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## The Jesus Narrative In The Talmud

Written by [Gil Student](#)

### Introduction

There are four main passages in the Talmud that are alleged by some to discuss the story of Jesus' life and death. What we will do here is to analyze closely these passages and see the reasons one may or may not attribute these stories to the life of Jesus. We will also look at another two passages that help us identify our protagonist(s). We will quickly realize that there are great difficulties in stating that any of these texts refer to Jesus. We will see that a large number of historians and talmudists have addressed these issues and have concluded that either none of these passages refer to Jesus or that they refer to a proto-Jesus, whose life was later obfuscated by the theologically motivated rewriting of history.

### Passages

[Introduction](#)  
[Jesus In The Talmud](#)  
[Christianity In The Talmud](#)

[Passages](#)  
[Ben Stada](#)  
[Yeshu](#)  
[Trial](#)  
[Execution](#)  
[Disciples](#)  
[The Student](#)

[Theories](#)  
[Hazy History](#)  
[Two Yeshus](#)  
[Early Jesus](#)  
[Conclusion](#)

It is important to keep in mind that there are many people in the Talmud with the same names. R. Aaron Hyman in his biographical work on the sages of the Talmud, *Toldot Tannaim VeAmoraim*, lists 14 Hillels, 61 Elazars, and 71 Hunas. Josephus lists approximately twenty different men named Jesus, at least ten of whom lived in the same time as the famous Jesus [cf. John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, p. 206 n. 6]. The name Panthera was also a common name in the first two centuries [cf. L. Patterson, "Origin the Name Panthera", *JTS* 19 (1917-18), p. 79-80, cited in Meier, p. 107 n. 48]. When dealing with first names, it is very common to come across different people in the Talmud with the same name and the same applies today. When I refer to Bill, am I talking about the President of the United States, the billionaire founder of Microsoft, or a local celebrity? In one place I could mean one Bill and in another place a different Bill. It is therefore almost impossible to identify someone based on their first name alone. Secular names, which in the Talmud means the name of the father, enable us to identify people with much better accuracy, but not entirely. It is very possible for both two men and a father's to have the same names. This makes history much harder but ignoring this fact is distorting history.

Note that the word "ben" means "son of" in Hebrew. Therefore, the name "Shimon Ben Gamaliel" means Shimon the son of Gamaliel.

### Passage #1: Ben Stada

Talmud Shabbat 104b, Sanhedrin 67a

תניא אמר להן רבי אליאזר לחכמים והלא בן סטדא הוציא כספים ממצרים  
בסריטה שעל בשרו. אמרו לו שוטה היה ואין מביאין ראיה מן השוטים. בן סטדא  
בן פנדירא הוא. אמר ר' חסדא בעל סטדא בועל פנדירא. בעל פפוס בן יהודה הוא  
אמו סטדא. אמו מרים מגדלא שיער נשיא היא כדאמר' בפומבדיתא סתת דא  
מבעלה.

It is taught: R. Eliezer told the sages: Did not Ben Stada bring witchcraft with him from Egypt in a cut that was on his skin? They said to him: He was a fool and you cannot bring proof from a fool.

Ben Stada is Ben Pandira.

R. Chisda said: The husband was Stada and the lover was Pandira.

[No,] the husband was Pappos Ben Yehudah and the mother was Stada.

[No,] the mother was Miriam the women's hairdresser [and was called Stada]. As we say in Pumbedita: She has turned away [Stat Da] from her husband.

### Summary

What we see from here is that there was a man named Ben Stada who was considered to be a practicer of black magic. His mother was named Miriam and also called Stada. His father was named Pappos Ben Yehudah. Miriam (Stada) had an affair with Pandira from which Ben Stada was born.

### Proof

Some historians claim that Ben Stada, also known as Ben Pandira, was Jesus. His mother's name was Miriam which is similar to Mary. Additionally, Miriam was called a women's hairdresser, "megadla nashaia" [for this translation, see R. Meir Halevi Abulafia, *Yad Rama*, Sanhedrin ad. loc.]. The phrase "Miriam megadla nashaia" sounds similar to Mary Magdalene, a well-known New Testament figure.

