

**A Man of Many Faces:  
Saint Paul and Early Christianity**



**Introduction**

The period directly after the death of Jesus Christ to the end of the Bar Kokhba Revolt of 135 C.E is one filled with great debate among religious scholars.<sup>1</sup> It was during this time that the young Christian faith went from having a local following in Palestine to a religion that had members across the Roman Empire. No figure has had more of an effect on the development and spread of this early Christianity than Paul of Tarsus.<sup>2</sup> However, for a figure so vital to a religious movement, his actions and motives have been surrounded by mystery and controversy. Some scholars believe that he, not Jesus of Nazareth, was the actual founder of Christianity.<sup>3</sup> Other scholars argue that Paul was actually a Gnostic,<sup>4</sup> while still others believe Paul represented Christ's real message.<sup>5</sup> It is important to look at Paul from all possible angles, which is often not done. As author Calvin Roetzel put it, people in general are, "conditioned to read Paul through Reformation lenses."<sup>6</sup>

It is important to note that Jesus and Paul never met while Jesus was alive, therefore, they could not have collaborated on a unified message. The men who were closest to Jesus while he was alive left no writings, but Paul did. Thirteen of the twenty-seven books in the New Testament are traditionally attributed to Paul.<sup>7</sup> He is also the vital figure in the Book of Acts.<sup>8</sup> These documents are the main sources for Paul's life. Paul's influence was clearly seen among the early church fathers. Every other modern commentator on Christianity has had to come to grips with him as well.<sup>9</sup> Traditionally, Christians believe Paul was the great messenger of Jesus' mission of his death and resurrection representing the salvation of the world.<sup>10</sup> However, after Jesus' death, Paul's view of the message was only one of many that would eventually develop. This paper will review the milieu of Judea during the rise of Christianity, and examine the leadership within the young movement in Jerusalem. It will also discuss the authenticity of Paul's letters, and describe the Christian sects that emerged after the death of Jesus with the goal of discovering why Paul's view of Jesus became the Orthodox one.

### **Background**

Bishop N.T Wright states that Paul belongs in "three worlds."<sup>11</sup> The first being the period of Second Temple Judaism, the second being the Hellenistic/Greek world and the third being Roman.<sup>12</sup> The Jewish world of the Second Temple Period was dominated by four main Jewish sects, the Sadducees, the Pharisees, the *Sicarii* and the Essenes. The Sadducees were the party that ran the Temple in Jerusalem. They traced their lineage through Zadok, who was the High Priest under Kings David and Solomon. Throughout the First and Second Temple periods they formed the priestly hierarchy inside The Temple. They were seen as the aristocratic class by others in Jerusalem.<sup>13</sup> The Sadducees were chiefly concerned with the political life inside Jerusalem. They had great influence in this area, due to the fact that they ran The Temple. As a

result of this, they did not hold the messianic beliefs of the Pharisees, who left everything in God's hands. The Sadducees served as the chief negotiators with Rome. They also rejected the belief in a bodily resurrection, along with the immortality of the soul.<sup>14</sup> In practice, the Sadducees only used the exact written words contained in the Law of Moses, rejecting other works that were used by the Pharisees such as the Books of Isaiah and Daniel. As a result of the destruction of the Temple to which the Sadducees were so connected, they gradually faded from history. Because of this, very little is known about the Sadducees, except for what comes from Josephus, some Talmudic literature, and the New Testament.<sup>15</sup>

The Pharisees were the sect that represented the views of the majority of Jewish people during the mid-late Second Temple Period.<sup>16</sup> They openly opposed the Sadducees. The Pharisees were first mentioned by Josephus, who cites their opposition to the Hasmonean kings. The Pharisees were less stern in their execution of the law than the Sadducees were. As the Pharisees opposed the [Sadducean backed Hasmoneans] they approached the Roman general Pompey and asked him to overthrow the Hasmonean ruler. As a result, Pharisee influence grew immensely. With the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, almost total control of the Jewish faith fell to the Pharisees. The Pharisees shaped the face of what is now considered the Jewish religion. The Pharisees held on strongly to the hope of a Messiah. Their Messianic beliefs were closely tied to their beliefs in the immortality of the soul and a bodily resurrection. Their belief system gave many of the average Jews a sense of hope for a better future.<sup>17</sup>

The *Sicarii* rose in Jerusalem during the 50's CE. Their name originated from the small daggers they used as weapons.<sup>18</sup> The first century historian Josephus wrote of them;

They employed daggers in size resembling the scimitars of the Persian, but curved and more like weapons called by the Romans *sicae*, from which this brigands took their name because they slew so many in this way. For as we said previously, they would mingle at the festivals with the crowd of those who

streamed into the city from all directions to worship and thus easily assassinated any they pleased.<sup>19</sup>

They believed that anyone who acknowledged the rule of Rome was a traitor. Their rallying cry was: “No king but God!”<sup>20</sup> Their main tactic was assassination. They resorted to this tactic because they knew they could not defeat the Romans with conventional warfare. They kept their numbers low, so they could have operational security. They operated mainly in an urban environment, in the heart of Jerusalem, conducting assassinations. The *Sicarii*'s targets were almost exclusively other Jews, specifically nobility but normally not against Romans. Most likely their targets were not randomly selected, but were part of an overall strategy to end Roman rule. Their main goal was to gain more allies from the Jewish population. They believed that as the Roman reaction grew more violent more Jews would support their actions. However, the *Sicarii* were not directly involved in the Revolt of 66 CE, and gradually withdrew from it all together.<sup>21</sup>

The last group, the Essenes were originally a branch of the Pharisees, but at some point prior to the Roman occupation, began to separate themselves. Evidence shows that there may have been a connection between the Essenes and Christianity. There is a strong possibility that John the Baptist was an Essene. Baptism was an important part of Essenes ritual. John's baptism of Jesus was one of the key moments that led Jesus to begin his ministry. Unlike traditional Judaism which focused on more worldly matters, the Essenes preached more on spiritual, other worldly matters, similar to Christian doctrine.<sup>22</sup> They rejected the Hellenistic influences that they believed were infiltrating Jerusalem. The purpose of the Essenes sect was to live a righteous life, through, “love of virtue or humility, and chastity.”<sup>23</sup> Josephus wrote that the Essenes were present during the reign of the Macabees. The Essenes followed the law to its letter. They separated themselves from contemporary Jewish society, focusing on study of the law, and work

for their community, while abstaining from, “sensual pleasures.”<sup>24</sup> They lived in a communal society, where all possessions were shared. Personal property did not exist in their communities. Most likely they lived in separate communities that did remain somewhat connected to each other. Josephus wrote that they believed in the immortality of the soul, the bodily resurrection, a day of final judgment and stayed away from the functions of the Temple in Jerusalem. King Herod believed they held special powers.<sup>25</sup> Archeological evidence holds that the main Essene community was located in Qumran, and it is generally believed they were the authors of the Dead Sea Scrolls. However, recently this hypothesis has been challenged. Scholars such as Esther Eshel have stated that they believed no Jewish community even existed at Qumran, and that the Dead Sea Scrolls originated in Jerusalem.<sup>26</sup> It is generally accepted that the Essenes, like many Jewish-Christian sects faded from history in the period after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE to the end of the Bar Kokhba Revolt in 135 CE. Most likely, many were killed when the Romans attacked Qumran in 68 CE.<sup>27</sup>

