow of the Hellenistic tyrant, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, and the miracle of the Temple oil, the festival of Hanukkah become and remains, a symbol of the rejection of Hellenism. Yeshua celebrated this festival (John 10:22-23).

The core message and truth of the Bible is a Hebraic truth NOT a Greek/Hellenistic approach to living.

Preterism:

While Wikipedia is not exactly a scholarly source, having looked at a few of the main Preterist websites, I don't see any major disagreement between their definitions and wikipedias:

"Preterism is a Christian eschatological view that interprets prophecies of the Bible as events which have already happened. Daniel is interpreted as events that happened in the second century BC while Revelation is interpreted as events that happened in the first century AD.

Preterism holds that Ancient Israel finds its continuation or fulfillment in the Christian church at the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70...

Partial Preterism:

Partial preterism holds that most eschatological prophecies, such as the destruction of Jerusalem, the Antichrists, the Great Tribulation, and the advent of the Day of the Lord as a "judgment-coming" of Christ, were fulfilled either in AD 70 or

during the persecution of Christians under the Emperor Nero. The Second coming and the resurrection of the dead, however, have not yet occurred in the partial preterist system....

Full Preterism:

Full preterism differs from partial preterism in that full preterists believe that all eschatology or "end times" events were fulfilled with the destruction of Jerusalem, including the resurrection of the dead and Jesus' Second Coming, or Parousia, and the Final Judgment. ..." - <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Preterism>

Appendix 2:

A brief reply to 'What Is The Preterist View' by Edward E Stevens (President of the International Preterists Association at the time I first wrote this article in August 2008)

My first reaction to both Preterist and Amillenialist views is that if our Messiah Yeshua (Jesus) has returned and inaugurated the Kingdom of God; then he is making an absolute mess of things!

Two very obvious examples are the total lack of unity within the church (the 'Bride of Messiah'), evidenced by over 38,000 denominations; and the on-going holocaust of abortion.

Abortion must surely be the greatest violence that mankind has seen since the days of Noah. With over 60-70 million surgical abortions p.a. and many millions more chemical abortions; the murder of the most innocent of all human beings has reached a level that far exceeds any of the wars or great massacres instigated by evil men such as Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot, Mao Tse Tung, etc.

Also Preterism is a doctrine that twists that whole purpose of God as expressed in Dan 7:18; and Rev 11:15 and which was the mission of our Messiah (Luke 4:43; Mark 1:38 & 1 John 3:8). This is so well summed up by Anthony Buzzard:

"Such a view abandons the Gospel of the Kingdom, which promises the world a universal era of prosperity and peace when the Messiah comes back. The destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 and the scattering of Jews outside their homeland did not signal the arrival of the Kingdom of God (Luke 21:31). The Kingdom, when it comes, will produce peace in Israel and the restoration of Israel as the headquarters of the Messianic Kingdom (Luke 1:32-35; Acts 1:6; 3:21, etc.). To imagine that the coming of Jesus happened in AD 70 is to misunderstand the Kingdom of God and thus the Christian Gospel of the Kingdom (Matt. 4:23; 9:35; 24:14).

In this article, Stevens starts by highlighting the errors of the last 150 years in 'Last Days' predictions. Here, I believe he is most correct in indicating the great many false predictions that Christians have made regarding the return of the Messiah. If the futurist or other approaches have any merit, any predictions that have anticipated the physical return of Yeshua before today have been shown to be in error. This does not negate the potential for the futurist or historicist approaches for example, to be successful in the future though.

He uses this failure as a basis to argue that alternative views or approaches should therefore be considered. This is certainly reasonable. He also states that 'most Futurists do not really believe that Christ has been successful yet in fully establishing his Kingdom' and that Preterists believe '... the Bible prophecy has been fulfilled in Christ and the on-going expansion of His church'.

The corollary to the statement on the lack of success is to imply that Yeshua has successfully established the Kingdom of God (and in the view of Preterism has done so since 70 CE). It seems to me that only the blind or totally isolated could believe such a claim. This world continues to be full of evil and of disobedience to God. This world is not reducing crime or suffering or poverty or disease despite the incredible progress of science which has enabled the potential to almost totally eradicate poverty and disease. The church may be expanding in some areas but statistics show that on a world wide basis the church is more fragmented than ever and is actually losing significant ground to atheism and Islam in particular. Whole nations are inexorably moving to embrace Islam; nations that were founded on Judeo-Christian principles and people; nations such as England. At the same time what is left of the church is a huge divergent of doctrinal positions and practices with over 38 - 40,000 denominations.

Stevens then goes on to state his case regarding the scriptures that appear to argue for a great imminence (about to happen) in the prophecies relating to the return of Yeshua; an imminence that he argues is only satisfied by a return in 70 CE.

While it is true that many prophecies do appear to speak of a 'soon coming' fulfilment and even Yeshua's first words in

public ministry as recorded by Mark suggest an imminence. *"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."* Mark 1:15 (NKJV)

I believe an in-depth study of the Hebraic nature of this way of speaking about prophetic events reveals a very different understanding. A short study by Harley Pinon follows as well.

Stevens argues that *"Christ has conquered all His enemies and has given us the Kingdom"*. I agree that there is a sense in which this is true. In the same way that any pronouncement of God is fulfilled in the moment of its utterance because it can no more be prevented from occurring than that the universe can be frozen in time. The fiat of God in declaring the creation of this universe were true at their utterance but took many billions of years to be outworked. The plan of God at the very foundation of this world was that the Messiah would be slain and poured out as a libation on the Holy Hill (And bow before it shall all who are dwelling upon the land, whose names have not been written in the scroll of the life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world; Rev 13:8 - YLT).

This plan took many many years to be enacted, yet it was as certain as the creation. Thus, our Messiah, in living the life that he did; in demonstrating the faith of Abraham and in accepting death on the cross has guaranteed that he will conquer all his enemies, but to suggest that this has already happened in to deny reality. The *'works of the devil'* (1 John 3:8) are still very much a part of this present evil age. When the enemies of the Messiah are made his footstool (Ps 110:1), we will also see the chosen first born of God, the nation of Israel restored to their Husband and vindicated. (Deut 32:38, Ps 135:14, Ezek 36:23, etc.). The events in the Middle East at this time demonstrate most emphatically that this is not currently the case!

Revelation 1:7 and other verse tell us that at the return of our Messiah the whole earth, believers and non-believers will see and hear him.⁴ There will be no mistaking his return when it happens. If this had happened in 70 CE it would have been of such historical significance that many would have written about it and we would still have access to these writings as we do to Josephus' books.

(NIV Revelation 1:7) *Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen.*

A Study of "Quickly", "Speedily," etc. by Harley Pinon

It is my contention that the Bible uses the expressions "quickly," "speedily," etc., in a different way than we do. Some have been so insistent on making the Bible "quickly" the same as our quickly that they have made an entirely new and different interpretation of even when the end of the word will be, etc. In fact, they even contend that the resurrection has already happened, and that all of Revelation has been fulfilled including chapters 20 - 22.

The following is more of a word study and verse comparison without too much commentary, but I provide it for your consideration.

MEANINGS OF THE GREEK WORD ΤΑΧΟΣ _"TACHOS" AND ITS USE IN THE N. T.

From Strong's Exhaustive Concordance Hebrew/Greek Dictionary we find the following definitions for the Greek word ΤΑΧΟΣ, "tachos":

5034. tachos, takh'-os; from the same as G5036; a brief space (of time), i.e. (with G1722 pref.) in haste:--+ quickly, + shortly, + speedily.

Thayer Definition: ταχύς _tachus 1) quick, fleet, speedy Below we have some verses that contain the words translated from that Greek word "Tachos". The words in bold letters in the following verses show some of the ways that the word "tachos" is translated in the New Testament.

Luke 18:8 (NKJV) "I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?"

I understand "when the Son of Man comes" as being the end of this world as we know it. This hasn't happened yet. Romans 16:20 (NKJV) "And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen."

Has Satan been crushed under our feet? Obviously not, yet nearly 2,000 years have passed, yet this is called "shortly." We are still waiting for the fulfilment of this promise. Revelation 1:1 (NKJV) The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants; things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John,

"things which must shortly take place." Some things that related to the seven churches of Asia did take place in a relatively short period of time, but other things in the book haven't happened yet.

Revelation 22:6 (NKJV) Then he said to me, "These words are faithful and true." And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things which must shortly take place. "the things which must shortly take place." -- see note above for Rev 1:1

FROM GOD'S PERSPECTIVE "IT IS A LITTLE WHILE"

(Haggai's prophecies were written sometime between 520-505 B.C.) Haggai 2:6-7 "For thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; 7 'and I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory,' says the LORD of hosts. Hundreds of years after the prophet Haggai wrote this, (after the destruction of the temple that was standing when Haggai wrote this prophecy) the Hebrew writer, quotes this verse as being still in the future, even though Haggai said: "it is a little while" when he wrote the prophecy. Hebrews 12:25 See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven, 26 whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven." 27 Now this, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. 28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.

"it is a little while" took hundreds of years to take place. In fact, I don't believe this shaken has happened yet.

THE TIME IS NEAR

God has wanted every generation to feel the expectancy of His coming and to be prepared for His coming. The prophet Zephaniah wrote his prophecies around 630 B.C., yet he uses the same kind of urgency in his message to the people of his day that John uses in the book of Revelation. Zephaniah says: "the great day of the LORD is near and hastens quickly" and "He will make speedy riddance."

Zephaniah is speaking of the same "great day of the LORD" that John is writing about in Revelation, hundreds of years later.

Amos 3:7 says: "Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, Unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets." Zephaniah 1:14-18 - 2:3 (NKJV) The great day of the LORD is near; It is near and hastens quickly. The noise of the day of the LORD is bitter; There the mighty men shall cry out. That day is a day of wrath, A day of trouble and distress, A day of devastation and desolation, A day of darkness and gloominess, A day of clouds and thick darkness, A day of trumpet and alarm Against the fortified cities And against the high towers. "I will bring distress upon men, And they shall walk like blind men, Because they have sinned against the LORD; Their blood shall be poured out like dust, And their flesh like refuse." Neither their silver nor their gold Shall be able to deliver them In the day of the Lord's wrath; But the whole land shall be devoured By the fire of His jealousy, For He will make speedy riddance Of all those who dwell in the land. Zephaniah 2:1 Gather yourselves together, yes, gather together, O undesirable nation, Before the decree is issued, Or the day passes like chaff, Before the Lord's fierce anger comes upon you, Before the day of the Lord's anger comes upon you! Seek the LORD, all you meek of the earth, Who have upheld His justice. Seek righteousness, seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden In the day of the Lord's anger.

"It is near and hastens quickly", but read the description that follows. Some of this sounds like the end of the world to me. "But the whole land shall be devoured By the fire of His jealousy," Has this happened yet? - Harley Pinon From http://www.harleypinon.com/a_study_of_quickly.htm Date Accessed 7th Aug 2008.

Appendix 3: The Prophetic Perfect

The implications of Hebrew's lack of a future tense for interpretation of prophecy:

Among my many roles in life, I have been a teacher of Physics, Mathematics, and IT¹⁰⁷ and have always tried to determine where my students go wrong in their attempt to answer a question. If I can be fairly sure about where their thinking goes off-track, then I am able to specifically address this point in their deductive reasoning and hopefully help them correct this mistake and achieve greater success.

¹⁰⁷ And Biblical Theology as well for many years now.

I try to use the same principle when analysing people's arguments for theological doctrines that I believe are erroneous. In many cases, I have found with great majority of these mistaken arguments, that the point of divergence and subsequent error, has been some failure to grasp a Hebraic approach, a Hebraism of some sort. It seems to me that two of the most significant are the Hebraic principle of 'agency' and the Hebraic use of hyperbole¹⁰⁸.

As an example, Preterism had bothered me in the sense that I could not see why so many, otherwise intelligent and rational students of the Bible, were accepting this doctrine. It wasn't enough that I could see many realities that made the conclusions of Preterism untenable, what troubled me was why these sincere men and women were choosing this doctrine in the first place. What were they reading and interpreting that was so convincing to them.

I believe I now have a much better understanding of where they are coming from, and I have to thank the many Preterists, both 'Partial' and 'Full' that have discussed this doctrine with me and helped me more fully understand their presuppositions and reasons.

So where do I see them going wrong?

Firstly, like most Hellenistic and mainstream Christian students of the Bible, they start in the New Testament. This is a classic mistake. The NT is built on the Tanakh. If we are to accept it's inspiration and veracity, then we must also accept the inspiration, veracity and foundational position of the Tanakh.

Please see my article '[Understanding the Bible 101](https://circumcisedheart.info/understanding-the-bible-101/)' at circumcisedheart.info for more detail on this issue.

The obvious problem with using the NT as your starting position, is that it's like trying to build a house with no foundations and making the foundations up as you go along. It encourages not only the creation of a 'Christ' (from the Greek '*Christos*') of your own making, rather than a Messiah (transliterated from the Hebrew משיח - Mashiach), which is a Hebraic concept and entity, and not a Hellenistic/Greek one.

Also it encourages the creation of many doctrines that are simply not Biblical because they often contradict the Tanakh and therefore these interpretations contradict Yeshua himself and his Apostles, who all held the Tanakh (and only the Tanakh) as sacred and authoritative.

The Tanakh can not be contradicted by the New Testament. Expanded, explained, revealed, enriched most surely, but never contradicted. If we allow contradictions, then the Almighty is subject to change, though He said '*I change not*' (Malachi 3:6), and He is then a liar and no different to Allah, the moon god, the god of Islam!

Thus if there is some text in the NT that contradicts the Tanakh, or at least, our interpretation of it, is contradictory, then we need to, either reassess our interpretation, or identify this text as a corruption (if we agree that the original autographs of the NT were in perfect accord with the Tanakh).

Secondly, having started in the NT, the Preterists then read the prophecies, which are mostly present tense, with some even past tense (or prophetic perfect), and from their perspective of some 2000 years later, they therefore see that the prophecies must have already been fulfilled.

This then leads them to look for events of the first century through which such fulfillment must have come and they end up with the Fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE.

So the mistake, the point of divergence, is primarily two-fold. First, starting in the wrong place and secondly, not being aware that Biblical Hebrew, the language of the Bible, the language and mindset of Israel in the first century has no future tense. Let's now look at this second point in some detail.

It appears that the King James translators of 1611 were not familiar with this problem of the Hebrew language having no easy way of presenting something as 'future tense'. As almost all modern versions are based on the KJV, it is no wonder that the great majority of translations distort the prophetic message of the Coming Age, the Kingdom of God.

The Hebrew language almost always presents events as past or present, even when those events are clearly still to occur and even perhaps predicted to occur a long time into the future. This is strikingly clear and unequivocal when these 'events' are divinely inspired prophetic utterances.

¹⁰⁸ I have a number of articles on the Hebraic Mindset at www.circumcisedheart.info

Add to this the fact that, as Hebrew is such an 'action language', **the writer would always translate himself to the time of the event he was describing** as if he were there and it was occurring as he/she witnessed it¹⁰⁹.

This was true for events that were long past, such as Moses descriptions of the Creation, and events that were still future.

Thus great care was sometimes needed to determine if the literal, present tense description of an event meant that it was either:

1. occurring at the time the writer spoke about it (or in the very recent past to their making a record of it); or
2. that it had occurred some day, years or generations in the past, or was to occur even some days, years or thousands of years in the future.

Part of the reason for using 'past' or 'present' tense for prophecies was the understanding of the Prophet of God, that the event was as good as accomplished, if it was a promise of the Almighty.

The writer could speak of it as past, because it's future occurrence was just as certain.

This mode of speaking is very common. It can be seen very clearly when we consider the Creation accounts, where the 'fiats' of God are declared as if presently being completed, and then actually take a considerable time to complete, even to the point where the order of completion may be different to the order of the 'fiat' or proclamation.

