

# The Christian Myth

## Introduction

When I refer to the Christian Myth, I mean the *fable convenue* one hears in church or reads in theological works. The myth may vary to some degree but in general is fairly uniform. The goal of this study is to examine the myth and determine what is Biblically sound and what is merely tradition.<sup>1</sup>

## The Myth

*Christianity began with the appearance of John the Baptist who heralded the coming of Jesus Christ the Savior.<sup>2</sup> After John's announcement, Jesus performed miracles and chose twelve disciples who preached the gospel to everyone, baptizing them, adding converts to the church. Jesus designated Peter as head of the disciples and the church. The Jewish leadership rejected Jesus' claims and conspired with the Romans to crucify him. After his crucifixion, Jesus rose from the dead and commanded his disciples to spread the gospel throughout the world. Following Jesus' ascension the disciples preached the gospel of Jesus' death and resurrection to Jews and Gentiles. One of the chief opponents to the disciples was a rabbi named Saul. In a dramatic confrontation, God saved Saul, who became Paul. Paul joined Peter and the other apostles (the Twelve) and preached the same gospel as they, baptized, and performed miracles.*

The teaching above is a myth for one simple reason: the Scriptures do not support it. While it certainly contains elements of truth, its overall message is erroneous and has led to great confusion.

## Analyzing the Myth

*Christianity began with the appearance of John the Baptist*

*who heralded the coming of Jesus Christ the Savior.*

The first objection is technical. What we term "Christianity" did not begin until after Paul's conversion. From Acts 11.26, we learn that it was in Antioch, not Jerusalem, that disciples were first called Christians. Those who believed Jesus was the promised Messiah were followers of "the way" or "this way" (Acts 9.2, 22.4). They were not known as "Christians." John the Baptist was not a "Christian" but a Jewish prophet (Luke 7.28). He operated under the Mosaic Law and believed Jesus was the Messiah. John would have fulfilled the role of Elijah (Malachi 4.5-6) *if* the Jews had accepted him and his message (Matthew 11.14, 17.10-12; Mark 11.9-13; Luke 1.17). Therefore, John did not proclaim "Christianity." He proclaimed a message of repentance to Jews in light of the nearness of the long prophesied kingdom (Matthew 3.1-12).

John understood Jesus was the Messiah Who would baptize with the Holy Spirit (unlike himself, who baptized with water) and with fire (Matthew 3.11). John's statement about baptism by fire indicated he understood the prophecies of the Messiah in His role as judge (Matthew 3.12 cf. Malachi 4.1; Matthew 13.24-30). But even as great a man as John demonstrated he had doubts about Jesus as the Messiah (Matthew 11.2-3). In response to John's questions, Jesus reassured him that He was indeed, the foretold Messiah (Matthew 11.4-6).

John declared Jesus was the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world (John 1.29). What John understood by this statement is unclear; the Scriptures do not provide that level of detail. We *can* conclude he did not know Jesus would die for the sins of the world and be raised from the dead. Not even the twelve apostles understood this (Luke 18.31-34). Only *after* Jesus' resurrection did Peter and John understand Jesus would rise from the dead (John 20.8-9). Furthermore, they did not preach Jesus' death and resurrection as their gospel—even after His resurrection (cf. Acts 2.22-38,

3.12-26). They continued to preach repentance to Israel and the kingdom of God.

*After John's announcement, Jesus performed miracles and chose twelve disciples who preached the gospel to everyone, baptizing them, adding converts to the church.*

Jesus chose twelve disciples (Matthew 4.18-22, 10.1-4; Mark 3.16-19; Luke 6.13-16) who preached the gospel. Their gospel was the "gospel of the kingdom" (Matthew 4.23, 9.35, 24.14; Mark 1.14). Their gospel was in contrast to Paul, who preached the "gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20.24). The Twelve knew nothing Paul's gospel that Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead (1 Corinthians 15.1-4).

The myth is that Jesus and the Twelve preached to everyone—Jew and Gentile. The Scriptures indicate otherwise. Jesus commanded His disciples not to preach to Gentiles (Matthew 10.5-6). Jesus Himself ministered to no Gentiles with two exceptions: the Canaanite woman (Matthew 15.21-28) and the Roman centurion (Matthew 8.5-13; Luke 7.1-10). His mission and ministry was Jewish (Romans 15.8-9). The Twelve never had a ministry to Gentiles—even after Jesus' resurrection. This may be shocking but it is true. Nowhere in the Bible can one find that the Twelve had an evangelistic ministry to Gentiles.

