

# **The Message Of The Prophets And The Teachings Of Paul Of Tarsus**

## **Point of Contact**

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## **The Message of All the Prophets is the Same**

One of the basic tenets of Islam is that there is no difference among the Prophets of God. Muslims must, as an article of faith, believe in the Divinely revealed Torah or the Books of Moses, the Psalms of David, the Gospel of Jesus and the Quran of Muhammad. Muslims believe that the essence of the teachings of all the prophets is the same. It is the sovereignty of God.

The Quran teaches that Jesus and Moses were in the same prophetic line as Muhammad.

“We gave Moses the Book and followed him up with a succession of messengers; We gave Jesus the son of Mary clear (Signs) and strengthened him with the holy spirit. Is it that whenever there comes to you a messenger with what you yourselves do not desire, you are puffed up with pride? Some you call impostors and others you slay!

Surah Baqara 2:87

“It is He Who sent down to you (step by step) in truth the Book confirming what went before it, and He sent down the Law (of Moses) and the Gospel (of Jesus) before this as a guide to mankind and He sent down the Criterion (of Judgement between right and wrong).

Surah Al Imran 3:3

And in their footsteps We sent Jesus the son of Mary, confirming the Law that had come before him: We sent him the Gospel: therein was guidance and light, and confirmation of the Law that had come before him: a guidance and an admonition to those who fear God.

Surah Maida 5:49

“And remember Jesus the son of Mary said: “O Children of Israel! I am the messenger of God (sent) to you confirming the Law (which came) before me and giving glad tidings of a messenger to come after me whose name shall be the Praised One (Ahmed).” But when he came to them with Clear Signs they said “This is evident sorcery.”

Surah Saaf 61:6

There are also many Hadith, traditions or sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, narrated by his Companions, which deal with the other prophets who came before him. Some of the Hadith regarding the Prophets Moses and Jesus, from Al Bukhari, one of the most respected collections, are given below. They illustrate the central tenet of Islam, which is that all the prophets were revealing the same message, that God alone is to be the centre of our way of life

Respect for Moses

Narrated Abu Said Al Khudri: A man from the Jews having been slapped on the face, came to the Prophet and said: O Muhammad! A man from the Ansar slapped me on my face!

The Prophet said “Call him”

When they called him the Prophet said “Why did you slap him?”

He said: “O Allah’s Apostle while I was passing by the Jews I heard him saying “By Him who selected Moses above the human beings.” I said: ‘Even above Muhammad?’ I became furious and slapped him on the face.”

The Prophet said: “Do not give me superiority over the other prophets, for on the Day of Resurrection the people will become unconscious and I will be the first to regain consciousness. Then I will see Moses holding one of the legs of the Throne. I will not know whether he has regained consciousness before me or whether the shock he had received at the Mountain (Sinai) during his worldly life was sufficient for him (so that he was exempted).”

Sahih Al Bukhari vol 6 p.128-129

Narrated Ibn Abbas: The Prophet once came to us and said, ‘All the nations were displayed in front of me and I saw a large multitude of people covering the horizon. Somebody said, ‘This is Moses and his followers.’

Sahih Al Bukhari Vol 4 p.411

Respect for Jesus.

Narrated Ubada: The Prophet said: "If anyone testifies that None has the right to be worshipped but Allah Alone Who has no partners and that Muhammad is His slave and His Apostle, and that Jesus is Allah's slave and His Apostle and His word which he bestowed on Mary and a soul from Him, and that paradise is true and hell is true, Allah will admit him into paradise with the deeds which he has done even if those deeds were few."

Sahih Al Bukhari vol 4 p.429

Narrated Abu Huraira: Allah's Apostle said: "Both in this world and in the hereafter, I am the nearest of all people to Jesus, the son of Mary. The prophets are paternal brothers; their mothers are different, but their religion is one."

Sahih Al Bukhari Vol 4 p.432

Another Hadith which mentions Jesus has profound implications for those who claim to follow the Gospel of Jesus but who are in fact, deeply influenced by the religion created by Paul. The reference to the breaking of the cross can be understood as a denial by Jesus of the religion of the crucified Christ. The killing of the pigs, a forbidden food under the Law, symbolises his rejection of Paul's claim that the Law was dead.

The Second Coming of Jesus

Narrated Abu Huraira: Allah's Apostle said 'By Him in Whose Hands my soul is, surely Jesus the son of Mary will soon descend amongst you as a Just Ruler; he will break the cross and kill the pigs and there will be no Jizya (a tax taken from non-Muslims in return for freedom from military service). Money will be in such abundance that nobody will accept a charitable gift, and a single prostration to Allah (in prayer) will be better than the whole world and what is in it.'

Abu Hurairah added: "If you wish you can recite this verse from the Holy Quran:

Of the people of the Scriptures

And there is none

(Jews and Christians)

But must believe in him

(Jesus as an Apostle of Allah

and a human being)

Before his death;

And on the Day of Judgement

He will be a witness

Against them. (4:159)”

Sahih Al Bukhari Vol 4 p.436

Muslims believe that Muhammad was the Last of the Prophets so the Book revealed to him is the final revelation which will remain until the Day of Judgement. We do not believe that he was the only prophet or that the other prophets should be ignored.

### **The Message of the Prophets is Unwelcome**

The Message of God, delivered by Moses, Jesus and Muhammad and all the other prophets, has brought out all the forces of oppression and darkness against it, from the beginning of history until today. The histories of Abraham, Noah, Moses, David, Jesus and Muhammad reveal the struggles they were forced to undergo from opponents of God’s message. The greedy and powerful have always, until today, feared this message and sought to silence it or, when this is obviously impossible, to modify it.

Maulana Maududi, the leading Islamic scholar to come out of India this century, attempted to explain this phenomenon in an address in 1939. This was published as a pamphlet entitled “*The Political Theory of Islam*”. Maududi was sentenced to death at one stage by a so-called Muslim Government for his forthright opinions. This illustrates how the Muslim world is ruled by those who fear Islam, something not fully comprehended in the West.

### **Maududi writes:**

“What strikes us most in the history of the prophets is that whenever these servants of God proclaimed that *‘there is no object of worship except the one God’* all the forces of evil came out to do battle with them. If it were merely a call to bow down in the mosques and the churches before one God with perfect freedom to owe allegiance and carry out the will of powers that be outside these sacred places, it would have been the height of unwisdom and a piece of incredible stupidity on the part of the ruling class to suppress the religious liberties of its loyal subjects for such a small thing ... Let us then investigate what exactly the real point of dispute in respect of God was between the prophets and those who opposed them.

A number of verses may be quoted from the Quran which makes it absolutely clear that the non-believers and the polytheists, who were at loggerheads with the prophets, did not

altogether deny the existence of God. They all admitted that there was a God who was the sole Creator of the heavens, the earth and of man, that the whole mechanism of nature was working to his orders, that he poured down the rain, moved the winds and controlled the sun, the moon, the earth and everything else. Says the Quran: "Say: to whom belongs the earth and what is on it, if you have knowledge? They will say, 'to God'." Surah 23. (p.8)

The question at issue was not dominion over land and sea or over the universe but over the allegiance of the people, not who should be regarded as controlling the forces of nature, but who should have the right to claim the obedience of human beings.

Amongst all creation, it is only humans who can and do claim godhood in relation to their fellow beings.

"The desire for godhood can take root only in the head of a man. It is only man's excessive lust for power and desire for exploitation that prompts him to impose himself on other people as a god and compel their obedience, force them to bow down before him in reverential awe and make them instruments for his self-aggrandisement. The pleasure of posing as a god is more delicious than anything that man has yet been able to discover."

(p.10-11)

Maududi writes of the two types of people who seek this status of a god. They can be like Pharaoh, with state power, a system of law courts and police and an army. In the past, this was associated with direct claims to divine status. The Emperor Augustus was proclaimed a god by the Roman Senate. Pharaoh was the living god, an incarnation of Horus. In modern times they are more likely to be president for life, like Kim Il Sung of North Korea, or be the founder of a national ideology with a greater than-human status. Maududi writes of this type of aspirant to godhood:

"For instance, there was Pharaoh who was so drunk with power and so proud of his empire that he proclaimed to the inhabitants of Egypt *'I am your highest lord'* and *'I do not know any other objects of worship for you but myself'*. When the Prophet Moses approached him with a demand for the liberation of his people and told him that he too should surrender himself to the Lord of the universe, Pharaoh replied that since he had the power to cast him into prison, Moses should rather acknowledge him as his object of worship.

