



INTRODUCTION

This volume is essentially a prequel to my earlier monograph *Jesus and the Origins of the Gentile Mission*¹ where I attempted to identify the impact that the historical Jesus exerted upon the rise and development of later Christian missions to the Gentiles. There I concluded that, in accordance with several strands of Jewish restoration eschatology, Jesus believed that a transformed Israel would transform the world, and because Israel's restoration had already begun it was becoming possible for Gentiles to experience the blessings of Israel's restoration and the advent of the kingdom as an embryonic foretaste of what was to come. Although I had engaged in concerted research and investigation into Jewish missionary activity of the Second Temple period during the writing of that volume, I did not have the opportunity to properly disseminate my conclusions which had to be largely presupposed and reduced to a mere footnote. It is here, however, that I intend to make that footnote come to life on its own and to tackle the subject afresh because it has such great significance for understanding Second Temple Judaism and early Christianity. What follows in this chapter is an introduction to the nature of the problem in plotting Jewish missionary activity in the Second Temple period and setting forth my own plan for how to go about such a study.

I take as my starting point the observation that Christianity was a missionary religion that crossed significant geographical, ethnic, religious, and political lines in the first centuries of the Common Era.² In the words of the Jewish scholar Martin Goodman: "Christianity

¹(LNTS 331; London: T&T Clark, 2006)

²On mission and universalism in the Old Testament and ancient Israel see Eckhard J. Schnabel, *The Early Christian Mission* (2 vols.; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2004), 1.55–91.

spread primarily because many Christians believed that it was positively desirable for non-Christians to join their faith and accrete to their congregations.³ Similar is Ramsay MacMullen: “The impulse to reach out from the inside was a part of belief itself.”⁴ Martin Kähler went so far as to say that mission was “the mother of all theology.”⁵ I have found these points to be reinforced by my own study of Christian exegesis of Isa 42:6 and 49:6 that attaches to Jesus and the church a divine calling to take the message of the gospel to the entire world.⁶ In the developing church of the second and third centuries the spread of Christians all over the world was frequently mentioned as part of the proclamation, exhortation, and apologetics of Christian authors.⁷ The missionary ethos of Christianity filtered into its theology and drove the praxis of many Christians so that we may legitimately speak of Christianity as a self-consciously missionary movement.

That is not to say that this ancient religious movement with its missionary thrust was not without complexity and context. It is worth pointing out that Paul was not the first or the only Christian missionary to Gentiles active in the first half of the first century, and one should resist reducing the early Christian mission to the Pauline mission.⁸ It is apparent that other Jewish Hellenistic Christian missionaries were active concurrently and cooperatively with Paul, but often independently of Paul’s own mission.⁹ There was also a Jewish Christian proselytizing

³Martin Goodman, “Jewish Proselytizing in the First Century,” in *The Jews among Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire* (ed. J. Lieu, J. L. North and T. Rajak; London: Routledge, 1992), 53.

⁴Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire (A.D. 100–400)* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1986), 105.

⁵Martin Kähler, *Schriften zur Christologie und Mission* (Munich: C. Kaiser, 1971 [1908]), 190.

⁶Michael F. Bird, “A Light to the Nations’ (Isa 49:6): Intertextuality and Mission Theology in the Early Church,” *RTR* 65 (2006): 122–31.

⁷*Diogn.* 11.1–3; Aristides, *Apologia 2* (Syriac); Justin, *1 Apol.* 1.39; Tertullian, *Apologeticus* 21; Hippolytus, *Dem. Chr.* 61; Origen, *Against Celsus* 3.28; *Asc. Isa.* 3:13–21.

⁸Michael F. Bird, “The Early Christians, the Historical Jesus, and the Salvation of the Gentiles,” in *Jesus from Judaism to Christianity* (ed. Tom Holmén; WUNT; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, forthcoming); Abraham J. Malherbe, *Social Aspects of Early Christianity* (2d ed.; Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2003), 65.

⁹Barnabas (Acts 15:35–39), Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:2–3, 18, 24–26; Rom 16:3; 1 Cor 16:19), Apollos (Acts 18:24–26; 19:1; 1 Cor 16:12); and the list of names in Rom 16 might also include Jewish Hellenistic Christian missionaries in Rome early on.

mission underway in the Diaspora that competed with Paul for converts (e.g., Phil 1:15–18) and at times formed a loose confederation of opposition against him. Furthermore the subject of who, when, how, where, and why missionizing took place by Christians is quite difficult to answer from our scant sources. Consequently the question of whether “evangelism” was carried out by specific individuals or corporately by these newly established congregations in large urban cities is a subject of ongoing dispute.¹⁰

