

“Hellenist” Christians?

by Wayne Goff

“Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution” (Acts 6:1).

The church at Jerusalem was comprised of “**Hebrew**” Christians and “**Hellenist**” Christians. Both were Jewish people, but there was a difference between the two. For whatever reason, the widows of the Hellenists were being ignored in the first church at Jerusalem, and that caused a conflict which was biblically resolved.

“**Hellenist**” Jews were those who were caught up in the **cultural revolution** of Alexander the Great and his Greek Empire when Greeks dominated the world. This Greek (Hellenist) influence continued through his Generals after his death, and even when Rome became the world power they continued the process of Hellenization.

So Hellenist Jews were those who began to speak the Greek language over the Hebrew language and worshiped God and read the Law of Moses in Greek. The Greek translation of the Old Testament, called “**the Septuagint**,” was made in Alexandria, Egypt around 250 B.C., so that shows you how wide-spread and lengthy this cultural transition was to the world at that time.

The “**Hebrew**” was the one who continued to speak the Hebrew language, worshiped God in the Hebrew tongue, and considered himself more loyal to God and the Law than the “Hellenists.” Paul references this in **Philippians 3:5** when he lists his own Jewish “RESUME” - “... **a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee.**” Again you see this in **2 Corinthians 11:22** - “**Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I.**” So you can see how this could cause problems in the Jerusalem church when Hebrew Christians and Hellenist Christians are joined together. But even a “Hebrew” like Paul could learn and speak the Greek language so long as he worshiped in Hebrew. Read also **Acts 21:40–22:1-2** where Paul speaks to an angry mob in the Hebrew tongue.

The **real problem** existed when Jews began to imitate *not only* the manners and customs of the Greeks, but then began to **worship** the gods of the Greeks! That was taboo to both Jews and Christians in the first century, but it is typical of those who are more influenced by “society” than by “God and religion.”

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