Similarly there was another king (Nimrod) who had an argument with the Prophet Abraham. Ponder a little carefully over the words in which the Quran has narrated this episode. It says: "*Think of him who had an argument with Abraham about his Lord, because God had given him the kingdom; how, when Abraham said; 'My Lord is He who gives life and causes death.' He answered: 'I give life and cause death'. Abraham said: 'God causes the sun to rise in the east can you make it rise in the west.'* So was the resister of truth shamed into silence."

(p.11-12)

Nimrod's claim was based on the absolute power he had over his subjects, over their lives and property. That is why he demanded that Abraham should serve and obey him.

“This claim to godhood which Pharaoh and Nimrod had put forth was by no means peculiar to them. Rulers all over the world in the past, as in the present, have made such claims.”

(p.12)

The second species of claimants to godhood are those who use the gullibility of the people or their ignorance and superstition to assert that they are in some way the mouthpiece of God. These people may claim that they too obey God but that they are the intermediaries through whom humanity must approach Him. They alone must carry out the sacred ceremonies and they alone can guide us:

“Constituting themselves the mouthpieces of God they start dictating to others what is lawful (halal) and what is not (haram). In this way their word becomes law and they force people to obey their own commands instead of those of God. This is the source of that Brahmanism and Popery which has prevailed under various names and in diverse forms in all parts of the world from time immemorial down to the present day, and in consequence of which certain families, races and classes have imposed their dominion over large masses of men and women.”

(p.14)

### **The Law of God is a Protection to Humanity.**

Only acceptance of the Law of God can liberate humanity from the rule of false gods. If we accept the rule of pretenders to godhood we become their slaves. It is the willingness of so many people to submit to false gods that creates the horrors we see in many parts of the world today. It is not pleasing to God that there should be worldwide starvation, famine created by civil wars, and mass poverty in the Third World and in the cities of the rich countries. This is a situation we have allowed to occur through our own short-sightedness. Our failure to take seriously the message of the prophets, which calls for submission to the Laws of God and the rejection of idols, is the fundamental cause of the distress which threatens to overwhelm us.

### **Maududi writes:**

“...the root cause of evil and mischief in the world is the domination of man over man, be it direct or indirect. This was the origin of all troubles and even today this remains the main source of all the plentiful vices which have brought untold misery on the suffering masses all the world over.”

(p.15)

Many people today, especially in the rich Western countries which regard themselves as “post-Christian”, claim to be without religion. Many have been influenced by the scientism of the early twentieth century and the incompatibility between what is in the Bible and what is established fact in other disciplines.

It may be true that they cannot believe in Biblical stories which have been altered and edited over the centuries to fit various ambitions or the dogmas of Paul and his followers, but it is not true that they are ‘without religion’. Maududi writes: *‘If you do not believe in God, some artificial god will take His place in your affection.’* Our religion is our way of life and is centred upon our object of worship.

In former societies the object of worship may have been a stone god or a spirit. In modern societies the object of worship has, for many people, become position, financial success or comfort, or the well-being of their immediate family. A political leader, a philosophical theory or a great cause can become a god for those whose horizons are less limited.

One lesson that history has taught us is that if we make just one aspect of life or experience our god, we limit the development of our truly human capacities to the sphere dictated by that religion. The evil within philosophies and religions like nazism or other deified versions of racism, is not only the physical damage they do to their opponents, but the way they stunt their adherents as well. It is important that people should clearly recognise their object of worship. Only then can they reflect upon the quality of their faith and the limitations inherent within it.

Revelations from prophets have provided a pathway for humanity since there have been human beings. No people have been left without guidance. The way or the religion which they have revealed is one which is not limited like the religions built around gods created by human desires are limited.

The prophets call us to a broad, unlimiting way of life in which our object of worship is the Lord of All the Worlds, the Beneficent, the Merciful, the Eternal upon Whom all the universe depends but Who depends upon nothing. This object of worship frees us from all slavery to lower gods.

The prophets throughout all history have called us to the path of liberation, away from the slavery which worship of invented gods creates. This call was always in the past and is still today, accompanied by hostility from those whose power was or is threatened. The threat is real. It means the end of personal power over others, the end of domination. Maududi explains it in these terms:

“This was the radical reformation effected by the prophets in the life of humanity. They aimed at the demolition of man’s supremacy over man. Their real mission was to deliver

man from this injustice, this slavery to false gods, this tyranny of man over man, this exploitation of the weaker by the stronger.

Their object was to thrust back to their proper limits those who had overstepped them and to raise to the proper level those who had been forced down from it. They endeavoured to evolve a social organisation based on human equality in which man should be neither the slave nor the master of his fellow-beings and in which all men should become the slaves of God.”

(p.18)

### **Did Paul of Tarsus preach this Message of God?**

In modern Trinitarian Christianity, Paul, called ‘the apostle’, assumes central importance. It is his epistles which form the foundation of the religion of the ‘crucified Christ’ teaching salvation through faith in the resurrection. There is very little in his writings about the Gospel revealed to Jesus or of the life of Jesus. In fact Paul claimed to be proclaiming a new gospel. It was a gospel of accommodation with the Roman rulers of Palestine and their Herodian puppets.

Paul wrote in his Letter to the Romans:

“You must all obey the governing authorities. Since all government comes from God, the civil authorities were appointed by God, and so anyone who resists authority is rebelling against God’s decision, and such an act is bound to be punished. Good behaviour is not afraid of magistrates; only criminals have anything to fear.....The State is there to serve God for your benefit.”

(Romans 13:1-4)

Such an attitude was very different from that of those thousands of Jews who accepted the Gospel and who were ‘zealous for the Law’ (Acts 21:21). They abhorred pagan rule and the pollution of the Temple and of the land which it brought.

Paul’s departure from the teachings of the prophets was further highlighted by difference over the Law itself. The purpose of the Law, according to Paul, was to control the evil and was in no way of benefit to the good.

“We know, of course that the Law is good, but only provided it is treated like any law, in the understanding that laws are not framed for people who are good. On the contrary, they are for criminals and revolutionaries, for the irreligious and wicked, for the sacrilegious and irreverent: they are for people who kill their fathers or mothers and for murderers, for those who are immoral with women or with boys or with men, for liars and for perjurers – and for everything else that is contrary to the sound teaching that goes with the Good News of the glory of the blessed God, the gospel that was entrusted to me.”



(1 Tim 1:8-11)

## **The Law**

Paul's view of the Law is difficult to understand. It is as if he hated what been revealed by God and reiterated by the Prophets of Israel right down until the Gospel of Jesus. The essence of the Law was clear. It involved recognition of the sovereignty of God:

“Listen Israel: Yahweh our God is the one Yahweh. You shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength. Let these words I urge on you today be written on your heart. You shall repeat them to your children and say them over to them whether at rest in your house or walking abroad, at your lying down or at your rising; you shall fasten them on your hand as a sign and on your forehead as a circlet; you shall write them on the door-posts of your house and on your gates.”

(Deut 6:4-9)

This constant remembrance of God was the core of the individual's and the society's progress towards holiness, giving rise to an ever-deepening consciousness of justice and righteousness amongst the people.

Under the Law, the power of a ruler, who had to be a believer, was limited. It was clear that sovereignty was not his to possess.

“...the king who you appoint to rule you must be chosen by Yahweh your God; the appointment of a king must be made from your own brothers: on no account must you appoint a king some foreigner who is not a brother of yours.”

“Once seated on his royal throne, and for his own use, he must write a copy of this Law on a scroll, at the dictation of the levitical priests. It must never leave him, and he must read it every day of his life and learn to fear Yahweh his God by keeping all the words of this Law and observing these rules...”

(Deut 17:15-19)

It also involved establishing justice:

“You must not exploit a poor and needy wage-earner: be he one of your brothers or a foreigner resident in your community. You must pay him his wages each day, not allowing the sun to set before you do, since he, being poor, needs them badly, otherwise, he may appeal to Yahweh against you, and you would incur guilt.

Parents may not be put to death for their children, nor children for parents, but each must be put to death for his own crime.

