

12 The Ebionite Records on the Trial of Paul

Historical Evidence for The Trial Spoken Of In Revelation 2:2

Apart from what we reviewed so far from the Bible, are there any historical records of a trial of Paul? Yes, indeed there are.

According to Eusebius (260-340 A.D.) and Epiphanius (315?-403 A.D.), there was an early Christian group known as the Ebionites. They made findings judicial in character about Paul's background. These findings claimed both of Paul's parents were Gentile. Further, they found Paul was not circumcised until he was an adult.¹ Obviously, the implication of these findings was that Paul lied when he made claims to the contrary. (See Philippians 3:5.)

When Eusebius mentioned the Ebionites' findings, he launched attacks on the Ebionites, challenging their orthodoxy. Eusebius charged the Ebionites were heretics. They supposedly did not believe in the virgin birth.² They also taught the Law had not been done away with. While it is likely true that the Ebionites believed Paul erred by abolishing the Law, the question of what they taught on the virgin birth account in Luke's Gospel may have been exaggerated or inaccurately portrayed. There are no clearly recognized writings of the Ebionites on these issues which actually have survived. Therefore, we cannot validate Eusebius' accusation. Nor did Eusebius quote any records of the Ebionites that

1. For the quote, see "The Ebionite Charge Against Paul" on page 306.

could substantiate the charges. Thus, these accusations merely serve as *ad hominem* which do not resolve the claims of Paul's truthfulness about his heritage, as we shall see.

Regardless, we are obliged to re-weigh the facts. First, Eusebius in particular appeared willing to exaggerate his attacks on the Ebionites. The reason was precisely because the Ebionites wanted Paul excluded from canon. Eusebius did not want Paul discredited. What was Eusebius' motivation in

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2. There is never any legitimate quote offered to prove the Ebionites denied the virgin birth. Rather, what is offered as proof by Eusebius is primarily an argument from *silence*. The original Ebionite version of the *Gospel of Matthew* in Hebrew was missing what we all today see as chapter one: the virgin birth narrative. From this absence, the charge was made that the Ebionites did not believe in a virgin birth. However, Jerome ca. 400 A.D. validated the Hebrew Matthew of the Ebionites. He cited several small variances from the Greek translation of the original Hebrew Matthew. None implied any unorthodox view. Thus, was the omission of the virgin birth narrative proof of heresy? No, because the same virgin-birth narrative is missing from Mark and John. Eusebius also tried to smear the Ebionites by claiming Symmachus, a Jewish scholar, was one of them. Symmachus disputed apparently the accuracy of the Greek Matthew's translation in Matthew chapter 1 of Isaiah 7:14 on the word *virgin*. Symmachus was correct. Therefore the fact this passage in Greek with its erroneous translation of Isaiah 7:14 is missing in the Hebrew Matthew actually heightens the validity of the Ebionite Matthew as more authentic. Regardless, Symmachus was never a Christian, and was anti-Matthew. He could not possibly be an Ebionite. The Ebionites were pro-Matthew. The impetus to bring exaggerated charges against the Ebionites was due to their position on Paul. There is no substantial evidence, pro or con, to support the Ebionites denied a virgin birth. Even if they did, because John, Mark and probably the original Matthew omit this story, how can it be a core doctrine of the church? How could denying the virgin birth make one a heretic? Jesus could still be from "everlasting" (Micah 5:2) if God occupied Jesus conceived by Mary and Joseph. In fact, one could make the case that the virgin birth account in Luke contradicts the prophecy that Jesus had to be of the lineage of David. (Jeremiah 23:6.) If there was a virgin birth, then Jesus would be, as the Epistle of Hebrews says, of the Order of Melchisedek, with no human father. How could an *adoption* by Joseph truly satisfy the prophecy of Jeremiah 23:6? This perhaps was the problem raised by the Ebionites with Luke's virgin birth account. We may never know for certain. Yet, if the Ebionites disputed the virgin birth, it could not possibly make them *real* heretics.

preventing Paul from being discredited? Was it to protect a true prophet or for political reasons? Eusebius was associated closely with Emperor Constantine. Eusebius was a promoter of the new-found powers of the bishop of Rome granted by Constantine's decrees. How would this potentially impact Eusebius' treatment of the Ebionites who attacked Paul?

The answer is obvious. After Peter founded the church of Rome and left, Paul arrived and appointed the first bishop of the church of Rome (Linus), according to *Constitution of the Apostles* (ca. 180-200 A.D.) at 7:46. That means Paul appointed the very first *pope* of Rome—although the name *pope* for the bishop of Rome was not yet in use. (Peter never apparently used the label *bishop* to identify his status at Rome.) Thus, the validity of the lineage of the Roman church depended crucially upon Paul. If Paul were discredited, it would discredit the Roman Catholic church virtually from inception.

Why No Other Ebionite Writings Survived

We do not know the Ebionites' true views because we cannot find the Ebionite works preserved in *any* library *anywhere*. Imperial Rome beginning with Theodosius' reign (379-395) outlawed any religion but that of the "bishops of Rome" (*Codex Theod.* XVI, I, 2). This was enforced by the destruction of both public and private libraries in Roman territories. If any heretical material was found, the owner suffered the death penalty. This suppression of historical works was interpreted broadly. For example, in 371, Emperor Valens ordered troops to remove from private homes at Antioch (Syria) works on liberal arts and the law, not just heretical works. "Discouraged and terrorized people all over the eastern provinces of the Empire, wishing to avoid any possible suspicion, began to burn their own libraries."³ This grew

worse under Theodosius. Then in 435 and 438, the emperors of Rome again commanded the public burning of unorthodox books throughout the empire.

So effective were these decrees, that there is not one single record written by an Ebionite that we can find preserved *anywhere* in *any* library. We know them only through the interpretation of their enemies. Our only records on the Ebionites' views are what Roman *government* authorities allowed to escape from the fire because the Ebionite's writings were quoted in the approved writings of Eusebius and Epiphanius.

Thus, it is not fair to judge the Ebionites solely from their enemies' writings. What Eusebius says needs to be taken with a grain of salt, particularly when bias can so easily enter and distort the analysis.

A Fortuitous Discovery of Ebionite Writings?

Or is that all that we now have from the Ebionites? Did the world recently discover a treasure trove of their writings from which we can objectively measure their orthodoxy? A good argument has been recently made by Professor Eisenman in *James: The Brother of Jesus* that we have recovered some of the Ebionites' writings among the Dead Sea Scrolls. How so?

Many of the sectarian works at the Dead Sea are written by a group who in Hebrew call themselves *the Ebyonim* or *Ebion—The Poor*. They even describe themselves as the “Congregation of the Poor.”⁴ The *Poor* of the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) claimed to be followers of “The Way,” part of “The New Covenant” who found the “Messiah” who is called

3. Clarence A. Forbes, “Books for the Burning,” *Transactions of the American Philological Society* 67 (1936) 114-25, at 125.

the “Prince of the Congregation” and “Teacher of Righteousness.” He is gone, killed at the urging of the priests at Jerusalem. After the departure of the Messiah (who will return), the temporal leader who led the *Poor* was called the *Just One*, *i.e.*, *Zaddik* in Hebrew.

Furthermore, their leader—the *Zaddik*—is in a struggle against the “Spouter of Lies” who seeks to seduce the New Covenant community from following the Law of Moses. The *Poor* (Ebion) reject the idea Habakkuk 2:4 means justification is by faith and insist its meaning is “justification by faithfulness.” The DSS Ebion have two works called “Justification by Works” which reaffirm their rejection of the position of the “Spouter of Lies.”

When we compare the Ebion of the Dead Sea Scrolls to what Eusebius describes as the Ebionites, the similarities are striking. The Christian sect of *Ebionites* seem to match the writings of the *Poor* (*Ebyonim*, *Ebion*) whose writings were found at the Dead Sea site of Qumram. These Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) reflect ideas and thoughts that are unmistakably *Christian*.⁵ The question is whether the writings of *The Poor* found at Qumram pre-date or post-date Christ.

