

Excommunicating the Faithful: Jewish Christianity in the Early Church

Kenneth W. Howard



AN IMPRINT OF THE
GLOBAL CENTER FOR RELIGIOUS RESEARCH
1312 17TH STREET • SUITE 549
DENVER, COLORADO 80202

INFO@GCR.ORG • GCR.ORG

GCR Press
An imprint of the Global Center for Religious Research
1312 17th Street Suite 549
Denver, CO 80202
www.gcr.org

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DOI: 10.33929/GCRPress.2022.01

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Typesetter: Hannah Purtymun, Jennifer Walker
Copyeditor: Erika Spong
Proofreader: Kelcey Morgan Norris
Cover Image: Madaba Mosaic Map of Jerusalem, Sixth Century CE
Cover Design: Abdullah Al Mahmud
fiverr.com/mahmuddidar

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Excommunicating the faithful: Jewish Christianity in the early church /
Kenneth W. Howard

p. cm.

Includes bibliographic references (p.)

ISBN (Print): 979-8-9857300-8-1

ISBN (eBook): 979-8-9857300-9-8

1. Church history—Primitive and early church, ca. 30–600. 2. Jewish Christianity—Primitive and early church, ca. 30–600. 3. Heresies, Christian—History—Early church, ca. 30–600. 4. Judaism—History—Post-exilic period, 586 B.C.–210 A.D. I. Title.

BS2840.E4 .H693 2022



For my great-grandfather, Rabbi Reuben Minkoff of Mogilev in Belarus,
who died long before I was born yet is my exemplar of faithful ministry.

Advanced Endorsements

As a scholar of Hebrew language and literature, with a focus on the Second Jewish Commonwealth, I have long been fascinated by the notion that the rift between Judaism and the developing Christian faith was not a matter of the Jews rejecting Jesus, but the Christian churches, having become thoroughly “Romanized,” rejecting the Jews. In this eye-opening volume, Rev. Ken Howard does a masterful job elucidating who the early Jewish Christians were and their ultimate exclusion from the orthodox Christian fold. In particular, the so-called Nazarenes identified with the apostolic church in every respect, their sole transgression being their wish to retain their Jewish identity, including the observance of Jewish ceremonial practices. *Excommunicating the Faithful* is a must for those who, from this “cautionary tale,” seek inclusion and diversity in today’s religious environment, and who seek to resolve differences, not through excommunication but dialogue.

–Kenneth Hanson, PhD
Coordinator & Abe and Tess Wise Endowed Professor of Judaic Studies,
University of Central Florida

How did a religion that was founded by Jewish people end up excommunicating all the Jewish groups? This is such an important question. Ken Howard takes you on a fascinating journey. He explores the question with depth, insight, and appropriate thoughtfulness. For anyone interested in this puzzling paradox of our origins, this is a must-read book.

–The Very Reverend Ian Markham, PhD
Dean and President of Virginia Theological Seminary

Here is a thorough study that elucidates a grievous turn in church history while analyzing the roots of Christian antisemitism. It also offers a cautionary tale for all Christian polity. Tracing the brave polity of inclusion of the apostolic age to its demise three centuries later, *Excommunicating the Faithful* is especially relevant in today's febrile mix of religion, politics, and culture. Its message reminds us that, given the right set of circumstances, the oppressor and the oppressed can easily switch places, even among the followers of Jesus of Nazareth.

–The Reverend Peter M. Antoci, PhD
Dean, Southern Maryland Region,
Episcopal Diocese of Washington

What happened to Jewish Christianity in the first centuries of the Christian church? Largely due to a dearth of original material, this proves to be a very difficult question to answer. Focusing on the fate of several of the more “orthodox” early Jewish Christian sects, Ken Howard's *Excommunicating the Faithful* is an impressive attempt to extract an answer to this question from the fragmentary and often problematic source material available.

–Morgan Rempel, PhD
Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies,
Georgia Southern University

Contents

Abbreviations	ix
Introduction and Thesis	1
I. Introduction	1
II. Thesis	3
III. Defining Jewish Christianity: A Review of the Literature	4
IV. Survey of Sources	8
A. Biblical Sources	8
B. Jewish Christian Gospels and Related Documents	8
C. Apologetic and Patristic Literature	9
D. Jewish Talmudic Literature	10
E. Archaeological and Historical Sources	11
1 Background: Analysis of Biblical References and Early Church Documents	12
I. Biblical References	12
II. Primitive Church Documents	16
2 Who Were the Jewish Christians? Examination of the Candidates Suggested by the Church Fathers	19
I. Cerinthians	20
A. Hippolytus	20
B. Pseudo-Tertullian	21
C. Eusebius	21
D. Epiphanius	21
E. Jerome	22
II. Ebionites	22
A. Tertullian	23
B. Hippolytus	24

