

The Historic Phenomena and Theology of the Nazarenes and Ebionites

by Dan Rogers

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The Nazarenes and the Ebionites as a Historical Phenomenon

The Nazarenes and the Ebionites are two groups which appeared as clearly defined entities in the second century within the phenomenon commonly called “Jewish Christianity.” The use of a term such as Jewish Christianity is problematic due to the multitude of meanings associated with it. For the purpose of this paper, “Jewish Christianity” is used not as a designation of origin, but as the designation of the point of view of a party. Consequently, not every Christian of Jewish descent can here be regarded as Jewish Christian. [1]

The Jewish Christians very early came into opposition and conflict with the European-centered, Gentile-dominated “Great Church.” There were, of course, those of Jewish origin who were loyal members of the “Great Church.” Justin, writing about the middle of the second century, distinguishes two groups of Christians of Jewish origin — moderates who were a part of the Great Church and who, especially in the Diaspora congregations, exercised a Judaizing influence on the formation of their doctrine and morality; and extremists who refused to live with Gentiles who would not incorporate the Jewish law into their faith in Christ. [2] There were probably such Jewish Christians who had separated themselves from the rest of what was being called Christianity because they combined faith in Christ with Jewish legal observance. They were to be found in many places such as Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Rome and for a long time. [3]

There is a clear profile only of the Jewish Christians of Palestine-Syria, who insistently emphasized their connection with the original cell of Christianity in Jerusalem and Galilee. This, and most of the information we have about them, comes from literary remains attributed to their circles. The polemic writings of the “Church Fathers” about the various Jewish Christian groups are unreliable due to obvious prejudice against those who would oppose their teachings. The Jewish Christians had independent theological and literary traditions, and represented, from the turn of the century to the third century, a group which was independent of the “Great Church” and whose outward form does not conform with their historiological characterization. [4]

Ebionite

The names under which these Jewish Christians appear in the lists of sects provided by the Church Fathers were originally honorable names in the NT

but their meanings had since deteriorated. Ebionim or “Ebionites,” is a rehebraized ancient title of honor which the primitive church adopted, probably after their flight from Jerusalem, on the basis of Jesus’ beatitudes concerning the “poor.” There was no one named Ebion, who served as father of the sect, as the Church Fathers (Hippolytus, Tertullian, Epiphanius, etc.) suggested in order to conceal the group’s true origin and to label it more easily as heretical. The name was chosen by the believers in accordance with a traditional pattern (e.g., Perusim = Pharisees, Sadducim = Sadducees). [5] Later, the hatred and satire of opponents reduced Ebionite to a nickname and term of abuse so that the Jewish Christians themselves avoided it. The term has been broadly used by not only the Church Fathers but by almost all writers. Any group proclaiming Christ and upholding the Mosaic law, regardless of whatever other philosophies, doctrines, and practices they held, have been lumped together under the term Ebionite.

Nazarene

The Nazarenes were a distinct group within the larger body of Jewish Christians with various, mostly extreme theologies — all of whom are referred to as Ebionites. The term “Nazoreans” is used in Acts 24:5 by Tertullus, a spokesman for Ananias and the Jewish elders, in describing the apostles and disciples in Palestine in the middle of the first century. The Hebraized form *Nozrim* is used in the *Birkath ha-Minim* (the *Petition against Heretics*) in the Jewish Eighteen Benedictions. This name was long used in Syria to designate Christians in general. Nazarene was obviously the first century appellation used to describe the disciples of Jesus of Nazareth. Kittel comments that the term should be considered as a substantive formed from the root *nsr* meaning “to keep,” or “to observe.” [6] If so, this would indicate that the Nazarenes were known as the Christian group of “observers;” observing the Messiahship of Jesus (of note in Palestine) and the Mosaic law (of note in Syria) .

