

## SETTING THE TABLE 2

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# WORDS AND CONCEPTS CHANGED

Over time, the meaning of words and concepts can change a great deal. The farther removed from the original context they are, the more their meaning can drift from the original intent. As Rome took over the early Messianic movement, many words and concepts changed, with others evolving much later as the English language originated. So it is important to look closely at the original context of the first-century scriptures to gain a true picture of what was meant at the time.

After the Jewish disconnect, the Roman Church continued to gain in strength and followers. Yet the only things that many Jewish people knew about Christianity was that they were not welcome in it, and that it contained lots of strange rituals and beliefs to which they could not relate. Remember that Constantine called Christianity “our religion,” declaring that it was to have nothing in common with the Jews. Much truth was lost in the process, and many concepts were drastically changed.

Since the Bible prophecies show that God is drawing the Jewish people back to Himself in our time, no one should have a problem with returning some of these words and concepts to the first-century Jewish idioms to which Jewish people today might more easily relate. This is not to say that everyone should wear a *yarmulke* (*kippah* or skullcap), because Abraham, Moses, David, and the first-century Jewish believers did not; the wearing of *yarmulkes* was a rabbinic injunction and not from the scriptures. Nor should we all wear robes and sandals as the first-century Jews did. It’s only to say that to understand the Jewish Messiah’s words and his disciples’ teachings in the first-century scriptures, we have to view them from within the Jewish idioms of their day.

In this chapter, we will examine a few terms (such as “church,” “communion,” “Christian,” “saints,” and even the name of Jesus) to see how their meanings changed as time went on. And when these meanings change, a false view of history can result.

For example, in the 1862 Young’s Literal Translation, James 2:2 is written as follows (with James teaching that we should not show partiality between the wealthy and the poor):

<sup>YLT</sup> James 2:2 for if there may come into your synagogue a man with gold ring, in **gay raiment**, and there may come in also a poor man in vile raiment,

In 1862 it was completely acceptable to compliment a Protestant on his attire as being “gay,” meaning “colorful” or “bright.” However, in our day, this would carry a very different connotation. This is one way that language can change over time to mean completely new things. By taking the original Jewish words and concepts out of the idioms in which they were spoken, believers can end up with meanings that the Jewish Messiah never intended.

### **Did the Jews Before Paul Share in “Communion” or Partake in the “Eucharist”?**

Most Christians (and Jews) today would be shocked if you told them that the Jews who lived a few hundred years before Jesus and Paul shared in “Communion” and partook in the “eucharist.”

The Greek word *koinonia*, often translated as “communion” in English Bibles, was also used in the Greek Septuagint (the translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek by the Jewish scholars). Thus it was familiar to Jews a few hundred years before Jesus or Paul even lived. This Greek word meant “fellowship” or “sharing,” and of course this Jewish sharing and fellowshiping had nothing in common with the Roman ritual of Communion that came hundreds of years later.

The religious-sounding English word “eucharist” comes from the Greek word *eucharistia*, meaning “thanksgiving.” It, too, often appeared in the Septuagint and was therefore common among Jews living before the time of Jesus and Paul. To them, the word simply meant “thanksgiving,” and they often “partook in thanksgiving” to God. As with the word “communion,” their use of the word “eucharist” certainly had no connection with any kind of Communion rite or Blessed Eucharist ritual that was kept later in Rome.

So when first-century Jews like Paul use these same Greek words in the New Testament, we must be careful not to overlay them with what they later came to mean in Roman theology. The Jewish nation used these words for hundreds of years before Paul, and we should therefore consider his words from that perspective, not from that of a later ritual in Rome.

The true Jewish communion—what this Greek word meant in the Jewish idiom and how it applied to the Jewish festivals, communal meals, and the Last Supper—will be more fully covered in the Twelve Courses.

### **Did the First-Century Jews Really Go to “Church”?**

Today, the word “church” can evoke various emotions among Jewish people, and for the most part they are not warm and fuzzy. If anything, “church” is considered a place where you would not find many Jewish people, which is easy to understand

after reading the history that led to the Jewish disconnect. This also explains why many Messianic congregations do not use the term “Messianic Church.”

This English word “church” (from the Greek *ekklesia*) can incorrectly portray first-century Jewish believers as no longer being Jewish (i.e., having no Jewish identity), but rather as “Christians” going to “church.” However, this Greek word *ekklesia* was used by first-century Jewish writers of scripture to indicate the place where the Jews would “congregate” or “assemble.” It was the same word that appeared in the Septuagint and was commonly used among Jews for hundreds of years before the New Testament to mean “called-out ones.” It referred to the “assembly” or those “called out” by God.

