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PAUL AND HISTORY

Introduction

With regard to Pauline scholarship it is probably no exaggeration to suggest that Paul's relation to Judaism aptly frames the most important discussions of the twentieth century. Thus an overwhelming amount of current "approaches to Paul" are related to the issue of the extent to which Paul remained within a Jewish religious context. While very few scholars in the beginning of last century seriously questioned that Paul was the founder of Christianity and that he himself had abandoned Judaism, the situation in the beginning of the twenty-first century is remarkably different. In contemporary discussions on Paul, the traditional perspective, characterized by an almost absolute contradiction between Paul and Judaism, is challenged by scholars who maintain that Paul, to some extent, remained within Judaism. A small number of scholars go even further, arguing that Paul even continued to observe the Torah after his earth-shattering vision of the risen Christ. In their view, Paul was as Jewish as any Jew in antiquity. The current situation could hence be described as two extreme positions framing a middle position that is criticized from both ends—and for quite different reasons.

It is rather obvious that the recent development of localizing Paul within a Jewish context has caused tensions within the scholarly community. For historical reasons, the bonds between biblical studies and Christian theology have been strong, and even in a post-Enlightenment context, this situation prevails. Even though there has been a similar

process with regard to Jesus, who in the beginning of the twentieth century was commonly viewed in contrast to Judaism, but who is now firmly localized within first-century Judaism,[1] the hesitation to accept a Jewish Paul has been more substantial.

Given the prominence of the doctrine of "righteousness by faith," especially within the Reformation churches, this hardly comes as a surprise. Traditionally, Christian *faith* has been constructed over and against Jewish *works-righteousness*. As a consequence, Paul has, from a Christian perspective, been seen as the main advocate of the "law-free" gospel. In the course of history, Judaism has become the dark background against which Christianity has been able to shine forth so much more brilliantly. However, the idea that Paul remained within Judaism is often perceived as threatening not only from a Christian perspective: a Jewish Paul is hardly a winning scenario from a contemporary Jewish viewpoint either. Because of the rather complex relations between Judaism and Christianity throughout history (which themselves are partly the result of the Christian interpretation of Paul), Paul has also commonly been seen from a Jewish perspective as constituting the clear demarcation line between Judaism and Christianity.

It is accordingly easy to understand why the resistance to the idea of seeing Paul as a representative of the Jewish faith and tradition has been, and still remains, powerful. However, the complex relation between scholarship and theology (Jewish and Christian) and the historical relations between Judaism and Christianity strongly suggest that prescientific assumptions, which have gradually come to be regarded as irrefutable truths, may be involved in the traditional historical construction of Paul. The idea that the image of Paul as depicted by church tradition represents the most plausible historical reconstruction can consequently be called into question.

To a considerable degree, many recent approaches to Paul aim at precisely this question. By deconstructing the view of Paul that has emerged in a dialectical relationship between the academy and the church throughout history, scholars critical of the "Lutheran" Paul intend to find a more historically accurate view of the apostle. As has been pointed out by Heikki Räisänen (whose work will be scrutinized in chapter 4), even scholars who generally share the view that Paul broke with Judaism have been unable to reach a consensus on Paul. "It is symptomatic that

the followers of the apostle have hardly ever been able to agree on what he really wanted to say," Räisänen states.[2] Räisänen himself believes that because Paul is so inconsistent, he cannot be understood in a proper way. Other scholars have rather criticized the overarching traditional perspectives and argued that Paul can be made intelligible from assumptions other than the Lutheran ones. They argue, in fact, that from these new assumptions a *more* coherent picture emerges. In any case, it is evident that the way in which Paul is being viewed is strongly connected to the general assumptions scholars use in their work.

Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles

Paul's letter to the Romans is an excellent starting point for introducing the interpretive problems of Paul's relation to Judaism. The letter, composed in the mid-50s CE, when Paul resided in Corinth, is regarded as perhaps his most important work, and it has exerted an enormous influence on the theological development of the Christian church. The Reformation theology of Martin Luther, for instance, is to a great extent based on Romans. The prologue (Rom 1:1-5) constitutes a comprehensive summary of Paul's understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ and his own role in the cosmic drama in which he finds himself deeply involved:

> Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name.[3]

Romans undoubtedly contains material pertaining to many of the complex questions the Christian church has wrestled with in course of history. Does faith or works justify a person? What is the role of Judaism in the Christian civilization? Has the role of the chosen people been transferred from the Jews to the Christians? Who is the true Israel? What is the relation between the Jewish law, the Torah, and grace?

The letters of Paul, with the exception of Romans, are addressed to communities founded by Paul himself and usually deal with local problems in the community. According to Acts, Paul undertook three extensive missionary journeys in Asia Minor and founded several communities where he resided for some time and then moved on. By writing letters, he answered questions and set about correcting matters he regarded as unsatisfactory. Because of this, it is quite difficult to reconstruct a systematic theology with the Pauline letters as a point of departure. Most of the letters at best offer limited glimpses of what Paul thought about certain matters. At times it is hard to know what he deals with, as we lack knowledge about the specific background situation of a letter. Regarding First Corinthians, for instance, we know it was a response to a query from the community in Corinth, but that letter is not extant. That is to say, we know the answers Paul gave, but not the questions posed.

When it comes to Romans, the situation is somewhat different. The Roman community was not founded by Paul, but probably by Jewish followers of Jesus who had migrated to Rome already during the 40s. This might be the reason why we find a more coherent theological survey in Romans than in the other letters. Paul's plan to extend his missionary endeavors westwards, toward Spain, has commonly been regarded as the reason why Paul wrote the letter. Because of this missionary plan of his, some scholars have assumed that he needed Rome as a base and composed the letter as a presentation of himself and his theology.[4]

The Elusive Paul

The nature of Paul's letter to the Romans has led some scholars to regard it as Paul's spiritual testament.[5] More recently, however, many scholars believe that Paul also wrote Romans in order to come to grips with local problems within the Roman community.[6] The fact that the overall purpose of the letter is not altogether clear brings a central problem within the field of New Testament scholarship to the fore—a problem it shares with all historical research—namely *that there are many historical issues that cannot be determined only from the ancient texts*. It is possible to understand Romans as a purely theological treatise with

no direct bearing on the local situation in Rome, but it is also possible that Paul composed the letter as an answer to specific problems that had come up in the community. The reader here confronts two different perspectives that considerably influence the overall interpretation of the letter.

The same is true regarding the question of the recipients of the letter. The Roman community was made up of both Jews and non-Jews who were followers of Jesus. But which group is Paul addressing? Is he speaking only to the non-Jewish part of the community, or to the community as a whole? The identity of the addressees is, in fact, crucial when determining Paul's relation to Judaism. In Romans 7:6, he writes: "But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we are slaves not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit." Does this mean that Paul claims that the Torah is no longer in force with respect to himself and to all other Jewish followers of Jesus? This is the conclusion if we presume that he is addressing the Roman community *as a whole*, that is, both Jesus-believing Jews and Jesus-believing non-Jews. The fact that Paul includes himself—"now we have become free"—indicates that he actually regards himself as "free" from the law.

