

# Jesus and Christ: A Lawyer's Commentary

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## Preface

The writing of this book, which started as an attempt to rescue the real teachings of Jesus from the accretions of church Christianity, was associated with a certain disappointment. Jesus seemed to me a rather attractive personality: a traveling teacher preaching goodness and freedom from anxiety and calling people to get close to God by decrying many legalisms of the Jewish oral tradition. The intended name of the book was *Jesus the Anti-Christian*.

Soon, however, a sad picture was revealed more and more vividly. Just as there were all kinds of animals in Noah's Ark, so the Gospels seemed to contain almost all known religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines. To make matters worse, the Gospels were far from harmonious with one another; in fact, they conflicted strongly.

So I replaced the initial title with *Jesus and Christ*, since I wanted to contrapose the different concepts behind these two names. My idea was to forget the differing accounts of the teachings of Jesus and demonstrate at least the chasm between the Gospel and the traditional church images of Christ. Alas, that turned out to be impossible too. Jesus could seem like a wonderful man, but he had hardly been one. Nor was he a bad man. Rather he was not a man at all, but an image.

The evidence seemed conclusive. Jesus became a collective image bearing no trace of a real figure, "real" in the terms in which the Gospels describe him.

When I took up this work I was not unacquainted with Christianity: I had read more than two hundred books already. As I wrote, I had to rework more and more of my first draft, until practically no idea remained of Jesus' historicity or of the Gospel teachings.

I realized that a negative result was nonetheless a result. Perhaps a demonstration of Christianity's complete invalidity would be useful to people who consider joining or leaving Christianity or identify it with panhuman morals.

I knew I would not convince academic readers. Those with minimal common sense abandoned dogmatic Christianity long ago while one more book will not persuade apologists acquainted with the critical literature. There was no need to engage atheists either; they hardly need another restatement of their beliefs. Eventually my prospective audience became people who treat Christianity more or less positively. Therefore, I felt free to choose the style of a "Neoplatonic" commentary, of which the academic

audience is not fond. I hope it will be helpful for readers who do not know the sources by heart.

While there are commentaries which elaborate on each pericope of the New Testament in a way acceptable to the Church, I attempted to present a different meaning of the texts. Certainly, a book by a single author, prepared in a limited time, cannot be as exhaustive as the works I oppose, which in many cases dwell not only on phrases but even on single words; my reading, however, gives the reader enough proof, so that further elaboration seems excessive.

The reader can judge the results for himself.

## Introduction

Although interest in the historical background of the New Testament has been present since the beginning of Christianity, it spread to common Christians and adherents of other religions only in the eighteenth century. Books were readily available then, and the churches finally lost their monopoly on shaping the views of mass audience.

An active search for historical roots for something essentially supernatural is somehow amusing. A gradual denial of the historicity of the NT took place over two centuries, a process some viewed with awe and others with horror. Few remained indifferent. Pillars of the Christian faith vanished one by one: the Virgin Birth, miracles, the abrogation of Jewish<sup>1</sup> doctrines. The demonstration of the commonalty of Jesus' teaching with Jewish sectarianism was perhaps the most painful development to many. Adding insult to injury, early Christianity was identified to a large degree with Gnosticism, its archenemy. Last to fall were "historical" proofs of the Gospel accounts, shown to be misrepresentations of earlier texts or plain forgeries.

Increased knowledge led to specialization, a familiar process. Scholars were unable to follow the thousands of published works of Gospel criticism. The laity could be acquainted with a few books at most, and if they did not sink in a sea of information, they were left with many questions: "Well, this aspect of Christianity does not pass scrutiny, but what about the other episodes? Is the doctrine as a whole credible?" No answers were readily available.

I felt the need of a new version of Celsus, a lawyer who wrote a devastating criticism of Christianity in the second century, literally pulling it to pieces. The Christian scholar Origen wrote a rebuttal which survives to our time, while Celsus' original does not.

The task of a complex analysis of the Christian religion required a proper technique. The traditional historical and stylistic methods would result in a colossal compilation of numerous works in many fields. I opted for a criticism of what Christianity accepts as its foundation, the Bible and the New Testament, based on logic and modern common sense. I approached the subject as a lawyer who deals with opponent's evidence:

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the book, I employ commonplace designation of Jews to people who should be properly called Judeans, adherents of Judaism in its various forms (including Samaritans and Idumaeans); Jews or Hebrews correctly relate to ethnical subgroup of Judeans.

respectfully, but specifically looking for weak spots and catching the witnesses by their words.

Liberal science does not allow unambiguous conclusions. The same facts can be explained differently. The reader will encounter probable readings in my book which may appear contradictory. This is not a book of answers but of doubts. I cannot show Christians what to believe, but I can demonstrate that what they believe is incorrect. As a good lawyer, I present them with evidence, essentially the analysis of witness' testimony; the conclusions are theirs. Accordingly, this book emphasizes the internal contradictions of the Gospels. I offer explanations of most of the discrepancies to arrive at a grand view of the NT's formation. The result may not be what the reader expects.

Another distinction of this book is its extensive scrutiny of Judean and Christian traditions. The Gospels, like the Talmud, are interpretations of the Jewish Bible. The relation between Judaism and Christianity requires a comparison of those works.

Rabbis usually considered it beneath their dignity to apply Talmudic knowledge to what they considered a Gentile superstition. Excellent English translations of the Talmud made it available for lay readers. Numerous commentaries also are helpful.

Thanks to archaeology, we now know much about when and under what circumstances the Bible was written, what accounts it is based upon, what in it is credible. No analysis of Christianity, a Bible-based religion, would be complete without that information.

One might detect the author's pro-Judaic attitude which arose from the book's structure, a constant comparison of Judaism and Christianity. The results do not favor the latter, though I am not sure they support Judaism either—a fascinating topic by itself but not an object of this work. The reader will see that inferences are based on common sense, without reference to the correctness of Judaism or Biblical historiography.

Judaism was the starting point of comparison only because Christianity made it such by asserting a system of postulates declaring its derivation from Judaism. Accordingly, to analyze the degree of agreement and disagreement of Christianity with Judaism is only natural.

My goal was to demonstrate the absence of anything supernatural or revealed in Christianity and to offer a convincing and coherent explanation of its origin and the formation of its sacred texts. I tried to answer dozens of the most important questions about Christianity. Did Jesus exist? If so, what did he teach? Where, how and why did Christianity first appear? What did it take from the Jews, what from the Gnostics, and what from the Gentiles? Did Jesus perform miracles? How was he born? How was received by Jews? Of what was he convicted? How was the Gospel portrait of Jesus formed? What layers are there in the Gospels?



What in them was added late? How did the figures of Peter and Mary Magdalene originate? How many apostles were there? Did Paul exist?

The book intends to leave the reader with no doubt on a single important issue of Christian doctrine. A line-by-line commentary on the Gospels and epistles should help the reader form a solid opinion of the historicity of Christianity. A discussion of Paul, the church's first theologian, and a demonstration of numerous debts to Greek mythology should lead to conclusions about Christian beliefs.

The only argument I leave to staunch Christians is a saying of Tertullian, "Believe it, because it's absurd!"<sup>i</sup>

## Matthew

Of all Christians known to us, Papias<sup>2</sup> was the first to identify Matthew as the author who “collected the oracles in Hebrew.”<sup>iii</sup> Papias did not imply that Matthew was a disciple of Jesus but rather someone interested in the topic. Although the “oracles” were commonly assumed to be sayings of Jesus reminiscent of the speculatively reconstructed Gospel source Q or the Sayings Gospel of Thomas, they could also refer to generic messianic prophecies. In any case, by the early second century, a popular text connected with Matthew existed, but Papias meant something very different from the modern version.

Though to dismiss Papias’ account as unreliable would be convenient, it agrees very well with what we know about the modern version of Matthew, enlarged by editing to three or four its original size. Initially it could have been the collection Papias mentions. Other sayings and their interpretation, prototexts or even edited pieces from Luke were inserted later. The large volume of falsification has nothing to do with either Jesus or the apostle Matthew.

Another argument that the original Gospel<sup>3</sup> was very different comes from the Talmud, which relates a story of a practical joke that the patriarch Gamaliel and his sister Imma (Mama) Shalom played on a Christian magistrate.<sup>iii</sup> They both bribed him, each obtaining an opposite judgment.

The judge is using a Gospel (probably, the Gospel of Matthew in Hebrew) very different from the one we know. He quotes from it: “From the day of your exile the Law of Moses was taken from you, and the Law of the Gospel was given” and “a son and daughter inherit equally.” Modern editions contain nothing of the kind.

Most interesting, however, is the following: “I looked at the end of the book and it says, ‘I have not come to do away with the Law of Moses or add to it.’” A similar text is found in Matthew 5:17. Thus from the second to the fourth century (when this book of Talmud could have been written), Matthew’s Gospel closed at the fifth chapter,<sup>4</sup> while the present version has twenty-eight chapters.

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<sup>2</sup> Bishop of Hieropolis (75–140 C.E.), famous for his work of collecting the rumors and witnesses’ testimonies of Jesus’ activity.

<sup>3</sup> Good news. The term is common in Judaism.

<sup>4</sup> Division into the chapters appeared much later, even though the original text was divided into topics. When this book mentions ancient Gospel chapters, it means those textual blocks, integrated by more or less common meaning, theme or logic.

The author of the modern Matthew's Gospel is unknown. Christian tradition ascribes the Gospel to the publican Levy-Matthew, but the only evidence is a legend reported by Origen. A disciple would relate more details about events of Jesus' mission. The Gospel's brevity is incomprehensible, even supposing that Matthew had no piety for a Jesus deified later. The author would certainly have given at least some attention to himself and his role.

A number of reiterated similar theses (5:30; 18:9; *etc*) characterize Matthew, which suggests composition from several versions.

Another peculiarity of Matthew is the tendency to explain the theses, often giving two formulations at once, the second explaining the first (6:25; 6:31; *etc.*), a trait ostensibly atypical of Jesus, who spoke in parables. This type of multilayered explanation might be attributed to successive editors. Matthew inclines to a literal elucidation of theses to which Thomas and Luke clearly attach mystical sense. In that, he paved a road that the church later used intensively.

Another important difference distinguishes Matthew from Thomas/Luke: a normative Judean, Matthew did not believe in a mystical resurrection to the new life "here and now." What Thomas promised to the initiated now, Matthew relegated to the afterlife.

Judean Matthew naturally became the choice of Christian editors for anti-Judean insertions. The most doubtful accounts of Jesus' birth, genealogy, and trial are attributed to him. Matthew's authorship was thought to attach credibility to those stories.

Matthew describes a Jewish preacher addressing Jews only. His Jesus preaches observance of the Law. There is no hint of the essentially pagan apocalyptic preacher depicted by John, the few apocalyptic theses in Matthew being probably late insertions. Jesus is rather an earthly man who knows fear, doubt, and anguish. He teaches no new faith and suggests no salvation through faith in himself; he urges obedience to the Law.

Jewish Christians limited their teaching to the sect's members. Matthew did not intend to extend Christianity to the Gentiles; rather he thought their preliminary conversion to Judaism necessary. Christianity for him was the correct form of Judaism with reverence for a teacher and wonderworker named Jesus.

The Ebionites<sup>5</sup> had a version of Matthew's Gospel, which differed substantially from the one in the modern canon. For example, it lacked a

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The concept of chapters existed at that time. The Mishnah, though recorded as a block of text, is divided into chapters and pericopes by the sense.

<sup>5</sup> A proto-Christian Jewish sect whose members revered Jesus as a teacher.

description of Jesus' birth. Epiphanius, the early Church authority, writes that the Ebionites distorted Matthew, but the reverse is more plausible. Otherwise, why did two Judean sects—Matthew's and the Ebionites—use widely different versions of the same Gospel?

Matthew's own Gospel mentions his calling only at 9:9, much after the other apostles. Thus, Matthew could not have heard Jesus' principal sermons as they are reported in the Gospel, and he could not know the circumstances of Jesus' baptism. That Jesus told him the intimate details of his birth is doubtful. Even if Matthew wrote the Gospel, he reports hearsay, inadmissible in both modern and ancient Jewish courts and useless to substantiate a theology.

Matthew's Gospel criticizes the Pharisees, even while praising their righteousness and knowledge of the Law. The intent is to depict the Pharisees as good Jews but allow that Christians are better. Matthew probably introduced some of the critical pericopes, while others came still later. That is one of the reasons for dating Matthew no earlier than the last third of the first century, when the destruction of the temple made the temple rites of the dominant Sadducees become obsolete and transferred power to the Pharisees.

1:7 "Abijah the father of Asah."

The late correction was made to agree with the Jewish scriptures. Early manuscripts erroneously read "Abijah the father of Asaph." The author mixed up unfamiliar Jewish names.

1:10 "Manaseh the father of Amon."

A late correction. Early manuscripts<sup>6</sup> erroneously read "Amos."

1:11 "Josiah the father of Jechoniah."

1Chron3:15 Sons of Josiah: Johanan, Joakim, Zedekia, Shallum. Jechoniah was the son of Joakim, not of Josiah.

1:17 "So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah<sup>7</sup>, fourteen generations."

The genealogy is forced: as few as fourteen generations separate the Babylonian exile (*ca.* 587 B.C.E.) from Jesus, about forty years a

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<sup>6</sup> Unless specifically noted, the references to divergent manuscripts depend on the NRSV Bible.

<sup>7</sup> Gr. *anointed one*, a literal translation of Heb. *Mashiah*, Messiah. In both languages at that time the word lacked its modern supernatural connotation.

generation, the standard biblical length. People then married, however, between thirteen and sixteen, so there must have been about thirty generations. The Talmud offers a different calculation. Rabbi Eliezer Ben Azariah, a contemporary of Rabbi Gamaliel, is listed as a descendent of Ezra in tenth generation<sup>iv</sup>, which would mean only ten generations from the return from Babylon to the middle of the first century C.E. Here we have either gross inaccuracy or allegory.

Probably after the genealogy in Chronicles broke off, many more generations followed, but the writer either did not notice or was too lazy to invent the names. Most likely, he divided the line intentionally into fourteen generations each to relate Jesus to the major events of Jewish history.

1:18 “Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.”

Elsewhere the record states they were not only engaged but also lived together. They traveled together to Bethlehem in Luke. How could they have had no intimate relations in that situation? How could Joseph know about Mary's pregnancy before the wedding, regardless of the engagement? Hardly she would tell him, and risk stoning. If he learned after the wedding, how could Mary remain a virgin? InfJam<sup>8</sup> tries to solve the problem by saying Joseph was not Mary's husband but her guardian.

The account of the virgin birth is a mistake. John reflects the original Gnostic view: “[All those] who were born, not of blood . . . but of God.”<sup>v</sup> John speaks of the initiation of many to a resurrection to a new life in the spirit, freed from the sins of flesh. Ignorant pagans likely took that language to mean a familiar virgin birth by an earthly woman through divine intervention. Thus it was interpolated in Matthew. Notably, John and Mark, both knowledgeable about Gnostic rites, lack the virgin-birth account.

The Holy Spirit, a hypostasis in Christianity, is God's breath: the same that brought Adam to life. In that sense, every human birth is due to the Spirit.

1:19 “Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly.”

What is righteousness here? If Joseph had obeyed the Law, he would have exposed Mary as a fallen woman, although it seems that norm was not enforced at the time<sup>vi</sup>. If Joseph wanted to help Mary, he would not have turned her out into the streets, condemning her to inevitable beggary. If he divorced her to avoid her disgrace, he would have to pay her a considerable sum for a common person under the marriage contract, the *ktubah*. He could not just sent her back to parents without disgracing her. Further, in

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<sup>8</sup> Infancy Gospel of James.

those days marrying a pregnant woman as Joseph did was forbidden: “A man shall not marry a pregnant widow or divorced woman before the child is born.”<sup>vii</sup> And how could Joseph not expose her or how could he “dismiss her quietly” if Mary gave birth to a child without a husband?

A possibility is that *righteous man* means Joseph was an Essene. The Essenes rejected much of the Law and perhaps the rule against exposing adultery too. They adopted children to their communities. That supposition transforms Joseph into an adoptive father, physically unrelated to Mary, and explains his absence from Jesus’ life after Jesus left the Essenes.

1:20–23 “An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said: ‘Joseph . . . name him Jesus . . .’ All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ‘Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call him Emmanuel.’”

The reference to prophecy seems to have been added later to substantiate the already formed tradition of virgin birth. Otherwise, why did Joseph give the name Jesus—God is salvation—to the child the prophecy says was to be named Emmanuel—God with us?

Curiously, the names Joshua and Emmanu-El contain two different designations of God: the tetragrammaton and Elokim (usually translated as Lord). As is now known, those names correspond to divergent scribal traditions, possibly those of Judea and Israel, recorded in the J and E streams in the Pentateuch. Those two and other streams converge in the modern Bible. Ancient theologians may have been unaware of that, but divinely inspired Joseph should not have made such an error.

“Then Isaiah said: ‘Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the *young woman* is with child, and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel . . . By the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted.’”<sup>viii</sup>

The writer follows the Septuagint: *virgin*. The Hebrew original is “young woman,” and the narrative was inserted when Matthew’s Gospel moved beyond an exclusively Jewish sect.

A Jewish translator of the Septuagint could hardly imagine the concept of virgin birth. Christians could think of it, however, inspired by popular pagan myths of divine conception, and could later interpolate theological “proof” in the Septuagint.

The “young woman” of Is7 is possibly a figure of Judea<sup>9</sup> and the name Emmanu-El is a figure of a righteous man or Jews returning to righteousness.

“Is with child”: present tense. Isaiah urged King Ahaz to fight with confidence, a prophecy designed to persuade Ahaz which had to come true immediately, not in the indefinite future. In this case, however, rabbinic interpretation opted for later fulfillment.

“By the time he knows how to . . . chose the good.” Luke says Jesus preached in the Temple (already chosed the good) from childhood, which is to say Israel’s enemies were already defeated.

“The land . . . will be deserted.” Syria and Ephraim stopped warring with Judea long before Jesus was born. The Roman Empire and the Greek states continued to exist after Jesus’ birth.

Isaiah further describes the infant’s life: “He shall eat curds and honey.” Other texts report that Jesus’ family was not wealthy.

1:25 “Joseph named him Jesus.”

The author, otherwise unacquainted with Judaic customs, probably chanced onto this legal phrase. That Joseph adopted Jesus legally by giving him a name is hardly indicated. In fact, if Joseph and Mary were officially married, no legal adoption procedures were needed. If the procedure was intended to reassure Joseph privately, how could Matthew (or Jesus, for that matter) know about it? A story of the adoption would be required by Jewish Christians, however, to establish Jesus’ Davidic descent through Joseph if he was not Jesus’ biological father.

2:1 “In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea . . . .”

Among several royal figures named Herod, only one was a king, Herod I the Great, but Luke’s chronology excludes the possibility of Jesus’ birth during his reign. Herod Antipas, successor of Herod I, was not king but tetrarch<sup>10</sup> in Galilee. In response to his request to make him king, the Romans exiled him to Spain.

“Magi came from the East.”

To mention the sages’ geographical home would make no sense to Jews, let alone Gentiles whose knowledge of scriptures was likely not profound. Something else is strange: knowing the Judean sacred texts and the stars so well to recognize a messiah, why did the magi not know where the messiah was to be born? Any Judean knew.

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<sup>9</sup> I commonly refer to the territory of Jewish settlement coinciding with Herod the Great’s kingdom as Judea.

<sup>10</sup> Ruler of some part of the state’s territory.

Just who came to Herod is not clear. The Greek *magi* means *magicians* more than *sages*.<sup>11</sup> No Judean acquainted with Lev20:27—"Man or woman . . . the magician should be committed to death"—would have written that. Confusion could arise from the fact that the Greeks called the Persian magicians, like any other sect with meaningful teachings, a philosophical school, which led the author to consider them not sorcerers but wise men. The Greeks respected every kind of knowledge. Plutarch sympathetically cites Cyrus the Persian, who boasted himself a better philosopher and magician than his brother Artaxerxes. (He could also drink more wine.)

Gentiles apparently related Jewish magicians to the Magi.<sup>ix</sup>

2:2 "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising."

The magi call Jesus "king of the Jews," but why would a foreigner of such limited significance interest them? The text may be a vestige of old tradition when Matthew's Gospel was intended for Judean sectarians only. For them Jesus was not the savior of all nations.

Gentile sages would have nothing to be happy about, since the birth of the messiah would bring devastation to their lands.

Often cited in support is the prophecy, "A star will rise from Jacob and a scepter will rise from Israel; it will break the foreheads of Moab and the cheekbones of Sheth. Edom will become a possession."<sup>x</sup> *Star* denotes a leader, not a celestial object (otherwise the celestial phenomenon *scepter* would also need explanation). Further, the prophecy is of a military leader, not of the pacifist Jesus. At any rate, the star was a popular metaphor in Judaism. The leader of the 132–135 C.E. rebellion took the nickname Bar Kochba, *son of a star*. That may be why of all the Gospels, the Jewish Matthew was chosen to bear the "star" episode. Possibly some vague form of the story was present in proto-Matthew,<sup>12</sup> since the author could not expect the Jews to accept someone not associated with a star as Messiah. Later Gentile scribes could shape the episode into the full-blown story of the magi, which was standard among neighboring peoples.

Is60:3 is claimed as another biblical substantiation "Nations shall come to your light." Here light is a metaphor of the presence of God, not a description of the star. Isaiah speaks again of military victory: "Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you . . . The wealth of the nations shall come to you. A multitude of camels . . .

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<sup>11</sup> The magi story perhaps wasn't commonly accepted. For example, painting of de Pitati in Ca' Rezzonico, 15–16<sup>th</sup> century, presents wizards as women.

<sup>12</sup> The "first edition" of Matthew, much shorter than the current version.



shall bring gold and frankincense.” *Arise* has the feminine object, so refers to the Holy Land and cannot refer to Jesus.

*War*6:5:3<sup>13</sup> “Over the town [Jerusalem] there appeared a star in the form of a sword, and a comet had been seen for the whole year.” There is little probability that the Matthean star or comet is the one Josephus says stood above Jerusalem a long time before the war of 66—70 C.E. Jesus could have been executed during the war but not born immediately before it. Unlike Luke or his editors, Matthew generally shows no acquaintance with Josephus, and the event as described is impossible, thus Matthew could not have seen it.

Nothing in Judaism could have brought the magi to Bethlehem. In pagan cults, however, celestial phenomena regularly accompany the birth and death of godmen, which seems natural since Gentiles thought the gods inhabited the sky and might mark such important events just so.

The real prototype of the event could be the explosion of a supernova. All the bright stars were long known; there was nothing new among them. The supernova nearest in time, however, appeared only in 1054 C.E.

Many other explanations of the episode were attempted. For example, “the rising of the star” meant the passage of one of the stars, supposedly Sirius, or one of the bright planets in a particular constellation. Such loose structure allows a suitable astrological map for practically any date.

Matthew’s episode might originate in the Judaic legend of Abraham’s birth. King Nimrod, an astrologer, read about the event in the stars and decided to kill all newborn males. Abraham’s mother escaped and bore him in a cave illuminated by divine light, just as was told of Jesus’ birth.

The appearance of a special star at a savior’s birth is present in many cultures unrelated to Matthew. The source of this episode may be the description of Adonis’ festival in Antioch and the cry, “The star of salvation has risen over the East”. The star is probably bright Venus—but the myth appeared long before Matthew’s Gospel.

One of the oldest extant epics, the Sumerian *Gilgamesh*, tells how a star descended onto the hero or demigod Gilgamesh. We may speculate about the essence of that star, so heavy that the notoriously strong Gilgamesh could not pick it up. Thus, Temple adduces a number of inconspicuous mentions in Berossus’<sup>14</sup> manuscript which possibly

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<sup>13</sup> The Judean War by Flavius Josephus.

<sup>14</sup> A priest who wrote the partially extant Sumerian history.

identify the egg-shape illuminated object in which Oannes<sup>15</sup> or his companions descended from the sky as a star. The same may be derived also from the Gilgamesh epic: the fallen star marked Gilgamesh as one of the host of demigods. The star (the egg-shaped object?) was the initial attribute of the host.

The antiquity of the star myth is no proof of Jesus' divinity but only that early Christians adopted a well-known myth for their hero.

2:3 "King Herod . . . was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him."

The population of Jerusalem would have rejoiced at the advent of the messiah. The falsifier's style here differs obviously from Matthew's. Detached from the events by time and distance, the writer regards the population of Jerusalem and the king as one whole. Actually, citizens of Jerusalem were likely constrained in their attitude toward Herod, an Edomite only recently converted to Judaism. Herod was neither of Davidic descent nor of Hasmonean origin, and even Josephus saw him askance. Curiously, the editor thinks of Judea as Jerusalem only.

Supposing Jesus' life began so rich in astonishing events, why did he not become well known in Judea at once? Why did he have no problems to return after the escape to Egypt? The Romans would be more suspicious about the appearance of the reputed messiah, a military chieftain, than would Herod the Great. That a messiah whose birth called forth so many telling events was not recognized looks strange.

2:4-6 ". . . where the Messiah was to be born? They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it was written by the prophet: "And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel."'"

That Herod asks a question whose answer requires a minimal knowledge of messianic Judaism is bizarre.

Mic5:2-4 "But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from old, from ancient days . . . and they shall live secure."

Here we have a common NT logical error. Prophecies do not provide exact circumstances, which enables Christians to apply the prophecies to the events of Jesus' life. In fact, the events Micah mentions were not exceptional and recurred throughout the centuries. Christians do not provide evidence that the prophecies meant Jesus specifically. In this case, the

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<sup>15</sup> Sumerians credited Oannes with bringing their civilization. In later myths, it might be understood as new religious teaching. They considered him amphibious demigod.

messiah must come from Ephrathah. If a messiah comes, he will be from Ephrathah. It does not follow that everyone born in Ephrathah is the messiah. The prophecy may be applied to Jesus only if we presuppose he is the messiah. The prophecy does not prove that Jesus is the messiah.

2:7 “Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared.”

Did no one but the magi notice the star?

2:8–9 Herod sends the magi to Bethlehem to find the messiah and “. . . there, ahead of them went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was.”

If the magi knew about Bethlehem from the prophecies, they need no guidance. That means the star had to stop (an impossibility) over a particular house. With the level of astronomical knowledge then, to distinguish the position of a celestial body seen from Jerusalem or nearby Bethlehem was impossible. The report is more a fantasy than a trace of an earlier mention of a more distant Bethlehem in Galilee, not Judea. Even then, astronomical observations were hardly different in the two places.

How could the star go ahead of the magi prior to their setting out for Bethlehem if at 2:7 Herod did not know the time of its appearance, i.e., the star had already disappeared?

2:11 “They offered him [Jesus] gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.”

Judean tradition often mentions frankincense specifically as a popular offering to idols, an odd gift to Jesus.

2:12 “And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.”

If Herod was in Jerusalem, the magi could hardly choose a different way. Bethlehem–Ephrathah is several miles from Jerusalem. The magi would have to sail across the Dead Sea or go round it to the south. Besides, if they went through Jerusalem, the magi did not have to visit Herod. The magi were not supposed to go back by the same road because of a common pagan superstition, perhaps to deceive evil forces hunting the object of their pilgrimage, an aim wrongly attributed to Herod.

2:13 “An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph . . . and said, ‘. . . flee to Egypt . . . for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.’”

If Herod disbelieved the messianic prophecies, he would not be interested in Jesus. If he believed the magi, he would never risk harming Jesus. There is the slight probability that Herod himself disbelieved the prophecies but was afraid others would believe: Jesus could not prove his messianic mission but would not be trusted.

Luke lacks the episode of Herod's persecution and the flight into Egypt. He says that Jesus' family lived peacefully in Nazareth and regularly visited Jerusalem on holidays. At any rate, Jesus was born after Herod the Great's death in Luke's account.

Although the escape account appears only in Matthew, Epiphanius mentions "other evangelists" who assert that Jesus escaped from Herod to Egypt, then returned to Nazareth, was baptized, and lived in the desert.<sup>xi</sup>

Talmud connects Jesus' flight to Egypt with the persecution of Pharisees by King Alexander Janneus.<sup>xii</sup> In the Talmudic account, Jesus was a disciple of prominent Pharisee in the early first century B.C.E.

2:15 "This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, 'Out of Egypt I have called my son.'"

The past tense of *call* could not be used to denote future events in a text written five hundred years before Jesus was born.

Hos 11:1–2 "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. The more I called them, the more they went from me." This passage refers to Israel's exodus from Egypt, not to Jesus. Jesus' mission started with his birth, before Joseph's family ran for Egypt. Thus, Jesus was called from Bethlehem, not from Egypt.

2:16 "Herod . . . sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men."

Strange conduct on the part of the wise magi: why did they go to Herod and tell him if they knew his response beforehand? InfJam21 avoids the problem of the well-meaning magi effectively inciting murderous Herod: he learned about their visit from the rumors they caused. Why were children two years and younger killed if the magi told Herod Jesus was born just a few days before? Or did Herod wait two years for the magi to return a distance of a few miles from Bethlehem? Perhaps the author was not sure how far Bethlehem was from Jerusalem and reserved two years for the journey. No slaughter of children during Herod's time is reported elsewhere. It would have been a mass action. Considering the birth rate at that time, most families had two or three children younger than two years. The perfectionist Josephus who disliked Herod would never miss such an event among Herod's copious wrongdoings. The slaughter of the innocents is one of many fantasies by the NT scribes, inspired probably by a similar story about Moses' birth, sufficiently popular not to require much erudition on the part of a Gentile scribe.

2:17–18 "Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah, 'A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children.'"

But Jer31:15 describes the Babylonian exile and not the messiah's birth. Jer30:24—the last days. Jer31:8—return from the North (some scholars consider it a description of present-day Israel) after returning from Babylon. Jer 31:16 “They shall come back from the land of the enemy”—an evident reference to return from slavery, not the slaughter of the innocents by King Herod.

2:19–22 “When Herod died . . . [Joseph] went to the land of Israel . . . But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee.”

There is an interesting correlation with Josephus: Herod changed his will just before his death, leaving his elder son Archelaus ethnarch of Judea.<sup>xiii</sup> The news appeared after Herod's death and reached Egypt with some delay, a surprise for Joseph when he came to Judea. Josephus' account suspiciously confirms Joseph's apprehension, noting that the population hated Archelaus, but we can also imagine a local scribe retroactively “saving” the messiah from the loathed ruler.

Herod Antipas, also the son of Herod the Great, was tetrarch of Galilee. Joseph, rearing the messiah, a rival for the ruler, no doubt feared him as well as Archelaus. Something is obviously wrong in the account. Possibly, the interpolator carelessly correlated his Herodian story with Jesus' known location in Galilee.

2:23 Joseph “made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled, ‘He will be called a Nazorean.’”

The word *Nazorean* could mean both Judean monk (literally, “separated”), and someone from the town of Nazareth. The interpolator is likely to have missed this difference in translation.

The Gospels say nothing about Jesus' being a monk. Jesus, with his lax observance of the Law, consumption of wine, and visiting unclean places, could hardly be called such.

The common reference is out of place here. “There was a certain man of Zorah, of the tribe of the Danites . . . His wife was barren . . . And the angel of the Lord appeared to the woman and said to her, ‘You shall conceive and bear a son . . . No razor is to come on his head, for the boy shall be a Nazirite [Nazorean] to God from birth. It is he who shall begin to deliver Israel from the hand of the Philistines.’”<sup>xiv</sup> The mention of a “barren wife” clearly makes birth by a virgin impossible, and the child here is not divine. The Gospel's text seems to refer originally not to Jesus, but to John the Baptist, who was a *Nazirite*. John's birth account also corresponds to this prophecy.

Another common reference is to Is11: “A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse . . . . The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him . . . . The wolf shall live with the lamb . . . . They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain . . . and will assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth . . . . Together they shall plunder the people of the east. They shall put forth their hand against Edom and Moab.” Neither Nazarene nor Nazorean but a military messiah is meant, not Jesus.

3:2 “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

John is important for Christianity only if he truly prophesied and not simply urged the Jews to repent. But if he has a divine revelation, how could he be unaware that Jesus’ advent would be premature, end in execution, and fail to bring on the kingdom of heaven?

3:3 “The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.”

Is40:3–6 “A voice cries out, ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level . . . . Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together . . . .’ A voice says, ‘Cry out!’ And I said, ‘What shall I cry?’”

The voice tells Isaiah what he must do and cry to the people. The voice tells what is to be done in the wilderness. The writer misconstrues “voice crying out in the wilderness,” identifying the voice with John the Baptist, who was preaching in the desert. Isaiah means the voice of God, whose voice did not cry in the wilderness but rather told Isaiah to go and work there. To minimize the difference, “he” replaces “our Lord,” ascribing the prophecy to Jesus. The Synoptic Gospelers risk calling Jesus Lord, but not God.

“Make his paths straight.” God’s paths, not Jesus.’ The “straight paths” metaphor refers to the perfection of souls and is at variance with Jesus’ advent to the spiritually still unprepared Jews, even more so if his advent is for redeeming or preparation, a function commonly ascribed to his forerunner, John.

The wilderness and straight paths are allegories. The wilderness is Judean society without true and deep reverence for God. Straightening the way means removing the obstacles to turning the Jews to God (idols, for instance) and preparing them for his advent.

Leveling all the ground means that all Jews must become equally devoted, giving rise to the later rabbinical interpretation that the messiah would not come until all Jews were equally good or bad.

The narrator tries to connect the place outside Jerusalem where John preached and “the wilderness” of Isaiah. The analogy is false: the area around the Jordan was populated and hardly wilderness.

The translation obscures the prophecy, replacing the tetragrammaton<sup>16</sup> which cannot refer to Jesus with *Lord*. John was preparing the people to meet not Jesus, but God.

Another quotation apologists relate to the Baptist is Is40:2: “Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she had served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins.”

There were no noticeable calamities in Judea in Jesus’ time, and the Jews did not “receive double” for their sins. The idea that Israel’s sins were fully paid seems curious just before the principal sin, the crucifixion of Jesus.

“Her penalty is paid.” New sins or punishments—the crucifixion of Jesus, the destruction of Jerusalem—are not expected. The authors of this text of the Gospel thought that the messianic age commenced with John’s coming. This meaning was lost when the emphasis of the episode was switched to Jesus.

3:4 “Now John wore clothing of camel’s hair . . . and his food was locusts and wild honey.”

We do not know whether Jews wore such clothes. The camel was an unclean animal, at least for food, though the Jews used camels extensively. The Talmud establishes the rules for feeding camels,<sup>xv</sup> and Is60 mentions camels bringing gifts to Judea. However, we do not know how rigid was John’s observance.

The mention of honey harks back to Is7: the child born by virgin would eat “curds and honey.” Christians related that prophecy to Jesus, and John’s diet was changed to the odd and rare locusts.

At 11:2, we learn that John had disciples. Perhaps they also ate wild honey; perhaps John ate something more tolerable. Having disciples meant being wealthy as a rule, because the teacher commonly kept them at his own expense.

John could hardly eat locusts only, which were a Jewish delicacy and usually scarce. Jews in those days would not have pitied someone on a locust diet. That Greeks would have found it disgusting makes Gentile

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<sup>16</sup> The proper name of God of [?] spelled with four consonants and no vowels. Egyptian priests, on the contrary, pronounced only the vowels of the sacred name.

authorship possible. John was close to Essenes who limited the consumption of locusts.

The Torah prohibits eating any winged insects. Why locusts were permitted is not clear. Perhaps they were not considered insects. There are exceptions for a number of winged insects,<sup>xvi</sup> despite Deut 14:19, "And all winged insects are not clean." The statements are not contradictory, since the first deals with a wide class of creatures, not specifically insects. Further, we do not know to what extent John was orthodox in observing the Law. Wild honey was thought to have the taste of manna,<sup>xvii</sup> also a delicacy.

The Christians evidently recognized these problems, and in the Slavonic Josephus, the Baptist wears bull hides and eats reeds, roots, and wild fruits. The Slavonic text perhaps preserved the facts, while the late Christian editor of Matthew forced the matter, likening John's clothes to those worn by hermits and changing his diet from simple to disgusting to prove his asceticism.

3:5-6 "Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins."

The bank of the Jordan was not heavily populated in Judea, though it was definitely not a wilderness. Jerusalem is a considerable distance from the Jordan, though the reference might be to a closer tributary.

The evangelists report that Herod Antipas executed John, but John had to baptize on the bank of the Jordan or elsewhere in Galilee in order to come under Antipas' jurisdiction, not near Jerusalem. Luke 3:3 says John roamed the whole vicinity of the river.

3:9 John addressed the Sadducees and the Pharisees: "Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham.'"

This may be a negation of the doctrine of merits, according to which the acts of the righteous atone for the sins of the present generation. Such a position would be natural for an austere sect like the Essenes, for instance. The Sadducees who resisted religious innovations could also reject the ancestral merits. Yet the idea is farfetched, since taking pride in one's ancestors is different from claiming their merits. Also, God's choice is presumably neither random nor absolutely incomprehensible, and Jews earned merit in each generation.

Probably the idea came from a Gentile writer striving to level the Jews' advantage and introduced into the profoundly Jewish Matthew by a later hand.



3:11 "One who is more powerful than I is coming after me . . . . He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."

Christianity supposes that John meant Jesus, but John did not say Jesus' name. John could not be afraid to pronounce the name, since the name *Jesus* bears no messianic connotation. If John believed in Jesus' divinity, he would hardly have worried that people might harm him.

Even the Gospels<sup>xviii</sup> and the Acts<sup>xix</sup> fantasize about receiving the spirit only by adherents of Jesus. Surely John meant someone who would baptize everyone, clearly speaking of God.

3:12 "His winnowing fork is in his hand and . . . he will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

Jesus had not separated people by judgment yet, another reason to doubt John was speaking about him. The text is clearly sectarian, condemning members of other factions, unlike Jesus who came to save all.

Lk22:31–32 Jesus to Peter, "Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail."

Matthew says Jesus was sifting; Luke, that Satan sifted. Since Jesus urged "judge not" and forgiveness, Luke's text appears more reasonable.

The metaphor (wheat and chaff, grain and tare) was standard, but open to different readings. Thus in the Talmud, "The wheat stalk and ear were arguing, which was more important. When the harvest came, the straw was burnt and the grain remained. The same is the argument between Israel and the Gentiles, who are more important. When Judgment Day comes, Israel will be saved, while the Gentiles will be punished."<sup>xx</sup>

3:14–15 "John would have prevented him, saying, 'Do you come to me?' But Jesus answered him, 'Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.'"

Matthew's vague reference to "all righteousness" attempts to explain the baptism for repentance of the sinless Jesus, especially since Jesus came to John deliberately. In Ebionites<sup>4</sup>, events develop more naturally. When John sees Jesus' glory, he asks Jesus to baptize him. Jesus answers, "It is all right. Everything was to be fulfilled in this way." Jesus does not urge John to perform something incomprehensible, as he does in Matthew, but explains things to reassure him. *Ebionites* is unlikely to present events accurately though: John continues baptizing and does not follow Jesus immediately as John would follow the messiah whom he expected.

In that text, John recognizes Jesus only when a halo appeared after his baptism. His failure to recognize Jesus at once would scandalize Christians: ostensibly, John prophesied about coming Jesus.

Jn1:29 bypasses the problem of Jesus' baptism: "The next day he [the Baptist] saw Jesus coming to him."

3:16 "And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him."

In Matthew, Jesus saw the sign. If everyone around Jesus saw it, he would have become famous immediately. If only Jesus saw the picture, the story is unverifiable.

Jn1:32 asserts that specifically John the Baptist saw the spirit. Lk3:21 does not limit the circle of those who saw the spirit. In Mk 1:10, the product of Gnostics, only Jesus saw the spirit, a reading which agrees with the Gnostic view of baptism as an act of acquiring personal experience.

How does one distinguish the spirit abiding in a dove from a common bird? The issue is of importance, because a dove lighting on a person was considered a sign.<sup>xxi</sup>

Ebi4 "Jesus came and was baptized by John. When he came out of the water, the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit came down as a dove and entered Him. Also there was a voice from heaven, 'You are my chosen Son . . . And again, 'Today I have become your Father.'"

The importance of that passage cannot be overestimated. The Ebionites were Judaic Christians using the Matthew proto-Gospel. Probably few were closer to the actual Jesus than they. Importantly, the Ebionites were not Gnostics, but they also believed that anyone who undergoes initiation and acquires the spirit becomes the Son of God.<sup>17</sup> Jesus was not a god-man. He was not divinely conceived and became the Son of God only after baptism. He was a common mortal, but he acquired the spirit and became divine, as any other may do.

Jesus heard a voice from heaven, the *Bath Kol*,<sup>18</sup> often mentioned in the Talmud, heard by many others and under less significant circumstances. The Jews represented the voice as a dove. Christianity later transformed the *Bath Kol* dove into an incarnation of the spirit.

Matt4 Jesus' temptation by the devil.

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<sup>17</sup> Job 1:6 "One day the sons of God faced the Lord, and Satan came among them." Jesus calls himself the Son of God, but so is Satan, too.

<sup>18</sup> *Daughter of the voice*, a technical term referring to hearing a reflection of God's voice. No one can hear his voice directly.

The analogy is with the serpent's temptation of Adam through Eve. Christians identified the serpent as the devil<sup>19</sup>. Possibly this episode appeared in process of harmonizing synoptics with Paul (who introduced the concept of Jesus as a "second Adam").

In the Jewish tradition, Satan tempted Adam on God's commission or at least with God's knowledge. Interestingly, the serpent was a symbol of wisdom, perhaps of Wisdom as a theological concept. He offered a taste from the tree of knowledge. Thus, the Biblical story possibly reflects not temptation by the devil but learning with the assistance of Wisdom. Such a reading deals better with the fundamental impossibility of Satan acting against the will of God. Angels lack free will, though Satan also has diabolic features in Jewish mythology.

It makes sense if an ordinary man is tempted. It is strange when Jesus incarnate is tempted by angelic Satan, when either should know both questions and answers beforehand. The same may be said about Lk3:13: the devil "has left him until an opportune time." The devil should have known that Jesus would never fall to temptation.

In Judaism, the devil became identified with Sitra Ahara, evil inclination.<sup>xxii</sup> "God has created evil inclination to test man."<sup>xxiii</sup> But it did not make sense to test Jesus if he was the divine essence without evil. The temptation episode was invented by the scribe when Christians did not yet regard Jesus as God's embodiment.

ScJam4:3<sup>20</sup> "If you fulfill the will of your Father . . . he will give you temptation by Satan *as a part of his gift*. But if . . . you will execute his will, I tell you, that he will love you, and will make you equal to me . . . by his Providence, through your own choice."

Heb4 Jesus is tempted not by devil, but by the holy spirit.

In Gnosticism, temptation was a joyful experience. There must have been many narratives of the temptations of Jesus demonstrating how special he was. Church Christians understood them literally. Of course, the account is sheer fantasy, since there was no one to hear the dialogue.

Jesus, like the Essenes, could have believed that the holy spirit had abandoned the temple and lived in the wilderness. He went there to search for the spirit, or believing that he acquired the spirit in baptism, Jesus went where the spirit was believed to be. The Christians, unfamiliar with Essene thought, decided that he was tempted there. Habitation of demons in wilderness is a conventional belief of eastern cults and among ancient Jews.

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<sup>19</sup> Genesis, compares the serpent to other earthly creatures, which seems to preclude any implication of supernatural nature, like devil.

<sup>20</sup> The Secret Book of James.

Jesus' answers to the devil's proposals, borrowed from the Torah, are wrenched from context. Jesus uses the Bible's words as formal arguments deprived of context or content.

Early Christians saw a world full of demons, a legacy of pagan cults merging with monotheism. The Gentile Christians believed in numerous manifestations of the spirit (*daimonia*), but only Jesus was divine and good. The rest were demons with negative connotation. To reconcile their existence with monotheism is a problem.

Unlike Christianity, Judaism does not make other gods the devil's servants. Azazel is one among several special cases.

Maimonides explains Deut 32:17: "They offered sacrifices to spirits, not to God, to idols, which they had never known." Jews believed that the spirits lived in the wilderness but not in towns. After leaving Egypt, they gathered in the desert around the blood of killed animals expecting spirits to come. They just wanted to communicate with imaginary spirits, not bow to them. The usual translation as *demons* instead of *spirits* is misleading.

Temptation by the devil is rare in Judaism, where God is one and almighty: the temptation of Eve by the serpent, the temptation of Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, David's temptation to take a census of the Israelites.<sup>xxiv</sup> (In 2Sam 24:1, God tells David to conduct the census.) Maimonides says<sup>xxv</sup> that God laughs at the devil's attempts.

Christianity borrowed the concept of the devil as a being opposed to God from sectarian Judaism or Gnosticism. The former attached great value to the prophets' descriptions of the devil. The Essenes say he leads the evil forces in the last battle. Note that all those references appeared after the fifth century B.C.E. and bear the vivid impress of Persian belief. In mainstream Judaism, however, the devil became a subordinate figure, *ha-satan*, the accuser,<sup>xxvi</sup> acting on earth only with God's approval (as in Job). Job uses mythological images and cannot prove theological doctrines. For example, Job28:22 calls death a separate character. The Talmud calls Job a parable, not a historic episode. The devil had no special influence on temporal affairs and is mentioned just a few times in the Bible.

Jewish tradition rarely mentions the devil, and usually speaks of evil inclination (*ha-yetzer ha-ra*) which lives in man and tempts him. The distinctions are significant: *yetzer*, not an external force like the devil, constantly abides in man. Malicious and kind intentions act simultaneously, and man deliberately chooses between them. Temptation is an honorable test,<sup>xxvii</sup> and even evil inclination, which appeared at Creation, is as good as the rest of creation. We cannot say that the Jews prized evil inclination. Zohar1:128 voices hope for its abatement in the messianic era. Still, fear of temptation is a sign of weakness, particularly weakness of belief.

*Yetzer* could be an adaptation from dualism to Jewish monotheism. Most constructions of philosophy and logic explain all phenomena as somewhere between two extremes. People cannot imagine a single essence evincing different qualities, e.g., good and evil, simultaneously. To the superficial observer, such a being seems a manifestation of dualism.

4:1 "Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil."

After the spirit descended on Jesus at his baptism, was his capacity to resist temptation still in doubt? The spirit curiously cooperates with the devil to tempt Jesus.

4:2 "He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished."

This story is probably modeled on Ex34:28. Moses ate nothing for forty days before receiving the Torah from God. The parallel is intriguing. One meaning could be that Jesus, like Moses, drew apart to receive revelation from the spirit, a new testament. Perhaps to simplify their religion and promote conversion, later Christians preferred to abrogate that covenant and sever ties with Judaism, thus leaving Jesus without his own teaching. The meaningless temptation of Jesus further supports this view.

The Gospel of John does not provide space for the forty-day temptation. There, Jesus departs for a wedding in Cana six days after his meeting with John the Baptist.

4:3–4 The devil suggests Jesus turn stones into bread. Jesus cites Deut8:3: "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." Yet the context of this phrase contradicts Jesus' refusal.

Deut8:3 "He restrained you by starving you, and then gave manna which had been known neither by you nor by your ancestors to make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but by each word coming from the mouth of God."

The "word coming from the mouth of God" gave the Jews manna in the wilderness when there was no bread. Deut8:3 speaks specifically of the creation of food. Turning stones into bread would be the same, as the devil correctly noted and Jesus misunderstood.

4:5 "Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple."

The temple had no domes, or turrets. If the temptation episode was inserted in Judea, it could not be earlier than the beginning of the second century: the writer never saw the temple being born after its destruction. The suggestion of some apologists of "wings" above the wall on the side of the Kedron is sheer fantasy.

4:5–7 The devil suggests Jesus jump from the pinnacle of the temple and supports his offer by an abridged quotation from Ps91:11–12, “He will command his angels about you” and “On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.”

In Lk10:19, the same Ps91:13—“I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy”—is applied not to Jesus but to his disciples.

Ps91 is about the believer: “Those who love me, I will deliver, I will protect . . . With long life I will satisfy them, and show them my salvation.”<sup>xxviii</sup> That is not about the divine Jesus.

But Jesus also continues to dissemble. “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.” In reality Deut6:16 contains a different injunction, “Do not put the Lord your God to the test, as you did in Massah.” In Ex17:2, the Jews demanded water from Moses, doubtful that God meant to help them, and got water as proof of the divine power and favor. Jesus could not doubt God’s help.

4:8–10 The devil promises to give Jesus all the kingdoms of the world, “if you will fall down and worship me.”

The Devil’s offer of the world’s kingdoms implies his control over the earth, a Gnostic concept. “And the devil said to him, ‘To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for *it has been given over to me*, and I give it to anyone I please.’”<sup>xxix</sup> Matthew excludes Luke’s Gnostic reference, but the sense remains.

4:12 “Having learned about the arrest of John the Baptist, Jesus departed into Galilee.”

But at that moment nobody knew him or was going to look for him. He started to preach later.<sup>xxx</sup> Hardly all those John baptized were persecuted. Leaving a country merely in protest would be unusual. An escape to Galilee made no sense, since John was imprisoned by the Galilean tetrarch Antipas.

The evangelist needed to establish a reason for Jesus’ return to Galilee. Baptized in Judea, he should have begun preaching there.

The escape from persecution vitiates the idea of Jesus as atoning sacrifice. A possible rejoinder is that Jesus meant to create a following before his death. Yet, he already had a few disciples, and he told them very little until the end. They did not recognize him as messiah. He was virtually unknown in Judea, aside from one day in the temple. A few miracles in Judea would provide more recognition than many in Galilee. He did not further his aims by delaying his execution.

4:13–16 “He made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: ‘Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.’” Matthew seriously distorts his source. Is9:1–2, “In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness, on them light has shined. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you . . . for . . . the rod of their oppressor you have broken as on the day of Midian. For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire.”<sup>xxxix</sup> The prophet speaks of physical redemption from oppression and a military victory which would bring prosperity to the Galileans, and says nothing about Jesus. Military victory over Midians was won long before.<sup>xxxii</sup> Isaiah’s prophecy cannot be applied to Jesus—although the tradition applies the metaphor of light to the messiah.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

Is58:10 calls good deeds in the evil world, *light in darkness*. But Paul rejected deeds in favor of faith.

Capernaum (*Cephar Nahum*) was apparently a well-known center of sectarians.<sup>xxxiv</sup> They cast a spell over Rabbi Jehoshua so that he rode an ass on the Sabbath. That a rabbi would be so lax about the Sabbath could indicate Christian sectarians at Capernaum. If the evangelist needed to select a place for Jesus to live, Capernaum would be appropriate.

Jesus’ settling in Capernaum contradicts Matt 17:25: on coming there he stayed in Peter’s house.

4:17 “From that time Jesus began to proclaim, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.’”

Another tradition has Jesus preaching and baptizing exactly as John did. Both were wrong about the end coming.

4:18–19 Jesus calls Peter and Andrew who are fishing: “Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.”

Ps91:3 “He will save from the snare of the fowler.” Is8:13–15 “But the Lord of hosts, him you shall regard as holy . . . He will become a rock one stumbles over, a trap and a snare for the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many among them shall stumble and they shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken.”

Did Jesus tempt the disciples by proposing to make them “fishers of men”? John the Baptist is called *Fisher of Souls* in the Mandaean *Book of John*. According to Jn1:35–42, Andrew was a pupil of the Baptist, and Peter was Andrew’s brother, also possibly connected with the Baptist. Perhaps Jesus tempted the Baptist’s followers by offering to make them equal to John.

Possibly the text originally spoke of the Baptist who attracted followers in such fashion. Jn1:40 “the two who heard John speak and followed him,” is located in the context unambiguously identifying “him” as Jesus, but usage of pronoun circumventing the nearest antecedent is unusual, and perhaps this piece belongs to narration about the Baptist, so that the “two” followed John. One of them was Andrew, and mention of Peter in the next line may account for the confusion; Matthew included Peter as the second man.

4:23 “Jesus went throughout Galilee teaching in their synagogues.”

“*Their* synagogues,” a phrase usual for Matthew, indicates Jesus might not have considered them *his*. Christians were expelled from the synagogues with the *Blessings of the sectarians*<sup>21</sup> and considered synagogues hostile, but not until the mid-second century. More likely, Matthew would call the synagogues *his* to accent the reprehensibility of turning the Christians out, and later scribes would substitute “their” when Christians and Jews were not welcome in each other’s gatherings.

Whether Jesus would have been admitted not only to read scripture but also to teach in the synagogues is not certain. If so, Jesus’ doctrine had to be fairly conventional. The Galileans, often unacquainted in depth with Judaism, might not in general notice deviations, but there were rabbis. Possibly this passage reflects the practice known to the Gentile writer: in the Diaspora, rabbis from distant places customarily taught in the synagogues. In any case, if the messiah must come to Judea, why did Jesus preach in Galilee?

Synagogues were only allowed after the Temple was destroyed. Until that time, the Biblical prohibition of communal praying outside the Temple was enforced.

4:24 “So his fame spread throughout Syria.”

Gentile roots are obvious here. Judea and Galilee were parts of the Roman province of Syria. The Jews hardly identified their country with Syria, and no Jewish writer would have written this.

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<sup>21</sup> *Bircat ha-minim*, introduced by Gamliel II in the second century, which in fact cursed sectarians and ousted them from the synagogues.



4:25 “And great crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and from beyond the Jordan.”

The NT does not characterize Jesus' followers as rich people who could use their own money to buy food. Begging would not provide for a crowd of disciples. The local food supply was inadequate to provide for a lot of visitors, even if they had money. Any surplus produce was immediately exported. Also travel was risky and comparatively expensive, which makes the report of large crowds doubtful.

Further, a large crowd would have attracted the Romans' attention. Josephus describes their persecution of the followers of a false Egyptian prophet who led them into the wilderness, promising to show them the destruction of Jerusalem's walls.

Why would Greeks from the Decapolis follow a Jewish preacher? To believe the account poses serious consequences. Did Jesus preach in Greek, using the badly translated Septuagint and preaching to Gentiles from the beginning, contrary to Matthew's report elsewhere?

Matt5 begins the Sermon on Mount. Chapters 5–7 present practically all the doctrine of the synoptic Gospels. Had Matthew heard it himself, his credibility and Christianity's would be improved. But while Jesus calls Andrew, Peter, James, and John in 3:18–21, Matthew's call comes at 9:9 in supposedly his own Gospel. According to his own report, Matthew did not hear Jesus' principal sermons.

John, already a disciple, does not report the Sermon on the Mount. Luke is acquainted with the tradition, but he presents a Sermon on the Plain.

A desert's wide-open space would swallow sound. Jesus could not shout loud enough to be heard from a mountain; even if the hill were small, still only a handful of people could hear him.

Possibly Matthew reports the Sermon on the Mount to establish an analogy with Moses. Moses brought the tablets of the Law from Mount Sinai; Jesus gives his commandments in a similar setting. The Jews received both the Covenant of God and the covenant of Jesus from a mountainside. Or perhaps Matthew recalled that rabbis read from a raised platform and enlarged the scene for Jesus. Unaware of those parallels, Lk6:17 sets the sermon on the plain.

A sermon from a mountain appears in many religions, such as Buddhism. Considering the technical impossibility of addressing a crowd

from a hill in the wilderness—difficulty of approach, dispersed sound, the crowd also on the hill—the whole idea is difficult to explain rationally.<sup>22</sup>

The Sermon on the Mount is a basic link between Christianity and Judaism. The apologists' principle problem is to demonstrate that the sermon was delivered in Aramaic and not invented by Greek-speaking writers, which would prove its Jewish derivation from the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus. Yet the absence of Aramaisms undermines the supposed authenticity of the Gospel. Modern scholars doubt the sermon's Aramaisms, yet even their presence would prove very little. The theology of the Sermon on the Mount is largely unconnected with other Gospel theses, let alone church doctrine. Its tenets belong to Judaism and to other religions and cultures. A Jewish Gospeler could have borrowed the sermon's theses from Jewish tradition. There is nothing new in them, and some of the sermon commandments are incompatible with Christianity.

