

PAUL

His Life and Teaching

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Preface

In his masterful volume *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free*, F. F. Bruce wrote that “no single event, apart from the Christ-event itself, has proved so determinant for the course of Christian history as the conversion and commissioning of Paul” (75). I share this conviction, which has motivated and guided my life as a college professor. I have taught courses on Paul for forty-five years, written a doctoral dissertation on one of his letters (1 Corinthians), and traveled extensively in the Mediterranean world since 1967, tracing out the routes Paul traveled. It has been my goal to explore every city of the approximately fifty he visited, and I have done that with the exception of only three or four. I have lived in Israel and Greece for extended periods of time researching the life of Paul and supervising teams in archaeological excavations in cities of Israel, including Caesarea Maritima, where Paul was imprisoned for two years. In addition, I have written more than 140 articles in eighteen dictionaries and encyclopedias, many of these articles on Paul. So when I completed my book on *Archaeology and the New Testament* for Baker Book House in 1991 and was asked to write this book on Paul, I was happy to accept the invitation because of my deep and abiding interest in the great apostle.

At the publisher’s request, I have written this book on the level of a college text and not for the scholarly world of professors and critics. Therefore, the use of foreign languages is minimal, and reference to contemporary critical views is usually placed in the notes and summarized in chapter 18 (“Paul in Recent Study”). It has been my aim to produce a volume that essentially reflects the content and method of my college courses on Paul and the results of my twenty-seven trips to the Holy Lands studying Paul’s world. As I exhort my students to do, I have tried to “put on my first-century glasses,” look at Paul in his Jewish and Hellenistic world of the Mediterranean, and see him not as a fourth-century church father, a sixteenth-century Protestant reformer, or a twenty-first-century evangelical missionary, but as what he was, a first-century Jewish rabbi who accepted Jesus as his Messiah and became an ardent, dedicated Messianic Jew.

In this volume, I have tried to emphasize that Paul was not the founder of Christianity, that he never ceased to be a Jew, and that Christianity is not a Gentile religion. There has never been a greater advocate of the universal composition of the Christian faith than Paul, who emphatically asserted that in Christ “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). This means that when people place their trust in Jesus, neither Jews nor Gentiles have to abandon their ancestry, neither males nor females have to abandon their gender, and neither slaves nor free people have to abandon their sociological status. Paul’s central focus in his preaching was that Gentiles do not have to become Jews any more than Jews have to become Gentiles, for as he went on to say, “If you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise” (Gal. 3:29). Monotheism as seen in the faith of Abraham was the foundation of the Judeo-Christian faith Paul proclaimed, and God is thus the Father of all believers. This means that wherever God has a son or daughter, I have a brother or sister (Jew or Gentile, male or female). The impact of this truth can be nothing short of revolutionary in a world filled with religious division, if the teaching of Paul is accepted and applied with love to everyday life. It is my prayer that this book may make some contribution to the realization of that goal.

Numerous individuals, organizations, and foundations contributed to my travel and research from 1967 to the publication of my book *Archaeology and the New Testament* in 1991. These have been acknowledged in the preface to that volume, and my research continues to benefit from their generosity. Since that time other contributors have made possible my further travel and research on the life and times of Paul, and I owe a deep debt of gratitude to all who have assisted in this project. At the risk of overlooking some who have participated with me in various ways, I want to thank the following partners in this ministry: the faculty, staff, and administration of Wheaton College; Don Edwards; Rob McRay; Bering Drive Church of Christ in Houston, Texas; Wheaton Bible Church in Wheaton, Illinois; David Sveen and the Domanada Foundation in Wheaton; and the G. W. Aldeen Memorial Fund at Wheaton College. I am also grateful for the friendship and financial support of the following individuals: Mac and Vonla Airhart, Randy and Therese Tomassi, Robert and Dawn Cavalco, Joseph and Patricia Dodson, Dr. Paul and Janet Jorden, Dick and Mary Norton, Martha Purdy, and Julie Stahler.