The Church Fathers and the Jews as Sources

The Church Fathers who have reported about these Ebionites/Nazoreans were seldom eye-witnesses of the communal life of these groups. They based their reports largely upon hearsay and upon the documents which had become known to them. We must understand the incredible prejudice in the form of anti-Semitism toward anything portending to observance of the Mosaic law.

Justin, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Origen, Epiphanius, Jerome, and Eusebius (whose Ecclesiastical History has preserved fragments from the memoirs of Hegesippus, who Eusebius considered to be a Jewish member of the Great Church) provide what we hope is some factual material in spite of various contradictions in their reports and their obvious prejudice. Of this material, the *Panarion* of Bishop Epiphanius of Salamis is especially important. It is intended to be a *kibotion iatrikon* (a medical box for use against wild beasts and snakes). He treats the Nazoreans in chapter 29 and, in detail, the entire Ebionite movement in chapter 30. The accounts are confused in various ways and often jumbled together, but seem partially verifiable by means of the information provided by the *Pseudo-Clementine narrative*. According to Hans-Joachim Schoeps, Epiphanius, the “patriarch of orthodoxy,” had a positive knowledge of the Ebionites and states that the original Clementines, in some form or another, were connected with them. [7]

In contrast to the polemic of the Church Fathers against these “enemies,” the Jewish synagogue chose to ignore them. The Jewish Christians are included among the *minim* (heretics), of whom it was said that they were worse than idolaters, for the latter deny God without knowing him while the former know him yet nevertheless deny him. [8]

Origin of the Nazarenes and Ebionites

The origin of the Nazarenes and Ebionites as clearly defined entities began with the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. The cessation of the Jewish Temple worship had a paralyzing effect on the life of the Jewish people, and from it they only slowly recovered and settled to an essentially maimed existence, with their cherished religion bereft of much of its reason for being. To the Jewish Christians who survived the carnage of 70 A.D., heart-rending questions must have presented themselves, but of their reactions to it no certain record remains. Among all the documents which comprise the NT canon, and indeed among other extant writing of the subapostolic age, there is no description of the terrible events which attended the defeat of Judea’s cause against Rome, or of the fortunes of the Palestinian Christians amid the confusion and overthrow of their nation’s life, neither is there any conscious reference to the significance of the catastrophe for Christianity. There is so complete a silence maintained in these documents that on their testimony alone nothing would be known of this disaster.

The fact of this remarkable silence raises a twofold problem, namely why the Jerusalem Christians left no record of their fortunes or indications of their

mental and emotional reaction to such a tremendous experience, and what was the reason which led the Gentile Christians apparently to allow so epoch-making an event as the destruction of the citadel of Judaism and the disappearance of the Mother Church to pass uncommemorated. Of this incredible period church historian, Hurlbut, writes:

“For fifty years after Paul’s life, a curtain hangs over the church, through which we vainly strive to look; and when at last it rises, about 129 A.D. with the writings of the earliest Church Fathers, we find a church in many ways very different from that in the days of Peter and Paul.” [9]

Edward Gibbon states:

“The scanty and suspicious materials of ecclesiastical history seldom enable us to dispel the dark cloud that hangs over the first age of the church.” [10]

What happened during this time? Obviously, it was a time of many heresies. The Church Fathers come on the scene in the second century to tell us vociferously who the heretics were and where the “orthodox church” was. These men claimed to be the followers of the apostles but their theology was different and seemed to blend Hellenistic philosophy and Babylonian religious custom with Christianity.

It was certainly a far different theology from that of the Jerusalem Church which Paul said he had taught the Gentiles to follow (Acts 15:2, 22-28; I Thes. 2:14). It is interesting that the descendants of the Jerusalem Church, the Nazarenes, were labeled as heretics and persecuted for their regard of the Mosaic law when they were merely carrying on the tradition of the church of Peter and James.

Flight to Pella

In the absence of any explicit statement in the NT or subapostolic documents, we are left to find our earliest, most complete, and almost only information about the fate of the Jerusalem Church in the fourth century *Ecclesiastical History* of Eusebius, which is substantially reproduced in the next century by Epiphanius.

