

THE FABRICATION OF THE CHRIST MYTH

Harold Leidner

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By

Harold Leidner

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INTRODUCTION

Macbeth: I drink to the general joy of the whole table...

[*Enter the ghost of Banquo*] Avaunt! And quit my sight! Let the earth hide thee!

Macbeth, Act 3, Sc.4.

As Christianity celebrates its bimillennium with much pomp and festivity, dissenting voices may be heard. Perchance the ghosts of vanished sects and religions, obliterated and replaced by Christianity, may appear at the banquet table. Christianity, which claims to have rescued mankind from darkness with the new religion of love, has done so at the cost of many hundreds of these lost creeds. Thus the Theodosian Code, dating from the period AD 325 – 450, placed thirty-six heresies under the ban, added pagan temples, magicians and astrologers to the ban, plus harshest penalties against Jews and Samaritans.

Concerning this Code one scholar writes:

“As for heretics, they received the particular compliment of over a hundred laws in the Theodosian Code, declaring illegal their beliefs, meetings, proselytizing, ownership of property, and very existence.”¹

The dissenters named in the Code stand in clear opposition to the Christian claims, and presumably could give alternate statements as to Christian origins and development. A rather large body of evidence can be found in support of the dissenters. Rather than a class action for all of them, we present a statement for the earliest and most prominent of these dissenters — namely the Jewish authorities. The central drama of the gospels is the passion narrative, which deals with the arrest, trial and crucifixion of Jesus. In these gospels the Jewish authorities play a

major role, which raises the questions of moral and historical responsibility. These gospels charge, in the sharpest possible terms, that these authorities brought about the death of an innocent man. This makes them the most obvious of targets. Conversely, if they are proved innocent of the charge, then they have in effect vindicated all the other dissenters. They have disproved the major elements in the story.

Raymond Brown discusses the issues involved in his massively researched two-volume study, *The Death of the Messiah*, which was published in 1994. Using the careful language of post-Vatican II, Brown writes:

“When the Jewish, Christian and pagan evidence is assembled, the involvement of Jews in the death of Jesus approaches certainty... Given the conclusion just reached, the issues of responsibility and guilt are inevitable. Reading the Gospels will convince most that at least, although troublesome, Jesus was a sincere religious figure who taught truth and helped many, and that therefore crucifying him was a great injustice... No matter what [salvationist] good came out of the death of Jesus, some human beings put him to death and the issue of their responsibility and/or guilt remains... Accordingly I think it is required of me to discuss the ways, some of them strongly anti-Jewish, in which the Gospels have discussed the Jewish role in the death of Jesus...”²

Other writers have been more vehement and more specific. Another conservative Catholic writer, Josef Blinzler, whose book *The Trial of Jesus* appeared in 1955 (pre-Vatican II), writes:

“Anyone who undertakes to assess the trial of Jesus as a historical and legal event, reconstructing it from the gospel narratives of the passion, must come to the same conclusion that the early Christian preachers did, namely, that the main responsibility rests on the Jewish side... His enemies were not concerned for the law, or even for a false concept of the law, but were aiming at the destruction of Jesus at any price... It was a judicial murder.”³

The charge is echoed by a third Catholic clergyman, this one belonging to the liberal wing. Hans Küng, in his book *On Being a Christian* — first published in 1974 — writes:

“What all the (gospel) evangelists make absolutely clear is that Jesus was innocently condemned...It is clearly established as an indisputable fact that Jesus was handed over by the Jewish authorities to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate... He (Jesus) was murdered.”⁴

Again, there is the clear inference of “responsibility and guilt” on the Jewish side.

The ringleader of the affair is declared to be the high priest Caiaphas, who, according to the gospel accounts, presided over the Sanhedrin hearing that condemned Jesus. But while we are on the topic of “great injustice” we may note that Caiaphas and his associates have never had the small courtesy of a day in court, the chance to cross-examine their accusers and the chance to examine the evidence — rights given to war criminals and to serial killers. Present-day Jews have been exonerated by the Vatican from alleged participation in the alleged crime against the alleged Jesus, but this makes the guilt of Caiaphas and his associates all the more damnable.

We know nothing of Caiaphas beyond the gospel accounts. Our main source, the Jewish historian Josephus, gives a terse half-line to his appointment, and another half-line to his dismissal — and that is all. Josephus records that the Roman consul Valerius Gratus “entrusted the office of high priest to Simon, the son of Camith. This person held the office for not more than a year and was succeeded by Joseph, who was called Caiaphas.”⁵

The entry was dated AD 18 by our calendar. Eighteen years later, the Roman consul Vitellius “removed from his sacred office the high priest Joseph surnamed Caiaphas, and appointed in his stead Jonathan son of Ananus.”⁶

The passage was dated AD 36. That is all we know about him. Nor do we have any information as to the others allegedly involved. Where is the presumption of innocence?

While there is much outrage against these individuals, no one seems to know what they did or did not do. Anthony Saldarini writes:

“Scholars have been unable to determine exactly what charges were brought against Jesus, the legality of the hearings or trials before the Jewish council in Jerusalem and the Roman governor Pilate, and the real reason for their verdicts. Since the gospel accounts are highly charged defenses of Jesus’ innocence, they attack, rather than coolly assess, the motives of Jesus’ opponents. Modern attempts to write a historically reliable account of why Jesus was executed depend substantially on how one reconstructs the historical Jesus.”⁷

Thus the innumerable “lives of Jesus” each give the author’s guesswork as to what happened, each version differing from the others, but all leaving Caiaphas firmly strapped to the electric chair. In reply to this chaos of accusations the present work is submitted as an *amicus curiae* brief in support of the Jewish leaders. It will give them their day in court, to which they are fully entitled. We will submit evidence in support of the following statements and premises:

1. The gospel story is an artificial, non-historical work. It has been fabricated from source materials that can be identified and traced to their incorporation into the gospels. There is not a particle of hard evidence that “Jesus of Nazareth” ever existed. No detail of the story has been confirmed beyond reasonable doubt, and there is much dispute over what took place.
2. In particular, the passion sequence, dealing with the arrest, trial and crucifixion of Jesus, is a contrived and synthetic work. All the elements and individual episodes can be traced to source documents that have been rearranged, edited, and radically christianized.
3. An alternate explanation can be provided for Christian origins and for early Christianity. Ordinarily the defendant is not required to solve the case and explain how it all happened. It is for the prose-

cution to prove the case beyond reasonable doubt. Here the errors, contradictions, divergences and impossibilities in the four gospel accounts, with clear evidence of fabrication, would soon demolish the case in a present-day courtroom. However the enormous facade of prestige, authority and invincibility that Christianity has acquired over the centuries makes it necessary that we use the approach of “solving the case” with our alternate version. This will comprise the main content of the present work.

4. The opening chapters will deal with the founding and early history of the Jerusalem church, and then with the career of the apostle Paul. Here the “historical Jesus” plays no part in the story. The Christian churches appear at a later stage, and these create the gospels. Here we survey the critique of these gospels by the New Testament scholars. It becomes clear that they have been unable to prove any part of the story, or prove that “Jesus” existed.

We ask the candid reader to give the Jewish leaders their day in court, and to examine the evidence for their acquittal.

NOTES:

1. Ramsay MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order*, 210
 2. Raymond Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 382, 386
 3. Josef Blinzler, *The Trial of Jesus*, 290, 293
 4. Hans Küng, *On Being a Christian*, 332, 336
 5. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18:35
 6. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18:95
 7. Anthony Saldarini, *Bible Review*, February 1998, 42
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TOO MANY JESUSES

“The indictment or information must so describe the person killed that the accused may know whom he or she is charged with having killed. If known, the name of the deceased must be alleged.”

Corpus Juris Secundum, “Homicide” 144a. (vol.40, 551)

The name Jesus appears frequently in the writings of the Jewish historian Josephus. In the Loeb edition of his works the index lists this name no less than twenty-one times referring to different persons, and it is one of the most common names in the index. The famed and much-disputed reference to “Jesus the Christ” appears as number nine on the list, with many Jesuses before and after. Some of these had outstanding careers and some met death under strange and tragic circumstances. The premise of a unique and remarkable Jesus is thus placed in question at the very outset of our inquiry. Others had their share of drama as well.

Josephus has been accused many times of writing as little as possible about “the” Jesus, and suppressing what he knew. One would think that the very name would cause a guilty start and a quick glance over the shoulder. However our historian writes freely about the other twenty with no accusation of suppression as to the others. In fact it is the scholars who do the suppressing, writing as little as possible about the name frequency and the other references.

The books of Josephus appeared in Greek, and we give the list of names in their Greek form, as given in the index or in the text:

1. Jesus son of Naue
2. Jesus son of Saul
3. Jesus, high priest, son of Phineas

4. Jesus son of the high priest Jozadak
5. Jesus son of Joiada
6. Jesus, high priest, son of Simon
7. Jesus, high priest, son of Phabes
8. Jesus, high priest, son of Seë
9. Jesus the Christ
10. Jesus son of Damnaeus, became high priest
11. Jesus son of Gamliel, became high priest
12. Jesus son of Sapphas
13. Jesus, chief priest, probably to be identified with 10 or 11
14. Jesus son of Gamalas, high priest
15. Jesus, brigand chief on borderland of Ptolemais
16. Jesus son of Sapphias
17. Jesus brother of Chares
18. Jesus a Galilean, perhaps to be identified with 15
19. Jesus in ambushade, perhaps to be identified with 16
20. Jesus, priest, son of Thebuthi
21. Jesus son of Ananias, rude peasant, prophesies the fall of Jerusalem

The list shows clearly that Josephus follows the Judaic custom of linking the son's name to that of the father: "X son of Y." He does this throughout his writings, in literally hundreds of cases, and does so here in the undisputed twenty cases, except for several minor figures involved in the turbulent events in Galilee during the war with Rome. We can guess that the information was lacking. But even here the text indicates family linkages for all except 15, "Jesus, brigand chief." These minor Jesuses appear in the narrative with every indication of time, place and detail to show that they were authentic figures. This has never been questioned.

Josephus was born into a priestly family and was particularly concerned with ancestry and lineage since his own status and privileges were derived as birthright. The priestly office was hereditary and was jealously guarded. Almost automatically Josephus labels a man according to status (priest or layman) and descent. Ten names on the list are priestly, with the father's name given. Josephus never leaves ancestry in doubt where this is material to the story.

This makes it strange that Josephus does not describe number nine as “Jesus son of Joseph.” The father’s name would certainly be known to our historian if he knew anything at all or wrote anything at all. After all, that would be the first question asked “Jesus” by a Jewish court: “Who are you and what is your name?” And there would be little dispute about the passage if the name Joseph were included. Instead the “Jesus-passage” begins: “About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man if indeed one ought to call him a man.”¹

Other versions of the passage also omit the father’s name. Could Josephus, Temple priest and historian, have written this way?

The plain inference is that this line was written by a Christian for Christian readers, for whom only one Jesus existed in all history, and that one without human paternity. The simple pronouncement of the word “Jesus” would immediately summon up the majesty of Christ to the Christian reader, and with no need to mention a father, since these Christian readers knew that Jesus was the Son of God. Hence the name of a human father was omitted. But of course Josephus never thought in those terms, hence he never wrote that opening line. And if he didn’t, then it would be difficult to salvage the rest of the passage. It could not exist without that line.

The present writer has researched New Testament literature for a good number of years and has never seen the Jesus list from the Loeb index published and commented on by any writer. The Christian apologists are anxious to preserve the uniqueness of Jesus, and play down all material tending to question that uniqueness. The apologists are even more anxious to preserve Josephus as an unshakable witness for the Christian case. If the list were discussed then it would at once raise the question of why Josephus did not write “Jesus son of Joseph.” It appears that the charge of cover-up and suppression should be directed at the scholar-apologists, not at Josephus.

The earliest reference in a Christian writing connecting Josephus to Jesus is by the church father Origen, in his book *Contra Celsus*, dated about AD 230. We will postpone discussion of the passage until that stage in our inquiry. The failure of earlier Christian writers to cite Josephus, when the passage would have been of great help to them during the sharp disputes of the prior century, has always been a major argument against the genuineness of this text. The Josephus passage in its present form appears only after the time of Origen.

Josephus will be a major witness in our inquiry, hence a biographical note is in order. He was born into a leading priestly family in Jerusalem in the year 37 by our present calendar and died some time after 100. In his own life, as strange as any that he narrates, he was a Temple priest, Pharisee, emissary to Rome, then briefly and dubiously a general in Galilee in the war against Rome. He was captured, and to save his life went over to the Roman side. After that he was an eyewitness to the siege and destruction of Jerusalem. Despite that — or perhaps because of that, to atone for the desertion — he became a spokesman and propagandist for Judaism in all his writings. Above all, he was a historian of the first rank, a task to which he devoted his life after the war. He worked with a staff of assistants and with matchless documentation available to him from Judaic, Greek and Roman sources. He devoted almost thirty years to these writings.

A tribute to his importance is given by Louis Feldman, who did the English translation for several of his books in the Loeb Library edition. Feldman writes:

“Josephus is our most important extant source for the period from the end of the second century BCE to the year 70, when the Second Temple was destroyed by the Romans... He is indispensable for our understanding of the political, social, economic and religious background of the rise of Christianity and of the other sects of the era, as well as of Jewry of the Diaspora. He is our most important literary guide to the geography, topography and monuments of Palestine, so that the archaeologist must dig with a spade in one hand and a copy of Josephus in the other. And he is most important as a historian of the Græco-Roman world who sheds crucial lights on events of the last century of the Roman Republic and on the first century of the Roman Empire.”²

Josephus wrote but four texts however two of these are large, encyclopedic works — the *War* in seven books, the *Antiquities* in twenty books. He composed two shorter works — the *Life* in one book, and the *Contra Apion* in two books. All show his fondness for names and details, for time and place, for anecdote and sharp camera-

like descriptions. The index to the Loeb ten-volume edition runs to 225 pages, small print, double column per page. It is mainly a list of names, and these run to the formidable total of 1,932 individuals (this by my count; I may be off slightly). And of this large number, only two have come under challenge as to their genuineness: Jesus and "James, the brother of Jesus called the Christ." The others are unquestioned. Josephus is a model historian 99.99 percent of the time, and fails only where he does not confirm the official story.

Returning to our Jesus list, we note that a number of the individuals referred to show linkages and parallels to the gospel Jesus. Again Josephus shows no awareness of this where we would expect him to note this at once. The list can be reduced to eighteen names, omitting "Jesus the Christ" and numbers 18 and 19, as not clearly identified. Of these eighteen, six show linkages to the gospel story — from marginal literary resemblance to apparent plagiarism from Josephus by the gospel writers. Thus one-third of the names are relevant, and as indicated below, every major aspect of the career of the gospel Jesus is echoed in these other figures cited by Josephus — and without the need for the "historical Jesus."

This is an odd development. If Josephus were aware of the historical Jesus then he would certainly be aware of the resemblances and duplications to his own writings. How could he be silent? We leave this to the experts to answer.

We list these six individuals in summary form, giving the Loeb index numbers, and with further discussion in later chapters:

Loeb 1. "Jesus son of Naue." This is the Scriptural Joshua son of Nun. It is a distinct coincidence that the heir and successor to Moses in Hebrew history has the same Greek name as the heir and successor to Moses in Christian doctrine. The name "Iesous" in the Greek texts applies equally to Jesus and to Joshua.

Loeb 4. "Jesus, son of the high priest Jozadak." This is the Scriptural Jeshua, the high priest of the Return and the rebuilding of the Temple. He figures prominently in the *Book of Zechariah* and has been made a prefiguration for Christ. Numerous proof-texts

found in *Zechariah* are also quoted and utilized in the gospel. We would expect Josephus to comment on all this, since he claimed special expertise on the interpretation of Scripture, but he shows no awareness of this. Instead he treats this Jesus as a figure of complete orthodoxy, and the founder of a dynasty of high priests that endured till the Maccabean era. At every point Josephus diverges from the gospel account.

Of the remaining figures, three can be linked together: in each case a Jesus is slain in Jerusalem, and disaster befalls the city as a form of divine judgment. This was a basic motif with Josephus. He had gone over to the Roman side during the war and was under the greatest compulsion to justify this desertion to his fellow Jews and to himself. The rationalization that he arrived at was that the Jewish cause had come under divine condemnation for its sins, and that in surrendering to the Romans he was really accepting the divine will. For that reason he eagerly searches out and cites all material pointing to divine punishment upon Jerusalem, elaborating and inventing if need be to bolster his argument. Indeed, the argument by Josephus that the city had come under divine punishment was the major reason his writings were preserved by the Christians. He cites the three “martyr-Jesuses”:

Loeb 5. “Jesus son of Joiada.” As Josephus tells the story, “Joannes the high priest of the Jews murdered his own brother Jesus in the Temple... The Deity was not indifferent to this, and for this reason the people were made slaves and the Temple was defiled by the Persians.”³

We have the motif that the slaying of a Jesus in Jerusalem brings disaster.

Loeb 14. “Jesus son of Gamalas, high priest.” This is another Jesus slain in Jerusalem, with divine vengeance upon the city. This time the slaying was by the Edomites, allied with the Zealots during the war with Rome. Killed with him was Ananus, a former high priest. Josephus was horrified at these murders and considers them among the worst of the crimes committed by the Zealots. He writes:

“But I suppose it was because God had condemned the city to destruction because of its pollutions, and desired to purge the Sanctuary by fire, that He thus cut off those who clung to these places with such tender affection.”⁴

This is a clear statement that the city would be destroyed for the slaying of “Jesus.”

Loeb 21. “Jesus son of Ananias, rude peasant, prophesies the fall of Jerusalem.” This is a third Jesus slain in Jerusalem, this time by “stoning” from the Roman catapult during the siege of the city. This man had prophesied tirelessly, “Woe unto Jerusalem.” As in the gospel version, he was handed over by the Jewish authorities to the Roman governor for punishment. “Though flayed to the bone he neither sued for mercy nor shed a tear... He answered never a word.”⁵

This comes close to plagiarism by the gospel writers.

If Josephus knew anything of the Christians he would know of their constant charge that Jerusalem was destroyed because of the crucifixion of Jesus. Therefore we cannot understand why he would be silent in this regard in his reference to “Jesus the Christ,” since he had brought up the other Jesus figures. The supreme need to justify his own desertion would override every other consideration. He certainly would have mentioned Jesus as one more figure prophesying the destruction of Jerusalem. Again the apologists have to do the explaining.

Loeb 15. “Jesus, brigand chief.” We include this entry for the record. In recent decades, writers of the Brandon-Winter school have argued for the “political Jesus,” namely one who was allied to the Zealots and who favored a war against Rome. Whatever the merits of this scenario, we note that Josephus has encountered this version of Jesus along with all the other roles. If the historical Jesus had been a “brigand” or allied with them, then here too Josephus would have no reason for suppression of any kind. All is set down plainly.

The previous list gives us the main points in the career of the gospel Jesus:

1. Joshua/Jesus is the heir to Moses and brings his followers to a promised land of salvation. Indeed he is frequently made a type or prefiguration for Christ.
2. Jeshua/Jesus, the priest of the Return, is also made a prefiguration for Christ, and the book of Zechariah is the source for numerous proof-texts to support the Christian polemic. Jesus is the perfect High Priest, foreshadowed by the earlier model. We would expect Josephus, a resolute defender of Judaism, to be aware of this.
3. He is a martyr figure, whose death in turn brings tragedy and destruction to Jerusalem. In each of the three cases he is rejected and punished by wicked Jews. This is a basic motif with Josephus. As mentioned, his insistence that Jerusalem was destroyed for its sins was a major reason why his works were preserved by the Christians.
4. Jesus the brigand chief indicates the turmoil and violence that Jesus and his followers brought about, threatening the authorities, Jewish and Roman, and causing their punitive response.

The prior material indicates that the person of “Jesus of Nazareth” could be constructed out of Judaic sources, without the need for a historical figure. Thus the gospel story comes under doubt at the very outset of our inquiry.

So strange is the silence of Josephus in the places where we would expect him to speak out that John Meier, a leading New Testament scholar, has given us the dubious explanation that Josephus never read a Christian document, which is close to saying that he never met a Christian. Meier writes that “in my opinion there is no probative evidence that Josephus knew any of the Four Gospels.”⁶

But Josephus was the most tireless and inquisitive of historians, describing the most insignificant of events, with access to all documentation, and he lived to a date past 100 . He was a direct contemporary to the alleged trial of Paul, and he was in Rome during the alleged

persecution of the Christians by Nero. What are we to think? How could he be uninformed? It seems Meier wants it both ways: he must have the decisive and all-important “Testimonium” — as the Jesus passage in *Antiquities* is often referred to. This states that Jesus existed and was crucified. Meier wants to block off all the inconvenient passages in Josephus which cast doubt on that existence. At the very least we have the inference that the gospels date after AD 100.

We will continue with the witness of Josephus. If he can break free of his custodians and can testify independently then perchance he will provide further material raising questions and doubts.

NOTES:

1. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18:63
2. L. Feldman, *Josephus, the Bible and History*, 17 – 18.
3. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 11:298 – 300
4. Josephus, *War*, 4:323
5. Josephus, *War*, 6:304
6. J. Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, vol.2, 97, n. 179
7. Jesus Passage: Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18:63 – 64

THE ALTERNATE SAVIOR

“I think that I have drawn up the whole story in full and accurate detail... I assert that no one else, either Jew or gentile, would have been equal to the task, however willing to undertake it, of issuing so accurate a treatise as this for the Greek world...”

Josephus, *Antiquities* 20:261 – 262

Referring again to the Loeb list of Jesus names, we note that the most prominent and important one is the first on the list. This was Joshua son of Nun, heir and successor to Moses, and the commander who brought his elect into salvation — against great odds and with divine aid. Through the indispensable Josephus, we learn that this Joshua/ Jesus is no longer a figure of remote antiquity, but has been projected with great dramatic force into events of the late period. Against the lack of attention to “Jesus of Nazareth” there is remarkable attention towards the “first Jesus” who is now the dominant figure.

Josephus narrates that towards the middle decades of the first century, about the period AD 30 – 60, a series of extraordinary mass assemblages took place in the Holy Land. The populace would gather in many thousands, unarmed but swept by religious exaltation, and then go on a mass pilgrimage to an ancestral site, in the belief that a miraculous event would take place that would bring deliverance to the nation. “Impostors and deceivers called upon the mob to follow them into the wilderness. For they said they would show them unmistakable marvels and signs.”¹

The Roman occupying power understood full well just which hated enemy the populace wanted to be delivered from. Rather than wait till the pilgrimages reached the desired site where religious frenzy would

create the miracle, the Romans attacked savagely to break up these gatherings, with heavy loss of life among the masses. And yet these huge pilgrimages continued.

Josephus reports these events accurately — as usual, he is our sole witness for very important events. However, he failed to notice their linkage and significance: all were concerned with reenacting events in the careers of Moses and Joshua, with faith that this reenactment would bring salvation.

One scholar points out the common theme and lists events reported by Josephus within that theme. He writes:

“Prophetic pretenders to messiahship promised to the people a startling authentication of their case and the arrival of imminent salvation. To this type belong the Samaritan who promised to show to his followers the Temple-furniture which had been hidden by Moses on Gerizim²; Theudas who promised to the people the repetition of Joshua’s miracle in the cleaving of the Jordan³; the ‘false leaders’ and ‘impostors’ who again and again led the people into the wilderness⁴; and the prophet from Egypt who held out the prospect of the repetition of the Jericho miracle at Jerusalem⁵; These prophets were convinced that the eschatological [i.e. final and supernatural] age of salvation would correspond to the early history of Israel, hence the wilderness and Moses typologies, that the age of salvation was imminent, and that they were called as the second Moses or Joshua to bring things to a head.”⁶

Other writers have noted the Moses/Joshua motif in these enormous events.

“These actions of deliverance are understood as new, eschatological actions that typologically correspond to or are informed by the great formative acts of deliverance led by Moses and Joshua.”⁷

“The Jews went back to their own ancient stories and then ritually reenacted those great inaugural acts of Exodus from bondage in Egypt and arrival in the Promised Land.”⁸

The impostors and the great multitudes did not think to go to Bethlehem, city of David. Nor did they think to go to Modiin, city of the Maccabees. Instead they went to the scenes in remote antiquity where victory and salvation had been manifest. There would be a Second Coming — signs and wonders would take place, and there would be the supernatural appearance of Moses and his lieutenant, Joshua/Jesus. And no one else could equal the grandeur of these ancestral saviors. The latter-day prophets and deceivers gained their authority only by speaking in the name of the early figures and promising to repeat their miracles.

We had thought that Moses and Joshua were figures of remote antiquity, as far as popular awareness at that period went. Now we find these figures propelled to the forefront. And we are told many times by the scholars that there was a widespread Messianic Hope centered on the advent of the Son of David. Prior to this there would be a Forerunner symbolizing Elijah to proclaim this Advent. But the frenzied emphasis on Moses and Joshua plainly means that this was the only Messianic hope at that period. There was no Davidic Hope and there was no “Elijah Forerunner.” The only saviors would be Moses and Joshua.

Josephus has been accused by one and all of concealing the Messianic Hope. He has received stern reprimands for his dishonesty. But here he is shouting from the housetops that he knows all about the Hope, and that it has been going on for thirty years. Only it is the wrong Hope and the wrong Savior — that is the offense of Josephus. As if in a Kafka novel, he is guilty because he doesn't confess to what he doesn't know.

It comes as a surprise to the modern reader that Moses and his lieutenant Joshua could hold so much power over the Jews of that period, since the Exodus events were dated more than twelve centuries earlier. But a reading of the literature then current gives us a sense of what was going on. Josephus indicates the great awe and reverence that all Jews felt for Moses. The Lawgiver was considered an abiding presence.

“But the admiration in which that hero [Moses] was held was not confined to his lifetime. It is alive today. Certainly there is not a Hebrew who does not obey the laws laid down by Moses, just as if he were still there and ready to punish him for any breach of discipline... That legislation, believed to have come from God, caused this man to be ranked higher than his own natural state.”⁹

The *Book of Sirach*, then considered a supplementary book to the Scriptures, declares that “The Lord made him equal in glory to the angels.”¹⁰

At the Qumran community at the Dead Sea the sect members did not so much as dare pronounce his name. They referred to him only as the “Lawgiver.” and this Law was studied there in courses, without cease day and night.

Philo of Alexandria uses extravagant language verging on deification:

“Since God judged Moses worthy to appear as a partner of His own possessions, He gave into his hands the whole world as a portion well fitted for His heir. Therefore each element obeyed him as its master, changed its natural properties, and submitted to his command... His partnership with the Father and Maker of all was magnified also by the honor of being deemed worthy to bear the same title. For he was named god and king of the whole nation and entered, we are told, into the darkness where God was.”¹¹

Philo also emphasizes the role of Moses as intercessor, and here he uses language readily applicable to the gospel Jesus:

“He took the part of mediator and reconciler... and made prayers and supplications, begging that their [the Israelites’] sins might be forgiven. Then when this protector and intercessor had softened the wrath of the Father, he wended his way back [to the Israelite camp in the wilderness] with mingled joy and dejection. He rejoiced that God had accepted his prayers, yet was ready to collapse with the dejection and heaviness that filled him, at the transgression of the multitude.”¹²

This is a concise picture of the later Jesus in the gospel: protector, mediator, suppliant before the Father, but filled with grief at the transgressions of the people.

A document dated as directly contemporary to the gospel period, known as the *Testament of Moses* (or alternately as the *Assumption of Moses*), carries the exaltation process to a bestowal of divine status upon Moses and also notes the role of intercessor. Concerning this book one commentator writes that...

“the parallels with the New Testament doctrine of Christ are remarkable. Moses appears to fill the place which would be taken by Christ in Christian belief, as a divinely appointed mediator, bound by no limitations of time and space, interceding on behalf of God’s people... He was ‘prepared before the foundation of the world’ to be the mediator of God’s covenant... But not only is Moses regarded as shepherd, compassionate guide, and intercessor; in 11:16 he is described as ‘the sacred spirit who was worthy of the Lord, manifold and incomprehensible, the lord of the word, who was faithful in all things, the most perfect teacher in the world...’ In 12:6 Moses is ‘appointed to pray for Israel’s sins and make intercession for them.’ Moses was also the appointed revealer of God’s hidden purpose. *Testament of Moses*, 1:12,15.”¹³

The presence of Moses in the late period effectively transfers Joshua/Jesus, the lieutenant of Moses, to the late period as well. And as the image of Moses becomes more grandiose, there is a corresponding exaltation of the image and role of Joshua/Jesus.

The Testament describes the transfer of authority from Moses to the first Jesus:

“And he called to him Joshua the son of Nun, a man approved of the Lord, that he might be the minister of the people and of the tabernacle of the testimony with all its holy things. And that he might bring the people into the land given to their fathers... saying to Joshua, Be strong and of good courage to

do with all your might all that has been commanded... And Moses took his hand and raised him into the seat before him, and said... You shall root out the nations...”¹⁴

From the foregoing texts we can conclude that if but a fraction of the aura and greatness of Moses were transferred to the successor, we would have a supernatural being named Jesus who would mediate between God and man, and who would make intercession to God for the removal of sin. And this would be arrived at without the need for the “historical Jesus of Nazareth.” And we can be sure that it was this view of Joshua as the hero and commander who would “root out the nations” that inspired the masses to seek out the ancient sites where he would again manifest himself.

We have here a clear and plausible explanation for the creation of an exalted and supernatural person named “Jesus.” He was the second Moses and took over all the authority and attributes of his teacher. But if we turn to the gospel figure, then there is nothing plausible there at all. How could the obscure backwoods parson from Galilee achieve “high Christology” and be made a grandiose cosmic figure within forty years of his death — and this in divergent Greek gospels?

The Testament of Moses, above mentioned, has been preserved in a single manuscript, dated in the sixth century, written in Latin, and described by the editor as a translation from the Greek which in turn was translated from the Hebrew. The Testament, on the face of it, is an ultra-orthodox Judaic tract, based on the farewell address of Moses as given in the closing chapters of Deuteronomy. There Moses urges strict obedience to the Law, and prophesies disaster and tragedy if Israel strays from this.

Obedience to the Law and punishment for disobedience are the timeless lessons of orthodoxy. Josephus, Temple priest and Pharisee, states this in the opening pages of his *Antiquities*:

“Speaking generally, the main lesson to be learned from this history by anyone who cares to read it, is that men who conform to the will of God and do not venture to transgress laws excellently laid down, will prosper in all things beyond belief, and God will grant them happiness for their reward. But

in proportion as they depart from the strict observance of these laws, their paths become more difficult, and whatever imaginary good thing they strive to do ends in hopeless disaster.”¹⁵

We may then ask why was this document copied, translated and preserved by Christian authorities for centuries after the original composition? As it stands, it is an orthodox Judaic text. The reason it was translated into Latin is that the translator saw the name “Jesus” (*Iesous*’ in the Greek) and promptly concluded that it must refer to the Lord Jesus as the heir to Moses — no matter what the intent was of the original writer. This must be put down as a conscious decision by the translator. He took Joshuan material and deliberately transferred it to Jesus, making the gospel Jesus the heir to Moses. Here we have an intermingling of the persons of Joshua and Jesus on the highest doctrinal level. The supernatural Joshua has become the supernatural Jesus, now made the heir to Moses by sleight-of-hand.

This decision by the translator assured the preservation of the Testament. Only those Judaic texts deemed useful to the Church and thus worth capturing have managed to survive, albeit in christianized form. If we ponder the implications of the foregoing material, we note that we have two Jesuses at the same time and the same place, both inciting the masses, and both arousing fear and anger in the authorities: Joshua and Jesus of Nazareth. This is one Jesus too many. They could be separate and independent figures, but as we have seen there is a blending, with Joshuan material being transferred to the gospel Jesus.

Thus we are led to a major premise: we do not need the human “Jesus of Nazareth” as the starting point, nor do we need a process of legend and myth building lasting decades and generations to arrive at an exalted and supernatural Christ. We can start right at the top and posit that Jesus is a radically christianized version of the supernatural Joshua. We thus have an alternate statement for Christian origins.

Those who question the existence of “Jesus of Nazareth” have always received the challenge: if this Jesus never existed, how do you account for Christian origins? Thus Alfred Loisy, himself the most skeptical of writers — and duly excommunicated from the church for his views — gives this explanation for the existence of Jesus:

“That Jesus was one among a number of agitators and enthusiasts who appeared in Judea between the years 6 and 70 of our era... that Jesus was crucified as a pretended Messiah by sentence of Pontius Pilate — all this has the highest degree of probability; to be more exact, the whole Christian movement becomes unintelligible if these beginnings are suppressed. No consistent argument authorizes their elimination. and there is nothing to replace them.”¹⁶

Loisy is compelled to accept “the historical Jesus” only because no other explanation makes sense. But what, perchance, if a “consistent argument,” quite intelligible and also having a high degree of probability, were offered to replace these beginnings? Loisy would then have to give it a hearing, since that is what he asked for.

A similar line of reasoning is used by Hans Küng. He argues that we must posit the existence of Jesus because that is the only way to understand how the early church came to “proclaim Christ.”

“The primitive Christian proclamation of Christ could have emerged and can be understood only in the light of the history of Jesus... It is only in this way that the primitive Christian and thus too the modern proclamation of Christ can be protected from the suspicion that it is not founded on a historical fact, but is merely an assertion, a projection of faith, or even a pure myth, an apotheosis.”¹⁷

That is, we need the “historical Jesus” to guard against the suspicion that Christianity is based only on faith and myth, and it is “only in this way” that the charge of myth can be answered. Here Küng is being less than candid. As an ordained priest of the Catholic church he knows very well that this church originated precisely in faith and myth, and that the Lord Jesus is not there as historical fact but through the miracle of the Incarnation. This is stated clearly in the Creed: “We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God... For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven and was made man...”

Küng, writing for present-day secular readers, skeptics and rationalists, presents the “Jesus of history” — otherwise the readers would simply shrug off the book. But he hasn’t proved anything, and he certainly hasn’t eliminated an alternate premise that would explain how this faith church itself came into existence.

We ask the candid reader to give our premise a hearing and a day in court. We propose to examine the Joshua premise in detail, to see what role it played in the origins of Christianity. At each point we will compare our premise with the “official version” to see which stands up better. As Walter Lowrie puts it...

“That theory which, without artifice or violence, best accords with the greatest number of facts recorded, and so best preserves the credit of the documents upon which it seeks to found itself, is presumably the right theory.”¹⁸

NOTES:

1. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 20:168
2. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18:85
3. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 20:97
4. Josephus, *War* 2:259
5. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 20:169
6. E. Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 2:602
7. R. Horsely, cited by J. Crossan in *The Historical Jesus*, 159
8. J. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 159
9. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 3:317, 320
10. *The Book of Sirach*, 45:2
11. Philo, *Questions and Answers Exodus*, 1:156 – 158
12. Philo, *Questions and Answers Exodus*, 2:166
13. A. L. Davies, *Dictionary of the Apostolic Church*, article Assumption of Moses, 107
14. *Testament of Moses* 1:9 – 10; 12:2, 9
15. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 1:14
16. A. Loisy, *Birth of the Christian Religion*, 12
17. H. Küng, *On Being a Christian*, 159
18. W. Lowrie, intro. to *The Mystery of the Kingdom of God*, by A. Schweitzer, 34

THE JERUSALEM CHURCH

“The scanty and suspicious materials of ecclesiastical history seldom enable us to dispel the dark cloud that hangs over the first age of the church.”

Edward Gibbon, *Decline and Fall*

A convenient starting point for comparing the merits of the rival explanations will be the question of the origins of the Jerusalem church. Following the four gospel accounts the next book in the New Testament canon is Acts of the Apostles. This purports to narrate the setting up of the Jerusalem church by the disciples of Jesus, and also narrates the career of the apostle Paul. Our alternate explanation for Christian origins eliminates the “disciples of Jesus” as the cause and also provides an alternate biography for Paul. Hence a clear-cut test is now available as to the merits of the two premises.

The whole question of the Jerusalem church was thrown wide open by a sensational discovery in the 1940s, namely, that of the Dead Sea Scrolls found at Qumran. Tucked away in the vast literature created by the Dead Sea Scrolls are two short paragraphs by Theodore Gaster that are of basic importance to our present inquiry. Gaster prepared one of the earliest translations of the scrolls then available, his text appearing in 1956. In the introduction to his book, he noted some “affinities” between several of the documents and the Epistle of James, one of the books in the New Testament canon. This James appears as head of the Jerusalem church — but how did he get there?

To explain the linkage Gaster then wrote:

“Indeed, we may perhaps not unreasonably conclude that the Dead Sea Scrolls actually open a window upon the little community of Jewish Christians clustered around James in Jerusalem. These men may have been originally the urban

brethren of the hardier souls that betook themselves to Qumran and to other camp settlements in the Desert of Judah. For the Zadokite Document provides expressly for urban as well as camp communities.”¹

Abruptly, we have a “window” opening to an alternate starting point for the Jerusalem church, and an alternate line of development. If Gaster is correct, the sect was not started by the Galilean disciples of “Jesus of Nazareth” but was an offshoot of the Qumran brethren, sharing their beliefs and literature and organization. And this had nothing to do with Christianity, since Gaster states flatly...

“The community envisaged by the Dead Sea Scrolls and translated into reality at Qumran is in no sense Christian, and holds none of the fundamental theological doctrines of the Christian faith.”²

A further inference would be that if all derived from Qumran, and nowhere else, then perchance the Jerusalem members knew nothing of “Jesus of Nazareth” since the Qumran members also knew nothing of him.

A. Powell-Davies, another early writer on the scrolls, was in substantial agreement with Gaster and noted many linkages between Jerusalem and Qumran.

He states:

“Both the Essenic sect (at Qumran) and the Jerusalem community call the congregation considered as a whole *the Many*; both have an executive committee called *the Twelve*; both have a superintendent or *episkopos* — translated by our word ‘bishop.’ In both cases the communities have ‘all things in common,’ which means that the wealth of the members and their current wages must be contributed to a central treasury in charge of a steward, who will make the necessary disbursements on behalf of the community...”

“Both the Essenic sectarians (at Qumran) and the Jerusalem community call themselves people of the *New Covenant* — which is exactly the same as *New Testament*; both practice baptism and have a sacred meal; both speak of themselves in such terms as the *Elect* or the *Poor* and speak of the truth of God as *Light* and themselves as *Sons of Light*. These are a few among the large number of identical practices and concepts.

“Must we not then see that the Jerusalem community as a *whole* was an Essenic body which had existed considerably *before* the crucifixion of Jesus, perhaps for several generations before, and that it was in fact an urban and less monastic counterpart of the Qumran society fifteen miles away on the shores of the Dead Sea?

“The *Twelve* of James, we may confidently infer, were of Jewish faith and remained such... Indeed, the more we look at James the more it occurs to us that irrespective of our earlier assumptions, we must ask a searching question: Was he truly a believer in the Risen Jesus?”³

If the Jerusalem church indeed derived from Qumran and was non-Christian, as Gaster and Powell-Davies affirm, then James and his fellow sectarians would logically know nothing of “Jesus of Nazareth,” since nothing in the copious Qumran texts shows any awareness of the said Jesus. Especially so if the Jerusalem church existed “generations before” the appearance of this Jesus. And among the sect members, the most famed and prominent one was the apostle Paul. What if he didn’t know either? Then the whole story of early Christianity begins to fall apart. A lot of rethinking is in order.

The “official version,” that this church derives from Jesus of Nazareth, is supported by a single work, Acts, the book immediately following the four gospels. Acts is generally attributed to Luke, the author of the third gospel. It is labeled the “sole authority” on the Jerusalem church, and if this is shown to be without merit, then perchance the Qumran premise should be accepted in the absence of a better solution.

One writer states:

“Whatever be the historian’s judgment as to its’ (*Acts*) value as a record, without it he would be compelled to wander without a guide in the trackless forest of conjecture as to the way the Church organized itself and began its work. It is the sole authority.”⁴

This is a large pronouncement and should be restated: *Acts became* the sole authority through church censorship that removed all rival versions, and through church declaration as to what should be in the canon and what should be excluded. Only then did *Acts* attain its authority.

During the turbulent early period many rival texts, put out by rival sects, were in use, as the scholars are well aware. At the beginning of our modern era a collection of these texts was published and other collections have been published since then.

“In 1703 Johann Albert Fabricius, the great Hamburg compiler, published his *Codex Apocryphus Novi Testamenti* [Collection of New Testament Apocrypha], which has retained its worth to modern times. In volume I Fabricius has collected Infancy Gospels, the Gospel of Nicodemus and Epistles of Pilate, the Epistle of Lentulus, apocryphal Gospel Fragments. Volume II contains Acta, Epistolae, Apocalypses aliaque scripta Apostolis falso inscripta. [Acts, Epistles, Apocalypses inscribed falsely in the name of Apostles]. Finally volume III brought liturgies under apostolic names and additions, as well as the Shepherd of Hermas.”⁵

It is only by accident of history that these other “acts of the apostles” lost out and are labeled “false.”

While Luke, the author of *Acts*, appears to be a secondary figure in terms of narrating the gospel story, since there are three other accounts, he has been projected into a unique role in terms of narrating the origin of Christianity as a functioning church. One scholar writes: “Many years ago Kirsopp Lake said to a class that if *Acts* is not a basically sound historical document, we know nothing of the origin of Christianity.”⁶ Bible experts place Kirsopp Lake in the front rank in this field.

Not only does Luke have the heavy burden of explaining Christian origins all by himself, but Acts is now the sole authority that connects Paul to the gospel story and makes him a witness to it. Henry Cadbury states: "Acts is the only bridge we have across the seemingly impassable gulf that separates Jesus from Paul."⁷ Thus if Acts should be rejected by the historians as a source, then we would have a trackless forest and an impassable gulf, and Paul would drop out as a witness. There would be no way of explaining the "beginnings" — thanks to church censorship in blocking off the rival explanations.

Luke cannot be dispensed with. His books Luke-Acts comprise the largest contribution by a single author to the New Testament, making up more than one-quarter of the volume. His gospel is granted a higher importance than Mark and Matthew:

"The loss of neither of them (Mark and Matthew) would reduce the amount of our information about Jesus as seriously as would the loss of Luke. This volume contains the largest part of the unique material in the Synoptic Gospels."⁸

The *New Bible Dictionary* lists no less than forty-six of these passages, each one a vivid episode or parable, found in Luke and omitted in the others. To this we must add of course the material common with the other gospels, meaning that we could have the entire story from beginning to end using only Luke, with far more detail and far more effectively than the other two (the gospel of John is tacitly omitted as nonhistorical).

Luke's second book, Acts, gets this tribute:

"The Book of Acts is even more indispensable. No narratives parallel to it have survived. It is our sole record of the Apostolic age... Even the extensive and self-revealing correspondence of Paul would leave his life and setting afloat for us in a sea of ignorance were it not for the succinct outline of his career sketched for us in Acts."⁹

If Luke drops out, then the historicity of the church origins must be without any other confirmation. Is not the entire structure extraordinarily fragile if so much depends on one man and one book?

Let us emphasize that the issue is not so much Luke in himself, but his achievement in connecting Paul to the gospel story, via Acts, and thus recruiting Paul as a witness. For if we, by some mental process, could blot out of consciousness all awareness of the content of the gospel and the content of Paul's official biography as found in Acts, and could then read Paul's epistles solely in terms of their separate and independent statements, then we might arrive at a different story for the origin of Christianity. The Qumran premise would then come into play.

This is blocked for us as long as Luke is in the path, and we cannot get to the separate examination of Paul until the problem of Luke and his books Gospel-Acts has been faced. And the scholars, for all their criticism of Luke, are compelled to support Luke in his basic premises: that there is the historical fact of a Jesus of Nazareth, his trial and crucifixion; there is the historical fact of a Jerusalem church founded by the disciples of this Jesus; and there is the historical fact of the young Saul who first opposed this church, but who was converted and became the apostle Paul, as witness to the gospel and the historical Jesus. All Luke's faults are outweighed a thousand fold by the magnitude of his achievement. Yet he remains the sole witness, and if Acts is to be rejected in its entirety, then we are literally compelled to look elsewhere for the origins of Christianity.

Putting it another way, if the scholar-apologists are committed in advance to the historical Jesus, then they will support Luke-Acts to the hilt, precisely to block off any alternate explanations that would threaten this historical Jesus. On the basis of the evidence that we will submit, however, we posit that the following critique of Luke can be made:

- The scholars have subjected Luke to very severe criticism. He is labeled as an editor working with earlier source materials, and in no sense a contemporary or witness to the events described though he chooses to describe himself as a companion to Paul in their travels. He is charged with freely altering or inventing as he sees fit.
- His books are given late dates by many scholars. A common dating is about 105, since a major source used by him is declared to be Josephus, whose death is placed after 100. Others date Luke as

late as 150. This latter date projects Luke into the period of sharp controversy among rival Christian sects as to the person and career of Jesus, with free composition of rival gospels.

There is no reliable dating, since the earliest reference to this book is near 200, and all we can say is that it was composed some time in the second century.

“In the New Testament, the book immediately following the four Gospels is the Acts of the Apostles (in Greek ‘Praxeis Apostolon’). It is mentioned first, as far as is known to us today, in the fragment of a list of sacred books which is called the Muratorian Fragment, from the end of the second century... Apocryphal Acts of individual apostles were already numerous in those days and included miracle stories without any historical value — for example, the Acts of Peter, Paul, John, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Matthew and Barnabas.”¹⁰

But Luke’s version is replete with miracles, with the Damascus Road vision the centerpiece. What if that drops out? And why this Acts and none of the others?

The existence of a large number of other gospels and “acts” at that period, and the apparent obscurity of Luke’s version, leads to the clear possibility that our author was but one of many in a crowded field of gospel and “acts” composition, and that he may have had rather modest hopes for his book at the time he wrote it. However Luke hit upon a masterstroke that assured reception and acclaim for his two books by the “catholic” Jesus-of-Nazareth party, and the inclusion of these books in their canon. This was the capture of James and Paul and making them witnesses to the gospel story. Apart from Luke’s novel we have no proof that they are indeed witnesses.

Johannes Weiss, a leading New Testament scholar of the early period, expresses extreme skepticism as to Luke’s text. He charges that Luke fabricated all of Paul’s speeches, that he fabricated his own presence as a companion to Paul and that he gave a false account of the all-important Apostolic Council that supposedly granted Paul a charter of independence. If Luke is wrong on all of these, then his credibility and bona fides have been reduced to zero, and Acts becomes worthless.

J. Weiss has rejected the speeches outright: "The speeches by Paul (in Acts) must be regarded throughout as interpolations by the editor."¹¹ (i.e., Luke; Weiss does not deign to give the name). However Luke tells the Damascus Road story three times in this book, wherein Paul became converted to Christianity, and two of these require that Paul recite the story himself, as dramatic speeches to large audiences. Thus Paul is made to confirm the most famous event in his own biography, while Paul's own version, given in very obscure and cryptic wording in Epistle to the Galatians remains open to a far different interpretation and certainly does not confirm the detailed and lurid account given by Luke.

Writes another scholar: "The whole [Damascus] story is probably legendary... It is quite possible that a pupil of Paul should have embodied the story of his teacher's conversion in a legendary form."¹²

It is apparent that if the Damascus Road story drops out then it undermines all that preceded it, namely the first eight chapters of the book. Luke's literary skill, which had neatly plotted the narrative, is now turned against itself, and the elimination of the climax acts as a kind of domino effect eliminating all the prior episodes one after the other. If Paul were not journeying to Damascus with letters of marque and reprisal, then there was no general persecution in Jerusalem, no slaying of Stephen, no fearless preaching by the Christians to arouse the wrath of the authorities, and no commands by the risen Christ to do the preaching. We lose all of the official biography of Paul, since only a supernatural event is deemed sufficient to explain his lifelong devotion to Christ, and we also lose the origin of the Jerusalem church.

No wonder the scholars are forced to say that something happened, no matter what, on Damascus Road. Luke, as usual, has been the sole guide and has left everyone lost in the wilderness. And if Luke makes bold to invent the speeches of Paul, perchance he has also invented the speeches of James, Peter, Stephen, etc.

J. Weiss states further that Luke was not a contemporary of Paul but belongs to a much later period. Therefore Luke could not have been Paul's companion on his journeys, and all the "we" passages are fictional. Luke inserts himself in chapter sixteen, joining Paul in Troas, meaning that he is supposedly there for the rest of the book, amounting to thirteen chapters, all of them now suspect. This is almost half the book.

Weiss emphasizes that Luke pertains to a later era, with different interests and viewpoint:

“It is the language, and above all the whole outlook of the writer [Luke], that point conclusively away from the time of Paul to a later, post-apostolic period... The author of this work betrays his remoteness from the events of the earlier period. Of Paul’s distinctive teachings he gives only a pale and faded picture.”¹³

This means that Luke has carried out a brazen, large-scale fake in making himself part of the early narrative.

The most jolting charge made by Weiss deals with the Council meeting:

“Luke has been guilty of one of the most serious distortions of the history of primitive Christianity. The representation of the Apostolic Council cannot be upheld in the light of Ep. Galatians.”¹⁴

The Apostolic council, narrated by Luke in chapter fifteen of Acts, is the central episode in the book — indeed, it is central to Christianity itself. The Jerusalem leaders, according to Luke, formally granted to Paul permission to preach to the gentiles that they could join the church, but were free from observance of the Mosaic law. The overall evidence shows that Paul never got this grant, that he faced sharp hostility from the “Judaizers” at every turn, and that quite probably he was expelled and excommunicated from the Jerusalem church. Luke has given us a radically false version of the whole story.

Others have joined the chorus of criticism. Alfred Loisy:

“From one end of the book to the other, [Luke] is busy in omitting from the facts which he knew all of those which he did not wish to speak of, and in falsifying at will the shape of those which it suited him to record, or which he found impossible to pass by in silence.”¹⁵

Frederick C. Grant: "If he [Luke] was acquainted with the epistles of Paul, he certainly does not betray his familiarity in any of the crucial passages of Acts."¹⁶

How then can we use Acts to get at the biography of Paul, if the only genuine testimony comes from Paul, and Luke is not using this?

In addition to the barrage of criticism thrown at Luke by the scholars in the matter of his honesty, we may note that this worthy is very free in his accusations against the Diaspora Jews:

"We are reminded again and again, with wearisome monotony, of the hostility and opposition of the Jews... It is repeated over and over again that they contradicted and blasphemed, that they would not believe, and that they were jealous."¹⁷

Luke is free with these charges in his prior Gospel — there too the Jews are constantly plotting, rejecting and persecuting. In fact there is a free interchange of episodes back and forth in the two books, as the scholars have uncomfortably noted. How reliable then is the gospel story if the discredited Luke is narrating it?

In the foregoing material we again have two contradictory accounts, this time concerning the origins of the Jerusalem church. The Judaic version relies on the Qumran texts, which of course have complete authenticity. The "official" version relies solely on Luke, and his account in Acts is perhaps the most criticized book in the New Testament canon. We can well understand why Gibbon stayed clear of the whole area of Christian origins — waiting till chapter fifteen of his 'Decline,' about the year AD 250 — before discussing the new religion. Only then did he find data that he could trust. All before that was "suspicious."

Our alternate premise holds up so far, namely that Christianity originates with a Joshua sect.

NOTES:

1. T. Gaster, *The Dead Sea Scriptures*, 17
2. T. Gaster, *The Dead Sea Scriptures*, 19
3. A. Powell-Davies, *The First Christian*, 152, 169
4. Jackson-Lake, *Beginnings of Christianity*, l:vii
5. E. Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha* vol.1, 66
6. E. Goodenough, *Studies in Luke-Acts*, 51
7. H. Cadbury, *The Making of Luke-Acts*, 3
8. H. Cadbury, *The Making of Luke-Acts*, 2
9. H. Cadbury, *The Making of Luke-Acts*, 2
10. J. Klausner, 209
11. J. Weiss, *Earliest Christianity*, 146
12. Jackson-Lake, *Beginnings of Christianity*, 2:332
13. J. Weiss, *Earliest Christianity*, 6
14. J. Weiss, *Earliest Christianity*, 144
15. A. Loisy, *Origins of the New Testament*, 191
16. J. Weiss, *Earliest Christianity*, 115, n.60.
17. J. Weiss, *Earliest Christianity*, 208 – 209.

THE HELLENIC DIASPORA

“Proudly the Jew felt that he had something to say and bring to the world...”

A. Harnack, *Mission and Expansion of Christianity*

In tracing out a line of development for the Jerusalem church — one that diverges from the “official” New Testament story — we find that a good clue is provided at the outset by Martin Luther. In his estimation, several of the books of the New Testament canon were suspect and of doubtful genuineness. He named four of these and placed them in limbo at the back of the book.

“In his translation he indicated his unfavorable opinion so far at all events that he relegated James, Jude, Hebrews, and the Apocalypse [i.e., Revelation] to the end of the New Testament without pagination.”¹

For his motives in this, we can guess that two of these texts, Epistle of James and Revelation, appear strongly Judaic, show no awareness of the crucifixion story and contain passages hostile to the apostle Paul — and Paul was the great champion of Christianity to Luther. The other two, Epistle to the Hebrews and Epistle of Jude, were also not sufficiently anti-Judaic to suit Luther, and moreover gave curious hints that Jesus was himself present at the Exodus — pointing to a linkage with Joshua and casting doubt on the crucifixion story. Luther wanted a bible that was *Judenrein* so these four had to go.

We can make the experiment of using the four excluded books as the basis for our reconstruction. Several contain Christian additions, but in their Judaic stratum they give us the basic nature of the Jerusalem church that Paul joined. They serve as a counterstatement to Paul’s epistles and thus explain what he found himself in opposition to at a later time, when he came to change his doctrines.

The Epistle of James will be our starting point. If this is read in its plain import and without Christian preconceptions, then we can see what offended Luther.

The epistle gives us a good description of the sect. We never find out how James came to be its head (nor do we get this information from the content of Acts), but he states that the honor of belonging to the sect derives from God alone, and that “Jesus” had nothing to do with recruiting the members:

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of Light... Of his own will he begat us with the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures.”²

We leave it to the experts to explain how James could come to write this, if he knew the career of his brother.

The epistle is in the form of an encyclical to “the twelve tribes that are in the Diaspora” meaning that there are branches abroad that are to receive the instructions and admonitions that James will impart. Here he shows that he is no naive, unlearned Galilean but that he speaks with authority. This is noted by one scholar:

“The Epistle strikes us at once as the expression of a vigorous personality... His short, decisive sentences fall like hammer-strokes. He constantly employs the imperative... His rebukes contain some of the sharpest invective in the New Testament...”³

He is an astute formidable personage, as Paul found to his cost.

The sect that he heads is well-established and long in existence. There are “elders” in charge of the local branches, which he calls “synagogues”; there are widows and orphans on the scene, who are to be supported; class differences have set in, since James complains that preference is being given to the rich man when he enters the synagogue. There is a body of accepted dogmas and practices, not part of normative Judaism: James believes in “devils” and also in faith-healing. “Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him.”⁴

There is oral confession in public: “Confess your faults one to another and pray one to another, that you may be healed.”⁵

There is an austere way of life imposed on all, summed up in the phrase “keep oneself unspotted from the world.”⁶

How did all this happen so fast?

Even the form of sermon is standardized: James throws startling charges at the congregation, including adultery and murder, and all this is accepted as a kind of convention. The sermon ends with gentle, affectionate phrases, and with all this there is the insistence on complete, unconditional orthodoxy. “For whosoever shall keep the whole law yet offend in one point, then he is guilty of all.”⁷

Didn’t James know that the death of Jesus meant the end to the Mosaic law? Instead James shows no awareness that a miraculous event had appeared. “It is remarkable that the Epistle contains no reference to the Death and Resurrection of Jesus.”⁸

Indeed remarkable.

As stated in a prior chapter, there is good evidence that this church was a product of the Qumran community. This should lead us to restate the wording of the opening line in chapter one. This reads: “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are in the Diaspora, greeting...”

The opening line of the second chapter is of a similar exalted nature: “My brethren, you lack the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of Glory...”

These are the Greek translations, but there is every likelihood that James, of the old breed, wrote in Hebrew and thought in Hebrew. The original text would then read: “Yacov, a servant of the Lord God and of His anointed one, (*mashiach*) Yehoshua... Our Lord God, and His glorious *mashiach* Yehoshua...”

The cult hero was Joshua, and there is no sign that James considered himself the biological brother of the human Jesus.

On the premise that the sect derived from Qumran, we can assume that the sect had a similar program. The Manual of Discipline scroll of Qumran states this program clearly:

“Everyone who wishes to join the community must pledge himself to respect God and man; to live according to the communal rule; to seek God with all his heart; to do what is good and upright in His sight, in accordance with what He has commanded by Moses and His servants the prophets; to love all that He has chosen, and hate all that He has rejected; to keep far from all evil and to cling to all good works;... to love all the children of light, each according to his portion in the community of God; and to hate all the children of darkness, each according to the measure of his guilt, which God will ultimately requite... They must not turn aside from the ordinances of God's truth, either to the right or to the left.”⁹

The epistle of James, which appears to be an authentic statement of the Jerusalem church, shows clear affinities to the Qumran text: total orthodoxy, a withdrawal and separation from the evil world, and a sharp division, a “we-they” between the elect and the outsiders. All this raises question after question. What does a reclusive Essene-like community at Qumran, and its assumed offshoot in Jerusalem, have to do with the very wide outer world of the Diaspora and the Judaism of the Roman empire? And how did a cosmopolitan Hellenic Jew like Paul come to join an obscure tiny sect such as this?

