

[presented at the American Academy of Religion Meeting, Quebec City, May 2006]

Taking Paul at his Word

Barrie A. Wilson, PhD
Professor, Humanities and Religious Studies
School of Arts and Letters, Atkinson, York University
4700 Keele Street, Toronto, ON, Canada. M3J 1P3

Email: barrie@yorku.ca

Abstract

Paul's "Christ Movement" in the Diaspora differs significantly from the "Jesus Movement" led by James (brother of Jesus) in Jerusalem in terms of origins, practices and beliefs. In addition, Paul's message is more radical than has usually been thought, contending that the time of torah is over and that no one needs to observe it, whether Gentile or Jew.

Paul's movement does not represent a seamless outgrowth of the movement in Jerusalem. He never met the historical Jesus; rarely quotes him or refers to his teachings; and never grounds his own message in what the Jesus of history taught and practiced. According to Paul, his contacts with the Jesus Movement were minimal. His movement is best understood as a separate religious enterprise.

The Book of Acts, written some 40-60 years later than Paul, represents an unreliable source for information about Paul: Acts' Paul is not Paul's Paul. Acts was written to create a linkage between the Christ Movement and the Jesus Movement. This synthesis, however, is suspect: it is historical revisionism and stitches the two movements together retroactively.

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.

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.¹

Two lines of scholarship have surfaced recently. Hyam Maccoby and Gerd Lüdemann argue for a discontinuity between Paul and Jesus, the founder of Christianity.² David Wenham and John G. Gager, however, contend that Paul continued the tradition of Jesus.³ 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?*”⁴

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 30 CE onwards, 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
Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • James in Jerusalem 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paul in the Diaspora
Origins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The historical Jesus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paul's personal mystical experience of the Christ • Paul - never met the historical Jesus
Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Torah observant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-torah-observant
Beliefs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus as inspired teacher, resurrected, expected to return to complete the job of messiah • Political catalyst • Era of universal peace (Kingdom of God) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christ as a cosmic figure • Christ: a divine being who has come into the world in human form to save humanity by dying and rising. • Those who have faith in Christ can share in his suffering, dying and rising.
Religion	Religion OF Jesus	Religion ABOUT 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."*⁵

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.⁶

In this paper 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 in this paper 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.⁷

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.⁸ 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."⁹

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.¹⁰

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 later¹¹ 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.¹² Paul’s Letter to the Galatians is later, from the mid 50’s CE.¹³ 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.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ 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.¹⁶

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.¹⁷ 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 2nd century CE downplayed its Jewish roots, especially the torah-observant practices of Jesus and his early followers. *How did this come about?* 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.¹⁸ 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 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 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.

TAKING PAUL AT HIS WORD

¹ 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.

² 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).

³ 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).

⁴ See Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament*, pp. 362-371.

⁵ Burton Mack, *Who Wrote the New Testament?* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), p.99.

⁶ As per contemporary scholarship, we do not know who wrote the various gospels, including the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts.

⁷ 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 X” without any claim that X and Y are in any way related.

⁸ 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.

⁹ Steve Mason, Tom Robinson, *An Early Christian Reader* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press, Inc., 1990), p.306.

¹⁰ See for instance, Bruce Chilton’s very readable and informative, *Rabbi Paul* (New York: Doubleday, 2004).

¹¹ 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.

¹² Bruce Chilton says 46 CE (*Rabbi Paul*, p.268); Burton Mack says 48 CE (*Who Wrote the New Testament?* p.103).

¹³ *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.

¹⁴ 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.

¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ *Jewish Antiquities*, Book 20, Chapter 8.

¹⁷ 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 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.]

¹⁸ 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.