

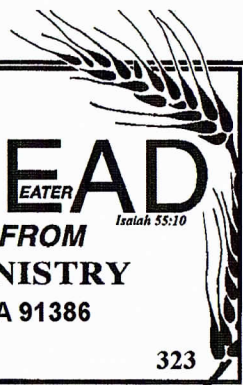
of Paul's argument, would Agrippa have been tempted to abandon his Judaism if he *had* been persuaded to become a *Christian*?

Paul finally arrives in Rome and has his chance to speak to the Jewish leadership there. Acts 28:21-23: Then they said to him, "We neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor have any of the brethren who came reported or spoken any evil of you. But we desire to hear from you what you think; for concerning this *sect*, we know that it is spoken against everywhere." So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, *persuading them* concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening.

In both Acts 26 and 28, Paul's argument clearly and accurately is made *only* by means of what Moses and the prophets had proclaimed would come. In the Acts period, God has yet to give Paul any revelation other than that which was totally in line with the prophetic plans for Israel, within Judaism. Paul has yet to be given the revelation of the mystery (Gk. *-musterion*, secret) concerning The Dispensation of Grace, as explained in Ephesians 3. Here, the word "sect" is used to describe these Israelite believers in Jesus Christ.

The third occurrence of *Christian* is found in 2 Peter 4:16: **Yet if anyone suffers as a *Christian*, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.** This passage deals with the suffering that is to be expected as a believer in Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 1:1 and 2 Peter 3:1 show that these two epistles were addressed to the descendents of the *diaspora* that had occurred six centuries earlier. These are the people that the Bible calls *ethnos*, which is usually translated *Gentiles*, but should be translated *nations*. Peter's epistles are addressed to Israelites that are "among the nations" who had belonged to what is described in Acts 26 as a *sect*.

While I don't shy away from the word *Christian* in identifying myself with Christ, I prefer to describe myself as "a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ." Believers in Christ have been using this word *Christian* to describe themselves for two millennia now, but it behooves us to recognize who it was that were called *Christians* in our New Testament. Both the words *Christian* and *sect* describe the Acts period Israelites who were becoming related to and identified with Christ. These believing Israelites are described as belonging to a sect within Judaism, and the word *Christian* describes that sect.



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WHO ARE 'THE CHRISTIANS'?

By Robert Juneau

The word *Christian* is often used to identify oneself with the religion of *Christianity*, a belief system, or a philosophical worldview. With all of the religious and moral implications associated with this word, it might seem strange that the Greek word *Christianos*, translated *Christian*, occurs only three times in Scripture.

The first occurrence is found in Acts 11:26: **So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called *Christians* in Antioch** (unless noted, *NKJV* used throughout). E.W. Bullinger suggests that this name may have been given at first by Gentiles in mockery, and that Jews would not have given this name, as *Christos* was a sacred part of God's name (*Jesus Christ*).

When the context of this passage is ignored, the word *Christian* is regularly forced to identify these early believers in Christ with the same company of people as those who have been calling themselves *Christians* for the past two thousand years; however, the Biblical use of this word has nothing to do with anyone being associated with *Christianity*. Seven verses earlier in Acts 11:19, the Word is preached to none but Jew only. Five verses later, in Acts 12:1-4, Herod purposely arrests Peter right before the feast of Passover. The reason that the word is going out to Jews only and that this Jewish feast is still prominent in the narrative is because this is still the work God was doing in and through the nation of Israel, within Judaism. This was the Acts period, not the present Dispensation of Grace when God is dealing with all nations on an equal standing as taught in Ephesians 3:6: **In Spirit, the nations are to be joint-enjoyers of a portion, joint-bodies, and joint-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the good message** (O.Q. Sellers' Resultant Version). This distinction is seldom recognized, which keeps people from doctrinally separating the dispensation in which the Antioch people became believers from the Dispensation of Grace believers.

Why is it so important to recognize the Jewish-centeredness and the Jewish character of the first century activities in our New Testament? Most

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believers acknowledge that the Messiah came into the world through the Jewish nation and lineage. Most *Christians* acknowledge that Christ lived out His earthly life within the bounds of Jewish culture, law and religion, so why is the Jewish framework that exists in our New Testament such a big point of contention for the serious dispensationalist?

