

Did Paul Invent Christianity?

Introduction

The response of some Muslims is ‘yes, Paul did invent Christianity’, or at least a form of Christianity

In his book *The Islamic Jesus: How the King of the Jews Became a Prophet of the Muslims*, Mustafa Akyol argues that Christians are wrong about **Christ** [note that all items in the Glossary at the end are in **bold**]. By his telling, the early followers of Jesus were divided in two: those who followed Paul and “divinized” **Christ**, and those who followed James the “brother” of Jesus and did not. Akyol, like some others, both Muslim and Christian, has a simple vision of how things went in the early Church: Two men, Paul and James, founded “two different branches of Christianity”. Paul, who saw Jesus as a divine redeemer and founded the Church, was wrong. James, who saw Jesus as a Jewish reformer and founded the Jewish-Christian movement, was right. James’s teaching and his movement would largely disappear, but not forever. That, in Akyol’s view where Islam comes in.

This essay argues that those who believe Paul invented Christianity may not have not fully appreciated the importance of understanding the fundamental beliefs and assumptions of the world Paul inhabited, both before and after his encounter with Jesus – in other words, his worldview.

A worldview is a network of ultimate beliefs, assumptions, values, and ideas about the universe and our place in it that shapes how a person understands their life and experiences (and the lives and experiences of others) and how that person acts in response. It’s *an overall view of the world*. It’s not a *physical* view of the world, like the sight of planet Earth you might get from an orbiting space station. Rather, it’s a *philosophical* view of the world—and not just of our planet, but of all of reality. A worldview is an all-encompassing perspective on everything that exists and matters to us.

Our worldview represents our most fundamental beliefs and assumptions about the universe we inhabit. It reflects how we would answer all the “big questions” of human existence, the fundamental questions we ask about **life**, the universe, and everything. We all have a worldview, and so did Paul.

Some understanding of Paul’s worldview is therefore necessary if we are to understand him and explore whether or not he invented Christianity.

What formed Paul’s worldview?

1. The Jewish worldview of his time¹

Paul was on the *right* path. His upbringing was shaped by Judaism, but Judaism of a certain type. He belonged to a group known as **Pharisees** who were popular and influential in Israel. They were not a small, insignificant, or fringe group, but were made up of respected, popular, and influential community leaders in Israel. They actively promoted not only their own holiness but also that of other Jews and many of them were politically active. Their overriding concern was purity; not simply personal “religious” purity but purity to advance the cause of preserving their Jewish nation, the people, they believed, God had chosen. They were active promoters of purity within the story and tradition (their worldview) of being Jews, God’s elect people. They practised purity to advance the cause of their nation faced with oppression from outside and disloyal Jews like Jesus from within. They were about national survival, the **Kingdom of God** against the kingdoms of this world, in particular Rome. The political situation was becoming more and more intense and came to a head climaxing in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

The mark of the faithful Pharisee was zeal. Zeal was not just another word for strong inner passion. It meant action, at times forceful, even violent action. It was a straight path from “zeal” to

the “Zealots”, the ancient Jewish sect aiming to establish a Jewish theocracy and resisting the Romans until Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70.

N T Wright in *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*ⁱⁱ writes,

“Zeal and the law; the **covenant**, Abraham, Phineas and Elijah; faith, courage, the reckoning of righteousness, the promise of glory; pay back the pagans in their own coin and hold fast to the commandments of the law! How much clearer could it get? ...The important thing was this: this was what being “zealous for Torah” looked like. The long line of Israel’s history can be told in terms of Abraham being faithful, and it being reckoned to him as righteousness, and then of the others who showed their faith, their zeal, their courage. Keep the law, for that is the path to glory! It is not difficult to imagine a young Jew, faced with the sordid power of paganism in the early first century and the shabby compromises of many of his countrymen, being fired by this vision. Cling on to God’s faithfulness, stir up your courage, and act. This is what being a Pharisee was all about. This, indeed — confusing for us in a world where the word “Judaism” refers to a “religion” in our modern sense — seems to have been what *loudaismos* (Greek for Judaism) meant: not simply the practice of a “religion”, but the “active propagation of the ancestral way of **life** and its defence”

The **Pharisees** were the religious culture warriors of their day and saw themselves as the guardians of Israel’s national purity. They believed that observing **Torah** as they kept it was not only good for individuals but essential to the moral and spiritual survival of the nation. They had a cause. They were zealous for that cause. Paul was one of them! He was on the right path!

From his earliest days, Paul (who was earlier called Saul)ⁱⁱⁱ had a sense of divine calling. His birthplace, Tarsus, was a bustling coastal city and administrative centre for the Roman province of Cilicia (what is now south-eastern Turkey). Paul was a tentmaker who, following the custom of his time, would have most likely learned his trade from his father. His Roman citizenship and strongly held doctrine and discipline of the **Pharisees** would also have been passed on by his father.

He grew up with a strong sense that God had set him aside for a special task. His calling came even before his birth, as he put it later, “from my mother’s womb.” While still a youth, he “advanced in Judaism,” he said, “beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers” (Bible: Galatians 1:14)

A prodigy, he went early to Jerusalem to study in the great centre of Jewish learning. At the time, there were two rival pharisaic schools in the city, following two first-century sages who took two different — and sometimes opposing — approaches to the law in the Torah. They were the school of Hillel and the school of Shammai. They flourished around the time of Jesus’ birth. It is said that the two sages debated and differed on more than three hundred important points of law, liturgy, morality, and theology. Shammai tended to be strict and exclusive in his interpretation. Hillel tended to be lenient. An ancient maxim (preserved by the House of Hillel) runs: “Be gentle like Hillel and not impatient like Shammai.”

By the time Saul arrived in Jerusalem, both men were dead. The young man perhaps still a boy took up study under Hillel’s grandson and successor, Gamaliel, who would be known to Jews ever after as Gamaliel the Great, and *Rabban*, which means “Our Master.”

Saul would later boast that he had studied under the greatest rabbi in the House of Hillel. But historians and other observers have long noted that Saul's sympathies seemed to lie more with the stricter and more exclusive House of Shammai.

If Shammai was impatient, as the maxim taught, it was because of his zeal for the law and his eagerness to bring about the day of the Messiah. Some teachers believed that faithful observance of the **Torah** was the precondition of God's saving action. Through the prophets, God had promised salvation and vindication to Israel — a gathering of the tribes, a restoration of the land, and an expulsion or subjugation of the foreign powers.

The New Testament Scholar N. T. Wright summarizes the situation:

'The Shammaites, and the revolutionaries in general, were eager to bring these prophecies to fulfilment by their zeal for the Torah. They would not sit around and wait; they would take matters into their own hands.....observing **Torah** would hasten the time of fulfilment. If God were to act climactically now, within history, while Israel was still not keeping **Torah** properly, she would be condemned along with the **Gentiles**'^{iv}.

Paul was one of them! Zealous for the cause! He was on the right path and ready for action!

Key point

Paul was confident that he was on the right path! Belonging to an honourable tradition. A trained religious scholar, zealous for God and ready to struggle and fight against the secular and religious enemies of God to usher in the Messiah.

Reflection question

Have you ever taken time to reflect whether or not you are on the right path?

2. The religious worldview of his time^v

Like all worldviews the Jewish religious worldview during the time of the Second-Temple is made known as an embedded story from which were derived the symbols and practice of their faith. The story goes something like this: Israel is **YHWH's** chosen **covenant** people, but she has been unfaithful to **YHWH** and disobeyed his laws in the Torah. For this reason, she finds herself in **exile**. But **YHWH** is faithful to his **covenant** and when Israel repents and once again is obedient, **YHWH** will deliver her from **exile**, defeat the evil ones, and live in Zion, Jerusalem, the city of the living God. When this takes place, a new world, with a new way of living, will be realized. It was evident to most, if not all, Jews of Jesus' day that this had not yet happened, that Israel's story had not reached its God-ordained conclusion.

The Jewish story originated from the Scriptural stories of creation, **covenant**, slavery, **Passover and Exodus**, **Priests**, Kings, Prophets, **exile** in Babylon and return to the land. From these stories came the symbols; Sabbath, Food, Nation, Land, Torah and Temple, the space where God was present. Like all worldview symbols, they provided Israel with a sense of identity and boundaries that make clear who is and who is not among the people of God. The outworking of Israel's worldview included regular worship, festivals, and living according to the Torah.

The stories, symbols and practice reveal a rich but simple worldview which can be summarized under the following common worldview headings.

Who is God?

We, the people of Israel, live in a cosmos created by the one true God. (Creation) A cosmos created to be God's 'temple' – the place where His dimension (**heaven**) and our dimension of space, time and matter (earth) meet.

We believe that God created all people, in His image meaning that they have a vocation to be His vice regents and wise caretakers of His creation. People are created, like an angled mirror, to reflect God's attributes into the world and to reflect the world back to God in prayer and praise.

Who are we?

Through His promise to our forefather Abraham God chose us to be the messenger through whom He would bless **all** mankind and who, through us, would in the end set the world to rights.

Our God is the one true God who works through the natural events of history. The gods of other nations are false gods, and worship of them is idolatrous.

God made a **covenant** with us promising to be faithful to us and our descendants if we were faithful in our responsibility to make Him known to the gentile (non-Jewish) world.

God gave us a divine gift, the **Torah**, which defines and shapes us as God's people to bless the whole world.

Early in our story, we found ourselves enslaved in Egypt and were liberated (**Exodus**), not through our own efforts but as a result of God's intervention (**Passover**).

We were given a land and knew the distinctive presence of God with us in the **Tabernacle** and later in the **Temple** which Solomon built. Holy places where God's space (**heaven**) and our space (earth) intersected.

What went wrong?

We sinned by breaking God's law and recognised that the invasion of the superpower Babylon was the punishment we deserved. The **Temple** was destroyed, God's presence left us. Our leaders were taken into **exile** and it seemed that God had abandoned us. Our **exile** in Babylon was no less than we deserved for our idolatry and sin.

When the Persians conquered the Babylonians, we were repatriated and although we rebuilt the **Temple** there was never the sense of God's presence as before and we were left with the feeling that we were still in **exile**.

