

# The History of the Faith - I

containing:

## Spreading the Word

by

Dean & Susan Wheelock

Now when the Gentiles heard this,  
They were glad and glorified the word of the Lord.  
And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.  
And the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region.  
*Acts 13:48-49*

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## ~ Introduction ~

Fight the good fight of faith,  
Lay hold on eternal life,  
To which you were also called  
And have confessed the good confession  
In the presence of many witnesses.  
1 Timothy 6:12

**T**here is much disagreement among scholars as to how the early congregations of *Messianic Believers* developed and grew after the death and resurrection of *Y'shua HaMashiach* (Jesus the Messiah).

This series of booklets (consisting of previous articles published in the *Hebrew Roots*® publication) begin an attempt to trace church history in an understandable way. This is not an easy or straightforward task, as there are not always good records (other than the New Testament which ends abruptly in the latter half of the first century) showing the growth and spread of the *ekklesia* (congregation or church) of the movement that was early on known as the *Nazarenes* (those who followed the teachings of *Y'shua of Nazareth*).

Likewise, there are scanty records tracing the development of Judaism after the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. Complicating the problem, is the lack of detail as to why and how the *Nazarenes* and Orthodox Judaism came to part company during those turbulent years. Further complicating the matter is the move of a major segment of the Messianic movement to the West where it left the Jewish roots of the faith in favor of certain pagan doctrines and practices.

It is hoped that, over the years, all of these issues can be addressed to bring us to an understanding of where our Faith in *Y'shua* originated and where it got off track. Armed with this information it is hoped that the 21st century *Messianic Movement* can get back on the track to observing what *Jude* called the "**faith ... once ... delivered:**"

**"Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints."**

(Jude 1:3)

From this verse we learn, that as early as the middle to late 1st century there were already men who were bringing doctrinal perversion into the *Nazarene Congregations*:

**"For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*]."**  
(Jude 1:4)

This booklet begins the *History of the Faith* series by examining how the Good News of the coming Kingdom of God was first spread throughout the Middle East. It consists of one article that was first published in Issue 07-2 under the title *Spreading the Word*.

Shalom!

Dean & Susan Wheelock

Beit Shalom, 2015

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## ~ Spreading the Word ~

And the hand of the Lord was with them,  
And a great number believed  
And turned to the Lord.  
Acts 11:21



Over the centuries, there have been many books and articles written about the history of the Christian Church. One of the early ones, which still exists in complete form today, is *Ecclesiastical History*. It was written by a 4th century Christian Bishop from Caesarea named Eusebius. While there is much valuable information in this book, when reading it one must keep in mind that Eusebius was a friend and confidant of the Emperor Constantine, and so he had to follow the party line of the time. The same caution should be given for many church history books which were written over the centuries.

### ~ Church History Books ~

Most modern Church histories spend little time on the very earliest portions of Church history. Rather they prefer to move quickly into later time periods where the historical record is more complete. In surveying Church histories over the years, it has been our experience that there is little mention about how the early Church kept the seventh day Sabbath, and virtually no information at all about how the Church came to abandon the Sabbath for Sunday worship. Many Church history books do not even mention the Sabbath. Yet, in our opinion, this is one of the key issues of the first and second century "Christian" assemblies, for it caused a separation between the first century Messianic Believers who followed the example of the original Apostles, and those who deviated from their practices and doctrines.

### ~ Two Streams ~

Toward the end of the first century and the beginning of the second, there developed two primary groups of Messianic Believers whose histories run parallel but not together. The first and most famous stream is that of Believers who accepted the change of worship from Sabbath to Sunday and the abandonment of Passover for an Easter Sunday celebration of the resurrection. Many other doctrinal changes accompanied those two major ones. Along side this Church history mainstream were a number of so-called "heretical" movements which were written about by a latter group of men often called the "Church Fathers." This is the type of information which is available to us today in most of our modern "Church" history books.

Running parallel to this main Church stream were men and women who, despite heavy persecution from the mainline Church, clung to:

"... the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints."  
(Jude 1:3)

It is possible to trace at least some of the activities of these brave men and women, down through the centuries, by studying the "heretical" movement called, by the Roman Church, the "Judaizers." These "Judaizers" (so-called) were the men and women who became our spiritual ancestors, for they kept the original Faith and blazed a righteous trail by setting an example for all of us who call ourselves *Messianic* or *Sabbatarian* today. They were a light in a dark world, for in addition to their unswerving faith in *Y'shua*, they also clung to those elements of the *Written Torah* which they understood, despite severe personal and community persecution:

**"Through Your precepts I get understanding;**

**Therefore I hate every false way.**

<sup>105</sup> **Your word is a lamp to my feet**

**And a light to my path.**

<sup>106</sup> **I have sworn and confirmed**

**That I will keep Your righteous judgments."**

(Psalm 119:104-106)

While their understanding of *Torah* was not always complete (for individual Bibles were not available in those early centuries), most of them did observe both the weekly Sabbath and the Festivals. They did the best they could with the information available to them. Many times that information was only the traditions and customs which had been passed down to them over the centuries.

Today, *Messianic Believers* have a great advantage. Not only do almost all of us have a Bible of our own, many have several Bibles as well as commentaries and other Bible aids. Truly, we live in the age spoken of by Daniel the prophet:

**"But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase."**  
(Dan. 12:4)

We live in an age when knowledge has been increased exponentially, and that includes Biblical knowledge.

### ~ When Did the Church Begin? ~

Some years back, we attended a conference where one of the presenters stated that the Christian Church began on the day of Pentecost in 33 AD with the giving of the Holy Spirit:

**"When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they [the disciples] were all with one accord in one place. <sup>2</sup> And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup> Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. <sup>4</sup> And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."**

(Acts 2:1-4)

Where exactly was this "place" or "house" in which the disciples were gathered? Most teachers assume it was the "upper room" where they were staying:

**"Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey. <sup>13</sup> And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying: Peter, James,**

**John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas the son of James."** (Acts 1:12-13)

However, if the disciples were cloistered away in some "upper room," their speaking in the various languages of the world would not have been heard, especially by as many as the 3000 people who were so moved that they became immersed (baptized) into the family of God in the name of *Y'shua*. (It can be assumed that many more than 3000 actually heard the disciples testimony that day, since probably not all who heard would have responded to the point of repentance and immersion.)