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This part of the myth is mostly true. Jesus designated Peter as head of the disciples and church (Matthew 16.18-19) following Peter's great declaration in which he identified

Jesus as the Messiah (Matthew 16.16-17). But what did Jesus mean by “church?” Jesus designated Peter as the leader of the *Jewish* church or congregation ([ἐκκλησία](#)). This church was *not* the church of the body of Christ (Ephesians 1.22-23; Colossians 1.24). The church, the body of Christ, began with Paul (1 Corinthians 3.10-11; 1 Timothy 1.15-16) after the ascended Lord revealed to Paul, not Peter, the “body of Christ.” Only after the Lord had ascended did He reveal Jew and Gentile were equal in Him. Only Paul taught that the Church was the body of Christ. Peter had no idea of equality of Jew and Gentile and never mentioned the body of Christ. Peter addressed Jews only (Acts 2-3) and preached what he had learned during his three years with the Lord in His earthly ministry. Peter’s ministry was consistent with what he had learned from the Lord about not going to Gentiles and that the Jew had first priority (cf. Acts 1.8; Romans 1.16-17).

After his resurrection, Jesus commanded his disciples to spread the gospel of the kingdom to all nations (Matthew 28.18-20; Mark 16.15-18; Luke 24.45-49; John 20.21-23).<sup>3</sup> It was the same gospel, “the gospel of the kingdom,” John the Baptizer, Jesus, and the Twelve had preached during Jesus’ earthly ministry. This gospel was distinct from Paul’s “gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20.24). Paul preached the cross—Christ crucified. Paul’s gospel was that Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead (1 Corinthians 15.1-4). For Paul, the preaching of the cross was good news. The cross was not good news as Peter proclaimed in his messages. For Peter, the cross represented a shameful deed from which Israel needed to repent (Acts 2.23, 36-38, 3.13-26). Hardly good news!

Since the Scriptures teach that the Twelve never had a ministry to Gentiles, they did not preach the gospel to the whole world. Why not? Had not the Lord commanded them to do so? In God’s revealed prophetic program, for the gospel to go to the nations, Israel had to repent and accept their Messiah. Jesus had commanded the Twelve to communicate the gospel in a

specific geographical order: Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1.8). The twelve apostles understood this command. They understood it so well that even under intense persecution they refused to leave Jerusalem (Acts 8.1). Peter had declared that the *entire nation* ("all the house of Israel" and "every one of you") had to repent (Acts 2.36, 38). Until this happened they had determined to remain in Jerusalem. Even after Peter's encounter with the Gentile Cornelius in Acts 10 where did he go? To more Gentiles? No, he returned to Jerusalem to minister to Jews.

Lastly, we learn from the Scriptures that the Twelve had no idea about the grace that Paul taught. The Twelve continued to operate under the Mosaic Law long after Pentecost. Peter, after he received the vision to go to the house of Cornelius (8-10 years after Pentecost), was still operating under the Law (Acts 10.28). At the Jerusalem Council (c. 51 AD), the Twelve still followed the Law. As such, they believed that Gentile believers had to keep the Law. Unless they did, they taught they were not saved (Acts 15.1, 5). Paul vehemently argued otherwise. The Council officially resolved the issue of Law-keeping with Peter's remarkable statement in defense of Paul (Acts 15.7-11). But keep in mind how many years had passed. If Paul was saved in about 34 A.D. and the Council was in 51 A.D., 17 years had gone by. Paul may have been saved in 37 A.D. But the point is that anywhere from 14-17 years had passed. That's a long time. During all this time Paul had been ministering to Gentiles and never taught that they were subject to the Mosaic Law (Romans 6.14). Even after the Council, James and those in the Jerusalem Church continued to maintain that the Mosaic Law was valid (Acts 21.19-20).

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*miracles..*

The first part of the above is consistent with the Scriptures. Saul, an ambitious rabbi, led the Sanhedrin's persecution against the Jewish church with tremendous zeal. He left Jerusalem to go to Damascus to expand his reach in arresting those who believed Jesus was the Messiah. Nearing Damascus the ascended Lord confronted him. The rest is history. Saul, that raging bull, the enemy of Christ, became Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles (Acts 9.1-22; 22.1-21, 26.1-23).

