

CHAPTER 13: PAUL AND THE RISE OF NEW TESTAMENT THEOLOGY

A) PAUL AND THE FIRST CENTURY PHARISEES

1) A PHARISEE OF THE PHARISEES

Jesus was born in Bethlehem around 4 BC. Only a few years later, a young boy named Saul was born to a conservative Jewish family in Tarsus of Cilicia.¹ Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin and his father was a Pharisee. When Saul was 12 years old, he was brought to Jerusalem. There he studied under one of the most important Pharisaic scholars in the 1st century. Saul's teacher was named Gamaliel. According to Acts 5:34, Gamaliel was such an important figure in Jerusalem that he was able to stand in the Council and dominate the proceedings.² His teachings were included in the Mishnah. This early precursor of the Talmud was completed around 200 AD, but it included much earlier material. Saul rose rapidly to prominence among the young Pharisees in Jerusalem. In Galatians 1:14, he claimed to have advanced in Judaism beyond many of his contemporaries because of his zeal for God's law. This changed remarkably about a decade and a half after Jesus rose from the grave. After a rather short career as a radical Pharisee, he was converted on the road to Damascus and became the apostle Paul. He became a missionary to the gentiles, and his letters helped shape Christian theology. Before his conversion, Paul had been a Pharisee, and his Christian theology was strongly influenced by his reaction against the Merkabah mystical traditions that he had learned as a Pharisee.³

The Pharisees' Merkabah mysticism was not just an odd theological perspective. It is important to understand what the Pharisees were trying to do. They were not legalistic old men. They were young radicals and they were very influential.⁴ They taught a religion based on loving God's law. They thought that God's law was something that could be obeyed, and they were determined to obey it so that they could earn the right to receive a vision of God.⁵ That was not an unreasonable way to interpret the

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Tarsus was located near the southeast coast of modern Turkey. It was a prosperous city with a large Jewish community. Tarsus was famous for its tentmaking industry. The hills around Tarsus were used to raise a special breed of sheep that had unusually long and strong hair. The wool from these sheep made excellent tent cloth. Saul's family may have been involved in this industry because Saul returned to the tentmaking business whenever finances required doing so. Saul wrote that he had been raised to follow strictly the requirements of the Jewish faith.

Gamaliel was known for having greater devotion to the law than anyone in his generation. Sotah ix.15 claimed that since Gamaliel had died, there had been no more reverence for the Law, and both purity and abstinence died out. For a discussion of Gamaliel, see Verne Voss' PhD dissertation, "Gamaliel/Paul: How Did the Relationship between Pharisees and Christians Develop and Change in the Early Christian Church?" Trinity Theological Seminary, Newburgh IN, 2004.

Paul's theology was so Jewish that interpretations of Paul now play a key role in intra-Jewish debates over the nature and future of Judaism. The topic in these debates is not whether Paul was right, but what Judaism should be. For a summary of this debate, see Daniel R. Langton, "Modern Jewish Identity and the Apostle Paul: Pauline Studies as an Intra-Jewish Ideological Battleground," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 28 (2005): 217-58.

Harrelson argued that the Pharisees probably developed from the Hasidim who were described in I Macc. 1:62-3. Harrelson noted that by the middle second century BC, the Pharisees were a force in the culture. They challenged priestly dominance in Israel's life. They interpreted the Torah and made it apply to all aspects of life. They provided the groundwork for Zealot movements and the Essenes. Harrelson argued that the Pharisees and Essenes drew three strategies for applying messianic passages. The first strategy was to wait for a new David who would make it possible for the Jews to practice Torah in their own land. The second strategy was to expect the Messiah at the end of the age, and to shape life today in the light of God's demands for life in the New Age since it could dawn at any time. The third strategy was to act in a way that might promote the coming of the New Age through revolution or by calling people into the wilderness to prepare for the messiah. Water Harrelson, "Messianic Expectations at the Time of Jesus," *The Saint Luke's Journal of Theology* 32 (1988): 31.

F. F. Bruce claimed that the Merkabah mystics stressed heavenly visions gained through the punctilious observance of the minutiae of the law. They stressed especially the laws of purification and asceticism. F. F. Bruce, "The Colossians Heresy," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 141 (1984): 195-208.

Scripture's demands for obedience.⁶ They were determined to be the kind of people demanded by the Old Testament prophets so that they could share the experiences of the prophets. Many of the Pharisees' beliefs were correct. They believed that the Old Testament was true. They believed in the resurrection of the dead. The Pharisees stood with absolute confidence on the fact that God was sovereign.⁷ They knew that God raised nations and brought them down. The Pharisees believed that God had a plan for history revealed in His Word, and that His kingdom was at hand.

The Pharisees believed that God had often appeared to the prophets and had revealed His will. The Pharisees further believed that God was willing and able to appear to men, although such theophanies were rare. The Pharisees believed that their generation badly needed men to stand before God's throne and hear His word as the messianic age approached. The Pharisees were among those who claimed this ability. As early as 6 BC, the Pharisees prophesied that Herod's throne would be gained by the descendants of Pheroras who had paid a fine that Rome had imposed on them. The Pharisees claimed to be able to make such a prophecy because of God's appearances to them.⁸

The Pharisees' basic goals were not improper. The problem was their method. The Pharisees oversimplified God's law and turned it into something that they could obey. Beyond that, they put a "hedge" around God's law.⁹ They wrote their own laws that were stricter than God's laws. If they obeyed their own laws, they believed that they could not accidentally violate God's law. One example of this can be seen in Exodus 23:19. God forbid Israel to cook a young goat in its mother's milk. Doing so would imitate a custom common in Canaanite idolatry. Drawing on roots laid by the Pharisees, modern Judaism built a hedge around this command. Conservative Jewish families use two sets of dishes. One set is for dairy products and the other for meat. The two sets of dishes are not even washed at the same time. Meat and dairy products were simply never mixed lest God's command in Exodus 23:19 be accidentally violated. This showed great reverence for the law and a deep commitment to obeying God. The problem was that it completely missed the point of the command. The point of the command was to avoid customs that were part of idolatrous worship. Unfortunately, the Jewish kosher laws were set in cement when they were declared to be "oral torah" preserved from Mount Sinai. All of the Pharisees' interpretations of the law were claimed to be part of the "oral torah" which had in theory been preserved since Moses' time.

Jacob Neusner argued that the Pharisees were only really interested in a limited class of laws. Civil law in general was the realm of the temple priests not the Pharisees. Neusner argued that the Pharisees were very interested in laws that involved agriculture, cleanness, Sabbath, festivals, and family laws.¹⁰ These were the kinds of laws that impacted the common people the most strongly. Unfortunately, the 1st century Pharisees had a problem with pride and hypocrisy. Even the Talmud recognized the problem and repeatedly condemned the 1st century Pharisees for their hypocrisy. In Luke 11:42-46, Jesus condemned the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. Jesus claimed that they bound heavy burdens on peoples' shoulders that they were not willing to touch with a finger themselves. In their great zeal for the law, the Pharisees lost sight of their own sinful hearts. They became proud and violent men. They were strong supporters of the 1st century messianic movements, and many Pharisees encouraged the revolts against Rome.¹¹ The Pharisees did not oppose Jesus for claiming to be the promised Messiah. They were willing to follow self-proclaimed Messiahs. The Pharisees opposed Jesus for three reasons. First, He was

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The Pharisees could have justified this confidence from Old Testament passages like Deut. 30:11-20. In this passage, Moses warned Israel that God's command was not too difficult for them to keep. Moses warned that it was in their mouths and their hearts. Moses warned that if they did not keep God's law and love the Lord, they would die. If they kept it, they would live.

Josephus claimed that the Pharisees attributed everything to fate and to God. This may be consistent with Paul's stress on God's sovereignty. Josephus, *Wars*, II.8.14

Josephus, *Antiquities*, 17:41-44. See the discussion in Neusner, *Judaism in the Beginning of Christianity*, 50. The claim of heavenly visions is consistent with the Merkabah mysticism accepted by Paul before his conversion.

Josephus stressed that the Pharisees emphasized the importance of reason. Josephus, *Antiquities*, VIII.1.3 This is consistent with the logical and rational character of Pauline theology instead of older Semitic relational theology.

¹¹Neusner, *The Pharisees: Rabbinic Perspectives*, 247.

Tradition claims that Pontius Pilate became so tired of the Pharisees' opposition that he built a wood cage. He filled it with Pharisees. Then he hung the cage in the air and lit a fire under it.

competing directly with them for funding. Jewish teachers usually lived on contributions.¹² They were not paid a salary by their disciples and students. Jesus and His entourage lived on contributions that may otherwise have gone to the Pharisees. So there may have been a certain element of practical financial jealousy in their opposition to Him. Second, the Pharisees were enraged at His claims to be an authoritative interpreter of God's law. Jesus rejected the Pharisees' interpretation of Scripture. Jesus spent three years teaching multitudes a different interpretation of the Old Testament. This cut directly at the Pharisees' pride, at their self-concept, and at their financial support. The Pharisees were characterized by enormous zeal for the law as they understood it. Jesus claimed that they did not understand the law and they failed to obey it. Worse yet, the Pharisees lost every debate with Him. Jesus directly challenged the Pharisees at the heart of their movement.

The third point of opposition between Jesus and the Pharisees was the most important. Jesus claimed not only to be the promised Messiah,¹³ but also to be God incarnate. To the Pharisees, this was blasphemy, and the claim deserved public execution. Jesus' claim was not just heresy. After all, the Roman world was full of gods, and it was not unknown for men to make some kind of claim to divinity. Egypt's Pharaoh had always claimed to be the god Horus incarnate. Caesars like Domitian would claim divinity. However, Jesus' claim was different from these. Jesus claimed to be Yahweh Himself. In John 8:56-59, the Jews claimed that Abraham had rejoiced to see His day. Jesus' opponents mocked Him and asked Him if He had seen Abraham. Jesus replied, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I AM." The word "I AM" in Hebrew was closely related to the name Yahweh. In verses like this, Jesus claimed to be the God of the Old Testament. This was a huge issue. Jesus' opponents immediately picked up stones to stone Him for blasphemy, but Jesus hid from them and left the temple.

This touched the heart of the Pharisees' religious zeal. The Pharisees believed that Yahweh had appeared to men constantly in Scripture. He walked with Adam in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3:8. He appeared to Abraham, and the patriarch made a meal for Him in Genesis 18:1-8. God appeared to Moses on Sinai in Exodus 24:9-11, and He went before Israel in a pillar of fire. Isaiah saw Him as His train filled the temple in Isaiah 6:1-5. Ezekiel saw Him reigning on His throne above the crystal sea, the cherubim, and the wheels in Ezekiel 1:1-28. Time and again through the pages of Scripture, God's people saw Him, and saw Him in a form that looked human.¹⁴ The Pharisees hoped to receive the same kind of visions. When Jesus claimed to be the Person seen by the Old Testament prophets, Jesus threatened directly the basis of the Pharisees' Merkabah expectations.

This confrontation with the Pharisees' most basic Merkabah beliefs brought Jesus and the early Christians into direct confrontation with the Pharisees' zeal. Vincent Smiles explored the meaning of "zeal" in the 1st century. Smiles noted that Paul claimed to have been extremely zealous for the law. Paul was so zealous for the law that he became a persecutor of the church. Smiles discussed James Dann's view of zeal. Smiles wrote the following.

In several publications, from 1987 to 1998, James D. G. Dunn has pointed to "the classic examples" of zeal as important background for understanding Paul's persecution of the church and his rejection, as an apostle, of "works of law" as necessary for righteousness. Dunn notes "three striking features" of such "zeal": (1) It represented "an unconditional commitment to maintain Israel's distinctiveness, to prevent the purity of its covenant set-apartness to God from

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Neusner noted Morton Smith's summary of the Pharisees' life style in Smith's article, "Palestinian Judaism in the First Century," in *Israel: Its Role in Civilization*, Moshe David, ed. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956), 67-81. Smith noted that the Pharisees lived like Greek philosophers. They taught without pay. They attracted disciples who followed them and served them. They looked for gifts of support, and they were exempt from taxes. They could be distinguished in the streets by their clothing, walk, and speech. They praised asceticism, and they discussed theoretical questions. Neusner, *Judaism in the Beginning of Christianity*, 52.

Much has been made of the Messianic secret in Mark's gospel. Whether or not Jesus claimed to be the Messiah depended on the situation. He was determined not to be forced to become the kind of military leader visualized by so many as the Messiah. To prevent the appearance of a military revolt centered on Him, He often warned those He healed not to reveal who He was. Jesus also denied the demons the right to speak about Him. However, in other situations, He declared clearly that He was the promised One.

Theophanies in the Old Testament included: Gen. 3:8; 28:12-13; 31:11-13; Ex. 3:5; Josh. 5:13-15; Judg. 6:22-23; 13:22-23; I Kngs. 3:5; II Kngs. 6:17

being adulterated or defiled, to defend its religious and national boundaries." (2) It involved "a readiness to do this by force," including "the slaughter of those who threatened Israel's distinctive covenant status." (3) It was directed not only against "Gentiles who threatened Israel's boundaries, but against fellow Jews too." The texts to be examined below will show that the violence was directed primarily against Israel; foreigners were targeted only if they directly interfered with Israel's observance of the Law.¹⁵

Smiley noted that the Old Testament talked about the zeal of the Lord. He noted that God's zeal was not a temporary or occasional characteristic of God. It was an essential part of His character, and His demand for obedience was absolute. God's character then provided the model for people to follow. Numbers 25:7-11 noted Phinehas' zeal for God. This zeal led him to kill an Israelite who had taken a Moabite woman into his tent. Phinehas was approved for using violence to insure Israel's covenant obedience and distinctiveness.¹⁶ Smiles noted that *Sirach* 45:23 commended Phinehas for his zeal for the Lord when Israelites had become apostate. Smiles noted that Elijah and Jehu were also recognized for their zeal in killing those who were worshipping Baal. Smiles argued that Paul persecuted the church from a similar zeal for God.

2) PAUL AND THE MERKABAH MYSTICS

a) Paul, Merkabah, and the Academic debate

It may be helpful to trace a few of the authors who have had a part in this discussion. Paul's relationship to Merkabah mysticism was explored by James M. Scott. Scott introduced his discussion of the topic with these words.

