

## How Jesus Became Christian

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Filed under: Christian Origins — James Tabor

I want to highly, even *extravagantly*, recommend a book by Barrie Wilson, York University professor in Toronto, titled How Jesus Became Christian (New York: St. Martins Press, 2008; Random House in Canada). I will go so far as to say that I judge this single book to be one of the most important contributions to an understanding of Christian Origins published in many decades. Prof. Wilson's book represents an absolute "sea change" in our understanding of how one moves from the historical Jesus (Jewish Prophet, Charismatic Healer, Teacher, Messiah figure), to the new religion called Christianity, created by the apostle Paul and given a definitive stamp of approval by what became the "standard story" of Christian Origins preserved in Luke-Acts.

Books that explore the "From Jesus to Paul" theme are quite common in the scholarly field: *From Jesus to Paul* (Klausner); *The Mythmaker: Paul and the Invention of Christianity* (Maccoby); *From Jesus to Christ* (Paula Fredrikson); *From Jesus to Christianity* (Michael White); *Paul: Founder of Christianity* (Lüdemann); and *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (Segal), to name a few more recent titles. However, in my view, Wilson has advanced the discussion miles beyond any previous work with his daring hypothesis regarding the stark and uncompromising dichotomy between what he calls the "Jesus Movement" and the "Christ Movement," created and espoused singlehandedly by the apostle Paul. Wilson goes a long way to putting an end to the wishful thinking that there is somehow of some kind of continuity between Paul and his "gospel" and the message of James, Peter, and John, and those early Jewish followers of Jesus commonly known as "the Jerusalem Church."

Wilson's writing style is clear, his documentation is impeccable, and he makes his case with a strength and a level of persuasiveness that in my judgment leaves counter proposals in the wayside. The book is already a best-seller in Canada and it is beginning to climb the charts on Amazon in the U.S. Prof. Wilson also has a Web site, with many features and additional materials including an interview and Blog.