

Myths and Facts about the So-Called Parting of the Ways between Judaism and Christianity

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1. Introducing the Question

Let us be absolutely clear from the beginning: this is a very sensitive topic for both Jews and Christians today, perhaps especially in this region. Contemporary religious identities are to a certain degree always dependent on historical developments. Therefore the reconstruction of that history is of immense importance for how we relate to one another. Often, however, we make the mistake of trying to draw a direct line between what once happened in the period when Judaism and Christianity were born and how it *should* be today.

But even a brief look at church history shows that Christianity and Christians have always adapted to new circumstances. Theology and church life have always been contextual and shifting in nature, even within the New Testament itself. And the same is true for Judaism: a quick look at Jewish history reveals to us variety, not uniformity. So, it is hardly possible to point at one specific period in history and say: *this* is exactly how it should always be—and then blame others for not seeing to it that things developed the ‘right’ way. How would we be able to choose one such specific time period in the first place? Not even the Holy Scriptures of Jews and Christians have dared such a move. They are the result of centuries of developments and varying theological views, as if to warn us *not* to commit such a mistake. It seems indeed as if diversity has been canonised.

And this is not a bad thing: this is both how human societies and religion ‘work’ and, theologically, how God interacts with us in history. Theologians may phrase it such that God is, to both Jews and Christians, involved in history making. It is our responsibility to not only discern what are God’s ways but also to reject what is not; to accept and prepare the way for what is constructive and promotes respect and co-existence, and to refuse violence in whatever form it comes.

I am mentioning this because our topic is at its core about historical developments of enormous influence throughout history and into the present. And it is about developments which involved oppression and violence, pain and suffering. As we try to understand history, therefore, we need to do it with open minds and in respect for those who walked the earth before us.

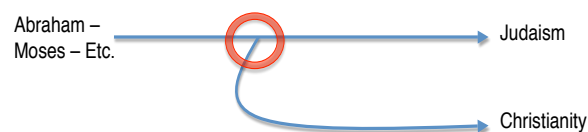
As a scholar, it is my task to use academic historical methods, tools and terminology to try to isolate key factors that contributed to the development in which Christianity became a religion of its own, outside Judaism. As we shall see, while contemporary Jews and Christians often have their own picture quite clear of what happened, an historical investigation will problematise much of what we think we know, and add new perspectives that may be useful for us when we think about *who* we are and *how* we interact with one other.

Let us, then, embark on this journey together.

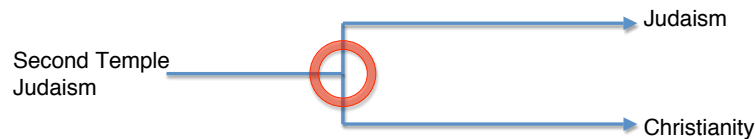
2. Dismantling Myths

In the mid-1990s I attended a conference in Germany organised by the International Council of Christians and Jews, which promotes co-operation, tolerance and respect among Jews and Christians. When we approached the last day of the conference and people were getting ready to return home, a few people, myself included, came to talk about what exactly the nature of Judaism's relationship to Christianity was. The conversation quickly landed in the question of how and why Judaism and Christianity parted ways. It was somehow assumed that the answer to this question would help clarify our present day relations and how we think theologically about one another.

A young Jewish man presented his view of this development as a timeline, from the time of Moses, or even Abraham, until today. This line, which was straight, presented the continuity of Judaism until modern times. Then, he added, at some point, due to the apostle Paul, Christianity departed from this line and formed a second line. If we draw this perspective as a figure, the red circle indicating the supposed parting of ways, it would look something like this:



Then a Christian responded saying that this was not an adequate presentation. Not only Christianity but also Judaism developed significantly after the Second Temple period and the destruction of the temple. It would be more accurate if the line were drawn like a tuning-fork:



Contrary to the first model, this model insists that both modern Judaism and modern Christianity have deep roots in Second Temple Judaism. Both, however, have since developed in ways that make them, in significant ways, different from the types of Judaism that existed during the time of the temple—and Jesus.

