

## **Introduction**

### **Part 3**

Knowing how the past  
has influenced the present.

Physical, emotional, or sexual abuse leaves a memory or imprint in our bodies that creates deep scars. These things (abuses) have the capability to cause us to shut down part of our heart and create walls that may be drawn up between individuals and even people groups. The basic conclusion is that our feelings, our personality traits, and our current behaviors are shaped by the past events that we have lived through. All of the experiences that we have been through resulting from childhood drama, may dramatically impact our lives and have the capability of affecting our present and even our future thoughts, behaviors, actions, and even our interpretation or understanding of Scripture. Based upon these truths, is it possible to conclude in the beginnings, at the infancy of Christianity, the rulings, conclusions, and theologies of the early church may also have significantly influenced our present day understanding of Scripture, the Lord God in heaven, His Messiah Yeshua, the body of believers, and Israel?

While studying the Scriptures, it is important to also look at history and ask the question *“what do the nations think about God’s Torah*



*and its application for life, and how has this influenced modern Christianity today?”* And, *“are there parallels that may be found between the Christian interpretation of the Torah as opposed to the pagan nations?”* For example, when a conquering nation took control of Israel, what were some of the legal religious restrictions imposed upon the people of Israel? By asking these questions, we are able to examine how events in the past, the nations presuppositions and prejudices, and how these presuppositions and prejudices appear to be a part of the church in the present day. I would like to investigate this beginning with the time period of the Maccabees.

The time period of the Maccabees is the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE. At this time, Judea lay between the Ptolemaic Kingdom (based in Egypt) and the Seleucid empire (based in Syria). These two monarchies formed following the death of Alexander the Great (356–323 BCE). Judea had come under Ptolemaic rule, but fell to the Seleucids around 200 BCE. In addition, Judea at that time had been affected by the Hellenization begun by Alexander the Great. Some Jews, mainly those of the urban upper class, notably the Tobiad family, wished to dispense with Jewish law and adopt a Greek lifestyle. The Hellenizing Jews built a gymnasium in Jerusalem, competed in the international Greek games, and *“removed their marks of circumcision and repudiated the holy covenant.”* (*1 Maccabees 1:15*) Note, *“to repudiate”* means *“refuse to accept or be associated with”* the Torah of God. The Maccabees founded the Hasmonean dynasty, which ruled from 164 BCE to 63 BCE. According to the book of the Maccabees, Antiochus Epiphanies afflicted Israel in the following way:

### ***1 Maccabees 1:31-58***

*1:31 And when he had taken the spoils of the city, he set it on fire, and pulled down the houses and walls thereof on every side. 1:32 But the women and children took they captive, and possessed the cattle. 1:33 Then built they the city of David with a great and strong wall, and with mighty towers, and made it a strong hold for them. 1:34 And they put therein a sinful nation, wicked men, and fortified themselves therein. 1:35 They stored it also with armor and victuals, and when they had gath-*

ered together the spoils of Jerusalem, they laid them up there, and so they became a sore snare: 1:36 For it was a place to lie in wait against the sanctuary, and an evil adversary to Israel. 1:37 Thus they shed innocent blood on every side of the sanctuary, and defiled it: 1:38 In-somuch that the inhabitants of Jerusalem fled because of them: whereupon the city was made an habitation of strangers, and became strange to those that were born in her; and her own children left her. 1:39 Her sanctuary was laid waste like a wilderness, her feasts were turned into mourning, her Sabbaths into reproach her honor into contempt. 1:40 As had been her glory, so was her dishonor increased, and her excellency was turned into mourning. 1:41 Moreover king Antiochus wrote to his whole kingdom, that all should be one people, 1:42 And every one should leave his laws: so all the heathen agreed according to the commandment of the king. 1:43 Yea, many also of the Israelites consented to his religion, and sacrificed unto idols, and profaned the sabbath. 1:44 For the king had sent letters by messengers unto Jerusalem and the cities of Judah that they should follow the strange laws of the land, 1:45 And forbid burnt offerings, and sacrifice, and drink offerings, in the temple; and that they should profane the Sabbaths and festival days: 1:46 And pollute the sanctuary and holy people: 1:47 Set up altars, and groves, and chapels of idols, and sacrifice swine's flesh, and unclean beasts: 1:48 That they should also leave their children uncircumcised, and make their souls abominable with all manner of uncleanness and profanation: 1:49 To the end they might forget the law, and change all the ordinances. 1:50 And whosoever would not do according to the commandment of the king, he said, he should die. 1:51 In the selfsame manner wrote he to his whole kingdom, and appointed overseers over all the people, commanding the cities of Judah to sacrifice, city by city. 1:52 Then many of the people were gathered unto them,