The epistle of James opens up areas scarcely touched by New Testament scholars, which explains why this epistle is kept under wraps. For to examine the background and implications of the text is to open the way to an alternate explanation for Christian origins. What we are dealing with is the epic of the Jewish-Hellenic Diaspora, and it is this Diaspora that explains the sect and the career of Paul. Hence a survey of this Diaspora Judaism is in order.

In the long journey of Israel down the centuries and down the millennia, perhaps the most fortunate of times was the period of more than two hundred years from the victory of the Maccabees, about 150 BC, to the war with Rome, which began AD 66. The pinnacle of this era was during the rule of Augustus Caesar — the forty years from 27 BC to AD 14 — but overall there was optimism, prosperity, and a large expansion of Jewish communities and synagogues to every part

of the Roman empire. If any thing, the Jews were overly favored, with privileges and exemptions granted by Rome — a benefit for which the Jews would later pay heavily.

However, in the high noon of the Hellenic Diaspora this Judaism had a profound influence on the pagan world. Here we make the discovery, known to the scholars but not to the layman, that the Judaism of that period was of a universalist outgoing nature, with a marked missionary aspect. The synagogues, in every major city of the empire, had many gentiles in attendance. At every point the stereotypes and the preconceptions as to Judaism fall by the wayside.

This missionary effort has been noted by several writers. Adolf Harnack, in his major work, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity*, estimated that the Jews numbered about 7 percent of the population at that time, or about four and half million out of the Roman total population of fifty-four million.¹⁰ He attributed this to the missionary effort.

“It is surprising that a religion which raised so stout a wall of partition between itself and all other religions, and which in practice and prospects alike was bound up so closely with its nation, should have possessed a missionary impulse of such vigor and attained so large a measure of success.”¹¹

He continues:

“The duty and hopefulness of missions are brought out in the earliest Jewish Sibylline books. Almost the whole of the literature of Alexandrian Judaism has an apologetic [i.e., polemical] bent and the instinct of propaganda... Proudly the Jew felt he had something to say and bring to the world, that is, *The one and only spiritual God, creator of heaven and earth, with his holy moral law...* The keenness of Jewish propaganda throughout the empire during the first century is also clear from the introduction of the Jewish week and Sabbath throughout the empire. Many pagans celebrated the Sabbath just as Jews today observe Sunday.”¹²

Josephus confirms this and shows himself to be a missionary in his own right:

“Our lawgiver Moses made excellent rules to secure our own customs from corruption, and to throw them open ungrudgingly to all who choose to share them. To all who desire to come and live under the same laws with us he gives a gracious welcome... The masses have long since shown a keen desire to adopt our religious observances. There is not one city, Greek or barbarian, nor a single nation, to which our custom of abstaining from work on the seventh day has not spread, and where the fasts and the lighting of lamps, and many of our prohibitions in the matter of food are not observed... As God permeates the universe, so the Law has found its way among all mankind.”¹³

George F. Moore, pointed out that this missionary effort was considered as quite normal in the Jewish communities:

“The Jews did not send out missionaries into the *partes infidelium* expressly to proselytize among the heathen. They were themselves settled by the thousands in all the great centers and in innumerable smaller cities; they had appropriated the language and much of the civilization of their surroundings; they were engaged in the ordinary occupations and entered into the industrial and commercial life of the community and frequently into its political life. Their religious influence was exercised chiefly through the synagogues, which they set up for themselves and which were open to all whom interest or curiosity drew to their services.”¹⁴

The gentiles, for their part, were drawn in varying degrees to Judaism, as Harnack explains:

“The adhesion of Greeks and Romans to Judaism ranged over the entire gamut of possible degrees, from the superstitious adoption of certain rites up to complete identification. ‘God-fearing’ pagans constituted the majority; proselytes, i.e., people who were actually Jews, obliged to keep the whole Law, there is no doubt were comparatively few in number.”¹⁵

The “God-fearers” had merely taken the first step, such as observing a few customs, and it would be this marginal group, the “sympathizers” who would be most vulnerable when the showdown came later. The Jews in turn were satisfied with this arrangement. One writer states that the Jews would wait three generations to make a convert:

“Judaism possessed the prudence and tact not to exact from its converts at the outset full and complete adoption of the Jewish Law. The neophyte was at first simply a ‘friend’ to the Jewish customs, observing the least binding ones — the Sabbath, certain fast-days, abstention from pork. His sons frequented the synagogues and deserted the temples, studied the Law, and contributed their oboli (coins) to the treasury in Jerusalem. By degrees habit accomplished the rest. At last the proselyte took the decisive step: he received the rite of circumcision, took the bath of purity... and offered, doubtless in money, the sacrifice which signaled his definitive entrance into the bosom of Israel. Occasionally, in order to accentuate his conversion, he even adopted a Hebraic name... In the third generation, according to Deuteronomy 23:8, there existed no distinction between the Jew by race and the Jew by adoption.”¹⁶

Aside from synagogue Judaism there were the individual spokesmen. On the best level we have Philo of Alexandria, who composed numerous missionary tracts devoted to expounding the Mosaic Law in his own speculative theology. At the other end were the street healers, who formed their own guilds.

“Phrygia, like the rest of Asia Minor during the Apostolic Age, was full of strolling Jewish sorcerers who undertook for money to cast out devils, to effect and destroy enchantments, to send and interpret dreams, and to manufacture love philtres.”¹⁷

Their gentile counterparts and rivals also utilized Hebrew mystery words in their exorcisms.

“This is abundantly borne out by the spells preserved for us by the Magic Papyri... The names of the angels Gabriel, Michael and Raphael given in the Old Testament and the Apocrypha are also common in all this literature.”¹⁸

All in all, Diaspora Judaism showed “pluralism” in the extreme, and got along very well with that pluralism.

The great achievement of this Hellenism was its literary creativity showing a wide range and diversity and a universalist outlook. The sheer volume of its literary output reaches hundreds of texts and we can list the main components.

The masterpiece of the Jewish-Hellenic Diaspora was the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures of some thirty-nine books, known as the *Septuagint*. This was used in all the synagogues, and was the main source of missionary Judaism. To this Scripture was added some seventeen books known as the *Apocrypha* and which had near-canonical status with the Judaism of that period. These include the Maccabean wars, in *I and II Maccabees*, the extensive wisdom books, *Sirach* and *Wisdom of Solomon*, and fictional favorites such as *Tobit*, *Judith* and *Susannah*. These texts remain part of the Catholic editions of Scripture, but have been dropped by the Jewish and Protestant editions.

A second group was the *Pseudepigrapha* [psood-ePIG-rapha] which was a genre of religious fiction, popular among Jews of the late Temple period. The texts were composed in the names of revered ancestral figures, and purported to give testaments, revelations and guidance to the Jews of the later period. A recent edition gives some seventy-eight writings, from fragments to lengthy texts, and include 'apocalyptic

literature and testaments, expansions of the Old Testament with legendary material, wisdom and philosophical literature, prayers, psalms and odes, and fragments of lost Judeo-Hellenistic works.' The preface extends this by listing 96 of these pseudepigrapha (pages xlv to xlvi); apparently only 78 were printed, but the content fills two volumes.¹⁹

Overall, we can quote tributes from modern scholars to this literature. In the R. H. Charles edition of the pseudepigrapha, published 1912, the editor states:

“The ethical element is the fundamental element in the chief books of this literature... It would be possible to fill many pages in setting forth the teachings of [Jewish] apocalyptic on such ethical subjects as conscience, courage, endurance, long suffering, justice, truthfulness, temperance, singleness of heart, [avoidance of] deceit, calumny, folly; on religious themes of an ethical character as love, faith, works, forgiveness, compassion, humility, reverence, [condemnation of] covetousness, lust; or on metaphysical themes influencing ethics, as foreknowledge, freedom, determinism, heredity, individualism, universalism...”²⁰

Prof. James Charlesworth, the editor for the modern edition of the pseudepigrapha, writes:

“It is obvious that post-exilic Judaism (i.e., the period after the return from exile, and marked by the inauguration of the Second Temple, about 450 BC) was distinguished by a voluminous and varied literature... During the post-exilic period the Jewish genius exploded into creative new writings...

“Apocalypses that stressed the grandeur and transcendence of God were customarily interspersed with hymns that celebrated God's nearness, and by prayers that were perceived as heard and answered. Post-exilic Judaism was a living and devout religion [with] new hymns, psalms and odes...

“The simplistic picture of Early Judaism should be recast; it certainly was neither a religion which had fallen into arduous legalism due to the crippling demands of the Law, nor was it characterized by four dominant sects...It is obvious that Judaism was not monolithically structured nor shaped by a central and all-powerful 'orthodoxy' ...The documents contained herein certainly demonstrate the rich vitality and diversity of Judaism during the early centuries...”²¹

Samuel Sandmel, in the introduction, joins in the tribute and states that the modern reader “can still be astonished, amazed, enlightened and overwhelmed by the abundance and variety and recurrent high quality of the Jewish literary activity of that period.”²²

Given these tributes on the record, several questions arise: What was the need for a new religion to replace Judaism, and what was mankind being rescued from? It is apparent that the Judaism of that period had many admirable qualities, and this was recognized in the empire. Long after the war with Rome, Judaism remained a licita religion. About AD 230, Origen writes:

“Now that the Romans rule and the Jews pay them the half-shekel, the Jewish Ethnarch (the Patriarch residing at Tiberias) through concessions from Caesar holds great powers and differs little from a true king.”²³

We are now in the high noon of the Hellenic Diaspora, before the long night fell. Against this background and broad panorama of Diaspora Judaism we can safely find a place for the Jerusalem church of James and Paul. The center was in Jerusalem, presided over by James, but the plain wording of the Epistle of James indicates that it was basically a missionary church with branches in the Diaspora. It was marginal, ascetic, apart from the main stream of the Diaspora synagogues, but this too had its place. There were Hellenized Jews who were fond of the theater and the stadium; at the other extreme were Jews who found their way to tiny sects that pored over arcane texts. It is in this area of borderline sects that we find the church of

James, with its own doctrines and practices, its own program and view of history, yet part of the Diaspora spectrum. It was considered quite in order at that period.

R. H. Charles notes that several of the texts in his edition had clear links to early Christianity. The *Book of Enoch* "...has had more influence on the New Testament than any other apocryphal or pseudepigraphic work."²⁴

As to *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*,

"St. Paul seems to have used the book as a vade mecum [a constant guide]... The Pauline borrowings are too numerous to be dealt with here. The reader can consult my [separately published] text."²⁵

At this point we may posit that Paul joined the Jamesian sect for the good reason that he, as a Diaspora Jew, agreed with the particular program of the sect. He states that in his first visit to Jerusalem he spent two weeks in the home of Peter, with James present.²⁶ The simplest explanation for this meeting with the top sect leadership was that this was Paul's initiation, along with a study course in sect doctrine. Leaving Jerusalem, where he had been ordained a missionary after his study course with James, Paul took up his career as an emissary of the Jerusalem sect. His early career is indicated in 1 and 2 Corinthians, and here too we find a background at wide variance from that given in Acts.

In these epistles Paul shows himself to be an itinerant missionary, far down in the ranks of the sect, and having a difficult time of it. The difficulty, strangely enough, does not come from the task of preaching a new faith to a pagan world, but from the overabundance and competition of his fellow-missionaries who are doing the same thing. Paul finds himself in a bible belt so crowded with rival missionaries, so swamped and crisscrossed with speakers that he is hard put to get a speaking engagement. He is not the originator, the lone pioneer preaching a new gospel, but one of many in a well-established movement.

These rivals are not the Hellenist refugees who had fled Judea as a result of the alleged persecution led by Paul years back. Not only are they veritable Jews but Paul argues vehemently that he is just as Jewish

as they are, and his only wish is to become as respectable, as accepted, as well-established as they are. "Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I. Are they ministers of Christ? I speak as a fool, but I am more so."²⁷

Instead of being the pioneer, he is trying to make his way in an organization that was there long before he arrived. And the scholars never tell us how all this came about.

The impression that emerges is of a church structure well organized in various Diaspora cities, all devoted to a 'Jesus,' but with a spectrum of ideas and dogmas concerning this Jesus, and various speakers would come to each branch giving their own message. The idea of guest speakers on circuit was in all likelihood used by Diaspora synagogues generally. The popular figures got letters of commendation from one branch, which gave them entree to other branches, and here Paul is on the defensive:

"Not that we venture to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves [i.e., they are well established in the field and have every right to be there]..."²⁸

Paul shows no great affection for these leaders. They appear to be smug bureaucrats who travel about in style, accompanied by their wives, none of which denotes martyrdom and persecution. Paul himself supplies a rather startling list of floggings, shipwrecks and arrests that he had undergone²⁹, but in context it is to show that he is the only one taking the thing seriously and no one else is having any trouble or making any sacrifices — which is just what he is complaining about. And there is the gentle hint that Paul is building it up to gain sympathy from the Corinthians and to help himself get speaking engagements (let him who never faked a job resumé cast the first stone). All in all, the picture is one of normalcy and stability.

Part of this normalcy is the alertness and inquisitiveness of the membership, their readiness to debate and argue and ask questions. They are not the humble recipients of a new doctrine. Rather they are the ones who pick and choose among the speakers. In the Corinthian church Paul has all he can to do restore harmony in what seems to be a Greek debating society.

“How is it then, brethren? When you come together, every one of you has a psalm, has a doctrine, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for improvement.”³⁰

Again we ask — how did this come about?

Paul reveals that Peter is well-known in the Diaspora, as are the “brothers of the Lord,” and writes:

“Have we no right to lead about a sister, a wife, as do the other apostles and as do the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas (Peter)?”³¹

We cannot believe that the siblings of Jesus of Nazareth all left Galilee and took up missionary careers, taking their wives with them. The phrase “brothers of the Lord” can therefore be given the interpretation as referring to the leading officials of the sect. And none of this is hinted at in Acts.

As to these figures, the impression we get is that we are dealing with able, intelligent men who handle themselves as experienced debaters and missionaries. These are the “Judaizers.” Could men of this calibre be totally mistaken about the content of Christianity? More likely they knew very well what they were doing. They were preaching the original program of the Jesus sect and they defended it ably. It is Paul, the brilliant diaspora Jew, who in the end was worsted by his opponents.

Further insights as to the daily life of the sect can be gleaned from other passages in Paul’s epistles. He speaks of “collections for the saints” — that is, the Jerusalem church. He also reminds his readers, rather bluntly, that he too requires support from the collections. In Galatians he is the sworn enemy of the Law, but at this earlier stage he finds a good word to say for it:

“For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn... Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live off the gospel.”³²

We might compare this arrangement to what the older generation of Jews called a *shaliach*. Such a man travelled about for a religious-charitable organization, collecting funds — some he remitted, some he kept

for himself. The impression we get is of a loose sect, all branches linked to the “Lord Christ” but with different preachers on circuit, jostling for position, and with the center in Jerusalem able to supervise, and in extreme cases — as befell Paul — to intervene if doctrinal matters got too far out of line.

His career, as we gather from Corinthians, involved building up churches to the cult Jesus in cities along the northeast Mediterranean. In some places he seems to have been the pioneer, in others there is a question of various rival missionaries who also appear, and whom he warns his readers against. These are “false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no marvel, for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.”³³

To one encountering these texts for the first time, and not taken in by the aura of sainthood given to Paul, he appears as a spiteful, truculent adversary towards all who disagree with him, and ready to thrust his way forward by any means necessary. In his chafing resentment at the leaders he shows no awareness that these were the actual disciples and companions of Jesus, directly commissioned by him. Otherwise he would not dare challenge their authority. This in itself is evidence to be weighed on the question of whether he knew of the existence of the said Jesus. Thus, from a single document, namely the Epistle of James, we have a large new area opening up.

At this stage, Paul is far down in the ranks, living a harried existence and with no chance of advancement. All this would be changed by catastrophic events in the future.

NOTES:

1. W. Bousset, *Encyclopaedia Biblica*, article: "The Apocalypse", 1:196
2. *Epistle of James*, 1:17
3. *Dictionary of Apostolic Church, James*, 629
4. *Epistle of James*, 5:14
5. *Epistle of James*, 5:16
6. *Epistle of James*, 1:27
7. *Epistle of James*, 2:10
8. *Dictionary of the Apostolic Church, James*, 630
9. *The Manual of Discipline scroll of Qumran*, Rule 1:1 – 19
10. A. Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity*, 8
11. A. Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity*, 9
12. A. Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity*, 9 n.3, 11 n.2
13. Josephus, *Contra Apion*, 2:210, 282, 284
14. G.F. Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era*, 1:323
15. A. Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity*, 12
16. *Jewish Encyclopedia*. 4:570
17. F. Legge, *Forerunners of Christianity*, 2:33
18. F. Legge, *Forerunners of Christianity*, 2:34
19. *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, edited by James H. Charlesworth
20. R. H. Charles, *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, 2:x
21. J. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol.1, xxviii – ix intro
22. S. Sandmel, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol.1, xiii intro
23. Origen, *Africanus*, 14
24. R.H. Charles, *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, 2:180
– citing twelve parallels to the epistles of Paul, ad loc
25. R.H. Charles, *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, 2:292
26. *Epistle to the Galatians*. 1:18
27. *2 Corinthians*, 11:22, 23
28. *2 Corinthians*, 10:12
29. *2 Corinthians*, 11:23 – 27
30. *1 Corinthians*, 14:26
31. *1 Corinthians*, 9:5
32. *1 Corinthians*, 9:9, 14
33. *2 Corinthians*, 11:13 – 14

JESUS AND THE EXODUS STORY

“Behold, I send my angel before your face, that he may guard you in the way... Obey his voice, provoke him not... My name is upon him.”

Exodus 23:20 – 21

The epistles of Jude and Hebrews, in our Luther list, are relevant to our inquiry in that they represent christianization of prior Judaic material. These epistles point to late speculative Judaism, also to the theology of Paul and the Jerusalem church. There is no awareness of “Jesus of Nazareth.” However there are clear linkages to Joshua and Moses, with confirmation for the premise that Joshua was the prototype for the gospel Jesus. Here we can trace out the line of development.

Basically there has been a christianization of the Exodus story, with Jesus replacing Moses as the leader in the wilderness, and then replacing Joshua in bringing the Israelites into salvation — the spiritual Christian version rather than the Canaanite version. Traditionally, the Passover story and the Exodus story comprise the national epic of the Jews. God rescued his people from Egypt with signs and wonders. There was the giving of the Law at Sinai, the years of wandering in the wilderness, and then God fulfilled his promise made to Abraham, by bringing the Israelites into the promised land. All this was carried out, on the human scene, first by Moses, then by his lieutenant Joshua. Their role in the story conferred the highest prestige and authority upon them. If the story were left just as it stands, and unchallenged by the Christian side, then Judaism would represent the divine will, and would have the highest legitimacy unto this day. Hence the need to capture and christianize.

However the Exodus story had undergone interpretations and revisions in late Hellenic Judaism, and in some speculative groups the story had been altered from the nationalist and historical plane to the

spiritual and mystical plane — with Christianity as the end product. In particular the writings of Philo of Alexandria led to this development. Philo was a thoroughly Hellenized Jew, a member of one of the wealthiest and most influential Jewish families in Alexandria, and a fervent admirer of Greek art and culture. He lived about 25 BC – AD 45.

With full leisure and Hellenized background, he took it upon himself to present Judaism in a manner familiar to and sympathetic to educated Greeks, and did so in extensive writings that represent a remarkable literary and philosophical achievement. But as the saying hath it, ‘No good deed will go unpunished.’ His writings, in their end result, went nine-tenths of the way towards Christian theology, and were fully taken over by Christian writers. Philo marks the transition from Hellenic Judaism to Christian theology.

The Passover story recites the passage from slavery to freedom, with the Israelites led by Moses. Philo transformed the story from the historical and national plane to the personal and spiritual plane. Thus he defined the Passover as...

“the change from ignorance and stupidity to education and wisdom... from fear and cowardice to courage and confidence... And there is another Passover of the soul, which is the sacrifice of passing over from [i.e. - abandoning] the body.”¹

It is the transfer from the material to the spiritual, from the lower to the higher. “The true sacrifice of God-loving souls consists in abandoning an empty and visible splendor, and attempting to change to the non-apparent and invisible.”² A similar thought appears in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where Moses rejects the ‘treasures of Egypt’ to gain a spiritual reward.

As Philo describes it, in his consistently allegorical manner, God rescued Israel from Egypt (that is, rescued the virtuous man from the corrupt material world) not by ‘historical’ means but by means of his intermediary and agent, described variously as Word or Logos, also as “angel” and Power, by which God communicates with man — a concept basic with Philo. Israel “took refuge in God the Savior, who sent his beneficent Power and delivered from their difficult and

hopeless position those who made supplication.”³ That is, Israel was rescued from Egypt by the Divine Word. If this Word is made to represent Jesus, then we have the message of Epistle to the Hebrews.

This Word or “Logos” is the key to Philo’s system, and he uses this throughout his allegorical explanations of Scripture. Among the attributes and powers of the Word/Logos, as given in one index list, are...

“...administrator of world, all-powerful, angel, bond of world, disciplines wicked, foundation of world, head of all things, instrument in creation, intercessor, judge of world, mediator, overseer of God’s power, physician, prophet of God, word of God.”

The complete list contains 37 attributes.⁴

Philo also describes the Word as the eldest son of God, and the first-born: “God’s first-born, the Divine Word.”⁵ This means that we do not need the “historical Jesus of Nazareth” to arrive at the full Christian theology. The Logos is God’s way to reach downward towards man. However man can also ascend upwards towards God, and if not able to reach God, can at least hope to attain communion with the Word. It is in this borderline region where Joshua, according to Philo, merges with the Word and is identified as the Word.

A key passage in Scripture reads:

“Behold, I send my angel before your face, that he may guard you in the way, in order that he may lead and bring you to the land that I have prepared for you. Give heed and listen and do not disobey. He will not show consideration for you, for My name is upon him.”⁶

Philo quotes this text then gives this interpretation:

“An angel is... wholly mind, wholly incorporeal, made to be a minister to God, and appointed over certain needs and services of the race of mortals since this race was unable, because of its corruptible nature, to receive [directly] the gifts

and benefactions extended by God... Of necessity was the Logos appointed as judge and mediator, and is called 'angel'... The entry into the land is an entry into philosophy... The divine Name is called upon the angel, who is the most sovereign and principal being known to heaven, earth and the universe. And he who has so great a power must necessarily be filled with all-powerful wisdom.”⁷

That is, the angel of the way is to be identified with the Word or Logos, in the fullest sense. In context, this identifies Joshua with the “angel of the way.” Thus it was Philo who first linked Joshua/Jesus with the Word. Essentially, Philo created Christianity.

Elsewhere, Philo states that when Moses changed the name of his lieutenant from Hoshea to Joshua, this in a mystical way effected a change from the individual and the mortal (i.e., the man Hoshea) to a supernatural state that was timeless and “*perfect*” (i.e., the new being Joshua/Yehoshua). “The state is everlasting, active, perfect. The individual is mortal, acted on, imperfect. The imperishable is higher and greater than the mortal.”⁸

We may note here that in the Greek text the change of name reads from “Oshee” to “Jesus” — that is, the new name that is everlasting and perfect. And it also represents the divine name “Jehovah is salvation.” Thus the scriptural text ‘My name is upon him’ applies to Jesus. In Epistle to the Hebrews, we read that Jesus, “being made perfect, became the author of eternal salvation to all them that obey him.”⁹ We now turn to these epistles in greater detail.

Rendel Harris, a well-known scholar of the early 1900s, points to “a curious variant in the Epistle of Jude.”¹⁰ Jude is very brief, comprising a single chapter of twenty-five verses. Verse 5, in most editions, reads in part: “the Lord, having saved a people out of Egypt, afterwards destroyed those that believed not.” Harris argues that...

“...there is good support, both from external and internal evidence, for reading *Jesus* [instead of Lord]... especially when in the previous verse [verse 4] Jesus Christ has been declared to be the only Master and Lord...”

That is, the text should read, “Jesus saved a people out of Egypt.”

Harris cites another Christian text in support of this: “Lo! the Virgin has borne Emmanuel. He came down from Heaven, and saved from the land of Egypt the people that went astray.”¹¹

He could also have cited Justin on the same theme. In the *Dialogue with Trypho*, Justin informs the Jewish disputant Trypho that “Christ was the Mighty God and was to be worshiped... Jesus brought your fathers out of Egypt.”¹²

Since Jesus is God, according to Justin, he has the power to intervene anywhere in history.

Harris then discusses Epistle to the Hebrews, where a key verse — chapter 4, verse 8 — deals with the same punishment for “disbelievers” mentioned in the Epistle of Jude: the “Lord” will grant deliverance and “rest” to those that believe, but will inflict punishment and deny rest to those that do not believe — and in both cases dealing with the rebelliousness of the Jews in the desert. Just who is the “Lord” that speaks and warns? If it is Jesus, then he was present and acted as God in the Exodus.

The key verse, in the Greek, Latin and King James, reads: “If Jesus had given them rest, then he would not have spoken afterwards of another day [for granting the true rest].”¹³

This seems clear enough, and Harris defends this as the obvious meaning: “We should therefor infer that it was Jesus who gives the Rest to believers, and who does not give it to unbelieving Jews.”¹⁴

The simple matter of trusting his eyesight and his common sense has led Harris to adopt this reading. However it places Jesus directly in the Exodus story.

The epistle discloses further that not only is Jesus present, but he has displaced the “Old Testament” leaders, Moses and Joshua. Moses is down-played, and Joshua does not appear at all. Jesus is the dominant figure throughout. In chapter eleven Moses is merely one of a long list of ancestral figures who “lived by faith.” He joined the Exodus as an outsider, on generous impulse, with no hint in the text that he was the supreme leader. The text reads:

“By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God, rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.”¹⁵

The inference is that Christ was present “as of greater value” and could “reward Moses” — and that Moses chose to join though he was free to remain in Egypt. It is all a personal decision on his part. It is never mentioned that the God of Israel throughout spoke with Moses and commanded him. One would never suspect the Passover and Exodus stories from this brief, dismissive account. All has been christianized.

In the case of Joshua the down-playing is more extreme: He is not mentioned at all. In a long section in chapter eleven of some thirty verses, seventeen ancestral figures from the Scriptures are listed and the faith of each one is extolled. Joshua is conspicuously omitted. The list comprises Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Esau, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel “and many others.” How could Joshua have been omitted, when so many minor figures were included?

This was not mere oversight since the Jericho story, where Joshua was in command, is told in a way that carefully eliminates him:

“By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days. By faith the harlot Rahab, because she had welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.”¹⁶

Joshua, the central character, has been omitted. The “Old Testament” Scriptural version reads:

“Then the Lord said to Joshua, See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands... Joshua commanded the people, Shout, for the Lord has given you the city... Only Rahab the harlot and all who are with her in her house shall be spared.”¹⁷

Joshua is so prominent in the original text that his elimination must have been deliberate.

As we recall, the passage in Epistle to the Hebrews 4:8 reads: "If Jesus had given them (the Israelites) rest, then he would not have spoken afterwards of another day."

In several modern Bible editions (NIV and NEB editions among these), this line appears in a revised version: "If *Joshua* had given them rest, then *God* would not have spoken afterwards of another day."

This is a blatant mistranslation amounting to deception.

The modern Bible editors felt that to place Jesus in the Exodus would be too much of a contradiction to the "historical Jesus of Nazareth." Therefore the text was revised, with the inconvenient Jesus removed and "Joshua" substituted. The Bible editors, ordained clergymen, proceeded to deny their Lord, and denied his power to intervene in the Exodus, all in the matter of expediency and to pander to modern views of the historical Jesus. But we must ask how Joshua can abruptly appear in chapter four when he has been carefully suppressed in chapter eleven. In the Greek Christian texts, such as this epistle, the name "Jesus" by itself always refers to *the* Jesus. If another Jesus, such as Joshua, were intended, then the full name of that person would be spelled out — "Jesus son of Nave" for Joshua. Therefore the text of Epistle to the Hebrews must logically retain the presence of Jesus in the Exodus story, with the passage in chapter four remaining as it was.

Furthermore in the Judaic Scriptural reading, Joshua indeed brought the Israelites to their rest, and God fulfilled his promises to Israel.

"Joshua took the whole land [of Canaan] according to all that the Lord said to Moses, and Joshua gave it for an inheritance to Israel... and the land rested from war... And the Lord gave them rest according to all that he had sworn to their fathers... There failed none of the good things which the Lord had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass."¹⁸

Therefore the modern revisionist translation must be wrong, and "Jesus" stays in the text.

Proof positive that in Christian doctrine Jesus was present in the Exodus is found in the “Reproaches,” recited and prominent during the Good Friday services to the present day. Here Jesus-as-God recites the many benefits he conferred upon the Jews in leading them out of Egypt and contrasts this with the base ingratitude and wickedness of the Jews in mocking and crucifying him. It is the same Person and the same unrepentant Jews in both cases.

We quote these edifying passages from the “Reproaches”:

“For your sake I scourged Egypt with its firstborn, and you scourged Me and delivered Me up... I led you out of Egypt, having drowned Pharaoh in the Red Sea, and you have delivered Me to the chief priests... I opened the sea before you, and you with a spear have opened My side... I went before you in a pillar of a cloud, and you have led Me to the judgment hall of Pilate... I fed you with manna in the desert, and you have beaten Me with blows and scourges... I gave you the water of salvation from the rock to drink, and you have given Me gall and vinegar... For your sake I struck the kings of the Canaanites, and you have struck My head with a reed... I have given you a royal sceptre, and you have given Me a crown of thorns... I exalted you with great strength, and you have hanged Me on the gibbet of the Cross...”

With this on the record, it becomes pointless to deny the presence of the supernatural Christ in the Exodus.

Other major themes in Epistle to the Hebrews, in exalting Jesus, are that he was the Creator of the universe and is the eternal High Priest. Both themes are anticipated in Philo, who assigns these roles to the Logos. In Philo’s version, the universe is created by God’s “saying” but the form of things derives from the *logon*. “At His saying, heaven and earth and the entire world were created, and the whole of substance received its form from the divine principles [‘logon’] as fashioners.”¹⁹

This appears in the Epistle as...

“His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, by whom he also made the worlds... Thou, Lord [Christ], in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands.”²⁰

The specific role of Jesus in the Epistle is that of the Eternal High Priest. This too is the role of the Logos, as given by Philo. “The High Priest is His [God’s] First-born, the divine Word.”²¹

The transition from Philo to Christianity consists precisely in substituting Christ for the Logos and then incarnating the Logos-Christ in the role of High Priest. Philo states in one passage that “the great high priest” is himself the officiator and the ritual offering, and the editor explains that this refers to the Logos.

Philo writes:

“Who then is God’s cup-bearer? He who pours the libation of peace, the truly great high priest who first receives the loving-cups of God’s perennial bounties, then pays them back when he pours that potent undiluted draught, the libation of himself.”²²

Here the editor notes that the “cup-bearer is the Logos.”²³

With Philo, the Logos-priest offers himself up, while in the Epistle the Christ-priest does the same. Jesus became “a merciful and faithful high priest... He offered up himself.”²⁴

From the foregoing we see that the epistles of Jude and Hebrews, plus the writings of Philo, can give us major elements in Christian theology — with no need for the presence of “Jesus of Nazareth.” What will be added to Philo by way of Christian doctrine will be the incarnation of the Word in the person of Jesus, and then the acting-out of the self-sacrifice of the High Priest, in the form of the Passion, where Jesus offers himself up. The doctrines will be presented in historical guise, but still embodying church doctrines.

Turning to Paul, we find that he has the same exalted view towards Christ that Philo had to the Word, and that he has also placed Christ in the Exodus story. He describes Jesus as the Rock of living water in the wilderness.

“All [the Israelites] did drink the same spiritual drink, for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.”²⁵

Paul knows only the supernatural Christ. “Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.”²⁶

“He is the image of the invisible God, and the first-born of every creature.”²⁷

This is close to Philo.

Passages in Paul’s epistles that purport to refer to a human Jesus can be labeled as “orthodox” Christian additions meant to make Paul a witness to the gospel story where the original text did not have the orthodox passages. The scholars are well aware that the first collection of Paul’s epistles was made by Marcion about AD 130. Marcion, called an archheretic by the early church, proclaimed a Lord Jesus who was a supernatural being, and used Paul’s epistles to confirm his position. Marcion would not have wasted a moment on Paul if it were known that Paul had conceived of Jesus as a human figure.

The early Christian Tertullian undertook to challenge Marcion’s version of Paul’s epistles with his own supposedly orthodox version, in a polemical work, *Against Marcion* written about AD 190. But in making the text comparison, Tertullian reveals that his own text is missing the Christian additions, which therefore were added at a later date.

In his dispute with Marcion over the text of the Epistle to the Romans, Tertullian begins with Rom. 1:16, wherein Paul states: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation.”

It is incredible that Tertullian did not start with verse 1:3: “Jesus Christ, our Lord, was made of the seed of David according to the flesh.”

Obviously he would have quoted this if it were in his copy, since this would have refuted the claim of Marcion that Jesus was purely a spiritual figure. Tertullian states elsewhere: “He who wishes to see Jesus must also believe him to be the son of David, by descent from the virgin.”²⁸

This makes it all the more strange that Tertullian did not comment on Marcion’s omission of the “son of David” in his edition of Epistle to the Romans. Plainly, Paul had omitted it, and it is an “orthodox” Christian addition.

Another variation in text is found in Epistle to the Galatians 4:4. The present text reads: "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, made of a woman, made under the Law, to redeem those that were under the Law."

Tertullian quotes the opening words, "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent his Son," then adds a long explanatory passage of about fourteen lines, then continues with the quote, giving as the text, "to redeem those that were under the Law."²⁹

The plain inference is that his text — and that of Marcion — read simply "God sent his Son to redeem those that were under the Law."³⁰

The added words — "made of a woman, made under the law" — meant that Jesus had come in the flesh, which Marcion and the Gnostics had denied, and that Jesus pertained to the orthodox Jewish-Christian God, which Marcion also denied. Paul was thus captured from Marcion and has been made to recite the orthodox doctrines. It is obvious that Tertullian would have quoted the orthodox text if he had it in front of him, since that would have demolished Marcion at once. But Tertullian is silent. He had only Marcion's original text. "The dog didn't bark."

Again we have evidence that Paul's original text did not confirm the historical Jesus. This 'confirmation' has been created by orthodox Christian forgeries of the text. We must ask where is the moral stature of a religion that must go in for these tactics.

If Paul did not know of the orthodox Judaic birth of Jesus, then the inference is that the others in the Jerusalem church did not know this either. All this confirms that this church had an origin and line of development entirely separate from that given in the gospel. A further inference is that if Jesus has replaced and supplanted Joshua in Epistle to the Hebrews, then this Jesus is a christianized version of Joshua.

We turn now to Revelation, the last of the four Luther texts. This deals with the death and resurrection of Jesus — but in the Jamesian version. Due to its importance in our inquiry we will submit an introductory chapter, giving the background events.

NOTES:

1. Philo, *Questions and Answers Exodus*, 1:4
2. Philo, *Questions and Answers Exodus*, 1:11
3. Philo, *Questions and Answers Exodus*, 2:13
4. Philo, *Jesus Index*, §293, vol.10 Loeb edit
5. Philo, *On Dreams*, 1:215
6. *Exodus*, 23:20, 21
7. Philo, *Questions and Answers Exodus*, 2:13
8. Philo, *On Change of Names*, §121 – 122
9. *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 5:9
10. R. Harris, *Testimonia*, part 2, p.51
11. R. Harris, *Testimonia*, part 2, p.52, referring to Papyrus Gr. 7, Rylands Lib.
12. *The Dialogue*, 76:7, 120:3
13. *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 4:8
14. R. Harris, 'Testimonies' part 2, p.53
15. *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 11:24 – 26
16. *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 11:30 – 31
17. *Joshua*, 6:2, 16, 17
18. *Joshua*, 11:23, 21:44 – 45
19. Philo, *Questions and Answers Exodus*, 2:42
20. *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 1:2,10
21. Philo, *On Dreams*, 1:215
22. Philo, *On Dreams*, 2:183
23. Vol.5, 524 Loeb
24. *Epistle of Jude*, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 2:17; 7:27
25. *I Corinthians* 10:4
26. *I Corinthians* 1:24
27. *Colossians* 1:15
28. Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, Book 4, 36:12
29. Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, Book 5, 4:2 – 3
30. *Epistle to the Galatians*, 4:4

JESUS AND THE FALL OF JERUSALEM

“Never did the men lack courage.”

Josephus, *War*, 3:41

Josephus rescues us from the sealed-off inner world of the tiny sect and presents the wide panorama of Roman events. Yet these events were to impact very strongly upon the Jamesian church by the enormous tragedy of the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple. This brought its own crisis to that church. Josephus devotes seven books to his account of the war, which we must compress to but a few pages. He shows that none of these events had anything to do with Christianity, though captured and made central to the Christian polemic.

The high noon of the Hellenic Diaspora was the period of about sixty-five years, from the beginning of the rule of Julius Caesar in 49 BC, to the death of Augustus, the second Caesar, in AD 14. The long downward path to disaster and tragedy began after that.

Tiberius, who succeeded Augustus, was hostile to foreign cults that were making headway in Rome and gaining converts, notably Judaism and the Isis cult from Egypt. Suetonius reports that Tiberius...

“...abolished foreign cults at Rome, particularly the Egyptian and Jewish, forcing all citizens who had embraced these superstitions to burn their religious vestments and other objects. Jews of military age were removed to unhealthy regions, on the pretext of drafting them into the army. Those too old or too young to serve, including non-Jews who had adopted similar beliefs, were expelled from the city and threatened with slavery if they defied the order.”¹

This is dated about AD 19.

Josephus gives an anecdotal version of these events. As to the Isis cult, he narrates a Boccaccio-like story wherein the lady Paulina, a Roman matron renowned for her virtue, was seduced by the roguish Decius Mundus, a Roman of high station. The lady was persuaded by his accomplices to go to the Isis temple, and to spend the night in the bed of the god Anubis — in the person of Decius. “It was a nightlong service that she performed for him, thinking that he was the god.” Tiberius, lacking a sense of humor, inflicted brutal penalties on all involved — exile for Decius, crucifixion for the temple priests.²

As to the Jews, “Fulvia, a woman of high rank, had become a Jewish proselyte” and was mulcted out of a large sum of money by four Jewish confidence men who promised to forward the money to the Temple in Jerusalem but kept it. The story was reported to Tiberius “whereupon he ordered the whole Jewish community to leave Rome... And so because of the wickedness of four men the Jews were banished from the city.”³

Presumably the Jews returned to Rome in the course of time. The next reported act of Tiberius with regard to the Jews was on a smaller scale but equally hostile: he appointed Pontius Pilate as procurator to Judea and Samaria, about AD 28. Josephus and Philo show sharp antagonism towards this official. Josephus writes that he offended the Jews by attempting to bring military standards bearing images into the city, and was compelled to back down only when the Jews showed they would resist this to the death.⁴

Many thousands also protested Pilate’s appropriation of Temple funds to build an aqueduct to bring water into the city. A riot took place where “many were slain and injured” by the action of Pilate’s troops.⁵ We are dealing with a violent, brutal figure.

Philo writes that the Jerusalem authorities were ready to bring charges against Pilate, “specifying in detail his bribe-taking, his violence, his thefts, his assaults, his abusive behavior, his frequent executions of untried prisoners, and his endless savage ferocity.”⁶

This is the kindly compassionate Pilate depicted in the gospel accounts. The plain import is that Philo, directly contemporary, and Josephus, a near-contemporary, show no awareness of the alleged gospel events and are giving a widely divergent view of a central figure in that story. As always, when testimony from the Jewish side is allowed to intrude, the gospel story becomes suspect.

Tiberius departed this life AD 37 and was succeeded by Gaius ('Caligula'). The real disaster then began; Caligula was convinced of his own divinity and demanded that worship and divine honors be rendered to him throughout the empire. The other cults shrugged this off and went along with the charade but the Jews were forced to resist.

Philo writes:

“It was only of the Jews that Gaius was suspicious, because they were the only people who deliberately opposed him. They had been taught from the very cradle, by parents, tutors, teachers, and by holy laws and unwritten customs, to believe that the Father and Creator of the universe is One God. All the other men, women, cities, countries, nations and regions of the world, although they deplored what was happening, flattered Gaius none the less, glorifying him more than was reasonable, and so increasing his vanity... The change he brought about was an absolutely fundamental one, namely the apparent transformation of the created, destructible nature of man into the uncreated, indestructible nature of God. This change the Jewish nation judged to be the most horrible of blasphemies, for God would change into man sooner than man into God... Accordingly, total and truceless war was waged against the Jewish nation.”⁷

As part of the war Gaius-Caligula ordered a giant statue in his own image to be constructed, this to be placed inside the Temple in Jerusalem. The governor of Syria was ordered to mobilize the legions to carry this out. The Jews in turn prepared for all-out war. The showdown was avoided by the timely assassination of Caligula in Rome.

In hindsight, considering the terrible cost of the war that broke out twenty-five years later, we may ponder the question that the confrontation with Rome would have been much better at the time of Caligula. At least the Jews had far better morale and unity than at the later time, and much of the Roman empire would have sided with them against the deranged Caligula.

As it was, the Roman bureaucracy now viewed the Jews as a dangerous and intractable element in religious matters, and ready to confront the legions. We can well guess that the senior elements of that bureaucracy held a “Wansee Conference” and decided that Judea had to be destroyed. It would be a staged plan and it would take years, but the Roman empire operated methodically that way.

The first step was taken by Claudius, who succeeded Caligula. He was called upon to adjudicate the rights of the Jews in Alexandria, where riots approaching civil war had recently broken out between the Jews and the Greeks in that city. Claudius decreed decisively against the Jews. The long advance of the Jewish-Hellenic Diaspora had ended.

Claudius issued two edicts on the “Judenfrage.” The first stated that the Jews throughout the Empire...

“...would be permitted to keep their ancient customs. I enjoin them by this kindness to act in a more reasonable spirit, and not to set at naught the beliefs about the gods held by other peoples, but to keep their own laws.”⁸

It was a plain order to tone down, or halt, the missionary effort.

The second edict was an extensive one, dealing with various matters in Alexandria. R. Graves, in his historical novel *Claudius the God*, gives this version for the key passage:

“I desire the Jews to press for no privileges in excess of what they already hold... nor to enter competitors for athletic or other contests at public games. They must content themselves with what they have, enjoying the abundance supplied by a great city of which they are not the original inhabitants.”⁹

Josephus tries to argue that the Jews had equal rights and citizenship there (“*ises politeias*”).¹⁰ However the decision was totally negative.

The Jews had been in the city for almost four hundred years, since its founding by Alexander in 325 BC. They had long outgrown the original quarter assigned to them, and were now pressing for full equality. This was now barred, as was participation in civic events such

as the games. If the largest and wealthiest Jewish community in the empire could be classed as alien, then the Jews of every other city could expect the same. If local citizenship was barred, then Roman citizenship would be impossible. There would be no advances anywhere.

The next step was to destabilize and disintegrate the province of Judea. This was done by the procurators sent there by Rome. Emil Schürer has noted the pattern:

“When we glance over the history of the procurators, to whom once more the government of Palestine was entrusted, we might readily suppose that all of them, as if by secret arrangement, so conducted themselves as most certainly to arouse the people to revolt.”¹¹

The conduct of Pilate, as described above by Philo, became the norm of brutality and violence.

Under the rules of the game, if a province was orderly, obeyed the Roman authority and paid all taxes, there could be no intervention by Roman troops. In fact the province had the right to bring charges of misconduct against the Roman governor where warranted. Only if the province took the initiative and started an uprising could the troops be sent in. Therefore the tactic was to goad Judea into an uprising.

The last two procurators were Albinus and Florus. With Albinus “there was no form of villainy that he failed to practice.”¹²

“His successor, Gessius Florus, made Albinus seem by comparison to be a paragon of virtue... Florus abstained from no form of robbery and violence... He stripped whole cities, ruined entire populations... Certainly his avarice brought desolation upon all the cities, and caused many to leave their ancestral abode and seek refuge in foreign provinces.”¹³

We may note that the Roman officials of that period, who run amuck and butcher at will, are depicted in Luke’s novel — Acts 24, 25 — as giving a courteous hearing to Paul and sending him to Rome with a large escort. Josephus had the courage to tell the truth.

Yet even in this anarchy, many drew back from the prospect of a war with Rome. They appealed to Herod Agrippa II, who ruled Galilee, to intervene with his friend the emperor Nero. Florus had carried out a massacre in Jerusalem with 3,400 slain and, as Josephus reports,

“...had ventured on that day to do what no one had ever done before, namely to scourge before his tribunal and nail to the cross men of equestrian rank. These were men who, if Jews by birth, had at least been invested with that Roman dignity.”¹⁴

Agrippa, in Jerusalem at that time, was forced to reply to this appeal.

Here Josephus presents a long oration, of fully twelve pages of text, which transparently gives his own position, but ostensibly was addressed by Agrippa to the populace. A war against the legions was hopeless, and here Agrippa presented a long roll call of all the provinces in the empire, renowned and warlike, that had yielded — what could tiny Judea hope for?¹⁵ The oration was Josephus’ own apologia. Agrippa’s appeal failed. When he urged the people to put up with Florus till a successor could be appointed, “they poured abuse on him and ordered him banished from the city. Some threw stones.” Agrippa then returned to Galilee.

The war was ignited by the Jewish side, as the Romans had planned all along.

“Eleazar, son of the high priest Ananias, was a very daring youth and captain of the Temple guard. He persuaded the (lower) priests who officiated in the Temple services to accept no gift or sacrifice from a foreigner. This act led to the war with the Romans, because the sacrifices offered on behalf of Rome and the emperor were rejected. The chief priests and the notables earnestly pleaded with them not to halt the customary offering for their rulers, but these priests remained unyielding.”¹⁶

The Roman occupation kept the facade of legality and consent, but demanded the “loyalty oath” in the form of the daily sacrifices. These were carefully defined as “on behalf of Rome” and “for the welfare of

Rome,” rather than as Caesar worship, but were mandatory and the halt was *casus belli*. In that fateful year, AD 66, the war began and lasted four years. It ended in tragedy beyond measure.

Josephus is our sole eyewitness to the events of those years, with description incredibly difficult because of the chaos and complexity of what took place. Instead of the unity at the time of Caligula, the nation was split into factions, regions, classes and rivalries. There were the war-party, the pro-Roman party, the large public helpless and neutral, all with many local leaders. Given these conditions, and the special partisanship of Josephus, his narrative has come down the centuries as a masterly achievement.

The siege of Jerusalem is the high point. In the defense of the city the bravest and the best were the Galileans. They had trooped in their thousands to the city under the leadership of John of Gischala and Simon Bar-Giora. These two were the sworn enemies of Josephus, and he blames them for all the disasters that befell Jerusalem in prolonging the resistance. Yet in his honesty in reportage he depicts the marvelous courage and initiative of their troops. For those who have dismissed the war as a remote abstract event, confined to prayer services at Tisha B’Av in the synagogue or unknown altogether, we cite several passages from Josephus, directly on the scene, who gives us the raw immediacy of the events.

The Romans had raised large earthworks near the walls, with the siege engines to be placed on the earthworks.

“But while the engines were being brought up, John from within the city had undermined the ground from Antonia right up to the earthworks. The tunnel was supported by props, leaving the Roman works suspended. Then he brought in timbers smeared with pitch and tar, and set the whole mass alight. The tunnel props were consumed, the mine collapsed in a heap, and with a tremendous crash the earthworks fell in.

“At first dense volumes of smoke arose with clouds of dust, with the fire smothered by the debris. But as the materials were eaten away a vivid flame now burst forth. The Romans were in consternation at this sudden disaster and were disheartened by the enemy’s ingenuity. Moreover, coming at

the moment when they imagined victory within their grasp, this loss dampened their hopes of ultimate success. It seemed useless to fight the flames. Even when these were extinguished, the earthworks had been destroyed.”¹⁷

Simon was not a whit behind.

“Two days later, Simon’s party launched an attack on the other earthworks. The Romans had brought up the rams there and were already battering the walls. But a certain Gephthaeus of Garis, a town in Galilee, with Magassarus, a soldier of the king (i.e., a deserter from Agrippa), along with a man from Adabiene called ‘Lame-leg’ from his handicap, snatched up torches and ran forth from the wall towards the engines. No bolder men than these three went forth from the city during this war, nor created greater terror.

“As though racing through friendly ranks and not into a mass of enemies, they plunged through the Roman ranks to set fire to the machines. Attacked on all sides by arrows and sword-thrusts, nothing could remove them till the rams caught fire. The flames were now blazing aloft, and Romans came rushing from their camp to the rescue. Then Jews came down from the rampart, without regard for their own lives, and fought with those trying to put out the flames. On the one side were the Romans trying to drag the battering-engines out of the fire, though the wicker frames were now ablaze. On the other side the Jews held on, clutching the red-hot iron and refusing to let go.

“From there the fire spread to the earth-works, outstripping the Roman defenders. These were themselves enveloped in flames and despaired of preserving anything. They retreated to the camp, with the Jews now in full pursuit along with reinforcements coming from the city. Flushed with success, they stormed right up to the camp entrenchments and grappled with the sentries... [Other troops joined.] In the medley of the fight, blinded by the dust and deafened by the din, neither side could any longer distinguish friend from foe...”¹⁸

Only the appearance of Titus, commander and later emperor, rescued the Romans. All honor to Josephus for recording that brave day.

Yet the Romans pressed on relentlessly against the doomed city. New earthworks were erected, new siege engines brought up. Indeed the Romans built a wall around the entire city to cut off all hope of escape. Josephus describes the siege minutely, with scores of details. Ultimately the north wall fell, the troops poured in with ghastly fighting, and the Temple was destroyed in flames on the fated Ninth of Ab (Tisha B'Av). The war was lost. There were tortures and crucifixions beyond number. Heroism was replaced by martyrdom and Israel went to the cross.

Josephus unflinchingly describes the torture of the Essenes:

“The war with the Romans tried their souls through and through by every variety of test. They were racked and twisted, burnt and broken, and made to pass through every instrument of torture in order to blaspheme the Lawgiver (Moses) or to eat some forbidden thing. But they refused to yield to these demands, nor did they ever show fear to their persecutors nor did they weep.”²⁰

The tortures were inflicted on many others. Then came the cross for the prisoners:

“The soldiers out of rage and hatred amused themselves by nailing their prisoners in different postures. So great was their number that space could not be found for the crosses, nor crosses for the bodies.”²¹

The enormous shattering reality of the events, the heroism that ended in suffering, the need to explain and comprehend the tragedy that was beyond limit, led inevitably to the composition of martyr accounts. Here we come upon the death of the Savior. Apart from the witness of Josephus, very few Jewish writings have survived that deal with the fall of Jerusalem and were composed in the years closely following that event. The short list comprises the books known as

2 *Baruch* and 4 *Ezra*, preserved in Christian custody and with Christian additions. A third document may be included, also in Christian custody. This is Revelation, the Apocalypse of John — a Jewish apocalyptic work based on the fall of Jerusalem.

Revelation is on our Luther list of Judaic works showing links to the Jamesian sect and to Joshua, and is of central importance to our inquiry since it deals with the “death and resurrection” of the Savior. It was the defiant answer of the Jamesian sect to the fall of the Temple.

From the foregoing we see that it derives from events having no connection to the gospel story or to “Jesus of Nazareth” hence we can derive a passion narrative involving the Jamesian Jesus through this alternate sequence of events. We turn to this text in greater detail.

Footnotes:

1. Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 36
2. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18:66 – 80
3. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18:81 – 84
4. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18:55 – 59
5. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18:60 – 62
6. Philo, *Legation to Gaius*, §302
7. Philo, *Legation to Gaius*, §115 – 119
8. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 19:290
9. R. Graves, *Claudius the God*, 167
10. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 19:281 – 285
11. Emil Schürer, *History of Jewish People*, 224
12. Josephus, *War*, 2:273
13. Josephus, *War*, 2:277 – 279
14. Josephus, *War*, 2:307 – 308
15. Josephus, *War*, 345 – 401
16. Josephus, *War*, 409, 410
17. Josephus, *War*, 5:469 – 472
18. Josephus, *War*, 5:473 – 487
19. Josephus, *War*, 499 – 510
20. Josephus, *War*, 2:152
21. Josephus, *War*, 5:451

THE DEATH OF THE SAVIOR

“You have been slain and you have redeemed us to God with your blood.”

Revelation, 5:9

We submit evidence that the original form of the passion narrative derived from the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple. Here too we have an orthodox Jamesian text, with the martyr figure linked to Joshua. In the standard Christian practice of capture and radical restatement, this was later transferred to the gospel “Jesus.”

It is common in Judaic writings to shift from the community to an individual who symbolizes the collective experience. This is explained by one writer:

“It is characteristic of Israelite thought to pass from the collective to the individual, and to represent the group by a single individual... This probably happened with the concept of the Suffering Servant. What was first a collective figure, representing the community, became the figure of an individual who in himself embodied its mission.”¹

In Revelation we have the historical event restated in a visionary and mythic manner — a literary form known as the Jewish apocalyptic. This text arose out of the fall of Jerusalem and deals with the martyrs who were put to death. “And they cried out with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, do you not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?”²

Here we find mention of many slain, while in the gospel account there is but a single death — that of Jesus. However, we note that the martyrdoms began with the Disturbances as described by Josephus, with “many slain” and continuing on to the war itself.

One of these episodes shows direct linkages to Revelation:

“During the period when Fadus was procurator of Judea (AD 44 – 46). a certain impostor named Theudas persuaded a majority of the masses to take up their possessions and follow him to the Jordan River. He stated that he was a prophet, and that at his command the river would be parted and would provide them an easy passage. With this talk he deceived many. Fadus however did not permit them to reap the fruit of their folly, but sent against them a squadron of cavalry. These fell upon them unexpectedly, slew many of them, and took many prisoners. Theudas himself was captured, whereupon they cut off his head and brought it to Jerusalem.”³

Josephus, bitterly partisan, again reports accurately.

The account in Revelation reads, “And I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus and for the word of God, and who had not worshiped the beast nor his image.”⁴

Theudas had borne witness to the first Jesus/Joshua in reenacting the crossing of the Jordan, and had been beheaded. And the others had not yielded to the Roman images and insignia on their standards, and had been slain. Nowhere is there resistance to Rome in the gospel accounts. Which Jesus are these people a witness to? Therefore, which Jesus is the subject of Revelation?

This text deals also with the martyr figure, called the Lamb, who sums up the collective experience and who brings redemption: “You have been slain and you have redeemed us to God with your blood.”⁵

We have here a mythical slaying, but based on very real events. Revelation is written in the visionary, mystical language of the Jewish apocalyptic. The Lamb is made the symbol for the fearful destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple, and for a glorious restoration. In the present text, “John,” the narrator of the visions, gives us a good clue as to the identity of the Lamb:

“And I [John] saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels having the seven last plagues, to fill up the wrath of God... And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of

God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvelous are your works, Lord God Almighty, just and true are your ways, you the King of the ages.”⁶

There is a clear parallel to the Song in Deuteronomy: “And Moses came and spoke all the words of this song in the ears of the people, he and Hoshea [i.e., Joshua] the son of Nun.”⁷

The clear juxtaposition of the Lamb in the place of Joshua points to the identity of the Lamb. The “song” is one of Jewish orthodoxy, with praise for the one God, and the parallel is found in the same chapter of Deuteronomy: “Ascribe greatness to our God. He is the Rock. His work is perfect, and all his ways are justice.”⁸

The Scriptural text confirms the Revelation text.

The Lamb in the person of Joshua can also be linked to the *Testament of Moses*. There Joshua is given a sealed scroll by Moses, to be opened at a future date, at the time of the final battle. He is told to be “of great courage” and to “root out the nations.”

And he is given an exalted status, by being raised to a seat at the side of Moses. Here Revelation appears to be the fulfillment of these episodes but on a divine scale, with the Lamb now commissioned by God and therefore worshiped by all.

In this text, the scroll, bearing seven seals, is given to the Lamb by one seated on the throne, apparently the Person of God. The Lamb is then acclaimed by those before the throne: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain and you have redeemed us to God with your blood...”

An innumerable choir of angels then adds: “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power and riches and wisdom...”⁹

We thus have a slaying and a resurrection, separate and apart from the gospel story, which explains why Luther rejected this book.