### **Jesus of Nazareth**

Into this world came a Jewish preacher named Jesus of Nazareth. The Romans considered Jesus to be a political rebel from Galilee. Jesus’ mission lasted around two years.<sup>28</sup> Around 30 CE, Jesus arrived in Jerusalem during the week of Passover. The Thursday of Passover week, after a meal with his followers, Jesus was arrested by Temple authorities in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus was convicted as a political enemy of Rome, and executed on the orders of the Procurator Pontius Pilate.<sup>29</sup>

It is clear that Jesus’ doctrine was influenced by the oppressive domination of the Roman occupation. It is clear that Jesus, through his message of the coming Kingdom of God, was trying to bring hope to the Judean peasantry. Whether this kingdom was spiritual one or a restoration of the Davidic line is debatable. There is some evidence that suggests that the true

nature of his movement was nationalistic, not a peaceful spiritual one. Jesus himself said in Mathew's Gospel; "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword."<sup>30</sup> The description given to describe two of Jesus' closest followers James and John as "Thunderers" certainly does not have a peaceful connotation to it. However, it is clear that the Roman authorities believed he was preaching of an earthly kingdom, and thus had him arrested and executed.<sup>31</sup>

### **James and Peter**

After the death of Jesus, a leader needed to emerge from among the young Jewish sect. The young movement had in it around 120 members.<sup>32</sup> His remaining followers formed the community in Jerusalem. The original followers of Jesus were spread around Palestine, and were united by the belief that Jesus was the Messiah. However, what that meant is uncertain. Many views of the true nature of Jesus emerged during this time. The term "Jewish Christians" is a very complicated one, encompassing the entire early period after the death of Jesus. The terms "original" and "legalist Christianity" can also be applied, meaning the same thing. Generally the term is referring to people that were born Jewish but came to believe in Jesus. They generally were against the Gentile Christianity of Paul, and his rejection of the Torah. The first followers were known as Nazarenes, and were all Jewish. However, there is a debate among scholars about what exactly the Nazarenes believed were in regards to the divinity of Jesus. There is a possibility that all of the original Christians went by the name Nazarenes. Scholar James Tabor writes, "The Jesus movement was from early on referred to as the Nazarenes, which roughly translates as the Messianists or the people of the branch."<sup>33</sup>

It was Jesus' brother James who emerged as the leader of the followers of The Way. This seems to come through in the book of Acts, such as Acts 15:13 which reads, "When they

finished, James spoke up, ‘Brothers, listen to me.’<sup>34</sup> The Clementine influenced writings, which often favored Peter, show that he was a subordinate to James. Early church fathers pointed out that Jesus’ early followers Peter and John stepped aside to allow James to become leader of the sect. However, some scholars believed that James actually held this position from the very beginning of the movement in Jerusalem. James was clearly the leader of the Jewish-Christian movement that emerged after the death of Jesus.<sup>35</sup>

James was most likely an Orthodox Jew following the Nazarite lifestyle.<sup>36</sup> The Nazarite Jews took vows of abstinence, and followed the prescriptions laid out in the Book of Numbers.<sup>37</sup> He would have been forbidden to touch the dead. If he somehow became unclean, he would have to offer a sacrifice to God.<sup>38</sup> Due to his strict adherence to Judaic Law, James was at first able to avoid persecution at the hands of the Sadducees. In his *The Ecclesiastical History*, Church history Eusebius quotes Hegesippus as saying;

He was called the ‘Just’ by all men from the Lord’s time to ours, since many are called James, but he was holy from his mother’s womb. He drank no wine and strong drink, nor did he eat flesh; No razor went upon his head; he did not anoint himself with oil, and he did not go to the baths. He alone was allowed to enter the sanctuary, for he did not wear wool, but linen, and he used to enter alone in the temple, and found kneeling and praying for forgiveness for the people, so that his knees grew hard like a camels because of his constant worship of God, kneeling and asking forgiveness for the people.<sup>39</sup>

However, as Paul’s message became more popular, James’ role has been relatively forgotten. The Catholic Church preaches that Mary the Mother of Jesus, remained a virgin her whole life, and thus James became a relative, not a brother.<sup>40</sup> In later Gospels James fails to appear as a vital part of Jesus’ ministry during lifetime. He is only mentioned in passing as a brother of Jesus who was against his ministry. The Gospel of John states that James was originally not a believer of Jesus. Church stories say that James became a believer after the resurrection of Jesus. In 1st Corinthians, Paul lists James as one of the people that the risen Jesus

appeared to.<sup>41</sup> The one New Testament writing attributed to James, “The Epistle of James,” could possibly be a representation of the Pre-Pauline views of the Jewish-Christians.<sup>42</sup> Some scholars argue later church fathers who shared Paul’s view of Jesus made sure James and Jesus’ other relatives had an insignificant role.<sup>43</sup>

James was killed in 62 CE. By the High Priest Ananus for his resistance to Roman occupation and more specifically his resistance to the Jews in leadership who served the Romans. Josephus points to a conspiracy to remove James involving both Ananus and King Agrippa the II. Ananus was appointed High Priest by Agrippa, and both had much to gain by removing James. Agrippa and Herod’s relationship grew in the 50’s CE. There is a possibility that both Agrippa and Herod blamed James for the anti-Roman disturbances that occurred during this time. James clearly opposed the appointment of Jewish leaders by the Romans, especially the position of High Priest.<sup>44</sup> Eusebius gives three accounts of James’ death from Clement, Hegesippus and lastly from Josephus.<sup>45</sup> Josephus wrote;

And so he (High Priest Ananus) convened the judges of the Sanhedrin and brought before them a man named James, the brother of Jesus who was called the Christ, and certain others. He accused them of having transgressed (breaking) the law and delivered them up to be stoned.<sup>46</sup>