The most logical action for Paul to have taken following his conversion would have been to seek out and partner with the Twelve. That was exactly what *did not happen*. Instead of going to Jerusalem, Paul went to Arabia and later returned to Damascus. Not until after three years had passed did he go to Jerusalem. While in Jerusalem he saw only Peter and James (the half-brother of the Lord). His sojourn was brief—15 days (Galatians 1.16-19). Rather than partnering with the Twelve, God kept Paul separated from them. He told Paul to leave Jerusalem because the Jews would not listen to him (Acts 22.17-21).

Before dealing with the issue of Paul's separation from the Twelve, let us examine Paul's baptizing and performing miracles. Early in Paul's ministry he baptized as had the Twelve. But as he received additional revelation from the ascended Lord he ceased that practice. Even in his early ministry Paul attached little importance to water baptism (1 Corinthians 1.14-17). For Paul, the preaching of the cross was everything (1 Corinthians 1.23). Instead of water baptism, Paul taught baptism by the Holy Spirit. By this baptism, all who believe Paul's gospel (1 Corinthians 15.1-4) are baptized (identified) with Christ into His body (1 Corinthians 12.13; Titus 3.5-7). By the time Paul wrote the Ephesians (about 5 years after he wrote the Corinthians), he declared there was only one baptism (Ephesians 4.5). If but one baptism exists,

is it baptism by the Holy Spirit or baptism by water? Clearly, baptism by the Holy Spirit is the "one baptism" Paul taught.

Paul performed miracles also, as did the Twelve. These miracles authenticated his ministry and served as a sign to the Jews (1 Corinthians 1.22). These miracles were necessary because Paul was always having to defend his apostleship. By the time of Paul's later ministry (after the period of time covered by Acts) God had removed Paul's ability to heal (Philippians 2.25-27; 1 Timothy 5.23; 2 Timothy 4.20) as He had earlier with the Twelve (James 5.13-15). Paul had written the Corinthians that such gifts were temporary (1 Corinthians 13.8-13). They had ceased entirely by the time Paul wrote his last letters (62-67 AD).

Why did God keep Paul separated from the Twelve? Even more to the point, why did God choose Paul at all? Was he an afterthought? This is THE central question of Christian theology and New Testament studies. Luke made it clear in his account in Acts that Peter was the leader of the Jewish church who proclaimed that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah. Peter and members of the Jewish church are prominent in the first 12 chapters of Acts. After that, they disappear for the next 16 chapters.<sup>5</sup> Why? Why did God need another apostle? He had twelve whom He had commissioned and who would reign with Him to rule Israel (Matthew 19.27-28).

The answer should be obvious. God needed a *different* apostle with a *different* ministry and *different* message in light of the Jews rejection of their Messiah and the gospel of the kingdom. Luke's purpose in Acts was to demonstrate the fall of Israel. Because of their fall, i.e., rejection of the Messiah and the prophetic kingdom, God saved and commissioned a new apostle to minister to Gentiles. According to God's prophetic timeline, the next event was the day of the Lord (Acts 2.16-21). Paul explained Israel's fall in his great treatise on Israel in Romans 9-11. This fall, Israel's "blindness" was

a “secret” ([μυστήριον](#), Romans 11.25), something no one knew until God revealed it to Paul.

Did Paul preach the same gospel as Peter and the Eleven? Not according to the Scriptures. Peter preached the gospel of the kingdom while Paul preached the gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20.24). Paul called the gospel he preached, *my* gospel (Romans 2.16, 16.25; 2 Timothy 2.8 cf. 1 Corinthians 1.18). Paul assumed ownership of his gospel (Galatians 1.11-12; 2.11), which was unknown to the Twelve, until they learned of it from Paul.

## Conclusion

Much confusion has resulted from the Christian Myth. In lieu of the Myth, the Scriptures teach the following:

*John the Baptist, a prophet of Israel, under the Law of Moses, heralded the coming of Jesus the Messiah. After John's announcement, Jesus performed miracles and chose twelve disciples who preached the gospel of the kingdom to Jews only (with a couple of exceptions) baptizing, and adding converts to the Jewish church. Jesus designated Peter as head of the disciples and the Jewish church. The Jewish leadership rejected Jesus' claims and conspired with the Romans to crucify him. After his crucifixion, Jesus rose from the dead and commanded his disciples to spread the gospel of the kingdom throughout the world beginning at Jerusalem. After Jesus' ascension, the disciples continued to preach the gospel of the kingdom to Jews only and to keep the Mosaic Law. One of the chief opponents of the disciples was a rabbi named Saul. In a dramatic confrontation, God saved Saul, who became Paul, "the apostle to the Gentiles." Paul did not join Peter and the other apostles (the Twelve). He did not preach the gospel of the kingdom. He preached the gospel of the grace of God: that Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead. He declared believers were not under the Mosaic Law but under grace. Paul baptized and performed miracles but these*



