

How many Jews became Christians in the first century?

The failure of the Christian mission to the Jews¹

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Abstract

This study examines the early Christian mission(s) to the Jews, and attempts to determine, albeit speculatively, the number of Jews in the Christian movement in the first century. It is argued that the combined Christian mission was marked by a distinct lack of success. Neither the Law-observant gospel of the Jerusalem church nor the Law-free gospel of the Hellenists and Paul made much impression upon the people of Israel. Throughout the first century the total number of Jews in the Christian movement probably never exceeded 1 000 and by the end of the century the Christian church was largely Gentile.

1. INTRODUCTION

There is no denying that the Christian movement began as a completely Jewish phenomenon and developed over the centuries into the Gentile religion of Christianity. This “parting of the ways” is a fascinating chapter in the history of religions, and scholars still debate when the separation occurred as well as the historical, religious and social conditions that contributed to it. I do not intend to revisit these particular issues in this study, even though my conclusions may

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have implications for these important questions. My sole aim is to examine the growth of the Christian movement in the first century, and to determine in a general way the numbers of Jews who converted to it. It will be argued that, despite the evidence of Acts to the contrary, the Christian movement made very little impression upon the Jewish people. Its Jewish membership probably never exceeded 1 000 at any point in the first century, and by the 50s the Jewish members were quite likely exceeded in number by their Gentile counterparts.

This figure might seem inconceivably low, but it gains plausibility if we consider the actual size of the Christian movement in the first century. Most scholars of Christian origins tend to exaggerate the size and importance of the early Christian church. This is understandable in the light of the discipline's intense concentration on the New Testament texts. By confining ourselves in particular to the letters of Paul, the Gospels and Acts, it is all too easy to create a limited and false impression of the ancient world and the place of the Christians within it. Yet the reality is that for all of the first century the Christians were a tiny and insignificant socio-religious movement within the Graeco-Roman world (Hopkins 1998:195-196). Christianity did of course grow considerably in later centuries and it eventually became the religion of the Roman empire, but we should take care not to retroject its later size and importance into the initial decades of its existence.

Just how small was the Christian movement in the first century is clear from the calculations of the sociologist R Stark (1996:5-7; so too Hopkins 1998:192-193). Stark begins his analysis with a rough estimation of six million Christians in the Roman Empire (or about ten percent of the total population) at the start of the fourth century. He then argues, on the assumption of 1 000 Christians in the year 40 that this figure could have been reached through a natural and consistent growth of 40 per cent per decade. What makes this a feasible rate of growth is that it compares very favourably with the expansion of the Mormon Church in more recent times, which has grown at a rate of 43 per cent per decade. This method of calculating total Christian numbers in the first century renders the following approximate results. There were 1,000 Christians in the year 40, 1 400 Christians in 50, 1 960 Christians in 60, 2 744 Christians in 70, 3 842 Christians in 80, 5 378 Christians in 90 and 7 530 Christians at the end of the first century.

These figures are very suggestive, and reinforce the point that in its initial decades the Christian movement represented a tiny fraction of the ancient world. More importantly, these small numbers make it neither absurd nor unrealistic to claim that the numbers of Jews in the Christian movement never exceeded 1 000 in the first century. It will be argued later in this study that Stark's estimation of general Christian numbers per decade is probably correct

in general terms, though the growth in the Christian tradition was perhaps less smooth and consistent than his statistical analysis allows.

In determining the numbers of Jews who became Christians, it is important to differentiate between the various groups and missions within the primitive Christian tradition. I have argued in a previous study that the Christian movement was divided into two major groups, Christian Judaism and (Gentile) Christianity (Sim 1998:19-26). The former was associated with the Jerusalem church, and it saw no incompatibility between faith in Jesus as the Christ and the traditional practices of Judaism. These Christian Jews in Jerusalem continued to observe the Torah and they expected all other Christians, both Jew and Gentile, to do so as well. The latter Christian tradition is associated initially with the Hellenists and later with Paul. These Jews no longer followed the Torah in the light of their understanding of the Christ event, and they accepted Gentiles as Christians without demanding a prior conversion to Judaism and observance of the Mosaic Law. I have also argued that these different groups were in conflict with one another in the initial decades of the Christian movement. The Jerusalem church, led by the disciples and the family of Jesus, initially opposed the Hellenists and later took active steps against the independent mission of Paul (Sim 1998:63-103). I draw attention to this point here because it is important to evaluate each of these Christian traditions in its own right and on its own terms, and to gauge the respective success or otherwise of each. It will be maintained in the following discussion that neither of them, not even the Law-observant tradition, made much impact at all among the Jews of the first century.

I am well aware that many scholars do not share my view on the factionalism of the primitive Christian movement. Such scholars accept more readily the witness of Acts, and argue that the different elements within the early church enjoyed harmonious relations and were largely supportive of each other. But even if one takes this line, and believes that the Jerusalem church encouraged the missionary activity of the Hellenists and Paul, it does not alter the evidence pertaining to the numbers of Jews who became Christians. The Christian attempt to convert Jews was just as unsuccessful no matter whether we view it as a united or a divided effort.

2. THE JERUSALEM CHURCH AND THE CHRISTIAN JEWISH MISSION

The original Christian tradition was Christian Judaism, and its oldest and most influential community was the Jerusalem church. Acts tells us that at the very beginning this church comprised roughly 120 members (Ac 1:15). This is a realistic figure. Included within this company, according to Acts 1:13-14, were

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the eleven remaining male disciples, a number of women who are otherwise unspecified, and the mother and four brothers of Jesus (cf Mk 6:3). It is sometimes suggested that the women mentioned here are the wives of the disciples. Certainly this reading was existent in ancient times. Codex D adds a reference to children to give the impression that the disciples were accompanied by their spouses and offspring. This interpretation, however, is probably incorrect. These women are more likely to have been certain female disciples who followed Jesus in Galilee (cf Lk 8:1-3; Mk 15:40-41; so Haenchen 1971:154-155; Johnson 1992:34; Witherington 1998:113 and Fitzmyer 1998:215). Altogether the people referred to in Acts 1:13-14 perhaps numbered no more than thirty.

