

Mennonite Brethren: Are you a Christian or a Nazarene?

"Most Christians are shocked to learn that Christianity was not the original faith of the Apostles. A thorough study of the New Covenant, however, shows us that the original faith of the Apostles was known as *Nazarene Israel* -- or the Nazarene sect of the Israelite religion.

Unlike the Christians, the Nazarenes did not believe that "the Law had been nailed to the Cross." Rather, the Nazarenes understood a person's salvation did not derive from rote observance of the Mosaic Law (the Law of Moses.) Rather, they understood Salvation to be a free spiritual gift (which one could never earn); and yet they continued to obey the Laws of Moses as an outward *sign* of their devotion to *Elohim*. 'Christianity,' on the other hand, was different. Christianity was a rival Hellenistic (Greek-oriented) faction within the Body of Messiah that placed very little value upon the Hebraic (and/or the Mosaic) aspects of the faith. To the First-Century Christian, attempts to persuade new converts to carry a burden for the Land of Israel, the Hebrew Language and Laws of Moses seemed irrelevant; and perhaps counter-productive. To the First-Century Christian, any sort of 'legal requirement' above and beyond confessing belief in Yeshua as the Messiah was viewed as 'Judaizing,' and was discouraged in the extreme.

The differences between the Nazarenes and the Christians all boiled down to a difference of belief: **Not** in Yeshua as the prophesied Messiah; but a difference of belief as to how to properly worship Him. If you believe that the terms *Christian* and *Nazarene* have always been synonymous, please consider this statement by the *Christian* Church father Epiphanius, who derided the Nazarenes as practicing a different (and incorrect) religion:

"The Nazarenes do not differ in any essential thing from them (meaning the Orthodox Jews), since they practice the customs and doctrines prescribed by Jewish Law; except that they believe in Christ. They believe in the resurrection of the dead, and that the universe was created by God. They preach that God is One, and that Jesus Christ is his Son....They are very learned in the Hebrew language. They read the Law....Therefore they differ...from the true Christians because they fulfill until now [such] Jewish rites as the circumcision, Sabbath, and others."

[The Church Father Epiphanius in his doctrinal book, "Against Heresies," Panarion 29]

Note that the Church father Epiphanius tells us that the Nazarenes fulfilled "until now" such 'Jewish' rites such as the circumcision, the Sabbath, and others. Since Epiphanius was one of the Church fathers primarily responsible for establishing the Roman Catholic Church Doctrine in the early Fourth Century, this means that the Nazarene Israelites also existed (as a separate and distinct religious order) until that time.

Also noteworthy is the fact that the Church father Epiphanius considered the Nazarenes to be *heretics*. But what does it mean that the Catholic Church Fathers considered the Nazarenes to be heretics? Ponder this remark by the Church 'Father' M. Simon, who is here taking issue with something that Epiphanius said:

“They (meaning the Nazarenes) are characterized essentially by their tenacious attachment to Jewish observances. If they became heretics in the eyes of the Mother Church, it is simply because they remained fixed on outmoded positions. They well represent (although Epiphanius is energetically refusing to admit it) the very direct descendants of that primitive community, of which our author knows that it was designated by the Jews, by the same name, of ‘Nazarenes’.”

[The Church Father M. Simon]

Consider the irony of it: 'Father' Simon tells us that the Nazarenes in his day were the “very direct descendants” of the original Twelve; and one gets the impression that they were doggedly attempting to adhere to the exact same religion that the Messiah Yeshua had delivered to their predecessors back in the First Century. In spite of this, Father Simon calls these Nazarenes heretics, simply because they *did not abandon* the Faith Once Delivered to the Saints in favor of the anti-Semitic, anti-Hebraic, and anti-Mosaic doctrines that were being established by the Church of Imperial Rome. Consider that the Catholic Church 'Father' M. Simon is suggesting that the “very direct descendants” of James, John, Peter, Paul, Matthew, Andrew, Philip and the rest of the twelve had become heretics in the Fourth Century, simply because they continued to practice the faith the Apostles themselves used to practice in the First Century. What we essentially have is an admission by the Church Fathers that their religion was not the One True Original at all: But that they laid claim to the authority of establishing themselves as the One True Original (even though they were not.)

If the statements of the Church Fathers are accurate, and if Catholicism is not the One True Original faith of the Apostles, then that would mean that both it AND its Protestant Christian derivatives are in danger of practicing error. But before we go further, do we know for sure that the Apostles were called *Nazarenes*, and not *Christians*? We have the statements of the Church Fathers telling us that this is so: But is there any way we can verify this from the Word?"

Brethren, all of the above was taken from the proposed first chapter of *Nazarene Israel*, (second edition). For an answer to the authors closing question see Acts 24:5 where Yeshua's followers were called *Notsrim*. Furthermore, the term "Christian" in Acts 11:26 (as it appears in both the Greek and Aramaic versions), was a derogatory term where those at Antioch made fun of the "little moshiachs." Similarly, the term that Kepha used in 1 Peter 4:16 is *Notzri* and not "Christian". The statement made in Acts 28:22 remains true to this day, "As

concerning this sect" (referring to the Nazarenes), "we know that everywhere it is spoken against." The term "Christian," however, refers to the ever popular, Hellenized version of the original faith of the Apostles.

I would be happy to send you a free copy of Norm Willis' book if you email me your address.

Shalom