Where would observant Jews have been on the day of *Shavu'ot* שָׁבוּעוֹת (Shah-vooh-oat' #7620 = the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost) if they were in the city of Jerusalem? They would have been at the Temple, along with all of the other pilgrims; the same place they frequented in the days following the giving of the *Ruach HaKodesh* הַקֹּדֶשׁ רוּחַ (Rue-ahch' (#7307) Hah Koh-dehsh' (#6944) = the Holy Spirit):

**"So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart,<sup>47</sup> praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved."**

(Acts 2:46-47)

*Shavu'ot* or Pentecost was not the "birthday of the Church" as so many claim. Rather, it was the day on which the Father sent the Bride of His Son, *Y'shua* the Messiah, the second of two great Betrothal gifts. The first gift had also been given on this very day some 1500 years before. That first gift was the Ten Words (or Commandments) followed by the *Written Torah*. The *Written Torah* told the Bride (the Children of Israel) what was expected in terms of behavior. However, the Children of Israel were not able to maintain that standard because of their fleshly weakness:

**"I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness."** (Rom. 6:19)

On this particular *Shavu'ot* (Pentecost), the Bride was given a second gift, the *Ruach HaKodesh* which empowered her to be able to keep the instructions (law) found in the *Written Torah*. In this way, the Bride became fully equipped to serve God according to His will.

#### ~ Terms ~

In order to understand when the beginning of the Church took place, we must look at some Hebrew and Greek terms. In the New Testament the word "church" is translated from the Greek word *ekklesia*:

**1577 ἐκκλησία** *ekklesia* {ek-klay-see'-ah}

**Meaning:** 1) a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place, an assembly 1a) an

assembly of the people convened at the public place of the council for the purpose of deliberating 1b) the assembly of the Israelites 1c) any gathering or throng of men assembled by chance, tumultuously 1d) in a Christian sense 1d1) an assembly of Christians gathered for worship in a religious meeting.

The English word "church" carries a lot of religious baggage. When someone says the word "church" do they mean an organization, a building, or the people who congregate there on Sunday morning?

A similar situation exists with the Greek word *synagogue*. Does the word "synagogue" mean the building in which the people meet or the congregation itself? In both cases, the first thing that probably comes to mind for many people is the building, even though that is not really the proper meaning. We believe a better translation for the word *ekklesia* would be "congregation" or "assembly." In other words, the *ekklesia* is the group of people who meet to worship God and learn about His ways, whether it be in a building or out of doors.

Another term of interest is the English word "sect." There are a number of "sects" mentioned in the New Testament. There is the "sect" of the Sadducees (Acts 5:17), the "sect" of the Pharisees (Acts 15:5 & 26:5), and the "sect" of the Nazarenes (Acts 24:5 & 28:22). This latter "sect" consisted of the followers of and Believers in *Y'shua*.

The interesting thing about the Greek word from which the English word "sect" is translated, is that it is the same word that is used for "heresy;" *haireisis*:

**139 αἵρεσις** *haireisis* {hah'-ee-res-is}

**Meaning:** 1) act of taking, capture: e.g. storming a city 2) choosing, choice 3) that which is chosen 4) a body of men following their own tenets (sect or party) 4a) of the Sadducees 4b) of the Pharisees 4c) of the Christians 5) dissensions arising from diversity of opinions and aims.

*Hairesis* basically means a difference of opinion. Certainly, the Sadducees, Pharisees, and Nazarenes all had differences of opinion with each other, especially when it came to the person of the Messiah. However, it was possible for a 1st century Jew to be both a Pharisee and a Nazarene, as exemplified by Paul:

**"For we have found this man [Shaul or Paul] a plague, a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes."**

(Acts 24:5)

**"But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, 'Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!'"**

(Acts 23:6)

*Shavu'ot* was not the birthday of the "church" separate and apart from the 1st century Jews who were the remnant of the Children of Israel who occupied the Land at that time. However, *Shavu'ot* was the birthday (if one wishes to call it

that) of the "Sect of the Nazarenes" or, put another way, the "Heresy of the Nazarenes."

Thus, the Greek word *ekklesia* (which is almost universally translated as "church" in our English Bibles) and *hairesis* (translated as both "sect" and "heresy") are related in that both indicate a group of people who hold a certain opinion. The difference is that *ekklesia* emphasizes the people as being gathered together, while *hairesis* emphasizes their commonality of belief.

In our opinion, the post-ascension *Shavu'ot* experience at the Temple in Jerusalem became the official starting point of the *Sect of the Nazarenes*, many of whom continued to meet in the Jewish synagogues for years to come.

### ~ If Not Then ~ When? ~

The New Testament actually speaks about the "church" existing in the time of *Moshe* מֹשֶׁה (Mow'-shay = Moses #4872):

**"This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel,**

**'A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear.'**

[Deut. 18:15]

<sup>38</sup> **This is he [Moses], that was in the church [*ekklesia*] in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us: ..."** ( Acts 7:37-38 KJV)

Notice, the Greek word used here is *ekklesia*, which the King James Version translates 115 times (out of 118 appearances) as "church."

There are two Hebrew words used to identify the "Church in the Wilderness." The first word is *edah*:

5712 עֵדָה `edah {eh-dah'}

Meaning: 1) congregation, gathering

The second is *kahal*:

6951 קָהָל qahal {kah-hahl'}

Meaning: 1) assembly, company, congregation, convocation 1a) assembly 1a1) for evil counsel, war or invasion, religious purposes 1b) company (of returning exiles) 1c) congregation 1c1) an organized body.

Both of these words are used in much the same manner as the Greek word *ekklesia*:

**""Speak to all the congregation [*edah*] of Israel, saying: "On the tenth day of this month every man shall take for himself a lamb, according to the house of his father, a lamb for a household. ... Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the whole assembly [*kahal*] of the congregation [*edah*] of Israel shall kill it at twilight.""** (Ex. 12:3, 6)

The "Birthing of the Church" occurred when God called the children of Israel to keep the very first Passover in Egypt.

At that time the sign, which showed what individuals were members of the "Church in the Wilderness," was the blood of the Passover Lamb painted on the lintel and doorposts. Those who accepted that symbol and stayed inside their house that night were saved from the plague of the death of the firstborn.