What is certain, however, is that the rise of early Christian missions to Jews¹¹ and Gentiles did not occur in a vacuum and it was indebted to several important contexts, factors, and precedents in the Greco-Roman world of antiquity. One may look towards Jesus as providing part of the propulsion for this phenomenon since post-Easter missionary activity has pre-Easter antecedents in Jesus’ own aims and activities.¹² One can also look towards the philosophical schools of antiquity where conversion and defection were already well known occurrences.¹³ In addition,

¹⁰ Cf. the debate in Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1970), 274; I. Howard Marshall, “Who Were the Evangelists?” in *The Mission of the Early Church to Jews and Gentiles* (ed. Jostein Ådna and Hans Kvalbein; WUNT 127; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2000), 251–63; Reidar Hvalvik, “In Word and Deed: The Expansion of the Church in the Pre-Constantinian Era,” in *The Mission of the Early Church to Jews and Gentiles* (ed. Jostein Ådna and Hans Kvalbein; WUNT 127; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2000), 265–87; John P. Dickson, *Mission-Commitment in Ancient Judaism and in the Pauline Communities: The Shape, Extent and Background of Early Christian Mission* (WUNT 2.159; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2003); James Ware, *The Mission of the Church in Paul’s Letter to the Philippians in the Context of Ancient Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 2005); Robert L. Plummer, *Paul’s Understanding of the Church’s Mission: Did the Apostle Paul Expect the Early Christian Communities to Evangelize?* (PBM; Bletchley: Paternoster, 2006).

¹¹ I have persisted in using the term “Jews” to describe those who, regardless of their geographical location, identified with the rites, beliefs, and customs of Israel’s Yahwistic religion. For more on the use and definition of this term, please see the Excursus at the end of the chapter.

¹² Cf. Dale C. Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus: The Earliest Christian Tradition and Its Interpreters* (London: T&T Clark/Continuum, 2005), 32.

¹³ I would add that along with Greco-Roman philosophies and Judaism, one should consider the missionary efforts of Buddhism as a precursor to the early Christian mission. Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* 1.15) wrote:

Thus philosophy, a thing of the highest utility, flourished in antiquity among the barbarians, shedding its light over the nations. And afterwards

there is also the activity of Jews among pagan polytheists that provides crucial insights into the challenges that Jews faced living either under pagan hegemony or else in pagan cities. For various Jewish groups this environment had several different results including acculturation to the values and norms of Greek and Roman culture (e.g., Philo), defection which can be either political (e.g., Josephus) or religious (Tiberius Alexander).¹⁴ Of course, many Jews tried to creatively maintain their Jewish identity and carefully engage in the wider fabric of society without completely being overwhelmed by the pagan environment in which they lived. This last option, all things being equal, was probably the default position of most Jews living in the Diaspora. We also know that as a direct result of Jews interacting with pagans, some pagans converted to Judaism. However, we cannot always say where, why, how, and by what medium. We do not always know the motivation and circumstance of such conversions, but the fact remains that many pagans adopted Jewish customs, remained sympathetic to Jewish beliefs, and some even went as far as to renounce their ancestral customs and become proselytes to Judaism. Such acts prompted curiosity and outrage from the pagan side and a host of questions and issues on the Jewish side as to what to do with proselytes.

it came to Greece. First in its ranks were the prophets of the Egyptians; and the Chaldeans among the Assyrians; and the Druids among the Gauls; and the Sramanas among the Bactrians; and the philosophers of the Celts; and the Magi of the Persians, who foretold the Saviour's birth, and came into the land of Judaea guided by a star. The Indian gymnosophists are also in the number, and the other barbarian philosophers. And of these there are two classes, some of them called Sramanas, and others Brahmins.

Origen (*Comm. on Ezekiel* [cited from Donald A. Mackenzie, *Buddhism in Pre-Christian Britain* (Glasgow: Blackie and Son, 1928) 42]) stated that Buddhists coexisted with Druids in pre-Christian Britain and he sees them as paving the way for the arrival of Christianity: “[T]he island [Britain] has long been predisposed to it [Christianity] through the doctrines of the Druids and Buddhists, who had already inculcated the doctrine of the unity of the Godhead.” Cyril of Jerusalem (*Catechetical Lecture* 6.23) said of one of his pupils, “But Terebinthus, his disciple in this wicked error, inherited his money and books and heresy, and came to Palestine, and becoming known and condemned in Judaea he resolved to pass into Persia: but lest he should be recognized there also by his name he changed it and called himself Buddha.”

¹⁴On Jewish apostasy and defection, see Stephen G. Wilson, *Leaving the Fold: Apostates and Defectors in Antiquity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 23–65.