Recently, there had been considerable interest in the Jewish mysticism of Paul, and particularly his Merkabah mysticism. For example, Alan F. Segal attempts to understand Paul as a visionary who underwent a mystical conversion akin to the experiences found in the Jewish mystical tradition exemplified in the Qumran Angelic Liturgy, I Enoch, and later Merkabah mysticism. Martin Hengel has also focused on the Merkabah experience of Paul, arguing that the apostle bears witness to an early Christian tradition based on Ps 110:1, that the crucified Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, was raised and seated "at the right hand" of God, that is, enthroned as a co-occupant of God's own "throne of glory" (cf. Jer 17:12), located in the highest heaven. Hengel suggests that Paul presupposes the Merkabah throne-chariot at many points in his extant writings.¹⁷

Scott noted that Hengel pointed to the significance of Psalm 110:1 for the early church. Hengel argued that this verse had an important role in the development of early Christian Christology. The early church's use of this verse was also seen by the Jewish community as blasphemy. The early church applied this verse to prove not only that Jesus was the Messiah but also that He was raised from the dead and was seated at God's right hand. Based on Psalm 110:1 and passages like Jeremiah 17:12, the early church claimed that Jesus was the co-occupant of God's glory throne. Hengel noted that the Old Testament claimed that only Yahweh sat on God's throne in heaven. Hengel argued that this Christological interpretation of Psalm 110:1 probably grew from Jesus' own claims. Hengel noted that when the high priest asked Jesus if He was the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed (Mark 14:61-62), Jesus responded with allusions to Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:13. Hengel also noted that Paul was the earliest witness to this Christological use of Psalm 110:1. Hengel noted that Paul saw Christ in His divine glory during his Damascus road vision. Hengel suggested that this occurred only two or three years after Jesus' death and resurrection. Hengel also claimed that Paul's use of Psalm 110:1 in Romans 8:34 and I Corinthians 15:25

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Vincent M. Smiles, "The Concept of 'Zeal' in Second-Temple Judaism and Paul's Critique of It in Romans 10:2," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 64 (2002): 283. Smiles discussed J. D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 121.

¹⁶ Smiles, "The Concept of 'Zeal' in Second-Temple Judaism and Paul's Critique of It in Romans 10:2," 287-289.

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James M. Scott, "Throne-Chariot Mysticism in Qumran and in Paul," 101-19 in Craig A. Evans and Peter W. Flint, eds. *Eschatology, Messianism, and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1997), 107-08.

demonstrated the Palestinian origin of this interpretation of Psalm 110. Scott noted Hengel's opinion that Paul presupposed the existence of the Merkabah throne at many points in his writing. Paul assumed that Jesus shared both God's Name and His throne. Hengel noted that Paul recalled a Merkabah vision in 2 Corinthians 12:2-4. Hengel suggested that Merkabah visions had a great impact on Paul's thought.

Scott suggested that Merkabah imagery may also have stood behind Paul's depiction of God's victory procession in 2 Corinthians 2:14-7:4. Scott noted that the victorious King headed a triumphant procession riding on His chariot. Scott then noted that Christ sat at God's right hand at the resurrection, and He now sits on the divine throne with the Father. Scott noted that Paul rejoiced in the knowledge given to men because of his encounter with the cherubim throne. The vision of God's throne gave Paul the knowledge of God which he then gave to men. Just as Moses mediated his Merkabah vision to men, so also God used Paul to teach the knowledge that God had given to Paul. Scott noted that those who stood in the presence of the cherubim throne and saw God face to face were transformed by the experience. They became God's glorious ones and they gained the ability to stand before Him forever. 2 Enoch 22:7 claimed that they put on the glory of heaven and become like angels. By standing in God's presence, Paul became a person who wore the aroma of heaven and who gave the world knowledge like the Torah. Paul claimed that he had an encounter with God like Moses' Merkabah vision on Sinai. Paul also claimed in 2 Corinthians 3:12-18 that believers viewed God's glory as in a mirror. Scott claimed that believers saw God's glory just as Ezekiel had seen it reflected in the Chebar River. They were then being changed into the same image of God.

Scott noted that Peter Schäfer recently challenged the claim that 2 Corinthians 12:2-4 recorded a Merkabah vision by Paul. Scott noted that C. R. A. Morray-Jones answered Schäfer's objections. Morray-Jones claimed that Paul was describing his own ascent to the heavenly temple. He described a Merkabah vision of the glorified Christ on His heavenly throne. Scott discussed a Gnostic text called the *Apocalypse of Paul*. This text may have been written in the 2nd century AD. It gave a Gnostic interpretation of 2 Corinthians 12:2-4. In the text, Paul passed through the gates of ten heavens and past the guards of those gates. Scott noted that the text resembled later Hekhalot texts and Merkabah mysticism. In the 7th heaven, Paul saw an old man dressed in white sitting on a throne. Scott suggested that this figure was drawn from Daniel 7.¹⁸

A number of other authors have explored the relationship between Paul and Merkabah. In 1971, David Bowman suggested that Paul may have been part of the discussions over *Ma'aseh Merkabah* in the school of Gamaliel. Bowman suggested that Paul may even have been one of the *Yorede Merkabah*. A *Yored* was a person who embarked on a ship. When applied to the Merkabah, Bowman suggested that Paul may have sought to embark on the chariot of God. Bowman argued that Merkabah speculation was based on Ezekiel 1, and Ezekiel only claimed to see the image of God instead of God Himself. Bowman argued that Paul would have interpreted the human figure seen on the throne as Jesus.¹⁹ The association of Paul with Merkabah mysticism was not new in Bowman's day, and many authors would defend a similar position in future years.

Robert Price noted that Paul's heavenly vision in II Corinthians 12:1-10 has been hard for scholars to understand. Price noted that Paul must have known the motif of a heavenly journey. Apocalyptic literature had described heavenly journeys by Enoch, Ezra, Baruch, Moses, and Levi. Each of these returned from heaven and described what they had learned, and their revelations included secrets about the last days, the angels, and astrology. Price argued that Paul may also have been familiar with Merkabah mysticism. Price note J. Bowker's claims that Merkabah, or throne mysticism, was practiced in Paul's day and later. Price argued that Merkabah mysticism can be traced back to the 1st century among rabbis like Johanan ben Zakkai. Price argued that hints of Merkabah can also be seen in the Testament of Levi, 1 Enoch, and the Qumran scrolls. Price noted Gershom Scholem's claim that Paul formed a link between these earlier traditions and the later Merkabah literature. Price claimed that the mystic contemplated Ezekiel's vision in hope of receiving such a vision himself.²⁰

J. W. Bowker argued for a substantial Merkabah influence on Paul's thought. Bowker suggested that Paul may very well have been trained in a 1st century form of Merkabah mysticism. Bowker made five

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Scott, "The Triumph of God in 2 Cor 2.14: Additional Evidence of Merkabah Mysticism in Paul," 260-81.

¹⁹ John Bowman, "David, Jesus Son of David and Son of Man," *Abr-Nahrain* 27 (1989): 15-7.

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Robert M. Price, "Punished in Paradise: An Exegetical Theory on II Corinthians 12:1-10," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 7 (1980): 33-4.

points about Merkabah mysticism: 1) Before Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 AD, Merkabah mysticism was practiced by some of the most important Jewish scholars like Yohanan ben Zakkai, who clearly did teach Merkabah techniques to his disciples. 2) The Merkabah mystics taught that visions of God were very dangerous for those who were not well trained. Paul claimed that he had been very well taught in rabbinic studies. 3) Practitioners of Merkabah contemplation were very clearly orthodox, mainstream Jewish scholars. 4) Visions of God clearly did happen within Orthodox Judaism, and 5) the purpose of Merkabah speculation was the interpretation of Scripture instead of simply the acquisition of a vision. Bowker argued that Paul received a number of visions during his ministry. The vision recorded in II Corinthians 12 sounded much like a Merkabah vision. Paul claimed to have arrived at the 3rd heaven, just as Yohanan ben Zakkai claimed to have been promised the 3rd level of heaven. Paul's Damascus road vision occurred while he was on a journey. The same was true of ben Zakkai's visions. Both also described falling to the ground in a heavenly light and hearing a voice speaking to them. Bowker also argued that Paul's Damascus road experience would be easier to understand if Paul had been contemplating Ezekiel's theophanies when the event occurred. Ezekiel's visions were a key topic of the Merkabah mystics. Bowker noted that both Paul and Ezekiel were on a mission to prosecute rebellious Israelites. He suggested that this might have brought Ezekiel's vision to Paul's consciousness.²¹

One of the more complete discussions of Merkabah mysticism was written by Timo Eskola. He noted that as early as 1971, J. W. Bowker had compared Merkabah mysticism with Paul's theology.²² Eskola noted that several writers in the 1990's applied Jewish mysticism to Christology. C. C. Newman analyzed Paul's use of Glory in his book *Paul's Glory-Christology*. This study led Newman to the chariot throne motif. Newman held that Paul had inherited a culture that had already given the term Glory a meaning related to apocalyptic. Newman suggested that Paul's conversion changed the way that he understood the term, and his theology was transformed by an apocalyptic Christology. Newman claimed that Paul interpreted the Christophany in the context of the Glory motif. Christ became for him the Davidic Messiah exalted to Glory.²³

Eskola noted that there are important questions to ask about Paul's relationship with the Merkabah traditions. To what extent did Paul accept and alter exaltation Christology and what role did early Christological traditions play in his theology? Eskola noted that several Pauline passages describe the resurrected Christ as being enthroned in heaven. Paul also used Psalm 110 in a Merkabah context. Eskola noted that several authors have asked if Paul himself was a Merkabah mystic. Eskola asked what might have been Paul's relation to the heavenly ascents in Jewish apocalyptic. Eskola noted that Paul would have known Jewish mysticism quite well. Eskola noted that Romans 8:34 did not depict Christ standing before God's throne as a high priest would have stood. Instead, Paul claimed that Christ was sitting at God's right hand. This gave Christ the ability to intercede for people.²⁴

Eskola noted that Colossians 2:16-3:1 was a polemic against the Merkabah traditions that had given rise to exaltation Christology in the first place. Eskola argued that Jewish mysticism must have been a significant threat to early Christianity. Jewish mysticism offered a parallel theological system that must have been very tempting to the young converts at Colosse. Eskola noted that the account of Paul's heavenly journey in 2 Corinthians 12:1-5 has led to a large discussion about Paul's relationship to Merkabah mysticism. Eskola noted several parallels between this passage and Merkabah mysticism. Paul referred to three heavens. A similar theme can be seen in the Testament of Levi, Jubilees, and 2 Enoch. Paul claimed to have learned things at Christ's throne that no one was allowed to speak. This claim was paralleled in Jewish ascent stories. Eskola noted that Paul did not mention arriving at a heavenly throne. Eskola argued that Paul's opponents at Colosse had probably used their claims of mystical experience to demonstrate their authority.

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Bowker, "'Merkabah' Visions and the Visions of Paul," *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 157-173. For Paul's status as a Jewish mystic, see also Alan Segal, *Paul the Convert: The Apostate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990). Segal claimed that Paul, "was also a mystic. In fact he is the only early Jewish mystic and apocalypticist whose personal, confessional writing has come down to us." See the discussion of Segal's position in Langton, "Modern Jewish Identity and the Apostle Paul: Pauline Studies as an Intra-Jewish ideological Battleground," 237.

²² Bowker, "'Merkabah' Visions and the Visions of Paul," 157-73.

²³ Eskola, *Messiah and the Throne*, 6-13.

²⁴ Eskola, *Messiah and the Throne*, 182-86.

Eskola noted that 2 Corinthians 4:6 claimed that believers would receive "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Eskola suggested that this could refer to a heavenly vision. Eskola noted that Glory was a key term in Jewish mysticism, and Glory was a technical term for the appearance of God in human form. Eskola suggested that Paul's heavenly vision in 2 Corinthians 12 may have been a vision of the exalted Christ enthroned in heaven. Eskola noted that Paul interpreted his Damascus road experience as a Merkabah vision. Eskola argued that this vision taught Paul the content of his theology. After this vision, Paul saw Christ as the Davidic ruler enthroned over heaven and earth. Eskola argued that Paul already had a view of the heavenly world before his conversion that made it possible for him to understand his Damascus road experience. So Eskola argued that Paul was probably familiar with Merkabah mysticism before his conversion, and he may himself have been a mystic. Eskola wrote,

He may himself be an example of a Jewish mystic converted to Christ. If it had been common for Saul the Pharisee to speculate on visions and angels, it is quite understandable that Paul the convert was attached to the picture of Christ as an enthroned king of heaven. When the scheme was further confirmed by Psalm 110 which provided a Scriptural proof for the exaltation and enthronement of the Davidide, what could better serve the purposes of a devoted Jewish mystic who is enthusiastic to proclaim his new Messiah?²⁵

Eskola suggested that Paul's theology may make it possible to understand the relationship between Merkabah mysticism and early Christology. He noted several impacts of Merkabah on Paul's thought. 1) Paul often described Christ as the enthroned Messiah. 2) Paul relies strongly on enthronement language with its emphasis on the Glory of the heavenly throne. 3) Paul described the enthroned Christ in terms similar to those used by Merkabah mysticism. 4) The book of Colossians demonstrates that Paul was well aware of Jewish mystical traditions. Eskola suggests that the strength of Paul's reaction in Colossians suggests that Paul himself may once have had a close relationship to that kind of mysticism.²⁶

Paul's similarity to the Merkabah tradition has been a topic of debate in both Christian and Jewish academic orbits. Langton noted Samuel Sandmel's evaluation of Paul. Langton claimed that Sandmel used Paul to argue against Orthodox Jewish limitations on the nature of authentic Judaism. Langton used the following quotation from Sandmel's book *The Genius of Paul*.

Paul was a mystic who encountered God-in the form of Christ. Paul's 'conversion' is the change wrought in him because of that experience. As a result of it, Paul sees what to him are new and heightened insights within his inherited and precious Judaism.

Now we must be more specific about the character of this heightened insight. In my judgment, no term better serves initially to classify the convert Paul than the word 'prophet'. Paul had the sense of a call from God, of communion with him, and a commission from God..."²⁷

That is an accurate observation about how the New Testament portrayed Paul.

Along the same lines, Alan Segal discussed the relationship between II Corinthians 3:18 and later forms of Merkabah mysticism. Segal wrote,

Paul here interprets the appearance of 'the Glory of the Lord' in Exod. 33:21 as a type of the revelation vouchsafed to the Christian community. The Christian community even surpasses those who stood at Sinai, for they behold the Glory of the Lord and are transformed into his divine likeness. To me this suggests that Paul has received a theophany of the human figure of the Lord YHWH, the so called angel of the Lord. Yet there are several unique aspects to this vision. For one thing, Paul identifies the Glory of the Lord, the angel of the Lord, or the angel of his presence, as having the features of the face of Christ (4:6). For another, for Paul this is the signal that the resurrection of the end time is beginning, that those alive and dead are being transformed into the body of Christ. This is quite a bit like the later Jewish mysticism of ascent and transformation

²⁵ Eskola, *Messiah and the Throne*, 201.

²⁶ Eskola, *Messiah and the Throne*, 196-201.