The legend of the martyrdoms during this war passed down the centuries, and there arose the tradition of a ‘Messiah son of Joseph’ who fell in battle against the Romans. It is very likely that Jewish accounts such as Revelation were the origin of this tradition. Again the name of Joshua intrudes into the story: he was an Ephraimite, and therefore a “son of Joseph.” He was slain by the armies of “Gog and Magog,” a symbol for Rome. He is also named here “Ephraim, the

Righteous Messiah,” which confirms the identification with Joseph and with Joshua. We give several of these “son of Joseph” texts, found in the valuable collection published by R. Patai, *The Messiah Texts*:

“In that hour the Messiah will come forth from Jerusalem to make war... In that hour the Holy One, blessed be He, will descend from the highest heaven above, and the ministering angels with Him... It is Gog and Magog who have come against Ephraim, the righteous Messiah of the Holy One, blessed be He, and His people Israel, to make war against them.”¹⁰

Another text reads:

“At that time a man will arise from among the children of Joseph... and he will be called the Messiah of God. And many people will gather around him in Upper Galilee, and he will be their king... Then Messiah ben Joseph, with the men who rally around him, will go up from the Galilee to Jerusalem, and they will slay the procurator of the king of Edom... And when Messiah ben Joseph and all the people with him will dwell in Jerusalem, then Armilus [leader of Gog and Magog] will hear of this, and will come and make magic and sorcery to lead many astray... And he will slay Messiah ben Joseph, and it will be a great calamity for Israel.”¹¹

A further text reads:

“Israel will be gathered in Upper Galilee, and there Messiah ben Joseph will look for them... And he will go up to Jerusalem, and rebuild the Temple and offer sacrifice... After this, Gog and Magog will hear and will go up, and will enter and will kill him in the streets of Jerusalem... And Israel will see this and say, ‘The Messiah is lost to us and no other Messiah will come.’ And they will mourn for him in four family groups.”¹²

This Messiah is also called “Ephraim” and is described as a martyr figure who offers his life “for the sins of others.”:

“The Fathers of the the World [the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob] will in the future rise up in the month of Nissan and will say ‘Ephraim, our Messiah! Even though we are your fathers, you are greater than we, for you suffered because of the sins of our children, and cruel punishments have come upon you...’ And the Messiah answered them, ‘Fathers of the World! Everything I did, I did only for you and for your children...’ ”¹³

The reference to Nissan points to the Passover, which occurs in that month. The son of Joseph is slain at that month.

The above texts date centuries after the fall of Jerusalem but illustrate how myths can have a historical basis. The origin points to the Jewish sources of Revelation. In that text the Lamb, though slain, resumes the warrior role of Joshua, who takes vengeance against “the kings of the earth”:

“These shall make war against the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them. For he is Lord of lords and King of kings. And they that are with him are the chosen and elect and the faithful.”¹⁴

From the foregoing, we have a statement for the death and resurrection of the martyr hero, named Joshua/Jesus. It is a compensatory myth for the catastrophe of the fall of Jerusalem, and therefore remains in a historical framework. And we can name the sect that put out the myth: it is the Jerusalem church of James and his followers.

Thus the suspect Book of Revelation cannot be brushed aside. It may be the most important of all. The central proclamation of Christianity was the death and resurrection of Jesus, established as historical fact — and we have that here. “I am the first and the last. I am he that lives, and was dead. Behold, I am alive forever.”¹⁵

It is a martyrology dealing with the death of “Jesus” but it pertains to the first Jesus not the second. It is in mystical, apocalyptic form, but it derives from real events in the real world hence it is plausible and credible throughout. However it shows no awareness of the gospel events. Nowhere in Revelation is there any hint that the Jews are responsible for the death of Jesus. Jerusalem is called “the beloved city.”¹⁶

The loss of Jerusalem is not a punishment for the Jews. Instead, in the New Jerusalem there will be no Temple, “for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the Temple of it.”¹⁷ The all-pervasive Judaic spirit of the book explains why Luther rejected it. The writer of Revelation had every opportunity to refer to “Jesus of Nazareth” and to ascribe the fall of Jerusalem to his crucifixion — yet the writer fails to do so.

The content of Revelation shows linkages to other texts. Here the martyr figure is called the Bridegroom. In *4 Ezra*, which also derived from the destruction of Jerusalem and was written in visionary, mystical style, there is an “old woman” who recites:

“I was barren and bore no child, though I had a husband thirty years. And it came to pass after thirty years God looked upon my affliction and gave me a son... When he was grown up I arranged a wife for him and made a feast day. And it came to pass that when my son entered into his wedding chamber, he fell down and died... And now I propose to neither eat nor drink, but continually to mourn and fast till I die.”

She is then told by “Ezra,” the narrator, that much greater tragedies have also taken place.

“Do you not see our mourning and what has befallen us? For Zion, the mother of us all, is in great grief and deep affliction... Our altar is thrown down, our Temple is destroyed... Our nobles are dishonored, our priests burnt, our Levites gone into captivity... our youths enslaved, our heroes made powerless...”

Ezra then narrates:

“And it came to pass, that while I was speaking to her, lo, on a sudden her countenance shone exceedingly... And when I looked, the woman was no longer visible, but there was a City built and of large foundations...”

The interpreting angel explains all this to Ezra:

“The woman that you saw is Zion, whom you now see as a builded city... And when she said to you that her son died on entering the marriage-chamber, this was the fall of Jerusalem that has come to pass.”¹⁸

In Revelation, the angel makes a similar explanation, this time to “John”:

“And one of the seven angels said, Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb’s wife. And he carried me away to a great and high mountain, and he showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God.”¹⁹

The above passage contains a number of linkages to the gospels. There we find cryptic references to the “Bridegroom,” taken to refer to Jesus, who will be “taken away.”

“The days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then they shall fast.”²⁰

The death of Christ is linked to the symbolic destruction of the Temple: “the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.”²¹

The later Christian polemic made this destruction the direct consequence of the death of Jesus. Yet the present writer fails to bring in that message.

Most important of all, the book, while written after AD 70, appears to be carrying on the feud between the Jamesian church and the Pauline faction — meaning that both sides are still in existence after

that date. The book condemns “those that say they are apostles but are not... who say they are Jews but are not, but are of the synagogue of Satan... [who] eat food offered to idols.”²²

These are charges that the “Judaizers” threw at the Pauline groups. Are these the later followers of both factions or — a jolting thought — are the original parties, James and Paul, still in existence?

In the foregoing, we have submitted an alternate explanation for the martyrdom and death of “Jesus” and his supernatural resurrection — one that does not require the historical “Jesus of Nazareth.” At this point one may argue that the crucifixion story in the gospels has the highest historical certainty, therefore it is pointless to consider any alternate premise. But can we be sure of that?

Despite the efforts of innumerable scholars over the past three hundred years, not a particle of hard conclusive evidence has been produced confirming any part of the life of Jesus. The prevailing mood of doubt and skepticism has been expressed by Rudolf Bultmann: “One can only emphasize the uncertainty of our knowledge of the person and work of the historical Jesus, and likewise of the origin of Christianity.”²³

Concerning the crucifixion story, a key episode is the assumed trial of Jesus before the Jewish Sanhedrin. Here Bultmann writes:

“I think the whole narrative in (gospel of) Mark is a secondary explanation... The account of the proceedings before the Sanhedrin in Mark 14:55 – 64 must be reckoned as a faith legend.”²⁴

Meaning that Mark, considered to be the earliest and most historical of the gospels, is giving a fictional account.

John Dominic Crossan, a recent writer, is even more emphatic:

“It is impossible, in my mind, to overestimate the creativity of Mark, but those twin trials (i.e., before the Sanhedrin and before Pilate) must be emphasized for what they are, namely, consummate theological fiction... It is magnificent theological fiction, to be sure, but entailing a dreadful price for Judaism.”²⁵

Mark did the inventing because, according to Crossan, the crucifixion was a short brutal affair with nothing much to record, and moreover the disciples had fled, so there was no one on the scene to record what little there was.

“It is difficult for the Christian imagination, then or now, to accept the brutal informality with which Jesus was probably condemned and crucified... [As] I maintain, Jesus’ followers had fled upon his arrest and knew nothing whatsoever about his fate beyond the fact of crucifixion itself.”²⁶

Here we must be crude enough to ask “What fact?”

If Mark is giving us magnificent fiction, perchance the whole crucifixion tale is without factual basis.

Since the scholars themselves have placed large questions over the crucifixion story, we are free to continue with our separate sequence of events. This will involve the radical premise that the quarrel between James and Paul is continuing after AD 70. That possibility will have to be examined.

NOTES:

1. Rowley, *Relevance of Apocalyptic*, 34
2. *Revelation* 6:9 – 10
3. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 20:97 – 98
4. *Revelation*, 20:4
5. *Revelation*, 5:9
6. *Revelation*, 15:1, 3
7. *Deuteronomy*, 32:44
8. *Deuteronomy*, 32:3 – 4
9. *Revelation*, 5:1 – 12
10. Patai, *The Messiah Texts*, 154, quoting 'Mid. Alpha Betot' 2:438 – 42
11. Patai, *The Messiah Texts*, 168 – 169 quoting 'Hai Gaon Responsum'
12. Patai, *The Messiah Texts*, 170, quoting 'Mid. Leqah Tov' 258 – 259
13. Patai, *The Messiah Texts*, 113, quoting 'Pesiqta Rabbah' ch. 36
14. *Revelation*, 17:18
15. *Revelation*, 1:18
16. *Revelation*, 20:9, 21:2
17. *Revelation*, 21:22
18. *4 Ezra* 9:43 – 10:49
19. *Revelation*, 21:9 – 10
20. *Matthew*, 9:15
21. *Matthew*, 27:51
22. *Revelation*, 2:2, 9, 4
23. R. Bultmann, *Form Criticism*, 20
24. R. Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 270, 305
25. J.D. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 390
26. J.D. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 390, 392

A CHRONOLOGY FOR PAUL

“I have seen many of Your people who have withdrawn from Your Covenant, and cast from them the obligations of Your law...”

2 Baruch 41:3

The premise that Paul, James and Peter were alive after the war with Rome, that is, after AD 70, will appear bizarre and hard to accept. It goes against the entire tradition and chronology. However a number of items of evidence — which the scholars term “multiple independent attestation” — point to this possibility:

- There is the blunt fact that Revelation, which undeniably dates after 70, shows that the bitter feud is continuing between Paul and the Jamesian church.
- Luke had every opportunity in Acts to narrate the deaths of these persons, yet failed to do so. We cannot well believe that Luke would pass up martyrdom stories if he had this material on hand.
- The impression given by Josephus is that after the war Jerusalem was simply wiped off the map and no one survived. A correction to this is given by E. Mary Smallwood in her book *The Jews Under Roman Rule*. She indicates that the Romans took prompt and energetic measures to restore the province — both as a source of revenue and because of its strategic value on the eastern frontier.

She writes:

“The province (Judea) was now put under an experienced governor, an imperial legate of praetorian rank, with a procurator under him in charge of the financial administration; and

the garrison was doubled or trebled in size when the six auxiliary units were replaced by a complete legion, X Fretensis, supported by auxiliaries... The establishment of a permanent legionary garrison in Palestine was not merely an attempt to contain the political aspirations of the Jews and prevent a recurrence of the prewar anarchy. It was also part of Vespasian's reorganization of the defenses of the eastern frontier... Within a decade the province was back on a sufficiently even keel that tax exemptions could be granted."¹

The reference to "containing political aspirations" with a large show of force indicates that many unreconstructed militant Jews were still on the scene. There were enough Pharisees to afford the luxury of a schism: the Romans permitted a collaborationist religious center at Jamnia (Yavne) near the coast, implying that the Jews there felt unwelcome, or unsafe, in Jerusalem. However the Romans made no attempt to interfere with Judaism as such.

"The Jews emerged from the war with the status of Judaism as a *religio licita* unscathed both in Palestine and among the Diaspora... Rome's quarrel had been primarily with Jewish political nationalism, not with the religion which she had tolerated for a century."²

Thus the Jerusalem leadership, along with Paul and his associates in the Diaspora, could well have survived. Roman pragmatism took wars and rebellions in stride, then restored order, military force, and tax collections as before.

- The traditions and chronology put out by official Christianity derive solely from the premise that Jesus existed and that the gospel events are basically historical. Once this premise is rejected, then the chronology vanishes also. We ask the scholar-apologists to show us clear and conclusive evidence that Paul, James and Peter indeed met their deaths prior to AD 70. Until this evidence is produced, our alternate chronology remains open.

In support of our dating we can cite two leading scholars of the early 1900s whose writings are still standard in the field. They argue that materials in Paul's epistles, considered perfectly genuine, nevertheless indicate a date after AD 70. That is, the material was called for by the destruction of the Temple, meaning that Paul was alive and well at that time.

R. H. Charles names two key texts, *2 Baruch* and *4 Ezra*, as deriving from the loss of the Temple and links Paul to both. As to *4 Ezra*, Charles writes:

"This material is comparable with the speculations of the Pauline letters... This discussion was felt to be concerned with one of the burning subjects of the day, the religious significance of the Fall of Jerusalem."³

We cannot expect Paul to speculate on the event before it happens; he has to be present at the time. The other text, *2 Baruch*, is described by Charles as "a good representative of the Judaism against which the Pauline dialectic was directed."⁴ Again Paul must be present to do the debating.

Albert Schweitzer, in his study of Paul, shows surprise that the scholars...

"...make scarcely any use of the parallels to Pauline ideas and conceptions which are found in Enoch, the Apocalypse of Baruch, the Apocalypse of Ezra (i.e., *2 Baruch* and *4 Ezra*) and here and there in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs. It is nothing less than astonishing that the close affinities with the Apocalypse of Ezra do not receive any recognition... The close affinity between this writer and Paul strikes the eye at once."⁵

The reason the scholars are unwilling to see "close affinities" is that *4 Ezra* was written after AD 70, and for Paul to be concerned with the same problems, then he also would have to be on the scene after that date. His epistles, especially Galatians, indicate that leading figures of

the Jerusalem church such as James and Peter are also on the scene. This demolishes all the chronology of Acts concerning the Jerusalem church, since church tradition had killed off these figures years before. All this would force an alternate theory for Christian origins and an alternate "life of Paul," meaning a collapse of the Christian case. The scholars therefore maintain discreet silence.

Given the emphatic statements of Charles and Schweitzer, it behooves us to examine the Epistles of Paul that point to the late date. Paul writes outside history; he lives in the enclosed heated world of the tiny sect, with its grandiose program and its strangely violent factional quarrels. However the hints are there, and it turns out that at least four of the epistles point to the late date.

The most striking example is *Galatians*: "The Jerusalem of the present time (Gr: *nun*) is in captivity with her children, but the Jerusalem which is above is free, and is the mother of us all."⁶

The direct meaning is the period after 70, with Jerusalem conquered, Jews on the slave blocks in Roman cities, and Roman coins bearing the inscription *Judea capta*. The word "nun" is emphatic, and is defined as "at this very time" in the Liddell-Scott lexicon.

We note that Paul's wording parallels that in *4 Ezra*. There the writer sets forth the vision of an old woman in mourning, her garments rent, and then the revealing words:

"Zion, the mother of us all, is in great grief and deep affliction... Our Levites are gone into captivity, our righteous youths are enslaved... This was the fall of Jerusalem, which has come to pass."

The woman is transformed and appears in glory: she is the heavenly Jerusalem.

"And it came to pass, while I spoke to her, her countenance on a sudden shone exceedingly, and her aspect became brilliant as lightning... And when I looked, lo, the woman was no longer visible, but there was a city built, a place that showed itself of large foundation."

The vision is then interpreted by an angel: "This woman whom you saw is Zion, and whom you now behold as a built city... and lo, you have seen the heavenly pattern of her."⁷

In the above, we have the juxtaposition of the earthly Jerusalem in captivity and the heavenly city that is free. R. H. Charles, in a footnote ad loq⁸, points out that the words "Zion, mother of us all" are to be compared to *Galatians* 4:26. Would that other scholars had the same honesty.

Our second epistle to be dated after AD 70 is *Romans*, which with *Galatians* gives us the full Pauline theology. All of chapter eleven of *Epistles to the Romans* reveals an utter finality, a new world of ideas. A vast historical event has taken place which has caused the rejection of Israel and the election of the gentiles. Throughout, Paul counterpoises the "fall" of Israel to the "salvation" of the gentiles. Surely this is not written in a complete vacuum, and Paul is aware that an enormous and fearful event had taken place. "Through their fall, salvation has come to the gentiles... Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity, but towards you (the gentiles) goodness."⁹

Where do we find this enormous Fall before AD 70?

Our next example from Paul's writings is from *1 Thessalonians*:

"The Jews killed the Lord Jesus and their own prophets and have persecuted us, and they please not God but are contrary to all men, forbidding us to preach to the gentiles that they might be saved, filling up their sins always, for the wrath has come upon them to the uttermost."¹⁰

One commentator, F. C. Baur, defends the passage as genuine and written by Paul, but admits that other scholars consider it a later, non-Pauline passage. He writes:

"The bitterness of this reference to 'the Jews' is unparalleled in Paul's writings and it has been suspected of being an interpolation... 'The wrath has come upon them to the uttermost' has been thought by some to presuppose the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, which would mean that this section is a later addition to the letter or that the whole letter is a pseudepigrapha."¹¹

The writer defends the passage as genuine, however we have his admission that “some” date the passage as later than AD 70. The language certainly indicates this. Only then had the extreme wrath fallen upon the Jews.

In the matter of bitterness, Paul has shown in the past that he is quite capable of that emotion. In *Galatians* he pronounces a curse on all who present a rival teaching. He throws contempt and insult on the Jerusalem leaders, and in *Corinthians* he describes his rivals as satanic beings who clothe themselves in garments of light. In particular, the phrase here “forbidding us to speak to the gentiles that they might be saved” points to the factional fight raging in the sect. His opponents are hounding him in all the churches, finally wrenching the extreme of accusations from him.

The fourth epistle to join the list is *Ephesians*. It contains a reference to “the middle wall of partition” which has been removed, and the gentiles are no longer separated from the Jews.

“Now in Christ Jesus, you [the Ephesians] who were sometimes far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who has made us one, and has broken down the middle wall of partition between us.”¹²

Several scholars have taken this as an allusion to the barrier set up in the Temple beyond which the gentiles were not permitted to pass. Thus C. L. Mitton, citing two other scholars, writes:

“The literal reference is to the stone wall in the Temple beyond which no Gentile might advance into the inner court [citing Weymouth]... It is its actual destruction that suggests its figurative use here [citing Goodspeed]... The destruction of the actual physical barrier must imply a date after its demolition, that is, a date later than AD 70, when the Temple, barrier and all, was razed to the ground.”¹³

To Mitton, this proves that the passage is late and that Paul could not have written it. But to the general reader, the passage is clear and effective, and as “Pauline” as any other passage he wrote. The scholars make free to dismiss every text that does not fit into the official chronology.

The candid reader may grant, however, that the four epistles cited above could reasonably point to a date after AD 70.

Overall, a date after 70 goes far towards explaining Paul's new theology: he was an orthodox Jew before that, albeit with the Essenelike doctrines of the sect that he had joined. But the catastrophe of the destruction of the Temple brought chaos and disintegration to all of Judaism, and Paul, with the other Jews, now had to ask whether the Law had failed. This was a question that was unthinkable in the earlier period but now had become central. The "Holocaust" had to be confronted and explained.

Let us examine the late Judaic documents "against which the Pauline dialectic was directed."

The *Book of Revelation* shows unswerving militancy: the slain will be avenged, fearful punishment will fall upon Rome ("Babylon"), and Zion will be rebuilt infinitely better than before. But this was the exception. Other documents such as *2 Baruch* and *4 Ezra* show despair and heartbreak. In the bleak, unendurable world after the War there was disintegration and chaos. There were questions that had to be answered. Why was Israel punished and the gentiles left untouched? And there was the ultimate loss of nerve: the wish that this world come to an end. The split between the embittered, orthodox party and those that despaired and left Judaism will define the conflict between Paul and the Jerusalem faction.

The sense of catastrophe is found in *2 Baruch*:

"Blessed is he who was not born, or having been born, has died. But woe unto us, because we have seen the affliction of Zion, and what has befallen Jerusalem... Earth, why give your harvests? Vine, why yield the wine, for an offering will not be made again in Zion, nor will the first-fruits again be offered. Sun, withhold the light of your rays, and moon hide your light, for the light of Zion is darkened..."¹⁴

Baruch asks God to "bring an end to mortality... reprove the angel of death, and let Sheol be sealed so that it may not receive the dead."¹⁵

This would bring life and death to an end and would force the Judgment. It is a wish that the world come to an end.

Here Schweitzer states that Paul's theology is permeated with the concept of the End-Time ("eschatology"), with the conviction that the present natural order had come to an end, and that the death and resurrection of Christ, as set forth in Revelation, operated as proof that the End-Time had come.

"The Apostle's doctrine is integrally, simply and exclusively eschatological... The believer is united with Christ, experiences with Him death and resurrection, and becomes a new creature, emancipated from fleshly corporeity."¹⁶

In Paul's early career, with its daily squabbles and rivalries, there is no sign of this cosmic theology. There he was concerned with having his expenses paid, as with the ox that treads out the grain. The chronology now begins to take shape: Paul joined the sect prior to the war, in a stable world, where the sect's program seemed in order. But all crashed down after the war, as Paul came to understand.

The change is shown in the text of Baruch:

"Moreover, you priests, take the keys of the Sanctuary and cast them into the height of heaven. Give them to the Lord, and say, 'Guard Your house Yourself, for we have been false stewards.'"¹⁷

Here the reproach is almost open: the priests blame themselves, but the implied reproach is to God. "You fooled us. We obeyed all Your commands, and this is what happened." The bitterness cannot be mistaken. Imagine Temple priests rejecting their office. Can Paul be blamed for his questioning?

Most galling and incomprehensible is that "Babylon" was left untouched:

"I, Baruch, say this against you, Babylon. Your grief should be equal to that of Zion. But now our grief is infinite and the lamentation is without measure. But you have prospered and Zion is desolate. Who will judge regarding these things? To whom shall we complain regarding what has befallen us? Lord, how have You endured this?"¹⁸

The same demand for an explanation is found in *4 Ezra*:

“And now, Lord, why have you delivered up the one [Israel] to the many, and dishonored the one root above the rest, and scattered your only one among the multitude? And why have they who denied your promises been allowed to tread under foot those that have believed your covenants? If you hated your people so much then they should have been punished by your own hands.”¹⁹

At the very least, this indicates that no one was aware of the Christian explanation — that there was divine punishment for the slaying of Jesus.

All this indicates a period of breakdown and questioning. It was a period of widespread disintegration. Baruch noted the split among the Jews, with many — especially the recent converts — deserting, yet, incredibly, others joining the beleaguered Jews even in that dark period, and with proselytes remaining loyal. He writes:

“I have seen many of Your people that have withdrawn from Your covenant, and cast from them the obligations of Your law. But others again have I seen who have forsaken their vain things, and have sought refuge under Your wings.”²⁰

However Baruch stands fast and urges the waivers to do so also:

“Do not withdraw from the way of the Law, but guard and admonish the people that remain, lest they withdraw from the commandments of the Mighty One... Zion has been taken from us and we have nothing now save the Mighty One and His law. If therefore we direct and dispose our hearts, we shall receive everything that we lost, and much better things than we lost by many times. For what we lost was subject to corruption, and what we shall receive shall not be corruptible. And let these things be always before your eyes, because we are still in the spirit and power of our liberty.”²¹

Josephus, who lived through those tragic years, also stood fast, to his honor as priest and Pharisee:

“Robbed though we be of wealth, of cities, of all good things, our Law at least remains immortal. There is not a Jew so distant from his country, so much in awe of a cruel despot, but has more fear of the Law than of him.”²²

More than that, R. H. Charles states that the Judaism after AD 70 became hardened and ascetic:

“It should be remembered that the destruction of the Holy City — and above all of the Temple — in AD 70 gave rise to a widespread ascetic movement among the Jewish people who survived, especially in Palestine. Many gave expression to their grief in severe and regular forms of fasting.”²³

By placing Paul after AD 70, much of his career and his theology become clearer. He was a product of the Hellenic Diaspora and had joined a missionary sect, but now the missionary effort had almost collapsed. The world he had moved in was that of the gentile near converts, the proselytes who had been newly drawn to Judaism. But with the Jews deserting the faith, the gentile proselytes now were far more likely to abandon a religion that had suffered so many blows. Paul, the authentic genius of Christianity, was able to construct a system whereby the convert would enter the True Israel, would gain the promises and hope and salvation, yet would evade the desperate situation that the Jews now found themselves in.

Paul understood the spirit of the times. His new theology is contemporary to documents like *4 Ezra*, *Revelation* and *2 Baruch*. Paul is in the maelstrom of events with all the others, as noted by Charles and Schweitzer. In the mean streets of Græco-Syriac slums he knew the full measure of the disaster that had befallen the Jews. And it was precisely in restating the elements of the destruction that Paul created his new theology.

All the parts began to fall into place. The fall of Jerusalem and the loss of the Temple could only mean that the natural order had collapsed, and that the End-Time was approaching, as *2 Baruch* had stated. The Lord Jesus had been slain, yet lived forevermore, as Revelation had stated. The Law had come to an end, as many understood.

With remarkable simplicity, Paul now decided that faith in the death and resurrection of Christ replaced the Old Judaism and created the New Israel. His epistles refer some twenty-five times to this death and resurrection, and is the central teaching in his theology.

However his orthodox opponents were strangely unaware that this “death” had changed the nature of Judaism, which is further evidence that we are dealing with a symbolic “death,” not a factual one. John Gunther, in his book *St. Paul and his Opponents* writes:

“Apparently the Judaizers found insufficient significance in the Crucifixion to consider it part of their *musterion* (mystic teachings)... The Judaizers found in the Old Testament no new *krupta* (secrets) concerning the Passion and Resurrection.”²⁴

These Judaizers insisted on the Mosaic Law. “The cross was not central in their teaching because of their attachment to the law. They denied that the cross decreased the need of the law.”²⁵

Paul’s views were therefore heretical. With the self-deception of the fanatic, Paul could not admit that his theology was forced on him by necessity as the only way he could keep his pagan proselytes from deserting. He would preach all this because it had been revealed to him by the Lord. The gentiles would then remain in his churches under the new rules. And if the Jerusalem elders objected, so much the worse for them.

The showdown between Paul and the Jerusalem church would now take place.

NOTES:

1. E. Mary Smallwood, *The Jews Under Roman Rule*, 331, 333 – 334
2. E. Mary Smallwood, *The Jews Under Roman Rule*, 344
3. R. H. Charles, *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, 2:554
4. R. H. Charles, *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, 2:470
5. Albert Schweitzer, *Paul and His Interpreters*, 51
6. *Epistles to the Galatians*, 4:25 – 26
7. *4 Ezra* 9:38; 10:22, 27, 43, 49
8. R. H. Charles, *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, 603
9. *Epistle to the Romans*, 11:11, 22
10. *1 Thessalonians*, 2:15 – 16
11. F. C. Baur, as quoted in *New Bible Commentary*, 1055
12. *Ephesians*, 2:13 – 14
13. C. L. Mitton, *Epistle to the Ephesians*, 232
14. *2 Baruch*, 10:6 – 12
15. *2 Baruch*, 21:23
16. A. Schweitzer, *Paul and his Interpreters*, 244
17. *2 Baruch*, 10:18
18. *2 Baruch*, 11:1 – 3
19. *4 Ezra*, 5:28 – 30
20. *2 Baruch*, 41:3 – 4
21. *2 Baruch*, 44:3; 45:3 – 7
22. Josephus, *Contra Apion*, 2:277
23. R. H. Charles, *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, 2:601
24. John Gunther, *St. Paul and his Opponents*, 279 – 280
25. John Gunther, *St. Paul and his Opponents*, 210

PAUL AND THE JERUSALEM CHURCH

“If any man preach any other gospel to you than that which you have received (from me), let him be accursed.”

Paul, *Epistle to the Galatians*, 1:9

The key document giving Paul's version of his relation to the Jerusalem church is the Epistle to the Galatians. We may call this the defining text by which Christianity came into being, separate and apart from Judaism. It is bitterly partisan, and clearly the Jerusalem leaders had their own version. But enough is there to let us see what was involved. It deserves study in detail.

The epistle is a statement of total independence from the church of James. It is more than emancipation, since Paul argues that he received nothing from that church in the first place — neither their teachings nor their authorization of apostleship. Paul declares this in the opening line of the epistle: “Paul, an apostle, not by human appointment nor by human commission, but from Jesus Christ.”¹

His apostleship had nothing to do with man.

The epistle, while addressed to the Galatians, is in the nature of an appeal to the rank and file of the sect in all the branches, and is aimed at the leadership. It is a position paper, and it is aimed at the overthrow of the leaders and winning over the rank and file.

The epistle narrates four episodes involving the Jerusalem church. In each, Paul carefully separates himself from all influence and from any hint of subservience as to that church. The first is his conversion story — time, place and circumstance unknown, but coming directly from God and dated three years before any contact with the church elders. He took his own good time after the supernatural conversion, journeying about the Levant for three years before that first meeting, to underline the degree of separation and lack of urgency — also his earlier date.

Paul writes:

“When it pleased God, who made me separate [unto him] from my mother’s womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me that I might preach him among the gentiles, immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood, neither went I up to Jerusalem to them that were apostles before me, but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to get to know Peter, and abode with him fifteen days.”²

The Son was revealed “that I might preach him to the gentiles.” This can only mean that they would be preached to *qua* gentiles, that is, free from all obligation towards the Mosaic law. Anything less than that interpretation would not require a divine revelation, since the Jamesian sect, and synagogue Judaism in general, would be willing to preach to gentiles, with the understanding that there would be conversion to Judaism at the end of the line. This revelation is what Paul now swears to, in writing to the Galatians more than seventeen years after the date of that occurrence. But if that is the meaning, why did he bother going to Jerusalem? He could have gone off on his independent missionary career from the very outset. The answer is that Paul most certainly did not get his final theology at the early date, though he now persuades himself that this is what happened.

The second reference to the Jerusalem church is in his introductory visit. This is narrated in an evasive and obscure manner, and again the impression is that he wants to distance himself, and deny any commitment or obedience. He has to admit the visit, but he wants to deny its implications:

“...Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to get to know (Gr: *historeo*) Peter, and abode with him fifteen days. But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord’s brother... Afterwards I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia, and was unknown by face unto the churches of Judea which were in Christ. But they had heard only, that he who persecuted us in times past now preaches the faith which once he destroyed.”³

That is, the visit was of a neutral nature — merely to “get to know” Peter, and no one else of importance was there except James. The phrase “the Lord’s brother” is ambiguous. It may mean a favored position in the sect and “companion” to Christ. In context it need not mean blood kinship to Jesus since Paul shows unrelieved hostility to all the Jerusalem leaders throughout the epistle. Elsewhere James is referred to as “a pillar” who “seemed to be a somebody” — language that Paul would not use if James indeed were of the family of Jesus.

Paul states also that he was “unknown by face” to all the other sect members, and besides he had persecuted them so much — and from long distance — that he could not have learned anything from them. All in all, it is an adversarial text that denies all contact with Jerusalem. But then, why is he on the defensive? Just what did those two weeks represent? A two-week visit has to be more than a getting-to-know-you.

We can be sure that during those two weeks in the home of Peter, and in the grim formidable presence of James, the young Paul observed each of the six hundred and thirteen rules of the Law, along with prayer, fasting and ablutions, and with total orthodoxy. Given Paul’s fervent nature and intensity, which show in all his writings, we can well believe that the young man, seeing the Temple in its glory, joined in the processions with faith unfeigned. Whatever he would say in later years it is obvious from this episode that he was orthodox at this time.

We can give the strongest interpretation to this episode and posit that the two weeks represented Paul’s novitiate and instruction period into the Jerusalem sect, with full acceptance of the program of the sect. James and Peter would not have accepted anything less. That is why Paul is trying to cover up the visit, and why his opponents were playing it to the hilt. Under any interpretation Paul’s missionary career does not begin until after that Jerusalem visit, and we posit that he was ordained a missionary at that time.

The key question is, when did all this take place? We know that Paul did not return to Jerusalem for a second visit for fourteen years, and when he did return it was with a radically different theology. He was no longer a devout Jew but was now numbered with the apostates

described in 2 Baruch: "I see many of Your people who have withdrawn from Your covenant, and have cast from them the yoke of Your Law."⁴

The inference forced on us is that it was the catastrophic event of the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple that had changed Paul. Therefore the chronology has to fit that.

A date for Paul after 70 explains the strange interval of fourteen years between his first and second visit to Jerusalem. We can now posit that he was converted before the war, with Judaism having full force and authority upon him. Then the war intervened and changed everything, with his new theology developed after that. The chaos of the war years and the aftermath made travel impossible for a long time. It also explains the ignorance of the Jerusalem leaders as to what he had been up to in the Diaspora and explains the collection of money that he was going to donate. The desperate conditions in Jerusalem made it appear that he could dictate terms. This was the occasion for the second visit.

We must therefore set the fourteen-year interval with the first visit prior to AD 66, when the War began, and the second one well after AD 70, when the War had ended and some small beginnings of travel to Jerusalem had become possible. A reasonable chronology would be AD 60 for the first visit, when Paul joined the sect and became a missionary, and AD 74 for the fateful second visit.

As mentioned, the impression given by Josephus is that Jerusalem was totally destroyed, but E. Mary Smallwood indicates that a fair amount of recovery took place within a few years after the end of the war, and with indications that a good part of the population had survived. Several of Paul's letters, as quoted, show that he too was on the scene. Paul, James and Peter would now have their confrontation.

Paul had his new theology, and he had his own fief, with a number of churches he had set up that followed his teachings. However one thing more was needed — he needed the full sanction and approval of the Jerusalem church, and formal recognition from them of his apostleship. This would convince the wavering gentile converts that he was preaching a fully authorized doctrine, and it would make his position as apostle invincible. Jerusalem was still in a precarious state. Perhaps the elders there would be amenable to what he had in mind. Paul now decided to stake everything on the journey.

Paul states that he made the trip on "revelation" meaning that an inner call had come to him to go to Jerusalem. We can accept this as correct, for if he had gone on direct orders from Jerusalem that would undermine his claim for complete independence, nor does it appear in the text that he was ordered to report. On the contrary, his visit appears to have taken them by surprise. Perhaps the element of surprise and confronting them with a *fait accompli* as to what he had been doing in the Diaspora were all part of his strategy. Paul had been on his own, free of all supervision during those years. Now he is going to Jerusalem to report and to win recognition for his work.

He took several of his associates along to aid him in the presentation. "Then fourteen years afterwards I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas and took Titus along with me also."⁵

Barnabas was a respected apostle in the movement who would confirm to the Jerusalem leaders that Paul had done remarkably well in the Diaspora. Titus was to be the test case. He was a gentile converted by Paul, yet outside the Law in that he was uncircumcised. No doubt Titus was a model of piety and learning, and would otherwise be quite eligible to join the sect. How would he be received?

Paul took along a third "companion," not least in persuasiveness. This was a sum of money that he planned to donate to the church, made up of collections from his gentile branches. The inference here is of a *quid pro quo*: Paul wanted his branches recognized as legitimate and valid within the Jamesian sect, fully on a par with all the orthodox branches, and with the collections as the mark of legitimacy. They would forward collections regularly to Jerusalem as did the other branches of the sect — and in that way Paul's doctrinal position would be honestly recognized since all his members would be deemed in good standing by Jerusalem itself.

If this had worked out, there would have emerged a mixed church with two separate doctrines, but with each branch legitimate. This appears to have been Paul's basic plan when he went to Jerusalem. The plan, and the premise of collections from each branch, assumes the formal, organizational supremacy of the Jerusalem center — and more important than that, it assumes that Paul was trying to retain, but on new terms, what had been his status in the past: that of an apostle authorized by Jerusalem. The whole obscure business of the collection

may be strong evidence that Paul was, after all, an apostle “from man” and that he was trying to gain doctrinal independence via the back door. He would be bound organizationally to Jerusalem, but not doctrinally.

Let us take up the events in sequence. Paul got to Jerusalem with his two companions and then broke the news as to what he had been up to.

“And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should labor, or had labored in vain.”⁶

That is, only men with strong nerves could be trusted to hear Paul’s gospel that he preached to the Gentiles, and any agreement worked out with him would have to be behind the back of the rank and file, who would never have permitted it.

We have here Paul’s admission that he did not dare face the entire membership of the Jerusalem church on this gospel, “lest he had run in vain.” Here we must ask why he must present his gospel in so covert a manner at the second Jerusalem visit, and why didn’t he present it openly to Peter and James at the first meeting? For surely he must have known it by then, since he tells us in the present epistle that God had revealed this to him three years before that first meeting. We have here proof positive that Paul had developed his new gospel after his admission into the sect. That entry was the occasion of his two week stay with Peter. He has changed the rules and now wants the Jerusalem church to change as well.

The next passage is perhaps the most important in the epistle, and deals with Titus. In our present text it reads...

“But not even Titus who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. False brethren sought to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage (to the Law) but we gave them no subjection, not for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you [Galatians].”⁷

If this is the case, then Paul had won a complete victory, and had his gospel and his apostleship accepted by Jerusalem. If he had gained the highest concession from James and the Jerusalem elders on this point then no one would have dared dispute Paul in any city after that. Titus had been admitted as a member of the sect, yet outside the requirements of the Law. And if this were the case, there would be no real need for the epistle.

Here Johannes Weiss dumps ice water on the Titus passage as it now reads:

“Unfortunately it is not certain and is even liable to very grave suspicions. The question might first be asked: If Paul had won such a complete triumph, how then was it possible for his opponents in Galatia to be able to use the occurrences in Jerusalem against him, and why is he so remarkably upset in just these verses that we can scarcely today understand his words?”⁸

The present text states emphatically that Paul refused to yield to the false brethren, presumably those who demanded that Titus agree to the circumcision. Weiss now points to the alternate, and correct version:

“There is in *Galatians* 2:5 an excellently attested reading which says the direct opposite, namely that Paul had given place in the way of subjection for an hour. This reading is not only the oldest but it also inspires confidence, for the reason that it certainly did not owe its origin to any ecclesiastical or dogmatic interest... If we adopt that older reading, we then get the following meaning: in order to take away from the false brethren every possible reason for finding fault, in order to establish the truth of the Gospel more firmly in principle, Paul ‘yielded for an hour’ ...Then, however, verse 3 must mean: Titus was not compelled to be circumcised but underwent it of his own free will. Thus Titus really was circumcised, and this was ever afterwards a weak point in Paul’s position. It could be said further, he yielded to the demand of the original

Apostles [and] he was not able then to have his Gospel ratified... From his agitated words it can be discerned that he had here to defend a step which could be interpreted as a defeat.”⁹

Again we have a major forgery of a Pauline text: the present fake wording indicates full victory for Paul’s position, while the original text shows a total defeat. Paul never did get his apostleship, his gospel and his independence ratified in Jerusalem. Just as he must acknowledge the fact of a two-week stay in Jerusalem as a confession of orthodoxy at the first meeting, so he must acknowledge orthodoxy at the second meeting. All he can do by way of reply is to play down the importance of those people who had forced the decision on him: “Those who seemed to be somewhat, whoever they were, it maketh no matter to me.”

The Jerusalem leaders took Paul back to the fold, took the money he had brought, and sent him back to Diaspora in the belief that he had given up his heresies. They were mistaken. Paul left Jerusalem and journeyed to Antioch and there he announced, with remarkable effrontery, that the Jerusalem elders had granted him full authority to preach to the gentiles on his own terms. Thus he turned the Jerusalem events upside down.

He writes to the Galatians:

“They who seemed to be somewhat in conference added nothing to me. But contrariwise, they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed to me, as the gospel of the circumcision was to Peter... And when James, Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go unto the gentiles, and they unto the circumcision. Only they desired that we should remember the poor [i.e., the collections] which I also was forward to do.”¹⁰

The elders “saw” — but did not agree or grant. Paul is falsifying the story.

Word of Paul's activities got back to Jerusalem, and he was now considered a lapsed heretic. He had resumed his former views. A control commission of "Judaizers" was sent to Antioch, which imposed Jerusalem rules, and forced the rejection of Paul's faction. Almost certainly the word went out to all the other branches of the church that Paul was to be shunned. The showdown at Antioch was Paul's last face-to-face contact with the Jerusalem leaders. After that he went his own way.

The epistle to the Galatians appears to be Paul's reply to the order of excommunication put out against him and shows that in this church too he is being undermined and vanquished by the Jerusalem leaders. The violence of the letter is proof positive that the split was far beyond any repair or compromise. He cannot be challenged nor can there be a rival gospel:

"There be some that trouble you [Galatians] and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received (from me), let him be accursed..."¹¹

The epistle states that Paul is not beholden to anyone nor can he be judged by anyone, since he received his apostleship by supernatural means: "The gospel which was preached by me was not after man, for I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ."¹²

The Jerusalem church had nothing to do with it. The Jerusalem leaders are throughout treated with open enmity. Paul's tone varies from disdain to anger to unforgivable insult. The leaders are...

"...those who seemed to be somewhat, whosoever they were, it maketh no matter to me; God accepteth no man's person, for they who seemed to be somewhat in conference imparted nothing to me."¹³

These observations culminate with what Weiss calls “a harsh wish, which is even coarse and indecent.” The Jerusalem church insisted that the proselytes accept the full letter of the law, including circumcision, and this particularly exasperated Paul. “I Paul say unto you that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing... I wish they that are confusing you would cut off their own selves.”¹⁴

The word used, *apokopto*, appears in a similar passage in the gospel: “If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off.”¹⁵

Paul is telling the Jerusalem elders to try major surgery on the male organ. How were they expected to react to that?

Paul’s arraignment of the Law is worked out with such finality and completeness of rejection as to make it impossible that he could consider himself part of the same sect as the Jerusalem leaders, or even of the same religion. We let Weiss summarize this, with his text references to Epistle to the Galatians:

“The Law was unable, indeed was never meant, to ‘make alive’¹⁶; it was to bring men into the dominion of sin¹⁷; it had brought a curse on men.¹⁸ Not through the Law, but from the Law has Christ redeemed men¹⁹ and made them God’s possession. God and the Law appear almost as [mutually] hostile powers²⁰; Slavery to the Law and Sonship to God are irreconcilable opposites²¹; the Law was mediated by angels and not received directly from God²²; it stands indeed in the closest connection with those world-elements [i.e., the *stoicheia*], those cosmic powers by whom humanity was kept in the most miserable bondage before the coming of Christ²³.”²⁴

We can see why Marcion took over Paul’s epistles.

This bondage to the Law is “a melancholy episode which can only be compared to an unworthy bondage to a stern and surly tutor, or even an imprisonment.”²⁵

The most lax and indifferent Jew in the matter of orthodoxy could not be expected to agree with Paul’s savage indictment. Nor could the Jerusalem church ever have granted Paul a franchise to preach these doctrines. The break was absolute.

The expulsion of Paul has major implications. It means that Christianity split off from Judaism in a radically hostile manner. No trace of 'joint-heritage' and 'sister-religions' can be found. These are present-day myths having no basis in historical fact.

Johannes Weiss, writing in the early 1900s, had the old fashioned candor to state the exact meaning of these events.

Paul was now a sworn enemy. He had broken with Judaism and belongs to a new order of faith:

“Now he and all believers are a new Israel of God²⁶; the true sons of Abraham²⁷; children of the heavenly Jerusalem²⁸; descendants of Isaac who was miraculously born ‘after the Spirit’²⁹. Here the breach with Judaism has been effected with decisive bluntness. It lies behind him in shadowy semblance, it belongs to the era of the flesh, of the world, of heathenism, and for him all that has lost its value by the death of Christ on the cross. It is dead, as far as he is concerned, and he himself is dead to all these things which are simply past and over. He feels that he is a ‘new creature’³⁰; that he has begun a new life, the life that is lived in the power of the Spirit of God³¹...”³²

The “breach with Judaism” has been glossed over in Acts, and here we find Luke at his worst. In his version, the “certain from James” who overthrew Paul at Antioch have been replaced by two men named Judas and Silas, who now accompany Paul and Barnabas to Antioch, and who bear an epistle from James and “the apostles and elders and brethren” addressed to Antioch, commending “our beloved Barnabas and Paul.” The fake epistle informs the Antioch church that they can ignore the Mosaic law and circumcision:

“Forasmuch as we have heard that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised and keep the Law, to whom we gave no such commandment.”

The epistle is read at Antioch upon which the members “rejoiced for the consolation.”³³

This whole section with its version of the Jerusalem meeting and the aftermath at Antioch cannot be put down to carelessness or naiveté. It shows Luke engaged in careful and deliberate fraud. Weiss gives his verdict:

“The author [Luke] has been guilty of one of the most serious distortions of the history of primitive Christianity. The representation of the Apostolic Council here given cannot be upheld in light of the Epistle to the Galatians.”³⁴

After the showdown at Antioch, Paul split with his associate Barnabas who went over to the orthodox faction. “Barnabas was also carried away with their dissimulation.”³⁵

Luke falsifies this also, making the split a personal squabble on the matter of taking one John Mark along on their further missionary journeys: “And the contention was so sharp between them that they departed asunder from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed unto Cyprus, and Paul chose Silas.”³⁶

Luke counts the day lost when he cannot fake the text.

After that Paul’s opponents attacked him relentlessly, undermining him in all his churches. Paul, seeing his lifework destroyed, was finally driven to lash back at them. He saw that the Jews themselves were under attack in many Diaspora cities, and he saw this as divine punishment upon the Jews for opposing his own doctrines. The fate of Jerusalem was proof that the extreme of punishment had fallen upon them. In the heat of factional hatred and bitterness, he makes the harshest of accusations:

*“The Jews killed the Lord Jesus and their own prophets and have persecuted us. And they please not God and are contrary to all men, forbidding us to preach to the gentiles that they might be saved, thus filling up their sins always, for the wrath has come upon them to the utmost.”*³⁷

The key phrase here, “forbidding us to speak to the gentiles that they might be saved” points to the factional fight raging in the sect. His opponents are hounding him in all the churches, finally wrenching this accusation from him.

The scholars are in agreement that, whatever the chronology, the Pauline epistles are earlier than the gospels. Therefore the accusation that “the Jews killed Jesus” must be set down as the earliest instance of the charge that would achieve grim fame at later times, and which would be basic to the Christian polemic. Paul has the harsh distinction of being the first Christian, and the first to make the murder charge.

As Paul saw it, the sect-Jesus had been slain and the Law was dead but in denying Christ and clinging to the Law, the Jews had made themselves party to his death. And the Jews denied the words of the prophets who had proclaimed Christ, therefore the Jews were party to the slaying of the prophets. Quite properly the Jews were to be punished to the uttermost, and to be hated by all mankind.

All this was outside the realm of history, but it was the denial of Christian doctrines that created the guilt of the Jews — and this guilt was to be spelled out in the Christian polemic. The starting point was the murder accusation made by Paul, void of any historical detail, and with no awareness of “Jesus of Nazareth.” It will be the task of the gospel writers to transform this into the slaying of “Jesus of Nazareth” placed in a historical framework, and given the form of a vivid passion narrative. We can trace out the development of this narrative.

NOTES:

1. *New English Bible* version.
2. *Epistle to the Galatians*, 1:15 – 18
3. *Epistle to the Galatians*, 1:18 – 23
4. *2 Baruch*, 41:5
5. *Epistle to the Galatians*, 2:1
6. *Epistle to the Galatians*, 2:2
7. *Epistle to the Galatians*, 2:3 – 5
8. Johannes Weiss, *Earliest Christianity*, 271
9. Johannes Weiss, *Earliest Christianity*, 272
10. *Epistle to the Galatians*, 2:6 – 10
11. *Epistle to the Galatians*, 1:8, 9
12. *Epistle to the Galatians*, 1:11, 12
13. *Epistle to the Galatians*, 2:6
14. *Epistle to the Galatians*, 5:2, 12
15. *Mark*, 9:43
16. *Epistle to the Galatians*, 3:21
17. *Epistle to the Galatians*, 3:19, 22f
18. *Epistle to the Galatians*, 3:10, 13
19. *Epistle to the Galatians*, 3:13, 4:5
20. *Epistle to the Galatians*, 2:9
21. *Epistle to the Galatians*, 4:5
22. *Epistle to the Galatians*, 3:19
23. *Epistle to the Galatians*, 4:3ff
24. Johannes Weiss, *Earliest Christianity*, 303
25. *Epistle to the Galatians*, 3:23f
26. *Epistle to the Galatians*, 6:16
27. *Epistle to the Galatians*, 3:19
28. *Epistle to the Galatians*, 4:26
29. *Epistle to the Galatians*, 4:29
30. *Epistle to the Galatians*, 6:15
31. *Epistle to the Galatians*, 2:20, 5:25
32. Johannes Weiss, *Earliest Christianity*, 304
33. *Acts*, 15:22 – 31
34. Johannes Weiss, *Earliest Christianity*, 144
35. *Epistle to the Galatians*, 2:13
36. *Acts*, 15:37 – 39
37. *1 Thessalonians*, 2:15 – 16

JUDAISM AFTER THE FALL

“I consider it my duty to reply to the attacks made against us by our enemies, and to convict them of falsehood and malignity.”

Josephus, *Contra Apion*, 1:3.

Diaspora Judaism, in a beleaguered state after the war, came under further attack from the emperor Domitian (AD 81 – 96). Prior to this, Titus had seized the funds forwarded annually by all Diaspora Jews to the Jerusalem Temple, now destroyed, and had converted this to a tax on the Jews. In return Judaism continued as a religion *licita*. Domitian went far beyond this. In his hostility towards the Jews and his avarice for further revenue he applied the tax to the near-proselytes. All who had “adopted Jewish ways” such as attending the synagogue were declared Jews, hence subject to the tax.

Suetonius describes the process:

“Domitian’s agents collected the tax on Jews with a peculiar lack of mercy, and took proceedings not only against those who kept their Jewish origins a secret in order to avoid the tax, but against those who lived as Jews without professing Judaism. As a boy, I remember once attending a crowded court where the prosecutor had a ninety-year-old man stripped to establish whether or not he had been circumcised.”¹

Robert Graves, in his translation of Suetonius, adds this note ad loc:

“A great many Greek converts to the Jewish ethical system, the so-called ‘God-fearers,’ had declined to undergo circumcision, which would have made them technically ‘Children of

Abraham,' and were not therefore subject to the tax, though they kept the Sabbath and worshiped Jehovah as the One God. Suetonius probably refers to these rather than to the Christians, who rejected the Sabbath and did all they could to prove they were not Jews."²

Domitian forced the near-proselytes to decide whether to join Judaism openly and completely or to be split off from it and thus escape Roman agents. As one alternative the near-proselytes formed churches of their own, which in time merged with Christianity.

"Some of them developed an eclectic monotheism of their own... Some of them, at least, took over many Jewish customs but rejected circumcision. Communities of this kind survived until the fifth century."³

We can readily guess that the same process took place in the small marginal sects far down in the social scale. The Pauline churches had a wide spectrum of adherents, from orthodox Judaism to near-paganism, from ascetic to libertine, with each faction seeking to make "the Lord Jesus" preach the doctrines of that faction. We note that John Gunther, in his book *St. Paul and his Opponents* lists a bewildering and chaotic array of factions that the scholars speculate may have been found in these tiny churches. They have come up with dozens of factions including "Syncretistic Jewish Christians, Libertine Gnostics, Jerusalem Judaizers, Judaizing Gnostics, Platonic and Pythagorean Stoics, Gnostic Ebionites, Ascetic Syncretistic Jews [et cetera, et cetera]."⁴

Here too the split took place, and early Christianity had its spectrum of rival churches from the outset.

Here we put the question: how can all this be explained if the starting point is made the human Jesus of Nazareth, and if Paul's career is supposed to date within thirty years of the death of Jesus? How can so much happen in so many cities in so short a time? The failure of the scholar-apologists to come up with any explanation means that there is something very wrong with the assumed starting point of a historical Jesus, and something very wrong with the assumed chronology of Paul's career, in the official version.

These groups, both in the synagogues and the small sects, found a need to justify their break with Judaism. The human mind is resourceful in discovering rationalizations and defenses. Rather than blame the Romans for their predicament, the breakaway sects blamed the Jews. The dark period after AD 70 saw onslaughts against the Jews not only on the social and political fields but on the literary field as well. The antisemites put out lampoon-histories and attack pamphlets on the "Jewish question," with a barrage of accusations against the Jews. It appears more than a coincidence that the breakaway factions found it expedient to take over many of the arguments of the antisemites.

In the early centuries many polemical works were put out by Christian writers with titles such as *Contra Judaeos* and *Adversus Judaeos*. To a surprising extent these tracts employ the arguments used by the pagan antisemites, but given a Christian garb. This justified the injured innocence of the Christians in their break with Judaism.

Here, as we have found constantly in the course of our inquiry, our main witness is Josephus. He took pen in hand to reply to the barrage of tracts against Judaism that had appeared at that time. His riposte, *Contra Apion* ['Against Apion'] is dated by the editor "to the beginning of the second century" (i.e. after AD 100). This tract, together with *The Life*, were his last works. He remained a truculent and effective debater to the end.

The date is important. In this book, as in his other writings, Josephus shows that he will retort promptly and sharply to any attacks on Judaism. The book searches out all opponents and shows enormous detailed research. A score of Greek historians are mentioned in his reply to books that attacked Judaism in general and that dealt with events in remote antiquity such as the Exodus. Then why didn't he reply to direct immediate attacks by Christianity on his own class of priests in his own home city? The chief priests were the primary targets of the gospel invective, and were accused of bringing about the death of an innocent man. Yet he is silent.

The term "chief priests" occurs fifty-five times in the gospels, and always in a hostile sense:

“The chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take him [Jesus] by craft, and put him to death... [He] will be betrayed to the chief priests and the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death...”⁵

We may put the silence of Josephus in his tract *Contra Apion* as further evidence that he showed no awareness of Christianity and that the *Jesus Testimonium* was not written by him.

Also surprising is that the Jewish spokesmen in the later period – from what we can recover from the Christian writings – show the same ignorance of Josephus as to the gospel story. It is as if they are hearing it for the first time. And in reply they show the same militancy and rejection demonstrated by Josephus. The tract put out by Josephus was the opening salvo for the sharp debate that would rage in the following centuries. Therefore this book merits careful study.

As an example of his readiness to debate even peripheral charges, we note that in the opening pages of the book Josephus replies to the derisory charge that the Jewish nation is paltry and insignificant, with little known history or achievements. Here Josephus launches into a diatribe against the Greeks “...who were late in learning the alphabet and found the lesson difficult.”⁶

“Surely it is absurd that the Greeks should be so conceited as to think themselves the sole possessors of a knowledge of antiquity and the only accurate reporters of its history. Anyone can easily discover from the historians themselves that their writings have no basis of sure knowledge, but merely present the facts as conjectured by individual authors. More often than not they confute each other in their works, not hesitating to give the most contradictory account of the same events.”⁷

Here Josephus cites a dozen writers to prove his point. The research is massive. “Each of these writers, in giving his divergent account of the same incidents, hoped thereby to be thought the most veracious of all.”⁸

We can well imagine how Josephus would reply to the errors, contradictions, divergences, impossibilities, hearsays, myths, defamations and free imaginings found in the four gospels.

Josephus notes that...

“...the main responsibility for the errors of the later historians who aspired to write on antiquity, and for the license granted to their mendacity, rests with the original neglect of the Greeks to keep official records of current events... It is this lack of any basis of documentary evidence, which would have served at once to instruct the eager learner and to confute the liar, that accounts in the main for inconsistencies between different historians.”⁹

We may observe that New Testament scholarship is one long despairing search for what happened at the Beginning, because no documentary evidence can be found and all must be guessed at, since the later accounts are contradictory and suspect. To reconstruct this lost Beginning the scholars try to replace the missing data with “documentation” from all the social sciences – comparative religion, anthropology, sociology, etc. – to wind up with divergent accounts. And to the present, not a particle of hard conclusive evidence has been found confirming any part of the gospel story.

Here Josephus boasts that in the matter of keeping records...

“...our forefathers assigned this to their chief priests and prophets, and down to our own times these records have been, and I venture to say, will continue to be, preserved with scrupulous accuracy.”¹⁰

He clearly includes the prophets as among the recorders and keepers of the Judaic heritage. He understands the prophetic writings to be part of orthodox Judaism, and he would protest at once if these writings were captured and used as anti-Judaic propaganda. The “prophetic writings” especially that of Isaiah, along with the Psalms, were to be the main polemical documents on the Christian side. Here too the Jewish disputants would prove to be unyielding.

After this introduction Josephus turns to the “gang of four” – Manetho, Chaeremon, Lysimachus and Apion, Greek writers from Alexandria. Their main tactic was to capture the Judaic material and turn it against the original owners, to turn a prized possession into a weapon to defeat those who had title and to oust them from possession. It is basically the Sophist tactic of capturing the arguments of the opponent and then skewering the opponent, ridiculing him with his own claims. We give the key elements in their writings, noting the parallels to the Christian polemic.

With the four, it was the Exodus story, which comprised the national epic of the Jews, and the career of Moses, the noblest figure in Judaism. All this would be ridiculed and turned upside down. The four put out lampoon versions of the Exodus story: in essence, a large rabble of Egyptian lepers and blind and lame, along with their leader, an apostate Egyptian priest named Moses who was also a leper, were driven out of the country. These outcasts then journeyed on and founded their city Jerusalem. The details varied and contradicted, as Josephus angrily pointed out, but the common theme was capture and hostile restatement.