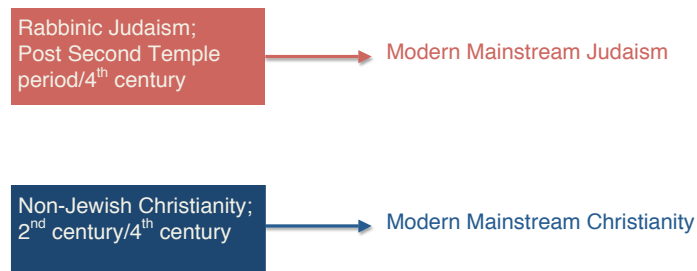
Interestingly, people who defend either model often refer to Paul as the person who ‘invented’ Christianity and thus initiated the parting of the ways. But this is a very problematic assumption, which we shall argue is false. Further, while the second model is slightly more on the mark, we must, in the end, conclude that both models fall short of accurately describing the historical developments that led to the present day situation. This has to do with the problematic nature of the question itself, which is misleading. We shall therefore, before we continue, pay attention to how this question of a so-called parting is formulated, and rephrase it so that we can then begin to explore history in more detail.

Strangely enough, the most problematic word in the question about the parting of the ways is the word ‘parting’. This word implies that what is *today* Judaism and Christianity once belonged together and later parted ways. The unproven assumption is thus, notably, that what is today Christianity and Judaism at one point actually did belong together. This is by no means to be taken for granted, and is, as we shall see, a very problematic idea.

Let me explain by noting a couple of points.

1. What is today mainstream Judaism are variants of rabbinic Judaism, which developed after the fall of the temple and did not become dominant in Jewish society until the 4th century. On the other hand, what is today mainstream Christianity are variants of non-Jewish Christianity, which began to develop in the first half of the second century and became dominant when Theodosius I made Christianity state religion in the late 4th century. We must understand, realise, and ponder the fact that, on the one hand, rabbinic Judaism did not exist as such before 70 C.E. On the other hand, the first evidence we have

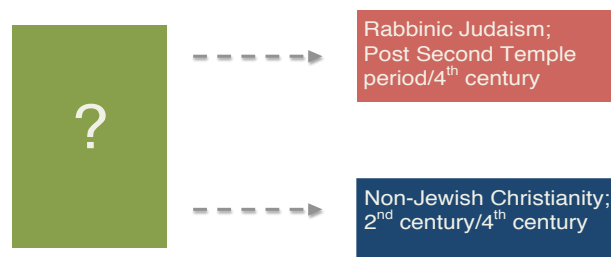
of a Christianity which rejects a Jewish identity for itself is dated to the 2nd century. Our modern religions of Judaism and Christianity are, thus, as one scholar provocatively put it, to be dated primarily to the fourth century as they took form as dominant religions in the Mediterranean world. What existed before this time was different in very real ways from today's religions; ritually, liturgically, institutionally, and theologically. In chart form, we can describe the situation as follows:



2. In order to speak of a parting between Judaism and Christianity, then, we need to ask *if and when* rabbinic Judaism and non-Jewish Christianity belonged together. This can be done by pursuing three lines of inquiry:
 - a. First institutional belonging. At which point did rabbinic Judaism and non-Jewish Christianity belong together institutionally? That is, did what is today our two religions at some point in history exist within the same institution, such as the synagogue? The answer is, and we shall explore this further below, no; at no point in time did these traditions co-exist within the walls of one institution.
 - b. But if we ask about theology, then: was there any time when rabbinic Judaism and non-Jewish Christianity shared basic theological convictions, such as the validity of the law, the land, and the temple? Or Jesus as the Messiah? The answer must again be in the negative: at no point did these traditions share these basic theological convictions.
 - c. Finally, we may ask about ethnicity. Do we have any evidence that rabbinic Judaism and non-Jewish Christianity shared a Jewish ethnic identity but later parted ways? Did some people who belonged within rabbinic Judaism drop their ethnic identity and choose non-Jewish Christianity? While there may have been individual examples of such conversions, we have no evidence that they were many. If conversions existed, however, they were between already established different institutions; there is no split to be discovered within rabbinic Judaism in this regard, which would create non-Jewish Christianity as its child.

