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A month or so ago I posted a series of blogs about the next trade book I'm hoping to write, which I'm tentatively calling "Expecting Armageddon." As I explained then, when I decide what I want to write next, I do a lot of preliminary research to get my ideas together and then write up a kind of overview statement about why I'm interested in the topic, what I imagine the book would cover, why I think it's both interesting and important, and how I would probably structure it (at least how I'm imagining I would - the end product is never what I anticipate at the outset). This kind of overview statement to myself ends up being the basis for what I send to my publisher as a Prospectus.

The publisher takes the Prospectus, mulls it over, talks about it among themselves, and then decides whether they want to offer a contract on the book. If not, I take it somewhere else. If they do, then we enter into negotiations about the terms of the contract (the advance on royalties, etc.).

When I moved over to Simon & Schuster as my publisher a few years ago (from Harper where I had been before), my agent and I negotiated a two-book deal. The first was The Triumph of Christianity and the second was a book-to-be-named-later. (I actually wrote up a detailed Prospectus for a second book, which I really liked; but, well, they weren't so sure about it. So we decided to decide later and they gave me a contract without knowing what it would be. When it came time to get serious about it, we hashed it out to our mutual agreement, and it is the book now in press, Heaven and Hell: A History of the Afterlife).

We are thinking about proposing a two-book deal again this time. One reason I like that is that it allows me to be thinking about the second book for a couple of years before actually getting into the hard-core preparation/research for it full time. The ideas percolate better that way.

And so for the second book of this possible two-book deal I would return to the idea I've had for years, dealing with the question, in short, of why Christians have the Old Testament. In effect, Christians early on claimed that the Jewish Scriptures (i.e., the Hebrew Bible) belonged to them and not to the Jews. That can be seen as ironic, since Christians who took the Bible as theirs did not follow the laws, customs, rituals, and festivals required in these books. And so my questions are: why did they insist on having them as part of their Scripture a set of books they chose not to follow and how did the Christian insistence that the Old Testament was Christian rather than Jewish affect the Christians' relationship with non-Christian Jews who insisted that no, the Hebrew Bible was their Scripture, not the Christians'?

It's a complicated set of questions, which I've blogged about before. But now that I have achieved some clarity on where I'd like the book to go, I thought I might lay out my thoughts here, in the terms I have laid them out to myself, prior to sending in a Prospectus. So I'd welcome feedback. This will take a number of posts. Here's how I'm imagining the initial lead-in:

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In the summer of 1994 I was invited to be a speaker at the annual conference of the B'nei B'rith Institute of Judaism, held at the Wildacres Retreat Center in western North Carolina. The week-long conference normally hosts three speakers to address various issues of interest to its Jewish attendees, in areas related to history, political science, literature, religion, and so on. Most speakers are Jewish, but the organizers thought it might be interesting to have a non-Jew with historical expertise talk about the ancient history of Jewish-Christian relations, from the beginnings of Christianity up to the fourth century.

This was a topic I had long been interested in, but my teaching and lecturing on the matter had always been to audiences that were predominantly Christian (by upbringing or confession). Most of the attendees at the conference, nearly all of them well-educated professionals, had only a vague knowledge of the New Testament including, in particular, the writings of Paul, and almost no understanding at all about what transpired in Jewish-Christian relations in the three or four centuries that followed. Just about everything I told them was news.

For me that made it an exciting week. But even more interesting were the reactions I received when people began to realize I wasn't Jewish (it had not been advertised). Once that happened, I started hearing the stories. The most moving had to do with what it was like to grow up Jewish in the South. It wasn't good. Two of the elderly attendees told me, separately, that when they were in grade school, classmates asked them to show them their horns.

The history of "Jews have horns," is long and complex. Though possibly not widely known, it almost certainly has its roots in the New Testament. In John chapter 8, Jesus is addressing his enemies, called, remarkably enough, simply "the Jews," and he informs them that since they have rejected him, they are not children of God but "children of the Devil." If the devil has horns, so too, apparently, his offspring.

But doesn't the Bible show that the Jewish people are the people of God? The Chosen Ones? How then did they become the progeny of Satan?

The answers lie in the Christian tradition even before the writing of the New Testament, in the novel ways the followers of Jesus, soon after his death, began to interpret the Jewish Scriptures. This is the short story: the earliest followers of Jesus thought Jesus had been predicted by the Hebrew prophets, and Jews who rejected him rejected both the Bible and the God who inspired it. Non-Christian Jews practiced a false religion.

As a strange corollary, as the Christian movement grew, it began to acquire far more gentile believers than Jewish. These gentiles saw no reason at all to become Jewish in order to follow Jesus, and as a result, they opted not to adopt Jewish customs and follow the Jewish law - a law that occupies the central place in the Bible. These gentile Christians often looked upon the non-Christian Jews as following an obsolete religion that was no longer relevant. And yet they retained the Scripture of the Jews (including its laws) and began to call it the Old Testament, claiming it was theirs. And theirs only. It was not a Jewish book. This was not simply a benign theological view with no social implications. It led to harsh antagonism between Jews and Christians that eventuated in anti-Semitic slander and violence that has characterized much of Western history for the past two millennia.



[Is the Old Testament a Christian Book?](#)

[Interview for "Letters & Politics" on The Triumph of Christianity](#)