In the Christian version, the Exodus was captured by *Epistle to the Hebrews*, where, as noted in an earlier chapter, the “Lord Jesus” was in command, and the entire story christianized. On the grand scale, the entire body of Judaic writings was taken over by the Christians, with the assertion that these texts were now the property of the New Israel. The Jews, as pariahs and outcasts, had no claim to anything.

The goal of the four writers was to ridicule the opponent with no pretense at history. The writers could “invent imaginary persons, put out incredible tales... pure legends.”¹¹

Dates, places, individuals are invented out of thin air, while Josephus complained in vain at all this. At times there is a show of genuineness by putting out names and dates, which Josephus exposes: “a king named Amenophis, an imaginary person.”¹²

The scholars note a similar freedom in composition, with full play to the imagination, in the gospel narratives. No episode, no words of Jesus, no time or place, can be labeled “historical” and free of question. At best, the item is labeled “early tradition.”

The Exodus stories are given a veneer of divine sanction by invoking Egyptian gods and priests who order the expulsions.

“Isis appeared to Amenophis in his sleep... The sacred scribe Phritobautes told him that if he purged the land of its contaminated population, he might cease to be alarmed. The king thereupon collected 250,000 afflicted persons and banished them from the country...”¹³

The pagan antisemites had introduced the religious motif in a brief, peripheral manner, while it is fundamental to the gospel narratives. There the story is presented as a sacred drama. It is bolstered on all sides by angels, revelations, proof-texts from Scripture. The divine intervention is one-sided, conveniently aiding the “good side” while punishing the Jews, with all this set down by gospel writers using free imagination.

In these tales the Jews behave in an extremely cruel and wicked manner. In Manetho’s version, Egypt was originally invaded by “an ignoble people from the East” identified as the Jewish “Hyksos” who...

“...savagely burned the cities, razed the temples to the ground, and treated the whole native population with utmost cruelty... Their ambition was to extirpate the Egyptian people.”¹⁴

At a later time, Moses, leader of the lepers, instructs his followers “to show goodwill to no man, to offer not the best but the worst advice, and to overthrow all temples and altars to the gods.”¹⁵

In the gospel version, the Jews are relentless in persecuting Jesus, striking him and spitting on him, then reviling him on the cross. No clear explanation is given for this behavior. One reason is “envy.”

“He (Pilate) knew that the chief priests had delivered him because of envy.”¹⁶

We are also told that “the Darkness comprehended not the Light.”¹⁷

John's gospel is insistent on the alien and separate nature of his foes, who live in a different world. "Why do you (the Jews) not understand me? It is because you cannot hear my words. You are of your father, the Devil."¹⁸

The gospel writers are following the Egyptian pattern.

Apion, the most virulent of the four, contributes several additional items that have parallels in the gospels. One is our old friend, the ritual murder tale. It seems that every year the Jews kidnapped a Greek, then fattened him for a grisly feast, presumably at the Passover.

"This practice was repeated annually at a fixed season. They would kidnap a Greek foreigner, fatten him up for a year, and then convey him to a wood where they slew him. They sacrificed his body with their customary ritual, partook of his flesh, and while offering up the Greek, swore an oath of hostility to the Greeks..."¹⁹

It was "a Jewish plot on his life-blood."²⁰

John's gospel in turn refers to Jesus as the Lamb of God and is careful to identify him with the Passover lamb slain by the Jews. In John's chronology, the farewell on Thursday evening makes no mention of the Passover and is not even a supper, since John intends to have Jesus slain prior to the Passover meal that will take place on Friday evening.

"In John 19:36 it is said that the reason why the bones were not broken (while Jesus was on the cross) was in order that a scripture might be fulfilled. The scripture in question (Ex. 12:16; Number 9:12) has reference to the paschal lamb. Jesus then is presented as the anti-type to the paschal lamb in such a manner that this precept finds literal fulfillment in him. But not this precept only. According to 19:14, Jesus is still at midday before Pilate. His death thus takes place in the afternoon, exactly at the time when the paschal lambs were wont to be slaughtered."²¹

John's gospel is therefore giving us a christianized version of Apion's ritual murder story, with the Jews carrying out a shocking deed. Josephus replies: "It is a gratuitous lie... for the one aim of the inventors of these unspeakable horror stories is to make us hated."²²

The reply did little good since the ritual murder tale has come down the centuries, achieving grim fame during the Middle Ages.

Apion also states that the Jews have suffered great punishments and misfortunes, and this shows the falsity of Judaism as a religion.

"A clear proof, according to him (Apion), that our laws are unjust and our religious ceremonies erroneous, is that we are not masters of an empire but rather are the slaves, first of one nation then another, and that calamity has more than once befallen our city."²³

In reply, Josephus notes that...

"...most races have frequently had to submit to others... I pass over the burning of the Acropolis of Athens, the temple of Ephesus, that of Delphi, and myriads more. No one ever reproached the victims, rather than the perpetrators, for these atrocities. It was left for Apion to bring this novel type of accusation against us, forgetting the disasters of his own Egypt."²⁴

Josephus writes that this is "a novel type of accusation" and that it was invented by Apion. Again we have the argument of silence, with the inference that he never heard of the Christian charge that Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed as punishment for the slaying of Jesus. This charge was played to the hilt in the Christian polemic but Josephus has no awareness of it.

In general, the response of Josephus to these attacks was to set the pattern for the Jewish response to attacks by the early Christians: there is sharp and angry rejection of the charges, there is unswerving defense of Judaism, and there is no awareness of the gospel events. The posture of the Jewish disputants nowhere gives support to the premise that the gospel events had a historical basis.

Josephus replied to Apion with no ceremony: Apion was...

“...an impudent liar... a knave, an ignorant fool... he has the mind of an ass and the impudence of a dog... the greatest blockhead as the writer of fiction... a low charlatan, whose life is as dissolute as his language...”²⁵

The Jewish disputants of the later period used similar language and similar militancy. They were prepared to defend Judaism, just as Josephus was.

He was there at the beginning, and we can trace developments from that point. He noted the success of the Jewish missionary effort, but it was that very success that created the large body of “God-fearers” and the borderline sects that were later drawn to Christianity. He writes:

“The masses have for a long time shown a keen desire to adopt our religious observances. There is not one city, Greek or barbarian, nor a single nation, to which our custom of abstaining from work on the seventh day has not spread, and where the fasts and the lighting of lamps, and many of our prohibitions in the matter of food are not observed.”²⁶

Josephus shows no awareness that Jesus was the Incarnate Word, and he also rejects the Logos-doctrine of Philo, wherein God required a “Son” to create the universe and administer it. This would contradict monotheism.

“We behold God’s works: Light, the heavens, the earth, the sun... These God created, not with hands, not with toil, not with assistants of whom He had no need. He willed it so and forthwith they were made in all their beauty.”²⁷

Here the editor notes *ad loc* that this was aimed at Philo. “His language is so similar to that of Philo that he may be combatting the latter.”²⁸

As mentioned, Philo had identified the Logos/Word with the “Angel of the Way” who led the Israelites, which was close to naming Joshua/Jesus as that angel. Christianity went all the way, in formally

naming Jesus as the Incarnate Word, and then providing him with a human career. However Josephus shows no awareness of any part of the Christian case.

Josephus showed scorn for the pagan pantheon, while the early Christians, well aware of the enormous attraction that these myths held for the masses, proceeded to capture and christianize many of these. Josephus, in his taunts, indicates at the very least that he had no awareness of crude resemblances to later Christian beliefs:

“Some gods are beardless striplings... The noblest and chief of them all, the Father, seduces women, rendering them pregnant... He cannot rescue his own offspring. Fine doings are these... Then there are gods in bondage to men, hired now as builders, now as shepherds, while others are chained like criminals in prison. What man in his senses would not be stirred to rebuke the inventors of such fables and to condemn the utter folly of those that believed them?”²⁹

Josephus is setting the pattern for rejection of the Christian claims, as we will see in later confrontations.

NOTES:

1. Suetonius, *Domitian*, 12
2. Robert Graves, *ad loc*, translation of Suetonius.
3. Jackson and Lake, *Beginnings of Christianity*, 5:96
4. John Gunther, *St. Paul and his Opponents*, 1-5
5. *Mark* 14:1, *Matt.* 20:18, so throughout the gospels
6. Josephus, *Contra Apion*, 1:10
7. Josephus, *Contra Apion*, 1:15
8. Josephus, *Contra Apion*, 1:26
9. Josephus, *Contra Apion*, 1:20, 23
10. Josephus, *Contra Apion*, 1:29
11. Josephus, *Contra Apion*, 1:229, 230
12. Josephus, *Contra Apion*, 1:230
13. Josephus, *Contra Apion*, 1:289, 290
14. Josephus, *Contra Apion*, 1:76, 80
15. Josephus, *Contra Apion*, 1:309
16. *Mark* 15:10
17. *John* 1:5
18. *John* 8:43,44
19. Josephus, *Contra Apion*, 2:95
20. Josephus, *Contra Apion*, 2:96
21. Paul Schmiedel, *Encyclopaedia Biblica*, 2:2524
22. Josephus, *Contra Apion*, 2:111
23. Josephus, *Contra Apion*, 2:125
24. Josephus, *Contra Apion*, 2:128, 131
25. Josephus, *Contra Apion*, 2:32, 37, 84, 88, 136
26. Josephus, *Contra Apion*, 2:282
27. Josephus, *Contra Apion*, 2:192
28. Josephus, *Contra Apion*, 2:192, note a, Loeb edition
29. Josephus, *Contra Apion*, 2:242 - 247

THE PRIMARY CHRISTIAN TRADITION

“The verdict is not suddenly arrived at. The proceedings only gradually merge into the verdict.”

Franz Kafka, *The Trial*

The Jews did not go gently into the night. With Josephus' material on Apion as a starting point we can trace the transition to Christianity.

The Christian writer closest to Apion was the early church father Justin. His writings show unrelieved hatred and contempt for Judaism, and he uses Apion's tactic of a capture and radical, hostile restatement of Judaic history. Almost every theme of the Alexandrian Four appears in his writings, but in a more complex and sophisticated manner. With Apion it was merely the Exodus story; with Justin it is the entire Jewish Scripture, with all personages therein, including God, made witnesses to Christianity. Also taken over from Apion are the motifs of Jewish wickedness, Jewish crimes and dire punishment for the Jews.

Justin was the most prominent Christian spokesman, missionary and apologist during the second century (AD 100 – 200). His birth is placed about 100, and he narrates that he was converted in his youth by a “venerable old man,” apparently an elder of the new church, and who imparted the full content of the faith. If we place the conversion about 120, and posit that the “elder” had himself adopted the faith some decades back, then we are getting to about AD 90. This clearly brings us to the first age of the church.

Moreover there is good evidence that the gospels, in their final edited form, date after Justin and that Justin is giving an earlier form of the Christian polemic. The glib assertion that the gospels date from the first century, about AD 70 to 90, derives only from the Unproved: that there was a Jesus of Nazareth, and there were disciples who preserved traditions about him that took written form at an early date. But first

there must be proof that this “Jesus” existed and that he had “disciples” otherwise the early date is a Christian attempt to create history and legitimacy. It remains without proof.

To go by the test of outside confirmation, which is the only test we can use, it is only late in the second century that the present four gospels are mentioned by name and quoted by name. They became canonical only about AD 180. This late dating, and evidence that much had taken place before the gospels appeared, was noted by Renan. He pointed out that the gospels surfaced towards the close of the second century, about AD 180, or a hundred and fifty years after the assumed original events. They were the end product of a long process of editing and revision, by parties unknown. He noted also that the said church father Justin is placed prior to all this, and he diverges markedly from the gospels. These texts became canonical and authoritative after his time therefore it remains possible that Justin is giving us an earlier version of Christianity.

Renan remarks on...

“...the little authority which the Gospel texts enjoyed during one hundred and fifty years [i.e., up to AD 180]. There was no scruple in inserting additions, in variously combining them, and in completing some by others... [They] proceeded from an obscure and purely popular elaboration... Justin, who often appeals to what he calls ‘The Memoirs of the Apostles,’ had under his notice Gospel documents in a state very different from that in which we possess them. At all events, he never cares to quote them textually... It was when tradition became weakened, in the second half of the second century [i.e., after AD 150], that the texts bearing the names of the apostles took a decisive authority and obtained the force of law.”¹

Justin never quotes these gospels by name.

This important statement by Renan has been confirmed by several scholars who pointed out that other church fathers of the early period also were unaware of the present gospels. The “apostolic fathers” Ignatius and Papias are dated prior to AD 150.

“Even where the gospel was highly prized, as by Ignatius or Papias, it is apparently in an oral rather than a written form... Along with material from the canonical Gospels or parallel to them, most of the Apostolic Fathers utilize what we anachronistically term ‘apocryphal’ or ‘extra-canonical’ material. It was evidently not so to them. We are still in a period when the New Testament writings are not clearly demarcated from other edifying material. This situation in fact continues yet further into the second century and may be seen in Justin Martyr and Tatian. Justin records that the ‘memoirs of the apostles’ called Gospels were read at Christian worship. His quotations and allusions, however, afford evidence that the extent of these was not identical with the four, but contained ‘apocryphal’ material.”²

Another scholar shares these views:

“In the extant Christian writings of the first half of that century [i.e., AD 100 to AD 150]... the writers do not quote formally, naming [Gospel] authors, but in a way that suggests loose quotation from memory, or the survival of oral traditions alongside the written Gospels... At mid-century Justin almost certainly means our four when he writes of ‘Memoirs’... With Irenaeus — about AD 180 — begins the period of definite and extensive quotation; for him there are only four canonical Gospels, and this is in the nature of things.”³

Definite quotations, naming the gospel, are not found prior to this date.

The canon listed and thus limited the contents of the New Testament. The dating for this is not definite, but it came well after Justin.

“W. Bauer has shown that even towards the end of the second century only the Gospels of Matthew and Mark had full acceptance, that the Gospel of Luke on the other hand was only hesitatingly recognized, and that there was considerable

opposition to the Gospel of John... There was therefore in the second half of the second century no fixed canon of the Gospels, and indeed the plurality of the Gospels was felt as a problem... About the turn from the 2nd to the 3rd century [i.e., AD 200], the canon seems to have obtained its fixed primitive form.”⁴

This makes the canon dating even later than AD 180.

Raymond Brown, in his major work *The Death of the Messiah*, confirms that the gospels were identified by name only late in the second century. Before this they circulated anonymously, hence subject to free revision. Brown writes:

“The common designations placed before the Gospels, e.g., ‘The Gospel according to Matthew,’ stem from the late 2nd cent. and represent an educated estimate of authorship by church scholars of that period, who were putting together traditions and guesses pertinent to attribution.”⁵

The evidence shows that the gospels became authoritative and canonical only after AD 180. Only at this late date was there some agreement as to what had happened a hundred and fifty years back. It was the setting up of a canon and of a massive church censorship to enforce that canon that established what was the correct and only permissible statement of “what actually happened” and thus the contradictory versions were excluded.

But the gospel writers themselves had been busy for many years, arranging and editing the materials collected from all sides, to create their picture of Jesus, inventing history where need be. As to the end product, Bultmann writes:

“We conclude that the whole framework of the history of Jesus must be viewed as an editorial construction, and that therewith a whole series of typical scenes which... we had looked upon as scenes in the life of Jesus, must be viewed as creations of the evangelists.”⁶

Hence the renowned four gospels may turn out to be as flimsy and fictional as the rival gospels of that period, now lost beyond recovery.

All this changes matters considerably. One of the strongest arguments for the existence of “Jesus of Nazareth” has been that the gospels appeared about forty years after the alleged events, and with no intervening contradictory material. Now these texts appear to be hearsay at eight generations removed, and with much intervening material. This opens up the whole area of the turbulent second century, with its chaos of rival sects, gospels and doctrines — so much so that the pagan Celsus noted sardonically that one would have to toss dice before deciding which sect to join.⁷

If the gospels indeed have this very late date, then the scholars have carried out a two-fold deception: by asserting the very early date they have bolstered the case for the “historical Jesus” by fake evidence; and they have in turn blocked off inquiry into areas that could challenge the entire case, blocking off the critics and opponents as well as the writings of early Christians — all this with the argument that these writings were late and irrelevant.

The scholar-apologists, committed to the “historical Jesus of Nazareth” as the starting point, have declared the gospel of Mark the earliest and most historical of the four. But if all four have equally obscure origins and are being revised at a late date, how can we be sure of this priority? The scholars have smuggled in the unproved Jesus to establish priority, but if this is dropped then alternate origins and alternate gospels are possible.

To return to Justin. E. R. Goodenough, in his book *The Theology of Justin Martyr*, has no great admiration for his subject. The world of ideas that Justin grew up in and absorbed was not given to profundities. “The popular philosophical environment of Justin [was] a welter of crude superstitions expressed in myths and in snatches of philosophical terminology.”⁸

Justin came to Christianity, as he defined it, because it ended all doubts and questionings and gave him total invincible certainty based on faith. “According to Justin, the ordinary human mind is unable to find truth by rational processes, and in Christianity does not try to do so.”⁹

Thus logic, intelligence and historical evidence are rejected. This is a broad hint that Jesus will not be arrived out through historical evidence but through absolute faith.

We see this in the conversion story that Justin relates to Trypho, the Jewish disputant, at the outset of the *Dialogue With Trypho*. The picture is that of the forlorn, despairing youth who wanders from one Greek school to another, and finds they are all given to clever debate rather than to imparting truth. One day, however, he met a venerable old man at a deserted place, who revealed the truth to him and brought him faith and certainty.

First, vain human reason must be discarded. "I care nothing about Plato or Pythagoras, nor about anyone who holds their opinions."¹⁰

So states the old man. Truth can be found in one place only, far above man-made systems. It is God's word found in the Scriptures and revealed to the prophets.

"There were a long time ago men of greater antiquity than all these reputed philosophers, men blessed and righteous and beloved of God. They foretold those things of the future which have indeed come to pass. Men call them prophets. They and they only saw the truth and declared it to mankind... They did not use logical proof when they wrote, since they are trustworthy witnesses and therefore superior to all such proof. The things that did take place and are taking place now compel agreement with what they have spoken."¹¹

The message of these prophets is given in a single line: "They glorified the Maker of all things as God and Father, and they proclaimed the Christ sent from Him as His Son."¹²

Their words are invincible, first because of divine revelation and because they were fulfilled.

Justin was won over by the venerable old man.

"He said many other things to me, then he went away and I saw him no more. But at once a fire was kindled in my soul, and a passionate desire possessed me for the prophets, those

great men who are the friends of Christ. And as I weighed his words within me, I found that this alone was philosophy, and philosophy safe and serviceable.”¹³

The old man left, and we never find out how he became converted. The origins are unknown.

This then was the evangel preached by Justin: he proclaimed the Lord Jesus, Son of God and God Incarnate, as established by the sacred texts. It is the evangel taught to him by his mentor, the “venerable old man,” going back perhaps to AD 90.

And when Justin alludes to the “memoirs of the Apostles,” we can assume that he understands them to have the same set of doctrines. Justin is giving us the primary tradition. The “historical Jesus of Nazareth” would be created at a much later stage — meaning that the gospel story is necessarily fictional.

Justin is vehement on his insistence that Jesus is God, and makes this his starting point. Thus at this stage of our inquiry we have two diametrically opposed concepts: the secular-naturalist view of the present-day New Testament scholars, that the starting point is the human Jesus of Nazareth, and against this the doctrinal-religious view, that the starting point is the incarnation of the Son of God. “Christ is not mere man of human origin, begotten in the common way of men.”¹⁴

“He came forth as God from above, and became man among men, and will come here again.”¹⁵

The writings of Justin are relevant to the question of gospel origins, since major themes in Justin are found in the gospel of John and in the gospel of Matthew. With John, it is the divinity of Jesus and with Matthew it is the prominence of proof-texts from Scripture. These two elements comprise the primary tradition, and exclude the “historical Jesus.” This indicates that the portrait of Jesus as a purely human figure is a later development.

The godhood of Jesus is declared forthrightly by Justin in the *Dialogue with Trypho*, and he is unyielding on this point. We give a number of representative statements by Justin:

“This Christ existed and was God before all the ages, and was born and became man and suffered, and was not man by origin.”¹⁶

“God has begotten as a beginning before all His creatures a kind of reasonable Power from Himself, which is also called by the Holy Spirit the Glory of the Lord, and sometimes Son, Wisdom, Angel, God, and sometimes Lord and Word... This Word of Wisdom is Himself God begotten by the Father of the universe.”¹⁷

“The power which was from the Father of the universe and appeared to Moses and to Abraham and to Jacob was called Angel when He comes forth to men, since by that power are the messages from the Father carried to men. He was called Glory since He appears sometimes in an appearance that cannot be reckoned by space; and was sometimes called a man and a human being, since He makes His appearance in the fashion of such forms as the Father wills. And they call Him Word [*Logos*] since He also bears to men the discourses that come from the Father.”¹⁸

“The blood of Christ would not be of human generation but of God’s power... Christ is not mere man of human origin, begotten in the common way of men.”¹⁹

“Christ is the Almighty God and is to be worshiped.”²⁰

Justin and the gospel of John present a sacred drama. A divine being is incarnated and appears on earth in human guise. He carries out a salvationist mission on earth, acting in secrecy and beset by hostile forces. He seeks out his elect ones and imparts instructions to them, then returns to the heavens. It is basically the Gnostic mystery, and if Justin is giving us the primary tradition, then he is rejecting the basic premise of modern scholarship. To the secular scholars, the starting point is the human Jesus of Nazareth, who was then mythified and deified. Justin starts at the top, with “high Christology.” The human Jesus of Nazareth emerges as the end point at a much later stage.

We may note here that Bultmann was in agreement with Justin in giving priority to John. “In John the original meaning of the gospel comes out in fullest clarity, in that the evangelist, while making free use of the tradition, creates the figure of Jesus entirely from faith.”²¹

Bultmann also agrees with Justin's view of the sacred myth, as is given in John's gospel: "In John, Jesus descends from heaven, like the Gnostic Redeemer, to bring men the saving message and he returns to the Father after completing his work."²²

The sequence divine-to-human is unmistakable in Justin:

"Jesus the Christ is the Son and Apostle of God, being formerly the Word. At one time He appeared in the form of fire [i.e., to Moses in the burning bush], and another as an incorporeal image. Now, by the will of God, He has been made man for the human race."²³

In arguing this position Justin had to confront not only the Jews, who of course denied that God could be incarnated, but rival Christian sects. These also preached a supernatural Christ, but found the human condition so vile that they would not grant a full incarnation of the sinless Christ into human flesh. He had only a human appearance, such as that assumed by the angels. These controversies can be read between the lines in Justin and in John, and will illustrate that John's gospel may be earlier than the other three gospels — thus undermining the "historicity" of those three, and showing their human "Jesus of Nazareth" to be a later development.

Justin, while berating poor Trypho for his blindness in not accepting Christ-as-God, takes time to warn him of the rival sects:

"There are those who are Christians in name, but in reality are godless and impious heretics. They teach in all respects what is blasphemous and godless and foolish."²⁴

"Many have taught what is godless and blasphemous and wicked, falsely stamping their teachings with His name. They teach what has been put in their minds by the unclean spirit of the devil, and teach it until now."²⁵

Thus there are rival sects and gospels on the scene, each one violently excommunicating the others. Justin is always free with his insults.

What was involved was just how “real” the incarnation was, and this was argued with strange vehemence. Justin repeats this “real” incarnation a number of times:

“He was incarnated through a virgin’s womb, and really became a child.”²⁷

“He indeed became a man who shared in sufferings.”²⁸

“He became a man really liable to suffering.”²⁹

“The Father willed that His own Son should in reality suffer for our sake.”³⁰

The inference is that he is arguing against rival sects that preached an illusory incarnation.

As an example of how the incarnation story from Justin and the gospel of John was altered in the Synoptic gospels (*Matthew*, *Mark* and *Luke*) we can note the different interpretations given to the sacramental meal. Justin and John are unaware that the sacrament of the bread and wine — the central ritual of Catholic Christianity — had anything to do with the Last Supper and the death of Jesus. Instead, these sacraments were to celebrate the Incarnation, and closely resembled the rites used by pagan sects in communing with their cult god. This angered Justin.

Justin writes:

“This food is called among us the Eucharist... Not as common bread and common drink do we receive these, but in like manner because Jesus Christ our Savior, having been made flesh by the word of God, had both flesh and blood for our salvation. Therefore we have been taught that this food which is blessed by the prayer of His word is the flesh and blood of Jesus who was made flesh.”

“For the apostles, in the memoirs composed by them which are called gospels, have thus delivered to us what was commanded to them: that Jesus took bread, and when He had given thanks, said, ‘This do ye in remembrance of Me. This is

My body.’ And in like manner, having taken the cup and given thanks, he said ‘This is My blood,’ and gave it to them (the apostles).

“This the wicked devils have imitated in the mysteries of Mithra, commanding that the same thing be done. That is, the bread and the cup of water are used with certain incantations in the mystic rites of one who is initiated...”³¹

Justin conspicuously omits the passion narrative and is concerned only with the Incarnation.

The plain inference from the above is that in the primary tradition, as taught by the apostles according to Justin, the sacraments were a mystic communion with a supernatural being, with no suggestion that they were to be connected with the impending crucifixion of Jesus. This is shown conclusively in John’s gospel, where the “last supper” is omitted. There is no mention of bread and wine at this final gathering. John is unaware that these rites were supposed to take place.

Instead, according to John, Jesus proclaims the flesh and blood sacraments much earlier in a bizarre scene in a synagogue, where he tells the Jews:

“He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is food indeed and my blood is drink indeed. He that eats my flesh and drinks my blood dwells in me, and I in him.”³²

Again there is no hint of impending death. The sacraments in John are separate and apart from those in the other gospels. And if John is earlier, then the “last supper” versions must be fictional. The sacraments have been transferred from the Incarnation motif to the Passion motif. This is a major falsification and undermines the entire passion narrative.

From the foregoing, we have good evidence that the primary tradition and the primary gospel was that given in the gospel of John. The vaunted priority of Mark derives from the premise that Jesus of Nazareth existed and that Mark is giving the earliest “traditions”

concerning this Jesus. Mark is arrived at by ruling out the other three: John gives a sacred myth, with no pretense at history; Luke removes himself by stating that many before him have composed gospels (Luke 1:1); Matthew relies mainly on visions and instructions from angels, also the working out of proof-texts, “that it might be fulfilled that which was spoken by the prophet,” in composing his life of Jesus. This leaves Mark as the least difficult to work with, and this created his priority.

Bultmann expresses his own reservations regarding Mark:

“Mark is the work of an author who is steeped in the theology of the early Church, and who ordered and arranged the traditional material that he received in the light of the faith of the early Church.”³³

“It has come to be recognized that the outline of Mark is not historical.”³⁴

We will continue with the testimony of Justin as giving the primary tradition.

Notes:

1. E. Renan, *Life of Jesus*, 20
2. *New Bible Dictionary*, article: 'Canon of NT,' 195
3. A. Barr, *Hastings Dictionary of the Bible*, article: 'Gospels,' 343
4. Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, vol.1, 33, 34
5. R. Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 4 n.2
6. R. Bultmann, *Form Criticism*, 28
7. Origen, *Contra Celsus*, 6:11
8. E.R. Goodenough, *The Theology of Justin Martyr*, 32
9. E.R. Goodenough, *The Theology of Justin Martyr*, 73
10. Justin, *Dialogue With Trypho*, 6:1
11. Justin, *Dialogue With Trypho*, 7:1, 2
12. Justin, *Dialogue With Trypho*, 7:3
13. Justin, *Dialogue With Trypho*, 8:1
14. Justin, *Dialogue With Trypho*, 54:2
15. Justin, *Dialogue With Trypho*, 64:7
16. Justin, *Dialogue With Trypho*, 48:1
17. Justin, *Dialogue With Trypho*, 61:1, 3
18. Justin, *Dialogue With Trypho*, 28:2
19. Justin, *Dialogue With Trypho*, 54:2
20. Justin, *Dialogue With Trypho*, 76:7
21. R. Bultmann, *Form Criticism*, 70
22. R. Bultmann, *Gospel of John*, 8
23. Justin, *1 Apology*, 63
24. Justin, *Dialogue With Trypho*, 80:3
25. Justin, *Dialogue With Trypho*, 82:2, 3
26. Justin, *Dialogue With Trypho*, 84:2
27. Justin, *Dialogue With Trypho*, 84:2
28. Justin, *Dialogue With Trypho*, 93:1
29. Justin, *Dialogue With Trypho*, 92:2
30. Justin, *Dialogue With Trypho*, 103:7
31. Justin, *1 Apology*, 66
32. R. Bultmann, *Gospel of John*, 6:54 - 59
33. R. Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 1
34. R. Bultmann, *Form Criticism*, 23

FROM PROOF-TEXT TO GOSPEL TRADITION

“The Covenant is ours only, for the Jews have forever lost that which Moses received.”

Epistle of Barnabas, 3:7

In preaching and defending his system, Justin was challenged on all sides by rival sects and of course by the Jews. The supreme weapon used by Justin, in proving his theology and refuting all opponents was that of proof-texts from Scripture. Here Justin shows himself to be a past master, and a walking library of these texts. His position is now invincible — as long as one believes in the sacred force of these texts, and in Justin’s own reading and interpretation. Hence the topic of these texts, so arid and distant to the present-day secular layman, is to be considered in the sequence of development of the gospels. It is only when the argument of the texts fell by the wayside that the historical Jesus had to be constructed to convince the opponents.

Justin’s virtuoso use of these texts, called *Testimonia*, is well illustrated in his two major works, his *Dialogue With Trypho*, and his *First Apologia To Caesar*. These are little more than quote-collections.

The *Dialogue* is Justin’s account of a disputation he had with one Trypho, who takes the Jewish position. It takes place in a Greek city, unnamed, and is dated about 135 since Trypho is described as fleeing from “the war” — taken to refer to the Bar-Kochba uprising. Justin’s edited account dates much later, since it is amended with almost endless quotes from Scripture, some chapter length and recited by Justin, while Trypho, the “straight man,” remains dutifully silent. Only rarely is he permitted to speak, but when he does it is quite effective.

Justin’s use of these texts appears to be a recent development, since Trypho shows bewilderment at the “proofs” being thrust upon him — and this is about AD 135. Justin tells Trypho that the proof-texts...

“...will appear strange to you, although you read them every day. From this fact we understand that because of your wickedness God has withheld from you the ability to discern the wisdom of His scriptures.”¹

But the gospels were quoting these proof-texts, presumably 100 years earlier. Trypho’s reaction shows his perplexity:

“Never yet have we heard any man investigating or searching into or proving this matter [the divinity of Christ], nor would we have tolerated your conversation, had you not referred everything to the Scriptures... All the words of the prophecy that you repeat are ambiguous, and have no force in proving what you wish to prove.”²

Neither Justin or Trypho show awareness of the doctrinal disputes in the gospels based on proof-texts. Again we must infer that the gospels date after Justin.

Note that Trypho, in shrugging off the quotes, is in effect rejecting the whole story. Nowhere in the *Dialogue* does he concede the force of a single quote where this would undermine Judaism. Justin’s book, really a debater’s manual for Christian missionaries, is compelled to give these ripostes by Trypho which are put down to Jewish obstinacy. Trypho is carrying on the tradition of Josephus. If he and Josephus were deserters, we can guess what the militants were like.

As to how the texts came into possession of the new church, Justin simply declares the forfeiture by the Jews and the transfer to the gentiles. Justin is emphatic that Christianity is the true and only Israel and the sole possessor of the Scriptures. The Jews have been ejected from any claim or title. There has been a takeover of the territory, with no ceremony. We give these representative statements:

“We are the true and spiritual Israelite nation, and the race of Judah and Jacob and Isaac and Abraham.”³

“[The proof-texts] are laid up in your Scriptures, or rather not in yours but in ours; for we obey them, but you, when you read, do not understand their sense.”⁴

“We are the true race of Israel.”⁵

“What was then in your nation has been transferred to us.”⁶

“For I have shown that Christ is called both Jacob and Israel.”⁷

“What more does Christ grant Abraham?... We shall inherit the Holy Land together with Abraham... But he [Christ] does not include you [the Jews], in whom there is no faith.”⁸

“We who keep the commandments of Christ are, by virtue of Christ who begat us unto God, both called and in fact are Jacob and Israel.”⁹

There is no joint heritage of any kind. A theological *putsch* had taken place, with the ouster of the old. The capture and restatement of the texts go back to Paul, who was a past master of the art. His method was taken over with little change by later Christians and is the mainstay of present-day Christian missionaries. Paul's usage has been analyzed by Johannes Weiss, in the chapter ‘The Theological Thinker,’ pages 436 to 438, of the book *Earliest Christianity*. We give the main points from this critique.

1. Paul considers the Scriptural text as final and irrefutable. “For him, ‘it stands written’ cuts off all discussion and objection.”
2. Paul's method cannot be accepted at the present day. It “contradicts entirely our idea of scientific exactness.”
3. He selects his own version of the text and wording. “He depends upon the Greek translation of the text, instead of going back to the original Hebrew.”

4. “He is accustomed not to bother himself about the context and original meaning of the words under discussion, but values them only in the sense that suits him.”

Weiss gives one example of this tactic, then declares that the original text “means just the opposite of what Paul desires to prove by it... Thus Paul’s exposition is entirely surreptitious (i.e., deceptive).”

5. “He approaches the Holy Scriptures with a fundamental conviction that God has placed concealed secrets in them which only the eye enlightened by the Spirit can discover.”

That is, the direct and obvious meaning can be replaced by a secret meaning, as revealed to one “enlightened by the Spirit” — which must then be accepted as the true and only meaning. This cuts off all debate and criticism. (The above points are found on page 436).

6. The Jews are blocked from understanding the true meaning of the “Old Covenant” because the Jews have not accepted Christ. Citing *2 Corinthians* 3:14, *Romans* 11:8 and *2 Corinthians* 3:16: “The veil still lies over the unbelieving Jews... They indeed hear the Word but do not understand it... Only when Israel turns to the Lord will the veil be lifted.”

7. “All the predictions of God have found their fulfillment in Christ... He is the real content of the Holy Scriptures... All must be related to him.”

That is, Paul’s dogmatic and doctrinal beliefs will determine what the texts are required to mean. There has been a seizure and occupation. The Hebrew Scripture is now a Christian textbook.

8. As an outstanding example of text capture, the word “Lord” applies to the God of Israel in the “Old Testament” but now it applies to the “Lord Jesus.” The Hebrew letters JHVH for “Lord” occur over 6,800 times in the original and are translated as “Kurios” in the Greek version, and then applied to Jesus, making it a Christian text in one fell swoop — all 6800 times.

“The Christian refers it frankly and freely to his Lord Christ... Paul can apply the word [‘Lord’] with equal conviction to God as well as to Christ.” (These points are on page 437)

9. Paul takes it upon himself to declare which of God’s acts and pronouncements are to be taken as absolute and which are of secondary importance. “Paul can distinguish between the eternal and the temporal, between that which has been fulfilled and that which has died out in the Old Testament.”

Thus the Mosaic Law is downgraded and does not represent the highest purpose of God. “It does not come directly from God, but is given through the mediation of angels.”

10. Paul captures ancestral figures and makes them witnesses to his own beliefs. Thus Abraham is no longer the first gentile converted to Judaism; rather Abraham has been removed from Judaism and has been returned to the Chaldees. “In Abraham shall all gentiles be blessed... The revelation made to Abraham [that faith equals righteousness] contains the real meaning of God, and the later Law ‘added unto it’ or ‘slipped in between’ is farther from God’s intention.”

Therefore orthodox Judaism and the observance of the Law need not have come into existence in the first place.

Moses is also recruited as a witness for the demise of Judaism.

“When Moses ‘covers his face with a veil’ to shield it against the glory of the Deity directed upon him from Sinai, Paul does not hesitate to impute to him the motive that the Israelites should not be permitted to observe how this glory became gradually weaker and weaker; he [Moses] wished to hide from them the fact that the Old Covenant must pass away.”¹⁰

This was before the Israelites got to the Holy Land, and 1500 years before Jesus appeared, yet Moses is required to prefigure the end of Judaism.

11. Another example of text-juggling by Paul is that “he amplifies the statements of Scripture by adding explanatory additions of his own, and then, nevertheless, treats these as Scriptural... It is just upon these [added words] that Paul bases his argument, and his proof rests upon this, that they are words of Scripture, which they certainly are not... For our critical thinking, this interpolation of one’s own thoughts is unbearable arbitrariness.”

12. “The more petty and forced the proof-text method appears, often clashing violently with the original meaning of the Old Testament passage, the more important it is for us to recognize that the earliest Christians were not so much concerned with details as with the underlying idea, that is, that the death of Jesus was not a miscarriage of the divine plan, but had been from the very beginning a fixed point in its program.”

And the “divine plan” is discovered by means of the violent clashing quotes.

13. Paul had used the word ‘faith’ in counter-distinction to “doing of works,” as the means of breaking free of the obligations of the Law. However Weiss points out that the Jews used “faith” precisely to affirm the Law.

“The same concept of faith also occurs in Judaism... So it is said of one who utters the daily confession of faith, the Shema.”

Martin Werner notes Paul’s resourcefulness:

“Paul found himself in the extremely difficult and disputable position of having to prove from the Old Testament, which ascribed eternal validity to the Law, that Christ through his death had become the end of the Law.”¹¹

From the foregoing we can see that the method of Christian proof-texts, as inaugurated by Paul, is open to major criticism and rejection. However this was the main weapon used by early Christianity, as was noted by Harnack who gives the viewpoint of the “occupying power”:

“If the people of Israel retained a single privilege, if a single special promise still had any meaning whatsoever, if even one letter had still to remain in force — how could the whole of the *Old Testament* be spiritualized [i.e., christianized]? How could it all be transferred to another people? The result of this mental attitude was the conviction that the Jewish people was now rejected... The Jewish people from the first persisted in adhering to the literal interpretation, practicing circumcision, offering bloody sacrifices, and observing regulations concerning food. Consequently they were always in error, an error which shows that they were never the chosen people. The chosen people throughout was the Christian people... From the outset the Jewish people had lost the promise; indeed it was a question whether it had ever been meant for them at all.”¹²

Here Harnack gives citations from church writings, emphasizing the rejection.

“...In any case the literal interpretation [by the Jews] of God’s revealed will proved that the people had been forsaken by God and had fallen under the sway of the devil... The final sentence had now to be pronounced: the *Old Testament*, from cover to cover, had nothing whatever to do with the Jews. Illegally and insolently the Jews had seized upon it; they had confiscated it, and tried to claim it as their own property... No, the book belonged from the outset, as it belongs now and forevermore, to none but Christians, whilst the Jews are the worst, the most godless of all nations upon earth...”¹³

We omit further pleasantries of this nature, as given by Harnack on pages 66 and 67.

“Such an injustice such as that done by the Gentile church is almost unprecedented in the annals of history. The Gentile church stripped Judaism of everything; she took away its sacred book. Herself but a transformation of Judaism, she cut off all connection with the parent religion. The daughter first robbed her mother, and then repudiated her! But, one may ask, is this view really correct? Undoubtedly it is, to some

extent... But viewed from a higher viewpoint the facts require a different complexion. By their rejection of Jesus, the Jewish people disowned their calling and dealt the death-blow to their own existence. Their place was taken by Christians as the new People, who appropriated the whole tradition of Judaism, giving a fresh interpretation to any unserviceable materials in it, or else allowing these to be dropped.”¹⁴

Rev. Harnack, forgetting that he is supposed to be an objective historian, is giving us the traditional brutal Christianity that prevailed down the centuries: because the Jews “rejected” Jesus, as alleged, the Jews deserved whatever fate and punishment that was meted out. But we can rephrase the question: “Is this view really correct?”

After all, it was through possession of the Scriptures that Christianity was able to create its theology, its legitimacy, its history, its claims, its large treasure-house of inspirational and doctrinal material. Without this total possession, the Christian case would be reduced to zero. And the Jewish disputants sharply denied the Christian usage of the texts, thereby in effect denying the right of Christianity to exist. Therefore the Jews had to be stripped of ownership by every means possible. Did that include invention of the Crucifixion Story? Surely the stakes were high enough. Whenever an occupying power takes over a territory, the “natives” are accused of horrific crimes to justify the occupation. This is standard procedure.

However the Christians cannot have it both ways: if they are the true owners of the Scriptures, and the wicked Jews have been ousted because of the slaying of Christ, then there can be no talk of “joint-heritage” and “sister-religions.”

This was noted by Marcel Simon, in his book *Verus Israel*. He writes:

“The Church claimed as its own property, and interpreted by means of its own theology... the sacred book of Israel. It even refused the Jews, for having misunderstood their own Bible, all title to it... The battle over an inheritance... explains the sharpness of the conflict, the violence of the hatred.”¹⁵

Inheritance is defined as “ownership by virtue of birthright.” The birthright is now established by force.

“The Church was already there in the Old Testament...It was Christ who appeared to Abraham, who revealed himself to Moses. And each time he appears in the Old Testament, it is already the Church to whom he is speaking.”¹⁶

“The battle that was joined was not simply one between two different movements within the one religion...The evidence suggests that the conflict should be seen as one between two distinct religions.”¹⁷

“From the Church’s beginnings... it was in conflict with Judaism. The struggle from the outset is a struggle between two distinct religions... Each religion contested the other’s right to exist.”¹⁸

But if that is the case, then how can there be any talk of “joint-heritage” or “sister-religions”? It is clear that there was war to the hilt from the very outset. While the “joint-heritage” is politically correct at the present time, there is no trace of it in the early centuries.

Returning to the proof-texts as used by Justin: these proof-texts were known as “Testimonia.” Rendel Harris, in his two-volume study, *Testimonia*, writes:

“A number of early Christian books are hardly more than strings of anti-Jewish texts [taken from the Scriptures, where the prophets rebuke Israel] with editorial connections and arrangements.”¹⁹

The purpose of these Testimonies was...

“...to show that the Jews, according to prophecy, have lost the divine favor and that the Christians have stepped into their place; and... to show that Christ was, and is, what the Scripture foretold Him to be.”²⁰

These proof-texts were used on “the dual basis of anti-Judaism and Christology.”²¹

By “Christology” is meant the study of the person and mission of Christ, particularly in its supernatural aspects. Harris states that...

“...the collection of proof-texts from the prophets antedates all our canonical Christian literature. Certainly the first need of the ‘new people’ [the Christians] was just such an attestation as prophesy could afford.”²²

This is further evidence that Justin precedes the gospels. First the “quotes” then the life of Jesus.

One would think that the first Christians would appeal for attestation directly to the words and deeds of Jesus. Surely these were notorious and known to one and all. Instead they appeal to the prophecies of Isaiah, eight hundred years back, and the Psalms of David, also many centuries back. The insistence on the proof-texts, and the sharp insistence on sole ownership of the Scriptures is plain evidence that the Christians had no other proof at this time.

The nature of the proof-texts from the “Old Testament” as used by Christian disputants, is well illustrated by a collection compiled by the church father Cyprian of Carthage, about AD 250. In this collection there is no trace of the joint-heritage or of sister-religions existing side by side, since the Jews were barred from any awareness or understanding of these texts. There is the sharpest split between Judaism and Christianity, and the proof-texts are there to confirm the split. The “old” is totally rejected.

The list is given in John G. Gager’s book, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism*, page 156. Cyprian divided his collection into 24 headings and we give the main ones:

#2. “The Jews did not believe the prophets and murdered them.”

#3. “It was foretold that they would neither know the Lord nor understand him nor receive him.”

- #4. "The Jews would not understand the holy Scriptures and these would become intelligible only in the last times, after Christ had come."
- #5. "The Jews would be able to understand nothing in the Scriptures unless they first believed in Christ."
- #9. "The former law given through Moses would cease."
- #10. "A new law would be given".
- #16. "The old sacrifice was abrogated and a new one established."
- #23. "The gentiles rather than the Jews would reach the kingdom of heaven."
- #24. "The Jews are able to receive pardon for their sins only if they wash away the blood of the slain Christ through baptism, and if they come over into the church and obey his teachings."

Rendel Harris, in his two-volume study of these "Testimonia," has traced out the process by which the proof-texts ultimately resulted in the composition of the gospels. First the "quotes" were used to create episodes, and give the appearance of actual events. The text-collections were supplemented with "acting out" versions.

"The extant anti-Judaic writings of the early Christian Church [are] those which are actually made up of *Old Testament* quotations to be used against the Jews, and those which have dramatized the quotations more or less completely into Dialogues. [Here] a representative Jew and a typical Christian discuss their divergences one from the other, and the Christian succeeds in disarming his opponent and sometimes in converting him."²³

In tracing out the transition, Harris notes that Christian books that expound proof-texts sometimes put questions to the reader of a challenging nature, in effect establishing a confrontation and dialogue with the reader. One such lecturer...

“...introduces a number of well-known quotations with attached questions such as ‘To whom did he say this?’ or ‘To whom do these words apply?’ Harris notes that this is a feature that is used in Epistle to the Hebrews: ‘Did he ever say this to any angel?’ ”²⁴

It takes but little editorial revision to make the Jews the direct target of the instruction, and with warnings to repent addressed to the Jewish disputant.

“We frequently find that a series of Testimonies is interpreted by a personal challenge to the Jew who is imagined to be listening... It was almost inevitable that when the testimony becomes a controversy, the collection of controversies should become a dialogue... The manner in which the dialogue evolves out of the testimonies is clear, and it is equally clear that that the evolution occurs early.”²⁵

From dialogue we can move to actual episodes, and if enough of these are strung together we have a *biography*; “A small collection of Old Testament extracts was gathered together in such a manner as to be the biography of the Lord in prophecies.”²⁶

This was expanded in the gospels, particularly in the gospel of Matthew, where numerous episodes were created on the basis of proof-texts, “that it might be fulfilled that which was spoken by the prophet.”

Describing one fictional debate, Harris writes:

“The debate is simply one more dramatization of an existing series of Testimonies... Xenos [the Jewish disputant] is an imaginary figure brought on the stage to make the argument from Testimonies more vivid and more interesting.”²⁷

We are on our way to the construction of the gospel disputes. It will be apparent that if a “Pharisee” can be inserted in place of the target of the Testimonies, then Jesus himself can be inserted in place of the lecturer.

Bultmann takes the position that the controversy scenes in the gospels are fictional; these are acting-out of proof-texts or other doctrinal matters which the Church wanted to propagate. Bultmann writes:

“Controversy dialogues [in the gospels] are all of them imaginary scenes... The controversy dialogues as we have them are not reports of ‘original dialogues’ but creations of the Church... In the form in which we have them, the controversy dialogues are imaginary scenes illustrating in some concrete occasion a principle which the Church ascribed to Jesus... We have to look for the *Sitz im Leben* [actual situation] of the controversy dialogues in the discussions the Church had with its opponents.”²⁸

This is a jolting statement. If the confrontations between Jesus and his opponents are “all of them imaginary scenes” and “creations of the Church”, then the whole plot framework of the gospels dissolves. These encounters create the mortal clash between Jesus and the Jewish leaders that leads to the final tragedy. Now we are told that it is all imaginary. And if these prologue skirmishes are fictional how much confidence can we have in the passion play itself? Perchance this too is a “creation” of the Church.

Bultmann is one inch from taking that position. He declares that the responsibility of the Jews for the death of Jesus derives from the Church controversies with the Jews. He writes:

“The Passion Narrative is thickly overgrown with legend. For the later Christians the real enemies were the Jews. Since they were found to be their (the Christians’) standing enemies and accusers in the work of the Christian mission — note the representation in the Book of Acts — they were also made responsible for the death of Jesus.”²⁹

It is not a very long step from inventing responsibility for an event to inventing the event itself in order to create that responsibility.

From the foregoing we conclude that the “historical Jesus” is not needed for the starting point in gospel composition. Instead we can start with doctrinal statements supported by captured proof-texts. These are developed and expanded and ultimately result in gospels.

The fact that the gospel writers had no historical knowledge to go by is shown by their gross ignorance as to the territories of Judea and Galilee. We turn to this topic in the next chapter.

NOTES:

1. Justin, *Dialogue With Trypho*, chapter 55
2. Justin, *Dialogue With Trypho*, 48, 51
3. Justin, *Dialogue With Trypho*, 11:5
4. Justin, *Dialogue With Trypho*, 29:2
5. Justin, *Dialogue With Trypho*, 135:3
6. Justin, *Dialogue With Trypho*, 82:1
7. Justin, *Dialogue With Trypho*, 100:1
8. Justin, *Dialogue With Trypho*, 119:5 – 6
9. Justin, *Dialogue With Trypho*, 123:9
10. *2 Corinthians*, 3:13
11. M. Werner, *The Formation of Christian Dogma*, 57
12. A. Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity*, 66
13. A. Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity*, 66 – 67
14. A. Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity*, 69 – 70
15. Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel*, intro xiii
16. Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel*, 79
17. Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel*, 64
18. Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel*, 135
19. R. Harris, *Testimonia*, 1:4
20. R. Harris, *Testimonia*, 1:5
21. R. Harris, *Testimonia*, 1:68
22. R. Harris, *Testimonia*, 2:25
23. R. Harris, *Testimonia*, 2:13
24. R. Harris, *Testimonia*, 2:45
25. R. Harris, *Testimonia*, 2:19 – 20
26. R. Harris, *Testimonia*, 2:36
27. R. Harris, *Testimonia*, 2:115
28. R. Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 40 – 41
29. R. Bultmann, *Form Criticism*, 72

GOSPEL ERRORS

“...so-called histories... published by persons who never visited the sites nor were anywhere near the actions described, but based on a few hearsay reports put together...”

Josephus, *Contra Apion*, 1:46

Whatever the faults of Josephus, all grant that he knows the terrain, the customs, the history of the region — and he is quick to point out the ignorance of others in these matters. However a critical reading of the gospel narratives will show that these were written long after the assumed events and far from the scene, and that the writers were densely ignorant at every point. They are turning out a botched and inept job — meaning that they are fabricating the “life of Jesus” starting from point zero. Let us examine the gospel expertise.

First we would like to get our bearings, with some background detail as to the people, the landscape and the geography of the region. The stage where the gospel drama was played out was a compact Semite region comprising Galilee, Samaria and Judea. It is but ninety miles from Capernaum on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee to Bethlehem, a few miles south of Jerusalem. There was a common language, Aramaic, and the customs and usages were known to all. Here we would expect the Galilean disciples to be at their most reliable. The absence of book learning would be matched by an increased peasant shrewdness and concentration on the daily concerns of occupation, custom and locale. We are told that they walked the highways and byways of Galilee, and we would like to check their expertise against that of the outsider from Jerusalem, the priest-historian Josephus.

In a classic paragraph he writes:

“The two Galilees [Upper and Lower] have always resisted any hostile invasion, for the inhabitants are from infancy inured to war, and have at all times been numerous. Never did the men lack courage nor the country men. For the land is so rich in soil and pasturage, and produces such variety of trees, that even the most indolent are tempted by these facilities to devote themselves to agriculture. In fact, every inch of the soil has been cultivated by the inhabitants. There is not a parcel of waste land... It is entirely under cultivation and produces crops from one end to the other... The towns too are thickly distributed, and even the villages, thanks to the fertility of the soil, are so densely populated that even the smallest of these contains fifteen thousand inhabitants.”¹

There may be a wee exaggeration in this, but we get the picture. Josephus is describing the Imperial Valley in California, and the gospel writers are describing the badlands of South Dakota: “What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which was lost until he find it?”²

What man indeed? As is well-known, sheep herding is confined to barren submarginal lands with minimal population. In what “inch of land” are we supposed to locate the wilderness and the sheep industry? “The Good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.”³

But shepherd and sheep had long vanished, and wild beasts did not leap from the thicket to endanger anyone.

We do not know how the disciples managed their own cultivation, since they are unacquainted with the plow: “A sower went forth to sow... Some seeds fell upon stony places where there was not much earth... Some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprung up.”⁴

This parable is told to “great multitudes” who have taken time out from sheep-herding and stone age agriculture. We wonder in what country Matthew was seated at toll. Josephus noted that “imperial grain was stored in the villages of Upper Galilee”⁵ — that is, there was surplus enough to be collected by the Romans.

As to the hardy populace, inured to war, we are given the alarming news that the province of Galilee was a plague area, with scarce one man sound of mind and limb. Jesus is portrayed as a healer therefore the inhabitants, without further ado, are required to be outpatients. Jesus went about...

“...healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease... and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with diverse diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils and those which were lunatic and those which had the palsy, and he healed them.”⁶

So terminal are the cases that when a cure does take place it is hailed as a miracle. We may ask why the Romans did not send a troop of boy scouts to fight the war.

Throughout his narrative, Josephus depicts these northerners as a boisterous and truculent folk. Josephus was sent from Jerusalem to Galilee to take charge of the defense of the province at the outbreak of the war, and there was no love lost between him and his troops. On one occasion he gave them a dressing-down, warning them that he would note whether they...

“...abstained from their habitual malpractices, theft, robbery and rapine, and ceased to defraud their countrymen, and ceased to regard as personal profit an injury sustained by their most intimate friends.”⁷

But these same folk become meekly submissive in the gospel, and sit in one place for three days to hear a sermon: “I have compassion on the multitude because they continue with me now for three days and have nothing to eat. I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way.”⁸

Josephus didn't see it that way but our gospel eyewitness knows better.

For all their quarrelsomeness, the Galileans trooped in their thousands to the defense of Jerusalem. “Never did the men lack courage.”

Under the leadership of John of Gischala and Simon Bar-Giora, they proved the bravest of the defenders of the city. However the gospel story gives a different picture. Jesus was the hero and miracle worker of Galilee. He went to Jerusalem accompanied by a multitude of his fellow Galileans who also made the Passover pilgrimage. He was to be their champion against the haughty members of the Establishment. Yet when he is seized treacherously and put to death, not one of the thousands utters a word of protest; all join in taunting and cursing their former leader when he is on the cross. They beg the Romans to crucify one of their own. This is a shabby and unworthy tale, and cannot be supported for a moment. It illustrates a basic motif in the Christian polemic: the studied falsification of the Jewish side in the interest of creating a fake scenario.

Turning to specific locales, we find the same discrepancy between what Josephus saw and the what the gospels narrate. Josephus states that there were 204 towns and villages in Galilee, and of this total he refers to 52 by name. He omits the all-important one, Nazareth, but it must have cost him an effort. The map reveals that the phantom village was surrounded by places listed by Josephus, and with frequent movement among these places. His command post, Japhia, was but two miles to the southwest, Sepphoris was five miles to the north, Simonias five miles to the west, and Dabarritta five miles to the east. What happened to Nazareth in the middle of all this?

The archaeologists have made digs in every spot of interest in the Holy Land but no one is in a hurry to dig at Nazareth and check the date of the lowest level. The carbon-14 might show that the town became manifest unto mankind just about the time Christianity became the official religion of the empire, about AD 325.

Another dubious entry is "Sychem" or Shechem, in Samaria. It is mentioned in the gospel as still standing (John 4:5, Acts 7:16), but Josephus gives the later name: "Vespasian descended by way of Samaria passing Neapolis, or as the natives call it, Mabartha."⁹

The editor states that this town "is in the immediate vicinity of Shechem."

He means vertically above, and separated by several archaeological strata. There is no trace of Shechem in the later literature and we cannot believe that Josephus would have omitted reference to the

famed biblical town if it had still been standing along Caesar's route. The inference is that Shechem had been replaced by Mabartha/Neapolis, today Nablus. The gospel eyewitnesses had confined their observation to the Greek/Hebrew scriptures and are composing a synthetic account.

The Sea of Galilee is invariably called Lake of Gennesar by Josephus (today called Kinneret), and this must be regarded as the correct name during his lifetime. His death is put at some time after 100. Mark and Matthew use the name Sea of Galilee. John gives the name as Sea of Tiberias. This can't be right. The city of Tiberias was shunned by religious Jews because the site had been a cemetery when the city was founded by Herod Antipas. The palace was set on fire early in the war because it contained pagan imagery. Luke alone uses the correct term, calling it Lake Genneseret. This does him rather more harm than good. So closely has Luke-Acts been linked to Josephus as a source that these books have been dated after AD 100. We must wonder why the four gospel writers could not agree on the most prominent feature of the province.

Haziness as to the Sea of Galilee is revealed in other gospel episodes. Matthew writes:

“And leaving Nazareth, Jesus came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying, The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, the people which sat in darkness saw a great light.”¹⁰

This rather scrambled passage refers to tribal boundaries that had long vanished, if they had been more than folk legend in the first place. Bible maps show that 'Zabulon' did not come near the Sea of Galilee, and had nothing to do with Capernaum. Moreover Matthew is using the Greek LXX as against the Hebrew. In the Hebrew the reference to Zabulon ends chapter 8, while “the people who sat in darkness” begins chapter 9 of Isaiah. Our sturdy Galilean is using a Greek text to construct a passage quite artificially.