In sum, then, we cannot say that Judaism and Christianity, *as we know them today*, ever parted ways, since we cannot prove that they ever belonged together in any of the three aspects that we have mentioned: institutionally, theologically or ethnically.

So, what do we do now? Wasn't Jesus Jewish? How do we deal with the fact that, if he was Jewish, which he was – why isn't mainstream Christianity Jewish today? And in which ways, really, are Jews and Christians today brothers and sisters, as also the Catholic Church rightly has emphasised since the 2nd Vatican Council? In order to answer these questions, we need to disconnect the present, and even the 4th century, and go further back in time, to the first century:



3. Digging Through History

It makes a lot of sense to focus on the synagogue if we are to understand what happened that led to later developments of Jewish – Christian relations. It was, after all, in the synagogue it all began. It is in particular interesting to see what was said by Jesus and his followers *in* that institution of the synagogue. Was their preaching ‘un-Jewish’ in any way? Would we find here traces of what led to later developments?

3.1 Jesus and Paul in the Synagogue

In the New Testament gospels we read that Jesus and his followers preached the good news about the Kingdom of Heaven in synagogues on Sabbaths, going from place to place, especially in the Galilee. Luke summarises Jesus preaching in the synagogue of Nazareth by quoting Jesus’ reading from the prophet Isaiah. Jesus, Luke 4:17-19 says,

unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring *good news to the poor*. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, *to let the oppressed go free*, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.

After rolling up the scroll and giving it back to the *hazzan*, the synagogue attendant, Jesus began his sermon to the people in the synagogue saying: “Today this scripture has been

fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21). As anyone familiar with first century Judaism knows, there is absolutely nothing in this summary of Jesus message that in any way goes beyond Judaism. Instead, it builds entirely on Jewish traditions and Jewish Holy Scriptures. As Luke also states regarding the reaction of the people, “All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth” (Luke 4:22).

Other Jewish groups, however, got irritated and disagreed strongly with his message. This was *not*, they said, the time for preaching and stirring up crowds with messianic hopes fulfilled, and Jesus was *not* the chosen person to be God’s messenger. Such debates, however, were quite common within Judaism in those days, and we know of several similar figures who in different ways promised redemption; Josephus, for example, tells us about a certain Theudas and an Egyptian Jew who tried to make a difference in their own ways under Roman occupation. The most famous of such figures was the second century revolutionary, Bar Kochbah, whom Rabbi Akiva, one of the most famous rabbis in rabbinic tradition, believed was the promised Messiah. Other rabbis disagreed, and other Jews beyond the rabbinic movement also disagreed. But this did not make Rabbi Akiva less rabbinic or Bar Kochbah less Jewish. Many joined them in a war against the Romans, which ended in defeat, disaster, and exile in the year 135 C.E.

The point I want to stress is that, while today thinking of Jesus as the Messiah is for most Jews and Christians the dividing line between the two religions, in the first and second century messianic belief was not a dividing line between those who thought of themselves as Jews and those who did not. *On the contrary*. Messianic belief was a very strong identity marker for Jews who took their Jewishness extremely seriously—too seriously according to many other Jews, who, for various reasons, would favour other ways of being Jewish under Roman occupation.

So following Jesus during his lifetime was a display of a stronger commitment to Jewish life and faith than the average Jewish person would entertain. And this did not change with Jesus’ death and the belief in his resurrection. In fact, the idea of resurrection and the world to come were Pharisaic doctrines, and the belief in a final judgment belonged firmly in Jewish tradition. It is very likely, as we also know from the New Testament, that many of the Jews who joined the Jesus movement especially after his claimed resurrection, were Pharisees (compare, for example, Acts 15:5, Paul, Nicodemus, and, I would argue, Matthew’s community¹). So when Paul preaches Jesus’ resurrection, he sees his own Pharisaic hopes fulfilled and expects the end of time and the final judgment to come soon.