What informed Jewish views, activities, attitudes, and relationships with non-Jews was the inherent tension in the Jewish belief matrix about Israel and the nations. Early Christian disputes about jurisdictions of mission, the rite of passage for non-Jews entering into salvation and the church, and the socioreligious praxis for adherents to the Jesus movement must be seen against the complex backdrop of two seemingly contradictory thoughts in Judaism. On the one hand, Jews understood their God to be the one God of creation, not simply a national deity, but a universal deity, who exercised sovereignty over the inhabited world and over all of the nations. At the same time, they believed that God had uniquely chosen them to be his people from all the nations of the world and this creator God was uniquely related to Jerusalem and the Israelite cultus. Either way, the story of Israel could not be told without reference to the nations.¹⁵ Herein lies the tension: the universalism of monotheism and the particularity of Israel's election. But what was the natural corollary of this tension in terms of day-to-day living beside Gentiles or at least under their political hegemony? If God had made the world for Israel, then why were Gentiles oppressing Israel? For those Jews with eschatological hopes, would the Gentiles be converted religiously to Yahweh worship, be admitted as aliens to Israel, be subjugated to a Jewish ruler, or simply be destroyed at the final day? Thus, monotheism, election, and eschatology provided a smelting pot for developing perspectives on how to relate to Gentiles. It invited reflection and thought on the fate of the Gentile nations vis-à-vis Israel, and this process had already begun in the Hebrew Bible itself, as a contrast of Jonah, Ezra, Ezekiel, and Isaiah illustrates. That could promote a range of social arrangements and ideological convictions about how Israel should coexist within a majority Gentile world. In some cases, there was only room for rank hostility towards non-Jews and an extreme emphasis on separation, while other Jews (not necessarily "liberal") were more inclined to engage positively with their neighbors, defend themselves against philosophical critique precisely through a shared philosophical discourse, and commend the Jewish way of life to outsiders. It is the nature of that commendation, which seems to have occurred in some

¹⁵Cf. Michael F. Bird, *Jesus and the Origins of the Gentile Mission* (LNTS 331; London: T&T Clark/Continuum, 2006), 26–29, 125–30; Terence L. Donaldson, *Judaism and the Gentiles: Jewish Patterns of Universalism (to 135 CE)* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2007), 1–2.

Jewish communities as attested in extant literature, that is the matter for discussion here. The details of why, who, how, where, when, and what impact this had upon the rise of early Christian missions are up for debate as well.

In light of that, my aim is to explore the nature of Jewish proselytizing activity and to ask whether it is possible to speak of a Jewish mission among Gentiles and how did that set the stage for the origins and development of later Christian missionary activity to the Gentiles. In sum, I am inquiring whether the primitive Christian mission to the Gentiles represents a continuation and revision of ongoing Jewish proselytizing efforts or whether it constitutes a genuine *novum*. Can we speak of a concerted effort, at least by some individuals and communities, to convert Gentiles to Judaism? If they did, is early Christianity's mission to the Gentiles merely an extension of such an activity? Did early Christianity win over paganism by using Jewish weapons?¹⁶ Or did early Christianity succeed because it presented a more inclusive brand of Judaism than its rabbinic counterpart?¹⁷ These are the questions that require resolution.

Let me also add a caveat here. We must remain conscious of the biases and ideologies that many persons bring to a study of this nature. Those of the Christian tradition (to which I admit that I belong) may want to advocate the "evangelical" uniqueness of Christianity over Judaism in order to demonstrate the superiority of Christianity over Judaism or perhaps to highlight the triumphal succession of Christianity from Judaism. Alternatively, those of the Jewish tradition may wish to retort that in the "evangelical" stakes the Jews of antiquity were equally up to the task and Christianity's success depends almost entirely on standing on the shoulders of those early Jewish teachers who had made effective inroads into pagan territory. For others a mission to convert those of another religion is something of an embarrassment as it can conjure up thoughts of intolerance and self-assured superiority which are inimical to religious pluralism or for fostering good interfaith rela-

¹⁶Cf. S. Safrai, and M. Stern, eds., *The Jewish People in the First Century: Historical Geography, Political History, Social, Cultural and Religious Life and Institutions* (2 vols.; Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1974–1976), 2.1097–98.

¹⁷Cf. Gerd Theissen, *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity* (trans. John Bowden; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978 [1977]), 55, 58, 114; John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991), 418–22.

tions.¹⁸ For that reason some scholars may wish to downplay any “evangelical” zeal to convert others. I wish to say, quite emphatically, that I am not trying to argue for the superiority of Christianity over Judaism, nor am I trying to make the Judaism of the Diaspora a kind of a John the Baptist–like forerunner to the Christian heralding of the gospel. I suspect that this is probably the view of many today and is arguably indicative of Adolf von Harnack’s popular thesis on the rise of the Christian religion.¹⁹ Also, I do not operate with the assumption that a religion that tries to convert people is evidently superior to a religion that does not. The various expressions of Judaism and Christianity in antiquity both accepted converts and to varying degrees sought them out. What concerns me is the historical, sociological, and ideological factors that made this so and what relationship existed between the two religious movements in regards to their interactions with Gentiles. The question I am pursuing is whether or not conversions to Judaism stemmed from activities that we would call “missional” and if that carried over into Christianity.