Eusebius, after relating how the Apostles were finally driven from Judea by the hostility of the Jews, goes on to describe the fortunes of the Christian community in Jerusalem:

“However, when the people of the church in Jerusalem, having been commanded by an oracle, given by revelation to men there approved, before the war (Mk. 13), to depart from the city and to dwell in a certain city of Paraea, namely, Pella, and when those who believed on Christ had migrated thither from Jerusalem ...” [11]

Eusebius then proceeds to show that when all faithful Christians had left Jerusalem and the whole land of Judea, the judgement of God then fell upon the unbelieving Jews in the form of the Roman armies. The accounts of Epiphanius agree on the main facts and add a note that some of the disciples subsequently returned to Jerusalem. [12] Some historians such as S.G.F. Brandon doubt that the Jerusalem Church fled to Pella because of geographic and political reasons, and also because Epiphanius’ account of their returning to a Gentile city which excluded Jews is not possible. [13]

In spite of the few historians who hold this opinion, there is no reason to doubt the accuracy of the statements of Eusebius and Epiphanius. That geographic and political reasons would have prevented this, is easily disproved by research into these factors by many historians, including Barbara C. Gray. Her article, “Movement of the Jewish Church During the First Jewish War,” is most cogent in regard to the Jewish migration to Pella. [14] As for the Gentile city of Aelia admitting Jews, Gibbon states:

“At his (Marcus) persuasion the most considerable part of the congregation renounced the Mosaic law, in the practice of which they had persevered above a century. By this sacrifice of their habits and prejudices they purchased a free admission into the colony of Hadrian, and more firmly cemented their union with the Catholic Church.” [15]

Both Eusebius and Epiphanius affirm that the migration to Paraea was a total one and that Christians fled over the Jordan, not only from Jerusalem but also from other cities and villages. Eusebius goes on to add that all of Palestine at that time was completely emptied of Christians. If this can be taken literally,

it means that a new wave of Christians must have come into the area from the Gentile churches and totally replaced the Jerusalem Church and all Jewish Christians.

Independent of these accounts, there are the passages referring to the exodus to Pella in the Ebionite “Acts of the Apostles,” as reconstructed from the Pseudo-Clementines. [16] Recognitions 1:37 (Syriac version) and 1:39 (Latin version of Rufinus) report that the wisdom of God led those who believed in Him to a safe place in the country before the outbreak of the war. The war, which would not come unexpectedly but which would verify the prediction of the “True Prophet,” would result in the destruction of non-believers. The Jewish war and its tragic consequences were evidently regarded as predicted by Jesus, and his Parousia was expected immediately after 70 A.D., when the prophecy of the destruction of the Temple and the abolition of sacrifice, emphasized in the teaching of the “Ebionite Jesus,” had been fulfilled. Finally, the true gospel would be sent out, only after the destruction of the holy city, for the refutation of future heresies (Hom. 2:17). With respect to these accounts, Hans-Joachim Schoeps says:

“Who else in the whole of Christendom would have been interested in appealing to this event and placing it of all things at the center of an account of the history of salvation, except the posterity of these exiles, the separated Jewish Christians or Ebionites, who, it is true, appear to be removed by a considerable period of time from the moment of their separation.” [17]

The Jewish Christians moved to Pella in Transjordan, and thus the rest of the history of this portion of the primitive church took place in a land foreign to that of their origins.

Why Pella?

Why did the Jewish Christian community choose the Transjordan area while Jewish emigration went to cities such as Jamnia and Lydda which were less remote? A prominent reason could have been that the primitive church had its real roots in Galilee, the country native to Jesus’ family. Julius Africanus reports that Jesus’ relatives had spread the gospel everywhere starting from the Jewish villages of Nazareth and Cochaba. [18] This suggests that the Decapolis was Jewish Christian missionary territory at an early date.