Indeed, even Paul’s claim that non-Jews must now, at the end of time, join the Jesus movement is thoroughly Jewish. In and around the first century several Jewish groups, building on prophetic and other passages in their Holy Scriptures, believed that when the end of time got closer, non-Jews would gather to Zion.² Different Jewish groups would think about this ingathering of gentiles in different ways: most Pharisees would, as Acts 15:5 states, claim that it would be necessary for male gentiles to be circumcised as they joined the Jewish Jesus movement, so that they too would be able to keep the Jewish law within the covenant.

¹ See my “Re-Thinking Early Jewish–Christian Relations: Matthean Community History as Pharisaic Intragroup Conflict.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 127:1 (2008) 95-132.

² For a thorough presentation and discussion of the source material, see Terence L. Donaldson, *Judaism and the Gentiles: Jewish Patterns of Universalism (to 135 C.E.)* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007).

Others, such as Paul, held the contrary opinion, taking their point of departure in the Psalter and in several other texts, stating that the God of Israel is the God of the whole world. Consequently, if non-Jews became Jews (through circumcision), the God of Israel would be narrowed down to be *only* the God of Israel, only the God of the circumcised. This would contradict Scripture according to Paul. But if there were two ‘categories’ in the people of God, both Jews and non-Jews, then truly the prophecies of the Scriptures would have been fulfilled and the God of Israel would indeed be the God of the whole world (compare Romans 3:29-31 and 1 Corinthians 7:17-20).

Thus, even for Paul messianic belief in Jesus was entirely within Jewish tradition, one strand of which opens up for the joining of non-Jews *as* non-Jews to the people of God. (This part of his argument is developed especially in Romans 11).

Now, if we cannot find hints at this time regarding a supposed split between what became Christianity and what became Judaism, what was it that happened that led to the development in the second century, when we hear the church father Ignatius proclaim that one cannot practice Judaism and at the same time be part of the Jesus movement? What was it, more specifically, that changed the original question: ‘can *non-Jews* be part of the Jesus movement?’ into the statement that *Jews cannot* be members and remain Jewish at the same time—a complete reversal of religious logic?

While this question has intrigued scholars for centuries, thanks to recent advances in the study of ancient synagogues we have now found several clues that may enable us to solve key aspects of this mystery. We need, therefore, to explore the nature of synagogue institutions in the first century.

3.2. What was a Synagogue in the 1st Century?

As we noted earlier, the New Testament repeatedly states that Jesus and his followers attended synagogues on Sabbaths and in that setting tried to convince other Jews that the kingdom of God was near. But what *was* a synagogue in the first century? I believe that in the answer to this question lies the key to what happened between Christ-believers and other Jews as well as clues explaining how later Jews and Christians became related strangers.

Today, when we speak of a synagogue, we mean a religious institution, and the building in which Jews come together for religious services. In antiquity, things were very different.

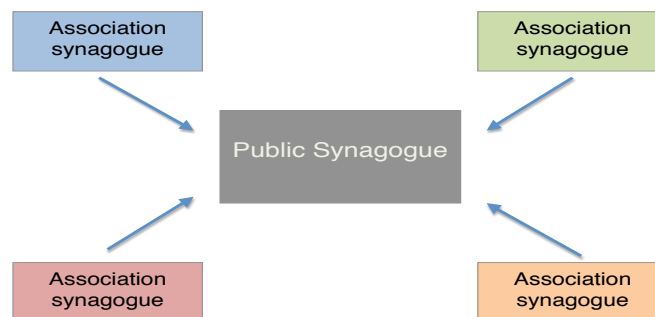
1. Behind what we translate into English as ‘synagogue’ when we read ancient texts lies hidden no less than 17 Greek terms, 5 Hebrew terms and 3 Latin terms. There is some overlap between them, but the terminological diversity is still striking. The most common of these terms were the Greek *proseuchē* and *synagogē*. Notably, *ekklēsia* was another such synagogue term, although translators of the New Testament usually translate this word into English as ‘church’.³