The reality is that we are still in **exile**. We are ruled by a puppet king (Herod) surrounded by an occupying power (Rome) and our religious establishment is corrupt.

We were not surprised, as God had made it clear in our Scriptures that, if we did not obey the Lord our God and carefully follow all his commands and decrees, curses would come on us and overtake us, causing us to be defeated by our enemies (Bible: Deuteronomy 28)

What's the solution?

We know that the one true God has always worked within history and we expect God to act once again to free us and to deliver us and establish His rule perhaps exercised through a true priesthood and possibly a true king like David.

In the meantime, God has made it clear that we must keep on the right path by being faithful to God's **covenant** and by obeying both the written and oral **Torah**. This is our only hope if we are not to remain in **exile**, ruled by a puppet king (Herod) and surrounded by an occupying power (Rome) and a corrupt religious establishment.

Once more in our history we can only look to God to intervene to save us from our idolatry and sin. We are aware from our prophet Isaiah, and other writings in the **Apocrypha**,^{vi} that the prelude to God's climactic act will involve **sacrifice** and suffering.

Where are we going?

We're living in the **present age** and long for the age to come which will arrive one day to bring God's justice, peace, and healing to the world as it groans and toils within the **present age**.

The three **core beliefs** which informed the religious worldview of Paul's time may be summarized as monotheism, election, and eschatology.

Monotheism, for Israel, declares that Israel's God is the only true God. The gods of other nations are false gods, and worship of them is idolatrous. Israel's God works within history through natural events.

Election is the answer to the question, 'what will God do in the face of evil'? God has chosen a people (**not because they are deserving or special in any way**) to serve as the means through which He will set the world to rights.

These two beliefs, monotheism and election, coupled with the realization that things are not yet set right, lead to the third core belief, **eschatology**. That is, Israel's confident expectation that God himself will act on their behalf. But for God to do this, he must first deal with the source of the problem, Israel's idolatry and sin. Until the time of God's climactic intervention the **sacrifice** of regular worship, pilgrimages, national feasts, and fasts, must continue, each practice enacting symbolically, in one way or another, the hoped-for restoration and anticipated participatory suffering, perhaps collective suffering.

Key point.

Everyone, whether religious or non-religious has a worldview which serves as the foundation and framework for all of their thoughts and actions, shaping their interpretation of the world. Paul, too, had one, and so it makes good sense to engage with him at the foundational level of his underlying worldview rather than impose our own worldview on him.

Reflection Question

Take time to reflect on your own worldview. What shapes your belief?

3. Doctrinal purity and monotheism^{vii}

Paul was zealous for doctrinal purity and was focussed on eradicating fellow Jews who, he believed, were on the wrong path.

Stephen died at the hands of a mob - men who were "enraged" (Bible: Acts 7:54) by his exposition of the Scriptures which pointed forward to Jesus's **life**, death and **resurrection** as the climax of God's call to Abraham. His murderers were many, but we know the name of just one of them: Saul (Paul, as he was later known). Luke in his history tells us: "Saul was consenting to his death" (Bible: Acts 8:1). Members of the mob left their cloaks with him as they took up stones to kill Stephen (Bible: Acts 7:58).

That day marked the beginning of the first coordinated, systematic persecution of the early Christian communities. Most of the **disciples** fled Jerusalem and went into hiding. Some took refuge among Israel's most notorious apostates, in Samaria, where the **Pharisees** and other religious authorities would be unlikely to venture. Only the Apostles stayed behind in Jerusalem. (Bible: Acts 8:1)

After Jesus' crucifixion and the testimonies of his **resurrection**, Paul, the young Pharisee consumed by zeal, pursued a program to purge Jerusalem and every Jewish community of any trace of Jesus' teaching or influence. Single-minded in his dedication to the task, he went about "breathing threats and murder against the **disciples** of the Lord" (Bible: Acts 9:1). "But Saul laid waste the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison" (Bible: Acts 8:3).

Saul was not a docile minion, blindly carrying out orders issued by higher authorities. He was the most active agent of persecution, moving it forward and prosecuting the matter himself. Not content with local action, he "went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem" (Bible: Acts 9:1–2). He was willing to travel 140 miles, from Jerusalem to Damascus, by foot or by horse, to round up **disciples** of Jesus and bring them to the same end as Stephen. The mere mention of Saul's name was enough to strike fear in the heart of those who followed Jesus' way (Bible: Acts 9:13–14).

Among the Church's persecutors, Saul was singular in his zeal, unabashed in his purpose. He saw no reason to be diplomatic or cautious about it. Although a Hillelite^{viii}, Paul had learned from the Shammites that faithful observance of the **Torah** was the precondition of God's saving action, not a(nother) crucified **Messiah**.^{ix} God had promised salvation and vindication to Israel - a gathering of the tribes, a restoration of the land, and an expulsion or subjugation of the foreign powers and they wouldn't sit around and wait; they would take matters into their own hands!

Saul saw the **disciples** of Jesus as heretics who opposed observance of the law and denied the holiness of the Temple. Jesus, after all, had repeatedly violated the laws regarding the Sabbath by healing people, encouraging his **disciples** to pick grain, and so on. He even declared himself to be "Lord of the Sabbath," thus putting himself in the place of God.

Saul believed that such heretics should be given a choice. They should adopt a strict observance of the law — or they should die, so that they would not bring divine judgment down on the rest of the nation. They were an obstacle to the fulfilment of the prophecies and the coming of the **Messiah**. They were an impediment to the destiny of Israel.

The **disciples** who fled Jerusalem were hardly cowed into silence. Luke reports that "those who were scattered went about preaching the word" (Acts 8:4). This new persecution, like the death of Jesus before it, just exacerbated the problem for the Jerusalem authorities. Wherever the **disciples** fled, they made new **disciples**, as the subsequent chapters of the Acts of the Apostles make clear. They fled to Antioch and in that city, they were, for the first time, called Christians (Acts 11:26). This new nickname — which may have been derogatory — did not indicate a new religion, different from that of Israel. Not even Saul considered Jesus' **disciples** to be **Gentiles**; they were guilty, in his eyes, precisely because they were unfaithful Jews. He would not have persecuted **Gentiles**, and he could not; he had no authority to do so.

Working with the chief **priests** in Jerusalem, however, Saul “shut up many of the saints [believers in the **Messiah**, Jesus] in prison” (Acts 26:10); and “when they were put to death,” he said, “I cast my vote against them.” He persecuted Christians “violently” (Bible: Gal. 1:13) — “to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women” (Bible: Acts 22:4). His goal was nothing short of the destruction of the early Christian communities (Bible: Gal. 1:13).

The growth of the Church fuelled his fury. He believed he was on a divine mission: “as to zeal a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness under the law blameless” (Bible: Philippians. 3:6).

As Paul travelled to bring the persecution to Damascus, the unexpected happened! It was an experience and the beginning of a journey which transformed Paul’s worldview.

Key point

Paul was zealous for doctrinal purity and was focused on eradicating fellow Jews who, he believed, were on the wrong path.

Reflection Question

Could Paul be described as a terrorist

Paul’s transformed worldview

Here is the story in Saul’s (Paul’s) words, recorded by Luke in his history of the early Christian movement (Bible: Acts 22:6-11):

“As I made my journey and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from **heaven** suddenly shone about me. And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” And I answered, “Who are you, Lord?” And he said to me, “I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting.” Now those who were with me saw the light but did not hear the voice of the one who was speaking to me. And I said, “What shall I do, Lord?” And the Lord said to me, “Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do.” And when I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me and came into Damascus” (Bible: Acts 22:6–11).

As Saul (Paul) lay on the ground, he knew he was encountering Almighty God, but he recognized also that he did not know God. He addressed the voice as “Lord,” but asked him, “Who are you?”

The response he received was curious: “I am Jesus . . . whom you are persecuting.” What could it mean? By that time, Jesus himself had been out of the picture for years. Saul had not been persecuting Jesus, but rather Jesus’ followers.

So close was the relationship of Jesus **Christ** to each believer that Paul later came to see his persecutions as blasphemy directed against God, although that would certainly not have been his view at the time: “I formerly blasphemed and persecuted and insulted him; but I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief” (Bible: 1 Tim. 1:13).

Paul remained a Jew throughout his **life**, a man of the Tribe of Benjamin. As he proclaimed the **gospel** of Jesus, he was trying not to draw Jews away from Judaism but rather to show them

that the ancient promises of God had been fulfilled in the **life**, death and **resurrection** of the **Messiah** Jesus.

A modern Jewish biblical scholar, Rabbi Jacob Neusner writes^x

“The earliest Christians, Jesus and his family and Paul, all saw themselves as “Israel” and called on Scripture to provide the framework of interpretation of the **life** and teachings, death and **resurrection**, of Jesus **Christ**. All of these groups fall into the category ‘Judaisms,’ though each differs in fundamental ways from the others”. In many years to come, there would be a parting of the ways, but it did not happen with Paul.

Paul accounts for his transformation in his own words, writing to an early Christian community in Galatia

“I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the **gospel** I preached is not of human origin. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus **Christ**.

For you have heard of my previous way of **life** in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. But when God, who set me apart from my mother’s womb and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the **Gentiles**, my immediate response was not to consult any human being. I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went into Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus”. Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days. I saw none of the other apostles – only James, the Lord’s brother. I assure you before God that what I am writing to you is no lie. Then I went to Syria and Cilicia”. (Bible: Galatians 1:11-24)

Why did Paul go to Arabia? ^{xi} Some think it was a time of solitary meditation, in preparation to share the good news (**Gospel**) about Jesus with **Gentiles** (see next section on How Paul’s worldview was transformed). Where was “Arabia,” anyway, at that time? No really precise or attractive answers have been forthcoming to these quite natural questions. Most agree that the main point Paul is making in the above passage is that he did not go to Jerusalem. But the question of Arabia is still a puzzle. Professor N T Wright (see endnote ^{viii}) proposes a solution to it.