Of the remaining ninety or so members of the earliest Jerusalem community, a large proportion would have included the families of these people. Many or most of the male disciples were married (cf Lk 14:26; Mk 1:29-31), and would have had a good many children between them (Mk 10:29; Lk 14:26; see Sim 1994:380-2). Although they seemingly deserted their wives and children in order to follow Jesus around Galilee, they presumably settled down again to family life when resident in Jerusalem (cf 1 Cor 9:5) (Sim 1994:382-388). The tradents of Codex Bezae were therefore correct to include the disciples' wives and children in the company of the earliest church, even if they mistakenly read them into the reference to the women in Acts 1:14. The four brothers of Jesus were also married (1 Cor 9:5). We can speculate that they too would have had children, even if we cannot estimate the exact number. The wives and children of the disciples and the brothers of Jesus perhaps account for, at a conservative estimate, another forty-five people. I have argued elsewhere that the female followers of Jesus were probably single women (Sim 1989:53-55). If that were the case, then they would have brought neither spouses nor children into the fledgling Christian movement.

This leaves another forty-five or so people to be identified. These members were probably supporters or sympathisers of Jesus during his Galilean mission, who also believed the proclamation of Jesus' resurrection. Luke in fact suggests this, when he identifies Barsabbas and Matthias, the two men put forward as possible replacements for Judas, as followers of Jesus from the early days (Ac 1:21-26). There may have been no more than ten or twenty such people, with their spouses and children making up the numbers. Needless to say, at this initial stage all members of the Christian movement were Jewish.

What needs to be determined is the growth of this group in the ensuing decades. According to Acts, the Jerusalem church grew at a tremendous rate. No less than three thousand residents of Jerusalem converted to the Christian movement on the day of Pentecost (Ac 2:41), and following this their numbers

grew daily (Ac 2:47). A further five thousand men converted soon after (Ac 4:4), and later they were joined by multitudes of men and women (Ac 5:14). The numbers of disciples continued to multiply significantly in Jerusalem and these converts included many priests (Ac 6:7). When Paul made his fateful final visit to Jerusalem (c 58 CE), he was told by James that there are now tens of thousands of Jewish converts to the Christian movement (Ac 21:20). How realistic are these figures?

Most scholars tend to dismiss them as Lucan exaggeration (Haenchen 1971:188-189; Conzelmann 1973:62-63; Lüdemann 1989a:47, 56, 77, 232). Often the reason cited is that Jerusalem in the early first century, according to the calculation of Jeremias (1969:84), had a population of no more than thirty thousand. If this figure is correct, then Luke does present the rather improbable proposition that between a third and a half of Jerusalem's population became Christian in the first few years of the movement's existence and that almost the entire population of the city was converted within three decades. Some scholars have objected to this argument by questioning Jeremias' calculation. In a recent study of this subject, Reinhardt (1995:237-265) argues that Jerusalem's first century population was in the vicinity of 100 000-120 000. This makes the percentage of Christians in Jerusalem according to Acts much more believable. But Reinhardt goes further than this. He suggests that the 3 000 mentioned in 2:41 and the 5,000 referred to in 4:4 were not residents of Jerusalem at all but pilgrims from the Diaspora. These people were in Jerusalem to attend the Feast of Weeks and many stayed in the city for a short time following the festival (Reinhardt 1995:259-260, 264; also Bruce 1988:53). Since Luke is referring to converts in Jerusalem and to many thousands of pilgrims who returned to their homelands, Reinhardt concludes that we need to take more seriously the numbers he cites.

We can take each of Reinhardt's points in turn. Even if we assume some historical core to the Pentecost story, it is not certain that those who heard the inspired utterances of the Christians were pilgrims. It is true that they originated from the Diaspora (Ac 2:5-12), but Luke describes them as residents of Jerusalem (2:5). They are therefore Diaspora Jews who had settled in Jerusalem and made their homes there (Haenchen 1971:168, 175; Johnson 1992:43; Witherington 1998:135). In support of this view is Luke's abrupt introduction of the Hellenists in 6:1. These people are merely mentioned and not introduced because Luke intends the reader to identify them with some of the converts of 2:41 (Watson 1986:27). A further reason to identify them as residents of Jerusalem and not as visitors to the city is that Luke says nothing of these people returning to their homelands and preaching the gospel. He

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reserves the spread of the Christian message beyond Jerusalem until later in his account.

Now we can examine the issue of Jerusalem's population. Even accepting Reinhardt's upper limit of 120 000 residents, does this make any more credible the numbers cited by Luke? A figure of 10 000 converts in the first few years still represents one twelfth of the city's population, and 20 000 by the late 50s equals one sixth of Jerusalem's residents. If these figures even roughly approximate reality, then we should expect such a rapid rate of conversion to have left its mark on other sources. Paul, for example, had firsthand experience of the church in Jerusalem. Apart from his visit to Peter some years after his conversion (Gl 1:18), Paul travelled back to Jerusalem in the year 48 to attend the so-called apostolic council (Gl 2:1-10). In recounting his version of this meeting, Paul never comments that the Jerusalem church had made impressive inroads into the population of Jerusalem or that it had grown extensively since his earlier visit.

The Jewish historian Josephus is also silent on this point. Despite referring to both Jesus and his brother James, Josephus never remarks that the Christians were a significant force in Jerusalem. In his comments about Jesus in *Antiquities* 18.63-4, which has clearly been emended by Christian scribes, Josephus mentions that the tribe of Christians survives to his own time but he never depicts them as a large or influential group either in Jerusalem or elsewhere. The same silence occurs when Josephus refers to the murder of James the brother of Jesus in 62 CE by the High Priest (*Antiquities* 20.200-201). He mentions that many people in Jerusalem objected to the execution of James, but he gives no indication that the brother of Jesus was the leader of a significant or large group in the city; the Christian movement that James led is in fact not even mentioned. Surely Josephus would have adverted to this movement had it contained the tens of thousands of members alluded to by Luke.

The same can be said of Josephus' detailed account of the Jewish war. When he refers to events and groups leading up to the conflict, he never once mentions the Christian residents of Jerusalem. Nor does he make any reference to them during the war. One might explain this anomaly by appealing to the much later testimony of Eusebius (*History* 3.5) that the Jerusalem church fled to Pella prior to the outbreak of hostilities. Yet such a response does not solve the problem. Even accepting that the Pella tradition is historically accurate, and this is a large assumption,³ it serves only to confirm that the numbers of Christians in Jerusalem were much smaller than the tens of thousands mentioned by Acts. If the Christians numbered a sixth or more of Jerusalem's population, then their

³ For arguments against the historicity of the Pella tradition, see Brandon (1951:168-173) and Lüdemann (1989b:200-213).

sudden departure would have had a dramatic impact on the city in all sorts of ways. We would expect such an event in the lead up to the war to have been noted by Josephus.

