

# Great Controversies



## Second Temple Era and Talmudic Times

The Origin and Spread of  
Christianity

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**Monday  
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*Great Controversies in Jewish History Series*  
**The Origin and Spread of Christianity**  
Rabbi Dr. Michael Berger  
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I. Late Second Temple Judaism

A. Political context

B. Jewish diversity

A. “natural” and “intentional” Jewish communities

B. sects

C. broader trends (in Judea)

D. Judea and diaspora

II. Focus on Judea, 1<sup>st</sup> century CE

III. Jesus the Jew (ca. 4 BCE - 30 CE)

A. historical problems (sources, etc.)

B. reasonable reconstruction

1. itinerant preacher/healer in Galilee, attracts followers with messianic message

2. comes to Jerusalem

3. Romans execute Jesus for insurrection

IV. “The Jesus Movement” (30-70 CE)

A. interpret the “calamity”

B. diversity within the movement

1. questions on law, circumcision, kosher food

2. Two communities

a. Jerusalem-based church (James)

b. network of Gentile churches (Paul)

C. Paul’s letters – original Christian documents

V. post-70 CE

A. destruction of Jerusalem, Temple

B. Growing apart

1. Judaism: reduction in diversity; effort to consolidate (calendar, prayer)

2. Christianity: utter rejection of cult, ritual; emergence of gospels

Acts of the Apostles 15:1-31

[1] But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."

[2] And when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question... [4] When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them. [5] But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up, and said, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to charge them to keep the law of Moses"...

[7] And after there had been much debate, Peter rose and said to them, "Brethren, you know that in the early days God made choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. [8] And God who knows the heart bore witness to them, giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us; [9] and he made no distinction between us and them, but cleansed their hearts by faith. [10] Now therefore why do you make trial of God by putting a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? [11] But we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will."

[12] And all the assembly kept silence; and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.

[13] After they finished speaking, James replied, "Brethren, listen to me. [14] Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. [15] And with this the words of the prophets agree, as it is written, [16] 'After this I will return, and I will rebuild the dwelling of David, which has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up, [17] that the rest of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, [18] says the Lord, who has made these things known from of old.' [19] Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, [20] but should write to them to abstain from the pollutions of idols and from unchastity and from what is strangled and from blood..."

[22] Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsab'bas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren, [23] with the following letter: "The brethren, both the apostles and the elders, to the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cili'cia, greeting. [24] Since we have heard that some persons from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions, [25] it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul... [28] For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: [29] that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from unchastity. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell."

[30] So when they were sent off, they went down to Antioch; and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter. [31] And when they read it, they rejoiced at the exhortation.