### Problems

1. Mary Magdalene was not Jesus' mother. Neither was Mary a hairdresser.
2. Jesus' step-father was Joseph. Ben Stada's step-father was Pappos Ben Yehudah.
3. Pappos Ben Yehudah is a known figure from other places in talmudic literature. The Mechilta Beshalach (Vayehi ch. 6) has him discussing Torah with Rabbi Akiva and Talmud Berachot 61b has Pappos Ben Yehudah being captured and killed by Romans along with Rabbi Akiva. Rabbi Akiva lived during the second half of the first century and the first half of the second century. He died in the year 134. If Pappos Ben Yehudah was a contemporary of Rabbi Akiva's, he must have been born well after Jesus' death and certainly could not be his father.

### Passage #2: Yeshu

## Talmud Sanhedrin 107b, Sotah 47a

ר' יהושע בן פרחיה מאי הוא. כדקטלינהו ינאי מלכא לרבנן אזל רבי יהושע בן פרחיה וישו לאלכסנדריא של מצרים. כי הוה שלמא שלח ליה שמעון בן שטח מני ירושלים עיר הקודש ליכי אלכסנדריא של מצרים אחותי בעלי שרוי בתוכך ואנכי יושבת שוממה. קם אתא ואתרמי ליה ההוא אושפיזא עבדו ליה יקרא טובא. אמר כמה יפה אכסניא זו. אמר ליה רבי עיניה טרוטות. אמר ליה רשע בכך אתה עוסק. אפיק ארבע מאות שיפורי ושמתיה. אתא לקמיה כמה זמנין אמר ליה קבלן לא הוי קא משגח ביה. יומא חד הוה קא קרי קריאת שמע אתא לקמיה. סבר לקבולי אחוי ליה בידיה הוא סבר מיידחא ליה. אזל זקף לבינתא והשתחוה לה. אמר ליה הדר בך. אמר ליה כך מקובלני ממך כל החוטא ומחטיא את הרבים אין מספיקין בידי לעשות תשובה. ואמר מר ישו [הנצרי] כישף והדיח את ישראל.

## What of R. Yehoshua Ben Perachiah?

When John [Hyrcanus] the king killed the rabbis, R. Yehoshua Ben Perachiah [and Yeshu] went to Alexandria of Egypt. When there was peace, Shimon Ben Shetach sent to him "From me [Jerusalem] the holy city to you Alexandria of Egypt. My husband remains in your midst and I sit forsaken."

[R. Yehoshua Ben Perachiah] left and arrived at a particular inn and they showed him great respect. He said: How beautiful is this inn [Achsania, which also means innkeeper].

[Yeshu] said: Rabbi, she has narrow eyes.

[R. Yehoshua Ben Perachiah] said to him: Wicked one, this is how you engage yourself?

[R. Yehoshua Ben Perachiah] sent out four hundred trumpets and excommunicated him.

[Yeshu] came before [R. Yehoshua Ben Perachiah] many times and said: Accept me. But [R. Yehoshua Ben Perachiah] paid him no attention.

One day [R. Yehoshua Ben Perachiah] was reciting Shema [during which one may not be interrupted]. [Yeshu] came before him. He was going to accept [Yeshu] and signalled to [Yeshu] with his hand. [Yeshu] thought that [R. Yehoshua Ben Perachiah] was repelling him. He went, hung a brick, and bowed down to it.

[Yeshu] said to [R. Yehoshua Ben Perachiah]: You taught me that anyone who sins and causes others to sin is not given the opportunity to repent.

And the master said: Yeshu {the Notzri} practiced magic and deceive and led Israel astray.

Background and Summary

Note that historians differ on the exact years of these events. For simplicity, we will assume the latest possible dates as suggested by Gershon Tannenbaum [*Jewish Time Line Encyclopedia*, p. 87].

John Hyrcanus was a successful king and soldier. During a banquet celebrating his victories in 93 BCE, some Pharisee rabbis offended him and he was convinced by Sadducee leaders to try to kill every Pharisee rabbi [Hyman, vol. II pp. 691-692, 766]. Some rabbis, such as R. Yehoshua Ben Perachiah and his student Yeshu, fled to Alexandria outside of John Hyrcanus's reach [Hyman vol. II pp. 647, 692]. Shimon Ben

Shetach, however, was hidden in Jerusalem by his sister, Salome Alexandra, who was John Hyrcanus's daughter-in-law [Hyman, vol. II pp. 647, 692, 766, vol. III pp. 1212-1213]. The extremely diverse religious population of Palestine, full of sects such as the Essenes, Kumrans, and numerous other groups, was temporarily devoid of any public Pharisee leaders.

