

The Nazarenes

The first believers in Yeshua were a Jewish sect known as “Nazarenes” or in Hebrew “Netzarim” (Acts 24:5).

The “church father” Jerome (4th Cent.) described these Nazarenes as those “...who accept Messiah in such a way that they do not cease to observe the old Law.” (Jerome; On. Is. 8:14).

Elsewhere he writes:

Today there still exists among the Jews in all the synagogues of the East a heresy which is called that of the Minæans (1), and which is still condemned by the Pharisees; [its followers] are ordinarily called ‘Nazarenes’; they believe that Messiah, the son of God, was born of the Virgin Miriam, and they hold him to be the one who suffered under Pontius Pilate and ascended to heaven, and in whom we also believe.”

(Jerome; Letter 75 Jerome to Augustine)

(1) “Minæans” apparently Latinized from Hebrew MINIM (singular is MIN) a word which in modern Hebrew means “apostates” but was originally an acronym for a Hebrew phrase meaning “Believers in Yeshua the Nazarene”.

The fourth century “church father” Epiphanius gives a more detailed description:

But these sectarians... did not call themselves Christians—but “Nazarenes,” ... However they are simply complete Jews. They use not only the New Testament but the Old Testament as well, as the Jews do... They have no different ideas, but confess everything exactly as the Law proclaims it and in the Jewish fashion— except for their belief in Messiah, if you please! For they acknowledge both the resurrection of the dead and the divine creation of all things, and declare that G-d is one, and that his son is Yeshua the Messiah. They are trained to a nicety in Hebrew. For among them the entire Law, the Prophets, and the... Writings... are read in Hebrew, as they surely are by the Jews. They are different from the Jews, and different from Christians, only in the following. They disagree with Jews because they have come to faith in Messiah; but since they are still fettered by the Law—circumcision, the Sabbath, and the rest— they are not in accord with Christians.... they are nothing but Jews.... They have the Goodnews according to Matthew in its entirety in Hebrew. For it is clear that they still preserve this, in the Hebrew alphabet, as it was originally written. (Epiphanius; Panarion 29)

They Did Not Call Themselves Christians—but “Nazarenes”

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No Nazarene in the Ketuvum Netzarim (the so-called “New Testament”) ever refers to themselves as a “Christian”. In fact Paul never calls himself a Christian, but frequently identifies himself as Jewish (Acts 21:39; 22:3) and even as a “Pharisee” (Acts 23:6).

The word “Christian(s)” appears only three times in the so-called “New Testament” and always in a context of being used by non-believers to describe believers. In the Aramaic of Acts and 1Kefa (The only books to use the word “Christian(s)”) the word always appears as a transliterated Greek word and not as the Aramaic word for “Christian” implying that Hellenists who spoke Greek were the ones calling them “Christians”.

The Greek word Christes is closely related to the Greek word Chrestes which was the name of a false god and was a word indicating a pagan priest or prophet and was often a title for pagan gods. Although CHRISTI is used by Homer as applied to the rubbing with oil of the body after bathing (Il. 23, 186; also in Od., 4, 252) the word Christes meant a white-washer, but Chrestes was a common title for pagan gods. The persecutors probably were poking fun at believers in Messiah because if one adapts Greek CHRISTI (anoint) in the same way as the Hebrew word Mashiach is derived from the three letter root מִשַׁח M-SH-CH (anoint), then the result is a word meaning “white washer” (i.e. one who covers things up and makes them look white/pure when they are not so on the inside). The Greek speakers probably got a good laugh out of this.

Originally the term “Christian” was a derogatory term used for Gentiles who were attracted to Nazarene Judaism and did not refer to a follower of a religion later named “Christianity”. The word “Christianity” was coined later by Ignatious sometime after 98 CE. Nazarenes see Christianity as an apostate movement which has rebelled against and rejected the Torah of YHWH and incorporated a great deal of paganism into its new non-Jewish religion.