But let us return to the prologue of the letter where Paul states that through Jesus, "we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among *all the Gentiles* for the sake of his name, including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ." Here Paul emphasizes his special mission—to reach out to non-Jews. Does this mean that the recipients of Romans are specifically the non-Jews in the community and that the purpose of the statement in Romans 7:6 is not at all to define the relation of *every human being* to the Torah? Is it possible that Paul in Romans 7:6 is only defining the relation of the *non-Jew* to the Torah, and that he employs a rather common rhetorical figure when he includes himself?

It is evident that many non-Jews harbored a keen interest in Judaism prior to becoming involved in the Jesus movement. We know from the Jewish historian Josephus (*B.J.* 7.45; *C. Ap.* 2.282), for instance, that Judaism was rather fashionable in Rome at that time and that non-Jews adopted Jewish customs and manners. Interested non-Jews, so-called God-fearers, took part in the activity of the synagogues,

and it is very likely that it was from this group that the first adherents to the Jesus movement were recruited.[7] If this is the case, we must assume that they, to some extent, had adapted to a Jewish way of life. They celebrated the Sabbath, ate Jewish food, said Jewish prayers, and they perhaps even thought they enjoyed a special status in relation to the God of Israel by imitating a Jewish way of life.

Many Jews probably did not mind non-Jews turning to the God of Israel or letting themselves be influenced by the Torah. The notion that some non-Jews also had a place in the world to come was no alien idea in ancient Judaism. Quite contrary to what is often assumed, Judaism did not generally claim the exclusive right to salvation. But the Torah was understood by some as a means for only the Jewish people to keep its special relation to the God of Israel alive. Thus it is possible that Paul, instead of working out a general way of salvation for humanity, in fact only attempted to correct what he considered to be a misconception among first-century Jesus-believing non-Jews.

A similar complex of problems appears in another Pauline letter, Galatians, which is of equal importance regarding Paul's relation to Judaism. In contrast to Romans, the purpose of which, as we have seen, is somewhat unclear, there is no doubt that Galatians was written to address a specific situation and with a special aim. Paul was furious with the Galatians, because he suspected that individuals proclaiming a different gospel from his had influenced them. The problem in Galatia seems to have been that non-Jewish followers of Jesus had been subject to persuasion to convert to Judaism. It is, however, unclear what lies at the bottom of this. Perhaps these opponents of Paul were Jesus-believing, Jewish missionaries asserting that a non-Jew had to become a Jew in order to be included in the salvation by Jesus Christ. Acts 15 hints that such ideas were in circulation. Luke, the author of Acts, mentions that "certain individuals came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved'" (Acts 15:1). In 15:5, Luke further states that "some believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees stood up and said, 'It is necessary for them to be circumcised and ordered to keep the law of Moses.'"

Another possibility is that the Jesus-believing groups were victims of pressure from local *Jewish* groups without any direct connection to the Jesus movement.[8] The Jewish communities were often subject to locally issued regulations concerning the relation to the official civic religion. In antiquity, political and religious powers were indissolubly united and exacted loyalty to the politico-religious system on part of the populace. Jews as a rule were exempt from the obligation to participate in Greco-Roman religious feasts and other such rites, however; as these were irreconcilable with the Jewish faith.[9] Non-Jews, on the other hand, taking part as interested guests in synagogue activities, no doubt also fulfilled the religious obligations incumbent on them by state decree, and most of them probably did not consider this a problem. Many God-fearing non-Jews simply included the God of Israel in their pantheon, side by side with all the other gods. In the non-Jewish world, among Greeks and Romans, the idea of worshipping only one single god was considered peculiar and, on the whole, unnecessary.

We must presume that this was accepted by the Jewish communities living, as they were, under the constant threat of having their special rights abolished. The suspicion that they had caused non-Jewish inhabitants in a city to neglect their civic religious obligations could easily result in reprisals from the authorities charged with safeguarding proper relations with the gods. Maintaining the sensitive balance between the Jewish and the non-Jewish worlds was thus of advantage to each and everyone. In this respect, the Jesus movement seems to have differed from other Jewish groups, for it stipulated that non-Jewish adherents must refrain from what was considered "idolatry," that is, involvement in Greco-Roman religion. Considering the conditions in society, this is likely to have created a complicated political situation for all Jewish groups in the area. Hence, it is in fact possible that the demands in Galatia for a regular conversion to Judaism emanated from Jewish groups that otherwise had nothing to do with the Jesus movement.

Regardless of the individuals behind the demands, Paul reacts most vehemently, and Galatians, as well as Romans, contains many Torah-critical statements. In Galatians 2:16a, Paul writes, "we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ." In Galatians 3:13a, he maintains, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law," and in Galatians 5:4 he thunders: "You who want to be justified by the law have cut yourselves off from Christ; you

have fallen away from grace." Here the matter *seems* clear-cut: Paul has dissociated himself from one of the most central tenets of Judaism, the Torah, and replaced it with Christ. Those who seek their righteousness in the Torah are foredoomed to failure and barred from grace. Paul really *seems* to have abandoned Judaism and instead created a new religion.

This is exactly the way scholars have traditionally assessed it, and there is a good deal of truth in Brad Young's description of the situation:

> The consensus of scholarship has come to view [Paul] as a Hellenistic Jew who departed radically from his Judaism. Scholars view him as being influenced by his upbringing in the Stoic environs of Tarsus and various streams of thought flowing forth from paganism, Greco-Roman culture, popular Hellenistic philosophy, mystery religious cults, and Gnostic systems. Seldom is the origin of Paul's faith seen as rooted in Pharisaism.[12]

Paul is commonly thought to have left Judaism because he had realized that the Torah represents a person's ambition to become righteous by means of his or her own efforts. Such an endeavor is not only impossible, as no one can keep the entire Torah all the time, but it also represents the cardinal sin—self-righteousness. On this view, when Jesus appears to Paul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-9), Paul is struck by the insight of the basic fault of Judaism and converts to Christianity. "The one who is righteous will live by faith," has often been regarded as the all-embracing conflict between Jewish self-righteousness obtained by keeping the precepts of the Torah, and Christian faith in Jesus as a basis for an attributive, undeserved righteousness, on the other. Strangely enough, Paul quotes a Jewish text, in fact from the prophet Habakkuk, who wrote: "Look at the proud! Their spirit is not right in them, but the righteous live by their faith" (Hab 2:4). When Paul formulates what would later become the cornerstone of the Protestant churches—righteousness by faith alone—he accordingly refers to the very Jewish tradition with which he is presumed to have broken. Righteousness, forgiveness, and atonement are, of course, all central Jewish concepts, and when Paul attempts to explain how this righteousness by faith alone functions

(Romans 4), he selects one of the prominent figures of *Judaism,* Abraham, as an example.