*to wit every one that forsook the law; and so they committed evils in the land; 1:53 And drove the Israelites into secret places, even wheresoever they could flee for succor. 1:54 Now the fifteenth day of the month Casleu, in the hundred forty and fifth year, they set up the abomination of desolation upon the altar, and built idol altars throughout the cities of Judah on every side; 1:55 And burnt incense at the doors of their houses, and in the streets. 1:56 And when they had rent in pieces the books of the law which they found, they burnt them with fire. 1:57 And whosoever was found with any the book of the testament, or if any committed to the law, the king's commandment was, that they should put him to death. 1:58 Thus did they by their authority unto the Israelites every month, to as many as were found in the cities.*

Take note how the book of Maccabees records what the Romans did to Israel for the purpose of, *1 Maccabees 1:49 To the end they might forget the law, and change all the ordinances.* Based upon *1 Maccabees 1:31-58*, we may summarize these new religious laws (restrictions) that Antiochus established for Israel:

### ***Imposed Religious Restrictions***

- *Thou shall profane the Sabbath*
- *Thou shall change the set times (festivals) and laws*
- *Thou shall set up idols*
- *Thou shall eat unclean animals*
- *Thou shall not circumcise*
- *Thou shall forget Torah*

It is apparent that the major goal of the conquering peoples in relation to God's name and the Torah, was to profane the name of God by com-

manding (requiring, restricting, preventing) the people against obeying God's Torah. I want to emphasize how the conquering pagan nation commanded the people to profane the name of God in this particular way. The people were commanded by the king to disobey the Torah of God, and those who would not Maccabees writes, *1:50 And whosoever would not do according to the commandment of the king, he said, he should die.* In addition, anyone found having a copy of the book of the Testament (the Torah) were to be put to death (see *1 Maccabees 1:57*). The profanation of the Name of God simply put means to "make common." The dictionary defines it as, *to profane - the sphere of the ordinary and routine, the everyday, natural world.* So, what does it mean to profane God's Name? The way this was imposed was to cause the people to violate and forget God's Torah. The basic conclusion is the nations commanded the people to turn from God's ways (righteousness, holiness, and truth) and to walk in sin. In addition to this, in today's modern interpretation, the profanation of the Name may also be related to having a lack of awe (respect) for God and His Word, making the Lord "my buddy," and not trembling before Him as the Scriptures say, "*Do you not fear Me?*" says the LORD. *'Will you not tremble at My presence?'*" (*Jeremiah 5:22*). We are called to be a special people, holy, and righteous unto the Lord God in heaven. We are not called to be common, or to behave as the nations do (see Parashat Ekev, *Devarim / Deuteronomy 7:12–11:25*). This uniqueness of the people of Israel found in the Torah command was to be despised and the first order of business was to command the peoples to stop serving their God according to His word. Have you ever had friends mock you and make fun of you for living according to God's word? Peer pressure has the capacity to function in the same way, minus the requirement of being put to death for our faith.

The practices of Judaism in the service of worship to God, through sacrifice, prayer, the study of Scripture, the Temple ritual, and ethics, are all found in God's Torah, and attempts were made by the nations to stop the Jewish people from doing these things according to God's Word. It is interesting how the moral imperatives in the Torah were not commanded against. These specific directives that were imposed against the people (*i.e. Thou shall profane the Sabbath, Thou shall change the set times (festivals) and laws, Thou shall set up idols, Thou*

*shall eat unclean animals, Thou shall not circumcise, and Thou shall forget Torah.*) were designed for a special purpose. The purpose being, it is within these things we find remembrance of the covenant of God, the Abrahamic (circumcision) covenant, the Mosaic (Sabbath rest) covenant, the Davidic (Messiah King) covenant, holiness (unclean animals), and not do as the nations do by serving God the way the nations serve their gods (idol worship). In the Torah the people find the hope of the Lord sending His messiah to deliver, and for powerful miracles of God to save. In addition, the Maccabees was the world's first ideological-religious war. No one in the ancient world died for their gods; only the Jewish people in their belief in the One true God and in the Torah Command, the only monotheistic religion at the time, thought their faith was worth dying for. This was the reasons why Antiochus Epiphanies commanded these new laws to be put into place, to destroy the hope of Israel, to turn the hearts of men from the God of their fathers, and to forget God's word and His commands. Remember, the war of the Maccabees was the world's first ideological-religious war, and we inherited this concept of the Lord our God and His Messiah Yeshua as being worthy of laying our lives down for Him!

