

Gentile Identity in the Didache Communities as Early Signs of the Parting of the Ways

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Early Jewish-Christian Relations

The **Didache** presents how Jews favoring Jesus set out to train Gentiles in righteousness with the expectation that they would be joined with Israel when God comes to redeem his people. In effect, the **Didache** embraced the Jewish faith of Jesus in centering redemption upon the gathering of Israel into the Kingdom by the Lord-God on the last day. The **Didache** assigns no efficacy to the death of Jesus and it is mute regarding his resurrection and his return. Hence, as I have argued in my thousand-page commentary, one finds in the **Didache** a preoccupation with the faith of Jesus rather than with faith in Jesus (as in the Gospels).

Against this backdrop, the **Didache** makes clear that Gentiles were expected to adhere to the Way of Life but not to be circumcised nor to follow Torah. Gentiles prayed three times each day calling upon God to redeem them but not to sanctify the Jerusalem Temple nor to reestablish the Kingdom of David. First fruits were required of them, but these were not given to the priests as normative Judaism supposed. Finally, the weekly community meals anticipating the Kingdom of God were regarded as "sacrifices" thereby suggesting Jewish experience in the Diaspora (as expressed by Philo [Special Laws 1.270-75] or Stephen [Acts 7:44-50]).

The task of my paper, consequently, will be to establish to what degree one has in the **Didache** an already established parting of the ways with Judaism?

What is the Didache?

The **Didache** reveals a tantalizingly detailed description of the faith, hope, and life that characterized the Jesus movement prior to the written Gospels. The focus of this movement was not upon proclaiming the exalted titles and miraculous deeds of Jesus--aspects that come to the fore in the letters of Paul and in the Gospel narratives. In fact, the document is entirely silent (much like the early layers of Q and the Gospel of Thomas) about Jesus dying for our sins. Furthermore, nothing is said about Jesus' vindication and exaltation through his resurrection and ascension. Nor does the **Didache** presuppose that Jesus sits at the right hand of God awaiting his return in glory. In contrast to these familiar forms of Christianity, the focus of the **Didache** was upon training Gentiles to live the Way of Life revealed by the Father through his servant Jesus with the expectation that they would be included in the Kingdom of God that Jesus heralded to Israel.

Ever since its discovery in 1873, **Didache** scholarship has been dominated by the mistaken judgment of Adolph Harnack who classified the **Didache** as the oldest of the Patristic "church orders" written sometime between 135 and 150 C.E. I must confess that I began with this premise but that, upon patiently reexamining the text over a period of sixteen years, I gradually discovered that the **Didache** was being misclassified and misunderstood. How so?

Firstly, a unified reading of the **Didache** has been impossible up to this point because the prevailing assumption has been that the **Didache** was created in stages with the compiler splicing together pre-existing documents with only a minimum of editing. The end result, therefore, was that scholars were occupied with defining stages of composition and, since every scholar had his/her own

schema for doing so, it was impossible to give any concerted energy toward recreating the community or communities that stood behind the **Didache**. My commentaries, in contrast, put forward an origination hypothesis that identifies the oral unity of the **Didache** as a whole and delineates the fine structure guiding the progression of topics from beginning to end.

Secondly, the **Didache** has been almost universally understood as citing either Matthew's Gospel or some combination of the Matthean or Lucan traditions. From this vantage point, it follows that the date of composition had to be set beyond the 80s and that the Synoptic material could be used to help interpret and understand the **Didache**. Thanks to Jean-Paul Audet (???) and to my work with Willy Rordorf during the summers of 1990 and 1992, I came to an early appreciation of the possibility that the **Didache** might have been created without any dependence upon any known gospel. My extensive study of this issue demonstrates that the internal logic, theological orientation, and pastoral practice of the **Didache** run decisively counter to what one finds within the received gospels.¹ The repercussions of this conclusion are enormous for those who accept it: (a) We are able to entertain a mid-first century dating for the **Didache**, and (b) we are prohibited from using any of the later Gospels by way of clarifying the meaning of the **Didache** (even in those areas where textual parallels are evident).

In brief, the **Didache** is not a collage of pre-existing texts; rather, it is a transcript of an oral training program that reveals a marvelous unity from beginning to end. The long title, **The Training of the Lord Through the Twelve Apostles to the Gentiles**, thus appears to be close to the mark after all. In a nutshell, the pastoral genius of the **Didache** consisted in establishing a comprehensive, step-by-step program of formation in order to transform the settled habits of perceiving and of judging of Gentile candidates seeking perfection in a religious movement that is decidedly Jewish in its conception. Throughout, the framers of the **Didache** gave detailed norms and practical descriptions of what was to be done. The focus was upon "what God would have us do" (orthopraxis) and only incidentally upon "what God would have us believe" (orthodoxy). Effectively, the **Didache** emerged out of the same Jewish concerns that produced the **Mishnah** and the **Manual of Discipline**. The Jewish framers of the **Didache** were well aware that any community that did not effectively pass on its values, its rites, and its way of life would flounder and eventually perish from the face of the earth.