Thus, with those caveats aside, I am pursuing the topic of precisely how “missionary” Judaism²⁰ was prior to the advent of the early Christian movement and what influences Jewish proselytizing activity had upon the early Christian mission. This issue is, as will be seen later, exceptionally problematic and highly disputed. A serious problem is the fragmentary nature of the evidence which derives from sources that mention the topic only in passing and with little comment. Moreover, there is the difficulty of definition and the danger of presupposing and then imposing later Christian categories of mission on to Second Temple Judaism. Steven Mason points out the ambiguity of the terms used: “Judaism (which kind? represented by whom?), missionary (does

¹⁸Rodney Stark (*Cities of God: The Real Story of How Christianity Became an Urban Movement and Conquered Rome* [San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2006], 5) levels this charge against S. J. D. Cohen and Martin Goodman in their respective studies on the grounds that, as secular Jews, they want to prohibit all religious proselytizing.

¹⁹See S. J. D. Cohen, “Adolf Harnack’s ‘The Mission and Expansion of Judaism’: Christianity Succeeds Where Judaism Fails,” in *The Future of Early Christianity: Essays in Honor of Helmut Koester* (ed. Birger A. Pearson; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 163–69.

²⁰For a discussion of the term “Judaism,” please see the Excursus at the end of the chapter.

mission require a central body or character?), and religion (how was ancient religion distinct from ethnic culture? from philosophy?).²¹ This is a subject that will have to be explored later.

Previous scholarship on this topic is relatively easy to divide up into a taxonomy of views. Essentially there are those who maintain that Judaism was a missionary religion and those who argue that it was not.²² Around the turn of the twentieth century, it was common to argue that Judaism was indeed a missionary religion. This view found notable expression in the works of Adolf von Harnack, Emil Schürer, Julius Wellhausen, and T. Mommsen.²³ The position was reinforced by several scholars well versed in Jewish sources, including G. F. Moore, B. J. Bamberger, W. G. Braude, and S. Sandmel.²⁴ This perspective was virtually canonized with Karl Kuhn's article in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* and A. D. Nock's early work on conversion in antiquity.²⁵

²¹ Steve Mason, "The *Contra Apionem* in Social and Literary Context: An Invitation to Judean Philosophy," in *Josephus' Contra Apionem: Studies in its Character and Context with a Latin Concordance to the Portions Missing in Greek* (eds. Louis H. Feldman and John R. Levison; Leiden: Brill 1996), 187.

²² See a historical survey of the debate in Rainer Riesner, "A Pre-Christian Jewish Mission," in *The Mission of the Early Church to Jews and Gentiles* (eds. J. Ådna and H. Kvalbein; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck 2000), 211–20.

²³ Adolf von Harnack, *The Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries* (trans. James Moffatt; 2 vols.; London/New York: Williams & Norgate/G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1904–1905), 1.1–18; Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* (edited and revised by G. Vermes, F. Millar and M. Black; 3 vols.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1973–1987 [1886]), 3.1.150–76; T. Mommsen, *Römische Geschichte V: Die Provinzen von Caesar bis Diocletian* (5th ed.; Leipzig: Weidmann, 1904), 492; Julius Wellhausen, *Israelitische und Jüdische Geschichte* (2d ed.; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1895), 152.

²⁴ G. F. Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of the Tannaim* (3 vols.; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1927–1930); B. J. Bamberger, *Proselytism in the Talmudic Period* (2d ed.; Cincinnati/New York: Hebrew Union College/Ktav, 1968); W. G. Braude, *Jewish Proselytizing in the First Five Centuries of the Common Era: The Age of the Tannaim and Amoraim* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1940); Samuel Sandmel, *The First Christian Century in Judaism and Christianity: Certainties and Uncertainties* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969).

