

Introduction

IF THERE IS ONE THING that Christians know about their religion, it is that it is not Judaism. If there is one thing that Jews know about their religion, it is that it is not Christianity. If there is one thing that both groups know about this double not, it is that Christians believe in the Trinity and the incarnation of Christ (the Greek word for Messiah) and that Jews don't, that Jews keep kosher and Christians don't.

If only things were this simple. In this book, I'm going to tell a very different historical story, a story of a time when Jews and Christians were much more mixed up with each other than they are now, when there were many Jews who believed in something quite like the Father and the Son and even in something quite like the incarnation of the Son in the Messiah, and when followers of Jesus kept kosher as Jews, and accordingly a time in which the question of the difference between Judaism and Christianity just didn't exist as it does now. Jesus, when he came, came in a form that many, many Jews were expecting: a

second divine figure incarnated in a human. The question was not “Is a divine Messiah coming?” but only “Is this carpenter from Nazareth the One we are expecting?” Not surprisingly, some Jews said yes and some said no. Today we call the first group Christians and the second group Jews, but it was not like that then, not at all.

Everybody then—both those who accepted Jesus and those who didn’t—was Jewish (or Israelite, the actual ancient terminology). Actually, there was no Judaism at all, nor was there Christianity. In fact, the idea of “a religion,” that is, one of a number of religions to which one might or might not belong, had not come on the scene yet and wouldn’t for centuries. By the third century (or even earlier) Christianity became a name for what Christians called themselves, but Jews were not to have a name for their religion in one of their own languages until sometime in the modern period, perhaps the eighteenth or nineteenth century. Until then terms meaning Judaism as the religion of the Jews were used only by non-Jews.

So, then, what are we talking about? We are not talking about a separate institution, a separate sphere of “religion,” still less of a “faith” for Jews. We are talking about the complex of rituals and other practices, beliefs and values, history and political loyalties that constituted allegiance to the People of Israel, not a religion called Judaism. To get a sense of the absurdity of the proposition that Judaism is a religion the way Christianity is, let me consider a very

recent event. In March 2011, the *New York Times* published the results of a social scientific study of satisfaction with life among various groups in the United States. Asian Americans were considered to be the “happiest” ethnic group, while Jews were considered to be the “happiest” religious group, thus leading to the inexorable conclusion that Asian American Jews were the happiest folk in America. This result is obviously flawed, because we all sense that both Jews and Asian Americans are ethnicities, whereas Christianity is never considered as an ethnic category at all. In fact, for us Jewishness is a very mixed category that doesn’t really map onto either ethnicity or religion alone. This has a good historical basis. As Paula Fredriksen has recently written, “In antiquity . . . cult is an ethnic designation; ethnicity is a cultic designation.”¹ That remained the case for Jews right up into modernity and to a not inconsiderable extent remains so even now.² In this book, the term “Judaism” will be used as a convenience to refer to that part of Jewish life that was concerned with obedience to God, worship, and belief, though I recognize that the term is an anachronism.

The Temple in Jerusalem was one of the most impressive cultic centers of the ancient world and famous throughout the known world for its splendor and magnificence. As opposed to most other peoples, who had many cultic centers, the Israelites performed all of their sacrifices at one place, the Temple in Jerusalem, for centuries—from

Josiah's reform in the seventh century B.C. until the Second Temple was destroyed in A.D. 70—(at least officially). When the Temple was extant, most Jews organized their religious lives around its festivals and rites, its priests and practices; distant Jews in Alexandria and similar places sent in donations. At least in principle, all Israelites were expected to make a pilgrimage to the one Temple in Jerusalem three times a year to celebrate the great festivals. This provided an organizing and joining principle for all the people transcending many disagreements and diversities. Even this, however, was not always the case, as there were groups, such as the people of the Dead Sea Scrolls, who rejected the Jerusalem Temple as corrupt.