Jerome tells us in his commentary on Isaiah 9:1 that:

“The Nazoreans venture to explain this passage as: When Christ came and his preaching was glittering, especially the land of Naphtali was delivered from the errors of the scribes and Pharisees, and he struck off from its neck the very burdensome yoke of Jewish traditions.” [19]

The Ebionites and Nazarenes understood the passage to mean that Jesus proclaimed the gospel first for the land in which they themselves then resided.

Eastern Palestine was the safest place the Jewish Christians could choose in this troubled period. Pella is a typical example of a hiding place, lying hidden in a valley on the edge of the Transjordanian high plateau. Today called *Khirbet Fahil*, it lies 260 feet above the Jordan, diagonally across from Scythopolis. Pella thus became a chief center of Jewish Christianity which had hitherto been Palestinian, and it probably remained an important location in the following centuries. The Jewish Christians apparently expanded from Pella into the rest of Peraea — the whole territory east of the upper Jordan. Johannes Weiss asserts:

“That the church here subsisted not merely as an intimidated flock in hiding, but continued its communal living and its propaganda, is undoubtedly probable.” [20]

Other Locations

The second most important location of Jewish Christians was the city of Cochaba. It seems to have been situated in Basanitis, about eighteen miles north of Pella.

According to Epiphanius (*Pan.* 30.18:1), the Ebionites lived “in Batanaea and Paneas, and especially in Moabitis and Cochaba, in Basanitis beyond Adraea,” and the Nazarenes lived in Pella and practically the same territories (*Pan.* 29.7). The statement about the Nazarenes inhabiting Beroea is confusing. Some suggest that what is meant is that the “Nazorean heresy” found in Beroea derived from Coele-Syria. [21] Others add that the Nazarenes of Beroea should probably be regarded as Jewish Christians of the Damascus congregation who were exiled to the north and who only later became associated with the Transjordanian descendants of the primitive church. [22]

Apart from the remote settlement in Beroea, Ebionite communities of the second, third, and fourth centuries inhabited the territory east of the Jordan. Catholic Christianity did not penetrate this area until, perhaps, the middle of the third century. Catholic bishops in Pella are mentioned for the first time in the first century.

Nazarene Bishops

The exodus into Transjordan took place under the second Nazarene bishop, Simon (Simeon) bar-Clopus. According to the report of Hegesippus, he was chosen bishop directly after the death of James when the relatives of Jesus assembled with the surviving apostles and disciples to elect a successor. [23] As a cousin of Jesus and James, Simon bar-Clopus was apparently the next-of-kin. If the third bishop, Justus, should also prove to be a relative (not yet determined with certainty), there would be a definite “dynasty of Jesus.” That Jesus’ family, referred to as the *desposynoi* because of their relationship to the “Lord” (i.e., those who were closest to the Messianic throne) occupied a prominent position in the Nazarene/Ebionite community is also attested by another account of Hegesippus. According to him, two grandsons of Jude, the brother of Jesus, by the names of Jacob and Zocher (Zechariah) were interrogated by the emperor Domitian and after their release governed their congregations until the time of Trajan. [24]

Heresy Abounds

According to the dating of James’ death, Simon bar-Clopus acceded to the episcopal seat of James between 63 and 66 A.D. In 107 A.D., according to Jerome, in the tenth year of Trajan’s reign, Simon suffered crucifixion. He was executed by Trajan’s governor, Atticus, as a descendant of David. Commenting on the tremendous significance of this event, Hegesippus wrote:

“The church continued until then as a pure and uncorrupt virgin; while if there were any at all that attempted to pervert the sound doctrine of the saving gospel, they were yet skulking in dark retreats; but when the sacred choir of apostles became extinct, and the generation of those that had been privileged to hear their inspired wisdom, had passed away, then also vile abominations of impious error arose by the fraud and delusions of false teachers. These also, as there was none of the apostles left, henceforth attempted, without shame, to preach their false doctrine against the gospel of truth.” [25]

