

# **Paul vs. Jesus**

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# Preface

In *How Jesus Became Christian* (New York: St. Martin's Press; Toronto: Random House, 2008), I argued that Paul's religion differed from Jesus' in terms of origins, beliefs and practices. Paul developed a new religion, not one that emanated from that of Jesus and his brother, James. He did so on the basis of a mystical experience of the Christ, the dead Jesus who appeared to him.

There's nothing wrong with a mystical experience. What is strange, however, is that what the Christ figure tells Paul is at odds with what the Jesus of history told his disciples and family members over a 3-year mentoring process. Paul substituted a Christ-centered, Torah-free religion focused on the worship of the dying-rising savior God-human for a Torah-centered, anti-Roman messianic Jewish community waiting patiently for God's kingdom to materialize, just as Jesus had promised. Are we supposed to believe that Jesus changed his mind, post-death?

Paul was not one of the original disciples and never met the historical Jesus who strode the Galilee proclaiming the message that the Kingdom of God was at hand and that people should prepare. As these essays indicate, Paul was not interested in the Jesus of history, just his death. If we only had Paul, we'd know nothing of the great parables of the Kingdom, the Lord's Prayer or the Sermon on the Mount.

It would seem for Paul that the only purpose of Jesus' life was his death. His message focused solely on this. For Paul, the message he delivered was this: if we can participate in the suffering and death of Jesus, then we, too, might have the hope of being resurrected, just as he was.

Paul was not the only offshoot of Jesus. James, Jesus' brother, led the Jesus Movement, holding fast to the observance of Torah and expressing hope that the messianic kingdom would soon appear. There may also have been a community led by Mary the Magdalene (see *The Lost Gospel*, New York: Pegasus; Toronto: HarperCollins, 2014) that focused on Jesus' marriage as the basis of redemption. Other groups may have been led by Thomas, John, Peter and others who differed from Paul. But Paul's view won out in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, favored by the Roman Emperors Constantine and Theodosius.

These papers continue the exploration into the differences between Paul and Jesus.

## Section One

# Taking Paul at his Word<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Introduction

What do we know of the historical Paul? What do we know of his career or message? How do we now assess his importance and impact? These are not easy questions to answer. The problem of reconstructing the historical Paul is almost as complicated as the problem of uncovering the career and message of the historical Jesus. It is slightly easier, however, for Paul, unlike Jesus, wrote documents.<sup>2</sup>

Two lines of scholarship have surfaced recently. Hyam Maccoby and Gerd Lüdemann argue for a discontinuity between Paul and Jesus, the founder of Christianity.<sup>3</sup> David Wenham and John G. Gager, however, contend that Paul continued the tradition of Jesus.<sup>4</sup> A tribute to the importance of this debate is that, for the first time ever, an important and widely used introduction to New Testament studies contains a chapter entitled, “Does the Tradition Miscarry?”<sup>5</sup>

In investigating the historical Paul, there are two early forms of what-became-Christianity that need to be recognized. The **Jesus Movement** in Jerusalem was led by James, the brother of Jesus. From the death of Jesus in the early 30's C.E., until his own murder by the high priest in 62 CE, James headed a group of observant Jews who were faithful to the teachings and practices of the historical Jesus, their rabbi. Other leaders in Jerusalem included Peter and John. The origin of this movement lay with the historical Jesus. These individuals knew the Jesus of the 20's: they walked with him, saw him killed and understood what he represented.

The Jesus Movement functioned well within the parameters of the Judaisms of the times. In outward practices, the members of the Jesus Movement did not differ from other

Jewish groups of the time such as Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes or Zealots. They followed the law, the Torah. This included male circumcision, keeping the dietary laws, observing the Sabbath and festivals and worshipping in the Temple.

One primary belief set apart the Jesus Movement from other forms of Judaism. They revered Jesus as an inspired teacher who was resurrected and who would return to complete the job of the messiah. That is, they expected him to act as a catalyst in overthrowing Roman authority. He would establish an independent Jewish state under himself as the Davidic king, and usher in an era of universal peace. This would reflect the universal rule of God, which Jesus announced was imminent.

Paul's ***Christ Movement*** differs considerably from the Jesus Movement and from the Judaisms of the time. It owes its *origin* not to the historical Jesus who was a teacher and messiah claimant but to Paul's personal mystical experience of the Christ. Paul never met the historical Jesus, and, according to his own account, rarely conferred with his successors.

In terms of *practices*, Paul's Movement rarely referred to the teachings or observances of the historical Jesus. In particular, it denied the necessity for keeping the law. In this connection Paul was particularly vexed about the matter of adult male circumcision which he took as symbolic of all that was wrong with the law. For him, converts can hang on to their foreskins.

Paul also differed from the Jesus Movement in terms of *beliefs*. He conceived of the Christ as a cosmic dying-rising savior, not as a political messiah come to reestablish the Davidic throne. For Paul, the Christ "was in the form of God" who "emptied himself...being born in human likeness." (Philippians 2:6-7). He urges his followers to come to "know" Christ and the power of his resurrection, as he has done, and to share in "his sufferings by becoming like him in his death" (Philippians 3:10-17). While 'Christ' is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew 'Messiah,' Paul transports the concept from its Jewish political environment into the cosmic world of Roman mystery religions.

As Chart #1 indicates, the two movements differ significantly in terms of origins, practices and beliefs:

Chart #1

	Jesus Movement	Christ Movement
<b>Leader</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• James in Jerusalem</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paul in the Diaspora</li> </ul>
<b>Origins</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The historical Jesus</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paul's personal mystical experience of the Christ</li> <li>• Paul – never met the historical Jesus</li> </ul>
<b>Practices</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Torah observant</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-Torah-observant</li> </ul>
<b>Beliefs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jesus as inspired teacher, resurrected, expected to return to complete the job of messiah</li> <li>• Political catalyst</li> <li>• Era of universal peace (Kingdom of God)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Christ as a cosmic figure</li> <li>• Christ: a divine being who has come into the world in human form to save humanity by dying and rising.</li> <li>• Those who have faith in Christ can share in his suffering, dying and rising.</li> </ul>
<b>Religion</b>	Religion <b>OF</b> Jesus	Religion <b>ABOUT</b> the Christ

A radical question now presents itself. Are the Christ and Jesus Movements rival interpretations of the same religion? Or are they, perhaps, different religions? Burton Mack noted these discrepancies when he wrote: “Unfortunately, many scholars also continue to imagine Christian origins in keeping with Paul’s views....There are two problems with this view. One is that Paul’s conception of Christianity is not evident among the many texts from the early Jesus movements. The other is that Paul’s gospel was not comprehensible and persuasive for most people of his time.”<sup>6</sup>

What, if anything, connects the Christ Movement to the Jesus Movement? Our natural tendency may be to say, “Yes, of course, they are both parts of the same religion. They simply represent different versions or interpretations of the one religion.” If we say that, however, then we have bought into the remarkable perspective of Luke, the author of the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts. Written around 100-120 CE, this remarkable document melds the two movements together in a seamless fashion. It was the creative genius of the author of the Book of Acts that retroactively links Paul to the Jesus Movement.<sup>7</sup>

In this section I will show the following:

- that the Book of Acts represents an unreliable source for information about Paul.
- that this document's synthesis of the Christ Movement with the Jesus Movement is suspect.
- that Paul's message is much more radical than has usually been thought, denying the legitimacy of Torah observance for all, whether Gentile or Jew.

Paul is, in fact, the founder of what-became-Christianity. It is a religion **about** the Christ, not the religion **of** Jesus, that is, the religion as taught and practiced by Jesus.

This radical reassessment fits in well with those who deny a continuity between Jesus and Paul, but the tradition "miscarries" in a different way than has usually been thought. It is not that we first have the Jesus Movement and then, growing out of that religious enterprise, we suddenly have Paul who takes it in a surprisingly different direction. This "**divergence model**" visualizes the relationship between the two movements as aspects of one religion. That cozy relationship does not seem to fit the facts.

What I am suggesting is that we need to visualize these two movements as two different religions. They were linked **retroactively** by the author of the Book of Acts, years after Paul and James died. Hence, a "**convergence model**." We will see why Luke wished to accomplish this synthesis in due course. The tradition, then, did not so much "miscarry," that is, migrate from one form to another within the same religion. Rather one religious outlook having a different origin was "substituted" for an earlier one.<sup>8</sup>

## 2. Acts – An Unreliable Source of Information about the historical Paul

There are three possible sources for information on the historical Paul: his own letters, the later Book of Acts and the even later Pseudo-Clementine Literature.<sup>9</sup> The one reliable source of information on Paul's career and message is his own account, to be found in his authentic letters from the 50's and 60's CE. Steve Mason and Tom Robinson have already gone a long way towards making this claim when they note, "So for a historical understanding of Paul, his own letters must take absolute priority over the presentation in Acts."<sup>10</sup>

The Book of Acts traces the early development of the Christian movement, including the work of the leaders in Jerusalem -- James, Peter, John and some others. This document also describes Paul's conversion, outlines his career, reports on his meetings with Jerusalem leaders, summarizes his various missionary trips and concludes with his eventual preaching in Rome. It

would be helpful if we could use the information presented in Acts to supplement Paul's own account of his career and message. Some have gone this route.<sup>11</sup>

There are many good reasons to question the reliability of the Book of Acts as a source for understanding the historical Paul. The most important reason is that **Acts distorts what we know of Paul from Paul himself**. Several examples will suffice to demonstrate this.

#### **Example #1:**

#### **Paul and Acts differ significantly on the amount of contact Paul had with the Jesus Movement leadership in Jerusalem.**

While Paul is at pains to distance himself from the leadership of the Jesus Movement in Jerusalem, the Book of Acts heightens this linkage dramatically.

Paul emphasizes, time and time again, that he did not receive his message from any human being (Galatians 1:1 and 1:12). Nor was he taught it (Galatians 1:12), for example, by earlier members of the Jesus Movement. Rather he contends that his source of information was experiential, that is, direct contact with the mystical Christ. In particular, he stresses that he did not receive instruction or validation from the Jerusalem leadership. He explicitly affirms that after his remarkable experience, he did not go up to Jerusalem to confer with James, Peter and others who were there (Galatians 1:16). In other words, he is denying the linkage between his movement and the Jesus Movement.

Acts on the other hand, portrays this early stage of Paul's career quite differently. After his mystical experience on the road to Damascus, he is depicted by the Book of Acts as going into the house of Ananias, a member of the Jesus Movement living there, who heals and baptizes him (Acts 9:10-19). Paul then preaches in the synagogues in Damascus, arouses the anger of "the Jews," escapes when "*his* {?} disciples" hear of a plot on his life. He then goes up to Jerusalem where Barnabas introduced him to "the apostles" (Acts 9:27). There he is portrayed as moving freely in Jerusalem, getting into a serious debate with "Hellenists" who attempt to kill him. He is then rescued, taken down to Caesarea and packed off to Tarsus. Why Paul arouses such anger is not made clear, especially when members of the Jesus Movement appear to live in harmony with other Jews who have different opinions. This represents an important clue that others understand that his teachings differ from those of the Jesus Movement.

