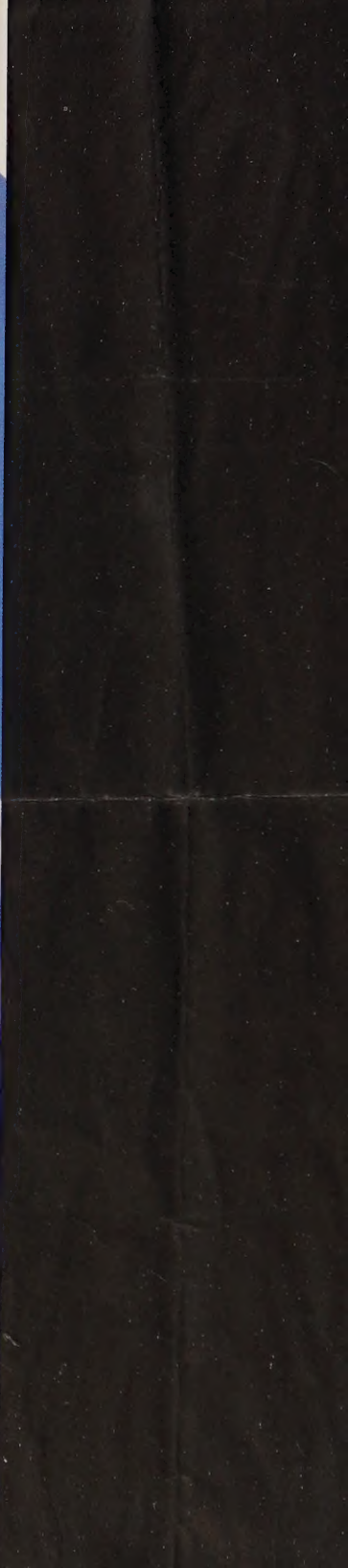


The Myth of the
Lord Jesus Christ
And How It Grew

Milton L. Forbes


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Milton E. Forbes

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Mountaintop Books
GLENWOOD, IOWA

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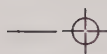
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Jesus Christ belonged to the true race of prophets.... But what a distortion did his doctrine and memory suffer in the same, in the next, and the following ages! There is no doctrine of the Reason which will bear to be taught by the Understanding. The understanding caught this high chant from the poet's lips, and said, in the next age, "This was Jehovah come down out of heaven. I will kill you, if you say he was a man."... Christianity became a Mythus, as the poetic teaching of Greece and of Egypt....

—RALPH WALDO EMERSON, 1838, "An Address" to the senior class of the Harvard Divinity School.

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1 Some Amazing Stories

Jesus' birth was like this, says Matthew:

When Jesus' mother Mary married Joseph, he discovered that she was pregnant by means of the holy spirit.

Joseph her husband, a righteous man unwilling to make her a public example, was inclined to put her away privately. Thinking it over, he dreamed that an *angelos* [messenger] came and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear taking Mary your wife to you, for the holy spirit impregnated her. She will bear a son, and you will call him Jesus."

That took place so that the prophecy would be fulfilled, "A virgin will bring forth a son whom they will call *Emmanu-el*, meaning, "With us the god" [Isaiah 7:14].

Joseph woke and took his wife to him, but did not know her until she bore a son. He called him Jesus (Matthew 1:18-21).

The impregnation was miraculous.

Notice that Matthew translates Hebrew words into Greek, which shows that his readers were more familiar with Greek. He goes on:

Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in Herod's reign. *Magoi* [magi, magicians] from the East came to Jerusalem asking, "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star in the East and came to worship him."

Worried, King Herod called all the high priests and scribes and demanded where Christ would be born. They replied, "In Bethlehem, for the prophet wrote, 'You, Bethlehem in Judah, a governor will come from you. He will shepherd my people Israel'" [Micah 5:2].

King Herod secretly told the *magoi*, "Search diligently for the baby. When you find him, tell me so that I also may come to worship him."

The *magoi* followed the star until it stood over the baby. They rejoiced. When they saw Mary with the baby, they fell down and worshipped him. They gave him gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Warned in a dream, they went home a different way.

The *angelos* returned and told Joseph, "Flee into Egypt with the mother and child. Stay there until further notice, for Herod wants to destroy the baby." They stayed in Egypt so that the prophecy would be fulfilled, "Out of Egypt have I called my son" [Hosea 11:1, Exodus 4:22].

When King Herod saw that the *magoi* had fooled him, he slew all the children two years old and under in Bethlehem and nearby. This took place so that the prophecy of Jeremiah would be fulfilled, "A voice was heard in Rama lamenting, weeping, and mourning. It was Rachel weeping for her children because they are not" [Jeremiah 31:5].

When King Herod died, an *angelos* came to Joseph in Egypt saying, "Go to Israel, for the man who tried to kill your baby is dead." Joseph took the baby and mother to Israel, but when he heard that Archelaus ruled Judea instead of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Warned in a dream, Joseph turned to Galilee and lived in Nazareth so the prophecy would be fulfilled. "He shall be called a *Nazorean*"¹ (Matthew 2:1-2:23).

Nazorean means “Keeper of the Torah (the Law of Moses).” We will see that Matthew was a Nazorean, but Jesus was not. Nobody knows where (or whether) Matthew found that prophecy.

Luke’s story is surprisingly different:

The Θεός [*Theos*, God]² sent the *angelos* Gabriel to Nazareth in Galilee, to Mary, a virgin engaged to Joseph, and said, “The Θεός will bless you with a son, and you will call him Jesus.”

Mary said, “How can that be, as I haven’t known a man?”

Gabriel replied, “The holy spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you, so your babe will be called the son of the Most High.”

Augustus Caesar decreed a tax on the whole world. Joseph, because he was descended from David, left Nazareth to go to Bethlehem to pay the tax, taking Mary his espoused wife with him. She gave birth to a son and laid him in a manger because there was no room at the inn. The *angelos* told nearby shepherds about Christ’s birth and where to find him. At that moment a choir of *angeloi* joined them in the field. The shepherds found Mary and Joseph with the baby in a manger.

After Joseph and Mary performed the rites of the Law of the Lord [*Kyrios*], they returned to Galilee, to their own city of Nazareth (Luke 1:26-2:39).

The stories have several things in common: An angel announces Jesus’ birth; his birthplace is Bethlehem; Mary is Jesus’ mother and Joseph’s wife, still virgin; the family went to live in Nazareth of Galilee.

Despite the similarities, great differences stand out to the careful reader. Luke says Joseph paid his taxes in Bethlehem despite residence in Nazareth because King David was an ancestor. How odd! David left Bethlehem a thousand years earlier. We are learning things history books don’t tell us. Luke doesn’t know about the star, the magicians, their gifts, the massacre, or the exile in Egypt.

Matthew says Joseph resided in Bethlehem but couldn’t go home. He doesn’t know about the taxes, inn, stable, manger, angelic choir, or shepherds. Mary’s pregnancy embarrasses Matthew (and his Joseph)—but not Luke.

Were Jesus’ visitors local shepherds, or magicians from the East? Both; why not? Obviously Matthew and Luke heard their stories from different witnesses who visited at different times and heard and saw different things.

Did the angel appear to Joseph in a dream as Matthew said, or did he stand before Mary as Luke said? Again both, for Matthew and Luke knew different aspects of the same great event.

Did a star hover over Bethlehem as Matthew said? Was the babe laid in a manger as Luke said? Yes and yes; why not?

But we wonder why Luke didn't know about Herod's plot to kill the baby Jesus or the slaughter of the infants. Why didn't he mention the flight to Egypt? Why didn't he know of Archelaus' threat to baby Jesus? How could Luke have overlooked such important events?

Was Nazareth Joseph's home as Luke said, or exile as Matthew said? Was Nazareth home *and* exile, both? Yes!

Was Jesus born when Matthew said—in Herod's reign? Or when Luke said—nine years later, after Herod died, and after Augustus Caesar deposed Archelaus and ordered Quirinius the governor of Syria to carry out the first Roman taxation of Judea? Both, of course. If you put Matthew's and Luke's stories together, Jesus was born in Herod's lifetime, therefore by 4 BCE. And nine years later, in 6 CE, the year of the first taxation, he was born again! That is truly amazing.

But something isn't right. Come, now. Which story is the true one?

Our answer depends on you. Some will tell you that both stories are true, never mind the contradictions. As Tertullian said eighteen centuries ago, "Of course Jesus' virgin birth is impossible. That's why I believe it!" If that's your answer, read no further. This book is not for you.

But something is going on here. If these stories are important, we ought to find out what that something is.

Where did Matthew and Luke find their stories? They never saw the baby Jesus, for they wrote their gospels at least eighty years later. But some of their stories bear a remarkable resemblance to certain narratives in ancient Jewish scripture. We may reasonably conclude that Matthew and Luke knew Jewish scripture and used it as a source.

For example, Isaac's birth was marvelous because his parents were senile, and also because God himself announced it:

Elohim [God]³ told Abraham, "I will bless Sarah and give you a son. She will be a mother of nations. Kings of nations will come from her."

Abraham laughed and said to himself, "Will a child be born to a hundred-year-old man and his wife who is ninety?"

Elohim said, "Sarah will indeed bear you a son. You will call him Isaac, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with him and his descendants. I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear next year at this time" (Genesis 17:19-22).

Sarah and Abraham were the legendary ancestors of the kingdoms of Edom, Israel, and Judah through Isaac's twin sons Esau and Israel (also

called Jacob).⁴ The story explained why those distinct peoples were so similar, and how Isaac got a name that meant “laughter.”

It is Sarah who laughs in an older version of the story:

Abraham sat in the tent door in the midday heat. He looked up and saw three men beside him. He gave them water for their feet and told Sarah to prepare a fine meal. As they sat eating under the tree, one asked, “Where is Sarah your wife?”

Abraham said, “Look, in the tent.”

The stranger said, “I will return to you according to the time of life, and Sarah will have a son.”

Sarah heard and laughed to herself, for they were old.

YHWH [Yahweh]⁵ asked, “Why did Sarah laugh? Is anything too hard for YHWH? I will return at the appointed time, and Sarah will have a son” (Genesis 18:1-15).

The prophet Samuel also had a miraculous birth because his mother Hannah was sterile:

Elkanah had two wives. One bore children, but Hannah, the one he loved, could not, for YHWH had sealed up her womb. The other wife teased her about it.

Elkanah and Hannah went to the temple of YHWH in Shiloh. After they ate and drank, Hannah vowed, “O YHWH of hosts, if you will remember your handmaiden and give her a son, then I will give him to YHWH for life.”

Eli the priest thought Hannah was drunk, so she explained her sorrow. Eli replied, “Go in peace, and YHWH will grant your wish.”

After Hannah bore the son and weaned him, she went to the temple in Shiloh with a grand sacrifice for YHWH. She brought the child to Eli, saying, “O my lord [*adonai*], this is the child I prayed for, and YHWH granted my petition. I have lent him to YHWH for as long as he lives.” Samuel remained at the temple and worshipped YHWH there.

Hannah prayed, “My heart rejoices in YHWH. My mouth crows over my enemies because I rejoice in your salvation. No one is as holy as YHWH, for there is none beside you, nor any rock like our Elohim. Never talk so arrogantly again! Let no arrogance come from your mouth, for YHWH is an *el* of knowledge, and he judges deeds. He breaks the bows of mighty men, while those who stumble become strong. Well-fed people will have to earn their bread, and the hungry now eat. Sterile women have seven children, while she who had many is now feeble. YHWH kills and gives life. He brings people down to the grave and brings them up! YHWH makes them poor and makes them rich. He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the beggar from the dunghill to join princes and inherit the throne of glory. The pillars of the earth are YHWH’s, and he placed the world upon them! He protects the genitals of his worshippers while the wicked will be silent in darkness, for no one will win by strength. YHWH’s enemies will be shattered; he will thunder upon them from heaven. YHWH will judge the earth’s ends. He will strengthen his king and exalt the horn of his anointed one [*mashiyach*]” (1 Samuel 1:1-2:10).

Children were a matter of pride as well as comfort, cheap labor, and social security, especially for women, so fertility cults in the temples did a thriving business throughout the ancient world. Hannah had a right to boast. YHWH vindicated her through Samuel’s birth.

Inspired by Hannah's exultation, Luke wrote Mary's victory song:

Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord [*Kyrios*].⁶ My spirit rejoices in the Θεός my savior, for he has noticed the low station of his handmaiden. All future generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me. His name is holy. His mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shattered the dreams of the proud. He has thrown the mighty down from their seats and exalted the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things and has sent the rich away empty. He has helped Israel remember his mercy" (Luke 1:46-55).

Luke used the story of Samuel's dedication to God when he composed the following tale of Jesus' dedication. He renamed Elkanah as Joseph. He transformed Hannah into both Mary and the prophetess Anna. He makes Eli into Simon—still a holy man:

Joseph and Mary, after the days of purification required by the Law of Moses, brought Jesus to Jerusalem to present him to the *Kyrios* and to offer a sacrifice. The holy spirit came upon Simon, a righteous and devout man waiting for the consolation of Israel. The holy spirit revealed that he would not die until he had seen the *Kyrios* Jesus Christ. He picked up Jesus and said, "My eyes have seen your salvation prepared before all peoples, a light to remove the veil before the peoples, and the glory of your people, Israel" [Isaiah 42:6, 49:6]. Anna the prophetess spoke to those in Jerusalem who looked eagerly for redemption (Luke 2:22-38).

"Redemption" meant obedience to God, which Luke thought would have spared Israel that terrible calamity, the First Revolt and Jewish War.

Samuel was precocious, and so was Jesus:

Little Samuel, wrapped in a linen gown, ministered before YHWH. His mother made him a little coat and brought it to him when she came up with her husband to offer the annual sacrifice. Eli blessed Elkanah and Hannah and said, "YHWH has given you children by this woman in return for the loan you made to YHWH," for YHWH visited Hannah so that she had three sons and two daughters. Little Samuel grew before YHWH. He was in favor with both YHWH and man (1 Samuel 2:18-26).

Jesus grew and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom [*sophia*]. The gift of Θεός was upon him. When he was twelve, the family went to Jerusalem. On the return, the parents realized they had left Jesus. They found him in the Temple sitting with the teachers. All who heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers. And Jesus increased in wisdom, in stature, and in favor with Θεός and man (Luke 2:40-52).

Luke patterned little Jesus after little Samuel.

YHWH's "visits" to Hannah show that her conceptions, like Mary's, were divine. In ancient times people often went to temples of fertility cults in hope of divine help with conception. Priests led them through

magical rites with drugs and hallucinations in the dark. After regaining consciousness, a woman knew only that a god had “visited” her. Hope, gullibility, and ignorance enabled people to believe in a host of mystery cults. Pregnancy often ensued, naturally, which proved the value of trust.

Luke modeled the birth of John the baptizer after Samson’s. This is Samson’s portentous birth:

Manoah of the tribe of Dan had a barren wife. The angel of YHWH appeared and told her, “Though barren, you will conceive and bear a son. Drink no wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean. No razor will touch his head, for he will be a Nazarite to Elohim from the womb, and he will begin to liberate Israel from the Philistines.”

The woman bore a son and named him Samson (Judges 13:2-25).

The Nazarites were an ancient Jewish religious cult that shunned wine and never cut their hair.

Luke shows that John, like Samson, was a Nazarite⁷:

The priest Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth were righteous. They had no child because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both old.

The *angelos* of the *Kyrios* stood at the right of the altar. When Zacharias saw him, the *angelos* said, “Fear not, Zacharias; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear a child, and you will call him John. He will be great in the sight of the *Kyrios*. He will drink neither wine nor strong drink, and he will be filled with the holy spirit from his mother’s womb.” And Elizabeth conceived (Luke 1:5-24).

Luke clearly drew upon ancient Jewish scripture to write stories of miraculous birth. Nevertheless, he called his tales “history”:

Many have written down the events that we believe took place, that eyewitnesses and evangelists handed down to us. Therefore it seems proper to write it systematically for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you might know the certainty of those things in which you have been taught (Luke 1:1-2).

Familiar with Jewish literature, Luke also knew Greek and Roman literature, including *Aeneid*, the epic propaganda which Augustus Caesar commissioned Virgil to write. Crossan noticed great similarity between Virgil’s praise of Augustus Caesar and Luke’s praise of Jesus.⁸ In Virgil’s *Aeneid*, Jupiter instructs Venus about a Roman holy birth:

A Vestal queen, Iliia, will bear twin babes [Romulus and Remus], sons of Mars. Romulus, proud in the tawny skin of his wolf-nurse, will build the city of Mars and call it Rome. I set no limits in space or time, but Empire without end (*Aeneid*, Book 1).

After Julius Caesar’s funeral, people saw his ghost slowly rise to heaven. Actually it was a comet. The senate proclaimed Caesar a god and built

temples with his image for people to worship.⁹ Once the precedent was set, the senate "deified" many subsequent emperors by the same method.

As for Matthew, he recalled a Persian *magos* who paid homage to the current king of kings. That magician was Tiridates, king of Armenia. Nero Caesar's generals had defeated Armenia and made it a Roman province. For several years Nero ordered Tiridates to come to Rome to acknowledge him as his king, but he kept putting off that humiliation.

When Halley's comet appeared early in 66 CE, Tiridates evidently thought it was a good sign. He made the journey with a retinue of *magoi*. In a great public spectacle, Tiridates gave Nero expensive gifts and fell at his feet. Eyewitness accounts came to Matthew, and he thought if *magoi* worshipped rascally Nero, good Jesus deserved the same honor and more. He brooded as the First Revolt came on and the Jewish War destroyed the nation. Twenty years after Tiridates' homage, Matthew wrote his delightful tale of the magi who visited Jesus, king of kings.

All Matthew wanted was to convince Jews that Jesus said some very important things, so he used Jewish scripture in such a way as to "foretell" his coming. Recall Joseph's flight to Egypt:

The family stayed in Egypt so that the prophecy would be fulfilled, "Out of Egypt have I called my son" [Exodus 4:22; Hosea 11:1] (Matthew 2:15).

Why did they go to Egypt? To save the baby *and, equally important, to fulfill prophecy and thus prove that God had sent Jesus*. Ten times in his gospel Matthew says, "to fulfill prophecy," so we know prophecies were important to him. We have already read his first five prophecies (above).

I don't suggest that Matthew (or Luke, for that matter) was untruthful. Far from it. In that time writers often heaped extravagant praise upon heroes and sages. In this case, Jesus was a greatly beloved Jewish folk hero famous for compassion for the most contemptible unfortunates. It didn't matter to Matthew that a lot of "common knowledge" about him was preposterous. He would use Jesus' notorious contempt for traditional piety to make a very important point—that even an otherwise despicable human being could be loving and compassionate and thus serve God. "Nice" people mired in religiosity might profit from Jesus' example. If we knew Matthew, we would see a sparkle in his eyes and a sly grin as he watches our faces for signs that we get his jokes.

Alas, for two thousand years Matthew has watched in vain. Nobody has since lived and breathed Jewish scripture quite the way he did in his

unique place and time. But today scholars like Randel Helms¹⁰ may help us understand some of his subtleties.

Might there be something to it anyway? Might the story of Jesus' virgin birth have come out of something that science can't explain? Can we get the facts? Maybe. Paul wrote several decades before the four gospels, so we might expect his letters to be more factual.

But maybe not. Thirteen times, Paul refers to Jesus as God's son. Why? He tells us very plainly:

Θεός' son Jesus Christ our *Kyrios* was formed from the seed of David... and declared to be the son of Θεός with power according to the holy spirit by the resurrection from the dead (Romans 1:3-4).

Nowhere does Paul say anything about virgin birth. His proof that Jesus was son of God was that in some sense he still "lived" even though he had been "killed."¹¹ Jesus' birth was unremarkable though perhaps it embarrassed or disgusted Paul. Matthew probably invented the story of the virgin birth three decades after Paul wrote.

As long ago as 1919, Karl Ludwig Schmidt showed that the Gospel of Mark was carefully composed fiction. Many other Bible scholars have found various kinds of evidence that show the same thing.

Recently Dennis MacDonald demonstrated what many suspected but couldn't prove, that the Gospel of Mark is one of many books written in the Greco-Roman period that imitated Homer's epics, *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.¹² Virgil's *Aeneid* is another imitation Homeric epic.

You might think such an earth-shaking discovery would make the front page and prime time news, and that church-goers would be excitedly talking about it. But no, the American public remains blissfully unaware that the gospels are not history books. Scholarly studies of the Bible don't make the best-seller lists. With rare exceptions our holy men seem equally oblivious. General ignorance of literature about the Bible—itself so pervasive in America—speaks volumes of the dearth of the critical thinking that should be making the suckers who are born every minute, as wise as serpents in a society of ravaging wolves.

Why did they write fiction? Every gospel writer had his purposes. We have already figured out one of Matthew's. John is explicit:

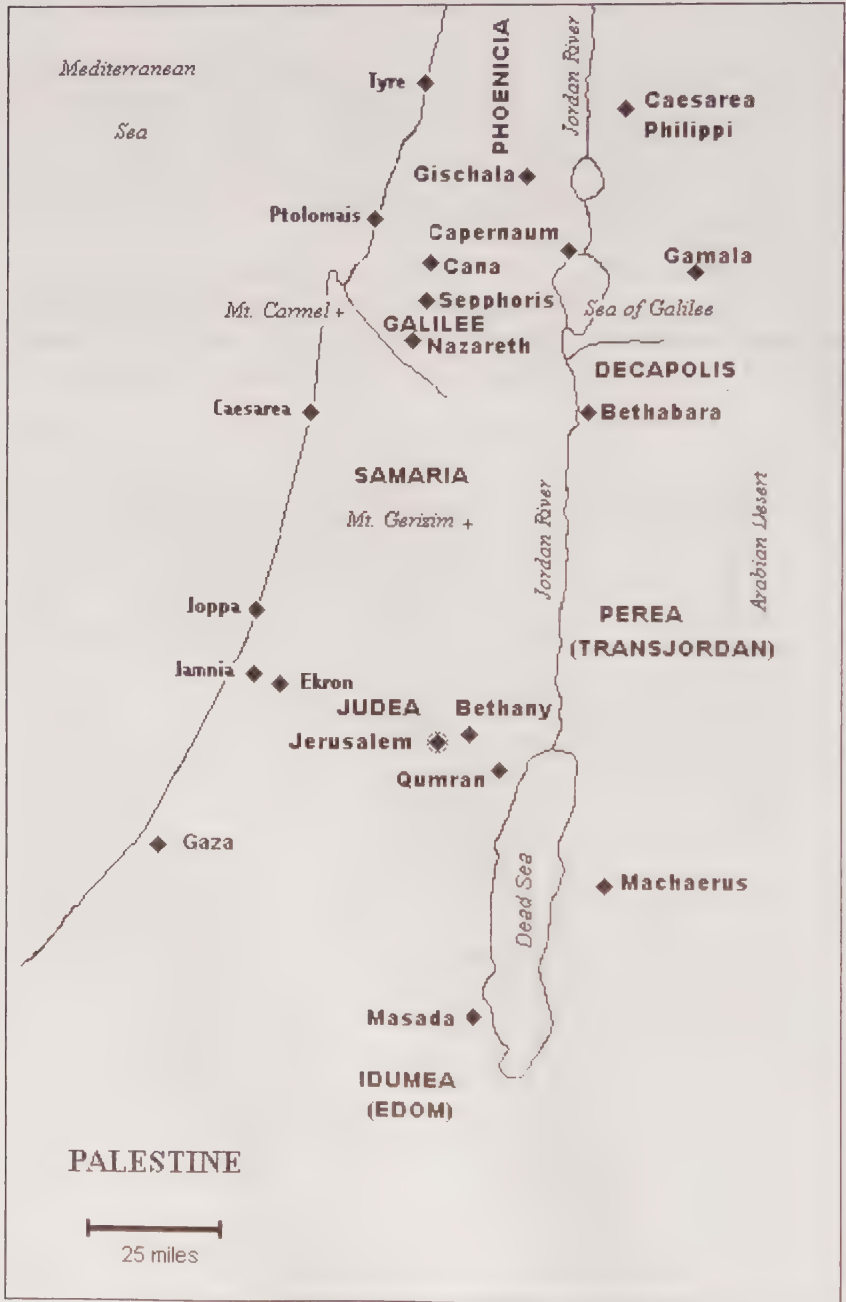
These miracles are written so that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of the Θεός, and that believing you might have life through his name (John 20:31).

That's a grand purpose. Writers of all four gospels had noble intentions, but they were not historians. They were fiction writers, and their fiction was great literature. Like speech, literature is often a shadowy world where truth is frequently not what it seems. Paul and the gospel writers raised Jesus above all other men and made him into a god. They made millions believe the impossible.

What about Jesus, a man who walked the dusty roads in Palestine during the Roman occupation? Can we find him? Or is he hidden forever in gospel fiction? How and why did mythmakers transform the memory of the real Jesus into the Lord Jesus Christ? That's what this book is about.

NOTES

1. Matthew invented the "prophecy" to promote his own sect, the Nazoreans. Nazoreans and Nazarenes, distinct Jewish sects, are often confused, as in the King James Version of the Bible (KJV). *Nazarene* originally meant "from Nazareth." *Nazorean*, Greek translation of Hebrew *Notzrim*, "Keepers of the Torah," played on Hebrew *Nazar*, a Nazarite, from "to separate," and Hebrew *netzer*, a green branch or shoot, as "A netzer will grow from the stump of Jesse [King David's father][Isaiah 11:1]." See Schonfield, *Pentecostal Revolution*.
2. *Theos* is the Roman transliteration of the Greek letters Θεός, God. (Θ is the Greek letter *Theta*, pronounced as "Th.") Several different words in scripture are translated as God, so it is often useful to see the original. We will leave Θεός in Greek letters as a reminder that the entire New Testament was composed in Greek, and that its authors did not necessarily imagine the Θεός as we do. See Appendix I, "You Know Lots of Greek Words."
3. The Hebrew *El* or *Elohim*, translated "God" in KJV, is related to other Semitic names for God including Arabic "Allah." Scripture written in the northern kingdom (Israel) in the Divided Kingdom period (933 to 722 BCE) usually used *Elohim*. Writings from Judah usually used YHWH (Yahweh or Jehovah), usually translated "Lord." See Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible? or The Hidden Book in the Bible*.
4. Esau was the legendary ancestor of Edom (Genesis 36). Jacob was renamed Israel (Genesis 32:28); his twelve sons fathered the twelve tribes of Israel (Genesis 29-30).
5. YHWH: consonants of Yahweh's name. See note 3, above.
6. *Kyrios*: Greek for master, lord, or Sir. *Adonai* is the Hebrew. Scripture was written in capitals without punctuation. Translators added lower case and punctuation.
7. Numbers 6:1-21 gives the requirements for the Nazarite vow.
8. Augustus Caesar and Jesus were both praised as gods: Crossan, 1-4.
9. Julius Caesar deified: Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*.
10. Randel Helms, *Gospel Fictions*.
11. Paul and the virgin birth: Sanders, 85-88, 243-244.
12. Gospel of Mark is fiction: Karl Ludwig Schmidt, 1919. Cited in Mack, 1993, 24. Dennis MacDonald, 2000, *The Homeric Epics and the Gospel of Mark*.





2 Contradictory Gospels

Which Jesus? And which euangelion? Paul got worked up over “some other Jesus” and “another euangelion”:

I’m surprised that you deserted me already to embrace another *euangelion*—which is *not* another one, but some people harass you and pervert the *euangelion* of Christ!

If I—or an *angelos* from heaven!—proclaims any other *euangelion* than the one I proclaimed to you, let him be damned. I repeat. If *anyone* proclaims another *euangelion* than the one you got from me, *let him be damned!* (Galatians 1:6-9).

If someone proclaims some other Jesus whom I didn’t preach or another *euangelion* that I didn’t give you, you might accept him (2 Corinthians 11:3-12:11).

Angelion means “message,” so *euangelion* means “good message,” “good news.” It is usually rendered “gospel,” a contraction of “good *spel*.” *Spel* is Old English for “story.”

Jesus was not the first man for whom “good news” was announced. A provincial assembly flattered Augustus Caesar by proclaiming his birth “the beginning of the *euangelion*.”¹

Paul’s *euangelion* was piecemeal in his mind, mouth, and letters. We don’t know what the “perverted” rival *euangelion* was, but it and Paul’s *euangelion* existed decades before Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Careful study has shown that the four gospels are complex, for each evolved from earlier, shorter compositions. Two gospels possibly older than Paul’s letters have been discovered *within* the four. They are called the Sayings of Jesus (Book of Q) and the Signs Gospel, and they have been reconstructed.² The Sayings of Jesus announced that the kingdom of God is here on earth. The Signs Gospel announced that the Messiah had come in the form of Jesus and “proved” it with miracle stories.

The Sayings of Jesus is so important to our search for Jesus the man that we must trace some of the steps leading to its discovery. This chapter will show how the Sayings of Jesus was discovered. (We will do the same for the Signs Gospel in chapter eight.) Now that scholars have pointed them out, inquisitive readers can find them. We can make the Sayings of Jesus stand out in your own New Testament.

Open the New Testament to the Gospel of Mark and scan the first page or two. Mark is telling about John, who baptized at River Jordan.

Now glance at the first few pages of the Gospel of Luke, and you will see the birth stories of John and Jesus—two full chapters of them. Next Luke sets the time of his story by the reigns of various rulers. He tells of John at the Jordan and quotes him at length.

Mark quotes little from John. Both he and Luke say that John baptized Jesus and the holy spirit roosted upon Jesus as a dove.

Scan a few more pages of both gospels and see if the following isn't so. Luke traces Jesus' ancestry back to Adam, then describes his three temptations in the desert. Mark says only that the spirit drove him into the desert to be tested forty days.

The gospels converge momentarily with Jesus' appearance in Galilee. Luke sends him home to Nazareth to enrage the congregation in the synagogue. Mark's Jesus instead announces that the kingdom of God is at hand, then goes to the beach, where he meets Simon, Andrew, James, and John. The four fishermen leave their nets and boats to go with Jesus.

The gospels come together in the synagogue in Capernaum, where Jesus astonishes the congregation with his "new teaching" and "authority" over demons. He cures Simon's mother-in-law of a fever. After supper, people swarm to Jesus for an all-night bout of exorcism and healing.

Luke climaxes Jesus' miraculous powers with the demons' announcement that Jesus is Christ. Jesus proclaims that it is time for the kingdom of God, and it is at hand. He goes to the beach and meets three fishermen. He does a miracle, and Simon immediately recognizes him as a god. Simon, James, and John are Jesus' first *three* disciples.

The gospels converge in the stories of the leper and the paralytic. Jesus the son of man has power to forgive sins. He is criticized for eating with publicans, for not requiring his disciples to fast, and for breaking Sabbath rest. Pharisees conspire against him.

Mark tells of crowds pressing on Jesus, his escape in a ship, demons who worship him, and magical power that enables the disciples to heal and drive demons out of afflicted people. Both gospels list the twelve disciples' names here.

The gospels of Mark and Luke have converged and diverged several times, but they follow the same plot and share many stories, often in the same order. Luke tells more stories, thus drawing out the plot. The following table summarizes the similarities and differences so far.

Some Parallels in the Gospels of Mark and Luke

Gospel of Mark 1:1-3:19		Gospel of Luke 1:1-6:16
(No parallel in Mark)		Birth stories
(No parallel in Mark)		Historical dates
John baptizing	=	John baptizing
(No parallel in Mark)		John's preaching
Mark 6:17-18	=	John not yet in prison
John baptizes Jesus	=	Herod imprisons John
Descent of spirit	=	John baptizes Jesus
John not yet in prison	=	Descent of spirit
(No parallel in Mark)		Jesus' genealogy
In wilderness to be tested	=	In wilderness to be tested
(No parallel in Mark)		The three tests
In Galilee	=	In Galilee
Reign of God is at hand		
Four disciples on beach		
(No parallel in Mark)		In synagogue in Nazareth
(No parallel in Mark)		Miraculous escape
Exorcism, Capern. synagogue	=	Exorcism, Capern. synagogue
At Simon's house	=	At Simon's house
Demons announce son of God	=	Demons announce Christ
		Reign of God is at hand
		Three disciples on beach
(No parallel in Mark)		Simon grovels to the god
Leper healed	=	Leper healed
Paralytic, son of man	=	Paralytic, son of man
Eating with publicans	=	Eating with publicans
Fasting	=	Fasting
Wineskin parable	=	Wineskin parable
Gathering on Sabbath	=	Gathering on Sabbath
Healing on Sabbath	=	Healing on Sabbath
Escapes crowds by ship		(No parallel in Luke)
Demons worship Jesus		(No parallel in Luke)
Jesus prays on a mountain	=	Jesus prays on a mountain
Disciples receive powers	=	Luke 9:1
List of twelve disciples	=	List of twelve disciples

If you compare Matthew with Mark in the same way, you will see the same pattern of convergence and divergence, and the same plot. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are the “synoptic gospels” because their authors “saw” (*optikos*) “together” (*syn*).

Bible students realized by the 1830’s that Matthew and Luke are expansions of Mark. Matthew copied about ninety percent of Mark; Luke, about half.

You can see Luke’s method if you page all the way through Mark and Luke, labeling similar verses as you go. (I suggest paperback New Testaments from a used book store for that purpose.) After surveying the two gospels in this way, you may see that Luke cut up Mark’s gospel into pieces, some large, many small. He even cut up verses. For simplicity, let’s say that Luke cut Mark’s gospel into eight major blocks and threw out four. The table in Appendix II summarizes Luke’s treatment of those eight Markan blocks.

If you follow the same procedure with Matthew and Mark, you may see that Matthew cut Mark’s gospel into about six large pieces and more than a dozen small ones. He switched many small pieces around. Matthew’s use of Mark is summarized in Appendix III. Neither Luke nor Matthew changed Mark’s main plot.

Non-Markan material in Matthew and Luke. A large amount of material in Matthew and Luke did not come from Mark. They wrote their own birth stories, which we looked at already, and also genealogies, resurrection stories, and many small bits here and there. Their own compositions are called “M” and “L” respectively.

More exciting is a second category of non-Markan material, the “sayings,” which are almost identical in Matthew and Luke, for example the Lord’s prayer (Luke 11:2-4, Matthew 5:3-12). Many other sayings have much in common, for example the Beatitudes (Luke 6:20-23, Matthew 6:9-13). The “sayings” material includes Jesus’ sermons, John the baptizer and his sermons, and Jesus’ three temptations.

In all, Matthew and Luke share two hundred fifty-six verses of non-Markan “sayings.” Those verses are *similar if not identical*. The gospels of Matthew and Luke share 256 verses not in the Gospel of Mark.

Matthew and Luke did not compose the “sayings,” nor did one copy them from the other. The “sayings” were not in Mark; they copied them from another source. Two hundred fifty-six verses would fill a small book. The source must have been a book of Jesus’ sayings.

Scholars became so convinced that such a book once existed that they called it "The Sayings of Jesus" or "The Sayings Source." German scholars called it "Source," *Quelle*, so it is also called the Q document, the Book of Q, or simply Q.

No actual copy of Q was found in a jar, cave, or anywhere else. It was found in Matthew and Luke. The first person to separate it was Adolf von Harnack in his *The Sayings of Jesus: The Second Source of St. Matthew and St. Luke* (1907). Harnack's reconstruction enabled scholars to study Q free of the context of Matthew and Luke, and the study goes on today.

Scholars saw that the Book of Q has a character of its own. It is not a narrative; it has no plot. It is a "sayings gospel." But a startlingly similar book actually entitled "The Gospel of Thomas" was discovered in Egypt in 1945.³ It consists of Jesus' sayings and lacks narrative and plot.

Further study of Q showed that it was composed of three "layers" written at different times. The first layer, Q¹, is a remnant of the Original Book of Q. The Original Book of Q underwent a drastic revision and is now represented by only about twenty sayings. Those sayings consist of advice in the form of maxims and aphorisms that have been compared with "wisdom" of Proverbs in the Old Testament. The advice in the remnant of the Original Book of Q is about reordering priorities in living, getting along with others, and carrying on Jesus' work. It contained a "mission story" of Jesus organizing disciples for home visits. The Q¹ writers thought of Jesus as a teacher, a wise man, a sage.

When Q¹ was revised, about thirty-five new sayings were carefully integrated with the twenty original sayings. Those thirty-five sayings form the second layer (Q²). The Q² sayings are more serious in tone, often angry, and include pronouncements and judgments against other Jews. Jesus is no longer a teacher, but a prophet and divine man. The stories of John the baptizer are in this second layer.

The third layer (Q³) consists of only a few additional sayings. One is a lament for Jerusalem's destruction, which happened in 70 CE. Other Q³ sayings show that the Q people were trying to reconcile with more traditional Jews. That, briefly, is Burton L. Mack's analysis of the Book of Q.⁴ His thorough study of Q and reconstruction are fascinating, very readable, and indispensable to understanding the gospels and the entire New Testament.

Composition of the synoptic gospels. Soon after the third layer was

added to the Book of Q, a man versed in Q, the Signs Gospel, and Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* composed the Gospel of Mark. A few years later, Matthew combined Mark's novel with the Book of Q in an attempt to bring Jesus people and Christians back to the Torah. Several decades later, Luke, hoping to instill "heart" into the Stoic-dominated ruling classes of the Roman Empire, used Mark and Q to create another gospel. Thus Q was buried in fiction. It was in plain view, yet invisible.

Q¹, the Original Book of Q, more than anything else we know, has the potential of bringing us closer to the Jesus who actually lived and breathed and walked the dusty roads of Galilee.

Can we find Jesus? Reasonable people have argued that Jesus did not exist.⁵ It is true that not one shred of hard evidence proves that he did. Yet Paul says in his letter to the Galatians that he spoke with "James the brother of Jesus." If Galatians is authentic, which few Bible scholars doubt, and if "brother" literally means "brother," then Jesus was a real man. Now our task is to separate the facts about Jesus from the piles of fiction written about him. Some of the literature composed shortly after Jesus' time may provide important facts about him. Many specialists in ancient literature and languages have devoted their lifetimes trying to sort out the facts, and some have been eminently successful. Each of us must decide *what is possible* while keeping our minds open to new information and new interpretations. In the long run we must accept what seems most probable. We will begin with the Original Book of Q.

NOTES

1. *Euangelion* of Augustus Caesar: Helms, 24. from Eliade, 39; also Crossan, 1.
2. The Sayings of Jesus (Book of Q) Reconstructed in Mack, 1993, Kloppenborg, *et alii*, arranged corresponding portions of Luke and Matthew in parallel columns and Miller, *The Complete Gospels*, which also includes the Signs Gospel.
3. Gospel of Thomas: Cameron, 1982. *The Other Gospels*; Meyer, 1986, *The Secret Teachings of Jesus*; Kloppenborg, *et alii*, 1990, *Q-Thomas Reader*; Miller, 1994, *The Complete Gospels*, 301-331.
4. Analysis of Book of Q: Mack, 1993, *The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q and Christian Origins*, 44-47, 71-102, 105-188. The reconstructed Original Book of Q is in 71-80; the Complete Book of Q, 81-102.
5. Jesus did not exist: For example, Cutner and Price. Also see Wells.

— ⊕ 3 The Kingdom of God Is Here Now

Jesus scorned material goods. So says Q¹, the Original Book of Q:

Jesus said, “Never mind about what to eat or wear. Life’s more than food! The body is more than clothes! Look at ravens! They never sow or reap! They don’t have storehouses or barns! The Θεος [*Theos*, God] feeds them! You’re better than birds!

“Which one of you can grow a foot taller by fussing about it? If you can’t even do that one little thing, why worry about anything else?”

“Lilies don’t work! They don’t spin! Yet, I tell you, Solomon in all his glory was never dressed up like them! If the Θεος so clothes the grass—in the field today and in the oven tomorrow—how much more will he clothe you, O you of little *pistis* [faith]!

“Everybody in the whole world needs food and clothes, so your Father [*Pater*] knows you need them. Strive for the *basileia* of the Θεος, and all those things will come to you. Fear not, little flock, for it’s your Father’s pleasure to give you the *basileia*” (Luke 12:22-32, Matthew 6:25-34; Q Saying 39).

Basileia, derived from *basileus*, king, is rendered “kingdom,” “rule,” “reign,” and “domain,” but even “the imperial rule of God” hardly conveys the absolute, terrifying arbitrary power that most people lived under in ancient times. God’s rule is even more absolute, but kind and just.¹

A major point of Q Saying 39 is to trust the Θεος. He is not the vengeful YHWH of scripture,

...visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and upon children’s children to the third and fourth generation (Exodus 34:7).

Nor is the Θεος of the Q people like Epicurus’ Necessity or Fate, or the Stoic *Logos*, Reason, divine Word. Q’s Θεος is the Providence that Greek and Roman myth personified in Zeus or Jupiter, the loving, caring, watchful father of gods and humanity.

Q Saying 39 taught the futility of chasing after comfort and possessions. It was carefully composed in a Hellenistic school. Burton L. Mack recognized it as a kind of rhetoric of the Greco-Roman age designed to change people’s minds. He called it a “classical argument.”² Most Q sayings were similarly contrived but are not as complex.

What else can we learn about Jesus from Q¹? He was homeless:

Along the road, a certain man told Jesus, “*Kyrios* [Master, Sir], I’ll follow you wherever you go.” Jesus replied, “Foxes have burrows; birds, nests; but the son of *anthropos* has no place to lay his head” (Luke 9:57-58, Matthew 8:19-20; Q Saying 19a).

“Son of *anthropos* (a human)” was as awkward for Greeks as “son of man” is for us. The phrase began as Hebrew “son of *adam*.” *Adam* meant both “earth” and “a human” though often used as the first man’s name. In the Old Testament “son of *adam*” expresses how contemptible humans are compared to gods. Our own vernacular has a crude parallel in “son of a bitch,” literally a dog. Usually derogatory, it can suggest community and human frailty. For example, “That poor son of a bitch didn’t have a chance” displays sympathy and understanding of a man’s helplessness against greater forces than he. It also means, “It could have been me.” So it was with “son of *adam*.”

Jesus expected followers to drop out of society, leave their families, and become homeless, too:

Jesus told a man, “Follow me.” He replied, “*Kyrios*, let me bury my father first.” Jesus said, “Let the dead bury their dead! You announce the *basileia* of the Θεός!” (Luke 9:59-60, Matthew 8:21-22; Q Saying 19b).

Jesus pointed out the virtues of poverty:

Jesus lifted his eyes and said, “You beggars [*ptochoi*] are fortunate because the *basileia* of the Θεός is yours!” (Luke 6:20-21; Q Saying 8a).

“Beggars” conveys a sense of utter destitution and hopelessness that are lost in the usual translation, “poor.”³

How can a beggar have the *basileia* of God? He is free. Nobody makes him work. Nobody owns him. Nobody wants him, even for a slave—he’s too independent! He is not greedy; he doesn’t strive for things he doesn’t have. He never worries about losing things; he has nothing to lose. Nobody lurks in the shadows to take his life or possessions he doesn’t have—so he is freer than the king. His only master is the mysterious power that created the world. The beggar has the *basileia* of God.

Anybody can have the *basileia* of God:

Wherever you go, tell them, “The *basileia* of the Θεός has come near you.” If they won’t have you, go out into the street and say, “We wipe off the dust of your city as a witness against you! But be sure of this, that the *basileia* of the Θεός has come near you!” (Luke 10:8-11, Matthew , Q Saying 20).

We will call Q Saying 20 “Q’s mission story,” of which the above quotation is an excerpt. For now, let’s try to understand what Jesus’

admirers considered the central message: God's *basileia* is here now. A saying preserved only by Luke and Thomas tried to make that clear:

When the Pharisees demanded, "When will the *basileia* of the Θεοῦ come?" Jesus answered, "You can't see the *basileia* of the Θεοῦ come. No one will ever say, 'Lo, here!' or, 'Lo, there!' Look, the *basileia* of the Θεοῦ is in your midst [or within you]" (Luke 17:20-21).

Jesus' disciples asked, "When will the kingdom come?" He answered, "It will not come by watching for it. It will not be, 'Lo, here!' or 'Lo, there!' The kingdom of the Father is spread out upon the earth, but men do not see it" (Thomas 113).⁴

That saying may have been a central part of the Original Book of Q before its drastic revision.

God imposed his will on stars and planets, so they move tirelessly through the skies to watch over us. They faithfully obey his commands. (That's why we call the universe "cosmos"—*kosmos* means "order.") God could likewise impose order upon the earth, so we'll remind him:

When you pray, say, "Pater of us in heaven... Let your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Luke 11:2-4, Matthew 6:9-13; Q Saying 26).

We're not submitting to God's will if we fight over possessions:

Give to everyone who asks. If someone takes your things, don't ask for them back (Luke 6:30, Matthew 5:40-43; Q Saying 9c).

Why do people fight? Because of envy. People regarded envy as a character flaw in the Hellenistic age.⁵ So did the Israelites:

Abel herded sheep, and Cain plowed the soil. They offered YHWH the fruits of their labor. YHWH respected Abel's offering but not Cain's, so Cain lost his temper and killed his brother Abel (Genesis 4:1-24).

What made Cain think YHWH didn't "respect" his offering? There was probably a tale now lost, of Abel accumulating greater wealth than Cain, and a history of priests insisting that YHWH required people to bring more meat and less grain for their offerings in the temples.

Jesus directly addressed the problem of envy:

A man asked Jesus, "Kyrios, speak to my brother about sharing his inheritance with me." Jesus answered, "Man, who made me your arbiter or judge?"

Jesus told his disciples, "Watch out for covetousness, for a man's life does not consist of his possessions," and he told them a parable (Luke 12:13-21; Q Saying 38).

Concern for goods keeps you from finding the *basileia* of God:

Sell all you have and give it to the poor. Don't keep your everlasting treasure in sacks that rot, but in the heavens where thieves can't enter nor moths destroy. Your heart is where your treasure is (Luke 12:33-34, Matthew 6:19-21; Q Saying 40).

Nobody can serve two masters [*kyriois*]. You can't work for both Θεός and wealth (Luke 16:13, Matthew 6:24; Q Saying 55).

Those sayings reminded Jews of King Solomon who after all his strife and achievement admitted, "Futility of futilities! It doesn't mean a thing!" (Ecclesiastes). Jesus was above pursuit of power and wealth.

The Jewish and Greek Golden Rule. Jesus' teaching was not about eternal life. He probably believed in rewards in heaven as Pharisees and Essenes did,⁶ but he did not make the outrageous claims that Zealots did. The Original Book of Q did not dwell on religious belief. Jesus was down-to-earth. He urged people to get along and show consideration:

Jesus said, "Whatever way you want people to treat you, do the same to them" (Luke 6:31, Matthew 7:12; Q Saying 9e).

The Golden Rule had a long history. Around 20-10 BCE Hillel the great Pharisee scholar quoted a version that shows even greater respect for human feelings and dignity:

Tobit told his son Tobias, "Don't do to anyone what you don't like" (Tobit 4:15).

Hillel said that all five books of the Torah of Moses are summarized in one particular commandment of the many:

You shall love your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18).

The Torah (*torah* is Hebrew for instruction or law) was much older than Tobit.⁷ It consists of the first five books of the Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The Greek for "Five Books" is *Pentateuch*. The Jesus movement and Hillel's school were different parts of a broad Hellenistic movement to liberalize Judaism. The Torah's justice was often heartless:

Never pity. Take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot (Deuteronomy 19:21; Exodus 21:23-24, Leviticus 24:19-20).

Liberal Jews listened to ancient prophets who knew the world is not all black-and-white. Rulers and the wealthy had responsibilities to the less fortunate:

You trample the poor and make them give you wheat... You abuse the just, take bribes, and turn send away the poor who ask for what you owe them... Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream (Amos 5:11-24; note Micah 6:8).

About the time Ezra created the definitive Torah, Socrates stated a form of the Golden Rule:

Doing evil to other people is the same as doing wrong... We must not do wrong in return or do evil to anyone in the world no matter how they treat us (Plato: *Crito*).

Hellenistic Jewish tolerance and justice overflow in these Q sayings:

Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who abuse you out of spite. If someone hits you on the cheek, offer him the other one, too. If someone claims your cloak, give him your coat, too. Give to everyone who asks of you. If someone takes your belongings, don't try to get them back.

If you love only those who love you, what merit is that? Sinners love those who love them. If you do good only to those who are good to you, how does that make you any better? Sinners do the same. If you lend to people you intend to ask for favors, how does that make you virtuous? Sinners expect to get back loans they make to sinners.

Love your enemies; do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward shall be great. You will be the children of the Most High, for he makes the sun rise on the evil and the good and sends rain upon the just and unjust (Luke 6:27-35, Matthew 5:9, 39-48; Q Saying 9).

Be merciful just as your Father is merciful. Don't judge others; then you will not be judged. Condemn not, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, then it will be given to you. In full measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, will men give into your bosom. For you will be measured by the same standard that you use (Luke 6:36-38, Matthew 5:48, 7:1-2; Q Saying 10).

"If a man wants your cloak, give him your coat" was probably adapted from advice to men who knew that judges would let creditors take all their property but their clothing. Jesus said, "Take your clothes off and give him that, too." Humanity and dignity were all a dispossessed man had, to the shame of creditor and judge in Roman Palestine.⁸

When young men dropped out of society to join Jesus, he taught them survival skills. They learned to beg shamelessly:

Ask, and it will be given you. Everyone who asks will receive. Knock, and it will be opened to you (Luke 11:9-10, Matthew 7:7-8; Q Saying 27).

We are reminded of Diogenes the Cynic, who begged from a statue for hours “for practice in being refused.”⁸

Good manners in Hellenistic Palestine demanded that beggars be grateful even if it is not kosher, “clean” according to the Torah:

Eat and drink whatever they offer you. Don’t go from house to house. In whatever city they receive you, eat whatever is set before you (Luke 10:7-8, Q Saying 20; but not in Matthew 10:5-14).

Jesus explained why Jewish food regulations were absurd:

Nothing outside a man can pollute him by going into him. What comes out is what pollutes him! Food goes into the belly, and anything not good passes through. Evil things coming from the heart pollute a man! (Luke 6:45, Mark 7:14-23, Matthew 15:17-20; Q Saying 13c).

That rhetoric would have angered *hasidim*, Jews who assiduously followed the letter of the Law.⁹ For more on *hasidim*, see Appendix IV.

Jesus did not write Q. We know because it is in third person.

The writers of Q thought of him as a sage whose teaching was uniquely appropriate to current conditions in Galilee. Educated in Hellenistic traditions, they formed a school that recast his terse retorts into rhetorical arguments.

Take QS 39 at the head of the chapter. The scholars knew the aphorism, “Life’s more than food or clothes,” which they attributed to Jesus. That was their *thesis*, the point they wanted to get across. They thought up some *reasons* for accepting it, some familiar *analogies*, and some *examples* that applied the thesis. They wrote a *conclusion* and a final *exhortation*¹⁰ to finalize the argument. The school wrote a whole manual of rhetorical arguments of varying complexity. That was the Original Book of Q.

A beggar or dropout from society, presumably Jesus, was behind the Q sayings, or rather behind the maxim or aphorism at the core of each saying: What difference does it make what you eat or wear? (QS 39). Give your stuff away; they only keep you from submitting to the *basileia* of God (QS 40, 55). Put your trust in God and human nature, not in possessions (QS 26, 27).

Cut all ties with people who insist that you must follow all those primitive man-made rules in the Torah. Those rules keep you from

submitting to the *basileia* of God. He expects you to treat other people with consideration and kindness (QS 19). You beggars are fortunate for having been shut out of the Temple and away from “nice” people, because that frees you from the Torah and you can associate with anyone you want (QS 8). You bring the *basileia* of God with you wherever you go, by your consideration for others (QS 20).

Why did beggars have the *basileia* of God? Roman procurators made farmers pay such heavy tolls that they often had to take out loans against the next year’s crop. Many couldn’t pay off the loan, so lenders grabbed the farms. Thousands of farmers were destitute and homeless. Some turned to crime, were caught, were impaled to die horribly, and were allowed to rot on the stake as a reminder that Rome ruled the world with absolute power and authority from the Θεός. Jesus said Jews were God’s chosen people. Those who obeyed and trusted in him still had his love, so trust in him. Jesus discouraged resorting to crime and gave them the *pistis*—trust in God and themselves—to ask for help from the more fortunate, especially those who profited at their expense. If it embarrassed those who misused good fortune and power given them from above, good! The debtor was secure in the knowledge that he lived under the *basileia* of God.

Jesus knew the heartless Jewish aristocracy used their outworn traditions to control Jews so they could live in lavish style. Honor your father and mother? No, hate them so you may reject archaic traditions (QS 52). Love your neighbor? No, love your enemy and make him a friend, said Jesus. Loyalty to friends and family? No, sinners play favorites, so, again, love your enemies (QS 9). Throw a stone at one who breaks a commandment in the Torah? No, let God be the judge, not you. God is merciful; you should be, too (QS 10). Forgive debts and mistakes of others if you expect God to forgive yours (QS 10).

The Gospel of Jesus, based largely on aphorisms in Q, paints a picture of Jesus as a kind of rebel against all human authority.¹¹ He was in a great popular peaceful resistance movement called Cynism. It is especially the aphorisms at the core of Q sayings that link Jesus with Cynism. Cynics deliberately broke taboos to provoke onlookers. To their criticism the Cynic responded with a witty, biting retort that acknowledged breaking the taboo and made the critic question his own thinking.

Cynism, an ancient Greek movement. The first Cynic was Antisthenes, Socrates’ first follower. Antisthenes’ target was the *polis*, a sort of

democratic government of many city-states. He shared Socrates' contempt for the men Athenians elected. They were greedy, ruthless men who clawed their way to wealth and power, then wrote laws for their own gain. Rulers and their laws are corrupt, so people should not obey them. "See what the lions did to the hares when they demanded an equal share in government," said Antisthenes.¹² He scoffed at Plato's notion that God chose rulers and sent laws down through them. Apparently Antisthenes considered people equal in the sight of God.

Greeks brought Cynism into Alexander's Macedonian Empire. It gave the masses the wisdom to stand up to powerful men with dignity and relative safety when Alexander replaced temple-state governments in Syria, Babylonia, and Persia with *polis* government. Citizenship and voting rights were restricted to a few and never included the many slaves.

The true Cynic dropped out of society and begged for a living so he could live his philosophy as a critic of Greco-Roman society. Cynics protected the people, for they criticized the rich and powerful, proclaiming wrongs and exposing hypocrisy. They chastised important people and treated them as slaves. The Cynic was a messenger and spy for Zeus as Socrates was the gadfly of Athens in the service of Apollo.

Some Cynics carried their notions of truth and honesty to the limit and went about naked and doing "everything" publicly to show they had nothing to hide. (If they hid natural things, how would people know they were not like those who did unnatural things in secret?) Their often shameless behavior may be why they were called Cynics, "Dogs." Yet they were "respectable" people with a serious and difficult mission, according to the Stoic philosopher Epictetus.

It was an austere life. A Cynic shed encumbrances including belongings, family, and friends. He was recognized as a Cynic by his staff, cloak, and small bag for the day's bread. He visited homes to comfort and heal the sick, counsel quarreling spouses, and see to it that they brought their children up properly and educated them. The Cynic publicly denounced wife abuse and other domestic wrongs. Cynics cherished independence and freedom. These wandering beggars were *kosmopolites*, world-citizens, unlike Socrates, who chose poison rather than leave his city.

The true Cynic showed no emotion, pain, or concern for his body. Men could break his body but could not touch his *psyche*. If they whipped him, he shouted his love for the man who ordered the whipping.

A Cynic who caved in was humiliated publicly just as incompetent athletes in the Olympics were beaten up and forced to eat dirt.

The Cynic made a game of breaking taboos and laws to provoke criticism from “nice” people. If they took the bait, he responded with a short, pointed retort that exposed fallacies in the criticism. It was a game of wit in good humor. The best rejoinder made the critic *think* about his own way of life. It was a daring game that won great respect for the wittiest and most audacious Cynics—if they kept from angering the target or losing their own temper. Cynic itinerants showed the masses how to face oppression and disaster with dignity.¹³ All that sounds very like Jesus as seen in the core aphorisms in the Original Book of Q.

Zeno (about 344-261 BCE) adapted Cynicism to help wealthy and ruling classes control the often unruly masses. (That’s where the money was.) His school, Stoicism, taught that self-discipline and control over emotion and passion helps us achieve happiness. Stoic insensitivity removed “heart” from rulers and bureaucrats. In the Roman Empire Stoicism was the predominant philosophy of the upper classes while Cynicism remained the philosophy of the masses.

The Original Book of Q overflows with Cynic philosophy. The saying about washing hands before eating (QS 13c, p. 22) probably began from a Cynic’s retort, “You’re right! I *didn’t* wash my hands! Look, it’s not what *goes in* that pollutes you! You excrete *that!* It’s what comes *out!*” That logic might be convincing when bacteria were unknown. Most Q¹ sayings began as retorts remembered from the Cynic stage of the Jesus movement and perhaps from Jesus himself.

“Don’t judge, then you won’t be judged” says, “You’re not perfect, either.” It asks, “What are *your* faults? Are you being honest? God hears you! Can you stand up to *his* judgment?” Thus the Cynic left his critic with something to think over. The critic may be more considerate in the future. The Cynic may have looked and acted disgusting, but he had integrity and was highly civilized in his way.

Jesus and his followers probably called themselves not Cynics but *Ebionim* (Aramaic) or *Ptochoi* (Greek), Beggars. Paul referred to unnamed men in Jerusalem, presumably Jesus’ followers, as “holy men of the *Ptochoi*.” *Ebionim* persisted in Palestine through four centuries or more.

Pistis, used so often in the New Testament, encapsulates much of the Ebionite character. Usually translated “faith,” it is much more: Self con-

confidence. Courage of your convictions. Stoic endurance in the face of adversity and public opinion. Like a bulldog. *Chutzpah*. Brass. Fearlessness. In-your-face boldness. It is trusting that people can master envy, temper, appetites, greed, and lust for power. *Pistis* is trusting God:

“Stop fearing those who kill the body but can’t do anything else” (Luke 12:4-7. Matthew 10:28-33; QS 36).

The Original Book of Q was a handbook elaborated from witty retorts from Cynics. Jesus was one of them,¹⁴ but he refused to carry the Cynic coin-purse, food-bag, or staff, or wear sandals. God would provide. *Pistis*.

The Jesus movement was part of a trend to replace native customs with Hellenism, the admiration and adoption of anything Greek. It was Alexander’s legacy. That Macedonian admired Greek culture and imposed it on his empire. Greece was *Hellas*; Greeks were *Hellenes*. The Macedonians were Hellenists, and their culture was Hellenism.¹⁵

The Jewish temple-state was a holdout, but, with glaring exceptions, the Romans generally left provincial customs alone and let Judeans run their temple-state. Yet Hellenism flowed into Palestine during the Roman occupation. It was generally Hellenistic Jews who attacked Jewish traditions. The Jewish custom of circumcision was hotly controversial. Uncircumcised men could not enter the inner Temple. Orthodox Jews defended circumcision as a sign of God’s covenant with Abraham. Greeks called it a barbarous mutilation. Many Hellenistic Jews underwent surgery to undo it. When Paul declared it optional, he may have been following Jesus’ liberal teaching.¹⁶

Galilee, with gentiles on the west, north, and east, became strongly Hellenized. Josephus, the Judean historian of the First Revolt, accused John of Gischala’s Galilean army of drinking blood, drunkenness, and effeminacy in behavior and dress with women’s clothing, hair-dos, paint, and perfume.¹⁷ In fact they had probably prepared themselves for death as prescribed by a macho Greek warrior custom. They may or may not have disgusted Jesus the Ebionite, but John of Gischala and Jesus were both part of a Hellenistic trend against orthodox Judaism. *Hasidim* and Zealots watched for violations of the Torah and were quick to raise an outcry to punish transgressors.

The Q school’s mission story. Sometime after Jesus died a school of admirers wanted to visit homes and preach that the *basileia* of God was

within everybody's reach. They wrote instructions for home visits in the form of a story in which they imagined Jesus sending disciples to many villages (QS 20). We don't have an actual copy of Q, so we don't have its actual mission story, but we do have four versions of it. Two of the four are in Luke's gospel, one of which he copied directly from Q. It is close to the original though he made it into the mission of the seventy:

The *kyrios* appointed seventy other disciples and sent them in twos before him wherever he went. He said, "The harvest is truly great, but workers are scarce. Pray the *Kyrios* of the harvest [God] to send workers into his harvest. Go your ways.

"Look, you'll be lambs among wolves! Carry no purse, money-bag, or sandals. Greet no one along the way. When you enter a house, first say, 'Let peace be at this house.' If the son of peace is there, your spirit of peace will rest upon him. If not, it will return to you.

"Stay in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they offer you, for the worker deserves his pay. Do not go from house to house. In whatever city you go and they receive you, eat whatever they put before you. Heal the sick who are there. Tell them, 'The *basileia* of the Θεός has come near you.'

"If any city does not accept you, go out into the street and say, 'As a testimony against you, we wipe off even the very dust of your city that clings to us! But the *basileia* of the Θεός has come near you'" (Luke 10:1-11, QS 20).

The missionaries, disciples of the school that wrote Q, were "workers" who attempted to imitate Jesus' Ebionite ways. They went all over the countryside knocking on doors. Their task was fraught with danger from outlaws and Zealots as well as suspicious householders. They "sent the spirit of peace" and offered remedies and comfort with loving kindness. They reminded people that God's *basileia* is here now to those who submit to his rule. They explained what it meant by reciting sayings about getting along with people: Don't judge, don't retaliate, don't fight over material goods, and so on.

How did the original Q mission story give rise to four different versions? First Mark made it into the mission of the twelve. Matthew adapted Mark's mission of the twelve to their own gospels. Luke did the same. He also copied many strings and blocks of sayings from Q. One of those Q sayings was the original mission story, but Luke made it into the mission of the seventy.

It appears that the Q people were relatively close to Jesus and knew him as a man with "heart," who kept his head and dignity in an enslaved nation. If they knew the myth of the Lord Jesus Christ, it does not show up in Q. It evolved in a different Jesus movement outside of Palestine.

The Book of Q reveals another side of the human Jesus that we must explore. We will begin by revisiting the mission story.

NOTES

1. *Basileia* of God: Mack, 1993, 123--130. There is no adequate English translation of this term. Funk and the Jesus Seminar translate *basileia* as "the imperial rule of God" in *The Five Gospels* and their other works.
2. Rhetorical arguments: Mack, 1993, 121-122. Original Book of Q: Reconstructed in 71-80. Numbering of Q sayings follows Mack, 81-102, 260-261.
3. Beggars: Crossan, 61. *Ptochos*, implying cringing and crouching, is not merely poor, but utterly destitute, despised, and begging.
4. These quotations from Luke and Thomas are not Q as we know it today, but presence in the Gospel of Thomas suggests that it was. Kingdom here now: Funk, *Five Gospels*, 136.
5. Attitude about envy: Mack, 1995, 245.
6. Jewish theories of resurrection: Josephus, *Jewish War*, 2:124-163. Josephus (37-95 CE), aristocratic native of Jerusalem, is the major historian of first century Israel.
7. Tobit: A Hellenistic book of the Apocrypha, Jewish books generally omitted from Protestant Bibles and Jewish scriptures today.
8. Give him your coat too: Funk, *Five Gospels*, 144. Diogenes the Cynic: Mack, 1993, 116.
9. Food laws in Torah: Especially Leviticus 11.
10. Rhetorical structure of Q sayings: Mack, 1993, 121-122.
11. Aphorisms at core of Q sayings: Mack, 1993. Jesus a rebel: Funk, *The Gospel of Jesus*; Crossan.
12. Socrates: Plato idealized him; Stone and Stewart provide more realistic views of him. Antisthenes, lions and hares: Aristotle, *Politics*, 3:13.
13. Epictetus: In *Discourses* 3:22. In *Great Books*, v. 12.
14. Cynism and the Original Book of Q: Mack, 1993, 105-130.
15. The Jewish temple-state: Mack, 1993, 51-68.
16. Circumcision: Kloppenborg, *et al.*, 108-114.
17. John of Gischala's Galilean army: Josephus, *Jewish War*, 4:564.



4 The Galilean Exorcist

Even the demons obey us! the seventy disciples said when they returned from their mission, according to Luke:

And the seventy returned joyfully, saying “*Kyrios*, even the *daimonia* obey us when we use your name.” And Jesus answered, “I saw *Satan* [Hebrew, “Antagonist”] fall from heaven like lightning! Look, I give you authority [*exousia*] to step on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power [*dynamis*—as in dynamite!] of the enemy [Satan’s kingdom]. Nothing will hurt you in any way. But don’t celebrate just because the *pneumata* [spirits] submit to you, but rather because your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:17-20).

Pneumata is the plural of *pneuma*—the air in *pneumatic* tires, the breath or wind which *pneumonia* obstructs, therefore life or spirit. Luke means the disciples were given magical power over poisonous animals and were immune to visible and invisible evil forces.

Did Luke invent the story that Jesus conferred magical powers on his disciples? No. He found it in the following passages of Mark and Q.

The Gospel of Mark is full of magic. Mark says that Jesus ordained his disciples to have magical “authority” over demons and sickness:

Jesus ordained twelve to be with him and to send out to preach and to have authority to heal sicknesses and expel *daimonia*. Simon he called Peter. James and John the sons of Zebedee he called Sons of Anger. Then were Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alpheus, Thaddeus, Simon the *Kananaios* [Zealot]¹, and Judas Iscariot. They went into a house but couldn’t even eat because *crowds* came to them, and when Jesus’ friends heard “it,” they came to restrain him, saying, “He’s beside himself!” Scribes from Jerusalem said, “He has Baalzebul and expels *daimonia* by the *archon* [ruler] of the *daimonia*” (Mark 3:14-22).

What was “it” that Jesus’ friends heard? Why did they say he was “beside himself”? Apparently Mark described strange behavior that an editor removed. But Mark is so proud of “it” that he has “scribes” confirm “it,” saying, “He has Baalzebul.” That meant Baalzebul “possessed” him and controlled his mind and every movement and made him act insane.

People everywhere believed that evil spirits caused mental diseases and certain other infirmities. In Palestine they believed that demons were ruled by Baalzebul, a Syrian god, so many prayed to him for relief.

“Jesus expels demons by Baalzebul” means that he commanded Baalzebul to turn the command of demons over to him. Jesus’ friends heard that he acted crazy. Of course he acted crazy if he exorcised. He put on a frightful mask, danced around, waved a magic wand, and screamed magical spells to subdue the demon, force it out of the patient, and frighten it away. His dance-and-song made his friends come to restrain him, according to Mark. It was a two-way “possession,” for in some secret ritual Jesus had made Baalzebul enter his body and take possession of it.

The story makes sense if you understand the spirit world. YHWH had given the archangel Satan authority over the world, and Satan delegated to Baalzebul authority over the invisible evil spirits. Satan disobeyed YHWH, so if Jesus made Baalzebul obey him, he was helping YHWH destroy Satan’s kingdom. Mark boasts of Jesus’ exorcisms, thinking they proved his supernatural powers. Mark says Jesus’ powers came from God and will subtly debunk other current explanations for his possession of them, including the Baalzebul theory (page 33).

Mark, three chapters later, tells his mission story, which begins with another empowerment of the twelve:

Jesus called the twelve and sent them out in twos. He gave them authority over unclean *pneumata* and told them to take nothing for their journey except a staff. No bag, no bread, no coppers in their belt. Wear sandals and only one coat. He told them, “When you enter a house, stay there until you leave. If anyone won’t receive or hear you, go! Shake off the dust under your feet as a testimony against them! (Mark 6:7-11a; QS 20).

“*Amen* I tell you it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city” (Mark 6:11b; QS 21, in Q² layer).

They went out and preached that men should repent. They cast out *daimonia*, anointed the sick with [olive] oil, and healed them (Mark 6:12-13).

Mark’s missionaries wear sandals, while Matthew, Luke, and Q’s do not. Evidently Jesus went barefoot. Mark created the mission of the twelve from Q’s story (QS 20), but Q did not say how many disciples Jesus had.

While the disciples are off on their mission, Mark entertains us with tales about John the baptizer and Herod Antipas, king of Galilee and Perea. Let’s skip to the disciples’ return:

When the apostles gathered with Jesus, they told him what they had done and taught (Mark 6:30).

What a letdown. We wanted to know what they did on the mission and how people reacted. The truth is that Mark wrote fiction and composed that closure after adapting Q's mission story to his gospel. Q's mission story had no closure because Q was a handbook of instructions for advancing the reign of God, not a novel like Mark's gospel.

Matthew uses Q's preface to introduce his mission story:

Jesus told his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but workers are scarce. Pray the *Kyrios* of the harvest to send workers out into his harvest" (Matthew 9:37-38; QS 20).

Matthew adapts Mark's ordination and list of the twelve:

Jesus called his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean *pneumata* to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and disease. The twelve apostles were Simon nicknamed Peter and Andrew his brother, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, Philip and Bartholomew, Thomas and Matthew the toll collector, James the son of Alphaeus and Lebbeus called Thaddeus, and Simon the *Kananaios* [Zealot] and Judas Iscariot. Jesus sent these twelve out and said... (Matthew 10:1-5a, = Mark 3:14-19).

Matthew himself ("M" material) restricts the audience to Jews only:

"Don't go into the way of the *ethnos* [foreigners, heathens, nations] nor any city of the Samaritans. Go only to the lost sheep of Israel" (Matthew 10:5b-6).

Unlike Mark, Matthew goes immediately into the mission story, which he adapts from Mark's:

"And as you go, preach, saying, 'The *basileia* of ouranous [sky, heavens] has drawn near.' Heal the sick, cleanse lepers, raise the dead, cast out *daimonia*. You received freely, so give freely. Bring no gold, silver, or copper in your belts, nor a bag for the road. Nor two coats, nor sandals, nor staff, for the worker deserves food. When you enter a city or town, find out who is worthy. Stay there until you leave. When you enter a house, wish them good health. If the household is worthy, let your peace come upon it. If it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. And whoever will not receive you or hear your words, when you leave that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet! (Matthew 10:9-14, from Mark 6:7-11a and QS 20).

"*Amen* I tell you it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city" (Matthew 10:15, = 11:24; from Mark 6:11b and QS 21).

Matthew, in or near Galilee, thinks Jesus went barefoot and without a staff. (Humph! What did Mark in far off Syria know about Jesus?)

Matthew restores this Q passage which Mark left out:

"Look, I send you out like sheep among wolves" (Matthew 10:16; QS 20).

Matthew defers Mark's Herod-and-John stories to a later chapter. He continues to 11:30 with a mixture of his own compositions and Q's, including a repetition of QS 21. Matthew forgets to bring the disciples back home, so they never report on their mission.

Luke also copies from Mark. This is the ordination and list:

Jesus called his disciples and chose twelve whom he called apostles: Simon whom he called Peter and Andrew his brother, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew, Matthew and Thomas, James the son of Alpheus and Simon called *Zelotes* [Zealot], and Judas the brother of James and Judas Iscariot (Luke 6:13-16; from Mark 3:13--19).

Luke substitutes "Judas the brother of James" for Thaddeus.

Like Mark and unlike Matthew, Luke lets three chapters elapse before the mission story. Luke fills those three chapters with a long block from Q (Sayings 7-18). Then he inserts a block from Mark including his mission of the twelve and the Herod-and-John story (Block 4 in Appendix III):

Jesus called his twelve disciples and gave them *dynamis* and authority over demons and to cure diseases. He sent them to preach the *basileia* of the Θεός and heal the sick. He told them, "Take nothing for your journey. No staff, moneybags, bread, or silver. Do not wear a second coat. Remain at whatever house you enter, and depart from there. If anyone won't receive you, when you leave the city shake off the very dust from your feet as a testimony against them." They went through the towns, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere. [*Diversion: embedded Herod-and-John story.*] When the apostles returned they told him all that they had done (Luke 9:1-10, from Mark 6:7-30).

That was the mission of the twelve which Luke copied from Mark.

After that Markan block, Luke inserts another long block of Q (Sayings 19-54). It includes Q's mission story that Luke makes into his mission of the seventy, which we already read (page 27).

Two chapters later, still in the same long block of Q sayings—

Surprise! Jesus the exorcist steps out of the Book of Q!

Jesus was casting out a *daimonion* that prevented a boy from talking. As the *daimonion* went out, the boy spoke, and the crowd marveled. But some said, "He expels *daimonia* by using Baalzebul the ruler [*archon*] of the *daimonia*." Others, testing him, asked him to show a sign from heaven.

Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, "Every *basileia* divided against itself is doomed for destruction, and a house divided against itself cannot stand.

"If Satan's *basileia* is fighting among themselves, how can his *basileia* stand?"

“But if I exorcise *daimonia* through Baalzebul, by whom do your disciples cast them out? They will judge you.

“But if I through the finger of Θεοῦ cast out *daimonia*, then the *basileia* of the Θεοῦ has come upon you!

“As long as a strong armed man protects his palace, his property is safe. But once a stronger man overcomes him, he loses everything” (Luke 11:14-22, Matthew 12:22-29; from QS 28).

The Q people knew all along that Jesus was an exorcist. The remnant of the Original Book of Q says nothing about it, but the Q² generation knew and exploited it. So did Mark, Matthew, and Luke. Now we know somehow that Jesus really existed, though we didn’t expect an exorcist.

Mark knows several prevailing theories for Jesus’ magical power:

Jesus and his disciples cast out many *daimonia* and healed the sick. Herod Antipas heard about it and said, “Jesus raised John the baptizer and does his *dynamis* by means of John.” Others said Jesus was Elijah or one of the prophets. But *Herod* said, “It’s John whom I beheaded! John *was raised* from the dead!” (Mark 6:13-16).

Jesus asked, “Who do they say I am?” The disciples said, “John the baptizer.” “Elijah.” “One of the prophets.” But Peter said, “You’re the *Christos!*” And Jesus told the disciples not to tell anyone and began to tell them about the son of man (Mark 8:27-31).

Mark’s theory is that Jesus was the Christ, the Jewish Messiah, not John, Elijah, or a prophet. (He is also the son of man, but we’ll get back to that in due time.) Mark wants you to know that Jesus’ power was from God.

Mark lets the other theories fall of their dead weight. One is that Jesus *is* John the baptizer. How can Jesus *be* John? In the tale, Herod thinks Jesus *raised* John’s spirit from the grave and “united” with it. Spirits had magical powers, and magicians “knew” how to “raise” and employ them. The spirit of a person wrongfully killed was especially useful.

“Raising” spirits from the grave (necromancy) was one of many kinds of hocus-pocus magicians used in those superstitious times. Necromancy was illegal, but magicians did it anyway:

You will not have among you a diviner, astrologer, enchanter, witch, charmer, seer with a familiar [servant] spirit, wizard, or necromancer (Deuteronomy 18:10-11).

King Saul disguised himself and went to Endor, to a woman with a familiar [servant] spirit, and he asked her, “Bring up someone for me.” She answered, “Whom shall I bring up?” Saul replied, “Call up Samuel the prophet.” As soon as she saw Samuel, she

recognized Saul. "You're Saul! Why did you trick me?" Saul replied, "Don't be afraid. I won't punish you" (1 Samuel 28:7-25).

Magical rituals included secret words, chants, and prayers to the spirits. "Nonsense!" you say. Yes, we know that now, but in those times most people believed in magic and had little reason not to. Mark worked hard to debunk the necromancy theory for Jesus' magical power.

If as Herod said, Jesus did magic "by means of John," he "raised" dead John and "united" with his spirit. How can anyone "unite" with a spirit? Magicians kept their professional secrets, but the word "inspire" provides a clue. "Inspire" is to imbue with spirit or a spirit, and it also means to inhale. Spirits move about through the air. Once the magician thought he had "raised" a spirit, he probably inhaled deeply to breathe it in. Hyperventilation causes giddiness and some loss of self control, which would indicate spiritual possession. Inhaling enabled Socrates to get a spirit, one of the Muses, who enabled him to recall a long poem in *Phaedrus*.

Preachers still tell us about "uniting" with Jesus. The New Testament mentions three magical methods by which Jesus' followers "united" with his spirit, namely, inhaling, ingestion, and trance:

Jesus breathed on the disciples and said, "Receive the holy *pneuma*" (John 20:22).

Jesus said, "Eat this. It's my body, which was broken for you. Drink this. It's the new covenant in my blood" (1 Corinthians 11:24-25).

Jesus said, "I am the living bread from heaven. If anyone eats this bread, he will live forever, and the bread that I will give is my flesh that I will give for the life of the world. Unless you eat the flesh of the son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day, for my flesh is in fact meat, and my blood is in fact drink. Anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood dwells in me, and I in him" (John 6:51-56).

At Pentecost, they were together. Suddenly they heard a sound and saw tongues of fire on each one. They were filled with the holy *pneuma* and spoke in tongues (Acts 2:1-20).

Secret magical rites lie behind the passages above. The first Q people may have risen above the magic, but under stress the next generation went back to it. Christians immersed themselves in magical traditions.

Q explains why mental diseases were likely to come back:

"After an unclean *pneuma* is driven out of a man, it walks through the desert looking for a new host. Finding none it says, 'I will go back to the man I was living in.' When it reenters the man, it finds its former home neat and orderly. So it goes out and finds seven

more *pneumata* worse than itself. They all take possession of the man, and his condition is worse than ever" (Luke 11:24-26, Matthew 12:43-45; QS 30).

Mental diseases often recur even today. In that day, "treatment" hardly touched the cause of the disease even if the exorcist calmed the patient and made his mind "neat and orderly."

Priests in the Temple exorcised and did magic by the same methods as Jesus, so he could retort, "By whom do *your* disciples cast them out?" The difference? Jesus was neither "clean" or a priest. Priests claimed descent from Aaron or Moses and inherited magical traditions attributed to them. Also Jesus employed a foreign god. He never spoke of YHWH. He could exorcise because he possessed Baalzebul. Jesus *was* Baalzebul in human form!²

Yahwist priests and prophets had long taught that Israel's god was YHWH, who had led them out of the desert into the promised land:

Ahaziah sent to [priests of] Baalzebul the *elohim* of Ekron for a prognosis. His messengers returned, saying, "We met [Elijah] who said, "Tell your king that YHWH says, 'Is it because there is not an *elohim* in Israel that you inquire of Baalzebul the *elohim* of Ekron? You will surely die" (2 Kings 1:1-8).

The Q people could not deny that Jesus had called on Baalzebul to take possession of him. Jesus' purpose was a good one, for he liberated people from demons that plagued them. He simply entered the chain of command within Satan's *basileia*. His ability to do so proved he had "authority" from God to destroy Satan's rule. Jesus' followers said that his servant spirit was a good one, for Jesus did only good.

If Jesus was an exorcist, does that mean he wasn't a Cynic? No. Cynics healed and comforted the sick, and exorcism was a healing art.

The exorcism stories show that Jesus was an ordinary man who had learned how to make a living as an exorcist and folk healer trained in the Cynic tradition. He went from village to village applying remedies and performing hocus-pocus to drive imaginary demons from those thought to need his services.

When Jesus came to a house, he sent the spirit of peace to the household and offered spiritual and physical healing. If he wasn't wanted, the spirit of peace came back to soothe his anger.

If the householder welcomed him, he performed his healing and magical arts, and was not shy about accepting food, shelter, and gifts

insofar as he did not violate the Cynic vow of poverty. He probably regarded himself as one of the *Ebionim* (Beggars), not a Cynic.

The mandate, "Eat what's offered you," shows that Jesus ignored the food laws in the Torah. Because Jesus did not follow the Torah, he was the kind of man that ancient scripture warns us against:

The man who wanders from the way of understanding will remain in the congregation of the dead (Proverbs 21:16).

Jesus was in the congregation of the dead. He was dead to the Torah and ritually clean Jews. The unclean might be unclean for any number of reasons spelled out in the Torah, especially in Leviticus. The rules were largely based on experience with contagious diseases, though most rules created in that early age could not have prevented contagion. Clean Jews literally avoided unclean people like the plague or they, too, would be unclean until "purified" by hocus-pocus rituals prescribed in the Torah. Foreigners, naturally, were unclean, being ignorant of the Laws of Moses. Unclean people were kept out of the Temple and inner courts until they made sin offerings and underwent the purifying rituals specified in the Torah. Many unclean such as demoniacs, lepers, and illegitimates could never be made clean. Jesus himself may have been unredeemable from birth or childhood for any of many reasons. Abnormal behavior may have predisposed him for a career of itinerant exorcism and healing. Being dead to the Torah opens options not available to observant Jews. Walking away from the Torah might enable rebirth into a larger society among gentiles.

How did Jesus become known as a preacher of the *basileia* of God? Unclean and free of the Torah, he associated freely with other unclean people and did not let rituals or rules stand in the way of friendship and touching people. He was quick to greet poor people and make them feel good with the usual greetings, snappy repartee, proverbs, stories, riddles, paradoxes, and jokes that he had picked up as he went about expelling demons and healing. Peace to this house. God is love. Love people—nothing else matters. Rules are made by men; they are *made* to be broken! Live and let live. Treat others the way you want to be treated. Love your neighbor. Oh, he hates you? Love him anyway, for you are a child of God! It's his will; he works in mysterious ways. God loves a cheerful giver. Your reward will be great in heaven. Anyway, you can't take it with you. He spread a simple philosophy, "The *basileia* of God is within you, and you can make it surround you by treating people kindly.

Love, for that is the *basileia* of God. Only you can decide to submit to God's *basileia*."

After Jesus died, his memory lived on. Stories about him offered delightful paradoxes: He had begged but had everything he wanted. This pure-hearted outcast had ignored the Torah but obeyed God's will better than scribes and priests in Jerusalem. He had joked about taboos and rituals that enslaved pious men. He had poked fun at men hungry for wealth and power who suddenly lost everything at a stroke. The foibles of society provided endless entertainment. Admirers collected Jesus' sayings and added their own, "knowing" what he would have said in various situations. But Jesus had few actual disciples who knew him well, for Cynics were very independent and exorcists didn't need many helpers. Yet we will see reason to believe the school that wrote the Gospel of Thomas continued his independent way of life.

Other admirers may have met to talk about coping with *hasidim* and Zealots, for it is hard to stand up to superpiety combined with superpatriotism even when you know better. Jesus people felt that Zealots didn't have to try to throw off Roman rule to restore Israel to God, for God never left even when the Romans occupied Palestine. God knows what's going on. If you want the *basileia* of God, just behave yourself—and presto! it's here.

The first Q writers. At some point some of Jesus' more educated Galilean admirers conceived the idea of actively spreading his notions of the *basileia* of God. They would go from town to town much as they had seen or imagined Jesus doing but on a larger scale. They would all be *Ebionim* or *Ptochoi*, "Beggars," like Jesus to underline their devotion to the *basileia* of God and rejection of riches and power. They wrote down sayings about the *basileia* of God and rules for the proper conduct of disciples. Their gatherings became a school, and they thought of Jesus as their schoolmaster *in absentia*. Thus the Original Book of Q (Q¹) began.³

The first Q writers may have been too sophisticated to take Jesus' exorcisms too seriously. Perhaps his reputation as an exorcist embarrassed or repelled them. (However, their mission story did include Jesus' empowerment of the missionaries.) They were interested in Jesus' ethics, that people are more important than rituals, wealth, and power. They did not fantasize about rewards in the sky after death. In a time of

stress, a later generation, Q², would exploit Jesus' reputation for supernatural powers, but not to the extent that Paul and the gospel writers did.

The early Q writers worked Jesus' aphorisms into theses, then developed many of them into rhetorical arguments, as Hellenistic teachers taught their students who might become orators or lawyers.⁴

Ironically, putting Jesus' lively repartee into formal arguments on papyrus changed the character of his movement. How could a book of instructions and sayings capture the free spirit of the wandering iconoclast? Did his followers trade one set of rules for another? Even if the Q people went barefoot and penniless on their missions, they never knew Jesus' independent life. The real Jesus was gone, never to be seen again. The Q writers were already creating an imaginary figure that had never been. Even so, they were still very far from the myth of the Lord Jesus Christ.

When did the Q people begin their missions? We might guess, in troubled times. Conditions were terrible at best under Roman occupation and often got worse. However the twenty relict sayings of the Original Book of Q don't indicate stress or crisis. Mack says the drive to organize missions came from within the group.⁵ Even so, it is tempting to see the Q movement as one of many Jewish attempts to move heaven and earth to cope with the many problems of the times. Their "basileia of God is near" suggests that they would have given a very high priority to discouraging Zealots from provoking Rome to anger. Indeed, the nation came to the brink of destruction in 39-40, so we must look at what was going on in Palestine.

NOTES

1. *Kananaïos*: Mark and Matthew did not translate it, not wishing to reveal any sympathy with Zealots. Luke had no compunction about translating the Aramaic *kananaïos* to the Greek word, *Zelotes*, Zealot. Brandon, 65, 78, 184 (n114).
2. By whom do your disciples cast them out? Matthew 12:27. Luke 11:19. Jesus an exorcist: Smith, 1978, *Jesus the Magician*. Jesus "was" Baalzebul: Smith, 32.
3. An early social group before Q¹ stage: Mack, 1993, 121-122.
4. Rhetorical arguments: Mack, 1993, 121-122.
5. Drive came from within. Mack, 1993, 51-68, 123-130.



5 John, Pilate, and Herod

Luke tells us when John the immerser stepped onto the scene:

In the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar [29 CE], when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod [Antipas] was tetrarch of Galilee [and Perea], Philip was tetrarch of Iturea and Trachonitis,... and Annas and Caiaphas were high priests,

The word of Θεοῦ came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness, and he came into the country along the Jordan announcing *baptisma* [immersion] for repentance (Luke 3:1-3).