So, within this horizon of understanding, what does the **Didache** reveal regarding the parting of the ways between Judaism and Christianity?

The Role of Jesus in God's Future

To begin with, one needs to notice that **Didache** focuses on God the Father as the expected savior coming to gather his elect into his kingdom.² In Paul's letters and in the sermons of Acts, this focus gets decidedly altered. The one who heralded the kingdom is now being celebrated as the savior who has been raised from the dead, taken up into heaven, and is sitting at the right hand of God awaiting the time for his triumphant return when he will raise the dead to life, judge the nations, and establish God's kingdom. The **Didache**, interestingly enough, focuses exclusively on what God the Father will do--much in the same way that Jesus did in his mission to Israel. Thus, quite clearly, the **Didache** originated within a community where the **faith of Jesus** (rather than **faith in Jesus**) was still dominant.

All the prayers of the **Didache** community are consistent on this point. The daily prayer is the kingdom prayer that is also summarized in Matthew. The repeated use of the aorist in this prayer anticipates the one-time coming of God's kingdom on earth.³ The weekly Eucharist follows this same pattern. At this evening banquet, the Father alone is addressed. He is the unseen host whose presence is felt. The wine shared evokes rejoicing in the "holy vine of David." The broken loaf shared evokes

"the life and knowledge" of the Father that has been "scattered over the hills" and will someday soon be reassembled into his kingdom! Those drinking and eating, to be sure, honored Jesus as "the servant" who revealed these things (**Did.** 9:2, 3; 10:3) but the things revealed are **from the Father** and **anticipate his future action** on their behalf.

In the Pauline eucharist, the bread and wine evoke the "body" and "blood" of Jesus and those eating/drinking "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor 11:26). Now it is the felt presence of Jesus and the anticipation of his return that shape the experience of those assembled. The Synoptics, as is well known, embraced this orientation and projected it onto the Last Supper and, in so doing, distracted us from Jesus' passionate expectation that the kingdom might break in on the first night of Passover and that, accordingly, he vows "that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes" (Luke 22:18).

In contrast, the **Didache** retains the original orientation of Jesus in his practice of having meals with outcasts that serve as a proleptic anticipation of their inclusion within the Kingdom of God. Norman Perrin⁴ was the first to develop this at length. Bruce Chilton, more recently, formulated it as follows:

Meals in Jesus' fellowship became practical parables. . . . To join in his meals was, in effect, to anticipate the kingdom as it had been delineated by Jesus' teaching. Each meal was a proleptic celebration of God's kingdom. . . .⁵

The **Didache** even gives an approving nod toward those Jews visiting the community and being identified as "Christians" (**Did.** 12:4) as having already made up their minds that Jesus has been appointed by God as his future Messiah.⁶ It does this, however, with the understanding that the "power and the glory" of the Father will be manifest "through Jesus Christ" (**Did.** 9:4). This does not mean, it should be remembered, that the Messiah comes from heaven in place of God; rather, it means that when God comes to raise the righteous from the dead and to gather the elect into his kingdom. Then and only then would the Father appoint Jesus to guide and rule his people in the Way of Life.

This transition from God's coming to Jesus' return has been widely studied.⁷ Even the **Didache** testifies to this trajectory. After the meal, those present enter into an eschatological expectation in which either the congregation and/or the prophets chant, "Hosanna to the God of David" (**Did.** 10:6). The term "Hosanna" has no significance in the Greek language nor does "David" have any special significance in Hellenistic history. This is just one of the more than forty instances wherein Gentiles were expected to retool themselves with Jewish modes of thinking and feeling in order to take part in the Jesus movement.

I make reference to this particular chant, however, because, in the **Apostolic Constitutions**, one finds a fourth century revision of the **Didache** that alters and expands this chant to read, "Hosanna to the Son of David, blessed be the one coming in the name of the Lord" (7.26.5)--a clear indication that now the community expected to greet the royal Messiah "who must remain in heaven until the time of universal restoration that God announced long ago through his holy prophets" (Acts 3:21).

When one studies the Jewish prophetic and apocalyptic literature, one makes three discoveries⁸: (1) The older expectations of God's salvation generally look to God as being the sole and exclusive savior of Israel in the end times. (2) Even when a human messianic figure appears, he plays out very limited, in time and in scope, functions that are subordinated to God's overwhelming power.⁹ (3) In the Jewish apocalyptic literature, increasingly significant and powerful deeds are assigned to the messiah. The messiah now, not only acts "in the name of God," he acts "with the power of God" and, accordingly, clearly exhibits a quasi-divine persona.¹⁰

Stepping back, we can now see that the **Didache** occupies the early phase wherein God is the sole Redeemer of Israel. Jesus is his servant and only the future will make clear what roles will be assigned to Jesus when God comes. Such a modest proposal could hardly be construed as a challenge to the absolute monotheism that has always been a pillar of Judaism.