Paul and Judaism

In the beginning of the twentieth century, a number of scholars pointed out that the image of Judaism commonly held up as a contrasting picture beside Christianity was historically dubious. They insisted that ancient Judaism was *not* a religion in which the believer merited salvation by keeping a set of peculiar precepts. The image of Paul as the hero of the Christian civilization who liberated Christianity from the burden of Jewish law was called in question, but it was only in the 1970s that these ideas began to have a profound impact on New Testament scholarship. Yet, the idea that Paul in reality belonged to the Judaism of the first century remained the opinion of a minority, and to say the least, many scholars are still skeptical of the hypothesis that Paul did not abandon Judaism and create a new religion.

During the last decades of the twentieth century, a new trend in research was introduced with the aim of placing Paul in the context of the richly faceted Judaism of the first century. There are several reasons for this. The post-war insight among Christian scholars of the connection between the horrors of the extermination camps and the traditional anti-Semitism transmitted down the centuries by the churches initiated an incentive to reflect upon the part played by Paul in Christian theology. The declaration *Nostra Aetate,* issued by the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), constituted a far-reaching attempt on the part of the Roman Catholic Church to clear away the foundation of a Christian theology formulated at the expense of the Jews. The emergence of an organized Jewish-Christian dialogue, with the ambition of discerning similarities and differences between the respective traditions, resulted in a reappraisal of their own religious tradition. Jewish scholars, with knowledge and points of reference that differed from those of the traditional New Testament scholars, started to become seriously interested in the study of the New Testament. As a result of research in the field of the historical Jesus, an increasingly Jewish portrait of him emerged, a portrait that has become more and more accepted. Finally, general hermeneutic reflection has played an important part. The emergence of

textual theoretical perspectives, which have made the process of interpretation as such problematic, as well as the relation between the text, the reader, and the original intention of the author, have been especially important.

The Aim and Outline of this Book

For the present we can thus note that there are two diametrically opposed basic perspectives regarding the understanding of Paul's relation to Judaism. It is evident that it is possible to understand Paul as the one who broke with Judaism. For a long time, this has been the obvious point of departure for the majority of Pauline scholars—and probably still is. However, it is also possible to see Paul as the representative of a universalistic, messianic, Jewish movement, for which the main problem was the salvation of the non-Jews. An increasing number of scholars are now addressing issues pertaining to Paul's relation to Judaism from the basic assumption that Paul was as Torah-observant as any other Jew during the first century. Thus we can see Paul as the reformer of a particularistic Judaism and the creator of a universalistic Christianity, in which the demands of the Torah had yielded to grace. But we can also view him as wholly true to his Jewish tradition, constantly occupied with formulating the theological basis for the relation of the non-Jew to the God of Israel and a social theory for coexistence between Jewish and non-Jewish followers of Jesus.

From a historical point of view, both these perspectives cannot be entirely correct. The aim of this book is to attempt to explain how Paul's relation to Judaism can be understood in two very different ways and to explore which approach is likely to produce the most historically plausible picture of Paul and the development of the early Jesus movement. How did the view of Paul originate that until very recently dominated New Testament scholarship, and how have the new approaches developed that now challenge the traditional image of Paul? As the relation of Paul to Judaism apparently cannot be discerned unequivocally from the biblical text, it is obvious that factors outside the text have played a crucial part. Thus an important question concerns the roles that social climate, theological trends, and philosophical traditions may have played in the evolution of the various images of the apostle.

It is quite obvious that such an account will be far from complete, and it is important to emphasize that the purpose of this book is not to present a comprehensive description of all Pauline scholarship. The focus here is how Paul's relation to Judaism has been assessed, especially the question of why certain specific interpretations originated, and the dependency of these interpretations on circumstances outside of the text. Even with this limitation in mind, it would be impossible within the scope of this book to cover all relevant research. Thus we will only be able to deal with a few representative works essential for the question of Paul's relation to Judaism, and the overall purpose is to point to certain tendencies particularly important for the development of various approaches to Paul. The selection of scholars who are used for instantiating a certain trend could thus have been done differently in some instances. Moreover, references to secondary literature are kept to a minimum. The relevant literature can easily be found through the bibliographies in the works under discussion, which I hope the reader of this book will find worthwhile to consult in the original.

The concentration on major currents within the discipline makes it important also to emphasize that this presentation to some extent represents a simplification and, of course, a subjective reconstruction of a development from certain points of view. It is important to bear in mind that the whole picture is much more complex, and there are always different angles that could have been taken into consideration.

A good starting point for this project is the so-called Tübingen School, which emanated from the radical German theologian Ferdinand Christian Baur (1792–1860). Baur personifies one of the first attempts to describe the development of Paul and the early church against the background of a specific philosophical tradition, and his work has exerted considerable influence on the research on Paul and the development of the early church. When dealing with the Tübingen School, there is every reason to look more closely at the way ancient Judaism was presented at the end of the nineteenth century, since this view had an enormous influence on New Testament scholarship. We will also search for the roots of the widespread contempt for Judaism and Jewish culture that marked the European cultural climate at the dawn of the twentieth century. This is the main concern of chapter 2.

In chapter 3, we will remain within the German cultural sphere and examine the development of the traditional view of Paul, here represented by the circle around Rudolf Bultmann and in the tradition of German Protestantism.

Chapter 4 deals with the so-called "new perspective on Paul" that emerged as the result of a strong reevaluation of ancient Judaism by the American scholar E. P. Sanders, who offered a fundamental settling of accounts with the image of Judaism that made up the foundation of almost all New Testament scholarship. Sanders's work led to a true explosion of studies on Paul, and various scholars called in question previously established conceptions of Paul and his relation to Judaism.

Some scholars, however, maintain that this "new perspective," though motivated by the understanding of how anti-Jewish thought-patterns and Reformation theology have influenced research on Paul, nevertheless repeats old paradigms, albeit in a new manner. For this reason, in chapter 5 we are going to look more closely at scholars who apply even more radical approaches to Paul, and in differing ways suggest that Paul can be completely located within the framework of first-century Judaism. Some even argue that Paul never abandoned Judaism or ceased observing the Torah.

Now scholarship quite often proceeds in an oscillating way. Thus scholars who maintain that the Reformation perspective nevertheless represents Paul more accurately than the more recent approaches have profoundly criticized the new perspective on Paul as well as the even more radical approaches. In chapter 6 we will take a look at scholars who, for example, call Sanders's new view of Judaism into question and argue that Luther should still have a word on the relation between Paul and Judaism.

The ongoing discussion on Paul and Judaism has also promoted different multidisciplinary approaches, and the discussion as such has led to an increased interest in Paul as an important figure within Western culture, not least within some philosophical discourses. The emergence of postcolonial perspectives has led to an increased interest in the political context of Paul's writings, and such perspectives have frequently been used in combination with more radical approaches to Paul. Scholars working with feminist perspectives have been forced to relate to an increasingly Jewish Paul, resulting in some self-critical

discussions on underlying anti-Jewish currents within feminist interpretations. This will be our focus in chapter 7.