Pontius Pilate came to Judea and settled in his palace in Caesarea in 26. To assert his authority over Jerusalem, he sent troops into the city at night. Next morning the people were horrified to see foreign troops in the holy city displaying images. Roman troops generally carried idols of Tiberius Caesar and the Roman gods atop poles, and shields and banners with all sorts of insignias. Images of any kind are forbidden by the Second Commandment, “You will make no graven image or likeness.”¹

The populace was enraged. The news that Pilate was displaying images in Jerusalem spread quickly. Crowds streamed into the city to demonstrate their anger, and delegation went to Caesarea to ask Pilate to remove the images. Pilate hadn’t expected such a fuss. He postured for several days before the delegation, then removed the images to Caesarea.

Sometime later Pilate began constructing an aqueduct to bring water the fifty miles from Solomon’s Pools near Bethlehem to Jerusalem. Word got out that he spent Temple funds on the aqueduct. Riots broke out, and Pilate went to Jerusalem to restore order. He sent soldiers into the crowd disguised as civilians and armed with cudgels or daggers. Then he came out to speak to the crowd. At once a mob surrounded him and shouted him down. Pilate signaled his men, and they clubbed or stabbed the demonstrators, killing many. The frightened crowd trampled many of their own to death as they tried to escape.²

On another occasion, Pilate placed an exhibit of gold-coated shields bearing images at Herod Antipas’ palace in Jerusalem. The Jews informed Tiberius Caesar, and he angrily ordered Pilate to put the shields in the Roman temple in Caesarea. That incident, probably after 31 CE, is described in a letter from Herod Agrippa accusing Pilate of “briberies, insults, robberies, outrages, wanton cruelties, executions

without trial over and over again.”³ At that, Pilate was a better governor than some.

Luke depicts Pilate as a monster:

Some told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. Jesus replied, “Do you think those Galileans died because they were worse sinners than all the other Galileans? Do you think the eighteen killed when the tower in Siloam fell on them, were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem?” (Luke 13:1-4).

We have no other record of those incidents. Luke, knowing Pilate’s reputation and not adverse to making it worse, may have been inspired by such incidents in Josephus’ *Jewish War* or tales from other sources.

Pilate’s final mistake was to slaughter a group of Samaritans who had gathered at their holy Mount Gerizim to dig up ceremonial pots and pans which one of their prophets said Moses had buried. When Pilate heard about the gathering, he assumed they planned to revolt, so he sent cavalry and infantry to break it up. The soldiers killed the leaders and scattered the rest. The Samaritans protested to Lucius Vitellius, legate of Syria. Vitellius sent Pilate to Rome to explain it to Tiberius and replaced him with his deputy Marcellus. That was in 36 CE.⁴

John the immerser attracts a crowd:

John told the crowd that came *baptisthenai*. “Sons of snakes! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?... The axe is already laid to the root of the trees. Every tree that doesn’t produce good fruit is being cut down and thrown into the fire” (Luke 3:6-9, Matthew 3:7-10; QS 4).

Baptisthenai (“to be immersed”) is a Greek word, but Israelites performed ritual immersions and washings from early times.⁵ In Roman times, Pharisees washed their hands before eating, Essenes bathed before meals, and their habit of washing after toilet amused Josephus.⁶ The *Yahad*, a Jewish sect known from certain of the Dead Sea scrolls, allowed “only those who followed the Torah” to “enter the waters for the pure meal of the saints,” or to be “cleansed by purifying waters, sanctified by rivers and seas, or washed clean by any ablutions whatever.”⁷ People stumbled onto such customs from experience with transmissible diseases without understanding their causes. Physical cleanliness became a symbol for spiritual cleanliness. John’s baptismal ceremony was Jewish.

Another Q saying tells us a little more about John:

After John's *angelon* [messengers] had left, Jesus spoke about John, saying, "When you went to see John in the wilderness, what did you expect? A reed trembling in the wind?"

Evidently John was no trembling reed. The "reed" may be a vestige of a play on an Aramaic word for Zealot.

Q seems to identify him with the masses of destitute people:

"What *were* you looking for? A man decked out in frilly clothes? Look, those who dress gorgeously and live delicately are in the palaces of kings!" (Luke 7:24-28, Matthew 11:7-11; QS 17).

Mark knew about John's disciples. They inspired fear:

The chief priests, scribes, and elders came up and asked Jesus, "By what authority do you do these things? Who gave you this authority?"

Jesus replied, "I will also ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. Was John's immersion from heaven or from men?"

The high priests, scribes, and elders debated among themselves, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask why we didn't believe John." "But if we say, 'From men—'"

They feared the people, for they thought John was a prophet (Mark 11:27-33).

Why should the aristocracy "fear the people"? Josephus said that Herod Antipas thought John planned to revolt, so he arrested him, brought him to Machaerus, and executed him.⁸ Mark romanticized the story. John must have had a large following itching to fight for his honor long after he died. Many were probably rebels in the First Revolt, and after the revolt they were still a significant force in the synagogues. Mark respected their zeal.

Why was John immersing at the Jordan? He was sanctifying his followers for a holy war for YHWH. If they died, they would receive glorious rewards in heaven. John was gathering an army in preparation for a foolish attempt to capture Jerusalem and ultimately overthrow Roman rule.⁹

After John was executed, his followers gave him a martyr's funeral:

When John's disciples heard of his death, they came and took up his body and laid it in a tomb (Mark 6:29).

What made John think he could drive out the Romans? Empires rise and fall, as the book of Daniel points out.¹⁰ The Roman Empire was rotten to the core, so it had passed its zenith and was ready to fall. Already Germans and Parthians threatened her borders. Rome's conquered peoples were restless and looking for the right time to revolt.

The pious rebel was a familiar figure in Israelite history. Amos was one. Elijah was an especially picturesque model. Judas the Maccabee had driven the Syrian army from Jerusalem against impossible odds only two centuries before. In Roman times, a rabbi, Judas the Galilean, founded the Zealot movement. For more on the Zealot movement, see Appendix V, page 303.

After John's time (44 CE), a "magician" named Theudas would lead a crowd to the Jordan and command it to part. Crispus Fadus the Roman governor sent horsemen who killed many and captured others. They cut off Theudas' head and carried it into Jerusalem on a pole.¹²

John likewise gathered a crowd at the Jordan. John was zealous for YHWH and had the *pistis* to move mountains. He may have been a Cynic who followed an ascetic Jewish tradition.¹¹ Why was he at the Jordan? John and Theudas after him were reenacting Joshua's leading the mythical twelve tribes of Israel into the promised land. The legend is that the river parted, and Joshua and the Israelites went across dry-footed.¹³

John was evidently on the Perea side of the Jordan, so it was Herod Antipas' business to know what he was doing. Antipas sent spies into the crowd who reported that John was leading a rebellion. So John was arrested and executed.

Mark said that Antipas arrested John for criticizing him for marrying a divorced woman while her first husband was still alive. John probably did criticize Antipas for that and other faults, but Mark romanticized the story. He also added a ghastly tale based on a famous incident in Rome in 184 BCE, when a woman asked for, and got, the head of a certain man on a platter.¹⁴

A king looking for a kingdom. Antipas' nephew, Agrippa, wanted a kingdom to rule. About fifty, he was son of Aristobolos, one of the murdered sons of Herod the Great. A kingdom seemed to be waiting for Agrippa, for another uncle, Philip, tetrarch of Iturea and Trachonitis, had died without an heir in early 34 CE.

Agrippa tried to speak to Tiberius Caesar, but Caesar refused to hear him. Agrippa lobbied all the influential people he knew in Rome without effect.

One of Agrippa's friends in high places was Gaius, better known as Caligula, a grandson of Augustus Caesar. Agrippa, when with Caligula, stretched out his hands and prayed for Tiberius to die so that Caligula

would ascend the throne. Tiberius heard about the prayer and clapped Agrippa in chains. That was in September, 36 CE.¹⁵

Herod Antipas and King Aretas. Herod Antipas did indeed plan to divorce his wife, for when he was in Rome he fell in love with Herodias, the wife of one of his half-brothers. The lovers agreed to divorce their spouses and marry each other. But Antipas' first wife found out his plans while he was still in Rome. She went to her father Aretas to tell him what Agrippa was going to do.

Aretas was king of the Nabateans, an Arabian tribe whose stronghold was at Petra, south of the Dead Sea. Angered at Antipas' treatment of his daughter, he attacked Antipas' army and destroyed it. When Tiberius heard of Aretas' victory, he ordered Vitellius the legate of Syria to capture or kill Aretas.

Vitellius had recently been in Jerusalem. It may have been as early as Passover, 36 CE, to install Marcellus as governor. At that time Vitellius made some concessions to Jewish factions who wanted more autonomy for Israel. He deposed Caiaphas the high priest and replaced him with Jonathan of a different high priestly family. He let Jonathan have the priestly robes and other ceremonial trappings which Herod the Great and the Romans had kept in Fortress Antonia between feasts. Also he allowed the Jews to keep the taxes collected on farm products that normally went to the Romans.

After Vitellius returned to Antioch he received Tiberius' order to destroy Aretas, so he and Herod Antipas led their armies into Judea. Jewish leaders asked Vitellius not to desecrate their holy land with the army's idols and insignia, so he sent the army along the coast while he and Antipas went up to Jerusalem. High priestly aristocrats met Vitellius warmly. He went to the Temple to offer a sacrifice to YHWH. Roman policy was to respect their subjects' religions and superstitions to make it easier to rule them. The gesture must have pleased many of the Jews, some of whom probably thought Vitellius was a humble, pious man who might be the great emperor whom Daniel envisioned:

I dreamed that the likeness of the *bar enosh* [son of man] came with the clouds of heaven, and he came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought him near, before him, and he received dominion, glory, and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him (Daniel 7:13-14).

Daniel, writing about 165 BCE, hoped the Roman king would send armies and fleets (with sails like clouds) to drive the Syrians out of

Israel. But a century later, the Romans occupied Palestine, and the Jews found out what *pax Romana* was like. That passage, interpreted differently, is the major source of the Jewish belief that a world ruler would arise in Judea.

Vitellius deposed Jonathan the high priest and installed the latter's brother Theophilus. On his fourth day in Jerusalem, he received the news that Tiberius had died on March 16, 37, and that Caligula was now the emperor. Vitellius made the Jews swear allegiance to Caligula. He aborted the campaign against Aretas and took his army back to Antioch to await orders from his new commander-in-chief.¹⁶

What about Jesus? Brandon concluded that John the immerser and Jesus were Zealot leaders and were executed for it.¹⁷ We agree that John was indeed executed as a rebel, but Jesus' case was different.

Q indicates that Jesus was a kind of rebel but not like John:

"What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed trembling in the wind?... I tell you, no man born of woman is greater than John, but the least in the *basileia* of God is greater than he" (Luke 7:28, Matthew 11:11; QS 17).

"From the days of John the immerser until now men have violated the *basileia* of the Θεοῦ and violent men take it by force" (Luke 16:16, Matthew 11:12; QS 56).

Q contrasts John the violent man with Jesus the pacifist who said, "Love your enemies."

One Q saying mentions a *stauros*. *Stauros*, a stake, is the Greek word in the New Testament that is mistranslated *crux* in Latin or "cross" in English. But the saying is about the disciples' *stauros*, not Jesus':

Whoever does not carry his *stauros* and come after me cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:27, 9:23, Matthew 16:24, Mark 8:34; QS 52).

"Carry your *stauros*" means, "Do your part. Carry your load. It's your duty." That's how Cynics and Stoics would have understood it.¹⁸ The saying is not evidence of Jesus' execution, but of his disciples' frustration in getting their countrymen—should we say patriots, superpatriots, or sympathizers of revolutionaries?—to join their movement. Q gives no hint that Jesus was hunted, persecuted, or killed. Q sayings about abuse are about his followers' troubles in the 60's.¹⁹ If Jesus was put to death, it should have left an impression on the Book of Q. It didn't.

Q probably says nothing about Jesus' death because he died as most people do, of natural causes and in peace. Typhoid, dysentery, cholera in

food or water; infected scratch, blood poisoning; pneumonia while sleeping soundly under the stars—you name it.

Yes, peaceful folk often got caught up with righteous indignation in mobs of patriots. Casual onlookers could easily get killed in those frequent riots. We read of excitable crowds in Jerusalem for the feasts and of Romans sending horsemen through them wielding swords and trampling people down. Besides, neither Romans nor Jewish authorities could have loved this anarchist. He could easily have been disposed of quietly. But there is no real evidence of a violent death.

It was Jesus' life and not his death that inspired his earliest followers, whom we call the Jesus people, including the Q community. Later on, Christians dreamed up the Lord Jesus Christ and dwelled on his supposed persecution and martyrdom. They paid far more attention to haunting scenarios in Jewish scripture and Greek epics than to mundane facts. They may have created the martyr myth from whole cloth to address momentary local needs. We will return to that point in later chapters.

Paul's letters provide little hard information. He speaks of "Jesus impaled (*estauromenon*)," but not when, where, why, or by whom. Nothing about Pilate, mother Mary, father Joseph, Galilee, or Nazareth. He refuses to discuss facts because they would detract from his *euan-gelion* of ethics, morals, and freedom from the Torah. He refuses to discuss the human Jesus at all:

Even if we knew Christ according to the flesh [*sarka*], from now on we know him no more {2 Cor. 5:16}.

Paul's interest was in the god, the Lord Jesus Christ, to be imitated.

Paul gives us one absolute, though approximate, date:

The governor of Damascus under King Aretas kept the city with a garrison eager to catch me. I was lowered in a basket from a window in the wall and escaped his hands (2 Cor. 11:32-33).

Caligula appointed Aretas king of Damascus in 37. Aretas died in 40. Paul escaped from Damascus sometime between those two events. Another passage indicates that he was evangelizing fourteen years later, between 51 and 54 CE. Here he says that Jesus died within memory:

Over five hundred brethren saw the risen Jesus at the same time, most of whom are still alive (1 Corinthians 15:6).

Jesus may well have died between 29 and 36 CE as is generally supposed.

After 100 CE, Tacitus wrote that one *Christus* in Judea whom Pilate executed founded a “pernicious superstition” that had come to Rome (*Annals*).²⁰ Tacitus did not name that “*Christus*.” As we will see, he could have been one of the many Zealots put to death for leading a rebellion. If he was Jesus Christ, Tacitus’ information probably came from common “knowledge” or from one of the gospels. In a disparaging chapter on Jews in *Histories*, Tacitus said only that “all was quiet” in Tiberius’ reign and nothing about Jesus, *Christus*, or Christians.

NOTES

1. Second Commandment: Exodus 20:3.
2. Pilate’s offenses: Josephus, *Jewish War* 2:165-180, *Antiquities* 18:3:2-3.
3. Pilate’s crimes: Sandmel, 45.
4. Pilate’s final mistake: Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18:4; Schonfield, 51-52, 93-94.
5. Jewish bathing and washing rituals: Exodus 29, 30, 40, Leviticus 8, 11, 14-17, 22, Num. 8, 19, Deut. 21, 23, 2 Kings 5, Job 9, Psalms 26, 51, 58, 73 Isaiah 1, 4, Ezekiel 16.
6. Essenes bathing, washing: Josephus, *Jewish War*, 2:124-163; *Antiquities* 18:1-5
7. *Yahad* baptized: *Manual of Discipline*, 3, 5. Vermes, 74-75.
8. John’s arrest: Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18:5:2.
9. John a revolutionary: Brandon, 143.
10. Empires rise and fall: Daniel 1-6.
11. John an ascetic Cynic: Mack, 1993, 158.
12. Theudas: Josephus, *Antiquities*, 20:5:1.
13. Jordan a magical river: Joshua 3:13-17, 2 Kings 2:8-14, 2 Kings 5:1-14.
14. Head on a platter: Mark 6:16-29; Crossan, 33-36. MacDonald, 77-82, mentions other theories and finds strong parallels with Agamemnon’s death in *Odyssey* 11:409-430
15. Caligula’s prayer: Josephus, *Jewish War*, 2:183; *Antiquities*, 18:6; Suetonius.
16. Vitellius’ journeys: Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18:5:3; Schonfield, 53-55, 93-94.
17. Jesus a revolutionary: Brandon, *The Trial of Jesus of Nazareth*.
18. *Stauros*: This word, mistranslated as “cross,” means “stake.” If the writers wanted to say “cross,” they would have said *tau*. T. Barker, 203-204; Cutner, 58-75. Loaves bear crosses in a picture of Mithra’s Last Supper. Cumont, 160, Cooper, 57. The cross symbolized the cosmos (axis of rotation and the sun god’s daily path, the equator)
19. Pick up your stake; Jesus not persecuted: Mack 1993, 138-139; Seeley, 222-234.
20. Funk regards Jesus’ execution as probable (*Honest to Jesus*, 221ff) Tacitus *Annals*, 15:44 (written after 100 CE).

— ⊕ — 6 He Who Lives By the Sword Will Die By the Sword

Gaius Caesar, nicknamed Caligula, let his friend Herod Agrippa out of prison and made him king over Philip's tetrarchy ("one-fourth of the kingdom" of Israel). Agrippa made his residence in Caesarea Philippi.

Agrippa's uncle Herod Antipas, jealous of his nephew's ascendancy, went to Rome with his new wife Herodias to ask Caligula for a greater title. But Caligula had a letter from Agrippa accusing Antipas of planning a revolt, so he exiled the couple to Lyons in Gaul and gave Agrippa their tetrarchy. Agrippa now ruled "half" of Palestine.

Caligula went insane soon afterward. A revelation informed him that he was Jupiter, lord of heaven, earth, and the underworld. He ordered the installation of statues of—get this!—Jupiter the Glorious, the Younger Gaius, in temples throughout the Empire for his subjects to worship.

In Alexandria the Roman prefect encouraged mobs to force synagogues to accept Caligula's statues. The Jews rioted in protest, so the Romans massacred them to restore peace. Several delegations went to Rome to plead for Caligula's intervention, but one Apion told him that the Jews refused to erect his statues out of contempt. Philo, the great Jewish writer, tried to speak for the Jews, but Caligula refused to hear him.

Caligula recalled Vitellius and appointed Publius Petronius legate of Syria. He told Petronius to gather an army, invade Judea, and place his huge gilded statue in YHWH's Temple in Jerusalem. Everyone advised Caligula against it, for the Jews would never agree and the bloodshed would be horrendous. Agrippa wrote Caligula and pleaded that he desist, pointing out that not even Pontius Pilate, with all his evils, ever tried such a thing. But Caligula ordered Petronius to go ahead and fight his way into Jerusalem if necessary.

Petronius reluctantly brought two legions and allied armies down the coast and encamped with the statue on the plain at Ptolemais for the winter (39-40 CE). He would invade in the spring. The planned operation was very public, not secret at all, and Jews came to him in droves to beg him to turn back, saying that he would install the statue over their dead bodies—literally—and those of their wives and children.

Evidently cooler heads urged Judeans to save their lives rather than fight if the idol came into Judea, for someone wrote a letter that Mark later adapted for the chapter that scholars dub “Little Apocalypse”:

When you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel standing where it shouldn't (you know what I mean!), then everyone in Judea should flee into the mountains. Anyone on the housetop should not go down into the house, nor try to save anything inside. Anyone in the field should not go back for clothing. Woe to anyone pregnant or with babies in those days! Pray it's not winter. In those days will be afflictions never seen from the creation until now, never to be again (Mark 13:14-19).

The “abomination of desolation” was Caligula's statue. Daniel described a similar event in 167 BCE. Antiochus IV of Syria had placed a statue of himself as Zeus Manifest in the Jerusalem Temple:

After [62 years] Messiah [Onias III, the high priest who opposed Antiochus IV] will be cut off (not that *he* did anything wrong). The people of the prince [Antiochus IV] will come and destroy Jerusalem and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood. Destruction will continue to the end of the war.

[Antiochus IV] will keep his promise to many [traitorous Hellenistic Jews] for [seven years]. In the middle of the [seven years] he will halt [Jewish] sacrifices [in the Temple], for [the Jews] will not go to the [Temple] because of the overspreading of abominations [where Antiochus' statue watches pigs being sacrificed] until the consummation [expulsion of the Syrian army].

Whatever the desecrator does will be done to himself (Daniel 9:25-27).¹

Garbled though that passage is, Jews understood that Caligula was reenacting Antiochus' folly. Dread and the excitement of war swept through Palestine. Whole families swarmed to the plain to beg Petronius not to bring Caligula's statue into Palestine. Petronius tried to reason with them, but they insisted that they would fight every inch of the way.

Petronius went to Tiberias in Galilee to estimate the opposition the invading army would encounter. Thousands pleaded with him along the way. In Tiberias he met with Agrippa's brother Aristobolos and other powerful Jews. They begged Petronius to turn back, explaining that Jews could not allow any idol to enter Judea. They had already submitted to Roman power. Invasion could not achieve anything more. They warned that farmers would not waste time tilling crops for fear of invasion, so famine would ensue.

Petronius replied that he had to carry out his king's orders. If he did not, he would be executed. Gaius Caesar himself would lead the army, destroy Israel as a rebellious nation, and auction any survivors as slaves.

The Jews answered that they already offered sacrifices twice a day to the health of Caesar and the Empire. (That was in the outer courts of

the Temple.) Allowing an idol in the Temple would be disloyal to YHWH, and blasphemous. Petronius would have to slaughter every Jew before he could get to the Temple. No Jew would survive to let himself be enslaved. They offered their throats for him to cut then and there. Petronius replied that he had no choice but to install the statue.

Nevertheless, he put it off. Spring and summer of 40 CE went by. In the autumn, farmers refused to plant crops that would be burnt. That gave Petronius an excuse. He wrote Caligula that revenue and grain shipments to Rome would stop if he invaded. He asked Caligula to rescind his order. Then he took his army back to Antioch.

Months passed, then Petronius received news of Caligula's assassination in January, 41. The crisis was over. A month later he received a letter from Caligula ordering him to invade at once or face immediate execution! Storms had delayed Caligula's letter three months.²

This passage commemorates Caligula's demise:

I saw one of his heads as though mortally wounded... Power had been given him for forty-two months... He who kills with the sword will die by the sword. Here is the patience and the *pistis* of the holy men (Revelations 13:3-10).

Did Josephus' account of Petronius' encampment on the plain cause Luke to imagine Jesus speaking on such a plain?

Jesus stood in a level place with his disciples and a great crowd from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon who came to hear him and have their diseases healed... He lifted his eyes on his disciples and said, "You poor are fortunate! You have the *basileia* of Θεοῦ..." (Luke 6:17-21; Matthew 5:1-5; QS 7-8).

Jewish reaction to the crisis was influenced by Zealot activists. In 6 CE two rabbis, Judas the Galilean and Zadok, said they would not be slaves to anyone but God. Imagining that God once ruled Israel directly, they would liberate Israel and make it the *basileia* of God once more. They are regarded as founders of the first century Zealot movement (Appendix V).

Jesus would have said the *basileia* of God was in reach. Submit to God's will, then you're in his *basileia*. He said to love, not kill. Look in your heart and expel hate. Zealot and hasidic agitation may have made Q people go out preaching that the *basileia* of God was at hand.

Claudius Caesar. In Rome, the army demanded that Caligula's uncle Claudius take the throne. He agreed, but the senate refused to appoint

that stuttering cripple who wanted to restore the Republic. Agrippa's friends and the palace guard talked the senate into electing Claudius.

Agrippa and a brother persuaded Claudius to send edicts to Alexandria and other provinces to protect rights of Jews. Claudius cited a long-standing Roman policy to allow subjugated people to keep their customs, but he warned the Jews not to despise "superstitious observances of other peoples," and to mind their own traditions.

Jewish influence in Rome is astounding. We suspect that their success encouraged Jerusalem to send apostles (*apostolos*, men "sent out") to the Jews of the Diaspora to influence the Empire at the popular level.

Claudius expelled some Jews from Rome because of "continual disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus," according to Suetonius.³ That is often taken to mean that Christianity was already established in Rome, but Jesus, dead or alive, could not have "instigated" a disturbance in Rome. We see no connection with him. "Chrestus" was likely a Jewish agitator in Rome who called himself "The Anointed One" as did a number of would-be kings in Palestine before and during the First Revolt. That's why Mark warned of "false christs" (13:6, 22). This one was in Rome.

About that time, Claudius sent a stern letter warning the Jews not to aid or comfort "Jews who sail down from Syria or Egypt." He demanded that Jews and Greeks stop fighting or else he would regard the Jews as rebels and put them down with whatever it took.⁴

"Jews who sail down from Syria or Egypt" were Zealots. Claudius' warning makes clear that Zealots agitated for an independent Israel. The Zealot movement, tracing itself back to Moses' time, freed Israel from Antiochus IV and never died out (see Appendix V). The following passage may reflect such efforts in Claudius' reign as well as after the First Revolt, when it was composed:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, *hypokritai!* You travel sea and land to convert a man, and then you make him twice the son of *Gehenna* as you are! (Matthew 23:15).

Agrippa, king of the Jews. Claudius appointed Herod Agrippa king over all Palestine the same year (41 CE), so Agrippa went to live in Jerusalem. Once more Israel was restored as it was in Solomon's kingdom. Joy to the world! The Messiah had come.

Agrippa was a politician known for friendliness to everyone, as well as for excessive generosity. He probably felt comfortable with foreigners, having grown up in Rome. Politician or not, he ordered Nazarites to

cut their hair, which would have angered *hasidim* and Zealots. He replaced Theophilus the high priest with Simon Cantheras. He soon deposed Simon Cantheras and reappointed Jonathan, who refused in favor of his brother Matthias. Agrippa's frequent changes in the office of high priest indicates attempts to please both revolutionaries and pacifists.

Doubtless Agrippa's manners were almost as Roman as his name and irritated many native-born Jews. One Simon denounced him for not being holy and for not being native-born. Agrippa invited Simon to sit down to talk with him. Simon sat but refused to speak, and Agrippa let him go.

In the coastal town of Doris, some young men put Caesar's statue in the synagogue. When Agrippa reported it to Petronius, the latter ordered a stop to harassment of Jews.

Agrippa began rebuilding the defenses around Jerusalem, including the walls that Pompey had destroyed a century earlier. Josephus described the walls as "too strong for human power to demolish." But Marcus, the new legate of Syria, let Claudius know about the rebuilding. Claudius demanded an immediate halt, and Agrippa complied. His efforts toward independence must have pleased the Zealots.

Several kings visited Agrippa in Caesarea, some from as far away as Asia Minor. Marcus sent them home, for he suspected Agrippa of trying to organize the eastern provinces to throw off Roman rule.

Agrippa died suddenly in Caesarea in 44 CE. His short tenure and failure to win independence must have disappointed most Jews exceedingly. Independence remained an explosive issue in Palestine.

The Messianic Myth

At this point it we must explore the complex Jewish tradition behind the word, Christ. *Christos*, Greek for "smeared with oil," refers to anointing heads of kings at the coronation ceremony. High priests were also anointed at their sanctification. The Hebrew equivalent of *Christos* is *Mashiah* (Aramaic, *Meshiha*); hence "Messiah" in English.

Anointing symbolized God's approval of kings and priests. That, of course, was a way to claim authority from God. Disobedience to rulers was disobedience to God. Scripture says that YHWH gave instructions for Aaron's anointment when he chose him as Israel's first high priest.⁵ YHWH told Samuel the prophet to anoint Saul the first king of Israel.⁶

Throughout Psalms, “The Anointed One” means King David or his descendants, the kings of Judah. In the Torah is a prophecy of self-rule:

A star will come out of Jacob, and a scepter will rise out of Israel (Numbers 24:17).

During the Exile, Jewish captives hoped that Cyrus of Persia would invade Babylonia, send them home, and rule with mercy and justice:

YHWH your redeemer says... of Cyrus, “He is my shepherd and will please me, even telling Jerusalem, ‘You will be built,’ and the Temple, ‘Your foundation will be laid’”... YHWH says to **Cyrus his *Mashiah***, to Cyrus whose right hand I have held, ‘Subdue nations before you, and I will loose the loins of kings to open the gates’” (Isaiah 44:29-45:4).

It happened; the exiles’ hopes were fulfilled: Cyrus Messiah defeated Babylonia, freed the Jews, and let Zerubbabel, a descendant of King David, lead them back to Jerusalem to rebuild the nation. Zerubbabel reigned as prince under the Persian king, and one Joshua was high priest. Therefore, Judah had two Jewish Messiahs for a time:

[Zerubbabel and Joshua] are the two “sons of freshly-pressed oil” who stand by the *Adon* [Master, Lord] of the whole earth (Zechariah 4:14).

“*Adon* of the whole earth” was deliberately ambiguous. It assured the Persian *adon*, the king, that Judah was loyal to him, but Jews knew that he ruled at the pleasure of YHWH, the ultimate *Adon* of the world.

In the following garbled passage, Daniel predicts that a Jewish prince would rule in 48 BCE. Antiochus IV had killed Onias III the high priest before Daniel wrote (165 BCE)⁷:

It will be [four hundred ninety years] from [Cyrus’] order to restore Jerusalem [538 BCE] to the *Mashiah*, a prince [48 BCE] (Daniel 9:25).

Daniel describes the ideal world ruler with sublime imagery:

I dreamed that one like a son of man⁸ came with the clouds of heaven and came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought him near before him.

He was given dominion, glory, and a kingdom so all people, nations, and languages would serve him. His dominion is everlasting dominion which will not pass away, and his kingdom will not be destroyed (Daniel 7:13-14).

Daniel wanted the king of Rome to stop Antiochus, and it happened. When he brought his army down to invade Egypt, the Roman ambassador to Egypt ordered him to go home. When the Maccabees ruled independent Israel, they made treaties with Rome. However, in 63 BCE

Pompey conquered an unwilling Israel. After several tumultuous decades of Roman occupation, Augustus Caesar's firm hand brought forty years of harsh justice and peace. His successors were less competent, and German tribes threatened the Empire in the north and Parthian horsemen in the east. After Augustus died, many of the subjugated peoples of the Empire probably thought its zenith had passed and looked for its fall. Jewish scholars thought Daniel's vision prophesied a new world ruler in their own time. "An ancient superstition was current in the East, that from Judea would come at this time the rulers of the world," Suetonius wrote in connection with the First Revolt.⁹ The Jews thought the world ruler would be Jewish.

Another interpretation—though I have no idea how popular it was—is that the world-ruling son of man in Daniel's dream would be a supernatural being who would come down on clouds from heaven. I don't think many balanced Jews really expected that, but that interpretation did create a rich folklore of the supernatural Messiah.

I suggest that the first "Christians" had nothing whatever to do with Jesus. They were the opposite, Messianic Jews impatient for a *Mashiah* or *Christos* to arise from their own people. Some followed self-declared Messiahs like Chrestus in Rome. Christians and the title of Christ had nothing whatever to do with Jesus until somebody deliberately separated the Messianic myth from Zealot agitators and applied it to Jesus the pacifist. That somebody may have been Paul or someone close to him. We will look at the evidence in due time.

NOTES

1. Antiochus' statue: Asimov, 612-615; Brandon, 41-44.
2. Caligula's attempt: Brandon, 41-42. Sandmel, 40-47. Josephus, *Jewish War*, 2:183-205; *Antiquities*, 18:8, Tacitus, 9.
3. Instigation of Chrestus, expulsion from Rome: Suetonius, 5. He was probably a local troublemaker: Smith, 1978, 50.
4. Claudius' letter: Reinach, 244.
5. Aaron the first high priest anointed: Exodus 28:41.
6. Saul anointed: 1 Samuel 9:16-17, 15:1.
7. Interpretation of Daniel: Asimov, 612-615.
8. Son of man: Not son of contemptible *adam* as in Ezekiel, but son of a respected *enosh*. Daniel knew better than to call the king of Rome "son of dirt," for *adam* means "earth" as well as "human." Kings were regarded as gods in human form, hence "one like" a man.
9. World ruler to come from East: Suetonius, 10:4; also note Josephus, *Jewish War*, 3:397.

— ⊕ — 7 On the Road From Damascus And One-Thousand-and-One Arabian Nights

Every Christian knows the story. Saul is persecuting Christians and heads for Damascus to hunt them down. On the road he “sees the light” and becomes a fervent apostle for the Lord Jesus Christ.

That’s Luke’s tale. He liked it so much that he told it three times and improved on it each time. This is the first telling:

As Saul approached Damascus, a light suddenly shone from heaven down around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice speaking to him. “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”

He said, “Who are you, *Kyrie*? [Lord]”

The *Kyrios* said, “I am Jesus whom you persecute. It is hard for you to kick against the prods.”¹

Astonished and shaking, Saul asked, “*Kyrie*, what do you want me to do?”

The *Kyrios* said, “Get up and go into the city. You will be told what to do.”

The men with him stood speechless, for they heard the voice but saw no one. They lifted Saul up from the ground. He opened his eyes but saw nothing, so they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind and didn’t eat or drink.

The *Kyrios* spoke to Ananias, a disciple in Damascus, in a vision. “Ananias, get up. Go into Straight Street to Judas’ house and ask for Saul of Tarsus, for, see! He is praying” (Acts 9:3-11).

Saul becomes Paul in Acts 13:9. In his letters he never calls himself Saul. Luke may have invented the name change to dramatize Paul’s conversion.

In the second telling Luke forgets that Paul’s men heard the voice. This time he lets Paul tell a Roman army officer about it:

“About noon as I approached Damascus, a great light suddenly shone down from heaven around me. I fell to the ground and heard a voice. ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?’

“I answered, ‘Who are you, *Kyrie*?’

“He said, ‘I am Jesus the *Nazarene* whom you persecute.’

“The men with me saw the light and were afraid but did not hear the voice. I said, ‘What shall I do, *Kyrie*?’

“The *Kyrios* said, ‘Get up and go into Damascus. You’ll be told what to do.’

“The glory of that light blinded me, so they led me by the hand into Damascus. One Ananias, a devout man obedient to the Law whom the Jews respected, came to me” (Acts 22:6-13).

Luke said Jesus was a Nazarene. He knew the Nazarenes, for they were a prominent and widespread Jewish Jesus sect in his time.

Everybody falls to the ground in the third telling, and Jesus makes Paul an apostle:

“Along the way at midday, O King [Agrippa II], I saw a light from heaven brighter than the sun shining down around me and my men. We all fell to the ground. I heard a voice say in Hebrew, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It’s hard for you to kick against the prods.’

“I said, ‘Who are you, *Kyrie*?’

“He said, ‘I am Jesus whom you persecute. Get up and stand on your feet, for I appeared to you to make you a servant and a *martyra* [witness] of this appearance and future appearances, rescuing you from your people and the *ethnos* to whom I send you, to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, from *Satan*’s authority to the $\Theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$ ’, so that they may receive forgiveness for sins and inheritance with those whom *pistis* in me made holy.’

“O King Agrippa, I obeyed the heavenly vision and revealed it first to the Jews of Damascus, Jerusalem, and all Judea, then to the *ethnos*” (Acts 26:13-20).

Luke is a great storyteller, but contradictions creep into his thrice-told tale.

Paul says he did indeed persecute “the *ekklēsia* of the $\Theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$ ” and “*ekklēsias* of Judea in *Christos*”:

I have a greater claim [to Jewish heritage], circumcised on the eighth day, from the lineage of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; a Pharisee as to the Law; *zelon* [zealous, fanatic] in persecuting the *ekklēsia*; faultless in observing the Law (Philippians 3:4-6).

You have heard of my life in Judaism, that I persecuted—farther than you can throw [*hyperbolēn*]!—the *ekklēsia* of the $\Theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$ and ravaged it, and excelled in Judaism above many of my peers of my own race, being more a *zelotes* of my ancestors’ traditions (Galatians 1:13-14). After I went to Syria and Cilicia, I was unknown by face to the *ekklēsias* of Judea in *Christos*. They had heard only that the one who used to persecute us now preaches the *pistis* that he once destroyed (Galatians 1:21-23).

“Faultless in observing the Law” means Paul was hasidic. “Persecuted,” “ravaged”, and *hyperbolēn* are boasts of a former Zealot, but he never gives the gory details. It is Luke, not Paul, who tells of Stephen’s death to which “Saul consented” (Acts 8:1).

Ekklesia is a word that indicates that he stood in the street to “call” people “out” to visit his gatherings. At least seventeen years elapsed between his persecuting *ekklēsias* and writing Galatians, so the *ekklēsias*

he persecuted may have been totally different and called something else. We should not assume the earliest “*ekklesias in Christos*” honored a man who preached love, because all that “*ekklesia in Christos*” means is it honored an “anointed one,” messiah. “Anointed ones” were kings or men striving to be kings. Followers of the would-be-king, John the baptizer, called him “Messiah” or “Christ.” Three rival Messiahs ruled besieged Jerusalem in its last days, one of whom was John of Gischala. His Galileans drank blood and dressed like women, which the Torah forbids.² (Such rituals prepared macho Greek soldiers for whatever lay beyond the grave.) Rebels had probably been calling themselves messiahs at least as far back as Judas the Galilean. Their violence contrasts sharply with Jesus’ pacifism. He never said he was Messiah or Christ.

Somewhere, at some time, somebody said Zealot would-be kings were *pseudochristoi*, false christs, for the Messiah would demand that people love one another as Jesus did. The synoptic gospels say the first to call Jesus “*Christos*” was Peter. John says he was Andrew.

Paul’s *apokalypsis*. Paul says his knowledge came from God and Jesus, yet he went to Peter “to learn”:

I Paul an apostle, not **from** *anthropon* [humans] or **through** *anthropon*, but through Jesus Christ and Θεος *Patros* [God the Father]... I tell you, brothers, that the *euangelion* which I *euangelisthen* is not from *anthropon*. I didn’t get it from *anthropon*. Nobody taught me. I received it through *apokalypsis* Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:1-13).

When the Θεος separated me from my mother’s belly, called me and chose me to reveal [*apokalypσαι*] his son so that I might preach him among the *ethnos* of the earth. I didn’t consult men. I didn’t even go up to Jerusalem to those who became apostles before me. Instead, I immediately *went away* into Arabia and *agam returned* to Damascus. After three years I went up to Jerusalem *historesai* [to learn from] *Petron*. I lived with him fifteen days. I saw no other apostle except James, the brother of the *Kyrios* (Galatians 1:15-19).

Paul received his *euangelion* by “*apokalypsis* Jesus Christ.” *Apokalypsis* means “veil (*kalyptein*) away (*apo*).” Jesus Christ removed the veil. Yet Paul visited Peter to learn from him and stayed fifteen days.

Three times Paul mentions seeing or talking to Jesus:

Haven’t I seen Jesus Christ our *Kyrios*? (1 Corinthians 9:1).

I, the last one of all, saw him also like one overdue at birth (1 Corinthians 15:8).

I begged the *Kyrios* three times... He told me... (2 Corinthians 12:8-9).

Paul “saw” Jesus, most likely in meditation, trances, or dreams. In that age if you saw any person in a dream, it was a spirit who had come to

visit you. When you sleep, your spirit go wandering around. Daniel gives some fictional examples of dream interpretation. Ezekiel tells of visions and spiritual travels. In modern terms, Paul's *apokalypsis* was that he saw the futility of Zealotism. He wised up and redirected his zeal into the Jesus movement. That's how God "called" him and cut his umbilical cord. That was Paul's "*apokalypsis* Jesus Christ."³

Paul does not say his *apokalypsis* was on the road to Damascus:

When the Θεός chose to reveal his son through me, I did not consult men... I immediately *went away* into Arabia and *again returned* to Damascus (Galatians 1:15-18).

He was going *from* Damascus, then "*again returned*" to Damascus. He *had been in Damascus* and had his *apokalypsis* on the way *back from* Damascus. After his *apokalypsis* he immediately *went away into Arabia* and *went back to Damascus*.

Luke changed Paul's story! He sends Paul in hot pursuit to Damascus only to run smack into the Lord Jesus Christ before he gets there. What drama! And what a model for Christians to this very day to suddenly "see the light" and surrender themselves to the Lord Jesus Christ. Luke wrote fiction, not history. The man who dreamed up angelic choirs did not transform to a historian when he completed the Gospel of Luke and started writing Acts. Yes, he did use Paul's letters and Josephus' *Jewish War* and *Antiquities*; also Q, Mark's gospel, and unknown sources of fact and fiction. Paul provided few facts, and they weren't always what Luke wanted. Whatever facts he had he buried under a bushel of fiction. That's what storytellers do. Luke was a skillful storyteller and propagandist. As Virgil provided Augustus Caesar and the Roman Empire with *Aeneid*, so Luke provided Christians with a noble epic. Luke-Acts is as historical as James Michener's historical novels. Historian Luke was not.

One-thousand-and-one Arabian nights. Paul was three years in Damascus. What happened there? Luke conjured up scenes of caring Jesus people and Paul preaching. Paul says only that he left as a fugitive:

The governor of Damascus under King Aretas kept the city with a garrison eager to catch me. [My friends] lowered me in a basket from a window in the wall, and thus I escaped his hands (2 Corinthians 11:32-33).

Paul's flight from Damascus was in Aretas' reign, 37 to 40. I suggest it was in 39 CE after Caligula made Agrippa tetrarch over Galilee and Perea. Agrippa had no reason to keep Uncle Antipas' war going, so he probably talked Gaius Caesar or Vitellius into making Aretas an ally and letting him rule Damascus. Somebody wanted Paul to answer for his crimes, so when the Syrians heard he was in town, they tried to catch him.

Paul's *apokalypsis* was three years before his escape. It was probably in 36. Paul the Zealot was on the busy caravan road from Damascus to Jerusalem when heard alarming news from people leaving Jerusalem. Vitellius was in Jerusalem to replace Pilate with Marcellus and put down Zealot agitators. He replaced Caiaphas the high priest with Jonathan and made other concessions to the Jews, but he also made it clear that they had better quit thinking about independence. Maybe Vitellius executed some of Paul's friends. The ultimate Roman threat was to eradicate the Jewish people by massacre, enslavement, and exile. They had better put down the Zealot movement themselves, both at home and abroad. Paul's life as a Zealot was over. His *apokalypsis* was beginning.

Paul hid his face in his robe and sought refuge in the Jewish quarter of Damascus. In that gentile city he made friends in sects he did not know well before, including Jesus people and Hillel's school. He began to see the Zealot folly: They quoted the Torah to prove that YHWH wanted them to kill anyone who disobeyed the Torah (Appendix V). To believe *that*, they had to ignore another commandment in the Torah, "You will not kill"! Which one should they obey? Paul was no longer a student in a debating contest. He saw that Zealots endangered their families, friends, neighbors, and nation. His faith in the Torah was shattered. There was but one answer: Love of humanity was righteousness as Hillel said, and as the Jesus of current fashion taught. That was Paul's "*apokalypsis* Jesus Christ." Later on he would write,

Even if I speak with the tongues of men and of angels—even if I sacrifice myself as a burnt offering!—I am nothing without love... *Pistis*, hope, and love abide, but the greatest of these is love (1 Corinthians 13:1-13).

The whole Law is fulfilled through one saying, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" [Leviticus 19:18-34] (Galatians 5:14).

If there is any other commandment, it is included in this saying, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." [Leviticus 19:18-34]... Love fulfills the Law (Romans 13:9).

The hymn came, perhaps, from Athens; the quotations, from the Torah.

Paul had grown up with a sense of mission and sacrifice to please the god who had chosen his nation as a light for the peoples of the world, to civilize them. He would have liked everyone to become a Jew, preferably Pharisee. But after his flight to Damascus he quit insisting that his associates be observant Jews. The true righteousness is love of humanity. He was now capable of calling Jesus “Messiah” as a model of righteousness. Furthermore, you don’t have to die as a Zealot to earn a high place in heaven. All of us can hope to earn eternal life by living in decency and love. That was the ultimate “good news.” Paul may have been the first to apply *euangelion* to the hope of eternal life through decent living and love.

Paul was set on his new doctrine before escaping from Damascus, and he wanted Peter to teach him more. He stayed fifteen days. We can only guess what each learned from the other. From Jerusalem he went to Syria, probably Antioch, and north to Cilicia. Tarsus, capital of Cilicia, may have been his hometown as Luke says, but as far as his letters indicate he could have been a Jerusalemite.

Paul was probably in Cilicia or Antioch in the fall of 39 when Petronius received orders to install Caligula’s image in Jerusalem. He probably saw the armies marching southward, and imagined them slashing his countrymen with their swords in the streets of Jerusalem. He must have been terrified for the future of Israel. Judgment Day was near. Paul’s next fourteen years are a blank. No doubt he elaborated his message and tried it out during that time.

Luke has Barnabas bring Paul from Tarsus to Antioch. They bring famine relief to Jerusalem. The Antioch *ekklesia* plans apostolic missions and sends Paul through Cyprus and Galatia in Asia Minor. Paul says nothing of any of this. Luke embellished Paul’s conference in Jerusalem with James, Peter, and one John (Acts 11:25-15:35).

Luke’s second missionary journey for Paul is overland through Asia Minor to Troas, near ancient Troy. At Troas Luke shifts from third person (“they”) to first person (“we”), perhaps to suggest that Acts’ author was the Macedonian who joins Paul. Paul goes to Neapolis, Philippi, Thessalonika, Beroë, Athens, and Corinth, then returns to Jerusalem and Antioch (Acts 15:36-18:22).

Luke's third missionary journey for Paul is from Antioch to Ephesus, where he stays three years. He visits Corinth, then heads for Jerusalem. He makes a portentous journey reminiscent of Jesus on the road to Jerusalem in the synoptics. In Jerusalem Zealots mob Paul. The Romans put him in protective custody in Caesarea, but the Jews make him stay in prison. He appeals to Nero Caesar for justice and is sent to Rome for trial. There he teaches two years. Luke lets us think Paul was executed in Rome.

Those journeys are interesting and reasonable but are not historical. Luke painstakingly built on the tidbits of information in Paul's letters. He makes Paul the ideal apostle for Christ.

What Paul says is that after fourteen years in Syria and Cilicia, he returned to Jerusalem to get moral support for preaching to gentiles "as Peter preaches to Jews." That was about 53 CE. He was in Antioch when Peter and "men from James" visited. He may or may not have already visited Philippi and Thessalonika in Macedonia, and Athens, where he wrote 1 Thessalonians. Galatians shows that he had been in Galatia, likely on route to Philippi. In Ephesus he probably wrote Galatians, Philemon, several letters to Corinth, and perhaps Romans. He visited Corinth three times. He planned to go to Jerusalem with a collection for the "*Ptochoi* (Beggars) of the holy men," then west to Rome and Spain. Instead, he was apparently imprisoned in Philippi, where he wrote the Philippians. His letters confirm only one missionary journey.

Many Jews met Paul's doctrine with skepticism and anger, but non-Jews were delighted with his "mysteries," especially the holy *pneuma* and the Pharisee doctrine of Judgment Day and resurrection.

Paul the apostle—meaning what? His letters provide the earliest New Testament usage of "apostle." Who are apostles besides Paul?

Peter-Kephas and Jesus' brothers are apostles:

Can't we lead about a sister, a wife, as other *apostolon* do, the brothers of the *Kyrios*, and Kephas? (1 Cor. 9:5).

An *apostolon* is a person "away-sent," or sent out. Paul's "apostles" are not exactly the same as those in the gospels and Acts:

Jesus was seen by Kephas, then by the twelve... Then he was seen by more than five hundred brothers at once. (Most of them are still alive.) After that, James saw him, then did **all the apostles** (1 Cor. 15:5-8).

Who are “all the apostles”? Paul knows too many to name besides Peter-Kephas, Jesus’ brothers, Apollos,⁴ and “the twelve” (who may have been invented after his time and inserted by an editor). The Q people were not apostles, for they were not “sent out” by either Jerusalem or Jesus. They were a school that organized missions on its own.

In Paul’s time, apostolic missions were probably the long-standing means by which the Jewish temple-state kept in touch with the *Diaspora*, “Dispersion.” The Diaspora was the Jewish population in many provinces of the Empire and beyond, the product of fate and fortune over the centuries. Jews settled as far west as Spain, east to Persia, India, and China, and as far south as Ethiopia. They clung together in ghettos and synagogues. They saw themselves in God’s blessing to Abraham:

YHWH told Abraham, “I will bless you, and multiply your descendants like stars in the sky, like sand on the seashore, and they will occupy the gate of YHWH’s enemy. All nations of the earth will be blessed through your descendants” (Genesis 22:15-18).

Diasporic Jews dreamed of seeing the beautiful gleaming white Temple on Mount Zion and tried to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the week-long Passover feast, annually if possible, or at least once in a lifetime.

Why were nations “blessed” through Jews? Because Jews knew what God wanted, and they were to teach the same to the nations:

I YHWH have called you in righteousness and will hold your hand and protect you and give you to humankind as a promise—a light for the nations to open their blind eyes and bring the prisoners out of the prison, they who sit in the darkness of the prison house (Isaiah 42:6-7; also 49:6).

The Diaspora illuminated nations from within. It sent money and helped Jerusalem know what was going on in the world. Jerusalem kept in touch through *apostoloi* as well as pilgrims and businessmen.

We suppose that priests and scribes in Jerusalem chose apostles from Jews in good standing to represent their interests so that apostles had education, training, and authority. The “important” men in Jerusalem whom Paul mentions may have directed apostolic missions. We imagine that apostles cooperated and competed with one another as brethren, friendly or not, with bias for their own sects, some being Zealots. It may have been a massive effort from Jerusalem to cool hot tempers in the Diaspora. Jesus’ philosophy may or may not have been a large part of it. We can’t distinguish different sects in Paul’s letters. The

First Revolt interrupted the apostolic program. Afterward, Pharisees resumed the missions and tried to get Jesus people to either repent or stay out of the synagogues.

NOTES

1. Hard to kick against the prods: Also occurs in Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* (Oceanus' second speech to Prometheus), and Euripides' *The Bacchae* (Dionysos' advice to Pentheus). Probably a common saying.
2. John of Gischala: Josephus, *Jewish War*, 4:564. Blood, women's clothing forbidden: Leviticus 17:10-14, Deuteronomy 22:5..
3. Paul's conversion: Segal in *Paul the Convert* shows that the conversion was not the sudden and dramatic event depicted by Luke.
4. Apollos an apostle: 1 Cor. 1:12, 3:4-6, 22, 4:6, 16:12. Elaborated into a tale in Acts 18:24, 19:1. Titus (3:13) was written long after Paul's time.

—⊕— 8 The Signs That He Was The Christ

Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah. That was the message of two very early tracts or essays that were found buried in the Gospel of John. Like Q, they were discovered only by careful study but are real.

The first essay is called the Signs Source (SQ) because it described “signs” that proved that Jesus was the Messiah.¹ The second essay is a sequel, the Passion Source (PQ)². It told of Jesus’ last days—mostly in Jerusalem—and the conspiracy that killed him. SQ and PQ bore the “good news” that the Messiah had come, so they truly were *euangelions*. They were the first *euangelions* of the Christ.

The two essays were soon combined to form the Signs Gospel (SG). After the First Revolt, a Redactor revised and expanded SG to create the Gospel of John. (Like SQ and PQ, SG is known only from analysis of John.) Thus the composition of the Gospel of John spanned fifty or perhaps sixty years—two or three generations. Scholars call the Christian Jews who completed the Gospel of John the “Johannine community.” SQ and PQ reveal something of the earlier generation that created them, the pre-Johannine community. It shows strong ties with Palestinian Judaism and probably lived in southern Syria. Perhaps it was the community in Damascus that sheltered Fugitive Paul and made him a disciple of Jesus Christ.

The Signs Source: Jesus Is The Messiah

SQ makes John the immerser and his disciples announce the good news:

This is John’s account. When priests and Levites came from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” John admitted, “I am not the *Christos*.” They asked, “What then? Are you Elijah?” and he said, “No.” They asked him, “Are you That Prophet [like Moses]?” He answered, “No.” They asked him, “Who are you? Explain yourself,” and he said, “I’m the one Isaiah the prophet wrote of, the voice crying in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the *Kyrios*.’” They asked him, “Why do you *baptisma* [immerse] if you’re not the *Christos*, nor Elijah, nor That Prophet?” and he said, “I *baptizo* in water, but among you stands one you don’t recognize, whose shoes I’m not fit to unfasten.”

Next day John saw Jesus coming to him. John said, “See the Lamb of the Θεός! He’s the one I said was before me, coming after me. I didn’t know him except to reveal him to Israel, so I *baptizon* with water... I saw the *pneuma* descend from heaven like a dove, and it stayed with him. He *baptizon* with the *pneuma*. He’s the son of the Θεός.”

Next day John, standing with two of his disciples, saw Jesus and said, "See the Lamb of the Θεος!... He's the son of God." Andrew found his brother Simon and told him, "We found the *Messias*," which means the "*Christos*"... When Jesus saw Simon, he said, "You are Simon, Jonah's son, and I will call you *Kephas*," that is, a *petros* [rock]. **[Simon Peter told Philip, "We found Elijah!"]** Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We found the one Moses wrote about in the Law and the Prophets. He is Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph"... As Nathanael appeared, Jesus said, "There's a true Israelite!" Nathanael said, "How did you know me? *Rabbi*, you're God's son and *basileus* [king] of Israel!" (John 1:41, 45, 49, 51).³

Jesus was "before" (greater than) John, but it could also mean that Jesus existed before John. Jesus was a god, but John was only human. John's various disciples evidently had said John was the Messiah, Elijah, or The Prophet. SQ made John deny that he was any of those divine or semi-divine beings, then testify that Jesus was all of them and more.

Elijah held a special place in the Israelite heart for standing up to the rich and powerful, the spectacular ascent to heaven as a sun god, and the prophesied return to earth:

A fiery chariot and fiery horses appeared as Elijah and Elisha were talking and came between them, and Elijah went in a whirlwind up to heaven (2 Kings 2:11).

Look, I [YHWH] will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of YHWH, and he will turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse (Malachi 4:5-6).

Today at Passover many Jews still place a glass of wine before a chair reserved for Elijah should he pay a visit.

The Torah foretells the coming of "The Prophet" like Moses:

YHWH your Elohim will lift one of you as a prophet like me (Deuteronomy 18:15-25).

The question, "Why do you immerse if you're not the Christ, Elijah, or That Prophet?" assumes that those figures would immerse Jews to cleanse them of sin and pollution. John did it to sanctify his Zealot followers for martyrdom. It is likely that John's disciples continued it.

John's denials and SQ's parallel counterclaims for Jesus leads us to expect Simon Peter to tell Philip that Jesus is Elijah. SQ almost certainly had that sentence to make clear that Jesus, not John, was Elijah (above, in bold, bracketed). When the Redactor decided that John was indeed Elijah, he removed the sentence⁴ but forgot to remove John's denial that he was Elijah.

Were you surprised that Andrew recognized Jesus as Messiah before Peter did? Everybody reads it, and everybody ignores it. Why is that “fact” there?

If we dare look for facts in a work of fiction—indeed, propaganda—, perhaps it really happened. Two disciples of John, one of them Andrew, left him. They heard Jesus’ opinion—maybe from Jesus himself—that angry John could never overthrow the Romans and become king of Judea. He was a *pseudochristos*, false messiah. Violence rarely works when poor people oppose overwhelming force. John went against the cosmic law of love, God’s law. God would never have “anointed” John. You have to charm your way into power. Use peaceful means. Make those tyrants your friends. Andrew, his companion, his brother Simon, Philip, and Nathanael founded a group who developed the idea that Jesus was God’s Anointed One, the *Messias* or *Christos* as much as there ever would be. They founded the pre-Johannine community. Andrew’s companion may have been SQ’s modest author named John as tradition holds. (We will hear about Judas Iscariot later.)

The notion that Jesus had “twelve” disciples came later. The Redactor, as an afterthought, inserted “the twelve” into the Gospel of John twice (John 6:67-71, 20:24) but did not bother with their names. He let Andrew keep his stature (John 1:41, 6:8, 12:22). A different community gave Peter the credit for recognizing the Messiah and demoted Andrew (Mark 8:27-30; 3:16-19). Matthew and Luke, with their own reasons, followed suit (Matthew 16:13-20, Luke 9:18-21).

How did the disciples know Jesus was the *Messias*?

The “signs.” The Gospel of John begins counting *semeia*:

Jesus did this first *semeion* in Cana of Galilee and showed his glory, and his disciples believed in him... (John 2:11).

In Capernaum Jesus healed... It is the second *semeion* that Jesus did (John 4:46-54).

Exactly what did SQ mean by *semeion*? *Semeion* or *sema* means “sign,” “symbol,” “significance,” or “meaning” as in “semaphore” and “semantics.” SQ had in mind the following passage in the Torah. YHWH has just told Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt:

“But they won’t believe me!” Moses told YHWH, “and they’ll say, ‘YHWH didn’t appear to you!’ YHWH said, “What’s in your hand?” “A rod.” “Toss it on the ground.” It became a snake that chased Moses. “Pick it up by the tail.” It became a rod. “Put your hand in your bosom.” Moses’ hand became leprous-white. “Again.” His hand was

restored. "If they don't believe you after *those* signs, pour river water onto the ground, and it'll turn to blood" (Exodus 4:1-9).

Those magical "signs" proved that Moses, a man, had power from YHWH, so listen to him!⁵ That's exactly what Jesus' "signs" meant.

This miraculous catch of fish was probably the third "sign":

From the shore Jesus asked the disciples, "Did you catch anything?" "No," they replied, not recognizing him. He said, "You'll find them on the right side." They tried it and couldn't even pull the net because of the abundance of fish... This is the third time that Jesus was revealed to his disciples... (John 21:1-14).

The counting of signs indicates that the author of the Gospel of John used an older document about signs. Early scholars began talking about John's "Signs Source," SQ. Further study showed it was about miracles that proved that Jesus was the Messiah.

SQ's first sign, turning water into wine, recalls Moses' turning water into blood, but turning water into wine was Greek magic. In the temple at Elis, western Greece, three pitchers of water turned to wine during the night before the feast of Dionysos, god of wine. The Dionysian cult was very popular in Syria. The pre-Johannine community was Hellenistic.

The second sign was the healing of a gentile official's son from afar.⁶ The third sign was the miraculous catch of fish. It symbolized evangelizing gentiles. The Redactor put it into a resurrection story near the end of the Gospel of John.

These are SQ's other signs: Jesus feeds five thousand men with five barley loaves and two fishes. He walks on the Sea of Galilee to his disciples. When he gets into the ship, instantly it arrives at its destination. In Judea he raises dead Lazarus and gives sight to a man born blind. In Jerusalem he heals a lame man. Eight signs in seven stories prove that Jesus was the Messiah and a wonder-working prophet like Elijah or Moses in the Epic of Israel.

Even though the pre-Johannine community wanted to represent Jesus as an Epic of Israel figure, they lived in a Hellenistic world. They knew some Aramaic but spoke Greek. That's why SQ translated the Aramaic words, *Messias* or *Meshiha* and *Kephas*, into Greek. SQ used the Greek version of Jewish scripture, the Septuagint. That's why he used the same Greek words as in the Septuagint's Elijah and Elisha food miracle stories. The Lazarus story is Egyptian.⁷

SQ identified with Galilean Jews and probably lived not far from Galilee. They were not Judeans, for SQ wrote of Judeans as adversaries.

SQ's conclusion proves there really was a book of signs:

Jesus did many other *semeia* in the presence of his disciples not included in this book (John 20:30).

The signs proved that the Messiah-Elijah-Prophet had come. That was important news because of the cult of revolution and martyrdom. Zealot would-be-kings endangered all Jews. John the immerser was one of them. SQ contrasted him with the popular figure of Jesus who had taught loving kindness and respect for people. Jesus was a model of righteousness despite being "unclean." He had "turned the heart of fathers toward their children" as prophesied for Elijah.

But John's hasidic disciples had made the same claim of John and harassed other Jews for not following their ways. They especially attacked followers of Jesus, an "unclean" man "dead" to the Torah. Therefore SQ made John and two of his disciples testify that Jesus was the great one, not John. Andrew left John for Jesus. Exploiting John even further, SQ said that John immersed Jesus, which would have cleansed him of sin, and he saw the holy spirit come on him and heard God call him his son.

John was vastly inferior to Jesus, a mere forerunner:

John said, "I'm not fit to unfasten the latchets on his shoes" (John 1:27).

Jesus crossed the Jordan where John first immersed, and he lived there. Many told Jesus, "John did no miracles, but everything he said about you was true" (John 10:40-41).

The holy spirit enabled Jesus to do miracles. John didn't have it.

"Son of God" can mean many things, but it generally meant that God "adopts" righteous, obedient people. As for actual fatherhood, Jesus was "the son of Joseph" in SQ. The virgin birth isn't in the Gospel of John.

SQ gave no hint that Jesus rose from the grave or would return. SQ's purpose was to prove that Jesus was the Messiah and son of God.⁸

SQ was written somewhat tongue in cheek to try to keep discussion civil and in good humor. (Everyone but small children, fools, and Paul's gentile Christians knew that Jesus was only a man like any other.) But SQ's moral was deadly serious. God's rule—his *basileia*—is here if we submit to it. The Messiah, if ever there will be one, has come and gone, never to return. There will be no other. Put away your swords and daggers, for you will not defeat the Roman Empire. God will do as he will in his own good time. He has his plans, of which sending Jesus was a part. The Messianic Age is here. It will be ruled by Jesus' teachings.

PQ: A Tale of Conspiracy, Death, and Resurrection

Critics knowing stories of Jesus' execution said that if he were the Messiah, nobody could have killed him. Besides, there was no prophecy that the Messiah would be Jesus of Galilee. SQ's author proved in a sequel, the Passion Source, that scripture did indeed prophesy that Jesus would come as the Messiah, and that the men who put him to death couldn't kill him.⁹ PQ patterned many of his episodes after scenes in Jewish scripture and Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* exactly as he had been taught as a schoolboy.

The first episode sets the stage for the entire essay. It opens where SQ ended, with Jesus in Jerusalem:

Jesus found money-changers and sellers of oxen, sheep, and doves sitting in the Temple. He made a whip from cords and drove them and the animals out. He poured out the money and overturned the tables. He told them, "Get your stuff out of here! Don't turn my Father's house into a marketplace!" (Scripture says, "Zeal for your house devours me!" [Psalm 69:9].) The Judeans asked him, "What *semion* can you show us [to prove your right] to do that?" Jesus replied, "Destroy this Temple⁹ and after three days I will raise it!" (John 2:13-19).

Jesus' anger and protest against the Judeans' desecration of "my Father's house" parallel Telemachos' anger at the suitors for spoiling his father's house, and his fight against them in *Odyssey*!¹⁰ Later on the Redactor would move the episode to the front of the Gospel of John.

PQ has already given the following two signs that Jesus is Christ: The Temple establishment will "devour" him, and he will raise himself from the dead after three days, as Jonah was as good as dead until the fish regurgitated him after three days.¹¹

The Temple cult feels threatened, so they conspire to kill Jesus (John 11:47-53).¹² Their failure to recognize the Messiah fulfills scripture:

Despite Jesus' signs, they didn't believe! Scripture *said* they wouldn't: "Who believed our report? To whom has YHWH's might been revealed? [Isaiah 53:1]." "[YHWH] blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts [Isaiah 6:10]" (John 12:37-40).¹²

Jesus sups with Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. Mary anoints his feet with spikenard. The traitor Judas Iscariot scolds her for extravagance, but Jesus says it's for his burial. He rides a donkey into Jerusalem and is acclaimed king of Israel—another sign that he is Messiah:

Blessed is he who enters in the name of YHWH! [Psalm 118:26] Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Look! Your king comes to you.

triumphant and victorious, humble and riding on an ass, on a colt the foal of an ass [Zechariah 9:9] (John 12:12-15).

Not a Passover supper. The Redactor replaced the original story of Jesus' last supper, if there was one, with speeches. The following is probably a vestige of the last supper though put into another context:

The bread that I will give is my flesh that I will give for the life of the world (John 6:51). *Amen, amen*, unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you have no life in you... for my flesh really is meat and my blood really is drink (John 6:53-55).¹³

The very notion of drinking any kind of blood was disgusting to Jews. Cannibalism, even if symbolic, was even worse. If *ekklesias en Christos*—whether *Christos* is Jesus or John—came to Judea with such a ritual, it's no wonder that Paul the Zealot persecuted them. He would have said it was one of many disgusting polluting Greek customs. Various Greek traditions, especially Dionysian festivities, included ritual "eating of the god." The Jesus story is rooted in Greek traditions far more than generally recognized.

The foot-washing after supper may have been in PQ. Also the following are probable vestiges of PQ's last supper story:

Jesus knew who would betray him. "One of you is a *diabolos*." He meant Judas Iscariot (John 6:64, 70-71).

The devil had already put "handing over" Jesus into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son (John 13:18).

Will you indeed lay down your life for me, Peter? You will deny me thrice before the cock crows (John 13:38).

Get up! Let's move on (John 14:31).

Jesus and his disciples went over the brook Kidron to a garden [cp. 2 Samuel 15:23] (John 18:1).

You will scatter and go home [Zechariah 13:7] (John 16:32).

Jesus was troubled in spirit and wept. "Shall I say, 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, this is why I came to this hour" (John 11:33, 35, 13:21, 12:27).¹⁴

Jesus' weighing alternatives recalls Socrates' choosing poison over exile after the Athenians judged him guilty.

Judas Iscariot leads a cohort of Roman soldiers and Temple guards who arrest Jesus, tie him up, and hustle him off to the high priest. "Iscariot" may be derived from *sicarius*, assassin. PQ modeled Judas after Homer's Melanthius, so he may be totally fictitious. Or he may represent a founder who let his friends down, among other possibilities.

PQ interweaves a tale of Peter's three denials into the trial scene.¹⁵ A disciple "known to the high priest" accompanies Jesus into the courtyard. The high priest sends Jesus to Pilate, who finds "no wrong in this man" but lets a mob decide to impale him anyway and free the murderer Barabbas. Soldiers declare the great truth that Jesus is king of Israel by their mock coronation. All this explicitly rejects Zealotism and its "false christs." He is impaled with two other men and the notice, "JESUS THE NAZOREAN, BASILEUS OF THE JOUDAION."

Scripture suggested some details of PQ's plot—which therefore "fulfill prophecy":

They divide my garments and cast lots for my clothes [Psalm 22:18]. For my thirst, they gave me vinegar to drink [Psalm 69:21]. After taking the vinegar he said, "Teteleotai [It is complete]," bowed his head, and handed over [*paredoke*] the *pneuma* (John 19:24-30).

Jesus' task was finished as soon as the "prophecies" were "fulfilled." His *pneuma* might have ascended to heaven at once as Essenes escaped their imprisoning bodies rejoicing. But no, Jesus would raise himself after three days. He didn't say where his *pneuma* would spend those three days. Probably in *Sheol* (*Hades*).

These are more details suggested by scripture:

He keeps all his bones. Not one is broken [Psalm 34:20]. You will not break a bone of [the Passover lamb] [Exodus 12:46]. When they look upon the one they pierced, they will mourn for him [Zechariah 12:10] (John 19:36-37).

Joseph of Arimathea took the body off the *stauros* and placed it in a tomb. Three days later "we"—Mary Magdalene and another person—found the tomb empty, so Jesus had indeed bodily "raised" himself. PQ may have included Peter's confirmation that the tomb was empty, and Jesus' appearance to Mary Magdalene.¹⁶

Thus PQ explained how men could have killed the Messiah. It was God's plan which he had revealed in scripture. Jesus' raising himself and other "prophecies" fulfilled were signs that he was the Messiah. That was "good news."

A Greek Tale

Neither SQ nor PQ said that Jesus would return, or that Judgment Day was near, or that the world would end. What they knew was that the Romans ruled Palestine and that Zealots could only make it worse. But Jesus had taught Jews how to live by the *basileia* of God, so it—the Messianic Age—was here. Therefore Zealots could put their sword away, read about prophecies of Jesus in the Torah and the Prophets, and follow his principles of loving kindness.

Jesus has been compared with Socrates, who at Apollo's command went around asking probing questions that upset prominent Athenians. Socrates had a *daimonion*, an inner voice that told him what was right or wrong. Three Athenians made false accusations against him. His fellow citizens judged him guilty and sentenced him to death. He died without flinching. Plato's Socrates has been admired ever since for his bold questioning and principled courage in the face of injustice.¹⁷

Many scholars have looked for evidence that the gospels were influenced by Homer's very popular *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, but in vain. Recently MacDonald showed that Mark was heavily indebted to Homer's epics.¹⁸ Odysseus' many misfortunes easily translated into PQ's plot of a man who tried to right wrongs committed by Romans and the Jewish puppets. Jesus' riot in the Temple is a transformation of Telemachos' rampage against the suitors in his father's house. Jesus' anointing, riding into Jerusalem, betrayal, last supper, persecution, prophecies of death, and courage in facing death are all take-offs from stories of Odysseus' woes or heroic deaths of Achilles and Hector, no matter how hidden or transformed they are. Use of Homer's epics is in addition to use of Plato and Jewish scripture. But PQ did it first, before the revolt; Mark redid it more comprehensively afterward.

We don't have to accept Jesus' execution as fact just because so many early documents include it. (The Book of Q doesn't; neither do *Didache* or the Gospel of Thomas.) Persecution is a universal fact of life. Anyone who resists authority can easily be martyred in fact or fiction. Writers will always find persecution plots useful to make their heroes larger than life.

The Signs Gospel (SG)

SQ and PQ were soon combined to form the Signs Gospel. Merging did not require major rewriting because they were consistent. Fortna has suggested that the Signs Gospel was created as early as the 40's or soon after¹⁹ —near the time of Paul's *apokalypsis*. At some time more resurrection stories were added. SG's purpose was to prove that Jesus was the Messiah and the Messianic Age was here.

The Hellenistic pre-Johannine people who wrote SQ and PQ were either the first Christian Jesus people or very close to them, but they were only Jews trying to live by the Torah the best way they could in a complicated and dangerous world.

Still ahead was the re-editing that would transform SG into the Gospel of John. That's when Jesus' long speeches were composed. The Gospel of John's framework is still that of SG and its predecessors. SQ and PQ.

Next we examine the role schools played in the creation of stories of Jesus, like some of the signs stories in SQ.

NOTES

1. SQ: *Semeia-Quelle*: Fortna, 5.
2. PQ: *Passions Quelle*. Fortna, 5.
3. John's and disciples' testimony: Fortna, 5-47.
4. Jesus as Elijah removed from tract: Fortna, 230.
5. "Signs" defined in Exodus: Helms, 83-100.
6. Official's son: Parallels in QS 15 (Luke 7:1-10) and Mark 7:24-30.
7. Signs, Dionysian rites, Septuagint Helms, 85-86. Elijah-Elisha food miracles: 1 Kings 17, 18, 2 Kings 4. Lazarus: Helms, 96-100; Budge, *Book of the Dead*, ix.
8. Signs Source: Fortna, 205-216, 226-228, 235-237, 265-273, 284-288, 296-298.
9. Passion Source: Fortna, 5, n14, 118-204. Temple: Paul uses the same word, *naou*, as a metaphor for the human body, the temple of God or holy spirit: 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, 6:19, 2 Cor. 6:16.
10. Cleansing of Temple: MacDonald, 33-36; *Odyssey* 1:140ff, 4:625-700.
11. Three days: Jonah 1:17, 2:10.
12. Temple cult felt threatened: Fortna, 128. Disbelief fulfilled a prophecy: Fortna, 129.
13. Eat flesh, drink blood: Fortna, 149-155.
14. Passover, garden scenes: Fortna, 149-155.
15. Melanthis: *Odyssey* 17:256-273, 22:142-193, 474-477, as Judas Iscariot: MacDonald, 38. Interweaving tale of Peter: Brandon discusses it in detail, but assumes Mark's gospel was the source for the other gospels.
16. PQ: Fortna, 118-220.
17. Socrates' mission, passion, noble death: Plato, *Apology*.
18. MacDonald: *The Homeric Epics and the Gospel of Mark*, 2000.
19. SG, the Signs Gospel: Fortna; Miller and Funk, *The Complete Gospels*.

— ⊕ — 9 Epic Stories from Jesus Schools

Some of SQ's "signs" appear to have been inspired by Old Testament Epic of Israel miracle stories,¹ but Greek origins are clear for three.

In the Epic of Israel, Moses parted the Red Sea for the Israelites' escape from slavery in Egypt. Across the sea he hosted a banquet:

Moses stretched out his hand over the Red Sea. YHWH sent an east wind all night and made the sea dry land. The waters were divided, and the children of Israel went across the sea on dry land (Exodus 14:21-22).

YHWH told Moses, "I will rain bread from heaven for you." That evening quail came and covered the camp. In the morning a small round substance like hoar frost appeared on the ground. Moses told the children of Israel, "This is the bread which YHWH has given you to eat" (Exodus 16:4-36).

Jesus also crossed the sea and hosted a banquet on the other side:

Jesus and his disciples crossed the Sea of Galilee. A crowd followed him, for they saw his healing miracles. He healed many, then went up into a mountain with his disciples. He looked up and saw a crowd coming to him. He said, "Where will we buy bread for these people?" A boy had five loaves and a few fish, but Philip and Andrew said there were too many people. Jesus said, "Make the *andres* [men] recline." It was grassy. He gave thanks and distributed the bread and fishes. There were five thousand *andres*. Leftovers filled twelve baskets. The people there said, "Surely this is The Prophet who is to come into the world!" When Jesus saw that the men wanted to make him a *basileus* [king], he went into a mountain alone.

In the evening the disciples got in the ship and headed for Capernaum. It became dark, and a great wind came up and made big waves. After rowing three miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and catching up with them. They were afraid. Jesus said, "It's I. Don't be afraid." They took him into the ship and instantly found themselves at Capernaum. When the people who had been at the feast found Jesus at Capernaum, they asked him, "When did you get here?" (John 6:1-25).

In doing "signs"—healing, making little food into plenty, walking on water, and instant arrival—Jesus is a *magos*—a magician or miracle worker, not an exorcist. How was he raised from a mere exorcist to *magos*? Storytellers familiar with his reputation for power over demons could easily imagine him having power over nature as well.²

The Red Sea was parted once, but River Jordan three times. Joshua led the Israelites across dry-footed into the promised land, where they

feasted (Joshua 3; 5:10-12). Jesus' name, *Yeshua*, a shortened form of *Yehoshua*, Joshua, is happenstance.

Both Elijah and Elisha parted the Jordan. One displayed his power to do magic, and the other tried out his own newly acquired power:

Elijah struck the Jordan with his mantle. The water divided so they crossed on dry land. Elisha said, "Let me have a double portion of the spirit." After Elijah left for heaven in his fiery chariot. Elisha took up Elijah's mantle, struck the waters with it, and they parted (2 Kings 2:8-14).

Elijah and Elisha transformed a little food into plenty, raised the dead, and healed the sick:

Elijah told the widow of Zarepath, "YHWH says you will never empty your barrel of meal or the jar of oil." Then he brought her son back to life (1 Kings 17:7-24. A parallel Elisha story is in 2 Kings 4:1-7).

The son of the woman of Shunem fell and died. Elisha raised him (2 Kings 4:18-37).

A man brought Elisha twenty barley loaves and full ears of grain in the husk. Elisha told the server, "Feed the people." The server said, "What! Shall I set this before a hundred men?" Elisha said, "Serve it to them, for YHWH says, 'They will eat with some left over.'" They ate with some left over (2 Kings 4:42-44).

Elisha cured Naaman of leprosy in River Jordan (2 Kings 5:1-27).

Jesus, too, raised the dead and healed the sick and lame:

An official came from Capernaum to see Jesus in Cana... Jesus said, "Go home. Your son lives." The official's servant came out to tell him his son was alive (John 4:46-54).

Jesus shouted into the tomb, "Lazarus, come out!" Lazarus came out, still bound up in burial cloths (John 11:1-45).

Jesus spat on the ground to make clay to put on the eyes of a man blind from birth, and told him to wash at Siloam. He did so, and he could see (John 9:1-8).

At Bethesda Jesus told a crippled man to get up and walk, and he did so (John 5:2-9).

Most scholars have held that most of SQ's "signs" are in the Jewish tradition, and can point to Old Testament sources.³ However, walking on waters is not parting them. Jesus did not part the waters.

SQ's stories of miraculous healings, the feeding of five thousand men, and the miraculous crossing of the sea are somewhat paralleled twice in the Gospel of Mark. Mark has two sets ("chains") of Epic of Israel miracle stories more or less similar to five of SQ's "signs." In

other words, Mark and John include a total of three chains of Epic of Israel miracle stories. In each chain Jesus performs five miracles: three cures, crossing the sea, and feeding thousands with a few loaves and fishes. Mark's stories will be itemized in chapter 21. One explanation for the three chains is they arose in three different groups.⁴ But walking on water is not the same as parting it. Moses, Joshua, Elijah, and Elisha parted water; Jesus did not.

A Greek ritual. We saw in the previous chapter that SQ used a Dionysian ritual for his first "sign":

When the wine was gone Jesus said, "Fill the jars with water." The steward tasted the water turned into wine and said, "You saved the best wine until now!" (John 2:1-11).

Homeric stories. Quite a different origin of some of Mark's miracle stories emerged when MacDonald saw that Mark relied heavily on Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* throughout his gospel. He showed that Mark developed his story of the feast of five thousand men from Nestor's drinking party at Pylos (*Odyssey* 3:34-68).

But SQ was written several decades before Mark, and its version of the feeding of five thousand men is also based on Nestor's drinking party at Pylos. As Telemachos and Athene sailed to Pylos and went ashore, so Jesus and his disciples sailed across the Sea of Galilee and went ashore. As Nestor and his son kindly welcomed Telemachos and Athene, so Jesus kindly welcomed a crowd. As Nestor fed 4500 *andres* (men), so Jesus fed five thousand *andres*. As Athene insisted that Telemachos meet their hosts confidently despite his reluctance, so Jesus insisted on feeding the crowd despite Andrew and Philip's objections. As Nestor's guests sat on sheep fleece, so Jesus' guests sat on grass. As Nestor's son and Athene prayed, so Jesus gave thanks. As Nestor's guests drank wine, divided beef, and were filled, so Jesus divided bread and fishes and the guests were filled (above, John 6:1-15). We conclude that SQ knew and used Homer's epics as a source. He was likely a schoolteacher.

Several decades later Mark recognized that SQ developed his story from Homer's tale of Nestor's feast. Mark turned it back into a Greek drinking party as in *Odyssey*, for he has the men sit "*symposia symposia*," that is, "together drinking, together drinking." (*Symposia* is from *sym*, "together," + *posia*, "drinking.") But Bible editors substitute "companies by companies" for *symposia symposia* because they don't

want you to know it was a drinking party as well as a feast. Mark *wanted* you to know (Mark 6:31-44).

Mark's Jesus hosts a second feast for thousands. Mark created it after Menelaus' wedding feast at Sparta, including women as well as men (*Odyssey* 4:30; Mark 8:1-9).⁵ Resemblance to the drinking party is because both crowds are fed with a few loaves and fishes.

As for Jesus walking across the sea, SQ got the idea from Hermes, whose "golden sandals carry him over the wet [Aegean] sea and boundless land with the breathings of the wind" (*Iliad* 24). Priam's driver sees a stranger coming in the darkness. He and Priam are terrified until Hermes, disguised as a young prince, takes Priam's hand and assures him of his good will and aid. Hermes gets in the chariot, "breathes spirit" into the horses and mules, and gets Priam to his destination very quickly. In SQ's story, Jesus' appearance frightens the disciples, and he assures them. He gets in the boat, and instantly they arrive at their destination (above; John 6:15-25).

Mark went back to Homer to improve on SQ's tale.⁶

In the evening Jesus, alone, saw the ship out on the sea with the disciples hard at work rowing against the wind. He walked out on the sea and approached them during the night. He would have passed them except that when they saw him walking upon the sea, they thought he was a *phantasma* [phantom] and cried out from fear. He told them, "Cheer up! It's I! Don't be afraid!" He climbed into the ship with them, and the wind died. They were amazed beyond measure and wondered (Mark 6:45-51).

As Zeus saw Priam from Olympus, so Mark's Jesus sees the ship from a mountain. The disciples mistake his spooky figure for a *phantasma*.

Mark wrote a tale of calming the sea inspired by several passages in *Odyssey*. It also recalls Jonah and Psalms 107⁷:

In the evening they took Jesus in the ship. A great windstorm came up, and waves came into the ship. Jesus was asleep on the headrest in the stern. They woke him saying, "Didaskale [Teacher], don't you care if we die?" He got up, scolded the wind, and told the sea, "Peace, be still." The wind died, and it was very calm (Mark 4:35-41).

Hellenistic teachers in the Greco-Roman age had their pupils write short stories about great men. The idea was that students would imitate their heroes. They became courageous by writing about great soldiers. They learned philosophy by writing what a philosopher might have said in various situations. They learned greatness by writing speeches for great men. The purpose was to develop character in young men rather than merely conveying facts. Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were the most

popular books of the Hellenistic period, and the models for teaching composition.

If our interpretation is correct, some or all of SQ's miracle stories were written in a Hellenistic Jewish school that thought of Jesus as a great miracle worker, sage, and liberator from the Torah. At first they used Jewish scriptural models, then turned to Homer's more fashionable stories. Thus SQ's simple plot merely called for Jesus to do "signs." PQ demanded that he stand up to deadly forces as did Elijah, Socrates, and above all Odysseus, Achilles, and Hector. Decades later Mark, another Hellenistic Jew, composed a biography of Jesus. He let SQ's John introduce Jesus, then expanded on SQ's "signs" to create many miracle stories. PQ provided the riot in the Temple, the anointing, the entry into Jerusalem, the passion, and the empty tomb. Mark went back to those tried and true fountains of inspiration, *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, for style, vocabulary, and ideas for plot and scenes.

SQ and PQ offer a glimpse into one or more Hellenistic Jewish schools that composed miracle stories and a passion narrative. Those stories tell us absolutely nothing about Jesus. They were about an ideal man, a man too perfect to ever have existed, to be imitated for building character. They are a step toward creation of a new god, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The closest we can get to the real man, whether Jesus or not, is through the aphoristic cores of some of the sayings in the Book of Q and the Gospel of Thomas. Everything else existed only in the imagination. Even the man behind the aphoristic cores is problematical.

NOTES

1. Jesus' Epic of Israel miracle stories: Mack, 1988, 216-222; 1995.
2. Jesus the exorcist becomes a *magos*: Morton Smith (1978) showed that his reputation as an exorcist was a major factor in creating myths of Jesus the wonder-worker.
3. Moses and Elijah-Elisha and other Old Testament stories as sources of Jesus Epic of Israel miracle stories: Helms, 75-76, 83-100.
4. Three chains of miracle stories: Mark 4:35-8:10, John 4:46-5:9, 6:1-21; also note QS 15, Luke 7:1-10, Matthew 8:5-10; Mack, 1988, 216-222. We will revisit Mark's Epic of Israel miracle chains in chapter 21. Three groups created three chains: Mack 1988, 221.
5. Party at Pylos was model for Mark's feast for five thousand: MacDonald, 83-90.
6. Gods walking on the sea: MacDonald, 148-153.
7. Calming the sea: MacDonald, 55-62; *Odyssey* 9:560-10:70, 13:70-80. Recalls Jonah and Psalms: Helms, 76-78.



10 Jesus for Gentiles A New Hellenistic God

Luke said the Jesus movement in Syria came from Jerusalem:

After Stephen's death, to which Saul consented, there was a great persecution against the *ekklesia* at Jerusalem, scattering them throughout Judea and Samaria, except the apostles... Saul made havoc of the *ekklesia*, entered every house, and sent men and women to prison. Refugees went everywhere preaching the word (Acts 8:1-4).

Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the *Kyrios*, asked the high priest for letters for the arrest of any of this way, men or women, in the synagogue in Damascus, to tie and bring them to Jerusalem (Acts 9:1-2).

Refugees from the persecution in Jerusalem fled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word only to the Jews (Acts 11:19).

That's fiction. Luke wanted Jerusalem to give Christianity all the authority it could, so he made the twelve stay in Jerusalem to start the movement. Followers invited persecution, then fled, disseminating their doctrine. He reconstructed history from traditions, from things going on in his own day and from whatever he needed for his story.

Actually Jesus legends developed in Syria long before the times that Luke portrayed. Nevertheless he was correct in saying it was in Syria where early Jewish Jesus people first welcomed gentiles, and where the Jesus *Christos* sect formed.

Luke placed both of those innovations in Antioch:

Refugees... fleeing as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch preached the word **only to the Jews**. Cypriots and Cyrenians came to Antioch to speak **to the Hellenistas [Hellenists who were not Jewish]**, preaching the *Kyrios* Jesus... And the disciples were first called *Christianous* in Antioch (Acts 11:19-26).

Why Antioch? A Tale of Two Cities and of Two Antagonistic Jewish Movements

There are good reasons to think Antioch played a major role in creating Christianity. Israel adopted many Hellenistic customs after Alexander's conquest in 333 BCE. When Alexander died, Israel was part of Ptolemy's Egypt, and when Seleucid Syria captured Israel, many Jews remained loyal to Egypt. When Antiochus IV invaded Egypt in 171

BCE, he feared Jewish loyalty to Egypt, so he killed anyone he mistrusted. He outlawed Jewish traditions including circumcision, imposed Syrian traditions on Israel, placed his statue as Zeus Manifest in the Temple, and tried to make Jews sacrifice pigs in front of it.