It is sometimes supposed that the Jesus movement broke with Judaism the first moment that Jesus' followers identified him as the forthcoming Messiah. This position is prompted by John's Gospel where it is said that "the Jews had already agreed that if any one should confess him to be Christ, he had to be put out of the synagogue (John 9:22). When one examines the later records of the rabbis, however, one discovers that messianic speculation was a popular pastime of the rabbis. Yohanan ben Zakkai, for instance, a contemporary of Jesus, was reported to have instructed his disciples to await the return of King Hezekiah as Messiah. Other rabbis rejected this assessment (b. Sanh. 98b). More importantly, it would seem that rival schools¹¹ of disciples were fond to push their own master as God's candidate for Messiah:

What is his [the Messiah's] name? The School of R. Shila said, "His name is Shiloh, for it is written 'until Shiloh come' [Gen 49:10]." The School of R. Yanni said, "His name is Yinnon, for it is written, 'His name shall endure forever: e'er the sun was, his name is Yinnon' [Ps 72:17]." The School of R. Haninah maintained, "His name is Haninah, as it is written, 'Where I will give you Haninah' [Jer 16:13]. . ." (b. Sanh. 99a).

In sum, while it impossible to know what was the degree of tolerance within the synagogues of the first century, one can be safe in saying that the messianic claim of the Jesus movement was not, in itself, the decisive cause for exclusion from the synagogue nor for the parting of the ways.

In our own day, a significant portion of the Lubavicher Hasidic Movement¹² of R. Menachim M. Schneerson regards him as the intended Messiah. In 1991, R. Schneerson proclaimed to his disciples that he is a prophet and that as a messenger of G-d, he is delivering the unprecedented news, "Behold, Moshiach is coming."¹³ As the end times expectation grew among his 200,000 disciples worldwide, many began to openly say that their beloved Rebbe was God's appointed **moshiach**. With his death on 12 June 1994, this expectation continued to grow. Being the end times, true believers expected that their Rebbe would be raised from the dead within a short time in order to function as God's **moshiach**. In a 1997 full-page ad in the New York Times, his disciples professed that their Rebbe has been "liberated from the limitations of corporeal existence" and that "the Rebbe is among us" and "his presence is more profoundly felt than ever before."¹⁴ These sorts of claims have been an embarrassment to some Jews¹⁵ and have bitterly divided many Jewish households. True believers, however, respond to their critics saying:

He [Rabbi Schneerson] is a righteous prophet who has never sinned, nor even been tempted, in his entire life; indeed, he has brought hundreds of thousands of Jews and Gentiles back to the Law [Torah]. Moreover, he is a direct descendant of King David. The Rebbe has revealed that the Messiah will finally arrive now, in our generation, amidst great miracles.¹⁶

The Jewish objection to the Lubavichers is not so much their faith in R. Schneerson. Rather they are disturbed by the Rebbe's message that the age of salvation is close at hand and that a worldwide appeal to both Jews and Gentiles is required as a consequence. Such a message is clearly decisive. For that matter, it clearly divides Christian denominations as well. In the first century, it was no different.

The Gentiles and the Coming Kingdom

What R. Schneerson makes clear in our own day is how the launching of a Gentile mission is possible if and only if evidence was forthcoming that God's coming was close at hand. Many Christians have become comfortable with the understanding that the Gentile mission emerged in the early church only because Jesus expressly commanded his disciples "to make disciples of all nations" (Matt 28:19) following his resurrection. According to Matthew, this may be the impression given; yet, following the research of Paula Fredriksen and others, the character of the Gentile mission is only possible in the end times. Three points:

1. The vast majority of the prophetic and apocalyptic texts of Judaism portray God's arrival as bringing blessings for faithful Jews but terrible punishments for the Gentiles. As E.P. Sanders (1985:212-216) correctly notes, a large number of prophetic texts look forward to the utter destruction of the Gentiles along with their idols (e.g., Isa 54:3; Mi 5:9, 15). Some more moderate texts allow that some Gentiles would survive in the age to come but only after bringing their treasures to Jerusalem and becoming the servants of Israel (e.g., Zech 14:14, Isa 14:2, 60:12). Only a very few texts hold out the prospect that some Gentiles would be invited to share in the glory of Israel when the Lord comes (e.g., Hos 1;10, 2:23, cited in Rom 9:24-26). What is astonishing about the Jesus movement and the modern Lubavicher movement is how they both ignore 98% of the bad news for Gentiles in favor of embracing what Fredriksen calls "the positive extreme" (Fredriksen:544)--namely, that Gentiles in the last days would abandon idolatry and attach themselves to Jews in their midst and accompany them as they go up to Jerusalem to worship the God of Jacob (Is 2:2-4, Mi 4:1-3, Zech 14:16-19). These select Gentiles will eat of the messianic banquet that the Lord has prepared for his people in Jerusalem (Is 25:6).¹⁷
2. Under ordinary circumstances, Gentiles who learned the folly of depending upon idols would be expected to convert to Judaism if they wished to be assured a place in the world to come. At that special time when the coming of the Lord was close at hand, however, a new alternative opened up. Jews preparing for the coming of their Lord were expected to return to a heartfelt observance of the Torah; Gentiles, on the other hand, "**turn from** idolatry (and the sins associated with it) and **turn to** the living God" (Fredriksen:547). Thus, circumcision, Sabbath keeping, and kosher foods were required of Jews but not of Gentiles since, as Fredriksen explains, "Gentiles are saved as Gentiles: they do not, eschatologically, become Jews" (Fredriksen:547).
3. This situation prevailed during the 30s and 40s and allowed Jews and Gentiles to be bound together in the same hope. Then a critical stress point emerged:

By mid-century, surely all these Christians must have realized that their expectations [of the imminent coming of the Lord] had not been fulfilled. . . . Gentiles continued to join the movement in numbers; the mission to Israel, however, had foundered (Fredriksen:560).

In response to this crisis, some Jewish Christians began to advocate that Gentiles ought to completely convert to Judaism so as to insure their place in the world to come. Others, like the framers of the **Didache** and Paul, strenuously insisted that the old policy of admitting Gentiles "with only the requirement of moral, not halakhic, conversion" be maintained: "This meant no idols. It also meant no circumcision" (Fredriksen:561).

As already noted, the **Didache** represents the systematic outline of the training program designed by Jewish Christians bent upon assuring that Gentiles had the settled identity and the habits of judgment required for the entrance into the Kingdom of God. Needless to say, the **Didache** goes way beyond the provisions of the so-called Council of Jerusalem. Paul, in his letters, clearly surmised that

moral perfection was required of Gentiles; yet, Paul summarizes the righteousness required of Gentiles in very general and very uneven terms. The **Didache**, in contrast, sets out a training that has a defined content and progression of topics from beginning to end. When it came to incidentals, the kind of water used for baptism or the quantity/quality of first fruits, the **Didache** was very lenient. When it came to the content of the Way of Life, however, the **Didache** repeatedly holds that nothing was to be changed. "You will not at all leave behind the rules of the Lord, but you will guard the things you have received, neither adding nor taking anything away" (D4:13). Thus, the novice was warned:

- 6:1 Look_out, lest anyone make you wander
 from this way of training,
 since without God s/he trains you.
- 6:2 [1] For, on_the_one_hand, if you are able to bear
 the whole yoke of the Lord, you will be perfect;
 [2] but if, one_the_other_hand, you are not able,
 that which you are able, do this.

This later rule indicates that habitual compliance was not expected at the time of baptism. What was expected, however, was that "the whole yoke of the Lord" be accepted as the criteria of perfection and that, on this and this alone, would each be judged on the last day (D16:2). Some scholars have argued that "the whole yoke of the Lord" refers to the Mosaic Torah as interpreted by Jesus.(???) In so doing, however, they are misled by the use of "yoke" in Matthew's Gospel and they fail to recognize that the last line points toward the cultivation of increased perfection in the limited rules already given.

Three practices insured that "the whole yoke of the Lord" was not to be forgotten nor neglected.

1. In the first place, the Way of Life was received in fear and trembling as the revealed way of the Father given to them by Jesus. Most probably, the novice memorized and recited at each meeting with his/her mentor all of the Way of Life that they had treated up to that point. This recitation helped to summarize and to review what had already been transmitted.
2. Secondly, the entire Way of Life was recited prior to every baptism (D7:1). The closing line, "This is the Way of Life!" (**Did.** 4:14b), may have served as liturgical refrain during this recitation. The mentor reciting the Way of Life probably inflected the ending of certain lines (e.g., the last line of 1:3, 1:4, 1:6, 2:2, etc.)--immediately signaling that the entire community should come in, chanting in unison, "This is the Way of Life!" Thus, at one and the same time, the candidate would recapture the warm feelings associated with hearing the words of the Lord voiced by his/her spiritual parent, and, at the same time, the chanted refrain would bring home to the candidates that their spiritual "family" affirmed their identity within this same rule of life.
3. Third, after the first eucharist that followed every baptism, all the members of the community were required to detail infractions they committed during the past week relative to the Way of Life. This confession of failings was spoken of at the end of the training prior to baptism (D4:14). After the first eucharist, specific details were given (D14:1-3). The **Didache** does not define what "failings" were to be publicly confessed. A "false step" (**parantomatos**), however, would surely include anything that placed one outside the "path of life." This could include anything from murder (**Did.** 2:2, 3:2) to grumbling (**Did.** 3:6). In any case, confessing failings had the effect of publicly reinforcing the Way of Life as a lifelong endeavor. Even small Infractions confessed by others had the effect of reminding everyone that attention must be given even to the small matters in the Way of Life. Someone repeatedly

confessing the same failing week after week would sooner or later have to reform his/her life or, in shame, to withdraw from the community.