The conclusion to draw is that Acts does heavily exaggerate the numbers of Christian converts in Jerusalem. The true figure was considerably smaller. A more realistic number for the growth of the church in its first few years is provided by Paul. When discussing the appearances of the resurrected Christ, Paul states that following the appearances to Peter and the other disciples, the risen Christ appeared to more than five hundred people at one time (1 Cor 15:6). Since this christophany occurred prior to the appearance to Paul, it must have taken place in the very early years of the Jerusalem church. If Paul's information is correct, then we have firm evidence of an initial expansion in the numbers of the Jerusalem community from 120 to more than 500.

Paul's evidence is, however, complicated by the fact that this particular appearance of the risen Christ is nowhere else attested in the literature of the early Christians. The Gospels know nothing of a christophany to 500 or more people and Acts too is silent about this event. Some scholars have argued that the occurrence mentioned by Paul is to be identified in some way with the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Ac 2:1-13) which, according to Acts 2:41, resulted in the conversion of 3,000 people.⁴ Yet such identification is dubious. Paul refers to a christophany, akin to his own experience of the risen Jesus, while there is no appearance of the risen Christ in the Acts episode (Conzelmann 1973:40). Moreover, there are significant differences in the numbers of people involved, more than 500 in the epistle and 3 000 in Acts. There is also the problem of chronology. Paul places the mass witness to the risen Christ prior to the appearance to James, but in Acts James and the other family of Jesus are members of the church prior to Pentecost. It must be concluded that the remarkable event mentioned by Paul left no impression whatsoever elsewhere in the early Christian writings. On account of this, it is unwise to estimate the numbers in the fledgling Jerusalem church simply on the basis of Paul's unsubstantiated report. Yet, having said this, it is significant that Paul puts the numbers of Christians in this early period in the hundreds and not the thousands.

In calculating the numbers I accept at the outset that the earliest Christians made some converts and that it expanded from its initial base of 120 members. Luke refers to Joseph Barnabas (4:36), John Mark and his mother (12:12), and the unfortunate Ananias and Sapphira (5:1-11). He also relates that some priests and Pharisees joined the young Christian movement (Ac 6:7;

⁴ Barrett (1971:342) views this as possible but incapable of proof. In a more recent statement, Barrett argues that the Pentecost story may be a variant version of the event referred to by Paul in 1 Cor 15:6 (see Barrett 1994:109; so too Lüdemann 1989a:43).

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15:5), and this is feasible given that this church continued to observe the Torah and to participate in the Temple cult. Perhaps the largest single group of converts were the Hellenists. Luke does not supply a number, but there are good historical reasons for believing that the Hellenists were a substantial group. First, there is evidence that the Greek-speaking Hellenists, led by the seven named in Acts 6:5, soon broke away from the Aramaic-speaking wing of the Jerusalem church (the Hebrews) and formed their own distinctive Christian community (Sim 1998:66-67). This action suggests that the Hellenists were numerically strong. Secondly and more importantly, we have the evidence of the later missionary activity of the Hellenists following their persecution in Jerusalem. When they fled from Jerusalem, the Hellenists established Christian communities in many locations in the Roman Empire.

Philip evangelised Samaria (Ac 8:4-25) and Caesarea (8:40), and anonymous Hellenists conducted missions in Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch (Ac 11:19). As will be argued below, the Hellenists seemingly founded churches in Lydda and Joppa as well. It is also probable that some Hellenists had fled to Damascus and established a church there. The Ananias who baptised Paul was possibly a local Damascene and not a refugee from Jerusalem, since he knew of Paul's persecution but had not experienced it himself (Ac 9:10-19; so Haenchen 1971:324; Barrett 1994:453 and Witherington 1998:317-318). But someone had told Ananias about Paul and had converted Ananias to the Christian tradition. Luke refers to other "disciples" at Damascus (Ac 9:21) and the likelihood is that these people were Hellenists (Conzelmann 1973:65). The Roman church may also have had Hellenist origins. At the conclusion of his epistle to the Romans, Paul mentions two Jewish Christians, Andronicus and Junia, and describes them as being in Christ before him (Rm 16:7). Their early conversion to the Christian movement raises the distinct possibility that they were Hellenists who at some point settled in Rome (Dunn 1988:895; Fitzmyer 1993:739-740). It is entirely conceivable that these two figures had a role in establishing the church in the imperial capital (Fitzmyer 1993:30) The fact that the Hellenists founded Christian churches in so many locations suggests that they comprised a large group within the Christian community prior to their persecution.

Can we calculate the numbers in the Christian movement just prior to the persecution of the Hellenists (c 33)? We are certainly dealing with the hundreds and not the thousands. This is in line with the calculations of Stark and the evidence of Paul. In determining the numbers of Hellenists, the figure must be large enough to account for the missionary success they enjoyed later in the Diaspora, but small enough for them to have been targeted and persecuted by other Greek-speaking residents of Jerusalem. On balance a figure of 200

presents itself as most probable. The numbers of the Hebrews is more difficult to ascertain but we should not estimate a number too much greater, if greater at all, than the numbers for the Hellenists. It was probably the lack of numerical superiority that prevented the Hebrews from stopping the Hellenists holding their own meetings and services. I would estimate a figure of around 200 for the Hebrews as well. We can therefore offer a rough estimation of 400 members of the Christian movement in the third year of its existence. While this figure is far lower than what we find in Acts, it nonetheless represents more than a threefold increase from the original number of 120.

The question to pose now is, how much more did the Jerusalem church grow in the next three decades? The first thing to note is that this church possibly lost as many as half its members when the Hellenists were driven from Jerusalem. It is also likely that the Hellenists would not have been replaced quickly. Even though the Law-observant Hebrews escaped the persecution, their missionary efforts must have been affected by these events. It is reasonable to assume that the Greek-speaking Jews who persecuted the Hellenists would have been wary of anyone proclaiming Jesus to be the Christ. This means that the earlier productive mission in the Greek-language synagogues of Jerusalem was now effectively closed to the Hebrews. The Aramaic-speaking Jews of Jerusalem remained as potential converts, but we need to remember that this group was not as receptive to the Christian message as the Greek-speaking Jews had been. If the figures above are in any way correct, then the mission to the Aramaic-language population of Jerusalem had attracted only 80 converts, while the mission to the Diaspora synagogues of Jerusalem from which the Hellenists derived had made some 200 conversions. In the light of this point, it would have taken the Jerusalem church a good many years to reach 400 members again. It may or may not be significant that after narrating the persecution of the Hellenists, Acts never refers again to the mission of the Hebrews in Jerusalem. This might be explained by Luke's desire to show the spread of the gospel throughout the Mediterranean world, but it might also be the case that the mission in Jerusalem fared rather unsuccessfully from that point on.