Antiochus' actions angered *hasidim* and Zealots as an insult to YHWH, the Torah, and Israel itself. On the other hand, many Jews welcomed Antiochus as a liberator in the belief that Hellenism was a higher, more humane culture than old-time Judaism. Thus Antiochus polarized the Jews and sowed the seeds of conflict between messianic Zealots and liberal Jews. The *hasidim* and Zealots revolted against Antiochus (Appendix V) and drove the Syrians out, while many of the liberal Jews fled to Syria. The Zealots proclaimed Simon king-priest of Israel. He was their Anointed One, their Messiah. Simon founded the tyrannical Maccabean Dynasty. One of his descendants, Jannaeus Alexander, impaled eight hundred Jewish dissidents.

Sometime after Antiochus IV died, his successors tried to make up for his abuse of Israel. In Antioch, capital of the Seleucid Empire, they gave Antiochus' booty from the Temple in Jerusalem to the local synagogue. They gave Antiochene Jews the same privileges as the Syrians and proclaimed them in a bronze plaque. A century later Roman conquerors made Antioch the capital of their eastern provinces and let the Jewish residents keep those privileges.¹

After the last Maccabean king-priest had been killed in the Roman period, Zealots renewed the struggle for the throne of Israel whenever possible. We may regard Zealot would-be king-priests as "Christian" Jews of a sort because they claimed to be the Anointed One (Messiah, Christ). Liberal Jews, on the other hand, insisted that "Love your neighbor" was the most important law in the Torah. Hillel the Pharisee taught that view in the Temple in Herod's reign, and sometime later the common people would attribute it to Jesus the exorcist. Zealots considered liberal Jews disloyal to YHWH, the Torah, and Israel.

Antiochene Jews generally lived at peace with their neighbors. Jews always welcomed "God-fearing" gentiles in synagogues.¹ "God-fearing" meant shunning violence, fornication, blood, and food offered to any god but YHWH. Some gentiles converted to Judaism and underwent a rigorous initiation including circumcision and study of the Torah. A convert remained a *proselytos*, "stranger," for he or she was still not really Jewish.

Of course gentiles shared many Jewish ideals anyway, for most religions and philosophies taught similar rules of proper behavior and self-control. Even so, Jews in gentile cities generally lived in their quarter with their own schools, as islands in a gentile sea. Even in Antioch *hasidim* and Zealots tried to make their countrymen follow outdated rules in the Torah and keep separate from gentiles.

Friendship Clubs and Jesus Myths

Apparently Jews could socialize with gentiles to a significant degree in Antioch over food and drink in social clubs, *koinonia*. Social clubs were part of Hellenistic culture in Syrian cities, for conquered peoples in the Macedonian and Roman Empires created various kinds of societies to replace social functions that were lost when the conquerors destroyed the native temple-states. Some *koinonia* were purely social; others served particular interests.² Paul and Acts speak of *koinonia*, meaning in various contexts “communion,” “sharing,” “partaking,” “contribution,” “distribution,” “communication,” and “fellowship.” Apparently Jesus people and Christians followed the social club model. *Koinonia* usually met in homes. We suggest that Antiochene Jews and gentiles associated in *koinonia* relatively free of hasidic interference.

Eat, Drink, and Be Merry. If it is hard to imagine how people socialized in the Hellenistic age, let Plato take you to a drinking party—*symposium*—in Athens in his *Symposium*. Jolly guests are gathering at Agathon’s home to celebrate his first “victory” as a playwright. They greet one another with joking, banter, and small talk. They keep it up as they sit down, are served, and eat. After dinner they “pour the drops of thanks, sing a hymn to the god, do the usual business, and settle down to drink”—but not before deciding “*how* they should drink.” A guest, a doctor, proposes that each person tell what he knows of “Love, that ancient powerful god.” He pays off the musician and sends her home so the men may tell of their experiences and theories of *Eros*. Gaiety interrupts their stories throughout the night.

Is *Eros* really an “ancient powerful god”? Yes, because Hesiod says in *Theogony*, “First *Chaos* (Void, Chasm) existed; then broad-breasted *Gaia* (Earth) and, in her cavities, misty *Tartara*; and *Eros* the handsomest of the immortal gods, who melts flesh and conquers reason and purpose in the hearts of all gods and humans.” Stated less poetically, *Eros* is a natural principle, a law of the universe.

The group or any individual in it might “pour drops of thanks” to any of various deities or great men, and propose singing a hymn to one of them. Different people had different spiritual lords; Socrates served Apollo. The greatest deity was the Θεός or Zeus. Dionysos, god of wine, would be greatly honored in any Greek drinking party. The primary purpose of the party was to share friendship. Plato’s purpose was exposition of various theories of love.

We can only speculate about exactly what went on in friendship clubs of Jews and gentiles. (We will see what Paul says later.) It probably depended on personalities. Some Jews adopted gentile ways and never looked back; others stuck with certain rules including avoiding gentiles.

In a friendship club respect for one another’s feelings is paramount. You don’t have to say or do things against your belief. Different customs can mean the same thing. Many Jews accepted that gentiles recognized YHWH by other names. We think of pouring libations to a god as a Greek custom, but the Torah requires pouring blood on the ground for YHWH.² Wine was a civilized substitute. If the Torah’s “Love your neighbor as yourself,” didn’t mean Jews could associate with gentiles, what did it mean? Distinctions between ethnic Jews, proselytes, and “God-fearing” gentiles could blur. Friends might joke about all sorts of outworn customs and ways Jesus might have handled them. Their *koinonia* could be the *basileia* of God that Jesus had said was available to everyone who obeys God. They chuckled at the paradox of a Jew who obeyed YHWH’s commandment of love though he was “dead” to the Torah. Jesus *enjoyed* his freedom from the Torah; he didn’t let “death” destroy him. He declared himself “reborn” and vindicated in God’s eyes. That uneducated man devoted his life to befriending lepers, demoniacs, illegitimates, and other outcasts, the very people scribes and priests declared untouchable. Jesus was the shining example of righteousness through love. They poured a libation and raised a cup to Jesus *Didaskale*, Teacher. No, make him Jesus *kyrios* (“master”), a man a notch above ordinary men despite his lowly station. He was a son of God through the righteousness of love. Jesus the “drunkard and glutton” (QS 18; Luke 7:34, Matthew 11:19) was surely a good Jewish substitute for Dionysos as patron deity of a party as the tale of the wedding at Cana (John 2:1-11) suggests.

Once *koinonias* “raised” Jesus above ordinary men, play on words could have led to myths of resurrection. Surely God had adopted him and *elevated* him in the book of life. When he died, surely God *raised* him to heaven like Enoch, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob without waiting for Judgment Day.

Adoption was another way God might have “raised” Jesus. There was a precedent in Roman times. The Roman senate declared Julius Caesar a god. In his will, Julius Caesar adopted his nephew Octavian as a son. If Julius Caesar was a god, so was his adopted son Octavian. Everyone agreed that Octavian Augustus Caesar was divine. Similarly, Jesus the son of God was divine. Sooner or later Jesus people in Antioch poured libations to Jesus *Kyrios*, Master or Lord. Gentiles among them thought of Jesus as a Hellenistic god and obeyed his rules as his slaves.

A *Koinonia* of Jesus People. A highly respected ancient book that didn’t quite make it into the New Testament gives us a ritual that developed in friendship clubs, *Didache*, or Teaching of the Twelve Apostles.³ It begins with passing the wine cup and giving thanks to the Father for sending Jesus. They break bread with thanks to the Father for life and knowledge through Jesus. They scatter crumbs to symbolize growth of Jesus *koinonia* and pray for all on earth to gather into the *basileia* of God under Jesus’ law of love. They eat their meal. Afterward they again give thanks and pray to the Father. The ritual ends, “*Maranatha!* (The Lord come!) *Amen.*”

Wine and bread among friends represent *koinonia*, community and friendship. Pouring wine means intimacy and letting your hair down. Breaking bread means sharing and loyalty. We suggest that the meal was followed by entertainment. Later on someone thought the social club was too festive, so he wrote *Didache* to restrain revelry and encourage sobriety and piety, perhaps for a particular occasion as a “thanksgiving,” *eucharistia*.

Didache does not mention Christ or violent death. It may have originated in *koinonias* of Jesus people who did not accept the Christ myth. *Didache* probably dropped out of use as martyred Christ cults replaced Jewish Jesus sects. *Maranatha!* might have been a prayer for all humanity to gather under Jesus’ rules. Different *koinonias* of Jesus probably tried out varied roles and titles for Jesus in their imaginations.

Koinonia in Praise of Martyred Christs

Among Zealots wine and bread evoked images of violence and danger to life and limb. Pouring wine meant bleeding and the ebbing away of life. Breaking hard bread was tearing bodies apart and snapping bones. Eating that bread and drinking that wine symbolized ritual cannibalism. Execution of Zealot would-be christs from time to time kept those images fresh.

When the pre-Johannine community imagined Jesus dying on the *stauros*, it was natural to use established Zealots' rituals to symbolize it. That community and Peter may have taught Paul this ritual:

I was taught what I taught you. The night the *Kyrios* was handed over, he took bread, gave thanks, and broke it, saying, "Take, eat. This is my body, broken for you. Do this to remember me." After eating, he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this whenever you drink it to remember me" (1 Cor. 11:23-25).

The instant the ritual mentioned Jesus' blood and flesh, it created a scene—and a tale—of his death even if there was no such tale before.⁴

Christian Jews like the pre-Johannine community attracted Paul the Zealot with the tale of violent death. It offered the macho experience of martyrdom—but in safety. It promised heavenly rewards for that experience. In chapter eight we saw vestiges of a morbidly cannibalistic ceremony in PQ that still remain in the Gospel of John. The cannibalistic ritual helped Paul transform from a persecutor into a loving but "suffering" evangelist. Mark rearranged Paul's words for his own cannibalistic scene. Matthew copied Mark's story. Luke restored Paul's ritual; perhaps he grew up in Paul's tradition.

The Communion or Eucharist now performed in Christian churches is a toned down version of Paul's ritual.

Literary Roots of the Cult of Martyrdom. Jewish roots. Long before martyrdom became popular, God's Righteous Servant and his Suffering Servant were popular figures.

The Righteous Servant is a child of Wisdom. Righteousness was obedience to YHWH and the Torah, the Jewish book of wisdom. Righteousness, loyalty to YHWH, studying the Torah, and the path to wisdom were one and the same. Trust in YHWH gives you the courage to be loyal to him and to face otherwise unbearable suffering.

Wisdom was a goddess, YHWH's consort, in early Israelite thought:

Doesn't Wisdom [*Chokmah*] call? and Understanding lift her voice? She stands over altars and cries at the city gates. "I call to you. O men. Guidance and sound knowledge are mine. Kings reign with my help, and princes decree justice. YHWH possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his ancient deeds. I was set up from eternity, from the beginning, before the earth was. I was beside him like one brought up with him, and I was his daily delight, rejoicing before him" (Proverbs 8:1-9:18).

We are reminded of the gods on Olympus in *Iliad*.

Jacob, also called Israel, was a child of Wisdom because of his faith in YHWH or Elohim. Early Israelites admired Jacob's slyness in cheating his father-in-law (Genesis 27-32). Jacob always won. Slyness was one kind of practical wisdom.

One of Jacob's twelve sons, Joseph, was another child of Wisdom. Rival tribes, Judah and Reuben, told competing stories about the brothers' jealousy of Jacob's love for Joseph. Joseph's brothers put him in a well to die. But Judah (and Reuben) saved him and sold him to the Ishmaelites (and Midianites), who sold him in Egypt. An editor combined and intertwined those tales (Genesis 37-50).⁶ Pharaoh needed Joseph's help in ruling Egypt. When famine hit his father and brothers, Joseph gave them food:

YHWH was with Joseph, and he became prosperous, and was in the house of the master of the Egyptians... When famine came, Joseph opened the storehouses and sold grain to the Egyptians. Every country bought from him... When Jacob heard there was grain in Egypt, he sent ten of Joseph's brothers to Egypt to buy... Elohim told Israel to go to Egypt, and his sons carried him... Israel lived in Egypt, and when he was a hundred forty-seven years old, he called for Joseph, to bless him... (Genesis 39:2, 41:56-57, 42:1ff, 46:1 ff, 47:27ff).

Another kind of wisdom was craftsmanship in making the tabernacle and ceremonial robes (Exodus 28:3, 31:3-6, 35:26-35). Then there was Solomon's proverbial wisdom (1 Kings 4:29-34, 10:4-24, 11:41), but his worship of "foreign" gods angered the storyteller. YHWH punished Solomon after his death by letting Israel, the northern kingdom, declare its independence (1 Kings 11:9ff).

The theme of the Righteous Servant's steadfastness and vindication runs throughout Psalms, where he is usually King David or his descendants. For example:

YHWH leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. You prepare a table for me in the presence of my enemies. Goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of YHWH forever (Psalm 23:1-6).

The Suffering Servant. The Righteous Servant was often mistreated despite or because of his faithfulness to YHWH:

Even my own dear trusted friend who ate my bread with me, raised his heel against me. YHWH, be merciful to me and raise me so that I may do the same to them (Psalm 41).

After the Exile, the Suffering Servant was a frequent metaphor for the people of Israel or Judah, or both. Editors often mingled praise with blame:

My Elohim, my Elohim, why have you forsaken me? I'm no longer human! People despise me. Those who see me laugh with scorn and shake their heads, saying, "He trusted YHWH to save him, since he delighted in him." Conspiracies of the wicked entrapped me. They pierced my hands and feet. They divide my garments among themselves and cast lots for my clothes (Psalm 22).

Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom my soul delights. I have sent my spirit upon him. He will judge the nations. He does not cry out or raise his voice. I show you off as a covenant to the world and light to the nations, to open the eyes of the blind. Listen, you deaf! Look and see, you blind! Who is as blind as my servant, as deaf as the messenger I sent? He didn't learn his lesson (Isaiah 42:1-25).

YHWH called me before my birth. He said, "Israel, you're my servant through whom I shall manifest my glory" (Isaiah 49:1ff).

My servant [Judah] will prosper, grow powerful, and rise to great heights. Many people were shocked that he was disfigured so brutally. He didn't even look human! Many nations will be astonished! He was despised, the lowest of humanity. We thought of him punished by Elohim, but he was punished for *our* disobedience! (Isaiah 52:13-53:12).

The Jews were interested in survival, well-being, and dignity for themselves and their families and descendants, not martyrdom. They trusted that YHWH would vindicate faithful people through good reputations, long prosperous lives, and powerful descendants.

Greek heroic and noble deaths. Homer's *Iliad* is full of heroic deeds, sufferings, and deaths for family, friends, and honor. *Odyssey* is a tale of a great hero's struggles against tremendous forces and continual bad fortune. Imitators extended the motif of heroism to latter-day soldiers, athletes, and sages who stood up to tyrants.⁷ Socrates is the best known example of a sage dying nobly (Plato's *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito*, and *Phaedo*).⁸ All of these stories were taught in the schools of Hellenistic Syria and were well known to educated people.

Hellenistic Jewish martyrs. Martyrdom does not appear as a virtue in Jewish literature until the Seleucid era, when they combined heroes with the Suffering Servant motif to create a Hellenistic Jewish cult of martyrdom. Ironically Zealots who fought foreign customs made Hellenistic martyrdom into a virtue with rewards in heaven. Hellenistic Jews in Syria—probably in Antioch—wrote several apocryphal books that combined the Jewish Righteous One with the Greek persecuted sage. These are excerpts from one of those books:

The ungodly... said, "Let's get the Righteous One, for he interferes with our plans and scolds us for violating the Law... and shuns us as unclean... Let's test the truth of what he says and find out what happens when he dies. If the Righteous One is a son of God, God will rescue him from us..."

But the souls of the Righteous Ones are in the hand of God, and no pain can reach them. Fools think they die and are destroyed, a misfortune—but they are at peace... God has tested them and found them deserving of himself... He accepted them like the sacrifice of a whole burnt offering... They will judge nations and rule peoples, and the Lord will reign over them forever (Wisdom of Solomon 1:16-3:9).

Hasidim dying in defense of the Torah will be raised to glorious life in heaven. Thus death is victory and vindication. Unflinching martyrdom is the absurd extreme of Cynic-Stoic mastery of emotion and hardship:

The best example of Reason mastering the emotions is the noble conduct of Eleasar and the seven brothers and their mother. By means of their executions they caused the downfall of the tyrants and purified the land (4 Maccabees 1:6-9).

Only those who wholeheartedly make righteousness their first thought are able to master the weakness of the flesh, believing that unto God they do not die, as our ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did not die, but live unto God (4 Maccabees 4:13).

By the blessed death of my brothers, by the eternal doom of the tyrant, and by the glorious life of the righteous, I will not deny the noble deaths of my brotherhood (4 Maccabees 5:37).

You will be punished not only in the present life, but also after you are dead (4 Maccabees 6:13).

Let's die like brothers for the Law. O brothers, Let's imitate the three children of the Assyrian court who disdained the same ordeal of the furnace [Daniel 3] ... Let's not fear the one who thinks he kills, for a great struggle and peril of the soul in eternal torment awaits those who disobey the ordinances of God. ... Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will receive us, and all our forefathers will praise us (4 Maccabees 6:23-29).⁹

Zealots and *hasidim* regarded the Romans as Satan's slaves. Revolt possibly ending in martyrdom was the only honorable way to stand up to Rome's brutal power. Zealots ignored the Cynic teachings of Jesus.

Unfortunately, holy brotherly martyrdom is everyday news in these days of Middle East conflict.

Two Independent Myths Are Joined Together

The martyrdom myth came from a different *koinonia* than the one that created the resurrection tale. The evidence is that Paul cites them as separate kinds of stories about Jesus' death: He unwittingly reveals their independent origins by citing them in separate phrases⁵:

Jesus was handed over for our sins [martyrdom myth], and was raised again [resurrection myth] so we could become righteous (Romans 4:25).

Independence of the two myths is more explicit in this earlier passage:

I was told that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that he was buried and rose again the third day according to the scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

“According to the scriptures” means that scribes in a *koinonia* found “prophecies” of Jesus' martyrdom and therefore, they argued, he must have been martyred. Meanwhile scribes in another *koinonia* found “prophecies” that “proved” that Jesus rose from the dead. The pre-Johannine community may have combined the martyrdom and resurrection myths and passed the combined version on to Paul. The “seam” still shows in Paul's recitation of what he had been taught.

Next we look at Paul's letters to see what else we may learn about him and his *euangelion*.

NOTES

1. Harmony and privileges in Antioch: Josephus, *Jewish War*, 7:34-113.
2. Hellenistic *polis*, *koinonia* replacing oriental temple-states: Mack, 1993, 54-68. Pouring blood on the ground for YHWH: Deuteronomy 15:23, Leviticus 4:7, etc.
3. Teachings of the Twelve Apostles, or *Didache*: May be found in large libraries in various versions of *Apostolic Fathers*.
4. Origin of meal ritual: Mack, 1988, 80-83, 114-120; *Didache*, 121n15.
5. Martyrdom and resurrection independent stories: Mack, 1988, 105-107, 111-118.
6. J and E Joseph stories intertwined: Friedman, 249.
7. Homer: MacDonald, *Homeric Epics and the Gospel of Mark*. Greek heroic and noble deaths: Hadas and Smith; Mack, 1995, 80, 140.
8. Socrates a traitor: Stone, *The Trial of Socrates*.
9. The earliest Christians: Mack, 1988, 98-123; Mack, 1995, 75-91.

— ⊕ 11 Paul's Gospel to the Thessalonians

Paul's earliest known letter says he visited Philippi, Thessalonika, and Athens. He wrote 1 Thessalonians in Athens.

Paul and his companions founded an *ekklesia* in Thessalonika:

Paul, Silas, and Timotheus to the *ekklesia* of the Thessalonians in Θεός the Father and the *Kyrios* Jesus Christ... We thank Θεός for you all the time because your *pistis* is spreading rapidly, and there is so much love among you that we brag in the *ekklesia* of Θεός about your patience and *pistis*, knowing that you chose Θεός (1 Thes. 1:1-4).

Paul's purpose was to teach loving kindness:

May the *Kyrios* make your love increase for each other and all people (1 Thes. 3:12).

Do not defraud your brother in any way (1 Thes. 4:6).

Whoever despises [people], despises not *anthropon*. but the Θεός, who gave us his holy *pneuma* (1 Thes. 4:8).

Never return evil for evil to anyone, but follow the good (1 Thes. 5:15).

Paul concedes that they already obeyed the law of love before he came:

You don't need me to write about *phil-* [love] *adelphia* [brotherly], for Θεός has always taught you to love one another, for you loved us, brothers who came to you from Macedonia. Do so even more (1 Thes. 4:9-10).

Many other rules come along with Paul's lessons on loving kindness, but he is not systematic about them. He does not even recite the Ten Commandments. Rather, every so often he lists or expounds on whatever rules of conduct pop into his head, as in this passage:

You know the commandments I gave you through *Kyrios* Jesus. The Θεός wants you to be holy, to abstain from fornication, to keep your vessel in holiness and honor, not in lustful passion like the *ethne* who do not know the Θεός. Do not take advantage of your brother in any way, because the *Kyrios* is the avenger of all that (1 Thes. 4:2-6).

What! That Jesus is "the avenger" would have surprised him. Paul never knew the man who refused to judge or arbitrate (QS 38; Luke 12:13-14).

Paul creates new myths as he goes along. Here he offers great rewards for following his rules:

You know how we exhorted, comforted, and changed you as a father does his children so that you walk worthy of the Θεός, who has called you to his *basileia* and glory (1 Thes. 2:11-12).

The real Jesus was probably not all that holy, for Q admitted he was a “drunkard and glutton” (QS 18; Luke 7:34, Matthew 11:19). Paul makes him into a model of Pharisee morality.

Paul teaches by *mimesis*, imitating (note “mime,” “mimic”), the standard method of teaching character in the Greco-Roman age.¹ His role-model is the new Hellenistic god, the Lord Jesus Christ:

Our *euangelion* came to you not only in words, but also in *dynameis*, the holy *pneuma*, and complete conviction. You saw how we lived for your own good. You *mimetai* [imitated] us and the *Kyrios*, and though you suffered much, you received the *euangelion* with the joy of the holy *pneuma* (1 Thes. 1:5-6).

The Joy of the Holy *Pneuma*

What is “the joy of the holy spirit”? We have seen the *pneuma* at work in exorcisms, but not with its “joy,” and not in *ekklesias*. Let’s see what Paul and others say about it.

Some people “despise prophesying,” which the holy *pneuma* makes possible:

Don’t stop the *pneuma*. Don’t despise prophesying (1 Thes. 5:19-20).

In another letter, Paul indicates that the *pneuma* bond his disciples through an intense common psychological experience:

We have all been *ebaptisthemen* by one *pneuma* into one body, whether we are Jews or *Hellenes*, slaves or free. We have all been made to drink into one *pneuma* (1 Cor. 12:13).

The *pneuma* is a direct pipeline to God that lets us fathom his mysteries:

Scripture says, “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, nobody has imagined, the things that the Θεός has prepared for those who love him” [Isaiah. 64:4]. But Θεός revealed them to us through his *pneuma*, for the *pneuma* sees into everything, even the deep mysteries of the Θεός.

Who even knows other people’s thoughts? We can only know our own *pneuma*. Likewise, no one can know the Θεός’ thoughts. Only the *pneuma* of the Θεός does. We have received the *pneuma* of the Θεός, not the *pneuma* of the *kosmos* [world] (1 Cor. 2:9-12).

The “joy of the holy *pneuma*” was a hypnotic group phenomenon. They were probably in a dark room chanting before the flame of a candle or oil lamp. One by one the participants became lost in space and time, sprawled onto the floor, and began babbling. The *pneuma* had taken

possession. Babbling was called *glossolalia*, “speaking in languages.” If words were distinguishable, it was “prophesying.” Ecstatic frenzy spread from one to another. It felt like a union with the Infinite and Eternal, especially among the suggestible people whom Paul attracted. Onlookers, whether Jews or gentiles, ridiculed them as drunk or insane. Luke created the scene in Acts 2:1ff from his experiences with ecstatic trances in his own *ekklesia* in Paul’s tradition.

Paul’s “*pneuma* of God” is the Old Testament *ruach*—the very breath of God, or wind. It’s the goddess *Chokmah*, Wisdom, in Job and Proverbs, and *Sophia* in Wisdom of Solomon.²

Luke indicates three conditions that may bring on “the spirit”:

About noon, Peter went up on the roof to pray. Famished, he would have eaten, but while lunch was being prepared, an *ecstasies* [ecstasy, trance] fell on him, and he saw heaven open and a great sheet descending, full of all kinds of fourfooted animals, wild animals, creeping things, and birds of the air. He heard a voice say, “Peter, get up! Kill and eat! Don’t call unclean what the Θεός has cleansed” (Acts 10:9-28).

Fasting may cause hallucination. So can the intense heat and light of the noonday sun and long praying sessions in postures that restrict the brain’s oxygen supply. Long periods of chanting in the dark and many drugs can also induce hallucination. Holy men have always known such techniques.³ Elijah’s prayer posture restricts his breathing and circulation as he prepares to cast a magic spell to bring rain:

Elijah went up to the top of Carmel and threw himself down upon the ground, putting his face between his knees... (1 Kings 18:42).

Some of the most ancient Israelite literature³ depicts holy men clearly under the influence of ecstatic drugs:

Samuel poured oil over Saul’s head and said, “Isn’t it because YHWH has anointed you to be chief of his possessions? ... When you leave me... you will go to the hill of Elohim, and you will meet a company of prophets coming down from the holy place with a psaltery, tabret, flute, and harp before them, and they will prophesy. The spirit of YHWH will come upon you, and you will prophesy with them and become another man.”

Indeed, Saul came to the hill and met a band of prophets, and the spirit of Elohim came upon him, and he prophesied with them (1 Samuel 10:1-12; also see 19:20-24).

The Torah itself describes a vision of Elohim at home on a mountaintop:

Then Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy elders of Israel went up [Horeb]. They saw the Elohim of Israel, and under his feet a pavement of sapphire stone, and the body of heaven clearly. Elohim did not harm the nobles of Israel, for they saw Elohim and ate and drank (Exodus 24:9-11).

We are familiar with the Greek gods living on Olympus' peak above the clouds, but gods also held court on mountain peaks in the Middle East. The "sapphire pavement" is that blue bowl over the earth, above the clouds. Even though made of stone, astronauts and other gods apparently have no difficulty passing through it, with or without space ships.

Isaiah hallucinates in Solomon's Temple to consult YHWH:

In the year that Uzziah died [king of Judah 781-740 BCE] I saw YHWH sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his retinue filled the Temple... (Isaiah 6:1-12).

Ezekiel sees God seated on the chariot-throne on which he traveled:

When I was among the captives by the river Chebar, the heavens opened, and I saw visions of Elohim... Upon what looked like a throne was a man-like figure... He told me, "Son of *adam*, stand upon your feet, and I will speak to you" (Ezekiel 1:1-2:1).

Ezekiel's concept of YHWH is based on King Nebuchadrezzar, who, seated on his chariot throne, captured Jerusalem and made thousands of captives including Ezekiel walk to Babylonia to work as slaves.

YHWH takes Ezekiel on his chariot-throne at least three times:

The spirit took me up... the hand of YHWH was strong upon me (Ezekiel 3:12-14).

The spirit lifted me up and brought me to the east gate of Jerusalem... The spirit of YHWH fell on me and told me, "Speak..." (Ezekiel 11:1-5).

The hand of YHWH was upon me and carried me out in the spirit of YHWH and set me down in a valley... (Ezekiel 37:1).

To experience a Jewish hymn of praises to YHWH on his chariot-throne and the archangels who rule the seven heavens, read *Angelic Liturgy (Songs of Sabbath Sacrifice)*, found among the Dead Sea scrolls. The Zealots who occupied Masada and the Qumran fort in the First Revolt left several scrolls of it at Qumran.⁴

The ancient Jewish ecstatic prophetic tradition continued as the Kabbalah through the Middle Ages in Europe. It taught you passwords that enabled you to command the archangels to open the gates of the seven heavens so you could rise to see God on his chariot-throne in the highest heaven.⁵

Such traditions were by no means unique to Judaism. Everywhere tribal peoples had holy men and women, prophets, *fakirs*, medicine men, witch doctors, and shamans with repertoires of secrets, mysteries, hallucinogens, and magical hocus-pocus designed to impress people and

gods. They claimed power to get tribal and cosmic gods to do favors for individuals or the tribe. That gave them great political power. As tribes evolved into nations, their hocus-pocus evolved into state religions that offered protection from neighboring states and their powerful gods.

The Egyptians left a great literature about magic on stone⁶ and papyrus.⁷ Greek mystery cults, largely tracing from the myth of Orpheus, also engaged in magical rituals and hypnotic trances.⁸ Everybody did it if they knew how.

That's what Paul meant by "the joy of the spirit"—ecstatic trances and hallucinations. He might have learned "the joy" from his Pharisee teachers, for they had secret magical traditions.⁹ On the other hand, Jesus not only knew magic, but also had a powerful familiar spirit. Paul probably acquired Jesus' magic and *pneuma* from Jesus people in Damascus or from Peter in Jerusalem. Paul says he "saw" Jesus.

When Paul brought the holy *pneuma* to Europe, the gods on Mount Olympus had long since grown old and pale, and the Orphic mysteries seemed primitive and barbarian. Paul's Pharisee manners gave ancient magic a new look, and the *pneuma* brought the vigor of a new Hellenistic mystery cult. The Greeks found new mystery cult extremely exciting. Just think of it! To feel the *pneuma*, the breath of the eternal Θεός actually take hold of you! You had a direct channel to the Θεός. Paul unleashed a power that he didn't understand, and the very sort of thing from newly conquered nations that Roman emperors feared might harm the Empire.¹²

Judgment Day and Resurrection

When Paul wrote the Thessalonians, he had already taught them the Jewish myth of Judgment Day and resurrection of the dead. He assures them that Jesus will be there:

You are waiting for the Θεός' son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, who delivered us from the wrath to come (1 Thes. 1:10).

That's the earliest record of "waiting" for Jesus. It's not a second coming; he will not return to earth, which will soon be destroyed, but a meeting with the Elect at the Judgment. The Pharisee notion of Judgment Day was new to Greeks. Q's audiences, in contrast, grew up with it. When Q people talked about Judgment Day, it was out of exasperation with Jews who rejected their invitations to join their humanistic movement. Paul was exploiting the gentiles' curiosity and hope for

immortality to capture their attention. Not that the notion was new, for the Orphic, Dionysian, and Eleusinian resurrection cults and various philosophies speculated about an afterlife.¹⁰ Paul's notions of the world's end and resurrection, combined with the imagined power of the holy *pneuma*, made his kind of immortality seem real to gullible folk.

Thessalonians asked Timothy whether family members who had already died had missed out on life in heaven. Thessalonians, like everyone else, remembered loved ones, visited family graves, performed customary rituals, and prayed for them. But were their souls lost because they had died too soon? Timothy didn't know, so Paul answered by creating a new scenario¹¹:

I don't want you to not know about those who are asleep [dead] lest you grieve like the hopeless. If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, the Θεός will bring with Jesus those who died without knowing him. We still living and in the *pistis* at the *Kyrios*' coming, won't go before those who are already asleep [dead].

The *Kyrios* himself will descend from heaven with the archangel's shout of command and the trumpet of Θεός. The dead in Christ will rise first. Then we living and in our *pistis* will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the *Kyrios* in the air, and so we will always be with the *Kyrios*. So comfort one another with these words. But you don't need me to say when. You know perfectly well that the day of the *Kyrios* will come without warning (1 Thes. 4:13-5:11).

Jesus will not return to earth as the book of Revelation would describe in the next century. He will appear out of the blue on Judgment Day to take the spirits of the righteous to heaven on Judgment Day. Paul is so intent on imparting Pharisee values to gentiles that he spun new myths as needed. He grafted Jesus Christ onto the Pharisee myth of Judgment Day. Most Jews would have scoffed at his bringing Jesus Christ into it.

Paul was creating a new community and separating it from its unholy neighbors. He taught that Jesus gave his life to save his holy followers from punishment after death:

The Θεός didn't choose us for wrath, but for salvation through our *Kyrios* Jesus Christ who died for us so that we may live together with him whether we are awake or sleep. So comfort one another and build up each other—as you're doing. Know those who work for you and lead you in the *Kyrios* and warn you. Esteem them highly in love for the sake of their work. And be at peace among yourselves. Warn those who are unruly, comfort the faint-hearted, support the weak. Be patient with everyone. Do not return evil for evil, but follow the good among yourselves and to everyone. Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. Shun all appearance of evil. The Θεός of peace sanctify you fully. May your whole being—*pneuma*, *psyche*, and *soma* [spirit, soul, body]—remain pure at the coming [*parousia*] of our *Kyrios* Jesus Christ (1 Thes. 5:9-23).

The Book of Q did not speak of Jesus' continuing presence or resurrection. He was dead, though his *pneuma* dwelled in at least some of them.

A Cult of Suffering and Persecution

Paul had had a bad time in Philippi, capital of Macedonia:

Brothers, you know that our coming to you was not in vain, even after we had suffered and were insulted at Philippi (1 Thes. 2:2).

People may not like Paul's message, but it is from God. Believe!

As the Θεός entrusted us with the *euangelion*, so we speak not to please men, but Θεός the tester of our hearts... (1 Thes. 2:4).

He puts himself in the way of ridicule, insult, and harm, then glories in being abused. His is a cult of suffering and persecution. But he fears trouble if he returns to Thessalonika, so he stayed in Athens:

I thought it best to stay alone in Athens and send Timotheus to you.

Don't let troubles get you down, for you know that we are predestined to have them. I told you that troubles were coming—they had already started. That's why I sent Timotheus, to find out your *pistis* lest somehow the tempter tempt you and our work be in vain. But when Timotheus brought *euangelion* of your *pistis* and love and that you remembered us, your *pistis* assured us about you in our afflictions and distress (1 Thes. 3:1-7).

Pistis, you remember, is more than faith; it is courage and endurance, and above all trusting God enough so that you keep serving him in the face of persecution. The activities in Paul's *ekklesia* apparently attracted ridicule or harassment from neighbors.

A forgery. Paul's letters are generally warm and affectionate:

Being fond of you, we were gentle with you, just as a nurse cherishes her children. We willingly gave you not only the *euangelion* of the Θεός, but also our own *psyche* [soul] because you were precious to us (1 Thes. 2:7-8).

But the tirade interjected at this point is out of character for Paul:

You became imitators [*mimetai*] of the *ekklesia* of the Θεός in Judea through Christ Jesus, for you have suffered the same things as they did from the *Joudaion* [Judeans], who killed the *Kyrios* Jesus and their own prophets and persecuted us. They do not please

Θεός, and go against all *anthropois*, forbidding us to speak to the *ethnos* to save them. But the uttermost wrath came upon them! (1 Thes. 2:14-16).

When did the “uttermost wrath” come upon the Judeans? It was when the Roman armies destroyed Jerusalem and the nation to the “uttermost.” That was in 70. The passage was written after that, and Paul was probably dead by then.¹²

After the interruption of the forged tirade, Paul continues in his usual warm style:

My heart has been with you, and I wanted to see you again very much. I would have come once and again, but Satan prevented me. For what is our hope, joy, or crown of blessing? Aren't you going to be in the presence of the *Kyrios* when he comes? (1 Thes. 2:17-19).

Paul let popular superstitions complicate and dilute his effort to teach Jewish ethics and morality to gentiles. He made Jesus into a god with a high place in the *kosmos*. Paul believed that Jesus' *pneuma*, the *pneuma* of God, worked through him. He made his Pharisee notions of resurrection and rewards in heaven harmonize with his doctrine of the Lord Jesus Christ and beliefs of his gentile flock. Thus he created a new Hellenistic mystery cult. Whether he intended or not, his theorizing eclipsed his message of loving kindness on earth.

NOTES

1. Character-building by imitation: Mack, 1993, 195-202, 1995, 146, 259.
2. Wisdom, or the Wisdom of Solomon: In the Apocrypha.
3. Trances as religious experience: Smith, 1973, 1978. Development of Jewish scripture: Friedman, 1987, 1998.
4. Throne-chariot in Dead Sea scrolls: *Sabbath Sacrifice*, Vermes, 210-213; Golb, 132-139, 293-298, 361, 370, 376.
5. Kabbalah: Scholem.
6. Egyptian magical carvings in stone: Budge, *Book of the Dead*.
7. Papyri of Egyptian magicians: Smith, 1978, 97-139.
8. Orphic religions: Reinach, *Orpheus, A History of Religions*. Orpheus tried to bring Eurydike back from *Hades*. Mack, 1995, 128-129, discusses effect of Paul's holy spirit on his Greek followers.
9. Secret Jewish magic: Smith, 1973, 83-84.
10. Perfection of soul: Plato's *Dialogs: Timaeus, Meno, Phaedrus, Apology*. Stoicism and Pythagoreanism also taught this, and of the soul's return to God.
11. Paul created new resurrection myth: Mack, 1995, 110-112.
12. Forgery: Second Thessalonians is the same kind of forged material, patterned on the first letter. Mack, 1995, 112-113.

— ⊕ — 12 Paul's Gospel to the Galatians

Paul vents his anger on Jews in Galatia who insist that his followers obey the Torah. He “proves” them wrong by the Torah itself.

After a salutation, he accuses the Galatian *ekklesia* of disloyalty:

I am astonished that you leave the one who called you by the gift of Christ to another *euangelion*—which isn't another; it is only that some trouble you and try to pervert the *euangelion* of Christ (Galatians 1:6-7).

Paul reviews many things: his former zeal; persecution of *ekklesias*; *apokalypsis*; return to Damascus; visit with Peter; conference with James, Kephas, and John; and permission to evangelize gentiles (Galatians 1:11-2:19).

He tells of his anger with Peter when he and Barnabas ate with gentiles until visitors came from James. Paul accused him in front of everybody of caving in to *hasidim*:

When I saw that Peter, Barnabas, and other Jews did not follow our *euangelion*, I told him in front of everybody, “If you, a Jew, live *ethnikos*, not as a Jew, why make the *ethnos* live as Jews? **We, Jews by birth and not sinners of the *ethnos*, know that obeying the Law of Moses does not make anyone righteous, but *pistis* in Jesus Christ does” (Galatians 2:14-16).**

Paul's *euangelion*, “good news,” was apparently that everyone is righteous if he or she has *pistis* in Jesus Christ. Merely following the Torah doesn't do it. That must have infuriated the *hasidim*.

Paul will not admit he was wrong to turn away from the Torah:

If we are proven to be sinners when we seek to be made righteous by Christ, is Christ serving sin? Let it not be! If I rebuild the things I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor! I have died to the Law by means of the Law so that I might live to Θεός (Galatians 2:17-19).

In the Greek text, “Law,” the Torah or Law of Moses, is distinguished from any other human law (*nomos*) by context or the article, “the.”

Paul feels that his disciples betrayed him:

O foolish Galatians! Who bewitched you to disobey the truth? You, for whose eyes Jesus Christ impaled was written! Did you receive the *pneuma* by following the Law, or by

hearing *pistis*? Does the man who brings the *pneuma* to you and doing *dynamis* among you, do it through the Law, or by hearing of *pistis*? (Galatians 3:1-5).

Did you hear that? “Jesus Christ impaled was *written*” for their eyes! “Written” in what form? I suggest it was the two tracts of “good news” we already saw—the Signs Source and Passion Source, SQ and PQ. Or the combined Signs Gospel, SG. Paul’s own oral *euangelion* evidently included all that plus the promise of eternal life if you behave yourself, and you don’t have to do all those silly things in the Torah.

God always intended his promise and blessing to Abraham to include everybody in the world. All it takes is *pistis*:

Abraham believed the Θεός. God counted his belief as righteousness [Genesis 15:6]. Those of *pistis* are children of Abraham.

Scripture foresaw that the Θεός would make the *ethne* righteous through *pistis*. Even before the *euangelion*, scripture told Abraham, “All *ethne* are blessed through you” [Genesis 12:3, 18:18]. Anyone with *pistis* is blessed with Faithful Abraham (Galatians 3:6-9).

The Torah curses anyone who tries to obey it:

Whoever obeys the Law is under the curse of the Law, for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not keep on doing everything in the book of the Law” [Deuteronomy 27:26] (Galatians 3:10).

If you try to obey the Torah, you must obey all of it. But that’s impossible—the Torah has too many rules—so you’re cursed if you try. Paul knows Pharisees’ rhetoric and uses it against their argumentation. He regards the Torah as a primitive step toward civilization, but of course he had to say it in the idiom of his time and place.

The way to righteousness is through *pistis*:

The Law doesn’t make anyone righteous in the sight of the Θεός. That’s obvious, for “The righteous will live by *pistis* [Habakkuk 2:4].” The Law isn’t based on *pistis*, for “Anyone who does them will live by them [Leviticus 18:5]” (Galatians 3:11-12).

Christ’s martyrdom magically did away with the Torah’s curse:

Christ has redeemed us from the Law, for he was made a curse for us, for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree [Deuteronomy 21:23],” so that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the *ethne* through Jesus Christ so that we might receive the promise through *pistis* (Galatians 3:13-14).

Paul proves it by picking at the Torah’s grammar:

[God] made his promises to Abraham and his *sperma* [seed] [Genesis 12:7]. [Scripture] doesn't say *spermasin*, plural, but *sperma*, singular. Christ is *one*, a single person—so *sperma* means Christ! (Galatians 3:15-16).

Moses instituted the Torah after Abraham's time without altering the promise God had already made to Abraham and the world:

Not even Moses' bringing the Law can cancel that promise! Moses imposed the Law because an *angelon* said to, because the Jews sinned (Galatians 3:17-19).

Now Paul personifies the Torah as a teacher to explain why the archangel imposed it on the Jews:

Before *pistis* came, the Law guarded us and kept us away from the *pistis* that would be revealed. The Law was our schoolmaster until Christ came so that we might be made righteous through *pistis*. Once we have *pistis*, we are no longer under a schoolmaster, for all of you are children of Θεός through *pistis* in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:23-27).

It doesn't matter who you are; we're all equal:

There is neither Jew nor *Hellene*, slave [*doulon*] nor free, male nor female... Everyone is Abraham's *sperma*, heirs according to promise (Galatians 3:28).

The theory of human equality was widespread in the Roman Empire. Stoic tutors taught it to spoiled brats who might achieve high office. Cynics encouraged the masses to look the elite in the eye. Paul gave his followers—slaves, women, losers—the satisfaction of believing God tested people on earth and would reward the righteous beyond the grave. Paul never disputes Roman laws: Wives were men's slaves. The wealthy bought and sold people. Everyone was the emperor's slave. God ignores distinctions, but he also expects everyone to obey human rulers. Ancient scripture decrees obedience to rulers, but also justice from them.

Paul continues with his analogy of the Torah as a school teacher:

An heir is no different from a slave [*doulon*] as long as he is a child, though he is *kyrios* of all. Tutors and housekeepers rule us as long as the father chooses. That's how we were enslaved [*doulomenoi*] by the *stoicheia* of the *kosmos* before becoming Christians (Galatians 4:1-3).

Stoicheia, "elements," are the forces or physical principles of the cosmos. To us, "elements" are impersonal natural phenomena. Not necessarily for Paul, though he is good at adapting to his audience. He may think of them as Hesiod's primal forces, like Earth, Sky, Love, Oceanus, Thunderer, Victory, Memory, Justice, and so on, or as spirits.²

He will call them *archontes* (“rulers”), which are the planetary gods when he writes the Corinthians. Jews called them archangels or Watcher Angels.³ Even Stoics regarded primal elements as ruling spirits from the *Logos*, Reason, World Spirit. Watcher Angels or ruling spirits may have been Paul’s understanding of *stoicheia*.

Jesus Christ rules *stoicheia* and cosmos. He is *Kyrios*, Lord of all:

When the time came, the Θεός sent his son (born through a woman, born under the Law) to redeem those who were under the Law [Jews], so that Θεός might adopt us as his children. Because you are his children, Θεός sent the *pneuma* of his son into your hearts, crying, “*Abba, Pater*.”¹ Therefore you are no longer a slave [*doulon*] but a son. If you are a son, you are an heir of Θεός through Christ.

When you didn’t know Θεός [*Theos*], you worshipped things that weren’t even gods [*theois*].

But now that you know Θεός—or rather Θεός knows you—, how can you go back to the weak and beggarly *stoicheia* that want to enslave [*douleuein*] you? You celebrate holy days, months, seasons, and years [of the Jewish calendar]! (Galatians 4:4-10).

If Jesus was “born under the Torah,” Paul didn’t think there was anything unusual about his birth. The myth of the virgin birth hadn’t been invented.

That God sent a redeemer from heaven is a Gnostic idea. Gnosticism was a broad and pervasive religious movement created when Alexander’s conquest of the East enabled Persian dualism and mysticism to merge with Aristotle’s notions of the universe. Paul’s very Jewish Θεός created the world and knew what went on in it. Israelites knew him because he revealed himself to them.

Paul ruthlessly twists the Torah to defend himself against *hasidim*:

Tell me, you who want to be ruled by the Law of Moses, don’t you listen to the Law? Abraham had two sons, Ishmael by Hagar the slave woman, and Isaac by Sarah the free woman. Ishmael was born as the result of animal desire, but Isaac was born as the result of [God’s] promise [Genesis 16:15, 21:2-12].

The two births are allegories for *two* covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, which creates slavery, for Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia. She answers to Jerusalem, which is enslaved along with her children [by *hasidim* and Zealots, maybe Romans].

The other covenant is Jerusalem [in heaven], free, mother of us all. Scripture says, “Rejoice, barren one! Break out and shout, she not in labor! For the desolate one has many more children than she with a husband!” [Isaiah 54:1].

Now, brothers, we are the children of promise, as Isaac was. But the one born through animal desire persecutes the one born through the *pneuma* even now.

Brothers, we’re not children of the slave woman [Hagar], but of the free [Sarah]! Therefore keep the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and don’t let the yoke of slavery entangle you again.

Look, I Paul tell you that if you're circumcised, Christ won't do you any good. Everyone who is circumcised has to obey the entire Law of Moses (Galatians 4:21-5:3).

This chart summarizes Paul's allegory:

Hagar	X	Abraham	X	Sarah
Sarah's slave				the barren wife
Her son Ishmael was born according to the flesh, became father of nomadic tribes				Her son Isaac was born by promise and <i>pistis</i> , became father of settled tribes of Israel
Earthly Jerusalem is mother of Jews, slave of Rome and Torah				Heavenly Jerusalem is mother of us all and free

Paul doesn't believe that stuff. He may even know that the Lord Jesus Christ is totally imaginary, but he desperately wants to save Israel from Scylla and Charybdis, Zealots and Romans. The power is in Rome for whatever reason, and it is ruthless. Caligula sent that power to destroy Israel (chapter six), and another madman could rise at any time and try again. So Paul will do everything he can to civilize the Empire by Jewish standards of decency and humanity. Few Romans will accept Judaism, but they will accept Jewish notions of love and decency if couched in terms they understand and respect—like the holy *pneuma* and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul is a lawyer or teacher making a point to stubborn people. He knows hasidic argumentation. As a young student in Jerusalem he may well have participated in scholarly discussions of YHWH's admission that he gave the Jews some bad laws (Appendix VI). He recognized the Torah as a primitive attempt at law. Now as a heretic he could easily have been stoned to death for saying the Torah is evil.

Paul is liberal but not libertine. He insists on standards of decency:

Do not use freedom for personal gain, but to serve one another through love. The whole Law is fulfilled thus, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." But if you bite and devour one another, watch that you don't eat each other up!

Walk in the *pneuma*, and you will not yield to animal desires. The body wants what the *pneuma* forbids, and the *pneuma* fights to control the body. They fight each other, so you want things you can't have. If the *pneuma* leads you, you are not under the Law.

The body tends toward adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lust, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, fighting, jealousy, anger, strife, seditions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, wild parties, and the like. I already told you anyone doing those things will not inherit the *basileia* of Θεός (Galatians 5:13-21).

Paul has problems that have aroused endless speculation:

You know how I preached the *euangelion* to you through bodily weakness at the first, and you did not despise or reject my bodily temptation, but received me as an *angelos* of Θεός, even as Christ Jesus (Galatians 4:13-14).

Paul has visited the Galatian *ekklesia* at least once.

He says that Jesus' martyrdom was voluntary:

The *Kyrios* Jesus Christ gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil *aionos* [aeon, eon, age] in accordance with the will of Θεός our Father (Galatians 1:4).

Gnostics would later personify "the present evil *aionos*" as one of several "aeons," another name for the gods that rule the *kosmos*.

Paul closes his letter by appealing to magical "marks of Jesus" as an amulet to ward off criticism:

Let no one cause me trouble, for I bear in my body the *stigmata* of Jesus (Galatians 6:17).

What were the *stigmata*? Did Paul receive his *stigmata* in an initiation ritual into the Christ cult, or as punishment? Were they scars symbolizing Jesus Christ's mythical wounds? Were they brands burnt into the skin to symbolize slavery to Christ? He sometimes speaks of Christians as "*douloi* (slaves) of Christ." Did Paul brand his followers as "*douloi* of Christ"?⁴ We wonder.

Paul likely wrote Galatians during a long stay in Ephesus sometime after leaving Athens and Corinth. Luke places that stay in the third journey.

NOTES

1. *Abba* is Aramaic for father; *Pater* is the Greek.
2. Primal spirits: Hesiod, *Theogony*; Bulfinch's *Age of Fable*. Paul's respect for elements will interest stoichiometrists and other chemists, who recognize 116 elements today.
3. Watchers, archangels: Graves and Patai, 83-84, 109.
4. *Stigmata* of Jesus: Smith 1978, 47-48, 178n. Be sure to read Mack's analysis of the letter to the Galatians (1995, 99-121).

— ⊕ — 13 Paul's Gospel to the Corinthians

Paul wrote seven letters to his Corinthian school. First Corinthians is a single letter, while 2 Corinthians is a collage. Paul is shaping a holy community and separating it from the larger society much as the Pharisees, Essenes, and Pythagoreans did.

Paul mentions an Earlier Letter to the Corinthians (ELC), now lost:

I wrote you in an *epistole* not to associate with fornicators (1 Cor. 5:1-13).

A probable fragment of ELC is buried in 2 Corinthians. It warns against intimacy or marriage outside the community of “believers”:

Don't be joined unequally with unbelievers, for what business does righteousness have with unrighteousness or lawlessness? Or light with darkness? What agreement does Christ have with Belial? What does a believer have to do with an unbeliever?

How can the temple of Θεος unite with idols? You are the temple of the living Θεος, for the Θεος said, “I will live in them and walk with them. I'll be their Θεος, and they'll be my people. So come out from among them and be separate,” says the *Kyrios*. ‘Shun unclean things, and I will receive you. Then I will be your Father, and you'll be my sons and daughters’” [Exodus 25:8, 29:45, etc.].

Having those promises, dearly beloved, let's cleanse ourselves of all filthiness of body and *pneuma*, perfecting holiness in the fear of Θεος (2 Cor. 6:14-7:1).

“The *Kyrios*” is YHWH in that passage.

We can reconstruct ELC, for the Corinthians replied, and Paul responded with 1 Corinthians. First Corinthians shows what the Corinthians replied, and that shows what ELC said.¹ It said:

1. Don't associate with fornicators.
2. Don't marry or associate with “unbelievers.”
3. Don't worship idols or eat food offered to them.
4. Don't go into temples.
5. Go easy on “speaking in tongues.”
6. Collect money to send to the “holy men” in Jerusalem.
7. Don't forget about heavenly rewards for obedience.

Luke says James gave Paul a letter prohibiting fornication, idolatry, blood, and eating food offered to idols.² Paul says nothing about it.

The Corinthians replied to ELC, “Don't worry about us marrying unbelievers—we won't touch women! Nor sacrifice to idols. But almost everybody is an unbeliever and fornicator—we can't avoid them! We even have to go to the governor to ask for justice. Why not talk to our

friends in the temples? Why not eat there if idols are nothing? Why not speak in tongues? It's good—it's from the holy spirit! Some say resurrection is a fable. How do you know we will rise? What kind of body will we have? We'll gladly take up a collection, but how? Have you heard that 'So-and-so' took up with his father's wife?" And Chloe's group sent word about the dissension following Kephass and Apollos' visit, of which some was against Paul even to the extent of begrudging feeding him when he visited them.

Paul's Answer: 1 Corinthians

Paul didn't want his disciples siding against him:

I urge you to agree, brothers. Don't split into factions. Be united in mind and judgment.

Chloe's group says you quarrel with each other. Every one of you says, "I'm really Paul's," "I, Apollos'," "I, Kephass'," or "I, Christ's." Was Christ cut up? Was Paul impaled for you? Were you immersed in Paul's name?

I thank the Θεός that I didn't immerse any of you lest you say I did! (Only Crispus and Gaius. And those of Stephanos' house. I don't know who else.) (1 Cor. 1:10-16).

The Corinthian school was so large that some met in Chloe's home and others in Stephanos'. Perhaps there were others.

Kephass-Peter preached to Jews in synagogues in the Diaspora to get them to abandon Zealotism and follow Jesus. Paul respects both Kephass and Apollos as fellow apostles of Jewish civility and piety and glosses over differences. He is bringing gentiles into the Congregation of Israel and has no intention of letting differences interfere. Luke cast Apollos as a disciple of John until he received the holy spirit and became Christian—an example for Jews in Luke's own day (Acts 18:24-19:7).

Paul digresses often. He tries to explain his doctrine:

Christ didn't send me to immerse but to preach the *euangelion* without the *sophia* of oratory lest the true meaning of Christ's *stauros* [stake] be forgotten. Preaching the *stauros* seems foolish to those who will *really* die, but to us who are saved it is the *dynamis* of Θεός! For it is written, "I will destroy the *sophia* of the wise and confuse those who perceive" [Isaiah 29:14] (1 Cor. 1:17-19).

Jesus' martyrdom allows gentiles to join the Congregation of Israel, and Jews to associate with them. *Sophia* means "wisdom," which includes *philo-sophia*, knowledge, common sense, religion, and superstition. Paul's main point is that regardless of what people might say, we have to

get along with one another in decency. But he can't resist the urge to share his esoteric Pharisee theories of resurrection with them.

Nobody can know God except through the Christ cult:

The Θεός in his *sophia* did not let the *kosmos* know him through his *sophia*. Because of that, it pleased the Θεός to save those who believe through the foolishness of our preaching (1 Cor. 1:21).

Ordinary *sophia* is worthless in knowing God; you have to have wisdom from God through the holy spirit. People are so foolish that his message has to be foolish to get them to listen and believe. Paul teaches loving kindness and won't let any argument or authority stop him.

Everyone challenges Paul's authority, but he won't play that game:

Joudaioi [Judeans] ask me for a sign. *Hellenes* [Greeks] demand *sophia*. Instead we preach *Christon estauromenon* [Christ impaled].

Joudaiois call it scandalous. *Hellenes* call it foolish. To the Called Ones—*Joudaiois* and *Hellenes*—Christ is the *dynamis* of Θεός and the *Sophia* of Θεός (1 Cor. 1:22-24).

Common sense, the Torah, and other worldly guides tell us to get along, but few people obey. So, "We preach Christ impaled" and "Christ is the Power and Wisdom of God."

Jesus Christ enables gentiles to join the Congregation of Israel without conversion to traditional Judaism:

Θεός made Christ Jesus *Sophia* to us as well as righteousness, holiness, and redemption [Jeremiah 9:24] (1 Cor. 1:30).

Paul admits to single-mindedness but denies sophistry:

I didn't come to you with fine speeches or *sophia* claiming to know the Θεός. I pretended to know nothing except Jesus Christ, and him impaled (1 Cor. 2:1-2).

But he's not above trying to impress Greeks with the *pneuma* of God:

I came only in proof of the *pneuma* and the *dynamis* so that your *pistis* might not be in human *sophia*, but in the *dynamis* of Θεός (1 Cor. 2:4-5).

He reveals secrets of the ages only to the *teleiois* ("mature," "complete," "fully developed," from *telos*, "end"). The *teleiois* are his disciples:

We tell the *teleiois* about *sophia*, but it's not the *sophia* of this *aión* [eon, age] or of the *archontes* [rulers] of this *aión*—they will die. We tell about the *sophia* of Θεός through *mysterion* [mystery]. It is the hidden *sophia* that the Θεός decided before the *aiónon* [eons, ages] for our glory (1 Cor. 2:6-7).

Archontes are Venus, Mars, Sun, Moon, and so on, the seven planets, generally thought to be gods. Judaism personified them as the Watcher Angels whom God ordained to rule the universe. They disobeyed him, so evil entered the universe. Paul thinks “this age” began at creation four thousand years earlier, to end with Judgment Day.

Ancient scripture does literally say the world will end:

Look, I create a new heaven and a new earth, and no one will remember the old heaven and earth (Isaiah 65:17).

A poetic disciple of Isaiah familiar with Persian notions of the world's end wrote that passage. He meant that when Babylonia fell and exiles were freed, they would put the Babylonian conquest and Exile behind them and rebuild Jerusalem. Later generations understandably thought he predicted the end of the world.

Paul's theory of Divine Deception. The wicked archangels and their human slaves didn't know who Jesus was:

None of the *archontes* of this *aión* knew the secret *sophia* which Θεός ordained before this *aión*. If they had, they wouldn't have impaled the *Kyrios* of glory! (1 Cor. 2:7-8).

Jesus fooled the archangels and tricked their human minions into killing him, a god from heaven. That plot is explicit in PQ. It blossomed forth in Christianity and Gnosticism.

The Divine Deception story assumed that the creator intended humans to live virtuously, then their spirits would ascend to heaven. The seven planets were gods or archangels.³ That world view agrees with the Genesis creation story:

Elohim made two great lights, the greater to rule the day, and the lesser to rule the night; and the stars. And Elohim set them in the heaven to light the earth and *rule* over the day and night (Genesis 1:16-18). ... Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and the entire host of them (Genesis 2:1).

The “host” of the heavens were gods, whereas the “host” of the earth included humanity and swarms of lesser gods and messenger spirits. The stars are probably fiery chariots, the destination of human souls as in *Timaeus*.

By the late Persian age, the seven planetary gods were the “seven eyes of YHWH” and the archangels or Watcher Angels of Jewish apocryphal literature.⁴ Originally they all obeyed God:

The morning stars sang together, and all the sons of Elohim shouted for joy (Job 38:7).

Stars were sons of God, that is, gods. (Couplets—a statement and a variation on the statement—are a common poetic form in the Old Testament.) In Job, God depended on *Satan* (Hebrew, “Antagonist”) to go down to earth to walk invisibly, watching, testing, goading, and punishing that wicked and obstinate human species.⁴

Isaiah regarded planet Venus as Archangel Helel, son of the goddess Dawn. That planet undergoes a regular cycle: It is invisible at times, then appears near the sun in the morning sky. It rises higher each day, then gradually falls, disappears, and reappears in the evening. That cycle led to the tale that Helel tried to be equal to God but couldn’t reach him. Angry El threw him down to earth. Helel stands for Babylon’s king⁵:

How you have fallen from the heavens, O Helel, son of Dawn! You are cut down to the ground, you who bleeds nations! For you said in your heart, “I will go up above the heavens and raise my throne above the stars of El” (Isaiah 14:12-32).

Helel is translated “shining star” or “Light-Bearer,” *Lucifer* in Latin.

According to Paul, Jesus’ birth attracted no attention. If the archangels knew he would be born into the world, they would have destroyed him. He provoked the archangels’ human slaves into killing him. But men can’t kill gods, and Jesus rose to heaven. His “death” magically released humanity from the archangels’ power so their spirits can return to the *pleuroma*, the fullness of God from whence they came—provided they love and obey him and believe that Jesus is Lord and Christ. It is a Gnostic salvation myth.

The Holy Spirit

The *pneuma*, God’s breath, transforms people into gods:

The *psychikos anthropos* [sensual, natural human] does not accept things of the *pneuma* of the Θεός, for he thinks they’re foolish. He *can’t* know them, for we discover them through the *pneuma*. The *pneumatikos* [spiritual human] judges everything, but no one judges him. “Who has the mind of the *Kyrios* so that he may teach him?” [Isaiah 40:13]. But we have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:14-16).

People normally think only of bodily needs and desires and have little self-control or sense of right and wrong. They act like the brutes they are. They scoff at Paul’s *pneumatic* theories. Their souls will die like animals’ souls. The *pneuma* is beyond appreciation of natural beauty,

art, and human relationships—those are *psychikos*, sensual. The *pneuma* opens up a whole new invisible spiritual world ruled by Jesus and the Θεός himself. Belief gives the Christian absolute certainty of right and wrong, and certainty of life with God forever.

Paul's disciples are not yet *pneumatikos*. There is more to learn:

Brothers, I couldn't speak to you as *pneumatikos*, only fleshly, as infants in Christ. I fed you milk, not food, for you weren't ready. You still aren't! (1 Cor. 3:1-2).

A goal of the Christ cult common to Cynism and Stoicism is self-control over natural impulses, desires, and emotions:

Your animal passions still drive you! That's why you envy, fight, and divide into factions. Aren't you being fleshly [*sarkikoi*] when you act like other men? When one says, "I truly belong to Paul," and another, "I belong to Apollos," aren't you being fleshly? Who are Paul and Apollos? Only Christ's servants who taught you about him! I have planted, Apollos watered, but the Θεός made it grow. We all work for Θεός.

I laid the foundation. Let someone else build on it, but keep an eye on how he builds, for no one can lay any other foundation but Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3:3-11).

You are above everything—Paul, Apollos, Kephas, the *kosmos*, life, death, the present, and the future, and you are Christ's, and Christ is Θεός' (1 Cor. 3:19-23).

Apollos may have been a Pharisee. Though Kephas-Peter probably preached Jesus as Christ, Paul has much more *gnosis*. Yet he respects both, knowing that they, like him, were trying to civilize the world.

Jesus will come to judge everybody:

Don't judge anyone before the *Kyrios* comes. He'll expose dark secrets and thoughts in hearts (1 Cor. 4:5).

Apostles have a difficult, thankless job:

I think the Θεός put the *apostoloi* last, doomed to die, for we're a spectacle to the *kosmos*, *angelois*, and *anthropois*. I'm a fool because of Christ, despised, reviled, persecuted, defamed, treated like the scum of the *kosmos* (1 Cor. 4:9-13).

Paul wants his disciples to imitate himself, for he imitates Christ:

Even if you had *myrious* instructors in Christ, you don't have many fathers, for I fathered you in Jesus Christ through the *euangelion*. Therefore I beg you to mimic [*mimetai*] me (1 Cor. 4:15-16).

Imitate me as I imitate Christ (1 Cor. 11:1).

“Imitating Christ” means being moral and standing up to persecution. It helps make his disciples a cohesive group. Paul is their “father.”

He will visit Corinth again soon:

I will go to you shortly if the *Kyrios* wills it. I will *gnosis* [know], not in conceited talk, but in *dynamis*, for the *basileia* of the Θεός is not through speech but *dynamis*.

What do you want? Shall I come to you with a stick, or in love and the *pneuma* of meekness? (1 Cor. 4:19-21).

Sexual and other taboos. Paul scolds the Corinthians for breaking certain taboos:

I often hear you have such fornication that the *ethnos* don't even have a name for it! Letting a man have his father's wife! And you arrogantly refused to expel the sinner! In the name of the *Kyrios* of us Jesus Christ, gather with my *pneuma* and the *dynamis* of the *Kyrios* of us Jesus Christ, and hand him over to *Satan* to destroy his flesh so his *pneuma* might be saved in the day of the *Kyrios* Jesus (1 Cor. 5:1-5).

Paul's Satan, like Job's, chastises people. It's the job God gave him.

Paul agrees that avoiding sinners is impossible:

I wrote you in an *epistole* not to associate with fornicators. Of course you can't avoid the fornicators of this *kosmos*! Nor the greedy, extortioners, and idolaters. To do that, you'd have to leave the *kosmos*! I only meant not to *live* with it. If a brother is a railer or drunkard, don't *eat* with him! Get rid of that wicked person! (1 Cor. 5:9-13).

Some Corinthians took fellow Christians to court:

How dare you take one another to law before unrighteous men instead of holy ones! Don't you know that the holy ones will judge the *kosmos*? If you're to judge the *kosmos*, how can you be unable to decide the smallest matters? Don't you know that we'll judge *angelous*? (1 Cor. 6:1-3).

They will judge the world! and angels! How and when? He doesn't say.

Sin may be legal, but that's no excuse for yielding to it:

I'm allowed to do anything, but not everything is good. Everything is allowed me, but nothing earthly will rule me (1 Cor. 6:12).

The Corinthians offered to divorce their spouses for the sake of the celibacy Paul advocates, but he discourages any such act:

Concerning the subjects you wrote me about. It's good for a man to not touch a woman, but to keep from fornication, every man should have his own wife. Spouses should not deprive one another unless they agree. That's up to you. If I had my way, everyone would be like me, but everyone has his own traits from Θεός.

Stay as you are, married or unmarried, circumcised or not, slave or free. Marry or not, but I say this, time is short. Those with wives should be like those with none (1 Cor. 7:1-40).

What! “Time is short!” Why? Paul must expect something terrible very soon that will at least affect Corinth, and perhaps the world. We know that Pharisees expect the world to end some day, but evidently Paul detects signs of the end in current events. The most usual fear is for the breakdown of law and order, riots, and civil wars in struggles for the throne of Rome, or foreign invasions, or all of the above. Therefore don't get pregnant, for pregnant women and babies are very vulnerable. As Paul wrote, Claudius was old and sick, and no one knew what lay ahead. Generals may fight for the throne; a madman might win it. Rebellious provinces or the Germans and Parthians might take advantage of the turmoil. It might even hit Corinth.

Claudius died October 13, 54 CE, allegedly poisoned by his wife Agrippina. The succession was orderly, for Claudius had adopted Agrippina's son Nero, so he became emperor. He was only seventeen, but everyone wanted him to succeed. But Paul's worst fears would soon be realized.

Eating food offered to gods. Paul admits that idols are powerless:

About things offered to idols. We have *gnosis* [knowledge], but *gnosis* makes you arrogant. As for eating food sacrificed to idols, we know that an idol is nothing, and there is no θεός but one. But even if there are things called *theoi* [gods] in heaven or on earth—many *theoi* and many *kyrioi* [masters]—, still to us there is but one Θεός, the Father from whom everything came to be, including us (1 Cor. 8:1-6a).

Paul did not write the next line, for God, of course, is the creator:

And one *Kyrios* Jesus Christ by whom all things exist, including us (1 Cor. 8:6b).

That line was added to harmonize 1 Corinthians with a letter his disciples wrote, Colossians, which we will see in the next chapter.

The Corinthians said there isn't anything wrong with eating with friends in Greek temples. Paul insists they can't do that any longer:

Not everyone understands that an idol is nothing. If a man thinks an idol is something, it is something to *him*, and his conscience is dulled. Don't set a bad example for the weak. If somebody sees you eating in an idol-temple, won't he be tempted to eat there too? Your *gnosis* would destroy the weak brother for whom Christ died! (1 Cor. 8:7-11).

In the next century Christians would refuse to worship the Roman gods and emperor, so they were persecuted for disloyalty to the Empire. That wasn't Paul's intention. He wanted his disciples to obey civil laws.

The worker deserves his pay. Paul bristles at complaints about feeding him and Barnabas when they visited Corinth:

Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Haven't I seen Jesus Christ our *Kyrios*? Even if others don't consider me an apostle, I *am* one to *you*, for the proof of my apostleship is that you are in the *Kyrios*.

My answer to those who quarrel with me is, can't we eat and drink? Can't we lead a sister, a wife, like other apostles and the brothers of the *Kyrios*, and Kephas? Or do only I and Barnabas lack the right to not work? (1 Cor. 9:1-6).

Is Barnabas "a sister, a wife"? Obviously not, but we are reminded how little we know about Paul and everybody else. Regardless, they should feed Paul:

What soldier ever served at his own expense? Who ever shepherds a flock without eating the flock's milk? It's written in the Law of Moses that you don't muzzle the ox that works for you [Deuteronomy 25:4]. Does the Θεός care about oxen?... Those tending the altar eat from the altar... What's *my* reward? (1 Cor. 9:7-18).

Paul digresses into his famous "I am all things to all people":

Though I'm free from all men, I made myself everyone's *doulon* [slave] to attract more. To *Joudaios* [Jews], I acted like a *Joudaios* to win them. To those under the Law of Moses, I followed the Law of Moses so I might attract them. To those without the Law of Moses, I acted like one without it (though following Θεός' law under Christ's law) so I might attract those without the Law. To the weak I became like the weak so I might attract the weak. I have made myself everything to everyone so I might save some (1 Cor. 9:19-22).

I'm allowed to do everything, but not everything is good. Not everything builds. Don't offend *Joudaios*, *Hellenes*, or the *ekkleisia* of the Θεός. Be like me, pleasing everyone in everything not for my benefit but so that many might be saved (1 Cor. 10:32-33).

His flexibility casts doubt on his credibility.

Joining the *ekkleisia* is joining the Congregation of Israel:

I want you to know that the fathers of us all followed the pillar-shaped cloud through the Red Sea, and *ebaptisanto* [were baptized] to Moses in the cloud and the sea!

They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink as we do, for they drank out of that spiritual *petra* [rock] that Moses struck [to make it gush water; Numbers 20:8-13]... That *petra* was Christ (1 Cor. 10:1-4).

Paul's Eucharist or Communion. Paul uses the new god's cannibalistic sacrificial meal to mold his *ekklesias* into a new *koinonia*, community:

Flee idolatry! I'm speaking to prudent people! Think about this:

The cup of blessing that we bless—isn't it eating the blood of Christ? The bread that we break—isn't it the body of Christ?

We different individuals are a single bread, one body, for we eat the same bread.

Look at Israel! Don't those who eat the sacrifices eat from the altar?

Does that mean an idol is anything? Or that food placed in front of idols means anything? No. I say that the *ethnos* sacrifice to *daimoniois*, not to Θεός. I don't want you to share with *daimonion*.

You can't drink both the *Kyrios*' cup and the *daimonion*'s cup! You can't eat from the *Kyrios*' table if you eat from the table of *daimonion*!

Do we want to make the *Kyrios* jealous? Are we stronger than the *Kyrios*? (1 Cor. 10:14-22).

Paul knows how to destroy his disciples' gods and demons.

If they passed the cup and broke bread, somebody furnished the wine and bread for all. Some, at least, brought food for themselves:

When you gather, it's not to eat the *Kyrios*' supper.

Everyone eats his own supper before everybody else. One is hungry, and another's drunk! What! Don't you have houses where you can eat and drink?

Do you despise the *ekklesia* of the Θεός and embarrass those who don't have anything? What shall I say? Shall I praise you? No, I won't! (1 Cor. 11:20-22).

Paul's disciples usually went to parties for companionship, food, and drink. Perhaps that's how he enticed them in the first place, or perhaps it was his "good news" of the god who had been killed but rose from the dead. But then Paul would harangue them about ethics and morals. They quickly got bored with that, so he has just reminded them how close they were to evil spirits as well as the breath of the Θεός. He deals with some very serious matters.

Paul recites some words that link the meal with the patron god:

I received from the *Kyrios* what I also handed over to you.

That the *Kyrios* Jesus in the night in which he was handed over, took bread, and having given thanks, broke [it] and said, "Take. Eat. This of me is the body for you broken. This do for my remembrance."

In the same way also the cup, after the supper, saying, "This cup the new covenant is in my blood. This do as often as you drink for my remembrance."

For as often as you may eat this bread and drink the cup, you declare the death of the *Kyrios* until he may come (1 Cor. 11:23-26).

Those lines probably had a long history. They may have come from secret Greek orgiastic springtime Dionysian festivals, which included

symbolic eating of the god and his resurrection, but then various peoples had such rituals. The Torah forbade drinking blood,⁶ but that doesn't mean holy men always obeyed the prohibition. Zealots probably used such rituals in drinking parties to celebrate dead heroes and to sanctify themselves in preparation for their own daring exploits. In disgust, some unknown but cheeky rabbi tailored one of their hymns to fit that impious man who couldn't even be *made* to fight, Jesus of Galilee. His hymn gave PQ an idea for a story of Jesus' heroic attempt to bring Israel to the *basileia* of God. Paul told PQ's tale to his *ekklesias*. He knew it wasn't true, but it helped him convert gentiles to Judaism. Almost as an afterthought he used the hymn of martyred Jesus to explain why eating and drinking in the *ekklesia* was a solemn occasion. "Bread" and "cup"—food and wine—honored Jesus for enabling gentiles to join the synagogue and Jews to leave the Torah with clear conscience.

Within a few decades Paul's words evolved into the magical rite of Communion or Eucharist with a priest "standing in" for Jesus. Neither Paul nor Jesus hosted such a ceremony. It wasn't even a ceremony for Paul; he merely explained why people should behave in the *ekklesia*.⁷

Paul scolds his disciples for not respecting the patron god:

Anyone who eats this bread and drinks this cup of the *Kyrios* unworthily is guilty of his body and blood. Each one of you—prove yourself when you eat of that bread and drink from that cup! You who eats and drinks without respecting the *Kyrios*' body, eats and drinks judgment against yourself. That's why so many of you are weak, sick, and sleepy! The *Kyrios* judges and disciplines us to save us from being damned with the *kosmos*. So, my brothers, when you gather to eat, wait for one another. If you're hungry, eat at home! (1 Cor. 11:27-34).

Jesus watches, judges, and punishes from heaven. He isn't Dionysos, god of wine, revelry, and wild parties. Paul makes up stories to get his followers to listen, but the result is to remove the Lord Jesus Christ ever farther from the man Jesus himself.

In the *pneuma*. In the earlier lost letter, E.I.C. Paul scolded the Corinthians for overdoing speaking in tongues. Enthralled by the novel experience, they protested. Paul responds in three chapters, beginning thus:

About spiritual gifts, a single *pneuma* brings differing gifts. We serve the same *Kyrios* in various ways. The same Θεός gives us different abilities. The *pneuma* works in each person to benefit everyone. The *pneuma* gives some people *sophia*; others *gnosis*, *pistis*, gifts of healing, *dynamis*, prophecy, recognizing spirits, speaking languages, or interpreting. It makes some into apostles or teachers. I will show you a better way (1 Cor. 12:1-31).

The better way is love. Paul is getting back to his main goal, to civilize the Roman Empire. He recites this very famous hymn:

Even if I speak human or angelic tongues, without love I'm only a brass gong sounding, or a cymbal tinkling. Even if I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all *gnosis* but don't love, I'm nothing. Without love, it means nothing to give everything I own to feed the poor and give my body as a burnt sacrifice. Love suffers long and is kind. Love doesn't envy; it doesn't boast; it isn't proud. Love thinks no evil. It rejoices in the truth. Love never fails, but prophecy will pass away, and so will *gnosis* and speaking in tongues... *Pistis*, hope, and love endure, but the greatest of these is love. Make love your aim. Pursue love (1 Cor. 13:1-14:2).

Paul has much more to say about using spiritual gifts wisely:

Seek spiritual gifts only to prophesy. Whoever speaks in strange languages speaks only to the Θεός, not men, for no one understands him. He who prophesies speaks to build up, encourage, and comfort people. He who speaks in an unknown language builds up himself, but he who prophesies builds up the *ekklesia*. Yes, speak in languages, but only to prophesy (1 Cor. 14:1-5).

If anyone speaks in an unknown language, let it be in twos or threes, each in turn, and let one interpret. If there is no interpreter, keep silent in the *ekklesia*, speaking silently to himself and to the Θεός. Prophesy in groups of two or three, and let the others judge (1 Cor. 14:27-29; also see v. 40).

“Proof” of resurrection. Skeptical Corinthians scoffed at Paul's Pharisee theory of resurrection, so he reviews what he had been told of Jesus' resurrection:

I declare to you the *euangelion* that I preached to you, which you received and by which you stand, and by which you are saved—that is, if you remember what I preached to you!— unless you have believed in vain! For I gave you at the very first what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; he was buried and was raised the third day according to the scriptures; and he was seen by Kephias, then by the twelve. After that, he was seen by over five hundred brothers at one time, of whom most still live, though some have fallen asleep. After that, he was seen by James, then by all the apostles (1 Cor. 15:3-5).

Now there is an obvious break in thought, for his next statements are manifestly not what Paul had “received”:

And last of all, I—born late!—also saw him, for I am the least of the apostles. I don't deserve to be called an apostle because I persecuted the *ekklesia* of the Θεός. But through the gift of Θεός I am what I am, and his gift to me was not in vain. I worked harder than all of them—not really I, but the gift of the Θεός that was with me (1 Cor. 15:6-10).

We can't tell how many of the sightings Paul (or a later editor) added to "what I also received."⁸

Paul knows perfectly well that reports of visions don't prove anything, so all too glibly he goes into another, totally illogical "proof":

If it is *proclaimed* that Christ was raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? If there's no resurrection, then Christ has not been raised. If Christ has not been raised, then the resurrection and your *pistis* are useless; we are false witnesses of the Θεός; you are still in your sins; and those who have died in Christ are lost! If we can merely *hope* through Christ, we are the most miserable of men (1 Cor. 15:12-19).

In other words, somebody proclaimed that Jesus rose, so he rose. Besides, we *want* eternal life, so Jesus rose; but if he didn't we are miserable. That's Paul's proof, but he knows it isn't proof. To keep his bluster going, he quickly switches to the significance of Jesus' resurrection:

Christ was raised from the dead, the first of those who die. *Thanatos* [Death] came through one man [Adam]. Resurrection of the dead also came through one man [Jesus]. As everyone dies because of Adam, so everyone will live because of Christ (1 Cor. 15:20-22).

Paul writes excitedly as he imagines what Jesus' coming will be like. He fits it into the traditional Pharisee Judgment Day:

Everyone will rise in his proper order: Christ first, then those who are Christ's when he comes. Then comes the *telos* [end, goal], when he hands the *basileia* over to the Θεός and the Father, when he puts down all worldly *archon* [governance], authority, and *dynamis*, for, "He must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet" [Psalms 110:1].

Thanatos is the last enemy destroyed, for, "He has put everything in subjection under his feet" [Psalms 8:6].

After Jesus has conquered everything, he himself will turn everything over to "The" [To], so that the Θεός may be All in All. (1 Cor. 15:23-28).

"The" is short for "The Θεός." Paul is describing a battle soon to come between titans. Jesus will snatch the universe away from the evil archangels and give it back to God. Then he will give back the cosmic powers that God loaned him so he could complete his mission, so that God will again become The Only One. Monotheistic Paul cannot imagine God as anything but One, yet he is unwittingly laying a foundation for a polytheistic Christianity.

Paul reminds the scoffers that when he was with them they begged him to ensure that deceased family members would be resurrected. Humoring them, Paul concocted a ceremony of “immersion” in which his disciples stood in for their deceased ancestors. They *wanted* to believe in resurrection then:

Otherwise what will they do, *bapizomenoi* [being immersed] on behalf of the dead if the dead are not raised at all? (1 Cor. 15:29).

He boils over with indignation:

And, “Why do we stand in danger every hour?” [4 Ezra 7:89].⁹ Every day I die in your boasting which I have in the *Kyrios* Jesus Christ.

What did I get out of fighting the wild animals in Ephesus? If the dead are not raised, then “Eat and drink, for tomorrow we will die! [Isaiah 22:13]” (1 Cor. 15:30-32).

Fighting wild animals? Lions, dogs, or bears? Or the two-legged kind like Demetrius in Luke’s tale?¹⁰ Paul doesn’t tell us. But he quotes Menander in *Thais*, “Bad company ruins good morals.”¹¹

Trying to offer still more proof, he recites analogies from nature:

Someone will ask, “How are the dead raised?” “What kind of body will they have?”

Foolish one! What you plant doesn’t live unless it dies! When you plant, you sow grains of wheat or whatever kind it is. You don’t sow plants! The Θεός gives the seed a plant’s body, which depends on what kind it is.

Fleshly bodies aren’t all alike. There are human bodies, animals, fishes, and birds. There are earthly bodies and heavenly bodies with different glories. *Helios* [Sun] has its glory. *Selene* [Moon] another, *asteron* [stars] another. *Aster* [Star] differs from *asteros* [star] in glory.

The same for resurrection of the dead. [The body] is sown in corruption; it is raised incorruptible. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in *dynamis*. A *psychikon* [sensual] body is planted; it is raised a *pneumatikon* [spiritual] body. There is a sensual body, and there is a spiritual body (1 Cor. 15:35-44).

Sexual intercourse is a weakness. It is dishonorable and corrupt. That would have surprised Jacob, the legendary father of the twelve tribes of Israel. It seems the human body and its functions disgust Paul.

Analogies have their limits. Farmers knew that dead seeds couldn’t grow. Sun, moon, and stars are not alive.

Paul quotes the Torah’s story of human creation to prove that the holy *pneuma* gives eternal life:

YHWH Elohim formed the *adam* [human] from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the *adam* became a living soul (Genesis 2:7).

It is written, "The first *anthropos adam* was made a living *psyche* [soul]." Therefore the last *adam* was made a life-giving *pneuma*. The sensual body was first, and the spiritual afterward. The first *anthropos* is of the earth [*ge*], earthy; the second *anthropos* is the *Kyrios* out of the sky [*ouranos*, note "Uranus"] (1 Cor. 15:45-47).

Paul contrasts animal life, *psyche*, with *pneuma*. *Psyche* enlivened the earthy first *adam* as an animal, whereas Jesus the "last *adam*" was divine because his *pneuma* came from heaven. Both *psyche* and *pneuma* meant "air," one of the four Aristotelian elements on earth, therefore "breath," therefore the life of any animal or human, but Paul makes *pneuma* the eternal heaven-sent breath of God or "divine spirit" to distinguish it from temporal animal life or "soul." The *pneuma* that Jesus brought from heaven to give eternal life to humans reminds us of the fire that the titan Prometheus stole from the gods to benefit humanity.

"First man" and "second man" reflect the Platonic belief that God conceived the *idea* and *form* of each thing he would create. The *idea-form* of each thing was perfect and eternal. But the first *adam* was created from matter, so he and his descendants are imperfect and temporal, being made of dirt animated with air, an earthen copy of the eternal *idea-form*. Jesus, the second *adam*, came down from heaven with the perfect eternal *idea-form* of man. Paul thinks his teaching elevates human brutes to become spiritual humans—gods in human form¹²:

We had the form of earthy ones, so we'll have the form of heavenly ones (1 Cor. 15:49).

Paul adapts the Pharisee theory of resurrection to the gentile Christ cult:

Look! *Mysterion* you I tell! We won't die! We'll be changed in an instant, the blink of an eye, at the last trumpet—for the trumpet will sound! The dead will be raised incorruptible, and we'll be changed!

What's written will happen: "Thanatos was swallowed up in *Nikos* [Victory]!" [Isaiah 25:8], and, "O *Thanatos*, where is your sting? O *Hades*, where is your *Nikos*?" [Hosea 13:14].

The sting of *Thanatos* is sin, and the *dynamis* of sin is the Law. But thanks to the Θεός, who gives us the *Nikos* through the *Kyrios* of us, Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:51-57).

Paul will convince through bluster regardless the cost to logic.

Collection for the poor. The Corinthians asked how to donate to the holy men in Jerusalem. Paul answers:

About the collection for the holy ones. I give you the same instructions as I did for the *ekklesia* of Galatia. Each person puts something aside on the first day of the week [Sunday] so there's no collecting while I'm there. I will send anyone you choose to

Jerusalem to carry your gift. He will go with me if I can also go. I will come through Macedonia to you, perhaps for the winter. But I will stay in Ephesus until *Pentekostes* [Shavuot, the Jewish spring harvest feast], for a great door is open, and there are many enemies. If Timotheus comes, don't scare him!... (1 Cor. 16:1-10).

Now we know that Paul wrote 1 Corinthians in Ephesus and had enemies there. As for Jerusalem, he never speaks of an “*ekklesia*” there, although Luke imagines one in that city.

Paul appears to be on good terms with Apollos:

About our brother Apollos, I asked him to visit you with the brothers. He didn't intend to come at all, but now plans to come when he can (1 Cor. 16:12).

So much for 1 Corinthians, Paul's second known letter to the Corinthians.

Second Corinthians: A Catch-All

Some of Paul's letters came apart, and the pieces were saved in a shoe box. Or were the letters censored, or cut down to “important” pieces? At any rate, fragments were pasted together with whole letters to form 2 Corinthians. We already read a piece of the early lost letter (ELC).

The New Covenant Letter. Paul's third known letter to the Corinthians reveals conflict with a Jew who said that Paul had no right to preach because he disobeyed the Law of Moses. Paul traces the *pneuma* to Moses' time, thus “proving” that human kindness is above the Torah and all other human laws. These are some delightful excerpts from that fragmentary letter:

Do we need letters of recommendation to you? *You're* our letter of recommendation!—written on our hearts, not in ink but by the *pneuma* of the living Θεός! It's not written on stone tablets but on human hearts!

The Θεός made us servants of the unwritten new covenant of the *pneuma*. The written Law kills, but the *pneuma* enlivens. The Law of Moses was carved in letters on stone tablets. They serve *Thanatou* [Death]! (2 Cor. 3:1-7).

Israelites couldn't look at Moses for the glare of his face. It faded... I'm not like Moses, who had to veil his face. The Israelites had hard thoughts. Their hearts are still veiled as they read the old covenant. Christ removed that veil! The *Kyrios* is the *pneuma*, and the *pneuma* of the *Kyrios* frees us from the Law of Moses (2 Cor. 3:7-17).