It has been a rare and blessed privilege for me to have my three sons—Rob, David, and Barrett—travel with me in the world of the Mediterranean and Middle East. They have lived in Israel, excavated with me at various sites in that country, and traveled through most of the other countries included in Paul’s travels. Teaching them and, in later years, their families about the life of Paul in the geographical settings where he lived has been one of the greatest

joys and blessings of my life. They physically labored with me in archaeological excavations, challenged my thinking, and contributed to my research.

The greatest supporter and contributor in every way to my work, not only in this volume but in everything I have written, is my wife, Annette. She has been a source of inspiration, insight, and encouragement in difficult times and the proofreader for everything I have done. Without her professional expertise and genuine interest, this book would not have been completed. I cherish the wonderful memories of our living again in the Mediterranean in 2001—doing five months of further research in Greece and Israel and spending a month working together in the little third-floor “crow’s nest” of our apartment in Elie, Scotland, where I wrote and she proofread the final portions of the book. And so this volume was written *amore Pauli*, for love of Paul, but with the love of Annette.

I also wish to acknowledge the important contribution my students have made to the composition of this volume by their research, papers, discussions of lectures, and the general interest and encouragement they have shown in my classes on the life and teaching of Paul. To the editorial staff at Baker Academic and especially to Jarl Waggoner I owe a special debt of gratitude. They meticulously checked my manuscript, offered valuable suggestions, and corrected my mistakes, while allowing me the freedom to express my viewpoints. Therefore, any failure to deal adequately with the overwhelming subjects of Paul’s life and teaching is mine.

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Part 1

PAUL'S LIFE

“In Person He Is Unimpressive” (2 Cor. 10:10 NIV)

We cannot help but wonder about the physical appearance of the great apostle. His opponents at Corinth referred to his bodily presence as “weak” (2 Cor. 10:10). The Greek word used here (ἀσθενής, *asthenēs*) often means weak or feeble (i.e., without strength), but it also means sick or sickly, referring to bodily disability.⁸⁰ Luke uses the word in Acts to refer to a lame man God healed through Peter (Acts 4:9; compare also Acts 5:15–16). Paul’s remark at the close of his letter to the Galatians (“See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand,” Gal. 6:11) possibly indicates a physical impairment that necessitated his use of secretaries for his written correspondence. Tertius, for example, wrote the Roman letter (Rom. 16:22). Paul uses this same Greek word in Galatians 4:13 when he reminds the Galatians that it was because of a “weakness of the flesh” (“bodily ailment,” RSV) that he first preached to them.

Paul also wrote to the Galatians that “you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me” (Gal. 4:15). While this may be no more than an expression indicating the regard the Galatians had for him, Paul may have chosen this particular imagery because there was actually something wrong with his eyesight. If so, this might provide an explanation for the fact that he did not recognize Ananias as the high priest during his appearance before the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem (Acts 23:5).

Contrariwise, it has been argued that a special characteristic of Paul’s personality was his practice of staring intently at people (Acts 13:9; 14:9; 23:1). “This suggests that his fixed, steady gaze was a marked feature in his personality, and one source of his influence over them that were brought into relations with him.”⁸¹ In a similar way, Peter stared intently at the heavenly vision that sent him to Cornelius (Acts 11:6), Cornelius stared at the angel who appeared to him (Acts 10:4), and Peter stared at the lame man in the temple before healing him (Acts 3:4). Stephen stared intently into heaven before his death (Acts 7:55), his audience stared intently at him while he spoke (Acts 6:15), and the synagogue congregation in Nazareth stared at Jesus as he spoke (Luke 4:20). The Greek verb used in all these instances (ἀτενίζεῖν, *atenizein*)⁸² is also used by Paul when speaking of the Israelites’ inability to stare at Moses’ glowing face when he descended the mount (2 Cor. 3:7, 13). Nevertheless, one with a visual impairment could stare just as intently as one who had good vision, and perhaps even with added incentive—the desire to see more clearly.

