

משיח

MASHIACH

Apostolic
Writings
Messiah
Hebrew Bible
Second Temple
Judaism

For centuries, scholars have taught that a decisive parting of the ways took place between Jews and Christians during the New Testament period. The New Testament was consequently read in light of this classic narrative, and first-century Jews who followed Yeshua were thus viewed as *former Jews* who had converted to a new faith and joined a new religious community.

Today this classic narrative is widely disputed. In their book *The Ways That Never Parted*,



Adam Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed document the history of this reassessment and show that the evidence supports a “variety of different ‘Partings’ at different times in different places.” Becker and Reed concur with Daniel Boyarin, Philip Alexander, John Gager, John Howard Yoder and a growing number of scholars who have concluded, based on textual and archaeological evidence, that “the fourth century CE is a far more plausible candidate for a decisive turning point than any date in the earlier period.” What are the implications of this historical counter-narrative for how we view Yeshua-believing Jews during the New Testament period? The reassessment suggests that first-century Jewish believers in Yeshua did not necessarily have to make a decision between being “in *kol Yisrael*” (all Israel) and being “in Messiah.” Generally speaking, they

remained a part of both ecclesial communities because at that time being a faithful Jew and a believer in Yeshua were not mutually exclusive categories.

Since the publication of E. P. Sanders’ seminal work *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (1977), a massive reassessment of the New Testament writers’ view of Jews and Judaism has occurred and this reevaluation continues unabated. There is no question that this new scholarship has resulted in a sea change in how the field of New Testament studies views Second Temple Judaism. It is now commonly recognized that first-century Judaism was diverse, even to the extent that Jacob Neusner and others can speak of “Judaisms.” This reassessment of Judaism during the New Testament period makes room for the possibility that the earliest Yeshua-believing Jews lived out their Christological convictions fully within the socio-religious context of pluriform Second Temple Judaism.

The now widespread recognition that the parting of the ways between Judaism and Christianity was a later development than previously thought has raised the question of how we should refer to first-century Jews who followed Yeshua, and how we should classify the Judaism of these Jews. Some of the terms increasingly used for these first-century Jews are “Jesus-believing Jews,” “Christ-believing Jews,” “Christian Jews,” “Messianic Jews,” “Jewish followers of Jesus,” “Jewish disciples of Jesus,” “Jewish believers in Jesus” and “Jewish believers in Christ” rather than the terms “Jewish Christians” or simply “Christians,” terms which many scholars now consider anachronistic and misleading. With respect to describing the Judaism of these Jews, it is becoming more common for scholars to use the terms “Christian Judaism,” “Messianic Judaism,” “Christ-believing Judaism,” “New Testament Judaism” and “Apostolic Judaism” in place of the older term “Jewish Christianity” or simply “Christianity.” Again, this is due to the broad recognition that the “-ity” was a later development.



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