Finally, in the closing chapter, we are going to analyze the reasons for the elusive image of Paul and the many approaches that have emerged. To what extent is biblical scholarship governed by other aims than "the objective quest for truth"? What are the roles of normative theology, philosophical traditions, and anti-Jewish currents handed down from previous generations? Who is the "real" Paul: the founder of Christianity, or just one of many Jews imagining that the God of Israel, through Jesus Christ, also offers non-Jews a place in the world to come?

Before we start examining Paul and the different approaches concerning his relation to the Judaism he undeniably was born into, we need to briefly survey his life and literary production in order to indicate some areas where the contradicting perspectives on Paul are particularly salient.

Paul—from Pharisee to Apostle

"I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia"

The sources of our knowledge of Paul are Acts, the second part of the double work of the evangelist Luke, written at the end of the first century, and Paul's own letters. As historical sources, Acts and the Pauline corpus are, however, not unproblematic. In Acts, the historiography is totally subordinate to the theological message. A prominent theme, for instance, is how the gospel is conveyed from Jerusalem to the center of the world, the city of Rome. In this drama, Paul is the hero. Onward, through incessant hardships, he battles unwearied for the truth of the gospel and finally reaches Rome thanks to divine intervention. The letters of Paul offer only a few biographical clues, and these are often included in highly rhetorical discourses. Of course, this does not preclude that they also contain historically correct information. Although many questions remain unanswered, and it is sometimes difficult to harmonize particulars in Acts with notices in the letters of Paul, it still seems possible to reconstruct at least the main outlines of the life of the apostle.

According to Acts, Paul came from Tarsus, a city located in present-day southeastern Turkey (Acts 21:39, 22:3). Tarsus was an important

center of commerce and learning in the Roman province of Cilicia, established in the year 64 BCE, and had roughly half a million inhabitants. In Acts, Paul claims not only that he comes from Tarsus, but also that he is a citizen there (Acts 21:39), which is rather surprising. In the first place, most inhabitants in the Greco-Roman cities were not citizens in a strict sense, but either free inhabitants or slaves. Only a small group of men with political influence were citizens in the true sense of the word and could be elected for official assignments. Women from all groups were usually excluded from political life. Secondly, the considerable Jewish population did not enjoy citizenship as a group, since this would have implied participation in the official religion, something Jews were unable to do if they wanted to be true to their own religious tradition. As noted above, the Jewish population in the Greco-Roman cities usually enjoyed status as privileged inhabitants, with the right to exercise limited self-government and with no obligations to take part in the religious rituals of the city.

It is, however, possible that citizenship was conferred on certain individuals from Jewish families who belonged to the social upper crust in some Greco-Roman cities without demanding that they give up their Jewish identity. The statement in Acts concerning Paul's citizenship in Tarsus may therefore be correct and indicates that Paul came from a family of some standing. This is further emphasized by the fact that Paul not only claims to be a citizen of Tarsus, but also by birthright a citizen of the Roman Empire (Acts 22:25-28).

The question of Paul's citizenship is brought up in Luke's account of how Paul, during a visit to Jerusalem, was accused of having taught Jews not to observe the Torah any longer and of having brought Greeks into the temple (Acts 21:17-36). The intention of Luke is probably to claim that Paul was accused of bringing non-Jews into the section of the temple called the "the Court of the Israelites." Although non-Jews were permitted to enter the temple precincts, they were not allowed to advance further than the "the Court of the Gentiles." Luke describes how Paul was rescued by the Roman governor from being killed by an incensed mob. The governor arrested Paul, who then addressed the governor in Greek, referring to his relatively high social status, saying: "I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of an important city" (Acts 21:39).

This narrative is interesting, because it illustrates that apparently the idea of Paul relativizing the importance of the Torah was known at least when Luke wrote Acts, and if the account is historically reliable, already in Paul's lifetime. But it is worth noting that Luke relates these facts as false—in Acts, Paul is generally depicted as faithful to his Jewish tradition. The reason why Paul visits the temple, according to Acts, is to show that the accusations are unfounded: Paul observes and guards the Torah (Acts 21:24).

The rest of the narrative offers further important information about the background of Paul. In a peroration to the enraged crowd, Paul repeats that he was born in Tarsus, but adds that he was "brought up in this city" (Acts 22:3), that is, in Jerusalem, and that he had studied under Gamaliel. As opposed to the citizenship in Tarsus and Rome, which Paul never himself mentions, we have in Philippians 3:4b-6 an autobiographical note that may confirm Luke's account. Paul writes:

> If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

Besides referring to his Jewish identity in several ways, Paul here describes himself as a Pharisee. This agrees well with the statement given in Acts that he had studied under Gamaliel, who was a leading Pharisee. The Pharisees were a religious, and to a certain extent, political, party that emphasized the importance of continuous interpretation of the Torah. One problem that occupied the Pharisees was how to apply the Torah to new situations. Unlike the Sadducees, the Pharisees accepted the oral Torah, that is, all interpretations and adaptations of the biblical text, which were considered divinely inspired and just as binding as the original precepts. In the Gospels, especially Matthew, the Pharisees are portrayed as the main opponents of Jesus, but the evangelist's presentation of them as hypocrites and exponents of a rigid, petrified religion must be viewed as a caricature. The Pharisees represented a pious movement. They enjoyed wide popular support and were dedicated to an interpretation of the biblical texts that was anything but rigid and literal.

The fact that Paul was nurtured in an environment that saw new interpretations of the biblical texts as a natural part of the divine revelation is an important aspect when trying to understand his way of reasoning.

"As to zeal, a persecutor of the church"

In Philippians 3:6, Paul describes himself as having formerly been "a persecutor of the church," something he also does in Galatians 1:13 and 1 Corinthians 15:9. The translation is a little misleading. The Greek word *ekklēsia*, here translated as "church," actually only means "community." What Paul refers to was, of course, not a "church" in our sense, but a group of Jews who believed that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah of Israel. In Acts 6:8-15, Luke describes how Stephen, a Greek-speaking Jew involved in the Jesus movement, was falsely accused of having uttered blasphemies concerning "Moses and God" and for expressing disparaging words about the temple and the Torah. Before the High Priest, Stephen delivered a lengthy speech (Acts 7:1-53), which led his audience to become "enraged and [to grind] their teeth at Stephen" (Acts 7:54), and all "rushed together against him. Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him" (Acts 7:57b-58a). Here Luke introduces "a young man named Saul" for the first time, who is no other person than Paul, referred to by his Jewish name. Luke mentions that Paul thought the stoning of Stephen, the first martyr of the Jesus movement, was justified (Acts 8:1).