God's new covenant with humanity is love. It replaces the Torah.

Paul applies the carrot-and-stick:

We want to please the *Kyrios*, for we will all go before the judgment seat of Christ so that each one takes the consequences for things he did in his earthly life, good or bad. Knowing the fear of the *Kyrios*, we try to convince people. Nevertheless, Θεός knows, and I leave it to your consciences.

I won't justify myself to you again! I'm only giving you reasons to appreciate me so you can answer those who judge by looks instead of the heart. It's for your own good (2 Cor. 5:10-14).

Paul's Jesus Christ is divine. The human Jesus is irrelevant:

From now on we don't judge anyone by human standards. In fact, even if we knew Christ in the flesh, we don't think of him as a man any more. Anyone in Christ is a new creature; the old things have passed away. Look! Everything is new! (2 Cor. 5:16-17).

Paul envisions what the Messiah ought to be, never Jesus himself.

He begins his final plea:

O Corinthians, our mouth is open to you; our heart is open to you. I haven't shut you out; you did it yourselves. To make amends, open your hearts (2 Cor. 6:11-13).

The fragment of ELC, the lost early letter, was pasted in at this point. After that is the ending of the New Covenant Letter, which reads in part:

Receive us! We didn't wrong anyone; we didn't ruin anyone or cheat anyone. My pride in you comforts me, and I overflow with joy through all our troubles (2 Cor. 7:2-4).¹³

The Severe Letter. Paul made a hasty, unpleasant visit to Corinth, after which he wrote his Severe Letter¹⁴:

Now I Paul personally beg in Christ's humility that when I'm with you next time I won't have to act tough with you. My weapons are not fleshly, but powerful to the Θεός (2 Cor. 10:1-5).

Paul observes professional courtesy toward apostles who contradict him by not mentioning their names, but he does air the conflict:

Whenever someone proclaims another Jesus or gives you a different *pneuma* or a different *euangelion* from mine, you accept it only too readily. I'm not one bit lower than the highest apostles! Even if poor in rhetoric, I don't lack *gnosis*. I will go on refuting those who claim to work on the same terms as I do. They pretend to be apostles of Christ. No wonder! Just as *Satan* changes himself into *angelos photos* [an angel of light –probably planet Venus], so do his servants!

I can boast, too! Are they Hebrews? Israelites? Abraham's descendants? So am I! Are they servants of Christ? I'm a better one! (2 Cor. 11:1-23).

Paul collected more insults, injuries, and horror stories than Luke can possibly use in writing the Acts of the Apostles:

I'm a greater servant of Christ than they, working harder, getting caned more often than I can count, more often in prisons, often in deaths. Five times Judeans gave me thirty-nine stripes. I was flogged three times. I was stoned. I was shipwrecked three times. I was out in the deep ocean for a day and night. While traveling, I have often been in danger from rivers, in danger from robbers, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from *ethnos*, in danger in a city, in danger in the desert, in danger in the sea, in danger from traitorous brothers, in labor and hardship, often in hiding hungry and thirsty, fasting often in cold and nakedness, conspiracies against me every day. That's besides serving the *ekklesia*. Which of you was sick when I didn't share his sickness? Who felt insulted when I didn't burn with anger to stand up for him? (2 Cor. 11:23-29).

Paul is the ideal apostle of *pistis* for a cult that boasts of persecution.

He tries to prove that he is no sophist by claiming to know more secrets of the ages than he has revealed. He even knows somebody—probably himself—who ascended into the heavens:

I know a man in Christ who over fourteen years ago (whether in the body [*somos*] or out of the body not I know—the Θεός knows) who was caught up to the third heaven.

And I know such a man (whether in the body or out of the body not I know—the Θεός knows) who was caught up into paradise and heard unspeakable words unlawful for anyone to repeat... (2 Cor. 12:2-5).

Paul may know the Enoch myth, which is known from the Ethiopian Bible and Dead Sea scrolls. Second Enoch tells of third heaven and paradise:

The angels led me up to the third heaven, and I saw all the sweet flowering trees and their fruits and foods bubbling with fragrance, and the tree of life where the Lord rests when he goes up into paradise... Paradise is between the eternal and the worldly (2 Enoch 8:1-10:3).¹⁵

Paul's comments remind us of Luke's allusion to the spirit's ascent to paradise immediately after death:

One of the malefactors impaled with Jesus said, "*Kyrios*, remember me when you come into your *basileia*." Jesus replied, "*Amen* I tell you that you will be with me today in paradise" (Luke 23:38-43).

The Enoch myth grew from a story in the Torah of a man who apparently never died:

Three hundred years after fathering Methuselah, Enoch walked with Elohim... Enoch walked with Elohim and was not, for Elohim took him (Genesis 5:22-24).

Few Jews or Christians knew anything about ascents to heaven. They were secrets reserved to very few.

Paul gives us a rare glimpse into one of his hallucinations:

Lest my many *apokalypsin* seem to go to my head, *Satan* sent an *angelos* [messenger] in the form of a thorn in my flesh to keep me humble. Three times I prayed to the *Kyrios* to get rid of the thorn, but he replied, "My gift is all you need. My *dynamis* is best when you are weak" (2 Cor. 12:7-9).

Criticism makes Paul come out from his stoic façade:

I'm a fool! You made me! I'm not inferior to the highest apostles, though I'm nothing. I showed you the signs of a true apostle with magical signs, wonders, and *dynamis* (2 Cor. 12:11-12).

"True apostles" do magic. Jesus people and Christians inherited secrets from exorcists' traditions. Initiates into mystery cults had to pass through several "veils" of mystery before being taught the deepest secrets.¹⁶

Paul intends to visit Corinth again:

I'm coming to you for the third time. I may not like you, and you may not like me with quarreling, jealousy, anger, and evil talk. The Θεός of me may humble me in front of you, and I may pain you who haven't turned from your uncleanness, fornication, and lust. This will be the third time I'm coming to you. As I said last time I was there, I won't spare you.

You want proof that Christ speaks through me. He shows his *dynamis* among you! Look at yourselves! Are you in the *pistis*? Prove it! (2 Cor. 12:14-13:3).

Two Collection Letters. Paul will collect money in Macedonia and Greece for "holy men" in Jerusalem. It appears that he was in Macedonia when he wrote two letters to start the collection process. One was to the Corinthians¹⁷:

Brothers, we want you to know what the Θεός' gift has done for the *ekklesia* in Macedonia. Troubles have severely tested them, but their joy was so great that they have been extremely generous in giving despite their *ptocheia* [poverty]. They gave more than they should have. They really wanted to. They insisted on helping the holy men.

So we urged Titus to help you complete this special service of love. You're so rich in everything you have—word, *gnosis*, eagerness to help, and love for us! I'm trying to find out how real your own love is. You know the gift of the *Kyrios* of us Jesus Christ. Rich, he made himself a *ptocheia* [beggar] to make you rich through his poverty.

How we thank the Θεός for making Titus as eager to help you as we are. He decided on his own to help you. With him we sent the brother whose praise is in the *euangelion* throughout the whole *ekklesia* (2 Cor. 8:1-19).

The other Collection Letter is to various *ekklésias* in Greece. He plays one group against another to get as much as possible out of them¹⁸:

I don't need to write you about helping the holy men, for I boasted to the Macedonians, "The brothers in Greece have been ready to help since last year. Your eagerness has excited most of them." Now I'm sending these brothers so that our boasting about you will not be in vain. But as I said, you are ready to help. How ashamed we would be—and so would you, too!—if the people from Macedonia come with me and find out that you're not ready!

So I had to send those brothers ahead of me to get you ready ahead of time to collect the gift you plan to make. Then it will be ready when I arrive and show that you gave because you wanted to (2 Cor. 9:1-5).

Both letters show that Paul still plans to go to Corinth.

Cover Letter for the Collection Letters. This is the seventh and final letter to the Corinthians. Paul has had problems in Ephesus:

To the *ekklésia* of the Θεοῦ in Corinth and to all the holy men throughout Greece. We want you to know the trouble we had in Asia. We lost all hope of living (2 Cor. 1:1-8).

"Asia" is western Asia Minor and includes Ephesus. Luke made the "trouble" into the silversmiths' riot, perhaps from events in his own time.¹⁹ Paul never says what happened in Ephesus. He went on to Troas, then to Macedonia where he wrote this letter, but he won't get to Corinth after all:

I had planned to visit you twice, once on route to Macedonia, then on my return, to ask for help for my trip to Judea, but decided not to go to Corinth.

In Troas I found that the *Kyrios* had opened the way for me to preach the *euan-gelion*, but I couldn't find Titus. Worried about him, I went on to Macedonia (2 Cor. 1:15-2:13).

Even in Macedonia we had no peace and every kind of trouble, but Titus' coming and his report encouraged us. He told me how much you wanted to see me, how sorry you are, how ready you are to defend me, and now I am even happier.

I'm not sorry for writing the letter that saddened you, for it made you change your ways. Θεοῦ uses that sadness to heal. I boasted to Titus about you. You measured up, so his love for you grows stronger. I'm so happy that I may count on you (2 Cor. 7:5-16).

That letter, preserved in two pieces, "covers" the two Collection Letters.²⁰ It leaves Paul in Macedonia, and now we lose his footprints.

Paul may have been "meek and puny," but his letters were a blueprint for a tough organization that would stick together through calm and storm. By careful attention to emotional needs within the community he devel-

oped a sense of belonging. In return, he demanded loyalty and obedience. Out of his own oriental religion he created a tradition of the Father's chosen people and the holy spirit, a direct channel to the Father. He demonized his disciples' neighbors and cut off their communication with them. At the same time he let his disciples bring certain beliefs and practices into the evolving cult. He was a model of courage, endurance, and certainty. Those qualities and the promise of eternal life became permanent features of Christianity.

NOTES

1. Paul's lost first letter and the Reply: Partly reconstructed by Buck and Taylor, 31-45.
2. James' request: In Luke's story, Acts 15:20, but not in Galatians 2:1-10.
3. Astral religion: Plato, *Timaeus*; Cumont, 1912.
4. Seven eyes of YHWH: Zechariah 4:10. Watcher angels: Graves & Patai, 83-84, 109.
5. Satan serving God: (Job 2:1-7). Helel: Graves & Patai, 57-58.
6. Ritual cannibalism: Smith, 1973, 102-103; 1978, 122, 146-147. Drinking blood abominable: Leviticus 7:26-27, 17:10-14, Deuteronomy 12:16, 23-24, 15:23.
7. Development of Paul's ritual was complex. Read Mack, 1988, 116-120, 120n15.
8. Shift from Paul's "I received" to "I saw": Mack, 1988, 113n11.
9. In danger every hour: Evidence that composition of 4 Ezra began before Paul's time
10. Wild beasts: Acts 19:23-41.
11. Menander: 1 Cor. 15:33; *The Holy Bible, RSV*, 908.
12. *Psyche, pneuma*: Jonas, 327. Forms: Plato, *Timaeus*.
13. New Covenant Letter: 2 Cor. 2:14-6:13, 7:2-4. Mack, 1995, 127.
14. Severe Letter: 2 Cor. 10-13. Mack, 1995, 127.
15. New Covenant Letter: 2 Cor. 2:14-6:13, 7:2-4. Mack, 1995, 127.
16. Secrets, mystery cults: Smith, 1973, 79-86, 97-113.
17. Collection letter for Corinth: 2 Cor. 8. Mack, 1995, 127.
18. Collection letter for Greece: 2 Cor. 9. Mack, 1995, 127.
19. Trouble: Luke's tale, Acts 19:23-41, probably reflects events in Ephesus in his own day.
20. Cover Letter: 2 Cor. 1:1-2:13 and 7:5-16. Mack, 1995, 127.

—⊕— 14 Paul's Gospel to the Roman Jews and His Letters from Prison

Romans was for the large Jewish population in Rome. Paul knows a number of them, for in the closing chapter he greets many by name, including several relatives. The majority of Jews in Rome probably regarded Paul as a renegade from the Law, and Jesus as a demoniac. Paul, trying to bring his countrymen along, explains why his gospel not only agrees with Jewish tradition, but actually fulfills scripture.

He knows that the Empire's capital city is vital to his purpose:

To all in Rome beloved by Θεός whom Jesus Christ called. I thank the Θεός of me through Jesus Christ for all of you, that your *pistis* is famous throughout the whole *kosmos*. I continually mention you in my prayers when asking that it be the Θεός' will to let me come to you, for I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift so that you may be strengthened—that is, so that I may be comforted together with you through the *pistis* in one another. I want you to know that I often intended to come to you but was kept weak. I am eager to preach the *euangelion* to you in Rome (Romans 1:7-15).

Paul has overstayed his welcome in Ephesus, Greece, and Macedonia. Before going west he will visit Jerusalem, where he fears Zealots and *hasidim*:

I was prevented from coming to you, but no longer is there any place for me in this region, and I wanted for many years to come to you. I will visit you on my way to Spain. Right now I'm taking donations from Macedonia and Greece to the *Ptochos* [Beggars, Ebionites] of the holy men in Jerusalem. The *ethnos* benefited *spiritually* from the holy men, so they can help them *materially*. Then I will go your way and to Spain.

I ask you to pray for my safety from those in Judea who don't believe, and that the holy men in Jerusalem will accept my service (Romans 15:23-31).

Everyone knows about the Θεός even if they don't honor him:

The Θεός shows his wrath from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. Obviously men know whatever can be known of the Θεός because he showed it to them. Ever since the creation of the *kosmos*, all creation has seen and understood his invisible, eternal *dynamis* and divinity—so they have no excuse! But when men came to know the Θεός, they didn't glorify him as Θεός, nor were they thankful, but their reasoning made them vain and darkened their foolish heart. Claiming to be wise, they became foolish (Romans 1:18-22).

Paul recites an early “core litany”¹ that was not necessarily Christian:

Men tried to represent the glory of the incorruptible Θεός with statues of corruptible man, birds, and animals. Therefore the Θεός gave them up as filth in the lusts of their own hearts, dishonoring their own bodies. They changed the truth of the Θεός into a lie and worshipped and served the creature more than the eternal, blessed creator. *Amen* (Romans 1:23-25).

Paul lists a rogue’s gallery of sins and “dishonorable passions,” then follows up with this collection of scriptural excerpts:

Sin rules all *Joudaios* and *Hellenes*, for it is written, “No one is righteous, no, not one. No one understands. Nobody seeks the Θεός. They have all left the way and become worthless. Nobody does good, no, not one” [Psalms 14:1-2, 53:1-2]. “Their throat is an open grave. They use deceit with their tongues. Under their lips is the venom of asps [Psalms 5:9, 140:3]. Their mouth is bitter and curses [Psalms 10:7]. Their feet are quick to shed blood. Their ways are destruction and misery” [Isaiah 59:7-8]. “They don’t fear Θεός” [Psalms 36:1]” (Romans 3:9-18).

Paul promises that wicked rulers and officials will be punished for their misdeeds, and righteous people will live forever:

O man who judges wrongdoers, then does the same, do you think you will escape the judgment of the Θεός? You are saving up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and unveiling of the righteous judgment of the Θεός, who will give to every man according to his deeds (Romans 2:1-6).

Eternal life is for those who patiently keep doing good and thus seek glory, honor, and immortality. Trouble and pain will come upon every *psyche* of man who does evil (Romans 2:7-9).

Paul insists the Torah is a worldly law like any other man-made law, so gentile converts don’t need the Torah. Nevertheless he wants to make peace with *hasidim*, so Jews are still God’s chosen people:

Honor and peace go to everyone doing good, first to the *Joudaios*, then to the *Hellene*, for the Θεός does not respect persons. Those without law who have sinned will perish without law. Those in the Law who have sinned will be judged by the Law. When the *ethnos* without the Law create their own laws and obey the Law naturally, it shows that the Law is written in their hearts and consciences (Romans 2:10-16).

Jews should exercise discretion in following the Torah:

See here, you who calls yourself *Joudaios*, who remains in the Law, boasts of Θεός, knows his will, enjoys fine things, being instructed from the Law, confident that you yourself are a guide of the blind, a light to them who are in darkness!

You dishonor the Θεός by breaking the Law! Because of you, the name of the Θεός is blasphemed among the *ethnos* as scripture says [Isaiah 52:5]. Appearance does not make you *Joudaios*, nor does circumcision of the flesh. Being *Joudaios* is within you. Circumcision is of the heart, in the *pneuma*, not in the letter (Romans 2:17-29).

Following the Torah is one kind of righteousness, but Jesus' *pistis* and self-sacrifice also make righteous those who believe in him:

A kind of righteousness of Θεός has been revealed outside the Law. The Law and the Prophets prove it. It is a righteousness of Θεός by means of *pistis* of Jesus Christ to all and upon all those who believe.

There is no difference. Everyone is a sinner [*i.e.*, imperfect] but is freely made righteous as a gift because of redemption through Christ Jesus' *pistis* (Romans 3:21-24).

Paul retells the story of Abraham's *pistis*, which opened to everyone a way of becoming righteous:

It was not written only for Abraham that God considered his *pistis* as righteousness. It was also for us who believe in the one who raised up Jesus the *Kyrios* of us from the dead, who was handed over for our sins and raised again to make us righteous. Therefore, being made righteous by *pistis*, we have peace with the Θεός through the *Kyrios* of us, Jesus Christ (Romans 4:23-5:1).

That argument was an attempt to retire an archaic but still hallowed set of rules imposed long before to civilize a primitive nation.

Pistis in Jesus assures us of eternal life. He contrasts Adam and Christ:

Now the Θεός sends his love to us—for when we were still sinners, Christ died for us. We will be saved from vengeance through him because we were made righteous by his blood. Formerly enemies, we are reconciled to the Θεός by the death of his son. Therefore we will be saved through his life.

Through one man, sin entered the *kosmos* and death came upon all men. Death reigned from Adam to Moses. Through one man, Jesus Christ, the gift of the Θεός has overflowed to many.

As sin has reigned through death, even so might the gift reign through righteousness to life for *aionion* [cons] through the *Kyrios* of us Jesus Christ (Romans 5:8-21).

When Adam disobeyed the Θεός, evil entered and magically took over the world. Jesus' death magically destroyed death and undid the evil.

Paul explains the struggle between flesh and spirit:

The mind of the flesh is death, but the mind of the *pneuma* is life and peace. So the mind of the flesh hates the Θεός, and does not obey his law (Romans 8:6-8).

The first sentence of the following passage is carefully crafted so that key words and ideas in the first half are repeated in reverse order in the second half. Paul may have used it as a magical incantation (“prayer”). He lives in a magical world:

If the *pneuma* of him who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you, he who raised Jesus from the dead will give you life through that *pneuma*. All those led by the *pneuma* of Θεός are sons of Θεός. You have not received the *pneuma* of slavery and fear. You have received the *pneuma* of adoption, so we cry “*Abba! Pater!*”

The *pneuma* itself says so. With our *pneuma* we are the children of Θεός, and if children, then heirs of Θεός, and joint-heirs with Christ. If we suffer with him, we may also be glorified with him. I think the sufferings of this present time are trifling compared to the glory which will be revealed in us (Romans 8:11-18).

A life of suffering “with” Jesus will earn us eternal life.

Paul regrets that so few Jews have *pistis* in Jesus:

Brothers, my heart’s wish and prayer to the Θεός is for Israel to be saved, for I know they have zeal for Θεός—though not by way of *epignosis* [superknowledge] (Romans 10:1-4; also see 9:1-5).

Paul has *epignosis*, knowledge above all other knowledge.

It is really easy to be saved:

If you confess *Kyrios* Jesus with your mouth and believe in your heart that Θεός raised him from the dead, you will be saved, for scripture says, “Whoever believes in him will not be shamed” [Isaiah 28:16].

There is no difference between *Joudaios* and *Hellene*, for the same *Kyrios* over all gives riches to all who call upon him, for “Whoever calls upon the name of *Kyrios* will be saved” [Joel 2:32]. Isaiah says, “Those who did not seek me found me; I was revealed to those who didn’t ask for me.” He says of Israel, “All day I stretched out my hands to a disobedient and back-talking people” [Isaiah 65:1-2] (Romans 10:9-21).

God’s chosen people won’t listen.

“The *Kyrios*” in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of Jewish scripture that Paul used, always means YHWH, but Paul sometimes chooses to make him Jesus Christ as in the passage above. It made a world of difference to Jews who saw Paul confusing Jesus with God.

God knew his chosen people would reject him, so he cunningly sent Paul to save the gentiles so the Jews would envy them! That will make them realize what a bargain *pistis* in Jesus Christ offers:

Did the Θεός throw his people away? No, for I am an Israelite of the *sperma* of Abraham and the tribe of Benjamin. The Θεός did not throw his people away. He *understood*

them! When Elijah begged the Θεός to destroy Israel, what did he answer? "I have kept seven thousand men for myself who didn't kneel to Baal" [1 Kings 19:10-18]. Today I choose a remnant as a favor to Israel (Romans 11:1-5).

Did the Judeans stumble so they will fall? No! Because of the Judeans' trespasses, salvation went to the *ethnos* to make Israel jealous. I'm an apostle to the *ethnos* to make Israel jealous so I may save some of them (Romans 11:11-14).

This may be the earliest claim that King David was Jesus' ancestor:

Θεός' son Jesus Christ was made of the *sperma* of David through the flesh (Romans 1:3).

Let's again note that Paul's "proof" of Jesus' divinity is not virgin birth:

His resurrection from the dead showed that he was son of Θεός in *dynamis* according to the holy *pneuma* (Romans 1:4).

The Letter to Philemon

Onesimus, a slave, ran away from his owner Philemon and came to Paul. Philemon was the host of an *ekklesia*. Perhaps Onesimus thought Jesus Christ had abolished slavery because Paul said there was no difference between slave and free. But no, the Empire was built on absolute obedience to legal masters. Freeman bought and sold slaves, but even Roman freemen had to obey the emperor; they were his slaves by way of the hierarchy of government officials. Paul feels for master and slave but has to tell Onesimus to go back. It appears that Paul is in prison:

Paul a prisoner of Christ Jesus and brother Timotheus to Philemon our dearly beloved and fellow worker and to our beloved Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and the *ekklesia* in your house.

As an elder and prisoner of Jesus Christ, I plead for my son Onesimus, whom I fathered in my bonds. I have sent him back to you—he who was useless to you but is now useful to both of us.

Receive him as my own heart. I wanted to keep him with me as my own heart to serve me in the bonds of the *euangelion*. I couldn't do that without your permission. Perhaps he left for a spell so that you should get him back forever, not as a *doulon* [slave], but as a beloved brother.

If you consider me a partner, receive him as myself. If he has wronged you or owes anything, charge it to me. I will repay it.

Prepare a room for me also. I trust that through your prayers I will be given to you. Epaphras, my fellow prisoner through Christ Jesus, sends greetings. So do my fellow workers Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke (Philemon 1-25).

Notice the “fellow workers” Mark and Luke whose names would be assigned to gospels decades later. Paul and Epaphras are in prison, probably in Ephesus (2 Cor. 1:1-2:13, 7:5-17). Ephesus was not far from Colossae, which was Philemon’s home, according to a letter written by Paul’s disciples in his name:

Our dear brother Tychichus, a faithful worker and fellow servant in the work of the *Kyrios*, will give you all the news about me. That’s why I’m sending him to you—to encourage you and tell you how we are getting along. Onesimus, faithful and dear brother who belongs to your group, goes with him. Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and so does Mark, Barnabas’ cousin (Colossians 4:10).

We presume that after writing Philemon Paul was released from prison and went to Troas, then Macedonia as we already saw.

The Book of Philippians

Philippians consists of a complete letter and fragments of two others, all pasted together.² The complete letter begins thus:

Paul and Timotheus, slaves of Jesus Christ, to the holy men in Christ in Philippi with the *epi-skopois* [over-seers] and *diakonois* [ministers]... (Philippians 1:1).

That’s the first time we have heard of *episkopois* and *diakonois*, better known as bishops and deacons. They were probably elected by the *ekkle-sia* and not appointed by Paul or another apostle as the apostolic myth would claim decades later.

Paul believes his efforts have given Christians confidence:

Brothers, I want you to know that the things that have happened to me have helped spread the *euangelion* so that my devotion to Christ is obvious throughout the whole palace and everywhere else. My devotion gives most of the brothers in the *Kyrios* more confidence so they keep getting bolder in coming to the word without fear (Philippians 1:12-14).

Palace? Remember that in Macedonia Paul “had no peace and every kind of trouble.” Philippi was a Roman colony and the seat of the emperor’s eastern palace, so there was little tolerance for irregularities. Evidently Paul was in prison there, and his followers could visit him.

He has enemies. It’s unclear whether they are apostles or local Jews:

Some proclaim Christ out of envy and opposition; others through good will. Some preach insincerely out of rivalry, hoping to make my imprisonment worse. I am happy that Christ is preached whether sincerely or not. I rejoice! (Philippians 1:15-18).

We would like to know what was said in the different ways to “proclaim Christ.” What would Paul have said of apostles who said Jesus was only human? We wonder.

Paul may be facing execution. The Philippians have petitioned for his release. He doesn't want to die but has to maintain Stoic-Cynic indifference. He weighs the advantages of martyrdom as though he has a choice. He decides that he would rather live:

I know that I'll be freed through your petition and the help of the *pneuma* of Jesus Christ. I hope I'll be courageous and bring honor to Christ with my whole being whether I live or die. To live is Christ; death is even better. I don't know which I will choose.

Of the two, departing to be with Christ is far better, but it's much more important for you that I remain alive. I'm sure of it, so I know I'll stay. I'll be with you to add to your progress and joy in the *pistis*. When I am with you again, you will have more reason to be proud of me (Philippians 1:19-26).

That melodramatic soliloquy doesn't seem quite real. We're reminded of Hamlet's soliloquy and Socrates' defense in Plato's *Apology*. If we take the above passage at face value, Paul looks forward to “departing” and “living with Christ” rather than “sleeping” or meeting Christ in the air on Judgment Day as in 1 Thessalonians. We wonder why the inconsistency.

Paul wants to be an example of Stoic-Cynic manliness:

It's important to be worthy of the *euangelion* of Christ so that I will hear that you stand firm, one *pneuma* and one *psyche*, and fight together for the *pistis* of the *euangelion*. Don't be afraid of your enemies. Always be courageous. It means you win.

You have been given the privilege of salvation, not only by believing in Christ, but also by suffering for him. It's the same struggle which you *saw* me fight, and now you *hear* from me (Philippians 1:27-30).

Paul's is a cult of persecution and suffering beyond Stoic impassivity.

Some Christians are arrogant. Paul wants them to curb ambition and imitate Jesus in humility, loyalty, and obedience to God:

Think the way Jesus Christ did.

He, though resembling Θεος,

Did not even consider misusing his opportunity to be equal with Θεος.

He humbled himself like a *doulon* [slave], as a man.

Appearing in the form of a man, he humbled himself

And was obedient to death, even to the death of the *stauros*.

So the Θεος exalted him to the highest place

And gave him a name greater than all others

So that every knee will bend at the name of Jesus,

Every knee in heaven, in the earth, and beneath the earth.
 Every tongue will proclaim that Jesus Christ is *Kyrios*
 To the glory of Θεός *Patros* [Father] (Philippians 2:5-11).

Scholars and translators misinterpret that hymn as evidence that Paul thought Jesus was equal to God, but that was a later gentile notion totally incompatible with Paul's Jewish monotheism.³

Christians must "shine as lights" in this evil world:

Do everything as innocent and pure children of Θεός without complaining or arguing, though living in a crooked generation. Shine among them as lights in the *kosmos* [compare Daniel 12:3] as you offer them the word of life. I will boast of you on the day of Christ because it will show that I didn't run in vain (Philippians 2:14-16).

Again Paul contemplates the possibility of martyrdom:

If my life's blood is to be poured out like a sacrificial offering in the service of your *pistis*, I rejoice and share my joy with you.

Finally, brothers, I rejoice in the *Kyrios*. Writing it isn't tiresome, but safety for you (Philippians 2:17-3:1).

That ends the Complete Letter to the Philippians.

In a fragment pasted into Philippians, Paul recalls his visit to Philippi years earlier:

How great is the joy I have in my life in the *Kyrios*! After such a long time you once again showed that you care for me. You Philippians know very well that when I left Macedonia in the early days of preaching the *euangelion*, you were the only *ekklēsia* to help me. You even sent necessities to me in Thessalonika twice. I have everything I need, now that Epaphroditus brought me your gifts. Glory to our Father to the *aiōnas* of the *aiōnon* [eons of the eons]. *Amen* (Philippians 4:10-20).

A second fragment without clue as to place or time is sandwiched between the Complete Letter and the first fragment. Paul attacks the *hasidim* with unusual vigor and again contemplates death in imitation of Christ:

Watch out for dogs, evil doers, and [Jews] who insist on cutting the body. *We* are the true circumcision, worshipping Θεός through the *pneuma*, rejoicing in our life in Christ, and not trusting in superficial rites.

I have the right to trust in the flesh—circumcised on the eighth day, tribe of Benjamin, Hebrew of Hebrews, a Pharisee, *zealotes* persecutor of the *ekklēsia*, blameless under the Law. What a waste!

Gnosis of Christ Jesus, *Kyrios* of me, is so much more valuable. All I want is to know Christ and experience the *dynamis* of his resurrection, share in his suffering, and become like him in his death in the hope that I too will be raised from death.... Brothers,

join in imitating me! Mark those walking as you have as my imitators (Philippians 3:2-17).

Paul weeps for nonbelievers:

I have told you this many times, and I now say it with tears, that many live as enemies of Christ's *stauros* and will end up in destruction. They think only of bodily desires and earthly interests (Philippians 3:18-19).

Do "enemies of Christ's *stauros*" include Jesus people like the Q community? Maybe, but Paul is not that specific about different doctrines.

Next he imagines Jesus' coming and the resurrection:

We are citizens of *Ouranous* [Sky, Heaven] and eagerly wait for our savior to come down, *Kyrios* Jesus Christ. He will change our shameful body so that it will resemble his glorious body. Fill your minds with those things that are good, praiseworthy, noble, right, pure, lovely, and honorable. The Θεός who gives you peace will be with you (Philippians 3:20-4:9).

Never mind that the Torah clearly says that Elohim YHWH made *adam* in his own image and that everything he made was good (Genesis 1:26-31). Paul's attitude toward the "shameful body" is Gnostic.

The compiler of Philippians may have written the closure:

Greetings to all holy people in Christ Jesus. All the holy people here send you greetings, especially those belonging to Caesar's house. May the grace of the *Kyrios* of us Jesus Christ be with all of you (Philippians 4:21-23).

"Caesar's house" is probably Nero's eastern palace in Philippi.

Nothing in Paul's letters indicates that he ever left Macedonia. Nero may have sent him to an ignoble death.

Baptisma

Paul says so much, yet so little, about *baptisma*, "immersion," that we must look at it more closely. Ritual immersion, bathing, and washing, as we saw in chapter five, were ancient Israelite practices,³ probably shared by many other peoples and sects. In the first century CE, Pharisees washed their hands before eating. The Jewish *Yahad* allowed "only those who followed the Torah" into their ceremonies to "enter the waters for the pure meal of the holy men" and "be cleansed by purifying waters, sanctified by rivers and seas, or washed clean by any ablutions whatever."⁴ Josephus said that Essenes bathed before meals, and he sneered

at their habit of washing after toilet.⁵ Also remember that Naaman was healed of leprosy by bathing in the Jordan (2 Kings 5:10-14). There is little reason to doubt that John's *baptisma* in the Jordan was a practice that many Jews would have respected.

The Book of Q says nothing about immersion. Mark told a story about John's immersion of Jesus:

John *ebaptisthe* Jesus in the Jordan, and immediately on coming out of the water, he saw the heavens opened and the *pneuma* like a dove descended upon Jesus... (Mark 1:9-12).

The Signs Source and Signs Gospel (SQ, SG) told that story, but it is now conspicuously absent from the corresponding scene in the Gospel of John:

John testified, "I saw the *pneuma* descend from heaven as a dove and it rested upon Jesus. I didn't know him, but he who sent me to *baptizon* with water told me, 'The one upon whom the holy *pneuma* descends and remains is the one who *baptizon* with the holy *pneuma*. I saw it, and I testify that he is the son of the Θεός'" (John 1:32-34).

The following much-edited passage denies that Jesus immersed:

Jesus and his disciples came into Judea, and he stayed with them and *ebaptizen*. John was also *baptizon* in Aenon because there was much water there. They came for John to *ebaptizonto* them, for he had not yet been thrown into prison. A question arose between some of John's disciples and the *Joudaiois* about purifying, and they came to John and said, "Rabbi, the man with you beyond Jordan of whom you testified, he *baptizei* and everyone comes to him." And John s answered [with a discourse].

When the *Kyrios* knew that the Pharisees heard that Jesus made and *baptizei* more disciples than John (though Jesus himself didn't *ebaptizen*—it was his disciples who did), he left Judea and went into Galilee (John 3:22-4:3).

Jesus scorned such rituals, and so did his earliest followers, for their interest was in exorcising and healing. We presume that the pre-Johannine community immersed long before they heard of Jesus, and when the legend came to them they had no reason to give it up.

Paul became libertine and usually did not "*baptisa*," though some other apostles did. He may have used "*baptisa*" for other rituals, but facts get lost among his metaphors:

Were you *ebaptisthente* in Paul's name? I thank the Θεός that I didn't *ebaptisa* any of you! Only Crispus and Gaius, And Stephanos' household. Maybe some others. Christ sent me to preach, not to *baptizein* (1 Cor. 1:13-17).

We have all been *ebaptisthemen* by one *pneuma* into one body, Judean and *ethnos*, slave and free. We have all been made to drink into one *pneuma* (1 Cor. 12:13).

I am impaled with Christ (Galatians 2:19-20).

Those who have been *ebaptisthene* into Christ have put on Christ (Galatians 3:26-29).

Let me not boast except in the *stauros* of our *Kyrios*, Jesus Christ, by whom the *kosmos* is impaled to me, and I to the *kosmos* (Galatians 6:14).

Don't you know that all of us *ebaptisthemen* into Jesus Christ were *ebaptisthemen* into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by *ebaptisa* into death. As Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we should walk in newness of life. If we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection. Knowing that our old self was impaled with Jesus so that the body of sin is destroyed, we should not serve sin any more. We are in the likeness of his resurrection (Romans 6:3-9).

Paul may not have used any water in his "*baptisma*" ceremony.

The Colossian *ekklesia*. Paul's disciples continued to "*baptisa*," as indicated by a letter which they wrote in Paul's name:

You are buried with Christ by way of *baptismati*, and you are risen with him by way of *pistis* in the workings of the Θεός, who raised him from the dead. He blotted out the handwriting of laws against us, took it away, and nailed it to his *stauros* (Colossians 2:12-14).

Clearly Christians had some kind of initiation ceremony of magical or symbolic significance.⁶

Paul disappears from history after his prison letters. It is likely that he died or was executed in Philippi. No hard evidence shows that he ever got to Jerusalem, Spain, or Rome as he planned.

The plot of Luke-Acts demands that Paul set an example of steadfastness for Christians and that he bring the Jewish gods to Rome. Therefore he scripts Paul's melodramatic journey to Jerusalem, the mob scene, and trial, all in imitation of Christ. Paul's protective custody in Caesarea and his appeal to Nero for justice create occasion for more drama and speeches. Even while awaiting trial before Nero for teaching "this sect spoken against everywhere," Paul tries to teach the Jews, but they leave to debate his doctrines among themselves. He teaches the *basileia* of God for two whole years without interference. Luke lets us suppose that Nero condemned and martyred Paul in Rome—a very nice touch for the story of the ideal apostle for a cult of suffering and persecution that would overcome Stoicism, the predominant philosophy of the Empire. Luke's tale enables Paul to get to Rome in spirit, even if his

flesh failed his *psyche* and *pneuma*. Paul would surely have appreciated Luke's effort to further his own work among gentiles and Jews, and his skill in writing a comprehensive and coherent *euangelion* for that purpose.

Paul's *euangelion* is known only from his letters, which are among the oldest and most precious documents in the New Testament, and the earliest in the New Testament to contain that word, *euangelion*. Paul himself said the *euangelion* of Jesus Christ had been written. Good candidates for that distinction are the Signs Source and Passion Source, whether they had already been combined as the Signs Gospel or not.

What was Paul's *euangelion*, his "good news"? First, that the Messiah of Jewish fable came to break the powers of evil and death on earth. Second; that the Messiah made everybody righteous if they believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and live under the *basileia* of God on earth. Third, that the righteous will be resurrected and live in the *basileia* of God in the sky forever.

Unfortunately, Paul gave us no biography of Jesus. Far from it. He wrote only of the mythical Lord Jesus Christ. He had no use for the real man. He pushed Jesus himself into the mists of the past. His consulting Peter, who apparently knew Jesus, doesn't help much, because Paul was interested only in the "mysteries" that Peter might offer, not biography. And anything Paul learned he bent to his own purposes.

However, Paul shows that James was a real person. If he was Jesus' brother, Jesus must have existed, and about the time the gospels say.

Now we must catch up on some other Jesus movements in and near Palestine as Paul spread his Christ cult in Europe and Asia Minor.

NOTES

1. Core of teaching: Mack, 1995, 139.
2. First Prison Letter: Philippians 4.10-20. Second Prison letter: Philippians 1.1-3.1. Third Prison Letter: Philippians 3:2-4:9. Mack, 1995, 144-146.
3. Arius fought Jesus' equality with God (ch. 27). Also see Buzzard & Hunting, 97-102.
3. Jewish rituals of bathing and washing: Exodus 29, 30, 40, Leviticus 8, 11, 14-17, 22, Num. 8, 19, Deut. 21, 23, 2 Kings 5, Job 9, Psalms 26, 51, 58, 73. Isaiah 1, 4, Ezekiel 16.
4. *Yahad* immersed: *Manual of Discipline*, 3, 5, Vermes, 74-75.
5. Essenes bathing, washing: Josephus, *Jewish War*, 2:124-163.
6. Paul's baptisms: Smith, 1973, 97-114.



15 Jesus Schools: Anecdotes and Pronouncement Stories

From Galilee the early Jesus movement spread into the Hellenistic cities of southern Syria where Jews were a significant minority. Damascus was but a hundred miles from Galilee on the great caravan route to the East. In the west was the Mediterranean coast and the city of Ptolemais where Petronius encamped in 39-40. Tyre and Sidon lay just twenty-five miles or so to the north. The anecdotes and pronouncement stories were probably created in Tyre or Sidon.¹ Years later, also in one of those cities the anecdotes and pronouncement stories would furnish Mark with lifelike character studies and pungent argumentation for his “biography” of Jesus.²

The anecdotes and pronouncement stories give us a peek into a Jewish community where early Jesus people were confronted by harsh criticism from Pharisees, family, neighbors, and synagogues. Observant Jews and *hasidim* regarded Jesus people as unclean and disloyal to YHWH. Jesus people took up those issues in their schools. How would Jesus have responded to such abuse? In a combined Cynic, Pharisee, and Hellenistic tradition they crafted witty replies and developed them into realistic anecdotes and pronouncement stories.

This anecdote defies customary attitudes about afflictions:

In Capernaum people heard that Jesus was in a house exorcising and healing. So many came in that nobody else could get in the door. Four men brought a *paralytikon* [paralyzed person] to be healed but couldn't even get to the door. So they went up on the roof, made a hole above Jesus, and lowered the cot with the *paralytikon* on it. When Jesus saw their *pistis* he said, “Child, your sins are forgiven.”

Certain scribes sitting there thought, “Why does he speak such blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but the One, the Θεός?”

Jesus read their minds and asked them, “Why do you argue? Look, is it easier to tell the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, pick up your cot, and walk’? Never mind. Just so that you may know that the son of *anthropos* has power on earth to forgive sins,” (he turned to the *paralytikon*) “Get up! Take up your bed and go home!” Immediately the boy did so (Mark 2:1-10).

Behind the tale is the assumption that afflictions are God's way of punishing people for sinning. The word, “affliction,” itself reveals that assumption. It comes from the Latin *afflictare*, “to vex” or “to injure.”

Who is vexing or injuring the afflicted one? A spirit, a god, or God himself, and it is doing it deliberately. Sick people are getting what they deserved. They don't deserve help, for you wouldn't interfere with divine retribution, would you? But Jesus said afflicted people were sick. They should be nursed in the hope of recovery and in any case made to feel more comfortable. We detect Hippocrates' rejection of spiritual causes of disease.³ Besides, Jesus said, the Θεός is not vengeful:

The *Pater* makes the sun rise upon the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and unrighteous. He is kind to the unthankful and to the evil (QS 9; Luke 6:35, Matthew 5:45).

Each anecdote and pronouncement story contains a "challenge" and a "response." Suppose a Cynic healer is treating a sick man. A critic challenges him, saying the man is sick because he sinned, so God punished him; therefore the healer shouldn't try to heal or comfort him. The Cynic responds, "Which is easier—heal him, or tell him his sins are forgiven?"

Confusion! The critic himself can't heal, but he can forgive. But only God can forgive sins. On the other hand, there are many conditions not even the best physician can remedy. But he can try to make the patient more comfortable. And who knows the mind of God? How do we know that God is afflicting this man for sinning?

Or the patient admits to a sin and the justice of God's punishment. "God will forgive you," says the Cynic, "and you will get well." An onlooker says that only God can forgive sins. The Cynic replies, "Is it easier to heal him, or to say his sins are forgiven?" The critic can't heal but could comfort the sick by saying that God is kind and forgiving and will make him well.

"It is easier to forgive than to heal" is obvious and universal. It has a certain ring of authority. It is a "pronouncement." When Jesus' followers cast Jesus' repartee as a pronouncement, they transformed an anecdote into a pronouncement story.

The story of the paralytic contains another pronouncement, "The son of *anthropos* has power to forgive on earth." Obviously God is the only one with power to remit sins. But *on earth* any "child of *adam*" can forgive anyone else. Wouldn't that help people get along with one another? It is a very evident, universal truth that is overlooked too often.

Let's note that telling people their sins were forgiven set the Jesus people against Temple priests who depended on regular contributions of "sin offerings."⁴

The anecdote was a Hellenistic literary form. It was a carefully designed tale around a critic's challenge to a sage, and the sage's response. Students in many Hellenistic philosophical schools were taught how to compose anecdotes to contrast sages' characters and their philosophies. They added realistic details and color.

The anecdote did not explain or try to prove the pronouncement. It stood on its own. It was self-evident. But anecdotes raised Jesus' character from that of a country sage to the level of scribes and priests in Jerusalem. And beyond, for Jesus creates laws. He judges. He is his own master. He rules a grassroots movement of common people. He will rule the world. Mark used anecdotes and pronouncement stories to show that Jesus was son of God and above all men, even the Temple establishment.

Some of the pronouncement stories deal with food rules, indicating that at least some Jesus people in Syria joined their Syrian neighbors in table fellowship. When *hasidim* accused them of associating with "unclean" folk, the Jesus school crafted this anecdote:

When Pharisees criticized Jesus for eating with toll collectors and unclean people, he retorted, "Look, I'm healing *sinners*, not the righteous!" (Mark 2:13-17).

Common sense tells us that a healer can't treat sick people without visiting them. Besides, physicians don't usually catch their patients' diseases. Eating with despised toll collectors and unclean people didn't make Jesus unclean. Jews can't be a light for people in darkness unless they associate and make friends with them.

The Sabbath law was a perennial difficulty. *Hasidim* observed Sabbath rest to absurdity because the Torah not only reiterated it but actually prescribed death for violating it:

Six days are for working, but the seventh is a holy day, a Sabbath of rest to YHWH. **Whoever works on the Sabbath will be put to death.** You will not kindle a fire in your homes on the Sabbath day (Exodus 35:2-3; see Exodus 20:8-11, Deuteronomy 5:12-15).

Observant Jews prepared the Sabbath meal before sundown on Friday to avoid "working" on the Sabbath (Saturday). Jesus people thought it unreasonable to obey the Sabbath commandment so strictly. Other nations had no such weekly holiday; every day was the holy day of one or another of the planetary gods. Don't we still honor the Sun, the Moon, Tieu, Woden, Thor, Frei, and Saturn in the names of the days of the week? Ours are Germanic gods except Saturn; Romance languages tend to stick with Roman gods.

The following legal-sounding argument makes Jesus *seem* to be an authority on scripture. It is in fact an example of Cynic audacity:

Jesus went through grain fields on the Sabbath, and his disciples plucked grain as they went. The Pharisees asked them, "Why do you break the Law?" Jesus asked, "Didn't you read that David ate Abiathar's bread in the house of the Θεός and shared it with his comrades when he was hungry? The Sabbath was made for *anthropos*, not *anthropos* for the Sabbath, so the son of *anthropos* is *kyrios* of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:23-28).

That last sentence is the pronouncement. Everybody knew that God created the two *adams*, male and female humans, *before* he took his day of rest. And for whom did God create the whole universe but humanity?

Somehow this anecdote seems to relate Jesus to King David:

David came to Ahimelech the priest, who, afraid, asked, "Why are you alone?" David said, "I serve King Saul, so give me five loaves, or what you have." Ahimelech said, "I have no common bread, only sacred bread, provided the young men are celibate." David said, "We are celibate, and the bread is in a sense common." So Ahimelech gave David the hallowed bread placed before YHWH the day before (1 Samuel 21:1-6).

Never mind that the priest was Ahimelech, not Abiathar. The Jesus scholars were not scribes of the Law and the Prophets.

This anecdote relies on common sense and Jesus' authority:

When they criticized Jesus for healing on the Sabbath, he asked, "Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath, or to do evil? To save life, or to kill?" (Mark 3:1-6).

Jesus people mocked *hasidim* who observed traditional days of fasting:

When Pharisees and John's disciples asked Jesus, "Why don't your disciples fast?" Jesus replied, "Can the children of the bride chamber fast while the bridegroom is with them?" (Mark 2:19).

Obviously not. It's absurd for people enjoying the fullness and abundance of life to deprive themselves unnecessarily. Nevertheless, in due time Jesus' followers fell back on customs they formerly ridiculed. They fasted in Jesus' memory:

"The time will come when the bridegroom is taken from them. *Then* they will fast" (Mark 2:20).

Jesus people, strongly influenced by Hellenistic thought, regarded many Jewish customs as uncivilized. The following pronouncements imply that the Torah was a relict of a barbarous age and should be abandoned, to be replaced with the modern ethical principles that Jesus espoused:

Nobody uses new cloth to patch old clothes. The patch pulls at the old cloth and makes the tear worse! Not only that, but no one puts new wine into old containers. New wine bursts the container, leaking out, and the container is ruined. New wine must be put into new containers! (Mark 2:21-22).

Throw out the Law of Moses and the Prophets! That may have been hyperbole or an extremist view. Not many Jesus people were prepared to go that far if they considered themselves Jews.

At first Jesus people thought of Jesus as an exorcist and sage. Schools were more interested in the sage, but as they composed anecdotes he became a scholar and lawyer fully capable of disputing with Pharisees on legalisms of the Torah. But Jesus does not use the Torah as authority. The logic of the anecdote was “challenge and response”—a critic’s attack on a Cynic followed by the Cynic’s reply. If the reply is a universal truth, it is a pronouncement. At first his pronouncements were true because they were true, but as his stature rose in the schools Jesus became his own authority. His pronouncements became true because he said them. Jesus had become lawmaker, judge, and ruler.

Pronouncement stories contrast sharply with Paul’s Pharisee argumentation and knowledge of scripture. Decades later, Mark found the pronouncement stories so useful that he used twenty-eight of them in his tale. Ultimately the *hasidim* kept the synagogues, the Torah, and the authority to interpret it. The Jesus people were shut out and “dead” to the main Jewish community.⁵ But that lay in the future. Early in the movement, most Jesus people and observant Jews tried to get along with each other. If only that other guy would see the light!

Next we look at Galilean Jesus people who went to Jerusalem to compete with Zealots for Israel’s heart and soul.

NOTES

1. Tyre or Sidon home of pronouncement stories: Mack, 1988, 94-95; 1995, 58.
2. Mark’s pronouncement stories: Mack, 1988, 54-62, 198-203, 379-384, 1995, 314-316.
3. Hippocrates: *On the Sacred Disease*. In *Great Books*, v. 10.
4. Sin offerings: Leviticus 5:13, 6:16-18, 26-29, 7:6-10, etc.
5. Analysis of pronouncement stories is based on Mack, 1988, 172-207, and 1995, 54-60, 314-316.

— ⊕ — 16 The Beggars of the Holy Men

Paul, looking for apostles in Jerusalem, found only Peter and James:

After my revelation I didn't go immediately to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but returned again to Damascus. Three years later I went up to Jerusalem to learn from *Petros* and stayed with him fifteen days, but I didn't see the other apostles except James the brother of the *Kyrios* (Galatians 1:16-19).

Neither Acts (1:14-20) nor the gospels call James an apostle. One other brother of Jesus, at least, was an apostle (1 Cor. 9:5). Q never mentions Jesus' brothers, but Mark (6:3) lists James, Joses, Judas, and Simon. "Brother" can mean anything, but in context the ordinary literal meaning is that Mary had five sons including Jesus and some daughters.

Paul spoke with James again, about 53 CE. He had been preaching to gentiles and wanted assurance about his *euangelion*:

Fourteen years later, obeying an *apokalypsin*. I went up to Jerusalem with Barnabas and Titus. Privately to highly respected men. I presented the *euangelion* which I proclaim to the *ethnesi*, in case I was wasting my effort. They didn't even make Titus—a *Hellene*—be circumcised! False brothers spied on our "liberty-through-Christ-Jesus," trying to enslave us again, but I didn't give in even though they acted like big shots with men consulting them. They meant nothing to me! (Galatians 2:1-6).

Hasidic tolerance of Titus the Greek surprised Paul more than did Zealot antagonism against himself. As for his preaching, James, Kephias, and one John made the momentous decision that he could preach his *euangelion* to the gentiles:

When James, *Kephias*, and John—who seemed to be pillars, saw that the *euangelion* of the gentiles was entrusted to me as the apostleship to the Judeans was to *Petros*—and saw the gift that was given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship and agreed that we'd go to the *ethne*, and they to the Judeans. They asked only that we remember the *Ptochoi* [Beggars]—which I would do anyway (Galatians 2:7-10).

Paul will "remember" the *Ptochoi* by bringing them donations:

Concerning the collection for the holy men... let each one put aside... to send to Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:1-2; also see 2 Cor. 8,9).

Now I'm going to Jerusalem to serve the holy men, for Macedonia and Greece were glad to donate to the *Ptochous* of the holy men in Jerusalem (Romans 15:25-26).

Those *Ptochoi* are holy men, not the riff-raff sort of beggar. We suppose they included James, Kephaz-Peter, John, and others. We know that at least some Jesus people and Christian Jews were called *Ptochoi* or *Ebionim* until at least 400 CE. We suggest that it was an ancient Jewish tradition of some holy men to take a vow of poverty and live on hand-outs. Jesus' followers probably gave the tradition a new form and life. They are working with *hasidim* and Zealots in the Jewish apostolic program.

In a rare glimpse of apostles at work in Antioch, we see the long reach of *hasidim* or Zealots from Jerusalem:

When *Petros* came to Antioch, I told him off because he ate with the *ethnos*—until certain men came from James! Then he withdrew and separated himself! He was afraid of [the *hasidim*!] (Galatians 2:10-14).

In Antioch Jews had “liberty-through-Christ-Jesus” except when *hasidim* visited. But if *hasidim* “came from James,” then James himself had to be some kind of hasidic. We surmise that he studied the Torah, became a priest, and achieved some standing in the Temple and the Jewish apostolic program.

Zealots got James and some others in the end, says Josephus:

Ananus the high priest, a Sadducee, was a bold, insolent man, and most rigid in judging offenders. He thought he was in luck when Festus died and Albinus had not yet arrived, so he convened the *Sanhedrin* of judges to accuse and try James the brother of Jesus called Christ, and some of James' companions as lawbreakers. They were judged guilty, and he handed them over to be stoned. Impartial citizens and those who regarded Ananus' action illegal, secretly sent word to the king [Agrippa II] and Albinus, asking them to prevent Ananus from doing more. Albinus sent Ananus a threatening letter, and Agrippa replaced him with Jesus the son of Dammas (Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 20:9:1).

A Christian edited that passage, for Josephus would not have called any man “Christ” without a sneer.¹

Evidently there was open conflict between Jesus people and Zealots. Ananus was a Zealot who wanted to get rid of James and other men he regarded as undesirable. He moved against them in the month after the procurator of Judea, Porcius Festus, died, and before Luceius Albinus arrived.. James and his allies were tried and killed in 62 CE.

About a century later, Hegesippus (100-180 CE) wrote a somewhat legendary account. A Christian Jewish writer from Palestine, he said that

James observed Nazarite vows, studied the Torah, wore priestly linen robes, and entered the Holy of Holies in the Temple as a priest. He was called James the Righteous for his piety and hours of daily prayer in the sanctuary. "Scribes and Pharisees" threw James off a parapet to be stoned. A fuller clubbed him to death. Hegesippus implied that James' death led to the First Revolt. Actually many other outrages occurred in the four years that passed before the revolt began.

James was probably one of the lower priests who sided with the poor against the aristocratic high priestly families. The high priests abused the lower priests and finally stopped paying them.²

Some of the Jesus people held James in very high regard, for the Gospel of Thomas represented him as a god.

The Christian apostolic myth was that God gave "authority" to Jesus, who chose twelve disciples and gave them "authority" as -apostles. After he died the apostles fanned out, founded *ekklesias* everywhere, and passed their divine "authority" on to the elders and bishops of *ekklesias*. Luke went all out to promote that myth to support bishops and elders in their claim to have absolute power from God.

Luke, as he copied Mark's narrative, introduced the word, "apostles," beginning with the ordination and mission stories:

Jesus called his disciples and chose twelve whom he called **apostles**... He sent them out...(Luke 6:13).

When the **apostles** returned, they told him everything they had done (Luke 9:1-10).

Luke used "apostle" four more times in the gospel, and twenty-five times in Acts. He had Jesus Christ himself, in heaven, appoint Paul an apostle on the road to Damascus. Paul's apostleship rubbed off onto Barnabas. Thus Luke changed the meaning of "apostle" forever. Apostleship was now a uniquely Christian phenomenon and severed completely from its Jewish origin.³

But the Gospel of Mark did not support the apostolic myth. An editor—maybe Luke himself—substituted "apostles" for "disciples" on their return from the mission of the twelve:

Jesus ordained twelve to be with him and send forth to preach... and Simon he called *Petros*... (Mark 3:14ff).

He called the twelve and sent them forth... (Mark 6:7-13).

The **apostles** returned to him and told him what they did and taught (Mark 6:30).

In Matthew's gospel, the editor inserted "apostles" *before* the mission:

The names of the twelve **apostles** are... (Matthew 10:2).

Now all three synoptics support the apostolic myth. (We'll look at the Great Commission later on.) The Gospel of John escaped that revision, for it never mentions "apostles."

Twelve disciples? The sources of the Gospel of John didn't know about Jesus' "twelve" disciples. SQ listed Andrew, Simon Peter, Philip, Nathanael, and "another disciple" (John 1:35-40), who has traditionally been identified with "pillar" John (p. 140), the son of Zebedee, and the author of the Gospel of John.

PQ had invented Judas Iscariot to thicken his plot with betrayal, and he used Homer's Melanthius for his model.⁴ *Iscariot* may be a corruption of *sicarius*, "assassin." An editor added Thomas, "the sons of Zebedee," and "the twelve" to the Gospel of John (6:67-71, 20:24-29).

The Gospel of Thomas names Thomas, James, Simon Peter, Mary, Salome, and Matthew. We suggest that James, Andrew, John, Simon Peter, Philip, Nathanael, Matthew, Thomas, Mary, and Salome were early members of the Jesus movement and perhaps knew him personally.

The following passage is the only time Paul mentions the "twelve." We can't resolve them, the "five hundred," or "all the apostles" with James, Peter, and John as leaders of the Jesus movement:

Kephas saw [the risen Jesus], then the twelve. After that over five hundred brothers saw him at once, mostly still living. After that, James saw him, then all the apostles. And last of all I saw him also, like one overdue at birth (1 Cor. 15:5-8).

"Kephas saw him, then the twelve" ignores James as leader when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians. It was inserted long after Paul's time to support Luke's resurrection tales. The editor deposed James and put him just ahead of "all the apostles and last of all Paul." That was done to weaken the authority of Jewish Jesus sects that rejected the myths of Paul and Luke's gentile Christ cult. We don't know where the "five hundred brothers" came from, or "all the apostles." Perhaps they were in popular stories of Luke's time, now lost.

Then Ananus the Zealot became high priest. When Porcius Festus died, the Zealots evidently thought the way was clear for them to establish total control of Jerusalem. We suspect they appointed the traditional "twelve judges" over the "twelve tribes" of Israel at that time. That

possibility is suggested by a scroll left by the Zealots at Qumran, that speaks of organizing the “twelve tribes” to recapture Jerusalem from foreign rule.⁵

The following Q Saying indicates that the Jesus movement appointed its own twelve judges in such a time of great stress:

Jesus said, “You *stayed* with me. I appoint to you a *basileia* as my Father has appointed to me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my *basileia* and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Luke 22:28-30, Matthew 19:28; QS 62).

James may have appointed the first twelve “judges” of the Jesus movement. After he and his companions were killed, Kephaz-Peter became leader and appointed those in Mark’s list, the first such that we have. They were the “judges” of the Jesus people until the First Revolt broke out in 66 CE. Matthew agreed with Mark’s list, but Luke substituted for Thaddeus “Judas brother of James.” He lets us think that Judas was also Jesus’ brother. Nathanael in John’s list reflects a time before Mark wrote his gospel. The following table compares the lists in the four gospels and Acts.

The Disciples in the Gospels and Acts

Mark 3:16-19	Matthew 10: 2-4; 16:17	Luke 6:14-16	Acts 1:13	John 1:40-45, 6:71, 11:16, 21:2, etc.
Simon Peter	Simon Peter <i>Barjona</i>	Simon Peter	Peter	Simon Peter son of <i>Jona</i>
Andrew (4th in list)	Andrew	Andrew	Andrew	Andrew and another disciple
James & John <i>Boanerges</i> , sons of Zebedee	James & John, sons of Zebedee	James & John	James & John	Sons of Zebedee
Philip	Philip	Philip	Philip	Philip
Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Bartholomew	
Matthew	Matthew	Matthew	Matthew	
Thomas	Thomas	Thomas	Thomas	Thomas
James son of Alpheus	James son of Alpheus	James son of Alpheus	James son of Alpheus	
Simon the <i>Kananaos</i>	Simon the <i>Kananaos</i>	Simon called <i>Zelotes</i>	Simon called <i>Zelotes</i>	
Thaddeus	Lebbeus called Thaddeus			
		Judas the brother of James	Judas the brother of James	
				Nathanael
Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot

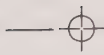
PQ and the Signs Gospel had already made Judas Iscariot's name infamous long before the revolt. Sometime after Peter made his appointments, one of the twelve let the others down, so "Judas Iscariot" was a natural nickname to give him. Mark assumed everyone would know his real name.

Other surnames indicate reputations for violence earned in the savagery of the First Revolt: *Barjona* ("terrorist"); *Boanerges* ("Sons of Rage"); *Zealotes*; and *Kananaios* (Aramaic for "Zealot").

No Jerusalem church in Paul's time. Eusebius anachronistically called James the first bishop of Jerusalem, and many scholars assume that James, Peter, and John led a church in Jerusalem. As far as we know there was no such thing as a "church" at that time, for our word "church" or "kirk" came from the Greek *Kyri-akon*, "Lord's house," which is not in the New Testament. James, Peter, and John were "holy men" working in the Temple. Luke used *ekklesia* for gatherings of Jesus people and Christians—and also for a mob which the silversmiths "called out" to protest Christianity's threat to tourist traps in Artemis' temple. Luke's use of *ekklesia* for the holy men in Jerusalem is just plain wrong, as is translators' "church."⁶ James, Peter, and John worked in the Temple as leaders of a liberal Jewish sect. They were the *Ptochoi* of the holy men whom Paul consulted, and for whom he collected money.

NOTES

1. Editing of Josephus' work: Brandon, 151-153; also see Funk, *Honest to Jesus*, 222.
2. Hegeippus' account of James: Eusebius, 2:23. Brandon, 16-21, 49-56.
3. "Apostles" in Luke 6:13, 9:10, 11:49, 17:5, 22:14, 24:10. In Acts: Acts 1:2, 26, 2:37, 43, 4:33, 36, 5: 12, 18, 29, 34, 40, 6:6, 8:1, 14, 9:27, 11:1, 15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23, 33, 14:4,14, 16:4. Paul and Barnabas are both apostles: Acts 14:4,14.
4. Judas Iscariot, Melanthis: *Odyssey* 17:256-273, 22:142-193, 474-477; MacDonald, 38.
5. Twelve tribes: *E.g.*, Genesis 49:28, Exodus 24:4, 28:21, 3:14, Joshua 3-4, Ezekiel 47:13. Also James 1:1, Revelations 21:10ff. War Scroll, columns ii, iii, v; Vermes, 17-18, 125-130. See bibliography for other translations of the Dead Sea scrolls.
6. Luke calls Jerusalem group an *ekklesia*: Acts 2:47, 5:11, 7:38, 8:1, 11:22, 26, 12:1, 5, 14:27, 15:3, 4, 22, 18:22, 20:17, 28. He calls Ephesian mob an *ekklesia*: Acts 19:24-41. Also in Acts, Luke used Paul's meager information in the two passages at the head of this chapter to elaborate his "Jerusalem church" led by James the brother of Jesus, with Kephas and John. The Jesus Seminar is studying this matter. A preliminary report indicates that there is no evidence for a Jerusalem church in the 50's, or for many other "facts." See Dennis Smith, 2000.



When Agrippa I died his son was too young to rule Palestine, so Claudius Caesar sent Crispus Fadus to govern. That was in 44. Two years later Claudius let Agrippa II rule Chalcis, a small territory in Syria, and replaced Fadus with Tiberius Alexander, brother of the famous Philo of Alexandria. Of Tiberius Alexander and Crispus Fadus, Josephus says they “left [Jewish] customs strictly alone and kept the nation at peace.”

In 48 CE Claudius sent Ventidius Cumanus to govern Palestine. In 52 two disturbances broke out during the Feast of Unleavened Bread following Passover. The first took place in the Temple courtyard, where the crowds of pilgrims were as usual under the watchful eyes of the soldiers at the adjacent Fortress Antonia. This time one of the soldiers made an indecent gesture. Immediately a group of young hotheads threw rocks at the soldiers, and the rest of the crowd joined in. Cumanus sent infantry into the courtyard to subdue the crowd. But the crowd panicked, ran for the exits, and stampeded thousands to death.

The other incident took place in Samaria as streams of pilgrims traveled to the feast. Samaritans attacked one group and killed a Galilean. The Jews asked Cumanus to send troops to arrest the guilty men. He ignored them, and when that news came to Jerusalem, many Jews went into Samaria for vengeance. Outlaws among them murdered Samaritans and Jews indiscriminately. Cumanus sent horsemen who captured many of the outlaws, but in the confusion other criminals plundered Samaritan villages and massacred the inhabitants.

Samaritans and Jews separately sent delegations to Claudius and Numidius Quadratus, legate of Syria. Quadratus captured and beheaded some of the outlaws and sent Cumanus to Rome to explain his actions to Claudius. Claudius banished Cumanus and sent Antonius Felix to rule Palestine. Claudius ordered three of the Samaritans executed and sent one of Cumanus’ tribunes to Jerusalem for torture and beheading.

In 54 CE Claudius made Agrippa king over his Syrian territories. Later that year Claudius died, and Nero became emperor. Nero gave Agrippa four cities and surrounding lands in Galilee and Perea to rule.

Zealots began a reign of terror in Jerusalem. They used daggers hidden in their bosoms, so they were called *sicarii*, “assassins.” Their first victim was Jonathan the high priest. Every day they stabbed or cut

the throat of somebody. At festivals the crowds of pilgrims were terrorized. There was no way to protect oneself, and the *sicarii* were never caught.

Frauds worked crowds up into religious frenzy by telling them that God would liberate Israel. They promised to show them miraculous “signs” and led them out into the desert, where they died. Other religious frauds and crony outlaws formed small bands which enslaved people to help them go through the countryside plundering, killing, and burning. Felix sent horsemen and soldiers to slaughter them.

The “Egyptian,” a self-proclaimed holy man, gathered a large crowd in the wilderness at the Mount of Olives with the intention of capturing Jerusalem. Felix caught, killed, or scattered the crowd. Luke used the incident in his story.¹

A riot broke out in Caesarea between Jewish and Syrian residents, who had long quarreled about the governance of the city. Felix broke up the riot and sent leaders from each side to Rome to ask Nero Caesar to decide the question. Caesar, busy performing in theaters and circuses, put off deciding the issue.

Nero gave Agrippa II the title of king in 59 CE. Agrippa appointed Ananus as high priest in Jerusalem.

Felix ruled harshly, executing many and sending others to Nero in Rome, but he cleared the countryside of outlaws.

In 60 CE Nero sent Porcius Festus to govern Judea. In Luke’s tale, Festus kept Paul imprisoned at his palace in Caesarea until he appealed for justice from Nero. There is no evidence that Paul was still alive at that time, let alone that he was in Judea.²

Of Festus, Josephus in *War* says only that he killed or captured many bandits, “the chief curse of the country.” In *Antiquities*, as we saw in the previous chapter, he tells of Festus’ sudden death three months after arrival. Festus’ office remained vacant for more than a month before Luceius Albinus got to Palestine.

Ananus the newly appointed high priest took over as ruler of Judea, but that didn’t keep outlaws and Zealots from taking advantage of the confusion. Ananus himself took advantage of the situation on behalf of *hasidim* and Zealots, for he arrested James and several other men and accused them before the Sanhedrin of transgressing the Torah. (Keep in mind that different groups had different interpretations of the Torah, and that Zealots and some *hasidim* regarded Jesus people as lawbreakers.) The Sanhedrin pronounced James and his associates guilty and had them stoned to death as the Torah prescribed.

Many in Jerusalem were enraged. Prominent citizens went to Alexandria, where Albinus was expected to arrive. Other citizens met King Agrippa II, who was on route to Alexandria to welcome Albinus and conduct him to Judea. On arrival, Agrippa immediately replaced Ananus with Jesus son of Dammaeus as high priest.³

James' friends eulogized and mythologized him:

The disciples asked, "Who will lead us after you leave?" Jesus replied, "No matter where you are, go to James the Righteous, for whom heaven and earth came into being" (Thomas 12:1-2).

Tension between conservative superpatriots and far-seeing liberals caused the wrongful death of James and his companions.

Only a long period of enforced peace, justice, and education could have healed the rift in the Jewish social fabric. As it happened, Nero Caesar let greedy and abusive procurators push the Jews into revolt against the Empire four years later. Albinus not only levied crippling taxes but robbed the people in every way he could. Outlaws bribed him to ignore their crimes. He even took bribes for the release of convicted criminals. Rascals everywhere formed gangs who roamed the countryside looking for victims to rob.

Soon after Albinus' arrival, a certain peasant came to Sukkot, the harvest feast held in late September or early October. Perhaps he had just been dispossessed as a result of Albinus' corruption. His name was Jesus bar Ananias. One day he stood in the Temple and began shouting, "A voice from the east! A voice from the west! A voice from the four winds! A voice against Jerusalem and the Temple! A voice against bridegrooms and brides! A voice against everyone!"

Jesus bar Ananias' prophesying went on night and day, and it upset everybody. They beat him to shut him up, but in vain. Priests took him to Albinus, who interrogated and whipped him, but he only moaned, "Woe to Jerusalem!" with every blow. Albinus declared him insane and let him go. Jesus kept it up. Josephus listed Jesus' prophecies among the "signs" of doom for Jerusalem. The revolt began four years later. After another three years, during a siege by the Roman army, one of their *ballistas* killed him.⁴

Gessius Florus was appointed procurator of Palestine in 64. He brought the news that Nero had decided that Syrians, not Jews, would govern Caesarea. After that, Syrians insulted and attacked Jews at will, and Florus punished any Jew who complained. Florus was openly

corrupt and bragged about it. Nero probably appointed him because their wives were friends.

In Rome, Nero wasted public funds on frivolous pursuits such as circuses, plays, and musical performances. The Great Fire broke out in July, 64, the work of arsonists who ran through the city with flaming torches to set fire to every home—everything from shacks to mansions including Nero's. They burned temples, monuments, and warehouses of food supplies for the city. Rome burned for six days. Then new fires were started, and they burned three more days. Nero's enemies said he put on theatrical costume and climbed the Tower of Maecenas to watch the fire while playing the lyre and singing *The Sack of Ilium*.⁵ They accused him of having the arsonists burn the city so he might rebuild it with more style.

Tacitus (50-117 CE) says that Nero blamed Christians for the fire, so he rounded them up and inflicted them with "exquisite tortures." Some he nailed to crosses; others he dressed in animal skins for dogs to tear to pieces in the theater. Still others he burned as torches at night to light up the games in the circuses. Tacitus says that this "most mischievous superstition" was one of many popular "things hideous and shameful" that settled in Rome from "all parts of the world;" that Romans hated Christians for their "abominations" and for hating humankind; and that the movement came from Judea, where Pontius Pilate had suppressed it by executing one "Christus" and where it had recently broken out again as well as in Rome.⁶ Suetonius (69-140 CE) does not link Christians to the fire, but he lists among Nero's "reforms" laws to punish that "sect professing a new and mischievous superstition"—the Christians.⁷

We cannot accept Tacitus and Suetonius' histories as primary sources, for they may have used Mark and Matthew's tales as historical documents. Romans—still angry at the nonsensical Jewish attempt to overthrow Roman rule and generally suspicious of the many foreigners who had brought their strange ways to Rome, no doubt hoping and working for the Empire's fall (and Jews topped the list)—had no reason to distinguish two diametrically opposite Jewish messianic movements: the cult of Jesus *Christos*, and the Zealots. They couldn't distinguish pacifist, yet independent, Jesus *Christos* from rebels who proclaimed themselves *Christos*. Romans still talked about the fanatic Zealot *christoi* in the First Revolt who believed they would be rewarded with eternal life in heaven for martyrdom while killing people. Never mind

that Jesus Christ was long dead; his followers worshipped him as a god and looked for eternal life under the rule of God in heaven.

Nero murdered his mother Agrippina and other relatives. After a suggestion from his astrologer, he began murdering other citizens. In 65 a group of senators plotted to kill him at the chariot races and replace him with a scion of nobles of the Roman Republic era. The plot failed, and many prominent citizens and their children were arrested, accused of conspiracy, and killed.

Nero murdered his wife Poppea the same year. He forced his tutor, the great Seneca, to kill himself. Nero poisoned another tutor, the commander of the palace guard. Nero was generally recognized as an evil man:

I saw another beast rising from the earth. He had two horns like a lamb but spoke like a dragon. He exercised all the power of the first beast [Caligula]. He used magic like calling fire down from heaven to deceive people. If you know how, calculate the number of the beast. It is the number of a man. His number is 666 (Revelations 13:11-18).

Why “666”? It was a secret code. Scholars have long known that if “Neron Caesar” is transliterated into the Hebrew alphabet, and if the letters are assigned certain numerical values, they add up to 666.⁸

The Drastic Revision of the Book of Q

The tensions in the Roman Empire and especially in Judea must have seriously affected the Q community. It was probably in Nero’s reign that they revised the Original Book of Q. In the revision they imagined Jesus less as a sage or teacher and more as a prophet or a child of *Sophia*, Wisdom. The Q people had become less patient with orthodox Jews. Many of the leaders were getting caught up in Jerusalem politics even as they defended their own turf, and cooler heads replaced them in the leadership of the Galilean school. Whatever their actual age, let’s call the Q people of that time the Q² generation. They reorganized the book’s outline, threw out all but about twenty of the original sayings, and added over thirty new sayings which comprise the second layer of the Book of Q (Q²).

The revisions indicate that family, friends, and elders scolded the Q people for adopting Greek ways and accused them of betraying Jewish traditions. Zealots probably threatened and abused them. The movement became less tolerant of outworn tradition and more insistent that Jews

must follow Jesus' teachings of loving kindness—or else they would all suffer the consequences.

The following exhortations show anger at those who left the Jesus movement, and frustration at the difficulty of getting new members⁹:

Jesus said, "Anyone not with me fights me! Anyone who won't gather with me scatters!" (Luke 11:23, QS 29).

Jesus said, "No servant can serve two masters! He will love one and despise the other. You can't serve both Θεός and money" (Luke 16:13, Matthew 6:24; QS 55).

Jesus said, "Fortunate is the faithful and wise servant whom his *kyrios* finds serving the household when he comes home. But if that servant thinks, 'My *kyrios* will be late,' beats the slaves, eats and drinks his fill, and is drunk, and if his *kyrios* comes home unnoticed, he will think the servant is untrustworthy and will hack him to pieces" (Luke 12:42-46, Matthew 24:45-51; QS 42).

Strive to enter at the narrow gate. Many will try to get in but can't. Once the householder has risen and shut the door, you will stay outside and knock on the door, saying, "*Kyrios*, *Kyrios*, open to us."

He will answer, "I don't know you or where you came from."

You will begin saying, "We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets."

He will say, "I tell you, I don't know you. Leave me, all you sinners" (Luke 13:24-27, Matthew 7:13-14, 23; QS 47).

The leaders of the Q community pressured their followers to be loyal. They dreaded the violence in Judea and the consequences it would surely bring—Roman destruction of the nation to pacify it. The Day of Judgment loomed on the horizon.

Some Q people went back to old traditions. Q leaders admitted that Jesus, a fallible man, should have followed tradition more, but he had been guided by a *pneuma* from heaven. It still guided his followers, and anyone disloyal to that "familiar" spirit will be punished:

Jesus said, "If anyone acknowledges me publicly, the son of *anthropou* will acknowledge him before the *angelon* of the Θεός. But anyone who denies me in public will be denied before the *angelon* of the Θεός. Whoever shall speak a word against the son of *anthropou* will be forgiven, but anyone who blasphemes against the holy *pneuma* will not be forgiven. When they bring you to the synagogues and before magistrates and powers, don't think about your answer or what you will say" (Luke 12:8-12, Matthew 10:19-20; QS 37).

Jesus the exorcist. Trying to prove that Jewish traditions were obsolete, the Q² generation looked for ways to claim greater authority for Jesus.

They resorted to Jesus' well known power over demons and the belief that he possessed and was possessed by a *pneuma*:

Scribes from Jerusalem said of Jesus, "He has Baalzebul and casts out demons by the *archon* of the demons."

Jesus answered the scribes in parables, "Every *basileia* at war against itself will fall. A house divided against itself can't stand. If Satan's *basileia* rebels against him and becomes divided, how can he last?

"As long as a strong armed man protects his palace, his belongings are safe. But if a stronger man breaks in, he can overpower him and take everything he has" (Luke 11:15-22, Matthew 12:24-29, Mark 3:22-30; QS 28).

"Satan's kingdom" could be the Roman Empire, but Jesus people preached nonviolence. If everyone obeyed God, Satan's power would fall. They must have regarded Zealots as Satan's slaves.

Hasidim said Jesus was possessed by an evil spirit. Q people replied that Jesus' familiar spirit was a good one, but to do its work onlookers must trust that it can do its work:

Jesus entered Capernaum. A centurion [of the Roman army] sent for him, for his slave was dying, and his friends brought Jesus near his house. "Just say the word," they said, "and he will be healed."

Jesus marveled at their belief in him, saying, "I have never seen such *pistis* in all Israel." And the slave got well (Luke 7:1-10, Matthew 8:5-10.13, John 4:46-53; QS 15).

If the Q people admitted that they or Jesus entered a gentile's home, the fury of Zealots would probably have descended upon them.

The divine man. The Q people carefully distinguished between Jesus the humble, imperfect son of man and his indwelling spirit. Nevertheless, some of the Q² sayings show Jesus as a prophet or a child of Wisdom—a step toward making him a god as Paul had already done among the gentiles.

Persecution. Some orthodox Jews treated Jesus people as unclean. Indeed, many Jesus people, like Jesus himself, probably went barefoot, wore castoff clothing, were dirty, and refused hasidic purity rituals. Feeling persecuted, they found encouragement in scripture:

YHWH Elohim's messengers warned their fathers because he had compassion for his people and his Temple. But they mocked Elohim's messengers, despised his words, and abused his prophets (2 Chronicles 36:16).

Jesus said, “You are fortunate when everyone hates you, shuns you, reproaches you, and casts out your name as evil because of the son of man [because you follow Jesus’ teachings]. So rejoice! Jump for joy! Because, look, your reward is great in heaven! That’s how their fathers treated the prophets (Luke 6:22-23, Matthew 11:21-23; QS 8b).

Abuse made Q people stick together, and scripture justified their defiance of hasidic traditions.

This saying anticipates a showdown with orthodox Jewish tradition:

Jesus said, “I came to set the earth on fire. I wish it was burning now! But I have a *baptisma* to be *baptisthenai*. What ordeals I will endure until it’s over!

“Do you think I came to bring peace to the earth? No, disagreement! From now on, five in a house will quarrel, father against son, son against father, mother against daughter...” (Luke 12:49-53, Matthew 10:34-39; QS 43).

Jesus the prophet. People scoffed at the naiveté of Jesus’ message of love. Frustrated, Q² people vented anger with traditional curses added to the mission story. In so doing, they represented Jesus as a prophet:

It will be more tolerable in the day of judgment for Sodom and Gomorra than for that city (Luke 10:12, Matthew 11:24; QS 21).

Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the *dynamis* had been done in Tyre and Sidon that was done in you, they would have repented in sackcloth and ashes long ago. It will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, were you lifted up to *Ouranous* [Sky, Heaven]? No! You’ll be thrown down to *Hades*! (Luke 10:13-15, Matthew 11:21-23; QS 22).

This saying represents Jesus as an old-fashioned Jewish prophet to prove he was true to Jewish traditions:

The *Sophia* of the Θεός said, “I will send them prophets and apostles, and they will persecute and kill some of them. The blood of all the prophets shed from the foundation of the *kosmos* may be exacted from this generation.”

Jesus said, “I tell you, the blood from Abel [Genesis 4:8] to Zechariah who died between the altar and the Temple [2 Chronicles 24:20-22, not Zechariah 1:1], will be required of this generation” (Luke 11:49-51, Matthew 23:34-36; QS 34).

Jesus, interpreter of the Torah. Pronouncement stories came from Syria to Galilee, and Q people used them to represent Jesus as a scholar of the Torah who could dispute with Pharisees on their own turf:

Jesus said, “You Pharisees wash the outside of the cup and platter, but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness. Instead, give from your heart, and behold! everything is clean to you.

“But woe to you, Pharisees! for you ignore Judgment Day and the Θεός’ love.

“Woe to you also, you lawyers! for you load enormous burdens on people and refuse to touch the burdens with your fingers!” (Luke 11:39-51, Matthew 23:4, 23, 25-27, 29-32; QS 34).

The Q people accused Jewish scholars with creating legalisms that shoved love aside and prevented the *basileia* of God:

“Woe to you, lawyers, for you took away the key of knowledge! You refused to enter and wouldn’t let anyone else go in” (Luke 11:52, Matthew 23:13; QS 34).

John the immerser’s disciples held up John as a model of Jewish piety and clean ascetic living. They criticized Jesus people for impiety and uncleanness. Mark represents “the people” as John’s admirers:

Jesus told the chief priests, scribes, and elders, “Answer one question for me. Did John’s ceremony of immersion come from heaven, or did he invent it?”

They went into a huddle to think up an answer. “If we say, ‘It came from heaven,’ Jesus will retort, ‘Then why didn’t you believe John?’” “But if we say, ‘He made it up,’ the people will riot.” For everyone thought John was a true prophet. So they told Jesus, “We can’t say” (Mark 11:27-32).

John’s disciples were fanatics whom Mark himself feared.

Q said that Jesus’ reputation impressed John:

John’s disciples told him of Jesus’ miracles, so he sent two disciples to ask Jesus, “Are you He Who Is To Come, or is That One still to come?”

In response, Jesus healed many infirmities and plagues, expelled evil spirits, and gave sight to many blind. Then he told John’s disciples, “Go tell John what you saw and heard! The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the *euangelion* has been preached to the beggars [*ptochoi*], and fortunate is everyone who does not take offense at me!” (Luke 7:18-23, Matthew 11:2-6; QS 16).

The Q people agreed that John was a martyr for YHWH and a prophet and even more. By now they said John was Elijah so they could declare him Jesus’ forerunner:

Jesus spoke to the people about John, “When you went out into the wilderness, what did you expect to see? A reed shaking in the wind? [Of course not. John was fearless.]

“But what *did* you expect to see? A man standing in gorgeous clothes? [Of course not. John wore rags or animal skins.] Look in the palace for that!

“What did you really expect to see? A prophet? Yes, and more than a prophet, for scripture foretold that John was coming, ‘I look, I send my *angelos* ahead of you, who will prepare the way before you’ [Malachi 3:1].

“I tell you that among those born of women there is no greater prophet than John the immerser. But the least in the *basileia* of Θεός is greater than John!” (Luke 7:24-28, 16:16, Matthew 11:2-13; QS 17).

Jesus was far greater than John. But John—even if he was Elijah—was a Zealot in real life, a violent man, as this slightly later saying (Q³) shows:

The Law and the Prophets were *until* John. From the days of John until now the *basileia* of Θεός has suffered violence, and men of violence take it by force (Luke 16:16, Matthew 11:12; QS 56a).

Q people blamed John for reviving Zealotism—a thing of the past. Violence was unacceptable in the modern civilized world, for now God wanted people to live in love and peace.

Jesus a child of Wisdom. John’s disciples said that Jesus was a demoniac, glutton, drunkard, and libertine who rejected the Law. The Q people couldn’t deny any of that, but on the other hand—

Jesus said, “The men of this generation act like children jeering at each other! John *baptistes* came neither eating or drinking, so people said, ‘He has a demon!’ Now the son of *anthropou* came eating *and* drinking, so they say, ‘Look at the gluttonous man and winebibber! A friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ But I tell you that *Sophia* is justified of all of her children!” (Matthew 11:16-19, Luke 7:31-35; QS 18).

So John also acted crazy. Though he and Jesus were opposites in many ways, Wisdom inspired both with wisdom. Though inspired with different kinds of wisdom, John and Jesus were both good in the sight of God.

“**Son of *anthropos*”** appears only once in the twenty sayings of the Original Book of Q that remain to us. The Q² generation played with three meanings of “son of man”: Jesus the man of humility; the righteous and merciful world ruler of whom Daniel dreamed; and the fantastic man-like god to come down from heaven, now becoming popular.¹⁰ This passage subtly exploits the ambiguity of the triple meaning of “son of man”:

Some people testing Jesus asked him for a *semeion* from heaven. He replied, “This is an evil generation! They want me to give them a *semeion*!

“There is no *semeion* except the *semeion* of Jonah the prophet! As Jonah was a warning for the Ninevites, the son of *anthropou* is a warning for this generation!

“On Judgment Day, the queen of the south will rise up with the men of this generation and testify against them, for she came from the utmost parts of the earth to hear the *sophia* of Solomon. Look! Someone greater than Solomon is here!

“The men of Nineveh will rise up when this generation is judged and will condemn it, for they repented at Jonah’s preaching. Look! Someone greater than Jonah is here!” (Luke 11:16, 29-32, Matthew 12:38-42; QS 32; Jonah 3:4-5; 1 Kings 10:1-13).

“Jonah” links the saying to Jesus. Everyone knew PQ’s and Paul’s tales of Jesus’ resurrection. But Q doesn’t call him “Christ” or talk about “Christ impaled.” Q uses the expression, “son of man,” to grab their critics’ attention and get them to think of Jesus’ authority from heaven and love as a cosmic principle. And, for the love of your family, for the love of God, quit testing the Romans’ patience.

Q is not so foolish as to say that Jesus will return, but a historical fact was the “Day of the Lord” when Nebuchadrezzar destroyed Jerusalem. The Zealots were tempting God again as they spoke. And Judgment Day will surely come. They don’t identify the son of man, but in the light of those three facts, consider this parable:

If the householder had known when the thief would come, he would have watched and kept him from breaking into his house. You be ready, too! The son of *anthropou* will come when you least expect him (Luke 12:39-40, Matthew 24:43-44; QS 41).

Think about it!

When will it be? Can’t you see the signs that are all around you?

When you see a cloud in the west, right away you say, “Rain’s coming,” and it comes. When you feel the south wind blow, you say, “It will get hot,” and it does. You *hypokritai*, you can judge the face of earth and sky—but *how can you not see this time?* (Luke 12:54-56, Matthew 16:2-3; QS 44).

What signs? Crooked high priests; crooked Roman governors. Robbers and murderers throughout Judea. Zealots abusing their own countrymen. Burning homes. All the crimes in the 60’s that Josephus described. It will surely end only with the destruction of Jerusalem. But then is the Roman Empire about to fall? What about the Great Fire of Rome? Nero’s depravity? In any case, signs of chaos and war are everywhere. But you just keep cool. Don’t let religious frauds or outlaws lead you out to the desert to die, or into a stupid march against Jerusalem. Look at the big picture:

Pseudochristoi will tell you, “See here!” or, “Look there!” Don’t follow them. The son of *anthropou* will come like lightning in his day.

The time of the son of *anthropou* will be like Noah’s. They ate, drank, and married until Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed all of them.