This confession of failings is not directed toward obtaining the forgiveness for sins. Rather, the confession assures that "your sacrifice may be pure" (D14:1). "Sacrifice permeated the ancient world, and it was a fact of life with which any new religions had to reckon" (Stevenson:11). In like fashion, the spiritualization of sacrifice made firm inroads during the first century within both Jewish¹⁸ and Gentile attitudes toward sacrifice. Within this context, the **Didache** recognized that the festive meal celebrating the election of Israel and anticipating the final ingathering constituted the "sacrifice" of the community. To offer this sacrifice, the community had to be striving toward holiness (not yet having attained it) and members had to avoid being in conflict with one other "in order that your sacrifice not be defiled" (D14:2).

From the vantage point of many Jews outside the movement, the entire Gentile mission was predicated upon Jesus' mistaken sense that the kingdom was close at hand. Even for those inside the movement, incompatible solutions to the delay of the Lord's coming were put forward. There can be no doubt, therefore, why the **Didache** put such massive emphasis upon "neither adding nor taking anything away" (D4:13) from the Gentiles in the name of the Lord.

Ideological Conflict with Hypocrites

This being said, it must be recognized that members of this community had an ideological conflict with a group that the **Didache** characterized as "the hypocrites." Due to the fact that most scholars thought of the **Didache** as borrowing from Matthew's Gospel, the interpretation of the **Didache** has been muddled by use of this Gospel. When examined carefully, however, it can be seen that the conduct of the hypocrites criticized by Matthew have nothing to do with the conduct of the hypocrites in the **Didache**. Furthermore, it cannot be surmised that the term "hypocrites" refers to pious Jews generally for there is not the slightest intimation that this community stands outside or against Israel.¹⁹ On the contrary, the hope of this community embraces entirely the hope of Israel as being God's preferential choice for the future.

In my own research, I have supported the hypothesis that the Didache's "hypocrites" were Jews (many of them Christians) who promoted temple piety among Gentile converts for mixed motives. Temple sacrifices were a traditional, divinely-approved, evocative aspect of Jewish piety. During the 40s and 50s, when troubles periodically erupted that pitted the Romans against the temple traditions, the prospect of Gentiles endorsing and/or participating in these rites served to legitimate and to lend support to the Jewish cause vis-à-vis the Romans. The first of these series of clashes erupted in 40 C.E. when Emperor Caligula attempted to install a statue of himself in the temple. From then on, disturbances erupted every few years.²⁰ Since religious identity and national security were so inextricably intertwined in Jewish self-understanding, most Jews were prone to brand as "traitors" anyone detracting from the temple or its operations. The **Didache**, in response, regarded those Jews and Jewish Christians who encouraged Gentile converts to pray and fast for the temple as "hypocrites" insofar as they promoted temple worship for its political and social advantage as a unifying force against the Roman occupation.

Given this interplay of religious and political realities, the framers of the **Didache** wished to entirely remove Gentiles from any and every attachment to temple Judaism. This is evident in the following five ways:

1. **Did.** 4:6 had the effect of giving ordinary members of the community a way to effect the "ransoming of your sins" without any priesthood, without any temple, without any animal sacrifice.

2. **Did.** 8:2 had the effect of defining the kingdom expectation using the prayer summary commonly known as the Lord's Prayer. Three times each day, small groups of community members boldly addressed the Lord as "Father" and offered him their praise and petitions. They were persuaded that God heard their prayers even though they were not priests and they ignored the temple cult. Their kingdom prayer, moreover, excluded the customary petition for the rebuilding of Jerusalem or for the reestablishment of the temple cult.
3. **Did.** 14:1-3 had the effect of establishing the eucharist as the "pure sacrifice" which, according to Mal 11:1, took place "in every place and time . . . among the Gentiles." Thus, by implication, the temple sacrifices in Jerusalem were entirely unnecessary and perhaps even contrary to "the divinely instituted rule of the Lord" (**Did.** 14:1; see #8a). Ordinary meals ritually served without any priests or a temple were thus understood as offering an acceptable communion sacrifice.
4. **Did.** 13:3 had the effect of establishing that "first fruits" were to be presented "to the prophets for they themselves are your high-priests." This rule effectively bypassed the priests of the temple who, according to divine decree, were elected to receive first fruits (Lv 23:10-14; Dt 26:1-11).
5. **Did.** 16:3-8 had the effect of recasting the end-time expectations such that Jerusalem and the temple had no role to play whatsoever--neither in the apostasy prior to the end or in the coming of the Lord-God at the end. Moreover, the end-times scenario of the **Didache** distinguishes itself from other Jewish prophetic and apocalyptic writings by affirming that the Lord will come to gather his elect without designating Jerusalem as the place for this gathering (see #10q).