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Langton, "Modern Jewish Identity and the Apostle Paul: Pauline Studies as an Intra-Jewish Ideological Battleground," 232.

which we know in the Hekhaloth literature, the mysticism we know as *merkabah* mysticism. The version that Paul tells us is more primitive and less developed, much closer to the transformation that is related of Enoch in 1 Enoch 71. But, if this is true, Paul's experience is again the first place we see Jewish mysticism. So not only is it important that Paul's religious life begins in Pharisaic Judaism, but it is also important that he witnesses a number of religious phenomena that we suspect were present in the Pharisaic community of the first century but cannot otherwise demonstrate.²⁸

Segal wrote about Paul from a Jewish rather than Christian perspective. Segal had discussed Jewish mysticism in his earlier works. Here he saw Paul as the kind of Jewish mystic that would later be associated with Merkabah mysticism.²⁹

b) Paul's Revised Merkabah Theology

While several authors have argued for a connection between Paul's visions and Merkabah mysticism, few have considered the implications of this suggestion for Pauline theology.³⁰ Paul's zeal for the law was intended to gain him a heavenly vision. When Paul received his first heavenly vision on the road to Damascus, he saw Christ at the right hand of God's throne. This radically changed and shaped Paul's whole theology.³¹ Paul's theology after his conversion turned Merkabah mysticism inside out. Paul's new perspective taught him first that all of his former zeal for the law had been misplaced. He learned that no man can earn the right to stand before God. Paul learned that all of his own attempts to earn the right to stand before God had only been filthy rags.

When Paul saw Christ at God's right hand, he realized that He did not deserve to stand before God. He had opposed Jesus with all of his ability. He had persecuted Christians severely, and he was traveling to Damascus to expand the area of his persecution. How then could He have received the heavenly vision that he had sought for so long? Paul learned that any man could only stand before God by His grace. While the concept of God's grace ran through all of Scripture, the Greek word *charis*, or "grace," had been almost unknown in the gospels.³² Outside of the gospels, the Greek word *charis*, or "grace," became one of the most important words in the New Testament. It became one of Paul's most common themes. Paul used the word "grace" 89 times.³³ Paul explained his basic theology in Romans 3:19-24. Paul wrote,

But we know that what the law says, it says to those who are under the authority of the law, that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may be under judgment by to God; because from the works of the law all flesh will not be justified before Him; for through the law is (or comes) the knowledge of sin. But now without the law the righteousness of God has been revealed, that was witnessed by the law and the prophets; the righteousness of God through the faith of Jesus Christ for all and on all those who believe. For there is no difference (between Jews and gentiles),

²⁸ Alan F. Segal, "Paul's Jewish Presuppositions," in James D. G. Dunn, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to St Paul*, (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 170.

²⁹ As a Jewish scholar, Segal would see Paul's conversion as an apostasy from Judaism to Christianity. While Segal would see Paul as being in the same thought world as the Merkabah mystics, he would also see Paul as a representative of a different religion than Judaism.

³⁰ In Gal. 1:14-19, Paul claimed that he developed his theological positions without input from the apostles or leaders in Jerusalem.

³¹ When discussing both Paul's mysticism and Christian mysticism in general, John Ashton noted that Paul's Damascus road experience transformed all of Paul's previous values and colored all of his subsequent life. Ashton, *The Religion of Paul the Apostle*, 116.

³² The word *charis* was also used in John's prologue in Jn. 1:15-17. Paul's companion Luke used *charis* in Lk. 2:40 where he described Jesus' childhood. Luke used the word *charis* frequently in the book of Acts.

³³ Rom. 1:5-7; 3:24; 4:4; 4:16; 5:2-21; 6:1; 6:14-15; 11:5-6; 12:3-6; 15:15; 16:20-24; I Cor. 1:3-4; 3:10; 10:30; 15:10; 16:23; II Cor. 1:2; 1:12; 4:15; 6:1; 8:1; 8:6-9; 8:19; 9:8; 9:14; 12:9; 13:14; Gal. 1:3-6; 1:15; 2:9; 2:21; 5:4; 6:18; Eph. 1:2; 1:6-7; 2:5-8; 3:2; 3:7-8; 4:7; 4:29; 6:24; Phil. 1:2-7; 4:23; Col. 1:2-6; 3:16; 4:6; 4:18; I Thess. 1:1; 5:28; II Thess. 1:2; 1:12; 2:16; 3:18; I Tim. 1:2; 1:14; 6:21; II Tim. 1:2; 1:9; 2:1; 4:22; Tit. 1:4; 2:11; 3:7; 3:15; Phi. 3; 25.

because all sinned and come short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.

Here Paul wrote that no one could stand before God because of his obedience to God's Law. Every man sinned against God, and every man had fallen short of God's requirement of righteousness for those who would see His glory. Instead of standing before God by his own obedience, Paul taught that anyone could stand before God only through faith in Jesus Christ. Jews and gentiles alike could be justified before God only as a gift of God's grace by the redemption provided by Christ's death.

Since the ability to stand before God came through God's grace, Paul learned that God was sovereign. God chose people and brought them to Himself. Paul learned that the ability to stand before God was given by God as pure grace, not by works of any kind. Not only was the ability to stand before God a product of grace, Paul learned that God had chosen him. In Galatians 1:15-16, Paul claimed that God had set him apart from his birth to proclaim the gospel to the gentiles. So the ability to stand before God was based on God's sovereign choice. This sovereign choice became an important theme for Paul. In stressing it, he was reaffirming one of the Old Testament's more important ideas. Throughout the Scriptures, God was depicted as choosing a people for Himself.³⁴ This divine election in the Old Testament already applied to those individuals in the nation who were a part of the believing community in the eschaton.³⁵ These were depicted as the righteous. The synoptic gospels all limited the "elect" of God to the righteous and not to the nation as a whole.³⁶ Paul applied the Old Testament idea of divine election to himself, to believing Jews, and to all believers. In Galatians 1:15-16, Paul claimed that God had set him apart from his birth to proclaim the gospel to the gentiles. In Romans 11:1-6, Paul noted that God has not rejected Israel despite their unbelief because a remnant of believers still existed by God's gracious choice. In Romans 8:33, Paul asked who could bring a charge against God's elect. In Colossians 3:12, Paul urged the Colossians to have a heart of compassion because they had been chosen by God. In Titus 1:1, Paul called himself an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of those who were chosen by God. Throughout Paul's theology, the apostle recognized that salvation by God's grace was under the control of God's sovereignty.

Paul's Damascus Road experience also led him to think deeply about the nature of God. He struggled to understand how Jesus could have been the God seen in the Old Testament theophanies. Paul's Damascus road experience simply proved the truth of claims that had been made consistently by the 1st century church. The gospel writers had consistently claimed that Christ would return in a way that resembled very closely the glory theophanies in Isaiah 6, Ezekiel 1, and similar Old Testament passages. In Matthew 16:27, Jesus promised Peter that the Son of Man would come in judgment with the glory of His Father with His angels. In Matthew 19:28, Jesus promised Peter that the apostles would have thrones of their own in the regeneration when He would sit on His glorious throne. In Matthew 25:30-34, Jesus' interpreted the parable of the servants in terms of the future when He would judge the nations sitting on His glorious throne. Mark 8:24-27 promised that after the tribulation of the last days, the Son of Man would come on the clouds with great power and glory. In Luke 9:26, Jesus warned that all those who were ashamed of Him in this world would face the consequences. Christ would be ashamed of them when He came in His glory and in the glory of the Father and His angels. All of the synoptic gospels recorded Jesus words to the high priest at His trial. Jesus warned the high priest that he would see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven sitting on His glorious throne.³⁷ Time and time again, Jesus claimed that He would sit on the glory throne of God that had been seen so often in the Old Testament. Paul echoes these words in Ephesians 1:20-23 when he wrote that God raised Christ from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places far above all rule and authority and power and dominion.

Paul explained Christ's relationship to the Old Testament theophanies with the motif of "God's image."³⁸ In Colossians 1:15, Paul wrote that Christ was the image of the invisible God and the first born of

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³⁵ Is. 45:4

³⁶ Is. 65:9; 65:22.

³⁷ Mat. 24:24-31; Mk. 13:22-27; Lk. 18:7.

³⁸ Mat. 26:64, Mk. 14:61-62, Lk. 22:70.

Hanson argued that Paul wrote a Midrashic commentary on Ex. 34 in II Cor. 3:7-18. He argued that Paul believed that Moses had seen the pre-incarnate Christ in the tabernacle. Hanson noted that the rabbis believed that no one could see

all creation.³⁹ In Galatians 1: 14-17, Paul claimed that Jesus was the "image" of the invisible God. Paul claimed that Jesus had existed before all things. Paul claimed that all things were created by Jesus and were held together in Him. In Philippians 2:5-11, Paul discussed in more detail the relationship between Jesus' Old Testament appearances and His incarnation. Paul claimed that Jesus had existed in the "form" of God in the Old Testament theophanies. Yet He did not insist on grasping His equality with God. Instead, Jesus emptied Himself, took the form of a servant, was made in the likeness of a man, and humbled Himself in obedience to death. So God exalted Jesus. God bestowed on Him the name of Yahweh. God decreed that every knee in heaven and earth would one day bow before Him, declaring Him Lord in the Father's theophanic glory. Along the same lines in Colossians 1:15, Paul called Jesus the image of the invisible God.

While these claims were central to Christian doctrine in the 1st century AD, they left much to be explained. The question for the first four centuries of the Christian era would be the relationship between the divine and human in the Trinity. How could Jesus be both God and man? What relationship could there be between Jesus and His Father, and how could God's nature be understood? These questions would bring conflict to the whole Christian church for the next five centuries. How could the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be at the same time One and Three? After the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD, official Christian doctrine would become that there were three Persons together in One God. In practice, Chalcedon would really conclude that the Trinity was a mystery beyond human understanding, and that attempts to understand the Trinity would lead to one kind of heresy or another. After Chalcedon, the churches of the Roman West would affirm strongly the doctrine of the unity of God, and then largely ignore it. Churches in Western Europe and the Americas have spent a lot of time talking about the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, but they have thought rather little about any practical unity between them. The 1st century AD was a very different time. The authors of the New Testament wrestled with the doctrine of the Trinity in more profound ways than the church has heard since that time.

Paul and the authors of the New Testament wrestled with both the unity and diversity of the Godhead. Paul and the other New Testament authors certainly recognized that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were different Persons. In Ephesians 1:17, Paul talked about the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory. This distinguished clearly between God the Father and Jesus His Son. Other similar verses could be suggested. Yet the authors of the New Testament also emphasized the unity of the Godhead far more than has been popular in the Western Christian church. In Matthew 10:20, Jesus promised that the "Spirit of your Father" would speak within the disciples. In I Peter 1:10-12, Peter called the Holy Spirit the "Spirit of Christ," and Peter claimed that the Spirit of Christ had spoken to the Old Testament prophets. In Romans 8:9-11, Paul equated the presence of the Holy Spirit within believers with the presence of the "Spirit of Christ" within them. In the same verses, Paul also equated the Holy Spirit with the "Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead." In II Corinthians 3:17, Paul noted that the "Lord" of Exodus 34:34 was the Spirit. In Philippians 1:19, Paul called the Holy Spirit "the Spirit of Jesus Christ." This was the 1st century form of the doctrine of the Trinity. While Paul's formulations did not resemble wording that would be used after five centuries of Christological conflict, Paul's words were simple truth. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were completely different Persons who acted independently of each other. Jesus claimed not to know things that the Father knew, and even Jesus was baptized by the Holy Spirit as the Spirit descended on Him. Yet at the same time, the Son was the Father. The Holy Spirit was the Father. Jesus was the Holy Spirit. The three were both completely distinct and completely One.

Paul wrestled with this reality but could not understand it. Paul concluded that both the Trinity and all of Christian theology were deep and eternal mysteries. Paul inherited the idea of a mystery from the synoptic gospels. In Matthew 13:11, Mark 4:11, and Luke 8:10, Jesus had explained to His disciples that

God in this age. God could not be seen because of His glory, not because He was incapable of being seen. Hanson argued that for the first three centuries AD, Jews believed that anyone in the Old Testament who claimed to have seen God actually saw the "image of God," and this "image" appeared in the form of a man. Hanson noted that Paul believed that Christ was the "image" of God in the Old Testament. A. T. Hanson, "The Midrash in II Corinthians 3: A Reconsideration," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 9 (1980): 3, 6.

Fossum noted that the divine body described in the Shi'ur Qomah material was not God Himself, but was the Glory. It was the appearance of God instead of God Himself. Fossum suggested that this may shed light on Paul's claim in Colossians 1:15-18 that Christ was the image of the invisible God. Fossum noted that the term "image" in Colossians belonged to the same set of concepts as Glory. Fossum, "Colossians 1.15-18a in the Light of Jewish Mysticism and Gnosticism," 198-99

they had been allowed to know the mysteries of the gospel while the crowds had been taught only in parables.⁴⁰ It is striking that all three gospels explained Jesus' words with a reference to Isaiah's great Merkabah vision in Isaiah 6:1-13. While Isaiah saw Jesus and heard His voice, His words were veiled to those who had rejected God's law so that hearing they may hear and not understand.

For Paul, mystery was right at the heart of theology. In Romans 11:25, Paul taught that the partial hardening of Israel was a mystery. In passages like Romans 16:25, Paul taught that the gospel was a mystery that had been kept secret for long ages past.⁴¹ In I Corinthians 2:6-8, Paul claimed that he spoke God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God had predestined before the ages for their glory. In I Corinthians 4:1, Paul claimed to be a servant of Christ and a steward of the mysteries of God. In I Corinthians 13:2, Paul warned that it would do little good to know all mysteries and all knowledge without love. In I Corinthians 14:2, Paul explained that those who spoke in tongues spoke mysteries in their spirits. In I Corinthians 15:51, Paul told the Corinthian church a mystery. He promised that they would not all die, but some would be changed at Christ's return. In Ephesians 1:8-9, Paul claimed that God had made known to him the mystery of God's will. In Ephesians 5:31-32, Paul described the relationship between a husband and his wife as a mystery that pointed to Christ's relationship with His church. In Ephesians 6:19, Paul prayed for boldness in making known the mystery of the gospel. In Colossians 2:1-3, Paul prayed that the Colossians' hearts may be encouraged having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth from the full understanding and true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself, in whom were hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. In Colossians 4:3, Paul asked for prayers that God may open a door for the word so that we may speak the mystery of Christ. In I Timothy 3:8-9, Paul instructed Timothy, telling him that deacons must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. Then in I Timothy 3:16, Paul quoted an early church hymn to prove that the mystery of Godliness was great. Paul spoke of the mystery of the faith. While Paul had received the finest rabbinic education available in his day, he had learned that the truth was far beyond any man's ability to grasp. All that Paul could do was to wrestle with the mysteries and try to understand them. Paul's former associates saw this struggle and questioned his sanity.⁴²

3) A LIFE "IN" CHRIST

Paul thought about the fact that the Holy Spirit had fallen on the church, and that the Spirit was within all of God's children. If the Holy Spirit was the Spirit of Jesus because of the unity of the Trinity, then Jesus Himself had entered all of His people. Jesus was "in" them, and they were "in" Him. For Paul, this became one of the most important doctrines of Christianity.⁴³ In later years, this principle came to be called the "mystic union of Christ and His church." This was a doctrine that was once almost universally accepted by the Christian church although it has faded away in a "seeker sensitive" ecclesiastical context.⁴⁴ R. Tudur Jones discussed the theological importance of the Mystic Union of Christ and His people. Jones wrote,

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The idea of religious "mysteries" was common in the first century AD. It was present in the Greek mystery religions. It was also used at Qumran where the Old Testament prophets were held to be mysteries in need of interpretation. See the discussion in Martin H. Scharlemann, "The Secret of God's Plan (Studies in Ephesians)," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 40 (1969): 534.