For some details on this please see my blog posts: "the Hebraic Mindset and The Fiats of God" -

<http://globaltruthinternational.com/2012/10/11/the-hebraic-mindset-and-the-fiats-of-god/>

and 'The Fiats of God: Genesis Re-punctuated'

-<http://globaltruthinternational.com/2012/10/12/the-fiats-of-god-genesis-re-punctuated/>

Here is some examples of 'prophetic perfect' in the Isaiah:

Isaiah 5:13 *"Therefore my people have gone into captivity, Because they have no knowledge; Their honorable men are famished, And their multitude dried up with thirst."* - written before the exile.

Isaiah 9:2 *"The people living in darkness have seen a great light; upon those living in the land that lies in the shadow of death, light has dawned."* - written a long time before the event most Christians would argue this refers to.

Isaiah 11:9 *"Evil they do not, nor destroy in all My holy mountain, For full hath been the earth with the knowledge of YHWH, As the waters are covering the sea."* - this prophecy is clearly still to be fulfilled.

Here also is a little of how Robert Young, the translator for Young's Literal Translation (1862) explains it:

"In referring to events which might be either past or future, (the Hebrew authors) were accustomed to act on the principle of transferring themselves mentally to the period and place of the events themselves, and were not content with coldly viewing them as those of a bygone or still coming time; hence the very frequent use of the present tense..."

- 1) *It would appear that the Hebrew writers, when narrating or describing events which might be either past or future (such as the case of Moses in reference to the Creation or the Deluge, on the one hand, and to the Coming of the Messiah or the Calamities which were to befall Israel, on the other), uniformly wrote as if they were alive at the time of the occurrence of the events mentioned, and as eye-witnesses of what they are narrating. This principle of translation has long been admitted by the best Biblical Expositors in reference to the Prophetic Delineation of Gospel times, but it is equally applicable and necessary to the historical narratives of Genesis, Ruth, etc.*
- 2) *The Hebrew writers often express the certainty of a thing taking place by putting it in the past tense, though the actual fulfillment may not take place for ages. This is easily understood and appreciated when the language is used by Yahweh, as when He says! in Gen. 15:18, "Unto thy seed I have given this land;" and in 17:4, "I, I, My covenant is with thee, and thou hast become a father of a multitude of nations." The same thing is found in Gen. 23:11, where Ephron answers Abraham: "Nay, my lord, hear me; the field I have given to thee, and the cave that is in it; to thee I have given it; before the eyes of the sons of my people I have given it to thee; bury thy dead." And again in Abraham's answer to Ephron: "Only—if thou wouldst hear me—I have given the money of the field; accept from me, and I bury my dead there." Again in 2 Kings 5:6, the King of Syria, writing to the King of Israel, says: "Lo, I have sent unto thee Naaman, my servant, and thou hast recovered him from his leprosy,"—considering*

¹⁰⁹ "[The past tense is used instead of the future tense] when the speaker views the action as being as good as done. This is very common in the Divine prophetic utterances where, though the sense is literally future, it is regarded and spoken of as though it were already accomplished in the Divine purpose and determination. The figure is to show the absolute certainty of the things spoken of." - Bullinger, 'Figures of Speech', p518

the King of Israel as his servant, a mere expression of the master's purpose is sufficient. In Judges 8:19, Gideon says to Zebah and Zalmunnah, "If ye had kept them alive, I had not slain you." So in Deut.31:18, "For all the evils that they have done"—shall have done. It would be easy to multiply examples, but the above may suffice for the present.

... The Hebrew has only two tenses, which, for want of better terms, may be called Past and Present.

The past tenses is either perfect or imperfect, e. g., 'I lived in this house five years,' or 'I have lived in this house five years; this distinction may and can only be known by the context, which must in all cases be viewed from the writer's standing-point. In every other instance of its occurrence, it points out either:

A gentle imperative, e. g., "Lo, I have sent unto thee Nauman my servant, and thou hast recovered him from his leprosy;" see also Zech. 1. 3, etc. or

A fixed determination that a certain thing shall be done, e. g., "Nay, my lord, hear me, the field I have given to thee, and the cave that is in it; to thee I have given it; before the eyes of the sons of my people I have given it to thee; bury thy dead;" and in the answer, "Only—if thou wouldst hear me—I have given the money of the field."

Thus, in the Hebrew language, Joel 2:28-32 reads as follows (Young's Literal Translation of the Holy Bible with the correct tenses of the verbs):

"And it hath come to pass afterwards, I do pour out My spirit on all flesh, And prophesied have your sons and your daughters, Your old men do dream dreams, Your young men do see visions. And also on the men-servants, and on the maid-servants, In those days I do pour out My Spirit. And I have given wonders in the heavens, and in the earth, Blood and fire, and columns of smoke. The sun is turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, Before the coming of the day of Jehovah, The great and the fearful. And it hath come to pass, Every one who calleth in the name of Jehovah is delivered, For in mount Zion and in Jerusalem there is an escape, As Jehovah hath said, And among the remnants whom Jehovah is calling!" — from http://www.teleiosministries.com/pdfs/Research_Material/hebrew_has_no_future_tense.pdf

Interestingly, Robert Young did not use the same approach when he quoted the Apostle Peter (Acts 2) quoting Joel 2.

While, it seems very clear that when Joel first made this prophecy, it had not occurred even though he referred to these events in the present tense. It is also very clear that when the Apostle Peter quoted Joel, he would also have been speaking in the present tense, and that some of these events were in fact happening at the very instance in time.

Where we need to take great care though is in determining if ALL the events of this prophecy were occurring at that exact time.

For example, there is no historical evidence that the sun turned dark on that Shavuot (Pentecost) day, or that the moon was the colour of blood. There is also no clear evidence that this part of the prophecy was figurative, while the rest was literal. What seems much more likely is that the Apostle Peter saw that some of Joel's prophecy was being fulfilled at the time, and that the Apostle Peter therefore anticipated that the rest would be fulfilled at some later time.

Partly because English does not have this problem with the lack of a future tense, and because the translators were not Hebrew prophets accustomed to using this 'fiat' language (where declaring a prophecy was to speak of something so certain to occur, that it may as well be a past event), most translators have not translated literally, but tried to reflect the reality as they understood it. Yet, they have not done this entirely consistently, so now apparent contradictions appear.

Let me give a couple of examples that I think, illustrate the problem, and also offer something of a solution.

Look at Jude 14 -15. The NASB has *"It was also about these men that Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied, saying, "Behold, the Lord **came** with many thousands of His holy ones, **15** to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him."*

While a number of translators change the tense here, Jude is referring to a prophetic statement in the Book of Enoch (a first century BCE manuscript written in Hebrew), which speaks as if the coming vision of the Messiah's judgment, with a great many of the faithful had already occurred.

The author of the Book of Enoch had used this 'past tense' or 'prophetic perfect'¹¹⁰ Hebraism to speak of a future event that he was so sure would one day occur. Jude, the brother of Yeshua and also a Hebrew and Israelite had quoted him and repeated this use. In translation into Greek, this 'prophetic perfect' had been maintained, and mostly even maintained in English (perhaps because the translators were translating a quote, rather than the words of the NT author).

I would expect that the great majority, even of Preterists, would read Jude and accept that the Book of Enoch's prophecy of Godly judgment, where a great many of the faithful are witnesses had not yet occurred when this prophecy was recorded. Neither had it occurred when Jude wrote. I would also argue from known historical information that it did not occur in 70 CE either, but here I might expect some disagreement from Preterists.

Also consider Ephesians 2:6-7 *"6 That is, God raised us up with the Messiah Yeshua and seated us with him in heaven, 7 in order to exhibit in the ages to come how infinitely rich is his grace, how great is his kindness toward us who are united with the Messiah Yeshua."* – CJB

Here, the translators generally have maintained the past tense in using the word 'seated', even though we know (I would hope!) that we are not currently in heaven, while at the same time believing that Yeshua is.

"That God has already seated his people with Christ in the heavenly realm is an idea unparalleled elsewhere in the Pauline corpus. It can best be understood as a statement of God's purpose for his people—a purpose which is so sure of fulfillment that it can be spoken of as having already taken place." - F. F. Bruce, 'The Epistle to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians' p 287.

Now look instead at Colossians 3:1 *"So if you were raised along with the Messiah, then seek the things above, where the Messiah is sitting at the right hand of God."* - CJB

Here, heaven, the dwelling place of the Messiah is now 'above'. That is, the Apostle Paul is now telling us that we are really on earth, not 'seated' in heaven. Both statements can't literally be true. Clearly, Ephesians 2:6 then is making use of this 'prophetic perfect' Hebraism.

While it can be very difficult when reading the NT in the English language to see where the 'prophetic perfect' is in use (especially since this Hebraism has been almost totally hidden by the use of future tense in English), some help is found in that these verses are often coupled with a second or third verse which clearly sets the context as one of future fulfillment. Some discernment and care is still needed though, as even Young's Literal Translation does not appear to be consistent in its approach either.

In fact, the prophetic perfect is perhaps most cleverly and unsuspectingly hidden in passages which deal with salvation, redemption, adoption, and glorification. All these concepts are primarily future, as they address our future citizenship of the Coming Age and ultimately, the New Universe. And yet, there is a sense in which they all apply now.

All who are faithful are 'saved', and yet that salvation is a divine promise, not a currently existing reality in which the believer is free from all pain and evil, and from temptation to sin, etc. If we hold to the blessed assurance of our 'hope' then it may even seem to us as if this salvation is present now, but a clear-headed and sober assessment of the world we live in today should surely make it clear that the earth is not as 'full of the knowledge of YHWH' as 'the sea covers the earth'.

And yet, it seems to me, that because many Preterists have approached the prophecies in the NT in this incorrect manner I have already alluded to, and been unaware of the Hebraism of the 'prophetic perfect', they have indeed embraced the belief that the earth is now as 'full of the knowledge of YHWH' as 'the sea covers the earth'. That is, they actually believe that the Messiah has actually returned and that we are now in the Coming Age.

It must surely be very difficult for those who have been so led astray into believing such a clear falsehood; to now turn back and re-assess their position. In the same way that Isaiah prophesied that times would come when people would call evil good, and good evil (Isaiah 5:20), these Preterists have managed to strongly delude themselves, though it would seem that they have done this most honestly and sincerely.

But there is always hope. The Almighty is always willing to help us, if we decide to further circumcise our hearts; to open

¹¹⁰ Also called 'perfect tense' by some scholars.

our hearts, our emotional attachments and our logical faculties, and look again with re-newed, Hebraic eyes.

I believe when Preterists are prepared to suspend their judgment a little and revisit their understanding from the perspective that I outline in my 'Understanding the Bible 101' article, there is a fair chance that they may be enlightened, and recognize the serious error that Preterism is, as well as the very unhelpful implications that this doctrine develops.

Appendix 4: Matthew 24

Preterism puts a huge emphasis on the prophecy of Matthew 24 and its particular interpretation of this prophecy. While I would argue that there is an awful lot else that is wrong in the presuppositions and interpretations made by Preterism, I think that as Matthew 24 is so central to the Preterist position it is worth some investigation to show that it can not bear the weight placed on it.

Before investigating Matthew 24 I would like to present some of my own presuppositions that I bring to the table.

Firstly, as I have outlined in some detail elsewhere (see for example 'The Times of Yeshua' and in my book 'The Greek NT: The Hebrew Behind the Greek'), I believe that Prof David Flusser and the Jerusalem School of Synoptic Research, have demonstrated fairly conclusively that Luke's Gospel was the first of the Gospel accounts (though some 'Life of Yeshua' scrolls in Hebrew were already in circulation before this Gospel was written), and that Luke has remained the most authentic and apparently least redacted (edited) and interpolated Gospel.

The techniques used by Flusser and the Jerusalem School have shown this quite conclusively.

It is also vital to appreciate the main technique used to determine the authenticity of a phrase or passage in the Gospels. With an outstanding knowledge of Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek and a second to none knowledge of the Jewish 'common-place', that is, a great grasp of the Jewish inter-testamental writings as well as the Jewish canon (the Tanakh), Flusser in particular, and his team were able to translate the Greek back into Hebrew. Where this translation gave idiomatic Hebrew and Hebrew phrases or stories that already existed in other writings, they were able to vouch for the particular verses. Where this 'back-translation' gave sayings that were far from idiomatic Hebrew and instead were only Greek constructions, they were able to ascertain which verses were redactions or interpolations¹¹¹ (that is added into the text).

With this approach, Flusser was able to demonstrate the following with respect to the apocalyptic Luke 21 narrative:

"What is sure is that Luke 21:25-26 constitutes an interruption between vv. 21:24 and 21:28; moreover, the passage about the Son of Man is purely Greek and does not betray any traces of Hebraisms (or even pseudo-Hebraisms). It is more natural to see that the words, "When all this begins to happen" (v. 28) are a continuation of v. 24, "When the times of the Gentiles will begin to be completed, then your liberation will draw near." One should also pay attention to the disagreement between the detailed description of the coming of the Son of Man in the "Synoptic Apocalypse," and Jesus' view that the day of the Son of Man will come like a thief in the night (see 1 Thess. 4:2). Jesus himself clearly expressed his position in Luke 17:22-37 (verses 25 and 33 are evidently interpolated, and possibly also verse 31). Matthew saw the identity of the theme between the two passages, but did not recognize that they are contradictory (see Matt. 24:26-28)!"

To explain a little the reference here to Luke 21:24-28, here is the passage with the interpolations shown bold and in brackets:

Luke 21: 20 *"But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near.*
21 *Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are inside the city depart, and let not those who are out in the country enter it,*
22 *for these are days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written.*
23 *Alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! For there will be great distress upon the earth and wrath against this people.*
24 *They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.*
(25 "And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the

¹¹¹ "If one knows both Hebrew and Greek, and is able to apply the method of literary criticism to the analysis of the synoptic Gospels, one finds that probably all the passages expressing an anti-Jewish tension came into being only in the Greek stage of those Gospels, and one notices that in most cases these changes in the original Hebrew narratives and sayings appear in only one of the three Gospels or are the work of one Evangelist" (namely Matthew) – 'Judaism and the Origins of Christianity' by David Flusser p 582

roaring of the sea and the waves, 26 people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 27 And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.)

28 Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.

Obviously reading only the translated versions of this passage in English would never bring us to such a conclusion, even though, given Yeshua's clear Jewish, Torah and Jerusalem¹¹² focus, the removal of verses 25-27 does illustrate how verse 24 flows onto verse 28.

Flusser also did some collaborative work with RL Lindsey from which they concluded that: *"although all the sources of the so-called 'synoptic apocalypse' of Mark 13 spoke about the future, only a small part of the speech in Luke describes the last days. Luke knew very well that he was speaking about various periods of the future after the crucifixion. He himself indicates explicitly the several points of time when he writes, 'This must first take place, but the end will not be at once (21:9). . . But before all this (21:12) . . . But when you see (21:20) . . . then (21:21) . . . until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled (21:24) . . . Now when these things begin to take place (21:28)."*

Luke presents the following distinct periods of time:

- the destruction of the Temple (21:5-6);
- the future appearance of false chiliastic prophets (21:7-8);
- catastrophes of the last days (21:9-11);
- persecutions of the disciples after the crucifixion (21:12-19);
- the Roman conquest of Jerusalem, the tribulation of Israel, and the period of its dispersion (21:20-24);
- the eschatological coming of the Son of Man (21:25-23);
- 'your liberation' (21:28)."

There is also another question that should be asked. Was the prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem in Luke 21:20-23 written after the real catastrophe, or can it be that these were Yeshua's own words?