Paul indicates in Galatians 1:14 that he belonged, before his conversion, to the strict Pharisaic tradition which focussed on “zeal for the law.” This zeal led him not just into zealous study and prayer but into violent action. Zeal of this sort was part of a long tradition within Judaism, looking back to particular scriptural and historical models. Of these, the best known was Phinehas, whose brief moment of glory appears in the Bible in Numbers 25:7-13 when he intervened to kill a Jewish man consorting with a Moabite woman. Phinehas remained as a model for subsequent “zealous” activity, not least in the Maccabean period, when the same issue (compromise with pagans and paganism) was perceived to be at stake. In these developed traditions, the other figure who emerges prominently is Elijah. The reason is again obvious: Elijah, too, acted zealously, killing the prophets of Baal who were leading Israel into paganism. So strong, indeed, is the connection between Phinehas and Elijah in the popular consciousness of “zeal,” not least in the first century, that the two figures are actually merged in several traditions, with Phinehas-like attributes being credited to Elijah and vice versa.

Elijah, too, was clearly a man of “zeal.” “I have been very zealous for **YHWH** of Hosts,” he says (Bible: 1 Kings 19:14). His zeal, of course, had consisted precisely in slaying the prophets of Baal, as recounted in the previous chapter. But he had been stopped in his tracks, confronted by Ahab and Jezebel with a threat to

his **life** (Bible: 1 Kings 19:1-2); and he had run away “to Horeb, the mount of God” (Bible: 1 Kings 19:8), apparently to resign his prophetic commission. There, in the famous story, he was met by earthquake, wind, and fire, but **YHWH** was in none of them. Finally, he heard “a still small voice,” inquiring why he was there. His explanation, as we just saw: great zeal, and now great disappointment. “I alone am left, and they seek my **life**.” Back comes the answer:

Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael as king over Aram. Also, you shall anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king over Israel; and you shall anoint Elisha son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah as prophet in your place. Whoever escapes from the sword of Hazael, Jehu shall kill; and whoever escapes from the sword of Jehu, Elisha shall kill. Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him. (Bible: 1 Kings 19:15-18)

Saul of Tarsus, prior to his conversion, was a “zealous” Pharisee. As noted on page 3, this means that he belonged to the Shammaite school and was ready to take the law into his own hands and act even when the official authorities were apparently negligent. One who had “advanced beyond most of his contemporaries” in his study and knowledge of Jewish law and lore would undoubtedly have been well aware of the Phinehas/Elijah tradition; one who had come to the conclusion that “zeal” was the only proper response to the crisis facing Israel, would have been ready to follow the Maccabees in imitating Phinehas/Elijah. This did not mean that Saul was a member of a group called “the Zealot party,” for at that time it is quite likely that things were not so formalized. It does mean that he sympathized, and acted in tune, with those who were choosing the route of violence against Jews who were regarded as traitors.

Someone in this position would naturally choose certain appropriate styles of action, based on scriptural and traditional models, in the belief that Israel’s God would vindicate such action. That, it appears, is what Saul of Tarsus did.

Saul saw himself acting out the model of Phinehas and/or Elijah. His zeal led him into physical violence against those whom he saw as the heirs and successors of the compromised Jews of (Bible) Numbers 25 and the Baal worshippers of 1 Kings 18 (see Bible: Acts 22:3-5). He “was persecuting the church with great violence and was trying to destroy it” (Bible: Galatians 1:13). However, when stopped in his tracks by the revelation on the road to Damascus, he again did what Elijah did. He went off to Mount Sinai. The word “Arabia” is very imprecise in Paul’s day, covering the enormous area to the south and east of Palestine; but one thing we know for sure is that, for Paul, “Arabia” was the location of Mount Sinai. (Bible) Galatians 1:17 and 4:25, state “for Sinai is a mountain in Arabia,” and are the only two occurrences of *Apa t’a* in the whole New Testament. Saul of Tarsus then “returned to Damascus” just like Elijah in (Bible) 1 Kings 19:15. And, in case this remarkable coincidence of themes is still unconvincing, we may note that in the same passage Paul describes his call in “prophetic” terms: “the God who set me apart from my mother’s womb . . .” (Bible: Galatians 1:15; cf. Isaiah 49:1; Jeremiah 1:5). Even though the Hebrew scriptures are silent about Elijah’s birth or call, this locates Paul firmly within the prophetic tradition of which Elijah was one of the supreme members.

If this is correct, Saul might have been doing what a puzzled zealous prophet might be expected to do: going back to the source to resign his commission. Alternatively, and perhaps preferably, he might be conceived of as doing what a puzzled, newly commissioned prophet might do, complaining (like Moses, Jeremiah, and others) that he is not able to undertake the work he has been assigned. And whatever still, small voice he may have heard, it was certainly not underwriting the zeal in which he had been indulging up until then. His zeal was now to be redirected (Bible: Galatians 4:18; see also 2 Corinthians 11:2). He was to become the herald of the new king, Jesus, calling on Scripture to provide the interpretation of the **life** and teachings, death and **resurrection** of the **Messiah** Jesus.

At this point, of course, the parallel with Elijah suddenly ceases to be exact. Saul of Tarsus was being told, through his whole Damascus Road Christophany, that the way of zeal was not the way by which the eschatological mission was to be accomplished.

Nevertheless, a parallel still holds. Elijah was sent with a message to anoint Hazael king of Syria and Jehu king of Israel; they, and Elijah's own successor Elisha, would complete the work that Elijah's zeal had begun. Saul was sent back from Arabia to be the herald of the newly anointed **Messiah**, Jesus. His was the kingship that would challenge all pagan powers, that would create the true community of the people of God. Saul, having taken the Elijah of (Bible) 1 Kings 18 as his role model in his persecuting zeal, took the Elijah of 1 Kings 19 as his role model when confronted, after his zealous triumph, with a totally new reality that made him **question** his whole **life** and mission to date. Paul may here be indicating that he had exchanged the role of Elijah-like zeal for the role of the servant. Instead of inflicting the wrath of **YHWH** on rebellious Jews, he now had a new role model, a new job description.

The Christian Paul's verdict on the pre-Christian Saul is this: he had a zeal for Israel's God, but it was an ignorant zeal, seeking to establish a **covenant membership for Jews and Jews only**, and to see that identity marked out by the works of Torah. What Saul learned on the road to Damascus, and perhaps on Sinai too as he reflected on Elijah's post-zeal humiliation, was that the true remnant was a remnant defined by the divine call, not by works. If this overall hypothesis about Paul, Arabia, and Elijah is correct, three concluding reflections may be in order.

First, the picture of the pre-Christian Paul comes into considerably clearer focus. He was on the "zealous" wing of the **Pharisees**: a Shammaite, in fact, despite the gentler Hillelite leanings of his teacher Gamaliel. Saul belonged to the majority party among the pre-AD70 **Pharisees**, who, when given a chance, were prepared to use violence to defend the honour of their God and his Torah. Like many others in this movement, he looked back to the great heroes of zeal, Phinehas and Elijah, and almost certainly to Mattathias and Judas Maccabeus as more recent representatives of the same tradition.

Second, Saul's reasons for persecuting the young church are likewise clarified. It was not just that early Christianity followed a crucified **Messiah**, blasphemous though that idea would have seemed. It was, more specifically, that the (Jewish) Christians, by denouncing the Temple and going soft on the Torah, were behaving in the compromised and traitorous way associated in Jewish tradition with the wilderness generation in the time of Phinehas, the Baal worshippers in the time of Elijah, and the Hellenizers in the Maccabean period. Jesus was, for them, taking on the role of Temple and Torah; he was the place where the living God was made known. They were thus renegade Jews of the worst sort. They were, in Saul's eyes, no better than Baal worshippers. It was the divine mission of the zealous Shammaite to cut them off, root and branch.

Third, the Phinehas/Elijah tradition has interesting implications for the early Jewish atonement-theology that may have influenced Paul and others. As we saw, Phinehas's action was interpreted in an atoning sense within various rabbinic traditions, perhaps based on God's words to Moses in which He recognised Phinehas' atonement for the Israelites because of his zeal for the honour of God."

His zeal had the effect of "turning wrath away from Israel", connecting his action with (Bible) Isaiah 53:12, "because he exposed his **life** to death." So too Elijah, according to Sirach (Jewish Apocrypha 48:10), is destined to turn away the divine wrath before it breaks out in fury. Thus might zealous actions in any age be seen as part of the divine purpose, dealing with sin and so saving the people of God. **But, for Paul, it was the death of Jesus at the hands of the pagans, not the defeat of the pagans at the hands of the heaven-sent zealous hero, that defeated evil once and for all: "he gave himself for our sins, to deliver us from this present evil age" (Bible: Galatians 1:4). The cross offered the solution to the problem that "zeal" had sought to address.** The revelation of the crucified, and now risen, **Messiah** was therefore sufficient to stop the zealous Saul in his tracks, to send him back like his role model to Sinai, and to convince him that the battle he was blindly fighting had already been won, and indeed that by fighting it he had been losing it.

Key point

Paul's transformed worldview followed his encounter with Jesus and a process of reflecting deeply on his Jewish scriptures.

Reflection Question

What would make me transform my worldview?

How was Paul's worldview transformed?

We have seen previously that Paul, a strict monotheistic law-keeping Pharisee, would be wrapped up in his Jewish worldview formed by scripture, literature, stories and tradition over many centuries.

The scriptural narratives of creation, **covenant**, **exile** to Babylon and return together with the earlier history of slavery in Egypt and **exodus**, were prominent building blocks on which Paul's Jewish worldview was built. He would therefore have to reflect deeply on them in the light of his and, also many others', experience of Jesus before and after his crucifixion. Could there be any continuity between Jesus' **life**, crucifixion, **resurrection** and ascension and the key scriptural narratives of his Jewish worldview? Did Jesus' **life**, death and **resurrection** make any sense? Could Jesus possibly be the climax of the promises made to Abraham and the fulfillment of the **covenant**?

Paul would have been disturbed as he thought deeply about how the **life** and teaching, crucifixion and **resurrection** of the **Messiah** Jesus could make any sense in the light of his Scriptures.

The creation of the universe, and of humans made in the image of God, is described in the first three chapters of Genesis. God brought into existence a good creation and bestowed on his people a vocation to be His vice-regents. They are to be like an angled mirror, to reflect His love and care into the world and in turn reflect back to God the praise of the whole world.