Paul's own account is quite different from that in Acts in two important respects. For one thing, in his Letter to the Galatians, he says that after his remarkable experience, he "did not confer with any human being" (Galatians 1:16). In particular he is at pains to emphasize that he did *not* go up to Jerusalem to confer with those who were apostles before him. He says he immediately went away "into Arabia," (Galatians 1:17) that is, into other parts of the Nabatean Kingdom, returning after a while to Damascus. Then, three years later, he indicates that he did go up to Jerusalem for 15 days, to visit Cephas (Peter) and James, but no others. Then he went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. Fourteen years later<sup>12</sup> he mentions another visit to Jerusalem, with Barnabas and Titus.

Furthermore, Acts attributes the trouble Paul experienced in Damascus to a political issue, namely the animosity of "the Jews" of Damascus to have Paul arrested. Acts noted that Paul had originally been sent to Damascus by the pro-Roman high priest in Jerusalem to capture certain of its citizens. The high priest had no authority over Jews living outside of his jurisdiction, and non-Roman Nabatean government authorities would not take kindly to this enterprise. Paul himself locates his mystical experience in Damascus but does not explain the reason for this journey. He is more concerned to emphasize that through this experience "God was pleased to reveal his son *in* (to) me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles" (Galatians 1:15, 16).

It is as important to Paul to distance himself from Jesus Movement leaders as it is for Acts to put him squarely in their midst. Paul wishes to emphasize that the message he brings comes directly from the mystical Christ who he believes is revealed "in" him (Galatians 1:16), not through any human agency.

#### **Example #2:**

#### **Paul and Acts present a very different understanding as to the nature of his relationship with the Jerusalem movement.**

As Paul presents the matter in Galatians, there was no significant relationship between his movement and that of the Jesus movement. From his perspective, his movement concerned Gentiles; theirs, Jews. As Paul notes, "they asked only one thing, that we remember the poor" (Galatians 2:10). For Paul, that is the only linkage: to take up collections to help those less fortunate financially. There is no reporting structure, nor any over-arching management coordinating the message and direction of these two enterprises. As Paul sees the situation, he does not report to anyone – least of all James in Jerusalem. From his perspective, the



relationship is analogous to Coke *versus* Pepsi, two competing companies. It is not the situation of two divisions of one company as is the case with Coke and Sprite.

The picture in Acts 15 is vastly different. In this account, when Paul goes up to Jerusalem, it is apparent that many members of the Jesus Movement there were insistent that the Torah be observed, even for Gentile members (Acts 15:1). Paul, it seems, was widely believed to be teaching otherwise, that Torah observance was not required. In this instance, Paul appears to be hauled into a hostile court where his views would be on the defensive. The structure is one of reporting, with Paul, the junior partner, reporting to senior management.

There are some strange details in this account. Paul is overlooked, although present and the *cause celebre* of the meeting. Peter, oddly enough, is positioned as the apostle to the Gentiles, not Paul. It is Peter who is portrayed as indicating that the message of the Jesus movement should be tailored to include all of humanity, Gentiles as well as Jews.

As depicted by the Book of Acts, James decides the issue at the Jerusalem Conference, adopting a dual structure for the movement (Acts 15:13-21). Jewish members of the Jesus movement would continue to obey Torah. But Gentile members of the movement would need only observe the Noahide laws incumbent upon all humanity, not the full Torah required of Jewish members. These Noahide laws include abstaining from food sacrificed to idols, from illicit sexuality, from eating meat from animals that have not been properly killed and from murder.

These requirements represent much stronger obligations than simply “remembering the poor” as Paul would have it. It positions Paul’s Movement as a subsidiary operation of a larger enterprise. It sets up a reporting structure in which Paul would be held accountable to James.

It is tempting to say that, for once, Acts got it right and that Paul minimizes the story. The incident places Paul in an unfavorable light, unlike most of Acts, and that might argue for its authenticity. Also the position on the part of James is consistent with the attitude of other Jewish leaders of the time. The Pharisees, for instance, would have held that Gentiles do not have to take on the full responsibility of Torah-observance in order to be regarded as righteous or to achieve salvation. For them, following the seven Noahide laws was sufficient. But they would not be Jews. If, for some reason, they wished to be converted to Judaism, they could do so through male circumcision and immersion...and, of course, following the law. But there was no necessity linked to salvation to do so. There was no question that the righteous of all the nations would be saved. Salvation was not the issue. The position of James concurs with the views of the Pharisees.

However, the account in Acts of a decisive “Jerusalem Conference” with James rendering an authoritative decision raises some important questions. It alone creates the impression that there is one movement, with two initiatives, one Jewish and one Gentile, each with separate obligations but all part of one enterprise.

The Jerusalem Conference, if it were held at all, would date from the late 40’s CE.<sup>13</sup> Paul’s Letter to the Galatians is later, from the mid 50’s CE.<sup>14</sup> In this letter, Paul has to deal with the issue of Torah observance. Rival teachers have come into Paul’s part of the world, telling Paul’s Gentile converts in Galatia that they need to observe the law. It is interesting that Paul does not identify who these individuals were.<sup>15</sup> They may have been members of the Jesus Movement whose members shared the belief that Gentiles who wish to become part of the new movement within Judaism must adopt Torah observance.<sup>16</sup> If an authoritative decision had been rendered by James only a few years earlier exempting Paul’s Gentile converts from this requirement, then it is astonishing these rival leaders to Paul do not know of it. Clearly whoever is disturbing the community in Galatia is unaware of this decree.

Moreover, in responding to them, it is surprising that Paul does not seem to know of this decree either. He does not refer to James’ pronouncement from only a few years earlier. That would have nipped the issue in the bud and settled the matter.

The idea of a Jerusalem Conference, presided over by the wise James, rendering decisions about Gentiles and Torah observance seems to be a construct by the author of Acts. It represents an important move to graft Paul’s radical Christ Movement on to the Jesus Movement.

### **Example #3:**

#### **Acts heightens the Judaism of Paul in a way that Paul never does.**

Paul usually discounts his Jewishness and he denounces those who would uphold Torah requirements for Gentile members of the movement. He contends that they are perverting the message, spreading confusion and that they are accursed. He satirically hopes that those who circumcise would suffer an accident and castrate themselves (Galatians 5:12). He says that those who follow the law have fallen away from grace (Galatians 5:4). He counts his former life in Judaism as “rubbish” (Philippians 3:8). He does not give any credence to the position that there might be another legitimate understanding of the new movement. In particular, he

provides no support to those in the Jesus Movement who see matters differently. For Paul, there is only one way of understanding the message, namely his!

Acts portrays Paul as being brought up in Jerusalem as a student of Gamaliel, the leading Pharisaic teacher of his time, and that he was educated strictly according to the Torah. Paul himself, however, is more modest, just noting in passing that he was a Pharisee (Philippians 3:5). He never claims more than that. Many members of the Jesus Movement came out of the Pharisaic party within Judaism without arousing any antagonism from this quarter (Acts 15:5). Acts even portrays the great Pharisaic leader, Gamaliel, defending the Jesus Movement when Peter is brought before the Sanhedrin (Acts 5:34-39). Josephus notes that the Pharisees took great offense when the Sadducean high priest had James killed in 62 CE.<sup>17</sup>

Acts' insistence upon Paul's Jewishness is highly overblown.

### **Conclusion: Acts' Paul is not Paul's Paul**

The Book of Acts represents an unreliable source for information about Paul. What we know of Paul from Paul is contradicted in Acts.

Acts gives us more information about Paul than Paul provides. How accurate, then, is Acts' Paul? If Acts' Paul contradicts what we know of Paul from Paul's Paul, then we have no basis on which to be confident of anything else Acts says of Paul. Acts' Paul is a later creation that serves the author of Acts' purposes well; it is not, however, a reflection of the historical Paul but the Paul the author of Acts needs to create to support his synthesis.

What we know of Paul, then, is from Paul. Paul's authentic "Paul" is vastly different from Acts' revisionist "Paul." We cannot use Acts to supplement Paul's own account of his career and message. We simply have no basis of knowing what additional information is fictional and what is historically accurate.

### **3. Acts' Attempted Synthesis of the Christ Movement with the Jesus Movement is Suspect**

Acts reflects later concerns and times than do the letters of Paul. Acts is dated by scholars to some 40 to 60 years after Paul wrote.<sup>18</sup> With Burton Mack, we will place this writing

around 120 CE, well after Paul wrote such writings as his Letter to the Galatians. Acts reflects more settled times, after the heated passion of the controversies of the mid first century had died down.

The author of this work is trying to understand retrospectively how what seemed to have begun as a movement within Judaism had, by his time, become something quite different. By 120 CE, the movement was predominantly Gentile. It had freed itself from Torah-observance and was now focused on the worship of a dying-rising savior God. True, there were members of the Jesus Movement still in existence. They had suffered a major setback with the destruction of Jerusalem and the Second Temple in 70 CE. They were fewer in numbers and their capacity for exercising leadership diminished. They were being increasingly marginalized by members of the numerically larger Christ Movement.

In so doing, the movement in the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE downplayed its Jewish roots, especially the Torah-observant practices of Jesus and his early followers. How did this come about? – this is the question the author of Acts is asking. His answer has to do with melding the radical outlook of Paul with that of the original form of Christianity headquartered in Jerusalem with very different beliefs and practices.

Acts' concern, therefore, is not just to tell the history of early Christianity, the Jesus Movement of James and the Christ Movement of Paul. Rather he is concerned to produce a work of great originality, to create nothing less than a synthesis of these two movements. In this way he could account for the character of Christianity in his own time. As we have seen, this perspective shapes the information Acts presents.

The Paul that Acts presents is the Paul needed to create the synthesis. We should, however, take Paul at his word. He takes every opportunity to distance his movement, his message and his career from that of the Jesus Movement. Paths do cross and when they do, as with the incident with Cephas Paul refers to in Galatians, he presses *his* religious commitments. There is no sense from Paul that there is another perspective or that there is another legitimate faction of the movement that might have differing commitments and concerns.

Why the author of Acts would attempt a synthesis or revisionist history is a matter for speculation. Luke, in both his gospel and the Book of Acts, is writing for a Roman audience, trying to impress upon them that the movement stemming from Jesus is a religion fit for the Roman Empire. He heightens Roman virtues such as self-control, playing down any element of emotionality in Jesus. He may also be appealing to the Roman virtue of antiquity, rooting the

Gentile Christ Movement in the Jesus Movement and through that, to Judaism. That would help establish an impressive pedigree for the new fledgling religion.

Or he may be attempting to ground the Christ myth of Paul in an actual historical being, Jesus, through the Jesus Movement. In reading Paul's letters, it is surprising how little is made of anything that stems from the Jesus of history. There is simply no reference to the teachings, observances or sayings that would reinforce or ground Paul's message in the religion of Jesus. There are no parables, Lord's Prayer or Sermon on the Mount. There is nothing that would reflect the relationship one would expect from a disciple of a rabbi.<sup>19</sup> There is just what Paul says he got mystically from the Christ whom he claims reveals himself in him. Devoid of linkage to the Jesus Movement and to Judaism generally, Paul's Christ Movement appears suspiciously like a Roman mystery religion and this may be an impression Luke is attempting to avoid.

The linkage is suspect. Acts distorts known information and grafts one movement onto another, without regard for strong differences in origin, beliefs and practices. The Jesus Movement people were unconvinced: they continued their separate observances, undeterred by the growing popularity of the Christ cult. They did not accept the synthesis.