80. G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1950), 64.

81. Ramsay, *St. Paul*, 38.

82. The word is defined by BAGD, 119, as to “look intently at something or someone.”

In any case, it seems best to understand Paul's "thorn in the flesh" as some kind of physical impairment he received at the time of his revelatory experience described in 2 Corinthians 12:7.⁸³ There is no question that Paul was a sick man. Others have considered his problem to be a human opponent who followed Paul around and harassed him, but nothing else in his letters or Acts seems to point to the existence of such a person.

On the other hand, there is a remarkably detailed description of Paul that appears quite early in Christian literature and portrays him not as feeble, but as possessing a "good state of body." It is in the beginning part of the *Acts of Paul*, which Tertullian, writing in the late second century, said was composed shortly before his time "from love of Paul" by a presbyter of Asia who confessed to writing it and was convicted and removed from his office.⁸⁴ The editor of *The Apocryphal New Testament* calls the author of the *Acts of Paul* an "orthodox Christian" and dates the book to about A.D. 160.⁸⁵ The author of a significant work on Paul holds that the account of Paul's appearance in the book "was originally written, probably in the latter part of the first century,"⁸⁶ a viewpoint not shared by a prominent authority on early church history.⁸⁷ An eminent papyrologist cautiously remarked that "perhaps the best thing to be said for it is that it is hardly likely to have been invented."⁸⁸ To modern readers, the description does not seem flattering.

In the setting of the story, Paul arrives in Iconium, a city in central Asia Minor, where Christian people are gathered to welcome him. One of these, Onesiphorus, who may or may not be the individual named in 2 Timothy 4:19, has never seen Paul but has been given a description by which he would be able to recognize him. When Paul finally appears, he is described as follows:

And he saw Paul coming, a man little of stature, thin-haired upon the head, crooked in the legs, of good state of body, with eyebrows joining and nose somewhat hooked, full of grace: for sometimes he appeared like a man, and sometimes he had the face of an angel.⁸⁹

83. Other possibilities have been advocated: epilepsy (like Julius Caesar and Napoleon), Malta fever, malaria, overstrung emotions with hallucinations, and a speech impediment. For documentation see Bruce, *Paul*, 135 n. 3.

84. Tertullian, *De Baptismo*, 17.5, in *I Tertulliani Opera: Pars I*, Corpus Christianorum: Series Latina (Turnholt: Typographi Brepolis Editores Pontifici, 1954), 292. The English translation is "On Baptism," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.), 3:677.

85. James, ed., *Apocryphal New Testament*, 270.

86. Ramsay, *St. Paul*, 151.

87. Adolf Harnack, *Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur bis Eusebius* (Leipzig: Heinrichs, 1897) 2.1:505.

88. James Hope Moulton, *From Egyptian Rubbish Heaps* (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1917), 50.

89. *Acts of Paul 3, The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, paragraph 2, in J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 364.

A slightly different translation appears in M. R. James's edition of *The Apocryphal New Testament*:

And he saw Paul coming, a man small in size, bald-headed, bandy-legged, of noble mien, with eyebrows meeting and nose somewhat hooked, full of grace. Sometimes he seemed like a man, and sometimes he had the face of an angel.⁹⁰

