

To smite an Israelite is as if one smote the Shekinah.
— Sanhedrin, 58

Why don't more Jews believe in Jesus?

Most Jews agree that Jesus' words are very wise, and as we have seen, the various doctrine of Christianity make sense of many puzzling stories, prophecies and rituals in the Hebrew scriptures. Yet very few Jews believe in Jesus as their Lord and savior. They have an excellent reason.

Ever since Christianity emerged from the shadow of persecution under the Romans and became the dominant religion of the western world, Christians have persecuted Jews. Following are but a few of the countless examples:

The Crusades. Every Jewish man, woman and child in Jerusalem was slaughtered when the city was first conquered by Christian soldiers. Then the soldiers held and praise and worship service. This was the climax of a long reign of terror for Jews in two continents, since the crusaders' armies routinely wiped out Jewish settlements and neighborhoods as they marched across Europe.

"The greatest and first expedition of these crusaders was to massacre the Jews, who were not the cause of the evils which the Saracens [Muslims] were inflicting upon the Christians in the East." (Dom Lobineau, a monk in the Middle Ages, quoted by Dan Cohn-Sherbok in The Crucified Jew (London: Fount, 1993), p. 41)

The Spanish Inquisition. Over 30,000 Jews were tortured to death by the Catholic church when they refused to abandon their religion and be baptized.

Ostracized and Publicly Humiliated. Throughout the Middle Ages it was common for church officials to demand special clothing or patches of cloth sewn to clothing or special hats (the kind worn by clowns) or other means of ready identification for any Jew who set foot outside his home. Eventually this even became part of Roman Catholic dogma:

It is decreed that henceforth Jews of both sexes will be distinguished from other peoples by their garment.... Trespassers will be duly punished by the secular powers, in order that they no longer dare flout Christ in the presence of Christians. (The Fourth Lateran Council of the Holy Roman Church)

So the church is the real source of the Nazi's plan to force all Jews in occupied Europe to wear yellow stars of David, and be tattooed in extermination camps.

Not only Catholics. Protestants might be tempted to claim innocence since all the examples above involve Catholics. But they should remember Catholics were the only Christians at the time. And guilt for anti-Semitism was shared by Protestants from the very beginning. Consider this...

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*The Jews, being foreigners, should possess nothing, and what they do possess should be ours . . . their synagogues should be set on fire . . . their homes should likewise be broken down and destroyed . . . they should be deprived of their prayer books and Tal-muds . . . their Rabbis must be forbidden under threat of death to teach any more . . . passport and traveling privileges should be absolutely forbidden to the Jews . . . let the young Jew and Jewesses be given the ax, the hoe, the spade, the distaff and spindle, and let them earn their bread by the sweat of their noses . . . (Martin Luther, "Against the Jews and Their Lies," a famous tract, quoted in *The Crucified Jew*.)*

Of course Martin Luther is one of the founders of Protestant Christianity.

- ▶ Consider the above examples of Christian anti-Semitism in light of the current wave of hatred and violence by Muslim extremists. Does this change your thinking about Muslim terrorism in any way? (See **Ps 143:2**, **Ps 51:5** and **Ro 3:23**)
 - ✓ Everyone has the capacity to hate. Anyone can be a terrorist, given the right circumstances.
- ▶ How does this information influence your understanding of **Prov 16:17-18**?
 - ✓ Those who believe themselves immune from the kind of evil that infects a Muslim terrorist are prideful fools, in danger of the very sins they think they are above.
- ▶ How does this information influence your understanding of **Mt 5:43-47**?
 - ✓ Jesus' "Love your enemies" is a command, not a suggestion, yet who can obey it in their own power?
 - ✓ If the Pope and Martin Luther can fall so short of love, surely it is impossible for us to measure up—unless we confess this fact and allow the Lord to change our hearts.

Isn't there some reasonable explanation?

For as long as Christians have been treating Jews this way, Christians have been making excuses. Following are some of the most common...