#### 4. Paul's Radical Message

In his influential manifesto, the Letter to the Galatians, Paul outlines one of his fundamental convictions regarding the relationship of the members of his movement to Torah. He does not argue that whereas Jewish members are obliged to continue to observe Torah, Gentiles are not. That would have been in keeping with the decision of the Jerusalem Conference (which we have seen is not likely an historical event). Paul's point is much more radical: **no one** should observe Torah. It is now wrong to observe Torah.

Paul advances several arguments against Torah observance in Galatians. The only ones we will examine in detail here have to do with those that deny the legitimacy of Torah observance for any one.

Paul contends that the time of Torah is over. He starts by saying that before faith came, we were under the law. In effect, the Torah was a 'disciplinarian' until Christ came (Galatians 3:24). Henceforth we would be made righteous, not by Torah, but by faith. He confidently asserts that we are all one in Christ Jesus and that distinctions such as gender, ethnicity and status no longer have any relevance (Galatians 3:28).

Here Paul is developing his own view of Jewish history. He sees three stages:

- Stage #1: Abraham to Moses: time of faith
- Stage #2: Moses to Christ: time of Torah (the disciplinarian)
- Stage #3: From Christ onwards: time of faith in Christ.

Now that faith has come, Paul puts it, there is simply no need to observe Torah. This has far-reaching consequences, for, if Paul is right, this argument would apply to the Jewish members of the Jesus Movement as well. He is attempting, in fact, to deny the legitimacy of the Jesus Movement by undercutting the very basis for the distinction James allegedly articulated in the Jerusalem Conference – that Jews need to observe Torah whereas Gentiles do not!

This argument would have caused panic amongst members of the Jesus Movement who, quite correctly, would have interpreted Paul as teaching the abolition of Torah observance for **anyone**, whether a member of his Christ Movement, the Jesus Movement or any form of Judaism. This distress reverberates decades later when the author of Acts comes to write his account of early church history. In spite of his desire to minimize past conflict, he cannot hide the fact that rumors that reached James in Jerusalem to the effect that Paul was teaching that the laws of Moses were no longer applicable (Acts 21:17-22).

An argument abolishing Torah observance requires much greater justification. Paul presents no biblical or other justification for contending that the time of Torah observance is over: just his assertion that it is. Why the appearance of the Christ rules out Torah observance is not made clear. There is no appeal to what Jesus said or did. There is no mention of any prophet who might have hinted at this. There is no reference to any saying of Jesus. It just rests on Paul's say-so. To say that the argument is 'flimsy' is to be kind: it is simply expedient and self-serving.

It is also at odds, it should be noted, with what the alleged Jerusalem Conference had decided. It is incredible that Paul would have gone ahead with arguments of this magnitude had that council been an historic event. If that Conference had taken place, then Paul's position would have been an act of extreme defiance.

The one really good argument that Paul could not use is this. He could have appealed to the practices or teachings of Jesus, that Jesus did not practice or advocate Torah observance. He could then have concluded that Torah-observance should not be obligatory for any member of the Christ Movement. This one argument would have clinched the case. He could not make this argument, however, for two reasons. First, he could not because the historical Jesus taught and practiced Torah observance. So, too, did his earliest followers in Jerusalem who were

continuing the teachings and practices of Jesus. Secondly, he could not make this argument because what the historical Jesus did and said did not matter to Paul: his focus was on what the Christ figure told him.

The position that Paul is advocating, a religion free from what he would consider the shackles of Torah, is a different religion than the one Jesus practiced, worked within and taught. It is his own creation and it was a brilliant move. Paul's position had appeal, especially to the God-fearer segment of the synagogue, that is, Gentiles who were enamored of the ethical monotheism of Judaism but who did not wish to convert to the religion. Conversion would have entailed taking on all the obligations of Torah plus (for adult males) undergoing adult circumcision and immersion.

The battle between the Christ Movement and the Jesus Movement was concretized in the value attached to foreskins. Circumcision was, for Paul, symbolic of all that was wrong with the Torah. He refers to Torah-observant Jews sarcastically as members of the "circumcision faction." He wishes that circumcisers would drop the knife and so castrate themselves. His Christ Movement succeeded whereas the Jesus Movement did not, primarily because he removed the main barrier to membership. Paul's radical message resonated throughout the Diaspora. Have salvation through faith in the Christ. No need to observe Torah. And your foreskin is safe.

## 5. Implications

What we know of the historical Paul is from Paul. What we get in Acts is an attempted synthesis, grafting the by-now-popular Christ Movement on to the Jesus Movement. In origins, beliefs and practices they had been quite separate, but through the creative genius of Luke they became retroactively linked.

The implication of this contention is that a new model of Christian origins is needed, one that recognizes the different origins of Paul's Christ Movement and Acts' retroactive linkage. Paul's Movement does not originate in the message of Jesus, nor does it represent an offshoot of the early Jesus Movement. It was, in its time, a separate religious enterprise.

The synthesis, moreover, had unintended consequences. The Christ Movement assumed center stage, which is what Acts wished to achieved. But it also shifted the religion away from the *teachings and practices of Jesus* to one preoccupied with *beliefs about the Christ*. It is quite a different religion altogether.

## Section Two

# If We Only Had Paul, What Would We Know of Jesus?<sup>20</sup>

### 1. The Question

If we only had Paul, what would we know of Jesus?

This is not an unreasonable question in light of what we know of the connections between Paul and Jesus.

For one thing, there was no contact between Paul and Jesus. Paul never met Jesus, the historical Jesus of Nazareth who taught in the Galilee, came to Jerusalem around 30 C.E. and who met his death there. Paul was not one of the original disciples. Paul never heard Jesus teach and was not present at his crucifixion.

Secondly, after his remarkable experience near Damascus, Paul stresses that he had minimal contact with Jesus' successors, the Jesus Movement in Jerusalem. This movement included James (the brother of Jesus) as well as his family members and disciples. These were the people who knew Jesus best. They had been with him throughout his ministry, heard him speak and were present at his death. They knew his character, values, teachings and practices. Yet, according to Paul himself, years went by before he conferred with them, and then only briefly.<sup>21</sup> This represents exceptionally strange behavior for someone who was supposed to be a recent convert. That alone should give us pause and prompt us to wonder if there was more to the Paul-Jesus connection than that of faithful disciple to the master.

The Jesus Movement constantly shadowed Paul in his journeys throughout the Diaspora – modern Turkey, Greece and Italy. Paul refers to them as “rival teachers” or as “super



apostles,” people who held quite different views on the correct teachings and practices of the new movement and who regarded Paul’s message as deviant. These included Jesus’ original disciples and his family members. Many of Paul’s letters refer to this opposition.<sup>22</sup> In particular, Paul deviated from the members of the Jesus Movement in his failure to observe Torah, the Jewish law. The leaders in Jerusalem worshipped in the Temple, kept the Sabbath, observed the dietary laws and practiced circumcision. So, too, did Jesus. In all respects, they were Jewish. Paul, on the other hand, advocated abandoning Torah observance, for Jews as well as for Gentiles.

Finally – and this is most remarkable – Paul says very little about the historical Jesus. He rarely quotes or refers to Jesus at all in the formulation of his own position and pronouncements. Even when advancing positions on topics Jesus had addressed, Paul is silent. This silence is hardly the practice one would expect of a devoted student of a rabbi.

In light of these considerations, we ask, if we only had Paul, what would we know about Jesus? The answer to this question should shed light on the broader question, what *was* the linkage between Paul’s movement and Jesus’?

We have seven genuine letters of Paul. The Pauline authorship of three additional writings is disputed by scholars and three others are most likely pseudonymous, that is, falsely attributed to Paul.<sup>23</sup>

### Letters of Paul

<b>Letters of Paul</b>		
<b>undisputed Pauline Epistles</b>	<b>Deutero-Pauline</b> (possibly pseudonymous)	<b>Pastoral Epistles</b> (probably pseudonymous)
Romans 1 Corinthians 2 Corinthians Galatians Philippians 1 Thessalonians Philemon	Ephesians Colossians 2 Thessalonians	1 Timothy 2 Timothy Titus

[source: Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 287]

This section will examine four questions:

1. Does Paul refer to Jesus' life?
2. Does Paul refer to Jesus' teachings directly?<sup>24</sup>
3. Does Paul allude to Jesus' teachings?
4. Does Paul refer to Jesus' teachings when making his own pronouncements on topics Jesus himself had addressed?

In all instances we will confine our analysis to the undisputed Pauline epistles.

Note that we cannot uncritically assume that everyone in Paul's time knew what we know of Jesus from the Gospels. We might get this impression from the way the New Testament is organized: first the four canonical gospels, then the Book of Acts, and then the letters of Paul. This structure is not accidental: it is strategic. It nestles Paul well within the cradle of the Gospels and that is what we are supposed to think. But historically this was not the case. Paul came first; then the Gospels. They were written well after the death of Paul in the mid 60's. Scholars typically date Mark to around 70; Matthew to the 80's; John to the 90's and Luke anywhere from the 90's to the 120's CE – all forty to ninety years after the death of Jesus. So we cannot assume that what we know of the life and teachings of Jesus corresponds to what Paul or his congregants knew of Jesus.<sup>25</sup>

The paper will argue that if we only had Paul, we would know very little of the teachings or practices of the Jesus of history. Paul's focus was not on the life and teachings of Jesus but, as we will discover, his interests lay elsewhere. These findings underscore the importance of viewing Paul's Christ cult as a separate religion from that of Jesus and his followers, the Jesus Movement under James in Jerusalem.

## **2. Does Paul refer to Jesus' Life?**

Paul provides us with only five pieces of information about the historical Jesus.

### **Information from Paul about Jesus' Life**

- |  |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. he was "born of a woman" (Galatians 4:4)</li> <li>2. he was Jewish, "born under the law" (Galatians 4:4)</li> <li>3. a biological descendant of David (Romans 1:3)</li> <li>4. he had brothers (1 Corinthians 9:5)</li> <li>5. he was crucified (1 Corinthians 1:22) and he died (1 Corinthians 15:3)</li> </ol> |
|--|

First of all, he mentions that Jesus was “born of a woman.” That’s hardly startling! Secondly, he tells us that Jesus was Jewish and, as such, was subject to the Torah. Thirdly, that he was a biological descendant of David. Fourthly, we are told that he had brothers. James is mentioned on occasion as, indeed, are “the brothers of the Lord.” The latter appear to be active in the Diaspora and are accompanied, unlike Paul, with their wives (1 Corinthians 9:5). Fifthly, he also tells us that Jesus was crucified and he died.

That’s all we are told. So, for Paul, Jesus is a Jewish male, human and a descendant of King David. His writings, however, fail to tell us anything about other aspects of Jesus’ life. For example, no mention is made of the circumstances of his birth, his upbringing, or the geographical location of Jesus’ ministry. Paul makes no mention of Jesus’ extended family other than his brothers – his parents, sisters, cousin or close associates such as Mary Magdalene who helped fund the Jesus mission.<sup>26</sup> Nor does he trace Jesus’ movements from the Galilee to Jerusalem, the events of the dramatic last week in Jerusalem or the circumstances surrounding his death.

#### **What Paul does not tell us about Jesus’ life**

- the circumstances of his birth
- the geographical location of Jesus’ ministry
- other family members – parents, sisters, cousin (John the Baptist), close associates such as Mary Magdalene
- his movement from Galilee to Jerusalem
- his last week in Jerusalem
- circumstances surrounding his death

So: does Paul refer to Jesus’ life? The verdict is, no, not really. Paul is not interested in what the Jesus of history did or went. He does not share the same agenda as later gospel writers.