Mark, labeled the most historical and reliable of the gospel writers, relates that a “lunatic in the wilderness” was cured by Jesus, who sent evil spirits from the lunatic into a herd of swine that went over the cliff into the Sea of Galilee.¹¹ This is placed at Gadara which is several miles from the Sea, though the manuscripts and earliest editions generally read Gerasa which is another city about fifty miles away.

As to how one locale was transformed into another, this is explained by one scholar:

“Gerasa was too far away, and the reading ‘Gadarenes’ is more plausible and has replaced ‘Gerasenes’ in the received text. The fame of Gerasa in the early centuries may have led to the seeking of its mention in the New Testament. Its ruins are among the most impressive in the Near East.”¹²

In plain English, the gospel writer, from his vantage point somewhere in the Roman empire, had heard of the fame of Gerasa and had calmly placed it on a cliff adjacent to the Sea. The correction and coverup are made by the later editors, with equal aplomb. We are left with the impressive ruins of gospel credibility.

Bethsaida is described by the scholars as...

“...a town on the north shores of Galilee near the Jordan... Pliny and Jerome tell us that it was on the east of the Jordan... But in Mark 6:45 the disciples were sent from east of the Jordan to Bethsaida towards Capernaum, hence a second Bethsaida has been postulated west of the Jordan.”¹³

To rescue Mark the scholars invent second Bethsaidas out of thin air. No wonder the saints quit the fishing business. They got lost every day.

The ignorance as to Galilee is matched by ignorance as to Judea. All gospel sites associated with Jerusalem are unconfirmed by Josephus, without exception. The “palace of the high priest,” the pavement Gabbatha, the Gate called Beautiful, Golgotha, the Praetorium, the Garden of Gethsemane — all these are unknown to him, and unlocated. The Garden is placed to the east of the city, on the bible

maps, and about a mile from the suggested location from the “chamber of the Last Supper,” going by the location of the city walls and gates at that period.

The Garden was separated from the city by the brook Kedron, and Josephus tells us that the brook was at the bottom of a “deep ravine.” Further to the north, where the Garden is supposed to be, “the depth at this point is terrific.”¹⁴

We are asked to believe that after the Last Supper, there was a one-mile stroll in the night air, with everyone scrambling down a ravine and up the other side to reach the Garden — conduct more suitable to a commando squad than to a group of pious Jews celebrating the Passover. The arresting party, possibly numbering hundreds, must also make the night venture. Wherever Josephus is allowed to testify, he spoils the fable.

The Nativity story is not meant to be analyzed by precise laboratory techniques, but Matthew’s version implies that Bethlehem is remote from Jerusalem. Herod has to send emissaries to that distant place to find out what is going on, and only two years later does the news trickle back. “He slew all the children that were in Bethlehem and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the Magi.”¹⁵

Matthew is unaware that Bethlehem was but six miles south of Jerusalem at that time, and Herod could have disposed of the matter of a rival within a few hours. The episode is constructed to fulfill a proof-text: “Rachel weeping for her children,” which requires a two year period to build up a suitable number of victims. All is reckless invention.

Luke narrates a sermon preached by Jesus in the synagogue at Nazareth, wherein the congregation is informed that Elijah had cured a woman in “Sarepta, a city of Sidon.”¹⁶

And so it was, when the account in *1 Kings* was written; but the city had gone from Sidon to Tyre some seven hundred years previously, as all in the synagogue know except Luke and Jesus. Other errors in geography are so far off that we must conclude the authors are using free imagination, or are writing so long after the events that their sources have become inaccurate.

Matthew writes of “Judea Beyond Jordan.”¹⁷ This is pretty hopeless. The Jordan formed the eastern boundary of Judea.

“The road from Jerusalem to Gaza is desert.”¹⁸

This news comes from “an angel of the Lord” who should know better. Judea was a populous province and bible maps show eight or nine cities between Jerusalem and Gaza at that period.

Luke places the village of Emmaus at seven miles from Jerusalem. “As it is twenty miles from Jerusalem rather than seven as suggested by Luke, this causes perplexity to those who would press the details of the story.”¹⁹

No comment.

From the above list, we are left with strong doubts as to whether we are dealing with Galileans or even with Jews acquainted with the Holy Land. For that matter, how sure are we that we are dealing with Jewish writers? We are told innumerable times that Jesus and his followers were birthright Jews. However a check on the gospels will reveal an ignorance as to custom and usage in Judaism equal to the ignorance on matters of geography. We ask for proof in the gospel content itself that we are dealing with Jewish eyewitnesses at the outset, and again we have error piled on error.

Josephus is aware of the Semite taboo against coming in contact with a corpse. He relates that the Samaritans in one case defiled the Temple area by scattering human bones on the precincts, and also notes there is a seven day period of ritual defilement after contact with a corpse.²⁰ However the gospel relates that the women of Galilee came to the tomb of Jesus to apply ointment to the corpse. John’s gospel adds the detail that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus applied about one hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes to the shroud, and wound the body “in linen clothes with the spices, as it is the manner of the Jews to bury.”²¹

After which — according to John’s timetable — the two doctors of the Sanhedrin sat down to the Passover table. This account will win few converts from the rabbinate.

Another Semite taboo deals with nakedness. This is invariably used in the sense of reproach however the gospel writers show a Græco-Roman nonchalance about nudity. Luke is persuaded that to stone a man, the orthodox Jews first remove their clothing, as do the athletes in the stadium. "The witnesses laid down their clothing."²²

They also run about in various states of undress in the city of Jerusalem: "They cried out and cast off their clothes and threw dust in the air."²³

Peter, another orthodox Jew, goes fishing in the nude, but when it comes to swimming he gets prudish and puts his clothes on: "Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat about him, for he was naked, and cast himself into the sea."²⁴

Just what is going on here?

There is a strong Semite taboo against the drinking of blood,²⁵ which the apostle John seems unaware of. Jesus informs the Jews of the synagogue of Capernaum, in homely everyday language, "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life. He who eats me will live... My flesh is flesh indeed, and my blood is blood indeed..."²⁶

This is a synagogue sermon rarely heard in Galilee. Folk taboos have an age-old force and are known to all in the given group, yet the gospel writers do not know these.

The gospels record that Jesus "taught daily in the Temple."

There is no evidence that the Temple precincts were open to private instruction, any more than a cathedral of the present day is. There was a fixed order of worship and sacrifice. We read in the Hebrew texts that prophets "stood in the gate of the Temple" to deliver warnings and preach sermons to those entering — meaning that the speaker remained outside. Yet Jesus holds class in the Temple every day.

We are told that a woman "taken in adultery in the very act"²⁷ is brought to Jesus inside the Temple, while class is in session. Women were admitted to an area of the Temple known as "Courtyard of the Women" and to no other part, and separate from the men's court. We can be sure the women there were in a proper state of virtue and purification. Yet here we have a woman in flagrante brought into the main Temple court by orthodox Jews. We also learn a detail of Temple furnishings hitherto unknown: the pavement was covered with sand, since Jesus writes a message on it "let him who is without sin..."

We are dealing with grotesque inventions at every point.

Among the Jews it is considered bad form to kill a man on *shabbis* but if the deed must be done, the method is by stoning. Luke, however, uses the Roman mode of hurling the prisoner from the Tarpeian Rock.

“All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this [sermon from Jesus]. They drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.”²⁸

What more will Luke invent?

Another glaring departure from Jewish observance and custom is the position taken by the first three gospels that a full dress trial and crucifixion could take place on a sacred holiday. Matthew, Mark and Luke make the Last Supper as the Passover meal, meaning that Friday, the next day, was also the Passover, on the Jewish dating.

“The Passover was one of the most sacred days in the Jewish calendar and hedged about with the strictest regulations. It seems inconceivable that Jesus would have been arrested, tried, condemned, crucified and buried on such a day.”²⁹

Many explanations have been offered by the apologists for this divergence, but the plain inference is that three gospel writers simply did not know the significance of the Passover, and made a gross error because they didn't know. That is the point, and no amount of apologetics can conceal this. Were they Jews or not?

Perhaps the most damaging error of all deals with John the Baptist. As Galileans, the gospel writers should know that John Baptist never left that province, and since the Baptist attracted large numbers, the baptisms certainly took place in the “Lake of Gennesar.” Because he was a dangerous opponent to the ruler of that province, King Herod Antipas, he was arrested and executed by that ruler — who had sole jurisdiction over him. Antipas would have been only too glad to get rid of the troublemaker and have him go elsewhere. However the gospel

accounts place John far to the south, in the Wilderness of Judea. This was a barren, desolate and waterless area. and separated from Galilee by two provinces — Decapolis and Samaria. Why would throngs of Galileans go there for mass baptisms, and why would throngs from Jerusalem go there in order to be denounced?

Nevertheless John Baptist is yanked to this impossible locale to act out a misquote from Isaiah in the Greek version of the Scriptures (known as the Septuagint, or LXX): “The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord.”³⁰

The correct reading from Isaiah states: “A voice calls out: Prepare in the wilderness a highway for JHVH [God].”

Which means that the caller himself is not in the wilderness and the quote has nothing to do with the gospels. All is reckless and impossible invention.

In the gospels, John Baptist is the Forerunner and Proclaimer for the advent of Jesus. John’s presence is necessary to get the story under way. And if John drops out, the story is blocked at the very outset. We can see the difficulty the gospel writers have gotten themselves into.

From the evidence submitted above, the blunt conclusion emerges that the gospel writers did not know the geography and customs of the Holy Land, and did not know Judaism itself. Meaning that they were not using “historical traditions” but were working with, and adapting, source materials having nothing to do with historical data of any kind. If the writers were ignorant of major elements in geography, custom and religion, how can they give direct verbatim reports of what Jesus said, and if they are wrong in so much why should we believe any part of their narrative?

In addition to the acting out of proof-texts and the use of free imagination, the gospel writers made use of specific sources in fabricating episodes in the “life of Jesus.” We turn now to these sources.

NOTES:

1. Josephus, *War*, 3:40 – 44
2. *Luke*, 15:4
3. *John* 10:11
4. *Matthew* 13:2 – 7
5. Josephus, *Life*, §71
6. *Matthew* 4:23
7. Josephus, *War*, 2:581
8. *Matthew* 15:32
9. Josephus, *War*, 4:449
10. *Matthew* 3:13 – 16
11. *Mark* 5:1 – 20
12. *Hastings Bible Dictionary*, article 'Gerasa'
13. *New Bible Dictionary*, article 'Bethsaida'
14. Josephus, *War*, 5:70, 6:192
15. *Matthew* 2:17
16. *Luke* 4:26
17. *Matthew* 19:1
18. *Acts* 8:26
19. *Hastings Bible Dictionary*, article 'Emmaus'
20. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18:30, 38
21. *John* 19:40
22. *Acts* 7:58
23. *Acts* 22:23
24. *John* 21:17
25. *Leviticus* 17:10
26. *John* 6:54
27. *John* 8:4
28. *Luke* 4:28
29. Rev. S. Gilmour, *Hastings Dictionary of the Bible*, 487
30. *Matthew* 3:3

THE GOSPEL AND JOSHUA

“You shall call his name Jesus...”

Matthew 1:21

As far back as the writings of D. F. Strauss in the 1830's it has been recognized that material from the Jewish Scripture has been applied to Jesus of Nazareth by the gospel writers and made part of his biography. J. Klausner lists several of the examples given by Strauss:

“The raisings from the dead form a parallel to like incidents recorded of Elijah and Elisha; the face of Jesus shone when he spoke with Moses and Elijah, just as the Old Testament describes the face of Moses as shining; Jesus ascends into heaven because Elijah went up to heaven in a flame of fire. It is possible to draw many similar parallels.”¹

The process is particularly apparent in the gospel of Matthew. He makes no claim to work with historical data. Instead he relies heavily on proof-texts from Scripture. The episode is there “that it might be fulfilled that which was spoken by the prophet.”

What is surprising is that Matthew also makes use of a great deal of Joshua material, Scriptural and apocryphal. In his gospel it forms the actual framework for the career of Jesus. If this Joshua material were removed, the framework would disappear. We thus have the premise, once again, that the gospel Jesus is a christianized version of Joshua.

Matthew's use of Joshuan material was not arbitrary. The early Christians were well aware of the close linkage and intermingling of the persons of Joshua and Jesus. They point out that Jesus was the Christian replacement for Joshua. Thus Tertullian, a second-century Christian, writes:

“When Oshea the son of Nun was marked out as the successor to Moses, his original name was changed and he began to be called Jesus [i.e., the Greek form of Joshua]... We first observe that this was a figure of him who was to be. This was because Jesus the Christ was to bring the second people, which we are, born in the wilderness of this world, into the land of promise. It is flowing with milk and honey, meaning the inheritance of eternal life, then which nothing is sweeter.

“This was to be effected by Jesus, through the grace of the gospel and not by Moses by the discipline of the law. This would be after we had been circumcised by the knife of flint, that is, by the precepts of Christ, for the rock was Christ. [This is an allusion to the act of Joshua in circumcising the Israelites with knives of flint on entering Canaan — Josh. 5:2]. Therefore that man [Joshua/Jesus] was set aside for the similitude to this mystery, and was also first established in the likeness of our Lord’s name, being surnamed Jesus.”²

In turn Origen, writing about AD 220, states that Jesus has replaced Moses — meaning that he had replaced Joshua, the heir to Moses — since the Law is no longer in effect:

“Unless we have understood in what sense Moses dies, we shall be unable to perceive in what sense Jesus reigns. If then you bear in mind the overthrow of Jerusalem, the desertion of its altars, the absence of sacrifices... then you will say that Moses, the servant of the Lord, has passed away... But when you observe the entering in of the heathen to the faith, the building of churches... then say that Jesus has taken over and holds the leadership of Moses, not Jesus the son of Nun, but Jesus the son of God... When you see the people of God observing the Sabbath not by abstaining from ordinary affairs but by abstaining from deeds of sin... then say that Moses, the servant of the Lord, has passed away, and that Jesus the Son of God, holds the leadership.”³

“The son of Nun (Joshua) read all the words of the law, which Moses wrote, before all the assembly of the children of Israel. But our Lord Jesus does this for his own people... Jesus reads the law to us when he explains to us the hidden things of the law. For we, who belong to the catholic [universal] church, do not reject the law of Moses, but we welcome it, provided that it is Jesus who reads it to us, so that as he reads we may lay hold of his understanding and interpretation.”⁴

From the previous we see that Christianity has established its theology and its legitimacy by the capture and christianization of Judaic material, with Moses and Joshua as the starting points. Matthew is engaged in the same process. He has turned to Joshuan material for much of the content of his gospel, beginning with his use of the ancestry and genealogy material.

With both Jesus and Joshua there is the sequence Jacob-Joseph-Jesus. Matthew’s gospel relates that “Jacob fathered Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.”⁵

The male sequence is Jacob-Joseph-Jesus. In the case of Joshua, the patriarch Jacob fathered Joseph as one of his twelve sons. Joseph was the ancestor of the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, and Joshua was an Ephraimite. In Semite usage, the revered ancestral figure is considered a “father” to all the tribal descendants. The Ephraimites are *B’nai Yosef*. Thus the sequence Jacob-Joseph-Joshua/Jesus would also apply to the first Jesus figure. Joshua is the son of Joseph, the son of Jacob.

It is difficult to see how Matthew managed to set down three correct names in the correct sequence unless he had a Joshuan source. With hundreds of names to choose from, he picks these three. The odds against coincidence are enormous. The scholars hurriedly pass over these nativity stories as “legendary,” but it is in these legends that the clues can be found.

The case for a Joshua connection is clearer in the episode where the name is bestowed on the infant. Matthew writes that an angel has chosen the name: “You shall call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins.”⁶

We can virtually duplicate this line by condensing a passage from an Apocryphal book of the Scriptures known as *Sirach*. This shortened passage reads in the Greek version: “Jesus became, in accordance with his name, a great savior and restrained the people from sin.”

This gives the name, the mission, and a play on words linking the name with “salvation” in a way not very clear to the reader. It obviously duplicates the Matthean text.

The passage in context reads:

“Let us now praise famous men... *Jesus* son of Naue was mighty in war and was the successor to Moses in prophesying. He *became in accordance with his name a great savior* of his elect... In the days of Moses he did a loyal deed, he and Caleb the son of Jephunneh. They withstood the congregation, *restrained the people from sin*, and stilled their wicked murmuring.”⁷

The *bold-italic type* gives us the Matthew passage.

The puzzling linkage “Jesus-save” is cleared up by referring to the Hebrew original of *Sirach*. There the reader can see the word-play in the text: “Hero and warrior *Yehoshua* [Jehovah-is-salvation] son of Nun, serving Moses with prophecy, was created in his day to be a great *shua* [salvation] to his chosen ones...”

Jesus-save is there in the original. This play on words is quite common in the Hebrew *Sirach*. Thus we read that “*Abraham* was a great father [*ab-raham*].”⁸

The translator of *Sirach* from Hebrew to Greek tells us in the prologue that he is a recent arrival in Alexandria, and apologizes for his shortcomings in Greek. His version shows that he is still thinking in Hebrew and has retained the Hebrew pun in the Greek. But Matthew’s text cannot be explained apart from the premise that he mechanically copied the Greek text without straightening out the unclear wording. He is dealing with sources that derive from Joshua, and he has clearly transferred the material to the gospel account. Joshua was then the source for the name episode.

The first and second Jesuses are also linked to the name Mary. The young Joshua was separated from his family and lived outside the camp as the servant of Moses. In this situation, the woman who would act as mother or foster-mother to the young lad would then be Miriam, sister of Moses — a mother but not by natural parentage. Miriam is the Hebrew name for Mary. Matthew found the name Mary/Miriam in his Joshuan source and placed it in his gospel. Again we have a duplication in the genealogies of the first and second Jesus.

The Koran preserves the tradition that Mary is to be placed in the very early period, that of Moses and Aaron. The father of Moses was Amram, and in the Koran Mary is described as “the daughter of Imran” — the Arabic form of the name. The wife of “Imran” gives birth to a daughter and declares, “Lo! I have named her Mary.”⁹

“Mary, whose body was chaste, was the daughter of Imran.”¹⁰

Thus she is the sister of Moses. She is also named as the sister of Aaron, brother to Moses. “O Mary...O sister of Aaron.”¹¹

This should be decisive in identifying Mary with Miriam, and placing her in the early period. Mary belongs to the Joshuan tradition.

The Koran also has the curious listing of Jesus immediately after “Jacob and the tribes” — which is just where Joshua would fit in. “We inspired Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes and Jesus and Job and Jonah and Aaron and Solomon and We imparted the Psalms to David.”¹²

Jesus should come last and should follow David, yet he is placed in a much earlier period where he merges with Joshua. Again the evidence fits in.

The possibility is open that Muhammad, during his caravan journeys, had met with marginal Jewish-Christian sects such as the Ebionites and had heard traditions from them that placed Jesus and Mary in the early period. These sects had fled to the farther reaches of Arabia Deserta to escape their fellow-Christians. Now their traditions were finding their way into the Koran. To place Jesus and Mary in the early period is again to note a linkage to Joshua/Jesus.

Another clear duplication is that both Jesuses come out of Egypt. With Joshua, there is the authority of the Exodus story, but with Jesus there is no clear explanation as to how an impoverished Galilean

family found itself in Egypt, and why they left. Matthew invents explanations out of thin air, using “an angel of the Lord” to order the flight into Egypt¹³, and using a proof-text to explain the return: “Out of Egypt have I called my son.”¹⁴

Luke omits the Egypt story, as do the scholar-apologists, but the clue is there. Matthew found a Joshuan source which he felt he had to adapt.

The next stage in the career of the young Joshua was to be named one of the twelve spies sent into Canaan to “spy out the land.” They are to reconnoiter dangerous enemy territory, much as the gospel Jesus and his twelve companions found themselves facing hostile authorities. *“I send you forth as sheep among wolves.”*

Here we turn to a Samaritan text. Joshua was the national hero of the Samaritans. He conquered the land and set up the shrine on their sacred Mount Gerizim — held by them to this day. The Samaritans therefore consider themselves earlier and more orthodox than the Jews of the Jerusalem Temple, and accept only the first six books of the Bible, that is, the Five Books of Moses plus the Book of Joshua.

Understandably, the Samaritans proceeded to enhance and embellish the Joshuan material in the Scriptures, freely inventing episodes that expanded on the triumphs of their hero. One such text, dealing with the spy mission, was published by Moses Gaster. It appeared in the July 1930 issue of the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, with the title “The Samaritan Hebrew Sources of the Arabic Book of Joshua.”

This text — which we will call the ‘Gaster document’ — is in “the ancient Hebrew Samaritan language... There is not a single Aramaic word in the whole text.”¹⁵

Gaster takes this as proof of the antiquity of the document. Among the Samaritans, Hebrew had ceased to be the spoken language by about 200 BC, being replaced by Aramaic, which in turn was replaced in later centuries by Arabic.

However ancient documents written in Samaritan Hebrew, and held in great esteem, continued to be copied and preserved in Hebrew down the centuries till the time when Gaster’s copy was found. Hence the original Gaster document dates perhaps at 200 BC, and of course appeared centuries before the Christian gospels. Quite possibly, the

folklore material preserved by the Samaritans was known to the Jews as well, and this was the conduit by which the material reached the gospel writers.

The document is based on the story of the spy mission into Canaan, found in Numbers 13, 14. In this version Joshua not only “spies out the land,” but confronts the enemy rulers in brief duels, warning them of the wrath to come while concealing his own identity. This duplicates the “second Jesus” who faced the Jewish leaders, as narrated in the gospel accounts. If apocryphal Sirach material can find its way into the gospels, then apocryphal early Samaritan materials can also be used.

Each “Jesus” reconnoiters in enemy territory and keeps secret his true identity — with Joshua that he is head of the invading army, and with Jesus that he is the Son of Man who will come in power and will rule over his enemies. There are “two advents” — one in lowliness and obscurity at the present, and a triumphant appearance in the future. There is the paradox of apparent powerlessness together with sharp confrontations with the “archons” — the ruling powers — and with open challenge and defiance. There is the warning that “the kingdom of heaven is at hand,” then the spy goes on to the next encounter. The main themes of Matthew’s gospel are paralleled in the Gaster document. We give the following examples:

1. In Matthew, Jesus conceals his identity, and there is much bafflement and speculation as to who he really is. “No one knows the Son except the Father.”¹⁶

John Baptist sends emissaries to inquire as to his identity: “Are you he that should come, or do we look for another?”¹⁷

Similar inquiries are found at Matt. 12:23; 13:55; 16:13,14 and 21:10. The “secret” is basic in the gospels.

In the Gaster document, Joshua puts out the story that he is in flight before the oncoming army of the Israelites and conceals the fact that he is one of the spies himself. He tells one king...

“...Twelve princes [i.e., the leaders of the invading army] have come hither and they are beautifully dressed. One of them is more goodly than the others. His clothes are superior to theirs and he is their leader.”¹⁸

Another Canaanite king is told “And with them [the army] is a goodly youth, for he it was who smote Amalek and his people.”¹⁹

This is a naively boastful touch, since here the spy Joshua speaks of himself.

2. In Matthew there is constant movement from place to place. There is the impression of flight to elude the authorities.

“Now when Jesus saw great multitudes about him, he gave orders to depart to the other side [of the Lake].”²⁰

“The Son of Man has not where to lay his head.”²¹

“He departed into a desert place privately.”²²

He is in alien territory and he warns his disciples, “I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves.”²³

In the Joshuan version, the plot requires secrecy and movement from place to place so that each king can receive the warning. They are obviously his enemies, so the danger and menace are built into the story. Matthew assumes the element of danger and menace from the outset. The Jewish authorities are labeled as implacable and deadly enemies. Matthew has replaced the Canaanite rulers with the Jewish rulers, while retaining the Joshuan source.

3. In Matthew, there is simultaneously a proclamation of the “Kingdom of Heaven” and promises of wrath from the same divine source. All who do not accept the new order will be punished or destroyed. The kingdom of heaven — never defined precisely — is a constant theme with Matthew and is referred to 36 times in the text.

At the same time Jesus declares “the children of the kingdom shall be cast into outer darkness.”²⁴

“I have not come to send peace but a sword.”²⁵

The cities of Galilee — home of his own countrymen — will be cast down.

“Woe unto you, Chorazin! Woe unto you, Bethsaida! And you, Capernaum, which are exalted to heaven, shall be cast down to hell.”²⁶

“The Son of Man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend and them that do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire, where there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”²⁷

“For as the lightning comes out of the east and shines to the west, so shall be the coming of the Son of Man.”²⁸

Joshua in turn announces the advent of the army of God and the inauguration of the new order, and he warns the kings of the destruction the Israelites will mete out. As in the army of Cromwell, there is much singing of hymns while they smite the enemy. Here the text clearly resembles the Qumran War Scroll.

The Samaritan version reads:

“They walk with great triumphant shouts and they speak very proudly... They never cease praising and singing hymns day and night to their God... They blow three times with the two trumpets of loud sounding, and their enemies all flee from before them. They know that the angels are surrounding them, and the Name, blessed be He, dwells in their midst. He it is who fights for them against their enemies... And the pillar of cloud goes before them, and all their enemies are destroyed by their hands... It is better for you to flee from them, for they seek to possess your land... The day of your destruction is nigh... The Mighty One in War is with them and He fights for them, and He it is who kills all their enemies.”²⁹

The Qumran version reads:

“And the priests shall sound a blast on the two trumpets used for calling to arms... And the Levites and all the people with rams’ horns are to sound a single blast, a great war-like trump, to melt the heart of the enemy... Thine [God] is the battle and it is not ours... The King of Glory is with us, along with the holy beings. Warrior angels are in our muster, He that is Mighty in War is in our throng. The army of His spirits marches beside us...”³¹

This is clear evidence of the early date of the Samaritan version.

4. Understandably, the rulers in both versions, Samaritan and gospel, become frightened and realize that they are in great danger. In Matthew...

“...they sought to lay hands on him, but they feared the multitude... They consulted that they might take Jesus by subtlety and kill him. But they said, Not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar among the people.”³¹

They are alarmed yet helpless.

In the Joshuan version the mood is one of panic.

“And when the children of Anak [the Canaanites] heard these words, their hearts melted away... their hearts greatly trembled... And when all the nations and kings heard these things from Joshua, then they quaked and trembling seized hold on them. They melted away and there fell upon them fear and terror...”³²

Theme after theme is duplicated.

5. In both cases “Jesus” is betrayed; his efforts come to naught. The betrayal comes from within the “twelve” who accompanied him, and it is done from evil motives. With Matthew, it is the famed treachery of Judas. In the earlier version, the twelve spies return from their mission in Canaan, and Joshua and Caleb give a favorable report:

“The land is exceedingly good. But the other ten men were not like unto them. They thought evil, for evil dwelt within them...They spread an evil report among the people of Israel.”³³

In the foregoing we have pointed to a number of parallels in the two stories: confrontation with enemy rulers while concealing one’s true identity; proclamation of wrath and salvation simultaneously; a pattern of encounter then abrupt movement to the next episode; the two advents one in lowliness, the other in triumph; alarm and panic on the part of the rulers; and betrayal by a companion for base motives.

With all this on the record then the case for the Joshua source appears quite arguable. We will continue with the account given in Matthew, who seems helpless without his Joshuan source.

NOTES:

1. Joseph Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 84
2. Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, 3:17:4
3. Origen, *Homilies on Joshua*, 2:1
4. Origen, *Homilies on Joshua*, 9:8
5. *Matthew*, 1:16
6. *Matthew*, 1:21
7. *Sirach*, 44:1, 46:1,7
8. *Sirach*, 44:19
9. *Koran*, 3:35 – 36
10. *Koran*, 66:12
11. *Koran*, 19:27 – 28
12. *Koran*, 4:163
13. *Matthew*, 2:13
14. *Matthew*, 2:15
15. Moses Gaster, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, July 1930,
article: The Samaritan Hebrew Sources of the Arabic Book of Joshua, 577;
henceforth referred to as the Gaster Document.
16. *Matthew*, 11:27
17. *Matthew*, 11:3
18. M. Gaster, *Gaster Document*, 10
19. M. Gaster, *Gaster Document*, 66
20. *Matthew*, 8:18
21. *Matthew*, 8:20
22. *Matthew*, 14:13
23. *Matthew*, 2:18
24. *Matthew*, 8:12
25. *Matthew*, 10:34
26. *Matthew*, 11:21, 23
27. *Matthew*, 12:41 – 42
28. *Matthew*, 24:27
29. M. Gaster, *Gaster Document*, 34 – 35, 57, 100, 105, 128 - 132
30. *War Scroll* 310, 314, 316; T. Gaster Edition
31. *Matthew*, 21:46, 26:4 – 5
32. M. Gaster, *Gaster Document*, 27, 36, 133
33. M. Gaster, *Gaster Document*, 135, 150

FURTHER DUPLICATIONS TO JOSHUA

“And Moses called to Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, Be strong and of good courage.”

Deuteronomy 31:7

For later episodes in the career of Joshua — with parallels in the gospels — we turn to another Samaritan book containing legendary additions to the Bible. This one is the *Samaritan Chronicle*, dating from the Middle Ages and preserved in Arabic. It is relevant to our inquiry since, as M. Gaster has pointed out, these texts faithfully transmit very early material. The Samaritans, as a sect of Old Believers, and anxious to establish their priority against the Judeans, clung tenaciously to their earliest traditions.

Concerning another late Samaritan text known as the *Asatir*, Gaster declares that much of this material was known to Josephus and used independently by him.

“Josephus, while following the account given in the Sacred Books, weaves into it a mass of legendary material... We find a surprising number of close parallels between Josephus and the traditions embodied in [this book.]”¹

As a corollary, several legendary episodes found in the *Samaritan Chronicle* show clear linkages to the gospel story, meaning that the gospel writers could have gotten the material from contemporary Judaic sources.

We list these parallels to the gospel account found in the *Samaritan Chronicle*:

1. The “missionary career” lasts but one year and has remarkable success. There is a “purification in a great river” followed by the feeding of the multitude in a “messianic feast.” All this in one paragraph of text, which in itself seems remarkable enough.

The text reads:

“And Joshua continued to fall upon one city after another and took possession of them... And it resulted that he, in one year, took possession of all their territories...Then he and all who were with him removed apart for purification. Now there descended from the blessed mountain [Gerizim] a great river that watered the lowlands, and to it the Ruler went down with all his army. When he had completed his purification, then Eleazar the priest offered up sacrifices for them. And they celebrated a grand feast, which was carried out fully and completely. Never was there witnessed a better feast than this, for the people were united.”²

It requires but little change to go to the baptism in the Jordan, and then a feeding of the multitude, so lavish that there were baskets of food left over. But the first account has a bottom layer of plausibility in its terse folklore quality, while the second requires belief in miracle. And there was success on the part of Joshua, while the masses that listened to “Jesus” are summoned up only on the word of the gospel writers

2. There is an imprisonment scene involving Joshua and his ‘cousin’ and it is the cousin who rescues Joshua from evil forces. A dove descends from the heavens and brings about the happy ending. It is emphasized that the apparent defeat of Joshua/Jesus and the deadly danger that he was exposed to were all part of the divine plan of redemption, and were meant to strengthen faith in God. All these themes appear in the gospel version. As to the Samaritan tale, here again we have a folktale that may well have a kernel of historical fact from antiquity, but here treated as legend.

In the Scriptural account, the main body of Israelites crossed the Jordan into Canaan, while the two and a half tribes of Manasseh elected to stay on the far side of the Jordan — but bound by clan covenant to aid their brethren if called upon.³ This forms the basis for the episode.

The conquest was more difficult than the Bible records reveal, or that the one-year triumph in the *Samaritan Chronicle* had related. One scholar writes:

“Several passages in the Bible confirm that the Israelites were not able to overcome the strongly fortified Canaanite cities in the plains ‘for they have chariots of iron and are strong.’⁴ ...the Israelite areas of settlement were thus limited in the main to the hill regions and to Transjordan.”⁵

In the present episode the chariots of iron are transformed into “walls of iron.” It appears that Joshua indeed found himself sorely beset by the Canaanites and was forced to appeal to his “cousin.” The late Samaritan legend hints at what might have happened at one time but has been omitted from the official texts.

The Chronicler gives us his story. In essence, the kings of Canaan challenge Joshua to do battle, pointing to their vast and invincible armies. Joshua sends a defiant reply “to the company of reprobates, rebels, libertines, infidels,” asserting that God will give him the victory.

Upon reading this the kings are overcome with grief and shock. “Woe unto us and our children, we have destroyed ourselves.”

However they are told by “the chief of the magicians” that they can take Joshua secretly, and “a crowd of magicians and wizards and conjurers” carry out the scheme. In the gospel version the arrest is also by trickery, and with many soldiers on the scene. “This is your hour and the hour of darkness.”⁶

The account in the Samaritan version reads:

“When the children of Israel came to Aijalon, before they were aware of it, Joshua and those with him were placed inside seven walls of iron. The plan of the magicians against them

was consummated, but this was in order that the decree of God — may He be exalted — might be accomplished. This was with regard to exalting the renown of Nobah, the king of the two and a half tribes that were beyond the Jordan.

“When Joshua beheld what had come to pass, he remained in great perplexity and exceeding fear. He began to desire of his Lord that a dove might alight upon him from the doves of Nobah his cousin. And he had not finished expressing his desire before the dove alighted in the room, and he praised God, Mighty and Powerful...And he wrote a letter to Nobah... ‘I and my people are imprisoned and perplexed inside seven walls of iron... Truly you know what covenants and compacts exist between us so rise up immediately’”

The dove delivered the letter, and on receiving it Nobah “cried out at the top of his voice ‘My brothers and cousins and comrades! Follow me and reach your brethren! Haste! Haste!’”

The army of Nobah then went to the rescue and wreaked havoc with the besiegers. All then joined in the victory celebration “and they ceased not to commemorate God with hymns of praise and hallelujahs.”⁷

The theme of the episode is obviously aid to the kinsman, and this is conspicuously absent in the gospel version. There John Baptist, cousin of Jesus according to Luke’s gospel, is unjustly put to death. When Jesus gets the news, his only reaction is to “depart by boat privately to a desert place.”⁸

This looks like desertion under fire, behavior that the Galileans would deem unforgivable.

Josephus relates that...

“...at a village called Gema, in the great plain of Samaria, a Galilean was murdered, who was one of a large company of Jews on their way up to the festival [in Jerusalem]. Thereupon a considerable crowd assembled in haste from Galilee with the intention of making war on the Samaritans...”⁹

This incident reveals the character of the Galileans.

The gospel writers show ignorance of the Galileans; however the “dove” appears in Matthew’s gospel at the baptism of Jesus.

“The spirit of God descended like a dove and alighted upon him, and there was a voice from heaven saying, This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.”¹⁰

The dove is the symbol of divine favor and rescue and here the “cousin” is on the scene, namely John Baptist.

The gospel of Luke narrates that John Baptist was the cousin of Jesus, in Luke 1:36, 57, 60.

If we can have a fictional arrest and imprisonment of Joshua by his enemies, then the door is open to a fictional slaying of Joshua by his enemies. Which in turn will bring us to a fictional slaying of “Jesus.” In the gospel version this is the Passion Narrative, dealing with the arrest, trial and execution of Jesus. This is an elaborate, separate story which we will cover in later chapters. Here we will go to the burial story. In the Scriptural account Joshua died in the fullness of old age, and with the greatest of honor and renown for having fulfilled his mission. Here we find a divergent account in the gospels, but with Joshuan elements present in the story.

An examination of the gospel version reveals the bizarre development that the death and burial of Jesus in Matthew’s gospel is a mirror-image of the death and burial of the five kings of Canaan in the *Book of Joshua*. One story is the counterpoint and the reverse of the other. It is as if the enemies of Joshua were determined to inflict upon him the same punishment that he had inflicted on the five kings. The parallels are too numerous to be accidental.

We point to these parallels: the victim is humiliated and mocked before his death; death is by ‘hanging on a tree’ as the equivalent of crucifixion; the hanging lasts till evening; the burial is in a rock, that is, a cave or a tomb hewn out of rock; “great stones” are rolled to seal off the cave; a watch is set over the tomb; and the event is known “until this very day.”

All this may be mere literary coincidence, yet we have seven parallels between Jesus and Joshua. We leave it to the scholar-apologists to explain all this.

In both cases there is the degradation and mockery of a king prior or to execution. Joshua commands the people, “Come near, put your feet upon the necks of these kings.”¹¹

In Matthew's version, the soldiers "bowed the knee before him and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews."¹²

With Joshua we have a slaying and a hanging as two separate acts, one following the other. The prisoners are executed, and after that the corpses are displayed on the trees. "And Joshua smote them and slew them, and hanged them on five trees."¹³

This detail is omitted in Matthew but is found in Acts, where Peter denounces the Jews because of Jesus "whom you slew and hanged on a tree."¹⁴

This retains the original sequence. Luke, in his own gospel, gives the detail that one of the malefactors was "hanged."¹⁵

The burial is at evening. "At the time of the going down of the sun, Joshua commanded that they be taken down from the trees."¹⁶

There is no need to inquire if they are dead, since they had been slain prior to the hanging. The gospel accounts must establish the fact of the death of Jesus after but a few hours on the cross, when all knew that crucifixion was designed to prolong the suffering of the victim, and often endured for days. That is, the gospel editors must tailor the story to fit the original data — which points to Joshua — and arrange for the death to take place after a brief period, and towards nightfall. All these gospel details are suspect.

Joshua then orders that the bodies "be cast into the cave where they had been hiding."¹⁷

Again the script-doctors have to rewrite the story: a cave must be converted to a tomb, and a body that had been rudely cast into a cave must now be given proper burial rites. The gospel editors are in wide disagreement on handling these details, meaning that they have no history. There is only the original tale derived from Joshua that they have to cope with.

Matthew's ingenious solution is to prepare "a new tomb hewn out of the rock."¹⁸

It is big enough to walk around in since the women of Galilee "entered in and found not the Lord Jesus."¹⁹

Can it be that the original was a cave?

In the Joshua episode, the "watch" occurs earlier. Joshua is told that "...the five kings have been found hidden in a cave at Makkedah. And Joshua said, Roll great stones upon the mouth of the cave, and set men by it to guard them."²⁰

That is, the kings are alive and inside the cave, hence a watch is logical under the circumstances. In the gospel version, the “watch” is over a cave, sealed with a rock so large that only a convenient earthquake can move it, and with a corpse inside. Why a watch? The logic eludes the average person.

In the Joshua version, the sequence is plausible: the kings were taken out of the cave, executed, and then their bodies were “cast into the cave where they had hidden, and great stones [were] laid in the cave’s mouth, which remain until this very day.”²¹

It is legendary, yet the events follow in line. And of course there was no need for a “watch” after the corpses were inside.

In Matthew’s version, the ingredients are distributed among different episodes: on Friday the “large stone” is rolled into place; on the next day (the sabbath) the “chief priests and Pharisees” are required to seal the tomb and set the “watch,” along with negotiations with Pilate, also on the sabbath. The contrived and clumsy nature of the various episodes derives from the fact that the source-material, coherent in its own context, is being transferred to a different story.

From the foregoing, we conclude that throughout the gospel of Matthew there is this curious intermingling of the persons of Joshua and Jesus, resulting in a series of contrived and implausible episodes in Matthew’s version. What is significant is Matthew’s readiness to invent episodes that attack and defame the Jews. The Joshuan material provides the framework, then episodes are invented out of thin air to show the Jews as malignant and hypocritical.

Thus on the day after the crucifixion the Jews “made the tomb sure, sealing the stone and setting a watch.”²²

Sealing the stone presumably involved plastering the stone to the tomb. This extensive masonry work takes place on the sabbath, hence the Jews must become sabbath-breakers, while accusing Jesus of this offense.

On Easter morn “there was a great earthquake for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and rolled back the stone from the door and sat upon it.”²³

However the Jews are insult-proof and ignore these miracles. Instead “they gave much money to the soldiers” to hush up the earthquake, and to say instead that...

“...his disciples came by night and stole him away while we slept... So they took the money and did as they were taught; and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.”²⁴

Money conquers all, even miracles.

We must ask why Matthew went out of his way to use Joshuan material when he had the highly historical Jesus of Nazareth as a model, and why he distorted and falsified this material to serve his own agenda. The plain inference is that there was no original. All had to be taken from sources and duly christianized. We have shown this in the “life of Jesus” constructed by Matthew from Joshuan materials.

But if the life (of Jesus) is a fabrication, constructed out of source materials, how much confidence can we have in the crucifixion story — and what sources were used by the gospel novelists for that one? We turn to this topic.

NOTES:

1. *Asatir*, 62, 64
2. *Samaritan Chronicle*, 21
3. *Joshua*, 1:12 – 14
4. *Joshua*, 17:18
5. Y. Aharoni, *MacMillan Bible Atlas*, 68 – 69
6. *Luke* 22:53
7. *Samaritan Chronicle*, 34 – 36
8. *Matthew*, 14:13
9. Josephus, *War*, 2:232 – 233
10. *Matthew*, 3:16 – 17
11. *Joshua*, 20:24
12. *Matthew*, 27:29
13. *Joshua*, 10:26
14. *Acts* 5:30, 10:39
15. *Luke*, 23:39
16. *Joshua*, 10:27
17. *Joshua*, 10:27
18. *Matthew*, 27:60
19. *Luke*, 24:3
20. *Joshua*, 10:17, 18
21. *Joshua*, 10:17 – 18, 27
22. *Matthew*, 27:66
23. *Matthew*, 28:2
24. *Matthew*, 28:12 – 15

 THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PASSION NARRATIVE

“You slew the Just One and his prophets before him.”

Justin, *Dialogue*, 16:4

The passion narrative, comprising the arrest, trial and crucifixion of Jesus, is the central drama of the gospels. In addition to the gospel accounts, many other versions of the Passion were composed during the turbulent second century. These narratives are now labeled “apocryphal” and “non-canonical” because they lost out. We would like to see where Justin fits into this welter of rival crucifixion stories.

He preceded the gospels and he diverges from the gospels in the matter of the divinity of Christ, and it turned out that he was giving the primary tradition. Here we have evidence that the same situation exists as to the passion narrative: Justin diverges and appears to be giving the primary tradition.

In hindsight, we can say that the four gospels emerged as the winners because they appeared to be the most plausible and historical. Especially in the passion narrative the gospel accounts gave a much better version of the events than the “apocryphal” accounts. A particular error of these rejected accounts, which disqualified them, was their emphatic statements that the Jews alone carried out the execution of Jesus. For a crucifixion to take place in a Roman-occupied province, under the iron control of Roman troops, the execution would have to be carried out by Roman troops. Indeed, crucifixions were the very symbol of Roman authority. Therefore any account that had the Jews carrying out the crucifixion of Jesus would have to be rejected as fictional.

Here we find, almost without exception, that the apocryphal texts name the Jews as the executioners, and the canonical accounts name Pilate and the Romans. What, perchance, if the apocryphal texts came first, and the gospels then tacked on the Roman presence to meet the objections of the critics? The gospel version therefore would not be

historical, but merely a revised editorial version of the prior texts. It would be one more “creation of the evangelists.” The story would have to be fictional since it was based on the false Jewish premise of the prior texts, and dating after the apocryphal texts. A false passion narrative brands the Christian case as fraudulent in its entirety. And it will come as no surprise that Justin, with his total hatred for the Jews, comes in this primary group. The Jews alone were responsible.

We can trace out a line of development, starting with versions that narrate an all-Jewish control of the event as the first group. In a second group, Pilate is present but he turns Jesus over to the Jews. In the final version, Pilate carries out the deed under protest, leaving the Jews with the full moral responsibility. “His blood be upon our heads.” The Hennecke edition of the *New Testament Apocrypha* contains a number of these relevant texts.

Texts with the Jews alone responsible:

- Papyrus Egerton 2. “The [Jewish] rulers laid hands on him that they might arrest him and deliver him to the multitude.”¹
- Acts of Peter. “And Peter uttered this reproach (to the devil): You did give Caiaphas the boldness to hand over our Lord Jesus Christ to the cruel throng...”²
- Christian Sibyllines (in the form of a prophecy). “They shall give to God blows with their unclean hands, and with their polluted mouths polluted spittings... They shall pierce his sides with a reed because of their law.”³

Texts with Pilate present, but the Jews responsible:

- Acts of Pilate.

“Pontius Pilate to his emperor Claudius [sic] greeting... The Jews through envy have punished themselves and their posterity with a fearful punishment... All the people of the Jews acknowledged him [Jesus] to be the Son of God, but the chief priests were moved by envy against him: They seized him and delivered him to me... I ordered him to be scourged, and handed him over to their will. And they crucified him and set guards at his tomb.”⁴

- Gospel of Peter.

“But of the Jews none washed their hands, neither Herod (Antipas) nor any of his judges. And as they would not wash, Pilate arose... And he (Antipas) delivered him to the people on the day before the unleavened bread, their feast. So they took the Lord and pushed him in great haste... And they brought two malefactors and they crucified the Lord between them...”⁵

- Tertullian, a leading Christian, wrote:

“The Jews brought Jesus to Pontius Pilate, at that time procurator of Syria, and by the fierceness of their demands, extorted it from Pilate that Jesus should be handed over to them to be crucified. Jesus himself had foretold that they would do this.”⁶

This is dated about AD 200. At this late date Tertullian did not consider the gospel version as binding and canonical, and he makes the Jews alone guilty.

The four New Testament gospels state that Pilate ordered the crucifixion and the Roman soldiers carried it out, but even here there is an element of uncertainty. Three of the gospels – Matthew, Luke and John – show traces of the earlier tradition. Mark alone is “correct.”

J. Blinzler writes:

“... in the Codex Syrus Sinaiticus... in the Gospel of St. Matthew, there is a description of the trial proceedings which, in contrast to our Greek text, makes it appear that it was the Jews alone who ill-treated, mocked and crucified Jesus.”⁷

The present text of Matthew has a suggestive line: “Pilate took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this righteous person. See ye to it.”⁸

How is the “multitude” supposed to understand the “see ye to it”? It seems to be permission to go ahead.

The gospel of Luke also has Pilate surrendering Jesus “to their will,” after which the crucifixion takes place, and only ten lines later do the Roman soldiers show up, as an afterthought and after the event.

“Pilate delivered him to their will and they led him away... And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified him... And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him.”⁹

Just who are the “they” who did the crucifying? In the plain context of the episode, it is the same “multitude” to whom Jesus was delivered.

The gospel of John has a similar gap between the “delivery of Jesus,” the journey to the crucifixion, and the belated appearance of the soldiers.

“They cried out, Away with him, crucify him! Pilate said to them, shall I crucify your king? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar. Then he delivered him to them to be crucified and they led him away. And he, bearing his cross, went forth to the place called Golgotha. There they crucified him and two others with him... Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments.”¹⁰

There is a clumsy insertion of “soldiers” who were invisible in the prior eight verses. Only the Jews had Jesus in custody, as a candid reading of the text will show. The “soldiers” come in as an editorial amendment.

As the above evidence indicates, three of the gospels have the historically impossible version of having the Jews alone in charge. This is strong evidence that they are to be linked to the earlier versions, and that late editorial touches have been applied to make them appear historical. These late touches cannot rescue narratives whose origins are fictional. And if the gospel Passion narratives turn out to be fabricated, then of course the Christian case cannot be historical.

Turning again to the writings of Justin, we find that they belong to the earlier tradition. Justin charges again and again that the Jews killed Jesus and were the only ones involved in the affair. The Romans are left out altogether and it is Justin's clear intent that they be left out. There can be no doubt as to Justin's intent; he belongs in 'group 1.'

Thus he tells the Jewish disputant Trypho:

"You alone are suffering the things that you are now rightly suffering, that your lands should be desolate and your cities burnt with fire...For you slew the Just One and his prophets before him..."¹¹

"Not only did you not repent, but when you learned that he had risen from the dead, you appointed chosen men and sent them into all the civilized world, proclaiming that 'a certain godless and lawless sect had been raised by one Jesus of Galilee, a deceiver whom we crucified.'"¹²

Another pleasantry:

"You are found to be always idolators and murderers of the righteous, so that you even laid hands on Christ himself, and still stay on in your wickedness, cursing them who prove that He who was crucified by you is the Christ."¹³

These charges are thrown at Trypho, who is dutifully silent while all this is going on. At the very least Trypho should have mentioned Josephus, and replied to Justin:

"Haven't you read your own gospels? All four narrate that Pilate was in charge and that Roman soldiers carried out the crucifixion. I call your attention to the account in Josephus: 'Pilate, upon hearing him [Jesus] accused by the leading men amongst us, condemned him to the cross.'"¹⁴

The silence of Justin and Trypho as to Josephus stands out as a major reason for dating the Josephus-passage well after Justin.

Similar accusations against the Jews abound in the *Dialogue* and in the *First Apologia*. The latter work is supposed to instruct the emperor (Marcus Aurelius) and here Justin cites proof texts again establishing “the guilt of the Jews.”

Quoting Isaiah, he writes: “I have spread out my hands to a disobedient and gainsaying people, who walk in a way that is not good.”¹⁵

Then Justin adds: “Jesus Christ stretched forth His hands, being crucified by the Jews.”¹⁶

In lecturing the emperor on Jewish guilt, Justin is of course exempting the Romans from any part in the affair. It is obvious that Justin could not have written as he did had he known of the gospel version. It is also obvious that if Justin is giving the primary tradition that the Jews alone executed Jesus, then the gospel writers are correcting Justin and are inventing history out of thin air by bringing in the Roman presence. This exposes the whole passion narrative as a fabrication.

As to how the gospel writers constructed the passion narrative, we have mentioned that John Crossan called Mark’s version “magnificent theological fiction,” but Crossan goes on to explain how the magnificent fiction was put together. Crossan names the sources, and curious to relate, one of the sources intersects with Justin, who gives a variant version of the episode in question.

As an example of how Mark created, Crossan traces out the development of one episode known as the Mockery Scene. The source is named by him as a book by Philo of Alexandria, called *Concerning Flaccus*. There the target of the mockery was King Herod Agrippa himself, then visiting Alexandria. The Greeks seized a harmless street vagrant named Carabas, and then...

“...the rioters drove the poor fellow into the gymnasium and set him on high. They put on his head a sheet of byblos bark for a diadem, clothed the rest of his body with a rug for a royal robe, while someone else handed him a piece of papyrus for a sceptre... Then from the mob standing around him there rang out a tremendous shout hailing him as Marin, said to be the name for ‘lord’ in Syria. For they knew that Agrippa was a Syrian by birth and was king over a large domain in Syria.”¹⁷

The episode, suitably christianized, appears next in an early Christian work known as the Gospel of Peter:

“But of the Jews none washed their hands, neither Herod [Agrippa] nor any of his judges...And he [Agrippa] delivered him [Jesus] to the people on the day before the unleavened bread, their feast. So they took the Lord and pushed him in great haste and said, ‘Let us hale the Son of God, now that we have gotten power over him.’ And they put upon him a purple robe and set him on the judgment-seat and said, ‘Judge righteously, O King of Israel!’ And one of them brought a crown of thorns and put it on the Lord’s head. And others who stood by spat on his face and others buffeted him on the cheeks...”¹⁸

Here we come to Justin. The same episode appears in his First Apologia.

“Jesus Christ stretched forth his hands, being crucified by the Jews who were speaking against him and denying that he was the Christ. And as the prophet said, they tormented him, then set him on the judgment-seat and said, Judge us.”¹⁹

The details of judgment-seat and “judge us” do not appear in the gospels. The plain inference is that Justin is also using the Alexandrian source.

Crossan then cites the mockery scene in the Gospel of Mark as the end product.

“So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas to them. And after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified. Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace, and they called together the whole cohort. They clothed him in a purple cloak, and after twisting some thorns in a crown, they put it on him. And they began saluting him, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’... Then they led him out to crucify him.”²⁰

The sequence then is Philo, Gospel of Peter, then Gospel of Mark.²¹ In the original, as reported by Philo, there is no sign of Jesus, no villainy by the Jews, nor is there even any harm done to Carabas. In Gospel of Peter we have a violent passion narrative, with the mockery included, but still not historical enough, since the Roman soldiers are absent. Finally Mark gets it right: there is a mockery scene and the Romans do the crucifying. The outrage of spittle and buffeting is still carried out by the Jews, this time by the judges of the Sanhedrin: "And some began to spit on him, and to cover his face and to buffet him..."²²

Crossan has named Philo as the source for a major scene. He also alludes to Philo for two other episodes in connection with Mark's narrative: the amnesty on a festival day,²³ and scourging a prisoner prior to execution.²⁴ He does not directly name these as Mark's source but leaves open the possibility. All this indicates that Philo's book should be studied in detail, to see what else is relevant. When this is done the result is rather startling: a large number of episodes in the gospel passion narrative appear to derive from Philo. No fewer than twenty-four can be found. We must ask why Crossan stopped short at three and did not go much further into the content of Philo's book, since he rejected Mark's version outright. We can guess that Crossan prudently refrained from venturing further into this dangerous territory, since it would question the very existence of the passion narrative. His colleagues have also stayed clear.

Bultmann quotes approvingly a statement that the gospels are little more than the crucifixion story:

"Since the main emphasis lay upon the conclusion, the Passion and the Easter story, it has quite correctly been said, 'With some exaggeration one might describe the gospels as Passion Narratives with extended introductions.' (M. Kähler)."²⁵

If the story drops out, then the gospels are dismantled.

Raymond E. Brown, in his enormously researched book *The Death of the Messiah*, virtually equates the story with Christianity itself. He gives an extensive list of reasons for its prominence, then states: "In sum, from every point of view, the passion is the central narrative in the Christian story."²⁶

Of the reasons he gives, we are most concerned with the historical one:

"Historically, Jesus' death was the most public moment of his life, as figures known from Jewish or secular history – Caiaphas, Annas, Pilate – crossed his path... [thereby] anchoring Christian belief about the Son of God to a Jesus who was a human figure of actual history."²⁷

That is, Jesus becomes historical only through his contact with named historical figures – otherwise he remains a figure of myth and theology. These figures are described for us by gospel writers given to magnificent fiction, and remarkably ignorant of the actual scene.

We turn now to our source for the passion narrative, namely the writings of Philo of Alexandria.

NOTES:

1. Henneke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 1:96
2. Henneke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 2:290
3. Henneke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 2:734 – 735
4. Henneke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 1:477 – 478
5. Henneke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 1:183 – 184
6. Tertullian, *Apologeticus*, 21:18
7. J. Blinzler, *Trial of Jesus*, 10
8. *Matthew*, 27:24
9. *Luke*, 23:25, 33, 36
10. *John*, 19:15, 23
11. Justin, *Dialogue With Trypho*, 16:2, 4
12. Justin, *Dialogue With Trypho*, 118:2
13. Justin, *Dialogue With Trypho*, 93:4
14. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18:64
15. *Isaiah*, 65:2
16. Justin, *First Apologia*, 35
17. Philo, *Concerning Flaccus*, §36 – 39
18. *Gospel of Peter*, 1 – 3
19. Justin, *First Apologia*, 34
20. *Mark*, 15:15 – 20
21. J. Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus? Exposing the Roots of Anti-Semitism in the Gospel Story of the Death of Jesus*, 126 – 128
22. *Mark*, 14:65
23. J. Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus? Exposing the Roots of Anti-Semitism in the Gospel Story of the Death of Jesus*, 111
24. J. Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus? Exposing the Roots of Anti-Semitism in the Gospel Story of the Death of Jesus*, 118
25. R. Bultmann, *Form Criticism*, 65
26. R. E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, vii
27. R. E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, vii

THE ALEXANDRIAN BACKGROUND

“My innocence doesn’t make the matter any simpler... In the end, out of nothing at all, an enormous fabric of guilt will be conjured up.”

Franz Kafka, *The Trial*

For a sketch of the life of Philo, we give this extract from the Loeb edition of his works:

“It has probably seldom happened that the characteristics of a man’s home and birthplace have been so faithfully reflected in his writings as they are in the writings of Philo of Alexandria. A citizen of the place which was at once the chief home of the Jewish Dispersion and the chief centre of Hellenistic culture, he owes his position in the history of religious thought to that remarkable fusion of Hellenism and Judaism which we find in his voluminous writings ... It is not necessary to discuss the little that is known of Philo’s life. It will be enough to say that he came of a rich and influential Jewish family and was trained in Greek as well as Jewish learning.

“The one public event in his life was his taking part in an embassy sent by the Jews of Alexandria to Caligula to complain of the persecutions which they had been suffering. This is dated AD 39 – 40, and as Philo in writing his account of the mission at some time later speaks of himself as an old man, it has been generally held that he was born about 20 BC. The date of his death is uncertain, but it will be seen that his lifetime covers the lifetimes of Jesus Christ and John Baptist, and much of that of St. Paul. There is no intimation that he knew anything of their life or work.”¹

From the foregoing we can divide his career into two parts: the first, covering most of his life, was that of the ardent Hellenist who attempted a vast synthesis combining Judaism with Greek philosophy and outlook. The brief second part, of two or three desperate years, was in the political arena and concerned with the fate of the Alexandrian Jews. By remarkable and fatal coincidence, in each part his writings were of profound influence. His religious writings paved the way and were the transition to much of early Christian theology, especially the doctrine of the Divine Word (or Logos). And his political-historical tract contains much of the material for the passion narrative, as we will show.

