

Pastor-teacher Don Hargrove
Faith Bible Church
Monday, January 10, 2011
<http://fbcweb.org/doctrines.html>

JEWISH APOLOGETICS (1) Introduction (DDR #621)

This DDR (daily doctrinal reflection) begins a new series: Jewish apologetics. I really appreciate the prayers of FBC family as well as the feedback in deciding which series to do next: Jewish apologetics or the true nature of the church. After prayer, reflection, and feedback, I have decided that the best thing is to do both: Jewish apologetics in the DDRs and the nature of the church at the beginning of each Bible class (when I spend a few minutes orienting us to the Plan of God in our preparation for Bible class).

As we transition from the previous series on classical apologetics to Jewish apologetics, a few comments about the distinction between the two are in order. In classical apologetics, the emphasis was on defending theism and the Christian faith against secularism, atheism, agnosticism, deism, post-modernism, pseudo-science, et al. The concentration was on the fundamental laws of logic, the nature of reality, arguments for the existence of God, philosophy of science, and the historicity of Christianity and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In Jewish apologetics, the focus shifts to a defense of Christianity against the charges from “traditional” Judaism. The emphasis now shifts from defending theism and Christianity against the charges of atheism to the defense of Christianity against Judaism which charges, among other things, that Christ is a false prophet, the NT writers inappropriately applied OT passages about the Messiah to Christ, and that Christianity is false because it is *new religion* in contrast to the true revelation of the God of Israel—which in the OT declared that if anyone comes along with anything that is contrary to the Torah, he is to be rejected, regardless of any miracles (which would certainly include resurrection from the dead).

This series may prove to be challenging in two ways. First, you may expect some brain drain from time to time due to the massive amount of *unfamiliar* material (pray for me as I seek to summarize the vast amount of Jewish material). Second, this study may turn your thinking inside out as we look at the Jewish roots of Christianity, and are challenged to put away a lot of our Gentile presuppositions on the nature of Christ, the life of the apostles, Jesus Christ, and Christianity. You may be surprised to know that the apostles and Jesus Christ acted a whole lot more like a first century Jew than a modern church attending Christian.

We will deal with a vast array of Jewish objections. It is unfortunate that the average Christian is not aware of the objections of Judaism—some are silly, most are based on false views of Christianity, while others are serious and require a great deal of thought. Most Christians could not defend the New Testament claims regarding Jesus as the Messiah against the attacks of Judaism. My prayer is that this series will go a long way in remedying that problem. I would add that it is impossible to refute any

position without really understanding the force of the argument. It is all too common a practice (because it is easier) to manufacture your opponent's position (by adding and distorting their claims) and then proceed to tear it down with a superficial attitude of triumphalism.

This series assumes the biblical presuppositions that we studied in classical apologetics such as the biblical commands and examples to do apologetics and the fundamental laws of logic and truth as presented in classical apologetics (see apologetics 1-42 at <http://www.fbcweb.org/doctrines.html>)

For almost two thousand years most Christians have had huge blind spots with regard to understanding Judaism. This has resulted in a great deal of anti-Semitism throughout church history—as well as being ill-equipped in demonstrating to the Jew that Jesus is indeed the Messiah. Today, an ultra-orthodox Jewish lad who has just completed his bar mitzvah at the age of thirteen could easily win a debate against around 99% of PhD Christian students in seminary on OT evidence for Jesus as the true Messiah. Due to the immersion in material, the thirteen year old Jew has far more information and critical thinking skills than the average Christian who thinks his few pat answers are going to get the job done. The Jewish young man has been exposed to the Hebrew Scriptures almost since the womb, and the Christian simply cannot directly engage him. He is able to sit down with his Hebrew Bible and critique the English Bible and in so doing destroy any confidence that Jesus could be the Messiah based on the OT prophecies. The point here is that this thirteen year old Jew could wipe the floor with a Christian theologian in a debate—not in a debate over the twenty volumes of the Talmud, not over Jewish dietary laws, but in a debate over the understanding of Old Testament passages about the Messiah and how, given their context, they cannot refer to Christ. While one may excuse the average Christian for not being able to deal with these Jewish objections, there is no excuse for the pastor not to be able to provide answers based on his understanding of the Hebrew text. Unfortunately, most today do not have a clue—and don't care. Any wonder why so many Jews have no respect for Christianity?