That the Jerusalem church made no better progress in the 40s and 50s is evident from the silence of Josephus. It is also suggested by the fact that these Christians underwent periodic persecution. Acts tells us that in the early days of this church, Peter and John were arrested, interrogated and threatened (Ac 4:1-21), and all the apostles were jailed (Ac 5:18), interrogated before the Sanhedrin (5:26-34) and then beaten prior to their release (Ac 5:40). The same source also mentions a persecution by Herod Agrippa some ten years later (c 43), which resulted in the murder of James, the brother of John, and the imprisonment of

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Peter (Ac 12:1-4). In his epistle to the Galatians (c 51), Paul states that those Law-observant Christian Jews who are the source of trouble in his church are introducing the Galatians to the Torah to avoid persecution (6:12). If these people were agents of the Jerusalem church, which is highly probable (so Watson 1986:59-61; Martyn 1998:459-466; Esler 1998:74, 137-138), then it means that this community was being persecuted in the early 50s. Finally, James the brother of Jesus was executed on trumped-up charges by the High Priest in the year 62. These instances of periodic persecution from the 30s to the 60s suggest that the Jerusalem church did not grow significantly during the two decades in question. It remained throughout this period a rather tiny and powerless entity within Jerusalem and an easy target for its opponents.

The Jerusalem church came to an inglorious end in the year 70. If the Pella tradition is not historically reliable, then we have to assume that these Christians remained in Jerusalem throughout the war and shared the same horrific fate as its other residents when the city eventually fell to the Romans. Presumably many were killed and others were taken captive and later sold into slavery. The complete decimation of the Jerusalem church is confirmed by the fact that after 70 this particular Christian centre plays no part at all in the later history of the Christian movement. This stands in complete contrast to its dominant and authoritative role in the first three decades of Christian history. Had this church survived the war by moving to Pella, we would expect it to have left its mark somewhere.

We may pause at this point and gauge the overall impact of the Jerusalem church, the centre of Christian Judaism, within Jerusalem itself. The results are not encouraging. From a base membership of 120, this church may have achieved initial success in its first three years of its existence, especially among the Diaspora Jews resident in Jerusalem. But with the departure of the Hellenists from the city, its numbers decreased significantly. Leaving aside the dubious testimony of Acts, there is no evidence from either Christian or non-Christian sources that this church later made significant conversions among the population of Jerusalem. It remained from beginning to end a small and largely uninfluential group within the city. Calculating the precise size of the Jerusalem church at any time is fraught with obvious danger, but I would argue that its numbers at no time exceeded 500. For much of its history, it may have been considerably smaller than this.

It might be suggested that the Jerusalem church enjoyed greater success elsewhere, perhaps when it conducted Jewish missions beyond the border of Jerusalem. The problem with this line of argument is that there is no good evidence that this church engaged in missionary activity outside its city of residence (Goguel 1953:94-95). The first five chapters of Acts, which deal in

cursory manner with the first few years of this church's existence, locate all the events in Jerusalem; there is no outreach at all beyond the city's borders. The Christian message moves beyond Jerusalem for the first time only when the Hellenists are persecuted and dispersed. Even after this event, the Aramaic-speaking component of the Jerusalem church that remained in Jerusalem seems not to have followed the Hellenist example and conducted missions beyond its home base. We have no evidence for even a single Law-observant Christian Jewish community established by the Hebrews outside Jerusalem.

Despite appearances to the contrary, Acts provides support for this statement. When Acts describes the movement of Peter and others outside Jerusalem, they visit existing churches and do not establish new ones. According to 8:14-24, Peter and John visited Samaria in order to impart the gift of the Holy Spirit to those already converted by the Hellenist Philip. There are to be sure historical problems in accepting this tradition as it stands (see Lüdemann 1989a:96-97), but even if we do so it testifies only that these members of the Jerusalem church were building upon and confirming the earlier work of Philip (Conzelmann 1973:64). It is true that at the end of this narrative Luke states that Peter and John preached to many Samaritans on the way back to Jerusalem (8:25), but this detail is pure Lucan redaction and of no historical value (Lüdemann 1989a:97-98). Yet, even if for sake of argument we accept this information as true as well, we are not dealing with a *Jewish* mission; the Samaritans were not considered Jewish by Jews.⁵

In Acts 9:32-43 Luke relates a number of stories concerning Peter in Lydda and Joppa. Peter's visits to these towns result in the conversion of many people, presumably Jews, since both were predominantly Jewish cities in the first century (Hengel 1983:116). While some scholars have argued from this material that Peter did conduct Jewish missions beyond Jerusalem (Lüdemann 1989a:123; Hengel 1979:93; Barnett 1999:240), the text does not support this conclusion. When the disciple arrives in Lydda, there were already Christians there (9:32). Presumably these people were converted by unknown Hellenists (Conzelmann 1973:64) or even by Philip (Witherington 1998:328; Fitzmyer 1998:444). Peter's intention therefore was to visit an existing Christian community and not to establish one. Further, his conversion of the residents of this city and the nearby Sharon results not from his preaching the gospel, but from his miraculous healing of the crippled Aeneas. The same pattern emerges in the story of Peter in Joppa. He is summoned there by other Christians, seemingly converts of anonymous Hellenists, because one of their community members had died, and the people of Joppa convert after Peter restores her to

⁵ The same point can be made of the conversion of the centurion Cornelius by Peter (Acts 10:1-11:18). Even accepting its veracity, this episode refers to the conversion of a Gentile and his family, and does not prove a Jewish mission by members of the Jerusalem church beyond Jerusalem.

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life. His conversions are therefore incidental and not intentional, and do not constitute a missionary focus on the part of Peter outside Jerusalem.

As with the story of Peter and John in Samaria, the historicity of these episodes cannot be automatically assumed. They conform very clearly to Luke's political agenda to minimise the differences between the Hebrews and the Hellenists, and to his theological agenda that the missionary activity of the Hellenists was supported and encouraged by the leading figures in the Jerusalem church. But even if we take them at face value, they still do not suggest that a broader missionary impulse on the part of the Jerusalem church after the departure of the Hellenists.