If born about 20 BC, then he passed the first thirty-five years of his life under the reign of Augustus Caesar, whom he is tireless in praising. It was the high noon of the Jewish-Hellenic Diaspora, centered in Alexandria. The Jews had been in the city since its founding in 325 BC by Alexander, at which time the Jews were allotted one of the five districts into which the city was divided, and which the Jews had long since outgrown.

All this came to an end with violent events amounting to civil war, that broke out between the Jews and Greeks in Alexandria in the spring and summer of 38. Because of the heavy loss of life and property on the Jewish side (and with losses on the Greek side as well, though Philo does not mention these), both sides were ordered to send embassies to Rome in the inquiry that inevitably followed.

Philo headed the Jewish delegation, and he gives his account of events in two books. Here he is no longer the devotee to Greek culture nor does he praise Roman rule; instead he is the embittered enemy and accuser. The first book, *Concerning Flaccus*, is an invective against the Roman governor, Flaccus Avillius, who is accused of openly siding with the Greeks and aiding them. The Greeks are described as the deadliest of enemies. The second book, *Legation to Gaius*, is an invective against the emperor Gaius (Caligula), described as deranged in the belief in his own godhood, and the sworn enemy of the Jews for denying this godhood. Flaccus and Caligula were safely dead by the time the books were written — slain by assassins — but the books show unswerving courage in denouncing the highest officials in the Roman empire.

What is of particular importance to our inquiry is the content of the first book. It is an account by an eyewitness, intensely partisan, and for that reason it emerges as a unitary dramatic work. All the parts fit in place, and it is a “passion narrative” in itself. The ordeal of the Jewish community is set forth as a martyrdom, and as a studied confrontation between good and evil, innocence and injustice. It is a morality tale, and in the end God intervenes to rescue and vindicate. There was indeed a remarkable rescue of the community at its darkest hour by the wholly unexpected overthrow of Flaccus, and Philo understandably calls it a miraculous event. This means that the story could be taken over en bloc and christianized.

Because the ordeal befell the community, this could be summed up and represented by an individual, labeled “the Servant.” This is a basic motif in Judaic martyrologies, as mentioned in a prior chapter.

“It is characteristic of Israelite thought to pass from the collective to the individual, and to represent the group by a single individual... This probably happened with the concept of the Suffering Servant. What was first a collective figure, representing the community, became the figure of an individual who in himself embodied its mission.”²

For example, Isaiah interchanges the singular and plural in the same sentence: “You are my witnesses, saith Jehovah, and My servant, whom I have chosen... Yet hear now, O Jacob My servant, and Israel, whom I have chosen...”³

Again we have an explanation for the transfer of Philo’s account to the gospel version. The community became the single martyr figure.

In our treatment of Philo’s narrative we have taken the literary license of describing collective injuries to the Jewish community as befalling the “Servant.” This gives us the linkage between Philo and the gospel passion, and explains the transfer of material. A further point: there is a second “martyrology” in Philo’s account, this one dealing with the downfall of Flaccus. Several episodes from this part of the story have been transferred to the gospel Jesus. Here again we take literary license and describe these as befalling the “Victim,” to indicate Flaccus as the one named by Philo.

Philo was a devotee to the Greek theatre, with numerous allusions to Greek plays in his writings. A lifetime of Hellenic culture makes him recast the career of the central figure, Flaccus, in the classic pattern of Greek tragedy, with clear parallels to *Oedipus Rex*. A noble aristocratic figure at the outset will be mutilated and destroyed at the end, and all proceeds with step-by-step inevitability. Philo is telling a good story. Anyone looking for a martyrology would readily take this one.

As to the steps by which Philo's account reached the gospel editors, we have the *fait accompli* that several episodes did reach them, as Crossan admits. We know also that the Greeks put out their own version of the Alexandrian events in a text known as *Acts of the Pagan Martyrs*, possibly as a counterstatement to Philo. This version may have been the conduit to the gospel narrative. Other sources will be treated in a later chapter.

A comparison between Philo and the gospel will show that Philo's original stands up better:

- a: A given detail or incident in Philo's account will be granted the highest authenticity as that of an eyewitness, even where it is openly partisan, while the same incident, when transferred to the gospel setting, will show errors and implausibilities. This demonstrates the artificial nature of the gospel version. It is derivative.
- b: A standard criterion used by New Testament scholars for the genuineness of a given gospel episode is the "criterion of embarrassment." The argument is that the writer of an artificial account would leave out material that shows human shortcomings if he could, but he had to put these in as part of the authentic tradition. As examples, the scholars offer as proofs of genuineness that the gospels reveal human flaws and weaknesses on the part of Jesus and the disciples: the despair of Jesus in the Garden, the panic and flight of the disciples to avoid arrest, the disbelief of the disciples at the news of the Resurrection at Easter morning. But now we find that these very details are there in the source. They are in Philo's account. The gospel writers simply transferred them from Philo to the gospel. Hence this line of argument cannot be used by the apologists.

With this in mind we give our list of parallels, following the sequence of events in the gospel passion, although Philo — as will be explained — follows his own sequence dictated by the Alexandrian events:

1. We have a Judas-figure, fully created. He behaves honorably at first and arouses no suspicion. He is “in charge of the purse” and only later is he led into betrayal.
2. Judas is led to the betrayal by the malice and dishonesty of the enemies of the Servant. They are moved by “envy.”
3. There is a “temple act” involving the deliberate disruption and violation of the religious precincts of the Jews.
4. There is a Last Supper, attended by a small group of friends. The motif of finality and farewell is spelled out.
5. The Garden Scene presents the fear and despair of the Victim at his approaching and inevitable death. It takes place at night and he is alone.
6. The Arrest is made by a detachment of soldiers, fully armed.
7. Throughout Philo portrays the Servant-community as innocent and the opponents as cruel and merciless - duplicating the gospel motif.
8. The companions show cowardice and fear lest they be arrested as well. They desert their leader.
9. A Herodian king visits the city and meets with the Roman governor to discuss the fate of the Servant.
10. There is a Mockery Scene, wherein the target is attired in royal garb and receives mock homage from his enemies.

11. In the trial of the Servant false charges are placed against him through malice and calumny.
12. There is a spy mission, by an observer who conceals himself among the servants and does not reveal his identity.
13. The Servant is scourged and beaten prior to crucifixion.
14. The tragic events take place on a national holiday, when it would be appropriate to show clemency and offer release.
15. Mob instigators bully and threaten the Roman official, and force him to carry out the sentence instead of clemency or amnesty.
16. Judas repents and makes full confession of his sins.
17. Judas meets his death by being torn to pieces in an open field.
18. For the crucifixion, there is a *via dolorosa* on the way to death that the doomed Victim must travel.
19. The crucifixion takes place on “the third hour” which is nine in the morning on the Roman reckoning, as in Gospel of Mark.
20. There is jeering and abuse by the onlookers.
21. The garments of the Servant are divided by his enemies.
22. The death of the Servant leaves his followers hopeless and despairing, however there is miraculous news of the revival of hope at early dawn.
23. This is doubted at first, but later confirmed and the doubts are removed.
24. All gather in joyous celebration, with praise to God for the rescue.

With these 24 points available, why did Crossan stop at 3? And if 24 points of duplication can be found in a single document, covering every major element of the passion narrative, are we not entitled to name this as the source of that narrative? Philo has provided enough material to label the gospel account of the passion as fictional in its entirety. And as Bultmann and Raymond Brown have pointed out, the passion amounts to the gospel itself, hence the whole structure must go.

The above catalogue is sobering enough, but two additional points should be mentioned:

- Josephus had certainly read Philo's account. All the Jews in the empire felt the ground shake under their feet after the Alexandrian events, and were well aware of the sequence of events. Hence Josephus would know of the many duplications to the gospel account. Again we have the argument of silence, indicating the ignorance of Josephus.
- Josephus fills in and supplements Philo's account in several places. Again this indicates that he knew nothing of "Jesus." We will cover this Josephus material in later chapters.

We now give Philo's account in detail, using his sequence, with comparisons to the gospel version at each point. The curtain rises...

NOTES:

1. Philo, Loeb Classical Library Edition, volume 1, ix – x
 2. H.H. Rowley, *Relevance of the Apocalyptic*, 34
 3. *Isaiab*, 43:10, 44:1
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THE ALEXANDRIAN PASSION BEGINS

Oedipus: I have wealth, power, craft of statesmanship, kingly position — I am admired by all!

Teiresias: I tell you, no man that walks upon the earth shall be rooted out more horribly than you.

Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*, scene 1

Prologue: The Servant-community welcomes an outsider who is placed in charge of the funds. He is of noble appearance and inspires confidence. No one thinks to suspect him. This man, Aulus Avillianus Flaccus, was appointed governor of Egypt in AD 32 by the emperor Tiberius. Philo presents him in his best light at the outset: “He gave to all appearances a multitude of proofs of high excellence... He revealed a brilliant and kingly nature, and bore himself with dignity...”

He took office and...

“...was sagacious and assiduous, quick to think out and execute his plans... In quite a short time he became thoroughly familiar with Egyptian affairs, intricate and diversified as they are... All matters connected with accountancy and administration of the revenue he managed successfully... He judged important cases and humbled the arrogant... He held this office for six years, and for the first five of these, while Tiberius Caesar was still alive, maintained peace and held command with such activity and vigor that he excelled all his predecessors.”¹

This is the highest praise. Men less qualified and less noble would advance to rule the empire, but another fate was reserved for him.

Gospel: It is clear that Egypt required someone to supervise ‘accountancy and administration of the revenue’ and that this man must be an outsider, sent in from Rome. It is less easy to understand

why a mendicant Galilean sect required a treasurer to hold the bag. They were under orders to carry no scrip and to give no thought to the morrow, taking only the food and lodging offered them each day. And if they needed a man for fiscal matters, they did not need to recruit one from the other end of the country, where "Judas" was supposed to come from. Philo, reporting history, gives us a clear, identifiable person. The gospel writers, dealing with myth and legend, must invent and improvise to come up with a Judas figure. The parallels always work out against the gospel version.

ACT 1

SCENE 1

In which the trusted friend is tempted into evil and the betrayal begins.

Flaccus administered his office in this kingly manner for the five years that Tiberius remained alive. The emperor died AD 37 and was succeeded by Gaius Caligula, a collateral "grand-nephew." Some say that Caligula hastened the demise. The young emperor soon gave signs of mental derangement and began a manhunt against the associates of Tiberius, whom he blamed for the death of his parents. Flaccus had been a close friend to Tiberius and was high on the list. His execution seemed inevitable. Again the Oedipus motif: a forgotten crime of the past returns to destroy the hero.

As news of the executions by Caligula came to the city, Flaccus lost control of himself, in what seems to us as an unroman manner. "He lost all hope and could no longer keep any grip on affairs, so utterly enfeebled was he and incapable of solid judgment."²

Affairs came to a standstill, and the Greeks saw at once what was involved. One writer surmises that the Greeks were in the picture at the very outset. One of the leading Romans executed, one Macro, had been accused by an Alexandrian Greek, Isidorus, whom Flaccus himself had ordered exiled to Rome.

“The fall of Macro may well have given Flaccus special cause for alarm, since it seems likely that Isidorus had a hand in it. Flaccus had to face the possibility that Isidorus would seek vengeance for his exile by employing the same tactic against himself.”³

With the governor in this desperate situation, the Greeks made their offer, which Philo sums up:

“We must find you a really powerful intercessor to propitiate Gaius. Such an intercessor is the city of Alexandria, which has been honored from the first by all the Augustan house and especially by your present master. And intercede it will if it receives some boon. You can give it no greater satisfaction than by surrendering and sacrificing the Jews.”⁴

The city was indeed a powerful intercessor. The cheap, limitless grain from Egypt was essential to the Italian economy. Nor was the offer too shocking; no one thought of violence at that time. All the Greeks wanted was to “keep the Jews in line.”

The Jews were advancing irresistibly from the status of resident aliens to the claim of equal citizenship with the Greeks. Flaccus was now asked to roll the Jews back to the status quo ante, that of four hundred years back. He agreed; he would have been bent on suicide if he had not. He showed his partisanship in court cases...

“...by refusing to give a fair and impartial hearing to the parties in disputes, and leaning to one side only. In all matters he gave the Jews no right of free speech, for whenever any Jew approached he turned away while to all others he made himself readily accessible.”⁵

Gospel: The betrayal by Flaccus proceeds logically, step by step. At this point there is not even any illegality. We are not required to put in any villain thesis. However, in the case of Judas, the betrayal is sudden, catastrophic, and without known motive. The mystery of why Judas betrayed is matched by the mystery of why

he joined the disciples, why Jesus tolerated him in the ranks, why he took such a paltry sum for the deed, what he hoped would be a better outcome, why he was not seized by the disciples upon open exposure at the Last Supper, why he was needed to identify a well-known man, why he was not used as a witness at the trial, why he repented, and why the repentance took the useless form of suicide rather than a last-minute attempt to rescue the prisoner. None of these crude objections have been allowed to intrude on the gospel drama. The story requires shock-value and emotionalism, not rational cause and effect.

SCENE 2

*In which the King of the Jews is taunted and mocked by the gentiles.
His royal robes are burlesqued.*

We are following Philo's sequence and he places the Mockery Scene at this point. The background of the episode is omitted by Philo — it has some embarrassing details (we get these separately from Josephus). As Philo tells it, the cold war continued for several months in Alexandria. The Jews then learned, with consternation, that Flaccus through neglect or design had failed to forward to Caligula the message of loyalty and congratulations drawn up by the Jewish community upon the emperor's accession. All cities and national groups in the empire were expected to send messages of this sort, and failure to do so would be deemed a grave affront.

In this confused and anxious situation the conflict was suddenly sharpened by the unexpected arrival in Alexandria of Herod Agrippa, a grandson of Herod the Great. He was a nephew of Herod Antipas of Galilee, and a close friend of Caligula's. Like all of his house, Agrippa was a carrier of disaster.

Josephus fills us in that several years before, the Roman governor of Syria, who had overall authority over the provinces of Judea and Samaria, had run Agrippa out of the region for bribery, influence peddling and general meddling in the affairs of the city of Damascus. Agrippa was without title or office at that time. He proceeded to

Alexandria, where he mulcted the leading Jewish families out of a sizeable amount of money, then went on to Rome since he had been brought up in the household of Augustus. In Rome he became very friendly with the young Caligula, which says much for both of them, and one day expressed the hope that Tiberius would depart this life so that one more worthy could inherit the empire. The remark was overheard and reported. He got out of jail a year and a half later, on the death of Tiberius.

One of Caligula's first acts on becoming emperor was to release his friend. As a reward for his loyalty Agrippa was given the tetrarchy of his late uncle Philip, a realm to the east of Galilee and the only territory available at the time. It seemed paltry to Agrippa and he stayed in Rome a year afterwards in the hope that something better would turn up. If anything unfortunate happened to Antipas in Galilee, or if Judea were to be restored to Jewish rule, then he wanted to be around. He was not to leave before the worst possible hour in Alexandria.

When his departure could no longer be decently postponed he went to make his farewells to Caligula. Then out of the blue the emperor offered the suggestion that the best way to travel would be by way of Alexandria because the wind was blowing in that direction. The city was hundreds of miles away from the logical Palestine ports such as Caesarea or Joppa and it was the last place Agrippa wanted to see, but there was no help for it. One did not argue with the whims of Gaius Caligula. It all seems designed to confirm Tolstoy, that history is made up of absurd random accident.

Here Philo takes up the narrative. The ship arrived within sight of the Alexandria lighthouse in the afternoon but Agrippa showed no desire to enter the harbor until dark, if at all. "His reason for making his visit in such an unassuming way was that he wished if possible to slip out of the city quietly and unobserved by the whole population."⁶

This is Philo's discreet but accurate explanation.

Probably Agrippa had no intention of going ashore and would have gone on to a Palestine port, but the Jewish leaders got to him and gave him to understand that he owed them a favor, all things considered. He was the one man able to face up to Flaccus and he had to take care of the all-important loyalty message to Caligula.

Agrippa met several times with Flaccus but got nowhere since the governor was himself in a position from which he could not retreat. Meanwhile Agrippa's ornate bodyguard "of spearman decked in armor overlaid with silver and gold" was becoming very noticeable in the city, and one scholar guesses that an "ostentatious parade" was made by this bodyguard through the city.⁷

This, with the pomp which Agrippa bestowed on himself at all times, led the Alexandrians to react with their favorite weapons — gibe and ridicule.

"The lazy and unoccupied mob of the city, a multitude well practiced in idle talk, who devote their leisure to slander and evil-speaking... spent their days at the gymnasium jeering at the king and bringing out a succession of gibes against him."⁸

The Greeks also played on the fears of Flaccus, the motif of 'envy and jealousy' now entering into the story:

"But jealousy is part of the Egyptian nature, and the citizens were bursting with envy. They considered any good luck to others as misfortune to themselves. In their ancient, and we might say innate hostility to the Jews, they resented a Jew having been made a king just as much as if each of them had thereby been deprived of a throne. And the unhappy Flaccus was again stirred up by his companions with incitements and appeals calculated to make him as envious as themselves. 'His stay here,' they said, 'is your dismissal. The dignity of the honor and prestige which invest him surpasses yours. He is attracting all men to him by the sight of his bodyguard of spear-men.'"⁹

The situation built up and waited for a spark.

"If the unruly mob gets a starting point for this misconduct in any direction they do not halt there, but pass on from one thing to another, always engaging in some fresh form of violence."¹⁰

The disaster was ignited by the most inoffensive of individuals, but who would become a sinister character upon his transformation and entry into Script B:

“There was a certain lunatic named Carabas, whose madness was not of the fierce and savage kind which is dangerous both to the madman himself and those who approach him, but of the easy-going, gentler kind. He spent day and night in the streets naked, made game of by the children and the lads who were idling about.”¹¹

This is our introduction to the renowned brigand and insurrectionist “Barabbas.” The ringleaders of the crowd came for him, and took him to the gymnasium for the revels.

“The rioters drove the poor fellow into the arena and set him on high to be seen of all. They put on his head a sheet of papyrus bark spread out wide for a diadem, clothed the rest of his body with a rug for a royal robe, while someone who had noticed a strip of papyrus thrown away on the road, gave it to him for a sceptre.”¹²

Now doughty men-at-arms stand at attention on either side of their lord, with sticks on their shoulders. Courtiers approach to do him reverence. They bow the knee, salute the madman whom they mock and set at naught. “Hail, King!”

The cry is repeated in Aramaic: “Maran! Maran!”

A great king from the east is enthroned before them.

“As in some theatrical farce, he was given the insignia of kingship, and then young men, in imitation of a bodyguard, stood on either side of him, carrying rods on their shoulders as spears-men. Then others approached him, some pretending to salute him, others to sue for justice or to consult him on state affairs. Then from the multitude standing around him there rang out a tremendous shout, hailing him as ‘Marin’ which is said to be the name for ‘Lord’ in Syria.”¹³

Gospel: We come here to a major duplication to the gospel account. This has been acknowledged by a number of scholars, among them Crossan, as noted. The parallels are clear: a man in the city who is a real or pretended king and who is hated, namely Agrippa; a man in abject and wretched condition, namely Carabas; the victim is stripped naked: "...he spent day and night in the streets naked"; he is costumed with crown of reed, robe, and sceptre; he is saluted with mock-ceremony; he is hailed with the title of king in a semitic language 'Maran' to indicate that he is 'King of the Jews'; and we have the presence of 'soldiers', i.e., the mock-spearmen. Philo has not left out one point.

As Matthew puts it:

"And they stripped him and put on him a scarlet robe. And when they had plaited a crown of thorns they put it on his head, and a reed in his right hand. And they bowed the knee before him and mocked him, saying Hail, King of the Jews."¹⁴

Luke, as if to emphasize the source, adds the details of a Jewish king, also named Herod, visiting a city outside his realm, with a bodyguard of soldiers, and on bad terms with the Roman official:

"And Herod with his men of war set him at naught and mocked him, and arrayed him in a gorgeous robe and sent him to Pilate. And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends again, for before they were at enmity between themselves."¹⁶

Where did that little item of "enmity" come from? The only possible source is Philo.

Then too the name Carabas is over-close. "The name is Aramaic. Cohn conjectures Barabas or Barabbas. Professor S.H. Hooke in a private letter observes 'It is a Hellenized form of the Aramaic word, just as Barabbas is.' "¹⁶

“It is possible that a reminiscence of a certain fool at the time of Agrippa I, whose name is given as Carabas by Josephus but which may have been Barabbas — C and B are easily confused in the writing of Semitic languages — may have colored the story.”¹⁷

The article is in error in naming Josephus rather than Philo, but makes the point that the letters are quite similar. In the Hebrew C and B differ only by a small stroke of the pen. As to how poor Carabas became a brigand, a careless reading of the passage would fasten upon the words “fierce, savage, dangerous” in Philo’s text which define the later role.

The Mockery Scene appropriately ends Act One.

NOTES:

1. Philo, *Concerning Flaccus*, §2 – 8
2. Philo, *Concerning Flaccus*, §16
3. E. Smallwood, *Legatio ad Gaium*, 15
4. Philo, *Concerning Flaccus*, §23
5. Philo, *Concerning Flaccus*, §24
6. Philo, *Concerning Flaccus*, §28
7. E. Smallwood, *Legatio ad Gaium*, 18
8. Philo, *Concerning Flaccus*, §33
9. Philo, *Concerning Flaccus*, §29
10. Philo, *Concerning Flaccus*, §35
11. Philo, *Concerning Flaccus*, §36
12. Philo, *Concerning Flaccus*, §37
13. Philo, *Concerning Flaccus*, §39
14. Matt, 27:28 – 29
15. Luke, 23:11 – 12
16. H. Box, *Flaccus*, 36
17. Jewish Encyclopedia, article: "Barabbas"

THE ALEXANDRIAN PASSION IN FULL PLAY

“Our enemies laugh among themselves.”

Psalm 80:7

ACT 2

SCENE 1

In which an act of violence and outrage takes place against the temples of the Servant-community.

Agrippa left Alexandria to continue his journey homeward, filled with rage, but having done all the damage he could. The Greeks were now in as bad a spot vis-à-vis the emperor Caligula as Flaccus was. All knew that Agrippa would make a furious complaint to his boon companion, and that Rome was of course bound to support its client-kings. The Greeks “...had dared, both in word and deed, openly and indirectly, to insult a king, a friend of Caesar’s, a person who had received Praetorian honors from the Roman Senate.”¹

Given the homicidal rages of Caligula and his unlimited power, anything was possible.

With events closing in on them, and forced to take some action, the Greeks made their next move and it was a stroke of genius. It had become notorious that Caligula was deranged on the subject of his own divinity, dressing each day in the garb of whatever god that suited his fancy.

“When the moon shone bright and full he always invited the Moon-goddess to his bed, and during the day would indulge in whispered conversations with a statue of Capitoline Jupiter, pressing his ear to the god’s mouth, and sometimes raising his voice in anger.”²

The Greeks were now aware that all depended on winning over the emperor. They did this perfectly by breaking into the synagogues all over the city, setting up images of Caligula, and then holding prayer services to the god. Violent fighting broke out, with the Jews forced to throw out the images and to treat the synagogues as desecrated. The Jews were neatly turned into enemies of Caligula and the Greeks were now his worshippers — the Greeks who never tired of showing their contempt for Rome were now devotees to the Caesar-cult. The point of no return had been reached.

Gospel: The “Temple act,” explosive and dramatic in the extreme, has caused much doubt and perplexity among the scholars. Jesus bursts into the Temple precincts, knocks over the tables of the money-changers, drives them out with whips, and in Mark’s version, brings the Temple services to a halt. “He would not permit any man to carry any vessel through the Temple.”³ It took the Roman army four years to do that. The questions come to mind at once. How could Josephus remain silent if the event had actually taken place? Why did the Temple guard not intervene? They were there precisely to prevent disorder, and with authority to cut down anyone who disrupted the services. And presumably Jesus with his family had made pilgrimages to the Temple over the years. Surely he knew the Temple arrangements. Why the violent outburst at this time and not before?

The strangeness of the gospel episode suggests that it was taken from the Alexandrian source and novelized by the gospel writers.

SCENE 2

In which the Servant is beaten and scourged prior to crucifixion.

The events soon escalated to violent clashes throughout the city. Philo does not mention casualties among the Greeks, but writes tersely, "Now the Jews though naturally well-disposed for peace could not be expected to remain quiet whatever happened."⁵

The mob was now ready for anything, and the Greek leaders were aware that the tide had turned in their favor. The bloodshed had inflamed passions and made compromise impossible, and the governor Flaccus remained demoralized and incapable of any decision.

At this point the Greeks decided to play for very high stakes and they won. They decided to put forward the extreme program which they had scarcely dreamed of a few months earlier. This was to get the governor to issue a formal decree wiping out all Jewish rights and privileges in the city and turning the clock back four hundred years.

"A few days later he issued a proclamation in which he denounced us as foreigners and aliens and gave us no right of pleading our case, but condemned us unjudged."⁵

We have a brutally unjust sentence. It was an open invitation to the Greeks to go ahead with "enforcing" the proclamation, now clothed in legality and immunity.

A massive assault and *Kristallnacht* took place. There was pillaging on a large scale, the Jews being driven out of the four gentile districts of the city and crowded in a starvation siege in the original Jewish fifth district. Philo describes the martyrdom of the Servant-community in detail: every Jew who ventured outside the district in search of food was butchered after the appropriate tortures, including breaking the limbs, setting the victims on fire, and literally tearing them to pieces. And for the Jews inside the area there was pestilence, stifling summer heat, and lack of food and water, added to the dense overcrowding. It was an all-out pogrom and "deportation."

On his side of the offensive, Flaccus ordered the arrest of all members of the Jewish council of elders, corresponding to the Sanhedrin and numbering seventy-two members. Thirty-eight of the

seventy-two were found and were publicly flogged in the theatre (in Greek cities this was an outdoor stadium-like structure). Philo does not give the reason for this punishment or for the crucifixions that took place later. We can guess that there were casualties on the Greek side and the Jews were branded as the aggressors.

“Of this council of elders, thirty-eight in number were found in their houses and were arrested by Flaccus. He ordered them straight-away put in bonds, and marshalled a fine procession through the middle of the market for these elderly men, trussed and pinioned, some with thongs and some with iron chains. They were then taken into the theatre. It was a spectacle most pitiable and unfitting for that place. As they stood with their enemies seated in front to signalize their disgrace, he ordered them all to be stripped, and then lacerated with scourges commonly used for the degradation of the vilest malefactors.”⁶

Here a touch of gallows-humor comes in. The lower orders, when punished, had been flogged with the lash whereas the Alexandrian citizens, if corporal punishment were ordered, had been struck with a flat blade. Among the “privileges” of the Jews had been the latter penalty. Philo must now point out that the punishment was not only outrageous but the wrong kind. The nobler penalty...

“...was observed in the case of our people by the predecessors of Flaccus and by Flaccus himself in his first years of office... The Alexandrian Jews, if they appeared to have done things worthy of stripes, were beaten with whips more suggestive of freemen and citizens.”⁷

Philo wants the decent penalty.

Gospel: It would seem that flogging a prisoner would be the most direct and simple of procedures, yet the four gospel writers are not at all clear on what was going on. In Matthew and Mark, the scourging is made preliminary to the crucifixion, with the event

decided upon. Luke and John make the scourging a substitute for crucifixion, with every indication that the prisoner was to be released after that. Only the intervention of the Jews brings about the crucifixion at that point. Luke and John manage to disagree further: in Luke the scourging is a threat that is not carried out; in John it is carried out, but Pilate is blocked in his plan to release the prisoner. Philo's account is clear and direct, but the usual chaos and contradiction appear in the gospel accounts. The writers work independently from the common source.

SCENE 3

*In which the Roman official is required
by custom to release a prisoner for the feast.*

However Flaccus yielded to the mob and ordered the Servant sent to the cross. Here we have a duplication as striking as any we have come upon, and a corresponding weakness of the gospel account as obvious as any, with the question of copying again impossible to evade. The crucifixions took place on August 31st, which had been set aside as the official birthday of Gaius Caligula. The Roman month had been renamed August in honor of Augustus Caesar. Gaius, who was of the Augustan house, had selected the 31st day for his birthday. Philo correctly points out that this was to be a day of rejoicing and festival, and should not have been desecrated with crucifixions. He then makes the key point that the decision was forced on the Roman official by mob pressure: he did it "to conciliate the mob," as the account explicitly states. Philo, who had carefully studied Jerusalem events, shows no awareness that the same drama had been played out but eight years earlier in the other city. We give his testimony:

"I leave out of account that if the [Jewish] elders had committed a host of crimes, Flaccus ought to have postponed the punishments out of respect for the season. Officials who conduct their administration as they should, do not pretend to honor but really do honor their benefactors [i.e., Caesar].

“They should make a practise of not punishing any condemned person until the notable celebrations in honor of the birthdays of the illustrious Augustan house are over. Instead he made the celebrations an occasion for illegality, and for punishing those who did no wrong, whom he could have punished at a later time if he wished. But he hurried and pressed on the matter to conciliate the mob, who were opposed to the Jews, thinking this would help to bring them around to make his policy[†] their own.

“I have known cases when on the eve of a holiday of this kind, people who have been crucified have been taken down and their bodies delivered to their kinfolk, because it was thought proper to give them burial and allow the customary rites. For it was fitting that the dead also should have the advantage of some kind treatment upon the birthday of an emperor, and also that the sanctity of the festival should be maintained. But Flaccus gave no order to take down those who had died on the cross. Instead he ordered the execution of the living, to whom the season should have offered a short-lived but not permanent reprieve. This would postpone the punishment, though not remit it altogether.”⁸

† – The line is not clear and the editor does not explain what “policy” is meant.

Gospel: If we are dealing with two separate incidents, Philo and the gospel, then it must be granted that Philo is logical throughout, while the gospel account has numerous improbabilities. The condition for clemency is clearly present in Alexandria, where it is put forward as the proper thing to do — not as a rigid rule by any means. However no one has found a custom of “releasing a prisoner for the feast” in Jerusalem, though the scholars have looked high and low for this famous custom. An amnesty, by definition, is a prerogative of authority, which can be bestowed or withheld on discretion. It cannot be extorted or demanded by those in the inferior position, as then it is no longer a privilege of authority. Philo says merely that Flaccus “ought to have” granted it, but it is not compulsory in Jerusalem or anywhere else.

In Alexandria, the mob has the official very much on the defensive since he needs them more than they need him. However Philo elsewhere describes Pontius Pilate as “a man of inflexible, stubborn and cruel disposition” and notes his “frequent executions of untried prisoners and his endless savage ferocity.”⁹

Not exactly the man to show tender solicitude for Jewish customs, especially since the custom cannot be located. We may add that to support the amnesty scene the scholars are compelled to adopt the timetable of John’s gospel. This places the Passover as beginning on Friday evening, with the earlier part of the day as secular. There would be little point in “releasing a prisoner for the feast,” if this feast had taken place the previous evening, but that is what the first three gospels assert. In what is a jarring discrepancy, these gospels place the Passover as commencing on Thursday evening, with the Last Supper as the Passover meal. Thus to support the amnesty scene, the scholars should logically reject three gospels to support the fourth — or at least explain a trial on the Passover.

For the foregoing reasons we can well conclude that Philo is giving us the authentic form of the episode, and the gospel versions are derivative.

SCENE 4

In which the Servant is mocked, and is then crucified on the third hour.

The crucifixions follow immediately after the scourging of the elders, with the inference that less prominent members of the Jewish community were sent to the cross. We continue the account:

“He [Flaccus] gave orders for the execution of the living... and he did this after maltreating them with the lash in the middle of the theatre and torturing them with fire and the sword. The show had been arranged in parts. The first spectacle lasted from dawn till the third or fourth hour and consisted of Jews being scourged, hung up, bound to the wheel, brutally mauled

and then hauled forth for their death march through the middle of the orchestra. After this splendid exhibition came dancers and mimes and flute players, and all the other amusements of theatrical compositions.”¹⁰

The Greeks were in fine form.

Gospel: Mark’s gospel sets the crucifixion at the “third hour,” i.e., nine in the morning. The gospels adopt the Græco-Roman system of starting the day at daybreak and counting the hours from that point. The present convention, in reading the gospel, is to set this at six a.m. thus putting ‘the third hour’ at nine. None of the “Galileans” seem aware that the Jews start the “day” at the prior evening — one of the many errors regarding Judaism found in the gospels.

To return to Mark: he writes, “And it was the third hour and they crucified him.”¹¹

Mark’s third hour may well be an echo of the Alexandrian events. Given the crowded events set down in his gospel — a morning trial before the Sanhedrin, a first hearing before Pilate, a transfer of the case to Herod Antipas, a second hearing before Pilate, the costume and mockery scene and the processional to Golgotha, placed outside the city walls — then a crucifixion at nine in the morning becomes so improbable that a gospel writer would not think to put it down on his own initiative. The likelihood is that Mark found it in his source, namely Philo.

The other gospels reject Mark’s third hour and venture guesses of their own. As Josephus puts it, “their writings have no basis in sure knowledge, but present the facts as conjectured by individual authors.”¹²

Luke and Matthew place the crucifixion at noon, since they aver there was darkness over the earth from noon till three (from the “sixth” to the “ninth” hours). In John’s gospel the trial is still going on at noon: “And it was the preparation of the Passover, and about the sixth hour, and Pilate said to the Jews, Behold your king.”¹³

Presumably the actual crucifixion takes place some time after that. Thus we have three different accounts from the eye witnesses. Again we have the strange fact that a clear direct statement in the source will have chaotic and divergent treatments in the gospels.

SCENE 5

*In which the Victim attends a last supper with his companions,
then is seized treacherously. His companions desert him,
and he is led away to his doom.*

Flaccus was to have several carefree weeks after he had solved the *Judenfrage* on August 31st. He had all the Greeks with him, but he forgot that the jovial emperor had him on the death list after all. It may be that Agrippa was able to forward a complaint from the Holy Land to Rome, but this is shaving the timetable rather close. The downfall of Flaccus occurred in early October, as Philo dates it, during the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot), which occurs at that time. We are left with the possibility that again Caligula acted on impulse, out of the blue, and ordered the action from Rome.

There is something close to miracle in the way events worked out. At any rate Philo brings in the religious lesson: "Justice, the champion and defender of the wronged, the avenger upon unholy men and deeds, began to enter the lists against him... God, it is clear, takes care for human affairs..."¹⁴

The events that befell Flaccus are carefully set forth by Philo as punishment and recompense. However, we come to a sequence of events which in Philo's version apply to "Judas" — that is, to the traitor Flaccus, while in the gospel the events turn up as applied to Jesus. As we shall see, there is a Last Supper, a Via Crucis, and a Garden Scene, all of them befalling the traitor, but transposed to "Jesus" in the gospel. Flaccus now takes center stage.

There has always been an ambiguity, a covert linkage, between Judas and Christ. These two alone wager their lives on the outcome while the others have a lesser role. In some variant gospels put out by heretical

sects, it is Judas who goes to the cross instead of Christ. This theme was used in Ignazio Silone's novel, *Bread and Wine*, and the identification is made explicit. The traitor, Murica, informs on his comrades to the fascist police, then repents of his deed. What follows is a studied duplication of the Passion.

The Prisoner is mocked by the police, just as the Roman soldiers did the mocking:

“Then they crowded round him and put a chamber pot on his head... they put a broom in his right hand... and they took a red carpet off the floor and wrapped it round him in mimicry of royal purple.”

After the death of the traitor his parents reenact the Eucharist: “This is his bread, you know, the bread he can no longer eat. This is his wine, the wine he can no longer drink.”

Step by step, Flaccus goes his own way, but it parallels the other version. Philo, caught up in his hatred for this man, is unaware that he has created a dramatic and, at the end, a pitiable figure. A writer looking about for material would be quite correct in taking several passages from the ordeal of “Judas” and ascribing them to “Jesus.” To indicate the ambiguity of source we will use the word “Victim” rather than “Servant” and continue with our summary of Philo's book.

For the arrest scene Philo is directly on target eight times in a row. Either he has a rare first edition of the gospel, or Jesus is under a strange compulsion to duplicate events that will occur eight years after his death. The parallels all relate to the Last Supper or the Arrest Scene:

- a) There is a small gathering involving close companions.
- b) It is described as a ‘feast.’
- c) It is held in the home of a third party.
- d) There is a spy mission; an outsider comes in secretly to observe the proceedings, and he mingles with the servants. (Will he be challenged and will he deny it thrice?)
- e) The arrest takes place just as the Victim raises a glass of wine; at that moment he foresees his own death, and a mood of doom and prophecy is established, with the wine linked to impending death.

- f) The arrest is made by soldiers armed with swords.
- g) His companions are terrified and all desert him.
- h) He is led away under arrest, and it is stated with finality that this will be his last supper on earth where he will be at peace.

All these are found in a tense passage of little more than one page of text, with scarcely a word wasted. It would take something like desperation to argue that all this is mere coincidence to the gospel version and that it did not influence the gospel writers.

We give Philo's account:

"A centurion named Bassus was sent from Italy under orders from the emperor, along with a company of soldiers whom he commanded... When it was evening the ship was brought to land. Bassus disembarked with his men and went forward without recognizing or being recognized by anyone... Learning that the garrison commander as well as Flaccus were feasting with someone, he hurried with unabated speed to the house of the giver of the feast, by name Stephanio, one of the freedmen of Tiberius Caesar.

"It was in Stephanio's house that the two were being entertained, and Bassus, keeping in the background a little way off, sent in one of his men attired as a servant to reconnoiter, hoping by this artifice to maintain secrecy. The soldier made his way into the dining hall in the guise of a servant of one or other of the visitors. Having taken a careful look around he returned with his information to Bassus.

"Bassus, learning of the unguarded condition of the entrances and the scantiness of Flaccus' retinue — for barely ten or fifteen of his household slaves had accompanied him — gave the signal to his companions and rushed in suddenly. Some of the soldiers took their stand along the dining hall, with swords in their girdles, and they surrounded Flaccus before he saw them, since he was drinking the health of some particular person and toasting the company.

“But when Bassus came forward into the middle of the room Flaccus saw him and was at once struck speechless with consternation. He wished to rise but when he looked at the guard around him, he knew even before he heard it what Gaius wanted to do with him. He knew what orders had been given to the newcomers and what would be his fate in the immediate future. For the mind has a remarkable power of seeing all at once, and hearing altogether, the successive events which will cover a long space of time.

“As for his fellow-guests, each of them rose shuddering and petrified with fear, lest his presence in Flaccus’ company at the feast was a crime destined for punishment. For it was unsafe to flee and moreover impossible, since the entrance had been occupied in advance. Flaccus himself was led away by the soldiers, upon orders from Bassus. Thus it was from a convivial gathering that he made his final departure.”¹⁵

So Philo reports the Last Supper and the Arrest Scene. It lacks only a farewell discourse by Flaccus to his companions. Philo then appends the moral:

“Such was the unprecedented blow which fell upon Flaccus, carried off like a prisoner of war in the country in which he was governing. It was caused, I am convinced, by his treatment of the Jews, whom in his craving for aggrandisement he had resolved to exterminate utterly.”¹⁶

The very force of the declaration convinces us, as if we needed it, that he could have had no knowledge of any gospel parallels. He is reporting the original event.

Gospel: Of the parallels noted, we will confine ourself to two of these since they are among the most interesting and dramatically effective in the narrative. One is the spy mission of Peter, and the other is the flight of the disciples. It is in episodes of this nature that the gospel story gains its highest credibility. There is the abruptly human, vivid and immediate scene, with the feeling that “it could not have been invented therefore it has to be true.”

The flight of the disciples carries conviction not only because it is so understandable, but because it is “an admission against interest,” which always impresses a jury. If it damages the case and shows the saints in a very human role then the argument arises that an editor would have omitted the scene. Since it is there it must have happened.

Similarly the spy mission appears as a rash and desperate act on the part of Peter, which rather improves on the original since he shows fear when exposed and proceeds to deny his own participation. Again it becomes a good argument in favor of the historicity of the passage.

The human weakness argument holds up very well until we note the parallels in Philo. We now have the alternate explanation that the gospel writers had the good sense to incorporate this material into their accounts. We have the source narrated by Philo rather than the gospel history. The duplications are too numerous to suggest otherwise.

With the arrest of Flaccus, the curtain falls on Act Two.

NOTES:

1. Philo, *Concerning Flaccus*, §40
2. Suetonius, *Gaius Caligula*, 22
3. Mark, 11:16
4. Philo, *Concerning Flaccus*, §48
5. Philo, *Concerning Flaccus*, §54
6. Philo, *Concerning Flaccus*, §74
7. Philo, *Concerning Flaccus*, §79
8. Philo, *Concerning Flaccus*, §81 – 84
9. Philo, *Legation to Gaius*, §301
10. Philo, *Concerning Flaccus*, §85
11. Mark, 15:25
12. Josephus, *Contra Apion*, 1:15
13. John, 19:16
14. Philo, *Concerning Flaccus*, §104
15. Philo, *Concerning Flaccus*, §109 – 115
16. Philo, *Concerning Flaccus*, §116

THE ALEXANDRIAN PASSION CONCLUDES

“Justice, the champion and defender of the wronged, the avenger against ungodly men and deeds...”

Philo of Alexandria, *Concerning Flaccus*, 104

ACT 3

SCENE 1

In which the Servant-community is miraculously resurrected at dawn, and all who had been in deepest despair now rejoice at their salvation.

Flaccus had an untroubled month after celebrating the emperor's birthday, culminating with an excellent dinner at Stephanio's. The Jews were trapped in the ghetto at the other end of the city. Philo now gives us the “evangel.” There will be a resurrection scene, here applied to the community, but transferred to the person of Jesus in the gospel account.

“At the time of the arrest of Flaccus the Jews were holding the national feast of the autumn equinox [i.e., Tabernacles] in which it is the custom of the Jews to live in tents. But nothing of the festal proceedings was being carried out. The [community] rulers, after suffering deadly and intolerable injuries and outrages, were still in prison. Their misfortunes were regarded by the common folk as shared by the whole nation, and the special sufferings which each of them experienced individually left them extremely depressed... Sorrow laid them prostrate through their powerlessness to find any remedy for their great miseries.

“They were in this very painful condition, oppressed by an overwhelming burden. But while they were crowded in their houses because night had fallen, there came some messengers who announced that the arrest of Flaccus had been made. They supposed that it was no true story but was something fabricated in order to try them, and they were still more pained at what seemed a mockery and a snare. But when a tumult arose in the city, then the night-watchmen were running up and down and horsemen were constantly riding back and forth to and from the camp at full speed.

“Some of the people, stirred by so unusual an event, came out of their houses to get information as to what had occurred. For it was clear that there was some upheaval. And when they learned of the arrest and that Flaccus was now in custody, then with hands outstretched to heaven they sang hymns and led songs of triumph to God who watches over human affairs... All night long they continued to sing hymns and songs of praise, and at dawn they poured out through the gates and made their way to the beaches close at hand.

“Standing in the most open space they cried aloud with one accord, ‘Most mighty King of mortals and immortals, we have come here to call on earth and sea, and air and heaven — to give Thee thanks... For the common enemy of the nation — Thou hast brought low.’”¹

There is a long hymn of praise at this point, which we have condensed.

Gospel: It is plain that Philo has given us the dominant themes: the despair of the disciples; the motif of being ‘locked in their rooms’ because of fear: understandable fear in Philo’s version, but ‘fear of the Jews’ in the gospel version; and the disbelief at the news at first. In the gospel version, the women who went to the tomb and then announced the Resurrection are not believed: “their words seemed as idle tales.”²

As usual, Luke is closest to the source.

Luke has also copied several lines of the dawn psalm of Philo almost verbatim, and transferred them to the “disciples” in Jerusalem: “They lifted up their voice to God with one accord and said, Lord, you are God, and have made heaven and earth and sea and all that is in them,”³ followed by a quote from the Psalms wherein the mighty are laid low.

Luke has the interesting gall to copy a Judaic author and Psalmist in order to compose a scene clearly aimed at the Jewish authorities.

With the rescue of the Servant-community, the rest of the book is concerned with the fate of Flaccus, now the Victim. The linkage to the gospel account continues.

SCENE 2

*In which the Victim is accused by his enemies,
is condemned, and journeys towards his death.*

We are following the sequence in Philo, where, as we suggested, the career of Flaccus “after the fall” takes on tragic dimensions. This part of the story finds Luke’s gospel and Acts coming more and more to the fore.

Flaccus was brought as a prisoner to Rome to face Caesar, (as was Paul), and there Flaccus got a full dose of false testimony. The two ringleaders of the Greeks, Lampo and Isidorus, had gotten there with uncanny speed, apparently before he did, and were ready to express the deep indignation of the Alexandrians against this evil man. This seemed the best way for the Greeks to extricate themselves from ties to someone on the losing side. To double-cross their ally was quite in order.

Gospel: In describing these two accusers Philo provides useful leads on how to portray “scribes and Pharisees.” Lampo, the scribe, had been employed as court clerk where he specialized in falsifying evidence:

“He remodelled and rearranged the documents and turned them upside down, while he picked up money at every syllable... a pen-murderer whose writings had done multitudes to death... in return for the accursed fee, better described as hire, which he received.”⁴

Allied with him was Isidorus, the demagogue, who was...

“nothing behind him in villainy, pandering to the mob, practised in producing disturbance and confusion, a foe to peace and tranquility... ever at pains to keep in contact with him an irregular and unstable horde of promiscuous, ill-assorted people... who launched accusations with no foundation, spinning long lying screeds of ribald doggerel.”⁵

In Luke’s version, the Jews “stirred up lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company and set all the city in an uproar.”⁶

“The Jews which had come down from Jerusalem stood round about and laid many and grievous complaints against Paul, which they could not prove.”⁷

This is all part of Luke’s “creativity.”

Lampo had in his time run afoul of the Romans and had gotten a two-year ordeal of drawn-out court appearances, which has been compared to the two years Paul spent in prison in Caesarea, as Luke would have us believe. Philo writes:

“Lampo had been put on trial for impiety to Tiberius Caesar and as the trial had dragged on for two years, he had broken down under it. For the ill-will of his judge had concocted postponements and delays, since he wished to keep hanging over Lampo the fear of the uncertain future for as long as possible, and to render his life more painful than death, even if there should be an acquittal on the charge.”⁸

Here one scholar notes: “The parallel to Paul’s case is obvious... It may be merely accidental coincidence, though I think this very improbable.”⁹
Again Luke copies.

SCENE 3

In which the Victim must travel his via dolorosa on the way to execution.

As to Flaccus, after the hearing in Rome with objective testimony from the two Greek experts, the prisoner was banished to a remote barren isle in the Aegean, to which Caligula would send the killers in due course. Flaccus realized this. One did not reach the highest echelons without knowing the rules of the game. The doomed journey is described in language which the gospel of Luke echoes:

“He again travelled the road from Rome to Brundisium which he had travelled a few years before, at the time when he had been appointed governor of Egypt and its neighbor Libya, so that the cities which then beheld him puffed with pride, parading the grandeur of his good fortune, might once more behold him covered with dishonor instead. Fingers pointed at him and reproaches poured upon him.”¹⁰

However some expressed compassion: “Whenever he disembarked the people flocked thither, the baser natures out of malice and the rest, whose way it is to find lessons of wisdom in the fate of others, to sympathize.”¹¹

Luke: “And there followed after him a great company of people and of women, who also bewailed and lamented him.”¹²

In all this we are never told what Flaccus was charged with and why he must die. It could not be for acts against the Jews, since Philo's own delegation in Rome, once he got there, was treated with great hostility by Caligula. It seems that in a passion play there is no room for logic. Something violent has to happen and that explains everything. The medium is the massacre.

The sea voyage to the place of exile has Luke busily taking notes. There is a storm, and a tabulation of stops along the way.

“Crossing the Isthmus of Lechaem to the opposite coast and coming down to Cenchreae, the port of Corinth, he was forced by his guards, who refused him any kind of halt, to embark at once on a small merchant ship [not a grain ship bound for Rome?]. They put to sea, where the violence of a contrary wind caused him to suffer a thousand discomforts, and only with difficulty did they arrive at the Piraeus. When the tempest ceased he coasted along Attica to Cape Sunium, and then continued his journey along the series of islands, namely Helene, Cia, Cythnus and the rest.”¹³

Luke: “And we sailed thence, and came the next day to Chios, and the next day to Samos, and tarried at Trogyllium, and the next day we came to Miletus...”¹⁴

The wretched prisoner arrived finally at the tiny isle of Andros, and makes the familiar prophecy: “As I journey in my misery it is as though I were bearing the corpse that is myself to a tomb... I die a long, drawn-out death in which consciousness still lives.”¹⁵

Luke: “Behold, we go up to Jerusalem... to be delivered unto the gentiles... and they shall scourge and put to death...”¹⁶

Upon arrival at the island he at times acted out the role of the Gadarene lunatic:

“His wild gestures were just like those of a madman. He would often jump about and run up and down and fling himself on the ground. Then he would cry out, ‘I am Flaccus who had among his subjects great forces of infantry and cavalry.’”¹⁷

The gospel version reads:

“He had broken the chains to pieces and no man could control him. Always, day and night, he was in the mountains and the tombs, crying and cutting himself... And he said, My name is Legion.”¹⁸

SCENE 4

*In which the Victim, alone at night, abandoned by all,
gives way to despair at his approaching fate.*

He admits his role as a traitor and makes full confession and repentance.

Here we have the Garden Scene, which provides a remarkable blending of the roles of Jesus and Judas. We have the despair and abandonment and loneliness of Jesus, together with the confession of Judas. Towards the close of the drama Philo provides his protagonist with a long soliloquy. At last we find out why Judas repented. It appears that in the Greek theatre the villain was required to go center stage in the final scene and announce his guilt to the audience. This was known as the "palinode" or recantation, therefore Philo puts it in. The scene has an intuitive dramatic rightness: the loneliness, the despair, the night, the knowledge of impending death and the dramatic imperative that demands the confession. No one has explained why Judas acted as he did. Philo gives us the answer.

"A few months later Flaccus bought a small piece of ground and spent much of his time there in solitude. He bewailed with tears and groans that this should be his fate. It is said that once upon a midnight he became possessed as in a mystical frenzy, and coming out of the shelter he had built there, he turned his eyes upward to heaven and the stars.

"Beholding that vast spectacle, he raised his voice. 'King of gods and men,' he cried out, 'indeed You do not disregard the Jewish nation, nor do they report Your providence incorrectly. All who say they do not find You a champion and defender go astray from true belief. I am clear proof of this, because all the acts which I madly committed against the Jews have befallen me. I allowed them to be robbed of their possessions — for that I had my heritage from my father and mother taken from me, besides all I received by gifts and benefactions. I cast on them the slur that they were foreigners without civic rights — therefore I lost my rights and have been driven into exile from all the habitable world. Some I marched into the

theatre and ordered them to be maltreated before the eyes of their bitterest enemies — I was not marched into one theatre or one city but paraded through all Italy to Brundisium, and through all the Peloponneses to Corinth, and past Attica and the islands to Andros my prison.

“I killed some and when others killed I took no steps to punish the murderers. That the avenging furies await me I know full well. The forces of punishment are already standing at the barriers and press forward eagerly for my blood. Every day or rather every hour I die in anticipation, and suffer many deaths instead of the final one.”¹⁹

Philo adds:

“He often became frightened and terrified, and his limbs shivered and shuddered. For the one thing which by nature is capable of consoling human life, hope the comforter, he had lost.”²⁰

Luke, as usual, comes closest and is the only gospel to supply physical details: “And being in agony he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was as great drops of blood falling on the ground.”²¹

Gospel: The Garden Scene in the gospel is also cast in the form of a soliloquy, since there is no one present or awake to hear the prayer uttered by Jesus. It is the only example of the soliloquy form to be found in the New Testament. Granting all poetic license to the gospel writers, we must ask why they departed from their standard narrative form to give us a scene exactly duplicating Philo in presentation, stage setting, hour of night, and mood of prayer, resignation and terror. The evidence detonates on the page that the scene was copied from Philo.

SCENE 5

“Now this man Judas bought a field with the rewards of his iniquity, and falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out.”

Acts 1:18

The ordained hour came for Flaccus. He saw the killing party in the distance, and this man who had revealed a brilliant and kingly nature, who had commanded the legions, now ran for his life like a frightened animal.

“He struck out from the road and raced away from them through the rough ground, forgetting perhaps that Andros is not the mainland but an island, in which speed is no use... The assassins never lost a moment in pursuing him. When they had caught him, some of them at once dug a pit while others violently dragged him along, though he was resisting and screaming and struggling hard. The result of this is that he ran upon the blows as does a wild beast, and his whole body was pierced with wounds... The whole place was flooded with the blood which poured like a fountain from the many veins which were sundered... As his corpse was dragged to the pit, most of the parts fell asunder.”²²

Gospel: Luke faithfully copies the detail that ‘the whole place was flooded with blood’; “All his bowels gushed out, and it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their language ‘Akeldama’ that is, ‘field of blood.’”²³

This was known to all the inhabitants except Matthew, who supplies a variant ending: “And Judas cast down the pieces of silver in the Temple and departed, and went away and hanged himself.”²⁴

As usual, he prefers to work with the Hebrew script, copying the death of Ahitophel, who sought to betray David: “Ahitophel went away to his city, put his household in order, and hanged himself.”²⁵

Luke works with one source and Matthew with another, indicating that we are dealing with a fictional event. The passion narrative is being constructed out of source materials — of which the main one was Philo, but other sources were used.

As for the Alexandrian events and the story he has told, Philo sums up the moral: “Such was the fate of Flaccus, who thereby became an undeniable proof that the help that God can give was not withdrawn from the Jewish nation.”²⁶

It is clear that Philo has composed a unified, well-planned drama that moves in a straight line from the opening scene of high promise to the unmarked grave on the lonely isle. And each episode in the story finds a parallel in the gospel Passion. Crossan, as noted, had limited himself to three episodes in the account to find gospel parallels. We can now state that the entire book was used by the gospel writers to construct their passion narratives.

ADDENDUM

*In which the events in Alexandria,
amounting to civil war, called for a hearing in Rome.*

The events in Alexandria, amounting to civil war, called for a hearing in Rome. Philo headed the Jewish delegation, and he gives his account of what transpired in a work with the title *Legation to Gaius* (i.e., the emperor Caligula). The rival Greek delegation included Isidorus and Lampon, ringleaders of the Greek faction, also Apion, whom we have met through Josephus.

Philo reveals that the hearing before Caligula was a grim farce. For the affairs of the most important city in the empire Caligula had deigned to grant a few moments while he was preoccupied with furnishing and decorating two of his villas outside Rome, these in the gardens of Maecenas and Lamia. As he darted from room to room giving instructions on the decor, he would call out questions over his shoulder. The Jewish and Greek envoys would have to scramble after the deranged emperor, trying to get a word in.

Philo gives the opening scene:

“We were brought into Gaius’ presence, and as soon as we saw him we bowed low to the ground with the greatest reverence and punctiliousness, and we greeted him with the title ‘Augustus Imperator.’ His reply was so polite and kind that we despaired not only for our case but also for our lives. For with a sneering grin he said, ‘So you are the god-haters, the people who do not believe that I am a god. I am acknowledged as a god by all other nations but am denied that title by you.’ Then raising his hands to heaven he uttered a Name which it is a sin even to hear, let alone to pronounce.

“The envoys from the other party were overjoyed, believing from these first remarks from Gaius that their case was already won. They waved their arms about, danced up and down, and called him by the title of all the gods.”²⁷

As a brutal insult to the Jews, he had shouted the Hebrew name Jehovah (pronounced by the Jews “Adonai” — “our Lord”). A further and more deadly blow came soon after, when it was learned that he planned to have a gigantic statue of himself placed in the Temple in Jerusalem. The project was halted by his assassination, but Philo’s book ends on a note of despair while Gaius’ verdict was yet awaited:

“How hard it was that the future of the Jews everywhere should be at stake in our persons — we, the five envoys. If Gaius were to give in to our enemies what other city would be quiet? What synagogue would be left unmolested? Which of our political rights would not be overthrown?”²⁸

The war with Rome would start twenty-five years later.

Without fail, in every instance where independent Jewish testimony is allowed into the record, there is challenge and contradiction to the Christian case. Philo’s account contains a memorandum submitted to the emperor, listing examples where the Romans respected Jewish customs and traditions. This memorandum reveals

a contradictory version to the Superscription Scene in the gospel, wherein Pilate posts an inscription offensive to the Jews and refuses to remove it.

We give Philo's version:

"Pilate was an official who had been appointed procurator of Judea. With the idea of offending the Jews rather than honoring Tiberius, he set up gilded shields in Herod's palace in the holy city. These bore no figure but only the inscription which stated the name of the dedicator and the name of the person being honored."²⁹

The inscription then was to "Tiberius Caesar," but by placing this demonstratively in Herod's palace, the plain intent was a taunt at lost Jewish sovereignty, which now was taken over by a Roman ruler. The shields meant "Tiberius, King of the Jews."

