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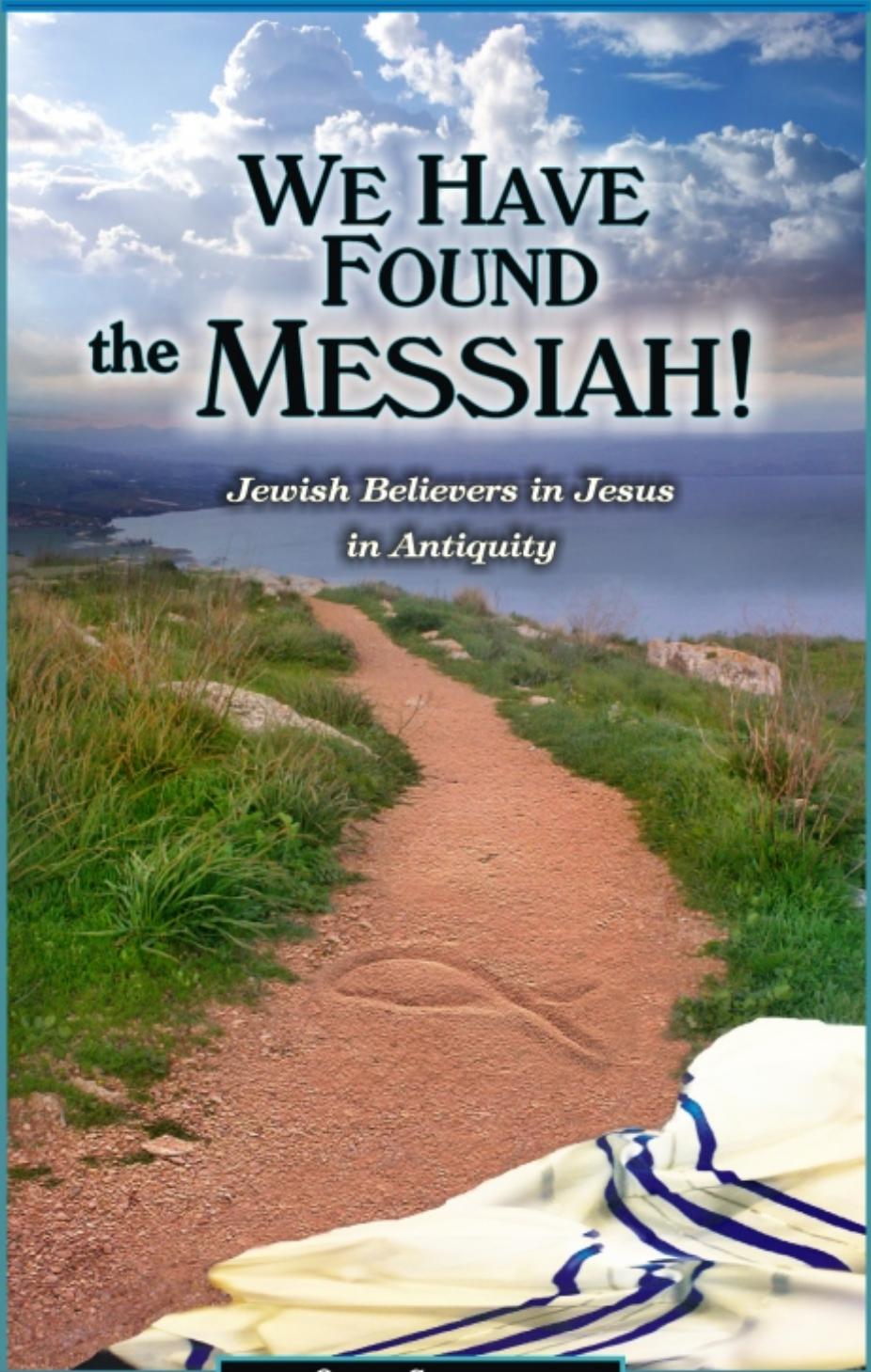

WE HAVE FOUND the MESSIAH!

Jewish Believers in Jesus in Antiquity

BY OSKAR SKARSAUNE

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Author's Preface

First, let me say what this book is not. It is not a scholarly discourse on the early history of the Jewish believers in Jesus, weighing different theories and points of view. It is not a thoroughly argued history of Jewish believers in Jesus, building up a solid case for the version of the story told here, documenting each step of the argument by learned notes. It is neither of these things.

The background of this book is an international history project entitled *A History of Jewish Believers in Jesus – The Early Centuries,* which will be published in the near future. In that book, sixteen authors have combined their insight and research to produce precisely that book which the present book is not. In *A History of Jewish Believers* the reader will find abundant references, solid documentation, closely argued cases regarding controversial questions, and pioneering contributions to ongoing research. All the scholarly effort put into that volume is a constant backdrop to the present book.

This book is a simple rendering, mostly in narrative form, of the story of Jewish believers in the early centuries – as I came to see this story, having finished the large volume of *A History of Jewish Believers*. I learned a lot from my fifteen co-authors in the *History*. I also learned a lot during my own research for my contributions to the volume. I should emphasize very strongly that the story told in the present book is the story as I personally came to see it. I suspect none of my fifteen co-authors would endorse each and every aspect of the story as I tell it. Some of them might even disagree fundamentally. Given the complexity of the problems and the scarcity of available source material, this can hardly be otherwise.

My first priority in this book has therefore been to tell my story well, from a narrative point of view. Underpinning argument has been kept to the absolute minimum. Some readers with a scholarly bent may even think it has been kept below that level! Readers who seek more of this are referred here, once and for all, to the large forthcoming volume of the *History*. In that book there are also copious references to primary sources, in the original languages as well as in English translation. In the present book all that has been left out. My thinly veiled agenda in doing so is, of course, to whet the reader's appetite for the greater book.

Let me add a few words on the plan of the present book. In the first six chapters I treat the story of Jewish believers before Constantine. In chapters eight through eleven I treat the era after Constantine. The reason for this chronological divide midway through the book is that conditions for Jewish believers changed considerably after Constantine. Source material is also less forthcoming after Constantine than before, which means that the pace of the story quickens after Constantine. There is, sadly, less to tell.

Finally, let me say who this story is about. I have chosen, in a great majority of settings, to call my subjects "Jewish believers in Jesus," not "Jewish Christians." When scholars speak about "Jewish Christians," they often speak about Jewish persons who believed in Jesus and who, combined with this faith, kept a Jewish lifestyle and still considered themselves Jewish. By this definition there were Jewish believers in Jesus who cannot be called Jewish Christians, because they did not keep a Jewish lifestyle. Or let us put it the other way around: There were Jewish believers in Jesus who were so successfully assimilated into predominantly gentile Christian communities that their Jewishness was hardly visible. These people are not excluded from this story (as they very often are). I give "Jewish believer in Jesus" a purely ethnic definition; by this term I mean any Jewish person – Jewish by birth or conversion – who came to believe that Jesus is the Savior.

With these remarks I am ready to begin my story.

Oskar Skarsaune
Oslo, 2005

1. In the Beginning . . .

In the beginning there was Jesus. He was born to a family who regarded themselves as David's offspring. Every boy-child, especially the first-born, in such a family would naturally play with the thought, *the promised Anointed One of David's seed – could that be me?* According to Luke, the boy Jesus seems to have had a very strong conviction of this. Later, when he was baptized by John, he had a strong experience of being anointed as Messiah when the Spirit of God descended upon him and he heard the heavenly voice proclaim him God's Son. From then on, he acted, not as the already enthroned Messiah, but as the *designated* Messiah. His ministry from this point on had the function of preparing for his own enthronement as the Messiah. He became, in a way, his own forerunner. He was – or became – aware, however, that this enthronement would entail a painful passage through suffering and death. In this, his picture of the Messiah's career was markedly different from that of many of his contemporaries, particularly that of his own disciples. They simply did not understand him on this score. As for himself, Jesus seems to have found the key to his own messianic career in the portrait of the Suffering Servant of God in Isaiah 53, and possibly also in the several portraits of the Suffering Righteous Ones in the Psalms. He warned his disciples that following him through his final enthronement as Messiah would entail suffering, pain, and even death on their part as well.

Even so, we see them stricken by grief, disappointment, and shock when these predictions and warnings come true. "We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel … but now it is the third day, already, since his death" (Luke 24:21, paraphrased). On the third day, however, he appeared to some of his female and male disciples in such a way that they were convinced he had risen from the dead. The discovery that his tomb was empty reinforced this interpretation of his appearances. At once the situation was totally changed. What had seemed like the utter failure of yet another messianic pretender was now seen in a completely different light. This messianic pretender had been triumphantly vindicated. His rising from the dead, his ascension to heaven, and his enthronement at the Father's right hand in heaven were seen as a truly messianic enthronement. Jesus had attained the throne of the Messiah, had entered his

messianic reign, through suffering, death, resurrection, ascension, and heavenly enthronement at the Father's right hand!

The Son of God Incarnate

There was one aspect of Jesus which now appeared in a different light to his disciples. During his ministry, he had every now and then spoken of himself, and even acted, as if he were more than an ultimate representative of God; he spoke and acted as if he were the incarnate Wisdom of God in person. Jews at the time were familiar with the prophet of God; he was in many ways the ultimate representative of God. The prophet would say, typically, "Thus says the Lord: …" He would say: "Believe in God!" "Be willing to give your life for God's sake!" "Follow God!" Jesus, however, said: "I say to you: …" "Believe in me!" "Be prepared to give your lives for my sake!" "Follow me!" He even did things that God alone was supposed to do: He forgave sins. He healed people – not by praying that God heal them, but by a powerful command, apparently drawing on a divine power to heal that was in him. He commanded – no, he rebuked – the wind and the waves, and they obeyed and were silent, as in Psalm 106:9, "He [God] rebuked the Sea of Reeds"; or in Psalm 107:29, "He [God] made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed."

When they experienced these things, the disciples reacted with incomprehension, puzzlement, and sometimes with awe bordering on fear: "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" (Mark 4:41). After the resurrection of Jesus, this dimension was easier to comprehend: By enthroning Jesus in heaven, at his right hand – rather than on an earthly, human throne in Jerusalem – God had indicated something about the very being of Jesus. He had not been an envoy only, not a mere prophet, not a representative. He had been, and was still, more than that. The disciples were now able to see the full significance of something Jesus had hinted at in one of his parables: There was a rich landowner who planted a vineyard and leased it to tenants. He sent representatives to collect the produce, but the tenants killed them. Then he sent his own son, for he thought, "they will respect my son." But the tenants did not respect him; they killed the son as well (Matt 21:33–41). The difference between the first envoys and the last, the son, had nothing to do with their function, or task. That was the same. The difference between the first envoys and the last one concerns their different relationship to the landowner. The first were envoys only, like the prophets. But the last one was more than that. He was the son. He was "from the father" in a way the others were not.

By being enthroned at God's right hand in heaven, Jesus had two things happen to him at once: As a truly human Messiah, he was exalted. He was given a power and a glory and a dignity that no other human being has ever received. At the same time, as the only Son of his heavenly Father, he returned to where he came from. He resumed his divine glory, which he voluntarily had "not held fast to" when he "emptied himself" and became a man (Phil 2:6–7).

The Creative Divine Word Made Flesh

The notion that in the case of Jesus there had not only been an ascent to heaven after his death, but also a descent resulting in his birth, could only be accommodated within one theological category known to Jews at the time of Jesus: the concept of divine Wisdom. In Sirach 24, God's Wisdom is said to have been present when God created the world. It is also said to have craved a dwelling on earth, among men, but to have found none until God made Wisdom pitch her tent among Jacob, on Zion. The choice of this verb is no doubt motivated by the implicit reference to the tent of meeting, where God dwelled during the desert wanderings, later functionally continued by the holy tent – or temple – on Zion. Once this background is identified, there are many terms and metaphors in John 1: 14–18 that become transparent: "The Word became flesh, and pitched his tent among us. And we saw his glory …" (literal translation).

This Wisdom Christology is not a later development within early Christianity. It is literarily attested very early. In 1 Corinthians 8:6 (literal translation), Paul seems to be quoting a ready-made formula, known beforehand to his addressees:

> For us there is
> one God, the Father, from whom all things, and we for him;
> and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things, and we through him.

The more I ponder these few lines of text, the more astonished I become at their remarkable significance. The words *One, God*, and *Lord* recall the basic confession of faith for every Jew, the *Shema*, recited twice daily, at rising in the morning and at going to bed in the evening:

> Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord is One. (Deut 6:4)

In 1 Corinthians 8:6 Paul includes Jesus, the one Lord, in the one God of the *Shema*! And this is not something which was prompted by a sudden brainwave when he wrote this passage around 54 CE. He is clearly quoting a formula, common to him and his addressees in Corinth. Paul does not present this formula as contested, he does not argue in its favor. He takes it for granted, and argues from it, not for it. In other words, it must have originated quite some time before the writing of 1 Corinthians. This could possibly bring us down to the first decade after the death and resurrection of Jesus, or at least early in the second. Regarding Jesus as being "part" of the one God of Israel was thus no late development within early Christianity, as is often assumed. There is no compelling argument that this variety of Christology is any later than the messianic type. And in the image of the risen Jesus enthroned on the throne of God in heaven, the two Christologies meet. They may have met from the very beginning: "God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:36).

How did the disciples know that Jesus had not only risen from his tomb, but was now enthroned at the Father's right hand in heaven? They knew this by more than one token. They knew it by the royal, divine power that accompanied the name of Jesus. They could heal in his name, expel demons in his name, even wake up the dead in his name. They knew it because the gifts of the kingdom were conferred by the risen Jesus and no one else. First among these gifts was the gift of the Spirit. In the kingdom of the Messiah at the end of days, the gift of the Spirit was no longer to be the privilege of a few elected servants of God. It was to be the common gift of the whole people, the young and the old, the slaves and the free, male and female (Joel 2:28–32, quoted by Peter at Pentecost, Acts 2:17–21). In short, they knew Jesus to be enthroned as the Messiah, the King, at God's right hand because they daily saw the concrete signs of the kingdom among them, and because these signs followed the name of Jesus.

The Death of the Messiah

This is a very rough outline of how faith in Jesus as Lord and Messiah began. It is still incomplete on one vital point: How, within this framework, was Jesus' death on the cross interpreted? Three models for comprehending this gruesome event seem to have presented themselves early on:

1) The death of Jesus was a necessary transition to his resurrection and ascension. The Messiah could not enter his glory before he had suffered and died (Luke 24:26 – this model is dominant in Luke's two books).
2) His death and resurrection was his royal defeat of his enemies: the powers of evil, the devil and his hosts, death, and sin (the latter two conceived of as powers rather than events or acts). This is perhaps the most messianic interpretation of Jesus' death and resurrection. It is broadly – and early! – attested in the New Testament writings.
3) His death was a sacrificial death for the atonement of sin, like the death of sacrificial animals in the temple service. It is sometimes assumed that this interpretation came a little later than the other two, and this may be so. Nevertheless, Paul clearly assumes it in Romans 3: 25, and again Paul may be quoting a ready-made formula, possibly deriving from the Jerusalem community at a quite early date. This model was nearest to hand when it came to interpreting the death of Jesus as a saving event in itself.

We may regard the above points as the main elements in the earliest formulations of faith in Jesus as Lord and Messiah. I think it should be said with some emphasis that none of this would be regarded as un-Jewish, as something that exploded Judaism from within – not the Judaism of that period. Scholars sometimes measure the "Jewishness" of early faith in Jesus by the standard of second century – or even later – rabbinic ortho-

doxy. But this may be anachronistic. First century Judaism was a complex phenomenon, with a wide variety of models and concepts into which a Messiah could be cast. There were certainly many Jews who took offense at Jesus when he clearly entered divine functions and roles. But the Judaism of that era was not without categories and concepts with which to express the idea of an incarnate Son of God.

In any case, as far as we can gauge from the New Testament, this was not a question with great divisive potential in early Christianity. Paul includes many fierce debates in his letters, and reports on debates, but nowhere does he enter into an extensive discussion of Christology in the strict sense. He seems to presuppose essential agreement on this score, not only between himself and his addressees in the letters, but also between himself and the Jerusalem community. There was another pressing question, however, and it was not unrelated to Christology. It was to prove very divisive, and would vex the early Christian mind for quite some time. This was the question of the relationship between the Torah and gentile converts to the new faith. But we have not arrived at that debate yet. We will linger a little longer with the early community of Jewish believers in Jerusalem during those first years after the death and resurrection of Jesus. Most of our information comes from the early chapters of Acts, and some from material preserved in Eusebius' *Church History.*

The Early Community and Mount Zion

In the beginning, according to Luke, there was conflict between the leading apostles and the temple authorities. On the other hand, the early community of believers in Jesus was held in high regard by the common people of Jerusalem. The latter fact goes a long way toward proving that the believers in Jesus were ordinary pious Jews in their lifestyle, provoking no offense by any kind of extremism as far as law and lifestyle were concerned. What set them apart from their neighbors was not their lifestyle, but their faith – and their very public proclamation of it. The apostles taught in public inside the temple compound itself, in the colonnades that surrounded the Court of the Gentiles – as Jesus himself had done, probably on more than one occasion and certainly during his last week in Jerusalem. This choice of location was hardly accidental. There are rabbinic sayings to the effect that authoritative decisions concerning the law should be made on and proclaimed from "Zion," the Temple Mount, according to Isaiah 2:3: "For out of Zion shall go forth instruction [Torah], and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." If any man believed that God had entrusted him with a decisive message to Israel, he had to address the people from the temple courts, from Zion. In Jewish tradition, Zion and Sinai were often put in juxtaposition: just as the word of God had been given at Mount Sinai the first time, it was to proceed from Mount Zion in the end-time. Therefore, although the Temple Mount was probably the most dangerous place the apostles could possibly preach and teach, they hardly felt they had any choice, considering the import of their message.

God – in these last days – had once again entrusted his chosen messengers with his word to his people.

This understanding of the nature of things is vividly present in Luke's report on the "birth" of the Jerusalem community on the first day of Pentecost in Acts 2. (It would perhaps be more to the point to speak of the community's "confirmation" than of its birth.) In order to understand this report properly, one should pay attention to how Jews envisaged the events at Sinai. (Literary attestations of this tradition are later than Acts 2, but this text in itself is a sufficient indicator of the age of the tradition.) At Sinai all 70 peoples of the earth had been gathered, and all were offered God's law. In order to be understood by all, God's voice split up into the different languages of the peoples, so that all could hear in their own tongue. The voice of God had even manifested itself in visible tongues of fire. This tradition is very likely the backdrop of the narrative in Acts 2: Once again, the Sinai event takes place, but this time on the end-time Sinai, Mount Zion. The voice of God splits up, and representatives from different lands and regions from the four corners of the earth hear God speak in their own language.

The Temple on Mount Zion: Old and New

At the top of Mount Zion stood the temple. It goes without saying that in some way or other the early community had to relate to the temple; they could not simply ignore it. Jesus himself had not ignored it. But how should one deal with it? The temple had two basic functions. First, it was the place of God's presence; his name dwelt there. Therefore, the temple was the preferred place of prayer, and the place of the rites that accompanied prayer: songs of praise and sacrifices of praise and gratitude. This aspect of the temple seems to have caused the early believers no problems at all – rather the contrary. We are told they regularly visited the temple to pray there. Paul once paid for the sacrifices of purification that were to be brought by some Nazirites. In short, there were aspects of the temple service, centered around prayer and the bringing of praise, that the early community of believers found no problems in continuing.

The other focal point of the temple service was more problematic. The temple was the place where forgiveness of sins was procured for Israel by the bringing of atoning sacrifices. As we have seen already, the atoning animal sacrifices offered in the temple had provided one of the models used to interpret the death of Jesus. He had been brought as a sacrificial victim and had been slaughtered as an atoning sacrifice. At the same time, he was understood as the ultimate and final sacrifice that put an end to all others. After him, no more sacrifices were needed.

It is difficult to gauge with any certainty how soon and how widely this understanding of things became prevalent in the early community. In Romans 3:25, Paul probably uses an earlier formula originating in Jerusalem. This formula, describing Jesus as "a sacrifice of atonement by his blood," contains a clear reference to the atonement effected by the

high priest in the holy of holies each Day of Atonement. This implies that Jesus not only was the ultimate sacrifice, but also that he made all other sacrifices superfluous. In Jewish Christian sources (preserved in Eusebius, Epiphanius, and the Pseudo-Clementines) that tell the story of the pre-70 Jerusalem community – and probably reflect its views on the matter – we are told of a complete rejection of the sacrificial service of the temple. This is brought out most vividly in the legends about James, the brother of Jesus. According to Hegesippus (writing ca. 190 CE), James took over the function of the high priest in the temple, and in a very interesting way – not once a year, but each day James entered the holy of holies. And there he wrought forgiveness of sins for Israel, but not by bringing sacrifices and sprinkling their blood; no, his only means was intercessory prayer. He was on his knees daily in the innermost sanctuary, so that his knees looked like those of a camel! It is as if James' service of intercession is an enactment in the temple of Jeremiah's and Isaiah's prophecies (Isa 56:7; Jer 7:11), quoted by Jesus in the temple compound: My house shall be a house of prayer, not a den of robbers (i.e. merchants trading animals for sacrifice).

This was one way the community dealt with the temple. But there was also another strategy, used before them by the Jewish community in Qumran by the Dead Sea. The Qumran community, too, was critical of the temple worship, but for a different reason. They thought the temple had been polluted by an unworthy priesthood. At the same time they were quite priestly themselves, and valued the temple and its service highly. What to do? They proclaimed that their own community was now the true temple.

In the early community of believers in Jesus in Jerusalem we see something similar. The community and its leaders are spoken of in temple terms. Peter is likened to the rock upon which the new temple, the *ecclesia* of Jesus, is built (Matt 16:18). The apostles and prophets are its foundation (Eph 2:20). James, Peter, and John Zebedee (and possibly others) are its pillars (Gal 2:9), James also its protecting wall (Hegesippus in Eusebius). Christ himself is the keystone. In a way, the physical temple on Zion became superfluous; it was replaced by a spiritual temple, the *ecclesia* of Jesus, the true house of the Lord.

So, it makes much sense that the earliest reports of conflict have to do with the temple authorities. In perceiving a danger to their own trade from this new movement, the priests of the temple were not entirely wrong. But it was the Romans, not the believers in Jesus, who would put the priestly establishment out of business on a permanent basis.

Jerusalem: the Mother Community

The reader will have observed, from what has been said so far, that the theological doctrines of the early Jerusalem community were not unusual or deviant in any way compared with motifs that are widespread throughout the New Testament writings. I believe the explanation for this is quite

straightforward: in many respects, the fundamental theological ideas of Christianity were hammered out during those early years in the Jerusalem community. At a later date, Paul was to insist that although his calling to be the apostle to the gentiles was given directly by Christ and no man, he was careful to check that his preaching was in agreement with that of the key Jerusalem leaders (Gal 1:11–2:10). That this was not just something Paul claimed is shown in his own practice in his letters: very often when Paul wants to drive home an important theological point, he does so by quoting or alluding to a fixed theological formula deriving from the theological workshops of the early Jerusalem community. This makes it unlikely that the early Jerusalem community would have been regarded as sectarian by the church at large, or that the spiritual and theological heirs of the first community would be found among the Ebionites or other sectarian groups of the second century and later.

But were there no characteristics of this early Jerusalem community that set it apart and made it special, that were not adopted or continued by other communities elsewhere and later? It seems to me that there are three features that distinguished this community in its early years:

1) The first is its leadership structure. According to Luke and Matthew, Jesus had said to the Twelve before his passion, "And I confer on you a kingdom, … so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:29–30 [NIV]; see Matt 19:28). It seems that in the first years of the community's existence words like these were applied to present realities, not future ones. Now the twelve apostles had already claimed their thrones, they were the tribal heads of the renewed twelve tribes of Israel. Therefore it was also necessary to find a replacement for Judas Iscariot – when he fell, his throne was left vacant, and another had to take his place (Acts 1:15–26). No similar need for supplementing the circle of the Twelve arose, however, when they died. They did not leave their thrones empty by dying; they now occupied their heavenly thrones. Therefore the ministry of leadership for the Twelve was unique and singular; there were aspects of it that were unique to them and were not taken over by their successors. When the circle of the Twelve was broken up by persecution, martyrdom, natural death, and involuntary exile, it was apparently not replaced by a new, evolving circle, but by a partly parallel but differently constructed pattern of leadership: James, the brother of Jesus, ascended to the top as chief leader of the community. Perhaps together with him, certainly after him, other of Jesus' nearest relatives were the natural leaders of the community. It is possible, however, that a symbolic reminder of the circle of the Twelve was present in the form of a twelve-member "presbytery" that assisted the leaders from Jesus' family. This leadership structure was peculiar to the Jerusalem community.
2) The role ascribed to the twelve apostles presupposed a very strong feeling of living in the end-time, living in a time when the final ful-

fillment of prophetic hopes was about to begin. Everything points to the reality that in these early years, the community of believers looked forward to the imminent appearance of Jesus in his messianic power and divine glory. In the meantime, they appear to have lived in an atmosphere of enthusiastic anticipation of eschatological realities. According to the synoptic gospels, Jesus celebrated the Jewish Passover with his disciples the day before he died. On that occasion he pointed forward to the time of the kingdom, when he would share the meal with them again. At the same time, he re-interpreted the significance of the unleavened bread and gave a new interpretation to the cup of wine, thereby instituting what became the eucharistic meal. Luke writes that in the beginning the Jerusalem community "daily broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts praising God." They also were together daily in the temple (Acts 2:46–47). There are many ways to interpret this. Luke would hardly consider it worth mentioning that they ate daily; hence the "breaking of bread" should probably be taken as a reference to some kind of eucharistic meal, since this association would cling to the term in Luke's time. Personally, I feel many features of Luke's portrait of the early community fall into place if one assumes that the community lived in a kind of continuous, eschatological Passover celebration. This would explain the daily Eucharist: The time of the kingdom has begun, now is the time when "you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom." One can easily imagine that this high-strung eschatological atmosphere cooled down somewhat in time, and that the continuous celebration of the presence of the risen Lord crystallized into the weekly celebration of his resurrection as a past event, on the first day of the week. This would explain why the Christian modification of the Jewish Passover meal, the Eucharist, came to be celebrated weekly and not once a year, as is the Passover. I should emphasize the hypothetical nature of this reconstruction. Our sources are sparse; the material allows for more than one interpretation.

3) The community practiced shared ownership of goods; many rich people sold their goods and contributed in this way to the common fund. In part, this may simply have been a continuation of the way Jesus and his disciples had lived. But it may also have been motivated by an important element in the community's understanding of itself. In Deuteronomy 15:1–4 there is a commandment about remission of all debts every 7th year – the good result being that "there will be no one in need among you" (quoted in Acts 4:34). Everyone was aware that this commandment of the Torah had remained a utopian ideal and little more. The Jerusalem community, like many Essenes, may have thought that in these latter days the time had come to realize this ideal. Their practice was not, to our knowledge, adopted by other Christian communities in such a concrete way. But the ideal of shared ownership of goods continued to be valued highly in the Christian movement. When Luke writes about it in Acts, it is not in order to

report a failure (as often thought), but rather to extol an ideal to be emulated in different ways. When, later, an external fundraising campaign for the many poor in Jerusalem became necessary, it was not a sign of the Jerusalem community's faulty strategy but rather of its success: the community presumably attracted many poor people, precisely because of its effective diaconal service.

Thus the community did not only teach and believe that they were realizing the life of New Israel in the last days, they did it in practice as well: in their worship, in their community life, in their caring for temporal needs. By this, Luke's simple picture gains in credibility: they were highly valued and respected by the common people of Jerusalem. And by none of this did they place themselves outside "Judaism." Even a hostile observer (in Acts 24:5) describes them as a "sect" or "party" within Judaism, and he uses the same term for this – *hairesis* – which Josephus uses when he describes the parties of Pharisees and Sadducees.

But this relatively peaceful situation was not to last. In order to understand the events that resulted in increased conflict, we shall have to turn to the expatriates in Jerusalem – the quite substantial colony of diaspora Jews living in the city at any time.

Jerusalem: Resident Diaspora Jews

"Jerusalem is my native city … and it is the mother city not only of the land of Judea, but also of many countries." The man saying these words, Philo, was himself a diaspora Jew born and raised in Alexandria, the capital of Egypt. He may have made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem once, but he spent his entire life as a citizen of Alexandria. Yet, his words about Jerusalem as his true native city are not only theological and ideological rhetoric. We all know the phenomenon from our own experience: expatriates often become more emotionally attached to the homeland than those actually living there. And in this case the attachment was often quite concrete, beyond the emotional level. There was constant two-way traffic of people, and with the people a two-way exchange of information, advice, impulses, and ideas between Jerusalem and the diaspora. If Jerusalem was the capital of Judea, it was even more so the true capital of the extensive Jewish diaspora. First and foremost we have the two-way traffic of pilgrimage. The ideal was to make the three yearly pilgrimages. For obvious reasons of time and expense this was practically impossible for those living some distance away, and the difficulties increased with the distance. For such people it was practical and cheaper to stay for two festivals, possibly all three, once they were in Jerusalem. Some people may have thought of their pilgrimage as a once-in-a-lifetime chance to enjoy the spiritual blessings of Jerusalem: regular participation in temple worship, opportunities to hear and converse with the leading sages of Jerusalem, and above all the thrilling experience of being in the chosen city of God's dwelling. Some may have stayed in Jerusalem for longer

periods for educational purposes, as we see the young Paul (Saul) do. Others may have postponed their pilgrimage to their later years, when they came to stay in Jerusalem and end their days there. All who were buried in the large cemetery on the Mount of Olives would wake up on the Day of Judgment and find themselves in the privileged front row.

For these and other reasons the visiting or resident diaspora Jews made their distinctive mark on the physiognomy of Jerusalem, and knowledge of what happened in Jerusalem would soon be spread to the remotest corners of the Jewish diaspora. (Whereas things that happened in Galilee could go unnoticed much longer.) Luke captures the situation perfectly in his picture of the crowd gathered in Jerusalem at Pentecost: the apostles were addressing Jews and proselytes from 1) Partia, Mede, Elam, Mesopotamia and Judea [the lands east of Jerusalem, counted from East to West]; 2) Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia [the lands to the North, enumerated counterclockwise]; 3) Egypt, Libyan Cyrene, Rome and Crete [lands to the West, counted clockwise]; and 4) Arabia [the land to the South]. We should probably also envisage native Jerusalemites as part of the audience, but Luke passes over them in silence, because it is the miracle of foreigners hearing the message in their own native tongues that is his focus at this point of the story. And here they are, Jewish expatriates from the four corners of the known world, listening to the Word of God now "going out from Zion" (Isa 2:3). In other words, when Jesus said to his disciples that his message should be proclaimed "to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47), one can reasonably claim that the apostles began doing so already on this first Day of Pentecost. From Jerusalem, their message would be carried by returning pilgrims to Partia, Mede, Elam, … Egypt, Rome, Crete, Arabia – to the four corners of the known world. In Romans 10:18 Paul quotes Psalm 19:4 as referring to the universal preaching of the gospel to the Jews, and as something that has already taken place: "Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world." In a certain sense, this was true from day one after Pentecost.

The majority of diaspora Jews living in Jerusalem spoke the *lingua franca* of those days, Greek. Many of them spoke Greek as their mother tongue or were genuinely bilingual, using Hebrew or Aramaic at home and Greek among their neighbors (as we can envisage Paul doing in Tarsus). There is great agreement among scholars today that when Luke calls the diaspora Jews of Jerusalem "Hellenists," it is their use of Greek as the common language he has in mind. Hellenists means "Greek-speakers."

In Jerusalem the diaspora Jews had their own institutions. All available evidence indicates that the synagogue originated in the diaspora. When they came to Jerusalem, the Jews of the diaspora brought the synagogue with them, and erected synagogues in the city. One of these, the only Jerusalem synagogue mentioned in Acts, was the "Synagogue of the Freedmen" (Acts 6:9). In this synagogue we find Jews from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia, and Asia. If this synagogue was a building (and not

only a community), it could well be identified with a building attested archaeologically by the following inscription, found in 1913 south of the Temple Mount:

> Theodotus the son of Vettenus, priest and archisynagogos, son of the archisynagogos, grandson of the archisynagogos, restored this synagogue for the reading of the Torah and the study of the commandments, and the hostel and the rooms and the [ritual] baths, for needy travelers from foreign lands. The foundations of the synagogue were laid by his fathers and the elders and Simonides.

This inscription opens a window into the piety and mentality of diaspora Jews in Jerusalem. The synagogue was built and maintained by a family of diaspora Jews of priestly descent, who probably immigrated to Jerusalem. The building was to serve pilgrims from the diaspora, and the inscription tells us what they came for: the reading of the Torah, the study of the commandments, the purification necessary to enter the temple.

I believe we should envisage the resident diaspora community in Jerusalem as a rather select group; they were probably not average diaspora Jews. Their very presence in Jerusalem testified to their commitment to central aspects of Jewish religion: the temple and its service, and the law. Their attitude is described well by one from their own ranks. They had zeal (Phil 3:6) – zeal for the law, zeal for the temple. Apart from that, many of them had probably drained their financial resources in order to come to Jerusalem, and may have had problems in finding good local employment. In other words, they would depend on charitable contributions to survive. The main source of such contributions would be their relatives back home, but local charity in Jerusalem could also come in handy.

Jerusalem: Hebrews and Hellenists

It is on this double background – zeal for the law and the temple and relative poverty – that I think we should read the account of the Hellenists in Acts 6 and 7. Distribution of sufficient food was a serious matter for the Hellenists, especially for their widows (Acts 6:1), and was a potential area for serious conflict. What to do? Seven trusted men were appointed to look after this business, and it seems their task was not limited to the distribution of food. Very likely they were leaders of the Hellenist group in the early community, very much after the model of the Twelve for the Hebrew (Aramaic-speaking) group. Twelve was the number of Israel, the twelve-tribe people. Seventy was the traditional figure associated with all the lands and peoples on earth. Perhaps the figure seven was an indication that these were leaders of those Jews coming from all the nations. (Cf. also the seventy disciples in Luke 10.) The necessity of this arrangement indicates that by this time, there was already a substantial group of diaspora Jews in the early community. Through these believers, the Jerusalem community as a whole was directly linked to the Jewish

diaspora network. The Jerusalem community was not an isolated group in a cultural backwater. They had excellent contacts all over the Jewish world.

