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## Jewish Attitude Toward Gentiles

In conjunction with the study of several New Testament epistles, such as the Epistle to Titus, this paper will give some insight into some of the difficulties facing local church congregations of the early church as they tried to come to grips with the great cultural differences between Jews and Gentiles.

The first section is a quotation from Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*.

"And then, as the proud Roman passed on the Sabbath through the streets, Judaism would obtrude itself upon his notice, by the shops that were shut, and by the strange figures that idly moved about in holiday attire. They were strangers in a strange land, not only without sympathy with what passed around, but with marked contempt and abhorrence of it, while there was that about their whole bearing, which expressed the unspoken feeling, that the time of Rome's fall, and of their own supremacy, was at hand.

"To put the general feeling in the words of Tacitus, the Jews kept close together, and were ever most liberal to one another; but they were filled with bitter hatred of all others. They would neither eat nor sleep with strangers; and the first thing which they taught their proselytes was to despise the gods, to renounce their own country, and to rend the bonds which had bound them to parents, children or kindred..."

"To begin with, every Gentile child, so soon as born, was to be regarded as unclean. Those [Gentiles] who actually worshipped mountains, hills, bushes, etc, idolaters, should be cut down with the sword. But as it was impossible to exterminate heathenism, Rabbinic legislation kept certain definite objects in view, which may be summarized:

- To prevent Jews from being inadvertently led into idolatry
- To avoid all participation in idolatry
- Not to do anything which might aid the heathen in their worship; and, beyond all this...
- Not to give pleasure, or even help, to heathens. The latter involved a most dangerous principle, capable of almost indefinite application by fanaticism."

From the Talmudic Tractate Abhodah Zarah, on the subject of idolatry, paraphrased - Even the Mishnah goes so far as to forbid aid to a mother in the hour of her need, or nourishment to her babe, in order not to bring up a child for idolatry. But this is not all. Heathens were, indeed, not to be forced into danger, but yet not to be delivered from it. "The best among the Gentiles, Kill; the best among serpents, crush its head."

Still more terrible was the fanaticism which directed that heretics and those who had left the Jewish faith should be thrown into actual danger, or, if they were already in it, to remove any chance for them to escape. No contact of any kind was to be had with such - not even to call medical aid in case of danger to life, since it was deemed, that he who had to do with heretics was in imminent peril of becoming one himself, and that, if a heretic returned to the true faith, he should die at once - partly to pay for his sin, and partly from fear of relapse.

The Jew had a low estimate of the Gentile's character. The most vile and unnatural crimes were imputed to Gentiles. They considered it not safe to leave cattle in their charge, to allow their women to nurse infants, or their physicians to attend the sick, nor to walk in their company, without taking precautions against sudden attacks.

The Gentiles should, as far as possible, be altogether avoided, except in cases of necessity or for the sake of business. They and theirs were defiled; their houses unclean, as containing idols or things dedicated to idols. Their feasts and their joyous occasions were polluted by idolatry. You could not leave the room if a Gentile was in it because he might, carelessly or on purpose, defile the wine or food on the table, or the oil and wheat in the cupboard.

Under such circumstances, everything must be regarded as unclean. Three days before a heathen festival, and three days after, all business or contact with heathen was avoided, for fear of giving help or pleasure. Jews were to avoid passing through a city where there was an idolatrous feast - nay, they were not even to sit down within the shadow of a tree dedicated to idol-worship. Such

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a tree's wood was polluted; if it was used in cooking, the bread was unclean; if a shuttle of a loom had been made from it, all the cloth woven on it was forbidden. In addition, if such cloth had been mixed with other pieces of cloth, or if a garment made with it had been placed with other garments, all of the garments became unclean.

Jewish workmen were not to help in building basilicas, stadiums, or places where judicial sentences were pronounced by the heathen. It was not lawful to rent houses or sell cattle to Gentiles. Milk drawn by a heathen, if a Jew had not been present to watch it, bread and oil prepared by them, were unlawful. Their wine was wholly forbidden; the mere touch of a heathen polluted a whole cask of wine. Even to smell of heathen wine was forbidden! If wine had been dedicated to an idol, it defiled a man to carry on a stick even an olive's weight of it. Other wine, if prepared by a heathen, was prohibited for personal use and for trading. Wine prepared by a Jew, however, which had been deposited in the custody of a Gentile,

was prohibited for personal use, but it was permitted to sell it.

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