²⁵ K. G. Kuhn, "προσήλυτος," *TDNT* 6.727–44; A. D. Nock, *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), 61–62. See also works by Harry J. Leon, *The Jews of Ancient Rome* (rev. Carolyn A. Osiek; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1995 [1960]), 250–56; Dieter Georgi, *The Opponents of*

Despite some occasional dissenters,²⁶ acceptance of widespread Jewish missionary activity remained the dominant viewpoint so that Joachim Jeremias could state: “Jesus thus came on the scene in the midst of what was par excellence the missionary age of Jewish history.”²⁷

However, in the last twenty-five years this consensus has been contested and has arguably been overturned.²⁸ The primary contributors who have overturned the old consensus are Scot McKnight and Martin Goodman who, in works published between 1991 and 1994, have arguably convinced the majority of academics working in the field of Christian origins and Judaism of the Greco-Roman period that postexilic Judaism cannot be properly characterized as a missionary religion. McKnight concludes, “it is my contention, contrary to a great deal of Christian and Jewish scholarship today, that Judaism was not truly a ‘missionary religion’ except in the most general of definitions of missionary.”²⁹ Goodman states: “The missionary here in search of converts to Judaism is a phenomenon first approved by Jews well after the start of the Christian mission, not before it.”³⁰ While McKnight and Goodman disagree on certain interpretations of evidence such as the extent of Jewish proselytizing in Rome (McKnight is more willing than

Paul in Second Corinthians (ed. John Riches; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986); Peder Borgen, “The Early Church and the Hellenistic Synagogue,” *ST* 37 (1983): 55–78; idem, *Early Christianity and Hellenistic Judaism* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996).

²⁶Cf., e.g., Johannes Munck, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind* (trans. Frank Clarke; London: SCM, 1959), 264–71; L. Goppelt, “Der Missionar des Gesetzes. Zu Röm. 2,21f,” in *Christologie und Ethik: Aufsätze zum Neuen Testament* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968), 138–39, n. 5.

²⁷Joachim Jeremias, *Jesus’ Promise to the Nations* (trans. S. H. Hooke; SBT 24; London: SCM, 1958), 12. See the similar statement made by Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries*, 1.324: Judaism was “the first great missionary religion of the Mediterranean world.” How far this view filtered into non-biblical scholarship is observed by how it is reflected in the conclusion of sociologists Patrick Nolan and Gerhard Lenski in their textbook on sociology (*Human Societies: An Introduction to Macrosociology* [9th ed.; Boulder, Colo.: Paradigm, 2004], 170–71) where they stated that: “For a time, Judaism was a missionary religion and won converts in many parts of the Roman world.”

²⁸Cf. Cohen, “Adolf Harnack,” 166–67.

²⁹Scot McKnight, *A Light among the Gentiles: Jewish Missionary Activity in the Second Temple Period* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 117.

³⁰Martin Goodman, *Mission and Conversion: Proselytizing in the Religious History of the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 90.

Goodman to admit more rigorous conversion efforts on the part of Jews in Rome), they are nonetheless in general agreement about the lack of a universal proselytizing drive in Judaism as a whole in the Greco-Roman period prior to the rise of early Christianity. In the resurgence of interest in the subject, much of it stimulated by the monographs of McKnight and Goodman, there has been an abundance of publications on this topic that have endeavored to either defend³¹ or reject³² the notion of extensive pre-Christian Jewish missionary activities among Gentiles.

³¹Louis H. Feldman, "Was Judaism a Missionary Religion in Ancient Times?" in *Jewish Assimilation, Acculturation and Accommodation* (ed. M. Mor; Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1992), 24–37; idem, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World: Attitudes and Interactions from Alexander to Justinian* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Peder Borgen, "Proselytes, Conquest, and Mission," in *Recruitment, Conquest, and Conflict* (eds. Peder Borgen, Vernon K. Robbins and David B. Gowler; Atlanta: Scholars, 1998), 57–77; Reidar Hvalvik, *The Struggle for Scripture and Covenant: The Purpose of the Epistle of Barnabas and Jewish-Christian Competition in the Second Century* (WUNT 2.92; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1996), 268–318; David Rokéah, "Ancient Jewish Proselytism in Theory and Practice," *TZ* 52 (1996): 206–24; Clifford H. Bedell, "Mission in Intertestamental Judaism," in *Mission in the New Testament: An Evangelical Approach* (eds. William J. Larkin Jr. and Joel F. Williams; New York: Marynoll, 1998), 21–29; James Carleton Paget, "Jewish Proselytism at the Time of Christian Origins: Chimera or Reality?" *JSNT* 62 (1996): 65–103; John P. Dickson, *Mission-Commitment in Ancient Judaism and in the Pauline Communities*, 11–85; Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 52; idem, *Cities of God*, 5–7.