When first-century Jewish Messianic followers continued using the Greek word *ekklesia*, it connected directly back to the assembly under Moses. They did not picture themselves going to a new place called “church,” but rather they understood the Greek word in the sense that they were those “called out” by God.

Did you know that Moses spoke the words of his song to the “church”?

<sup>NAS</sup> Deuteronomy 31:30 Then Moses spoke in the hearing of all the **assembly** of Israel the words of this song, until they were complete:

<sup>LXT</sup> Deuteronomy 31:30 καὶ ἐλάλησεν Μωυσῆς εἰς τὰ ὄτα πάσης **ἐκκλησίας** Ἰσραηλ τὰ ῥήματα τῆς ᾠδῆς ταύτης ἕως εἰς τέλος

English translations make a distinction between the Old Testament and the New Testament. In the former, this gathering together is translated as “assembly” or “congregation”; in the latter, it is translated as “church.” But in fact the Messianic Jews made no such distinction. Above in Deuteronomy, we see that the *exact same* Greek word is used in the Septuagint for the assembly under Moses, which is almost always translated from the Greek New Testament into English as “church,” as it is here:

<sup>KJV</sup> Hebrews 2:12 Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the **church** will I sing praise unto thee.

<sup>GNT</sup> Hebrews 2:12 λέγων, Ἀπαγγελῶ τὸ ὄνομά σου τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς μου, ἐν μέσῳ **ἐκκλησίας** ὑμνήσω σε,

Notice that the writer to the Hebrews is quoting David from the Psalms. However, was David really going to “church” to sing? Definitely not as most people would think today.

When the King James Bible translates this same scripture from the Psalms, David does not sing praise in “church,” for that word was reserved for Christians. Instead, David sings his praise in the “congregation.”

<sup>KJV</sup> Psalm 22:22 I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the **congregation** will I praise thee.

If you asked a Jewish follower of Moses living a hundred years before Jesus if he would like to go into the midst of an *ekklelesia* and sing praise, he would be glad to do it. However, if you used the English translation of this Greek word and asked a Jewish follower of the Old Covenant living today if he would like to sing in the midst of a *church*, his reaction would likely be very different.

English translations never use this English word in the Old Testament, because to them “church” is the place where “Christians” go. However, the first-century Jews did not make such a distinction; they used the same Greek word the Jews had used for hundreds of years that connected directly to the assembly under Moses, Samuel, David, and the other Jewish leaders, as the Septuagint shows:

<sup>NAS</sup> 1 Samuel 17:47 and that all this **assembly** may know that the LORD does not deliver by sword or by spear; for the battle is the LORD’s and He will give you into our hands.”

<sup>LXT</sup> 1 Samuel 17:47 καὶ γνώσεται πᾶσα ἡ ἐκκλησία αὕτη ὅτι οὐκ ἐν ῥομφαίᾳ καὶ δόρατι σώζει κύριος ὅτι τοῦ κυρίου ὁ πόλεμος καὶ παραδώσει κύριος ὑμᾶς εἰς χεῖρας ἡμῶν

<sup>NAS</sup> Psalm 26:12 My foot stands on a level place; In the **congregations** I shall bless the LORD.

<sup>LXT</sup> Psalm 25:12 ὁ γὰρ πούς μου ἔστη ἐν εὐθύτητι ἐν ἐκκλησίαις εὐλογῆσω σε κύριε

Although most English translations (of the Old Testament) are from the Hebrew Bible and not from the Greek Septuagint, the change from using “assembly/congregation” to using “church” is yet another one that has aided in portraying the New Testament as being disconnected from Jewish roots. Picturing “church” in first-century Jerusalem as a modern-day church with a steeple would simply be wrong. We would not picture Samuel and King David going to “church,” nor did the first-century Jewish believers see themselves going to a new place called “church.”



Many believers today are not aware that the early Protestants also had a problem with this English word “church,” because in their idiom it was directly connected to

the “one universal church” that was understood to be the Roman Catholic Church. (Note that the word “catholic” means “universal.”)

William Tyndale (c. 1492–1536), the first scholar to translate large parts of the Greek New Testament into English, rejected the English word “church” and used the word “congregation” instead. In his day, this more accurately pointed to *any gathering* of believers rather than to the one Roman Catholic Church.