By the year 91 BCE, John Hyrcanus and his sons Antigonus and Aristobulos had died and his third son Alexander Janneus became king. Even though Alexander Janneus was an ardent Sadducee, his wife convinced him to appoint his Pharisaic brother-in-law, Shimon Ben Shetach, to the Sanhedrin, then dominated by Sadducees. Slowly, over the course of a number of years, Shimon Ben Shetach outshone his Sadducee opponents in the Sanhedrin and appointed his Pharisaic students as members [Hyman, vol. II pp. 766-767, vol. III pp. 1213-1214].

By the year 80 BCE it was finally safe for the Pharisee rabbis to quietly return and Shimon Ben Shetach sent a cryptic note to his mentor, R. Yehoshua Ben Perachiah, encouraging him to return [Hyman, vol. II pp. 647-648, vol. III pp. 1213-1214].

Some 50 to 60 years after the great Pharisaic victory of the Hasmoneans, in which Pharisees rebelled against the Greek-Syrians and gained the monarchy, these Pharisee rabbis returned to a country full of heretical sects that had either integrated aspects of Hellenist paganism into their religion or had, in an attempt to repel all unproven influence, rejected the traditions of the rabbis. The Pharisees who remembered the prominence in which they had so recently been held were now witnesses to the disintegration of their religious society.

While returning, Yeshu misunderstood one of his teacher's remarks and said something that demonstrated that he was interested in and looking at married women. As sexual promiscuity was a sign of many of the Hellenist sects, R. Yehoshua Ben Perachiah suspected his student of being yet another leader influenced by Hellenism and had him excommunicated [this hasty conclusion was condemned by the Talmud a few lines before our passage]. After many attempts by Yeshu to reconcile with his mentor, R. Yehoshua Ben Perachiah was finally ready. However, Yeshu approached him while he was reciting Shema, the most important part of the morning prayer during which he could not stop to speak. He motioned to Yeshu with his hand which was misinterpreted as a signal to go away. Yeshu finally gave up and fulfilled his teacher's suspicion. He adopted a pagan religion and went on to create his own sect of Judaism and lead many Jews astray.

### Proof

Some historians note some similarities here between Yeshu and Jesus. Most notably, in one manuscript of the Talmud he is called Yeshu the Notzri which could be rendered (with only a little difficulty) Jesus the Nazarene.

### Problems

1. Yeshu lived about a century before Jesus.
2. Only one of the approximately four distinct manuscripts available have the title HaNotzri (possibly, the Nazarene). None of the other manuscripts contain that title which make it suspect as a later interpolation, as medieval commentators suggest [cf. Menachem HaMeiri, *Beit Habechirah*, Sotah ad. loc.].
3. Notzri does not necessarily mean Nazarene. It is actually a biblical term (Jeremiah 4:16). While centuries later it was undoubtedly used to refer to Christians in the form of Notzrim or Netzarim, it could have been a term used to refer to many strong communities. The name "Ben Netzar" was used by the Talmud to refer to the famous

- chief of robbers Odenathus of Palmyra [see Marcus Jastrow's Dictionary p. 930]
4. The name Yeshu alone could have been common. We know that the name Jesus was common [see Collossians 4:11 and [above](#)].
5. Other than the name, nothing in the story fits anything we know about Jesus.

### Passage #3: Trial

Talmud Sanhedrin 67a

דתניא ושאר כל חייבי מיתות שבתורה אין מכמינין עליהן חוץ מזו. כיצד עושין לו מדליקין לו את הנר בבית הפנימי ומושיבין לו עדים בבית החיצון כדי שיהו הן רואין אותו ושומעין את קולו והיא אינו רואה אותו. והלה אומר לו אמור מה שאמרת לי ביחוד והוא אומר לו והלה אומר היאך נניח את אלקינו שבשמים ונעבוד עבודת כוכבים. אם חחר בו מוטב ואם אמר כך היא חובתינו וכך יפה לנו העדים ששומעין מבחוץ מביאין אותו לב"ד וסוקלין אותו. וכן עשו לבן סטדא בלוד ותלאוהו בערב פסח.