In an earlier period, the prophets of Israel had caustically critiqued the temple sacrifices due to the priests' neglect to offer proper animals (Mal 1:6-11) or due to the inappropriate conduct of those offering sacrifice (Is 1:11-20). The prophets, however, never anticipated a time or a place wherein the temple cult would not be the center of Jewish piety. The community that concealed its library at Qumran, meanwhile, was a community centered around former temple priests who deliberately withdrew from the defilement at Jerusalem in the eschatological hope that God was preparing to purify his cult. Their withdrawal from temple worship was, consequently, strategic and temporary. Furthermore, instead of relying upon the temple cult managed by the priests to define worship, the Pharisees gave every Jew the right and the obligation to address God. As such, daily prayers and simple rituals conducted by ordinary individuals served "to bring the individual into direct communion with God" (Rivkin:58). Furthermore, these prayers and rites were performed, not in the divinely ordained holy temple, but within the ordinary places of their home and their synagogue. Instead of having the priests direct the reading and the interpretation of Torah (Rivkin:32-41), the Pharisees gave every male Jew the right and the obligation to read and to interpret the Torah for himself guided by the oral traditions handed down by the rabbis. The assertion that there was a binding oral tradition alongside the binding written scroll separated the Pharisees from the Aaronide priesthood. By taking charge of their own interpretation, the Pharisees declared their intellectual and spiritual independence from the priests. The Pharisees, however, never imagined that God's future would not entail the restoration of Jerusalem and of its temple.

In the Acts of the Apostles, Stephen boldly proclaimed the radical position that "the Most High does not dwell in houses made with human hands" (Acts 7:48). Such a position was clearly at odds with the Peter Christians who "spent much time together in the temple" (Acts 2:46). These two Jewish factions of the Jesus movement were thus setting themselves up for an eventual clash. As the political and economic importance of the temple for sustaining a popular struggle against Rome took shape in the 40s and 50s, most sectors of the Jesus movement withdrew their support from the temple. As they did,

they found ways to supplant the importance of the Jerusalem temple. The **Didache** represents a very early and very pervasive form of supplanting the need for a temple, both in the present and in the future.

Conclusion

Stepping back, let's recall that the guiding proposition of this essay is that the **Didache** represents a coherent and uniform plan for training Gentiles bent upon joining with Jews in awaiting the redemption of Israel. Given their abandonment of idolatry and their acknowledgment of the God of David, these Gentiles fully expected to be embraced within the blessings to come wherein the Way of Life would prevail everywhere on the face of the earth.

In examining the claims made for Jesus, it became evident that the servant Christology of the **Didache** would not have been an insurmountable offense among those Jews who expected God might be lacing his boots in preparation for his coming. The onset of the Gentile mission, however, would have been more problematic. Only those sectors of Judaism that firmly embraced the kingdom as "close at hand" would have been disposed to endorse Gentile inclusion. Even for those Jews expecting the imminent coming, however, there would be few who would allow that God could entirely forgive any Gentile for their passive or active involvement in the suffering that had been visited on Israel for so many generations. The Gentile mission, consequently, would have been an affront to God's justice. Only inside the movement was it a question of whether, due to the delay of God's coming, Gentiles needed to become full Jews in order to be assured of participating in God's blessings.

There were many Judaisms. Every form of Judaism known to us, however, that made a strategic withdrawal from the temple establishment did so with the proviso that, in the end times, this breach would be healed. Some sectors of Jewish Christianity, however, formed a Gentile identity that insured that no reconciliation with the temple was necessary or possible. Such a strong stance against the temple (even in the world to come) would have been the cause for much confusion and pain among nearly all other forms of Judaism. Seen entirely within, therefore, it seems evident that the framers of the **Didache** deliberately fashioned a Gentile identity that entirely bypassed the Jerusalem temple. In the world to come, the Gentiles would offer sacrifice in every time and place on the face of the earth--not in Jerusalem. The words of the Lord to Malachi would thus be fulfilled. Everything else God said through the prophets regarding the future of the temple and of the priesthood was thus passed over in complete silence. One might imagine that the framers of the **Didache** might have been willing to allow that some inferior form of worship would show up in Jerusalem in the world to come. If so, they say nothing regarding this. For the Gentiles and their Jewish mentors, however, it was far better not to speculate as to what Jerusalem might or might not be in the future. Same for the roles that Jesus might or might not play in the world to come. In this regard, the framers of the **Didache** were conservatively apocalyptic: "**I am the LORD, and besides me there is no savior**" (Isa 43:11).