In this example of Tyndale’s use of “congregation” in 1 Corinthians 10:32, notice how much the English language has changed since then:

Se that ye geve occasion of evell nether to ye Iewes nor yet to the gentylys nether to ye **cogregacion** of god:

<sup>KJV</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:32 Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God:

The Catholic Church became angry with Tyndale and his English translation because now the scriptures were accessible in the language of the common man, whereas before they had been in Latin, a language reserved for the higher, better educated classes.

Tyndale responded to a Catholic cleric who challenged him concerning his English translation by saying, “I will cause the boy who driveth the plow to know more of the scriptures than thou.”

Tyndale was imprisoned in a dungeon and later burned at the stake. The Roman Catholic Church did not say this was because he had translated the Bible into English or because he had left out the word “church,” but rather it claimed he was a heretic (as the Fourteenthers were called). The Messiah never said to kill those who do not believe the same way you do, so this was definitely the wrong spirit at work.

Several English (Protestant) translations—such as Young’s Literal Translation (1862) and The Darby Bible (1884)—would follow Tyndale’s lead by not using the word “church” anywhere in the scriptures. Instead, they used the word “assembly” where Tyndale had used “congregation.” Since these believers were protesting (hence the term “Protestants”) the doctrines and practices of the “one universal church,” they did not want to use a word that seemed connected to that church.

In turn, the Roman Catholic Church disliked the word “congregation,” and in the King James translation (which kept about 85 percent of Tyndale’s original translation), it was changed back to “church.” After all, in Catholic theology they were the “one Catholic Church” that the Messiah had built. This word “church” became the accepted term for the place where Christians gather, right down to our day.

Giving this word a different nuance in English is another change in word and concept that helped separate the Jewish people from hearing about the Messiah, as well as to separate them from the Gentiles who believe in the Messiah.

## Did the Early Jews Who Believed in the Messiah Become “Christians”?

Many Christians today believe that when Peter, Paul, and the early Jews found Jesus to be the Messiah, they saw themselves as Christians and thus part of a new religion. Yet this is a false picture of their true experience. Those earliest Jewish believers accepted that they had found the Messiah, and yet initially most everything else remained the same; they did not see themselves as members of a new religion.

When the Holy Spirit came down at Pentecost and certain other events transpired (such as Peter’s vision in Acts 10), they began to understand that they were now in the promised New Covenant of which many Jewish prophets had spoken. However, they continued to participate daily in the Temple, performing the requisite ritual *mikvah* immersions as well as appropriate sacrifices each year, such as the Passover. Some Christians today might not like this reality, but if one understands Jewish law and God’s law, they would realize that in those days one could not enter the Temple without being “right with God” as per the sacrifices and ritual cleansings; the Temple authorities would never have allowed it. We see this with Paul as late as Acts 21, when he needs to be ritually prepared to enter the Temple, offer up the appropriate sacrifices, and give notice to the Temple authorities of having been thus ceremonially purified:

<sup>NAS</sup> Acts 21:26 Then Paul took the men, and the next day, **purifying himself** along with them, went into the temple, **giving notice** of the completion of the days of purification, until **the sacrifice was offered for each one of them.**

Paul already understood New Covenant truths, but he knew that to enter the Temple certain requirements of the law (such as appropriate sacrifices and cleansings) had to be adhered to because the Temple authorities still enforced the law of Moses.

We see Peter also gradually coming into new truth, for he would have continued to refuse to eat with Gentiles had the Lord not given him the vision in Acts 10 to bring him further into the New Covenant. Not all the apostles had the same understandings initially, but because they were open to God’s spirit leading them, they did gradually come into the new truths from the Lord as they went along. For example, this new truth that Peter came to understand—that it was okay to eat with Gentile believers and to no longer consider them as unclean—came years after the Resurrection. The apostles clearly did not see all truth immediately but were led into it as they yielded to God’s spirit.

As New Covenant Jewish believers were eventually rejected from Judaism and as various persecutions drove them out of Israel, they adopted these new truths to the point that Paul—understanding they were now under the New Covenant and the Sabbath was part of Old Covenant law—would teach that it was no longer necessary

to obey the Old Covenant laws (Colossians 2:16, 17; Romans 14:5). However, it wasn't as simple as that for Messianic Jews who assembled in the Temple in Jerusalem, where the authorities there were not lenient with those who did not obey the Old Covenant laws concerning the Sabbath and the sacrifices.

The law was clear that anyone not offering up the Passover sacrifice at the proper time would be cut off from the nation. The Jews in the Temple were even going to kill Paul for bringing a man they mistakenly believed to be uncircumcised into the Temple and for teaching against the law of Moses (Acts 21:26–31). As strict as the Jewish authorities were, these Messianic believers would not have been able to continue meeting in the Temple as they had been for some years if they had been rejecting the law right in front of the Temple authorities.