You must not infringe the rights of the foreigner or the orphan: you must not take a widow's clothes in pledge. Remember that you were once a slave in Egypt and that Yahweh your God redeemed you from that."

(Deut 24:14-18)

The Law was intended to train the people of Israel to serve God and thus to prepare them as a light to the world. It included demands for abstention from evil and the positive cultivation of virtue. The dietary laws were associated with the notion of holiness. They were part of training in self-discipline, without which submission to God is impossible. The sacrificial cult involving the expiation of religious sins was part of the cultivation of awareness that such offences created a gulf between the individual and God, erecting a barrier to the attainment of holiness.

Justice and Righteousness are the fundamentals of the moral law established by God. Justice, which Epstein describes as 'the negative aspect of Holiness', involves six fundamental rights:

"These were the right to live, the right of possession, the right to work, the right to clothing, the right to shelter, and finally the right of the person, which included the right to leisure and the right to liberty, as well as prohibitions to hate, avenge or bear a grudge.

Righteousness was to manifest itself in the acceptance of duties, especially in the concern for the poor, the weak, and the helpless, whether friend or foe. It was also to show itself in the conception of earthly goods, the possession of which was to be regarded not as a natural right but as a divine trust"

(Epstein p.27)

Jesus came to confirm this Law. Even later Pauline theologians could not expunge this subject from the collection of writings which became the New Testament. Respect for the Law was so basic to his teachings that to ignore it would have rendered all else invalid. Jesus said:

"Do not imagine that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete them. I tell you solemnly, till heaven and earth disappear, not one dot, not one little stroke, shall disappear from the Law until its purpose is achieved."

(Mat 5:17-18)

**The final part of this statement makes matters even plainer. Jesus said:**

"Therefore, anyone who infringes even one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be considered the least in the kingdom of heaven; but

the person who keeps them and teaches them will be considered greater in the kingdom of heaven.”

(Mat 5:19)

**In the Gospel according to Luke, who was close to Paul, it is written:**

“It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for one little stroke to drop out of the law.”

(Luke 16:17)

Jesus condemned the scribes and Pharisees, not for following the details of the Law but for concentrating on only part of it. He said, according to the Gospel of Matthew:

“Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You who pay the tithe of mint and dill and cumin and have neglected the weightier matters of the Law – justice, mercy and good faith. These you should have practised, without neglecting the others.”

(Mat 23:23)

He also taught that his message was not for the pagans. In his instructions to his disciples Jesus told them not to go into gentile territory and not to enter any Samaritan town but to *‘...go instead to the lost sheep of the House of Israel’* (Mat 9:6-7). Again in the Gospel according to Matthew it is recorded that a Canaanite (non-Jewish) woman asked Jesus to assist her daughter. Jesus said *“I was sent only to the lost sheep of the House of Israel.”* She kept on begging him for help so he said *‘It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the house-dogs.’* She persisted and Jesus gave in and helped her. (Mat 15:23-28)

Jesus also warned that not all who claimed to be his followers would be recognised as such, not even those who claimed to prophesy or work miracles. He is reported to have said:

“It is not anyone who says to me ‘Lord, Lord’ who will enter the kingdom of Heaven, but the person who does the will of my Father in heaven. When the day comes, many will say to me ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, drive out demons in your name, work many miracles in your name?’ Then I shall tell them to their faces: I have never known you; away from me, all evil doers!”

(Mat 7:21:23)

Paul had great confidence in the truth of his personal revelation. He seemed unaware of the teachings of the Gospel on the importance of the Law. It is of course possible that Paul did not know what Jesus had actually preached as he had not heard him and makes no reference to his teachings in his letters.

Paul writes:

“...those who rely on the keeping of the law are under a curse, since scripture says; Cursed be everyone who does not persevere in observing everything prescribed in the book of the Law. The Law will not justify anyone in the sight of God, because we are told: the righteous man finds life through faith. The Law is not even based on faith, since we are told: the man who practises these precepts finds life through practising them. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law by being cursed for our sake, since scripture says: Cursed be everyone who is hanged on a tree.”

(Gal 3:10-13)

The teachings of Paul created great controversy at the time. There is evidence from Paul's letters and from other sources that they were not well received by the Jerusalem Community or its leaders. They were so different from the teachings of the prophets, including Jesus, that Christian scholars are still writing explanations of his views.

### **Paul a Controversial Figure**

Paul's defensiveness in the letters which can be clearly attributed to him, suggest that he was under constant and sustained attack. He denies that his message comes '*...from any delusion or impure motives or trickery*' (1 Thes 2:3) and denies that he seeks to flatter human beings (Gal 1:10) or seek honour from them (1 Thes 2:6). His authority to preach is questioned for he comments '*...you are asking for a proof that it is Christ who speaks in me*' (2 Cor 13:3).

He complains that he is not universally accepted as an apostle, writing: '*Even if to others I am not an apostle, to you at any rate, I am, for you are the soul of my apostolate in the Lord*' (1 Cor 9:2). He is also most sensitive to the charge that he lives off the church members and wants to emphasise how hard he and his companions work and how they suffer (1 Thes 2:9; 2 Thes 3:7, 1 Cor 4:12-13). That he was at some stage referred to as the 'enemy' is intimated in his Letter to the Galatians in which he asks '*have I turned into your enemy simply by being truthful with you?*' (4:16).

The strength of his attacks upon his opponents suggest a fierce ideological struggle between the Pauline 'saved through the blood sacrifice of Jesus' school and the Jerusalem Community, advocating adherence to the Law and the Gospel of Jesus. He attacks the pro-Law advocates who have apparently had great impact upon the Galatians as '*troublemakers who are seeking to pervert the Gospel of Christ*' (Gal 1:7) and goes on in the same chapter to put such people 'under God's curse'. He attacks them again as '*false brothers who had secretly insinuated themselves to spy on the freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, intending to reduce us to slavery*' (Gal 2:4).

Although it had been instituted by God, Paul claimed that return to observance of the Law would mean that the Galatians would again '*be fastened to the yoke of slavery*' (5:1). He warns his followers against those who wish to obey the Law and the Gospel,

describing them as ‘self-mutilators’ (Phil 3:2). He accuses Cephas and Barnabas of insincerity in his account of what occurred in Antioch after some people came from James in Jerusalem (Gal 2:13).

This attack upon the very people whom he elsewhere refers to as ‘*God’s holy people in Jerusalem*’ (1 Cor 16:1-4; and ‘*Pillars of the Church*’ (Gal 2:9) suggests, at the very least, a deep ambivalence in the relationship between them and Paul. He can only mean the Jerusalem leaders when he states that he does not consider himself at all inferior to the ‘super-apostles’ and writes that ‘*those super-apostles had no advantage over me*’ (2 Cor 11:5,12:11). Paul in fact recognised no earthly authority above himself, claiming that he had been appointed an apostle by Jesus, not any human being (Gal 1:1).

This tremendous sense of total correctness led Paul to interpret all opposition to him as devilish. He suggests that those who oppose him include ‘counterfeit apostles’ and ‘dishonest workers’ (2 Cor 11:13) and even Satan’s servants disguised as ‘servants of uprightness’ (2 Cor 11:14-15). He wishes that his opponents would ‘mutilate themselves’ (Gal 5:12). The advocates of the Law were self-interested people who just wished to boast about their success (Gal 6:13), wished to stir up disagreements (Rom 16:17) and who preached differently to Paul ‘*out of malice and rivalry*’ or ‘*out of jealousy, not in sincerity*’ (Phil 1:15-19).

Although certain that he was following the correct path, Paul could not totally ignore the community of those who followed the Gospel of Jesus. The prestige of those who had walked with him and heard his Gospel as he had preached it, the Jerusalem Community and its three leaders, James, Cephas and John, could not be ignored. To have some credibility with the Gentiles and overseas Jews, Paul had to have their support or at least their apparent support.

He is much concerned with the collection being taken for ‘God’s holy people’ the Jerusalem Community leaders (1 Cor 16:1-4), a theme continued in both his Letters to the Corinthians. That he felt it necessary to answer the charge that he might embezzle the collection (2 Cor 8:20-21) shows the suspicion with which he had to contend. He must claim the authority of the Jerusalem Community for the validity of his teaching to the Gentiles (Gal 2:1-10) and he writes that ‘*they asked nothing more than that we should remember to help the poor*’.