I do not usually criticize the literal contents, because presumably many sayings relate to macrosocial relations or individual mystical experiences and are not intended for literal application.

5:3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Th3:5 "But if you do not know yourselves, then you live in poverty, and you are the poverty" is a prototype. Matthew avoided the Gnostic notion of knowledge.

The Essenes called themselves *poor*, following ancient tradition: "The sacrifice of God is a broken spirit",<sup>xxxv</sup> or later, "Meekness and abjection of spirit befit the pupils of sages."<sup>xxxvi</sup> However, the line dividing the good and bad kinds of poor is fine: "The truly poor man is untrained and does not know which precept to observe."<sup>xxxvii</sup>

5:4 "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."

Traditionally, a reference to Is61:3: "... to provide for those who mourn, to give them ... the oil of gladness instead of mourning." But the context is, "Foreigners shall till your land and dress your vines; but you shall be called

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<sup>22</sup> There are repeated reports in Egyptian and Sumerian texts of such and such a god or such and such a goddess teaching "from the mount." The Sermon on the Mount is at least the echo of an extremely ancient tradition whose origins are unclear.

Supporters of the version of other civilization existing before the Deluge propose at least coherent explanation: just in this way it was convenient to address the ancient people described as giants in many legends. According to Judaic tradition, Adam was also incredibly tall. The legendary burials of colossally tall forefathers are venerated in modern Turkey.

priests of the Lord.”<sup>xxxviii</sup> This cannot be related to Gentile Christians, because there are no *foreigners* (members of another ethnic group) for them. Otherwise, the thesis is commonplace:<sup>xxxix</sup> those suffering in this world will find comfort in the future world.

5:5 “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.”

Ps37:11 “The meek shall inherit the earth.” But the context (Ps36:9) is, “Those that wait upon the Lord shall inherit the earth.” Mic6:8 “. . . to walk humbly with your God.” These texts speak not of worldly meekness but the fear of God. The Jews also extended the thesis to temporal relations, especially to empathy: “The meek in this world shall be praised in the future world.”<sup>xl</sup>

5:4,6 “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted . . . . Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”

Lk 6:21 “Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.”

Th69 “Congratulations to those who have been persecuted in their hearts: they have truly come to know the Father. Congratulations to those who go hungry, so the stomach of the one in want may be filled.” Two theses of Thomas, persecution and hunger, appear in different places in Matthew’s sermon, suggesting that they originally existed as set of sayings which the evangelists manipulated as they liked.

Luke speaks of people truly hungry and weeping without allegory. Thomas speaks of a thirst for spiritual knowledge and the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew may indicate allegory at 5:6, “. . . who hunger and thirst for righteousness [not for drink].” In 5:4, the mourning must be taken literally. Matthew’s meaning is not clear, probably he does not mean people mourning Jesus, since at least fifty years had passed since his death. The grief might be related to wartime suffering. In that case, the Christian tradition of blaming the destruction of Jerusalem on the execution of Jesus was not yet developed in Matthew’s time, since the evangelist would not suggest compassion in a case of preordained retribution.

Thomas’ allusion to persecution is clearly allegorical: “. . . persecuted in their hearts.”

Curiously, Luke rejects the Gnostic meaning, which he characteristically accepts when drawing on Thomas or other common prototexts. Perhaps the thesis is intended for literal interpretation and in Thomas reveals the Gnostic point of view. Naturally, then, mourning and laughing were removed from Thomas, since they require a literal, not a

mystical, interpretation. The obverse is also possible, that Matthew and Luke adapted the mystical thesis to real life.

Rom12:14–16 “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another.”

The sense is close to 5:4,11, but differs from it textually. Perhaps there are no traces of authentic text here, but rather some moral standards generally accepted in the culture.

5:8 “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”

A free interpretation of the tradition reflected in Ps 24:4–5: “Those who have . . . pure hearts . . . will receive blessing from the Lord . . .”

5:10 “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

This may be an interpolation to sustain the spirits of Christians facing Roman persecution, though persecution was not extensive and hardly needed the consolation of Jesus’ promise.

Persecution for righteousness was a popular theme with sectarians, since it likely touched their leaders once in a while, but the practice would not be stirring in Judea about 30 C.E. Possibly, Matthew referred to the harassment not specifically of Christians but of all Jews, which increased in the prewar period and certainly after it. The mention of persecution instead of, for example, mistreatment may point to a postwar origin of the idea.

Interpolation is also evidenced by the fact that 5:3 already promises the kingdom of heaven to those poor in spirit. Then Jesus enumerates other awards for other merits. But 5:10 returns to the kingdom of heaven.

Th58 “Congratulations to the person who has toiled [suffered<sup>23</sup>] and has found life.”

The sense is clear in Thomas: the one who by suffering or toil of cognition has achieved comprehension and found the kingdom of heaven is blessed. Interpreting literally, Matthew could link misery in this world (“persecuted for righteousness”) with a promise of the kingdom of heaven in the life to come.

5:11 “Blessed are you when people revile and persecute and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.”

This blessing comes after 5:10, which already dealt with persecution and is shaped by the Gospel editor to serve Christians, not Jews.

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<sup>23</sup> Ambiguity of Coptic translation.

Th 68, "Congratulations to you when you are hated and persecuted; and no place will be found, wherever you have been persecuted." Apparently a mystical sense should be sought. Blessed are those whose enemies help free them from temporal attachments. Such enemies are hard to find. Likewise, it is said of Vishnu, "He who is despised is happy, free of all attachments." Ordinarily one must release himself: released from the world by toil or cognition, not with the help or influence of external circumstances. Or it is impossible to persecute the initiated: "And no place will be found." He is always quiet and free.

Striving to preserve the traditional meaning of the concept, Christian theologians presume that Thomas is wrong, that Th68:2 must be read, "And the place will be found, where you will not be persecuted." But Th68 makes perfect sense without such correction. Literal contradictions—persecution is good, but there is no persecution—are typical of mystical texts.

Similarly, Th69:1 implies a mystical sense: "Congratulations to those who have been persecuted in their hearts: they have truly come to know the Father." Probably, Thomas means persecution by a thirst for knowledge, or persecution from without, detachment from the evil world and by immersion in the self. Having achieved that state, they have come to know God.

In Is51:7, this phrase is irrelevant to Jesus. God declared to exiled Hebrews who kept his teaching; Matthew modeled Jesus' saying on Isaiah to comfort the compatriots exiled after 70 or 135.

Apparent heavy editing in 5:10–12 aims to sustain the spirit of mocked and persecuted Christians: "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people revile and persecute and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven." "Persecuted for righteousness sake" is connected by implication to and should follow 5:6, "hunger and thirst for righteousness." Making being "persecuted for righteousness sake" a criterion for entering heaven does not fit with the Torah's description of righteousness as the observance of the Law, which Jesus affirmed. The forefathers and the prophets generally were not persecuted. Should we understand that the kingdom of heaven is not theirs, especially if we recall that elsewhere Christian teachers promised their followers a place in the kingdom of heaven beside Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? We should not suppose that being persecuted is a sufficient but not a necessary condition, because the kingdom "is theirs," implying that it is no one else's; religions are exclusivist.

One may argue that the text should not be formally scrutinized; but the sermon purports to be divine doctrine, superceding the Torah. We may

expect it to be accurate; otherwise, how would Christians know how to gain the kingdom, by which rules specifically?

Jesus does not mention specifically his followers elsewhere in the sermon as a mass movement, which further identifies the passage as a late insertion. The sermon would have nothing to do with administrative issues, and a commandment to follow Jesus to be blessed is out of character with the sermon as a set of general precepts. 5:11–12 addresses only Christians, while 5:3–9 and 5:13–48 speak to all Jews. The addition at 5:11–12 could be taken from the accounts of healings in Lk 6:22–23.

5:12 “In the same way they persecuted the prophets.”

Matthew appears to adapt Lk6:23, “That is what their ancestors did to the prophets,” softening a negative reference to his countrymen.

In the Bible, there are a few mentions of persecutions of prophets, but such persecuted prophets are not listed. Certainly, this was nothing like the general pattern, but rather rare occurrences.

We may suppose the influence of the pseudepigrapha.<sup>24</sup> For example, *Lives of the Prophets* tells of mass persecution and murder of the prophets.

Sects probably considered their founders, and often many others, prophets. When their doctrine was not accepted and the sect left mainstream Judaism, sectarians could form the opinion that their prophets were persecuted. Possibly we see an adaptation of the popular Greek tradition which Socrates recalled, namely that the crowd had denounced many good people like him.

5:13–14 “You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot. You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid.”

This contrasts the earlier emphasized meanness.

Col4:6 “Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, so that you know how to respond to everyone.” Probably expensive salt was a popular metaphor for something pleasant or good. Or salt could be metaphor for the Holy Spirit: Matt10:20 “For it is not you who speak, but the spirit of your Father speaking through you.” “Seasoned with salt, so that you know how to respond” seems identical to “dictated by the Holy Spirit.” To Matthew, calling the Jews the “salt of the earth” meant that they alone bear the spirit and should not lose it. Jewish tradition confirms that

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<sup>24</sup> Anonymous texts attributed to well-known writers, an attribution generally absent from the apocrypha, though commonly added in the heading. Theologians generally accord the apocrypha more weight; some consider them historically authentic.

interpretation: "The word *commandment* is used in connection with five things: circumcision, rainbow, *salt*, sufferings and the priesthood."<sup>25</sup>

Is49:3–6 "You are my servant, Israel . . . I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." This interpretation seems fairly consistent with the Gospel pericope,<sup>25</sup> since Matthew could mean Israel as light. Among the possible Hebrew roots of the name Jerusalem are both *light* and *town*. Although they are written differently from the city's name, they sound the same. Matthew may play on words. Such an allegory based on word play could be an idiom.

Th 32 "A city built on a high hill and fortified cannot fall, nor can it be hidden." The image of a well-built city may be a metaphor for unassailable knowledge, but the reference is hardly to Jerusalem: the city fell to its enemies several times.

Lk14:34–35 "Salt is good; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? . . . men throw it away." Context of Lk 14:33 "None of you can become my disciple if you do not give up your possessions." Even straining the interpretation, this is not about Jews in general, as in Matthew. Gentile Luke clearly had no idea what salt was all about and took it as metaphor for wealth. The passage might then read "Wealth is good but if you have lost the taste for it, it will not be attractive any more; therefore, give away your possessions" to the poor.

Both Luke and Thomas seem to have been popular. Thomas' ideas were used in a range of meanings, to mean both the coming of the kingdom of heaven and a military triumph for Israel. Possibly Matthew used the common ideas and filled them with the sense his purpose required.

Mk9:49–50 "For everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good, but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."

Probably Mark has it right. The metaphor is intricate, but the supposition that mystics wrote Mark seems correct. Taken from this Gospel, Matthew and Luke used the idea in various forms but lost its sense in the adaptation.

"Salted with fire" indicates an initiation, the acquisition of the spirit. "If it has lost its saltiness" means some other salt, probably the soul dissolved in the spirit, the body lost in the other world, material benefits, or just being Jewish. Mark affirms the priority of the interior salt (spirit, "salt in oneself," indestructible wealth) over the exterior, probably material wealth or being Jewish, which he perhaps viewed as obsolete.

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<sup>25</sup> Smallest meaningful bit of text

5:15–16 “No one after lighting a lamp puts it under bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your lamp shine before others.”

Jewish converts to Christianity should not conceal their faith. Their views were apparently reprobated.

Lk8:16–17 “No one after lighting a lamp hides it under a jar . . . but puts it on a lampstand, so that those who enter may see the light. For nothing is hidden that will not be disclosed.” A doubtful context: the lit candle is not intended to be a secret but rather a symbol of openness.

The allegory “secret—disclosed” possibly describes the suffering in the afterworld of people whose sins remained secret on earth. Since the end reveals all sins, people should strive not to commit them, as the Essenes taught.<sup>xlii</sup>

Lk12:1–2 appropriately criticizes the Pharisees’ hypocrisy with this idea.

Lk11:33–34 “No one after lighting a lamp puts it in a cellar, but on the lampstand so that those who enter may see the light.<sup>a</sup> Your eye is the lamp of your body.<sup>b</sup> If your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light.”<sup>c</sup>

In verse a, hiding the light is futile. The metaphor in verse b calls the eye the lamp of the body. In verse c, purity of vision determines purity of soul. Luke appears to be combining several different themes.

Lk11:36 repeats: “If then your whole body is full of light, with no part of it in darkness, it will be as full of light as when a lamp gives you light” could link Lk11:34 to Lk11:33, passages of obviously different meaning, proclamation and purity of soul, respectively.

The light–lamp–soul metaphor was fairly common. For example, Salome (first century C.E.) says, “Let your light shine as a lamp!”<sup>xliii</sup> Ber17 “Let your eyes be lighted by the light of Torah.” Barnabas 3:4 speaks of the light of the righteous in the same sense: “Your light will shine as dawn.”

Undoubtedly, *light* refers to the light of knowledge which must be expanded “on a lamp-stand, shines for everybody.” Yet what knowledge did the evangelists mean? Torah, gnosis, Essenism, Christianity? The presence of God, *shekinah*, was also called light.<sup>xliv</sup> Since the Gnostics believed the initiated received not only the Holy Spirit but also light, gnosis is probably meant here, something the literalist church would rather forget.

This concept, like many others of the ancient mystics, entered Judaism in the kabbalah as the light that appeared at creation to overcome the primordial darkness. Each good person bears that light into the world’s dark places.



Th33 "What you will hear in your ear, in the other ear proclaim from your rooftops. After all, no one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket . . . . Rather, one puts it on a lampstand so that all who come and go will see its light."

Maybe the metaphor of the lamp in the Gospels and Th33:2–3 is original. Thomas' context is the most likely.

Thomas' is a standard metaphor. Philo condemns mystics who restrict their doctrines to a few instead of declaring them in the marketplace.<sup>xlv</sup>

Doubts arise with, "What you will hear in your ear, in the other ear proclaim from your rooftops." The appeal to preach mystical doctrine openly was initially only for the prepared, a Christian concept which would spite the Gnostics. The apocalyptic Gnostics believed that mystic teaching should come just before the end of time.

Matthew likely adapted the thesis to real conditions when members of his sect could not preach from the rooftops and called for preaching but not publicly. The teaching in Th33:1 about teaching from the rooftops formed a separate pericope, 10:26–27, in the context of church interpolated admonitions intended for Christian preachers.

A standard allegory equates commandment with lamp and the Torah with light.<sup>xlvi</sup> Thus the Gospel instruction may be initially that Jews not to hide the lamp (commandment) selfishly but rather bring it to other nations. The reference to Christian teaching came later.

Improbable though not impossible is that "lamp" means temple, as in 1 Kings 11:36, which would date the pericope as very early, indeed, pre-70 C.E. The author could be inviting Gentiles to come to the temple by converting and encouraging the Christians' proselytizing efforts—or possibly the Jews', if this text is a borrowed maxim.

6:22–23 "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!"

Matthew and Luke do not explain the light which is darkness, light to a man of pure vision but darkness to one whose eye is evil. The Essenes used the term "light in you"<sup>26</sup> as a vague term for the soul. This sense is supported by Job, on whom Isaiah modeled obscure words, "Are not my days few? . . . Leave me alone, that I may *brighten* up a little before I go, never to return, to the land of gloom and deep darkness . . . where *light* is

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<sup>26</sup> "From the source of his knowledge he opened light in me." (*Rule of Community*)

like darkness.” *Darkness* in Job is death, transformed in Matthew into spiritual death.

The evangelists’ original sense of the passage is lost, and Luke attempts to connect it with the lamp in Matthew 5:15 in a different context. 5:14 “You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid.”

Did16:1<sup>27</sup> “Look after your life; your lights shall not go off . . . . Be ready.” The eyes, the light of body, are an allegory of consciousness, wakefulness, being attentive to the world.

Thomas’ text seems more precise. Th24 “His disciples said, ‘Show us the place where you are, for we must seek it.’ He said to them, ‘There is light within a person of light, and it shines on the whole world. If it does not shine, it is dark.’” The meaning probably is that the initiated person always influences (shines on) the world, regardless of where he is.

Th61:5 “If one is whole, one will be filled with light, but if one is divided, one will be filled with darkness.” This describes the initiated, undivided between good and evil. Light denotes such a person’s quasi-divine state.

Dia Sav 6 “The Savior said, ‘The lamp of the body is the mind. As long as [the things that are] in you are rightly ordered . . . your bodies are [light].”

Matthew and the *Dialogue of the Savior* present different variations of the same tradition. In all probability, it was not even a tradition but, so to say, a structure of metaphor, a logical copula, “the lamp of the body is ( . . . ). If ( . . . ), your bodies are light.” There must have been many versions of this structure with almost the same sense.

This was a standard device in that time: the image and logical copula were taken from a rhetoric model (in this case “body is light”). Less gifted writers could easily build their own aphorisms with the help of this device. 5:17 “I have come not to abolish [the law] but to fulfill.” The phrase indicates Jesus’ adherence to the law.

Christian theologians misrepresent the issue, supposing that Jesus’ advent is the final fulfillment of the law. The law, however, is aimed at specific actions and not reaching some last event and cannot be fulfilled as prophecies can.

5:17 does not correlate well with 5:18. If Jesus fulfilled the law by his appearance, then why assert in the next pericope that the law will abide eternally? 5:17 was probably interpolated or considerably edited.

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<sup>27</sup> Didache, extracanonical Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, a very authoritative work based on non-Christian Jewish text

The apologist must defend Jesus vis-à-vis the law; later Gentiles disregarded the issue. An educated guess is that the pericope is sectarian, arguing with mainstream Jews that his sect is not a breakaway. Mention of the competition with scribes<sup>28</sup> and Pharisees in 5:20 reinforces the view.

5:18 “For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.”

Jesus, whom the church presents as divine—thus, logically, omniscient—does not consider the end of heaven and earth near.

Only sectarians who identified prophecies with the law, could imply that the law may be *accomplished*.

Jesus unambiguously demanded eternal observance of Jewish commandments.

5:19 “Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven.”

Matthew needed this threat to combat non-Judean Christians preaching an alternate doctrine. Interestingly there was significant communication between their congregations, giving rise to argument. The Gentile Christians' authority must have been great: Matthew promises them not hell but rather insignificance in the kingdom of heaven. 5:19 betrays Matthew's polemic, reminiscent of Paul's, too much to be authentic.

Such rigidity in keeping the commandments is atypical of Judaism. Man should aim to obey the law, but violation of a commandment does not preclude salvation. Repentance and a return to righteousness earn pardon almost any sin. The sectarians were more rigid about carrying out of their interpretation of the law.

5:20 “Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

5:10 sets another terms. Evidently, Matthew has not yet determined exactly who may enter the kingdom. Rather, he reasons on the subject without concrete conclusions about the way to heaven.

In the first and second centuries B.C.E., the Pharisees were a persecuted sect after a brief moment in power during Queen Salome's reign. The persecution extended to summary execution. Pharisees who defended the religious laws generated sympathy among the population. When the Gospel was written, they were very popular, although not the

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<sup>28</sup> The scribes, *soferim*, were one of the groups which composed the Mishnah.

predominant party in Jesus' time. Jesus confirms their righteousness, but says that his followers were even more so.

5:21–22 “You heard, it was told to the ancients, “Do not murder . . . But I tell you, if you are angry with a brother [without cause], you will be liable to judgment.”

Jesus draws an analogy with the commandment “Do not murder,” implying that anger or affront is contemplated murder. He again identifies intent with deed at 5:28: “Everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

Jesus amplifies the Torah's injunction. Two related terms in Hebrew approximate the English *kill* (legal, e.g., by court sentence or at war) and *murder* (illegal, predatory, unnecessary). The Torah reasonably uses the latter, but Jesus extends the prohibition impractically, ruling out not only taking life but aggressive feelings as well. Yet the Torah prescribes anger toward idolaters, and the Gospels imply hatred towards nonbelievers in discourses on their sufferings during the apocalypse.

Both sectarian and rabbinic works parallel Jesus' interpretation, but such instances are mostly allegories, statements of the ideal, not harsh injunctions like Jesus'. The church had no choice but to ignore the commandment of its founder. The phrase *without cause* was added after the fourth century, completely changing the sense, but making the injunction practical. Probably the passage is a popular maxim rather than an authentic saying of Jesus. For example, the Gospel of Hebrews in its 8<sup>th</sup> fragment offers another version: one of the greatest sins “to sadden brother's or sister's spirits.” This could be a commandment of joy, characteristic of Buddhism, though we may not know for sure.

Matthew continues, “And if you will say to your brother, ‘Empty man!’ you shall be referred to the Sanhedrin.”<sup>29</sup>

A similar attitude is found later in the Talmud: “He who has insulted his neighbor only with a word should have to apologize.”<sup>xlvi</sup> The most famous example is the Torah commandment, “You shall not covet your neighbor's wife . . . or anything [else] that belongs to your neighbor,” though it might refer specifically to actionable desire.

The Gospel continues, “And if you say, ‘You fool’ you will be in danger of hell fire.”

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<sup>29</sup> Possibly this phrase is misunderstood. Is 53 contains a story of a certain man, unfulfilled messiah. That chapter was taken as *peshet* on the Baptist, and later applied to Jesus. The person is called in verse 3 the one “despised by men.” This mild term of abuse was later replaced by Aramaic *rakah*, “the empty one.” Perhaps the evangelist prohibited ill talk not about everyone, but specifically about the Baptist, to comply with Is 53 *peshet*.

A similar idea is found in the Talmud: “‘You shall not murder’ means that you should not act so that your brother’s blood boils in his veins.”<sup>xlviii</sup> A violation of “You shall not murder” brings on a blazing inferno, thus paralleling the Gospel.

Aaron believed that he who insults his neighbor has sinned against him.<sup>xlix</sup> *Evil tongue* – spreading even the truth but without intention to change a situation for the better – is a high crime in rabbinical Judaism.

5:25–26 “Come to terms quickly with your accuser . . . or your accuser may hand you over to the judge . . . and you will be thrown into prison . . . You will never get out until you have paid the last penny.”

Luke chose another context for this popular maxim, “And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right? Thus, when you go with your accuser before a magistrate, on the way make an effort to settle the case.”<sup>l</sup> Luke is perhaps wrong since rabbis judged trials, not magistrates. He might also fail to understand the first phrase, which possibly deals with the issue of which teaching is correct and urges each person to decide himself whether he likes the sectarian views instead of relying on their critique by rabbis.

A literal interpretation is problematic. The only way to reconcile with an opponent is to pay the debt—but then the creditor violates Jesus’ injunction to forgive debts—presumably, other offenses denominated in money, as well.

Judaism, in Sanh6<sup>30</sup>, understood it this way: “The precept is to settle prior to court, not to start court proceedings.”

5:27–28 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

Typical of maximalists, such superrigid requirements are convenient for organizing enthusiasts in a small sect but are completely unacceptable for mass religion. The concept is at variance with Judaism as a practical religion. For most people, preventing sinful thoughts is impossible. God created both sinful and righteous thoughts. They are not sin; sin is their implementation, action contrary to the law.

The commandment “You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife” sometimes used in substantiation, has altogether a different meaning. It adds “neither his bullock, nor his donkey,” a prohibition against coveting another’s property, of which the wife is part. The commandment has nothing to do with adultery but rather prohibits jealousy and the hope of getting something without compensating the owner fairly. The commandment prohibits actionable intent with the consequences harmful to neighbors, not feelings and thoughts that harm no one.

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<sup>30</sup> Talmud, the book of Sanhedrin.

5:29–30 “If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away . . . And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell.”

The aggressive tone is not congruent with the sayings commonly accepted as authentic. 18:7–9, however, is similar: “Woe to the world because of stumbling blocks! . . . If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to enter life maimed or lame than to have two hands or two feet and to be thrown into eternal fire.” Jesus proclaimed spiritual change, but hardly self-mutilation.<sup>31</sup>

The idea of a pure heart struggling with an evil body is disgusting, a denial of the inner unity preached by the mystics. The natural consequence is to despise the body, which allows cutting extremities without compunction.

The threats to those who tempt newly converted Christians—“Woe to him through whom temptation comes”—may also be a rebuke to other factions. Luke and Thomas have no analogues, suggesting that Matthew opposed parties other than the Pharisees, possibly Gentile Christians.

The customary reference to Deut13:6 is improbable: “If anyone secretly entices you, even your brother . . . ‘Let us go worship other gods’ . . . Show them no pity . . . kill them.” This suggests not tearing out one’s own eye but using it.

The same is true for Deut25:11–12: “If men get into a fight with one another, and the wife of one intervenes to rescue her husband from the grip of his opponent by reaching out and seizing his genitals, you shall cut off her hand.” The counsel is punishment, not self-restraint.

A similar concept is present in Judaism, though in the nonauthoritative late Midrash Abkir. Rabbi Mattathias Ben Haresh blinded himself to escape a woman’s enticement. His vision was miraculously restored. Evidently the author did not think it better to live without an eye than without temptation.

The idea is meaningless. Man’s longings originate with his thoughts, not his perceptions. He would probably be tempted even more without seeing the object of his desire. Righteousness can be understood differently. Practically, we refrain from certain actions; ideally, we do not think of them. Fighting mental lust with physical measures is a vulgar attempt to imitate ideal righteousness.

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<sup>31</sup> A host of fanatical believers in the Dark Centuries and in early Middle Ages followed this prescription for self-mutilation.

5:32 “Anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery....”

“Except on the ground of unchastity” looks like an insertion to harmonize with Deut24:1 where unchastity is a cause for divorce.

Probably, a Gentile or a sectarian extremist added the passage later. Upon being divorced, Jewish women received a certain amount of money under the marriage contract to save them from poverty. The poor in general, and women in particular, were objects of extensive charity. The forger refers to the experience of divorced Gentile women who often turned to prostitution for their living.

Abstention from lechery and divorce is not new with Jesus. Consider Proverbs: “For the mouth of a strange woman oozes honey . . . . But the consequences from her are bitter;”<sup>lii</sup> and “Take comfort from the wife of your youth.”<sup>lii32</sup>

“According to the Shammai school, a man cannot divorce his wife, except for something disgraceful.”<sup>liii</sup> Hillel permitted divorce without essential limitations but censured it. A follower said, “The altar of the Lord is crying for him who has divorced his first wife.”<sup>liv</sup> The Jews probably followed Hillel’s more permissive interpretation. “...and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”

Judaism imposed few limitations on a divorced woman regarding her behavior or a second marriage. This passage lacks internal logic. If the divorced woman is a debauchee, the man who marries her stops her misbehavior and commits an act of kindness, not adultery.

The same injunction appears at 19:3–12, evidence of the compilation of different prototexts in the Gospel.

5:33–35 “You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not swear falsely . . .’ but I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool.”

The idea is not new. Deut23:21–22 “If you make a vow . . . do not postpone fulfilling it . . . If you refrain from vowing, you will not incur guilt.” Later in the Talmud, “It is not necessary to swear even the truth.”<sup>lv</sup>

The Gospeler shows a primitive comprehension of theology, since heaven is not the throne of God as a physical object; such is God’s glory, allegorized as heavens. Onkelos<sup>33</sup> treats *footstool* as another image of the

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<sup>32</sup> This is the literal meaning; “strange woman” is a metaphor of foreign religion.

<sup>33</sup> Possibly rabbi Aquila, a famous proselyte, who translated the scripture, provides an extremely authoritative interpretation.

throne, so that theologically both *earth* and *heavens* refer to the same thing, God's glory. Matthew physically separates the earth and the sky.

Evolution of this injunction is amazing. It is hard to find another instruction of Jesus which was violated so consistently, from antiquity to our days. In a typical example, courts commonly require an oath on the Bible, exactly the book prohibiting the oath. Curiously, Jesus prohibited even existence of courts when he declared against judging one's neighbor, and demanded out-of-court settlement.

5:36 "And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black."

The passage reflects a determinism which denies free will. The Jews believed that after creation the world developed according to the given laws of nature. Predetermination figures in that the laws of nature are created and the commandments are given and known beforehand. Those laws, not God's will, determine each case. Hair color is not a manifestation of God's will.

The sectarians, on the other hand, embraced determinism. To feel directly subordinate to God let them feel closer to him.

The passage could be a reflection of the rabbinic attitude to swearing. Only those vows whose surety a man controls were valid. To swear by the sunrise, for instance, was void. To swear by one's head lacked judicial content. Characteristically, the Talmud contains contradictory opinions on whether the vow by the life of one's head may be retracted.<sup>lvi</sup>

5:37 "Let your word be 'Yes, Yes' or 'No, No'; anything more than this comes from the evil one."

The second phrase, as well as other mentions of the devil in everyday life, is likely an insertion. The first part of the phrase is traditional in Judaism. For example, "God will punish those who do not keep their word precisely."<sup>lvii</sup> Or more exactly, "'Yes' is oath, and 'no' is oath."<sup>lviii</sup>

5:38–39 "You have heard that it was said 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also."

The problem of resisting the Romans was real in Judea. An injunction of meekness in the face of oppression would make sense after the war or when odious prefects ruled Judea. Before that, first-century Jews were not persecuted in daily life, as the prefects were unconcerned with the people's common affairs. Things changed after the war, more after the revolt of Bar Kochba, when many Gentiles came to Judea and persecuted the Jews.



Nonresistance to evil may arise from different motives: awareness of the insignificance of this life, a sense of spiritual unity with the enemy, comprehension and forgiveness of an enemy, disregard or apathy toward the enemy or the world.

Socrates deals with this concept. Since evil is not to be done at all, it is not to be done in return for another evil. But morality exists in the context: offensive violence is evil, while defensive is not; what is returned for the evil is not necessarily itself evil. Non-resistance is impossible in real life if only one person inclines to do evil and must be stopped by force. Violence occurs even in secluded peaceful communities. To love everyone is theoretically good, but in reality we choose whom to love: the criminal or his next victim. At the extremity, the idea becomes its dialectical opposite. Absolute mercy in the administration of justice becomes brutality to people in the power of criminals. Jesus perhaps recommended an example to a very few people who have forever confronted evil in the world.

The concept may be drawn from Hinduism or Buddhism, which began to penetrate the Middle East and Europe shortly before the time of Jesus. The Greek philosophers also used similar popular ideas. For example, Plutarch, unable to attribute it to any particular teacher, attributes the idea to Dion simply as the reasonable thing to say. He views both evil and retribution as coming from a single source: weakness of character. Jesus taught refraining from punishment at all at a time when crime was more severe even than in the modern inner cities. A Roman who ventured into the city's suburbs had a reasonable expectation of being murdered. Brigandage was common in Judea to the extent that the indifferent Roman prefects had to fight it. Jesus' doctrine of forgiveness, if practiced generally, would have worsened conditions, making people easy prey for criminals. The realized church never upheld the doctrine, and the writers of the Gospel's apocalypse prescribes punishment for non-Christians.

State religion is understandably severe, since it underlies society's laws. The laws of the Judaic theocracy were more humane than those of other nations, yet they had features which seem barbarous to modern people. Then came Christianity with its emphasis on mercy. It was not an official religion and did not bear the burden of formulating and justifying operating law. Acquiring official status later, Christianity formed a tradition of extremely rigid laws, just as Judaism, isolated from state functions, became extremely kind. Today it is difficult to imagine rabbis condemning people to burn (even if rather humanely) or to beating with clubs.<sup>lix</sup> As Christianity now loses its influence on the state, it also returns to its early, more loving form.

Jesus' doctrine of forgiveness was not generally accepted. InfTh3<sup>34</sup> reports that the child Jesus magically killed another child who disturbed his play. A similar murder occurs in InfTh4. Possibly, the Gnostics did not see love of the enemy as forgiveness but, like Japanese Zen, as attentiveness to the enemy directed at his eventual destruction.

Christians expect Jesus will preside actively at Judgment, punishing ill-defined evildoers. Does this mean that ordinarily people not resist evil and leave vengeance to Jesus at his Second Advent? People who do not believe in the apocalypse can do evil without restriction, making life Hell for everybody else.

Making judicial procedure moral is among Judaism's triumphs as a practical religion. Prohibiting testimony and trial would provoke evil and destroy the system of justice prescribed in the Torah.

The concept of total forgiveness is not alien to Judaism, especially when it became the only choice of stateless people. "Do not attempt to revenge upon those who have offended you. It is better to be offended and meek in spirit."<sup>lx</sup> "The man said, 'I always reconcile with the person who caused me damage. I become his friend and return good for evil. And before I go to bed I forgive everyone who requires it.' 'You are greater than Joseph,' responded Rabbi Abba."<sup>lxi</sup>

5:40 "And if anyone wants to . . . take your coat, give your cloak as well."

Anyone who follows Jesus' instruction literally must eventually go naked. The passage may be a literal interpretation of Gnostic texts that speak of mystical denuding, the rejection of the body, which clothes the soul.

In Jewish law, creditors cannot appropriate essential clothes of the debtors.

5:41 "And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile."

There is no evidence that free Jews could be forced to accompany others or carry their burdens unless Jesus meant such conduct by Roman soldiers. There were no Romans in Galilee during the rule of Herod Antipas, another indication that the Gospel was written after the Jewish War.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> The Infancy Gospel of Thomas.

<sup>35</sup> This conventional spelling is wrong, arising from incorrect translation of the Josephus' title. His book, named by analogy with *De Bello Gallico*, refers to Judean War, the war in the land of Judea. It is standard to name wars after territories, not nations.

5:42 "Give to everyone who begs of you, and not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you."

19:21 "'If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor'" contradicts 5:42. No one would have money to lend after distributing all his or her goods.

Lk6:30,34 "Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again . . . . If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again."

Th95 "If you have money, do not lend it at interest. Rather give [it] to someone from whom you won't get it back." Thomas describes the Jewish concept of philanthropy of lending for an indefinite time and not demanding return. The purpose was not to offend the recipient of alms.

Thomas' reading is probably authentic. Luke supplemented it with further explanation. Matthew's presentation conforms with strict Judaism. In particular, he excluded interest. Jews may not charge interest of other Jews, though there were ways to get around that limitation. Matthew does not say money should not be lent at all. The Torah specifically prescribed lending, and tradition dealt with debt in detail.

Another possible explanation is that the ending of Thomas contains numerous insertions and distortions. Matthew could have proposed the traditional Jewish position which went into Thomas and from there to the late version of Luke.

The concept of giving without giving back possibly reinforces the prohibition against withholding loans when the jubilee year is near. Deut15:7-10, "Do not be . . . tight-fisted toward your needy neighbor . . . . You should rather open your hand, willingly lending enough to meet the need . . . . Be careful that you do not entertain a mean thought, 'The seventh year, the year of remission, is near,' and therefore view your needy neighbor with hostility and give nothing . . . . Give liberally and be ungrudging."

The fact that shortly before Jesus, Hillel invented a special kind of receipt—*prozbul*—allowing the nominal transfer of loans to the public treasure during the seventh year shows the importance of the problem. By Jesus' time, lending before the sabbatical year was no longer an act of charity, and Jesus offered another, more generous, concept.

5:43-44 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, 'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.'"

The citation is wrong; the Torah does not enjoin hating enemies, which Matthew should know. The author of the pericope was Gentile or a

sectarian with a very peculiar interpretation of the Torah. *Enemies* in the Torah are *idolaters*, and “hate your enemy” may mean hating idolaters and loving the Law. The concept is religious, not social.

Of the known Judaic sects, only the Essenes preached hatred of enemies. The teaching makes sense if Jesus addressed them only.

As Yadin notes, the matter may refer to the Qumran community rule: “. . . to like everyone whom he has chosen and to hate everyone whom he has rejected.” We have no information on the practical implementation of Essene precepts and should not forget that they are typical of sectarian militancy.

The Essenes were secluded, and hardly circulated their doctrine. But Jesus was sure the audience is familiar with the idea. Likely, therefore, the Essenes are the audience, a fact which argues in favor of Christianity originating among the Essenes.

Matthew deletes “Bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you” from Luke’s text. Perhaps, hearing Jews or Romans cursing his fellows every day was too acute for Matthew. Luke probably describes what he considers a loyal attitude toward the Romans.

The injunction corresponds with neither Christian practice, nor with Gospel doctrine. Christianity is built upon the threat to those who reject Jesus: they will not inherit the kingdom of heaven and will moreover be tortured perpetually in hell. According to Matthew, Jesus both loves them and sends them to Hell.

Torah says the same as Jesus about enemies: “When you come upon your enemy’s ox or donkey going astray, you shall bring it back. When you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden and you would hold back from setting it free, you must help to set it free.”<sup>lxii</sup> The Torah, however, is more practical. It does not require loving the enemy, clearly impossible for most people, but refraining from harming him outside the prescribed legal framework, and possibly even reconciling with him. Tradition says the same: “If two people ask you for help, and one of them is your enemy, help him first,”<sup>lxiii</sup> giving the enemy precedence over a stranger to offset the inclination to hurt an enemy.

Some say that even unrealizable ethical maxims are good, since they provide ideals to strive for. The inability to conform to accepted ethical norms makes a person feel guilty, sinful, and defective, producing despair and undermining his willingness to follow even the attainable norms. Why strive to be good, if you are bound to fail?

Possibly, Jesus’ loving nature was underlined to combat the Gnostics. Their analogue of Jesus, the demiurge, was not kind, a quality

reserved to the supreme god. Christians strove to present their deity as loving, therefore superior to the demiurge.

5:45–46 “. . . so that you may be children of your Father in heaven;<sup>a</sup> for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good<sup>b</sup> . . . . For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have?<sup>c</sup> Do not even the tax collectors do the same?”

Matthew offers here as many as three explanations of 5:44.

The first, 5:45, is a postulate probably used in the liturgy.

The second is a popular non-Christian allegory. The orthodox Jewish text is different, “The rain falls on the righteous and the unrighteous alike.”<sup>lxiv</sup> The idea is profound: immutable God is not moved by good or evil, and people should similarly restrain their judgment. Essenes attached special importance to the sun, which might prompt them to deviate from the standard Jewish allegory of rain.

The third, 5:46, is borrowed from some source analogous to Lk6:32: “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them.” The publican Matthew or the writer assuming that persona changes *sinners* to the more specific *tax collectors*, or they both change the original *Gentiles*.

5:47 “And if you greet only your brothers . . . do not even the Gentiles do the same?”

Some manuscripts change *Gentiles* to *tax collectors*, avoiding Jesus’ anti-Gentile stance. How easily, how impiously, Christian scribes adapted their sacred texts. Perhaps for the same reason tax collecting is the only profession sharply criticized in the Gospel. At first *tax collectors* was substituted for *Gentiles* in some places, and then the scribes decided to equate them with *sinners*, which is perhaps Luke’s rendering of *Gentiles*. Therefore, “sinners and tax collectors.” Less plausibly, the original “[Jewish] sinners and Gentiles” was changed to “sinners and tax collectors.”

Besides Matthew, other apostles, the fishermen, belonged to a despised profession in the Jewish tradition and cannot be excluded as the archetype of sinners. The evangelists could intentionally picture Jesus’ disciples—tax collectors, fishermen, adulteresses—as the people who had come the longest way to righteousness.

The Greeks esteemed fishermen to an extent. Orpheus was thought to be one. A Gentile author could imagine his fishermen simple, hard-working, decent people, which differed from common Jewish view.

6:1 “Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.”

Quite possibly the second phrase is an insert. Promising a greater award—God’s approval—to replace a lesser one—people’s admiration—contradicts the disinterested motive at 6:3.

Zohar1:25 “One of the forms of ‘strange worship’ [idolatry] is practiced by those who build synagogues and academies, place there Torah scrolls with decorative crowns, but who are guided not by desire to minister to God, but aspiration for public approval and glory.” The book is late, but the proposition is probably based on ancient tradition.

6:2–3 “So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets . . . But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.”

Th62 “I disclose my mysteries to those [who are worthy] of [my] mysteries. Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.” That is, mystical notions should be kept secret, metaphorically expressed by the left hand not knowing of the right hand’s doing.

Luke does not have an analogue of 6:1–4, which is strange for such important directions on piety and charity. Matthew or later editors probably altered Thomas’ text to mean charity to expunge Gnostic mysticism. The passage may have been excised from later versions of Luke for the same reason.

Consider in the context of 19:21: “If you wish to be perfect, go sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor.” “Love your neighbor as yourself” says the same. 19:21: a believer should distribute his whole property instead of deceiving himself by almsgiving, which provides spiritual comfort without noticeable cost, false satisfaction from small help.

The statement has parallels in Buddhism, which proscribes anyone (the recipient included) from knowing the giver, and the latter should not know the former. Importantly, the philanthropist presumably should not know about his own charity: “Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.”

The injunction of such charity that even the giver does not know about it makes assistance almost impossible, which, indeed, might be the aim of Jesus: to prohibit the spiritually useless almsgiving. In any case, imposing restrictions on a donor changes both the object and the subject of philanthropy. The accent of care switches from those who receive to those who give. Understandably, the mystics took care of their own souls, not those of the poor. They might easily neglect the interests of the needy by impractically regulating the philanthropy in favor of those who give to avoid a possible sin of complacency.

The idea must have been popular with the Gentiles, since charity was a duty for the Jews. Charity probably bred less pride in Jews, who practiced it routinely, than in Gentiles, who considered it meritorious.

The Talmud says, "He who gives alms secretly is as great as Moses . . . The best way to give alms is to throw it into the alms basket. Then the giver does not know to whom he gives, and the poor does not know who gives him."<sup>lxv</sup> Also, "A rabbi saw somebody giving a beggar a coin in public. He said, 'It would be better if you gave him nothing than to dishonor him.'"<sup>lxvi</sup>

6:4 "And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

Another trade-off: keeping giving secret brings a greater reward from God.

6:5–6 "And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they *have received* their reward. But when you pray . . . shut the door and . . . your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

This pericope seems to be a compilation of various ideas: one criticizes the Pharisees, the other makes recommendations to Christians. Both will receive the reward, irrespective of how they pray. Perhaps the editors were aware of the problem, and some manuscripts add "will openly reward you" to distinguish the result of Christian prayer.

6:6 "Whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret."

The authenticity of this passage is ambiguous. Perhaps inconsistency with church rites made Luke exclude it.

DiaSav37:2–4 "The Lord said, 'Pray in a place where there is no woman.'" The injunction refers to praying where nothing distracts, not to surreptitious prayer to a mystical God, hidden from the others.

The idea of individual worshipers addressing God developed as far back as the Babylonian captivity, notably in Ezekiel. An early tradition says, "Blessing is only present in the things concealed from looks."<sup>lxvii</sup> And, "Those who pray so that it is heard by others are not worth confidence."<sup>lxviii</sup>

After several lines, a text of the standard prayer employing the first person plural, credibly implies presence of many worshippers.

6:7–8 "When you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do . . . for your Father knows what you need before you ask him."

The distinction between modes of prayer was purely practical. The omniscient God of the Jews knew about needs and so on. In contrast, the

numerous gods of the Gentile pantheon were busy with their own affairs. Worshipers had to draw the divine attention to their needs.

The idea is typically Jewish. Thus, “Let the words of man before God be always few in number.”<sup>lxix</sup> The rabbis also criticized the use of many epithets applied to God.

Jesus’ followers apparently did not know of the injunction, “Call your Father, pray to God often.”<sup>lxx</sup>

6:9 “Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.”

Before the destruction of the temple, prayers varied rather freely so long as they bore the correct sense. Fixed prayers appeared around 70 C.E. and especially at the beginning of the second century. Most likely, the prayer in 6:9–13 took form about then. A formal prayer would have seemed strange before that.

6:9–13 appeared after Christians formed their own isolated sect and stopped taking part in synagogue liturgies. The final redaction of the prayer appeared only in the second century. Even Did8:2 cites a different version.

There were still other versions of the standard prayer: “So, when you give praise, do it in this way: ‘Hear us, Father, as you heard your only-begotten Son and received him to yourself, [and] gave him rest from many [labors. You] it is whose power . . . your light . . . You are the solitary’s purpose and freedom from all care . . . Hear us, as you heard your elect.”<sup>lxxi</sup> This text from the mid-second century is based on several early prototexts and is as credible as Matthew’s. Jesus was not the only person begotten by God; David was likewise adopted.<sup>lxxii</sup>

As a rule, teachers composed many prayers, not just one. Matthew’s lacks the standard beginning: a blessing, the name of God’s emanation, and thanksgiving for creation, and some specific theme. Matthew’s prayer speaks about nothing in particular. The author could not accommodate a spacious text; he needed one prayer to fit all occasions.

The address “Our Father” is atypical of Judaic prayers of that period. Its use should disappoint apologists who stress Jesus’ use of *abba* as evidence of his special closeness with God. The writer obviously thinks many people have the right to address God that way.

“Hallowed be your name” is conventional Jewish liturgy, the response to the *Shma*<sup>36</sup>.

Lk 11:2 looks more accurate: “Father, hallowed be your name.” Luke might have a reason for omitting “in heaven,” a possible Gnostic

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<sup>36</sup> “Hear, O Israel,” the opening words of the principal Jewish liturgy.



allusion to the devil's rule on earth. But the Jews used "in heaven" in their own prayers, and Matthew saw no problem with it. Jesus or the evangelist chose to be more accurate elsewhere: 11:25 "Jesus said, 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven *and earth*.'" 6:10 "Your kingdom come."

A customary bit of Jewish liturgy, though the Jews would hardly use a formula invented by sectarians. It first appears in Jewish writings in the second century.

"Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

A wish, not a certainty, which bears the impress of the Gnostic concept of earth's subordination to the devil. Interestingly, Luke, who usually follows Gnostic sources, does not have this phrase in Lk 11:2. In any case, the language suits liturgy better than individual prayer, since there is no actionable appeal to God.

6:11 "Give us this day our daily bread."

But 6:8, "For your Father knows what you need before you ask him," and 6:31, "Do not worry saying, 'What will we eat?'"

The meaning of the Greek word *epiousios* is ambiguous ; Origen thought the Christians invented it. Among suggested readings are "for today" and "for tomorrow." Some versions read, "Give us this day our daily bread for tomorrow" or "tomorrow's bread." The idea may have a hint of Gnosticism: a taste of the future kingdom of heaven ("bread") today, here and now. In this case, 6:25–34 telling about the lilies growing free from cares is logical as a new thesis about physical food and clothes, not repetition of 6:11.

6:12 "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."

Man have only one debt to God, to observe the commandments, so the language refers to the forgiveness of sins; but Christians defy the law and the commandments. Boasting of repentance is odd. Mt 6:14, where forgiveness is a meritorious act of kindness taken into account, not a request by analogy for God's guaranteed forgiveness, corrects this verse.

Matthew puts *forgiven* in a past tense form, while Luke uses the present. Unless the Matthean text is simply mistaken, the difference is curious. What past event Matthew has in mind, we do not know, but the tense makes the prayer applicable to the current generation only. That interpretation makes sense, because poor Christians hardly forgave debts, could not lend in the first place. Certainly, lending hardly took place on a scale large enough to merit mention in daily prayer. According to the Torah, forgiving debts in compliance with a certain procedure is not a virtue but the bounden duty of any Jew.

Though many scholars believe that the prayer refers to Christians forgiving offenders, not the remittance of debt, that is improbable. It precludes allegory, which looks for similar meaning in dissimilar images. The writer apparently noticed the ambiguity, and added 6:14: “If you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.”

6:13 “And do not bring us to the time of trial [into temptation], but rescue us from the evil one.”

How Christians should be saved from the trial is unclear. John suggests that Christ’s followers will not undergo the trial but will have eternal life by default.<sup>lxxiii</sup> Hardly anything in Matthew can be interpreted in that vein. The pericope is rather late.

A less probable explanation is that Christians did not want to live to the apocalypse, which would start the trial. They are asking to die, to be rescued from the evil world, before that.

In general, Christianity emphasizes the devil. Perhaps the strong whip of fear of the devil was required to convert Christians. How weak Christian faith must be if they must ask daily<sup>37</sup> for delivery from temptation? The prayer does not urge confronting temptation, but rather avoiding it.

Jewish writings underscore man’s freedom of choice between good and evil.<sup>lxxiv</sup> Temptation is only confirmation of man’s predisposition to this or that. Sanh 107 “Man should not lead himself into temptation”—which is not the same as asking for no temptation. The tradition, however, is not altogether alien to Judaism: “Man should not say, ‘Let the All-Merciful keep me far from sin,’ but he must say, ‘Let the All-Merciful keep sin far from me.’”<sup>lxxv</sup> Even this prayer means temporary enticements, not the devil’s interference at every step.

Mt6:13 looks like an insertion. Mt6:14 starts with, “For if you forgive others their trespasses,” which is a consistent elaboration of 6:12.

6:14–15 “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

Here is a logical error. Because every man sins, his refusal to forgive others’ trespasses amounts to his automatic condemnation. People, thus, must always forgive. God, however, do not always forgive: in particular, those who do not obey the command of forgiving others. Disobedience to the divine commandments, thus, exclude the divine

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<sup>37</sup> Modern Christians do not say the prayer daily, but “give us our daily bread” or “the bread for tomorrow” suggests an everyday prayer.

forgiveness. To imitate God, people should not forgive trespasses against themselves.

Mt6:14 makes sense standing alone, but contradicts the threat added in 6:15.

6:16–18 “And when you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces to show others, that they are fasting . . . . When you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face.”

The idea is strange. Judaism has no fasts so long that they cause suffering and wry faces. The recommendation to wash the face (only during fasts?) suits Gentiles better, since Jews observe elaborate purification rites. The Gospels elsewhere criticize the Jewish tradition of washing hands, utensils, and the table before each meal. A Jew would have to wash his hands and leave his face dirty to suit this injunction.

A parallel with Is61:3—“oil of gladness instead of mourning”—may be noted here. Matthew's original idea may have been similar, suggesting anointing during the fast, and could have been changed later to suit a Gentile audience and the Gospel's animosity toward the Pharisees.

6:19–21 “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume . . . but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes . . . . For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

The idea is illogical. Treasure is collected where the heart is, not vice versa. We collect what we love; we should not come to love what we for some reason collect. To imagine someone collecting spiritual wealth in order to become attached to it is difficult. Rabbinic Judaism, though, came up with a similar notion that even mechanically observed commandments eventually become a second nature.

Lk12:16–21 presents the idea in a different context, the parable about the futility of the plans of a man who cannot handle his life. Th63 is similar. Matthew does not include the parable, may have considered it trivial<sup>lxvii</sup> and decided to follow Th76:3 instead: “So also with you, seek his treasure that is unfailling, that is enduring, where no moth comes to eat and no worm destroys.” Matt13:44–46 follows Th76:1–2.

As to organs, there is a dispute. Mary7:4 in a similar context mentions not heart, but reason. B.Batra11 “My ancestors collected treasures below, where force is victorious, treasures bearing no fruits . . . . I have collected treasures above, where no power can win, treasures bearing fruits . . . treasures significant in the future world.”

The notion that true riches live in the mind was standard in ancient ethics.

6:24 “No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”

Th47:1–4 “A person cannot mount two horses . . . . And a slave cannot serve two masters, otherwise that slave will honor the one and offend the other. Nobody drinks aged wine and immediately wants to drink young wine. Young wine is not poured into old wineskins, or they might break, and aged wine is not poured into a new wineskin, or it might spoil.” Thomas does not mean the incompatibility of two of life’s purposes but the incompatibility of old and new religions. The old way is not depleted, but contact with the new one might spoil it, as contact with the old might spoil the new. Neither is inferior to the other; they are different. A new way exists separately alongside the old. The authenticity of this passage is doubtful, since it suits the requirements of the Gnostics but does not suit Jesus who did not preach a way essentially distinct from Judaism.

Th47 raises doubts about the authenticity of the second part of Matt6:24, “You cannot serve God and wealth.” Not only does Thomas lack this idea, but also the sense is different in Thomas: he posits the choice between old and new religious paths, not between the spiritual and the temporal. Jewish Matthew had good reason to alter the language to avoid an open split with Judaism.

6:25–34 “Do not worry about . . . what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear . . . . Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap . . . and your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? . . . Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin . . . . But if God so clothes the grass of the field . . . will he not much more clothe you, you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. So, do not worry about tomorrow . . . . Today’s trouble is enough for today.”

Lk12:24 specifies ravens, not birds in general. Matthew knew that ravens are unclean to Jews and modified the phrase. Luke had no reason to specify *birds* as *ravens* and could have selected a more attractive bird, as he chose the beautiful lily. Significantly, pagans and Gnostics praised the raven as a symbol of wisdom.

The analogy with birds is inappropriate—they toil to find food—as is the comparison with lilies. Unlike man, they are not free to do what they like. Matthew characteristically attacks the Gentiles.

This concept is present in Judaism. For example, Ps55:22: “Place your cares on the Lord, and he will support you; he will not let the righteous

hesitate.” Or in the Talmud: “He who makes a generation, dresses it.”<sup>xxvii</sup> Still there is no hint that a man should not take care of his food or clothes himself. Thus, “Man must not say, ‘I shall eat and drink as long as I can, and the heavens will sympathize with me.’ On the contrary, he should work to make his living.”<sup>xxviii</sup> The Christian reading points to the imminent end of the world, before which they will unethically live on the alms of those who remain engaged in temporal affairs. Begging was characteristic of wandering pagan preachers, while Jews, including rabbis, were obliged to work for living.

The notion of caring for the soul but not the body is characteristic also of Greek philosophy.

The phrase “of little faith” acquired sense during the composition of the Gospel, when belief in Jesus had already become an independent requirement. It had a different meaning, if any, in Jesus’ time.

Just conceivably, the appeal is to an especially aggrieved audience. The very poor would not be persuaded to forget about food and clothing: in time hunger would remind them of the difficulty of this theological application. The passage may refer to the poorest Christians: the sect provided their needs; they could accept the policy. Mt6:32 confirms that option: “You need all these things.” Matthew is compelled to acknowledge people’s material needs. With “all these things,” Matthew avoids preaching cutting them off.

6:27 “Add . . . to your span of life.” Less plausible is the literal “add . . . to your height.” The notion of prolonging life was a popular tradition and appears repeatedly in the Gospels.

6:32 “The Gentiles strive . . . for all these things . . . your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things . . .” repeats 6:8: “For your Father knows what you need before you ask him.” Such repetition in Jesus’ short sermon is hardly probable and suggests compilation.

The need to use ten pericopes to set forth a single idea also indicates that Matthew edited the text, obviously trying to insert his thoughts, but forced to compromise. Likely many did not accept asceticism.

“Today’s trouble is enough for today,” prohibiting anxiety but not care, contradicts the injunction against taking care at all.

Th36 (Coptic) “Do not fret, from morning until evening and from evening to morning, about what you are going to wear.”

Th36 (Greek) “Do not fret, from morning until evening and from evening to morning, about your food, what you are going to eat, or about your clothing. You’re much better than the lilies, which do not card and never spin. As for you, *when you have no garment*, what are you going to

put on? Who could add to your life span? That same one will give you your garment.”

The Coptic version of Th36 looks authentic. The mention of the absence of body (garment of soul) in the Greek version is polemic and might come from a late writer. Perhaps Thomas meant disregard for the earthly body (“clothes”), which is of no use in the afterlife, and Matthew, misunderstanding, thought of real clothes and food.