It must be reiterated that early Jewish believers did not see themselves as now practicing some new religion, but rather that the promised Messiah had brought them into the promised New Covenant. Originally, Messianic followers were called the “sect of the Nazarene” (probably as a derisive term) by those on the outside. Later, this Jewish Messianic movement was called “the way” (because in John 14:6 Jesus had said he was “the way”), and the believers were called this for some time.<sup>41</sup>

It was not until one or two decades later that some in the Greek city of Antioch began to be called “Christians” (meaning followers of Christ/Messiah, Acts 11:26), and this nickname stuck. At first, the label was not used by Jesus or initially by the apostles, but it arose later and eventually came to be accepted. The term “Messianic” (from “Messiah”) is basically the same as “Christian” (from “Christ”); both are from the original Hebrew and Greek words for “anointed.”

Although Jewish Messianic believers should, of course, accept all true Christians as brothers and sisters in the Lord, and likewise Christians should accept Messianic believers and not allow any schism in the body of Christ, there is no scriptural command or even a suggestion from the Lord for believers to be called “Christians.”

“Christianity,” which began as a word referring to those who followed the Jewish Messiah, would later come to not only exclude Jews but be outright hostile to them in Rome. So when we come down to our day, it's hardly surprising that some do not want to use the word “Catholic” when referring to their Christianity, and others prefer the name “Messianic” to Christian.

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41 Acts 9:2; 18:25, 26; 22:4; 24:14, 22.

## Was the Name of the Messiah Really “Jesus?”

Another word that has evolved over time is the English name “Jesus.”

In 1985, when I was a graduate student in Bible college, I was part owner of a building that was rented to a group of Jewish Messianic believers. After sharing beliefs with these very nice people and also being impressed by their level of scholarship, I became a touch frustrated by their referring to Jesus as *Yeshua*. My thought was, “Why can’t they just call him by his *real* name?” However, after considering this, I soon realized that Jesus was never called by this English name while he lived, nor was he ever called Jesus until only a few hundred years ago.

Even the early English Bibles did not call him Jesus; the 1611 King James Bible called him “Iesus,” which is a transliteration of the Greek New Testament name *Iesous* (pronounced *ee-ay-sooce*). The Tyndale original called him *Iesu*. Since the English language did not have its beginnings until many hundreds of years after Jesus lived, the English name “Jesus” was not used until more than 1,600 years later.

*Yeshua* is the Hebrew name (translated as Joshua in English) that was translated as *Iesous* in Greek. Thus the Messiah’s Greek name was the same one as Joshua’s, who had led the Israelites into the Promised Land. In the Greek New Testament, both bear the identical name, since it is a translation of the one Hebrew name; it was only in the English translations that Joshua and Jesus were given different names.

Changing his name from “Joshua” to “Jesus” hides certain spiritual connections and truths that might otherwise be seen had the same name continued to be used for both of them. If the Messiah had been called “Joshua” in English, we would see a direct connection to the Jewish man who, after Moses, led the Jews into the Promised Land. Also apparent would be a connection to the Jewish high priest in Haggai, who was commissioned to *build the house of God* (Haggai 1:1, 8, 14), as well as to Joshua, the “Shoot” in chapter 6 of Zechariah:

<sup>NIV</sup> Zechariah 6:11 Take the silver and gold and make a crown, and set it on the head of the high priest, **Joshua** son of Jehozadak.

<sup>JPS</sup> Zechariah 6:12 and speak unto him, saying: Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying: Behold, **a man whose name is the Shoot**, and who shall shoot up out of his place, **and build the temple of the LORD**;

The high priest Joshua pointed to the true Joshua—the “shoot/sprout” out of David, who would build the Lord’s true house, a spiritual house (1 Peter 2:5) for those who love God. The Joshua who followed Moses and led Israel into the Promised Land pointed to the true Joshua—the Messiah—who would lead all of God’s people into the true *eternal* and spiritual Promised Land with fullness of joy and pleasures forever more:

<sup>NAS</sup> Deuteronomy 31:23 Then He commissioned Joshua the son of Nun, and said, “Be strong and courageous, for you shall bring the sons of Israel into the land which I swore to them, and I will be with you.”