We know according to the history of Israel, when the people began to mingle with the nations, the ways of God become less important as sin takes rule over the body as opposed to walking in the Spirit according to the command (*Romans 7*). This is a common thread throughout the Scriptures, of the deceptions found in the nations, and the reason why the Lord God of Israel commanded the people, according to Parshat Ekev, to be careful not to do as the nations do, or to serve the Lord God in the way the nations serve their gods. It is important to note how the ultimate motivation of the pagan nations was to force the people of Israel to forget their God by laying down specific religious restrictions and forbidding the people from obeying the Torah. Keeping this in mind, do you know that early Christianity did the exact same thing as Antiochus to restrict the Jewish person, and even to convert the Jewish believer in Yeshua the Messiah to turn from his roots and to turn from obedience to the Torah?

The extent of which the early church did these things are clearly apparent while studying the various councils, for example, what we read according to the canons on the Council of Laodicea. The council

of Laodicea was a regional synod of approximately thirty clerics from Asia Minor that assembled between 363–364 CE in Laodicea, Phrygia Pacatiana. The major concerns of the Council of Laodicea involved the regulation of the conduct of church members. The Council expressed its decrees in the form of written rules called canons. Among the sixty canons decreed, those related to the restrictions placed upon the body of believers were aimed at being anti-Torah and may be summarized in the following way:

### *Summary of all Canons from Council of Laodicea*

- *Maintaining order among bishops, clerics and laypeople (canons 3–5, 11–13, 21–27, 40–44, 56–57)*
- *Enforcing modest behavior of clerics and laypeople (4, 27, 30, 36, 53–55)*
- *Regulating approach to heretics (canons 6–10, 31–34, 37), Jews (canons 16, 37–38) and pagans (canon 39)*
- *Outlawing the keeping of the sabbath (Saturday) and encouraging rest on the Sunday (canon 29)*
- *Outlining liturgical practices (canons 14–20, 21–23, 25, 28, 58–59)*
- *Restrictions during Lent (canons 45, 49–52)*
- *Admission and instruction of catechumens (a Christian convert under instruction before baptism) and neophytes (a person who is new to a subject, skill, or belief, canons 45–48)*
- *Specifying a Biblical canon (canons 59–60)*



Canons 29, 37, and 37 illustrate the religious restrictions that were placed upon Christians who obeyed the Torah at this time. The point of these canons were to restrict the people from obeying the Torah command of God in a similar manner to those established by Antiochus Epiphanies.

**CANON XXIX.**

*CHRISTIANS must not judaize by resting on the Sabbath, but must work on that day, rather honoring the Lord's Day; and, if they can, resting then as Christians. But if any shall be found to be judaizers, let them be anathema from Christ.*

**CANON XXXVII.**

*IT is not lawful to receive portions sent from the feasts of Jews or heretics, nor to feast together with them.*

**CANON XXXVIII.**

*IT is not lawful to receive unleavened bread from the Jews, nor to be partakers of their impiety.*

Is this surprising that the church would state something that speaks directly against the ten commandments, calling the Sabbath rest Judaizing and commanding people to work on the Shabbat and move the Shabbat from the seventh day to the first? The early church ruled it Anathema (*a formal curse by a pope or a council of the Church, excommunicating a person or denouncing a doctrine*), for those who followed the Torah and this council consider Saturday worship a sin. Why do you think that is? Why did the early church leaders consider Saturday worshipers on the same level as heretics and enemies of the church? Note how this has influenced the Christian opinion on the Torah of God both in the early church and in modern times.

Note also that persecution did not begin with the Roman authorities in the new Christian church. The New Testament writings tell of a fractional strife that was occurring between Jews and Greeks as a result of the massive influx of Greek believers in the God of Israel and in His

Messiah Yeshua. The former claiming that one needed circumcision for inclusion into the kingdom of God (see *Acts 15*), and the latter challenging the Jews by claiming to be “*the New Israel*,” which is founded in the new theologies developed by the church starting within the first few centuries following the death of the disciples. In the early chapters of Acts, Stephen (*Acts 7:57*) and James, the brother of John the disciple (*Acts 12:2*), became victims of the Jerusalem mob and of King Herod Agrippa, respectively. History demonstrating a presupposition of anti-Torah and anti-Semitism, it is easy to see how the Roman authorities developed a new interpretation on Scripture that authorizes a form of Christian hostility towards the Jews and the Word of God (the Torah).