In Lot’s time they ate and drank, bought and sold, planted and built. But when Lot left Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all.

It will be the same when the son of *anthropou* appears. In that night, if two men are in one bed: one will be taken, the other left. If two women are grinding wheat, one will be taken, the other left.

The eagles will gather at the carcass (Luke 17:23-37; Matthew 24:23-41; QS 60).

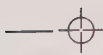
Nowhere does Q say that Jesus will return, but there is no doubt about the mythological son of man coming down from heaven. He is not Jesus, but is a popular figure born of desperation and wishful thinking, and ultimately derived from a fantastic interpretation of Daniel's dream. Q²'s main point is that the Romans are almost certain to reimpose their brutal *pax Romana* on Israel.

Whether Q² intended or not, their new sayings tied Jesus to the burgeoning supernatural son of man folklore as well as to prophetic and child of Wisdom traditions. Once those sayings were written they became an *apokalypsis* of the *aion*, whatever form that might take. And the fantastic son of man would become identified with the humble son of *adam* Jesus. That heavenly figure, already created by Paul, might return at any moment.¹¹

Signs and portents were indeed gathering in Palestine, for nationalistic fanatics were driving the nation into revolt against the Roman Empire.

NOTES

1. The Egyptian: Acts 21:38; Josephus, *Jewish War*, 2:264.
2. Paul in Jerusalem, Caesarea, Rome: Acts 21-28.
3. James' death: Brandon, 49-57; Eusebius, 2:23. The oldest source, Josephus, *Antiquities*, 20:9, shows clear signs of Christian editing.
4. Josephus, *Jewish War*, 6:277ff.
5. Fire of Rome: Suetonius 6:38.
6. Human torches: Tacitus, *Annals*, 15:44.
7. Nero's reforms: Suetonius, 6:16. Instigation of Chrestus: Suetonius, 5:25.
8. Nero was "666": Asimov, 1213-1214.
9. The second layer of Q: Mack, 1993, 131-147.
10. 4 Ezra (2 Esdras in the Catholic Bible) is in the Apocrypha. The orthodox Jewish core is dated to Domitian's reign, but folklore and early written forms of it may have started much earlier.
11. The second layer of Q: Mack, 1993, 131-147.



18 Deliver Zion! The First Revolt Begins

“First a star very like a broadsword stood over Jerusalem, and a comet that remained a whole year.” Those were the first in a list of “unmistakable portents that foreshadowed the coming desolation” of Jerusalem.¹ The starry messenger that appeared as a thief in the night in January, 66, was Halley’s comet.

Josephus saw the mysterious “sign,” Halley’s comet, as a very bright nineteen-year-old, and felt the electric excitement of the citizens of Jerusalem. He was not particularly superstitious, though he apparently believed that the Θεός provides signs of coming events. Probably every Roman subject looked for omens of Nero’s death or the end of the Empire. Few could doubt that a comet was a sign from God of some earth-shaking event. Priests searched ancient books for clues.

A comet looks exactly the way a god might appear as he comes down from high heaven surrounded by his “glory.” Some Israelites might have said that YHWH Lord of Hosts was himself leading an army of angels to earth. Others would say it was Elijah in his fiery chariot drawn by fiery horses to set things right before the terrible Day of YHWH. Still others might say it was the son of man foretold by Daniel. Paul’s enlightened disciples knew the Θεός would send the *Kyrios* Jesus Christ. In any case, few Jews or Christians could doubt that Judgment Day was at hand.

Halley’s comet made its nearest approach in February. Then, its mysterious mission to earth apparently accomplished, it began its ascent. More portents were reported. At three in the morning of April 8, as pilgrims gathered for Passover, a light as bright as the midday sun shone around the altar and sanctuary for half an hour. A cow waiting in the courtyard of the Temple to be sacrificed gave birth to a lamb. One midnight, a very heavy gate locked with bars and bolts swung open without visible cause. By the end of April the comet was out of sight.

More portents appeared on earth. On May 21 a wonder appeared in the skies before sunset. Chariots and regiments of soldiers sped across the sky. Armies encircled towns throughout Palestine. But those armies didn’t produce any visible effect on earthly affairs.

At Pentecost, priests said that when they went into the inner Temple to perform the nightly rituals, there was a mighty rushing sound, a crash, then a loud cry, "Let's get out of here!"

Josephus listed the above omens toward the end of his *Jewish War* to support his contention that Jewish scripture prophesied Vespasian's ascension as the ruler of the world, and that God now lived in Rome.²

Magi from the orient. Of course the comets had also been seen and interpreted in Rome. Nero's astrologer Balbillus advised Nero that rulers usually dodged impending evil by getting rid of their most prominent citizens. From that time on, Nero murdered at will.

King Tiridates of Armenia traveled to Rome after Halley's comet appeared. Three years earlier, the victorious Roman general in Armenia had made that Persian king, brother of the king of Parthia, lay down his crown at the foot of Nero's statue, prostrate himself, and promise to come to Rome to grovel at Nero's feet. Evidently Tiridates thought Halley's comet was an auspicious sign, for he put off the visit to Rome until its appearance.

Tiridates' visit was a joyful occasion for Nero, whose generals had spent several years wresting Armenia from Parthia. Rome had always celebrated victory with pomp and circumstance. Nero loved creating grand spectacles for common people to admire and for nobility to envy. Tiridates' humiliation was Nero's shining hour.

The ceremony was in the grand Persian style. Nero, decked out in triumphal garb, was seated in full view of the crowds. Turbaned Tiridates crawled in supplication to Nero and declared that Nero was Mithra, the sun god's companion come to earth.

Nero graciously extended his hand to Tiridates, drew him up to his feet, and kissed him. He removed Tiridates' humble turban, restored the ransomed crown, and gave him Armenia to rule as a province of the Roman Empire. Then the ceremony moved to the theater, where Tiridates sat at Nero's right hand under a star-spangled awning. The army and the crowd hailed Nero as *Imperator*, Commander.

Nero wanted to learn how to make the gods obey his commands and answer his prayers. He was in luck, for Tiridates was a magician with other magi in his retinue. Nero persuaded him to teach him Persian magic and initiate him into the mysteries of Mithra. The lessons cost Nero three thousand gold pieces per day. The magic didn't work, so Nero lost interest, but he gave Tiridates a million gold pieces as a departing gift.³ From that time on, Nero's image on coins wore a radiate

crown, which could represent both the Persian sun god and the Roman sun god, Sol *indiges*.

In Jerusalem, Gessius Florus demanded seventeen talents (more than a thousand pounds of precious metals) from the Temple treasury, saying that Nero needed it. No doubt he did. The high priests handed the fortune over to Florus. That was in May, 66.

The people of Jerusalem assumed that Florus kept the money for himself, so a group of young men collected pennies for him. The Jewish leaders halted the mockery and asked Florus to overlook it as a juvenile prank. It was too late. Florus demanded the culprits. The Jews refused to hand them over. Enraged, Florus sent soldiers through the upper marketplace killing everyone in sight. They arrested many citizens, including Jews with Roman citizenship, and whipped them before Florus or nailed them to poles to die. King Agrippa II was in Egypt, so his sister Bernice implored Florus to stop, but in vain. Over three thousand died that day. No other Roman governor had treated the Jews like that. Next day people lamented in the streets for the dead, but the chief priests sent them indoors to wail privately for fear of provoking Florus again.

Then Florus sent two cohorts to Jerusalem. A large group of citizens came out to greet them with harps and singers, but the soldiers slaughtered them and advanced to the Temple and Fortress Antonia. An angry crowd, expecting them to plunder the Temple, tore down the colonnade and steps leading from Fortress Antonia to the Temple and gathered to block them from getting in.

Florus notified Cestius Gallus the legate of Syria that the Jews had revolted. At the same time, Jews let Gallus know what Florus had done. Gallus sent an envoy who reported that the Jews were not in revolt and that Florus had indeed mistreated them.

Agrippa came to Jerusalem and spoke to the people in the gymnasium to cool their tempers. He begged them to accept the fact that Rome was their master. The people swallowed their anger and collected forty talents (2,500 pounds of precious metal) for taxes already due Nero. Then they began repairing the damage.⁴

It is likely that most of the Jesus people in Jerusalem were caught up in all this turmoil against Florus, the common enemy.

Deliverance to Zion! Eleazar the Temple captain, son of Ananias the high priest, was angry at the Romans' brutality and payments to them. He ordered the priests to refuse all offerings and gifts from foreigners.

including sacrifices for the welfare of Rome and Caesar's health. Hotheads enthusiastically supported his rash orders. Eleazar's orders have been found among the Dead Sea scrolls as fragments of many copies. Those orders directed priests to refuse offerings from gentiles because their containers polluted the Temple.⁵ Eleazar's actions were clearly those of a Zealot, although Josephus is not yet willing to use that almost sacred word for rebels or outlaws.

Citizens, Pharisees, and high priests called Eleazar and his followers to a public meeting at the east gate. They tried to convince the insurgents that they were starting something they couldn't finish. Besides, it was an act against YHWH, for their ancestors had always accepted foreigners' contributions to the god of Israel and had put up stations for them all around the outer court of the Temple. Such contributions were always put to good use. They begged the insurgents to change their mind before the Romans found out they had impious rebels to get rid of. The insurgents refused to listen.

The insurgents had possession of the Temple and Lower City, so the high priests asked Agrippa and Florus for troops to restore order. Agrippa sent two thousand cavalry, but a week of fighting didn't budge the insurgents. Nor could the insurgents take the Upper City from Agrippa's horsemen.

Sicarii upset the standoff. They came into the Upper City with the crowds on Wood-Carrying Day, when people contributed wood for the perpetual fire. The *sicarii* helped the insurgents take the Upper City. The rebels burned Agrippa's palace and the house of the high priest Ananias. Then they burned the office of money-lenders' records, thus fulfilling a promise to free all debtors from debt.

Next day the insurgents besieged Fortress Antonia. After two days, they entered and killed the Roman garrison, and burned the fortress. Then they besieged the palace where Ananias, his brother Hezekiah, and other leaders were hiding.

Menahem led his Zealots to Masada, the mountain fortress in the desert south of Jerusalem. He was a descendant of Judas the Galilean, who is generally credited with starting the Zealot movement in 6 CE. Menahem's Zealots killed the Roman garrison at Masada and armed themselves from the well-stocked armory.⁶

Menahem brought his men to Jerusalem by the middle of August, 66. They besieged the Upper City and took it from Eleazar's forces, then found and killed Ananias and other refugees.

Menahem intended to rule Israel like the priest-kings of the Macabean dynasty. Josephus tries not to call them Zealots out of respect for Israelite tradition, but he says that Menahem put on kingly regalia and went into the Temple followed by "a train of armed Zealots." Eleazar and his men attacked them and slaughtered many, including Menahem. The survivors fled to Masada under Eleazar son of Jairus, also related to Menahem. That Eleazar held Masada until the Romans retook it.⁷

Eleazar the Temple captain, son of Ananius, besieged a Roman garrison in Jerusalem. He agreed to let them escape if they disarmed, but once they laid down their arms, he massacred them. That was on the Sabbath, so the citizens refused to help Eleazar any more. We hear no more of that Eleazar, but his followers continued his fight to the end.

The Syrians of Caesarea massacred their Jewish neighbors. Florus caught and enslaved many of the survivors. In response, Jews throughout Palestine rose up in anger and plundered and burned towns dominated by Syrians, including Caesarea.

Syrians retaliated against Jewish minorities in many cities as far north as Tyre. The same things also happened in Agrippa's territories.

Jewish hotheads revolted in Alexandria. Tiberius Alexander, governor of Egypt, sent two legions into the Jewish quarter to plunder and burn homes and massacre the people.

Cestius Gallus brought an army down from Antioch to Ptolemais, where Agrippa and other allies joined him. The combined army went on to Caesarea and Joppa, where they slaughtered the Jewish residents and burned their homes. Then it went into Galilee, where it burned Zebulon and neighboring villages. It eradicated the mountain stronghold of Asmon in the center of Galilee. Sepphoris, the largest city and stronghold in Galilee, welcomed the army and pledged loyalty. There was no other resistance in Galilee at this time, perhaps because of the pacifistic Jesus movement.

Gallus brought his army back to Judea and camped a few miles from Jerusalem. The city was full of people for Sukkot, the harvest feast, and crowds came out to attack the camp. The Romans threw off a direct assault, but a band of rebels led by Simon bar Gioras of Gerasa sneaked around to the rear and inflicted heavy casualties.

Several days later Gallus brought his army through Agrippa's wall on the north side of Jerusalem and encamped in the New City. A group of leading citizens sent word to Gallus that they would open the gates to

the Upper City for him, but he suspected a trap. He laid siege and undermined the wall protecting the Upper City. It looked as though he would shortly capture Jerusalem. But suddenly he withdrew his army and prepared to return to Syria.

It was a miracle! The insurgents thought YHWH had saved Israel. They came out and attacked Gallus' army. Unprepared for that, he moved away several times, then began retreating toward Syria. The rebels pursued while attacking the rear again and again, and turned the retreat into a rout. They inflicted heavy casualties all the way to the Syrian border. The insurgents captured loot, siege-machines, and supplies that the army had abandoned. The rout was in November, 66.

In Damascus, the Syrians had already confined the Jews in the gymnasium to keep them from disturbing the peace. When they heard about Gallus' rout, the Damascenes slaughtered all the Jews. Perhaps the Christian Jews left before it was too late. Maybe not.

Gallus sent messengers to Nero at his palace in Philippi to report the fiasco. He blamed it on Florus, who was soon replaced with Marcus Antonius Julianus.⁸ Gallus died that winter. Perhaps sudden ill health had prompted him to give up the siege.

Zion delivered! Singing hymns of victory, the revolutionaries prepared to defend and govern their free nation. Large numbers of citizens joined the insurgents, and the combined group called themselves Zealots. Josephus consistently uses that name for this group from that point on. Their leader was a tyrant, Eleazar bar Simon of a priestly family.⁹

The Zealots expected Nero to send a much larger force than Gallus', so they began preparing for a long siege. All over the city they forged armor, weapons, and arrow points. They chose Joseph bar Gorion and the high priest Ananus bar Ananus to supervise the civilians and city defenses. Joseph and Ananus served reluctantly, hoping the Zealots would soon realize the futility of defending Jerusalem against the Empire.

The Zealots stamped coins, "Deliverance to Zion."¹⁰ They chose governors and generals for the various districts of Palestine.

Our historian, Josephus bar Matthias, was appointed governor and general of Galilee and Gaulonitis (Golan Heights). Josephus appointed seventy elders over the region, and seven judges for each of the nineteen towns. He raised an army of "one hundred thousand" from the region and prepared the towns for war. (Josephus was prone to exaggerate, but we have no other count.) Josephus gladly gave John of Gischala the

responsibility for Gischala. Sepphoris likewise looked after its own defenses. The fates of those two towns would be poles apart.

Many civilians believed Jerusalem was doomed, and many of them left. It was about the last good time to leave the city. Those who had no place to go lamented their plight openly, which alarmed many. A legend, probably false, said the Jesus people took refuge in the Hellenistic city of Pella in the Decapolis.¹¹ It is more likely that most of them patriotically joined the Zealots and died with them.

The Roman Empire, of course, could not accept rebellion in any of its provinces. The First Revolt quickly became what Josephus—and presumably the Romans—called the Jewish War.

NOTES

1. Unmistakable portents: Josephus, *Jewish War*, 6:295-300. Halley's comet: Moore and Mason, 46.
2. Fulfillment of portents; prophecies: Josephus, *Jewish War*, 6:300-328.
3. Tiridates in Rome: Suetonius, 6:13, 30; Griffin, 178-179, 216-217, 232-233.
4. Agrippa II in the gymnasium: *Jewish War*, 2:345-415. Josephus loved writing dramatic speeches. It is a good example of ancient portrayal of character and historiography.
5. Eleazar's orders: Josephus, *Jewish War*, 2:416-430. Multiple copies found: Document 4Q394-398 in Eisenman and Wise, 182ff.
6. Menahem at Masada: Josephus, *Jewish War*, 2:430, 435-457.
7. Menahem followed by a train of Zealots: *Jewish War*, 2:435-437. This is the first time that Josephus calls any of the rebels "Zealots." In *Antiquities* he says that Judas the Galilean led "the Fourth Philosophy," by which he evidently meant the Zealot movement.
8. Gallus' ill-fated campaign: Josephus, *Jewish War*, 2:498-556.
9. Zealots ruled Jerusalem: Josephus, *Jewish War*, 2:561-654.
10. Zealot coinage: Brandon, 147-148.
11. Legend of Pella as refuge: Eusebius, 3:5. Probably false: MacDonald, 164, 243n9.

— ⊕ — 19 The Revolt Becomes a War

“An ancient superstition was current in the East, that the rulers of the world at this time would come out of Judea,” Suetonius wrote in his biography of Emperor Vespasian. He added that the Jews assumed the world ruler would be Jewish, but he turned out to be Roman.¹

It is even more ironic that Vespasian “fulfilled” the Jewish “prophecy” *precisely because* the Jews revolted against Rome. Prophecies have a way of coming to pass in unexpected ways, you know—a favorite theme of Greek tragic poets. By the way, that “ancient superstition” is an interpretation of Daniel 7:13-14.

Nero chose Vespasian from his staff in Greece to put down the revolt in Judea. Vespasian came from a distinguished Italian family, for his father had been a tax-collector and customs official with a reputation for honesty, and then became a banker in Switzerland. Vespasian’s grandfather served Pompey as a centurion, then became a tax-collector.

Vespasian went to Antioch to take command of the army in Syria and sent his son Titus on to Alexandria to bring Tiberius Alexander’s army up from Egypt. Antioch had just been burnt, and the Jewish minority was blamed for it. Inquiry revealed the fire began as a conspiracy to burn the office of public records to free the arsonists from debt, as Zealots in Jerusalem had done. The Syrian conspirators hoodwinked a young Jew into blaming his own father, a magistrate.²

Vespasian’s army met Titus’ in Ptolomais and drilled together. Vespasian sent a contingent under Placidus into Galilee to destroy towns and villages. Placidus did not bother with Jotapata; it was too well protected by fortifications atop a circular hill surrounding the town.

Vespasian encamped at Galilee’s border with a tremendous show of force calculated to strike fear into the rebels. It worked, for any Galileans fled. Sepphoris, in the heart of Jesus’ homeland and formerly King Antipas’ residence, swore loyalty to Vespasian. Then Vespasian ravaged the surrounding villages to starve the rebels. After that, he went to Carmel to consult a seer. He received the oracle that no matter how ambitious his plans were, he would never be disappointed.³

Josephus, governor and general of Galilee, found the Galileans unwilling to fight. He failed to win over or capture Sepphoris. Those of his men who did not desert were demoralized. Seeing nothing but defeat, he looked for a way out. At Jotapata he made a suicide pact with his

men so that none would be taken alive, but all the while he was looking for an honorable way to desert to the Romans.

Vespasian and Titus brought their forces back to Galilee and destroyed more villages, some of which had already been abandoned. Then they besieged Jotapata. It was a heroic struggle that took forty-seven days. Only Josephus and another man survived. It was July, 67.

Vespasian intended to send Josephus to Nero for trial and execution, but Josephus writes that he told Vespasian that he, Josephus, was a messenger from God who could foretell the future. He prophesied that Vespasian and Titus would both be emperors of Rome. Suetonius said that Josephus “insisted that he would soon be released by the very man who put him in chains, and who would then be emperor.” Vespasian took the “prophecy”—or should we say flattery?—very seriously.⁴ He kept this messenger from God in chains as an advisor, and that’s why we have Josephus’ first-hand history of the First Revolt.

Vespasian brought an army down the coast and razed Joppa. The insurgents expected an immediate attack on Jerusalem, and that was probably when they hid most of their personal and Temple valuables. They hid much of the treasure in Jerusalem, but they took much of it out to caverns in the Judean desert, including caves at Qumran. The Copper Scroll lists many of the Temple treasures and their hiding places.⁵

Instead of besieging Jerusalem, Vespasian went back to Galilee to destroy an army of rebels at Tiberias. The rebels fled onto the lake on rafts and boats only to be encircled and slaughtered by thousands. Vespasian sent six thousand captives to Nero, who needed them to dig a canal across the Isthmus of Corinth, his dream of long standing. Vespasian auctioned off another twenty-four thousand in slave markets.

Then Vespasian besieged Gamala. Taking heavy casualties, the Romans undermined a stone tower and made it collapse upon the Jewish sentries inside. The army poured through the breach thus formed and massacred both insurgents and townspeople. It was October, 67.

Titus saw that he couldn’t take Gischala without massive bloodshed in the town, so he offered John of Gischala terms for surrender. John asked for the Sabbath to get his partners to agree. Titus consented and withdrew to camp. Next morning the townspeople surrendered to Titus—but John was gone.

Titus pursued John, killing or capturing the thousands unable to keep up with John. Even so, John got to Jerusalem with his family and a strong army. He quickly established his Galilean army as a formidable

rival of the Zealots under the leadership of Eleazar bar Simon and Zachariah bar Amphicalleus.

Vespasian and Titus brought their armies near Jerusalem, razed all villages, and stationed troops along the way. Elsewhere roving bandits terrorized the countryside with robbery and murder. Every home was torn between patriots and pacifists. Thousands fled into Jerusalem for safety but found nothing for them. Food reserves were already gone, and there was no law. Bandits came in to rob and steal, and they murdered prominent citizens.

Civilians still looked to the high priests Ananus son of Ananus and Jesus son of Gamalas as their rightful leaders. The Zealots and John's Galileans wanted to remove those leaders, so they got help from an army of twenty thousand Idumeans. The Idumeans soon thought the rebels were cheating them, so they let two thousand imprisoned citizens escape from the city. Then they left to join the Simon bar Gioras who had routed Cestius Gallus' army. Simon now commanded Menahem's Zealots at Masada, whom Josephus henceforth calls *Sicarii*.

Vespasian put off his siege to let infighting and desertion reduce the rebels' strength. In the meantime he destroyed everything around the city that might interfere with a siege, then crossed the Jordan into Perea to destroy villages and slaughter the Jewish residents.

Gadara tore down part of its wall to surrender to Vespasian. But when he entered, he found the hanged body of a prominent citizen whom hotheads had accused of sending a delegation to surrender to the Romans. Placidus chased the hotheads to a nearby village. But the hotheads panicked the Jews around there and caused them to flee southward for Jericho with their livestock. The Jordan River was at flood stage, and the stampede was trapped. The Romans slaughtered or captured thousands. Thousands more jumped into the river and drowned. That was in March, 68.

Zealots from Masada raided Engedi and nearby villages for food in preparation for a long siege. In Judea large bands roamed the countryside plundering everything in sight. Vespasian made another sweep of destruction and slaughter through Judea, then did the same in Idumea. He destroyed Jericho and Gerasa in June, 68.

Revolt in Rome. Gaius Julius Vindex, the legate in central Gaul and himself a Gallic, led a revolt in March, 68. Concerned for the Empire's welfare, Vespasian stepped up efforts to end the Jewish revolt. He encircled Jerusalem and made ready for the assault.

Vindex' revolt was quickly put down, but he had already suggested that legions in Spain hail Servius Galba, governor of Near Spain, *Imperator*. The Praetorian Guard in Rome also recognized Galba. The senate declared Nero a public enemy, and he committed suicide. Cornered, the senate reluctantly made Galba emperor in June.

When Vespasian heard of Galba's ascension, he put off the assault and sent Titus to Rome to swear loyalty to Galba and receive his orders regarding Jerusalem. Meanwhile he destroyed more villages in Judea.

Titus, still on route to Rome, learned that Nero's friend Marcus Otho had murdered Galba in January, 69, and made himself emperor. It was another *fait accompli* forced on the unwilling senate. Titus returned to Judea for his father's instructions.

In Jerusalem, the Zealots under Eleazar bar Simon and the priests held the inner court of the Temple and the caverns and tunnels beneath, which the high priests had normally kept well provisioned. The Zealots were about twenty-four hundred men strong but seldom ventured out for fear of John of Gischala.

John and his six thousand Galileans held Temple Mount, the outer courts of the Temple, and the city. We have already noted Josephus' remarks on their most un-Jewish customs—drinking blood, drunkenness, and wearing women's paint, hair-style, clothing, and perfume. Yet they were fierce, audacious murderers, rapists, looters, and mutineers. John could handle them.⁷

Simon bar Gioras brought his ten thousand Zealot-*Sicarii* from Masada and encircled the city. Hoping Simon would weaken John's forces, Eleazar agreed to let him take the New City and Upper City. Simon murdered Josephus' brothers in front of their father Matthias, whom they then tortured to death. Josephus' mother remained in prison.⁸

Opposing rebel forces ventured out for short sallies to throw spears and stones at each other. Bodies piled up where thrown in the streets and outside the walls. Citizens wanted the Romans to capture the city soon.

In Germany, the legate Aulus Vitellius didn't like either Galba or Otho, so he brought a massive force down to Italy. Upon his victory at Cremona, Otho committed suicide. The senate immediately declared Vitellius emperor (April, 69).

But Vespasian wanted the job. It was his by right and by prophecy, but he had to do his part. He worked night and day to make Josephus'

prophecy come true. In July, 69, Tiberius Alexander's army hailed Vespasian *Imperator*. Roman governors and armies throughout the East offered support. Vespasian handed the Judean war over to Titus and sent Mucianus, legate of Syria, to Rome with picked men. At Titus' request he freed Josephus from his chains and restored his civil rights. Vespasian said Josephus was a true prophet and assigned him to "prophesy" for Titus in the day-to-day battles in Judea.

Vespasian went to Alexandria with Tiberius Alexander and the army to assure control of Egypt, the major source of grain for the city of Rome. Then he stayed on in Alexandria to consult the oracle in the Sarapeum, the temple to Sarapis, pray for supernatural help, seek auspicious oracles, and keep in touch with the war in Judea. Besides, he must prepare to rule and plan a great triumph in celebration of what would surely be a great victory in Judea. His future, his sons', and Rome's were too important to leave to Fate, Providence, or Destiny.

Germans and Gauls revolted again, and Scythians crossed the Danube to invade the Empire. Rome itself was in turmoil. Vespasian sent an army to turn back the Scythians, and his son Domitian put down the German and Gallic revolts.⁹

Vitellius reigned eight months, then was defeated and killed near Cremona in north Italy by Antonius Primus in December, 69. Immediately the senate proclaimed Vespasian emperor. Mucianus got rid of Antonius Primus and made Domitian head of the Empire until Vespasian should arrive. The Empire was secure for Vespasian, and Romans acclaimed him everywhere. But Vespasian waited for good sailing weather and a favorable oracle from the priests in the Sarapeum.

Three factions ruled Jerusalem, each fighting the other two. The Zealots under Eleazar bar Simon still held the Temple and the underground tunnels with food supplies. John and the Galileans still controlled the Temple Mount and outer courts. Simon bar Gioras still ruled the Upper City and most of the Lower.¹⁰ The winter of 69-70 was the last time that people could easily escape from Jerusalem.

Titus and Tiberius Alexander brought the army from Egypt to Caesarea, where they joined three legions that remained in Judea. The Syrian army came down eager to avenge the humiliation of their rout three years earlier under Cestius Gallus. In March, 70, Titus placed a camp east of the city, another to the north, and a third to the west.

The vastness of the armies, the professional discipline of the ordered ranks, the banners and insignia, the war machines—all combined to strike terror into the hearts of the revolutionaries. Now the mutually hostile factions cooperated against the common enemy. They set up stone-throwing machines. Their archers aimed at Roman scouts venturing near the walls. Squads of rebels made quick forays against forward Roman posts by day, and terrorized the camps by night.

At Passover Eleazar partially opened the Temple gates to let people in from the city to celebrate the feast. John sneaked armed men in with the pilgrims, took the Temple, and forced Eleazar's Zealot army to submit to him.¹²

Titus and Josephus, looking for a place to assault the city, made a complete circuit around its walls. Josephus recognized sentries on the wall at one point and approached to plead with them to surrender. An archer aimed at Josephus but instead hit a Roman soldier next to him.

Titus ordered his army to raze the suburbs and cut every tree for timber. They built siege machines around the city under the protection of archers, spearmen, and wicker screens. They put battering rams against the wall. Despite the danger from Roman archers and spearmen, the rebels sent sorties to throw firebrands at the machines. Emboldened by success, the rebels sent larger sorties with little more effect.

The Romans placed three 75-foot wood-and-iron towers near Agrippa's wall. They manned the towers with archers, spear-throwers, and stone-throwers, all of whom greatly harassed the rebels. In May, 70, the battering rams tore open Agrippa's wall. Romans poured through the gap and occupied the New City. Titus ordered them not to damage the houses and shops there.

A contingent of Romans inside the wall camped in the pilgrims' camping area near Fortress Antonia. The revolutionaries attacked that camp day and night, both from the wall and in sudden, reckless forays from the gates. They vied with each other in taking risks.

Titus made personal contacts with every soldier as the battle raged on. Several days later they captured the second wall, but rebels in the houses and shops drove them off. Four days later the Romans retook the wall and tore everything down. Again underestimating the Zealots' fanaticism, Titus halted the attacks to let the rebels think about giving up, but they just kept on fighting.

Titus built a platform next to Fortress Antonia and another near the ruins of Agrippa's palace. His men worked under the protection of

archers on the towers, forty stone-throwers, and three hundred quick-loading machines.

Then Titus and Josephus called on the defenders to surrender and spare the city and Temple. Josephus told them their crimes already made God leave the Temple and go to Italy to live. Now everyone must submit to Rome. He promised that Titus would be merciful if they surrendered now, but if he had to storm the inner wall and Temple, he would spare nobody. The defenders replied that God would save their Temple, but if he chose not to, they would die for him as an example for the world. Besides, they would rather die than be slaves of Rome.

Famine had turned the citizens into walking skeletons, but the rebels ransacked homes and warehouses for any overlooked cache against the day their own supplies ran out. John's men undermined the Romans' platform at Fortress Antonia. It suddenly fell into a hole and was set afire. In various ways the rebels destroyed the other platform and many of the war machines.

Shortage of lumber halted rebuilding siege machines. During the lull, Titus had his men build a wall around Jerusalem. That kept them busy, and the wall would block tunnels and other hidden routes for bringing food into the city. The wall was four and a half miles long and had thirteen forts. It was completed at the end of June, 70.

Citizens still tried to leave the city at the risk of torture and death if the rebels caught them. But the rebels exploited the Romans' humanity, for "escapees" welcomed into the Roman line sometimes killed as many Romans as they could before they were killed or fled.

Revolutionaries and citizens alike despaired of any end to the horror of slaughter and rotting bodies. Gloomy silence and stink of rotting bodies reigned over the city. Joy rang out when a stone knocked Josephus out, but he recovered.¹³

Lumber arrived and was soon made into new platforms and siege machines, and the Romans resumed battering the walls. John tunneled toward a platform again, but the wall collapsed into the tunnel. The Romans tried to use that tunnel but found a second wall blocking it. After they dug through it, they were beaten back or killed.

A party of Romans captured the ruins of Fortress Antonia. Titus ordered it razed. Within a week his men leveled it and made the rubble into a wide road to the Temple. That was accomplished in July, 70.

The Romans built four platforms on the north and west sides of the Temple. Unable to bring the wall down in those places, they burned the gates and colonnades around the Temple. Titus ordered his generals not

to burn the Temple itself, for he wanted to save it as a beautiful trophy for the Roman Empire.

Once the gates were burnt, the army moved up to the Temple, and rebels took shelter inside. At sundown Titus called the army away, intending to surround the Temple the next morning and capture it. The rebels made a sortie against soldiers who were putting out fires next to the Temple, and in the fighting one of the soldiers threw a firebrand into the Temple, setting the interior on fire. Titus tried to put the fire out, but angry soldiers kept setting new fires, and finally Titus let it burn. Many rebels ran out of the burning Temple and fled into the city. The Romans slaughtered every one they could find and looted and burned everything around the Temple Mount. That was in August, 70. The god of Israel had lived in the Temple or its predecessor, Solomon's Temple, for a thousand years.

As the Temple burned, a crowd from the city gathered at the colonnades on the west side, for a prophet had told them to wait there for "signs of deliverance." Josephus said he was a "false prophet like many others." The crowd was caught in the burning colonnades and died. Perhaps they were looking for the Messiah or the son of man—or the Lord Jesus Christ—to come down from heaven. We might recognize the name of the "false prophet" from Mark's list of twelve, if we knew it. Josephus said an evil age had ended in fulfillment of prophecy.¹⁴

The victorious army assembled with their standards at the Mount of Olives to offer a sacrifice to the gods. The soldiers hailed Titus as Commander, *Imperator*.

Some priests remained holed up in the Temple wall. After four days they came down and begged for mercy. Titus replied it was too late for mercy and ordered them killed.

Rebel leaders in the city asked to speak with Titus. He met them on a bridge on the west side of the Temple, and they asked for permission to go out into the desert with their families. He retorted that they didn't deserve anything and would all die.

Next day Titus sent the army to destroy and burn everything they could. They burned the Sanhedrin, Citadel, and Ophel, the residential area of the lower priests. Then they burned the Lower City. Burning the office of property titles and inheritance records ensured that nobody but the emperor could lay claim to any property.

Now the Romans built platforms for invading the Upper City, where defenders and citizens were now concentrated. Many tried to escape, but

rebels killed some, and the Romans killed others. But Titus or the soldiers let many go out of overwhelming disgust with butchery. The Romans accepted Temple treasures from the treasurer and priests in return for their lives.

In September, 70, the platforms were complete, and the Romans battered through the wall into the Upper City. They frightened away the defenders and occupied the wall and towers. The Romans ran through the streets cutting down everyone they found until sundown. Then they set the ruins on fire. The wreckage burned throughout the night. Many rebels hoping to escape after the Romans left, hid in tunnels and sewers.

The next day the soldiers were sent to kill anyone still resisting, and the aged and infirm. The others were taken alive and questioned. Those over seventeen were sent to Egypt as slaves for hard labor, or to the provinces as gladiators or to fight lions in the theaters. Those under seventeen were sold in slave markets. The best-looking young prisoners were chosen for the triumphal procession in Rome, ultimately to be sold as slaves there. Every day many died from effects of starvation. Many could no longer eat.

John of Gischala was found in the sewers with other refugees. He would go to Rome for special treatment.

Titus sadly marveled at the beauty of construction and enormous size of the stones in the ruins. Nevertheless, he ordered anything standing razed as an example to rebels wherever they might arise in the Empire. He kept only three high towers and adjacent sections of wall for the protection of troops who would guard the city.

For hours Titus sat upon a dais to greet his soldiers one by one, to praise and reward each for outstanding performance. Then he made a huge sacrifice to the gods and invited the troops to a great feast to celebrate their great victory.

A poetic description of the war? This woman is Israel; her son, Jesus:

A great *semion* appeared in the *ourano* [sky]: A woman clothed with the sun, crowned with twelve stars, pregnant and crying in labor. Look! another sign appeared: a great red *drakon* [dragon]! His tail threw a third of all the stars in the sky to earth. He would eat her baby, a son who would shepherd all the *ethne* with an iron rod. But the baby was caught up to the Θεός and his throne. The woman fled from the *drakon* into the wilderness, where Θεός prepared a place for her, where they fed her 1,260 days [three and a half years]. (Revelation 12:1-6).

Surely the woman represents Jesus people in flight.

The gods battled in the sky, where Satan was defeated:

In a war in the sky, Michael and his *angeloi* fought the *drakon*—that old snake called the *diabolos* and *Satan*—and threw him down to earth with his *angeloi* (Revelation 12:7-9).

This is a different view of Jesus people in flight:

Thrown to earth, the *drakon* chased the woman. She was given two great eagle wings so she could fly from the serpent into the wilderness, into her place where she is nourished for a season, and seasons, and half a season. The serpent poured a river of water from his mouth to carry the woman away. Earth opened up and swallowed the river to save her. The *drakon*, angry, went to make war with the rest of her *sperma* who keep the commandments of Θεός and testify of Jesus Christ (Revelation 12:13-17).

That is “prophecy” in Revelation, but maybe it was first written in a history of the First Revolt. Of tens of thousands of people in Jerusalem and other cities there were many groups of Jesus people who left at various times, or stayed to see it through or die. Maybe the passage above is a record of the fictional¹¹ or actual flight of Jesus people to Pella.⁶

The bloody scenes of the Jewish War burned in Mark’s mind as he set quill to a great epic of the man who decades earlier did everything humanly possible to get his countrymen to take command of their own instincts and emotions. The fate of the holy city, this latter-day Troy, lay entirely in their hands.

NOTES

1. Prophecy of world ruler: Suetonius, 10:4.
2. Arson in Antioch: Josephus, *Jewish War*, 7:58.
3. Oracle at Carmel: Suetonius, 10:4.
4. Josephus, *Jewish War*, 3:348, 397, 5:1; Suetonius, 10:5.
5. Copper Scroll: Martinez, 460-473.
6. Exodus to Pella: Schonfield, 233-241.
7. John’s Galileans: Josephus, *Jewish War*, 4:564.
8. Simon killed Matthias and sons: Josephus, *Jewish War*, 5:538.
9. Vespasian in Alexandria: Josephus, *Jewish War*, 7:70-95.
10. Rule of Jerusalem: Josephus, *Jewish War*, 5:1-46.
11. Flight from Jerusalem: Eusebius, 3.5.4; Schonfield, 242-245; MacDonald, 164, 243n9.
12. John took the Temple: Josephus, *Jewish War*, 5:98, 248.
13. Death ruled the city: Josephus, *Jewish War*, 5:486-520.
14. Capture and burning of the Temple: Josephus, *Jewish War*, 6.3.17; Suetonius, 10.4; Tacitus, *Histories*, 2:78, 5:13; Eisenman and Wise, 18.

— ⊕ — 20 The World Ruler From Judea

Vespasian, biding his time in Alexandria, tightened his grip on Egypt as he listened to the latest news from Rome. He also frequented the Sarapeum, that grand temple for the worship of Sarapis, lord of heaven, earth, and the underworld. Ptolemy, the Macedonian general who inherited Egypt from Alexander, had declared Sarapis the national god of Egypt and built the Sarapeum for his worship. Sarapis was a Hellenistic version of Egyptian Osorapis, or Osiris combined with Apis the bull.

Vespasian brought many gifts to Sarapis, and the priests in their good time gave him a favorable oracle from the god. Soon afterward, Vespasian received news of Vitellius' death at Cremona. But the time was still not quite ripe for Vespasian to go to Rome.

One day as Vespasian was judging prisoners brought to him in the court of justice, two laborers came asking for healing. One was blind; the other, lame. Vespasian replied that he was not trained in the healing arts, but his friends insisted that he go along with the request.

It seems that Sarapis had told the laborers in dreams that Vespasian would cure their infirmities. They gave Vespasian Sarapis' instructions. Accordingly, he spit into the blind man's eyes to magically restore his sight. He touched his heel to the lame man's leg to magically heal it. The magic worked, thus showing that Vespasian possessed the divinity that was absolutely required to rule the vast, multiethnic Roman Empire.

From Greece came news that holy men probing the ruins of an ancient temple had dug up a lot of vases with Vespasian's picture.¹

Finally all the omens indicated that the time was right. He boarded a grain ship that sailed to Rhodes, then joined a fleet of triremes to Rome. At every stop he listened to the concerns of the people he would rule.

Titus, heir apparent, also knew the value of public relations. He visited the eastern regions so his future subjects would know him, and he them. The first visit was to Caesarea Philippi. Titus brought captives from the revolt to fight vicious animals or each other in the theater for the amusement of the Syrians.

Back in Caesarea, Titus' men offered him a valuable gift: Simon bar Gioras the Zealot leader had come up from a hole under the Temple

ruins, one of many rebels still emerging from the tunnels beneath Jerusalem. Titus reserved Simon for special display and justice in Rome.

Titus put on a great show to celebrate his brother Domitian's birthday. The spectacle used up more than twenty-five hundred Jewish prisoners by burning or making them fight in the theaters.

Then Titus toured Syria with his army, giving each city a Roman holiday and its encounter with greatness. In Beirut he celebrated Vespasian's birthday with the usual sacrifice of Jewish prisoners.

Then Titus headed to the Euphrates, where he would accept a golden crown from the king of Parthia. His route took him near Antioch, and citizens came out to beg him to visit the city. They escorted him in, then asked him to expel the Jews from their city. Titus listened, but postponed a reply until his return from the Euphrates.

On Titus' return, a great crowd gathered in the theater to hear his reply. He said he would not expel the Jews because their own country had been destroyed and no one else would let them in. He ordered the Antiochenes to keep displaying the bronze plaque that had guaranteed Jewish privileges for two centuries.

Titus visited Jerusalem on the way to Alexandria. Romans were still finding gold and silver in the ruins. He mourned the destruction of the people and their beautiful city and cursed the fanatics who caused it.²

Triumph in Rome. The ships bringing Titus and his army docked at Ostia, the seaport for Rome. His father and crowds of joyful citizens met them in a great celebration. And the celebration was just beginning, for Vespasian Caesar had prepared a great triumphal procession to show off the victors and spoils of war to the Roman people. He gave Josephus a stipend, protection, and an apartment under his thumb, and the job of writing the history of the Jewish war.

You should read Josephus' eye-witness account of the triumph yourself; this is a summary. The night before the triumph, Vespasian Caesar and Titus prayed and sacrificed at the temple of Isis, sister-wife of Sarapis and goddess of fertility. Vespasian Caesar and Titus slept at the temple. Apparently they gave Sarapis and Isis considerable credit for their victory. The cult had been in Rome for some time, but Vespasian Caesar and Titus' devotion made it more respectable in Roman eyes.

Before daybreak the army gathered at the temple by cohorts and centuries. Dignitaries (senators, knights, and senior magistrates) gathered at the Octavian Walks and waited for the conquering heroes.

At dawn Vespasian Caesar and Titus came out of the temple in bay wreathes and crimson silken robes. They joined their guests sitting upon a dais in chairs carved from ivory. The army came up and hailed Vespasian Caesar and Titus and shouted their praises. Vespasian Caesar rose, piously covered his head with his mantle, and thanked the gods for the victory. Titus did the same. Vespasian Caesar praised Titus and the army, then gave the soldiers a lavish breakfast. The two generals had breakfast at the Triumphal Gate, then sacrificed to the idols there.

Now the triumph began with the senators at the head. Heralds sounded trumpets behind them. Carriages piled with tons of gold, silver, jewels, and other booty from Jerusalem came next. Large pictures followed, either on wagons or carried by men. The pictures showed Jerusalem, the Palestinian countryside, the fortifications, the destruction, the wounded, and piles of dead bodies. The pictures were followed by *tableaux vivants* depicting the vanquished people, the land, and the battles.

Then came a model of the Temple, once the home of the exotic mystery cult of the Jews and their tribal god. Next were the crimson curtains from the Temple. Then came the giant sacred scrolls of the Torah, never before displayed to heathen eyes. Eight strong men carried the solid gold table of the shewbread. Another eight carried the legendary solid gold seven-branched lamp called the menorah. It was taller than a man. Others carried signs explaining the trophies. The crowds gawked at the magical trappings of that mysterious oriental religion.

Next came groups of men with poles topped with gold-and-ivory statues of Winged *Victoria*. Four white oxen followed.

Then came the star prisoners, Messiah Simon bar Gioras and Messiah John of Gischala, both securely bound in chains. Then followed seven hundred frightened children of Jerusalem in chains, all to be auctioned in the slave markets of Rome.

The three victorious generals were next. First came Vespasian Caesar in a chariot drawn by four horses. His sons followed: Titus riding in a chariot and Domitian upon a horse alongside.

Last came the battle-scarred soldiers radiating joy of victory, shouting, singing, laughing with tears as they saw their loved ones and friends cheering from packed sidewalks, porches, windows, balconies, rooftops, and trees. Everybody in Rome turned out for the glorious procession.

The triumph squeezed its way through the narrow, crowd-filled streets and wound through the circus. It came up the Sacra Via and through the marbled Forum. The dignitaries at the head stopped at the

temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, the Empire's highest god. The rest of the procession drew up and crowded around the dignitaries.

Heralds proclaimed Simon bar Gioras as the commander-in-chief of the rebels, and announced his crimes and punishment. A noose was placed around his neck, and he was led into the Forum. The procession and onlookers waited in solemn hush. Soon a messenger announced that Simon had received his reward. The crowd applauded and shouted with joy. John of Gischala received life imprisonment.

White oxen were sacrificed while priests led prayers to the Roman gods, and to the $\Theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$ who had once lived in Solomon's Temple, but now lived in Rome. The priests inspected the oxen's entrails, divined them, and announced the omens were favorable for the Emperor, the Empire, and the people of Rome. For the rest of the day this master race celebrated its great victory and thanked the gods for making them the rulers of the world.³

The triumphal procession publicized an important message for everyone within and without the Roman Empire. A subjugated people had bucked the Empire, and the sons of Romulus and Remus had virtually wiped them out from the face of the earth. The *Deus* used to reveal himself in Judea, but he now lived in Rome. He made Rome invincible. Anyone who dared challenge her would die. The Romans were God's chosen race. The prophecies in Virgil's *Aeneid* had been fulfilled.

Furthermore, Vespasian Caesar was the one of whom the Jews' own prophet Daniel had written,

Look, I saw one like the son of man coming with the clouds of heaven, and he came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought him near, before him. And he was given dominion, glory, and a kingdom so that all people, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, a kingdom that shall not be destroyed (Daniel 7:13-14).

The prophecy had been fulfilled; the "one like the son of man" was Vespasian Caesar. His dynasty would be around for a long time, for his two blessed sons were made in his image. The Empire would maintain world peace with justice and mercy indefinitely far into the future.

Titus had delegated the mopping-up in Judea to the legate of Syria Cerealius Vetilianus. Vetilianus was soon succeeded by Lucilius Bassus.

Bassus captured Herodium, a fortress several miles south of Jerusalem. Then he took the virtually impregnable fortress of Machaerus that

had been built by the Maccabean king-priest, Alexander Jannaeus. Bassus killed or enslaved the townspeople because some had run away during the night after agreeing to surrender.

Bassus then encircled the Forest of Jarden, where refugees from Machabaeus and a group of rebels from Jerusalem were hiding. The Romans cut down the trees and killed the Jews as they tried to escape.

Vespasian Caesar ordered Bassus and the procurator of Palestine, Libertius Maximus, to sell off all Jewish lands. Vespasian Caesar founded no city, but allowed former Roman soldiers to settle in Emmaus. Now that the Temple was gone, Jews were required to pay their traditional Temple taxes to the emperor instead.

Bassus soon died, and Flavius Silva took his place. Silva subdued the whole area and took Qumran, another Maccabean fortress. The people at Qumran were Zealots and their families, as indicated by religious artifacts and military-style graves at the site.⁴ They were the *Sicarii* who had controlled the entire region, including Masada.

The Battle of Masada. The Zealots or *Sicarii* still held Masada under Eleazar ben Jairus, a descendant of Judas the Galilean. Masada was a huge citadel on a flat-topped mountain. It was accessible only by two steep, narrow paths that wound up the mountainside. Both were exceedingly hard to climb. Alexander Jannaeus had built the citadel. Herod the Great improved and prepared it for possible invasion by Cleopatra of Egypt. Masada had a palace, thirty-seven towers, fields of rich soil, well-stocked storerooms, cisterns for an ample water supply, a large store of weapons and projectiles, and supplies of lead, bronze, and iron to make more.

Silva established headquarters at the foot of the mountain. Jewish prisoners carried all food and water for the army over miles of very rough desert. At several critical points along the paths up the mountain, Silva built walls and stationed soldiers to catch any escaping rebels.

Many obstacles beset the Romans as they worked their way up. About 450 feet below the top they found a wall blocking the entrance to the top. They built a tower of earth, stone, wood, and iron plates to create a platform for a battering ram. When the battering ram broke through the wall, they found a second wall of wood and earth behind it. Soldiers ignited the wall by throwing torches at it.

Silence and a pile of burning bodies greeted the Romans when they entered the fort. The defenders had murdered one another and committed suicide to prevent being enslaved. Two women, one of them Eleazar's

relation, and five small children were in hiding, the only survivors. Josephus composed a long speech for Eleazar's last hours. The fall of Masada ended the First Revolt in Palestine. That was in April, 73 CE.

Some Zealots who had escaped to Alexandria tried to get the Jews there to revolt. The Jews arrested and burned them to death. As they died they protested that their only crime was to call God their master instead of Caesar. Even little children refused to mouth Caesar's name. So says Josephus.⁵

Vespasian Caesar, anticipating that Jews in Egypt might revolt, ordered the great temple near Memphis destroyed.

Vespasian Caesar also ordered a search for all descendants of King David. They were to be killed to prevent anyone from claiming the right to rule Israel and starting another revolt. That is according to Hegesippus.

Vespasian Caesar ordered the construction of the Colosseum in Rome. It was financed by the sale of part of the enormous spoils of the Jewish War.⁶ In the Colosseum thousands of wild animals and human beings would fight to the death for the entertainment of Roman spectators for centuries.

Final Additions to the Book of Q (Q³)

The Q people found grim satisfaction in the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. Long before, Wisdom threatened to leave the city:

Wisdom [*Chokmah*] cries out there! She raises her voice in the streets. "You didn't listen to me. I will laugh at your calamity; I'll mock you when your fears are realized—devastation! and your destruction comes like a whirlwind! *Then* you will call upon me, but I won't reply!" (Proverbs 1:20-33).

Now the Q people heard Wisdom as *Sophia* scolding the dead Zealots for making her leave Jerusalem because of their violence:

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those sent to you! How often I wanted to gather your children as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings! But you didn't want it!

See! Your house is left to you desolate.

You won't see me until you say, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the *Kyrios*" (Luke 13:34-35, Matthew 23:37-39; QS 49).

In other words, nobody could think rationally with all the anger, crazy behavior, and disorder of the Zealot independence movement. They

drove out common sense. We might say that Reason had left the city. That Q saying was written soon after the Romans destroyed Jerusalem.

The Q people knew only too well how dangerous the Zealots were but comforted themselves that there were greater powers than Zealots:

Jesus said, "I'll tell you whom to fear. Fear him who has the authority to throw you into *Gehenna* after killing you. Yes, I say, fear *him!*" (Luke 12:5, Matthew 10:28; QS 36).

Zealot rhetoric and obsession with killing for God to earn a place in heaven had affected the Q people, for they, too, now spoke of reward and punishment after death.

Hasidim said that Jesus, a man possessed by Baalzebul, had misled his followers into thinking that the Torah and Prophets were obsolete. Q people, now wanting *hasidim* to accept them, insisted that Jesus passed every test of piety:

The *pneuma* led Jesus into the wilderness for the *diabolos* to test him. The *diabolos* told him, "If you're the son of Θεός, tell this stone to turn into bread." Jesus replied, "It is written that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of Θεός [Deut. 8:3]."

The *diabolos* showed him all the *basileias* of the world in a flash and said, "I'll give you all this authority and glory (for it's mine to give to anyone I want) if you worship me." Jesus replied, "Get behind me, *Satan*, for it's written that you'll worship the *Kyrios* your Θεός and serve only him [Deut. 6:15]."

The *diabolos* took him to Jerusalem, set him on a pinnacle of the Temple, and said, "If you're the son of Θεός, jump off! It's written that *angelois* watch over you and will lift you up lest your foot hits a stone [Psalms 91:11-12]." Jesus replied, "It's written that you won't test the *Kyrios* your Θεός [Deut. 6:16]." And when the *diabolos* was done testing Jesus, he went away (Luke 4:1-13, Matthew 4:1-11; QS 6).

Jesus, true to the Torah and Jewish ideals, passed every test. The Q people were crafting a new character for Jesus, for they no longer said the Torah and the Prophets were obsolete. They used to ridicule a long list of hasidic rules that interfered with simple love and humanity, but now they slipped the following notice into that list:

You should indeed have done all of those things without neglecting the others (Luke 11:42c, Matthew 23:23; QS 34).

Q people now said that Jews must now observe all those hasidic rules. They envisioned Jesus as a scholar of the Torah and the Prophets fully competent to tell what it meant. Either they had gone back to the old-time religion, or *hasidim* had joined them during the war. Or both. Nevertheless they remained firmly against the violence of the Zealots:

The Law and the Prophets had authority until John. Ever since, the *basileia* of Θεός suffers violence, and violent men take it by force. It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than one dot of the Law to fail. Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery. Anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery (Luke 16:16-18, Matthew 11:12-13, 5:17-18, 31-32; QS 56).

The first two sentences blame John for putting the idea of revolt in Zealots' heads. But that doesn't mean abandoning the Torah. As for remarriage, Jesus people probably accepted it, but now Q forbids it.

Jesus conversed with God, who confided to him secrets of the ages:

I thank you, Father, *Kyrios* of ouranous and ge, that you have hidden these things from the wise and cunning and revealed them to babes... [Daniel 2:27]

My Father has handed everything to me. No one knows who the son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the son and anyone to whom the son wishes to reveal it (Luke 10:21-22, Matthew 11:25-27; QS 24).

In that age, fertility goddesses abounded, including Isis, Cybele, Demeter, and Artemis, and gentiles kept them when becoming Christians. They simply called them by a new name: the mother of Jesus. The following saying indicates that the cult of Jesus' mother had come to the Q people, and as good Jews they repudiated it:

As Jesus spoke, a certain woman of the company called out, "Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts which you sucked!"

Jesus replied, "No! Instead: blessed are those who hear the word of the Θεός and keep it!" (Luke 11:27-28; QS 31).

Refugees from the war were coming back into Palestine, but Jewish government and tradition had been destroyed. They had to rebuild everything. The Q people envisioned themselves forming the new Israel under the *basileia* of God, as did the Pharisees (next page), but the Q people imagined it guided by Jesus' principles:

You are the ones who stayed with me in my trials. I appoint for you the *basileia* that my Father appointed to me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my *basileia* and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Luke 22:28-30, Matthew 19:28; QS 62).

The passages above constitute the third layer of Q.⁷

An addition to one of Paul's letters. An angry Christian added these lines to 1 Thessalonians to place the blame for the destruction of Jerusalem upon the Judeans:

The Judeans killed the *Kyrios* Jesus and their prophets, drove us out, displeased Θεός, fought against everyone, and kept us from speaking to the *ethnos* to save them. They were as sinful as they could possibly be. The wrath has come upon them to the *telos* [end] (1 Thes. 2:14-16).⁸

Jews came back to Palestine to try to go on with their lives, but the city and Temple on which they had relied, were gone. The ancient cult of burnt sacrifices was gone. Jews weren't even allowed to visit the ruins. The aristocracy was gone (though apparently a few survived, for Hegesippus included Sadducees in a list of sects "hostile to the Tribe of Judah and the Christ"). The other hostile sects were the Galileans, Daily Baptists, Masbotheans, Samaritans, Essenes, and Pharisees. We know nothing about the first three, but each probably claimed to be the true Israel and perhaps chose twelve judges to rule the twelve tribes.

Eusebius gives us a list of "bishops of Jerusalem" who occupied the "throne" up to the Second Revolt, 132-135 CE. That title, "bishop," is probably anachronistic. In the list, after James and cousin Symeon, thirteen others followed. The "Tribe of Judah and the Christ" spun off seven "heretical" sects.⁹

The Pharisees

Pharisees were the dominant Jewish sect after the war. They regarded the destruction of Jerusalem as God's punishment for disobedience. "Disobedient" included Jesus people and Christians.

With the Temple gone and access to Jerusalem denied, the Pharisees founded synagogues in Palestine. Like synagogues in the Diaspora, they were ruled by rabbis and elders. They tried to persuade heretics to renounce their heresies. They regularly pronounced a curse on followers of Jesus, and excommunicated them.

There were two academies for Jewish studies in Palestine. The one at Jamnia, or Jabneh, several miles west of Jerusalem, had long been an important center for Jewish studies. It was saved from destruction because the Pharisee rabbi ben Zakkai, who had been smuggled out of Jerusalem during the siege, found refuge at a nearby Roman camp and prevailed on them to spare Jamnia. After Jerusalem fell, Rabbi ben Zakkai created a new government for all Israel, including a Sanhedrin. It kept the calendar of feast days up to date and sent apostles to the Diaspora. Jamnia was long an important center for Israel.

Rabbi Akiba founded an academy at Bene-Berek near Jaffa about 75 CE. Akiba's academy did much to shape Israel's future. It set to work to

identify the "genuine" books from the enormous number that had accumulated since the Exile. They rejected messianic and apocalyptic literature such as the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, Psalms of Solomon, Wisdom of ben Sirach, the Maccabees, Enoch, Wisdom of Solomon, and 3,4 Ezra. They rejected any book not in Hebrew, and anything written after Ezra's time. (Daniel's setting in the Exile fooled them into thinking it predated Ezra. Daniel was begun about 200 BCE.) The rabbis eventually closed the Jewish canon (Torah, Prophets, and Writings). It contains the same twenty-two books that constitute the Protestant Old Testament.¹⁰

NOTES

1. Vases: Suetonius, 10:7.
2. Titus in the East: Josephus, *Jewish War*, 7:35, 95-113.
3. Triumph in Rome: *Jewish War*, 7:113-162.
4. Qumran, Zealots: Contrary to decades of scholarly opinion, Qumran was never a religious community. Nor were the celebrated Dead Sea scrolls written there. Golb.
5. End of First Revolt: Josephus, *Jewish War*, 7:247-434.
6. King David's descendants: Eusebius 3:12; Brandon, 56. Financing of Colosseum construction: Feldman.
7. Third layer, Q⁵: As defined in Mack, 1993, 81-102, 171-188, 260-261, 366ff.
8. Addition to I Thes.: Mack, 1995, 151.
9. Return to Jerusalem: Eusebius 3:11, 4:5, 22.
10. Academies of ben Zakkai and Akiba: *Encyclopedia Judaica*.

—⊕— 21 The Kingdom of God Is At Hand

A Galilean sage died in a futile attempt to prevent the war he foresaw destroying Jerusalem. That was the theme of a novel that appeared soon after the war. The author is unknown, but about 130 CE Papias, bishop of Hierapolis, said Peter's interpreter wrote it and his name was Mark. That name stuck. He or she probably lived in Tyre or Sidon and had a good library.¹ Mark was probably a teacher. To him, the fall of Jerusalem was an epic tragedy greater than the fall of Troy.

Mark and his friends were under attack from Pharisees for ignoring certain of their rules. Mark replied that their attitude was exactly what led to the revolt and destruction of Jerusalem. The Pharisees retorted that YHWH destroyed Jerusalem because his chosen people had abandoned the Torah—like Mark and his group. The Pharisees arrested Jesus people, tried them in their synagogues, and caned them to try to make them repent. Those who wouldn't repent were barred from synagogues, and curses were pronounced on them. Some Jesus people caved in.

Mark's small group felt isolated and beleaguered. Would all their young people renounce Jesus and go back to the synagogue? Would their group dwindle away and Jesus' message of compassion be lost?

Mark had watched the Jewish War from not so far away. He felt that no one had to die in that war. It didn't have to happen. It began with the Judeans' love for ritual and regulation instead of God and humanity. Jesus' code would have prevented it, except that Jews were blinded by religious and patriotic fervor. Mark, though not Christian, began to understand the power of Paul's "Jesus Christ impaled" to persuade. He began to say that Jesus *knew* Zealots were driving Israel toward destruction. Jesus tried to halt the rising tide of violence. Jesus gave his life—no, he *ransomed* himself—on the *stauros* so his people might live. His *stauros* represented all the brutalities of the war, and every cruelty since Cain killed his brother Abel.

Mark knew the Trojan War, too, for he told Jesus' story as a Homeric epic. He probably taught *Iliad* and *Odyssey* in his school. As *Iliad* is about heroism before the fall of Troy, so the Gospel of Mark is about a man who heroically tried to prevent the fall of Jerusalem. As Odysseus met one misfortune after another only to find himself betrayed by his own neighbors, so Jesus met one attack after another by his own coun-

trymen and the Temple cult.² Jesus was as brave in facing death as Achilles and Hector. He was greater, for death could not conquer him. His spirit and his hope still live among us.

In Mark's tale, Jesus was one of many children born to an ordinary woman. God poured his spirit upon him and gave him extraordinary powers of healing and magic. Jesus preached love and compassion instead of violence. He dismissed the Law of Moses as archaic. He said the time was ripe for the *basileia* of God. Demons recognized Jesus and obeyed his command to tell nobody. His disciples knew who he was but never really understood. Declaring the Torah obsolete angered the Judean Pharisees and priests, so they plotted to kill him. He knew the *hasidim* would revolt against Rome and the Temple would be destroyed.

Mark said it all happened as Jesus said it would. The Judeans were destroyed, so he was vindicated in his attempt to bring love. The "good news," *euangelion*, was that the very worst that could befall Israel was past. The *hasidim* had surely learned their lesson. Now the twelve tribes of Israel could cooperate in rebuilding the nation in loving kindness. It was an unprecedented opportunity. The *basileia* of God was at hand.

Mark combined various conceptions of Jesus into a single previously unimagined character, though rather ambiguous. Was Jesus an ordinary man whom God adopted and blessed with his spirit? Of course. Was he the humble son of man, beggar, and iconoclastic sage of the early Q people? Yes, and he was also an exorcist with fearful magical powers. He was the angry prophet of the Q² generation. He was an Epic of Israel miracle worker. He was the legalistic son of man of the pronouncement stories. He was Wisdom's child, the Righteous Suffering Servant and son of God. He was a man of many misfortunes like Odysseus, a hero like Troy's Hector and Greece's Achilles, and a martyr like Socrates. He was the Lamb of God. He was Elijah—well, no, *John* was Elijah, but Jesus was The Prophet Like Moses and king of Israel, heir to David's throne. He was Daniel's son of man, the world ruler who would reign forever. He would return from heaven, destroy Jerusalem, and call the twelve tribes back to Israel. He was the Messiah of Jewish prophecy and far greater. He was Paul's Jesus Christ.

Mark wrote for his own small group, and he also appealed to other Jesus people, Christians, Pharisees, and all Jews to submerge their differences and get along with each other.²

The Gospel of Mark is a drama in three acts. John baptizes Jews to prepare them for the Messiah's coming. He baptizes Jesus. God pro-

claims him his son and sends the holy spirit upon him. In Galilee he announces that the *basileia* of God is approaching. He commands evil spirits; Satan's reign will soon end. He forgives sin and declares hasidic rules obsolete, so Pharisees scheme against him (Mark 1:1-8:26).

The second act opens on the road northward from Galilee. Jesus reveals the "messianic secret," that he is the Messiah. He foretells his death and resurrection. He repeats the prophecy on the road to Jerusalem. The people proclaim him son of David as he rides into town on a donkey. He declares God's disgust with the Temple cult. He predicts the revolt, destruction of Jerusalem, miseries, the son of man's coming, and the imperial rule of God (Mark 8:27-13:37).

The third act begins with Jesus' meal with his disciples. Judas Iscariot betrays him. Jesus is arrested, falsely accused, condemned, and put to death. "Signs" mark the end of the Temple era. The women find the body gone. A young man tells them to tell the men Jesus will meet them in Galilee, but they are afraid to tell them (Mark 14:1-16:8).

But you must read the Gospel of Mark yourself. As we page through it, we will note some of his sources: mostly SQ, PQ, Paul, the Homeric epics, Jewish scripture, Epic of Israel miracle tales, pronouncement stories, and the Book of Q.

The present title, *Euangelion to kata Markon*, was added at a later time. (By Papias? Maybe.) Mark himself began it thus:

Mark 1:1 "Beginning of the *euangelion* of Jesus Christ, son of God."

Act I. Jesus proclaims the reign of God. In the opening scene, Mark deftly interweaves scripture, SQ's story, and a Q saying:

Mark 1:2-5 Prophets wrote. "I send my *angelos* before you to prepare the way before you." Exodus 23:20. Malachi 3:1. "The voice of one crying in the desert, 'Prepare the way of the *Kyrios*; make his paths straight.'" John preached repentance and baptized at the Jordan. SQ (John 1:19-36); QS 3 (Luke 3:1-6, 16-17).³

Mark clothes John as Elijah:

1:6-8 John wore a coat of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist. He ate locusts and wild honey. 2 Kings 1:8; Zechariah 13:4; Leviticus 11:22.

King Ahaziah asked, "What kind of man told you that?" His servants said, "He wore haircloth and a leather girdle." The king said, "Elijah the Tishbite!" (2 Kings 1:8).

Mark follows Q and SQ in making John defer to Jesus:

Mark 1:7-8 John preached repentance and baptized, saying, "One greater than I is coming." QS 4-5 (Luke 3:1-6, 16-17); SQ (John 1:27).

Mark provides the earliest known reference to Nazareth:

1:9 Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee...

Schonfield says Nazareth of the gospels lay east of Chinnereth, the lake Mark calls "Sea of Galilee." Nazareth never appears in Jewish scripture, nor in historical records until the third or fourth century CE.⁴

Mark found the descent of the holy spirit in SQ, and probably also the baptism although that is not in the Gospel of John now:

1:9-11 John baptizes Jesus. Holy spirit descends as a dove. A voice in the sky says, "This is my son in whom I am well pleased." SQ (John 1:31-34); Psalm 2:7.

The dove is from magicians' lore.⁵ The voice from heaven and the adoption of Jesus are from Jewish scripture:

YHWH said, "You are my son. Today I have begotten you" (Psalm 2:7).

Mark mentions the temptations recently composed by the last Q writers:

1:12-13 The spirit drives Jesus into the desert to be tested by *Satan* forty days. QS 6 (Luke 4:1-13).

Mark knows Q well but is writing a tale that Q could not have written.

The next scene is in Galilee, where Jesus says we can have the rule of God. He gathers the first four disciples:

1:14-15 John is in prison. Jesus says, "The time is fulfilled. The *basileia* of God draws near (QS 20). Repent and trust [*pisteuete*] the *euangelion*."

1:16-20 Jesus calls Simon, Andrew, and James and John the sons of Zebedee. Immediately they follow him. QS 19b,c (Luke 9:59-62). Contrast with Elisha's delay to perform certain rituals (1 Kings 19:19-21).

Mark feels urgency similar to Q's: Disciples must drop everything *right now* and spread the news of God's *basileia*. Throughout the tale, his readers would have recognized Mark's parody of James and John by allusion to Castor and Pollux, the twins of the constellation Gemini.⁵

Mark draws on legends of Jesus the exorcist and his own experience with exorcists and synagogues:

1:21-28 Jesus enters a synagogue. Demon announces "Jesus Nazarene, Holy One of Θεος." Jesus commands silence and expels him. His authority amazes the people.

The demon recognizes Jesus as a god, but Jesus hushes him to keep Pharisees and rulers from finding out who he is—"the messianic secret."

Mark further demonstrates Jesus' supernatural power:

1:29-45 Jesus heals many and casts out demons. He heals a leper whom priests could not cure but will declare cured. Leviticus 13:49, 14:2-3.

Next Mark weaves in some pronouncement stories⁵ that his own school may have composed a generation or two earlier. He exploits the ambiguity of the "son of man" epithet while showing Jesus using common sense with rules from the Torah:

2:1-12 Jesus forgives sins and cures an affliction regarded as God's punishment for sin. He claims power to forgive. Pronouncement stories.

2:13-3:6 Table fellowship with Levi son of Alpheus, toll collectors, and sinners. Fasting, eating holy bread. Sabbath observance: Deuteronomy 23:25, 5:14; 1 Samuel 21:1-6; 2 Samuel 8:17; Exodus 23:12. Pronouncement stories.

Jesus is in open table fellowship with "unclean." The Greek name "Alpheus" suggests that Levi's father was Hellenistic. Jesus probably associated freely with gentiles even if some of his followers did not.

Pharisees, angered by Jesus' flagrant violations of the Law of Moses, begin to conspire against him:

3:6 Pharisees go out to conspire with Herodians against Jesus. The conspiracy theme is from *Odyssey*, PQ (John 11:47-53), and Paul (1 Cor. 2:8, 11:23?).

Mark, like PQ, blames *hasidim* and Zealots for Jesus' death. As *Odyssey* opens with the suitors' conspiracy against Telemachos and Odysseus, so Pharisees begin conspiring early in the gospel (Mark 3:6) rather than after the riot in the Temple as in PQ (Mark 11:15-19; John 2:13-25, 11:45-67). "Herodians" are men in Herod Antipas' court.

Mark lets the invisible demons testify as to Jesus' divinity:

3:7-12 Jesus is famous as an exorcist and healer. Demons all over Galilee bow down to him and declare him son of God.

Now Mark lays groundwork for the mission story:

3:13-19 Jesus ordains twelve to heal, exorcise, and preach. Simon he calls Peter; James and John the sons of Zebedee he calls *Boanerges* [sons of Thunder or Rage], Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alpheus, Thaddeus, Simon *Kananaios* [Zealot], and Judas Iscariot who betrayed him. QS 20 (Luke 10:1-11); QS 62 (Luke 22:28-30); 1 Cor. 15:5; PQ (John 6:70-11, 12:4, 13:18, 18:2-3).⁶

One disciple is a Zealot (*Kananaios*, Aramaic). The surname *Boanerges* indicates that James and John were violent men. Matthew will call Simon Peter *Barjona* (“terrorist,” Matthew 16:17, euphemized in John 1:42). Most or all probably fought and died as rebels in the revolt. That’s why Mark depicts the twelve as “not understanding.” PQ compared Judas, possibly an unfaithful early disciple, with *Odyssey’s* Melanthius. Mark also knew a traitor he called Judas.⁷ Presumably neither “James” is the brother of Jesus—but we don’t know, do we?

Mark uses the Baalzebul story to show that Jesus would destroy Satan’s kingdom, of which the Temple cult and *hasidim* were a part:

3:20-30 Scribes accuse Jesus of possessing Baalzebul. Jesus announces the imminent fall of Satan’s *basileia*. Pronouncement story; QS 28 (Luke 11:14-23); QS 37b (Luke 12:10); Isaiah 49:24-25.

3:31-35 Jesus denies his family. Pronouncement story; QS 43 (Luke 12:49-53); QS 52 (Luke 14:26-27).

Jesus’ denial of family recalls Cynic independence and leaving family. Jesus’ rejection of *hasidim*, and Odysseus’ rage against the suitors.

Mark’s community hoped everyone would submit to the *basileia* of God. Some of their teachings would remain secret until that day came:

4:1-20 Secrets of the *basileia* of God. Parable of the sower. Pronouncement story.

4:21-22 Candle parable. Anything hidden will be revealed. QS 33a (Luke 11:33); QS 35 (Luke 12:2-3).

4:23-25 You will be measured by your own standards. He who has, will get more. QS 10c (Luke 6:38).

4:26-29 Preaching the *basileia* of God is like planting seeds.

4:30-32 Parable of the mustard seed. QS 46a (Luke 13:18-19).

Mark’s group probably taught secrets to trusted members who had passed certain tests for admission to the inner circle as in mystery cults.

The two “chains” of Epic of Israel miracle tales were thought to come from separate groups. One chain begins with the calming of the storm; the other, walking on water. Each chain has the feeding of a multitude and three exorcisms or healings. Actually Mark adapted some of SQ’s signs and composed others with help from *Odyssey*.⁸

The first miracle chain is interwoven with Q’s mission story, pronouncement stories, and stories about John. Mark imagines Chinnereth, a lake, as a stormy sea like *Odyssey’s* Aegean⁴:

4:35-5:1 Jesus calms storm as they cross to gentile side of Sea of Galilee. First miracle story of first chain. *Odyssey*.⁹

5:2-20 Jesus exorcises in graveyard, sends demon "Legion" into 2,000 pigs. First miracle chain. *Odyssey*.⁹

5:21-43 Back in Galilee, Jesus raises Jairus' daughter. First miracle chain. He cures a woman of hemorrhage. First miracle chain.

6:1-6 Jesus teaches in synagogue in Nazareth, but townspeople and family reject the "son of Mary," the *tekton* [carpenter]. Pronouncement story; QS 43c (Luke 12:51-53). Odysseus was a skilled carpenter [*tekton*]. *Odyssey* 5:234-256, etc.).⁹

6:7-11 Jesus sends forth the twelve disciples to heal, exorcise, and preach the *basileia* of God. Q's mission story (QS 20, 21; Luke 10:2-11, 21).

6:12-20 Herod Antipas says Jesus "is" the "raised" John the baptizer.

6:21-29 Girl demands John's head on platter, variation of event in Rome in 184 BCE. Other possible sources are Cicero, Livy, Seneca; Esther 5-7 and *Odyssey*.⁹

6:30 Disciples return from mission; Mark has nothing to say about the mission.

6:31-44 Jesus hosts five thousand men with five loaves and two fish at a *symposia symposia*. 2 Kings 4:42-44. *Odyssey*,⁹ SQ (John 6:1-14). End of first miracle chain.

Rejection (6:1-6) recalls suitors' hostility to Odysseus and symbolizes Jewish rejection of the Jesus movement. Mark never again mentions Jesus' family.

"Son of Mary" means he was illegitimate.¹⁰ Thus Mark chides Pharisees for despising God's children who are victims of others' deeds. Matthew has not yet invented the myth of Jesus' virgin birth.

How could Herod Antipas think that Jesus "is" John? In Mark's story, Antipas thinks Jesus called John's spirit up from the grave and united with it, thus explaining Jesus' *dynamis*. Most people believed some magicians could work magic by calling on spirits of the dead.¹¹ Mark thus acknowledges Pharisee accusations that Jesus used magic, but will soon offer his own explanation for Jesus' magical powers.

The girl's request for John's head on a platter was modified from an incident in Rome two centuries earlier. Mark places it in a scene depending on *Odyssey* or the book of Esther, or both.⁹ The feeding of the five thousand (above) was one of SQ's signs taken from a drinking party in *Odyssey*. Mark restored the Homeric drinking party.⁹

Mark's second miracle chain opens with Jesus' walking on the sea, one of SQ's signs¹²:

6:45-52 Jesus walks across the sea. Disciples think he is a *phantasma*. Start of second chain of miracle stories. *Odyssey*, SQ (John 6:15-25). Disciples, like Odysseus' companions, are fearful, dense, don't "understand."¹²

6:53-56 Crowds come to be healed.

7:1-23 Jesus accuses Pharisees of superficiality. Evil thoughts and words make you unclean. Pronouncement story; QS 34c (Luke 11:38-41); Isaiah 29:13; Exodus 20:12, 21:17; Deuteronomy 5:16; Leviticus 20:9.

7:24-30 Jesus talks to Syro-Phoenician woman, heals daughter from afar. Pronouncement story; second miracle chain. Compare QS 15 (Luke 7:1-10), SQ's second sign (John 4:46-54).

7:31-37 Jesus heals deaf and dumb boy. Second miracle chain.

8:1-9 Jesus feeds four thousand in the Decapolis with seven loaves. Second miracle chain; modified by wedding feast in *Odyssey*.¹³

8:10-13 Pharisees demand a sign to prove that God sent Jesus. Pronouncement story.

8:14-21 Disciples complain of having only one loaf; Jesus scolds them for not "understanding." *Odyssey*; Jeremiah 5:2; Isaiah 6:9-10.

8:22-26 Jesus heals a blind man. End of second chain of miracle stories. Compare SQ (John 5:2-9).

According to SQ, Q, and Mark, Jesus would never have entered a gentile's home. That is contradicted by his eating with toll collectors (2:15-16) and by the Cynic tradition of cosmopolitanism. Jews regarded Jesus as hopelessly unclean, therefore he was free of the Torah and might embrace gentiles. Mark's community probably ignored certain taboos privately but not publicly. Mark publicly taught that Jesus kept his distance from the Syro-Phoenician woman's house. But then he asks Jewish readers to take a larger step: After Jesus multiplies loaves and fishes for a crowd of five thousand in a Jewish context, he goes through the Decapolis, a gentile region, where he feeds four thousand, then returns to the Jewish side where Pharisees scold him. In the boat, the disciples complain of having only one loaf. "Don't you understand *even yet*?" Jesus asks. The moral is that the message of love must go to gentiles too.¹³ Jesus may have socialized with gentiles, but if Zealots caught his followers doing so, they might have killed them.

Act II. On the road to Jerusalem is a dramatic transition to Jesus' battle against evil forces. Jesus reveals himself in terms of four different traditions about who he was:

8:27-30 Jesus asks disciples, "Who do men say I am?" "John the baptizer": From exorcists' tradition, popular opinion.¹⁴ "Elijah or one of the prophets": From popular opinion, Epic of Israel tales, SQ, Deuteronomy 18:15-18. "What do *you* say?" "You are the *Christos*!" He admits it, demands secrecy: SQ, PQ, Paul's Christ cult.

The first reply is the accusation that Jesus called up John's spirit to use in exorcising. Jesus' students of exorcists' arts may have said so, but Mark wants to scotch that idea.¹⁴ He also wants people to think Jesus was greater than Elijah or any prophet. (*John* is Elijah, Jesus' forerunner.) Mark wants his community to accept that Jesus is the martyred Christ, not any of the preceding three personalities.

Mark next presents Jesus as a fifth personality, the son of man who will come down from heaven. Mark doesn't exactly say he is Jesus, but his community had played with Jesus the son of man anecdotes. Now the son of man is a martyr who predicts his own death as Achilles and Hector did—but this son of man will rise from the dead.¹⁵ Thus Mark introduces PQ's passion story although PQ didn't know the son of man. This son of man is unmistakably superhuman:

8:31-33 First of three prophecies: son of man will suffer, be rejected, be killed, rise after three days." Combines Odysseus the man of misfortune with Jewish Suffering Servant (Isaiah 42:1-6, 49:1-6, 50:4-11, 52:13-53), pronouncement stories' son of man, Q²'s son of man; Daniel's child of Wisdom and son of man; martyred Christ (1 Cor. 15:3-4, PQ); Socrates' noble death (Plato's *Apology*, *Crito*, *Phaedo*).

Pharisees would soon ridicule Mark's heavenly son of man with their own hasidic, gigantic son of man in 4 Ezra.

Mark wants his group to stand firm against pressure to conform:

8:34-38 "Take up your *stauros* and follow me." QS 52b (Luke 14:27), from Stoics and Cynics.¹⁶

Mark pictures Jesus looking beyond the coming devastation of Jerusalem. Then, and only then, will Judeans submit to the rule of God:

9:1 Jesus says, "Some of you standing here won't die until you see the *basileia* of God come with *dynamis*."

9:2-8 Jesus is transfigured, shining. God says of Jesus, "*He is my son. Listen to him.*" Possible sources: *Odyssey*; Exodus 34:29-35; 2 Kings 2:11; Philo's *Life of Moses*.¹⁷

9:9-10 Jesus tells disciples to keep his mission secret until the son of man rises from the dead, much like Odysseus' secrecy at his return, *Odyssey* 13:220-22:87.¹⁷ But also see 1 Cor. 2:6-8. SQ and PQ implied that Jesus' mission was secret.

9:11-13 Elijah had come as John. Judeans, not ready for the *basileia* of God, abused him, so son of man must also be abused. Pronouncement story; 1 Kings 19:2ff.

9:14-29 Jesus prays to drive out deaf and dumb spirit. Epic of Israel miracle story.

Transfiguration proves Jesus a god like Moses and Elijah. He is as Jewish as they. *But Jesus is greater, for he is God's only son.* Therefore Israel must listen to him only. That means the Law of Moses is dead.

Jesus predicts his death twice more and warns the twelve not to seek power—a great fault of Zealots and politicians. Mark, writing after the First Revolt, knew that patriotic Jesus people got caught up in day-to-day skirmishes against Romans as well as the great battles in the revolt:

- 9:33-37 Service in the *basileia* of God. A leader must serve all. Receiving children. Pronouncement story; QS 48c (Luke 13:30); QS 50 (Luke 14:11).
- 9:38-40 A man uses the magical power of Jesus' name to exorcise. "Let him," says Jesus. Pronouncement story, magical tradition; Numbers 11:27-29.
- 9:41-48 Service in imitation of Jesus. Offending little ones... QS 57 (Luke 17:1-2).
- 9:49-50 Salt parable. Keeping peace with one another. End of discourse on service. QS 53 (Luke 14:34-35); Isaiah 66:24.
- 10:2-12 Remarriage after divorce is adultery. Pronouncement story: Deuteronomy 24:1-4, Genesis 1:27, 5:2, 2:24.
- 10:13-16 Children are the *basileia* of God. Pronouncement story.
- 10:17-23 Rich man should give all he has to the poor. Cynics. Pronouncement story: QS 40 (Luke 12:33-34); Exodus 20:12-16, Deut. 5:16-20.
- 10:24-27 Rich men cannot enter the *basileia* of God. Pronouncement story.
- 10:28-30 Jesus promises eternal life to Peter and disciples.
- 10:31 Many who are first will be last, and the last first. QS 48c (Luke 13:30).
- 10:32-34 Third prophecy of son of man's death, with details.
- 10:35-44 Service in imitation of Jesus. James and John ask to sit beside Jesus, a clear parallel with Castor and Pollux.¹⁸ They must suffer as he will. Gentiles (Romans) vie for power, but the will of God is that leaders serve the others. Pronouncement story.
- 10:45 Son of man serves, will give life as ransom for many. Priam's ransom. *Iliad* 24. Also Christ cult ("He died for us," 1 Cor. 15:3).

"Children are of the *basileia* of God" is from Mark the devoted teacher of innocent boys. That rulers should serve their subjects traces from Amos and Aristotle's *Politics*. Jesus' reply to James and John indicates they died in the power struggles of the First Revolt. Mark adds "ransom for many" to the son of man myth to make the repulsive Christian tale of martyrdom acceptable to Jesus people. It is a twist on Priam's payment of ransom for the body of his son Hector.¹⁸

Mark calls Jesus a Nazorean to acknowledge the principal, and more hasidic, Jesus sect in Palestine. Many of them probably fought under John of Gischala, Simon bar Gioras, or Eleazar in the revolt. Mark weaves in another title for Jesus, "son of David," therefore the legitimate king of Judea:

10:46-52 "They came to Jericho. [Hiatus.] As he left Jericho a blind man "sees" that "Jesus the Nazorean" is son of David. Jesus restores sight. Romans 1:3; SQ, PQ (John 1:49, 12:13, 18:33-19:21); blind Tiresias "sees" in *Odyssey*.¹⁹

YHWH's promise that David's descendants would rule Judah forever was one of the roots of the Messiah myth.¹⁹ We wonder what happened in Jericho. A censor probably removed a story of a secret cult ritual.²⁰

Mark followed PQ, not the later SG, in keeping the uproar in the Temple after Jesus' entry into Jerusalem:

11:1-11 Jesus rides on colt of ass into Jerusalem in procession with the twelve. 1 Samuel 10:2; Zechariah 9:9; Psalms 118:26; PQ (John 12:12-15); *Odyssey* 6.

11:12-14 Jesus curses fig tree. Magical tradition.²¹

11:15-19 Uproar: Jesus calls Temple a den of thieves, overturns tables, angers high priests and scribes. Jeremiah 7:11; Isaiah 56:71; PQ (John 2:13-24); *Odyssey*.

11:20-22 Jesus sees the fig tree withered. Magical tradition; *Odyssey* 7.

Jesus' entry into the Temple was not triumphant. It was inspired by Odysseus' miserable entrance to Alcinous' palace. The Temple cult did not welcome Jesus, so they will die like the fig tree. Uproar in the Temple recalls Telemachos' distress at the suitors, and Odysseus' slaughter of them.²¹ Mark and PQ before him had been educated in Hellenistic schools and Diasporic synagogues, and did not empathize with the Temple cult.

Mark uses few Q sayings, but here are three:

11:23 Faith can move mountains. QS 59 (Luke 17:6).

11:24 Believe in power of prayer. QS 27 (Luke 11:9-13).

11:25-26 Forgive people. QS 26 (Luke 11:1-4).

11:27-34 High priests challenge Jesus authority to "do these things." PQ (John 2:2:18). Jesus replies, "Who gave John his authority?" Priests dare not answer because of John's strong following. Pronouncement story.

Jesus' disciples had as much right to claim "authority" as John's.

Jesus teaches in the Temple. He begins with a parable that foretells the slaughter of Jews in the First Revolt, and Jesus' death yet again:

12:1-9 Parable of vineyard workers who kill the owner's son, so owner kills them. Isaiah 5:1-7. *Odyssey*.²¹

12:10-11 Parable of the stone builders rejected. Psalms 118:22-23.

12:12-17 Judeans plot against Jesus. Pharisees and Herodians try to make him choose between YHWH and Caesar. Pronouncement story; PQ.

12:18-27 Sadducees ask Jesus about resurrection of woman and her seven husbands. Pronouncement story; Deuteronomy 25:5; Exodus 3:6.

12:28-34 Greatest commandment is love God and neighbor. Pronouncement story; Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Leviticus 19:18; 1 Samuel 15:22; Micah 6:6-8.

12:35-37 No one dares ask Jesus any question. But at one time someone did ask him a question, for he *answers*, "How can scribes say Christ is son of David? David called Christ 'Kyrios,' so he can't be his son." Pronouncement story; Psalms 110:1.

Mark has just summarized Jesus' teaching: love God and fellow man. He also proved Jesus Christ *wasn't* "son of David;" he was far above Zealot messiahs and all human kings.

Mark adds to a Q saying to compare scribes and Pharisees with suitors of Odysseus' wife Penelope:

12:38-40 Scribes like long robes and the best seats, and devour widows' houses. *Odyssey*; QS 34d (Luke 11:43, Matthew 23:6-7).

12:41-44 The parable of the widow's two mites. Pronouncement story.