<sup>NAS</sup> Psalm 16:11 Thou wilt make known to me the path of life; In Thy presence is fulness of joy; In Thy right hand there are pleasures **forever.**

Giving the Messiah a different English name blurs and obscures many of these pictures, further removing him from his true Jewish roots. If you were to call Jesus “Joshua” today, nobody would know to whom you were referring. Even the angel of the Lord directed that the Messiah have the same Greek name as that of Joshua (Matthew 1:20, 21), yet in English we have changed it to a different one that has clouded some of these connections.

For this reason, I will often refer to Christ as “the Messiah” in this book to portray the Jewish sense of who he actually was. Again, it is not that we should never call him “Jesus,” for names frequently change from one language to another, but this history must be understood so that no spiritual light is lost in the translation, regardless of whether we call him “Yeshua” or “Jesus.”



If we really wanted to get technical, we would also have to change the way we pronounce the word “Jew,” for neither the Hebrew nor the Greek used the “j” sound with these words. Even in early English the “j” sound is not used, as you can see with Tyndale’s use of the words “Jesus” and “Jew” boldfaced below:

Galatians 3:28 Now is ther no **Iewe** nether getyle: ther is nether bonde ner fre: ther is nether man ner woman: but ye are all one thinge in Christ **Iesu.**

<sup>NAS</sup> Galatians 3:28 There is neither **Jew** nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ **Jesus.**

The English word “Jew” was derived from the tribe of Judah and from the land that this tribe was given (Judah/Judea). It did not have the “j” sound in Hebrew (pronounced “*Yehudah*”) or in Greek (pronounced “*Iouda*”). Hence in the time of Jesus, they came to be known as “Ioudaians”; the name was first shortened in English to “Iews,” then

eventually “Jews” or “Judeans.” A word spelled or pronounced “*Jew*” is found nowhere in either the Hebrew or Greek scriptures; this is the English translation.

### Will the Real “Lion of the Tribe of Judah” Please Stand Up?

The scriptures refer to the Messiah as the lion of the tribe of Judah, which itself was said to be a lionlike tribe. However, the Messiah was set apart as *the* lion, which means he stood above other such mighty men from this lineage such as Caleb, King David, Isaiah, Nehemiah, and others. However, the visual that has been handed down through history often portrays a different picture.

Most people today would immediately recognize the three people below as being Jesus, even though each one is a different person in a different portrait. All that’s needed is long, flowing hair and a certain “holy” look, and everyone knows it is Jesus. However, no first-century Jewish believer (whether he had ever seen the Messiah or not) would have picked from these three.



The fact is that the true Messiah had short hair, and Paul actually states that it is a *shame* for a man to have long hair (1 Corinthians 11:14) and that long hair is a covering for the woman to show submission. Paul would not go around saying it was shameful for men to have long hair if the Messiah wore his hair that way.

Another reason Jesus definitely would not have looked like these three men is that he would not have had a pale complexion, for he spent significant time walking under the hot sun of arid Israel before sunscreen was invented. He was a Jew from the tribe of Judah. But as time went by, from the first century when Jesus lived and on into the Middle Ages, he came to be portrayed in paintings as less Jewish and more as a Gentile with the long, flowing hair that became the custom among some European kings and nobility, even down to some of the early American presidents.

Every time something is portrayed falsely, a certain amount of light is lost.

### Were the Early Jewish Believers, Like Paul, Really Called “Saints”?

It was through the Roman Catholic Church that the English word “saint” became widely applied to people in the New Testament, as well as to various Catholic “Saints.” To first-century Jewish believers, however, the Greek equivalent word *hagios* (from the Hebrew *kadosh*) actually meant “holy” or “set apart to God” (as did *kadosh*). In the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew, *hagios* was often applied to Moses, Aaron, David, and the whole Israelite nation when they walked with God. *Hagios* was later translated into English as “saint.”

The use of the English word “saint” for first-century Jewish believers like “Saint Paul” and “Saint Peter” makes them seem more non-Jewish and slightly Catholic. Portraying these Messianic followers as disconnected from their Jewish heritage gives a false impression.

If they are portrayed as Roman Catholic “saints,” some might picture them going around Jerusalem (such as in Acts 2:42–46) practicing a Roman ritual of Communion. However, if we think of them correctly—as Jews who were firmly connected to all things Jewish that had gone on before and since Moses, but who now existed in the promised New Covenant—then we see the true Jewish Messianic perspective.

### Did the Early Jewish Believers Really Have a “Pastor”?

“Pastor” is another word with no connection to the first-century Jewish idiom. Messianic Jews never had “pastors” as such, but their scriptures often spoke of men who led and guided the people as “shepherds.”