It is often claimed that Paul provides solid evidence for such a mission when he refers on two occasions to the churches of Judea. In Galatians 1:22-23 Paul states that after his visit to Jerusalem and then to Syria and Cilicia, he was not known by sight to the churches of Christ in Judea, even though they were aware that their former persecutor was now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy. Paul refers to these churches again in 1 Thessalonians 2:14.⁶ Here he urges his readers to emulate the example of the churches of God in Christ Jesus, which are in Judea. Just as these churches suffered at the hands of the Jews, so too are the Thessalonians experiencing conflict with their own compatriots. The identity of these churches is not clear. It would seem that the Jerusalem church cannot be included among their number, despite its location in Judea, because Paul was clearly known there by sight; he had just described his two week stay when he met with Peter and James (so correctly Dunn 1993:81; *pace* Martyn 1998:175; Betz 1979:80; Bruce 1982:104-105). Some scholars claim that, whether or not the Jerusalem is included, these churches were other (Law-observant) Christian communities in Judea that had been established by the Jerusalem church (Betz 1979:80; Barnett 1999:358-9; Martyn 1998:175-177).

This view too has serious problems. Paul specifies that he himself had persecuted the Christians in these churches prior to his conversion and that he now proclaims the same message as they do. It is, however, extremely unlikely that the Law-zealous Paul persecuted the Aramaic-speaking wing of the Jerusalem church or any of its outposts (given their existence), because these Christians continued to observe the Torah and to participate in the Temple cult. Rather, it was the Hellenists who were targeted by Paul and other Diaspora Jews for the very reason that their version of the Christian tradition dispensed with the Torah and the Temple. Moreover, it was not the Law-observant gospel of Jerusalem that Paul now preached, but the Law-free gospel of the Hellenists. The churches of Judea are therefore Hellenist Christian communities, which

⁶ The whole section in 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16 is often viewed as an interpolation, but there are no sound reasons for this judgement. See the detailed discussion of this question by Schlueter (1994).

were presumably, established when the Hellenists fled Jerusalem. Included among their number were perhaps the churches of Lydda and Joppa.

If there were no Christian communities established by the Jerusalem church in Judea, were there perhaps such churches in Galilee? The first thing to be noted in this regard is that no such groups would have been found in the earliest days of the Christian movement. As noted above, those who supported Jesus during his historical mission and who wished to take part in the post-resurrection church moved to Jerusalem along with the disciples and the family of Jesus. It is possible of course that the Jerusalem church later conducted missions in Galilee, and this possibility needs to be explored. Some scholars have argued that the Christian tradition was well represented in Galilee. So confident has been this claim that various synoptic documents have been attributed to these Galilean Christians, including the hypothetical Q source and the Gospels of Mark and Matthew (Horsley 1995:104-105; Freyne 2001:304-310). The major difficulty with this view is that there is no external evidence at all for the existence of Galilean Christian communities. While Paul does refer to believers in Jerusalem and Judea, he never mentions believers in Galilee. The sole reference in Acts to such Christians appears in 9:31 where Luke refers to the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoying a period of peace after persecution. It is sometimes claimed that Luke is providing historical information at this point (Horsley 1995:105), but this is far from certain. The verse in question is a Lukan redactional summary whose purpose is to demonstrate that the gospel had been fully established in the traditional Jewish homeland prior to its movement into the Gentile world (Barrett 1994:472). It is significant that, despite this reference to the church in Galilee, Luke says nothing about the origins or the later histories of these communities. We may infer from this that Luke had no information about these churches at his disposal. If there were Christians in Galilee, whether converted by the Hebrews or the Hellenists, then the fact that they left no impression on our sources means they were very few in number (so Barrett 1994:472; Witherington 1998:326; Hengel 1979:75-76; Davies 1974:421-425).

The evidence suggests that the Jerusalem church did not engage in missions either in Judea or Galilee. Did it perhaps exercise influence elsewhere? Here we are on surer ground. For a period of time the Jerusalem church controlled the Christian community in Antioch. In what follows I am summarising my earlier reconstruction of the history of this church (Sim 1998:63-107). The church in Antioch on the Orontes was established in the early to mid 30s by certain Hellenists, and it was here that the Law-free mission to the Gentiles originated (Ac 11:19-20). The Antiochene church became the most important church within the Hellenist network, attracting Paul some years after his conversion and ultimately embarking on missionary endeavours to

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other parts of the Roman empire (Ac 13-14). It was this Hellenist community in particular that came to the attention of the Jerusalem church, and in the year 48 messengers were sent to Antioch from Jerusalem with the message that Gentile Christians could not be saved unless they submitted to circumcision and converted to (Christian) Judaism (Ac 15:1-2). These events led to the apostolic council where Paul, Barnabas and others presented the Law-free case of the Antiochene church to the Jerusalem community (Gl 2:1-10; Ac 15). Whatever the outcome of this meeting, soon after James again sent messengers to Antioch to enforce observance of the Torah (Gl 2:11-14). On this occasion James was successful. Paul left Antioch to pursue new mission fields in Asia Minor and Greece, and the Antiochene church was transformed into a Christian Jewish community, perhaps under the leadership of Peter.

Antioch was a huge city with a total population in excess of half a million, and a large Jewish community that numbered in the tens of thousands. Did the transformed Christian community of Antioch, now completely Law-observant, enjoy much success in converting Jews to belief in Jesus? The evidence of the Gospel of Matthew, written in Antioch towards the end of the first century (Sim 1998:31-62), suggests not. In the parable of the wedding feast (Mt 22:1-10), the evangelist describes in allegorical fashion the Christian Jewish mission to the Jews. Those called to the feast (the Jews) rejected the invitation and persecuted the ones sent to invite them (Christian Jewish missionaries). This behaviour so angered the king who gave the feast (God) that he sent his troops to destroy the city of the murderers, an obvious reference to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. This retrospective view of the Christian mission to the Jews, which applies to the Antiochene church and perhaps to the Jerusalem church as well, identifies it as a total failure in the period prior to the Jewish war. Furthermore, the situation did not improve for Matthew's Christian Jewish community after the conflict. The Gospel is clear that at the time of writing this small church was in sharp conflict with emergent Formative Judaism, and was being persecuted as a result (Sim 1998:109-163).