It is odd that an author of the Greek text of Thomas ignores the Gnostic concept of heavenly clothes, garments of light. He believes there will be no clothes at all, as in Th 37 and Dia Sav 34:4.

Here as in many other cases the diverse views of Jewish sects approximate Gentile beliefs. The kabbalists say that ancient Jewish mystics saw the body as the soul’s clothing, which falls off at death and lets the soul ascend to the heavens.

7:1 “Do not judge, so that you may not be judged.”

The prohibition of judgment stands alone, like other statements from which the sermon was compiled. Otherwise, it makes weaker statements meaningless. If one may not judge, then why prohibit oaths and vengeance elsewhere? The general prohibition of judgment surely includes them.

Jesus means that human judgment is imperfect, that man should not judge by the commandment, “Do not do to your neighbor what you would not like to be done to yourself.”

Matthew mixes two different concepts. One is purely practical: if you do not judge others, perhaps they will not judge you. The other is religious: if you behave morally and do not judge others, by analogy you will not be judged in the afterlife. Christians disagree about the latter. Matthew insists on the apocalyptic predictions that Christians will stand trial like others, but retreats from that position here. Paul also embraces both options. John is straightforward: calling Christians members of a mystical community, he asserts they will not be condemned.

The maxim looks very curious before the Gospel doctrine of final judgment. According to the logic, even non-Christians who abstain from judgment might expect to bypass the trial. For Jesus to embrace the rule and forego judgment, he abdicates his function as judge at the end according to the apocalypse.

Rom14:10 “Why do you pass judgment on your brother? . . . For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.”

Th53 “Light and darkness . . . are brothers. They cannot be separated. By this reason neither good is good nor bad is bad.”

Refinement distinguishes the Gnostic concept “do not judge.” Sin is the fruit of the flesh. The soul apart from the flesh is always pure and beyond judgment. To try the flesh is senseless, because flesh is always sinful. To condemn what cannot be otherwise is improper (sin is not a choice but a property of the flesh).

Mystics refused to divide reality into good and evil, and denied evil *per se*. As Maimonides notes, the ability to discern good from evil was not Adam's prize but his punishment, his spiritual disunity.

Abot2 “Do not judge another before you put yourself in his place; judge all people mercifully.”

The passage may not be an authentic text but rather a version of a popular maxim. The structure is standard, like, “Do not dishonor others, so that you will not be dishonored.”<sup>lxxix</sup>

The most interesting concept may be this: “When is man ready to accept the kingdom of heaven? When he can tell . . . justice from forgiveness.”<sup>lxxx</sup>

7:2 “For with the judgment you make, you will be judged.”

The notion must have been common. Indeed, you can expect to be judged in the afterlife by the same standards you use with others. One wants to be lenient, and worldly trials come to naught, as in Mt7:1.

“And the measure you give will be the measure you get.”

This widespread proverb can hardly be ascribed originally to Jesus. Related tradition appears in the Bible: “You shall have only a full and honest weight . . . so that your days may be long . . . For all who do such things [differently] . . . are abhorrent to the Lord your God.”<sup>lxxxi</sup> Similarly, in the Talmud: “Those using the wrong measure shall be equaled to hypocrites and blasphemers whose sin God will never forget.”<sup>lxxxii</sup>

7:3–5 “<sup>3</sup>Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? <sup>4</sup>Or how can you say to your neighbor, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ while the log is in your own eye? <sup>5</sup>You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye.”

In the textually identical Th26, 7:4 is missing. Matthew adds his favorite word “hypocrite” while characteristically explaining the saying.

The idea is standard. Thus, “If the judge says to the accused, ‘Take a chip from your teeth,’ he will say, ‘Take out the board between your eyes.’”<sup>lxxxiii</sup> Typical of Jewish tradition, the injunction is realistic even if taken literally. The accused held a chip in his mouth, the analogue of a modern toothpick or chewing gum.

A Greek saying, “Each man carries two packs, one in front, one behind him. The one in front has every one else’s faults, and he sees them clearly. The one in back has his own faults, and he hardly sees them at all.”

7:6 “Do not give what is holy to dogs; and do not throw your pearls before swine.”

Curiously, this commandment was acceptable to both Jewish Matthew, who took it for a prohibition against preaching to Gentiles and Gnostic Thomas, for whom it was a ban on revealing mystical doctrine to outsiders. Though the passage appears in both Matthew and Thomas (Th 93), Luke understandably lacks it. He accepted none of the sermon’s restrictions.

The common apologetic interpretation that Christians should not expose their teaching to pagans is utterly absurd and contradicts numerous commissions to preach to anyone under any conditions. Another explanation makes even less sense: the passage denies pagans participation in the Eucharist. Christians themselves participated in pagan eucharistic rituals. Paul and perhaps the Didache mention it as common practice. Besides, the last supper is clearly an addition to Matthew, violating the narrative’s logic. There Jesus peacefully breaks bread with his disciples after declaring his imminent betrayal.

From the Talmud: “Do not propose to sell pearls to those who sell vegetables and onions.”<sup>lxxxiv</sup> Jews – and Jesus – prohibited teaching the Torah to Gentiles.<sup>lxxxv</sup>

7:7–8 “Search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives.”

The passage must be a standard formula.

Sir6:27 “Search and find . . . and you will know . . . Wisdom.”

Th94 “The searcher will find, and the one who knocks, will open.” The passage appears near the end of Thomas, where the text abounds with insertions.

Th92 “Seek and you will find. In the past, however, I did not tell you the things about which you asked me then. Now I am willing to tell them, but you are not seeking them.” Before his resurrection, Jesus spoke to his disciples in parables, and they did not understand him. After the resurrection, his doctrine becomes comprehensible for Christians, but they are content with literal interpretation and do not search for mystical sense.

Jn16:28–30 “I came from the Father and have come into the world; again, I am leaving the world and am going to the Father. His disciples . . . said, ‘Yes, now you are speaking plainly, not in any figure of speech! Now we know that you know all things . . . . By this we believe that you came



from God.” Do not ask why the disciples, who saw the miracles, did not accept Jesus' special nature earlier.

John stands on a similar, but not the same, tradition. Before the crucifixion, Jesus began to speak to the disciples openly, without parables. Th92 cannot be explained the same way: “Now I am willing to tell things, but you are not seeking them.” First, Jesus does not tell (“willing”); second, the disciples do not ask (“do not seek”).

Mr4:5–7 “For the seed of true humanity exists within you. Those who search for it will find it.” A reference to looking for the kingdom of heaven in oneself, here and now.

The Gnostics had a whole set of varied concepts about Jesus' sudden decision to teach openly. Each evangelist treated the matter in his own way. The concepts challenge common sense: why wait for death before revealing his teaching?

“Everyone who asks will receive” resembles a late addition in the spirit of the Church rather than of the Gnostics.

Th2 probably contains the authentic idea: “Those who seek should not stop seeking until they find. When they find, they will be disturbed. When they are disturbed, they will marvel, and will rule over all.” Thomas speaks of ruling as a spiritual experience, not as a heavenly kingdom.

Heb6 follows Th2: “When they rule, they will rest,” implying that rule is a spiritual state of rest, abstinence from worldly affairs. The politically active Church hardly abstained from the world.

7:9–11 “<sup>9</sup>Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? <sup>10</sup>Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? <sup>11</sup>If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!”

Lk9:11–12 “Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake, or if the asks for an egg, will give a scorpion?” Some versions of Luke add “bread” and “stone,” obviously harmonizing with Matthew.

Several different versions of Matthew and Luke demonstrate the passage is not authentic text but started with popular tradition, some kind of argument structure. Various images—“bread/stone, fish/snake, egg/scorpion—were threaded onto the design at the writers' discretion.

Likely Matthew decided to give his own explanation at 7:11. The preaching, the search for truth at 7:8, became a method of acquiring worldly possessions, apparently by prayer (asking). Matthew emphasizes “asking,”

i.e., addressing God in Christian prayer. However, “your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”<sup>lxxxvi</sup>

Christians ignore the inconsistency of their concept: Jesus’ listeners are sons of God (“your Father”) in the same sense as is Jesus, and well before he opened them the way with his crucifixion.

7:13–14 “Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction . . . . The gate is narrow . . . that leads to life, and there are few who find it.”

Shabbat<sup>104</sup> “Everyone wishing to defile himself with sin will find all gates open before him, and everyone wishing to attain the highest degree of purity will find all good forces ready to help him.” Judaism emphasizes freedom of choice.

7:15–18 “<sup>15</sup>Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing . . . . <sup>16</sup>You will know them by their fruits . . . . <sup>17</sup>So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit.”

Diviners and teachers abounded in Judea in those days. Matthew could mean leaders of competing Christian sects, like Simon Magus.

Jesus, compared with (sacrificial) sheep, hardly brought good fruits to Israel, and amusingly fits the description. Possibly the phrase is a pun on Greek *tokos*, “offspring,” which can mean both fruit and interest. People bearing bad fruits are likened to usurers, the worst offenders.

7:19–20 “<sup>19</sup>Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. <sup>20</sup>Thus you will know them by their fruits.”

This is a late addition. Mt7:20 repeats 7:16. 7:19 precisely repeats the words of John the Baptist at 3:10, spoken in a very different context and meaning sinners generally. 7:19 seemingly substantiates the punishment of Jews

7:21 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.”

The church’s hypocrisy extends to rejecting the law but leaves this commandment in the Gospel. Jesus says clearly that no one who breaks the commandments can inherit the kingdom, and evildoers cannot.<sup>lxxxvii</sup> Declaration of faith alone cannot win salvation.

Significantly, this saying appeared quite late, when calling Jesus *Lord* was customary. Modern apologists try to substitute the generic meaning of *Lord*, something like *sir*, but the writer implies the extreme honor inherent in the title.

The address *my Father*, literally interpreted, might lead to the virgin-birth myth.

7:22 “On that day many will say to me ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?’”

The Christian idea that Jesus’ name works miracles came later.

10:1 “Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease.” At first Jesus shared his power. Later, when he was deified, his name alone was thought enough to cast out spirits.

7:23 “Then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.’”

Here Jesus insists that Christians should observe the law.

Ps6:8 “Depart from me, all you workers of evil, for the Lord has heard the sound of my weeping.” Naturally, David hopes to avoid his enemies. Mt7:23 incorrectly assigns the same anxiety to Jesus, the Holy Spirit incarnate.<sup>38</sup> First, that a deity asks someone to go away is strange. Second, evildoers are mystically removed from God, and Jesus’ request for even further estrangement makes no sense. And how can they flee God? Perhaps the author thought in terms of anthropomorphic, nonomniscient Greek deities, who routinely look for people. Third, evildoers can turn to righteousness at any time. To remove them finally deprives them the possibility of reform and contradicts scripture. The mistake may be not important if Matthew means only on the last day.

7:24–25 “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them, will be like a wise man who built his house on rock . . . [The house] did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And everyone, who hears . . . and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand.”

Lk6:47–48 is different: the house was not “built on rock” (possibly reminiscent of the church built on Peter, the rock) but simply “built well.” Some versions of Luke also use “rock.”

If we accept *house* as a metaphor for faith, then Matthew argues with the Gentile Christians: faith without observance of the law (the *rock*) is unstable, like a house built on sand. Paul ignored this clear instruction to act when he proclaimed that only faith matters and deeds are unnecessary.

ScJm8:7 “I am made known to you building a house of great value to you, since you take shelter in it; likewise it can support your neighbors’

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<sup>38</sup> Matt 7:21 “Many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord.’”

house when theirs is in danger of collapsing.” The collapsing house may be the ruined faith of other people, shored up by Christian teaching, though the exact meaning is not clear. The statement possibly refers to the role of Christianity in the crisis of Judaism after the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. The plural *neighbors* seems to exclude one Christian supporting another, though could be applied to families.

The Gnostics recognized a place where those who achieve a higher spiritual state live, apart from the world. In this context, ScJm may intend *house* as a Gnostic spiritual place and the support as help initiated Christians might offer their less advanced fellows.

Probably, the evangelists doctored some parable about a builder.

7:26–27 “And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand . . . and it fell, and great was its fall!”

This may be a late description of the destruction of Jerusalem. “Like a foolish man” also suggests nonauthenticity. 5:22 “And if you say, ‘You fool,’ you will be liable to the hell of fire.”

7:28–29 “The crowds were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.”

The writer demonstrates a certain knowledge of rabbinic argument. Christian theologians surely encountered that method in discussions.

Jesus’ doctrine was unconventional in one important manner. Rabbis substantiated each argument with the authoritative words of their forerunners or careful interpretation of scripture according to specific rules. Jesus taught without supporting evidence. That is, he tried to enact *halackot*<sup>39</sup> on his own authority (opinion), unlike the rabbis.

Jesus’ method is odd. Even philosophers of that time referred to authoritative teachers. His method could be expected from an uneducated person unfamiliar with rabbinic tradition. Similarly, a Gentile forger inventing or amending the teaching of a Jewish teacher could operate in no other way. The notion of a genius rejecting authority for a fresh idea was alien to ancient mind where antiquity equaled authority equaled correctness. The traditional method of prove would have better persuaded the people, and much of the Jesus teaching could be readily substantiated from the Torah.

Jesus’ method incurred continuous reprimands. The temple priests ask Jesus by whose authority he does “these things.”<sup>39xxxviii</sup> The episode in this form is meaningless, since Jesus taught there and did no miracles. Rather, they asked whose authority supported his doctrine. The Gentile

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<sup>39</sup> Plural of *halackah*: opinion on legal issues, meaning the *Way*.

editor did not understand that and decided to improve the text. Jesus was likely aware of the problem. He refuses to answer the priests and corners them with an irrelevant counterquestion: "Was John's baptism from the people or from heaven?"

Elsewhere Jesus argues in the rabbinic manner, as when he uses proof by analogy with Satan. He needed arguments and repeatedly distorted the scriptures. Neither he nor the evangelist was familiar with the oral tradition from years of study, while the use of popular quotations required no education beyond the minimum for Jewish boys.

"The crowds were astounded," because they did not understand much theology. The writer knew the rabbis criticized Christians for not backing their teaching with scripture and extrapolated this view to all Judeans.

8:4 "See that you say nothing to anybody."

Those words Jesus spoke to the man whose leprosy he healed in violation of the cleansing procedure.<sup>lxxxix</sup> That is evident nonsense if many people were around. 8:1 "Great crowds followed him."

In Capernaum, the faith of a centurion who asked Jesus to heal his servant, who was far away, surprised Jesus. The population of Capernaum, a minor town, hardly exceeded several hundreds. Even taking into account nearby settlements, what could such a garrison, which includes centurion, be required for? It is not known for sure whether Herod Antipas in Galilee had a standing army of foreign mercenaries (the centurion is Gentile). Usually such an army was hired for a specific war, as keeping it was very expensive. The centurion did not ask Jesus to go to the servant but only to speak a word of healing. Jesus responded at 8:10: "Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith." 8:13 "And to the centurion Jesus said, 'Go; be it done for you according to your faith.'" Logically 8:13 must follow 8:10 immediately.

The centurion episode is doubtless a forgery aimed at showing that even Gentiles believed in Jesus, while the Jews rejected him. The same story of healing at a distance was told about Apollonius of Tiana, and the Christians borrowed it.

8:11 "I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven."

At 22:30 Jesus responds to Sadducees, "For in resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven." That is, at least, do not eat.

Christian theologians have done nothing radically new calling nations besides the Jews. The Judaic position is clear: people of other nations inherit the kingdom of heaven by turning to the law. In Jeremiah,

even hostile people turn to God as World to Come approaches.<sup>40</sup> In Ezekiel, other people are not saved, though they have until the last day to convert. Isaiah “You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified . . . I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”<sup>xc</sup> The rabbis said, “The righteous of all nations will take part in the World To Come.” Righteousness is simplified to the seven basic commandments given to Noah.

Is56:7 “. . . my house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.” But this is true only for those mentioned in 56:6: “And the foreigners who join themselves to God . . . who keep his Sabbath . . . and hold fast my covenant.”

Though the writers of the Jewish pseudepigrapha, unlike the prophets, envisage the enslavement or destruction of the Gentiles on the last day, the Pharisees were actively converting them to Judaism. In any case, Judaism was open to Gentile proselytes.

8:11–12 is an insertion, foreign to the context of belief. Having just said in 10, “Truly I tell you . . .”, Jesus starts anew in 11: “I tell you . . .” A host of such insertions appear in the NT to justify the call of other nations. Quite to the contrary, Jesus often refuses to help the Gentiles and even the Samaritans, who confessed a peculiar version of Judaism, and forbids his disciples to do so.

The continuation, “while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness,” changes the meaning of the passage.

8:14–15 “When Jesus entered Peter’s house, he saw his mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever; he touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she got up and began to serve him.”

The episode is doubtful. Mothers usually lived with their sons, not their daughters. Since families were large, the lack of a son is unlikely.

An image of a mother serving her adult children or son-in-law is odd in Jewish culture which emphasizes respect to parents. The story makes sense in light of the legend of Petronilla, Peter’s daughter, who followed him and died in Rome. A father would take a daughter with him if her mother were dead; indeed, Paul claims Cephas at some time traveled with his wife.<sup>xc1</sup> Perhaps the mother-in-law was the only woman in the house at that time to serve a meal.

The author of Matthew seems to adapt Lk4:38: “Moreover Simon’s mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever . . . He stood over her and *rebuked* the fever, and it left her.” In Luke, Jesus exorcises the demon of fever, which looks badly not only from the point of view of modern science

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<sup>40</sup> The World to Come, העולם הבא, ha-olam ha-ba.

(which divine Jesus should be aware of), but also from that of Judaism, which prohibits exorcism.

8:16–17 “He cast out spirits with a word, and cured all who were sick. This was to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah, ‘He took our infirmities and bore our diseases.’”

Matthew specifically mentions the fulfillment of the prophecy, not a loose similarity, and he is mistaken. People then believed that diseases were caused by evil spirits or were punishments. In the former case, Jesus cast demons out but did not take them to himself, as would follow from Isaiah. In the latter, Jesus remitted the punishment but did not “[bear] our diseases.”

8:20 “And Jesus said to him, ‘Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.’”

Th86 “. . . have no place to lie down and rest.” In this form, the idea makes sense. Animals and birds may rest, but man is always in movement wherever he is. Animals and birds in the security of their nests do not worry, but men worry even at home. Thomas suggests mystic rest from the world.

Interpreted literally, both Luke and Matthew mean Jesus has no house of his own. This might picture him as an Essene, living in a communal dwelling. Perhaps Jesus’ homelessness is an allegory of Wisdom seeking refuge on the earth.

8:22 “But Jesus said to him, ‘Follow me, and let the dead bury their dead.’”

Participation in a funeral rendered people unclean according to the law. The disciple would need a week of purification and could not follow Jesus.

The passage may reflect the tradition that Jesus was a Nazirite. In that case, neither he nor his disciples could touch the dead.

It is plausible that Matthew invented the statement. Though it alludes to Jewish custom on one hand, on the other Jesus aggressively calls those who rejected him “dead.” Jesus tried to convert them and therefore did not consider them dead.

8:28–34 Jesus casts demons into swine, which subsequently jump into the water and drown. The episode is depicted at Gadarene, miles from the lake of Kinereth’s bank. Pigs could not run that far to rush off the cliff. Further, the bank is flat there, and the pigs would have to look hard for a cliff. The problem was evident to early Christians, and Origen thought the village was Gergesa. All of it seems speculative.

“The country of the Gadarenes” is the territory of the Jewish clan of Gad, bounded by the southern extremity of the Sea of Galilee, sparsely inhabited country. Why would Jesus go there?

An example of healing demoniacs occurs at 8:31: “The demons begged him, ‘If you cast us out, send us into the herd of swine.’” Pagans believed that demons moved from one body to another at the instruction of a man with special skills. The belief is still present in Arab culture. The miracle story may be borrowed from a source, because normally Jesus exorcises demons Greek-style, not moving them or ejecting them through a specific part of the body, like a toe on the right foot, so that they will not enter someone else. In another tradition reflected in the Gospels, he attempts to heal by forgiving sins, but is sharply rebuked for infringing God’s prerogative. Jesus’ miracles doubtlessly reflect Gentile conventions; Jewish miracles are different, usually of calling the rain and free from sorcery or faith healing.

In an Eleusinian<sup>41</sup> rite, the converted bathe with piglets which absorb their sins. Ancient people did not clearly distinguish between the two causes of illness, sin and demonic possession. In this episode Jesus drives the demons into other beings. Ignorant of the rite, Mark has the demons implore Jesus not to send them out of the country but into the swine.<sup>xcii</sup> This kind of patriotic attachment of demons to the land is just silly.

What Jesus was doing in a Gentile country full of pigs is not clear. Mark says there were two thousand, more than one herd, enough to feed thousands of Gentiles, who apparently lived in desert terrain. Gentile swine breeders would hardly have tolerated the destruction of their herds by an alien newcomer.

8:34 also confirms that Gentiles populated the territory: “Then the whole town . . . asked him to leave their neighborhood.” The destruction of swine would not likely alarm Jews.

Jesus’ visit to predominantly Gentile Decapolis is difficult to reconcile with forbidding the disciples to visit Gentile cities<sup>xciii</sup> or to cure even Samaritans,<sup>xciv</sup> fringe adherents to Judaism; nor is it clear why Jesus cures the Gentile in this episode, then refuses to heal the Canaanite woman’s daughter.<sup>xcv</sup>

What pigs were doing at the deserted, infertile lake is a mystery, since so many would hardly find enough to eat. To drive a herd of two thousand pigs is problematic: unlike cows, they scatter. Polybius describes pigs tended on the Greek plains and in forests in herds of a thousand or

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<sup>41</sup> Eleusis in Greece was the scene of mass spectacular mystic rituals.



more. The appearance of a large herd in the Gospel may point to the author's familiarity with Greece rather than Judea.

9:2–8 “Jesus . . . said to the paralytic, ‘. . . your sins are forgiven.’<sup>3</sup> And behold some of the scribes said, ‘This man is blaspheming.’<sup>4</sup> But Jesus . . . said, . . .<sup>5</sup> For which is easier, to say, “Your sins are forgiven,” or to say, “Stand up and walk?””

To deal with a problem of Jesus usurping divine prerogative of forgiveness, Matthew extravagantly ascribed laziness to Jesus: he forgave, because it took fewer words than to exorcise.<sup>42</sup> Theoretically, the paralytic could do without Jesus: according to 6:14–15, the ill man only needed to forgive others to automatically gain the remission.

Since illnesses were punishment for sin or, at any rate, divinely originated, Jesus could not heal by his own will. Matthew avoids saying that Jesus forgave sins like God, though he hints at it. Had that been so, the Sanhedrin would have no need to look farther to substantiate a charge of blasphemy.

8:2 “And there was a leper who knelt before him, saying, ‘Lord, if you choose, you can make me clean.’ He . . . touched him, saying, ‘I do choose. Be made clean!’” Christians tried to hint at the power of Jesus to forgive sins without riskily direct claims. Matthew, unlike John, lived in a country where declaring someone divine had criminal consequences.

Egerton2:2 is the most reasonable: “If you wish I will be cleaned.” This is orthodox Judaism: God may heal leprosy at the request of a prophet or, from the Christian viewpoint, of Jesus.

9:30–31 After healing two blind men, “Jesus sternly ordered them, ‘See that no one knows of this.’ But they went away spreading the news about him throughout that district.”

The logic of the Gospels is unclear. In many other instances, Jesus does not ask his audience to keep quiet; indeed to count on secrecy after a miracle is unrealistic. Attempts to make connections between secrecy and certain types of miracles or audience have failed. Jesus performed wonders to demonstrate his power, which required spreading the news.

The injunction is unconvincing in view of transparent hints to the Pharisees about Jesus as messiah, his miracles and sermons. The forger needed to answer those who doubted Jesus and perhaps to explain why Jesus did not declare himself messiah.

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<sup>42</sup> Contrasted to Jesus' evading saying that he has a power to forgive sins, are the future millions of priests who shrived at their own discretion. Nobody would be deceived by their declaration of possessing special authority given by God.

The forgers of some prototexts later included in Gospels may have used the request for secrecy to explain why multitude did not recognize Jesus or to show converts that he worked miracles but kept them secret. A policy of secrecy in those stories would undergird them. People learned of the miracles only from the storyteller: "In some place Jesus healed some man of an illness but forbade him to tell about it. That is why we have learned about this healing just now." Later the stories were inserted in the Gospel context, a crowd was added, and the wonderworker was Jesus, which led to inconsistency between promoting himself as messiah and keeping a low profile.

Other more or less plausible explanations may be advanced. For one, Jesus knew that enjoining secrecy assures that people would spread the news. Or healing involved certain non-Jewish (mystical? Egyptian?) rites. Jesus attempted to conceal the rites, not the healing itself.

Lk4:41 "Demons also came out of many, shouting, 'You are the Son of God!' But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Messiah."

This is a vestige of some other tradition, according to which Jesus should not have been recognized. Probably we should look for an explanation in the sectarian texts about the rejected and persecuted messiah. Following their logic, Jesus had to hide until the time came for him to bring in the last day, before which rulers, priests, and evil spirits must not recognize him.

The overlapping traditions result in an absurdity. Jesus healed and called the sick to himself. He denounced the people of Nazareth who rejected him despite the miracles in Capernaum. Yet he demands secrecy from the healed. People heard the cries of the exorcised spirits; in fact the exorcisms demonstrate Jesus' authority. Still, he urges the demons to be silent.

9:10 "Many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him."

Lk5:29 "Then Levi [Matthew] gave a great banquet for him in his house; and there was a large crowd of tax collectors and others." But Lk5:27 says he left everything when he joined Jesus. Perhaps Luke wrongly made Levi the host because tax collectors were there.

Jesus seemed to despise tax collectors: "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?"<sup>xxvi</sup>

In Matthew, the banquet takes place somewhere in Capernaum, but what was "a large crowd of tax collectors" doing in a small town?

Characteristically, Matthew omits Jesus' visit to the house of a hated tax collector, though Luke reports it.

The tax collector Levi converted and followed Jesus. Accordingly, he had to give away his property, take up his cross, and so on. Yet he kept his house and money and hosted a party. Jesus does not scorn the banquet paid for with filthy lucre; moreover, he participates.

The episode may be the invention of a Gentile who did not consider tax collectors sinners but honorable public servants. Notably, Matthew mentions *sinners*, while Luke speaks of *others* with no implication that they are bad people. That could also account for tax collectors being included in the lists of apostles. Apologists usually say Levi was called to show the possibility of repentance; but the point is that tax collectors were not so much sinners but despised people. On the contrary, a Gentile would respectfully portray tax collectors as wealthy followers of Jesus, revealing the difference between Jewish and Gentile notions about tax collectors.

The Gospels' fixation on tax collectors may result from the editors' need to create background for Matthew. They reasonably supposed that, as the author, he would present himself and his colleagues as egregious sinners so his conversion would have greater value.

The phrase "tax collectors and sinners" means that tax collectors were not literally sinners but were worse than other people. Sectarians might have compared tax collectors and trespassers, since they attributed special importance to their own books and disregarded the fact that Torah, contains no "ban on profession," except for prostitution, and specifically prescribes taxes. The subsequent theological condemnation of taxation was part and parcel of the general dislike of taxes.

A particularly negative attitude to tax collectors likely developed after the Jewish War, when they collected inflated taxes and the humiliating *fiscus Iudaicus*. Hence the tax collector narrative can likely be dated later than 70 C.E.

Given the number of tax collectors, prostitutes, sick people, and so on, socializing with sinners and the unclean was hardly a great problem for Jews, though it would greatly shock the Essenes. The evangelists could use it to counter Essene conventions.

The Jews did not expel sinners from society. The well-known rabbi Simeon Ben Lakish was a bandit in his youth. Repentance and abandonment of his evil ways were conditions of his conversion. The Gospels show Jesus communicating with sinners. His sermons neither convinced them nor set them right; they clung to their old ways.

The Talmudic tradition offers an analogy to Jesus' conduct. In Sanh37, Rabbi Zeira was a friend of burglars, hoping his example would set them on a new path. They repented after his death. Other rabbis condemned his

behavior: because evil must be expunged by punishment and social rejection, not by tolerance.

“A righteous man should follow the sinner and help him get rid of uncleanness, to subdue the Evil Spirit to his will and to cure his soul. And it will be taken into account to the righteous man’s credit as if he has born the sinner anew.”<sup>xcvii</sup> Or “Even when your left hand repulses them, your right hand should draw sinners nearer.”<sup>xcviii</sup> The attitude of Jewish society to sinners may be characterized as readiness to encourage repentance and a refusal to participate in uncleanness.

The well-to-do tax collectors and other sinners might have been the sect’s main source of income, and negative attitude to them was compromised. Sponsoring was very important; the Talmud often mentions matrons who patronized rabbis.

9:12–13 Answering the Pharisees who criticized his participation in the banquet, “Jesus . . . said, ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick . . . . For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.’”

“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick,” was a popular proverb of supposedly Greek origin, not an original saying of Jesus.

One would hardly call to repentance a host after joining his festive banquet.<sup>43</sup> A dinner in that culture meant friendship and recognition. The Pharisees did not oppose sermons preached to sinners to turn them to the law, but criticized Jesus for partaking in a meal with the sinners.

The guests were closer to belief in Jesus’ powers than many, but he calls them sinners. Jesus therefore defined sin as immoral conduct, not lack of faith. Once healed, sinners had to stop sinning and live according to the law—which the church rejects.

In fact, nowhere in the Gospels did he urge the Pharisees, the scribes, the Jews—everyone, in a word—to repent. We may have here a remnant of a very old tradition about a common preacher addressing customary sinners and not trying to reform the world.

9:14–15 “Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, ‘Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?’ And Jesus said to them, ‘The wedding guests cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken

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<sup>43</sup> Living on alms, Jesus was not in moral position to criticize his donors. Moses could reproach the Israelites because he did not take cattle or any payment from anybody, *Kohelet rabbah* 3.

away from them, and then they will fast.” Lk5:34–35 has *fast* instead of *mourn*, because Luke did not know of the custom Jesus spoke of.

The friends of the bridegroom did not fast because one cannot expect a profound prayer or self-immersion, as is appropriate for a fast, from rejoicing and intoxicated people. Socializing with Jesus, however, should promote praying and fasting. Taanit<sup>8</sup> is probably an early tradition: if fasting is impossible right now, begin fasting at the earliest opportunity. Such situations arose often, and the corresponding *halackah* should be very ancient. Doubtless, people knew it. The NT does not show the apostles fasting after Jesus' execution to compensate for numerous missed fasts. John describes the risen Jesus' appearance at supper, so obviously no one fasted. Acts reports no fast after Jesus' ascension.

9:14–15 Surely a late explanation of an early and temporary Christian abandonment of Jewish fasts. The practice is integral to many religions, and the church later incorporated fasts in Christian practice. The desire to reinstate fasting explains the ending—probably added later—when Jesus retorts that his disciples will fast after his death.

At the same time *often* could be interpolated to show that Jesus' disciples in fact fasted, and often enough, though not too often. The word could be added simply to allow for minimal correlation of the episode with Judean reality, where it was impossible for a teacher to advocate no fast at all. Seeing fasting as mourning further supports the Christian origin of the idea. The Jewish tradition of fasting was joyful, as Jesus himself suggests in 6:18, or at least solemn.

A victorious Church no longer needed to make rituals easy to attract proselytes and adopted many long fasts, even more for people in religious orders. At the same time, Christian impractically long fasting hypocritically evolved into mere abstinence from certain foods.

Th<sup>27</sup> especially stresses the importance of fasting: “If you do not fast from the world, you will not find the [Father's] domain.” The Gnostics saw fasting in the mystical sense of abstinence from the world.

Th<sup>104</sup> “They said to Jesus, ‘Come, let us pray today, and let us fast.’ Jesus said, ‘What sin have I committed . . . ? . . . When the groom leaves the bridal, then let people fast and pray.’” In Jesus' presence, the disciples abstain from the world in a mystical fast, but after he is gone, they must fast physically. Apparently an insertion, the idea runs contrary to Th<sup>104:2</sup> where Jesus says that those who are clean (have not sinned) are not required to fast. The only way to reconcile Th 104:2 and Th 104:3 is to suppose that with Jesus near, the disciples were sinless and would begin to sin after he left, neither plausible nor admirable.

The groom image was typical of the Gnostics. They called the place where the initiated received the Holy Spirit and Light the *bridal chamber*.

9:16–17 “No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak, for the patch pulls away from the cloak, and a worse tear is made. Neither is new wine put into old wineskins; otherwise the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and the skins are destroyed; but new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved.”

Lk5:36 “No one tears a piece from a new garment and sews it on an old garment.” The editor of Matthew probably replaced Luke’s quotation with a more graphic one. On the other hand, Luke’s audience may have been unfamiliar with the properties of unshrunk cloth, and Luke decided to use a more recognizable image. Or Luke reinforced the concept by saying that trying to adapt new teaching to old destroys it. In any case, the absence of piety in the evangelists is obvious: they hardly considered the text as revelation.

Th47 “A person cannot mount two horses or bend two bows. And a slave cannot serve two masters . . . . Nobody drinks aged wine and immediately wants to drink young wine. Young wine is not poured into old wineskins, or they might break, and aged wine is not poured into a new wineskin, or it might spoil. An old patch is not sewn onto a new garment, since it would create a tear.” The idea seems important for Thomas, since the repetition of several similar wordings deviates from his usual style.

Thomas speaks of the incompatibility of new ways and old (Judaism and Gnosticism), both of which are good in a sense. He says that someone who tastes the old wine (Judaism) need not experiment with young wine (a new way). The notion suited Christians so ill that some manuscripts omit it and others substituted, “And no one after drinking old wine desires new wine, but says, ‘The old is good,’” after Lk5:39, who apparently modified Thomas’ original.

Thomas’ text may be the source. Matthew writes, “The wine is spilled, and the skins are destroyed,” an obvious abridgement of Thomas, where broken wineskins and spoilt wine are distributed between the two hemistichs.

Matthew presents the advantage of the new way—he omits “old wine is not poured into new wineskins” and the other pairs: two horses and two bows—and retains only a description of the disadvantage of the old. The final form is probably a late, heavily edited text intended to discredit Judaism and promote faith in Jesus’ resurrection.

“The hole will be still worse.” That is, the NT damages Judaism, and in turn it makes Christianity useless. The writer argues that by separation, “Both are preserved.” This is the argument for Gentile Christianity, without it clinging to Judaism. The parables do not match with the context: at 9:14–15, Jesus answers the question about fasting and at 9:8 he answers that about healing the daughter of an official. In both cases,

Jesus responds, with words and actions, accordingly. At 9:16–17, Jesus just makes a declaration without any particular reason.

9:36 “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”

The common Christian allusion to Is53:6—“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all”—is groundless. If Isaiah meant Jesus, then Jesus is more to be pitied than glorified.

The grammatically correct reading is, “God pushed our iniquity into him,” implying that the man became as sinful as everyone else.

Matthew adds “without a shepherd” and wrenches Isaiah’s meaning to mean Jesus. Is53 mentions no shepherd.

9:37–38 “Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.’”

Jesus would hardly expect his disciples to ask him to send more disciples to preach. The appeal is to God to send more prophets. Jesus claims no special power to convince God but instructs his disciples to pray. In this very credible text (present in Th73 and Lk10:2), Jesus unambiguously admits that he is not unique and that “other laborers” are available.

10:5 “These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: ‘Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans.’”

That injunction contradicts the postresurrection commission to preach to all people. It is impossible to repute that Jesus’ judgment changed radically after the crucifixion is not likely: further, he knew the crucifixion was ahead when he warned the disciples away from the Gentiles. The likely words do not belong to Jesus, but to Matthew’s polemic with Gentile Christians or the outcast Samaritans.

The disciples could hardly go from Judea to Galilee without passing through Samaria.

The Christians’ antipathy to the Samaritans might differ from the Jews’. Christians could not reproach Samaritans for disobeying the law of Moses, since they did the same. They felt no piety for the Jerusalem temple, while the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerazim did not scandalize them. Both postures are anathema to traditional Jews.

The quarrel possibly arose because the Samaritans, like the Sadducees, denied resurrection which became crucial for Christianity only after Jesus’ crucifixion, further evidence that the episodes critical of the Samaritans are not authentic.

Yet another possibility is that Samaria was influenced by remnants of the Baptist's sect, led by Simon Magus and hostile to Jesus.

10:6 "Go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

Th14:4 "When you go into any region and walk about in the countryside, when people take you in, eat what they serve you and heal the sick among them" hardly implies an appeal to the Gentiles. Thomas' version makes sense if Jesus' disciples were Essenes. If so, Jesus formally released them from the obligation to eat only with other Essenes and affirms that the food of observant Jews is clean. He also lifts the prohibition against healing non-Essenes. The Essenes were prized as healers.

10:7 "Proclaim that . . . the kingdom of heaven has come near."

This phrase makes sense for preachers of the Baptist's sect, but overturns the reasoning of Christian theologians about Jesus' messianic mission. The messiah should come just before the judgment and the arrival of the kingdom; he should not be preaching a kingdom coming in some indefinite, albeit near, future. Jesus had no specific date in mind.

10:8 "Raise the dead."

Early Christians seemed to take this pericope literally, with numerous legends of resurrections performed by the apostles. Such events were seen as signs of the last days.

Perhaps the direction is purely mystical: resurrect, awaken belief, in those who are spiritually dead. If so, the wording was tucked in with other less radical commandments by design: "Cure the sick . . . cleanse the lepers, cast out demons; you received without payment; give without payment." One can, of course, always argue that healing and cleansing are also connected with spiritual revival and conversion.

"You received without payment; give without payment" could mean the disciples should not put on airs before neophytes, though this interpretation is not likely. More likely would be a direction to abrogate the long period of apprenticeship ("payment") before receiving the secret teachings. Both Gnostics and Essenes had such a preinitiation period.

10:9–11 "Take no gold . . . no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for laborers deserve their food. Whatever town or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy, and stay there until you leave."

"For laborers deserve their food" substantiates the Christian concept of requiring a community to provide for preachers. Mark lacks the clause, and the Essenes could not have honored it, since they were forbidden to take anything free from the unclean, including other Jews.



Most likely it came into Matthew from some tradition or from Paul<sup>xcix</sup>, where he quotes it to defend himself against a charge of abuse of power. Since Paul seems unfamiliar with any sayings of Jesus, we cannot imagine he took this one from the Gospel; rather, he invented it.

The notion is present in the Judaic tradition<sup>c</sup>, but nowhere in the sense of maintaining rabbis. Jesus' conduct resembles that of wandering Greek philosophers more. Judaism forbade supporting rabbis at public expense, though it accepted that the priests receive a tithe, according to the Torah. Rabbis started receiving wages in the Middle Ages and in a roundabout way: technically, wages were not payment for their work but rather compensation for the lost income they would have earned some other way. Before that, even famous rabbis earned their living at some trade other than being rabbis.

Zohar Hadash 1:4 reports that in antiquity pious wise men went hungry and did not work while they studied the Torah, though that may be just legend.

The injunction amounts to ordering the faithful to provide for ministers if divine inspiration does not lead the lay people to feed their teachers of their own will—a contradiction of the notion of carefree lilies relying on nothing worldly.

Perhaps the passage aims to explain the established procedure of giving preachers firstfruits, including the first baked bread. Did13 describes the tradition, apparently unaware of the Gospel prescription.

Did11 stipulates that itinerant preachers should stay no more than a couple of days in one town, and Matthew may have wanted to challenge that Jewish Christian rule. Second-century Christian preachers went to large Gentile cities, not to tiny Judean settlements, and had to stay longer at each place.

The pericope describes the Essenes' manner of traveling as Josephus presents it. They took nothing with them and stayed in the homes of their associates ("who in it is worthy"). All property was common, so they needed nothing for the trip.

One can hardly imagine what else "who in it is worthy" could mean. There were no Christians yet. The rich would hardly welcome religious cranks, and righteous Jews would not house people who disobeyed the law. Some scholars suppose Jesus meant his sympathizers, but that cannot be. Disciples would stay in the town they arrive at by evening and start preaching the next morning. Until then, they had no way to find sympathizers. Rural communities still commonly attend meetings in the morning; arriving in the afternoon, Christian preachers would not have found much audience.

Why would the itinerant preachers need a host? Customarily travelers lodged in a kind of rest house maintained by the community or the synagogue. Jesus also conspicuously does not mention eating on the road: the Essenes ate at dawn and dusk with nothing in between.

The Gospel must mean some group well known to the apostles, probably the Essenes.

In describing a preacher, the writer decided to add such a characteristic detail as a staff. The general sense of the Essene prohibition was not to take anything that was available in the houses of fellow sectarians. As to the staff, it is required on a trip, not during a stay as a guest. Perhaps the idea of abandoning the staff was to not look like the Essenes.

Possibly, the instruction initially referred to a sword. It was a characteristic attribute of Essenes during travels. A later Christian scribe may substitute “shaft” for “sword,” in order to demonstrate the loyalty and peacefulness of his group. The injunction not to take a staff probably came late, perhaps by error, while Mk6:8 preserves the original tradition, “except a staff.” Mark’s version is similar to what we know about the Essenes. Other details also indicate that Matthew decided to expand on Mark. Mark says, “Take no copper” ; Matthew, “Nor gold [irrelevant to poor preachers] nor silver.” Mark says, “Wear simple footwear, do not wear two cloaks”; Matthew—“No shoes and no two cloaks.”.

Mark: “Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place.” So did the Essenes to avoid incurring uncleanness. Mark speaks of a well-known kind of house. The Essenes lived in secluded communities, so a traveler could enter any Essene house, though in practice certain members of the community were responsible for receiving and accommodating travelers.

10:14–15 “if *anyone* will not welcome you . . . shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town . . . it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorra on the day of judgment than for that town.”

Mark changes *anyone* to *any place*. Mark may preserve an early tradition that the Christians addressed the Essenes as a community. Matthew implies that preachers addressed individual people and families, but rarely whole settlements. Matthew remembered that the preachers tried to win individual Essenes to the new faith, while Mark imagined converting en masse. Possibly, Matthew originally mentioned “house,” which Mark replaced with “town,” and later Matthew was harmonized as “house or town.”

10:15 mentions only *town*, as in the same context of Acts 13:51. But Matthew wrote in 10:11–13 about the house. Mention of the town represents harmonization with Acts.

Matthew certainly knew that the towns of Sodom and Gomorra were destroyed, not the lands.

People, not cities, are subject to judgment<sup>44</sup>. A city had those who had not accepted the apostles, those who were ready to accept them, those who would convert later. Gen 18:32 “For the sake of ten [righteous men] I will not destroy it [Sodom].”

Lk 10:14 names Tyre and Sidon in a similar context. Perhaps Luke's readers knew those Gentile cities better. Matthew uses the notorious Sodom and Gomorra, familiar to his audience.

Lk 9:52–56 The Samaritans, following the pattern of religious conflict with Judaism, did not welcome Jesus on his way to Jerusalem, and the disciples suggest calling down fire on the city. “But he [Jesus] turned and rebuked them. Then they went on to another village.” The Samaritans rejected not just the disciples but even Jesus himself without retribution. Luke imagined Samaria as a village, not a region.

10:16 “See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.”

The comparison with sheep (“lost sheep,” *etc.*), commonly applied to the Jews in general but not to the apostles, catches the eye. Really, The apostles were hardly sheep after they learned from Jesus how to heal the sick and raise the dead.

Th 39 “The Pharisees and the scholars have taken the keys of knowledge and have hidden them. They have not entered, nor have they allowed those who want to enter to do so. As for you, be as sly as snakes and as simple as doves.”

Th 39:3 looks like a template for 10:16, though the writer of Matthew disliked “sly” and substituted “wise.”

In Thomas, resourcefulness is necessary to get to the supposedly secret knowledge of Pharisees. Perhaps resourcefulness is required in the exterior world, and simplicity—in the interior one. In Matthew, slyness (in relations with enemies) is evidently meant, not wisdom. Were there wolves in Israel numerous enough to be compared to a crowd? Few forests remained in Galilee, if Josephus' report of a population in the millions is correct in the least, though great forests covered Greece and Italy.

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<sup>44</sup> Sodom and Gomorra are unusual as everyone left there was evil. Even Nineveh was not destroyed as its people repented.

10:17 “Beware of them, for they will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues.”

The Jews of those days had to tolerate religious diversity, since they were subject to constant interference from other cultures and had a host of their own sects. Both Sadducees and Pharisees sat in the Sanhedrin. Talmud describes friendly relations between the antagonistic schools of Hillel and Shammai.<sup>ci</sup> Historians rightly identified most intolerant Jews as Zealots.

The persecution of Christians in Judea must have been short, since the theocracy was powerless after 70 C.E. The Gentile author wrote so late that he ignored the actual events of the first and early second centuries. Christians would hardly have been beaten in the synagogues, since the *Sectarian Blessings* liturgy forbade them entry.

10:18 “And you will be dragged before governors and kings because of me . . . .”

The phrase is obviously inserted for the encouragement of Christian ecclesiasts. The writer has missed the point that just at this time Jesus addressed only apostles.

Persecution of Christians had been rather short-term, about thirty years in total before Christianity was declared a legal religion. After that, the repressions against Christians were limited, basically carried out by aborigines eating up the missionaries. It is odd that the prophecy pays such attention to fleeting events in an allegedly eternal religion.

10:19–20 “When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you . . . by the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.”

Spirits talking through people are more representative of pagan religion<sup>45</sup> than of Judaism. Even the prophets used their own words. Ex4:12: “I’ll be at your [Moses] mouth and will teach you what to say.” Matthew’s version forces the matter beyond recognition. The spirit will not teach Christians to speak but will literally talk through them. To suggest that the baptized become one with God, who then speaks through them, is implausible.

The apostles knew they spoke by themselves and not through the Holy Spirit. 10:19–20 is a late addition describing comparatively old events. The author could say the first Christians spoke by the Holy Spirit but not his contemporaries.

10:19 recalls Socrates’ conduct on trial. His inner voice told him not to prepare his defense beforehand, since death is preferable to living

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<sup>45</sup> These beliefs are also present with modern Arabs.

among the evils of his day. Jesus' conduct was similar. The Christian editor, unacquainted with this Greek tradition, did not understand the self-denial which 10:19 intends and decided to explain it in 10:20.

10:21 "And children will rise against parents."

This adaptation of the mystical exhortation at Mt10:37 to the context of practical instructions reminds Christians whose families did not support them that just that was predicted. They will receive their reward.

10:23 "You will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes."

But from the apostles' point of view, Jesus has already come. What else did they expect? Perhaps Jesus expected a Son of Man to come and saw himself as the messianic herald. The words could be John the Baptist's, sending forth his disciples. Perhaps Matthew identified a mystical advent with widespread conversion; or the pericope was composed after Jesus' death in expectation of his Second Coming.

The promise was an alluring propaganda device, though to all appearance it has not come true. Missionaries have visited every place on earth, and still there is no Second Advent.

Some apologists suggest this late notion means the apocalypse will come before all the cities of Israel are converted. However, what is the fiery end of the world at which the Son of Man will preside is needed for, if everyone becomes Christian? Besides, unlike in the ancient world, nowadays the population of cities is not converted *en masse* but each person is free to choose. Jesus' prediction cannot come true.

10:24 "A disciple is not higher than his teacher, and a slave is not higher than his master."

Jesus does not usually belittle his disciples. He told them God was "your Father" and that they would inherit the kingdom of heaven. The idea would be useful to the Church to prevent heretics and even laity from promoting their own doctrines and interpretations, as Paul reports that many did. The second half is a mistaken attempt to explain the first.

Lk6:40 "A disciple . . . fully qualified will be like the teacher." *Fully qualified* is better translated *initiated*, pointing to the saying's Gnostic origin. Saying that apostles may become like Jesus refutes the notion of his divinity.

10:26 "So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known."

The statement in this form makes no sense. What is the connection between fearing those who reject Jesus and persecute Christians (10:17–25) and revealing the secret? They did not hound Christians secretly.

Lk8:16 possibly presents the same idea in another context: “No one after lighting a lamp hides it under a jar, . . . but puts it on a lampstand, so that those who enter may see the light.”

10:27 “What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops.”

Jesus speaks in darkness but instructs his disciples to speak openly. Perhaps the cover of darkness prevented witnesses from collecting evidence of blasphemy for a trial before the Sanhedrin.

The cult of Hermes Trismegistes, similar to Gnostic Christianity, performed its most sacred rites in darkness. A movement from darkness to light meant expansion of the circle of the initiated.

Lk12:2 is textually similar to Matt10:26–27 but has a different sense: “Therefore whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered behind closed doors will be proclaimed from the housetops.” Luke refers to the later spread of Christianity, perhaps during the last days.

Th5:2 is like 10:26: “Know what is in front of your face, and what is hidden from you will be disclosed to you.” Mystical doctrine taught that truth is revealed to those attentive to the world after initiation.

Th6:5–6 elaborates the idea in the context of Th6:2–3, “Do not lie, and do not do what you hate.” Lies and malicious actions become known in due time. Similarly in the Talmud, “Man does not lie about what will certainly be opened.”<sup>cii</sup> Th6, however, looks like an insertion: the disciples ask Jesus whether they have to respect the law and tradition, and Jesus says it is enough not to lie and not to do what is hateful.

The discrepancy among the contexts suggests that 10:26 existed independently as a maxim, and the evangelists decided where to insert it.

10:29–31 “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.”

The absolute determinism of this statement cannot be reconciled with Jesus’ appeals to observe the law, repent, and convert, since those actions require freedom of choice. In Judea, only the Essenes accepted determinism.

Lk12:6 puts it differently: "Are not sparrows sold for two farthings<sup>46</sup>? Yet not one of them is forgotten in God's sight." Luke implies oversight, not determinism.

Lk12:7 "But even the hairs of your head are all counted" seems to be an insert; "but even" does not fit the context. Such views were not alien to Judaism. Y.Shebiit 9 presents exactly the same idea. Hullin<sup>7</sup> offers a different version: "A man will not cut his finger without instruction from above."

The Sadducees wholly denied determinism. There was no clear Pharisaic doctrine, especially in early times, but the idea was that, though man seems to act freely, his choices are already known. "Everything is known beforehand, and the freedom of choice is given, and the world is judged kindly; and everything depends on the deeds."<sup>ciii47</sup>

The most typically Jewish tradition was that God created the world and the laws according to which the world develops. Creation is complete, though God foreknows its further development. Gospelers largely preferred the concept of God's absolute control: which hair is to fall and how a flower grows. They rejected the laws of nature but thought every event to be governed by the arbitrary decision of God.

The comparison with small birds is characteristic of Christian self-abasement. Elsewhere Jesus compares them to beautiful lilies which God takes care of.

10:32–33 "Everyone . . . who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny."

The author transforms a message of love, forgiveness, and tolerance into a threat.

10:34 "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword."

Th10 "I have cast fire upon the world, and look, I am guarding it until it blazes."

Lk12:49 "Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division!"

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<sup>46</sup> Luke specifies the price, mentioned by Matthew, relating common cost of five birds: two *asses* (*farthing*), 1/8 of denarius.

<sup>47</sup> David attempted building the Temple. Jonah did not want to go to Nineveh. In these and other cases, people were free in their actions, but in the long run the predetermined events took place: the Temple was built by Solomon, and Jonah preached in Nineveh.

Lk12:50 “I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed!” Luke sees Jesus’ crucifixion as the purifying fire that has come upon the earth. The cleansing fire of faith which purifies the sinful earth is a standard metaphor of Buddhism. Possibly here is a reflection on the Stoic concept of ethereal fire as the source of life.

10:35–36 “For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and one’s foes will be those of his own household.”

Jesus lists the preconditions for Messiah’s arrival standard in Jewish tradition.<sup>civ</sup> Either the saying originally belonged to the Baptist, or Jesus establishes himself as Messiah’s precursor rather than Messiah.

The passage hopes to comfort newly converted Christians in conflict with their families. Paul was tolerant of mixed-religion marriages<sup>cv</sup>, but developed Christianity was ready for conflict. This passage contradicts Jesus’ instructions to honor parents and sustain marriage. It also hardly suits Jesus’ role as messiah and savior.

Mal4:5 “Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents, so that I will not come and strike the land with a curse.”

Mic7:2–7 “The faithful have disappeared from the land . . . . They [the Israelites] hunt each other with nets. Their hands are skilled to do evil . . . . For the son treats the father with contempt, the daughter rises up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; your enemies are members of your own household. But as for me, I will look to the Lord.”

These antecedents are about moral degradation and mutual enmity, not about a messianic paradise on earth.

The beautiful Th16 may be more accurate: “Perhaps people think that I have come to cast peace upon the world. They do not know that I have come to cast conflicts upon the earth: fire, sword, war. For there will be five in a house: there’ll be three against two and two against three, father against son and son against father, and they will stand alone.” A mystical sense of affliction for separation from earthly attachments obtains here, loneliness endured for the sake of self-knowledge and wisdom, the surrender of love for particular people to strengthen the love of God,<sup>48</sup> personal understanding instead of communal rites. Jesus did not invent this;

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<sup>48</sup> Historically, the same approach resulted in the rise of janissaries, who were removed from their parents for loyalty to sultan only, and were even taught to hate them, now regarded by these Muslim converts as infidels.



note Heraclitus, for example: "The unsimilar is beneficial, and from differences results the most perfect harmony, and all things take place by strife."<sup>49</sup> The goal is the same: recovery of spiritual wholeness. Christian literalists<sup>49</sup> have later added to the thesis the family landscape and separation to justify the conflicts in the families.<sup>50</sup>

The statement could be a reflection of a popular Greek notion that duty to society supercedes duty to family.<sup>cvii</sup> Similar ideas are also present in Judaism: "As one star can set on fire the whole earth if it collide with it,<sup>51</sup> so one holy man may bring the fire from heaven."<sup>cviii</sup>

10:37 "Whoever loves mother or father more than me is not worthy of me."

Th55 is more credible: "Whoever does not hate father and mother cannot be my disciple, and whoever does not hate brothers, and carry the cross as I do, will not be worthy of me."

Lk14:26–27 "Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother . . . and even life itself, cannot be my disciple."

Matthew extenuates "does not hate" as "loves more."

Th101 builds on Th55: "Whoever does not hate father and mother as I do cannot be my disciple, and whoever does not love father and mother as I do cannot be my disciple. For my mother . . . but my true mother gave me life." Th 105 is similar.

In this dubious passage, Jesus affirms that his true mother was the Holy Spirit (or Wisdom). Both versions of the concept were present in Gnostic texts. Jesus' birth by the Holy Spirit or Wisdom, not from God, disallows his claim to uniqueness and raises the possibility of achieving his state for anyone.

The sense corresponds to Th55, a turning from the temporal affection for one's family to real spiritual community with God.

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<sup>49</sup> Those who literally interpret the text with mystic sense.

<sup>50</sup> Although seemingly interfering with the instruction to love everyone, in fact the thesis does not, because equal love to everyone equals no attachment to anyone. Also, Th 72, "A person said to him, 'tell my brothers to divide my father's possessions with me.' He said to the person, 'Mister, who made me a divider?' He turned to his disciples and said to them, 'I'm not a divider, am I?'" Literal perusal will result in immediate contravention with Th 16. In fact, Th 16 speaks about separation with the exterior, while Th 72—about integrity of the interior (dividing of one object-possessions [?]).

<sup>51</sup> As a matter of fact, it is puzzling that ancient people recognized stars as immensely large objects of fire.

10:38 “And whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me.”

How could Jesus’ followers know of the cross before the crucifixion?

16:24 “Then Jesus told his disciples, ‘If anyone wants to be my disciple, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.’”