But now we have to bring in the second characteristic of the diaspora Jews highlighted above: their zeal on behalf of the law and the temple. When preachers and teachers like Stephen, himself a Hellenist, entered the synagogues of their kinsmen from the diaspora, they addressed an audience prone to react intensely – with zeal! – to everything they said. Imagine Paul, before his calling, in the audience, and you probably have the typical picture of a zealous diaspora synagogue attendee. This was stuff for conflict and controversy, probably more so here than in the average audience of native Jerusalemites. That is probably the reason why it is among the Hellenists that we hear, for the first time, of persecution instigated from "below" rather than by the temple authorities. The accusation against Stephen concentrates precisely on the two things that mattered most to the local diaspora community: "This man never stops saying things against this holy place and the law" (Acts 6:13). The message of the early preachers of Jesus was explosive stuff in this setting, and Stephen became the first martyr. Some scholars assume his martyrdom was the result of a more radical anti-temple or anti-law attitude among the Hellenist preachers, more prevalent among them than among the Twelve and the "Hebrews." But I find this unlikely, and think the explanation proposed here is easier to substantiate in the sources: in Acts, Jewish Hellenists regularly appear as zealots for the law and the temple. In many ways, they are reminiscent of the present-day zealots in Jerusalem. Many of them are immigrants, and they speak the Greek of our days – American English – often with a Brooklyn accent.

The persecution of Stephen spread to include others, and many of the Jerusalem community had to leave the city. They preached wherever they went. Philip, one of the seven, went as far as Samaria and preached and baptized there. Some time later, Peter and John came from Jerusalem to approve and confirm this new breakthrough of the gospel. Philip, for his part, met, converted, and baptized an Ethiopian eunuch, probably a proselyte (Acts 8). None of these cases are presented by Luke as examples of mission among gentiles. They should rather be seen as mission among fringe groups that were excluded from the Israel of old, but were to be included in the new, restored Israel. In the end-time, "Joseph" (the tribes of the Shechem/Nablus area) would join "Judah" (Ezek 37:15–28), and the eunuchs would find a place now denied them in the House of the Lord (Isa 56:3–5).

The First Mission to the Gentiles

Some of the dispersed believers went beyond this. They traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, but spoke to no one except the Jews. Some, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, also spoke to Greeks (gentiles) when they arrived at Antioch (Acts 11:19–20), and many believed.

From a chronological point of view, one would think of this as the beginning of the mission among the gentiles. But Luke is eager to have the gentile mission begin by apostolic authority, and therefore he interpolates other material between the narrative summarized in this passage and the story told in the passage above. In Acts 10:1–11:18 he tells the story of Peter and Cornelius, and the subsequent summit in Jerusalem at which the Jerusalem community endorsed the first baptism of a gentile household: "God has given even to the gentiles the repentance that leads to life!" (Acts 11:18). The story of Peter and Cornelius is in many ways spectacular and singular, a clear demonstration of the legitimacy of the gentile mission by direct divine intervention.

The story of the first gentile mission in Antioch, by contrast, is quite unspectacular. This mission should, in many ways, be seen as an almost inevitable side effect of preaching the gospel in the synagogues of Antioch. In a typical synagogue in the greater cities of the empire there were not only Jews in attendance, but also "God-fearing" non-Jews. They knew and believed in the God of Israel; they obeyed the ethical commandments of the Torah, and probably some of the ritual commandments as well – especially such as made fellowship with Jews easier. We may have an echo of their practice at this point in the *Didaché* (ca. 100 CE, possibly written in Antioch): "Concerning food, observe as much as you can, but in any case keep far away from that which is offered to idols" (6:3). When the believers in Jesus preached in the Antiochene synagogues, they would find a hearing not only among the local Jews but also among the God-fearing gentiles. In this way the beginning of the mission among the gentiles would be a quite undramatic spin-off, so to speak, of the mission to the Jews. But when uncircumcised gentiles were added to the community of believers, a new problem immediately had to be addressed: Were they to be circumcised and subject to all the commandments of the Torah – even those commandments that were given exclusively to Israel? Or could they be included in the community as gentiles, as non-Jews, who were only subject to those commandments of the Torah which were expressly said to be valid for "the foreigners dwelling among you"? In order to answer this question, the whole question of the role of the Torah in the days of the Messiah had to be addressed. This theme, and the whole question of the mission among the gentiles, will be the subject of the next chapter. Here I will wrap up this story about the Jerusalem community with a few words about James and his successors, and with a short review of the surprisingly many individuals we know of by name in this community.

Early Leaders: James and Other Relatives of Jesus

There is hardly any doubt that the first leaders of the Jerusalem community were the Twelve. But there is likewise little doubt that at a later time James, the brother of Jesus, was the dominant leader. The fact that James is mentioned first among the three "pillars" in Galatians 2:9 probably reflects a situation in which James is already ascending to the lead-

ing position in Jerusalem. He clearly has this position at the meeting reported in Acts 15; even more so in Acts 21:17–26. The exact details of this perhaps gradual transition of leadership from the Twelve to James will probably always elude us – the only source (Acts) is not sufficiently explicit to allow definite conclusions. It was probably not a question of James supplanting the Twelve, but rather a process of complementarity, with one structure overlapping the other for a considerable period of time. In a certain sense, the circle of the Twelve would disappear with its first deceased or exiled member; and in this sense, it may have dissolved rather early. In Acts 12 we find two relevant facts in this regard: James son of Zebedee was executed by Herod (this is usually dated to 42 CE, Acts 12:2), and during the same persecution Peter left Jerusalem, either for good or for quite some time (Acts 12:17). Peter "left and went to another place"; some have taken this as a veiled reference to his journey to Rome. In any case, Peter reappears in Acts 15, but that is the last time we hear of him in Acts.

With Peter out of the picture, James was left as the towering figure of authority in Jerusalem. He was the oldest brother of Jesus, but not the only one. There were three more brothers – Joses, Judas (Jude), and Simon (Mark 6:3) – and at least two sisters, possibly called Mary and Salome. But it seems these other siblings of Jesus may have had Galilee rather than Jerusalem as their permanent dwelling (1 Cor 9:5; Julius Africanus); hence James in Jerusalem may have had a "presbytery" around him rather than a family council of siblings. James died a martyr's death in 62 CE. Three accounts of his death have been preserved, one in Josephus, one in Eusebius (quoting Hegesippus), and one in the Nag Hammadi *Apocryphon of James*. Common to these sources is the portrayal of James as having an excellent standing among all the Jews of Jerusalem, and being called, like Abraham and a few others, *the Just*. He is further portrayed in Hegesippus as a man of prayer. According to the Jewish style of turning theological ideas into concrete narrative form, Hegesippus tells the story of how James lived in "priestly" sanctity from childhood, and how he, as leader of the Jerusalem community, daily entered the holy of holies to pray and to intercede with God for the people, more effectively than any sacrificial service could. According to the same story in Hegesippus, when James was killed and an end put to his intercessory prayer, the Romans immediately made war on Jerusalem and Judea, and destroyed the city. Jerusalem's *oblias* – possibly *gebul-am*, "protecting wall of the people" – was gone.

Whether the New Testament Epistle of James was written under his personal supervision, in good Greek, or as his testament by a close associate after his death, there are good reasons to regard it as an authentic expression of James' teaching. It is structured as an "encyclical" from a central authority in Jerusalem to the Israel of the diaspora. In this letter, James comes through as a representative of the same type of Jewish wisdom teaching that we find in many of the sayings of Jesus. James is a Jewish sage who believes in Jesus. When he says that faith needs be more

than a theoretical insight, this is not necessarily anti-Paul. It can be better understood as a traditional Jewish emphasis on the kind of faith required by the *Shema* of Deuteronomy 6:4. Believing in the oneness of the God of Israel, as a purely intellectual insight, is not enough to qualify as faith in the full biblical sense. One is also required to love him with all one's heart, soul, and might (Deut 6:5). A purely theoretical insight – "faith by itself" – into the oneness of God may in itself be barren; it produces no corresponding works. When faith is alive, it is different. All of this is fully understandable without any polemical glance at Paul. Paul is speaking of faith in another sense: not faith in the oneness of God according to the *Shema*, but faith in God's saving act for men in Jesus. The difference between the two authors concerning the saving power of faith in itself has to do with the differences in their respective concepts of faith.

When James was martyred, the Jerusalem community faced a leadership crisis. By the year 62 CE Peter was probably far away in Rome, and no other of the Twelve seems to have been ready to step in as head of the community. According to Hegesippus, a meeting took place in Jerusalem in which Jesus' cousin Symeon, son of Joseph's brother Clopas, was elected "bishop" after James. Symeon was martyred under Trajan, according to Hegesippus, by being crucified. Hegesippus says that he was 120 years old at his martyrdom. This is probably not historical information, but a theological statement: like some other biblical figures, and because of his righteousness, he reached the maximum age (after the great flood) for humans. Historically, his martyrdom may have occurred around 100 CE. The main criterion for electing Symeon as James' successor was certainly his close family ties to Jesus. Some scholars have spoken about the succession Jesus–James–Symeon as an early Jewish Christian "caliphate," in which the close relatives of the founder succeed him as chiefs. While this may be an exaggeration, there is probably some truth to it. And this gives us an interesting perspective on the wild theories of the bestselling *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail*, by Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh and Henry Lincoln (London: Jonathan Cape, 1982). In this book it is claimed that Jesus survived the cross and became an old man, that he married Mary Magdalene and had offspring from her, and that this "Jesus dynasty" represented a constant threat to Christian orthodoxy by their very existence. (Christian orthodoxy was the myth that Jesus died on the cross, rose again and ascended to heaven, leaving no offspring behind.) The authors are right on one point: had Jesus survived the cross and lived on for many years, and had he married and had offspring by Mary Magdalene, then Jesus, his wife, and their children would have been very effective refutations of the whole Christian message right from its beginning. In fact, this refutation would have been so devastating that it is inconceivable that the Christian "myth" would arise at all, much less inspire belief. But the authors also have to disregard the evidence we have just now reviewed. In Hegesippus, the close relatives of Jesus were not only completely unfamiliar with the "fact" of his marriage and offspring; they not only believed in the Christian "myth" about the crucified, risen, and en-

throned Jesus – they were also regarded as the very guardians of Christian orthodoxy! Hegesippus says that as long as the church of Jerusalem was ruled by the Lord's relatives, it was orthodox and not sullied by heresy. After Symeon's martyrdom this changed; heresy made a bid for leadership of the Jerusalem community. What Hegesippus means by orthodoxy is illustrated by his own report that he traveled to Rome via Corinth, and that he found the same faith as that of the Jerusalem church in both these churches. Of course, Hegesippus may embellish things a little and smooth over differences, but what he said would not find acceptance among his readers if it flew right in the face of common knowledge. In other words, the Jerusalem community under Symeon's leadership was not known in the church at large as significantly deviant in any way.

In this case, why does it seem like this community lost some of its significance, after 70 CE, as the "Mother Community" toward which all eyes were directed as far as leadership and guidance for the church at large were concerned? This may have to do with the fate of Jerusalem itself in the years after 70. Archaeologists are now quite convinced that Jerusalem was practically emptied of its Jews after 70; the only permanent residents were the tenth Roman garrison, keeping watch in a completely ruined city. This tallies well with the report in Eusebius that the community of believers in Jesus left the city shortly before the war, due to a prophetic warning. Eusebius does not say that they ever returned. This has been inferred, however, by what he says about fifteen "bishops from the circumcision" leading the community, from James to the Bar Kokhba war. But it is not clear from this list whether these leaders really were residing in Jerusalem, or were leaders-in-exile over a community-in-exile (according to Eusebius this exile was located mainly in Pella in the Transjordan). If the latter alternative corresponds to the facts, the physical dissolving of the Jerusalem community after 70 would explain its apparent loss of significance in those same years. Explanations based on the assumption that it gradually developed sectarian or heretical views are unfounded in the sources, and seem to me unnecessary.

Jerusalem: Jewish Believers Known by Name

I conclude this story of the Jerusalem community with a review of the members we know by name. This review is based on the more extensive one written by Richard Bauckham in the forthcoming *History of Jewish Believers in Jesus (HJBJ)* volume. I list them in alphabetical order, except that the Twelve and the Seven are mentioned first in each section.

Hebrews

The Twelve, mentioned here in the order of Acts 1.

1. *Peter* (Greek) or *Kefa* (Aramaic) – "The Rock" – was his nickname, given him by Jesus. His original name was *Simon*. His brother was Andrew (a Greek name), his father Jonah or John. His father's house was

in Bethsaida, a fishing village on the northeastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. His mother-in-law lived in Capernaum. Her house seems to have been Peter and his wife's residence when Jesus called him to become his disciple. As "The Rock" Peter was the leader in the circle of the Twelve.

2. *John, son of Zebedee.* Like Peter, John was a fisherman, probably from Capernaum. In the early stories in Acts he often appears together with Peter. Among the Twelve, these two act as a team and as the two foremost leaders. Already as fishermen in Galilee, Peter, John, and James were close companions (Luke 5:10); the bond between them may have developed after Peter moved to Capernaum, or John and his brother may have also originally come from Bethsaida. If the latter was the case, it would prove that the two families often acted in concert, since both moved to Capernaum.

3. *James, brother of John*. The two sons of Zebedee had a very ambitious mother, and were called *Boanerges* by Jesus. The meaning of this name is uncertain; in Mark 3:17 it is interpreted as "sons of thunder." (Since John and James are mentioned second and third in Mark's and Luke's lists [Mark 3:16–19; Acts 1:13] the name may allude to the violence of the second and third of the twelve tribes, Simeon and Levi, reported in Genesis 34 and 49:5–7: "weapons of violence are their swords.") Together with Peter, the two brothers made up the inner circle of three among the Twelve. In the early Jerusalem community, James seems to have receded somewhat into the background rather quickly. He is not mentioned in the stories of Peter and John in Acts 3–4 and 8. James son of Zebedee was among the early martyrs; he was executed by the sword under Herod Antipas, ca. 42 CE, probably the first of the Twelve to die.

4. *Andrew* (the name is Greek) was the brother of Peter. The reason he is not mentioned together with Peter, in the lists in Mark and Acts, is that "the three" should be mentioned first.

5. *Philip* (also a Greek name) sometimes acts together with Andrew (John 6:5–9; 12:20–22). Like Andrew and Peter, and perhaps John and James, Philip was from Bethsaida. They were probably intimate friends before being called by Jesus, and may have had family ties. The Philip belonging to the Twelve is not to be confused with Philip the Evangelist (see below). He was soon identified with him, however, in later ecclesiastical tradition. In Acts, Philip of the Twelve plays no role, except in the list of apostles.

6. *Thomas "the Twin."* Theoma is Aramaic for twin. Probably Thomas had a twin brother, and the two of them were known as the Twins. Only one of them became a member of the Twelve, and hence was called the Twin. In Syriac tradition, his name is given as *Judas Thomas*, Judas the Twin. Judas could thus be his personal name, but he was called by his nickname so as not to be confused with Judas the traitor and the other Judas among the Twelve (see below). A recent theory – that Thomas was actually the twin brother of Jesus – misunderstands theological language about Thomas as a spiritual double of Jesus as if it was meant physically. In the stories of Acts Thomas plays no role; according to Syriac legends of

a later time, he became the apostle of the Syriac church, and ended his days in India.

7. *Bartholomew*. From the New Testament we only know his name; according to later legend he brought the gospel to India, but this may be without historical basis.

8. *Matthew* (Matt 9:9); also called Levi (Mark 2:14)? Matthew appears in all lists of the Twelve in the New Testament; apart from this, we hear nothing of him. A tax-collector named Levi, son of Alphaeus, was called to be a disciple of Jesus according to Mark 2:14, but in this narrative it is not said that he became a member of the Twelve. Perhaps the author of Matthew identified Mark's Levi with Matthew in order to have a story of Matthew's calling. In other early ecclesiastical traditions, Mark's Levi is sometimes identified with another of the Twelve, James son of Alphaeus (because of the father's name; see the next entry). If Levi and Matthew really were the same person, it could be that Matthew was a Levite, and that being a tax-collector was sufficiently unusual for a Levite to give him precisely this nickname: *Ha-Levi*, the Levite. In later ecclesiastical tradition, Matthew is first and foremost known as the author of the most influential New Testament gospel: the Gospel of Matthew.

9. *James son of Alphaeus*. There were two other Jameses from whom it was necessary to distinguish this one: James son of Zebedee, and James brother of Jesus. This may account for his nickname, "the less," if, as is likely, he was the James mentioned in Mark 15:40. His mother was Mary, his siblings Joses and Salome. This Mary was hardly the mother of Jesus, since it is extremely unlikely that she had two sons by the name James. Mary, Joses, and Salome may have joined James in Jerusalem and belonged to the early community there.

10. *Simon the Zealot*, or in the Hebrew, *Shimon Ha-qannai*. His nickname may have primarily served to distinguish him from Simon Peter. It hardly describes him as a follower of an organized Zealot party, since this did not yet exist. It is probably a more general description of his attitude: he was zealous for the law of his ancestors, and may have been willing to use violence to uphold it. Apart from his appearance in the lists of the Twelve, we hear nothing about him.

11. *Judas son of James*. By his name, this apostle could easily be confused with Judas Iscariot. This may account for the "son of James" in Luke's lists, and for the fact that Mark and Matthew substitute his name with the Hebrew version of the Greek Theudas, *Thaddeus*. Jews of the time often had two names, one Greek and one Hebrew/Aramaic, the sound (not the meaning) of which were similar. Apart from the lists, this apostle is not mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament. In later Syriac legends he may be identified with Addai, who brought the gospel to Syria.

12. *Matthias* was chosen to replace Judas Iscariot. He had been a disciple of Jesus, and an eyewitness of the risen Lord. Apart from this, nothing is known of him.

The Relatives of Jesus

13. *Mary the mother of Jesus*. According to Acts 1:14 she was with the Twelve in the early days after Easter; according to John 19:27 the beloved disciple let her live in his own home, presumably in Jerusalem. Later legends saying that she followed this disciple (John the Presbyter, not John son of Zebedee) to Ephesus, and was buried there, are probably not historical.

14. *James, the brother of Jesus*, leader of the Jerusalem community together with the Twelve, and after their departure its sole leader. See more on him above. Jesus had three more brothers: Joses, Judas, and Simon (Mark 6:3). Paul, in 1 Corinthians 9:5, combined with information in Julius Africanus, gives one the impression that these brothers had their base of operation in Galilee rather than Jerusalem. But they probably were in close contact with the Jerusalem community, especially with their brother James.

15–16. *Clopas and Mary* (John 19:25). This Clopas was probably the brother of Joseph, Jesus' father, mentioned by Hegesippus. They seem to have made their dwelling in Jerusalem after the events of Jesus' last week.

17. *Symeon the son of Clopas* [and Mary, the above couple], cousin of Jesus. Succeeded James as leader of the Jerusalem community. See above.

Other Hebrews

18?. *Addai*, the evangelist of Syria according to late Syriac legends, may have been a historical person, but hardly identical to the Apostle Judas/Thaddeus.

19. *Agabus* (Acts 11:28; 21:10–11), a prophet. We have insufficient information to decide whether he was a native or a diaspora Jew.

20–21. *Ananias and Sapphira* (Acts 5:1–11), a rich couple. The Aramaic name Sapphira is almost exclusively attested among the rich inhabitants of Jerusalem in the first century.

22–23. *Andronicus and Junia* (Rom 16:7), probably husband and wife, certainly Jewish, possibly natives of Jerusalem, since they belonged to the early community and were eyewitnesses to the risen Lord ("apostles") like Matthias and Joseph in Acts 1:21–23. They became close friends of Paul. Richard Bauckham has proposed that Junia may be the Joanna of Luke 8:3 and 24:10; if so, she was among those who followed Jesus from Galilee and later settled in Jerusalem.

24. *John? "The Beloved Disciple"* and putative author of the fourth gospel may not have been John the son of Zebedee. If so, it is very likely that he had his home in Jerusalem and belonged to the Jerusalem community from the beginning. Later, he moved to Ephesus, and became known as John the Elder.

25–26. *John Mark* and his mother *Mary*. Since she owned a house in

Jerusalem, I have included them among the "Hebrews," although the diaspora background (Cyprus) of John Mark's cousin Barnabas (Col 4: 10) may imply a similar diaspora background for them as well. Outside the land of Israel, John Mark probably called himself by the Latin name Marcus. He was a co-worker of Paul and Barnabas in their missions; later we find him in Rome (1 Pet 5:13). An old and probably reliable tradition identifies him as the author of the earliest preserved gospel of the New Testament: Mark.

27. *Joseph Barsabbas Justus* (Acts 1:23): the non-chosen candidate to replace Judas Iscariot. He had been a disciple of Jesus in his ministry, and an eyewitness of the risen Lord. Justus was the Latin sound-equivalent to Joseph; Barsabbas means that he was born on a Sabbath. An early tradition, probably alluded to in Mark 16:18, records that he once drank poison without harm.

28. *Joseph of Arimathea*, a rich landowner from Jerusalem and member of the high priest's council, probably became a member of the Jerusalem community. He provided temporary burial for Jesus in his own rock-cut tomb.

29. *Nicodemus*, a member of the high priest's council, and belonging to one of Jerusalem's most aristocratic families, the ben Gurions, probably became a member of the Jerusalem community.

30. *Rhoda* (Acts 12:13–15), a female servant in the house of Mary mother of John Mark. She may have been of gentile origin, but had probably become a proselyte before coming to faith in Jesus, and should therefore be counted as a Jewish believer.

31. *Thebouthis* challenged Symeon at his election. He held heretical opinions according to Hegesippus, but exactly what his heresy was, is unclear.

Hellenists (Diaspora Jews)

The Seven

32. *Stephen* (a typically Greek name meaning wreath), perhaps the first believer in Jesus to venture a preaching campaign in the diaspora synagogues of Jerusalem. Became the first martyr.

33–37. *Philip the Evangelist* and his four daughters. Not to be confused with Philip the apostle. Preached in Samaria and to the Ethiopian eunuch, Acts 8. After some time he settled in Caesarea; according to early traditions he ended his days in Hierapolis in Asia Minor, where his tomb is mistakenly identified as the tomb of the apostle.

38. *Prochorus*. Apart from his name, and his being elected to be among the Seven, nothing is known about him.

39. *Nicanor*. The same as for Prochorus.

40. *Timon*. The same.

41. *Parmenas.* The same.

42. *Nicolaus*, a proselyte from Antioch. This is the one certain instance in the New Testament of a proselyte who became a believer. Irenaeus

and other church fathers take the "Nicolaitans" of Revelation 2:6, 15 to be heretical followers of this Nicolaus, but there is insufficient reason to make this identification.

Other Hellenists

43. *Joseph Barnabas*, a Levite from Cyprus, cousin of John Mark, probably one of the early founders of the Jerusalem community. Paul calls him an apostle, which probably means he was one of those commissioned to evangelize by an appearance of the risen Lord. Commissioned envoy from Jerusalem to the community in Antioch; co-worker of Paul on his first missionary journey. The last we hear of him is that he resumes his mission at the place of his birth, Cyprus, together with John Mark.

44. *Judas Barsabbas*, a prophet, one of the two entrusted with taking the official letter of the apostolic council to the diaspora communities (Acts 15:22–34).

45. *Mnason*, like Barnabas from Cyprus, had settled in Jerusalem or close to it, and was one of the founding members of the Jerusalem community. Was Paul's host during the latter's last visit to Jerusalem, as he approached the city (Acts 21:16).

46. *Silas/Silvanus*. According to Paul an apostle; he probably was commissioned to his service through an appearance of the risen Lord in the early days of the Jerusalem community. Used as an envoy of the Jerusalem community, i.a. to bring the letter of the Jerusalem council to its addressees. Accompanied Paul on part of his second journey. In 1 Peter Silas is in Rome together with Peter and Mark.

47–49. *Simon of Cyrene* and his sons *Alexander* and *Rufus*. Simon seems to have been resident in Jerusalem at the time of the crucifixion. Mark 15: 21 implies that the gospel's readers were quite familiar with Alexander and Rufus. They probably, like their father and mother, became members of the early Jerusalem community, and may later have come to Rome. In Romans 16:13 Paul greets Rufus and his mother, who were in Rome at the time Paul wrote this epistle. He says about Rufus' mother that she had been "a mother to me also" – obviously not in Rome, since Paul had not yet been to Rome. If we assume that Paul had met the family in Jerusalem, that they later moved to Rome, and that Mark was written in Rome, the identification of Rufus, the son of Simon of Cyrene, with the Rufus greeted in Romans 16 becomes an attractive hypothesis. But Rufus was too common a name for certainty to be possible.

This list is by no means exhaustive. Some other disciples mentioned in the gospels may have joined the Jerusalem community without Luke mentioning them, such as Nathaniel, Mary Magdalene, Martha, Mary and Lazarus of Bethany, Bartimaeus of Jericho, etc.

This brings us to ca. 50 individuals named or mentioned in the New Testament and the church fathers. The list illustrates and makes more concrete some of the aspects of the early community that were highlighted above, first and foremost that the Jerusalem community was not an

isolated one, having little contact and communication with the outside world. The distinction between resident Hebrews and resident/immigrant diaspora Hellenists was not razor-sharp. Many of the Hebrews traveled widely. Many of the diaspora Jews maintained contact with their homelands while in Jerusalem, and must have fed input from the diaspora into the Jerusalem community. There was lively, and continual, two-way traffic between the communities.

It is to the spread of the gospel through the Jewish diaspora network that we now turn, and to the new problems that this raised.

2. Jews, Gentiles, and the Torah

We have come to that part of our story which proved most difficult for the early community of believers. There was hardly anyone who doubted that according to the Scriptures the gentiles were to be included in the end-time salvation that God had promised his people. All peoples on earth were to receive the blessing promised to Abraham. He was to be not only the father of Israel, but the father of all nations. In the prophets, time and again we read words that speak of the salvation of non-Israelites, even Israel's arch-enemies like Egypt and Assyria. The question was not if, but *how* the gentiles were to be part of this end-time salvation. On this question there was no unanimous opinion among Jews in general at the time, nor was there any agreed position among the early believers in Jesus. Hardly anyone doubted that Jesus had confirmed the prophetic hope of salvation for the gentiles. He had even, on occasion, expanded his ministry to Israel and reached out to gentiles. As the risen one, he had commissioned his disciples to extend their ministry beyond Israel – "make [not only Israel but] all nations my disciples." But on the question of exactly how his disciples were to carry this out, Jesus had not been more forthcoming than the Scriptures.

The Salvation of the Gentiles – How?

It therefore comes as no surprise that this became a controversial question in the early community of believers in Jesus. In the New Testament books we seem to discern two or three main patterns of thought on this question. One of them was probably based on the model provided by prophetic passages like Isaiah 2:1–4. This text could easily be understood to mean that in the end-time God would first redeem Israel. The glory that would then be realized on Mount Zion, for Israel, would in its turn attract the attention of all other peoples. They would say among themselves, "Come, let us go to Jerusalem to get our share in the redemption that has been realized there." Then one could envision two scenarios. In the first, the gentiles receive their share in this end-time salvation by being made Jews through the rites of conversion. When the text speaks about the gentiles praising God for the Torah that went out from Zion, it

is not farfetched to think that they would mean the Torah given at Sinai, and this Torah was for Jews. But one could also imagine that this end-time going out of the Torah referred to a renewed Torah (some rabbinic texts express this opinion), and in that case the gentiles would not necessarily have to become Jews in order to be included in Israel's salvation. Several prophetic texts speak about the salvation of Egyptians and Assyrians (and other peoples) together with Israel, as Egyptians and Assyrians, rather than by being absorbed into Israel.

According to both varieties of this model, Israel was to be saved first. The salvation of Israel was, so to speak, the means of salvation for the gentiles. When all Israel had come in, the gentiles would come in almost by themselves.

It is not difficult to find very explicit statements of this view in early Christian literature. In the so-called *Preaching of Peter* (ca. 125 CE), Jesus says to his apostles that they should preach to Israel for 12 years, and then go out preaching to all the world. In the book of Acts, Luke himself seems to think very much along these lines, and James also, as reported by Luke. In his great speech in Acts 15:13–21, James says the following: Now God has restored the fallen booth of David, he has restored eschatological Israel, "*so that* all other peoples may seek the Lord – even all the gentiles over whom my name has been called." Even Paul – who otherwise modified this scheme in a very fundamental way – knew this model, and he complied with it by always visiting the local synagogue and proclaiming the gospel to the Jews first. It is not only Luke in Acts who portrays Paul's mission this way. Paul himself hints at this missionary pattern in Romans 1:16: the gospel is the power of salvation, for the Jews first, and then also for the Greek. According to Acts, Paul felt he had no right to proclaim to the gentiles before the Jews had had their fair chance to receive the gospel.

But there was also another way to conceive of Israel and the nations. This model took as its point of departure the simple historical fact of the widespread Jewish diaspora. By the time of Jesus, Jews were scattered around almost all the Mediterranean lands, and also further east, throughout the old Persian Empire. Biblically speaking, this could be interpreted as a curse: the punishment of exile. Salvation entailed being brought back to the land. But there was also another way of looking at it. It could also mean blessing; in particular, it could mean blessing for the peoples Israel was living amongst. By Israel being scattered among the nations, the light of the Torah shone among people who did not yet know it. They could be attracted by this light. By Israel's dispersion, the Lord had given Israel "as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth" (Isa 49:6).

Luke especially is quite familiar with this model. He hints at it more than once. In Acts 2, reporting the events at Pentecost, Luke describes the apostles speaking to an audience that will bring their words to the ends of the earth in all four directions. Not because this audience is an audience of gentiles – they are clearly Jews or proselytes – but because

this audience represents the widespread Jewish diaspora. Through these dispersed Jews the word of God will shine for the gentiles among whom they live. Again, when members of the Jerusalem community itself were dispersed in the aftermath of Stephen's martyrdom, their exile became a blessing to those among whom they lived. In the synagogues of Antioch, gentiles not only listened to the message; they believed and became members of the community.

This mission to the gentiles by "natural diffusion" through the Jewish diaspora network was perhaps as important as the missionary campaigns conducted by full-time missionaries like Paul. In terms of numbers of converts it was perhaps more important. Very likely, this was the way important communities like those in Rome, Ephesus, Antioch, and Alexandria had been formed. But whether by this method or by targeted campaigns, the question remained: Should gentiles who believe in Jesus be made Jews in the process? Should they be included in the New Israel of God through the rites of conversion to Judaism, or could they be included without them, i.e. *as gentiles?*

Must Gentile Believers Become Jews?

This was the big question of the mission to the gentiles. It was too important to be left to the whim of local communities. According to Acts, it was also too important to be left to men to decide – so it was decided by the Holy Spirit himself! Only afterward was it approved by Peter, and then by the whole Jerusalem community. I am speaking about the famous story in Acts 10, in which God leads Peter to the house of Cornelius after preparing him for the visit by commanding him in a vision to eat animals that Peter deemed unclean, non-kosher. For Jews obedient to the Torah's dietary regulations, this was a permanent problem. In the house of a gentile they would be offered food that was non-kosher, often by several criteria. No doubt Cornelius was not an ordinary gentile; he was a God-fearing gentile, believing in and praying to the God of Israel. But he had not formally converted to Judaism. He was therefore not subject to the full package of ritual commandments in the Torah, those commandments that were given to Israel alone.

When Peter preached in Cornelius' house, something happened that surprised him as well as the other believing Jews who had followed him: they "were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the gentiles, for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God" (Acts 10:45–46). For Peter, this decided the issue; the Holy Spirit himself had gone ahead of Peter and the other believers. The Holy Spirit of God took up his dwelling in uncircumcised people, he gave himself to them and manifested himself in them in exactly the same way as he had done with Peter and the other believers. The gift of the Spirit was the prime gift, the greatest privilege of each and every person in the new people of Israel. Therefore, Peter concluded, "Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just

as we [believing Jews] have?" (v. 47). Normally baptism and the Spirit belonged together. In this case the Spirit went ahead – the Spirit made an all-important point, so to speak, and Peter followed suit. "He ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days" (v. 48) – which Peter did, he and the Jewish believers who had followed him. They stayed with Cornelius for several days, eating his non-kosher food!

Back in Jerusalem this caused offense. When Peter returned, "the circumcised believers criticized him, saying, 'Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?'" (Acts 11:2–3). Peter answers by telling the whole story of what happened. He says the Holy Spirit taught him not to worry about the commandments that made a distinction between gentiles and Jews. And he says, "If God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?" With this Peter's critics were appeased, and they said, "Then God has given even to the gentiles the repentance that leads to life" (v. 17–18).

The question seemed settled. Non-Jews were not to be subject to any of the ritual commandments, but were to be baptized and thereby included in the new people of God as they were, as non-Jews. Jewish believers were to set aside those commandments of the Torah that made full table fellowship with gentile believers impossible (but were probably not to ignore them in other settings, among Jews).

It would soon appear, however, that not everyone was satisfied with this radical and simple solution to the problem. First and foremost, we hear nothing about James agreeing to it in Acts 11. This may explain something Paul writes in Galatians 2:11–14. When Peter came to Antioch, he acted as he had in the house of Cornelius – he ate with the gentile believers. But then some envoys came from James in Jerusalem, and Peter changed his behavior: "After they came, he drew back and kept himself separate for fear of the circumcision faction." This made Paul rebuke him to his face: Peter's former behavior had expressed his true opinion on the matter; what he did now was dishonest, done only out of fear for his good reputation.

A Practical Compromise: the Apostolic Decree

It seems that the meeting reported in Acts 15 was in response to this conflict, which threatened to divide the early church. Apparently, the opinion that gentiles had to be circumcised to enter the church had also been revived by some Pharisaic believers in Jerusalem (Acts 15:1–5). At this meeting, Peter defended the conclusion he had drawn from his experience at Cornelius' house: the gentiles were to be included without circumcision or the yoke of the Mosaic law. Then James spoke. He supported Peter's conclusion, but addressed more directly the question of table fellowship, proposing a new solution. In Leviticus 17–18, certain commandments were said to be obligatory not only for Israel, but also for the "foreign-

ers" living among them. If the non-Israelites kept these regulations, their presence among the Israelites would not pollute the land or its people. James now proposed – in order not to cause offense to the local Jewish communities of the diaspora, who knew the Torah well – that the gentile believers should comply with these commandments of the Torah: abstain from things polluted by idols, from fornication, from the meat of strangled animals, and from blood. This decision, the so-called Apostolic Decree, can be shown to have had a wide influence in the early church. When questioned by the Roman magistrate in 177 CE, the Christians of Lyon in Gaul said that they ate only meat without blood in it. In other words, they bought kosher meat from the local Jewish butcher.

How Paul related to the Apostolic Decree is a matter of discussion. Some scholars say he simply ignored it. Others say he implemented it, but interpreted it more according to its intention than according to its wording, as in 1 Corinthians 8–10. An interesting proposal by Marcus Bockmuehl is that one should notice the address of the decree carefully. It is valid for believers in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia. These areas were often included in "Greater Israel" as defined by the rabbis. The laws for foreigners in Leviticus 17–18 would therefore apply in these areas, but not outside them. Be that as it may, it seems clear that after the apostolic council of Acts 15 matters were settled for a while concerning the mission to the gentiles. It went on, and with considerable success. It should be emphasized, however, that this by no means meant an end to the mission to Israel.