³ Such translation is problematic since today ‘church’ is understood as something different than ‘synagogue’ but in the first century no such institutional distinction based on terminology is discernable. An example of this confusion is Galatians 1:22 where Paul writes: “I was still unknown by sight to the *ekklēsiai* of Judea that are in Christ.” *Ekklēsiai* is translated in the New Revised Standard Version as ‘churches,’ but this misses the fact that Paul has to differentiate these associations, these *ekklēsiai*, from other Jewish associations by adding ‘that are in Christ.’ Paul is talking about a specific form of synagogue which was for those who had accepted Jesus as the Messiah. There is no ‘church,’ as we understand the word today, to be found at this time. See further below.

2. What is more important, however, is that these terms were used interchangeably for two types of institution. The first one was the village assembly, a kind of municipal institution in which people came together to make decisions regarding local affairs; archives were kept there etcetera. Also, since what we today call religion was not thought of as separate from other spheres of society, including politics, Torah was read and discussed publicly on Sabbaths. No specific Jewish group, like the Pharisees, were in charge of public synagogues. These synagogues were open to all, including women and children, and people could read and deliver messages and debate as they wished; no offices limited the function of reading and preaching to specific designated individuals. Some groups used the public synagogues as a platform for proclaiming their own version of Judaism: Jesus and his followers did this according to the Gospels (see, for example, John 18:20⁴).

3. The other type of institution that was designated by the same synagogue terms was a voluntary association type of institution, very similar to other such voluntary associations in the Graeco-Roman world (in Latin: *collegia*). Jewish association synagogues were institutions created by Jews belonging to specific groups, such as the Essenes and the Pharisees. These institutions were not public; they were for members only, and possibly visitors who were interested in a specific form of interpretation of their religion. The first century Jewish author Philo calls the Essenes' association a *synagogē* and we hear of a "synagogue of the Freedmen" in Acts of the Apostles in the New Testament (Acts 6:9). Also, the synagogue mentioned in the famous Theodotos inscription from Jerusalem should be understood not as referring to a public municipal institution but to an association synagogue.⁵

The institutional situation can be drawn as follows:



⁴ "I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret."

⁵ For the source material, see the recent comprehensive source book covering texts, papyri, inscriptions (in original languages and English translations) and archaeological remains (including plans and photographs): Runesson, Anders, Donald D. Binder, and Birger Olsson. *The Ancient Synagogue: From its Origins to 200 C.E. A Source Book*. Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity Series 72. Leiden: Brill, 2008. A paperback version was published in 2010.

In other words, while all Jews came together in public synagogues to make local decisions and read Torah on the Sabbath, some groups of Jews also had their own association synagogues in which they interpreted Jewish life in specific ways.⁶ While Jesus never belonged to an association synagogue and never created a new formal association himself (he preached mostly in public), his followers did so after his death. We see this clearly in the Gospel of Matthew (especially chapter 18), and we hear of such institutions also in Paul's letters and in Acts.

So, the Pharisees had their associations and now Jesus' followers began forming their own in the mid- to late first century. This meant the creation of leadership positions and so on. In other words, if we look at synagogue institutions and hierarchies at this time, Pharisees had their own leaders and Christ-followers had theirs. The important thing to note is that these institutions, these associations, were *independent* of each other from the beginning.⁷ Both groups of Jews would, however, still meet in the public village assembly, the public synagogue, and there they would debate their differences and try to convince each other—and others.

As we know from history, Christ-followers spread rather rapidly all over the Mediterranean world in the second century onwards, first and foremost in places where there already lived Jews and where there were synagogues. In these synagogues they would preach their message about Jesus and the kingdom to their fellow Jews as well as to non-Jews who sometimes were present because they were interested in Judaism; these non-Jews are called God-fearers in the sources. As they did so, they began organising themselves as association synagogues, gathering either in private homes or as subgroups within existing synagogues, if other Jews allowed them to do so. In the second century, however, something completely new begins to happen. In order to describe this development, we need to widen the perspective and take a look at the larger Graeco-Roman world.