³²Martin Goodman, "Proselytising in Rabbinic Judaism," *JJS* 40 (1989): 175–85; idem, *Mission and Conversion*, 60–90 (= Martin Goodman, "Jewish Proselytizing in the First Century"); Scot McKnight, *A Light among the Gentiles*; E. Will and C. Orrieux, "Prosélytisme Juif"? *Histoire d'une erreur* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1993); A. T. Kraabel, "The Roman Diaspora: Six Questionable Assumptions," *JJS* 33 (1982): 445–64; idem, "Immigrants, Exiles, Expatriates, and Missionaries," in *Religious Propaganda and Missionary Competition in the New Testament World: Essays Honoring Dieter Georgi* (eds. L. Bormann, K. Eel Tredici and A. Standhartinger; Leiden: Brill, 1994), 71–88; S. J. D. Cohen, "Crossing the Boundary and Becoming a Jew," *HTR* 82 (1989): 13–33; idem, "Was Judaism in Antiquity a Missionary Religion?" in *Jewish Assimilation, Acculturation and Accommodation* (ed. M. Mor; Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1992), 14–23; Paula Fredriksen, "Judaism, the Circumcision of Gentiles, and Apocalyptic Hope: Another Look at Galatians 1 and 2," *JTS* 42 (1991): 532–64; Lester L. Grabbe, *Judaism from Cyrus to Hadrian* (London: SCM, 1992), 534–35; I. Levinskaya, *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Set-*

While the McKnight-Goodman view is clearly in the ascendancy, it has not gone unchallenged. Louis Feldman has responded to the views of McKnight and Goodman and contested their findings at every level. Based on the cumulative evidence from demographic data and literary sources, he argues that the proof for Jewish missionary activity in antiquity is in fact considerable. His argument moves in several stages.³³ First, Feldman contends that proselytism is at least one possible explanation for the drastic increase in the size of the Jewish population during the Hellenistic period. Second, after a review of literary evidence from the *Epistle of Aristeas*, *Sibylline Oracles*, *Testament of Levi*, *Wisdom of Solomon*, *Testament of Joseph*, the writings of Philo and Josephus, and from rabbinic literature, he claims that many Jews were very active in seeking to win proselytes. Third, he detects in Roman resentment of conversion to Judaism an indication that Jews were pursuing missionary activities. Fourth, Feldman believes that the expulsions of Jews from Rome in 139 B.C.E. and 19 C.E. were due to aggressive missionary activities based on the various reports of the expulsions. Fifth, the tradition of Jewish propaganda-apologetic literature was an effective medium for proselytizing given high rates of literacy and the widespread availability of books among libraries and book collectors in the Roman era. The Septuagint, Apocrypha, and Pseudepigrapha, along with the writings of Philo and Josephus very probably contributed to conversions in his view, given that some Greco-Roman authors (e.g., Alexander Polyhistor) knew the history and customs of the Jewish people. Sixth, Feldman supposes that oral proclamation in the agora or synagogue would have been a further element that facilitated conversions to Judaism. Seventh, Feldman appeals to various instances of Gentile conversions in Palestine, Phoenicia, Syria, Mesopotamia, and in Rome which are taken as being indicative of widespread missionary practices.

ting 5: The Book of Acts in Its Diaspora Setting (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996); Riesner, "A Pre-Christian Jewish Mission," 211–50; Paul Barnett, "Jewish Mission in the Era of the New Testament and the Apostle Paul," in *The Gospel to the Nations* (eds. Peter Bolt and Mark Thompson; Festschrift Peter T. O'Brien; Sydney: Apollos, 2000), 263–83; Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter T. O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission* (NSBT 11; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2001), 55–71; Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Urchristliche Mission* (Wuppertal: R. Brockhaus, 2002), 174 (= *The Early Christian Mission*, 1.172); Donaldson, *Judaism and the Gentiles*, 491–92, 512–13; James Patrick Ware, *The Mission of the Church in Paul's Letter to the Philippians*.

³³Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World*, 288–341.

Some might suggest that Feldman's study is an effort to place ancient Judaism on a philosophical par with ancient Christianity in the missionizing stakes. This cannot be said to motivate John Dickson, however, an Australian Anglican who concludes his 2003 monograph by saying, "Sporadic evidence of intentional missionizing activity on the part of some Jews was indeed found in the literature, and attempts in recent scholarship to call into question the reliability of the relevant texts or to minimize their significance failed to convince."³⁴ Dickson rejects the category of a "missionary religion" and instead believes that it is profitable to investigate the activities of some Jews who consciously sought, in diverse ways, to draw Gentiles under the wings of the Shekinah. He finds at the level of both ideology (i.e., "mindset") and praxis (i.e., "missionizing") a framework conducive to missionary activity that was translated into action by some Jewish teachers who took it upon themselves to instruct Gentiles in the way of Torah which is an analogous role to that of "missionary."³⁵

It is against this background of scholarship that I intend to argue that the Christian Gentile missions, however indebted to their Jewish background, are not directly attributable to an on-going Jewish mission. It is my assessment that Jewish proselytizing activity was spasmodic, and that there was no concerted effort to convert Gentiles to Judaism on a wide scale. The primitive Christian mission arose principally out of a concoction of eschatology and Christology and reading the Jewish Scriptures in light of new perspectives in these areas.³⁶ These perspectives were fleshed out by Jewish Christians and Hellenistic Christians in contexts where the initiation and integration of Christian Gentiles into Jesus-believing groups were a matter of contention. The first Christians inherited intra-Jewish disputes about group boundaries, the means of proselytism, the status of proselytes and Gentile adherents to Judaism, and the problem of how to participate in pagan society. They engaged these matters from the vantage point of a specific eschatological and christological orientation. Given this framework, my contribution will be a fresh engagement with this issue and will represent a revision and update of earlier studies by McKnight and Goodman. I also intend to interact with more recent volumes that touch on the topic, as well as to

³⁴Dickson, *Mission-Commitment in Ancient Judaism*, 309.

