INTRODUCTION

At the time of its origins, all of what we now call Christianity was Jewish Christianity. Jesus was a Jewish prophetic figure who looked for the restoration of Israel under the rule of God. All of his followers were Jews, and all of those who first proclaimed his resurrection and vindication as God’s Messiah were Jews. Their belief that Jesus, crucified and risen, was God’s promised Messiah distinguished them from their fellow Jews, but in all other respects they remained loyal Jews, worshipping at the temple according to the established Jewish pattern (Acts 3.1; see Falk 1995) and apparently faithful in their adherence to Torah (the Jewish Law). However, within a relatively short time, the message about Jesus the Messiah had begun to be shared with non-Jews, and there was diversity and disagreement about the extent to which Gentile (and Jewish [cf. Gal 2.14]) believers in Christ should adhere to the Jewish way of life, with all that that entailed (see Acts 15:1ff.). Paul, of course, looms large in such early and crucial debates (see e.g. Gal 2.11-21). The key question for this chapter is: What became of this essentially Jewish Christianity which characterised the whole Christian movement at its point of origin?

The terms ‘Jewish Christianity’, and ‘Jewish Christian’, not terms which ancient writers use, owe their prominence in contemporary discussion particularly to Ferdinand Christian Baur (1792-1860), the famous Tübingen scholar who argued that the development of early Christianity was to be understood fundamentally in terms of a conflict between Petrine Jewish Christianity and Pauline Gentile Christianity, two opposing wings which came together in the ‘synthesis’ of orthodox Roman Christianity. On this view, Jewish Christianity is that form of Christianity associated especially with Peter, James, and other Jerusalem
Christians, and often labelled, indeed denigrated, as ‘conservative’, ‘legalistic’, ‘exclusive’, etc. (see further Hill 1992). However, the question of how to define ‘Jewish Christianity’, and indeed whether it is a distinguishable phenomenon within early Christianity, remains a subject of ongoing debate.

**Defining Jewish Christianity: the scope of this chapter**

Three main definitions of Jewish Christianity have been proposed. One is an ethnic definition; that Jewish Christians are those Christians who are ethnically Jews, Jews who became Christians. However, such a broad definition does not ‘define’ anything meaningful at all, not least because of the great diversity of belief and practice among such ‘Jewish’ Christians (e.g. Peter, James and Paul!; cf. Taylor 1993: 20-21; Carleton Paget 1999: 04). A second definition focuses on theological characteristics. Such a definition undergirds, for example, the massive study by Jean Daniélou (1964), who regarded Jewish Christianity as a type of Christian thought which characterised the Church before what Daniélou called the ‘Hellenistic’ phase of the Church Fathers. In this way, in distinction to Hans-Joachim Schoeps (1964), who saw the (‘heterodox’) Ebionites (see below) as the classic expression of Jewish-Christian theology, Daniélou sought to show how a ‘Jewish’ form of theology undergirded the ‘Great Church’ — the ‘orthodox’ tradition — from the beginning. Of the many criticisms that may be brought against this approach perhaps the most telling is that, as with an ethnic definition, Daniélou’s ‘theological’ definition is too broad to be useful. If ‘Jewish Christianity’ is defined as that form of Christianity which reflects the thought-patterns and literary forms of Judaism then virtually all of early Christianity is surely included.⁵

For these and other reasons, most scholars now seem to prefer a broadly ‘praxis’-based definition of Jewish Christianity.⁶ In other words, ‘early Jewish Christianity’ designates
Jews who recognised Jesus as Messiah (and may or may not have acknowledged his pre-existence or divinity) but who continued to observe the Jewish Law (Mimouni 1992: 184). This definition itself is by no means clear or watertight, for there remains, for example, the issue as to the extent of Jewish practice necessary for someone to 'count' as a Jewish Christian (cf. Wilson 1995: 143; Carleton Paget 1999: 05-06). Nevertheless, it seems to offer the most meaningful and valuable definition of Jewish Christianity.

In this chapter, however, due to the scope assigned to it within this book, a somewhat wider view will be adopted which will enable us to track the diverse developments of the Jewish Christianity of the early Jerusalem community into the second century and beyond. There is certainly evidence, both within and outside the New Testament, of Jewish-Christian groups which did continue to follow a Jewish way of life while holding a Christian belief in Jesus as Messiah, though this evidence is sparse and often subject to considerable debate. Yet also important are the texts which reveal how essentially Jewish-Christian traditions came to be incorporated into the ‘mainstream’ of developing Christian orthodoxy, maintaining the ‘symbolic world’ of Jewish thought (and specifically of the Jewish scriptures) but abandoning Jewish praxis and even adopting an anti-Jewish posture. It is significant that the former of these routes — the genuinely Jewish-Christian tradition, according to a praxis-based definition — is one which, for reasons we shall explore and seek to explain below, was sidelined and eventually extinguished in the post 70CE developments in Christianity and Judaism. Much of the important evidence for such Jewish-Christian groups derives from the writings of various anti-heretical writers of the second to fourth centuries, who record important information about the beliefs and practices of the members of these groups, and preserve extracts from their gospels (i.e. the so-called gospels of the Ebionites, of the Nazarenes, and according to the Hebrews). The latter route — the symbolic but non-praxis
route — is evidenced in New Testament texts such as 1 and 2 Peter and Hebrews, and in non-canonical writings such as the Didache and the letter of Barnabas.10

FROM THE FIRST EASTER TO THE FALL OF JERUSALEM (70CE)

Our main source concerning the life of the very earliest church is Acts, written probably some 50 years or so after the events it describes in its opening chapters. Because of this time gap, and the apparent tendencies and interests of the writer (known as Luke, also the author of the gospel by that name), its evidence must be used with some circumspection; indeed its portrait of the earliest community in Jerusalem and its success is undoubtedly somewhat idealised. Nevertheless, the picture of a group of Jews, led by a circle known as apostles, continuing to live and worship as Jews while proclaiming their faith in the risen Messiah Jesus, seems essentially accurate (see Acts 2:42–3:1).11 The apparent unanimity of the community, however, evidently came under some threat due to the tensions between those Luke calls the ‘Hebrews’ and the ‘Hellenists’ — most likely Aramaic-speaking Jews from Palestine and Greek-speaking Jews from the Diaspora respectively (Acts 6:1-6; see Hengel 1983:4-11; Hill 1992: 22-24). It is also clear that after this tension had emerged, and after persecution had driven some of the believers from Jerusalem, the message about Jesus began to be shared with non-Jews, notably in Antioch (Acts 11:20). The dominant view in current scholarship is that the tension between the Hebrews and the Hellenists was theologically significant; that Stephen and the others mentioned in Acts 6:5 were leaders of the Hellenist group, in which there developed a theology more critical of law and temple than that held by the Hebrews; that it was the Hellenists particularly who were persecuted and driven from Jerusalem; and that it was the Hellenists who were primarily responsible for taking the gospel to non-Jews, and not requiring from Gentile converts full adherence to Jewish law (see Hengel 1983: 1-29, 53-58; Wedderburn 1989). On this view, the basic division between Petrine Jewish
Christianity and Pauline Gentile Christianity is already present *in nuce* in the earliest divisions within the Jerusalem community. However, Craig Hill (1992; 1996) has argued that the evidence cannot sustain such a neat ideological compartmentalisation of the two major wings of the earliest church. Instead he sees considerable diversity and plurality among both Hebrews and Hellenists in the Jerusalem church.

While there may be more significance in the division between Hebrews and Hellenists than Hill allows, his warnings against the often pejorative labelling of the ‘Hebrew’ grouping as representing *en bloc* a ‘conservative’, ‘legalistic’ Jewish Christianity based in Jerusalem are important. There was indeed considerable diversity among the earliest Jewish Christians, not least in regard to the questions concerning the relationship between Jewish and Gentile Christians, and the behaviour required of the latter.

Disagreement over this issue, and specifically over the question as to whether Gentile converts should be circumcised, led to a ‘conference’ in Jerusalem, known as the ‘Apostolic Council’ (Acts 15:1-29; Gal. 2:1-10), held sometime probably between 47 and 51CE. Specifically, according to Luke, some of the Jewish Christians from Judea had arrived in Antioch propagating the view that Gentile converts must be circumcised, in opposition to the policy established there that Gentiles need not become Jews (Acts 15:1; cf. Gal. 2:3-4). The meeting in Jerusalem was arranged in order to try and resolve the resulting dissension and disagreement. Paul and Barnabas were the most prominent representatives of the Antioch church at this conference, spokespersons for the view that Gentile converts must not be compelled to ‘judaize’ (cf. Gal. 2:14). Peter and James, named by Paul along with John as the ‘pillars’ of the Jerusalem church (Gal. 2:9), were also prominent voices in the debate (James, the brother of Jesus, had by now become probably the dominant leader of the Jerusalem church; see Bauckham 1995: 427-50).
James in particular, according to Acts, was prominent in proposing a settlement that did not require full conversion to Judaism from Gentile believers (and did not require their circumcision), but which laid down certain legal prescriptions for them (the so-called ‘Apostolic Decree’): abstention from food offered to idols, from sexual immorality, from what has been strangled and from blood (Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25). Richard Bauckham argues that these regulations are based on those set down for ‘aliens’ living among the Jews in Leviticus 17–18 (Bauckham 1995: 452-62). Paul’s own account of the conference in Gal. 2:1-10 also records that circumcision was not imposed as a requirement, and that Paul’s mission to the Gentiles was apparently recognised as valid. However, Paul makes no mention of the Apostolic Decree as such, and considerable doubt has been raised as to whether or not Paul would have accepted it, had it been proposed at the meeting.