Paul's Missionary Strategy

I have said already that Paul, who now emerged as the leading apostle to the gentiles, always preached to the Jews first. But Paul infused new impetus and urgency into the mission to the gentiles by deeply modifying the historical scheme that was presented above. As I said, Isaiah 2:1–4 was understood as implying that all Israel had to be saved first, before the time came for the gentiles to be included into this saved Israel. In Romans 11 Paul turns this scheme around. He says, No, God has not meant for us to wait for the salvation of all Israel before we turn to the gentiles. It is the other way around. For now, God has allowed the majority of Israel to harden their hearts with regard to the gospel. This means that we should go to the gentiles now, at once. And it is by observing what happens among the gentiles that Israel will be saved. By watching the gentiles receive God's salvation in Jesus, Israel will be provoked to zeal, and envy, and will turn to Christ as one. In this way, all Israel will be saved. In being the apostle to the gentiles, Paul is indirectly a worker for the salvation of all Israel.

We do not know how widely this Pauline point of view was accepted among Jewish believers in general. The answer to this question is not crucial, however, when it comes to assessing the amount of support Paul's mission to the gentiles had. The point is that on the decisive issue – that

gentile believers need not be circumcised nor subject to the full Mosaic practice – there was wide agreement among Jewish believers of many persuasions. This position had the backing of Peter (and presumably the remaining Twelve), it had the backing of James, it had the backing of plenary meetings of the Jerusalem leadership. We should not envisage Paul as an isolated loner in his "law-free" mission to the gentiles. He had Jewish co-workers all the time; he worked in agreement with the Jerusalem leaders. The communities that grew as the result of his work often had Jewish believers in their midst. The typical Christian community in the diaspora was a mixed one, and many communities had a substantial proportion of Jewish believers. And we are led to believe that Jewish and gentile believers lived closely together as one community. In Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8–10 Paul gives advice on how to handle possible conflicts that could arise because of this, especially when Jewish and gentile believers met around the same table, sharing a meal.

Summary

Let us review the broad lines of the story that has been unfolding in the period surveyed so far: 1) In Jerusalem and Galilee, and elsewhere in the land, we see communities of Jewish believers in Jesus. They probably were purely Jewish as far as their members were concerned. If gentiles were present in them, they were probably very few, like e.g. Cornelius' household in the community of Caesarea. The believers of these communities would normally lead an entirely Jewish life. Only rarely was it necessary to "become a gentile to gentiles" in order to win them and live together with them. But when necessary, the Jewish believers of the land were willing to do so. 2) In the diaspora, we see many mixed communities, in which Jewish and gentile believers lived closely together. Due to the much greater proportion of gentile believers here, greater accommodation was necessary on the part of the Jewish believers in this mixed setting. But very likely the Jews of the diaspora were also more accustomed to this kind of practical compromise than the Jews of the land were. Archaeology indicates that it was customary among the Jews of the diaspora to find practical compromises that allowed a certain degree of integration into the local community of citizens – without, however, compromising the basic beliefs and morals of Judaism.

If we had the opportunity to conduct a census of Jewish believers, say around 60 CE, it is quite possible that we would find the majority of Jewish believers living in mixed diaspora communities, and the minority living in purely Jewish communities in the land. The Jewish believers of the land of Israel would lead a completely Jewish life; the Jewish believers in the mixed communities would, to a greater extent, have "become gentiles to gentiles." That would not be due to a difference in theology, but would rather reflect their different circumstances.

As we did in the first chapter, let us give some faces and names to the anonymous group we have been talking about here: the Jewish believers

who worked together with Paul in his mission, and the Jewish believers we know by name who were core members of some of these mixed communities.

Jewish Co-workers or Friends of Paul

1–6. We know some of them already, because they were prominent members of the early Jerusalem community: certainly *Barnabas, John Mark*, *Silas/Silvanus*, and *Mnason*; possibly *Andronicus* and *Junia* (Rom 16:7). Working together closely with prominent members of the early Jerusalem community had great significance to Paul himself.

Others

7. *Ananias* of Damascus, "a devout man according to the law and well spoken of by all the Jews living there" (Acts 22:12). Instrumental at Paul's conversion, and the one who baptized him.

8. *Apollos* came from Alexandria. The first we hear of him in Acts is that he came to Ephesus (Acts 18:24). Later he went to work in Corinth. On his way from Alexandria to Ephesus he may have passed through Judea and become a disciple of John the Baptist before coming to believe in Jesus. His ignorance of baptism in Jesus' name may have been one of the doctrinal deficiencies that were mended by Prisca and Aquila during his stay in Ephesus. In Corinth his eloquence made some prefer him to Paul (see 1 Cor 1–4). He was not among Paul's closest co-workers, and the relationship between them may not have been entirely without tension.

9–10. *Aquila* and *Prisca/Priscilla*. Originally members of the community of believers at Rome, they were expelled from Rome along with other Jews in 49 CE, after which they came to Corinth. Here they were Paul's hosts and eager co-workers in his mission. Often Prisca is mentioned first, which may indicate that she was the more eager of the two. Later we meet the couple in Ephesus, again supporting Paul in his ministry there. The last we hear of them is in Paul's lists of greetings in Romans 16, which means they had returned to Rome, and in 2 Timothy, which would imply that they once more had returned to Ephesus.

11. *Aristarchus* (Col 4:10–11; Phlm 24; Acts 19:29; 20:4; 27:2), a Jewish believer whom Paul mentions as one of his co-workers. Probably a native of Thessalonica, he seems to have accompanied Paul on his third missionary journey, and on his journey as a prisoner to Rome.

12. *Crispus* (Acts 18:8; 1 Cor 1:14) was an *archisynagogos* of Corinth, and became a believer together with his entire household. He was one of the few Paul had baptized in Corinth.

13. *Herodion* (Rom 16:11), a Jewish believer in Rome, known to Paul and greeted by him. His name may indicate that he had been a slave in the household of King Herod.

14. *Jason* (Rom 16:21), a friend who accompanied Paul on his last visit to Jerusalem at the time of Paul's writing Romans (from Corinth). Perhaps

identical to the Jason in Thessalonica, mentioned in Acts 17:7. Many Jews with the Jewish name Jesus changed their name to Jason when living in Greek surroundings.

15. *Jesus Justus* (Col 4:11), characterized by Paul as a "co-worker of the circumcision."

16. *Lucius* (Rom 16:21), a Jewish believer, sends greetings from Corinth to Rome in Romans chapter 16. Nothing else is known about him.

17. *Lucius of Cyrene* (Acts 13:1, hardly identical to the Lucius of Rom 16: 21). A Jewish believer who worked together with Paul, Barnabas, Simon Niger, and Manaen in Antioch. He may have been among the founding members of the Antioch community, cf. Acts 11:20.

18. *Manaen* (Acts 13:1), the Greek form of *Menahem*, was a founding member of the Antioch community. He had been brought up with Herod Antipas.

19. *Mary* (Rom 16:6) in Rome was probably a Jewish believer, indicated by her name.

20–21. *Rufus* and his mother (Rom 16:13), very likely Jewish believers since Rufus was a common Greek substitute for Reuben. Paul probably knew them from Jerusalem, and Rufus could possibly be one of the sons of Simon of Cyrene (Mark 15:21).

22. *Simeon Niger* (Acts 13:1), cf. Lucius of Cyrene above. Simeon is a Hebrew name. His byname *Niger* may indicate that he came from somewhere in Africa.

23. *Sopater, son of Pyrrhus* (Acts 20:4), a believer from Beroea, accompanied Paul to Jerusalem on his last visit there. Probably identical to the *Sosipater* mentioned in Romans 16:21, there said to be Jewish.

24. *Sosthenes* (1 Cor 1:1), a fellow-sender of 1 Corinthians, perhaps identical to the Jewish believer Sosthenes of Acts 18:17; the latter was an *archisynagogos* of Corinth.

25–27? *Stephanas and his house* (1 Cor 1:16) were probably Jewish, having come to faith by listening to Paul in the Corinthian synagogue, Acts 18:4.

28–30. *Timothy*, his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois (2 Tim 1:5). Eunice was certainly Jewish, Lois very likely. Timothy himself had a gentile father, and was not circumcised until Paul performed this rite on him. He became one of Paul's closest and most trusted co-workers, traveled widely, and was co-sender of six of the Pauline letters.

31. *Zenas* (Titus 3:13) is characterized as "skilled in the law." This may indicate that he was Jewish, if the law in question was the Torah.

Most of these 30 or more persons were certainly Jewish believers; a few of them very likely so. Compared with a sum total of some 88 named individuals in the Pauline letters and Acts, this means that around one third of Paul's friends and co-workers in the diaspora were Jewish. It is interesting to observe that this proportion also seems to hold true for the one diaspora community for which we have any data at all: that in Rome. In Romans 16 Paul greets 26 persons; of these, some 8 were certainly or probably Jewish – again, one third. And this was after the expulsion of

the Jews from Rome in 49 CE. We may assume that some of them had already returned to the city, but hardly all. On the other hand, Jewish believers may be over-represented in the list in Romans 16, since Paul obviously makes a point of identifying Jewish believers in the predominately gentile community.

When telling the story of Jewish believers in Jesus, these Jewish believers in the mixed communities of the diaspora should by no means be left out, as they too often are. They were not members of purely Jewish communities. They did not belong to an organized movement of "Jewish Christianity." Regarding their lifestyle, they would probably, to a great extent, follow Paul's example in becoming a gentile to gentiles and a Jew to Jews. In other words, they would probably, most of them, be well integrated into the ethnically mixed communities to which they belonged. To make this possible, the Apostolic Decree was probably followed in many of the diaspora communities, or other practical compromises were found that made communal life possible.

With this we have established a kind of framework within which we can continue our story of the Jewish believers in Jesus. We have seen that Jewish believers basically found themselves in one of two typical settings: 1) communities that were entirely Jewish, whose members could, therefore, practice a Jewish lifestyle according to the Torah; or 2) mixed communities made up of Jewish as well as gentile believers, whose members had a lower "Jewish profile" than those in a purely Jewish setting. The former would be most common in the land of Israel; the latter would be the norm in the diaspora. In continuing my story, I have chosen to focus on individual regions. I believe this brings some order to the widespread material, and will facilitate a clearer overview.

3. Jewish Believers in the Land of Israel

"The land of Israel" refers to the extended territory, including parts of the Transjordan region.

We must begin, of course, in Jerusalem. What happened to the city and its inhabitants during and after the Jewish war, from 66–70 CE? There is little doubt that many inhabitants of the city, being trapped in it during the war, were massacred during the Roman conquest. Others were taken captive and led as prisoners of war to Rome. The temple itself was razed. With the temple in ruins, the Sadducees and other chief priests had lost their power base. It has often been assumed that this paved the way for a rapid and complete takeover of leadership by the Pharisaic party.

The traditional view can be summarized as follows: the Pharisees were left as the only religious leaders. They rose to the occasion and became the rabbis of rabbinic Judaism – from then on the one and only normative form of Judaism. This development is symbolized by the famous story of how the chief Pharisaic leader, Johanan ben Zakkai, was smuggled out of the beleaguered city in a coffin and brought before the Roman general, Vespasian. When asked what he wanted from the would-be emperor, he answered, "I ask nothing of you save Jabne, where I might go and teach my disciples and there establish a prayerhouse and perform all the commandments." This was granted him, and the first rabbinic "academy" was established in Jabne on the coastal plain, roughly midway between Jaffa and Ashkelon. This event encapsulates the transformation of Pharisaism into rabbinic Judaism.

The significance of this event can easily be overstated, however. In recent scholarship, two points have been made so often and with such emphasis that they can, by now, be regarded as common knowledge: 1) Rabbinic Judaism is not simply an unbroken continuation of pre-70 Pharisaism. The colleges of rabbinic sages were not made up exclusively of Pharisees, and absorbed into themselves more strands of tradition than the purely Pharisaic. 2) The leadership which the rabbinic sages offered the Jewish people was not immediately and universally recognized. Many of the sages came from a sectarian past; they represented one group within a rather narrow religious elite within the people. One

has to keep in mind that according to Josephus the Pharisees numbered around five thousand – five thousand among a total population in the land of more than one million! In rabbinic literature reflecting the situation after 70 CE, the sages often appear as members of *haburoth*, purity societies, which were quite concerned with protecting their own purity in all dealings with outsiders. And these outsiders were, apparently, the majority of the people – "the people of the land," the ordinary Jews who did not abide by the rabbinic laws on purity, tithing, etc. In recent scholarship it has been claimed that it took the rabbis three centuries or more – after 70 CE – to establish the hegemony over a large majority of the people that they were able to keep in later centuries. This is an important correction of the traditional picture when relating the story of Jewish believers in Jesus.

On a very concrete note, the story of Johanan ben Zakkai's flight from Jerusalem has a valid point. With him, the sages left Jerusalem for good. First the seat of teaching and authority was reestablished in Jabne. Then, probably after Bar Kokhba's defeat in 135 CE, it was moved to Ussha in Galilee, finally to settle in Tiberias somewhat later. The rabbis never returned to Jerusalem. This corresponds to a striking fact pointed out by archaeologists: no Jewish burial sites or other traces of Jewish presence dating from the period between the two Jewish wars (66–70 and 133–35 CE) are to be found in Jerusalem. This is in stark contrast to the overwhelming archaeological evidence of the presence of the tenth Roman legion, Fretensis. The Roman garrison left its traces all over the city, on the western hill in particular. Either the Roman garrison made a point of keeping the city *Judenrein*, or the Jews chose voluntarily not to settle in a city that was being continually polluted by pagans worshipping their pagan gods.

I believe we should read the evidence of a flight from the city by the Jewish believers prior to the first war in this light. There is nothing intrinsically improbable about this tradition, preserved in Eusebius. And the tradition reported by him says nothing about a return after the war. I would like to suggest that the Jewish believers who left Jerusalem before or during the first months of the war never returned, for exactly the same reasons that the rabbis and other Jews did not return.

In that case, to where did they escape? Eusebius says that they fled to Pella in the Transjordan. He may well be right, at least in the sense that a significant group of the believers in Jesus escaped to this city, perhaps comprising the leadership group. Eusebius also has a list of 15 "bishops from the circumcision" who allegedly led the Jerusalem church during the period between the wars. They could well be leaders-in-exile over a community-in-exile. (Perhaps the list should be divided into: 1) three leaders in succession – James (the brother of Jesus), Symeon (the cousin of Jesus), and Justus; and 2) twelve "elders" who may have formed a kind of advisory board for one or more of the three leaders.)

But there is no need to suppose that Pella was the only destination to which the believers in Jesus fled. There are passages in the gospels that

speak of a flight from one city to another in Judea, and it would seem natural for some believers to escape back to their native Galilee. Be that as it may, I believe we cannot go much wrong in assuming that after 70 CE there was no longer a resident community of believers of any significant size in Jerusalem. If so, we shall have to look for the survivors of the pre-70 Jerusalem community in other places in the land, and probably in the Transjordan, too. After 135 CE this situation was made permanent by Roman law: as a punishment for the Bar Kokhba revolt, no Jew was allowed to appear within seeing distance of Jerusalem. The city was made *Judenrein* by law.

What has been said so far is a necessary preamble to the story of Jewish believers in the land of Israel, apart from the Jerusalem community. The community in Jerusalem was probably dissolved permanently during the first Jewish war; the local communities elsewhere in the land were not. This is not to say that these scattered communities were founded by fugitives from the Jerusalem community. There is ample evidence in the New Testament that many of them existed well before 70 CE. Indeed, many of them might go back to the days of Jesus' own ministry around the land. This, of course, is most obvious for Galilee, where Jesus spent most of his time teaching and preaching and healing the sick. Let us briefly review the New Testament evidence of Jewish believers in the land.

Judea

Paul speaks of believers in Judea in the pre-war period (Gal 1:22–24; 1 Thess 2:14). Luke speaks of them repeatedly in Acts (1:8; 2:9; 8:1; 9:31; 11:1; 11:29; 26:20). Mark (13:14), Matthew (24:15–16), and Luke (21:20–21) seem to presuppose them. Apart from this, the existence of believers in Judea, outside Jerusalem, is to be inferred rather than documented. But as was said above, it seems very likely that the Judean groups of Jewish believers received an influx of fugitives from Jerusalem both before and during the Jewish war. According to Justin Martyr (writing in the 150–60s), Bar Kokhba persecuted Jewish believers in Jesus during his uprising against Rome – probably because they would not support him because of the messianic claims made by or about him. We do not know the geographical location of these persecutions, but given Bar Kokhba's operations persecution in Judea remains a likely scenario. It is quite likely that these Judean believers have left a literary monument of their hopes and hardships during the years of Bar Kokhba's war: the so-called *Apocalypse of Peter*. In this early Christian writing, the still powerful presence of Bar Kokhba is strongly felt, and he has not yet been defeated. It is clearly indicated that he is a persecutor of the believers in Jesus, and that the author of the book himself belongs to this group. It is interesting that the Christology of the book is very close to the Christology of one of Justin Martyr's sources in his writings, a source that by all appearances had its origin among Jewish believers in the land of Israel. This Christology is strikingly Jewish, and strikingly "orthodox" at the same time. First and

foremost, Jesus is portrayed as the Messiah, fulfilling the messianic promises and the messianic career laid out for him in the Law and the Prophets. He is enthroned as the Messiah by his resurrection and ascension, along the lines laid out in the old creedal formula of Romans 1:3–4, which, as we saw, may well have its origin in the early Jerusalem community.

Galilee

Evidence of Jewish believers in Galilee between Jesus' ministry there and the first Jewish war is sparse, but not non-existent. Luke shows knowledge of communities in Galilee in the 40s in Acts 9:31. Paul speaks about the brothers of Jesus conducting a mission – perhaps in Galilee? – in the 50s (1 Cor 9:5). Early in the third century, Julius Africanus says that the Lord's relatives, the famous *desposynoi*, conducted a mission from the two Galilee villages of Nazareth and Kokaba, but he is not very precise concerning which period he is talking about – perhaps the time after the first war? In any case this shows that Jesus' whole family did not move on a permanent basis to Jerusalem. Some, perhaps many, remained in or returned to Galilee, and were known to be active in preaching the gospel. According to Africanus, one of their "specialties" was to proclaim Jesus the king, of David's seed, by expounding his genealogy, discrediting the Herodian family's claim to Jewish kingship in the process.

It may also be that these Jewish believers in Galilee developed the distinctive "Jesus the savior of Galilee" theology that we find in the Gospel of Matthew, and later in the so-called *Epistle of the Apostles* (a New Testament Apocryphon, ca. 150 CE), and later still in the *Commentary on Isaiah* (ca.160 CE), attributed to the Jewish believers called Nazoreans by Jerome. In these writings, Jesus is portrayed as the messianic redeemer of Galilee. After his resurrection, he gathers his scattered flock and leads them as the Good Shepherd to Galilee, where the great light shines forth as promised in Isaiah 9:1–2 (cf. Matt 2:23; 4:12–17; 26:31–32; 28:7,10,16; *Ep. Apost.* 30). In the Nazorean *Commentary on Isaiah*, Jesus liberates the Israel of Galilee by substituting the yoke of the Pharisees (= darkness) with his own teaching (= light), and bringing his own light also to the gentiles.

A rabbinic story may testify to contact between leading rabbis and Jewish believers in Jesus in Galilee in the period between the wars. It is said that the famous Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrkanos was arrested because he had dabbled in "heresy" (here, this clearly means the doctrine of Jewish believers in Jesus). When tried in court, Eliezer did not free himself by cursing Jesus. He later admitted that he had taken considerable interest, even pleasure, in a ruling of law by Jesus, reported to him in Sepphoris by the Jewish believer Jacob. This story, even if fictional, presupposes that Jewish believers and leading rabbis in Galilee were sometimes on quite friendly terms, and had interesting conversations with each other. And there are other rabbinic stories testifying to close social relationships between believers and non-believers in the period after the Bar Kokhba

war. It may be that the remains of a "house church," within the ruins of the Byzantine "House of Peter" church in Capernaum, represent archaeological evidence of the community of Jewish believers in the town.

In general, rabbinic stories of encounters between rabbinic Jews and believers in Jesus in Galilee are set in the second and third centuries. These stories, like the one told above, presuppose rather close social relationships between Jews who believed in Jesus and Jews who did not believe in him. Jewish believers visited the local synagogues, and may on occasion have tried to read from Hebrew gospels during worship. Non-believing Jews entered the houses of believers in Jesus, because the latter maintained a normal Jewish lifestyle, very much like that of their neighbors. One has to keep in mind that when leading rabbis took measures to prohibit such contact, the very existence of these prohibitions testifies that social contact was taking place. At some time during the turn from the first to the second century CE, leading rabbis introduced a new prayer into the main prayer service of the synagogue. This prayer, though called, like the other prayers, a blessing, was really a curse – a curse against heretics in general, and in one early version of the text, Nazoreans in particular. When Jewish believers attended the synagogue service, they could easily be recognized when they hesitated to say this prayer. But the existence of this prayer, and the rabbinic ruling making it obligatory, do not mean that this prayer was immediately introduced in each and every synagogue – not in the land, and certainly not in the wide diaspora. The rabbis were an elite group, and it took centuries for their rulings to be obeyed everywhere. The vast majority of the Jewish people continued to obey the law in their daily lives as best they could, making all the necessary practical compromises that were part of everyday life. It was the same with the believers in Jesus. But they had a new authority to back them in their resistance to the sharpened claims of the rabbis; they had the authority of Jesus. The very heart of rabbinic tradition – ritual purity and tithing – were minor concerns for Jesus. He was radical in other respects. He equated the mere intention to sin with having actually done so. Ethical purity was more important than ritual.

The Nazoreans

One external factor is important when it comes to understanding how these Jewish believers in Jesus lived in Galilee and further east: in these areas, Jews and gentiles lived close together, but as a rule in different villages. There were many purely Jewish or purely gentile villages. This means that in the villages where we find Jewish believers, social fellowship with non-believing Jews could be a problem, but social communion with gentiles much less so. In these communities, maintaining a Jewish lifestyle would be entirely natural for the Jewish believers, something they probably did not feel any need to justify. This also means that these believers would not automatically subscribe to a theology that viewed the compromises necessary when living in mixed surroundings as illegiti-

mate. In the fourth century, Epiphanius and Jerome speak of such Jewish believers in the Syriac area who lived according to the law for their own part, but apparently had no problem recognizing the "law-free" mission of Paul among the gentiles.

These believers were most commonly known, and referred to by the two church fathers mentioned above, by the name *Nazoreans*. It seems that this was the common name for believers in Jesus (Jewish or gentile) in the whole Syriac-speaking area. The name probably means "followers of the Nazorean," the Nazorean being Jesus. He was called so because he came from Nazareth. When a messianic pretender was called "the one from Nazareth," the name may have had a slightly derogatory meaning. The Messiah should not come from a tiny, insignificant village in Galilee. In Matthew we see a counter-offensive against this criticism being developed. Yes, the prophets actually had said that the scene of the Messiah's redemptive work was to be Galilee (Isa 9); they had even predicted his name – in Isaiah 11:1, do not read *nezer* ("a branch") but read *nozri* ("a Nazorean"). In the fourth century, church fathers like Epiphanius and Jerome knew Jewish believers in the land of Israel and in Syria (especially Beroea) who were quite orthodox in their faith – they even recognized the legitimacy of Paul's mission to the gentiles. But these church fathers were so accustomed to think of Jewish believers as sectarian that they thought these believers must be sectarian, too. Accordingly, they called this supposed sect by the name commonly used for believers in these areas: Nazoreans. In this way, I suggest, the Jewish Christian sect of the Nazoreans arose. In reality, the authentic material on the Nazoreans that we find in Epiphanius (very little, in fact), and in Jerome (a lot more), should be taken as evidence of non-sectarian Jewish believers in the land and in the Syriac area. The only thing that these church fathers found to be wrong with these believers was their Jewishness: they observed the law. Otherwise they seem to have been quite "orthodox" in their faith.

The Ebionites

There is another name, however, by which some Jewish believers in the land and in the Transjordan were called, and this name has undoubtedly sectarian connotations: *ebionim* (Hebrew) or *ebionaye* (Aramaic/Syriac) – the "poor ones." In the Bible this is not a derogatory term, quite the contrary. It is a honorific term, describing those within the people who are poor because they are faithful to the God of Israel, while the rich and powerful forsake him and oppress the poor. Therefore the poor are also said to be those to whom eschatological redemption and compensation will be given. In the end-time, God will save the "poor ones." Jesus confirmed this, i.a. in the first beatitude. James, the leader of the Jerusalem community, castigates the rich and identifies himself with the poor.

It is, accordingly, quite probable that "poor ones" was a name Jewish believers in the land chose for themselves at a time when they felt strongly oppressed by the non-believing Jewish leaders. They identified them-

selves with the poor who are spoken of in many of the Psalms, and who are promised salvation in the Prophets. It may have been a quite general term, used by more than one type of Jewish believers.

But here Irenaeus comes in. In his review of heresies (in his great work *Against Heresies*), he writes of a group of Jewish believers for whom the Davidic descent of Jesus was so important that they eliminated the doctrine of the virgin birth. They gave priority, it seems, to Jesus' paternal descent from David through Joseph. Irenaeus had to call this group by a name, and he seems to have taken the name *ebionaye* to mean "followers of Ebion," or in Greek, *ebionaioi*. In this way, I suggest, the sect called the Ebionites arose. Irenaeus is hardly wrong in taking this denial of the virgin birth of Jesus to be typical of a certain group – hence a "sect" – but he may have been wrong in ascribing the name Ebionites to this group only. Be that as it may, from then on the name stuck to this group. When later church fathers – like Origen in the third century – use the term as a general name for Jewish believers, they add that these Ebionites come in two types: those who believe in the virgin birth of Jesus, and those who do not. After Origen, most descriptions of the Ebionites appear to be learned constructs, based on the scattered material in earlier fathers, and also in some clearly non-Ebionite sources (as in Epiphanius, see chapter 4).

This way of looking at the available evidence results in vastly reduced claims regarding how much we do and can know about the Ebionites mentioned by Irenaeus. It seems Justin Martyr knew such people, but not by that name. They seem to have claimed that Jesus was born a son of David by Joseph, that he was anointed Messiah by John because of his righteous conduct according to the law, and that he had been enthroned as Messiah by his resurrection from the dead. They used a Hebrew (perhaps Aramaic) version of the Gospel of Matthew; they faced Jerusalem when praying. They seem to have required that gentiles convert to Judaism and keep the law when becoming believers in Jesus. A disciple should in every respect become like his master, Jesus. Since explicit polemic against this package of notions is strikingly absent in the New Testament writings of the first century, it probably arose in the second. One way to interpret the rise of Ebionism at that time would be that it arose as a Nazorean version of the rabbinical orthodoxy emerging in this period. But here we have little evidence, and are groping in the dark. I now wind back to our main track, which is to look at the history of Jewish believers in the land by looking at the different regions separately.

The Coastal Plain

Like Jerusalem itself, the cities of the coast were hubs of contact with the outside world. The grain ships sailing along the coast, from Alexandria to Rome and back, often sought harbor in the coastal cities (especially Caesarea, Jaffa, Haifa or Acco/Ptolemais). There was probably a greater concentration of Jewish Hellenists (Greek-speakers) in these cities than inland, and in some of them the ruling class were Romans. It is among

the latter that the first gentile converts were won, according to Acts 10. In this same chapter, however, we also hear of Jewish believers in the coastal cities. We meet them in Jaffa, including one named Tabitha (9:36). We meet them in Lod. Peter's healing of Aneas in this city led to many coming to faith "in Lod and Sharon" (9:32–43). In Caesarea we meet the Hellenist Philip and his four daughters (21:8–9). Philip conducts mission on the coastal plain: Gaza, Azotus [Ashdod] and Caesarea are specifically mentioned. Paul visited the "church" of Caesarea on his return from his second missionary journey (18:22). We also find believers in Acco and Tyre (21:3–7). In Acts 15:3 we meet Jewish believers in "Phoenicia," the coastal plain around Tyre.

It was to the coastal plain that Johanan ben Zakkai retreated from beleaguered Jerusalem. He established the first rabbinic academy in Jabne, midway between Jaffa and Ashdod. One can easily imagine that during the period between the two wars, interaction between emerging rabbinic orthodoxy and believers in Jesus was quite intense in this area, but the sources mostly fail us. The nearest we come to actual evidence are the rabbinic rulings against social contact between rabbinic Jews and Jews who believe in Jesus that we encountered above. Some of them, at least, may stem from this period.

In the first half of the third century we meet Origen in Caesarea (ca. 234–253), conversing intensely with Jews who didn't believe in Jesus and Jews who did. From one of the latter he acquired this interesting piece of Jewish Christian tradition: Jewish believers sign their forehead with the cross-shaped sign of the Taw (Ezek 9:4) on all occasions prescribed in Deuteronomy 6:7–9. Probably this was a Jewish Christian addition to the custom of binding a phylactery to one's forehead. Origen also submits the interesting information that many Jewish believers – he calls them Ebionites, the "poor ones," collectively – were not adoptionist in their Christology. It seems he met several Jewish believers whose doctrinal position he regarded as unobjectionable.

Samaria

According to the Gospel of John, the first to believe among the Samaritans was a woman whom Jesus met at Jacob's well (John 4). She led many of her townspeople to believe in him, too. Later, we hear that Philip conducted a mission in Samaria, and that many Samaritans believed, the magician Simon among them (Acts 8). Apparently the Jerusalem leaders felt a need to supervise things in Samaria. Peter and John went there, and saw the Spirit confirm that the Samaritans had now become full members of the church. The status of the Samaritans was unclear at this time: were they Jews or not? In Acts, Luke clearly seems to regard them as "lost sheep of Israel." The mission among the Samaritans is not the beginning of the mission among the gentiles. Paul and Barnabas pass through Samaria on their way to the Jerusalem summit (Acts 15:3). They bring the believers there the good news of the conversion of gentiles (during

the first missionary journey); accordingly, the church in Samaria is clearly included in the Jewish church of the land of Israel. According to evidence in Justin Martyr (who, as we remember, was a native of Samaria), the magician Simon later became a disruptive force among believers in Samaria. He deceived many; at the end of his life he seems to have made it all the way to Rome (like Justin himself). From Justin onward, the church fathers regarded Simon as the arch-heretic, the founder of heresy. And since heresy to the church fathers meant Gnosticism, they often portrayed Simon as a gnostic. It is doubtful whether this is historically accurate. The most famous Samaritan believer in Jesus from the period between the wars is Justin himself. But he was not a Samaritan by birth; he clearly identifies himself as a gentile. There is no doubt, however, that he knew Samaritan as well as Jewish believers during his early years in Nablus, and that he adopted and transmitted many of their doctrines in his preserved writings.

Transjordan

In the story of Paul's calling we hear of believers in Damascus, Ananias among them (Acts 9:1–25). Eusebius writes that shortly before the Roman siege of Jerusalem, the community of believers in the city fled to Pella in the Transjordan. That there was a community of believers in Pella during the period between the wars is very likely. Shortly after the Bar Kokhba war one of that community's members, Aristo of Pella, himself probably a Jewish believer, wrote the *Controversy between Jason and Papiscus,* which became an important source for many later writers of similar dialogues between Jews and Christians.

During the rest of the second and third centuries evidence of Jewish believers in the Transjordan is extremely sparse. Most important is the fact that they are well documented and widespread in the fourth and fifth centuries – and this can hardly have come about suddenly. We therefore have every reason to think that there were, in fact, many Jewish believers in the Transjordan in the late second and the third century, though we know next to nothing about them.

Jewish Believers in the Land: Their Literary Heritage

In the New Testament, the letters of James and Jude, two brothers of Jesus, clearly exhibit important traits of the theology of the early Jerusalem community, whether they were written during the lifetime of these relatives of Jesus or shortly afterward. The same goes for 1 Peter. Haggadic stories transmitted by Papias, the "Elders" in Irenaeus, Hegesippus, and Africanus obviously derive from a quite early period among Jewish believers from Jerusalem or Galilee. Hegesippus, a Christian author who probably came from the land of Israel, may have been Jewish himself. In any case he transmitted in his writings several traditions that derived from the early community of Jewish believers in Jerusalem. In the fragments of his writings that Eusebius preserved in his *Church History,* we

encounter a remarkably Jewish concept of Christianity, emphasizing the true messiahship of Jesus and the unpolluted orthodoxy of the Jerusalem community as long as it was ruled by the relatives of Jesus. The stories told by Hegesippus about events and persons in the early community are striking in their Jewish techniques; it is like listening to rabbis telling their haggadic embellishments of scriptural stories. Julius Africanus was from Jerusalem, and may also have been Jewish. He transmits several interesting traditions which he says he received from local Jewish believers in the land, especially relatives of Jesus.

During the period between the two wars, Jewish believers in the land of Israel obviously took great interest in the different apocalyptic works being written in the land. They partly adopted these works whole, as e.g. *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch*; others were partly modified by Christian editing, as e.g. *3* and *4 Baruch* and *Apocalypse of Abraham*. *The Apocalypse of Peter* was almost certainly written by a Jewish believer in the land of Israel during the Bar Kokhba war. Very shortly after the war Aristo of Pella wrote the (now lost) *Controversy between Jason and Papiscus*. It is probable, however, that Justin Martyr and later writers of dialogues incorporated much material from this lost writing into their own. Justin Martyr also seems to have used another Jewish Christian source originating in the land of Israel in his writings, and is therefore a rich source for Jewish Christian theology. In the so-called *Pseudo-Clementines* there is a passage that seems to be taken whole from a much earlier work (*Rec.* 1.27–71). Graham Stanton has called this work an *Apologia for Jewish Believers in Jesus*. The author of this work probably belonged to a community of Jewish believers who had fled from Jerusalem to somewhere in Judea or the Transjordan. The Christian editing of the so-called *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* may well have been done by Jewish believers in Israel, before and/or after the Bar Kokhba war. A Jewish Christian *Commentary on Isaiah*, quoted by Jerome, may also have its origin among Jewish believers in Galilee around 160 CE; it seems closely related to the theology of Matthew and the *Epistle of the Apostles*.

Jewish Believers in the Land: Their Theology

There is no uniform theology to be found in these different literary sources. They have some common traits, however, and seem to share some common theological concerns. Their literary format exemplifies typically Jewish genres: apocalypses, commentary on Scripture, haggadic re-telling of scriptural stories. Many of these writings express a strong hope for the end time salvation of the whole Jewish people. Most of them presuppose that Jewish believers should live as pious Jews, obeying the law, but not in the way it was interpreted by the rabbis. Some are critical toward the person of Paul; some recognize his mission to the gentiles as legitimate. In their Christology they employ several models. The *Apologia for Jewish Believers in Jesus* seems to employ mostly a Prophet-like-but-greater-than-Moses Christology, making the abolition

of sacrifices and the institution of a new means of purification from sin – Christian baptism – the main task of Jesus. Other texts evince a markedly messianic Christology, putting great emphasis on Jesus fulfilling the messianic prophecies. Still other texts portray the Son of God in the role of the pre-existent divine Wisdom, assisting God at the creation of the world and becoming incarnate to save his own creatures from sin and death. It should be emphasized that there was apparently no big controversy about which of these Christological models was to be accepted. They seem to have co-existed, rather peacefully, even within the writings of one and the same author, as in Justin Martyr. Only on one point do we encounter polemic: Justin knows of Jewish believers who deny the virgin birth of Jesus and claim his Davidic descent through Joseph in a physical sense. Irenaeus knew the same group, and called them Ebionites. But it is surprising to see how comparatively "mild" the polemic against these people is in the two fathers. It is when they aim in the opposite direction – at heretics who denied the full humanity of Jesus – that they bring out their biggest guns.