Lk9:23 “take up their cross daily,” seems to reflect the original sense: daily hard work at self-knowledge instead of carrying a cross literally in the form of an apostle’s staff or suffering.

10:41–42 “Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple, truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.”

“These little ones in the name of a disciple” may mean that the apostles already had followers (*little ones*). Bishops trace their descent from the apostles. Or a *disciple* replaced *the disciple*, meaning the leader of a congregation, perhaps Matthew himself.

The episode with a cup of water is ambiguous. At that time, wells in Judea were usually maintained at public expense, and an apostle could take water himself. Curiously, the author requires a meaningful favor: the water must be cold.

The practical recommendations of 10:41–42 could be added to what Jesus told the apostles in 10:40: “Whoever welcomes you welcomes me.”

The commissioning of the apostles at Matt10 concurs with Jesus’ admonitions to the apostles in Lk9 and to seventy-two disciples in Lk10. Jesus’ appeal to apostles at 10:5 is an admixture of some prototext and later interpolations, and at 10:17 the text turns to a description of Christian preachers and doctrinal issues, returning to the apostles in 10:40. The prototext could refer to any messianic preacher, perhaps John the Baptist.

11:1 “Now when Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and proclaim his message in their cities.”

9:35 “Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom.”

Oddly, Jesus first preached in *all* the cities, then instructed his disciples and sent them, and then visited the same settlements again.

11:3 John the Baptist sends the disciples to ask Jesus, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?”

The “one who is to come” refers to Deut18:15, but Moses meant the whole range of prophets: “The Lord your God will raise up for you prophets like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet.” Christianity denies applicability of this promise to Jesus by considering him higher than a prophet, even than Moses. Gospel prophecies are either of late derivation or eschatological (difficult to corroborate in this life), or diffused to abstraction.

John had to know the answer, since the one whose advent he had foretold would be greater than Moses. Once again 11:3 confirms that the report of Jesus’ baptism is a forgery. If John already knew of Jesus’ divinity at his baptism, why does he ask here?

11:5 Jesus answers the Baptist: “The blind receive their sight, the lame walk.”

Christian theologians say Jesus enumerated his miracles to convince John of his Christhood, yet does not declare it openly to avoid punishment. Why would a divine being fear worldly punishment? And if the realization of the prophecies was important, why hide them by forbidding the healed to tell?

To prove that Jesus’ actions were predicted and constituted a realization of biblical prophecies, Christians commonly cite Is29:18: “On that day the deaf shall hear the words of a scroll, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see.” First, one day, not a span of years; second, not physical healing, but a grasp of the commandments by those who ignored them before.

Isaiah continues that all those who “deny justice” “will be no more.” But absence of the unjust contradicts the long-term availability of those “persecuted [by those unjust] for righteousness” whose “the kingdom of heaven is.”

The images in Is35:5 are even less appropriate. That “the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped” means instantaneous total healing, which is a metaphor for conversion to God, not a medical description. And further: “The burning sand shall become a pool . . . . No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it.” Jesus never performed such miracles. “The redeemed shall walk there. And the ransomed of the Lord shall return,” make clear that the text refers to the return from captivity or dispersion. The prophecies have nothing to do with Jesus. Besides, he did not heal everyone, as is implied in Isaiah, but only a few.

11:6 “And blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me.”

But what of Mt21:44, Jesus as the *stone of temptation*: “And everyone, who falls on this stone, will be broken to pieces, but when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.” Here, Jesus threatens unbelievers.

11:7–8 “Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John, ‘What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? . . . Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces.’”

Th78 “Why have you come out to the countryside? To see a reed shaken by the wind? And to see a person dressed in soft clothes, like your rulers and your powerful ones? They are dressed in soft clothes, and they cannot understand truth.”

The sense is not clear. Maybe, people literally did not go to the wilderness to see reeds but to meet John. A connection with 1Kings14:15—“The Lord will strike Israel, as a reed is shaken in the water”—seems far-fetched, since the passage was hardly popular; nor does the saying imply that people came expecting the apocalypse. *Reed* could be mistranslation of *suf*, *end* [of days].

The figure of “someone dressed in soft robes” is also unclear. The explanation that Jesus hereby denies John’s Christhood—John does not live like king, so he is not Messiah—seems forced. More probably the second comparison comes from some other tradition.

Jesus began to praise John publicly only after John recognized him as the messiah.<sup>cix</sup> John was popular, and Jesus’ show of unity with him was expedient.

11:10 “This is the one about whom it is written, ‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.’”

The distortion is exceptional, even by New Testament standards. Mal3:1 “See, I am sending a messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight . . . Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents, so that I will not come and strike the land with a curse.”<sup>cx</sup> Elijah should arrive before the final, supposedly second, advent, immediately preceding the apocalypse. Elijah (in the guise of an angel in some interpretations) will prepare the way for God (“before me”), not for Jesus (“before you”). John did not preach universal peace (“will turn the hearts”) but repentance. Harmonious families contradict Jesus’ promise in 10:35–36 to divide families.

In Is52:7, the messenger (here—John) will declare salvation (Heb. *Ieshua*—Jesus). The episode appeared as an elaboration on this pun.

11:11 “Among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist.” Interestingly, Jesus was also born of woman, so he considers himself lower than John. Christian theologians prefer to ignore that conclusion. An appeal to Jesus’ birth “not quite” of a woman is futile. First, he was born the usual way, the notion of his virgin birth arising from mistranslations of scripture. Second, regardless of who fathered him, a woman bore him. Third, John the Baptist had to be the prophet Elijah<sup>cx</sup> in the guise of an angel. That is, he was even less “born of woman” than Jesus. And we get back to the old question: prophet Elijah is all right, but how did the angel get into prison?

Jesus’ allusion to John the Baptist becomes clear now: “But the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.” John the Baptist was just a man. Otherwise, granted the heavenly hierarchy, how could the prophet Elijah (John the Baptist) be the least, especially since the kingdom is promised even to those “persecuted for the truth” and to other common Christians. Taken literally, the statement means that the Baptist did not enter the kingdom, which ranks him below rank-and-file Christians.

Probably Th46 is more accurate: “From Adam to John the Baptist, among those born of women, no one is so much greater than John the Baptist that his eyes should not be averted. But I have said that whoever among you becomes a child will recognize the Father’s imperial rule and will become greater than John.” In Thomas, John is not the greatest but rather a great prophet. A Gnostic Jesus would say the Baptist had not become a child and did not achieve perfection.

“No one has arisen greater . . .” Is John the Baptist really greater than his forefathers, Moses and the prophets? That is either hyperbole or outright flattery of a fellow sectarian.

11:12 “From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force.”

The Gnostics counseled slyness to deceive the ruling evil powers. Accordingly, people cunning and violent enough to overcome demons will enter the kingdom. What “suffered violence” means is not clear; it may refer to the mass following of the Baptist, supposedly assured of the heavenly domain.

“Until now” implies a time lapse and is incompatible with the account of John’s asking Jesus about his mission.

11:13 “For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John came.”

The Gospel applies Malachi’s prophecy, quoted in 11:10, to John. All the prophets had come, and the messenger’s time approached. John looks like a prophet, but the line of prophets ended long ago in Jewish tradition. Therefore, John must be someone else. Matthew readily accepts

Malachi's description of the messenger, returning Elijah, though in other places Jesus refused to accept John as Elijah.

11:14 "And if you are willing to accept it, he [John the Baptist] is Elijah who is to come."

Note the future tense—*is* to come, not *was* to come. With "if you are willing" that might mean that John and Elijah are alike; the Baptist may represent Elijah but not *be* Elijah.

Jn1:21 the priests asked John, "'Are you Elijah?' He answered: 'No.'" There is no agreement.

11:19 "The Son of Man . . . [is] a friend of tax collectors and sinners!"

In Judaism, a repentant sinner ceases to be an offender and may not be reminded of his transgressions. This passage could mean only unrepentant sinners, so Jesus' efforts to reform them were vain.

The phrase may become clear in the Essene context. They called everyone who did not keep their rules unclean, sinners. Jesus talked to everybody, clean or unclean.

Or perhaps the statement is an extrapolation of a later tradition about Jesus addressing sinners. From the point of view of early Jewish Christians, Jesus meant Jews, for whom sin meant transgression of the law. Later Gentile Christians did not consider that sin, but the tradition about sinners was fixed and hard to abandon. Accordingly, the meaning of "sinner" became anyone who violates unspecified moral principles.

11:20–21 "Then he began to reproach the cities in which most of his deeds of power had been done, because they did not repent. 'Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida!'"

But in 9:35, 11:1 Jesus visited all the cities. How were his miracles worked mostly in these two? Probably Jesus visited only a few towns. At least two travel stories are mirror images of one journey, separate in two prototexts and joined in the Gospel.

Chorazin could be identified with Gerazim, a charismatic place of sin, the mountain on which the Samaritans built an alternative temple against the Torah's express prohibition. But scholars actually "found" this city, arbitrarily placing it on a map.

Matthew contradicts Lk9:10–17 where a large crowd came to listen to Jesus at Bethsaida, presumably ready to follow his teaching. Importantly, Jesus expects his audience to repent only but not to observe a specific commandments or follow a teaching. That makes him almost indistinguishable from John the Baptist.

11:22 "But I tell you, on the day of judgment it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon than for you."

The writer uses Tyre and Sidon as examples of sinfulness reminiscent of Sodom and Gomorra, the Bible's worst examples. Matthew mentions the latter in 10:15 in a similar context. But why those cities?

The prime example of sin then was Samaria. 10:5 "Enter no town of the Samaritans." Many people from Tyre and Sidon came to Jesus,<sup>cxii</sup> and he visited them himself.<sup>cxiii</sup> Even if the passage in Mark is forged, neither does Jesus criticize the cities in Matthew. Why speak of the impiety of cities where Jews were in the minority and the population was not obliged to follow the law? Jesus does not mention Greek cities near Nazareth—Sepphoris, Tiberias, Scythopolis—though his audience was better acquainted with them.

Tyre and Sidon were well-known and important seaports, and the Gentile scribe may have been ignorant of the small Greek towns in the vicinity. Or perhaps he substituted well-known and similar names for the original Sodom and Gomorra.

11:23 "And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? No, you will be brought down to Hades."

The author clearly had no accurate mental picture of Cepharnanai, a rustic village so poor that, according to Lk7:5, a Gentile centurion built the synagogue.

11:25 "Jesus said, 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants.'"

Several layers of meaning apply here. *Bnim* (בְּנִים) has several meanings: children, the children (people) of Israel, wise men (children of wisdom). The hidden things are taken away from *bnim* (wise men) and given to *bnim* (people). Exegesis of homonyms was a popular rabbinic method. Also, "like a child" is someone standing before God, thus especially close to him: human wisdom is childish compared to God's.

A connection to Ps8 is improper: "Out of the mouths of babies and infants you have founded a bulwark . . . to silence the enemy and the avenger . . . . What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God." "[M]ortals," *ben adam*, denotes people in general, not *the* Son of Man.

The Israelites, not all children, are called "babies and infants" in the same sense used when Jesus refuses to help the Canaanite woman: "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."<sup>cxiv</sup>

The psalm does not oppose “children” and “wise men.” The idea is completely different: man is so small that God’s attention and good will for him are miraculous. Adam before the fall<sup>cxv</sup> is compared to the angels, not men in general, because Adam was close to the angels. Whether the writer distorted the psalm’s meaning by design or simply did not understand it is hard to say. The method of formal analogy, connecting different fragments based on similar words, was popular.

The claim that simple Christians are contrasted to the learned Pharisees is implausible. Jesus thanks God for revealing to him something hidden from the wise, some secret or mystic doctrine. Possibly the evangelist meant to contrast Jewish book wisdom with the childish simplicity of the sectarians.

This concept was not alien to Judaism. “Real compassion and love exist only among children and in relation to children.”<sup>cxvi</sup> The maxim speaks of people without adult attachments and prejudices, who feel instead of analyzing. The tradition is even closer to the Christian interpretation. In the nonauthoritative Yalkut Hadash Elijah, Moses tells Elijah, “You must go and visit the newly-born children of Israel, and they will return the gift of prophesy to you.” But Prov9:6 makes more sense: “Lay aside simpleness . . . and walk in the way of insight.”

Another source of the image of children may be proposed. One of the four faces of *mercabah* (the chariot described by Ezekiel, one of Judaism’s most mystical symbols) belongs to a *keruv* (cherub), usually associated with angel. Another meaning of *keruv* is *child*. There could be a suggestion of becoming angelic.<sup>52</sup>

11:27 “No one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”

The first part of the sentence makes sense, if by *son* it means the initiated. The second seems to be interpolated to show Jesus’ selectivity and to control Christians with that whip. It is also a demonstration of Jesus’ arbitrary will and personal power, an attempt to make him a theologically independent mediator. Most important, it offers a simple way of cognition, without long preparation and initiation.

Jesus ordinarily preached general rules with no requirement of his personal participation, and there is no proof that he “revealed” God to the disciples.

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<sup>52</sup> Curiously, another meaning of *keruv* is cabbage; hence the story told children about their birth, that they were found in cabbage.



Knowledge of God draws us closer to God. Revelation presupposes special closeness, such as is unattainable in Judaism<sup>53</sup> but believed possible by the Gnostics.

11:28–30 “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Judaism adopts a restrained attitude toward rest. “Wise men find rest neither in this world nor in the world to come, but they will ascend from power to power until they face God on Zion.”<sup>cxvii</sup> The sages will not cease studying.

Typically, the Gospel offers two parallel explanations. The “light” burden of Jesus’ teaching is compared to the law’s heavy one. This contraposition is impossible for law-abiding Matthew and reveals Gentile editing, corroborated by the opposite idea in another Jewish source: “Truly I tell you, if you can bear the yoke of the Lord in its entirety, you will be perfect; but if not, then do what you can.”<sup>cxviii</sup> Jewish Christians at least considered the yoke a heavy but necessary burden.

The teaching could be based on a description of the Essenes, known to us from Hippolytus: “They are anxious that mercy and assistance be extended to those that are burdened with toil.”<sup>cxix</sup> From Hippolytus’ practical recommendation that Essenes obey their congregation’s leader, the saying comes to mean an abrogation of the law.

Is58:6 “Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, . . . to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?” That is, no yoke is acceptable, though the yoke of the law bears no negative connotation in scripture.

Christians relate the passage to Jer6:16: “And ask for the ancient paths, where the good way lies; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls.” Jesus supposedly did not urge the ancient way. Sir6:28—“For at last you will find the rest she [Wisdom] gives”—is similar.

Sir51:25–30 “Acquire wisdom for yourselves without money. Put your neck under her yoke, and let your souls receive instructions.” The Greek translation does not mention Wisdom: “Acquire for yourselves without money. Put your neck under the yoke.” A Christian scribe may have made the change to preserve the metaphor of the yoke for Jesus.

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<sup>53</sup> Jer 31:34 and other prophets attribute such knowledge to the messianic period, and Deut 34:10 sees it as the state of Moses but not the whole community.

Initially, 11:29–30 likely resembled Ben Sirah but was distorted beyond recognition to suit the Church’s needs.

“For my burden is light.” The idea may have appeared or been rephrased after Christianity’s struggle for survival ceased, and the Church no longer wanted to offer salvation by simple declaration of faith, without circumcision and *kashrut*. By the time of the insert, the Church had obviously had administrative authorities, and “my burden is light” was intended for accounting for some inconveniences (limitations, orders, exactions) for the flock.

Th90 is more reasonable: “Come to me, for my yoke is comfortable and my lordship is gentle, and you will find rest for yourselves.” Matthew takes “rest” (from worldly affairs) literally, associating it with “carrying heavy burdens.”

“For I am gentle and humble in heart . . .”: one does not believe it when he hears it from people who call themselves “gentle and humble.”

“Come to me, all . . .” Christianity was already widespread enough. “Learn from me” suggests that Jesus is the ultimate teacher who knows God completely. Only Moses came close to that status in Deut34:10. Jesus’ claim would engender mistrust or even violence. Note the Jews’ violent response to the words “I know him” at Jn7:29–30.

The Hellenistic world contrasted rest to motion in a metaphysical sense. They thought, quite correctly, that motion is indispensable to existence. For example, celestial spheres would fall if they ceased to move. Therefore, rest, the absence of motion, could be understood as the end of the physical world, an end which the Gnostics so longed for.

The souls of the initiated abide in rest. Th50:3 “If they ask you, ‘What is the evidence of your Father in you?’ say to them, ‘It is motion and rest,’” motion seen from without but rest from within. The seemingly profound statement refers perhaps to the unmoved, unchanging spirit in Genesis, effortlessly gliding over the face of the waters. More probably it is a Gnostic philosophical rejoinder.

The Gnostics saw the world is immersed in evil and man’s task, to escape the world and recover his original divine nature. The dualism associated with two gods, one who controls the higher spheres and the other, the earth, was an indelible feature of Gnosticism. Since neither god could defeat the other finally, as the Gnostics thought reality shows, both were theologically equal. Yet, the balance of power is temporary, and the good god will prevail in the end. Both participated in the creation of the world.

In Aristotle’s doctrine of the properties, each form of matter has a definite characteristic; for example, hot or cold; or warm, if some atoms are hot, while the others are cold. Atoms have just one property and not its

opposite—only hot or only cold, only white or only black.<sup>54</sup> That provided proof against Gnosticism. If two gods participated in creating each atom, one could give one property, while the other, another property, raising the possibility of an atom being both hot and cold. Motion and rest were also attributes of atoms, and dualism required that atoms could have both, that is to be in motion and at rest simultaneously.

The Gnostics accordingly postulated that a body could be both in motion and at rest. Thomas assigns such language to Jesus who thereby not only corroborates dualism, the existence of two competing deities, but also claims that only Gnostics know the god of the higher spheres, from whom they obtain the attribute of rest. Those who refuse to recognize the coexistence of two properties in one body have only one such property, in this case motion, the temporal attribute. They do not recognize the spiritual god and bear only the evil temporal property. Their personal experience in bodies with only one property leads them to reject Gnostic theosophy; but Gnostics, acting on their experience, affirm the coexistence of both motion and rest in one body, that is, the coexistence of two opposing attributes, not one attribute—motion—or its absence—rest. The Gnostics alleged to combine the divine rest with unavoidable motion<sup>cxx</sup> and solve Plato's problem that the ideal original forms of things degenerate through evolutionary change. Things, for the Gnostics, could move without changing, thus be at rest. Maimonides explains the coexistence of opposites without invoking dualism: "The image of being above the throne is divided, the top is of *hashmal* color, the lower part looks like fire. As to the word *hashmal*, it can be explained as consisting of two words, *hash* and *mal* . . . 'rapidity' and 'pause.'"<sup>cxxxi</sup> Maimonides transferred dualism from theology into linguistics.

12:1–4 "Jesus went through the grain fields on the Sabbath; his disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. When the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, 'Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath.' He said to them, 'Have you not read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence.'"

"His companions" indicates that the writer read 1 Sam carelessly. David lied to the high priest Ahimelech and said there were more people with him. In truth, he was alone.

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<sup>54</sup> Nuclear physics showed this evident postulate wrong. Even the smallest particles simultaneously possess conflicting qualities of wave and particle. That discovery vindicated Heraclitus idea of the unity of opposites. What Gnostics saw as two deities might, in the end, be different manifestations of one God.

David ate the sacred bread when he was fleeing,<sup>cxxii</sup> not a violation of the Sabbath but of a completely different law stipulating that only priests could eat the bread of presence, a less significant commandment.

The high priest asked David to abstain from intercourse with women if he ate the sacred bread and gave David the bread soon to be replaced with warm bread. David's minimal violation was driven by necessity, while the disciples broke the Sabbath laws arbitrarily.

Apostles in the Gospels and Epistles are repeatedly described as not perceiving Jesus, not righteous people at all. Their comparison with David, whose ancestry Christians proudly claimed even for Jesus, is clearly inappropriate. Christian theologians say Jesus affirmed the priority of man's hunger over the covenant, which is difficult to buy since nothing kept the disciples from gathering grain on Friday. Plucking ears from somebody's field to store for the next day would be less offensive than breaking the Sabbath.

Moreover, movement was as much a violation of the Sabbath as gathering food. Travel in general was forbidden on Saturday. Matthew knew there was no use trying to defend gathering food while traveling, and the Pharisees would not have noticed the violation because they would not have been in the fields on Saturday in the first place. The writer presupposes there were Pharisees everywhere, while actually there were few in Galilee. Had zealous Galileans noticed Jesus and his disciples, deliberately desecrating the Sabbath, they would have executed them according to the law.<sup>cxxiii</sup>

The disciples' right to gather food is doubtful: gleaning<sup>cxxiv</sup> was the privilege of foreigners, orphans, and widows,<sup>cxxv</sup> and plucking grains from living plants amounted to stealing.<sup>55</sup>

Grain can be eaten only shortly before harvest, which in Judea comes after Passover.<sup>56</sup> The synoptic Gospels do not record Jesus and his disciples celebrating the holiday twice. Since Jesus was crucified at Passover, the food gathering had to take place long before the harvest. Taking the whole account as credible puts the Sabbath violation after Passover and is yet another argument for dating the crucifixion with the autumn festival of Succoth.

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<sup>55</sup> A person might not eat the raw grain in the volume sufficient for satiation. There was a popular mode of execution: the condemned was fed with dry peas that swelled in his stomach. Wheat and barley do not swell so much, but also significantly.

<sup>56</sup> Jewish spring festival, transformed by Christians into a celebration of Jesus' resurrection.

Th27 "If you do not observe the Sabbath day as a Sabbath day, you will not see the Father." Even interpreting the Sabbath mystically as the Gnostics did, the symbol of rest, Jesus nonetheless required his followers to keep it.

The Essenes explicitly forbade harvesting on the Sabbath. Perhaps, Matthew argues against them in this episode.

The whole episode is improbable. Breaking the Sabbath was the last sin Jesus would have wanted to commit. Such unlawful behavior would scandalize people when they saw Jesus and his disciples walking about the fields while good Jews were in the synagogues or enjoying the holiday at home.

12:5–6 "Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and yet are guiltless? I tell you, something greater than the temple is here."

The evangelist repeatedly<sup>cxxvi</sup> calls Jesus "something greater," though the meaning is not clear. Late editions substitute "he who is greater."

The temple was the place of communication with God. In this context, Jesus is actually compared with God, not the temple, which hardly implies meekness. In any case, the argument did not justify Christian violation of the Sabbath when Jesus was no longer present.

Priests worked on Saturdays so the Jews could keep the Sabbath. Their work was not the work the commandment prohibits but rather divine service, always permissible. How did the disciples, traveling and gathering food, serve the Jews? The disciples had no cause to break the Sabbath, as the priests did.

12:7 "If you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless."

But does not keeping his commandments show love of God? The author follows the Greek translation. The original is, "For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice."<sup>cxxvii</sup> The Talmud means "mercy" in commenting, "We have the same good redemption, mercy and personal philanthropy as it is said in Scriptures, 'For I desire mercy, not sacrifice.'"<sup>cxxviii</sup> Accusing the Pharisees of misunderstanding the rather apparent sense of the prophecy is absurd. Since at least the time of Hillel, a Pharisee, the Jews attached more importance to the willing observance of the law than to formalities.

Hosea's prophesy, repeatedly mentioned in the Gospels, probably entered popular tradition after destruction of the temple, not at the time of Jesus. After the destruction of the temple, Rabbi Johanan Ben Zakkai applied the prophecy to demonstrate the possibility of redemption through beneficence, not offerings.<sup>cxxix</sup>

Perhaps the argument in 12:1–12 dealt with some other issue and not with the Sabbath. Hosea’s statement is not applicable to Sabbath violations, since they have nothing to do with either the love of God or mercy. Perhaps the writer used the example of David to show that sacrifices are not sacred, and invoked Hosea as proof.

12:8 “For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.”

The Pharisees would hardly bear such words, since God created the Saturday holy day. Matthew claims that Jesus is greater than the divine Sabbath. Likely he did not think in formal terms, but the statement implies that Jesus and God are the same, a notion unacceptable even for Matthew.

Only the disciples gathered food, not Jesus. “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry?”<sup>xxx</sup> indicates that Jesus was not hungry (presumably, the disciples spent most time with Jesus, and “not saw” equals “was not”). Jesus’ alleged divinity had nothing to do with the violation of a commandment which Moses and the prophets kept, by the disciples.

Jesus has already not only explained why his disciples defied Sabbath, but has even passed over to criticizing Pharisees (“if you had known . . .”). In 12:8 he returns for the third time to explaining violation of Sabbath, which suggests an insert.

The Pharisaic concept “not man for Shabbat, but Shabbat for man” dates from the Maccabean revolt to justify bearing defensive arms on Saturday. In such form it is present at Mk2:27 and may have been the same in Matthew before its amplification by a Christian editor who misunderstood the homonym *ben adam* in the sense “simply a man” and applied it to Jesus as “the Son of Man.” The idea of the Sabbath as created for mankind and not intended to generate oppressive restrictions is replaced with the bizarre notion of the Sabbath as a theological phenomenon subordinate to Jesus.

12:11–12 Jesus explains healing on Saturday. “Suppose one of you has only one sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath; will you not lay hold of it and lift it out? . . . So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.”

The Gospel premise is incorrect. Saving sheep, to be slaughtered shortly, could be defended on grounds of necessity but not as a good deed. No one would save a trapped wolf. The evangelist specifies the unlikely case of a man who owns a single sheep—and cares more about saving his whole property than doing good deeds to sheep. People then would hardly see helping animals as meritorious but rather as a matter of prudence. Perhaps that is why the author uses a sheep, a pastoral animal likely to arouse sympathy with urban Greeks.

How did the sheep get into the pit? Tending animals is work and thus forbidden on the Sabbath. If the shepherds were Gentiles,<sup>57</sup> saving the sheep would be no problem. Since grazing was permissible at home, taking care of sheep there was permitted on the Sabbath.<sup>cxxx</sup>

Violation of Sabbath was authorized only to save life and deal with what might be called *clear and present danger*; even military maneuvers which might save lives later were forbidden. Saving the sheep could be justified by urgency. Since the occurrence was common, a legal tradition permitting it probably existed. Jewish tradition did not deal with miraculous healing on the Sabbath, since the issue was practically irrelevant. Healing a person long sick could wait until the following day. There are six days in a week for good works. Saturday is for doing nothing. The creation of the world was the utmost good, but nothing was created on the seventh day.

Lk14:5 mentioning in a similar context a *son* (some manuscripts substitute it for *ass*) and a *bull*, is not credible: Lk14:3 (healing on Saturday) returns (without any new reasons) to the subject depleted in Lk6:6–10 and Lk13:11–16.

The saying was plotted originally on “son . . . well.” Rescuing from a well was a standard metaphor of human goodness, such as in Menander’s *Dyskolos*. The Gentile writer thought that he had found a moral breach in the Law and did not know that rescuing a human being was a well-known exception. Later on, someone thought the episode with child excessively apparent and added a bull. Grasping that rescuing a child is hardly a proper analogy for nonurgent healing, and a bull would not fit into a well, Matthew decided to abandon the former and squeeze a sheep into the well instead of the latter.

Matthew’s editor drew the Sabbath episode from Lk6:1 and 6:6 which describe two Sabbath violations at different times. Matthew conflates both episodes into one: early in morning the disciples went for a walk in the fields, and Jesus argues with the Pharisees; that same morning they set off to synagogue with the Pharisees and the dispute reopens, with Jesus offering new arguments. The Pharisees “asked him, ‘Is it lawful to cure on the Sabbath?’ so they might accuse him.”<sup>cxxxii</sup> They could have simply charged him with traveling and gathering food on Sabbath; Matthew knew that, but his Gentile editor did not.

The Essenes opted for the strict rule—“If it [an animal] falls into the cistern or well, it is not permitted to drag it out on Saturday”<sup>cxxxiii</sup>—in response to the liberal interpretation of other Jews that an animal should be removed before it died and polluted the well. If the first Christians were

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<sup>57</sup> Depending on the current interpretation of the commandment, hiring Gentiles for Sabbath work could be prohibited.

Essenes, Jesus may offer their custom as an example of practically impossible rules.

The saying supposes that man can tell good from evil and do good on the Sabbath, hardly something in the human grasp. Man should not decide when to break the divine law, unless the commandments come into conflict in a particular situation.

The healing of the man with a withered arm on Sabbath is present in the Gospel of the Nazarites, though with a different emphasis: Jesus cures the man so he could work instead of panhandling.

Even if Jesus argued the possibility of doing good on the Sabbath, he did not intend to abrogate the holy day altogether, as the Christians did. Matthew's Gospel offers four justifications for violating the Sabbath, indicating a conflation of sources or layers of editing. The Christians were at pains to attribute notions of abrogating the law to the author of the most Jewish Gospel. Never mind the contradiction with Jesus' urging compliance with much less significant commandments.

12:25–26 “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste . . . . If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then will his kingdom stand?”

The saying only claims that if Satan exorcizes, then his kingdom is doomed, which looks bad given the background of Jesus' crucifixion—in this context denoting exactly the kingdom that has not stood—not that Jesus cannot wield satanic power. Jesus does not reveal the nature of his exorcism.

A dispute about in whose name Jesus casts out demons could have taken place, and Matthew's avoidance of the word *name*, implying a certain power, is not coincidental. At that time, God's name was usually abbreviated into a senseless set of letters, a practice which the rabbis expressly condemned. Probably fortune tellers and exorcists resorted to the ruse. Names were also given to angels, devils, and evil spirits in folklore. Luke implies that Jesus uttered a name, and the bystanders wondered whose it was. The matter was so important that Rabbi Ishmael forbids the sectarian James of Cepharsama to cure the snake-bitten Rabbi Eleazar Ben Dama by the name of Ieshua Ben Pandira, often identified with Jesus.

Matthew, understandably, preferred to avoid mention of this practice. His Jesus was not a blatant conjurer; he would have known the real name of God. As a matter of fact, Jesus did not use the tetragrammaton at healings—Pharisees would have recognized it by the four consonant letters regardless of the vocalization. Matthew is supposedly the author of the pericope, which appears in modern editions of Lk11:17–18. But after Lk11:15 some early manuscripts add, “But some of them said, ‘He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons’ . . . . And in response he



said to them, 'How can Satan cast out Satan?'" The addition is meaningless, since Luke presents the same language two pericopes later, and it is needed only if Lk11:17–18 was not available at that time and the editor wanted to harmonize with Matthew.

The metaphor of the "kingdom divided against itself" appears in the Talmud. If Romans begin to persecute the Jews living among them, their kingdom will be called *divided (broken)*.<sup>cxxxiv</sup> The Gospel text is still closer to another wording, "The house where discordance rules will be broken down."<sup>cxxxv</sup>

12:27–28 "If I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your own sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you."

This implies that if the kingdom of heaven had not come, then Jesus was casting out devils not by spirit of God. Probably there is a mistake here, and the Christian writer meant quite the opposite. Jesus believes that the Pharisees also cast out demons by God's power. In that case, the kingdom of God existed on earth before Jesus' appearance, when only the Pharisees practiced exorcism.

Why does Jesus speak about the sons of Pharisees and not about Pharisees themselves or about their brothers? It is doubtful that *sons* means only *exorcists* among Pharisees. Appealing to the sons as to judges is only meaningful if it refers to descendants whose activity proves the unfoundedness of the beliefs of their ancestors. Apparently, the Pharisees of the time (*sons*) were practicing exorcism, which earlier members of the sect supposedly despised. This interpretation is borne out by the biblical usage. 2Kings 9:1 "Elisha the *prophet* called one of the *sons* of the prophets" which distinguishes between prophets and their sons, the latter being apprentices, possibly indeed the sons. Of Pharisaic rabbis who were in advanced age, since learning took a long time, and their sons were a group of juniors. Like Jesus, they engaged in a certain activity, probably exorcism, without formal rabbinic credentials.

We do not know whether post-Temple rabbinic Judaism was stricter or less strict than its antecedent. There are good arguments for both views. Either the early Pharisees practiced exorcism to gain popularity, or later Jews assimilated foreign rites of exorcism.

Exorcism contradicts another teaching of Jesus: nonresistance to evil. By casting out demons, Jesus resists evil. Healing illnesses could be perceived as the intervention of good, regardless of exorcism, and the evil spirits in the narrative could have appeared later, after Christianity assimilated demonic cults. To what extent Jews then connected illness with

the presence of evil spirits is not clear. Possibly this text answers criticism of Jesus' exorcisms by noting that the Pharisees do the same.

12:29 "Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his property, without first tying up the strong man? Then indeed the house can be plundered." Th35 is identical.

Lk11:21–22 "When a strong man, fully armed, guards his castle, his property is safe. But when one stronger than he attacks him and overpowers him, he takes away his armor . . . and divides his plunder." Luke amplifies the available text—"fully armed," "castle," "attacks," "overpowers," "will take the armor," "divides his plunder"—without noticing that Jesus' personal action becomes a collective operation—"divides his plunder."

There may be a mystical sense. For example, *strong man* could mean someone deeply rooted in this world; to *tie*, to make someone poor in spirit; to plunder property, to erase temporal attachments. But in the context of exorcism, the meanings become different. "Strong man's castle" hardly means the world, the devil's home, since Jesus' tying him would mean the end of evil and the dawn of the kingdom of heaven. "Strong man's castle" is probably a man in whom the devil abides. Jesus insists on tying the strong man (devil) instead of killing or casting him out. Jesus plunders (appropriates) the man's soul, instead of setting it free.

The allegory is puzzling. Jesus defends his right to deal with the devil in order to enslave him. 12:27–28 The refusal to associate with Beelzebul in 12:27–28 is likely a late addition. In 12:26 Jesus evades the issue of association with Satan and does not imply that he got the power from God. Magicians perform miracles by controlling demons. That relation lacked the modern tint of Satanism, since demons were considered real and pervasive and they effectively controlled earthly affairs. The early Christians had no reason to excise the account.

12:24–30 closely follows Lk11:15–23. Matthew characteristically has the Pharisees attack Jesus; Mark, perhaps not knowing precisely who the Pharisees are, generalizes with "scribes." We know that the prototexts consisted of very small pericopes, bits of one or two phrases. A seven-verse coherent context is unlikely in a prototext. The passage is a conflation of similar sayings from different sources and some late additions.

12:30 "Whoever is not with me is against me."

Lk9:50 "Whoever is not against you is for you." 12:30 hardens the neutral stand. Matthew's version resembles the attitude of the Essenes, who called themselves sons of light and everyone else sons of darkness.

12:31–32 “People will be forgiven for every sin and blasphemy, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven.”

Th44 “Whoever blasphemes against the Father will be forgiven, and whoever blasphemes against the Son will be forgiven, but whoever blasphemes the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, whether on earth or in heaven.” Matthew adapts the notion of *son*, the initiated, to Judaism by substituting *Son of Man*.

The synoptics seem to have drawn the passage from a prototext of Gnostics who considered the holy spirit divine, though they attached no special importance to Jesus, the *son*, in the pantheon of gods, mythical heroes, and philosophers. They recognized God the *father* as a subordinate figure, a hypostasis of the supreme god whose manifestation is the universal holy spirit. Jesus defends the spirit that begot him, both physically with Mary<sup>cxxxvi</sup> and spiritually at baptism.

The passage may have been meant to allay doubts about the ecstatic prophecies Christians claimed to utter with the help of the holy spirit.<sup>cxxxvii</sup> Then the evangelist's polemic zeal becomes comprehensible, since the problem of the flock's confidence in such revelations must have been urgent. The Jews, perhaps, ridiculed the vulnerable Christian doctrine of the spirit. Yet Christians claimed the possession of the Holy Spirit as the ground of their unique chosenness and were very sensitive to attacks against the spirit.

A modern interpretation of the Spirit as God's breath in Adam runs against the clear identification of the Spirit with the Holy Spirit which is given uniquely or rarely. The breath, on the contrary, is within each human. Jews surely would not denigrate the breath of God; they rather ridiculed the Christian notion of the Holy Spirit abiding in the sect.

In Judaism, profaning God's name is a grave crime, but to equate blaspheming either God or Jesus alike seems strange. Since Christians recognized the God of Israel, a felicitous solution was to ban blasphemy of the Holy Spirit with whom Jesus was blessed. That achieved the double aim of protecting both God and the Spirit, inseparable in Christian theology from Jesus.

12:33 “Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree bad, and its fruit bad.”

Matthew attempts to explain this statement at 12:34–35, attributing to Jesus, “You brood of vipers! How can you speak good things, when you are evil?” But 12:33 wants the Pharisees to recognize the tree as good. 12:34 calls the Pharisees themselves the *bad tree*. At 12:33, the Pharisees are the judges, and at 12:34 they are judged.

Th43:2–3 “You do not understand who I am from what I say to you. Rather you have become like the Jews, for they love the tree but hate its fruit, or they love the fruit but hate the tree.” This may mean that Jews liked the Pharisees but not their rigid doctrine, liked Jesus’ doctrine but did not accept him. Matthew wrongly placed the passage in the context of a critique of the Pharisees.

Probably the metaphor denotes a man who cannot make a decision, cannot rationally interpret the arguments and make conclusions. The language is idiomatic and was not invented by Jesus. Thus, Shir ha-Shirim r.7, “The good tree bears good fruit.”

As usual, Matthew lumped different sayings together. The correlation with Thomas continues at 12:35: “The good person brings good things out of a good treasure, and the evil person brings evil things out of an evil treasure.”

Th45:2–4 “Good persons produce good from what they’ve stored up; bad persons produce evil from the wickedness they’ve stored up in their hearts, and say evil things. For from the [malicious] overflow of the heart they produce evil.”

12:37 “For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”

Christians were forced to carp on Pharisees in response to ridicule from them. Normally, the Jews judged by deeds, not by words, though some words—blasphemy—are deeds themselves. The passage may be characteristic of sectarian views. Being limited in actions like rituals, sectarians naturally attached special value to words. Rigid sectarians even extended prohibition further—from words to desires.

The translation is ambiguous, since the same word in Hebrew may refer to word and thing. The latter translation makes more sense.

Curiously the admonition does not hint at the censure which usually sends the Pharisees into outer darkness instead of into the kingdom of heaven.

12:38–39 “<sup>38</sup>Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to him, ‘Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.’ <sup>39</sup>But he answered them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.’”

12:39 does not fit in with 12:38. 12:39 likely had nothing to do with Jesus originally but was a rejoinder to people’s common demands for proof of prophecy.

The Pharisees’ demand is reasonable because Jesus’ teaching departs from orthodoxy. In Ex4, Moses tells God that the Israelites will not

believe him and receives three signs, one after the other, in case they still do not believe. Claiming likeness to Moses as renewer of the law Moses gave, Jesus had to prove to the Jews that he spoke in the name of God.

The Pharisees' demand of a sign from Jesus shows that his miracles did not convince them. Maybe they saw such miracles often. Perhaps, more probably, they did not see Jesus' miracles at all. Why does Jesus refuse to give them signs, if he constantly works miracles before crowds?

Jesus offers the sign of Jonah: "For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so for three days and three nights the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth."<sup>xxxviii</sup> But the sign of Jonah is improper. The Pharisees want confirmation that Jesus is the Messiah while he is alive. Jesus insists they execute him and learn of their error afterward. The rejoinder is meaningful only in retrospect; it would make no sense to either Pharisees or the disciples who knew nothing of the crucifixion yet. The Pharisees did not see the sign of the resurrection, because Jesus revealed himself only to the disciples, and the Gospel accounts of his rising are contradictory. The disciples hardly expected the sign, since on the third day they neither came to Jesus' tomb nor believed the women who told them of the resurrection.

"The sign of Jonah" is formally incorrect. Jesus rose after two full days and two nights. He died after 3:00 p.m. on Friday and was buried no sooner than dusk. Counting the incomplete days, his absence can be stretched to three days and two nights but not to three days and three nights. Apologists answer that Jews counted day and night as one whole, but the evangelist specifically divides the day into daylight and dark.

Confinement in and release from the whale's belly was a sign for Jonah that he should go and preach to Nineveh. By analogy, the sign should be given to Jesus, not to the Pharisees. The confinement in the whale's belly a punishment for Jonah's unwillingness to preach to Nineveh. Jesus supposedly conformed to the divine will.

Though technically a prophet since he proclaimed what he heard from God or an angel, Jews do not call Jonah one. God spoke to him once, not continuously as with the other prophets. Maimonides ranks the prophets by the frequency of their revelations. Judaic tradition treats the book of Jonah as a tale.

Jewish Matthew knew all these things, so this account was certainly added to his Gospel in an attempt to prove the resurrection with the same story.

The version in Lk11:30 is at least formally satisfactory: "For just as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so the Son of Man will be to his generation."

Luke's source was formed before Jesus was deified. The writer compares him with Jonah, an insignificant envoy. Jesus refers to one generation only. Perhaps the author does not mean the destruction of Jerusalem but generically condemns any evil city, like Nineveh.

12:42 "The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to listen to the wisdom of Solomon, and, see—something greater than Solomon is here!"

Jews of Jesus' time would not consider Sheba's domain, traditionally thought to be Ethiopia, as "the end of the earth." They knew more distant lands. For a European writer with only vague ideas of Middle Eastern and African geography, it was indeed as far as the world's edge.

12:43–45 "When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it wanders through waterless regions looking for a resting place, but it finds none. Then it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' When it comes, it finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then it goes and brings along seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and live there."

Why this statement? Perhaps the people Jesus treated returned to insanity soon,<sup>58</sup> or perhaps they were in fact never cured but lay unconscious for a time, which led others to believe they were cured.

"Waterless region" reflects the Eastern notion that spirits live in the wilderness, an idea Maimonides, elaborating on the prohibition against consuming blood, suggests the Jews subscribed to.

Otherwise, the allegory of an ignorant person (not filled with knowledge) being easy prey for a malicious spirit was common. Zohar5:267 presents the common view: "Whom can evil inclination [Sitra Ahara, unclean spirit] be likened to? To a person who comes up to a door, opens it, and if nobody stops him, enters as the invited guest. If then nobody objects again, he gives orders as the master of the house."

12:46–50 "His mother and his brothers were standing outside, wanting to speak to him . . . Jesus replied, 'Who is my mother and who are my brothers? . . . For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and mother.'"

According to the law, disrespect for a mother merited death. Jesus urged others to "honor your father and mother."<sup>cxix</sup> While he could reject his brothers who did not believe in him,<sup>cxl</sup> this was not a case with his mother who evidently knew of his divinity through his unusual birth.

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<sup>58</sup> This is reported of modern shamans.

Rejection of one's kinsfolk is a prominent consequence of turning to Judaism. Philo praises proselytes who endure the hardship of such rejection.<sup>exli</sup> Jesus had to turn away his family if he had switched to a significantly different strain of the religion or was a proselyte to Judaism.

Th99 "The disciples said to him, 'Your brothers and your mother are standing outside.' He said to them, 'Those here who do what my Father wants are my brothers and my mother. They are the ones who will enter my Father's domain.'" Lk8:19–21 is similar, except that Jesus' family could not reach him because of the crowd. Perhaps Luke wanted to explain why they were waiting outside. Though they could have pushed through the crowd, they were perhaps unclean and could not enter for religious reasons.

Matthew narrows Thomas' and Luke's description of "mother and brothers" as "those who hear the word of God and do it" to the disciples: "And pointing to his disciples, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers!'" Luke later added, "For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother," which contradicts singling out the disciples, and assumes many followers. That anyone could become a mother to Jesus makes sense if he were a mystery initiate but not if he were a virgin-born divine being. The editor omitted "who hear the word," probably to avoid a Gnostic connotation and replaced "whoever does [the word]" with "whoever does the will." Thomas is probably closer to the original, since "does the word" is Hebraism, where *word* and *thing* are the same word, and therefore *word* is perceived as actionable.

Epiphanius quotes a similar text from Ch.5 of the Ebionite Gospel to prove that Jesus was not human and did not perceive his family in the literal sense. He would have referred only to Matthew, had that text been available then. The diction of "*my* Father in heaven," typical of additions, confirms the text's inauthenticity; Jews considered God the father of all.

Elucidation appears at Lk14:26: "Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple." The "life itself" clarification is evidence of Gnostic derivation. The Gnostics valued solitude as freedom from affections. Th49 "Congratulations to those who are alone and chosen, for you will find the [Father's] domain. For you have come from it, and you will return there again." Family affection is important. The Gnostics created parables, myths, and Gospels for every occasion and would not have avoided such an important issue. Later their text was interpreted literally as Jesus' refusal to meet with his kin. Another semantic layer of Jesus' rejection of his Judaic roots was attractive to the Church. Such secondary and tertiary elaboration is common in religious texts, usually vague and fecund in ambiguous interpretations.

Buddhism has a similar concept. Those who turn to Shakyamuni lose their past and their families to enter Buddha's family. In this sense, if Jesus clung to his family, he renounced his initiated status.

In *Histories* 5 Tacitus writes of the Jews, "Those who come over to their religion adopt the practice, and have this lesson first instilled into them, to despise all gods, to disown their country, and set at naught parents, children, and brethren." He evidently had Christian practice in mind. They preferred their new brothers in religion to their old families, perhaps an indispensable requirement for small, secluded sects.

Regardless of the external similarity, the sense of Deut33:8–9 is quite different: "And of Levi he said, . . . [He] said of his father and mother, 'I regard them not'; he ignored his kin, and did not acknowledge his children. For they observed your word, and kept your covenant." The Levites set God above their kin when they killed those who worshipped the golden calf.<sup>cxlii</sup> Deuteronomy says the Levites had no choice; but Jesus faced no such necessity when he rejected his mother.

13:3–9 "A sower went out . . . . Some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground . . . and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil . . . . And since they had no root, they withered away . . . . Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty."

The harvest described is unlikely even now. No sower threw valuable seed on rocks or among weeds. Speed of appearance of sprouts depends only a little on depth of soil: Th9 lacks this transparent allegory concerning superficial belief, which he would have certainly used if available to denote the preparation time before the initiation. Jesus was familiar with rural life and would hardly have used such absurd metaphors. Pliny and Herodotus tell similar stories of unusual (but ostensibly common) productivity.<sup>cxliii</sup> The editor may leave a trace of Gentile culture showing.

InfTh12 tells a tale of Jesus sowing and getting a hundredfold yield. The remarkable germination was perhaps a standard metaphor for how teaching spreads.

Curiously, the author distinguishes between different yields on a good soil, implying the existence of higher and lower levels in Christian community, while Paul proclaimed everyone equal in Christ. 13:10–12 "The disciples . . . asked him, 'Why do you speak to them in parables?' He answered, 'To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For to those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away.'"

Lk8:18 is more accurate: ". . . what they seem to have." Although apologists say that means faith—"those who have [faith]"—it conforms



precisely to a standard Gnostic proposition of knowledge. Faith is absolute, but knowledge can increase. Even superficial faith—"what they seem to have"—can hardly be taken away, while lack of superficial knowledge is common; such knowledge could evaporate from contact with the true teaching, and accumulating a new knowledge takes new efforts. In the context of "Then pay attention to how you listen," Lk8:18 evidently refers to knowledge, not to faith. Th41 also points to a Gnostic interpretation. The *knowledge* of the parables is *gnosis*.

Gnosticism imparts mystical knowledge to an inner circle and superficial rites for everyone else. Jesus spoke in parables to a level available only to those craving knowledge: "Do not throw your pearls before swine". Like many Gnostic notions, that approach is suspect in any society with isomorphous<sup>59</sup> ethics, since it harms—"even what they have will be taken away"—most people, naturally disinclined to spiritual enlightenment. Moreover, Jesus deliberately withheld knowledge by speaking in parables. Why then did he preach to everyone instead of to his disciples only?

"To them it has not been given . . . ." Yet Jesus criticized the Pharisees for withholding knowledge: "Woe to you, lawyers!"<sup>60</sup> For you have taken away the key of knowledge; you did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering."<sup>cxliv</sup>

Contrary to the Gospel, Jesus spoke in parables not only to the crowd but also to his disciples. He told the disciples nothing beyond what he told the crowd or what the crowd would soon learn about his resurrection. Not once did the disciples understand a parable others did not, evidence that "to you it has been given to know" originally alluded to a text different from the modern Gospel that contained mystical teaching, like John.

The passage uses the standard logic of a proverb: "God gives wisdom to the wise" or "Poverty follows the poor." The popularity of such old saws shows when Talmudic writers strive to explain them: "The rich people brought their sacrifice of the first fruits in gold and silver baskets, and they received their baskets back. The poor people brought their sacrifice in baskets made of skins, and they did not receive their baskets back."<sup>cxlv</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Equally applicable to all. Mystic sects generally apply different standards to themselves and to others.

<sup>60</sup> The term *lawyer* possibly derives from a mistaken translation of the Septuagint, *Torah* as *law*. Here we also often use the customary translation. Actually, *Torah* means *teaching*.

Jesus spoke in parables, an approach rooted in sectarian writings. The Essenes held aloof from the outside world, a trait of self-contained groups well-known to sociologists. Secrecy made doctrine less accessible and therefore more precious. Much of Essene theosophy was formulated in parables, just the form Jesus chose.

His parables differ from prophetic allegories based on scripture, which can be interpreted using the method of similar context: like terms or idioms from scripture and their meanings are substituted in prophecy. Christian allegories hardly refer to scripture, because they had insufficient knowledge of it and attributed greater significance to their own pseudepigrapha. Sectarian origins may also account for the Gospel parables' aggressiveness, another feature of antisocial groups.

To prove that Christianity descends from Judaism, apologists cite the copious use of parables in rabbinic tradition. Naturally, the most secret doctrine becomes the most prized. Rabbis used the obscure style in other discussions, and parables penetrated the tradition after Jesus' time. They are comparatively numerous in late Midrashim. Most Jewish parables are meaningful when taken literally, and straightforward, since the teaching was intended for all Jews and not kept secret. Christian parables often do not make sense literally.

The Talmud presents great stylistic differences between its parables and Gospel parables, the former usually kind, witty, refined, and the latter, rigid, aggressive, illogical.

Gospels incorrectly use standard metaphors. For example, *Coming into the world* meant a manifestation of God, like light, fire, etc. the Gospels use it to describe the physical birth of a child of God. *Transfiguration* meant giving disciples wisdom; the Gospels speak of Jesus changing color. *Ascension* symbolized God's tragic abandonment of the Israelites; the Church reports a literal ascension which assures resurrection, intercession, and justification: highly positive events. *Legs* symbolize the cause; nailing to the cross would thus signify lost cause. The purest motion is flight; Jesus moving about Jerusalem on foot would be sluggish and powerless.

13:13–16 “The reason I speak to them in parables is that seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand. With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that says: ‘You will indeed listen, but never understand, and you will indeed look, but never perceive. For this people’s heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; so that they might not . . . understand with their heart and turn and I would heal them.’ But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear.”

A mistaken attempt to substantiate the previous Gnostic statement with Judaic prophecy is added after Jesus' answer at 13:12. If Jesus' hearers

neither see nor hear and their hearts “have grown dull,” shouldn’t he speak to them plainly, not in parables which they will understand even less? To fault them for condemning Jesus, who deliberately made himself incomprehensible to them is unjust.<sup>61</sup>

“Seeing they do not perceive” was a popular idiom based on the double sense of the Hebrew homonyms *to see* in the literal sense and *to understand*. It is encountered elsewhere as early as the *Prometheus Bound*. The writer distorts Is6:9–11: “And he said, ‘Go and say to this people: ‘Keep listening, but do not comprehend; keep looking, but do not understand.’ Make the mind of this people dull, and stop their ears, and shut their eyes, so that they may not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and comprehend with their minds and turn and be healed . . . until cities lie waste without inhabitants.”

Isaiah’s instructions are ironic: tell people what they should not do, and they will likely listen, do the opposite, and save the land.<sup>62</sup>

Note the continuation: “And vast is the emptiness in the midst of the land . . . like . . . an oak whose stump remains standing when it is felled. The holy seed is its stump.”<sup>cxlvi</sup> That is, despite their suffering, the Jews, not all the world’s people, are the people of God.

Jesus spoke in parables for another reason: “This was to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet: ‘I will open my mouth to speak in parables; I will proclaim what has been hidden from the foundation of the world.’”<sup>cxlvii</sup> No wonder the writer does not name the prophet: there is no such text in scripture. Further, Jesus said nothing new, “hidden from the foundation of the world.”

The usual reference to Ps49:4 does not work: “My mouth shall speak wisdom; the meditation of my heart shall be understanding.” That does not explain why Jesus spoke *only* in parables.

The same problem appears in Ps78:2: “I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old.” By replacing “dark sayings from of old” with “what has been hidden from the foundation of the world” the forger tries to make the verse describe a supernatural being, not ordinary intelligent people. But “. . . things that we have heard and known,

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<sup>61</sup> God hardened pharaoh’s heart, and punished him. That seems unjust until we realize that he was punished for the earlier deeds against Israelites. To make cause-and-effect relationship clear, God correlated each plague with refusal to release the Israelites.

<sup>62</sup> Judea was densely settled in the time of Jesus, not destroyed. That is, supposing after evangelist that Judeans have subjected themselves to Isaiah’s literal instructions (did not realize, understand, etc.), the punishment had been completed (and the land was repopulated already).

that our ancestors have told us”<sup>xcxlviii</sup> indicates no new teaching. The evangelist adapts the psalm by substituting the plural *parables* of the Gospels for the single parable of the psalm.

13:24–30 “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed . . . . An enemy . . . sowed weeds among the wheat . . . The slaves . . . said to him, . . . ‘Do you want us to go and gather them?’ But he replied, ‘No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them . . . . At harvest time I will tell the reapers, ‘Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.’”

Raised in rural society, Jesus could hardly miss the fallacy. If the weeds are not pulled, the wheat will not grow. Jesus’ audience knew that and could hardly make out the inferred moral. The parable also inaccurately compares the kingdom, a passive object, to a person giving judgment, an active subject.

The parable recalls the Baptist: “His winnowing fork is in his hand and . . . he will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”<sup>xcxlix</sup> While John describes the fate of good and bad, the evangelist speaks of withholding judgment for some indefinite future. The passage may appear when the Church had to respond to the criticism that many people from throngs joined it.

A less plausible explanation is that the Christian communes prepared actively for the final battle with the powers of evil. The Essenes did so in theory. More pragmatic leaders suggested waiting for the approaching judgment.

The dualism of “the one sowing good” and “his enemy” appealed to the Gnostics, and the parable appears in Th57.

Zohar Hadash1:12 “In summer, when the king went out into his garden, he ordered the weeds pulled. But when he saw flowers peeking out among them, he kept the weeds because of the flowers. When the flowers grew and were picked, he ordered the weeds pulled.” the account is logical, since the flowers were few and appeared accidentally and grew among the weeds. The book was written when the Jews had lived in the Diaspora for centuries, rarely cultivated land, and would not see the obvious incongruity. The parable means that a few righteous people can save even the lawless Jews, at least for the time before judgment. Contrast that to the Christian claim of being all wheat with only some noncompliant “weeds” around. Curiously, the same fate awaits both wheat and weeds: they are destroyed in practice, by consumption and burning, respectively.

The Talmud passage resembles the Gospel only superficially: the governor appointed Rabbi Eliezer the city police chief. Rabbi Ieshua asked him, “How long will you give our God’s people over to execution?” “But I

only pull weeds from the vineyard,” Rabbi Eliezer answered. “Leave the weed pulling to the owner of the vineyard,” he was told.<sup>cl</sup> The argument is about handing Jews over to Gentiles for trial. Neither the rabbinic writings nor Jewish state histories support delaying punishment for bandits.

The Christian approach disagrees with the Torah's call for justice. By Jesus' logic, sin must be endured, allowed to develop, canker others, and stifle good freely.