It is taught: For all others liable for the death penalty [except for the enticer to idolatry] we do not hide witnesses. How do they deal with [the enticer]? They light a lamp for him in the inner chamber and place witnesses in the outer chamber so that they can see and hear him while he cannot see or hear them. One says to him "Tell me again what you said to me in private" and he tells him. He says "How can we forsake our G-d in heaven and worship idolatry?" If he repents, good. If he says "This is our obligation and what we must do" the witnesses who hear him from outside bring him to the court and stone him. And so they did to Ben Stada in Lud and hung him on the eve of Passover.

### Summary

This passage discusses how an enticer to idolatry, one of the worst religious criminals (see Deuteronomy 13:7-12), was caught. The Talmud then continues and says that this was the method used to catch the notorious Ben Stada.

### Proof

Again we see Ben Stada. Above we were told that he performed witchcraft and we are now told that he was an idolater as well. The connection to Jesus is that Ben Stada is connected to Jesus in the passage above and that he was executed on the eve of Passover. The Gospel of John (19:14) has Jesus being executed on the eve of Passover.

### Problems

1. The same problems above connecting Ben Stada to Jesus apply here as well, including his living almost a century after Jesus.
2. Ben Stada was stoned by a Jewish court and not crucified by the Roman government like Jesus.
3. The Synoptic Gospels say that Jesus was executed on Passover itself (Matthew 26:18-20; Mark 14:16-18; Luke 22:13-15) and not the eve of Passover.
4. Jesus was not crucified in Lud.

### Passage #4: Execution

Talmud Sanhedrin 43a

והא תניא בערב פסח תלאוהו לישו [הנצרי] והכרח יוצא לפניו מי יום שהוא יוצא  
 ליסקל על שכישף והדיח את ישראל כל מי שידע לו זכות יבא וילמד עליו ולא  
 מצאו לו זכות ותלאוהו בערב פסח. אמר עולא ותסברא בר הפוכי זכות הוא מסית  
 הוא ורחמנא אמר לא תחמוז ולא תכסה עליו אלא שאני ישו [הנצרי] דקרוב  
 למלכות הוה.

It is taught: On the eve of Passover they hung Yeshu and the crier went forth for forty days beforehand declaring that "[Yeshu] is going to be stoned for practicing witchcraft, for enticing and leading Israel astray. Anyone who knows something to clear him should come forth and exonerate him." But no one had anything exonerating for him and they hung him on the eve of Passover.

Ulla said: Would one think that we should look for exonerating evidence for him? He was an enticer and G-d said (Deuteronomy 13:9) "Show him no pity or compassion, and do not shield him."

Yeshu was different because he was close to the government.

### Summary

Here we have the story of the execution of Yeshu. Like Ben Stada, he was also executed on the eve of Passover. Before executing him, the court searched for any witnesses who could clear his name, as was normally done before any execution. Ulla, however, questioned this practice. An enticer, due to the biblical mandate not to be merciful, should not be afforded this normal consideration. The Talmud answers that Yeshu was different. Because of his government connections, the court tried to search for any reason not to execute him and upset the government.

### Proof

Again we see Yeshu. All of the proofs from above connecting Yeshu to Jesus apply here as well. Additionally, the execution on the eve of Passover is another connection to Jesus as above with Ben Stada.

### Problems

1. As mentioned above with Ben Stada, the Synoptic Gospels have Jesus being executed on Passover itself and not the eve of Passover.
2. As above, Yeshu lived a century before Jesus.
3. Yeshu was executed by a Jewish court and not by the Romans. During Yeshu's time, the reign of Alexander Janneus, the Jewish courts had the power to execute but had to be careful because the courts were ruled by the Pharisees while the king was a Sadducee. It seems clear why the courts would not want to unnecessarily upset the monarch by executing a friend of his. During the Roman occupation of Jesus' time, there is no indication that the Jewish courts had the right to execute criminals.
3. There is no indication from the New Testament that Jesus had friends in the government.