C. Origen	24	
D. Jerome	29	
E. Conclusions	29	
III. Nazarenes	29	
A. Justin Martyr	30	
B. Origen	31	
C. Filaster	36	
D. Jerome	36	
E. Augustine	40	
F. Conclusions	40	
IV. Symmachians	41	
A. Origen	41	
B. Eusebius	42	
C. Jerome	42	
D. Ambrosiaster	42	
E. Conclusions	42	
V. Elkesaites	43	
A. Hippolytus	43	
B. Epiphanius	44	
C. Conclusions	44	
VI. Summary and Conclusions	45	
3 Theology of the Jewish Christians: Analysis of the Jewish Christian Gospels		48
I. The Gospel of the Nazarenes	50	
II. The Gospel of the Ebionites	55	
III. Summary and Conclusions	58	
4 Corroborating the Church Fathers: Analysis of Archaeological, Talmudic, and Other Sources		60
I. Archaeological Data	60	
A. Jerusalem	61	
B. The Judean Desert	63	
C. Galilee	63	
D. Syria and Transjordan	64	
E. Conclusions	64	

II. Talmudic References	66
III. The Pella Tradition	69
A. Conclusions	74
IV. Summary and Conclusions	74
5 From Acceptance Through Ambivalence to Apathy: The Changing Attitude of the Church Fathers toward Jewish Christianity	76
I. Setting the Stage: A Roman Holocaust in the Holy Land	76
II. In the Beginning: A Jewish Christian Church	78
III. Clashing Cultures: The Church in Transition	80
IV. The First Easter Controversy	82
V. Jewish Christianity on the Defensive	82
VI. The Easter Controversy Continued: Anti-Judaism and Politics	84
VII. Irenaeus and the Ebionites: The First Excommunication	88
VIII. Nicaea and the Easter Decree: The Axe is Raised	89
IX. Gentile and Jewish Christians in Jerusalem: The Holy City in Schism	93
X. Epiphanius and the Nazarenes: The Axe Falls on Jewish Christianity	94
XI. Postscript: A Broken Promise	95
XII. Summary and Conclusions	96
6 Conclusions	97
Bibliography	102
About the Author	110

Abbreviations

ad Gal.	Ambrosiaster, <i>commentarius in epistulam ad Galatas</i> (“Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians”)
adv. haer.	Irenaeus. <i>adversus haereses</i> (“Against Heresies”), aka <i>The Panerion</i> (“The Bread Basket”)
adv. Luc.	Jerome. <i>adv. Lucianus</i> (“Against Lucian”)
adv. Marc.	Tertullian. <i>adversus Marcionem</i> (“Against Marcion”)
adv. omn. haer.	Pseudo-Tertullian. <i>adversus omnes haereses</i> (“Against All Heresies”)
adv. Paleg.	Jerome. <i>adversus Palegius</i> (Against Palegius)
anacor.	Epiphanius. <i>Anacortus</i> (“The Anacortes”)
Antioch	Athanasius. <i>canonum superius memorata Synodus Antiochiae in Syria</i> (“Canons of the Synod at Antioch in Syria”)
apol.	Justin Martyr. <i>próti sygnómi</i> (“First Apology”)
archeology	Mancini, Ignazio. <i>Archeological Discoveries Relative to the Jewish-Christians</i> . Jerusalem: Franciscan, 1970.
Av. Zar.	<i>Avodah Zara</i> (“Foreign Worship”), Talmud (Babylonian)
B. Brach	Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot (“Blessing”)