Once the Temple was destroyed in A.D. 70, however, all bets were off. Some Jews wished to continue sacrifices as best they could, while others rejected such practices entirely. Some Jews thought that the purity practices that were important in Temple times were still to be practiced, while others thought they were irrelevant. There were, moreover, different interpretations of the Torah, different sets of ideas about God, different notions of how to practice the Law. In Jerusalem, which had been refounded by priests and teachers (scribes) returned from the Babylonian Exile (538 B.C.), new religious ideas and practices had been developed, many of them adopted by a group called the Pharisees, who were apparently rather aggressively promoting these ideas among Jews outside of Jerusalem who

had different traditional practices, the so-called People of the Land, those who had not gone into Exile in Babylonia.

So being religiously Jewish then was a much more complicated affair than it is even now. There were no Rabbis yet, and even the priests in Jerusalem and around the countryside were divided among themselves. Not only that, but there were many Jews both in Palestine and outside of it, in places such as Alexandria in Egypt, who had very different ideas about what being a good, devout Jew meant. Some believed that in order to be a kosher Jew you had to believe in a single divine figure and any other belief was simply idol worship. Others believed that God had a divine deputy or emissary or even son, exalted above all the angels, who functioned as an intermediary between God and the world in creation, revelation, and redemption. Many Jews believed that redemption was going to be effected by a human being, an actual hidden scion of the house of David—an Anastasia—who at a certain point would take up the scepter and the sword, defeat Israel's enemies, and return her to her former glory. Others believed that the redemption was going to be effected by that same second divine figure mentioned above and not a human being at all. And still others believed that these two were one and the same, that the Messiah of David would be the divine Redeemer. As I said, a complicated affair.

While by now almost everyone, Christian and non-Christian, is happy enough to refer to Jesus, the human, as

a Jew, I want to go a step beyond that. I wish us to see that Christ too—the divine Messiah—is a Jew. Christology, or the early ideas about Christ, is also a Jewish discourse and not—until much later—an anti-Jewish discourse at all. Many Israelites at the time of Jesus were expecting a Messiah who would be divine and come to earth in the form of a human. Thus the basic underlying thoughts from which both the Trinity and the incarnation grew are there in the very world into which Jesus was born and in which he was first written about in the Gospels of Mark and John.

You may well wonder why these distinctions—drawn from a very distant past—should matter to anyone in the present day. One difference that I expect this discussion to make is that Jews and Christians will need to begin to tell different stories about each other in the future. On one hand, Christians will no longer be able to claim that Jews willfully, as a body, rejected Jesus as God. Such beliefs about Jews have led to a deep, painful, and bloody history of anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism. Many ancient Jews simply accepted Jesus as God, and they did so because their beliefs and expectations had led them there. Others, while holding similar ideas about God, found it hard to believe that this particular, seemingly undistinguished, Jew was the one they were waiting for.

On the other hand, Jews will have to stop vilifying Christian ideas about God as simply a collection of “un-Jewish,” perhaps pagan, and in any case bizarre fantasies.

God in a human body indeed! Recognizing these ideas as deeply rooted in the ancient complex of Jewish religious ideas may not lead us Jews to accept them but should certainly help us realize that Christian ideas are not alien to us; they are our own offspring and sometimes, perhaps, among the most ancient of all Israelite-Jewish ideas. On the other hand, certain kinds of modern “liberal” Christian apologists, such as Philip Pullman (the author of *His Dark Materials*), will have to stop separating out a “good Jesus” from a “bad Christ.” I suggest that Jesus and Christ were one from the very beginning of the Jesus movement. It won’t be possible any longer to think of some ethical religious teacher who was later promoted to divinity under the influence of alien Greek notions, with his so-called original message being distorted and lost; the idea of Jesus as divine-human Messiah goes back to the very beginning of the Christian movement, to Jesus himself, and even before that.

Checklists and Families: Christian and Non-Christian Jews

The terms “Christian Jews” and “non-Christian Jews” that I distinguish throughout this book might be surprising to people who think of Christians and Jews as opposites. But if we look closely at the first few centuries after Christ, we begin to see that this is precisely the way we ought to view the history of the religion of the Jews at that time. Before

we get there, however, it may be helpful to challenge some of our closely held assumptions about what religions are.