### **Passage #5: Disciples**

Talmud Sanhedrin 43a

ת"ר חמשה תלמידים היו לו לישו מתאי נקאי נצר ובוני ותודה. אתיוהו למתי אמר להו מתי יהרג הכתיב מתי אבוא ואראה פני אלקים. אמרו לו אין מתי יהרג דכתיב מתי ימות ואבד שמו. אתיוהו לנקאי אמר להו נקאי יהרג הכתיב ונקי וצדיק אל תהרוג. אמרו לו אין נקאי יהרג דכתיב במסתרם יהרג נקי. אתיוהו לנצר אמר להו נצר יהרג הכתיב ונצר משורשיו יפרה. אמרו ליה אין נצר יהרג דכתיב ואתה השלכת מקרבך כנצר נתעב. אתיוהו לבוני אמר להו בוני יהרג הכתיב בני בכורי ישראל. אמרו לו אין בוני יהרג דכתיב הנב אנכי הורג את בך בכורך. אתיוהו לתודה אמר להו תודה יהרג הכתיב ממורד לתודה. א"ל אין תודה יהרג דכתיב זובח תודה יכבדני.

It is taught: Yeshu had five disciples - Matai, Nekai, Netzer, Buni, and Todah.

They brought Matai [before the judges]. He said to them: Will Matai be killed? It is written (Psalm 42:2) "When [=Matai] shall (I) come and appear before G-d."

They said to him: Yes, Matai will be killed as it is written (Psalm 41:5) "When [=Matai] shall (he) die and his name perish."

They brought Nekai. He said to them: Will Nekai be killed? It is written (Exodus 23:7) "The innocent [=Naki] and the righteous you shall not slay."

They said to him: Yes, Nekai will be killed as it is written (Psalm 10:8) "In secret places he slay the innocent [=Naki]."

They brought Netzer. He said to them: Will Netzer be killed? It is written (Isaiah 11:1) "A branch [=Netzer] shall spring up from his roots."

They said to him: Yes, Netzer will be killed as it is written (Isaiah 14:19) "You are cast forth out of your grave like an abominable branch [=Netzer]."

They brought Buni. He said to them: Will Buni be killed? It is written (Exodus 4:22) "My son [=Beni], my firstborn, Israel."

They said to him: Yes, Buni will be killed as it is written (Exodus 4:23) "Behold, I slay your son [=Bincha] your firstborn."

They brought Todah. He said to them: Will Todah be killed? It is written (Psalm 100:1) "A Psalm for thanksgiving [=Todah]."

They said to him: Yes, Todah will be killed as it is written (Psalm 50:23) "Whoever sacrifices thanksgiving [=Todah] honors me."

### Summary

Five of Yeshu's disciples were brought before a court, tried for the crime against G-d and society of idolatry, and executed according to biblical law. This passages presents each disciple cleverly bringing a biblical verse in an attempt to exonerate himself and the court responding likewise.

### Proof

The name Yeshu is used as above. The additional proof this passage provides is that Matai is the Hebrew equivalent of Matthew, one of Jesus' disciples.

### Problems

1. The same problems above connecting Yeshu to Jesus apply here.
2. Of the five disciples, only one is recognized. What of the other four?
3. The name Matai seems like a nickname or Aramaic equivalent of Matityahu, which was a known Jewish name in that time period. It was probably a common name,

considering the high esteem in which the patriarch of the Hasmonean dynasty, Matityahu, was held by the common people. Some manuscripts have the name of R. Yehoshua Ben Perachiah's famous colleague as Matai from Arbel [cf. R. Shimon Ben Tzemach Duran, *Magen Avot*, ed. Zeini (Jerusalem:2000) p. 31].

## Passage #6: The Student

Tosefta Chullin 2:23

מעשה בר' אליעזר בן דמאי בן אחותו של ר' ישמעאל שהכישו נחש ובא יעקב איש כפר סכניא לרפאותו משום ישו בן פנדירא ולא הניחו ר' ישמעאל.

It once happened that R. Elazar ben Damah was bitten by a snake and Ya'akov of the village Sechania came to heal him in the name of Yeshu ben Pandira, but R. Yishmael did not allow him.

### Proof

Here we see the only place in which the names Yeshu and Ben Pandira are connected.

## Theories

### Hazy History

Some historians consider all of the above passages to refer to Jesus. Granted, there are many difficulties in tying all of the details together, particularly the historical timeframes. However, these historians claim "that chronology was not a science in which the rabbis excelled, or one in which they laid stress upon accuracy" [RT Herford, *Christianity in Talmud & Midrash*, p. 347]. The rabbis of the talmud had a hazy memory of Jesus and embellished upon it in order to villainize him. The inconsistencies among the various stories are of no consequence because the rabbis did not care. Thus, Jesus is Yeshu is Ben Stada is Ben Pandira. Mary Magdalene is called Jesus' mother due to some vague familiarity with the gospel story. Jesus' execution was recalled but only some details remembered. In fact, these historians found many more references to Jesus in the talmud that did not use his name [discussed [here](#)]. Herford lists about twenty different passages that he claims refer to Jesus and still concludes that "it is remarkable how very little the talmud does say about Jesus" [ibid.].