B. Gittin	Babylonian Talmud, <i>Gittin</i> (“Documents”)
c. Celsum	Origen. <i>contra Celsum</i> . (“Against Celsus”)
c. Cres.	Augustine. <i>contra Cresconium grammaticum partis Donati</i> (“Against Cresconius, a Donatist Grammarian”)
chron.	Eusebius. <i>chronicon</i> (“Chronicle”)
chron. Pasch.	Author unknown. <i>chronicon Paschale</i> (the “Paschal Chronicle” or “Easter Chronicle”), also called <i>chronicum Alexandrinum, Constantinopolitanum, or fasti siculi</i>
Const.	Eusebius. <i>vita Constantini</i> (“The Life of Constantine”)
de bapt.	Augustine. <i>de baptismo contra Donatistas</i> (“On Baptism, Against the Donatists”)
de carne.	Tertullian. <i>de carne Christi</i> (“The Body of Christ”)
de praesc.	Tertullian. <i>de praescriptione haereticorum</i> (“The Prescription Against Heretics”)
de princ.	Origen. <i>de principiis</i> (“On First Principles”)
de situ	Jerome. <i>de situ et nominibus locorum hebraicorum liber</i> (“On locations and local names in the Hebrew Scriptures”)
de vir. Ill.	Jerome. <i>de viris illustribus</i> (“On Illustrious Men”)
de virg. vel.	Tertullian. <i>de virginibus velandis</i> (“On the Veiling of Virgins”)
dem.	Araphrat of Persia. <i>Demonstrations</i> (translated from the original Syriac)
Dial.	Justin Martyr. <i>Dialogue with Trypho the Jew</i>
div. haer. liber.	Philastrius (also Philaster or Filaster). <i>diversarum hereseon liber</i> (“Book of Diverse Heresies”)

epist.	Jerome. <i>epistola Augustini</i> (“Epistle 79 to Augustine”)
hist. eccl.	Eusebius. <i>Historia Ecclesiastica</i> (“Church History”)
hom. in Gen.	Origen. <i>homiliae in Genesim</i> (“Homilies on Genesis”). Latin translation by Jerome.
hom. in Jer.	Origen. <i>homiliae in Jeremias</i> (“Homilies on Jeremiah”). Latin translation by Jerome.
hom. in Luc.	Origen. <i>homiliae in Lucam</i> (“Homilies on Luke”). Latin translation by Jerome.
in epist. ad Rom.	Origen. <i>in epistulam ad Romanos</i> (“On the Epistle to the Romans”)
in epist. ad Titum	Chrysostom. <i>in epistulam ad Titum</i> (“On the Epistle to Titus”)
in Esaiaem	Eusebius. <i>commentarium in Esaiaem</i> (“Commentary on Isaiah”)
in Hab.	Jerome. <i>commentarium in Habakkuk</i> (“Commentary on Habakkuk”)
in Hiez.	Origen. <i>homiliae in Hiezechielem</i> (“Commentary on Ezekiel”)
in Joh.	Origen. <i>commentarium in evangelium Ioannis</i> (“Commentary on the Gospel of John”)
in Matth.	Origen. <i>commentarium in evangelium Matthaei</i> (“Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew”)
in Mic.	Jerome. <i>commentarium in Micah</i> (“Commentary on Micah”)
Jud.	Chrysostom. <i>adversus Judaeos</i> (“Against the Jews”)

Nazarene	Pritz, Raymond A. <i>Nazarene Jewish-Christianity: From the End of the New Testament Period until Its Disappearance in the Fourth Century</i> . Jerusalem: Magnes, 1988.
onomas.	Eusebius. <i>onomasticon (peri tōn topikōn onomatōn tōn en tē Theia Graphē)</i> , (“On the Place-Names in the Holy Scripture”)
pan	Epiphanius. <i>panerion</i> (“The Bread Basket”), aka <i>Adversus Haereses</i> (“Against Heresies”)
Pascha	Melito, <i>peri Pascha</i> (“Homily on the Passion”)
PE	A. F. J. Klijn and G. J. Reinink, <i>Patristic Evidence of Jewish Christian Sects</i> . (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill).
PEAJ	Wilson, Stephen G. “Passover, Easter, and Anti-Judaism: Melito of Sardis and Others.” In Jacob Neusner and Ernest S. Frerichs (eds.), <i>“To See Ourselves as Others See Us”: Christians, Jews, “Others” in Late Antiquity</i> , 337–355. Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1955.
phil.	Ignatius. <i>epistolī stous philadélfeia</i> (“Epistle to the Philadelphians”)
Praef.	Origen. <i>praefatio contra Celsum</i> . (“Preface of Against Celsus”)
prol.	Jerome. <i>commentarium de nominibus Hebraicis</i> (prologus), (“Prologue to the Commentary on Hebrew Names”)
ref.	Hippolytus. <i>refutatio omnium haeresium</i> (“Refutation of All Heresies”), aka <i>Elenchus</i> or <i>Philosophumena</i>
refut. omn. haer.	Hippolytus. <i>refutatio omnium haeresium</i> (“Refutation of All Heresies”), aka <i>Elenchus</i> or <i>Philosophumena</i>
Sanh.	Babylonian Talmud, <i>Sanhedrin</i> (“The Synod”)