Whatever was or was not agreed in Jerusalem, it does not seem to have succeeded in ending the disagreement and conflict. The so-called ‘incident at Antioch’, reported by Paul (Gal. 2:11-21; on which see Dunn 1990: 129-82), was particularly significant. The church at Antioch had clearly established the practice whereby both Jews and Gentiles ate together in the fellowship meals of the community, without the Gentile believers having become Jews or following Jewish food laws. Peter, Paul and Barnabas all participated in this ‘mixed’ fellowship, until ‘certain people from James’ arrived, whereafter Peter, the other Jews, and even Barnabas (Paul’s missionary companion) withdrew (Gal. 2:12-13). While there remains much discussion as to precisely what the criticism of the people from James was, it seems clear that table-fellowship of Jews and Gentiles was regarded by them as unacceptable, unless the Gentiles adopted certain Jewish customs (no doubt regarding food; Gal. 2:12, 14).

Diversity among those regarded as representatives of earliest Jewish Christianity, then, is apparent. Peter, it seems, while remaining a Jew with a mission to the Jews (Gal. 2:7), was prepared to join in fellowship with Gentiles who did not follow Jewish food-laws nor
convert to Judaism, though he wavered in this view under pressure.\(^\text{17}\) James was more insistent on the need for Gentiles to adopt certain requirements regarding food — probably those set down in Jewish law for non-Jewish resident aliens (cf. Lev. 17–18; note 13 above). However, it is not evident that he urged circumcision on the Gentiles; indeed the evidence of Acts and Galatians suggests that he did not (cf. Bauckham 1995: 450-80).\(^\text{18}\) Some Jewish Christians at the time, however, did insist that circumcision was necessary for all who would be members of God’s people. Not only do both Luke’s and Paul’s accounts of the Apostolic Conference make this clear (Acts 15:1; Gal. 2:3), but the conflict in Galatia which brings forth such heated polemic from Paul (e.g. Gal. 1:7-9; 3:1-5; 5:12) is evidently focused on that particular issue (Gal. 5:2-12; 6:12-15). Paul labels the proponents of such a view pseudadelphoi, ‘false believers’ (NRSV; Gal. 2:4), and finds himself opposing their judaizing message elsewhere too (2 Cor 11:13, 22; Phil. 3:2-7).\(^\text{19}\) Among the early Jewish Christians, then, that is, among those Jews who believed in Jesus as Messiah but continued to practise a Jewish way of life in obedience to the law, there was diversity concerning what was required of Gentile converts. The Decree which James seems to have promoted represents something of a middle way between those who saw no need for Gentiles to adopt any of the marks of Jewish identity (Paul, and perhaps Peter — hesitantly), and those who argued for their full conversion to Judaism, with the attendant markers of circumcision, sabbath observance and food regulations (cf. Dunn 1990: 191-95).

**The death of James and the flight to Pella**

In 62CE, Josephus records, James, the brother of Jesus and leader of the Jerusalem church, was executed (Ant. 20.200). Peter and Paul each met a similar fate, not many years later (between 64 and 67CE). As we shall see below, James’s considerable and continuing influence may be seen in the literature associated with his name, and the reverence with
which he was regarded, especially, though by no means exclusively, in Jewish-Christian circles (see also Martin 1988: xli-lxi; Laws 1980: 41-42).

An important, if scarcely documented, moment in the history of early Jewish Christianity probably followed shortly after the death of James. According to Eusebius (HE 3.5.3), just before the beginning of the Jewish revolt against Rome in 66CE, Christians in Jerusalem were warned in an oracle to leave Jerusalem and go to Pella in the Decapolis (see map). While some scholars have disputed the historicity of this tradition (e.g. Lüdemann 1989: 200-13), on balance it seems that it should be cautiously accepted (see Pritz 1988: 122-27; Wilson 1995: 145-48; Carleton Paget 1999: 20-21). If this right, then this geographical ‘flight’ would likely provide the point of continuity between the earliest Jewish Christianity, based in Jerusalem, and the later Jewish-Christian sects, a number of which are located in Transjordania and Syria by the anti-heretical writers who discuss them (cf. Pritz 1988: 108, 120-21; Carleton Paget 1999: 21-22).

However, in spite of the Jewish War of 66-74CE, a Jewish-Christian presence in Palestine seems also to have continued, or perhaps to have recommenced due to return to the region after the war. Eusebius recounts the appointment of James’s successor as ‘bishop’ (HE 3.11; 4.22.4) and lists the ‘bishops’ of Jerusalem after James until the Bar Kochba Revolt (HE 4.5.1-5; see Bauckham 1990: 70-79). He also refers to Africanus’ account of Christian missionary activity in Galilee carried out by relatives of Jesus (HE 1.7.14; Bauckham 1990: 60-70).

FROM THE FALL OF JERUSALEM TO THE BAR KOCHBA REVOLT (132-135CE)

The Jewish War of 66-74CE was of considerable significance for the development of both Judaism and Christianity (cf. fig.1). Before 70CE Judaism was characterised by diverse groups with varied beliefs and practices, and what we now call Christianity was essentially a
messianic sect within that plural matrix (see e.g. Rowland 1985: 65-80; Neusner 1984a). Even though Paul had played a large part, theologically speaking, in creating a notion of Christian identity which would eventually undergird Christianity’s existence as a separate religion, before 70 this separation had hardly begun to take place, at least in Jewish-Christian circles (even Paul, after all, though regarded as a dangerous apostate by his fellow Jews, remained under the auspices of the synagogue and endured its discipline on a number of occasions; 2 Cor. 11:24). After 70CE, however, tensions between Christians and Jews increased, polemical exchanges became increasingly evident, and, from the late first century onwards, both ‘religions’ began, slowly, to develop a coherent ‘orthodox’ power-base, from which ‘deviant’ groups were expelled and excluded.

It is from this period of history that a number of texts important for the study of Jewish Christianity come, though there is debate about the dating of many of them, as we shall see.

**Jewish-Christian texts of the late first century**

As the discussions of definition and scope above will have revealed, ascertaining which texts should ‘count’ as Jewish-Christian is not entirely straightforward. Nevertheless, on the basis of the definition that Jewish Christians are Jews who believe in Jesus as Messiah but continue to live as Jews, upholding the Jewish law, there are certain New Testament texts which seem to bear witness to this form of early Christianity. Brief comments will also be made concerning the non-canonical text known as the Didache.

**The Letter of James**

Since most scholars agree that the James who is named as the author of the letter of James (Jas 1:1) is James the brother of Jesus and leader of the Jerusalem church, this letter is an obvious place to turn for an example of early Jewish-Christian teaching. The majority of
scholars do not think that James himself wrote the letter, at least not in its final form, and date it somewhat later than the lifetime of James (c.75-100CE). Nevertheless, its characteristics and teaching indicate a Jewish-Christian tradition which may well be connected with James. While the letter is clearly a Christian writing (1:1; 2:1), and exhibits many parallels with gospel traditions in Q and Matthew (see Hartin 1991; Martin 1988: lxxv-lxxvi), it is addressed in a thoroughly Jewish way to ‘the twelve tribes of the Diaspora’ (1:1) and has very little explicitly or exclusively Christian theology. More prominent, along with its evident concern for the poor and criticism of the rich (1:9-11; 2:1-7; 5:1-6), is its concern for ‘wisdom’ (1:5; 3:13-17) — a strongly Jewish tradition — and its high regard for the law and its fulfilment, especially in opposition to any view which suggests that faith does away with the need for works (1:25; 2:8-26; 4:11-12). The law is described as ‘the royal law’ (2:8), ‘the law of liberty’ (1:25; 2:12). The heart of the law is located in Lev. 19:18: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself’, yet the whole law is to be fulfilled (2:8-11; cf. Gal 3:10); there is no hint that its ‘ritual’ or ‘ceremonial’ demands, including circumcision etc., are no longer in force. Indeed the structure and content of the argument in Jas 2:14-26, compared with Rom. 3:27-4:22 (see Dunn 1988: 197), suggests that this teaching is directed against Paul, or, rather, against a developed or distorted version of Paul’s teaching (cf. Chester 1994: 46-53; Wilson 1995: 154). While Paul always insisted that his gospel was not a licence to sin (Rom. 3:8; 6:1ff.; Gal. 5:13f.), his emphasis on freedom, on no longer being ‘under the law’ (Rom. 6:14-15; 1 Cor 9:20; Gal. 5:18), and on justification coming by faith and not through the ‘works of the law’ (Rom. 3:20, 28; Gal. 2:16 etc.) could and did lead to the accusation that Paul abandoned the law and its demands, and taught others to do the same (Rom. 3:8; Acts 21:18-22). Opposition to Paul in some forms of Jewish Christianity certainly continued long after Paul’s death (see below on the Ebionites and Jacobites; further Lüdemann 1989).
The Letter of Jude