Unfortunately, this cannot be done by carbon dating the papers found at the Dead Sea. Such dates only tell us the date of the age of the paper. Carbon dating can not tell us the date of the *writing* on the paper. Yet, we have other reliable means to identify the date of the *activity* of the people whose writings were preserved at Qumram. Fifty-seven to sixty-nine percent of all the coins in the Dead Sea caves are from the

4. The *Dead Sea Scrolls* identify the community as *The Poor* of Psalm 37 where “the **congregation of the Poor**...shall possess the whole world as an inheritance.” (Psalm 37 in *Dead Sea Scrolls* Peshar 3:10.) Their self-identification is evident repeatedly in the *Habakkuk Peshar*. The Wicked Priest who killed the *Zaddik* will be “paid back in full for his wickedness against the ‘Poor’ (Hebrew, *ebyonim*).” (Norman Golb, *Who Wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls?*(1995) at 85.) The verbatim original was: “The Lord will render destructive judgment [on that Wicked Priest] just as he plotted to destroy the Poor.” (1QpHab 12.2.)

period 44-69 A.D.—part of the Christian era. Thus, the only way to know whether Christians or non-Christians wrote these writings is to study the words on the pages of the DSS.

Professor Eisenman finds significant proof the Dead Sea *Ebyonim* is a Christian group. For example, in the DSS, the temporal ruler of the *Ebion* who succeeds the killed Messiah (who will return) is called the *Zaddik*. Numerous ancient sources outside the DSS identify James the Just (the brother of Jesus) as *The Zaddik*. Translated, this means *Just One*. Jerome by the 400s will call him *James the Just*. In Christian writings of that era, the name of James was rarely used. He was merely called *the Zaddik* or *Just One*.⁶ As we saw previously, James—the *Zaddik*—was the first bishop of Jerusalem after Jesus' resurrection.⁷

So is it then mere coincidence that the head of the Ebion of the Dead Sea Scrolls is called the *Zaddik*? Of course not. Professor Eisenman appears to have stumbled upon a major discovery.

If Professor Eisenman is correct, this means the *Ebionites* in Eusebius' writings are *the Jerusalem Church under James*. What Professor Eisenman then notes to corroborate this idea is that Paul refers twice to sending money to

5. For example, in the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) there is the uncanny debate over justification by works vs. faith, centering upon a discordant view of Habakkuk 2:4. The DSS writings advocate justification by works. Their "enemy" is one who espouses that the Law is no longer to be followed. "A similar vocabulary of justification was used by the [DSS]...[Paul's] invective in 2 Cor. 6:14 has close affinities with the [DSS] polemic." (Alan F. Segal, *Paul the Convert* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990) at 174.) Segal goes on to explain: "Paul reads Habbakuk as contradicting the notion that Torah justifies. In the [DSS] the same verse was used to prove that those who observe the Torah...will be saved." *Id.*, at 180. The DSS thus mirror uncannily the Paul v. James debate.

6. "James's title was 'the Just' or 'the Just One, which Epiphanius tells us was so identified with this person as to replace his very name itself." (Eisenman, *James: The Brother of Jesus*, *supra*, at 375.)

7. See "James Is the Head Bishop of the Church" on page 242.

the poor at Jerusalem. Eisenman says this just as easily could be *The Poor*. (Rom. 15:26; Gal. 2:9-10.) If we translate back Paul's words into Hebrew, he was saying *The Ebion* of Jerusalem was the name of the church under James. They were the *Congregation of the Poor*, just like we might call a church *The Lighthouse Church*. We do not see Paul's intent due to case size in the standard text which changes *The Poor* into *the poor*.⁸

What heightens the probability Professor Eisenman is correct is recent archaeology. The initial hypothesis was that the DSS were exclusively the writings of an Essene sect from the 200 B.C. era. This idea recently crumbled in 2004. Golb's contrary hypothesis that the DSS came from the Temple at Jerusalem between 65-70 A.D. has now been strongly confirmed by extensive archaeological digs under auspices of Israeli universities. These digs proved there was no community site of monks at Qumram. It was a clay plate factory. The initial inference of a large community of monks from the presence of a large number of plates misinterpreted the evidence. Second, we can now infer the scrolls were hidden in the mountains to protect the scrolls, and not because a large community had been involved in copying activity. In fact, archaeology now proves there was no copy center or Scriptorium, as originally claimed. None of the metal clips copyists use to guide copying were found at Qumram. A few ordinary pens and numerous coins were found. Yet, no metal clips of copyists. Not even a fragment of one!

The very nature of the scrolls likewise demonstrate that no monkish community was engaged in copying them. The Dead Sea Scrolls, it turns out, are not only an eclectic collection of sectarian materials but also a cache with numerous copies of the Bible texts. This is just what one would expect to find from the Temple Library at Jerusalem had it been secreted away in advance of the Roman troops sieging Jerusalem prior to 70 A.D. The Essenes would not be

8. Eisenman, *James the Brother of Jesus* (Penguin: 1998) at 156.

expected, by contrast, to preserve several opposing strains of sectarian writings. One such strain is the writings of *The Poor—The Ebion*. On the other hand, we would expect to find Jewish Rabbis at Jerusalem wanting to keep copies of Christian writings for informational purposes at the Library of the Temple of Jerusalem. We would expect to find records of sectarian differences maintained by such a library.

Golb's argument has now essentially been vindicated. Golb made a scholarly case that the DSS are writings that were taken from the Temple at Jerusalem during the years of the Roman siege that finally prevailed in 70 A.D. Hiding them in these caves preserved them from the torches which in the end destroyed the Temple in 70 A.D. after a long siege.⁹

Thus, recent archaeological discoveries at Qumram establish that many of the documents can be potentially prepared in the Christian-era. We no longer are forced to disregard the Christian character of certain writings merely because of the Essene hypothesis which strangled DSS studies until now. Among the newer writings in the DSS, we find some in Hebrew written by a group calling itself *The Poor—The Ebion*. This transliterates very well as *The Ebionites*.¹⁰

9. Norman Golb, *Who Wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls* (N.Y.: Scribner, 1995) at 11, 12, 30, 36. See also the archaeological report of 2004 by Magen & Peleg that destroyed many myths about Qumram, proving it was not an Essene settlement. See, AP 8/18/04; *S.F. Chronicle* (9/6/04); *Ha'aretz* (Israel), July 30, 2004. Finally, this story is now being carried in mainstream publications. See Carmichael, "Archaeology: Question in Qumram," *Newsweek* (Sept. 6, 2005), available at <http://msnbc.msn.com/id/5842298/site/newsweek>. *Newsweek* mentions that "Magen & Peleg set off what can only be called an academic revolution" which now corroborates "Norman Golb" who first argued what Magen & Peleg now confirm. See also, "The Dead Sea Scrolls," <http://virtualreligion.net/iho/dss.html> ("After 10 years of excavation Magen & Peleg conclude that the settlement at Qumran could not have been a monastery, but rather was a pottery factory which was vacated by its few inhabitants during the Jewish-Roman war.")

Do The Dead Sea Scrolls Depict A Trial of Paul?

What is highly intriguing is a further theory of Professor Eisenman about Paul. He claims the *Poor*'s writings in the DSS speak of a trial of Paul. He says James is depicted as Paul's key antagonist in a heated confrontation where Paul spoke vigorously against James. Paul's effort was viewed as an attempt to split the group. Eisenman bases this on two DSS writings. The first is the *Habakkuk Pesher*, a commentary on Habakkuk 2:4—a favorite verse of Paul. The DSS author interprets the verse, however, to require faithfulness for salvation. The *Pesher* then rejects the idea that justification is without adding works to faith.

Professor Eisenman sensibly asks us how can we credibly believe this *Pesher* on Habakkuk 2:4 is directed at anyone else than Paul. As we shall see next, the DSS *Poor* are up in arms about “the spouter of Lies” who opposes the *Zaddik*. Are we to believe it is merely coincidence again the *Ebion* of the DSS just so happen to want to show Habakkuk 2:4—one of Paul's favorite proof texts—does not stand for an idea that Paul alone is known to have espoused? Eisenman concludes we are clearly witnessing *deconstruction* of Paul's doctrines in the DSS *Ebion*-ite materials.