In conclusion, the literary heritage of the Jewish believers in the land of Israel is rich, diverse, and vibrantly engaged with the events of the period. It is amazing to see to what extent this heritage was taken over by Justin, Irenaeus, and others – leading spokesmen for the emerging mainline gentile church. In many ways, we could call the early Jewish believers in the land of Israel the fathers of later Christian theology.

4. Jewish Believers in the Eastern Diaspora

The world in which early Christianity arose was divided between two large empires, one of them old, the other more recent. The recent one was the Roman Empire, and the history of Christianity within the Roman Empire is rather well documented. Therefore it is this history which is most often told. But east of this empire there was another, older one – the Persian Empire. In its heyday it extended from Antioch in the west to the Indus valley in the east, or, in terms of regions, it comprised Syria, Mesopotamia and Persia. The language of this empire was Aramaic, and later the dialect of this language which we call Syriac. In the time of Jesus, Rome had conquered most of Syria, including Antioch. But in eastern Syria/northern Mesopotamia there was an independent kingdom that functioned like a buffer between the two giants: the kingdom of Osrhoene. The name is a Greek form of the Syriac word Urhai, which recurs today as the name of the capital of this kingdom, Urfa; in antiquity the city was called Edessa. Preserving its independence was a delicate balancing act for the kings of Edessa. They managed till 216 CE; in that year the Romans conquered the kingdom and made it part of their own empire. From then on, the border between the Roman and Persian empires ran between northern and southern Mesopotamia.

Syria

According to a legend rendered by Eusebius and a later author, the king of Osrhoene, a contemporary of Jesus, got sick and sent a letter to Jesus with a request for healing. Jesus wrote a letter back, saying that after his death and resurrection he would send an envoy to the king who would heal him in Jesus' name. Later, the Apostle Thomas sent his disciple Addai to Edessa, where he healed the king and converted the inhabitants of the city. Many of these were Jewish merchants who were involved in the silk trade along the Silk Road, Edessa being an important commercial hub on that road. This is clearly a legend with little or no historical basis, but on one point it may be quite credible. Early believers in Edessa may indeed have included several Jewish believers. There are many pieces of evidence, from the second century and later, that make this likely.

If we begin in the first century, there is no more than the list in Acts 2 which enumerates the eastern lands from which pilgrims were present on the Day of Pentecost: "Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia." This would correspond more or less to present day Iran and Iraq. The least we can conclude from this list is that Luke, when writing Acts, had knowledge of believers in these eastern lands.

In the second century we have the beginnings of a rich Christian literature in Syriac and Greek, written by Syrian believers. It is a divided church that appears in this literature. On the one hand we have a very Jewish form of Christianity, expressed in very Jewish genres and forms of thought, proud of its heritage from the twelve apostles but apparently ignoring Paul. Literature expressing this point of view includes Tatian, the "barbaric" philosopher who extols Christianity as a barbaric philosophy opposed to everything Greek. We also have the so-called *Odes of Solomon*, whose author may well have been a Jewish believer. Secondly, we have another type of Christianity with a clearly gnostic slant. To this branch belong the so-called *Gospel of Thomas* (mid-second century) and the somewhat later *Acts of Thomas*. Thirdly, and perhaps more importantly, we have the strongest opponents to all forms of Jewish Christianity: Marcion and his followers. Marcion took great offense at the neglect of Paul in Syriac Christianity, and responded by developing a starkly anti-Jewish theology in which he made Jesus represent the highest God, different from the God of the Bible, and made Paul the only apostle who had really understood the message of Jesus. The Twelve had misunderstood Jesus and had "Judaized" his message. Even in the preserved texts of Luke and Paul's letters, Marcion thought he could recognize Judaizing interpolations. He therefore became the first textual critic ever with regard to the New Testament text. Instead of the Jewish Bible, he wanted a "purified" Gospel of Luke and "purified" versions of Paul's 10 main letters to be the only Holy Scriptures.

This theology seems to have been a dominant counterpoint for more than one Syriac author, for Tatian as well as the *Odes of Solomon.* But it is in the strange set of writings called the *Pseudo-Clementines* (because they are wrongly attributed to Clement of Rome) that we meet an extended polemic against Marcion. These writings come in two versions, the *Recognitions* and the *Homilies*. In their present form they do not antedate the fourth century CE, but scholars tend to agree that they are both based on a common source from an earlier date, probably the third century. In this work, "Peter" conducts a prolonged debate with "Simon" – obviously the two characters are based on their roles in Acts 8. Scholars have often assumed that it is Paul who is represented by the figure of Simon. I would like to argue, however, that it is really Marcion who hides behind Simon, and that Paul is involved only as interpreted by Marcion. Be that as it may, "Peter" advocates a strikingly Jewish form of Christianity in his speeches in this work, combined, however, with some very strikingly non-Jewish points of view. For example, Peter argues that Simon's critique of the Old Testament can be countered by the knowl-

edge that there are false passages interpolated into the Torah, and that the Prophets are to be rejected wholesale. I therefore suspect that the "Jewish" Christianity of the Pseudo-Clementines is not a genuine expression of the theology of Jewish believers, but rather a kind of "artificial" Jewish Christianity, propounded by a gentile critic of Marcion. The relevance of this is that Hans Joachim Schoeps, in his classic study of Jewish Christianity, used the Pseudo-Clementines as his main source, claiming that these writings represented the variety of Christianity that was the most direct successor of the early Jerusalem community. I think this is a mistake. I also think Epiphanius of Salamis made the same mistake long before Schoeps, in the 370s, when he made the Pseudo-Clementines one of his main sources for his portrayal of the Ebionites.

The *Didascalia*

It is different with the other main work of Syriac Christianity in the third century, the so-called *Teaching* (Latin *Didascalia*) *of the Apostles* (not to be confused with the smaller document *The Teaching* [Greek *Didaché*] *of the Twelve Apostles,* from ca. 100 CE). It seems likely that the author of this Syriac work was himself a Jewish believer. In this document we meet five distinct categories of people:

1) "The people," Jews who do not believe in Jesus. The author is clearly critical toward them, but much less so than other ecclesiastical writers, and he recommends intercessory prayer for their salvation.
2) Jewish believers who observe the entire Torah, including the ritual commandments (Sabbath, purity, kosher food). The author criticizes these believers. They have not understood that Jesus came to abolish the burden of these commandments, which are referred to by the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *Mishnah:* "deuterosis."
3) "We," the Jewish believers who have understood this, and have therefore abandoned all the commandments that belong to the "second legislation" (all the commandments given after Israel's sin with the Golden Calf). This group, with whom the author identifies himself, is actively pursuing a mission to increase the fourth group, the gentile believers.
4) Gentile believers. There seems to be a very full communion of faith and practice between groups 3 and 4. This is also in line with the fictional framework of the *Didascalia* – it presents itself as the outcome of the apostolic council described in Acts 15.
5) "Heretics," most of whom are ascetics of various types.

Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert has proposed that we regard the *Didascalia* as a "Mishnah for the disciples of Jesus," a Mishnah opposed to the roughly contemporary (rabbinical) Mishnah, which by analogy could be called a "Mishnah for the disciples of the Sages." The author makes a fundamental distinction within the law: before Israel's sin with the Golden

Calf, God only gave the Ten Commandments; these are the true and sufficient law. After Israel's sin, the second legislation with all its ritual commandments was imposed upon Israel as a punitive measure. After Jesus, we are all, Jewish and gentile believers alike, freed from the bond of this second legislation. Fonrobert here suspects a conscious contrast to the rabbinical Mishnah, which is almost exclusively about that part of the Torah which was given after the Golden Calf episode. She also points to a rabbinic saying which seems to respond rather directly to the *Didascalia*'s challenge: "It used to be proper to recite the Ten Commandments every day. Why then do they not recite them now? Because of the claim of the heretics: so that they should not say, Only these were given to Moses on Sinai."

There are many strikingly Jewish traits in the Didascalia, in its exegetical techniques and other respects. Perhaps the most striking feature is that this document strongly advocates a Christian Passover celebration at exactly the same time that the Jews have theirs. The argument is that the laws concerning Passover (Exodus 12 and 13) were given prior to the Sinai event. Concerning circumcision, the author seems ambivalent as far as Jewish believers are concerned (he certainly opposed circumcision of gentile believers). He does not argue directly against it, but indicates it has no significance for salvation. It is only spiritual circumcision that really counts.

The definition of heresy in this document is also strikingly Jewish:

> They [the heretics] all, however, had one law …, that they should not use the Torah and the Prophets, and that they should blaspheme God Almighty, and should not believe in the resurrection. … Many of them were teaching that a man should not take a wife … Again others … taught that a man should not eat flesh, and said that a man must not eat anything that has a soul in it. Others, however, said that one was bound to withhold from swine's flesh only, but might eat those things which the law pronounces clean, and that he should be circumcised according to the law.

The last clause seems to have Jewish believers of the Ebionite type in mind. The other heretical doctrines seem to be of a gnostic or Marcionite type. The counterpoint to the above enumeration of heresies comes in the author's description of orthodox faith:

> And we [the apostles] have fixed and constituted … that you shall worship God Almighty and Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit; that you be ministered to by the holy Scriptures, and believe in the resurrection of the dead; and that you make use of all his creatures with thanksgiving; and (that you) take a wife. … Sufficient, however, for the faithful is the spiritual circumcision of the heart … And about baptism also, one is sufficient for you, that which has perfectly forgiven you your sins.

Again the last clauses seem aimed at Ebionite practice, but the main emphasis is against gnostics and Marcion. In its practical conclusions, the *Didascalia* thus comes remarkably close to Paul on many points. It is therefore quite paradoxical that it ignores him completely, and makes the Twelve the only authorities – like Matthew and the *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles,* both of them thought to be works of Syrian provenance.

A Jewish Heritage in the Church of Syria

Since the Passover celebration presupposed in the *Didascalia* has a strikingly Jewish character, it therefore lies near to hand to ask if there are other features of Syrian church life that point in the same direction. G. Rouwhorst has pointed to i.a. the following:

1) The Syriac church had four Scriptural readings during regular Sunday worship: one from the Law, one from the Prophets, one from Acts or the letters of Paul, one from the Gospels. The two readings from the Law and the Prophets certainly continue synagogue practice. Rouwhorst thinks this tradition must have been established very early in the life of the Syriac church, and finds it remarkable that it was so long-lived.
2) The Eucharistic prayer of the Syriac church – still in use among Nestorian Christians – was composed in Aramaic at an early period and is very Jewish, close in structure and wording to the Jewish prayer after meals. Its origin must go back to Jewish believers. The fact that the Syriac church did not change it later (when other churches changed theirs) is a good argument for a continued presence of Jewish believers in the Syriac communities.

Mesopotamia and Persia

Crossing the border of the Roman Empire – going further south and east, into Mesopotamia and Persia – we are extremely short on sources that can tell us more than the bare fact that Christianity spread throughout these regions prior to Constantine (early fourth century). It is possible, however, to make some inferences from evidence from the post-Constantinian period. Jacob Neusner has made the point that in Babylonia, the rabbinic form of Judaism apparently made a more effective bid for total hegemony than in other areas, and Babylonian Jewry increasingly became the guardian of rabbinic orthodoxy, culminating in the Babylonian Talmud during the sixth century. He assumes that this could not have happened without considerable conflict and opposition, and that those Jews in Babylonia who did not submit to the authority of the rabbis would become rather alienated from the Jewish communities that did submit to this new authority. He suggests that these Jews would often be ripe for joining the community of Jews and gentiles who followed the authority of Jesus instead. This assumption is strengthened by the fact that it agrees

perfectly with the picture we have of the church in these areas in the fourth and fifth centuries – to which we shall return in chapter 9 below.

In conclusion, it seems that Jewish believers were a substantial component of the Syriac communities, and that due to their influence Syriac Christianity as a whole retained a distinctly Jewish flavor. Believers in the Syriac area were not uniform in their practice or beliefs, and neither were the Jews, from whom many of them came. We have seen that some Jewish believers retained only a Jewish Passover and (possibly) circumcision as expressions of their Jewish identity, otherwise having full communion with gentile believers in practice and in faith; others kept the entire Torah, and may or may not have required gentiles to do the same.

5. From Antioch to Gaul

In Acts, Luke describes Antioch of Syria as the most important center of early Christianity next to Jerusalem itself. This no doubt corresponds to the historical facts. Antioch was the capital of the Persian Empire during the period when this empire was ruled by the Seleucids (323–64 BCE). When the Romans put an end to Seleucid rule and added Antioch to their own empire, Antioch had a double role. As the third largest city in the Roman Empire (after Rome itself and Alexandria), it faced in two directions. Seen from the west, it was the gateway eastward into the older Persian Empire, whose language was Aramaic/Syriac. The city itself was probably bilingual, with Greek as well as Syriac spoken in its alleys and bazaars. In the countryside around the city Syriac would be the everyday language, and a Syriac speaker could make himself understood all the way to the Indus valley. Seen from the east, Antioch was a gateway to the west, to the Roman Empire. Antioch was an important hub in the Roman diaspora, especially so for the Jewish network. Since the early days of the Seleucid dynasty, a substantial number of Jews had made their home in Antioch. Many of these were merchants; they traveled widely, and many Jews from other parts visited Antioch.

This corresponds perfectly with the picture presented by Luke in Acts. Throughout the book, the mission to and in Antioch has a strikingly "international" character. Consider the following summary of events: Resident diaspora believers in Jerusalem were scattered after the persecution of Stephen, and "traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch." Some of these, "men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks also …" Hearing about this, the Jerusalem church sent Barnabas (a Cypriot) to Antioch; he went to Tarsus to get Paul to help him. It is likely that all the five leaders ("prophets and teachers") enumerated in Acts 13:1 were Jewish believers: Barnabas, Simon "the black," Lucius, Manaen, and Paul. Of these, probably none were natives of Antioch – a not unusual situation among people dwelling in a metropolis. It is the "western" network of Antioch that is indicated here: Barnabas was a native of Cyprus, but came to Antioch as the official representative of the Jerusalem community. Paul was a native of Tarsus (Cilicia), Lucius of Cyrene, Simon was possibly an African, and Manaen

could have spent his early years in Rome together with Herod Antipas (as indicated in Josephus). After some time prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch; Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem with gifts.

Jewish and Gentile Believers in Antioch: The First "Christians"

Once the gospel had gained a foothold in the Jewish community of Antioch, it was almost inevitable that some gentiles should hear it and become believers, too. These were the so-called God-fearers, gentiles who had, for a long time, socialized with the local Jews, visited their synagogues, and were believers in the God of Israel. In this way, the community of believers in Jesus in Antioch became a mixed one almost from its very beginning. There are good reasons to think that this was not an unusual situation in the diaspora in general.

But this situation was not entirely without its problems. Table fellowship between Jews and gentiles in the diaspora was probably not uncommon, but made practical compromises on the purity regulations of the law necessary on the part of the Jews. Were they to follow all the regulations of the Pharisees, social fellowship with gentile neighbors would have been a practical impossibility. It seems that in the beginning, table fellowship among Jewish and gentile believers in Jesus was not a problem in Antioch. When Peter arrived somewhat later, he did not make a problem of it either, not in the beginning. It was only when "some from James" arrived that he backed off and would no longer eat with gentile believers. It seems to have been a situation in which leaders in Jerusalem were uneasy about the high degree of compromise on purity regulations that was practiced out there in the diaspora. This might, in fact, have been typical of the situation not only among Jews who believed in Jesus, but among Jews in general. In any case, the matter was urgent enough to call for a summit in Jerusalem to reach a decision. It was, according to Acts 15, James who hammered out a compromise. Gentile believers should not be converted to Judaism by circumcision and full observance of the law. They should, however, facilitate full table fellowship with Jewish believers by observing those few commands that were enjoined upon gentiles in the Torah itself (Lev 17–18). This decision was submitted to the churches "in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia." Syria and Cilicia had been missionized from Antioch, and belonged to its orbit. It is also possible that according to Jewish thinking at the time, Syria and Cilicia were included in the concept of Greater Israel, and thus belonged to the territory in which the regulations for foreigners living in the land applied.

Outside this geographical area, practice with regard to the Apostolic Decree seems to have varied. Paul may have disregarded it, at least in his work among the Galatians and Corinthians, while Christians in Gaul obeyed it in the latter half of the second century (see below).

After some time, the community of believers in Jesus in Antioch stood sufficiently apart from the Jewish community to be given their own name.

They were called *christianoi*, a Greek plural of the Latin word *Christianus*. The Latin background of the name may indicate a kind of official or semi-official recognition by the Roman authorities of Antioch. It was probably meant to signify "followers of Christos/Chrestos" (the two words would be pronounced the same way). "Chrestos" was a very common first name, and Christos was probably understood as a variation of this name. The titular meaning of the name, "the Anointed One," was nearly incomprehensible to gentiles with no grounding in Judaism.

Once this name had been formed, it stuck, and "Christians" became the most common name for believers in Jesus within the Greek and Latin spheres of the empire, be those believers Jewish or gentile. Thus there was no connotation of anything un-Jewish about this name in the beginning – that came much later. The net result of what we have seen here and in chapter 3 is that believers in Jesus were called Christians in the Greek and Latin areas, and Nazoreans in the Syriac areas, regardless of whether they were Jewish or gentile.

Tracing Jewish Believers in Antioch

The history of the Antioch community after the period covered in Acts is only visible to us in accidental glimpses in the Christian sources. The majority of scholars think that the so-called *Didaché* ("Teaching") – or *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles to the Gentiles*, as the full title runs – was produced in Antioch or nearby around 100 CE. (Some scholars date it earlier by a few decades.) Its full title reflects its genre, authorship, and addressees rather correctly. In this writing, Jewish believers address gentile believers with instructions in accordance with Jesus' command in Matthew 28:19–20. Briefly put, the essence of the *Didaché* is that believers should not follow the law-tradition of the "hypocrites" (Pharisees/rabbis?), but that of Jesus and his apostles. This would have little relevance around 100 CE unless the communities addressed in the *Didaché* were still living close to Jews, and had a significant number of Jewish believers in their midst. The whole Christian community celebrated weekly worship on Sunday, rather than the Sabbath. The Jewish days of fasting were consciously transferred from Monday to Wednesday, and from Thursday to Friday. There is a nearness to Jewish practice, combined with a rather sharp polemic. The call for unity between Jewish believers and those gentile believers who are baptized and observe abstention from food offered to idols (obeying the Apostolic Decree) is one of the main concerns of the author.

Some ten years after the *Didaché* we encounter Ignatius, bishop of Antioch. In his letters, written in Asia Minor and addressed to communities there, there is not much information concerning the situation in Antioch. If gentile Judaizers in Antioch had advocated worship on Sabbath rather than Sunday, and had required gentile believers to observe the whole package of dietary rules in order to take part in the one common Eucharist, then Ignatius would have found the same problems

at home as he later found among the Smyrneans and Philadelphians. But this we cannot know. It seems probable, however, that he would have praised the author of the *Didaché* as being one from the circumcision (a Jewish believer) who preached Christianity, not Judaism. In any case, it is clear that when Ignatius characterizes the church as being the one body of Christ, made up of Jewish and gentile believers (*Smyrn*. 1.3), he is not addressing any particular local community but is stating what to him was a universal truth about the church.

In the early decades of the second century we seem to encounter – in the writing commonly called *The Ascension of Isaiah* – a group of Syrian Jewish believers who considered themselves prophets, and who felt suppressed by the emerging ecclesiastical office holders in the Syrian church. It is evident that Ignatius felt threatened in his authority as bishop by some who claimed prophetic gifts; this writing could be part of the same conflict seen from the other side. This interpretation of the *Ascension* therefore allows us a glimpse into a Jewish Christian, or predominantly Jewish Christian, outsider group in Antioch of the late first or early second century.

Toward the end of the second century, we once again get a clear view of Christianity in Antioch. In his three books *To Autolycus* (ca. 180 CE), Theophilus, the bishop of Antioch, defends Christianity against attacks by the pagan Autolycus. Theophilus himself was probably a gentile, but was converted to Christianity by reading the Old Testament prophets and adopted a theology that strikes modern readers as being very Jewish. Theophilus defends biblical monotheism against pagan attacks, and also attacks gnostic exegesis of important texts in Genesis. Gnosticism had been represented in Antioch, toward the middle of the second century, by Saturninus. Theophilus never mentions him by name, but is known to have written works (now lost) against Hermogenes (another gnostic) and Marcion. Robert M. Grant has argued that Saturninus opposed a very Jewish form of Christianity in Antioch, very similar to that represented by Theophilus himself. For his part, Theophilus had such a strong consciousness of unbroken continuity with the Old Testament that there is no anti-Jewish polemic in him. He regards himself as a member of the same people of God that he reads about in the Old Testament. "In almost every respect his apology is a defense of Hellenistic Judaism as well as of Jewish Christianity," says Grant. Indirectly, the very Jewish character of Theophilus' theology may be a significant indication of the continued presence of Jewish believers in the Antioch community.

Other evidence points in the same direction. There are possible quotations of a very Jewish eucharistic prayer in Theophilus. This ability to borrow from Jewish prayers, or form new ones in the same language, is also apparent in the later *Apostolic Constitutions*, probably written in Antioch. The obvious conclusion is that there was a strong element of Jewish believers in Antioch; these exerted considerable influence on the community's theology and practice for an extended period of time, right into the third and fourth centuries.

Cyprus

Before continuing our story north of Antioch, I present here the few scraps of information we have about the church on Cyprus, since Cyprus belonged to the natural orbit of Antioch. The Greek-speaking Jews scattered from Jerusalem after the persecution of Stephen also reached Cyprus, preaching to the Jews there. At that time the most well known Jewish believer from Cyprus, Barnabas, had probably been in Jerusalem for some time, and was already a believer. Later he became a prominent leader of the Antioch community, and went together with Paul on a mission journey which began on his native Cyprus. He finally returned to Cyprus to complete the mission there. In the Byzantine period, the veneration of the local "apostle's tomb" developed on Cyprus. It is, of course, very difficult to tell how far back such a tradition may reach. We know the name of one other early Cypriot believer. He had a house in Jerusalem and acted as Paul's host on the latter's last visit to Jerusalem: Mnason. "He was a man from Cyprus and one of the early disciples" (Acts 21:16).

The Jewish community on Cyprus took an active part in the Jewish uprising in parts of the diaspora in 115–117 CE (Antioch and Syria remained calm). The consequences were catastrophic. According to Dio Cassius, the ancient historian, 240,000 persons were slain in the fighting on Cyprus – this probably means that the entire Jewish community was wiped out. After the insurrection no Jew was allowed to set foot on the island, even if the reason was shipwreck. It is only in the late third and fourth centuries that Jews gradually re-settled on the island. This probably means there were no Jewish believers on Cyprus for 150 years or more after 117 CE.

Asia Minor: Paul Preaching to Jews and Gentiles

Having said the little there is to say about Jewish believers on Cyprus, we follow Paul on his first missionary journey (Acts 13–14) and go to Asia Minor. We are much better informed about this region than most others in the diaspora. This holds good for the history of the Jews in the region, and also for the history of the Christians. Asia Minor had been populated by numerous Jews from early in the Seleucid dominion, and Phrygia and Lydia especially had quite substantial Jewish colonies. It is therefore hardly accidental that Paul, on his first missionary journey, concentrated most of his effort on the Phrygian Jewish heartland (located in part in the southern extension of the Roman province of Galatia). It is probable that his letter to the Galatians was addressed to the communities founded there: Pisidian Antioch [present day Yalvac], Iconium [present day Konya], Lystra, and Derbe. In all these cities he began by preaching and debating in the local synagogue, creating sharp conflict within the synagogue community. Some Jews believed in his message: in Antioch "many Jews and devout converts to Judaism," in Iconium "a great number of Jews and Greeks" – the Jewish mother of Timothy and Timothy himself (he was not yet circumcised, but Paul soon remedied that) among them – and in

Derbe Paul apparently won Gaius, probably a Jewish believer (cf. Acts 20: 4). The problems Paul discusses in his letter to the Galatians may well have been fostered by a close fellowship between gentile and Jewish believers in these communities, and Paul may be addressing the Jewish believers in the area directly in Galatians 6:16: "peace be … upon the Israel of God."

This is especially interesting because for centuries to come, the Christians of Phrygia held fast to Jewish traditions when the church around them did not. As we shall see, we even have the name of a high-ranking church leader from Phrygia, in the late fourth century, whom we know to be a Jewish believer. He may not be the lone exception he appears to be at first glance.

Apart from these four Phrygian cities, we hear of Paul working in Attalia and Perge in Pamphylia, without any results being recorded by Luke. He accords much greater significance to Paul's work in Ephesus and Troas (ancient Troy) on the west coast, though neither of those communities was founded by Paul. The mission in Ephesus is especially instructive for our purposes. In Ephesus Paul met Jewish believers in Jesus when he first arrived there (during the return of his second journey, Acts 18:19). Priscilla and Aquila, Jewish believers, followed him to Ephesus from Corinth and continued to work there when Paul left. Apollos from Alexandria soon arrived in Ephesus, and, although he only knew the baptism of John, preached Jesus as the Messiah with great fervor. Priscilla and Aquila taught him and sent him to Corinth. Paul returns to Ephesus on his third journey, and stays for two years and three months (Acts 19:1–20:1). All this activity is carried out by Jewish believers, and this mission work has the Jewish community in Ephesus as its primary target. It is difficult to imagine Apollos offering the baptism of John to gentiles, and Luke portrays him as a preacher in the synagogues only. Therefore, when Paul meets twelve believers in Ephesus who have only been baptized with the baptism of John – presumably by Apollos – it is very likely that these were Jewish (Acts 19:1–7). In the synagogue of Ephesus Paul preaches for three months and wins several believers. He then withdraws from the synagogue and continues his teaching in the public lecture hall of Tyrannus. For two years this goes on, "so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord" (Acts 19:10). Even Jewish exorcists in Ephesus were so impressed by the power (and popularity?) of the name of Jesus that they began to use it in their exorcisms. In the well-known episode in the Ephesus theater, it seems as if the crowd makes no distinction between Jews who believe in Jesus and Jews who do not. Jews in general seem to be targeted by the furious crowd (there is no mention of Jesus or Christians!). This indicates that close links still existed between the Jewish believers in Ephesus and their non-believing Jewish relatives and neighbors. We also see the interesting picture of Paul creating trouble for the entire Jewish community of a large city. Seen from the perspective of the local Jewish community, Paul probably appeared as a provocateur and troublemaker, disturbing the delicately established harmony between the local Jews and their pagan neighbors.

The account in Acts indicates that the gospel spread from Ephesus to the whole province. In the Pauline letter to Colossae this is confirmed as far as the Lycus valley is concerned: Paul's co-worker Epaphras taught in Colossae, Laodicaea, and Hierapolis, possibly also elsewhere (Col 1:7; 4: 12–13; Phlm 23). The letter to the Ephesians clearly confirms the mixed character of the Ephesian community. In Christ the "wall of separation" between Jews and gentiles has been torn down. In the Ephesian community this is concretely expressed in the fellowship – one body of Jewish and gentile believers.

An inventory of Paul's co-workers in his mission in Asia Minor (based on Acts and Colossians) reveals the following list. Jewish believers: Barnabas, Mark, Silas, Timothy, Aquila, Priscilla, Apollos, Aristarchus, Tychicus, Jesus/ Justus (10 persons), and possibly Gaius. Gentile believers: Erastus, Sopater, Secundus, Trophimus, Epaphras, Philemon, Apphia, Archippus (8 persons). This list is a telling corrective against the usual picture of Paul as a loner in his missionary work, a single Jewish believer who abandoned Judaism and his fellow Jewish believers, creating through his mission a church of gentile believers only. He had more Jewish than gentile co-workers, and he never abandoned his concern for the Jews to hear the gospel first. The result of the Pauline mission was the same as of other missions being conducted in the diaspora: the establishment of mixed communities.

Asia Minor: "The Johannine Circle"

Which other missions were in progress in Asia Minor? No doubt there were many anonymous (to us) preachers around, but we know the name of one authority who apparently came to Ephesus some time after Paul: the "Elder John," who according to early traditions ended his days in Ephesus, and was connected in one way or another with the Gospel of John, the Letters of John, and the book of Revelation. I tend to agree with those scholars who think this John was not John the son of Zebedee. Rather, he may have been a Jerusalemite, and was probably the anonymous disciple in the Gospel of John whom Jesus is said to have loved. In any case, there is no doubt that in the 90s (at the latest) we meet a John in Ephesus, whom many Christians in the province of Asia during the following decades regarded as their "own" apostle, perhaps because his tomb was among them (Paul's was in far away Rome). In the "letters" of Revelation 2–3 we see the first orbit of influence of this "Johannine" Christianity. From Ephesus it spread to neighboring Smyrna and inland to the remaining five cities of Revelation 2–3: Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicaea, and probably also to other cities in the same orbit. The letters of Ignatius, ca. 110 CE, are addressed to cities within the same orbit: Ephesus, Smyrna, Philadelphia, Tralles, and Magnesia.

Especially relevant to our story are two questions: 1) did "Johannine" Christianity eclipse "Pauline" Christianity in the province of Asia?; and 2) was Johannine Christianity less Jewish than Pauline Christianity ever was? If answered in the positive, these questions would mean that the

spread of Johannine Christianity meant an end to Jewish Christianity wherever the latter had existed from the beginning. I believe, however, that both questions should be answered in the negative, for the following reasons:

1) There is absolutely no evidence to support the popular view that Paul's name and effort were soon forgotten and replaced by John. On the contrary, Ignatius never mentions John in his letters, but mentions Paul very emphatically in his epistle to the Ephesians: the Ephesian believers are "fellow-initiates with Paul, who was sanctified, who gained a good report, who was right blessed, in whose footsteps may I be found, … who in every Epistle makes mention of you …" (12.2). Likewise in the epistle of Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna – who in his youth had seen and heard John – there is no mention of John, but two of Paul (3:2; 9:1). There is therefore no reason to believe that believers who revered John always did so at Paul's expense. If any more evidence is needed to make this point, we have it in the most towering figure of Asian Christianity: Irenaeus. He may no doubt be called the greatest of all promoters of the Johannine tradition of Asia Minor, but his greatest doctrinal authority was Paul.
2) The reason that Asian Johannine Christianity has often been bypassed in histories of Jewish believers is that the anti-Jewish polemic in the Johannine writings seems even sharper than in Paul. In recent years, however, there has been an increasing emphasis on the fact that the intensity of anti-Jewish polemic in these writings reflects an intra-mural criticism among Jews rather than an external criticism coming from gentiles. When, for example, Revelation calls the Jews of Smyrna (2:9) and Philadelphia (3:9) "the synagogue of Satan," the background may be that the Jews in these cities had allied themselves with the Roman authorities when the latter persecuted Jewish believers (and probably their gentile fellow believers as well). The local Jews had probably struck a delicate deal with the surrounding society: we don't provoke you, you don't persecute us. For the book of Revelation, the definition of Jewishness in the face of persecution by idolaters is faithfulness, and if necessary martyrdom, not collaboration and compromise. Those who are guilty of the latter sin are not true Jews. They have allied themselves to the satanic power of Rome. This reading of Revelation presupposes that the author himself is a Jewish believer, and that the core of the communities he is addressing also consists of Jewish believers. There are good reasons for this reading.

The Christology of the Johannine writings easily matches that of Paul, and is based on the same Jewish Wisdom tradition. The most relevant Jewish background is found in the elaborate Wisdom and Torah concepts of contemporary Jewish theology. There are obvious points of contact here between the Wisdom Christology of Pauline passages like 1 Corinthians 8:6, Philippians 2:6–11, and Colossians 1:15–20 on the one hand, and John

1:1–18 on the other. More than in any other group of writings in the New Testament, Jesus simply takes the place of the Torah in the Johannine writings (the Gospel and the letters in particular). He is the Torah in person, Torah incarnate; apart from him the Torah has no meaning.

Asian Passover Celebration and the Influence of Jewish Believers

There is an unmistakable Passover dimension to the Johannine writings. Jesus is the Lamb of God; salvation has the exodus from Egypt as its dominant biblical type. It is therefore no surprise that Polycrates of Ephesus (around 190 CE, quoted in Eusebius' *Church History*) enumerates John in Ephesus (the beloved disciple of John's Gospel), Philip (the apostle) in Hierapolis, Polycarp in Smyrna, Thraseas in Eumenia and Smyrna, Sagaris in Laodicea, Papirius (not located), and Melito in Sardis as such who celebrated Passover at the same time as the Jews, on the 14th of Nisan. This was hardly an innovation of Johannine Jewish believers in Asia; one should think of it rather as the ordinary practice of Jewish believers right from the beginning. The persistence of this custom in the communities of Asia Minor should be seen as an indicator that these communities continued to have a significant number of Jewish believers in their midst, and even in their leadership, for a long time.

Recently, a good argument has been proposed to the effect that what Polycrates is really saying in his letter is that all the enumerated leaders, and Polycrates himself, were Jewish believers. He seems to call them all his "countrymen" (like Paul in Rom 9:3), and if his compatriots comprised John and Philip, all of them have to be Jewish like these two, including the celebrities Polycarp of Smyrna and Melito of Sardis.

I shall return to this important point shortly, but first I want to emphasize the significant links between Asia Minor and the land of Israel indicated by what we have just said. This link is also evident in Papias of Hierapolis (ca. 110 CE). The evangelist Philip and some of his daughters had ended their days in Hierapolis. In Papias' days, itinerant disciples still came to the city carrying oral traditions from Jesus' disciples and their followers. The samples of these traditions, which Eusebius and Irenaeus have preserved from Papias, fully substantiate the basic Jewishness of this material and its strong eschatological orientation.

If Polycarp of Smyrna was a Jewish believer, we have in him an example of a "Pauline" type of Jewish believer. Writing in the 120s or 130s to the Philippians across the Aegean Sea, he makes living righteously the main topic of his letter, bringing it very close to the Pauline Pastorals. During Polycarp's martyrdom, the Jewish community of Smyrna seems to have been curiously concerned with the proceedings, and above all to have taken action to prevent a martyr cult arising in the aftermath of Polycarp's death. In Revelation 2:9 there is also an indication of active participation by the Smyrnean Jewish community in the persecution of Jewish believers. This exhausts the evidence of Jewish participation in persecutions

in the entire early church. It seems as if this was something peculiar to Smyrna (and once Philadelphia, Rev 3:9). However, if the Gospel of John was written at Ephesus, the role of "the Jews" in John's Gospel could mirror similar processes there. The Jewish community was well integrated into the general society of these cities; they had a recognized position as a *politeuma*. They would not be happy to see this position jeopardized by newcomers who challenged the Roman authorities by their stubborn refusal to become as smoothly integrated as they themselves were. When the Jews of Smyrna are called "the synagogue of Satan" in Revelation, we could possibly translate it into "the synagogue allied to Rome."