Sota	Babylonian Talmud, <i>Sota</i> (“Errant Wife”)
Strom.	Clement. <i>Stromata</i> (“Miscellanies”)
Taanit	Babylonian Talmud, <i>Taanit</i> (“Fasting”)
Theo.	Theodotion. <i>Septuagint</i> (“Seventy”). Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures.
War.	Josephus. <i>o evraïkós pólemos</i> (“The Jewish War”)
Weights	Epiphanius. <i>métra kai stathmá</i> (“Weights and Measures”)

Introduction and Thesis

I. Introduction

The study of Jewish Christianity in the early church is both intriguing and disheartening. It goes without saying that all of the first Christians were Jews. Jesus's disciples, the Twelve, and the Apostle Paul were all Jews. The book of Acts reports that tens of thousands "from the circumcision" came to believe in Jesus as Messiah.¹ None are recorded as ever renouncing their Judaism. In fact, the controversial issue at the time was quite the opposite. The earliest church council was called by the Apostles to determine whether a person could become a follower of Jesus without first converting to Judaism. Yet by the early part of the second century, if the reports of the church fathers are to be believed, all that remained of Jewish Christianity were small, isolated pockets of Jewish Christians.² Some were relatively orthodox in their theology.

¹ Acts 21:20; cf. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "Jewish-Christianity in Acts in the Light of the Qumran Scrolls," in *Essays on the Semitic Background of the New Testament*, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1971): 271–304. Fitzmyer notes that great care must be exercised in the use of the book of Acts in order to distinguish "Lucan theologoumena" from the historical information that it also contains. While the Acts account is problematic in establishing specific events as historic, it tends to be more helpful in establishing the context within which Jewish Christianity arose. Readers may give more weight to the historical assertions of Acts when they have points of contact from other sources, biblical or non-biblical. For example, Fitzmyer has established a number of points of contact between the book of Acts and the Qumran materials.

² Ernest W. Saunders, "Jewish Christianity and Palestinian Archeology," *Religious Studies Review* 9 (3) (1983): 201–205; cf. Bellarmino Bagatti, *The Church from the Circumcision: History and Archaeology of the Judaeo-Christians* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1971); Ignazio Mancini, *Archaeological Discoveries Relative to the Judaeo-Christians*,

2 *Excommunicating the Faithful*

Some occupied the fringe of orthodox Christian doctrine. Some were beyond the fringe. However, orthodox or not, they were held in almost universally low esteem by the larger church, judging by the opinions of most of the patristic writers—which demonstrate an ambivalence at best. By the end of the fourth or fifth centuries, Jewish Christianity had apparently disappeared; if the patristic literature is to be believed, there are no contemporaneous reports on any Jewish Christian sects after that time.

This work will trace the development of Jewish Christianity from its beginnings in the earliest Christian communities through its eventual apparent disappearance. It will attempt to shed light on several questions: Who were the various groups which composed, or which evolved from Jewish Christianity? What can be said of their origins and development, and what became of them? What were the natures of the theologies—particularly the Christologies—of these various groups? How did the attitude of the church fathers toward Jewish Christianity change from the first to the fourth century? And how did their changing attitudes contribute toward the eventual demise of Jewish Christianity?

These questions are difficult to answer with certainty because original source materials are extremely scarce. No original Jewish Christian documents currently exist in complete form. All that remain are fragments of Jewish Christian documents—a few Gospels and scriptural commentaries—quoted by various patristic writers. The only other sources of information on early Jewish Christianity are the reports of the patristic writers themselves, the majority of which are either secondhand or based on tradition. There are also several canonical and apocryphal documents which are thought to be dependent on earlier Jewish Christian documents or which display aspects of Jewish Christian theology. Therefore, this

(Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1970); and G. Quispel, “The Discussion of Judaic Christianity,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 22 (1968): 81. Bagatti and Mancini believe that the archaeological evidence indicates that Jewish Christianity was much more prevalent in the third and fourth centuries than is apparent from patristic sources, and was perhaps the dominant form until the arrival of the Byzantines. Quispel argues that Jewish Christianity remained alive and active long after the fall of Jerusalem and was instrumental in spreading Christianity to Mesopotamia and further east, laying the groundwork for Aramaic-speaking, Syrian Christianity.

paper will draw on a variety of sources including biblical evidence, fragments of Jewish Christian documents as quoted in patristic documents, the comments of the patristic writers themselves, and certain early Jewish documents.