This description may not have seemed as unflattering to ancient readers as it does to modern ones.⁹¹ A second-century passage from Archilochus reads: "I love not a tall general nor a straddling one, nor one proud of his hair nor one part-shaven; for me a man should be short and bowlegged to behold, set firm on his feet, full of heart." The author of the *Acts of Paul* may have used this second-century passage by Archilochus to describe Paul because he admired him.⁹² Suetonius, second-century biographer of the Roman emperors, described Augustus Caesar in terms that include the following: "His *eyebrows met above the nose*; he had ears of normal size, a *Roman nose* [i.e., it was a bit long and crooked, JM], . . . his height 5 feet 7 inches . . . how *small a man* he was. . . ."⁹³ Another author suggests that the author of the *Acts of Paul* took his description of Paul from several early authors, including Plutarch and Philostratus, who describe the Greek hero Herakles as having a hooked nose, meeting eyebrows, and bowed legs.⁹⁴ Thus, these early descriptions of Paul were intended to be flattering and represent him as a hero. Early pictures of Paul in the catacombs and elsewhere portray him as bald, as does the *Acts of Paul*. This may reflect a current tradition rather than an assumption based on the shaving of his head at Cenchreae (Acts 18:18) and probably in Jerusalem (Acts 21:24).

"I Am a Pharisee" (Acts 23:6)

Among Paul's recorded self-descriptions, he three times calls himself a Pharisee. Before Agrippa he said, "According to the strictest party of our religion I have lived [ἔζησα, *ezēsa*] as a Pharisee" (Acts 26:5). To the church in Philippi, Paul wrote that he was "as touching the law, a Pharisee" (Phil. 3:5 KJV), meaning that his perspective of the Torah was that of a Pharisee. And before the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, he declared, "I am [ἐγὼ εἰμί, *egō eimī*] a Pharisee" (Acts 23:6),

90. James, ed., *Apocryphal New Testament*, 273.

91. See further the discussion in E. Margaret Howe, "Interpretations of Paul in *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*," in *Pauline Studies: Essays Presented to Professor F. F. Bruce on His 70th Birthday*, ed. Donald A. Hagner and Murray J. Harris (Exeter, England: Paternoster; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 33–49.

92. This is the opinion of R. M. Grant, "The Description of Paul in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*," *Vigiliae Christianae* 36 (1982): 1–4.

93. *Aug.* 2.79 (italics added).

94. Abraham Malherbe, "A Physical Description of Paul," *HTR* 79.1–3 (1986): 170–75.

which, stated in the present tense, affirms that he had not forsaken that affiliation, even after three missionary journeys among the Gentiles!

The Pharisees were one of three “sects of philosophy,” as Josephus called them,⁹⁵ that were prevalent in Judea before and during the time of Paul. The other two were the Sadducees and the Essenes. Sadducees were pro-Roman at this time and controlled appointments to the high priesthood. They denied a physical resurrection of the human body and the existence of both angels and spirits, all of which the Pharisees affirmed (Acts 23:8).⁹⁶ Essenes were the smallest of the groups and were almost certainly the group that produced the Dead Sea Scrolls. Their teaching is described in some detail by Josephus.⁹⁷ The Pharisees, Josephus wrote, were “the most accurate interpreters of the laws, and hold the position of the leading sect.”⁹⁸ Paul was thus affiliated with the largest and most influential sect of the Jewish religion at the time, one that he himself called “the strictest party of our religion” (Acts 26:5). Since Paul maintained that he remained a Pharisee even after his conversion (Acts 23:6), it is important to understand something of the background of this group and its approach to understanding the Torah.

The origins of the Pharisees are hidden in obscurity. They appear in history by name after the Maccabean revolt in the mid-second century B.C. However, their approach to the law is as old as the time of Ezra and the return from exile. Among other things, they believed that the Torah, written and oral, contained the complete law. There were not two laws but one; the oral and the written law were of complementary and equal authority. The claim was that the extracanonical traditions, called the oral law or Mishnah, were handed down from the time of Moses along with the written Torah. The Mishnah declares:

Moses received the Law from Sinai and committed it to Joshua, and Joshua to the elders [cf. Josh. 24:31, JM], and the elders to the prophets [cf. Jer. 7:25, JM], and the prophets to the men of the Great Synagogue [a body of 120 elders, including many prophets, who came up from the exile with Ezra, JM]. They said three things: Be deliberate in judgment, raise up many disciples, and make a fence around the Law.⁹⁹

The Mishnah records the opinions of the Pharisaic party,¹⁰⁰ which was the only party to survive the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. These opinions have become the basis of modern forms of the Jewish faith. The value of the Mishnah in representing the views of Judaism in the time of Paul is not uniform because much of it reflects later opinions and emendations that were necessary for dealing with the inevitable changes in religious practices among Jews after

95. *Ant.* 18.11; cf. 13.171–73; *J. W.* 2.119.