Subsequent chapters record the awful consequences of human failure to live up to their vocation. Idolatry is the root of the problem and sin quickly follows, bringing predictable consequences and judgement seen in the story of Noah. Paul knew of human failure but also knew that in spite of this, God would be faithful and remain committed to the redemption and restoration, not only of his creation but also of his image-bearing creatures.

Paul would have recalled the **covenant** God made with Abraham calling him and his family, Israel, to be the solution to the problem of evil, the problem of human idolatry and the antecedent of one family of nations.

But their history takes a turn for the worse when famine drives Israel's migration into Egypt where, in God's providence, Joseph's rise to power enabled him to meet their needs and ensure their survival. However, enslavement followed many years later under a new Pharaoh and it was only God's faithfulness and commitment to His **covenant** and His direct intervention through the **Passover** that the Israelites escaped from Egypt, crossed the Red Sea and occupied the land which God promised to them.

In that land God gave Israel the Torah, guidance designed to enable each individual Israelite to become a whole, cleansed, integrated human being; a blueprint of what a genuinely human **life** is like. His holy presence lived amongst them in the **Tabernacle** and they were given rules and guidelines to make sure they were a holy people fit to be in his presence.

Paul knew from the scriptures that God's plan was for Israel to address the problems of the world and bring justice to the ends of the earth. How this would happen remained more than a little mysterious to even prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, yet they remained certain that God would act in history to judge and to bring about His just rule. And in the meantime, Paul knew that Israel's vocation was to be faithful to their calling to **Torah** obedience and to hold fast to the **covenant** promises made by God. But this

was looking unlikely. Israel's sin and failure to embody their vocation had brought God's judgement, the destruction of the **Temple**, **exile** in Babylon and a sense that God, despite His **covenant** with Abraham, had deserted them.

The Babylonian **exile** had ended several hundred years previously but, as he reflects, Paul and many other Jews of his time recognised that there was something deeply amiss with their world, whether because of Israel's idolatry and sin on the one hand or Gentile oppression culminating in Roman occupation on the other, or perhaps both as it had been so many times in the past. It went even beyond that; something seemed to be deeply amiss within humankind itself, something to which God's **covenant** with Israel must be the answer. Paul returns to the story of creation, and to the story of the **Exodus**, praying and trusting that God would do again what, as creator, he has the power and the right to do, and what as the **covenant** God he has the responsibility to do, namely, to establish justice in the world and, to vindicate his people when they cry to him for help.

Paul's scriptures were pointing to one great 'arrival', perhaps a national leader, a warrior king like David? Nevertheless, Paul knew that behind this hope there was a deeper hope. Prophets like Isaiah and Ezekiel, and in the more recent period prophets like Zechariah and Malachi, had insisted that one day God himself would come back to 'visit and redeem his people'. However, there was little sign of this happening. Rather there were many times in Israel's history when the **covenant** promises themselves appear to have come to a dead end, unfulfilled.

Now was such a time. Why? Could it be because of Israel's idolatry? Israel's sin? Israel's failure to keep their part of the **covenant**? God had made it clear in the scriptures that if Israel obeyed him, the created order within the promised land would be abundantly fruitful, but if Israel disobeyed, the land itself would turn against them, and ultimately drive them into **exile**. True, there had been a return to the land from **exile** in Babylon but nevertheless there was an awareness even now of being in **exile**; the sense that God's presence in the **Temple** was missing and then there was the Roman occupation.

God had called Abraham and his family to be the bearers of the solution to the world's problems and to human idolatry, but it was now becoming clear to Paul that he, along with others in Abraham's family, were in fact themselves part of the problem.

The only hope was that God would once more intervene directly as he had done long ago when they were slaves in Egypt. God would have to find a way to deal with Israel's idolatry and sin. As foreseen by prophets like Jeremiah and Ezekiel, if there was to be any hope, God would have to establish a new **covenant** and bring into being His rule and a new kingdom.

Could Jesus possibly be the fulfilment of these scriptures? The climax to God's **covenant**? A crucified **Messiah**, surely not? And yet a *risen* **Messiah** whom he had now, along with many others, encountered for himself!

Paul came to realise after prayer and reflection that his scriptures did provide God's foundation for making sense of the **life** and teaching, crucifixion and **resurrection** of the **Messiah** Jesus. Jesus was indeed the embodiment of Israel's God, the God of Abraham. God had come in person to a point in history where the pain of the world, and of Israel, was most sharply focused, and took it upon himself on the cross. In God's plan Israel stood to represent humanity and the world and the **Messiah** Jesus, faithful and without sin, was representing Israel and in turn all humanity and the broken world.

At Jesus' crucifixion **Satan** had thrown everything at him but death was not the last word. Jesus' was indeed God's faithful servant and his **resurrection** was a vindication of his faithfulness.

There was a new **exodus**, the power of evil was smashed. The **exile** from broken relationships with God and humanity was ended. In the **life**, death and **resurrection** of Jesus a new way of living, a new way of being human had been launched upon the world, a way that people thought impossible but a way that transformed lives and communities and a way that had to be shared.

Paul, like many others, came to understand that the **life**, death and **resurrection** of Jesus had universal implications beyond Israel and that his vocation was to share the good news (**gospel**) of Jesus with not only his fellow-Jews and but also the **Gentiles**, the rest of the world. Paul's vocation had begun and much of it is recorded in the books of the New Testament. In his own words to the Christian community in Corinth:

“For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that **Christ** died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to someone untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace towards me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them—though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe. Now if **Christ** is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no **resurrection** of the dead? If there is no **resurrection** of the dead, then **Christ** has not been raised; and if **Christ** has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised **Christ**—whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then **Christ** has not been raised”. (1 Corinthians 15:3-16)

Key point

Paul's worldview was transformed when he recognised that the only hope was that God would once more intervene directly as he had done long ago when they were slaves in Egypt. God would have to find a way to deal with Israel's idolatry and sin. As foreseen by prophets like Jeremiah and Ezekiel, if there was to be any hope, God would have to establish a new covenant and bring into being His rule and a new kingdom.

Reflection Question

What would it take to transform your worldview?

What is Christianity?

The heart of the Christian faith is Jesus; not the church, or morals, or anything else. All of these other things flow from an encounter with the **Messiah**, Jesus **Christ**, but he is the heart and source of it all. The four **Gospels**, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John connect Jesus to the story of Israel and recognise him as the **Son of God**, the living embodiment of Israel's God, the long-awaited return of Israel's God. They describe how Jesus' mission of proclamation, healing, and exorcisms and the opposition that arose as a result, demonstrate in word and deed that God's kingdom is becoming a reality on earth as it is in **heaven**; that the destructive powers of darkness have been defeated; they are not in control.

Within the story the **gospel** writers are telling is not only the story of Israel but the story of the darkness and evil that have plagued God's good world. Evil has been depicted throughout the story of Israel in various forms of idolatry and injustice not only by pagan people but by members of the people of God. The patriarchs, the kings and other heroes in the up-and-down story of Israel were all flawed, hindered by the ever-present evil and sin. Evil is not merely a pagan problem but a sickness affecting all people and all creation.

The **Gospels** describe the storm clouds which were forming around Jesus from his birth, as Herod sought to kill him even before his ministry started. The poor responded to his ministry, but his kingdom message did not draw applause from the ruling Jewish elite. The **Pharisees** opposed him. The chief **priests** sought to kill him. Rome saw him as a political threat. He taught the way of peace, reconciliation, and self-**sacrifice**. All of this animosity and opposition was how evil coalesced into a single force culminating in Jesus' death. Jesus had been battling not people and their evil ideas as much as evil itself. The **Gospels** record how, as he drew near to his death, Jesus told his **disciples**, “Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this

world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (Bible: John 12:31-32). Jesus’ death would be a victory over evil by overcoming and casting out the ruling force behind the evil in the world. This victory was not placed artificially over the story of Israel but the destination of Israel’s unfolding story and the fulfilment of God’s commitment to the **covenant** He made with Abraham. In this way, the **gospels** show not simply the coming of God’s kingdom to be the culmination of Israel’s story, but equally the story of how evil forces came together against Jesus so that, in his death and **resurrection**, Death, Evil, and Sin itself were defeated. Evil had gathered together in Herod and Pilate at the trial of Jesus, just as Psalm 2 said: “The rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed” and also Jesus, when he told the chief **priests** and the **temple** guards on his arrest, “This is your hour, and the (the hour of the) power of darkness” (Bible: Luke 22:53). The battle Jesus was in was not against flesh and blood but against the power of darkness itself.

The power of darkness is the **satan**, the “ruler of this world,” who was finally defeated by Jesus’ death. The **satan** entered Judas turning him into “the accuser,” the literal meaning of the word “**satan**.” This battle with evil is not simply the convenient backdrop to the death of Jesus. It’s the story of struggle and death, victory and love, a story of Jesus’ death as the defeat of evil in accordance with God’s **covenant** love. The words of John the Baptist in the **Gospels** convey to us the words of Jesus about his death at the Feast of **Passover**; Jesus is the **Passover** lamb who, “takes away the sin of the world” (Bible: John 1:29). As sin is taken away, a great victory over the power of evil has been won. The rule of the **Messiah**, Jesus **Christ**, in God’s kingdom has been unveiled in the present by putting an end to Sin. The great themes of God’s kingdom rule and the redemption of the world through the cross are inextricably tied together in the **gospels**.

Forgiveness of sins, and thus the end of **exile** comes about because Jesus bears the punishment of Israel. Jesus brings an end to **exile** and the shape of the **kingdom of God** is redefined by his death. The **kingdom of God**, in contrast to first century Jewish expectations, looks like self-giving love and self-denial. As Israel’s representative, Jesus does what Israel was called to do but ultimately could not do, namely, representing the light of God’s truth to the Gentile world. The **Gospels** record Jesus saying, “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up,” a reference to his death (Bible: John 3:14). As Jesus was lifted up on the cross, buried and rose again, Sin and Death that had plagued not only Israel, but all mankind, were brought together. When we see the cross and contemplate the suffering of Jesus, we realize that not only the power of evil but also our personal sins have been dealt with. The death of Jesus was not to appease an angry God, but rather to demonstrate the love of God; “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son...” (Bible: John 3:16).