For moderns, religions are fixed sets of convictions with well-defined boundaries. We usually ask ourselves: What convictions does Christianity forbid or what practices does it require? We ask similar questions in regard to Judaism, Hinduism, Islam, and Buddhism, the so-called great religions of the world. Such an understanding, of course, makes nonsense of the idea that one could be both a Jew and a Christian, rendering it just a contradiction in terms. Jews don't fit the definition of Christians, and Christians don't fit the definition of Jews. There are simple incompatibilities between these two religions that make it impossible to be both. I will argue in this book that this conception just doesn't always fit the facts, and specifically that it doesn't represent well the situation of Judaism and Christianity in the early centuries at all.

We usually define members of religions by using a kind of checklist. For instance, one could say that if someone believes in the Trinity and incarnation, she is a member of the religion Christianity, but if she doesn't, she isn't a proper member of that religion. One could say, conversely, that if someone does not believe in the Trinity and incarnation, then he is a member of the religion Judaism, but if he does believe in those things, he isn't. One could also say that if someone keeps the Sabbath on Saturday, eats only kosher food, and circumcises her sons, she is a member of

the Jewish religion, but if she doesn't, she is not a member of the Jewish religion. Or, conversely again, if some group believes that everyone should keep the Sabbath, eat only kosher food, and circumcise sons, they are not Christians, but if they believe that these practices have been superseded, then they are Christians. This is, as I have said, our usual way of looking at such matters.

However, this manner of categorizing people's religions runs into difficulties. First, someone has to be making the checklists. Who decides what specific beliefs disqualify a person from being a Jew? Throughout history these decisions have been made by certain groups of people or individuals and are then imposed on other people (who may, however, refuse—unless the deciders have an army). It's a little bit like those "race" checklists on the census forms. Some of us simply refuse to check a box that defines us as Caucasian or Hispanic or African American because we don't identify that way, and only laws, and courts, or an army could force us to if they chose to. Of course, it will be asserted that the decisions about Jews and Christians (not Americans) were made by God and revealed in this Scripture or that, by this prophet or that, but this is a matter of faith, not of scholarship. Neither faith nor theology should play a role in the attempt to describe what was, as opposed to what ought to have been (according to this religious authority or another).

Another big problem these checklists cannot address

has to do with people whose beliefs and behaviors are a blend of characteristics from the two lists. In the case of Jews and Christians, this has been a problem that simply won't go away. For centuries after Jesus' death, there were people who believed in Jesus' divinity as the incarnate Messiah but who also insisted that in order to be saved they must eat only kosher, keep the Sabbath as other Jews do, and circumcise their sons. Here was an environment where many people, it would seem, thought that there was no problem in being both a Jew and a Christian. Moreover, many of the very items that would form the eventual checklist for being a Jew or being a Christian did not at all form a border line at that time. What shall we do with these folks?

For quite a number of generations after the coming of Christ, different followers and groups of followers of Jesus held many different theological views and engaged in a great variety of practices with respect to the Jewish law of their ancestors. One of the most important arguments had to do with the relation between the two entities who would end up being the first two persons of the Trinity. Many Christians believed that the Son or the Word (Logos) was subordinate to God the Father and even created by him; others believed that while the Son was uncreated and had existed from before the beginning of time, he nonetheless was only of a *similar* substance to the Father; a third group believed that there was no difference at all

in substance between the Father and the Son. There were also very sharp differences in practice between Christian and Christian: some Christians kept much of the Jewish law (or all of it), some kept some rules but dropped others (e.g., the apostolic rule of Acts), and still others believed that the entire law needed to be overturned and discarded by Christians (even those born Jews). Finally, there were Christians who held that Easter was a form of the Jewish Passover, suitably interpreted with Jesus as the Lamb of God and paschal sacrifice, while others vigorously denied such connections. These had an analogue in practice as well, with the former group celebrating Easter at the same time as the Jews celebrated Passover, while the latter just as vigorously insisted that Easter must *not* be when the Jews hold their Passover. There were many other points of conflict as well. Until early in the fourth century, all of these different groups and diverse individuals called themselves Christians, and quite a few called themselves both Jews and Christians as well.