First, because if we honestly desire to attain Biblical clarity, it must be recognized that this specific work that God was doing in and through the nation of Israel was suspended at Acts 28:28. Most in Christendom agree that a change occurred at some point in the first century, but in their efforts to make sense of this pivotal change, the early so-called church fathers made a mistake by pointing to the destruction of Jerusalem and her temple in 70 A.D. We don't have to look someplace else in history for the answer to why God is no longer uniquely involved with the nation of Israel. The explanation for this change is found within the pages of our Bible if one would rightly divide the word of truth, as in 2 Timothy 2:15.

Second, it must be recognized that the culture, the law, and the religion of Biblical Judaism is the very mechanism that will bring to fruition all of God's promises for this earth and mankind upon it. To ignore, or work around these two great truths, as most do, greatly impairs our ability to understand the Word of God.

Most believers today acknowledge Israel's special place in God's Old Testament activities, but seem unwilling or unable to acknowledge the fact that Israel's privileged position is still very much in place throughout a large part of the New Testament. The common thought is that once a Jew had embraced Christ as their Messiah they moved away from their Judaism and moved toward *Christianity*. It is not Scripturally justifiable in any way to believe that the first century Jewish men and women coming to Christ would have abandoned their Judaism in favor of some new religion called *Christianity*. The following is from Sir Robert Anderson's book, *The Silence of God*:

"To think that after thousands of years of waiting for their Messiah, after all of the promises God made about His coming, after all of the desire, hope, and longing for Him to come, that a first century Jew, when finally able to lay hold of and embrace his long awaited Messiah, would abandon Judaism and cease being a religious Jew, is a grotesque absurdity."

It is absurd to think that an Israelite should have turned from Judaism when this was the very mechanism that brought him his Messiah in the first place. This would be like waiting years for a promotion at work, and when you finally get it, you quit your job. Does it make sense that the very thing that brought you the advancement you have always wanted is abandoned the moment you finally get it? It seems strange to me that so many believe this is what was happening in the first century, but despite the Biblical evi-

dence to the contrary, this is taught in almost every circle of *Christianity*.

Biblical Judaism is the only religion we see interwoven with the language of the New Testament. Much of the doctrine, many of the commandments, many of the directives and edicts, many of the practices and rituals found in Christendom are taken from language that is misplaced and never intended to be applied outside of God's religion for Israel. When we go to the New Testament to find support for all we do and think as believers in Christ, we are forced to navigate our way through the myriad of passages that were purposely written within the context of Jewish culture and religion. Over the history of Christendom, few have been willing or able to navigate this successfully, causing much confusion and many non-Biblical teachings.

An Israelite was identified as such because of the bloodline, the nationality, the culture, and the religion to which he belonged. A New Testament Israelite did not become a *Christian* when he or she came to faith in Christ; in fact, they would have become much more of a Jew than ever before. This is what Romans 9 is about when Paul says, **They are not all Israel who are of Israel, and, The children of promise are counted as the seed.** The requirement to move forward with God's plans for Israel now included faith in their Messiah and submission to the Kingdom (government) of God. In Acts 21:20, James tells Paul that the *tens of thousands of believers* in Jerusalem are all *zealous for the law*. They now had more motivation than ever to be faithful to the law and to Judaism. In the Acts period, God was drawing Israel to Himself through all Christ had done on the cross, so it only makes sense that through faith and submission to Him, an Israelite would have found himself more in line with God's will, and rightly so because the kingdom of God was becoming a reality on earth.

The second occurrence of the word *Christian* is found in Acts 26:28. Leading up to this second occurrence are the events of verses 19-21. Paul rehearses his encounter with the Lord on the road to Damascus before King Agrippa. He sums up his apostleship in a few sentences, claiming obedience to the vision, declaring his message to those in Damascus, throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles (Gk.-*ethnos*, nations). He declared that they should submit to God, turn to God, and do the works related to that submission. For these reasons, he says, the Jews seized him in the temple and tried to kill him. Acts 26:22 says: **Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come** A few verses later Paul asks Agrippa if he believes the prophets. This is a rhetorical question because any leader in Israel worth his salt would have believed Moses and the prophets, so Paul then says, **I know that you do believe.** Acts 26:28: **Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You almost persuade me to become a Christian."** With his argument based on *nothing but Moses and the prophets*, can it honestly be thought that Paul was attempting to get Agrippa to forsake Judaism in favor of a new religion called *Christianity*? Within the context