It is worth noting that the apologetics we find in the Bible primarily is Jewish apologetics. You do not find challenges to Christianity from atheism, evolution, Islam or secularism. What we have in the New Testament is Jewish apologetics. One of the foundation truths of the New Testament is that Jesus came to fulfill what was written in Moses and the prophets. If Jesus is not the Messiah you can throw away the New Testament, and Christianity is false. Not only did Jesus engage in Jewish apologetics, He opened up the OT Scriptures up to the apostles after the resurrection. We also have Paul who regularly visited synagogues to engage the Jews concerning Jesus Christ. While classical apologetics is needful with regard to our modern world of evolution and atheism, the apologetics we find in the New Testament is chiefly Jewish apologetics.

Christianity is the fulfillment of Judaism. One common misconception is that Christianity is a “new religion” that replaced the old. God did not send His Son into the world as a Jewish rabbi to start a lovely new home and garden variety religion called Christianity. He came to fulfill what was written in Moses and the Prophets.

For the first few DDRs, my goal will be to get us to understand the Jewish perspective of why they reject Jesus Christ as the Messiah. Let's begin by noting some of the common Jewish reasons given for rejection of Christ and Christianity (italicized words are common sayings *from Jews*):

1. The most common reason is that they just listen to their rabbi and depend upon him to tell them what is right. They do not do their own research—not much different from a lot of doctrineless Christians.

2. *“Jesus did not fulfill all of those Messianic prophecies.”*

3. The incarnation: *“God can't become flesh!”*

4. *“Jesus did become king and set up a kingdom for the Jews”.*

5. *“Jesus did not free us [Jews] from our enemies as predicted in the OT.”*

6. *“Jesus did not set up peace on the earth as promised in the Messiah.”*

7. Jews feel that if they believe in Jesus, they no longer can be a Jew. Even if the Jew is not religious/spiritual, there is a still sense of us [Jews] and them [Christians].

8. *“The NT either misquotes, misrepresents, or takes out of context the Hebrew Scriptures.”*

9. *“Look at the anti-Semitism in church history: Chrysostom said that God hated the Jews and the synagogue was worse than a brothel; look at the crusades; consider Martin Luther, A Christian/Bible reformer, and his horrific book (the Jews and Their Lies), where he said Jewish businesses should be destroyed and that the Jews were a serpent's brew, and that we should burn down their synagogues and destroy them; and what about Hitler and his Nazis who followed Luther's viewpoints? How can we accept Christianity when it has hated and persecuted the Jews, God's chosen people? Furthermore, the fact that most Christians are not aware of this further demonstrates the culpability of the church against God's people. Why are these events not in Christian history books? Furthermore, instead of bringing love, peace and reconciliation to a sick world, the church has tortured and killed our forefathers, and burned our synagogues and holy books. The Christianity that claims to bring love and compassion to the world has had fixed a course directly against us and shed the blood of millions of our people. The blood of our people cry out from the ground. No, we reject the Christian religion for it is filled with unfathomable hate! It is hateful and bankrupt in all of its segments. We do not see Christianity as a model for redeeming humanity.”*

This is all very tough stuff! It is important to *understand* that most Jews do not see the difference between a professing church and the true church. Most lump us with the professing church, which not only perpetrated great evil but has also incorrectly taught doctrines such as the Trinity, the Law, and the God-man Jesus Christ. The church has not only been theologically and biblically illiterate, it has had horrible anti-Semitic attitude—which Satan loves!

10. *“Christianity is a gentile religion. It is not for us.”*

11. *“Jews are God’s chosen people; the Gentiles are not.”*

12. *“Jesus died—the Messiah was not supposed to die before completing His mission.”*

13. *“We can’t believe in three gods as per your Trinity. Our forefathers lived and died with the Shema on their lips, “Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! (Deu 6:4). Every day when we cite the Shema we focus all of our energy and intellect on God’s uniqueness and absolute unity. How dare you tell me God is a trinity—that is not the God of Sinai. I will not betray my God or my people!”* It is important to understand that for many Jews, their “no” to Christ and Christianity is simply a yes to what they believe is the true God of Israel. They would rather die than convert to what they see as a false religion.

