

“To Recover What Has Been Lost”

*Essays on Eschatology, Intertextuality, and Reception
History in Honor of Dale C. Allison Jr.*

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Al Tirah (“Fear Not!”): Jewish Apocalyptic Eschatology, from Schweitzer to Allison, and After

Paula Fredriksen

If Jesus expected the end of the world, then he was mistaken.



Our epigram first appeared in a work, now some decades old, ostensibly on the historical Jesus. As an empirical observation, it is unimpeachably correct. Its author, however, embedded it within a larger argument—specifically, an argument against construing Jesus as a traditionally apocalyptic figure.¹ His thinking seems to have run like this:

- 1) Since Schweitzer, scholars have taught that Jesus (as, also, Paul) expected the kingdom of God in their own lifetimes; that is, scholars reconstruct these two ancient figures as apocalyptic thinkers.
- 2) If “kingdom of God” is defined as meaning “the end of the world,” then Jesus (and Paul) were wrong.
- 3) But—and *this point is simply assumed, nowhere stated*—Jesus (and Paul) cannot have been wrong.
- 4) Therefore, Jesus (and Paul) cannot have taught that the “end of the world” was at hand, and so must have meant something else.

In a later study, this time in quest of the historical Paul, this same writer warmed to his topic. There he inveighs against Schweitzer as a font of “the traditions of the fathers”—the phrase, given in scare quotes, nods to Paul’s Ἰουδαϊσμός in Gal

1 N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, COQG 2 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996). Wright’s remark appears at p. 95; his argument, *passim*. Wright relies upon what he takes to be ancient Jewish appreciations of “metaphor,” which enables him to transpose elements of ancient apocalyptic traditions into a (surprisingly contemporary, recognizably Protestant) theological key. I assess his efforts on Jesus in “What You See is What You Get: Context and Content in Current Research on the Historical Jesus,” *ThTo* 52 (1995): 75–97. For Dale Allison’s review, see “Jesus and the Victory of Apocalyptic,” in *Jesus and the Restoration of Israel*, ed. Carey C. Newman (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 126–41 and 310–13.

1:14. Schweitzer and his “various successors,” this author continues, constitute a “guild of biblical scholars” who think apocalyptically about “kingdom” and “Parousia” and “the end of the world.” Braving their disapproval (“wrath”), our author then rhetorically renders his conjured opposition as “Pharisees” who “wear their fringes long and their phylacteries broad,” thereby repurposing the polemics of the Matthean Jesus (Matt 23:5).² Evidently, this author’s contemporary “opponents” are tantamount to those of the historical Jesus and of Paul. In short, whether for principled theological reasons (the inerrancy of foundational figures)³ or for polemical ones (“Christian” identity agonistically defined, with apocalyptic eschatology cast as its hostile—ergo, “Jewish”—contrast), this author urges scholars to renounce what Schweitzer proposed, namely, to account for what would become Christianity by appeal to late Second Temple expectations of an imminent end.

Imputing epistemological inerrancy to ancient figures and essentialist religious identities to their modern interpreters seems a shaky foundation for historical work. Schweitzer’s assertion that robust, temporally conceived apocalyptic convictions motivated the lives and missions of both Jesus and Paul, however, can be evaded in other ways. Etymological fastidiousness about the meaning of the term “apocalypse” deflects awkward temporality. The term itself, after all, simply means “revelation.” It does not necessarily imply a timetable.⁴ “Apoc-

2 N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 2 vols., COQG 4 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 1165. Much of the book’s bulk is given over to creative constructions of what ancient Jews *really* thought when they used (seemingly?) apocalyptic themes and images, and to Paul’s Christian corrections of these ideas (see, e.g., Wright’s italicized *declamatio*, 1:26). My review appears in *CBQ* 77 (2015): 387–91. For a brilliant comment on Wright’s delicate situation, namely, the need to assert that foundational Christian figures are “Jewish, but not *too* Jewish,” see the wry observations of James G. Crossley, “A ‘Very Jewish’ Jesus: Perpetuating the Myth of Superiority,” *JSHJ* 11 (2013): 109–29.

3 As Allison queries, “Does Wright believe that if we adopt a more literal interpretation of Jesus’ apocalyptic language, then we will be stuck with the embarrassment of an error-ridden Jesus? Is the nonliteral interpretation of biblical prophecy an attempt to circumvent an unwelcome alternative?” and remarks that “Schweitzer’s Jesus is an offence; Wright’s Jesus, by comparison, is a welcome relief. Surely then our suspicions must be aroused.” “Jesus and the Victory of Apocalyptic,” 137. Allison further surveys some of the theological anxieties occasioned by the apocalyptic Jesus and “eschatological error” in “The Problem of Apocalyptic: From Polemic to Apologetics,” in *Apocalypticism, Anti-Semitism and the Historical Jesus: Subtexts in Criticism*, ed. John S. Kloppenborg and John W. Marshall, JSNTSup 275 (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 98–110.

4 See, for example, some of the essays collected in Ben C. Blackwell, John K. Goodrich, and Jason Maston, eds., *Paul and the Apocalyptic Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016); also, J. P. Davies, *Paul among the Apocalypses? An Evaluation of the “Apocalyptic Paul” in the Context of Jewish and Christian Apocalyptic Literature*, LNTS 562 (London: T&T Clark, 2016). Wayne

alyptic eschatology?” Revelation about “final things” in the sense of absolute or ultimate importance.⁵ “Eschatology” in this sense can be seen as already “inaugurated” through the work of Jesus and of Paul; but its beginning implies no end. Rather, “inaugurated eschatology” manifests in the quotidian, coding for Christology, or for a post-Jewish/post-ethnic consciousness (“grace, not race”)⁶ or for improved community ethics, for eschewing the fustiness of Jewish ancestral observances, or for enjoying a “resurrected mind.”⁷ Finally—a most elegant expedient—the term(s) for and the idea of an impending end to normal historical time, when investigating these ancient figures, can simply be ignored.⁸

Much is gained when Second Temple Jewish apocalyptic is denied, redefined, or quietly discarded. Foundational New Testament texts, and the historical figures that they represent, become quite literally timeless, thus immediately and comfortably usable for modern theologies. Indeed, framed this way, these ancient figures seem not to be ancient at all. Twenty-first-century theologies cohere with and conform to what these first-century persons themselves actually meant and said.

Constructing historically inflected modern theologies is one thing, but doing ancient history is another. Why do New Testament Studies routinely confuse

Meeks’s observations on the academic definitional elasticity of this concept still obtain, *The First Urban Christians* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 171–72 and 240 n. 20. For a concise history of the variety of definitions surrounding this term, see John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 1–42.