3. THE HELLENISTS AND PAULINE LAW-FREE MISSION

As noted above, the Hellenists established Law-free Christian churches in a number of areas. Initially these Christians confined their proclamation to other Jews. This was consistent with their missionary thrust in Jerusalem, and it is confirmed by Acts 11:19. In this text Luke states that the Hellenists who travelled to Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch spoke only to Jews at first. While it is clear that the Hellenists made some Jewish converts in Lydda, Joppa, Damascus and perhaps elsewhere, there is no reason to believe that their numbers were very high. We should expect that the failed Law-free mission to the Diaspora Jews in

Jerusalem met with no greater success among Jews in other locations. It is significant that when the new convert Paul preached to the Jews in Damascus, his life came under threat (Ac 9:20-25; cf 2 Cor 11:32-33). There is also good evidence, to be presented below, that the Hellenists in Rome met with staunch opposition. Also of importance in this regard is Luke's silence concerning the Hellenist mission to the Jews outside Jerusalem. He does mention the success of Philip among the Samaritans and he takes for granted that other Hellenists converted Jews in Lydda, Joppa and Damascus, but he says absolutely nothing about the success or otherwise of the mission to the Jews in other areas. What he does tell us is that some Hellenists in Antioch began to preach to the Gentiles. This momentous act, which changed forever the nature and character of the Christian movement, was most probably initiated by the limited success of the Jewish mission (Barnett 1999:265; Watson 1986:31-32). It is doubtful that they would have embarked on such a new enterprise had the Jewish mission achieved positive results.

Luke relates that this mission to the Gentiles was a singular success and that it was in Antioch that the term "Christian" was coined. None of this is questionable. The Antiochene church was indeed a unique community, comprising both ethnic Jews and ethnic Gentiles who were bonded by faith in the Christ rather than the Jewish Law. They were an entirely new religious phenomenon, and a new name was created to describe them. It is likely that in the ensuing years the success of the Hellenist Gentile mission filtered through to other Hellenist centres, and that those in predominantly Gentile cities and towns followed suit.

Rome is perhaps a good example of this. There is evidence that as late as 49 the Roman Christians (from Hellenist origins?) were still engaged in a Jewish mission. Seutonius (*Claudius* 25:4) testifies that the Jews were expelled from Rome in that year because of disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus. According to Acts 18:1-2, this expulsion involved Christians of a Jewish background as well. If, as many scholars accept, it was Christian preaching which caused these problems in the Jewish community, then it shows that the Hellenists were continuing with their original mission, though such a mission may have run alongside a Gentile mission as well. It also demonstrates the vehemently negative response the Hellenist gospel received at this time. These events almost certainly led to the abandonment of the Jewish mission in Rome and to the sole focus on the Gentile mission. When Paul writes to this church in 58, he identifies its members as predominantly Gentile (Rm 1:5-6, 13-15; 11:13; 15:15-16). In his greetings at the end of the letter he mentions eight Jews and some twenty Gentiles (Rm 16:3-16). This trend towards a large Gentile membership continued in the next few years. The Christian community

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persecuted by Nero in 64 must have been overwhelmingly Gentile because it was presumably much easier to distinguish the Christians from local Jewish groups than it had been in the time of Claudius.

We may now turn from the Hellenist missions to the mission of Paul, especially his independent mission from the time he left Antioch to his final visit to Jerusalem. The question to consider is whether Paul preached to both Jews and Gentiles during this period. Acts testifies that Paul's missionary strategy was to enter the local synagogue and proclaim the gospel to the Jews and God-fearers there (Ac 13:5, 14-16, 26; 14:1; 16:13-14; 17:1-4, 10-12, 17; 18:4, 19; 19:8-10; cf 20:21), and Luke notes that Paul made many Jewish converts (13:43; 14:1; 17:4, 11-12; 18:4, 8). While many scholars accept this tradition that Paul preached to and converted Jews (i e, Barnett 1999:269, 329-338; Munck 1959:202-204; Becker 1993:168-169), this is not likely for the following reasons.

First, Paul specifies that part of the agreement reached at the apostolic council (c 48 CE) was that there would be a clear line of demarcation of missionary policy between Antioch and Jerusalem. The Jerusalem church would be responsible for the Jewish mission, while Paul and the Antiochene church would continue to oversee the Gentile mission (Gl 2:7-9). Paul's understanding of this mutual decision, therefore, committed him to the Gentile mission alone and excluded him from actively evangelising Jews (Sanders 1983:186; Martyn 1998:212-213). There is no evidence that Paul felt obliged to break this agreement. On the contrary, the apostle implicitly accuses James of not living up to his side of the bargain when later he sent people to Antioch to convince the Gentile Christians of the necessity of Law-observance (Gl 2:11-14).

Secondly, in strict accordance with the Jerusalem agreement, the independent Pauline mission that followed this incident was patently confined to Gentiles. Paul makes this clear many times in his epistles. He presents himself as *the* apostle to the Gentiles (Rm 11:13; 15:16). It is Paul who was set apart by God to preach Jesus to the Gentiles (Gl 1:16) and to bring Gentiles to the obedience of faith (Rm 1:5; 15:16). He is the one entrusted with the Gentile mission (Gl 2:7-9) whose task is to reap some harvest among the Gentiles, both Greeks and barbarians (Rm 1:13-14). Paul even identifies himself as the representative of the Gentile churches (Rm 16:4; Sanders 1983:181; Martyn 1998:213-214). Nothing is said in any of these letters of a simultaneous mission to the Jews.

Thirdly, when Paul refers to the ethnic background of his converts, he invariably identifies them as Gentiles (Munck 1959:201-202; Sanders 1983:182). The Thessalonians had turned to God from idols (1 Th 1:9) and they had suffered the same trouble from their (Gentile) compatriots as did the Jewish Christians of Judea from their (Jewish) neighbours (1 Th 2:14). The Corinthians

too had formerly been led astray by dumb idols (1 Cor 12:2) and some were probably reverting to their old ways (1 Cor 6:9-11; 8:7; 10:1-14). The converts in Galatia were clearly idol worshippers (Gl 4:8), while the Philippians are described as the true circumcision who must not accept those who mutilate the flesh (Phlp 3:2-3).

Even though the evidence is clear that Paul's mission was to the Gentiles and that his churches were Gentile in character, this need not exclude the possibility that some Jews were found in the Pauline churches. The Crispus mentioned in 1 Corinthians 1:14 may be the same person referred to in Acts 18:8, and it is possible that the Sosthenes of 1 Corinthians 1:1 is to be identified with the figure of the same name in Acts 18:17. In Romans 16:21 Paul mentions Lucius, Jason and Sosipater, all of whom are described as his (Jewish) "kinsmen". Paul's trusted co-worker Timothy was half-Jewish, if Acts 16:1-5 is reliable. Other Jews in the Pauline network include Apollos and Priscilla and Aquila, although Paul converted none of these. Apollos became a Christian in Alexandria (Ac 18:24-28), presumably as a result of an early mission in that city by the Hellenists, while Priscilla and Aquila were Roman Christians who were exiled because of the edict of Claudius (Ac 18:1-2). The small number of Jews in Paul's network and churches do not suggest in the slightest that he conducted a mission to such people. These were presumably incidental and opportunistic conversions that occurred when individual Jews heard Paul preaching his gospel to the Gentiles (Sanders 1983:190).

