

Being a missionary church in the early church

By [Steve Taylor](#)

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In the gospels, Jesus is recorded as doing many miracles. What did those who were healed do after they had encountered Jesus? While some followed, many returned to their homes and lives. What did they do as a result of their Jesus encounter? Would that encounter translate into an ongoing set of practices and beliefs? How would that set of practices and beliefs mix and merge with the set of practices and belief that would become Christianity?

Sometimes, I try to imagine what might happen if two people who had experienced a miracle of Jesus ever met. What might trigger the storytelling that would suggest they had both encountered Jesus? What resources would they use to assess each others practices and beliefs?

Let me provide a specific example. What might happen when the healed leper in [Mark 1](#) met the woman with the issue of blood in [Luke 8](#)?

John Wilson, in his book on the history of Caesarea Philippi, notes that in history, for some 300 hundred years after Jesus death, Caesarea Philippi was a city with a celebrated statue. Residents of the city understood it was a statue of Christ, erected by a woman whom the Lord had cured of a flow of blood. (Wilson, John F (2004) *Banias: The Story of Caesarea Philippi, Lost City of Pan*, I.B.Tauris)

So imagine that the healed leper of Mark 1—brought up God-fearer, monotheistic, no graven images, Jewish—sets out to share the story of his encounter with Jesus.

He goes on a missionary journey, enters Caesarea Philippi ready to preach the message. Spots a statue. Potential outrage (being a God-fearing, monotheistic, no-graven-images Jew) turns to confusion as he recognises the hands of the statue are like the hands of the person who touched him.

He locates the statue owner, a woman. She has shared her experience of God's touch with people, who now gather weekly around this statue to share stories of being touched by God.

How do these two people, very different, begin to realise they are part of one holy, catholic, and apostolic church? If the group in Caesarea Philippi have developed a different set of practices and beliefs than the group of mobile missionaries, how will convergence begin to happen? Who gets to decide what is [out of bounds church](#) and what is not?

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