For the next decades, ca. 140–170, our sources invite us to make a detour back to Phrygia. One of the few literary documents left from the Jews of Asia Minor is the First and Second Sibyl, together one work, not two. "The work consists of an original Jewish oracle and an extensive Christian redaction" (John Collins). The redaction was very likely done by a Jewish believer in Jesus. This redaction is dated to no later than 150 CE. The Jewish material clearly points to Phrygia as the place of origin: "O Phrygia, you will emerge first [after the big flood] from the surface of the water. You, first, will nourish another generation of men as it begins again. You will be nurse for all" (1:196–198). "There is a certain tall lofty mountain on the dark mainland of Phrygia. It is called Ararat …" (1: 261–262). This Sibyl exhorts all men, Jews and gentiles, to repent while there is still time. There are remarkably few, and no clear, references to the ritual commandments of the law, but the Apostolic Decree is stated in no uncertain terms: "Do not eat blood. Abstain from what is sacrificed to idols" (2:96).

In the 160s, the Montanist awakening erupted in Phrygia, and was called "the (Kata)Phrygian heresy" by opponents and the "New Prophecy" by supporters. This prophecy said that the heavenly Jerusalem was to descend to earth in two villages in the mountains of Phrygia. This location might seem rather exotic, were it not for the fact that Jewish tradition in Asia Minor had already made the Phrygian mountains the scene of life's beginning anew, after the great and universal conflagration.

In Phrygia there is no evidence that "Jewishness" was an issue in the many heated debates created by the new revival. This probably means that the Jewishness of the Phrygian prophecy was no greater than that of its opponents. In other words, the Jewishness of the Montanist theology and practice was "average," and typical of Christianity in Phrygia in that age. On this background, one notices with interest the following accusation hurled against the Montanist pioneers by an anonymous critic:

> Is there a single one, my good sirs, of these followers of Montanus or of the women who began to chatter, who was persecuted by the Jews or killed by lawless men? Not one. Or, were any of them seized and crucified for the sake of the Name? Not so. Or even, were any of the women ever scourged in the synagogues of the Jews or stoned? Never, in any wise.

This would seem to presuppose that it was not unusual for Christians in Phrygia to be scourged in the synagogues, clearly an indication that some or many of them were Jewish believers. This inference is uncertain, however, because the quoted passage contains many allusions to Matthew 23:34. Even so, the quote may also have contemporary realities in mind.

In the 170s, our most important source of information – Melito of Sardis – takes us back to the Asian orbit of "Johannine" cities. In his one preserved work, *On the Pascha*, we see a Christian Passover haggadah in its mature stage, having been developed, it seems, in intense dialogue and polemic with the rabbinic haggadah, which may also have been formed during the same period, and in counter-polemic against the Christian version. Melito combines a fully Johannine "high" Christology with the equally Johannine motif of Jesus being the true Passover lamb. The Pascha, *paschein*, is derived from *pathein*, to suffer. The Christian Passover being celebrated simultaneously with the Jewish is integral to Melito's poignant and bitter polemic against non-believing Israel and their Passover. It is precisely this closeness that explains the bitterness of a family feud. If we are right to interpret Polycrates' letter in Eusebius as implying that Melito was a Jewish believer, the conflict really was in the family.

The custom of celebrating the Christian Pascha on the same evening as the Jewish Passover was to become a hallmark of believers in Asia Minor for many years. It seems not to have been completely abandoned in these areas even after Nicaea (see chapter 11). In the 190s, Victor of Rome (189–199) tried to impose on the Asians the Roman practice of celebrating on the first Sunday after the 14th of Nisan. He met firm resistance from the Asians, whose spokesman was Polycrates of Ephesus. We have already seen how proudly he lists seven of his predecessors as being Jewish believers who faithfully kept the old tradition in this regard.

Turning to the third century, we are faced with an almost complete silence about Asia Minor in our sources. One of the few exceptions is a note in the Passover treatise of Anatolius of (Syrian) Laodicea, ca. 268 CE. He himself was not an adherent of the stance of Asia Minor on the Passover question, but has the following to say about the Asians:

> … all the bishops of Asia up to the present, who have accepted without question the rule by irreproachable authority, namely of John, who leant on our Lord's bosom, … celebrated the Pascha without question in every year whenever it was luna 14 and when the lamb was sacrificed among the Jews, once the [spring] equinox was over…

That this was due not solely to conservatism on the part of Asian bishops, but to the continued influence of Jewish Christian leaders, is indicated by evidence from the following century, to which I shall return below.

Paul in Macedonia and Greece

We move on with our story by following Paul into Macedonia on his second missionary journey (50–52 CE). In Philippi, a Roman colony, there were few Jews and apparently no synagogue. The "place of prayer" that Paul and his companions visited was probably an outdoor substitute for a synagogue, but the only named convert Paul made here was Lydia from Thyatira. She is called a God-fearer, and was probably a gentile who sympathized with the Jewish way of life and hence sought the Jewish place of prayer. When Paul comes to Thessalonica, he first visits the synagogue, as usual. Some of the local Jews are won by Paul, among them Aristarchus (mentioned in Acts 19:29; 20:4; 27:2). Paul's host Jason was probably Jewish, but may have been a believer prior to Paul's arrival. The majority of Jews in Thessalonica rejected Paul and his message in such strong terms that it was deemed necessary to send him to Beroea for his own safety. There his message was received more favorably among the local Jews. Apparently many of them became believers. Paul had to move on, however, because the Jews of Thessalonica came after him. But Silas and Timothy would remain in the city and complete the work there.

Following Paul to Athens, in Greece, we find nothing that allows us to reach any conclusion about the presence of Jewish believers in the city. It is only when we arrive in Corinth that some light is thrown on this aspect of the story. Prior to Paul's first arrival, others had preached the gospel in Corinth – most importantly, perhaps, the Jewish believers Aquila and Priscilla, who had come to Corinth after being expelled from Rome under Claudius (49 CE). Paul worked closely with this couple, and in the beginning seems to have concentrated his own efforts on the local synagogue. Some Jews became believers, but apparently not many. When Paul finally gave up and declared himself finished with the synagogue, he moved next-door – to a God-fearer named Titius Justus, who had probably first listened to Paul in the synagogue. He was not the only one to believe Paul's message. An official of the synagogue, Crispus, probably a Jew, also became a believer. It is even possible that the man chosen to succeed him, Sosthenes, also became a believer. A Sosthenes is mentioned as co-sender of 1 Corinthians; he could well be the synagogue official mentioned in Acts 18:17.

First Corinthians gives us the following names of local believers in Corinth: Chloe's people (1:11), Crispus and Gaius (1:14; Crispus was probably the synagogue official of Acts 18:8, hence a Jewish believer), Stephanas and his house (1:16; 16:15–17), and Fortunatus and Achaicus (16:17). That some of these were Jewish believers is likely, but not demonstrable, except for Crispus. Of those who ministered in Corinth for shorter or longer periods, Titus was a gentile (Gal 2:3; 2 Cor 7:5–7; 8:16–24); the others – Aquila and Priscilla, Apollos, Paul, Silas, and Timothy – were all Jewish believers.

Paul's two letters to Corinth are full of advice on how to live with tensions and factions in the community. These tensions had to do, for exam-

ple, with questions of who should be accorded greatest authority (Paul? Peter? Apollos?), and questions of kosher meat versus meat offered to idols. Some of the "pseudo-apostles" preaching against Paul in Corinth were no doubt Jewish (2 Cor 11:22), but apparently they did not promote circumcision. It is rather as strong charismatics and wonderworkers that they tried to out-apostle Paul. It may also be that they tried to impose the Apostolic Decree on the Corinthian believers, something Paul found disruptive. Paul, on the other hand, defended gentile believers who refused to have anything to do with idol sacrifices (although Paul himself considered such meat legitimate when bought at the city's market). His advice was, when dining in a gentile home, don't ask from whence the meat came. If another believer asks, and has objections to the meat, abstain in solidarity with him. It is difficult to say precisely how the picture of Paul's opponents should be pieced together, but it is hard to avoid the impression that the conflict or conflicts in Corinth had to do in part with the very mixed origin of the Corinthian believers: some Jewish, some God-fearers, and some pagans pure and simple.

The Mixed Community at Corinth

After the short period of this community's life covered by Acts and Paul's Corinthian letters, our sources are extremely sparse. Around 100 CE the so-called *First Letter of Clement*, written in Rome and addressed to Corinth, indicates that there were still conflicts in Corinth. But we have no way of knowing which, if any, theological differences motivated these conflicts. When Hegesippus arrived in Corinth sometime during Anicet's episcopacy in Rome (155–166), he seems to have found everything to his satisfaction as far as "orthodoxy" was concerned. For Hegesippus this meant that the Corinthian community held in high regard "what the Law and the Prophets and the Lord preach." Since Hegesippus was so deeply steeped in Jerusalemite Jewish Christian theology and traditions, his testimony at least indicates that the community at Corinth was not thoroughly "gentilized" in its theology in the late second century. The close contact with Rome that *First Clement* documents may well have continued, and Hegesippus may be right to make no distinction as to the "orthodoxy" of the two communities. Indirectly, this could indicate that the Jewish Christian element in the Corinthian community was by no means extinct in his time.

A decade later, Corinth had an influential bishop – Dionysius. Of his ethnic identity we know nothing. He wrote a letter to the Roman community that includes the following passage:

> … you also … have united the planting that came from Peter and Paul, of both the Romans and the Corinthians. For indeed both planted also in our Corinth, and likewise taught us; and likewise they taught together also in Italy, and were martyred on the same occasion.

Passages like this testify to the need felt by this community, founded by Paul, to list Peter among their founders and early authorities. As we can see from 1 Corinthians, there were some in the very early years of the community who claimed Peter (rather than Paul) as their spiritual father. It is difficult to say with any degree of certainty whether this reclaiming of Peter has anything to do with a particular faction of Jewish believers in the Corinthian community. This was the theory of the so-called Old Tübingen School, whose great master was F.C. Baur. According to him, "catholic" Christianity was created when Jewish Christianity, claiming Peter's authority, coalesced with gentile Pauline Christianity. To Baur, the above passage was welcome proof of the completed synthesis. This is probably making too much out of it. But the least we can say is that toward the end of the second century, the Corinthian community stood firmly at the side of the Roman community in rejecting the anti-Jewish theology of Marcion (who made Paul alone his basis, and rejected the Law and the Prophets – as did most gnostics). This does not prove that there were many Jewish believers in Corinth at this time, but it certainly does not exclude the presence of quite a few.

Rome

Going west, we now arrive in Rome, the imperial capital itself, probably comprising around one million inhabitants in this period. There was a significant Jewish colony in Rome. Some of its members went on pilgrimage to Jerusalem once or several times during their lives, and came back with news from the capital of all Jews. Some of those who visited Jerusalem at the Pentecost festival after Jesus' death and resurrection (30 CE?) had the opportunity to hear Peter and the other apostles proclaim the new message about Jesus the Messiah of Israel. Acts 2 explicitly mentions visitors from Rome being in Peter's audience. The ones who believed Peter's message would bring it back home, and later visitors to Jerusalem could have had the same experience. In this way an early community of Jewish believers in Jesus came into existence in Rome – no doubt very small in the beginning, but growing steadily. It may well have been that believers in Jesus proclaimed their new faith in the synagogues of Rome. In that case some gentile God-fearers were also in the audience. There is no reason to assume that the situation in Rome was any different from e.g. that at Antioch. In other words, from very early on the Roman community of Christians became a mixed one. In this first period, both Jewish and gentile believers were probably well integrated into the local synagogue communities, as they had been before.

But this was to change. During Claudius' reign (41–54 CE) two edicts were issued, one in 41 CE and the second in 49 CE. The background of both edicts was internal disturbances within the Jewish communities in Rome. The first edict forbade meetings; the second expelled Jews from Rome due to disturbances instigated by the question of one "Chrestus" – very likely a misunderstanding of the word "Christ." Perhaps this conflict

was instigated by representatives of the "Stephen circle" in Jerusalem arriving in Rome, and preaching a more radical anti-law version of the message. The disturbances could also have come about due to the sheer success of the new message: it won so many adherents that it could no longer be ignored. If the new message was very successful among the God-fearers, it was bound to create tension among the Jews of Rome. The intensity of the conflict also indicates that more than a messianic claim for Jesus was at stake. Perhaps the Jewish believers in Rome drew the same conclusions from their new faith with regard to the law and temple that Stephen did. However that may be, the new message proved divisive in the Roman synagogues.

Claudius' second edict evicted the Jews from Rome – maybe all Jews, or maybe just the troublemakers. In any case the result would be that the community of believers in Jesus temporarily lost its Jewish members. Aquila and Priscilla were among the exiles; they went to Corinth. After some time, however, Jewish believers must have filtered back to Rome. Others may have taken up residence there for the first time. This probably accelerated after the death of Claudius in 54 CE. When Paul wrote his letter to the Roman community in the late 50s, between one fourth and one third of the persons he greets by name are Jewish believers, and Aquila and Priscilla are once again among them. In other words, the effect of the expulsion was not long-term. There could have been another long-term effect, however. The expulsion meant the excision of that segment of Roman Jewry that, so to speak, represented the overlap between the Jewish and Christian communities. The long-term effect of this was probably a sharper division between the two groups. Jewish believers who settled (or re-settled) in Rome after the expulsion would have had good reason not to provoke Jewish non-believers. Otherwise, the unhappy experience of 49 CE could easily be repeated. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the rift between Jewish believers and non-believers would have deepened after Claudius' edict.

Paul wrote Romans in the late 50s, and it is not only the list of greetings (Rom 16) which testifies to the existence of a mixed community in Rome. The Jewish believers comprise slightly less than a third of this list, but they may be overrepresented in the circle of Paul's acquaintances. We can therefore not exclude the possibility that they actually comprised a smaller proportion of the believers in Rome than they did in Paul's list. The other aspect of Romans which indicates a mixed community is its extended discussion of questions pertaining to kosher meat and drink. It is surprisingly difficult to get a clear picture of exactly which groups were involved in these disputes within the community, and why they acted as they did. But there is hardly any doubt that the basic disagreement about how closely Jewish and gentile believers should observe the Torah regulations is behind the different conflicts. In other words, the Roman believers experienced the typical problems of table fellowship in mixed diaspora communities.

In the 50s and 60s, leading up to the great persecution under Nero (64

CE), it seems that the situation in Rome could be best described as the gradual development of a clear Christian group identity, distinguishable from the Jewish identity of "ordinary" non-believing Jews. Among the Christians, Jewish and gentile believers were living closely together in small, tightly knit house churches. It seems they preferred this type of communal life, instead of making things easier by separating Jewish and gentile believers into different churches. Since 49 CE the gentile believers had been the majority, and possibly increased their proportion as the years went by. In Romans, Paul clearly presupposes that the majority of Roman Christians are gentile believers.

The group identity of these Roman Christians could perhaps be described as follows: The ethnic differences among believers were downplayed, and the majority position of the gentile believers was often reflected in ways that make one think all believers were gentile. Close contact and conflicts with the Jewish community were no longer part of the Christian self-definition.

This new understanding is reflected in documents like Hebrews, *1 Clement,* and *Hermas,* all of them produced in Rome. They are all rich in Jewish ideas. At the same time the synagogue and the Jewish people are strangely absent from them. Even in Hebrews, it is the temple worship of the old covenant that is viewed as "the competition," not contemporary Jews. It makes sense to see this as a long-term effect of Claudius' edict of 49 CE. This development would probably have come about in any case, but Claudius' edict may have made it happen earlier in Rome than elsewhere.

Turning to the second century, what evidence do we have for Jewish believers in Rome? I believe we have disappointingly little. Jean Daniélou has argued that the following early Latin documents originated in Rome, and were authored by Jewish believers: the old Italian Latin Bible itself and *5 Ezra*; Pseudo-Cyprian's *Adversus Judaeos*; and the anonymous sermon *De aleatoribus* (all of which were produced toward the end of the second century). But none of these works can be attributed to Rome with any certainty. And even if we accept them as Roman, they cannot prove more than a continued influence of Jewish or Jewish Christian terminology and imagery in Roman Christian writings of the period. The fact that the authors were well acquainted with this legacy does not say anything about their own ethnic background.

The Roman writings of the early second century exhibit a remarkable absence of anti-Jewish polemic. The same is true about two of the few certainly Roman documents of the mid-third century: Novatian's treatises *On The Trinity* and *On Jewish Foods.* The lack of any clear anti-Jewish polemic in the latter treatise is truly remarkable. His polemical front is not Christians practicing Mosaic regulations, but Christian heretics, like Marcion, who ridicule these Mosaic laws, asking how the creator God could declare animals, which he had created himself, unclean. These attacks turn Novatian into an apologist for Moses and the God of the Old Testament.

The kind of anti-Jewish polemic found in the documents claimed for Rome by Daniélou has close parallels in clearly African writings from the same period. It therefore seems to me that Daniélou's testimonies to Jewish Christianity in Rome should instead be seen as African documents, some of which may have been penned by African émigrés in Rome.

To conclude, evidence of intense Jewish-Christian interaction is scantier in Rome than in most other places. This probably means that Jewish believers in Rome were very well integrated into communities with a dominant gentile majority, and that friction between the Christian and Jewish communities of Rome was therefore minimal. It does not mean there were no Jewish believers in Rome, but probably relatively fewer than in the cities farther east. We must also reckon with the fact that when Jewish believers become well integrated into predominantly gentile communities, the mechanisms of assimilation are activated. The children of such believers may no longer regard themselves as Jewish.

Gaul

We now move further west. Paul had plans to go all the way from Rome to Spain; if he ever got that far, we simply do not know. *First Clement* is the only early source which seems to claim that he did in fact reach Spain and witness there, but there is one big problem with this testimony: it may simply be based on Paul's stated, and therefore well-known, plan to go there (Rom 15). For Clement, an apostle's stated plan was likely to have been realized. Otherwise, there is an almost deafening silence in the early sources about any community west of Rome being founded by Paul, and this speaks against the realization of his plans. There is, in fact, a rather striking silence about any early Christian presence in these parts. Neither is there much clear evidence of the presence of Jews.

This leaves us with the following rather singular situation: when the historical scene in Gaul is suddenly lit up in 177 CE, not only do we see two fully developed Christian communities in the cities of Lyons and Vienne, but these Christians are also the first evidence of a Jewish presence in these cities – in fact, in the whole region.

What happened in 177 CE was a great persecution of believers in Jesus; in all, 48 people from the two cities were martyred. Immediately after the event, representatives of the two communities wrote a letter containing a narrative of what happened. They addressed this letter to those brethren in the faith with whom they felt most closely connected – and that turns out to be "the brethren in Asia and Phrygia." The most natural explanation of this is also certainly the correct one: these communities in Gaul consisted largely of immigrants from Asia Minor, many of them merchants and other traveling people. Two of them were mentioned by name in the letter. Attalus was a native of Pergamum, and had been a "pillar and foundation" of the church there; Alexander was "a Phrygian by race and a physician by profession," and had lived many years in Gaul. Of the 48 named martyrs, one third have Greek names. When describing

the tortures endured by the martyrs, the letter repeatedly borrows from the language of the first, and especially the second, books of Maccabees. These Christians in Lyons obviously identify with the Jewish martyrs who were persecuted by Antiochus Epiphanes.

One of the martyrs, Alcibiades, had been in the habit of eating only bread and drinking water. The communities in general are said to practice abstention from "blood of creatures without reason." This means they practiced the Apostolic Decree, eating only meat which had been ritually slaughtered. This could hardly have been possible unless they bought their meat from a Jewish butcher in Lyons or Vienne. Alcibiades may have come from a place where this opportunity did not exist, and hence completely abstained from meat and wine. Was he a Jewish believer? Were the Christians in Lyons in general living in close contact with the local Jews, and were some of them Jewish believers themselves?

There is more evidence of continued contact between Christians and Jews in Gaul in the fourth and fifth centuries. Considering the close links between Christians in Gaul and the Christians in Asia and Phrygia, it would not be surprising if the constituency of the communities in Gaul was very similar to those in Lydia/Asia and Phrygia – in other words, a significant proportion of Jewish believers.

It is difficult to conclude much from the writings of Irenaeus, made bishop of Lyons subsequent to the persecution of 177. He incorporated whole blocks of Jewish Christian tradition in his writings. He probably brought this with him as part of his theological luggage when he left Asia Minor. Even so, it is interesting to note that in his *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, addressed to a colleague but in reality written to the Christian communities in Gaul and elsewhere, he assumes that the addressees would appreciate a small midrash on the Hebrew text of Genesis 1:1 (*Proof* 43). He also presupposes that the addressees need to be reminded repeatedly that the Mosaic law, though good, need no longer be observed.

Thus, everything seems to justify the view that the communities in Gaul were daughter churches of the churches in Lydia and Phrygia, and that these daughters resembled their mothers to a very great extent.

6. From Alexandria to Carthage

To complete our story of pre-Constantinian Jewish believers, we must consider the southwestern orbit of the spread of Christianity, from Alexandria to Cyrene to Carthage.

Alexandria and Cyrene

For centuries there had been a large Jewish colony in Alexandria. At the time of Jesus there was also a large Jewish colony in Cyrene. These Jewish diaspora communities were among the most vigorous, but both of them suffered a major disaster toward the end of the great uprising in 115–117 CE. When the Romans crushed this uprising, they virtually wiped out the Jewish colonies of Alexandria and Cyrene. The significance of this fact is often overlooked in histories of early Egyptian Christianity.

On the day of Pentecost, there were Jewish pilgrims present from "Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene" (Acts 2:10). Apparently some Jews from Cyrene came to faith in Jesus, because later we hear that some members of the Jerusalem community were scattered during the persecution following the death of Stephen, among them "some men of Cyprus and Cyrene." These were the pioneers in preaching the gospel to non-Jewish Greeks in Antioch (Acts 11:20). In Acts 13:1 we are told that one of these Cyrenean believers was Lucius. Acts also gives us the name of a Jewish believer from Alexandria: Apollos (Acts 18:24), who proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues of Ephesus and then in Corinth.

These few scraps of information in the New Testament are, strictly speaking, about believers coming *from* rather than going *to* Alexandria and Cyrene, and we are not told explicitly that they came to belief in their native cities or that they returned and preached among their countrymen. As far as Apollos is concerned, the Western text of Acts says he received his first Christian instruction in Alexandria. This certainly cannot be excluded as a natural implication of Luke's report on him in the non-Western text: he continued in Ephesus and Corinth what he had begun in Alexandria. In any case, the presence of more than one Jewish believer from Alexandria and Cyrene would normally imply some sort of two-way traffic; believers also traveled in the opposite direction and brought their

faith home with them. If Apollos had already been proclaiming Jesus in Alexandria, before he came to Ephesus, and continued in Ephesus what he had done in Alexandria, it is interesting to note that according to Acts he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogue only. He preached, first and foremost, to his fellow Jews.

Between this evidence from the 50s of the first century and the writings of Clement of Alexandria toward the end of the second century, there is a strange silence in our literary sources concerning Christians in Egypt and Cyrenaica. Most perplexing is the silence from Eusebius. All he has to offer is some purely legendary or highly speculative material that is of no historical value. The simple truth is that for this period of some 100-plus years, we are completely in the dark concerning Christianity in and around Alexandria and Cyrene. It could be, however, that this silence itself is significant. In the middle of this dark period we find the nearly complete physical extermination of the Jewish communities in these regions. The assumption that early Christianity here had been dominated by Jewish believers, and that the spread of faith in Jesus took place mostly within the large Jewish communities in these cities, would explain why the crackdown in 117 CE was also a catastrophe for the early church.

This, of course, has to remain speculation. But it can be supported by an argument advanced by Birger A. Pearson. He points to the remarkable take-over of Jewish writings that seems to have occurred quite early among believers in Alexandria. He further speculates that in his old age, Philo may have met with Jewish believers in Jesus and dialogued with them, and that some of his disciples might have become believers in Jesus. Apollos would be a case in point. Jewish believers, for their part, may have valued Philo's writings highly and been responsible for beginning the process of making Philo into almost a church father.

Walter Bauer explained Eusebius' silence on early church history in Egypt with the assumption that Eusebius found it so heretical that he preferred not to say anything about it. My proposal above may be combined with Bauer's in the following way: For the period ca. 120–150 we have literary remains (Gospel fragments, some of the earliest Nag Hammadi texts, etc.) and reports on heretical Alexandrian teachers of a gnostic bent in other church fathers. Could this reflect the situation after the crackdown in 117, when local representatives of the "orthodoxy" of the land of Israel and the leading diaspora communities had been eliminated, and there were few to confront wild-growing traditions with the corrective of the early Jerusalem tradition? Again, we are definitely in the realm of speculation.

As far as Eusebius is concerned, it is with his note on bishop Demetrius in Alexandria that we enter solid historical ground. He seems to have entered his office as bishop in ca. 190 CE. It was at approximately the same time that Clement of Alexandria entered his career as a prolific author. From then on, we are as well (or badly) informed on the history of Egyptian Christianity as that of other provinces. These teachers represent a roughly "orthodox" Christianity, but of a peculiar Alexandrian brand.

That this had a history prior to their own decades is argued convincingly by C.H. Roberts, who points to the early and wide distribution of entirely "orthodox" biblical manuscripts in Egypt.

In the second and third centuries we find Clement and Origen mentioning Jewish believers whom they used as informants on Jewish Christian traditions. These believers were probably not native Alexandrians, however. Speaking about his theological mentors, Clement says,

> Of these, one was in Greece, the Ionian, and others were in Magna Graecia [southern Italy]; another one was from Coele-Syria, one was from Egypt, and others were in the East; one was from the land of the Assyrians, and *another was a Hebrew in Palestine*.

This would indicate that when Clement quotes Jewish Christian traditions in his works, these may be quotes either from written sources or from this Jewish Christian mentor whom Clement met in the land of Israel.

Origen mentions on several occasions in his works a "Hebrew master" from whom he quotes Jewish Christian interpretations of Scripture. If these quotes are all from the same person, Origen writes that he had fled "far away from the law and to where we resided [Alexandria]" because of his faith in Jesus. Origen is very likely speaking about a Jewish believer from the land of Israel; in any case this man was not a native of Alexandria.

This more or less exhausts our sources on Jewish believers in Alexandria and Cyrene for the period before Constantine. I cannot help thinking that this is an indirect testimony to the terrible disaster that very likely hit the Jewish believers of these cities in 117 CE.

There is one point to add, however. The Roman crushing of the revolt was probably much less effective in the Egyptian countryside. If the early Jewish believers in Egypt were to survive in greater numbers, it would be here. David Frankfurter has argued persuasively for the view that in the third century, in the Egyptian countryside – not least in Upper Egypt – there was a much more apocalyptic and "Jewish" Christianity than in Alexandria itself. He refers i.a. to Dionysius of Alexandria's unequivocal testimony to this. Dionysius (bishop 247–264) found it necessary to write an extensive treatise on Revelation and the Old Testament promises to curb millennial enthusiasm among the followers of bishop Nepos in Arsinoe. Nepos had written a tract, *Against the Allegorists,* which was certainly aimed mostly at Origen. Dionysius is full of praise for this group's intelligence and perceptiveness, but he brands their understanding of the Old Testament portrait of the times of salvation as "Jewish," and also admits that this kind of exegesis was widespread in the Egyptian countryside – and had been for a long time. This in itself does not prove that there was a significant segment of Jewish believers among Egyptian Christians in the countryside. But this type of Christianity, and this milieu, would certainly be more hospitable to them than Alexandria itself.

Carthage

Moving further west, to Roman Africa and its capital Carthage, evidence of Jewish believers is almost exclusively of an indirect nature. No writing that has been preserved can, with any certainty, be attributed to a Jewish believer, although this has been claimed for some of the pseudo-Cyprianic works (see more below). Even so, circumstantial evidence clearly indicates that "among the first North African Christians [there] were many Jews" (Anni-Maria Laato).

In Carthage, as in other significant cities on the African coast, there was a large Jewish community. The Jewish cemetery outside Carthage bears eloquent testimony to the size and wealth of the Jewish community there in antiquity. This community was part of the general Roman diaspora network. In the Berber countryside one would meet another type of Jew: Berber tribes who had collectively converted to Judaism.

Our first information on African Christians comes from Carthage and the surrounding area. The first document is the *Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs*, from shortly after 180 CE. It is a brief report on the trial of some named Christians from Scili, who were sentenced to die by the sword in Carthage on July 17th, 180. Little is to be deduced from this short document, but it is interesting that the martyrs are said to "reign with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" eternally, immediately upon death. It would probably be an over-interpretation to deduce a millenarian doctrine among the martyrs and their community from this short statement.

The Old Latin Bible translations of Africa show signs of direct contact with the Hebrew text. Either local Jews had a hand in this translation before Christians came to use it, or Jewish believers in Jesus had a hand in it. In either case, the Christian Latin Old Testament is indirect evidence of contact between Jews and Christians. A study of cemeteries and early basilicas in Carthage seems to indicate a striking continuity between Jewish and Christian burials.

African Christianity comes to full life before our eyes in the numerous writings of Tertullian, ca. 195–220, and in the roughly contemporary anonymous work *On the Two Mountains of Sinai and Zion.* The latter is so imbued with Jewish and/or Jewish Christian traditions, Hebrew etymologies, Jewish gematria (numerology), and other Jewish features that some commentators have posited a Jewish believer as its author. This is by no means unlikely, but difficult to prove beyond doubt.

Tertullian was no doubt a gentile himself, but his works embody much Jewish tradition that was most likely transmitted to him via Jewish believers, either orally or through their writings. An extensive study of this topic claims that this Jewish influence became more pronounced toward the end of Tertullian's life than it was before he joined the Montanist movement. This could indicate that the Montanist movement in Roman Africa had a special appeal for Jewish believers and those gentile believers who were closest to them. In Tertullian we have very unequivocal evidence that Carthaginian Christians at this time fully observed the Apostolic Decree concerning meat:

> … the Christians … have not even the blood of animals at their meals of simple and natural food; [they] abstain from things strangled and that die a natural death, for no other reason than that they may not contract pollution … from blood secreted in the viscera. … You tempt Christians with sausages of blood, just because … you know they hold these unlawful.

This rather scrupulous observance of the Apostolic Decree clearly indicates a Christian community that included Jewish believers, for whom observance of the decree by the whole community of believers was important.

Like Justin, Tertullian is a millenarian. This was more than a literary heritage. In his work against Marcion he reports on current events in Judea in support of his position: heavenly Jerusalem has recently been seen suspended in the sky above Judea. This report came to him via Montanist channels, but it is hard to imagine that the originators of such reports were other than Jewish believers in the land of Israel. During the campaign of Severus against the Parthians, "in Judea there was suspended in the sky a city early every morning for forty days. As the day advanced, the entire figure of its walls would wane gradually, and sometimes it would vanish instantly." The vision was attested even by gentiles, says Tertullian, but it is difficult not to think that this relocation of the descent of heavenly Jerusalem – from Pepuza and Thymion in Phrygia to Judea – was fed into Montanist lore by Jewish believers in Judea.

In the third century we also find two anonymous works which are relevant to our story: 1) *On the hundredfold, sixty fold and thirty fold* is a commentary on Jesus' parable of the sower. This work is probably from the first part of the third century. It contains striking similarities to Jewish Christian traditions in the *Didaché* and other Syrian documents, like the *Didascalia.* 2) *On the computation of the Pascha* is a treatise written in 243 CE, probably in Roman Africa. Much the same can be said about this writing as about the former.

The poet Commodianus was probably a third century African. In his eschatology there are Jewish elements that cannot be derived from any earlier Christian literature known to us, first and foremost the return of the ten lost tribes from beyond the Euphrates. Commodianus is much more earthbound in his eschatology than any of his predecessors. These Jewish features are combined with a vehement anti-Judaism, probably reflecting closeness to an actively proselytizing Judaism.

The last author to be mentioned here is Lactantius, very likely an African in origin. In his old age he experienced the Constantinian revolution; Constantine made him the tutor of his son Crispus in 317 CE, in Trier. Lactantius demonstrates the vibrant eschatological scenarios of African-Latin Christianity, but a distance from Jews and Judaism is obvious in his writings and he envisions no hope at all for an end-time salvation of the Jews.

7. Constantine and His Legacy

The 20-plus years from 303 to 325 CE are among the most dramatic in the history of the ancient world, and especially in the history of the Christian church. During the first ten years of this period the Roman Empire mobilized all its strength to crush the church once and for all – and failed miserably. During the next twelve years a complete reversal took place, with Christianity becoming first fully legal, then a favored religion in the empire. Constantine, whose long road to absolute power in the empire began in the utmost west and north – in York, England – in 306, had a vision before his decisive battle at the Milvian Bridge outside Rome in 312. According to his Christian court historians (Eusebius and Lactantius), he saw a cross and heard the words, "by this sign conquer!" They think of this as Constantine's "conversion"; modern historians are a little more cautious. But there is hardly any doubt that from then on, Constantine increasingly believed that the one God he already believed in, and whom he felt had called him to restore the Roman Empire to its former might and glory, was worshipped most appropriately by the Christians. Accordingly, the Roman emperor from then on lavished favors on the formerly persecuted church, favors that must have made many a bishop dizzy from sheer surprise. In 325 the great universal council in Nicaea was convened by the emperor himself. He arranged transportation and lodging and provisions for all participating bishops; he even attended the opening meeting and addressed the bishops humbly as merely the "bishop" of external things, while they were the true overseers of church matters. Attending bishops who had barely survived the great persecution a few years earlier must be excused for their inclination to think that they were witnessing the coming of Christ's kingdom here and now.

From Mission to Christianization

Rapid and dramatic as this total change was, it was only the beginning of an extended process that took at least 200 years to complete, the process we can call the "Christianization" of the Roman Empire. Public acts of pagan worship were outlawed in 380 CE, but this does not mean they came to an abrupt end in that year. The Christian emperors were no less

political realists than their pagan predecessors. They knew they could not afford to alienate large segments of the empire's population by proceeding violently against their gods and their religious traditions. Like all wise rulers, they knew more could be accomplished by letting mild measures – even mild pressures – work in their unobtrusive but effective way over extended periods of time, than by a dramatic use of coercion.