Like the letter of James, the letter of Jude is written in the name of one of Jesus’s brothers, not identified directly as such, but as ‘brother of James’ (Jude 1; see Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3). With this ascribed authorship it is an obvious source for early Jewish Christianity. Most scholars, however, do not think that Jude himself wrote the letter, and many date it after the Jewish War (see Bauckham 1988: 3812-19). A date between 75-90 seems most likely. Nevertheless, the letter does reveal a thoroughly Jewish background. It is clearly a Christian letter (Jude 1; 4; 17-25) but much of it is taken up with an attack on intruding ‘heretics’, who are clearly a reality and a perceived danger at the time when the author writes. This major section of the letter (Jude 5-16) uses scriptural types and texts to demonstrate that the false teachers of the present are precisely those whose existence and doom is foretold in scripture. Not only are the Jewish scriptures the basic source from which the writer builds his argument, but other Jewish writings and traditions (1 Enoch; The Testament of Moses) are echoed or quoted in the midrashic exegetical tapestry which Jude creates (see Bauckham 1988: 3800-804; 1990: 179-234). The letter appears to reflect a Palestinian-Jewish apocalyptic worldview (see Rowston 1975: 561-61; Bauckham 1983: 8-11; Charles 1993: 42-47).

It must also be pointed out, however, that Jude does not explicitly refer to the Jewish law, nor does it give any indication that it is addressed exclusively to Jewish Christians. Indeed, Jude’s admonitions to ‘contend for the faith that was once and for all entrusted to the saints’ (v.3; cf. v.20) and to ‘remember the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ’ (v.17) seem to indicate not only a date sometime after the first generation of Christians have died but also that Jude was written to defend a developing ‘apostolic’ orthodoxy against perceived threats from ‘heretics’ (cf. Wisse 1972). It is not entirely clear, then, whether we should regard Jude as a document of early Jewish Christianity, or whether it
reflects a time when Jewish apocalyptic exegesis is being taken up into the symbolic order of a developing Christian orthodoxy (see further below on 2 Peter).

**The Gospel of Matthew**

The Gospel of Matthew (cf. fig. 2), probably written around 80-90CE, has long been recognised as the most Jewish of the canonical gospels and it is no surprise that the Matthean traditions are most prominent among the gospel traditions preserved and used by those groups later regarded as ‘heretical’ Jewish-Christian sects (see below). Matthew’s is the gospel which most clearly seeks to demonstrate that Jesus is the fulfilment of the promises of the Jewish scriptures (Matt. 1:22; 2:15; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4) and seems to portray Jesus, in some ways, as a new Moses (Allison 1993). Especially relevant is the Matthean stress on the need for fulfilment of the law (5:17-20; unique to Matthew): believers in Jesus are not to abandon any parts of the law; on the contrary, they are to fulfil it perfectly, in intention as well as action.\(^24\) Also revealing in this regard is the observation that Matthean redaction of certain Markan passages evidences ‘a tendency to play down Jesus’ potentially critical remarks or actions in the Markan account, or at least seek to justify them halakhically’.\(^25\) Matthew’s Jesus is also notable for his explicit restriction of the mission to the Jewish people only (Matt. 10:5-6; 15:24).

All of this would seem to indicate a gospel written primarily for Jewish Christians who, while accepting Jesus as Messiah and Lord, continue to observe, and indeed are especially concerned in every respect to fulfil, the Jewish law. However, other factors must also be taken into account. One such factor is that counterbalancing the Matthean references to a mission restricted to Jews alone are the places where the good news is proclaimed to be for the whole world and not just for the Jewish people (28:19-20; and already hinted at in 2:1-2; 8:11-12). Another prominent feature of Matthew is its sharp polemic against the scribes
and Pharisees, most notably in chapter 23 (see Stanton 1992: 146-68; Wilson 1995: 46-56; note also 27:25). Can a gospel be both Jewish and anti-Jewish, both exclusive and universal in its understanding of mission? It may be that the final form of Matthew’s gospel reflects a time when more exclusive Jewish-Christian traditions had been brought together with those favouring the Gentile mission, such that Matthew represents something of a reconciling of viewpoints (cf. Jones 1994: xvii-xxii). The sharply anti-Jewish — or rather, anti-Pharisaic — polemic of Matthew 23 is entirely comprehensible in terms of a situation of intense argument and power struggle between close relations, each of whom believes the other to be fundamentally wrong in the claim they are making (cf. Stanton 1992: 146-68; Wilson 1995: 46-56). After the war of 66-74CE the Pharisaic-rabbinic group gradually emerged as the strongest within Judaism, and, from the academy at Jamnia (Yavneh) in the post-war years, began to demonstrate its concern to formalise ‘orthodox’ Jewish belief and practice in what emerges as rabbinic Judaism. The Christian groups represented a deviant threat. For the Jewish Christians, however, whom Matthew represents, the Pharisees represented the wrong way forward for Judaism, and so they are derided as hypocrites. Jesus is the one through whom God has fulfilled the promises of scripture. There was a power struggle, then, over who offered the right way forward, who had the integrity to demonstrate the correct way to interpret and fulfil the law. For the Jewish Christians the answer was Jesus; for the leading circles of rabbinic Judaism, it was the Pharisees/rabbis.

The Didache

Similarities between the Gospel of Matthew and the Didache have often been noted (see Did. 1.3-5; 8.2). These similarities may well reflect the Didache’s origin in the same locale as Matthew: Syria, perhaps more specifically Antioch (cf. Brown and Maier 1983). It is generally dated to the late first or very early second century. The Didache begins by outlining
'two ways': one of righteousness and life, the other of wickedness and death (Did. 1.1-6.1). A similar pattern of teaching is found in the epistle of Barnabas (18–20; see below), and almost certainly stems originally from Jewish sources (cf. 1QS 3.20-21; Carleton Paget 1994: 80-82). Of particular interest, however, are other parts of the Didache, which may reflect a Jewish-Christian ethos quite similar to that of the Matthean community. Nowhere in the document is any rejection of the Jewish law suggested, although some flexibility seems to be allowed: in 6.2-3, adherence to Jewish legal regulations appears to be encouraged, though anyone who cannot bear ‘the full yoke’ is urged to ‘do what they can’. The specific example of food regulations is then cited, with the comment that flexibility in this regard stops short of eating food that has been offered to idols. That is firmly prohibited. In other places, the Didache reflects the Christian adoption of Jewish practices (e.g. fasting, praying three times a day, and perhaps the form of baptism) along with a clear concern to differentiate Christian from Jewish behaviour. This concern is most obvious in regard to fasting, where, in order to distinguish themselves from ‘the hypocrites’ (the Jews; note the similarities to Matthew’s language here), the Christians are urged to fast on different days of the week (Did. 8.1; cf. also 8.2-3). An essentially Jewish-Christian form of faith and conduct seems to be evident here, with the distinction from Jewish practice being made not in the rejection of obedience to the law or Jewish tradition, but in varying the form of practice in order to be different.

Claiming the Jewish Heritage: a symbolic route for Jewish Christianity

So far we have considered some mainly New Testament texts which seem to reflect a truly Jewish-Christian stance: acceptance of Jesus as Messiah by Jews, but continued and whole-hearted adherence to the practice of their law. In the Gospel of Matthew, however, we have seen, alongside this Jewish-Christian stance which affirms the practice of the Jewish
law, harsh polemic against the leaders of the Jewish community, the Pharisees (and, implicitly, their heirs, the emerging leaders of rabbinic Judaism).

Other texts, both canonical and non-canonical, sometimes classified as Jewish-Christian, depending on the definition adopted, bring a clearly Jewish-Christian heritage into what develops as ‘orthodox’ Christianity, comprising largely Gentile members and in which the Jewish law is not observed fully, i.e. in its ritual and ceremonial aspects, which serve to create and affirm Jewish identity. In some of these texts there is also polemic, more or less explicit, against the actual practice of Judaism.