It might amaze some believers to know that the English word “pastor” is actually absent from most Bibles. In fact, the word itself does not appear once in the New Testament. To be fair, the plural “pastors” does appear once in some English Bibles (Ephesians 4:11), but the original Greek was the word for “shepherds,” and some English Bibles prefer to use that term:

<sup>NAS</sup> Ephesians 4:11 And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* **pastors** and teachers,

<sup>DBY</sup> Ephesians 4:11 and he has given some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some **shepherds** and teachers,

<sup>YLT</sup> Ephesians 4:11 and He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* proclaimers of good news, and some *as* **shepherds** and teachers,

Using the term “shepherd” in a spiritual sense follows the longstanding Jewish idiom of taking a natural (literal) thing and applying it spiritually. As the Jewish people

had natural sheep with natural shepherds, so they applied this concept in the New Covenant to spiritual sheep and spiritual shepherds (i.e., those who would shepherd each “flock”). However, it’s important to point out that this word was changed, thus becoming something that Jewish people could not relate to, did not feel a part of, and even felt excluded from. That is why it’s often better to use words that more authentically convey what the Messiah meant. To most people—especially many Jewish people whom the Lord may be drawing to Himself—“pastor” does not carry the same meaning as a shepherd.

It is true that this word “pastor” means “to shepherd,” and this isn’t to say that the word should never be used; but again it’s important to highlight how the word changed to become something totally foreign to most Jews.

A pastor is typically perceived as the “head” of the “church” (i.e., the “called-out ones”), even though according to scripture the Messiah is to be the head (Ephesians 5:23, 4:15; 1 Corinthians 11:3). Many literal flocks of sheep in Israel would have more than one shepherd, but most churches today do not have more than one pastor.

The mostly Jewish writers of the New Covenant used the same Greek word (ποιμένα) they had been familiar with from the Septuagint for many years, which meant the same as the Hebrew word (רעה) meaning “shepherd”:

<sup>NAS</sup> Jeremiah 3:15 “Then I will give you shepherds after My own heart, who will feed you on knowledge and understanding.

We would never think of the Israelites before Christ as having “pastors,” so plainly this word took on a new meaning in English:

<sup>NAS</sup> Ezekiel 34:2 “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy and say to those shepherds, ‘Thus says the Lord God, “Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock?”’

Changing the Greek word for “shepherds” into the New Testament English as “pastors” is one more thing that has portrayed a whole new religion that was separated from all Jewish history.

### What about the Word “Trinity”?

Although many good people believe in both sides of this doctrine, and numerous arguments concerning it exist, one thing cannot be disputed: The word “Trinity” is found nowhere in either the New Testament or the Old Testament. Furthermore, this concept is totally alien from anything the monotheistic Jews ever believed.

While this book's aim is not to argue this doctrine, we do briefly need to examine the word "Trinity," since this chapter is about words and concepts that changed over time. This is one concept that clearly changed in Rome. It was under Constantine at the council of Nicaea in AD 325 that this doctrine was formalized into the "Nicene Creed," whereby God, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus were called "very God" themselves, yet together these three were the one true God.

To believe this doctrine, one would also have to believe that all of God's great leaders throughout history completely missed this "very God" concept. It's untenable that Noah, Elijah, Abraham (who was called the friend of God), and Moses (who spoke "face to face" with God) all missed this *supposed* understanding of God's nature and that there were really three Gods who make up the one God. While it is true that these great Jewish leaders believed in the Father, the Holy Spirit, and in a future Messiah, they never believed this actually made three Gods into one God.

David spoke of the Holy Spirit (*Ruach HaKodesh* in Hebrew), but he did not see it as a second God or one-third of God, otherwise he would have told us:

<sup>NAS</sup> Psalm 51:11 Do not cast me away from Thy presence, And do not take Thy **Holy Spirit** from me.

The Jewish writers of the New Covenant used the same Greek words for "Holy Spirit" that the Septuagint used in this Psalm of David. We must not jump to the conclusion that just because they spoke of the Holy Spirit, they were thinking of a third God, or a member of the threefold Trinity of Constantine's Nicene Creed (which did not exist yet). When David spoke of the Holy Spirit, he was simply speaking of God's presence (who is holy and who is spirit) being with him.

First-century Jews had this same understanding. They also believed in a coming Messiah from the tribe of Judah through David, but again they did not consider him to be a third God or a member of a threefold Trinity that together made up the one God. Once again, here is another overlay of Roman theology on the words and idioms of first-century Jewish believers.