There is some controversy as to exactly what is meant by Hegesippus. Schoeps would identify “church” as the Ebionites. Certainly it is true that it was at this juncture that heresies and schisms began to develop within the Jewish Christian movement. Some groups among the Ebionites began to question the divinity of Jesus and the validity of the teachings of Paul; some became Gnostic. The Nazarenes became known as “moderate” Ebionites — accepting the divinity of Jesus, the writings of Paul, and the Mosaic law. Most historians commenting on Hegesippus’ meaning of “church,” such as Henry Chadwick, understand it to mean the entire Christian church, not just the Ebionites. [26] This period strikingly corresponds to Brandon’s “period of silence,” Gibbon’s “dark cloud,” and Hurlbut’s “curtain.” Examining the Catholic Church which emerged from this period and its theology and practice, we find a church significantly different from that of the church of the days of Peter, Paul, and James. Heresy did undoubtedly abound during the period following the death of Simon while the “curtain” hung over the church. When the curtain lifts, the “Church Fathers” are on the scene, telling us they have emerged victorious over the “heretics” and have established “orthodoxy.” Of course, their orthodoxy while ostensibly condemning Gnosticism and the pagans, gradually accepted many of their ideas and customs. The customs, rites, temples, and idols of the pagans were no problem for the “Great Church;” it merely gave them Christian names. On one thing, however, the Great Church was dogmatic — there was to be no “Jewishness” nor “Mosaic law” allowed. Somewhat of a strange attitude for a church founded on the Old Testament, originated by Jesus, and which worshipped a Jew. In a strange reversal of the truth, the Jewish Christian sects came to be blamed for the “abominations of impious error” spoken of by Hegesippus. [27]

Some Jewish Christians Join with the Great Church

According to Eusebius (*Eccl. Hist. V. xii*), up to the year 135 A.D. there were fifteen bishops of the circumcision who succeeded one another and who possessed all the marks of a kind of monarchical episcopate over the congregations of the Jewish Christian church. Schoeps feels that this number can hardly be correct and thinks that perhaps bishops of other congregations beside the one designated as Jerusalem’s are included in this list. [28] With the fall of Bether, the last Jewish stronghold, in 135 A.D., the revolt led by the Jewish partisan Bar Cocheba which had lasted for three and one-half years came to its end. This year marks the end of the Jewish Christian congregation of Jerusalem (at Pella). According to the list of bishops provided by Eusebius, their last bishop, Judas, resided there until the

eighteenth year of Hadrian's reign (134-135 A.D.). Tradition ascribed to this last bishop the surname Kyriakos, which appears to bring him into relationship with Jesus' family [29] The next bishop in the episcopal seat of James, Marcus (Mark) by name, was not of Jewish origin. Marcus was a Gentile, probably a native either of Italy or of the Latin provinces. At his persuasion, the most considerable part of the congregation at Pella renounced the Mosaic law, in the practice of which they had persevered above a century. By this sacrifice of their habits and Culture, they purchased a free admission into the colony of Hadrian, into Jerusalem, and firmly cemented their union with the Catholic Church. [30] Here again, it is interesting to notice that while the pagans did not have to give up their culture or rites, the Jewish Christians were required to forsake their observance of the Mosaic law. Those Nazarenes who remained at Pella and continued in obedience to the Law were called heretics and mocked as "Ebionites (poor in doctrine)" by the Catholic Church. [31]

Later History

The Jewish Christians in Palestine did not participate in the Bar Cocheba war. The reason is not hard to guess: it was because of Bar Cocheba's messianic claim which was accepted by the majority of the people and by its rabbinic leadership headed by Rabbi Akiba. In the persecution of 135 A.D., conducted by the Jews, the last Jewish Christian martyrs of whom we have knowledge perished. It was probably another headlong flight for the Jewish Christians, for they had to leave behind their greatest relic, the bishop's chair upon which James had sat and which was exhibited in Jerusalem as a precious relic even in the time of the emperor Constantine. The persecutions during and after the year 135, constituted the end of both the Jewish state and Palestinian Jewish Christianity. Hugh Schonfield writes:

"Jewish Christianity never regained its position of authority in the affairs of the Church. The Hadrianic war, which had wrung the death knell of Jewish hopes of political independence, had also relegated the church of the apostles to the rank of a heretical sect. Henceforth the Jewish Christians, while they observed their ancestral customs, were practically excluded from the Catholic Church and might only associate with one another in their own congregations." [32]

For the external history of the Ebionite communities in Transjordan after 135 A.D., we possess few direct testimonies. We do know that they continued

their mission in a limited way and that in this new homeland, which was practically untouched by international commerce, they held their own for a long time — some 350 years. Their tendency to heretical schism, following the customary sectarian fate, probably produced further schisms of separate lines of development. Since Epiphanius gives us information concerning the existence of Ebionite settlements on Cyprus about the year 375, we may suppose that the Ebionites fled from their hostile environment to this island. In the west around 360 A.D., Ambrosiaster and Marius Victorinus knew Symmachians and Nazoreans. Augustine identifies these groups with each other and explicitly states that remnants of them persisted to his own time — presumably he means in North Africa. In Syria, however, according to a statement by Theodoret of Cyprus who was certainly well enough informed about this region, the Ebionites were no longer in existence as autonomous groups about the year 450. It was at this time that Pella became an episcopal see of the Catholic Church.

A New Source

Until 1966, this was all the information we had. In that year, Schlomo Pines published the discovery of an Arabic treatise written around the year 1000, with a Jewish Christian source. The greatest part of its material is from early centuries of Christianity. The source reflects traditions and opinions of a Jewish Christian group, different from many of the Ebionites, but probably identical with the Nazarenes. Writing about his discovery, Pines states:

“The text appears to be of purely Jewish Christian origin and seems to relate some of the traditions of the sect. These traditions bear in part on the history of Christianity in the first century (and perhaps in the first half of the second) and do not appear to derive from a tradition which gives the point of view of the dominant churches. In other words, there is a fair chance that this text — which may have been written in the fifth century or later — represents an independent, otherwise quite unknown tradition concerning some events which occurred in the earliest Christian community; this tradition, however distorted it may have been in the course of transmission, could conceivably go back in parts to the first period of Christianity.” [33]

Historically this text offers a location of the Jewish Christians among the Islamic tribes of the outer regions of Syria and elsewhere. A “clandestine”

existence to use the term of Schonfield. From the fifth century on, the Jewish Christians lived in small groups or wandered as individuals.

The Theology of the Nazarenes and the Ebionites

The Nazarenes are often referred to synonymously with the Ebionites. Jean Danielou is the most noted for this. This reference is only fair if you define Ebionism as the name for the entire Jewish Christian movement of which the Nazarenes were a part. S.G.F. Brandon feels there were Jewish Christians (Ebionites) living in Syria and Transjordan before 70 A.D. (c.f. note 13). Indeed there were Ebionites who adopted Gnosticism (including rejecting portions of the Old Testament and embracing vegetarianism), Essenic notions, the theosophic stamp of the Elkesaites (in which we find the groundwork of the pseudo-Clementine system [34]), the mysteries of the Mandeans, etc. The most numerous body of Ebionites, and most commonly referred to by that appellation, is the group which may well have arisen out of the Nazarene group, from the schisms occurring among the Jewish Christians in Transjordan following the Bar Cochba war of 135 A.D. This was the group which came to believe that Jesus was only a physical man, but became the Messiah as a result of his perfect obedience to the law of Moses. Based on the pseudo-Clementine documents, many historians conclude that they also felt that the whole ritual law of Moses was necessary to salvation for all men and that Paul was an apostate heretic whose epistles should be discarded.

The Nazarenes, often called “moderate” Ebionites, were the legitimate remains of the apostolic church — both ethnically and theologically. They united the Mosaic law with belief in the virgin birth, the divinity of Jesus, and Jesus’ Messiahship. They practiced circumcision and the Sabbath in addition to the New Covenant Sacraments, and services of the Christian Church.