There were others who were not that patient. Local bishops often found the imperial hand to be dragging in the enforcement of the 380 CE edict making Christianity the only legal religion of the empire. They sometimes provoked local confrontations that forced the emperor to intervene with military power on the side of the Christians. Even more impatient were bands of marauding monks. In the decades around 400 CE, bands of monks occupied pagan temples in many places, and then either burned them, tore them down, or converted them into churches. To modern readers, this clearly appears as the illegitimate use of sheer physical force in a battle which ought to be fought with purely spiritual means. But it is not certain that men of antiquity would have regarded this in exactly the same way. We have to keep in mind that when human beings inhabit a world of which spirits and gods are an integral part, spiritual power is often very physical in its manifestation. The simple fact that these monks came away from their sacrilege toward the spirits and gods unharmed, the fact that they could defame the old divinities without the latter taking any punitive action, certainly impressed many a pagan spectator.

All the mechanisms and measures here mentioned – and more – were at work in bringing about the "Christianization" of the whole Roman Empire. What did this process mean with regard to our story about the Jewish believers in Jesus? It was, in my opinion, of great significance. It changed the conditions and the outer framework for the main actors of our story in fundamental ways. Let us review some of them.

Legislation Concerning Jews

In the days of the pagan empire, Jews had been granted special privileges but had also been curbed in certain ways. The most important privilege was that Judaism was granted the status of a legal religion, despite the refusal of the Jews to respect the Roman gods or participate in Roman emperor worship. This exemption from a universal public duty was granted to the Jews and no one else. Partly as a compensation for this privilege, there were some restrictions with regard to which public offices Jews could hold. Legislation tended to vary over time in this regard, but the Jews were never given a carte blanche to all public offices. This may have been felt as less of a restriction than it sounds, because many public offices were costly honors. They imposed heavy burdens of an economic nature; being exempt from them was something like an economic privilege.

It was customary in earlier scholarship to claim that with the Christian

empire, legal conditions for the Jews worsened considerably. The restrictions to which they were subjected became more numerous and harsher. In recent years, however, a re-evaluation of this has come about. The dominant trend now is rather to stress the continuity in the empire's policy with regard to the Jews. First of all, when all public acts of paganism were banned, there was no similar treatment of Judaism. Judaism was still, as the only non-Christian community of faith, a legal religion. The Jews retained their full rights to practice the religion of their fathers; their houses of worship were protected by law against any harm. Restrictions with regard to public offices continued to vary somewhat, but as I said, these restrictions were often not seen as burdens, but boons.

Christianization by Coercion

What I have said so far is valid on the level of legislation. In real life things are often more complicated. Again we are faced with the greater intolerance of some bishops, and especially the bands of monks that I mentioned above. It is sad, but perhaps understandable, that some zealous bishops and monks thought that a strategy which had proved successful in winning pagans to Christianity might work with the Jews as well. In the decades around 400, we see the first recorded synagogue burnings, most often instigated by fanatical monks, and sometimes supported by the local bishop.

They knew this was illegal, of course, but they gambled on the emperor and his local representative turning a blind eye – which they often did. One incident when this was not the case has become famous: it took place in Callinicum, a small town by the Euphrates, in 388 CE. At the instigation of the local bishop, the city's Christians burned down the local synagogue. Emperor Theodosius ordered the bishop to compensate the Jews for all losses, and to have the synagogue rebuilt using church funds. The emperor also required those guilty of the arson to be punished. All this came to the notice of Ambrose, the bishop of Milan, and he wrote a letter to the emperor persuading him to revoke all these punitive measures – which the emperor did! It goes without saying that as a missionary strategy, this was not very successful. If anything was effective in inoculating Jews against Christianity, it must have been events like these. Not one ecclesiastical writer claims that any of these events produced a single convert – with one notable exception.

Mass Conversion at Minorca

Early in 418 the leader of the Jewish community on Minorca (a small island next to Mallorca), Theodore, had a dream. He saw his synagogue full of singing monks! If we want to rationalize this dream, we could say he had a nightmare about the same thing happening on Minorca which had happened recently in several other places. It is the bishop of Minorca, Severus, who recorded the events there for us, only weeks after

they happened. He interprets Theodore's dream as divine "softening up" of a stubborn Jew, to prepare him for the staggering events that soon followed. Severus' Christian flock in the one western city of the island, Jamona – where no Jews lived – were stirred into zeal against the Jews by the arrival of some relics of St. Stephen on the island. Remember that Stephen was the first martyr put to death by the Jews; the cult of his remains did not bode well for the Jews of Minorca. All 540 of them were living in the eastern city of Magona, where they maintained very close, peaceful, and even friendly relations with their Christian neighbors. With the arrival of the Christians from Jamona, all this changed for a while. Tensions mounted and came to a head as Severus and his flock marched through the town toward the synagogue. An incident of mutual stone-throwing followed, but according to Severus, miraculously no one was hurt. Then they arrived at the synagogue, and as if by divine intervention it caught on fire and burned down. Severus is clearly apologetic here; he says the whole riot happened against his better advice. At the same time he is very pleased with the outcome of the whole series of events, and more or less explicitly attributes the real cause to God or Christ.

But the burning of the synagogue did not produce a single convert, no more here than elsewhere. We get a glimpse of Severus and Theodore, the Jewish leader, standing in the ruins of the synagogue and disputing intensely over the messiahship of Jesus. Theodore stood his ground and was not impressed by anything the bishop said. Then some of the Magona Christians, fearing for Theodore's safety, began shouting to him, "Theodore, become a Christian!" This shout was repeated frequently, but was, according to Severus, misunderstood by the Jewish spectators. They thought they heard the Christians shout, "Theodore has become a Christian!" This shocked them, and Theodore simply lost control of his flock; they ran in all directions. Theodore saw no way out other than to promise to be baptized within three days. After this, a steadily increasing flow of conversions took place, boosted by other dreams and marvelous miracles of nature. There was also a much publicized vision of a light, representing St. Stephen, over the Magona church. Theodore had himself baptized, as he had promised, but even so, a few noble women among the Jews were the last to give in. Much prayer and many miraculous signs were necessary. But finally the last one was baptized, which made the number of converts complete: all the 540 Jews of Minorca were now Christians. The Jews' Christian neighbors now resumed their good relations with them, embraced them, and welcomed them as Christian brethren. The whole event had taken no more than eight days, from February 2nd to 9th, according to Severus. He ends his letter by speculating that this event may herald the end-time conversion of all Jews, after the fullness of the gentiles has come in.

Severus, of course, is no neutral reporter of these events. He may have colored his narrative to suit his purposes. Even so, his tale rings true on one decisive point: it was not the violent measures of coercion that really carried the day – they had not proved effective elsewhere, and Severus

indicates that they were not effective on Minorca, either. It was the curious misunderstanding that happened when the Jews believed that their leader had converted that made them inclined to follow him. In a small and closely-knit community like the Jewish one on Minorca, decisions like this are likely to have an epidemic nature. Maybe what Severus tells us is close to what really happened.

Apart from the bare facts of the story, it is instructive about how the situation after Constantine had changed. Before Constantine, the church had been a persecuted minority with no political clout to wield against its persecutors. Now the reverse was true. Even if the burning of the synagogue was illegal, the bishop of Minorca hardly feared punishment for what the Christians had done – all the more so since the Jews would not claim recompense and rebuilding of their synagogue now that they had become Christians. Before Constantine, a Jew who joined the church had everything to lose by doing so. Judaism was a legal religion; Christianity was not. Now a Jew had much to gain, socially, by joining the church. The first Jewish convert on Minorca, Reuben, expresses this quite bluntly when he says to Theodore, who had yet to make a commitment, "What do you fear, Lord Theodore? If you truly wish to be safe and honored and wealthy, believe in Christ, just as I too have believed. Right now you are standing, and I am seated with bishops; if you should believe, you will be seated, and I will be standing before you." Before Constantine, conversions for sheer opportunistic reasons had been a rare problem. Now they happened, and the church as well as the empire were very well aware of it. Socrates, one of the church historians after Eusebius, tells of a Jew who had made a good business of being baptized in one church after the other until he was recognized and exposed. In 397 Emperor Arcadius made a law that begins with the words, "We have learned that convicts of the Jewish religion want to join the community of the church in order to escape their crimes and out of various necessities. This is not done from devotion to the faith, but as false simulation. …[Such people] are to be allowed to return to their own law, for this is of greater benefit to Christianity."

As is always the case, when opportunistic or coerced conversions happen, they tend to put a stigma on all changes of faith. Aren't all conversions opportunistic? When coercion is applied, resulting conversions are seen – not unnaturally – as apostasy plain and simple. There will be a suspicion of apostasy even when conversions happen for entirely legitimate reasons. We can perhaps say that in this way the post-Constantinian conditions made it more difficult for Jewish believers in Jesus. They became more vulnerable to accusations of opportunism or cowardice.

This is something to keep in mind as we review the stories preserved about Jewish believers during the two hundred years following the Constantinian revolution, presented in the following chapters. But there is one further remark to be made about the implications of the Constantinian revolution with regard to Jewish believers. It concerns their number. How many Jewish believers were there, and how did the

situation after Constantine affect their relative proportion within the church?

The Relative Proportion of Jewish Believers

Here we enter an area where some speculation cannot be avoided. What I present here is not meant to be taken as exact numbers, but rather as interesting ideas that may give us some indication of the historical realities on the ground. Sociologist of religion Rodney Stark has made some interesting proposals concerning early church growth in general, and the Jewish dimension of early church growth in particular. He estimates that for the first three hundred years of the church, the average growth for one decade was 40%. If we estimate the number of Christians at one thousand around 40 CE, this gives us the figure of 6 million for the year 300 CE; this corresponds to 10% of an estimated population of 60 million in the whole Roman Empire. Next, Stark assumes that Christianity would be a very attractive option for diaspora Jews, who were torn between loyalty to the commandments of the Torah, which kept them isolated, on the one hand, and the urge to assimilate away from Judaism on the other. Christianity presented itself as the easiest way out of this dilemma, since it was itself sufficiently Jewish to be attractive and yet made cultural assimilation easier than did traditional Judaism. Stark therefore assumes that Christianity must have remained an attractive option for many diaspora Jews throughout the pre-Constantinian period and well into the fourth century, and that the church's mission among the Jews ought to have been quite successful.

There are, no doubt, good arguments in favor of Stark's theory, but also some against it. Let us, however, approach the question of numbers from his own statistical point of view. We will assume that Stark's estimate of a 40% growth per decade is correct, and make an estimate of the relative proportion of Jewish believers within the average church community. In Paul's list of greetings to the Roman community in Romans 16, the proportion of Jewish believers is between one fourth and one third of the total. If we assume that the Jewish believers are somewhat overrepresented in this list (Paul was Jewish himself, and may have had more Jewish than gentile friends in Rome), we should probably adjust the proportion of Jewish members quite a bit downward. Let us assume that in the middle of the 50s, around 10% of the Christian community in Rome was Jewish, and that this was roughly representative of most diaspora communities. Around 250 CE, with around one million Christians in all, 100,000 of these would be Jewish believers. At that time the Jewish population of the empire would be around 5 million, which means that those 100,000 Jewish believers made up 2% of the total Jewish population. There is nothing in these figures that seems absolutely unrealistic; on the contrary, it is easy to square this picture with that presented to us in the literary sources.

According to Stark's model, in the 50 years between 250 and 300 CE the Christian population grew from one million to six million. If we assume

that in this period the growth among Jews did not keep pace with the growth among gentiles, but lagged behind and stabilized at around 10% or less, we get the following figures for 300 CE: total Jewish population still 5 million, Christians 6 million, and 160,000 Jewish believers. The Jewish believers would then comprise 2.7% of the Christians, and 3.2% of the Jews. Again, this is not completely unrealistic. But if this is anywhere near reality, consider for a moment what the numbers would be in the fourth and fifth centuries. The recruitment base for Jewish believers did not increase, and the recruitment base for gentile Christians was immense in comparison. Toward the end of the fifth century the proportion of Christians was probably around 90% of the general population (Christianization nearly complete), or 50 million (even if we assume a certain depopulation during the fifth century). In other words, even if the number of Jewish believers was stable around 160,000, their proportion within the church as a whole would drop from 2.7% around 300 CE to about 0.3% in 500 CE. You might ask why I have stipulated no growth for the Jewish part of the church in this period. I have done so mainly for two reasons. As I have explained above, I believe the changes under Constantine may have had more adverse than positive effects for the Jewish believers. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, we have every reason to believe that there was considerable assimilation going on in the mixed Christian communities, and that many Jewish believers assimilated into mixed communities so successfully that their offspring did not consider themselves Jewish. One would have to recruit new believers from among the Jews just to maintain the absolute number of Jewish believers, since they had a big "leak" on the other end. In other words, when Jewish believers became relatively fewer after Constantine, this was not necessarily because they became fewer in absolute numbers, but because the gentile membership of the church increased enormously.

Let me emphasize once again that this has been an experimental exercise in statistics. I have made many assumptions that are little more than guesswork. And speaking of guesswork, I would not be surprised if the proportion of Jewish believers turned out to be considerably larger in Asia Minor and Roman Syria, and perhaps even greater beyond the imperial border, in Mesopotamia and eastward. This piece of guesswork is based on a general impression from the literary and archaeological sources from these areas, and is not a solid hypothesis.

In general, nothing of the above strikes me as entirely unrealistic. And we should not jump to conclusions when we find, time and again, that all we have in terms of names of Jewish believers from the post-Constantinian period are those of apparently isolated individuals, one or two per locality. We have to keep in mind that we find few names of individuals in general in this period, due to the character of the sources. Even if only one in a hundred Christians were a Jewish believer in this period, there would still be thousands of Jewish believers behind each named individual.

With this as a backdrop, we now return to the story of Jewish believers after Constantine.

8. The Land of Israel under Byzantine Rule

The populace of the land of Israel were soon to feel the effects of the change of regime that had taken place in the empire. Almost immediately, Constantine and his mother Helena began an ambitious program of church building. This would be continued during the rest of the fourth, through the fifth, and far into the sixth century. This program turned the land of Israel, the land of the Jews, into the Holy Land for all Christians. Christian pilgrimage began under Constantine, and accelerated through the following centuries. Some pilgrims came to stay; the land of Israel gradually became the home of many Christian newcomers, most of them monks and nuns. Monasteries were established, the deserts became the home of hermits and monastic establishments – and almost all of these people were immigrants.

With Christian supremacy all over the land of Israel, the Jews became one among several minorities within their own land. The building of churches under Constantine and later emperors was a very visible form of the spiritual appropriation of the land. "Rabbinic Jews … must have felt that their spiritual patrimony was being usurped before their very eyes" (Philip S. Alexander). All this hardly made it easier for the Jewish believers who had managed to carve out an existence among other Jews. During the second and third centuries it had become common for Jews and gentiles to live in their own separate villages. This pattern of segregated villages was to continue, and perhaps become even more pronounced, in the Byzantine era. The many gentile Christians who now came to visit or stay did not settle in Jewish villages or towns. They settled near the holy places of the new Christian Holy Land: Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Mamre. Later the whole land became dotted with Byzantine churches, monasteries, and hostels. The Christian newcomers seem to have been mostly unaware of their brethren in faith among the Jewish population of the Holy Land. Jerome met one Jewish believer in the Syrian desert; that is all he has to tell.

The rabbinic sources document debates between rabbis and Jewish believers in the fourth century. But it is evident that in this later period, polemic against Christianity increasingly has the gentile Christianity of the Roman Empire in view. The Jewish believers in the land of Israel seem

to dwindle in numbers and significance. This was probably so not only because of the negative effects of the Constantinian revolution, but also because the rabbinic measures against them had greater effect as time passed.

But the fourth century also saw a new kind of Jewish believer: those who joined the Constantinian church. Due to a fortunate accident, the story of one of them, Joseph of Tiberias, has been preserved. It is Epiphanius who rendered this story in the 370s; he was personally acquainted with Joseph and got his story directly from him. It is too long and complicated to be told in full here, but I will summarize its main points.

"Count" Joseph of Tiberias

Joseph had been a trusted servant of the Jewish patriarch of Tiberias. Toward the end of the patriarch's life, Joseph witnessed several things that amazed him. Peeping through a crack in the door to his master's bedroom, he witnessed the secret baptism of the patriarch by the nearest local bishop. Upon the death of the patriarch, he found to his amazement several New Testament writings in Hebrew translation in his secret library. Then Joseph had dreams in which Christ appeared to him and exhorted him to believe. Joseph was also miraculously healed by Jesus, but still did not yield.

On his deathbed the patriarch had entrusted his minor son and prospective successor to Joseph's care. The young man proved to be quite a challenge for Joseph, due to his unruly behavior. Again Joseph has many experiences that push him in the direction of belief in Jesus. What especially impresses him is the power of the name of Jesus and the sign of the cross. On a tax collecting tour in Cilicia for the newly installed patriarch, Joseph suffers much at the hands of furious Jews who resent the measures he is enforcing on behalf of the patriarch. He also reads the gospels anew, guided by a local bishop. He is now ripe for baptism, and having been baptized, he visits Constantine and is appointed a count by him. Equipped with imperial allowances, he returns to the land of Israel and tries to erect churches in some of the towns around the Sea of Galilee where no Byzantine churches yet existed. If any of these were ever completed, one could be the first Byzantine "House of Peter" edifice in Capernaum, which dates from Joseph's time.

It is interesting to note how true Joseph's story is to the fourth and fifth century mentality. Among the rabbis of this period we find a lesser emphasis on scriptural arguments in their dealings with the *minim* (heretics), and an increasing emphasis on miracle working. The rabbis do not deny that *minim* may do miracles, but the rabbis now meet them on their own terms and do even greater counter-miracles. In Joseph's story there is no emphasis on arguments from Scripture concerning messianic prophecies or the like. What gradually leads Joseph to conversion are experiences in the realm of spiritual power – visions in dreams, healings, the power of the cross and the name of Jesus in exorcisms, and the breaking of spells.

"In Joseph's stories it is the experience of the 'power' of Christ and of the Christian faith which matters more than any theological arguments" (Timothy C.G. Thornton). In the background of his story we observe the "normal" workings of what I have called the "Christianization" process. People feel that a new and stronger power is coming; they are not insensitive to the fact that faith in Jesus has now become the religion of the strongest political power known. The empire has gone over to *minut*, and the rabbis recognize that this presents a new challenge – ordinary people will not be unaffected by it, and may jump to conclusions unwanted by their leaders.

As Epiphanius renders Joseph's story, he confirms one aspect of the story from his own experience: there is much underground use of the power of Jesus' name among the Jews of the land, even some underground faith in him as savior. Perhaps Epiphanius, without knowing it, was in contact with some of the old-style Jewish believers in the land, well integrated into their Jewish villages and towns. But this is a somewhat speculative interpretation.

Joseph's strategy for presenting his new faith to his fellow Jews is distinctively Constantinian: he tries to build churches in purely Jewish towns – Tiberias, Capernaum, Nazareth, and Sepphoris. According to Joseph/Epiphanius there were no Christians in these towns prior to Joseph's church-building initiative. This probably means there were no gentiles there, hence no gentile Christians. The rabbinic sources strongly indicate that there were Jewish believers in Tiberias, Sepphoris, and Capernaum from the second century onward. Apparently these did not count as Christians, perhaps not for Joseph, certainly not for Epiphanius.

The "new" Jewish converts of Joseph's type were probably not more numerous than the older Jewish believers who remained socially integrated among their fellow Jews. Crossing the divide and joining the triumphant post-Constantinian church could not be easy for any Jew mindful of his or her standing in the Jewish community.

Constantine's Legacy in the Land

The effects of the Constantinian revolution were probably most radical in the beginning. Joseph's ambitious and provocative program of building new churches in old Jewish centers, financed by imperial funds, was not followed up on. In typically Jewish towns and villages the Byzantine churches were most often built in unobtrusive locations on the outskirts. They were locally financed and appear comparatively late, often toward the end of the fifth century or later. Having surveyed the archaeological data, Doron Bar arrived at the conclusion that the countryside of the land of Israel was not Christianized rapidly, or faster here than elsewhere: "… [C]onversion to Christianity among the rural population came slowly, late and spontaneously." This agrees with another archaeological fact: the late fourth and the fifth and sixth centuries were the golden age of synagogue building in the land of Israel. It is from this period that we

have sumptuous synagogues, with the stunning mosaic floors that still fascinate tourists. This would be impossible if Byzantine rule in general was very coercive and oppressive toward the Jewish population of the land of Israel. Perhaps we have a symbol of the real situation in the well-known fact that in Capernaum, the Byzantine synagogue seems to have been more magnificent than the Christian church memorializing Peter's house.

The presence of two kinds of Jewish believers in the land of Israel – those living as Jews, more or less integrated into Jewish villages and Jewish quarters in the cities, and those who became Byzantine Christians, integrated into the imperial church – would go a long way toward explaining why it is so difficult to find their archaeological traces. The Jewish Byzantine Christians would not leave traces in stone and plaster different from those of other Byzantine Christians. Jewish believers living among other Jews would hardly risk a public display of specifically Christian symbols. In other words, archaeologically they would be hard to distinguish from their neighbors. In any case, Jewish believers in both categories were probably so few that even if they had left clear traces of themselves, we would be lucky to happen upon them.

But now an interesting question can be raised. The Jewish believers who remained integrated in their Jewish villages, but who experienced increasing social isolation from their own as the influence of the rabbinic leadership increased – did they ever consider establishing their own villages, or their own quarters within existing towns? In the Middle East this has been an often-chosen strategy for ethnic and religious minorities in coping with their situation. We have, to my knowledge, no unambiguous evidence that this happened with Jewish believers in the land of Israel, unless Julius Africanus' reference to Jesus' relatives living in Nazareth and Kokaba in Galilee is meant to portray such a situation. But Africanus, in the third century, is probably looking back at realities more than one hundred years earlier.

I would like to suggest that this strategy was more easily realized away from the new Jewish heartland in Galilee – namely in the Transjordan (the latter term used rather broadly). When church fathers of the fourth century – Eusebius, Epiphanius, and Jerome – speak about Ebionites and Nazoreans living in named villages or towns east of the Jordan (and further north), one gets the impression that they are speaking of communities of Jewish believers living together, either in villages of their own or as distinguishable communities within greater towns or cities.

A brief review of the evidence reads as follows:

Eusebius: Near Choba, left (= north) of Damascus, there is another Choba; in the latter live Jewish believers in Jesus, called Ebionites.

Epiphanius: 1) The fugitives from Jerusalem had settled in Pella, where they were influenced by "Ebion" who lived in the village Kokaba near Qarnaim and Ashtarot in Bashanitis. 2) The roots of Ebion's heresy are located in Nabatea, Banias, Moabitis, and Kokaba in Bashanitis beyond Adrai. 3) Nazoreans are now found in Beroea (= Aleppo) near Coelesyria, in the Decapolis near Pella, and in Bashanitis at the place called Kokaba.

Jerome: 1) The Nazoreans in Beroea, a city of Syria, use Hebrew Matthew. 2) Ebionites live in Chobaa, near Choba, left of Damascus.

The only archaeological evidence at all relevant to this may come from the Golan. In the village of Farj, and in two other villages not far from it, lintels have been found on which the symbols of the menorah and the cross are combined. "All these lintels are expressions of one and the same artistic and symbolic approach and they may well have been used by a Christian sect, possibly newly converted Jews, which integrated the menorah into its iconographic repertoire" (Zvi U. Ma'oz). It is true, as Joan E. Taylor remarks, that we cannot be absolutely sure whether these Jewish believers were "Byzantine" Christians or Jewish believers of the Nazorean type. But since Epiphanius is so specific about Nazoreans being present on the Golan in his time, I am inclined toward the latter possibility.

9. Jewish Believers East of Antioch

In this chapter we are going to review the little that can be known about Jewish believers in that part of the worldwide church in which they were, probably, most numerous and most significant. The Syriac-speaking church in Antioch and eastward was, in political terms, divided between the Roman Empire in the west and the Persian Empire in the east and south. Until 363 CE the border between the two empires ran east of Nisibis, after this year it was moved west of the city. The reigning dynasty in the Persian Empire was the Sassanids; they were eager supporters of the national religion of Persia, Zoroastrianism. This sometimes meant trouble for Jews and Christians, who were persecuted at different times. In the latter half of the fifth century, a deal was struck between the Persian ruler and the Christian Catholicos (head of the Syriac church). The Christians were recognized as a *millet,* a "nation," which meant a certain amount of independence and internal jurisdiction, with the head of the church being responsible to the Persian monarch for the good behavior of his subjects and for collecting tax from them. This system is still used in several places in the Middle East.

Constantine had ambitions of taking the Christians east of the Roman border under his protective wings. This hurt them more than it helped. Quite naturally, the Persian ruler became suspicious that Christians might be a Roman fifth column within his realm. After this, Christians within the Persian Empire would be wary of having too close ties to Christians in the west. As time passed, the eastern Syriac church (often called the Nestorian church) became alienated from the Greek and Latin churches, to the profit of none.

Jewish Believers in the Syriac Church

What about the Jewish believers in the Syriac church? We begin slightly south of Antioch, in the coastal city of Laodicea (present day Latakia/Ladhiqiyah). Here we meet the famous bishop Apollinaris (in office 361–ca. 390 CE). His fame is partly due to his somewhat controversial views on Christology; many regarded him heretical in this respect. But none doubted his rare competence in biblical exegesis. He was well con-

nected with the Syriac-speaking Christians in the interior of Syria, and seems to have been on excellent footing with the Jewish believers of this region, first and foremost in ancient Beroea (present day Aleppo). Not only did he profit from their linguistic competence in Syriac (and also Hebrew), he also seems to have adopted some of their interesting eschatology, which appears very Jewish. The reason we know this is that Jerome visited Apollinaris around 378, and eagerly followed his exegetical lectures. Jerome, like other Roman Christians, regarded Apollinaris a doctrinal heretic; this did not hinder him, however, from deeply admiring the exegetical techniques and insights of this man.

In this way it is possible to piece together – from scattered remarks in Jerome's exegetical commentaries – a more or less coherent eschatological doctrine of the Jewish believers of Beroea in Syria. It is likely that Jerome also got some of his other information on these Jewish believers (whom he calls by the common name for Christians in this area, Nazoreans) from Apollinaris (see previous chapter).

In Antioch itself, at approximately the same time (387–88 CE), we find John Chrysostom giving a series of sermons in which he deplores the very good social relations between many Christians and the Jews of Antioch. There are Christians in Antioch who socialize with Jews, visit their synagogues and their homes, and take part in their fasts and festivals. More specifically, Chrysostom says that some Christians had taken part in the Jewish Days of Awe from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur, and then had also joined in the festivities of the Feast of Tabernacles. They also celebrated the Jewish Passover together with their Jewish friends. They found Jewish festivals to be "venerable and great"; they had "something solemn and great about them." These Christians, says Chrysostom, regard the preachers in the synagogue "as more trustworthy teachers than their own Fathers." A Christian man dragged his wife to the local rabbi "to swear there an oath about some matters under dispute with him." When asked why he preferred the rabbi to his own Christian pastor, he said many regarded oaths sworn before the rabbi as "more to be feared." The Judaizers also resorted to Jewish medicine and prayer in times of illness, and regarded the synagogues as holy places because of the Torah scrolls kept there.

In these homilies by Chrysostom we see a church leader trying, by all means at his disposal, to enforce a religious and social demarcation between Jews and Christians – a demarcation that was far from clear in real life. Some Jews and Christians socialized with each other quite intensively. Are we to believe that this frequent crossing of the divide was one-way only, all the time? There is hardly any doubt that the majority of the Christian Judaizers were gentile by birth. But it would be surprising if the believers attacked by Chrysostom belonged exclusively to this category, and if the close contact between Jews and Christians did not result in any crossing of the divide from the other side.

I have remarked already (see chapter 5) that the so-called *Apostolic Constitutions,* slightly prior to Chrysostom, evince clear signs of Jewish

Christian authorship for some of their prayers. In these documents we also find warnings against visiting synagogues, celebrating Passover together with Jews, and observing their rules of purity. These warnings probably stem from the final editor of the text, roughly contemporary with Chrysostom and of one mind with him on this point.

One conclusion about Jewish believers in Antioch can certainly be drawn from the evidence presented here: they were probably not numerous at the time of Chrysostom, and those who belonged to his community may have found life increasingly difficult to the degree that Chrysostom was successful. To what degree that was, we cannot know.

In the fifth century we hear about "Paul the Jew," who was patriarch of Antioch. This could mean he was in fact Jewish, but we cannot know with certainty. "Jew" had by this time become a common label for Nestorians, and Paul was a Nestorian.

Jewish Believers in the Persian Church

In the interior of Roman Syria, east of Antioch, we have already encountered the Nazoreans – the Jewish believers in Beroea (Aleppo). Jerome probably knew of them through Apollinaris, but may also have had closer contact with them during his own stay in the Syrian desert, among the monks there. It was probably among these monks that Jerome met a Jewish believer whom he took as his personal tutor in Syriac. From the Nazoreans in Beroea he got hold of a Syriac Matthew and a commentary on Isaiah. To judge from the quotations of the latter that we find in Jerome, the Nazoreans of Beroea were immigrants from Galilee. The Nazoreans may have moved into Syria at any time between the latter half of the second century and the latter part of the third. This migration eastward may have been part of a larger Jewish migration in the same direction during this period.

By far the greatest theologian of the church of Roman Syria was Ephraim of Nisibis. He was of gentile origin himself, but his works are so packed with Jewish tradition and Jewish interpretations of Scripture that it is hard to avoid the conclusion that he must have had Jewish believers among his theological mentors. This possibility is reinforced by his own fierce anti-Jewish attitudes. He would hardly have accepted anything that came to him directly from Jews. But if it came via Jewish believers whom he found quite acceptable in their theology and conduct, it would be a different matter. This is probably what happened. In this way, the writings of Ephraim are excellent indirect evidence of the widespread influence of Jewish believers in the Syriac church.

And there is more. Important indirect evidence can also be found in the Syriac Bible. Every translation of the Bible is at the same time an interpretation of the biblical text. In the Syriac Bible, the so-called *Peshitta* ("Common"), we find – as in Ephraim – many Jewish interpretations that closely parallel the Jewish translations of the *Targums* (Aramaic translations and paraphrases) and rabbinic commentaries. Since the *Peshitta*

seems to be a work by Christian scholars, rather than Jewish ones, it is highly probable that at least some of these Christian scholars were Jewish believers.

During the fourth and fifth centuries Christian church buildings – basilicas – cropped up all over Syria. The Syrian basilicas have one architectural feature in common that is peculiar to them: a raised platform in the middle of the nave, called by Syrian Christians the *bema.* This is a typical feature of contemporary synagogue architecture, and even the function is the same in churches and synagogues: the Scriptures are read from the *bema*. Since this is only found in the Syrian area, I am inclined to believe it has something to do with the greater proportion of Jewish believers in these parts.

It is in the Syrian desert that we hear of the first mass conversion of Jews ever recorded. It must be added, though, that these were a special kind of Jew – an Arabic tribe of "Saracens." This name may indicate that some Arabic tribes adhered to some kind of Jewish tradition, and considered themselves to be descendants of Abraham and Sarah. If they would have been recognized as Jews by anyone other than themselves is another matter. In any case, according to the church historian Sozomen, a Saracen tribe was converted to Christianity around 360. This came about because a Syrian monk had prayed successfully that their childless chief might have a child. Some years later the female head of the tribe, Mavia, required a Nicene bishop for her tribe, and the monk Moses was ordained and served among them.

Finally, it should be added that from all appearances, the Syriac church of Roman Syria continued celebrating Passover at the same time as the Jews for much longer than the western church, and for a long time after the council of Nicaea outlawed this practice.

In conclusion, although direct evidence is scanty (but not lacking), indirect evidence on Jewish believers in the church of Syria is quite substantial, and confirms our assumptions: Jewish believers were, and continued to be, an influential element in Syriac Christianity.

Mesopotamia and Persia

We now go east of the imperial border, into Mesopotamia and Persia proper. During the fourth and fifth centuries, the Jewish communities in Babylonia were the only ones which could compete with those in the land of Israel as far as learning and rabbinic orthodoxy were concerned. The Babylonian diaspora seems to have turned in on itself to a much greater degree than Jewish communities elsewhere. In the Babylonian Talmud, gentiles and Jewish heretics are much more distant opponents than in contemporary rabbinic texts from the land of Israel.

This leads to the inference that when Jews in Babylonia during this period came to believe in Jesus as the Messiah, it was probably very difficult for them to remain inside the closely knit Jewish communities. Jacob Neusner believes that the Christian communities of Babylonia had a sub-

stantial component of Jewish members whom the rabbis had alienated by their strictly orthodox regime.

It is probably on this background that we should understand the one towering figure of the Persian church: Aphrahat. He was a monk at Mar Mattai, north of ancient Nineveh and near modern Mosul. He wrote twenty-three *Demonstrations* in Syriac, the first ten in 337, the rest in 344. In the *Demonstrations* he addresses many themes important to his fellow monks and Christians. Debate with Jewish objections and points of view is weaved into many of the *Demonstrations,* and shows how important the relationship to Jews and Judaism was for Aphrahat and his church. Aphrahat stands out among many other church fathers in conducting this debate in a reasoned, non-hateful way. He exhibits a strange combination of nearness to Jewish modes of interpreting Scripture on the one hand, and a lack of real contact with the contents of orthodox rabbinic exegesis on the other. Jacob Neusner has checked the dossier of texts used by both Aphrahat and the rabbis in addressing the same issues, and found a remarkably low degree of overlap. I take this to confirm that the rabbinic communities of Babylonia were very much closed in on themselves, and that Aphrahat represented those believers in Jesus who were either Jewish themselves, and hence deeply separated from the Jewish community, or gentiles in close community with the Jewish believers. Aphrahat's thorough familiarity with Jewish modes of interpreting Scripture makes Sten Hidal believe he was Jewish himself; I see no decisive reason to reject such a conclusion. This could also explain his reasoned and basically friendly addresses to the Jews.

In his polemic against circumcision, Aphrahat only denies the efficacy of circumcision with regard to salvation; otherwise he does not criticize the Jews for having practiced circumcision, nor for doing so now. But with regard to salvation, it is faith in Jesus which counts, not whether you are circumcised or not. Aphrahat also seems to imply that he knew fellow Christians who observed the Jewish Sabbath and other Jewish festivals. The context seems to indicate that these were Jewish believers who, according to Aphrahat, should "separate" themselves from past practices, just as (gentile?) believers should abstain from divination, sorcery, magic, etc. This would indicate that Aphrahat himself practiced the lifestyle recommended in the *Syrian Didascalia*.

Toward the end of this period we find the curious document called *Explanation of Events in Persia*. This is an example of the popular genre in which debates between representatives of different religions are held in a king's palace, and in the king's presence. Such events actually took place. This particular report, however, can hardly be taken as historical at face value. It may reflect, however, one or more real events in which the Persian king actually arranged debates among Christians, Jews, and others. The *Explanation*'s report that some, though not all, of the Jewish participants were convinced by the Christian argument and joined the church, and that relationships between Jews and Christians were largely peaceful both before and after the debate, may also have some verisimilitude.