This was some 17 years after his conversion, for as he states, he was in no hurry to confer with any human being as he had been selected in his mother’s womb for this work (Gal 1:15-17). Even so, he was fearful that he and his gift might not be accepted by the Jerusalem leaders, writing: ‘*I pray that the aid I am carrying to Jerusalem will be acceptable to God’s holy people*’ (Rom 15:31).

But still there might be another barb for these ‘super-apostles’ for Paul throws in the line ‘*One person may have faith enough to eat any kind of food; another less strong, will eat only vegetables*’ (Rom 14:2). James the Righteous, leader of the Jerusalem Community was a vegetarian and supporter of the Law and the Gospel.

## **James the Righteous and the Jerusalem Community.**

James, the brother of Jesus (Mat 13:55-57), was the leader of the Jerusalem Community and was described by Eusebius as the first Bishop of Jerusalem. James the Righteous or 'upright' was said to have been 'holy from his birth'. *'He drank no wine or intoxicating liquor and ate no animal food, no razor came near his head'* (Eusebius p.59). A wearer of priestly linen, he was permitted to enter the Sanctuary of the Temple alone.

He was so often on his knees beseeching forgiveness for the people that his knees grew hard like a camel's. These were all characteristics of the Nazirites, those consecrated to Yahweh, the most firm of all adherents of the Law, (Num 6:1-5). He taught the Gospel so well that even some of the ruling class came to believe that Jesus was the Messiah. *'Because of his unsurpassable righteousness he was called the Righteous and Oblias – in our own language 'Bulwark of the People and Righteousness' - fulfilling the declarations of the prophets regarding him.'* (Eusebius p.59)

Eusebius tells the story of James' martyrdom. The scribes and Pharisees, afraid of his effectiveness, asked him to tell the people gathered for the Passover that Jesus was not the Messiah. He went up on the parapet of the sanctuary to address the crowd. Instead of denying that Christ was the Messiah, he won many to the Gospel. The Pharisees threw him off the parapet and he was stoned then beaten to death with a fuller's club (Eusebius p.58-61). However, according to Eisenman, there is evidence that this was not quite correct. The Pseudoclementines tell that he broke his legs in a riot at the Temple, instigated by 'an Enemy'. He was stoned outside the city at a later date. Hegesippus may have confused the two incidents.

The strict adherence to the Law of this Jerusalem Community is reflected in the name they were given. The early followers of Christ were called 'Nozrei ha-Brit' or 'Nozrei brito' – keepers of His Covenant (Eisenman p.36, 99). The name of Nozrei is Hebrew terminology for Christians. In Arabic it is Nazrani. It has nothing to do with the town of Nazareth, which may not even have existed at the time of Jesus. Later developments have obscured this attitude of the early followers of Christ towards the Law but indications have survived. For example, the first martyr Stephen, condemned the Jewish leaders for failing to uphold the Law and the Prophets and for betraying the 'Upright One' (Acts 7:51-53).

The successor to James the Righteous as leader of the Jerusalem Community according to Eusebius, was Symeon, who was known as the cousin of Jesus. This was because his father Clopas was the brother of Joseph, the husband of Mary. He was martyred under the Roman Emperor Trajan for being a follower of Jesus and for being a descendant of David.

His successor was Justus, a follower of Jesus and the Law. Grandsons of Jude, another brother of Jesus, lived on until this time, although they had nearly been executed by the Emperor Domitian for being descendants of David, for his descendants were long considered a potential threat to Roman rule in Palestine. (Eusebius p.95-96).

This church was called by the Greek Christians the “Church of the Circumcision”, for all the leaders of the followers of Jesus in Jerusalem until 135 C.E. were Hebrews and followers of the Law (Eusebius p.107). The line ended when the Roman Emperor Hadrian expelled all Jews from Jerusalem, levelled the City and established Aelia Capitolum. The Jews had risen up in full scale revolt against Roman rule but were defeated. The city was subsequently inhabited by Gentiles and the leadership of the church there passed to those who followed the tradition of Paul.

### **The Great Controversy.**

Robert Eisenman, whose work on the Dead Sea Scrolls is only now becoming well known, deals in some depth with the major split amongst the Jews at the time of Paul’s epistles and James’ martyrdom. In his “*James the Just in the Habakkuk Peshar*” 1986 and “*Maccabees, Zadokites, Christians and Qumran: A New Hypothesis of Qumran Origins*” 1983, he argues that during the first century of the Common Era, the time of the Herodians, the strict followers of the Law were at odds with official Temple Judaism.

Those who claimed to be servants of God and adherents of the Law, obedient to the New Covenant, stood up against ‘seekers after smooth things’ those who were prepared to accept foreign kingship, foreign appointments of high priests, foreigners and foreign gifts in the Temple, marriage with nieces, divorce etc. All of these offences involved Herodians or those closely associated with them.

Pharisees were the ‘seekers after smooth things’ for they sought accommodation with foreigners (Herodians and Romans). Sadducees were divided into two groups – those who followed Boethus, the imported Herodian priest, who also ‘sought after smooth things’ and those who strictly followed the Law. The Sadducees who took part in the persecution of the followers of the Gospel of Jesus were those of the official party.

The official Dead Sea Scroll scholars, who have had control of the documents for over thirty years, date them, on highly controversial evidence, safely out of the Christian era. This scholarly orthodoxy has been challenged by Eisenman who has evidence that they were contemporary with what is now known as ‘the early church’. What is most compelling is his argument that it is events in the early church which can alone account for the issues and ideas dealt with in many of the scrolls. Eisenman argues that the teachings of the Righteous Teacher in the Commentary on Habakkuk can be linked to those of James the Just in the early Jerusalem Community.

### **Enemies of The Way.**

In the Commentary on Habakkuk there are two antagonists of the Teacher of Righteousness. One antagonist was the Wicked Priest and the other, the Liar.

**Eisenman writes:**

“Two antagonists are also readily discernible with regard to James’ life. One was an establishment high priest responsible for his death – Ananus. Ananus was killed in the early stages of the uprising by ‘Violent Gentiles’ and his body was violated and thrown outside the walls of Jerusalem without burial (events we think are reflected in the Habakkuk Peshar); the other, a self-willed, often rebellious and argumentative individual within the movement, Paul. Following a more antinomian approach to the Law, he had a new version of ‘salvation’ which he proposed ‘teaching to the Gentiles’. These two antagonists of James can be linked to the two antagonists of the Righteous teacher in the Habakkuk Peshar: one a “Man of Lying”/”Pourer out of Lying” within the community itself, who ‘speaks derogatorily about the Law in the midst of the whole congregation’, “leads Many astray”/”tires out Many with a worthless service”...and “leads astray in a wilderness without a Way” (the opposite of ...proper teaching activity of “making a way in the wilderness” by showing “zeal for the Law”).” (Eisenman p.viii)

The depth of this division between those who advocated close adherence to the Law and those who accepted the status quo comes out in several documents. The Herodian royal family was a particular target for attack and association with it was evidence of departure from God’s religion.

### **Eisenman writes:**

“The peshar, in addition to accusing the establishment high priest it refers to as “Wicked” of being responsible for the death of the Righteous Teacher, also charges him with ‘polluting the Temple’. This charge comprised one of the ‘three nets of belial’ following the exegesis of the ‘Zadokite Covenant’ in CD, iv-v (the other two: ‘fornication’ and ‘Riches’ have real application to Herodians, as opposed to artificial ones to Maccabeans and others; both are echoed in the peshar). Two persistent themes relating to the personal status of the Herodians also exercised Qumran legal theorists in the Zadokite Document and Temple Scroll, divorce and marrying nieces. Together with a third theme, incest, they bear on the ‘fornication’ charge above. Antagonism to ‘fornication’ is a significant theme, too, in all extant traditions attaching themselves to James’ name.” (p.viii-ix)

Priests like Ananus took their appointment from the Herodians. It is to members of this foreign royal family that the ‘three nets of belial’ refer. That Herodians were even allowed into the Temple was part of the ‘pollution’ charge, the theme at the centre of internecine squabbling from 40s CE to 60s CE, eventually triggering the uprising against Rome and the destruction of the Temple.

### **Justification by Faith and the City of Blood.**

The question of ‘justification through faith’ is a major theme of the Commentary on Habakkuk. Paul taught that the blood of Jesus who died on the cross removed the necessity to obey the written Law. It was a sacrifice to God the Father, which the follower of Paul who wrote the Letter to the Hebrews claimed ‘...has achieved the eternal perfection of all whom he is sanctifying’ (Heb 10:14).