The Gospel in Aramaic, and possibly Hebrew, was used and there was no antipathy to Paul. Their eschatology focused on the resurrection from the dead, a future conversion of all Israel, and a millennial reign of Christ on earth. [35]

After the Bar Cochba revolt of 132-135 A.D., the Nazarenes would not go back to Aelia and become part of a Gentile church. It was at this time that the Catholic Church began to call them heretics, primarily due to their continued observance of the Sabbath, the Passover on the fourteenth of Nisan, and the annual Sabbaths, as well as dietary laws. Epiphanius suggests that, until 135 A.D., Christians everywhere observed Passover irrespective of the day of the week. [36] W.D. Davies states that the Jewish Christians still observed the Feasts of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles — understanding that the New Covenant through Jesus did not negate these

aspects of the Old — and that, the Jewish Christians were the dominant element in Christianity until 70 A.D. [37]

The years 70 and 135 A.D., were times of crisis for the Nazarenes. The next time of crisis came at the time the Roman emperor, Constantine, was baptized into the Catholic Church. An era of pagan persecution was passing away only to be replaced by the more terrible and prolonged persecutions by Christian Romans of any who would keep the law of Moses. [38]

In the fourth-fifth century source attributed to the Nazarenes (or the remains of them) by Shlomo Pines, the Nazarenes attack the Romans (Catholic Christians) for abandoning the Mosaic law and for replacing it with different laws and customs. They also attack the Christology of the Catholic Church because of the emphasis on the person of Christ as opposed to their emphasis on Christ as prophet, proclaiming the coming of the Kingdom of God. Another charge against the “Great Church” is that they have replaced the Fast (Day of Atonement) with other fasts such as Lent. The descendants of the Nazarenes in this text further take to task the “Church Fathers” for their idea about Christ doing away with the Sabbath and instituting Sunday observance. They explain that Christ came to magnify the law (here in regard to how to observe the Sabbath) not to change or to do away with it. The Council of Nicea was viewed as a death warrant for Jewish Christians. Any who would observe the Sabbath rather than Sunday were to be executed. [39] Under the sway of force — according to the text:

“... people who professed the religion of Christ came to do all that is reprehensible: they worshipped the cross, observed the Roman religious rites, and ate pork. Those who did not eat it were killed.” [39]

Another condemnation of the Roman Church was that they had taken the Roman and Greek feast, called the “Nativity of Time,” which celebrated the return of the sun in January, and had introduced various modifications into it and called it the “Nativity of Christ” (later observed in the West on December 25 — “Christmas”). The text denounces many additional customs in the Christian churches as pagan. [39]

It is interesting that the same period as the writing of this text, is also that of John Chrysostom’s anti-Jewish sermons in Antioch, in which, he vehemently denounced the Judaizing tendencies of Christians who celebrate the Jewish

rather than the Christian feasts. This well could have been in reaction to the group responsible for the writing of our text.

The author of our text claims that the Catholic Church hated the Jews because with their understanding of the OT, they could see through the pretensions of the Catholics.

Summary

It would appear that, in the Nazarenes, apart from some later schisms and heretical movements, we have the true members of the Jerusalem church led by the successors of James and the family of Jesus. They preserved, in the face of overwhelming persecution, the beliefs and customs transmitted to them by the Apostles. Their theological understanding from Jesus and James was that Jesus had not come to do away with the law of Moses, but to refine it — making it a way of life not based on a temple and sacrificial system. While not antagonistic to the Gentile Christians, they warned of false leaders who would claim apostolic authority in replacing the Mosaic law with false customs and doctrines. They indicted the “Church Fathers” for their Alexandrian allegory, Platonic dualism, and antipathy to the law of Moses. Out of an anti-Semitic bias the “Great Church” labeled these true Christians as heretics and sought their destruction.