- 5 Speaking of “the explicit transformation of apocalyptic into a claim for ultimacy,” Allison refers to the work of Wolhart Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968), “Problem of Apocalyptic,” 104–5 and n. 16.
- 6 Wright’s unhappy sound bite, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and The Law in Pauline Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 1991), 240.
- 7 These last phrases and arguments, congruent with Wright’s (e.g., *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 2:1043–1265), structure the lengthy meditations of Douglas Campbell, e.g., *The Deliverance of God: An Apocalyptic Rereading of Justification in Paul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009) and, more recently, *Pauline Dogmatics: The Triumph of God’s Love* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020). Both Campbell and Wright further blunt Paul’s eschatology by asserting the Pauline authorship of Ephesians, Colossians, and 2 Thessalonians. Campbell indeed recasts Pauline chronology accordingly: *Framing Paul: An Epistolary Biography* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014).
- 8 Thus John Barclay, both in his large synthetic work, *Paul and The Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), and in his small introduction, *Paul: A Very Brief History* (London: SPCK, 2017), nowhere treats “apocalyptic,” “eschatology,” “kingdom of God,” or “Parousia.” The words appear in the body of the books; but Barclay’s reconstructed mid-first-century salvation history is leached of any apocalyptic component and configured as a function of a temporally stable, universalized theology of sin and grace, with Jewish “law” on the negative side of the soteriological ledger.

the two endeavors, producing modern confessional identities when supposedly describing the past? The birth of our discipline in the late Renaissance provides a partial answer. Paleographical analysis, textual criticism, research in primary languages, reimagining ancient context, liberating biblical interpretation from institutional doctrinal monopolies: all of these intellectual commitments emerged from work done then. But these attributes of modern scholarship took shape within a charged political and cultural context. The rise of the modern nation state (*cuius regio, eius religio*) and criteria of meaning resting on truth claims born of developments within empirical sciences, coincided with the new scholarship's shaping of religious reformation.⁹ These factors, too, had their effects.

Reformers in their own view, while facing off with Rome, were not *merely* facing off with Rome. Nor, they were convinced, were they generating something new, *qua* post- or anti-Catholic sixteenth-century theologies. Rather, through exegesis, *they were recovering what the historical Jesus and the historical Paul had actually meant*. Theological truth (as they construed it), to *be* theological truth, had to be transparent upon historical truth (again, as they construed it). On this point, the criteria of meaning drawn from the new empirical sciences served to validate the new theology, which saw itself as (the new) history.¹⁰

And, alas, Reform theologians pressed their views by drawing upon a long, highly developed tradition of intra-Christian polemics: the tropes of rhetoric *contra Iudaeos*. Tertullian, inveighing against Marcion, had leagued him with “the Jews.” Athanasius, battling ecclesiastical enemies, condemned his opponents as “Jews.” North African Catholics, urged Faustus the Manichaeon, were just like “the Jews.” Dissident North African Catholics, thundered Augustine, were even “worse than the Jews.”¹¹ Rhetorical “Jews,” by the sixteenth century,

9 For a big-picture orientation to this political and religious ecology, see Tim Blanning, *The Pursuit of Glory: Europe 1648–1815* (New York: Penguin Group, 2008).

10 Henning Graf Reventlow, *The Authority of the Bible and the Rise of the Modern World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1985).

11 On the launch and development of *c. Iud.* theological framing, see two classic studies: James Parkes, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue: A Study in the Origins of Antisemitism* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1961 [orig. 1934]), and Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel: A Study of the Relations between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire, 135–425* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986 [orig. 1948]). On the intra-Christian exchange of anti-Jewish insult, and the theological work that it does, see David P. Efronson, “The Patristic Connection,” in *Anti-Semitism and the Foundations of Christianity*, ed. A. T. Davis (New York: Paulist, 1979), 98–117; John G. Gager, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); Paula Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 65–78, 90–102, 223–34, 290–319; Brent Shaw, *Sacred Violence: African Christians and*

had long served to articulate (gentile) Christian identities and theologies vis-à-vis other, internal competitors. Late Renaissance reformers weaponized these tropes yet again. Empty ritualism, hypocritical Pharisaism, legalism (earning salvation through “the works of the Law”): these “Jewish” opponents of Jesus and of Paul stood on the side of the Pope. Grace, faith, the return to Scripture, salvation as unearned, unmerited gift—that was the message of true Christianity. In resisting Judaism, Jesus and Paul, urged the Reformers, had long ago resisted papal Rome.¹²

New Testament Studies remains profoundly shaped by the culture wars of the late Renaissance. This, I think, is the fundamental reason why so much current New Testament work, conceived as history and defended by appeals to history, renders Christianity’s foundational figures, Jesus and Paul, as “Christian” in ways that agonistically and anachronistically distinguish them from their native ancient Jewishness. This is why so many New Testament scholars—be they Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, or none of the above—keep recovering a specifically “Protestant” Jesus (anti-sacrifice, anti-Temple, anti-purity, and so on) and a specifically “Protestant” Paul (enemy of “Judaizing,” champion of “grace” or of “faith” as over-against “the works of the Law”).¹³ And this is why,

Sectarian Hatred in the Age of Augustine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), esp. chapter 6, “Ravens Feeding on Death”; Paula Fredriksen, “Augustine and ‘Thinking with’ Jews,” *AJR*, 15 February 2018, <https://www.ancientjewishreview.com/articles/2018/2/3/augustine-and-thinking-with-jews-rhetoric-pro-and-contra-iudaeos>.

- 12 For a pristine statement of this sensibility, see Martin Hengel, *Between Jesus and Paul: Studies in the Earliest History of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 57. E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 57, notes NT historiography’s polemical correspondence of Catholics and Jews. Further on the entanglement of anti-Jewish and anti-Catholic sentiment mobilized by Lutheran theologies of justification and grace, see Michael Bachman, “The Anti-Judaic Moment in the ‘Pauline’ Doctrine of Justification,” in *The Message of Paul the Apostle within Second Temple Judaism*, ed. Frantisek Abel (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2020), 21–59. Bachman quotes the German historian Dietz Bering who, in his 2014 monograph *War Luther Antisemit?*, opined that a common focus on works-righteousness “closely linked the Jews with the systematic profiteer of this works ideology: the Pope” (translated and quoted in Bachman, “The Anti-Judaic Moment in the ‘Pauline’ Doctrine of Justification,” 23). For an analysis of the Reformation’s re-weaponization of *contra Iudaeos* rhetoric against Catholicism, and the ways that these contestations (“Jews” coding for “Catholics”) still shape current NT scholarship, see Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 34, 43–45, 83, and *passim*. Smith’s insights have not aged.
- 13 I retired from the Jesus Wars long ago, but still recall Dom Crossan’s claim that an anti-sacerdotal, anti-ritual Jesus navigated his mission by the universalist principles of Gal 3:28: John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991), 263. For two Jewish productions of the Protestant Paul,

within the New Testament scholarly *imaginaire*, the generative social and religious contrast to and context of “Christian origins” is not “paganism” (about which I will shortly say more), but “Judaism” (about which I will shortly say more).¹⁴

