

**PREPRINT – A.Y. Reed, “Christianity, Second Temple,” forthcoming in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Jewish History, Religion, and Culture*, ed. Judith Baskin, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.**

Among the significant events of the last century of the Second Temple period was the emergence of the Jesus Movement. The birth of Jesus can be dated around 6–4 BCE, and his death around 30–33 CE. The earliest surviving writings by a follower of Jesus are the letters of Paul, penned in the 50s and 60s. The oldest written accounts of the life of Jesus (Gospels of Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John) and of the deeds of the first generation of his followers (Book of Acts) date from after the destruction of the Second Temple. These and other texts in the New Testament preserve evidence that the Jesus Movement originated as a movement within Judaism, even as they also reflect its increasing appeal to Gentiles.

In research on Christianity, it was once common to treat Jesus and/or Paul as founders of a new “religion” (A.J. Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew* [2004]). Consistent with the theological training and institutional settings of most New Testament scholars, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century studies often took for granted a supersessionist model of history; they read the origins of Christianity as the restoration of biblical piety from the alleged corruption of “late Judaism” (the older label for what is now termed “Second Temple Judaism”). In the wake of World War II and the Holocaust, however, concerted efforts were made to shed such theological biases, and there has emerged a new understanding of Second Temple Judaism and Christian Origins. In addition, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls brought new attention to non-canonical sources, exposing the rich variety in Jewish belief and practice in Second Temple times. Scholars have increasingly understood the Jesus Movement as one among many apocalyptic and messianic movements in Second Temple Judaism (P. Fredriksen, *Jesus of Nazareth* [1999]). Accordingly, they have read the New Testament literature as evidence both for the diversity of Second Temple Judaism and for the origins of Christianity.

Much about the historical Jesus remains debated. Was he a wisdom teacher, political revolutionary, and/or apocalyptic prophet? Did he see himself as the messiah (Greek: *christos*)? One of the few points of consensus is that Jesus was a Jew; he was born of a Jewish mother, and he lived and died as a Jew in the Land of Israel. Josephus’ account of Jewish history, for instance, includes a passing reference to Jesus and depicts him as a wise-man and wonder-worker (*Antiquities* 18.63–64). Likewise, in the stories about his life in the Gospels, we find no hint that Jesus saw himself as anything other than a Jew. Even though the Gospels were written at a later time, when some of Jesus’ followers were developing a self-definition in distinction from their Jewish contemporaries, these texts preserve traditions about Jesus preaching in synagogues, celebrating Passover, interpreting Jewish scriptures, and debating halakhic issues with Pharisees. Jesus is described as teaching by means of parables that recall, in form and content, the *meshalim* of Jewish Wisdom literature and Rabbinic Midrash. Many of his parables concern the coming of the “kingdom of God.” In this too, Jesus fits well with the Judaism of his time, an age of uncertainty and upheaval when many charismatic leaders warned of the impending End of Time. There are also some hints that Jesus understood his message as first meant for Jews; according to the Gospel of Matthew, for instance, he initially instructed his followers to preach only to “the lost sheep of Israel” (10:6).

Jesus' Jewishness is even evident in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7), a set of teachings that later Christians understood as exemplifying Jesus' break from Judaism. The statements here attributed to Jesus, however, include exhortations to observe the whole of the Torah (5:17–20). Such statements shed an interesting perspective on his polemics against Pharisees (e.g., Matthew 23), raising the possibility that he and his followers were engaged in inner-Jewish controversies akin to the debates between other sects in Second Temple times.

According to the Gospels and Book of Acts, the Jesus Movement initially consisted of Jews who believed that Jesus was the messiah foretold in the Jewish scriptures. It was centered in Jerusalem and led by Peter. Followers of Jesus frequented the Temple and preached their message in synagogues (e.g., Acts 3; 13; 17–18). Like other Jewish apocalyptic and messianic movements of the time, they supported their claims with biblical proof-texts, drawing on the writings of the prophets in particular. And, like other such groups, they met with resistance from other Jews who did not share their particular beliefs.