Jerome's Admission: We Made it All Up!

in a letter to Augustine, Jerome makes an amazing admission concerning the Nazarenes:

“The matter in debate, therefore, or I should rather say your opinion regarding it, is summed up in this: that since the preaching of the gospel of Christ, the believing Jews do well in observing the precepts of the law, i.e. in offering sacrifices as Paul did, in circumcising their children, as Paul did in the case of Timothy, and keeping the Jewish Sabbath, as all the Jews have been accustomed to do. If this be true, we fall into the heresy... [of those who] though believing in Christ, were anathematized by the fathers for this one error, that they mixed up the ceremonies of the law with the gospel of Christ, and professed their faith in that which was new, without letting go what was old. ...In our own day there exists a sect among the Jews throughout all the synagogues of the East, which is called the sect of the Minæans, and is even now condemned by the Pharisees. The adherents to this sect are known commonly as Nazarenes; they believe in Christ the Son of God, born of the Virgin Mary; and they say that He who suffered under Pontius Pilate and rose again, is the same as the one in whom we believe. But while they desire to be both Jews and Christians, they are neither the one nor the other. I therefore beseech you, who think that you are called upon to heal my slight wound, which is no more, so to speak, than a prick or scratch from a needle, to devote your skill in the healing art to this grievous wound, which has been opened by a spear driven home with the impetus of a javelin. For there is surely no proportion between the culpability of him who exhibits the various opinions held by the fathers in a commentary on Scripture, and the guilt of him who reintroduces within the Church a most pestilential heresy. If, however, there is for us no alternative but to receive the Jews into the Church, along with the usages prescribed by their law; if, in short, it shall be declared lawful for them to continue in the Churches of Christ what they have been accustomed to practice in the synagogues of Satan, I will tell you my opinion of the matter: they will not become Christians, but they will make us Jews.

(Jerome; Letter 75)

Jerome repeats Augustine, saying of the Nazarenes: “since the preaching of the gospel of Christ, the believing Jews do well in observing the precepts of the law, i.e. in offering sacrifices as Paul did, in circumcising their children, as Paul did in the case of Timothy, and keeping the Jewish Sabbath, as all the Jews have been accustomed to do.” (Jerome; Letter 75 Jerome to Augustine)

Jerome responds saying of the Nazarenes “though believing in Christ, [they] were anathematized by the [church] fathers for this one error, that they mixed up the ceremonies of the law with the gospel of Christ, and professed their faith in that which was new, without letting go what was old.” (ibid)

In other words Augustine and Jerome tell us that the Nazarene doctrine that the Torah should still be observed began with “the preaching of Christ” and was the doctrine kept by Paul, but that the church “fathers” of Christianity declared this to be an error and a heresy.

Ignatious Did it!

Up until the time of Ignatius (in the late first century), matters of dispute that arose at Antioch were ultimately referred to the Jerusalem Council (as in Acts 14:26-15:2). Ignatius usurped the authority of the Jerusalem council, declaring himself as the local bishop as the ultimate authority over the assembly of which he was bishop, and likewise declaring the same as true of all other bishops and their local assemblies. Ignatius writes:

*...being subject to your bishop...
...run together according to the will of God.
Jesus... is sent by the will of the Father;
As the bishops... are by the will of Jesus Christ.
(Eph. 1:9, 11)*

*...your bishop...I think you happy who are so joined to him,
as the church is to Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ is to the Father...
Let us take heed therefore, that we not set ourselves
against the bishop, that we may be subject to God....
We ought to look upon the bishop, even as we would
upon the Lord himself.
(Eph. 2:1-4)*

*...obey your bishop...
(Mag. 1:7)*

*Your bishop presiding in the place of God...
...be you united to your bishop...
(Mag. 2:5, 7)*

*...he... that does anything without the bishop...
is not pure in his conscience...
(Tral. 2:5)*

*...Do nothing without the bishop.
(Phil. 2:14)*

*See that you all follow your bishop,
As Jesus Christ, the Father...
(Smy. 3:1)*

By exalting the power of the office of bishop (overseer) and demanding the absolute authority of the bishop over the assembly, Ignatius was actually making a power grab by thus taking absolute authority over the assembly at Antioch and encouraging other Gentile overseers to follow suite.