Some 1500 years later, after the many trials, tribulations, and even captivities that fell upon the Congregation (Church) of the Children of Israel, the *Ruach HaKodesh* became the new identifying sign of those who accept the blood of the Passover Lamb (*Y'shua HaMashiach*) as payment for their sins:

**"Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ [*Messiah*], our Passover, was sacrificed for us."**

(I Cor. 5:7)

These men and women were then (just as we are today) part of the New Covenant remnant of the Congregation of the Children of Israel (the *ekklesia* or Church) as members of the Sect of the Nazarenes:

**"I will surely assemble all of you, O Jacob,**

**I will surely gather the remnant of Israel;**

**I will put them together like sheep of the fold,**

**Like a flock in the midst of their pasture;**

**They shall make a loud noise because of so many**

**people."**

(Micah 2:12)

Even though the original *ekklesia* has been but a remnant of the people of Israel down through the centuries, God's promise is that at the very end, the Church or Congregation of the Children of Israel will include all of Israel:

**"And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written:**

**'The Deliverer will come out of Zion,**

**And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob;**

<sup>27</sup> **For this is My covenant with them,**

**When I take away their sins.'" [Isaiah 59:20-21]**

(Rom. 11:26-27)

### ~ Worship ~

Thus we see that, according to Scripture, the Church or Congregation of the Children of Israel began at Passover in Egypt. It continued to exist, down through the centuries, all the way to the time of *Y'shua*. During that time, the Congregation (Church) of the Children of Israel was centered around Tabernacle and Temple worship which was the place that *Y'shua* called "My Father's House:"

**"And He said to those who sold doves, 'Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!'"** (John 2:16)

You can search the Gospel accounts high and low and not find a single place where *Y'shua* disparaged Temple worship. The Temple was the religious focal point of the Congregation of the Children of Israel, and *Y'shua* did nothing during His lifetime to change that.

All of the men of the Congregation of the Children of Israel were required to attend the pilgrimage Festivals held at the Temple in Jerusalem:

**"Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD [YHVH] your God in the place which He chooses: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Tabernacles; and they shall not appear before the LORD [YHVH] empty-handed."**  
(Deut. 16:16)

There is clear Scriptural evidence that *Y'shua* (along with His parents) attended the Festivals in Jerusalem, both as a child (Luke 2:41) and as an adult (John 2:13; John 7:10).

The place God chose for His people to meet (or where He placed His name, as it says in other passages) was the Temple in Jerusalem. Solomon, in his Temple dedication prayer stated the following:

**"Yet regard the prayer of Your servant and his supplication, O LORD [YHVH] my God, and listen to the cry and the prayer which Your servant is praying before You today: <sup>29</sup> that Your eyes may be open toward this temple night and day, toward the place of which You said, "My name shall be there," that You may hear the prayer which Your servant makes toward this place."**  
(1 Kings 8:28-29)

In addition to worship at the Temple, there also was the Synagogue system which, in the 1st century, flourished everywhere Jews were to be found -- throughout Judea, the Galilee, and in the Diaspora. The Synagogues served a number of functions. They were a *Beit Midrash* בֵּית מִדְרָשׁ (Beit (#1004) Meed-rahsh' (#4097) = House of Study), a community center, and, in those cities and towns outside of Jerusalem, they were also the center for Sabbath worship. *Y'shua* supported this system, for we read that He attended synagogue on a regular basis:

**"So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read."** (Luke 4:16)

#### ~ The Sect of the Nazarenes ~

After *Y'shua's* death and resurrection and the arrival of the *Ruach HaKodesh* (Holy Spirit), the members of the Sect of the Nazarenes participated in both Temple and Synagogue worship. We have already seen how the disciples of *Y'shua* went to the Temple daily (Acts 2:46-47). This practice is confirmed in another passage where we read that Peter and John went up to the Temple at 3 p.m. for the afternoon hour of prayer:

**"Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour."** (Acts 3:1)

Thus we see, that many days after *Y'shua's* ascension and the giving of the *Ruach HaKodesh*, the disciples were still observing Temple worship as a part of their routine while residing in Jerusalem. Since we are told that the Holy Spirit would teach them all things, it is evident that the Holy Spirit did not tell the disciples to quit worshipping at the Temple:

**"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to**

**your remembrance all things that I said to you."**

(John 14:26)

It is also clear that the Synagogue remained the place where those of the Sect of the Nazarenes met when outside the city of Jerusalem. For example, it was Paul's custom to attend Synagogue every Sabbath, as long as the local leaders would allow him to be there:

**"And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks."** (Acts 18:4)

#### ~ Persecution Begins ~

Right from the start things did not go particularly well for the Sect of the Nazarenes in their relationship with other Jews. This should have come as no surprise, since *Y'shua* had told them such would be the case:

**"They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. <sup>3</sup> And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me."** (John 16:2-3)

This adversarial relationship was especially strong between the Sect of the Nazarenes and the Jewish leadership at the Temple, the very ones responsible for putting *Y'shua* to death. For the most part, these antagonistic leaders were primarily members of the Sadducean Sect.

The first trouble the Apostles encountered, with the Jewish leadership, was when Peter healed a crippled beggar at the Temple when he and John were there for afternoon prayer:

**"And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms from those who entered the temple; <sup>3</sup> who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked for alms. <sup>4</sup> And fixing his eyes on him, with John, Peter said, 'Look at us.' <sup>5</sup> So he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them."**

**"<sup>6</sup> Then Peter said, 'Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*] of Nazareth, rise up and walk.'**

**"<sup>7</sup> And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. <sup>8</sup> So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them -- walking, leaping, and praising God."**

(Acts 3:2-8)

This healing caused quite a stir among the other Jewish worshippers who were present at the Temple:

**"Now as the lame man who was healed held on to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the porch which is called Solomon's, greatly amazed."** (Acts 3:11)

This event gave Peter an opportunity to teach the people about *Y'shua*. However, the commotion it caused alerted the Temple leadership and they had Peter and John arrested. One of the sticking points for the Temple leadership (many of whom would have been Sadducees) was their teaching about the resurrection of the dead, for the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection (Matt. 22:23):

**"Now as they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, <sup>2</sup>being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus [*Y'shua*] the resurrection from the dead. <sup>3</sup> And they laid hands on them, and put *them* in custody until the next day, for it was already evening." (Acts 4:1-3)**

This action resulted in Peter and John being able to testify about their faith before the Temple leadership. Since, the leadership did not want to cause an uproar among the people, they released Peter and John with only an admonition:

**"And they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus [*Y'shua*]."**

**"<sup>19</sup> But Peter and John answered and said to them, 'Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. <sup>20</sup> For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.'**

**"<sup>21</sup> So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way of punishing them, because of the people, since they all glorified God for what had been done." (Acts 4:18-21)**

Remember, these were the very same Jewish leaders who were responsible for putting *Y'shua* to death.

#### **~ Persecution Continues ~**

Persecution of the Apostles continued, for the Jewish leadership (especially the Sadducees) did not want the Jewish people to join the Sect of the Nazarenes. If they could have had their way, they no doubt would have tried to completely eliminate the Nazarenes, either by having them stoned (as they did later on to Stephen) or by heating up other forms of persecution until the people just gave up. However, the Apostles were certainly not going to give up, and their fearlessness, before the Jewish leadership, greatly inspired the other members of the Sect of the Nazarenes to continue on, despite heavy opposition.