However, the Book of Acts fails to mention the death of James.<sup>47</sup>

After James’ death, Hegesippus stated that his role of bishop was fulfilled by his cousin;

And after James the Just had suffered martyrdom, as had the Lord also and on the same account, again Symeon the son of Clopas, descended from the Lord’s uncle, is made bishop, his election being promoted by all as being a kinsman of the Lord.<sup>48</sup>

It is clear that the Jerusalem sect was under the control of Jesus’ family, who were descendants of the “House of David.” They saw themselves as the royal family, who wanted the messiah, or “Son of David” to return to control the Jewish state. Those that held leadership

positions and personally knew Jesus made it very hard for outsiders to enter the movement, due to its close nature.<sup>49</sup>

Orthodox Christian tradition holds that after the death of Jesus, Peter, not James led the early movement and oversaw a community of around 120 believers. Orthodox tradition stated that Peter was able to hold together the young movement with his strong personality. Peter was from the town of Bethsaida, which was Hellenistic. Because of this, Peter would have most likely known some Greek along with the languages of Galilee.<sup>50</sup>

This most likely helped him hold together the young sect which included members from Galilee, Asia Minor, Judah and the Eastern Diaspora. Peter was also assisted by the brothers James and John, who were two of Jesus' original disciples. Peter led many of the earliest converts, many of whom were Hellenistic Jews from the Diaspora, in the aftermath of Jesus' death. Some scholars such as J. Klausner state that these Jews were the bedrock of the new sect. Klausner wrote, "If it had not been for them (Hellenistic Jewish converts), Christianity would have remained a Jewish sect like the Essenes."<sup>51</sup> Once Peter assumed his role and began spreading the message of Jesus, the Sadducean Temple authorities began to take note. It is possible that the sect was growing, which caused the Temple authorities to take note of the sect. As Acts 4:4 says, "But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand."<sup>52</sup> Temple authorities were obviously disturbed by the story of a resurrected criminal who was executed by the Romans, being spread. Temple authorities arrested both Peter and John as a warning, but eventually released them. However their arrest only increased interest in the sect. As a result, Peter and John were again arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin. However, one of the leading Pharisees named Gamaliel, the alleged teacher of Paul, rose to defend them. He noted that in the past there were numerous other messianic sects,

all of which eventually ended, and if this sect was not of God it would fail as well. As a result of Gamaliel's words, they were eventually given a minor punishment and let go.<sup>53</sup> Traditional Christian belief holds that Peter headed the Jewish-Christian sects until around 44 CE.<sup>54</sup> In that same year, Peter was again arrested, but this time it was under the command of King Agrippa I. He then "escaped" from prison, and carried out missionary work beyond Jerusalem. Some evidence points to the possibility that Peter served as a bridge between the Jewish Christians and the spreading Gentile Churches. Later church tradition holds that Peter went to Rome where he was martyred around 64 CE during the Christian persecutions under Emperor Nero.<sup>55</sup>

### **Jewish Wars**

One of the most vital events in the history of both Judaism and Christianity was the Jewish Revolt of 66-70 CE. In the context of the entire Roman Empire, the Judean Province did not play a vital role. However, with the beginning of the revolt in 66 CE, the empire turned its attention to destroy those in Judaea that opposed their rule, especially Messianic organizations. Many Jews who violently opposed Roman rule during the revolt became known as Zealots, which means one who is, "jealous on the behalf of God."<sup>56</sup> The Zealots believed that the only one who could rule Judaea had to be a Jew from the line of David. However, the Zealots and other Jews were unable to defeat and overcome the might of the Roman Empire. In the end in 70 CE, the Temple was destroyed, and over a million Jews were killed when the Roman over conquered Jerusalem. Unfortunately, very few original followers of the Jesus or Movement or The Way, survived the war. It seems likely that after the revolt began, the members of The Way saw no other option but to join the revolt, and suffered the same fate as others who opposed Roman rule. In the aftermath, any writings that may have been produced by these followers were destroyed and lost to history. The end of the revolt only intensified the tension between Jews

who accepted Jesus and traditional Jews. Thus those Jews who believed in Jesus saw it in their best interest to disconnect themselves from traditional Judaism. They believed by doing this, it could help them avoid the wrath of the Romans, who worked to weed out the armed messianic movements.<sup>57</sup>

The Jews mounted one more revolt against Rome rule in 132 CE. This revolt lasted until roughly 135 CE, and resulted in the total annihilation of Jerusalem and over 580,000 Jews killed in battle. The Jewish people were expelled from their lands, and over the years, anti-Semitism began to evolve. Any small, remaining remnants of the Nazarenes would have been engulfed by the Romans.<sup>58</sup>

### **Traditional View of Paul**

All the “facts” that are going to be discussed in this section have been debated by scholars at one time or another. Other scholarly opinions will be discussed later in the paper in the section titled “Other Views of Paul.” Traditional belief says that Paul came from the city of Tarsus, which was a Roman town in Asia Minor, that had a large Jewish community.<sup>59</sup> Paul was a Roman citizen and practiced the trade of tent making.<sup>60</sup> He most likely knew both Greek and Aramaic, and tradition holds that he was trained as a Pharisee, learning at the school of the Palestinian rabbi Gamaliel. His influence help make Paul a devotee to traditional Judaism. This would have clearly brought him into conflict with the Hellenist Jews. He was indirectly involved in the death of Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Paul viewed the Christian movement as an affront to Judaism.<sup>61</sup>

It is important to note that the views stated above are not the only theories about Paul. It is first important to point out the possible gaps in the traditional theory. As was stated, the book of Acts claims that Paul was a Pharisee who studied under Gamaliel. Some scholars believe that the

author of Acts inserted Paul's Pharisaic beliefs to show how radical his conversion to Christianity truly was. However it is important to note that Paul himself never mentions this in any of his own letters.<sup>62</sup> Author Hyam Maccoby believes that Paul actually represented the anti-Pharisee tradition that emerged later in the Christian Gospels. Maccoby also discusses how the circumstances of Paul working for the Temple do not match with the historical reality. He states that the only situation in which the High Priest would use his police force was if he perceived a threat to the Roman Government. If Paul was working for the High Priest, it simply seems more reasonable that he was a Sadducee. In fact, many Pharisees sympathized with the early Jesus movement. In the Gospels themselves two Pharisees Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea sympathized with Jesus and his movement. Gamaliel himself did not condemn the new movement as one against the law. He believed it was a Messianic movement that opposed the Roman occupation.<sup>63</sup> If the new Jesus Movement's main tenets involved opposition to Roman rule, this would have fit with the sentiments of many Pharisees. If the Jesus Movement openly opposed the Torah, it seems unlikely the young sect would have received any support from the Pharisees.<sup>64</sup>