“But now the Law has come to an end with Christ and everyone who has faith may be justified.”

(Rom 10:14)

The Letter to the Hebrews, designed to carry Pauline ideas to the Jews, contains a particularly clear image of the new doctrine, :

“In other words brothers, through the blood of Jesus we have the right to enter the sanctuary by a new way which he has opened for us, a living opening through the curtain, that is to say, his body.”

(Heb 10:19-20)

There is an opposing view in the Letter of James in the New Testament. James writes “*Empty man (fool)! Would you not like to know that faith without deeds is useless?*” (2:20). This has been taken by some scholars to be a direct reply to Paul’s preaching on the subject.

There is a similar counter to the Pauline notion of justification through faith in the Commentary on Habakkuk. It might even be the reason it was written in the first place. Eisenman writes:

“Perhaps even more importantly, I suggest that what can only be understood as the ‘Jerusalem Church’ or ‘Palestinian ‘ version of the exegesis of Hab 2:4 (the righteous will live through faith) is present in the pesher. In our view, the presence in the pesher of this much-overlooked exegesis is the real reason for its composition. (p.ix)

**The ‘Commentary on Habakkuk’ reads:**

*[But the righteous shall live by faith] (2:4)* Interpreted, this concerns all those who observe the Law in the House of Judah, whom God will deliver from the House of Judgement because of their suffering and because of their faith in the Teacher of Righteousness.”

(Vermes p.287)

Thus the Commentary restricts justification by faith to the Children of Israel and amongst them, to those who observe the Law, the ‘Doers of the Torah’. That they will be delivered because of ‘their faith in the Teacher of Righteousness’ distinguishes them from the rest of the House of Judah, suggesting a new dimension to the Law, perhaps a new revelation. James takes a view entirely consistent with the Commentary. This is quite distinct from the way Paul tries to use this quotation from scripture. The significance of his position becomes more intelligible when we consider the religio-political situation under the Herodians.

Apart from this attack upon the Pauline theology of 'justification through faith' in the Commentary on Habakkuk, there is also an attack upon the whole notion of salvation through blood. The scriptural text is followed by a denunciation of the city of vanity built with blood.

*“Woe to him who builds a city with blood and founds a town upon falsehood! Behold, is it not from the Lord of Hosts that the peoples shall labour for fire and the nations shall strive for naught? (Hab 2:12-13). Interpreted, this concerns the Spouter of Lies who led many astray that he might build his city of vanity with blood and raise a congregation on deceit, causing many thereby to perform a service of vanity for the sake of its glory, and to be pregnant with (works) of deceit, that their labour might be for nothing and that they might be punished with fire who vilified and outraged the elect of God.”*

(Vermes p.288).

Given the antagonism expressed in his letters towards other preachers who did not accept his freshly revealed gospel, Paul could well be the target of this denunciation. Claiming that those who preached the Law and Gospel were 'servants of Satan', 'counterfeit apostles' and referring to those who had been close to Jesus as 'super-apostles' with 'no advantage over me', put Paul into the category of one of those 'who vilified and outraged the elect of God'. Certainly James is dealing with vilification by someone specific when he writes in his letter;

*“Think how small a flame can set fire to a huge forest. The tongue is a flame too. Among all the parts of the body, the tongue is a whole wicked world: it infects the whole body; catching fire itself from hell, it sets fire to the whole world of creation. Wild animals and birds, reptiles and fish of every kind can be tamed, and have been tamed, by humans but nobody can tame the tongue – it is a pest that will not keep still, full of deadly poison.”*

(James 3:5-8)

Even more point is given to James' criticism of those who slander their brothers. This is why the letter has often been interpreted as an attack upon Paul.

*“Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who slanders a brother, or condemns one, is speaking against the Law and condemning the Law. But if you condemn the Law, you have ceased to be subject to it and become a judge over it.”*

(James 4: 11)

The Commentary on Nahum, like the Commentary on Habakkuk, also contains an attack upon the 'city of blood' which the deceitful ones have constructed.

*“Woe to the city of blood, it is full of lies and rapine” (3:1) Interpreted, this is the city of Ephraim, those who seek smooth things during the last days, who walk in lies and falsehood”*

(Vermes p.280)

It mentions amongst the deceitful ones, 'the stranger' who joins the 'kings, princes and priests' who lead Ephraim astray with 'their false teaching, their lying tongue, and deceitful lips'. This reads like a denunciation of the whole establishment of heathens and 'seekers after smooth things' who have been joined by someone new, 'the stranger' perhaps from Tarsus.

'The tongue' is a frequently used image in the scrolls, associated with 'the Liar'. 'The Liar' is also accused of removing the 'boundary markers' of the Law and leading the house or city of Ephraim into the wilderness so that they lose their way. Ephraim – those who are deceived by the Liar and those with him, and Judah – those who steadfastly follow the Law and reject the 'smooth things', are often juxtaposed in the scrolls.

### **Paul's Mission Protected by Rome**

In the Acts of the Apostles, Paul's mission is portrayed as though it was acceptable to the Jerusalem Community, but there are many suggestions that the case was otherwise. In chapter 21 from verse 17 there is an account of a demand from James and the elders, that Paul should show that those who had said he told people to disobey Moses were in error by undertaking public penance in the Temple, according to the Law. This required a seven-day ritual of purification. However before the time was over he was recognised and denounced as '*..the man who preaches to everyone everywhere against our people, against the Law and against this place*' (Acts 21:27). It is possible that James may have forced Paul into this situation, knowing that he could not refuse to undertake the ritual as this would have put him in open defiance of the Law, but by agreeing to the ritual he made himself, more than ever, the 'Liar' attacked in the Commentary on Habakkuk (Baigent and Leigh p.218-219).

The whole city apparently erupted into riot. Paul was dragged from the Temple and the doors closed behind him. The Roman tribune heard what was going on and led his soldiers to the rescue. As the tribune actually led his troops, it is likely that the whole cohort, 600 men, was involved. Paul was carried by soldiers into the fortress out of the reach of the crowd which wanted to kill him. According to Acts, only when he was inside and was about to be put under interrogation did he reveal his status as a Roman citizen to the tribune. Freed the next day, he went to the Sanhedrin, where he created dissension between the Sadducees and the Pharisees by claiming to be '*a Pharisee and the son of a Pharisee*' (Acts 23:6). The dispute became so emotional that once again the tribune rescued Paul and put him in the fortress.

Forty men, obviously those 'zealous for the Law', decide to kill Paul. "*But the son of Paul's sister heard of the ambush they were laying and made his way into the fortress and told Paul, who called one of the centurions and said 'Take this young man to the tribune.'*" (Acts 23:16-18). The tribune, concerned for Paul's welfare, called out 200 soldiers with 70 cavalry and 200 auxiliaries, provided a horse for Paul and quietly got him escorted out of the City 'in the third hour of the night'. He was safely delivered to

Felix the Roman governor in Caesarea. Here he was lodged in Herod's praetorium, the palace that was the official residence of the Roman procurator.

When the high priest Ananias and some elders came before Felix to put their case, Paul told Felix that he accepted the Law. *'...I worship the God of my ancestors, retaining my belief in all points of the Law and in what is written in the prophets...'* (24:14). Paul remained there under house arrest for two years, having frequent discussions with Felix until the governor was replaced in about 60 CE. The new governor Festus visited Jerusalem early in his term of office and the case of Paul was again raised. Called before his tribunal, Paul again argued that he had committed no offence against either Jewish law, the Temple or Caesar. He appealed to Caesar when Festus asked if he was prepared to answer those charges before him in Jerusalem, for he understood that he might not be able to escape again.

King Agrippa II and his sister Bernice, with whom he was widely believed to be living in an incestuous relationship, visited Caesarea not long after this where they met Paul. The strength of the links between these Herodians and the Romans is indicated by the fact that Bernice later on became the mistress of Titus, second in command to Vespasian at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem and later Emperor of Rome. After the fall of the city in 70 CE, and the capture of thousands of its inhabitants, Titus visited Caesarea on the coast and then Caesarea Philippi *'...where he stayed a long time exhibiting shows of every kind. Many of the prisoners perished here, some thrown to wild beasts, others forced to meet each other in full-scale battles.'* Another 2,500 were similarly dealt with, some being burnt alive, to celebrate his brother's birthday in Caesarea a few months later (Josephus p.376-377).