Alliances to empirical criteria in order to validate truth-claims—the great contribution of the Renaissance to modern science—is another epistemological residuum of the sixteenth century’s Catholic/Protestant *agōn*. It has continued to complicate New Testament Studies’ reception of Schweitzer’s intellectual legacy. The prophecy that normal time would end in the mid-first century has been irrefutably disconfirmed.¹⁵ Time’s *force majeure* has thus problematized Jesus’ and Paul’s apocalyptic message. But their prophecy’s disconfirmation serves neither as evidence nor as argument against Schweitzer’s proposal that the impending kingdom was, indeed, what both men proclaimed. On the contrary, Schweitzer’s appeals to apocalyptic eschatology has extraordinary explanatory purchase and descriptive power. As such, his work represents a premier contribution to New Testament historiography.

see Alan F. Segal, *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990) and Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994). Modern Jewish identity formation, as well as an academic orientation within traditional Protestant New Testament scholarship, also shapes the work of both of these authors. “Christianity,” as represented by their respective reconstructions, was always other than “Judaism,” the separation *ab origine* in Paul’s own letters.

- 14 On first-century “Jews” coding for sixteenth-century Catholics, see above n. 12. The moral and religious valence of such rhetorical “Jews” (conceived of and presented as historical Jews) varies according to the needs of the particular scholarly argument. “Jews” are “good” when they exemplify “strict monotheism,” for example, but “bad” when they exemplify rigid attachments to ethnic practices, or an (excessively “monotheistic”?) inability to accommodate early very high Christology. On these various deployments of “Jews” in current NT scholarship, see my 2020 Shaffer Lectures for Yale University, “Christian Identity, Paul’s Letters, and ‘Thinking with Jews,’” <https://livestream.com/yaledivinityschool/events/9005063>.
- 15 Disconfirmed, though never discredited: Christian end-time prophecy, paradoxically long-lived, is perennially retrieved through reinterpretation. For Roman-period readjustments, see Paula Fredriksen, “Apocalypse and Redemption in Early Christianity: From John of Patmos to Augustine of Hippo,” *VC* 45 (1991): 151–83; for the period from antiquity through the Middle Ages, see Richard Landes, “Lest the Millennium be Fulfilled: Apocalyptic Expectations and the Pattern of Western Chronography 100–800CE,” in *The Use and Abuse of Eschatology in the Middle Ages*, ed. Werner Verbeke, Daniel Verhelst, and Andries Welkenhuysen (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1988), 137–211. Landes extends his analysis into the twentieth century in *Heaven on Earth: The Varieties of Millennial Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). On the mentality of end-time movements more generally,

1 *Ad fontes: Schweitzer*

The fact that even the second [Christian] generation does not know what to make of [Paul’s] teaching suggests the conjecture that he built his system upon a conviction which ruled only in the first generation. But what was it that disappeared out of the first Christian generation? What but the expectation of the immediate dawn of the messianic kingdom of Jesus?

Our second epigram comes from Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*.¹⁶ This work appeared only in 1930. But Schweitzer had laid the groundwork for this study much earlier, with the book that was originally conceived as its introduction, *Paul and His Interpreters* (1912). In that earlier essay, Schweitzer had famously stated, “For him [Paul], there was only one religion: that of Judaism. ‘Christianity’ is for Paul no new religion, but simply Judaism with the centre of gravity shifted in consequence of the new era,” a new era brought about through the death, resurrection, and impending Parousia of Jesus.¹⁷ In other words, *Mysticism* was largely conceived and composed within the same period as Schweitzer’s other seminal masterpiece, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (1906).¹⁸

As with Jesus, so with Paul: Schweitzer framed both figures within a radical Jewish eschatology, realistically conceived.¹⁹ Schweitzer insisted that the “kingdom” language both of the gospels and of the epistles was no excursion into metaphor: rather, to reconstruct either figure, these resolutely Jewish, eschatological ideas must be understood “in their historically conditioned form.”²⁰ “The Preaching of the Kingdom of God by Jesus was itself eschatological, and so it was understood by those who heard it. ... [I] assume the complete agreement of the teaching of Paul with that of Jesus.”²¹

see Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992). See also Dale C. Allison Jr., *Jesus of Nazareth: Millenarian Prophet* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991). Now, with the current COVID-19 crisis, millenarian prophecies are awash on the internet.

16 Albert Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of the Apostle Paul* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998 [orig. 1931]), 39.

17 Schweitzer, *Paul and His Interpreters* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1912), 237.

18 Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001 [orig. 1906]). For further historical and biographical context, see esp. James Carleton Paget, “Schweitzer and Paul,” *JSNT* 33 (2011): 223–56.

19 Schweitzer had Johannes Weiss’ pioneering work to draw on, *Jesus’ Proclamation of the Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971 [orig. 1892]).

20 Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of the Apostle Paul*, xxv.

21 Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of the Apostle Paul*, xxiv.

For this reason, Jesus plays a rather large cameo role in Schweitzer's later Pauline study. Both men, he says there, preach a kingdom composed of traditions evident in the earlier and later prophets, Enoch, Psalms of Solomon, and the Apocalypses of Baruch and Ezra, in Jesus' case leavened by his personal appropriation of Isaiah 53.²² Jesus' mission announces the coming of the messianic age; his resurrection in a sense at least partially achieves it. By conquering death, Jesus breaks the current dominion of cosmic angels and powers. In the period between Jesus' resurrection and his Parousia, Schweitzer states, "redemption was already coming into operation."²³

How then do we get from this Jewish Jesus, with his idiosyncratically Jewish message and his indisputably Jewish audience, to the diaspora figure of a Jewish, eschatological Paul bringing this news of the coming kingdom to pagans? Schweitzer posits prior Jewish missions run by the Pharisees, whose "vigorous missionary activity" Jesus had condemned.²⁴ Why? Because Jesus holds to the "universalism of the old eschatological expectation." Jesus' task is to go to Israel. God himself, Jesus thinks, will convert the nations. "To convert the heathen beforehand is to take into one's own hands what God has reserved for himself"; Jesus' "eschatological-expectation universalism forbids a mission among the Gentiles."²⁵

If this is the case, Schweitzer then asks, how was it that the gospel came to be preached to pagans at all? "How came this departure from [Jesus'] attitude?"²⁶ It "grew naturally," he opines, out of the prior Pharisaic Jewish mission. The Hellenists took the gospel to the gentiles, intending thereby to turn gentiles into Christian Jews. Paul the apostle, perhaps because he failed among Jews, then turned to gentiles who, he thought, would be redeemed as gentiles.²⁷ But all of these apostles, Schweitzer insists, whatever their policies with respect to integrating gentiles, worked within a very condensed time frame: the end would arrive soon.²⁸

Further, Schweitzer urged, all of Christ's apostles, Paul no less than his apostolic competition, continued as members of this movement to live according

22 Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of the Apostle Paul*, 54, 59.