Though persecuted from without and troubled from within, they clung to their faith to death. Finally forced either to flight or to a clandestine existence, they almost disappeared; but, as individuals or as small groups, they hid among other “heretics,” always clinging to their faith in Christ and their observance of the law of Moses.

It is indeed ironic that the faith and family of Jesus came to be rejected as heretical while a syncretic blend of NT teaching, Gnosticism, paganism, Platonism, and allegory replaced it and became known as “orthodox Christianity.”

NOTES

1. The weakness of the book by Jean Danielou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, London, 1964, is that while it presents a wealth of material, it confuses the two types.
2. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, ch. 47.
3. H. Schoeps, *Jewish Christianity, Factional Disputes in Early Church*, Philadelphia, 1969, p. 10.
4. Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy*, Tubingen, 1964, p. 274.
5. Schoeps, p. 11.
6. Kittel and Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the NT*, art. "Nazoraion," Grand Rapids, 1977.
7. H. Schoeps, *Theology and History of the Jewish Christian*, Tubingen, 1949, pp. 457-79.
8. stated about 100 A.D. by Rabbi Tarphon, *Tosefta Tractate Shab.*, 13:5.
9. Hurlbut, *Story of the Christian Church*, p. 41.
10. Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Random House, N.Y., ch. 15, p. 382.
11. Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.*, III. v. 2-3.
12. Epiphanius, *De Mens. et Pond.*, xv.
13. S.G.F. Brandon, *The Fall of Jerusalem*, London, 1951, p. 169.
14. Barbara C. Gray, "Movement of the Jewish Church during First Jewish War," *Jewish Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. 24:1-7, Jan. 1973.
15. Edward Gibbon, ch. 15, p. 390.
16. H. Schoeps, *Study of the Pseudo-Clementines*, Leipzig, 1949, pp. 69 ff.
17. H. Schoeps, *Theology*, p. 447.
18. Eusebius, I. vii. 14.
19. Jerome, *M.P.L.*, 24: 125.
20. J. Weiss, *Earliest Christianity*, N.Y., Harper and Row, 1959, Vol. 2, p. 716.
21. A. Schmidtke, *New Documents and Understanding of Jewish Christian Evangelism*, Leipzig, 1911, p. 124.
22. H. Schoeps, *Jewish Christianity*, p. 29.
23. quoted by Eusebius, III. xi. 1.
24. quoted by Eusebius, III. xx. 6.
25. quoted by Eusebius, III. xxxii. 3-6.
26. H. Chadwick, "Hegesippus," *Ency. Brit.*, Chicago, 1967.
27. *Ibid.*
28. H. Schoeps, *Theology*, pp. 266 f.
29. H. Schoeps, *Jewish Christianity*, p. 34.

30. Eusebius, IV. vi.; Sulpicius Severus, ii. 31. By comparing their unsatisfactory accounts Mosheim de Rebus (*Christians before Constantine the Great*, p. 327, etc.) has drawn out a very distinct representation of the circumstances and motives of this revolution.
31. E. Gibbon, p. 391.
32. Hugh Schonfield, *History of Jewish Christianity*, London, 1936, p. 62.
33. Shlomo Pines, *Jewish Christians According to a New Source*, Jerusalem, 1966, p. 21.
34. P. Schaff, *Hist. of Christian Church*, Grand Rapids, 1950, p. 434.
35. Ibid., pp. 430-432. See also Jerome's *Commentary* on Isa. 9:1.
36. Epiphanius, *Against Heresies*, 70,10.
37. W.D. Davies, "Paul and Jewish Christianity," *Jewish Christians*, 1972, p. 72.
38. H. Schonfield, *History*, p. 97.
39. S. Pines, *Jewish Christians*, pp. 3-5, 31, 32, 34. For an analysis of the "salvation understanding" of the Nazarenes from this source see: D. Flugger, "Salvation Past and Future," *Numan*. 16:139-55, sp. 1969.
40. Ibid. p. 65.