Mark's chapter 13 is the "Little Apocalypse." Writing about a man trying to prevent the destruction of Jerusalem, Mark recalls the razing of the Temple and "false messiahs" who fought for the throne of Israel:

13:1-2 Leaving the Temple, a disciple marvels at its construction. Jesus says, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will remain upon another." *Odyssey*.²²

13:3-8 When will it happen? Jesus begins listing signs. "Many will come in my name saying I AM, but the *telos* [end] is not yet. *Ethnos* against *ethnos*, *basileia* against *basileia*; wars, and famines are only the beginning of troubles."

The disciples' awe of the Temple and Jesus' put-down parallel Telemachos' awe at his father's royal hall in Athene's supernatural light and Odysseus' put-down.²² "I AM" is a name for YHWH, but Zealot messiahs apparently used it for themselves.

Which *telos* is coming, according to Mark's Jesus? The end of troubles? Of Jerusalem? The war? The Temple cult? All those things except troubles, but life will go on for the survivors. The *telos* of the Temple, its cult, and the rebellion is the beginning of renewed *pax Romana* in the holy land. Mark hopes that Israel can rebuild its unique nation under the *basileia* of God as a light to the nations.

But the future was cloudy. *Hasidim* were persecuting Jesus people and blaming them for the destruction of Jerusalem. Mark draws on this late Q saying to encourage his people to stand their ground against hasidic persecution:

13:9 They'll hand you over to councils, and you will be beaten in the synagogues, and you will be brought before rulers and kings because of me (QS 37c, Luke 12:11-12, Matthew 10:17-20).

Somebody clumsily inserted the Great Commission into Mark's advice to stand fast:

13:10 And to all *ethne* first must be announced the *euangelion* (Compare Romans 10:18, from Psalm 19:4, and Luke 24:47, Matthew 24:14.).

Mark, not a missionary like Paul, concludes his advice on standing fast:

13:11 Don't decide beforehand what to say, for the holy spirit will guide you (QS 37c, Luke 12:11-12, Matthew 10:17-20).

Now we can see that an editor in Paul's tradition wanted Jesus to make "the holy spirit" "guide" missionaries, so he inserted Verse 10.

Next Mark adapts a passage composed forty years earlier, perhaps in his own synagogue, when Petronius' army passed through his city with Caligula's statue, to fight its way to Jerusalem if necessary. Mark noticed that it also described Vespasian's army as it passed through his city displaying its usual idols and insignias, on its way to Jerusalem:

13:14-19 When you see the Abomination of Desolation of which Daniel spoke—you know what I mean!—standing where it shouldn't, those in Judea should flee to the mountains. It will be like nothing before or ever again. Daniel 9:27, 11:31, 12:11.²²

On the other hand, Zealots and bandits rampaging through Palestine would have killed all Jesus people if *Kyrios* hadn't sent the Romans:

13:20 If *Kyrios* had not shortened the days, no one would have been saved. But he shortened the days for his Elect whom he had chosen.

Jesus people are the "Elect." Mark recalls the many who were fooled into joining rebels and religious frauds before and during the revolt:

13:21-23 There will be *pseudochristoi* and *pseudoprophetai* who will try to mislead the Elect. Daniel 12:1.

The "stars" may be the aristocrats, Temple cult, and Zealot messiahs who fell in the Jewish War:

13:24-26 After the misery, sun and moon will darken and stars fall. Isaiah 14.

Jesus people, especially Mark's community, will lead the Jews:

13:27 Then they will see the son of man come with great power and glory [Daniel 7:13-14.] The son of man will send his *angeli* to gather his Elect. Deut. 30:3-4; Zechariah 1:18-2:13;²² QS 44 (Luke 12:54-56).

Mark expects refugees and Diasporic Jews to return and repopulate Palestine. YHWH will retake possession of Judea and live among his people. Many nations will convert to Judaism and live in peace among the Jews under the principles that Jesus taught. That's how the *basileia* of God will come. It was about to happen.

The signs of revolt were plain long before it began:

13:28-29 Take a lesson from the fig tree. You know summer's here when it puts forth leaves. Likewise when you see these happen, know it's near, even at the gates! *Odyssey*.²² QS 44 (Luke 12:54-56).

13:30-31 This generation will not pass until these things happen. Heaven and earth will pass away, but not my words. *Odyssey*.²² QS 56b (Luke 16:17).

Yet nobody knew exactly when until it happened, and nobody knows when the *basileia* of God will take hold:

13:32-37 No one knows what day it will be, not even angels or the son. [And] only the Father knows when the son of man will come. Watch. QS 41 (Luke 12:39-40).

As Mark wrote, no large-scale return of exiles had begun, nor harmony among Jews. The leaders of the Jesus people—*angeloi* who will “gather the Elect”—were frantically trying to turn people to Jesus’ principles.

Was Mark writing about the end of the world? No, no, no. His mind was on the desolation of the war and reformation of the Jewish nation, not on Judgment Day. He wanted Jesus people to lead Israel in the postwar era.

Act III. The conspiracy goes forward:

14:1-2 Priests and scribes will arrest Jesus, but fearing the people, wait until after the feast day. *Odyssey*; Psalms 31:41; 38:12; PQ (John 11:47-53); 1 Cor. 2:8, 11:23.

14:3-9 A woman anoints Jesus in the house of Simon the leper. Judas protests the cost; Jesus retorts that it is for his burial. *Odyssey* 19:330-507.²² Pronouncement story; Deuteronomy 15:11; 1 Samuel 10:1.

14:10-11 Judas offers to “hand over” Jesus to the high priest for pay. Signs Gospel: vestiges of betrayal remain in John 6:70-71, 13:2, 29. Not in 1 Cor. 11:23.

Mark found Judas in PQ, who patterned him after Melanthius in *Odyssey*²³ and perhaps an early untrustworthy associate. In the present Gospel of John, Judas is a thief in charge of the money box. Jesus sends a spirit into Judas that makes him betray Jesus and thus help Jesus complete his mission (John 6:70-71, 12:4-6, 13:2, 10-11, 18, 21-30). Mark simply makes the high priest hire Judas.

Mark’s community probably held a *koinonia*, friendship meal, in lieu of Passover, for he calls the last supper Passover:

14:12-16 Jesus and the disciples prepare for the Passover meal. 1 Samuel 10:3.

14:17-21 As they sat and ate, Jesus predicted his betrayal. “Woe to that man!” QS 57a (Luke 17:1); Psalms 41:9; Exodus 24:8.

Mark probably adapted his story of the last supper from Paul’s *koinonia*, though he probably also knew PQ’s story of the last supper, of which only vestiges remain (chapter eight; John 13:2-30). This is Mark’s version:

14:22 Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "Take, eat; this is my body." 1 Cor. 11:23-24; Psalms 41:9, Exodus 24:3-8.

14:23-25 Jesus took the cup, gave thanks, passed it to them, and they all drank. He said, "This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many." PQ, 1 Cor. 11:25-26; Exodus 24:8. Jesus will drink no more wine until he drinks it new in the *basileia* of God.

Mark's Jesus blesses the bread and makes the cup part of the meal, whereas Paul's Jesus gives thanks for the bread and delays the cup until after the meal. For Paul the meal was the usual friendship meal, not Passover and not a cultic ceremony. Paul merely wanted his followers to "remember" Jesus at each get-together (1 Cor. 11:25). Mark says nothing about "remembrance."

Calling bread and wine human flesh and blood to be eaten and drunk was a gentile ritual as in Dionysian rituals.²⁴ The Torah forbade drinking blood.²⁵ Mark, Paul, and PQ used those symbols to proclaim their freedom from the Torah and keep hasidic spies away.

Mark's Jesus people had not regarded Jesus as Christ or a martyr, but now he wants them to accept both Christian notions.²⁶ Paul said Jesus' body was broken for "you," his disciples. Mark says the blood was poured out for "many." Immersed in Homer's epics, Mark carefully thought out those changes to puncture fantastic Christian claims and to expose the hasidic rigidity that had caused Jerusalem's destruction.²⁷

As in PQ, Mark's Jesus predicts Peter's denial and the disciples' flight. For Mark, denial and flight symbolize their abandoning Jesus' principles to join the rebels. He tells them to meet him in Galilee after he rises from the tomb:

14:26-31 Jesus and disciples go to Mount of Olives. He says disciples will scatter. Zechariah 13:7. Nevertheless he promises that after he rises he will go ahead of them in Galilee. But Peter will deny him. PQ; John 18:15-18, 25-27.

Jesus' point, and Mark's, is that if the disciples went home to Galilee, they wouldn't get caught up in the excitement of revolt and get killed. But they don't understand that Jerusalem is an unhealthy place to be.

Jesus is a Homeric hero as well as the Jewish Suffering Servant facing death with Stoic-Cynic courage²⁸:

14:32-40 Jesus prays to not have to go through with his execution. "Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done." Psalms 42:6, 11; *Iliad*.

14:41-52 Men come; Judas kisses Jesus, who scolds them for deceit. They arrest him. PQ (John 18:1-11). Naked young man flees. Amos 2:16; *Odyssey*.

14:53-60 High priest tries Jesus. He is accused of threatening to destroy the Temple. 2 Cor. 5:1; PQ (John 18:12-14, 19-25, 2:18-22); Psalms 27:12, 109:2.

14:61-65 Jesus tells high priest he is Christ and son of God, and to expect to see the son of man sitting at the right hand of God and coming to earth. He is accused of blasphemy. Psalms 38:13-16.

Hark! When will the high priest see the fantastic, gigantic Son of Man of folklore come down from heaven? It had to be when he was killed in the revolt. That means the Son of Man—Jesus, risen from the tomb—destroyed Jerusalem and the Judeans in the fury of the revolt!²⁸

The naked young man is timid Elpenor who begs Odysseus for burial *and* fulfills Amos' prophecy. He will reappear in Jesus' tomb.²⁸

Mark applies three titles to Jesus at once (Christ, son of God, son of man).²⁹ He is melding disparate traditions.

Mark uses PQ's tale of Peter's denial to represent the inability of the twelve and other Jesus people to keep out of the rebellion:

14:66-15:1 Peter denies Jesus three times. PQ (John 18:15-18, 25-27). Jesus is "the Nazarene."

"Nazarene" obviously meant "of Nazareth," but somehow it became the name of a liberal sect in Syria. Mark was a Nazarene. In contrast, the more hasidic Nazoreans of Palestine "kept the Torah."

Mark, like PQ, thinks Jews should accept Jesus as their ruler:

15:2-5 Pontius Pilate questions Jesus about being the king [*basileus*] of the Judeans [*Ioudaion*]. PQ (John 18:28-37). Psalms 39:9.

Mark expands on PQ's tale that Pilate customarily released a prisoner chosen by excitable Passover crowds:

15:6-15 A crowd gathers to choose a prisoner for release. Pilate offers to free Jesus the king of the Judeans, but high priests persuaded the mob to demand release of a rebel. Pilate asks what to do with Jesus. "Impale [*Staurosom*] him!" "Why? What evil has he done?" The mob insists, "Impale him!" To please them, Pilate releases Barabbas and sentences innocent Jesus to impaling. *Odyssey*; PQ (John 18:38-40, 19:6).

Mark blames Judeans for Jesus' death and the destruction of Israel. Barabbas' Homeric antecedent was Odysseus' roguish rival Irus, but the First Revolt produced lots of new, real-life scoundrels for Mark to pick from.

Mark expands PQ's stories of mocking and impaling Jesus. The "reed" may have been a play on the Aramaic words *qana*, "reed," and *Qannaya* or *Kananaia*, "Zealot"³⁰:

15:16-20 Roman soldiers scourge Jesus and mock him with purple coat and reed for a scepter. PQ (John 19:1-3). Psalms 31:11, 35:19-25, 69:20; *Odyssey* 15:17, 18:118.
15:21-32 They take Jesus to Golgotha. Soldiers impale him, then cast lots for his clothing. Above him is a notice entitled, "The King of the Judeans," giving the reason for execution. Two thieves are executed with him to fulfill scripture. Isaiah 53:12. Passersby wag heads at him for pretensions as Christ, king of Israel, and for boasting that he would rebuild the Temple in three days. Priests and scribes say, "Let him save himself." Psalms 22:7-8, 109:23. PQ (John 19:17-24); *Odyssey*.

Darkening skies show God's displeasure with the Judeans. Jesus' *pneuma* shouts as it escapes and goes to *Hades*, like Hector's.³⁰ The gentile soldier understands what the twelve and the Judeans did not:

15:33-41 Darkness at noon. Jesus calls, "Eloi, Eloi, why have you forsaken me?" He is offered vinegar to fulfill scripture. PQ (John 19:28-30). He cries out and gives up the *pneuma* as the veil rips. Centurion declares Jesus son of Θεός. PQ, *Iliad* 22:360-365; Psalms 22:1, 69:21.

The tearing shows God's judgment: It is final. The Judeans rejected Jesus and so are no longer the chosen people. God will destroy them.

Mark omits PQ's piercing of Jesus' side but keeps Joseph's care of the body. To the two women he adds Salome. Peter does not appear to check the tomb. Whereas in *Odyssey* timid Elpenor stayed in *Hades*, the frightened, naked young man comes back fully clothed, and thus Mark subtly advances the promise of resurrection²⁸:

15:42-47 Joseph of Arimathea claims the body and lays it in tomb. *Iliad*, PQ (John 19:38-42). Mary Magdalene and Mary "mother of Joses" witness it.

16:1-8 Early Sunday, the two Marys and Salome find the stone rolled away and body gone. PQ (John 20:1-22). Young man in tomb says Jesus rose and went ahead to Galilee to meet disciples. He tells the women to let the disciples know, but the women are too frightened to tell anybody.

The body gets up, rolls the heavy stone away, and walks to Galilee.

The best Greek manuscripts written before Eusebius' time (died 328 CE) end at verse eight with the women's amazement, fear, and silence. That's how Mark ended his tale. MacDonald points out what was probably common knowledge when Mark wrote, that the twelve stayed in Jerusalem to jockey for power and die alongside thousands of other Galileans and Judeans in the revolt, 66-70 CE.³¹ Paul gave us an eye-witness glimpse of James, Kephaz, and John leading Jesus people in Jerusalem in the 50's. After James' death in 62 and growing signs of trouble, many Jews, doubtlessly including Jesus people, left Jerusalem. But not the twelve. They, like many others, remained and joined the

rebels to defend free Israel from the Romans. The twelve names in Mark's list may be the most accurate historical information in all the gospels, although it reflects the 60's rather than Jesus' time.

What kind of book is it, besides an imitation Homeric epic? Mark didn't pretend it was history, for he set many "flags" to display its very respectable Homeric paternity. That is true even though he hid or transformed many of his borrowings.³¹ He wrote his epic to proclaim the "higher truth" that it was time for people to get along.

To teach that sort of truth, Mark wrote a kind of tale called an aretology, from *areté*, Greek for manliness, courage, virtue. Aretology was a popular literary genre for teaching ethics and character in the Greco-Roman world. Aretologies were fictitious biographies that exaggerated heroes' virtues and ignored any faults. Character study could be life-like. A tale could be so outrageous as to amuse or anger the reader. Who hasn't been indignant over the way Athenians treated Socrates?

People often idolize heroes more and more as time goes on. Socrates was already larger than life in *Apology* and became bigger in subsequent dialogues.³² Achilles, Hector, and Odysseus were the Supermen and Captain Marvels of the Greco-Roman age. Emperors and soldiers cut their eyeteeth on Homer's tales and tried to imitate his demigods.

Mark's gospel was an aretology. He wanted people to believe the truth of Jesus' teaching that humanism is God's law and supersedes the Torah. He wanted Jesus people to stand up to Pharisee criticism with heads held high. He wanted Christians and Jews to come back to the real world of humankind. Ironically, he gave the Jesus Christ myth the appearance of historical fact with specific names, faces, places, and times. Ever since, Christians have quoted Mark and his imitators as eyewitness accounts of things that couldn't have happened.

Mark's new-age epic struck such a chord with Christians and Jesus people in the aftermath of the Jewish War that imitations and sequels became the fashion. It was expanded to create a new gospel, Matthew, within a few years. A generation or two after that, it was expanded into the very different Gospel of Luke, with Acts as a sequel.

Bishops discovered the power of Jesus Christ stories as supposed eyewitness accounts and touted their favorites. Mark was evidently Papias' favorite. Perhaps he had been brought up on it. He gave it Peter's authority by saying that his interpreter, Mark, wrote down "all he remembered" of Peter's sermons.³³

How did Papias know about Mark? He didn't. Markan legends were popular in Papias' time. The unknown authors of Acts, Colossians, 2 Timothy, and 1 Peter exploited them. So did Papias. The story tellers probably found Mark's name in Paul's letter to Philemon.³⁴

An angry gospel. Mark wanted people to understand how dangerous it was for Jews to reject Jesus' gospel of love. That's why over and over he told of actions by Judean crowds, Pharisees, priests, and scribes against Jesus. His tale should have remained "in house"—among Jews only. He didn't expect it to be used against his own people, but that's exactly what happened. His wonderful tale reinforced Syrian and Roman hatred of Zealots and Jews generally. They thought it was history. In the mouths of politicians and fools it became the word of God—the greatest lie ever told. The lie became a whirlwind against Mark's people. The lie justified treating Jewish refugees as hardly human and driving them from town to town, country to country as undesirables. It excused the Inquisition's bringing its full barbaric force against Jews in the *auto-da-fé*. The lie justified pogroms in Czarist Russia. It justified Adolf Hitler's holocaust of millions. The lie lives on today in continuing insults and efforts to convert or murder Jews. We all live in a more dangerous and superstitious world because of that lie. It is all the sadder that superstitious people and crooks call Mark's clever work of fiction the word of God.

NOTES

1. Sidon, Tyre: Mack, 1988, 321. Also see Mack, 1988, 316-323; 1993, 177-180; 1995, 158-159.
2. Mark imitated the Homeric epics MacDonald. Mark a fictional biography: Mack, 1988; 1995, 152-161. Signs Source, Passion Source of Gospel of John: Chapter eight; partially dissected out by Fortna. The heroes' deaths were predicted but only Jesus rose from the dead: MacDonald, 131-147; *Iliad* 24:550-551, 756.
3. Q sayings are referred to the Gospel of Luke, where they are preserved best. For reconstructions of Q and the sayings, see Mack, 1993, 81-102.
4. Nazareth: Schonfield, 1974, 278-288; *Insilco Judaic*. Chinnereth: Mark lived on the seacoast imagined the lake as a Homeric sea. See MacDonald, 55-62.
5. Holy spirit. dove. Smith, 1978. James and John sons of Zebedee a parody of Gemini. MacDonald, 25-32, etc. Pronouncement stories: Listed in Mack, 1995, 314-316.
6. Disciples in Signs Gospel: Fortna 139, 149.
7. Disciples were rebels: Brandon, 65, 114, 144, 148, 185. Disciples not understanding: MacDonald, 20-23. "Sons of Thunder" indicates tie with Castor-Pollux myths: MacDonald, 24-32. Melanthius: *Odyssey* 17:256-273, 22:142-193, 474-477; as Judas Iscariot: MacDonald, 38.
8. Two miracle chains: Mack, 1988, 216-219. Mark wrote them, inspired by *Odyssey*: MacDonald, 83ff.

9. *Odyssey* source of calmed storm, demoniac, carpenter, feast stories: MacDonald, 55-76, 15-19, 83-80. John's death: Crossan 1994, 33-36; MacDonald, 77-82.
10. Illegitimacy: Smith, 1978, 26-28, 46-47.
11. Necromancy: Smith, 1978, 33-36, 43, 97-100.
12. Phantom story: Crossan, 1994, 183-186. Disciples don't understand, Jesus walking on water from *Odyssey*: MacDonald, 20-23, 148-153.
13. Two feeding stories: Crossan, 1994, 174-178. From *Odyssey*: MacDonald, 83-91.
14. Magical tradition: Smith, 1978, 33-34, etc.
15. Jesus, Achilles, and Hector predict their own deaths: MacDonald, 131-134. Mark combs scripture for quotations: Mack, 1988, 100-113. But SQ and PQ did much of it first. Hector would not rise: MacDonald, 162; *Iliad* 24:550-551, 756.
16. Stoic-Cynic saying: Mack, 1993, 138-139.
17. Transfiguration. *Odyssey*: MacDonald, 91-96. Philo's *Life of Moses*. Hadas & Smith, 129-160. Mark used Homer's theme of secrecy: MacDonald, 44-54.
18. James-John, Castor-Polydeuces: MacDonald, 24-32. Prepare Jesus people for martyrology: Mack, 1988, 276-279. Priam's ransom: *Iliad* 24, MacDonald, 148-153, 185-187.
19. David's house forever: 2 Samuel 7:16; Friedman, 104-107, etc. Tiresias parallel: MacDonald, 97-101.
20. Removal of ritual: Smith, 1973.
21. Not a triumphal entry: MacDonald, 102-110. Cursing fig tree from magical tradition. Smith, 1978. Temple a den of thieves: MacDonald, 33-43. 12:1-9. Parable of vineyard *Odyssey* 5:518-519, 14:163-164, 16:307, 317, 371-372, 383-385, 17:539-540; MacDonald, 35-37.
22. Awe, put-down, signs: *Odyssey* 19:1-50, 102-105; MacDonald, 111-112. Abomination of Desolation: Brandon, 71-74, saw it as Titus standing in the Temple, but it had to be earlier in the Jewish War to give Judeans time to flee. Gather Elect: In Jerusalem Bible, Zechariah 2:10-17. Fig tree: *Odyssey* 19:296-307; MacDonald, 112-114. Anointing: MacDonald, 114-119.
23. Handed over: Mack, 1988, 299, 304-305. Melanthius: *Odyssey* 17:256-273, 22:142-193, 474-477; as Judas Iscariot: MacDonald, 38.
24. Meal: Mack, 1988, 114-120, 271-276, 298-304; Smith, 1978, 122-124, 138; Cumont, 1903, 138, 158, 191.
25. Drinking blood forbidden: Leviticus 7:26, 10:18, 17:10-14, Numbers 23:24, Deuteronomy 12:16, 23, 15:23.
26. Prepare Jesus people for martyr tale: Mack, 1988, 276-279.
27. Mark wished to drain the Christ cult of significance: Mack, 1988.
28. Homeric hero: MacDonald. Suffering Servant: Isaiah 42:1-10, 49:1-6, 50:4-11, 52:13-53. Son of Man of folklore: 4 Ezra. Elpenor: *Odyssey* 10:552-566, 11:72-78, 12:8-15, MacDonald, 9-14, 165-168. Amos: Mack, 1988.
29. Three titles: Smith, 1978, 39.
30. Reed, Zealot, play on Aramaic words: Brandon, 103-104. Barabbas is Irus *Odyssey* 18:1-122; MacDonald, 38-42, 184-185. Hector's soul protests: MacDonald, 185.
31. Best MSS of Mark end at v. 8, prompting varied explanations, e.g., Schmidt, 151-155; Miller, 52, 453-455; Funk, 127; Nineham, 449-453; Eusebius, 150n1; Jerusalem Bible, 1685nb,c. Disciples died in First Revolt. MacDonald, 162-164. Mark like *Iliad* is open-ended, inviting many other compositions. MacDonald, 198-199. Mark set many "flags" to make reader notice Homeric parallels: MacDonald, 43 etc.
32. Evolution of aretologies. Hadas and Smith, 57-66. Socrates. Plato was the first to adapt to a sage, the ancient heroic theme of overcoming impossible odds while courageously enduring persecution, ultimately vindicated. Hadas and Smith, 1-66.
33. Papias: Eusebius, 3:39:11-17.
34. Legends about Mark: Mack, 1995, 153.



Mount Vesuvius erupted and obliterated Pompeii and Herculaneum two months after Titus became Caesar. That was in 79. Titus added two tiers (stories) to the three of the Colosseum that his father built.¹ Titus' short reign was constantly disturbed by fires, plagues, and Domitian's plots.

Domitian became Caesar in 81. He built the Arch of Titus to commemorate the Roman victory over Judea. The arch and its scenes of war and the triumphal procession still boast of that victory.

Matthew, somewhere in northern Palestine, repudiated Mark's claim that Jesus declared ancient Jewish scripture obsolete. Quite the contrary; Jesus *fulfilled* the prophecies of the Torah and the Prophets:

Don't think I came to abolish the Law and the Prophets! I came not to destroy but to fulfill! (Matthew 5:17, his own composition).

Amen I tell you, until the heavens and the earth pass away, not one *iota*, not a single dot, will pass from the Law in any way until everything happens (QS 56b, Matthew 5:18; compare Luke 16:17).

Matthew was a *Nazorean*, "Keeper of the Torah," who tried to get along with Pharisees. He was somehow related to the latest Q writers (Q³) who thought Pharisees could show some loving kindness:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, *hypokritai*! You tithe mint, dill, and cumin—but you forget the more important stuff of the Law—judgment, mercy, and trust. Yes, you *should* do them, but you should also do the other things too (Matthew 23:23; QS 34a, Luke 11:42).

Matthew taught that Jesus obeyed the Torah and furthered its purpose of getting people to submit to the rule of God. Both Matthew and the Q community criticized scribes and Pharisees for overlooking the love and compassion that the Torah teaches.

A "scribe" was anyone who made a living by the rather rare skills of reading and writing. Many took unfair advantage of uneducated people, but not all scribes were *hypocritai*:

Jesus said, "Every scribe instructed in the *basileia* of heaven (*ouranous*) is like a householder who brings both new and old things from his treasures" (Matthew 13:52).

Matthew was a “scribe instructed in the reign of heaven.” He taught Jesus people to study the Torah and the Prophets for its wisdom. He also used the Book of Q as a manual of instruction. When Mark’s tale came out, Matthew liked the plot but could not tolerate Mark’s rejection of the Torah. Q did not have a plot, so Matthew wove it into Mark’s tale. He changed some of Mark’s teachings to fit his own hasidic mindset.

To merge Q with Mark, Matthew cut Mark’s gospel into eight blocks (Appendix II). He cut up Q, often into separate sayings, and inserted John’s preaching and the temptations into the first Markan block. He reassembled the other Q sayings into five sections of instruction. They generally open with a sermon to a multitude, shift to the disciples, and end, “And it came to pass that after Jesus spoke, he left.” The first section is the Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5-7); the second is the mission story (chapter 10); the third, secrets of the *basileia* of heaven (chapter 13); the fourth, humility and service (chapter 18). The fifth section blasts the Pharisees, then tells the disciples about the coming destruction of Jerusalem, the son of man, and the *basileia* of heaven (chapters 23-25). He created his own birth and resurrection tales.

Thus Matthew placed Jesus’ *Sayings* (the Book of Q) within a biography for the first time. The Gospel of Matthew was done about 85-90, in Domitian’s reign. It became the manual of instruction for Jewish Jesus people in and near Palestine.

Papias said that Matthew, one of the twelve, “compiled the *Logoi* in Aramaic.” The “*Logoi*” (*Sayings*) was likely Q and, along with Mark’s gospel, a favorite of Papias, for he wrote the now-lost five-volume *The Sayings of the Lord Explained*. He said nothing about the Gospel of Matthew;² we wonder why.

Contrary to Papias, all of the New Testament including Matthew and the embedded Book of Q was originally composed in Greek. Soon after Matthew was composed, Aramaic translations appeared that would naturally be assumed to be in the original language.

We can speculate sentimentally that one Matthew composed the Original Book of Q and that Papias gave him credit for the completed book. His name stuck even after Q merged with Mark’s gospel.

The Gospel of Matthew was Irenaeus’ favorite. He was the Greek bishop of Lyons in Gaul (130-200 CE). He said that Matthew of the twelve wrote his gospel for Jews “in their own tongue” when Peter and Paul were in Rome, and that after they died Mark wrote his gospel from recollections of Peter’s sermons. Thus Irenaeus gave it priority and direct apostolic authority.²

None of the four gospels was signed. Only the author and perhaps a small group knew who wrote each gospel, so we have no choice but to use its traditional name.

Matthew invented a new character for Jesus. He transformed Mark's son of God into a teacher who built upon the Torah.³

Don't think that I came to cancel the Law and the Prophets. I came to fulfill it. Until the heavens and the earth pass away, not one *iota* nor a single dot will pass from the Law in any way until everything happens (Matthew 5:17-18, partly from QS 56).

"Until everything happens" means the completion of God's plan as revealed in the Torah and the Prophets. As we saw in chapter one, Matthew harped on the theme of fulfillment of prophecy.

Matthew, a humanist, found that living his humanism under the Torah was more demanding than Phariseism:

Jesus said, "I tell you, unless you're *more* observant than the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the *basileia* of heaven" (Matthew 5:20).

Jesus said, "You have heard those of old time say, 'You shall not kill,' and, 'He who kills is in danger of judgment.' But I tell you that *anyone angry with his brother* is in danger of judgment. Whoever insults his brother, '*Raca!* [meaning unknown]' is in danger of the council [*sanhedrin!*] But I say that anyone who tells his brother, '*Moré!* [Fool; note "moron"]' is in danger of *Gehenna's* fire" (Matthew 5:21-24).⁴

Jesus said, "When you give to charity, don't blow your trumpet as do the *hypokritai* in the synagogues and streets to make men admire them. *That* is their reward—men's admiration! When you give to charity, don't let your left hand know what your right hand does. Keep your gift-giving secret.

"When you pray, don't be like the *hypokritai*. They love to pray standing in the synagogues and on street corners for men to see. That is *their* reward! *You* go instead into the closet and shut the door to pray to your Father. He is unseen, and your Father who sees unseen will reward you publicly" (Matthew 6:1-8).

Matthew wants to represent Jesus as a true-blue Israelite teacher of the Torah. That was not easy to do for a Hellenistic Galilean exorcist who flouted the Torah, and whose birth was disgraceful. Matthew addresses those issues in his first two chapters with rare wit and sense of humor.

Right at the start Matthew audaciously blends Jesus' ancestry from Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and kings of Judah including David and Solomon. He excuses Mary's sin by mentioning four other wicked women.⁵ Tamar is the first:

Judas begat Phares and Zara by **Tamar**... (Matthew 1:3).

Send your kids to bed right now. Tamar did not set a good example:

Judah didn't recognize Tamar his daughter-in-law because she covered her face like a harlot. She conceived by him. Three months later, Judah was told, "Tamar played the harlot and is pregnant by prostituting herself." She bore twins, and the firstborn was Phares (Genesis 38:15-29).

I did not make that up. It is right there in the *Torah* of all places for heaven's sake for God and man to read through all time! Matthew's point was that if Jesus was unredeemably disgraced because of Mary's sin, so were all Judeans—including King David—because of Judah and Tamar. Actually, Tamar's actions were justified, considering what Judah had done previously.

We're not done with King David, for his great-great-grandmother was Rahab and his great-grandmother was Ruth:

Salmon begat Boaz of **Rahab**, and Boaz begat Obed by **Ruth**, and Obed begat Jesse, and Jesse begat David the king... (Matthew 1:5-6).

Putting Rahab, a friendly Canaanite harlot, into King David's ancestry was Matthew's sleight-of-hand to add sparkle to ancient scripture:

Salmon began Boaz, and Boaz begat Obed, and Obed begat Jesse, and Jesse begat David... (1 Chronicles 2:11-15).

Joshua sent two men to spy on Jericho, and they stayed with Rahab the harlot. The king of Jericho demanded that she hand them over, but she hid them in the flax barn... The Israelites destroyed Jericho and everything in it... Joshua saved Rahab the harlot, and she lives in Israel to this day because she hid the spies (Joshua 2:1-6, 6:17-25).

Matthew lets us assume that Boaz' father Salma or Salmon was one of the Israelite spies whom Rahab befriended.

As for Ruth, she appears in a tale that became holy scripture even though it mocked Ezra for banning marriage to foreign women:

Boaz ate and drank and, in a good mood, went to lie down. Ruth came in quietly, uncovered his "feet," and lay down beside him. At midnight he woke up. Seeing Ruth, he asked, "Who are you?" She said, "I'm Ruth, your handmaiden. Spread your skirt over me, for I'm closely related to you." He said, "YHWH will bless you, for you didn't chase after young men. I will do as you ask." Boaz took Ruth for his wife, and she bore a son—Obed, father of Jesse, David's father (Ruth 3:7-4:17).

Ruth, a foreign lady, was precisely the sort of gal Ezra warned against.

We will not notice King David's improprieties as we look at the fourth wicked woman in Matthew's list, namely, King Solomon's mother Bathsheba:

And David the king begat Solomon by **Uriah's wife**... (Matthew 1:6).

David saw a very beautiful woman washing herself—Bathsheba, wife of Uriah the Hittite. David sent for her and lay with her. She conceived. Uriah slept at David's door with the servants, so David sent him into battle to be killed.... Their baby was unhealthy and soon died... David and Bathsheba had another child and called him Solomon... (2 Samuel 11:1-12:24).

To finish off his imaginary genealogy, Matthew invents "Joseph the husband of Mary of whom Jesus was born." An angel explains to Joseph that Mary's unexpected pregnancy was really a miracle. Matthew does not let Joseph divorce Mary though Jewish law gave him that right. So what if Jesus was illegitimate? says Matthew. Jesus was in good company with kings David and Solomon. Besides, many of Jesus' followers and Matthew's associates were doubtlessly illegitimate, for the Jesus movement attracted all sorts of people shunned by Pharisees and other nice folk. The Torah itself treated illegitimates without mercy:

A bastard shall not enter the congregation of YHWH even to the tenth generation (Deuteronomy 23:2).

Matthew's Jesus school must have had a lot of fun adding Jesus to scriptural genealogies. They didn't know they were themselves participating in the writing of holy scripture. I guess that's how God gets fallible men and boys to write down his inerrant words.

Matthew's school adapted ancient scripture to create a prophecy of Jesus' birth:

All this happened to fulfill the prophecy about the *Kyrios*. "The *parthenos* [virgin] will conceive and bear a son whom they will call Emmanuel [Isaiah 7:3-16], meaning, 'With us God'" (Matthew 1:22-23).

What did Isaiah actually write? That King Ahaz must stay calm and trust YHWH to destroy Judah's enemies:

YHWH told Isaiah, "Tell Ahaz to be careful, quiet, and unafraid. Don't let the tails of the two smoking firebrands—the kings of Syria and Israel—scare you. They're plotting against you, but in sixty-five years Israel won't even be a *people*."

YHWH told Ahaz, "The *Adonai* [Lord] himself will give you a sign. The *admah* [girl] will conceive and bear a son. She will call him Immanuel [God with us]. He will

eat butter and honey and grow to tell good from evil—but before he is that old, the lands of your enemies will have lost their kings” (Isaiah 7:3-16).

Matthew has tortured Isaiah’s history. Isaiah spoke of Judah’s survival as Assyria expanded westward. The kings of Syria and Israel frantically tried to make Ahaz join them against Assyria, but Isaiah insisted that Ahaz must not join them.

Isaiah wrote nothing about Jesus or the Messiah. He wrote nothing about a virgin, *bethula* in Hebrew. He wrote about an *admah*, “girl.” Who was she? There is no clue. Perhaps she was one of Ahaz’s wives or concubines. The translators of the Septuagint incorrectly substituted *parthenos*, virgin, for *admah*. Matthew used the Septuagint, but he surely knew the original Hebrew version.

Isaiah did not have virginity in mind at all, for several years later, when Ahaz was still nervous about Syria and Israel, Isaiah said he was so sure of Judah’s security that he himself had a baby:

I went into the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son. YHWH told me to name him “Hasty loot! quick plunder!”—for before he can say, “Daddy! Mommy!” the king of Assyria will loot Damascus and plunder Samaria [the capital of Israel] (Isaiah 8:3-4).

In due course Syria and Israel made war against Judah. Ahaz went to Assyria’s king, threw himself at his feet, and swore to serve him. Assyria destroyed Syria and Israel but left Judah in peace, though probably at great cost.⁶ Such was ancient diplomacy between tiny nations and giants. Isaiah’s prediction came true, but it had nothing to do with virgin birth. Matthew exploited the Greek translation of Isaiah to tell a ridiculous tale to make the point that Jesus, an ordinary man, was as much of a Messiah as there ever would be. We all come into existence in the same way and therefore theoretically equal. Matthew’s sense of humor was lost on readers who took his joke seriously and missed the higher truth.

Three Jewish translators—Aquila of Pontus, Theodotion of Ephesus, and Symmachus the Ebionite—explained that *parthenos* was a wrong translation.⁷ Symmachus wrote pamphlets attacking Matthew’s gospel for the fable of virgin birth. He insisted that Jesus was Joseph’s son and an ordinary man.⁸

We ought not condemn Matthew for quoting scripture out of context and twisting it out of shape. Matthew was no journalist, historian, or scientist. He was a teacher of reading, writing, arithmetic, and right living with a lot of interference from Pharisees. He merely used their rhetorical methods against them and expected his readers to use common sense. Men of God, overreaching themselves, take Matthew too seriously. They

might profit from joining the local Liars Club or Retired Sports Fishermen's Association. Ever since the Enlightenment it has been unscrupulous to claim that Jewish scripture foretold Jesus. It absolutely did not.

The magi. Matthew recalls Halley's comet and the news of Tiridates' humiliation at Nero's feet. He transforms Tiridates' homage into the tale of magi who follow a star to Bethlehem to worship the newborn king of kings. The tale signifies that all humanity might dwell together in peace under the law of love that Jesus of Nazareth taught long before. Any ruler who follows Jesus' principles would be kinder and greater than Caesars who enslaved nations and ruled their subjects so brutally.

Why Bethlehem? Jesus was from Nazareth, but Matthew makes him fit Micah's plea for Judah's help in Israel's defense against Assyria:

YHWH says, "Band together, daughter of thousands [Jerusalem]! Assyria has laid siege against Israel! Assyria will strike the king of Israel on the cheek with a rod!

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though small and one of thousands of villages in Judah, from you a ruler of Israel will come to rule the people I chose a very long-time ago" (Micah 5:1-3).

The *magoi* told Herod, "The king will be born in Bethlehem of Judea, for the prophet wrote, 'And you, Bethlehem of Judah, is not the least among the princes of Judah, for out of you will come a governor who will rule my people, Israel'" (Matthew 2:6).

David was born in Bethlehem, so Jesus has to be born there too.

Matthew's tale of the slaughter of infants was believable, for Herod was a savage murderer who killed his wife Mariamne, their two sons, and many other innocent people, never by trial. But the massacre and flight were Matthew's idea so he could quote Hosea, "Out of Egypt have I called my son," to suggest that Jesus was a second Moses.

Matthew gets the holy family to Nazareth by making it avoid Herod's son Archelaus. Its mythical exile in Nazareth fulfills prophecy:

Joseph went to live in a city called Nazareth to fulfill the prophecy, "He will be called a *Nazorean*" (Matthew 2:23).

No such prophecy is known. Matthew made it up. More appropriate would be "He will be called a *Nazarene*," meaning that he came from Nazareth. But a competing sect called itself *Nazarenes*. Matthew thinks Nazoreans were the true followers of Jesus, and Nazarenes were not.

Who were the Nazoreans and Nazarenes? They were both Jesus people, *Ebionim* (“Beggars,” *Ptochoi*). They were distinct sects though translators fail to distinguish them. Matthew never mentions Nazarenes, for they were too Greek, too Syrian, and too libertine—like Mark. Matthew’s community were Nazoreans, “Keepers of the Torah,” in Palestine.⁹ Matthew changes *Nazarene* to *Nazorean* when copying the following passage from Mark’s gospel:

One of the maids of the high priest saw Peter warming himself and said, “And you were also with Jesus the *Nazarene*” (Mark 14:67).

Another girl saw Peter on the porch and said, “This fellow was also with Jesus the *Nazorean*” (Matthew 26:71).

Matthew deletes *Nazarene* elsewhere when copying from Mark. Nazarenes were Hellenistic Jesus people in Syria. Mark uses *Nazarene* three times—and *Nazorean* once, just to be inclusive.⁹

John’s immersion of Jesus in Mark and the Signs Source created a *non sequitur*, for if Jesus was greater than John, how could John immerse Jesus? Matthew turned the *non sequitur* into God’s inscrutable plan:

Jesus came from Galilee to Jordan *baptisthenai* by John, who retorted, “I need *baptisthenai* by you! Why do you come to me?”

Jesus answered, “Let it be so now, for it is proper to fulfill all righteousness in this way,” and John agreed (Matthew 3:13-15).

The Sermon on the Mount. Matthew’s narrative follows Mark: John at Jordan, Jesus’ temptations, entering Galilee, gathering the first four disciples, preaching the reign of God, exorcising, and healing. But Matthew doesn’t like Mark’s scene of the exorcism in the synagogue, so he leaves it out. The Sermon on the Mount forms a dramatic climax.¹⁰

Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount opens with Q’s Beatitudes, but he adds phrases from scriptural passages like these:

To comfort all who mourn... [Isaiah 61:2] (Matthew 5:4).

The meek will inherit the earth and will delight themselves in the bounty of peace [Psalms 37:11] (Matthew 5:5).

Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters, listen to me, and let your soul delight in abundance. Hear, and your soul will live [Isaiah 55:1-3] (Matthew 5:6).

Who will climb the hill of YHWH? He who has a pure heart... He will receive good fortune from YHWH, and righteousness from the Elohim of his healing [Psalms 24:4] (Matthew 5:8).

To see the effect of Matthew's scriptural additions, compare his Beatitudes with Luke's, which are close to the original Q Beatitudes:

Lk 6:20 Fortunate are you poor, for yours is the *basileia* of the Θεός.

21 Fortunate are you that hunger now, for you will be filled. Fortunate are you who weep now, for you will laugh.

22 Fortunate are you when men will hate you, and when they throw you out, reproach you, and exorcise your name as evil because of the son of man.

23 Rejoice in that day! Leap for joy! For, see, your reward is great in heaven, for that is how your fathers treated the prophets. (Q Saying 8.)

Mt 5:3 Fortunate are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the *basileia* of ouranous.

4 Fortunate are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.

5 Fortunate are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

6 Fortunate are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they will be filled.

7 Fortunate are the merciful, for they will obtain mercy.

8 Fortunate are the pure in heart, for they will see Θεός.

9 Fortunate are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of the Θεός.

10 Fortunate are they who are persecuted for my name's sake, for theirs is the *basileia* of heaven.

11 Fortunate are you when men will revile you and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for my sake.

12 Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for that is how they persecuted the prophets who came before you.

Matthew changes Q's and Mark's "*basileia* of Θεός" to "*basileia* of ouranous (sky, heaven)" throughout the gospel, but he usually means the same thing as Mark and Q—a more civilized society on earth. Perhaps Matthew thought "*basileia* of Θεός" was too Greek and heathenish. He does speak of rewards in heaven and punishments more than Mark did, but that's not the usual context of his "*basileia* of heaven."

Unlike Mark, Matthew does not belittle the twelve. He treats them with respect and gives Peter amazing powers:

Simon Peter said, "You are the Christ, the son of the living Θεός!" Jesus answered, "You are fortunate, Simon *Barjona*! Nobody told you but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are *Petros*, and upon this *petra* I will build my *ekklesia*, and the gates of *Hades* will not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys to the *basileia* of the heavens. Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven..." (Matthew 16:17-19).

Saying that a man can order heaven what to do is ridiculous.¹¹ To do that, Matthew deifies Peter. In the same breath he boasts of his new nickname, *Barjona*, "Terrorist." Unlike Mark, Matthew *esteems* Peter's fighting in the revolt (so also that of his companions). Also unlike Mark,

Matthew sends the disciples home to Galilee to meet the resurrected Jesus. They have decades to return to Jerusalem to join the Zealots.

Matthew ignores James except when copying Mark's stories of Jesus' family (Mark 6:1-6, Matthew 13:53-58). James wasn't hasidic enough for Matthew. In contrast, the Thomas people deify James (page 223; Thomas 12) but depict Peter and Matthew as not very bright.

The Roman Catholic Church alone claims the passage above proves that the bishop of Rome is Jesus' representative on earth through Peter. Matthew says no such thing. As far as anyone knows, Peter's going to Rome was invented long after his death and is totally fictitious.

The end of the age. Jesus warns that it is time to repent, for many signs point to something terrible happening in Israel within a generation:

John told the Pharisees and Sadducees, "Who told you to flee from the wrath to come?... The axe is laid to the root of the trees, to throw them in the fire" (Matthew 3:7-12; QS 4).

After the tests in the desert, Jesus proclaimed, "Repent, for the *basileia* of the *ouranon* is at hand" (Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:15).

In Capernaum, a centurion asked Jesus to cure his servant... Jesus, marveling, said, "I have never found such faith in Israel! I tell you, many will come from the east and west to sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the *basileia* of heaven, but the children of the *basileia* will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 8:5-13; QS 15, 48).

Jesus sent out the twelve... and told them to preach, "The *basileia* of heaven is at hand... Whoever stands fast to the *telos* will be saved. When they persecute you in this city, flee to another. I tell you that you will not have gone over the cities of Israel before the son of man comes" (Matthew 10:5-23; QS 20, 21, 37c, Mark 6:7-12).

If Satan throws out Satan, he is divided against himself, so how can his *basileia* stand? (Matthew 12:26; Mark 3:22-30).

The one sowing good seed is the son of man. The field is the *kosmos*. The enemy who sowed noxious rye grass is the *diabolos*. The harvest is the completion [*syntelia*, from *telos*, end] of the *aiunos* [age]. The reapers are the *angeloi*. The noxious weeds are gathered and burned in the fire, and that's how it will be at the completion of the *aiunos*... At the completion of the *aiunos*, the *angeloi* will come and take the wicked from among the righteous and toss them into the fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 13:37-50).

The son of man will come soon in the glory of his Father with his *angeloi*, and then he will reward each one according to his or her deeds. *Amen* I tell you, some standing here will not taste death until they see the son of man coming in his *basileia* (Matthew 16:27-28; QS 35, Mark 9:1).

Jesus said, "I tell you, all these things will come upon this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you that kills the prophets and stones those who come to you... Look! your house is empty" (Matthew 23:36-39; QS 49).

Jesus showed his disciples the Temple buildings and said, "Every stone will be thrown down." The disciples asked, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of your presence, and of the end of the *aionos*?" Jesus answered, "Don't let anyone fool you. Many will say, 'I am Christ'... *Ethnos* will go up against *ethnos*, and *basileia* against *basileia*. There will be famines... These are the beginning of sorrows" (Matthew 24:1-8; Mark 13:1-8).

He who endures to the end will be saved. This *euangelion* of the *basileia* will be proclaimed throughout inhabitable lands as a witness to all *ethnos*. Then the end (*telos*) will come. Therefore when you see the Abomination of Desolation mentioned by Daniel the prophet standing in the holy place... (Matthew 24: 13-26, 28; Mark 13:13-23).

The son of man will appear like lightning flashing across the sky!

Immediately after the tribulation the sun will be dark and the moon won't shine. Stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken... Then the sign of the son of man will appear in the sky. The tribes of the earth will wail, and they will see the son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. He will send his *angeloi* with a great trumpet sound, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Matthew 24:27, 29-31; QS 60a, Mark 13:24-27).

Amen, I tell you, this generation will not pass until these things are done. Heaven and earth will pass away, but not my words (Matthew 24:34-35; Mark 13:30-31).

The son of man will come without warning. Only the Father knows when (Matthew 24:36-44; QS 60b, 41, Mark 13:32).

Jesus cried again with a loud voice and gave up the *pneuma*. And look! the veil of the Temple tore from top to bottom. The earth shook, rocks split apart, and graves opened up! Many of the holy ones rose, came out of their graves, and went into the holy city, where many saw them! (Matthew 27:50-53; Mark 15:37-38).

The eleven disciples went away into Galilee to a mountain, and when they saw Jesus, they worshipped him, but some doubted. He said, "All authority is given me in heaven and on earth. Go and teach all *ethnos* to do everything I commanded. I will be with you every day to the completion of the *aionos*" (Matthew 28:16-20).

The end of the age is painful and drawn out. Jesus knew the Judeans and Zealots would revolt and destroy the nation. The day Jesus died was Judgment Day: The dead were resurrected, and God decided to destroy Jerusalem. In time the Romans destroyed Jerusalem. Still under way was a spiritual war between Jesus' followers and intolerant people, and between angels and evil spirits. It is up to Jesus people to fulfill the Torah and the Prophets and be a light for the nations. They must aggress-

sively teach Jesus' ethics as well as the Torah. Civilizing the masses will make it possible for kings and emperors to rule with mercy and justice. Unfulfilled parts of Jesus' mission will be completed before Jesus' generation has entirely died off. The story of the end of the age is not coherent because it was stitched together from various sources and published before it could be smoothed out.

Even when using dramatic imagery from folklore, Matthew was a realist. He knew that Jesus was a man, and not the best example (though he should have been), but his message was in the Torah, and it was simple: Love your neighbor. All Messiahs are human and always will be, but they can follow Jesus Messiah's example in respecting fellow human beings. Matthew's gospel was not about a kingdom *in* heaven or the end of the world. He was looking for everyone to accept and follow Jesus' teachings and the Torah, and thus *bring heaven's rule to earth*.

Proclaim the gospel. We saw in the last chapter that Jesus' command to proclaim the gospel was inserted clumsily into Mark's gospel (in bold):

Take care of yourselves... councils... synagogues... rulers and kings as a witness... **And the euangelion must first be proclaimed among all *ethnos***. But when they lead you and hand you over, do not premeditate your rebuttal... (Mark 13:9-11).

An editor inserted it differently into Matthew's gospel—twice (in bold):

He who endures to the end will be saved. **This euangelion of the *basileia* will be proclaimed throughout inhabitable lands as a witness to all *ethnos*, and then the *telos* will come.** Therefore when you see the Abomination of Desolation mentioned by Daniel the prophet standing in the holy place... (Matthew 24: 14).

The eleven disciples went away into Galilee to a mountain, and when they saw Jesus, they worshipped him, but some doubted. He said, "All authority is given me in heaven and on earth. Go and teach all *ethnos* to do everything I commanded. I will be with you every day until the completion [*synteleias*] of the *aionos* [age]" (Matthew 28:16-20).

Matthew himself wasn't all that interested in evangelizing gentiles:

Jesus said, "Don't go into the way of the *ethnos* nor any city of the Samaritans. Instead, go to the lost sheep of Israel" (Matthew 10:5-6).

"Israel" includes the Diaspora, but someone else would have to take it to the gentiles. Peter and Paul, of course, had divided up their work just that way forty years before Matthew wrote:

When they saw that the *euangelion* for the uncircumcision was committed to me as the *euangelion* for the circumcision was to Peter... [James, Kephass, and John] gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship (Galatians 2:7-8).

Evangelizing gentiles was not Matthew's mission. After Luke wrote his gospel, editors emended Mark's gospel hastily, and Matthew's carefully, to make the synoptics agree that Jesus commissioned the twelve disciples as apostles to all nations.

God is the Father; Christ is the leader of the Jesus people. Some Christians thought they should have rabbis, "fathers," and "leaders":

Don't let anyone call you *Rabbi, Rabbi*, for you have only one leader [*kathegetes*], Christ, and you're all brothers. And call nobody on earth *Pater*. You have only one *Pater*; he is in heaven. Don't be called "Leader" [*kathegetai*]. Only one is your *kathegetes*—Christ! (Matthew 23:8-11).

We are reminded that Paul recognized bishops and deacons, according to Philippians. Today we also have priests, Fathers, and so on—all gentile inventions. Matthew as well as Jesus would have been disgusted.

Matthew enlivens the empty tomb story:

After Jesus' body was placed in the tomb, the priests told Pilate that Jesus had promised to rise after three days, so they wanted soldiers to guard the tomb until the third day lest the disciples steal the body at night...

The two Marys arrived the third day. A great earthquake struck; and an *angelos* came down from *ouranous* and rolled away the stone and sat on it. The guards fainted. The *angelos* told the women that Jesus had risen. As the two Marys went to meet the disciples, Jesus appeared and promised to meet the disciples in Galilee.

The priests bribed the soldiers to say that the disciples came at night and stole the body, and the Judeans still say so today (Matthew 27:62-28:15).

Thus Matthew answers those who ridiculed Christians for believing that a dead man could rise. Letting skeptics accuse the disciples of grave-robbing was a clever way to make them admit the tomb was empty.¹² It is one more of Matthew's jokes; he didn't believe Jesus rose.

Matthew's gospel was a Judaized version of Mark's very Greek Homeric epic of the Jewish War. It replaced Mark, and Christians came to regard Matthew as the first gospel, very complete, very Jewish, unimpeachably authoritative, and the standard by which all other gospels were judged. It became popular among Christian Jews and Jesus people, especially in Palestine.¹³

Josephus was safely ensconced in an apartment in Rome under the protection—or thumbs—of Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian. Josephus wrote *The Jewish War* soon after the end of hostilities. He told how fanatics destroyed the Jews' standing as God's chosen people, so God left Jerusalem to take up residence in Rome:

"Rome's might was invincible... [Romans were] the lords of the whole world. From every side fortune had passed to them. God, who hands dominion over from nation to nation round the world, now lives in Italy... God was now on the Roman side."¹⁴

That passage was in perfect harmony with Virgil's *Aeneid*.

Josephus then wrote *The Antiquities of the Jews* in the hope of giving his people the respect they deserved as very ancient civilized people. It begins with the creation story and ends with his own experiences in Galilee in the revolt. Apion of Alexandria scoffed at Josephus claim of great antiquity of Jewish literature. Josephus replied with his two-volume *Against Apion*. He also wrote an autobiography. He died about 95 CE.

NOTES

1. Titus and Colosseum: Feldman.
2. Papias: Eusebius 3:39:11-17. Irenaeus: Eusebius 5:8.
3. Mack, 1993, 183-185; 1995, 161-167.
4. *Gehenna*: Hell, not *Hades*. From Hebrew for the Valley of Hinnom, where Jerusalemites burned refuse, and before that, performed child sacrifice as in 2 Kings 23:10, Jeremiah 7:29-34, 19:1ff., 32:35, Deuteronomy 12:29-31, 18:9-10, Ezekiel 16:20-21, 20:24-26, 31, 23:37-39, Exodus 13:1, 13:11-13, 13:14-16. Asimov, 163, 390. Appendix VI.
5. Four women excuse Mary: Smith, 1978, 24-28.
6. King of Assyria: 2 Kings 16:7-18.
7. Aquila of Pontus: The real Aquila of Pontus flourished after Matthew was written and disseminated. Paul mentioned one Aquila (1 Cor 16:19, Romans 16:3), so Luke used him in Acts (18:2-26), adding "of Pontus" to relate him to the translator to make his story seem more historical.
8. Symmachus: Origen of Alexandria, 185-254 CE, created a concordance of four translations "in common use" (Septuagint and translations of Aquila, Theodotion, and Symmachus). Eusebius 6:16-17, 5:8. Was this Symmachus a bishop of Jerusalem, listed with "gentile" bishops (Eusebius 5:12. The time is about right.
9. Nazarene: Mark 1:24, 14:67, 16:6. Nazorean: Mark 10:47. See note 1, p. 9.
10. Matthew removed synagogue scene: Mark 1:21-28; Mack, 1995, 163.
11. Peter dictates to heaven: I am indebted to Art Dutky for pointing out the implications of this passage.
12. Why Matthew invented guard story: Mack, 1995, 166.
13. Matthew became the standard: Mack, 1993, 183-185; 1995, 161-167.
14. God now lives in Italy: *Jewish War*, 18:360.

— ⊕ — 23 Glimpses of an Early Gospel

The gospels of Thomas and John evolved in their own distinctive communities and reached their final form about 100 CE. Both are Gnostic in that they depict Jesus as a savior who came down from heaven to redeem human souls, those sparks of divinity which had become trapped in this dark world. Gnosticism was a religious world-view in Asia Minor, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt that combined Hindu eternity, Persian dualism, Jewish mysticism, and Aristotle's theory of a geocentric universe.¹

Thomas: A Gospel of *Gnosis*

The prologue of the Gospel of Thomas says, "Jesus' *secret* sayings recorded by *Didymos Judas Thomas*." Many of Thomas' sayings are indeed cryptic. Even those with seemingly plain readings may have had additional, less obvious meanings. Funk *et alii* found many parallels in Gnostic literature.²

Didymos is Greek for "Twin," and *Thomas* is the Aramaic, so the prologue literally says the author is "Twin Judas the Twin." Thomas is on Mark's list of twelve disciples. One of Jesus' brothers was named Judas (Mark 6:3), so some have thought "*Didymos Judas Thomas*" was Jesus' twin. That would be interesting if true. James and Joses would be older than Judas and Jesus; Simon, the youngest. All that is possible, but there is no evidence whatever that Jesus had a twin.³

God's *basileia*. Thomas says the *basileia* of God is here now:

The kingdom will not come by watching for it. No one will say, "Here it is!" or "There it is!" The kingdom of the Father is spread around upon the earth, and people don't see it (Thomas 113).

Jesus said, "If your leader says the kingdom is in heaven, the birds are already there! If they say it's in the sea, the fish are already there! It's within you and outside you" (Thomas 3:1-5).

We wonder where Luke found this similar saying:

When the Pharisees asked when the *basileia* of the Θεός would come, Jesus retorted, “You can’t see the *basileia* of the Θεός come! Nobody will say, ‘Lo, here! or Lo, there!’ The domain of the Θεός is in your midst” (Luke 17:20-21).

God’s domain is the whole world. Obeying God is a matter of attitude. It’s a matter of trusting God. Some of the more Gnostic sayings (below) suggest that the inner circle might also enter another kingdom of God through hallucination—so the kingdom is “here now” in that sense, too.

Thomas people weren’t missionaries like James, Paul, and Q people:

Jesus said, “Be passersby” (Thomas 42).

This is the closest that Thomas comes to a mission story:

Jesus said, “When people take you in as you go walking around anywhere in the countryside, eat whatever they give you and heal their sick” (Thomas 14).

Did we just glimpse Jesus instructing a novice about the hardships of life as one of the *Ebionim*? Evidently Thomas people continued Jesus’ wandering, begging, Cynic lifestyle. Q people were more sophisticated social activists who would take time out from their occupations living to work at making the *basileia* of God a reality on earth.

Vestiges of a primitive book of sayings. Our first impression of the Gospel of Thomas is that many sayings were copied from the four canonical gospels. Actually those sayings are primitive remnants of a very early gospel. The primitive sayings are simpler, less sophisticated forms of Q¹ sayings. For example, this verse represents the Beatitudes:

Jesus said, “Fortunate are the poor, for yours is the kingdom of heaven” (Thomas 54; compare QS 7, Luke 6:20, Matthew 5:3).

The following sayings, reminiscent of Q¹, were never developed into “classical arguments” in Thomas:

Jesus said, “Don’t lie, and don’t do [to others?] what you hate, because heaven can see everything. Nothing is hidden that will not be revealed...” (Thomas 6; compare Tobit 4:15, QS 9d, Luke 6:31, Matthew 7:12; QS 35, Luke 12:2-3, Matthew 10:26-27).

Jesus said, “What comes out of your mouth soils you, not what goes into your mouth” (Thomas 14; compare QS 13, Luke 6:43-45, Matthew 12:33-35).

Jesus said, “Love your friends like your own soul. Protect them like the pupil of your eye” (Thomas 25).

The following sayings are related to pronouncement stories, but each lacks the anecdote and makes a different point:

His disciples asked, “Do you want us to fast? How should we pray? Should we donate to charity?” (Thomas 6).

Jesus said, “If you fast, you sin. If you pray, you will be condemned. If you donate to charity, you will harm your *pneumata*” (Thomas 14:1).

The disciples said to Jesus, “Let’s fast and pray.” Jesus said, “What sin did I commit? Or how have I been undone? Let people fast and pray when the groom leaves the bridal chamber” (Thomas 104; compare Mark 2:16-20).

Does that mean that Jesus didn’t fast, pray, or give alms? Perhaps. In any case, Thomas people are a Jewish counter-culture who reject certain generally accepted Jewish customs.

Thomas people scorn pursuit of wealth and power:

Jesus said, “Let anyone who found the world and became rich, renounce the world” (Thomas 110).

Jesus said, “If you don’t fast from the world, you won’t find the kingdom” (Thomas 27:1; compare QS 38, 40, Luke 12:13-21, 33-34, Matthew 6:25-33, 19-21, Mark 10:21).

“Fasting” is a metaphor for giving up worldly ambition and comfort.

Thomas people consider the Torah a leftover from a barbaric age:

Jesus said, “No one pours new wine into an aged wineskin—it might break. You don’t pour aged wine into a new wineskin—it might spoil. You don’t sew an old patch onto new clothes—it might tear” (Thomas 47; compare Mark 2:21-22).

Like Greeks and unlike prudish hasidics, Thomas folk think people should not be ashamed of their bodies:

The disciples asked, “When will you appear to us?” Jesus said, “When you strip without shame and trample your clothes under foot like little children. Then you will see the son of the Living One, and you will not be afraid” (Thomas 37).

Contempt for clothing reminds us that some Cynics went about naked. The “son of the Living One” is Jesus. Clothing is probably also a metaphor for worldly goods and concerns.

Circumcision is mutilation:

The disciples asked, “Is circumcision beneficial or not?” He replied, “If it were beneficial, children would be born already circumcised. The true circumcision in spirit is beneficial in every way” (Thomas 53).

In the Torah, circumcision represents covenants between YHWH and his chosen people.⁴ The saying above indicates that Jesus and his followers rejected circumcision along with the Torah.⁵ Just because Jesus was Jewish does not prove that he was circumcised, for many Jews in the Hellenistic age accepted the Greek ideal of the perfect body. Some who had been circumcised undertook surgery to undo the effect. It is likely that Jesus was not circumcised.

Yet the Thomas people observe the Sabbath:

Jesus said, "If you don't keep Sabbath a *sabbath* [Hebrew, "a day of rest"], you will not see the Father" (Thomas 27:2).

Thomas people thought they were faithful Israelites.

The First Revolt left its mark on the Gospel of Thomas. It tells the parable of the vineyard in which the laborers killed the owner's son, so the owner killed them. That parable is accompanied by the parable of the cornerstone as in Mark (Thomas 65, 66). Both parables are more allegorical in Mark, so Thomas' may be a slightly earlier version than Mark's.⁶

Thomas says that Jesus destroyed the Temple once and for all:

Jesus said, "I will destroy this house, and no one can build it" (Thomas 71).

In other words, Jesus in heaven sent the Romans to destroy the Temple, and by inference, the old Judaism. The note of satisfaction reminds us that *hasidim* and Zealots harassed Jesus people and killed James and his companions.

The world's beginning and end are equally unknown to us:

The disciples asked, "How will everything end?" Jesus said, "Have you discovered the beginning? When you find it, there is the end..." (Thomas 18).

Is the present age one of many cycles of creation and destruction, as Hinduism teaches? Regardless, Thomas people expect the world to end, and they look forward to eternal life:

Jesus said, "The heavens and the earth will roll up in your presence, and whoever is living from the Living One will not die" (Thomas 111).

Like Hinduism's Lord Krishna, Jesus is light, a metaphor for the all-pervading creative forces of the universe:

I am the light that is over all things. I am All: from me all came forth, and everything will be perfected to me. Split a piece of wood; I am there. Pick up a stone, and you will find me there" (Thomas 77; compare John 1:4-7, 8:12, 9:5, 12:46).

But don't worship Jesus as a second god, for he was born of a woman:

Jesus said, "If you see one not born of woman, fall on your faces and worship him. He is your Father" (Thomas 15).

God, of course, is the only one not born of a woman. God was The Only One to the Thomas people. Jesus is clearly beneath God.

Thomas says nothing about Jesus' dying on the *stauros*.⁷ They, like the Q people, would have known whether that happened or not. Paul, we remember, didn't care anything about the human Jesus; he was converting gentiles to Judaism, even if it was a bastard variety.

Jesus' disciples. Thomas mentions several interesting names. We assume that this James is Jesus' brother, though he was made into a god:

The disciples asked Jesus, "Who will lead us after you leave?" Jesus replied, "No matter where you are, go to James the Righteous, for whom heaven and earth came to be" (Thomas 12:1-2).

The Thomas people must have considered James their leader and sought his guidance. After he died they continued to seek his guidance by trance, prayer, meditation, or dreams.

Thomas' group knew and respected Simon Peter and Matthew, but Thomas was the one who received Jesus' *gnosis*, secret knowledge:

Jesus said, "Tell me what I am like." Simon Peter said, "You're like a righteous angel." Matthew said, "You're like a wise philosopher." Thomas said, "Teacher, I can't express what you're like." Jesus took Thomas aside and told him three sayings, but Thomas refused to divulge them to his friends... (Thomas 13).

Thomas' group held that Thomas was Jesus' most trusted disciple. So much for Peter as keeper of the keys to the kingdom of heaven, and the Gospel of John's Beloved Disciple. Do we detect some rivalry between sects of Jesus people?

Thomas mentions two women disciples, Salome (Thomas 61, in which she says Jesus climbed onto her couch) and Mary, not identified (Thomas 21, 114). We are reminded of Salome, Mary Magdalene, and Mary mother of Joses and James in Mark (15:40-16:1). Thomas people did not adopt the Virgin Mary cult.

Thomas people regard manly women equal to men:

Simon Peter said, "Make Mary leave us, for women are unworthy of life."

Jesus said, "I will guide her to make her manly... Every female who makes herself manly may enter the kingdom" (Thomas 114).

There are two kinds of people: manly, for whom the ideal of perfection is the gutsy he-man; then there are women. Everything good was associated with manliness. Timid people cannot be included in the first category. That's why our word "virtue" was derived from *vir*, Latin for "man." In the verse above, manliness meant Cynic boldness, wit, audacity, and the courage to stand one's ground, all of which the tender sex is certainly capable of.

The only disciples mentioned in Thomas' gospel are Thomas, James, Simon Peter, Matthew, Mary, and Salome. Perhaps they were Jesus' closest friends in his lifetime as far as the Thomas people knew, or joined the movement soon after Jesus died.

The Sayings of Jesus probably underwent many rewritings beginning with a list of aphorisms attributed to him. The aphorisms were refined into sayings, and the list became a small book. The Q writers, being educated in Hellenistic schools, elaborated the sayings into various levels of complexity. Thomas people scorned Q's Hellenistic book learning and kept the early, "genuine" sayings of an earlier stage, which Thomas himself may have had a hand in. The Thomas people, closer to Jesus' way of life and more detached from society than the Q missionaries, ignored Q²'s drastic revision of the Original Book of Q. They generally rejected prophetic and apocalyptic sayings. They ignored stories of "signs," conspiracy, impalement, resurrection, and virgin birth. Yet the original set of sayings gradually evolved over the years even in the hands of the Thomas people.

A Gnostic turn. At some point the Thomas people sought "deeper" understanding of Jesus' sayings:

Jesus said, "I will teach you things no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no hand has touched, and have arisen in the human heart" (Thomas 17).

It is written, "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered the human heart, the things that Θεός has prepared for those who love him" [Isaiah 64:4; 65]. But Θεός has revealed them to us through the *pneuma* (1 Corinthians 2:9).

Self-knowledge is an inward, spiritual *gnosis*:

Jesus said, "You have come from the kingdom and will return to it... You have come from the light, from the place where light came into being of itself..." The disciples asked, "When will the new world come?" Jesus said, "It has come, though you don't know it" (Thomas 49-51).

Thomas holds the Gnostic belief that human souls are sparks of divinity from the highest god.

The "secrets of Jesus" are *gnosis*, the stock-in-trade of Gnostics:

Jesus said, "Whoever discovers the meaning of these sayings won't die" (Thomas 1).

Jesus said, "I will reveal mysteries to worthy people..." (Thomas 62).

Jesus said, "When you know yourselves, then you will be known, and you will be children of the living Father. If not, you will live in poverty, and you will *be* that poverty" (Thomas 3).

"Know yourselves" reminds us of the inscription at the temple to Apollo at Delphi which Socrates quoted (Plato's *Protagoras*).

Jesus is light and life from God and creator of the world:

Jesus said, "I am the light that is over everything. I am All. Everything came from me, and comes to me. Split wood; I am there. Lift a stone; I am there" (Thomas 77).

Jesus is now a Gnostic savior from the highest heaven. He came down to earth to give people *gnosis* about returning to God:

Jesus said, "I appeared to them in the flesh in the world... My soul ached for the children [of God] because they came into the world empty and will leave empty. They will repent when they come to their senses" (Thomas 28).

Jesus said, "You have often wanted to hear what I tell you, and no one else will tell you. There will be days you will seek and will not find me" (Thomas 38).

Thomas' redeemer myth is rudimentary, yet unmistakably Gnostic.

We suppose that Thomas of the twelve and his friends joined the revolt to make sure the Jesus people would have a say in the new government, and died in Jerusalem. The survivors—the women, children, and aged people of Thomas' group—left Palestine. They probably became Gnostic after that time. The Gospel of Thomas reached close to its final form around 100 CE. Around 200 CE in eastern Syria the community wrote other books attributed to Thomas.

Eusebius listed the Gospel of Thomas among “rejected” books, and it was lost until a Coptic version was found in Egypt in 1945. Then papyrus fragments already in museums were recognized to be from a Greek version of Thomas. The Gospel of Thomas was a “sayings gospel” very like the hypothetical Book of Q and helped establish the latter as very real, although an actual copy has never been found except as preserved in Matthew and Luke. Thomas is eloquent testimony to the diversity of Jesus groups and their writings in the first century.⁸

NOTES

1. Gnosticism: Jonas *The Gnostic Religion*. Aristotle taught that the planets, moon, sun, and stars revolved around the earth, the center of the universe.
2. Gnostic parallels to Thomas: Funk, *et al.* *Five Gospels*, 470-532.
3. Twin: Kloppenborg, *et al.*, 90-91.
4. Circumcision a token of covenant with Abraham: Genesis 17:10-27. With Moses: Exodus 4:23-26; also Leviticus 12:3.
5. Circumcision and Jesus: Kloppenborg *et al.*, 75-128.
6. Parables more allegorical in Mark: Mark 12:1-9, 10-11; Funk, *Five Gospels*, 100-102.
7. No death on the *stauros*, despite copying QS 52. See chapter 5.
8. Thomas: Discussed in Mack, 1993, 180-183, 1995, 60-64, 151. The complete Gospel of Thomas is available in many books, including Funk, *et al.*, *The Five Gospels*, Kloppenborg, *et al.*, *Q-Thomas Reader*, Meyer, *The Secret Teachings of Jesus: Four Gnostic Gospels*, Cameron, *The Other Gospels: Non-Canonical Gospel Texts*, Miller, *The Complete Gospels*.

—⊕— 24 John's Cosmic Savior and God

Jesus Messiah had visited the earth and returned to heaven, so the Messianic Age—the *basileia* of the Θεός—could begin. The Signs Gospel (SG) proved all that, at least to the Johannine community. But the Judeans had ignored Jesus' message of love and went on with their drive to declare independence from Rome. So Rome destroyed the nation. Even that didn't make the surviving Judeans change their ways.

Meanwhile the Johannine community thought up fresh notions about Jesus Christ. The Signs Gospel was out of date after the war, and an editor undertook the task of modernizing it. We will call him or her "R," the Redactor. R expanded the Signs Gospel six-fold and transformed it into the new, robust Gospel of John.

John is a tale of Jesus' battle against evil in the form of the Judeans. God had planned Jesus' mission ever since Satan, the chief *archon* whom God had appointed to rule the world, rebelled and led the *adam* to disobey God. Jesus' mission was to break Satan's power and restore love of God and humanity to the world. His mission completed, Jesus' death was but a metamorphosis back to the form of a god.

A Hymn introduces John the immerser, who announces that the *Kyrios* has come as prophesied. He is Jesus. He provokes the Judean Temple priests into plotting against him. They can't do anything to him until he is reglorified, the first step of metamorphosis.¹ As he becomes reglorified, he explains it to his disciples.² Men come to arrest him. They recognize him as God³ but arrest him anyway. On the *stauros*, he declares his mission complete (*teleiothe*) and gives up the *pneuma*.⁴

The Messianic Age

Three signs prove the Messianic Age is here. First, Jesus was a very great visitor from heaven, greater than Elijah, Moses, or the Messiah. Second, anyone believing in Jesus receives the gift of eternal life. Third, even today Jesus gives his disciples the *pneuma* from God. The Redactor develops and emphasizes those three signs of the Messianic Age: Jesus' greatness and the gifts of the *pneuma* and eternal life.⁵ Let's look at those three signs in the Redactor's work, beginning with the gift of eternal life.

The Gift of Eternal Life

Jesus brought eternal life to the world:

The son of man must be lifted up so that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For the Θεός so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, so that whoever believes in him should not die, but have everlasting life (John 3:15-16).

Anyone who believes on the son has everlasting life. Those who don't believe in the son won't see life. Instead, the Θεός' wrath will abide on him (John 3:36).

Whoever drinks the water that I will give will never thirst, for that water will be a well of water springing up to everlasting life (John 4:14).

Amen, amen, I tell you that whoever hears my word [*logos*] and believes on him who sent me, has everlasting life... and will go from death to life (John 5:24).

Look for the food which endures through everlasting life, which the son of man will give to you (John 6:27).

The one who sent me wants everyone who sees the son and believes on him to have everlasting life, and I will raise him at the last day (John 6:40).

Whoever eats my flesh [*sarka*] and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day (John 6:54).

My sheep hear my voice... I give them eternal life, and they will never die, nor will anyone pluck them from my hand (John 10:27-28).

Jesus lifted his eyes up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come... You have given me power over everybody so that I should give them eternal life. This is life eternal so that they might know you, the only true Θεός, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (John 17:1-3).

Jesus' Greatness

The several different conceptions of Jesus and his titles invite word games that lead the Redactor to imagine Jesus as an ever greater figure from heaven. He sews many patches large and small onto the fabric of the Signs Gospel but can't iron out all the wrinkles. The resulting figure of Jesus is complex and inconsistent.

Jesus the savior. The savior of the world is a Gnostic concept:

Many Samaritans believed because of Jesus' own word [*logos*] and said, "Now we believe because we have heard him ourselves and know that this is indeed the Christ, the savior of the *kosmos*" (John 4:41-42).

If anyone hears my words and doesn't believe, I don't judge him, for I came not to judge the *kosmos* but to save it. He who rejects me and my words has one who will judge him. The word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day (John 12:47-48).

Jesus the judge. Despite the previous passage, Jesus *will* judge:

The Father judges no one, but has delegated all judgment to the son, so that everyone should honor the son even as they honor the Father (John 5:22).

Such contradictions reveal the handiwork of varied writers.

The Redactor, like the Pharisees, expects Judgment Day:

The will of the Father is that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but that I should raise it up again on the last day. It is the will of the one who sent me that everyone who sees the son and believes on him will have everlasting life, and I will raise him up on the last day... No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day (John 6:39-40, 44; also 6:54, 12: 48).

Martha told him, "I know that Lazarus will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me—even if dead—will live, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die" (John 11:24-26).

Jesus the son of man. The Signs Gospel did not mention the "son of man." The supernatural son of man myth is in full bloom as the Redactor writes. He likes that grand figure and uses it twelve times. He identifies him with Jesus:

Jesus told Nathanael, "Amen, amen, you will see heaven open and *angeloi* of the Θεός ascending and descending upon [*epi*] the son of man" (John 1:51; also 2:13-14, 5:27, 6:27, 53, 62, 8:28, 12:23, 34, 13:31).

"Angels ascending and descending" came from the tale of Jacob's ladder, above which stood a huge figure:

Jacob dreamed of a ladder stretching from the earth to heaven with angels of Elohim going up and down. YHWH stood above and said, "I am YHWH Elohim of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (Genesis 28:12-13).

You have often seen that giant in the winter night sky and called him "Orion." The Milky Way is Jacob's ladder. Orion, YHWH, the son of man, and Jesus are one and the same heavenly figure to the Redactor.

Jesus is God himself:

My Father and I are ONE (John 10:30).

Before Abraham was, *EGO EIMI* [I AM] (John 8:58).

If Jesus existed before Abraham, he is a god. "I AM" is the Torah's attempt to express the Inexpressible, identify the First Cause, and grasp the Infinite and the Eternal:

Elohim told Moses, "I AM THAT I AM. Tell the children of Israel, 'I AM sent me to you'" (Exodus 3:14).

The Redactor uses the same words, I AM, several more times:⁶

EGO EIMI the bread of life (John 6:35).

EGO EIMI the light of the *kosmos*... the light of life (John 8:12).

EGO EIMI the gate for the sheep [Israelites] (John 10:11).

EGO EIMI the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, even if dead, will live (John 11:25).

EGO EIMI the Way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through me (John 14:6).

EGO EIMI the true vine [Israel], and my Father the husbandman (John 15:1).

Bread, water, light, and life are metaphors for Jesus or his *gnosis*.

Contradictions abound in elevating Jesus to God, but a good Christian refuses to think about them. He brushes them aside as "disbelief."

Prologue to the Gospel of John. Jesus the creator. The Redactor puts a Gnostic Jewish Hymn at the head of the gospel (John 1:1-18). The Hymn begins thus:

In the beginning was the *Logos* [Reason, Word], and the *Logos* was with the Θεός, and Θεός was the *Logos*.... Everything was made through him and nothing without him (John 1:1-3).

With that verse, the Redactor recalls the creative force of the Spoken Word at the beginning of the Torah:

In the beginning... Elohim SAID, "I et there be light," and there was light, and Elohim saw the light, that it was good, ... and Elohim CALLED the light Day, and the darkness Night, and the evening and the morning were the first day (Genesis 1:1-5).

The Spoken Word could be the impersonal and undeniable forces of nature. Or it may be personified as a god like *Chokmah*, Wisdom or *Sophia*. Plato called the creator a *demiurgos*, “craftsman,” in *Timaeus*. Zeno the Stoic called the creative force *Logos*, Reason. Philo of Alexandria said the *Logos* was the Spoken Word of God.⁷ In John the *Logos*, Word, is Jesus.

The *Logos* creates light and life, including human life and reason:

In him was *Zoë* [life], and the life was the *Phos* [light] of the *anthropos*. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overpower it (John 1:4-5).

“Darkness” could be various evils, but the Johannine community always had Judeans, *hasidim*, and Zealots in mind.

The Redactor interweaves the first line of the Signs Gospel (**bold**) and his explanation into the Hymn:

The Θεός sent a man named John [the immerser] to testify as a witness (SG; John 1:6) to the light (Hymn) so that *anthropoi* might believe through him. John was not that light, but a witness to the true light which illuminates every *anthropos* who comes into the *kosmos* (Redactor; John 1:7).

Jesus the *Logos* is the creator. His existence before creation of the world is not merely poetic license: R wants us to believe that Jesus is the great power of the cosmos. Perhaps the principle is the love that Jesus the man taught. *Eros* was the first god, according to Hesiod. He caused Earth and Sky to spawn the twelve titans and hosts of other gods. Doesn't *Eros* keep all life going? God is love (1 John 4:8,16).

R brings up Jesus' preexistence again in Jesus' monologue to God:

Now, O Father, glorify me with your own self with the glory which I had before the *kosmos* was [created]... Be with me where I am so they may see my glory which you had given me, for you loved me before the creation of the *kosmos* (John 17:5, 24).

Here “*kosmos*” means Judean society. R disregards gentiles.

The Redactor's Hymn describes Jesus' visit to the Judeans:

The light was in the *kosmos*, and made the *kosmos*, but the *kosmos* did not know him. He came to his own, and his own did not accept him, but he gave everyone believing on his name authority to be children of the Θεός, for they were born from Θεός, not out of heredity, sexual intercourse, or animal desire. And the *Logos* took human form and tented among us, and we saw his glory, the glory of the only one begotten by the *Patros* [Father], full of *charitos* [generosity] and truth (John 1:6-14, Redactor, Hymn).

The “glory” of gods began with the ancient belief that sun, moon, planets, and stars were gods. Moses’ face shone after seeing God (Exodus 34:30-35). Ezekiel and Isaiah described God’s glory. Mark mentioned the brightness of Jesus, Moses, and Elijah (Mark 9:2-4).

As God, even if he came into the world as a Galilean, Jesus’ rightful place is in YHWH’s Temple in Jerusalem. The Judeans’ failure to recognize Jesus ultimately causes destruction of the nation.

Jesus the only begotten son of God. The Redactor weaves into the Hymn a line from the Signs Gospel (**bold**) to show that the light or *Logos* is Jesus; then the Hymn tells of Jesus’ liberation of Christians:

John testified, “This is the one I spoke of, the one coming after me, greater than I, and who existed before me” (Signs Gospel, John 1:15). We have all partaken of this fullness, gift upon gift, for Moses gave us the Law, but Jesus Christ brought gifts and truth. Nobody has seen Θεός at any time except the only begotten θεός in the bosom of the *Patros*; he has declared him” (Redactor, Hymn John 1:16-18).

“Fullness” implies the dawning of the Messianic Age.

“Nobody has seen God at any time except his only begotten son” contradicts the Torah: Moses saw God; Jacob wrestled with God; and Enoch walked with God.⁸ In the Prophets, Elijah went to heaven.⁹ Christian Jews, like everybody else, used anything that might be useful to make a point and ignored anything contradictory.

Jesus’ glory. The Signs Gospel said that Jesus, after performing his first sign, in Cana, “revealed himself.” The Redactor inserted “his glory”:

This did the first of the signs the Jesus in Cana of Galilee. And he revealed **the glory of him**, and believed in him the disciples of him (John 2:11; SG; **R in bold**).¹⁰

Jesus made himself glow, so he *must* be a god.

Thus ends the prologue to the Gospel of John¹¹ and our discussion of Jesus’ greatness. Now we turn to R’s third sign of the Messianic Age.

The Holy Spirit

Like everyone else, the Redactor knew the old story that Baalzebul gave Jesus power over demons. Pharisees used that “fact” to belittle his followers’ preposterous claims, so the Redactor grapples with it:

The Judeans asked Jesus, "Don't you have a *daimon*?" Jesus said, "No, but I honor my Father... Anyone following my sayings will never see death." The Judeans answered, "Now we *know* you have a *daimon*..." (John 8:48-52).

Some said, "He has a *daimon* and is mad. Why do you listen to him?" (John 10:20-21).

Of course, Jesus' followers claimed Jesus' spirit came from God.

In the Signs Gospel, even before the Redactor revised it, Jesus transmitted the holy spirit to his disciples by breathing on them:

The risen Jesus breathed on his disciples and said, "Receive the holy *pneuma*" (John 20:22; Signs Gospel).

This is a vestige of a ritual in SG for "getting" Jesus' spirit:

Unless you eat the flesh [*sarka*] of the son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life (John 6:53-54).

That ritual was probably part of SG's supper scene, which the Redactor overwrote with his own supper scene (**in bold**):

Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew it was time to depart out of this *kosmos* to the Father, having loved his own in this *kosmos*, he loved them to the end. And supper being finished... (John 13:1-2; Signs Gospel; **R in bold**).

The notion that one person can live in another came from ancient traditions, including those of exorcists and magicians.¹²

The following three passages are probably R's. Jesus' very words are holy *pneuma*:

The words that I speak to you are *pneuma*, and they are life (John 6:63).

Jesus' spirit lives in his followers:

Live in me, and I in you... If you live in me and my words live in you, you will ask what you will, and it will be done for you (John 15:1-11).

Even though the disciples received the holy spirit again and again, the Redactor has Jesus promise to send a spirit after he ascends to heaven:

Now I go to him who sent me... I will send you the *parakletos* ["one summoned"]. He will reprove the world... He will guide you into all truth... (John 16:5-15).

Who is the "one summoned"? Is it another holy spirit? We wonder.

So much for the Redactor's proofs that the Messianic Age had come.

Judean Hostility

After the war many Jews relied on Pharisee rabbis to restore traditions. In Palestine they built synagogues as in the Diaspora to replace the Temple. Jesus people opposed many traditions, so the Pharisees attacked them bitterly. The Redactor identifies Pharisee hostility with the Zealot fanaticism that had brought on the war. To contrast Judean hostility with other Jews' acceptance of Jesus, the Redactor has him travel from Galilee to Judea twice instead of the single melodramatic journey in the synoptics, and also sends him to Samaria and the Transjordan. The Redactor imagines Jesus' spirited responses to Judean hostility:

The Judeans persecuted Jesus and sought to kill him... Jesus said, "Search the scriptures! You imagine having eternal life through them. The scriptures testify of me, but you won't come to me so you may have life" (John 5:16-40).

Some said of Jesus, "He is a good man." Others said, "No, for he leads the people astray." Nobody dared speak openly about him for fear of the Judeans (John 7:12-13).

"If you were Abraham's children, you'd act like him. But you want to kill me... Your father is the *diabolos*. You obey him. He was a murderer and a liar" (John 8:1-47).

The Pharisees attacked Jesus people who came to their synagogues:

They will put you out of their synagogues. Indeed, the time is coming when they will kill you thinking they serve the Θεός, not knowing either the Father or me (John 16:2-3).

Many of the chief rulers believed in Jesus but would not admit it for fear that Pharisees would expel them from the synagogues (John 12:42).

The parents of the one cured of blindness knew that the Judeans had already agreed that anyone confessing Christ would be put out of the synagogue (John 9:22).

The Redactor finds special meaning in Isaiah's words:

Hear the word of YHWH, you who obey his word. Your brothers who hate you, who cast you out **for my name's sake**, said, "Let the name of YHWH be glorified." But to your joy, I will appear! Then they will be ashamed (Isaiah 66:5).

Jesus said, "I have chosen you out of the *kosmos*. That's why the *kosmos* hates you. They have done all these things to you **for my name's sake**, because they don't know the one who sent me" (John 15:18-21).