But even if one wished to push the point that Paul did evangelise Jews as well as Gentiles, then it would have to be admitted that his success among the former was marginal (so Munck 1959:202-204; Becker 1993:168-169). This would be consistent with the widespread rejection of the similar Hellenist message to the Jews in Jerusalem and elsewhere. It is also supported by Paul's heartfelt anguish in Romans 9-11 over the refusal of his people to respond positively to the Law-free Christian gospel. Whether Paul here is referring to the failure of his own mission or the failure of the Hellenist mission makes no difference to the overall point; the Jewish people have heard the Christian message and most of them have rejected that message.

4. NUMBERS AND PERCENTAGES

I now wish to examine in more concrete terms the growth of the Christian movement in the first century in the light of the above discussion. In doing so my aim is to establish the numbers of Christians at the end of each decade, and then to calculate how many of these were Jews. I am well aware of the speculative nature of this enterprise, but informed speculation governed by the available evidence is often necessary in historical reconstruction. The figures

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provided by Stark for overall Christian numbers which were mentioned at the beginning of this study will be used as a point of reference. Stark's figures are of course statistical and do not take into account historical and social factors that may have affected the overall number of Christians. In the following analysis, I will argue that the pattern of growth was less consistent than Stark's statistical model. This is to be expected. As a general rule, smaller groups are more prone to dramatic change than much larger groups. The Christian movement in the first century was affected by events that not only influenced its overall numbers, but also the proportion of Jews to Gentiles. Yet having said this, the figures presented by Stark may not be all that far off the mark.

Obviously the church began as a purely Jewish phenomenon. From its initial membership of 120 in Jerusalem, it grew to a figure of perhaps 400 in its first few years. The persecution and dispersal of the Hellenists saw a decline in the membership of the Jerusalem church, but it paved the way for an overall increase in Jewish membership of the Christian movement. The Hellenists had some success outside Jerusalem, though not great success for the reasons given previously. It can be estimated that these converts amounted to no more than 400 in different cities and towns. Had the Hellenists experienced more success than this, they would not have abandoned the Jewish mission for the Gentile mission. With the Jerusalem church at this stage struggling for members, the numbers of Christians by the middle years of the 30s may have reached 800 or so. At this stage the Christian movement still comprised only native-born Jews, though there was a division between those who observed the Torah and those who had abandoned it.

The Jewish nature of this movement was to change with the beginning of the Gentile mission in Antioch in the latter part of the decade. Given the initial success of this mission, by the year 40 there may have been as many as 400 Gentile members of the Antiochene church. This would mean that there were around 1 200 Christians after the first ten years of this movement's existence, a figure slightly above the calculation of Stark. Two thirds of these would have been Jews, and one third Gentile.

The next decade was turbulent. Jewish numbers would have remained constant throughout. The Jerusalem church probably made a few Jewish converts here and there, but it is not likely that the Hellenists did. Once word of the successful Gentile mission in Antioch filtered through to other Hellenist centres, it is likely that those in predominantly Gentile environments began to emulate their Antiochene colleagues. This would have led to a significant increase in Gentile numbers. The church in Antioch must have increased its Gentile membership as well, and we can add further converts with the mission from Antioch conducted by Barnabas and Paul in the early 40s. It is reasonable

to assume that by the late 40s Gentile numbers had trebled to 1 200, while Jewish numbers remained static at 800.

This trend, however, experienced a severe setback in 49 CE when James, obviously concerned with the expansion of Law-free Gentiles in the Christian movement, managed to impose the Law-observant gospel on the Antiochene church. The many Gentile Christians in Antioch were faced with a very difficult decision; either convert to Judaism as a requirement for Christian membership or leave the Christian movement altogether. Most probably left the church and reverted to their former belief systems. This would have decimated Gentile numbers in the Christian movement, because at that time most of its Gentile converts resided in Antioch. The only Gentile members at the close of the decade would have been those in other Hellenist communities and those converted by the expanded mission from Antioch. Only the Roman church may have had a significant Gentile Christian membership at this stage. By the year 50 I would estimate very similar figures to those ten years earlier, about 800 ethnic Jewish members of the church and perhaps 500 Gentiles. This is slightly lower than the estimation of Stark, but it takes into account the dramatic events of that decade.

The 50s were witness to the extraordinary missionary activity of Paul and his co-workers. After his departure from Antioch following the incursion by James, Paul established many Gentile churches around the Aegean basin, many of which were in large cities. It is impossible to determine with any precision the numbers of Gentile converts in the Pauline network, but by the year 58, the year of Paul's arrest in Jerusalem, we can safely estimate that there were at least 1 000 Gentile Christians in his churches. In addition to these Pauline communities, the (Hellenist) church in Rome was by the late 50s both large and predominantly Gentile. There were perhaps many hundreds of Gentile Christians in the imperial capital by the end of the decade. Other Hellenist churches may have had large numbers of Gentiles as well, though we have no direct evidence of this.

There is no reason to believe that Jewish numbers grew at all during this decade. Only the Jerusalem church and the transformed Antiochene church were engaged in the Jewish mission, and the Gospel of Matthew is clear that neither church enjoyed much success. It is quite plausible that Jewish numbers even declined as older members died and were not replaced by new members. By the year 60 we can estimate about 800 Jews at the very most and some 1 500 Gentiles in the Christian movement. Once again these figures are higher than the calculation of Stark, but they take into account the remarkable rate of Gentile conversions achieved by Paul and his co-workers.

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This trend towards Gentile numerical superiority would have continued in the next decade. The growth in the Pauline churches may have slowed with the arrest and death of Paul (c 64), but there is no reason to believe that it stopped altogether. Paul's many co-workers presumably continued his mission. One event that did affect Gentile numbers, however, was the Neronian persecution. This persecution would have decimated the numbers of Christians in Rome and reduced to a large extent the overall numbers of Gentiles in the Christian movement. But an even greater disaster was to befall the Jerusalem church, which was to all intents and purposes wiped out in the year 70. The demise of this important centre of Christian Judaism left the struggling Antiochene community as the only major church living according to the Law-observant gospel. Smaller groups of Christian Jews may have survived as well – we hear of such sects in the later Patristic writings – but not in great numbers. At the end of this decade, we are perhaps dealing with a maximum of 400 Christians of Jewish background and a Gentile Christian population of around 2 500. This is again slightly higher than Stark's estimate.