Whoever Paul was, his persecution of Christians can be seen in Acts;

I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them.<sup>11</sup> Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. In my obsession against them, I even went to foreign cities to persecute them.<sup>65</sup>

Paul was possibly ordered to continue his persecutions in Damascus, which had a reputation for being a hiding place for dissenting Palestinian groups.<sup>66</sup> After the death of Stephen many Christians, fearing for their safety, moved to Damascus. However, the High Priest had no authority in Damascus, due to the fact it was controlled by the Nabatean Kingdom, which

controlled both Jordan and Arabia.<sup>67</sup> This fact raises the question on whose authority Paul was working. He may have possibly been acting on his own volition. On his way to Damascus in 34 CE, Christians believe Paul had an experience that would forever change his life. He was clearly a changed man, as the book of Acts shows.

Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?" Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ.<sup>68</sup>

The traditional Christian view holds that Paul's change was a miraculous one, with him seeing a vision of the risen Jesus.<sup>69</sup> The story goes that while on the Road to Damascus, a bright light struck Saul to the ground, blinding him. While on the ground a voice asked him why he was persecuting him. Saul asked who it was, and the voice responded saying it was Jesus, the one who Saul was persecuting.<sup>70</sup> The voice then told Saul to continue to Damascus, where he would receive further instructions. Once he arrived on Damascus, he met the Christian Ananias who made him see again, and most likely baptized him.<sup>71</sup> This vision altered Paul's zealous Pharisaic view of the law, and instead began preaching a message to all, including the Gentiles, of salvation through the risen Jesus. It seems that Paul was striving to form some kind of equality between Jews and Gentile converts.<sup>72</sup>

### **First Jerusalem Conference**

According to the Book of Acts, Paul went to Jerusalem, where he came in contact with the leaders of the early sect in what is known as The First Jerusalem Conference;

When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord.<sup>73</sup>

It remains unclear exactly why Paul went to Jerusalem. The date was most likely around 37 CE. However he did not remain there very long. Galatians 1:18-19 states “Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter and stayed with him fifteen days. I saw none of the other apostles—only James, the Lord's brother.”<sup>74</sup> Most likely Paul had to defend his alleged “conversion” to James who would have been skeptical of his new faith, and thus was very cautious in his movements around Jerusalem. His works as a persecutor of followers of The Way would have been well known to James. There is also the possibility that Paul met only briefly with The Way and spent most of his time staying with Hellenistic Jews. Traditional scholars hold that the two discussed the way the message of Jesus’ resurrection would be conducted. However, even traditional scholars hold that Paul was generally not well received among the followers of The Way. Paul then returned to his home in Tarsus, most likely fearing for his own safety at the hands of those hostile to his message, including Greek Jews. There is little known about this period in Paul’s life, and there is debate among scholars on how long Paul remained in Tarsus, but it seems to have been a substantial period. Paul used his time in Tarsus to prepare for his next mission.<sup>75</sup>

### **Antioch**

Paul next move was to Antioch. The book of Acts states that both Paul and his follower Barnabas moved into Antioch, and were welcomed by the followers of Jesus who were living there. The city of Antioch was an important trade route for the Roman Empire and also had a substantially large Jewish community. The followers of Jesus in Antioch did operate somewhat independently of the leadership in Jerusalem. Their freedom from Jerusalem may have given Paul an opportunity to preach his message of Jesus as well as his doctrine of fulfillment of Judaic

Law. It is also important to note that it was the Jewish-Christian Community in Antioch that was first referred to as Christians. It is unclear whether this name was invented by the Christians or given to them by the Romans.<sup>76</sup> Antioch was also the first place where Paul declared himself an “Apostle.” Paul remained in Antioch from around 40-45 C.E. It was around 45 C.E when he began his first mission to Asia Minor. Traditional scholars contend that the main reason for Paul’s travels was to organize and develop Christian communities where they were no Christians. However, these communities on Asia Minor already had members of the Jesus movement living there, and seems likely that he was there to preach his message of Jesus. Paul could also use his established relationship with the church at Antioch to make his message seem more creditable to those communities in Asia Minor.<sup>77</sup>

#### **Paul’s Travels 45-50 CE.**

As Paul traveled, he spread his view of Jesus’ message. The book of Acts states that Paul stopped in towns such as Perga and Pisidian. Soon after, Paul and his assistant Barnabas returned to Antioch. By this point in his travels, Paul’s doctrine of “justification by faith” rather than works through the law brought him into conflict with the Jerusalem sect leaders.<sup>78</sup> Paul preached of a “common divine law” for all people of the world, the written law of the Jews being one, and the other written in the hearts and minds of the Gentiles. However, it was the same God, revealed to the Jews through their many covenants, and to the Gentiles from the founding of the world. With that said, Paul did not refrain from chastising actions taken by the Gentiles. He attacked the Gentiles use of idols, and many of their immoral actions, such as homosexuality, which was commonplace for Jews in his day.<sup>79</sup>

It seems clear that the leaders in Jerusalem were not happy with the new message that Paul was spreading. During his return to Antioch, followers of The Way reported to James that Paul

was preaching that non-Jewish converts did not need to be circumcised and could eat non-kosher food. This was clearly in conflict with the teachings of the movement in Jerusalem. James as the leader of The Way dispatched Peter to Antioch to show the authority the Jerusalem sect held over the followers of Jesus. It is clear that the Jerusalem Church believed that Paul must account his actions to those who were the original followers of Jesus. Questions regarding Paul and Barnabas' pagan converts immediately arose. It is unclear what was discussed, but it is clear that there were distinct difference in message and practice between the Pauline's in Antioch and the movement in Jerusalem, including eating meals that were not kosher with gentile converts.<sup>80</sup>