A number of leading scholars such as CH Dodd have shown that these words were most likely original words of the historical Yeshua. In fact, a number of prophets before him had predicted the same things. For example Judah of Galilee was so sure in 6 CE that he and his followers stood on the Mt of Olives waiting for the destruction to occur! (see 'A History of the Jews' by Paul Johnson p 122).

After having said that the liberation of his people is drawing near, Yeshua concluded (in Matt. 24:32-33; Mark 13:28-29; Luke 21:29-31) his vision of the future by saying, *"Now learn the lesson from the fig tree. As soon as it puts forth fruit, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door."* Yeshua alludes here to the fig tree in Song of Songs 2:13, in accordance with the common Jewish opinion that the whole passage (2:11-13) speaks about the redemption of Israel. Also, according to the apocryphal Psalms of Solomon (17:21-22) the Son of David will *'purge Jerusalem from Gentiles who trample her.'* "

This was written shortly after the conquest of Jerusalem by Pompey in 63 BCE.

Let us now turn to a few of Flusser's comments on Matthew:

"This lament over Jerusalem is the only passage common to Matthew and Luke that does not appear in Mark. Otherwise, Matthew follows Mark in his almost complete silence about Jerusalem. Nevertheless, in Matthew the lament over Jerusalem is misplaced—not unintentionally. While Luke (13:34-35) places the lament following the Pharisees' warning, in Matthew (23:37-39) the lament is presented—before the announcement of the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem (Matt. 24:1-2)—as a final conclusion of Jesus' invectives against the Pharisees! Matthew's transposition of the setting implies that the Pharisees themselves are those "who kill the prophets." In Jesus' day it is certain that they neither killed nor persecuted the visionaries (Matt. 23:29-31).

¹¹² "According to Luke, Jesus was accompanied along his last way by the sympathy of his own people. By contrast, according to Mark—who is accepted by Matthew—he was abandoned by all, with the exception of those who formed the kernel of the future Church. Here we want to show that the tendentiousness of Mark is also palpable in his virtual elimination of Jesus' expression of his strong ties with Jerusalem and its tragic future. While Luke's passion narrative often speaks (Luke 13:34-35; 19:41-44; 21:28; 23:27-31) about Jesus' attachment to the "city of the great king" (Matt. 5:35), only his prediction of the destruction of the Temple (Luke 21:5-7) is paralleled by Mark 13:2-4 (and Matt. 24:1-3)." – 'Judaism and the Origins of Christianity' by David Flusser

Similarly in Fifth Esdras (2:10-13) – a 2nd Century CE book¹¹³, this is what the Lord says to Ezra: "Inform my people that I will give them the kingdom of Jerusalem which I have given to Israel . . . the kingdom is already prepared for you".

Elsewhere I have tried to show that the final redactor of the Gospel of Matthew embraced the same opinions as Fifth Esdras and the eschatology contained in Justin Martyr's Dialogue, and that there are even literary motifs common to the three sources. Here it must suffice to bring two Matthean passages. "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit" (Matt. 21:43). "Many, I tell you, will come to feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of Heaven. But those who were born to the kingdom will be driven out into the dark, the place of wailing and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 8:11-12)."

The unhappy development from Luke to Mark and from there to the final redactor of Matthew can be shown by the synoptic history of Luke 4:32. According to this saying in its earliest form, when Jesus began his ministry in the synagogue at Capernaum, his hearers were astonished because "his word was with authority" (Luke 4:32).

Mark 1:22 makes the meaning clearer, "The people were astonished because he taught them as one who had authority, and unlike the scribes." Matthew (7:28-29) repeats Mark's wording. He further "clarifies" the situation, speaking about "their scribes," but he also purposely transfers the astonishment of Jesus' hearers to another situation. "When Jesus had finished his discourse, the people were astonished at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, and unlike their scribes." And what is "the discourse" that Jesus, according to the Matthean final redactor, finished at that moment? The "Sermon on the Mount" which in reality resembles very much the "teaching of the scribes." One is intrigued at the subtle tendencies in the metamorphosis of the sentence. It is likely that Mark did not foresee where his literary changes would lead. On the other hand, it is difficult to deny that even in the Gospel of Mark, these later centrifugal forces were already at work.

Thus we cannot avoid the conclusion that Matthew was not a Jewish Christian but a Gentile who wrote his Gospel after the destruction of the Temple. It seems that the Gentile origin of the Evangelist can also be shown with the help of those few passages which record events of which only he had heard and which do not depend on a written source. All these passages are written in a very vulgar popular Greek; they do not reveal any Jewish knowledge on the part of the author, and I could not even detect in them any knowledge of the Greek Bible [the LXX]. Thus we have to abandon speculations about Matthew as a representative of Jewish Christianity; he was evidently a Gentile and is the oldest witness of a vulgar approach which caused much harm to the Jews and did not promote a true understanding of the very essence of the Christian message.

Not only in Matthew but also in the other synoptic Gospels the essential changes from the original tradition of Jesus's disciples were introduced only at the Greek stage of its development. This applies also to all the passages where tension against Jews and Judaism is felt. In my opinion, Matthew is the only synoptic Gospel which speaks of the condemnation of Israel as a whole. The veracity of the early tradition in the synoptic Gospels, which can be detected by scholarly methods, and the fact that tendentious tension against Jews and Judaism came into being only in the Greek stage of their development, are important not only for the Christian faith but also for the so-called Jewish-Christian dialogue."

What I hope these few quotes from some of Prof. Flusser's brilliant work illustrate is that, to put so much reliance on a portion of Matthew, specifically chapter 24, which Flusser argues was written after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE, is to in turn make outlandish and unmerited claims about an event that was not anywhere near as unique as Preterists claim.

If this brief reflection on Matthew 24 has given you pause for thought, and the Preterist doctrine is something that you find some merit in, then I would strongly urge you to read *'Judaism and the Origins of Christianity'* by David Flusser, and in particular chapter 35 *'Two Anti-Jewish Montages in Matthew'* and chapter 36 *'Matthew's "Verus Israel"'*.

¹¹³ Fifth Esdras retains some very harsh views, concerning the Jewish people and their sins before God.

Study 4: The End of The Sabbath

Hellenism has introduced the allegorical approach to all Scripture, or at least to any portions that you are uncomfortable with taking at face value. The call to put aside a day, especially the same day that the Jewish people honour as a 'day of rest' or a day to put God first seems almost anametha to some!

The question of Sabbath observance remains a contentious one for many who profess to follow, Jesus/Yeshua (the Torah-observant Jew) and believe he is the end-times Messiah.

I will again use Rabbi Yisroel Blumenthal 4 Step approach in critiquing this argument regarding a change (to Sunday) or an ending of the Sabbath.

To repeat, in an article 'Contra-Brown'¹¹⁴, Rabbi Blumenthal explains this 4-Step approach:

"Scripture is a lengthy and complex document. The message of scripture cannot be found in the reading of specific isolated passages. Rather, the true message of scripture emerges from an understanding of the totality of scripture. When any given doctrine is presented as a scriptural teaching, there are four basic criteria that should be applied to determine if the doctrine is truly scriptural:

- 1. We must ask ourselves if the doctrine in question is **fully supported** by scripture. Does scripture support all of the main points of the doctrine? Or are there significant gaps which the proponents of the doctrine must fill in? Does scripture provide **comprehensive support** for the doctrine in question?*
- 2. Another quality we must look for in our examination of the given doctrine is **clarity**. Is the scriptural support claimed for the doctrine **clear and unambiguous**? Or are there other possible interpretations of the passages marshaled on behalf of the doctrine in question.*
- 3. A third criteria by which we should judge a specific doctrine is the **directness** of the scriptural support. Are the passages quoted to sustain the theory addressing the issue in a **direct and straightforward** manner? Or is the scripture discussing another issue altogether.*
- 4. Finally we must ask if the scriptural support for the doctrine is **consistent**. After evaluating the doctrine for comprehensiveness, for clarity and for the direct nature of the support – we must then ask if scripture ever provides a conflicting teaching that is as comprehensive, clear and direct as are the passages cited in support of the doctrine in question.*

I am again using this 4-Step approach to look at the question of the place of the Sabbath amongst those who profess Yeshua as their Messiah, and in particular, the Gentiles amongst this group.

The doctrine that I wish to use Rabbi Blumenthal's 4-Step method on is the argument that 'the Sabbath is no longer relevant for Christians' (or that it is to be somehow observed on the first day of the week – Sunday – rather than on the 7th day, that is Saturday).

In my Study #3 here on Judaism's perspective on Preterism, I have already detailed how this approach can be used to forcefully refute 'fulfilled eschatology', or Preterism.

It seems to me that most Christians today accept the Hellenistic falsehood that Yeshua 'fulfilled' Torah and that this means it is no longer binding, and for example, this means that there is no compulsion whatsoever to 'keep the Sabbath'.

¹¹⁴ <http://jewsforjudaism.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/Contra-Brown.pdf>

There is of-course a great variety or nuances within this group as to what is meant by the understanding that the 'Law/Torah has been fulfilled or destroyed' and that the so-called 'Old Covenant' has been replaced. I have also addressed these arguments in other articles, but here I would like to focus just on the Sabbath issue.

Blumenthal's Step 1:

So Step 1 is to ask, is the removal of the Sabbath 'Law' (the 4th Commandment) **fully supported** by Scripture?

There is no question that the Sabbath played a very significant life in the role of all Israel and the Jewish people, from the time of Mt. Sinai until, and including the times of Yeshua, as well as right up to the present day¹¹⁵.

There are a great many references to the observance of the weekly Sabbath throughout the Tanakh. I do not believe it at all necessary to revisit this overwhelming evidence to the centrality of the weekly Sabbath in the lives of the Jewish people. Such centrality has remained unabated for thousands of years.

But what about the times of Yeshua and the Apostles?

Here are just a few scriptures that indicate that the Sabbath was still central to the lives of these Torah observant Jews.

Firstly, Yeshua and the Sabbath:

Luke 4:16 *"When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom."*

Luke 4:31 *"Then he went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and was teaching them on the Sabbaths".*

Mark 6:1 *"Yeshua . . . went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples. When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed."*

Mark 1:21 *"Then they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and taught."*

Luke 13:10 *"On a Sabbath Yeshua was teaching in one of the synagogues"*

Next, the disciples/Apostles:

Acts 13:

14 . . . *They came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down.*

15 *After the reading of the Law and Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, "Men and brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say on."*

16 *Then Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said, "Men of Israel and you who fear God, listen: . . ."*

42 *And when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath . . ."*

44 *And the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God."*

Acts 16:13 *"And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there."*

¹¹⁵ *"More than Jews have kept Shabbat, Shabbat has kept the Jews."* - Ahad Ha'am - Asher Ginsberg, poet and Zionist ideologue: 1856-1927

Acts 17:

"1 . . . They came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue.

2 As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures."

Acts 18:

"1 . . . Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. . . .

4 Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. . . .

11 So Paul stayed for a year and a half, teaching them the Word of God." (that is, on every Sabbath for 18 months!)

So, even from these few references it should be clear that Yeshua and his followers observed and continued to observe the Sabbath (and that much of the teaching of God's Word was on the Sabbath). Furthermore there are NO, that is not one explicit statement throughout the entire New Testament where Yeshua or one of his appointed Apostles explicitly informed the followers of Yeshua that they were NOT to obey the 4th Commandment and stop 'keeping the Sabbath'.

So, there is really no doubt whatsoever that the removal of the 4th Commandment is NOT fully supported by Scripture.

Step 2:

Rabbi Blumenthal's Step 2 is to look for clarity. Does the doctrine in question have clear and unambiguous support?

Typically Christian scholars who argue for the end of the Law (Torah) and the end of Sabbath keeping will turn first to Colossians 2:16. As an example, this is the approach of Sir Anthony Buzzard in his debates on this issue, and in his book, *'The Law, the Sabbath and New Covenant Christianity'* (which contains a chapter written by the late Charles Hunting¹¹⁶).

In fact, I have spent considerable time in discussions and debate with Anthony Buzzard over this issue and also wrote a detailed paper on Colossians 2:16 – see 'Colossians 2 and the Sabbath', which is included as an appendix.

This passage is understood in diametrically opposed ways by many scholars. That is, its message may have been abundantly clear to its original readers, but it is in serious debate today as to its meaning and import.

Therefore, regardless of whether you find my take on Colossians 2:16 the most convincing, or Sir Anthony Buzzard's opposing take as more biblically sound, there can be no doubt that this, **perhaps the single, most relied upon verse**, in the NT for those who argue for the abolition of the Sabbath is **far from clear and unambiguous**.

So in Step 2 our conclusion must be that there really is little clarity for this 'Christian' doctrine and no unambiguous support.

¹¹⁶ It is interesting that in the last few years of his life Charles Hunting rejected this teaching on the Law and the Sabbath and instead came to strongly support, both in his words of encouragement, but also financially, the scholarship of the Biblical Hebrew and Greek scholar, Frank Selch, as well as my scholarship. I strongly recommend Frank Selch's book on the Sabbath. It is freely available as a pdf download from my website – see <http://www.charismacomputers.com.au/What%20about%20the%20Sabbath.pdf>

Step 3:

So having seen that the doctrine in question fails at Steps 1 and 2, how about Step 3? Is this doctrine presented in Scripture in a direct and straightforward manner? Can we find verses where this issue is clearly and explicitly addressed in context, and that the verses speak in a straightforward and clear-cut manner in presenting the truth of this doctrine?

Without doubt there is not a single passage in the NT that informs the readers and followers of Yeshua that they should discard the 4th Commandment. It may be argued though that some passages imply, at least in some implicit or indirect manner that the Sabbath is not to be honoured any more.

For example, we read in all three Synoptic Gospels that '*the son of man is Lord of the Sabbath*'. Could this mean things have changed? Could this imply some reversal or removal of this commandment?

Firstly, whatever you may imagine that this means, it should be clear that no-one can be Master of something, if that something is no more¹¹⁷.

The Sabbath was made for man; the Almighty created a rest day and even observed it Himself, for our benefit, for our growth and joy¹¹⁸! To discard it is simply foolishness¹¹⁹!

Some try to argue that Yeshua somehow lessened or removed the requirement to observe the Sabbath because he 'broke' the Sabbath law himself. Even if this were true, it would not change the reality of the Almighty's unchanging call to observe the Sabbath, as this man, Yeshua, even as the perfect representative of the Almighty on Earth, has no authority to overturn the eternal commandments of God. He was given great authority; to forgive sins; to have authority over nature and demons, but no-where do we read that he was given authority to change the foundational commandments of God, the 10 Words.

I believe that part of the problem here, which has perhaps led some to think that Yeshua did advocate a change in Sabbath observance, are misinterpretations and redactions of passages like that in Matthew 12 where we read about the disciples eating wheat from the fields on the Sabbath.

It was accepted that on the Sabbath it was permissible to pick up fallen heads of grain and rub them between the fingers. According to Rabbi Yehuda, also a Galilean like Yeshua, it was even permissible to rub them in one's hand. Some of the Pharisees though, found fault with Yeshua's disciples for most likely behaving in accordance with their Galilean tradition.

That is, it is most probable that these Galileans, picked the fallen heads of grain, rubbed them together and ate them.

¹¹⁷ See comment from [Flusser in Study 1](#). Repeated here for ease of reference:

The great Jewish scholar Prof. David Flusser also argued that Yeshua was not stating that 'he' was Lord of the Sabbath, but that man, or mankind, that is all of us, are Lord or Master of the Sabbath: "*On that occasion, Jesus said, among other things, "The Sabbath was created for man, not man for the Sabbath. So, man is lord even of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27-28). Literally, "the son of man." Here it means simply "man." This was already recognized in the seventeenth century by the famous Dutch scholar, Hugo Grotius in his commentary on Matt. 12:8.*" – 'Jesus', by D. Flusser, 2001. So Flusser is saying that all men (or in this context, at the very least, all who follow the teachings (Torah) of the God of Israel), not just the Messiah have dominion over the Sabbath – why then would they remove (or move it to Sunday)?