The next three decades can be taken together. Christian Judaism, now locked in a fierce battle with Formative Judaism, would not have increased its numbers at all. In all probability it lost numbers either through death or apostasy. Conversely, the Gentile Christian churches were in a position to flourish. The church in Rome soon recovered from its persecution, and grew considerably in size. The Book of Revelation alerts us to the fact that there may have been sporadic persecutions of Christians in Asia Minor towards the end of Domitian's reign (c 96). This may have led to a slight loss of membership in that region, but the epistles of Ignatius of Antioch, written in the early second century, bear witness to a strong Gentile Christian presence not long after.

If we accept Stark's figure of 7 530 as the total Christian population at the end of the first century (so too Hopkins 1998:204, 206, 212), then they can be divided into something like 400 Jews at most (mainly in Antioch) and 7 130 Gentiles dispersed around the Mediterranean world. In percentage terms this means that 5.3 per cent were Jews, while 94.7 per cent were Gentiles. I do not believe these percentages should be adjusted even if we consider Stark's numbers as too low. A doubling of overall Christian membership to 15 060 would translate to about 800 Jews and 14 260 Gentiles. However we calculate the Christian movement's population at this point in its history, there can be no doubt that it was overwhelmingly Gentile and would continue on this path in the future.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER QUESTIONS

In this study I have engaged in a speculative calculation of many Jews were converted to the Christian movement in the first century. It was argued that the numbers of native-born Jews in this movement probably never exceeded 1 000 at any time. The Law-observant mission of the Jerusalem church, despite the witness of Acts, was hardly a success. It may have enjoyed some conversions in its initial years, but following the departure of the Hellenists from Jerusalem it struggled to attract new members in its city of residence. Its numbers were probably never more than 500. The other major Christian Jewish centre, the Antiochene church after 49, achieved no better results in its Jewish mission. The original Law-free Hellenist mission to the Jews fared no better, either in Jerusalem or in the Diaspora. The failure of the Hellenists to make a significant impact upon the Jews probably led to their decision to take the gospel to the Gentiles, a move which proved much more successful. Paul carried on this policy once he left Antioch, and Jewish conversions to the Law-free gospel all but dried up. The destruction of the Jerusalem church during the Jewish war decimated the numbers of Christians of Jewish background, and only a few hundred remained by the end of the century.

One can only conclude that the Christian mission to the Jews was a dismal failure (Jervell 1984:26). Just how unsuccessful it was is revealed by the following figure. If at best the Christian movement contained only 1 000 members of Jewish origin at any point in time, then this represented a mere 0.0166 per cent of the total Jewish population in antiquity, working on the accepted figure of six million Jews (or 10 per cent of the ancient world) in the first century (McKnight 1993:11). While it is true that the proportion of Gentile Christians to Gentiles in the Roman Empire was also small at this stage, we know that Gentile membership expanded considerably in the ensuing centuries. The same is not true of Jewish membership.

This brings us to the question that cannot be avoided. Why did so few Jews join the Christian movement? This question cannot be answered in any detail here, but a few suggestions can be made. We can rule out the explanations of the early Christian texts, which stereotype the Jews as blind (Jn 15:39-41), lacking belief (Jn 10:24-6), obstinate (Mk 12:1-12), unworthy (Mt 22:1-10), or weak in that they been led astray by their wicked leaders (Mt 15:14; 23:13-15). These sorts of explanations assume that the Jews should have converted, and they look for flaws in the Jewish character to explain why they did not. Paul is more creative and less judgemental in his theological assessment of the situation. He argues that the "disobedience" of the Jews was always part of the divine plan. The people of Israel were hardened so that the

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gospel could be taken to the Gentiles (Rm 11:7-12), but Paul has full confidence that ultimately all of them will be saved (Rm 11:25-32).

If we consider this matter objectively and not from a Christian theological perspective, then the “failure” must rest with the Christian mission and not with the Jewish response. To put the matter bluntly, the Christian proclamation, both in its Law-observant and Law-free guises, failed to convince to the vast majority of Jews who heard it. Paul relates in 1 Corinthians 1:22-23 that the Christian proclamation of Christ crucified presented a major obstacle to Jewish conversion, and there is no reason to question this. The Christian claim of a crucified messiah who was then raised from the dead by God did not conform at all to contemporary Jewish messianic beliefs and, despite Christian claims to the contrary, there was nothing in the authoritative Hebrew Scriptures that clearly and unambiguously predicted these events. This point is reinforced in Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho* from the mid second century. The Jewish Trypho demands proof of the Christian claim that the messiah had to die such a shameful death on the cross (chs 89-90).

The Hellenist and Pauline Law-free gospel faced the additional difficulty of convincing the Jews that the Torah was now rendered invalid and that there was no longer any distinction between Jew and Gentile. Once again it is not surprising that most Jews, including the Christian Jews in Jerusalem, rejected this claim out of hand. While Paul himself was of the opinion that the Mosaic Law was a temporary measure until the coming of the messiah (Gl 2:23-25), this is not what the Hebrew Scriptures say. On the contrary, these texts are explicit that the Law is to be obeyed forever (e g, Dt 11:1; 12:1; 29:29), and no doubt many Jews preferred to be guided by their scriptures in preference to the proclamation of the Hellenist Christians and Paul.

In order to reinforce the unconvincing nature of the Christian preaching to Jewish ears, we need do no more than refer to the example of Paul. Paul heard the Hellenist gospel, which proclaimed that Jesus was the crucified and resurrected messiah whose appearance had brought to an end the observance of the Torah, but he did not respond positively to this message. His reaction was outrage to such an extent that he persecuted the Hellenists. It needs to be remembered that when Paul became a Christian, he did not do so upon hearing and believing the Christian proclamation. By his own admission, it took the direct intervention of the risen Christ himself to convince Paul that the Hellenists were right. Other Jews, however, were not visited by the risen Jesus and were therefore not given the definitive “proof” that Paul claimed was revealed to him. These Jews were required to judge the validity of the Christian message solely on the basis of what they heard from Christian preachers. Just as the pre-conversion Paul was unconvinced by this teaching, so too were they. It was

probably because Paul acknowledged his privileged position that he did not follow the lead of other Christians and condemn his Jewish contemporaries for their negative response to the Christian gospel. He knew from his own experience that the Christian message, standing in tension as it did with traditional and contemporary Jewish beliefs, would struggle to make much impression on his fellow Jews.

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