### **Second Jerusalem Conference**

As a result of the difference, Paul was called to Jerusalem to discuss the doctrinal differences. Around 50 CE, Paul was summoned to the second Jerusalem meeting, which was called to settle the question of Gentile Christians and circumcision as well as kosher laws. Those present at the meeting included James, Peter and John.<sup>81</sup> This question most likely arose from pressure placed on Jewish-Christians to avoid interacting with those who were uncircumcised. This pressure most likely arose from Zealous Jews in late 40s to early 50s CE. Paul strongly disagreed with this, believing that it would be a hindrance to Gentile conversion. In Galatians, Paul describes the need for Gentile Christians to have the "freedom" from the Jewish law.<sup>82</sup> However James and others within the Jerusalem leadership stated that there were Jewish laws that even the Gentiles were required to follow. Some of these laws included the forbiddance of sacrifice to idols and chastity. Pauline tradition holds that Gentile Christians did not have to strictly follow the Jewish Law, but many questions still remained unsolved. Was it possible that those in Jerusalem thought that Paul's message about Jesus was better than no message at all? Christian tradition stated that the question of circumcision was settled between Paul and James'

followers. However, in parts of Galatians Paul continued to argue against Gentile circumcision even after the council, which may show that the debate continued beyond the conclusion of the council.<sup>83</sup> Galatians 2:11-14 reads;

When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.<sup>84</sup>

### **Travels in Asia**

After the conclusion of the Jerusalem Conference, Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch. However, Paul wanting to continue the spread of his message, went to Asia, in locations such as Ephesus around 52 CE. This mission lasted around three years. In 56 CE, Paul made his final mission and produced the book of Romans. The book of Romans was possibly written in preparation for Paul's mission to Spain. In the book of Romans, a view of Paul's theology seems to emerge. Paul speaks of how no one has been able to live up to what God demands of us, so the only way to be saved is through the grace of Jesus Christ. To do this, you must live by faith. Living through faith allows you to be free from the law. Paul was clearly trying to show that his message was meant to go beyond just Jews. It is meant for the whole world.<sup>85</sup>

### **Final Jerusalem Visit**

On what would be his final visit to Palestine around 60 CE, Paul was arrested. Paul most likely returned to Jerusalem to make a payment collection to James that had been agreed upon at the Second Jerusalem Conference. Paul may have also returned to Jerusalem for political reasons, and he may have seen his donation as a way to try and further his connection in the movement. During his visit Paul was accompanied by a Gentile Convert from Ephesus, whom he

took into the Temple. According to Jewish Law, Paul could be put to death for such an act. By this point in his mission however, Paul had many enemies in and around The Temple, many of whom were Jews of the Diaspora and possible members of The Way who opposed his refuting of the Torah. Paul was given permission by the Roman commander to address the crowd, most likely due to his claim of being a Roman citizen. Acts states; "Having received the commander's permission, Paul stood on the steps and motioned to the crowd. When they were all silent, he said to them in Aramaic."<sup>86</sup> Paul went on to say;

When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance and saw the Lord speaking. 'Quick!' he said to me. 'Leave Jerusalem immediately, because they will not accept your testimony about me.' " 'Lord,' I replied, 'these men know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you. <sup>20</sup>And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.' "Then the Lord said to me, 'Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'<sup>87</sup>

This action seems to have created more enemies within the crowd, which called for Paul to be killed. Eventually a riot started and Roman forces were forced to intervene. They then arrested Paul who had been dragged outside of The Temple, and separated him from the rioting crowd. Paul then again makes the claim to the Romans that he is a citizen, stating that he cannot be punished until he is found guilty of a crime. It seems most likely that Paul was directly moved to Caesarea once he told the Roman soldiers of his citizenship. However, the book of Acts includes a confrontation between Paul and the Jewish Sanhedrin. Paul sided himself with the Pharisees against the Sadducees and the High Priest, stating to the Sanhedrin that he himself was a Pharisee. In addressing the Sanhedrin, he said;

Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, "My brothers, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead." <sup>7</sup>When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided.<sup>88</sup>

It is possible that Paul was trying to show himself to be more aligned with the movement of James and Peter. It is also important to note that many consider this event to be a creation by the author of Acts. Paul was then kept under arrest by the Romans in Caesarea. While in Caesarea, Paul remained under fire from the High Priest in Jerusalem. He remained in Caesarea for an additional two years. Paul was then transferred to Rome, where he was allowed to live in his own home under the guard of Roman soldiers for another two years. While in Rome his message about Jesus to all who would listen. Acts also claims that Paul met with Jews during his time in Rome. However, this also seems to be an addition made by the author of Acts, due to the fact that Paul on multiple occasions had been threatened by Jews. There is almost no evidence that Paul suffered during his time in Rome. Due to the fact Paul claimed he was a Roman citizen, he was granted the right to appeal his alleged crimes to the Caesar, who at the time was Nero. However during this time, roughly around 64 CE. Nero's persecution of Christian's was in full swing. Christian tradition states that Paul and Saint Peter were both held in the same prison. Tradition holds that he was executed by decapitation at the hands of the Romans somewhere around 64 CE.<sup>89</sup>

It is interesting to note that the author of Acts did not include Paul's final fate. There is a possibility that the traditional author Luke chose not to include Paul's death, because he did not want his second work (after his Gospel) to end with the main character being executed by the Romans. Because of this, multiple stories about Paul's last years began to arise. There is a story of Paul being freed and continued his mission work to Spain. However, if this were the case, it seems that Luke would have included it at the end of Acts. This detail could have been covered very easily. If Paul had been acquitted by Roman authorities, that seems like an event Luke would have covered in his work. There is also the possibility, as was mentioned before, that Paul

was executed in the aftermath of Nero's persecutions. If he was executed, it would have not been under special circumstances. Paul would have most likely been executed among a plethora of others Christians. As Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan put it, "In the terror of Nero's accusation and the horror of his vengeance, few Christians were able to concentrate on what happen to Paul, Peter or anyone else."<sup>90</sup> There are many questions that remained unanswered regarding Paul's possible execution. To begin, it seems unlikely that Roman authorities would have allowed him to preach openly if his message was anti-imperial. If Paul was truly a Roman citizen, his crime would not have fit the bill for the government to execute him. There is also evidence that shows Paul was most likely not decapitated. During Nero's reign, Christians were mostly executed by being mauled by animals, being burned at the stake and crucifixion. The legend of Paul being executed by decapitation most likely rose during the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, in works such as church father Tertullian's *de Praescriptone Haereticorum*.<sup>91</sup> A multiple of church traditions arose to where exactly Paul was executed, but the exact site is unknown.<sup>92</sup> It is clear that Paul's view of Christianity was devoid of the strict commitments of Judaism (i.e. circumcision), but Paul's Christian communities did develop their own forms of commitment, through their beliefs in the return of the Messiah. Obviously, Paul's rejection of Jewish Law was a huge move, separating himself and his followers from the most important aspect of the Jewish faith. Alan Segal writes, "As he himself says, (Paul) gave up everything of significance to follow his vision. So would all those who followed him out of Torah-centered Judaism."<sup>93</sup>