Moreover Ignatius drew men away from Torah and declared the Torah to have been abolished, not only at Antioch but at other Gentile assemblies to which he wrote:

*Be not deceived with strange doctrines;
nor with old fables which are unprofitable.
For if we still continue to live according to the Jewish Law,
we do confess ourselves not to have received grace...
(Mag. 3:1)*

*But if any one shall preach the Jewish law unto you,
hearken not unto him...
(Phil. 2:6)*

It is also Ignatius who first replaces the Seventh Day Sabbath with Sunday worship, writing:

*“...no longer observing sabbaths, but keeping the Lord’s day
in which also our life is sprung up by him, and through
his death...”
(Magnesians 3:3)*

Having seceded from the authority of Jerusalem, declared the Torah abolished and replacing the Sabbath with Sunday, Ignatius had created a new religion. Ignatius coins a new term, never before used, for this new religion which he calls “Christianity” and which he makes clear is new and distinct religion from Judaism. He writes:

*...let us learn to live according to the rules of Christianity,
for whosoever is called by any other name
besides this, he is not of God....*

*It is absurd to name Jesus Christ, and to Judaize.
For the Christian religion did not embrace the Jewish.
But the Jewish the Christian...
(Mag. 3:8, 11)*

Restoration of All Things

“...[Yahweh] shall send Messiah Yeshua, which before was proclaimed unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the *Times of Restitution of all things*, which Yahweh has spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began. (Acts 3:20,21)”

A major prophetic event that the Scriptures state will occur before the return of Messiah, is just about ready to occur, in fact it is happening right now!

... but in the land of their captivities they shall remember themselves. And shall know that I am YHWH their Elohim: for I will give them a heart, and ears to hear: And they shall praise me in the land of their captivity, and think upon my name, And return from their stiff neck, and from their wicked deeds: for they shall remember the way of their fathers, which sinned before YHWH. And I will bring them again into the land which I promised with an oath unto their fathers, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov, and they shall be masters of it: and I will increase them, and they shall not be diminished. And I will make an everlasting covenant with them to be their Elohim, and they shall be my people: and I will no more drive my people of Israel out of the land that I have given them.
(Barukh (Baruch) 2:30-35)

Romans 11 discusses this stage of the restoration, but it also tells us that an even more powerful stage will involve Judah being grafted back into its own olive tree:

And if their stumbling became riches for the world, and their loss, riches to the Goyim:**how much more therefore**,their fullness?
(Rom. 11:12 HRV)

For if their reprobation was reconciliation to the world, **how much more therefore**,their return, but life that is from among the dead?
(Rom. 11:15 HRV)

23 And those, if they do not remain in their lack of trust, also will be grafted in: for Eloahis able to graft them in again.

24 For if you, who are from the olive [tree] that was wild by your nature, were cut off andwere grafted—contrary to your nature—into the good olive [tree], **how much more** then,those, if they be grafted in their natural olive [tree]?
(Rom. 11:23-24 HRV)

Paul says here: You think the restoration of Ephraim is great, **wait until you see the restoration of Judah!**

That is what this restoration work is about, not just the grafting in of Ephraim (although that is part of it) but the restoration of Judah, the restoration of the ancient sect of Nazarene Judaism, the original Jewish followers!

Conclusion

By the end of the first century Ignatius of Antioch had declared that the Nazarene doctrine that the Torah should still be observed which Augustine admitted began with “the preaching of Christ” and was the doctrine kept by Paul to be an error and a heresy.

He seceded from Judaism and founded a new religion which he called “Christianity”. A religion which rejected the Torah, and replaced the Seventh Day Sabbath with Sunday Worship.

Yeshua did not come to create a new religion, he came to be the Messiah of Judaism. The original followers of Yeshua as the Messiah were a sect of Judaism called the sect of the Nazarenes (Acts 24:5).