It is the next document found among the Dead Sea Scrolls which is the key document to identify Paul as the object of a trial by the *Poor* (*Ebyonim*) of the DSS. This faith-works discussion of the *Habakkuk Pesher* continues in a

10.Scholars other than Eisenman are beginning to realize the Dead Sea Scrolls which were written by the *Ebion* are potentially related to the group known as the *Ebionites* in Eusebius' writings. See, e.g., the University of Pennsylvania DSS conference of October 19, 2004 which mentions the Pesharim document from Cave 1, stating: “Column 12 raises the question as to whether the DSS community referred to itself as ‘the Poor.’ ***This could be important for early Christian studies, since...the Ebionites (Hebrew for ‘poor’) was a name used by Jewish Christians later on.***” <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/rs/rak/courses/427/minutes04.htm> (last visited 2005).

work by *The Poor* entitled the *Damascus Document*. It says the contrary view on “works” justification is held by the “Spouter of Lies” who resists the “Zaddik.” The “Spouter of Lies” seeks to have the “Congregation of the New Covenant” depart from the Law. A heated public confrontation occurs between the *Zaddik* and the *Spouter of Lies*. You can find this *Damascus Document* in any of the many compendiums of the DSS to verify this yourself.

Professor Eisenman claims this *Damascus Document* is too uncanny a reference to Paul and James to claim it reflects a pre-Christian debate. It appears Professor Eisenman has the better case on this point as well. The DSS scholars who initially dominated the field tried to maintain this Damascus Document is a pre-Christian document. They did so to serve their now discredited all-encompassing Essene theory.¹¹ They ignored the contrary internal evidence in the Damascus Document. This is one of the very few DSS documents that was found *long before* the 1950s and outside the Dead Sea area. When the Damascus Document was originally found in Egypt in the 1890s, its contents led pre-eminent historians to regard it as a Christian writing. George Margoliouth of the British Museum said in 1910 and 1911 that the Damascus Document was written around the time of the destruction of the Second Temple (*i.e.*, 70 A.D.), and was the work of the “Sadducean Christians of Damascus.”¹²

11. The traditional Essene theory is that *every writing*, even copies of the Bible, were all made by an Essene community living at Qumram. The new approach, based on archaeology and textual evidence, does not deny that *some* writings were Essene *possibly*, even if such a claim is purely speculative. (The word *Essene* never once appears in the DSS.) The real mystery is how all these writings, reflecting *divergent views*, all appear at Qumram. Golb’s theory is the one that best fits all the facts. It is the only explanation for *divergent views* in the DSS. The Essene *all-encompassing* theory needs serious re-evaluation.

12. G. Margoliouth, “The Sadducean Christians of Damascus,” *The Athenaeum* (No. 4335) (Nov. 26, 1910) at 657-59; *The Expositor* Vol. 2 (1911) at 499-517.

Margoliouth's opinion was given long before the DSS discovery at Qumran in the 1950s. It antedated by forty years the premature fixation on Essenes of 200 B.C. as the authors of the Damascus Document. This fact proves an objective assessment of the Damascus Document would lead to a different result. One would conclude objectively it is a work of Christians known as *The Poor* who were zealous for the Law (*Zadokites=Sadducean*).

We can also see this for ourselves. The Damascus Document identifies the community as *The Poor* or *Ebion* in Hebrew. They followed the *Zaddik*, a label which independent and reliable sources prove was the moniker of James. The enemy of the *Poor* was the *Spouter of Lies*, who sought to seduce the New Covenant community from following the Law. The NT evidence strongly suggests that Paul was accused of lying about his apostleship and Paul knew this.¹³ The NT evidence likewise demonstrates the Jerusalem church under James was known as *The Poor*. (Rom. 15:26; Gal. 2:9-10.) Early church evidence also demonstrates a group called *Ebionites* (which is a transliteration meaning *The Poor*) were Christians who felt Paul was seducing wrongly the Christian community from following the Law.

13. The verses which are apparently veiled criticisms of Paul in the NT always accuse him of **lying**. Revelation 2:2 says the ones who tell the Ephesians they are apostles but are not are "**liars**." When Paul contradicts Jesus on the idol meat command, 1 John 2:4 tells us: "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a **liar**, and the truth is not in him." When Paul says he is a Jew, and the Ebionites say they found out Paul lied, Jesus says: "them that say they are Jews, and they are not, but do **lie**." (Rev. 3:9.) Paul was apparently aware of the accusation of being a liar. He defensively insists often "I lie not." (Rom. 9:1; 2 Cor. 11:31; Gal. 1:20.) That this accusation was over his apostleship is evident in this quote from 1 Timothy 2:7: "I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I speak the truth, **I lie not**)."

Professor Eisenman thus has the better case on the Christian-era aspect of the *Damascus Document*. Then, if he is correct on its meaning, the DSS depiction of the *Poor*—*The Ebion*—perfectly and uniquely match the Ebionites of whom Eusebius spoke.

It then follows the Ebionites must be orthodox. They are to be equated with the Jerusalem church of *The Poor* under James. Eusebius must have engaged in distortion of their beliefs to serve his agenda of the 300s. Eusebius's purpose is self-evident. He wanted to discredit the Ebionites because of the centrality of Paul to the validity of the *Roman Catholic Church* (RCC). Many forget that after Peter's presumed founding of the church at Rome, it was Paul who had appointed the first bishop of Rome—Linus—of the RCC.¹⁴ Today we call this bishop of Rome the *pope*. However, the Ebionites claimed Paul was to be ejected from canon as inconsistent with Jesus' position on the Law. If the Ebionites were right, this means the RCC was corrupted by Paul shortly after Peter founded the Roman church. Eusebius had no choice but to attack the Ebionites regardless of their high standing in the Church's recent memory. In fact, that high standing explains why Eusebius attacked them so vigorously.

Some believe it is inconceivable Eusebius could knowingly disparage the Jerusalem Church under James as legalists. However, even in our modern era, those wed to Paul make such a blatant disparagement of the Jerusalem church. Here is a quote of a fundamentalist Christian journal *The New Birth* condemning freely the Jerusalem Church of the twelve apostles and James:

The gospel of the Jerusalem church became a perverted gospel once the Law Covenant was fulfilled and set aside as the governing covenant economy. And the Jerusalem church would not accept this fact, but continued stubbornly trying to keep the

14. See page 295 *supra*.

Law Covenant. It will be explained in this article that trying to keep both the Law Covenant along with the New Covenant perverted the gospel of Christ and annulled both covenants. It was ***necessary for the Lord to take Paul out into the wilderness apart from all the others and teach him directly the pure gospel of Christ***, because ***the gospel of the Jerusalem church was now a perverted gospel***, Gal 1:11-24.¹⁵

All Eusebius was doing is precisely what *The New Birth* was doing. Eusebius was putting Paul's view of the Law as the measure to test the orthodoxy of James and the Jerusalem church. Under Paul's criteria, the Jerusalem church (*The Ebion*) became the heretics. Paul's words proved to Eusebius and the *New Birth* that the apostolic church was heretical. It is thus entirely reasonable and permissible to infer Eusebius knew he was talking about the Jerusalem church of the twelve apostles when he labelled the Ebionites as heretical legalists. This is what justified Eusebius either falsely or in a misleading manner to charge the Jerusalem Church with denying the virgin birth because its Hebrew version of Matthew lacked any account of the birth narrative.

The Reliability of The Ebionites Despite the One-Sided Charges Against Them

Nevertheless, even if the Ebionites did not believe in the virgin birth as charged (see footnote 2 of this chapter for why this charge appears unfounded or does not involve true heresy), they still believed in Jesus' divinity and His resurrection. They were Jewish Christians. They simply did not regard the Law as abrogated. They still rested on the Saturday-Sabbath. For this too they were condemned by Eusebius

15. "Firstborn Sonship of Christ," *The New Birth* (February 2000) Vol. 25 No. 2.

and Jerome later. Yet, resting on Saturday-Sabbath was apostolic practice, as demonstrated by the *Constitutions of the Apostles* dating at least to the early 200s. It was only in 363 A.D. that Constantine's bishops in the Roman Empire made it heresy and *anathema* to rest on the Saturday-Sabbath. The churches that form the modern Eastern Orthodox church escaped this Roman decree. They were largely in territories that were *not* under the Roman Emperor's authority. As a result, the 250 million members of the Orthodox Church today and their members of twenty centuries past keep the Saturday-Sabbath while worshipping on Sunday.