### **Other Views of Paul**

The claim has also been made the Paul theology was greatly influenced by the Gnostic/Hellenistic movement. It seems that many of Paul's letters have Gnostic tendencies in them. Paul clearly states that the world has fallen so deep into sin that it must be saved by a

higher power. There is no evidence that Paul believed that the world was created by the “evil” God of the Old Testament. He clearly believed in the Genesis story of God creating the world. Instead of there being an evil god who created the world, Paul uses Satan, the figure who corrupted the world, thus making outward the salvation the only hope for humanity. The role of Satan is vital to Paul’s theology. However Jewish belief normally regarded Satan as simply an angel of God, who at times filled roles such as the Angel of Death. Hyam Maccoby believed Paul used the language of The Gnostics. 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 2:8 reads, “None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.”<sup>94</sup> Maccoby believes that the rulers Paul is referring to are not the Romans or the Jewish leaders, but evil supernatural forces. Jesus came into this world; Paul believed to break the power of the evil supernatural forces. A clear Gnostic connection is seen in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 4:4; “The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”<sup>95</sup> By calling the evil force a “god,” it seems there is a connection to the evil creator god of Gnostic belief. However, there is little scriptural evidence in Judaism to support Paul’s dualistic claims, but there clearly is in Gnosticism. Paul’s opinion of the law also clearly reflects the Gnostic tradition. Paul states that it is the purpose of the law to show people how to behave, but also to show how low and lost the situation of humanity is. For the Gnostics, how behave was clearly less important to the idea of salvation.<sup>96</sup> One tradition holds that there were two major Gnostic Churches. The first being the one developed by Valentinus, whose teacher was reportedly a follower of Paul, and the second being the Church of Marcion. These sects believed that Paul’s true teachings reflected ideals such as virginity and gender equality and asceticism.<sup>97</sup> However, there is one key aspect of Pauline theology that did not coincide with Gnosticism. The key aspect of Pauline theology, the idea that Jesus died and

was then resurrected to save mankind. This doctrine was possibly influenced by some Ancient Mystery Cults, such as Mithras. For instance, there were traditions stating that Mithras was born in a manger, similar to Jesus. Specifically Gnostics believed that Jesus was not a divine savior, but as Jay Tolston put it, “an avatar or voice of the oversoul sent to teach humans to find the sacred spark within.”<sup>98</sup> There is a strong possibility that Pauline Christianity was a combination of Gnostic tenets and ancient religion traditions of savior gods.<sup>99</sup>

### **Early Sects of Christianity**

As was stated before, the earliest sect of what came to known as Christianity were called the Nazarenes. The origins of term go back to Jesus himself. The Bible uses the phrase “Jesus of Nazareth” seventeen times. Traditional scholar’s state The Nazarenes believed in the resurrection, and the belief in the divinity of Christ. However, they did not reject the law and still practiced circumcision and the Sabbath. The Nazarenes were the dominant form of Christianity in the first century. Their devotional stance towards Jesus seems to be in line with the traditional proto-orthodox view. The Nazarenes were a separate Jewish-Christian sect than the Ebionite’s. There is a possibility that the Ebionite’s split from the Nazarenes over the divinity of Christ, and /or leadership issues within the sect. Some scholars such as H.J Schoeps mistakenly interchange the terms Jewish Christianity and the Ebionites.<sup>100</sup>

The Ebionites were in fact, their Ebionite means “poor”. The Ebionites rejected Paul’s message, due to its forsaking of the law. In fact some scholars contend that the Ebionites believed that Paul himself was actually a Greek who converted to Judaism. They believe that Paul then left Judaism to collaborate with the Roman occupiers, to advance his own status. Certain Ebionites even blamed Paul for the Temple being destroyed, due to his strong anti-Jewish message. They continued the observance of Jewish law including circumcision and used

only a Hebrew form of Mathew's Gospel. It is also believed that the Ebionites produced their own scripture, which is now lost to history, most likely suppressed by the church in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. They continued to celebrate Jewish holidays such as Passover. There is some debate on whether or not they accepted the Virgin birth, but it seems most likely that they did not.<sup>101</sup> They most likely believed that Jesus was the strictly human son of Mary and Joseph.<sup>102</sup>

Some other scholars hold to the hypothesis that the Ebionite movement grew out of what remained of the Jewish-Christians after Jewish Revolt of 66 CE. These Ebionites were rejected by Church leaders as heretics, due to their rejection of Paul's teachings. They Ebionites continued to deny the divine aspects of Jesus, and continued to believe in the supremacy of the law.

### **Gnostics**

As was briefly mentioned, the Gnostics were a Christian sect that developed outside of the "Jewish Christian" umbrella. This term comes from the Greek for knowledge. Gnostic beliefs existed before the rise of Christianity, possibly having its origins in a dualistic Iranian religion. From the Gnostic viewpoint, the Orthodox Christian view as too focused on the material world and as result missed the "truth." They believe the Earth was created by a demonic deity, the God of the Old Testament. They believed there is a God superior to the one of the Old Testament, who sent Jesus to reveal the true hidden knowledge. They therefore believed the Torah was the work of the evil, lesser god. As a result, the Gnostics most likely looked at the Jews as enemies of the higher God, establishing a tradition of anti-Semitism. The true resurrection, as the Gnostics believed it, was not a bodily one, but a spiritual connection with the divine. They believed that the only thing that died on the cross was Jesus' material body. They did not focus on Jesus' earthly mission and life. They focused more on the "hidden meanings" of scripture. The Gnostics produced works such as the Gospel of Thomas, Philip and Truth. Gnostics have a

tradition related to Monastic practices. Monasticism is the religious practice of removing yourself from the world, and committing your life to spiritual service to God. As the Christian Church evolved, many of its later fathers accused the Gnostics of immoral behavior that opposed their Orthodox viewpoint.