II. Thesis

The author's thesis is that within the diversity which characterized the Jewish Christianity of the early church, there existed at least one Jewish Christian sect whose theology stood within the acceptable bounds of orthodoxy of the church, and that this sect existed through at least the fourth century—at which point it was declared heretical by the church fathers and eventually died out, despite the fact that it remained within the bounds of orthodoxy³ and considered itself a part of the greater church. The thesis also suggests that the increasing antipathy of the church fathers toward Jewish Christianity was the result of a variety of interrelated influences operating over several centuries. Some of these influences included: the changing demographics of the church and the accompanying clash of cultures; the increasing isolation of Jewish Christianity from the predominantly Gentile church; power struggles between competing Christian communities in Palestine, as well as Rome's interest in asserting its primacy; theological and pastoral concerns—which were well-intentioned but resulted in increasingly narrow views of orthodoxy and orthopraxy; as well as some outright anti-Jewish attitudes.

Care must be taken in applying the term “orthodoxy” in this context to avoid its application in an anachronistic manner. For example, it would be inappropriate to apply modern standards of orthodoxy to the period of the early church covered by this investigation. Furthermore, within the period covered by this investigation it would be equally inappropriate to apply the standards of orthodoxy of a later period to an earlier period (e.g., the more unified orthodoxy of the fourth-century post-Nicaea church to the diversity of the first-century primitive church). Therefore, when

³ That is, orthodox in all ways except for its observance of the ceremonial law.

the term orthodox is applied to a group in this study, it is applied in context; that is, in terms of the acceptable standards of orthodoxy present in the greater church at the time (e.g., second-century Jewish Christian groups will be evaluated against the standards of orthodoxy of the second-century church).

III. Defining Jewish Christianity: A Review of the Literature

A major problem in the study of Jewish Christianity is defining the subject. Some scholars tend to define Jewish Christianity very broadly, in primarily theological terms. For example, Danielou speaks of Jewish Christianity as Christianity expressed in the thought-forms of Judaism; in other words, Christian groups whose theology was dependent on the theological concepts and symbols of Judaism.⁴ Similarly, Longenecker, following Danielou, defines Jewish Christians as those Christian communities which existed between 20 CE and 135 CE and which were located in Jerusalem or considered Jerusalem to be their mother church.⁵ Quispel, using a similarly broad definition, classifies the beginnings of Christianity in Syria, Alexandria, and North Africa as Jewish Christian.⁶ While such a broad concept of Jewish Christianity has the benefit of demonstrating the deep roots of Christianity in the theological concepts of Judaism at the time, it is too broad to permit any meaningful study and inevitably leads to statements such as those by Klijn—that early Christianity was a Jewish Christian phenomenon.⁷ While such a statement is undoubtedly true, it does not limit the field of study in any useful way.

⁴ Jean Danielou, *The Development of Christian Doctrine before the Council of Nicaea*, Vol.1, *The Theology of Jewish-Christianity* (Chicago: Regnery, 1964), 10.

⁵ R. N. Longenecker, *The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 1970); quoted in G. Lüdemann, *Opposition to Paul in Jewish Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 29.

⁶ Quispel, 81.

⁷ A. F. J. Klijn, "The Study of Jewish-Christianity," *New Testament* 20 (1973/74): 426.

Some scholars continue to use the term “Jewish Christian” in an ethnic sense, although not as frequently as in years past. Defined ethnically, a Jewish Christian is a member of the Christian community born of Jewish parents. Adolf von Harnack, for instance, took such an approach.⁸ A solely ethnic perspective, while certainly narrowing the field of study, is overly simplistic. For example, it would be inappropriate for the purposes of this study to classify as Jewish Christian a person who had renounced all connections to all aspects of Jewish ceremony and theology.

Schoeps and others define Jewish Christianity in terms of orthodoxy and heresy.⁹ This involves taking at face value the categories imposed by the early Christian heresiologists. By this definition, the Jewish Christians of the earliest Jerusalem church are accepted as orthodox, while groups which appear on later lists of heresies are a priori considered heretical. Lüdemann notes that while this approach has enjoyed great popularity since the time of Eusebius, it is relatively uncritical and seldom attempts to define the concept of Jewish Christianity in any practical way.¹⁰

Finally, Simon, Lüdemann, and others argue that Jewish Christianity should be defined primarily in a religious sense. In this case, Jewish Christians are considered to be those members of the Christian church with a commitment to the ceremonial law, regardless of their ethnic origins.¹¹ This approach views Jewish Christianity primarily as an anti-Pauline movement.¹² It includes Gentile Christians who were committed to the ceremonial law and excludes per se those of Jewish background who were not. While this position avoids the overly broad generalizations of Danielou’s

⁸ Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma Vol. 1*, translated by Neil Buchanan (1958). Quoted in Lüdemann, 30.