The Christian approach exposes a common logical trap. Leaving punishment to God looks attractive, though he usually exercises his power through natural processes and human actions, not miracles. Human deeds, not lightning, effect divine judgment. A sentence derived from the commandments is divine chastisement.

13:31–32 “He put before them another parable: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.’”

Omniscient or at least living in the country, Jesus knew that mustard does not grow on trees. Th20 The kingdom of heaven is “like a mustard seed. [It is] the smallest of all seeds, but when it falls on prepared soil, it produces a large branch and becomes a shelter for birds of the sky.”

Thomas' kingdom is knowledge which blossoms in prepared and searching souls. The sheltered birds may have various meanings: either that such people bear heaven in themselves, or that they give knowledge to others, or that they console others. Further evidence of Gnostic origin is the comparison of the kingdom to the smallest seed, the tiny kernel of mystic knowledge shared by a tight circle of the initiated.

Matthew characteristically emphasizes the parable's literal sense: the seed is *sown* and *grown*, the birds *make nests*—but without the specifically *prepared* soil.

13:33 “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.”

Th96:1–2 “The Father's imperial rule is like [a] woman who took a little leaven, [hid] it in dough, and made it into large loaves of bread.”

The *kingdom* of the synoptics is like leaven; Thomas' is like a woman. The evangelists tend to confuse subject and object. Matthew, Luke, and Thomas present many parables about the approach of the kingdom, which may have originally referred to Gnostic knowledge.

13:31–32 about the mustard seed and 13:33 about leaven seem identical: the least knowledge (seed, leaven) flourishes in a person prepared

(soil, flour). The repetition is curious, possibly because the writer had no clue of the parables' meaning, which is further confirmed by his tendency to take the parables literally and ignore allegorical meanings.

Less plausible explanations are also possible. Ancients thought that leaven destroys flour and simultaneously wakes something new to life. The parable may mean the destruction of the world and its resurrection in a new form. Or perhaps *kingdom of heaven* meant a spiritual state near the divine, spread through experience of it. Man strives for it or transmits it to others. Still another explanation may be that a few initiates (yeast) can change the world.

Yet another allegory cannot be excluded. "In the life to come, when the Blessed One, hallowed be His name, will appeal to the earth to return all the bodies buried in it, what was mixed with dust, as leaven is mixed with dough, will swallow and enlarge and will raise the whole body."<sup>eli</sup> The Gospel writer may have meant the leaven of resurrection and the approach of the heavenly kingdom in resurrection, whether Jesus' or the general resurrection.

Yeast is also commonly mentioned in a negative sense. Zohar2:182 draws a comparison between it and evil inclination spreading all over the body until it destroys the man. The metaphor comparing yeast and core teachings was common. Thus, in Ber34 a little leaven and salt are good, but too much of either is bad.

13:39–42 expounds the parable of the weeds: "The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels . . . . The Son of Man will send *his* angels, and they will collect out of *his* kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire."

Matthew's usual comment refers to the parable which ended at 13:30. Thus, 13:31–38 is an even later addition. Evidence that the passage is late includes calling Jesus *Son of Man* in a supernatural sense; assigning to him his own angels; substituting the polemic *his kingdom* for the idiomatic *kingdom of heaven*; and the developed concept of hell as a *furnace of fire*.

Jesus and his angels are going to fry the lawbreakers on the hellish fire themselves without leaving this job to the devil. This is a curious remnant of monotheism in the theology which has already assimilated many pagan beliefs, including that of the afterworld.

The language at 13:49–50 differs in kind: "So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the furnace of fire."

First, not Jesus but angels, presumably those of the devil's tribe, do the work. Second, they "separate the evil from the righteous" with the

impression that most will be righteous. The criteria of the final judgment evolve continually.

Who were the *evil*? The Talmud uses a technical term, “the evil of the world,” to stigmatize sectarians.

Mt13:39–42, 47–48 and 49–50 were separate statements on the apocalypse which editors set near each other because of their similarity. This created the doublet of “throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

13:44 “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid . . . and bought that field.”

To conceal a discovery is thievery in Jewish law. Such deal would be permissible, only if the buyer discovered the treasure after he had already purchased the field, and the owner of the hidden treasure was unknown. The writer describes Roman law: if the rightful owner cannot be found, the discovery belongs to the one who found it.

At an unspecified time, *halackah* permitted keeping Gentile property in response to the Gentiles’ refusal to return property to Jews. The custom may arise after 70 C.E., when Jews had to live among Gentiles. Though legal, such conduct was dubious.<sup>clii</sup>

Th109 is more accurate: “The [Father’s] imperial rule is like a person who had a treasure hidden in his field but did not know it . . . . The son . . . sold it [the field]. The buyer went plowing, [discovered] the treasure, and began to lend money at interest to whomever he wished.” The Jews would have hardly used the metaphor of usury, which was prohibited and condemned to the extent that usurers were not accepted as witnesses.<sup>cliii</sup>

It is unclear how wisdom, the *treasure*, can be intended for one person, yet be received by someone else. One need not buy a field to attain wisdom, which is personal experience. Probably this late parable is about the Jews for whom the treasure was intended and the Christians who have received it. Judaism offered them an example of meritorious thievery, Jacob taking Esau’s inheritance.

13:45–46 “Again the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.”

The kingdom of heaven is a spiritual condition and cannot be like a merchant. Merchants do not buy things to keep but to sell. The author demonstrates ignorance of the underlying concept, namely that wisdom or the kingdom of heaven are not bought even at the cost of rejecting one’s possessions, but earned slowly and painstakingly.

Th76:1–2 is similar to Mat13:45–46 but continues at Th76:3: “So also with you, seek his treasure that is unfailing, that is enduring, where no moth comes to eat and no worm destroys.” The saying is about the search for eternal values, not the heavenly kingdom of the Christian afterlife.

Matthew preferred to insert Th76:3 into a more compatible context at Mat 6:19–21.

13:47–48 “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net . . . [which] caught fish of every kind; when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. So it will be at the end of the age.”

This parable curiously puts the righteous fish into vessels to die and throws the evil ones back into the sea to live. The net may be the inbreaking of the kingdom of heaven but not the kingdom itself. As the net captures all kinds of fish, so the approach of the kingdom will include all kinds of people.

The version in Th8 seems more reasonable: “The human one is like a wise fisherman who cast his net into the sea and drew it up from the sea full of little fish. Among them, the wise fisherman discovered a fine large fish. He threw all the little fish back into the sea, and easily chose the large fish.”

Could it be that Jesus made mistakes in his parables? Just so, if he were human. But Christians claim he was divine. Why then did he confuse such simple matters? Perhaps he disregarded common sense and accuracy in favor of the inner meaning, but such an assumption violates the principle that parables could have several semantic layers, but each must be accurate.

13:52 “Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.”

Essenes developed an elaborate doctrine of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus argues against involving members of other sects.

13:54–56 “People . . . said, . . . ‘Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And are not his sisters with us?’”

Having five sons, living to adult age, besides sisters, was unusual until modern medicine appeared, and makes the account suspicious. The more so since one brother is Joseph. Jews usually did not name a son after his father, and Joseph’s son would not be called Joseph. Perhaps recognizing the problem, Mark changed the brother’s name to Josés.

Jesus’ father is not named, but his mother is, a cultural impossibility which would have been evident to Matthew.



13:57—58 In his hometown, “Jesus said to them, ‘Prophets are not without honor except in their own country’. . . . And he did not do many deeds of power there, because of their unbelief.”

The author of 13:58 seems to be unaware of 9:23–26 where Jesus resurrects the daughter of a leader of the synagogue “in his own town.”<sup>cliv</sup>

Mk2:3–5 (=Mt 9.2) shows Jesus healing a paralyzed man. Instead of Matthew’s ambiguous “in his own town,” Mark locates the action in Capernaum.<sup>clv</sup> Though Mark may have the geography wrong, as he often does, his version reflects an existing tradition found in Matt4:13: “He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum.” In early Christian tradition “his own town” meant Capernaum. Only Lk4:23–24 suggests the place is Nazareth: “Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, ‘Doctor, cure yourself! . . . Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.’”

17:25 is commonly used to argue that Capernaum is not Jesus’ hometown but that he stayed in Peter’s house. Perhaps he did not own a house. His mother could live with another son, but Jesus did not live with his family anymore: “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.”<sup>clvi</sup> Early Talmudic tradition may also point to Capernaum as his hometown, describing Cephar Nechanija as a hotbed of heresy.

11:23 includes Capernaum among the cities where Jesus performed miracles, though according to 13:58, he worked no wonders there because they did not believe in him. Yet faithlessness did not hamper him in Chorazin and Bethsaida: “Then he began to reproach the cities in which most of his deeds of power had been done, because they did not repent.”<sup>clvii</sup> At a wedding in Cana of Galilee, the guests may have known Jesus, but that did not prevent him from turning water to wine. Thus both the evangelist’s reasons why Jesus could not work miracles—disbelief<sup>clviii</sup> or familiarity<sup>clix</sup>—do not hold.

Presumably Jesus worked miracles by the power of God, not through the people’s belief like some hypnotizer. If Jesus intentionally neglected those who did not trust him, were not the people of Jerusalem and the Gentiles of Tyre, before whom he worked miracles, also unbelievers? There was no need for wondrous works before believers, only to convince and convert unbelievers.

Th31 must be more accurate: “Jesus said: ‘No prophet is welcome on his home turf; doctors do not cure those who know them.’” Jesus’ mission would be futile among his townsmen, since they knew him in everyday life and could not accept him as divine. Miracles had nothing to do with it. Luke replaces Thomas’ “doctors do not cure those who know

them” with a familiar proverb, “Doctor, cure yourself!” and does not notice that he implies to Jesus an illness of the kind he cured in others.

Luke might be correct: early Christian folklore, reportedly reflected in the lost Slavonic version of Josephus, referred to Jesus as a hunchback. This might be a reason behind various “hunchback” legends in medieval Christendom. The man described by Isaiah in chapter 53, to whom the earliest Christians likened Jesus, was visibly ill.

14:3–4 “For Herod had arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, because John told him, ‘It is not lawful for you to have her.’”

Herodias divorced<sup>63</sup> Philip<sup>64</sup> before Herod Antipas married her. Antipas, thus, did not violate a commandment prohibiting relations with the brother’s<sup>65</sup> wife. The Slavonic Josephus says Herodias was already widowed, which deserves attention, especially since the Christian editor had no reason to alter Josephus to justify the hated Antipas. That would explain why Salome, her daughter, was still with her at Herod’s court; normally unmarried heirs were kept under a father’s control to avoid unwelcome claims to the throne. In this case, Antipas was right, though not legally obliged, to marry the widow of a brother who left no male heir.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Story of Herodias’ divorcing her husband, that is, initiating divorce is doubtful. For all we know about the then customs of Judea, women did not have such right; neither did Roman or Greek women. On the contrary, they lacked even basic rights. It was considered normal for a Roman husband to pass—or even lend—his wife to another. Roman divorce documents, however, state that both the husband and wife agreed to divorce, implying that they had equal rights in divorce.

It would be easy to conjecture that Luke improvises on the customs of a faraway land, had we not encounter the same opinion in Mk10:12, “if she divorces her husband and marries another...” A possible solution is that a woman could effectively initiate the divorce by exercising her right of refusing the husband (M.Yebamot 13:1:B), although this right seems to be recognized only for minors (M.Yebamot 13:1:I) Perhaps the idea of female-initiated divorce sprang from 1Cor7:10–11 where Paul mentions this right in the context of religiously motivated divorce, where open practicing of Christianity by wife automatically led to her dismissal by husband, and thus equaled initiating divorce.

<sup>64</sup> According to Luke. Josephus mentions Herod II as her ex-husband.

<sup>65</sup> That Philip and Antipas were only half-brothers was irrelevant in the ancient legal system.

<sup>66</sup> *War* [italics or not?] 2:9:6 In 37 C.E., Gaius Caligula appoints Agrippa the king of the deceased Philip’s tetrarchy. Philip probably had no male heirs.

Josephus<sup>clx</sup> records Herod Antipas' genealogy. He was the son of Herod I the Great and Malthase the Samaritan. Aristobulus was Herod's son by Mariamme I, daughter of the high priest. Herodias was the daughter of Aristobulus and Bernice and niece of her new husband Herod Antipas. Such marriages were common; Josephus<sup>clxi</sup> describes many in the ruler's family.<sup>67</sup> Thus, Herodias' father Aristobulus married his cousin<sup>68</sup> Bernice. Nor could one expect strict observance from Antipas, son of the Idumaeen Herod and the Samaritan Malthase. Moreover, marriage regulations were relaxed in Judaism for kings even to the extent of polygamy.<sup>69</sup>

Herod married Herodias, conveniently divorced for that purpose, possibly about 5 C.E. To set an upper limit of the date, note that the tetrarch Philip, who married Herodias' daughter Salome, died in 34 C.E. Even if he married the twelve-year-old Salome just before his death, she was born in 22 C.E., and Herodias did not yet divorce Herod II. Even the latest plausible date of the divorce, 22 C.E., is much earlier than the beginning of John's mission in 29 C.E.<sup>clxii</sup> John's reproach from seven to twenty-five years later would be old news and no reason to execute him. John may have still been preaching in 5 C.E., but early Christian tradition pushed everything forward so he could baptize Jesus. The baptism of semi-divine Jesus became an embarrassment to the church only later; initially, the baptism established Jesus authority.

Herod violated the tenth commandment, "Do not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his ox or his ass" at most. We do not know what the rabbinic tradition regarding covetousness was then or if it was authoritative. The politically dominant Sadducees, to whose faction Antipas probably belonged, did not accept oral tradition at all.

The Baptist does not seem to have much of an argument. Luke's account is probably incorrect, and John condemned not Herod but Herodias for adultery. That Herodias, not Herod, wanted John dead strengthens that view.

Josephus<sup>clxiii</sup> sharply disapproves of Glaphyra's marriage to the ethnarch Archelaus some time after the death of her previous husband—Archelaus' brother Alexander. Though Josephus condemns Glaphyra for adultery, he earlier reports that Archelaus started the affair.

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<sup>67</sup> Whether these accounts are authentic or were added to Josephus is another question.

<sup>68</sup> Daughter of Salome, Herod's sister.

<sup>69</sup> Although by modern views Idumaeans were converted to Judaism not long before the depicted events, there are arguments in favor of them preaching a substantially different version of Judaism centuries earlier, just like Samaritans. The details of their beliefs, be it sun- or moon-worship, are not beyond speculation today.

The story suspiciously parallels that of Herodias. Both women married a brother-in-law. Both men dismissed previous wives. Both were royal marriages. Men initiated both matches. Glaphyra dreamed that her former husband accuses her of setting things in motion, precisely the accusation against Herodias in the otherwise puzzling account of her divorcing her former husband to marry a new one.

The story of the Baptist and Herod is a forgery based on the story of Glaphyra.

14:6–11 Herodias' daughter dances for Herod, who swears to give her anything up to half his kingdom; on Herodias' advice, she asks for John's head; Herod executes John.

A female plot forcing the ruler to do evil unwillingly is a customary literary subject. It is hardly believable that the king's niece (or daughter) would dance; it was condemned as a dissolute occupation. Christian apocrypha mention dancing-girls among the lawless along with harlots. The girl was Herodias', not Herod's, and was perhaps Salome, Herodias' daughter from the first marriage. If John, according to Luke, started preaching in 29 C.E., went to prison a little later, and stayed there for some time, the episode is dated not earlier than 30 C.E. If Herodias divorced in 5 C.E., her daughter was at least twenty-five years old when she danced, a venerable age for a woman in those days, well beyond dancing. She would be married by this age, not living with Herod anymore.

Herod would hardly swear to give anything whatever, Salome could have asked for something more valuable to him than John's head. Further, he would hardly keep a promise that became inconvenient. A rabbi or a priest could rescind the oath because Herod failed to anticipate its consequences.

John was likely executed because he had a following, not for some dubious condemnation of the marriage. The authorities doubtless feared the movement might foment revolt. John could easily rouse his followers to rebel, as did the inconspicuous elder who started the Maccabean revolt and whose sons founded the Hasmonean dynasty.

Christians may have misrepresented the reason for John's execution to hide the transparent parallel with Jesus, also dangerous as a mob leader. If Jesus' problems were so earthly, the whole redeeming crucifixion story would fall to pieces. The Christians did not explain John's execution coherently. According to Luke,<sup>clxiv</sup> he rebuked Antipas for evil deeds. Luke possibly confused Herod Antipas and Herod the Great, whom Josephus roundly condemned.

An editor may have confused two different modes of execution. Beheading was common in Roman culture and unlikely in John's case. The Jews thought beheading shameful, worse than burning, stoning, or

strangulation. Antipas had no reason to be cruel to the Baptist. Cutting off heads after execution by some other means to present them as gifts was also a Roman practice. Execution by beheading suggests Gentile authorship.

According to Josephus, John was imprisoned because of his mass following and possible rebellion. Nothing suggests his condemnation of Herod's marriage. Josephus asserts further that Herodias' first husband was Herod II,<sup>70</sup> not Philip.<sup>71</sup> Editors saw the contradiction and later manuscripts of Matthew do not mention Philip. Josephus contradicts the Gospel account.

14:12 "His [John's] disciples came, took the body and buried him. Then they went and told Jesus."

If Jesus were so popular before John's death that the Baptist's disciples went over to him, Herod would not suppose he was John come back to life, as in 14:3–4.

According to the Law, John should be buried in full. Giving his head to Salome was a scandalous violation.<sup>72</sup>

The feeding of five thousand people with five loaves of bread at 14:15–21 merits attention. Though Jesus could possibly have created the food, let us consider the practical aspects of dealing with such an act.

Five thousand men "besides women and children"<sup>73</sup> or about ten thousand people came to a deserted place. Counting crowds by numbering the adult males is common among Greek authors. Such a number would generously populate two or three Galilean towns of the time. Herod could hardly tolerate such an exodus to the wilderness. Rulers are suspicious of crowds. Josephus reports that the Romans massacred four hundred Jews because they left the city to wait for the end. Herod Antipas would have done the same. The mass scene is dubious.

"And they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full," in the end the volume of bread actually increased; the feeding was not an illusion. Since the crowd "ate and were filled," he must have created a pound per person, roughly five tons. "[He] broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds." To "break" five tons of bread and distribute it quickly presents problems. Though Jesus could create bread miraculously, the disciples had to pass it out physically. Since the people were sitting, the disciples had to approach each one.

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<sup>70</sup> Son of Herod the Great and Mariamme II.

<sup>71</sup> It was Herodias' daughter Salome who married Philip.

<sup>72</sup> Head was a major organ, attributed magical qualities. This powerful magical object could give rise to the story of what later became the Holy Grail, which at least in one medieval source is reported to be a head.

An account of the huge crowd taking on a trip almost no food but twelve empty baskets might appear as argument against Gnostics, who treated the episode as metaphor of spiritual satiation, filling with knowledge.

Matthew seems to correct Lk9:10–17: “He . . . withdrew privately to a city called Bethsaida . . . . They [people] followed him . . . . The twelve came to him and said, ‘Send the crowd away, so that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside, to lodge and get provisions.’” Luke’s account might have made sense in urbanized Greece, but not in the countryside outside Bethsaida, where food was as available as it was in villages. Matthew eliminates the inconsistency.

In Mt15:33, under similar circumstances, the disciples ask Jesus again how they should feed the people, four thousand men besides women and children, with seven loaves of bread. John reports five thousand people.

The discrepancies between John’s and the synoptics’ accounts of the feeding suggest a Gnostic source, which John used, as does the mystical sense of the Eucharist: Jesus is spiritual bread for believers and satisfies the thirst for knowledge. John<sup>clxvi</sup> records another version of the same tradition: “Those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty.”

Why was the story so important that all four evangelists report it, Matthew twice? The *Sibylline Oracles*, important prophecies in the ancient world, and accepted by some Christians, predict that someone would feed five thousand people with five loaves and two fishes. The same block of text contains another transparent parallel with Jesus. John may have included the episode in his Gospel to correlate with the Sibyls.<sup>73</sup>

A similar story in InfTh12 shows the child Jesus giving away grain he grew. The notion of distributing miraculous bread was likely popular, and different authors used it to suit themselves.

Yadin suggests an interesting explanation. After a host has been fed, one version reports twelve baskets of leftovers, the other, seven. The Pharisees donated twelve loaves of bread to the temple each week, and the Essenes—seven baskets of bread at a festival. Jesus’ (his teaching’s) leftovers are the same as sacrifices of those two major sects, and therefore his teaching is way greater than theirs.

The miracle is not unique. Elisha fed a hundred people with twenty loaves of bread, a somewhat more realistic undertaking.

14:24 “But by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them.”

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<sup>73</sup> If so, the Church is remarkably inconsistent: rejecting deities, whom Sibyls had served, it accepts prophecies, received from those deities—certainly, only because they are beneficial to Christianity.

The storm did not begin all of a sudden. Experienced fishermen would hardly have put to sea in such weather, but even so they could sail against the wind.

14:25–32 Jesus walks on the water and calms the lake.

Moses, Elijah, and Elisha all parted bodies of water, so the miracle is not unique to Jesus. Pythagoras did the same so that his disciples could reach him at the island. This may be a development of the story where Jesus only calmed the lake.<sup>clxvii</sup>

15:1–2 “Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, ‘Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands before they eat.’”

The author's imagination took him far afield. Pharisees supposedly set off from Jerusalem to Galilee to learn why Jesus' disciples do not wash their hands.

Since meals are mostly private affairs, how would the Pharisees know about the transgression? If they heard rumors, they would have heard Jesus' explanation as well.

15:3–6 “He answered them, ‘And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? . . . But you say that whoever tells father or mother, ‘Whatever support you might have had from me is given to God,’ then that person need not honor the father. So, for the sake of your tradition, you make void the word of God.’”

The Pharisees, on the contrary, laid down a rule that obligation to parents took precedence over voluntary offerings. The converse, a father disinheriting his son, is seen as a mistake in a moment of anger.<sup>clxviii</sup> The Pharisees criticized their unethical fellows: “What is a plague for the Pharisees? Scholars acting as lawyers who give advice by which the law could be circumvented while formally adhered to.”<sup>clxix</sup>

One could redirect assets due in settlement of debt or a marriage contract by sacrificing them,<sup>clxx</sup> but only if this is the last bit of property and the debtor is left with nothing whether he settles the debt or sacrifices it. But there are no fixed obligations to parents; a child must support them as far as possible. His obligation to them would be void only if he sacrificed his whole property, which made no sense and was prohibited by other regulations.

Legislation was not sect-specific but rather universal, because all Jews were subjects to the same courts. Material support of one's parents was a legal obligation, and the courts would not remit that duty at the Pharisees' behest, certainly not in the society dominated by the Sadducees.

15:7–9 “You hypocrites! Isaiah prophesied rightly about you when he said: ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.’”

Is29:13 “The Lord said: ‘Because these people draw near with their mouths and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their worship of me is a human commandment learned by rote.’” Isaiah means people in general, not specifically teachers. The change distorts the meaning.

In Ch.3 of the early Gospel of Egerton, which eluded the Church’s editing, the quotation from Isaiah appears in the context of Jesus’ answer to whether it is permissible to pay what is due to rulers, probably to imply that Pharisees use scripture to deal with worldly matters while neglecting spiritual issues.

15:11 “It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles.”

In Judaism, even eating impure sacrifices did not convene impurity. Defilement only comes from within a person, and Jesus’ accusation is misplaced.

We do not know whether all Jews observed the purity rites or only the Pharisees. By the end of the first century, or early in the second, when the Gospel was written, the Pharisees were dominant and the discrepancy could be forgotten.

Jesus expounds the parable reasonably: “For out of the heart come evil intentions . . . . These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile.”<sup>clxxi</sup> He means eating with unwashed hands,<sup>74</sup> not abrogating the kosher laws. He justifies dismissing the oral tradition, not the commandment.

It is practically impossible that Jesus urged his followers to waive the commandment of kosher food. This move would immediately isolate him from all Judeans. On the background of such a doctrinal abyss, it would be absurd for Sadducees to discuss minuscule details, like the form of resurrection. Th14 presents the idea differently: waiving the fasts, prayers, charity, and *kashrut*, and turning to the Gentiles and healing everyone. Rom14:14 “Nothing is unclean in itself.” Perhaps Matthew decided to incorporate this popular saying but emasculated its Gentile content to comply minimally with Judaism. Perhaps Matthew opposed Essene strictures concerning ritual purity. They Essenes are more suitable adversaries in this dispute than the Pharisees. If the first Christians were Essenes, the pericope reveals an internal sectarian dispute over the extent

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<sup>74</sup> Do modern Christians really want to follow this rule eating with dirty hands?



and regularity of washing, not the necessity of it. Otherwise, Jesus' reasoning parallels the Jewish tradition of spiritual purity. The rabbis always opposed formal observance for the sake of appearance only. The charismatic Hanina Ben Dosa violated his own cleanness in public to defy the formalities.<sup>clxxii</sup>

Both good and evil come from God: "God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good."<sup>clxxiii</sup> That is, sinful inclinations are also good and do not themselves defile. Evil desire, unavoidable for most, does not defile; acting on it (transgression of the law) does.

15:12–14 "Then the disciples approached and said to him, 'Do you know that the Pharisees took offence when they heard what you said?' He answered, 'Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind.'"

Why would the Pharisees take offence at something which only mildly challenged their view? Their discrepancies with Sadducees were much more extensive. The original context may have been different.

Th40 "A grapevine has been planted apart from the Father. Since it is not strong, it will be pulled up by its root and will perish." A similar allusion to the weakness of roots near the surface appears in the parable of the sower.<sup>clxxiv</sup> The point is the frailty (*not strong*) of superficial or incorrect knowledge (*grapevine*). Matthew turns the proposition against the Pharisees (*plant*). The pericope may imply admiration of the Essenes who called themselves God's planting.<sup>clxxv</sup>

Th34 "If a blind person lead a blind, both will fall into a ditch." Lk 6:39 presents the saying without context among other isolated statements.

Thomas and Luke speak of a single "blind person," possibly referring to the mystics' practice of teaching face-to-face. Matthew uses the plural and turns the saying against the Pharisees to show that Jesus condemned them.

Matthew's phrase "of the blind" is missing in some manuscripts and was probably added by a Gentile editor to denote Judeans who rejected Jesus as *blind*. The aphorism was popular, like "When a shepherd loses his way his flock follows him."<sup>clxxvi</sup>

A common reference is to Is42:18–20: "Look up and see! Who is blind but my servant, or deaf like my messenger whom I sent? . . . He sees many things, but does not observe them." If Christians see a prophecy of Jesus, then he is "the blind guide of the blind." Isaiah meant something entirely different. The blindness of his messenger is blindness to Israel's sins, a positive trait rather than negative as in the Gospel.

15:15 "But Peter said to him, 'Explain this parable to us.'"

Peter means the stories of the plant and the blind guides,<sup>clxxvii</sup> Jesus' reply to the offended Pharisees, particularly the second. Luke<sup>clxxviii</sup> calls the story of the blind guides a parable.

At 15:17, however, Jesus explains not the parable of the blind guides but the saying about defiling thoughts. We may suppose that 15:12–14 was interpolated, a view strengthened at 15:12, when the disciples tell Jesus of the Pharisees' offense. Evidently the parable was sufficiently clear to them.

The insertions at 15:3–9 and 15:12–14 would have appeared after Christians ceased to side with the Pharisees against the Sadducees, who went out of power after the temple's destruction and became enemies with Pharisees and possibly their competitors for Gentile converts. The Pharisees proselytized in Judea where they would oppose only Matthew's followers. He alone of the evangelists shows enmity for them.

Matthew both respects and criticizes the Pharisees. His antagonism could not stem from his denial of Judaism, since his Gospel is expressly Jewish. Possibly the Pharisees scorned Matthew and turned Jews away from him.

Matthew's conflict with Pharisees contrasts sharply with Paul's alliance with them against the Sadducees in the Acts. Christians should have sided with the Pharisees since they accepted ambiguous interpretations of scripture, a method indispensable for Christians trying to adjust prophecies to fit their leader. The Sadducees, on the other hand, rejected not only the oral tradition but also the prophets, so critical to Christianity's legitimacy.

15:21–28 “Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon . . . A Canaanite woman . . . started shouting, ‘Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.’ . . . He answered, ‘I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel . . . [But] great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.’”

The Canaanites, the ancient biblical people, had probably disappeared by that time. Perhaps as in Mk7:26, the name means Syrian or Phoenician. A second disciple named Simon was nicknamed “the Canaanite,”<sup>clxxix</sup> Perhaps from Cana in Galilee, mentioned by John; this version presumes that Mark's reference to her being Gentile is incorrect. The “Canaanite woman” may not have been Gentile and the episode aimed not at Gentiles but other heretical Jews, like the Samaritans, which suits Christianity better and may explain why the pericope was not excised.

If Jesus came for Israel only, what was he doing in Gentile Tyre and Sidon? He at one time forbade his disciples to visit the Gentile lands.<sup>clxxx</sup> The woman knew of him, so he had been active there.

"It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs"<sup>75</sup> reveals the anti-Gentile agenda.<sup>clxxxii</sup> A Jewish sectarian might be expected to call Gentiles dogs. In Luke, Jesus preaches among Gentiles and heals them.<sup>clxxxii</sup> Matthew and Mark may have included this remark as proof against the Gentile Christians: on the one hand, only Judaic Christians are legitimate; on the other hand, strongly believing Gentiles may still turn to Jesus.

The episode's presence at Mk2:27 suggests another explanation. Though Mark may have belonged to a Jewish mystic sect at Alexandria, he is commonly thought of as Gentile, and anti-Gentile account in his Gospel is odd. In his version, Jesus might mean that he came only to members of the sect, and it is improper to reveal the teaching, suitable to children of God—the initiates—to others; the episode might have dealt originally with disseminating teaching, not with miracles.

The logical construct is not free of defects: most likely the woman less believed in than hoped for Jesus. She would be probably as insistent when appealing for a cure to any pagan deity or sorcerer. The episode was obviously invented. No woman could initiate conversation with a man she did not know, much less a foreigner. Matthew may have meant to demonstrate the grossness of Gentile customs.

15:30 "Great crowds came to him, bringing with them the lame, the maimed, the blind . . . and he cured them."

Is35:5–6 "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy." Maimonides confirms<sup>clxxxiii</sup> that Isaiah uses eyes, ears, and so on allegorically, to mean new paths of knowledge, not organs. Why did those Jesus healed not leap like deer? No prophecy predicts Jesus' activity of physical healing.

16:1–4 "The Pharisees and Sadducees . . . asked him to show them a sign from heaven. He answered them, 'When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.' And in the morning, 'It will be stormy today, for the sky is red . . . . You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. An evil and adulterous generation asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah.'"

Lk12:54–57 "He also said to the crowds, 'When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, 'It is going to rain'; and so it happens . . . . You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky,

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<sup>75</sup> Dogs might refer not to Gentiles generally but to Greeks and Romans. The word denotes homosexuals in Deut 23:18, a notorious feature of that culture, at least in the view of Jews.

but why do you not know how to interpret the present time? And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right?"

Th91 "They said to him, 'Tell us who you are so that we may believe in you.' He said to them, 'You examine the face of heaven and earth, but you have not come to know the one who is in your presence, and you do not know how to examine the present moment.'"

Matthew's weather signs suit Judea but not just any place. Probably due to that, 16:2–3 is missing from a number of manuscripts.

16:1–4 is a doublet of 12:38–39. The Gospel is a collection taken from many prototexts, and some features reappear with slightly different wording. The probable source of this insertion is Luke.

Jesus is evasive, refusing to prove his divine mission by a sign, though he worked many miracles elsewhere.

16:13–14 "Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.'"

That Jesus went to Ituraea, where the Jewish population was slight, might show that, though he shunned Samaritans and heretical Jews, he dealt with Gentiles. Going to Caesarea violates his instructions at one point that the disciples avoid Gentiles.<sup>clxxxiv</sup> There may be other reasons to forbid the disciples to visit the Gentiles, then go to them himself. The disciples may have been unprepared to preach conversion.

Some took Jesus for John the Baptist, though John was well-known and they could hardly be confused. Either Jesus preached much later than John or the author wrote when people were unsure when either lived.

Jesus would have hardly been mistaken for one of the prophets whose line ended five centuries earlier. Jews expected only Elijah to return. The question makes sense if Jesus asked not about himself, but about the local interpretation of the *Son of Man* doctrine. His disciples explained to him how the locals perceive this enigmatic figure. This explanation does not agree with the context of the next question, but that question is forgery, adapted by Matthew to suit 16:13–14, which he misunderstood. In the Th13 original, the next question of Jesus bears no relation to this one.

16:15–16 Jesus "said to them [his disciples], 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.'"

Th13 is more credible: "Jesus said to his disciples, 'Compare me to something and tell me what I am like.' Simon Peter said to him, 'You are like a just angel.' Matthew said to him, 'You are like a wise philosopher.'"

Thomas said to him, 'Teacher, my mouth is utterly unable to say what you are like.'"

Thomas, not Peter, gives the best description of Jesus (consequently, it is Thomas to whom Jesus reveals something one on one afterwards). Accordingly, there is no reason to distinguish Peter as holder of the keys to heaven, a fact which shatters the Peter-centered tradition of the Church. In Thomas, Jesus asks the disciples' their own opinion, not that of followers, not "who do people say I am?" Matthew absurdly identifies him with the prophets. Thomas has no analogue of 16:20 enjoining secrecy, because in Thomas' original Peter does not call Jesus the messiah.

16:23 When Peter tries to dissuade Jesus from going to Jerusalem, Jesus answers, "Get behind me, Satan!"

How can Jesus speak so to the man to whom he has given the keys of the kingdom?

Jesus continues, "You are a stumbling block to me," meaning Peter's power to tempt is great, since the devil himself did not succeed with Jesus in the desert.<sup>clxxxv</sup>

16:24 "Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If any want to become my followers, let them . . . take up their cross and follow me.'"

While Jesus invited any number of followers, Matthew does not mention other companions except disciples and, possibly, a few women. Did not Jesus foresee that he appeals in vain? Jesus may have addressed sectarians who traditionally had a cross with them ("their cross"). The Essenes customarily walked with a (cross-shaped?) staff, as did itinerant philosophers, the Stoics in particular who although not famous among the population, were certainly known to the teachers, and so Jesus could model his behavior on theirs. The Roman world knew cross from the lituus of the augurs. The cross is a symbol in many religions, though the Jews did not use it. The probability that Jesus suggested sufferings, for which crucifixion was a common metaphor, is slight: before Christianity, the idea of religion promoting suffering would look bizarre. Christians usually understand this saying as Jesus' prediction that he will carry a cross on the way to his cruciform. But he did not carry his cross himself; Simon of Cyrene did it for him. Moreover, Jesus had to carry not the cross, but the crossbar for his arms and his disciples would look strange traveling in such a way. So, the allegory does not hold. If anything, this is the instruction to every Christian to carry out missionary work.

16:25 <sup>a</sup>"For those who want to save their life will lose it, and <sup>b</sup>those who lose their life for my sake will find it."

An ultimatum: those who do not follow Jesus to the end will not inherit the kingdom, regardless of any deeds. What could loss of life for

Jesus' sake be if his destiny was already known? What could the disciples do for his sake? Knowing the future and having told his disciples, Jesus knew some would not lose their life for his sake.

Probably only the second half of the statement appeared originally and referred to giving up things temporal in favor of eternal life. Annexed to the first part and included among instructions to his disciples, the saying implies martyrdom as the price of the kingdom of heaven.

Considering the many corruptions of Matt16, the Christian doctrine of the Second Advent seems unconvincing. 16:27 "For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done."

Aside from the dubious context, the statement has a trait common to insertions: the third-person "Son of Man." The pride with which Jesus talks about the angels and Glory (actually, the latter should be mentioned first as more significant) is difficult to match with his higher status as the embodiment of God.

The simultaneous arrival of the divine being, the glory of God, and the angels is theologically absurd. Glory is the manifestation of God in the world, which is unnecessary when God comes himself, yet the Second Coming is depicted just so: openly, not in a human body. The angels are divine intermediaries, unnecessary when God reveals himself and deals with people directly, as at the end of time.

The vision is built on Daniel's prophecy, where the son of man receives power at the apocalypse. Although Daniel's figure does not judge, Christians assign that function to Jesus.<sup>76</sup> Otherwise, where is the lash needed to convert unbelievers? The idea of repayment fits ill with nonresistance and tolerance.

The doctrine of the Second Coming appeared relatively late. In the apocalyptic passage at 16:27, Jesus may refer to some other divine being soon to come. Vestiges of that notion appear in the late Gospel of John, where Jesus promises to send a heavenly advocate to the disciples. A righteous man, he thought himself fit to enter the kingdom upon his death and send such a figure to the earth.

16:28 "There are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

Both the third-person "the Son of Man" and "in *his* kingdom" are typical of Gospel forgeries. In the possibly authentic sayings, Jesus says "in the kingdom of heaven."

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<sup>76</sup> while for the time being making arrangements in his name.

The promise is bizarre, since the falsifier knew the pledge remained unfulfilled. 24:34 makes more sense: "Truly I tell you, this generation [the Jews] will not pass away until all these things have taken place." Perhaps Lk9:27 preserves the original tradition: "There are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God." Though all Jesus' followers will go to heaven after death, some will enter an equivalent spiritual state in this life after initiation. Much less plausible is that "will not taste death" implies no judgment at death and immediate entry into the afterlife. Th1 confirms the rightness of the mystical approach: "Whoever discovers the interpretation of these sayings will not taste death."

Th51 "His disciples said to him, 'When will the rest for the dead take place, and when will the new world come?' He said to them, 'What you are looking forward to has come, but you do not know it.'" The saying bears a Gnostic tint, the kingdom of heaven here and now as individual experience instead of wholesale apocalypse.

Th85 "Adam came from great power and great wealth, but he's not worthy of you. For had he been worthy, [he would] not [have tasted] death." This is very close to Matt16:28 on immortality.

Th111 "'The sky and the earth will roll up in your presence, and whoever is living from the living one will not see death.' Does not Jesus say, 'Those who have found themselves, of them the world is not worthy?'" The apocalyptic scent hints at a late origin.

Matthew habitually interpreted the mystical literally when he dealt with the approaching messianic era or immortality. When his prediction did not come true, he added the apocalypse to mask false prophecy as joyous anticipation of the postponed apocalypse.

17:3<sup>77</sup> "Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him [Jesus]."

How did the disciples know the men were Moses and Elijah? There were no portraits, images being prohibited in Judaism. Christian art resolves the problem by making Moses to carry the tablets, and Elijah to step out of the fiery chariot.

Elijah was taken to heaven alive and therefore could appear embodied and talk to Jesus. Moses died, but some believed he also entered heaven alive, since his burial place was unknown when the Torah was written down.<sup>clxxxvi</sup>

Matthew does not record the conversation, seemingly of no interest to him but in Lk9:31 "they appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem." That is an embellishment, since the text continues, "[Jesus'] companions were

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<sup>77</sup> transfiguration; apostles see Jesus on the mountain.

weighed down with sleep.”<sup>clxxxvii</sup> Luke may have meant a dream conversation, a form of prophecy standard in many religions. The transfiguration event evolved from literal interpretation.

Apologists see this account as a metaphor of the New Testament’s taking the place of the Old as holy scripture: Jesus meets Moses, who gave the law, and Elijah, the most authoritative of the prophets, but another explanation is more probable. ScJm 2:6–7 “No one will enter the kingdom of heaven at my request unless if you fill yourself. I will take James and Peter and fill them.” Jesus takes two disciples into the wilderness to feed them with knowledge of the law and the prophets.<sup>78</sup>

The transfiguration event is misplaced, since the disciples’ behavior toward Jesus changes little: still little piety. Transfiguration after crucifixion is further supported by the report that Jesus was not recognized initially after resurrection, thus with changed appearance.

17:5 “From the cloud a voice said, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved . . . . Listen to him!’”

The same announcement already came at his baptism.<sup>clxxxviii</sup>

17:10–13 “<sup>10</sup>And the disciples asked him, ‘Why, then, do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?’ <sup>11</sup>He replied, ‘Elijah is indeed coming and will restore all things; <sup>12a</sup>but I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but they did to him whatever they pleased. <sup>b</sup>So also the Son of Man is about to suffer at their hands.’ <sup>13</sup>Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them about John the Baptist.”

This contradicts the Gospel’s claim that the Jews honored John, whom Herod executed for personal, not religious, reasons.

At 11:14 Jesus said John was *as* Elijah, which the disciples would not have forgotten. At 17:10–11, the disciples ask when Elijah will come, and Jesus says: later. 17:12–13 suggests the opposite: John has come and was rejected, like Jesus. 12b is an interpolation, and the whole pericope may be a generic saying from the voluminous Elijah tradition and may indeed refer to the Baptist.

The Christian editor gave the same reason for the failure of John’s mission as for Jesus’: he was rejected. The editor may have tried to reconcile the prototext—the return of Elijah—with the Christian claim that Jesus fulfills the prophecies. If so, Elijah should come first. If John accomplished everything attributed to the coming Elijah—made the crooked straight, turned hearts, prepared the way of the Lord—then why did not Jesus succeed?

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<sup>78</sup> Heretics disregarded the third section of Jewish scriptures, the Writings.



17:14–17 Jesus heals an insane boy whom his disciples could not heal: “And Jesus answered him, ‘You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you? How much longer must I put up with you?’”

Perhaps too much of disgust for the people Jesus is going to die for. This saying may be attributed to a sectarian writer deprecating his countrymen.

17:19–20 “Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, ‘Why could we not cast it out?’ He said to them, ‘Because of your little faith. For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.’”

The saying is alien to the synoptic context. Jesus used a similar metaphor when his word withered a fig tree.<sup>clxxxix</sup> The same image appears when the disciples ask him to increase their faith.<sup>cxc</sup> In Luke Jesus strengthens their faith by saying faith can move mountains.<sup>79</sup>

Th48 “If two make peace with each other in a single house, they will say to the mountain, ‘Move from here!’ and it will move.” Also, Th22: “Jesus said to them, ‘When you make the two into one, and when you make the inner like the outer . . . then you will enter [the kingdom].’” The concept is more typical of Buddhism than of Gnosticism. Gnostic dualists rather opposed body and soul (“the *two*”). Another possibility is that “the *two*” are good and evil inclinations, and the saying deals with moving forward in a circle to return to the primordial divine state of innocence of good and evil. Such was Adam’s state which he forgot when tasted the poisonous fruit of superficial knowledge. Still another layer of meaning is that Adam was originally both man and woman simultaneously, and his division into male and female created desires and anxiety.

17:21 “This kind [of demon] can be cast out only by prayer and fasting.”

Jesus has just said that faith “the size of a mustard seed” casts out demons not pious works. “Prayer and fasting” may be the recommendations to Christian exorcists who failed with faith only. 17:21 is missing in some ancient manuscripts. The passage may correlate 17:19–20 with the similar 21:20–22, which concludes, “Whatever you ask for in prayer with faith, you

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<sup>79</sup> The possibility of moving mountains in meditation is standard in many ancient cults. Creating mass religion, Christians simplified meditation to belief, even to declaration of faith. Curiously, during two thousand years failure to move even the slightest stones, not even the mountains, had to be explained by the low faith—even for assiduously believing Christians.

will receive.” Jesus expressly stated the inadmissibility of the requests in prayers,<sup>exci</sup> “For your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”

17:22–23 “As they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, ‘The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised.’ And they were greatly distressed.”

Jesus had already said that more than once.<sup>excii</sup> The statement likely appeared in many of the independent sources merged in Matthew.

17:24 “When they reached Capernaum, the collectors of the didrachmas came to Peter and said, ‘Does your teacher not pay the temple tax?’”

All Jews paid the temple tax of half a shekel. Rabbi Eliezer<sup>exciii</sup> says it was one shekel. Why should the temple tax be paid in Greek coins? Galilee was more or less autonomous and had its own local currency. We do not know how coins bearing human images forbidden by the Torah were used. From at least the beginning of the second century *zuzim*, coins bearing the image of Zeus, circulated in Judea. That Rabbi Shimai was so righteous he would not look at a statue or coin with an image<sup>exciv</sup> also suggests that the prohibition was relaxed.

If the episode is authentic, Jesus’ village was greatly Hellenized, even to the extent of quoting the Greek Septuagint. If so, the Pharisees’ skeptical assessment of Christians who had not read scripture in Hebrew is predictable.

The question addressed to Peter acquires sense, if the tax collectors knew Jesus to be an Essene. They said the tax should be paid once in a lifetime, not annually. The tax collectors probably knew the Essenes dissented from orthodoxy but ignored the details and asked Peter whether Jesus pays instead of demanding payment.

Since the episode occurs only in Matthew, we may suppose he added it to show Jesus’ faithfulness to temple rites. After the temple was destroyed and all its cult abandoned, Matthew could bolster his followers’ legitimacy with such a claim.

17:25 “[Peter] said, ‘Yes, he does.’ And when he came home, Jesus spoke of it first, asking, ‘What do you think, Simon? From whom do kings of the earth take toll or tribute? From their children or from others?’”

This seems to be the usual criticism of uncomprehending Peter, even while acknowledging his close position to Jesus. The logic of Jesus’ question is flawed. How can we compare temple alms paid in faith and taxes collected under coercion?

No Jew would have written such a thing. They idiomatically called themselves children of God. If we follow the logic here, no Jew should pay the temple tax but rather leave it to the Gentiles, not God's children. Pronounced by Jew, the argument is tantamount to abrogating the Levitic dues for all Jews; this was the Essene view.

Not only Jesus but also Peter had to pay the tax. Why did he not simply pay it without resorting to a stunt?<sup>cxv</sup> The episode may be entered to prove Peter's significance. Jesus pays the tax for Peter and for himself, but not for Peter's brother, the apostle Andrew, who also lived in Capernaum.

17:27 "So that we do not give offence to them, go to the sea and cast a hook; take the first fish that comes up; and when you open its mouth, you will find a stater;<sup>80</sup> take that and give it to them for you and me."

Stories of fish disgorging coins, pearls, or other treasure are common.<sup>cxvi</sup>

18:3 "Unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

This mystical saying is convenient for the Church. Probably, it was understood in the spirit of "I believe, for it is absurd." Unable to defend its doctrines rationally, Christians fall back on unquestioning, supposedly childlike simplicity – and faith.

Matthew struggles to explain.

18:4 "Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." The saying is about meekness and accepting one's own insignificance. Childlike simplicity assures a place in the heavenly hierarchy.

Lk9:46–48 "An argument arose among them as to which one of them was the greatest. But Jesus . . . took a little child and put it by his side, and said to them, . . . 'The least among you is the greatest.'" He might simply have repeated, "Blessed are the meek."

11:25 "Jesus said, 'I thank you, Father, . . . because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants.'" The *infants* are ignorant people, unlike the learned Pharisees. The saying resonates with Greek philosophy. "Like children" encapsulates Socrates' assessment of human knowledge which is ignorance.

Th4:1 "The person old in days won't hesitate to ask a little child seven days old about the place of life, and that person will live." Wise people are open to more knowledge, and would listen to simple people,

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<sup>80</sup> Two didrachmas. Even for alms-gathering sect, didrachma was a small coin. The fact that Jesus did not have four drachmas<sup>80</sup> demonstrates unpopularity of his faction.

even to children – and to unlearned Christians. It is a standard reasoning of futility of the book wisdom, the traditional knowledge.

ScJm2:6–7 “No one will enter the kingdom of heaven at my request but if you fill yourself.” This saying, on the contrary, requires learning or, at least, the religious cognition.

Matthew worked with several sayings involving children and interpreted them literally as meekness, though the sense of each was initially different.

19:14 “Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to me . . . for to such as these the kingdom of heaven belongs.’”

He does not speak here about children: the kingdom of heaven does not belong to *them*, only to *such as* them.

Th46:2 “But I have said that whoever among you becomes a child will recognize the [Father’s] imperial rule and will become *greater* than John.” Jesus compares a child with an adult, John, so it is not necessary to be a child to enter the kingdom. One must shed earthly ambitions and attachments, become perceptive and trustful to live in the divine spiritual state. Thomas’ version may reflect the mystical tradition from which the other sayings were adapted.

Th22 “He said to his disciples, ‘These nursing babies are like those who enter the [Father’s] domain.’ They said to him, ‘Then shall we enter the [Father’s] domain as babies?’ Jesus said to them, ‘When you make the two into one, and when you make the inner like the outer . . . then you will enter.’” When the disciples ask about the bodily afterlife, Jesus says the question is irrelevant, since the kingdom of heaven is here and now. The concept deals with regaining the primordial state of innocent singularity. The Gnostics identified that state with divinity: “Jesus said to her, ‘I am the one who comes from what is whole.’”<sup>cxvii</sup>

The idea lost its sense when Matthew interpreted it literally, urging to change (not to improve), to belittle, etc. He deals with real children, “[Jesus] called a child, whom he put among them . . . .”<sup>cxviii</sup>

18:5–6 “<sup>5</sup>Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me. <sup>6</sup>If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned.”

It is difficult to imagine Jesus fastening a millstone around someone’s neck, though of course back then rabbis were not lenient in the modern sense. The saying is linked to 18:1–4, also about children, though one deals with childlike mysticism and the other with humble Christians.

18:6 is a later addition to 18:5, which originally run somewhat differently, like “whoever welcomes one such child [itinerant childish simple preacher] in the name of God welcomes God,” and was adapted to suit Jesus.

18:6 deals with Christian conversions to Judaism. Codex Theodosianus (438 C.E.) lists many laws prohibiting the conversion, suggesting that it was an urgent problem for the Church.

18:10 “Take care that you do not despise one of these *little ones*.”

The injunction has nothing to do with the just mentioned children, whom no one despises. Perhaps Jewish Christians disdained Gentile converts. Zech 13:7 “The Lord of hosts [says] . . . ‘Strike the shepherd, that the sheep may be scattered; I will turn my hand against *the little ones*.’” But why would Matthew’s followers despise their compatriots? If *little ones* are the meek, they were respected. Likely the writer missed the meaning and put the text in a context with children.

“In heaven *their* angels continually see the face of my Father who is in heaven” may shed light on the meaning. The Gnostics maintained each person has a double in heaven waiting for the soul to abandon the body and join him on high. Those may be the *angels*. The *little ones* are uninitiated Gnostic novices.

18:12–13 “If a shepherd . . . finds [a lost sheep] . . . he rejoices over it more than over the other ninety-nine that never went astray.”

Jesus speaks of sinners repenting. Gnostics or sectarians would have used a different proportion. They conceived of the world as sunk in evil, where sinners were the majority, not one of a hundred. The image may come from a baptismal sect, like the Essenes, for whom repentance was central. Lk 15:7 addresses personal internal repentance, not the external agency of a shepherd or a preacher finding (converting) a lost soul.

This pericope is arbitrarily joined to 18:10, from a different tradition dealing with certain *little ones* but not sinners.

Th 107 “The [Father’s] imperial rule is like a shepherd who had a hundred sheep. One of them, the largest, went astray. He left the ninety-nine and looked for the one until he found it. After he had toiled, he said to the one sheep, ‘I love you more than the ninety-nine.’” The shepherd grew fond of the sheep “*after* he had toiled.” If he disliked it initially, why did he risk the remaining sheep to save it? And the analogy with sheep anyway to be killed soon is odd.

The meaning of Thomas’ *largest sheep* is not clear. To suggest it symbolizes the Jews means only that this sheep went astray while the rest—all other people—did God’s will, which was not the case.

There is a similar story about Moses grazing sheep.<sup>cxcix</sup>

18:14 “So it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost.”

Paul resisted imposing Jewish law on proselytes (*little ones*) so that they do not sin (be *lost*) due to the nonobservance.<sup>81</sup> This late addition is absent from the otherwise similar Th107.

18:8–9 “If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to enter life maimed or lame than to have two hands or two feet and to be thrown into the eternal fire.”

Jewish tradition since the time of the Maccabees affirmed that the righteous will rise with whole bodies, irrespective of mutilations suffered, a way of dealing with the wounds from battle or torture in the doctrine of bodily resurrection. Some sects, as is implied here, may have believed that resurrection is in the body’s last condition. This, among other possibilities, may explain why in John Jesus was pierced in his side on the cross instead of his legs being broken as was done to the other two convicts.<sup>cc</sup>

The pericope repeats 5:29–30 and interrupts the theme of the children, pointing to interpolation.

18:11 “For the Son of Man came to claim and to save that which was lost.”

Jesus calling himself “the Son of Man” signals a forgery. He came to claim, as an established divine figure, not to save by turning to repentance.

18:11 is absent from the ancient manuscripts.

18:15–17 “If your brother sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the assembly.”

The church (assembly) had no magisterial power, and Christians appealed to the heathen for judgment.<sup>cci</sup> The witnesses come after the sin is committed and are useful only if the sinner persists in transgression (“not listen to them”). That is, most likely, not any offence is meant, but only doctrinal digression. This explanation may correlates 18:15–17 with 18:21–22 about forgiveness of temporal offences.

The requirement of the witnesses was common in many cultures and does not guarantee the saying’s Jewish origin.

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<sup>81</sup> Paul disguised this reason by appealing to the supposed theological ineffectuality of the law for salvation.

Some mistakenly see a connection to Lev19:7 “You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; *you shall reprove* your neighbor, or you will incur guilt yourself.” The injunction forbids bearing malice against kinsmen. The tradition<sup>ccii</sup> elsewhere forbids exposing people in the presence of others, since there is no love in such reproach. “Whoever rebukes the wicked gets hurt. A scoffer who is rebuked will only hate you; the wise, when rebuked, will love you.”<sup>cciii</sup>

The Qumran Essenes were obliged to criticize each other in the presence of witnesses, and if that did not work, then before the whole congregation.

18:17 “And if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”

But Jesus associated with sinners, and Matthew was a tax collector. The derogation of Gentiles does not mean the writer was Jewish. Christians also called unconverted persons Gentiles. Or the text may have been edited to simulate a Jewish origin.

18:18 “Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

Jesus vouchsafes this power not only to the disciples but to Christians in general,<sup>82</sup> though he also promised it in the identical wording to Peter - seemingly exclusively.<sup>cciv</sup>

“Will bind” should be understood in the context of “again . . . if two of you agree.” What is agreed on earth will be corroborated in heaven. If there is no agreement, neither does heaven resolve the matter.

18:19 “Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done by my Father in heaven.”

The doublet may be a distorted Gnostic concept similar to Th48: “If two make peace with each other in a single house, they will say to the mountain, ‘Move from here!’ and it will move.” Thomas speaks of mystical inner unity, while Matthew refers to relations with others.

“[M]y Father” instead of the more usual “Father in heaven” points to a late origin.

18:20 “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”

This is a substantiation of communal prayers. The Greek version of Th30 may be the original: “Where there are three deities, they are divine. Where there are two or one, I am with that one.” DiaSav1:5 “I opened the

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<sup>82</sup> The context “If another member of the church sins against you” implies all Christians.

way and taught them, the chosen and the solitary, the passage by which they will pass.”

For the Gnostics *gathered* means *not divided*. In Matthew it means simply *present in one place*. The saying may be about the trinity: when one or two deities are spoken of, Jesus is the third. The “three deities” are the Capitoline Triad.

Did4:1 “Where the divine is spoken of, there is Lord.” Christianity appropriates sayings about God and applies them to Jesus.

Matthew’s concept was popular in Judaism. The godhead (Shekinah) joins the prayer when nine or ten of the faithful assemble.<sup>ccv</sup>

18:21–22 “‘Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?’ Jesus said to him, ‘Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy times seven times.’”