1 and 2 Peter

For F.C. Baur and those who have followed his interpretation of the division within early Christianity (see above), Peter is the most prominent leading figure in the Jewish-Christian wing of the church. Texts bearing Peter’s name, therefore, merit our attention. In fact, as with the letters of James and Jude, most scholars do not regard Peter as the author of the two New Testament letters which bear his name (in the case of 2 Peter, this judgment is virtually unanimous). 1 Peter most likely dates from around 75-95CE, while 2 Peter is somewhat later, from the late first or early second-century.28

In the context of the present discussion, one of the most striking features of 1 Peter is the thoroughly Jewish way in which it describes the identity of those to whom it is sent. Among the writings of the New Testament it is one of the most saturated with citations from and allusions to the Jewish scriptures. 1 Pet. 2:4-10 in particular is full of scriptural citations and imagery: ‘you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people claimed by God for his own’ (2:9, etc.). The ‘Jewish’ character of 1 Peter is such that Eusebius, writing in the late third or early fourth century, took it to be a letter addressed specifically to ‘the Hebrews’, i.e. Jews (HE 3.1.2; 3.4.2). In fact, the addressees of 1 Peter are almost certainly
exclusively, or primarily, Gentile believers (see 1:14, 18; 2:10; 3:6; 4:3-4). Thus, in 1 Peter, thoroughly and definitively Jewish self-designations are taken over and claimed by the church, applied to Gentile believers without any indication being given that another religious community also lays claim to these traditions (the lack of any such acknowledgment makes Peter’s own authorship of the epistle unlikely, along with the other factors taken to indicate pseudonymity). There is no explicit anti-Jewish polemic here, but there is at least an implicit supersessionism: the Christian church has simply taken over, ‘without remainder’ (Achtemeier) the status and identity of Israel (see Achtemeier 1996: 69-72; Richardson 1969: 171-75).

Also absent from 1 Peter is any positive reference to the upholding of the Jewish law, such as we found in James and Matthew. Certainly the believers are frequently urged to live a good and holy life, based on the scriptural assertion that God is holy (1 Pet. 1:15). But there are no grounds on which to argue that this letter reflects a Jewish-Christian stance with regard to Jewish practice. The disputes about the basis on which Jewish and Gentile believers are to share fellowship together, and the regulations which are incumbent upon the latter, seem not to be a pressing concern.

Alongside the ‘Jewish’ character of 1 Peter, one must also note the letter’s indebtedness to various strands of early Christian tradition: gospel sayings, credal formulae, Pauline theology. Indeed, 1 Peter, clearly written from Rome (5:13), represents something of what Baur saw as the synthesis of Jewish and Gentile Christianity in Rome. Not only is there a weaving together of traditions from various strands of early Christianity, but, especially notable here, there is also a detaching of the symbolic order of Judaism from Jewish practice. In other words, 1 Peter claims a definitively Jewish identity for a body of people who do not live as Jews. Such a strategy is, of course, not unique to 1 Peter. Paul’s claim that the true children of Abraham are those who have faith in Christ, and not those who are circumcised
and obey the law (Gal. 3:6-4:31; Rom. 4:1ff.), is a decisive theological step in just such a
direction. But perhaps 1 Peter, associated as it is with the name of Peter and with circles who
honoured him, also represents an important milestone along the route whereby some
traditions of Jewish Christianity were embraced and valued within the symbolic order of
developing orthodox Christianity. That Rome was an important location for such a
development will be seen from the other documents which evidence a similar trajectory (see
below).

If some may be inclined to doubt that 1 Peter represents a reconciling of Petrine and
Pauline viewpoints, an interweaving of various strands of Christian tradition, surely 2 Peter
provides an even clearer example. While clearly aware of a previous letter written in Peter’s
name, the author of 2 Peter can hardly be the same person who wrote 1 Peter, though the
letter most probably originates in the same geographical location, Rome. One of the most
obvious literary features of 2 Peter is that it takes up and adapts much of the material from
Jude 4-18 in its own polemic against false teachers (2 Pet. 2:1-3:3; see table in Horrell 1998:
141). Thus the Palestinian-Jewish style of exegesis which Jude employed to identify the
intruders as the very people predicted and consigned to doom in scripture is taken up into a
later writing of Roman Christianity. Moreover, 2 Peter makes clear and explicit use of Gospel
tradition (1:17-18) and, significantly, makes positive reference to ‘our beloved brother Paul’
and his letters, which are clearly being valued as scripture (3:15-16). Hence, while associated
with the name of Peter (even using a more Jewish form of his name: Simeon Peter [1:1]) and
incorporating what may be termed Jewish-Christian materials (from Jude), 2 Peter is not a
document of Jewish Christianity in the sense in which we have defined Jewish Christianity.
Rather, like 1 Peter, it represents the nascent Christian orthodoxy of Rome, into which the
symbolic world of Jewish Christianity has been incorporated. Similar comments could be
made, though space does not permit discussion, regarding 1 Clement and the Shepherd of Hermas (cf. Daniélou 1964: 36-39; 43-45).

Hebrews

Another New Testament writing often attributed to the Roman church (cf. Heb. 13:24; Lindars 1991: 17-18) and dated somewhere between 60 and 100CE (Attridge 1989: 9), is the so-called letter to the Hebrews. It is not clear from the letter whether its addressees are Jewish Christians, Gentile Christians, or a mixed community (Attridge 1989: 10-13). It is certainly the case that the letter is concerned to bolster the faith and commitment of Christians who are tempted to lapse in their faith and abandon their meetings together in the face of a degree of hostility and oppression (Heb. 6:1-12; 10:23-25; 10:32–12:13 etc., note 12:4). These Christians may perhaps have been Jewish Christians tempted to return to the faith and practice of Judaism, or Gentiles tempted to proselytise (there is certainly evidence that such a turning to Judaism was sometimes an attraction to Gentile Christian converts: Gal. 3:1-3; 5:1-12; Justin, Dial 47; see Wilson 1995: 159-67; Hvalvik 1996). What is absolutely clear is that the letter itself is full of quotations and imagery from the Jewish scriptures but that its overriding concern is to show how Christianity is superior to Judaism. Christianity is the perfect and real fulfilment of the imperfect shadow which preceded it. Christ is superior to prophets and angels (Heb. 1:1ff), to Moses (3:3), and to the levitical priesthood (4:14–10:25). The Jewish law and cultic system are only a shadow of the reality that has come in Christ; they can never produce true perfection and forgiveness (10:1). Christ is the mediator of a ‘new covenant’, which has rendered the old one ‘obsolete’ (8:13; cf. 10:29; 12:24); the Jewish cult and the Jewish way of life (13:9) are no longer to be practised. Hebrews, then, is a classic example of a presentation of the Christian faith in thoroughly Jewish terms: Christ’s person and achievement are explained in terms drawn from the Jewish scriptures and
specifically from the Jewish cult (his blood shed, etc.: see 9:1-28), yet at the same time this functions as a claim that Christianity has superseded Judaism. The earthly realities of the Jewish cult find their fulfilment in the spiritual, heavenly cult in which Christ is both high priest and sacrificial offering. Once more, the symbolic ‘world’ of Judaism is wholeheartedly adopted by a Christianity in which the actual practice of Judaism is rejected. The concrete practices of Judaism, especially in its cult and law, are seen as crude and imperfect precursors of the heavenly reality now accessible through Christ.

The Letter of Barnabas

A not dissimilar supersessionist agenda is evident in the so-called Epistle of Barnabas, which probably dates from the very end of the first century and comes from Alexandria, Egypt. Like Hebrews, a major concern of Barnabas is to demonstrate that the true fulfilment of God’s covenant, promises, and salvation, is found in Christ and not in the practice of Judaism. This concern almost certainly reflects the real ‘risk’ of some Christians being attracted to Judaism (Barn. 3.6; see Horbury 1998: 133-40; Hvalvik 1996), perhaps particularly in view of the possibility of the temple being rebuilt (cf. Barn. 16.4), though whether such people were Jewish Christians or judaizing Gentiles is not entirely clear. Where Barnabas goes further than Hebrews is in claiming that the Jews, in a sense, never were the covenant people (cf. Barn. 4.6-8; 14.1-4): because of their sinfulness, they misunderstood the teachings of Moses and falsely believed that regulations concerning food, circumcision and sabbath observance were meant to be taken literally. In fact, Barnabas claims, they never were meant to be taken in this way, but they symbolize moral and spiritual teachings (Barn. 9.1-10.12; 15.1-9). Similarly, the sacrificial cult, the deeds of Moses, and so on, typologically refer to the achievements of Christ (7.1-8.7; 12.1-11). Even the Temple was not meant to be a
physical building (16.1-2): the true temple is the Christian community, in which God really
dwells (16.8).

In both Barnabas and Hebrews, then, we see a Christianity determined to claim the
Jewish heritage exclusively for itself, a Christianity which claims the symbolic world of
Judaism as its own, but rejects the particular practices which Judaism had made central. The
motivation for this denigration of Judaism and of Jewish practice is at least in part the
attraction of Judaism to significant numbers of Christian converts, whether originally Jewish
or Gentile, and whether or not there was specifically ‘missionary’ activity on the part of the
Jews. In one sense, therefore, such early Christian documents, rich as they are in Jewish
tradition, are clearly Jewish in character; in another, they are anti-Jewish. Certainly they reject
the idea of continuing to live as Jews, following Jewish practice. Thus, on a praxis-based
definition, they do not represent early Jewish Christianity.