In Graeco-Roman society there were many cults which originated from specific places, such as the Isis cult from Egypt and the Mithras cult from Persia. These cults formed religious associations, which were *originally* only for people who came from these countries. In antiquity, what we today call 'religion' was thought of as connected closely to specific countries, ethnic identities, and laws, so that we see a connection between land – law – people – god. If you were from a specific nation, an ethnic group, you worshiped a specific god, and had no problem with the fact that others from other countries worshipped their own gods. This was so also for the Jewish people: the Jews, as everyone else, had their own land, their own law and worshiped their own specific God, the God of Israel.

At some point, however, many Graeco-Roman cultic associations began to attract worshippers from other countries, with different ethnic identities. The Isis cult, for example, grew to become extremely popular around the Mediterranean. The ethnic identity marker of those who worshipped such specific gods was weakened, and anyone regardless of ethnic belonging could now become a member of these cults. Non-Egyptians began to worship Isis too.

⁶ The majority of Jews would not belong to any association at all.

⁷ While this was most often the case, I have argued in the article mentioned above in footnote 1 that the Matthean association initially was a subgroup within a larger Pharisaic movement before it broke away and formed their own institution. This would explain not least the aggressive anti-Pharisaic rhetoric which is present only in Matthew's Gospel. Such a 'parting of ways' took place, however, entirely within Judaism and did not create what we call Christianity today. See further below.

The interesting thing is that this is exactly what we see happening with the association synagogues, often called *ekklēsiai*, of the Christ-believers. Since these Jewish Messianic associations were interested in non-Jews for theological reasons (the end of time was getting closer and gentiles were expected to join them), many non-Jews became members. Acts 15 deals with how to handle such non-Jewish members, without losing sight of the fact that the heart of this Messianic movement was Jewish. Paul does the same in Romans 11.

As time went by, and Ignatius is our first witness to this development in the second century, these non-Jews would no longer accept ethnicity as a membership criterion, just as other Graeco-Roman cults, such as the Isis cult, had already lost their ethnic identity markers. For these non-Jews it would no longer be acceptable to claim that ethnic Jewish status was compatible with belief in Jesus as the Christ. Ignatius says it outright: You cannot practice Judaism and be a ‘Christian’ at the same time.⁸ These gentile Christ-believers thus divorced themselves from Jewish Christ-believers who maintained their Jewish identity as a vital component of their religious identity, just as Jesus and the earliest disciples had done before them.

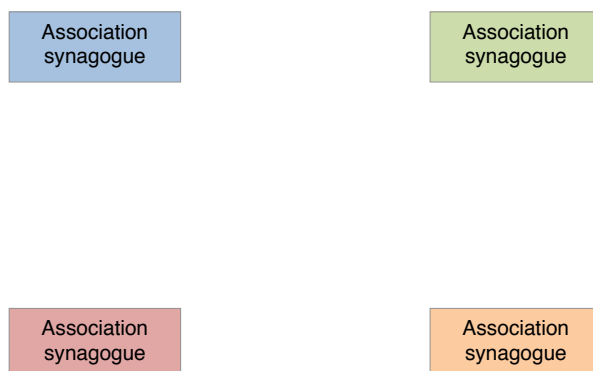
This new development, following the same pattern as many other cults in the Graeco-Roman world, led to a rising popularity of Christ-belief as disconnected from Judaism. It was this form of non-Jewish Christianity that found its way into the leading strata of Roman society and eventually to the emperor himself. And it was this form of Christ-belief that became state religion in the Roman Empire under Theodosius I in the 380s. Jewish Christ-believers and non-Jewish Christ-believers no longer gathered in the same association synagogues, but had parted ways with each other.