14. *“We do not believe in human sacrifice.”*

15. *“Jesus can’t be the Messiah because He changed the Torah/law. And our Bible teaches us that if anyone comes along and changes the Torah, we are to reject him out of hand—even if he performs miracles and is raised from the dead. We will not follow other gods! We will not worship Jesus as God! Jesus changed the Torah and that disqualifies him from being the Messiah.”*

Deuteronomy 13:1 "If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, ² and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them,' ³ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the LORD your God is testing you to find out if you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

16. *“God made promises to us, not the church.”* Reformed churches believe that the promises of the OT were transferred to the church. The best friends of Israel have always been the dispensationalists, who believe the promises for the Jews are for the Jews—not the church.

17. *“We love being under the Torah, it is a gift from God. Keeping it is my delight, read Psalm 1:2; 19; 119:72! Furthermore, in the kingdom the Torah will come forth from Zion. The greatest gift God has given us is the Torah—the extraordinary privilege of keeping the Law. The Torah is our highest delight and we will be studying it forever and ever. The fact that you Christians denigrate the Law indicates your movement is not from God.”* The Jews love the Law. No other nation was given this privilege by God.” As a matter of fact, there is a Jewish prayer uttered every morning that includes thanksgiving to God that he is not a Gentile, a woman, or a slave. The reason a traditional male Jew says this prayer when he gets up in the morning is related to his love of the Law: a Gentile is not required to keep the law; a woman is not required to keep all of the law according to Jewish traditions because she is unable to keep some of them because of constraints upon her as a woman (due to certain times of the month and/or household responsibilities); and a slave because the slave had responsibilities to his master. Only a free male Jew has the privilege of being able to

keep all of the commands of the Torah which is the highest privilege. Jews have a very different way of looking at the Torah than most Christians—especially those who understand grace.

18. *“Jesus is not God. Our Bible plainly tells us that God is not a man. Read Numbers 23:19! Moses warned us about this explicitly in Dt 4:15-19: do not make for yourselves an idol in any shape, like that of a man You Christians worship God in the form of a man.”*

19. *“How can you Christians expect us to accept your OT Messianic proof-texts when you have not examined the context; rather, you have arbitrarily applied it to your Jesus.”*

20. *“Can’t you see that you are asking me to deny the Torah and in so doing deny the God of Israel?”*

Are you starting to feel the force of their arguments (even if you do not agree)? My goal for the next few DDRs is to really get us to feel the weight of their arguments. After that, we will demonstrate beyond any reasonable doubt that Jesus is the true Messiah. Only by first understanding them and their objections can we really engage them and be in a better position to share the good news of Jesus Christ to them. This study will also open up a wealth of information on the Jewishness of Christianity and thus open up our eyes to greater understanding of the New Testament.

The alternative to gaining knowledge about Judaism is to close our eyes and stay in the dark regarding Judaism, and be satisfied with some superficial triumphalism with its few pat answers that do not come close to addressing these issues—this is not good for us, our faith, or in reaching them for Christ. One may choose to remain ignorant over the horrific anti-Semitism in church history, what the Jews think about this that or the other, but how could any Christian think it is OK not to be able to defend the Messiahship of Jesus Christ against the claims that He was a false prophet?

I leave you with a quote from one of the greatest OT scholars, Franz Delitzsch, (I have used his 10 volume commentary on the OT for more than 20 years. I purchased it based on the recommendations of my first pastor R.B. Thieme): *“The Church still owes the Jews the actual proof of Christianity’s truth. Is it surprising that the Jewish people are such an insensitive and barren field for the Gospel? The Church itself has drenched it in blood and then heaped stones upon it.*

Yet we somehow think that by quoting an isolated Messianic proof text, one whose original context we have often not even explored, we will be able to convince a religious Jew to “become a Christian,” or, if he rejects our words but is honest with himself, we expect him at least to acknowledge the truthfulness of our position.

As Michael Brown (arguably the greatest Jewish apologist in the world) aptly put it, *“Can you see now that, in his eyes, we are asking him [the Jew] to deny God, deny Torah, deny the eternal covenant, deny his people, and embrace an alien, idolatrous, and seriously flawed religion? And can you see how this insensitivity smacks of the very triumphalism that has been such a curse on our history? And isn’t it striking that we find the need to have a serious apologetic arsenal to address the cults, to address other major, world religions, and to address post-modernism and evolutionism, yet we fail to recognize how essential it is that we massively shore up our Jewish apologetics? And isn’t this lack all the more striking when we remember that, according to Rom 1:16, the gospel is to the Jew first?”*

In Him,

Pastor Don