The fourth century “*church father*” Epiphanius provides a detailed description of what was taking place and of those who live their lives according to the command of God.

***Epiphanius; Panarion 29***

*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 God 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 (310-403 CE) records how there were some who believe in the Messiah Yeshua and did not cease to obey the Torah of God. He says that they did not call themselves “*Christians*” and they did not ascribe their practices wholly to Judaism, but called themselves “*Naaarenes*” instead. He states how these Nazarenes are different from both the Jew and the Christian in the sense that they following in the footsteps of the Messiah according to the Torah of God. Is this not the way we are called to emulate your messiah? Is this not an early teaching, to walk in the footsteps of the King Messiah similar to how the rabbis interpret Israel’s calling, ‘*Israel is the retinue of the King and his duty is to imitate the King*’ (*Sifra to xix. 2*).(*Everyman’s Talmud by Abraham Cohen, 1932, pg 58-59*)? Epiphanius points out specifically saying “*they are still fettered by the Law—circumcision, the Sabbath, and the rest— they are not in accord with Christians.*” Note how this parallels the commands of Antiochus Epiphanies. He says circumcision and the Sabbath are not in accord with Christians.

Jerome, another “*church father*” Jerome (4<sup>th</sup> Century) also described these Nazarenes as those “*...who accept Messiah in such a way that they do not cease to observe the old Law.*”

### ***Jerome; Letter 75***

*“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.*

Note how Jerome believes faith in the Messiah Yeshua should result in one leaving the Torah of God. Jerome states that if these things be true (*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*) then Christianity of the time falls into heresy. Regardless of the biblical example of Paul, Jerome believes the coupling of the Torah commands with faith in the Messiah Yeshua is heresy and instructs his readers to not accept Jews into the church who continue to obey the Torah because they will make them into Jews in the end, meaning they will teach all to obey the five books of Moshe. Paul considered all peo-

ples are to have the heart of a Jew (see *Romans 2*) What is fascinating is how these opinions parallel the commands of Antiochus Epiphanes *Thou shall profane the Sabbath, Thou shall change the set times (festivals) and laws, Thou shall set up idols, Thou shall eat unclean animals, Thou shall not circumcise, and Thou shall forget Torah.* Based upon the historical accounts, there was a strict anti-Semitism that is related to these particular commands of God. It is within these commands of God that we find the hope of Israel, and the truth of Yeshua the Messiah.

We know according to the Scriptures, loving God means keeping his commandments, and his commandments are not burdensome. (*1 John 5:3*). The Apostle Paul makes an interesting conclusion at the end of the book of Romans.

***Romans 16:19-27***

*16:19 Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I rejoice because of you; but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil. 16:20 The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you. 16:21 Timothy, my co-worker, sends his greetings to you, as do Lucius, Jason and Sosipater, my fellow Jews. 16:22 I, Tertius, who wrote down this letter, greet you in the Lord. 16:23 Gaius, whose hospitality I and the whole church here enjoy, sends you his greetings. 16:Erastus, who is the city's director of public works, and our brother Quartus send you their greetings. 16:25 Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ, in keeping with the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, 16:26 but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all the Gentiles might come to the obedience that comes from faith— 16:27 to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen. (NASB)*

In Romans 16:25-26, Paul draws in the context of the Messiah Yeshua, to the mystery of the Messiah that was hidden in the Scriptures, in the

prophetic writings and in the command of the eternal God, and of the power of God working in the lives of the Gentiles such that the *“might come to the obedience that comes from faith.”* What is this obedience that Paul is speaking of that brings joy to his heart? What is this obedience to the faith that Paul is speaking of? What is to be “obeyed” having faith in Yeshua the Messiah? Paul speaks of the power of God in the commands and the prophetic Scriptures, that all Gentiles will come to the obedience that comes from faith. Is not this the command of God that has been given to His holy people to live out? (*1 John 5:3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome. NASB*) These things will be discussed further in this Torah series.

Next week we will look at the developed theologies and how these have influenced our modern understanding of Scripture, the Lord God in heaven, His Messiah Yeshua, the body of believers, and Israel.