It is true, however, that the Jewish scriptures portray the Messiah as having a nature that is like God's. And they do speak of the Messiah in exalted terms, saying his *name* would be called "Mighty God" and "Eternal Father":

<sup>NAS</sup> Isaiah 9:6 For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His **name** will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

Now Jesus was never called the long string of names listed above. In the Jewish idiom, a person's name was often symbolic for his nature, for who he was. Many of the Jewish prophets and others had God's name "Yah" (or "El," meaning God) attached to their name (such as Isa-iah, Jerem-iah, Dani-el, Ezeki-el).

When Abraham was given the promises of God, his name was changed from "Abram" to "Abraham" (meaning "father of a multitude," Genesis 17:5). When Jacob (meaning "one who supplants") wrestled with the angel of the Lord, his name was changed to "Israel" (meaning "prevailed with God," Genesis 32:28). When the ark of God was captured by the Philistines under Eli, and Eli fell over backward and broke his neck, the child to whom his daughter-in-law was giving birth was named Ichabod (meaning "the glory has departed").

It was also written that the Messiah would be called "Immanuel" (meaning "God with us"):

<sup>DBY</sup> Isaiah 7:14 Therefore will the Lord himself give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and shall bring forth a son, and call his **name** Immanuel.

Now Mary did not name Jesus "Immanuel," even though God told her that the coming child was the Messiah; the angel directed her husband Joseph to give him the name that had God's name attached to it. As we saw earlier, the name "Jesus" was the Greek name for "Joshua," a loose transliteration of the Hebrew name to which God's name was attached ("Yah-Oshea" meaning "Yahweh saves").

So why didn't Joseph and Mary call Jesus "Immanuel" to fulfill this prophecy? The answer is that, like the prophecy from Isaiah 9:6 above, the name is not meant literally. Rather, it expresses the nature and essence of the Messiah, who would be "God with us" and would bring salvation. As the scripture says, he was the exact expression of God's nature:

<sup>NAS</sup> Hebrews 1:3 And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high;

Thus, the Messiah was not a second or third God, but because of his nature and being perfectly yielded to God, he was in effect "God with us." You might ask which God was with us? There is only one God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This one God (often pictured as the Father) would be indwelling him, as the Messiah himself said:

<sup>NAS</sup> John 14:10 “Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but **the Father abiding in Me** does His works.

Jesus said his heavenly Father was the *only* true God, and that he, Jesus, could do nothing by his own initiative:

<sup>NAS</sup> John 17:3 “And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, **the only true God**, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.

<sup>NAS</sup> John 5:30 “I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.

There are many scriptures that call for answers, and those answers are actually fairly simple when we consider the first-century Jewish idioms and the fact that God sometimes spoke directly through Christ (see “The Logos of God” section in Course 8). Clearly the prophets and other men of God, from Noah and Abraham down to Isaiah and Malachi, did not view God as a Trinity. As this Roman doctrine developed, “Trinity” became another word that caused Jews to know that the “Church” was not a place connected to the God of Abraham.



Some may ask where this word “Trinity” originated, since it is not in the Old Testament, the Septuagint, or the New Covenant scriptures.

It’s historically clear that three different gods made up the Roman triad, with Jupiter as the supreme god of the Roman pantheon alongside Juno and Minerva. On Rome’s Capitoline Hill stood an elaborate temple where their deities (called the “Capitoline Triad”) were worshipped. Earlier in Roman history, a previous version of this Triad—commonly called the “Archaic Triad”—was made up of Jupiter, Mars, and Quirinus.

The Greek *he trias*, which means “the triad,” was first used in a Christian sense by Theophilus, the bishop of Antioch (ca. 169–ca. 183) to refer to God, God’s *logos*, and God’s *Sophia*. It is hard to discern Theophilus’s exact meaning; some say he was referring to the Holy Spirit with *Sophia* and to Christ with the *logos*. According to McClintock and Strong, Theophilus “was educated a heathen, and afterwards converted to Christianity . . . . Having been converted from heathenism by the study of the Scriptures, he wrote an apology for the Christian faith, addressed in the form of a letter to his friend Autolycus.”<sup>42</sup>

42 McClintock and Strong, *Cyclopedia*, vol. 10, p. 335, s.v. “Theophilus of Antioch.”

It was in this letter to Autolycus (*Apology to Autolycus* 2:15) that we have the first Christian usage of the Greek term for “the triad” in connection with God. But it was third-century church writer Tertullian who is credited with coining the term *trinitas*—a Latinization of the Greek *he trias*—which later became “Trinity” in English. Born to a Roman centurion in Carthage, Tertullian later converted to Christianity in Rome and is often called the father of Latin Christianity.