### **3. Does Paul refer to Jesus’ Teachings Directly?<sup>27</sup>**

It would be natural for us to expect that Paul would refer to the teachings of Jesus in promoting his new religion. Contemporary Christian preachers do that all the time. They refer to the words of Jesus to bolster their positions on current matters pertaining to Christian ethics or to establish a connection between their ideas and those of the founder. Even more importantly, since Paul’s credibility and message were constantly in question, we would expect

him to authenticate his teachings by reference to the words of Jesus. Paul, however, does not typically do this.

There are six possible direct references to the teachings of Jesus – instances, that is, where Paul explicitly invokes Jesus in presenting his views. Not all of these correspond to what we know from other sources Jesus said.

### (a) Sexual Morality

The first one concerns sexual morality. Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians:  
 [S1] “For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from unchastity; that each one of you know how to take a wife for himself in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like heathen who do not know God; that no man transgress, and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things.” (1 Thessalonians 4:2-6)<sup>28</sup>

The passage is attributed to “*the Lord Jesus*.” It expresses the view that people abstain from unchastity and that they take a wife, honoring that commitment. Unchastity or *porneia* (πορνεία) refers to a wide range of illicit sexual activities including fornication (casual sex) and adultery. Paul’s view appears to be that marriage is preferable to unchaste behavior.

This passage, however, does not correspond easily to any known teaching of Jesus. Presumably Jesus would share the view that people should avoid unchaste behavior but there is no direct parallel for Paul’s motive for marriage in the teachings of Jesus in the gospels. Jesus does mention unchastity, however, but in the context of a different topic, that of divorce.

Paul	Jesus
[S1] “For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from <u>unchastity (πορνεία)</u> ; that each one of you know how to take a wife for himself in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like heathen who do not know God; that no man transgress, and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things.” (1 Thessalonians 4:2-6)	“And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, <u>except for unchastity (πορνεία)</u> , and marries another, commits adultery.” (Matthew 19:9)

According to this passage, Jesus permits the divorce of a wife by a husband in one instance only, namely that of a wife who engages in unchaste behavior.<sup>29</sup> But the context differs from that of Paul – Jesus addresses the topic of divorce rather than the motive or rationale for marriage.

The verdict? This does not correspond to any known teaching of the historical Jesus as reported in the gospels. It is, however, likely Jesus would have agreed with Paul’s position that unchaste behavior is wrong.

### (b) Divorce and Remarriage

Another issue concerns divorce and remarriage. Paul advises married couples as follows: “to the married I give charge, not I but the Lord, that the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, let her remain single or else be reconciled to her husband) – and that the husband should not divorce his wife.” (1 Corinthians 7:10, 11).

Paul appeals explicitly to “the Lord” and advocates no divorce. In the case of a separation of the wife from her husband, she should either remain single or be reconciled to her husband. So, while separation is permissible, it is regrettable and does not permit divorce or remarriage.

This is not what Jesus said, at least as presented in the later Gospel of Matthew: “But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, makes her an adulteress; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery” (Matthew 5:32). Here divorce is permitted on the grounds of female unchastity. Moreover, a man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Paul	Matthew
[S2] “to the married I give charge, not I but the Lord, that the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, let her remain single or else be reconciled to her husband) – and that the husband should not divorce his wife.” (1 Corinthians 7:10,11).	”But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, makes her an adulteress; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery” (Matthew 5:32).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• no divorce</li> <li>• if wife separates, she should remain single</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• divorce permitted only on the ground of female unchastity</li> <li>• a man who marries a divorced woman</li> </ul>

or else reconcile with her husband	commits adultery. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• nothing is said about divorce in the circumstance of male unchastity.</li> </ul>
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So the verdict here has to be: Paul contradicts Jesus' teaching with respect to divorce. It is, in fact, a harsher judgment.

### (c) The Fate of the Deceased

A pressing problem within the early Pauline community had to do with the fate of members who have died. Paul addresses this important concern by prefacing it with "for this we declare to you by the word of the Lord."<sup>30</sup> Then he goes on to discuss what happens when the Lord reappears (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17). When this event occurs, those who are alive at that time will be transformed; those who are dead will rise.

This teaching is attributed to "the word of the Lord." It is not evident, however, in any of the canonical gospels.

Paul	Canonical Gospels
[S3] 'For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord.' (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17)	---

The death of members of the movement prior to the coming of the Kingdom was not an issue for Jesus. And for good reason. For Jesus, the Kingdom of God was so near that he is reported to have said, "there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power" (Mark 9:1). He fully expected that God's Kingdom would arrive within his lifetime and that of his audience. He may even have thought

that, as God’s messiah, he would have a hand in bringing it about. For Paul, however, writing some fifteen or twenty years after the death of Jesus and faced with congregants dying, this was an important problem that he had to address.

Verdict: this saying [S3] does not correspond to any known saying of Jesus.

#### (d) Validity of Kashrut (Jewish Dietary laws)

A fourth matter concerns the observance of Jewish dietary laws (kashrut). Paul addresses this in his Letter to the Romans and introduces his point of view as follows: “I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself.” (Romans 14:14). The attribution here is to “the Lord Jesus,” but the phraseology is significant – he knows “in the Lord Jesus,” not “from” Jesus. This represents terminology Paul typically uses for his mystical experience of the Christ.

Paul cautions members of the new movement not to offend those who wish to abide by the ancient dietary laws. His point, however, is pastoral, that is, not to give offense to people holding a different view. It is not as if that the laws of kashrut still apply. For Paul, they don’t. As he made clear in his letter to the Galatians, Torah, including the dietary laws, is no longer valid.

In this Paul’s views parallel those of the later gospel of Mark (Mark 7: 18,19) which portrays Jesus as declaring all things clean.

Matthew, however, using Mark as a base for his writing, treats Mark’s explanatory comment differently (see below). In addition, according to Matthew, Jesus did not abolish any aspect of Torah, dietary laws included (Matthew 15:16- 18) (see below). It is on this basis that he omits Mark’s interpretive comment about Jesus abolishing the dietary laws.

Paul	Mark	Matthew
[S4] “I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself” (Romans 14:14)	“And he said to them [his disciples], ‘Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a man from outside cannot defile him, since it enters, not his heart	“And he said, ‘Are you also still without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and so passes on? But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a man.” (Matthew 15:16-18)

	but his stomach, and so passes on?' <b><u>(Thus he declared all foods clean).</u></b> (Mark 7:18, 19)	<b><i>(Thus he declared all foods clean). This is omitted in Matthew's editing.</i></b>
		Note also: "Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished." (Matthew 5:17, 18)

Like Matthew, members of the Jesus Movement under James in Jerusalem upheld Torah observance as did Paul's rival teachers in the Diaspora.

So we have a dispute in our sources: Mark has Jesus deny the dietary laws; Paul says he is "persuaded in the Lord Jesus" that they are null and void. However, Matthew, James (Jesus' brother), the Jesus Movement generally and Paul's rival teachers uphold them.<sup>31</sup> Hence we will generously categorize this saying as a disputed teaching of Jesus although the practice of the Jesus Movement and James in keeping Torah would argue that Jesus did the same, including the dietary laws.

### (e) Remuneration for Preaching

A fifth matter concerns the right of a teacher to receive payment. Paul cites the example of the Temple priests who share in the offerings made by people to God. Thus they gain sustenance from Temple service. "In the same way," Paul goes on to add, "the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel" (1 Corinthians 9:14).

So Paul attributes this saying directly to the "Lord." It parallels a saying of Jesus preserved in the gospel of Luke that "the worker deserves his wages" (Luke 10:7) This was uttered in the context of Jesus sending forth seventy followers as an advance guard, into towns and villages he intended to visit. He encouraged them not to take provisions with them, but to accept food and drink from people they would encounter along the way. Thus by 'worker' Jesus means a teacher.



Paul	Luke
[S5] "In the same way the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel" (1 Corinthians 9:14)	"the worker deserves his wages" (Luke 10:7)

Verdict: selection S5 corresponds to a known saying of Jesus.

### (f) The Eucharist

Paul prefaces the following teaching by saying that this is what he had received "from the Lord" and had passed on to them:

"...that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, 'This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Whoever, therefore, eats the bread and drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord." (1 Corinthians 11:23-27)

Here Paul equates 'bread' with 'body of the Lord' and 'wine' with the 'blood of the Lord.'

The canonical gospels, written after Paul and probably with his views of the Eucharist in mind, support this contention. Matthew, for instance, equates the cup of wine with Jesus' blood: "this is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:28). The Gospel of John also equates wine with blood – "he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him" (John 6:56).

It is highly unlikely that the Jesus of history said anything of the sort, however, especially equating the cup of wine with his blood and encouraging his followers to drink blood.<sup>32</sup> Jewish prohibitions against the drinking of blood were strict and clear. As the book of Leviticus says, "If anyone of the house of Israel or of the aliens who reside among them eats any blood, I will set my face against that person who eats blood, and will cut that person off from the people...Therefore I have said to the people of Israel: No person among you shall eat blood, nor shall any alien who resides among you eat blood." (Leviticus 17:10-12). If Jesus had said anything of the sort, so clearly contrary to a biblical injunction, it would have sparked furious

outrage – perhaps even civil unrest or Jesus’ immediate death.<sup>33</sup> So what Paul attributes to Jesus is not likely to have been made by any Jewish teacher.

Moreover, the Jewish method of slaughtering animals ensures that no blood remains in the meat to be consumed.

Secondly, we have an alternate account of the communal meal of the new movement and it is significantly different from the ritual that Paul describes. The *Didache*, a late 1<sup>st</sup> century work, preserves an account of the early Christian thanksgiving meal, one that corresponds to Jewish Sabbath evening prayers. It likely reflects the practices of the Jesus Movement in Jerusalem under James and perhaps even the Jewish Christian group for whom the Gospel of Matthew was written.

There are three significant differences between the *Didache* and Paul’s account. First of all, this meal begins with a blessing over wine and then over bread, unlike Paul’s account which has the reverse order. Secondly, it does not equate the wine with blood or the bread with body. Thirdly, the ceremony is not one that commemorates the death and resurrection of Jesus but rather his person, his life and his teaching. The communal meal in the *Didache* provides a very different emphasis.

In Jewish prayer, the wine is blessed as follows: “Blessed are you, O Lord our God, sovereign of the universe, who brings forth the fruit of the vine.” It’s a thanksgiving for the means of enjoyment – the wine. In the *Didache*, the prayer is similar but builds upon a metaphorical meaning of the vine. The cup of wine is blessed as follows – “We give thanks to thee, our Father, for the holy Vine of thy servant David, which thou has made known to us through thy servant Jesus.”<sup>34</sup> The wine is the Vine of David, the new community.

In the Jewish prayer, bread is blessed as follows: “Blessed are you, O Lord our God, sovereign of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.” Here bread is a symbol of life, that which comes from the inanimate and which gives and sustains life. In the *Didache*, the bread is blessed – “We give thanks to thee, our Father, for the life and knowledge that thou has made known to us through thy servant, Jesus.”<sup>35</sup> The bread symbolizes life. Both prayers build upon traditional Jewish models.