¹¹⁸ The Weekly Sabbath teaches 3 very important, fundamental principles:

1. Belief in the Creation of the Universe by the Almighty who rested on the Seventh Day,
2. Belief in revelation, that is, in the Almighty revealing His ways and plans to those who seek Him – because the Torah is studied on the Sabbath,
3. Belief in the World to Come, in the coming Kingdom of God, the New Heavens and Earth, a time of true shalom (peace), a time when every day will be as joyous as the Sabbath. The Sabbath represents a small foretaste of this great new World. We read in Isaiah 66:22-23 "For as the new heavens and the new earth that I make shall remain before me, says the LORD, so shall your offspring and your name remain. From new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, declares the LORD."

¹¹⁹ <http://luke443.blogspot.com.au/2012/07/the-sabbath-one-of-greatest-gifts-god.html>

But what we read in Greek (see Matt 12:1-2¹²⁰ in the footnote) is that they ‘plucked’ the heads of grain.

It seems fairly clear then, that when the original Hebrew account (written by someone who knew the customs and even the local differences in interpretation) was translated into Greek, the translator, not knowing these customs, and perhaps trying to make the scene more colourful, added the statement about plucking the wheat and thus introduced the one and only act of transgression of the Torah recorded in the synoptic Gospels¹²¹.

Another example, which perhaps leads to this confusion about Yeshua’s observance of the weekly Sabbath, is the story of his healing a man on the Sabbath.

John 7: 22-24 *“Moses has given you circumcision (not that it is of Moses, but of the fathers), and on the Sabbath you circumcise a boy. If a boy receives circumcision on the Sabbath, that the Torah may not be broken, are you angry with me, because I made a man completely healthy on the Sabbath? ...”*

The Torah commanded that baby boys were to be circumcised 8 days after being born (Gen 17:12, Luke 1:59). This Torah obedient practice could be problematic if the 8th day was the Sabbath when no work was to be permitted. Here the daily practice of Torah could bring about a conflict. To deal with this conflict, the arrangement had been accepted and practiced that if a boy’s 8th day from birth was the Sabbath, the person performing the circumcision (a ‘mohel’) was allowed to break the Sabbath by carrying the tools required through the village and performing the ritual.

It was accepted that when this conflict between the requirements of observing the Sabbath and of circumcising a male child on the 8th day occurred, the circumcision took precedence. If however the child was ill on his 8th day since birth (which say, was the Wednesday) and he was not well until the the Sabbath (the Saturday), the ruling was that now the Sabbath took precedence and so the circumcision would not be performed until a later day.

Yeshua by his comments appears to condone this approach to the potential conflict between these commandments. However, what he then goes on to say is illuminating.

Firstly, he states, given this ruling, why should he be condemned for healing the whole man on the Sabbath. The clear understanding being that circumcision was a form of healing (not only a token or marker but a positive commandment of Torah), perhaps primarily because it was a mark of entry into the family/tribe of Israel.

If then circumcision was permitted to be performed on the Sabbath, because of it’s importance and impact in bringing some ‘healing’, Yeshua argues bringing full healing (healing the ‘whole man’) is surely just as permissible, if not even more so, and therefore not an infringement of Torah with respect to the Sabbath.

So in examining just these two Gospel narratives, it should be now apparent that any implicit re-assessment of the place of the Sabbath is much more likely a mistaken implication based on limited understanding or suspect translations.

¹²⁰ Matthew 12:1-2 *“At that time, Jesus went on the Sabbath day through the grain fields. His disciples were hungry and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. But the Pharisees, when they saw it, said to him, “Behold, your disciples do what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath.”*

¹²¹ See M. Kister, "Plucking on the Sabbath and Christian-Jewish Polemic," *Immanuel* 24-25 (Jerusalem, 1990), pp. 35-51. For more on these textual issues see my book, 'The New Testament: The Hebrew Behind The Greek' - <http://www.amazon.com/The-New-Testament-Hebrew-ebook/dp/B009X00NQU/>

Given that after some 2000 years and a significant degree of redaction and interpolation of the NT, along with a commonly Hellenistic perspective to trying to interpret it, it is informative to seek evidence of how the early Gentile followers of Yeshua understood the NT.

That is, did these gentile followers of Yeshua, for example amongst the groups that the Apostle Paul wrote and preached to, observe the weekly Sabbath?

It would appear that they most certainly did. Not only were they observing it in attending the synagogues on the Sabbath to hear the Apostle Paul and others preaching (as we read in the Book of Acts), the historical evidence also confirms this.

“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”. (Note that Decimus Iunius Iuvenalis, known in English as Juvenal, was a Roman poet active in the late 1st and early 2nd century CE.)

*In this respect, Juvenal is a good example, for his words display some of the derision felt by most ‘elite Roman’ pagans with respect to Jewish rituals: **“There were three things in particular which the educated world of the time made the butt of its jeers, viz. the abstinence from the use of swine’s flesh, the strict observance of the Sabbath, and the worship without images.***

While in Plutarch it is seriously debated whether the abstinence from the use of swine’s flesh may not be due to the fact of divine honours being paid to this animal, Juvenal again jokes about the land where “the clemency of the days of old has accorded to pigs the privilege of living to a good old age,” and where “swine’s flesh is as much valued as that of man.”

Then as for the observance of the Sabbath, the satirist can see nothing in it but indolence and sloth, while he looks upon Jewish worship as being merely an adoring of the clouds and the skies”. Schurer ibid p295.

This would certainly indicate that the Roman Gentile elite would not be impressed with any gentiles who became God-fearers and started observing these ‘rituals’.

“Brown and Meier, ‘Antioch and Rome’, argue throughout that the dominant Christianity at Rome had been shaped by the Jerusalem Christianity associated with James and Peter, and hence was a Christianity appreciative of Judaism and loyal to its customs (p. 110) Cited by Wedderburn, Reasons, p. 51. Cf. Brown and Meier, Antioch and Rome, pp. 110-11. ‘In fact, it is possible that the Christians in Rome continued to be part of the Jewish communities and synagogues for a long time as there are several references to synagogue meetings in “Shepherd of Hermas” (ca. 100-140 CE)’¹²²

¹²² See ‘The Mystery of Romans’ by Mark Nanos

The Apostle Paul observed and/or supported many of the Feasts, New Moons (Yom Teruah) and the Sabbath, either by a direct reference to it, by attending the festival, or making a supportive reference to it:

- Shabbat(Sabbath): Acts 13:14-16; Acts 18:4; 4:16
- Pesach (Passover) – 1 Cor 5:7; Acts 27:9
- Festival of Unleavened Bread – Acts 20:6
- Shavuot – 1 Cor 16:8; Acts 20:16
- Yom Teruah – 1 Cor 15:52; 1 Thess 4:16 (New Moon Day, Rosh HaShannah)
- Yom Kippur – Acts 27:9 (the Fast Day)
- Sukkot – Acts 18:21

Thus it should be clear in assessing 'Step 3' that there is no direct and/or straightforward declaration in either the Tanakh or the New Testament that the Sabbath is somehow defunct. Thus, this Christian doctrine of denying the continuing relevance of the call to observe the Sabbath, seriously fails on Steps 1,2 and 3.

Step 4:

In 'Step 4' we are to investigate if there is any opposing doctrine that is at least as comprehensive, clear and direct as the doctrine being biblically evaluated. In this case the 'opposing doctrine' is the position espoused in the Tanakh that Sabbath keeping is foundational to holy living.

While no-one could seriously question the comprehensive support for the 4th Commandment throughout the Tanakh, we may ask if this support continues in the NT. On any superficial examination it may not be obvious, but when we dig a little deeper we instead see an implicit reference to and reliance on the place of the Sabbath throughout all the narratives of the NT.

As already detailed a little, there are many passages such as Luke 4:16; 4:31;6:6;13:10 that indicate the Yeshua attended the synagogue and /or temple on the Sabbath. There are also many passages that indicate the centrality of Sabbath observance in the lives of everyone associated with Yeshua, such as Mark 1:21; 6:2:16:1 and Luke 23:56.

Some have argued that the commandment to observe the Sabbath is restricted to the Jewish people and that the other nations, the Gentiles are not called to observe it. Part of this understanding may possibly have come from the fear that Gentiles, in not being fully conversant with Sabbath commandments and procedures would most likely fail to properly honour the Sabbath and in so doing actually profane or desecrate it.

Not all Jewish Rabbi's share this concern though. For example Rabbi Yoel Schwartz writes:

*"There are those who say that every Ger Toshav (a non-Jew living in Eretz Yisrael in the time of the Jewish Temple, who has formally accepted the obligation to observe the Noahide laws in front of a Jewish court) has to uphold and keep the Sabbath (Rashi, Kritot 9, Yevamot 40). There is room to suggest that the Noahides, even nowadays, by accepting to fulfill the seven commandments, are in the same category as a Ger Toshav and should, according to Rashi, be required or at least allowed to keep the Shabbat."*¹²³

¹²³ <http://www.jewishanswers.org/index.php?p=1806>

Conclusion:

In conclusion then, the Christian doctrine of 'Sabbath denial' does not meet the criteria established for any of the four 'steps' and in fact, should be seen to be a false doctrine which tries to denigrate, or change Torah, the eternal instructions of the Almighty.

At this point, if such an approach to the Sabbath is new to you, you may ask, why. Why is the Sabbath so important. Of what significant benefit to mankind is it?

These are worthwhile and important questions to ask. What follows is just a small attempt to offer some of the answers.

The Sabbath was and is one of the most significant indicators of freedom ever! In the ancient world no other people group had a day off each week; no other nation had such freedom. The Sabbath is one of the greatest gifts God has ever given man - a day free from labour and a day to honour the King of the Universe, our Creator!

In the desert wanderings of the Exile from Egypt, a double portion of the manna was collected on the 6th day to last through the Sabbath. When this was tried on other days the manna rotted. God demonstrated in this miracle alone, how important it was Him, that His people observed a day of ceasing or abstaining from their normal labours of providing for themselves and their families.

The Sabbath day, a day spent with community and family in study, prayer, discussion, and peace, reminds us how we should regulate and perfect our spiritual, intellectual, physical, domestic and social behaviours. Observing the Sabbath reminds and instructs us to sanctify our lives, the way God has sanctified the Sabbath day.

This commandment does not limit our freedom, it gives us distinct guidance toward holiness and therefore meaningfulness for our lives. The first six days God made good, the seventh He made holy. We may struggle to stop working on the Sabbath ('Shabbat' in Hebrew), but because it is commanded by God, there should be no guilt about having some downtime.

The Sabbath also reminds us of our potential for doing good. We, human beings, created on the 6th day are the bridge between the worldly and the divine – between the rest of creation (on the first 5 days) and the sanctified 7th day.

The appreciation of a non-productive day is predicated on a week of labour. *"Six days you shall labour, and do all your work"* Ex 20:9 (ESV) During the week we emulate the creative side of God.. The Sabbath is then the culmination of a productive week on which the non-productivity can be appreciated only when preceded by creativity.

Community prayers and fellowship are an important part of the Sabbath. The Sabbath was given to the Israelites as a reminder of God's freeing them from slavery – as a reminder then of both God and the sanctity of human freedom. It should serve the same purpose for Gentile followers of Yeshua who have also been freed from the slavery of sin.

On the Sabbath we search for the essence of God. Shabbat is the antidote to the tendency toward self-idolatry. Every time we live a day dedicated to holiness we have the opportunity to bring some residual effect into our daily lives. The Sabbath is not about time off, it is about sacred time.

I find it so sad, almost a form of self-flagellation and self-abuse, when people, especially those who

think they follow the Messiah, Prophet and High Priest of Israel, reject the Sabbath!

The Sabbath is a real day, NOT some theoretical, spiritual inner delusion of rest when the real man/woman continues to sweat blood and tears!

Augustine and many of the early Hellenistic/pagan church fathers have a lot to answer for in convincing the church that the Tanakh is all allegory and spiritual types and shadows! I pray that I have enlightened you a little to this serious error of mainstream Christianity.

"The Sabbath is spirit in the form of time." (Abraham Joshua Heschel - 'The Sabbath' 1951)

I repeat, for more on the Sabbath I recommend Frank Selch's great booklet 'What About The Sabbath' (available from Amazon.com as a Kindle eBook).

Also I highly recommend: *"The Ten Commandments: The Significance of God's Laws in Everyday Life"* by Dr Laura Schlessinger and Rabbi Stewart Vogel, which includes a great portion on the Sabbath, some of which I have paraphrased above.

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Colossian 2:16; the Feasts of Israel and the Weekly Sabbath:
A challenge amongst brothers

“So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths,” (Col 2:16 - NKJV)

Introduction

An awful lot has been written and debated on the interpretation of Colossians 2:16. There are whole books on this verse and a number of websites devoted exclusively to it as well.

In fact, given the uniqueness of the message in this verse, regardless of what interpretation is made of it, it seems to carry far too much weight, to have far too much impact. If it could be unequivocally shown to be a message that was given a number of times by either just the Apostle Paul or by several of the New Testament writers and/or Yeshua, then it would seem reasonable to give this message, whatever way it is interpreted, such standing and impact.

The demonstration of such repetition appears lacking.

Thus, it would appear that this passage has gained its significance principally from the defense of mainstream Christianity's observance of Sunday as the 'day of rest'. It also appears that this strong defense of Sunday as the 'Lord's Day' has been a fairly recent event perhaps as a result in the growth of Christian groups that have taken to observing the Sabbath on the seventh day of the week, the Saturday.

With the growth of this defense, there has also been a growth in the articulation of the opposing view, the view that this text says nothing about the weekly Sabbath, or alternatively, that it actually encourages the observance of the various Jewish 'markers' such as their Holy Days.

Given the massive amount of commentary on this passage why am I making the effort to add to this debate?

Personal experience has shown this verse to be divisive and that such division can result in the severing of relationships and even to have a significant impact on Christian organizations and fellowships.

While I would not presume to pronounce that I can bring anything new to this debate, I would like to argue that I may bring some clarity and rationality to the debate, at least in the eyes of those who respect my past efforts and my teaching and writing skills.

I also don't expect to necessarily convince any of the correctness of my interpretation of this statement by the Apostle Paul, as despite my best efforts I still have some good friends and brothers who are scholars and well-known Christian authors with whom I share much agreement doctrinally, but who take the opposite view of this verse.

In this article I hope to give an historical overview of the context of this verse, chapter and epistle; to therefore indicate both who the Apostle Paul was writing to and the 'heresy' or error that he was addressing in this specific chapter/section of his epistle. I also hope to make it abundantly clear what

his ultimate and simple message was, that is, what behaviour and actions he was strongly encouraging in his readers.

As part of this account, I will also attempt to succinctly address the current situation that the Apostle Paul's message speaks into; how this may therefore impact us today and how I suggest we may respond.

The Historical Setting of Colossians:

While the authorship of this epistle is questioned somewhat by scholars, there appears to be strong agreement that either Paul, or someone writing on his behalf, composed this letter. The general consensus is that it was composed in 60-61 CE and most likely while Paul was in prison in Rome.

Paul was clearly addressing this epistle to Gentile believers in Colosse¹²⁴ - "*most readers were gentile converts ...*" who "*... had once been utterly out of harmony with God, enmeshed in idolatry and slavery to sin, but God had reconciled them to himself - Col 1:21-22*" (Oxford Companion, Metzger p128).

I will try now to discuss and evaluate the relevant phrases in Colossians 2 which are used to try to determine who Paul was speaking against and therefore set the scene for the conclusion of Col 2:16.