⁹ Hans-Joachim Schoeps, *Jewish-Christianity: Factional Disputes in the Early Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964), 9–13.

¹⁰ Lüdemann, 30.

¹¹ Marcel Simon, *Versus Israel: A Study of the Relations between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire*, trans. H. McKeating (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 265f, 390ff; cf. Lüdemann, 30.

¹² Simon, *Versus Israel*, 247f. However, Simon does not claim that Jewish Christianity was univocal in its anti-Paulinism. Rather, the tenor of each Jewish Christian group’s anti-Paulinism was dependent on the group’s attitude toward the law.

definition without the gross oversimplification of a strictly ethnic approach or the narrowness of the orthodoxy/heresy approach, it too has some disadvantages.

For one thing, Lüdemann argues that the Apostle Paul should not be considered a Jewish Christian because he did not observe the Torah in his associations with Gentiles. Yet Paul never spoke of himself as a convert from Judaism¹³—he believed faith in Christ to be the true successor of the faith of Abraham.¹⁴ He may have been willing to observe the ceremonial law in his dealings with Jews,¹⁵ and he was willing to require Jewish ethics of Gentile converts.¹⁶ Therefore, it would be inappropriate to define Jewish Christianity in a way that would exclude him. In addition, it is not true that Jewish Christianity was a uniformly anti-Pauline phenomenon since (as I

¹³ Gal 1:15ff; cf. Phil 3:4ff. In Paul's own account of his coming to faith in Christ he never calls himself a proselyte nor does he use the term conversion to describe his experience. Rather, he speaks of his experience as a calling. Even in his letter to the Philippians, in which he accounts all his achievements as a devout Jew as loss and irrelevant to his salvation, he does not renounce his Jewishness or speak of himself as an ex-Jew.

¹⁴ Rom 4:1ff; cf. Patrick J. Hartin, "Jewish Christianity: Focus on Antioch in the First Century," *Scriptura* 36 (1991): 50.

¹⁵ Cor 9:19ff; cf. Acts 21:23–26; 1 Cor 11:19ff; Gal 2; Albrecht Ritschl, *The Formation of the Old Catholic Church* (1857), quoted in Lüdemann, 12–13. The Acts passage, in which Paul agrees to observe the purification rituals while in Jerusalem, is historically problematic for the reasons mentioned above. However, in 1 Cor 9:19ff Paul proclaims his willingness to be as a Gentile to Gentiles and as a Jew to Jews. While this can be interpreted in other ways, it does allow the possibility that Paul was willing to observe the law occasionally, as a means to an end: winning Jews to Christ. Also, in 1 Cor 11:19ff Paul seems to have adopted the Jewish Passover ritual as the model for the Lord's Supper. On the basis of Gal 2 it can be argued that for Paul occasionally to submit to ceremonial law, after criticizing Peter for his inconsistency in the application of the ceremonial law, would amount to violating his own principle. However, Ritschl argues that Paul understood the apostolic decree geographically; that is, churches outside of Palestine would fall under Paul's authority, while those inside would fall under the authority of James and Peter. If this was the case, then Paul would have been living up to the terms of his agreement and acknowledging the authority of James and Peter when he submitted to the purification rituals.

¹⁶ George P. Carras, "Jewish Ethics and Gentile Converts: Remarks on 1 Thess 4:3–8," in *The Thessalonian Correspondence*, ed. Raymond F. Collins (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 1990): 306–315.

will argue below) at least one Jewish Christian group, the Nazarenes, did accept Paul and his Gentile mission. Finally, this perspective does not adequately represent the variety of attitudes towards the ceremonial law by those who did observe it: those who practiced it on certain occasions but not on others; those who observed it to honor the Jewishness of the Lord Jesus;¹⁷ and those who viewed it as essential for salvation.