This was at one time the standard approach of historians. However, the obvious bias against talmudic rabbis and the wanton attribution of nameless passages has since given way to a more balanced approach among academics.

Goldstein, in his highly respected doctoral dissertation *Jesus in the Jewish Tradition*, argues against the attribution to Jesus of various references in the talmud, such as Balaam and "a certain person". In his view, this is finding in the texts what one was a priori looking for [Cf. Goldstein, pp. 57-81]. Joseph Klausner does not consider the Ben Stada passages as referring to Jesus [Joseph Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, pp. 20-23]. Johann Maier concurs and adds that Ben Pandira had no connection to Jesus either [Johann Maier, *Jesus von Nazareth in der talmudischen Uberlieferung*, p. 237, cited in John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, vol. I p. 106 n. 45]. Maier further denies that the passage in Sanhedrin 43a about the execution and disciples of Yeshu has anything to do with Jesus [Maier, p. 229, cited in Meier vol. I p. 107 n. 51]. John P. Meier, a Catholic priest and author of the most recent and highly acclaimed scholarly analysis of the evidence of Jesus' life, *A Marginal Jew*, which has even been added to the Anchor Bible Reference Library, takes a middle ground and says "While not accepting the full, radical approach of Maier, I think we can agree with him on one basic point: in the earliest



rabbinic sources, there is no clear or even probable reference to Jesus of Nazareth" [Meier, vol. I p. 98].

Meier also adds what seems to be a direct answer to Herford's remark quoted above. Meier says "Hence, apart from Josephus, Jewish literature of the early Christian period offers no independent source for inquiry into the historical Jesus. Indeed, why should it? Engaged in a fierce struggle for its own survival and definition, early rabbinic Judaism had other matters on its mind -- matters that, from its own perspective, were much more important" [Meier, *ibid.*].

Many modern historians detect different strata of texts from different ages within the talmudic period. The passages originally referred to different people named Yeshu, Ben Stada, and Ben Pandira, none of whom were Jesus. Over time, different generations of talmudic rabbis melded the passages together with added phrases and details. However, according to Johann Maier, none of these passages ever related to Jesus. Some scholars, such as Joseph Klausner and John P. Meier, believe that some of the later additions were meant to refer to Jesus, while the original basic text did not. It is therefore very difficult to determine what, if anything, the talmud actually says about Jesus.

These attempts at literary analysis of the talmud, while not quite heretical to traditional Jews, are certainly anathema. We will therefore try to use the literature of more traditional historical views of the talmudic passages along with some classic rabbinic commentaries to understand the subjects of these texts.

### Two Yeshus

The standard rabbinic understanding of these passages is that these passages refer to at least two different people [cf. *Tosafot HaRosh*, Sotah 47a sv Yeshu, Shabbat 104b sv Ben Stada; *Tosafot* (uncensored) Shabbat 104b sv Ben Stada; R. Abraham Zacuto, *Sefer Hayuchasin* 5:6, R. Natan David Rabinowitz, *Binu Shenot Dor Vador*, pp. 422-425] . The first lived in the first half of the first century BCE during the reign of Alexander Jannaeus. The second lived in the first half of the second century CE, during the time of the Roman persecution that led to Rabbi Akiva's tragic death.

The first, Yeshu Ben Pandira, started his own sect and had many followers. His heretical and idolatrous teachings lasted centuries after his life but, like so many Jewish sects, slowly died out after the destruction of the Temple.

The second, Ben Stada, was simply a public idolater from an illustrious family who was caught and punished.

The only connections between the two are their fathers' names, that they were executed on the day before Passover, and that they both spent time in Egypt. The first is probably a mere coincidence because, as pointed out [above](#), Panthera (which in Hebrew and Aramaic is equivalent of Pandira) was a common name.

Ben Stada may have been executed on the day before Passover in Lud out of deference for his illustrious step-father. On that day, most people were gathered in Jerusalem preparing their Passover sacrifices and very few people would have witnessed the execution in Lud. Yeshu Ben Pandira may have been executed on the day before Passover *in Jerusalem* for the exact opposite reason. Since he was the leader of a heretical sect, the court may have wished that the crowd in Jerusalem would see his execution and learn that his sect was a deviation from the true Judaism.