The two *sevens* appear in Lk17:4: “And if the same person sins against you seven times a day, and turns back to you seven times . . . you must forgive.”

18:23–34 A king remits a ten thousand talent debt for a man who later refuses to forgive his debtor one hundred denarii. Having learned about this, the king hands him over to the torturers.

Unlike some other parables, this one is primitive and straightforward. The hyperbole in the astronomical ten thousand talents—two or three talents was a lot of money—is typical of Christian forgers. The Roman commander Scaurus sold the throne of Hyrcanus to his brother Aristobulus for three hundred talents.<sup>ccvi83</sup>

The ruler first thinks of selling the debtor and his family into slavery, an immoral act in Jewish culture, but the writer says that God will do the same to every person who doesn’t forgive his fellows.

The parable also reflects the menace typical of forgeries: the king hands the man over to the torturers. “So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.” Jesus spoke of forgiveness elsewhere in great detail and hardly needed to repeat the teaching in this primitive, distorted form.

The parable teaches that God is more ready to forgive than people are. A religion in which God forgives so readily and so much is expedient for sinners, in terms of the material and moral cost of following it to achieve a desired salvation.

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<sup>83</sup> Historians often attributed immense riches to various rulers. Among other examples of ancient sources, Hume mentions that Athenian treasure consisted of 10,000 talents, and Ptolemy possessed 740,000 talents. The parable reflects literary convention of the period.



Mt18 is incoherent, the theme changes constantly, and there are many iterations and doublets, indicating editing and merging of many prototexts and sources.

19:3 “Some Pharisees came to him, and to test him they asked, ‘Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause?’”

Pharisees would not ask a question the answer to which was known to any Jew: the Torah surely permits divorce. The Hillel school of rabbinic thought allowed divorce for practically any reason, including slightly burned food; the Shammai school strictly limited divorce. The Pharisees may have wanted to know which of these two positions Jesus believed. The Essenes of the marrying kind prohibited divorce, and the question, garbled here, may have sought Jesus’ thoughts on the restriction.

19:4–5 “Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning made them male and female? . . .

and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’”

Gen2:24 is not an interdiction of divorce. Is it possible to consider any legal spouse a wife in the sense of Gen2:24? When marriages break down, can unity between two different people be forced?

Maimonides condemns those who concentrate on the plain meaning of Genesis.<sup>ccvii</sup> Jesus takes matters superficially and reads “be joined” as a prohibition of divorce instead of a return to the spiritual state preceding Adam’s division into two beings.

19:6 “Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

Here is the concept of resting in Providence, likely a late addition intended to validate the interdiction of divorce.<sup>84</sup>

19:9 “And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another commits adultery.”

The addition “except for unchastity” which appeared in the later manuscripts contradicts the prohibition of divorce just made. The notion is a compromise to correlate with the law.

The continuation “and marries a divorced woman commits adultery” was added late. Some have “gives her a cause to commit adultery” instead of “commits adultery,” a Gentile notion. Jewish divorces generally gave women a considerable sum of money precisely so they would not have to walk the streets.

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<sup>84</sup> Jesus supposes that in each marriage God joins the people. But then where is the problem of divorce from?

The Shammai school made adultery a cause for divorce; Hillel thought husbands shared the fault.

Paul puts forward another concept: an unbelieving spouse could be divorced.

19:7–9 repeats 5:31–32. Characteristically, Matthew forces Jesus' statement to conform to Judaism "except on the ground of unchastity." Perhaps a later editor conflated two sources and produced the repetition.

Divorce owing to adultery is a form of condemnation on the part of a husband and contradicts "do not judge" injunction.

19:10–11 "His disciples said to him, 'If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.' But he said to them, 'Not everyone can accept this teaching, but only those to whom it is given.'"

"To whom . . . is given" rejects the possibility of individual achievement. The idea could come from some exclusive sect like the Essenes. Essenes who married did so only to procreate and would have no reason for divorce.

"[I]s given" may refer to initiation into mysteries. If so, Jesus advocates celibacy for the initiated, also implied by Paul, and the fate of others is irrelevant.

19:12 "For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven."

The usual biblical reference is out of the context. Is56:3–5 "Do not let the foreigner joined to the Lord say, 'The Lord will surely separate me from his people'; and do not let the eunuch say, 'I am just a dry tree.' For thus says the Lord: 'To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths . . . and hold fast my covenant, I will give, in my house and within my walls, a monument and a name better than sons and daughters.'" The passage does not encourage eunuchs. Isaiah says anyone can inherit the kingdom of heaven if he observes the law. Overcoming difficulties ennoble the obedient; and there is room even for eunuchs.

The Bible calls eunuchs unclean.<sup>ccviii</sup> Men with injured genitalia may not be priests<sup>ccix</sup> or participate in public rites.<sup>ccx</sup> The rabbis proclaimed against asceticism, abstinence, and castration. Rabbi Akiba answered a eunuch, "Man is handsome with a well-groomed beard; his wife is the delight of his heart, and children are a patrimony from the Lord. He who does not possess these would better be dead."<sup>ccxi</sup> Besides, emasculation, if practiced consistently, would extinguish the population in a single

generation,<sup>85</sup> a secular matter beyond the interest of sectarians. If the saying were true and binding, every believer would rush to enter the kingdom thereby. When Christianity became the state religion, it abandoned the idea.

Jesus would not urge physical castration to reach the kingdom of heaven, since his morality was not only physical: "But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart."<sup>ccxii</sup>

The Roman Empire forbade, though tolerated castration.<sup>86</sup> The philosophers condemned it and popular opinion ridiculed it; thus Christians are unlikely to advocate it. Perhaps the whole matter is a metaphor for earning the kingdom through celibacy.

19:12, connected only indirectly with marriage, surfaces in a coherent context. 19:11 completes the doctrine of divorce: "Not everyone can accept this teaching, but only those to whom it is given." 19:13 takes up the question of children.

19:14 When disciples forbade people to bring the children to Jesus for him to pray for them, "Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me . . . for to such as these the kingdom of heaven belongs.'"

The episode as it is is doubtful, considering that Matt6 mentions only one prayer suggested by Jesus, and 6:8 forbids praying for something in particular (for example, for children). Actually, these are clearly different traditions. As supernatural person, Jesus would have been expected just to lay his hands on something. Requiring him to pray for someone reveals him as nothing more than an itinerant teacher, which is, evidently, what the earliest tradition was all about. Why would the disciples forbid children in light of Jesus' teaching in 11:25 and 18:3? Otherwise, the disciples were likely to keep women and surely children away from Jesus. The wife of Rabbi Akiba was not permitted to approach him, more perhaps because of her appearance than her gender.<sup>ccxiii</sup> Children were not allowed inside the temple, to which Christian allegory likened Jesus, and a possible meaning is that everyone may come to Jesus, unlike the temple.

19:16–17 <sup>a</sup>"Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" <sup>b</sup>And he said to him, 'Why do you ask me about *what is* good? <sup>c</sup>There is only one who is good.'"

Is goodness of God really the reason not to practice beneficence? The Synod's edition makes more sense: "Why do you *call me* good?"

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<sup>85</sup> A practical solution of polygamy or unrestrained sex by very surviving males was hardly in Jesus' mind.

<sup>86</sup> Hadrian banned circumcision, mistaking it for castration, one of the reasons of Bar Kochba's revolt.

Lk18:19 also has, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone.” Here is a wordplay on *chrestos* (good)/ *christos* (anointed, messiah).

Jesus does not claim God’s unique goodness.<sup>87</sup>

The phrases b and c seem interpolated in otherwise coherent dialogue: a question and the answer. “What is good” is a typical philosophical topic, reminiscent of Pilate’s question. “Who is good” was likely a similarly popular topic in discussions with the Gnostics and polytheists.

19:16–24 “If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments . . . If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor.”

Jesus says obedience to the law is a condition of eternal life. Poverty is useful for perfection but not prerequisite—which contradicts Luke’s eschatology,<sup>ccxiv</sup> which, coupled to John’s promise of eternal life to all Christians,<sup>ccxv</sup> means all Christians must live in poverty and keep the commandments, contrary to Paul.

Luke’s Jesus asks only the disciples to sell everything,<sup>ccxvi</sup> which makes sense, since his closest associates are initiated into the mysteries and should leave earthly attachments behind. Otherwise, why is a man without the daily necessities more spiritual than one with them? Hume reports some Athenians prone to distribute their property,<sup>ccxvii</sup> an honorable act recommended, even to aliens and possibly the basis of the Gospel exhortation.

Jesus’ suggestion contradicts not only logic but also the Bible. Prov30:8–9 “Allow me neither poverty, nor riches . . . lest I be poor and steal and disgrace the name of my God.” The Jews of the time apparently disagreed sharply about how much should be given away. Not only Jesus adopted the extreme view. A limit was set at no more than one fifth of assets.<sup>ccxviii</sup> The Sanhedrin had the issue because many tried to require others to distribute everything.

The church promoted Jesus’ instruction to all Christians—and with adverse effect. Instead of the practical Judaic tithe, Christians recommended sharing everything: as a result, charity decreased: people reject unworkable moral demands to avoid the sense of guilt, rather than scale such demands down to practical.

Lk10:25–37 Jesus enjoins keeping the commandments, though he does not mention wealth, and says that neighbors are not only Jews but anyone who treats you kindly (the “good Samaritan”).

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<sup>87</sup> Church prefers to ignore this injunction of Jesus among others, and did not oppose the nickname *good* for Pope John XXIII already in the twentieth century.

Jesus continues, “. . . and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” Probably this part is a late insert. First, Jesus has already said that the distribution of assets is not the condition of heavenly existence. Second, it would be problematic to sell an estate while Jesus is staying in this village: the real estate was not that liquid. Third, it would be correct to alter the episode, “come, and follow me” should be first and then “and you will have treasure in heaven.” Besides, why does the person need to follow Jesus if even dispersing his property is more than sufficient for salvation? What more could he possibly want to get from following Jesus? Certainly the evangelist means following of the established Church, nonexistent in Jesus' time.

The evangelist is torn between Jesus' injunctions of poverty and the Christian desire to look respectable and have affluent sponsors. Thus, Joseph of Arimathea (who took Jesus' body for burial after the crucifixion), although being a disciple, did not distribute his assets among the poor.

19:17–19 The man asks which commandments: “‘You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; Honor your father and mother; also, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ The young man said to him, ‘I have kept all these; what do I still lack?’”

The situation is rather curious. A righteous Jew asks Jesus which commandments he must keep. He knew the basic commandments, and the question is moot. Matthew at least substitutes a layman for a lawyer of Lk10:25. Lk18:18 is hardly more believable in ascribing the query to “a certain ruler”: why did he not ask a rabbi before?

The critical question is, “What do I still lack?” The young man must have expected Jesus to name some commandment missing from scripture. Otherwise, he could have asked a rabbi.

Probably Jesus was accepted as a sectarian having a set of uncommon rules. And most likely it was a well-known sect. If Jesus did not belong to a sect, the young man would have no reason to expect a different set of commandments from him. The question of how to better oneself, attain the apex of perfection, was traditional in philosophical schools in the conversation of the pupil with the teacher. Lk10:25–37 may preserve the original version: “A lawyer stood up to test Jesus. ‘Teacher,’ he said, ‘what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ He said to him, ‘What is written in the law?’ He answered, ‘You shall love the Lord your God . . . and your neighbor as yourself.’ . . . And he said to him, ‘You have given the right answer; do this . . . But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’” Jesus answers with the parable of the Good Samaritan the morality of which is universal.

The episode is accurately constructed to show that the kingdom of heaven is open to non-Jews. Matthew changed the story to avoid mentioning the Samaritans. For Matthew, whose Jesus refused to cure the Canaanite girl and prohibited the disciples to visit Gentile towns, Christianity was for Jews only.

Matthew's young man claims, "I have kept all these [since my youth]." This is odd: since what youth, if he is still young? Allowing for this problem, some manuscripts lack "since my youth." In Luke, the question comes not from a young man but from a "certain ruler" or a lawyer. When Matthew borrowed the episode from Luke, he replaced them with a Jewish youth, but still had this full-age person in mind, when he wrote "since my youth."

19:19 adds a commandment: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Why would Luke have omitted it, if it were in the original? Matthew strived to differentiate his sect from Pharisees and other Jews, and introduced this commandment as an ideal. Earlier his Jesus suggested another way to perfection: distribution of one's entire property. The two ways are related: a person who loves others as oneself should logically allow others to use his property as he does, and thus distribute it.

The list of the commandments is decidedly unreligious: something which even the Christian editor accepted; the commandments of love of God, and of Sabbath are conveniently not included. The arbitrary choice of commandments (neither the ruler nor the rich young man were likely to steal) also indicates superficial acquaintance with Judaism. Luke's version is more likely the original.

19:23 "Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'Truly I tell you, it will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven.'"

Jesus affirms that wealth itself is not ("hard," not "impossible") an insurmountable obstacle to salvation, though it is a distraction. Hillel said, "The greater the wealth, the greater the concern."<sup>ccxix</sup>

Buddhism put it this way: "The *greedy* will not go to heaven."<sup>ccxx</sup> The question is not how much money a person has, but how wealth might distract him. A poor man would hardly worry less about money than a rich one.

The idea is compatible with Judaic tradition: "Not everyone merits two tables."<sup>ccxxi</sup> That is, not every one manages to combine learning (or spirituality) and wealth.

Gnostic Thomas treats the matter differently: "The one who has become wealthy should reign, and the one who has power should renounce."<sup>ccxxii</sup> *Wealth* is taken in the mystical sense of knowledge. Similarly, "Adam came from great power and great wealth."<sup>ccxxiii</sup>

19:24–25 “‘Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven.’ When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astounded and said, ‘Then who can be saved?’”

The camel metaphor implies that a rich man simply cannot enter the kingdom of heaven, which goes beyond 19:23, where the feat is only hard.

New doctrines are often radical, since they did not have yet to accommodate with reality. Though Jesus and his disciples renounced property, money, and sustenance labor, they were not free from them at all. They depended on the alms<sup>ccxxiv</sup> of those who did not abandon normal patterns. Jesus is in no position to accuse the Pharisees of hypocrisy.

The metaphor was known elsewhere. Thus, “‘Maybe you are from Pumbedita<sup>88</sup> where they try to push an elephant through the eye of a needle.’”<sup>ccxxv</sup> The saying may refer to their casuistic approach to scripture. Similarly, “‘In a dream nobody sees an elephant going through the eye of a needle. In a dream we only see what we thought about in the daytime.’”<sup>ccxxvi</sup>

Why were the disciples surprised? “‘You cannot serve both God and mammon.’”<sup>ccxxvii</sup> Perhaps the original form which perplexed the disciples was different. Their question, “‘Who will be saved?’” is out of place, since there were few rich people in Jesus’ circle, and the restriction of the eternal life of the rich was of no importance for salvation of the majority of the followers. Taken in the context of Jesus’ teaching that children, not the wise (*rich in knowledge*), will be saved, the saying makes sense. The disciples were surprised, since they assumed the knowledgeable Pharisees were guaranteed a place in heaven.

The text may build on some proverb like, “‘The hearts of the ancients were as open to knowledge as a wide hall; people later were as opened as a room: but our hearts—like the eye of a needle.’”<sup>ccxxviii</sup> In that case, the saying means, “‘It is easier for the ignorant to obtain the necessary knowledge [elephant of knowledge pass through the needle-eye of their desire to study] than for those rich in the (false) knowledge to enter the kingdom.’”

19:26 “‘But Jesus looked at them and said, ‘For mortals it is impossible, but for God all things are possible.’”

The wealthy cannot save themselves, but God can save them if he wishes. Such a reading not only contradicts 19:23 but is also pointless in this context. Does not salvation depend on their deeds?

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<sup>88</sup> Site of a famous Jewish school, known for its scholasticism.

19:27–28 “Then Peter said in reply, ‘Look, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?’ Jesus said to them, . . . ‘When the Son of Man is seated on the throne of his glory, you . . . will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.’”

Mt20:20 “Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to him . . . . She said to him, ‘Declare that these two sons of mine will sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom.’ But Jesus answered . . . ‘To sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father.’”<sup>ccxxxix</sup> Yet Jesus had just promised essentially that very thing.

According to John, Peter was the Baptist’s disciple before Jesus called him. Thus he “left everything” previously and not because of Jesus. On the other hand, other accounts speak of Peter’s mother-in-law and his house in Capernaum, so he had not forgone everything.

“Then Jesus told his disciples, ‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me . . . . Those who lose their life for my sake will find it.’”<sup>ccxxx</sup> Peter should have known that his reward was the kingdom of heaven. Jesus promises the disciples<sup>ccxxxi</sup> more than his other followers<sup>ccxxxii</sup> for the same sacrifices.

The disciples may not judge: “Do not judge, so that you may not be judged.” Jesus himself is a judge in violation of his own teaching.

*His glory* is probably a later scribe’s mistake, since Daniel promises the Son of Man will receive power and glory from God; they are not his own.

There were thirteen tribes, since Joseph was divided into two,<sup>ccxxxiii</sup> as opposed to twelve apostles. The judgment will involve not only Israel but also all nations, so the number of tribes is irrelevant to calculating the number of thrones.

Daniel modeled the final judgment on Sanhedrin procedures, with their numerous judges, which wars with the significant concept of God as the supreme and only judge. A small, persecuted community relished the idea of judging their oppressors. The Essenes developed the theme and expected their priests to become judges.

The notion of thrones is primitive. Jesus tells the Sadducees, “For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven,”<sup>ccxxxiv</sup> implying that the afterlife is incorporeal. To Maimonides<sup>ccxxxv</sup> the term *throne* denotes the majesty and essence of God in the Bible. Any place or thing marked by God is called his throne. If Jesus were divine, his throne was in Judea in the time of his mission. “When the Son of Man is seated on the throne of his glory” in this context implies that



Jesus will acquire divine nature sometime later, that he has not always had it.

Jesus may have been speaking of a Son of Man to come, not of himself. Following Daniel, he promised the apostles the enigmatic thrones of judges which Daniel allocates to the righteous. Never mind that Daniel a Jew would not consider the disciples righteous.

The church used Daniel's "thrones were set in place . . . . The court sat in judgment, and the books were opened"<sup>ccxxxvi</sup> to demonstrate that God has several hypostases, one of them Jesus, for whom the thrones were prepared, though they were in fact for the numerous court officials who sat in judgment.<sup>ccxxxvii</sup> Here the thrones are for the disciples.

Further disagreeing with the Gospel account, Dan 7 continues: "And as I watched, the beast was put to death . . . . As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away . . . Dominion . . . shall be given to the people of the holy ones." Neither Jesus or nor the apostles are involved; the "holy ones" are the righteous Jews oppressed by the four beasts, four kingdoms.

"But you, Daniel, keep the words secret and the book sealed until the time of the end."<sup>ccxxxviii</sup> Christians base their eschatology in part on this doubtful book, which was hardly included in scriptures.

19:29 "And everyone who has left houses . . . for my name's sake, . . . will inherit eternal life."

Jesus would not use the formula "for my name's sake," widely exploited in Christian literature. Jesus was suggesting other ways to gain the kingdom of heaven.<sup>ccxxxix</sup> This may be a late admonition to Christian pilgrims.

19:30 "But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first."

Matthew, on the contrary, continuously emphasized the priority of the Jews, to whom God spoke *first*. ahead of the Gentiles, reached *last* by Christianity. Possibly the Pharisees are *first* and the Christians, *last*, but it is unlikely that the aggressive, apocalyptic sectarians considered themselves *last*. Verses just ahead<sup>ccxl</sup> also show that *last* are the Gentile Christians, as does Luke's "Indeed, *some* are last who will be first, and *some* are first who will be last."<sup>ccxli89</sup>

20:1–15 The parable of the workers in the vineyard: men who worked one hour received as much as those who worked all day. The

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<sup>89</sup> This saying would have been to the point after the parable of that it is not worth taking the first place ahead of other guests, so as not to have to move to the last one, Lk 14:7–11.

master paid more than usual to the former, and the latter obtained the money that had been initially agreed upon.

The parable says that the master may pay—and God may save—as he sees fit, regardless of deeds. Within Matthew’s Jewish narrative, the parable makes no sense. Christians, however, needed to demonstrate that others could take precedence over the Jews.

The master kept his word with everyone, though some were dissatisfied. Even this late version does not justify God’s rejection of Jews in favor of Christians; the best the author could hope for was equality. Besides, everyone had to work (probably, to keep the commandments).

This parable builds on the popular theme.<sup>ccxlii</sup> King (the master) distinguished one of the workers in the vineyard as an experienced person, and all the day kept company with him. In the evening, he has paid him as much as he paid the others. The rest of the workers protested that he worked only for two hours and received as much. The owner responded to this that the worker did more in two hours than the others during the whole day.

20:16 “So the last will be first, and the first will be last [<sup>b</sup>for many are called upon but few are chosen].”

The pericope is not originally connected with the preceding parable but rather inserted as the conclusion. The logic is faulty: all the workers got equal payment, so no one is either first or last. Both the parable and the conclusion come from other contexts, 19:30<sup>ccxliii</sup> and 22:14,<sup>ccxliv</sup> respectively.

“For many are called upon but few are chosen” may mean Jews in general and Matthew’s followers or common Christians and initiated Gnostics. The saying makes no sense applied to Jews and Christians, since all Jews were chosen even by Jesus, though few answered Jesus’ call. The saying is excluded from many manuscripts

20:28 “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

In another late amendment, Jesus calls himself the *Son of Man*, a title customary in additions. *Servant* points to his conformity with Isaiah’s prophecy as well. The doctrine of the redemption of sin by human sacrifice could hardly be engendered in Jewish Matthew’s sect, but is characteristic of Gentile Christianity.

The Gospels report many moments when Jesus was served: Peter’s mother-in-law, the woman who wiped his feet with her hair, of whom Jesus said, “She has performed a good service for me.”<sup>ccxlv</sup>

20:30–32 “Two blind men sitting by the roadside . . . shouted, ‘Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!’ . . . Jesus . . . called them, saying, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’”

Did Jesus not know what the blind men wanted without asking?

21:1–3 “When they came near Jerusalem and reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, ‘Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, just say this, ‘The Lord needs them.’ And he will send them immediately.’”

Jesus would not call himself Lord, a title attributed to him by Gentile Christians.

Jesus knows that the owner will object. Why should he believe the disciple's explanation? Should the phrase “the Lord needs them” be convincing enough, the larger part of asses in Judea would change their owners. Even in the then credulous society, it would be a no-go.

Curiously, at Lk19:33 owners of the ass politely ask disciples unknown to them, “Why are you untethering the donkey?” instead of acting somewhat more violently.

21:4–5 After Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, “This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet, saying, ‘Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’”

The writer imagines Jesus sitting on two donkeys simultaneously, “put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them.”<sup>ccxlvii</sup> While the antecedent is *cloaks*, *them* in the dual number probably refers to the same object. Why would the disciples put garments on both animals, or why were the two animals needed, if Jesus used one? Zech9:9 “Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” The author wrongly understands *daughter*, which refers to Zion, Jerusalem, not the inhabitants. To *ride* usually means to *reign*; a messiah would enter Jerusalem victoriously, not to be crucified. The writer takes the poetic repetition for the mention of a second donkey, based probably on mistranslation. Note an amusing contravention with Jesus' saying, “A person cannot mount two horses.”<sup>ccxlviii</sup>

Zech9:10 “He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the warhorse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off; and he shall

command peace to the nations.” To attribute this prophecy to the period before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans is a mistake.<sup>90</sup>

Zech9:11–13 “As for you . . . I will restore to you double. For I have bent Judah as my bow; I have made Ephraim its arrow. I will arouse your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece, and wield you like a warrior’s sword.” Jews in the time of Jesus did not wage war on Greece. Zechariah’s prophecy also excludes the Christian appeal to other peoples.

Lk19:29–35 In a similar episode, Jesus rides one donkey. Perhaps some non-Jewish editor of Matthew tried to harmonize the passage with the prophecy. Jesus mounts the donkey near the Mount of Olives, five hundred yards from Jerusalem for a messianic entry. Why would a victorious Messiah walk from Galilee and ride only a short distance to assert his status?

The full sense of the donkey story is already lost today. To Jews,<sup>ccxlviii</sup> the donkey was a symbol of the messiah. When Apion said Jews worshipped the donkey,<sup>ccxlix</sup> he meant not the rabbinic metaphors but well-known rumors, so scandalous that Josephus took considerable pains refuting them. Beyond the messianic framework, Christians also used donkey imagery; a caricature discovered on an ancient wall excavated in Rome depicts a crucified person with a donkey’s head. In medieval tradition, the donkey appears on the Pala d’Oro at St. Mark’s in Venice. The donkey was popular among mystics though of unknown symbolism. Jesus’ connection with a donkey had more of a mystical significance than it was an indication that he was the messiah.

Donkey in Hebrew is *aton*. An inconspicuous animal might be chosen as a symbol of Aten, the monotheistic god associated with the sun whom Egyptians worshipped around the time of the Exodus. The Messiah traveling on a donkey thus comes with the power of Aten, at the time associated with Helios and revered by the Jews.<sup>cccl</sup> Donkey was sacred to sun-god Apollo and Dionysus. Various pagans asserted that Jews revered the ass.<sup>cccli</sup> Ass was a potent metaphor: consonants of "wild ass" coincide in Hebrew with "city," Jerusalem.

21:9 “The crowds . . . were shouting, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David!’”

The writer misuses the acclamation, strange for Jewish Matthew but to be expected of a forger ignorant of Aramaic. *Hoshyanu* means *salvation*—God, save us—and cannot be *to* somebody. The object of

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<sup>90</sup> It is incorrect to suppose that the real situation in Judea introduced forced variations into the prophecies. Sure, the prophets who knew of the forthcoming Messiah, envisaged situation in Judea. In any decent theology, its sacred texts are considered precise, not allowing for variations.

*Hoshyanu* would be the Jews, not Jesus. *Hoshyanu* heralds the approach of judgment, not the messiah.

Even if authentic, the pericope does not prove much. Men claiming to be messiah were fairly common, like the warrior Bar Kochba, Feuda, and the Egyptian, described by Josephus.

21:11 "The crowds were saying, 'This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.'"

The crowd exclaims, "Hosanna to the Son of David!"<sup>»cclii</sup> for a messiah, not for some contemporary prophet. Further, "the prophet from Galilee" was an oxymoron in Judea. Though some important rabbis came from the school at Usha, Judeans thought most Galileans were ignorant about religion. It was hardly needed to explain to Judeans that Nazareth was in Galilee. If it were an unknown village, nobody would have mentioned it at all, saying simply, "from Galilee." Finally, the messiah, a descendant of David, was not to come from Galilee but from Bethlehem, which would have been a more convincing ascription.

21:12 "Then Jesus entered the temple [of God] and drove out all who were selling and buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves."

The atypical phrase "the temple *of God*" probably indicates falsifying. These words belonging to a Gentile with a developed piety toward temples are missing from a number of ancient manuscripts.

The episode presents numerous problems. Jews came to Jerusalem from many places with various currencies and no animals for sacrifice. Roman money was banned from the temple with its image of Emperor Augustus and the inscription *The Son of God*. All Roman and Greek coinage bore images, and pilgrims exchanged them for imageless coins.

The Torah directs Jews to bring money and buy offerings at the temple: "Go to the place that the Lord your God will choose; spend the money for whatever you wish . . . Eat there in the presence of the Lord your God."<sup>»ccliii</sup> Even if that rule applied only to the Diaspora Jews, it was sufficient to justify money-changers and sellers.

Further, many civil procedures occurred in the temple, not just rituals. The Sanhedrin sat in the temple, lost property was brought there to be returned to the owners, and so on. Trade in the temple complex, several walls away from the altar, did not impede religious purity. Apparently, the writer thought the temple a ceremonial building, not a complex structure. A possibility remains that Jesus was disgusted by having to enter the temple through a bazaar.

That Jesus' action could be accepted by the people is demonstrated by a historical example. In thirteenth century, ibn Taymiyya famously had a

habit of overturning the boards of backgammon players on his walk to the mosque. Jesus could be authoritative enough to allow himself such a demonstration of disgust.

What were the temple guards and the Roman garrison doing? Perhaps, Jesus was executed because of this skirmish.

Jesus comes to the Temple for the first time (at least, so Matthew relates) and does not bring gifts or make sacrifice, not even two small coins (which is understandable, if he was Essene). From the point of view of the Jews, it looked offensive. And Jesus did not negate the Temple or ceremonials. At 17:24, he paid the temple tax.

21:13 “[Jesus] . . . said to them, ‘It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer; but you have made it a den of thieves.’”

Is56:6–7 “And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord . . . all . . . [who] hold fast my covenant, these I will bring to my holy mountain . . . Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.” The promises deal with foreign peoples turning to God, not trade in the temple.

Jer7:8–11 “Here you are, trusting in deceptive words to no avail. Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely . . . and then come and stand before me . . . and say, ‘We are safe!’ . . . Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your sight?” The warning is against coming to worship with guilty souls. The animal sellers were not bandits. They violated neither commandments nor tradition. The priests authorized them. It is wrong to mix violation of the commandments and a divergent (rather disputable) interpretation of balance between spiritual and worldly.

Perhaps Jesus expressed popular grievance against the high prices. Even so, the prices were inflated by costs imposed by the temple administration, and Jesus’ tantrum was unreasonable.

21:14 “The blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he cured them.”

Deformed people were banned from the temple.

21:15 “But when the chief priests and scribes *saw* the amazing things that he did, and heard the children crying out *in* the temple, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David,’ they became angry.”

The ceremonially pure priests would not have come near the people, especially anyone lame. On the eve of the festival, they were both busy and fastidiously pure. Children probably could not go beyond the courtyard.

Inactive indignation of the priests is odd, since they could employ Temple guards. Assuming there was a large group of followers around Jesus, the Roman garrison would have intervened, too. Unlikely the Scripture-savvy, Messiah-longing priests ignored prophecy-fulfilling supernatural feats of Jesus.

21:16 “Jesus said to them. ‘Yes; have you never read, ‘Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings you have prepared praise for yourself’?”

This is poor reasoning when addressing scribes. Ps8:3 speaks about the people of Israel, not about nursing babies praising God.

21:17–18 “He left them, went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there. In the morning, when he returned to the city, he was hungry.”

In the culture of that time, he would be given breakfast without fail before leaving. The more so because he was apparently staying with his friends, in the house of Simon the leper.

There is a hint at Jn4:31–34 that Jesus never felt hunger. Of course, John describes a divine Jesus who is far removed from the human being whom we encounter in Matthew.

21:19–21 “And seeing a fig tree by the side of the road, he went to it and found nothing at all on it but leaves. Then he said to it, ‘May no fruit ever come from you again!’ And the fig tree withered at once . . . . The disciples . . . were amazed . . . . Jesus answered them, . . . ‘If you have faith and do not doubt . . . if you say to this mountain, ‘Be lifted up and thrown into the sea,’ it will be done.’”

Did not the all-knowing Jesus know about the absence of fruits before approaching the tree? Such aggressiveness of the child-Jesus (toward other children) is also described in the Infant Gospels. The Greeks had a similar notion that the gaze of a god could wither a tree was a notion of the Greeks, and attributed that power to the statue of Diana in Aetolia. A still less pleasant analog is Medusa the Gorgon. Gazing into her eyes turned anyone into stone.

Egerton4 describes the opposite: Jesus wondrously grows a fruit or a fig tree in water. The tree and water allegory of Egerton4 resembles the Essene Hymn 8. The metaphor appears also in Zohar4:202: “The one who studies the Torah is not a dry tree, but a tree planted by water streams.” Mandaean priests cut their staffs from olive trees, “the staff of the living [flowing] water.” A tree is a metaphor for a national or religious group, or perhaps its leader; water symbolizes knowledge and grace. The Gospel editor may have wanted to incorporate the power of the symbols as actual events in Jesus’ life.

A hungry man would be more likely to command the tree to produce fruit than to wither it. The author opts for an allegory of Jews disregarding Jesus' teaching and bearing no fruit. The episode is, however, a miracle, not a parable. The episode is likely a forged conflation with the standard image of moving mountains (cf. 17:20). The moment reveals Jesus' impatience but no loving and forgiving nature.<sup>celiv</sup>

Lk13:6–9 “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard . . . . He said to the gardener, ‘See here! For three years, I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?’ He replied, ‘Sir, let it alone for one more year . . . . If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’” Allowing for the three years as a hyperbole, the description relates to Greece where some trees—notably wild olive—look dead in winter, completely withered and dry, but grow green in spring. One should not cut down a dry tree, but wait for it to flower again.

The difference between Luke's account and Matthew's is whether people who reject Jesus—the fruitless tree—are doomed or may yet be saved by turning to him (bearing fruit). The parable in this form likely was introduced into Matthew rather late to show that he also discriminated against Jews.

21:23–26 “The chief priests . . . said, ‘By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?’ Jesus said to them, ‘I will also ask a question . . . . Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?’ . . . . They answered Jesus, ‘We do not know.’ And he said to them, ‘Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.’”

When the priests ask Jesus by whose power he works miracles, he is not doing wonders but rather teaching. The source seems to have contained a question of by whose authority Jesus teaches. The rabbis customarily corroborated their teaching with reference to the early or authoritative teachers, while Jesus did not. A confused Gentile editor changed the text.

The question of the nature of Jesus' authority arises often. Unlike the scribes, Jesus taught like one with authority who did not need to refer to recognized teachers. Some accused him of healing in the name of Beelzebub, and he evasively answered that the devil's kingdom divided against itself would not stand.

To answer a question with a question is traditional, but in this case the exchange makes no sense. The priests want to learn about Jesus, but he uses their inability to answer a puzzling question as the excuse not to answer their question. To say Jesus dismissed their question, since they would believe him no more than they believed John, seems facile. The



Baptist did not speak about the heavenly origin of his message, as Jesus implies; it was people's opinion. The priests quite probably welcomed John's call to repentance.

21:28–31 “A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’ He answered, ‘I will not’; but later he changed his mind and went. The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, ‘I go, sir’; but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?”

The family of a vineyard's owners hardly worked in it. Judging by the parable about the denarius, the low-wage workers were employed. The straightforward parable appeared belongs to a Gentile: the Jews say they love the law but do not keep it, while the Gentiles have converted at last. The Gentiles, however, were not called or given commandments before the Jews.<sup>91</sup> The author falls in a trap comparing them to the Jews. According to the parable, the Gentiles must perform the same work, that is, follow the same commandments as the Jews.

The existence of several versions of the parable does not add to its credibility.

21:31 “Jesus said to them, ‘Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you.’”

This statement does not absolve tax collectors. Mt5:46 “For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?” At 21:31 Jesus speaks not about publicans and harlots but about those who admit their sinfulness and turn to obeying the law, and who, he says, will enter the kingdom of heaven before the hypocrites.

The saying looks like an addition to justify admitting sinners to the Christian communities, a practice which doubtless caused trouble and had to be justified. The publican Matthew would hardly compare his colleagues, with whom he had to deal even after his conversion,<sup>cclv</sup> with prostitutes.

21:32 “For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him.”

How many publicans and harlots were in Judea that the crowds coming to John<sup>cclvi</sup> consisted of them (presumably, Jesus mentioned them because they were the most numerous social groups in John's following)? And if they believed and repented, where did Jesus get his own followers from among them? The statement contradicts 21:25–26: Jesus asks the

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<sup>91</sup> The writer unlikely implied the commandments to Gentiles, which the rabbinic tradition distills from God's words to Adam and Noah.

priests, whether John's baptism was from the people or from heaven. They hesitate to answer, "From the people," for fear of bolstering the crowd's estimation of John as a prophet. The priests in the Temple were hardly afraid of a crowd of largely prostitutes.

"And even after you saw it, you did not change your minds." But why should the priests change their minds about someone whom sinners follow and call a prophet?

The pericope seems to reflect an early tradition that John brought new teaching (something to believe in), though the Gospels portray him calling for repentance only, not teaching. Perhaps John's teaching about the apocalypse was in question, but Jesus hardly believed it, since John did not usher in the apocalypse and apparently the priests were right to disbelieve him.

21:33–41 A parable of a master who repeatedly sends his servants (prophets) to the tenants of his vineyard (Jews) for payment (obedience), then sends his son (Jesus), whom the tenants kill. The Pharisees agree that the owner will put the villains to death and install new tenants (Gentiles) in their place.

A less plausible interpretation is that the Pharisees are the original tenants and Matthew's followers their replacement. In Jesus' time, the Pharisees were not an ancient sect and thus hardly the original tenants to whom many messengers (prophets) were sent. The parable deals with the disobedience of the whole Jewish community, not a faction such as the Pharisees. The prophets were sent to all Jews, not to the Pharisees alone. "New tenants" cannot refer to Judeo-Christians, since they are not "new" but have always been the chosen people. From Matthew's point of view, they are the true Jews who first accepted the new doctrine. His Gospel is Jewish-leaning, suspicious of Gentiles, and critical of the Pharisees' efforts at proselytizing.<sup>92</sup> The episode could not belong to Matthew.

The parable in its present form was created as Jesus' prophecy of his own death, including even such details as his execution outside the vineyard (Jerusalem).<sup>cclvii</sup>

Lk20:9–16 and Th65 differ: the servants (prophets) were beaten, not killed, which is significant if we recall that the Essenes, to whom

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<sup>92</sup> Pharisees were not a sect in the sense of a group recruiting followers. Proselytes (in whose conversion they were active) usually did not know the details of Judaism, whose knowledge distinguished Pharisees from other sects. The newly converted could not even marry the legitimate Judeans (though the law is clear, in a well known opposite example, proselyte illustrious rabbi Meir married famous Beruria, of whose birth nothing peculiar is known). Overall, they were not full members of Pharisaic milieu.

Matthew could be related, claimed the prophets were killed, not occasionally persecuted as in the mainstream tradition. Luke also attributes the moral conclusion<sup>93</sup> to Jesus, without forcing it on the Pharisees.

Matthew specifies that the son was sent "last," which fits the framework of Christian theology claiming Jesus as the last chance for of salvation. Matthew's Gentile editor changed Thomas' parable: though he does not dwell on the viciousness of those who reject Jesus, he promises they will be exterminated or deprived of salvation and the kingdom of heaven given to others.

The Gospel parables are allegories and should cohere in both external and internal sense. The new tenants (Christians) who replace the old ones must pay the same (obey the law). Otherwise why install them? Yet the Christians abrogated the law.

A father would not send his son after the tenants beat the servants and showed that they were criminals ready for a fight. The father had no reason to assume they would respect his son and become obedient.

21:38 says the servants kill the son to get his inheritance, which is nonsense. They had no claim to the property. Did the tenants kill Jesus hoping to inherit the kingdom of heaven? The vineyard is the standard metaphor of the promised land or Israel,<sup>cclviii</sup> not of the kingdom of heaven.

The parable's presence in the synoptics and in Thomas, the concept of the Son, the theocentrism, the Greeks' ignorance of rural Judea, and the absence of the details of murder only superficially favor the authenticity. That the Greeks knew little about Jewish viniculture is immaterial. Even if the Greek editor knew nothing about renting out vineyards, which would be strange, the parable could happen in Syria or Egypt, where customs are similar. All the synoptics borrowed from Thomas, and this parable is only one example. The concept of the Son of God was widespread, and applied to various people. In fact, Jesus told everyone to call God *Father*.<sup>cclix</sup>

Theocentrism indicates only the parable's early derivation. The Christians did not declare Jesus divine from the beginning, and the scribe reasonably and naturally assigned the main role to God. Even the late Gospel of John ascribes to Jesus the role of advocate before God.

Though apologists look for an allusion to the crucifixion in the forgery, that would not only seem excessive but would also exaggerate the situation in the vineyard. An editor with a grain of common sense would not introduce the details of Jesus' execution and make the forgery transparent.

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<sup>93</sup> Matt 21:41 "He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants."

The parable could be an exhortation. “Whoever leases one vineyard eats birds; whoever leases many vineyards is eaten by birds.”<sup>cclx</sup> Two interpretations are possible. One, to have many vineyards one must work and stay close to the birds. Or the owner of many vineyards risks being killed in one of them where birds will consume his body.<sup>94</sup> None of that, however, is peculiar to Judea, as the Gentile author knew.

21:42–44 “<sup>42</sup>Jesus said to them, ‘Have you never read in the scriptures: ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone?’ <sup>43</sup>Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom. <sup>44</sup>Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush any one on whom it falls.”

The context implies keystone: a relatively small stone now used to hold together arches in the center, but in antiquity widely employed to fix large uneven stones in a wall. The wall keystones were small and therefore initially rejected by the builders. Thus Jesus ranks himself after the Pharisees, though he insists that even a minor teacher can reveal important teaching, possibly supporting the doctrine of Pharisees, the big stone. David, to whose psalm Jesus refers, was similarly humble.

Th66 also points to a keystone, “Show me the stone that the builders rejected: that is the keystone.” It is probably an allegory of (the?) knowledge: rejected by the people, it is essential for the kingdom of heaven. The meaning of cornerstone is implausible: Greek text refers to the head of the angle, thus keystone, as it is used in an arch. A cornerstone is large and good; it would not be rejected: even if unused at a corner, it is still used immediately afterwards for a wall. Once rejected, a stone cannot become a cornerstone, because the corner is already laid by the time builders changed their mind. The metaphor is pertinent to a keystone.

The metaphor of the stone was common and was used variously, which created a tangle later. Rabbi Shimmai wrote, “Evil thought is like a large stone, which stands at the crossroads, and people stumble over it. The ruler said: ‘Break pieces off it one by one until I come and remove it.’”

21:43 is an addition surrounded by superficially consistent text about a cornerstone. Some manuscripts lack 21:44 but have 21:43. The editor adds “will be taken away from you” and excises 21:44 to preserve the length of the text, which does not mean 21:44 is authentic: its “stone” metaphor differs from 21:42; and who could fall on a cornerstone set into a wall? The forger was looking for a similar metaphor.

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<sup>94</sup> An unusual explanation is that the owner of many vineyards is so rich that he is allowed excarnation, which seems the correct sense of the high burial grounds for the rich, mentioned in the Bible several times.

21:43 is indispensable to Christianity's need to add an appeal to all peoples to Matthew.

The Gospels disagree on whether Pharisees will inherit the kingdom. While 21:43 denies them, 5:20 gives them a generous chunk.

While in 21:42 *cornerstone* is a metaphor for a humble person raised by God,<sup>cclxi</sup> the *stone* in 21:44 is God himself.<sup>cclxii</sup>

The Gospel sense of "who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces" is similar to Th82: "Whoever is near me is near the fire." Other possibilities include Jesus as a stumbling block, a trap for Jews, and punishment for those who reject Christianity. Yet another is that the crushing stone symbolizes the law. The idiom "to stumble and be caught by the devil" was popular at that time, and Matthew's text may mean, "The devil will catch ("broken to pieces") anyone who stumbles (rejects Jesus). The pericope may include all those meanings.

21:44 might reflect the polemic with the Essenes: "As to me, if I stumble the grace of God will always save me."<sup>cclxiii</sup> 21:44 may affirm that God will not save, that Jesus was the last chance, and that the Essenes who rejected Jesus will not be saved.

21:45–46 "When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables . . . they wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, they [the crowds] regarded him as a prophet."

Even at his apogee, even those who followed Jesus did not see him as the messiah but rather as one of the numerous prophets. Denouncing others, especially underdogs like the Pharisees, would not lead to arrest.

The passage may be late. The phrase "the crowds . . . regarded him as a prophet" appears nearby<sup>cclxiv</sup> in relation to the Baptist. A single writer would not likely use the phrase twice.

22:2–14 Jesus tells the parable of the king who prepared a banquet for his son but when the guests declined sent servants to invite everyone they found to fill the table. The Jews rejected Jesus, and God called others.

22:6–7 "The rest [the invited guests] seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city." The addition alludes to the destruction of Jerusalem and is missing from Thomas. It turns out that the king first burnt the city, and then continued the wedding banquet.

22:11–13 A man without a wedding garment is banned from the feast: "Bind him and throw him into the outer darkness." That Jesus means

either faithless Christians or Judas<sup>95</sup> Iscariot is an oversimplification. Missing from both Thomas and Luke, the passage probably appeared initially in another context and ceased to make sense after being transferred to this parable.

The “outer darkness” is a place beyond earth and heaven. Since “there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth,” it is probably hell. But the Greek Hades was not a place of punishment. The idea of hell as punishment is Christian, based on many sources, including Egyptian cults.

22:14 “For many are called, but few are chosen.”

All nations may come to the temple,<sup>cclxv</sup> but only one small nation is chosen.

The text may refer to those chosen for initiation into the Christian mysteries when Christians still perceived themselves as a small sect rather than as a mass religion.

Or, the many invited at first were the Jews; the few, the Jewish Christians. A Gentile’s perspective would be different: first the Jews only, then anyone. Lk14:16–24, accordingly, differs: instead of the invited guests (Jews), the outcasts from the streets (Jewish sinners), finally everyone (Gentiles).

Late editing distorted the parable’s sense. Th64 speaks not of a wedding banquet—to refuse to attend was an affront— but says simply, “Somebody was receiving guests.” Each guest gives a work-related reason to miss and apologizes politely. Then the host directs his servant, “Go . . . into the main streets and invite everyone you find to the banquet.” The difference from 22:10 is important: Matthew’s “slaves . . . gathered . . . both good and bad,” but Thomas makes no such distinction and only invites (to the kingdom of heaven) others to replace those who have to work (preoccupied with the temporal realm). Thomas did not imply that all Jews were lost to worldly affairs.

The end of Thomas’ parable explodes the forgery. “Buyers and merchants [will] not enter the places of my Father.”<sup>cclxvi</sup> The parable deals with obsession with worldly things, not conversion to Christianity. That view agrees with Th63, which speaks of the vanity of wealth. Corrupted beyond recognition in the canonical Gospels to justify the call of other nations, Lk14:16–24 is an intermediate stage of Thomas’ parable.

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<sup>95</sup> The standard spelling of his name is wrong, invented to distinguish the hated man from other people of this name. His name is Judah or, properly, Yehudah—like the name of Judah’s tribe, of Judah the Galilean, and the NT author Jude.

Thomas' parable recalls Prov9 where Wisdom invites the guests to her housewarming. Matthew characteristically substitutes the standard metaphor of God as king for Thomas' *someone*.<sup>96</sup>

22:15–22 “Then the Pharisees . . . [came] along with the Herodians, saying, . . . ‘Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?’ But Jesus . . . said, ‘Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the coin used for the tax.’ And they brought him a denarius. Then he said to them, ‘Whose image is this, and whose title?’ They answered, ‘Caesar’s.’ Then he said to them, ‘Give therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.’”

Whether Jews paid taxes with Roman coins is unclear. The presence of moneychangers in the temple indicates that local coins remained the official means of payment. Jews disliked using money with graven human images; and any Jew could quickly distinguish between what belongs to God and what to the emperor: everything belongs to God.

Who were the Herodians? If they were the servants of Herod Antipas, the episode may have happened in Galilee but is reported in the account of Jesus' stay in Jerusalem. But Galileans paid taxes not to the emperor, but to the local ruler, who paid a lump sum to Rome.

Compare Mt16:6—“Jesus said to them, ‘Watch out and beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees’”—to Mk8:15—“. . . the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod.” The Herodians may be Sadducees, the priestly sect close to the Jewish royal court.

The Essenes, whom Herod the Great may have patronized, could be called Herodians, though calling sectarians by the name of a patron dead for

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<sup>96</sup>Invitation of the poor to banquet is not clear and could be called fantasy, but Plutarch similarly describes the last birthday party of Marcus Anthony, “many of the guests sat down in want, and went home wealthy men,” thus implying this was a standard metaphor. It is hard to believe that king's banquet was accessible to everyone. Importantly, the poor did not just receive food outside the house, but evidently had access to the hosts, whom they could address with a wish.

Cinna relates a like dream, which he saw shortly before murder of Julius Caesar. In the vision, Cinna was invited by Caesar to supper but refused, although Caesar was urging him. In the end, Caesar took him by the hand and despite of Cinna's resistance led him to the deep and dark place. Regardless of what psychoanalysts would recognize in this account, it could be plausible reference to the “outer darkness.” Meaning of this vision seems to be evident to the contemporaries, as Plutarch does not comment on it, contrary to his usual manner. We do not know what this dream, and, accordingly, the parable means.

more than thirty years would be odd. The episode is late, from a time when Christians had broken with their Essene roots and were pointedly trying to separate from them. Hippolytus<sup>cclxvii</sup> remarks that some Essenes did not touch Roman coins, which may be why Jesus said the denarius was for the emperor and Jews should not care about it.

Only Matthew criticizes Herod the Great; Luke and John do not. In Herod's time, some Essenes left Qumran for more comfortable conditions. Matthew would decry divisions among the Essenes and denounce their patron.

The saying may preserve long-lost tradition. The image of Jesus parallels that of Judah the Galilean who revolted against paying Roman taxes and defied the emperor's rule. A distaste for tax collectors morphs into a theological excuse for paying taxes but those prescribed in the Torah. Luke cites the charge of tax evasion brought against Jesus at his trial.<sup>cclxviii</sup> The story may be an attempt to deny the charge and present Christians as law-abiding people, much as Josephus, from whom Luke borrowed much, did for the Jews.

If the same collectors levied both temple and Roman taxes, the sense can be different. Jesus offers to pay both Caesar and God while focusing on spiritual matters. Yet tax collectors were notorious sinners and would hardly be trusted to collect the temple dues.

Th100 "They showed Jesus a gold coin and said to him, 'The Roman emperor's people demand taxes from us.' He said to them, 'Give the emperor what belongs to the emperor, and give me what is mine.'"

Thomas' abbreviated version appears in the later, heavily edited part of his Gospel. Jesus is shown a coin even before being asked about the tax, a detail out of context; the evangelist presumes the reader's knowledge that Jesus asked to see the coin. Thomas' editor reports a gold coin, far too valuable to carry around or for paying taxes. Most think the coin was a silver denarius with Tiberius' image. Significantly, Thomas replaces Matthew's duty to God with duty to Jesus. Th100 looks like a harmonizing insertion, handy for the Gnostics, who denied the significance of money.

Egerton3 may be closest to the original: "They came to him and asked to test him, . . . 'Tell us whether it is permitted to pay to the rulers what is due to them? Should we pay them or not?' Jesus knew about their intents and became angry. Then he said to them, 'Why do you honor me as a teacher, but do not do what I tell you to do? Isaiah was right about you, 'These people come to me with their mouths, but their heart is far from me; they honor me in vain because they insist on teachings which are the human precepts.'" The question probably scandalized Jesus, as the question about giving Jesus *his* (spiritual) due was ignored.



Rom13:7 "Pay to all what is due them—taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due." Paul must not have known of Jesus' supposed answer.

The tax collectors asked John the Baptist a similar question: "Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you."<sup>ccclxix</sup> They must collect only as much as they send to Rome and keep a modest, legal commission. John accepts taxes but hopes to limit the harm. The story may be yet another borrowing from the Baptist.

22:23–29 "Teacher! Moses said, 'If a man dies childless, his brother shall marry the widow, and raise up children for his brother.' Now there were seven brothers among us; . . . In the resurrection, then, whose wife of the seven will she be? For all of them had married her. Jesus answered them, 'You are wrong, because you [do not] know . . . the scriptures.'"

The Sadducees rejected oral tradition and interpretations of the Torah. Jesus' answer would not have interested them. Sadducees were a priestly party and would hardly follow Jesus, much less call him *teacher*.

Jesus' insult is not impertinent, since the Sadducees probably did *not* know the Scriptures; they rejected everything but the Pentateuch. They did accept Deuteronomy, the source here, and knew the relevant text. Jesus answers without appealing to the Bible's authority, then accuses the Sadducees of ignorance.

John Hyrcanus converted Galileans to Judaism only a century before. The Galileans were notoriously insouciant about the law. Rabbi Yohanan Ben Zakkai was asked only two questions about the law during his eighteen years there.<sup>ccclxx</sup> Matthew undoubtedly knew the Jewish opinion of the Galileans and would hardly set Jesus up to articulate fine points of law at the risk of being laughed at.

Zohar1:21 "The woman that was married twice in this world will belong to her first husband in the future world."

22:30 "For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven."

This passage does not relate to the previous one. If Jesus accuses Sadducees of not knowing the scriptures, we expect him to use them in his answer, but his reply, as well as the whole doctrine of resurrection, is without basis in scripture.

The resurrection will take place (contrary to the Sadducees) but without bodies (contrary to Pharisees). The saying was meaningless for the Sadducees may not have believed in angels.

The idea may have been introduced by a serious theosophist, though coincidence is more likely. Angels are incorporeal and all one, manifestations of a single essence, because incorporeality mandates unity.<sup>97</sup> Souls, likewise incorporeal and one in essence, do not differ among themselves; there are no relations among them. In that sense, at least, they are like angels.

The statement contradicts apocalyptic judgment and Jesus' bodily resurrection and the general resurrection, and probably is part of harmonizing the Gospels with Paul, who attempted to meld Pharisaic Judaism (bodily resurrection) and Greek theosophy (eternal soul, no resurrection) in the concept of the *spiritual body*.<sup>cclxxi</sup> Later, with competition of Greek theosophy suppressed and with the care for common sense discarded, the Church reaffirmed the doctrine of bodily resurrection, a concept founded on the novel Jewish idea. Judaism of the time considered the soul indivisible from the body, not susceptible to a separate resurrection. The question was open: in some Jewish traditions, people enter an essentially bodiless life before the resurrection: "The Age to Come will not be like this era. In the Age to Come there will be neither food nor drink, nor conception of children, there will be no work, no jealousy, no hatred and no destitution."<sup>cclxxii</sup>

Lk20:35–36 "But those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. Indeed they cannot die any more, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection." The passage is about the living "who are worthy." "They cannot die any more"—they have not died yet in any usual sense. Luke records the mystical doctrine of the resurrection and spiritual life of the few initiated, free from bodily affections and made like angels.

Probably Matthew distorts the Gnostic tradition of resurrection as transformation here and now, death to the world and resurrection in spirit, a concept which, when interpreted literally, may have evolved into the Christian doctrine of resurrection. Matthew added a well-known paradox of the resurrection consequences of having several husbands. Jewish Matthew could not accept the celibacy of the initiated, and so he transplanted it into the future.

Resurrection is alien to the Torah. At 1Sam28, Saul asks the witch to call Samuel's ghost. "Then Samuel said to Saul, 'Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?'"<sup>cclxxiii</sup> Samuel was in a sleep in Sheol, the underground abode of souls which Christians wrongly identified with the

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<sup>97</sup> Differentiation is only possible through varying attributes. Incorporeal has neither form or space, nor matter, thus no attributes.

Gentiles' underground hell. Prophecies of judgment, influenced by the Persian cults, assume Sheol is temporary.

Scripture rarely mentions resurrection. Is26 "On that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah: We have a strong city; he sets up victory like walls and bulwarks . . . . You will ordain peace for us . . . . Your dead shall live . . . . Awake and sing for joy!" The *dead* are the spiritually weary Israelites.

Ezek37 "Then he said to me, 'Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel . . . . I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil.'" Though the passage is metaphorical, Ezekiel may have been familiar with the concept of resurrection and did not deny it.

Dan12:1–4 "But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book. Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame . . . . But you, Daniel, keep the words secret and the book sealed until the time of the end." Daniel is the least authoritative book, very late and laden with pagan concepts.

2Macc7 Resurrection is for the righteous. Sinners die eternally—which contradicts their resurrection to shame in Daniel.

22:31–32 "And as for resurrection of the dead have you not read, . . . 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is God not of the dead, but of the living."