96. See the teaching of the Sadducees in Josephus, *J. W.* 2.164–66; *Ant.* 18.16–17.

97. *J. W.* 2.119–61; *Ant.* 18.18–22.

98. *J. W.* 2.162.

99. *Avot* 1.1 (Danby, *Mishnah*, 446).

100. Danby, *Mishnah*, xiv.

the destruction of the temple. On the other hand, certain tracts of the Mishnah that preserve a knowledge of the customs dealing solely with Jerusalem and the temple¹⁰¹ “were preserved and handed down,” often in the very words of the men who had lived under the law in pre-destruction days and had known the full experience of living in temple times. Since these tracts no longer applied to daily life after the temple fell, “they have been less overlaid with comment and argument by later generations of teachers, and less exposed to the possibility of revision under the influence of later fashions of interpretation.”¹⁰²

However, there is no mistaking the basic claim under which these opinions that were codified into the Mishnah developed. The claim was expressed in the tract *Sanhedrin* 11.3: “Greater stringency applies to the observance of the words of the Scribes than to the observance of the words of the written Law.” The significance of this claim is clearly enunciated by Danby:

The Mishnah, in other words, maintains that the authority of those rules, customs, and interpretations which had accumulated around the Jewish system of life and religion was equal to the authority of the Written Law itself, even though they found no place in the Written Law. This, again, is but an assertion (known also in other religious and legal systems) that side by side with a written code there exists a living tradition with power to interpret the written code, to add to it, and even at times to modify it or ignore it as might be needful in changed circumstances, and to do this authoritatively. Inevitably the inference follows that the living tradition (the Oral Law) is more important than the Written Law, since the “tradition of the elders,” besides claiming an authority and continuity equal to that of the Written Law, claims also to be its authentic and living interpretation and its essential complement.¹⁰³

Moses had memorized this oral law and passed it on to Joshua, and so it had been passed down through the centuries by reliable authorities to succeeding generations, and its authenticity was beyond suspicion.¹⁰⁴ The men of the Great Synagogue had advised their disciples to “make a fence around the Law” in order to prevent breaking the law itself. The Torah was viewed as *Torah Sheleimah*, that is, all-embracing. It “signified the fullness of the revealed tradition which is to say the oral and written stipulations and all the deductions, inferences, and case decisions authoritatively derived from them.”¹⁰⁵ American constitutional law offers a rough secular parallel. “It includes not only the Constitution itself (the written law), but also the many aspects of oral law, i.e., naturalized traditions from older legal systems, two centuries of accumulated case decisions, theoretical writing on Consti-

101. Especially *Yoma*, *Middot*, *Tamid*, and parts of *Bikkurim* and *Sheqalim*.

102. Danby, *Mishnah*, xv n. 4.

103. *Ibid.*, xvii.

104. D. J. Silver and B. Martin, *A History of Judaism* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 1:224.

105. *Ibid.*, 1:225.

tutional issues, and the implicit assumption that a consistent attitude toward the organization of human affairs exists within the Law.”¹⁰⁶

The problem facing a Torah scholar like Paul was how the all-embracing law, which was eternal and immutable, could be applied to Jews who no longer lived in circumstances for which that law was designed. The revision of such a law was theoretically impossible by definition, but pragmatically it was a necessary fact of life, especially for those Jews who lived in the Diaspora. How could a poor Jewish male living in Italy or Spain appear three times a year¹⁰⁷ in Jerusalem when he could barely afford to feed his family and had no money with which to travel such distances? Indeed, by the reign of the Roman emperor Hadrian (A.D. 117–38), the temple was destroyed, and Jews were not even permitted to enter the city of Jerusalem. How could Jewish worshipers, even in Palestine itself, keep the commandments related to worship in the temple/tabernacle when it had been destroyed?