³⁵Dickson, *Mission-Commitment in Ancient Judaism*, 11–50 (esp. 49–50).

³⁶See further Bird, "A Light to the Nations," 122–31.

put forward my own understanding of certain pieces of evidence from the Pauline corpus (such as that derived from Galatians and Colossians) and how they relate to these very issues.

This study will proceed by defining “mission” and “conversion” as they relate to antiquity (chapter two). It will then assess the various strands of evidence for Jewish proselytizing activity including a study of sources relating to both Palestine (chapter three) and the Jewish Diaspora of the wider Mediterranean (chapter four). I will follow that up with a study of further information from the New Testament and early Christian literature about Jewish missionary activity and missionary competition between Jews and Christians (chapter five). The matters discussed will cover a wide array of evidence drawn from Jewish, Christian, and pagan sources in addition to brief surveys of epigraphic and archaeological evidence. I conclude that, although proselytes to Judaism were made in significant numbers, there is no evidence for concerted, organized, or regular efforts to recruit Gentiles to Judaism via the process of proselytizing. Conversion to Judaism was a difficult affair, and was usually done at the initiative of the Gentile.

EXCURSUS: “JEWS” AND “JUDAISM”

I prefer to use the term “Jew,” but several scholars prefer a translation of “Judean” for Ἰουδαῖος (see, e.g., BDAG, 478–79). K. C. Hanson and Douglas Oakman (*Palestine in the Time of Jesus: Social Structures and Social Conflicts* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998], 176; see also Steve Mason, “Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History,” *JSJ* 38 [2007]: 457–512) list five possible meanings for the word depending on its context: (1) the inhabitants of Judah, distinct from the surrounding regions of Galilee, Samaria, Perea, Idumaea, etc.; (2) all the inhabitants of Palestine, including Galilee, Samaria, Perea, Idumea, etc.; (3) all those in the Mediterranean and near east with ethnic connections to Judea; (4) all those professing allegiance to the state religion of Judah (even if proselytes); and (5) the ruling elites of Judea (as opposed to peasant classes). I am open to using “Judean” as the default setting for Ἰουδαῖος, as this seems necessary in certain places (e.g., Josephus, *Ant.* 18.196 and *Ag. Ap.* 1.179).

But against a universal correlation of “Judean” with Ἰουδαῖος, there are several things worth noting. (1) Epigraphic evidence indicates

that the word Ἰουδαῖος designates someone who is ethnically a “Jew,” but it can also designate a proselyte who has become a Jew by religious and social integration. In this later case, the designation can obviously be broader than a territorial or ethnographic affiliation because of its chiefly religious character (see Ross S. Kraemer, “On the Meaning of the Term ‘Jew’ in Greco-Roman Inscriptions,” *HTR* 82 (1989): 35–53; Margaret H. Williams, “The Meaning and Function of *Ioudaios* in Graeco-Roman Inscriptions,” *ZPE* 116 [1997]: 249–62). (2) One must wonder if the titles “Israelite” (יִשְׂרָאֵלִי), “Hebrew” (עֵבְרִי), and “Judean” (יְהוּדִי) are virtually synonymous. The interchangeability of some of these terms is highlighted by Josephus who calls himself both a “Hebrew” (*J.W.* 1.3) and a “Jew/Judean” (*Ant.* 1.4). These two designations are linked together in *Ant.* 1.146 as well (Ἐβερὸς ἀφ’ οὗ τοὺς Ἰουδαίους Ἑβραίους ἀρχήθεν ἐκάλουν Ἐβερὸς [“Heber, from whom they originally called the Jews Hebrews”]). Paul does something similar by referring to himself as ἐκ γένους Ἰσραήλ and Ἑβραῖος ἐξ Ἑβραίων (Phil 3:5), a Ἰουδαῖος and ὑπὸ νόμον (1 Cor 9:20), and as Ἰσραηλίτης (Rom 9:4). Paul, like Josephus, seems to use these terms flexibly and interchangeably. So while “Israelite” and “Hebrew” probably possess similar geographic or ethnographic connotations to “Judean,” they also have a socio-religious component that cannot be eliminated. (3) In 2 Macc 2:21, 8:1, 9:17, and 14:38, Ἰουδαῖος appears to designate a religious disposition and is not a reference to one’s place of origin or ethnic association. In fact, in 2 Macc 6:6, one can cease being a Jew by not performing the religious practices of keeping the Sabbath and festivals. (4) When adherents to the Israelite religion lived outside of Palestine, if they gained Roman citizenship, and if their first language was Greek and not Aramaic, then their identity became more complex and a single and simple identification of them as “Judean” does not do justice to the full complexity of their identity. Some Ἰουδαῖοι might have described themselves more as “Hellenists” than “Judeans.” (5) Josephus describes the Idumaeans, who were from outside Judea, as becoming “Jews” (Ἰουδαῖος) because they adopted “circumcision” and the “customs of the Jews” (*Ant.* 13.258) and not because of their ethnicity or territorial proximity to Judea (see also *J.W.* 4.278 where the Idumaeans are labeled as those from the “kindred nations” [συγγενεστάτους ἔθνεσιν]). We must also wonder if the vituperative term “half-Jew” used of Herod the Great (*Ant.* 14.403) refers to his ethnic descent or lax adherence to the Jewish way of life. (6) I am also unaware of there