Luke then goes on to describe how the adherents of the Jesus movement in Jerusalem are sorely harassed and how Paul, as the one responsible for the persecutions, "was ravaging the church by entering house after house; dragging off both men and women" and "committ[ing] them to prison" (Acts 8:3). Luke continues relating how Paul was "breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord" (Acts 9:1) and on his own initiative, procured a letter to the synagogues in Damascus, authorizing him to arrest adherents of the Jesus movement. The reason for Paul's powerful resistance to the Jesus movement is not altogether clear. The Pharisees, of course, represented basically an elitist movement, which to a certain extent opposed the kind of popular movements that Jesus and John the Baptist represented. But it does not seem that faith in Jesus as such was reason enough for persecuting those who professed such a belief. Both prior to and after Jesus, there were various movements in Israel with more or less explicit messianic claims. Josephus describes how local messianic movements appeared in connection with the death of Herod the Great in 4 BCE (*A.J.* 17.273-284; *B.J.* 2.57-65). The leaders of these movements were even proclaimed kings by their followers in a manner that, of course, brings to mind King David, the outstanding prototype of all messianism.[1] The same kind of movements appeared when the two Jewish wars broke out in 66–70 and 132–135 CE respectively. The leader of the second revolt, Bar Kochba, "Son of the Star," was believed to be the Messiah by his followers.

It seems that messianic claims were a political rather than a theological problem. It is possible that one reason why Paul felt it necessary to stop the spread of the Jesus movement had to do with the conditions of the Jews under Roman occupation. As a complicated web of religious and political aspects had led to the accusations, trial, and execution of Jesus, it is conceivable that Paul's resistance to the Jesus movement was motivated by a combination of religious and political factors. Potential messianic figures with widespread popular support constituted an obvious danger on different levels, not the least of which would be causing revolts that could awaken the sleeping watchdog—Rome. The complete crushing of all resistance during the Jewish Wars bears witness to the quite realistic misgivings that Rome was prone to act harshly against movements that could be seen as a threat. Jerusalem was conquered and laid waste in 70 CE. In 135, the city was turned into a Roman city to which Jews had no admittance, and the name of the Roman province, *Iudaea*, was changed to *Syria Palaestina*. The original Greek word, *plyistiin*, can be derived from the Hebrew word *pəlištîm*, which means "Philistines"—during the early Israelite kingdom the Philistines were one of the arch-enemies of Israel. In one blow "Israel" is changed into "the land of the Philistines" and the Jewish people became for a long time deprived of their cultic center.

"Who are you, Lord?"

According to Acts, Paul experiences something very unexpected on the road to Damascus, while on his way to arrest adherents of the Jesus

movement. The antagonist in Luke's narrative is suddenly changed into the protagonist.

Luke writes that Paul, when he approached Damascus, was swiftly blinded by a light from heaven (Acts 9:3-9):

> Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" He asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

Luke continues narrating how Paul miraculously regained his sight through a certain Ananias, who by divine revelation had learned that Paul had been chosen as an instrument in the plan of God for the salvation of the world. Ananias laid his hands on Paul, who then regained his sight, and as soon as he was baptized, he immediately started preaching in the synagogues that Jesus is "the Son of God" (Acts 9:20).

It is likely that Paul experienced something that resembles what in psychology of religion is called "a mystical experience." Characteristic of these experiences are the very elements mentioned in the account in Acts—light, voices, and a sense of transmission of knowledge. Such experiences are not unusual, and nothing indicates that it was different in antiquity. It is possible that Paul's involvement in the persecutions of the adherents of the Jesus movement created an interior psychological conflict that brought on a solution by means of an experience described in Acts and perhaps also in Galatians 1:15-17, where Paul may allude to the same incident that Luke describes:

> But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with any human being, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles before me, but I went away at once into Arabia, and afterwards I returned to Damascus.

If Paul refers to the same experience, his way of narrating it indicates what it meant for his further activity. The significance of this for mystical experiences is that they are interpreted with the culturally conditioned cognitive patterns of the individual as a point of departure. In Paul's case, the prophetic vocation seems to have been the one nearest at hand.[12] Compare, for instance, Paul in Galatians 1:15-16 with the calling of Jeremiah as a prophet (Jer 1:4-5): "Now the word of the Lord came to me saying, 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.'"

It is also worthwhile to compare the description of the experience of Paul in Acts and Galatians with the visions of the two classical prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel (Isa 6:1-8; Ezek 1:4—3:15). This brings to the fore the question of how to deal with what happened to Paul on the road to Damascus. Traditionally, the description in Acts has provided the norm for a religious conversion. On the road to Damascus, the Jew Paul becomes a Christian. This, of course, corresponds to the notion that Paul abandoned Judaism. In a famous article that has exerted a strong influence on the research on Paul in several respects, Krister Stendahl called into question whether Paul really was "converted." Instead of speaking of Paul's "conversion," Stendahl insists, we should rather see his experience as the calling to a specific task—the mission to the non-Jews—in a manner resembling the calling of the classical prophets.[13]

In Acts 9:20-25, Luke reports that Paul ends up in Damascus after his experience, where he promptly starts preaching in the synagogues. According to Acts, this results in the decision of the Jews to get rid of Paul, and he is forced to escape to Jerusalem, where he tries to get in touch with the disciples. The latter are suspicious of Paul's recently acquired devotion to Jesus for obvious reasons. Paul himself refers to this incident in 2 Corinthians 11:32-33 and mentions that "the governor under King Aretas" had the city under close surveillance in order to apprehend him, which enables us to approximately date the incident. Aretas IV was king of the Nabateans from 9 BCE to 40 CE and may have taken control of Damascus in the year 37. Paul's flight from Damascus thus ought to have taken place during the period 37–40.

In any case, Paul is introduced to the apostles and can move about freely in Jerusalem. But even in Jerusalem his life is threatened and he

has to flee to Tarsus. Here the account of Acts differs from Paul's own version in Galatians. In Galatians 1:17, Paul is extremely careful to emphasize that he, after his calling, "did not confer with any human being" and above all had no contact with the apostles in Jerusalem. He writes that not until three years later, after having sojourned in Arabia and Damascus, did he visit Peter in Jerusalem for fifteen days (Gal 1:18). Then, "still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea that are in Christ," Paul traveled to Syria and Cilicia, which probably means Tarsus (Gal 1:21-22).

It is possible, but perhaps not very probable, that Paul developed his theology in splendid isolation from the apostles in Jerusalem. Galatians was written in a situation where Paul's missionary activity was indeed threatened. He may possibly have felt abandoned by the leadership of the Jesus movement, and this may have influenced the way he presented his relation to them. Galatians contains rather sarcastic references to Peter, John, and James and also bears witness of a split between Paul and Peter, which may have involved James too (Gal 2:11-14). A more deep-seated conflict between Paul and some of the leaders could perhaps also have contributed to his wish to dissociate himself from them. The note in Acts 9:27 that Paul at an early stage visited the apostles in Jerusalem for that reason seems plausible, even though Paul later emphasized his independence from them.

On the other hand, the description in Acts 9:20 of how Paul started working as a missionary immediately after his calling should perhaps not be taken at face value. If Paul really had a transforming mystical experience, he must have undergone a rather long process of resocializing, including the social as well as cognitive aspects. This probably took place in Damascus, and in this case it must have been here that Paul started the process of working over his experience in depth. In that process, his Pharisaic training must have stood him in good stead.

According to Acts, the lynching of Stephen (Acts 6:8—8:1) resulted in a far-reaching persecution of the adherents of the Jesus movement in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles dispersed (Acts 8:1). Some of them managed to reach Antioch in the Roman province of Syria (Acts 11:19). That some of the refugees ended up there is not very surprising—Antioch was a true world metropolis with excellent overland communications and, in addition, a large Jewish population.