Their both having spent time in Egypt is similar to two American Jews today both

visiting New York City at some time in their lives. From the year 307 BCE to the year 113 CE, Alexandria had one of the largest and most illustrious Jewish communities in the world. Its hundreds of thousands of Jews had a very large and active Jewish community, which is probably why R. Yehoshua Ben Perachiah and Yeshu were able to hide there. The Alexandrian community was also noted for its affinity to Hellenistic culture. Its most famous product, Philo, wrote exclusively in Greek and propounded a very Hellenistic philosophy which some consider to be heretical to Judaism [see Samuel Belkin's introduction to *Midreshei Philon*]. It is certainly not surprising that the young Ben Pandira's visit to this thriving Jewish center led him to accept a hybrid Jewish-Hellenist religion that was considered idolatry by traditional Jews.

The following chart shows which details refer to each person.

<b>Yeshu Ben Pandira</b>		<b>Ben Stada</b>	
<u>Passage 2</u>	Lived appr. 80 BCE	<u>Passage 1</u>	Lived appr. 100 CE
	Student of R. Yehoshua Ben Perachiah		Sometimes called Ben Pandira but mainly Ben Stada, possibly to differentiate him from Yeshu Ben Pandira
	Escaped persecution by fleeing to Egypt and, upon return, became an idolater		Brought witchcraft from Egypt
<u>Passage 4</u>	Executed on the day before Passover		Mother was Miriam the hairdresser, also known as Stada
	Had close contact with government officials		Father was Pandira
<u>Passage 5</u>	Had five disciples who were also executed.	<u>Passage 3</u>	Step-father was Pappos Ben Yehudah
<u>Passage 6</u>	His legacy remained for centuries, even until the time of R. Yishmael (died 133)		Executed on the day before Passover in Lud for idolatry

### Early Jesus

Some historians go further. It is well known, and long a matter of controversy, that beginning in the early 19th century some historians disputed the existence of an historical Jesus at all. According to this theory, Jesus never existed and the early church fathers created him as a figure for their religion. The gospels are compilations of various legends that were attributed to this mythical character Jesus. Much ink has been spilled debating this theory, but there are some historians who accept this and go one step further. They identify the basis of the New Testament Jesus in the story of Yeshu Ben Pandira. This legendary figure, who was branded a heretic by Jewish leaders, founded a Jewish sect that inspired and influenced the early Christians. These early Christians then adopted the story of Yeshu Ben Pandira and modified it to fit into a later historical period and their own eclectic religious beliefs. [cf. R. Avraham Ibn Daud, *Sefer Hakabbalah*, 53; *Sefer Hayuchasin*, *ibid.*; Avraham Korman, *Zeramim Vekitot Beyhadut*, pp. 354-364].

Some daring scholars have even identified the original Jesus or proto-Jesus, Yeshu Ben Pandira, as the Teacher of Righteousness who led the sect in Qumran [cf. Alvar Ellegård, *Jesus One Hundred Years Before Christ*; G.R.S. Mead, *Did Jesus Live 100 B.C.?*; G. A. Wells, *The Jesus Myth*].

While these theories are highly speculative and certainly not mainstream, researchers have amassed a large amount of evidence, from archaeological finds to medieval references, that point to either this or a similar conclusion.

## Conclusion

It seems clear by now that there is no consensus whether Jesus is mentioned at all in the Talmud. Most of the supposed "blasphemies" of Jesus and Mary in the Talmud do not refer to them at all. However, there can be no denying, and no rabbi would deny this, that the authors of the Talmud did not believe in Jesus' messiahship or his divinity. If you are looking for Christian fellowship then Jewish literature is not the place to look. However, there is no basis at all to state unequivocally that the Talmud calls Jesus a bastard or that Mary was a prostitute who had sex with many men. As has been shown, those passages definitely do not refer to Jesus.

Note: The wording of the texts was taken from Chisronot Hashas, originally printed in Koenigsberg in 1860 and reprinted in Tel Aviv in 1989. The text of the Tosefta was taken from the standard Vilna edition and slightly modified based on Saul Lieberman's *Tosefet Rishonim*.

Back to [home](#)

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