Jesus dies as a rebel in the place of rebellious Israel, as depicted in the crowd’s desire for Barabbas to be released and Jesus to be crucified. The **gospel** writers make it clear that Jesus was innocent. He had done nothing wrong, yet he was sentenced to death. Even as he hung on the cross, the penitent thief being crucified with Jesus announced that Jesus hadn’t done anything wrong (Bible: Luke 23:41). Jesus promised “paradise” to this thief – not **heaven**, but a restful holdover until **resurrection**. Within Luke’s **gospel** we see the powers of darkness are defeated because Jesus dies on behalf of the guilty. Jesus dies as a substitute in that Jesus represents Israel as their **Messiah**. Jesus bears the weight of Israel’s sins and the sins of the world and dies as the forces of evil collude against him so at long last the **kingdom of God** may come into the **present age**. The death of Jesus is what it looks like when Israel’s God becomes king of the nations, but it does not look like conventional power. The death of King Jesus reveals the power of the **kingdom of God** - the power of co-suffering, the power of self-giving love. The kingdom is therefore launched not by the elites of society but by the poor, the meek, the mourning, and the peacemakers. The kingdom will not come through the military might of empire, but through the way of nonviolence, enemy-love, and prayers for persecutors.

By his death, Jesus sets forth a new ethic – the ethic of love and reconciliation that will become the ethic by which God redeems the world and brings his space into our space, **heaven** to earth. The death of Jesus therefore does not save us from the world by taking us to **heaven**. Rather the death of Jesus saves us *for* the world, a powerful revolution *within* the world, a vision found among Israel’s prophets. Israel was always called to be the means by which the **kingdom of God** would come, but the means by which the revolution began took most of Israel by surprise. The **Messiah** came into this world born of a virgin in Bethlehem, but he came with the words of peace and forgiveness on his lips. The very nature of power had to be radically reimagined by the followers of King Jesus. According to Wright, “A new sort of power will be let loose upon

the world, and it will be the power of self-giving love. This is the heart of the revolution that was launched on Good Friday” (Endnote).

As we step back and take a bird’s-eye view of what we see about the death of Jesus in the **Gospels**, we see the climax to the stories of the Old Testament: the stories of creation, **covenant**, **Passover**, release from Pharaoh’s captivity, **exile** and return. We see a new story unfolding. A new story anticipated by the prophet Jeremiah who wrote:

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new **covenant** with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the **covenant** that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my **covenant** that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. For this is the **covenant** that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbour and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” (Jeremiah 31:31-34 New King James Version (NKJV))

and the prophet Ezekiel, who wrote:

For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new **spirit** within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My **Spirit** within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do *them*. Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God. (Ezekiel 36:24-28 New King James Version (NKJV))

A new Jesus-centred story of new creation is brought into the present, a new **covenant**, a new **Passover**, a new release from captivity to sin, a new return from **exile** and restoration.

Following God by becoming a **disciple** of Jesus, by committing ourselves to the Jesus-centred story in the Bible and trusting in Jesus as the one who is able to rescue us from our idolatry and forgive our sins, and living our **life** in the presence of the **Holy Spirit** is the essence of Christianity.

Key point

The heart of the Christian faith is Jesus; not the church, or morals, or anything else. All of these other things flow from an encounter with the Messiah, Jesus Christ, but he is the heart and source of it all. The four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John connect Jesus to the story of Israel and recognise him as the Son of God, the living embodiment of Israel’s God, the long-awaited return of Israel’s God. They describe how Jesus’ mission of proclamation, healing, and exorcisms and the opposition that arose as a result, demonstrate in word and deed that God’s kingdom is becoming a reality on earth as it is in heaven; that the destructive powers of darkness have been defeated; they are not in control.

Reflection Question

Is it possible for Christians to focus on the church and lose sight of Jesus?

So, did Paul invent Christianity?

In the end, one can say that Paul was like a shepherd, leading God’s people and working out the practical on-the-ground implications of the **life**, death and **resurrection** of Jesus whereby Jew and Gentile would be

united in **Christ** on the very same basis and with the very same **discipleship** requirements. Though Paul did not call this end result Christianity, he more than any other of the original **apostles** was responsible for the birthing of what was to become the early church. Though he did not invent its doctrines or even its ethics, he most consistently applied the truth of the good news (**Gospel**) about Jesus until a community that conformed with these truths emerged.

The doctrinal Creeds of the church did not exist until the third century A.D. Paul did not invent the idea that Jesus was divine, or the idea of the Trinity, or the idea of the atoning death of Jesus, and certainly he could not be accused of inventing the idea of the virginal conception since he never mentions it in any of his letters. Paul simply shared in common with all other true Christians that, in his own words in a letter to the early Christian community in Corinth,

“For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that **Christ** died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve.⁶ After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the **apostles**, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born” (Bible: 1 Corinthians 15:3 – 7).

All the earliest followers of Jesus were Jews, and all the books of the New Testament were written by Jews, with one or two possible exceptions, for example, the author of the Bible books of Luke and Acts. Certainly, the very earliest followers of Jesus did not see themselves as creating a new religion. They were sectarian Jewish followers of Jesus. However, through a process which involved a variety of factors, for example the conversion of many **Gentiles** and the expulsion from various synagogues in the Empire, the Jesus movement in reality became a separate entity from early Judaism. In fact, it appears that this was already the case during the lifetime and ministry of Paul. One could say that Paul was a frontrunner who, along with others less well known, helped to guide the ‘Jesus movement’ out of Judaism and into a worshipping community centered on Jesus **Christ**. But it would be wrong to say that he was the inventor of Christianity. In any worshipping community that endures for any length of time there are always pioneers or trailblazers who see the way forward more clearly than others, and certainly Paul was one of these. It is clear enough that Paul’s insistence that salvation or the ‘new birth’ must be by grace through **faith** in Jesus had implications that only a few had fully worked out in his day. For one thing, in Paul’s mind this meant that Jewish Christians were no longer obliged to keep the Mosaic **covenant** and its law. They could do so if they chose, but it was not required even of Jewish Christians, much less of **Gentiles**. Paul clearly understood the radical implications of salvation by grace through **faith** in Jesus. He understood that this meant that if you required **circumcision** and law observance of the Jewish Christians, but not the Gentile ones, you were in effect creating two different Christian groups, two different ways of following Jesus - an impossibility running counter to everything God achieved through the **Messiah**, Jesus **Christ**, whose death and **resurrection** fulfilled God’s ancient plan for saving the world and renewing creation through Abraham and his offspring.

In the end, one could say that Paul was a shepherd leading God’s people in new directions and through uncharted waters to a new promised land where Jew and Gentile would be united in **Christ** on the very same basis and with the very same **discipleship** requirements. Though Paul did not call this end result Christianity, he more than any other of the original **apostles** was responsible for the birthing of the form of community which was to become the early church. Though he did not invent its doctrines or even its ethics, he most consistently applied its truths until a community that practised these truths emerged.

Glossary^{xii}

Age to come. (Present age, age to come, eternal life)

By the time of Jesus many Jewish thinkers divided history into two periods: 'the present age' and 'the age to come' - the latter being the time when **YHWH** would at last act decisively to judge evil, to rescue Israel, and to create a new world of justice and peace. The early Christians believed that, though the full blessings of the coming age lay still in the future, it had already begun with Jesus, particularly with his death and **resurrection**, and that by **faith** and **baptism** they were able to enter it already. 'Eternal life' does not mean simply 'existence continuing without end', but 'the life of the age to come'.

Apostle (apostle, disciple, the Twelve)

'Apostle' means 'one who is sent'. It could be used of an ambassador or official delegate. In the New Testament it is sometimes used specifically of Jesus' inner circle of twelve; but Paul sees not only himself but several others outside the Twelve as 'apostles', the criterion being whether the person had personally seen the risen Jesus. Jesus' own choice of twelve close associates symbolized his plan to renew God's people, Israel; after the death of Judas Iscariot (Matthew 27.5; Acts 1.18) Matthias was chosen by lot to take his place, preserving the symbolic meaning. During Jesus' lifetime they, and many other followers, were seen as his 'disciples', which means 'pupils' or 'apprentices'.

Baptism

Literally, 'plunging' people into water. From within a wider Jewish tradition of ritual washings and bathings, **John the Baptist** undertook a vocation of baptizing people in the Jordan, not as one ritual among others but as a unique moment of **repentance**, preparing them for the coming of the **kingdom of God**. Jesus himself was baptized by John, identifying himself with this renewal movement and developing it in his own way. His followers in turn baptized others. After his **resurrection**, and the sending of the **holy spirit**, baptism became the normal sign and means of entry into the community of Jesus' people. As early as Paul it was aligned both with the **Exodus** from Egypt (1 Corinthians 10.2) and with Jesus' death and resurrection (Romans 6.2-11).

Christ – see Messiah

Circumcision (circumcision, circumcised)

The cutting off of the foreskin. Male circumcision was a major mark of identity for Jews, following its initial commandment to Abraham (Genesis 17), reinforced by Joshua (Joshua 5.2-9). Other peoples, e.g. the Egyptians, also circumcised male children. A line of thought from Deuteronomy (e.g. 30.6), through Jeremiah (e.g. 31.33), to the Dead **Sea Scrolls** and the New Testament (e.g. Romans 2.29) speaks of 'circumcision of the heart' as God's real desire, by which one may become inwardly what the male Jew is outwardly, that is, marked out as part of God's people. At periods of Jewish assimilation into the surrounding culture, some Jews tried to remove the marks of circumcision (e.g. I Maccabees 1.11-15).

Covenant

At the heart of Jewish belief is the conviction that the one god, YHWH, who had made the whole world had called Abraham and his family to belong to him in a special way. The promises God made to Abraham and his family, and the requirements that were laid on them as a result, came to be seen in terms of either the agreement that a king would make with a subject people, or sometimes of the marriage bond between husband and wife. One regular way of describing this relationship was 'covenant' which can thus include both promise and law. The Covenant was renewed at Mount Sinai with the giving of the Torah; in Deuteronomy before the entry to the promised land; and in a more focused way, with David (e.g. Psalm 89). Jeremiah 31 promised that after the punishment of **exile** God would make a 'new covenant' with his people, forgiving them and binding them to him more intimately. Jesus believed that this was coming true through his Kingdom proclamation and his death and resurrection. The early Christians developed these ideas in various ways, believing that in Jesus the promises had at last been fulfilled.