The effort to formulate a comprehensive but specific definition of Jewish Christianity seeks a uniformity of theology and practice which did not exist at the time. Modern scholarship has established that first-century Judaism was not a monolithic movement but had a variety of competing strands of theology and practice. It is naïve to assume that the followers of Christ who emerged from these Jewish strands would not demonstrate a similar diversity. Perhaps a more pragmatic approach to the definition of Jewish Christianity would be most appropriate. Such an approach would broadly recognize as Jewish Christian any group of people who considered themselves to be Jewish and who also considered themselves to be followers of Christ. It would then organize these groups according to appropriate subcategories: by their attitude toward ceremonial law, Christology, etc. Such a modified ethnic definition would eliminate from study those Gentile Christian groups who appropriated Jewish theological concepts or even ceremonial concepts without specifically identifying themselves as Jewish. It would also eliminate from consideration those ethnic Jews who renounced all identification with Judaism. For example, groups like the Nazarenes, who practiced the ceremonial law consistently (not as a legal requirement for salvation, but to honor the Jewishness of Jesus Christ), would be considered law-observant, orthodox Jewish Christians. Those like the Apostle Paul, who considered themselves free from the requirements of the ceremonial law, but did not renounce their identification with Judaism, would be considered law-free, orthodox Jewish Christians. However, groups like the Ebionites, whose theology (I will argue below) fell outside

¹⁷ Origen, in *Matth. Ser. 79*, in A.F.J. Klijn and G.J. Reinink, *Patristic Evidence for Jewish Christian Sects*. (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill), 13, referred to in subsequent notes as *PE*.

the bounds of orthodoxy, would be considered law-observant, heretical Jewish Christians. And the Elkesaites, who (I will argue below) adopted some Jewish Christian ideas but did not acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah and did not consider themselves a part of the greater church, would be considered a Jewish group, albeit a syncretistic one, and not Jewish Christian.

IV. Survey of Sources

The definition of the term Jewish Christian has no small impact on the issue of sources. The modified ethnic definition of Jewish Christianity adopted by this study allows more focused attention to be given to a more manageable number of closely related groups and sources than would be possible with Danielou's diffusive definition. In addition, sources for this study are limited, for the most part, to sources which can shed light on specific, identified Jewish Christian groups. However, some attention is given to documents which cannot be attributed to a specific group, but which nonetheless establish important background information on Jewish Christianity.

A. Biblical Sources

The term Jewish Christian is not used in the New Testament. However, the book of Acts does provide some light on the context and origins of Jewish Christianity. The Bible will be one of the major sources of background data for "Chapter I—Background: Analysis of the Biblical, Archaeological, and Other Data."

B. Jewish Christian Gospels and Related Documents

Jewish Christian groups left behind little direct literary evidence. What remains are fragments of documents which are quoted by the patristic authors. Jewish Christian groups produced several non-canonical Gospels. Although these have all been referred to by the patristic authors as the *Gospel According to the Hebrews*, these are actually at least two or three different recensions of the *Gospel According to Matthew*, each associated by patristic authors with a

different Jewish Christian group.¹⁸ Not only is this evidence fragmentary, but there is also some confusion over which document fragments should be associated with which group. Therefore, great care must be taken in using this evidence. The Jewish Christian gospel materials will be the primary focus of “Chapter III—The Theology of the Jewish Christians: Analysis of the Jewish Christian Gospels.”

In addition to these Gospel fragments, fragments from the Nazarene *Commentary on Isaiah*¹⁹ are useful in documenting certain aspects of that group’s theology. The *Pseudo Clementine* literatures, specifically the *Homilies* and *Recognitions*, are helpful in establishing the theological concepts of the Ebionites. Information from these sources will be included in “Chapter II—Who Were the Jewish Christians? Examination of the Candidates Suggested by the Church Fathers” and “Chapter IV—Corroborating the Church Fathers: Analysis of Archaeological, Talmudic, and Other Sources.”

Other writings, which cannot be attached to a specific Jewish Christian group, but which may be used to establish characteristics of early Jewish Christianity, include the *Didache*, the *Epistle of Barnabas*, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, and others. Information from these sources will be found in “Chapter I—Background: Analysis of Biblical References and Early Church Documents.”

C. Apologetic and Patristic Literature

Most of the information available on early Jewish Christianity comes from the Apologetic and patristic literature. For many reasons, great care must be taken in evaluating this information. It is in no way comprehensive. It is not the direct product of Jewish Christian groups. Many of these reports are not eyewitness reports but secondhand information. Not least important is the fact that these are the reports of the “winning side,” those who in the end declared all Jewish Christian groups to be heretical, and therefore may be subject to some self-justification. Nevertheless, they form

¹⁸ P. Vielhauer and G. Strecker, “Jewish-Christian Gospels” in *New Testament Apocrypha. Vol. 1, Gospels and Related Writings*. ed. W. Schneemelcher (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1991) 134–178.

¹⁹ Jerome, in *Esaiam* (PE, 109).

the largest part of what limited information is available, and so they must be used.

