JEWISH ORIGINS OF CHRISTIANITY
Any discussion of the Jewish background of Christianity may easily be organized around three historical figures, on the one hand, and three ways of defining Jews, on the other. Namely, the story of early Christianity is easily organized around the names of John the Baptist, Jesus of Nazareth and Paul, and the definition of Jews in antiquity—"Who was a Jew?"—is just as easily organized around three separate criteria: place (Jews as Judaeans), pedigree (Jews as children of Jews), and religion (Jews as adherents of Judaism, which is a complex of belief and practice). What I would like to suggest, however briefly, is that Christianity appeared as a result of the confluence of certain processes in poles of the Jewish world represented, respectively, by John, Jesus and Paul. These processes, I will suggest, undermined the importance, for the definition of a person as being Jewish, of Jewish place, of Jewish pedigree, and also of the practical side of the Jewish religion, thus allowing for the appearance of a type of Judaism that defines its adherents by common belief alone.

First the poles: John, Jesus and Paul are products of different parts of the ancient Jewish world. John and Jesus were both from Palestine, but from different parts: John seems to have been from the south and also to have been associated (directly or indirectly) with Qumran,1 Jesus was from the Galilee. Later we will see something of the different foci of these two settings. Now it is enough to note that we may assume that Aramaic was the main language in Palestine, although

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1 By which I mean that whereas prior to the Qumran discoveries we had no way of explaining the historical background that produced John, today Qumran can do that for us, although we have no way of knowing the precise channels or nature of his relationship to it. Most of what is essential here was already said a few years after the Scrolls started appearing; see W. Brownlee, "John the Baptist in the New Light of Ancient Scrolls", in: The Scrolls and the New Testament (ed. K. Stendahl; New York: Harper, 1957) 33–53. For a later discussion, based on another generation’s worth of publications of texts and studies, see R. L. Webb, "John the Baptist", in Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls 1 (2000) esp. 420–421.