Dead Sea Scrolls

A collection of texts, some in remarkably good repair, some extremely fragmentary, found in the late 1940s around Qumran (near the north east corner of the Dead Sea), and virtually all now edited, translated and in the public domain. They formed all or part of the library of a strict monastic group, most likely Essenes, founded in the mid-second century BC and lasting until the Jewish-Roman war of 66-70. The scrolls include the earliest existing manuscripts of the Hebrew and Aramaic scriptures, and several other important documents of community regulations, scriptural exegesis, hymns, wisdom writings, and other literature. They shed a flood of light on one small segment within the Judaism of Jesus' day, helping us to understand how some Jews at least were thinking, praying and reading scripture. Despite attempts to prove the contrary, they make no reference to **John the Baptist**, Jesus, Paul, James or early Christianity in general.

Disciple (apostle, discipleship, the Twelve)

'Apostle' means 'one who is sent'. It could be used of an ambassador or official delegate. In the New Testament it is sometimes used specifically of Jesus' inner circle of twelve; but Paul sees not only himself but several others outside the Twelve as 'apostles', the criterion being whether the person had personally seen the risen Jesus. Jesus' own choice of twelve close associates symbolized his plan to renew God's people, Israel; after the death of Judas Iscariot (Matthew 27.5; Acts 1.18) Matthias was chosen by lot to take his place, preserving the symbolic meaning. During Jesus' lifetime they, and many other followers, were seen as his 'disciples', which means 'pupils' or 'apprentices'.

Eternal life (present age, age to come, eternal life)

By the time of Jesus many Jewish thinkers divided history into two periods: 'the present age' and 'the age to come' - the latter being the time when YHWH would at last act decisively to judge evil, to rescue Israel, and to create a new world of justice and peace. The early Christians believed that, though the full blessings of the coming age lay still in the future, it had already begun with Jesus, particularly with his death and **resurrection**, and that by **faith** and **baptism** they were able to enter it already. 'Eternal life' does not mean simply 'existence continuing without end', but 'the life of the age to come'.

Eucharist

The meal in which the earliest Christians, and Christians ever since, obeyed Jesus' command to 'do this in remembrance of him' at the Last Supper (Luke 22.19; 1 Corinthians 11.23-26). The word 'eucharist' itself comes from the Greek for 'thanksgiving'; it means, basically, 'the thank-you meal', and looks back to the many times when Jesus took bread, gave thanks for it, broke it, and gave it to people (e.g. Luke 24.30; John 6.11). Other early phrases for the same meal are 'the Lord's supper' (1 Corinthians 11.20) and 'the breaking of bread' (Acts 2.42). Later it came to be called 'the Mass' (from the Latin word at the end of the service, meaning 'sent out') and 'Holy Communion' (Paul speaks of 'sharing' or 'communion' in the body and blood of Christ). Later theological controversies about the precise meaning of the various actions and elements of the meal should not obscure its centrality in earliest Christian living and its continuing vital importance today.

Exile

Deuteronomy (29-30) warned that if Israel disobeyed **YHWH**, he would send his people into exile, but that if they then repented, he would bring them back. When the Babylonians sacked Jerusalem and took the people into exile, prophets such as Jeremiah interpreted this as the fulfilment of this prophecy and made further promises about how long exile would last. (70 years according to Jeremiah 25:12; 29:10). Sure enough, exiles began to return in the late 6th century (Ezra 1.1). However, the post exilic period was largely a disappointment, since the people were still enslaved to foreigners (Nehemiah 9:36); and at the height of persecution by the Syrians, Daniel 9.2,24 spoke of the 'real' exile lasting not for 70 years but for 70 weeks of years, i.e. 490 years. Longing for the real 'return from exile' when the prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc would be fulfilled, and redemption from pagan oppression accomplished, continued to characterise many Jewish movements, and was a major theme in Jesus' proclamation and his summons to repentance.

Exodus

The Exodus from Egypt took place, according to the book of that name, under the leadership of Moses, after long years in which the Israelites had been enslaved there. (According to Genesis 15.13f., this was itself part of God's covenanted promise to Abraham.) It demonstrated, to them and to Pharaoh, King of Egypt, that Israel was God's special child (Exodus 4.22). They then wandered through the Sinai wilderness for 40 years, led by God in a pillar of cloud and fire; early on in this time they were given the **Torah** on Mount Sinai itself. Finally, after the death of Moses and under the leadership of Joshua, they crossed the

Jordan and entered, and eventually conquered, the promised land of Canaan. This event, commemorated annually in **Passover** and other Jewish festivals, gave the Israelites not only a powerful memory of what had made them a people, but also a particular shape and content to their faith in **YHWH** as not only creator but also redeemer; and in subsequent enslavements, particularly the **exile**, they looked for a further redemption which would be, in effect, a new Exodus. Probably no other past event so dominated the imagination of first-century Jews; among them the early Christians, following the lead of Jesus himself, continually referred back to the Exodus to give meaning and shape to their own critical events, most particularly Jesus' death and **resurrection**.

Faith

Faith in the New Testament covers a wide area of human trust and trustworthiness, merging into love at one end of the scale and loyalty at the other. Within Jewish and Christian thinking faith in God also includes *belief*, accepting certain things as true about God, and what he has done in the world (e.g. bringing Israel out of Egypt; raising Jesus from the dead). For Jesus, 'faith' often seems to mean 'recognizing that God is decisively at work to bring the **kingdom** through Jesus'. For Paul, 'faith' is both the specific belief that Jesus is Lord and that God raised him from the dead (Romans 10.9) and the response of grateful human love to sovereign divine love (Galatians 2.20). This faith is, for Paul, the solitary badge of membership in God's people in **Christ**, marking them out in a way that **Torah**, and the works it prescribes, can never do.

Gentiles

The Jews divided the world into Jews and non-Jews. The Hebrew word for non-Jews, *goyim*, carries overtones both of family identity (i.e., not of Jewish ancestry) and of worship (i.e., of idols, not of the one true God **YHWH**). Though many Jews established good relations with Gentiles, not least in the Jewish Diaspora (the dispersion of Jews away from Palestine), officially there were taboos against contact such as intermarriage. In the New Testament the Greek word *ethne*, 'nations', carries the same meanings as *goyim*. Part of Paul's overmastering agenda was to insist that Gentiles who believed in Jesus had full rights in the Christian community alongside believing Jews, without having to become **circumcised**.

Ghenna (Gehenna, hell)

Gehenna is, literally, the valley of Hinnom, on the south-west slopes of Jerusalem. From ancient times it was used as a garbage dump, smouldering with a continual fire. Already by the time of Jesus some Jews used it as an image for the place of punishment after death. Jesus' own usage blends the two meanings in his warnings both to Jerusalem itself (unless it repents, the whole city will become a smouldering heap of garbage) and to people in general (to beware of God's final judgment).

Gospel (synonyms 'good news', 'message', 'word').

The four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, record the 'good news'

The idea of 'good news', for which an older English word is 'gospel', had two principal meanings for first-century Jews. First, with roots in Isaiah, it meant the news of **YHWH's** long-awaited victory over evil and rescue of his people. Second, it was used in the Roman world of the accession, or birthday, or the emperor. Since for Jesus and Paul the announcement of God's in-breaking **kingdom** was both the fulfilment of prophecy and a challenge to the world's present rulers, 'gospel' became an important shorthand for both the message of Jesus himself, and the apostolic message about him. Paul saw this message as itself the vehicle of God's saving power (Romans 1.16; 1 Thessalonians 2.13).

The four canonical 'gospels' tell the story of Jesus in such a way as to bring out both these aspects (unlike some other so-called 'gospels' circulated in the second and subsequent centuries, which tended both to cut off the scriptural and Jewish roots of Jesus' achievement and to inculcate a private spirituality rather than confrontation with the world's rulers). Since in Isaiah this creative, life-giving good news was seen as God's own powerful word (40.8; 55.11), the early Christians could use 'word' or 'message' as another shorthand for the basic Christian proclamation.

Heaven

Heaven is God's dimension of the created order (Genesis 1.1; Psalm 115.16; Matthew 6.9), whereas 'earth' is the world of space, time and matter that we know. 'Heaven' thus sometimes stands,

reverentially, for 'God' (as in Matthew's regular '**kingdom** of heaven'). Normally hidden from human sight, heaven is occasionally revealed or unveiled so that people can see God's dimension of ordinary life (e.g. 2 Kings 6.17; Revelation 1, 4-5). Heaven in the New Testament is thus not usually seen as the place where God's people go after death; at the end the New Jerusalem descends *from* heaven *to* earth, joining the two dimensions forever. 'Entering the kingdom of heaven' does not mean 'going to heaven after death', but belonging in the present to the people who steer their earthly course by the standards and purposes of heaven (cf. the Lord's Prayer: 'on earth as in heaven', Matthew 6. 10) and who are assured of membership in the **age to come**.

Holy Spirit

In Genesis 1.2, the spirit is God's presence and power *within* creation, without God being identified with creation. The same spirit entered people, notably the prophets, enabling them to speak and act for God. At his **baptism** by **John the Baptist**, Jesus was specially equipped with the spirit, resulting in his remarkable public career (Acts 10.38). After his **resurrection**, his followers were themselves filled (Acts 2) by the same spirit, now identified as Jesus' own spirit: the creator God was acting afresh, remaking the world and them too. The spirit enabled them to live out a holiness which the **Torah** could not, producing 'fruit' in their lives, giving them 'gifts' with which to serve God, the world, and the church, and assuring them of future resurrection (Romans 8; Galatians 4-5; 1Corinthians 12-14). From very early in Christianity (e.g. Galatians 4.1-7), the spirit became part of the new revolutionary definition of God himself: 'the one who sends the son and the spirit of the son'.

John the Baptist

Jesus' cousin on his mother's side, born a few months before Jesus; his father was a **priest**. He acted as a prophet, baptizing in the Jordan - dramatically re-enacting the **Exodus** from Egypt - to prepare people, by **repentance**, for God's coming judgment. He may have had some contact with the **Essenes**, though his eventual public message was different from theirs. Jesus' own vocation was decisively confirmed at his **baptism** by John. As part of John's message of the **kingdom**, he outspokenly criticized Herod Antipas for marrying his brother's wife. Herod had him imprisoned, and then beheaded him at his wife's request (Mark 6.14-29). Groups of John's disciples continued a separate existence, without merging into Christianity, for some time afterwards (e.g. Acts 19.1-7).