**Increasing conflict: the birkat ha-minim and the Bar Kochba revolt**

If the texts examined immediately above show something of how the developing
Christian orthodoxy claimed its Jewish heritage while at the same time opposing the practice
of Judaism and thus rejecting the legitimacy of the Jewish-Christian stance, then it is also
significant to consider the ways in which Jewish Christians may have come to be
marginalised from the Jewish side too. In the aftermath of the war of 66-74CE the leading
circles of Pharisaic rabbis who gathered at Jamnia (see map) in the school founded by Rabbi
Johanan ben Zakkai (see Schäfer 1979; Jagersma 1985: 151) sought over time to promote and
establish a form of Jewish (rabbinic) orthodoxy, such that various forms of Jewish
sectarianism, including, but not only, Jewish Christianity, were gradually excluded from what
some scholars call ‘normative’ Judaism (see above, with notes 26-27).
An important moment in the history of this developing orthodoxy is marked by the introduction into synagogue liturgy of the so-called birkat ha-minim (the benediction concerning the heretics), the twelfth of the Eighteen Benedictions. There is considerable debate concerning the original form of this twelfth benediction, to whom it referred, and when it was introduced. However, it does seem most likely that some form of curse against heretics was introduced towards the end of the first century (as the Babylonian Talmud records; van der Horst 1994: 99). Its main purpose was probably to strengthen Jewish unity, the lack of which had proven so disastrous in the war against Rome of 66-74CE. Thus the target of its attack was not specifically or exclusively Christians, but it is most likely that Jewish Christians, and possibly Christians generally, were included among those cursed as minim, heretics (see Alexander 1992: 8-9; van der Horst 1994). Since the ground-breaking work of J.L. Martyn (1968), the Gospel of John has generally been seen as clear New Testament evidence for this effective exclusion of Christians from the synagogues (see John 9:22; 12:42; 16:2), while Justin Martyr provides the strongest second-century evidence for such practice (see Horbury 1998: 72, 102-108; and below). Also central to the twelfth benediction in which heretics were cursed is the prayer that the ‘insolent kingdom’ (i.e. Rome) may ‘be quickly uprooted, in our days’ (see van der Horst 1994: 99). Along with strengthening unity and uniformity within Judaism, then, the prayer also expresses Jewish hopes for the rapid downfall of Rome. These hopes seemed as though they might be realised when the Jewish leader Simon ben Kosiba emerged and was hailed by many as Messiah (he came to be called Bar Kochba, ‘son of the star’; cf. Num 24.17). Not only would Jewish Christians living in Palestine have been naturally reluctant to hail anyone other than Jesus as Messiah, but they would probably have been reluctant to support the nationalistic fervour which culminated in the second Jewish revolt against Rome in 132CE. According to Justin Martyr (1 Apol. 31.6), in the Jewish revolt, Bar Kochba ordered that
Christians be severely punished, unless they denied the Messiahship of Jesus (see Bauckham 1998: 228, who argues that this scenario is reflected in the Apocalypse of Peter, which he regards as a Palestinian Jewish-Christian work written during the Bar Kochba revolt). With Jewish Christians cursed as heretics in synagogue worship, and failing to support the Jewish revolt against Rome, their exclusion from the religious community of Israel was doubly confirmed (see Bauckham 1998; Alexander 1992: 22).

JEWS-CHRISTIAN GROUPS IN THE SECOND CENTURY AND BEYOND

Despite their increasing marginalisation from both the emerging Christian and Jewish orthodoxies, Jewish-Christian groups continued to exist at least until the fourth century (see fig. 3). The evidence for these groups and their beliefs and practices is unfortunately sparse, stemming from sources which are not uncontroversial. Apart from the slender archaeological evidence (see Taylor 1993), there are the accounts in the church fathers, for whom the Jewish Christians are heretics, and the Jewish-Christian writings believed to be embedded in later texts such as Epiphanius’ Panarion and the Pseudoclementine Homilies and Recognitions (Wilson 1995: 143-44). Nevertheless, there is sufficient evidence to enable us to say something about the distinctive emphases of some of these groups, to deduce that they were in existence in the second century as well as later, and, equally importantly, to infer some continuity between them and the varieties of Jewish Christianity reflected in the New Testament.

The evidence of Justin Martyr

Important evidence concerning the existence of Jewish Christians in the latter half of the second century and their difficult relationship with the Church is found in Justin Martyr’s Dialogue with Trypho (written c.160CE). Justin’s (fictional?) dialogue partner, Trypho the Jew, asks about the fate of those who profess Jesus as Christ, yet continue to observe the
Mosaic Law (Dial. 46.1; 47.1). Justin replies that they will be saved, as long as they do not seek to persuade Gentile converts to adopt and practice Jewish rites (probably including circumcision; note the word peritmêthentas in Dial. 47). Gentiles who have been persuaded to judaize will also, Justin expects, be saved, as long as they do not deny Christ. But Gentiles who have turned to the Mosaic Law and abandoned the profession of Christ will not be saved, and nor will Jews who do not believe in Christ, especially those who curse Christians in their synagogues (Dial. 47). In the following chapters (Dial. 48-49), Justin also refers to Christians who believe in Christ but deny his divine pre-existence, regarding him as of merely human origin. It is most plausible, though not indisputable, to link this view also with certain Jewish-Christian groups, specifically with the Ebionites (see below).

Justin provides clear evidence, then, of the continued existence of Jewish Christians, some of whom he accepts within the boundaries of the church (those who do not persuade Gentiles to adopt Jewish rites) and others whom he does not (those who urge Jewish practice on the Gentiles). He also reveals that his opinion with regard to the inclusion of the former category of Jewish Christian is not universally accepted. There are some Christians, he says, who ‘boldly refuse to have conversation or meals with such persons’ (Dial. 47). Justin’s view, then, may have been more tolerant than that of many of his Christian contemporaries; certainly, after Justin, it is only as ‘heretics’ that we subsequently hear of Jewish Christians — from Irenaeus’s comments on the Ebionites onwards (Adv. Haer. 1.26.2, written c.182-188; Carleton Paget 1999: 24).

The diversity among Jewish Christians which Justin hints at is further revealed in later sources, although the evidence does not permit many clear distinctions to be drawn between different groups; the evidence of the heresiologists, notably Epiphanius, is not always reliable, and the term ‘Ebionite’ had become a rather general and negative label for heretics. Moreover, links or similarities between Jewish-Christian and Samaritan or Gnostic groups, all
of which are included in Epiphanius’ catalogue of heretical groups, seem in some cases possible, though hard to specify. In what follows, then, I shall follow the helpful taxonomy set out by Stephen Wilson (1995: 148-59), while recognising, as Wilson does, that such a scheme inevitably involves some crude generalisation, and may be questioned at certain points.

**Ebionites**

Irenaeus is the first to use the name ‘Ebionites’ to describe a Jewish-Christian group, though it is possible that the name has earlier origins as a self-description adopted by some Jewish Christians in Palestine (the Hebrew term *ebionîm* means ‘the poor’, and was used at Qumran as a self-designation). According to Irenaeus, the Ebionites denied the virgin birth (*Adv. Haer.* 3.21.1; cf. Justin *Dial.* 48), adhered to the demands of the Jewish law, including circumcision, used only the Gospel of Matthew, and rejected Paul (cf. 3.15.1), whom they regarded as an apostate from the law. They were concerned to interpret the (Jewish) prophets, and ‘adored’ Jerusalem ‘as if it were the house of God’ (*Adv. Haer.* 1.26.2).

Later writers add further information to this list, though some of it is almost certainly spurious: Tertullian, for example, adopts the heresiologists’ typical tendency to associate all heresies with a named founder, and contrasts the heresy of Marcion with that of ‘Ebion’ (*Haer.* 33.11). The most lengthy report comes from the extensive survey of heretics compiled by Epiphanius, bishop of Salamis in the fourth century. In *Panarion* 30, Epiphanius describes the Ebionite sect, often confirming what we already know from Irenaeus and others, including their ‘low’, adoptionist, Christology (see also Eusebius *HE* 3.27.2), but adding further interesting information. For example, he reports that the sect began when Christians from Jerusalem fled to Pella at the time of the capture of Jerusalem (*Pan.* 30.2.7) and locates them in this Transjordanian region (see map above). Also significant is his report of their avoidance...
of contact with foreigners (i.e. non-Jews), their ritual washings and their insistence on marriage (Pan. 30.2.6; 30.18.2). They apparently justified their insistence on circumcision by appealing to a Gospel saying: “It is enough for the disciple to be like his master.” [Matt. 10:25] “Christ was circumcised”, they say, “so you be circumcised” (Pan. 30.26.2). However, the Ebionites rejected sacrifice (Pan. 30.16.5) and were vegetarians, and adapted their Gospel traditions and scriptural interpretation to support this stance — one which Epiphanius ridicules and strongly opposes (Pan. 30.15.3-4; 30.16.5; 30.22.3-8). The so-called Gospel of the Ebionites, known only from quotations in Epiphanius, records that John the Baptist ate ‘pancakes’ and wild honey, a clever alteration from the Greek akrides (locusts; Matt. 3:4) to enkrides (pancakes) thus making John a vegetarian too. This Gospel, which the Ebionites, according to Epiphanius, call ‘According to Matthew’ or the ‘Hebrew Gospel’ (Pan. 30.13.2; cf. 30.3.7), seems, from the limited evidence we have, to have existed in Greek and to have consisted of some kind of harmony of the synoptic Gospels (see Howard 1988; Elliott 1993: 3-6; further below). According to Epiphanius, because of their view of Jesus as of human origin, born of Joseph and Mary, they remove the genealogy in Matthew, and begin their gospel: ‘It happened in the days of Herod, king of Judaea, in the time of the high priest Caiaphas, that there came someone named John baptizing...’ (Pan. 30.14.2).