The next phase of persecution began as a result of the healing of many people by the Apostles while at the Temple:

**"Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed."**

(Acts 5:16)

The mass healing of many people did not sit well with the leadership, for they could see their power slipping away if it continued. So, once again they tried to stop the movement by arresting the Nazarene leaders:

**"Then the high priest rose up, and all those who *were* with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with indignation, <sup>18</sup> and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison."**

(Acts 5:17-18)

During the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the prison and told the men to go back to the Temple and continue preaching truth:

**"And when they heard *that*, they entered the temple early in the morning and taught. But the high priest and those with him came and called the council together, with all the elders of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought."**

**"<sup>22</sup> But when the officers came and did not find them in the prison, they returned and reported, <sup>23</sup> saying, 'Indeed we found the prison shut securely, and the guards standing outside before the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside!'"**

**"<sup>24</sup> Now when the high priest, the captain of the temple, and the chief priests heard these things, they wondered what the outcome would be. <sup>25</sup> So one came and told them, saying, 'Look, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!'"**

(Acts 5:21-25)

The Apostles were clearly gaining a following among the common people through the healings that were taking place and because of their testimony about *Y'shua* as Savior and King of the coming Kingdom of God. Because of their growing popularity, the chief priests and leaders were afraid to re-arrest them by force:

**"Then the captain went with the officers and brought them without violence, for they feared the people, lest they should be stoned. <sup>27</sup> And when they had brought them, they set *them* before the council."**

**"And the high priest asked them, <sup>28</sup> saying, 'Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!'"**

**"<sup>29</sup> But Peter and the *other* apostles answered and said: 'We ought to obey God rather than men. <sup>30</sup> The God of our fathers raised up Jesus [*Y'shua*] whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. <sup>31</sup> Him God has exalted to His right hand *to be* Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. <sup>32</sup> And we are His witnesses to these things, and *so also is* the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him.'" (Acts 5:26-32)**

After hearing Peter's testimony they were so angry they wanted to have the Apostles killed. The flash point was no doubt Peter's assertion that *Y'shua* had been taken to heaven where He sits at the right hand of God the Father. This was the same issue which, later on, would get Stephen stoned:

**"When they heard *this*, they were furious and plotted to kill them."**

(Acts 5:33)

It was the reasoned voice of Rabbi Gamaliel, who brought the Council to its senses. (This was the same Gamaliel, from the Pharisaic School of Hillel, who had been *Sha'ul's* teacher.):

**"Then one in the council stood up, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in respect by all the people, and commanded them to put the apostles outside for a little while."**

**"<sup>35</sup> And he said to them: 'Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men. <sup>36</sup>For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody. A number of men, about four hundred, joined**



him. He was slain, and all who obeyed him were scattered and came to nothing. <sup>37</sup> After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away many people after him. He also perished, and all who obeyed him were dispersed. <sup>38</sup> And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; <sup>39</sup> but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it -- lest you even be found to fight against God.'" (Acts 5:34-39)

The Council understood the wisdom of this approach, but they were so angry they did not want to let the Apostles go without some form of punishment:

"And they agreed with him, and when they had called for the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus [*Y'shua*], and let them go. <sup>41</sup> So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name." (Acts 5:40-41)

Their beating did not stop the Apostles from continuing on with their daily Temple teaching about *Y'shua*:

"And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus [*Y'shua*] as the Christ [*Messiah*]." (Acts 5:42)

#### ~ Stephen the Martyr ~

The Sect of the Nazarenes continued to increase at a phenomenal rate. In fact, even many of the Priests became followers of *Y'shua*:

"Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith." (Acts 6:7)

Not only were the Apostles proclaiming the Good News of the forgiveness of sins and the coming Kingdom of God with *Y'shua* as King, the newly ordained "Deacons" were as well. One of them, Stephen, was especially effective:

"And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people." (Acts 6:8)

Some did not like the fact that Stephen was having such great success, so they plotted to have him arrested:

"Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen. <sup>10</sup> And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke.

<sup>11</sup> Then they secretly induced men to say, 'We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.' <sup>12</sup> And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon him, seized him, and brought him to the council. <sup>13</sup> They also set up false witnesses who said, 'This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law; <sup>14</sup> for we have heard him say that this Jesus [*Y'shua*] of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us.'" (Acts 6:9-14)

Stephen was brought before the Council where he answered the charges leveled against him by giving a testimony about the history of Israel. It is interesting to note that Stephen did not claim that he was a part of a new religion called Christianity. Stephen's testimony was not about a new religion, his testimony was about the history of the Congregation (Church) of the Children of Israel, and about how many prophecies of the past had already been fulfilled. He ended his discourse by condemning the Jewish leadership of all generations, including the ones to whom he was speaking:

"*You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you.* <sup>52</sup> Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, <sup>53</sup> who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it."

(Acts 7:51-53)

Needless to say, Stephen's accusation did not sit well with the members of the Council:

"When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with *their teeth*."

(Acts 7:54)

However, Stephen was not finished, nor was he intimidated. He ended his testimony by relating a vision that God was giving him at that very moment; a powerful message about who *Y'shua* really was and where He resided:

"But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus [*Y'shua*] standing at the right hand of God, <sup>56</sup> and said, 'Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!'" (Acts 7:55-56)

This was the last straw for the members of the Council. In their opinion, Stephen had committed blasphemy by testifying that *Y'shua* was now at the right hand of God the Father:

"Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; <sup>58</sup> and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. <sup>59</sup> And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, 'Lord Jesus [*Y'shua*], receive my spirit.' <sup>60</sup> Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, 'Lord, do not charge them with this sin.' And when he had said this, he fell asleep." (Acts 7:57-60)

#### ~ Sha'ul the Persecutor ~

A major outcome of Stephen's stoning was the stirring up of a man named *Sha'ul* (Saul) into a rage of persecution against the members of the Sect of the Nazarenes:

"Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. <sup>2</sup> And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. <sup>3</sup> As for Saul, he made havoc of the

**church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison. <sup>4</sup> Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word."**

(Acts 8:1-4)

This was the first great persecution against the Sect of the Nazarenes and the end result was the spreading of the Good News throughout the entire region. It is important to notice this persecution seems to have taken place only in Jerusalem. We are not told whether it eventually spread to other communities in Judea and the Galilee. However, *Sha'ul* did try and take the persecution outside of the country by obtaining a letter of permission to go to the city of Damascus and hunt down Nazarenes there. Perhaps his choice of that location was because Damascus was where some of the Nazarenes went in an attempt to escape *Sha'ul's* Jerusalem persecution:

**"Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest <sup>2</sup> and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem."**

(Acts 9:1-2)

Of course, this led to the conversion of *Sha'ul* from being a persecutor of the Brethren to a Believer in *Y'shua HaMashiach*. Eventually it also led to him becoming the Apostle to the Gentiles and a teacher of Israel:

**"But the Lord said to him [*Ananias*], 'Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.'"**

(Acts 9:15)

Once all of this turmoil was over, the Nazarenes were given a measure of peace and security for a time:

**"Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied."**

(Acts 9:31)

### ~ The Gospel Spreads ~

Scripture is silent on exactly how much time passed while all of these persecutions were taking place. However, many scholars place *Sha'ul's* journey to Damascus as occurring in 34 or 35 CE, but the bottom line is that we cannot know for sure. We do know that it would be a number of years after *Sha'ul's* encounter with *Y'shua* before he would become the Apostle Paul, for he had to undergo a period of training:

**"But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, <sup>16</sup> to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, <sup>17</sup> nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. <sup>18</sup> Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days."**

(Gal. 1:15-18)

After his visit to Jerusalem, it would still be a number of years before *Sha'ul* began his ministry in earnest (his first letter

to the Thessolonians would not be written until about 49-50 CE). During this time, the Apostles and Deacons continued spreading the Gospel to other areas including Samaria:

**"Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ [*Messiah*] to them. <sup>6</sup> And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. <sup>7</sup> For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. <sup>8</sup> And there was great joy in that city."**

(Acts 8:5-8)

### ~ The Samaritan Story ~

The Samaritans were a non-Israelite people who lived in the area between Judea in the south, and the Galilee in the north. Today, Samaria is part of the so-called West Bank. Relations between the Jews and the Samaritans ranged from being strained to downright hostility. This fact was evident when *Y'shua* had His encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well:

**"He [*Y'shua*] left Judea and departed again to Galilee. <sup>4</sup> But He needed to go through Samaria. <sup>5</sup> So He came to a city of Samaria which is called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. <sup>6</sup> Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus [*Y'shua*] therefore, being wearied from His journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour.**

**"<sup>7</sup> A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus [*Y'shua*] said to her, 'Give Me a drink.' <sup>8</sup> For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.**

**"<sup>9</sup> Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, 'How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman? For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.'"**

(John 4:3-9)

The history of the relationship between the Jews of Judea and the Samaritans is most interesting. The city of Samaria (from which the region gets its name) became the capitol of the northern kingdom of the House of Israel after the united kingdom of Israel was divided, following the death of Solomon. At that time, the rulership of the Northern Kingdom of Israel was given to an Ephraimite named Jeroboam. Upon taking office Jeroboam immediately led the Northern Kingdom into idolatry:

**"And Jeroboam said in his heart, 'Now the kingdom may return to the house of David: <sup>27</sup> If these people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the LORD [*YHVH*] at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will turn back to their lord, Rehoboam king of Judah, and they will kill me and go back to Rehoboam king of Judah.'**

**"<sup>28</sup> Therefore the king asked advice, made two calves of gold, and said to the people, 'It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt!' <sup>29</sup> And he set up one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. <sup>30</sup> Now this thing became a sin, for the people went to worship before the one as far as Dan.**

<sup>31</sup> He made shrines on the high places, and made priests from every class of people, who were not of the sons of Levi. <sup>32</sup> Jeroboam ordained a feast on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, like the feast that *was* in Judah, and offered sacrifices on the altar. So he did at Bethel, sacrificing to the calves that he had made. And at Bethel he installed the priests of the high places which he had made. <sup>33</sup> So he made offerings on the altar which he had made at Bethel on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, in the month which he had devised in his own heart. And he ordained a feast for the children of Israel, and offered sacrifices on the altar and burned incense."  
(I Kings 12:26-33)

As a result of these idolatrous actions by Jeroboam, the Levites who lived in the Northern Kingdom fled to the Kingdom of Judah in the south:

"For the Levites left their common lands and their possessions and came to Judah and Jerusalem, for Jeroboam and his sons had rejected them from serving as priests to the LORD [YHVH]."  
(II Chron. 11:14)

The religion of the Northern Kingdom of the House of Israel was apostate from the very beginning. This apostasy continued down through the reign of all the kings of the House of Israel, until God could no longer tolerate it. Despite the warnings God sent through the prophets, the House of Israel refused to repent, so they were sent into captivity at the hands of the Assyrians:

"Now the king of Assyria went throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria and besieged it for three years. <sup>6</sup>In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria took Samaria and carried Israel away to Assyria, and placed them in Halah and by the Habor, the River of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes. <sup>7</sup> For so it was that the children of Israel had sinned against the LORD [YHVH] their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and they had feared other gods, <sup>8</sup> and had walked in the statutes of the nations whom the LORD [YHVH] had cast out from before the children of Israel, and of the kings of Israel, which they had made."  
(II Kings 17:5-8)

Nearly the entire population of the Northern Kingdom of Israel was removed by the Assyrians:

"For the children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they did not depart from them, <sup>23</sup>until the LORD [YHVH] removed Israel out of His sight, as He had said by all His servants the prophets. So Israel was carried away from their own land to Assyria, *as it is to this day.*"  
(II Kings 17:22-23)

Rather than leave the land empty and desolate, the Assyrians moved other ethnic groups in to replace the Israelites who had been removed:

"Then the king of Assyria brought *people* from Babylon, Cuthah, Ava, Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed *them* in the cities of Samaria instead of the children

of Israel; and they took possession of Samaria and dwelt in its cities."  
(II Kings 17:24)

The descendants of these new ethnic groups were the Samaritans of *Y'shua's* day. Perhaps a few native Israelites managed to escape the Assyrian captivity by hiding in caves. If so, they would probably have intermarried with the new ethnic groups and would have lost their identity as Israelites, just as those who were taken captive and relocated later lost their identity (becoming the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel).

These new Samaritans were a pagan lot, so they wanted someone to teach them about the gods of this new region in which they had been placed:

"And it was so, at the beginning of their dwelling there, *that they did not fear the LORD [YHVH]; therefore the LORD [YHVH] sent lions among them, which killed some of them.*

<sup>26</sup> So they spoke to the king of Assyria, saying, 'The nations whom you have removed and placed in the cities of Samaria do not know the rituals of the God of the land; therefore He has sent lions among them, and indeed, they are killing them because they do not know the rituals of the God of the land.'