Luke's assertion in Acts that it was in Antioch that the message of Jesus was first preached to non-Jews as well seems plausible. He writes that those who first reached Antioch "spoke the word to no one except Jews. But among them were some men of Cyprus and Cyrene who, on coming to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists also, proclaiming the Lord Jesus" (Acts 11:19-20).

This preaching most probably took place in a synagogue, where non-Jews also were present, which is how they too were reached by the message.[14] Josephus (*B.J.* 7.45) states that the Jewish communities in Antioch had a special attraction for the non-Jewish population, which is why we may assume that the God-fearers were especially numerous. We may also assume that there were different Jewish views on the proper degree of social interaction with non-Jews. Certain Jewish groups were probably critical of an overly intimate relationship between Jews and non-Jews. At the same time, it seems as though a relatively large part of the Jewish population welcomed contact with non-Jews, and in Antioch, as well as in other places, there was a pronounced trend among Jewish groups wanting to combine a Jewish life with Hellenistic culture. In short, there was a mutual interest in social contacts between Jews and non-Jews, and the synagogue was the natural meeting point. Thus the community in Antioch probably was an ordinary synagogue, where Jews generally welcomed non-Jews. As a result of the activities of the missionaries from Jerusalem, its members became convinced that Jesus was the Messiah of Israel and that the messianic age had arrived, which was why non-Jews could be included in the salvation by the God of Israel.

According to Acts, Paul became involved in the community in Antioch, thanks to a certain Barnabas, who brought him to Antioch from Tarsus, and they both functioned as teachers for a year (Acts 11:25-26). Luke tells that the Holy Spirit then announced that Barnabas and Paul were going to receive new assignments—Paul, the Pharisee and teacher, now became a missionary.

"Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul"

In the middle of the 40s, Paul started a large-scale missionary activity in the eastern part of the Roman Empire. Luke writes in Acts 13:2-3:

> While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

The first missionary journey started from Antioch and went via Cyprus to the southern parts of present-day Turkey and was sponsored by the community in Antioch. In the beginning, Paul, together with a certain John, presumably acted as assistants to Barnabas on the mission journey. It is not yet a question of independent missionary work for Paul. Although the synagogues remained the centers of activity, some non-Jews were reached by the gospel of Jesus. On Cyprus, the trio met the Roman governor Sergius Paulus, who became a follower of Jesus (Acts 13:6-12). Luke claims that they "spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks became believers" (Acts 14:1).

However, the mission to the non-Jews, which seems to have held a prominent position from the very beginning, also caused problems. Even though everyone in the Jesus movement presumably agreed that non-Jews also had a place in the world to come, there was no agreement on *how* this should be realized. Luke writes, "certain individuals came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved'" (Acts 15:1). According to those who represented this view, only Jews could enjoy salvation through the God of Israel.

There seems to have been quite a variety of Jewish views on the fate of non-Jews in the age to come. Some sectarians, such as the Qumran community near the Dead Sea, believed that everyone not belonging to their sect, Jews as well as non-Jews, would all perish in the final battle. The idea that the non-Jewish peoples all would either be annihilated or conquered by Israel in the last days can be found in the Bible. In Micah 5:10-15, the prophet says:

> In that day, says the LORD, I will cut off your horses from among you and will destroy your chariots; and I will cut off the cities of your land and throw down all your strongholds; and I will cut off sorceries from your hand, and you shall have no more soothsayers; and I will cut off your images and your pillars from among you, and you shall bow down no more to the work of your hands; and I will uproot your sacred poles from among you and destroy your towns. And in anger and wrath I will execute vengeance on the nations that did not obey.

On the other hand, there are passages with an entirely different perspective, indicating that non-Jews will have a part in the final salvation, provided they turn to the God of Israel. In Isaiah 2:2-4, there is a majestic vision of a future existence in peace and harmony:

> In days to come the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it. Many peoples shall come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

Here it seems as if the non-Jewish peoples will have their share in the world to come in the same way as the Jewish people, but without first having to convert to Judaism. The text rather seems to presuppose a retained ethnic distinction, but ethnic uniformity—Jews and non-Jews shall all gather before God and keep his commandments.[8]

It is reasonable to assume that those Jewish communities that welcomed non-Jews as guests also believed that some non-Jews, in one way or another, would have a place in the world to come. The question of how this would be accomplished, and how Jews and non-Jews should relate to each other until the kingdom of God finally breaks forth in full power, was brought to the fore by the Jesus movement's belief that they were now living in the messianic age.

Luke mentions that uncertainty concerning these matters resulted in disturbances and discussions in Antioch, and the community decided to send a delegation to Jerusalem in order to have the issue settled by the apostles (Acts 15:1-2). This meeting, commonly called the "apostolic council," is usually considered to have taken place in the year 49 CE. It is probably the same gathering that Paul refers to in Galatians 2:1-10.

where he mentions his visit to Jerusalem to meet with James, Peter, and John, to whom he presented his gospel.

In Acts, Luke offers a more exhaustive account of what Paul merely touches upon, namely the decision of the apostolic council that non-Jews in the movement did not have to become Jews, and that they were not formally obliged to observe the Torah, only a minor set of rules, the so-called apostolic decree (Acts 15:19-20, 28-29, 21:25). The council also decided that Peter should carry out the mission to the Jews, whereas Paul became responsible for preaching the gospel to the non-Jews. It seems that Paul's opinion that non-Jews could become members of the Jesus movement without first having to convert to Judaism had been favorably received in the leading circles of the movement.

This, however, did not mean that all problems were solved. In Galatians 2:11-14, Paul tells of a schism between himself and Peter, the so-called Antioch incident—another illustration of how the same text can lead to quite different interpretations. Paul writes that he presented his view of the gospel at a meeting with James, Peter (also called Cephas), and John and that they all took his hand as an acknowledgement that they belonged together (Gal 2:1-10). In the following verses he continues:

> But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood self-condemned; for until certain people came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But after they came, he drew back and kept himself separate for fear of the circumcision faction. And the other Jews joined him in this hypocrisy, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not acting consistently with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?" (Gal 2:11-15)

A common interpretation of this passage is that the community in Antioch had given up the Jewish food precepts and that this was what the emissaries of James reacted against.[16] The traditional interpretations usually assume that Paul had abandoned Judaism and no longer observed the Torah. However, as we have indicated above, such a basic

supposition is far from self-evident—it is not at all certain that Paul's intention was that all Jews in the Jesus movement should stop observing the Torah. Furthermore, if the non-Jewish adherents of the Jesus movement were recruited from the group of non-Jews that already took part in the activities of the synagogue, it is, as noted above, likely that they previously had adapted a Jewish lifestyle, especially with regard to food.