Checklists and the Imperial Religion

The checklist approach to making an absolute divide between Christian and non-Christian, between Jew and non-Jew, came into its own under the Christian Roman Empire, which set much store in getting all the messiness sorted out.

For many years it was believed that an early period of fluidity came to an end in a definitive “parting of the ways” that took place in either the first or second century. The argument was twofold. On one hand, the Temple had been such a unifying force that other forms of diversity were much more tolerable without threatening the core of Jewish identity. Following the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple by the Romans in A.D. 70, other ways had to be produced to secure such identity, hence the invention of a Jewish orthodoxy that excluded followers of Jesus. On the other hand, we are told that it was the divergence of Christianity from that core that drove an early parting of the ways. I contend that such diversity did not end with the destruction of the Temple and continued well beyond this event. Many have thought until recently (and some still do) that it ended with the Council of Yavneh, which allegedly took place in A.D. 90 or so.³ According to a certain interpretation of a talmudic legend, this was a great Jewish ecumenical council (something like the great Christian ecumenical councils of the fourth and fifth centuries) in which all sectarian differences were abolished: all Jews agreed to follow the pharisaic-rabbinic tradition, and those who didn’t were expelled and left the Jewish polity. But this view has largely been discredited by recent scholarship. It was invented by scholars more or less on the model of the great late-ancient Christian councils during which Christian orthodoxy was promulgated, especially

the famous Council of Nicaea and its successor the Council of Constantinople.

In 381 at Constantinople the definitive step in cleaning up the differences based on a half century of negotiations following the Council of Nicaea was taken.⁴ In 318 the newly Christian emperor Constantine had called an ecumenical council of bishops from all over the Christian world to come to Nicaea (present-day İznik in Turkey) to sort all of this out and restore peace to the Christian churches and communities, following a great deal of dissension, conflict, and bitterness between them.

Some of the major issues addressed at Nicaea were matters of creed, such as the precise definition of the relationship between the Father and the Son. Others were matters of practice, such as the correct date of Easter and its relationship to the Jewish Passover. It was here, at Nicaea, that on the first question it was decided that the Son was consubstantial with the Father, that is, they are two persons of the exact same divine substance. Easter was severed once and for all within orthodox churches from its calendrical and thematic connections with Passover. In the end what was accomplished in Nicaea and Constantinople was the establishment of a Christianity that was completely separated from Judaism. Since Christianity could not define its borders on the basis of ethnicity, geographical location, or even birth, finding clear ways to separate itself from Judaism was very urgent—and these

councils pursued this end vigorously. This had the secondary historical effect of putting the power of the Roman Empire and its church authorities behind the existence of a fully separate “orthodox” Judaism as well. At least from a juridical standpoint, then, Judaism and Christianity became completely separate religions in the fourth century. Before that, no one (except God, of course) had the authority to tell folks that they were or were not Jewish or Christian, and many had chosen to be both. At the time of Jesus, all who followed Jesus—and even those who believed that he was God—were Jews!

The decisions that were made in Nicaea had the effect, as well, of driving a powerful wedge between traditional Jewish beliefs and practices and the newly invented orthodox Christianity. By defining the Son as entirely on an equal footing with the Father and by insisting that Easter had no connection with Passover, both of these aims were realized. Between Nicaea and Constantinople, many folks who considered themselves Christians were written right out of Christianity. Christians who practiced Judaism, even only by holding Easter at Passover (which included practically the entire church of Asia Minor for a few centuries), especially were declared heretics. Nicaea effectively created what we now understand to be Christianity, and, oddly enough, what we now understand as Judaism as well.