Ex3:6 The narration is in the present tense, so the forefathers are somehow alive. That logic applied to other dead people supposes they are also alive in the same sense. Then why a future resurrection? The Gnostics saw judgment as ongoing, not as *future indefinite*.

Matthew borrowed a typical rabbinic argument, which appears in exactly the same form in 4Macc16:25. One interpretation of Ex32:13—"Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel"—asks, "Why are the three forefathers mentioned? Rabbi Levi said, 'Moses said, 'Lord, are the dead living?' He answered, 'Moses, you have become a heretic.'"<sup>cclxxiv</sup>

22:33 "And when the crowd heard it, they were astounded at his teaching."

Certainly, Jesus' reasoning on resurrection was trivial.

22:34–40 The Pharisees ask Jesus about the greatest commandments. "Love the Lord your God . . . [and] love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

The translation obscures the meaning of *neighbor*, evident in Hebrew. He is not everyone, but a kin, member of close group, for example,

the builders of the Babylon tower. The obligations only extend to those with whom you share values and may expect reciprocity.

The Pharisees would hardly ask such a simple question to which an unambiguous rabbinic answer was well known; Jesus conforms to it. The legendary Pharisaic founder Hillel identified negative formulation of the second commandment as the basis of the law.

Rom13:8–9 “Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments . . . are summed up in this word, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” Jesus uses a popular maxim common to many cultures and religions.

Th6:3, an early and possibly original text, has “Do not do to the other what you hate yourself,” conforming to the Jewish traditional and logical formula. Th25 “Love your friends like your own soul, protect them like the pupil of your eye” strictly limits the circle of those who must be loved, keeping the instruction practical. *Protect* implies counteraction to evil, akin to the negative wording. Rom13:10 adheres to the traditional formula: “Do not do evil.” The imperative of love in Lev19:34 should be viewed in the context of Lev19:33 “You should do him no wrong,” and in Lev19:18 – in the context of “You should not take vengeance,” both essentially negative formulations. Jewish commandments are pronouncedly practical, but to love a neighbor as yourself is impossible. Not harming or oppressing the neighbor is simple, doable. Hebrew is properly translated, “Feel love to him similarly to [the way you like] yourself,” and Jesus might well intended the same mild meaning of positive attitude, rather than actionable love.

Positive Mt7:12, “Do to the other what you would like the other to do to yourself,” transforms the ethical standard into an impracticable maxim. It is necessary to provide for all neighbors (only Christians?) before eating a meal or at least to let them come to one’s table. Paul recognized that one does good to others only to his own detriment: Rom15:2–3 “Each of you must oblige your neighbor . . . for Christ, too, did not please himself.”

Still worse matters stand with the formula’s recurrence. If a Christian loves his neighbor, he should allow him to experience the same satisfaction. Thus, having given his property to the neighbor, he will be compelled to immediately receive the neighbor’s property, and vice versa *ad infinitum*.

As the resources of each concrete Christian are limited, he will permanently have to choose whom of his neighbors he will love like himself: that is, first, to judge, second, to divide, third, all the same to have no possibility of observing such commandment.

The one accepting does so to the detriment of the giver (whose means thus diminish) and of others who could receive this property or favor instead of the receiver. Each recipient in effect does evil to some other people.

7:12 means *all others*, not only neighbors; even wicked people must be loved, which is incompatible with practical ethics. On the contrary, the negative formulation raises no problem about *neighbors*; (unprovoked) evil should be done to no one.

The instincts of altruism and self-preservation are in a state of dynamic equilibrium in human beings and combine differently in different situations. The chronic prevalence of one over the other would be destructive.

The negative commandment expresses the essence of practical Judaism. It tries neither to change human beings nor to restrain their thoughts but rather to stay their hands from carrying out thoughts of sinful actions.

22:41–45 The Pharisees remind Jesus that the messiah is a descendant of David. “How is it then David . . . calls him Lord, . . . ‘The Lord said to my lord, Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet.’ If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?”

Since David calls the future messiah “my lord,” he is unlikely David’s child. Ps 110, traditionally sung at the coronation of Jewish kings, refers to the military messiah and calls the Jewish monarch *my lord*. Each king was a potential messiah (liberator of Israel), whence the anointing ceremonies.

The Christians quibble on the ambiguous translation “my Lord/the lord,” whereas in Hebrew these are different words: the tetragrammaton and sir (lord), respectively. Ps 110’s connection to Jesus is doubtful even from the Christian point of view. First, how could the all-forgiving Jesus have the enemies mentioned in the psalm? Second, how could he have enemies before his incarnation? Third, the the essence of God might not struggle *long* with enemies.

While the evangelist says Jesus will wait until his enemies are destroyed, Paul says he will destroy them himself before delivering the kingdom to God.<sup>cclxxv</sup>

22:46 “No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.”

The question Jesus is purported to have asked would have made no sense to the Jews, since it alludes to mistranslation. The Jews knew that the context meant both God and king.

They asked Jesus no more questions; but an authoritative teacher is asked many.

“[F]rom that day” indicates a considerable span of time. Jesus was executed three days later.

23:3 “Therefore, do whatever they [scribes and Pharisees] teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach.”

This saying requires Christians to observe the commandments and Jewish oral tradition even more devotedly than the Pharisees did. Lk11:2: “But woe to you, Pharisees! For you tithe . . . and neglect justice and the love of God.” Any detailed doctrine becomes formalized. The Pharisees could lose sight of basic principles behind a host of *halackot*. The Jews knew the problem, and the Talmud, too, denounces such Pharisees.

Jesus’ instruction to conform to Pharisaic doctrine refutes Christian claims of new teachings which replace the law.

23:4 “[The Pharisees] bind on heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of the others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to *move* them.”

Lk11:46 Jesus makes the charge against lawyers, not Pharisees. Lk11:45 emphasizes the difference between the two.

Matthew’s editor absurdly supposes that Pharisees make the others observe the Law, and do not do so themselves. The other evangelists stress the Pharisees’ precise observance of the law.<sup>cclxxvi</sup> Luke avoids confusion with “unwilling to lift a finger to *ease* them,” rebuking Pharisees for a too strict construction of the law. Yet before Jesus, the school of Hillel prevailed among the Pharisees who treated the law more liberally than the Shammai school did. Though the Pharisees were more rigid than common people, the Gentile editor did not know about the relaxed norms for laymen and thought the Pharisees had to know and follow the extensive body of *halakot* to the last letter.

This pericope is probably borrowed from Luke and intensified from *ease* to *move* . . . 23:5 continues 23:3 about Pharisaic deeds. 23:5 “They do all their deeds to be seen by others; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long.”

Regardless of Jesus’ comment, the tradition had changed. The *tallis* replaced “fringes”; *tefillin* are worn only during prayers, though their size was increased. “When Rabbi Yanneus was asked why even the devout Jews do not wear *tefillin* all day, he said that it was because of hypocrites.”<sup>cclxxvii</sup>

Rabbis have always criticized hypocrisy. The Talmud satirically lists seven varieties of Pharisees, saying that only those who love their

neighbors are the real Pharisees and the rest only called so.<sup>cclxxviii</sup> "Hypocrites are excluded from the presence of God."<sup>cclxxix</sup> Christianity has created professional ministers whose hypocrisy and ostensible piety has surpassed the same criticized by Jesus in the Pharisees. Both parties customarily accused each other of hypocrisy. According to the Talmud, "Everywhere the word *hypocrisy* appears, the Scriptures speak about heresy."<sup>cclxxx</sup>

If the Pharisees were as bad as the Gospels say, why were they so popular? How could they participate in the feasts, preside in the synagogues,<sup>cclxxxi</sup> and merit the title *teacher*?<sup>cclxxxii</sup> Would hypocrites contend fearlessly with the regime to defend their faith? They obeyed their own rules but did not expect other Jews to do so.

Pharisaic teaching acquired legitimacy only just before Jesus' time and went from a persecuted faction to the party in power. If excesses occurred, they should be attributed to the pride of success or enthusiasm. Could Gospel editors be sure their own congregation was better? To read Paul, it was not.

23:8 "But you are not to be called teachers, for you have one teacher, and you are all students."

Jesus' disciples would hardly call themselves teachers, the distinctions between a disciple and a teacher being great. Regulations rigidly controlled when someone could be called *rabbi*. However, the Acts describe apostles behaving like teachers who are obviously not familiar with this injunction. Paul relates about many Christians ostensibly prophesying at the meetings. The passage may come late, when the Church needed to put an end to private revelation and establish a unified tradition.

This anti-Pharisaic idea of God as the only teacher stretches the point. One cannot dismiss all earthly teachers. Jesus offers consolation to his ignorant disciples, whom no one was addressing *teacher*, anyway. There might be a connection to the Essenes whose clothes, according to Josephus, resembled those of disciples of scholars.<sup>cclxxxiii</sup>

23:9 "And call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father, the one in heaven."

Jews did not call strangers *father*. Hippolytus mentions a group of Essenes<sup>cclxxxiv</sup> who prohibited calling anyone but God *lord*.

Curiously, Christians employ exactly this address to their religious mentors.

23:10 "Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah."

Jesus never called himself *messiah*, not even at his trial. Like Matthew, he knew the connotations of this title, so unlike his own experience.

23:12 “All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.”

The goal of any Christian is to be meek and humble—if sufficiently humble in this life, then exalted in the world to come. Thus, he actually aims at greater exaltation, and uses the belittling of things worldly as a temporary means. But if he aims at eternal meekness and belittling, then, on the contrary, in his mortal life he should aspire to be raised.

And these people speak about hypocrisy!

23:13 “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you lock people out of the kingdom of heaven. For you do not go in yourselves, and when others are going in, you stop them.”

The Pharisees were not strong enough to attempt stopping Christianity’s spread until the second century. No one bothered with the propaganda of minor sects. Many heretics may have hoped the authoritative Pharisees would accept their doctrines or at least not dissuade others from accepting them. Thomas’ and Luke’s usage of *knowledge* instead *kingdom* hints at a Gnostic origin.

Lk11:52 “Woe to you, lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge; you did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering.” Th102, “Damn the Pharisees! They are like a dog sleeping in the cattle manger: the dog neither eats nor [lets] the cattle eat.” Th39 “The Pharisees and the scribes have taken the keys of knowledge and have hidden them. They have not entered, nor have they allowed those who want to enter to do so.” What *keys*? Possibly, the Pharisees insisted on their exegesis of the Scriptures and persuaded others to do so, rather than accepted the mystic’s interpretation. The reference could be to the secret Pharisaic doctrines related to the Creation, like Ma’aseh Mercabah. The concern with Pharisees is unusual for Thomas, and suggests interpolation.

23:14 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows’ houses and for the sake of appearance you make long prayers; therefore you will receive the great condemnation.”

According to the argument ascribed to rebellious Korah,<sup>cclxxxv</sup> Moses and Aaron’s laws were unfair for the poor. Take widows: Judaism requires two tithes plus first fruits and the firstlings of cattle. If a woman had only one animal, her tax rate was almost 100%. But in practice, widows had access to community charity and other kinds of help. By Jesus’ time,



numerous legal devices, like marriage contracts<sup>98</sup> and children's obligations for parental support, protected widows.<sup>99</sup>

"Rabbi Akiva behaved so: when he prayed in public he hurried his prayer not to keep the people long; but when he prayed in private he prayed long with many bows."<sup>cclxxxvi</sup>

Early manuscripts of Matthew do not contain 23:14. The passage was borrowed from Lk20:47 to harmonize.

23:15 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cross sea and land to make a single convert, and you make the new convert twice as much a child of hell as yourselves."

Matthew accuses the Pharisees of proselytizing, either unacceptable for his messianic but otherwise traditional sect or in competition with it. Possibly he reacts to Gentiles converting to Judaism instead of the Jews—to Christianity.

"To make a single convert." Other sources give the impression that in the times of Jesus, Judean proselytes were rather numerous. The thesis 23:15 could arise after the Judean War, when conversion to Judaism became unattractive for many people.

23:16–17 "Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the sanctuary is bound by nothing, but whoever swears by the gold of the sanctuary is bound by the oath.' You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold or the sanctuary that has made the gold sacred?"

Pharisees had several reasons for annulling an oath by the temple or the sanctuary, including hastiness, swearing by property dedicated to God, swearing by real estate.<sup>cclxxxvii</sup> essentially, certain impossibility of carrying the vow, since the oath-giver has no control over the temple. According to the Talmud, however, the Pharisees respected the oaths by the sanctuary.<sup>cclxxxviii</sup>

Jesus calls them "blind fools," though he warned, "[I]f you say, 'You fool,' you will be liable to the hell of fire."<sup>cclxxxix</sup>

23:18–20 "<sup>18</sup>And you say, 'Whoever swears by the altar is bound by nothing, but whoever swears by the gift that is on the altar is bound by the oath.'<sup>19</sup>How blind you are! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred? <sup>20</sup>So whoever swears by the altar, swears by it and by everything on it."

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<sup>98</sup> *Ktubah* established women's special property rights. In antiquity, women's rights as property owners were not clearly defined.

<sup>99</sup> Christian cloisters and priests later literally "devoured widows' houses" by forcing the heads of households to leave the patrimony to Church, not to the family under the pains of purgatory.

The writer was neither Gentile nor even Essene, since the latter disdained the temple sacrifices. The pericope hardly belongs to Matthew, since by his time the temple was destroyed and the issue of the offerings on it moot. Though the Mishnah<sup>100</sup> reflects a burst of theoretical interest about temple procedures in the second century, the idea may come from earlier texts, unrelated to Jesus' Christianity.

The rabbis could invalidate an oath by the altar on grounds of incompetence.<sup>ccxc</sup> To violate an oath led to the destruction or transfer of the collateral. If someone swears falsely by his horse, the animal is forfeit. But is the altar or any public object destroyed if someone swears by it falsely? Does anyone want that outcome? Therefore, the oath is void. Modern law adopts the same approach, generally accepting only one's property as collateral. But in Jesus' time, the Jews then may have sworn even by God.

Unlike 23:16–17, the passage not only criticizes Pharisaic views but also establishes in 23:20 a standard for oaths. "But I say to you, 'Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool. . . . And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black.'"<sup>ccxc1</sup> Jesus, like other Jews, believes that swearing by sacred objects or one beyond human power is not permissible, while 23:20 contemplates swearing by the altar. Moreover, 23:20 contradicts Jesus' condemnation of pledges as such. The editor greatly extends the use of oaths, contrary to Jesus' doctrine.<sup>101</sup>

23:23 "Hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matter of the law: justice and mercy, and faith. It is these you ought to have practiced without neglecting the others."

To blame the Pharisees for lacking faith is odd: in their time they were subject to tougher persecution than Christians. *Faith* is likely a scribal addition to standard Jewish pair, *justice and mercy*.

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<sup>100</sup> The Mishnah, a record of oral tradition compiled at the beginning of the third century by rabbi Judah, contains opinions contemporary with the earliest extant Christian tradition and shows how Judeans understood the Bible at the dawn of Christianity. Accordingly, the Gospels and epistles are better compared to the Mishnah than to the scriptures. The Talmud and Midrash are later expositions of the Mishnah; the first dates to the period when the Gospels were finally formed.

<sup>101</sup> The nature of such textual deviations is unclear. Even though merging of prototexts can be involved, was not the editor at least vaguely familiar with the Gospel to see the glaring inconsistency? One is tempted to suggest that the scribes knew much different Gospels, which were compiled in the modern version so late that their texts were already highly disseminated and resistant to change.

The church was also more concerned with the tithe than with mercy.

23:25–26 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the plate, yet inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisees! First clean the inside of the cup, so that the outside also may become clean.”

Matthew passes over from the scribes and Pharisees at 23:25 to only Pharisees at 23:26.

Lk11:39–40 is hardly authentic: Jesus criticizes the Pharisees after one of them invites him to dinner, impossible in that culture.

Th89 “Why do you wash the outside of the cup? Do not you understand that the one who made the inside is also the one who made the outside?” The point is care for the soul’s purity and obviates rites of external purification.

POxy 840:2:8 “And you wash and scrub the surface layer of the skin like the prostitutes and dancers who wash and scrub and embalm and make up themselves to fascinate the men, though inside them the scorpions creep and they are full of every lie.” The comparison was popular, and authors used it variously.

The Essenes taught that sin makes a person unclean and associated purity with righteousness.<sup>ccxcii</sup> Jesus speaks of it just so. Purity comes not from ritual ablution but from sinlessness. Yet the Essenes practiced rigid bathing ceremonies. Their teaching can be harmonized with that of Jesus: After the Essenes were dispersed, ritual purity became practically impossible, and they developed a spiritual interpretation of their sacraments, just as happened in Judaism after the Temple was destroyed.

In the Jewish tradition: “Not exterior rituals bring forgiveness, but interior sincerity.”<sup>ccxciii</sup> “Man must be clean inside and outside before he starts his meal.”<sup>ccxciv</sup>

23:29–31 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For . . . you say, ‘If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’ Thus you testify against yourselves that you are descendants of those who murdered the prophets.”

The reference to 2Chron36:16 does not bear examination: “But they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words, and scoffing at his prophets.” There is no physical violence. Jews generally respected the prophets.

“You are descendants” makes no sense when spoken among Jews. All shared the same ancestors, including those who abused the prophets.

The pericope makes sense among other Gentile allegations against the Jews.

23:34 “Therefore I send you prophets, sages, and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues.”

The interpolator may call the other Christians *prophets* and *sages*. The Christians, however, did not have many texts, and thus a significant number of scribes. The text may be borrowed from sectarian writings, and the words of God attributed to Jesus. The crucifixion is an embellishment, or refers to legendary execution of 800 Pharisees by Jewish king Alexander Janneus.

Lk11:49 “Therefore also the Wisdom of God said, ‘I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute’ so that this generation may be charged with the blood of all the prophets shed since the foundation of the world.”

The editor of Matthew understood the imparity of the theological status of Wisdom and Jesus, even taking Jesus as messiah, and at any rate was contempt about the Wisdom, popular among Gnostics.

23:35–36 “Upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. Truly I tell you, all this will come upon this generation.”

Responsibility of children for their fathers’ deeds contradicts the covenant.<sup>102</sup> If this generation bears all responsibility, why are the previous ones, which hypothetically performed hounding, exempt?

The writer confuses Zechariah son of Barachiah<sup>ccxcv</sup> and Zechariah son of Iodai,<sup>ccxcvi</sup> whom the servants of King Joash stoned in the temple courtyard for saying God had turned from Israel.

Another source is possible. Josephus reports that the Zealots tried Zechariah son of Baruch.<sup>ccxcvii</sup> Though the court acquitted Zechariah of conspiracy to betray besieged Jerusalem to the Romans, the Zealots nevertheless killed him in the temple. That explains the anachronism: though the crimes of the Jews include the murder of Abel—neither he nor Cain were Jews—and stretched to the ancient murder of Zechariah son of Iodai, had not the Jews repented of those crimes long ago, or committed any more recent?

23:38 “See, your house is left to you, desolate.”

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<sup>102</sup> “Visiting on children the iniquities of their fathers” refers only to idolatry. The limit is set on the fourth generation, because no subsequent kin is defiled by personal attachment to idolater.

The saying is evidence that Jerusalem has been destroyed. Dating Jesus' speech after 70 C.E. raises obvious problems, and *desolate* is removed from a number of manuscripts, leaving the phrase meaningless.

23:39 "You will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

But the crowd has just shouted exactly those words.<sup>ccxcviii</sup> And, of course, Christians continued to say this for millennia, to no avail.

Jesus speaks before he was seized but was seen after that.

"Blessed is he who comes" is a common Jewish greeting which the Gentile editor may have taken for liturgy. Ps118:26 "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." The psalm celebrates David's victory, and a more precise reading is, "Blessed in the name of the Lord is the one who comes," that is, David.

If the Jews took Jesus for a prophet and followed him,<sup>ccxcix</sup> why does he condemn them? The condemnation of the Pharisees suddenly encompasses the whole nation.

24:2 "Truly I tell you, not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down."

Not prophecy but a description of the temple's destruction after the Jewish War. Josephus reports that Titus' army demolished even the walls.

If Jesus knew of the temple's impending demolition, why did he attempt to clean it by expelling the traders? This saying is not prophecy. The Gospels were written after the war, and many "predictions" postdate the events.

24:3–5 "The disciples came to him privately, saying, 'Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?' Jesus answered them, 'Beware that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Messiah!'

Jesus did not call himself *messiah*. The disciples knew nothing yet of his future execution and had no reason to ask about the Second Advent. Remove *your coming*, and the disciples merely ask about the signs of the end of days, without reference to Jesus.

This warning about impostors resonates with Paul's accounts of not only his own competitors but also various messianic (Christian) sects. The Church sought to counter with Jesus' forewarning. In fact, Jesus' rivals were not pretenders. Like him, they proposed to save all Jews and their sects were as messianic as those of Matthew or Paul.

24:9–14 "Then they will hand you over to be tortured and will put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of my name . . .

But the one who endures to the end will be saved . . . and then the end will come.”

The hated of “all nations” indicates a context beyond a sect. “My name” likely means the sacred name of God, not Jesus’. The writer adapted a Jewish apocalyptic text.

24:12 “And because of the increase of lawlessness, the love of many will grow cold.”

As in other places, *lawlessness* means transgressing the law. How does this saying agree with Paul’s setting the law aside? Abrogating the commandments (*lawlessness*) leads to the loss of faith (*love growing cold*).

24:15–16 “So when you see the desolating sacrilege standing in the holy place, as was spoken of by the prophet Daniel (let the reader understand), then those in Judea must flee to the mountains.”

“Let the reader understand” indicates a Jewish audience. Even if the evangelists (except Matthew) did know little of the scriptures, and Paul less and that in the Septuagint translation, Gentile Christians may not have been familiar with Daniel.

Dan9:24–27 “Seventy weeks are decreed for your people and your holy city. . . . from the time that the word to restore . . . Jerusalem until the time of an anointed prince, there shall be seven weeks; and for sixty-two weeks it shall be built . . . .”<sup>103</sup>

*Weeks* are seven years, and Daniel speaks of the second temple, built after the Babylonian exile and desecrated by Antiochus Epiphanes. Upping desolation to the temple’s destruction in 70 C.E., Christians offered no explanation of Daniel’s dating, that is, how his *weeks* mean anything but the time between Babylon and Antiochus.

24:20 “Pray that your flight may not be . . . on a Sabbath.”

Here is unambiguous evidence of early derivation from an apocalypse from as far back as the third century B.C.E. By the Maccabean revolt, the Sabbath injunctions did not forbid escape to save a life. Since “the holy place” suffers “desolation,”<sup>ccc</sup> the enemy is already in Jerusalem. “To flee to the mountains”<sup>ccci</sup> on Saturday was no problem, except possibly for sectarians.

24:22 “And if those days had not been cut short, no one would be saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.”

Does not shortening the agony equally save the wicked?

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<sup>103</sup> The Book of Daniel relates of the past events and the Jewish tradition does not recognize it as prophecy.

The pericope makes some sense in the context of Jewish doctrine, where the elect will be saved, not for an afterlife but for the long messianic age, available to the living only; thus “the elect” are happy to survive. In the Christian doctrine of resurrection, they should be happy to die to reach the afterlife sooner. Mention of *the elect* may reveal Jewish sectarian authorship; they naturally considered themselves chosen. Mainstream Judaism was not apocalyptic.

24:23–24 “Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look! Here is the Messiah!’ or ‘There he is!’ do not believe it. For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce great signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.”

The number of men claiming to be the messiah was considerable, both before and after Jesus. This passage may come from the struggle with Simon Magus, an opponent of Jesus, a successor to John and leader of his sect who made wondrous signs.<sup>ccci</sup> *The elect* presumes selection by someone. Deeds make no difference and do not change their status as elect.

Matthew substitutes Messiah for Lk17:22–23’ *Son of Man*, a very different concept.

24:25 “Take note, I have told you beforehand.”

An apparent amendment, out of context by style and sense, to tie the Jewish apocalyptic text to Jesus, perhaps in response to criticism of “retrospective prophecies.”

24:26 “So, if they say to you, ‘Look! He is in the wilderness,’ do not go out . . . Look! He is in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it.

Josephus mentions false prophets leading the Jews into the wilderness. The Romans routinely murdered people at such gatherings to prevent rebellions. *Inner rooms* could mean the Holy of Holies but more likely, just upper secret rooms in meeting houses or homes. Adherents of such strange and secret rituals were probably persecuted. Matthew cautioned against two dangerous mistakes.

24:26 “I have told you beforehand,” repeats 24:23. The writer possibly aimed to link the saying to 24:27: “For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.” Curiously, Matthew considered that lightning always starts from the east, apparently reminiscent of the sun. Comparison with lightning may be intended to exclude false Messiahs. The writer demands what they certainly could not deliver.

The urgent problem of pretenders accounts for the many inserted warnings against false Christs.<sup>ccci</sup> Christians could wait by then for the widely anticipated and discussed Second Coming.

The cautioning against searching for Jesus “here and there” reflects arguments with the Gnostics who conceived the kingdom of heaven (the Second Coming) as human experience, here and now.

Lk17:20–21 “Being asked by Pharisees when the kingdom of God will appear, [he] answered them, ‘. . . the kingdom of God is inside you.’” *Inside* may be better translated *among you*: the kingdom of heaven is descending upon the community.

The Gospel of Mary leans toward individual knowledge, “Be on your guard so that no one deceives you by saying, ‘Look over here!’ or, ‘Look over there!’ For the seed of true humanity exists within you.”<sup>ccciv</sup>

Th3 “If your leaders say to you, . . . ‘The [Father’s] kingdom is in the sky,’ then the birds of the sky will precede you. Rather, the [Father’s] kingdom is inside you and outside you.” The kingdom “outside you” rather unusually for Thomas contradicts the Gnostic notion of the outside world plunged in evil.

The late Th113 locates the kingdom of God on the earth, not in individual people: “His disciples said to him, ‘When will the [Father’s] kingdom come?’ ‘. . . the Father’s kingdom is spread out upon the earth, and people do not see it.’”

The doctrine of the immanence of the kingdom of heaven was very early in Christianity. Later the passage became a warning against impostors.

The late Midrash: “If a man tells you when the end of exile will come do not believe him.”<sup>cccv</sup>

24:28 “Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.”

A possible explanation is, “Whoever has come to know the world has discovered a carcass, and whoever who has discovered a carcass, of that person the world is not worthy.”<sup>cccv</sup>

Lk17:37 “Then they asked him, ‘Where [will one be taken and the other left], Lord?’ He said to them, ‘Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.’” Jesus says the end will appear all over the world at once. Gnostics used the corpse as a metaphor for the world; the destroying angels could be the vultures.

The late phrase also alludes to Roman legions with their standards (with eagle’s image) approaching Jerusalem. The same word means both eagles and vultures.

24:29 “Immediately after the sufferings of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven.”



The standard description of Judgment Day<sup>ccvii</sup> shows the evangelists drawing from Jewish apocalyptic texts. Christians relate the events to Jesus' crucifixion instead of to the judgment.

24:30 "Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."

Christians would like to believe the *sign* is a cross. In Daniel, the sign is a vision of someone like a human being.

24:31 "And he will send out his angels . . . and they will gather his elect from the four winds."

A Jew would know that Daniel's version calls the elect *before* the Son of Man comes ("the judges sat").

24:32–33 "From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near."

Jesus criticized the Pharisees for knowing the signs and seasons of the year, yet demanding a sign from him.<sup>ccviii</sup>

24:34 "Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place."

Jesus already promised<sup>ccci</sup> the advent of "the Son of Man on the clouds of heaven"<sup>cccix</sup> to the current generation, even assured the high priest of the same.<sup>cccxi</sup>

The presence of the prophecy remains a mystery. By the time Matthew was compiled, the end had not come true. Either the destruction of Jerusalem was seen as the beginning of the apocalypse, and the writer thought the Second Coming was near and disregarded cavils about "the present generation." Or if Christianity actually originated in 60s, the "present generation" was still alive. Or the passage may reflect Gnostic notions of initiation and "the end of the world" as spiritual experience. When juxtaposed over the apocalypse, the thesis transformed into the prediction of an imminent end of the days. Or *this generation* may mean *this people*, meaning that the Jews will survive to the messianic age.

24:36 "But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."

Subsequent manuscripts omit "nor the Son" as too transparent an allusion, which exclusion indicates the pericope's early origin. Perhaps the reference is not to Jesus but to Daniel's Son of Man, which would suit some sects. The context explicitly mentions the Son of Man.<sup>cccxi</sup>

If implying Jesus as Son this rejection of Jesus' knowledge contrasts to his depiction in John, where Jesus received all knowledge of God. The different knowledge of the father and son refutes trinity.

24:37–39 “For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days . . . they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man.”

Yet another conflated source describes the sudden, inconspicuous approach of the end of days, whereas elsewhere numerous signs—wars, destruction, *etc.*—signal the onset of the apocalypse.

24:40–41 “Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left.”

Lk17:34–35 “On that night there will be two in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. There will be two women grinding meal together; one will be taken and the other left.” Luke harmonizes with Matthew at Lk17:36: “Two will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left.”<sup>104</sup>

Th61:1 “Two will recline on a couch; one will die, one will live.”

Matthew gives one example, Thomas another, and Luke, all three. The synoptic Gospels differ, and the intensive editing is evident.

Many such maxims ascribed to Jesus circulated among Christians, though ubiquity does not equal authenticity. The Talmud says, “Two may gather [poisonous] cucumbers. One of the gatherers may be guiltless, the other is guilty.”<sup>cccxi</sup>

The threat—“the other will be left”—served to discipline congregations and attract new members. Jesus' customary gentleness gives way to menace.

Lk17:37 “Then they asked him, ‘[Taken] where, Lord? He said to them, ‘Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.’” The saying appears in Matthew in another context: “As the lightning . . . will be the coming of the Son of Man. Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.”<sup>cccxiv</sup>

The continuation of Th61 is puzzling, “Salome said, ‘Who are you, sir? You have climbed onto my couch and eaten from my table as if you are from someone.’ Jesus said to her, ‘I am the one who comes from what is

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<sup>104</sup> A bed, mentioned by Luke, was uncommon in Judea, being an attribute of prosperous Romanized citizens. A floor's bedding was likely used by several people, not just two of them.

whole.' . . . 'I am your disciple.'" Thomas' point is that the whole is divine, but the apocalypse will bring division engineered by the evil demiurge, not God's final cleansing of the world.

Th61 may parallel the Essene custom of sharing meals with strangers, though only those of their sect. Salome asks who sent Jesus, and content with the answer, recognizes his right to eat together with her. Who Salome was is unclear,<sup>105</sup> but the Gnostics paid her a good bit of attention. Seemingly of high standing, she has the right to question Jesus. Mark includes a Salome among the women who first see the resurrected Jesus at the tomb, though Matthew does not.

24:42 "Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming."

The pericope is well-suited to admonish following Jesus' teaching while patiently waiting for his new appearance. It may be dated to the period when people start doubting his new advent.

24:43–44 "But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour."

24:42 completes the concept, though 24:43–44 open and close it anew. The editor inappropriately chooses a proverb to compare Jesus to a thief against whom the vigilant owner should guard himself. Of the *parousia*<sup>106</sup> Paul writes, "The day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night,"<sup>cccxcv</sup> comparing the coming, not Jesus, to a thief. 24:37–39 reflects the Gnostic end without signs. The most traditional posture regarding the last days appears in, "The Son of David [Messiah] will come when nobody is waiting for him."<sup>cccxcvi</sup>

Th21:5–7 could be the original: "For this reason I say, if the owners of a house know that a thief is coming, they will be on guard before the thief arrives, and will not let the thief break into their house and steal their possessions. As for you, then, be on guard against the world. Prepare yourselves with great strength, so the robbers can't find a way to get to you." Thomas' Jesus coherently presents the Gnostic concept of opposing the evil world. The thief is the devil, not Jesus. The allegory is common in Judaism.<sup>cccxcvii</sup>

ScJm3:11 may explain "be on guard": "Therefore, I say to you, become full and leave no place within you empty, or else the one who is coming will be able to mock you." ScJm3:18 specifies: "Therefore,

<sup>105</sup> Her telltale feature is doubt and peculiar spite, Inf Jm 20, Th 61, somewhat parallel to that of doubting Thomas.

<sup>106</sup> The advent at the end of time.

[become] full of the spirit but lacking in reason. For reason is of the soul; indeed, it is soul.” ScJm7:7 “For without the soul the body does not sin . . . . For the spirit is what animates the soul, but the body is what kills it.” The devil’s temptations are futile with people who live in the spirit, with minds and bodies detached from the world to guard against evil.

24:45–51 “Blessed is that slave whom his master will find at work when he arrives . . . . He will put that one in charge of all his possessions. But if that . . . slave says to himself, ‘My master is delayed,’ and he begins to beat his fellow slaves, . . . the master of that slave will come . . . at an hour that he does not know. He will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites.”

“My master is delayed” indicates a late origin when Christians realized the Second Coming was not near. Characteristic signs of falsification: coarse, straightforward parable, primitive realism, “slave-master” relations, threat and apocalypse. Stories of evil slaves deceiving their masters were popular in the Greek literature of the period.

While Matthew accused his fellow Jews of being *hypocrites*, Luke call his pagan rivals *infidels*: [The master] “will cut him in pieces, and put him with the unfaithful. That slave who knew what his master wanted, but did not prepare himself . . . will receive a severe beating. But the one who did not know and did what deserved a beating will receive a light beating . . . . And from him to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded.”<sup>cccxviii</sup> The narration loses all connection with the context, evolving from the slave left in charge to one who did not know his task, adding criticism of the Jews (“to whom much has been entrusted”) and a guarantee of their condemnation (“more will be demanded”). Luke, like Josephus, elsewhere presented Jews as reasonable and respectable people, his religious ancestors.

Luke’s parable violates the common Jewish tolerance of slaves, not only regulated by the Torah but also an integral part of tradition and culture. Beating slaves was indecent, and no Jewish author would compare God to a master thrashing his slave. Gentiles, however, felt no such compunction.

Christians would naturally have opposed themselves, not someone else, to the *unfaithful*. Accordingly, slaves of Jesus may be Christians, at least before the parable was extrapolated to cover Jews. Perplexing is who are the Christians mistreating their fellows. According to Paul, Church administrators’ abuse of power could be in question even that early. The apocalypse at Mt24 combines several prototexts,<sup>cccxi</sup> the narrative ending, then resuming, repeatedly, as do the warnings. The popular text is full of inserts. Luke distinguishes between the kingdom of heaven and apocalypse, assigning them to different chapters.<sup>cccxx</sup>

25:1—13 Jesus tells the parable of the ten maidens who went to meet their bridegroom with lamps. Five of them took some oil to refill the lamps and waited for the groom with their lights. Five lasses lacked oil, and while they were going to fetch some, the groom came and closed the door behind him and the other five.

Neither Judeans, nor other neighboring people had such a custom. In any reasonable civilization, the bridegroom would need to go through a marriage ceremony, although there existed possibility of concubines. Probably the falsifier had rather loose knowledge about Judea. The wedding mentioned could be an insert, the girls being prostitutes. Indeed, some manuscripts read of bridegroom and bride coming to the event. But a Jew would hardly call prostitutes *wise*. A lighted lamp symbolizes the spiritual awareness taught in early Christian tradition: "Look after your life; your lanterns shall not go out . . . . Be ready."<sup>cccxxi</sup> "The bridegroom was delayed" shows a flock waiting for a delayed Second Coming.

Lk13:25–30 says it differently: "When once the owner of the house has got up and shut the door, and you begin . . . to knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, open to us,' then in reply he will say to you, 'I do not know where you come from.'" The passage typically demands immediate conversion and threatens the impossibility of future salvation: "Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank with you . . . . 'But he will say, . . . 'Go away from me, all you evildoers!' There will weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see . . . all the prophets<sup>107</sup> in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrown out."

The passage embodies a rough approximation of rabbinic tradition, present as well in other religions. Promising forgiveness in the afterlife would hardly encourage discipline; the potential of exclusion from paradise would encourage repentance.

25:13 "Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour, in which the Son of Man is coming."

This repeats 24:42 Some sources read, "You do not know the day," others, "You do not know the hour." The editor of 25:13 used both. The phrase does not appear in early manuscripts.

25:14 "For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them." Despite the coordinating conjunction *for*, the parable is not connected to the prior parable's theme of

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<sup>107</sup> This comparison with prophets is puzzling, unless Luke envisages all members of Christian congregation as prophets; this seems to be the case, since Paul alludes to all or many of them prophesying. The comparison is between good and bad Christians, not between the biblical prophets and Christians.

wakefulness, though it does resume the themes of 24:45–51, leading to the conclusion that 25:1–13 is an addition.

25:14–30 Jesus tells the parable of the talents: three slaves received from their master several talents each; the two put the money to use and have brought the income to their master, while the third slave buried his talent and was punished by his master for doing so, “You wicked and lazy slave! . . . You ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest.” The master rewards the slaves who returned a profit.

Lk19:11–27 is the same parable, but says the ruler went to a distant country to receive kingship. On his return, he gives the good slaves authority. This is not a good parallel, as Jesus did not entrust people with care for the world during his absence; the more so as he was rejected. The parable exhorts Christians to spread the Gospel as they await the Second Coming and seems a mishandling of some earlier story whose object were Jews. 25:29 repeats 13:12: “For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away.” The forger hoped thereby to validate his emendation. Lk19:27 brings 25:29 to a conclusion: “But as for these enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them, bring them here and slaughter them in my presence.” How ill that suits meek Christianity!

The parable shows many faults: slaves who make a profit must always return it to their master, no matter to what position they are raised. Slaves had no property rights; everything they had belonged to their owners. Luke more realistically gives the slaves not property but authority.

The fantastic aspects typical of forgeries are also present. Five talents, even in silver, was more than an average man earned in a lifetime. A gift of thirty talents from a king was very large. Luke mentions giving ten minas to ten slaves. A slave or hired hand might earn a hundred denarii<sup>108</sup> in four months.<sup>109</sup> Matthew’s editor tends to eccentric details, and speaks of talents.

Lk19:17 “Because you have been trustworthy in a very small thing,” the slave receives much. Matthew mislabels five talents “a very small thing.”

Naz8 presents the parables in 24:45–51 and 25:14–30 in a single story: one servant drank up the master’s money, one made a profit, and the

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<sup>108</sup> One mina is a hundred denarii.

<sup>109</sup> Tacitus says Roman soldiers received a denarius a day; provincial workers presumably earned less. On the other hand, Plutarch reports that Galba promised his soldiers 7,500 drachmas each.

third hid the money. The first servant went to the dungeon, the second was ennobled, the third was criticized—a more plausible outcome.

The parable countenances harsh master-slave relations. One may assume that loving Jesus did not approve of slavery. Jewish culture, the rabbis, insisted on humane treatment.<sup>110</sup> Many commandments deal with the treatment of slaves.

Oddly, Christianity's first converts in Rome were slaves. Historians claim they were attracted by preaching equality. Nonsense. Gentile religion did not distinguish between bondsman and free. Many slaves attained high status. Pilate is usually thought to have been a freedman. Yet the Gospels insist on the owner's right to dispose even of a slave's life, although Claudius prohibited killing old or sick slaves. Christianity offered Roman slaves relatively prompt forgiveness without the need for offerings and righteousness, victory over rich oppressors, but not that much as to offset inconveniences of illegal religion. Possession of a peculiar religion of their own was hardly sufficiently attractive to become outcasts. Since the doctrine of eternal life was developed in Greek mythology, Christians could attract only by promises of forthcoming bodily resurrection in this world, and of the triumph of the poor and sinners, not of the righteous. Roman Christians attracted the slaves with different promises than those extant in the Gospels.

The impact of slaves on Christianity was large. In a minor example, the earliest Christians commonly changed their names. Jews did not do so when moving to another sect. But the name change was a rule for slaves, to whom the owner gave a new one. Monks even borrowed the Latin word *cella* (*cell*), denoting, among other things, slaves' rooms in Roman houses.

25:31 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory."

Here are elements from the dubious traditions of Daniel and Enoch. Dan7:13–14 "One like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven . . . . To him was given dominion and glory and kingship." 1Enoch61:8 the Lord of the angels has seated the elect one "on the throne of his glory."

"All the angels" points to a sectarian, possibly Essene, origin: they believed in multitude of angels.

The Christian notion of angels raises not a few questions. Consider four-wing angels<sup>111</sup> at St.John's basilica in Rome, a medieval building

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<sup>110</sup> A master who knocked a slave's teeth out had to free the slave. One can only guess whether that really happened.)

<sup>111</sup> The faces of the cherubs are of cupids of Greco-Roman mythology, the image Raphael made famous. The tradition relates to the Hebrew homonym *keruv* (thus, cherub) having another meaning, a *child*.

supposedly built on the site of a fifth-century temple. The idea of specifically four wings, identified with four powers, not of two wings, was peculiar to Jewish mystical doctrine, which appeared in the eleventh century. Sharing of mystical concepts after millennia of bitter strife between the religions is interesting. Four-wing cherubs and six-wing seraphs are especially popular in Orthodox Christianity, whose theologians strangely enough took a lot from Judaism.

25:34–36 “Then the king will say . . . ‘Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, . . . I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, . . . I was in prison and you visited me . . . just as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers.’”

The pericope may come from a Jewish source dealing with charity, with “my Father” inserted by a Christian scribe. The idea runs into trouble with Paul’s notion, namely that works avail nothing and only faith saves.

“The least of these who are my brothers”: if Christianity is based on faith, how should “the least of these” be distinguished? All of them believe, all are identical. By the time the pericope was amended with this phrase, a Church hierarchy had been already formed, and the *least* defined.

People who help Christians are “blessed by my Father.” Judaism is more generous. Is58:7 “To share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them . . .” Ezek18:5–9 “If a man is righteous, . . . gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with a garment, . . . follows my statutes, and is careful to observe my ordinances, acting faithfully . . . he shall surely live, says the Lord God.”

The phrase “from the foundation of the world” ignores the fact that the kingdom of heaven was at least initially promised to Jews, not to Christians. Jesus never called himself *king*, even allegorically, that title being reserved to God.

25:37–40 “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food . . . ? . . . And the king will answer them, ‘ . . . just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’”

Jesus supposedly tells not only what Christians (*righteous*) are going to ask, but also what he will answer. But knowledge of the answer makes the question senseless. And is it plausible that on Judgment Day Christians will argue with Jesus as they doubt whether he has arranged them on his right correctly?

At 25:37 speaks not of all Christians, but only of the righteous. Since only those who helped others are thus defined, what about the poorest



Christians who can help others only meagerly: cannot they be good? Are the Christian wandering ecclesiasts living on handouts instead of helping the others dispossessed of the kingdom of heaven? Or how about Christian hermits having no physical possibility to help anybody? How often should they help? Is, for example, one time enough in order to enter the kingdom? Here again we encounter an abyss between Judaism as a practical religion and sectarian maximalism. The teaching cannot be boiled down to a single absolute and concrete commandment. Simply as ethical norm, recommendation to help others is trite.

25:41 "Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'"

The insert is aggressive as usual. Is the nature of sizzling fire the same for very different beings: human nonbelievers and a devil who truly believes in Jesus since he knows about Jesus' divinity? Who will control the fire, if Satan and all his demons will be burned in it? Will the loving Christians take their place in hell controlling the fire? Why is the fire eternal? In this case, will the devil, demons, and nonbelievers always exist (though in torment)? Then the universal paradise cannot dawn, at least not in the context of modern ethics, because the inhabitants of paradise would have to supervise the torture of their former neighbors. Normative theology is fairly amended: the hellfire is also prepared for the devil himself.<sup>112</sup>

25:42–43 "for I was hungry and you gave me no food . . ."

Those who refuse hospitality to the Christian ecclesiasts get to hell, regardless of their belief in Jesus: Christians may be given shelter without belief, just through the common morality. Similarly, refusal of hospitality to fellow members of the congregation may be dictated by quite practical reasons of a person otherwise believing in Jesus.

26:3–4 "Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, and they conspired to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him."

The authorities needed a ruse to bypass Jesus' disciples and the crowds he drew. A skirmish would attract the Romans' attention, though the same crowd could lead to a charge if inciting a riot.

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<sup>112</sup> If demons are fallen angels, then perhaps some demons repent. The process of angels turning into demons and vice versa (the demons into the righteous angels) should be curiously dynamic. There should be intermediate stages, like doubting angels who only intend to sin or the angels who sinned little. There should be a certain exterior power tempting the angels (money? women? gambling?)

26:5 “But they said, ‘Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people.’”

The well-known confusion surrounding the precise day and hour of Jesus’ arrest arises here. The synoptics say Jesus was seized just on the night of Pesach, but the accounts vary and cannot be satisfactorily reconciled. The editor did not know that in the Jewish calendar the day starts on the previous evening, and Jesus appeared to be arrested on the first day of the festival. John reports the crucifixion a day before Pesach, though Jesus would hardly be crucified so near the festival if there was a threat of public commotion.

26:6–7 “Now while Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment, and she poured it on his head as he reclined at the table.”

Since the word *messiah* means *anointed* (with oil), the episode suggests that before the anointment in Bethany Jesus was not a messiah. Reclining at the table points to Jesus’ having a meal. Anointment and, in fact, any foreign activity during a repast contradicts Jewish tradition.

It is impractical to pour liquid on the head of a reclining person. During the ritual the subject was sitting, not lying. A jug (several liters) is too much oil to pour on a head. A woman having no assets of her own would not have money to buy a jug of chrism—unless it was simply olive oil, and not precious ointment.

Alabaster vessels cost more than earthenware, but otherwise were inexpensive. Besides, they are fragile. Expensive oil would be stored in a metal jar, one of gold, silver, or copper. If stone, then marble or other rock, abundant in the East. Another explanation is that Eastern alabaster jars were expensive in Europe, both because of their exoticism and transportation problems. This would reveal some foreign composition of the story.

The episode might simply have developed in stages until it had illogical or incompatible parts. Small perfume bottles about 2 inches high were indeed made of alabaster. Such vessels are relatively durable. But imaginatively extending it to the jar size, appropriate to “pouring,” made the scene absurd. Yet anointing with oil was a commonplace part of standard hygiene. Hegesippus praises James the Just who did not cut his beard, anointed himself with oil, and bathed.<sup>cccxxii</sup> Those habits may distinguish him as an especially righteous Essene.<sup>cccxxiii</sup> Jesus suggests, “When you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face.”<sup>cccxxiv</sup> Thus, the story could be the polemic with Essenes, who considered it unworthy to rub oil on the skin, as having harsh skin was a virtue. The writer perhaps wanted to demonstrate Jesus’ abandoning the Essenes.

“At Bethany in the house of Simon the leper” indicates that the account originated outside Judea. Lepers lived separately, not in the villages, in compliance with the Torah.

Simon hardly lived in one of three leper refuges prescribed in the Essenian Temple Scroll. First, the Essenes were not so numerous that their unclean would occupy three villages, especially since they initiated only the healthy. Second, the account does not say the whole village was unclean. On the contrary, Jesus entered the *house* of the leper, not a special settlement.

According to Mk14:8, anointing was a preparation for burial . . . . However, there's no such rite in Judaism in regards to a live person. The “preburial anointing,” however, makes sense as part of a mystical initiation, which included burial in a cave or a sarcophagus. That anointing was preparation not for burial but for allegorical resurrection in a renewed spirit. When the Church interprets Jesus' execution as an actual event, not like an initiation mystery, the anointing becomes meaningless. In the mysteries of Dionysus, where the deity died annually to revitalize the earth, anointing was performed by female deity. Christians, formally accepting monotheism, settled for earthly woman.

Mk6:13 reports that Jesus' disciples anointed to heal, further evidence of the ritual's common meaning, aside from any supernatural significance.

Luke sets the scene in the house of a Pharisee, and the woman is a known sinner.<sup>ccxxxv</sup> Such a woman could never enter a Pharisee's house, and no one would stand the gross violation of custom, a woman publicly touching a man and kissing his feet. Only the women of the family could join the men, and then only to serve the meal.

This image of the woman could certainly mean a slave or wife, but in the given context, Luke probably envisaged a homage at the feet of a deity statue.

Defending the woman's conduct, Luke's Jesus reproaches his host, the Pharisee, who offered him no water to wash the feet, did not kiss him, and poured no oil on his head. To expect such conduct of a Pharisee was ridiculous. The author portrays Jesus as already deified, to serve whom was no shame for Pharisee. Curiously, Jesus contrasts the woman, who has rubbed his feet with oil, and the Pharisee who has not even poured oil on his head. In Matthew's Gospel, woman pours oil just on the head, doing the thing that Luke's Jesus considers very small.

Jn12:1–8 depicts the same moment but omits the sense of anointing. The woman rubs Jesus' feet with spikenard and dries them with her hair. John's episode may be formed from two different stories: pouring oil on the head (in Matthew), and a sinner's weeping at Jesus' feet (in

Luke). John described anointment of the feet instead of the head either from ignorance or to show the significance of Jesus whose feet were equal to the head of a king.

Jesus' behavior is paradoxical. Though he and his disciples went without creature comforts, he accepts the woman's expensive gift, offering an explanation indicative of kingly pretensions. The evangelist shows a divine Jesus to whom worship is due.

Myrrh and spikenard are mentioned as popular perfumes as far back as the Song of Songs, written, by various assumptions, 500 to 1000 years before the Gospels. It seems illogical that taste for perfumes did not change during such a tremendous time. Consider that expensive items are more prone to change of fashion, especially if they are widely available.

26:8–12 “But when the disciples saw it, they were angry and said, ‘Why this waste? For this ointment could have been sold for a large sum, and the money given to the poor . . . Jesus . . . said to them, . . . “You always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me . . . .”

This saying is unusually snobbish; rabbis always gave priority to the needs of the poor. Members of a small sect credited the utmost significance to their leader, at the same time leaving the charity to the society at large.

“By pouring this ointment on my body, she has prepared me for burial.”

Jesus might say “pouring this ointment on me,” but not the bombastic “on my body.” The phrase contradicts the concept of messianic anointment (in Matthew) and honors given (in John). Probably it was interpolated in both rather late to settle the problem of Jesus' messianic anointment only at the end of his earthly path. If the myrrh were used in a funereal ceremony, then, as well as frankincense, it was rubbed on the body, not poured on the head. Ritual pouring of oil on the head was an unction.

“Truly I tell you, wherever this good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.”

The woman has not performed an obligatory ritual, but acted of her own will, which was regarded as merit. The evangelist's certainty of the story's preservation unambiguously points out that this legend was popular at his time. It was probably Luke's legend of a weeping woman at the feet of a deity.

26:17–21 “On the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus saying, ‘Where do you want us to make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?’ . . . When it was evening, he took his place with the twelve; and while they were eating [reclined] . . .”

The Jewish day started with the rise of the first star of evening, though in Galilee the day started at sunrise. The first day of Passover was the day *after* the evening' paschal meal. The Greeks also started the day at dawn, and the Gospel chronology may mirror Greek, not Galilean, customs.

*Seder*<sup>113</sup> is a reenactment of the preparations before the Hebrews' hurried escape from Egypt.<sup>cccxxvi</sup> Jews were to eat quickly, their loins girded, their feet shod, a staff in their hands. The lamb was cooked with bitter herbs and probably not very tasty. Each eats a slice of meat the size of an olive.<sup>cccxxvii</sup> Such haste is hardly compatible with reclining. Rabbis, however, introduced four glasses of wine and prescribed reclining at Seder. The episode is composed well after the Temple was destroyed and the Pharisees came to dominate religious life of the Jews.

Only thirteen persons sharing the meal is unlikely, since they must eat the sheep fully. For each participant to have a very small piece, many people should be present. It would take few people several hours to eat a sheep, which breaks that evening chronology, already compressed.

On the metaphorical side, Jesus appears to eat his own allegory, the sacrificial lamb, which is a rather bad joke. Deut16:5–7 "You are not permitted to offer the Passover sacrifice within any of your towns . . . but at the place that the Lord your God will choose . . . . Offer the Passover sacrifice, in the evening at sunset . . . . You shall cook it and eat it at the place that the Lord your God will choose; the next morning you may go back to your tents." The sheep was to be killed and eaten in the temple, not at home. There was even a list of who would eat each sheep.<sup>cccxxviii</sup> Jesus and his disciples did not visit the temple that day.

The last supper closely resembles a Greek *symposium*, a male dinner party, where they drank incessantly, while eating in reclined pose, and each person gave a speech on some topic. Jesus' enjoyment of banquets and drinking fits the Greek tradition better than a person pretending to be a teacher of the Jews. In Greece, participation in banquets was a matter of politeness, and ability to drink much alcohol was commonly mentioned as a major merit even of rulers.

The supper, as depicted in the Gospels, could not be the Passover *seder*, and, accordingly, the event could not be dated by the evening of Passover.<sup>114</sup>

26:20–25 At Jesus' announcement that one of the twelve will betray him, "They became greatly distressed and began to say to him one after another, 'Surely not I, Lord?' He answered, 'The one who has dipped

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<sup>113</sup> The ritual Passover meal.

<sup>114</sup> After the War, Jews replaced the sheep (which had to be slaughtered in the Temple) by symbolic meal. The writer lived sufficiently late to anachronistically make Jesus participate in such dinner.

his hand into the bowl with me will betray me . . . Judas, who was about to betray him, said, ‘Surely not I, rabbi?’ He replied, ‘You have said so.’”

To share a meal was a sign of friendship, and the editor clearly plays it up. It was indecent to cause harm to someone with whom you dined. Jesus’ response to Judas’ denial is the same as his answer to the high priest during the trial.<sup>cccxix</sup> The laconic phrase is ironic, roughly equivalent to *So you say*. This reply is the evasive *no* rather than colloquial *yes*. In the same sense it is used towards Judas.

26:24 “The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to him by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better that he had not been born.”

Nowhere in Daniel is the Son of Man, the final ruler of the world, betrayed. 26:24 breaks the coherent context.

The composition of the betrayal prophecy’s episode also evidences the forgery. 26:26–28 (Eucharist) is arranged *after* Jesus announced the upcoming deed of Judas. After this prediction, just as if nothing had happened, Jesus divides the bread and pours wine for his disciples. They do not take Jesus’ fate hard either, but eat freely. Both the episode of Judas’ betrayal and Eucharist were inserted, but at different times.

26:26–28 “Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, ‘Take, eat; this is my body.’ Then he took a cup . . . saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.’”

Moses aspersed Israelites with the blood of sacrificed *calves*, calling it *the blood of the covenant*,<sup>cccx</sup> but Jesus is routinely allegorized as a sacrificial *lamb*. Christians, of course, could drink wine (blood) to partake in Jesus’ soul. But many people would not find it different from cannibals devouring their enemies in order to soak up their courage.

In the Dionysian rite of *omophagia*, the worshippers ate raw animal flesh, seemingly an allegory of drawing closer to a divinity by eating him. The Egyptians rejected meat in favor of grain, identified with Osiris, who died in a sown kernel and resurrected in an ear. The evangelist John clearly knew of eucharist as a common pagan rite, when he frowned at the Jews, who did not understand Jesus’ words about eating his flesh.<sup>cccxix</sup> The allegory, if not the rite, exists in Judaism: “Come, eat of my [Wisdom’s] bread, and drink of the wine.”<sup>cccxixii</sup>

The Torah prohibits drinking blood,<sup>cccxixiii</sup> since the Jews believed the soul dwelt in the blood. Moreover, Christianity forbids consuming blood, too, “but we should write to them to abstain only from things polluted by idols . . . and from whatever has been strangled and from

blood.<sup>»ccxxxiv</sup> But the Eucharist proved more important in the evolving tradition, and apostolic opinion was neglected.