4. Jewish Believers in Jesus: What happened?

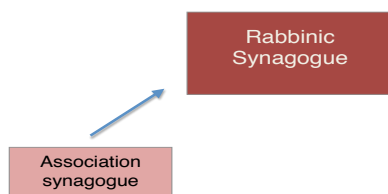
We know from history that the associations of non-Jewish Christians moved on to become the mainstream churches of today. But what happened to the Christ-believing Jews? Could they remain within the public synagogue in the Holy Land and still have their own association synagogues alongside other Jewish associations? (Compare the chart above.) The answer is yes, they did, for several centuries, but not without conflict with other Jews (and non-Jews). A brief overview of the historical development will explain the fate of Jewish believers in Jesus.

The institutional pattern of public village synagogues and association synagogues remained in place as long as the Jews controlled their own towns and villages. However, when Constantine in the fourth century—and later Christian emperors—began colonising the Holy Land this all changed. Since public synagogues were municipal institutions in charge of administration they were rendered obsolete when Byzantine Christians took over the administration at place after place. The earlier institutional pattern is broken and changes in the following way:

⁸ Ignatius, *Letter to the Magnesians* 10.3.



This pattern continued under Muslim rule. What was left when the public synagogues lost their municipal function was only the association synagogues of specific Jewish groups. These synagogue buildings now provided people with a place to read Torah together and worship. Interestingly, it was at this time that the rabbis began to be the dominant group in Jewish society. Their association synagogues were transformed into religious institutions for the majority of Jews. We can draw the development like this:

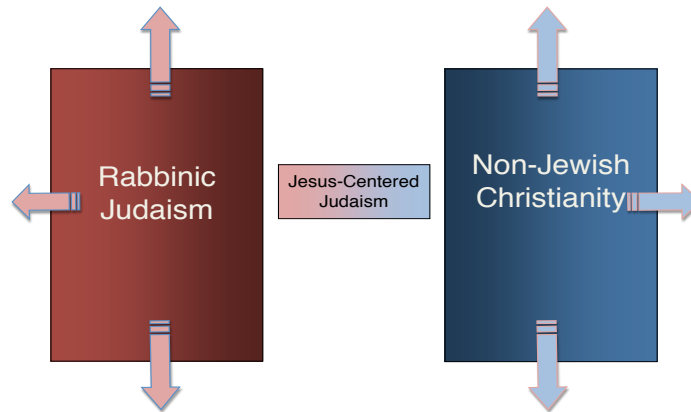


The rabbinic association synagogue became—and has remained to our own days—mainstream Judaism.

Since rabbinic Judaism was a specific form of Judaism and their synagogues were dedicated to this form of Judaism, Jews who joined them had, of course, to adhere to this specific form of Jewish life and faith. Consequently, Jews who believed in Jesus as the messiah could no longer remain in the synagogue, since ‘synagogue’ was now defined as ‘rabbinic synagogue’ and the municipal type of synagogues had disappeared. When people talked about ‘the synagogue’ at this time what they meant was ‘rabbinic Judaism/synagogues.’ (This is important to remember when we read the church fathers and later Christian writings: while they refer to ‘synagogues’ as mentioned in the New Testament in their rhetoric, what they see as they read the Gospels is the synagogues of their own time, the rabbinic synagogue, which did not exist in the first century. The same is true for much of the reception of the New

Testament up to our own days as it relates to the understanding of first century synagogues and the interaction between Christ-believers and other Jews in such institutions.)