23 Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of the Apostle Paul*, 64; cf. 70, 98–99. Unlike current advocates of "inaugurated eschatology," however, Schweitzer did not hold that these post-Resurrection communities thought that redemption's current (i.e., mid-first-century) unwinding pushed off its imminent culmination.

24 Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of the Apostle Paul*, 178; cf. Matt 23:15.

25 Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of the Apostle Paul*, 179, 180.

26 Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of the Apostle Paul*, 181.

27 Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of the Apostle Paul*, 181–82, 186.

28 "From his first letter to his last Paul's thought is always uniformly dominated by the expect-

to Jewish law.²⁹ Indeed, Paul’s dedication to his gentile mission was a function of his larger commitment to the impending redemption of all Israel. “It is to save *Israel* that Paul exercises his calling as Apostle of the Gentiles.”³⁰ And Schweitzer well captures the improvisational quality of the post-Easter mission: “The appearing of the future Messiah before the Messianic Age, his dying and rising again, nothing of which was foreseen in the traditional eschatology, gave a problematical character to the period between the resurrection of Jesus and his return.”³¹ Nonetheless, the apostles did not spiritualize this eschatology, Schweitzer insisted. They intensified it.³² The apocalyptic message proclaimed by Jesus, signaled by and through his resurrection, embraced by ex-pagan gentiles, would be achieved through Christ’s Parousia, they were convinced, within the lifetime of their own generation—history’s *last* generation.

The vigor and clarity of Schweitzer’s argument are undiminished, though not all of its particular explanatory elements have endured a century of further scholarship. Scholars, now, who try to fill in the gaps in our knowledge of Paul’s life will generally (though not universally) handle Acts more critically than Schweitzer did, then. And a key presupposition in Schweitzer’s explanation for the Christ-movements’ eventual outreach to pagans has not stood the test of time: few historians now construe Roman-period Judaism as a missionary religion.³³ “That the Law comes to an end when the Messianic reign begins” is *not* “for Jewish thought self-evident,” as Schweitzer claimed.³⁴ “Mysticism” has proved cumbersome as a term of historical analysis.³⁵

And over the course of the past century, the tenor of historical reconstruction has changed. When accounting for his ancient actors, for example, Schweitzer often scripts them, quite literally: it is their own understanding of certain key texts that provides their reasons for doing what (Schweitzer

tation of the immediate return of Jesus”; “If Paul’s thought underwent a development it certainly did not consist in a slackening of his eschatological expectation as time went on.” See Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of the Apostle Paul*, 52, 54.

29 Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of the Apostle Paul*, 187, 190.

30 Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of the Apostle Paul*, 184; cf. 186.

31 Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of the Apostle Paul*, 98.

32 Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of the Apostle Paul*, 99.

33 See Martin Goodman, *Mission or Conversion? Proselytizing in the Religious History of the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994); more recently, Paula Fredriksen, *Paul: The Pagans’ Apostle* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 69–73, also *infra* 316, s.v. “missions.”

34 Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of the Apostle Paul*, 69, unfootnoted.

35 That “mysticism” is a problematic term for understanding Paul emerged in the course of a panel on Schweitzer at the SBL Annual Meeting in Denver, 2014; participants included Terence Donaldson, Adela Yarbro Collins, Kathy Ehrensberger, and me.

thinks that) they did. Schweitzer's Jesus seeks his own death because he read Isaiah 53. And Paul himself understands Jesus' death in light of Isaiah 53, though Paul does not bother to mention this because it is so self-evident.³⁶ Many of Schweitzer's ancient actors walk around with a lot of both volumes of Charlesworth in their heads. Most scholars, now, would hesitate to impute to hypothesized ancient textual exegesis as much social traction as Schweitzer did.

And yet, if we take a step back from the text-specific details of his reconstruction, it is clear that Schweitzer put his finger on a crucial historical problem, one whose very obviousness makes it harder to see. Why did these messiah-minded Jews ever leave Jerusalem, taking their urgent apocalyptic message out into the synagogue communities of the Greco-Roman city? And how, once there, did they come to involve and to incorporate interested pagans? In other words, how did the apocalyptic convictions of the first generation of the Jesus-movement(s), pre-crucifixion and (even more) thereafter, eventuate in "the origins of Christianity"? In pursuit of this question, we turn now to the work of Dale Allison.

2 Allison and Apocalyptic

The time scheme ... for a messianic movement has but a single date: now.³⁷

Constructing Jesus: Memory, Imagination, and History attains what should not have been possible for so prolific a scholar. Allison not only parsimoniously assembles the vast erudition offered in his three prior books (and innumerable scholarly articles) on the historical Jesus.³⁸ He also conceives, shapes, and shares new ideas. The volume measures the movement of historical Jesus research over the past century-plus since Schweitzer's *Quest* changed (or should have changed) the field.³⁹ Hermeneutically sophisticated, bibliograph-

36 Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of the Apostle Paul*, 63.

37 Dale C. Allison Jr., *Constructing Jesus: Memory, Imagination, and History* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 31, quoting Harris Lenowitz.

38 I.e., Allison, *Jesus of Nazareth*; Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus: The Earliest Christian Tradition and Its Interpreters* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005); Allison, *The Historical Christ and the Theological Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).

39 Allison develops Schweitzer's intellectual legacy *passim*; but see esp. *Constructing Jesus*, 31–104 and 221–304. I too stand in this academic stemma; Allison's notes, *infra*, signal where our respective reconstructions agree and disagree. Cf. Paula Fredriksen, *Jesus of*

ically omnivorous, critically engaged with current extra-disciplinary methods: *Constructing Jesus* does what great books do. It locates us generatively in our field. Directing our gaze backward, Allison surveys the landscape of our academic past, so that we can see the various roads that scholars have traveled by. And he leaves us facing forward, new questions and problems emergent, toward the scholarly future that *Constructing Jesus* will help to form. Before I go any further: Thank you, Dale, for this book.