The Jews protested,

"...choosing as their spokesmen Herod's four sons and other officials, and besought Pilate to undo his innovation. ... But Pilate, who was a man of inflexible, stubborn and cruel disposition, obstinately refused [*What I have written — I have written*]. The Jews then shouted, 'Do not cause a revolt! Do not cause a war! Do not break the peace!'"³⁰

In the gospel version Pilate posts the inscription "Jesus King of the Jews" and the Jewish leaders accept this then slink off. The Philo version shows that the leaders would not budge till the inscription was removed, even at the cost of a war. Pilate still refused to remove the shields, and a letter of protest was sent to the emperor, Tiberius. Tiberius ordered the shields removed and sent to the Roman base at Caesarea. The Jews had forced Pilate to back down.³¹

Tiberius himself was of a “cruel and inflexible disposition,” ready to punish any disobedience. We can be sure that Pilate would not dare post another offensive inscription after that. Hence the gospel version — “Jesus King of the Jews” — must be labelled fictional, and a distortion of the original. In every case, the apparent authority of the gospel version of events derives from the suppression of the contradictory source.

NOTES:

1. Philo, *Concerning Flaccus*, §116 – 124
2. Luke 24:11
3. Acts 4:24 – 25
4. Philo, *Concerning Flaccus*, §131
5. Philo, *Concerning Flaccus*, §135
6. Acts, 17:5
7. Acts 25:7
8. Philo, *Concerning Flaccus*, §128
9. F. Jackson and K. Lake, editors, *Beginnings of Christianity*, 5:330
10. Philo, *Concerning Flaccus*, §152
11. Philo, *Concerning Flaccus*, §154
12. Luke, 23:27
13. Philo, *Concerning Flaccus*, §155
14. Acts, 20:15
15. Philo, *Concerning Flaccus*, §159
16. Luke, 18:31
17. Philo, *Concerning Flaccus*, §163
18. Mark, 5:5, 9, 11
19. Philo, *Concerning Flaccus*, §168 – 175, abbreviated.
20. Philo, *Concerning Flaccus*, §176
21. Luke, 22:44
22. Philo, *Concerning Flaccus*, §186 – 190
23. Acts 1:19
24. Matthew, 27:5
25. 2 Samuel, 17:23
26. Philo, *Concerning Flaccus*, §191
27. Philo, *Legation to Gaius*, §352 – 354
28. Philo, *Legation to Gaius*, §371
29. Philo, *Legation to Gaius*, §299
30. Philo, *Legation to Gaius*, §300 – 301
31. Philo, *Legation to Gaius*, §304 – 305

JOSEPHUS AND THE JAMES PASSAGE

“Those of the inhabitants of the city who were considered the most fair-minded, and who were strict in observance of the Law, were offended...”

Josephus, *Antiquities*, 20:201

Supplementing Philo’s account, we present material from Josephus bearing on the passion narrative. This will serve further to demonstrate the fictional nature of the gospel account, and will also establish that Josephus, in having his own writings used as a source by the gospel writers, could not have been aware of the events.

The most important of these is the “Annas episode” found in *Antiquities*, volume 20, paragraphs 197 – 203, which contains these major elements of evidence:

- The passage, in the present text, contains a reference to the slaying of James “brother to Jesus called the Christ” hence is always cited by those supporting the disputed reference to Jesus found in *Antiquities*, volume 18, paragraphs 63, 64, and proving that Josephus was aware of the existence of Jesus. The reference to James appears as a single line imbedded in a rather lengthy episode dealing with the high priest Ananus. The line appears irrelevant to the content of the Ananus episode, and could be deleted with no effect on that story. This at the outset is a good hint that the James passage is a Christian interpolation. Line 200, in our present text, refers to “James, brother to Jesus called the Christ.”

In context, as will be shown, a large question mark can be placed against the genuineness of this phrase.

- There is good evidence that the passage served as a source for John's gospel and explains why his gospel diverges from the other three, known as the Synoptics. Raymond Brown states: "There is not one iota of evidence in John to show that he or his readers knew about the Synoptic Sanhedrin session on the night before Jesus died."¹

In John, Jesus is brought before "the high priest Annas" (identified with Ananus in Josephus), and Brown states that some scholars "think that only Annas was mentioned in John's source with Caiaphas added in later Johannine editing."²

Only Josephus reports a lynch trial by Annas, making that the obvious source.

- The account in Josephus brings in details at wide variance with gospel episodes, again undermining the credibility of these episodes.

While the alleged James passage has been overshadowed by the Testimonium (as the passage in *Antiquities, volume 18*, paragraphs 63, 64 is often referred to), it has received a surprisingly large degree of support. Scholars who cannot bring themselves to accept the Testimonium as genuine turn to the James passage as a fallback position. It shows that Josephus did refer to Jesus, no matter how obliquely, hence the existence of Jesus is proved after all. We must therefore examine this in detail.

Before quoting the entire Ananus episode in context, we call attention to the following points, to be noted by the reader:

1. The charge that is always brought against Josephus is that he of course knows the full story of what the Jews did to Jesus, and if he fails to make a full detailed confession then he is accused of cover-up. But here he narrates that a vengeful high priest carried out a lynch trial and execution that was illegal. A brutal episode is narrated candidly and without suppression. The plain inference is that if Josephus knew of "Jesus" he would have reported it just as candidly.

2. Josephus states that the elder Ananus was “extremely fortunate.” This worthy appears in the gospel account as “Annas,” the father-in-law of Caiaphas. It is to this Annas that Jesus is first brought upon his arrest, and who then sends Jesus to Caiaphas.³ It seems unnecessary praise to call this man extremely fortunate for helping slay the Messiah of the Jews. How could Josephus praise such a man if he knew of the gospel story? Josephus, a born storyteller and the authority par excellence on the high priesthood, is also unaware that the family of Ananus is carrying on a blood-feud with the family of Jesus: the father helps kill Jesus, and the son kills James. How could Josephus be silent?

3. In dealing with the enormous mass of narrative material in his books, Josephus constantly uses reminder phrases — “as I have mentioned previously... as I have already explained.” These phrases occur twice in the present episode but are conspicuously omitted in referring to James. Here Josephus should certainly have written “James, the brother of Jesus called the Christ, who, as I have already stated, was put to death by Pilate.” And what would the scholars not give for that phrase. The text certainly calls for it. How could Josephus omit it? We leave it to the apologists to explain that one.

4. The text states that Ananus “...convened the judges of the Sanhedrin and brought before them...” those who were accused. The inference is that he is haling men before a court of which he himself was not a part. Josephus nowhere states that the high priest was himself a judge in the Sanhedrin. Nor does it appear elsewhere in the literature that the high priest himself was a judge in the ordinary sessions of the Sanhedrin. It was precisely the convening of a kangaroo court by a high priest, with subservient judges doing his bidding, that offended the “fair-minded” element in the city. We must ask whether Josephus had any awareness of gospel accounts where the high priests “Annas” and Caiaphas were judges in the court and force through the lynch verdict.

5. The trumped-up charge against the accused was that they "...had transgressed the Law."
- This is an obvious impossibility if the James of the Jerusalem church is meant, since all the accounts emphasize his extreme orthodoxy. Surely Josephus would know of this, if he knew anything of the Jerusalem Christians. At every point the story unravels. And it is quite strange that the scholar-apologists remain silent at this open error. This shows the reference to "James" to be a Christian addition to Josephus.
6. The passage goes on to state that after the legal lynchings, "...those of the inhabitants of the city who were considered the most fair-minded, and who were strict in observance of the Law, were offended at this."
- This points to the Pharisees, who emerge with complete honor. It cannot refer to the Sadducees, "...who indeed are much harsher than any of the other Jews when they sit in judgment."
- Here the editor, in a footnote, (Loeb edit. 493, note g), pointedly quotes another passage from Josephus: "The Pharisees are naturally lenient in the matter of punishment."⁴

Again we have questions. If the Pharisees were the sworn enemies of Jesus, as the gospels affirm, then we cannot understand why they were concerned in the slightest with James, brother of Jesus and the leading Christian in Jerusalem. And if the Pharisees were fair-minded after all, then this places in question every episode of plotting and villainy in the gospels where they were supposed to take part. In Christian parlance the word "Pharisee" has been made a taunt and a curse, and here, finally, they emerge with honor.

7. Josephus then narrates that the "fair-minded" element then met with Albinus, the Roman official about to take office in Judea, and informed him that the high priest "...had no authority to convene the Sanhedrin without his [the Roman's] consent."
- Josephus broadly implies that this was the first time that the Sanhedrin had convened to judge a case without first getting permission from the Roman authorities. The high priest Ananus

had done something that no one had presumed to do before, which was why the Roman official was enraged. Certainly Josephus is silent as to previous illegal sessions of that court.

This means that Josephus was unaware that the Sanhedrin had conducted a full dress trial of Jesus, with arrest, witnesses, cross-examination and formal death sentence, before breaking the news to Pilate that a trial had taken place. And there were further court proceedings without Roman knowledge or consent: the lynch trial and slaying of Stephen, the mass arrests carried out by Paul in Jerusalem and further orders to Paul to make arrests in Damascus. Josephus is unaware of these lurid and imaginary events. Major blocks of the gospels and Acts then fall apart.

8. The passage is vintage Josephus — clear, detailed, and with all the major figures named. We are given time and place, in a careful account, in his usual reportorial style. How could he have failed to give us the Jesus story with equal coverage and with equal detail? If we compare the “brush strokes” of this passage with the style of the Testimonium we would conclude at once that Josephus never wrote the latter.
9. In context, the James-passage is a single line in an episode dealing primarily with the illegal behavior of a high priest, “the younger Ananus.” This episode, counting prologue and epilogue, covers seven numbered text-passages — *Antiquities* 20:197-203 — comprising thirty-nine lines of text, with important material coming before and after the reference to James, found in passage 200. In the New Testament literature this episode is never quoted in full, with all thirty-nine lines of text set down. Only passage 200 is quoted, dealing with James. Just what is there in the other passages that makes the scholars so reluctant to put these down in print? Perchance it means giving Josephus a day in court and the chance to give his own testimony — and with the danger that he will turn out to be a witness against instead of a witness for the gospel story.

10. The possibility of Christian interpolation has been admitted by some writers. Henneke argues that while the text as a whole is genuine, the original referred only to “certain persons” and James was not mentioned. “It is possible that there is a Christian interpolation in the text... In that case Josephus wrote only of the judicial murder of certain persons accused of violation of the Law.”⁵

We now give the complete episode, with several phrases in italics for emphasis, and with the disputed reference to James in brackets. Josephus writes:

“Upon learning of the death of Festus, Caesar [Nero] sent Albinus to Judea as procurator [AD 62]. The king [Herod Agrippa II] removed Joseph from the high priesthood and bestowed this office on the son of Ananus, who was also called Ananus. It is said that the elder Ananus was *extremely fortunate*. For he had five sons, all of whom became high priests of God, after he himself had enjoyed the office for a very long time — a thing that had never happened to any other of our high priests.”⁶

“The younger Ananus who, *as we have said*, had been appointed to the high priesthood, was rash in his temper and unusually daring. He followed the school of the *Sadducees, who are indeed much harsher than any of the other Jews* when they sit in judgment, *as I have already explained*. Possessed of such a character, Ananus thought he had a favorable opportunity, because Festus was dead and Albinus was still on the way. So he convened the judges of the Sanhedrin and *brought before them certain men [and a man named James, the brother of Jesus who was called the Christ]*. He accused them of having *transgressed the law* and delivered them up to be stoned.”⁷

“Those of the inhabitants of the city who were considered *the most fair-minded, and who were strict in observance of the law*, were offended at this. They secretly sent to King Agrippa, urging him to order Ananus to desist from any further actions of this

sort, since he had not even been correct in his first step. Certain of them even went to meet Albinus, who was on his way from Alexandria. They informed him that Ananus *had no authority to convene the Sanhedrin without his consent*. Convinced by these words, Albinus wrote to Ananus, threatening to take vengeance upon him. King Agrippa, because of Ananus' actions, deposed him from the high priesthood, which he had held for three months. He replaced him with Jesus son of Damnaeus."⁸

Concerning the above, the "fair-minded" reader may well conclude that the reference to "James, brother of Jesus called the Christ" has no relevance to the story, and is a forgery. As to the main body of the passage, it clearly shows wide divergences to the gospel content.

As it is, the gospel writers make free use of Josephus. He appears thinly disguised as "Joseph of Arimathea" where he figures in the episode of the Descent from the Cross. The four gospels relate that a "Joseph of Arimathea" requested permission of the Roman consul to remove the body from the cross, and the permission was granted. Mark adds the detail that the victim may not yet be dead:

"Joseph of Arimathea, an honorable counselor, who also awaited the kingdom of God, came and went in boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. And Pilate marvelled if he were already dead, and calling for a centurion he asked if he were indeed dead. And when he knew it of the centurion, he gave the body to Joseph."⁹

Here the gospel writers are coming to grips with history. Indeed there was a "Joseph" who was exceedingly learned in the Law, and who arranged for the descent from the cross:

"I saw many prisoners who had been crucified and recognized three of my acquaintances among them. I was cut to the heart and came and told Titus with tears what I had seen. He gave orders immediately that they should be taken down and receive the most careful treatment. Two of them died in the physician's hands; the third survived."¹⁰

In the gospel parallel three men are crucified on Calvary; the two thieves die, and the central figure is resurrected in the sequel. Josephus was of a wealthy family and a landowner: "Vespasian presented me with a considerable tract of land in Judea."¹¹

'Arimathea' is probably the word "Ramathaim" (*twin hills*) and has been placed in Judea. Josephus often described the rebels against Rome as "brigands" which brings us to the two thieves on Calvary. With these numerous parallels on the record we have every likelihood that Josephus was the source. Josephus should bring suit for plagiarism.

Several other passages in the gospels show the influence of Josephus. He often adds his own literary flourish to Scriptural material and it is his version that is adopted by the gospel writers. We give these examples:

1. The dirge over Jerusalem, recited from the Mount Of Olives, follows the pattern of using Josephus rather than the original: "And David went up by the ascent of Mount Olivet, and wept as he went up and he had his head covered."¹²

Josephus adds the detail "When David reached the crest of the mountain he gazed upon the city, and with many tears, as if already fallen from power, he prayed to God."¹³

Luke's version reads:

"And when Jesus had come near, even now at the descent of the Mount of Olives... he beheld the city and wept over it, saying... For the days shall come upon thee that thine enemies shall compass thee about."¹⁴

2. The advice of Caiaphas that "...it is expedient for us that one man die for the people, that the whole nation perish not..." parallels the advice offered by a wise woman in a besieged city, who counselled the defenders to surrender one man to have the siege called off.

"The woman went to all the people in her wisdom. And they cut off the head of Sheba the son of Bichri and cast it out to Joab."¹⁵

Josephus is kind enough to compose a speech for the woman:

“Do you wish to perish most miserably with your children and wives for the sake of a worthless fellow whom no one even knows, or have him for a king in place of David? ... Will you set yourself up as a single city against so great and mighty a power?”¹⁶

Here Caiaphas chimes in loyally: “All men will follow him and the Romans will take away our place and nation.”¹⁷

Josephus has expanded the Scriptural text, and has been copied.

3. The Judas kiss is narrated rather tersely in the original.

“And Joab said to Amasa, Are you in good health, my brother? And Joab took Amasa by the beard with the right hand to kiss him. But Amasa took no heed to the sword that was in Joab’s [left] hand, so he smote him in the fifth rib, and shed his bowels out in the ground, and struck him not again.”¹⁸

The version of Josephus adds the condemnation, and supplies the timeless motive of “envy”:

“Joab seized Amasa, who was near him, by the beard as if to kiss him, then with an unforeseen thrust in the belly killed him. This impious and most unholy deed he committed against a brave youth who was moreover his relative and had done him no wrong. He did this because he envied him his office of commander.”¹⁹

Somehow Josephus is always on hand to supply the script.

Another passage in Josephus almost, but not quite, got into the gospels. There it is related that Jesus cured the leper, raised a child from the dead, and fed the multitude with bread left over. The prophet Elisha performed the same miracles, and we would like to know how Josephus reports these. Our historian had a special fondness for stories of this type, and he appears eager to give us his version.

He writes:

“And when the king of the Israelites came from Moab to Samaria, he had with him the prophet Elisha, whose acts I wish to relate for they are glorious and worthy of record, as we discover them in the sacred books.”²⁰

Josephus gets as far as the first miracle — the widow and the jar of oil — which is a harmless one, since there is no gospel parallel. But when we get to the other miracles, which are duplicated in the gospels and which are glorious and worthy of record — behold, the miracles themselves miraculously vanish. For the first and last time in all the thirty volumes of Josephus, there is a major *lacuna* or gap in the text. And it occurs just at the point where we want to read the passage and where Josephus wants to tell it to us...

“There is a lacuna in Josephus’ text corresponding to the biblical narrative extending from 2 Kings 4:8 to 6:8, which tells of the Shunamite woman [and her dead child], the poisoned pottage, the miracle of the loaves, the leprosy of Naaman the Syrian, the rescue of the iron axe-head from the water, and the beginning of the Syrian war.”²¹

This lengthy gap does not occur elsewhere in Josephus and is not filled in by any of the Greek or Latin manuscripts. The uncharitable thought comes to mind that the material was removed deliberately and that something required the removal — namely the duplication with the gospel versions. Josephus himself can be made to appear or disappear at the whim of the gospel writer.

Since the James passage has been placed in question, we turn now to the Testimonium itself, that is, the passage in *Antiquities*, volume 18, paragraphs 63 and 64.

NOTES:

1. R.E. Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 460
2. R.E. Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 460
3. John, 28:13, 24
4. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 13:294
5. Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha, vol. 1*, 420
6. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 20:197, 198
7. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 20:199, 200
8. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 20:201 - 203
9. Mark, 16:43 - 45
10. Josephus, *Life*, §420
11. Josephus, *Life*, §425
12. 2 Samuel, 15:30
13. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 7:203
14. Luke, 19:37, 41, 43
15. 2 Samuel, 20:22
16. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 7:291
17. John, 11:50
18. 2 Samuel, 20:9, 10
19. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 7:284
20. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 9:46
21. Editor, *Antiquities*, ad loc

JOSEPHUS AND THE TESTIMONIUM

“The passage concerning Jesus Christ which was inserted into the text of Josephus between the time of Origen and that of Eusebius may furnish an example of no vulgar forgery.”

Gibbon, *Decline and Fall*

What Gibbon meant by the above statement is that we are dealing with a forgery that was carefully and astutely drawn, and that it made Josephus a witness to the basic elements of the Christian case, all in a brief text. Gibbon explains:

“The accomplishment of the prophecies, the virtues, miracles, and resurrection of Jesus are distinctly related. Josephus acknowledges that he was the Messiah [Greek: *Christos*], and hesitates whether he should call him a man.”¹

In addition there is full confirmation of the crucifixion story. If Josephus could be made to set all this down then the passage could indeed be labeled a masterly composition. Josephus has been captured and fully confirms the story.

We give the text, with the openly Christian phrases put in italics:

“At this time there appeared Jesus, a wise man *if indeed one should call him a man*. For he was a doer of startling deeds, a teacher of people who receive the truth with pleasure. And he gained a following both among many Jews and among many of Greek origin. *He was the Christ*. And when Pilate, because of an accusation made by the leading men among us, condemned him to the cross, those who had loved him previously, did not cease to do so. *For he appeared to them on the third day, living*

again, just as the divine prophets had spoken of these and countless other wondrous things about him. And up until this very day the tribe of Christians, named after him, has not died out."²

John P. Meier offers a truncated version of the above, which deletes the three openly Christian phrases. Meier states these three were later Christian additions. This makes the passage more credible to the modern secular reader, thus making Josephus a more plausible and effective witness, and rescuing the passage from all-out rejection. This is put forward as revealing what Josephus really wrote, thus replying to Gibbon. Only parts were faked; the basic stratum is genuine.

Meier's improved, up-to-date version reads:

"At this time there appeared Jesus, a wise man. For he was a doer of startling deeds, a teacher of people who receive the truth with pleasure. And he gained a following both among many Jews and among many of Greek origin. And when Pilate, because of an accusation made by the leading men among us, condemned him to the cross, those who had loved him previously, did not cease to do so. And up until this very day the tribe of Christians, named after him, has not died out."³

Having created this revised version, Meier then announces that it is "of monumental importance."

He and his fellow-apologists are compelled to take this position because this text, brief and disputed as it is, and the companion text dealing with James, remain the only documents of antiquity put forward to prove the existence of Jesus conclusively. Meier admits that Josephus is the sole witness who carries any weight as to the existence of Jesus, and if he drops out, then there is no proof at all. The Rev. Meier writes:

"It is a passage of monumental importance. In my conversations with newspaper writers and book editors who have asked me at various times to write about the historical Jesus, almost invariably the first question that arises is: But can you prove that he existed? ...Thanks to Josephus the answer is yes."⁴

The passage is monumental because if it didn't exist then no proof could be shown that Jesus existed. Josephus is the sole prop for the Christian case, and this in two brief, endlessly disputed passages. It is passing strange that thousands of books by Christian scholars have failed to confirm one line of the gospel story, but ten alleged lines by a Pharisee, a Temple priest and an unswerving defender of Judaism can accomplish what all the thousands of Christian scholars could not.

Be it noted, at no time do the scholars show the slightest embarrassment or apology in converting an orthodox Jew, a Pharisee and a Temple priest, into a spokesman for Christianity. The act of forging testimony is never condemned. Instead Josephus is lectured for "covering up." Von Dobschütz writes:

"In personal character Josephus was not free from decidedly sinister traits. A thorough Jew, he was always able to make the most of his opportunities, and was not over-scrupulous as to the means he employed... We need only mention his having done his best to suppress the Messianic expectations of his people..."⁵

John Meier calls him 'an old fox' who is out to deceive his readers:

"Josephus may be engaging in a studied ambiguity... It is quite possible that the old fox Josephus purposely wrote a neutral or ambiguous statement about Jesus that could be read in more than one way."⁶

It is also quite possible that Josephus wrote nothing about Jesus, but he is being grabbed by the scruff of the neck and being made a witness.

We turn to the weighty question: did our Pharisee-priest-Judaist historian really write that passage? There are two standard tests used in determining the genuineness of disputed literary works. The first test is to search out the earliest authentic editions of the author's works to see if it has been included, also to note the earliest references to the disputed text, to note the date when it was attributed to the author. The second test is to compare the disputed text to the total oeuvre of the author, to see how it matches the unique style, mood and wording of the author.

As to the first test one might suggest that a simple way to determine what Josephus wrote or did not write would be to compare the present text with authentic copies of Josephus in the possession of Jewish authorities. Surely the Hebrew University in Jerusalem has early manuscripts of Josephus. Here we get the sobering news that all Jewish writings dating from the assumed time of Jesus, and from centuries before and after, have disappeared from Jewish possession, and are found only in Christian collections.

This state of affairs is revealed in a *Forward for Jews*, by the late Rabbi Samuel Sandmel, to a large two-volume edition, published under Christian auspices and editorship, of some of these lost or abandoned Judaic texts, namely *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*.⁷

How all this vanished from Jewish custody appears baffling to Sandmel who writes:

“By the strangest quirk of fate respecting literature that I know of, large numbers of writings by Jews were completely lost from the transmitted Jewish heritage. These documents stem roughly from 200 BC to AD 200. Not only the so-called Pseudepigrapha, but even such important and extensive writings as those by Philo and Josephus have not been part of the Jewish inheritance from the past; these were preserved and transmitted by Christians.”⁸

The “strange quirk” befell the writings of all other sects and religions that were unwise enough to challenge or even to differ from that faction that ultimately triumphed as “catholic” Christianity. The very memory of these rival sects and their writings has vanished into the void except for fugitive references preserved in church writings, or recovered in rare archaeological finds. Many of these sects were also wiped out by the Theodosian and Justinian Codes, forced through by the triumphant “catholic” faction.

We are told by Sandmel that after the strange quirk, the Judaic texts were “...preserved and transmitted by Christians.”

To “preserve,” as defined in the dictionary, is “to keep from harm... to maintain and protect” — which presumably means to keep intact in its original condition. However the texts, in Christian custody, often underwent a mystical transformation, and changed from Orthodox Judaic to Orthodox Christian. As we can see from the admittedly Christian passages, Josephus was transformed from a Pharisee and Temple priest to a devout Christian. And we have no Jewish originals for comparison.

It is first quoted by Eusebius, about AD 325, and the earliest Greek manuscript of Josephus extant dates from the eleventh century — one thousand years after his death — and in church possession. The Loeb edition names this as the *Codex Vindobonensis II.A.19*. And even with Eusebius there has been some scrambling. He first quotes Josephus’ account of John Baptist, which is given in *Antiquities, volume 18*, paragraphs 116 - 119, then adds: “After relating these things concerning John, Josephus in the same work also makes mention of our Savior in the following manner... [here Eusebius quotes the Testimonium].”⁹

The plain import is that in Eusebius’ text the passage followed the reference to John, to make Josephus a witness to John as the forerunner to Jesus. However in our present text of Josephus the passage appears some fifty paragraphs earlier, in *Antiquities, volume 18*, paragraphs 63 & 64, after a reference to Pilate — and with no indication that Josephus ever connected John to Jesus. The passage was shifted from John to Pilate by a later editor. This makes it suspect at once.

The one line in the Testimonium that purports to be directly historical deals with the crucifixion. However this line is found in three contradictory versions. There is the Greek version, as above. The Slavonic version reads,

“The teachers of the Law were overcome with envy, and gave thirty talents to Pilate in order that he should put him to death. And he took it and gave them liberty to exercise their will themselves. And they laid hands on him and crucified him, contrary to the law of their fathers.”¹⁰

The Arabic (*Agapius*) version reads, “Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die.”

The Jews are not mentioned at all.

Thus we have the Jews and Pilate acting together to slay Jesus (in the Greek version); the Jews alone slay Jesus (Slavonic); and Pilate alone slays Jesus (Arabic). We leave it to the experts to decide which of the three fakes reads best. All are found in Josephus.

Our conclusion is that the passage, while in Christian custody, has been *compromised, corrupted and contaminated*. Also, we do not have copies in Jewish possession for purposes of comparison. Therefore on the first test we must reject the Testimonium as of unproved genuineness. We also note the courtroom rule that if testimony is shown to be false in major parts, then all of it can be rejected. Since Meier has conceded that three Christian passages were added to the text, then none of it may be taken as genuine.

On the second test, namely that of literary style, we have presented numerous and extensive extracts from the writings of Josephus. He is never terse, minimal, unclear. He is always detailed, reportorial, giving names, time and place — and the reader always knows what is going on. We are concerned here with the key line in the Testimonium: “Pilate, upon hearing him accused by the leading men amongst us, delivered him up to the cross.”

That is the sum total of the passion narrative. Would Josephus really confine himself to a single line?

There are two episodes in Josephus where Jewish authorities turn over fellow Jews to the Romans for punishment. Let us see how our historian handles these episodes. The first of these is “Jesus, son of Ananias” who appeared as number 21 on the Loeb list. The episode contains numerous direct parallels to the gospel content, which rules out accident and coincidence. We also note the large space given to the account indicating its importance to our historian. Why didn't he give an equal amount of space to *the* Jesus?

We note these parallel elements in the two accounts: a martyr tale involving an individual named Jesus; he is of a humble station in life; there is a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for a religious festival; there is fearless preaching in the Temple; the message means an overthrow of the established order in Jerusalem; the preaching outrages the Jewish authorities, who arrest him; there is a preliminary trial before the Jews,

where Jesus is “severely chastised” — in the gospel version Jesus is struck by a servant of the high priest¹¹ and is struck by others;¹² Jesus is then brought by the Jews before the Roman governor, where he is “flayed to the bone”; there is a mysterious silence by the prisoner, who refuses to answer accusations or beg for mercy — in the gospel version “he gave no answer... Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge, to the great amazement of the governor.”¹³

The Roman governor releases the prisoner, believing him to be deranged — in the gospels Pilate is willing to release Jesus as a harmless person; and in the epilogue Jesus is slain by the Romans.

In the foregoing we have almost a dozen linkages between the gospel and the Josephus narrative, and the plot outline and sequence are the same. Just what is Josephus suppressing?

We quote from his account:

“Four years before the war, when the city was enjoying profound peace and prosperity, there came to the feast called Tabernacles a humble peasant, one Jesus son of Ananias [*Yeshu bar Hananiah*, in the Aramaic]. Standing in the Temple, he suddenly began to cry out, ‘A voice from the east, a voice from the west, a voice from the four winds; a voice against Jerusalem and the Sanctuary, a voice against the bridegroom and the bride, a voice against all the people’ [a variant of Jeremiah 7:14].

“Day and night he went about all the alleys with this cry on his lips. Some of the leading citizens, angered at these ominous words, arrested the fellow and severely chastised him. But without a word on his own behalf or for the private hearing of those who smote him, he only continued his cries as before.

“Thereupon the magistrates, supposing that the man was under a supernatural impulse, as was indeed the case, brought him before the Roman governor. There he was flayed to the bone with scourges, but he neither begged for mercy nor wept a tear. Instead he changed his cries to a sadder one, responding to each stroke with ‘Woe to Jerusalem!’

“When Albinus the governor asked him who he was and whence he came and why he uttered these cries, he answered him never a word but repeated without cease his dirge upon the city. Finally Albinus pronounced him a madman and let him go.”

Josephus narrates that this man continued his cries “for seven years and five months” — for four years till the outbreak of the war and then for three and a half years afterwards, when he met his death during the siege.

“He was going his rounds and shouting in piercing tones from the wall, ‘Woe once more to the city and to the people and to the Temple.’ Then he added a last word, ‘and woe to me also.’ At that a stone hurled from the catapult struck him and killed him on the spot. And with these ominous words on his lips, he passed away.”

Consummatum est.

The episode appears in *War, volume 6*, paragraphs 288 - 309, and covers about one hundred lines of text. We can compare the elaborate and detailed narrative with the single line of factual matter found in the disputed Jesus-passage: “Pilate, upon hearing him [Jesus] accused by men of the highest standing amongst us, condemned him to be crucified.”¹⁴

And that is all we find by way of concrete description. We may well ask how Josephus, with his fondness for violent and dramatic stories, could have contented himself with a single line of reportage.

As to the parallels in the two stories, we note that the most effective and vivid touches in the passion narrative are the very ones brought in by Josephus: the contrast between the humble and defenseless prisoner and the brutal authorities, also the mysterious silence of the prisoner under the repeated questioning by the governor.

We may add that Josephus has put fictional details in the story to bolster his own special pleading. It is incredible that the Zealots would have permitted doomsaying and defeatism during the siege. Why then

did Josephus invent details for a minor Jesus, when he had factual knowledge of the all-important Jesus? We leave it to the experts to answer that one.

The second episode of betrayal of Jews to the Romans took place in Alexandria and is one of shocking drama, as only Josephus can describe. In the closing days of the war with Rome, a diehard band of Zealots escaped to Alexandria, where they attempted to incite the Jews there to rise up against the Roman authority. We let Josephus tell the outcome:

“Meeting with opposition from certain Jews of rank, they murdered these and continued to urge the others to revolt. Observing this madness, the leaders of the [Jewish] council of elders, thinking it no longer safe to overlook these proceedings, convened a general assembly of the Jews. They exposed the madness of the Sicarii [dagger-men] and proved them responsible for all their troubles. They said that these men would instantly be put to death if the Romans recognized them, and now they wanted to involve innocent people in the calamity which they had brought upon themselves. The leaders therefore advised the assembly to beware of the ruin being brought by these men, and by delivering them up, thereby make peace with the Romans.

“Realizing the gravity of the danger, the people followed this advice. They rushed furiously at the Sicarii and seized them. Six hundred were caught at the spot. All who escaped into Egypt and the Theban district were soon caught and brought back. All were then amazed at the endurance or desperation or strength of will of these prisoners. For under every form of torture or laceration of body, devised to make them acknowledge Caesar as lord, not one submitted or came even near saying this. All kept true to their beliefs, in triumph over their bonds. They met tortures and fire with their bodies that seemed insensible to pain, and their souls seemingly rejoiced in this. But most of all the onlookers were struck by the young children, not one of whom could be made to call Caesar lord. So far did the strength of their courage rise superior to the weakness of their bodies.”¹⁵

Josephus himself was swept along by these martyrdoms and he gives them the full force of his literary style. How then could he write a pallid, insipid one-line account of the martyrdom of Jesus? "Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standing among us, condemned him to the cross."

Not a word more. The test of literary style rules out the genuineness of that line. If that line goes there is little point in trying to defend the rest of the passage. If the passage goes, the existence of Jesus becomes ever more wraithlike.

And again we must ask: where is the moral authority of a religion that must resort to forgery to establish its case?

NOTES:

1. Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Chapter 16, n. 36
2. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18:63, 64
3. J. Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, volume 1, 61
4. J. Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, volume 1, 68
5. Von Dobschütz, *Dictionary of the Apostolic Church*, article: "Josephus", 650 – 651
6. J. Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, volume 1, 76, 84
7. *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, edited by James H. Charlesworth, published by Doubleday & Co., New York, 1983
8. Rabbi S. Sandmel, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, intro, xi – xiii
9. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 11
10. Josephus, Loeb edition, volume 3, 650
11. John, 18:22
12. Matthew, 26:67 and Luke 22:63
13. Matthew, 27:12 – 14
14. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18:64
15. Josephus, *War*, 7:411 – 419

CELSUS AND ORIGEN

“What credible witness beheld this appearance? Who heard a voice from heaven declaring you to be the Son of God? What proof is there save your own assertion?”

Origen, *Contra Celsus*, 1:41

Due to the importance of the Josephus Testimonium¹ as the sole evidence for the existence of Jesus, it will be of interest to trace out the events that brought this illustrious fake into existence. These events will illustrate the situation of early Christianity vis-à-vis its opponents, and will demonstrate the absence of historical evidence surrounding every part of the Christian case.

Towards the close of the second century, at a time when the Christian sects were gaining prominence in the Roman empire and giving concern to the authorities, a pagan writer named Celsus, a skilled and well-educated polemicist, and a firm upholder of the Roman order, composed an extensive and sharply hostile attack on that religion. So effective was his book, which he called *A True Discourse*, that some thirty years later, about AD 220, the renowned Christian writer Origen wrote a detailed, almost line-by-line rebuttal. The original Celsus material, copiously quoted, plus Origen’s replies, formed a tract in eight books and of awesome length — about 600 pages in the present format. It is known as *Contra Celsus*.

The fact that a respected Christian writer had put out the book preserved the original Celsus portion intact. This large section remains the only work of antiquity giving an open all-out attack on Christianity that has survived. All other hostile works have been lost to the censorship. Even a work as prestigious as that composed by the apostate Emperor Julian, *Against the Christians*, has disappeared.

In the Roman manner Celsus employed foreign auxiliaries to help in the fighting. In this case he recruited a Jewish spokesman to score many of the points. This “Jew of Celsus” is not named, but carries on so much of the polemic that we can assume that Celsus took over a Jewish tract of that period. Celsus, himself a pagan Epicurean and agnostic, thoroughly part of classic Hellenism, shows equal dislike for Judaism and Christianity, except that Judaism was a legitimate religion. Almost by definition the Romans were required to support the orderly accepted citizenry against a suspect group. A further fact was that he found the arguments of the Jewish disputant quite useful. So we have the odd couple, Celsus and his Jewish orthodox spokesman, both attacking Christianity. Origen, in turn, quotes the Jewish aide verbatim many times and does battle with him also. To add to the confusion Celsus takes time out to show elegant pagan scorn for the barbaric Jews, and Origen must hasten to prop up Judaism since that is where his Scriptural authority came from.

What is remarkable in this three-sided debate is that nowhere in the course of the six hundred pages of controversy is there a particle of confirmation for any event in the gospel story — and this from disputants particularly qualified to get this information. Origen, in the manner of Justin, relies only on proof-texts from Scripture, and berates the blindness of the Jews. “We charge the Jews with not acknowledging Him to be God, to whom testimony was borne in many passages by the prophets.”²

The Jewish aide, in the manner of Trypho, rejects the theology, the proof-texts and the miracle stories, and then, in the manner of Apion, creates an imaginary life of Jesus based on a lampoon version of the gospels. He offers no other source. Origen reveals that in his conversations and disputes with Jewish leaders in his own period that there is the same all-out rejection of the Christian case.

Celsus, with detached disdain, treats the Christians as a naive and deluded rabble, and charges that they have fabricated the whole story by copying Greek sources. He finds nothing original in the story, certainly nothing historical. We can guess that all three disputants had researched the sources and had found nothing. It is from this vacuum of knowledge that the Josephus Testimonium emerged as an attempt by the Christians to create concrete evidence where none existed before.

It is in the *Contra Celsus* that, at long last, the name Josephus enters into the literature — and this about AD 220. Origen, in replying to a statement by the Jewish aide, cites Josephus, thus showing that he is holding the books of Josephus in his hands, *but he fails to quote the Testimonium itself when he had every reason to*. The Testimonium contains material that would fully answer the barrage of challenges made by the two opponents. The silence of Origen is taken as proof positive by rejectionists such as Gibbon that Origen did not see this passage in his copy, and that it was added at a date after Origen.

The reference to Josephus is found in Book 1, chapter 47, and makes several points:

- It is evident that Christian editors had already been at work forging Josephus, since he is made to say that the Jews killed James and that Jerusalem was destroyed as punishment for this crime. Now Origen complains that Josephus should have said that it was for the death of Jesus that Jerusalem was destroyed. The forgery of the James reference is obvious. Therefore the present version in Josephus, where the high priest Ananias is made to cause the death of James becomes that much the more suspect.

Origen states throughout that Jesus was a supernatural being, God Incarnate, hence he must explain that when Paul called James “a brother of the Lord” this was meant in a spiritual sense, not a natural one. Perhaps Origen was correct in this: Paul did not regard James as the sibling brother of the “Lord Jesus” who was the cult-figure.

- Origen writes that Josephus “did not believe in Jesus as the Christ.” This is ambiguous; we do not know whether Origen meant an express denial by Josephus, or whether he was silent. It may indicate further tampering, whereby Josephus in some way is made to reject Jesus. At any rate this contradicts the present Testimonium text, wherein Josephus names Jesus as “the Christ.” Plainly, this must date after Origen.

- Having devoted this much space to Josephus, Origen had every reason to quote the Testimonium in full. His failure to quote any of it is strong evidence that the entire passage was composed at a later date. We give the Origen passage and the reader will note the absence of Testimonium material. Origen writes:

“I would like to say to Celsus, who represents the Jew as somehow accepting John as a Baptist who baptized Jesus, that the existence of John, baptizing for the remission of sin, is related by one who lived no great length of time after John and Jesus. For in the 18th book of his ‘Antiquities of the Jews’ Josephus bears witness to John as having been a Baptist, and promising purification to those who underwent this rite. Now this writer, although not believing in Jesus as the Christ, was seeking after the cause of the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple. He ought to have said that the conspiracy against Jesus was the cause of these calamities befalling the people since they put Christ to death who was a prophet.

“He says nevertheless, against his will though not far from the truth, that these disasters happened to the Jews as a punishment for the death of James the Just, who was a brother to Jesus called Christ. The Jews had put him to death, though he was a man most distinguished for his justice. Paul, a genuine disciple of Jesus, says that he regarded this James as a brother of the Lord, not so much on account of their relationship by blood, or their being brought up together, but because of his virtue and doctrine.

“If then Josephus says that it was on account of James that the desolation of Jerusalem was made to overtake the Jews, should it not have been more in accord with reason to say that it happened on account of the death of Jesus Christ, of whose divinity so many churches are witnesses?”³

The entire burden of the passage appears to be a complaint that the fake reference to James should be replaced by a fake reference to Jesus. Josephus is not called upon to do anything else. We now turn to the main content of Origen’s book, considered in relation to the

statements in the Testimonium. By this time the four gospels had become widely known as the main texts of the new religion, and Celsus with his assistant direct their main fire at these books. The Jew attacks specific episodes as fictional, and Celsus comes up with “village atheist” arguments ridiculing the entire story. Thus we have a rehearsal and ‘prequel’ for much of the scholarly criticisms of the modern era.

But the contrast is very large. In that far-off beginning, Christianity had not attained the vast authority and invincibility of later centuries that would block criticism as futile and dangerous. Nor were there battalions of scholars on hand to defend and buttress the gospel accounts where Origen floundered in his replies.

Therefore the attacks by Celsus and his ally-of-convenience represent “*New Testament* criticism” of primary importance. To Celsus and the Jew of Celsus, in that raw opening period, the aura of majesty and perfection surrounding the Official Religion of the Empire, built up over the later centuries, was unsuspected. The myth of the invincibility of Jesus to all criticism wasn’t there. They challenged the gospel story in every part and did not grant any credibility to the story. At this very early date the opponents were getting their day in court.

Turning to the content of Origen’s book, we note that there were many charlatans and god-claimants on the scene at that time, which led Celsus and his aide into the trap of conceding reality to “Jesus” when there was only the Christian preaching for this. Celsus writes (as quoted by Origen):

“There are many nameless people who appear in and out of temples, and with great ease and on the slightest occasion, assume motions and gestures as if they were possessed. They do this to create surprise and sensation. Each one then says, ‘I am God, I am the Son of God, I am the Divine Spirit. I have come because the world is perishing but I wish to save you from your sins. You will see me returning again with heavenly power. Blessed is he who does me homage, and on the rest I will send down eternal fire’...

“To these promises are added strange, fanatical and quite unintelligible words, of which no rational person can find the meaning. So dark are the sayings that they have no meaning at all, but they provide occasion for every fool and impostor to apply them to his own purposes.”⁴

Can we blame Celsus for including “Jesus” in that list? And how does one decide which sect to join? “The common and ready cry of each sect is, ‘Believe, if you will saved, or else begone!’ What shall those do who are anxious to be saved? Shall they toss dice to decide whom to join?”⁵

By the sharpest of ironies, it was the opponents who invented the human Jesus. The tactic used by Celsus and his aide was the same as that used by the opponents in the Age of Enlightenment, sixteen centuries later. In both eras they were erecting a human figure and a human biography to counter the portrait of Jesus as a divinity.

Albert Schweitzer, in his landmark study, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, indicated plainly that the historical Jesus was never established or confirmed by standard conventional evidence, but instead was put forward as a radical hypothesis by the skeptics and rationalists of the eighteenth century. In the opening chapter of his book he makes this important statement:

“The historical investigation of the life of Jesus did not take its rise from a purely historical interest; it turned to the Jesus of history as an ally in the struggle against the tyranny of dogma.”⁶

That is, if Jesus could be presented as a purely human, historical person, free of supernatural elements, and if it could be argued that a later Church had invented all its dogmas, mysteries and miracles and had foisted these on the human Jesus, then that would strip this Church of all legitimacy and authority. Had the skeptics “turned to” the Jesus of history or had they created him? In both cases, in the early period and in the eighteenth century, the gospels were the only source for the counter-histories.

Just as eighteenth century skeptics had no outside evidence or confirmation for a “life of Jesus,” so Celsus and his aide had nothing to go by but the gospel content. Origen states this to be the case:

“This Jew of Celsus continues in the following fashion, ‘Although he could state many things regarding the events in the life of Jesus that are true, and differing from those recorded by the disciples, he willingly omits them.’ What then are those true statements, unlike the accounts in the Gospels, which the Jew of Celsus passes by without mention?... Or is he only pretending to have something to say, while in reality he had nothing to produce beyond the Gospel narrative which could impress the reader with the feeling of its truth?”⁷

The Jewish disputant uses only the Christian texts. He states: “All these statements are taken from your own books. We need no other witness in addition to this. You fall by your own sword.”⁸

The approach he used was apparently in the form of a “Dialogue with Jesus,” wherein Jesus was subject to sharp cross-examination, with a demand that he prove his claims. Thus in the Baptism Scene, the Jew writes:

“When you say you were bathing besides John, you say that what had the appearance of a bird from the air alighted upon you. What credible witness beheld this appearance? Who heard a voice from heaven declaring you to be the Son of God? What proof is there save your own assertion?”⁹

If the Jew is going to press this approach to every episode in the life of Jesus, then very little “proof” and little “credible witness” will emerge. But since he shows himself fully qualified to present the Jewish case, why didn’t he produce original Jewish documents such as the Sanhedrin records? Surely he could have done so instead of inventing a fictional life of Jesus. And why didn’t Origen demand that the records be produced?

On the all-important trial sequence, the Jewish aide had nothing to go by but the gospel account. Thus he challenges the gospel account of the Last Supper, wherein Jesus exposes Judas as a traitor who will betray and Peter as a perjurer who will deny under oath. Here the Jew remarks:

“How is it that if Jesus points out beforehand both the traitor and the perjurer, they do not fear him as a God, and then cease, one from his intended treason and the other from his perjury?”¹⁰

Here Origen replies: “That he was betrayed by those whom He called His disciples is a circumstance which the Jew of Celsus learned from the Gospels.”¹¹

But surely he must have known that the Jewish leaders were directly involved in the Judas affair. Didn't he have independent records?

About the time Celsus published his polemical work, *A True Discourse*, the Jewish Patriarch, the renowned “Judah the Prince,” residing at Tiberias, was composing his commentaries on the Mosaic law, which were to form the primary stratum of the Talmud. One of the earliest tractates was *Sanhedrin*, which codified Jewish trial procedure. Judah was well aware of what was transpiring in the Diaspora cities, and he knew of the inroads that the Christian religion was making among the Jewish communities. His tractate *Sanhedrin* pointedly differed from the gospel trial accounts in every respect, and nowhere confirmed any part of their version. The intent was clear: he was signalling the Jewish communities that the gospel story was fraudulent.

I. Abrahams agrees that the *Sanhedrin Mishnah* appears aimed at the gospels.

“So great, indeed, is the discrepancy between the Rabbinic and the Gospel trials, that the *Mishnah Sanhedrin IV* almost looks like a polemic of the former against the latter... The Gospel narratives would hardly have been familiar to Jews before the date of this Mishnah.”¹²

The Patriarch had the highest prestige: “Now that the Romans rule and the Jews pay them the half-shekel, the Jewish Ethnarch through concessions from Caesar holds great powers and differs little from a true king.”¹³

The tract then amounted to an official Jewish denial.

Origen also reveals that the Jews challenged ‘high Christology’: “Although I have conferred with many Jews who professed to be learned men, I have never heard anyone expressing his approval of the statement that the Logos is the Son of god.”¹⁴

Against the challenges and denials by the opponents Origen had no reply except appeals to the gospel. He pointed to “...the wonderful works which He [Jesus] performed, and which were made the subject of prophecy.”¹⁵

The only proof for the wonderful works is that there were prophecies that these would take place. Celsus had issued the challenge: “What great deeds did Jesus perform as being a God?”¹⁶

In reply, Origen admits that he has no other source for the miracle stories than the gospel accounts themselves:

“Now to this question, although we are able to show the striking and miraculous character of the events which befell Him, yet from what other source can we furnish an answer than from the Gospel narratives?”¹⁷

But the famed Josephus Testimonium stated expressly that Jesus had performed “surprising feats” and this on the witness of the most prestigious of the Jewish historians. Why didn’t Origen appeal to Josephus when he had his books in his hands, and when that would have proved his case? This is obvious evidence that the Testimonium appeared at a later date and was meant to bolster the Christian case.

From the foregoing evidence we state that no part of the said Testimonium — even the truncated portion that is supposed to be genuine — can be traced to Josephus. Nowhere in the three-sided debate do we find clear evidence that “the historical Jesus” existed. He

is always portrayed in counterpoint to the Christian image of God Incarnate. There is no reference to the Josephus-passage, which would have proved his existence. This must be dated to a later period.

Origen argues solely on the basis of proof-texts from Scripture to prove all events in the career of Jesus. He offers no other evidence.

“Jesus is the Son of God who gave the Law and the prophets. We, who belong to the Church, do not transgress the Law but have escaped the mythologizing of the Jews. We have our minds humbled and educated by the mystical contemplation of the Law and the prophets.”¹⁸

“All the prophecies which preceded His birth were preparations for His worship. And the wonders which he wrought were by a divine power which was foretold by the prophets.”¹⁹

“The ignorance of the Jews regarding Christ was caused by their not having heard the prophecies about Him.”²⁰

This is the sum total of his argument, and is the Christian situation as of his period, about AD 230. He has no history or tradition.

The victory of Christianity came a century later, when Constantine chose this as the official religion of the empire. This led to the suppression of rival sects and religions. The Jews survived, but were gradually stripped of all rights under Roman law, and reduced to pariah status. The long epic of Hellenic universalist Judaism came to an end and was replaced by the sealed-off ghetto.

What this means is that Christianity in the early period never succeeded in proving its case on the basis of historical evidence, but only through the crushing force of Roman authority, censorship and suppression. Fifteen centuries would pass from the time of Origen to the reopening of challenges to the gospel story. We may inquire whether the scholar-apologists of the modern period have made a better case.

NOTES:

1. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18:63 – 64
2. Origen, *Contra Celsus*, 2:9
3. Origen, *Contra Celsus*, 1:47
4. Origen, *Contra Celsus*, 7:9
5. Origen, *Contra Celsus*, 6:11
6. A. Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 4
7. Origen, *Contra Celsus*, 2:13
8. Origen, *Contra Celsus*, 2:73
9. Celsus, *Contra Celsus*, 1:41
10. Celsus, *Contra Celsus*, 2:18
11. Origen, *Contra Celsus*, 2:40
12. I. Abrahams, *Studies in Pharisaism*, 2:127
13. Origen, *Origen to Africanus*, 14
14. Origen, *Contra Celsus*, 2:31
15. Origen, *Contra Celsus*, 1:50
16. Celsus, *Contra Celsus*, 2:33
17. Origen, *Contra Celsus*, 2:33
18. Origen, *Contra Celsus*, 2:6
19. Origen, *Contra Celsus*, 8:9
20. Origen, *Contra Celsus*, 1:26

NEW TESTAMENT SCHOLARSHIP

“You must understand that in these matters opinions differ so widely that the confusion is impenetrable.”

Franz Kafka, *The Trial*

A survey of New Testament scholarship in the modern era will reveal remarkably little in the way of results. A good summary of the first one hundred fifty years of this research is provided by Albert Schweitzer in his classic, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*. He begins in the 1760s and brings the quest down to his own date, the early 1900s. He covers the work of some 250 scholars, no two of whom agree, and in the closing chapter writes:

“There is nothing more negative than the result of the critical study of the life of Jesus... He is a figure designed by rationalism, endowed with life by liberalism, and clothed by modern theology in an historical garb”¹

In this closing chapter Schweitzer also reveals that this “critical study” was a bogus enterprise. New Testament scholarship pretends to be engaged in objective research, however the field is dominated by members of the Christian establishment, engaged in apologetics and damage control. The scholars discussed by Schweitzer were theologians, almost without exception. They were ordained clergymen, or at least graduate students of theology, and the enormous body of research carried out by them during the nineteenth century is labeled by him as “...the science of historical theology”²

At that period the scholars in the field had not yet arrogated to themselves the title of *historians*. Instead they labeled themselves as *critical theologians* or *historical theologians*.

Schweitzer acknowledged candidly that “we theologians” were using history to advance theology — in particular, to bring the secular masses “in a roundabout way” back to the Christian fold. After Renan the human Jesus of Nazareth was the only presentation that most readers would accept, hence this figure was to be manipulated towards theology.

Schweitzer writes:

“We modern theologians are too proud of our historical method, too proud of our historical Jesus, too confident in our belief in the spiritual gains which our historical theology can bring to the world. The thought that we could build up, by the increase of historical knowledge, a new and vigorous Christianity, and set free new spiritual forces, rules us like a fixed idea... We thought that it was for us to lead our time by a roundabout way, through the historical Jesus as we understood Him, in order to bring it to the Jesus who is a spiritual power in the present.”³

Here we get the news that all the scholars in the field, from the earliest period to Schweitzer’s day, from radical to conservative, were engaged in missionary activity rather than historical research. And this continues to the present. Almost every writer in the field today is on the faculty of a theological department or institution. Any scholar-theologian who takes this missionary approach cannot pretend to be engaged in historical research of an objective nature. He will certainly find ways to interpret the data to fit his goal, and will find ways to reject documents that threaten the goal.

Schweitzer also indicated that the *quest* had a dubious origin. It began by smuggling in the premise that “Jesus of Nazareth” existed, and then used this literary creation to attack the church establishment. In the opening stage, that of the eighteenth century Age of Enlightenment, Jesus was presented by the rationalists, skeptics and philosophes of that era as free from all supernatural and miraculous elements. The writers “turned to the Jesus of history as an ally in the struggle against the tyranny of dogma” — without the small formality of proving that this Jesus had actually lived. The *quest* proved to be a game of catch-up, to locate the personage they had posited in the first place.

The pioneer writer, named by Schweitzer as Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694 – 1768), wrote what was essentially a Voltairean tract, attacking the church establishment, here thinly disguised as the disciples of Jesus. Reimarus used the tactic of Celsus, many centuries earlier, of accusing the Christians of fraud: they had invented the story and had invented the divinity of Jesus. Reimarus argued that Jesus himself “...had not the slightest intention of doing away with the Jewish religion and putting another in its place.”⁴

At every stage Jesus is made to carry out the agenda and ideas of the writer.

As Reimarus saw it, Christianity was invented by the disciples. These are portrayed as lazy, dishonest, and preying on the gullible by inventing fake miracles and fake resurrection stories after the death of Jesus. This was the first priesthood.

“They had forgotten how to work. They had seen that preaching the Kingdom of God would keep a man... They would surely find a sufficient number of faithful souls who would share their possessions with them. So they stole the body of Jesus and hid it, and proclaimed to all the world that He would soon return.”⁵

Reimarus invented scenarios out of thin air to discredit an existing religion. In this very odd manner the historical Jesus first appears in New Testament scholarship. Reimarus had, of course, complete certainty that Jesus and the disciples existed, but this derived from many centuries of Christian indoctrination. Reimarus, like the Jew of Celsus, had nothing to go by but the gospel accounts. The historical Jesus appears as a literary figure, created by restating the gospels in the secular naturalist mode, and with intent to overthrow the gospels.

Reimarus dared not publish his tract, and it circulated privately in the underground of that period. Lessing published it some ten years after Reimarus' death, labeling it the work of an anonymous writer. About that time, the 1770s, another disruptive work appeared. This was Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Schweitzer does not mention him, but he had titled one chapter of *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* as “Thoroughgoing Skepticism” — which certainly

applied to Gibbon. He appears as a latter-day Celsus, whom Gibbon quotes with full approval. Gibbon shared his hostility to every part of the Christian case. Gibbon was one of the giant figures of that century, ranking with Rousseau, Voltaire and Diderot, and he sums up the spirit of the times.

He quotes Celsus in his charge that “the Christians were perpetually correcting and altering their Gospels.”⁶

His own attitude towards miracle stories can be summed up in his dismissal of the renowned miracle tale of the Cross in the Sky (*in hoc signo...*) supposedly witnessed by the armies of Constantine:

“I shall endeavor to form a just estimate of the famous vision of Constantine... by separating the historical, the natural and the marvellous parts of this extraordinary story which, in the composition of a specious argument, have been artfully confounded in one splendid and brittle mass.”⁷

Constantine himself was a particular target for Gibbon, who attacked him at every opportunity.

Celsus had charged that “...the Christians hate each other with a perfect hatred.”⁸

Gibbon in turn emphasizes these blood-feuds, referring to the Theodosian Code (AD 325 – 450), which named and banished 36 sects as heretical. We find these pleasantries in the Code:

“All heresies are forbidden by both divine and imperial laws and shall forever cease... No place for celebrating their mysteries, no opportunities for exercising the madness of their excessively obstinate minds, shall be available to the heretics... The contamination of the Photinian pestilence, the poison of the Arian sacrilege, the crime of the Eunomian perfidy. shall be abolished even from the hearing of men.”⁹

The “great madness” of the other sects received similar treatment.

Celsus had narrated that in the early period there was a chaos of rival sects, gospels and doctrines so that one had to cast dice to decide which to join. Confirmation for this was the remarkable find, in the 1940s, of a large library of Gnostic texts in the Upper Nile. Concerning these Elaine Pagels writes:

“Yet even the fifty-two writings discovered at Nag Hammadi offer only a glimpse of the complexity of the early Christian movement. We now begin to see that what we call Christianity — and what we identify as Christian tradition — actually represents only a small selection of specific sources, chosen from among dozens of others.”¹⁰

It is notorious that history is written by the winning side, and now we have only the official Christian version for “what happened.” As mentioned, Gibbon avoided the whole area of Christian origins, and waited until chapter fifteen of his book before introducing Christianity. This was about AD 250. Only then did he feel that he had enough reliable documentation on hand. Disputed texts, supported only by Christian sources, were questioned and rejected, which is why he rejected the Josephus Testimonium. His critical standards have been followed by professional historians of the later period. This explains why courses in Christian origins are taught today only in divinity schools, not in the history departments of the universities.