Thus, Eusebius (who was quoting Epiphanius) presented an illogical and weak case why we should ignore the Ebionites' investigation. Eusebius clearly engaged in the fallacy of *ad hominem*. The correct response was always to examine the plausibility of the Ebionite charges against Paul from *independent evidence*. It may very well be that the Ebionites are not only orthodox in every respect, but more so than ourselves because they were led by James and the twelve apostles.

The Ebionite Charge Against Paul

Early church historians preserved the Ebionite charge against Paul even while trying to dishonor the Ebionites. This is the exact quote from Epiphanius in the 300s:

They declare that he (Paul) was a Greek... He went up to Jerusalem, they say, and when he had spent some time there, he was seized with a passion to marry the daughter of the priest. For this reason he became a proselyte and was circumcised. Then, when he failed to get the girl, he flew into a rage and wrote against circumcision and against the sabbath and the Law. (Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 30.16. 6- 9.)

The Ebionites thus say that Paul was not a Jew, but the son of two Gentile parents. He became circumcised as an adult when he fell in love with the daughter of a priest.

How Plausible Is The Ebionite Charge Against Paul?

There is independent evidence to corroborate the Ebionite charge that Paul was not a Jew in the strict Jewish sense. It appears he was an Herodian Jew which to true Jews is *not a true Jew at all*:

- Herod and his family tried to tell Jews he was Jewish, but true Jews did not accept Herod's claims. The Herodian lineage had foreign elements in it.
- Herod the Great was a Roman collaborator ruling Judea as King prior to Jesus. He was put into power by the Romans lending him troops to subjugate Judea.
- One of his sons, Herod Antipas, succeeds him in the time of Christ to rule part of his kingdom.
- Saul/Paul in Romans 16:11 greets "Herodion, my kinsman" [*i.e.*, 'my relative'] which is a name that a member of the Herodian family would use.¹⁶
- Josephus, who as far as we know was not a Christian, mentions a Saulus in his work *The Antiquities of the Jews*. In book XX, chapter 9, Josephus says Saulus is a member of the family of the successor, Herod (Antipas). Josephus says this Saulus sided with the High Priest in resisting a tumult by lower order priests over temple funds going to the High Priest. Josephus records this Saulus' activity was after Jesus' movement had

"Costobarus...and **Saulus** did themselves get together a multitude of wicked wretches, and this because **they were of the Royal Family**, and so they obtained favor among them because of **their kindred to Agrippa.**"

Josephus *Antiq.*
XX, ch, 9. sec. 4

already begun but before we know independently that Paul joined it. (*Antiquities*, XX 9.4.). This therefore puts the Saulus of Josephus in precisely the chronological position of Saul (Paul) prior to his road to Damascus experience. Further, the Saulus of Josephus and the Saul of Acts both are collaborators of the High Priest (an appointee of Herod). So when Josephus says Saulus was of the family of Herod, this is direct evidence that Saul-Paul was of the family of Herod.

- The most important fact is that Paul says he has Roman citizenship from birth. (Acts 22:28 “I have been born a Roman citizen.”) You would carry around proof on a small *Libellus*. Paul’s claim was accepted in Acts. It has several implications.
- First, Roman citizenship was an honor from Rome which in the Judean region primarily only could be enjoyed by members of Herod’s family or his closest allies. The list of Roman citizens was kept in Caesar’s office in Rome. It was not a very long list. Most native-born Italians did not enjoy this privilege. In outlying provinces like Judea, it was dispensed to military allies and their families to give them special protection from Roman occupation forces. You could not torture or beat a Roman citizen.
- Second, Roman citizenship from birth means Saul had to be given a Roman name from birth.¹⁷ It turns out that *Paul* is a Roman name.¹⁸

“I am giving [those] of the synagogue of Satan, the ones who say they are Jews and are not but are lying. Listen! I will make them so that they shall come and prostrate themselves in reverence before your feet, and they shall know that I loved you.”
Jesus, Rev. 3:9

16. See discussion in Prof. Robert Eisenman, “Paul as Herodion,” *JHC* (Spring 1996) at 110 *et seq.*, available online at <http://www.depts.drew.edu/jhc/eisenman.html> (last accessed 10-05).

- How did Paul happen to have a Roman birth name if he was truly Jewish? It cannot happen. A true Jewish family would not give their child a Roman name or even accept Roman citizenship from birth. This would represent defilement. Thus, Paul had to be from birth a non-Jew. However, his parents also named him Saul, which is a Jewish name. Thus, his parents aspired to be Jewish. This fits perfectly the Herodians. They would be non-Jews and Roman citizens, but they would also aspire to be Jewish.
- Thus, in the Judea of that era, only Herodians would have a child with both a Roman and Hebrew name (*Paul Saul*) who would have Roman citizenship from birth (Acts 22:28) and who would greet a “kinsman” (*i.e.*, a relative) named Herodion. (Romans 16:11.) It thus is not a coincidence that Saul in Acts is a collaborator of the High Priest appointed by Herod. Nor is it insignificant that Saulus in Josephus is likewise a collaborator of the High Priest in precisely the time-frame of Saul-Paul prior to becoming a Christian. This then leads us to the *unequivocal* statement in Josephus that Saulus is a member of the Royal family of Herod Antipas.

In fact, Paul being an Herodian ‘Jew’ would explain the presence of Herod’s foster brother as a member of the Christian church at Antioch. After Paul’s Damascus Road experience, he went to Arabia for fourteen years. (Gal. 1:17-

17. “When a foreigner received the right of citizenship, he took a new name.” The *nomen* “had to be *nomen* of the person, **always a Roman citizen**, to whom he owed his citizenship.” Harold W. Johnston, *The Private Life of the Romans* (Revised by Mary Johnston) (Scott, Foresman and Company: 1932) ch. 2.

18. Most Christians assume that Jesus changed Saul’s name to *Paul* in the same way Jesus changed Simon’s to Peter. However, there is no mention of this in the three accounts of Paul’s vision in Acts chs. 9, 22, and 26. In the middle of Acts, Luke starts referring to Saul as Paul, with no explanation. Nor does Paul explain in any of his letters why he uses the name Paul. **It turns out that Paul is a Roman name.** *Saul* is a Hebrew name. There is an apocryphal account that Paul took his name from a Roman official Paulus whom he converted. Yet, to be a citizen from birth, one must have a *Roman* name from birth. *Paulus* must have been it.

2:1). At the end of that time, Paul emerges as a delegate from the Antioch church to go to Jerusalem for a ruling on circumcision. (Acts 14:26, 15:2.) So who previously belonged to this church at Antioch?

And there were certain in Antioch, in the assembly there, prophets and teachers;...Manaen also—**Herod the tetrarch's foster-brother**—and Saul (Acts 13:1).

Who recruited Herod's brother? Someone had to do this. Someone of the family of Herod would be in the best position to do so. Saul-Paul, with Roman citizenship, would have the uncommon status to permit social contact with Herod's brother. If Josephus' reference to Saulus means Saul-Paul, and he was thus a member of Herod Antipas' family, then Paul likely recruited Herod's brother.

This Acts 13:1 passage underscores once more the many uncanny links between Paul and Herod. The primary ones are:

- Romans 16:11, the greeting to Paul's relative, "Herodion."
- Paul's service to the High Priest, who is appointed by Herod.
- The apparent Saulus-Paul link in Josephus where Josephus says Saulus is from the family of Herod; and
- As Acts 22:28 reveals, Paul has Roman citizenship from birth in the Judean region under Herodian control.

Paul was thus apparently an Herodian Jew, not a true Jew.