Please note that as we are seeking to determine the context and error that Col 2:16 is addressing we cannot use this verse itself to determine this as this would be circular logic and there is also a sense in which to use the clear Judaic references in verse 16 as evidence of the perspective and hence the error, is to incur the logical fallacy of 'affirming the consequent'.¹²⁵

Colossians 2:

- 1 For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face,
- 2 that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ,
- 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.
- 4 I say this in order that no one may **delude you with plausible arguments.**
- 5 For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.
- 6 Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him,
- 7 rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.
- 8 See to it that no one takes you captive by **philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.**

There are many new words introduced by Paul (or the author on Paul's behalf), so it can be challenging to be certain about these words/terms. The most likely reading though (if not presupposing the answer based on Col 2:16-17, is that 'plausible arguments', 'philosophy and empty

¹²⁴ Colosse at the time of this epistle was no longer an important centre. Its inhabitants were mainly Greek colonists and native Phrygians, though there were many Jews living in the area as well. Antiochus the Great (223-187 BCE) had relocated hundreds of Jewish families from Mesopotamia to this region. They seem to have been more liberal or Hellenistic Jews than those in the neighboring province of Galatia to the east.

¹²⁵ Surprising it appears to me that a significant number of leading scholars have made this very mistake. This includes Bruce Metzger, James Dunn and FF Bruce. This does not make their conclusions incorrect but does bring them into question.

deceit' and 'elemental spirits of the world' ¹²⁶, ¹²⁷ especially refer to Hellenistic or Greek mindsets, even if pushed by Hellenistic Jews. So we see first here that Paul is arguing against a Greek mindset.

The term 'plausible arguments' is fairly open to interpretation but certainly sounds philosophical rather than someone attempting to speak the word of God.

The term 'philosophy (Strong's #5385) and empty deceit' is much more clear cut. The word 'philosophy' is not found anywhere else in Paul's letters or the New Testament. The use of the word 'philosophers' is found in Acts 17: 17 where it is used to describe some Greek scholars. (Epicurean and Stoic philosophers).

While it is conceivable that Hellenistic Jews in Colosse may have engaged in 'philosophy and empty deceit' as these liberal Jews embraced the culture around them, we can be quite sure that the Apostle Paul cannot have been referring to Judaizers¹²⁸ at all, because some researchers and scholars such as Louis Feldman in '*Palestinians & Diaspora Judaism in the First Century*', Christianity & Rabbinic Judaism (1993) state that no rabbis distinguished themselves in philosophy or wrote any treatise in Greek nor did they use any Greek philosophical terms in the talmudic corpus (of the time).

That is, Paul in using the 'philosophy' label could not have meant to identify any Hebraic Jews in Colosse.

The term 'elements' is found in only 5 places in the NT with a similar meaning to here. The others being Col 2:20; Gal 4:3; Gal 4:9 and Heb 5:12. I will discuss the first three of these verses further on, and argue that they are not referring to Judaizers. Hebrews 5:12 though is illuminating.

Heb 5:12 *"For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles (Strong's #4747) of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat."*

Of the 5 similar uses of this Greek word 'stoicheion' in the NT, the phrase here is not 'elements of the world' or 'elemental spirits of the world' or 'principles of the world' but 'first principles of the oracles of God'. Thus it appears that when Paul wishes to use this word/term to refer to Torah or to some part of the ordinances of God, he explicitly adds 'the oracles of God' rather than 'of the world' to clearly distinguish that this is his focus.

Thus, by inference, we can be more confident that his use of 'elemental spirits of the world' was NOT referring to Judaizers, as he reference was not to Moses but to basic pagan principles.

What about Gal 4:3 *"In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world?"*

Paul includes himself here in those who are enslaved to these 'elemental spirits of the world' which I argue are humanistic or pagan principles. Paul was no pagan or Hellenistic Jew so how does this fit?

¹²⁶ 'Elements' (Greek word 'stoicheion' - Strong's #4747) – translated variously as rudiments, elemental things, elementary principles.

¹²⁷ Clearly this is contentious. James Dunn argues that the term in Col 2:8, "*the elemental spirits of the world*" is a Jewish reference ("*The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: a commentary on the Greek text*" James D. G. Dunn, p150). The problem is that he uses Gal 4:9 as support, yet this passage is clearly addressing Gentiles before they knew God and thus is addressing Greek/pagan mindsets, not Jewish ones.

¹²⁸ Marvin Wilson in 'Our Father Abraham' p 25, defines Judaizer as 'Gentile converts to Judaism – those that submitted to the entire Oral and Written Torah (including circumcision)'. A more common usage though is anybody, Jewish or Gentile who submits to Messiah but also expects all believers to be physically circumcised and obey the dietary laws and all the other Jewish 'boundary markers'.

The fact that Paul admits to being enslaved by these 'elementary principles' seems discordant¹²⁹.

However, note that Paul says 'when we were children', that is, he is referring to himself as a child (along with his listeners as children).

It is well understood in Judaism to this day that a child (even born into the Jewish race and circumcised on the eighth day) is not by default a child of Torah. He/she must be instructed in Torah and when he reaches 13 his understanding of Torah is tested (his Bar Mitzvah) and he becomes a 'son of Torah', a 'son of the Jewish people'. It is only through this initiation at 13 years of age that it officially puts off the pagan/Hellenistic or natural way of thinking and becomes a 'son of Torah'.

Thus Paul in Gal 4:3 is including himself, when he was a child, as a person enslaved to the 'world's ways', to paganism or human precepts. So I therefore believe this passage also fits with my general perspective on Col 2.

FF Bruce (and some other scholars) in 'Paul, Apostle of the Heart Set Free' refers to an Iranian Gnostic myth that was current in the Near East at the time. In the literature of this myth the term "the elementary principles" is used to refer to the stellar spirits which were identified with the heavenly bodies. Again this indicates that a Jewish heresy was not being referred to – specifically Paul was not addressing Judaizers with the use of this term.

The term 'human tradition' could of course be referring to the 'traditions of men' which are found in all cultures and which even Yeshua railed against. Thus, taken by itself, 'human tradition' could be referring to Jewish error such as the legalistic adherence to Oral Torah.

Consider Colossians 2:11 *"In him also you were circumcised with a **circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Messiah,**"*

Now some may argue that the secondary reference to circumcision here suggests an argument against Judaizers (as per Galatians), rather than against Hellenism.

The focus here though has temporarily changed to point at Messiah Yeshua. Paul is addressing how these Gentile believers have been grafted into the body of Messiah, into the commonwealth of Israel. The proof of this change of emphasis follows in verse 14 which will be dealt with below.

Paul is simply stating that Gentiles have come into the body of Messiah without needing to be physically circumcised – this had already been established very explicitly by Paul.

Thus the contra/secondary reference here is simply to the difference between Jew and Gentile believers. Paul is not addressing the heresy or those preaching it in this phrase 'a circumcision made without hands'.

*"12 having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.
13 And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses,
14 by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.*

¹²⁹ The solution to the problem of Paul's use of 'we' in verse 3 had escaped me for some time. Thanks to Frank Selch for this insight.

*15 He disarmed **the rulers and authorities** and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.” – Col 2*

This section is clearly referring to the rules and authority of men. The ‘handwriting in ordinances’ (WEB/KJV) or ‘record of debt’ (ESV) is clearly a reference to laws of men not the Torah of Moses. The concept here of the triumph of the cross and the removal of a barrier, a record of debt is very similar to that recorded in Ephesians 2. I recommend my article ‘Siblings of the King’¹³⁰ for an in-depth look at Ephesians 2 and specifically verse 15 for further background and support of my argument here.

Yeshua nails ‘something’ to the cross. Clearly this ‘something’ is ended or set-aside and no longer has any position of power and this action results in stripping (or overcoming) ‘principalities and powers’, the disarming of rulers and authorities.

As Yeshua specifically said he did not come to destroy the Torah, there is no logic or sense at all that the ‘divine instructions’ of God are the ‘something’ that is nailed to the cross.

Some versions have in v14 ‘contrary to us’. The Torah, specifically the Ten Commandments are not “contrary to us,” rather they are a hedge of protection surrounding us (see Psalm 119:6), giving us freedom (see James 1:25 and 2:8-12), and bringing us to Messiah Yeshua (see Galatians 3:24), who supplies the grace and power that we need to keep them, for God’s honour and glory.

“16 Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a sabbath.

17 These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.

*18 Let no one disqualify you, insisting **on asceticism and worship of angels**, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind,” – Col 2*

Leaving aside the focal verses 16 & 17, let us investigate the phrases used in V18.

The term ‘worship of angels’ was clearly Gnostic as it was condemned by the Rabbis in the Talmud (eg. Amora R Judan). If any Jewish sects did participate in such a practice they were certainly not mainstream proto-Rabbinic but rather, very liberal and Hellenistic. That is Judaizers would not have promoted the ‘worship of angels’.

*“Still stronger opposition than that evoked **by prayer to, and worship of, the angels** was aroused by the views that made the angels partners in the creation of the world; and needless to say, the tradition that the whole world was created by angels, **inculcated by various Gnostic doctrines**, appeared even to apocalyptic circles (which assigned a considerable role to Princes, and angels, and even to angels of destruction, and angels of Satan, Belial and Mastema [hatred]) to be in conflict with Israel’s Torah. **In condemnation of the worship of angels a Baraita teaches: ‘If one slaughters. . . to Michael, the Prince of the Great Host. . . it is as flesh offered to idols.’**”*

- The Sages – Their Concepts and Beliefs” by Ephraim Urbach.

Plato introduced dualism which led to Gnosticism and this involved asceticism¹³¹ – this is a mode of living that is a far cry from any typical Jewish lifestyle. Some argue of evidence at Qumran for the

¹³⁰ Available from www.restorationfellowship.info or www.charsiamcomputers.com.au

¹³¹ Asceticism: Extreme self-denial, self-mortification and austerity. A doctrine that the ascetic life releases the soul from bondage to the body and permits union with the divine. As the TaNaK and 1st Century Judaism taught the unity of soul and body and rejected the immortality of the soul, asceticism then is a Platonic/Hellenistic not Hebraic or Judaic belief. FF Bruce rejects the argument that the Colossian heresy is some form of Gnostic Essenism based on what is missing from the text such as there being no mention of ‘ceremonial washings’. Another scholar, Ephraim Urbach indicates that asceticism is not Judaic: *“The reasons for this opposition were many and varied; we shall mention only those that give expression to the **antithesis between the Halakha and asceticism.**”* (p447) ‘The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs’ (Halakha/Halacha means ‘the way’ or right living).

Jewish sect, the Essenes, embracing an asceticism, but there is evidence that this was partly due to Hellenistic influences. Certainly Yeshua did not himself embrace asceticism.

Asceticism is a mode of life that included dietary limitations, (but not the dietary laws of the Torah) and to which the phrase in verse 21 below is so clearly referring to, is Gnosticism (see Marvin Wilson, 'Our Father Abraham' p 169).

While it may be true that such a form of ascetic Judaism (or 'non-conformist' Judaism to use FF Bruce's term), was present in Colosse there appears little evidence for it. On the other hand there is good evidence for the existence of Egyptian cults that practiced 'absurd asceticism' (to use Schurer's term). *"And so we find that since the third century B.C. Egyptian cults had come to be very widely practised throughout Greece generally. Besides these, other Oriental worships, and that in strange admixture, are also to be met with particularly in the islands of Greece and in Asia Minor."* The History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ" Schurer p301.

Thus, there is plenty of evidence that asceticism has its foundations in Greek (Pythagorean) and Egyptian or Persian cults, not in Judaism.

To embrace the festivals and the sabbaths that are part of them (except Yom Kippur) meant to enjoy food (meat) and drink. Therefore, true ascetics would not do so. Thus there is clearly some confusion here where the language is not helpful. To live a life of simplicity, of avoiding any form of over-indulgence is not to be ascetic (see the definition of asceticism in the footnote below).

This is a vital and most significant point.

If in verse 16 Paul is speaking against believers being involved in the biblical feasts it certainly would make no sense to argue for this conclusion if those promoting the biblical feasts were ascetics. To repeat, by definition ascetics would not encourage or embrace biblical feasts, as they are not an act of self-denial but a joyous occasion when the ingestion of much food and wine was encouraged!

These Gnostics or Hellenists were clearly not happy to see their neighbours in Colosse partaking of food and drink; that is, enjoying the festivals.

Just try reading v 16 without the festivals section and you get ***'Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink ..'***

The question here would then be, what were they doing with respect to food and drink to be judged and for Paul to say to ignore this judgment?

Clearly, they can't have been fasting as this would be consistent with asceticism which Paul very clearly rejects in verse 18. The festivals and weekly Sabbaths on the other hand are times of good food and wine. So even in this simple exercise it should be abundantly clear that Paul was at the very least encouraging them that they should not let men or the traditions of men determine their behaviour where that behaviour was the result of the free choice to observe certain rules related to food and drink.

There are a couple of plausible ways to interpret this 'shadows' reference. It may be a Platonic one (see Handbook to Exegesis of the New Testament By Stanley E. Porter p332 for a good reference) namely: *"The world of our experience, which we take to be real, is only a shadow world. The real world is the world of Ideas, which we reach, not by sense-knowledge, but by intuitive contemplation. "*

This Platonic concept is that the sun passes through the 'true' world of 'reality' or 'substance' into the world we inhabit where we only really see shadows of truth/reality. In this analogy or Platonic mindset, the Messiah is in the 'real world' (heaven – the spiritual world) and is thus the 'substance'.

If Paul is speaking out against a Hellenistic heresy, then we would expect him to refer to this Platonic mindset. In this understanding, everything we do here is a shadow. Thus the festivals etc., are not an endpoint in themselves, as Messiah is, but this does not devalue them anymore than it devalues ALL our actions in this age.

“19 and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.

*20 If with Christ you died to **the elemental spirits of the world**, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations” —*

*21 **Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch***

22 (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings?” —Col 2

The reference to the elemental spirits of the world takes us back to verse 8 and the Hellenistic mindset. The “*Do not handle, do not touch ...*” is then clearly seen as referring to ascetic practices (Wilson, p169 argues this as well and even that this ascetic practice has continued to be deeply but falsely ingrained in Christendom).

Some may argue that the Essenes or a similar sect of Judaism was prominent in Colosse. A number of writers such as Philo state that the Essenes were not found outside of Israel.

More revealing is the statement by Emil Schurer, in “The Jewish People in the Times of Jesus” (1890 translated in 2005) states: *In all these points a surpassing of ordinary Judaism is apparent, and this is also the case in the strongly puritanical trait, by which the Essenian mode of life is characterized. They saw in many of the social customs and institutions, which the development of culture entailed, a perversion of the primitive and simple ways of life prescribed by nature. **They thought therefore that they manifested true morality by a return, to the simplicity of nature and of natural ordinances.** Hence their rejection of slavery, oaths, anointing oil, and of luxury in general; hence their **principle of living a simple life and allowing themselves only so much food and drink as nature required.** It cannot be shown that they practised actual asceticism by fastings and mortifications, by abstinence from flesh and wine. It was only the exceeding what nature required that they condemned.”*

Also note that where this phrase in verse 21 is used it is referred to in verse 22 as a human precept and teaching. If it was indeed a doctrine of Judaizers, would Paul have called in a human precept rather than a mis-interpretation of scripture? As far as I can tell this phrase is neither biblical or even any part of Oral Torah.

*23 These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in **promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.** — Col 2*

Verse 23 reiterates the philosophical (self-made religion) and ascetic nature of the heresy that Paul was speaking against.

It is interesting to reflect on what was the typical behaviour of the Gentile converts in Colosse. Emil Schurer sheds some light on this:

*“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 edict¹³² of the Jerusalem Council (or were obeying the Noachide Laws) and were also observing the Sabbath. That is they were observing some restrictions regarding food; they were observing the weekly Sabbath and yet not observing all the ceremonial laws (the 613 mitzvot).