That was then, this is now. After all, a lot of time has passed since the Inquisition. Yet many Jews still live among us with the tattoos of extermination camps on their forearms, and as mentioned above, the Nazis learned to mark them from the church. Furthermore, it is a historical fact that Lutheran pastors throughout Germany spoke in favor of the Nazis from the pulpit. And although Germany was a predominantly Protestant nation prior to WWII, very few Christians stood against the Nazis.

The Nazis came for the Communists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist. Then they came for the Catholics, and I

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didn't speak up because I was a Protestant. Finally they came for me, and by that time there was no one left to speak up. (Martin Niemoeller, clergyman and concentration camp survivor, quoted in From Horror to Hope, Germany, the Jews and Israel, New York: German Information Center, p. 43)

- ▶ What do you suppose a Jew whose parent or grandparent died in the camps would say to a Christian who made this excuse? What would be the effect on that Jew's willingness to listen to that Christian's views on Jesus?

The Jews deserve Christian wrath, because the Jews killed Jesus. This is the excuse the Crusaders and torturers of the Inquisition used. Some of the earliest church fathers also believed it (see Hippolytus' "Expository Treatise against the Jews"). Even some Christians justified the Holocaust on this basis. But consider this excuse in light of the New Testament...

- ▶ See **Luke 18:31-33**. Whom does Jesus say will sentence him to death, torture him and carry out the death sentence?
 - ✓ "The gentiles." That means everyone who is not a Jew.
- ▶ See **Acts 4:27**. Who is listed in the apostles' prayer as responsible for Jesus' crucifixion?
 - ✓ They list "the gentiles" along with "Herod," Pilate" and "the people of Israel." All the world is guilty.
- ▶ See **Mt 21:45-46**. Who is it that Jesus' enemies fear? Why do they fear them? What does this say about the excuse above?
 - ✓ They fear a "crowd" of Jews who followed Jesus.
 - ✓ They fear those particular Jews will come to Jesus' defense.
 - ✓ This means not all Jews were against Jesus; on the contrary, there were many on his side.
- ▶ See **Acts 5:34-39, John 3:1-9, John 7:50-51, Luke 13:31** and **Acts 6:7**. What do these verses tell you about the idea that all Pharisees, priests and members of the Sanhedrin were against Jesus?
 - ✓ Some Jewish leaders not only did not participate in crucifying him, but actually counted themselves among his followers.
- ▶ Have you ever heard these points in a sermon or another Bible study? What does your answer say the state of Judeo/Christian relations today?

I've never hurt a Jew in my life. This is probably the most common excuse. It is based on an individualistic view of life that is foreign to most Jews, *including Jesus*. From his time until now, most religious Jews understand themselves to be responsible to a community, and view their successes and failures as shared by that community, rather than as purely individual acts. Because of this, many

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Jews feel personally ashamed when they learn of the grievous sins of any Jew. Is this a godly point of view?

- ▶ See **1 Cor 12:27**. Which Christians stand independent of the community, or “body” of Christ?
 - ✓ “Each one” of us is part of it, so no Christian is independent of it.
- ▶ See **John 17:20-21**. Does the body of Christ include only those Christians who are currently alive on earth?
 - ✓ Jesus’ prayer was for future generations who would believe in him through the work of the apostles’ generation, and he prayed “that all of them may be one.” This means the body of Christ spans the generations.
- ▶ Given your answers to the two questions above, are you unconnected to the actions of Christians you have never met? How about those who lived in generations before you?
 - ✓ All Christians are connected, whether they meet in this life or not, and whether they live during the same timeframe or not.
 - ✓ This should come as no surprise to those who understand we are immortal.
- ▶ What do your answers say about the excuse above?
 - ✓ We cannot shirk responsibility for the actions of other Christians no matter when they lived, or where. We are all responsible for working together as a body to the glory of God. When one fails, we all fail.

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