One of Allison’s many accomplishments in this work is his interdisciplinary enrichment of Schweitzer’s insights into Jewish apocalyptic hopes.⁴⁰ His survey of gospel materials lays out a “catalog” of apocalyptic logia attributed to Jesus, which he situates within an interpretive context of other ancient Jewish materials (including letters from or attributed to Paul).⁴¹ A narrative arc organizes the details: prophecies of the imminent kingdom align the messages of John the Immerser, Jesus, and Paul.⁴² What galvanized the prophecy in ways peculiar to the Jesus-movement—or, rather, to the Jesus-movements, whose variety is already visible in our earliest stratum of evidence, Paul’s letters—was his followers’ conviction that “God raised Jesus from the dead.”⁴³ Thus Allison:

Easter faith may have been born after the crucifixion, but it was conceived before. Schweitzer saw the truth: the “resurrection experiences” are “intelligible” only if they were “based upon the expectation of the resurrection, and this again as based on references of Jesus to the resurrection.” Without antecedent expectation of the imminent resurrection of the dead in general, there would have been no proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus in particular.⁴⁴

Nazareth, King of the Jews (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000); more recently, Fredriksen, *When Christians Were Jews* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 7–73, on Jesus, with benefit of Allison’s 2010 publication.

40 In this effort, of course, Allison has an advantage that Schweitzer did not: the institutional and intellectual development of religious studies within the context of liberal arts, independent of theological seminaries and faculties of divinity. Cultural anthropology, social psychology, comparative millenarianism (from Melanesian cargo cults to Hasidic subcultures in Brooklyn) now take their place alongside of biblical exegesis when framing the academic study of Christian origins, as does (or should) work in epigraphy, archaeology, Jewish Studies, Classics, and Roman social history and religion.

41 Allison, *Constructing Jesus*, 32–85.

42 Allison, *Constructing Jesus*, 48–55.

43 Allison, *Constructing Jesus*, 55–59.

44 Allison, *Constructing Jesus*, 59, citing n. 129 to Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 343.

In dispute, for current scholarship, is not the claim that (some of) Jesus' earliest followers thought that he had been raised from the dead. It is, rather, that this conviction came embedded within a vivid expectation of the end. On this point, in support of the argument advanced by Allison above, our earliest evidence, Paul's letters, is decisive. Jesus had an inner core of twelve followers, a number that recalled the plenum of Israel, itself an eschatological idea (1 Cor 15:5, cf. Rom 11:26, referencing the eschatological plenum of twelve tribes).⁴⁵ The earliest post-crucifixion community, originally in Jerusalem for the Passover pilgrimage holiday, (re)assembled in the city and stayed there (cf. Gal 1:17, 2:1), and it was in Jerusalem, specifically from the Temple Mount, that Paul expected the returning Christ to manifest (Rom 11:25–26).⁴⁶ The community's expectation of a messianic, eschatological finale, in other words, alone accounts for its relocation and continued residence in the holy city.⁴⁷ And, even decades after "Easter faith," Paul construes Jesus' resurrection as the first of a universal, eschatological series of pneumatic transformations, which he himself expects to live to undergo (e.g., 1 Cor 15:20, 52; cf. 7:6, 29, 10:11; 1 Thess 4:15–18; Phil 3:20–21, 4:5; Rom 13:11–12, 16:20).

Ἀλλὰ ἐρεῖ τις, Paul is not Jesus. Paul's conviction that the end was nigh does not of necessity entail that Jesus taught the same thing. The "Christ event" might have spurred Jesus' earliest followers to think (clearly incorrectly) that the kingdom approached. Hearing this belief expressed by those whom he "persecuted" (in Damascus? Gal 1:13, 17), then subsequently receiving his own Christophany, Paul may have drawn the same incorrect inference, namely, that Christ's resurrection signaled the general one, thus the impending end (e.g., 1 Cor 15 *passim*). Such a reconstruction indeed firewalls Jesus of Nazareth from eschatological error, imputing temporal miscalculation to the post-crucifixion community instead. Later gospel traditions, incorporating this misapprehension, then wrongly ascribed apocalyptic teachings to their messianic protagonist. Possible? Yes. History is radically contingent. But this argument, while protecting the historical Jesus from error, comes at a very high cost. It cuts him off from our earliest evidence about him, rendering it fundamentally irrelevant to historical work.⁴⁸

45 Cf. Allison, *Constructing Jesus*, 67–76, 232–33.

46 Allison, *Constructing Jesus*, 50–51.

47 Even once the ethnic, thus religious context of our ancient sources shifts, Jerusalem remains prime eschatological real estate: see, e.g., Justin, *Dial.* 80–81; Irenaeus, *Haer.* 5:35; cf. Origen, *Princ.* 4.3.8. As with late Second Temple Jewish apocalyptic traditions, so for later (and current) gentile Christian ones, the kingdom launches from Jerusalem.

48 The Jesus Seminar, untroubled by theological concerns about inerrancy, likewise disconnected Jesus of Nazareth from apocalyptic prophecy, retrieving him as a wandering sage

What happens if we instead posit vital connections between the mission of Jesus and the post-crucifixion missions in his name? “When we imagine that Christianity’s missionary impulse was not born solely of post-Easter circumstances and that Jesus was not alone in broadcasting his message, what follows?”⁴⁹ We can posit a less crepuscular causality for this *particular* movement, one that accounts for its urgency, for its mutagenic intensity, and for the profile of its social activities, which bridged the Jewish/pagan “divide” (such as it was: more below).

This last unquestioned and unquestionable fact—that the early post-crucifixion Jesus-movement(s) also accommodated non-Jews, who up to that point had been worshipping their own gods—drives us back to Jewish apocalyptic eschatology, construed realistically, as Schweitzer and Allison have insisted. Various Jewish and Samaritan prophets and charismatic figures, Josephus tells us, appeared and mobilized followings in the decades between Herod the Great and the Roman destruction of Jerusalem.⁵⁰ Within these Jewish territories, Jesus proclaimed his message of the coming kingdom to fellow Jews. His post-Easter community gathered in Jerusalem and waited. Eventually, the kingdom’s delay propelled them to continue Jesus’ mission to Israel, now outside of the holy city. By the early 30s, the good news had reached Damascus. And by mid-century, in the cities of the diaspora, Paul—and others—took the message of the coming kingdom and its messiah to pagans as well as to Jews. How does thinking with Jewish apocalyptic traditions help us to connect these facts, and to understand their dynamics? Why, mid-century, when the kingdom is already late, do Paul and his generational cohort still proclaim the messianic “Now”?⁵¹

To chart our way through these questions, we need to be critically self-aware in our use of our standard categories: “Jewish apocalyptic eschatology,” “Judaism,” “paganism,” and, of course, finally, “Christianity.” “Apocalyptic escha-

or wisdom teacher wrongly rendered apocalyptic by later tradition; cf. Allison’s remarks, *Constructing Jesus*, 46–49.