Unlike John the Baptist, who died for denouncing Herod the tetrarch for marrying his niece, (Mat 14:3-5) Paul speaks to Agrippa as to a fellow believer. Agrippa, according to the author of Acts, is so moved by Paul's eloquence that he declares *'A little more, and your arguments would make a Christian of me.'* (26:28) *'And Agrippa remarked to Festus, 'the man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.'* A rather different attitude from that of Herod the tetrarch to John the Baptist or of Pharaoh to Moses. The ideology of Paul and his supporters is revealed by such writing. They have thrown off what the followers of the Law regarded as fundamental, advocacy of the truth, especially before tyrants. They were indeed shown to be 'seekers after smooth things'.

When Festus died unexpectedly in 62 CE, the position of Roman Governor was temporarily unfilled. Agrippa took the opportunity to have James the Righteous murdered. While he may have been sympathetic towards Paul, he showed no such feelings for the leader of the Jerusalem Community, whom even Paul recognised as one of the 'Pillars of the Church'. This provides further substantiation for the view that James represented the party which threatened the power of the tyrants, while Paul represented something else.

Acts continues the story of Paul's voyage to Rome. When forced aground on Malta the soldiers planned to kill all the prisoners but the Roman military again saved him. *'...the*

*centurion was determined to bring Paul safely through and would not let them carry out their plan' (27:43). Arriving eventually in Rome 'Paul was allowed to stay in lodgings of his own with the soldier who guarded him' (28:16). At his meeting with the leading Jews of Rome just after his arrival, Paul again denied doing anything contrary to 'the customs of our ancestors' which was a demonstrable untruth. Acts ends with Paul in his own rented lodging in Rome, preaching 'without any hindrance from anyone'.*

That Paul may have been used to dealing with the Herodians is indicated by some of the comments in his letters. In Romans 16:10-11 he writes '*Greetings to all the household of Aristobulus. Greetings to my kinsman, Herodion..*' Aristobulus was one of the sons of Agrippa II and 'Herodion' is obviously a member of the monstrous family. Luke mentions as amongst the prophets and teachers in the church of Antioch '*Manaen, who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch*' (Acts 13:1).

Eisenman sees some commonality between Herodian dynastic ambitions and Paul's views. Paul's Roman citizenship was due to his birth in Tarsus in Cilicia.

"In Ro 10:12 and elsewhere, Paul announces his desire to found a community that would 'make no distinction between Jew and Greek'. In our view this is precisely the kind of ambitions which characterise the Herodian family, particularly Agrippa I and his brother Herod of Chalcis, but also his son Agrippa II and very likely the latter's son 'Aristobulus' in Northern Syria, Cilicia and Lower Armenia." (p.59)

Such opinions are not acceptable to the modern Pauline Christian Church. Eisenman acknowledges this but does not draw back from his conclusions.

"Doubtless my presentation of Paul's position on these matters will not be a popular one, but I believe the strong links between the Pauline approach and Herodian family ambitions are not difficult to appreciate. Paul's Roman citizenship is easily comprehended in such a context. Herodians had married into the Cilician royal house and, in addition, Paul hints at his own 'Herodian' roots in Ro 16:11 above. The massive fear displayed at Qumran over the power of an individual of the "pauline" genus and Paul's ready access into the circles of Jerusalem power as described in Acts also become comprehensible within such a framework. The reticence of the Letter of James and its meticulous avoidance of the same kind of slander that Paul permits himself in more unguarded moments, as well as James' seemingly endless indulgence of him, are also made comprehensible in such a context."

(p.59)

### **Blessed the Upright...Woe to the Wicked.**

James the Righteous was martyred for his uncompromising adherence to the Law and the Gospel of Jesus. His martyrdom, according to Eisenman, was the work of Ananus the 'Wicked Priest' of the Qumran Scrolls, appointed by Agrippa II. He was used by the king

to murder James in 62 CE during the interregnum created by the sudden death of Festus. He too, was slaughtered. Josephus, the Jewish traitor wrote of the death of Ananus:

“The murderers, standing on their dead bodies (the high priests), ridiculed Ananus for his devotion to the people...So devoid of decency were they that they threw out the dead bodies without burial...I should not be far wrong if I said that the fall of the City began with Ananus’ death.”

(Josephus p.260)

Eisenman suggests that Agrippa may have blamed James for the embarrassment of the Temple Wall affair. Those ‘zealous for the Law’ had insisted on the building up of the wall to prevent Agrippa witnessing sacrifices in the Temple, while lolling at his banquets in his palace across the way. The antagonism of the lower priesthood towards the Herodians and their appointments and the leading role taken by James in opposition to them, may have been related to the mention in Acts that *‘a large group of priests made their submission to the faith’* (6:7) and the mention of the conversion of *‘thousands of Jews all zealous for the Law’* (21:21).

Hegesippus, the Jewish follower of the Gospel upon whom Eusebius relies, writing about a century after the events, quotes Isaiah 3 as referring to the destruction of Jerusalem and the martyrdom of James. This style of exegesis of Scripture is in accord with that of Qumran. It suggests an evil fate for ‘the wicked’. The actual text referring to the martyrdom is:

“Say: ‘Blessed the upright

for he will feed on the fruit of his deeds;

woe to the wicked, it will go ill with him,

for he will be treated as his actions deserve.”

Is 3:10-11

To Hegesippus there was no doubt that the martyrdom of James ‘the upright’ by ‘the wicked’ was the immediate precursor to the siege of Jerusalem by Vespasian. Eusebius mentions that the followers of the Gospel were saved from the Fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE. *‘... by means of an oracle given by revelation to acceptable persons there, were ordered to leave the City before the war began and settle in a town in Peraea called Pella.’* (Eusebius p.68) He also quotes a comment by Josephus, which has since disappeared from all copies of his work, having been changed to the above reference to Ananus, that:

“These things happened to the Jews in requital for James the Righteous, who was the brother of Jesus known as Christ, for though he was the most righteous of men, the Jews put him to death.”

(Eusebius p.61)

The Commentary on Habakkuk refers to the fate of the Wicked Priest, suggesting that the early church commentaries on these events showed considerable linkage with those dealt with in the Qumran Scrolls:

*“Shall not your oppressors suddenly arise and your torturers awaken; and shall you not become their prey? Because you have plundered many nations, all the remnant of the peoples shall plunder you”* (2:7-8) (Interpreted, this concerns) the Priest who rebelled (and violated) the precepts (of God...to command) his chastisement by means of the judgements of wickedness. And they inflicted horrors of evil diseases and took vengeance upon his body of flesh.”

(Vermes p.287)

Eisenman translated this last line as *‘they inflicted ignominious pollutions and they took vengeance upon the flesh of his corpse’*. Instead of Vermes translation, Eisenman argues that ‘ignominious pollutions’ suggests the shame and divine disapproval associated with such mistreatment of the ‘flesh of his corpse’ (Eisenman p.49-51).

Another reference to this event is alluded to in the Commentary on Habakkuk 2:17. In Hebrew ‘the poor’ are ‘ebionim’ and it says that the Wicked Priest shall be paid the reward he tendered to ‘the Poor’ (Vermes p.289). ‘The Poor’ here is a reference to James and his companions who were martyred, according to Eisenman’s interpretation of the scroll, and is an indication of what lies in store for Ananus, the murderer who will himself be murdered.

## **The Poor**

There is some evidence from histories of the early church, after the defeat of the Jews by Rome, that the Jerusalem Community continued to observe the religion taught by Jesus for many years. Histories of the Christian Church deal with ‘the Poor’, which appears to have been the term used for those who followed the Gospel. It carried the sense, not of deprivation of basic necessities, but of complete dependence upon God (Fox p 124). This is similar in concept to the meaning of ‘Muslim’, one who surrenders to God. The meaning of the ‘good news proclaimed to the poor’ (Luke 7:22) and Paul’s collection for the ‘poor saints which are in Jerusalem’ (Rom 15:26) take on a different light with this understanding.

Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, *‘How blessed are the poor in spirit: the kingdom of heaven is theirs’* (Mat 5:3) or *‘How blessed are you who are poor: the kingdom of God is yours’* (Luke 6:20) suggests a link between ‘the Poor’ and the followers of the Gospel from an

early stage. It is of interest that the Qumran Commentary on the Psalms carries a similar idea to that of this famous sermon, offering blessings to ‘the Poor’. The commentary deals mainly with Psalm 37 which is concerned with the destiny of the just and the wicked:

*“But the humble shall possess the land and delight in abundant peace (11) Interpreted this concerns [the congregation of the] Poor who shall accept the season of penance and shall be delivered from all the snares of Satan. Afterwards, all who possess the earth shall delight and prosper on exquisite food.”*

*“The wicked borrows and does not repay, but the righteous is generous and gives. Truly, those whom He [blesses shall possess] the land, but those whom He curses [shall be cut off]] (21-22) Interpreted this concerns the congregation of the Poor, who [shall possess] the whole world as an inheritance. They shall possess the High Mountain of Israel [for ever], and shall enjoy [everlasting] delights in His Sanctuary....”*

(Vermes p.290)

This identification of ‘the Poor’ with the early followers of the Gospel of Jesus is supported by evidence from 250 years after the fall of Jerusalem to Titus. Eusebius, who wrote at the time of the Emperor Constantine, was one of those who attended the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE. In his history of the church, he made this comment about what was by then regarded as an heretical sect, ‘the Poor’ or, in Hebrew, the ‘Ebionim’ or ‘Ebionites’:

*“They did not deny that the Lord was born of a virgin and the Holy Spirit, but nevertheless shared their refusal (another sect with a similar name) to acknowledge His pre-existence as God the Word and Wisdom. Thus the impious doctrine of the others was their undoing also, especially as they placed equal emphasis on the outward observance of the Law. They held that the epistles of the Apostle (Paul) ought to be rejected altogether, calling him a renegade from the Law; and using only the ‘Gospel of the Hebrews’, they treated the rest with scant respect. Like the others, they observed the Sabbath and the whole Jewish system; yet on the Lord’s Day (Sunday) they celebrated rites similar to our own in memory of the Saviour’s resurrection. It is then because of such practices that they have been dubbed with their present name: the name of Ebionites hints at the poverty of their intelligence, for this is the way in which a poor man is referred to by the Hebrews.”*

(Eusebius p.91)

*The New Jerusalem Bible* identifies the Ebionites as Judeo-Christians who fled the city before the collapse of Jerusalem in 136 CE and dispersed in Transjordan and Syria (p.2074). There are many references to these remnants of the Jerusalem Community over the years. In *“The Roots of Christianity”*, Walsh writes of these Gospel followers:



“The Ebionites, who occupied a region to the east of the River Jordan.... The Ebionites seem to have believed that Jesus, having been dwelt in by the messiah from his baptism until shortly before his crucifixion, had purged the Law of Moses of all its distortions. It had now to be rigorously observed. Paul, who had a distinctly ambivalent attitude to the Law, they vehemently rejected. They refused him the title of apostle, and claimed he had been deluded by visions sent from the devil. They had one Gospel, that of Matthew, adapted to their own particular views, and fragments of it have been preserved in the writings of the fourth-century bishop, Epiphanius.

Occupying roughly the same geographical area were the Nazaraioi. They are less well-documented than the Ebionites, but were apparently rather more orthodox. They, too, had a version of the Gospel of Matthew for their own use, written in Aramaic. They accepted Jesus as messiah but observed the Jewish law as far as circumcision, the sabbath and other rituals were concerned.

Towards the end of the second century Julius Africanus, who despite his name may have been a native of Jerusalem, reported that in the area east of the river Jordan there were Christians who believed themselves descended from ‘the cousins of the Lord’.”

(Walsh, p.101)

### **Consequences of Domination by Pauline Christians.**

Christianity became the quietistic religion advocated by Paul, accepting the authority of the Roman Emperor and joining in the general anti-Jewish attitudes of the Empire following the Jewish Revolts of 66 CE and 135 CE. The anti-Jewish tone of much of the New Testament can be traced to this disassociation of the Pauline Christians from Judaism and the desire to appease the Roman authorities as to the loyalty of the Christians to the State. The writing up of the role of the Roman authorities in protecting Paul from the Jews in the Acts of the Apostles may have been rooted in this same desire

This personal religion in time became the State Church of Constantine, in which Jesus became intertwined with Sol Invictus, the Sun god. The East, the source of the Rising Sun, became the direction towards which Christians prayed and the rays of the sun around the head of the elect denoted holiness in religious art. Far from challenging the pretensions to sovereignty of the Emperor, this religion supported them, for the state became the mighty protector of Pauline orthodoxy. The Emperor became God’s representative on earth. Heresy, a deviation from official doctrine, became a criminal offence and opposition to the state became a sin against the church.

Ian Wilson writes in *“Jesus: the Evidence”*

“That Constantine himself mixed Christianity and the Sol Invictus cult is clear from a second commemorative medallion issued by him within two years of the first, on which he represented himself with a Chi-Rho monogram on his helmet, and with a leaping Sol chariot horse below. How far Jesus had become divorced in Western Christians’ minds

from the Jew of history is forcefully illustrated by a portrait of him as a beardless Apollo-like youth in a mosaic that once decorated the floor of the Romano-Christian villa at Hinton St Mary in Dorset. Only the Chi-Rho monogram identifies it as Jesus.”

(p.137)

We need little imagination to work out what Moses, Jesus or James the Righteous would have thought about this new establishment cult.

The message of Jesus and the Jerusalem Community which followed him, was in accordance with what the pro-Law and anti-Herodian Doers of the Torah, the believers of Qumran, practised. John the Baptist went before him and had been executed for denouncing Herodian fornication. James the Righteous was to suffer the same fate after him, for his pronouncements on the Law and the Gospel.

### **Recurring ‘Heresies’**

The Pauline variety of the gospel was not the unchallenged victor. The ultimate fate of the Ebionites is unknown but over the centuries there were many revivals of the original message, each revival becoming a paler imitation of its predecessor.

Many of the ‘heresies’ Eusebius denounces were arguments that Jesus was a human prophet with a message from God. Artemon’s ‘heresy’, that Jesus was a human being, was revived in Eusebius’ day by the Bishop of Antioch, Paul of Samosata. Eusebius complains that these ‘false teachers’ always claimed that the notion that Christ was only a human was an old established belief, whereas, he maintains, it was but a recent invention. Artemon’s followers argued that the true belief, that Jesus was but a man, was accepted by the Roman church until Victor, the thirteenth bishop after Peter (Eusebius p.175-176).

The teachings of Paul of Samosata, appointed bishop in 264 CE, disgusted Eusebius. He taught that Jesus was a man, he denied that he had come down from heaven, i.e. he denied the doctrine of incarnation, and he refused to allow hymns to Christ to be sung in the churches because they were innovations. Much of Eusebius’ account of this deviation from the Pauline church’s “truth” is taken up with describing the scandalous nature of Paul of Samosata’s personal life (p.244-249). This appears to have been as popular a way of slandering political and theological opponents at that time as it is today.

Although Paul of Samosata was denounced by the synods of Antioch in 264 and 268, he was not dealt with until his opponents called upon the pagan emperor to remove him from his diocese. The Paulicians continued teaching for hundreds of years. As late as the ninth century they were sufficiently strong for the Empress Theodora to send an army to Armenia to destroy them. Despite violent suppression, the teaching remained in the culture and consciousness of the people. Those whose ancestors had been massacred by the emperors, did not forget. Professor Faruqi remarks that a small number called themselves Paulicians after they had accepted Islam. They were known as strict unitarians and as iconoclasts ([Faruqi p.223](#)).

Unitarians, Socinians, and Arians all rejected to varying degrees the notion of the 'sonship' of Jesus and the Pauline teachings of salvation through faith in the crucified Jesus. They all rejected the trinity and were all subjected to ferocious persecution throughout the history of Christendom. The Companions of Muhammad found, when they were spreading the message of the Quran, that wherever there were Arians or Unitarians in large numbers, they quickly won adherents to the new revelation. There were however, Unitarians in countries and cultures separated from the Message of the Quran. Michael Servetus, who was burnt alive in Geneva by Calvin in 1553 for his faith in One God, is one of those who rejected the divinity of Jesus and the doctrine of the trinity, as was Joseph Priestley, the discoverer of oxygen, who was forced to flee England for his Unitarian faith when his home was destroyed by a 'church and king' mob in the 1790s.