That Christians in Mesopotamia adhered to the Jewish Passover celebration is confirmed by Epiphanius on Cyprus in the 370s (long after Nicaea). He speaks about a sect called the Audians, who came from Mesopotamia. He lauds them for many things, and obviously regarded them as fine Christians. But they were wrong to keep their old tradition of celebrating Easter at the same time that the Jews celebrated Passover.

It is somewhat frustrating that our sources on Christianity in and east of Persia are so exceedingly scanty that we have to be content with the above glimpses. General considerations do support the view that Jewish believers played a significant role in this province of the church, but we are not able to fill in many details of the picture.

10. Jewish Believers in Africa and Arabia

For the entire northern coast of Africa, from Alexandria to Carthage, evidence on Jewish believers is very scanty. We have every reason to think there were some, but they were not numerous. Evidence of contact and discussion between Jews and Christians is more forthcoming. In Alexandria a milieu of gifted authors seems to have developed; these, so to speak, "updated" the old dialogue between Jason and Papiscus, written by Aristo of Pella in the second century. Origen, the greatest of all Alexandrian scholars, had given this book good publicity in the third century, and it seems that Alexandrian authors in the fourth and fifth centuries wrote revised and expanded versions of it. What they did was to add new Jewish arguments not answered in *Jason and Papiscus*, and then answer these. This clearly indicates that Jews were somewhat concerned with the old book, since they found it worthwhile to answer it, and that Christians took a similar interest in updating its arguments. There is also direct evidence of a narrative nature, from around 400 CE, that Egyptian bishops dialogued with Jews on a rather friendly basis. But in terms of names of Jewish believers, all we find is the name of one individual in Alexandria – Adamantius, a Jewish physician. Around 414 there were anti-Jewish riots in Alexandria, instigated by its powerful bishop, Cyril. One of the Jews who left Alexandria at this time was Adamantius. He traveled to Constantinople, where he was well received by the bishop Atticus, either because he was already a believer in Jesus or because he professed his intention of becoming one. Some time later he returned to Alexandria and resumed his career there.

In Carthage we have no names of Jewish believers, only hints at their existence in some of the writings of Augustine. He discusses with Jerome whether converts from Judaism should be allowed to continue their Jewish lifestyle as Christians. Augustine's position is that this could be thinkable in principle, since obviously the first generation of Jewish believers – the apostles and other early Jewish believers – did so. On the other hand, their reasons for doing so no longer applied to the same extent, and Augustine agrees with Jerome that they would do best to abandon Jewish ways when becoming Christians. It should be mentioned here that Augustine was instrumental in making the belief that the Jews

would become believers in Jesus prior to his return an important part of the eschatology of the Latin church.

It is when we turn farther south that we find something to tell about Jewish believers in this period. At the southern end of the Red Sea there is a strait between the ancient kingdom of Himyar (modern Yemen) on the Arabian side, and the ancient kingdom of Axum (spanning parts of modern Djibouti, Eritrea, and Ethiopia) on the African side. Our sources on the early history of these kingdoms are sparse and in part clearly legendary, but this much seems clear: Under Emperor Constantius (337–361 CE), efforts were made to secure Roman shipping through the southern strait of the Red Sea by Christianizing the kingdoms on both sides of the strait. This effort seems not to have had any lasting results. In the fifth century, however, we see both Jewish and Christian missions in full swing on both sides of the strait. In Himyar it seems the population was first converted to Judaism, then, some time later, to Christianity. Then a Jewish king persecuted these new Jewish believers in Jesus, and tried to force them back to Judaism. In Axum events seem to have been less dramatic, but largely similar. Many converts to Judaism were made, and some later became Christians. This is probably the origin of the Ethiopian Falashas and Ethiopian Christians, which explains the strong Jewish heritage in old ecclesiastical traditions in Ethiopia. This old church is as much a daughter of the Syriac church as it is the offspring of the Greek church in Alexandria.

11. From Asia Minor to Spain

Conversion in Crete

Before we begin telling the story of Jewish believers along the northern orbit of Christianity within the Roman Empire, I invite the reader to tune in to an extraordinary story about Crete told by the church historian Socrates.

> Sometime around 430 a Jewish impostor pretending to be Moses preached for a whole year in the synagogues of Crete. He said he would lead all the Jews of the island dry-shod through the sea and into the land of promise, and he duped them into thinking they could safely give away all their belongings. When the set day of the new exodus arrived, he led the Cretan Jews on to a high cliff by the sea and bid them jump into the sea from there. Some did so, and were either crushed when landing on rocks or were soon drowning if they had managed to land in the sea. Some Christian merchants and fishermen happened to be in the neighborhood; they saw what happened and warned the remaining Jews not to follow the first ones in jumping from the cliff. They were also able to save some of those drowning. "When finally the Jews perceived how terribly they had been duped … they sought to lay hold of the pseudo-Moses in order to put him to death. But they were unable to seize him, for he suddenly disappeared … In consequence of this experience many of the Jews in Crete at that time abandoned Judaism and attached themselves to the Christian faith."

Apart from Socrates we have no other independent evidence of this event. On the other hand, Socrates is writing only some ten years after the alleged event, and could hardly risk presenting such a story unless he was convinced of its truth. The story itself has a credible scenario: once some Jews have become unsettled in their traditional way of life by some kind of messianic pretender, and then experience deep disappointment, they may prefer not to return to "normal" Judaism but rather to seek an alternative.

Obviously, this story has a completely different theme than the one told by Severus of Minorca a few decades earlier. In the present case, there is no element of Christian coercion involved. Socrates makes no comment on the story, and does not place it within any greater context – probably because no such context came to mind. He allows it to speak for itself in all its unique singularity – as will I.

Jewish Believers in Asia Minor

As we saw when we treated the pre-Constantinian period, Jewish Christians were more numerous and influential in Asia Minor than in other parts of the Mediterranean diaspora, especially in the regions of Lydia and Phrygia. In this later period, there are still clear signs of a significant Jewish Christian presence in Phrygia.

Again it is Socrates, the church historian from Constantinople (ca. 380–after 440), who has preserved valuable information. He pays special attention to the schismatic church of the Novatians. This sect originated in Rome, under the presbyter Novatian, around the middle of the third century. In the fourth century it had established itself with a church in Constantinople, and was especially strong in Phrygia/Paphlagonia in Asia Minor. Here the Novatian church gained members who were strongly committed to the older tradition of celebrating Easter simultaneously with the Jews, even if this meant celebrating it before the spring equinox (in violation of the Passover regulation from Nicaea).

This question threatened to create a schism within the Novatian churches. Here is what Socrates says about the beginning of the conflict:

> [The Novatians] in Phrygia … about this period [370s] changed the day of celebrating Easter, being averse to communion with other Christians even on this occasion. This was effected by means of a few obscure bishops of the sect convening a synod at the village of Pazum, which is situated near the sources of the river Sangarius; for there they framed a canon appointing its observance on the same day as that on which the Jews annually keep the feast of unleavened bread.

Having said this, Socrates goes on to report that the more prominent bishops of the Novatian church, those of Constantinople, Nicaea, Nicomedia, and Cotyaeum, were absent from this synod. When this decision became known, it created a schism within the Novatian church. There seems to have been a local Phrygian rebellion within the Novatian church, and it would be very interesting to know who these "obscure" local Phrygian bishops were.

Some time later, it seems they were represented in Constantinople by the presbyter Sabbatius. Socrates reports:

> Marcian [the Novatian bishop of Constantinople] had promoted to the rank of presbyter a converted Jew named Sabbatius, who nevertheless continued to retain many of his Jewish prejudices … Sabbatius resolved to defend that innovation made by the Novatians in the time of Valens (364–78), at Pazum, a village of Phrygia, concerning the festival of Easter.

Because of this, Sabbatius chose to secede from the church and celebrate his own Eucharistic services. When summoned by his bishop to a synod of bishops – at Angarum in Bithynia this time – to explain this practice, he affirmed "that he was troubled about the disagreement that existed respecting the feast of Easter, and that it ought to be kept according to the custom of the Jews, and agreeable to that sanction which those convened at Pazum had appointed." The synod responded with a canon called *Indifferent*. It declared that disagreement about the dating of Easter was not a valid reason for schism, "and that the council at Pazum had done nothing prejudicial to the catholic canon." The bishops added that in the early days of the church, close to the time of the apostles, there had been disagreement on this issue, but "it did not prevent their communion with each other." Accordingly, freedom was to reign in this matter, each being free to follow local tradition. This encouraged Sabbatius to continue his practice of celebrating Easter at the same time as the Jews. "Having watched all night, he celebrated the Sabbath of the Passover; then on the next day he went to church, and with the rest of the congregation partook of the sacraments."

He pursued this course for many years, says Socrates, and made many in Phrygia and Galatia follow him, though in secret. Finally, he was consecrated bishop by these followers. What is striking about this whole matter is how strong the local tradition in Phrygia must have been, able to challenge the near unanimous consent of other regions of the Novatian church, and enduring enough to be tolerated by the rest of the Novatian bishops. I have emphasized above how strong the tradition of celebrating "with the Jews" was in the province of Asia and in Phrygia in the second century, partly due to a strong element of Jewish believers within the church leadership (see chapter 5). I wonder if the situation was similar with some of the "obscure" local bishops who dominated the synod at Pazum late in the fourth century. The one thing we know is that when we are given the name of one of the leaders of this faction, he happens to be a Jewish believer: Sabbatius. It is also interesting that the only thing that was deemed reprehensible about Sabbatius was that he felt so strongly about the dating of Easter that it merited a schism in the church. His position on the date itself was deemed legitimate enough. If, as a Jewish believer, he preferred to celebrate with the Jews, he was free to do so, and so were the churches in Phrygia – as long as no one insisted that the whole church follow them. I believe the whole affair tells us something significant about a still strong Jewish Christian element in the Phrygian region during the fourth century. We have seen already how a similar te-

nacity in "keeping with the Jews" was evident in Syria and Mesopotamia, and for the same reasons.

Socrates has one more story about a Jewish believer and how he came to believe. This time the story is set in Constantinople itself.

> A certain Jew being a paralytic had been confined to his bed for many years; and as every sort of medical skill, and the prayers of his Jewish brethren had been resorted to but had availed nothing, he had recourse at last to Christian baptism, trusting in it as the only true remedy to be used. When Atticus the [Novatian] bishop [of Constantinople] was informed of his wishes, he instructed him in the first principles of Christian truth, and having preached to him to hope in Christ, directed that he should be brought in his bed to the font. The paralytic Jew receiving baptism with a sincere faith, as soon as he was taken out of the baptismal font found himself perfectly cured of his disease, and continued to enjoy sound health afterwards. This miraculous power Christ vouchsafed to be manifested even in our times; and the fame of it caused many of the heathens to believe and be baptized. But the Jews were not induced to embrace the faith, not even by such signs taking place.

Individual stories like these are not the only testimonies to the Jewish Christian presence in Asia Minor, however. In Phrygia there was a council, this time of the imperial church, in Laodicea (364 CE?), which produced some interesting canons. *Canon 16* ordains that on Sabbath one should read the gospels as well as other Scriptures. This seems like a concession: they could not entirely do away with worship on the Sabbath among Christians, but required the reading of the gospels instead of, or in addition to, the traditional Torah readings. It is hard to imagine that this custom was still so well established at this time unless there was a significant presence of Jewish believers in the communities observing the custom. *Canon 29* is directed against abstention from work on the Sabbath; obviously some Christians kept the Sabbath as did the Jews. *Canon 37* forbids participation in the celebration of Jewish festivals, and *Canon 38* forbids receiving *azyma*, unleavened bread, from the Jews. This last might forbid two practices: taking part in the Jewish Passover meal, and/or using their Passover bread in a Christian celebration. Taken together, these canons present a picture of rather close social relations between Jews and Christians in Phrygia, at roughly the same time as that of Sabbatius.

Rome and Italy, Gaul and Spain

In Rome itself there is little direct evidence on Jewish believers from this period, nor is there much evidence on gentile Judaizers. Interesting light on the situation in Rome comes from Jerome's story about his contact with a Jewish friend who lent him Hebrew Scriptures from one of the local synagogues. On an individual level, the friendship between the Jew

and the Christian must have been rather close, on the other hand the relationship between the two communities was such that Jerome's Jewish friend had to lend him the books secretly. Jerome himself belonged to a circle of Bible students in Rome, and this circle was interested in Jewish learning concerning the Bible. But this interest among Christians was frowned upon by the majority of church leaders. It is characteristic that no dialogue between a Jew and a Christian was written in Rome during this period, as far as we know. Nor are there any Roman synodal canons directed against Judaizing.

The little direct evidence we do have concerns a few individuals. The most well-known Roman Jewish believer is Isaac, who acted as litigator for the opposition party during legal proceedings against Pope Damasus in the 370s. He is not known only for his role in this conflict. He also wrote a tract on the Trinity and the incarnation. It is still extant, and shows him to be a fairly orthodox Western theologian, at least by the standards of his time and place. We have reason to believe that the church party that employed him as their spokesman regarded him as being a good man for their cause. We do not know if he maintained a Jewish lifestyle. We also do not know why he later returned to Judaism; maybe sheer frustration over the nasty conflicts surrounding Damasus played a part. And maybe his return to Judaism is the reason that we know he was Jewish – otherwise he may not have gotten his byname, *Iudaeus*. While named Jewish believers are rare in the sources, there is nothing to indicate they were extraordinary when they do occur.

This is clearly shown in another case. In the 390s, Paulinus of Nola and his wife established a kind of pilgrim's hostel and monastery at Nola, in Campania, Italy. In Paulinus' own letters and other contemporary sources, some 40 visitors to his hostel in the period 395–431 are listed; these were studied by Sigrid H. Mratschek. In 396, the first year of the hostel's operation, two guests are named in one of Paulinus' letters: "All those who are in the house with us greet you, as for example Proforus *ex Hebraeis* and Restitutus who loves the Lord …" The context indicates that these two were monks staying temporarily at Nola; one notices how matter-of-factly Proforus is said to be Jewish. His place of birth and permanent residence are unknown.

Turning to Milan, we meet the mighty bishop Ambrose (tenure 374–397), certainly not a friend of the Jews. He mentions a curious episode that took place in Bologna: local Jews were present when Ambrose and local Christians exhumed two martyrs, Vitalis and Agricola, who had been buried in the Jewish cemetery. Why were they buried there? I can think of two reasons: either they were Jewish believers, whom the local Jews recognized as martyrs for the God of Israel, or, if they were gentiles, the Jews gave them posthumous shelter during the heat of persecution. Jews offering shelter to Christians in times of persecution was not uncommon. Jews being impressed by gentiles becoming martyrs for the God of Israel is also on record in our sources. This is probably the setting which gives meaning to Ambrose's report. Ambrose himself seems surprised at the af-

fection that was evinced by the local Jews for the two martyrs: those who had dishonored the martyrs' master honored his disciples!

Ambrose spoke on more than one occasion about Jews who admire Christians and their churches, who engage in friendly conversation with Christians, and who themselves study their own Scriptures day and night with such zeal that Christians fall far behind. Ambrose encourages preaching to Jews, and although most of them will not listen, there are a few who will and may believe and ask for baptism.

Evidence for close social contacts between Jews and Christians in Rome and the rest of Italy is sparser than that from other regions during the period surveyed here. But we do have scattered glimpses that indicate that relationships "on the ground" might have been closer than the official policy on both sides would recommend.

As noted in chapter 5, in the pre-Constantinian period the church of Gaul looked very much like a "daughter" of the church in Asia. Links between the east and Gaul were still strong in the two hundred years following Constantine. Hilary of Poitiers (†367) is in this respect typical: he dwelled in Asia Minor from 356–59 (due to an imperial banning from his see at Poitiers), and transmitted the eastern theological heritage back to his native France upon his return.

The source material on the relationship between Jews and Christians in Gaul is mainly of two types: synodal decrees and literary dialogues.

The synod at Vannes in Bretagne (between 461 and 491) prohibited any table fellowship between clerics and Jews, but said nothing to prohibit laypeople from eating with Jews. The reason for this prohibition is interesting: while we Christians eat the food of the Jews without making any difficulty about it, the Jews regard our food as unclean. By accepting this, the Christian clergy would be admitting they have a lower social standing than the Jews!

The level of ongoing social contact between Jews and Christians in the late fifth century witnessed to by this decree is astonishing. It is therefore not surprising to find that two of the rather few Jewish-Christian dialogues preserved come from Gaul. The early fifth-century *Disputation between Simon and Theophilus*, by Evagrius of Gaul, was written to arm Christians with good arguments in the Jewish-Christian debates they were expected to be involved in. The provenance of the *Consultations of Zacchaeus the Christian and Apollonius the Philosopher* is not as certain, but it probably derives from a monastic milieu in Gaul similar to that of Evagrius, and roughly contemporary with him. It is not as overtly addressed to real-life debate as the *Disputation*. The purpose is rather didactical, and aimed at catechumens. But it is remarkable that anti-Jewish apologetics was considered part of the syllabus of ordinary catechumens.

As so often for this period, the scant evidence presented here is circumstantial. It invites us to conclude that occasional conversions happened, given the high level of social contact. But more than that we cannot say.

The two earliest literary attestations of Jewish settlement in (southern) Spain are Christian. Paul's plan to visit Spain presupposes Jewish settle-

ment there, since Paul's custom was to begin his mission in the local synagogues. The next attestation comes some 250 years later, in the canons of the pre-Constantinian synod at Elvira. This synod convened in 306 and passed 81 canons on several matters, among them the following:

> *Canon 16* forbids mixed marriages between Christians and Jews or heretics. The penalty for Christian parents who marry their daughter to a Jew or a heretic is five years' excommunication. It is obvious that the council wanted to put an end to a practice that was not at all uncommon. There were probably similar rulings on the Jewish side.
> *Canon 49* rules that Christians should not ask the local rabbi to bless the fruits of their fields. Again it appears that this was not an uncommon practice; Christian farmers had probably seen Jewish farmers practicing blessing ceremonies for which the Christians had no parallel. By the time of the council the church had developed ceremonies, and the canon threatens that if you have a Jew bless your fields, the subsequent blessing by your own priest will be without effect.
> *Canon 50* says that clerics or laypeople who share meals with Jews are to be excommunicated. The interesting thing to note here is that even clerics socialized with Jews.
> *Canon 78* requires five years' excommunication for a Christian husband who commits adultery with a Jewess or a pagan woman.

Taken together, these canons tell the story of social realities on the ground. Christians and Jews in early fourth century Spain were socializing with each other to a degree that worried religious leaders – probably on both sides. Even clergy, probably of the lower ranks, took part in this.

The same picture of close social contacts between Jews and Christians also emerges from 20 sermons by Gregory of Elvira, written around 400 CE. They became known by the misleading name *Tracts of Origen*. We often have discussions with Jews, says Gregory, and the purpose of these sermons is to arm his community for such debates.

A similar picture of close and peaceful social contacts in Minorca, in the early years of the fifth century, is provided by bishop Severus of Minorca (see chapter 7). The social relationships were so amicable that Severus was embarrassed by them: the Christians had lapsed into complacency, they had lost their zeal!

It seems a natural inference that under such conditions sporadic conversions took place, probably in both directions. But direct evidence is lacking, except for the spectacular mass conversion in Minorca related in chapter 7.

12. In Conclusion

Many histories of the Jewish believers in antiquity have been written with the assumption that they were a marginal phenomenon – or at least that they soon became a marginal phenomenon. Christianity began as something quite Jewish; the first believers were Jewish. But very soon Christianity became something very un-Jewish, and marginalized its Jewish members. They were reduced to the categories of the marginal, the exotic, and the sectarian. This view of the historical development of the church is often held by scholars and believers who deplore this development deeply, who sympathize with the Jewish believers and find their marginalization to be a grave error on the part of the gentile church.

This book tells the story of Jewish believers about whom the above description holds true. We have met the Ebionites of Irenaeus and later fathers. It is very likely that they were considered a sectarian group, repudiated by the larger church as heretics. But this group should not be regarded as the quintessential Jewish believers of the early church. They by no means comprised the majority of Jewish believers at any time.

Rather, it would appear that the majority of Jewish believers were of two types:

1) First, we have those who were living in predominantly Jewish communities, and had much contact with other Jews in their everyday life – either Jewish believers like themselves or Jewish non-believers. In settings like these, leading a Jewish way of life was more or less self-explanatory; it created no basic problems. This does not mean they automatically obeyed all the regulations of the rabbis. They had developed their own way of interpreting the commandments of the Torah; they obeyed the tradition coming from Jesus. Most of them may have had no problem recognizing that gentiles should be included in the one church of the Messiah without being made Jewish in the process. This view not only had the authority of a prominent Jewish believer like Paul on its side; it was perhaps more important to many Jewish believers that this view was believed to have been endorsed by James himself, the brother of the Lord. In his very significant passage on the Jewish believers of his time (the 150s CE), Justin Martyr speaks very ex-

plicitly about Jewish believers of this persuasion, and says that gentile believers who think like him have no problem recognizing such Jewish believers. For them to observe the Torah – as long as they do not require the gentile believers to do so – is quite acceptable and represents no hindrance to full Christian fellowship.

2) Jewish believers living in the mixed communities of the diaspora seem to have practiced different degrees of accommodation in order to be – or become – fully integrated into these predominantly gentile communities. One cannot exclude the possibility that pressure was sometimes applied to achieve this measure of integration. But again, there is no reason to assume that this was always the case. Many a Jewish believer may have accomplished this kind of integration on a purely voluntary basis, and according to the Pauline principle of becoming a gentile to gentiles in order to win them. It is possible that Jewish believers in this category made up the majority of Jewish believers from quite early on.

While there seems to have been widespread agreement that Jewish believers were free to practice as much of the Torah as they found feasible, and that gentile believers were equally free not to observe any of the commandments peculiar to Israel, there was one point on which controversy lasted for a long time. When should mixed communities celebrate Passover/Easter? It seems that in areas where Jewish believers made up a significant portion of the mixed communities (Asia Minor, Roman Syria, Mesopotamia), celebrating the Christian Easter at the same time as the Jewish festival was the obvious choice. The decisions of the western churches – first to celebrate Easter on the Sunday following the 14th of Nisan, and then to move the Christian celebration farther from the Jewish one by making independent calendar calculations within the church – were consciously anti-Jewish, and were intended to clearly separate Christians from Jews.

At the same time, the many anti-Jewish regulations enforced by church authorities during the fourth and fifth centuries testify to a quite nuanced picture on the ground, among ordinary Jews and Christians. Most of the regulations are meant to curb intensive social contact between Christians and Jews. Obviously such mutual socializing took place all the time and in many places. Such a scenario is made credible by the laws intended to curb it. And this in turn makes credible the suggestion that there was traffic both across the divide and on the "border" between Jews and Christians, very likely in both directions. It is here, I believe, that we find the scenario that makes the existence of Jewish believers plausible throughout the entire period of antiquity (and later).

In the present book, the Jewish believers of the pre-Constantinian period have been moved from the fringes of the church (as in traditional histories) into the center of the church. I believe the Jewish believers have thereby regained their rightful position. It is as if they close ranks around their most famous representative: Paul. He was not alone in be-

coming a Jewish teacher of the gentile church. He was not alone in belonging to the Jewish "branch" springing from the Jewish "root" of the tree of the church. In this branch were many like him. They were theological teachers, they were gifted authors, they left a rich and highly influential heritage for the gentile church to cherish and develop further – as we see Justin do in his writings, and Irenaeus, and Tertullian, and …

I also believe I have been able to paint a more accurate picture of Jewish believers' theology, especially their Christology. There was no one Christology common to all Jewish believers. Not all of them were Ebionites, for example. It is rather the rich variety, the abundance of christological models, that is so striking for the modern observer. Almost all of these models are already represented within the New Testament, and the contribution made to christological doctrine by the early Jewish believers was to become fundamental in the development of the Christology of the gentile church. Jewish believers contributed as much to "High Christology" as they did to "Low Christology."

The format of this book has not allowed me to delve more deeply into these questions. Again I refer the interested reader to the much richer resources for the study of these questions in the *History of Jewish Believers in Jesus*. It is all there, in depth and in detail.

A Final Summary: The Gist of This Book

I have not always held the views propounded in this book. As a young student of church history, I adopted the picture of Jewish Christianity presented in the textbook: the first community of Jewish believers in Jerusalem came to a tragic end during the Jewish War against Rome (66–70 CE). Scattered members of the community survived in the city of Pella and in other places in the Transjordan area, but soon became isolated and turned in on themselves. They ended up as sectarian factions, lost all contact with the flourishing gentile church, and disappeared for good from the scene of history during the fourth century CE.

According to the textbook, this was all that could be said about Jewish Christianity. This version of the story led to two important conclusions. One of them was stated in so many words in the textbook itself: Jewish Christianity disappeared because it was not a viable option. It tried to combine two incompatible elements: 1) earning salvation and membership in the people of God by observing the law; and 2) receiving salvation as a free gift by believing in the saving work of Jesus, apart from the law.

The other conclusion was not stated in my textbook; it was beyond its horizon. But I soon discovered that this conclusion was often drawn in present-day discussions about the legitimacy of Jewish believers in Jesus. If Jewish Christianity had come to a sad end during the very first centuries of the history of the church, then modern Jewish believers have no continuity at all with the earliest Jewish believers. Modern Jewish Christianity could only be seen as a misguided attempt to recreate – rather artificially – something that had come to a natural and unavoidable end centuries ago.

In this way, the picture of early history impinged upon present-day discussions. One could argue that the experiment of modern Jewish Christianity or – more recently – Messianic Judaism had already been conducted, centuries ago, and had been judged a failure by history itself.

Insofar as the history *between* the ancient and the modern versions of Jewish Christianity was at all considered, it hardly made things any better for modern Jewish believers. After Jewish Christianity had supposedly come to an end – that is, during the Middle Ages and later – there were still Jews who embraced faith in Jesus and regarded themselves as members of his church. But these people were seen, in their own time, as apos-

tates and traitors by their fellow Jews. They had quite simply joined the enemy. Modern historians sometimes still speak of them as apostates, but more often use psychological terms, describing them as "divided souls" or self-haters, or placing them in other such pathological categories. And when it comes to modern Jewish believers, it is often these medieval "apostates" that are used as the valid analogy, not the Jewish Christians of antiquity.

On this background it is evident that telling the history of Jewish believers in Jesus is more than a purely scholarly exercise. It has much contemporary relevance. Is the history of Jewish believers in antiquity a history of people attempting the impossible, trying to combine two incompatible identities? Is it a history of failure? Is it a history of voluntary or enforced sectarianism? These are very much the questions directly and indirectly addressed in the book you are now reading, and addressed more fully in the much larger forthcoming volume *A History of Jewish Believers in Jesus – The Early Centuries.* And, secondly, is the history of Jewish believers after antiquity only a history of religious and national treason? This is the question addressed in the planned second volume of this project, *A History of Jewish Believers in Jesus – Medieval and Early Modern Period.*

In the following pages I will try to give you the gist of the story told in the present book. You will hardly be surprised when I tell you beforehand that it is significantly different from the version I read in my textbook of church history, the version rendered above.

In the Beginning ...

When our story begins there were no gentile believers, none at all. When we hear in Acts that on the day of Pentecost 3000 people were baptized, and that later the number of believers had grown to 5000, we know that *all of them* were Jewish. Even if those scholars who think Luke exaggerates a little are right, this fact remains: in the beginning, all believers in Jesus were Jewish. In those days, no problem of Jewish identity was involved in becoming a believer in Jesus. Luke tells us that the early Jerusalem community was in "good repute" among the ordinary citizens of Jerusalem.

This fact allows an important conclusion about the early Jerusalem community: as believers in Jesus, they maintained a good Jewish lifestyle. They no longer believed that they were saved by observing all the commandments of the law, but they saw no reason to become non-Jews in their lifestyle. Why should they? Later, when the gospel was proclaimed to non-Jews – to Syrians, Cilicians, Phrygians etc. – these people were not asked to abandon their Syrian, Cilician, or Phrygian identity. The gospel made ethnic identities of secondary importance; it did not dissolve them. It would be strange indeed if the Jewish people, the people who were the first addressees of the gospel, should be the one and only people who had to abandon their national identity when embracing Jesus as their Messiah. It is quite clear from the New Testament that no one in the

early community entertained such a strange idea. In the early days, there was simply no question of a double identity. The early believers were Jews who had found their Messiah, and if anything this made them more Jewish, not less. Finding the expected Messiah was something particularly Jewish. For gentiles, the very concept was without meaning.

Was Jesus an un-Jewish Messiah?

One could argue against what I just said with the following question: was not Jesus a Messiah of an un-Jewish type? There is no doubt that later, among the gentile believers who resulted from Paul's mission, Jesus was thought of as being divine, as being God's Son in a sense that no other human being was. He was "God of God and Light of Light." Some scholars find that this way of conceiving the role of Jesus was only thinkable among gentiles, not Jews. For the Jews the Messiah was to be a "man of men," an ordinary human being with an extraordinary task. These scholars therefore believe that the "good repute" of the early believers among their fellow Jews also means that they did not think of Jesus as divine. Had they done so, they would have been of "ill repute" among their compatriots. Scholars who think like this often make a "low," "human-only" Christology part of their definition of Jewish Christianity.

In my view, there is little if anything in the New Testament and other ancient sources to sustain this theory. In the present book, I have argued that Paul and John's doctrine of Jesus being the one and only Son of God was well conceivable within Jewish and biblical categories of thought. In believing in this kind of Messiah, neither Paul nor John defined themselves out of Judaism. And there is no indication in any of our sources that there was any great or significant difference between the first Jewish believers in Jerusalem and the later gentile believers in the diaspora on this score. It is only in the second and third centuries that we have first-hand and reliable reports of Jewish believers holding Jesus to be human-only – the so-called "Ebionites" – but these reports also make it plain that this was true of *some* Jewish believers, not all. In the fourth century, church fathers like Epiphanius and Jerome had no criticism to offer concerning the Christology of those Jewish believers they knew first-hand. The only point on which they take them to task is their practice of a fully Jewish lifestyle.

The Inclusion of Gentiles into Israel – How?

But while the question of Christology was not very divisive among the early believers in Jesus, another question proved very difficult. It had to do precisely with the fact that some believers were Jewish and wanted to remain so, while others were gentile and had no intention of becoming Jewish. If such was the case, how could unity in one fellowship be achieved? We see this question being addressed in chapters 10–11 and 15 in the book of Acts.

To modern believers it may seem strange that this should be such a difficult problem. But this is because most of us take the solution that was hammered out by those early believers for granted. It has become so self-evident to us that we no longer realize how difficult the issue really was. Two things were not controversial among the early believers: 1) It was agreed that the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) envisaged that in the end-time the gentiles were to participate in Israel's salvation; they were to join the people of God. 2) It was also agreed that Jesus himself had confirmed this, and had given his disciples the mandate to disciple all nations.

The dispute concerned a third question, not answered clearly by the Old Testament or by Jesus: *how*, exactly, were the gentiles to be included in Israel's salvation? In the first century CE, a procedure had developed for converting gentiles who wanted to join the Jewish people. You could become a Jew, even if you were not born Jewish. This ritual of conversion to Judaism was often thought of as effecting a kind of second birth: the person's pagan past was wiped out, and after conversion the convert – or *proselyte*, as he or she was now called – was considered a new-born Israelite. In the entire period of the Old Testament this possibility of gentiles becoming Israelites was unknown, as we see e.g. in the story of the Judeans who had to send away their gentile wives and their children at Ezra's command (Ezra 10). Had Ezra known the option of making these wives and their children Jewish by the rite of conversion, he would certainly have done so.

Once this ritual was established, however, a new question arose about all the texts in the Old Testament which spoke about "foreigners" (Hebrew *gerim*) joining Israel. Were these texts to be understood as prophetic anticipations of the rite of conversion, and were gentiles to join Israel exclusively through this ritual?

This was probably a debated issue among Jews in general in New Testament times, and became a hot issue among the early believers in Jesus. No definite answer was to be found in the Bible, and Jesus had not made any explicit statement about it. On this background one can better understand why the question was so controversial. And the answer was not found through study of the Scriptures. The answer was *given* – by the Holy Spirit himself. That, at least, is the way the early community understood things. In the house of Cornelius, Peter had, to his great amazement, observed how the Spirit was given to gentiles *as gentiles*. Later, at the apostolic council in Jerusalem (Acts 15), James – the brother of Jesus and now the leader of the community – found additional support for this in the Scriptures. Amos 9 seemed to indicate that the gentiles were to be joined to the restored Israel *as gentiles*, not as Jewish proselytes. James therefore supported the position that gentile believers should not be subject to circumcision and the other ritual commandments of the law that marked the Jewish people as distinct and Jewish. He added, however, one regulation intended to facilitate full table and meal fellowship between observant Jewish believers and non-observant gentile believers. Gentile believers should obey those commandments in the law which the

law itself enjoined on non-Israelites living in the land – the commandments given in Leviticus 17–18: do not sacrifice to idols, because this is bloodshed; do not eat meat of animals sacrificed to idols; do not eat meat of strangled or non-slaughtered animals, because there is blood in it; do not have any illegitimate sexual relationships. Leviticus states that these commandments are to be obeyed by the Israelites themselves as well as by "the alien who resides among you" (Lev 17:8,10,12,13,15; 18:24–26). By obeying these commandments, the gentile believers actually keep the law of Moses, namely those commandments which the law itself imposes on non-Israelites.

It looks as though this compromise was widely practiced, but probably not everywhere. When Paul writes to the Corinthians and Romans, he seems to enforce the spirit of this compromise rather than its letter: one should not eat meat coming from sacrifices in pagan temples if any other believer is offended by it. On the other hand, Christians in Lyons in Gaul practiced the prohibition against meat with blood in it as late as the 170s CE. The spirit and intention of the Apostolic Decree is obviously that full unity in one fellowship (of gentile and Jewish believers) should take precedence over ritual commandments hindering such unity, with *both* parties being willing to make necessary accommodations.

The Spread of the Gospel through the Jewish Network

This was a strategy for unity in mixed communities. And mixed communities were the rule rather than the exception once the gospel was taken outside the land of Israel. In Acts we are told that when Jewish believers from Jerusalem came to Antioch – due to persecution – they preached not only to the Jews of Antioch but to gentiles also. This may not have been a conscious decision. One could take it to be an inevitable consequence of the nature of the diaspora synagogue communities. Throughout the diaspora, Jewish synagogues were the meeting places not only of local Jews, but also of non-Jews who had developed some degree of fascination and sympathy with Judaism and its values. In Acts, Luke calls such gentiles "God-fearers"; the same designation recurs in Jewish inscriptions recently found at Aphrodisias in Asia Minor. We see Paul addressing such a mixed synagogue community at Pisidian Antioch: "You Israelites, and [you] others who fear God, listen …" (Acts 13:16). "My brothers, you descendants of Abraham's family, and [you] others who fear God …" (13:26, in the same speech). Gentile sympathizers with Judaism, people who frequently attended synagogue services and socialized with Jews, who were familiar with the law and believed in the God of Israel, but who had not taken the final step of full conversion to Judaism – such people are found as a fringe group in almost all synagogue communities of the diaspora, at least according to the descriptions in the book of Acts. And there is archaeological material to support this.