<sup>27</sup> Then the king of Assyria commanded, saying, 'Send there one of the priests whom you brought from there; let him go and dwell there, and let him teach them the rituals of the God of the land.' <sup>28</sup> Then one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and dwelt in Bethel, and taught them how they should fear the LORD [YHVH].

<sup>29</sup> However every nation continued to make gods of its own, and put *them* in the shrines on the high places which the Samaritans had made, *every nation in the cities where they dwelt.* ... <sup>32</sup> So they feared the LORD [YHVH], and from every class they appointed for themselves priests of the high places, who sacrificed for them in the shrines of the high places. <sup>33</sup> They feared the LORD [YHVH], yet served their own gods -- according to the rituals of the nations from among whom they were carried away."  
(II Kings 17:25-29, 32-33)

The Samaritans continued in their various apostate-pagan religions until about the time of Alexander the Great (c.325 BCE) when the brother of the High Priest at the Temple in Jerusalem agreed to marry a princess of the Samaritans. As a reward for marrying his daughter, the king of Samaria had a temple built on Mount Gerizim that was a duplicate of the Temple of the LORD in Jerusalem.

This Levite husband of the princess became the High Priest of this Samaritan temple and instituted a service similar to that performed in Jerusalem. Thus, the Samaritans of *Y'shua's* day had come to accept their own version of the *Written Torah* (the first five books of the Bible), and they circumcised their sons, just like the Jews did.

In 129 BCE, John Hyrcanus destroyed the Samaritan Temple, so that during the time of *Y'shua* the temple on Mount Gerizim no longer existed. Yet the Samaritans continued to look to Mount Gerizim as their place of worship, just as the descendants of those ancient people do to this day.

### ~ Samaritan Conversion ~

Because the Samaritans kept the commands of the *Written Torah* and circumcised their sons, they were a special category of people when it came to being admitted into Judaism. Unlike the Gentiles, who had to undergo extensive training followed by physical circumcision before they could become Proselytes, the Samaritans could become Jewish Proselytes merely by denouncing worship on Mount Gerizim, being immersed in a Jewish *mikveh* מִקְוֶה (meek'-veh = kosher immersion pool) and bringing an appropriate offering to the Temple in Jerusalem (the Samaritan men were already circumcised).

Because of these more relaxed rules pertaining to the Samaritans becoming Jews, it was also easy for a Samaritan to become a member of the Sect of the Nazarenes. All that was required was to accept the blood of *Y'shua HaMashiach* as payment for sin and be immersed into the family of God in the name of *Y'shua*, just like an ordinary Jew who wished to become a Nazarene. Because they already knew and kept the *Written Torah* commands, there was no need for a prolonged training program.

This is why the Nazarene leaders went into Samaria immediately following the relaxation of the Jerusalem persecution. Samaritans were not considered to be Gentiles, in the pagan sense of the word, and therefore did not need to go through the full conversion process.

### ~ The God Fearers ~

For a pagan Gentile to become Jewish required a much more rigorous program. Gentiles could attend Synagogue (and many did), but in order to become a member they had to undertake a training program which took at least one year to complete. Those Gentiles, who committed to that training program, were referred to as God Fearers or Proselytes of the Gate.

Upon the successful completion of this training program, the God Fearers had to do three things to become Proselytes:

- ◆ Be circumcised (if they were male)
- ◆ Be immersed in a *mikveh*
- ◆ Bring a sacrifice to the Temple in Jerusalem.

Once these obligations had been fulfilled, the formerly pagan Gentile became a Proselyte and was considered to be a full fledged Jew. His father was said to be Abraham and his mother Sarah.

### ~ The Roman Centurion ~

The Roman Centurion Cornelius was one of the God Fearers studying to become a Jewish Proselyte:

**"There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, <sup>2</sup> a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always."** (Acts 10:1-2)

It was at the ninth hour (about 3 p.m.), during the time of prayer, that Cornelius was shown a vision directing him to send men to Joppa to find a man named Peter:

**"About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, 'Cornelius!' <sup>4</sup> And when he observed him, he was afraid, and said, 'What is it, lord?' So he said to him, 'Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God. <sup>5</sup> Now send men to Joppa, and send for Simon whose surname is Peter. <sup>6</sup> He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. He will tell you what you must do.'"** (Acts 10:3-6)

Cornelius obeyed the vision and immediately sent two men to Joppa to find Peter. The following day Peter had a very troubling vision -- for it seemed to contradict a direct command of the *Written Torah* which he had observed all of his life:

**"The next day, as they went on their journey and drew near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour. <sup>10</sup> Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance <sup>11</sup> and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. <sup>12</sup> In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. <sup>13</sup> And a voice came to him, 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat.' <sup>14</sup> But Peter said, 'Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean.' <sup>15</sup> And a voice spoke to him again the second time, 'What God has cleansed you must not call common.' <sup>16</sup> This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again."** (Acts 10:9-16)

Peter was very confused, for if he were to take the vision literally, then he would be required to break the commands found in the *Written Torah* forbidding the eating of unclean meat. Not only did Peter object on the grounds that the creatures shown him were unclean, he also objected because he had never eaten anything "common."

What does it mean to eat something "common?" That would be any "clean" meat which had not been prepared in a *kosher* manner or on which tithes had not been paid. This comment by Peter tells us that, even though he was an Apostle of the Sect of the Nazarenes, he was still an Observant Jew, and that he was following the precepts of the *Written Torah* along with some of the *Oral Torah* commands of the Pharisees. Peter knew that God does not change and that He would not want him to eat anything unclean. Therefore, the Scripture tells us that:

**"... Peter wondered within himself what this vision which he had seen meant, ..."** (Acts 10:17)

Meanwhile, the men from Joppa arrived. God instructed Peter to go with them, so he took some Brethren from Joppa and accompanied the men back to Caesarea to visit Cornelius. Upon his arrival at the home of Cornelius, Peter was faced with another puzzling problem. According to the *Oral Torah* of the Pharisees, Peter, being a Jew, was not permitted to enter the house of a Gentile:

**"And the following day they entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them, and had called together his relatives and close friends. <sup>25</sup> As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. <sup>26</sup> But Peter lifted him up, saying, 'Stand up; I myself am also a man.' <sup>27</sup> And as he talked with him, he went in and found many who had come together.**

**"<sup>28</sup> Then he said to them, 'You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean. <sup>29</sup> Therefore I came without objection as soon as I was sent for. I ask, then, for what reason have you sent for me?'" (Acts 10:24-29)**

It was now clear to Peter what the vision of the unclean things meant. The vision did not mean that he should begin breaking the *Written Torah* by consuming unclean meat. What it did show him was that he was not obligated to follow the *Oral Torah* commands which taught that all Gentiles were ritually unclean and that observant Jews were forbidden to even enter their houses.