⁴¹ Eph. 3:2-10; Col. 1:25-27

⁴² One danger perceived by the rabbis about Merkabah mysticism was that the heavenly vision could destroy a person's ability to distinguish between truth and error. See on this fear, Bruce, "The Colossian Heresy," 202. This may have led to the charge that Paul had lost his mind.

⁴³ Paul's "in Christ" theology has been interpreted in a wide variety of ways, and it has often been explained without a reference to the "mystic union." One recent study of the subject was written by Thomas Allen. He noted that the phrase "in Christ" has often been interpreted as a reference to baptism. Allen suggested that it should be interpreted in light of the Semitic idea of a corporate personality. Allen suggested that an individual was functionally identified with a group so closely that his own personhood was, "seen to supply the necessary conditions for the group's existence and unity." Thomas G. Allen, "Exaltation and Solidarity with Christ: Ephesians 1.20 and 2.6," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 28 (1986): 110.

⁴⁴ For a study of the mystic union in a Puritan context, see R. Tudur Jones, "Union with Christ: the Existential Nerve of Puritan Piety," *Tyndale Bulletin* 41 (1990): 186-208.

Union with Christ has been a prominent element in Christian experience and thinking throughout the centuries. That is especially true of Mystical Theology. But it is also true of Protestantism. When extolling the blessings of faith, Luther wrote 'The third incomparable benefit of faith is this, that it unites the soul with Christ as a bride is united with her bridegroom. And by this mystery...Christ and the soul become one flesh.' Calvin similarly insists that there can be no benefit to us unless the Holy Spirit engrafts us into Christ. 'To this is to be referred that sacred marriage, by which we become bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh, and so one with him' (Eph. 5:30). As Peter Toon has rightly emphasized, union with Christ was of 'supreme importance to Calvin.' This conviction was woven into the fabric of Protestant thinking here in Britain in the sixteenth century.⁴⁵

For Paul, Christ's presence within His people was the heart of their relationship with God.⁴⁶ Paul expressed this clearly in Romans 8:9-11. Paul told the Roman Christians, "You are not in the flesh but in the Spirit if the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. If Christ is in you, the spirit is alive. If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through the Spirit who indwells you." The Spirit within the Roman Christians was the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, and also the Spirit of the Father. Paul told the Romans that they were alive to God if Christ Jesus was within them through the Spirit. Paul expressed a similar idea in Colossians 1:27-28. In this passage, Paul talked about the riches of the glory of this mystery which was Christ in them, the hope of glory. Paul told the church at Colosse that he proclaimed Christ so that Paul could present all of them complete in Christ. Those who contained Christ's Spirit were "in" Christ. The theme of life "in" Christ was one of Paul's most important themes.⁴⁷ In Philippians 1:1, Paul wrote to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi. In Romans 11:4-5, Paul wrote that the Roman Christians were one body in Christ.

Paul believed that Christ's presence within each believer made the believer's salvation possible. God's law decreed that every man must die for rebellion against God. If Jesus entered each believer and become "one" with them, then they were also "one" with Him. Believers then shared in His death and resurrection. Christians were free from the condemnation of the law because they had already died to it "in" Christ. In Ephesians 4:32, Paul told the Ephesians that God had forgiven them "in" Christ. In Galatians 2:20, Paul declared that he had been crucified with Christ; and that it was no longer he who lived, but Christ lived "in" him. Paul declared that the life that he now lived he lived by faith in the Son of God who loved him and delivered Himself up for him. In Romans 6:3-8, Paul wrote that those who had been baptized into Christ Jesus had been baptized into His death. Their old selves had been crucified with Christ. They had been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised up from death through the Father's glory, so also they may walk in newness of life. Paul wrote that those who had become united with Christ in the likeness of His death would also be united with Him in the likeness of His resurrection. This promise was fulfilled in several ways. It would be fulfilled in the future when Christ's people would join the resurrection of the last days. However, this promise was also a present reality in Paul's day. Paul taught that since Christ's Spirit was present in each Christian, there was also a sense that

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⁴⁶ Jones. "Union with Christ: the Existential Nerve of Puritan Piety," 186-87.

⁴⁷ For a discussion of Calvin's spin on Paul's "in Christ" theology, see J. Todd Billings, "United to God through Christ: Assessing Calvin on the Question of Deification," *Harvard Theological Review* 98: 315-334.

Adolf Deissmann stressed the importance of "in Christ" theology for Paul. Deissmann claimed that the idea of being "in Christ" appeared 164 times in Paul's letters, and it was the characteristic expression of Paul's Christianity. Deissmann argued that Paul adapted this expression from the LXX translation of the Psalms where the phrase "in God" was common. Deissmann argued that Paul had believed in a form of Jewish mysticism before his conversion that was based on the "in God" verses of the Psalms. Deissmann noted that the ancient Greeks had also practiced a form of mysticism. The Greeks believed that certain people could be filled with their god and be given power by their god. Paul replaced Jewish and gentile forms of mysticism with Christ-mysticism. Deissmann argued that there were two kinds of mysticism in the ancient world. One was based on unity with god while the other was based on communion with god. Deissmann argued that Paul stressed communion with Christ, but did not believe that man could become God. Deissmann argued that Paul's mysticism taught that the believer was transformed by God. He was possessed by Christ, and he became a "Christ-bearer." Adolf Deissmann, *Paul: A Study in Social and Religious History*, (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1972), 140-47; 151-53.

believers were already in heaven with Him. In Ephesians 2:4-6, Paul wrote that God made Christians alive together with Christ and raised us up together with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places. In Ephesians 1:3-11, Paul blessed the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who had blessed Christians in the heavenly places in Christ.

Paul taught that those who had died to the law's demands by being united with Jesus were free from the law's condemnation. In Philippians 3:8-9, Paul declared that he persevered so that he could gain Christ and be found "in" Him, not having a righteousness of his own. In Romans 7:4, Paul explained to the Christians at Rome that they had died to the law through Christ's body, so that they may be joined to Him who was raised from the dead to bear fruit for God. In Romans 8:2, Paul explained that the Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus had set them free from the law of sin and death.

Paul taught that having Christ's Spirit within brought more than salvation. It also brought a calling and a mission. In Ephesians 2:10, Paul told the Ephesians that they were Christ's workmanship, and they were created "in" Christ Jesus for good works. In Colossians 2:6-13, Paul urged the Colossians that as they had received Christ Jesus the Lord, so they should walk "in" Him, having been rooted and firmly built up "in" Him. Paul taught that in Christ dwelt all the fullness of deity in bodily form. So by being "in" Christ, the Colossians Christians had been made complete. They had been buried with Him in baptism. When they had still been dead in their transgressions, they had been made alive together with Him. In Colossians 2:20, Paul urged them not to be carried away with false claims because they had died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world. In II Corinthians 5:17-19, Paul explained that if any man was in Christ, he was a new creature. Old things had passed away, and new things have come. God had reconciled him to Himself through Christ and gave him the ministry of reconciliation.

Paul also taught that being "in" Christ through the presence of His Spirit gave Christians the power to withstand all that the devil could use to attack them. In II Corinthians 4:10-11, Paul declared that he had carried in his own body the dying of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in his body as well.⁴⁸ Paul said that he had constantly been delivered over to death for Jesus' sake so that Jesus' life may be manifested in his mortal flesh. In II Corinthians 1:5, Paul noted that just as the sufferings of Christ had been his in abundance, so had the comfort through Christ. So in Philippians 3:7, Paul prayed that the peace of God might guard their hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Paul saw other implications for the Spirit's presence as well. Paul taught that the presence of Christ's Spirit within each believer turned the believer into a temple for God. In I Corinthians 6:19, Paul told the Corinthian Christians that they were a temple for God if He was within them. In I Corinthians 3:16-17, Paul told the Corinthians that they were the temple of God if God's Spirit dwelled within them. Paul told them that they should be holy because they were God's temple, and they should not destroy God's temple by their behavior. In II Corinthians 6:16, Paul asked the Corinthians what agreement God's temple could have with idols. Paul said that they were the temple of the living God, just as God had promised "I will dwell in them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be My people."⁴⁹ If this was true, then building the church was also in a sense building a temple for God. Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:20-22, that the whole church was a building that was being fitted together. The church was growing into a holy temple in Christ and was being built into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

Merkabah mystics had always had an interest in the future. They taught that few could see God in this age because of His glory. However, the mystics believed that a day would come in the future when all

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Schweitzer argued that the "in Christ" motif was at the heart of Paul's theology. Schweitzer wrote, "The original and central idea of the Pauline Mysticism is therefore that the Elect share with one another and with Christ a corporeity which is in a special way susceptible to the action of the powers of death and resurrection, and in consequence capable of acquiring the resurrection state of existence before the general resurrection of the dead takes place." Schweitzer also argued, "Grafted into the corporeity of Christ, he [one who is baptized] loses his creatively individual existence and his natural personality. Henceforth he is only a form of manifestation of the personality of Jesus Christ, which dominates that corporeity." James Dunn argued that it was hard to avoid seeing in Paul something like a mystical presence of Christ within and without. Dunn argued that this presence of Christ both established and sustained the individual's relationship with God. This presence of Christ also bonded the Christian community together. See the discussion of Schweitzer's position in Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 392, 401. When evaluating Schweitzer's suggestion, it is very important that the "in Christ" theme not be pushed to the point that the creature/Creator distinction is lost.

Paul took God's promise to dwell among Israel as a promise to dwell within believers.

believers would be able to see God.⁵⁰ The Qumran scrolls shared a similar hope. They reflected a belief that in the last days, members of the community would inherit the glory that Adam had in the Garden of Eden before his fall.⁵¹ After Paul's conversion, Paul continued to believe this, but reinterpreted it in a Christian context.⁵² When Paul struggled to understand the result of standing in Christ's presence, he thought about Moses' experience on Mount Sinai. While Moses had seen God in a veiled way on the top of the mountain many times,⁵³ Moses recognized that he had not seen either God's face or God's full glory. In Exodus 33:18-23, Moses asked to see God's glory. Yahweh showed Moses as much of His glory as a man was able to see without dying. Exodus 34:29-35 noted that Moses' face shone with a burning glory when he descended from Sinai. If seeing even part of God's true glory would make Moses' face burn with a fire like glory, what would happen when Christians stood in Christ's presence and saw Him in His heavenly glory? Paul's answer was that seeing Christ in His full glory would transform Christians into radiant and glorious beings.⁵⁴ In I Corinthians 15:48-49, Paul promised that the Corinthians would in the future bear the image of the heavenly just as they had borne the image of the earthly. In II Corinthians 3:18, Paul promised that Corinthians, "but we all having an unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord are being changed (into) the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit." Paul was claiming that Christians in the future would see Christ's full glory. When they did, they would be transformed by the experience just as Moses' face became radiant when he saw God's glory on Sinai. All believers would one day see His glory in themselves as if seeing Him in a mirror. They would gain the glory that Moses gained on Sinai just by seeing Him as He truly was.⁵⁵

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Hanson made this claim. He claimed that men were prevented by God's glory from seeing God now. The rabbis believed that in the age to come, people would see God. Hanson, "The Midrash in II Corinthians 3: A Reconsideration," 3, 6.

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See the discussion in Allen, "Exaltation and Solidarity with Christ: Ephesians 1.20 and 2.6," 111.

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Mooray-Jones discussed the rabbinic idea that the first Adam was the image of God. Mooray-Jones noted that Adam lost his glory when he fell, but his lost glory was restored to Moses on Sinai. Mooray-Jones argued that this was the idea behind Paul's doctrine of glorification. It was a restoration to the original image of God. Mooray-Jones argued that the Glory was also the Logos and God's Name. Mooray-Jones claimed that the transformation of the mystic's body into the "likeness" of God's image implied that the righteous man could come to embody the Image of God and the Name of God. Mooray-Jones noted that in *Hekhalot Rabbati*, the mystic's ascent to the throne climaxed as he stood before the throne. The mystic was told to recite things that had been said by God's throne. Mooray-Jones suggested that the mystic was identified with the Merkabah. The mystic asked God to be enthroned upon him and within him as he was manifested as God's image. Mooray-Jones suggested that the tradition of transforming mystic experience can be seen behind Paul's claims in Rom. 8:29, 2 Cor. 3:18 and Eph. 4:12-13. In this context, Rom. 8:29 claimed that believers were predestined to become conformed to the Image of God's Son. 2 Cor. 3:18 claimed that believers would see God's unveiled glory and this sight would transform them into God's likeness from one level of glory to another. Eph. 4:12-13 promised that believers would gain the stature of the *pleroma* of Christ. Mooray-Jones, "Transformational Mysticism in the Apocalyptic-Merkabah Tradition," 18, 26, 30

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Ex. 19:3; 19:9; 19:18; 24:9-10

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Paul discussed the fire like glory that believers would gain when they stood in Christ's presence and saw Him face to face. Paul did not stress the rest of this Old Testament theme. The Old Testaments stressed that physical environments also became radiant with a fire like glory when they were filled with God's presence. God appeared to Moses in a burning bush: Ex. 3:2. The pillar of cloud and fire in the wilderness burned with glory fire because God was within it: Ex. 13:21; 40:38; Num. 14:14. Mount Sinai burned with glory fire to the heart of heaven when God descended to the mountain: Ex. 19:16-20; 24:16-17; Deut. 4:11; 4:36; 5:22-26. The tabernacle in the wilderness often burned with glory fire when God descended into it: Ex. 40:34-35; Lev. 9:23-24; 16:2; Num. 14:10; 16:19. The Jerusalem temple was filled with glory fire when Solomon dedicated it: II Chron. 7:1-3. Jerusalem and the earth would come to have this fire like glory in the eschaton: Num. 14:20-21. Is. 4:3-6; 60:19-20; Ezek. 44:4; Rev. 21:11. The heavenly reality was a similar place of fire like glory. Is. 6:3-4. This glory fire of God's presence was a blessing to His people because they were united with Christ. God's glory was then a natural and normal thing for them to experience. Seeing this glory fire may help explain Enoch's transfiguration in Gen. 5:24 and Elijah's fiery chariot in II Kings. 2:11. God's glory fire was also used as an instrument of judgment against sin in God's presence: Gen. 19:24; Lev. 10:2; Num. 16:19 16:35; Deut. 5:24-29; I Kings. 18:30-38; II Kings. 1:10-12; Ps. 97:3; 106:18; Ezek. 1:13; 10:2. It is possible that hell was created as a lake of fire as part of the glory fire motif. Is. 66:24; Matt. 3:12; Rev. 20:14-15.