Therefore, the available evidence strongly vindicates the investigation by the Ebionites. The Ebionites could in a strict investigation prove that Paul did not have Jewish parents according to the rabbinic definition. Thus, while the Ebionites' doctrines made them want to exclude Paul because of his position on the Law, this did not apparently bias the result. It appears their claims on Paul's background are so substantial that we could conclude Paul was not a true Jew even without knowing the Ebionite claim on Paul's background.

The significance of trusting the Ebionite charge, however, is this means they were proving Paul to be untruthful. Paul claimed he was born a Jew and circumcised on the eighth day. (Phil. 3:5.) This fits right in with Rev. 2:2 where the false claimant to apostleship was proven a *liar* at Ephesus. It also fits the parallel statement by Jesus about those who “lie” and “say they are Jews but are not.” (Rev. 3:9.)

Most important, the Ebionite charge has the characteristic of evidence one might bring up at a trial. It has a judicial ring to it. There is nothing polemical about it. No doctrines are involved. The charge purports to be the result of someone trying to find out more about Paul's background. Thus, it appears the Ebionites were involved in finding evidence to bring up at a trial regarding Paul.

*Evidence of Peter's Testimony Against Paul
in a Trial*

Additional evidence of a trial of Paul comes from a sermon collection called the *Clementine Homilies* from 200 A.D. Scholars believe it contains a smaller fragment from an earlier Ebionite writing about a trial involving Paul with Peter as a star witness against Paul. This fragment is stuck inside a later story written to appear as if the opponent is someone called Simon Magus. (This was apparently done to avoid the censor's hand.) Instead scholars deduce the original fragment was certainly talking about Paul. This can be validated by comparing what Peter says to how Paul responds in statements we find in Acts chapters 22 and 26.

Homily 17 and the Trial of Paul

In this section of the *Clementine Homilies*, Peter asks Simon Magus publicly why would Jesus come to an enemy in a vision. Peter wonders why would Jesus spend years teaching the apostles to have their message supplanted by someone

who merely claims to have had a vision of Jesus. These are all good questions even if the fragment were really directed at a confrontation of Peter with Simon Magus. But was it?

To answer that we need more background. This dialogue appears as Peter's testimony in a trial atmosphere. It is found in *Clementine Homilies: Homily 17*. Scholars say this fragment's original source must have been written by the Ebionites. Later, it was inserted into the *Clementine Homilies* as if directed at someone else called Simon Magus. Scholars concur that its original context was written to tell what transpired when Peter was testifying against Paul.

How do scholars deduce this? This fragment so clearly applies to Paul that it is inconceivable Simon Magus could involve all the same characteristics as Paul. As Alexander Roberts, the editor of *The Anti-Nicene Fathers*, explains: "This passage has therefore been regarded as a covert attack upon the Apostle Paul."¹⁹ Likewise, Robert Griffin-Jones, a pro-Pauline scholar, admits Paul is the true adversary in this passage: "Paul is demonized...in a fictional dispute [in the *Clementine Homilies*] in which Peter trounces him."²⁰ Bart Ehrman concurs in this *Homily* that "Simon Magus in fact is a cipher for none other than Paul himself."²¹

You can decide for yourself. Here is the excerpt that has convinced scholars the target is Paul. This is Peter's statement at this trial of one who said "he became His apostle" but Peter refutes:

19. The wording in *Homily 17* where Peter says his opponent claims he "stands condemned" is interpreted as a clear allusion to Paul's telling Peter he "stands condemned" in Gal. 2:11. Roberts then explains: "This passage has therefore been regarded as a covert attack upon the Apostle Paul."

20. Robin Griffith-Jones, *The Gospel According to Paul* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2004) at 260.

21. Ehrman, *Peter, Paul and Mary Magdalene* (Oxford: 2006) at 79.

If, then, our Jesus appeared to you in a vision, made Himself known to you, and spoke to you, *it was as one who is enraged with an adversary*; and this is the reason why it was through visions and dreams, or through revelations that were from without, that He spoke to you. But can any one be *rendered fit for instruction through apparitions*? And if you will say, 'It is possible,' then I ask, 'Why did our teacher abide and discourse a whole year to those who were awake?' And how are we to believe your word, when you tell us that He appeared to you? And how did He appear to you, when *you entertain opinions contrary to His teaching*? But if you were seen and taught by Him, and *became His apostle* for a single hour, *proclaim His utterances*, interpret His sayings, love His apostles, contend not with me who companied with Him. For in direct opposition to me, who am a firm rock, the foundation of the Church, you now stand. If you were not opposed to me, you would not accuse me, and revile the truth proclaimed by me, in order that I may not be believed when I state what I myself have heard with my own ears from the Lord, as if I were evidently a person that was condemned and in bad repute. *But if you say that I am condemned*, you bring an accusation against God, who revealed the Christ to me, and you inveigh against Him who pronounced me blessed on account of the revelation. But if, indeed, you really wish to work in the cause of truth, *learn first of all from us what we have learned from Him*, and, becoming a disciple of the truth, become a fellow-worker with us. (*Ps-Clementine Homilies 17,19.*)²²

Let's test the possibility that Peter did in fact deliver this speech, and Paul heard it. We will find evidence in the New Testament that Paul was aware of this charge that Peter made, as recorded in the *Clementine Homilies*. Paul's knowledge of this charge can be proven in how Paul embarrassingly changed his accounts of his vision with Jesus.

The version in Acts chapter 22 is precisely the vision that Peter is addressing in *Homily 17*, as it lacks any positive words from Jesus toward Paul. This must be what pressures Paul later to change the account into what we see in Acts chapter 26. This account reverses the Acts chapter 22 account. It puts words in Jesus' mouth for the first time that are positive toward Paul. However, by Paul changing the accounts, he demonstrates a clear contradiction with the earlier version in Acts chapter 22. Thus, the Acts chapter 26 account eliminates the point Peter raises in the *Clementine Homily 17*. However, it does so at a great price—terrible embarrassment when the later version of Acts chapter 26 is compared to Paul's earlier vision account in Acts chapter 22. Only something precisely like Peter's speech in *Homily 17* can explain such a risky reversal of the vision account. We next examine the evidence for this.

How Acts Mirrors the Clementine Homilies

Point One: Jesus Only Words Are Negative in Acts Chapter 22

The main argument in Peter's *Clementine* speech was that Paul's vision of Jesus involved Jesus only talking *negatively* to Paul. In fact, *Homily 17*, chapter 18 is devoted to Peter proving from Scripture that visions of God are how God

22. "The Clementine Apocrypha," *Anti-Nicene Fathers* (ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson; rev'd A. Cleveland Coxe) Vol. VIII (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishing Inc., 1994) at 269 *et seq.* This is available online at http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/ANF-08/anf08-61.htm#P5206_1525700. These *Clementine Homilies* were part of church history since the 200s, and even were frequently official readings in the early church. They purported to be written by Clement, the bishop at Rome around 96 A.D. Scholars of today claim these letters were written around 200, and included within them the earlier tradition of the Ebionites, such as in this passage. Because they were not apparently written by Clement, in fact, they are now labelled *The Pseudo Clementine Homilies*.

reveals himself to enemies, not allies. In that context, Peter's point is unmistakable. Paul's vision only contains negative statements from Jesus, invalidating it as a proof of Paul's authority.

Then we will see that the account of Paul's vision given in Acts chapter 22 is exactly what Peter describes in *Clementine Homily* 17:19. In the Acts 22:7-16 account, the only positive statements come *later* from a person named Ananias. They do not come from Jesus *at all*, just as Peter says in this *Clementine Homily*. Jesus' only words are negative toward Paul, as we discuss in detail below.

Point Two: Paul Lost A Trial Before Jewish Christians.