Across the seven decades between the Councils of

Nicaea and Constantinople, options for ways of believing or being Christians were cut off through this process of selection, especially the option to be both Christian and Jew at the same time. One could not both believe in Jesus and go to synagogue on Sabbath: we won't let you. Also, say the Nicene rulers of the Church, one must believe that the Father and the Son are separate persons but of exactly the same substance. God from God, as the formula goes; if you don't, say these rulers, you are not a Christian but a Jew and a heretic. These strenuous efforts to make the separation absolute were further productive of a great deal of anti-Jewish discourse at the time and continuing almost to our own day (nor is it quite dead yet). Bishop John Chrysostom's (c. 349–407) sermons "Against the Jews" were an excellent example of this development.⁵

One of the most zealous defenders of the new orthodoxy was St. Jerome. Not exactly a household name, Jerome (A.D. 347–420) was nonetheless one of the most important Christian scholars, thinkers, and writers of the late fourth and early fifth centuries. Considered one of the four "doctors of the Church" by the Roman Church,* he translated the Bible from Hebrew and Greek into the

* Notes the *Catholic Encyclopedia*: "Certain ecclesiastical writers have received this title on account of the great advantage the whole Church has derived from their doctrine. In the Western church four eminent Fathers of the Church attained this honour in the early Middle Ages: St. Gregory the Great, St. Ambrose, St. Augustine, and St. Jerome."

Latin Vulgate (this translation continues to be the official Latin Bible of the Catholic Church). He also was one of the most important translators of important early Greek Christian writers into Latin (especially the works of Origen).

We have a wonderful, lively collection of his letters written to his more famous colleague St. Augustine of Hippo, a fellow doctor of the Roman Church, on the best strategies for defending this new orthodoxy. In one of these letters, he stated:

In our own day there exists a sect among the Jews throughout all the synagogues of the East, which is called the sect of the Minei, and is even now condemned by the Pharisees. The adherents to this sect are known commonly as Nazarenes; they believe in Christ the Son of God, born of the Virgin Mary; and they say that He who suffered under Pontius Pilate and rose again, is the same as the one in whom we believe. But while they desire to be both Jews and Christians, they are neither the one nor the other.⁶

A close look at Jerome's text will explain several of the points that I have been making. Jerome described a group of people who believed in the orthodox Nicene Creed: Christ is the son of God, he was born of a virgin, he was crucified and suffered, he rose. But they thought they were Jews too—they prayed in synagogues, kept the

Sabbath, and adhered to dietary and other rules. In fact, they didn't see "Christians" and "Jews" as two categories at all but as one complex category. Presumably they were practicing some sort of Jewish ritual as well, although it is unclear from Jerome's statement precisely what it was. Jerome denied them their claim of being Christian, because they claimed to be Jews; he denied them their claim to be Jews, because they claimed to be Christians. And he certainly denied them the possibility of being both, because that was an impossibility in Jerome's worldview. For him (and for us as well), these were mutually exclusive possibilities. However, for these Jews who confessed the Nicene Creed, there was no contradiction. Just as today there are Jews who are Hassidic—some of whom believe that the Messiah has come, died, and will be resurrected—and Jews who reject the Hassidic movement entirely but all are considered Jews, so in antiquity there were Jews who were believers in Christ and Jews who weren't, but all were Jews. To use another comparison that is evocative if not entirely exact, it is as if non-Christian Jews and Christian Jews were more like Catholics and Protestants today than like Jews and Christians today—parts of one religious grouping, not always living in harmony or recognizing each other's legitimacy but still in a very important sense apprehensible as one entity.

In order to protect the orthodox notion that there is an absolute distinction between Jews and Christians,

Jerome had to “invent” a third category, neither Christians nor Jews. Jerome, backed up by the fiats of Emperor Constantine’s Council of Nicaea and the law of the Roman Empire, the code of the Emperor Theodosius, rather imperiously declared that some folks were simply not Christians; even more surprisingly, he claimed he could decide that they were not Jews either, because they didn’t fit his definition of Jews. No one before Constantine had had the power to declare some folks not Christians or not Jews.