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This verse has been the topic of substantial debate. See for example: Hanson, "The Midrash in II Corinthians 3: A Reconsideration," 2-28. Martin McNamara, *The New Testament and the Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch*, (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1966), 168-88. Martin H. Scharlemann, "Of Surpassing Splendor: An Exegetical Study of 2

In II Corinthians 4:4-6, Paul followed up on this theme by praying that God would grant them the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. Paul repeated this theme in Philippians 3:20-21. He promised the Philippians that their citizenship was in heaven. From heaven, they waited for a Savior who would transform their bodies into conformity with the body of His glory. Paul claimed that Jesus would do this by His power to subject all things to Himself.⁵⁶ In Colossians 3:1-4, Paul urged the Colossians Christians that since they have been raised up with Christ, they should keep seeking the things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. For they had died, and their life was hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who was their life was revealed, they would also be revealed with Him in glory.⁵⁷

B) GALATIANS, JAMES, AND THE JEWISH CHRISTIANS

1) ISRAEL'S LAW AND THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

One of the most difficult questions for the early church was the role that the Old Testament law should continue to play. Paul had learned that the ability to stand before God did not come by obeying the law. God's law condemned every man as a sinner and law breaker before God. While God's law could not by itself bring salvation, what role would the law have?

This was problematic for the early Jewish Christians because Jesus had reaffirmed the Old Testament law instead of suggesting that it would pass away.⁵⁸ In Matthew 7:21-23, Jesus warned that some would be condemned because they had not obeyed God's law even though they had performed miracles in Jesus' name. Jesus warned that God would say that He never "knew" them. This seems to have been the covenantal or treaty use of the word "know." Loyal vassals "know" their sovereign and are "known" by Him. Those who do not obey the sovereign are not His vassals no matter what else they may do. Jesus concluded this warning by quoting Psalm 6:8, "Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness." In this Psalm, King David declared that God had saved him from his enemies, and he demanded that those who did iniquity must depart from him. Along the same line, king Jesus demanded that those who opposed God's will must depart from His presence.

Jesus stressed repeatedly that the commands of His new kingdom would not replace the Old Testament law. In Matthew 5:17-19, Jesus declared that He had not come to abolish the law or the prophets. He declared that not the smallest letter of the Law would pass away until heaven and earth came to an end. He declared that anyone who annulled the least of the commandments and so taught others would be least in the kingdom. Whoever kept and taught the Old Testament commands will be called great in the kingdom.

Throughout His ministry, Jesus consistently affirmed the law at least as it was originally written. In Matthew 7:21-23, Jesus warned that God would condemn lawless men even though they cast out demons, prophesied, and healed the sick in Jesus' name. None of this mattered if they rejected God's law. When Jesus healed a leper in Matthew 8:4, Jesus commanded him to go and show himself to the priest. This was the requirement for a healed leper in Leviticus 13:49. So Jesus was telling him to do as the law required. In Matthew 18:16, Jesus told His disciples to take two or three witnesses when they confronted believers with unrepented sins. Jesus was reminding His disciples of the requirements of the law in

Corinthians 3:4-18," *Concordia Journal* 4 (1978): 108-17. J. Lambrecht, "Transformation in 2 Cor. 3:18," *Biblica* 64 (1983): 243-254. Carol Kern Stockhausen, *Moses' Veil and the Glory of the New Covenant: The Exegetical Substructure of II Cor. 3:1-4, 6*, (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1989).

This was not a uniquely Pauline theme. Just as Merkabah imagery was present in other New Testament authors, the promise of future glory was as well. In I Pet. 5:1, Peter promised that he and his readers were partakers of the glory that would be revealed.

Paul did not create this idea. The promise of eschatological glory had been expressed in Dan. 12:2-3. Daniel was told that those who had died would rise at the end of history. Then those who "had insight" would shine brightly like the expanse of the heavens and those who led many to righteousness would shine like the stars forever. In the gospels, Jesus promised in Matt. 13:42-43 that stumbling blocks will be cast into the fiery furnace. Then the righteous would shine like the sun in the kingdom of their father

Vern Poythress argued that Jesus' Sermon on the Mount received its structure from the covenant blessings and curses in Ex. 19 and Deut. 28. Vern S. Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses*, (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishers, 1991), 256-57.

Deuteronomy 19:15. In Matthew 19:3-8, the Pharisees asked Jesus if it was ever lawful for a man to divorce his wife. Jesus replied by discussing the heart of the laws teaching on marriage in Genesis 1:27 and 2:24. The Pharisees responded with Deuteronomy 24:1-4. In Matthew 19:18-19, a rich young man asked Jesus what good thing he should do to obtain eternal life. Jesus quoted from the Ten Commandments then added Leviticus 19:18 which was the command to love your neighbor as yourself. The Pharisees recognized that this was one of the most important commands in the Old Testament. When the rich young ruler claimed that he had obeyed the law all of his life, Jesus asked him about Leviticus 19:18. Jesus told him that if he really loved his neighbor as himself, he should sell his possessions and feed his starving neighbor. The young man was convicted as a law breaker and turned away choosing wealth instead of repentance. Matthew 19 taught that the law was still valid, and that even those who thought they had obeyed the law were still condemned by it. Since the law condemned law breakers, it was only possible to enter the new kingdom through repentance and faith in God's grace.

Taking Jesus' words at face value, the early Jewish Christians obeyed the Old Testament laws.⁵⁹ The problem arose with gentile converts. Before Jesus' resurrection, gentiles became Jewish proselytes when they were converted. They were then required to be circumcised and to obey the Jewish law. The Old Testament gave ample justification for this custom. In Genesis 17:12-13, Yahweh commanded Abraham to circumcise even the servants in his household. Exodus 12:44-48 required that gentiles be circumcised if they were to eat the Passover. Leviticus 16:29 required that both Jews and gentiles should partake of the Day of Atonement. Leviticus 17:8-10 warned that both Jews and aliens in the community would be cut off from the nation if they did not bring their sacrifices to the tabernacle. If they ate meat with its blood, both Jews and gentiles would be cut off. Leviticus 18:26 commanded that both Jews and gentiles were required to obey God's law. Leviticus 20:2 commanded that any Jew or alien would be stoned for worshiping Molech. Leviticus 25:6 commanded that both Jews and gentiles must observe the sabbatical year in his fields. Numbers 35:15 decreed that the cities of refuge should protect both Jews and aliens. Standing on the basis of Old Testament, the Jewish Christians insisted that gentile converts had to be circumcised and had to obey God's law.

A very practical consideration stood in the background as well. As the Roman empire had expanded, it had absorbed a great many religions. Each religion had insisted on representation in the city of Rome. Conflict between these competing religious claims had led to an imperial edict. Any established religion would be tolerated. Any new religion would be by definition illegal and those who supported it could be executed.⁶⁰ As long as converted gentiles were required to obey the Old Testament law, Christianity could be claimed to be a faction of Judaism. As such, Christianity was a legal religion. If the gentiles were not required to obey the Old Testament law, the Scribes and Pharisees could make a strong case that Christianity was a new religion. As such, it would be illegal throughout the empire, and it would face civil

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Koenig noted that the earliest church in Jerusalem obeyed both the moral and the ceremonial law. (Acts 2:1; 2:46; 3:1). Koenig argued that Jesus actually heightened the demands of the law. (Matt 5:21-48; Mk. 10:2-9). Koenig suggested that Jesus only really moved beyond the understanding of the law common in His day in Mk. 7:19. There He was portrayed as abolishing the kosher laws. Mk. 7:19 claimed that Jesus had declared all foods to be clean. Koenig suggested that Mark may have misunderstood Jesus' words since this was still an issue for Peter in Acts 10:1-16. Koenig suggested that Jesus respected and upheld all of the Torah's commands. Koenig noted that Jesus believed that He had been sent only to Israel, not to the gentiles. Koenig suggested that this could be seen in Matt 15:24; 15:26; Mk. 7:27; Mk. 5:18; Lk. 8:38; Matt 10:5-6; Rom. 15:8. Yet, Jesus considered all Israel to be lost sheep without a shepherd in Matt 9:36; Mk. 6:34. Jesus believed that everyone needed to repent. Koenig also thought that Jesus believed Himself to be teaching something new in Israel, although He did not view Judaism as being obsolete. This can be seen in Matt 9:14-17; Mk. 2:18-22; Lk. 5:33-39. Jesus did take a stand against the Temple just as the prophets had before Him. (Is. 56:7; Jer. 7:11; Mat. 21:13). In Matt. 23:1-3, Jesus even upheld the legitimacy of the Pharisees. Koenig noted that Jesus did sometimes express great frustration with His generation in passages like: Matt. 13:13ff. Mk. 4:10-12; Lk. 8:9-10; Mat. 23:32-36; Lk. 11:49-51; Mk. 8:11ff; Mat. 12:39; 16:4; 17:17; 23:32ff; Mat. 21:43. Koenig argued that Jesus never viewed the temple as being without value. His followers continued to worship in it in Acts 2:46; 3:1; 5:12; 5:25. Jesus had more faith in the future of the temple than Jeremiah had in his day. Jesus cleansed the temple which suggested the possibility of rehabilitation. In Jer. 7:16-20, Jeremiah simply pronounced doom on the temple. Koenig, *Jews and Gentiles in Dialogue*, 26-9, 46.

⁶⁰ This decree may have been in the background in Acts 16:20-21. The accusation against Paul was that he proposed customs that were not legal before the Roman government. It may also explain Acts 24:14. Paul described the gospel to Felix as "the Way which they call a sect." The issue at stake in this distinction is whether Christianity is a valid expression of Judaism.

prosecution. Rome's early persecutions against Christianity were usually based on the claim that it was a new religion. So there was a great deal at stake in the debate over obedience of the law.

2) CONFLICTS OVER THE LAW

Jewish Christians were soon in conflict with Paul and his gentile converts. The conflict reached its head in Galatia where men who claimed to represent the Jerusalem church had demanded circumcision and obedience to the law. Galatians 4:10 noted that the Galatian church had begun to follow the days, months, and seasons of the Jewish law. In Galatians 1:6, Paul accused the Galatians of abandoning the gospel for a different faith, a faith of righteousness gained from obedience instead of faith. Paul argued in Galatians 2:21 that Christ died needlessly if righteousness before God could be gained by obeying the law. In Galatians 5:1-4, Paul warned that those who tried to be justified before God by obeying the law were obligated to obey the whole law. Since no one could do so, their attempts to find justification through the law cut them off from salvation by God's grace.

Paul argued in Galatians 2:1-7 that he preached the gospels to the gentiles for 14 years. Then he was concerned that he may be wrong. So he went to Jerusalem to confer with the apostles. Yet James, Peter, and John did not require that Titus be circumcised. Instead, the apostles confirmed His calling to teach the gospel to the uncircumcised gentiles. Paul claimed that much of the trouble in Galatia had been caused by false brothers who had pretended to be Christians.⁶¹ Yet not all of the conflict could be explained this way. Acts 15:5 noted that the demand for circumcision was stressed most strongly by a group of Pharisees who had become Christians.⁶² In Galatians 2:11-14, Paul complained that men who came from James in Jerusalem persuaded Peter, Barnabas, and others to separate from the gentiles.

Paul stressed that the law could not bring salvation. In Galatians 3:10, Paul quoted Deuteronomy 27:26. This verse warned that everyone who did not obey the words of the law would be cursed. Instead, Paul quoted Habakkuk 2:4 that the righteous would live by their faith. Paul argued that Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law. Paul argued in Galatians 3:24 that the law was intended as a tutor to lead people to Christ so that they could be saved by faith.

Paul then constructed an argument based on Sarah and Hagar in Genesis. The heart of this argument centered on the role played by gentile believers in the Old Testament. Paul argued that the Sinai legislation required that gentiles in the believing community could only be slaves and servants just as Hagar had earlier been in Abraham's household. Deuteronomy 29:11 noted that the aliens in the wilderness community were assigned to hew wood and draw water. Joshua 9:16-21 noted that the Gibeonites were allowed to live among the Israelites as hewers of wood and drawers of water. What was the gentiles' role in the Sinai covenant? They could be only slaves. Paul argued that the Sinai relationship between Jews and gentiles still dominated the interaction between these groups in Jerusalem. However, the city of Jerusalem in Palestine was only a symbol and image of the heavenly Jerusalem. As members of the promised new covenant and new kingdom, the gentiles were equals with the Jews. They were free. They belonged to the new covenant forever. Why would they choose to return to the slavery of the old covenant? If they did return to slavery, they would have to fear an event similar to God's decree to Abraham in Genesis 21:10-12. God warned Abraham to drive out Hagar because Ishmael would not inherit the promises of the covenant with Sarah's child. The gentiles in Israel faced a similar threat that they could be driven from Israel if Israel was defined as the people of God. They were not called by God to

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Dunn argued that Galatians was one of the most polemical documents in the Bible. It began with fiery indignation in Gal. 1:6-9. The Jewish leaders of the Jerusalem church were described as being only *oidokountes*, or those who are reputed to be leaders. Paul's Jewish opponents were described as being false brothers who had crept in to spy out their freedom. Paul encouraged the Galatians to cast out the other missionaries from Jerusalem who had opposed him. Dunn argued that Gal. 2:12 accused Peter of separating himself from the gentiles for fear of the Jews. Dunn argued that the phrases used may have intentional alluded to the Pharisees and to the Qumran community since both prided themselves in their separation from sinners. In the conflict over table fellowship, Paul may have been accusing Peter of acting like a Pharisee. Dunn noted that there had been an ongoing debate within the Jewish world over the proper rules for table fellowship. James D. G. Dunn, "Echoes of Inter-Jewish Polemic in Paul's Letter to the Galatians," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 112 (1993): 459-60.

In Gal. 4:17, Paul argued that those who demanded circumcision were shutting out the gentile Christians for selfish reasons. They wanted the gentiles to seek the Jewish teachers. This would be consistent with the Pharisees' goals in general.

remain in the Old Covenant. They were members forever of the new covenant and new kingdom, and they could never be driven from it. In Galatians 5:1, Paul warned that Christ had set the gentiles free. So they should hold firm and not return to the slavery of the old covenant.⁶³

Paul then warned in Galatians 5:14-15 that they should not turn their freedom from the law into an opportunity for sin. Paul warned that the whole law was summed up in the command to love their neighbor as themselves. Paul warned that those led by the Spirit do not act in an unrighteous way even though they are not under the law. In Galatians 5:16-21, Paul warned that those who were led by the Spirit did not engage in immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissension, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and such things. Paul warned that anyone who did these things could not inherit the kingdom of heaven.