Jewish Christ-believers had now to meet in their own associations only. They became increasingly marginalised between growing rabbinic Judaism on the one hand and growing non-Jewish, byzantine Christianity on the other:



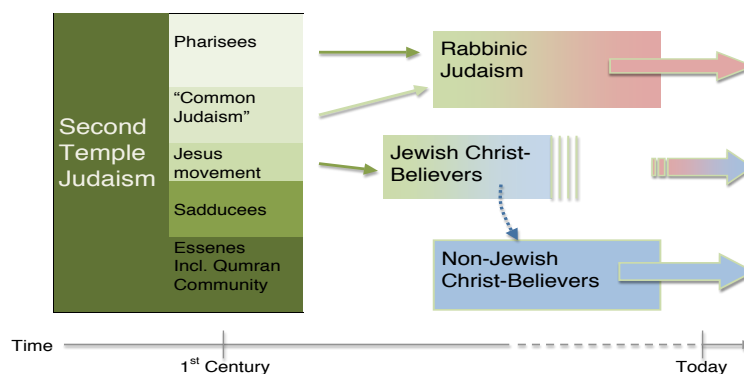
We hear of Jewish forms of Christ-belief as late as in the fourth century, and the church father Chrysostom (347–407 C.E.) complains that his congregation of Christians attends both church and synagogue. The grass roots obviously did not differentiate between Jewish and Christian identities as much as the elite did. However, this form of messianic Judaism, or apostolic Judaism as it may also be called, eventually more or less disappeared from the scene of history not to re-appear in a variety of forms until around the 1970s. In Late Antiquity, those who once nurtured a messianic-Jewish identity most likely were absorbed to some degree by rabbinic Judaism, then giving up their messianic beliefs as related to Jesus, and to a larger degree by the non-Jewish form of majority Christianity that was sponsored by the empire; they soon lost sight of their Jewish identity.

As it happens, the historical pattern that we have just summarised in more general terms seems to have left marks in the archaeological remains of one specific place, namely Capernaum. This site reveals a Late Antique synagogue and about 20 meters south of it the remains of an octagonal Byzantine church. Underneath both of these structures lie hidden remains of earlier synagogues and churches going back to the first century. Analysing the development of these two buildings in relation to each other is a fascinating undertaking indeed.⁹

⁹ For discussion of this site, see Anders Runesson, “Architecture, Conflict, and Identity Formation: Jews and Christians in Capernaum From the 1st to the 6th Century.” Pages 231-57 in *The Ancient Galilee in Interaction: Religion, Ethnicity, and Identity*. Edited by Jürgen Zangenberg, Harold W. Attridge, and Dale Martin. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007.

6. Concluding Remarks: A Note on History and Authentic Origins

So, what are the *facts* of the so-called parting of the ways between Judaism and Christianity and the origins of our respective faiths? The most fundamental insight that needs to be part of this discussion is that there were three groups, not two, involved in this process: Jews, Christ-believing Jews, and non-Jewish Christians. It seems clear that the real parting of the ways, the process that created what is now the Christian church, took place between Jewish believers in Jesus and non-Jewish believers in Jesus, *not* between ‘Jews generally on the one hand and Christians generally on the other.’ The chart, still simplified, becomes a bit more complex than the two initial ones we presented above:



There is no straight line from modern mainstream Christianity back to Jesus and his earliest followers, and there is no straight line from modern mainstream Judaism back to the Judaism of the second temple period. The main difference is that, while Jews (including Jewish believers in Jesus) have always held on to their ethnic identity as part of their religious worldview, non-Jewish Christians made a point of not doing so and that made all the difference.

How do we deal with this history today? I think we need to move beyond simple questions like ‘who is right and who is wrong.’ History is always too complex for any attempts at imitating it, and, to speak theologically, the Spirit of God cannot be controlled; it blows wherever it wants (John 3:8). We don’t have to be anxious about history. History *is* important for our identities as Jews and Christians, in all our diversity, but since history was never uniform or homogenous, it cannot and should not control us. It would mean a break with our own roots to try to impose on others our own identical image: there has *always* been diversity.

Rather, what we need to take seriously is what has often been forgotten: the absolute need for finding ways to live together in peace, to find unity and reconciliation in diversity. A choir needs more than one voice. If history does not fit into our hearts, as a friend said earlier this year as we discussed the situation in the Middle East, the problem is not with history but with our hearts.

The capacity to love and live in peace is, as I see it, what brings authenticity to our respective faiths, and *this* establishes a firm link back to our respective origins.