Jerome tells us something about the synagogue leadership here as well: they also condemned these people as not Jews, thus applying a similar type of checklist to read people out of a group.

But there’s more yet. Jerome gives fascinating names to this sect of not-Jews, not-Christians. He calls them, as we’ve seen, *minei* and Nazarenes. These names, mysterious as they seem at first, are really not mysteries at all. They refer to two terms used in the rabbinic prayer against the sectarians, which is, in fact, first firmly attested in Jerome’s fifth century (although earlier forms of it are known from the third century). In this prayer, repeated in the synagogues, Jews used to say: “And to the *minim* and to the *Notzrim*, let there be no hope.”

The term *minim* means, literally, “kinds.” Jews who don’t belong to the group that the Rabbis wish to define as kosher are named by them as “kinds” of Jews, not

entirely mainstream. This included Jews who are not quite halakhically/theologically correct, such as followers of Jesus, but still Jews. The second term, *Notzrim* (Latinized as *Nazarenes*), is much more specific, referring as it does to Nazareth and thus explicitly to Christians. This is plausibly the very prayer to which Jerome is referring in his letter, since his alleged condemnation by the Pharisees comprises precisely these two names for the group. The word *minim* seems just to mean sectarians in a general sense, including such as these who follow the Jewish law but confess the Nicene Creed. The word *Notzrim* (Nazarenes) would be a specific reference to that Christian character of these Jews. But according to Jerome's report, even this is not a Jewish condemnation of Christians in general but rather applies to those poor folks who couldn't tell the difference properly and thought that they were both.⁷ The total delegitimation that Jerome seeks to accomplish of the both-Jews-and-Christians in his letter to Augustine by declaring them "nothing," the Rabbis (whom he calls anachronistically "Pharisees") seek to accomplish through the medium of a curse against those same Jews-and-Christians when they come to the synagogue. While both would undoubtedly have denied it angrily, Jerome and the Rabbis are engaged in a kind of conspiracy to delegitimize these folks who defined themselves as both Jewish and Christians, in order that the checklists remain absolutely clear and unambiguous.

As we can see, these seemingly innocuous checklists are really tools of power, not simply description. If, thunders Jerome, you believe in the Nicene Creed, get out of the synagogue, and you will be a Christian. If you stay in the synagogue and drop your belief in Christian doctrine, then the Pharisees will agree to call you a Jew. Fill in the boxes correctly on the checklist, or you are neither a Christian nor a Jew. The very fact that Jerome and the Rabbis needed to fight against these *minim*, these Nazarenes who thought they were both Jews and Christians, suggests that they did, in fact, exist and in sufficient numbers to arouse concern.

We need a way of thinking about the varieties of Jewish religious experience—especially in the crucial early period—that successfully accounts for the eddying and swirling of different currents of thought in a larger, more complex field of differences and similarities, one that enables us to speak of both the Rabbis and the *Notzrim* as historically—not normatively—expressions of Judaism.

Instead of a checklist for who is a Jew, which inevitably, as we have seen, leads to arbitrary exclusions, we could use the idea of family resemblances in order to recapture the period of religious fluidity that followed Jesus' death. As one literary scholar has noted, "Members of one family share a variety of similar features: eyes, gait, hair color, temperament. But—and this is the crucial point—there need be no one set of features shared by

all family members.”⁸ There is perhaps one feature that constitutes all as members of the Judeo-Christian family, namely, appealing to the Hebrew Scriptures as revelation. Similarly, there was one feature that could be said to be common to all ancient groups that we might want to call (anachronistically) Christian, namely, some form of discipleship to Jesus. Yet this feature hardly captures enough richness and depth to produce a descriptively productive category, for in so many other vitally important ways, groups that followed Jesus and groups that ignored him were similar to each other. To put this point another way, groups that ignored or rejected Jesus may have had some highly salient other features (for instance, belief in the Son of Man) that bound them to Jesus groups and disconnected them from other non-Jesus Jews. On the other hand, some Jesus Jews may have had aspects to their religious lives (following pharisaic, or even rabbinic, halakha) that drew them closer to some non-Jesus Jews than to other Jesus People.⁹ Moreover, some Jesus groups might have related to Jesus in ways more similar to the ways that other non-Jesus Jewish groups related to other prophets, leaders, or Messiahs than to the ways that other Jesus groups were relating to Jesus. That is, some Jews in the first century in Palestine might have been expecting a Messiah who would be an incarnation of the divine but rejected Jesus as the one, while some other Jews who accepted Jesus might have thought of him not as divine but