Information from Apologetic and patristic sources will be found primarily in “Chapter III—The Theology of the Jewish Christians: Analysis of the Jewish Christian Gospels.” Some of the major writers quoted include Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Pseudo-Tertullian, Eusebius, Epiphanius, Jerome, and Augustine. Secondary studies which were important in the development of this section include Klijn’s and Reinink’s *Patristic Evidence for Jewish Christian Sects*, Pritz’s *Nazarene Jewish Christianity*, Vielhauer and Strecker’s “Jewish-Christian Gospels,” and Lüdemann’s *Opposition to Paul in Jewish Christianity*.²⁰

D. Jewish Talmudic Literature

A study of Jewish Christianity would not be complete without consulting early Jewish sources for potential information, though many researchers have neglected to do so. Part of the problem lies with the difficulty in using Talmudic texts, in any precise manner, for historical evidence. In the case of Jewish Christianity, the references are few: about a dozen Talmudic texts. Primary sources for this data include Pritz’s *Nazarene Jewish Christianity* and Schiffman’s *Who Was a Jew?*²¹ However, the Talmudic texts do provide some useful corroborative evidence, which is offered in “Chapter IV—Corroborating the Church Fathers: Analysis of Archaeological, Talmudic, and Other Sources.”

²⁰ Klijn and Reinink, *PE*; Raymond A. Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity: From the End of the New Testament Period until Its Disappearance in the Fourth Century* (Jerusalem, Israel: Magnes Press, 1988); Vielhauer and Strecker; cf. Lüdemann.

²¹ Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Who Was a Jew? Rabbinic and Halakhic Perspectives on the Jewish Christian Schism*. (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav Publishing House, 1985).

E. Archaeological and Historical Sources

Archeological sources provide some useful information about the prevalence and geographic extent of Jewish Christianity in Palestine and the surrounding areas in the first four centuries—the period covered by this study. A primary source for this data will be Mancini’s work *Archaeological Discoveries Relative to the Judaeo-Christians*,²² with some supplementary data from other sources. This data will be covered in “Chapter II—Background: Analysis of Biblical References and Early Church Documents” and “Chapter IV: Corroborating the Church Fathers.” Chapter V will also draw on historical data from Josephus’s *Jewish Wars*. Boyarin’s book, *Borderlines: The Partition of Judeo-Christianity*,²³ Fredrickson’s book, *When Christians Were Jews: The First Generation*,²⁴ and Reed’s book, *Jewish-Christianity and the History of Judaism*²⁵ also provide useful historical context for Chapter IV, as well as “Chapter V—From Acceptance Through Ambivalence to Antipathy: The Changing Attitude of the Church Fathers toward Jewish Christianity.”

²² Mancini, *Archaeology*.

²³ Daniel Boyarin, *Borderlines: The Partition of Judeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

²⁴ Paula Fredriksen, *When Christians Were Jews: The First Generation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018).

²⁵ Annette Yoshiko Reed, *Jewish-Christianity and the History of Judaism* (Heidelberg, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2017).

About the Author

The great-grandson of an Orthodox rabbi from Belarus, who thought he might become a rabbi himself, Ken Howard made the “mistake” of betting a college roommate that he could prove Jesus was not the Messiah. He eventually joined the Episcopal Church because it was “the most Jewish church I could find.”

Ordained for nearly thirty years in the Episcopal Church, Ken has started two congregations, including the first successful startup congregation in his judicatory in over forty years. He has been involved in several congregational redevelopment projects ever since.

Ken is the founder and Executive Director of The FaithX Project, a faith-based consulting, research, and resource development practice with the mission of helping congregations survive and thrive in challenging times by better understanding and engaging missional opportunities in their communities through data-grounded missional discernment and experimentation.

Ken is also the author of *Paradoxy: Creating Christian Community Beyond Us and Them*, and is currently working on a new book, *The Choice: Faithful Congregational Leadership in Challenging Times*. He is also the author of several published papers, including “The Religion Singularity: A Demographic Crisis Disrupting and Transforming Institutional Christianity” and “Grounding Discernment in Data: Strategic Missional Planning Using GIS Technology and Market Segmentation Data.”

Ken and his wife, Rhee, have two adult children, two cats, and a Scottie dog named “Duncan.” He and Rhee will soon celebrate forty-six years of marriage. Ken enjoys bike riding, trying new and different ethnic foods, reading science fiction and fantasy, and contemplating the spiritual implications of quantum physics, entangled states, and “spooky action at distance.”