Postscript

In the year 132, Simon Bar Kokhba and his followers fought a guerilla warfare with the Roman soldiers quartered in Jerusalem and environs. The rebels were initially successful due to the element of surprise and their refusal to confront the Romans head on. As a result of these successes, a significant number of Jews joined the revolution. In a few years, Jerusalem was on its way to becoming the capital of a restored Jewish kingdom. At this time, R. Aqiba, one of the most prestigious rabbis, took the lead in proclaiming Bar Kokhba as God's Messiah.²¹ Thus, Bar Kokhba developed a legitimacy that evoked the hopes of all Israel. But then the seasoned troops of Julius Severus showed up and ruthlessly tracked down and defeated all the rebels. To prevent any further impulse to revolt, Jews were

henceforth forbidden, on pain of death, to enter into the city of Jerusalem. Moreover, a Roman colony was settled in the city, a temple to Jupiter was built on the former site of the temple, and the city was renamed Aelia Capitolina.

Reflecting on these events, the rabbis routinely renamed Bar Kokhba as Bar Kozeba. In so doing, the rabbis took the Hebrew text used by R. Aqiba, "A star (Kokhba) shall come forth out of Jacob" (Nm 24:17) and supplied it different vowels so as to make it read, "A disappointment (Kozeba) shall come forth" (see **t. Taanit** 4:5). This helps explain why the system of Judaism created by the rabbis was bent upon developing a system of sanctification bent upon serving God without any yearning for a messianic deliverance in the last days. The **Mishnah** codified in the year C.E. 200 thus has little to say about the Messiah. Only later, when the sting of the Bar Kokhba revolt was largely forgotten, did small elements of messianic expectation reassert themselves in rabbinic Judaism.

Jacob Neusner's **Messiah in Context** painstakingly shows how the rabbis refined and protected the Jewish people from the outbreak of any messianic madness in this redefining of religion. In sum, Neusner concludes, "Judaism in its formative canon does not fall into the classification of a messianic religion."²² Christianity, on the other hand, does. And this helps to explain why the early churches gave a central importance to messianic and apocalyptic expectations while the synagogues did not. In a sense, therefore, today's Lubavicher Movement is an anomaly insofar as it expects the imminent eruption of the messianic age. On the other hand, one would expect contemporary Christian churches to be preoccupied with the expectation of the messianic age, especially as the new millennium is now beginning. Thus, within Christian circles, the cautionary words of Jesus are very much needed:

If anyone says to you, 'Look! Here is the Messiah!' or 'There he is!' --do not believe it. For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce great signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. Take note, I have told you beforehand (Matt 24:23-25).

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References to "the Lord" (**kyrios**) in the **Didache** have been assumed to refer to Jesus due to Pauline and Synoptic usage. See my analysis in **The Didache**, pp. 563-564, 660-666.

My commentaries here follow Raymond Brown, "The Pater Noster as an Eschatological Prayer." See **The Didache**, pp. 311-333.

Norman Perrin, **Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus**, pp. 104-107, 204-205. See **The Didache**, pp. 391-395.

Bruce Chilton, **Pure Kingdom**, p. 86.

The Didache, pp. 265-371. See Peter's servant Christology in Acts 3 as interpreted by John A.T. Robinson, "The Most Primitive Christology of All?", in this connection.

The paramount study showing how biblical texts heralding God's coming were transposed to foretell Jesus' return is by John A.T. Robinson, **Jesus and his Coming**.

The Didache, pp. 676-682.

Phase 2 finds expression in Rev 21. Herein, the new Jerusalem comes down from heaven; yet, it has no temple need of the sun and the moon since, as the text explains, "the glory of God is its [sun]light, and its lamp is the Lord (Rev 21, 22:5). Here both Almighty God and his Lamb, Jesus, come down from heaven. One will notice, however, that the moon is a lesser light than the sun, as lamplight is less than sunlight, so too, Jesus is exceedingly less than the Lord (Almighty).

In Paul letters to the Thessalonians, the coming of the Lord God is passed over in silence in favor of highlighting the anticipated return of Jesus (1 Thess 1:10, 3:13, 4:14-15). What the Lord-God will do is no longer clearly distinguished from what the Lord-Jesus will do. In Paul, consequently, one has the first steps toward transforming the "Son of God" of Jewish theology into "God the Son" of patristic theology. Even for Paul, however, Jesus will return to vanquish evil and to set up kingdom, but, in the end, he will turn everything over to the Father (???)