only as a human Messiah. The model of family resemblance therefore seems apt for talking about a Judaism that incorporates early Christianity as well. This expanded understanding of “Judaism” completely allows for the inclusion of the earliest Gospel literature within its purview, thus making the earliest and in some ways most foundational texts of Christianity—Jewish.

The Jewish Gospels

By now, almost everyone recognizes that the historical Jesus was a Jew who followed ancient Jewish ways.¹⁰ There is also growing recognition that the Gospels themselves and even the letters of Paul are part and parcel of the religion of the People of Israel in the first century A.D. What is less recognized is to what extent the ideas surrounding what we call Christology, the story of Jesus as the divine-human Messiah, were also part (if not parcel) of Jewish diversity at this time.

The Gospels themselves, when read in the context of other Jewish texts of their times, reveal this very complex diversity and attachment to other variants of “Judaism” at the time. There are traits that bind the Gospel of Matthew to one strain of first-century “Judaism” while other traits bind the Gospel of John to other strains. The same goes for Mark, and even for Luke, which is generally considered the “least Jewish” of the Gospels.

By blurring the boundaries between “Jews” and “Christians,” we are making clearer the historical situation and development of early “Judaism” and Christianity. We can understand much better the significance of our historical documents, including the Gospels, when we imagine a state of affairs that more properly reflects the social situation on the ground of that time, a social situation in which believers in Jesus of Nazareth and those who didn’t follow him were mixed up with each other in various ways rather than separated into two well-defined entities that we know today as Judaism and Christianity.

Among those different types of Jews, we will find “proselytes, God-fearers, and *gerim*.”¹¹ The “proselytes” were non-Jews who completely threw their lot in with the Jewish people and became Jews, while the “God-fearers” remained identified as Greeks and pagans but adhered to the God of Israel and the synagogue because they admired the religion of the One God. The *gerim*, sojourners or resident aliens, were Gentiles who lived among Jews in “their” land. As such, they were required to observe certain laws of the Torah and received certain protections and privileges as well. It has been recently pointed out that the *gerim* were required to keep precisely the laws marked out in Acts for Gentile followers of Jesus, thus giving even these a place in the household of Israel. Talking about the borders of Judaism and Christianity is much more complicated (and interesting) than we might have thought previously.

Belief in Jesus was one of many overlapping forms of the complex of practices and convictions that we today call Judaism. But it is no longer clear that even this is the most interesting or important difference among various Jewish groups as seen from that time, as opposed to a view from our time with all the history that has intervened. Jews who didn't accept Jesus of Nazareth shared many ideas with Jews who did, including ideas that today mark off any absolute difference between two religions, Judaism and Christianity. Some of these ideas were very close, if not identical, to the ideas of the Father and the Son and even the incarnation. Not to pay attention to this is to continue to commit the theologically founded anachronism of seeing Jews (and thus Jewish Jesus folk also) as more or less "Jewish" insofar as they approach the religion—verbal and embodied practices—of the Rabbis.

My story is one of possibilities cut off by authorities, both orthodox Christian leaders such as Jerome on the one hand and "orthodox"—for Judaism the term is an anachronism and maybe even a misnomer—rabbinic or "Pharisaic" authorities on the other. What revisiting those possibilities might augur cannot be predicted in advance. One of those most secure ideas about the absolute difference between Judaism and Christianity is that Christians believe that Jesus was the Son of God. So let's begin our journey there.