Thus when Paul writes to them and speaks into their lives he tells them to let no-one judge you regarding food and drink, etc. Surely, this was a word of encouragement not condemnation; a word to say ‘enjoy being part of the commonwealth of Israel, enjoy the pleasures of the festivals and the worship, rest and fellowship of the sabbaths (or weekly Sabbath)¹³³.

The context of Colossians and the epistles of Paul:

To help with the context of Paul’s epistle to Colosse, I think it helpful to reflect on the pagan view of the Jewish rituals that Paul refers to. In this respect, Juvenal¹³⁴ is a good example, for his words display some of the derision felt by most ‘elite Roman’ pagans with respect to Jewish rituals: *“**There were three things in particular which the educated (?! my emphasis) world of the time made the butt of its jeers, viz. the abstinence from the use of swine’s flesh, the strict observance of the Sabbath, and the worship without images. While in Plutarch it is seriously debated whether the abstinence from the use of swine’s flesh may not be due to the fact of divine honours being paid to this animal, Juvenal again jokes about the land where “the clemency of the days of old has accorded to pigs the privilege of living to a good old age,” and where “swine’s flesh is as much valued as that of man.” Then as for the observance of the Sabbath, the satirist can see nothing in it but indolence and sloth, while he looks upon Jewish worship as being merely an adoring of the clouds and the skies. It would appear again that contemporaries with a philosophical training had, in like manner, no appreciation whatever of the worshipping of God in spirit**”.* Schurer p295

In this quoting of Juvenal, we learn that the elite of Roman society around the time of Paul’s epistle thought very little of Jewish food laws, Jewish observance of the Sabbath and perhaps Jewish acknowledgement of new moons, etc (from the reference to adoring the clouds and skies). In other words, Roman society denigrated Jewish attitudes to *‘food ... festival(s) ... new moon or sabbaths’*.

So we could imagine some pagan Romans speaking, to their Greek or Romans friends or relatives who were ‘God-fearers’ and followers of Yeshua at Colosse, words like *“(Reject Jewish ways) in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths,”*.

¹³² The ruling of the council in Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-28) made it clear that Gentile believers were excused from taking on the entire yoke of Torah (i.e. conversion) but instead were prohibited from four things: food offered to idols, fornication, meat strangled and blood.

¹³³ I will address the issue of whether or not the use of ‘Sabbath’ in v16 refers to the weekly Sabbath or the Sabbaths that are part of the festivals further on in this article. It is not a vital issue, at least from the perspective I believe Paul was promoting.

¹³⁴ Decimus Iunius Iuvenalis, known in English as ‘Juvenal’, was a Roman poet of the late 1st & 2nd century CE - <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/Juvenal>

But wait a minute, this is what most mainstream Christian scholars argue that the Apostle Paul actually said and he was no pagan or pagan sympathizer.

So this statement could not have meant don't get involved in these practices that pagans think are deserving to be the butt of jokes. Rather the Apostle Paul was surely saying, don't fear the condemnation of the pagan society about you when you DO involve yourself in this observance of the Biblical Holy Days.

It is important to recognize that as the Apostle to the Gentiles, Paul spoke out against all error that would lead Gentile believers away from the liberty found in Messiah Yeshua. This meant he spoke against Judaizers (as for example in Galatia) who argued for the necessity of physical circumcision, and he also spoke out against pagan heresies that had come into the community through the Hellenising of Judaism. I hope I have convinced you that in speaking to the Colossians he was concerned with the Hellenising influence that was trying to disrupt the path of the followers of Yeshua who had been taught to adopt the faith of Yeshua¹³⁵ and therefore embrace the Biblical Holy Days as part of their daily lives.

The term Sabbath(s) in Col 2:16:

Is this referring to the Sabbaths that are part of the Festivals, the dates of which are based on the new moons, or was Paul referring to the weekly Sabbath, the 7th day of rest?

Again it appears most commentators, based on their prior commitment to this verse arguing against Jewish rituals, have contended that the Sabbaths (most translations have the plural), refers to the weekly Sabbath, not to the Sabbaths that were instituted as part of the biblical festivals.

There are a number of good reasons for questioning this consensus though.

Pastor Ron du Preez ThD, DMin has published a book *'Putting the "Sabbath" to Rest: A Scriptural Study of the Sabbatōn in Colossians 2:16'*, in which he argues that the structure that the apostle Paul employs in this passage is the chiasm, familiar in Hebrew writing and having an ABA (or ABCBA, etc.) structure.

The key to this understanding is Hosea 2:11, in which God states of Israel's ceremonial observances, "I will also cause all her mirth to cease, her feast days, her new moons, and her sabbaths, and all her solemn feasts." In Hosea 2:11, the sequence is chiasmic, which is typical of Hebrew thought.

To better appreciate this form of exposition, we first need to remember that Hebraic writing often used various forms of repetition or parallelism. A simple example of this is in the Shema (Deut 6:4-6) where we read *'You shall love the LORD your God with **all your heart** and with **all your soul** and with **all your might**'*. This is really a repetition of the statement that you are to love God with all of you. The terms heart, soul and might really mean the same thing in this context.

So Du Preez's argument is that the terms 'feast days', 'new moons', 'sabbaths' and 'solemn feasts' all refer to the Biblical feasts and so the phraseology in Hos 2:11 is in the form ABCA, where each letter represents a repetition of the same term or concept.

¹³⁵ Rom 3:22 *Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference,* Rev 14:12 *Here is the patience of the saints: here are those who keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.*

This chiastic form¹³⁶ appears some 30 times in Hosea alone and in fact is prevalent throughout both the Tanakh and the New Testaments. The chiastic structure is very significant for proper biblical exegesis, but seems to have been largely forgotten. It was recognized many years ago when John A. Bengel in 'Gnomon of the New Testament' (5th Vol. 1742, p. 399), wrote: *"Often there is the greatest use in the employment of this figure, and it is never without some use, viz, in perceiving the ornament, in observing the force of the language; in understanding the true and full sense; in making clear the sound exegesis; and in demonstrating the true and neat analysis of the sacred text."*

Du Preez goes on to argue that this chiastic form is employed by Paul not only in Col 2:16 but just 5 verses later in verse 21 as well! - "*Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch*" (i.e. ABA). He argues that Paul is making reference to Hosea 2:11 by speaking of yearly feast days, such as Passover, the monthly new moon observances, and the yearly solemn feasts, e.g., the Day of Atonement (sabbaths).

To further strengthen his argument that the use of 'sabbaths' in Col 2:16 does not refer to the weekly Sabbath, Dr. du Preez points out that when the weekly seventh-day Sabbath is spoken of in the Bible, there are linguistic clues that help the reader distinguish between the ceremonial sabbaths and the weekly Sabbath. One of these linguistic clues is that God refers to the weekly Sabbaths as "My Sabbaths," whereas He refers to the ceremonial sabbaths as "her," "its," or "your" sabbaths.

Having been questioned in depth over this issue of whether the weekly Sabbath is included in this 'trio' in Col 2:16, I have come to believe at this time, that despite du Preez's alternative perspective, the weekly Sabbath **is** actually being referred to here.

The issue that I find most convincing is the great parallel between Ex 45:17 and Col 2:16 in terms of this trio of observances. In researching Talmudic and other Judaic commentary on Ex 45:17, I could find no clear indication as to whether the weekly Sabbath or the Sabbaths (specifically of Yom Teruah and Yom Kippur) were being described. I then found a calculation of the number of lambs needed for the burnt offerings being detailed in Ex 45:17 and noted that the weekly Sabbath was included in this calculation. Thus, at this point, I am swayed toward the position that the weekly Sabbath is indeed indicated, however, I remain open to further elucidation on this matter.

If we accept that the weekly Sabbath is indicated here, does this mean that Paul is arguing for some extremely momentous change here, a change of earth shattering proportions if he is arguing that the weekly Sabbath is to no longer have the central significance that it had in Biblical times and in the lives of Jesus and his disciples?

No, I do not believe so. Note first that if the perspective presented here is valid then Paul is arguing that the feasts and Sabbath be embraced not discarded. Thus, Gentiles are to embrace the weekly Sabbath also but clearly with a freedom from judgment.

The weekly Sabbath is forever and will even be honoured in the New Universe! See Ex 31:16-17 for example. To suggest some temporary suspension of its observance and the reduction of the Ten Commandments to nine for a period of time seems extremely unlikely, particularly given no explicit instructions for such a dramatic and life-changing event can be found anywhere in the Biblical cannon.

The well known scholar Albert Barnes, referring to the phrase in Col 2:16, argues that: *"Or of the sabbath days. Gr, "of the sabbaths." The word Sabbath in the Old Testament is applied not only to the seventh day, but to all the days of holy rest that were observed by the Hebrews, and particularly to*

¹³⁶ See http://www.inthebeginning.org/chiasmus/introduction/chiasmus_intro.htm for a good explanation of chiasmus. Also see <http://www.hccentral.com/gkeys/chiasm.html> and <http://www.bsw.org/project/filologia/filo12/Art09.html>

the beginning and close of their great festivals. There is, doubtless, reference to those days in this place, as the word is used in the plural number, and the apostle does not refer particularly to *the* Sabbath properly so called. ... **No part of the moral law—no one of the ten commandments—could be spoken of as "a shadow of good things to come."**

These commandments are, from the nature of moral law, of perpetual and universal obligation.

—Barnes' Notes on the New Testament, Philadelphia, August 25th, 1832.

Another very interesting and plausible understanding is suggested by David J. Conklin¹³⁷. He points out that the Greek word 'heorte' (Strong's #1859 - meaning 'feast' or 'festival') is translated as 'holy days' in the King James Bible and that this meaning of feast is never used of Yom Teruah (Day of Trumpets) or Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement). Both these days are ceremonial Sabbaths (see Lev 23: 23-32) and yet do not appear to be days for great feasting (Yom Kippur is a day of fasting) as with the other special days such as the Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles.

Therefore if Paul had, in the original version of the verse, used this word or some other word meaning 'feast' then it makes sense for him to include 'Sabbaths' in the expression to clarify that he was including all the appointed feasts outlined in Leviticus 23.

An interesting alternative understanding which some scholars have argued for is that in verse 16 & 17 Paul is arguing that the holy days are a shadow of the age to come; that is, these are celebration days that help prepare us for life in the coming Kingdom of God.

According to 'A Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament' by Julius Fuerst (1871), Col 2:16-17 should read part: **"In respect of a festival or new moon or Sabbaths-which are a shadow FROM things to come-FOR the Body of Messiah."**

Regardless of whether the weekly Sabbath is being referred to in Col 2:16 or not, I hope I have already shown that it's observance is not being questioned in any way, shape or form here. I will expand on this further on.

To conclude this section, here is a brief encyclopedia summary interpretation of the Colossians 2 is: *"Like some of his other epistles (e.g., those to Corinth), this seems to have been written in consequence of information which had been conveyed to him of the internal state of the church there by Epaphras(1:4-8). Its object was to counteract false teaching. A large part of it is directed against certain speculatists who attempted to combine the doctrines of Eastern mysticism and asceticism with Christianity, thereby promising believers enjoyment of a higher spiritual life and a deeper insight into the world of spirits. Paul argues against such teaching, showing that in Christ they had all things. He sets forth the majesty of his redemption. The mention of the "new moon" and "sabbath days" (2:16) shows that Gnostic ascetics were judging the body of Christ for "eating and drinking" and observing the "feasts, New Moons, and Sabbaths." In response, Paul commands the saints to "let no one judge you...but the body of Christ," i.e. **the Church itself, which was observing these biblical holy days** (Matt. 5:17-19; Rom. 3:31). Paul focuses much of his epistle to the Colossians in combating the teachings of the early Gnostic sects, particularly ascetics (see Col. 2:4-23)." From http://www.statemaster.com/encyclopedia/Epistle-to-the-Colossians#Content_of_the_letter*

The current situation:

It is a fact of history the mainstream Christianity celebrates the 'Sabbath', the 7th day, on the Sunday. When and why did this change occur. Was it, at least in part, because of the Apostle Paul's epistle to

¹³⁷ http://www.666man.net/Colossians_2_16-17_By_David_Conklin/colintro.html

the Colossians?

To repeat, Emil Schurer in referring to God-fearing gentiles states that Sabbath observance was still common even late in the 2nd century: *"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 (see notes 271 and 289). 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."* Schurer in A HISTORY OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE IN THE TIME OF JESUS CHRIST (1890).

He also makes the point that the main reason for Sabbath (Saturday) attendance at the synagogue was for instructions:

"Such an institution was created by post-exilic Judaism in the custom of the reading of Scripture on the Sabbath day in the synagogue. For it is necessary first of all to remark, that the main object of these Sabbath day assemblages in the synagogue was not public worship in its stricter sense, i.e. not devotion, but religious instruction, and this for an Israelite was above all instruction in the law.... Josephus rightly views the matter in this light: "Not once or twice or more frequently did our lawgiver command us to hear the law, but to come together weekly, with the cessation of other work, to hear the law and to learn it accurately." Nor was Philo in the wrong, when he called the synagogues "houses of instruction," in which "the native philosophy"¹³⁸ was studied and every kind of virtue taught."

The Sabbath was obviously observed by Yeshua and Paul. There are many clear passages that testify to this. It is also true though the Paul speaks of meeting after the Sabbath was over, and therefore on the first day of the week (but actually on Saturday night) to commemorate the resurrection. For example, in Acts 20:7 we see that since Paul was an observant Pharisee, celebrating Shabbat, followed by Havdalah¹³⁹ would have been quite normal, and even fortuitous because it allowed him to incorporate the resurrection events. As each Havdalah points to a new beginning with reference to salvation (Isa.12:1-3) it would have been a wonderful opportunity to speak about the Risen One. Jesus was the reason for this gathering at the start of the first day, NOT the abolition of the Sabbath.

Rejection of Sabbath, and its replacement by Sunday worship, was a rejection of Israel (which didn't occur until after 70 AD and more likely closer to 115 AD (according to Ignatius – see 'Our Father Abraham' by Marvin Wilson p115).

Paul's letter to the Colossians was written 10 to even 55 years earlier – thus it can not have been arguing for a change to Sunday worship – if it had been, this change would surely have occurred much sooner. Also the use of the term 'Lord's Day' for the Sunday (as used in The Didache (120 AD) is a mistaken understanding of what the 'Lord's Day' (in Revelation) actually means!

There is a Jewish saying *"More than Israel kept the Sabbath, the Sabbath kept Israel"*. Thus, the Sabbath is much more than a Jewish marker. Marvin Wilson says *"Judaism treats the Sabbath as a queen or bride; its holiness is a reminder of the world to come. Judaism tries to foster the vision of life as a pilgrimage to the seventh day, the longing for the Sabbath all the days of the week"* (quoting Abraham Heschel).

In fact, there is some evidence that the Sabbath was observed before Israel. For example, even Prof

¹³⁸ You may have noted that Philo (and Josephus) refer to the practise of Judaism as 'native philosophy'. Note also though that these men were both Hellenists. See my earlier quote that no Talmudic literature uses this term.

¹³⁹ Havdalah is a Jewish religious ceremony that marks the symbolic end of Shabbat and holidays, and ushers in the new week. In Judaism, Shabbat ends—and the new week begins—at nightfall on Saturday.

Driver of Brown/Driver/Briggs fame, believes the Sabbath was of Babylonian origin (i.e. pre-Moses).