Not only rival schools, but even a predominant rabbi naming a false Messiah does not appear to be sufficient to discredit him. This happened when the renowned R. Aqiba identified Bar Kokhba, who led a Jewish revolt against Rome in 132-135 CE, as "the King Messiah" (y. Taanit 4:5). The revolt was brutally crushed by the Romans. Bar Kokhba earned the nickname "Bar Kozeba" (i.e., "Son of Disappointment") by the rabbis. But this did not prevent R. Aqiba from continuing to be regarded as one of the great lights of Israel and his judgments on numerous issues to be credited later in the Talmud.

Lubavitcher Jews represent a Brooklyn-based Hasidic movement with roots in 18th century Poland. That's where Shalom Shmuel Schneersohn, the founder of Hasidism, preached Judaism based on the omnipresence of God in all things: Even sinners could serve God through inner joy. Many branches of Hasidism developed over the next century, each growing around their particular rebbe and his teachings. The Lubavitcher communities sprang from the writings of 18th-century Rabbi Schneersohn of Liadi, who published the Tanya, which is revered by adherents today as containing the key to spiritual awareness. The movement gets its name from the Belorussian town where the movement began. This group of ultra-orthodox Jews has their headquarters in Brooklyn, New York, and has about 200,000 members worldwide.

<http://www.moshiach/blind/27nissan.htm> R. Schneerson announced to his disciples and to the world community, Nissan 5751 (11 Apr 1991), that the **moshiach** was close at hand and that, Jews and Gentiles alike, have a role in preparing his way.

New York Times (08 Jul 1997) cited in <http://www.shereshministries.org/already.htm>

David Berger, **The Rebbe, the Messiah, and the Scandal of Orthodox Indifference** (London & Portland: Littoral Press, 2001). R. Berger tells the story of the Lubavitcher community's descent into the madness of messianism and idolatrous worship of Schneerson as well as the impassivity of many of the world's leading Orthodox rabbis and institutions. See Allan Nadler, "A Historian's Polemic Against `The Madness of False Messianism'" <http://www.rickross.com/reference/lubavitch/lubavitch9.html> & Arnold Jacob Wolf, "Habad's Dead Messiah," **Judaism** 51 (2002) 109-115.

Brian J. Ellison, "Who Is the Son of God?" **Noah's Covenant Web Site**, p. 3 <http://www.noahide.com/son.html> This site explains that the Torah was given to the Jews; whereas, for Gentiles, God has given the seven commandments of Noah. Gentiles, consequently, are urged to embrace the Noahide Covenant, to learn to pray to God properly, to help others, and "to redeem every part of his life from the emptiness of modern existence" (p. 3).

This alone is enough to infuriate many Jews because, to their way of thinking, the righteous God of Israel has been negligent in overlooking (much less pardoning) even the smallest amount of the suffering Gentiles have wrecked on God's world.

ple. When Jesus is portrayed as holding up before his hometown audience in Nazareth the sad fact that Elijah overlooked the Jewish homes in favor of lodging with the pagan widow at Zarephath in Sidon during the famine and that Elijah overlooked all the lepers in Israel in favor of healing Naaman the Syrian, it is no surprise that "when they heard this, all the synagogues were filled with rage" (Luke 4:26). For those who have suffered, it is hard to swallow a prophet who takes a favorable stance toward Gentiles.

Paul, for instance, at one point, urged Christians "to present your bodies as living sacrifice (**thusian**), holy and acceptable to God" (Rom 12:1) and, at a later point, he referred to his own "preaching the Gospel" as his "sacrificial/priestly service" (Rom 15:15). Robert J. Daly carefully documents this "spiritualization of sacrifice" in his treatise, **The Origin of Christian Doctrine of Sacrifice**.

Niederwimmer, in like fashion, believes the term "is probably a general reference to the pious of Israel" with "referring to 'Pharisees in particular'" (1989:131f). Other, citing the evidence that the semiweekly fasting and praying that was done each day was not characteristic of all Jews, believe that "hypocrites" must "more likely to refer to Pharisees in particular" (Draper 1996:233). None of these conjectures, however, take note of the fact that the **Didache** nowhere shows sharp hostility toward the Jews, in general, or toward the Pharisees, in particular. All of these conjectures, therefore, are flat.

James D.G. Dunn lists these in **The Parting of the Ways**, pp. 126-127.

R. Akiba identified Bar Kokhba, who led a Jewish revolt against Rome in 132-135 CE, as "the King Messiah" (Matthew 24:5). The revolt was brutally crushed by the Romans. Bar Kokhba was given the nickname "Bar Kozeba" (i.e., "Son of Disappointment") by the rabbis. Yet this did not prevent R. Akiba from continuing to be regarded as one of the great lights of Israel and from having his judgments on numerous issues cited in both Talmuds. The rabbinic community, consequently, was forgiving of the grave error R. Akiba made during his lifetime.

Jacob Neusner, **Messiah in Context** (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1994) 231.