<i>Paul</i>	<i>the Didache</i>
<p>[S6] "...that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, 'This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Whoever, therefore, eats the bread and drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord." (1 Corinthians 11:23-27)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Bread = body of Jesus</li> <li>➤ Wine = blood of Jesus</li> </ul>	<p>"We give thanks to thee, our Father, for the holy Vine of thy servant David, which thou has made known to us through thy servant Jesus."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Wine = the Vine of David, the new community.</li> </ul> <p>"We give thanks to thee, our Father, for the life and knowledge that thou has made known to us through thy servant, Jesus."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Bread = life.</li> </ul>

Verdict: Paul's view of the Eucharist is unlikely to have been uttered by the Jesus of history. Shared by members of the Jesus Movement, the version of the communal meal preserved in The Didache more likely reflects the tradition of Jesus than does Paul's.

### Summary: Direct References by Paul to Teachings of Jesus

As the following chart indicates, we have direct references to one teaching for which we have parallels; two unknown teachings, one disputed one; one unlikely saying and one contradicted saying:

known sayings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• remuneration for preaching [S5]</li> </ul>
Unknown sayings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sexual morality [S1]</li> <li>• fate of the deceased [S3]</li> </ul>
Disputed sayings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Validity of Kashrut [S4]</li> </ul>
unlikely sayings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eucharist [S6]</li> </ul>
Contradicted sayings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Divorce [S2]</li> </ul>

The overall verdict: Paul pays scant attention to the teachings of Jesus.

### 3. Does Paul Allude to Jesus' Teachings?

There are three possible allusions to the teachings of Jesus, that is, vague references where Paul may be referring to the teachings of Jesus but where he does not attribute these positions directly to him. In fact, he may be quoting others or drawing on the same reservoir of biblical images that Jesus himself used. These allusions group as follows:

### **(a) Attitudes towards persecutors**

Two passages in Paul's Letter to the Romans illustrate attitudes towards persecutors. In one, Paul says [S7], "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them" (Romans 12:14). This corresponds to a saying attributed to Jesus, "But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44).

Another passage says, [S8] "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink" (Romans 12:20). In his depiction of the Great Judgment Jesus said, "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink'" (Matthew 25:37). Paul may not be making a direct allusion to this saying of Jesus: Proverbs 25:21, 22 could have provided a common source for both Paul and Jesus' teachings.

### **(b) The Torah and love**

Jewish law identifies 613 commandments. Jesus summarized these as two commandments. Paul reduces them to one and mentions it in two of his letters.

[S9] "For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Galatians 5:14)

[S10] "...for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'you shall not kill,' 'you shall not steal,' 'you shall not covet,' and any other commandment, are summed up in this sentence, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law" (Romans 13:9-10).

The passage – "love your neighbor as yourself" -- is from Leviticus 19:18. The Jewish sage, Hillel, slightly before Jesus, had summarized Judaism succinctly. Hillel said, "That which is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. That is the whole Torah; the rest commentary. Go and study it." (Shab. 31a). Paul's version is similar to this one, only expressed positively.

Jesus' summary of the law is more complex, and more traditional, however, than either Hillel's or Paul's. For Jesus, the summary rests upon two principles. As Mark puts it, a scribe

asks Jesus what he would identify as the most important commandment. Jesus replies with the traditional Hebrew prayer, the Shema: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart; and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.” Then he adds a second commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Mark 12:30, 31). Here Jesus is quoting from two passages from the Torah, Deuteronomy 6:4 and Leviticus 19:18.<sup>36</sup>

For Jesus, the most important commandment has to do with obligations towards God, the second, with obligations towards fellow human beings. The two most important laws reflect the structure of the Ten Commandments: the first four expressing obligations towards God; the last six, obligations directed towards other human beings.

Paul is probably referring to the tradition of Hillel rather than the teachings of Jesus. If he had known that Jesus had said there were two main commandments, he would likely not have changed the numbering.<sup>37</sup>

### **(c) Kingdom of God teachings**

Paul says that the Kingdom of, [S11] “For you yourselves know well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.” (1 Thessalonians 5:2).

This phrase is repeated in other canonical writings, in 2 Peter and the Book of Revelation.<sup>38</sup> But Jesus had also said that the transformation will occur soon, within the lifetime of the generation to whom he is speaking – “Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away till all these things take place” (Matthew 24:34).<sup>39</sup> He cautions them, however, to be ready and to focus on this rather than the specific timetable – since no one knows when the day when the Lord will come, comparing it to the sudden appearance of a thief in the night (Matthew 24:43, 44).

Verdict: a likely allusion or, possibly, a stock answer.

### **Summary: Possible Allusions to Teachings of Jesus**

As the following chart indicates, we have two likely allusions to the teachings of Jesus.

### **Possible Allusions to Teachings attributed to Jesus**

<i>Likely Allusions</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• blessing persecutors [S7]</li> <li>• time of the end unpredictable [S11]</li> </ul>
<i>Common source</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• kindness towards all, including enemies [S8]</li> </ul>
<i>Unlikely Allusions</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Love Your Neighbor as Summary of Torah [S9, S10]</li> </ul>

\* \* \*

If we only had Paul, either by way of direct references or by possible allusions, we would not know anything about the following teachings of Jesus. For one thing we would not know of his apocalyptic orientation, that is, his emphasis on the imminence of God's rule over the whole world (the Kingdom of God message) which he expected to occur within his lifetime. By the Kingdom of God Jesus meant world transformation, with evil eradicated, the righteous rewarded, the dead raised and Israel preeminent over all the world. On that day God would be one and all humanity would come to worship the one God. There is also no mention of Jesus' parables or his miracles. Nothing from the Sermon on the Mount including the beatitudes and the challenge to Higher Righteous. Nothing on prayer – not even the Lord's Prayer.

#### **What Paul does not tell us about Jesus' Teachings**

- his apocalyptic orientation, that is, his emphasis on the imminence of God's rule over the whole world (the Kingdom of God message)
- parables
- miracles
- Sermon on the Mount teachings
- prayer, e.g. Lord's Prayer

**4. Does Paul refer to Jesus' teachings when making his own pronouncements on topics Jesus himself had addressed?**

Paul occasionally tackles issues Jesus had addressed. Surprisingly, in these contexts, he typically makes pronouncements of his own without any reference to the position of Jesus on the matter.

### **(a) Torah observance**

One of the most important issues within 1<sup>st</sup> century C.E. Judaism concerned how to interpret and follow Torah correctly. The Dead Sea Scroll community had separated from mainstream Judaism over this very issue. Following the lead of their inspired Teacher of Righteousness, they contended that they, and they alone, possessed the keys to correct Torah interpretation. Pharisees also debated the interpretation of the law as controversies between the Schools of Hillel and Shammai and with Jesus attest. Sadducees and Zealots had their own views as well. John the Baptist had appeared, urging people to return to Torah, to honoring their obligations towards God and towards humanity, symbolized by a water ritual. So knowing one's stance on Torah was a defining characteristic of every branch of Judaism, the new Christian movement included.

The Jesus Movement under James, Jesus' brother, in Jerusalem was Torah-observant including Temple and Sabbath observances, circumcision and the dietary laws. The Gospel of Matthew reflects this stance in his gospel Jesus is depicted as saying, "Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished" (Matthew 5:17, 18). Indications from this gospel as well as the practices of his brother argue that Jesus himself was Torah observant and did not see himself abolishing these laws. Indeed, Matthew portrays Jesus as teaching "a Higher Righteousness," that is, one that extends actions to underlying attitudes. This has the effect of making Torah observance much more difficult. Jesus himself recognized this and indicated that his followers needed to exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees.

Paul, however, departs from this position. In his Letter to the Galatians he denies the legitimacy of Torah observance. This is a strong claim, for Paul is not just saying that parts of the Torah should be abandoned or that Torah needs to be reinterpreted. His point is that members of his Christ Movement should completely disregard all of Torah.<sup>40</sup>

For Paul, the time of Torah has ended. Its legitimacy extended only from the period of Moses to Christ. It no longer pertains.<sup>41</sup> The radical nature of Paul's arguments is often not appreciated, as extending not just to Gentiles but to Jews as well. Paul was widely recognized at the time for teaching precisely this radical view.<sup>42</sup> In addition, Paul does not consider himself to

be subject to the Torah (1 Corinthians 9:20), describes his former life in Judaism as “refuse” or “rubbish” (Philippians 3:8) and dismisses the practice of circumcision as counting for nothing (1 Corinthians 7:19) Clearly by the end of his life, Paul had left Judaism for something else.

It is exceptionally strange that nowhere in this vitally important discussion does Paul inject any word of Jesus to bolster his abolition of Torah.

### **(b) Dietary Matters**

Paul tells his followers to shun the worship idols. He also adds, however, that it is permissible to “eat whatever is sold in the meat market” (1 Corinthians 10:25), even though the animal may have been butchered in honor of some deity or may involve prohibited meat. Nowhere in this discussion does he inject the perspective of Jesus or that of his followers, especially James. It is unlikely that either Jesus or James would have agreed with Paul in this regard.

So does Paul refer to Jesus when making pronouncements on topics Jesus himself had addressed? Again the verdict is: no.

## **4. Conclusions**

Here is Paul’s score card.

In terms of references to Jesus’ life we have established that there are only minimal references.

In terms of Jesus’ teachings, Paul makes only one reference to a known saying of Jesus and provides two possible allusions. In terms of putting forward his own positions on topics that Jesus himself addressed, we find Paul silent. He does not refer to Jesus’ teachings to back up contentious points even when his credibility is under attack.

This indicates an exceptionally slim connection between the teachings of Paul and those of the Jesus of history.

Either the life and teachings of the historical Jesus were not of interest to Paul or else they were simply not known. His focus was on the Christ figure, the post-death and post-resurrected Jesus, who communicates directly with him and through him.



This reinforces the view that Paul was the founder of a separate religion, one about the Christ, not one centered upon the teachings and mission of Jesus.

## 5. Paul's Real Focus

Paul's focus was clearly not only the historical Jesus but rather on who he was and what his death represented. As he interprets the death of Jesus, Paul tells us the following. First of all, for Paul, Jesus was God's Son. He was resurrected from death.

Paul maintains, moreover, that Jesus died for our sins and that the whole purpose of his mission was "...to redeem those who were under the law so that we might receive adoption as sons" (Galatians 4:5,6) The "we" in "we might receive adoption as sons" refers to those who are not Jewish. So the purpose of Jesus' coming is to incorporate all humanity as children of the one God. Whether Jesus saw his ministry in the terms that Paul describes is highly questionable. In one passage where Jesus hesitated to assist a Canaanite woman from the district of Tyre and Sidon, he indicates that he has come to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24).

### The Significance of Jesus for Paul

1. Jesus was God's Son (1 Thessalonians 1:10)
2. Jesus was resurrected by God (1 Thessalonians 1:10)
3. Jesus died for our sins (1 Corinthians 15:3)
4. The purpose of Jesus' ministry was "to redeem those who were under the law" so that all people, including Gentiles, might receive adoption as sons (Galatians 4:5)

For Paul, Jesus or what he calls the Christ or Christ Jesus was a pre-existing being. That is one natural interpretation of a key passage in Philippians. There he describes Christ Jesus being "in the form of God," not counting equality with God as something to be grasped, but "emptied himself...being born in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:6, 7). Here Paul seems to be describing Christ Jesus as initially having a divine form which assumed a human shape, having been "sent" by God to accomplish a specific task. That mission, Paul says, had to do with redemption. On this view, Christ is a cosmic redeemer, sent to rescue humanity from the clutches of sin and evil. While the Greek Christos (Χριστός) translates the Hebrew Mashiach (מָשִׁיחַ) there is nothing in this view that approximates the Jewish view of the task of a messiah. A messiah is a political agent who would assist God with world transformation, resulting in the

exaltation of the Jewish state, universal peace and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth.<sup>43</sup>

Paul's focus is emphatically not on the Jesus of history. He is not concerned with the contours of his life, the details of his mission, the involvement of his extended family, his political aims or their relationship to Jewish messianic expectations. His focus is solely on a "post-death Jesus" whom he typically calls "Christ" or "Christ Jesus."