Justification (Justification, justified)

God's declaration, from his position as judge of all the world, that someone is in the right, despite universal sin. This declaration will be made on the last day on the basis of an entire life (Romans 2.1-16), but is brought forward into the present on the basis of Jesus' achievement, because sin has been dealt with through his cross (Romans 3.21-4.25); the means of this present justification is simply **faith**. This means, particularly, that Jews and **Gentiles** alike are full members of the family promised by God to Abraham (Galatians 3; Romans 4).

Kingdom of God (kingdom of heaven)

Best understood as the *kingship*, or sovereign and saving rule, of Israel's God **YHWH**, as celebrated in several psalms (e.g. 99.1) and prophecies (e.g. Daniel 6.26f.). Because **YHWH** was the creator God, when he finally became king in the way he intended this would involve setting the world to rights, and particularly rescuing Israel from its enemies. 'Kingdom of God' and various equivalents (e.g. 'No king but God!') became a revolutionary slogan around the time of Jesus. Jesus' own announcement of God's kingdom redefined these expectations around his own very different plan and vocation. His invitation to people to 'enter' the kingdom was a way of summoning them to allegiance to himself and his programme, seen as the start of God's long-awaited saving reign. For Jesus, the kingdom was coming not in a single move, but in stages, of which his own public career was one, his death and **resurrection** another, and a still future consummation another. Note that 'kingdom of **heaven**' is Matthew's preferred form for the same phrase, following a regular Jewish practice of saying 'heaven' rather than 'God'. It does not refer to a place ('heaven'), but to the fact of God's becoming king in and through Jesus and his achievement. Paul speaks of Jesus, as **Messiah**, already in possession of his kingdom, waiting to hand it over finally to the father (1 Corinthians 15.23-28; cf. Ephesians 5.5).

Leper (leprosy)

In a world without modern medicine, tight medical controls were needed to prevent the spread of contagious diseases. Several such conditions, mostly severe skin problems, were referred to as 'leprosy', and two long biblical chapters (Leviticus 13-14) are devoted to diagnosis and prevention of it. Sufferers had to live away from towns and shout 'unclean' to warn others not to approach them (13.45). If they were healed, this had to be certified by a **priest** (14.2-32).

Life (life, soul, spirit)

Ancient people held many different views about what made human beings the special creatures they are. Some, including many Jews, believed that to be complete, humans needed bodies as well as inner selves. Others, including many influenced by the philosophy of Plato (fourth century BC), believed that the important part of a human was the 'soul' (Greek: *psyche*), which at death would be happily freed from its bodily prison. Confusingly for us, the same word *psyche* is often used in the New Testament within a Jewish framework where it clearly means 'life' or 'true self', without implying a body/soul dualism that devalues the body. Human inwardness of experience and understanding can also be referred to as 'spirit'. See **also holy spirit, resurrection**.

Messiah (messianic, Christ)

The Hebrew word means literally 'anointed one', hence in theory either a prophet, **priest** or king. In Greek this translates as *Christos*; 'Christ' in early Christianity was a title, and only gradually became an alternative proper name for Jesus. In practice 'Messiah' is mostly restricted to the notion, which took various forms in ancient Judaism, of the coming king who would be David's true heir, through whom **YHWH** would bring judgment to the world, and in particular would rescue Israel from pagan enemies. There was no single template of expectations. Scriptural stories and promises contributed to different ideals and movements, often focused on (a) decisive military defeat of Israel's enemies and (b) rebuilding or cleansing the **Temple**. The **Dead Sea Scrolls** speak of two 'Messiahs', one a priest and the other a king. The universal early Christian belief that Jesus was Messiah is only explicable, granted his crucifixion by the Romans (which would have been seen as a clear sign that he was not the Messiah), by their belief that God had raised him from the dead, so vindicating the implicit messianic claims of his earlier ministry

Miracles

Like some of the old prophets, notably Elijah and Elisha, Jesus performed many deeds of remarkable power, particularly healings. The **gospels** refer to these as 'deeds of power', 'signs', 'marvels' or 'paradoxes'. Our word 'miracle' tends to imply that God, normally 'outside' the closed system of the world, sometimes 'intervenes'; miracles have then frequently been denied as a matter of principle. However, in the Bible God is always present, however strangely, and 'deeds of power' are seen as *special* acts of a *present God* rather than as *intrusive* acts of an *absent* one. Jesus' own 'mighty works' are seen particularly, following prophecy, as evidence of his messiahship (e.g. Matthew 11.2-6).

Mishnah

The main codification of Jewish law (**Torah**) by the **rabbis**, produced in about AD 200, reducing to writing the 'oral Torah' which in Jesus' day ran parallel to the 'written Torah'. The Mishnah is itself the basis of the much larger collections of traditions in the two Talmuds (roughly AD 400).

Parousia

Literally, it means 'presence', as opposed to 'absence', and is sometimes used by Paul with this sense (e.g. Philippians 2.12). It was already used in the Roman world for the ceremonial arrival of, for example, the emperor at a subject city or colony. Although the ascended Lord is not 'absent' from the church, when he 'appears' (Colossians 3.4; 1 John 3.2) in his 'second coming' this will be, in effect, an 'arrival' like that of the emperor, and Paul uses it thus in 1 Corinthians 15.23; 1 Thessalonians 2.19; etc. In the **gospels** it is found only in Matthew 24 (w. 3, 27, 39).

Passover – see Exodus

Pharisees (legal experts, lawyers, rabbis)

The Pharisees were an unofficial but powerful Jewish pressure group through most of the first centuries BC and AD. Largely lay-led, though including some **priests**, their aim was to purify Israel through intensified observance of the Jewish law (**Torah**), developing their own traditions about the precise meaning and application of scripture, their own patterns of prayer and other devotion, and their own calculations of the national hope. Though not all legal experts were Pharisees, most Pharisees were thus legal experts.

They effected a democratization of Israel's **life**, since for them the study and practice of Torah was equivalent to worshipping in the **Temple** - though they were adamant in pressing their own rules for the **Temple** liturgy on an unwilling (and often **Sadducean**) priesthood. This enabled them to survive AD 70 and, merging into the early rabbinic movement, to develop new ways forward. Politically they stood up for ancestral traditions and were at the forefront of various movements of revolt against both pagan overlordship and compromised Jewish leaders. By Jesus' day there were two distinct schools, the stricter one of Shammai, more inclined towards armed revolt, and the more lenient one of Hillel, ready to live and let live.

Jesus' debates with the Pharisees are at least as much a matter of agenda and policy (Jesus strongly opposed their separatist nationalism) as about details of theology and piety. Saul of Tarsus was a fervent right-wing Pharisee, presumably a Shammaite, until his conversion.

After the disastrous war of AD 66-70, these schools of Hillel and Shammai continued bitter debate on appropriate policy. Following the further disaster of AD 135 (the failed Bar-Kochba revolt against Rome) their traditions were carried on by the rabbis who, though looking to the earlier Pharisees for inspiration, developed a Torah-piety in which personal holiness and purity took the place of political agendas.

Present age

present age, age to come, eternal life

By the time of Jesus many Jewish thinkers divided history into two periods: 'the present age' and 'the age to come' - the latter being the time when **YHWH** would at last act decisively to judge evil, to rescue Israel, and to create a new world of justice and peace. The early Christians believed that, though the full blessings of the coming age lay still in the future, it had already begun with Jesus, particularly with his death and **resurrection**, and that by **faith** and **baptism** they were able to enter it already. 'Eternal life' does not mean simply 'existence continuing without end', but 'the life of the age to come'.

Priests (Priests, high priest)

Aaron, the older brother of Moses, was appointed Israel's first high priest (Exodus 28-29), and in theory his descendants were Israel's priests thereafter. Other members of his tribe (Levi) were 'Levites', performing other liturgical duties but not sacrificing. Priests lived among the people all around the country, having a local teaching role (Leviticus 10.11; Malachi 2.7), and going to Jerusalem by rotation to perform the **Temple** liturgy (e.g. Luke 2.8).

David appointed Zadok (whose Aaronic ancestry is sometimes questioned) as high priest, and his family remained thereafter the senior priests in Jerusalem, probably the ancestors of the **Sadducees**. One explanation of the origins of the **Qumran** Essenes is that they were a dissident group who believed themselves to be the rightful chief priests.

Rabbis (Pharisees, legal experts, lawyers)

The Pharisees were an unofficial but powerful Jewish pressure group through most of the first centuries BC and AD. Largely lay-led, though including some **priests**, their aim was to purify Israel through intensified observance of the Jewish law (**Torah**), developing their own traditions about the precise meaning and application of scripture, their own patterns of prayer and other devotion, and their own calculations of the national hope. Though not all legal experts were Pharisees, most Pharisees were thus legal experts.

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Repentance

Literally, this means 'turning back'. It is widely used in the Old Testament and subsequent Jewish literature to indicate both a personal turning away from sin and Israel's corporate turning away from idolatry and back to **YHWH**. Through both meanings, it is linked to the idea of 'return from **exile**'; if Israel is to 'return' in all senses, it must 'return' to **YHWH**. This is at the heart of the summons of both **John the Baptist** and Jesus. In Paul's writings it is mostly used for **Gentiles** turning away from idols to serve the true God; also, for sinning Christians who need to return to Jesus.

Resurrection

In most biblical thought, human bodies matter and are not merely disposable prisons for the **soul**. When ancient Israelites wrestled with the goodness and justice of **YHWH**, the creator, they ultimately came to insist that he must raise the dead (Isaiah 26.19; Daniel 12.2-3) – a return from **exile** was also spoken of in terms of **YHWH** raising dry bones to new life (Ezekiel 37.1-14). These ideas were developed in the **second-Temple** period, not least at times of martyrdom (e.g. 2 Maccabees 7). Resurrection was not just 'life after death', but a newly embodied life *after* 'life after death'; those at present dead were either 'asleep', or seen as 'souls', 'angels' or 'spirits', awaiting new embodiment. The early Christian belief that Jesus had been raised from the dead was not that he had 'gone to **heaven**', or that he had been 'exalted', or was 'divine'; they believed all those as well, but each could have been expressed without mention of resurrection. Only the bodily resurrection of Jesus explains the rise of the early church, particularly its belief in Jesus' messiahship (which his crucifixion would have called into question). The early Christians believed that they themselves would be raised to a new, transformed bodily life at the time of the Lord's return or **parousia** (e.g. Philippians 3.20f.).