There is even some argument that the 10 Words were practiced by some prior to Moses:

"This argument of the Cutheans could have been based on the view current among the Jews (The Book of Jubilees), that the Patriarchs already observed the Torah before ever it was given at Sinai. Their (the Cutheans') assertion concerning the temple that they had built at Gerizim purports to attest the antiquity of their worship, that it was pre-Mosaic.. This was a widespread belief among the Samaritans at this period, as we learn from Eupolemos, who tells us that Abraham was received by Melchizedek at the temple of Gerizim..... The fact that they call their god the anonymous deity is to be explained by the Jewish practice not to pronounce the Ineffable Name but only its substitute (cf. Κύριος in the Septuagint). This usage was also current among the Samaritans" from "Jews. Judaism and the Classical World: Studies in Jewish History in the Times of the Second Temple and Talmud" by Gedalyahu Alon. (Translated from the Hebrew by Israel Abrahams - Jerusalem 1977).

So if none of the New Testament writers proposed the rejection of Sabbath observance, and if the change to Sunday did not occur until 70 CE at the earliest of more likely around 100 CE, what brought about this change?

The most obvious answer is the rise of anti-Semitism and the Hellenistic influence on a community (the Church) that was increasingly Gentile in its makeup. I highly recommend a series of podcasts by Ron Dart on this issue (available from <http://www.borntowin.net/newsite/>) .

What makes this even more definitive is that the weekly Sabbath had always been created for man's benefit; for man to have dominion over it, that is to gain life from it, not to be some form of bondage or legalism!

Flusser states interestingly, (Jesus, 2001) *"On that occasion, Jesus said, among other things, "The Sabbath was created for man, not man for the Sabbath. So, man is lord even of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27-28). Literally, "the son of man." Here it means simply "man." This was already recognized in the seventeenth century by the famous Dutch scholar, Hugo Grotius in his commentary on Matt. 12:8."*

So Flusser is saying that all men, not just our Messiah have dominion over the Sabbath – why then would we remove or move it!!

Some scholars have argued that this change is recorded in the NT and have quoted Acts 10 and Gal 2, and possibly Romans 14:5 as evidence. Yet, there is absolutely no explicit mention of the weekly Sabbath in either Acts 10 or Gal 2.

Some also argue that for a Gentile convert to keep the Sabbath would be to become partake of something that was a national identity marker rather than being a 'new man in Christ'.

In the times that the Apostle Paul was writing though, the great majority of Gentiles converts were already 'God-fearers' and so would have been observing the Sabbath (to the accepted degree at least of attending the synagogue, etc). Thus, this question or perspective would have been irrelevant to them.

In summary regarding Col 2:16 and the weekly Sabbath, there is therefore no real evidence for a rejection of the Sabbath. Even if it were being identified in Col 2:16, it is not being rejected, but Paul is encouraging his Colossians readers not to fear the judgment of the Hellenists, and instead enjoy the participation in the Holy Days.

The Sabbath:

The weekly Sabbath, as part of the Ten Commandments, the 10 Words, is a universal law that is immutable. How then might we best live so as not to fight the will of God?

Let us embrace it as a joy given for us to have dominion over; let us, with all the freedom we have from legalism, from the traditions of men; seek to honour this creation of God while as 'strong' (Rom 14:5) believers help others to embrace the Sabbath as best they can despite the challenge of our modern Western society.

Frank Selch in his booklet 'What about the Sabbath' (p 22) sums this up very well:

The Apostle Paul makes it very clear throughout his writings that no amount of 'law keeping' can make anyone right before G-d. Included in this are of course observances of Holy Days and Sabbaths! At the same time, Paul makes it quite clear that we are not to judge one another by what one observes or not observes, eats or does not eat (Romans 14:1-10). Does that not tell us that if a brother feels that he wants to honour G-d by observing the Sabbath, others should not stand in judgment over him; in the same way he should not judge those who want to observe a different day, on which they want to worship G-d more intensely.

Bearing this in mind, I believe that I have a point in saying that if one were to choose a day, on which Christians should honour G-d corporately, why not select the day the Almighty had chosen for Himself in the first place? And could we not say the same for other traditional Christian non-biblical celebrations as well, or at least permit those who see (non-salvific) merit in commemorating Biblical events, to follow the guiding of their hearts?!

The Bible makes about 112 references to the Sabbath in the Tenakh, and 76 in the New Covenant writings. For instance, Paul did MOST of his teaching on the Sabbath, and not once is he recorded as saying that the Sabbath was superseded by worship on the First Day of the week. Throughout the history of the church there is ample global evidence that Christians felt that they should honour the biblical Sabbath.

Also knowing that when we fail to fully appreciate how to act in harmony with God's moral code, we are not condemned because our salvation was and never will be dependent upon our obedience. **Our obedience is the result of our salvation not the reason for it.** The reason, the source, is always our Messiah and his and Paul's call to us to have his faith, to trust our God as he did.

Colossian 2 is the ONLY place in the whole NT where the phrase '*festivals, new moons and Sabbaths*' is used (Some would argue for Gal 4:10 as well but I believe this is incorrect¹⁴⁰).

Because it is the only place this phrase is used in the NT we need to be very careful about arriving at a 'new' (i.e. different from OT) revelation from it. Instead take it at face value and leave it grouped and what we should see (based on the Jewish perspective of the writer) that it is a statement that there is

¹⁴⁰ Some commentators find this calendrical series in Gal 4:10 to be **purely pagan** in nature or suggest that it may be a blending of pagan nature worship with the Jewish cycle of holy days and feasts. See Troy Martin, "Pagan and Judeo-Christian Time-Keeping Schemes in Gal 4:10 and Col 2:16," New Testament Studies, 1996 page 112.

"Troy Martin, 'Time-Keeping,' has argued that Gentile converts adopted the Jewish calendar as evidenced in Col 2:16, but in Gal 4:10 some of them are in the process of returning to their pagan calendar. He bases his opinion on the immediate context of Gal 4:10, particularly verses 8 and 9, where Paul 'asks them how they can desire their former life again. He then proposes their observance of the time-keeping scheme in 4:10 as a demonstrative proof of their reversion to their old life. Considering only the immediate context of Gal 4:10, the list must be understood as a pagan temporal scheme" (pp. 112-113). Martin recognizes that the larger context implies Jewish influence on Gentile Christians but suggests that Paul's opponents are requiring them to be circumcised. "Confronted with circumcision as a requirement of the true Christian gospel, the Galatians most likely apostatize and return to their former status as Gal 4:8-11 plainly states" (p. 115)." – from https://adventistbiblicalresearch.org/sites/default/files/pdf/sabbath-catholic2002_0.pdf

nothing 'wrong' with observing (or not) these festivals.

With this approach, the more prominent status of the weekly Sabbath is really left untouched by this Colossians 2 commentary. In other words, we should NOT use Colossians 2 in an argument either for or against the weekly Sabbath at all!

What then are the clear facts regarding the Sabbath as a part of the Ten Commandments, the core of the Torah?

- 1) Jesus/Yeshua and Paul, and 'Jesus in Paul' kept the Torah. There is abundant evidence for this. In fact, the evidence is fairly conclusive that not only did they observe the 10 Words¹⁴¹, but that they also observed the ceremonial laws and much of the Oral Torah as well. Thus they both observed the Sabbath.
- 2) There is however also abundant evidence that Paul in reaching out to the Gentiles, told them that they did not need to get physically circumcised;
- 3) It is also a fact that 'Jesus in Paul' got Timothy circumcised, but it would appear this was because of his Jewish heritage (mother's side).¹⁴²
- 4) It is a fact that the Levitical Priesthood which was always a sacrificial system, ended with the ultimate sacrifice. Thus there was some change in the ordinances of God (Heb 7:12)
- 5) It is a fact that Yeshua did not speak against the Sabbath at all, but he did speak out against the legalistic interpretation of the Biblical demands concerning the Sabbath. Jesus stated that the 'son of man' is Lord of the Sabbath. You (or Yeshua), can't be Lord or Master ('in charge of') something that doesn't exist or which has been made redundant. Why would a loving Father take away something which was 'made for man' i.e given for our benefit.¹⁴³
- 6) It is a fact that before the Messiah walked this earth a Gentile needed to become a proselytized Jew to become a son or daughter of God. The OT made provision for Gentiles to convert to Judaism such as Rahab, Ruth, and male foreigners who were circumcised as a prerequisite for celebrating the Passover (Exod. 12:48). In the NT though the Apostle Paul makes it very clear in a number of places that Gentile believers in Jesus do not need to be physically circumcised. In fact, we see in 1 Cor 7:18, that he said, not only should Gentiles refrain from circumcision but that Jews should not try to undo their circumcision (by epispasm).¹⁴⁴
- 7) It is a fact that the Jerusalem Council made it very clear that Gentiles did not need to take on the entire yoke of all 613 Jewish rules and regulations. (At least not initially – some argue that this decision was temporary). It is also clear from the context that the reasons behind the list of four prohibitions were reasons of fellowship and outreach. It should also be clear that where ritual/ceremonial matters are discussed, Gentile believers are given the freedom of choice (I Cor. 10; 27-30; Rom. 14:1-6, 10-14; Col. 2:16).¹⁴⁵
- 8) It is also instructive to study both why God included the weekly Sabbath in the 10 Words and what

¹⁴¹ The core of the Torah (divine instructions) is the Ten Commandments, the 10 Words..)

¹⁴² Paul circumcised Timothy (Acts 16:13); took the nazirite vow (Acts 18:18; 21:1726); taught and observed the Jewish holy days such as: • Passover (Acts 20:6; 1Cor. 5:68; 11:1734) • Shavuot (Pentecost) (Acts 20:16; 1Cor. 16:8) • fasting on the Day of Atonement Yom Kippur (Acts 27:9) • and even performed animal sacrifices in the Temple (Acts 21:1726/Num. 6:1321; Acts 24:1718). Among his more notable statements on the subject are:
• "Neither against the Jewish Torah, nor against the Temple, nor against Caesar have I offended in anything at all." (Acts 25:8)
• "I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers." (Acts 28:17)
• "...the Torah is holy and the commandment is holy and just and good." (Rom. 7:12)
• "Do we then nullify the Torah through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we maintain

the Torah." (Rom. 3:31).

¹⁴³ Mark 2:27-28 And he said to them, The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath. See also the interpretation of this verse by the late Prof. Flusser.

¹⁴⁴ 1 Cor 7:18 Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision.

¹⁴⁵

it means to obey this 'Word'. While, this is a issue worthy of considerable exposition, I think it helpful to mention a couple of points here. We read in Gen 2:2-3 that God 'sanctified' the Sabbath. The Biblical Hebrew word used here though is l'kadesh and its true meaning is 'to be connected with God'.¹⁴⁶ The Sabbath gave the Jewish people a 'connection' with God. It does this for all who honour it. In Exodus we read the command to 'remember' the Sabbath and in Deuteronomy 5 the command to 'guard' (not keep –see 'Exodus' by Youlus 2006 p65) the Sabbath. The Jews were to remember the weekly Sabbath, not because of the creation event but now because they were saved out of slavery. The 6th day double portion of manna also helped them remember that they were to depend on God for their daily existence. To guard implies both a relationship with God and with each other. We see that even down to today, the Jewish people to a large measure have 'guarded' the Sabbath (it has kept them united as a people group, more than many other ethnic or cultural distinctive, The 'badge' of Judaism though is really circumcision not the Sabbath).

- 9) It is a fact that Jesus spoke very strongly on the issue of obedience in the Sermon on the Mount and that we therefore need to take the greatest care as teachers in how we present these issues:

Matt 5 18-20:

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.

Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

The Sabbath then is not only part of the moral code, the moral DNA of the universe, it is also a great gift to mankind, something that the Hebrew's appreciated and valued very highly.

It would therefore seem totally foreign to the mindset of Yeshua or Paul to suggest this day be ignored or changed to another day. It seems extremely clear from all the historical evidence we have that the change by the church to Sunday worship was a deliberate change to reject Israel. It was not a change to enable Gentile believers to gain some form of freedom from Moses, it was not a change to place Yeshua's resurrection on the first day at the pinnacle of everything - neither Yeshua nor Paul called for this. Yeshua never tried to elevate the worship of him and his actions as the centre of our devotion - he always pointed to God. Joel Hemphill does a great job of explaining this in 'To God be the Glory'.

Thus to change the day of rest, the day of joy, the day of worshipping God to the Sunday makes no sense from a biblical and Hebraic perspective and further, there is NO clear, unequivocal explicit evidence anywhere in the NT for such a dramatic and discordant change.

It appears that Judaism understands so much better than Christianity the centrality of family, of community, of the group taking precedence over the individual - to institute a break in the Sabbath rest so that Messiah-believing Jews worship on the Sabbath and Messiah-believing Gentiles on the Sunday can only be seen as divisive, not freeing; as anti-Semitic not God-honouring.

To further then expect believing Jews to reject the Sabbath for Sunday was to ask them to surely reject far too much?

¹⁴⁶p

To repeat, the simple, the straight forward reading of Col 2:16 statement that you 'let no-one judge you regarding the feasts and the Sabbath' (regardless of which Sabbath), has Paul saying to his readers, that they can enjoy and celebrate these days even though they are Gentiles.

If the culture surrounding these 'God-fearing gentiles' was as derisive to Jewish ways as the historical evidence indicates, then I do think Paul's call to 'let no-one judge you', is indeed an encouragement to maintain their practices of synagogue attendance etc.

Why the great differences of opinion of this verse? I find it interesting (and it may be the result of my less than exhaustive research), that it appears that almost all Jewish scholars and Hebraists see Colossians 2 as speaking against Hellenism or paganism, whereas the mainstream Calvinistic and Higher Criticism type (i.e. Hellenistic in my opinion) scholars see it as speaking against Judaizers or a syncretic Hellenistic/Judaic view.

So what motives and misconceptions may be at work here?

Mainstream Christianity has an awful lot to lose if their interpretation of this chapter is wrong. Those who argue for the position I have been presenting here instead have a lot less at stake, because if this verse is removed from consideration, the biblical support for the removal of the Sabbath is virtually non-existent. Therefore, it should be abundantly clear that this verse has been given too much credence and this by mainstream, Hellenistic Christianity.

For a start, the Hebraic perspective on who is 'saved' is practical not creedal. That is, whether someone acknowledged a particular doctrine intellectually or not is not as important as how they lived. As Christians, as Gentile believers, then, we know that our faith is secure through our acknowledgment of our Messiah and our obedience to him, etc.

Thus, the Sabbath issue, regardless of the 'correct' understanding is not going to condemn us. I believe each of us must work out our faith with fear and trembling and IF we do come to a point in our journey where we see the Sabbath as important then we need to take the appropriate steps in how we live.

I have come to this point. Marvin Wilson in 'Our Father Abraham' is most emphatic and clear, with extensive support, that asceticism is not at the heart of Judaism or the Hebrew Bible; that is, it is not biblical. Also he argues that Colossians 2:21 ("Do not taste...") is ascetic and therefore not in anyway Judaic. In context then Colossians 2:16 is not a statement against Judaism and the feasts but an encouragement to enjoy them!

When a challenging issue is addressed with very clear pre-suppositions then there is a tendency to read the preconceived conclusion into the exegesis. That is to indulge in circular reasoning or 'affirming the consequent'. Thus, you can not use the fact that Col 2:16 (the conclusion – indicated by the word 'So' at the start of the phrase) is clearly referring to the Biblical Feasts to argue that therefore the heresy addressed throughout the chapter must be a Judaic one, and that those being challenged are Judaizers.

If Paul in Colossians 2 was addressing a heresy that involved Jews, then they were very much Hellenistic Jews and as such they would not have been pushing food laws, the festivals & sabbaths. The contrast Paul makes between these 'philosophies' and the Messiah is between he who is the pinnacle of Torah, the perfect expression of it, and the world's ways, the traditions of men wherever they originate from. Yeshua embodied and lived all that HaShem had declared in the TaNaK, and this

included the festivals and the Sabbath, etc.