### **What Happen to These Sects?**

As history has shown, the Pauline version of Christianity, whether authentic or not, has become the dominant and is considered the “Orthodox” view. But why? It is important to analyze exactly how this could of happen. The mainline Orthodox view of Christianity was not fully evolved during Paul’s lifetime. From Paul’s death to Christianity becoming the official religion of the Roman Empire, close to four-hundred years passed.<sup>103</sup>

Scholars are generally divided on exactly what happen to the Jewish-Christians. 4th century church legends states that before the Jewish War of 66 CE. began, the community left Jerusalem and settled in Transjordan. This is however, little historical evidence to support this claim. Even if some Jewish-Christians did make it to Transjordan, the most likely only existed there until the fourth or fifth centuries, where they eventually faded from history. There is possibility their beliefs influenced the doctrines of Nestorian Christianity. Nestorian doctrine which was developed in the fifth century, believed that Jesus was born as a mortal man, but became the divine Christ when the *logos* or nature of God, entered him.<sup>104</sup>

Either way, it is more plausible that a majority of the Jewish-Christians were still in Jerusalem at the end of the revolt and the temple being destroyed in 70 CE. The ones were survived the destruction scattered to areas such as Galilee and Caesarea, and even to Egypt. Jewish-Christians were then expelled from worship in synagogues. The Gospel of John, written at the earliest in the 90’s CE, mentions this twice. John 16:2 reads, “They will put you out of the synagogue in fact, a

time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God.”<sup>105</sup> In around 107 CE, Simon Bar Clopus, who was believed to be the final relative of Jesus, was killed, reportedly at 120 years old. It is believed he was the last living person who directly knew Jesus during his life. An Orthodox Christian Church was eventually formed in Jerusalem (renamed Aelia Capitolina by the Romans), but was it was until around 140 CE. when the church was formed, in the aftermath of the Bar Kokhba Revolt. This new “church” was made of gentile converts and had no connection to the original followers of Jesus, such as James. It followed the teachings of Paul’s Christianity. These Christians sought to connect themselves to the early Jerusalem movement, and believed that there was no conflict between Pauline doctrine and that of the Jerusalem leadership.<sup>106</sup> These Christians submitted to the rule of the Romans, and their pagan idols and temples. This lasted for nearly 200 hundred years, until the Roman Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity, and established a more open religious policy throughout the empire. The remaining Jewish-Christians began to fade, compared to the expanding church in the west. A main reason for this was due to the exodus of Jewish life from Palestine as a result of the Jewish Wars with Rome, which affected both traditional Judaism and the remaining Jewish-Christians. The Jewish-Christian movement within Palestine was never able to organize themselves into any kind of hierarchy or establish any leadership structure. They often remained disorganized and fragmented, and content with their isolation in the Palestinian region. As a result, they were never able to challenge the primacy of the bishops of Rome, Alexandria and Antioch. Even with the seat of power for the Christian movement shifting from Jerusalem to Rome, however Palestine remained a center for pilgrimage. By the 5<sup>th</sup> century, the Jewish-Christians were struggling to survive as a sect. Persecution at the hands of the growing and ever more powerful Catholic Church nearly drove them out of existence. The persecutions most

likely ended with rise of Islam, and its eventual conquering of Christian lands. The Jewish-Christians that remained began to openly practice their beliefs again. Some evidence points to this happening around the tenth century CE.<sup>107</sup> Some of the later Jewish-Christians merged with some Gnostic sects such as The Elkesaites, who combined Gnosticism, Judaism, magic and astrology. They operated mainly around Rome during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. They developed a doctrine where souls could travel or “transmigrate” into different bodies. These sects eventually faded out, due to the fact they were not part of the Orthodox Christianity or post-Temple Judaism.<sup>108</sup>

The Gnostic Movement would suffer a similar fate as the Jewish Christians. Early church leaders sought to counter the Gnostic beliefs. The Father that Jesus spoke about was not a separate, greater God than the one of the Old Testament. It was the same God. Church Father Irenaus attacked the Gnostics for fragmented and unorganized texts and beliefs, while preaching of the unity of the Orthodox Gospels. As was stated before, Orthodox Christians constantly attacked the Gnostics for their perceived lack of morality, especially in regards to sexual behavior. In their attacks on Gnosticism, the Orthodox Church emphasized the Pauline doctrines that focused on the connection from the creation in Genesis through the resurrection of Jesus, which they saw being countered by the Gnostic theology. The Orthodox leadership was able to gain more control and power through their hierarchical system of bishops that developed. The church organized the canon of scripture, and ensured its connection to Paul and the apostolic tradition. The stability that evolved within the Orthodox tradition is one of the main reasons it emerge victorious in its conflict with the Gnostics. The Gnostics on the other hand, were never able to organize themselves into any kind of structure to compete with the message of Orthodox Christianity. Gnostics sects continued into the 4<sup>th</sup> century, but gradually began to die out, as the church in Rome began to assert its power. The Orthodox Church continued to outlaw Gnostic

texts, and by the 5<sup>th</sup> century, the Gnostics no longer represented any threat to Orthodox teaching.<sup>109</sup>

Clearly, the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. signified the end of Jerusalem serving as the center of the Jesus' movement, with it moving to Rome. Once the Roman Church gained the support of the emperor, its place as the main voice of Christianity until the Reformation was sealed. This is the key factor and event that allowed for Pauline Christianity to become accepted as the Orthodox and "true" version of Christianity, due to the fact alternative sects were no longer in existence, and could not present an alternative message. The new supremacy of the Catholic Church allowed them to conduct persecutions against pagans and launch attacks against Jews, due to their role in the death of Jesus.<sup>110</sup>

### **Paul as a Jewish-Christ Mystic**

However, there is also the possibility that Paul himself never intended for a new religion to spring from his teachings. There is a strong possibility that Paul still saw himself as operating under the umbrella of Judaism. Paul preached of a message with the authority of the God of Israel.<sup>111</sup> There is a possibility that Paul saw the revelation of Christ as the final fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant. A Jew who came to accept Jesus did not have to change the God they worship. However, it is clear that Jews who accepted Jesus would have to give up some parts of the Torah, to be in communion with Gentile converts. Eventually, Christianity would become something different neither Jewish nor Greek.<sup>112</sup> If this is the case, Paul's identity seems to fall in between the Orthodox view and other non-traditional views. Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan describe Paul as a "Jewish Christ Mystic."<sup>113</sup> These authors describe mysticism as a kind of special relationship/union with God, where the idea of oneness with God is emphasized. This is seen in both Acts and in Paul's letters through the incident on the Road to

Damascus, one of the few areas where the two are actually in agreement. The letters and Acts are not in complete agreement on the facts, but the overall stories coincide. This experience became the vocation of Paul for the rest of his life, but did not change his religion. Paul it seems, so this as reveling another nature of Judaism and not a new separate religion. The words of 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 3:18 show Paul's mystical view;

“And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”<sup>114</sup>

Paul may have seen new view as a new revelation of Judaism. Paul went from a “Pharisaic Jew” to a Jew who accepted Jesus as the Messiah. Clearly as was stated before, Paul never met Jesus during his life. However, Paul testifies throughout his letters that he had a divine experience with the risen Jesus. This experience clearly supports the idea that Paul can be fully understood as a Jewish-Mystic, who believes in Jesus. Paul also infers through other letters that his experience on the road to Damascus was not his only experience with the risen Jesus. In 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians Paul most likely writing about himself in the third person, says;

I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows— was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell.<sup>115</sup>

This passage along with others in Paul's letters, show Paul had many visions of risen Jesus. But to fully understand Paul, it is important to look at the authenticity of the thirteen letters that are said to have been written by him.