Spain had enjoyed centuries of Arianism under the Visigoths until, after years of bloody struggle, the Roman Catholics took control. Like Islam, Arianism rejected duality in the nature of Christ, rejected the crucifixion and resurrection and its view of a divine nature in Christ might be interpreted as God's spirit or word breathed into him. In 710 CE a group of Muslim missionaries went to Spain from North Africa. They were murdered by the Spanish Catholic authorities which were, at that time, engaged in a theological and physical war with the remnants of Arianism. In accordance with older Roman notions of the unity of religion and culture, different religious beliefs were considered politically dangerous by the Roman Catholic authorities. It was not a healthy climate into which to try to introduce Islam.

The murder of the Muslims was a major blunder. The Catholics did not allow for the preparedness of the converted North African Muslims, many of whom had been Christians before, to defend their missionaries, and they did not understand the attitudes of the Spanish masses to their Catholic Church. In 711 a Muslim expedition to support the right of Muslim missionaries to preach without hindrance was launched. It found a lot of support amongst the Spanish people and clergy. Large numbers of priests accepted Islam, setting an example to their congregations, which converted in hundreds of thousands. It was an example unprecedented in history. The prestige of Islam and of the Muslims rose to levels which could only be compared to the adulation given to western culture amongst Third World peoples today. Alvar, a monk of Cordoba in 854 complained:

"Our Christian young men, with their elegant airs and fluent speech, are showy in their dress and carriage, and are famed for the learning of the gentiles; intoxicated with Arab eloquence they greedily handle, eagerly devour and zealously discuss the books of the Chaldeans (Muslims) and make them known by praising them with every flourish of rhetoric, knowing nothing of the beauty of the Church's literature, and looking down with contempt on the streams of the Church that flow forth from Paradise..."

(Faruqi p.223)

Domination by the Pauline Church suppressed the truth but could not wipe it out. The survival of the old ideas in the face of official terrorism for so long gives courage to those who believe that truth may become temporarily weakened, but it cannot be eliminated altogether.

## **Conclusion.**

Moses, Jesus and Muhammad (p) carried the same message of submission to God. Paul's teachings differ from them on each major principle.

*1. The three prophets taught the Oneness of God, the Creator of the universe and acceptance of the absolute sovereignty of God.*

This was the very foundation of the Ten Commandments delivered to Moses, it was the essence of the Law as described by Jesus (Mat 22:35) and is the foundation of the faith based upon the revelation to Muhammad. To become a Muslim, the first thing one must declare is that there is no object worthy of worship other than God.

Paul laid great emphasis upon Jesus as a son of God, leading in time to the development of the trinitarian belief. Although he cannot be described as a trinitarian himself, his error was that his teachings were compatible with this idea. He also attributed sovereignty to the State, which was at that time, the pagan Roman State.

*2. The three prophets taught that obedience to God was the path to salvation.*

The Law delivered by Moses was the basis of obedience for the Children of Israel. Jesus taught that adherence to this Law led to salvation. The Quran was revealed as a guide to those who want to submit to God and to do His Will. Islam or surrender to God, is the path to happiness and salvation.

Paul placed his personal 'revelation' above the Gospel of Jesus and the Law of Moses. He developed the notion of salvation through faith alone, leading to denunciation of the Law.

*3. The three prophets stood up to the ruling authorities of their time, demanding that those authorities should recognise the sovereignty of God.*

Moses warned Pharaoh of the consequences of his refusal to listen to the Word of God and Pharaoh lived to know the truth of what he said. Jesus berated the scribes and Pharisees for their hypocrisy, obeying the outward details of the Law but ignoring justice, mercy and good faith. (Mat 23:23) Muhammad called on the ruling pagans of Mecca, the Quraysh, to abandon the partners they attributed to God and to worship Him alone. He condemned their oppression of pilgrims and their racial pride.

Paul taught obedience to the pagans and to the Herodians at a time when their tyranny was reaching the stage of terrible excess. His notion of religion was more of an individual belief, closer to that of the cults of the time than to the religion of God.

*4. The three prophets were all forced to become refugees at some stage of their lives because of the threat they represented to those in power.*

Moses led his people into Sinai from Pharaoh, Jesus was taken into hiding from King Herod and Muhammad was forced to leave Mecca. In each case their continued presence was considered a real danger to the status quo and in each case the life of the particular prophet was at stake. In each case it was their status as servants of God which caused them to flee.

Paul was forced to flee several times. He was under such a cloud with the Jerusalem Community that when he got to Jerusalem some three years after his conversion, he was told by the elders to return to Tarsus, the place of his birth. (Acts 9:30) This was tantamount to exile when the whole Gospel was aimed at the Children of Israel. The opposition he met may have been due to his attitude to the Law or to the fact that he had been a major persecutor of the followers of Jesus for the Temple establishment earlier on. His final exit from Jerusalem to Caesarea under Roman escort was because the pro-Torah party wanted to kill him for teaching opposition to the Law. In each case his exile was related to opposition from advocates of the Gospel or the Law.

*5. The three of them taught respect for the rights of the weak as part of submission to God.*

The Law and the Prophets are forthright on the fate of those who oppress the poor and this message was re-iterated by Jesus. The fundamental position of all the opponents of the Romans and Herodians in Jerusalem at the time of the destruction of the Temple was 'hesed' or piety towards God and 'zedek' or righteousness towards men (Eisenman p.vii). This is spelt out in the summary by Jesus of the essence of the Law in which it is stated that believers must love God and love their neighbours as themselves. (Mat 22:34-40). In the Quran the rights of neighbours are so strong that the Prophet Muhammad once remarked that he thought there might be a revelation giving them rights of inheritance. Similarly the rights of orphans, servants and the oppressed are given both legal and moral standing in Islam and neglect of the rights of others renders other acts of worship invalid.

Paul's writings are intensely polemical, concerned rather with defending the gospel he was preaching, warning against teachers he disagreed with and arguing against observance of the Law. The social teachings of the Gospel of Jesus are not mentioned. Salvation through faith which is undemanding of works does not recognise the place of 'zedek' in religion.

*6. Those who claimed to follow the prophets tried to change their teachings into a religious form acceptable to the status quo, a personal faith which quietly accepted persecution and oppression.*

By the time the Herodian family ruled Palestine, Judaism was demonstrating signs of corruption. The chair of Moses had been taken over by corrupt successors. The official priesthood, the Pharisees and sections of the Sadducees, 'seekers after smooth things', accepted the immorality of their rulers, pagan donations to the Temple and pagan control of Jewish political life. Jesus and the Jerusalem Community which followed him, sought to re-establish the primacy of the Word of God in this community. The Gentile Christians who replaced the original followers of the Gospel after the total destruction of Jerusalem by Hadrian in 136 CE had a different view of the meaning of the life and message of Jesus, based largely on the teachings of Paul. A central tenet of this teaching was that the ruling authorities should be accepted as appointed by God (Romans 13:1-4). Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire and a bulwark of its authority.

Similarly in the Muslim world, particularly since the advent of modern imperialism and Third World nationalism, secular and neo-colonial authorities have tried to mould Islam into something approximating State Christianity, a bulwark of oppressive authority. Some Muslim majority countries have even established departments of religious affairs with a clerical class paid by the State to carry out "official Islam" which is suitably "non-political".

However this is not the total picture. The message of God is protected by Him and will never be obliterated. While Judaism has largely degenerated into a tribal cult and has lost sight of its universal message and Christianity has, for the most part become the religion established by Paul, there are Jews and Christians still seeking the truth. There are Muslims weighed down under false State propaganda and opportunist teaching, but they have the source of truth, the Holy Quran, available to them. Seekers after truth will find the essence of God's revelation over the centuries contained within it. While the original books of the Torah and the Psalms have been altered from time to time and many records of the teachings of Jesus have been altered or destroyed, we have God's promise that the Quran will be protected until the end of the world. This means that the message of the sovereignty of God will never disappear and explains why the modern Pharaohs with their Herodians and Pauls are working so hard to distort Islamic education and control Muslim scholars and leaders.

Islam is not a religious sect. It calls only for our submission to the One God and places great emphasis upon the Quran, not for any sectarian purpose but because it is a record of God's final revelation to humanity. It is worth serious investigation.

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