being any evidence for a non-Jew living in Palestine who did not follow the Jewish way of life being called a “Judean.” Such persons were usually called “Syrians” instead (see Herodotus, *Hist.* 2.104.3; Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 1.15.72.5; Porphyry, *Abst.*, 2.260). In sum, the terms “Hebrew,” “Israelite,” and “Judean/Jew” can designate a wide variety of territorial, ethnic, and religious referents depending on the context and we should avoid boxing these terms into one exclusive referent. Yet the religious nature of being a Ἰουδαῖος does appear to be the most acute and frequent connotation. See especially Daniel R. Schwartz, “‘Judaean’ or ‘Jew’? How Should We Translate *Ioudaios* in Josephus?” in *Jewish Identity in the Greco-Roman World* (ed. J. Frey, D. R. Schwartz, S. Gripentrog; AJEC 71; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 3–27 and S. J. D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 92–93 (my thanks to Loren Rosson and Chris Weimer for pointing me to some of this material).

By referring to “Judaism,” I do not refer to it as a monolithic entity but rather use it to denote a common ethnicity and custom that unified the γένος (“race”) or ἔθνος (“nation”) of Jewish people. The diversity of beliefs among the Jewish people in the Second Temple period has led some to speak of “Judaisms.” For example, Robert A. Kraft and George W. E. Nickelsburg (*Early Judaism and Its Modern Interpreters* [Atlanta: Scholars, 1986], 2) write, “early Judaism appears to encompass almost unlimited diversity and variety—indeed, it might be more appropriate to speak of early Judaisms.” Similar is J. Andrew Overman (*Church and Community in Crisis: The Gospel according to Matthew* [Valley Forge, Penn.: TPI, 1996], 9): “So varied was Jewish society in the land of Israel in this period, and so varied were the Jewish groups, that scholars no longer speak of Judaism in the singular when discussing this formative and fertile period in Jewish history. Instead, we speak about Judaisms. In this time and place, there existed a number of competing, even rival Judaisms.” However, this is not altogether helpful as it virtually denies any unifying traits within the Jewish national religion. I retain “Judaism” as a descriptive term because: (1) several scholars, while fully recognizing the varieties of Jewish belief, employ it as general term (e.g., E. P. Sanders, *Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishnah: Five Studies* [London: SCM 1990], 255–56; Richard Bauckham, “The Parting of the Ways: What Happened and Why,” *ST* 47 [1993]: 137–38; Martin Goodman, *Mission and Conversion: Proselytizing in the Religious History of the Roman Empire* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1994], 39; John M. G. Barclay, *Jews in the*

Mediterranean Diaspora from Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE–117 CE) [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996], 401); (2) “Judaism” (Ἰουδαϊσμός) is a term that was used by Jews themselves in the Second Temple period and we can safely assume that these writers were well aware of the diversity and complexity of their own religious beliefs, practices, and nationality (2 Macc 2:21; 8:1; 14:38; 4 Macc 4:26; Gal 1:13–14); (3) according to Jossa (Giorgio Jossa, *Jews or Christians?* [trans. Molly Rogers; WUNT 202; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2006], 23), the designation “Judaisms” results from seeing Judaism in primary intellectual rather than social categories. Martin Hengel (*Judaism and Hellenism* [2 vols.; trans. John Bowden; London: SCM, 1974], 1.1–2) defines Ἰουδαϊσμός as follows: “The word means both political and genetic association with the Jewish nation and exclusive belief in the one God of Israel, together with observance of the Torah given by him.” See for further discussion, Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness*, 7–8, 105–6.