### **Pauline Letters**

As was stated earlier, thirteen books in the New Testament are attributed to Paul. However there is a lot debate on whether Paul actually wrote all of them. During Paul's lifetime, none of the synoptic Gospels of Mathew, Mark, Luke, and John had been written yet, with the Gospel of

Mark being the first written around the year 70 CE.<sup>116</sup> With that said, it is important to note that most contemporary scholars agree that Paul did not author all of the thirteen letters that it is said he wrote. As Marcus J. Borg and John Dominic Crossan put it, “First not all of the letters attributed to Paul were written by him—there is more than one Paul in the New Testament.”<sup>117</sup> Over the past two-hundred years, scholars have identified three categories for the Pauline letters. They are letters believed to be written by Paul, letters that are believed to have not been written by Paul, and letters where there is uncertainty over who the author is. Generally, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians, Romans, 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians, Philippians, Galatians and Philemon are believed to be authored by Paul. These letters are considered to be the earliest works of the New Testament, written in the 50’s CE. It is generally accepted that Titus, and 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy were not authored by Paul but written in his name around 100 CE. It is however, important to note that during antiquity people would often write in the name of someone else. To do so was not disingenuous. The letters of Colossians, 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians and Ephesians are debated among scholars as to whether or not Paul was the author. Scholars Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan believe these letters to not be the work of Paul. They believe these letters were produced a generation after the life of Paul.<sup>118</sup>

Thus it can be gathered from the information above that the New Testament actually include writings of three different people, all attributing to Paul. The three “Pauls” often present differing messages on a variety of subjects, such as slavery and gender equality.<sup>119</sup> Regarding gender equality, in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians, one of the letters considered to be authentic, Paul writes;

The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer.<sup>120</sup>

In Colossians, a letter where the authenticity is debatable, it reads;

“Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.”<sup>121</sup>

In Timothy, a letter that Paul most likely did not write himself, it states;

A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.<sup>122</sup>

There is a clear and obvious difference in message between the three letters, that seems to evolve to a more conservative message, and in turn a more conservative Paul. Borg and Crossan call this the, “deradicalization of Paul.”<sup>123</sup> It is important to try and understand why most likely certain later church leaders writing in the name of Paul, decided to change his message. Peter’s second letter which was possibly written as early as the mid 60’s CE reads, “He [Paul] writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.”<sup>124</sup> Clearly, from early on some were changing Paul’s letters to fit their own personal beliefs. Over time, it became difficult to discern who Paul really was. The Paul who thought of women on equal footing with men and even who put women in leadership positions, had evolved into a Paul who placed women back into what had been their traditional roles.<sup>125</sup>

It is important to note that that all of the Pauline letters were not meant by Paul to be an autobiography, they were written as letters to faith communities, and were went to deal with specific problems in them. It is a difficult task to interpret Paul writing’s without understanding the issues of the specific community. The idea that Paul’s letters being divinely inspired scripture does not emerge until the fourth century. Also the books of Acts can be seen as bias work written in favor of the Pauline doctrine, or even possibly the work of fiction.<sup>126</sup>

Paul has often been accused of changing the Christian message to make it more compatible with in the Roman Empire. However, Paul's message can also be interpreted in another light. Romans 13:1-7 is often interpreted as the passage where Paul tried to make Christianity compatible with Roman rule. It reads;

Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.<sup>127</sup>

It is first important to understand the context in which this letter was written. Paul wrote this letter around 55/ 56 CE. This was in aftermath of the death of the Emperor Claudius and the early reign of Nero. In the concluding lines of the passage Paul calls on the followers to pay their taxes. It is a message to the Christian community in Rome that paying taxes is a small matter, and one not worth getting executed by the Romans for. It is also important to note that the first manuscripts of the Pauline letters were written like normal letters, with no verse numbers or chapters. The dividers that were put in place often causes specific verses to be taken out of context. If Romans is read from 12:14-13:10, the section in question 13:1-7, does not seem to be so subservient to the Roman rulers. Romans 12:14-21 reads;

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the

eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord. On the contrary 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.<sup>128</sup>

13:8-10 reads;

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.<sup>129</sup>

Paul is asking the Christians in Rome not to resist burdens such as taxes in an aggressive way. Paul message of love and peace would clearly haven been contradicted if Christians revolted in tax riots against the Romans.<sup>130</sup>

### **Conclusion**

It is very obvious that whoever Paul truly was, his influence on what we think to be Christianity cannot be overstated. Paul's influence, through the letters that are attributed to him help to lay the foundation for what would develop into the Christian faith. Paul's doctrine of a faith free from the law would eventually become accepted as Christian Doctrine. As was stated, there was not a fixed definition on what it meant to be a Christian until the fourth century CE. Church leaders and historians openly attacked any remains of those who did not accept the Pauline version. By this time, the traditional Pauline Christian view of Jesus as the divine Messianic savior was the most prevalent throughout the Rome Empire.<sup>131</sup>

It is obvious that there can be no real consensus on who Paul of Tarsus was. Some believe he was representative of Jesus' message. Others believe he was not who he said he was, and purposely change the true message of Jesus to fit a mold that would not be hostile to the Roman

Empire.<sup>132</sup> Other claim that Paul did not believe he was creating any kind of new religion, and that the revelation of Jesus was through the Hebrew God, and it was his duty to spread that to the Gentiles. Whatever his true identity or mission was, it is clear that all of the right factors come together during and after Paul's life that allowed his view of Jesus and Christianity to become the view that is now considered to be the Orthodox one. As was shown the Jewish Wars played a pivotal role in separating the Jewish foundations of the Jesus movement, and allowed the Pauline doctrine of salvation through grace and not from the law to emerge. As some evidence has shown, it is also possible that later authors writing in the name of Paul changed Paul's message of equality to a more conservative stance that aligned more with the Roman world view. The ability of Church Fathers to stamp out what they perceived as opposition sects finally allowed what we think of Christianity in today's world to emerge. As this paper has shown, Saint Paul had the greatest role in the evolution of the Christian faith.

## Endnotes

On the history of the period, see;

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