He makes his main focus abundantly clear in many of his short creedal-like statements in his letters. For example, in 1 Corinthians he maintains that "We preach Christ crucified" (1 Corinthians 1:23). Similarly "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). And again, he says, that he faithfully transmitted to the Corinthians that which he himself had received, the view that Christ died for our sins; was buried; raised on the third day; and appeared to Cephas and then to the twelve (1 Corinthians 15:5).<sup>44</sup> His hope is to identify with Christ "that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead." (Philippians 3:10, 11)

Indeed, his gospel is that of the post-death Christ Jesus. He makes this clear in Romans, saying that he serves "the gospel of his Son" (Romans 1:9). Since, according to Paul, Jesus had become God's Son only at or by virtue of his resurrection, it is the post-death resurrected Jesus that Paul shows any interest in. That Jesus he refers to as "Christ," and claims to have a unique relationship with Christ, a privileged pipeline that no other early Christian teacher claimed to have had. He receives information no one else at the time ever received.

## Section Three

# What's a Messiah to Do?<sup>45</sup>

### 1. Introduction

There have been many individuals who have claimed -- or whose followers have claimed -- to be the Jewish messiah. These include, in modern times, Rabbi Schneerson; in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century C.E., Bar-Kokhba; and earlier, Judas the Galilean, Simon of Peraea, Athronges, Theudas, "the Egyptian," and, of course, Jesus of Nazareth.

What criteria must an individual satisfy in order to be deemed "a" or "the" Jewish messiah? To say of any person that he is "a" or "the" messiah must mean that that person satisfies specific pre-existing criteria for this role. But what exactly are these criteria? What must a messiah do in order to qualify for this title?

This paper examines four models of what constitutes a messiah. Three were current in Jewish literature prior to the time of Jesus. These models will be examined in historical sequence and, in so doing, neglected passages from Zechariah and the Psalms of Solomon will be discussed. These set forth the job requirements.

A fourth model, from the writings of Paul after the death of Jesus, advances a different concept of the messiah. His Christ concept of a dying-rising savior God-human does not match the expectations for a Jewish messianic figure. This contention reinforces the view that Paul has created a distinctive religion, one that has little to do with either Judaism or the Jesus Movement under James in Jerusalem.

Let's examine three Jewish criteria for being a messiah.

## 2. Jewish Criteria for Being a Messiah

### Model #1

The first model is the oldest one. Psalm 2 in the bible imagines a situation where the kings of the earth conspire to act against “the Lord and his anointed” [Psalm 2:2]. Here the anointed one (Mashiach) refers to the king, whom God is described as having installed on Zion. The king, moreover, is said to be a son of God [Psalm 2:7] and has the mandate to make other nations his vassals. Rulers who wish to conquer Israel are advised to heed this decree and come to serve the Lord.

We do not know when Psalm 2 was composed. If it was during the time of the Davidic monarchy, from approximately the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE, then it would refer to the king in Jerusalem. The psalm, along with other “royal” psalms may very well have been used at the coronation in praise of the new monarch.<sup>46</sup> When the monarchy ended during the Babylonian Exile, the psalm would have been interpreted as applying to some future ideal king. In either instance, the king is anointed as symbolic of his designated task to be a ruler, under the sovereignty of God.

In inception, the root concept of being a messiah is political.

### **Model #1: Messiah as Designated Political Activist**

**A Messiah is a person anointed by the Lord to perform a task**

Typically such individuals are spoken of as “the Lord’s anointed.” Persons who are spoken of in this manner include: Samuel [1 Samuel 24:7]; David [2 Samuel 19:22]; and Zedekiah [Lamentations 4: 20]. In addition, Cyrus the Great, King of Persia, was said to be a messiah [Isaiah 45:1] for his historical role in permitting the Jews to return to Judea. Immediately after the Exile, when it was hoped that the Davidic monarchy would be restored, Zechariah notes that Zerubbabel, a descendant of David, as well as Joshua the high priest were both said to be “sons of oil,” that is, anointed ones [Zechariah 4:14].

A messiah in this initial sense is a ruler, an ordinary human being who is recognized as a messiah by being anointed. There is nothing strange or mysterious about these anointed ones any more than there is with the rulers of England who are also anointed as they are crowned.

This is, however, not the concept of messiah that has created all the fuss.

## **Model #2**

In order to understand the next two models that arose within Israelite society prior to the birth of Jesus, some background in understanding eschatological discourse is required.

Sometime towards the end of the Babylonian Exile or shortly thereafter, religious discourse for some changes from the political to an eschatological dimension. A *political* discussion refers to changes in civil structures, now, at this point in time, on earth. These changes will happen in the normal course of history, through human agents. An *eschatological* discussion, on the other hand, refers to massive changes on a worldwide scale -- universal change. These changes are said to happen "soon," that is, at some time to come, in an age to come. They will be brought about, not by ordinary human historical dynamics but by the actions of God intervening dramatically in history.

Eschatological discourse characteristically features secret and mysterious information about the inner dynamics of world history -- "the inside scoop," as it were, populated by strange supernatural beings. It is markedly dualistic: us, the righteous people, versus them, the evil doers. Espousing an eschatological perspective was never mainstream, existing on the margins of Judaism and proliferated typically in literature outside the canonical Hebrew Bible. It is in an eschatological context, however, that robust ideas of "the" messiah appear.

Let's examine some of these writings that are both eschatological and messianic in nature. These provide the background needed for understanding the next two models. They demonstrate how unrealized expectations create a future eschatological hope.

### **a) Second Isaiah -- Israel, the Moral Beacon for Humanity**

Second Isaiah, that is, the Isaiah of chapters 40-55 in our present book of Isaiah, paved the way. Writing just before 539 BCE, that is, just prior to the conquest of the Babylonian Empire by Cyrus the Great, King of Persia, Second Isaiah imagines a wonderful political future for Israel. He announces the New Israel, the servant of God [Isaiah 44:21], whose cities will be rebuilt, Jerusalem included, along with the Temple [Isaiah 44:26-28].

This prophet then shifts to an eschatological dimension. He urges Israelites within the Babylonian Diaspora to get ready to move. There will be geological changes: mountains will be leveled and valleys raised. This represents his poetic way of saying that redemption, the way home, will be easy [Isaiah 40:3-5; Isaiah 49:11]. Likening the return to a new Exodus – even a new Creation – Second Isaiah imagines the desert blooming [Isaiah 44:3; Isaiah 51:3] and Israel adopting a new role on the world stage as a moral beacon to the nations [Isaiah 42: 6; Isaiah 49:6; Isaiah 51:4]. He envisages all exiles returning, not only from Babylonia but also from Egypt and from the west [Isaiah 49:12]. Waxing eloquently about the new state of affairs, he depicts the return as the major news on the world stage. The wealth of other nations will flow into Jerusalem. Israel will be a prominent country [Isaiah 45:14-18].

The return did not happen quite the way Second Isaiah envisaged, however. Not all the exiles returned. Israel was not an independent state, but a vassal of Persia. It did not experience the influx of wealth from surrounding nations. Some exiles straggled back to Judah over a 100-year period. The Temple was modestly rebuilt in 515 BCE and old-timers who remembered the former temple Solomon had built wept when they saw its replacement. Fifty or sixty years later, the religion was transformed under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah. But there were dashed dreams -- prophecies that failed to materialize as described. Perhaps, some thought, the Exile was not yet fully over.

### **(b) Third Isaiah – A New Universe**

A writer we refer to as “Third Isaiah,” that is Isaiah chapters 56-66, writing closer to the year 500 BCE, announces that God is about to create a new heavens and a new earth [Isaiah 65:17], creating Jerusalem as a joy and its people a delight, envisaging the time of universal peace when “wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox” [Isaiah 65:25]. All humanity will come to worship the one God [Isaiah 66:23].

This represents a vastly different world altogether, but it was not the reality on the ground in the new fledgling Jewish state. The world after the Babylonian Exile looked very much like the world before that event, except that the jurisdiction of Judah had limited autonomy, and a modest Temple.

The juxtaposition of expectations versus reality against sparked views that perhaps someday, in an age to come, the universe would be recreated so that all humanity will live in peace, in unity and harmony, under the one God and that Israel would lead the way to this new state of being.

### **(c) 2 Samuel: Covenant with David -- There will always be a David ruling Israel**

Another failed expectation had to do with one of the covenants. There are a number of covenants recorded in the Hebrew Bible – one with Noah, another with Abraham, one between God and the Jewish people conveyed through Moses and one regarding David. This latter covenant has far-reaching consequences for it sets up enormous expectations. God is depicted as saying to David through the prophet Nathan, “Your house and your kingship shall ever be secure before you; your throne shall be established forever” [2 Samuel 7:16]. From the time of David in the 11<sup>th</sup> century down to the Babylonian Exile in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE, there was always a descendant of David on the throne in Jerusalem. The lineage ended during the Babylonian Exile, for the monarchy was not re-established upon the return. Zerubbabel, a descendant of David, smeared with oil, exits from history without the monarchy being reestablished.

What, then, of this covenant? What did God intend? Would there, in the future, be a restoration of the Davidic monarchy? Would this occur at the “end time” when God will recreate the entire universe? What role might this new Davidic monarch play in these momentous happenings?

So dashed expectations that arose when reality did not match prophetic utterances helped fuel eschatological dreams. But another dynamic was also at work. Justice, said some, demands that God act to end evil times. Some came to the position that the times were so corrupt that surely God would act to correct a world gone wrong.

### **(d) Zechariah – The Eschatological DreamWorks Factory of Ancient Israel**

The last chapters of Zechariah --chapters 9-14 – create an eschatological framework.<sup>47</sup> Dated some time to the Greek period, that is after Alexander the Great’s conquest of the Middle East around 333 BCE, Zechariah give us an indication of how some thought the world would dramatically change sometime in the not-too-distant future.

In Zechariah chapters 12-14, God is the main actor. The scenario is described as occurring “on that day.” It is a time of great warfare, with many nations coming up to wage war against Jerusalem. The city will be captured with ensuing looting and rape, and two-thirds of its inhabitants will be slaughtered. Yet God will prevail. Jerusalem will be purified. There will eventually be universal recognition of God – “And the Lord will become king over all the earth;

on that day the Lord will be one and his name one” [Zechariah 14:9]. Survivors of the nations of the world will annual trek up to Jerusalem, “to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the festival of booths” (Succoth) [Zechariah 14:16].

Zechariah creates the contours of Israel’s eschatological dream. There are three phases: (1) evil times, (2) world transformation, and, finally, (3) just desserts when the righteous will be rewarded, evil doers punished and the righteous dead restored to life.

These passages in Zechariah are often overlooked in discussing messianic expectations because, while they set forth the conceptual framework, they make no provision for a messiah. His importance is that he establishes *what* eschatological times will be like. Others present alternative visions *how* those times will transpire.