After Cornelius told Peter what God had shown him in a vision, Peter responded:

**"Then Peter opened *his* mouth and said: 'In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. <sup>35</sup> But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him. <sup>36</sup> The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*] -- He is Lord of all -- <sup>37</sup> that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: <sup>38</sup> how God anointed Jesus [*Y'shua*] of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. <sup>39</sup> And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree. <sup>40</sup> Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly, <sup>41</sup> not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, *even to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead.* <sup>42</sup> And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God *to be Judge of the living and the dead.* <sup>43</sup> To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.'" (Acts 10:34-43)**

God then confirmed what Peter suspected -- that Gentiles were not to be excluded from the Sect of the Nazarenes, on the basis of circumcision, if they truly believed that *Y'shua* was the Son of God and the promised Savior and Messiah. Peter's suspicion was confirmed when the *Ruach HaKodesh* (Holy Spirit) fell upon those uncircumcised Gentiles who feared God:

**"While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. <sup>45</sup> And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. <sup>46</sup> For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God."**

(Acts 10:44-46)

Upon seeing what was taking place, Peter was inspired to follow through with immersion, even though these Gentile men were not circumcised:

**"Then Peter answered, <sup>47</sup> 'Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?' <sup>48</sup> And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days.'" (Acts 10:46-48)**

### ~ The Fallout ~

At this point, everything was changed in the way the Sect of the Nazarenes related to Gentiles. Not only would this event cause a rift between the Nazarenes (the Believers in *Y'shua*) and the non-Messianic Jews, it also caused a problem within the Nazarene Sect itself. This was immediately evident when Peter returned to Jerusalem and related to the Brethren what had happened in Caesarea:

**"Now the apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. <sup>2</sup> And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him, <sup>3</sup> saying, 'You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!'" (Acts 11:1-3)**

Rather than rejoice that God had made a way for Gentiles to become full fledged members of the Sect of the Nazarenes and become grafted into the Congregation (Church) of the Children of Israel without having to undergo the *Oral Torah* restrictions of the Pharisees, instead, some of the observant Jewish Brethren complained about Peter entering the house of a Gentile and eating a meal with him.

The *Oral Torah* of the Pharisees had created a middle wall of partition between the Jews and the Gentiles which was never intended by God. The *Written Torah* does not forbid Jews from entering the house of a Gentile or eating with them -- as long as they serve food that is Biblically acceptable and has been properly slaughtered. Because Cornelius was a God Fearer, we can assume that he understood the food issue and was careful not to serve Peter and his entourage food that was unacceptable. Perhaps he served them vegetables. After all, meat was not daily fare in the 1st century, except for those who were rich.

Following a full explanation by Peter of all the events which took place, those who had first objected saw the error of their ways and, instead of continuing to be critical, they praised God for bringing Gentiles into the fold:

**"When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, 'Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.'" (Acts 11:18)**

### ~ The Ethiopian Eunuch ~

Some believe that the first Gentile to be baptized was the Ethiopian Eunuch whom Philip met on the road from Jerusalem to Gaza:

**"Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, 'Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.' This is desert. <sup>27</sup> So he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch**

of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship,<sup>28</sup> was returning. ...

"<sup>36</sup> Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, 'See, *here is water*. What hinders me from being baptized?' <sup>37</sup> Then Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.' And he answered and said, 'I believe that Jesus Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*] is the Son of God.' <sup>38</sup> So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him."

(Acts 8:26-28, 36-38)

First of all, the use of the word "eunuch" in this passage does not necessarily mean that this man had been sexually mutilated. While the word can mean "an emasculated man," it can also indicate that he was a high official in the royal court. The *Written Torah* is clear that a sexually mutilated man would not be allowed to worship at the Temple:

**"He who is emasculated by crushing or mutilation shall not enter the assembly of the LORD [YHVH]."**

(Deut. 23:1)

While the Ethiopian Eunuch was most probably a Gentile by birth, based on the above passage he was also probably already a Jewish Proselyte, for it says that he had been to Jerusalem to worship. It is unlikely that a Gentile God Fearer, who had not already converted, would travel all the way to Jerusalem when he would only be allowed into the Court of Gentiles, a place where none of the worship activities could be visually observed.

It was not unusual, in the 1st century, for there to be high ranking officials in Gentile courts who had converted to Judaism. This was true even in Rome. Therefore, it is our opinion that the Ethiopian Eunuch, having been a Gentile God Fearer, was already a Proselyte -- one whom the Jews would have considered to be Jewish because of his conversion. Perhaps he had come to the Temple to finish his conversion obligations by bringing the required sacrifice.

### ~ The Word Spreads ~

The Jewish leadership in Jerusalem seemed to think they could stamp out the Sect of the Nazarenes through persecution. However, instead of stifling the spreading of the word, their actions actually caused the word to spread even further, but, at this time, only to Observant Jews:

**"Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only.** <sup>20</sup> But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus [*Y'shua*]. <sup>21</sup> And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord."

(Acts 11:19-21)

Because of the dispersal of the word, the Apostles decided to begin more formal evangelism in the Diaspora:

**"Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch."**  
(Acts 11:22)

Barnabas was pleased with what he found in Antioch:

**"When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord. <sup>24</sup> For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord."**  
(Acts 11:23-24)

Now it was time to get *Sha'ul* שְׂאוּל (*Shaw-ool'* #7586) involved, so Barnabas went to the city of Tarsus to find him:

**"Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. <sup>26</sup> And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. 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."**  
(Acts 11:25-26)

Barnabas and *Sha'ul* were not the only ones to come to Antioch with a message for the people. Others also came and one gave a very important prophecy:

**"And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. <sup>28</sup> Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar. <sup>29</sup> Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. <sup>30</sup> This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul."**

(Acts 11:27-30)

### ~ More Persecution ~

During their time in Jerusalem, Barnabas and *Sha'ul* witnessed the killing of the Apostle James and the imprisonment of Peter by king Herod. Peter escaped martyrdom at that time by being miraculously released from prison by an angel of God. However, Herod Agrippa I paid dearly for these acts of persecution, and more importantly for allowing the people of Tyre and Sidon to proclaim him a god:

**"Now Herod had been very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; but they came to him with one accord, and having made Blastus the king's personal aide their friend, they asked for peace, because their country was supplied with food by the king's country."**

**"<sup>21</sup> So on a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat on his throne and gave an oration to them. <sup>22</sup> And the people kept shouting, 'The voice of a god and not of a man!' <sup>23</sup> Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died."**  
(Acts 12:20-23)