*activities ceased as the Word of God neared completion. Paul proclaimed a new gospel, the gospel of the grace of God, the preaching of the cross.*

<sup>1</sup> Tradition fares poorly in the Scriptures as does religion (Acts 26.5; Galatians 1.13-14; James 1.26-27). Jesus, Paul, and Peter had little use for it. Jesus equated tradition with hypocrisy, vanity, and blindness (Matthew 15.1-20; Mark 7.1-23). Paul called it philosophy and vain deceit (Colossians 2.8). Peter called it an empty manner of life or behavior (1 Pet. 1.18). Tradition is man's viewpoint about God. Religion outwardly reveres God but does not reveal the condition of the heart.

<sup>2</sup> Most teach the Church began at Pentecost with the coming of the Holy Spirit. As such, Pentecost is celebrated as "the birthday of the Church." However, most view Christianity as having begun with John the Baptizer. Some even teach Christianity began with Adam! These teachings are easy to demonstrate as false for they are without Scriptural support. The Church of Christianity is the body of Christ composed of Jews and Gentiles that are equal in Him. We learn about the body of Christ only from Paul. Before Paul, no one preached the equality of Jews and Gentiles in Christ. Paul was converted probably 5-7 years after Pentecost. Pentecost was a Jewish feast. When Peter preached on that day in Acts 2, he addressed Jews *only*. The Scriptures give no indication Peter thought Gentiles were equal with Jews. On the contrary, it is clear from Acts 10 that Peter was a Law-keeping Jew who wanted nothing to do with Gentiles. Peter and the Twelve had no knowledge of the body of Christ until after Paul's conversion. They never wrote about the Church as the body of Christ in any of their epistles. What we know about the Church and equality of Jew and Gentile in Christ comes from Paul alone. Peter only knew of God's prophetic plan in which Gentiles would be blessed *through* Israel. This blessing depended upon the nation's acceptance of their Messiah. Not until Peter's

declaration in Acts 15.11 did he recognize that Paul's ministry and teaching was wholly different and that it had supplanted the ministry of the Twelve.

<sup>3</sup> This is commonly known as "the Great Commission." See the author's [study](#) of this topic to ascertain its audience, timetable, and fulfillment.

<sup>4</sup> Some maintain the gospel has been preached to the world already. They cite Matthew 24.14; Mark 13.10, 15.15; Acts 1.8 as the command to preach the gospel and maintain that it was fulfilled in Romans 10.18, 16.25-26; Colossians 1.5-6, 23. Two major problems exist with this view. The first is confusion over the ministry of the Twelve with the ministry of Paul. Paul was commissioned as "apostle to the Gentiles" (Romans 11.13; 1 Timothy 2.7; 2 Timothy 1.11; Galatians 2.2). Peter and the Twelve were commissioned as apostles of Israel. Paul and they agreed to keep their ministries separate—Paul went to the Gentiles and Peter, etc., went to the Jews (Galatians 2.7-9). The second problem is that the Twelve preached the "gospel of the kingdom" (Matthew 24.14) whereas Paul preached the "gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20.24). Paul's gospel was the preaching of the cross: that Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead (1 Corinthians 15.1-4). Faulty exegesis occurs in citing Jesus' instructions to the Twelve and the claim that His command was fulfilled by Paul. The "gospel of the kingdom" cannot and will not be accomplished by the Church. The "gospel of the kingdom" will resume after God removes the Church, the body of Christ from the earth (the Rapture). At the present time, God has set aside (temporarily) the gospel of the kingdom (and national Israel) in light of Israel's rejection of Peter and the Twelve's message that Jesus was the Messiah. Other problems exist with the exegesis that the gospel has been preached to all the world but this will suffice. The point is made.

<sup>5</sup> Peter and James (the half-brother of Jesus) appear in Acts 15. This was for one reason: to settle the dispute Paul had with them about whether Gentiles had to be circumcised and

obey the law of Moses to be saved. Paul won the dispute, primarily because of Peter's testimony concerning his preaching to the Gentile, Cornelius. In God's providence and foreknowledge, He gave Peter the vision and specific mission to go to Cornelius so that 14 years later (Acts 15.7) he could come to Paul's defense!

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