Precisely because the early mission of the church concentrated on the Jewish synagogue communities in each new city around the

Mediterranean and eastward into Mesopotamia and Persia, the earliest communities of believers in Jesus became mixed ones. Normally, a minority of the local Jews would accept the message of Jesus as their Messiah, whereas a greater number of the gentile God-fearers gladly received this message. This general picture is not only supported by the evidence in Acts; it fits well with other New Testament writings and with Christian writings from the second century. In a couple of cases we even find evidence indicating the relative size of the Jewish and gentile components within the early diaspora church. In Acts and Paul's letters we find some 90 names of friends and co-workers of Paul. Of these, about one third were Jewish believers. In Romans 16, Paul greets 26 persons by name; of these 8 were Jewish, again one third. It may be that because Paul himself was Jewish the proportion of Jewish believers in his entourage was somewhat greater than the statistical average in the diaspora communities. But even if Jewish believers only made up one fourth or one fifth of the typical Christian community, they would still be a significant element in most diaspora congregations. And the Jewish believers in the diaspora would soon outnumber those living in Jerusalem and elsewhere in the land of Israel. From these simple statistics a whole line of important historical and theological conclusions follow. I will concentrate on three.

1) Except for the first few decades of the church's history, the majority of Jewish believers lived their lives as believers in mixed communities. Throughout the diaspora, this was the "normal" situation. In mixed communities, the unity of believers in the one body of the Messiah was the overruling concern. The concessions the gentile believers had to make to realize this unity were in part specified in the Apostolic Decree. In actual practice, the concessions may have varied from place to place and from one period of time to another. Over time, the concessions made by gentile believers would often develop from more to less.

What concessions the Jewish believers made are not specified in the Apostolic Decree, and may also have varied considerably from place to place, and perhaps even within one and the same community. What is certain is that the one early Christian leader who might be most prone to urge Jewish believers to abandon their Jewish way of life for the sake of unity – Paul – did not do so. For his own part, he was an observant Jew who kept as many of the particularly Jewish commandments as was possible. And Acts 21:21 clearly implies that the accusation that Paul taught Jewish believers in the diaspora "to forsake Moses, and … not to circumcise their children or observe the customs" was false. Paul did no such thing. On the other hand, Paul was crystal clear that table fellowship, and other concrete manifestations of the unity of believers, should have precedence over ritual regulations that made this unity practically impossible. He had set the standard himself by becoming "a gentile to gentiles" when this could further the reception of the gospel.

This was very likely not a new problem for any Jew in the diaspora. They had struggled with it all the time. Practicing the strictest regulations of the Pharisees was hardly possible anywhere except in the cities of the

land of Israel. Many commandments in the law could not be observed outside the land and away from the temple. But even other commandments could be troublesome, from a social point of view, and could lead to an inevitable "ghettoization" of the diaspora Jews. We know that this – as a rule – did not happen. On the contrary, the degree of integration of the Jewish community into the greater fellowship of the city is often amazing. But, by and large, diaspora Jews were able to stick to that minimum which preserved their identity as Jews. Jewish wisdom often advised practicing the law according to the principle that the law was given to further life, not destroy it. With the additional motivation that pragmatic compromises could now further the spread of the gospel, this Jewish wisdom gained a new depth.

2) None of the above reasons for choosing practical compromises in matters of ritual observance would apply in communities made up of Jewish believers alone, especially if these communities were living in a predominantly Jewish milieu. This would be the case, for example, in the Jewish villages of the land of Israel, and in mainly Jewish villages in the Transjordan and even further inland, in Syria. In such settings, we should assume that Jewish believers did not differ from their Jewish neighbors in their lifestyle. They had every reason to be "Jews to Jews." And that, exactly, is what we find in the sources. Jewish believers who live an ordinary Jewish life, keeping all the ritual commandments of the law, are reported in these areas.

3) The difference in lifestyle that we have been speaking about would have little to do with different theologies among the Jewish believers, but everything to do with different *circumstances*, different settings. I believe there has been a tendency in much scholarship to overplay the significance of purely theological considerations as the decisive factor behind differences in lifestyle. When Peter was among Jews in Jerusalem, he no doubt observed all the regulations about purity of food and drink. When he came to Antioch, he had common meals with gentile believers, in conscious neglect of Jewish custom. This did not mean he changed his theology concerning this matter while traveling from Jerusalem to Antioch. The circumstances in Antioch were simply different from those in Jerusalem.

I think the basic framework for the life and practice of Jewish believers – laid out in these three points – goes a long way toward explaining what we actually observe in the available source material. Let me point out some main motifs in the historical picture.

Where Do We Find the Jewish Believers?

As a general rule we should expect more Jewish believers in areas where Jews in general were relatively more numerous. The Jews of antiquity were not evenly distributed throughout the entire Roman and Persian diasporas. In the land of Israel itself, Judea was no doubt the Jewish center, with Jerusalem as its dominant capital, while Samaritans dominated in

Samaria and gentiles were strongly represented in Galilee. The strongest Jewish presence outside the land was in Syria, Mesopotamia, Lower Egypt (especially in the capital, Alexandria), and Asia Minor. And it is precisely in these areas that there is the strongest evidence in the sources for the presence of an influential segment of Jewish believers in the Christian communities, even in their leadership.

One more factor must be brought into this picture before it is complete. Three great catastrophes afflicted the Jewish people in the first and second centuries CE. The result of the first Jewish war (66–70 CE) was that the temple lay in ruins and Jerusalem became "trampled on by the gentiles" (Luke 21:24) – the tenth Roman legion, to be precise. Archaeology seems rather unambiguous on this point: while the Roman legion left its traces all over Jerusalem, there is a complete lack of any trace of Jewish presence in Jerusalem after 70 CE. First and foremost there are no Jewish burials in the city during the post-70 period. Probably the Jews shunned the city that had been so terribly destroyed and profaned by gentiles worshipping their own gods. This means that the Jerusalem community only lived on after 70 CE as a community in exile, probably scattered to different villages in the land, as well as to Pella in the Transjordan. The leadership of the Jewish people, the emerging rabbinic leadership, first made Jabne on the coastal plain their new headquarters, later Usha in Galilee, and later still Tiberias. They never returned to Jerusalem, and Jewish believers probably didn't either.

After the second great catastrophe in the land, this became illegal in any case. The second Jewish war under Simon Bar Kokhba (133–135 CE) resulted in a decree by the Roman emperor Hadrian which prohibited every circumcised person from appearing within eyesight of Jerusalem. The city was transformed into a Roman military camp, and even the name was changed: from now on the city was Aelia Capitolina. All of this had dramatic consequences not only for Jews in general, but also for the Jewish believers in Jesus. After 70 CE the city of Jerusalem was emptied of Jews, after 135 CE they did not even have legal access to the city, but now a new community of *gentile* believers was established in Aelia. On the other hand, Galilee gained importance during this period as the new center for Jews within the land. In Galilee there is rich evidence of Jewish believers in Jesus in a variety of sources, from their own literary works to stories about them in rabbinic literature.

In the diaspora a catastrophe of no smaller proportions hit the Jewish communities in Egypt, Cyrene, Cyprus, and in parts of Mesopotamia. In the years 115–117 CE some sort of rebellion broke out among the Jews of these regions, apparently provoked by attacks by gentile neighbors. These Jewish rebellions were crushed by Emperor Trajan's troops, and the Jewish communities of Cyrene, Alexandria, and Cyprus were wiped out. We have every reason to believe that in all three of these regions there were relatively many Jewish believers, but they would have shared the other Jews' fate, and after 117 CE we encounter an almost complete absence of Jewish believers in these communities for many decades.

When we envisage the situation in the second and third centuries CE, we are left with the following picture: We should expect evidence of Jewish believers first and foremost in Galilee, the Transjordan and Syria, and in Asia Minor. In the entire western diaspora there were Jews in the major cities, first and foremost in Rome itself, but there were not nearly as many Jews in these parts as there were further east. Even in Rome itself the Jewish colony could by no means be compared with the large one in Alexandria that was physically annihilated in 117 CE. And in Rome the Jewish colony was probably severely decimated by the expulsion of Jews from Rome under Claudius in 49 CE (cf. Acts 18:2). In the western diaspora we should therefore expect to find evidence of a few Jewish believers in the mixed Christian communities, relatively fewer than further east. This has nothing to do with western Jews being more resistant to the gospel. The lesson of our considerations here is quite simple: we can't expect many Jewish believers in Jesus in places where Jews were scarce in the first place.

What has been said so far amounts to a rough geographical outline of the history of Jewish believers until the period of Constantine (312–337 CE). In this book I have tried to fill in this outline with more details, region by region, as much as the sources allow. I will not repeat or summarize this here. Instead I will present a few glimpses of the day-to-day life of Jewish believers in those areas where we have reason to believe they were quite numerous.

Galilee, Transjordan, and Syria

Jewish believers in these parts seem to have practiced basically the same type of Jewish Christian lifestyle: a very Jewish one. This was because they lived among other Jews, and their communities and worship services would have few, if any, gentile participants. We meet them in the second century in Galilee. Biblically speaking, this was the land of Zebulun and Naphtali, and one biblical prophecy stood out as the shining promise of salvation for the Jews of Galilee: "There will be no gloom for those who were in anguish. In the former time [God] brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light …" (Isa 9:1–2). In the Gospel of Matthew this prophecy plays a prominent part, in the beginning as well as at the end. For Matthew, Jesus began his ministry by bringing the light of salvation to Galilee (Matthew 4:13–16 quotes Isaiah 9:1–2 as having been fulfilled by Jesus conducting his ministry from Capernaum). Jesus ended his ministry by collecting his scattered flock and leading them to Galilee, as the Messianic Shepherd (Matt 26: 31–32; 28:7,10,16–20). From Galilee (not from Jerusalem, as in Luke–Acts) the light of salvation is to be sent out to all nations. Was Matthew written in Galilee, from a markedly Galilean perspective? We cannot know for certain, but later church fathers say that many Jewish believers in

Jesus had Matthew as their one and only gospel, and that they read it in a Hebrew or Aramaic version. Centuries later, in the 390s, Jerome claims that he had seen copies of this version of Matthew. He asserts that it was used by the Jewish believers of Berea (now Aleppo) in Syria, and a copy was kept in the library of the bishop of Caesarea. This is interesting, because the same Jerome quotes from some sort of commentary on texts from Isaiah, and this commentary came to him from the same Jewish believers in Berea. These precious fragments from a Jewish Christian commentary on Isaiah probably date from the middle of the second century, and were very likely written in Galilee. They continue precisely that type of interpretation of the book of Isaiah that was begun by Matthew. The darkness that has engulfed Galilee comes from the Pharisaic interpretation of the law, while the light of salvation for the (Jewish) people of Galilee comes through the teaching of Jesus.

It is evident that the theology encoded in these few fragments of biblical interpretation stands in a great degree of continuity with the theology of the Gospel of Matthew. This allows the conclusion that the Christology of these Jewish believers was probably much the same as that in Matthew. It is also evident that while these believers kept a strictly Jewish lifestyle for their own part, they accepted Paul and his mission to the gentiles. They accepted that gentile believers should not be made Jews, and should not be subject to circumcision and full observance of the Mosaic Law.

Justin Martyr speaks about Jewish believers of the same type around the middle of the second century. He probably does so from first-hand experience during his early years in the land of Israel. It also seems he built much of his own interpretation of Old Testament texts on interpretations coming from these Jewish believers in the land. Justin builds an argument, for example, that in Genesis 19:24 there is talk of two divine Lords in the biblical text, one talking with Abraham on earth and one in heaven, raining sulfur and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah. The exact same argument is attributed to a Jewish believer in the land of Israel in the Talmud. The Talmud also states that this argument had been refuted by the famous Rabbi Meir, around the middle of the second century. Interestingly, Justin seems to state his own version of the argument with a view to counter Meir's objection.

This is not the only mention of Jewish believers in Galilee in rabbinic literature. There are several, and what is made evident in these reports is that these Jewish believers had a "high" Christology; that they led an entirely Jewish life, fully integrated among their fellow Jews; and that they had a generally good reputation. The rabbis, time and again, have to warn their own disciples against socializing with these people.

The fact that some of the literature of these Jewish believers in Galilee was later found in the possession of Jewish believers in Aleppo, in Syria, may indicate that there was continuity, possibly due to gradual migration, between the believers of Galilee, the Jewish believers in the Transjordan, and those further east in Syria. The church fathers Epiphanius and Jerome,

both of whom lived in this area in the latter part of the fourth century, call these Jewish believers *Nazoreans*. They speak of them as if they were a clearly defined group or sect, but this may not have been the case. Nazoreans was the common name for believers in Jesus in the Syriac-speaking regions; it simply meant "followers of the Nazorean," and was probably the name given them by outsiders. It is probable that one of Jerome's main informants about these Jewish believers was bishop Apollinaris of Syrian Laodicea (now Latakia). In the preserved fragments of Apollinaris' own works one encounters strikingly Jewish passages, in which Apollinaris probably adopts much of the eschatological doctrine of the Jewish believers of Aleppo or elsewhere in Syria. He would hardly have done so had he regarded them as heretics. Epiphanius and Jerome, on their part, have little to object to in their doctrines, but think they are heretics because they keep a Jewish lifestyle. The tolerance shown toward such Jewish believers by people like Justin Martyr had evaporated in later fathers like Epiphanius and Jerome. But it lived on, to some extent, in the great Augustine. Jerome took him to task for this, in a famous exchange of letters.

With this picture of the law-observant Nazoreans in Galilee, Transjordan, and Syria I have not yet exhausted our sources on Jewish believers in this area, especially those in Antioch and the western part of Syria. Here we find a partly Greek-speaking, partly Syriac-speaking church, apparently made up of mixed communities, but with a significant portion of Jewish believers in their midst. In the several "apostolic" church orders which were conceived within this church – *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* (Greek) at around 100 CE, *The Doctrine of the Apostles* (Syriac) at around 250 CE, *The Apostolic Constitutions* (Greek, fourth century CE) – we see Jewish believers teaching gentile believers how to live like disciples of Jesus. The Jewish believers speaking in these documents are, as part of the fiction, the apostles. In this way, these documents present themselves as the natural sequels to Matthew's Gospel. We are listening in, as it were, on the apostles teaching disciples from all nations to keep everything Jesus told them (Matt 28:20). This fictional framework could explain why the persons speaking in these church orders are presented as being Jewish themselves. But many recent investigations of these documents suggest that there may be more to it than that. Many scholars think that the authors of these documents may in fact have been Jewish themselves, at least the authors of the first two. But, other than Jerome's Nazoreans, they obviously lived in mixed communities, and had gone a long way toward abandoning Jewish customs that would separate them from the gentile majority in their communities. On some points, however, there was no room for rejecting Jewish practice. First and foremost there is the question of when to celebrate Passover. In the third century *Doctrine* there is no doubt that disciples of Jesus, Jewish and gentile, should celebrate their Passover at the same time as the Jews celebrated theirs. And, in contrast to other Christian documents of the time, there is a vibrant concern for the salvation of the whole Jewish people, along with urgent requests that one should pray for them.

This corresponds to the fact that church buildings and liturgy in Syria have more traces of synagogue architecture and Jewish liturgy than those in any other place. There is no reason to avoid the only natural conclusion: The mixed Christian communities in Syria still had, in the fourth century, a substantial segment of Jewish believers, and some of the latter may have had a significant say in church leadership.

Much the same may have been true about the church of Mesopotamia, but here our sources are scarce indeed. It is attested beyond reasonable doubt, however, that here too the Jewish date for Passover was followed by believers in Jesus, whether Jewish or gentile.

Asia Minor

For this region, we are better off as far as sources are concerned. The overall picture is similar to that of Syria, but we can provide more details and a few names.

When Paul conducted his mission in this region, about one third of his co-workers were Jewish believers. This may well reflect the proportion of Jewish believers in the communities he left behind. The followers of John – the authority behind the fourth gospel, the Johannine Letters, and the Revelation of John – seem also to have been mainly Jewish. The criticism of Jews and Judaism in these writings is perhaps largely internal – Jews who believe in Jesus criticizing Jews who don't. But the audience of these writings was clearly partly gentile. In other words, these writings reflect the mixed Christian communities of Ephesus and its neighboring cities.

The Jewish believers who followed the lead of John conducted their lives very much like the Jewish believers who followed Paul. For the sake of unity with gentile believers they set aside many of the ritual commandments of the law, but not all. They were quite strict about avoiding anything connected with idolatry, and they celebrated Passover on the Jewish date, just like their brethren in Syria. This practice became a hallmark of most Christians in Asia Minor, and gave them the nickname "Quartodecimans" – the people of the fourteenth [day of Nisan], the day on which the Jewish Passover celebration began.

As late as the 190s CE the leading bishop of Ephesus, Polycrates, presents himself as a Jewish believer, faithful to the practice of his Jewish predecessors when he defends his Passover traditions against the bishop of Rome. Among his "countrymen" and predecessors he enumerates the apostles John and Philip, and also Polycarp and Melito of Sardis. It is therefore likely that the latter two were also Jewish. This could explain why those Jews of Smyrna who did not share Polycarp's faith in Jesus were so active in his persecution. It could also explain why Melito's criticism of Israel in his famous Paschal Homily – a Jewish Christian Passover Haggadah, really – was so emotionally intense. The explanation could be exactly the same as e.g. for Stephen's speech in Acts 7; this is internal Jewish criticism.

Like the Gospel of John itself, Melito's sermon clearly presupposes that the Christian community celebrates its Passover on the same evening as

the Jews. It has been suggested quite recently by an Israeli scholar that Melito may, in fact, have been a pioneer in the development of a more extensive Jewish Passover Haggadah. Melito first launched a Haggadah centered on Jesus as the true Passover Lamb. The rabbis then answered with a Haggadah centered on the Exodus event. In the Jewish Haggadah, the rabbis extolled the Exodus story as the one which was to be celebrated at Passover until times eternal, never to be supplanted by another. And they chose a biblical text which emphasized that it was God himself, and *not* another (e.g. God's angel or Son), who delivered Israel from Egypt.

The Christology of this "Johannine circle," as scholars often call them, was that of John's Gospel and Melito's homily. Jesus is identified with the divine Wisdom or Law, who was with God before creation, with the assistance of whom God created the world. This Wisdom or Law was incarnate in Jesus, was made flesh in him. In this way Jesus is the personified Law. All that Jews used to say about the law could now be said about Jesus. *He* was the Way, the Truth, and the Light. As the Son of God he was infinitely greater than Moses, who was only a servant of God.

A particularly strong Jewish presence was established in the region of Phrygia. It may not be accidental, therefore, that a strong prophetic movement within the Jesus movement erupted in the 160s CE precisely in Phrygia. They were called the Montanists, after one of their leaders. They said, for example, that the heavenly Jerusalem of the Revelation of John was to come down and be established in two small, remote villages in the mountains of Phrygia. This claim would hardly have been possible were it not for the fact that local Jewish tradition had, for a considerable time, said something similar.

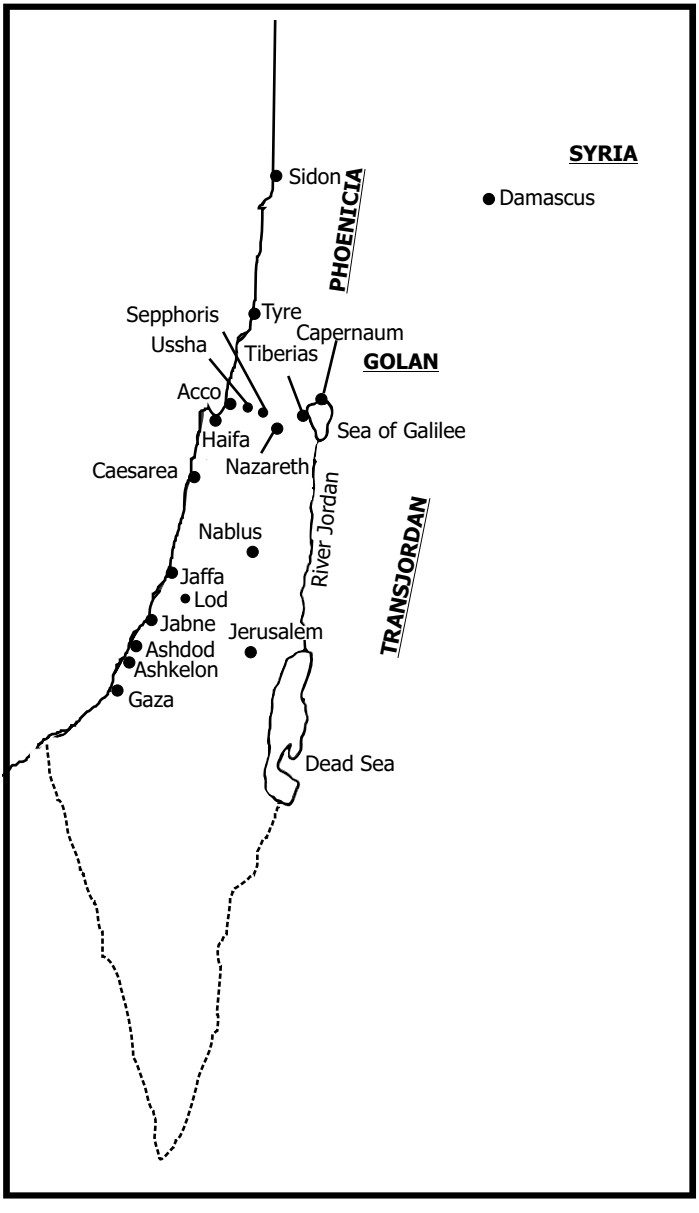
We find the region of Phrygia once again in an interesting event that took place in the 370s CE. A faction of the church, founded by the Roman presbyter Novatian, had established itself also in Asia Minor. Coming from Rome, this church normally followed the western practice of celebrating Easter on the first Sunday after the eve of the Jewish Passover. But in Phrygia the Novatians abandoned this Roman custom. A local synod of Novatian bishops decided they should celebrate on the same date as the local Jews. This can only mean that this tradition was still strong among Phrygian Christians. We do not know if any of the local bishops gathered at this synod were themselves Jewish believers. But when a name of one of the leaders, Sabbatius, does emerge, we are explicitly told that he was Jewish. And, quite interestingly, a new synod in the Novatian church declared that different practices in this matter were quite legitimate. It was only when Sabbatius insisted that all should follow *his* practice that he was excommunicated.

The Mighty Minority

With these few glimpses I end this summary. In the book itself, you can read more about the great change that came with the Emperor Constantine as far as conditions for Jews in general, and Jewish believ-

ers in Jesus in particular, are concerned. You can also read about the first instances of voluntary mass conversion by Jews, and the sad story of the first applications of coercion to convert. Here the rather singular story of the collective conversion of the Jews at Minorca, in 418 CE, stands out. It is told rather extensively in chapter 7 above.

I will conclude by emphasizing one point. Most Jewish believers were part of mixed communities, made up of a minority of Jewish and a majority of gentile believers. But though they were a minority, the Jewish believers were a very significant minority. The Norwegian scholar Jacob Jervell once called them "the mighty minority." They were significant not least because they were the theological mentors of early gentile Christians. Because of them, mainstream gentile Christianity never completely abandoned its Jewish roots, and for this, and much else, later generations of Christians owe them great gratitude.



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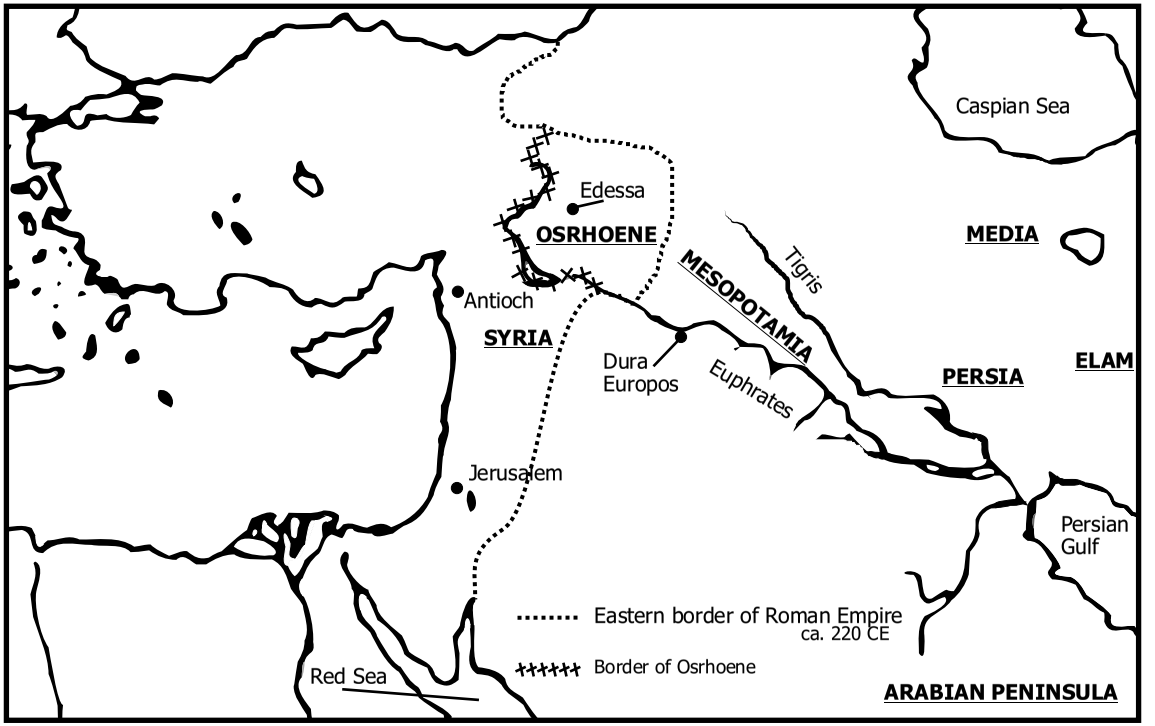

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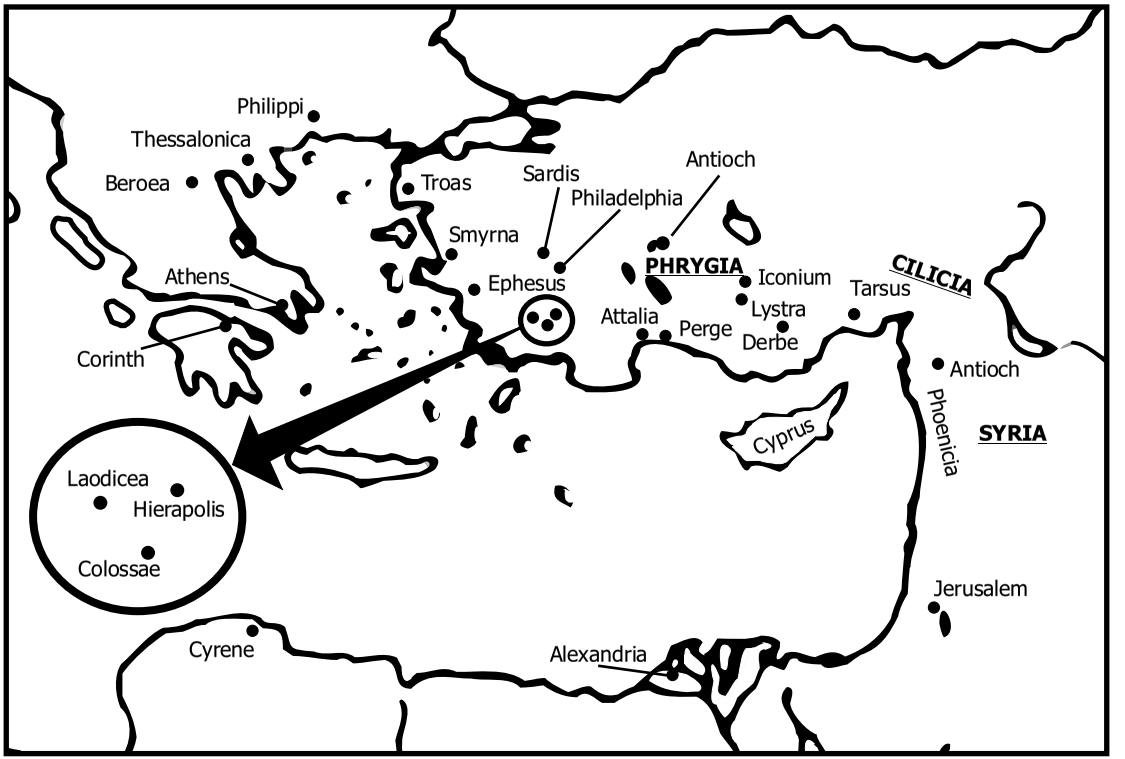

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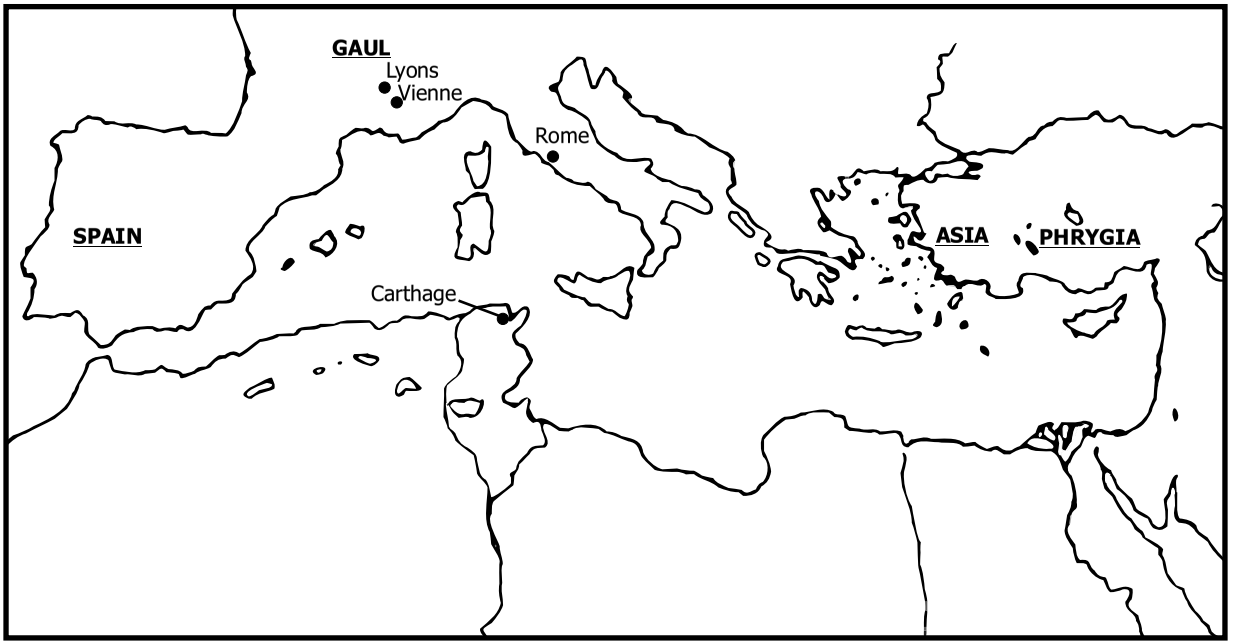

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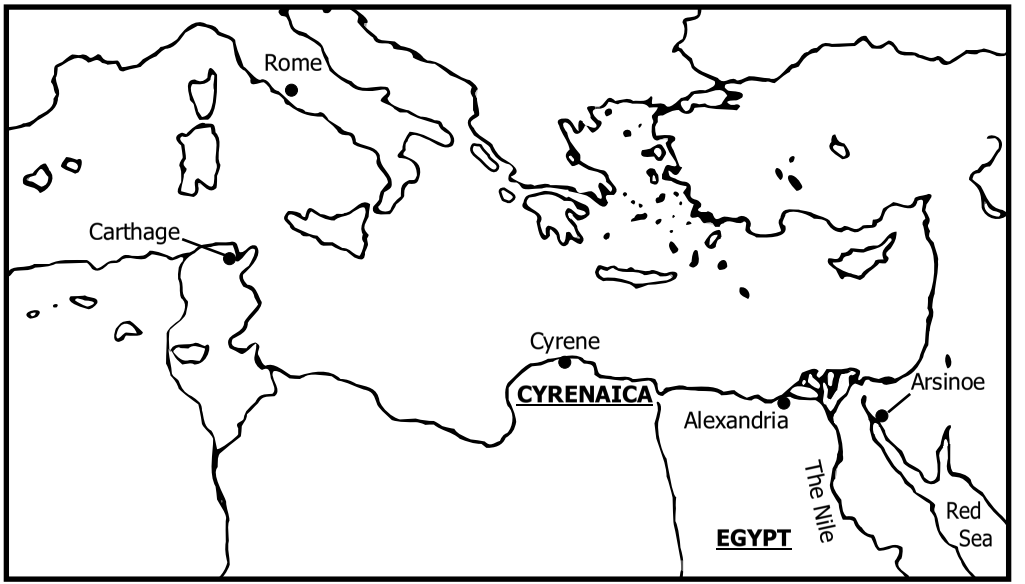

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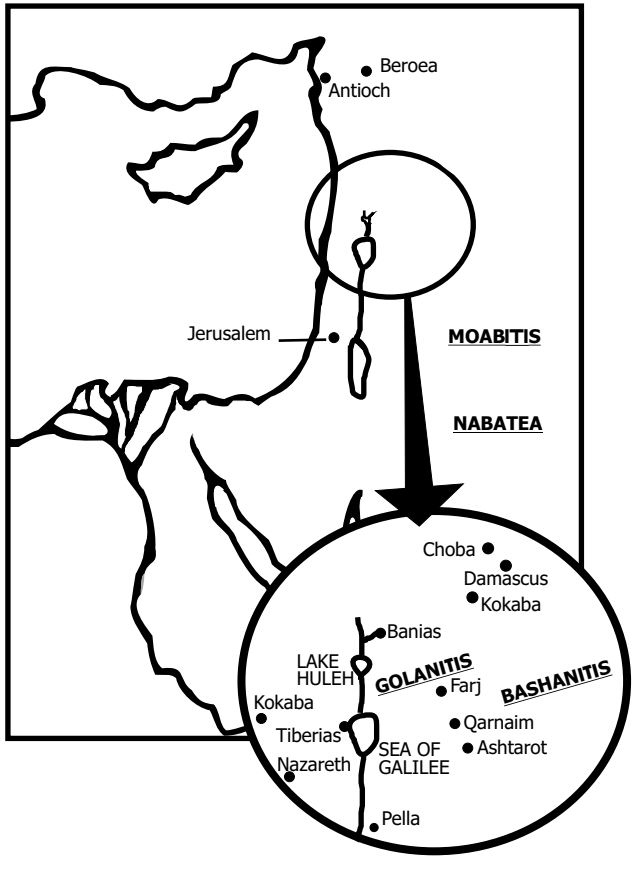

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