3) THE JERUSALEM COUNCIL

How could the Jewish Christian and gentile Christian conflict be resolved? Paul and the leaders of the Jerusalem church called a council in Acts 15 to settle the question. This council was held sometime between 45 and 49 AD depending on how New Testament chronology is understood. This council would set the pattern for resolving theological debates in the future. The Christological conflicts of the first four centuries would all be addressed in the great church councils, and many councils of lesser importance would be held throughout church history.

The Jerusalem council concluded that gentiles were not required to obey the Sinai covenant since it was given to Israel. Gentiles were only required to obey Noah's covenant since all men were the descendants of Noah. This conclusion was in keeping with Paul's training under Gamaliel. In the 1st century AD, the rabbis had taught that there were only two covenants in Scripture, God's covenant with Noah, and His covenant with Abraham. The rabbis argued that Noah's covenant showed some understanding of God's law, and it was binding on all men. The second covenant was God's covenant with Abraham. All later covenants were seen as being extensions of Abraham's covenant. This would be important in the 1st century AD, and especially at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. The Jerusalem Council decided that gentile Christians were not bound by Abraham's covenant. The Jerusalem Council did require believing gentiles to abstain from fornication and from eating meat with its blood. These items were listed as responsibilities for gentiles in Leviticus 12 and 18. At least the prohibition against eating blood was grounded in the Noahic covenant. So it was required by God of all men.⁶⁴ James sent a letter to the churches informing them of the findings of the Jerusalem council since he was by this time the leader of the Jerusalem church.⁶⁵

This led to a new question. If gentiles were not required to obey the Mosaic law, were people free to do whatever they wished? Could they simply ignore the law? Was Christianity simply a matter of

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This passage has consistently been misunderstood in the academic debate. The assumption has been that Paul was identifying Old Testament Israel as Hagar. This misinterpretation has led to many debates and much confusion. One example of the recent debate can be seen in Joel Willitts, "Isa 54, 1 in Gal 4, 24b-27: Reading Genesis in Light of Isaiah," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 96 (2005): 188-210. Willitts argued that Paul's allegory about Hagar should be understood in the context of Is. 54:1. Willitts argued that Israel had lost her marriage relationship to Yahweh because of her sin. In God's judgment, she had become Hagar. So Paul expressed an eschatological truth contrasting the present Jerusalem of the Mosaic covenant with the new covenant of the heavenly Jerusalem.

⁶⁴ In Gen. 9:4, Noah's descendants were forbidden to eat meat that still contained its blood. Lev. 17:12 repeated this prohibition for both Jews and gentiles in the community.

⁶⁵ Martin noted that James appeared abruptly in Acts at the time of the Jerusalem Council which Martin dated at 49 AD. James had assumed the leadership role in the church after Peter left Jerusalem following his release from prison in Acts 12:17. Martin suggested that James had gained leadership of the church already in Acts 12:4 when Peter was still in prison. Acts 12:17 noted that the message of Peter's release was carried to "James and the brethren." In Acts 15:13-21, James was in a position of authority at the Jerusalem Council. James gave a decisive ruling at the Council. Later in Acts 21:18-26, James received Paul and directed him to take responsibility for men who had taken a Nazarite vow. Martin noted that James was killed by the high priest Ananus II who killed "James the brother of Jesus" in 62 AD. Ananus used the lack of a Roman ruler in the 3 or 4 months between the death of Festus in 62 AD and the arrival of the procurator Albinus. Ananus II was removed from office by Herod Agrippa II for calling the Sanhedrin together without the procurator's permission. Ralph P. Martin, "The Life-Setting of the Epistle of James in the Light of Jewish History," 97-103 in Gary A. Tuttle, ed. *Biblical and Near Eastern Studies*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 97-8.

intellectual assent that had few practical requirements?⁶⁶ If Christianity were understood this way, this would lead to a kind of sin that could disintegrate the church. James then wrote another letter to the gentile churches.⁶⁷ This second letter was the book of James.⁶⁸ In James 1:1, James addressed this letter to the twelve tribes of Israel who were dispersed abroad. So James' book was written fundamentally to Jewish Christians in the Diaspora, although James also intended gentile Christians to profit from his advice. In this letter, James argued for a continued role for the law in a church that was saved by grace through faith. The book of James was not unlike a New Testament wisdom book.⁶⁹ It often seemed to echo Proverbs or Ecclesiastes in the Old Testament. However, it was not a return to the past. As many authors have pointed out, the book of James drew very heavily on sermons preached by Jesus during His earthly ministry.⁷⁰ Jesus had stressed constantly the importance of obeying God's law as His followers lived within the Kingdom of God.⁷¹ The book of James explained the importance of the law for teaching Christians how to live a life of faith.⁷² Its view of the law was not unlike that of Peter's first epistle.⁷³ While the book of James has often been contrasted with Pauline theology,⁷⁴ James did not really disagree with Paul. Both agreed that justification came only by grace through faith. Both agreed that justification by grace did not provide an excuse for sin. Both agreed that the law taught people how to live a life of faith.⁷⁵

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MacArthur suggested that James was written to correct those in the early church who thought that faith was simply an intellectual assent. James taught that the thing that distinguished true faith from counterfeit faith was the righteous behavior produced by true faith. MacArthur suggested that it was not enough to know and assent to the facts of the gospel. MacArthur suggested that it was not even enough to have an inner conviction that the truths of the faith applied to oneself. MacArthur suggested that true faith required submission to the Lord and the shunning of sin. This led MacArthur to defend what has been called "lordship salvation," which has been the subject of substantial controversy within the evangelical world. John F. MacArthur Jr. "Faith According to the Apostle James," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 33 (1990): 13-34. Whether or not MacArthur's position is the best model for interpreting the text, the book of James clearly taught that faith must be reflected in actions for it to be real. In James 2:23-25, James argued that Abraham was justified by works before he was circumcised, and even a gentile like Rahab was justified by works as well as faith.

The link between the Jerusalem Council and the book of James can be seen in the fact that James used Amos 9:11-12 in both Acts 15:17 and James 2:7.

Charlesworth noted that there is no reason to date James after 70 AD. He also noted that the book is profoundly Jewish in its thought and imagery. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha and the New Testament*, 1:86. The Jewish character of James can be seen in James 2:19. In this verse, James alluded to the Shema Israel of Deut. 6:4. He wrote, "You believe that God is One. You do well. The demons also believe and tremble."

Phillip Sigal described James as Halakhah. He noted that in the debate about the book, it has been represented as wisdom literature, as parenetic, as Christian, as undatable, and as Palestinian. He suggested that there was an element of truth in each of these claims. He suggested that James was certainly similar to the wisdom literature. Phillip Sigal, "The Halakhah of James," 337-51 in Kikran Y. Hadidian, ed. *Intergerini Parietis Sepum (Eph. 2:14): Essays Presented to Markus Barth on his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, (Pittsburgh: The Pickwick Press, 1981), 337.

For a detailed discussion of this topic, see Dean B. Deppe, *The Sayings of Jesus in the Epistle of James*, dissertation at the Free University of Amsterdam, 1989.

Similarities between Jesus' view of the law and James' view of the law can be seen in Matt. 7:21/James 1:25; Lk. 6:46/James 7:25, and Matt. 22:37-39/James 2:8.

Hiebert noted that the book of James has proven notoriously difficult to outline. It is a disjointed collection of admonitions linked together with keywords. A variety of ideas have been proposed as central motifs for the book. Hiebert noted that the purpose of the book of James is not to discuss the nature of the faith. He argued that the book's purpose was to teach believers how to test the reality of faith by the actions of those who claim to have faith. It also encouraged believers to live in keeping with their faith. D. Edmond Hiebert, "The Unifying Theme of the Epistle of James," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135 (1978): 221.

Similarities between James and 1 Peter can be seen in James 1:10-11/1 Pet. 1:24; James 5:20/1 Pet. 4:8; James 1:2/1 Pet. 1:6, and James 4:6-11/1 Pet. 5:5-6.

James 1:1 and 2:1 were the only references to Jesus in the book of James. Similarities between Matthew and James can be seen in Matt. 5:7/James 2:13; Matt. 5:19/James 2:10, and Matt. 6:19/James 5:2-3.

Kistemaker argued that the book of James appeared to be a collection of sayings that were only loosely fit together. The book had an ethical rather than doctrinal focus. Kistemaker suggested that the author of James was familiar with the oral

James differed from Paul in that the book of James expressed those truths within the context of Jewish Christianity.⁷⁶

4) THE BOOK OF ROMANS

The book of James did not end the discussion about the Old Testament law's role in the New Testament church. A few years after James sent his letter to the churches, Paul once more took up the topic in the book of Romans. Paul wrote to a church that had seen terrible conflicts between Jews who had rejected the Gospel, Jews who had become Christians, and gentile Christians. Only a few years before Romans was written, the emperor Claudius had renewed Tiberius' edict that all Jews should be driven from Rome in order to quiet the conflict.⁷⁷ This occurred in 49 AD. Claudius' edict had been enforced in a surprisingly brutal way. The Jews' property had been seized. Many had been forced into the military or had been sent as slaves to the mines. This time of suffering had afflicted Jews who had rejected the gospel, but it had also struck equally Jewish Christians who had been driven from their homes or worse by Roman oppression. These Jewish Christian exiles from Rome included Paul's friends Aquila and Priscilla.⁷⁸ The Jews' expulsion from Rome may have simplified the gentile Christians' life in Rome for a few years, but the Roman church would shortly face one of the most terrible persecutions that any group of Christians would face in the 1st century. In a few years, Nero would devastate the church in Italy with the greatest brutality.

In the years between Claudius' edict and Nero's persecution, the Christians left in Rome were still licking their wounds over the theological war that they had just fought. Paul hoped to heal some of the damage done to the church. Paul wrote the Roman church about his hopes to visit them in the future, and he tried to explain to them why some Jews were so strongly opposed to the faith and how the Old Testament law should be understood by the church.

There has been endless academic discussion about how Paul used the name "Israel" in the book of Romans. Much of that discussion has resulted from a basic misunderstanding. The academic discussion has often really presupposed a condition that would exist half a century later when the apostle John would write the book of Revelation. By that time, the Jewish and Christian worlds would have gone in very different directions. John implied a strong distinction between Jews and Christians. In Paul's day, that

tradition about Jesus, but he was not familiar with any of the New Testament books. No evidence in the book of James suggested dependence on any of the gospels or epistles. Kistemaker argued that if James had been familiar with any other New Testament book, his work would have been more theologically oriented. Instead, the book of James echoed Jesus' teaching. Kistemaker noted that several passages in James had a remarkable similarity to the Sermon on the Mount. Kistemaker noted that in James 2:1, the book of James was addressed to those who believed in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ. Kistemaker argued that in the early church, these words were used to describe the risen and ascended Lord. Kistemaker noted that James did not discuss Jesus' life, suffering, death, or resurrection. While James assumed that the resurrected Jesus was divine, James discussed instead the practical implications of Jesus' teaching. Kistemaker suggested that the book of James reflected an early stage in the doctrinal development of the Christian church. Kistemaker suggested that James did not argue for the validity of the law. He simply assumed it. For James, the law was summarized in the Royal Law of James 2:8. The law gave freedom. As such, it must be obeyed. Kistemaker noted that James paralleled closely Jesus' own teaching on the law. Kistemaker noted that James encouraged his readers not to sit in judgment on their brothers, for doing so was sitting in judgment on the law itself. Kistemaker noted that some commentators have suggested that James was written to criticize Paul's understanding of faith and works. James argued that faith resulted in works. Other authors have suggested that the book of James was written before Paul began his writing career, and that Paul wrote the book of Romans to give a better understanding of the significance of faith without works. Simon J. Kistemaker, "The Theological Message of James," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 29 (1986): 55-8.

Daids argued that the book of James showed no contact with Paul's thought. This can be seen most clearly in James 2:14-26 where James used the words *pistis*, *ergon*, and *dikaio* in a way that differed from Paul's use of those words. Peter H. Davids, "Theological Perspectives on the Epistle of James," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 23 (1980): 102.

The Jews were actually driven from Rome three times. In 139 BC, the Jews had been expelled from Rome for trying to corrupt Roman morals through the cult of Jupiter Sabazior. This was probably a Latin spelling of the name "Lord God of Sabaoth." The Jews were driven from the city again by Tiberius and Claudius. A century later, they would be driven from the city once more.

Acts 18:2

radical break had not yet happened. In Paul's day, the Christian church was still predominantly a Jewish institution. Paul's church had been augmented by many gentile converts, although few had become proselytes in the traditional sense. While Paul's Christianity was still largely a Jewish Christianity, the role of gentile Christians in a largely Jewish faith was becoming increasingly problematic, and the future break was already rapidly developing. For Paul, the church was the new kingdom and the new covenant promised in Jeremiah and other prophets. It was a "now and not yet" in-breaking of the eschaton. As such, it was Israel. Yet it was an Israel bound by a new law instead of the covenant in Exodus and Deuteronomy that had been broken. For Paul, the line between Old Testament Israel and the New Testament church was still rather ambiguous, although the line was crystal clear between an understanding of salvation based on obedience and an understanding of salvation based on grace through faith.

The first question that Paul addressed in Romans was why such bitter conflict had broken out between Jews who had rejected the Gospel and both Jews and gentiles who had accepted it. In Romans 1:18-32, Paul traced the process by which people lost their knowledge of God. This section began and ended with a claim that the people described in it had known God's law. Echoing in the background behind Romans 1:18-32 was Israel's choice of the golden calf at Sinai. Echoing in the chapter was also century after century of later idolatry among God's chosen people. Echoing also in the background was revolt against God by the whole human race. Paul's claims in this passage were intentionally ambiguous because he was placing both Jews and gentiles in a context of rebellion against God. Paul claimed that people who originally knew God refused to honor Him or to give thanks to Him. This lack of honor for God led them into foolish and mistaken beliefs that grew from a hardened heart. Eventually God gave them over to every kind of depravity. Although they had once known God's decrees that those who did such things deserved death, they chose depravity and revolt for themselves. This path to revolt had been followed by Jews and gentiles alike, although each group had followed this path in its own.

In Romans 2:1-8, Paul addressed both groups at Rome. Both had condemned each other violently. Paul warned that those who condemned others were in reality also law breakers themselves. Paul warned that God was not characterized by such violent condemnation. God was patient and kind. God's patience should have led to repentance and peace at Rome instead of such conflict and violence. Paul warned in Romans 2:9-13 that all who rebelled against God would perish in their revolt. Paul warned that this would be true for Jews and gentiles alike. Paul warned that those who heard what the law required were not justified before God simply by hearing it. Only those who actually did the things required by the Old Testament law would be justified by God. So those who fought violently about the law were condemned by it whether they were Jews or gentiles.