Investigation of the broadly Ebionite grouping could proceed further; with examination, for example, of the so-called Kerygmata Petrou, an earlier writing incorporated in the Pseudoclementine Homilies, which some regard as Ebionite in origin (see Wilson 1995: 150-52). Similarly, the Ascents of James (see below) might perhaps be Ebionite. Also relevant, though even more obscure, are the Elchaisites, a sect of Jewish-(Christian?) origin, probably influenced by the Ebionites, but about whom little can be established with certainty. However, enough has been done to allow us to see that the Ebionites represent Jewish Christians who acknowledge Jesus as Messiah, but hold a low, adoptionist,
Christology, adhere to the Jewish Law, including circumcision, avoid contact with Gentiles and repudiate Paul and his mission.

How far back may the Ebionites’ origins be traced? Certainly we may locate their earliest roots ultimately among the Jerusalem Christians, specifically those who opposed Paul, insisted on circumcision for all members of God’s people, and remained separate from non-Jewish believers. But their distinctive emphases, practices, christological beliefs and so on, developed over time, and their rejection of sacrifice distances them somewhat from the earliest Jewish Christians, who loyally attended the temple (Acts 3:1); the Ebionites may even have originated from a split among the Nazarene ranks, after the flight to Pella (cf. Pritz 1988: 38-39; further below).  

**Jacobites**  

We have already seen the importance of James as a leading figure in Jewish-Christian circles and have briefly considered the character of the New Testament letter written in his name. Heightened reverence and regard for James is evident in the Ascents of James, a Jewish-Christian writing incorporated, like the Kerygma Petrou, in the Pseudoclementine corpus (specifically, in Rec. 1.33-71 [or 27-71]), and usually dated in the latter half of the second century. Epiphanius refers to an Ebionite document called the Ascents of James (Pan. 30.16.7-9), which is generally identified with this section of the Pseudoclementine corpus, though the identification has recently been disputed (Jones 1995: 35, 146-48). Whatever the origins of this text, it does seem clearly to be Jewish-Christian in character (Jones 1995: 164-67).

In this source, James is indisputably the most outstanding and important leader of the early church; he was ordained bishop of Jerusalem by Jesus himself (Rec. 1.43.3; 1.68.2, etc.). James led a highly successful mission to the Palestinian Jews, so much so that,
according to the legendary account, the Jewish priests began to fear that the whole populace would be converted (Rec. 1.43.1). Notably, the source claims that the only difference between the Christian message propagated by James, and the Jewish faith which the priests represent, concerns belief in Jesus, who is apparently regarded by the Christians as the prophet promised by Moses, ‘the eternal Christ’ (1.43.1-2). The Jewish sacrificial cult, however, is apparently superseded by the practice of baptism, having been instituted in the first place only by way of concession to the people (1.36.1–1.39.3). By contrast, the Jewish Law is spoken of positively (1.33.3-5; 1.35.2; 1.60.4) and Jesus is described as a ‘teacher of the law’ (1.62.3), suggesting, according to Robert Van Voorst (1989: 138), ‘that the community of the AJ [Ascents of James] was law-observant’. The Gentile mission is accepted, and is regarded as a result of Jewish rejection of the message (1.42.1), but it only began, apparently, after the Temple was destroyed (1.64.2). Whether, and to what degree, Gentile converts are expected to adopt Jewish legal and ritual observance is not discussed. Opposition to Paul among this group (he is described as ‘that hostile man’) is generally seen in the account of his persecution of Christians and attack upon James (1.70.1-8; 1.71.3-4). However, the depiction appears to be of the pre-Christian Paul and is probably dependent on Acts (8:1; 9:1).41

Because of its ‘obsession’ with James, Stephen Wilson takes the Ascents of James as representative of a distinct, ‘Jacobite’, grouping within early Jewish Christianity; it is the focus on James, Wilson suggests, that most distinguishes this grouping from the Ebionite tradition (1995: 155). Apart from the prominence of James, a belief in Christ’s pre-existence (see Van Voorst 1989: 164) and acceptance of the Gentile mission may also distinguish the writer(s) of the Ascents from the Ebionites. On the other hand, the rejection of sacrifice in both the Gospel of the Ebionites and the Ascents (see Van Voorst 1989: 166-67), along with Hegesippus’ description of James, like the Ebionites, as abstaining from meat (in Eusebius HE 2.23.5), may suggest that the groups should not be neatly differentiated. The Ebionites
(though not only the Ebionites) may well have held James in high regard, just as they may also have done with Peter, if the *Kerygmata Petrou* is Ebionite (see above).

Clearly the *Ascents of James* contains legendary and hagiographic development of the historical facts about James, leader of the Jerusalem church. Nevertheless, a degree of continuity within the circles who focused their allegiance on James should not be overlooked. Wilson points to parallels between the *Ascents* and the letter of James: ‘an emphasis on keeping the law, a modest Christology, anti-Paulinism, and, above all, invocation of the central and authoritative role of James’ (Wilson 1995: 154). Also noteworthy is the focus on James in the passage from the Gospel according to the Hebrews quoted by Jerome (*de Vir. Ill.* 2). Again, the roots of such groups of ‘Jacobites’, if that is a legitimate label, may be traced back ultimately to the earliest Jerusalem community and specifically to the circle around James, brother of Jesus. James, we recall, apparently supported the Gentile mission while upholding observance of the law and requiring that Gentile converts obey a minimum of Jewish legal prescription.

**Nazarenes**

The name ‘Nazarene’ may well be the earliest term used to label followers of Jesus. According to Matthew, Luke-Acts, and John, Jesus was called ‘the Nazarene’ (*ho nazōraios*) during his public ministry. Matthew’s attempt to show that this name is a fulfillment of that spoken through the prophets, ‘he shall be called a Nazarene’ (Matt. 2:23), is notoriously difficult, since no prophet actually says quite such a thing, but surely reflects Matthew’s concern to demonstrate that this feature of Jesus’s identity, along with others, is a sign of his being the promised Messiah. In Acts 24:5 we find Paul described as a member of ‘the sect of the Nazarenes’ (*hê tôn Nazōraiôn hairesis*), a label which apparently designates Jewish followers of Jesus as a ‘sect’ or ‘party’ within Judaism — characterised pre-70CE by
sectarian diversity (see above). The earliest (Jewish) Christians, then, may well have been known as ‘Nazarenes’.\textsuperscript{45} However, with the inclusion of Gentiles into the Church, the Greek term Christianoi, ‘Christians’, became the dominant label (cf. Pritz 1988: 14-17; Wilson 1995: 156).

The determination to exclude the Nazarenes from the religious community of Israel after 70CE is probably evident in the benediction against all minim (heretics; see above) and certainly in the introduction of the term notzrim (Nazarenes) into this benediction. There is considerable debate and uncertainty as to when exactly notzrim was added to the benediction and to whom exactly it referred. While it may have included all Christians, it certainly designated Jewish Christians, and was most probably in use, at least in certain locations, well before the fourth century, possibly from the late first or early second century.\textsuperscript{46}

In Christian sources, however, after Acts the name ‘Nazarenes’ hardly reappears until Epiphanius’ Panarion, written in 376CE (Pritz 1988: 15), where it designates a group of ‘heretics’ (see Mimouni 1998a: 223-26). As with the Ebionites, Epiphanius provides the most extensive source of information about the Nazarenes, even though some of his assertions are highly doubtful. From Panarion 29, devoted to the Nazarenes, the following picture emerges: Others named them ‘Nazarenes’, but they accept the name, since Jesus himself was called the ‘Nazarene’ (Pan. 29.6.7). They use the whole of both Old and New Testaments (29.7.2, 4) and read both the Jewish scriptures and their Gospel (described as the Gospel of Matthew) in Hebrew (29.7.4; 29.9.4). They believe in the resurrection, in God the creator, and in his child Jesus Christ (29.7.3). They also observe the Law of Moses. Indeed, Epiphanius encapsulates neatly the essentially Jewish-Christian character of their faith and practice: ‘In this alone do they differ from the Jews and the Christians: from the Jews in believing in Christ, and from the Christians in being bound still to the law, to circumcision and the Sabbath and the rest’ (Pan. 29.7.5). Hence, to Epiphanius the Christian, they are ‘Jews and nothing else’ (29.7.1).
Yet he also reports that they are hated by the Jews, and cursed three times daily in their synagogues, a clear reference to the *birkat ha-minim* (Pan. 29.9.2-3).