Consider next that Paul mentions in 2 Timothy chapter 4 having had to give a "first" defense of himself from other Christians and no one came to his defense. This apparently relates to the fact that in 2 Timothy 1:15 Paul says all the Christians in Asia (*i.e.*, modern Western Turkey, which includes Ephesus) abandoned him. This defense was thus put on inside a church-setting in Asia Minor. The verdict ended up that all Christians in proconsular Asia abandoned him, according to Paul's *own words*. (2 Tim. 1:15.) Paul then mentions he still regards he somehow escaped the "mouth of the lion..." at this defense he put on. What did he mean? Paul's words at 2 Timothy 4:14-17 are:

(14) Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord will render to him according to his works: (15) of whom do thou also beware; for he greatly withstood our words. (16) ***At my first defence no one took my part, but all forsook me:*** may it not be laid to their account. (17) But... ***I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.*** (ASV)

These statements, all read together, point to Paul admitting he was tried by fellow-Christians in Asia Minor (where Ephesus was), he lost and was then forsaken by all

those in that region. Yet, then how are we to understand his words “escaped the lion”? Was it by making up the Acts chapter 26 vision account on the spot?

Point Three: The Lion represents Jewish Christians

To understand how Paul “escaped” at this trial among Christians, although he lost, we must identify the *lion* in 2 Timothy 2:17. Paul most likely meant his Jewish-Christian opponents.

While there is conjecture in Jerome’s writings that Paul meant Nero when he referred to the *lion*, Jerome was relying upon an apocryphal account of a Paul-Nero encounter. Nero has no nickname as *lion*. Jerome does not explain why Paul would have used the label *lion* for Nero.²³

The more natural reading is that *lion* represents the Tribe of Judah, *i.e.*, the Jews. This also fits the historical context. Read this way, 2 Timothy 4:17 means Paul felt he somehow escaped the Judaizing Christians. Nevertheless, the verdict in Asia Minor was a severe loss to Paul of all influence in Asia Minor among Christians there. (2 Tim. 1:15.)

Is *lion* a symbol of Judah? Yes. The lion is historically treated as a symbol of the tribe of Judah. It comes from the Bible. In Genesis 49:9, Judah is specifically called “a lion’s whelp.” In Numbers 24:9, the people of Israel are likened to a “lion.” This symbol for the Tribe of Judah is repeated in Revelation 5:3, 5. Thus Paul’s reference to the *lion* in 2 Timothy 4:17 is likely a reference to his Jewish-Christian opponents within the church.

23. Jerome conjectures incorrectly that Paul means that he escaped “the lion” Nero. Jerome says that in Paul’s first encounter with Nero he dismissed him as harmless. Jerome says lion “clearly [is] indicating Nero as lion on account of his cruelty.” (Jerome, *Lives of Famous Men*, ch. V.) However, Jerome is alluding to the Paul-Seneca correspondence as proof of the Paul-Nero encounter. However, most scholars find good reason to regard those letters as illegitimate, and this encounter as a highly improbable myth. Second, Jerome does not say Nero’s nickname was lion, just that the label might fit him and be Paul’s intention.

Point Four: Escaping With Some Legitimacy In Tact is Paul's Meaning

How can Paul escape yet lose all support? Peter's attack in the Ebionite account of a trial versus Paul goes to Paul's legitimacy. If in Paul's vision account, Jesus had no positive words for Paul, and we must rely upon Ananias (who is no prophet) to confirm Paul's legitimacy, then Paul loses *all* legitimacy. Peter's argument in the *Clementine Homilies* says Paul's authority stands on nothing positive from Jesus. If all we ever had was the Acts chapter 22 vision-account, Peter says Paul stands on *nothing* from *Jesus* to confirm Jesus ever had a positive feeling toward Paul.

However, Paul could walk away from a trial he loses on whether he is an apostle (Rev. 2:2) if he walks away with some legitimacy. If Paul was at least viewed as having met Jesus who *positively* told him he would be a *witness* (not an apostle), it would be enough for Paul to survive as a legitimate authority among Christians. This is what the vision account in Acts chapter 26 gives Paul, if the trial-judges believed Paul. Thus, at this trial, what Paul apparently means by saying he "escaped the lion" is that he was not stripped of all authority to teach and preach. He only could no longer call himself an apostle. (Rev. 2:2.) He salvaged a win on the only point that mattered to Paul up to that time. No one could disprove that Paul had seen Jesus and there were positive words for him. At least, no one could prove otherwise until Luke published Acts. There we see the vision account in Acts chapter 22 undercuts whether the Acts chapter 26 vision account *ever took place*. Let's next compare these two accounts to understand how Paul changed his accounts to save his legitimacy at a trial, but lost it for us when we critically compare the two versions.

Point Five: The Vision Account in Acts 26 Solves The Problem

Posed By The Vision Account in Acts 22

First, in Acts 22:10 Paul reports that at the time of the “vision” he is criticized by Jesus and merely told to go into Damascus. There is no word of approval at all from Jesus, just as Peter says in the Peter speech above in *Homily 17*. See this for yourself by reading next Acts 22:7-16:

(7) And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? (8) And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, ***whom thou persecutest.*** (9) And they that were with me beheld indeed the light, but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me. (10) And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, ***Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do.*** (11) And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me I came into Damascus. (12) And one *Ananias*, a devout man according to the law, well reported of by all the Jews that dwelt there, (13) came unto me, and standing by me said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And in that very hour I looked up on him. (14) And he [*Ananias*] said, ***The God of our fathers hath appointed thee to know his will, and to see the Righteous One, and to hear a voice from his mouth.*** (15) For thou shalt be a witness for him unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard. (16) And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on his name. (ASV)

So imagine Peter has heard this same story from Paul, and only this story from Acts chapter 22. There is no word of approval from Jesus. Just condemnation. The only words ascribed to Jesus other than pure condemnation are these:

Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do. (Acts 22:10).

This Acts chapter 22 vision account gave Peter room to challenge the validity of Paul's commission from Jesus.²⁴ No evidence is put forth by Luke that Ananias is a prophet somehow (*i.e.*, predictive words to validate him). (Acts 9:12-17; 22:12.) Peter says in the above passage of the *Clementine Homilies* to his opponent (Paul): "If, then, our Jesus appeared to you in a vision, made Himself known to you, and spoke to you, ***it was as one who is enraged with an adversary***; and this is the reason why it was through visions and dreams...." Peter must be referring to Paul's Acts chapter 22 version of the vision account. It was a brief vision, nothing more. Jesus was adversarial in tone.

In Peter's charge, Peter has not seen or heard the next account of the vision, which we can read in Acts chapter 26. This *not only proves Paul is the intended target from the Clementine fragment*, but it also *gives the Peter speech immense authenticity and reliability*. Because if the Peter speech never really happened, there is little reason why Paul would go out of his way to *contradict* and put a *whole new spin* on his vision experience when we see Acts chapter 26. The purpose of Paul's switch in Acts chapter 26 is clear: it erases the criticism of Peter recorded in the *Clementine Homilies*. In Acts chapter 26, Jesus appears now to have approving words during Paul's vision experience.

24.If one ignores Peter's criticism in the *Clementine Homily* and insists this Acts chapter 22 account legitimizes Paul, one must recognize the only positive remarks come from Ananias. Then this means Paul's legitimacy depends 100% on the legitimacy of Ananias. However, there is no evidence from Luke in Acts or anywhere in the New Testament that Ananias is a prophet (*i.e.*, by means of confirmed prophecy). As Gregg Bing unwittingly admits in "Useful for the Master," *Timely Messenger* (November 2004): "Ananias...was ***not an apostle, a pastor, or a prophet***, as far as we know, but was simply what many would call an *ordinary man*." Peter in the *Homily* realizes that the validity of thinking Jesus spoke positively to Paul mistakenly ignores that Paul's *positive* commission in Acts chapter 22 solely comes from an uninspired non-prophet named Ananias.

To see this, we must read Paul's next account of his vision in Acts chapter 26. It is a very different account indeed. Paul, talking to Agrippa, states in Acts 26:14-18:

(14) And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice saying unto me in the Hebrew language, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the goad. (15) And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. (16) ***But arise, and stand upon thy feet: for to this end have I appeared unto thee, to appoint thee a minister and a witness [Gk. *martus*] both of the things wherein thou hast seen me, and of the things wherein I will appear unto thee;*** (17) delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom I send thee, (18) to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive remission of sins and an inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith in me. (ASV)

Do you see that verses 16-18 are *new* very positive statements by Jesus? (Also, please note, Jesus has still not once actually called Paul *an apostle*.) Do you likewise see this Acts chapter 26 version undercuts Peter's argument in the speech from the *Clementine Homilies*? Do you further see that Peter could not possibly have known of this *Acts chapter 26 version* at the time Peter confronts his opponent (obviously Paul) in the *Clementine Homilies*?