The Johannine community uses Jesus' law of love to cultivate group loyalty in the face of persecution:

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. As I have loved you, love one another. Then everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another (John 13:34-35).

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than to lay down his life for his friends. I command you to love one another (John 15:12-15, 17).

R Sewed New Patches Onto An Old Gospel

The following listing by chapters shows broadly how R used the Signs Gospel (SG) and his own additions (R) to create the Gospel of John.

1. Gnostic Jewish Hymn (R). Testimony of John and disciples (SG). Son of man, angels (R).
2. First sign, Cana (SQ-SG). Attack on commerce in Temple (PQ-SG).
3. Nicodemus and discourse (R). John (SG?). Discourse (R).
4. Samaritan woman (R probably added this SQ-like independent story). Discourses (R). Second sign, Capernaum (SG).
5. Healing in Bethesda (SG). Discourse about Sabbath (R).
6. Feeding of five thousand and walking on water (SG). Discourses to Judeans and disciples in Galilee (R). Numerous vestiges from SG.
7. Jesus' brothers are in darkness; discourse; Nicodemus (R).
8. Adulteress (Gospel of Hebrews?). Discourse in Temple (R).
- 9-10. Heals blind man (SG). Discourse, journey to Transjordan (R).
11. Raising Lazarus; Pharisees' plot goes forward (SG).
12. Supper with Lazarus; anointing (SG). Plot to kill Lazarus (R). Triumph (SG). Greeks come to Jesus; discourse (R).
13. Supper (SG vestige; R). Judas (SG). Washing feet (SG or R). Judas sent out (SG). Jesus is now glorified (R). Peter will deny Jesus (SG).
- 14, 15, 16. Farewell discourse to disciples (R).
17. Discourse to God; more on glorification (R).
18. Arrest; trial; Peter's denial; more trial; more denial; trial before Pilate; Pilate considers releasing Barabbas (SG).
19. Scourging, mocking; Pilate and crowds decide fate; Jesus impaled; title of Jesus Nazorean; death scene; Joseph buries Jesus (SG).
20. Empty tomb; Mary talks to Jesus; he breathes on disciples (SG). Doubting Thomas story (R). Closing (mostly SQ-SG).
21. Meal on beach. Catch of fish (third "sign" in SQ-SG). Peter and beloved disciple; authorship of Gospel of John (post-R editor).

The Redactor treated the Signs Gospel with respect, though he freely inserted a word or two, a phrase, a sentence, or as much as three chapters of Jesus' long Gnostic discourses. His own material transformed SG into the most other-worldly of the four gospels. Fortunately, he did not smooth over the contradictions and other seams which show that the Gospel of John evolved from earlier writings.¹³

The Redactor could not tolerate SG's notion that Jesus was Elijah. He almost certainly removed a sentence in SG that said, "Simon Peter told Philip, 'We have found Elijah.'" The Redactor made Jesus, instead, find Philip.¹⁴ The Redactor made John the immerser into Elijah and forerunner of the cosmic Jesus Christ.

The Redactor inserted the story of the Samaritan woman into the Signs Gospel.¹⁵ It bears some resemblances to Signs Source stories.

The Redactor moved Jesus' cleansing of the Temple to chapter two from just before the supper with Lazarus.

R added the references to the "twelve" disciples.¹⁶

Evidently Thomas people scoffed at resurrection tales, for R belittles Thomas for disbelief:

Thomas, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples told him, "We have seen the *Kyrios*." Thomas replied, "Unless I feel the nail-holes in his hands and stick my hand in his side, I won't believe it."

Eight days later Jesus appeared among the disciples and told Thomas, "Touch your finger to my hands and stick your hand in my side, and be believing, not faithless."

Thomas answered, "My *Kyrios* and my Θεος!" Jesus said, "Do you believe because you saw me? Fortunate are they who haven't seen and yet believed" (John 20:24-29).

Thus Thomas became the horrible example of unbelief although most Jesus people knew that Jesus did not rise from his tomb. The Redactor inserted the Doubting Thomas story immediately before the original ending of the Signs Gospel.¹⁷

R's Jesus gives all the disciples power to remit sins, not just Peter:

Jesus breathed on them and said, "Receive the holy spirit. **If you remit sins, they are remitted; if you retain them, they are retained**" (John 20:23; R in bold).¹⁸

A still later editor wrote the appendix (chapter twenty-one). It is a beach scene in two parts. The first consists of two interwoven stories: Jesus cooking for seven disciples, and the miraculous catch of fish.

The miraculous catch of fish was the third sign in the Signs Source and Signs Gospel, for it still ends, "This is the third time Jesus revealed himself to his disciples." Because it symbolized conversion of all

nations, the later editor thought the catch of fish story belonged at the end of the gospel. He added, "after he rose from the dead." The relocation interrupted the enumeration of signs, so the editor removed the enumeration from all subsequent signs.

The second part of the appendix, still on the beach, was added piecemeal. Peter affirms his love for Jesus three times. Jesus tells him to feed his sheep and predicts his capture and death (vv. 18-19). Jesus tells Peter that the disciple "whom Jesus loved" would "tarry until I come" (vv. 20-22), which was immediately qualified (v. 23). The editor attributed the gospel to the beloved disciple (v. 24).¹⁹

The Gospel of John never mentions "apostles." The apostolic myth evolved among gentile Christians and meant nothing to the Johannine community.

Still More Tampering

Most ancient manuscripts of John and a few of Luke have the story of a woman accused of adultery. It is not in any manuscript older than the fifth century. When it is included in John, its location varies. The KJV and New Jerusalem Bibles have it at John 7:53-8:11; the RSV restricts it to a footnote at that spot.²⁰

Eusebius found a story of an adulteress in the Gospel of Hebrews and liked it, although he regarded that gospel "counterfeit."²¹ The gospel is unknown today; evidently the church destroyed it as "heretical." We surmise that the story was composed for the Gospel of Hebrews and that several scribes independently saved it from extinction by inserting it into John and Luke in the fifth century.²²

No Virgin Birth in the Gospel of John

Even though the Redactor regards Jesus as God and God's son, he says Jesus' earthly father was an ordinary man:

Philip told Nathanael, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Torah and Prophets—Jesus of Nazareth, son of Joseph" (John 1:45; Signs Gospel).

The Judeans said, "Isn't this Jesus the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he say, 'I came down from heaven'?" (John 6:42; Redactor).

Jesus' conception and birth were ordinary. John the baptizer said the holy spirit came to him from heaven as a dove when John baptized him,

according to SQ, but R probably removed the baptism itself (John 1:32, Mark 1:10). (How can you have a Zealot baptize God?) R ignored or hadn't read Matthew's recently published tale of the virgin birth.

John, A Gnostic Tale

In Gnosticism, God is in the highest heaven, the realm of light, and hidden from our view. Without his knowledge, an evil craftsman god, a *demiurge*, created this dark, evil cosmos. He trapped in the cosmos sparks of divinity from God. The *archons* created human bodies to imprison them. Each spark of divinity is a human *pneuma*.

The earth is the center of the cosmos. It is surrounded by seven transparent, concentric, spherical heavens. Each heaven has a gate ruled by an *archon*, a planetary god—Moon (the lowest), Mercury, Venus, Sun, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. Outside the star-studded canopy is infinite highest heaven, the domain of the one true eternal God.

Each human *pneuma* is imprisoned like a pearl within a seven-layered animal soul (*psyche*). You don't know you have a *pneuma* from God unless you were taught. A savior from God came down through the heavens to give people *gnosis* about God and how to enable your *pneuma* to shed the *psyche*, get past the *archons*, and return to God. The savior was often in the person of some rascally Gnostic teacher. Some taught that morality enabled your *pneuma* to get past the *archons*; others said you must *disobey* all moral rules, for the *archons* tyrannically imposed them on us. In either case the human spirit sheds its *psyche* layer by layer as it passes through the heavenly gates, and only the *pneuma* enters highest heaven. That is Gnostic salvation.²³

In the Gospel of John, Jesus is the creator, but he is a good one. He is also the savior from God. He *is* God. His *pneuma* and *gnosis* instruct us about God and the Way back to God. The Θεός is far from this dark world and is unknown to unenlightened people.²⁴ John and Paul's Christianity differ from other Gnostic religions only in particulars.

R's Jesus created the dark universe, so it can't be evil:

Θεός so loved the *kosmos* that he gave his only begotten son...Θεός did not send his son into the *kosmos* to condemn it, but to save it (John 3:16-17).

Despite that denial, the world is "dark."²⁵ It is made of contemptible matter, which changes. Flesh, being material, decays. Only the *pneuma* is divine. Christians resolve that view with Jewish scripture by making Satan and Adam's disobedience the cause of evil entering the world.

R's school competes with other philosophical schools for students:

Jesus asked the twelve, "Will you also leave me?" Simon Peter responded, "To whom would we go? *You* have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68).

The Johannine community had its own true *gnosis* and secret rituals.

Authorship of the Gospel of John

To give the gospel apostolic authority, the author of the appendix (John 21) said the "Beloved Disciple" wrote it. The gospel never names the Beloved Disciple. Irenaeus said he was Apostle John, son of Zebedee, and added that he wrote it in Ephesus, where he lived into Emperor Trajan's reign (98-117 CE). About 324 Eusebius said John *Presbyter* was Apostle John's disciple, and that both lived in Ephesus, where tombs of two different "Johns" still existed.²⁶

Let's try Irenaeus' theory. John the Beloved Disciple was Andrew's companion when he wrote SQ. He matured with the Gospel of John. In the following passages, SG's story is in normal print; **the Redactor's additions are in bold**, and a later editor's in italics:

Two of John's disciples heard Jesus speak and followed him. One was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother (SQ-SG, John 1:35-40).

Peter and another disciple known to the high priest followed Jesus (SG, John 18:15-16).

Leaning on Jesus' bosom was a disciple whom Jesus loved (R, John 13:23).²⁷

Mary ran to Peter (SG) **and the other disciple whom Jesus loved** (R), to tell about the empty tomb (SG) (John 20:2-10).

The disciple whom Jesus loved said, "He is the Kyrios." ... Peter saw the other disciple whom Jesus loved... This is the disciple who testified of these things and wrote them... (latest editor(s), John 21:7, 20-24).

The gospel did not mention the sons of Zebedee until someone appended chapter twenty-one. Paul knew either that John or some other John as the colleague of James and Peter in Jerusalem (Galatians 2). If the author of SQ, PQ, and SG was in Jerusalem, he may have left in time to rejoin the Johannine community (John 21:18-23). A very different possibility is that SQ started as "The testimony of John the immerser," as a very short independent essay; later it was shifted to some real or imaginary "Disciple John." The reason for suggesting those possibilities is to show

that the name “John” may have been attached to the gospel in various ways, none of which is supported by hard evidence.

The Johannine Community as Nazoreans

PQ and the Signs Gospel said that Jesus was a Nazorean:

Pilate wrote a title and put it on the *stauros*, JESUS THE NAZOREAN THE BASILEUS OF THE JUDEANS (John 19:19. PQ, SG).

Jesus asked the band, “Whom do you want?” They answered, “Jesus the *Nazorean*.”... Jesus said, “I AM” (John 18:4-7. PQ, SG).

The Redactor’s Jesus is recognized as God, and repeats his question:

And they fell to the ground. Again Jesus asked, “Whom do you want?” They answered, “Jesus the *Nazorean*.” He said, “I said, ‘I AM...’” (John 18:4-7; R).

The Gospel of John does not contain the word, “Nazarene.” We conclude that the Johannine community called themselves “Keepers of the Torah”—Nazoreans—from earliest times. We saw previously that they may have lived in southern Syria, perhaps Damascus.

Perhaps John was Andrew’s friend and wrote SQ and PQ. Paul joined the community in Damascus. John joined James and Peter in Jerusalem. The high priest killed James in 62. Before it was too late, John left Jerusalem. His community found safety in northern Syria. The Redactor inherited John’s Signs Gospel and made it into the Gospel of John about 95 CE. The Johannine community continued writing books under John’s name in northern Syria or Asia Minor for years.²⁸

The Tribe of Judah and the Christ

Eusebius, quoting Hegesippus, says the Jesus group in Jerusalem fled to Pella during the revolt. They returned as the Tribe of Judah and the Christ and included Jesus’ kinsmen.²⁹ MacDonald studied this carefully and believes they all died in the war. He regards stories of flight and return as fiction.³⁰ Yet many Jews did flee Jerusalem, and many stayed to fight and died, so there may be some truth underlying the fiction. Eusebius lists leaders of the Jewish Jesus people in Jerusalem before the Second Revolt (132-135 CE). He lists James, Jesus’ brother; Symeon son of Clopas the brother of Mary, Jesus’ mother; Justus; Zacchaeus; Tobias; Benjamin; John; Matthias; Philip; Justus; Levi; Ephres; Joseph;

and Judas—nearly all Jewish names. One Thebuthis tried to take over the leadership. Failing, he started a new sect, and his several followers founded other sects. Jewish sects hostile to Jesus people were Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Samaritans, Galileans, Daily Baptists, and Masbotheans.³¹

The Roman Emperors

Domitian Caesar. If God now lived in Rome, he didn't guide Domitian Caesar very well. Domitian was widely regarded as another Nero who arbitrarily confiscated property of leading citizens and exiled or killed them. His reputation for widespread persecution of Jews and Christians is probably undeserved, for most of his savagery was in-house.³²

A story of this period brought Domitian Caesar together with two of Jesus' relatives. The governor of Palestine sent two grandsons of Jesus' brother Judas to Domitian Caesar with the accusation that they were related to Jesus, therefore ought to be killed as descendants of King David. They admitted to both charges. Domitian asked about their property and money. They replied that they farmed twenty-five acres and proved it by their callused hands. When asked about the kingdom of God, they said Jesus would come down to destroy the world, then establish the kingdom in heaven. Domitian contemptuously dismissed them and told the governor to leave them alone. Later they became leaders of the Tribe of Judah and the Christ, and lived into Trajan's reign. Eusebius did not relate them to the bishops named above.³³

Domitian died in 96; his successor, Marcus Cocceius Nerva, in 98.

Marcus Ulpus Trajan succeeded Nerva. Enforcing Nero's laws against Christians, he ordered them hunted down and killed.

A tale said that Jews arrested Symeon son of Clopas at age 120 and brought him before Atticus, governor of Palestine, in 106 CE. They charged Symeon with being Christian. Both Symeon and his accusers were tortured and put to death.³⁴

In 109, Jews of Alexandria and Cyrene revolted, and the Romans put down the revolts with slaughter. Rebellion also brewed in Mesopotamia, so the Romans massacred the Jews there, too.

Roman persecution of Christians troubled the governor of Bithynia, Pliny the Younger. In 112 he reported to Trajan that Christians did nothing improper or illegal except refuse to worship idols of the state gods. (Jews were exempt from that requirement.) Pliny said that Chris-

tians merely got up at dawn to sing a hymn to Christ as a god, and that Christ had forbidden them to murder, cheat, steal, or fornicate. As a result of Pliny's letter, Trajan ordered that Christians were not to be hunted down, but if met they should be punished.³⁵

NOTES

1. My hour is now: John 12:23-32, 13:1, 16:21, 32, 17:1.
2. Glorified: John 13:31. Overcame world: John 16:33.
3. Jesus is God: John 18:5-6.
4. Mission completed: John 19:28-30.
5. Redactor: The final major editor, also called "4E." Teeple and Fortna provide considerable information about the Redactor's work.
6. I AM: Funk *et al.*, *Five Gospels*, discuss meaning of I AM, 419, 428.
7. Philo and the Logos: Sandmel.
8. Moses saw God: Exodus. 19:20f, 24:9-1113-18, 34:1-29. Jacob wrestled with God: Genesis 28:13, 32:24-31. Enoch walked with God: Genesis 5:21-25.
9. Elijah went to heaven, will return: 2 Kings 2:1-12, Malachi 4:5-6.
10. Redactor added "his glory": Fortna, 49-54.
11. Prologue: John 1:1-18. Fortna, 15-34. Teeple analyzed the Hymn itself.
12. Belief in indwelling spirits from magical tradition: Smith, 1978.
13. Redactor left abundant evidence of editing: Fortna.
14. Redactor removed statement that Jesus was Elijah: John 1:43. Fortna, 34-47.
15. Samaritan woman: Fortna, 108-109, 117, 301-302, 307.
16. Twelve disciples: John 6:67-71, 20:24. Not in SG. Fortna; Miller, 180-193.
17. Original ending of SQ and SG: John 20:30-31 Fortna, 201-206, 212, 215, 219-220, 323.
18. Remission of sins is Redactor's editing: Fortna, 191.
19. Catch of fish: Fortna, 65-68, 304 & n150. Peter's arrest, death. This story may have inspired the elaboration's of Dionysius of Corinth, 110-189 CE, and Gaius, 160-230 CE, quoted by Eusebius 2:25.
20. Orphan stories: Miller, 449-455. New Jerusalem Bible, 1761, note a. RSV, 843.
21. Story of adulteress in Hebrews: Eusebius, 3:39:17.
22. Not before fifth century: Teeple, 197.
23. Gnostic doctrine: Jonas, 42-47. Also see Cumont, *Astrology and Religion Among the Greeks and Romans*.
24. Distant God: John 7:28-29, 8:14-19.
25. Christians regard world as evil: John 3:19-21, 7:7.
26. Irenaeus on authorship of John: Eusebius 5:8. Two Johns in Ephesus: Eusebius 3:39.
27. Redactor's work: Fortna, 148-149.
28. Johannine books in northern Syria: Mack, 1995, 175-183.
29. Tribe of Judah and the Christ: Hegesippus. Eusebius, 3:11-12, 23, 4:22. Hegesippus wrote from 130 CE on.
30. Flight and return of Jerusalem Jesus people doubtful: MacDonald, 164, 243n9.
31. "Bishops of Jerusalem": Eusebius, 3:11, 32. A Clopas is in John 19:25, Luke 24:18. Hostile Jewish sects: Eusebius, 4:22.
32. Domitian's crimes in-house: Mack, 1995, 196.
33. Grandsons of Judas: Eusebius, 3:19-20.
34. Symeon's death: Eusebius, 3:32.
35. Trajan halted hunting of Christians: Eusebius, 3:33, 4:2.

— ⊕ — 25 Choices vs. Right Thinking

Jesus' whole game was *hairein*, to choose: He decided for himself what was right and expected his followers to do the same.

His witty, uninhibited repartee invited imitation and sparked the imaginations of other Israelites. His apparently off-hand (but actually carefully thought out) remarks challenged bedrock truths and made a playful but daring game of commenting on society.

Young admirers try to imitate their mentors' teachings, apply them to novel situations, and improve on them. Every leader and teacher puts a unique spin on his or her teaching and usually expects students to follow that particular *ortho doxa*, "right thinking," orthodoxy. Their speculations become axioms if they withstand the test of time. Their disciples do the same. Thus different schools and sects proliferate. Every orthodoxy is a "choice," a heresy.

By the middle of the first century the Jesus movement consisted of the Thomas school, Q people, James' group, pronouncement story writers, pre-Johannine school, and Paul's *ekklelesias*, and maybe others. Each one was a heresy, a choice, and every one claimed to be "right thinking," orthodox. After the Jewish War, new thinkers created new heresy-orthodoxies. Mark provided a powerful pseudo-history for sects that declared freedom from the Torah. Matthew's Nazoreans reined Jesus people back to the Torah in his unique way. The Thomas and Johannine communities, far from Palestine, evolved into Gnostic Christians.

The Letter to the Colossians

Also after the war, a sect in Asia Minor taught that Christians were above human laws:

Beware lest anyone robs you through *philo sophias* and vain deceit following human traditions that obey the *stoicheia* of the *kosmos* instead of Christ, for all the *pleroma* [fullness] of the *theotetos* [perfection of the divinity]. You are perfected in Christ in whom you were circumcised without hands, and buried with him in *baptisma*, wherein you are risen with him through *pistis*. Your sinful and uncircumcised self is dead, and you are resurrected with him, blotting out handwritten laws against us, removing them, and nailing them to the *stauros*. Having conquered all rulers and authorities, Christ displayed his triumph publicly. If you, with Christ, are dead to the *stoicheia* of the

kosmos, why do you act as though you were living in the *kosmos* under the Law? Let no one judge you by food, drink, a holy day, new moon, or Sabbath (Colossians 2:8-3:4).

That passage says that all worldly laws and traditions, not only Jewish ones, are evil, and everyone who obeys them is enslaved to *stoicheia* of the *kosmos*. If so, even the Romans are also slaves of *stoicheia* and make evil laws, so Christians should not obey them. It is no wonder that Romans suspected Christians of subversion whether they defied Roman laws or not. Sooner or later, Christians would do exactly that.

The Colossian community, like Paul's *ekklesias*, lived in an imaginary kingdom "ruled" by Jesus and separated from its neighbors by its own laws and world-view:

The Θεός has delivered us from the power of darkness and has taken us into the *basileia* of his dear son (Colossians 1:13).

The Colossians elaborated on the relation between Jesus and God:

Jesus is the image of the invisible Θεός and the firstborn of all creation. He created everything in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, Including thrones, dominions, rulers, and authorities (Colossians 1:15-20).

Colossian Jesus is greater than Paul's Christ. He resembles the cosmic Christ of the Gospel of John. The author signed the letter with Paul's name, but Paul would not have advocated disobedience to earthly authority, and the letter's word usage is different from Paul's. His followers in Colossae wrote the letter a decade or so after the First Revolt.¹

Apokalypsis or Revelation of John

The book of Revelation looks forward to the fall of the Roman Empire. The writer, who calls himself John, oversees a circuit of seven *ekklesias*, each within a day's walking distance from the last. He describes some awesome scenes for the purpose of convincing his disciples that he communicates with God and Jesus Christ:

Apokalypsis of Jesus Christ which the Θεός gave him to show the *douloi* [slaves] about things that must soon happen, which he sent through his *angelos* to his slave John... John to the seven *ekklesias* in Asia... and from Jesus Christ who made us *basileis* [kings] and *hiereis* [priests] for the Θεός.. (Revelation 1:1-4).

John's disciples are Christ's slaves, therefore kings and priests!

What things “must soon happen”? The fall of the Roman Empire. It was common knowledge that Roman provinces, which were conquered nations, wanted independence, and that Parthia threatened the East and German tribes the North. Maybe Christians could help the process along.

John brooded upon those matters:

I John, your brother and companion in tribulation and in the *basileia* of Θεός and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the island of Patmos for the word of Θεός and the testimony of Jesus Christ. I was in the *pneuma* on the Lord’s day... (Revelation 1:9-10).

John imagines Jesus Christ in heaven:

One like the son of man stood among seven candlesticks... holding seven stars in his right hand... (Revelation 1:13).

The candlesticks represent John’s *ekklesias*. The stars are their *angeloi*.

Jesus dictates to John his critiques of the seven *ekklesias*. He begins with Ephesus, which was probably John’s home *ekklesia*:

“To the *angelos* of the *ekklesia* in Ephesus write, ‘Jesus Christ, who holds the seven stars in his right hand, says, I know your deeds, labor, patience, intolerance of evil people, and that you have tested the false apostles and found them to be liars. But you have left your first love, so remember where you fell from, and turn back. Still, you, like me, hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans’” (Revelation 2:1-7).

The Ephesians have strayed from John’s ideal.

What were the Nicolaitans’ “hateful deeds”? Even if we had a list of them, it would tell us more about rivalry between sects than about Nicolaitans. Luke didn’t think Nicolaitans were so bad, for he included Nicolaus, an Antiochene converted to Judaism, with six Hellenistic Jewish leaders.² Clement of Alexandria had only praise for Nicolaus, his family, and his asceticism.³ Nicolaitans were probably not very different from John’s sect. John could not tolerate that difference, which was probably that Nicolaitans obeyed Roman laws, like Paul and Luke.

John holds his Smyrnian disciples’ feet to the fire:

“To the *angelos* of the *ekklesia* in Smyrna write, ‘The First and Last who was dead and is alive says, I know your works, trials, *ptocheian* [voluntary poverty] (though you are rich), and the blasphemy of those who say they’re Jews but are instead of Satan’s synagogue. Don’t be afraid of suffering. The *diabolos* will throw some of you into prison for trial, and you will have ten days of ordeals. Be faithful to the death, and I will give you a *stephanos* [garland, crown] of life...’” (Revelation 2:8-11).

John says that God wants Christians to refuse to worship Roman gods and court execution. John promises rewards in heaven for martyrdom. Does that sound familiar? Smyrna had a temple with an altar to the long-dead and deified Tiberius Caesar. Roman governors required their subjects to demonstrate loyalty to Rome by sacrificing to the Roman gods and emperors. They exempted Jews but apparently did not regard all Jesus people as Jews. John wants the governor of Asia to exempt Christians, and to force the issue he urges his followers to openly refuse to worship Roman gods and emperors.

The *ekklēsia* in Pergamum had a martyr worthy of imitation:

“To the *angelos* of the *ekklēsia* in *Pergamos* write, ‘The one with the sword with two sharp edges says, I know your deeds and that you dwell in Satan’s seat, and you hold fast to my name and have not denied your faith even in those days when Antipas my faithful witness was slain among you where Satan lives.

“‘But you still have some who repel the children of Israel when you eat food sacrificed to idols, and fornicate. Also, some of you hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which I hate...’” (Revelation 2:12-17).

Pergamum was “Satan’s seat” because it had a great altar to Zeus (Jupiter). John scolds those who eat in the temples or yield to the Romans’ requirement of worshipping Zeus and the emperor. The “children of Israel” are John’s disciples.

At Thyatira, some Christians took part in fertility rites:

“To the *angelos* of the *ekklēsia* in Thyatira write, ‘The son of Θεός says, I know your works, love, service, faith, and patience. But you let that woman Jezebel, a false prophetess, teach and seduce my servants to commit fornication and eat food sacrificed to idols...’” (Revelation 2:18-29).

Who was “Jezebel”? Most likely a priestess of the local fertility cults of Cybele or Ma. Fornication in the temple was often the most effective and socially acceptable cure for sterility for many women.

“Prophecy.” The rest of the book is about the fall of Rome. John expects Parthia to invade the eastern provinces, slaughtering and bringing famine, disease, and anarchy:

I saw a white horse, and the rider had a bow. He was given a crown and went forth to conquer.

A red horse came out, and the one sitting on him had great power to remove peace from the earth so men would kill one another. He was given a great sword.

I saw a black horse, and he sitting on him held a balance, and a voice said, “One day’s pay for a measure of wheat!”

I saw a pale horse. Death sat on him, and *Hades* went with him. Power was given them to kill with sword, famine, death, and the beasts of the earth (Revelation 6:1-8).

Are the “beasts” wild animals and feral dogs feeding on corpses? Are they outlaws exploiting helpless survivors? Are they mothers and fathers desperately stealing food for their families? Very likely all of them. The four horsemen personify consequences of invasion and war. They may also be four Parthian tribal chiefs whom God may allow to cross the Euphrates into Syria with their armies to destroy the Romans:

Four *angeloi* confined to the great river Euphrates were turned loose with an army of two hundred million horsemen, and the horsemen had breastplates of orange-red fire and sulfur. The horses breathed fire and sulfur and had tails like serpents, and inflicted wounds (Revelation 9:15-20).

Horses with “tails like serpents” evoke images of scorpions, but John has just described a military maneuver: Archers race forward on horses, suddenly stop, turn, fire a “Parthian shot,” then retreat to regroup. Soldiers or machines throw hot, molten sulfur, which clings to the skin, burns it, and with a spooky blue flame spews choking fumes.

John points out that God chose and empowered Rome to govern unruly nations, but she misused her power. God will throw her down:

Θεός remembered great Babylon and gave her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his anger (Revelation 16:18-19).

I saw a woman upon a scarlet beast, full of blasphemous names and with seven heads and ten horns. She was dressed in purple and scarlet, decked with gold, precious stones, and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication. Upon her forehead was a name, *MYSTERION!* BABYLON THE GREAT, MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND DEPRAVITIES OF THE EARTH. She was drunken with the blood of holy people and witnesses of Jesus... The *angelos* told me, “The woman is that great city which rules over the kings of the earth...”

Then I saw another *angelos* come down from heaven with great power, and he cried with a mighty strong voice, “Babylon the great has fallen!... Its time has come!...” (Revelation 17:3-18:24).

After Rome falls, Christ will marry the Christian movement. Christians will rule the world in a long era of peace, justice, and mercy:

The Lamb has married, and his wife has made herself ready (Revelation 19:7).

Heaven opened, and I saw somebody on a white horse... His clothes were dipped in blood. He was the *Logos* of the Θεός, king of kings and *kyrios* of *kyroi*... The *diabolos* was chained for a thousand years... The martyrs reigned on thrones with Christ for a

thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live until the thousand years were up. That is the resurrection (Revelation 19:11-20:7).

That passage is the first clear prediction of Jesus Christ's return to earth. The Pharisee-style general resurrection will follow a thousand years of Jesus' rule. Hence the name Millennialism for sects who adopted John's scenario as a prediction. Revelation was the Millennialists' textbook.

John was a Millennialist. He was a Zealot of his time and place secretly preparing his disciples to exploit any opportunity to seize the reins of power whenever the Empire should fall. Paul would not have condoned John's subversion, nor, probably, would the Nicolaitans. That's why John condemned them. Christians trying to sidestep the entangling issues of loyalty branded Millennialism as a "heresy."

Who was the "John" who wrote Revelation? "John" may have been a pseudonym, but the most popular tradition held that he was John the *Presbyter* ("Elder") of Ephesus. We might guess he was a Christian Jew from the Johannine community. John the *Presbyter* taught Papias, bishop of Hierapolis, a Millennialist.⁴ Detractors of Revelation said that Cerinthus, a Millennialist in Phrygia, wrote it, while Cerinthus himself attributed it to "a great apostle" whom he refused to name.

Irenaeus dated Revelation to the close of Domitian's reign, but there are reasons for thinking it was written early in Trajan's reign, 98-117.⁵

Eusebius, actively promoting Christianity to be the Empire's religion, declared that Revelation had "disputed" authority and denounced Millennialism as "heresy."⁶ Millennialism was a Christian Jewish movement that looked forward to the fall of the Empire, or actively worked toward it. The Millennialist movement lasted three or four centuries.

What about the prophecies in Revelation? In 407 CE Goths under Alaric sacked Rome after ravaging the Danube and Balkans. They and other German tribes mortally wounded the Western Roman Empire and took it over piecemeal. The Eastern Roman Empire, as the Byzantine Empire, fell a thousand years later. Prophecy fulfilled.

First Clement

From Nero on, probably all emperors until Constantine watched Christians closely as subversives. To avoid suspicion, Christians in Rome demanded that fellow Christians obey the emperor. That's the thrust of a letter called 1 Clement written by *presbyters* of some or all of the churches in Rome.

We know nothing except legends about the Clement to whom 1 Clement is attributed. He was probably one of the *presbyters* of Rome.⁷ Legend says he was bishop of Rome or pope and identifies him with the Clement in Philippians 4:3.

The occasion for the letter was that upstarts in the Corinthian church deposed their elders, who then appealed to the Roman churches for help. Why Rome? Rome was the largest city, capital, and nerve center of the Empire. But Roman Christians had their own problems:

The church of God at Rome to the church of God at Corinth... Brothers, the sudden and unexpected dangers and calamities that have fallen upon us have delayed our answer to your questions (1 Clement 1:1).

What “dangers and calamities”? Persecution, perhaps from Trajan early in his reign.⁸ Christianity was a foreign magical cult that suspicious Romans feared and would have liked to destroy.

Roman *presbyters* don't want any suggestion of trouble:

I condemn that wicked and detestable sedition so unbecoming God's elect which a few heady and self-willed men have fed, making it so crazy that it debases your venerable and renowned name (1 Clement 1:1).

The Roman *presbyters* warn that fighting was dangerous, for their enemies have already noticed it:

We're not the only ones to hear of your fighting! So have those who disagree with us! You pile blasphemies upon the Lord's name because of your stupidity and put yourselves in danger. Stop it at once! Pray the Lord for mercy and restore us to the honorable and pure conduct of our love for the brotherhood (1 Clement 47:7-48:1).

It is likely that the upstarts in Corinth wanted their congregation to work for the fall of the Empire. But the Roman Christians said the rebels should respect their leaders:

You had all glory and growth, then you ate and drank, got uppity and fat, and kicked. That caused jealousy and envy, strife and sedition, persecution and anarchy, war and captivity, the low against the honored, the foolish against the wise, the young against the elders (1 Clement 3:3).

Roman Christians did not want the Empire to fall, so they set an example of obedience and loyalty to Rome in this prayer to God:

Give us harmony and peace so that we may be saved while obeying you and our rulers and governors on earth. You chose them to rule over us. We acknowledge the glory and honor that you gave them, so that we may be subject to them, never resisting your will.

For you, heavenly Master, king of the ages, give to the sons of men glory, honor, and authority over men... (1 Clement 60:4-61:3).

Obedience to the emperor was obedience to God.

The *presbyters* of Rome call upon the Corinthians to sacrifice their own interests in obedience to their *presbyters*:

Which of you is noble? compassionate? full of love? Then say, "If it is my fault, I will leave. I will go wherever you wish and do what the people order so that the flock will be at peace with its duly chosen *presbyters*." Look at the *gentiles*. **Many kings and rulers gave themselves up to death for their subjects.** Many left their cities to forestall revolt. Many sold themselves into slavery to buy food for others (1 Clement 54:3-55:3).

The Corinthians should reread Paul's warning about factions:

Pick up Paul's letter. What did he first write you? He warned you not to choose among himself, Kephass, or Apollos because you had already begun to split into parties and factions [1 Cor.]. It's a shame that one or two people should lead the ancient church of the Corinthians into sedition against its *presbyters*... (1 Clement 47:1-6).

The grave sin of envy caused the mutiny in Corinth, so the *presbyters* urge repentance, citing examples from Jewish scripture. Envy even caused the apostles' persecution and death:

Look at the apostles. Because of envy, Peter underwent many sufferings until he was martyred and went to the place of glory due him. For the same reason, Paul also received the reward of his patience. He was chained up seven times. He was whipped. He was stoned. He preached in both the East and West, leaving behind the glorious report of his faith. Having taught righteousness to the whole world, traveling even to the extreme West, he was martyred by the governors' orders and left this world for to the holy place, becoming a most eminent model of patience for all ages.

These holy apostles were joined by a very great number of others who also underwent great pains as a glorious example to us (1 Clement 5:3-6:1).

That passage may be the start of legends that Peter and Paul were martyred. The *presbyters* knew from Paul's letter that he planned to go to Spain, and assumed that he died in the West, but they don't say that Peter and Paul were ever in Rome. Mack explains, "...a martyr's death was the natural way to end... stories [of apostles]."⁹ When 1 Clement was written, the stories of Peter and Paul in Rome were yet to be written.¹⁰

In Rome as elsewhere, Christianity was a salvation cult of guilt, obedience, suffering, and martyrology in imitation of Christ:

Let us look steadfastly at the blood of Christ and see how precious his blood is in the sight of God, which being shed for our salvation has obtained the grace of repentance for the whole world (1 Clement 7:4).

It is right that we become obedient to God rather than follow the proud and seditious ringleaders of a detestable following (1 Clement 14:1).

You are contentious, brothers, and not intent on salvation... Your division has perverted or discouraged many. It caused wavering in many, and grief to us all. Yet your sedition still goes on (1 Clement 45:1, 46:9).

To make the promise of eternal life seem credible, the *presbyters* cite various analogies, including the phoenix of Arabian tales:

Jesus will come quickly, without delay, and the Lord will come to his temple with the holy ones you look for.

The Lord continually shows us that there will be a future resurrection, of which he has made our Lord Jesus Christ the first fruits, raising him from the dead. We see many examples of resurrection. Night lies down; day rises and departs, and night comes on again. Seed is sown, dissolves, and many plants come up and produce fruit.

Consider the wonderful kind of resurrection seen in Arabia. A bird called the phoenix lives five hundred years, then dies. Its decaying flesh produces a worm that grows feathers, matures, picks up the nest, and flies with it to Heliopolis in Egypt, where, in plain sight of everyone, it lays the nest on the altar of the Sun (1 Clement 24:1-25:5).

How do you obey God? The Roman military establishment provides an ideal model. Be a good soldier:

Let us serve as soldiers who readily and obediently execute orders given by emperors and commanders, each in his own rank (1 Clement 37:1-5).

The apostolic myth. The holy spirit came to bishops and deacons from Jesus through apostles. It was an unbroken chain of divine authority from God to church rulers. Therefore disobeying bishops or deacons was disobeying God. These excerpts are probably the earliest statements of the apostolic myth:

God sent Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ sent apostles... The apostles went abroad full of the holy spirit proclaiming that the kingdom of God was at hand. In countries and cities they appointed their first disciples to be bishops and deacons over those who joined later, having proved themselves through the holy spirit (1 Clement 42:1-4).

The apostles knew men could fight over the bishop's office, so they appointed the officials and gave their offices a permanent character so that if they die the church would choose other reputable men to succeed them. You unjustly removed men chosen by other reputable men with the whole church's approval! They served blamelessly, humbly,

peaceably, and unselfishly. Everyone praised them. It would be a great sin if we should throw out those who did their duty (1 Clement 44:1-5).

Apostolic authority is pure myth, for Jesus' disciples as seen in Q, SG, John, and Thomas were never apostles, "sent out." Missions of the Q people were their own idea. The disciples did not appoint bishops. Nor did Paul, who spoke of apostles sent from Jerusalem. Paul's *ekklesias* chose their own leaders.

It was Luke, perhaps following 1 Clement, who created the apostolic myth. He built on Mark's tale of Jesus' twelve disciples and Q's tale that Jesus sent disciples out to evangelize. Luke's models were Paul and his fellow Jewish apostles. He imagined Jesus sending the twelve out as apostles but said nothing about them appointing bishops. Mark and Matthew probably did not mention apostles until an editor following in Luke's footsteps added them. Mark and Matthew, like Cynics and Jesus himself, distrusted human leaders in their congregations:

Jesus said, "You know how the *ethnos* rule. Not you. Whoever will be great among you will be the servant" (Mark 10:42-45; QS 50).

Do not be called "Rabbi." One is your leader, the Christ, and you are all brothers (Matthew 23:8).

The *presbyters* of Rome resort to Jewish scripture because they cannot name a single bishop appointed by an apostle:

It's nothing new. Scripture long ago said, "I will appoint them overseers in righteousness and servants in faith" [Isaiah 60:17]... (1 Clement 42:5).

Despite Isaiah, the apostolic myth is new to Christians in 1 Clement.¹¹ Reliance on Jewish scripture suggests a significant Christian Jewish presence among Roman Christians at that time.

Christians are now "God's special people," the Congregation of Israel. Jesus Christ is the high priest of Israel:

May all-seeing God, Father of spirits and Lord of all life, who chose our Lord Jesus Christ and us to be his special people, grant to every soul of humanity that calls upon his glorious and holy name, faith, fear, peace, long-suffering, patience, temperance, and sobriety so that he may be pleased with us through our high priest and protector Jesus Christ... *Amen* (1 Clement 64).

Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch

Ignatius was arrested and sent to Rome, probably to fight in the Coliseum. Along the way he wrote letters to congregations in Ephesus, Magnesia, Tralles, and Smyrna (all in Asia Minor), and Rome.

Ignatius gloried in suffering in imitation of Christ, for martyrdom was the way to God:

The nearer I am to the sword, the nearer I am to God. When I am among the wild beasts, I shall come to God. Only in the name of Jesus Christ I undergo all to suffer with him, he who was made a perfect man strengthening me. I was sent from Antioch bound with chains becoming God (Ignatius to the Smyrneans 2:6-7).

I came [to Smyrna] bound from Syria, trusting through your prayers to fight with beasts at Rome so that by suffering I may become indeed the disciple of him who gave himself to God (Ignatius to the Ephesians 1:4).

I fear your love lest it injures me, for it will be hard for me to get to God if you save me. I will never again have such an opportunity of going to God, nor will you if you remain silent so that I will partake God. You cannot do me a greater kindness than to let me be sacrificed to God now that the altar is prepared. When you are gathered in love, give thanks to the Father through Christ Jesus that he has brought a bishop of Syria to you, being called from the East to the West (Ignatius to the Romans 1:4-7).

Night and day I fight wild beasts by sea and land, from Syria to Rome, being bound to ten "leopards"—a band of soldiers who, though treated kindly, are the worse for it.

May I enjoy the wild beasts prepared for me, that they expend all their ferocity upon me and eat me, and not treat me as they have done some whom they did not touch. If they won't do it willingly, I will provoke them to it.

I would rather die for Jesus Christ than rule the earth. I seek him who died for us; I want him who rose again for us. Let me imitate the passion of my god (Ignatius to the Romans 2:8-16).

It is not known whether Ignatius made it to Rome.

Ignatius urged Christians to obey their bishops:

The bishop presides in place of God [!]; the *presbyters*, in place of the apostles... Be united with your bishop (Ignatius to the Magnesians 2:5-7).

Follow your bishop as Jesus Christ, the Father, and the *presbyters* as the apostles. Revere the deacons as the command of God. Let no one do anything related to the church apart from the bishop. Look on the Eucharist as established when offered by the bishop or his delegate. Wherever the bishop appears, let the people also be, just as where Jesus Christ is, there is the *kat-holikos* [catholic, universal] church. Baptizing or celebrating the Eucharist is illegal without the bishop (Ignatius to the Smyrneans 3:1-5).

Ignatius wants Christian sects to agree on a single doctrine without "choices." He understands the political power of a single-minded faction obedient to its leader.

The cult of the Virgin Mary. The Gospel of Matthew used wit in dealing with the tradition that Jesus was illegitimate. His subtlety and humor were lost on more and more readers as time passed. Ignatius, surrounded by fertility cults of Cybele, Ma, Isis, Aphrodite, and Ash-toreth, urged the cult of the Virgin Mary onto Christians:

Mary's virginity and Jesus Christ's birth were kept secret from the prince of this world (Ignatius to the Ephesians 4:10).

Christ was truly the son of God according to the will and power of God, and truly born of the Virgin (Ignatius to the Smyrneans 1:4).

First Clement never mentions Mary, let alone the Virgin. It is likely that the cult of the Virgin Mary originated in Syria or Asia Minor and had not yet made a significant impression on Roman Christians.

Ignatius does not reveal the charges against him. It may have been for being a Christian, for they were being hunted down early in Trajan's reign. Ignatius reveled in his coming martyrdom. He may have deliberately provoked the Romans to arrest him for being a Christian, to set an example of resistance to the Empire.

NOTES

1. Colossians: Mack, 1995, 183-188.
2. Nicolaus: Acts 6:5.
3. Clement praised Nicolaus: Eusebius, 3:29.
4. Cerinthus: Eusebius, 2:25, 3:28, 3:39:1, 7:25. Papias: Eusebius, 3:39:17.
5. Date of Revelation: Eusebius, 5:8; Mack, 1995, 196.
6. Authenticity of Revelation disputed: Eusebius, 3:25.
7. Clement and 1 Clement: Mack, 1995, 244-247.
8. Date of 1 Clement: Mack, 1995, 244.
9. Martyr's death: Mack, 1995, 227.
10. Stories of Peter and Paul in Rome: Beginning about 170 CE. Eusebius, 2:14, 25, 5:6.
11. Apostolic myth after 100 CE: Mack, 1995, 225-250.

— ⊕ — 26 Religion in the Roman Empire

Birth rates declined in Rome. The specter of a shortage of Roman citizens to rule the far-flung Empire prompted Augustus Caesar to decree laws encouraging citizens to marry, stay married, and have large families. Those who didn't were penalized.

Manpower is a universal concern of tribes and nations. They have always fretted about having enough defenders and workers to provide the good life and survive against hungry neighbors. Babies are the remedy, so people tried to provide them. Early people depended on shamans' magic as well as natural law. When tribes settled down, shamans became priestesses and priests who built temples to offer their magic to the public.

Tribal kings depended on holy men and women to help them rule and maintain power. Priests and priestesses supervised public celebrations and the daily lives of the people. They gave divine assurances of bright futures and warned of clouds on the horizon. Of course they took care of their own interests first, and manipulated leaders and public to assure their own welfare above all. Seneca is credited with pointing out that all religions are equally false but equally useful in ruling.

Roman priests maintained an unbroken line throughout the eras of the Roman tribe, Kingdom, Republic, and Empire. And beyond: I suggest that the Roman priesthood did not go away when the citizens forsook the temples to embrace Christianity. Priests did the same when the time came. They made Christianity their own and brought many of their aboriginal customs along with them.

The Roman gods. From tribal days each Roman family had its *genius*, a spirit that guarded the family and promoted fertility. It was often represented as a snake in pictures and statues. The family's ancestors were remembered as statuettes in a shrine. Over the home's front entrance, Janus' double face kept vigil over comings and goings and all sorts of "beginnings," which no doubt included conception. Vesta watched over the family's hearth, fire, and food as it cooked. The whole family honored her at meals. Women were especially attached to Vesta as a fertility goddess. She was a Roman precursor of Virgin Mary. Most gods were probably fertility gods in some aspect or at some time in the evolution of tribal folklore.

Janus was the god of “beginnings” in the public domain, too. We still honor the *beginning* of the *solar* year on the first of *January*. Roman Janus created the world, the greatest of all “beginnings.” As *Janus Pater* he was father of gods. He watched over the break of dawn as well as gates and doorways. Historically Janus probably began as a greatly respected tribal king whose subjects imagined as the sun god. In the early Kingdom a temple was built to Janus in the Forum. Whenever Rome declared war, Janus’ priests opened the temple’s great doors and kept them open until victory was achieved.

In Latium, the region south of the Tiber River that included Rome, Vesta was the fertility goddess of sown fields as well as the ceremonial fire goddess. The Latins’ Indo-European ancestors knew her as Avesta, goddess of fire. She and Janus ruled every aspect of daily life, privately and publicly, from prehistoric times.

Quirinius was the Latin war god and gave his name to Quirinal Hill of the seven on which Rome was built, overlooking the Tiber.

From the dawn of Roman history, Romans called their sun god *Sol indiges*, “the indigenous Only One.” Sol was reborn at every winter solstice. He ensured the harvest toward the end of summer. Romans celebrated Sol on December 25 and in August on Quirinal Hill through the Empire even as Roman armies became acquainted with sun gods of the peoples they conquered. For example, they identified Sol with Helios of Greece. After the Persian king of Armenia came to Rome and prostrated himself at Nero’s feet, Nero pictured himself on coins with a radiate crown—Sol *indiges*. But it was also the Persian sun god who shared Mithra’s last supper and took him to heaven in his fiery chariot.

Saturn was a god of manuring of fields, sowing, abundance, harvest, and vine-growing. Once upon a time he must have been the Latin sun god, for Rome celebrated his birthday in their greatest festival, the Saturnalia. From December 17 to 23, schools, law courts, businesses, and military operations closed down. Romans identified Saturn with Kronos, the Greek Father Time and highest of the planetary gods. Virgil thought Saturn had been king of Italy in the mythical Golden Age.

Jupiter was the most important agricultural god of Latium and her neighbors. He ruled light, sun, moon, lightning, rain, sowing, and fertility. He became creator and ruler of the world and father of the gods. He was identified with the bright, high planet just below tired, old Saturn.

Juno, Jupiter’s sister and consort, was goddess of light and every aspect of marriage including coitus, pregnancy, labor, and childbirth

throughout central Italy. She was another likely Roman precursor of Virgin Mary.

Mars was Juno's son. Originally the Latin god of springtime, vegetation, and fertility, Mars displaced Quirinius as the Roman war god. He was identified with Greek Ares and the red planet.

Rome probably began as a village on "Palace" Hill, the Palatine. According to a late legend, Romulus founded the city in 753 BCE.

Romulus was Mars' son, conceived while his virgin mother, Rhea Silvia, slept. (Does that sound familiar?) The twins Romulus and Remus were born. A priestess at the temple to Vesta at Alba Longa, Rhea Silvia was daughter of Numitor, king of Alba Longa. (The Vestal Virgins were committed at age ten by their parents to a thirty-year career as virgins. Today we call them nuns.) Rhea Silvia's brother killed her, for death was the penalty for breaking the Vestal Virgins' vow of chastity. But first Rhea Silvia placed the twins in a reed basket and set it adrift in the Tiber River. (Another old story.) The basket snagged near a wolf, who rescued and suckled the twin babies.

Romulus built a temple to Juno on Esquiline Hill. He also established the cult of Vesta on Palatine Hill, and Vestal Virgins were assigned to keep the sacred fire burning perpetually. They also tended ceremonial fires and performed sacrifices for public affairs.

After Romulus died, Romans imagined him as the incarnation of Quirinius the war god. His successors conquered all Latium under Romulus-Quirinius' spiritual guidance. To consolidate their hold over the conquered tribes of Latium, the Romans moved the Vestal Virgins, their ceremonies, and their festivals to Rome.

King Servius Tullius built a huge temple to Jupiter on Capitoline Hill. He conquered the district of Aricia, several miles away. There, on the shore of Lake Nemi, was a temple ruled by Vesta-Diana, goddess of the moon and the hunt. Servius Tullius built a temple to Diana on Aventine Hill in Rome and ordered her festivals held there. Women came to pray to Diana for easy childbirth.¹ Romans identified Diana with Venus, originally a fertility goddess of fields and gardens. When they visited the great and ancient temple to Artemis in Ephesus, they identified that many-breasted hunting and fertility goddess with Diana.

When the Kingdom expanded into the volcanic region of Italy, Romans met the cult of Volcanus, the local god of fire, thunderbolts, war, and the sun. The natives regarded Volcanus as another name for Jupiter. The Romans built an altar in the Forum to Volcanus.

Early in the Kingdom period, the Roman nobility created a constitution and established the senate. Under the constitution the senate appointed the king, who ruled like the patriarch of a large family.

About 616 BCE, Tarquinius Priscus of Etruria, the district north of the Tiber, usurped the Roman throne. The Tarquin dynasty built a temple on Quirinal Hill devoted to the Capitoline Triad. The Triad included Etruscan Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva. Etruscan Jupiter was a war god. Minerva was a goddess of wisdom like Athene of Athens.

On Palatine Hill the Tarquins built a temple to Mars. He soon became identified with Quirinius the war god. A temple to Saturn was built on Capitoline Hill.

A Sybil offered to sell King Tarquinius Superbus the prophetic Sibylline Books. He bought them and put them in the care of the priests of the temple of Jupiter. For centuries, kings and senators had the priests consult the Sibylline Books for oracles before making major decisions. The Sybils were an order of prophetesses evidently from the cult of Cybele in Asia Minor.

The Romans overthrew the Etruscans and expelled them from Latium in 505 BCE. The senate abolished the Kingdom and declared the Roman Republic. They appointed two consuls to govern in place of the king. The senate elected consuls for six-month terms.

Consuls functioned as chief magistrates but dressed and acted like kings. Whenever they went through the streets of Rome or traveled about, two men went ahead carrying the fasces, a bundle of wooden rods tied around an axe with a scarlet thong. The fasces symbolized the power to punish and execute. Soon generals would use the fasces adorned with laurel wreathes to symbolize similar powers over armies and provinces.

The Roman priesthood was organized into four colleges headed by the *Pontifex Maximus*, Great Priest. The colleges supervised temples, sacrifices, and the Vestal Virgins. They organized official feasts and interpreted omens and prophecies. The priesthood stabilized the government and society through political change. But the strife of political contenders jockeying for position and power, eroded republican government. Long before Julius Caesar was born, civil wars were shaking the Republic.

Julius Caesar became a priest in Jupiter's temple at the age of fifteen. He rapidly moved into higher public offices including consul and *Pontifex Maximus*. As a general he won victories in five different war theaters and entered Rome in five triumphal processions. In 48 BCE the senate made Julius Caesar consul for life and gave him the titles of

Dictator for life, and *Imperator*, Commander. Thus the Republic ended. *Imperator*, a military title, proclaimed his absolute power to command the obedience of civilians as well as the military establishment. Julius Caesar had sole authority to use the fasces as a symbol of power. He was murdered in 44 BCE. In his will he adopted his grandnephew Octavian and named him his successor.

The senate named Octavian Caesar to co-rule with Mark Antony and Marcus Aemilius Lepidus. That *troika* was called the Second Triumvirate. Octavian defeated his rivals in 29 BCE. As Augustus Caesar, Octavian declared the *Imperium*, Empire, in 27, and accepted the title of *Imperator*. A priest when young, Augustus Caesar took the title of *Pontifex Maximus*.

Religion enabled Augustus Caesar to rule every aspect of Roman life. Principal imperial gods in his time included Jupiter, Juno his consort, Mars, Janus, and Romulus-Quirinius. Planetary gods ruled the days of the week—*dies Solis* (Sun's day), *dies Lunae*, *dies Martis*, *dies Mercurii*, *dies Jovis*, *dies Veneris*, and *dies Saturni*. And so do they today in the various Romance and Germanic languages. The English names honor Germanic gods.

In the belief that superstition helped control subject peoples, Augustus Caesar encouraged conquered nations to keep their old religions, requiring only that they pray for the health of the emperor and pay tribute to the gods that made Rome great. Roman gods included the emperor, for the senate had proclaimed that the murdered Julius Caesar was a god. If Caesar was a god, so was his adopted son Octavian Augustus Caesar.

Augustus Caesar arranged with Virgil to write an epic like those of Greece and Israel to help unify the Empire. Virgil wrote for ten years but died in 19 BCE with the work unfinished. That was the *Aeneid*, a masterpiece patterned after Homer's epics. The *ersatz* epic told of Roman ancestry from imaginary Trojan survivors of the Trojan War. It made Romulus into a Trojan, and also Julius, imaginary ancestor of Julius and Augustus Caesar. Smiling Jupiter told Juno, "I will make all nations Latins with a single tongue. From their blended blood a new race will rise. They will be worthy men, surpassing gods!" (*Aeneid* 12). Thus Jupiter the world creator ordained Rome's greatness. Augustus Caesar's understanding of the importance of ceremony, religion, and mythology in binding diverse peoples together, along with his firm hand, ended a century of civil war and turmoil.

Many foreign religions and philosophies invaded the Empire and established themselves in Rome itself. We have already seen Tacitus' disgust with foreign influences that made Rome a "sewer," and he was surely not alone in his opinion of blending races and cultures.

Foreign religions in Rome include the cult of Cybele and Attis from Phrygia. Isis and Sarapis from Egypt. Mithraism from Persia via Babylonia. Greek Stoicism and Epicureanism. Judaism. And Hellenistic Christianity that claimed Judea as its place of origin.

Cybele was Mother Earth, Mother of All, the wild and primitive Great Mother who lived on Mount Ida in Phrygia. Her son was Attis, a shepherd whom she killed out of jealousy for his love. Cybele's followers mourned Attis' death every spring equinox (March 21). Her priests beat themselves with knuckle-bone whips and ran bleeding and wailing through the streets. Then they carried Attis' coffin through the streets in grief. On the third day, Cybele joyfully resurrected Attis as a fir tree. That martyr and fertility cult spread into Greece, where it absorbed the native Greek cult of Rhea the earth goddess.

The Cybele cult was already in Rome when Hannibal of Carthage brought his army and elephants through the Alps into Italy. Rome was terrified. The senate consulted the priests with the Sibylline Books, who said that if the Great Mother were brought to Rome, Hannibal would be defeated. The senate immediately sent ambassadors to Phrygia to ask King Attalus for Cybele's throne, a black meteorite. Attalus could hardly have given up the Great Mother and her throne cheaply, but the Romans brought them to the temple of Winged *Victoria* in 204 BCE. Two years later Rome defeated Hannibal. The grateful senate built a special temple for the Cybele cult on Palatine Hill.

Sarapis. When Alexander the Great conquered Egypt, the Macedonians were surprised and pleased to find an ancient Greek colony at Saqqarah. They had taken over a temple that Ramses II had built for the cults of Osiris, Apis, and Ptah. Osiris was god of the world and underworld; his sister-wife was Isis. Apis was a bull-god. Ptah was "the beginning of beginnings." The Greeks combined Osiris with Apis to create Osorapis (Sarapis), a Hellenistic god, and called his temple the Sarapeum.

Ptolemy, the Macedonian general who inherited Egypt, made Sarapis into the imperial god of the Ptolemaic Empire. He built a much larger Sarapeum at Alexandria—the very temple where Vespasian would

worship Sarapis and consult priests before sailing to Rome. Vespasian must have given Sarapis and Isis great credit for his victory in Judea and success Rome.

Isis was the Egyptian goddess of motherhood and fertility. She and Osiris had a son, Horus the sun god and god of sky, light, and goodness. After every sunset, Horus became Osiris, judge of the dead and ruler of the underworld. Various stories told how Set, the jealous brother of Osiris and Isis, murdered Osiris. Every morning Isis as Dawn restored Osiris as Horus the sun god. The Isis-Osiris myth explained not only the diurnal cycle but also the annual appearance of Sirius the brilliant star who heralded the Nile floods that enriched and watered fields of grain.

The Isis cult became popular in Greece. Greeks built temples to Isis everywhere, including at Piraeus the port of Athens, and even in Athens itself, at the foot of the Acropolis.

Freedmen and slaves brought the Isis-Sarapis cult to Italy in the 100's BCE. They built temples at Pluteoli, Pompeii, and Herculaneum. The senate tried to keep the cult out of Rome, but Caligula in his time built a great temple to Isis and Sarapis in the Field of Mars. We saw that Vespasian and Titus slept there the night before their great triumph. Domitian was also a devotee Their devotion must have made the cult fashionable in Rome.

We already saw Apuleius' uncomplimentary description of a procession of priests of the Syrian goddess in the novel, *The Golden Ass*. Apuleius, a devotee of Isis, told of the ceremonies and initiation. His principal character, Lucius, prays to Isis for a favor:

"O blessed Queen of Heaven—whether you are Ceres the first motherly nurse of all fruitful things... or celestial Venus who in the beginning of the world coupled together male and female with love and so established human reproduction forever... or Apollo's sister Diana, who spares so many from labor pains with your medicines, now adored at the sacred places of Ephesus! You who brightens all cities by your feminine light; you who nourishes all seeds in the world by your damp heat, giving your changing light according to the wanderings of the sun—by whatever name or fashion or shape it is legal to call upon you—I beg you to end my hard work and misery! Lift my fallen hopes! Save me from wretched Fortune which chased me so long!"

Apuleius' own joy gushes from Lucius' mouth as the moon rises:

I fell asleep... Then I saw her! bright and rising out of the sea!... She spoke, "See, Lucius, I have come; your weeping and prayer have moved me to help you. I am the natural mother of all things... I am Cybele of Phrygia... Minerva of Athens... Ceres...

Juno... Hecate... Nemesis... Egyptians and Ethiopians know the correct ceremonies... and call me by my true name, Queen Isis" (*The Golden Ass*, Book 11).

Isis was also Mother of Gods, Great Goddess, and Mighty in Magic. Lucius later joined the rites of Osiris. When Apuleius wrote, Vesta was still dear to the Roman heart, but in time Isis would displace her from the Roman hearth. Archaeologists attest to Isis' popularity, for they have found thousands of statues of grieving Isis nursing baby Horus in the ruins of homes and temples. Worshipers initiated into the rites of Isis became immortal. The fertility and martyr cult of Isis and Osiris reached its zenith in the third and fourth centuries even as Christianity expanded in direct competition. The Virgin Mary's time was still to come.

Judaism in Rome. After Pompey conquered Jerusalem, he brought some Jewish soldiers to Rome. Julius Caesar brought in more Jews and gave them considerable freedom in Rome. They established synagogues and welcomed Romans to them. The Sabbath was also Saturn's day, so Romans and Jews could agree that Saturn was YHWH's Roman name.

Mithraism. Mithra was the Persian equivalent of the Hindu hero Mitra. Mithra was born from a rock struck by lightning. Ormazd (Infinite Time, known to Greeks as Kronos) told Mithra to kill a great white bull. Mithra had a long heroic fight with the bull and finally killed it. The bull's decaying body spawned all beneficial plants and animals. Mithra ate his last supper with the sun god, who then took him to heaven in his fiery chariot. Thus Mithraism was a resurrection religion.

Mithra watches over humanity in his daily journey through the sky with the sun god. Art of his last supper shows loaves with small crosses (+). The Mithraic cross represents the cosmos—the sun's daily east to west path and the universe's apparent north-south axis.

Zoroaster objected to the bloody sacrifice of bulls in Mithraic ceremonies and founded a religion without it. Persian rulers promoted Zoroastrianism to replace Mithraism, but after Alexander destroyed the Persian temple-state, most Persians went back to old-time Mithraism.

Macedonians and Greeks hated everything Persian too much to adopt Persian myths. Under the Roman Empire, Tiridates, Persian king of Armenia, brought Mithraism to Rome. Mithraism inspired Nero to put Sol's radiate crown on his coins.

Mithraism flowed into the Danube region as Roman soldiers returned from Babylonia. Mithraism was a men's club. Military men at all levels liked its sense of justice, *machismo*, regimentation, and espe-

cially the camaraderie within ordered ranks. For Mithra was not only a hero, but also god of friendship, contracts, justice, and light. All over Europe Mithraic sanctuaries with mysterious underground ceremonial chambers were built next to women's temples to Cybele.²

Stoicism. Zeno adapted the philosophy of the masses—Cynism—to the wealthy upper crust. Like Cynism, Stoicism taught emotional control, impassivity to pain and pleasure, and integrity. But Stoicism rendered the divine Father or Providence into an impersonal *Logos*, Reason. The “Reason” within each of us is a spark from the *Logos*. We are gods insofar as we follow our innate Reason. Our “Reason” returns to the *Logos* after death. Stoicism became popular among Roman nobility who wanted to teach personal integrity to the young, especially those who would become officials or rulers. Stoicism became the predominant philosophy in the Empire, at least among educated classes. Famous Stoics include Nero's tutor Seneca, Emperor Marcus Aurelius, and Epictetus the philosopher. Stoicism is usually contrasted with the more down-to-earth, less speculative Epicureanism.

Epicureanism also taught self-control, moderation, and balance in life, but derived them from natural human wish to be free of pain. Epicurus strove for objectivity, trying to root ethics and propriety in the natural world. He relegated gods and spirits to outer space, though Lucretius paid lip service to them in the Epicurean treatise, *On the Nature of the Universe*. The saying, “Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you may die,”² is a cynical caricature of Epicureanism. The real reason for persecuting Epicureanism was its denial of gods.

Luke Pleads for “Heart” in the Roman Empire

Most of Luke's friends and neighbors, if not Christian, were probably Stoics. They were decent and dignified but had little “heart.” The whole Roman Empire lacked “heart.” Luke thought if God chose men for high office over others, they could approach their duties with a sense of humility and service, and even self-sacrifice. They could be kind to underlings and the public and treat them with justice and mercy. They should all have instruction in Christian philosophy. Further, if the Emperor and his appointees understood Christians, they would respect them and quit persecuting them.

Christianity was “the way” to live *and* “the way” to the Θεός:

The chief priests and scribes sent spies who asked Jesus, “*Kyrios*, we see that you teach the true **way** of Θεός” (Luke 20:19-21; from Mark 12:13-17).

Saul asked the high priest for letters to the synagogues of Damascus allowing him to arrest people of this **way** (Acts 9:2; also see 22:4).

Some of the Judeans spoke against that **way** to the crowd, so Paul left them, drew away his disciples, and debated every day in the *scholē* of a certain *tyrannus* [tyrant or ruler of the city]... There was considerable debate about that **way** (Acts 19:9, 23; also see 24:22).

The Christian way would elevate the ethics of rulers, bureaucrats, and Roman society in general, and establish the Θεός’ rule on earth if given a chance.

Christianity was the way of salvation:

A girl possessed by a *pneuma* of divination followed Paul and us, saying, “These men are *douloi* of the Θεός, the highest, and show us the **way** of salvation” (Acts 16:16-17).

Salvation was the return of the *pneuma* to the Θεός without blemish—without sin. Other philosophies and cults such as Stoicism and Pythagoreanism also offered salvation, but they lacked a credible story of a divine messenger or savior. Luke followed Mark and Matthew’s examples in creating Christian “history”:

John’s father Zachariah prophesied, “Blessed is the *Kyrios* of Israel, for he has redeemed his people... You, John, will be the prophet of the highest, for you will go before the face of the *Kyrios* to prepare his ways, to give *gnosis* of salvation to his people... and guide our feet in the **way** of peace (Luke 1:67-79; also see Luke 3:4, from QS 4).

Apollos, a Jew from Alexandria, mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus. He had been instructed in the **way** of the *Kyrios*. Fervent in the *pneuma*, he taught about the *Kyrios*, but knew only the baptism of John. When Aquila and Priscilla heard, they took him and expounded the **way** of Θεός more perfectly (Acts 18:24-26; also see 24:14).

Luke knew how hysterical worshippers of ancient gods got, and the anger of men who catered to it, when their income was threatened:

Demetrius, a silversmith who made silver shrines—for *Artemis* brought considerable profit to the craftsmen—called together the craftsmen and said, “Sirs, you know our wealth comes from this craft. Paul has convinced many people in Ephesus and all Asia that manufactured things are not gods, so our craft is in danger...” A commotion arose throughout the city... The crowd shouted in unison for two hours, “Great is *Artemis* of the Ephesians...” The town clerk appeased the crowd and said, “Men of Ephesus, who doesn’t know that Ephesus worships *Artemis* and the thing that fell down from Jupiter [a meteorite]? These things can’t be denied, so keep still. You have arrested these men who

are not robbers of *ekklesias*, nor blasphemers of your goddess. If Demetrius and the craftsmen want to complain against them, they can take them to court..." Then he dismissed the *ekklesia* (Acts 19:21-41).

Luke's interest in Ephesus strongly suggests that he lived there.

The prefaces of Acts and the gospel tie Luke's two books together:

Many writers told about our fervent beliefs as eyewitnesses and hyper-orators of the words [*logoi*] brought to us. I have full information about everything from the beginning [of Christianity], so it is best to put it in order for you, most excellent *Theophilus*, so that you might know the certainty of the words that you were taught (Luke 1:1-4).

I wrote the preceding book, O *Theophilus*, about everything that Jesus did and taught until the day he ascended, after appearing to his apostles after his death and giving them commandments by the holy *pneuma*, and speaking of the *basileia* of Θεός (Acts 1:1-3).

Theophilus, "God's lover," may be a pseudonym. Perhaps he was the Emperor. Perhaps he was a governor whom Luke knew personally. *Theophilus* already knew something of Christian doctrine.

The prefaces of Luke and Acts imitate the prefaces in Josephus' two-volume *Against Apion*. These are Josephus' prefaces:

I made it clear to readers of my *Antiquities of the Jews*, most excellent Epaphroditus, that our Jewish nation is very ancient... (Josephus, *Against Apion*, Book 1).

In my first book, most honored Epaphroditus, I have shown our antiquity and confirmed the truth of what I have said, from Phoenician, Chaldean, Egyptian, and Greek records (Josephus, *Against Apion*, Book 2).

Luke's two-volume tale begins in Jerusalem and ends in Rome. Its message is that the Θεός had once chosen Israel to teach humanity his way and made his home in Jerusalem. The Judeans disobeyed him, so he moved to Rome and showered his favors upon the Romans. Didn't the *Aeneid* say so? Israel recently rebelled against the world rulers God had chosen, so he ordered the Romans to destroy Israel. They were now the Θεός' chosen people with the duty of setting an example for the nations.

Luke's tale opens with God's speaking to Jews through prophets and angels. Jesus and John's births are miraculous. He makes John a priest's son, an Old Testament prophet, and Jesus' cousin. Jesus, the last Jewish prophet, rejects John's barbarous fanaticism and preaches a new *euangelion* of loving kindness and justice. The Judeans reject Jesus' civil ways, plot against him, and kill him. God raises him from the dead. The disciples, witnesses to Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, receive the *pneuma*. As apostles they spread the *euangelion* to Judeans, Samaritans,

and the Diaspora. In a vision Peter learns that he must take the *euangelion* to the gentiles without burdening them with the Torah. Meanwhile Saul, a typical Zealot, persecutes the Hellenistic disciples, but Jesus in heaven appoints him as an apostle. Step by step Saul gives up his rebellious, provincial ways and metamorphoses into Paul, a loyal Roman citizen. Paul takes the *euangelion* to the gentiles and endures much suffering in imitation of Christ. He brings a donation to James, but the Judeans accuse him of disobeying the Law of Moses. Felix and Festus keep him in jail, so he appeals to Nero. That is the earliest but fictional statement that Paul got to Rome. Awaiting justice, he preaches to Jews unsuccessfully, so he preaches to gentiles for two years. We all know what kind of justice Nero would dispense, don't we?

It is a powerful story with all the appearance of history. In Stoic fashion it teaches the reader to endure hardship and persecution in imitation of Jesus Christ and the apostles. It boosts Paul's (or Luke's) brand of Christianity. Luke-Acts became the standard for gentile Christians.

Luke, like Matthew, composed his first two chapters from Jewish tradition to represent John and Jesus as true Israelites. Also like Matthew, he combined Mark with Q, beginning with John's preaching repentance and baptizing for remission of sins. Luke created a genealogy of seventy-seven generations beginning with "Jesus supposedly son of Joseph" and ending, "[son] of Adam [son] of Θεός." Thus Luke reminds Greeks and Romans that Zeus-Jupiter was father of gods and all men.

Luke, like Matthew, copied the Q story of the three temptations. He followed Mark's narrative closely. He copied Mark's first chain of miracle stories but not the second (Luke's Greater Omission); Mark's mission story with the embedded Herod-John stories; Jesus' revelation that he was the Christ; and first two prophecies of his death. Along the way Luke composed a few stories including the one of the sinful woman who washed and anointed Jesus' feet.

As Jesus heads for Jerusalem, he teaches and does good deeds along the way. The teachings are Q sayings skillfully woven into the narrative, often with Luke's own little scenes, parables, and stories. Luke embellishes the empty tomb scene with "two men in shining garments." He creates Jesus' appearances to the eleven and to Clopas (Jesus' uncle, according to current folklore), and the commission to preach to all *ethnos*. Mark to the contrary, Luke makes Jesus tell the apostles to stay in Jerusalem just before he ascends to heaven.

Jesus reappears in Acts and promises the holy spirit will give the apostles *dynamis* to spread the gospel. They receive it at First Fruits

(Pentecost). Led by Peter and John but not James, they preach in Jerusalem, then Judea. In Samaria they convert Simon the *magos*, one of many rascally saviors from heaven in Luke's time. Paul becomes an apostle and makes three journeys (to Cyprus, Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Greece) before his arrest in Jerusalem. Luke-Acts establishes the apostolic myth so that bishops and deacons may claim authority from the Θεός through the holy spirit and the apostles.

The apostles preach more than twenty sermons which are scattered throughout Acts. The doctrine is that Jesus obeyed God, so God raised him; and that anyone who wants salvation must repent for the remission of sins, be baptized, and receive the holy spirit.

The following excerpt from an apostolic speech in Acts illustrates Luke's doctrine, which in this case is directed at Jews:

On Pentecost, a sound like mighty rushing wind from heaven filled the house. Tongues of fire sat upon each person. They were filled with the holy *pneuma* and spoke in *dialectos*. Peter explained, "Men of Judea and visitors in Jerusalem, Joel said this would happen! Whoever calls on the *Kyrios* will be saved. Wicked hands impaled and killed a man approved by the Θεός, Jesus the Nazorean. The Θεός raised him up. Let all Israel know that the man you impaled is both *Kyrios* and Christ. So repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you will receive the gift of the holy *pneuma*. Save yourselves from this obstinate generation" (Acts 2:1-40).

Luke makes different audiences respond in different ways to his sermons, thus creating interesting, realistic stories, but he invents the sermons.³ He invents the dramatic scene of the pouring of the *pneuma* with wind and fire. Forget that Acts looks historical. It's no more historical than the Homeric novels we call gospels.

Prevailing Stoic philosophy dictated having students study "speeches-in-character" of great men so they would imitate them. In that tradition, Luke creates the character of Apostle Paul by composing "speeches-in-character" for him, and the reader is supposed to mimic that character (*mimesis*),⁴ and be an apostle for Christianity.

Jews angrily refuse any attempt to liberalize their traditions. Luke, a Hellenistic gentile, is unsympathetic:

Jesus came to Nazareth where he had been brought up. He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath and stood to read as he used to do... He said, "The scripture you hear is fulfilled today..." The people became angry, rose up, pushed him out of the city, and took him to the brow of the hill to push him down head first (Luke 4:16-29).

Luke creates the synagogue in Nazareth. Synagogues were a Diasporic invention. They did not come to Palestine until the Temple was

destroyed.⁵ Luke thinks the obstinate and ill-tempered Jews deserved to have their nation destroyed.

To Luke, *Nazoreans*, “Keepers of the Torah,” were *hasidim* or Zealots. Jesus was an enlightened one, for Luke calls him *Nazorean* eight times in the gospel. Only in the demoniac’s speech is Jesus a “*Nazarene*,” “a native of Nazareth.”⁶ Paul is no longer a *Nazorean* although one of Luke’s characters still thinks he is⁷:

Paul is a pestilent fellow and a ringleader of the sect of the *Nazoreans* (Acts 24:5).

When copying from Mark’s Little Apocalypse, Luke makes it clear that it was about the First Revolt, which did not have to happen:

Jesus said, “Not one hair of your head will perish, but don’t risk your life. When you see armies surrounding Jerusalem, know that its destruction is near, for these are days of vengeance and scripture must be fulfilled” (Luke 21:18-22; compare Mark 13:14).

“Woe to pregnant and nursing women. In those days great distress will be upon the land and great wrath upon the people. They will fall by the sword’s edge or be sold as slaves to all *ethne*. Jerusalem will be trodden down by the *ethnos* until the time of the *ethnos* is fulfilled” (Luke 21:23-24; compare Mark 13:17).

A loyal Roman subject, Luke omits Mark’s “abomination of desolation standing where it shouldn’t,” for “it” was Emperor Vespasian leading the Roman army into Judea—or Emperor Titus standing in the Temple!

The *ethnos* are the many peoples of the Empire. After quelling the Jewish revolt, the Empire entered an age of Roman peace and glory:

When you see these things happen, know that the *basileia* of Θεός is at hand (Luke 21:31).

Luke shapes these scenes from Josephus’ *Jewish War*:

Jesus looked at Jerusalem and wept, saying, “You don’t know it, but the time is coming when your enemies will dig a trench around you and surround you. They will raze you with your children inside, not leaving one stone upon another, because you didn’t know the time of your visitation” (Luke 19:41-44).

A crowd followed Jesus, and the women bewailed and lamented him. He said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not wail for me, but for yourselves and your children...” (Luke 23:27-31).

Jesus’ countrymen falsely accused him of inciting rebellion:

Witnesses accused Jesus, saying, “We found this fellow perverting our *ethnos* and telling them not to pay taxes to Caesar. He claimed to be *Christos*, a king” (Luke 23:2).

But Luke's Jesus didn't come to fight or liberate Israel from Rome:

When Samaritans shunned them, James and John asked Jesus, "Kyrios, do you want us to call lightning down upon them as Elijah did?" Jesus answered, "You don't know what kind of *pneuma* you're of! The Son of man did not come to destroy lives, but to save them!" And they took a detour around the village (Luke 9:52-56).

The disciples thought the *basileia* should appear immediately (Luke 19:11).

The disciples asked Jesus, "Kyrios, will you now restore self-rule to Israel?" He replied, "It's not for you to know the future. The Father keeps it to himself" (Acts 1:6-7).

Luke wants Zealots to quit agitating for independence.

Luke was not especially superstitious. His *ekklelesia* was a social and ethical society, and not very cultic. He believed that Christians deserved the same respect as Stoics. And more, for gentile Christians taught love, peace, and obedience to the Θεός. The intelligent reader would recognize stories of angels and miracles as tales. On the other hand, the world was full of mysteries, and most people, including Stoics, believed in spirits and the afterlife. What did it hurt to hope? Nobody can prove there isn't life beyond the grave. Christianity was like most cults and philosophies in teaching decent and sensible living along with the mysteries and superstitions required to make people behave themselves. Luke thought Christianity was the best philosophy of all. Besides, Jesus' miracles and resurrection seemed well attested to by eyewitnesses—Mark, Matthew, John, and Paul.

Luke dramatizes the shortcomings of philosophy and Gnosticism:

Certain philosophers of the Epicureans and Stoics met Paul. Some said, "What will this babblers say?" Paul said, "Men of Athens! You are too superstitious, for I saw an altar inscribed, 'To the Unknown Θεός.' The one you worship in ignorance—I'm *telling* you about him! The Θεός made the *kosmos* and everything in it. He is *Kyrios* of *ouranou* and earth, so he doesn't live in temples. Nor is he worshipped by human hands as though he needed anything! He made all *ethnos* of one blood. He wants them to seek the *Kyrios*, though he's not far from any of us. As one of your poets said, 'We are his children.'⁸ He overlooked our ignorance in the past, but now he commands us to repent. For he has chosen a day in which he will judge the habitable world!..." (Acts 17:18-31).

News of the Θεός' coming judgment would attract attention.

It wasn't that moral and ethical behavior was foreign to Rome. As the Greek historian Polybios observed, Rome's rulers knew how to exploit popular superstitions and fear of the gods to make the masses obey and keep officeholders honest. Superstitions, mysteries, and dread of *Hades* were necessary to ensure good behavior. Rulers of the Roman

Empire injected religion into private and public life in every way possible to help them control their subjects.⁹

Authorship. Luke-Acts is anonymous. Many Bible scholars have thought this passage identifies the author:

At Troas Paul dreamed that a Macedonian stood and said, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." Immediately **we** tried to go to Macedonia (Acts 16:9-10).

According to that theory, the author was a Macedonian, for immediately he began writing "we." Until now Acts has been written in third person. The other "we" sections generally support that conclusion.¹⁰ A different explanation is that it was customary to tell of voyages using "we."¹¹

Given the title, Gospel of Luke, scholars point to these passages:

Timotheus my fellow-worker, *Loukios*, and my kinsmen Jason and Sosipater salute you (Romans 16:21).

I beg you also, my true yoke-fellow, help those women... (Philippians 4:3).

...and *Loukas*, my fellow-workers (Philemon 24).

These passages also mention Luke, but Paul did not write them:

Loukas the beloved physician and Demas greet you (Colossians 4:14).

Only *Loukas* is with me (2 Timothy 4:11).

Nothing says that *Loukas* came from Macedonia, traveled with Paul, or wrote anything. Every one of Paul's time was dead when Luke-Acts was written. The writer is unknown, but "Luke" is the only label we have.

Appeals to emperors. Pliny the Younger, governor of Bithynia, punished some Christians under Nero's laws, but had second thoughts about it. In 112 CE he reported to Trajan that they did nothing wrong apart from refusing to worship idols. They worshipped Christ as a god and followed his rules against murder, theft, fraud, and adultery. Trajan ordered governors not to hunt Christians, but punish them if met.

In the reign of Aelia Hadrian (117-137 CE), Serennius Granianus appealed for a halt to treating Christians as criminals. Granianus was a former governor of Asia including Ephesus. His successor, Minucius Fundanus, hunted out Christians. After Granianus' appeal, Hadrian told Fundanus not to persecute Christians on false charges.¹²

Justin Martyr (100-165 CE) wrote a book that persuaded a Roman emperor not to persecute Christians. Justin was a Greek or Roman brought up in Samaria. After studying various philosophies in Ephesus, he chose Christianity. He moved to Rome and wrote *A Defense of Our Faith* and addressed it to Emperor Antoninus Pius. After that, Pius proclaimed that Christians obeyed God even if they refused to worship state gods. He forbade persecution of Christians unless they broke laws.¹³ Pius reigned 138-161 CE.

Luke-Acts may have been written partly to earn justice from an emperor or governor. It fits the time—let’s say about 120 CE. Perhaps “Theophilus” was Granius or Hadrian or both.

The Second Jewish Revolt Against Rome

Hadrian evidently thought the Empire had expanded too far, for he built a wall to prevent the Picts from invading England, then withdrew his army from Parthia. He clamped down on disturbances within the provinces, especially Palestine. He outlawed Jewish tradition including circumcision and teaching Judaism. He built a temple to Jupiter on the ruins of YHWH’s Temple in Jerusalem. A delegation including Rabbi Akiba went to Rome to protest, but to no avail.

Back in Palestine Rabbi Akiba found Simon Bar Kochba (“son of the star”) and persuaded him to fulfill an ancient prophecy:

A star will come out of Jacob, and a scepter will rise out of Israel, and will strike the corners of Moab and destroy all the children of Sheth (Numbers 24:17).

The star symbolized a high priest; the scepter, a king. In Akiba’s eyes, Bar Kochba was a potential priest-king, a Messiah. So Bar Kochba gathered an army of Zealots and declared independence in 131 CE. He failed to get Christian Jews and Jesus people to join him, but even without them he quickly captured Jerusalem, fifty towns, and many villages.

The legate of Syria, Lucius Septimius Severus, did not have an adequate army, so Hadrian led his own to Jerusalem in 134. Bar Kochba and his forces left to hole up in Beththera, seven miles to the southwest. Hadrian besieged and destroyed them.

A Zealot army remained at the Qumran fort. Hadrian destroyed it in 135 CE. Letters from Bar Kochba have been found there.¹⁴

The Judeans fled, were driven out, or were enslaved. As for Rabbi Akiba and others who had led Bar Kochba to revolt, the Romans arrested

and flayed them alive. Despite the executions, Akiba's academy at Bene-Berak continued.

Hadrian banned Jews from sight of Jerusalem. He renamed the city Aelia after himself and populated it with gentiles.¹⁵

Eusebius says that a gentile Christian community settled at Aelia, and he lists fifteen "gentile bishops of Jerusalem" between 135 and 180 CE.¹⁶ All had Latin or Greek names, though that does not prove they were gentiles. Bishop Symmachus had the same name as the Ebionite translator who criticized Matthew for mistranslating "girl" as "virgin." Perhaps they were one and the same man. The date is about right.

Gnostic Christianity

Marcion. About 140 CE, Marcion, son of the bishop of Sinope in Asia Minor, came to Rome teaching that YHWH the creator caused all the evil in the world. Jewish scripture says so:

I create light and darkness. I make peace and evil. I YHWH do it all (Isaiah 45:7).

YHWH's cruel justice in the Torah proved he was evil. Jesus' father was not YHWH but the Unknown Θεός, who sent him into the world to save human souls from YHWH by grace.

Marcion's holy book consisted of Paul's letters and the Gospel of Luke (without the birth and resurrection stories). It may have been the first New Testament.

Marcion's teachings angered other bishops. They probably responded by creating the first version of the Apostles' Creed, which begins, "I believe in God the Father, maker of heaven and earth." The bishops pressured Marcion to teach their doctrines and use their books.

Marcion replied that the bishops had no authority over him, and he denied the apostolic myth. One reason for rejecting Acts was probably because it taught the apostolic myth.

Justin Martyr attacked Marcion for denying that Jesus created the universe—itself a Gnostic notion. Ultimately the bishops drove Marcion from Rome, but he went on founding churches wherever he went.

About that time, Valentinus of Alexandria came to Rome, also teaching that YHWH was evil and created the evil world. Valentinus' world-view was much more elaborate and speculative than Marcion's, and he wrote his own books. The bishops made Rome too hot for Valentinus, and he soon left.¹⁷

The “Phrygian Heresy”

John’s Revelation with its prediction of the fall of Rome fed Roman suspicions that Christians and Ebionites were revolutionaries. Not far from John’s Ephesus was Phrygia, a hotbed of Millennialism. Around 140, the Millennialist Montanus became widely known for prophesying Jesus’ imminent return. He renamed his small town Jerusalem and prepared to meet Jesus. Montanus no doubt looked for Rome to fall. Eusebius accused the Montanists of demonic possession because of their strange behavior, including ecstatic trances and dyeing their hair.¹⁸

Montanus’ successor, Theodotus the shoemaker, taught that Jesus was an ordinary son of a man and woman. The holy spirit came on him after John’s baptism as Mark said, and probably SG. The voice from heaven showed that God “adopted” him, making him his son. Hence Millennialism was “Adoptionism,” as Eusebius said,¹⁹ or a form of it.

Some Christians from Phrygia who had settled in Gaul refused to participate in religious ceremonies at festivals. They were punished or put to death.²⁰ That was in the reign of Marcus Aurelius (161-180). Evidently the Romans considered them rebels.

Adoptionism was one of three views of Jesus’ nature at that time. The Gospel of John said that Jesus was preexistent and that he created the world—a very Gnostic notion. Eusebius said that God begot Jesus through the holy *pneuma* (Matthew 1:20, Luke 1:35). He called Adoptionism “heresy” and attacked it with venom.

It was mainly a matter of displaying loyalty to Rome. As we will see, Eusebius played up to Emperor Constantine, who was looking for religion to unify the Empire, not divide it. Adoptionism was largely Ebionite, and close to the Jewish belief that God is One and Jesus was an ordinary man. Adoptionism was popular in the eastern provinces which had not fully resigned themselves to Roman rule, and expected Rome to fall at any time. It lent itself to Millennialism. Adoptionism was a form of Unitarianism, which we will contrast with Trinitarianism in the next chapter.

Clement of Alexandria

Alexandria was a hotbed of philosophical speculation. Around 50 CE Philo interpreted Jewish scripture according to Plato’s philosophy. In the second and third centuries Greek, Jewish, Egyptian, and Persian ideas

contributed to the great Gnostic movement in Alexandria and throughout the East.