Epiphanius also supplies important, and plausible, information about the origins of the Nazarenes. He locates them in the Transjordanian areas of Beroea in Coele Syria, in the Decapolis near Pella, and in Cochaba, stating that the sect began when the disciples fled from Jerusalem to Pella (Pan. 29.7.7-8). Although Epiphanius reports that the sect began in the Transjordan, his own linking of the Nazarenes with the disciples fleeing from Jerusalem suggests a continuity between the pre-70 Jerusalem Christian Jews and the later Nazarenes (de Boer 1998: 246). Epiphanius also claims that the Ebionite ‘heresy’, specifically their ‘founder’ Ebion, came from among the Nazarenes (Pan. 30.1.1; 30.2.1). We have already noted that the idea of a person named Ebion as founder of the Ebionites seems unlikely to be true. Nevertheless, Ray Pritz makes the plausible suggestion that Epiphanius may here rightly indicate that the Ebionite sect actually originated from a split among the Nazarenes after the flight to Pella, perhaps over leadership or Christology (Pritz 1988: 37-39, 108).

Indeed, a major difference between the Nazarenes and the Ebionites concerns Christology. While Epiphanius is unsure whether or not the Nazarenes hold an orthodox Christology (Pan. 29.7.6), Jerome (Ep. 112.13) confirms that they do (Pritz 1988: 53-55). Such a divergence among Jewish Christians over Christology may be hinted at in Justin (Dial. 48), and is certainly reported by Origen (C.Cels. 5.61) and Eusebius (HE 3.27.2-6), though both of these writers regard the difference as occuring between two kinds of ‘Ebionites’ (probably because this was the more common heretical label for Jewish Christians). From Jerome’s writings it is also possible to confirm that the Nazarenes accept Paul and endorse the Gentile mission (Commentary On Isaiah 9.1-4; Pritz 1988: 64), again in distinction from the Ebionites. Jerome also provides most of the evidence for a so-called ‘Gospel of the Nazarenes’, a Hebrew (probably Aramaic, in fact) gospel which Jerome reports having
translated into Greek and Latin (de Vir. Ill. 2). Jerome, as do other patristic Christian writers, refers to this gospel as the Gospel according to the Hebrews, sometimes adding, ‘which the Nazarenes read’. Epiphanius states that the Nazarenes have the Gospel of Matthew in Hebrew (Pan. 29.9.4) and the Nazarenes’ Aramaic Gospel seems to have the closest relationship to what we know as the Gospel of Matthew. Indeed, some New Testament manuscripts of Matthew contain marginal textual notes that refer to To Ioudaïkon (The Jewish [Gospel]; Elliott 1993: 4). The relationships between the various quotations and references to the ‘Gospel according to the Hebrews’ in patristic writers is a complex matter, but modern scholars are more or less agreed on distinguishing three ‘gospels’: the Gospel of the Ebionites (see above), apparently existing in Greek and containing some kind of harmony of all three synoptic gospels; the Gospel according to the Hebrews, also in Greek and used by Jewish Christians in Egypt; and the Gospel of the Nazarenes, which was preserved in Aramaic and was probably most closely related to Matthew, though precisely how closely remains open to debate (see Elliott 1993: 3-6; Klijn 1988). Pritz suggests that all these Jewish-Christian gospels may have stemmed from one original Hebrew Gospel, associated with the name Matthew, which was ‘variously adapted, expanded, edited, and used by the different streams of Jewish Christianity’ (Pritz 1988: 85).

The Nazarenes, then, share with the other groupings we have considered the essential features of Jewish Christianity: belief in Jesus as Messiah and continued adherence to the Jewish Law. They differ notably from the Ebionites in their orthodox Christology, their acceptance of Paul and the Gentile mission. Indeed, their only divergence from Christian orthodoxy is that they adhere to the Jewish law. The Jacobites (see above), if they were a distinguishable group, perhaps fall somewhere in between, accepting a Gentile mission but repudiating Paul. As Wilson notes, it is tempting to align each of these three groups with the diversity of opinion evident among the earliest Jewish Christians, though such a neat
categorisation could too easily imply both clearer continuity and tidier distinctions than was actually the case (see above; Wilson 1995: 157). The evidence does not permit clear boundaries and neat distinctions to be drawn. Too many questions remain: What was the relationship between the Nazarenes and the Ebionites? Did the latter split from the former, and if so, when and where? Were the Jacobites in any way an identifiable grouping? What was the relationship between the various forms of what patristic writers call the Gospel of the Hebrews? What seems clear is that patristic writers know of at least two basic types of Jewish Christians, one of which is essentially orthodox and is criticised only for adherence to the Jewish law (Nazarenes), the other of which is condemned also for its denial of orthodox, incarnational Christology (Ebionites). Moreover, while there is considerable development and diversification of belief and practice among Jewish-Christian groups, it also seems justifiable to see some continuity between the ‘heretical sects’ identified by the patristic heresiologists and the earliest Jewish Christians.

CONCLUSION: THE FATE OF JEWISH CHRISTIANITY

If it is right to see a degree of continuity between the first (Jewish) Christians and the sects condemned as heretical in the fourth century, then clearly the story we have been attempting to revisit is one in which those who were originally central to, indeed constitutive of, Christianity were later excluded and denounced as heretics. The successors of Jesus the Nazarene and Paul of the party of the Nazarenes were the ‘heretical’ Nazarenes denounced by Epiphanius. Some of the later Jewish Christians clearly held beliefs outside of what came to be regarded as Christian orthodoxy (the Ebionites), while others (the Nazarenes) seem to have been entirely orthodox in every respect except for adhering to the Jewish Law. The Nazarenes’ apparent orthodoxy may indeed explain why they were not denounced as
heretical, until the Church acquired its status as dominant religion of the empire in the fourth century.

The Jewish-Christian heritage — the symbolic world of Judaism — was, as we have seen, claimed by the emerging orthodox Church. In this sense Jewish Christianity was taken up into the developing institution. But while Judaism’s symbolic order was adopted, its practices were rejected and ridiculed, and rites such as circumcision and sacrifice were spiritualised and Christianised. In claiming itself as the covenant people of God, the Church laid claim to have superseded Judaism, and denounced the Jews for their unbelief, and for continuing to live in error. A history of anti-Judaism which has been examined extensively in recent years was one result. The result for Jewish Christians, of course, was rejection and marginalisation by the Church; their continued practice of Jewish legal observance could not be tolerated, even if they held otherwise orthodox Christian beliefs.

From the Jewish side too, the Jewish-Christian stance came to be regarded as increasingly intolerable. The gradual development of a rabbinic orthodoxy demanded the exclusion of heretics and sectarians, among whom Jewish Christians were prominent. The cursing of (Jewish) Christians in the synagogues and their punishment during Bar Kochba’s revolt reveal this process of exclusion in practice.

Consequently, with the victory of rabbinic Judaism as orthodox Judaism by the third century (see Alexander 1992) and the victory of Christianity as the religion of the Empire in the fourth, the fate of Jewish Christianity was sealed. The groups which we have examined apparently disappeared in the fourth or possibly early fifth century. They were, in a nutshell, ‘abandoned on both sides for being neither one thing nor the other’ (Wilson 1995: 167).

Some scholars using social-scientific methods in the study of early Christianity have compared the early Christian movement with the modern phenomenon of a religious ‘sect’. Our study of early Jewish Christianity suggests some relevant observations and qualifications
with regard to this perspective. First, it is probably misleading to refer to Jewish Christianity before 70CE as a religious ‘sect’, if that is meant in the sense of a close-knit separatist community in tension with a more or less monolithic ‘parent’ body. On the one hand, the whole of Judaism pre-70 seems to be characterised by sectarian diversity, such that the messianic Jews known (probably) as Nazarenes were only one among a number of varied groups. On the other hand, the early Jewish Christians, unlike some other Jews who withdrew to their community at Qumran, remained involved in the ritual, cultic, and liturgical life of Judaism and were not a tightly-bounded sectarian movement. Secondly, after 70CE, though the process took several centuries, both Judaism and Christianity moulded their diverse traditions into an increasingly powerful orthodoxy, especially powerful, of course, on the part of Christianity. It was these dominant orthodoxies which took the initiative in excluding ‘heretics’ and thus in creating a sectarian status for groups which were regarded as deviant. In other words, in some sense, the initiative for forging a separatist sectarian identity, over against a ‘parent’ religious body, came not from the group which ‘broke away’, but rather from the centre. If we asked the detective’s question of the Jewish Christians, ‘Did they jump or were they pushed?’, the answer would seem to be the latter: they were pushed from both sides.

A suitable epitaph is in fact provided by Jerome (Ep. 112.13) who writes of the Nazarenes something that was a reality for all Jewish Christians: wanting to be both Jews and Christians, they end up being neither (...dum uolunt et Iudaei esse et Christiani, nec Iudaei sunt nec Christiani). If we recall the vision of Jesus, insofar as we can know it, a loyal Jew who looked for the establishment of God’s kingdom (in which Gentiles might perhaps also share), then it is hard to deny some sympathy for the early Jewish Christians who in some sense kept precisely that vision alive, but were denied a place in either Judaism or Christianity.48
This is a somewhat controversial statement, since the role and self-understanding of Jesus continue to be vigorously debated. That Jesus was a Jew who saw his mission primarily in relation to the Jewish people, however, is virtually undisputable. Cf. Sanders 1985; Charlesworth 1991, etc.