Those who believed in Jesus as messiah, however, faced an additional challenge in persuading other Jews: the one whom they claimed as messiah was dead, slain at the hands of Romans. Jesus' followers proclaimed that he had been resurrected, and they developed an understanding of his death as inaugurating a series of end-time events that included his future return. Such claims seem to have been met with skepticism among many of their fellow Jews (cf. Matthew 28:15).

Some members of the Jesus Movement understood the coming of the messiah as marking the inclusion of Gentiles in God's promises to Israel – consistent with biblical and Second Temple Jewish ideas about the in-gathering of “the nations” at the End of Time (e.g., Isaiah 2:2–4; 14:1–2; 19:18–25; Jeremiah 3:17; Micah 4:1–5; *1 Enoch* 90). The inclusion of Gentiles was promoted particularly by Saul/Paul, who was a Pharisee and possibly a student of R. Gamaliel the Elder (Acts 22:3). Although Paul was not a disciple of Jesus during his lifetime, he later came to believe that Jesus was messiah. In his letters, he describes how a vision prompted him to change his name from Saul to Paul and to become the “messenger/envoy (Greek: *apostolos*) to the Gentiles” (Romans 11:13; Galatians 2:2). Paul argued that Gentiles could be saved through faith in Jesus, even apart from Torah-observance (e.g., Romans 1–9; Galatians 1–3). He traveled throughout the Roman Empire spreading his message and founding communities.

There were others in the Jesus Movement, however, who did not share Paul's approach to Gentile inclusion. Some appear to have believed that Gentiles could join the Jesus Movement only if they first converted to Judaism. In the letters of Paul and Book of Acts, we find references to those who required circumcision of Gentile male converts (Galatians 2:12; Acts 15:1–5). Contestation surrounding the inclusion of Gentiles is also evinced by debates about dietary issues. Jesus' brother James, for instance, apparently believed that Jewish followers of Jesus must maintain their ritual purity through separation from Gentiles, particularly at meals (Galatians 2:11–14; cf. Acts 10:28; Colossians 2:21). Initially, Peter seems to have embraced a similar position, whereby Torah-observance was incumbent on all members of the Jesus Movement (Galatians 2:12; Acts 10–11). It seems that he only later became convinced that circumcision was unnecessary for Gentile converts (Acts 15:6). According to the Book of Acts, Peter ruled that they need only avoid fornication, blood, improperly slaughtered meat, and food offered to idols (15:20), thus

voicing a view of Gentile salvation that resonates with later Rabbinic traditions about the Noachide commandments (*t.Avodah Zarah* 8.4).

Scholars continue to debate whether Paul believed that the coming of the messiah had negated the need for Torah-observance for Jews as well as Gentiles (S. Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul* [2004]). It has been suggested, for instance, that Paul may have maintained the efficacy of Torah-observance for Jews, even as he also believed that a separate path to salvation for Gentiles had been opened with the coming of Jesus (J.G. Gager, *Reinventing Paul* [2002]). In any case, it may be significant that Paul continued to self-identify as a Jew and as a Pharisee (Galatians 2:15; Philippians 3:5; Acts 22:3; 26:4–5). Eventually, the Pauline Epistles would be interpreted in terms of Christian claims concerning the abrogation of Torah-observance by the Gospel and the supersession of Israel by the church. Paul's own position on such questions, however, is less clear.

After the deaths of James, Paul, and Peter, the Jesus Movement became increasingly displaced from its original Galilean and Judaeian settings. In the wake of the Bar Kokhba Revolt, the Jerusalem church waned in power. The communities founded by Paul and others elsewhere in the Roman Empire flourished, and the movement attracted more and more Gentile converts. In the New Testament literature, we can discern the first traces of a long process by which some believers in Jesus distinguished themselves first from other Jewish groups and then from "Judaism" more broadly.

Nevertheless, it is perhaps not coincidental that so many Second Temple Jewish writings were preserved and transmitted by late antique and medieval Christian scribes (e.g., Apocrypha; "Old Testament Pseudepigrapha"; writings of Philo and Josephus). Nor should it be surprising that there are so many parallels to early Christian traditions in Second Temple Jewish literature. The Jesus Movement's origins in Second Temple Judaism continued to resonate in Christian belief and practice, leaving open lines for contact, conflict, and competition between Christians and Jews for many centuries.