Although the Torah scholar would adamantly deny that he was doing anything more than interpreting and elaborating on the law, applying the specifics of the law or at least its evident spirit to a particular case, the truth was that “the Pharisaic scholar in fact made law.”¹⁰⁸ This scenario is all too familiar to those whose religious experience includes teachers and officials who see no difference between the Word of God and their interpretation of the Word of God!

Ancient rabbis differed in the methods they used to apply the law of Moses—given in the desert to a collection of Jewish tribes—to an urbanized and sedentary population. Even among the Pharisees, there were both stringent and lenient interpreters. It is one of the perplexing unknowns of New Testament study how Paul, the ardent defender of the “strictest party of [his] religion” (Acts 26:5)—who was “extremely zealous . . . for the traditions of [his] fathers” (Gal. 1:14), who was “educated according to the strict manner of the law of [his] fathers” (Acts 22:3), and who undoubtedly was brought up in an orthodox Hebrew-speaking synagogue in the Diaspora¹⁰⁹—could have fallen under the influence of the lenient, if not liberal, theology of Gamaliel in Jerusalem.

“At the Feet of Gamaliel” (Acts 22:3)

Paul was “brought up” in Jerusalem “at the feet of Gamaliel” (Acts 22:3).¹¹⁰ Later traditions associate Gamaliel with the eminent contemporary

106. *Ibid.*

107. At the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Booths (Deut. 16:16).

108. Silver and Martin, *Judaism*, 1:225.

109. Paul said he was a “Hebrew born of Hebrews” (Phil. 3:5).

110. Gamaliel I. See Bruce, *Paul*, 50. This Gamaliel is mentioned in the Mishnah, *Gittin* 4.2, in connection with liberalizing remarriage after divorce. See Danby, *Mishnah*, 310–11.

of Jesus, the rabbi Hillel, as successor to his school and possibly even his grandson,¹¹¹ though this is uncertain.¹¹² The translation of the word ἀνατρέφω (*anatrephō*) as “brought up” (RSV, NIV, etc.) is not to be taken as indicating anything more than that Paul was educated in Jerusalem under Gamaliel when he came to that city for his professional training. It need not mean that he was nurtured there from infancy as was Moses by Pharaoh’s daughter (cf. *anatrephō* in Acts 7:21). We do not know at what age Paul was sent to Jerusalem from Tarsus. He did have a sister who lived there at the time of Paul’s arrest, and perhaps he had relatives who had lived in Jerusalem earlier (Acts 23:16).

The influence of Hillel, whose approach to Jewish law was more lenient than that of his noted contemporary Shammai, is reflected in the moderating view expressed toward Christians by Gamaliel in Acts 5:33–39. Unlike Shammai, who was a Palestinian Jew, Hillel, as a young man, came to Jerusalem from Babylonia, where an important school of Jewish thought had existed for centuries—the one that produced the Babylonian Talmud. It has been argued that Hillel was schooled in Babylonia.¹¹³ Even though the ancient city of Babylon was still in ruins in the time of Paul, there were small cities in the vicinity that contained flourishing communities of Jews. Nehardea, a city not far to the south of Babylon, was the chief center of Babylonian Jewry and has been considered the residence of the Head of the Exile, the leading rabbi among the Jews exiled in Babylonia (called the Exilarch).¹¹⁴ Other important centers of education in Babylonia were Nisibis, Pumbedita, Sura, Mehoza, and Neresh.¹¹⁵