Paul argued that the Old Testament law was itself a proper thing. In Romans 2:20, Paul claimed that the Jews had in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth. In Romans 7:12, Paul wrote that the law was holy, and the commandment was righteous and good. Paul wrote in Romans 3:21-24 that the Old Testament prophets had already witnessed that righteousness before God did not come by keeping the law because the law only made people understand their failure to obey God. Paul taught that the Old Testament prophets already understood that justification before God came by faith. Paul taught that the kind of faith required was faith in Christ Jesus who was the propitiation for sins promised in the Old Testament. Paul taught that both Jews and gentiles were equally justified before God by grace through faith, and Paul argued in Romans 4:1-5 that even Abraham was justified in this way.

Paul argued in Romans 2:14-15 that God's law had never been a thing intended only for Israel. Even before Sinai, God's Law had been written on the heart of every man.⁷⁹ So every man was condemned by the law written on his conscience whether he was a Jew or a gentile. Paul warned Jews that knowing the law was of no value without righteousness. He warned that those who were uncircumcised but who obeyed the law would judge Jews who did not really obey it. In Romans 2:28-29, Paul explained that being a Jew was not at base an outward characteristic produced by genealogy and circumcision. Being a Jew was a matter of the heart, and it was produced by God's Spirit. Those who had only genealogy, circumcision, and pride were not really Jews at all. Yet Paul added in Romans 3:1-2, that being a Jew was still a very valuable thing because God's Word had been entrusted to the Jews. Beyond that, Paul warned the gentiles in Romans 11:1-2 that Israel still had a special role in God's kingdom. So disdain against the Jews was never justified. God had never rejected His people even though many of them lived in revolt against Him. God was still able to graft Israel back into the tradition of faith despite the rebellion of so

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The rabbis claimed that the basic laws essential to man had been given both to Adam and Noah. See the discussion in W. D. Davies, *Jewish and Pauline Studies*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 7-8.

many. In Romans 11:28-29, Paul promised that the gifts and calling of God were irrevocable, and that Israel's future role in the kingdom was assured.

Paul urged the Christians at Rome to seek the unity of the faith instead of the conflicts of the past. Both Jewish Christians and gentile Christians were one people of God. Both were members of the new kingdom promised by the Old Testament prophets, and both were now accountable to the law of the Spirit with its absolute requirement of love for God and love for His people.⁸⁰ Paul's message was very important for the survival of the Roman church because unity in the church would be vital in the face of Nero's persecution only a few years in the future.

C) PAUL AND PROTO-GNOSTICISM

Paul preached the gospel in a gentile world that was dominated by philosophical debates. Paul struggled against mistaken philosophies throughout his ministry. Acts 17:18 noted especially his struggles at Athens with the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers.⁸¹ However, these were not the most dangerous philosophies that Paul faced. During the 1st century AD, two surprisingly similar theological and philosophical systems were slowly developing among Jews and Christians in the ancient Near East. The first of these was Merkabah mysticism. The second was Gnosticism.⁸² Both positions grew in some ways from the Egyptian/Platonic/Jewish synthesis of the Nile delta, although Merkabah drew on this synthesis partly through its impact on apocalyptic.⁸³ Both reached their full form in the 2nd and 3rd centuries, but both had at least their precursors in the 1st century. In some important ways, these systems were opposites of each other. For example, Gnosticism rejected the historical value of the Old Testament and disdained the God of the Old Testament. Merkabah was rooted deeply in confidence that the Old Testament was true, and it was grounded in a reverent desire to see the God of the Old Testament. While there were great differences between these systems, there were also surprising similarities. P. S. Alexander discussed the similarities between Gnosticism and Merkabah mysticism.⁸⁴ Alexander noted especially the similarity of a Merkabah text called the ascension of Nehunyah ben Ha-Qanah (Heikhalot Rabbati XV-XXIII) and the kind of Gnosticism attacked by Origen in his summary of the sect of the

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M. Nanos recently argued for a different approach to Paul's view of the Law. Nanos suggested that Paul argued that Jews should obey the law and gentiles should respect it. Nanos saw Paul's advice to the Roman church this way. Paul encouraged the Jewish Christians in Rome to obey the law. Paul encouraged gentile Christians to respect the Jewish Christians who obeyed the law and to accommodate them. See the discussion of Nanos' position in Ben Witherington III, "Contemporary Perspectives on Paul," in James D. G. Dunn, *The Cambridge Companion to St Paul*, (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 259.

⁸¹ Many books and articles have explored Paul's conflicts with philosophical systems. Paul's relationship to Stoicism has been an especially popular topic. See for example, Troels Engberg-Pedersen, "The Relationship with Others: Similarities and Differences between Paul and Stoicism," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 96 (2005): 35-60.

⁸² Yamauchi noted that there had been a lot of debate about the definition of Gnosticism. Some define it very narrowly and find no conclusive evidence for pre-Christian Gnosticism. Others define the term more broadly and see Gnosticism in both the New Testament and a variety of early texts. Yamauchi noted that one author's Gnosticism is often another author's mysticism, esoterism, Docetism, or Encratism. Edwin M. Yamauchi, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism: A Survey of the Proposed Evidences*, (London: Tyndale Press, 1973), 13-4.

⁸³ One of the more recent authors to enter the debate over possible Egyptian roots for Gnosticism was Carl Smith. He argued that Gnosticism reflected Jewish disillusionment after the Jews in Egypt revolted against Rome during Trajan's reign. Carl B. Smith II, *No Longer Jews: The Search for Gnostic Origins*, (Peabody: Hendrickson), For the influence of Egyptian religion on Gnosticism, see Parrott, "Gnosticism and Egyptian Religion," 73-93.

⁸⁴ Alexander, "Comparing Merkabah Mysticism and Gnosticism: An Essay in Method," 1-18. Alexander noted that these similarities were already recognized before World War I by Hirsch Grätz, Moses Gaster, and others. However, a detailed study of the relationship between Merkabah and Gnosticism only was done after Scholem's books. Scholem suggested that Merkabah mysticism was a form of Jewish Gnosticism, although that suggestion has not been universally accepted. Ithamar Gruenwald stressed the differences between Merkabah and Gnosticism. Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkabah Mysticism*.

Ophians.⁸⁵ Alexander noted that an important part of the Ophians' theology was the ascent of a soul to heaven after the person died. The Ophians believed that the soul tried to reach its goal in the realm of the Father and the Son. To get there, the soul had to pass through a "barrier of evil" consisting in gates that were shut by Archons. The Ophians believed that there were seven Archons guarding seven gates. Each Archon could only be passed if the soul addressed him by name, recited the correct formula, and showed the correct "symbol" to the Archon. Only after passing through the seven gates could the soul reach the Ogdoad, which was the domain of the "First Power." This heavenly ascent sounded much like the records of heavenly ascents claimed by the Merkabah mystics. Alexander noted that the relationship between Gnosticism and Merkabah could be explained in several possible ways. One possibility was that both traditions developed from a common root in Jewish apocalyptic, and that Merkabah mysticism represented the legitimate continuation of apocalyptic within the Jewish orbit. This would seem far more likely than the common claim that the Pharisees were influenced by Hellenism in Palestine since the Pharisees reacted against Hellenism with substantial rage.

What does all this have to do with Paul and the 1st century church? Paul preached the gospel to gentiles in a Hellenized world that was increasingly influenced by ideas rooted in ancient Egypt but that had become the common property of the Hellenized world. These ideas were being developed into theological systems that would produce full blown Gnosticism in the future. These theological motifs were producing a direct challenge for the early church. They included the following beliefs. 1) The earthly is by its nature corrupt and the pure spirit of God is good. 2) The corrupt earth can not come in contact with the pure spirit of God. 3) Salvation is gained by having the proper knowledge. 4) A series of intermediary beings fill the distance between God and man. Each of these intermediate beings must be passed through magic as the soul ascends to God. 5) The intermediate beings constituted the *pleroma*, the "fullness." This world view was shared by Jewish and gentile intellectuals across the Hellenized world.

How did Paul address this set of ideas? Paul began by attacking the philosophers directly. In I Corinthians 1:18-31, Paul warned the Corinthians that the gospel would appear to be foolishness to those who were perishing, although it was the power of God. Paul assured the Corinthians that this had always been true. Paul quoted Isaiah's prophecy in Isaiah 29:14. In that passage, Yahweh declared that he would destroy the wisdom of the wise and set aside the cleverness of the clever. Paul assured the Corinthians that the same thing was true in their day. In Ephesians 4:17-19, Paul warned the Ephesians that the unbelieving gentiles walked in the futility of their minds. Paul claimed that their understanding was darkened, and they are excluded from the life of God because of their ignorance. In II Corinthians 10:3-5, Paul warned the Corinthians that Christians did not walk in the flesh and did not wage spiritual warfare with weapons of the flesh. Despite this, Paul promised them that their spiritual weapons were powerful for the destruction of fortresses. The Christians at Corinth were destroying speculations and every lofty idea raised up against the knowledge of God. Paul praised them for taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. In Colossians 2:8, Paul warned the Colossians to let no one take them captive through philosophy or through empty deception gained through the traditions of men.⁸⁶

Paul then went on to discuss the nature of true knowledge. In I Corinthians 2:4-8, Paul reminded the Corinthians that his wisdom and preaching had not been in persuasive words of wisdom like the

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Origen of Alexandria in Egypt was a famous early Christian philosopher, theologian, polemicist, and heretic. He lived roughly from 185 AD to 250 AD.

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The Colossian heresy has often been interpreted as a 1st century form of Gnosticism. However, not every author has agreed with that interpretation of the book. For example, F.F. Bruce suggested that the Colossian heresy was Merkabah mysticism instead of Gnosticism. Bruce argued that this heresy was not the kind of Judaizing view of the law confronted in Galatians. Instead, it was a Jewish theological movement that sought a higher knowledge and special revelation. Bruce suggested that this form of Jewish theology was Merkabah mysticism. Bruce claimed that the Merkabah mystics hoped to receive a vision of God's cherubim throne by an extreme attempt to observe God's law. Bruce noted that the heavenly ascent could only be attempted after a period of asceticism, and it could only be accomplished with the help of angels. Bruce noted that Rabbi Akiba had claimed such a vision, and that Paul himself had claimed a heavenly vision in 2 Corinthians 12:2-9. Bruce suggested that the accounts of Paul's Damascus road experience also resembled Ezekiel's vision in Ezekiel 1. Bruce noted Scholem's claim that Merkabah mysticism was a variation of the Gnostic goal of ascending through spheres of hostile angels to reach the fullness of God's light. Scholem viewed Merkabah mysticism as Jewish Gnosticism. Bruce noted that it can not be proven that some in the Christian community had cultivated Merkabah mysticism, but Merkabah mysticism fits well the Biblical description of the Colossian heresy. Bruce, "The Colossian Heresy," 200-04. Other perspectives have also been offered as the heresy addressed in Colossians.

philosophers, but in the power of the Spirit. Paul said that he had taught them this way so that their faith should not rest on human wisdom but on God's power. Yet Paul reminded them that he did speak wisdom to those who are spiritually mature, but it is God's wisdom expressed in a mystery. If the rulers of this age had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. In I Corinthians 3:18-20, Paul warned the Corinthians not to allow anyone in the church to deceive himself. If anyone thought that he is wise in this age, he should become foolish to this world. Then he could become truly wise. For the wisdom of this world was foolishness before God. To support this claim, Paul reminded the Corinthians of Psalm 94:11 which read, "The Lord knows that the reasoning of the wise is useless." In I Corinthians 8:13, Paul reminded the Corinthians that we all do have knowledge. However, knowledge makes people arrogant while love edifies them. So Paul warned that if anyone thought that he knew anything, he had not yet known as he ought to know. Paul told the Corinthians that true knowledge was a reflection of a relationship. It was covenant or treaty knowing. So Paul told the Corinthians that if someone loved God, he was known by God. In Philippians 3:8-10, Paul told the church at Philippi that he counted all things to be loss when compared to the highest value of knowing Christ Jesus, and to be found in Him and in His righteousness. Paul declared that nothing can be valued over knowing Him, knowing the power of His resurrection, and knowing the fellowship of His sufferings.

Paul prayed that the growing churches in Asia would gain true knowledge instead of the emptiness of the philosophers. In Ephesians 1:18, Paul prayed that the Ephesians would have the eyes of their hearts enlightened to know the hope of God's calling and the glory of their inheritance among the saints. In Colossians 3:10, Paul urged the Colossian church to put on the new self that is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him. In Ephesians 3:14-19, Paul prayed for the Ephesians that they may be able with all the saints to comprehend what is the "breadth, and length, and height, and depth," and that they may know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge. For as Paul promised in II Corinthians 4:6, it is God who gave them the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. So Paul urged the churches to press on to know God and be known by Him. Paul urged them to know God's will and His love instead of philosophy.⁸⁷

The 1st century precursor of Gnosticism stressed more than a mistaken view of knowledge. It also taught that a series of intermediate beings stretched between the corrupt world and the pure god. While Paul did not deny the importance of angels in God's revelation,⁸⁸ he insisted in I Timothy 2:5 that there was One God and One Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. Paul insisted that Jesus was the only Mediator that anyone needed to stand in God's presence. What role then was played by the "fullness," or the *pleroma*? Paul used this word constantly to teach how it should be understood. In Romans 15:29, Paul promised that he would come to the Rome in the "fullness," the *pleromati*, of the blessing of the gospel. In I Corinthians 10:26-28, Paul quoted Psalm 24:1, teaching that the earth is the Lord's and the "fullness," the *pleroma*, of it. In Galatians 4:3-4, Paul taught that we were held in bondage to the Law, to the elemental things of the world, until the "fullness," the *pleroma* of time had come. Then God sent His Son. In Ephesians 1:22-23, Paul told the Ephesian church that God had put all things in subjection under Jesus' feet and made Him the head of the church which is His body, the "fullness," or the *pleroma*, of Him who was "filling," or *pleroumenou*, all in all. In Ephesians 3:19, Paul prayed for the Ephesians that they may know the love of Christ that is better than knowledge, and that they may be "filled," *plerothete*, to all the "fullness," *pleroma*, of God. In Ephesians 4:10-13, Paul taught that the One who had descended to the earth was the same One who had ascended above the heavens so that He may "fill," or *plerose*, all things. Paul assured the Ephesian church that God had given some to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers to equip the saints, until we all attain the unity of the faith and the knowledge of God's Son, and until we become mature to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness, the *pleromatos*, of Christ. In Colossians 1:19, Paul taught the Colossians that it was the Father's pleasure for all the "fullness," the *pleroma*, to dwell in Jesus. In Colossians 2:9, Paul claimed that in Christ dwells all of the "fullness," the *pleroma*, of deity in bodily form. Again and again, Paul used the same word for the intermediate beings that the precursors of Gnosticism were using. However, Paul used the word in a radically different way. Paul taught with it that the whole means of access to God is summed up in Christ.