The next major figure in our inquiry will be David F. Strauss (1808 – 1874), a clergyman-scholar of the early period with whom begins the actual dismantling of the gospel texts. Like others, his career was destroyed because he expressed unwelcome views. Schweitzer devotes three chapters to him, of more than fifty pages, and he may be credited as establishing the main premises of New Testament scholarship. Schweitzer states that his *Life of Jesus* “...marked out the ground which is now occupied by modern critical study.”¹¹

At the age of twenty-seven (in 1835), he published this *Life* in two volumes, of 1400 pages, which contained a basic list of “firsts” in the field of critical scholarship. Later generations expanded and modified these premises, but they have defined the parameters:

- The gospel writers were not disciples or eyewitnesses. The gospels were composed generations after the alleged events. “That any of our Evangelists was an eyewitness is a thesis for which there is no extant evidence to prove.”¹²

- The writers viewed Jesus in terms of their own religious ideas, and therefore constructed his person and career as the means for carrying out of those ideas. With Strauss it was the claim that the writers had exalted the person of Jesus by applying many Old Testament episodes to him, since almost automatically there is a legend-creating process at work.

“No sooner is a great man dead than legend is busy with his life... We are almost compelled to assume that the historical Jesus will meet us in the garb of Old Testament Messianic ideas and primitive Christian expectations.”¹³

However this process distorts the original career and makes recovery of that career more difficult. It can lead to a rejection of the gospel episode because the legend has replaced it.

“The call of the first disciples cannot have happened as it is narrated... The call is modeled upon the call of Elisha by Elijah... The creative activity of legend must have come in to confuse the account of what really happened.”¹⁴

This presents the main problems in New Testament scholarship. The generations after Strauss placed the date of gospel composition farther and farther away from the assumed original events; the sources used by the writers to create the person and career of Jesus were expanded to encompass much of the ideals and remarkable deeds of antiquity; the creative activity of the writers became the dominant factor in gospel composition and was now attributed to established churches; and the origins grew more wraithlike, conjectural, and approached the vanishing point. The scholar had to play detective, work backwards from the gospels, and somehow locate a historical Jesus at the starting point, despite the forbidding texts. All this assuming that he existed and that they were not inventing their historical figure.

The full implication of what Strauss had started became apparent in the writings of Bultmann, a century later.

Scholars of the *Form Criticism* school, headed by Rudolf Bultmann, took the position that these gospels were compiled and completed by the established churches of the second century as the warrant for their own history and legitimacy. These churches “constructed” the main content of these texts.

Bultmann states this view:

“We conclude that the whole framework of the history of Jesus [in the gospels] must be viewed as an editorial construction, and that therewith a whole series of typical scenes, which because of their ecclesiastical use and their poetic and artistic associations, we had looked upon as scenes in the life of Jesus, must be viewed as creations of the evangelists.”¹⁵

But there is scarcely a scene in the gospels that is not ecclesiastical or artistic. If these passages drop out, then very little can be salvaged as original. At best the gospel writers used “traditional material” from the remote past, but this material is suspect in the extreme.

“In the first place, there is the possibility that these traditional sections may also have been edited by the evangelists; and in the second place, though they lay before the gospel writers as traditional material, it is not yet proved that they are historical narratives.”¹⁶

Strauss provided the lead, which Bultmann carried much further. Strauss declared that the discourses of Jesus had been edited and rearranged in the text by the writers.

“The Synoptic discourses, like the Johannine, are composite structures, created by later tradition out of sayings which originally belonged to different times and circumstances, arranged under certain leading ideas so as to form connected discourses.”¹⁷

The relentless Bultmann then proceeded to demolish the tradition itself. In his writings he rejects all the passages that make up the actual career of Jesus: the sayings, parables and discourses; the cures and miracles; the confrontations and controversies with his opponents. He traces these to Judaic or Greek sources.

“The miracle stories of the gospels possess a remarkable resemblance to the Hellenistic miracle narratives... Sayings are found which the church took over from Jewish tradition, and with certain alterations and additions attributed to Jesus.”¹⁸

The entire story is virtually eliminated.

Prior to Bultmann, Harnack had noted with admiration that the Christians were equal-opportunity looters, freely taking over from other sources whatever appeared useful:

“How rich then, and how manifold, are the ramifications of the Christian religion as it steps at the very outset on to pagan soil!... It is the religion of authority and of unlimited faith; and again, the religion of reason and of enlightened understanding. Besides that, it is a religion of ‘mysteries’... Every force, every relationship in its environment, was mastered by it and made to serve its own ends... It learned and borrowed from many quarters; indeed, it would be impossible to imagine it existing amid all the wealth and vigor of these religions, had it not drawn pith and vigor even from them... Here is a religion which embraces everything... One name, the name of Jesus Christ, still sums up everything.”¹⁹

Jesus continues at the present time to be all things to all men, which has led to virtual anarchy in New Testament studies since each scholar presents his own view. John Crossan writes:

“Historical Jesus research is becoming something of a scholarly bad joke... [because of] the number of competent and even eminent scholars producing pictures of Jesus at wide variance with one another... Seven different images of Jesus that have

been proposed by scholars in recent years [with personas including political revolutionary, magician, charismatic, proto-Pharisee, rabbi, etc.]”²⁰

We are back with Celsus: one must cast dice to decide.

Another “solution” gaining favor in recent studies is to claim “margin-ality.” Jesus was a marginal figure in a marginal province. His life was so obscure and he was so far down in the social scale that no notice was taken of him by contemporaries, and his followers were so humble that they could not record much. He was “...a peasant nobody,”²¹ as Crossan puts it. This conveniently explains the absence of historical data but does not explain how four gospels brimming with fictional data could emerge from this vacuum at the outset, and why the writers would bother with him.

The ultimate in dissolution of the person of Jesus is made, at present, by a group including Burton Mack, Ron Cameron and Dieter Georgi. They take the position that the main body of scholars, because of their Christian background, had instinctively taken over the gospel premise: that a unique and remarkable Person had appeared on the scene, and that extraordinary events had taken place.

“The fundamental persuasion is that Christianity appeared unexpectedly in human history, that it was at its core a brand new vision of human existence, and only a startling moment could account for its emergence... It is this startling moment that seems to have mesmerized the discipline.”²²

As opposed to the unique and extraordinary, Mack’s group explains Christian origins in secular terms, relying on the humanities and the social sciences.

“The task would be to account for the formation of the gospel in the context of a later social history... Instead of assuming eruptions of inexplicable energy penetrating the human scene from without... one should look for historical circumstances, intellectual resources and social motivations for early Christians to have imagined such a cosmic drama.”²³

That is, nothing extraordinary and cosmic had happened at the start, but the later group, out of its own social setting, had created the story to legitimize itself. Thus the supernatural Jesus dissolves and disappears; he is a creation of the later sect, and there was no history.

While this appears as the most extreme and farfetched of views, it is but the end-product of the position of Reimarus: that the disciples altered and invented. Jesus assumes whatever persona his lowly but obstinate followers want him to have. We thus have the idolatry of the image: each worshipper endows the Icon with whatever attributes, virtues and miraculous powers that the worshipper desires. In the modern view the attribute of "human existence" has been attached, which brings the divine being that much closer to the worshipper. But this is a matter of faith, not of evidence. For all their skepticism and rejection, the Mack-Cameron-Georgi group devoutly asserts the existence of the human Jesus as the starting point — with no shred of proof.

NOTES:

1. A. Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 398
2. A. Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 4
3. A. Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 400
4. H.S. Reimarus, quoted by A. Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 17
5. H.S. Reimarus, quoted by A. Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 21
6. E. Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, chapter 15, 188
7. E. Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, chapter 20
8. Origen, *Contra Celsus*, 5:63
9. *Theodosian Code*, 16.5.5, 16.5.6, enacted AD 379
10. E. Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, xxxviii
11. A. Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 84
12. D.F. Strauss, quoted by A. Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 78
13. D.F. Strauss, Quoted by A. Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 79
14. D.F. Strauss, Quoted by A. Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 82
15. R. Bultmann, *Form Criticism*, 28
16. R. Bultmann, *Form Criticism*, 28
17. D.F. Strauss, Quoted by A. Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 89
18. R. Bultmann, *Form Criticism*, 36, 57
19. Harnack, *Mission and Expansion of Christianity*, 312 – 313
20. J. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, xxvii
21. J. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, xii
22. B. Mack, *A Myth of Innocence*, 4
23. B. Mack, *A Myth of Innocence*, 9

SKEPTICAL STUDIES

“I cannot determine what I ought to transcribe till I am satisfied how much I ought to believe.”

Edward Gibbon,
The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire

With so much of the gospel story rejected by critical scholarship, how much confidence can we have in the central drama, namely the passion narrative? If that is shown to be fictional in its entirety, then the gospel story is in virtual bankruptcy. However scholarly studies of this narrative in recent decades have indeed gone far towards dismantling the story. This means that the Jewish authorities and judges of the Sanhedrin, accused down the centuries of bringing about the death of an innocent man, have been cleared of any wrongdoing, and it is the gospel writers who stand accused of putting out a fake story.

Bultmann began the dismantling process in his *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, first published in 1921. He methodically rejected each episode as given in Mark's gospel. We summarize his opinions:

The betrayal by Judas¹

“Judas' betrayal, at least as it is actually presented, belongs to legend.”²

The anointing at Bethany, foreshadowing the anointing of the body for the burial,³

“...a biographical legend.”⁴

The preparation for the Passover, where the disciples will meet a man directing them to the Passover chamber.⁵

“The basis is a fairy-tale motif... to show the traveler his way.”⁶

The foretelling of the betrayal, wherein Jesus announces that one at the table will betray him.⁷

“The legendary character of the scene follows from the fact that the announcement of the betrayal is not followed by any practical consequences.”⁸

The institution of the Lord’s Supper.⁹

“...a cult legend of the Hellenistic circles concerning Paul... The section was turned into an account of the Passover in editorial revision... We may well ask if the author of Gospel of John had a more primitive account of the Last Supper in front of him.”¹⁰

The road to Gethsemane and the foretelling of Peter’s denial.¹¹

“The tradition behind [this] has to be classed as a historical account with legendary traits. It prepares the way for the Arrest and the Denial.”¹²

That is, it derives from “tradition,” which is as far back as Bultmann is able to go.

Jesus in Gethsemane.¹³

“This is originally an individual story of a thoroughgoing legendary character which has not survived intact in *Mark*... It is characteristic for the history of the tradition that Luke or his copyist has expanded the scene by the wholly legendary section of *Luke 22:43ff* [Garden Scene].”¹⁴

“This piece of narrative is colored by legend in the motif of the betrayal by a kiss, and in what Jesus says in verses 48ff, which sounds very much like Church apologetics and dogmatics.”¹⁶

Peter’s denial.¹⁷

“The story of Peter is itself legendary and literary.”¹⁸

Trial and judgment by the *Sanhedrin*.¹⁹

“I think the whole narrative in *Mark* is a secondary explanation of the brief statement in 15:1 [i.e., ‘And straightaway in the morning the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council, and bound Jesus and carried him away, and delivered him to Pilate.’²⁰] ...In the first place we have to ask: not what can be thought of as historical, but what is intelligible as tradition in the Christian Church?”²¹

That is, we have “Church apologetics and dogmatics” creating the trial episode. Elsewhere Bultmann states that the Sanhedrin trial “must be reckoned as a faith-legend.”²²

The ill-treatment of Jesus (where Jesus is buffeted and spat upon by the Sanhedrin judges).²³

“This is a piece of the tradition that is somewhat scattered and Mark has put it at a peculiarly unfortunate place. It must have been part of an older narrative...”²⁴

Delivery to Pilate, sentence and crucifixion.²⁵

“This is by no means a unitary composition... The episode of Barabbas is obviously a legendary expansion... Matthew has also enlarged a few legendary features: Pilate’s washing of his hands [Matthew 27:24] and the death of Judas [Matthew 27:2 – 10].”²⁶

The mocking of the Crucified.²⁷

“This is a legendary formulation on the basis of a prophetic proof: Psalms 22:8, Lamentations 2:15.... The appearance of the chief priests and scribes as typical opponents of Jesus is in the secondary tradition.”²⁸

The death of Jesus.²⁹

“This account is strongly distorted by legend... The terata [earthquakes and resurrections] at the death of Jesus [are] Christian legends...”³⁰

The women as witnesses.³¹

“As at the Resurrection women are here named as witnesses. And here they are as little historical as there. They are necessary because the disciples who had fled could not be made to appear.”³²

The burial.³³

“This is a historical account which creates no impression of being a legend apart from the women who appear again as witnesses... Matthew 27:62–66 attaches the legend of the sepulchre guard for apologetic [i.e., polemical] reasons.”³⁴

Finally we come to an episode labeled “historical.” Bultmann does this because he ends his critique of the passion narrative with Mark’s burial story. He makes this an implied rejection of the Resurrection, which he does not cover. If Jesus existed he of course was buried, so Bultmann is safe in declaring this to be historical, but all else is rejected.

As Bultmann sees it, the Jesus that appears in the passion story is not a human personage, but a doctrinal and cult god.

“The figure of Jesus is seen in the light of faith, of cult and of myth... There is no interest in his *Bios* in a purely historical sense... The Christ who is preached is not the historical Jesus but the Christ of the faith and the cult... The Gospels are expanded faith legends... There is no historical-biographical interest in the Gospels, and that is why they have nothing to say about Jesus’ human personality, his appearance and character, his origin, education and development... They do not tell of a much admired human personality, but of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Lord of the Church, and do so because they have grown out of Christian worship and remain tied to it.”³⁵

From which it follows that the passion narrative is a doctrinal statement, not a historical event.

From the foregoing material we must agree that Bultmann, recognized as the leading New Testament scholar of the century, has dismantled the main content of the passion narrative. The human Jesus cannot be derived from the gospels, but is a secular invention. The human-biographical Jesus, which today appears unquestionable, was first created by the skeptics and philosophes of the eighteenth century, precisely because they wanted to combat the Christ of the Church.

This Jesus then achieved vivid novelistic human reality in Renan’s *Life of Jesus*, published in 1863, a book that was the scandal and bestseller of the decade, and which has set the pattern for the human Jesus to the present. Before the modern era the Jesus of the Passion was there only as a creation of the church, to speak and act out church doctrines.

In the foregoing critique by Bultmann we note that all episodes that implicate the Jews and throw reproaches and accusations against the Jews have been declared by him to be “legendary.” These include the bribery of Judas, the *Sanhedrin* trial, the mistreatment and mockery of Jesus, the Barabbas story where the Jews prefer a criminal to Jesus, the “washing of the hands” by Pilate, and Matthew’s burial story wherein the Jewish authorities conceal the disappearance of the body of Jesus from the tomb. At this point the high priest Caiaphas could ask for a directed verdict for acquittal.

The dismantling of the passion narrative, begun by Bultmann, has continued and intensified in recent decades. A good summary of the present “state of the art” is given in Burton L. Mack’s study, *A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins*, published in 1988.

He writes:

“For most of the rather long history of New Testament scholarship, the passion narratives remained critically unexamined. Only recently has this situation changed markedly. The reasons for tardiness in coming to this text are complex, no doubt, but underlying them all one suspects a certain hesitation to scrutinize those events crucial for Christian myth-ritual... The passion narrative is the primary myth-ritual text for Christianity. For that reason it holds a privileged position. For that reason also it has been less rigorously analyzed than other portions of Christian literature.”³⁶

The long-delayed exploration gained momentum in the 1970s. “In the seventies many studies on the passion narratives appeared in Germany... American studies set a new course in the 1970s.”³⁷

Mack calls the reasons “complex” but it will occur to the general reader that enormous events had taken place in the prior thirty years: the Holocaust and the War Crimes tribunals, which opened up the full record of the genocide of the European Jews; the founding of the State of Israel, with many nations supporting it; Vatican II, which with Orwell-like suddenness canceled the age-old stereotype of the Jews as a depraved race of Christ-killers; and the stunning victory of Israel in the 1967 war, which changed the stereotype from contempt to admiration.

Against these events the gospel passion narrative stood in fierce contradiction, since this narrative declared that the Jewish authorities were the driving force in bringing about the death of Jesus. Covertly, the scholars sought to distance themselves from a narrative that was now “politically incorrect.” A revision was in order. With unspoken accord the scholars, all members of the Christian Establishment, felt the time had come to revise the story in a way that would leave the

person of Jesus intact, but would reduce the villainy of the Jews. The target for the enterprise turned out to be the *Gospel of Mark*, declared by the scholars to be the earliest and most historical of the gospels. If it could be shown that Mark had put the story together and had fabricated the antisemitic portions, that would solve the problem. Jesus existed, but the passion story would be explained away. We thus have the spectacle of established New Testament scholars engaged in this dismantling work, following their own agenda. It is further testimony undermining gospel credibility, therefore the existence of Jesus.

We confine ourself here to two recent studies of the passion narrative, put out by New Testament scholars recognized to be in the front rank in this field: *A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins* by Burton L. Mack; and *Who Killed Jesus? Exposing the Roots of Anti-Semitism in the Gospel Story of the Death of Jesus* by John Dominic Crossan.

Mack indicates that he has no knowledge as to how Jesus met his end, therefore all would have to be invented by Mark.

“One can only speculate about what happened. Jerusalem was, of course, the big city for Galileans during this period. Jesus must have gone there on some occasion, most probably during a pilgrimage season, was associated with a demonstration, and was killed.”³⁸

We are not even told that there was a trial and a crucifixion. Perhaps the Romans attacked the pilgrims, and Jesus was cut down with many others.

Mack then rejects key episodes in the story, as did Bultmann. We list these, which again operate to dismantle the passion narrative:

1. The ‘temple act,’ wherein Jesus violently disrupts the Temple proceedings, overthrowing the tables of the money-changers, etc, is rejected, but this removes a major cause as to why the authorities would want to get rid of a dangerous enemy. Mack states: “The temple act cannot be historical... The conclusion must be that the temple act is a Markan fabrication.”³⁹

2. "The story of the arrest (at Gethsemane) is a Markan fiction... The Righteous One is the forsaken one, without helpers and alone before his accusers."⁴⁰
3. The Sanhedrin trial is also fabricated. "Mark used the motif of the false witnesses to create the illusion of a trial... The trial is really a very vicious fiction."⁴¹
4. "The trial before Pilate was necessary because historical credibility demanded it. The Romans, rather than the Jews, executed criminals by means of crucifixion."⁴²
Mack hints that Mark found himself in the dire predicament of having to put in a historical touch.
5. "The story of Judas' betrayal is a Markan fiction."⁴³
6. Peter's denial was "imagined": "Many scholars have thought to see a 'Petrine' reminiscence in this story, finding it difficult to believe that Mark imagined all of it. The evidence that he did, however, is overwhelming."⁴⁴

As to why Mark created this narrative, and his gospel as a whole, Mack's explanation is that this gospel was put out by a "synagogue reform movement" in the Diaspora in sharp conflict with the synagogue authorities, leading to expulsion of that group. The gospel emerged as a legitimization document, wherein Jesus embodied the grandiose claims of that group, and also symbolized the alleged martyrdom of the group.

"The Jews who did not accept the teaching of the Jesus-people about Jesus and his kingdom are pictured in the gospel as those who conspired to kill him... The conflict of the synagogue reform movement with the synagogue was read back into the myth of origins and presented as the cause for Jesus' crucifixion."⁴⁵

The end result was the “vicious fiction” of the Sanhedrin trial implicating the Jewish leaders in an imaginary event. It is a revenge-story where later events are read back as the “myth of origin.”

This is Mack’s explanation as to how Mark’s gospel came into being. It neatly explains the absence of historical credibility in Mark’s gospel while preserving the existence of Jesus and preserving the hallowed premise of Jewish villainy in expelling and persecuting the good reform group. This helps establish the bona fides of Mark in creating a fictional gospel. Mack has covertly propped up the Christian case. The gospel is a fake but it is an understandable fake.

While this appears to be a radical thesis, it fits very well with our premise, set forth in earlier chapters, that Paul led a “reform group” that was expelled from the Jamesian church, and that in retaliation Paul came out with his virulent charge, “The Jews killed the Lord Jesus.”

Mack remarks on this:

“Paul said once that the Jews killed Jesus as they had killed the prophets...⁴⁶ Paul’s meditation shows just how dangerous it would be to historicize the kerygma [sect doctrines]. It also shows the circumstances under which one might be tempted to do so. The circumstances are those in conflict with Judaism or with Christian Judaizers.”⁴⁷

Exactly. The conflict will be “historicized” in the fabrication of supposed events, including a charge of first-degree murder on the part of the Jewish authorities.

Our second writer on the passion narrative is John Crossan. He agrees with Burton Mack that the disciples had no knowledge as to how Jesus met his end, therefore all had to be imagined.

“The hypothesis I am testing is that Jesus’ companions knew he had been arrested and executed but knew nothing at all about what, if anything, had intervened. They had no details at all about any judicial proceeding or, indeed, any knowledge about whether any such event took place.”⁴⁸

Perhaps there had been no trials. In his major work, *The Historical Jesus*, Crossan writes: "It is now impossible for us to imagine the offhand brutality, anonymity and indifference with which a peasant nobody like Jesus would have been disposed of."⁴⁹

Crossan also follows Mack in the hypothesis that the *Gospel of Mark* was composed by a member of a dissident group that had been expelled from the synagogue. His gospel is a legitimization text, that explains why his sect is the true Israel. It is also a resentment text, putting all blame on the Jews. Just as they had persecuted Mark's group so the Jewish leaders had persecuted Jesus in the earlier period.

Crossan explains:

"Mark writes for and to a community that has suffered severely from lethal persecution... He has Jesus foretell as distant future what he knows full well as recent past, 'As for yourselves, beware, for they will hand you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues...' Mark 13:9."⁵⁰

"Mark tells us of accusations made against Markan Christians by Jewish authorities, and he retrojects such accusations back onto Jesus himself."⁵¹

We thought Crossan was going to defend the Jews against "antisemitism in the gospel" and now we have Jewish villainy set forth in full display. With friends like Crossan...

Johannes Weiss shows scant belief in these stories, as related in Acts:

"We are reminded, again and again, with wearisome monotony, of the hostility and opposition of the [Diaspora] Jews, who from envy at the Apostles' success, stir up the mob against them, hinder their activity, and drive them from the place."⁵²

In the foregoing, Crossan has vouched for Mark's bona fides: there was a Jesus who was slain, and there was resentment at the Jewish authorities. Mark thus has plenary absolution in inventing as he pleases.

Crossan nevertheless joins Mack in rejecting major episodes:

1. Jesus' predictions of the passion.

"There is no reason, after John Baptist's execution, that Jesus might not have imagined some similar fate for himself, but these precise prophecies were created and placed on Jesus' lips by Mark himself."⁵³

The predictions include direct accusations: "The Son of Man must undergo great sufferings and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed."⁵⁴

This is now labeled a Markan creation.

2. The Sanhedrin trial and the Pilate trial. "The trial of Jesus was first created by historization of Psalm 2... It is not just the content of the trials but the very fact of the trials that I consider to be unhistorical."⁵⁵

The trials are the very essence of the passion narrative.

3. Barabbas. "Mark invents that very character itself."⁵⁶

This is a key episode, and shows the villainy of the Jews in calling for the release of Barabbas rather than Jesus.

4. "I consider Joseph of Arimathea to be a total Markan creation."⁵⁷

Be it noted, this Joseph has a major role in the tomb and burial stories. Pilate turns over the body of Jesus to him and he makes the burial arrangements. If he drops out of the story then all is in disarray.

5. "Mark created the empty tomb story, just as he created the sleeping disciples at Gethsemane."⁵⁸

This of course is a denial of the resurrection story.

Overall, Crossan denies historical fact anywhere in the crucifixion story. "In conclusion, I cannot find any detailed historical information about the crucifixion of Jesus. Every item we looked at was prophecy historicized rather than history recalled."⁵⁹

As Crossan sees it, the whole story was the acting out of proof-texts. "In the beginning was passion prophecy, then came passion narrative."⁶⁰

Crossan states that the gospel writers, starting with a blank page and with zero history, were quite free with their imaginings and their creativity. The gospel of John shows "...extremely creative adaptations...(with) brilliantly independent creativity."⁶¹

"John's alleged used of Mark is so profoundly creative that we are dealing with a total transformation."⁶²

In general, the gospels involve...

"...historization, actualization, popularization. Some anonymous genius took diverse Scriptural fulfillments, for example Psalm 2, and historicized them into a story of what happened to Jesus, but did so that the events were actualized in the most recent experience of the Christian community, and the interaction of past and present was presented in popularized format."⁶³

This genius did all the work.

The primary source is named as the apocryphal gospel of Peter, in itself a fictional work, after which "...the other evangelists each developed it extensively, creatively and quite deliberately. John, however, did so most brilliantly."⁶⁴

"From John, as usual, one expects maximum creativity."⁶⁵

We can imagine what would happen to these accounts in a present-day courtroom. However Crossan finds it all "fascinating": "It is fascinating to compare what Mark created to make his points, with what John created from Mark's account, to make very different points."⁶⁶

Thus far, two of our scholars, Burton Mack and John Crossan, have failed to provide any confirmation for the passion narrative. We turn now to scholars who support the narrative and will examine their arguments.

NOTES:

1. *Mark*, 14:1
2. R. Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 262
3. *Mark*, 14:3 – 9
4. R. Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 263
5. *Mark*, 14:12 – 14
6. R. Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 264
7. *Mark*, 14:17 – 21
8. R. Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 265
9. *Mark*, 14:22 – 25
10. R. Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 266
11. *Mark*, 14:26 – 31
12. R. Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 267
13. *Mark*, 14:32 – 42
14. R. Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 267 – 268
15. *Mark*, 14:43 – 52
16. R. Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 268
17. *Mark*, 15:53, 66 – 72
18. R. Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 269
19. *Mark*, 14:55 – 64
20. *Mark*, 15:1
21. R. Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 270
22. R. Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 305
23. *Mark*, 14:65
24. R. Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 271
25. *Mark*, 15:1 – 27
26. R. Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 272
27. *Mark*, 15:29 – 32
28. R. Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 273
29. *Mark*, 15:33 – 39
30. R. Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 273 – 274
31. *Mark*, 15:40 – 41

32. R. Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 274
33. *Mark*, 15:42 – 47
34. R. Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 274
35. R. Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 306 – 307, 370 – 373
36. B.L. Mack, *A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins*, 249
henceforth referred to as A Myth of Innocence
37. B.L. Mack, *A Myth of Innocence*, 258, 262
38. B.L. Mack, *A Myth of Innocence*, 89
39. B.L. Mack, *A Myth of Innocence*, 292
40. B.L. Mack, *A Myth of Innocence*, 293
41. B.L. Mack, *A Myth of Innocence*, 294 – 295
42. B.L. Mack, *A Myth of Innocence*, 295
43. B.L. Mack, *A Myth of Innocence*, 304
44. B.L. Mack, *A Myth of Innocence*, 305
45. B.L. Mack, *A Myth of Innocence*, 170, 207
46. *1 Thessalonians*, 2:14 – 15
47. B.L. Mack, *A Myth of Innocence*, 280
48. J. Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus? Exposing the Roots of Anti-Semitism in the Gospel Story of the Death of Jesus*, 112
henceforth referred to as Who Killed Jesus?
49. J. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, xii
50. J. Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?* 17
51. J. Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?* 110
52. J. Weiss, *Earliest Christianity* 208
53. J. Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?* 67
54. *Mark*, 8:31
55. J. Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?* 84, 117
56. J. Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?* 111
57. J. Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?* 172
58. J. Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?* 184
59. J. Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?* 159
60. J. Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?* 12
61. J. Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?* 21
62. J. Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?* 29
63. J. Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?* 95
64. J. Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?* 114
65. J. Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?* 186
66. J. Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?* 80

THE THEOLOGIAN-APOLOGISTS

“In definite acquittal the documents relating to the case are said to be completely annulled. They simply vanish from sight.”

Franz Kafka, *The Trial*

As noted in our introductory chapter, several Catholic clergymen-scholars emphasize the theme of “responsibility and guilt” on the part of the Jewish authorities. However when we come to examine their evidence we find they are in the same morass of uncertainty and guesswork as the rest of the New Testament scholars and are unable to confirm any part of the story.

The three in question — Josef Blinzler, Hans Küng and Raymond E. Brown — must join the others in citing Josephus as the sole evidence of any weight that Jesus existed, while acknowledging the controversy as to genuineness. Blinzler: “The authenticity of the *Testimonium Flavianum* is much disputed, as is well known”¹

Küng discreetly refers only to the James passage, staying clear of the main passage. “The earliest Jewish testimony is provided, about AD 90, by Flavius Josephus... He mentions with obvious reserve the stoning in 62 of James, ‘the brother of Jesus, the so-called Christ’ ”²

The main Testimonium was too hot to handle.

Raymond Brown writes concerning the passage: “Large parts of it are plausibly from the hands of Josephus,”³ — while listing nine writers in a footnote that deny that any of it is.

As mentioned, we will grant that this text is genuine only if undisputed original manuscripts of Josephus are located that confirm this text. Brown must show more than “plausibility.” In a murder case the existence of the victim must be proved beyond reasonable doubt.

Blinzler admits that the four gospel writers themselves did not consider their accounts as “historical” — rather these were “theological”:

“None of these four (gospel) accounts is an actual report of a trial... The evangelists are, generally speaking, less interested in the purely historical course of events than in their content as religious doctrine, hence their accounts of the passion must also be understood primarily as testimonies of faith...”⁴

The attempt to recover the “history” is what has led to all the scholarly disputes, as Blinzler admits.

Thus concerning incendiary passages in Matthew’s gospel, as where the Jews cry out “His blood be upon us and our children,” Blinzler writes: “The strongly polemical and biased character of these passages peculiar to Matthew alone has caused them to be generally regarded by critics of the gospels as legendary accretions.”

Blinzler however comes to the rescue: The passages “contain hardly anything that is historically improbable.”⁵

The criterion of “probability” is the best that he can offer.

Küng in turn writes: “Despite the closest critical investigation, since we have neither official records nor statements of eyewitnesses, it is no longer possible to reconstruct the details of Jesus’ trial.”

He then adds nonchalantly that it is not too important to know what the Jews did or did not do:

“It is relatively unimportant whether a formal sentence of death was pronounced by the Sanhedrin or whether there was an agreement to surrender Jesus to Pilate, with all the consequences, or merely even a suggestion that Jesus was dangerous as...a potential rebel.”⁶

Meaning that Küng has no knowledge of any kind, hence the possibility is left open that the whole trial story is fictional, as Crossan and Mack have argued.

Raymond Brown was considered among the most influential of American scholars in this field. His book *The Death of the Messiah* lists 1500 authors in the index, along with scores of scholarly publications and reference works. Let us see what he has to offer on the passion narrative — the “PN” as he calls it.

Having gotten Josephus to vouch that Jesus plausibly existed, Brown goes on to make this central to the story. All is unproved but Brown makes this so emphatic that the illusion of historical fact is foisted upon the reader:

“Jesus was a human figure of actual history.”⁷

“One can characterize as bedrock history that Jesus of Nazareth was crucified at Jerusalem.”⁸

He was “...someone who lived at a particular time in a particular place among real people.”⁹

“We shall begin with indisputable facts... All four Gospels have a Sanhedrin session that dealt with Jesus.”¹⁰

“That Jesus was buried is historically certain.”¹¹

“It is solid history that Jesus was associated with John the Baptist and that John Baptist was put to death by Herod Antipas.”¹²

The above illustrates the *modus operandi*. By placing the assumed Jesus in a historical framework of time, place and ‘real people’ then Jesus is made historical himself. Which is like saying that in the novel *War and Peace* the character of Prince Andrey becomes historical because he is in the framework of hundreds of historical facts dealing with Napoleon’s invasion of Russia. But at least Tolstoy had his facts right. As we demonstrated in an earlier chapter, the attempt of the gospel writers to describe the terrain, the customs and the religion itself of the region led to error upon error. The writers know as little of Judea and Galilee as they know of the Upper Amazon.

If the gospel writers are so far off in describing landscape, locale, custom and religion, how accurate can they be in describing the named historical personages — Pilate, Caiaphas, “chief priests,” Pharisees et cetera? We note at the very outset that the gospel writers had failed to give a naturalist-historical portrait of Jesus himself. Instead, as Bultmann has pointed out, they had made Jesus a mythical supernatural

figure, a Son of God and worker of miracles, the spokesman for church doctrines and the embodiment of proof-texts. Can we expect greater historical accuracy in their portrayal of the opponents of Jesus?

To maintain the mythical supernatural portrait of Jesus, the gospel writers were compelled to make the Jews as mythical and supernatural as Jesus, but in manichaeian counterpoint: pure evil as opposed to pure good. "The Darkness hated the Light... You are of your father the Devil..."

To reject the teachings of Jesus and to plot against against him would require an extraordinary amount of malignancy, and this created the stereotype of the Jew that has prevailed down the centuries until the post 1970s. Thus Raymond Brown fails in his argument that the naming of actual personages in the gospels thereby establishes the historical existence of Jesus himself. Let us see if Brown has confirmed any other part of the "PN."

Brown fully agrees with Bultmann that Mark selected, arranged and edited prior traditional materials and used these to construct his PN. Brown explains how Mark constructed the Sanhedrin trial scene:

"... the individual evangelists have reshaped the preGospel tradition... I have pointed out awkwardnesses that were created by the pulling together of incidents that were separate in the tradition... Why not present them forcefully as one dramatic scene where the interaction of motives and decisions can be more easily understood?... The clarity and force of the unified trial presentation has moved and been remembered by hundreds of millions; the awkwardnesses have bothered a handful of scholars subjecting the narrative to microscopic examination."¹³

Mark's dramatic and moving scene includes such pleasantries as having Jesus struck in the face and spat upon by the Sanhedrin dignitaries. The word "tradition" is used to legitimize Mark's lurid imagination. Burton Mack correctly called the story "very vicious fiction."

Brown relies heavily on the word "tradition." However there is a wide difference between tradition and history. Historical research makes a sharp distinction between what is labeled as factual event,

confirmed and corroborated as to time and place, and what is found in legend and tradition. Tradition is defined generally as "...the handing down orally of stories, beliefs, customs, etc. from generation to generation."

In Christianity, tradition has the specific meaning of "the unwritten teachings regarded as handed down from Jesus and the Apostles."

Thus the word very conveniently establishes the existence of Jesus and the Apostles at the beginning, and also establishes the sincerity and good faith of the gospel writers at the end. These writers can be accused of many things, but they have avoided the main charge: that the whole story is a fake and they have invented the story. It is the magic word "tradition" that has rescued them and granted their bona fides.

This "tradition" obviously does not include exact time, place and firm corroboration since if we had these elements we would have authenticity and chronology; we would have historical fact and not tradition. We also note that tradition is always self-serving. It is preserved and treasured by a given group or society to enhance the prestige, accomplishments and antiquity of that society. And quite often the said tradition is used to discredit a rival group or society. This is clearly illegitimate since the target group is attacked by sources 'handed down' and which cannot be verified. The target group cannot fight back. It is simply the victim of an age-old "tradition" that amounts to age-old defamation.

Thus the scholar who in any way appeals to the "oral tradition" of the "early Christian community" and claims this as a source for historical fact, historical event or historically accurate statement, is at once stepping outside the area of standard research. He is using a word not used by Gibbon or any other responsible historian. He is going in for guesswork and scenario-writing, and he must clearly indicate this to the reader. He must state that at best this "oral tradition" may contain historical possibility — provided we agree that there was a Jesus of Nazareth and that there were "apostles" to hear the sayings and report the events and launch the "tradition." Under the guise of objective research all this is being foisted on the reader. Not one word of it can be used in the courtroom against the Jewish authorities.

Crossan had called the process of scene-fabrication by the gospel writers "...actualization, historization, popularization."

Brown prefers the word 'vocalize' to indicate that the invented scene is the acting out of some concept or belief. We give several examples:

Matthew has the Jews cry out. "His blood be upon us and our children."¹⁴

Brown explains: "Matthew, writing after 70, vocalizes a causal judgment that arose among Jewish believers in Jesus."¹⁵

On the trial stories:

"We are hearing Christian tradition about the basic issue of Jesus' identity vocalized respectively between Jesus and the Jewish authorities, and Jesus and the Roman governor. That issue has in each case been shaped into a simple question format and made central in a dramatized trial setting."¹⁶

Thus the Jewish and the Roman trials are fictional, based on "vocalization."

The last words of Jesus on the cross: this refers to a Scriptural text "in which Mark/Matthew vocalize Jesus' desperation."¹⁷

Matthew's story of the guard at the tomb: "It suggests that the story of the guard at the sepulcher was vocalized at a period when the Pharisees had become the chief opponents of Christians."¹⁸

Brown makes no apology for this process. Throughout he defends the "creative" work of the gospel writers, in inventing passages and in expanding the work of the other writers. "Indeed one must pay tribute to Matthew 26:42 for having expanded Mark's colorless 14:39 with theological skill, to fashion a second prayer."¹⁹

"The individual evangelists have reshaped the preGospel tradition."²⁰

"The Lucan crucifixion account... suggests how an imaginative adaptation of Marcan material could account for many of the differences between the two Gospels."²¹

Another example:

“Almost twice as long as the Marcan account, Matthew’s Roman trial is longer than his Jewish trial. While using Marcan material as the backbone, Matthew has supplemented it with dramatic incidents that greatly enliven the account and heighten the theological import.”²²

It bothers Brown not in the least that Matthew invents out of thin air. Matthew gets high marks for his creativity.

In his campaign to defend every line of the PN, Brown frequently uses phrases such as “not impossible” and “not implausible,” no matter how farfetched the episode is. Crossan, who seems to be carrying on a running feud with Brown, gives a list of these in *Who Killed Jesus?*, pages 36 – 37, citing Brown’s book. We select several from the list:

- Attendants slap or beat Jesus after his Jewish interrogation. “Such abuse is not at all implausible historically.”²³
- Passersby mock Jesus on the cross. “It is not implausible.”²⁴
- Members of the Sanhedrin are present at the cross. “It is not at all implausible.”²⁵

And this is on the Passover.

Brown thus establishes the “responsibility and guilt” of the Jewish authorities by a list of not-implausibles. Since when does an objective historian go in for these tactics?

To add to the general confusion, no one knows who wrote the gospels or where or when.

“No Gospel identifies its author. The common designations placed before the Gospels, eg, ‘The Gospel according to Matthew,’ stem from the late 2nd century [i.e., after AD 150], and represent an educated estimate of authorship by church scholars of that period who were putting together traditions and guesses pertinent to attribution.”²⁶

“Our ignorance of what preceded Mark has allowed widely divergent theorizing about the Gospel’s import.”²⁷

Concerning the trial of Jesus by the Sanhedrin, wherein Brown is determined to find “responsibility and guilt,” he writes:

“Overall there is the issue of composition. How were the accounts in the various Gospels put together? I shall reserve the discussion of the myriad proposals about composition until I have commented on the whole trial.”²⁸

The scholars have put out a “myriad” of proposals. Which of the thousands is correct? We have a chaos of theories as to source and invention and shift of material from one gospel to the other, with no two scholars in agreement. “Opinions differ so widely that the confusion is impenetrable,” as Kafka puts it.

Brown writes that the virtue and innocence of Christ operated to create “great injustice” when he was executed:

“Reading the Gospels will convince most that at least, although troublesome, Jesus was a sincere religious figure who taught truth and helped many, and that therefore crucifying him was a great injustice.”²⁹

That is, the truth of the gospel creates the guilt of the Jews. But to a devout and zealous individual setting fire to a synagogue it is the guilt of the Jews that creates the truth of the gospel. The question is — which came first, the Victim or the Villainy, and which created which?

The writings of the Alexandrian Four, especially Apion, show that the stereotype of the Jew as alien and demonic was well-known prior to the composition of the gospels. Apion’s contribution was the ritual murder story — that each year, presumably at the Passover, the Jews offered up an innocent victim, which was a great injustice. Can we be sure that Apion was not one of the sources used by the gospel writers?

It will be recalled that Justin and the other early Christians were emphatic that the Jews alone carried out the crucifixion — an impossible situation in a Roman-occupied province. We thus have guilt created out of thin air. And if the gospels were edited and improved versions of Justin, these would have no higher credibility.

At the conclusion to his book, after 1500 pages, Brown has very little to offer the reader. He defends Mark against the charge that he is a novelist who invented the whole story; instead Mark made use of a “source” although that source is lost and invisible, which rescues Mark from the charge. And Brown consoles us with the news that there are “rich layers of tradition” still to be explored although the savants have been working on this for 300 years to no avail.

He writes:

“Our investigation brings us to a positive conclusion and a point of challenge. We may safely conclude that Mark uses a source in writing his PN. We know that source, however, only as incorporated in Mark. The greatest challenge that lies before us is not the separation of tradition from Marcan redaction for, as our earlier work shows, that task may finally be an impossible one. Rather, we must investigate the rich layers of tradition that come to us in the form of the Marcan PN.”³⁰

Nowhere in the above is there any mention of historical fact since it may be impossible even to obtain a separate “tradition” from Mark. Where then is the guilt of Caiaphas and his associates? We must conclude that Brown has joined the others in the dismantling of the passion narrative. But Brown had stated that “...from every point of view the passion is the central narrative of the Christian story.”³¹

Therefore the entire story vanishes, which necessarily means the dismantling of the case against the Jewish authorities.

As we bring our inquiry to a close several conclusions may be stated:

1. The gospel story is fictional in its entirety. There never was a Jesus of Nazareth and there never was a crucifixion story.
2. In particular the passion narrative must be condemned as a deliberate fraud, meant to attack and defame the Jews.
3. Christianity has fabricated its origins, its legitimacy and its historical truth by the capture and occupation of the Judaic Scriptures, and the claim to be the True Israel. This is a conquest and occupation which the Jews have never recognized.
4. An alternative explanation can be provided for Christian origins and early Christianity — one that does not require the “historical Jesus.”
5. New Testament scholarship is a bogus enterprise. It creates scenarios and takes over material from the social sciences to give the impression that Christianity has an authentic historical origin. The pose of objective research is used to prop up the gospel story but no hard evidence can be found to support that story.

In view of the foregoing, the candid reader is asked to render a verdict of acquittal for the Jewish authorities.

NOTES:

1. J. Blinzler, *The Trial of Jesus*, 29
2. H. Küng, *On Being a Christian*, 120.
3. R. Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 374 n. 104
4. J. Blinzler, *The Trial of Jesus*, 39
5. J. Blinzler, *The Trial of Jesus*, 216 – 217
6. H. Küng, *On Being a Christian*, 331 – 332
7. R. Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, vii
8. R. Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 13
9. R. Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 13
10. R. Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 555
11. R. Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 1240
12. R. Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 1468
13. R. Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 559 – 560
14. Matthew 27:25
15. R. Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 29
16. R. Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 730
17. R. Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 1047
18. R. Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 1289
19. R. Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 204
20. R. Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 559
21. R. Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 906
22. R. Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 754
23. R. Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 586
24. R. Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 1027
25. R. Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 1027
26. R. Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 4, n.2
27. R. Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 46
28. R. Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 454
29. R. Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 383
30. R. Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 1523 – 1524
31. R. Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, vii

 EPILOGUE

“...A dwarfed, walled-in collection of alleys and creaking ancient buildings, its ugliness and loneliness in marked contrast to the warmth and charm of greater Frankfurt... this was the *Judengasse*, the ghetto of the Jews.”

Howard M. Sachar, *“The Course of Modern Jewish History”*

In the present work we have traced out developments in the Hellenic Jewish Diaspora up to the period of about AD 240. We now have the somber task of narrating the studied and deliberate destruction of this Diaspora by a triumphant Christianity, and its replacement by a shattered and pariah ghetto Judaism.

A standard myth is that Judaism disappeared as a significant force after the disaster of AD 70. However our main authority for the later period will be Marcel Simon’s book *“Verus Israel: A Study in the Relations Between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire, 135 – 425.”* He quotes several writers to show the continued effectiveness of this Judaism. He cites E. Schwartz who argued that “...a Jewish proselytizing movement that was both strong and many-sided survived in the face of the victorious Church.”¹

W. Bousset “...thinks that the Hellenistic and universalist spirit maintained itself much longer than is generally admitted... [with] a hitherto unsuspected vitality.”²

Catholic Christianity became all-powerful after AD 325 with its adoption by Constantine as the official religion of the empire, however Judaism remained very much on the scene — to the alarm of the Church.

M. Simon writes: “Though Christian anti-Semitism existed, at least in rudimentary form, at the very beginning of Christianity, it only unfolded fully in the fourth century [AD 300 – 400].”³

The charges thrown at the Jews were the same as those made at the very beginning: “The Jews are worthy of hatred because they killed Christ, persecuted his disciples, and rejected his teachings.”⁴

Not only were the Jews obstinately rejecting Christian doctrines but were inducing others to a similar rejection. And while the Christians had been powerless to silence the Jews at the early period, weapons were now at hand in abundance to do the job. To the Church authorities the Jewish ‘threat’ was very real:

“It was the existence of the pro-Jewish sentiments among the laity that is the real explanation for Christian anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism was the defensive reflex of the orthodox hierarchy to the Jewish danger, the Jewish disease [as one Christian document put it]... The most compelling reason for this anti-Semitism was the religious vitality of Judaism... It was shown in the attraction that the Synagogue and its message still managed to exercise over the [Christian] believers... The Synagogue was an ever-present reality...”⁵

Not only a reality but an expanding one, causing in turn “...the explicit and repeated legislative measures the Christians took during the fourth century to protect themselves against Jewish expansion.”⁶

The all-powerful Church found itself on the defensive. The average Christian attracted to the synagogue seemingly was not impressed by Church arguments based on dogma and theology. If anything, it was the directness and obviousness of Judaism that appeared superior to the complexity and mystery of articles of faith such as the Incarnation and the Trinity. “Even the more troublesome obligations of Jewish observance found a large public willing to comply with them.”⁷

At least these were direct rituals and observances which the layman could perform, not the elite priesthood.

The bleak record of how the destruction of this Judaism was carried out can be found in the Theodosian Code. This Code was a compilation of laws and edicts issued during the period from Constantine to Theodosius II — about AD 325 to 450.

Clyde Pharr writes:

“The Theodosian Code and Novellas [supplements] form the richest single source and the only official collection of contemporary information for the political, social and economic conditions of the later Roman Empire.”⁸

The Code, in effect, spelled out the concordat between the later emperors and the Catholic faction, chosen among many rival sects, as being the most disciplined and submissive to authority, and most unswerving in its support of the empire. The emperor, his army and bureaucracy, would control politics and the economy, maintaining ‘order’ with iron force. The Church would control the social and religious life of the State, preaching harmony, with each party to the concordat upholding the other.

From the beginnings of the Christian movement submission to authority had been preached as a virtue. Tertullian, about AD 190, affirmed his loyalty to Caesar, and declared that the fall of Rome would mean the end of the world:

“We are ever making intercession for all the emperors. We pray for them long life, a secure rule, a safe home, brave armies, a faithful senate, an honest people, a quiet world, and everything for which a man or a Caesar can pray.” (Apologia 30:4)

He then quotes 1 Timothy 2:2: “Pray for kings, for princes and powers, that all things may be tranquil for you.” (Apologia 31:3)

“There is another need and a greater one, for praying for the Emperors... The end of the age itself, with its menace of hideous suffering, is delayed by the respite which the empire means for us... I set the majesty of Caesar below God, and all the more commend him to God, to whom alone I subordinate him.” (Apologia 32:1, 33:2)

On the Roman side:

“Diocletian (AD 285 – AD 305) and Constantine (AD 324 – AD 337) reorganized the state apparatus... An enormous hierarchy of officials administered public affairs... The entire population was organized as one vast army.”⁹

All occupations were frozen, with ‘desertion’ punished. Farm tenants (*coloni*) were reduced to serfdom. They and their children would have to toil on the estates lifelong.

“Coloni who contemplate flight must be bound with chains and reduced to a servile condition, so that by condemnation to slavery, they shall be compelled to fulfill their duties as befit freemen.” (Code 5:17.1)

Church support was urgently needed to combat unrest in the empire, especially when rival sects were encouraging this.

“The numerous heretical and schismatic sects of the period of the late Empire frequently represented a rebellion against the State and the authoritarian control of the State-supported Church, rather than profound doctrinal convictions and differences.”¹⁰

Thus the ‘Circumcellians’ were...

“...composed of runaway slaves, ruined peasants, and the non-Roman population of North Africa, who combined ecclesiastical with social revolt, and fanatically sought martyrdom.”¹¹

The Code condemned some 36 of these heretical sects. “Their books shall be immediately consumed with fire under the supervision of the judges.” (Code 16.5.34)

Farm tenants (*coloni*) who attended their meetings “shall be recalled from these depraved religions by frequent flogging.” (Code 16.5.52)

“Very many persons who have been expelled from the churches go about nevertheless with secret madness.” (Code 16.6.2)

“They shall be flogged with leaden whips and shall receive a sentence of exile.” (Code 16.6.4)

A heretic was defined as anyone who wavered in the slightest from the Catholic faith: “If any man should disturb the Catholic faith, he is deserving of deportation.” (Code 16.4.3)

“Those persons who may be discovered to deviate even in a minor point of doctrine from the tenets and the faith of the Catholic religion are included in the designation of heretics, and must be subject to the sanctions issued against these heretics.” (Code 16.5.28)

“No man shall argue about religion or discuss it, or give any counsel. If any person, with flagrant and damnable audacity, should dare to persist in his actions of ruinous obstinacy, he shall be restrained with a due penalty and proper punishment.” (Code 16.6.2)

In this world of harshest authority on all sides, with all freedom of movement in thought and occupation now forbidden, there was no longer a place for a religion as flexible and challenging as Hellenic Judaism. Its very existence was seen as a threat. Meaning that this Judaism would either be wiped out, or would have to adopt the specific role and marginal place dictated by the triumphant Church — and that was a pariah existence. Since the Church was indispensable in the matter of instilling obedience throughout society, any request by the Church to the emperor would be granted. The Church would now settle accounts once and for all with the Jews.

As Marcel Simon puts it,

“The condition of the Jews became steadily worse... The status of the Jews little by little was eroded... The Jews’ position was made to seem more and more like a burden placed on them, like a divine punishment falling on a class of people who are

under condemnation... These regulations progressively excluded Jews from one area of public service after another... and were intended to set the Jews apart from the rest of society.”¹²

This has a distinctly theological cast, and indicates that the legislation was pushed through by the Church hierarchy. The Roman authorities had no quarrel with the Jews, and were content to collect the half-shekel. The Jewish Patriarch was the respected spokesman for the Jewish populace. The attacks began after Constantine, with Judaism fully protected under law prior to that time.

The new laws are found in ‘Title 8, Book 16’ of the Code, which is labeled ‘*Jews, Caelicolists and Samaritans.*’ Here we find a mixture of laws affirming Jewish legitimacy — showing the traditional Roman position — along with laws aimed at the destruction of Judaism. The opening statute is blunt enough: Jews who assault Jewish converts to Christianity as by “...assailing them with stones, then such assailant shall be immediately delivered to the flames and burned, with all his accomplices.” (Code 16.8.1, dated AD 339).

“Jews shall not be permitted to disturb any man who has been converted from Judaism to Christianity.” (Code 16.8.5)

However, “If any person should be converted from Christianity to Judaism, then his property shall be forfeit to the treasury.” (Code 16.8.7, dated AD 353, and showing that Judaism was still gaining converts)

The wording of one law indicates that attacks on synagogues were beginning:

“It is sufficiently established that the sect of the Jews is forbidden by no law... [The authorities] will restrain with proper severity the excesses of those persons who, in the name of the Christian religion, presume to commit certain unlawful acts, and attempt to destroy and despoil the synagogues.” (Code 16.8.9, dated AD 396)

The *Kristallnacht* was beginning.

The Patriarchate was also under attack: “If any person should dare in public to make an insulting mention of the Illustrious Patriarch, he shall be subject to a sentence of punishment.” (Code 16.8.11, dated AD 396)

The tide turned in the next century when the Patriarch Gamliel was stripped of the title “honorary Prefect,” barred from founding new synagogues, or performing “circumcisions on a Christian.” (Code 16.8.22)

“Jews and Samaritans shall be deprived of all employment in the imperial service.” (Code 16.8.16)

There are virulent statutes, referring to “the detestable and offensive name of Jews.” (Code 16.8.19)

The laws were aimed at...

“...a perversity that is Jewish and alien to the Roman empire... It is more grievous than death and more cruel than murder that any person of the Christian faith shall be polluted by Jewish unbelief.” (Code 16.8.20, dated AD 409)

This was a call for the removal of Jews from all contact with Christians, to avoid the pollution. A process of ‘ethnic cleansing’ then took place, the removal being to ghetto areas. The method of choice was setting fire to synagogues. This is the plain inference of a statute that provided no penalty for those that set the fires, merely the pious utterance that “now and henceforth no person shall seize and burn their synagogues.” (Code 16.8.25, dated AD 423)

To this was appended an order that the Jews be compensated by being given a site on which to construct a new synagogue — which of course would be set on fire in due course.

Even this token concession was removed by Novella Title 3.8 (dated AD 438): “They shall not dare to construct a synagogue anew... They must repair the ruins of their synagogue [at the original site].”

Again a futile tactic. The only recourse left open was to retire to a ghetto district, out of reach of the mob. The ghetto existence of the Jews therefore derived directly from the Church’s incitement to violence.

The Patriarchate came to an end about AD 429 with the dissolution of the family dynasty. The rabbinate then took over the leadership of the ruined Jewish communities. The literature of Hellenic Judaism was abandoned, then forgotten. This literature derived from a Judaism that was universalist and missionary, but now only survival mattered. Thus the long epic of Hellenic Judaism, that had started 325 BC in Alexandria, came to an end. It had endured, with its remarkable history and achievements, for more than seven hundred and fifty years.

Notes:

1. Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel*, xi
2. Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel*, xi
3. Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel*, 208
4. Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel*, 208
5. Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel*, 232
6. Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel*, 279
7. Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel*, 325
8. Clyde Pharr, *The Theodosian Code*, xxv.
9. Clyde Pharr, *The Theodosian Code*, xix
10. Clyde Pharr, *The Theodosian Code*, 582
11. Clyde Pharr, *The Theodosian Code*, 582
12. Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel*, 127,128

AUTHOR'S NOTE

My status is that of an educated layman who has devoted many years to the study of the literature pertaining to Christian origins and early Christianity. This enterprise would perhaps be equivalent to obtaining academic degrees in the field. However I do not have the imprimatur of the scholars in the Establishment. Moreover I have been led to conclusions that radically challenge the doctrines and positions of the New Testament Establishment, as is apparent from the content of this book. Hence I owe the reader some explanation as to how this came about, and what qualifications I have for this enterprise.

Data: I was born in 1916 in New York City. My parents were Polish Jews recently arrived. I am now a retiree in Florida. Single.

Education: College of City of New York, 1932-1936. B.S. degree.
New York University School of Law, 1936-1939. LL.B. degree.
Passed the New York bar; admitted November, 1940.

U.S. Patent Office: passed examination for patent attorney and was registered as a patent attorney 1956.

I did not practice law as I was attracted to other fields. However this legal background has been of great value in evaluating the testimony and credibility of New Testament documents; especially patent law, which deals largely with questions of dating, priority, originality of material, infringement and copying.

Major influence: I was drawn to the field of gospel studies by a book that made a profound impression on me. This was *The Case of the Nazarene Reopened*, by Hyman E. Goldin (Exposition Press, 1948). Goldin was a lawyer, rabbi and Talmudist. He subjected the four gospel writers to sharp cross-examination as to each

one's version of the crucifixion story and was able to show almost line-by-line divergence, contradiction, impossibility and fabrication in the four accounts. Here an orthodox rabbi had broken the ghetto taboos and had made a direct challenge to the Christian case.

And I was compelled to follow his arguments.

From that time onward (I came upon the book in the 1950s) I took up extensive reading on the gospel story and on early Christianity in general. My book is essentially a continuation and updating of Goldin, dealing with much of the material made available after his time, and like Goldin's book, is a legal brief for the Jewish side. The main defense that is used is to show that the gospel account is fictional and fraudulent in its entirety, and that an alternate explanation for Christian origins can be provided.

Employment: During War II I served in the merchant marine as a radio operator. I was in the North Atlantic convoys and was on ships in relief work and army supply for the year afterwards. By then I came in direct contact with Jewish refugees. In 1947 I was a crew member and radio operator for the blockade-runner *Exodus*.

By this time I had become drawn to the merchant marine and continued in this occupation for some thirty years afterwards, though with much time ashore. This occupation over the years brought awareness of the enormous world of the have-nots, in many foreign ports. It also gave me the leisure to continue my studies, with greater opportunities after retiring at age 62. While retaining a skeptical layman's approach, I believe I have acquired the academic qualifications of the Establishment.

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sole authority for a Christian origin of Jerusalem Church, 44;
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charges Jewish authorities with murder, 12.

Brown, Raymond E.:
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One can only emphasize the uncertainty of our knowledge of the person and work of the historical Jesus and likewise of the origin of Christianity.

— Rudolf Bultmann

There is nothing more negative than the result of the critical study of the Life of Jesus.

— Albert Schweitzer

My status is that of an educated layman who has devoted many years to study the literature pertaining to Christian origins and early Christianity. This enterprise would perhaps be the equivalent of obtaining academic degrees in the field. However, I do not have the imprimatur of the scholars in the Establishment. Moreover, I have been led to conclusions that radically challenge the doctrines and positions of the New Testament Establishment, as is apparent from the content of this book...

— Harold Leidner, Author

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