A quick look at the history of Christianity shows as that the Christian ascetics are also more Greek than Hebrew. Perhaps it needs to be re-stated but groups /sects which were Gnostic in much of their outlook can not have been Judaizers, that is, they would not have been arguing for circumcision, the food laws, for keeping the feasts and ceremonial law, etc.

As the Apostle to the Gentiles, Paul's arguments were first and foremost to inform of the Messiah and the Kingdom against the paganism that surrounded him in the Gentile world. Certainly, he also spoke out against those who would force followers of Yeshua to become Jews by accepting all the Jewish markers such as circumcision, but the focus of his ministry was to the Greek world not to the Jewish world.

So the context of Colossians is very much consistent with Paul's ministry – he was extolling the virtues of Yeshua and Torah to a Greek community where the Hellenistic influences were trying to divert the God-fearers from embracing and enjoying biblical festivals, etc.

Given the incredible weight of evidence from the rest of the NT that the Sabbath and the festivals were still observed by Yeshua, by Paul¹⁴⁷, by all the followers of Yeshua in all the lands, I think that Col 2:16 is clearly too equivocal to base such a dramatic doctrinal change upon it, especially when v16 starts with "**Therefore let no-one pass judgment on you ...**".

That is, this issue is not 'life and death', it is not a salvation issue whichever perspective you come from. Therefore, to use it to remove the 4th commandment is, at the very least, most questionable.

Another popular argument is that the Sabbath(s) being referred to in Col 2:16 is the weekly Sabbath, is based on OT precedent and the apparent 'trio' or 'triad'. That is, that is '*or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a sabbath*' the '*festival*' refers to yearly events; the '*new moon*' to monthly and therefore the '*sabbath(s)*' to weekly. If this pattern was intended then it would appear the term Sabbath(s) was referring to the weekly Sabbath.

While this seems plausible from our Greek mindset, consider these few scriptures:

*The contribution of the king from his own possessions was for the **burnt offerings**: the burnt offerings of morning and evening, and the burnt offerings for the **sabbaths, the new moons, and the appointed feasts**, as it is written in the Law of the Lord 2 Chron 31:3 (ESV)*

*We also take on ourselves the obligation to give yearly a third part of a shekel for the service of the house of our God: for the showbread, the regular grain offering, the regular **burnt offering, the sabbaths, the new moons, the appointed feasts**, the holy things, and the sin offerings to make atonement for Israel, and for all the work of the house of our God. Neh 10:32-33 (ESV)*

*And they were to stand every morning, thanking and praising the Lord, and likewise at evening, and whenever **burnt offerings** were offered to the Lord on **sabbaths, new moons and feast days**,*

¹⁴⁷ Some scriptures that highlight Paul's clear observance of the Biblical festivals:

Acts 20:5-6 *These went on ahead and were waiting for us at Troas, but we sailed away from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days we came to them at Troas, where we stayed for seven days.*

Acts 20:16: *For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he might not have to spend time in Asia, for he was hastening to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost.*

Acts 25:8 *While he answered for himself, Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Cæsar, have I committed any offence.*

Acts 28:17 (this was in Rome at the end of his ministry) *And it came to pass, that after three days Paul called the chief of the Jews together: and when they were come together, he said unto them, Men and brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people, or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans.*

according to the number required of them, regularly before the Lord 1 Chron 23:30-31 (ESV)

Notice the association of the burnt offerings with the sabbaths, new moons and feasts. The burnt offerings were only performed at the Temple. Thus the sabbaths being referred to here are those that part of the feasts and not the weekly Sabbath. The triadic formula is just typical chiasmic parallelism.

Note also:

“Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and sabbath and the calling of convocations— I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates;” Isaiah 1:13-14 (ESV)

And

“I will also cause all her mirth to cease, her feasts, her new moons, and her sabbaths, and all her solemn assemblies.” Hosea 2:11 (ASV)

We see here in Isaiah 1 that God is clearly most displeased with the legalistic approach be taken to the Festivals. The Sabbath being referenced here is clearly those that are part of the feasts. As God’s weekly Sabbath is eternal He can not possibly be calling for the weekly Sabbath to end. Similarly with Hosea, God clearly can’t be referring to the weekly Sabbath as the seventh day remains.

Thus, the ‘triadic formula’ in Col 2:16 is clearly NOT referring to the weekly Sabbath at all.

The most important part of verse 16 though is the first few words that say **‘let no-one pass judgment on you’** and therefore whether the weekly Sabbath is included here or not is not to my mind the most important aspect of this scripture.

Some also argue that the 4th Commandment was abolished based somehow on Gen 17 (Abraham being circumcised). The argument being that the weekly Sabbath, the food laws and holy days are all lumped together as practices that are no longer to be observed. Again this seems to be an example of the logic fallacy, ‘affirming the consequent’, where a false use of Col 2:16 is read back into Genesis 17.

Perhaps Genesis 17 could be used to argue that we must get circumcised if we were under the same covenant as Abraham. However, nowhere does scripture indicate that all 613 mitzvot or ordinances (or 618 for some sects of Judaism), must be lumped together.

That is, when Paul and the writer of Hebrews clearly state that the ceremonial laws relating to sacrifice and circumcision (at least for Gentiles), are no longer valid, they are not by inference also removing the weekly Sabbath.

I think it also vital to appreciate that Abraham was ‘saved’ (made right with God), before he was circumcised. The circumcision was just an outward sign of an inward faithfulness.

We need to take care not to assume that the four prohibitions of the Jerusalem Council are ALL that Gentile followers of Jesus are to adhere to. If this were so then it places ‘avoiding food offered to idols’ as more importance than all the 10 Words; of more importance than the prohibition against murder for example.

Some also talk of the fear of going back under the ‘shadow’. While it may be possible, it seems very clear that all who have the faith of Jesus, who demonstrate his faithfulness, can have nothing to fear from Jewish ordinances. Knowing that none of these regulations can bring salvation because we already have it; we can choose with the greatest freedom, to enjoy all the our Father has given us, from the weekly Sabbath to the joy of shouting praises to Yahweh on Yom Teruah (The Day of

Shouting) and the joy of dancing around the Synagogue holding a Torah Scroll on SimChat Torah (the eighth and last day of the Feast of Tabernacles).

It may also help to reflect a little more on what the concept of 'shadow' may entail. For example, consider marriage as a shadow:

"For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as angels in heaven"
Matt 22:30 (ASV)

"And Jesus said unto them, The sons of this world marry, and are given in marriage: but they that are accounted worthy to attain to that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: for neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection." Luke 20:34-36 (ASV)

"Let us rejoice and be exceeding glad, and let us give the glory unto him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready" Rev 19:7 (ASV)

"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. Eph 5:31-32 (ESV)

These texts show that the marriage of a man and women in this age is passing and is to be replaced or subsumed into the Marriage of the Lamb with his bride. Thus the substance again is Messiah and by inference the shadow is the current practice of marriage. May I suggest that part of the mystery referred to in Ephesians is how the 'shadow' points to the substance.

So marriage is a good analogy with respect to the 'shadows' of the Holy Days in Col 2:16. It is a shadow, something still real and relevant, but without the more physical reality of the thing it points to.

Incidentally 'shadow' can mean error but I would suggest the meaning in Col 2:17 could be as per Judges 9:15 where it means more 'protection' (as in the shade/shadow protects us from the sun).

How do we know this may be the correct meaning, rather than 'error'?

Because the phrase is a 'shadow of things to come'. Reading this as 'an error of things to come' suggests that there is in some way error in the Kingdom. Taking the context instead that the feasts, etc., help us to focus on our Messiah and on all the great things that God has revealed, we can see how the protection, the comfort of these festivals points to a greater celebration to come at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb and in the coming Kingdom of God.

These Holy Days are also a time of rest and rejoicing – how is this in any way binding when we use this time to focus on the return of our Messiah – for example many, both in Judaism and Christianity believe the Messiah will come/return at the Feast of Trumpets¹⁴⁸.

Why do this if such days are not a blessing? God has given no clear reason why we should celebrate the first day of the seventh month. If the Messiah returns then, won't it become the greatest day of celebration? It may prove a bit hard to stomach for all those believers who rejected the Feasts, when in the Kingdom they will be called to celebrate this Feast (along with the clear instructions in Zechariah 14 to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles, etc).

¹⁴⁸ See my article on Yom Teruah available from www.charismacomputers.com.au

Some scholars also refer to 1 Cor 9 as supporting the argument that observing the Sabbath is in some way 'weak'. But the Sabbath is not mentioned here. There is no proof that the Sabbath is not part of the 'law of Christ' and it is certainly not 'outside the law of Moses'.¹⁴⁹

Some also argue that "... asking someone to keep the weekly Sabbath means going back to the state of immaturity under the law."

Why is enjoying a God given benefit, a day which even God Himself so ordained as to in some sense 'rest' (from creative work) on that day, a form of immaturity?

Is the church more mature today because it rejected the Sabbath and embraced Sunday instead? I see no evidence for this! Maturity is a result of wisdom. Wisdom is a result of knowledge being gained and applied.

Yes, Yeshua brought a great fulfillment of knowledge, The Tanakh may well be incomplete without him, just as it is incomplete without the fulfillment of all it's prophecies. So there may be a sense in which in applying that fuller knowledge we can be more mature than some. But there is no way, despite putting on the 'mind of the Messiah', that will I ever be more mature than Moses, the most mature and humble of men who saw and talked directly with God!

Even in the resurrection when we sit down with Moses, Elijah, King David, etc. I am sure my maturity, my wisdom will not approach theirs.

An act of maturity would surely be that, where there is even the slightest doubt, we should observe Yeshua and the Apostle Paul and do what they said and did. After all, Yeshua said '*Those who do the will of my Father are my brothers and my sisters*'. He even said 'do what the Pharisees say'!¹⁵⁰

Yeshua even looked upon the man who had observed most of the commandments and 'loved him' (Mark 10:21). This man, admittedly Jewish, would have observed the Sabbath.

When Gentile believers also remember and guard the Sabbath, we can also remember our exodus from slavery thanks to our Messiah's atoning sacrifice and we too can guard each other through the shared fellowship of this day.

The mainstream view on Colossian 2 appears to result from the following errors:

- 1) The misunderstanding that Col 2:16 is binding in some way, rather than an exhortation for a simple freedom of choice and freedom from judgment;
- 2) The mistake of seeing all the 613 ordinances and regulations as rising and falling together, That is, a failure to see the clear separation between the instructions given in God's own hand and those given to a specific people group, the Jews and even to specific peoples within that group such as the priests or woman¹⁵¹;
- 3) A failure to appreciate that Jewish and Gentiles (even in Messiah Jesus) have different expectations placed on them by God. While they are 'one in Messiah' it is a unity of purpose not sameness, in the same way that male and female believers remain distinctly different;

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¹⁵¹ the Second Temple, 'The Concise Book of Mitzvot: The Commandments Which Can Be Observed Today' by Chafetz Chayim For example, t that only apply in Israel.

- 4) A mistaken understanding that in 'fulfilling' the Torah, Jesus 'abolished' it. This includes a mistaken concept of what it means to be 'obedient to Jesus' (Heb 5:9). For example some argue that "Yeshua is the fulfillment of all the Law". This is to misunderstand both the term 'fulfillment' and the 'Law'.

There is clear evidence as to what a Pharisee or a man with a Pharisaic mindset¹⁵², like Yeshua meant when he made this statement that he did not come to destroy 'Torah' but to fulfill it. Flusser explains in his seminal book 'Jesus' that to 'fulfill the Torah' was to correctly interpret and enact it and to 'destroy the Torah' was to interpret it incorrectly. Thus it was apparently quite common for Pharisees in arguments with each other to shout 'You are destroying the Torah!' or 'I am fulfilling Torah!'

To repeat, two examples that I think illustrate this well are Gal 6:2 and Romans 13:10. Try reading these passages and replacing 'fulfill' with 'correctly interpret and enact' and hopefully you will see what I mean:

Gal 6:2 *Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.*

Romans 13:10 *Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.*

This context is of course perfectly in harmony with God's pronouncement to Moses that he would send a Prophet who would perfectly declare the Torah (that is, who would 'fulfill' it).

Conclusion:

In conclusion then, what does the Apostle Paul, the Torah-observant Jew say to Gentiles regarding the Holy Days (we cannot be sure if Paul was including the weekly Sabbath here):

One man esteems one day as more important. Another esteems every day alike. Let each man be fully assured in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks. He who doesn't eat, to the Lord he doesn't eat, and gives God thanks. (Rom 14:5-6)

To again reiterate, with respect to Col 2:16, the crucial phrase is surely 'let no-one judge you'.

It is well established that for the first 10-15 years after the ascension of Yeshua, his followers were all Jewish (this may have included some proselytes who were already part of the Jewish community at the time. Luke for example may fit this criteria).

Clearly though the receiving of the power of Holy Spirit by Gentiles (Cornelius in 50-55 CE) forced the disciples to re-assess the scope of the new move of God through Yeshua and to accept Gentiles into the fellowship.

This in turn led to the need to formulate some plan, as we see with the Jerusalem Council edicts (these were only minimal standards, according to Prof. Flusser in "Judaism and the Origins of Christianity"), so that these Gentiles could be included in the fellowship without needing to become Jewish proselytes.

¹⁵² Prof. David Flusser in "Jesus" (2001) p36 states: *"In the Pharisees, Jesus saw the contemporary heirs of Moses, and said that men should model their lives upon their teaching. This makes sense, for although Jesus was apparently indirectly influenced by Essenism, he was basically rooted in universal non-sectarian Judaism. The philosophy and practice of this Judaism was that of the Pharisees. It would not be wrong to describe Jesus as a Pharisee in the broad sense."*

It should also be obvious that the apostles needed to defend the new faith, the followers of Messiah Yeshua, against two opposing extremes (and nuances of these of course), the Judaizers and the Greek Pagans/Hellenists.

The Apostle Paul's dramatic change when he was shown that Yeshua was the Messiah, the Son of God, led him to be seen as an enemy by the Hellenistic Jews.

Acts 9: 28-29 *"So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. And he spoke and disputed against the **Hellenists**. But they were seeking to kill him."*

Yet at the end of his ministry in his last days in Rome, he stated most emphatically that he had not rejected the Written Torah or even the Oral Torah (the customs of the fathers).

Acts 28:17 *After three days he called together the local leaders of the Jews, and when they had gathered, he said to them, Brothers, though **I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers**, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans.*

Acts 28:23 *When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets.*

So we see here that the Apostle Paul had not rejected his heritage, he had not abrogated the Law and yet he had clearly spoken out against Judaizers. This should not seem in any way contradictory when we remember that the Judaizers were those who argued that the Gentile followers of Yeshua needed to be circumcised to be fully adopted into the commonwealth of Israel. While Paul rejected their legalistic argument, he did not reject the Torah, the Law of Moses, he did not reject the celebration of the Holy Days and the weekly Sabbath, he did not reject the Biblical expectations placed on his Jewish brothers.

With this clarity with respect to Paul's creedal practice and with the appreciation that it was no different to Yeshua's, we should be able to now see the freedom and grace displayed when Paul effectively said to the Colossians:

'My Gentile brothers and sisters in Yeshua the Messiah, do not succumb to the pressure of the pagan society you live in and reject the Biblical practices you have embraced on becoming both 'God-fearers' and disciples of Yeshua.

The Biblical Holy Days, these great feasts that both point back to our freedom from slavery, but most importantly point forward to the Messiah's return and the coming Kingdom, are days that you can freely embrace if you desire.

The feasts will give you a sense of the reality that will be yours with Messiah in the Kingdom. Avoid the false rules and regulations of the pagans that surround you but make the Messiah the Head of your life. He has raised you to life eternal. Hold fast, as through Messiah Yeshua you grow in God." (my paraphrase)