For recent work on Jewish Christianity see Carleton Paget 1999 (which I have been grateful to read in proof form) and Mimouni 1998b (which I have not yet seen). A most valuable collection of the relevant patristic evidence is Klijn and Reinink 1973.


Wilson 1995: 224 comments that Daniélou offers ‘a definition, it is now realized, so capacious as to be meaningless’. See further Taylor 1990: 313-14; 1993: 22; Carleton Paget 1999: 08-12.


This qualification is important in order to indicate that the denial of Jesus’s divinity — such as characteristized the Ebionites (see below) — is not, contra Schoeps, definitive of Jewish Christianity.

Due to the lack of evidence, and the focus on Jerusalem in Acts, it is difficult to say much about early Christian groups elsewhere in Palestine, specifically Galilee (cf. Matt. 28:7-16; Mark 16:7). Later evidence (He 1.7.14) does indicate the presence and missionary activity of Jewish Christians (pace Taylor 1993: 31-36, 45-46), particularly those led by descendants of
Jesus’s brothers in what Bauckham (1990: 70) refers to as a ‘dynastic tradition’ within early Jewish Christianity.

9 These texts may be found in Elliott 1993, and in the more popular volume edited by Ehrman 1998.

10 Text and translation of Didache and Barnabas in Lake 1912. These non-canonical texts are presented along with the New Testament writings in Ehrman 1998, which contains (arguably) all of the Christian texts from the first 100 years of Christian origins.

11 We should perhaps call them Christian Jews: they become Jewish Christians only later (post 70CE) after their exclusion from Jewish religious life (cf. de Boer 1998; Martyn 1968; below note 45).

12 It is generally considered that these passages refer to the same occasion, though this is certainly open to debate.

13 See also Wehnert 1997: 213-38 (and review by Bockmuehl 1999). The so-called Noachide commandments, applicable to all humanity (cf. Gen. 9:1-7; Alexander 1992: 23-24; further Bockmuehl 1995), are also often mentioned as Jewish precedent and basis for the Apostolic Decree.

14 See e.g. Hill 1992: 107-15; Catchpole 1977, who argues that the Decree was not part of the conference agreement with Paul, but was later promulgated by James and brought by his emissaries to Antioch (see below on Gal. 2:11-21). It is notable that Paul’s own record is that the Jerusalem leaders ‘added nothing to me’ (Gal. 2:6) and urged only that Paul ‘remember the poor’, which, Paul says, he was in any case eager to do (Gal. 2:10). His apparently ‘liberal’ stance in regard to the eating of food offered to idols (1 Cor. 8:1–11:1) also seems scarcely compatible with the demands of the Decree (cf. Horrell 1997). However, for other
viewpoints, see e.g. Tomson 1990: 177-220; Bauckham 1995: 470-71; and, more generally on the Apostolic Decree, Wehnert 1997.

15 Were the demands of the Decree adopted at Antioch? Catchpole (1977: 441) argues not, on the basis of the fact that the Jewish Christians, including Peter, subsequently withdrew from fellowship with Gentile Christians.


17 Peter’s change of practice under pressure at Antioch is one reason to doubt the reliability, or at least the chronological placing, of Acts 10:9–11:18: if Peter was so firmly convinced, this early, of the acceptability of Gentiles as Gentiles (and, it seems, of the negation of the distinction between clean and unclean types of food) then his vacillating behaviour at Antioch is scarcely comprehensible.

18 An important point here concerns the translation of tous ek peritomês in Gal. 2:12. Bauckham argues that the NRSV’s ‘circumcision faction’ is incorrect and that the phrase simply means Jews (1995: 471 n.169; cf. Eusebius HE 3.4.2). Whether the Jews in view were Christian or non-Christian Jews is also the subject of some debate; see Longenecker 1990: 73-75.

19 Bauckham (1995: 471-75) argues that there is no real evidence to support the view that some Jewish Christians continued to advocate circumcision for Gentile converts after the Apostolic Decree. While he is certainly right that there is no evidence of the demand for circumcision being at issue in 2 Corinthians, the evidence of Gal. 5:2-12; 6:12-15; Phil. 3:2-4; and Justin Dial 47 suggests that some Jewish Christians did indeed continue to urge the
practice of circumcision on Gentile Christian converts (see below; cf. also Carleton Paget 1999: 64-65 n.48).


21 Hence some scholars have spoken in terms of a transition from ‘formative’ Judaism to ‘normative’ Judaism. See e.g. Neusner 1984a; 1984b; further below.

22 For a recent book on James see Bernheim 1997 (note also Bauckham 1999).


24 Note also Matt. 23:23. In 5:17 the phrase ‘do not think...’ implies a polemic (anti-Pauline?) against the idea that Jesus has somehow abolished the law.


26 See Neusner 1979: 21-23; Alexander 1992: 3 et passim; Jagersma 1985: 149-52. Note, however, Wilson’s caution about the pace and extent of the spread of rabbinic influence (1995: 46-47); see further Hezser 1997, who argues that the rabbinic movement in Roman Palestine was an informal, non-institutionalised, non-centralised movement based on networks of personal alliances. Her major work deserves closer attention than has been possible here.

27 Cf. Alexander 1992: 3: ‘In the power-vacuum created by the First Revolt the Rabbinic party and the Christians competed for the hearts and minds of Jewry. The rabbis emerged victorious.’

28 On the various aspects of 1 and 2 Peter discussed here see further Horrell 1998.

29 For a comparison of Hebrews and Barnabas with regard to the issue of supersessionism, see Wilson 1995: 110-42.
Dates into the early second century have also been suggested, as has a Syro-Palestinian setting. See discussion in Carleton Paget 1994: 9-42; Hvalvik 1996: 17-42.


A decision on this point depends in part on when the term notzrim (Nazarenes; i.e. Christians in general) was added to the benediction. See discussion in van der Horst 1994; Pritz 1988: 102-107; de Boer 1998: 247-52.

Horbury 1998: 9-10 argues that curses may have been employed as a test of loyalty even before the 66-74 war in both Jewish and Christian worship; cf. Acts 26:11; 1 Cor 12:3; 16:33.

For a history of research into the Pseudoclementine corpus see Jones 1982; 1995: 1-38.

For further discussion see Stanton 1998; Lieu 1996: 103-53.


See Keck 1965; 1966; Wilson 1995: 149. Cf. also Gal. 2:10, though Rom. 15:29 seems to make clear that it is a certain section of the community in Jerusalem who are designated ‘the poor’ and thus to strengthen the argument that the reference here is essentially to those who are materially poor.


It is questionable whether their existence can be traced back as far as Goulder (1994b) suggests.

I am grateful to Richard Bauckham for this point.

The gospel known by modern scholars as ‘according to the Hebrews’ apparently existed in Greek and was used by Jewish Christians in Egypt; see Elliott 1993: 3-6, 9-10. However, the
allocation of patristic citations (all of which refer to ‘the Hebrew Gospel’, or some similar title) to three different gospels known by scholars as the Gospel of the Ebionites, of the Nazarenes, and according to the Hebrews, is not entirely secure; cf. the discussion in Pritz 1988: 83-94.

43 This is how the name given to this grouping is conventionally anglicized (e.g. Wilson 1995: 155-59; Pritz 1988). It normally appears in Greek as Nazóraioi (e.g. Acts 24:5; Epiphanius Pan. 29.1.1) and hence de Boer (1998; see 253 n.1) prefers ‘Nazoreans’; Amidon (1990: 90, etc.) renders it ‘Nazoraeans’. The most extensive discussions are Pritz 1988 and Mimouni 1998a.


45 In an extensive recent etymological study, Mimouni (1998a) argues that for the period up to the early second century the term ‘Nazarenes’ (rather than the term ‘Christian’) may serve to designate the disciples of Jesus of Jewish origin. From the second century, however, with the formation of Jewish-Christian groups known as the Ebionites and the Elchaisites, the label Nazarenes should be reserved for the group(s) which the Church Fathers regard as orthodox (see esp. pp.261-62). Pritz (1988: 15) argues in a similar vein that ‘the name Nazarenes was at first applied to all Jewish followers of Jesus... So also in Acts 24:5 the reference is not to a sect of Christianity but rather to the entire primitive Church as a sect of Judaism.’ De Boer (1998) proposes that the change may be understood in the following way: the Nazoreans (sic) were originally ‘Christian Jews’, one of a number of parties within pre-70 Judaism, who later became ‘Jewish Christians’, i.e. excluded from Jewish religious and institutional life as defined in post-70 rabbinic Judaism. Later still they were excluded from Christianity too.

46 See discussion above, with notes 31-33.
An early ground-breaking study by Robin Scroggs, together with critical assessment and further reading on the subject, may be found in Horrell 1999: 69-91.

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