49 Allison, *Constructing Jesus*, 26.

50 Josephus, *Ant.* 17 narrates some of this turmoil. See esp. the sharp analysis of Matthew V. Novenson, *The Grammar of Messianism: An Ancient Jewish Political Idiom and Its Users* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); more briefly, see Fredriksen, *When Christians Were Jews*, 172–78.

51 Fredriksen, *When Christians Were Jews*, 74–143, attempts one reconstruction of this moment of the movement. What follows in the present essay are further thoughts on this nexus of historical issues and apocalyptic eschatology, helped immeasurably by questions put to me by Jennifer Eyl, Brent Nongbri, Troels Engberg-Pederson, and Eric Barreto, curated by Matthew Thiessen, for an online symposium on *Paul: The Pagans’ Apostle* at <https://syndicate.network/symposia/theology/paul-the-pagans-apostle/>.

tology” is *not* a doctrine with a punch list of points, seven of which or ten of which have to be present in a given text before scholars consent to confer the designation. It is, rather, our heuristic, shorthand term for a baggy and uncoordinated assortment of expectations, predictions, resentments, compensatory visions, and hopes. Certain themes course through Jewish prophetic traditions (Micah, Isaiah, Tobit, various Dead Sea Scrolls, and so on), and they appear in various combinations. “Messiah” is more often absent than present. The ingathering of Israel and the turning of the nations to Israel’s god are two strong themes; eventually, too, ideas about redemption as life after death *qua* resurrection (itself variously defined). The distinguishing difference between these prophecies about an idealized future (“Jewish restoration theology,” as Sanders suggested)⁵² and “Jewish apocalyptic eschatology” as defined here, is urgency: the *time frame* of these prophecies has shifted from “on that day” to *soon*—and, in the case of the first generation of the Jesus-movement(s), to *now*.

I lack sufficient evidence to conjecture why John the Immerser and, following him, Jesus of Nazareth thought that God’s kingdom was at hand.⁵³ I do know that an astonishingly strong trust (אמונה; πίστις) in this prophecy enabled some of Jesus’ followers not only to *experience* Jesus as raised, but also to *interpret* that experience: it validated their confidence in his prophecy. Paul, some quarter-century later, and to significantly different auditors, still broadcast the same message: The kingdom is *at hand*.

Why *not* interpret this tangle of traditions, preserved in New Testament texts, as metaphors encoding (later) Christian theological ideas? Precisely because of the actual social behavior of this generation. These Jews continued Jesus’ mission to Israel after his death. To do so, they eventually moved out from Jerusalem. Once in mixed-ethnic cities—Jaffa, Caesarea, Damascus, Antioch—they also accommodated sympathetic pagans. And (another crucial datum) they did so while insisting that these pagans eschew their own gods and make an exclusive commitment to Israel’s god.

Schweitzer had explained this ethnic segue by positing earlier Jewish (Pharisaic) missions to turn gentiles into Jews. But such missions never existed. It was the Christ-movements of the first generation that brought them into existence, again out of apocalyptic convictions. How did this happen and why?

52 E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (London: SCM, 1985), 61–120.

53 James G. Crossley, *Jesus and the Chaos of History: Redirecting the Life of the Historical Jesus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) frames the question socioeconomically, in terms of alienation of land. It’s an intriguing proposal: see the discussion at <https://syndicate.network/symposia/theology/jesus-and-the-chaos-of-history/>.

Here we must pause again to consider how we as historians deploy two other categories that we rely on: “Judaism” and “paganism.” These too are etic abstractions. Like “Jewish apocalyptic eschatology,” “Judaism” and “paganism” are *our* heuristically convenient labels.⁵⁴ Roman-period Jews were an ethnic archipelago, unevenly distributed across the Empire and beyond, varying locally according to class, clan, and culture,⁵⁵ varying trans-locally even more. (Jesus and Paul, remember, did not even access scripture in the same language.) Ancestral customs, many concentrated on and around their one particular god (and, occasionally, on his divine assistants),⁵⁶ were variously communicated and enacted by people who thought of themselves and were thought of by others as Ἰουδαῖοι, a biological-historical συγγενῆς (Rom 9:3). The *-ism* of “Judaism” implies broad, abstract and articulated trans-local ideological consensus, but in point of fact—then as now—vigorously various *enactments* of Jewishness prevailed.⁵⁷

“Paganism” likewise embodied a huge variety of ancestral customs, traditions, texts, behaviors, and beliefs. Here, classicists, epigraphists, and historians of ancient Mediterranean religions other than Judaism have been truer to their topic than Jewish Studies and New Testament scholars have been to theirs. “What non-Jews did when attempting to beneficently align heaven and earth” is one functional definition of “paganism.” Philosophical (thus, pagan) divinity—the god(s) of a tiny educated minority—was radically transcendent.

54 “Gentile” seems a religiously neutral ethnic designation: the person in question is not a Jew. “Pagan” is a religion-specific designation, and a fourth-century CE gentile Christian neologism to designate traditional, indigenous Mediterranean cults and traditions. Behind both English words is the single Greek term *ἔθνη*. In Jesus and Paul’s generation, there was no such thing as a religiously neutral ethnicity: gods and humans came bundled together in family groups, sharing *συγγένεια*, bound together (for many peoples, with divine-human biological lineages) through inherited ancestral practices that expressed protocols for and obligations to their particular pantheons. For this reason, I use the fourth-century term for these first-century people. Further on this idea, see Fredriksen, *Paul*, 34 and *passim*.

55 And even within the same class, culture, and ethno-religion, as Philo’s debate with other Alexandrian Jewish allegorizers evinces, important and principled differences of interpretation and practice could obtain, *Migr.* 16.86–93.

56 See Loren T. Stuckenbruck, *Angel Veneration and Christology: A Study in Early Judaism and in the Christology of the Apocalypse of John*, WUNT 2/70 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995); also Stuckenbruck, “‘Angels’ and ‘God’: Exploring the Limits of Early Jewish Monotheism,” in *Early Jewish and Christian Monotheism*, ed. Loren T. Stuckenbruck and Wendy E. S. North, LNTS 263 (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 45–70.

57 On the homogenizing effect that rabbinic literature has exerted on Jewish historiography, see Ross S. Kraemer, *The Mediterranean Diaspora in Late Antiquity: What Christianity Cost the Jews* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 1–42.