As for the Jewish believers, they never used the Greek term *he trias* in the scriptures, nor did they portray God as a triad, for they knew God was one.

After Rome destroyed the Jewish Temple (AD 70) and then slaughtered Bar Kochba who led the Jewish revolt against Rome (AD 135), the Roman emperor Hadrian forbade the Jews to enter Jerusalem altogether. He not only renamed Jerusalem “Aelia Capitolina” in honor of the Jupiter temple on Rome’s Capitoline Hill, but he also subsequently erected another temple to Jupiter on the very site where the Jewish Temple had once stood, blatantly showing that the Roman God (and Triad of Gods) was now in control.

While some readers may not like the history given here, it’s important nonetheless to examine the origins of our English word “Trinity” and how this was yet another concept that changed over time.

### What about the Word “Apostle”?

One last word that has a different nuance today in English than it did to the first-century Jews is “apostle.” As with all of the other words we’ve so far covered (except “Trinity”), the Greek word *apostolos* (translated into English as “apostle”) also appeared in the Septuagint hundreds of years before the time of Jesus and Paul. It simply meant “sent forth.”

This Greek word was well established among first-century Jews and did not portray a new concept or part of a new religion to them. However, the English word “apostle” that is in use today seems foreign to most Jews and not at all connected to their history—only to Christianity.

<sup>NAS</sup> Exodus 23:20 “Behold, I am going **to send** an angel before you to guard you along the way, and to bring you into the place which I have prepared.

<sup>LXT</sup> Exodus 23:20 καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ ἀποστέλλω τὸν ἄγγελόν μου πρὸ προσώπου σου ἵνα φυλάξῃ σε ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ ὅπως εἰσαγάγῃ σε εἰς τὴν γῆν ἣν ἠτοίμασά σοι

This same Greek word was used for a vine that would “shoot forth” and bear fruit:

<sup>NAS</sup> Song of Solomon 4:13 “Your **shoots** are an orchard of pomegranates With choice fruits, henna with nard plants,

<sup>LXT</sup> Song of Solomon 4:13 ἀποστολαί σου παράδεισος ῥοῶν μετὰ καρποῦ ἀκροδρύων κύπροι μετὰ νάρδων

The promised Messiah was also pictured as a “shoot” or “branch” coming out of the lineage of David:

<sup>NAS</sup> Jeremiah 23:5 “Behold, *the* days are coming,” declares the LORD, “When I shall raise up for David a righteous **Branch**; And He will reign as king and act wisely And do justice and righteousness in the land.

<sup>NAS</sup> Zechariah 3:8 ‘Now listen, **Joshua** the high priest, you and your friends who are sitting in front of you—indeed they **are men who are a symbol**, for behold, I am going to bring in My servant **the Branch**.

<sup>NAS</sup> Isaiah 11:1 Then a **shoot will spring** from the stem of Jesse, And a **branch** from his roots will bear fruit.

<sup>JPS</sup> Isaiah 11:10 And it shall come to pass in that day, that the **root** of Jesse, that standeth for an ensign of the peoples, unto him shall the nations seek; and his resting-place shall be glorious.

When Jesus used this Greek word for root<sup>43</sup> in the scripture below, he referenced this same “root/shoot” that Isaiah prophesied would come from David’s lineage.

<sup>NAS</sup> Revelation 22:16 “I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the **root** and the offspring of David, the bright morning star.”

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43 *BDAG* gives a meaning of this Greek word as follows: 2. that which grows from a root, *shoot*, *scion*, in our lit. in imagery *descendant*. (Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (*BDAG*), 3rd ed., p. 906, s.v. “ῥίζα.”)

The Greek in this scripture is not saying that Jesus was a root that came *before* David, but rather a “root shoot” out of dry ground that was connected back to David by being his promised descendant. The Septuagint uses this same Greek word in Isaiah 11:1, which is translated as “a branch” from Jesse (in Isaiah 11:1 further above).

The Messiah said that he was the true vine, and that the apostles would be sent forth as extended branches:

<sup>NAS</sup> John 15:5 “I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing.

The intention here is that as we stay connected to the Messiah—as branches shooting off from the vine—we will also bear much spiritual fruit.

To summarize, many words and concepts covered in this chapter were blurred or changed when Rome took over the Church. Also, subtle and not-so-subtle changes have occurred through the evolution of the English language. To accurately understand what these scripture writers intended, we must always discern what they meant in terms of the Jewish idioms of the day.