### **(e) 1 Enoch, Book 2: Here Comes the Judge!**

1 Enoch provides one way of understanding how the time of the end will occur. The timing of 1 Enoch Book 2 is significant.<sup>48</sup> In 167 BCE, just a few decades before this work was produced, Antiochus Epiphanes tried to eradicate Judaism and the Jewish people as a distinctive entity. The Temple was desecrated with offerings of pig meat. Prostitutes cavorted on Temple Mount. Sacred books were burned. The faithful who followed the dietary laws and practiced circumcision were tortured and killed. These were truly evil times and they gave rise to the Maccabean revolt which liberated Jerusalem and the Temple in 164 BCE.

1 Enoch announces that God will soon intervene in history. It will be a time of world transformation, a new universe, in which the righteous will be rewarded, sinners destroyed and the righteous dead resurrected. The eschatological pattern conforms exactly to the model created by Zechariah. What differs, however, are the agents. Instead of God acting solo, Enoch introduces two new players: the Lord of the Spirits and the Messiah. The mysterious Lord of the Spirits is described as focusing his attention on “holy, righteous, and elect” human beings [Enoch 38:4]. The Messiah [Enoch 46, 48] is a righteous agent chosen by the Lord of the Spirits.<sup>49</sup> He is a spiritual being whose sole task is to judge the deeds of the unrighteous including the removal of kings and the powerful from their position of authority.



**Model #2: The Supernatural Judge**

**(1) Evil Times, followed by:**

**(2) World Transformation**

**God transforms the world, assisted by the Lord of the Spirits and the Messiah.**

**The Messiah is a spiritual being who judges the peoples of the world.**

**This results in:**

**(3) Just Desserts**

**where the righteous are rewarded; sinners, destroyed;  
and the righteous dead resurrected.**

For Enoch, the Messiah is a heavenly being judging people from a supernatural location (“a throne of glory”). He is not human -- consequently there is no incarnation, no ruling Israel as the Davidic monarch, no dying, and no resurrection. The Messiah is under the jurisdiction of the Lord of the Spirits. Curiously, there is no indication why this latter entity could not also fulfill the role of the messiah-judge. All in all, the model in Enoch appears cumbersome – at least three entities (God, Lord of the Spirits, a heavenly messiah) busily transforming the world. This is not the model that predominated in Jewish thinking prior to the time of Jesus.

**(f) Psalms of Solomon: The Triumphant Davidic King**

The Psalms of Solomon, a 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.E. document, gives us the fullest account of the role of the messiah and shapes the dominant Jewish understanding of his job description.<sup>50</sup>

The situation that prompts this writing is the capture of Jerusalem by the Roman leader, Pompey, in 63 B.C.E. Welcomed into the city, he seized Temple Mount by force, executed the Jewish resisters led by the high priest and entered the Temple. Sometime after these events, a group of devout Jews compose what we refer to as the “Psalms of Solomon.” [Note, this is not the Book of Psalms we have in the bible].

This writing gives us eye-witness testimony to the devastation within Jerusalem. In actions recalling the earlier events of Antiochus Epiphanes, Psalm 2 [of the Psalms of Solomon] records how the Romans “arrogantly trampled” on Temple Mount “insulting” Jerusalem. Residents of Jerusalem have themselves defiled the Temple and prostitution is widespread. Psalm 2 concludes with a call upon God to act in justice, to repay sinners for their crimes and to

reward the faithful righteous. Psalm 17 begins with a recollection of the perpetual covenant with David and with a summary of the current evil times – devastation, massacre of Jerusalemites, exile, worship of false gods, leaders misleading the people. This psalm, having established that these are clearly evil times, works within the threefold framework established by Zechariah and looks forward next to world transformation and just desserts.

According to the Psalms of Solomon, the messiah is the righteous Jewish king, a descendant of David, who assists God in bringing about world transformation. The result will be a transformed world in which Israel becomes the pre-eminent country, God is acknowledged as the universal God and is worshipped by everyone everywhere, evil-doers are eradicated and the righteous are rewarded. Presumably with sinners destroyed, the world will achieve peace. Exiles will return.

### **Model #3: The Human Eschatological Catalyst**

**The Messiah is a Davidic king who assists God in bringing about world transformation in eschatological times. Specifically this individual must**

- **be the Davidic king of an independent Jewish state, having eliminated foreign domination**
- **judge humanity, rewarding the righteous and eliminating the unrighteous**
- **help usher in an era of universal peace reflecting the universal rule of God**

**During this time exiles will return from the Diaspora and the righteous dead will be restored to life.'**

At the time of Jesus, Model #3 predominated. The messiah would be a human political leader who would emerge at the time of God's transforming the world. The world after the appearance of the messiah will differ vastly from the world before. It was not part of the expectation that the messiah would be an incarnate deity who has a special birth and exceptional death. The focus is not on *who the messiah is* but on *what the messiah must do*.

### **3. Paul's Christ Messiah**

Let's turn to the influential views of Paul, writing in the 50's, some 20 years after the death of Jesus. Paul refers to a *Christos*. *Christos* is the Greek translation of *Mashiach*, but much is lost in translation, as we shall see.

The source of Paul's religion was his mystical experience of the Christ which dramatically changed his life. Emphasizing that he had minimal contact with the leaders of the Jesus Movement in Jerusalem, Paul devised his own set of beliefs and practices. His Christ Movement differed significantly from theirs. To cite only one instance, he developed a Torah-free religion, whereas the Jesus Movement under James in Jerusalem was Torah-observant, as was Jesus. Moreover, Paul was not at all concerned with the Jesus of history, telling us only minimal details -- that he was born, that he was Jewish and that he died. He did not quote the Jesus of history nor did he refer to his teachings, even when he has the opportunity to do so.<sup>51</sup> His source of inspiration is the mystical Christ.

Paul advanced his views of the Christ in his Letter to the Philippians, written some time either in the 50's or early 60's. The view of the Christ that he presented there is as follows. The Christ was a pre-existing being who was born in human form. He was obedient to God. He died. He was exalted so that all humanity can worship him. Those who become like him in death can attain resurrection [Philippians 2:5-11].

Paul thus focuses on *who* the messiah is: the *Christos* or messiah is a dying-rising savior God-human. His task, according to Paul, is to save those who participate in his suffering and death.

#### **Model #4A: Savior of Humanity**

**A Christ is a dying-rising savior God-human who saves those who participate in his suffering and death.**

The focus for Paul is on personal salvation. "Living is Christ," he says [Philippians 1:21], and he stresses he wants "to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead" [Philippians 3: 10, 11]. A believer lives "in Christ" and in life and death is united with Christ. It is because of this mystical unity and also because Christ himself was raised from the dead that the believer can experience resurrection.

Paul probably recognized, however, that this idea of the Christ was insufficient to meet prior criteria for messiah-ship. Where were the expected world transformation and the "just desserts"? In some passages, Paul indicates that he expects the Lord Jesus to return. When

Jesus returns – what Paul calls “the day of Jesus Christ” [Philippians 1:6] – Christ will “hand over the kingdom to God the Father” [1 Corinthians 15:24]. At this time, the dead will be resurrected, those who are alive and righteous will assume a “spiritual body,” all evil powers will be destroyed including death [1 Corinthians 15:20-57]. Paul, it appears, is in fact proposing a two-stage messiah-ship for Christ.

#### **Model 4B – The Christ as Savior Messiah**

##### **Phase One: Savior**

**Christ, a dying-rising savior God-human, saves those who participate in his suffering and death.**

##### **Phase Two: Messiah**

**Christ returns to destroy evil, conquer death, reward the righteous with eternal life. The dead are resurrected.**

## **4. Conclusions**

### **Conclusion #1: Paul’s Christ is not yet a Messiah**

The development of a two-stage messiah-ship is an invention of Paul. Clearly Jesus had not fulfilled the job description on his first go-around. World transformation had not occurred and the righteous had not been truly rewarded. So Paul contends, there has to be a “return” when Christ will return to complete the tasks expected of a messiah.

There was, however, no antecedent in Jewish thought for a two-stage messianic operation. The messiah either would or would not accomplish world transformation. If he did, then he was the messiah. If he didn’t, then he was just a messiah-claimant. In Paul’s case, the Christ is simply a messiah-who-is-yet-to-be. He hasn’t yet performed the tasks necessary to qualify as a messiah. The correct way of describing the Christ, then, is as a messiah-claimant, much the same as Bar-Kokhba or Rabbi Schneerson who have yet to return.

### **Conclusion #2: Paul’s Savior figure derives from Graeco-Roman mystery religions.**

Paul places the Christ’s death-and-resurrection as central to the idea of the messiah, a notion foreign to all previous Jewish views of the messiah. Prior to Paul there was no requirement that the messiah be resurrected. Nor was it expected that he would act as the

“savior-vehicle” through whom all humanity will be saved. These represent new twists on the idea of a messiah.

It would appear as if Paul builds his view of the Christ on models found outside Judaism, in the mystery religions of the time. The Christ is like Dionysus or Mithras or many other figures – heroes who die and rise again to save humanity and whose followers can achieve salvation through participation in the hero’s life and death. While *Christos* translates *Mashiach*, it transports the concept from a Jewish environment into a vastly different world.

**Conclusion #3: Paul’s Christ, even if he were to return as Messiah, does not fully correspond to Jewish messianic expectations.**

Some crucial elements are missing in Paul’s description (Model #4B) versus the Jewish expectation (Model #3).

For one thing, Paul’s concept ignores the political dimension of the Jewish messiah. On his approach, the Christ, when he returns as messiah, will not be the Davidic king who will govern Israel and assist God in bringing about world transformation.

For another, Paul de-Judaizes the concept of the messiah. The Christ is a cosmic savior, a spiritual being who pre-existed his earthly life and whose only task it appears is to save those who participate in his life and death. There is nothing particularly Jewish about him. Paul would probably argue that he was universalizing the messianic notion, but that wasn’t the expectation. The Christ is not the Jewish monarch come to restore Israel to prominence, who encourages the return of Jews from the Diaspora and who overthrows Roman rule.

Thirdly, for Paul, the messiah was not primarily human. The expectation was that the messiah would be born, live and die -- fully human -- with virtues and flaws, but chosen by God as a catalyst, to help bring about a new world order. Paul’s concept, however, is that of a pre-existing spiritual or divine being who appears in human form. For Paul, the Christ has to be a divine figure in order to act as a savior-vehicle, saving all who participate in his life and death and to eventually overcome all cosmic forces of opposition to God’s will.

Finally, proclaiming the Christ as messiah now, in advance of world transformation, ignores the eschatological dimension of the Jewish expectation. The world before and after Jesus appeared looks very much the same. Paul would probably have argued, however, that at least for the individual who is “in Christ,” there are new possibilities that did not exist hitherto. But on a political level, the world was the same. Israel was still ruled by Rome; the righteous continue to suffer; and eschatological times have yet to appear.

Kindly put, Paul has “jumped the gun,” proclaiming the Christ figure as messiah when he is a messiah who is not yet.

**Conclusion #4: Paul’s Christ represents a substitute being**

Paul’s Christ concept reinforces the view that Paul’s religion is different from that of either Judaism or the early Jesus Movement in Jerusalem. Denying the validity of Torah, including male circumcision, the dietary laws, the festivals and the Jewish basis for ethics; and by ignoring the teachings of the Jesus of history, Paul creates a religion based upon a believer’s mystical participation in the Christ.<sup>52</sup> But Paul’s Christ is not the Jewish Messiah: it’s a substitute being, a mystery religion dying-rising savior God-human whom Paul tries to graft on to the Jewish notion of the expected messiah.