Thus, it makes the most sense that Acts chapter 22 reflects the account Paul first gave at trial in response to Peter's charge. This explains why Paul believes he "escaped" the mouth of the lion even though the result was that all Christians of Asia (Minor) abandoned Paul. (2 Tim. 1:15.) No one could disprove that Paul had some vision and there may have been positive statements by Jesus. These two vision accounts fell short of calling Paul an apostle. Paul lost the trial on that score. (Rev. 2:2.) Yet, in Paul's mind he won because he was not totally de-legitimized.

Point Six: Don't The Vision Accounts of Acts 22 & 26 Conflict?

In reflection on Paul's various vision accounts, ask yourself this: how plausible is it that the version in Acts chapter 26 just happens to allow Paul to side-step Peter's charge? Furthermore, is it really plausible that both versions (Acts 22 and 26) are true? No, it is not.

In the later version, Acts 26:16, Paul says that Jesus tells him he is appointed to be a witness (*martus, martyr*). However, in the earlier version of Acts 22:13-15, Jesus is harsh and then simply says Paul will be told "all" that he is to do when he gets into town. Then in town, and *only then*, Paul learns he is being appointed to be a witness. *The identical words* that Ananias' used in Acts chapter 22 are now transferred, in the next account in Acts chapter 26, into Jesus' mouth. The implausibility of both accounts being true stems from this verse in Acts chapter 22 where Jesus supposedly tells Paul:

Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of *all things* which are appointed for thee to do. (Acts 22:10).

In this version from Acts chapter 22, Jesus himself says it is in Damascus that Paul will learn "all" of what to do. In the Acts chapter 26 version, everything that Paul was told in the Acts chapter 22 version in Damascus (which was in Ananias' mouth) is now given by Jesus before Paul *even goes to Damascus*. Both versions simply cannot be true. This is because 100% of what Ananias said in Acts chapter 22 is given by Jesus before Jesus in the vision departs in Acts chapter 26. So how can it be true that in Damascus Paul would learn for the first time "all things which are appointed for thee to do?" In the later account of Acts chapter 26, this 100% precedes Paul's trip to Damascus, making a liar out of Jesus in the Acts chapter 22 account. There Jesus said it would be given at Damascus. If you love the Lord Jesus more than Paul, the two stories are irreconcilable.

Point Seven: Why Make A Contradictory Account of the Vision Experience?

This change between Acts chapter 22 and chapter 26 is what explains how Paul in his “first defense” was able to “escape the mouth of the lion,” as he puts it in 2 Timothy 2:17. He apparently used this clever side-step. ***Paul simply made up more words of Jesus but this time words of approval before Jesus departs in the vision.*** Paul thereby made it appear Jesus is now a friend, and not an adversary. This explains why Paul’s “first defense” spoken about in Second Timothy succeeded to some degree in Paul’s mind even though “all in... Asia abandoned me.” (2 Tim. 1:15.) Paul felt he had success in holding onto some legitimacy even though the verdict was so bad that all in Asia Minor abandoned him. He must have felt his defense salvaged enough that he could believe he escaped the Jewish-Christian opponents that he faced. Thus, Paul apparently made up this Acts chapter 26 version of the Christ-vision on the spot. Paul was satisfied that in doing so he “escaped the mouth of the lion” even though he effectively lost and “all in...Asia abandoned me.”

Paul’s Contradictory Vision Accounts Permit Skepticism About Paul

Of course, this all depends on you having a certain skepticism about Paul. Yet, most of us evangelicals resist fervently this notion. For those of you having trouble reconsidering Paul’s place in the New Testament canon, please consider the following clear-cut contradiction between Paul’s first two versions of his vision.

Acts 9:7 And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, ***hearing a voice***, but seeing no man. (KJV)

Acts 22:9 And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but ***they heard not the voice*** of him that spake to me. (KJV)

Square these two if you can, but the Greek is identical. The men with him in one case *heard* (Gk. *acoustica*) the voice, and in the other the men with him *did not hear* (Gk. *acoustica*) the voice. Scholars compliment Luke for his honesty, showing us the contradiction. (*Robertson's Word Pictures*.) However, these scholars are not thinking how damning this is of Paul's credibility.

The Validity of the Charges of Peter in Homily 17

Even if the Peter charges in *Homily 17* never took place at a real trial, it turns out that it still makes two arguments that are *valid*. This is interesting because it means in 200 A.D., people had already seen flaws in Paul's alleged appointment. It is not something first seen millennia later by me.

Peter's Charge That Paul Rejected the Apostles' Teachings

An important point leaps off the page of the Peter confrontation with his antagonist in the *Clementine Homilies*. John in 1 John told us, reminiscent of Revelations 2:2, to test every spirit to see whether it comes from God. There were several criteria he gave to tell the liars from the true. He said something very reminiscent of Peter's remarks in the *Clementine Homilies*:

We belong to God, and everyone who knows God will listen to us [*i.e.*, the twelve apostles]. ***But the people who don't know God won't listen to us.*** That is how we can tell the Spirit that speaks the truth from the one that tells *lies*. (1 John 4:6 CEV)

Now compare this to Peter's charge against his antagonist (*i.e.*, Paul) previously quoted from the *Clementine Homilies*:

...love His apostles, contend not with me who accompanied with Him. For in direct opposition to me, who am a firm rock, the foundation of the Church, you now stand. If you were not opposed to me, you would not accuse me, and revile the truth proclaimed by me, ***in order that I may not be believed when I state what I myself have heard with my own ears from the Lord***, as if I were evidently a person that was condemned and in bad repute. But ***if you say that I am condemned, you bring an accusation against God, who revealed the Christ to me, and you inveigh against Him who pronounced me blessed on account of the revelation***. But if, indeed, you really wish to work in the cause of truth, learn first of all from us what we have learned from Him, and, becoming a disciple of the truth, become a fellow-worker with us. (*Ps-Clementine Homilies* 17:19.)

Peter had the same view as John. Peter tells Paul in the *Clementine Homilies* that if you were one of us, you would listen to us, rather than make us out to be liars. John says that “the people who don’t know God won’t listen to us.” Peter is saying, in effect, by rejecting the *twelve* apostles and their teaching, which was based on a Message delivered personally from the Lord, Paul was rejecting Christ himself.

Now where did John and Peter get that idea? Jesus in Matthew 10:14-15 said:

(14) And whosoever ***shall not receive you, nor hear your words***, as ye go forth out of that house or that city, shake off the dust of your feet. (15) Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city. (ASV)

Those who reject the *twelve* apostles were condemned by the Lord Jesus Himself. The words of the *twelve apostles*, if rejected, cause us to be at risk of the fire suffered by Sodom

and Gomorrah. This is not because their words are prophetic, but because of the Message the twelve *personally* carried from Jesus. If rejected, it puts us at risk of judgment by fire.

Did Paul Admit He Rejected the Teachings of Peter?

In Paul, we see hostility toward the *twelve apostles* in many ways.²⁵ The twelve “imparted nothing to me,” says Paul. (Gal. 2:6.)