Normative native divinity was profoundly local and ethnic. (Israel's god, interestingly, was both.)⁵⁸ "Gods, like men, live in a social context,"⁵⁹ which in the early Empire particularly meant in Mediterranean cities, where most Greek-speaking Jews were as well. Diaspora Jews thus lived with pagan gods as well as with pagan humans, and successfully managed their relationships with both populations. And urban pagans, should they so choose, could drop by and into local Jewish communities (let's use "synagogues" for heuristic convenience), just as they could also visit with the Jewish god and his people in the temple's precincts.⁶⁰

Looking at "Judaism" and at "paganism" as mutually exclusive "religions" obscures this picture.⁶¹ A cascade of later, doctrinally Christian interpretive instincts intrudes. Since "Judaism" was "monotheistic," Jews did not believe in the existence of other gods (so go these arguments); since "pagans" were "polytheists," Jews thought that they were "impure," and avoided close contacts with them.⁶² And the goal or purpose of "religion" ends up being about "salvation," defined as what happens after death. This description perforce ignores not only the wealth of archaeological and inscriptional evidence that we have for close and comfortable pagan/Jewish interactions both within specifically Jewish institutions (Jerusalem's temple; diaspora synagogues) and within specifically pagan ones (the city foremost, where Jews were citizens, ephebes, town councilors, members of trade associations, actors, and athletes).⁶³ It also ignores

58 On which, see Paula Fredriksen, "How Jewish is God? Divine Ethnicity in Paul's Theology," *JBL* 137 (2018): 193–212.

59 Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986), 46.

60 On this normal Mediterranean mixing, and diaspora Jews' embeddedness in broader pagan culture, see Fredriksen, *Paul*, 32–60.

61 On which, see esp. Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), and, on how an emphasis on "salvation" disrupts our reconstruction of ancient behaviors, Nongbri, "The Concept of Religion and the Study of the Apostle Paul," *JJMJS* 2 (2015): 1–26.

62 Happily, the Mishnah preserves the story of Rabban Gamaliel at the Roman baths, 'Abod. Zar. 3.4. On the porosity of ethnic (thus, religious) boundaries in the early Roman city, and on the efforts even to conjure such boundaries, see Paula Fredriksen and Oded Irshai, "'Include Me Out': Tertullian, the Rabbis, and the Graeco-Roman City," in *Identité à travers l'éthique: Nouvelles perspectives sur la formation des identités collectives dans le monde gréco-romain*, ed. Katell Berthelot, Ron Naiweld, and Daniel Stoekl ben Ezra, *BEHER* 168 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 117–32.

63 For a review of the inscriptional evidence, see Irina Levinskaya, *The Book of Acts in Its Diaspora Setting*, *BAFCS* 5 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 51–82; see also the discussion in Pieter van der Horst's excellent *Saxa iudaica loquuntur: Lessons from Early Jewish Inscriptions* (Brill: Leiden, 2014).

plain statements in our earliest New Testament texts, where pagan gods play important roles both in Paul’s paraenetic teachings and in his Christology.⁶⁴

It was the diaspora synagogue that incubated the Jesus-movement abroad. It was there that apostolic outreach to fellow Jews eventually included pagans: these synagogue pagans, aurally familiar to some degree with Jewish ideas (“David,” “Abraham,” “the Law,” “Israel,” “messiah,” “the writings”) and practices, were part of the apostles’ audiences. And they were there *qua* pagans, actively engaged with their own native gods while involved to some degree or other with the Jews’ god as well. (Magicians had professional reasons for wanting to do so; others were drawn by the biblical stories recounted weekly, in the vernacular; others by various Jewish customs and celebrations. Motivations doubtless varied.)⁶⁵ Jews had long before this period made their peace with other peoples’ worshipping other gods (though a vocal minority, well preserved in the biblical echo chamber whether Hebrew or Greek, condemned non-Jews for making images of their deities). Paganism, especially in the Diaspora, was *normal*. Most Jews most of the time had no problem with pagans being pagans—a point disapprovingly noted by later irate church fathers.⁶⁶

Paganism *was* a defining problem, however, in those prophetic texts that speculated about the end. In those traditions, idolaters are the objects of divine wrath. Or, they are at last rehabilitated, turning to the true god and smashing their idols. Sometimes, even their gods are rehabilitated, and bow down to Israel’s god as well.⁶⁷ (Paul voices all of these views; Jesus, confining himself to Jewish areas and Jewish audience, did not need to.)⁶⁸

New Testament scholarship’s Reformation inheritance, with its hostile rhetorical focus on “Judaism” (as Papal Rome’s proxy) has continued to shape his-

64 Construing Paul “within Judaism” has proved controversial; situating him “within paganism”—whose gods provide the returning Christ with his cosmic combatants—no less so; see Fredriksen, *Paul*, 137–41.

65 On the continuing “paganism” of such synagogue-affiliated outsiders, also known as “god-fearers,” see Paula Fredriksen, “If It Looks Like a Duck, and It Quacks Like a Duck ...: On Not Giving Up the Godfearers,” in *A Most Reliable Witness: Essays in Honor of Ross Shepard Kraemer*, ed. Susan Ashbrook Harvey et al., BJS 358 (Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Series, 2016), 25–34.

66 Deuteronomy 4:19 allots worship of celestial bodies, not of their images, to the nations; cf. Deut 32:8–9 NRSV. Tertullian, *Nat.* 1.13.3–4, Commodian, *Instructiones* 1.37.10, and Cyril of Alexandria, *De adoratione in spiritu et veritate* 3.92.3 all complain about synagogues’ accommodating interested pagans.

67 See Terence L. Donaldson, *Judaism and the Gentiles: Jewish Patterns of Universalism (to 135 CE)* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007).

68 See further Fredriksen, *Paul*, 131–66.

torical reconstructions of what would become, retrospectively, the first generation of “Christianity.” “Judaizing,” especially circumcising, continues to serve as the Christ-movements’ generative social and religious contrast. The movement’s actual larger context, pagans and their gods, becomes invisible. So too does the social novelty of this movement’s pagan outreach. Even in its Pauline iterations, this outreach enacted a radical form of *Judaizing*: pagans were to stop worshipping their own gods and worship, instead and exclusively, Israel’s god.

This radically Judaizing demand to pagans defined the Jesus-movements, Paul’s included, in the Diaspora. It is this demand that indexes these movements’ continuing certainty that the end was indeed at hand. The message disrupted the urban divine/human ecosystem, occasioning difficulties for host synagogue communities (which had made long-lived, commodious, and socially stable arrangements with majority culture), with Roman magistrates, with irate urban mobs, and with the lower gods themselves (cf. 1 Cor 11:25–27).⁶⁹ No matter: the movement’s time frame was *now*. Pagans turning to Israel’s god was another proof, for Christ’s apostles, that they knew the time on God’s clock. The end was precisely when such a turning—the universal acknowledgment of Israel’s god—was to occur. It was all occurring ἐν τάχει, νῦν (Rom 16:20, 26).