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Eph. 5:5

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Gal. 3:20

Paul's philosophical opponents also taught that the earth was a corrupt place while the spiritual world was pure.⁸⁹ This led to asceticism and the denial of the flesh in search of the purity of the spiritual world. Paul warned against such pointless asceticism. In Colossians 2:20, Paul asked the Colossians, "If you have died in Christ to the elementary principles of this world, why are you still strongly influenced by asceticism which has no real value in controlling fleshly indulgence?" In I Timothy 4:1-5, Paul warned Timothy that in the last days, some would fall away from the faith and pay attention to deceitful spirits and the doctrines of demons who require asceticism. Paul claimed that the philosophical positions of his opponents were doctrines of demons. Paul certainly did believe that there was an invisible spiritual world. However, it was not a world of intermediate beings that formed a bridge between the physical world and God. The spiritual world was made of angels and demons who were contending for the world and the kingdom. In Ephesians 6:12, Paul reminded the Ephesians that we do not wrestle with flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers, and with the forces of darkness and wickedness.⁹⁰ These are the true spiritual beings, not the intermediate beings of the philosophers.

D) LUKE AND PAUL'S LEGAL DEFENSE

Luke wrote a history of the early church that included both the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts. Luke's writings have been one of the great storm centers in recent scholarship.⁹¹ The gospel of Luke has been part of the synoptic debate, and academic debates have swirled around many topics in the book of Acts. While several possible purposes for Luke and Acts have been proposed,⁹² the purpose of Luke's writings may best be studied by noting the conclusion of Acts. The book of Acts traces history down through Paul's first Roman imprisonment. It does not mention his trial, his release, his second arrest, or his execution. This is true despite the fact that II Timothy 4:11 seems to place Luke with Paul during these events. This would suggest that Luke and Acts found their purpose before Paul's first Roman trial. The most likely explanation for this may be that Luke and Acts were intended as Luke's defense for Paul before the emperor's court at Rome. Its purpose was complete when his trial began, so it did not contain a discussion of the trial itself. If Luke and Acts were written to defend Paul in court, Luke structured his gospel and his early church history to make several points. A brief survey of Luke and Acts can suggest ways that Luke may have used historical evidence to argue for Paul's release.

1) LUKE AS A LEGAL BRIEF

Luke began his gospel in Luke 1:1-4 by stating his purpose. Luke noted that many people before him had written down brief histories of Jesus' life and the beginning of the church.⁹³ While Luke does not

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Franzmann suggested that the heresy at Colosse may have been an early form of Gnosticism. It held a dualistic view of reality, teaching that the spiritual realm was good and the physical realm evil. Martin H. Franzmann, *The Word of the Lord Grows*, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1961), 152. Paul's opponents included other perspectives as well. Some were Stoics. Others were Epicurians. A wide variety of philosophical perspectives were being defended in the first century, and Paul's theology has been seen as interacting with several of these perspectives.

There has been quite a bit of debate about the nature of Paul's principalities and powers. MacGregor argued that the principalities and powers were unseen demonic forces that stood behind the events that happened in history. MacGregor argued that these demonic forces were far stronger than the demons routinely cast out by Jesus and His disciples. G. H. C. MacGregor, "Principalities and Powers: The Cosmic Background of Paul's Thought," *New Testament Studies* 1 (1954/55): 17-28. See also J. Y. Lee, "Interpreting the Demonic Powers in Pauline Thought," *Novum Testamentum* 12 (1970): 54-69.

W. W. Gasque suggested that there may be no other area in New Testament studies where scholarly opinion has been so divided. W. W. Gasque, "The Historical Value of the Book of Acts: An Essay in the History of New Testament Criticism," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 41 (1969): 69.

For a summary of proposed purposes for Luke/Acts, see R. F. O'Toole, "Why Did Luke Write Acts (Lk-Acts)?" *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 7 (1977): 66-76.

This is strikingly out of keeping with the common claim that a period of oral tradition existed before the first gospel was written. Those who are determined to deny the miraculous require a rather long period of oral history so that rumors can be accepted as facts, and so that miracle stories can develop among those unfamiliar with the facts of Jesus' life. Luke suggests instead that eye-witnesses of the events in Palestine recorded what they had seen for themselves. This

specify any of these earlier sources, it is not impossible that the gospels of Matthew and Mark may have been among them. Luke certainly claimed that the idea of writing gospel histories was well in place before he began his account. Luke claimed that the written histories were not rumors or hearsay. They were based on the statements of eye-witnesses. As such, they were written documents that should stand up in court. Luke claimed that he had investigated these early sources very carefully himself. Now he planned to arrange for Theophilus the events that occurred in chronological order.⁹⁴

As Luke began his account, he grounded events in Palestine within the context of Roman history. In Luke 2:1-3, Luke gave a date for Jesus' birth that was based on a decree by Caesar Augustus about a census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. Then in Luke 3:1, Luke identified the beginning of John's ministry with the 15th year of Tiberius Caesar. Luke explained that during these years, Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod was the tetrarch of Galilee, and Phillip was the tetrarch of Abilene. Throughout his history, Luke would continue to ground the events of his account with the key events in Roman history. For example, Acts 11:28 recorded a famine that struck the ancient world during the reign of Claudius.

In Luke 3:23-38, Luke wrote a genealogy for Jesus. This genealogy has been a subject of constant discussion because it differed completely from Matthew's genealogy in Matthew 1:1-17. It has often been claimed that one of these was the genealogy of Mary while the other was the genealogy of Joseph. However, this can not be true. Both genealogies ended with Joseph. The early church authors claimed that Joseph was adopted. They claimed that one genealogy gave Jesus' physical lineage while the other gave his legal lineage. Why might Luke have recorded a very different genealogy than Matthew? The answer may come from Luke's legal defense for Paul. The 1st century had already seen a half dozen Jewish messianic figures lead revolts against Rome. The age was a time of enormous messianic fervor. Matthew's genealogy traced Jesus' lineage from David and Solomon through Judah's subsequent kings. This genealogy could have justified Jesus' right to the throne as the true and proper descendant of David and Judah's kings. However, Jesus' royal genealogy may have made Jesus look very dangerous to Rome. If Paul was interpreted to be a follower of a messianic rebel, Paul could quite properly have been condemned. Luke argued instead that Jesus' lineage should be traced through David's son Nathan, and that none of Jesus' ancestors were kings. This genealogy would have been far more reassuring to a Roman audience. If Joseph was adopted as the early church suggested, both the genealogies of Matthew and Luke would have been correct. Luke's genealogy would simply have been more practical in the context of Paul's imprisonment.⁹⁵

In Luke 5:17, Luke recorded that Jesus was criticized by "some" of the scribes and Pharisees. John Koenig noted that Luke's attitude toward the Pharisees was more ambiguous than Matthew or Mark. Luke stressed in Luke 5:17 that only "some" of the scribes and Pharisees had been opposed to Jesus.⁹⁶ This was consistent with Luke's claim that the Pharisees as a whole, and the nation as a whole, were not opposed to His message, only "some" men from Jerusalem.

In Luke 18:3, Luke stressed that Christ's crucifixion was intended to fulfill the Old Testament prophets. This would soften the accusation that Jesus had died at the hands of Rome. Luke may have argued that Jesus really died at God's hand instead. Luke strengthened this case by adding details to the account of Jesus' death that were not found in Matthew and Mark. In Luke 23:20-23 Luke added Pilate's comment that he found no fault in Jesus and that Pilate wanted to release Him. In Luke 23:34, Luke added Jesus' prayer at His crucifixion that the soldiers be forgiven. All of this suggests that Roman justice had not

⁹⁴suggests that a period of oral tradition never in fact existed.

The name "Theophilus" means "lover of god." There is no longer any way to identify this person. It is unclear whether the name should be accepted as evidence that Luke wrote for a believer, or if Theophilus was simply a Roman official.

This explanation can be supported by a parallel in Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews*. Josephus had turned traitor to the Jews during the 70 AD revolt against Rome. He had declared the Roman general to be the promised Messiah. After the war, he wrote his history in Rome as a court historian. Feldman made an interesting observation about Josephus' *Antiquities*. He noted that Josephus realized that belief in a messiah implied revolt against Rome. So Josephus omitted from his writing any reference to David as the ancestor of the messiah. For example, Nathan had promised in II Sam. 7:13 that David's throne would be established forever. Yet Josephus only noted that David's royal line would last for a long time. Feldman, *Josephus's Interpretation of the Bible*, 152. Just as Josephus avoided messianic claims that would threaten Rome's authority, Luke may have chosen to give Jesus' non-royal lineage in a legal defense at Rome.

Koenig, *Jews and Gentiles in Dialogue*, 107, 115-18.

condemned and executed Jesus. Instead, Jesus was the victim of a small group of Jewish extremists. In Luke 24:20, Luke stressed that the chief priests and Jewish leaders had been responsible for Jesus' death.

A similar argument might have stood behind Luke 21:24. This verse was found only in Luke but not in Matthew or Mark. In this verse, Luke promised that Jerusalem would be trodden down by the gentiles until the times of the Gentiles were fulfilled. Luke suggests that at some future time, Jerusalem would rise once more, and would be once again under Jewish rule. Luke argued that this future date was the time that a Jewish Messiah would take over the world. The years before this would be the time of the gentiles. This claim would argue that Jesus and His followers did not plan to lead a messianic revolt against Rome. After all, this was the age of the gentiles. Jewish domination would only begin far in the future.

2) ACTS AS A LEGAL BRIEF

Luke continued similar arguments in the book of Acts. In Acts 2:10, Luke recorded that Jews and gentile proselytes from Rome had already been present at Pentecost. So Christianity had always been partly a Roman religion. In Acts 5: 36, Luke suggested that Jesus was very different from the other messianic claimants and their followers in the 1st century. Even Gamaliel, one of the Jerusalem's most important Pharisees, had recognized the difference between Jesus and Theudas who had claimed to be someone important. Theudas was slain and his followers scattered. In Acts 5:37, Gamaliel also mentioned Judas of Galilee who rose up in the days of the census. He attracted a following. However, he was also killed and his followers scattered. In Acts 21:38, Luke also mentioned an Egyptian who rose as a messianic figure stirring up a revolt and leading 4,000 people into the wilderness. Luke may have been arguing that if Jesus was not that kind of messianic figure, then Paul was not a rebel for following Him.

Luke recorded an important event in Acts 16:20-21 and 16:37-38. Paul was arrested and beaten at Philippi. That night, there was a great earthquake and the quake broke open the jail. Yet Paul chose not to escape. He believed that he had not deserved to be arrested and he chose not to escape like a convict. The next morning, the city magistrate sent instructions for Paul to be released. Paul refused to leave quietly. He sent word to the magistrate that he had been arrested and had been beaten without a trial. He warned the magistrate that he was a Roman citizen and that he could not be treated this way. Luke recorded that the Roman magistrate was afraid because he recognized that he had acted improperly and could be held accountable for what he had done. The magistrate appealed to Paul to leave the prison and the city. This event provided a legal precedent for Luke's claim that Paul was not guilty of an offense before Rome.

A similar attack against Paul and his supporters was made at Thessalonica in Acts 17:5-8. Luke stressed that "the Jews" formed a violent mob. This social disruption would have been seen as a serious threat to Roman control of the city. The Roman officials could not tolerate this kind of behavior without having to answer to Caesar. When the mob could not find Paul, they dragged Jason and other Christians before the magistrates. "The Jews" accused Jason and the brethren of turning the world upside down. This was an accusation that they were destroying the natural and proper religious order.⁹⁷ Luke noted that the Roman officials had chosen not to prosecute Jason and his friends despite the Jews' accusations. In Acts 17:23, Luke added Paul's comments at the altar to an unknown god. Luke may have included this passage to demonstrate that Christianity was compatible with Greek or Roman culture. In fact, Paul identified Israel's God with this altar. The recorded conversion of Dionysius the Areopagite may have strengthened this case. In Acts 18:2, Luke reminded Theophilus that Claudius had driven the Jews from the city of Rome. In Acts, the Jews were always troublemakers. They opposed Paul at every turn, and they were responsible for Paul's appeal to Caesar. In this verse, Luke reminded the Roman authorities that the Jews had always caused problems for them as well. In Acts 28:20-21, Luke made a related argument. Luke noted that the Jews in Rome had known nothing about the attacks that the Jews in Jerusalem had made against Paul. When Paul placed his case for the gospel before the Jews in Rome, he argued that his position was not incompatible with traditional Judaism. He had simply been the victim of Jewish extremists, and the Romans were well acquainted with the trouble caused by Jewish extremists.

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In the Egyptian Middle Kingdom, this accusation had been made against Seth, the Egyptian trouble maker god. Seth was associated with all things foreign and especially with Semitic peoples. Coffin Spell 358, 942. Raymond O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 3 vols. (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1973), II:2, III:81. A number of Old Kingdom, Middle Kingdom, and New Kingdom motifs were preserved surprisingly late in Egypt's history.

In Acts 19:21, Luke argued that Paul had intended to visit Rome before he was taken into custody. Paul was not dragged as a felon before Roman justice. He had come to the city at his own decision. Luke made a related argument in Acts 23:11. In this verse, God appeared to Paul and assured him that he would testify to the truth in Rome. This suggests that God Himself was responsible for Paul's presence in Rome, not Roman justice.

Luke went into the details of Paul's appeal to Caesar to justify Paul. In Acts 22:25-29, Luke noted that the Roman Centurion had planned to scourge Paul to find out why he was being attacked by the Jews. When Paul identified himself as a Roman citizen, the centurion had released him and had treated him with respect. In Acts 23:27, Luke recorded the Roman commander's report that he had used his troops to rescue Paul from the Jews. This rescue had required 200 armed troops and 70 cavalymen because of the threat to Paul. Something similar happened in Acts 27:43. Luke recorded a centurion's command that the prisoners in his ship should not be killed during a shipwreck. Luke noted that the centurion spared all of his captives because he did not want to endanger Paul. The centurion recognized that Paul was a man of integrity. Paul's integrity was also demonstrated in Acts 28:16. Luke noted that Paul had been allowed to live with only one guard while he waited for his trial in Rome. He made no attempt to escape because he was an innocent man.

In Acts 25:8-21, Luke summarized Paul's defense before Festus. Paul argued that he had committed no offense against Caesar, and had not committed an offense against the Law, the temple, or the Jews. When Festus risked Paul's safety by planning to transport him to Jerusalem for trial, Paul exercised his right as a Roman to appeal to Caesar. Luke noted Paul's claim that no one could hand over a Roman like Paul to an unfair trial by the Jews. Festus recognized the validity of Paul's objection and agreed to send him to Caesar for evaluation. In Acts 26:32, Agrippa told Festus that Paul could be released if he had not appealed to Caesar. So Agrippa recognized and affirmed Paul's innocence.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Acts had a legal tone throughout. For a discussion of this, see Allison A. Trites, "Importance of Legal Scenes and Language in the Book of Acts," *Novum Testamentum* 16 (1974): 278-84.