### ~ Paul Begins His Missionary Work ~

*Sha'ul* and Barnabas came back to Antioch from Jerusalem to resume their duties with the growing congregation there:

**"And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled *their* ministry, and they also took with them John whose surname was Mark." (Acts 12:25)**

Now *Sha'ul* was ready to become the Apostle Paul and to be sent out on Missionary journeys to take the Gospel to both the Jews and the Gentiles:

**"Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. <sup>2</sup> As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, 'Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' <sup>3</sup> Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent *them* away." (Acts 13:1-3)**

The name change from *Sha'ul* (Saul) to Paul is first recorded when he was on the island of Cyprus:

**"But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. <sup>9</sup> Then *Saul*, who also is *called Paul*, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him <sup>10</sup> and said, 'O full of all deceit and all fraud, *you* son of the devil, *you* enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord?'" (Acts 13:8-10)**

The name *Sha'ul* (Saul) means "desired" while the name Paul means "small or little." Perhaps he was given the name Paul because he is reported to have been small in stature. Perhaps he was given that name because, prior to meeting *Y'shua* on the road to Damascus, *Sha'ul* was proud of being a Pharisee and was determined to stamp out this new Sect of the Nazarenes. God may have caused his colleagues to rename him Paul as a way of making him more humble.

We are not going to attempt to record Paul's missionary journeys in this booklet, there are many books which chronicle those travels and teachings in detail. However, we would like to show how Paul used the Synagogue as a vehicle for the spreading of the Good News.

#### **~ Synagogue Witnessing ~**

During Paul's many journeys, his method of operation was to go first to the Jewish Synagogue and present them with the Good News. An example of this is found in the story about his arrival at a different Antioch, this one being in Pisidia:

**"But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down. <sup>15</sup> And after the reading of the Law [*Torah*] and the 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.'**

**<sup>16</sup> Then Paul stood up, and motioning with *his* hand said, 'Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen' ..." (Acts 13:14-16)**

Paul proceeded to go into a long discourse covering some of the history of the Congregation (Church) of the Children of

Israel down through the ages. When he got to the point of discussing king David, he used that opportunity to tell them about *Y'shua*, the promised Messiah, who was a direct descendant of David:

**"From this man's seed, according to the promise, God raised up for Israel a Savior -- Jesus [*Y'shua*] -- ... <sup>26</sup> Men *and* brethren, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to you the word of this salvation has been sent." (Acts 13:23, 26)**

Paul's discourse about *Y'shua* was so compelling, especially to the Gentile God Fearers who were present, that they invited him to return the next Sabbath and tell them more:

**"So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath. <sup>43</sup> Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. <sup>44</sup> On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God." (Acts 13:42-44)**

When they saw what a powerful impact Paul's message had on the people, the Jewish leadership of the Synagogue became jealous:

**"But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul. ... <sup>49</sup> And the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region." (Acts 13:45, 49)**

The next logical step was for the non-messianic Jewish leadership to stir up those people, over whom they had influence, and get Paul and Barnabas run out of town:

**"But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region." (Acts 13:50)**

The point is, Paul did not forsake the synagogue unless the synagogue first forsook him and he had no other choice but to take his message outside the synagogue. Later on, at Corinth, we learn that Paul:

**"... reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks." (Acts 18:4)**

Paul never gave up his Jewishness to become the leader of a so-called new religion later to be named Christianity. Paul remained a Jew of both the Sect of the Pharisees and the Sect of the Nazarenes to his dying day:

**"And it came to pass after three days that Paul called the leaders of the Jews together. So when they had come together, he said to them: 'Men *and* brethren, though I have 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 28:17)**

Paul was a confirmed member of the Sect of the Nazarenes within the Congregation (Church) of the Children of Israel.

~ Summary ~

As we begin our journey back in time to examine the History of the Faith, we need to understand that the Holy Scriptures are a complete unit. The New Testament is a continuation of the Old Testament and does not take precedence over it:

**"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."**

(II Tim. 3:16-17)

This passage refers specifically to the Old Testament, because they were the only Scriptures available when this was written. However, later on as the New Testament developed, Peter tells us there were other writings from his own day (including the writings of Paul) which met the criteria of being classified as Scripture:

**"Therefore, dear friends, as you look for these things, do everything you can to be found by him without spot or defect and at peace. <sup>15</sup> And think of our Lord's patience as deliverance, just as our dear brother Sha'ul also wrote you, following the wisdom God gave him. <sup>16</sup> Indeed, he speaks about these things in all his letters. They contain some things that are hard to understand, things which the uninstructed and unstable distort, to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures."**

(II Pet. 3:14-16 CJB)

As we trace the history of the "Church" from its beginnings, it is important to understand that the "Church" did not begin on Pentecost in 33 CE. It actually began when God called the Children of Israel, living in Egypt, to slay the first Passover lambs and place the blood of those lambs on the lintel and doorposts of their dwellings so the Death Angel would pass over them. This is where and when the Congregation (Church) of the Children of Israel first gathered as a formal unit.

This original "Church," of God's chosen people (the Children of Israel), suffered many trials and tribulations because they were not able to keep the perfect law of God (*Written Torah*) and receive the promised physical blessings. Because of their sins (transgressions of the *Torah* -- also

referred to as the law), God sent His very own Son, *Y'shua HaMashiach*, to tabernacle among the Children of Israel and offer up Himself as a perfect sacrifice for the sins of the people. That being accomplished -- God then sent the *Ruach HaKodesh* (Holy Spirit) to indwell the remnant of the Congregation of the Children of Israel; those who believed in *Y'shua*.

The sending of the *Ruach HaKodesh* (on *Shavu'ot*) marked not the "birthday" of a new "Church" but rather the "Birthday of the Sect of the Nazarenes." They were the called out remnant who were commissioned to take the Good News of Salvation and the coming of the Kingdom of God to the Jews first (Rom. 2:9-10) and then to all the world:

**"And Jesus [*Y'shua*] came and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.' Amen."**

(Matt. 28:18-20)

Almost immediately, the Apostles and other Disciples of *Y'shua* began this task. However, it was preceded by some prodding in the form of persecution -- causing the Nazarenes to disperse throughout Judea, Samaria, the Galilee, and even into the synagogues of the Jews located in the Diaspora. As they took the message to these areas, many came to faith in *Y'shua*.

Life was not easy for these early Messianic Believers, but the results of their witnessing were phenomenal. This fact, in itself, indicates this was not a work of men, but truly the work of God:

**"Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of *this* calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of *His* goodness and the work of faith with power, <sup>12</sup> that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*] may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*]."**

(II Thess. 1:11-12)

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