What happened (or should have happened) then? A universal transformation of the quick and the dead into σώματα πνευματικά. This transformation into spirit by spirit was already underway, says Paul, both for ex-pagan gentile communities and for certain chosen Jews—the present remnant (Rom 11:5), God’s Israel (Gal 6:16, meaning those Jews within the movement who agreed with Paul), and of course for Paul himself. What about everyone else? If most of Israel, ca. 57 CE, has not yet been immersed into Christ, how do *they* all get his πνεῦμα? If most of the seventy nations have not been so immersed, how will *they* get Christ’s πνεῦμα? And what about the dead (that’s a lot of people) who number among each group? I have no idea, since Paul does not say. What he *does* say is that all Israel will be secured (σωθήσεται) and that the fullness of the nations will “come in” (presumably, to the kingdom of Christ’s father; Rom 11:25–26).

Where then does everyone go? *Ad astra*. That’s where bodies of πνεῦμα belong. Paul says this pretty plainly.⁷⁰ Is his vision “Jewish” or “pagan”? From “Judaism” or from “Hellenism”? On this question, our etic, analytic categories must cede to the antiquity of our evidence. That evidence comes from the first

69 Fredriksen, *When Christians Were Jews*, 131–68.

70 As Matthew Thiessen has recently shown, *Paul and the Gentile Question* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), esp. 134–60.

century. Astral afterlife is a good, ancient, Mediterranean idea. And the ancient Mediterranean is where Paul and his Christ-infused contemporaries—his Jewish colleagues within the movement, his ex-pagan audiences within the cities of his apostolic ambit—happened to live.

If first-century Jewish apocalyptic eschatology is theologically unnerving, then astral soteriology is probably no less so. But problems that twenty-first-century persons have with first-century thoughts does not mean that first-century people did not think those thoughts. Antiquity remains intractably Other. What, then, does this mean for modern theology?

3 God and Time

To do history is not to do theology.

Dale Allison ends *Constructing Jesus* on this point, our final epigram.⁷¹ And he has elsewhere dealt with the modern theological implications of taking ancient history seriously, on its own terms.⁷² “Doing theology” as a constructive enterprise falls outside of my own academic competence: I am a historian of ancient Mediterranean peoples and of the ways that they managed relations with their gods. But I will close this essay with a concluding unscientific postscript, on history and on theology both.

Theology—even historically sensitive theology—ends by expressing the traditions of its author’s current, contemporary religious commitments and community.⁷³ And that community lives in the present. True, it draws on texts, Old Testament and New Testament, bequeathed by the past; it generates meaning through scriptural exegesis. Theology is *textual*.

But theology is itself also a kind of time machine. It updates these ancient texts, retrieving them from intellectual obscurity and ethical irrelevance, rendering them meaningful to the contemporary church.⁷⁴ Churches are in this sense transtemporal communities. From where they stand, now, they draw

⁷¹ Allison, *Constructing Jesus*, 462.

⁷² Allison, *Constructing Jesus*, 31; see also Allison, *The Historical Christ and the Theological Jesus*, 90–101.

⁷³ Much New Testament scholarship, conceived as “doing history,” expresses its authors’ contemporary religious commitments no less so.

⁷⁴ Or churches: Different Catholics will see something different in these texts than will different Protestants, Ethiopian Copts from Greek Orthodox from Nestorians. Different churches have different histories, different doctrines, different traditions of interpretation—and thus, in this way and in others, different Bibles as well.

their lines of descent backwards, through their canonical texts, authoritative teachers, and inherited doctrines, to their foundational figures—most especially, given the contours of canon, to the figures of Jesus and of Paul. Current identity is contiguous thanks to the ligature of theology. Theology inscribes identity.⁷⁵

History unsettles it. That is because, while biblical theology is primarily textual, history is *contextual*. Inscriptions, archaeological evidence, papyri, amulets, other contemporary writings of all sorts: these data points—not creeds, councils, and church doctrines—guide the critical reconstruction of the past. That historical construct presents us with a geocentric universe, structured and influenced by astral intelligences and nonhuman social agents. A world where all ancient persons, Jesus and Paul included, worshiped the divine with animal offerings. Where they struggled with δαιμόνια and with unclean spirits,⁷⁶ and fretted about male-gendered angels (1 Cor 11:10). Where “purity” and “impurity” were physical states as well as moral metaphors, and these states had cosmic consequences.

Thus, what an ancient text *meant* in its native temporal context cannot but be different from what it, within a current community, *means*.⁷⁷ If theology refamiliarizes Jesus and Paul, history defamiliarizes them—and should. This is because ancient people were not modern people, and they lived in a world utterly different from ours. As historians, our obligation is to make sense of them. If we take them seriously in their humanity—in our common humanity—we will acknowledge that they were as historically marked by their times as we are by ours. And Jewish apocalyptic eschatology, realistically conceived—as Schweitzer, Allison, and other historians have urged—is one of the temporal “markers” of Jesus and of Paul.

One last thought. A theological one. God, for Western monotheisms—Judaism, Christianity, Islam—is also historically conditioned.⁷⁸ That God speaks to

75 This identity-confirming and conferring function of theology is equally true for Jewish and Muslim communities: in any community concerned with “orthodoxy,” the foundational past is the measure of authenticity and legitimacy. For this reason, as I have written elsewhere, that past is too important to be allowed to exist: “Paul and Augustine: Conversion Narratives, Orthodox Traditions, and the Retrospective Self,” *JTS* 37 (1986): 3–34, here 34.

76 On which, see Jennifer Eyl, *Signs, Wonders, and Gifts: Divination in the Letters of Paul* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019); on Jesus as well as on Paul, see Giovanni B. Bazzana, *Having the Spirit of Christ: Spirit Possession and Exorcism in Early Christian Groups* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020).

77 On this distinction, see the seminal essay by Krister Stendahl, “Biblical Theology, Contemporary,” *IDB* 1:418–32.

78 I owe this theological formulation to Augustine. He was wrong to tell Jerome not to bother

us, muffled and imperfectly, through maddeningly interpretable, imperfectly transmitted, variably translated, inherited texts. Like us—the only beings made in the divine image—God too stands within a web of words. We share with the divine this condition of temporal contingency: our ideas about God are tempered by our times. We have no place or other dimension within which to encounter God. Human time, history, is where that encounter takes place.

Al tirah.

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re-translating the Old Testament from the Hebrew. (That was bad for party discipline, he argued; and besides, all human language is distorting, because it bridges eternity and time.) But he was right that sacred texts, issues of divine inspiration notwithstanding, are *eo ipso* historically conditioned, because they *are* texts. Further on this theological point: Paula Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews*, esp. 190–210; also my response to Eric Barreto at <https://syndicate.network/symposia/theology/paul-the-pagans-apostle/>.

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