Sacrifice

Like all ancient people, the Israelites offered animal and vegetable sacrifices to their God. Unlike others, they possessed a highly detailed written code (mostly in Leviticus) for what to offer and how to offer it; this in turn was developed in the **Mishnah** (c. AD 200). The Old Testament specifies that sacrifices can only be offered in the Jerusalem Temple; after this was destroyed in AD 70, sacrifices ceased, and Judaism developed further the idea, already present in some teachings, of prayer, fasting and almsgiving as alternative forms of sacrifice. The early Christians used the language of sacrifice in connection with such things as holiness, evangelism and the **eucharist**.

Sadducees

By Jesus' day, the Sadducees were the aristocracy of Judaism, possibly tracing their origins to the family of Zadok, David's **high priest**. Based in Jerusalem, and including most of the leading priestly families, they had their own traditions and attempted to resist the pressure of the **Pharisees** to conform to theirs. They claimed to rely only on the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament), and denied any doctrine of a future life, particularly of the **resurrection** and other ideas associated with it, presumably because of the encouragement such beliefs gave to revolutionary movements. No writings from the Sadducees have survived, unless the apocryphal book of Ben Sirach ('Ecclesiasticus') comes from them. The Sadducees themselves did not survive the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in AD 70

Satan (the satan, 'the accuser', demons)

The Bible is never very precise about the identity of the figure known as 'the satan'. The Hebrew word means 'the accuser', and at times the satan seems to be a member of **YHWH's** heavenly council, with special responsibility as director of prosecutions (1 Chronicles 21.1; Job 1-2; Zechariah 3. 1f.). However, it becomes identified variously with the serpent of the garden of Eden (Genesis 3.1-15) and with the rebellious daystar cast out of **heaven** (Isaiah 14.12-15), and was seen by many Jews as the quasi-personal source of evil standing behind both human wickedness and large-scale injustice, sometimes operating through semi-independent 'demons'. By Jesus' time various words were used to denote this figure, including Beelzebul/b (lit. 'Lord of the flies') and simply 'the evil one'; Jesus warned his followers against the deceits this figure could perpetrate. His opponents accused him of being in league with the **satan**, but the early Christians believed that Jesus in fact defeated it both in his own struggles with temptation (Matthew 4; Luke 4), his exorcisms of demons, and his death (1 Corinthians 2.8; Colossians 2.15). Final victory over this ultimate enemy is thus assured (Revelation 20), though the struggle can still be fierce for Christians (Ephesians 6.10-20).

Son of God

Originally a title for Israel (Exodus 4.22) and the Davidic king (Psalm 2.7); also used of ancient angelic figures (Genesis 6.2). By the New Testament period it was already used as a **messianic** title, for example in the **Dead Sea Scrolls**. There, and when used of Jesus in the **gospels** (e.g. Matthew 16.16), it means, or reinforces, 'Messiah', without the later significance of 'divine'. However, already in Paul the transition to the fuller meaning (one who was already equal with God and was sent by him to become human and to become Messiah) is apparent, without loss of the meaning 'Messiah' itself (e.g. Galatians 4.4).

Soul (life, soul, spirit)

Ancient people held many different views about what made human beings the special creatures they are. Some, including many Jews, believed that to be complete, humans needed bodies as well as inner selves. Others, including many influenced by the philosophy of Plato (fourth century BC), believed that the important part of a human was the 'soul' (Greek: *psyche*), which at death would be happily freed from its bodily prison. Confusingly for us, the same word *psyche* is often used in the New Testament within a Jewish framework where it clearly means 'life' or 'true self', without implying a body/soul dualism that devalues the body. Human inwardness of experience and understanding can also be referred to as 'spirit'. See **also holy spirit, resurrection.**

Spirit (life, soul, spirit)

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Tabernacle

According to the Tanakh and Old Testament, the **tabernacle** (Hebrew: *מִשְׁכָּן*, *mishkan*, meaning "residence" or "dwelling place") was the portable dwelling (temple) of Yahweh (God) used by the children of Israel from the Exodus until the conquest of Canaan. It was constructed of woven layers of curtains and wood, and richly furnished with valuable materials taken from Egypt. Moses was instructed at Mount Sinai to construct and transport the tabernacle with the Israelites on their journey through the wilderness and their subsequent conquest of the Promised Land. After 440 years, Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem superseded it as the dwelling-place of God. (Wikipedia)

Temple

The Temple in Jerusalem was planned by David (c. 1000 BC) and built by his son Solomon as the central sanctuary for all Israel. After reforms under Hezekiah and Josiah in the seventh century BC, it was destroyed by Babylon in 587 BC. Rebuilding by the returned **exiles** began in 538 BC, and was completed in 516, initiating the 'second Temple period'. Judas Maccabaeus cleansed it in 164 BC after its desecration by Antiochus Epiphanes (167). Herod the Great began to rebuild and beautify it in 19 BC; the work was completed **in AD 63**. The Temple was destroyed by the Romans **in AD 70**. Many Jews believed it should and would be rebuilt; some still do. The Temple was not only the place of **sacrifice**; it was believed to be the unique dwelling of **YHWH** on earth, the place where **heaven** and earth met.

The Twelve (apostle, disciple, the Twelve)

'Apostle' means 'one who is sent'. It could be used of an ambassador or official delegate. In the New Testament it is sometimes used specifically of Jesus' inner circle of twelve; but Paul sees not only himself but several others outside the Twelve as 'apostles', the criterion being whether the person had personally seen the risen Jesus. Jesus' own choice of twelve close associates symbolized his plan to renew God's people, Israel; after the death of Judas Iscariot (Matthew 27.5; Acts 1.18) Matthias was chosen by lot to take his place, preserving the symbolic meaning. During Jesus' lifetime they, and many other followers, were seen as his 'disciples', which means 'pupils' or 'apprentices'.

Torah (Torah, Jewish law)

'Torah', narrowly conceived, consists of the first five books of the Old Testament, the 'five books of Moses' or 'Pentateuch'. (These contain much law, but also much narrative.) It can also be used for the whole Old Testament scriptures, though strictly these are the 'law, prophets and writings'. In a broader sense, it refers to the whole developing corpus of Jewish legal tradition, written and oral; the oral Torah was initially codified in the **Mishnah** around AD 200, with wider developments found in the two Talmuds, of Babylon and Jerusalem, codified around AD 400. Many Jews in the time of Jesus and Paul regarded the Torah as being so strongly God-given as to be almost itself, in some sense, divine; some (e.g. Ben Sirach 24) identified it with the figure of 'Wisdom'. Doing what Torah said was not seen as a means of earning God's favour, but rather of expressing gratitude, and as a key badge of Jewish identity.

YHWH

The ancient Israelite name for God, from at least the time of the **Exodus** (Exodus 6.2f.). It may originally have been pronounced 'Yahweh', but by the time of Jesus it was considered too holy to speak out loud, except for the **high priest** once a year in the Holy of Holies in the **Temple**. Instead, when reading scripture, pious Jews would say *Adonai*, 'Lord', marking this usage by adding the vowels of *Adonai* to the consonants of YHWH, eventually producing the hybrid 'Jehovah'. The word YHWH is formed from the verb 'to be', combining 'I am who I am', 'I will be who I will be', and perhaps 'I am because I am', emphasizing YHWH's sovereign creative power.

Endnotes

ⁱAdapted from Chaplain Mike (<http://www.internetmonk.com/archive/what-was-a-pharisee>) and Mike Aquilina <https://catholicexchange.com/saul-persecutor-paul-apostle>

ⁱⁱPaul and the Faithfulness of God. SPCK Publishing. 2013. ISBN-10: 0281055548
ISBN-13: 978-0281055548

ⁱⁱⁱHow Saul Became the Apostle Paul by Craig von Buseck
<http://www1.cbn.com/biblestudy/how-saul-became-the-apostle-paul>

^{iv}What St Paul Really Said: was Paul of Tarsus the real founder of Christianity? N T Wright
Forward Movement (July 1997) ISBN-10: 0880281812. ISBN-13: 978-0880281812

^vAdapted from N. T. Wright's Hermeneutic: Part 2 – The Historical Jesus
https://churchsociety.org/docs/churchman/117/Cman_117_3_Stewart.pdf

^{vi}This is recorded in our history in the a (4 Maccabees 17) where it's recorded that the Jewish martyrs who died under Antiochus in the early 2nd century BCE were a “. . . ransom for the sin of our nation,” and “the blood of those devout ones and their death [was] as an atoning sacrifice” (verses 21-22).

^{vii}Adapted from <https://catholicexchange.com/saul-persecutor-paul-apostle>
Saul the Persecutor, Paul the Apostle by Mike Aquilina

^{viii} Paul: At the Feet of Gamaliel? <https://readingacts.com/2011/09/07/paul-at-the-feet-of-gamaliel/>
Accessed: Date

^{ix}“The very mention of crucifixion was taboo in polite Roman circles, since it was the lowest form of capital punishment, reserved for slaves and rebels. As for the Jews, the very idea of a crucified Messiah was scandalous. A crucified Messiah was a horrible parody of the kingdom-dreams that many were cherishing. It immediately implied that Israel’s national hope was being radically redrawn downward.” N.T. Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began: Reconsidering the Meaning of Jesus's Crucifixion*

^xThe Apostles and Their Times. Mike Aquilina. Sophia Institute Press. ISBN 9781622824601

^{xi} Adapted from Paul, Arabia, and Elijah (Galatians 1:17) by N T Wright. (Originally published in *Journal of Biblical Literature* vol. 115, 683–692. Reproduced by permission of the author)

^{xii} All glossary items from New Testament for Everyone Series by N T Wright. Publisher: SPCK