We already saw that Alexandria produced the Gnostics, Carpocrates and Valentinus, in the second century. Carpocratians must still have been important in the time of Clement of Alexandria (150-215 CE), for he railed against them as *asteres planetai*, “star-wanderers,” an epithet also used in Jude 13. In a private letter Clement attacked the Carpocratian gospel, which was a secret long version of Mark. He also admitted that he, too, used a secret long version of Mark, and that he gave his inner circle secret instruction.²¹ Clement was evidently strongly Gnostic, although the church always respected him as a church father.

Clement’s attack on rival Christians was not at all unusual. A bishop armed with the absolute certainty of the holy spirit might call his congregation, stir them up to righteous anger, and march with them into a “heretical” church. They would loot the church, burn all “heretical” books, and sometimes burn the church itself. Those riots often caused death on both sides. One bishop boasted of burning over two hundred copies of a “heretical” gospel.²²

Emperor Lucius Septimius Severus (193-211) ordered a large-scale persecution of Christians which drove Clement into exile about 210 CE. The Carpocratians disappeared from history, and so did Clement.

Victor Makes It A Roman Religion

Victor was the first Roman to become bishop of Rome (189-199). He initiated the use of Latin in the church instead of the traditional Greek. It was a large step toward making Greek Christianity into a Roman religion, and more useful to his emperor. It is likely that many priests, traditions, and customs of long-time Roman religions came into the Roman churches from Victor’s time on.

Victor thought he should rule not only the western churches, but also those in the East. He told all churches to celebrate Easter the Sunday after Passover as western churches did. Eastern churches had always celebrated Easter on Passover, and many bishops refused to obey the order. Victor called them to Rome and told them to obey him. It was one of many ways Roman churches snubbed their Greek and Jewish origins.

Victor excommunicated Theodotus the shoemaker around 190, but Adoptionism continued under another Theodotus, then Natalius, then Artemon, and finally Paul of Samosata, bishop of Antioch. Eusebius

condemned them all,²³ probably to display loyalty to Rome and distance himself from the Jewish independence movement.

Origen

Origen (about 185 to 254 CE), a Greek scholar in Alexandria, was a student of Clement. He taught “universal salvation,” that all human spirits would be saved if they repented before the Judgment at the end of the world. Even Satan could redeem himself. Satan and humankind fell because they loved worldly things more than God. God created his son and human spirits before creating the world. Origen’s was a variation on the doctrine of preexistence. God the Father is One, but the son is manifold, as his various roles and titles show. God created everything in love through Jesus Christ the *Logos*. Christ the Mediator unites human spirits with God through “mystical ecstatic union” in prayer and trances. Christ and the holy spirit always remained united with God through love, so they never fell as Satan and humanity did.

Origen’s theories of preexistence, dualism of matter and spirit, and the heavenly redeemer were Gnostic. There were even more strongly Gnostic sects for him to dispute with, notably the Valentinians. Origen also disputed with Plotinus, founder of Neoplatonism, though both had studied Platonism in Alexandria. Origen rejected Pythagorean transmigration of spirits, for animals can’t reason as humans do.

Origen traveled to Rome, Palestine, Greece, and Arabia to teach, dispute, and put down Christian “heresies.” About 225 the bishop in Caesarea ordained Origen. That provoked Demetrius, bishop of Alexandria, to prohibit Origen from teaching in Alexandria. Origen settled in Caesarea and founded a school. After Origen died, Eusebius attended a philosophical school run by Pamphilus, a Christian. Pamphilus and Eusebius admired Origen and wrote five-volumes in his defense. Eusebius devotes pages of praise to Origen in *History of the Church*.

Apparently Christians were getting close to the Roman throne. Servants of Emperor Alexander (222-235) were “mainly believers,” but his successor Maximin (235-238), a Thracian peasant usurper, ordered church leaders killed. Eusebius thought Emperor Philippus “the Arabian” (244-249) was Christian and cited letters from Origen to Philippus and his wife. Emperor Decius (249-251) killed the bishops of Rome and imprisoned the bishops of Antioch and Jerusalem for life. Eusebius said Decius’ persecution of Christians was because he hated his predecessor, Philippus the Arabian.

Origen was arrested in 250 and tortured. Decius died the next year, and Origen was released from prison, an old man with broken health.²⁴

Upstart Christianity had muscled its way among the ancient fertility and martyr cults of Rome. It offered to promote fertility and help maintain law and order over the teeming millions of the vast Empire, and to do it better. It wanted official sanction now, and eventually it would demand union with the Empire as its one and only bride.

NOTES

1. Vesta Diana cult: Frazer in *The Golden Bough*. Saturn: Virgil, *Aeneid*.
2. Mithraism: Cumont; Cooper. Cross: Earth's axis is the other part of the cross. In that age earth's axis was imagined as the axis of the skies' daily rotation around earth. Eat, drink, be merry: Genesis 43:34, Judges 19:6, 1 Kings 4:20, Isaiah 22:13, Ecclesiastes 2.24, 5:18, 8:15, 9:7; Luke 12:9, 1 Cor. 10:7, 15:32.
3. Luke composed sermons in Acts: Mack, 1995, 232-234.
4. *Mimesis* and speeches-in-character: Mack, 1993, 198-201.
5. Hostile L stories: Luke 7:36-50, 11:10-17, 14:1-61, 18:9-13, 19:1-10, 23:6-16. Also note 5:8, 7:29-30, 11:37-38, 15:2, 14-15, 19:39-40, 22:31-32.
6. Demoniac's speech: Luke 4:34, Mark 1:24.
7. Paul a Nazorean: Acts 24:5. Jesus a Nazorean: Luke 18:37, 24:19, Acts 2:22, 3:6, 4:10, 6:14, 22:8, 26:9. Jesus Nazarene: Luke 4:34, Mark 1:24.
8. Poets: Aratus in *Phenomena*; Epimenides is also quoted in same verse *The Holy Bible*. RSV, 874, n.
9. Polybios: Wrote about 150 BCE. Finley, 499-500; Sorenson, 58-59.
10. "We" sections: Acts 16:9-17, 20:5-15, 21:1-18, 27:1-28:16.
11. "We" customary for voyages: Mack, 1995, 230-231.
12. Trajan, Hadrian forbade persecution: Eusebius, 3:33, 4:8-9.
13. Justin Martyr: Eusebius, 4:13-14; Mack, 1995, 259-273.
14. Letters from Bar Kochba at Qumran: Golb, 51.
15. Jews banned from Jerusalem: Eusebius, 4:5-6.
16. Gentile bishops: Eusebius, 5:12.
17. Marcion, Valentinus: Eusebius, 4:10-11; Mack, 1995, 251-259.
18. Montanus: Eusebius, 5:14-18.
19. Theodotus: Eusebius, 5:28. Jesus' baptism: John 1:30-33, Mark 1:10-11.
20. Martyrs in Gaul: Eusebius, 5:1-3.
21. Letter from Clement of Alexandria: Smith, 1973, 14.
22. Bishops burning books: Smith, 1973, 145.
23. Theodotus and followers Natalius, Artemon: Eusebius 5:3, 28. Paul of Samosata: Eusebius 7:27-30.
24. Origen: Eusebius, 5:1-8, 6:39-42.

—⊕— 27 The Empire Marries the Church

Even as gentile Christianity wandered ever farther from its Jewish roots, Christian Jews and Jesus people rightfully insisted that they were truest to Jesus. They were still known as *Ebionim*, “Beggars.”

Eusebius, a gentile native of Caesarea, knew Ebionites at first hand. In a display of loyalty to Rome, he said the devil entangled these “heretics” in a “unique trap.” He mocked them for believing that Jesus was a man and tried to shake their belief. In a bad pun he attributed their name to their “poor and mean opinions of Christ.”

Eusebius distinguished two Ebionite sects. One agreed with Eusebius that Jesus was born of Virgin Mary by the holy spirit, but they denied that he was “God the Word and Wisdom” before his earthly existence. They observed the Jewish Sabbath as well as Sunday as holy days. They used “only the Gospel of the Hebrews.” Eusebius declared it counterfeit¹ although Jerome said most people regarded “the Jewish gospel ... the authentic Gospel of Matthew.” It was also called the Gospel of the Nazoreans. Its contents are known only from a few quotations.² Perhaps it was an Aramaic translation of the original Greek Gospel of Matthew that had undergone the inevitable alterations. We suggest that these Ebionites were Nazoreans in Palestine.

The second group of Ebionites rejected the virgin birth, for Jesus was an ordinary man born of a union between Mary and a man. He became righteous through growth of character. They followed “every point of the Law.” These Ebionites were probably Nazarenes and Adoptionists related to Mark’s school in southern Syria.

Two or three generations after Eusebius wrote, Epiphanius, bishop of Salamis, Cyprus (367-403), attacked what may have been a third sect of Ebionites in his region. Epiphanius said their “Hebrew Gospel” was a forged, mutilated, and incomplete Gospel of Matthew. It taught that God did not beget Jesus but created him as an archangel at the creation. Epiphanius quoted from their gospel passages that combined Matthew, Luke, and probably Mark.³ This sect apparently was a Gnostic offshoot.

Evidently there was another Gospel of the Hebrews “which the Nazarenes are wont to read.” It is known only from quotations and references. It said that when Christ decided to visit the earth, he came down from heaven “in a great power”—his mother Mary. Despite Jesus’ unusual birth, John baptized him and the holy spirit descended on him. It

had a "Doubting James" story about the risen Jesus' visit to his skeptical brother James and giving him bread.⁴ Again we see Gnostic influence.

We have already seen that the second century Jewish writers Aquila of Pontus, Theodotion of Ephesus, and Symmachus the Ebionite denied the virgin birth and insisted that Jesus was Joseph's son and entirely human.⁵ That was the common sense view of Jews and early Jesus people, and it continued for centuries.

The Cult of the Virgin Mary, God's Mother

A tale grew up among Christians in Ephesus that Apostle John lived there and sheltered Jesus' mother Mary. Residents identified two old headstones inscribed "John" as the Apostle's and the *Presbyter's*.⁶

Myths of the Virgin Mary became ever more fantastic. Origen called Mary "God-Bearer" (*Theo + tokos*). That notion assumed that Jesus was God. Mary was the mother of God. That impossible figure was constructed from Isis, Cybele, Ishtar, Gaia, and other mothers-of-gods. Jesus people and Jews generally regarded those notions as repulsive.

And Mary remained a virgin all her life. She had no other children besides Jesus. His brothers and sisters were Joseph's children by a previous marriage. Mary herself was conceived immaculately, for her mother Anna was impregnated by the holy spirit. So said the second century Gospel of the Birth of Mary and Infancy Gospel of James.⁷

Syrian, Greek, Egyptian, and Roman Christians put icons of the Christian gods in churches to worship. Epiphanius fought their idolatry but to no avail. After all, gentiles had always worshipped before statues and paintings of gods and saw no reason to change, especially since Mary was but another name for their goddesses. Thus Christians once more betrayed Jesus and his people. Christianity had become just one more polytheistic, idol-worshipping cult.

Dionysos of Alexandria (190-264) said Easter should follow the spring equinox,⁸ the day of Attis' resurrection. It would have meant separating Easter from Passover, and further separation from Judaism.

The Isis and Mithra cults became more popular during the second and third centuries even as Christianity and the Virgin Mary cult spread. Emperor Commodus (180-192) promoted Mithraism. A temple was built to Mithra in the center of Rome by the beginning of his reign.

Caracalla (211-217) worshipped Mithra, and also Apollonius of Tyana (in Asia Minor). Apollonius, a little later than Jesus, was a

famous magician honored in biographies with tales resembling Jesus stories. Caracalla built a shrine and a temple to Apollonius.⁹ That illustrates a universal tendency for people to raise certain men to gods.

Germans wanted a share of the Roman good life. The Romans couldn't keep the Ostrogoth tribe out, and they settled north of the Black Sea in 214 CE, where they set up a kingdom. It was the first of many German invasions that would destroy the Empire.

Sol *Invictus*, A New Old Religion

Elagabalus, a thirteen-year old priest of the sun god at Emesa, Syria, became emperor of Rome. His mother was the real ruler. Elagabalus, claiming that his god was the highest one, built a temple to Sol *invictus* ("invincible Sun") near his palace in Rome. He tried to make his cult the official religion, but it didn't catch on in his short reign (218-222 CE). It seems emperors no longer had to come from the ancient Roman tribe.

Jesus Christ joins the Roman pantheon. Emperor Alexander Severus (222-235 CE) promoted Mithraism, but he also kept statues of holy or outstanding men such as Christ, Orpheus, Abraham, Apollonius of Tyana, and deified emperors in his personal chapel.¹⁰

Eusebius lists far-flung bishoprics from Gaul and Carthage to the Euphrates and Arabia. Throughout his *History* he tries to prove a continuous line of apostolic authority for all orthodox churches. In his lists the earliest names are necessarily legendary or fictitious, being of a time before the apostolic tradition was well established.

Ostrogoths again. In Gallienus' reign (261-268), Ostrogoths invaded the Balkans and Asia Minor. They laid Athens waste and destroyed Ephesus including the great temple to Artemis. Their fleets ravaged Aegean coasts. They were Christians bent on destroying competing religions and Roman power.

Sol *indiges* made Emperor Aurelian (270-275 CE) invincible in a crucial battle in Syria. Out of gratitude he built a temple to Sol *invictus* in the Field of Agrippa in Rome. Thus Aurelian fused many traditions for their combined power. Sol *invictus* was Helios of ancient Greece. He was Râ and Horus-Osiris-Sarapis of Egypt, ancestor of Pharaohs and the Ptolemies. He was Mithra's friend who daily crossed the sky. Sol

invictus was all sun gods of the world, including ancient Sol *indiges* still celebrated daily and in seasonal rites on Quirinal Hill. An emperor's death was his return to Sol, his friend. Sol *invictus* was the imperial religion up to its merger with Christianity.

The Adoptionist Paul of Samosata, bishop of Antioch, must have seen "the writing on the wall" for himself and his views, for he invited other bishops to many meetings to discuss Jesus' nature. That was about 260 CE. After some fifteen years of that talk, seventy to eighty bishops converged on Antioch to put an end to it. Malchion, a church *presbyter* and master of a local Hellenistic school of rhetoric, led the attack. The assembly excommunicated Paul, appointed another in his place, and sent letters to tell other bishops. But Paul refused to leave his church.

Next came a momentous step in the relationship between church and Empire, for the bishops appealed to Emperor Aurelian for help. Himself a devotee of Sol *invictus*, Aurelian let the Italian bishops decide. Paul had to go.¹¹ Romans had a centuries-long-suspicion of Hellenistic and Jewish Christianity and were trying to bridle any challenge to power.

Emperor Diocletian (284-305), an Illyrian, dedicated at least one great temple to "Mithra, Protector of the Empire." He made the vast Roman Empire a tetrarchy after decades of evolution toward it. Two Augusti and two Caesars would rule the Empire. Diocletian was Augustus over the East with his throne in Nicomedia, Asia Minor. He appointed Galerius as Caesar over the Balkans and eastern Danube region.

Diocletian appointed Maximian as Augustus to rule the West from Rome. Maximian chose Constantius to rule as Caesar over Gaul and Britain. To help seal the deal, Constantius divorced his wife Helena and married Maximian's daughter Theodora. Tenure of the Augusti would be limited to twenty years.

Maximian, nervous about threats of German invasion via the Alps, moved his throne to Milan. An unintended result was that the bishop of Rome consolidated his power.

In 303 Galerius talked Diocletian into requiring Christians to worship the state gods. Disobedient Christians would be persecuted. Constantius did not enforce the persecution. He was probably a Mithraic with Christian sympathies if not a secret Christian.

Diocletian abdicated in 305 and made Maximian do the same, for their twenty years were up. Diocletian raised Galerius to Augustus of the East and made his own nephew Caesar. Diocletian made Constantius

Augustus of the West. Ignoring Constantius' son Constantine, Diocletian appointed Flavius Valerius Severus to the post of Caesar in Rome. But Maximian wanted his son Marcus Maxentius to have that post, so he refused to let go of his power.

Constantine the Great

Constantine was with his father in Britain when the latter died (306 CE). Their army immediately hailed Constantine Augustus of the West and *Imperator* of the whole Empire. *Imperator* (Commander, Emperor) signified the soldiers' loyalty and acceptance of his absolute power over them and all subjects of the Empire. Constantine built an imperial palace at Trier, a safe distance west of the Rhine in Gaul.

Galerius, supported by his own loyal army, allowed Constantine to be Caesar under Augustus Severus. But in Rome Maximian saw to it that the people acclaimed his son Augustus Maxentius. When Severus led his army into Rome to claim the throne, his soldiers joined Maxentius. Then Galerius ordered Maxentius to fight Constantine if he tried to enter Rome. Constantine stayed in Gaul.

In 308 Galerius made his nephew Maximin (Maximinus) Augustus of the East with Licinius as his Caesar. Maximin persecuted Christians. He ordered the forgery of Pilate's *Memoranda* to combat Christian teaching by disproving their claims to historical fact. He had the *Memoranda* posted everywhere and required teachers to make their school-children study and memorize it.¹²

Galerius' death in 311 cleared the way for Constantine. He brought his army down through Gaul, took northern Italy, and destroyed Maxentius' northern army. In 312 he approached the Milvian Bridge, which spanned the Tiber two miles above Rome. Maxentius foolishly led his army out of Rome, crossed the bridge, destroyed it, and dug in.

Constantine's forces slaughtered Maxentius' trapped army and stuck Maxentius' head on a lance for display to the crowds as they victoriously came into Rome. The senate proclaimed Constantine Savior of Rome and *Imperator* over the whole Empire. It erected a triumphal arch next to the Colosseum to honor Constantine's victory. At the unveiling of the arch, Constantine saluted the sun as his guardian. The arch shows him sacrificing to Apollo, god of light, from whom he evidently sought guidance. Coins from Constantine's reign show Sol *invictus* as his companion.

Constantine ordered a statue of himself for “the busiest spot in Rome,” according to Eusebius. The statue was titled, “Savior of Rome.” It held “the trophy of the Lord’s passion under the hand” while the other hand held “the sign of the Savior.”¹³ We don’t know what either the “trophy” or the “sign” was.

Constantine told the governor of Rome’s African colony that Christian bishops could help the Empire and should not be forced to leave churches for other duties. His subsequent actions increasingly indicate that he was Christian and saw its potential to unify the Empire.

Had Constantine been a secret Christian up to now? Had his mother Helena brought him up as a Christian, or did her conversion follow Constantine’s? Did the bishop of Rome convert Constantine by proving that Jesus was the true name of the Apollo and Sol *invictus* whom he worshipped? Did the bishop help Constantine see that Christianity could either unify or destroy the Empire, depending on how he played his cards? Those questions remain unanswered.

Maximin disobeyed his orders to leave Christians alone, so Constantine called Licinius to Milan. There they issued an edict that guaranteed freedom of religion, or rather gave Christianity preference. But Maximin kept up the persecutions, so Licinius killed him and took the throne as Augustus in Nicomedia in 313. Licinius sent out a letter rescinding Maximin’s orders against Christians. It mentioned *kyri-akons*, the Lord’s houses. That is the first known use of *kyri-akon*, which in German and English became *kirche*, “kirk,” and “church.”¹⁴ We suspect that Constantine wrote that letter for Licinius to send out.

The extremely ascetic Christian sect of Donatists complained to Constantine that other Christians persecuted them. He called a council at Arles, Gaul, in 314 and persuaded them to relax their stringent rules.

God Is One—Or Is He?

Arius was a *presbyter* in Alexandria who had studied in Antioch. In Alexandria his bishop Alexander taught that Jesus was divine, eternal, and creator of the universe. In other words, Jesus was a god equal to God the Father; nevertheless Father and son were one and the same. Perhaps behind Alexander’s doctrine was Egyptian Horus who became Osiris the father who begat Horus the son at dawn. Also there was the Gnostic notion that God the Father was remote and unsullied by such menial work as creating worlds. Alexander’s two-gods-in-one would eventually evolve into the three-gods-in-one of today’s Christianity.

Arius disagreed. God adopted the human Jesus as a son. God was the only unbegotten, and he created everything including Jesus. Jesus was neither God nor his equal, nor his begotten son. Nor was Jesus self-existent, eternal, or truly divine. His divinity lay in the holy spirit that settled on him at John's baptism.

I refuse to call Arius' view Arianism, much less heresy, because Arius did not invent it. Arius' view was close to the original common sense view of Jesus' Galilean disciples and close to reality: Jesus was a man and a son of a man. It was the Adoptionism of Paul of Samosata and the view of Jesus people and most Christians, especially in the East. I will call it Unitarianism—the belief that God is One.

But now Arius was in Alexandria, where polytheism profoundly influenced Christianity. Alexander fought viciously, and Constantine would soon get into the dispute.

Constantine, after Licinius' death in 324, moved into the palace in Nicomedia. But he had grand plans for the Empire's capital. He razed ancient Byzantium on the European side of the Bosphorus and began building a new capital there. It would be called Constantinople. Eusebius completed his *History of the Church* about that time.

Constantine wanted to settle the dispute over Jesus' nature. He sent a deputy to gather information, call the bishops to Ankara, and reconcile differences. But the deputy called a meeting in Antioch and presided over it. He took Alexander's side. Eusebius supported Arius, so the bishops excommunicated Eusebius and sent Arius into exile.

Constantine, dissatisfied with that result, called the bishops to a council in Nicea, not far from the palace. He presided with Eusebius the bishop of Caesarea on one side and Eusebius the bishop of Nicomedia on the other.

Alexander presented the issue of Jesus' nature as a creed: Jesus was of the same "substance" as God. It was something that nobody could really understand. Alexander lost the first vote by a small margin. There was considerable confusion about what they were voting on, so they voted several more times. At last they approved Alexander's creed almost unanimously. Jesus was a god. That was probably the result that Constantine wanted in the first place. We call it the Nicene creed, that Father and son are the same. So are Horus and Osiris.

The council dealt with some other issues. It placed Easter on the Sunday after Passover as in Rome. It gave the churches of Alexandria, Antioch, Byzantium, Jerusalem, and Rome authority over their respec-

tive regions. The Roman church received no special privilege, perhaps because Constantine resided in the East.

Arius they exiled to Illyria. Ten years later Eusebius, with support from Constantine's son Constantius II and Eusebius the bishop of Nicomedia, got Constantine to let Arius return.

All in all the Nicene Council made the Empire more comfortable with Christianity at the price of further cutting loose from its Jewish roots. It was a deliberate effort to transform that very independent Jew—an imperfect man executed for fomenting revolt at that—into a god. Gods the emperor and priests could deal with, and people have to bow down to them and bring gifts. Now Constantine, already an incarnation of Sol *invictus*, could also be the divine Jesus *and* God the Father. Constantine had statues made of Jesus the sun god for the imperial palaces in Nicomedia and Rome. The statues of Jesus looked like Constantine. Beside the statues stood Cybele in prayer. Or was she Virgin Mary?

Constantine missed no opportunity to make Christianity the state religion. Jesus Christ and Sol *invictus* were one. He declared Sol *invictus*' holy day a holiday, which was also the day of Jesus' mythical resurrection. It was the first time the Empire observed a regular weekly holiday, though Jews had observed Sabbath for centuries. Sometime later Jesus' birthday was declared to be December 25. That meant the sun's birthday and Saturnalia festivities became Jesus' celebration. He built many churches and gave them public funds for charities. Constantine began oppressing the religions of *pagani*, country folk.

Constantine's mother Helena became a missionary and traveled to Palestine to find the fabled places where Jesus had gone. She built several churches in Palestine. In 330 CE Constantine moved the seat of government to Constantinople.

The Sign of the Cross

Roman soldiers often displayed figures of crucified men on their standards to intimidate civilians. Constantine used a sort of cross as a symbol for his imperial power, but he began to use it to represent Jesus. The church followed. Until then, the symbol for Jesus was the word IXΘΥΟΣ ("fish") or a picture of a fish. Fish? Why a fish? Because IXΘΥΟΣ was an acronym for the mantra, *Iesous Christos Uiou tou Theos Soter* (Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior), and IXΘΥΟΣ or ιχθυος (*ichthyos*) means "fish."

Paul and the gospel writers did not use words that mean “cross” or “crucify.” They said Jesus was put on a *stauros* (stake or post) or *xylon* (tree or wood).¹⁵ Those words were mistranslated into Latin *crux* and English “cross.”¹⁶

In 335, Constantine told of a vision the day before his decisive battle at Milvian Bridge. He saw a “cross of light” above the afternoon sun with an inscription, “Conquer by this sign.” That night Jesus came to him in a dream with the same sign and told him to use it to conquer. He said he attributed his success from that day on to Jesus and his use of the sign. All that may be true, but we depend on Eusebius’ word for it.

Eusebius said Constantine’s “cross” was a spear pointing up with a horizontal bar across it, and that he placed the symbol at the head of every advancing army. The church writer Lactantius (about 240-320), tutor of one of Constantine’s sons in Trier, said that Constantine’s army at the Milvian Bridge carried shields and standards embellished with a *labarum*, the vertical spear with crossbar and a circle above the spearpoint. Inside the circle were the Greek letters *Chi* and *Rho* (XP). Christians knew *Chi-Rho* as the first two letters of ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ. To others it stood for XPEETON, “good.”¹⁷ But the spear in any context symbolized Constantine’s rule over the whole world, military might, and power of life and death. It could hardly represent *victims* of imperial power except among its victims and their sympathizers.

The cross was an ancient symbol for the cosmos to primitive cultures on every continent. The sun’s daily east-to-west path and the earth’s north-south axis and temperature gradients were too obvious to miss. The two axes symbolize the four “winds” or “corners” of the world. The “hot cross buns” of Mithra’s last supper symbolized not death, but the world Mithra and the sun god ruled. The Greek cross (✠) of the Eastern Orthodox Church is a form of the ancient cosmic cross, not Constantine’s spear. Yet an early copyist of Luke played with a cross. Three times he contracted *σταυρον* (*stauros*, stake) to *στρον* and superimposed the *τ* and *ρ* (*tau* and *rho*) to form a kind of cross (⚡).¹⁷

In India, the cross-like *lingam* was a phallic fertility symbol in the worship of the Hindu god Shiva. The horizontal bar could represent a ring viewed edgewise, so a cross could represent both sexes at once. The rather sword-like Latin cross (✠) probably came from pre-Christian Roman fertility symbols on priestly robes and necklaces of Vestal Virgins. The Latin cross was not in widespread use as a Christian symbol until the seventh or eighth century. Anyone who doubts use of fertility symbols in the church should read literature on the subject.¹⁸

Even as a Christian symbol, the cross rarely symbolizes the wrongfulness of brutality. It represents redemption from sin; hope for eternal life; Jesus' suffering as an ideal for imitation; and the church's "might makes right." The cross is a magical wand and amulet. The gesture of "crossing oneself" is a magical ritual. For Constantine and his subjects, spear and crossbar projected his imperial power.

Constantine was baptized shortly before his death in 337. It was not a death-bed conversion. A Christian could be baptized only once and would therefore prefer to be cleansed of sin as near death as possible.¹⁹

Unitarianism remained popular in most parts of the Empire. Emperor Constantius II (337-361) declared Arianism the official religion. Its leader was Eusebius of Nicomedia, *papa* (father, Patriarch) in Constantinople. Unitarianism prevailed among Germans, too. The Gothic bishop Ulfilas (311-381) invented an alphabet for translating the Bible into Gothic. The Germans spread the Gothic Bible and Unitarianism wherever they went.

Flavius Valens became Emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire in 361. In 372 Huns from central Asia swept through the Gothic Kingdom and Germania, so Emperor Valens allowed Visigoth refugees to cross the Danube and settle in the Roman Empire. Many of them joined the Roman army, but the Romans abused them and provoked them into revolting. The Visigoths defeated the Romans and killed Valens. Flavius Theodosius became Emperor of the East in 379.

The Trinitarian heresy. Alexander had long since died, and Athanasius was now bishop of Alexandria. Athanasius continued the cause against Jesus' humanity. He prevailed on Emperor Theodosius to call a council of bishops in Constantinople in 381.

The council affirmed the Nicene Creed and added that the holy spirit was equal to the Father and the son. Thus God is three in one and one in three. That is the Trinitarian doctrine or Athanasian creed. It is more word-play than substance. (Let it be known that I, too, am three in one and one in three, for I am me, myself, and I.)

Word-play or not, Trinitarianism was a new "choice," "heresy," but the council declared it orthodox. Over the aged Ulfilas' objections, the council declared Unitarianism a heresy.

The Council of Constantinople raised the *papa* of Rome over the *papa* of Constantinople. In that move we see the Roman priesthood regaining its ancient power under guidance of the bishop of Rome.

We might think the Trinitarian doctrine came from Matthew:

Go, teaching all *ethne*, baptizing them in the name of the Father, son, and holy *pneumatos* (Matthew 28:19).

However, Matthew doesn't say Father, son, and holy spirit are one. Or equal. Or persons. Or one in three. The verse is Trinitarian only to Trinitarians. Matthew was written long before the Trinity was imagined. Besides, Matthew or his editors probably originally composed that verse in a simpler form such as the verse which Eusebius quoted, "Go, making disciples of all nations in my name."²⁰ A Trinitarian changed it.

The Trinitarian heresy did not leave the great Origen unscathed, even though Eusebius of Caesarea stoutly defended him in his *History of the Church* and the five-volume *Defense of Origen*, which he co-authored with Pamphilus. Origen had held that God the Father created Jesus Christ, so they were not coeternal or coequal. Origen's doctrine of universal salvation led to the accusation that he didn't believe in hell, which was probably true. Augustine of Hippo (350-430), later sanctified, denounced Origen. So did the Second Council of Constantinople (533), though without declaring him a heretic.

Let's not fool ourselves any longer with the delusion that Christianity is monotheistic. It isn't. If we haven't lost count, it is tetratheistic, for it adores Holy Four: God's mother, his son, his breath, and himself.

After the Council's insults to the Visigoths, Theodosius outlawed their Unitarianism and tried to pacify and assimilate them. He probably regarded Unitarianism as too Jewish, therefore potentially seditious. Nevertheless, Unitarianism survived at least two more centuries among untamed Germans.

Perhaps Unitarianism never did die out, for it resurfaced in three places during the Reformation. In Spain Michael Servetus (1511-1553) wrote *On the Error of the Trinity*. When Servetus went to Geneva, John Calvin turned him over to Roman Catholics who burned him at the stake.

In Italy the Sozzini or Socinus family, which had produced theologians, espoused Unitarian beliefs. Laelius Socinus (1525-1562) doubted Catholic teaching at an early age. He became interested in biblical research. At 21 he traveled to Venice, France, and England, and settled in Zurich. He corresponded with John Calvin. He visited Melancthon,

the professor of theology at Wittenburg who with Martin Luther led the Reformation. Laelius left his papers to his nephew Faustus Socinus (1539-1604). The Inquisition drove Faustus from Italy to Zurich in 1559. Twenty years later Faustus settled at Rakow, Poland, where he led a large church. He discounted supernaturalism and taught that Jesus was a man. A mob drove Faustus Socinus out of Rakow in 1598.

In Transylvania Francis (Ferenc) David (1510-1579), a bishop and court preacher to King John Sigismund, called himself Unitarian by 1567. David said Jesus was a man. King John proclaimed the first royal edict of toleration in Europe in 1568, but he soon died. John's successor began persecuting Unitarians about 1571. He threw David into prison in 1579, where he died. Unitarianism in Transylvania survived the Reformation and the world wars.

The Acts of Pilate or Gospel of Nicodemus appeared in the reign of Emperor Theodosius. An endnote credits Theodosius with finding the book among public records in the ruins of Pilate's hall in Jerusalem.²¹ Actually the book was fabricated as counter-propaganda against Maximian's forgery of Pilate's *Memoranda*.

In 382 Ambrose, bishop of Milan, persuaded Emperor Gratian of the West to remove the altar to *Victoria* from the senate, and to give up his religious title of *Pontifex Maximus*. Sometime later the bishop of Rome assumed the title of Supreme Pontiff.

Orthodoxy. Now that the Roman Empire had a new official "orthodox" religion, Christians used their new-found power to stamp out competing sects and religions. They destroyed temples or converted them into churches, like a temple of Isis in Egypt, and one to Ma in Asia Minor. In Athens the *Parthenon* ("Virgin"), that famous temple to Athene, became—what else?—the Church of the Virgin Mary.

Priests must have jumped ship to Christianity wholesale. No doubt they brought many traditions of their former religions with them including nominal chastity and the prevalent homosexuality. Nuns and convents probably came from Roman Vestal Virgins.

Some traditions could be adapted with little more than a name change. Sorrowing Isis nursing baby Horus became sorrowing Virgin Mary with baby Jesus. Rituals, processions, and trappings of the Roman Catholic Church resemble those of the Isis cult. Attis of Phrygia, resurrected as a fir tree every spring, became Jesus. All over Europe agricultural goddesses became Virgin Mary or lesser saints. In some cases they

were called witches or demons in the hope of banishing their worship.²² Ephesus, once home of many-breasted Artemis, now worshipped Virgin Mary in the first known church dedicated to her.

About 390, the British monk Pelagius was shocked by loose morals of Christians in Rome. He established his own sect in southern Italy, then removed to Palestine, where he attracted a following. Pelagius denied the doctrine of original sin and the need for faith and dogma. Augustine attacked Pelagius viciously and branded him a heretic.

One Eugenius led the Franks of Gaul in a revolt in 392. Eugenius captured Rome and declared himself emperor of the West. He restored the Isis cult. Two years later, Theodosius killed Eugenius and ruled the entire Empire for one year. Theodosius was the last monarch of an undivided Roman Empire.

The Virgin Mary cult absorbed the Isis cult and probably that of Vesta. The *pagani*—rural folk, bumpkins—stayed with their ancient religions longer than city folk, and so *pagani* came to mean non-Christians.

Two Christian empires. Theodosius died in 395. His sons divided the Empire, Honorius taking the West, and Arcadius the East. From that point on, emperors imposed civil penalties to help the church stamp out competing sects and religions. Emperors provided public money to the church of Rome and approved or disapproved appointments of bishops. The church served as an arm of the government for help in maintaining law and order.

Disputes Over Authenticity in Creating the Christian Bible

As we have seen, various communities and schools mainly wrote their books for their own communities. The Signs Source and Passion Source, Thomas, Q, and Mark were for distinct Jewish communities. Matthew's gospel and its variants provided most Jewish Jesus people with instruction and a "history" of origin in a single volume and possibly replaced the Torah for some. Paul's Romans and pseudo-Pauline Hebrews were for Jews; the other letters were for gentile or mixed Christians. A gentile wrote Luke-Acts for the whole Roman Empire. The Jewish Johannine community in northern Syria created the Gospel of John and several letters and books under his name. An offshoot in Asia Minor created the treasonous Revelation. Nazarenes combined Mark, Matthew, and Luke to create the Gospel of the Nazarenes. And so on.

After the office of bishop became usual in churches, bishops sifted through more than a hundred books sacred to one group or another. They chose favorites, then defended their "authenticity." Around 130 CE Papias claimed Peter's authority for the Gospel of Mark, and Matthew's for the *Sayings*, which was probably the Book of Q. A generation later Irenaeus gave Matthew the greatest authority and priority, but he also gave Mark, Luke, and John his stamp of approval. His opinion prevailed.

Marcion used Paul's letters and the abridged Gospel of Luke as the first known New Testament around 140 CE. Apollinarius spoke of the New Covenant of the Gospel around 170. The Old Covenant or Old Testament was the ancient Torah, Prophets, and Writings of the Jews.

More than a century later, Eusebius classified "New Testament writings" into four categories: "Recognized," "Disputed," "Counterfeit," and "Heretic." "Recognized" books are the "holy quartet" of gospels, Acts of the Apostles, Paul's letters (probably all fourteen including pseudo-Pauline letters), 1 Peter, 1 John, and "if thought proper," the Revelation of John. All are now in the New Testament.

"Disputed, yet familiar to most [churchmen]" are James, Jude, 2 Peter, and 2, 3 John. All but 2 Peter are distinctly Christian-Jewish. All were accepted into the New Testament, probably to entice Ebionites and Jews into going along with the gentile Christian movement.

"Counterfeit" books include Acts of Paul, The Shepherd, Revelation of Peter, Epistle of Barnabas, Teaching of the Apostles (*Didache*),—and—what's this? Again the Revelation of John!—"if it seems the right place for it," he says, some reject it and others recognize it. Of the Disputed books, only Revelation made it into the New Testament.

Eusebius would like to reject outright the "counterfeit" Gospel of the Hebrews as not true, genuine, or recognized though "familiar to most churchmen." However, he acknowledges that some bishops "have found a place for it," and it "has a special appeal for Hebrews who have accepted Christ"—Ebionites. The few quotations now available indicate that it evolved from an Aramaic or Hebrew translation of Matthew.²³ All books mentioned so far were "familiar to most churchmen."

"Heretical forgeries" are the gospels of Peter, Thomas, Matthias, and the Acts of Andrew, of John, and other apostles. We have found the Gospel of Thomas indispensable in understanding Q and Jesus movements. Eusebius says they "must be thrown out as impious and beyond the pale." That was done, so some are not available today.

Coming back to Revelation, that book is “recognized” and “familiar”—yet “counterfeit”! Eusebius sits on the fence. He quotes a long critique by another fence-sitter, Dionysos of Alexandria: “I myself would never dare reject the book that many good Christians think highly of. I’m not smart enough to judge.” Revelation was “a mystery too wonderful to comprehend.” Others, Dionysos said, agreed that Revelation, being an allegory, was hard to understand. Its Greek was “barbarous,” therefore not by the author of the more polished Gospel of John. But Eusebius elsewhere indicates that Apostle John wrote Revelation.²⁴ The truth is that both Dionysos and Eusebius agreed with Revelation that the Roman Empire was evil and will soon fall to be replaced by Christian rule, but they didn’t dare give anybody an excuse to accuse them of disloyalty.

In 367 Cyril, bishop of Alexandria, included Revelation among the twenty-seven books that he approved for the Alexandrian churches. They constitute our New Testament.

The bishops separately preserved many other books useful for their purposes, like Ignatius’ letters, *Didache*, and 1 and 2 Clement. They are available today in various collections, notably *Apostolic Fathers*.²⁵

Jerome. In 382 Damasus, bishop of Rome, authorized Jerome to produce the best Latin translation possible. Damasus died four years later, and Jerome moved to Bethlehem with Paula, a wealthy Roman, and her daughter. Jerome’s translation, the Vulgate (“Common”), with some revision by the Council of Trent, 1545-1563, is still the basic Latin version. It was divided into the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament was translated from the Septuagint version of Hebrew scripture.

The church chose to use the Septuagint because some of its passages could be interpreted as foretelling Jesus’ coming. It contained several books rejected from the Jewish canon such as Tobit, 3, 4 Ezra, 1, 2 Maccabees, Wisdom of Solomon, and Wisdom of ben Sirach. Martin Luther separated those books as the Apocrypha in his German translation. So did the first edition of the King James Version. Today most Bibles omit the Apocrypha. The New English Bible, Vulgate, and Jerusalem Bible include it. The Apocrypha is also available separately.

The bishops put the twelve minor prophets (from Hosea through Malachi) at the end to make Old Testament “prophecies” lead to the Messiah’s coming in the New Testament. For example, it encourages misreading Malachi as a prophecy of the coming of Jesus and John:

I will send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his Temple... I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord (Malachi 3:1, 4:5).

Ezra probably wrote Malachi to tell the priests in Jerusalem to shape up for his arrival. But you could argue that the Lord is coming, and Elijah will prepare the way. Turn the page, and Matthew's tale of Lord Jesus' miraculous birth and Elijah as John seem to prove that the New Testament tells of the fulfillment of Old Testament "prophecies."²⁶

The bishops carefully selected and arranged the books of the Christian Bible to teach Paul's doctrine of original guilt, persecution, martyrdom, and eternal life. The Christian Bible opens with the creation and Adam's disobedience to God that brought evil and death into the world. Abraham was a model of faith and obedience. God chose the Israelites to be a holy people and example for all nations, but Moses brought the Torah to a disobedient nation. Over and over God revealed himself to the Israelites, but they never got it right, even with the Exile. Therefore he decided to send his son to redeem humanity. He revealed bits and snippets of his plan to Isaiah, Daniel, and other prophets. The prophecies were fulfilled in the birth of God's son in human form. The Jews still didn't get it, and they killed God's son. But he lived!—he had destroyed death! Soon afterward the Jews were punished. Somehow the four disparate and contradictory gospels blend together in the mind, to form a seamless story.

Jesus empowered twelve disciples as apostles to spread the good news that anyone may achieve eternal life. The apostles imitated Jesus as models of obedience and endurance under persecution. Peter and Paul opened the good news up to gentiles. Forged apostolic letters preached obedience to—you guessed it—the bishops, for the apostles had empowered bishops and deacons with the holy spirit. Revelation—well, you have to have the bishops tell you what it all really means, but it does promise that Jesus will return to earth to rule for a thousand years.²⁶

The bishops saw that their creation was good and declared it the word of God, never to be questioned.

More of God's Mother

Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople 428-431 CE, rejected the Alexandrian doctrine of *Theotokos*. It was *pagana*—boorish, ignorant. He also

rejected Trinitarianism, for Jesus' divine nature came from God his father, and his human nature came from his mother, a human. Jesus' two natures remained separate—therefore he wasn't God. Nestorius was not Adoptionist, but he was closer to Jesus than the new Trinitarian orthodoxy. His followers attributed his doctrine to Theodore, bishop of Mop-suestia in Asia Minor, under whom he had studied.

Cyril, *papa* of Alexandria and a follower of Athanasius, failed at changing Nestorius' mind, so he attacked him without mercy. Cyril, a sly rascal, got both emperors, Theodosius II and Valentinian III, to call a council to settle the question. The council met at the church of the Virgin Mary in Ephesus in 431. Cyril, presiding, accused Nestorius of teaching that Jesus was both Mary's son and God's son, therefore two separate persons. He put forth the dogma that Jesus' divine and human natures were joined in one person. The council approved the dogma and also Mary's title, *Theotokos*. The council declared Nestorius a heretic, deposed him, and drove him out of the Empire. Thus polytheistic Christianity, a Gnostic religion, won yet another victory over the people who understood Jesus best. Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches still call the Virgin Mary *Theotokos* and teach as dogma that Jesus' divine and human natures did not remain separate, but joined together in perfect union.

Nestorianism remained popular. In 489 CE, bishops mounted a persecution against them. The Nestorians fled to Persia and settled there. From Persia they sent missionaries to Central Asia, China, and Mongolia, and established many churches in those countries. Nestorianism, over 100,000 strong, still survives in Syria, Iraq, and Iran.

New myths evolved by the sixth century about the Virgin Mary's own immaculate conception, virgin birth, and ascension. The church established feast days to celebrate her immaculate conception and virgin birth (September 8), purification (February 2), annunciation (March 25), and domitian (falling asleep, August 15). That last, domitian, means that Mary never died but "fell asleep." Domitian became a feast-day to celebrate her bodily ascent to heaven, where her spirit reunited with her body. In 1950 Pope Pius XII, a devotee of the Virgin Mary cult, declared Mary's bodily assumption a required article of faith.

Modern-day adoration of the Virgin Mary reminds us of Lucius' adoration of Isis as she rose from the sea:

"O blessed queen of heaven—whether you are Ceres the first motherly nurse of all fruitful things... or celestial Venus who in the beginning of the world coupled male and female with love and so made an eternal propagation of humankind... or Diana sister of

Apollo who spares so many from labor pains with your medicines, now adored at the sacred places of Ephesus..." (Apuleius, *The Golden Ass*, Book 11).

The cult of the Virgin Mary absorbed or replaced worship of Vesta of hearth and home, Isis, and many other goddesses. Today a movement is under way to elevate even further this Greco-Roman-Egyptian goddess in the Roman Catholic Church and to get Protestants to adopt the cult. Christians never knew Jesus, the humble sage of Galilee.

The Empire Is Falling! Prophecy In Fulfillment

The Visigoths under King Alaric tried to take Constantinople but failed. They sacked Rome in 410. In desperation the Roman armies pulled back from the Rhine to defend Italy. That opened the way for hordes of Germans to sweep into Gaul. The Vandal tribe was the most notorious because they destroyed everything in their path before settling in Spain.

King Alaric soon died, and the Visigoths moved north and established a kingdom in southern Gaul. They also pushed the Vandals out of Spain and founded a Visigoth kingdom there. The Vandals went to north Africa where they ruled for more than a century.

The evolving papacy. Bishop Innocent (402-417) asserted that he, *papa* of Rome, had inherited the authority of the apostles, and claimed jurisdiction over all churches.

Celestine, bishop of Rome 422-432, invented a new myth, that Peter was Vicar of Christ ("in place of Christ"). He asserted that Peter had come to Rome and served as the first *papa* of Rome. Peter, as Vicar of Christ and bishop of Rome, was "bishop over all bishops," and so were all succeeding bishops of Rome down to Celestine himself. Celestine presumably based his tale on Matthew 16:18-19. Of course Matthew says nothing of the kind, but Celestine's argument furthered the Roman church's long-standing claim to the right to rule all churches.

Leo, *papa* of Rome 440-461, got Emperor Valentinian III to issue an edict proclaiming that papal decisions had the force of law. That placed Rome's military might at his disposal.

The Patriarch, *papa* of Constantinople, made a counter-claim for himself as bishop over bishops with papal authority. The Council of Ephesus (449) and the Council of Chalcedon (454) decided in his favor.

But Leo rejected the councils' decisions and proclaimed "the mystical unity of Peter and his successors." He claimed that the *papas* of Rome "become" Peter on taking office. Therefore anything the *papa* of

Rome said and did, Peter in heaven said and did. Leo helped Valentinian III keep law and order and in return received the emperor's full support.

The same Council of Chalcedon also tackled the old question of Jesus' nature. Leo advanced the Western doctrine as follows: First, Jesus combined divine and human natures. Second, Christ and God were of a single substance. Third, Christ's divine and human natures were combined in him without confusion, change, division, or separation. The council approved the Western doctrine. Nevertheless the East clung to their view that Jesus' human and divine natures were combined into a single nature (monophysitism, from *physis*, nature).

The last emperor of the Western Roman Empire was deposed by German invaders in 476. German tribes divided up the West. Burgundians from north Germany spread into lower Gaul, while the Franks held the rest of Gaul. Ostrogoths ruled Italy.

The Eastern Roman Empire lasted another millennium. It expanded briefly under Emperor Justinian I and his wife Theodora, who dreamed of restoring the old Roman Empire. They conquered Italy, Sicily, Sardinia, southern Spain, and northern Africa by 565. But the Lombard tribe from Germany invaded northern Italy, set up a kingdom there, and so ended the dream of restoration of the Roman Empire.

Another threat emerged in Arabia, where Mohammed Ali founded the Islamic Empire in 611. Islam conquered Syria and Palestine in 638, Egypt and Libya by 643, and Spain by 743. The Eastern Roman Empire, reduced to Greece, the Balkans, and Asia Minor, went back to an ancient name, the Byzantine Empire. Constantinople became Byzantium.

Charlemagne inherited the Frankish Empire in 771 and expanded it to include all the Germans from Gaul to Bohemia. Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne in 800 CE to symbolize the resurrection of the Western Roman Empire. Charlemagne proclaimed it the Holy Roman Empire. He protected the papacy and gave it its own territory for the first time, but otherwise kept the pope at arm's length. The Holy Roman Empire was, according to Adolf Hitler, the First German Reich.

The Crusaders from western Europe took up the cause of "liberating" Palestine from Islam, beginning in 1095. They conquered Lebanon, Palestine, and western Syria and thus blocked Islamic expansion into eastern Europe. Three centuries later Islam pushed the Crusaders out and took Asia Minor. But then Ottoman Turks occupied Asia

Minor (Turkey). In 1453 they conquered Greece and the Balkans—the last remnant of the Eastern Roman Empire.

The prophecy in Revelation was fulfilled. The Roman Empire was no more. The Whore of Babylon had fallen, and other hands grabbed her wealth and power. The Roman priesthood survived the fall as the Roman church and made itself useful to nations as they recreated themselves.

NOTES

1. Gospel of the Hebrews: Eusebius, 3:25-27.
2. Gospel of the Nazoreans: Cameron, 97-102.
3. Gospel of the Ebionites: Cameron, 103-106.
4. Gospel of the Hebrews: Cameron, 83-86.
5. Symmachus attacks Matthew: Eusebius, 6:17.
6. Two Johns in Ephesus: Eusebius, 3:1, 18, 23, 31, 39. John sheltered Mary: John 19:27.
7. Birth of Mary, Infancy Gospel: Jones and Wake, 17-37, Miller, 379-396.
8. Easter after spring equinox: Eusebius 7:20; Chadwick, 24-25.
9. Emperors promoted Mithraism: Cumont; Cooper. Apollonius: Smith, 1978, 86, 88; biographies, Hadas and Smith.
10. Jesus in Severus' pantheon: Smith, 1978, 88.
11. Paul of Samosata: Eusebius, 5:28, 7:27-30.
12. Maximin's forgery: Eusebius, 9:2.
13. Statue, cross: Grant, 141-148; Chadwick, 126; Eusebius, 9:9.
14. Lord's house: Eusebius, translator's note, 376.
15. *Stauros*: E.g., Mark 8:34, 10:21, 15:21, 30, 32, 1 Cor. 1:17-18, Galatians 5:11, 6:12-14. *Xulon*: E.g., Mark 14:43,48, Acts 5:30, 10:39, 13:29, 16:24, Galatians 3:13, 1 Peter 2:24.
16. Cross, crucify not in NT; various forms of cross: Cutner, 58-75.
17. Lactantius, 240-320 CE: Grant, 134-148; Chadwick, 126. Eusebius: *Life of Constantine*, in Carroll, 175. Superimposed *tau*, *rho* to form cross: Papyrus 75, 200 CE?. Beck, v.
18. Pre-Christian origin of cross as symbol: Cutner, 58-75. Barker, 203-204. Literature on fertility and its symbols in the church: E.g., McCabe; Weir & Jerman.
19. Life of Constantine: Grant.
20. Matthew's Trinitarianism only in eyes of beholder: Buzzard and Hunting. Primitive form of command to disciples: Eusebius, 5:4, note 2.
21. Acts of Pilate or Gospel of Nicodemus: Jones and Wake, 63-91.
22. Comparisons of Isis with Virgin Mary: Frazer, xli, 383-384. Agricultural goddesses become Virgin Mary, saints, demons: Berger. Virgin Mary myth: Cutner, 76-85.
23. Gospel of Ebionites, Hebrews: Cameron, 97-102; Eusebius, 3:25-27.
24. Eusebius' opinions on books: 3:3, 24-25, 28, 39, 5:8, 7:20-25, etc.
25. Collections of "doubtful" books: *Apostolic Fathers*, various editors and editions, Miller, *The Complete Bible*; Jones and Wake, *Lost Books of the Bible*.
26. Creation of the Bible: Mack, 1993, 231-236, 1995, 251-292.

— ⊕ ————— 28 Onward Through the Ages,
Often Wrong Though Never In Doubt

Jesus was part of the thousand-year popular movement known as Cynism. Cynics insisted on integrity and humanity. They purposely transgressed social norms to provoke criticism so they could fling startling, eye-opening aphorisms that exposed the critics' shortcomings.

Zealot pressure to join the revolution to "restore the nation to the *basileia* of the god of Israel" may have been the reason an ethical movement began preaching that God's *basileia* was already within reach despite the Roman occupation. If you want the *basileia* of God, examine your thoughts, submit your whole self to his rule, and reach out to everybody with love and understanding. That was the way to the *basileia* of God.

The very act of writing down Jesus' pungent aphorisms distorted them. Nor could written words capture Jesus' independence of lifestyle and thought. For a time Thomas' group kept the first draft of the sayings, but a more intellectual Hellenistic school developed them into the rhetorical arguments of the Book of Q. Other schools created anecdotes and pronouncement stories. Still others cast Jesus in miracle stories and Homeric episodes.

One school, tired of claims that John was God's Anointed One, pointed out that God didn't like murderers. The Messiah would be kind-hearted—like Jesus. He was the Messiah. His contrary notions of piety didn't matter; his humanity did. His magical powers and control over demons proved that he was the Messiah even though Judeans didn't know who he was and impaled him. That school held a ritual in which initiates symbolically ate Jesus' flesh and drank his blood. All Jesus ethical groups quickly diverged from the solitary exorcist, healer, and sage.

Paul's sect diverged earlier and farther than any other because he pandered to superstition in the hope of civilizing the gentiles. He made Jesus into a Hellenistic god, the Lord Jesus Christ. Ignoring reality and facts about Jesus, Paul sacrificed integrity. His cult would soon begin sacrificing humanity as well.

When Zealots began fighting for the throne in Jerusalem, the twelve disciples "denied Jesus" and "scattered," as Mark put it, and joined the

revolt. Betrayed and dismayed, the Q people composed a parable. Just imagine, *what if the Romans had offered to make Jesus the emperor?*

The *diabolos* took Jesus up into a high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a flash! and said, "I will give you all this power and glory! It was turned over to me, so I can give it to anyone I choose. It's all yours if you worship me!"

Jesus said, "Get behind me, *Satan!* It's written, 'You will worship the *Kyrios* your Θεός, and you will serve only him'" (Luke 4:5-8, Matthew 3:8-10; Q Saying 6).

Jesus knew the futility of strife. His reply illustrates both his humility and his attitude about human rulers. If a man won't submit to the will of God, God doesn't rule him. Civilized behavior comes from the heart, not from rituals or desire for material things, power over men, and glory.

That lesson was lost on worshippers of Paul's Lord Jesus Christ, for they made the very same deal with the *diabolos*. The myth of the Lord Jesus Christ became a totalitarians' tool. It began with Paul's Lord Jesus Christ and promises of eternal life in return for obedience. He taught them to stand together against ridicule. Paul armed them with an arrogant certainty of knowledge from God so they wouldn't compromise with "error." His followers, slaves of the Lord Jesus Christ, developed a hierarchy over armies of obedient followers. The sect became a determined, highly organized pressure group that aimed at making the Roman Empire theirs. They became skilled at indoctrinating both the masses and the men at the centers of political power. If persuasion failed, they stirred hysterical mobs to attack neighbors. They could be brutal while mouthing love and kindness. They tortured and killed men and women who said Jesus was a man. A man who said, "Judge not, so you aren't judged."

Spiritual descendants of king-makers of ancient Rome—priests—promote ignorance and superstition. It was not enough to make a man into God; they have him born to a human woman who was his mother, consort, and daughter! Doctrinaires are prisoners of their own doctrines, for they can't examine the truth of their own doctrines. Truth is not their goal, but defense and expansion of their organization. In the name of "solidarity" they repudiate the freedom that Jesus enjoyed.

The real Jesus, an involuntary but shrewd subject of the Roman Empire, taught powerless and dispossessed folk how to face tyranny with dignity. If he could meet the owners of the myth of the Lord Jesus Christ, he would say, "What are you doing? I don't know you" (Matthew 7:23). "What's this 'Lord Jesus Christ' that you worship?"

I. You Know Lots of Greek Words.

Imagine my surprise and delight when I looked at the Greek New Testament and saw Greek words I just couldn't keep in my head when studying science. Let me share my joy of discovery. The following "plain English" words came from Greek whether directly or by way of Latin, French, or German: aëroplane, agony, analysis, anarchy, anatomy, antagonist, antigen, apology, architect, atom, auto, biology, bomb, catalog, catastrophe, character, chiropractor, chrome, circle, crisis, criticize, cryptic, dialog, diameter, ecology, economy, ecstasy, electron, embryo, energy, enzyme, epidemic, erotic, estrogen, Europe, fantasy, galaxy, genetic, giant, gyroscope, helium, hemisphere, hydrogen, hype, hypnosis, hypodermic, idea, idol, krypton, leukemia, lithium, metaphor, meter, meteor, metropolis, microphone, monarchy, mystery, myth, neon, oligarchy, Olympic, ophthalmologist, optic, orchestra, osteopath, ostracize, parallel, paralyze, Pentagon, Philadelphia, phosphorus, plutocrat, pneumonia, prophet, psyche, psychosomatic, pyramid, pyre, rhetoric, rhinoceros, semaphore, sophomore, syllable, sympathy, synthesis, system, technical, telepathy, thermometer, titanic, toxin, triangle, uranium, xerography, xylophone, zodiac, zoo, zygote.

The Greek *alpha-beta*. Some of our ABC's came from the twenty-four letters of the Greek alphabet with little or no change. These are a few of the Greek letters.

The first letter is *alpha*, A. Lower case *alpha* is α. The second letter is *beta*, B, β.

Beta spelled out in Greek letters is BETA or βετα (upper case, lower case). The other letters are *epsilon*, E and ε, the fifth letter, and *tau*, T and τ, the nineteenth.

Alpha spelled out in Greek letters is ΑΛΦΑ or αλφα. Λ and λ are *lambda*, "L" and "l." Φ and φ are *phi* and stand for "Ph" and "ph."

The third letter is *gamma* (Γ, γ for G, g). "Earth" is *ge* (γε or ΓΕ), or *gaia* (γαια or ΓΑΙΑ) in Greek. "Geography" is *ge* combined with *graphein*, "to write." Double *gamma*, γγ, as in αγγελος, *angelos*, is pronounced "ng" as in "angle."

The fourth letter is *delta* (Δ, δ), as in ΔΕΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ or δημοκρατια, which is translated "democracy." *Mu* (Μ, μ), *kappa* (Κ, κ), *iota* (Ι, ι), and *omicron* (Ο, ο) are what they look like. The Greek letter *rho* (Ρ and ρ) is "R and r."

Demokratia is a combination of *demos* (ΔΕΜΟΣ, δῆμος), "people," with *kratein*, (ΚΡΑΤΕΙΝ, κρατείν), "rule." *Sigma* (Σ, σ) is our "S, s," and *nu* (Ν, ν) is "N, n."

Lower case *sigma* has the form of σ except at the end of a word. Thus *sepsis* (putrefaction, as in "anti-septic") is σεπσις or ΣΕΠΣΙΣ. No doubt you recognize π and Π as *pi*. It is our letter "P, p."

"Theology," study of gods, combines *theos*, "god" (θεος or ΘΕΟΣ), with *logos*, "a study of" (λογος, ΛΟΓΟΣ). *Theta* (θ, Θ), is pronounced "th."

"I am *Alpha* and *Omega*, the beginning and the ending" (Revelation 1:8), is like "I am A to Z," for *omega* (ω, Ω, another "o, O") is the last letter of the Greek alphabet.

To find the Greek original for any word in the New Testament, use Green's *Interlinear Bible*, *Strong's Concordance*, or *Greek New Testament*, which are in most public libraries. For word origins, see a library's or a collegiate (e.g., Guralnik's) dictionary.

II. Luke's Use of the Gospel of Mark. (Discussed in chapter 2.)

Mark's Narrative Markan blocks that Luke used are in bold .	Gospel of Luke Markan passages in bold .
Mark has no birth story.	Lk. 1:1-2:51: birth stories are all L.*
Block 1: Mk. 1:2-1:15. John the baptizer; Jesus' baptism, temptations. Luke followed Mark's outline, adding John's preaching and the temptation story from Q, and his own composition (L).	Markan Block 1: Lk. 3:1-4:30 , heavily edited. Luke used QS** 3-6. Genealogy and Nazareth story are L. Lk. 3:19-20 is from Mk. 6:17-18.
Block 2: Mk. 1:16-3:19. Four disciples join him; exorcisms in synagogue and Simon's house; healing of leper; healing of paralytic; announcement of son of man; the passing of the Law; ordination of twelve disciples.	Markan Block 2: Lk. 4:31-6:16 , except that 5:1-11 is L. He left out Andrew.
Block 3: Mk. 3:22-35. <i>Luke discarded the Beelzebul accusation</i> ; the one in Lk. 11:15-22 is Q. Luke used Mk. 3:31-35 (Who is my family?) in 8:19-20 ; there are many other small examples we cannot take note of.	Lk. 6:17-8:3 is QS 7-18 and L.
Block 4: Mk. 3:36-6:44. The kingdom of God. Calmed storm; possession of swine; Jairus' daughter; prophet rejected; sent forth twelve disciples; Herod Antipas; feeding five thousand.	Markan Block 4: Lk 8:4-9:17. We noted his using the Herod Antipas story in 3:19-20 (above).
Block 5: Mk. 6:45-8:26. Walking on sea; washing cups; Syrophenician woman; loosing boy's tongue; feeding four thousand; spittle on eyes to cure blindness. <i>Luke discarded this block ("Luke's Greater Omission")</i> .	
Block 6: Mk. 8:27-9:40. Who am I? Jesus' first prophecy of death; transfiguration; exorcism of dumb spirit; second prophecy of death; receiving children; another exorcist.	Markan Block 6: Lk. 9:18-9:50.
Block 7: Mk. 9:41-10:12. Offending little ones; flavorless salt; divorce illegal. <i>Luke discarded this block ("Luke's Lesser Omission")</i> .	Lk. 9:51-18:14 is QS 19-52 and L.

*L is Luke's own composition. **QS is "Q Saying." Numbered as in Mack, 1993, *The Lost Gospel*

(Continued on next page)

II, Luke's Use of the Gospel of Mark, continued.

Mark's Narrative Markan blocks that Luke used are in bold .	Gospel of Luke Markan passages in bold .
<p>Block 8: Mk. 10:13-16:8. Receive the kingdom of God as a child; rich man; third prophecy; blind man at Jericho; James and John request thrones; triumphal entry into Jerusalem; riot and teaching in Temple; the coming destruction of Jerusalem; coming of son of man; last supper; betrayal; arrest; trial; crucifixion, burial, empty tomb scene.</p>	<p>Markan Block 8: Lk. 18:15-43. Lk. 19:1-22:27: L + QS 61. Lk. 19:28-22:27. Lk. 22:28-30: QS 62 + L. Lk. 22:31-24:9: from Mark, but heavily edited.</p>
<p>Mark had no story of the resurrected Jesus after the empty tomb scene and frightened women. His gospel ended at 16:8. A later author wrote Mk. 16:9-20.</p>	<p>Lk 24:10-53 is L.</p>

*L is Luke's own composition. **QS is "Q Saying." Numbered as in Mack, 1993, *The Lost Gospel*.

III. Matthew's Use of the Gospel of Mark. (See chapter 2.)

Mark's Narrative Markan blocks that Matthew used are in bold .	Gospel of Matthew Markan passages in bold .
Mark has no birth story.	Mt. 1:1-2:23: genealogy, birth stories, all M.*
Block 1: Mk. 1:2-1:15: John the baptizer; Jesus' baptism, temptation. Preaching and temptations added from Q; M material added.	Mt. 3:1-17: from Mark with QS** 3-6 and M added.
Block 2: Mk. 1:16-3:19. Four disciples join him; exorcisms in synagogue and Simon's house; healing of leper; healing of paralytic; announcement of son of man; the passing of the Law; ordination of twelve disciples.	Mt. 3:18-4:25; 8:1-4, 14-16; 9:2-17; 10:2-4; 12:1-15, with Q and M material added.
Block 3: Mk. 3:20-30. <i>Like Luke, Matthew discarded Mark's Beelzebul story and used the Q story.</i> Mk. 3:31-35: Who is my family?	Mt. 12:22-30 is QS 28. Mt. 12:46-50.
Block 4: Mk. 3:36-6:44. Reign of God; Jesus calmed storm; possession of swine; Jairus' daughter; prophet rejected; sent forth twelve disciples; Herod Antipas; feeding five thousand.	Mt. 8:23-34; 9:18-26; 13:1-15, 18-20, 31-33; 14:1-21; Q and M material added.
Block 5: Mk. 6:45-8:26. Walking on sea; washing cups; Syrophenician woman; loosing boy's tongue; feeding four thousand; spittle on eyes to cure blindness. (= Luke's Greater Omission.)	Mt. 14:22-16:12; Q and M material added.
Block 6: Mk. 8:27-9:40. Who am I? Jesus' first prophecy of death; transfiguration; exorcism of dumb spirit; second prophecy; receiving children; another exorcist.	Mt 9:32-33; 16:13-18:5, with considerable Q material inserted.
Block 7: Mk. 9:41-10:12. Offending little ones; flavorless salt; divorce illegal. (= Luke's Lesser Omission.)	Mt. 18:6; 19:1-9; Q sayings inserted.
Block 8: Mk. 10:13-16:8. Receive the kingdom of God as a child; rich man; third prophecy; blind man at Jericho; James and John request thrones; triumphal entry into Jerusalem; riot and teaching in Temple; the coming destruction of Jerusalem; coming of son of man; last supper; betrayal; arrest; trial; crucifixion, burial, empty tomb scene.	Mt. 9:27-31; 19:13-27; 20:17-34; 21:1-27, 33-44; 22:15-46; 24:1-24; 26:1-27:2; 27:11-61; 28:1-8; all this interlarded with Q and M material.
Mark had no story of the risen Jesus; a later author wrote Mk. 16:9-20.	Mt 28:9-20: M.

*M is the material that Matthew composed. ****QS" denotes Q Sayings, numbered as in Mack, *The Lost Gospel*.

IV. The *Hasidim*.

The *hasidim* were “the pious ones” who obeyed the Torah punctiliously. The Torah made clear that the Israelites were YHWH’s chosen people, whom YHWH selected to be a nation of priests, and an example for the rest of the world:

If you will truly obey my voice and keep my covenant, then you will be a special treasure to me above all nations, for the whole earth is mine, and you will be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy people (Exodus 19:5-6).

You are a holy people unto YHWH your Elohim. He has chosen you to be a special people for himself, above all people on the face of the earth (Deuteronomy 7:6; also see 14:2, 21, 26:19).

YHWH will appoint you a holy people for himself as he has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of YHWH your Elohim and walk in his ways, and all the people of the earth will see that you are called by the name of YHWH, and they will be afraid of you (Deuteronomy 28:9-10).

I YHWH have called you in righteousness and will hold your hand and will keep you and give you for a covenant of the people, a light for the nations, to open the blind eyes, to bring the prisoners out of the prison, they who sit in darkness out of the prison house (Isaiah 42:6-7; also 49:6).

V. The Zealots. (Also see chapter 6.)

The Zealots were fervently nationalistic hasidics who prided themselves on their “zeal” for YHWH, meaning they would gladly kill for him. Phineas was the archetypal Zealot:

Zimri, an Israelite, brought a Midianite woman to his brothers, and Moses and all the Israelites saw them. Phineas took a javelin and went into the tent after Zimri and skewered both.

YHWH told Moses, “When Phineas was zealous for my sake, he turned my wrath away from the Israelites so I did not consume them in my jealousy. Tell Phineas that I give him my covenant of peace. He and his descendants shall have the covenant of everlasting priesthood, because he was zealous for his elohim” (Numbers 25:6-15).

When Antiochus IV tried to Hellenize and assimilate Israel into the Seleucid Empire, many Jews regarded him a liberator who would free them from hasidic intolerance and allow them to adopt modern Greek ways. Zealots regarded them as traitors to their god and country.

Antiochus IV placed his statue as Zeus Incarnate in Jerusalem and outlawed circumcision and other Jewish traditions. Jews flouted his laws and boycotted the Temple, so he sent soldiers throughout Israel to enforce his laws. In one village, the priest Mattathias refused to sacrifice a pig. Another Jew volunteered to do it, and Mattathias killed him:

Mattathias acted as Phineas had in his zeal for the Torah. Then he went through the town shouting, “Let everyone who has any zeal for the Torah and defends the Covenant come

out and follow me." Then he and his five sons fled into the hills, leaving everything behind (1 Maccabees 2:26-28).¹

Hasidim and Zealots joined Mattathias and his sons, thus precipitating the Maccabean Revolt. The Jews named the revolt after Mattathias' oldest son, Judas nicknamed *Maqqaba*, Hammer.

In two years Judas reclaimed Jerusalem and purified the Temple, thus showing what *pistis* can do against impossible odds. Judas and three of his brothers were killed within the next twenty years.

Simon, the last of Mattathias' sons, was acclaimed as commander-in-chief, high priest, and king of Israel in 143 BCE. Once again YHWH ruled Israel through his Anointed One. Simon's descendants, the Maccabean dynasty, reigned as tyrannical priest-kings for several generations. They kept Israel independent until the Roman invasion.

Pompey invaded in 63 BCE. The Zealots amazed him with their endurance and zeal even while being slaughtered around the altar in the Temple. Hyrcanus (a descendant of Simon) swore loyalty to Rome, so Pompey restored him as high priest. The Zealots remained in the background, always looking for a chance to revolt.

When Pompey left, Antipater, an Arab from Idumea, helped Julius Caesar keep Palestine under Roman control. His son Herod became king over Palestine in 40 BCE.

One Hezekiah and his band kept the Palestine-Syria border in turmoil. Perhaps they were Zealots, patriots trying to drive the Romans from their land. Herod hunted them down and killed them as outlaws.

Herod ruled forty years. As he lay dying, two rabbis promised rewards in heaven to anyone who died while cutting down the great golden eagle over the east gate of the Temple. Their students tried to cut it down, but were arrested. Herod ordered them and the rabbis burned alive, and other conspirators slaughtered.

Herod's sons Archelaus, Antipas, and Philip divided the kingdom. Zealots and outlaws, exploiting the confusion, rose up throughout the country. Men hoping to make themselves king gathered followers and wreaked general havoc. One was Judas, son of the Hezekiah whom Herod had killed thirty years earlier. Judas raided Herod's armory in Sepphoris and armed a horde that plundered everywhere they went, killing both Romans and Jews.

Varus the legate of Syria brought an army to put down the revolt. He burned Sepphoris and enslaved the residents. He impaled two thousand men before restoring peace to Palestine.

After Herod Archelaus ruled Judea for a tumultuous ten years, Augustus Caesar had Quirinius, legate of Syria, replace him with Coponius, a Roman general. Coponius had orders to execute criminals, take a census, and collect taxes for Rome.

Two Pharisees, Zadok and the rabbi Judas the Galilean, announced that they would call no man lord. God was their only ruler and master. They said Jews were cowards if they paid taxes to Rome. Paying taxes was the first step to enslavement. They were "zealous" to lead a revolt.

Judas and Zadok's notion of God's direct rule came from the story that YHWH once ruled Israel without kings or priests:

The men of Israel said to Gideon, "Rule over us, and your son, and his son, for you saved us from the Midianites."

But Gideon replied, "I won't rule over you, and my son won't. YHWH will rule over you" (Judges 8:22-23).

Josephus regarded Judas the Galilean as founder of the Zealot movement, the "fourth sect of philosophy" after the Sadducees, Pharisees, and Essenes,² but he called them outlaws, not Zealots until late in *Jewish War*. He often expressed his disgust for them. He knew them all too well.

For the first two centuries of Roman occupation the Zealot movement attracted young hotheads who murdered and robbed. When the First Revolt broke out in 66 CE, Menahem and Eleazar, descendants of Judas the rabbi, fought as Zealots,³ and other groups called themselves Zealots. The movement ultimately forced the Romans to destroy Israel.

The Dead Sea scrolls provide evidence of a Zealot group that called itself *Yahad*, "Oneness" or "Unity." They hid their scrolls in Cave 1 at Qumran in the First Revolt. Some of their books were the Manual of Discipline, War Scroll, and Damascus Document. Some of their books traced to the late Maccabean period. Descendants of the Maccabean Dynasty may well have led the *Yahad* continuously as an independence movement through the first two centuries of the Roman occupation.

The *Yahad* envisioned war between the "children of light"—pious Jews—and "children of darkness"—their enemies. They intended to rule Israel after the war. Jews would return to Palestine from the Diaspora to reconstitute the twelve tribes of Israel as in Numbers 1:5-16.⁴ We infer that the *Yahad* was right in the thick of the Zealot movement from Judas the Galilean to Menahem, Simon bar Gioras, and Eleazar ben Jairus at Qumran and Masada in and First Revolt.

NOTES

1. 1 Maccabees is one of the books of the Apocrypha.
2. Fourth sect: Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18:1; *Jewish War*, 2:124.
3. Judas' descendants Zealots: Josephus, *Jewish War*, 2:435, 7:247.
4. *Yahad*: Golb, 75-77, 184-185, 296-297, 350-351, 368-377. Dead Sea scrolls: Martinez; Wise, Abegg, and Cook; Vermes.

VI. Bad Laws from YHWH; Passing Through Fire. (See chapter 7.)

Paul, in his letter to the Galatians, told of bad laws in the Torah. He could have quoted Ezekiel, who said the same thing and told what they were:

“[Your ancestors] did not obey me, but despised my laws... **Therefore I gave them some bad laws...** to make their own gifts destroy them. Therefore they passed all their firstborn through the fire so that I could destroy them, so that they might know that I am YHWH” (Ezekiel 20:24-26).

That is astonishing: YHWH gave the Israelites bad laws. But what is “passing all their firstborn through the fire”? Ezekiel explains:

The word of YHWH came to me. “Son of man, let Jerusalem know her abominations... You made human images and prostituted yourselves before them... **Your sons and daughters** whom you have borne to me—**you sacrificed them to idols to be devoured!** Of all your prostitutions, **killing my children and burning them for idols** is no small matter” (Ezekiel 16:1-2, 17-21).

Devoured? The Hebrew word can be rendered “burnt,” but also “eaten.” “consumed.” “food,” or “meat.” You decide which is the best meaning. Ezekiel goes on:

“When you offer your gifts, making your sons pass through the fire, you pollute yourselves with your idols even to this day! Will you ask me for guidance, O house of Israel? As I live,” says YHWH Elohim, “I will not answer you!” (Ezekiel 20:31).

YHWH said to me, “Will you judge [Judah and Israel]? They have prostituted themselves with their idols, and also **sent their sons whom they bore unto me, through the fire to devour them...** **When they slew their children** for the idols, they polluted my sanctuary. They did it right in my house!” (Ezekiel 23:37-39).

What! Ezekiel actually accuses Israelites and priests of sacrificing children right in Solomon’s Temple!

We have all read of child sacrifice in ancient Philistia, Carthage, and Mexico, but we did not expect to find evidence in the Bible of child sacrifice in Israel. The truth is that the Bible reaches far back into the past and records the gradual civilizing of a people in their own words. Early Israelites sacrificed children because they believed the god demanded it. Their holy men said so. But now one of their holy men, Ezekiel, demanded that they stop sacrificing their children. Ezekiel had gone to Babylonia as one of thousands of captives in 597 BCE and began denouncing his countrymen five years later. He blamed their defeat and exile to YHWH’s anger over child sacrifice and other wrongs. Ezekiel believed that YHWH sent the Babylonians to destroy Judah as punishment for disobedience. The same thing had happened to Israel, the northern kingdom, a century earlier, at the hands of Assyria.

Ezekiel heard that the people remaining in Jerusalem went right on with child sacrifice and idol worship in Solomon’s Temple, so he warned them that YHWH would destroy Jerusalem if the evils continued. Sure enough, it happened in 586 BCE.

In Jerusalem Jeremiah said the same thing:

Cut off your hair, O Jerusalem! Throw it away! Begin lamenting at altars, for YHWH has rejected and abandoned those who angered him. "The children of Judah have done evil in my sight," says YHWH. "They put abominations in the house named for me, polluting it. They built altars at Tophet in the valley of the son of Hinnom to burn their sons and daughters in the fire, which I did not require. It didn't even come into my heart! Therefore, look, the days come," says YHWH, "that Tophet and the valley of the son of Hinnom will be called the valley of slaughter, for they will fill Tophet with their own bodies. Carcasses of this people will be meat for birds and scavengers, and no one will shoo them away. Voices of mirth and gladness, of bridegrooms and brides, will cease in the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem. The land will be deserted" (Jeremiah 7:29-34).

YHWH told me, "Get a clay jar from the potter. Take the elders and priests into the valley of the son Ge-Hinnom [of Hinnom], near the entry of the east gate, and proclaim, 'Hear the word of YHWH. O kings of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem. I will bring evil upon this place because they forsook me and burned incense in it to other gods... and filled this place with blood of innocents! They built altars of Baal to burn their sons with fire as burnt offerings for Baal! Break the clay jar in front of them and tell them, 'YHWH Sabaoth says, That's how I'll break this people and the city, smashed like a potter's jar! They'll bury them in Tophet until it is full!'" (Jeremiah 19:1ff).

King Zedekiah imprisoned Jeremiah for speaking out:

The word that came to Jeremiah from YHWH the tenth year of Zedekiah king of Judah... "[The Israelites] built altars for Baal in the valley of the son of Hinnom, for their sons and daughters to pass through the fire to *Molech*, which I did not command them. It didn't even come into my mind that they would do this abomination! Now Jerusalem will be handed over" (Jeremiah 32:1-35).

Molech, "king," or *Baal*, "Lord," was the king of the Canaanite gods.¹ It is hard for people to change long-held beliefs, especially when some of the holy men pooh-pooh the change, and people think their efforts at pleasing the gods paid off in the past.

Zedekiah revolted in 586 BCE, so Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem including Solomon's Temple and again took thousands into captivity. It is hard to imagine what a heart-wrenching experience the destruction and the fifty-eight years of Exile were, and how much Israel was transformed. It is often said they went into the Exile as Israelites and came out Jews.

The Yahwist's struggle for reform actually began centuries before the Exile with Amos the prophet. The reigns of King Hezekiah and King Josiah were times of reform. Jeremiah, Josiah's adviser, was guided by a "torah of Moses" that had been found in the wall of Solomon's Temple (2 Kings 22:3-23:25). That *torah*, now called the Deuteronomic Code, or the D document, forms the core of the book of Deuteronomy. According to D, Moses said,

When YHWH Elohim destroys the [Canaanites] as you enter and settle in their land, watch that you don't worship their gods. Every abomination that YHWH hates, they have done for their gods, for they have burnt their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods (Deuteronomy 12:29-31).

When you settle in the land which YHWH your Elohim gives you, you will not follow the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or daughter pass through the fire... (Deuteronomy 18:9-10).

Israelite shepherds settled in thinly occupied uplands of Canaan and gradually adopted many of the Canaanites' religious practices. Child sacrifice may have been one of them.

When King Josiah was killed in battle after a successful forty-year reign, his brothers evidently thought he finally got his come-uppance for breaking with tradition, for they went back to the old ways, according to the ending of 2 Kings. Jeremiah protested vehemently and persistently, thus becoming *persona non grata* in Jerusalem.

Child sacrifice was a royal tradition in Israel, Judah, and neighboring kingdoms. The following story gives an example. Child sacrifice was Moab's response to a siege by Israel, Judah, and Edom:

The king of Moab took his eldest son who should have succeeded him, and sacrificed him as a burnt offering upon the city wall. There was great anger against Israel, so they left and went back to their own land (2 Kings 3:27).

The sacrifice was a magical rite to please the Moabite tribal god and ensure his protection. It exerted a powerful psychological effect on everybody. The besiegers saw the Moabites' fury rise to fever pitch and their amazing feats of courage and desperation. The besiegers thought the Moabites' magic was working, so they gave up and left.

Ahaz the king of Judah provides another example. Evidently he sacrificed his son when Israel and Damascus besieged Jerusalem:

Ahaz was twenty years old when he began to reign. He reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. He didn't do what was right in the sight of YHWH his Elohim like his forefather David. Ahaz walked in the way of the kings of Israel and made his son pass through the fire, following the abominations of the [Canaanites] whom YHWH drove out before the Israelites (2 Kings 16:1-3).

Expelling Canaanites from their land is fiction.

The author of 1,2 Kings listed the kings of Israel and Judah and pointed out those who "passed their sons through the fire" and "did not do right in the sight of YHWH." That author is called the Deuteronomist Historian, and was probably Jeremiah.²

The Deuteronomist Historian adapted a Canaanite tale to illustrate faithfulness to YHWH:

Jephthah, Gilead's son by a harlot, was a mighty man of valor. Gilead also had sons by his wife, who pushed Jephthah out... When the Ammonites attacked Israel, the elders asked Jephthah to lead them. The spirit of YHWH came upon Jephthah... He vowed to YHWH, "If you hand the Ammonites over to me, I will make a burnt sacrifice to you of whatever comes from my house to meet me when I return in peace." He defeated Ammon, and when he came home, his daughter danced out to meet him with timbrels! She was his only child. When he saw her, he tore his clothes and said, "Alas, my daughter, you have brought me down, for I opened my mouth to YHWH, and I can't take it back." She said, "Father, if you made a vow to YHWH, go through with it, for YHWH helped you defeat Ammon. Let it be done to me. Just wait two months so I may go up

and down upon the mountains and bewail my virginity, I with my friends.” Two months later, she returned to her father who carried out his vow. Ever since, daughters of Israel lamented Jephthah’s daughter four days each year (Judges 11:29-40).

In the story, the Israelites made Jephthah a judge over them.

Child sacrifice in the Torah. In Israel, the northern kingdom, a Babylonian story was made into a story of Abraham’s unquestioning obedience to God. We know it came from the northern kingdom because they usually called God “Elohim.” (In Judah God was called YHWH.) This was the Elohist’s story:

Elohim tested Abraham and said, “Take your son Isaac and go to the land of Moriah and offer him as a burnt offering upon one of the mountains.” Abraham rose early in the morning and took two of his young men with him and Isaac his son...On the third day Abraham saw the place far off. He told the young men, “Wait here with the ass, and I and the boy will go yonder and worship and come back.” ...Abraham took the knife to slay his son (Genesis 22:1-10).

A Yahwist editor removed the gory details of Abraham’s unflinching sacrifice of Isaac and substituted the following Yahwist story:

And the angel of YHWH called from heaven and said, “Abraham, don’t touch the boy, for now I know that you respect Elohim, seeing you have not withheld your son from me.” Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught by his horns in a thicket. Abraham caught the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. Abraham called the place YHWH-Jireh, as it is called today, “In the mount of YHWH it shall be seen.” Then again the angel of YHWH called from heaven and told Abraham, “‘By myself I have sworn,’ says YHWH,— (Genesis 20:11-16a).

The Elohist’s story continues:

—‘because you did not withhold your son, your only son, I will bless you. You have obeyed my voice.’” So Abraham returned to his young men, and they rose and went together to Beersheba, and Abraham lived there. (Genesis 16b-19).³

Even if the Yahwist made Abraham sacrifice the ram, Abraham still returned without Isaac. Therefore in the original story Abraham did indeed sacrifice Isaac in complete obedience to Elohim’s will. That was the moral of the story—you must obey the will of Elohim (which usually means the priests) no matter how dear the sacrifice is to you.

After the Exile, Ezra combined a number of older *torahs* to create a single definitive Torah, the Five Books of Moses that we have now.⁴ Ezra could have removed or rewritten anything objectionable such as Isaac’s murder. Child sacrifice was as abhorrent to Ezra as it was to Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and the Deuteronomist.

Nevertheless, some evidence remains in the Torah, that the Israelites performed child sacrifice after they settled in Canaan. The following three passages, once independent, represent the Canaanite practice of sacrificing humans and animals as an Israelite celebration of their escape from Egypt:

YHWH told Moses, "Sanctify to me the firstborn, whatever opens the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and beast. It is mine..." (Exodus 13:1).

When YHWH brings you into the land of the Canaanites, You will set apart for YHWH all that opens the matrix, and every firstling from your flocks and herds. The male will be YHWH's. You will redeem every firstling of an ass with a lamb. If you don't redeem it, you must break its neck. You will redeem all the firstborn sons among your children you will redeem (Exodus 13:11-13).

When your son asks you in time to come, "What is this?" tell him, "By strength of hand YHWH brought us out from Egypt, from the house of bondage, and when Pharaoh would not let us go, YHWH slew all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn man, and the firstborn beast. Therefore I sacrifice to YHWH all that opens the matrix, being the males, but I redeem the firstborn of my children" (Exodus 13:14-16).

Redemption of children is an afterthought. (Priests have to eat, don't they?) We suspect that reformers in the Exile such as Ezekiel made that change in the laws, or Ezra did when he created the definitive Torah from earlier *torahs*, which he then brought from Babylonia to Jerusalem.⁵

Paul and Ezekiel were right. The Torah contained some bad laws. Those imperfections may increase our respect for the antiquity and evolution of Jewish traditions and scripture. Jewish scripture is a record of the struggle of a people to ferret out evil from their society, even if resided in their hallowed traditions, and bring such evils to an end.

The first four books of the Torah are based on documents earlier than Deuteronomy. They contain only the following prohibition against child sacrifice. It seems out of context:

You will not let any of your children pass through the fire to *Molech*, nor will you pollute the name of your elohim: I am YHWH (Leviticus 18:21).

Perhaps Ezra slipped it into Leviticus after the Exile. He wrote an angry letter. Malachi, to the priests in Jerusalem telling them to shape up. He didn't mention child sacrifice in the letter, but they surely knew his feelings on that subject.

NOTES

1. Child sacrifice and *Molech*: Asimov, 162-163, 389-390.
2. Jeremiah as Deuteronomist Historian: Friedman, 1987.
3. The Abraham-Isaac story: Friedman, 1987.
4. Ezra as redactor of the Torah: Friedman, 1987.
5. Ezra brought the Torah to Jerusalem: Ezra 7:1, 6, 10ff; Friedman.



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... I saw visions in the night, and see! the likeness of the son of man came with the clouds of heaven and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and tongues should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and his kingdom shall not be destroyed (Daniel 7:13-14).

... Και τότε οψονται τον υιον του ανθρωπου ερχομενον εν νεφελαις μετα δυναμεως πολλης και δοξης ... Αμεν λεγω υμιν οτι ου μη παρελθε η γενεα αυτη μεχρις παντα ταυτα γενηται (Μαρκον 13:26, 30).

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