Not the real thing at all.

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## ENDNOTES

### TAKING PAUL AT HIS WORD

<sup>1</sup> Presented initially at the American Academy of Religion Meeting, Quebec City, May 2006.

<sup>2</sup> The authentic writings of Paul include: Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians and Philemon. They do not include the Deutero-Pauline epistles (Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians) or the Pastoral letters (1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus). See Bart D. Ehrman's helpful chart in his *The New Testament*, Third Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 287. The documents not included as authentically Pauline are said to be 'pseudonymous,' that is, written by some anonymous author but attributed to Paul.

<sup>3</sup> Hyam Maccoby, *The Mythmaker: Paul and the Invention of Christianity* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986); Gerd Lüdemann, *Paul: The Founder of Christianity* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus books, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> David Wenham, *Paul: Follower of Jesus or Founder of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995); John G. Gager, *Reinventing Paul* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> See Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament*, pp. 362-371.

<sup>6</sup> Burton Mack, *Who Wrote the New Testament?* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), p.99.

<sup>7</sup> As per contemporary scholarship, we do not know who wrote the various gospels, including the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts.

<sup>8</sup> To say "X miscarries Y" is to say that "X is a continuation of Y but somehow misrepresents Y," where X and Y are both part of the same enterprise. To say "X is substituted for Y" is to say that "Y has been replaced by Y" without any claim that X and Y are in any way related.

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<sup>9</sup> I will not discuss the Clementine or Pseudo-Clementine Literature in this paper. We now know that this literature reflects the views of the Ebionites, the intellectual heirs to the Jesus Movement. See Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 182-185. See also translations of *The Letter of Peter to James* and its *Reception*, as well as *The Homilies of Clement* in Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 191-200.

<sup>10</sup> Steve Mason, Tom Robinson, *An Early Christian Reader* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, Inc., 1990), p.306.

<sup>11</sup> See for instance, Bruce Chilton's very readable and informative, *Rabbi Paul* (New York: Doubleday, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> This could be interpreted either as 14 years from his first visit to Jerusalem and so 17 years after his dramatic mystical experience or it could be 14 years from that event.

<sup>13</sup> Bruce Chilton says 46 CE (*Rabbi Paul*, p.268); Burton Mack says 48 CE (*Who Wrote the New Testament?* p.103).

<sup>14</sup> *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), says "about A.D. 55 or slightly earlier" (p. 263 NT); Burton Mack in *Who Wrote the New Testament?* says 52-54 CE.

<sup>15</sup> It is interesting, too, that Paul speaks of them as "rival" teachers, not as "colleagues" as one might expect from members of the same movement. This provides further evidence of distancing his movement from the Jesus Movement if in fact the rival teachers were members of that group.

<sup>16</sup> In a separate incident, one involving Cephas in Antioch, Paul implicates "the circumcision faction" and "people from James" (Galatians 2:11, 12). But these are not so identified as the cause of the disturbances in Galatia.

<sup>17</sup> *Jewish Antiquities*, Book 20, Chapter 8.

<sup>18</sup> There is widespread variation in the dating of the Book of Acts. Burton L. Mack dates Acts to 120 CE (Burton L. Mack, *Who Wrote the New Testament?* p.228. Bart D. Ehrman dates it earlier, to "around 80-85 C.E." [Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament*, p.148]. Timothy Freke and Peter



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Gandy date it to “the second half of the second century,” that is, after 150 CE [Timothy Freke & Peter Gandy, *The Jesus Mysteries*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 1999, p. 156.]

<sup>19</sup> The perception that Acts created is strongly reinforced today by the order in which the New Testament is presented. First we are confronted with the four canonical gospels. Then the Book of Acts. Finally we encounter Paul’s writings (from longest to shortest). The order in which the documents are presented creates the impression that, of course, people in Paul’s time knew ALL that, when, of course, the gospels only appeared 10 to 55 years after Paul’s death (70-120 CE). We do not know what, if anything, they knew of the traditions reflected in these later writings.

### **IF WE ONLY HAD PAUL, WHAT WOULD WE KNOW ABOUT JESUS?**

<sup>20</sup> initially presented at the International Conference on the Arts & Humanities, Honolulu HI, January, 2008,

<sup>21</sup> According to Paul, after his remarkable experience near Damascus, he immediately went away “into Arabia,” returning after a while to Damascus. Then three years later he goes to Jerusalem, staying with Cephas (Peter) and visiting with James for a total of fifteen days. Then some fourteen years later he returns to Jerusalem along with Barnabas and Titus. (Galatians 1:16 – 2:1)

<sup>22</sup> We can now reconstruct the views of his “rival teachers” or “super apostles” from what Paul says about them and we can rightfully ask, who best represents the teachings and practices of Jesus? Paul or emissaries from those in the Jesus Movement in Jerusalem who knew the Jesus of history?

<sup>23</sup> The seven genuine letters of Paul are: Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians and Philemon. Those that are probably pseudonymous include 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus. Those that are possibly pseudonymous are: Ephesians, Colossians and 2 Thessalonians. See list and discussion in Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, p. 287. In addition, there are letters now lost including at least one to the Corinthians and one to the Laodiceans. Paul’s *letters to Seneca* are considered forgeries.

<sup>24</sup> The translation of Paul’s letters that I use is from Steve Mason and Tom Robinson, *An Early Christian Reader* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press Inc., 1990).

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<sup>25</sup> Nor can we rule out the possibility that the gospels themselves were either written or edited after being written to reflect the growing acceptance of Paul's views over his rivals.

<sup>26</sup> Luke 8:2,3

<sup>27</sup> There are some methodological issues here relating to the problem of the historical Jesus. That problem raises the question, how can we now know what Jesus said when (a) he wrote nothing, (b) the sources are many decades later and (c) the writings themselves disagree on key points? There is, unfortunately, no way of getting behind these texts, other than perhaps using the principle "as James, so Jesus." That is, if we can extrapolate from James' teachings and practices back into Jesus, then perhaps we have a basis for adjudicating what Jesus himself may have held and done, James being Jesus' brother who was with him throughout his life and who led the early Jesus Movement in Jerusalem. We do not have to solve this problem here in this paper, however. We will simply compare sayings and teachings of Paul in his genuine letters to sayings and teachings **attributed to** Jesus in the four canonical gospels.

<sup>28</sup> Mason and Robinson note that the passage can also be translated as

*"For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from unchastity, that each of you know how to gain control of (or procure) his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in the passion of lust like the heathen who do not know God; that no man transgress and defraud his brother in business."*

On this translation, the view is that men abstain from unchastity, that is, that they should practice penis-management, controlling their sexual urges and practices. This sexual injunction is curiously combined with the command not to defraud others in business.

<sup>29</sup> Nothing is said, however, about a wife divorcing a husband because of his unchaste behavior.

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<sup>31</sup> Note that the differences between Mark and the later gospel, Matthew, could be accounted for by supposing that Mark reflects Pauline views in a way that Matthew does not.

<sup>32</sup> See Hyman Maccoby, *The Myth-maker: Paul and the Invention of Christianity*, chapter 11.

<sup>33</sup> In this connection it is important to remember that Jesus' arrest, trial and death were made on political grounds, that he was "King of the Jews," not that he contravened Jewish law, Torah, in any respect.

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<sup>34</sup> Mason & Robinson, *op.cit.*, p. 549.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Note that Jesus is singling out *the two most important* commandments, not the *only* commandments. Torah still applies.

<sup>37</sup> Another reason why Paul could not have used Jesus' twofold summary of the law, had he known of it, is that one of the first four commandments – duties towards God – include honoring the Sabbath, to keep it holy. With Paul's rejection of Torah went the abolition of Sabbath observance.

<sup>38</sup> 2 Peter 3:10 ("But the day of the Lord will come like a thief..."); Revelation 3:3 ("I will come like a thief"); Revelation 16:15 ("Lo, I am coming like a thief"). Revised Standard Version translation.

<sup>39</sup> If this passage reflects what the historical Jesus said, in the 20's, then the lifetime of a generation alive at that time would stretch only to 90 CE (20 CE plus average generation life span of 70 years). Matthew's original readers may have read this differently, thinking that it pertains to their generation (80 CE plus average generation life span of 70 years). In either instance, world transformation was expected to have occurred either by 90 or 150 CE.

<sup>40</sup> In particular, the practice of circumcision bothered Paul and he rails against it. Although the bible traces the Jewish origins of circumcision to Abraham and describes it as a practice in perpetuity, Paul contends that "*neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God*" (1 Corinthians 7:19). Clearly Paul neglects to note that this was one of the commandments of God and that Jesus himself had been circumcised. In Galatians Paul says that "*if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you,*" pointing out that "*every man who receives circumcision... is bound to keep the whole law*" (Galatians 5:2,3).

<sup>41</sup> See my book, *How Jesus Became Christian* [New York: St. Martin's Press; Toronto: Random House; London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson] for an examination of Paul's arguments in rejection of Torah observance.

<sup>42</sup> Opposition to Paul, mentioned in most of his letters and also in the Book of Acts, tends to focus mostly on his rejection of Torah.

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<sup>44</sup> The reference to “Cephas and then to the twelve” appears to be shorthand, for Cephas (Peter) was one of the twelve and Judas Iscariot had already betrayed Jesus. This reference also omits reference to Mary Magdalene who according to Matthew 28:1, was also a witness to the resurrection.

### **WHAT’S A MESSIAH TO DO?**

<sup>45</sup> Originally presented at the 5<sup>th</sup> International Conference on the Humanities, Honolulu, January 2007.

<sup>46</sup> Other royal psalms include: 2 (Coronation); 18 (Thanks for Success in Battle); 20 (pre victory); 21 (post victory); 45 (royal wedding); 47 (God enthroned as King); 72 (God=s blessing upon the King); 93, 95, 96, 97 98, 101, 110 (Lord promises victory to the king).

<sup>47</sup> There are two collections of oracles appended to the Zechariah scroll, chapters 9-11; chapters 12-14.

<sup>48</sup> For the full text of 1 Enoch, see James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, volume one, pp. 5-89. Book Two of 1 Enoch, “*The Book of the Similitudes*,” is dated from approximately 105-64 BCE (*op.cit.*, p. 7).

<sup>49</sup> In this work the Messiah is referred to variously as the “Righteous One,” “Anointed One,” “Chosen One,” “Son of Man” or the “Elect One”). Enoch Book 2 also refers to a “congregation of the righteous” whose appearance triggers world cataclysm.

<sup>50</sup> Essentially the same view of the messiah and of the eschatological age is found in the Dead Sea Scroll community. Demonstrating this will be the subject of another paper.

<sup>51</sup> For instance, on the subject of Torah observance in Galatians, Paul never refers to the teachings or practices of Jesus in support of his rejection of Torah. In terms of ethical instructions in Galatians, he never refers to the ethical teachings of Jesus. On the subject of divorce in 1 Corinthians, he never refers to what Jesus taught on this topic as mentioned in the gospels. Furthermore, on the subject of eating meat sacrificed in temples dedicated to pagan deities, he never refers to the teachings of James in Jerusalem that required Gentiles to abstain from meats obtained from such temples and which were not properly slaughtered. On these

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topics of major importance – overall lifestyle, ethics, marriage and divorce, food – Paul does not refer to the teachings of Jesus.