The name of Hillel is associated with certain hermeneutic norms of juristic deduction and analogy, which are called Hillel’s *Seven Rules*.¹¹⁶ These rules, which Hillel received and worked into a method, defined “certain ways in which logically valid conclusions in the juristic field are derivable from the written law.”¹¹⁷ For example, Deuteronomy 15:1–12 stipulates that all loans are to be canceled when the Sabbatical Year arrives. In Hillel’s urban society, this would have produced chaos in the economic system, because no one would lend money in the months preceding the arrival of the Sabbatical Year, knowing that the loan would be canceled before it could be repaid. It has been

111. This is accepted by E. P. Blair, “Gamaliel,” *IDB*, 2:351.

112. See Jacob Neusner, *The Rabbinic Traditions about the Pharisees before 70* (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 1:341–37; Bruce, *Paul*, 50. The tradition is evidently rejected by Bruce Chilton, who makes no mention of Hillel in his rather extensive article on Gamaliel in *ABD*, 2:903–6.

113. George Foot Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of the Tannaim* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962), 1:77.

114. *Ibid.*, 1:105 n. 3.

115. *Ibid.*, 1:102–5.

116. These seven rules may be found in the Tosefta (*Sanhedrin* 7.11) or more conveniently in Emil Schürer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ* (New York: Scribners, n.d.), 2.1:336.

117. Moore, *Judaism*, 1:78.

argued that Hillel “unabashedly devised a legal subterfuge” that had the impact of voiding the requirements of the written law. He instituted a *takkanah*, an emergency decree, that allowed such late loans to be made over to the courts, a third party that was not a person and thus not specifically covered by the biblical text, which is framed in terms of one person lending to another. This allowed the loan to remain uncanceled despite the demands of the law. Thus, Hillel “did not repeal Torah or nullify it; he simply set it aside by interpretation.”¹¹⁸ After all, life took precedence over the letter of the law, he reasoned, for the Torah was a “law of life.”

The reason Hillel’s school became the more lenient one in treating law undoubtedly lay in the fact that he came from Babylonia, where the situation in the Diaspora was different from that in Jerusalem. Hillel realized that the law must take account of actual conditions rather than imposing regulations and making demands on people that are impossible for them to fulfill. More than three hundred conflicting interpretations of the two schools of Hillel and Shammai on matters of law and observance are reported in one connection or another in the Talmud.¹¹⁹

Paul, too, was from the Diaspora. His teacher, Gamaliel, was a representative of the Hillel point of view, and Paul’s approach to Jewish law seems to have been the same. In dealing with the question of divorce among believers, Paul could draw on Jesus’ teaching to Jews, and so he wrote: Now this says the Lord, not I (see 1 Cor. 7:10). But in dealing with mixed marriages, those in which one of the partners had converted to Christianity, Paul could only say, as Gamaliel or Hillel would have said: “To the rest I say, not the Lord . . .” (1 Cor. 7:12). Jesus never taught on the subject, since marriage outside the Jewish religion was not permitted (Ezra 10:11; Neh. 13:25). Paul, facing a new situation, the inclusion of Gentiles in the new faith, which the law did not envision, had to make the necessary adjustments to embrace the new circumstances.

Like Hillel, Paul would take a more commonsense approach to matters. The law did specify that an ox should be taken out of the ditch, even on the Sabbath. For Hillel this meant also that one *could* eat an egg laid by a chicken on the Sabbath. One *could* offer Passover sacrifice, even if the day for the sacrifice fell on a Sabbath. It was this mind-set, this more lenient approach to matters of law and grace, that eventually won out for Paul, overcoming his more strident background of strictness in biblical interpretation. Providence is an altogether marvelous thing. How different history might have been had Paul come under the influence of the Shammai school rather than that of Gamaliel. Saul of Tarsus was just the man for whom God was looking at this point in history, the fullness of time.

118. Silver and Martin, *Judaism*, 1:226.

119. *Jewish Encyclopedia*, ed. I. Singer et al. (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1912), 3:115f.