Other interpretations conclude that the problem was how Jews and non-Jews convened. Generally speaking, this is more likely. Many suggestions in this direction, however, presuppose that Jews considered non-Jews "intrinsically impure," or that the problem concerned ritual impurity issues.[17] But ritual impurity was generally connected with the temple in Jerusalem and really had no bearing on non-Jews.[18] Non-Jews were, in fact, considered neither ritually defiling, nor intrinsically impure.[19]

On the other hand, non-Jews, and for that matter Jews as well, might be considered *morally* impure. Regarding non-Jews, the problem was mainly their involvement in Greco-Roman religion, which from a Jewish perspective was regarded as "idolatry."[20] As we noticed above, it is likely that, for sociopolitical reasons, Jewish communities accepted that non-Jewish guests also took part in the official religion. This implies that the community members probably were used to turning a blind eye at the involvement of non-Jews in Greco-Roman cults. It is also possible that they distinguished between cultic actions determined by the sociopolitical system, and those that were performed because of personal convictions.

The issue in Antioch may have revolved around Paul's understanding of how Jews and non-Jews should associate in the convental community. A point that Paul seems to have emphasized was that Jews and non-Jews in the Jesus movement enjoyed the same standing in relation to the God of Israel. In Romans 10:12, Paul writes, "There is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him." From a Jewish perspective, this was a rather revolutionary notion, not held even by everyone in the Jesus movement. Equally challenging was certainly Paul's idea that the non-Jewish Jesus-believers would be saved by inclusion into the covenant. But from a Jewish perspective, Paul's solution is logical, since most Jews seem to have believed that it was the covenant with the God of Israel that guaranteed the individual a place in the world to come.

Observing the Torah was a way of expressing a will to remain within the covenant that God made with the Jewish people at Sinai.

The problem for non-Jews was that the covenant was between the *Jewish* people and the God of *Israel* and thus presupposed Torah observance. Hence, the covenant with God implied salvation, but the covenant was only for Jews. This apparently caused a problem. With his Pharisaic training and ability to find creative solutions to problems that called for adaptation of the existing tradition, Paul, however, had found a "loophole in the law"-enabling him to include non-Jews in the covenant providing salvation, *without first having to make them Jews*. Paul made use of the fact that the God of Israel had first made a covenant with Abraham (Genesis 15) before he was circumcised and long before the Torah was given at Sinai. In Romans 4:9-12 he argues:

> Is this blessedness, then, pronounced only on the circumcised, or also on the uncircumcised? We say, "Faith was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness." How then was it reckoned to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the ancestor of all who believe without being circumcised and who thus have righteousness reckoned to them, and likewise the ancestor of the circumcised who are not only circumcised but who also follow the example of the faith that our ancestor Abraham had before he was circumcised.

The example of Abraham shows, according to Paul, that an uncircumcised man also can be considered righteous and moreover enter into a covenant with God. This application of the passage about Abraham made it possible for non-Jews to be included in the covenant with the God of Israel, but with their ethnic identity unchanged.

Of course there were social separatist trends within first-century Judaism. The aim of a Jewish lifestyle is even, to a certain extent, to create a social barrier between the Jewish people and other people (see, for instance, Leviticus 18:24-30). But at the same time, we should not exaggerate the social consequences of this. In the Diaspora, the Jews had long since learned to survive in a society with values they did not share and religious cults they regarded as idolatry. Even though a certain degree of assimilation certainly took place, centuries of interrelationship with the non-Jewish world had not caused the Jewish population to lose its distinctive religious and cultural character. On the contrary, Jewish identity in the Diaspora was well developed. Different Jewish groups, of course, had their own strategies for how to relate to the non-Jewish world. Certain groups were highly critical to social intercourse with non-Jews and lived in their own secluded parts of cities where they had minimal contact with non-Jews, but it is not correct to say that the Jewish population as a whole shunned social contacts with non-Jews.[21]

The problem in Antioch, then, was probably the degree of intimacy in social relations. If Paul argued that non-Jewish adherents of the Jesus movement had become included in the covenant through Christ and emphasized that Jews and non-Jews had the same status before the God of Israel, this probably had far-reaching social consequences. However, it probably did not affect the *food* they ate, but rather the *ritual* of community meals.[22] Such matters as the seating at the table and how wine and food were handled may have indicated to some Jews (like James) who did not share Paul's ideology regarding the equal standing of the non-Jews before God that the Jewish identity of the community was threatened. Accordingly, it is likely that it was solicitude for the Jewish adherents to the Jesus movement that caused James's reaction. Paul's comment to Peter that he lived "like a Gentile and not like a Jew" (Gal 2:14) could be taken as an ironic allusion to the criticism of the delegation, the tenor of which no doubt was that the Jesus-believing Jews in the community, because of their close dealings with non-Jews, challenged traditional social boundaries.

The delegation from James—the circumcision faction that Peter feared—seems to have recommended that the status of the non-Jews should be altered. The reason for this may simply have been an effort to try to get the ethnic identity and the social intercourse to correspond. If Jews and non-Jews socialized as if they belonged to the same ethnic group, James's representatives may have thought it best to have the non-Jews turned into Jews, in spite of the earlier agreement from Jerusalem. This does not necessarily mean that James had changed his

mind on the general principle that non-Jews could be saved without becoming Jews, only that he disagreed with Paul on the implications for social interaction resulting from this theology. According to James, non-Jews could very well be connected to the Jesus movement, but only if the distinction between Jew and non-Jew was manifest also in social relations. Peter, however, seems to have chosen another way, namely to restrict commensality.

Both these solutions were impossible for Paul to accept for theological reasons. If non-Jewish men were circumcised, and both men and women were turned into Jesus-believing Jews, multitudes of peoples, would not flock to the house of God, as in Isaiah 2:3, but only the Jewish people. God would then be the God of the Jews only, not of the non-Jews, as Paul asserts in Romans 3:29-31.[32] Peter's solution of regarding the non-Jews in the movement as ordinary God-fearers was therefore not acceptable to Paul. Because of their faith in Jesus, these individuals, unlike ordinary non-Jews taking part in the activities of the synagogue, had become partakers in the covenant that grants salvation, and their standing before the God of Israel was consequently comparable to that of the Jewish people. This must, according to Paul's outlook, also be reflected in the social relations.

This suggested interpretation of the Antioch incident is possible and perhaps even feasible, but we must point out that there are many other ways of understanding what really took place in Antioch. The problem is that the text does not offer enough facts concerning, for instance, the relations between various groups, the identity of the members of the delegation, or who insisted on retaining circumcision for the reader to be able to form a univocal opinion of the historical course of events. The problem concerning the standing of the non-Jews and Paul's fury over the meddling from the outside and from Peter is however manifest.

For Paul, the Antioch incident marks the transition toward a more independent ministry. It shows that the early Jesus movement was far from homogeneous and also that the first period was characterized by profound conflicts. Divergent views on how non-Jews would be saved and on the relations between Jews and non-Jews existed side by side, and in spite of the importance Paul later enjoys, we must admit that during his lifetime, he represented the opinion of a minority, and was

generally rather marginalized and had severe difficulties in legitimizing his standing as an apostle.