However, let us ask whether there is anything in Paul’s writings that specifically corroborates this kind of hostility between *Paul and Peter*? Peter is claiming in the *Clementine Homilies* that Paul makes up a false charge to make Peter look like a liar. Paul makes it appear Peter does not know the Lord Jesus very well. Peter calls this an opposition to an apostle of Jesus Christ. It is a major effrontery that cannot stand. Peter warns Paul in effect that Paul is in danger of the Sodom and Gomorrah warning of Jesus. Did Paul ever

25. Paul sneers at the three “so-called” leaders at Jerusalem: James, Cephas (*i.e.*, Simon Peter) and John, adding pejoratively that they “*seemed* to be pillars” (Galatians 2:9). Paul then boasts that he believes he is at their level: “For I suppose I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles” (2 Corinthians 11:5). And in 2 Corinthians 12:11, Paul claims “in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing.” There is some textual and historical reasons to think Paul calls the twelve *false* apostles in 2 Cor. 11:12-23, *viz.* verse 13 “fashioning themselves into apostles of Christ.” (Other than the twelve, who else claimed to be apostles other than Paul? No one that we know.) Another example of derogation involves the apostles’ amazing gift of tongues (Acts 1). Paul ran down that gift, which had the effect of taking the lustre off the true apostles’ gift of tongues. See 1 Cor 14:4-33. Finally, if the Galatians understood the twelve contradicted Paul in any way, Paul would be cursing them in Gal. 1:8-12. He warns the Galatians that even if an “angel from heaven” came with a different Gospel than Paul preached, let him be *anathema* (*cursed*). In light of Paul’s comments in chapter two of Galatians, it is fair to infer he meant to warn of even a contradictory message from *the twelve and/or James*.

behave in an insulting way toward Peter from sources we all trust as true? Yes, and Paul admits it. (Actually he *boasts* about it.)

In Galatians 2:11-14, we read:

(11) But when **Cephas** [*i.e.*, Peter] came to Antioch, I resisted him to the face, because he stood condemned. (12) For before that certain came from James, he ate with the Gentiles; but when they came, he drew back and separated himself, fearing them that were of the circumcision. (13) And the rest of the Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that even Barnabas was carried away with their dissimulation. (14) But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto **Cephas** [*i.e.*, Peter] **before them all**, If thou, being a Jew, livest as do the Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, how compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? (ASV)

Paul boasts here of being able to condemn a true apostle of Jesus Christ. "I resisted him to the face, because he stood condemned." Then Paul says he gave Peter a dressing down "before them all." Paul did this publicly, not in private.

In doing this, Paul violates his own command to us: "Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but appeal to him as a father." (1 Tim. 5:1.) Paul also violated Jesus' command: "if your brother sins, go and reprove him *in private*; if he listens to you, you have won your brother." (Matthew 18:15.)

Yet, who was right in this public rebuke by Paul of Peter? There is strong reason to believe *Paul was wrong*, not *Peter*.

Paul was teaching Gentiles that it was permissible to eat meat sacrificed to idols. (See page 122.) The twelve apostles tacitly approved James condemning this in Acts chapter 15. Jesus condemns it three times in the Book of Revelation.

Peter apparently discovered this practice by Paul. Peter then would have appropriately withdrawn from eating with Gentiles under Paul's influence. Peter had to be obedient to Jesus who likewise condemned what Paul was permitting.

Thus, Paul admits in Galatians that he refused to follow the example of Peter's withdrawal from eating with Gentiles. Peter was probably simply *obeying Christ*. Now you as a Christian must choose: is Peter as an apostle of Jesus Christ somehow less authoritative than Paul who Jesus never once appointed as an apostle in three vision accounts? While most commentators *assume* Paul is in the right on the withdrawal issue, on what basis? Paul's say-so? Because Paul permits eating meat sacrificed to idols but the twelve were misled in Acts chapter 15 to approve prohibiting it?

One must not be influenced by Paul's one-sided account. We can see Paul had an eating practice that made dining with Gentiles under his influence *impossible*. Jewish custom was to avoid violating food laws by simply not eating with Gentiles. This way they would not offend their host by either asking about foods presented or by refusing foods Gentiles offered. This is all that Peter was doing: being polite as well as conscientious.

Peter's Question Why Jesus Would Use Paul Aside from Apostles

Finally, Peter in the *Clementine Homilies* speech (previously quoted) asks his antagonist (Paul) a blunt question that remains valid even if *Homily 17* were fictional:

And how did He appear to you, when you entertain opinions contrary to His teaching? But if you were seen and taught by Him, and became His apostle for a single hour, ***proclaim His utterances***, interpret His sayings, love His apostles.

Doesn't anyone else find it incongruous that not a single utterance from Jesus' teachings in the Gospel accounts are found in Paul's many letters? For Paul, Jesus is just the

divine messiah who dies, resurrects and we must trust in this fact. Apart from that, Jesus' teachings are completely absent in Paul. ***Peter thinks this is a major flaw.***

What Peter brings out in the *Clementine Homilies* again can be corroborated by looking at Paul's writings. Paul admits in Galatians that after he was *converted*, he then began his work for *fourteen years* before he ever went back to Jerusalem to learn from the apostles *who knew Jesus*. (Gal. 2:1.) Paul admits that until that time, he only had a brief two week visit to Jerusalem three years after his vision. Paul emphasizes his lack of contact with the twelve by pointing out that in those two weeks he only met Peter and then briefly James, the Lord's brother. Paul adamantly insists this is his sole prior encounter with the apostles within "fourteen years" (Gal. 2:1):

But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb... To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately ***I conferred not with flesh and blood: Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me;*** but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. Then after ***three [more] years I went up to Jerusalem*** to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days. But other of the apostles I saw none, save James the Lord's brother. Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not. Afterwards I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. (Galatians 1:8-21)

Peter in the *Clementine Homily 17* thus asks a very good question. If Jesus spent a year with the apostles after the resurrection teaching them, Jesus obviously did so in order that their witness would be full and superior to others. Then it was incumbent on Paul to learn from them. Yet, by Paul's own admission, Paul fails to do so *for years*. How then can Paul form the greater body of New Testament *Scripture* when his ideas are not based on Jesus' teachings? Isn't that a red flag right there? Christianity is being expounded by someone who never spent any extended time with Jesus, never trained

under him, and whose writings are devoid of utterances of Jesus except a small unique aphorism and only one inaccurate quote from the Lord's supper account.²⁶

Note: Peter to James, Preface to Clementine Homilies

"For some among the Gentiles have rejected my lawful preaching and have preferred a lawless and absurd doctrine of a man who is *my enemy*. And indeed some have attempted, while I am still alive to distort my word by interpretation of many sorts, as if I taught the dissolution of the Law ... But that may God forbid! For to do such a thing means to *act contrary to the Law of God* which was made to Moses and was confirmed by our Lord in its everlasting continuance. For He said: 'For heaven and earth will pass away, but not one jot or tittle shall pass away from the Law.'" *Letter of Peter to James*, 2.3-5 (presumed 92 A.D.)^a

a. Bart D. Ehrman, *Peter, Paul & Mary Magdalene* (Oxford: 2006) at 79.

Other respected thinkers have been astonished by Paul's lack of mentioning any lessons of Jesus. Albert Schweitzer once said:

Where possible, he (Paul) avoids quoting the teaching of Jesus, in fact even mentioning it. If we had to rely on Paul, we should not know that Jesus taught in parables, had delivered the sermon on the mount, and had taught His disciples the 'Our Father.' Even where they are specially relevant, Paul passes over the words of the Lord.²⁷

"Paul created a theology of which **nothing but the vaguest warrants** can be found in the words of Christ."
Wil Durant
Caesar & Christ

26. Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:24-25 quotes from the Last Supper at odds with Luke's account. See Luke 22:19-20. Luke says Jesus' body is 'given' but Paul says it is 'broken.' This variance is significant. As John 19:36 mentions, Psalm 34:20 says not a bone of His shall be broken. Paul's quote is thus contradictory of Luke as well as theologically troublesome. The aphorism is 'better to give than receive.' Acts 20:35.

A modern Christian scholar, Hans van Campenhausen, agrees this deficiency in Paul's writings is a striking and glaring problem:

The most striking feature is that the words of the Lord, which must have been collected and handed on in the primitive community and elsewhere from the earliest days, *played no, or at least no vital, part in Paul's basic instruction* of his churches.²⁸

Peter's point in the *Clementine Homilies* is likewise that Paul's failure to teach what Jesus teaches is the clearest proof that Paul is not following Jesus. It is a point well-taken.

27. Albert Schweitzer, *Albert Schweitzer Library: The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* (John Hopkins University Press: 1998).

28. Hans van Campenhausen, *The Formation of the Christian Bible* (J. A. Baker, trans.) (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972) at 109.