"If only I may finish my course"

After the Antioch incident Paul departed on two very extensive missionary journeys in present day Turkey and Greece. With the exception of First Thessalonians, written during the second journey, Paul composed all his letters during, or following, the third journey, undertaken around 53–58. Thirteen letters bear Paul's name, but for a majority of scholars it is evident that not all of them were written by Paul himself. Most scholars would agree that First Thessalonians was Paul's earliest letter, written around 50–51 during his sojourn in Corinth, but because of the content of Second Thessalonians, many scholars doubt that Paul really wrote this letter. If so, it was probably written shortly after First Thessalonians. Otherwise, the letter was probably written at the end of the first century, in a time of external hardships, which may be the reason why eschatological aspects are so strongly emphasized.

On the other hand, Galatians belongs to the letters that can safely be considered authentic. It was probably written during the period 53–55, when Paul resided in Ephesus. The two letters to the community in Corinth, both regarded as authentic, were also written by Paul in Ephesus, but somewhat later than Galatians, presumably around 55–57. Romans, which we dealt with in the introduction to this chapter, was probably written in Corinth about 56 or 57.

Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians constitute a separate problem. Their common denominator is that the author mentions that he is imprisoned, though not saying where or when. The question that arises is which imprisonment—or imprisonments—Paul refers to, as this is crucial for the dating of the letters. Different scholars here offer different answers. Some claim that they were written during an otherwise unknown imprisonment in Ephesus sometime between 53 and 55, others suggest they were written during his imprisonment in Caesarea about 58–60, and still others maintain that they were written in Rome 60–62. In addition, the matter becomes even more complicated as some scholars doubt that Ephesians was written by Paul, and some even question the authenticity of Colossians. If Paul is not the author of

these letters, they too must have been written toward the end of the first century.

Regarding the so-called Pastoral Epistles (First and Second Timothy, Titus), practically all scholars agree that they were written after the death of Paul.[24] The developed hierarchical organization hinted at is a clear reason why most scholars conclude they were written around 100.

In order to be on the safe side, we should accordingly only regard First Thessalonians, Galatians, both letters to the Corinthians, Romans, Philippians, and Philemon as authentic. It seems unlikely that Paul wrote Ephesians and the Pastoral Epistles, but it cannot be completely ruled out that the he is the author of Second Thessalonians and Colossians.

The fact that there are New Testament letters claiming the nominal authorship of Paul, in spite of being written several decades after his death, does not mean they should be considered obvious falsifications. In antiquity, people had somewhat different views on authorship than we have today. It was, for instance, possible to let ancient heroic figures pose as authors of later literary works. The Wisdom of Solomon and the book of Baruch, included in the so-called deuterocanonical literature (Old Testament Apocrypha), are good examples of this. The book of Isaiah includes texts written several hundred years after the death of the prophet Isaiah. Many scholars believe that later prophets from the prophetic schools incorporated their texts in the book of Isaiah, as they considered themselves his ideological heirs. Regarding Ephesians and the Pastoral Epistles, the conditions may have been similar—individuals considering themselves to belong to a Pauline tradition wrote these letters in Paul's name. It is, however, important to bear in mind that their claim to represent authentic Pauline thoughts does not necessarily mean that this really was the case. When reading Ephesians and the Pastoral Epistles, one should be aware of the possibility that the authors represent an interpretation of Paul with which he himself would have felt uncomfortable.

Regarding the last period of Paul's life, we are entirely dependent on Acts. Even if we assume that Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon were written during this period, this is of no help, since these letters contain no direct autobiographical material. But in Acts, Luke gives a

detailed account of how Paul traveled to Jerusalem, how he was accused of bringing non-Jews into parts of the temple out-of-bounds to them, and how he taught the Jews that they no longer had to observe the Torah. These accusations, according to Acts, resulted in what almost amounted to a riot, and Paul was arrested by the Roman governor. The governor, in turn, attempted to find out what this was all about by letting the chief priests and the Jewish Sanhedrin interrogate him. During this meeting, Paul managed to stir up a conflict between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, with the consequence that the governor again had to intervene and save him (Acts 23:1-10).

The governor decided to turn the case over to a higher authority, especially since Paul had referred to his Roman citizenship. Because of this, Paul was taken to the Roman procurator, Felix, in Caesarea. But as Felix wanted to remain on friendly terms with the Jews, he put Paul in custody, where he had to languish for two years until the successor of Felix, Porcius Festus, arrived. The latter, according to Acts 25:1-12, was called on by the chief priests and "leaders of the Jews" who presented accusations against Paul and were planning to assassinate him. Paul, on the other hand, persisted in claiming that he had "in no way committed an offense against the law of the Jews, or against the temple, or against the emperor" (Acts 25:8). Referring to his right as a Roman citizen to have his case tried by a higher authority, he appealed to the emperor, leaving the governor no other option than to transfer him to Rome.

After many hardships, Paul arrived in Rome and was met by fellow believers. He was placed in a kind of house arrest, but seems to have been allowed to receive everyone who wanted to see him. According to Acts, he stayed in Rome for two years "proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance" (Acts 28:31). Here, rather abruptly, Luke breaks off the narrative about Paul, but according to tradition (*1 Clem.* 5:2-7; Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 2.25.5) Paul, and for that matter Peter, suffered martyrdom under Emperor Nero.

At the beginning of the second century, the Jesus movement was transformed and Christianity as we know it today appeared—as a non-Jewish religion where a Jewish identity was incompatible with being a Christian. In this non-Jewish part of the Jesus movement, which

developed into the Christian church, the one-sided reading of Paul fitted like a glove. Eventually, the notion of the Apostle to the Gentiles arose, the man who repudiated his original religious identity in order to become the one who brought the salvation of the God of Israel, not to the Jews, but to the non-Jews, and at the same time banished everything Jewish to the rubbish heap.

We are now going to move forwards, almost two thousand years in time, and examine how this idea has been utilized and how the image of another, even more complex Paul, is gradually emerging.

2

: OF A PARADIGM

The Tübingen School and German Idealism

Hegel and Dialectics

The leading philosopher in nineteenth-century Germany was no doubt Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel (1770–1831). In his early years, he studied theology at the University of Tübingen with the purpose of becoming a minister. While there, he was strongly attracted to mysticism, something that is also evident in his philosophy, which to a great extent is characterized by theological issues. From 1818 until his death he held a professorship in Berlin. In Tübingen, where he had started his academic career, his influence would eventually result in the emergence of one of the most radical theological schools the world had seen: the Tübingen School.

In view of the enormous influence that his ideas generally had, it is perhaps only natural that Hegel's philosophy had such an impact on the theological development in the nineteenth century. During his sojourn at the Berlin University, he gathered adepts from all over Europe. At the end of the nineteenth century, most leading philosophers were Hegelians.

Many theologians saw in Hegel's philosophical system new opportunities to recover ground after the humiliating defeat theology had suffered from the philosophy of the Enlightenment. Although the "absolute spirit" of Hegel was something quite different from the Christian God, Hegel regarded Christianity as the highest form of religion and even