It turns out that the apostles drink Jesus' blood shed by him for redemption. Consequently, blood (and Jesus) proves to have been sacrificed to the apostles. Matthew's account was introduced very late when the editor was not constrained in identifying wine with blood.

Luke's Eucharistic notions ("my blood, my body") are absent in the early manuscripts. His description of eating bread and wine is an account of the common rite, not yet transformed into the Eucharist. Lk22:17–19 "Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, 'Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.' Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them . . ." There is nothing of Eucharist here. Unlike Matthew's, Luke's version does not violate logic. He describes the meal first, then Jesus' accusation of Judas. The Didache separates the rite from the meal and, like Luke, oddly reverses the order of bread and wine, suggesting that the wine was plentiful and strong.<sup>ccxxxv</sup> Even in the Jewish Christian Didache, the rite is already infected with pagan traditions, "Break the bread and deliver thanksgivings; but before confess your sins for your *sacrifice* to be pure."<sup>ccxxxvi</sup>

Matthew's account reflects the Jewish tradition of sharing the bread and the cup of blessing,<sup>115</sup> though in the older ritual only one person drank from the cup and there was no idea of quasi-physical communion with God's body.

Unlike John, Matthew oddly dates Eucharist by Pesach, though the incompatibility of this rite with another ceremony of the paschal *seder* meal should be clear to Matthew. John does not connect the last supper with the Eucharist at all, but alludes to it earlier<sup>ccxxxvii</sup> in an episode with no relation to the supper but clearly reflecting developed theology. John presupposes the reader's knowledge of the Eucharist. "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life . . . Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them" relates of experiencing the kingdom of heaven ("bread") through a mystical process. Matthew's interpolator conflated the Eucharist and the Last Supper accounts.

Paul offers the simplest and likely the earliest explanation of the Eucharist: "And when he had given thanks, he broke it [bread], and said, 'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, 'This cup is a new covenant in my blood. Do this, each time you drink it, in remembrance of

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<sup>115</sup> The importance of the tradition is evidenced by the cup's monetary equivalent being forty golden coins, B. Hullin 87.

me.<sup>cccxxxviii</sup> “The cup of the covenant” notion is not intelligible, but so are many other theological structures of Paul. Late manuscripts of Matthew also add *new* to the word *covenant*.<sup>cccxxxix</sup> Another covenant was originally implied: Jesus’ blood shed to turn Jews to the covenant of Torah. Some pagans also drank blood/wine to be in a covenantal relationship with their deity. Justin Martyr mentions bread with a cross on top and a cup (water with wine<sup>116</sup>) used in Mithraic eucharistic ceremonies required for salvation in that religion. What did Paul mean by “Do this, as often as you drink it”? When Jews “each time” repeated, for example, paschal ceremonials in commemoration of Exodus, there was depth of tradition behind them. Repetition, even once a year but in the course of centuries, is naturally described as “each time.” But Christianity had just been engendered, proselytes supposedly partaking in Eucharist for the first time. Paul knew that the newly converted Christians adhered to this pagan ritual, and was trying to read it anew instead of fighting it head on. Thereby Gentiles were pleased as nothing was changed in their habits, and Paul reached his purpose as they worshipped Jesus.

Paul attempts to implant the Eucharist into the Jewish tradition: during the Exodus “all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ.”<sup>cccxl</sup> Paul’s notion that Christ accompanied the Exodus pilgrims would require considerable theological acrobatics later. Only the weight of tradition impeded the creation of new metaphors. However, there already were quite a few of them.

26:29 “I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until the day I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”

*New* wine implies a new spiritual state. But nothing can be new for Jesus if he is an eternal being. Why should Jesus wait for the disciples to attain that state? He is always in it, at least from his rising, when the apostles are obviously not in the kingdom.

Lk22:18 “For I tell you that from now on I will not drink from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” Jesus speaks of the kingdom of heaven as his personal experience, regardless of the disciples (“with you” in Matthew). If we suppose that the crucifixion narrative is a metaphor of an initiation rite, the promise seems logical: as Jesus sups with his friends before the initiation, he says he will drink wine next after the initiation, when he will be in the heavenly state. The new wine symbolizes something to do with knowledge.

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<sup>116</sup> Actually, it was not wine in the modern sense but grape spirit, like Italian grappa or chacha of the Black Sea Georgians.



26:31 “Then Jesus said to them, ‘You will all become deserters because of me this night; for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’”

Zech13:7–9 “‘Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is my associate,’ says the Lord of hosts. Strike the shepherd, that the sheep may be scattered . . . one-third shall be left alive. And I will put this third into the fire, refine them as one refines silver, and test them as gold is tested.” By *sheep*, Zechariah implies all Jews, not the disciples. The prophecy does not apply to Jesus. The events depicted by Zechariah had not happened.

There is an error in logic here. The sheep will be dispersed not “for it is written” so, but it was written predicting the dispersion. The causal relationship is broken. But the writer considers everything correct: the disciples were scattered *because* it was ostensibly prophesied so. The author was all too aware that he created this thesis based on the prophecy, and unconsciously recorded this knowledge.

26:33–35 “Peter said to him, . . . ‘I will never deny you.’ And so said *all* the disciples.”

Was Judas Iscariot there too? Jesus predicted his betrayal earlier the same evening,<sup>cccxi</sup> though the disciples did not react and they let Judas leave to bring the guards. Correcting the known mistake, Jn13:30 makes Judas leave the company.

26:37 “He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated.”

If Peter's betrayal has just been predicted, why does Jesus so honor him? Probably two different sources combine here. The same three disciples witnessed the raising of Jairus' daughter and Jesus' transfiguration.

In Hellenic literature and mythology, the main character of the tragedy must demonstrate suffering.

26:39 “And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, ‘My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; <sup>b</sup>yet not what I want but what you want.’ Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping.”

If the disciples were sleeping, who heard Jesus' prayer? He was arrested and executed at once and had no opportunity to tell the disciples about his prayer. Public prayer would contradict Jesus' own injunction. The saying may be a prayer commended to Christian martyrs. 26:39b looks like interpolation to show that Jesus did not resist God's will and did not lament over what should have been his mission.

26:40–41 “Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; ‘Stay awake and pray that you may not come into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.’”

Even with all their faithlessness, the disciples, would hardly sleep. Lk 22:45 suggests unconvincingly that the disciples slept because they were sorrowful. The saying about the weakness of the flesh is not typical of Jesus and obviously belongs to developed Christianity.

26:42 The words of Jesus’ prayer again. 43—the disciples are sleeping yet another time. 44—“the same word” of Jesus’ prayer for the third time. 45—the disciples are sleeping once more. Three times Jesus prays, three times he finds the disciples sleeping. A scribe mistook 26:41 about awareness for literally sleeping/ awakening and developed the episode. “The sleeping episode” in Gethsemane, senseless when taken literally, actually reflects on some ritual. 26:45 “Then he came to the disciples and said to them, . . . ‘See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.’”

Daniel’s Son of Man is a victorious heavenly figure, does not come into the world, and is not betrayed.

26:47 “Judas . . . arrived; with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people.”

The priests would have sent the temple guard. “Chief priests” shows that the Gentile author thought of many high priests, though there was only one at a time.

26:48 “Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, ‘The one I will kiss is the man.’”

Whether the kiss was a common salutation or was intended only for close friends is not clear. Judas could have just pointed to Jesus, who was well-known, anyway. This odd action hints at his still remaining friends with Jesus who deliberately assigned this task to Judas.

26:51 “One of those with Jesus put his hand on his sword, drew it, and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear.”

Why did a disciple of Jesus carry a sword, while he preached nonresistance? The account might have originated independently of the Gethsemane story, its author supposing a different crowd with Jesus, not the three apostles. To solve this ambiguity, Lk22:36: Jesus advises his disciples to buy swords.

Charging a particular apostle of militancy would have entailed protests of his supporters, a particular community considering him as its founder. Christians preferred to avoid demonstrating to Romans that their

founders were permanently and possibly illegally armed.<sup>117</sup> Jn18:10 polemically specifies that Peter drew the sword. Lk22:38 mentions two swords. The change of a seemingly insignificant detail is a conscious decision. If Peter should not have carried a sword, Luke may have wanted to show that he was not the only disciple armed.

According to Philo, the Essenes did not carry swords. If one of the disciples had a sword, the purpose might be to show they were not Essenes. Josephus, however, reports that the Essenes took a sword or a club on their travels. Probably both Essenes and Christians took weapons on journeys, even if they taught goodness and nonresistance, respectively.

26:52 “Then Jesus said to him, ‘Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.’”

“Who take the sword” may refer to Romans or Jews after the war.

The structure of the saying is common. Noah commanded: “Whoever sheds the blood of a human being, by a human being shall that person’s blood be shed.”<sup>cccxliv</sup>

Job36:11–12 “If they listen, and serve him, they complete their days in prosperity . . . But if they do not listen, they shall perish by the sword, and die without knowledge.” Mt26:52 likely means to show that violence is repugnant to God, and borrowed from popular Job, perfectly suiting a Gnostic bias.

The Essenes were preparing for an apocalyptic battle with their enemies, one of the reasons the Romans destroyed their communities. The Essenes both “took the sword” and “perished by the sword.” Matthew warns his readers against the error.

26:53 “Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?”

Jesus was just asking in vain about the rescue in Gethsemane, still another indication of that episode being foreign to the Gospel. Counting angels contradicts their incorporeality. The phrase “a legion of angels” appears in Jewish literature,<sup>cccxlvi</sup> but *legion* is simply an allegorical allusion to their multitude. The phrase “twelve legions” suggests quantitative measurement. At any rate, would one angel not have been enough?

The Gospels understand angels differently from the Jewish tradition. Judaism knows of eternal angels and those created for a short period. The eternal angels are usually as few as four (equally incompatible

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<sup>117</sup> Roman policy concerning ownership of weapons in Judea and provinces in general is not clear. Greek tyrants often prohibited their subjects to own weapons. If there were any restriction, it would be enforced in Jerusalem during festival.

with incorporeality), while the remaining host represents various powers and actions of change. Judaic angelology was borrowed, however, and even the names were introduced after the Babylonian captivity.<sup>cccxliv</sup>

The evangelists incline to Gentile angelology, possibly known in some Jewish sects, with an infinite number of quasi-corporeal angels—including the twelve legions ready for war with Jesus' persecutors.

26:55 "At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, . . . 'Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me.'"

In Matthew, Jesus comes to the Temple approximately three days before his execution. According to John, Jesus went to the Temple several times, but for a short while only. In Luke, Jesus visited the temple often but is only reported to have taught there at the end of his mission.

Where did the crowds come from at the mount at night? Yet another incongruent insertion.

26:56 "But all this has taken place, so that the scriptures of the prophets may be fulfilled."

At 26:54 Jesus explains his submission and dismissal of the legions of angels as fulfilling the prophecies. 26:56 must refer only to 26:55, but the prophecies do not say the messiah will be seized. Not even the known pseudepigrapha mention it.

The unusual "scriptures of the prophets" points to a Gentile origin.

26:59 "Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for false testimony against Jesus so that they might put him to death."

Only the priests, Levites and those Israelites entitled to marry from the tribe of Levi could judge capital cases.<sup>cccxlvi</sup> The elders would not necessarily qualify, so their participation in Jesus' trial is doubtful. Rabbis' disciples occupied three full rows<sup>cccxlvii</sup>, and that the writer omits them hints at forgery.

Why would the Sanhedrin gather hastily at the high priest's house instead of at the Chamber of Hewn Stones in the Temple? There were seventy-one members of Sanhedrin,<sup>cccxlviii</sup> and no fewer than twenty-three judges had to hear a capital charge.<sup>cccxlvi</sup> Along with the scribes, the elders, and the disciples, how could so many gather at a private home, even a big one?

No tradition supports the high priest presiding in the court, though he did after the destruction of the temple.<sup>cccclx</sup> Josephus, on the other hand, is certain that the high priest headed the trial.<sup>ccccl</sup> The Gospel author can be knowledgeable of Josephus or of after-war Judean tradition.

"The whole council" would not search for evidence against Jesus. He could not be incriminated without the prosecution's witnesses. He had the right to defense, and the deliberation starts with defense.<sup>cccli</sup> Finally, if all the judges voted to condemn, the result was acquittal.<sup>ccclii</sup> Luke is incidentally correct here: at least one judge voted against executing Jesus.<sup>cccliii</sup>

According to the Gospels, the trial took place on Friday, on the eve of Passover or after the festival began. Capital crime hearings were not initiated on the Sabbath or the evening before a festival,<sup>cccliv</sup> because trials took at least two days: sentence was not the same day charges were preferred.<sup>ccclv</sup> In fact, the Sanhedrin did not consider cases on holidays.<sup>ccclvi</sup> Further, the case was not urgent: Jesus preached in the Temple several days,<sup>ccclvii</sup> and the Passover was only approaching.<sup>ccclviii</sup> Dating the crucifixion on the holiday contradicts even the Gospel: "And they conspired to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him. But they said, 'Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people.'"<sup>ccclix</sup>

A trial on the first night of Passover, when the high priest was offering sacrifices in the temple, was impossible. Even John's version gets in trouble, since a day before Passover the priests were ceremonially pure and busy making preparations. Since the Jewish day started at dusk, the holiday preparations started the morning before. There was no time for a trial, certainly not in the night before the cock crowed.<sup>ccclx</sup> Luke says the session started at dawn.<sup>ccclxi</sup>

The odd chronology makes sense, however, if Jesus is readying for a rite of initiation. He would have prayed the whole night in Gethsemane before the rite began early in the morning.

Our ideas about the Jewish legal system are based on the procedures and examples recorded in the Talmud; and the Mishnah, composed nearest to these events, was written from memory and often resembles logical exercises: "And how do we know that the Sanhedrin *consisted* of seventy-one members? Because it is said, 'Gather seventy elders of Israel for me.'<sup>ccclxii</sup> As Moses was in addition to them, so, there were seventy-one."<sup>ccclxiii</sup> The form of a question indicates the facts were not actually known but surmised. The Mishnah speaks about the very distant past. Even its language raises doubts: it is written in Hebrew, archaic by Jesus' time, and employs few Aramaic words.<sup>118</sup> The Talmud reflects the Pharisees' attitude toward jurisprudence, but before the temple was destroyed, justice hewed to the Sadducees' line, which Josephus says was

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<sup>118</sup> Today theological texts are also often worded in antiquated language. Historians, on the other hand, do not usually write in such tongue. Perhaps psychologically, it accompanies descriptions that are not quite accurate.

severe and often irregular.<sup>ccclxiv</sup> Josephus also accuses the Sanhedrin of corruption,<sup>ccclxv</sup> though he offers little proof.

Unlike Matthew's account, Lk22:66–71 describes a short confrontation with the priests and the scribes, where Jesus agrees he is the Son of God. Then he was taken to Pilate for trial. Matthew, familiar with Jewish legal procedure, sets events before the Sanhedrin.

The Romans could have sentenced Jesus for the political crime of rioting, the most plausible explanation for arresting him just before the holy day and for why the Jerusalem priests bothered with Jesus, who preached in Galilee, where they had no more than nominal jurisdiction. The Sanhedrin trial was useful for Christians to clear their relations with Romans. Christians badly needed a founder not in conflict with the empire and made the Romans the unwilling executors of a Jewish court's decision. In John, the Sanhedrin does not judge Jesus. The high priest speaks with him before handing him over to Pilate on a charge of high treason: he allegedly called himself the King of the Jews.<sup>ccclxvi</sup>

Many traditions coincide here. Paul, the earliest extant Christian writer, reports a sentence for blasphemy: Jesus was hanged (not strangled) on a tree, presumably after being stoned.<sup>ccclxvii</sup> Acts reflects the same tradition. It is impossible to discover the original tradition under layers of later development, but Jesus was likely hanged on a tree in the original tradition—by Jews, not Romans. Deut 21:23 “Anyone hanged on a tree is under God's curse” suggested a change, and crucifixion replaced hanging.

26:60 “Though many false witnesses came forward” they found no cause for death.

The priests seized Jesus for specific blasphemies, which had naturally been heard. Why the scarcity of witnesses, and why did they need false ones?

What did false witnesses say, if their testimonies revealed no crime? The laws of religious offence were simple and well known. Either the witnesses were honest people who reported nothing unacceptable, or the evangelist wants us to believe the false witnesses were not instructed. People who gave false testimony were themselves executed, which did not happen. The Gospel account depicts a proper trial, contrary to the Christian tradition of lying witnesses and malicious judges.

There was a procedure of examining witnesses. First, they were assembled<sup>ccclxviii</sup> and warned about the admissibility of various testimonies.<sup>ccclxix</sup> Generally, they could report only what they had heard and seen themselves, about which there was no ambiguity. Then they were led from the courtroom and summoned singly for detailed interrogation, no fewer than eight questions.<sup>ccclxx</sup> The examination of “many false witnesses”

would take a long time and exceed the already dense chronology of the day of crucifixion.

If we're to believe the Gospels' accounts, there was no problem to sentence Jesus for numerous violations of the Law, like desecration of Sabbath, which according to Josephus was a punishable offence.<sup>ccclxxi</sup>

26:61 "[A witness] said, 'This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.'"

A safe bet: no pretender would be asked to validate his claim by destroying the temple. What if it turns to be true? And if there was a hothead, the alarmed crowd would quickly cajole the preacher into abandoning the project. Significantly, to promise to build the Temple by the power of God wasn't a violation. Nor would anyone demand the execution of someone who promised to tear down the temple, yet less if he promised to rebuild it at once. It was all mere declamation for the priests. They hardly feared that Jesus would destroy the temple by supernatural power; if so, they would fear him, not persecute him.

Jn2:19 "Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.'" The logical construction is characteristic of theological disputes. Jesus says he will restore the temple within three days, but *only if* his accusers raze it themselves.

The threat to demolish the temple would be natural for someone who attached no great significance to the sanctuary. The Essenes did not. Any such talk would seem preposterous before 70 C.E., which suggests a late date for the controversy.

The saying may be a literal interpretation of Th71: "I will destroy [this] house, and no one will be able to build it." But Thomas does not mean the temple but more likely the world. Th10 "I have cast fire upon the world." The Gnostics hoped for the annihilation of the world, the devil's abode.

Josephus describes an Egyptian who promised to destroy the wall of Jerusalem by his mere appearance. Later the prefect Felix killed many of his followers, and the Egyptian fled.

26:62–63 "The high priest stood up and said, 'Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?' But Jesus was silent."

All Jesus had to do was respond to the allegations to deny blasphemy. His silence legally implies admission of the charges.<sup>119</sup> If he chose to be silent, what is the Sanhedrin to be blamed for?

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<sup>119</sup> Now it would amount to a "no contest" plea, essentially admitting the charges.

The writer correlates the need for Jesus to declare his divinity at the culmination of his earthly mission, and traditional in Greek culture refusal to answer the prejudiced judges. Isaiah's Suffering Servant was silent "as a lamb before its shearers." Jesus could neither admit the accusations (thus accepting the sentence as just) nor deny them (abrogating his divinity).

26:63 "Then the high priest said to him, . . . 'Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.'"

The Sadducees considered the messiah a man; answering *yes* to the question would not constitute blasphemy.

Calling oneself *son of God* is not a problem in Judaism. Luke implies that all Jesus' ancestors are *the sons of God* as he traces Jesus' genealogy back to God.<sup>ccclxxii</sup> Calling someone a Son of God might be blasphemy from a sectarian viewpoint.

Honi the Galilean, stoned near Jerusalem, is usually recalled in this connection. He worked miracles and called himself *Son of God*. But he was lynched for his refusal to curse King Aristobulus II as his assailants demanded.

Claiming to be the messiah might have been a criminal deception, a tradition possibly reflected in the Talmud, where Jesus is called *deceiver*. Yet nowhere in the authentic text of Matthew does Jesus declare himself the messiah, and there is no hint of messianic militancy, except perhaps when he attacks the temple traders.

Technically the charges did not constitute legally defined blasphemy, misuse of the name of God,<sup>ccclxxiii</sup> though some interpreted the charge more broadly. When Jesus claimed to forgive the paralytic's sins, "some of the scribes said, 'This man is blaspheming.'<sup>ccclxxiv</sup> Although no charges related to miracles were brought against Jesus, references to sorcery could have been excised from the Gospel accounts later.

"But if he has stained the name of God and repented, then repenting, the Day of Atonement and suffering will protect him,"<sup>ccclxxv</sup> means blasphemy was not a temporal crime but an impediment to salvation. In Jesus' time, blasphemy was hardly actionable. The court debate seems impossible, and no witnesses could confirm misuse of a word unknown to them in the first place. This argument presumes that the extant tradition of the definition of blasphemy also reflects the Sadducees' views, whose theology is almost absent from the Talmud.

Jesus could use the name of God to work miracles, but the Jews did not believe he did. They said he healed in the name of the devil. If Jesus



used the sacred name, theoretically known to the high priest only,<sup>120</sup> the Jews would accept him as a prophet, making the trial impossible. Even so, healings would hardly constitute improper use of God's name.

Jewish law regarding sorcery is formulated to avoid convictions. "The one who works a miracle is guilty, and the one who only creates illusion is not."<sup>ccclxxvi</sup>

The charges against prophetic pretenders were declarations, formulated not to lead to sanctions: "The false prophet is the one who prophecies of what he has not actually heard or of what he has not actually been told; such is executed by man. But the one who hides his prophecy, who neglects the words of other prophets, or the prophet who breaks his own words, is executed by the heavens."<sup>ccclxxvii</sup> Since no witness can confirm what a prophet hears from God, proving crime is impossible, and the punishment is left to heaven.<sup>121</sup>

The Talmud describes trial for *minuth*, a word whose meaning is lost but is related to sectarianism more than to blasphemy. A Rabbi Eliezer was puzzlingly accused of *minuth* without any notion of offense.<sup>ccclxxviii</sup> The rabbi himself thought the cause was his socializing with a sectarian, not any particular sin.<sup>122</sup> *Minuth* was not punished by execution.

Persecution of the *minim* could be instituted after the break with sectarians by Gamliel II, but the theocracy was too weak by then. Effective and aggressive measures against sectarians, like execution, required too strong a ruler in Judea with its multitude of religious trends. The crucifixion of 800 Pharisees by Alexander Janneus was caused more by political than religious dissents.

Gamliel introduced *Birkat ha-Minim* curse to drive sectarians out of synagogues. Follows, they otherwise frequented synagogues. There was no persecution. Had Gamliel been able to prosecute heretics, he won't need an elaborate trick of expelling them with blessing which was actually a curse.

The Talmud mentions hostile judges using Christian sacred texts as early as in the time of patriarch Gamliel.<sup>ccclxxix</sup> The Romans appointed magistrates from among loyal Christians after the war. The oppression of

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<sup>120</sup> Consonantal writing is available in Torah; the secret is in the vowels, which is odd, since possible vocalizations are few.

<sup>121</sup> The problem existed for the one formulating his prophecy so precisely that its nonfulfillment can be proved, which evidenced that the prophet had not "heard" what he was speaking about. The Mishnah protects even such people by introducing a loophole, "breaks his own words," (not those of God) a euphemism for unrealized prophecy, punished from heaven.

<sup>122</sup> It was probably only a legend, since as Judeans who joined Christian sects, for example, Ebionites were not tried.

Jews by Christians gave rise to Christian claims of being persecuted by the Jews. Justin Martyr testifies that zealous proselytes to Judaism rather native Jews persecuted Christians.<sup>ccclxxx</sup> At any rate, Christians killed each other in sectarian strife in numbers that dwarf their possible persecution by Jews.

The court would have a hard time enforcing a charge of heresy, which required approval by the Roman procurator. The Roman state's attitude to religion in the provinces was tolerant. When in Luke's Gospel Jesus calls himself King of the Jews (an obviously religious term), the charge<sup>ccclxxxi</sup> becomes confused with Jesus' saying about paying the imperial tax. Yet in Lk22:70–71 the Sanhedrin charges Jesus with declaring himself the Son of God.

Luke avoids the temple riot, driving out the traders, as the cause of Jesus' execution, more plausible than a muddy tax issue.

The high priest's position is clear. False prophets and phony messiahs were abundant, and some accepted them. They incited futile rebellions against the Romans. The revolt of the pretender Bar Kochba resulted in the destruction of the Jewish theocracy early in the second century.

26:63–64 “Then the high priest said to him, ‘I put you under oath before the living God, tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.’ Jesus said to him, ‘You have said so.’”

Possibly Jesus was evasive to avoid dissuading his followers.

Being under oath, it was enough for him to call himself the messiah. Not only the case would have been decided in his favor, but he would have been recognized. In those times, an oath was taken at face value. Jesus did not call himself the messiah because he was not the messiah. He avoided answering the same question from John the Baptist and made no such claim even to the disciples.

The priests' calculations were accurate. Jesus was incapable of perjury. The evangelist confuses issues here: Jesus' evasive answer—“you have said so”—would have been taken as denial, not admission. The charge was not that Jesus called himself the Son of God before the Sanhedrin. Quite the opposite, he was accused of deceitfully calling himself so everywhere, though he could not confirm it before the court of law.

“Mark misunderstood the “You have said so” formula, replacing it with the affirmative “I am.” This answer is impossible since in Hebrew it means the name of God.

26:64 “Jesus said to him, . . . ‘From now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.’”

The statement does not square with the evasive answer above, unless Jesus was not speaking about himself. The author did not distinguish between *son of God*<sup>ccclxxxii</sup> and *son of man*. The editor knew the priests did not see Jesus on the clouds. Such a claim would have raised eyebrows when the events were still fresh in memory. The interpolation may be dated at least a century later than the events.

The evangelist once again quotes Dan7:13–14: “I saw *one like a son of man* coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. To him was given dominion.” The phrase *one like* is omitted. Daniel probably meant *shekinah*, the cloud of glory surrounding the presence of God, something the author misunderstood.

The writer combines the traditions of Jesus as suffering servant, messiah, the Son of God,<sup>ccclxxxiii</sup> and the divine “one like a human being.”<sup>ccclxxxiv</sup>

26:65 “Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, ‘He has blasphemed! Why do we still need witnesses?’”

The evasive reply “You have said so” was, if not denial, then an appeal to the opinion of the judges. But opinion was not evidence, a point of law the high priest certainly knew.

Perhaps, the high priest did not object to “you have said,” accepting the denial. He protests, when Jesus, admitting he is not the messiah, applies Daniel’s prophecy to himself. Yet only the sectarians paid much attention to Daniel.

One who has heard blasphemy has to tear his clothes.<sup>ccclxxxv</sup> The Gospel description is suspiciously close to the Mishnah. The idea that the Gospel preserves the minute details of the trial is far-fetched, especially since none of Jesus’ followers were present. The editor possibly used the Mishnah as a reference, meaning the Gospel account could not exist before the mid-second century.

26:66 “‘What is your verdict?’ They answered, ‘He deserves death.’”

The unwilling Roman prefect would not approve the sentence without formal proceedings. The judges would have to vote in order of seniority. A nighttime kangaroo court outside the temple, without reliable witnesses or formal voting and assessing judgment the day of the hearing instead of the following day, contradicts everything we know about the Jewish legal system.

After Julius Caesar, the Jews had the right to religious trials and to punishment by religious norms, including the death penalty. According to popular tradition reflected in the Christian interpolations in the Slavonic

text of Josephus, Hebrew, Latin, and Greek signboards at the temple's entrances threatened Gentile trespassers with the death penalty, according to Jewish, not Roman, law. The prefect's approval, even if required, seems a formality to align the two jurisdictions. According to Judean law, the execution of the sentence could not be delayed. Thus, Ananias correctly administered Jewish legal procedure by executing James, and his failure to obtain Roman consent was a minor transgression.

The Mishnah, the prevailing legal codex of the second and third centuries, does not hesitate at capital punishment, regardless of Roman authorization.

26:67–68 “Then they spat in his face and struck him, . . . saying, ‘Prophecy to us, you Messiah! Who is it that struck you?’”

Such behavior was impossible at a Sanhedrin trial, governed by strict rules of decorum.

More likely, the crowd, not the elders, beat Jesus.<sup>ccclxxxvi</sup> Lk22:64 says Jesus was blindfolded. Matthew's editor incorrectly presumed the messiah was a prophet.

These people were not wrong in their demand. Being a prophet, Jesus could have answered them, changing his own fate and supposedly the fate of the world.

27:1 “When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together against Jesus in order to bring about his death.”

"Of the people" indicates foreign origin. Matthew would hardly stress such a detail, since he knew the “elders” were Jews.

Why did they have to confer in the morning? They had already rendered the verdict.<sup>ccclxxxvii</sup> We find still another Lucan tradition, where the elders, not the Sanhedrin, accused Jesus.

27:2 “They . . . led him away, and handed him over to Pilate the governor.”

The forger seems unsure of Pilate's position. His correct title could be *prefect* or *procurator* but not *governor*, which Matthew knew.. A prefect a magistrate who acts in the absence of the King of Judea. A procurator is the official Roman representative in imperial territory, in charge of land and finances.

27:3–4 Judas returns the money to the priests and elders. “He said, ‘I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.’ But they said, ‘What is that to us? See to it yourself.’”

Who witnessed and reported the moment?

That Judas helped to commit Jesus for trial was scarcely a sin, provided he knew nothing about the court's injustice. The Gospel says Jesus was offered defense. Did Judas expect some other outcome?

The priests admit Jesus' innocence of blasphemy, and consequently that he was the messiah, which is impossible.

The account could be invented to clear space for the apostle Paul. But Paul mentions twelve apostles, not eleven, though likely unaware of the Acts fable of appointing Matthias in place of Judas.

27:3–7 “Judas . . . repented and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders . . . . They used them to buy the potter's field as a place to bury foreigners.”

The text probably means a field near Jerusalem. Since Jerusalem was full of foreigners, a considerable space would be required. Earthenware was cheap and potters were poor. How could one own a large field? If the city needed the land, why did they wait to buy it with Judas' money?

People who were stoned must be buried on public land, not in their family crypts. Execution by stoning was unusual; at that time, only rare religious offences were penalized thus. Then there could be no separate field for burial of these people, and thirty pieces of silver were spent for a plot specifically for Jesus. Thereby this land became public and suitable for his burial.

The episode seems connected with Socrates' conviction: his supporters offered replacing execution with a fine of thirty silver minas. This amount could be a standard metaphor for the price of a life. One mina is one hundred drachmas, each equal to a day's salary of a laborer. It is a strange anachronism, but at the time of Jesus, a denarius was also a daily wage. The author probably had in mind not local silver coins, but minas, whereas Judas would have received approximately ten-year wages of a worker. There were many versions of the episode with thirty monetary units. According to Slavonic Josephus, the priests obtained Pilate's approval of the execution with a bribe of thirty talents.

27:9 “Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah, ‘And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of the one on whom a price had been set, on whom some of the people of Israel had set a price, and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me.’”

There is no such text in Jeremiah but rather, “The word of the Lord came to me: Hanamel, the son of your uncle Shallum, is going to come to you and say, ‘Buy my field that is at Anathoth . . . .’ And I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel, and weighed out the money to him, seventeen shekels of silver. I signed the deed . . . . Thus says the Lord, . . .

Take these deeds . . . and put them in an earthenware jar, in order that they may last for a long time . . . Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land.”<sup>ccclxxxviii</sup>

Jeremiah speaks to King Zedekiah in a Jerusalem besieged by Nebuchadnezzar to assure him that the Jews will return and need the property titles to be deposited for safekeeping in clay pots. Neither the place, nor the amount matches with the Gospel.

The text is in an altogether different prophecy: “‘If it seems right to you, give me my wages; but if not, keep them.’ So they weighed out as my wages thirty shekels of silver. Then the Lord said to me, ‘Throw it into the treasury . . . So I took the thirty shekels of silver and threw them into the treasury in the house of the Lord.”<sup>ccclxxxix</sup> Zechariah receives payment for shepherding the Jews, an allegory of prophesying, unlike Judas who is paid for betrayal.

St. Augustine admits that the Matthean manuscripts which replace *Jeremiah* with *the prophet* are forgeries.<sup>cccxc</sup>

The text bears traces of various traditions. According to Zechariah, Jesus would be the prophet sent to lead the flock to the slaughter of the Jewish War. Hence the thirty pieces of silver and the potter. Another tradition expected recovery from the war analogous with the return of the exiles from Babylon, Jeremiah’s theme.

Acts 1:16–19 describes the land purchase and Judas’ death differently: “Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out.” Possibly Judas has died of hernia while handling the plot purchased with the money from betraying Jesus. A traitor who reported Jesus when he was unaccompanied by a crowd, if he was indeed betrayed and not simply followed, remained unknown, and the death which Judas suffered led to speculation that he was the culprit. Into the second century, there was no uniform tradition of Judas’ fate. Apollinaris the Younger, bishop of Laodicea accepted Papias’ story<sup>cccxc</sup> that Judas rotted alive for a long time. Gangrene could have led to the rupture in Acts. Papias selected the most authoritative oral tradition, while other versions probably existed as well. Matthew’s account of Judas’ death is hardly more than a myth. Neither Papias nor Apollinaris accepted it.

27:11–14 “‘Are you the king of the Jews?’ . . . ‘You say so.’ . . . But he [Jesus] gave him [Pilate] no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.”

Pilate tries Jesus for high treason, not a religious crime, although *king* may have meant something else to the evangelist. The author of Acts thought the Romans would never prosecute religious crimes; the proconsul

Gallio refused to hear Paul's case and told the Jews to handle issues of faith themselves.<sup>ccxcii</sup>

Somewhat more realistically, Luke makes tax evasion the main accusation.

Jn18:30 Jesus is charged with "doing evil," equivalent to a charge of sorcery in Roman law. That correlates with the tradition that Jesus studied sorcery in Egypt. Yet there were many magicians in Judea then, though they were not actively prosecuted.

Jesus' silence surprised Pilate, since silence was understood as pleading guilty. Or the refusal to answer could be seen as contempt, for which the Roman soldiers would have flogged Jesus.

Either the evangelist was torn between different requirements or left a collection of unharmonized fragments. On the one hand, Jesus should have resembled the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, who was silent;<sup>ccxciii</sup> on the other, he had to say something, to reveal himself at the climactic moment. At 26:63, Jesus is silent, following the prophecy. But in 26:64 he quotes Daniel to the high priest, rendering his silence in the previous verse meaningless. Pilate asked, "Are you the king of Jews?" and Jesus replied, "You say so." Yet at 27:14 Jesus "gave him no answer."

The problems reappear in Luke, where Lk23:6–12 describes the exchange between Herod and Jesus: in Lk23:9, Jesus "gave him no answer."

John probably knew nothing of Isaiah's prophecy. In his Gospel, Jesus speaks freely to both the high priest and Pilate.

27:15–20 "Now at the festival the governor was accustomed to release a prisoner for the crowd, anyone whom they wanted. At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Jesus Barabbas."

For apparent reason, later manuscripts exclude *Jesus*, leaving only *Barabbas*. Possibly the name Barabbas (bar Abba, "a son of a father") was invented to show that the robber was just a common man, and Jews preferred anybody to Jesus. However, Bar Abba was also a proper name.

Calling a robber after a hero in a deliberate forgery is odd. Their crime could also be the same: Bar Abba was sentenced for murder during mutiny in Jerusalem. Excluding the disputable murder, Jesus was probably accused of instigating the commotion in the Temple, known as the expulsion of the traders. Perhaps Jesus Bar Abba is Jesus himself, the Son of the Heavenly Father. Accordingly, the crowd's behavior is understandable when a day ago it was proclaiming *hosanna* to Jesus and now demanded to release Bar Abba—indeed, they were the same person.

The episode could originate from a legend of Jesus (or his twin Bar Abba, perhaps evangelist Thomas the Twin) being saved. Possibly this legend gave rise to the resurrection account and the eyewitness stories of meeting him in different places, as far as India. We would not know what is reality and what is myth in this yarn. Later the episode was crudely inserted into the Gospel, so that a collision was formed: out of the two prisoners (Jesus and Bar Abba), Pilate offers to release one, but in the end, there are two robbers alongside Jesus.

Another possibility, in one prototext, Jesus is called by name, in another—Bar Abba. Although Judeans asked to release Bar Abba, Pilate did not let him go. This makes sense of the Gospel's text,<sup>cccxciv</sup> where two rebels are crucified alongside Jesus; no one having been released. It also explains why the only alternative candidate for release was Barabbas, while there were actually two other condemned persons; no one demanded Pilate to release these criminals, but only Jesus Bar Abba from Nazareth. The Sanhedrin did not condemn more than one person a day,<sup>cccxcv</sup> and the sentence was enforced at once.<sup>cccxcvi</sup> Jewish court decisions did not result in multiple simultaneous executions. The Romans would hardly keep a rebel, already sentenced to death, to crucify him during a festival. On the contrary, they were concerned not to arouse the crowd's feelings during mass gatherings. If the prefect's Roman court sentenced Barabbas, his release was more important for the Jews, since from their point of view he was illegally condemned.

That a crowd wanted a capital criminal released is improbable. Popular robbers of the Robin Hood variety are another case, but just they were most dangerous for the authorities, and the prefect would not offer releasing such convicts. The episode is interesting and certainly meant something but is corrupt beyond comprehension. There is no historical record of a custom of releasing prisoners. The insertion of similar matter at Lk23:17 also points to forgery.

In Luke is a hint of the possible origin of the episode. Pilate persistently offers to release Jesus, but the mob howls for Barabbas. There is no reference to a custom; the crowd simply appeals for pardon. A later editor could conclude that Pilate released Barabbas because of the festival and imagined the custom.

27:23 "But they shouted all the more, 'Let him be crucified!'"

Most likely *they* were not the Jews in general but the crowd usually present at the Sanhedrin.<sup>cccxcvii</sup> Including the rabbis' disciples, the crowd could easily number several hundred people.

Execution for religious offence was by stoning. Crucifixion was reserved for political offences. Interestingly, rebellion (against the existing order), *ναωτεπιίζειν*, meant specifically innovation—possibly, also religious



innovation, thus confusing the evangelist into attributing crucifixion to Jesus.

Unlike ordinary Jews, the Essenes thought of hanging as the execution proper, not as a chance to display a stoned corpse.<sup>cccxcviii</sup> Gentile editors could have confused hanging with crucifixion.

27:24 “[Pilate] took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, ‘I am innocent of this man’s blood; see to it yourselves.’”

Washing the hands means cleansing from unknown murder according to the law. When a body was found outside a city, local elders washed the hands to show that the citizens did not commit the murder.<sup>cccxcix</sup>

Why would Pilate, known for his disregard of Judaism, use the ancient sign of proving innocence? He cared nothing for moral or legal responsibility. Even to imagine the notoriously cruel prefect trying to convince the Jews to spare Jesus is a stretch. He could easily set aside the sentence and release Jesus. If he did not want to sentence Jesus to crucifixion as a political criminal for pronouncing himself king, he could let the Jews stone Jesus for a religious offence. In any case, he would hardly discredit his own authority and open himself up to complaints to the emperor by saying he will send an innocent man to death.

27:25 “Then the people as a whole answered, ‘His blood be on us and our children.’”

If “us and our children” means Jews in general, how could Matthew’s sect accept the verdict? If it means only those present in the court, to condemn them in particular, instead of those who were at the high priest’s or those who reviled Jesus, It is odd. The statement may mean to harmonize Matthew’s Jewish Gospel with the anti-Judaism of Gentile Christianity.

If Jesus came as savior, why are Jews condemned for his death? Even in Gentile Luke’s prophetic song of Simeon, we find, “For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and to be the glory of your people Israel.”<sup>scd</sup>

Jews would never curse their children like in 27:25. The writer in his search for sources has skipped from Deut21:6 in the previous verse to Deut21:8: “Do not let the guilt of innocent blood remain in the midst of your people Israel.”

The saying is modeled on the Jewish court procedure whereby a judge tells a witness, “If an innocent man is condemned, his blood will be on you and your descendants for all generations.”<sup>scdi</sup> Here it means that though the people knew of Jesus’ innocence, they testified against him all the same. Acquaintance of the Gentile author of the episode with Jewish

legalisms likely indicates that the trial narration originated after the Mishnah was circulated in the third century.

The notion was common: “[Paul], shaking his clothes off, told them, Your blood is on your heads, I’m clean, from now on I’m going to Gentiles.”<sup>cdii</sup>

27:26 “After flogging Jesus, he [Pilate] handed him over to be crucified.”

The Jews demanded execution, and Pilate objected to it. The Jews did not ask him to beat Jesus. If Pilate wanted to spare Jesus, why does he have him beaten additionally?

The prefect could have Jesus flogged for refusing to answer, a potentially capital offense.

27:28–29 The Roman soldiers “put a scarlet robe on him, and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand.”

The Roman soldiers in Judea would have known what the local kings wore, but Jesus was dressed as a Roman. Purple dress was typical of the deities’ statues in Greek temples. The “crimson raiment from Bosrah” in which Isaiah said the messiah would come suits the military, not the spiritual, messiah. The soldiers had no knowledge of Isaiah.

To twine a crown of blackthorn is not that simple—it is a rigid and prickly plant. Soldiers lacked the skill of those artisans afterwards twining wreaths for Christian festivals. Jesus’ wounds from thorns had to be less than those of the soldier who made the crown. If the story of the crucifixion and resurrection is a Gnostic invention, things add up. In the mystery rites, the initiated wears a palm crown, and the leaves stand out like the sun’s rays.<sup>cdiii123</sup> The wreath resembles the crown of thorns.

Tacitus mentions (correctly or not) Jewish high priests wearing ivy wreaths. Dionysus wore the same. Victors at the Olympian games were awarded crowns of wild olive.

Lk22:64 “They began to mock him and beat him; they also blindfolded him.” The Jews had such a custom.<sup>cdiv</sup> The evangelists could not have known, since everything happened behind the walls of the praetorium. A rite when the masters beat the initiated was part of a mystical initiation. The rite might imply confidence, obedience, meekness, rejection

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<sup>123</sup> Isaac Mozeson suggests the same etymology for *crown*, from Hebrew קֶרֶן *keren*, ray. The derivation from the Indo-European root *ker*, to *bend*, is less likely, since the crown was an attribute of kings, considered the earthly embodiment of the sun gods.

of the temporal. Such a procedure would explain why Jesus wore a solemn vestment and crown and held a reed during the beating.

The rite may also be why Jesus entered Jerusalem on two asses. Donkeys were used in mystical rites, sometimes as a divine image, but more often as an image of the devil. To ride an ass could signify overcoming the devil and was a part of the initiation.

The messiah could lose a battle or be rejected in this world like Wisdom and still leave with dignity; but he could not to be subjected to a disgraceful execution. Justin Martyr, attributing to the Jewish opponent in the *Dialogue with Trypho*<sup>124</sup> an effective acquiescence to Christian views, does not twist Trypho's opinion to the extent of the possibility of crucifying the messiah.

Imitation of a shameful death could be a part of the initiation ceremony. There possibly existed an account of Jesus' mystical initiation, death, and rising to a new life, quite in line with the tradition of Greek mysteries. Its initial sense was lost and the story was taken literally. That was the source of the crucifixion account.

Jesus' "death" was actually a spiritual experience, which Paul offered to other Christians, not a real event. Yet both Paul and Peter described torture and death on a tree. Probably in their time the story was already interpreted literally, though the original mystical content was not yet forgotten.

In this context the resurrection also becomes clear. The Egyptian mysteries included metaphorical death, entering a sarcophagus, and leaving it after a time. The initiated spent two or three days in the sarcophagus as did Jesus in the cave.

27:32–33 Simon of Cyrene is "compelled . . . to carry his cross. And when they came to a place called Golgotha [which means Place of a Skull] . . ."

If it was a permanent place of robbers' execution, then there was no need to bear the cross, which would have been fixed there.<sup>125</sup> The description is more realistic than John's, where Jesus carries the cross himself. Although it is claimed to be customary, I'm at loss as to how was it possible to compel a man already condemned to death to carry the cross. The cross was at least seven feet tall; otherwise, the convict might touch the ground. Ordinarily they were between eight and ten feet, which made it impossible to carry except on the back bent double. Going through the

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<sup>124</sup> Beside the text, the title is evidence of forgery: *Dialogue*, not *Against* [deleted underlining] *Trypho*, which would be appropriate for a polemical tract.

<sup>125</sup> Unless it was promptly stolen after every execution for valuable wood.

narrow streets in this position carrying a considerable load is an ordeal even for able-bodied Christian pilgrims imitating the last path of Jesus, and probably impossible for a beaten and starved Jesus.

Perhaps the condemned carried not a cross, but only the crossbar to which his arms were bound. That casts doubt on Jesus' reported wounds, which doubting Thomas touched. However, this is also implausible, since the crossbar should be at least 8 feet long, making it almost impossible to move in the narrow streets. If the Sanhedrin condemned Jesus, he should have been hanged with his arms bound together.<sup>cdv</sup>

Criminals were executed where they committed crimes,<sup>cdvi</sup> so Jesus should have been hanged in Galilee, though in some cases the condemned were brought to Jerusalem and punished on the eve of a festival.<sup>cdvii</sup>

Perhaps the Christian author knew the popular Essene tradition that Adam was buried at Golgotha. By the time the Gospels were written, Paul had established the tradition of likening Jesus to Adam.

27:34 "They offered him *vinegar* to drink, mixed with *gall*."

Mk15:23 "And they tried to give him *wine* mixed with *myrrh*."

The Jews believed in humanizing executions: "The condemned to execution is given [about a liter] of wine blended with frankincense so he may lose consciousness."<sup>cdviii</sup> The Romans, however, gave wine to the condemned to prevent immediate death from pain and shock. Their victims were alive sometimes after two or three days, or even a week when they used ropes instead of nails. That Jesus did not want to drink might mean he preferred to die quickly and may explain why he died so soon.

Mark reflects the Jewish custom. Matthew's editor replaced precious myrrh with denigrative gall. The Jews kept fast on the holiday eve, and would have no food with them. John specifies that a soldier brought the wine.

Christians incorrectly assert that Jesus suffered the most painful death. Crucifixion was a common mode of execution in the Roman world, nothing of extraordinary cruelty. Asians employed much more excruciating executions. Later Christians far exceeded the ancient Romans in cruelty of execution. Perhaps the only people to whom crucifixion was the most cruel common execution were Greeks, real authors of Gospels and the early tradition. Jesus' suffering is incompatible with monotheism. If Jesus is an aspect of God, he could not experience feelings in consequence of an external influence; Docetists came up with the notion that Jesus only appeared to suffer. To deal with this obvious problem, Christians asserted that he shed his divinity on coming into the world. Someone has yet to explain convincingly how a deity, pervasive by his nature, could become

corporeal and detach from his divinity, at the same time somehow keeping it.

The usually cited biblical parallel with Psalm 69 is forced: "They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink." Nobody gave any food to Jesus, poisoned or otherwise. The author uses one part of the prophecy and ignores the other.

Ps 69 does not suit the divine Jesus Christians want to see:

"The wrongs I have done are not hidden from you." What sins did Jesus commit?

"Do not let those who hope in you be put to shame because of me." But Jesus glorified God by his crucifixion.

"I have become a stranger to my kindred." Paul teaches that Christians are the new Israel and presumably Jesus' kin.

"When I humbled my soul with fasting, they insulted me for doing so." Nobody insulted Jesus when he fasted in the soul in Gethsemane. Jesus refused the real fast.

"Do not let . . . the Pit close its mouth over me." Jesus believed he would live eternally and promised the Sanhedrin that they would see him at God's side. Divine, he could not conceive of being cast into the underworld.

"Do not hide your face from your servant." If Jesus were divine, he would have seen God's face always.

"Let their table be a trap for them." Jesus preached love of enemies.

If Ps 69 contains a prophecy of Jesus' suffering, conclude he did not strive to redeem humankind by crucifixion and tried to avoid his fate in every possible way.

27:35 "And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots."

The soldiers could not divide the seamless tunic.<sup>126</sup> Priests wore such clothes during ceremonies, but they would look strange on a poor preacher Jesus. In Gnostic and Essene baptismal rites, the initiated wore such a seamless tunic.

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<sup>126</sup> There was a custom of dividing rich man's clothes between servants, even by tearing them, as some textiles were of considerable value. This practice is attested even into the Middle Ages. Marco Polo's biographer, John Baptist Ramusio, relates that upon his party return, they gave a banquet where "they took off those robes [of crimson satin] . . . were by their orders cut up and divided among the servants."

The cloth was so important that after the soldiers took one, Jesus followers found another in which to bury him. Since burials then were exceedingly rich—and Jesus was buried by wealthy man—such cloth is odd. But linen cloth is of great significance in Jewish tradition: it is the cloth of Bar Nash, Son of Man.<sup>cdix</sup>

If Jesus' family were present,<sup>cdx</sup> they should have taken the clothes, not the soldiers. John, who included the relatives in the scene, probably did not know the custom.

Drawing from Ps22:18—"They divide my garments among them, and for my clothes they cast lots"—some manuscripts add, "Let what was spoken by the prophet come true."

Another reference to Ps22, "My hands and feet are *pierced*" is only mistranslation; it is actually *shriveled*.

In the attempt to establish a parallel with 27:34, the Christians distorted Ps22:15: "My mouth is dried like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws." The Hebrew has not *mouth*, but *strength*, which precludes allusion to Jesus' thirst and offering him vinegar.

Ps22 does not suit Jesus:

"I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest." Did Jesus never converse with God?

"They trusted, and you delivered them." Did Jesus think he was somehow not delivered?

"You are . . . enthroned on the praises of Israel." This language does not describe a mob about to kill a savior.

"But I am a worm, and no man." At the height of his mission, could Jesus considered himself less than a man?

"Since my mother bore me you have been my God." And before? Divine Jesus should be eternal.

"For dogs are all around me; a company of evildoers encircles me." Why would anyone give his life to save evil Jewish *dogs*?

"Save me from the mouth of the lion! . . . I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you." Jesus did not want to be offered as a victim and promised to praise God in this life.

27:37 "Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, 'This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.'"

The Sanhedrin heard various charges, including the threat to destroy the Temple and Jesus' calling himself the Son of God.<sup>cdxi</sup> Now it appears that Pilate sentenced Jesus for yet another offence, setting aside the

Sanhedrin's charges which disappeared as different accounts were merged. Since the Sanhedrin's judgment proved irrelevant to the final charge, Jews had no part in Jesus' execution.

27:38 "Then two bandits were crucified with him."

The Christians mistranslate Isaiah: "They made his grave with the robbers and his tomb with the rich," alluding to Jesus' burial not on public land (as it is proper under the Law and probably mentioned at 27:7), but in the crypt of a well-to-do man, Joseph.<sup>cdxii</sup> But Isaiah says, *he gave*, not *they made*.

27:39–40 "Those who passed by derided him . . . saying, . . . 'If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.'"

Had Jesus come down from the cross, people would then have accepted him as messiah. In any case, crowds of people passing by seem unlikely on Friday afternoon, especially on the eve of a major religious festival. The apologists explain that Jesus had a different task: to make people convert with his agony. But a miracle attested by Romans would be still better reason to do so.

27:41–42 "In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, 'He saved others; he cannot save himself.'"

The priests would hardly be at the place of execution, since the festivals required ritual purity, contaminated by contact impure things. And why would the aristocrats, the elders, wait around for Jesus to die?

The elders here speak only about saving, which doctrine is virtually absent from Matthew. The pericope should be dated by the late period when the concept of Jesus' coming for salvation became central in Christianity.

27:42 "If he is the King of Israel, let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe him."

If Jesus came to save, why he did not persuade people by demonstrating his power?

27:43 "He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to."

The term "he trusts" contrasts Jesus to the speaker, impossibly for people who also trust God, like the priests, scribes, or elders.

27:45 "From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon."

The writer attempts to relate the episode to prophecy: "On that day, says the Lord God, I will make the sun go down at noon, and darken the earth in broad daylight."<sup>cdxiii</sup> Amos spoke of Samaria,<sup>cdxiv</sup> not Jesus. The

editor interprets the image of the darkened sun, standard in prophecies of destruction, literally.

Joel2:31 “The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes.” The moon is blood-colored during a lunar eclipse. On the evening of April 1 (possibly the fourteenth of Nisan), 33 C.E., a partial lunar eclipse was visible in Jerusalem. Occurring on an important holiday and seen by multitudes, the event could recall the prophecy of Joel. The pseudepigraphal *Epistle of Pilate* also mentions the moon turning to blood, a lunar eclipse.

Eclipses do not last three hours. A full eclipse lasts no more than three minutes. Moreover, Passover falls on the new moon,<sup>cdxv</sup> while a lunar eclipse requires the full moon; lunar eclipse, as described, may occur on Succoth. Solar eclipse, however, may occur at the new moon, thus on Passover.

The times translated as noon and 3:00 p.m. which are mentioned in the Gospel could be something else such as six and nine o'clock, obviously in solar chronology. Only the Essenes and the Christians used it (another sign of their association) and started the day at sunrise, the modern 6:00 a.m. Other Jews started time from the previous evening.

27:1 Jesus' trial began in the morning with “all the chief priests and the elders” participating, many people. They would not have gathered before 7:00 A.M.

27:2 Jesus was handed over to Pilate. According to the Talmud, the court procedure took several hours, if not the standard two days. If we follow the Gospel and allow for a swift trial by the Sanhedrin, Jesus could appear before Pilate no earlier than 9:00 a.m.

27:11 Pilate's trial.

27:20 The people have gathered.

27:22 Pilate addresses the Jews at about 11:00 a.m.

27:26 The soldiers flog Jesus.

27:27 The whole cohort gathers and scoffs at Jesus for some time, about noon.

27:32 Simon of Cyrene drags the heavy cross uphill through crowded streets, at least two hours, after which the cross is raised, perhaps 3:00 P.M.

27:38 Jesus was on the cross some time before darkness came—at about 4:00 p.m., not midday. They would not have executed Jesus so late since the body could not hang after sundown. Even the Romans refrained



from brazen violations of the law on holidays, avoiding trouble with the crowd.

Luke's account is worse. Jesus was brought to Pilate, who sent him to Herod at the other end of the city who returned him to Pilate; from there Jesus went to Golgotha at the opposite city wall. Evidently, Luke knew nothing of placement of the palaces and did not reckon with the chronological consequences of interpolating the encounter with Herod.

The chronology works without the Sanhedrin trial. The Romans started the day with a 5:00 a.m. breakfast. If Pilate arose early, he could have started a trial by 6:00 a.m.

Contrary to the Christian tradition, the Jews could plead in favor of Jesus, especially if his prototype were a popular leader like Judah the Galilean, which would move Pilate to a speedy<sup>127</sup> trial, over by seven o'clock, and Jesus could have gone to Golgotha by nine and be crucified by ten.

27:46 "And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, . . . 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'"

If Jesus was accomplishing his mission through self-sacrifice and resurrection, God was watching him. Did he fear he might not rise again? Further, if Jesus is an aspect of God, how can he appeal to himself? The Trinity doctrine had not formed yet.

"Why have you forsaken me?" Did not Jesus expect crucifixion? Was he counting on divine intervention to save him? The text must be early, since Luke corrected the problem with "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."<sup>cdxvi</sup>

Sectarians used this citation from Ps22:1 to demonstrate the duality of God, Jesus being one of the two aspects. But since he does not address himself here, whatever is his view of dualism, he does not consider himself one of the hypostases.

27:47 "When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, 'This man is calling for Elijah.'"

Jesus cried in Hebrew, "Eli, Eli!" Who would confuse that with Elijah, where guttural *h* makes a very different sound?

The word play is based on having Jesus call God *El*, one of God's common biblical names. The true name was known only to the high priest and spoken by him only in the Holy of Holies. One would expect the Son of God to use that name at the critical point.

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<sup>127</sup> There was no need for officializing and Pilate would not have to sit at stadium. He neglected Jewish customs and reluctance to altercation with the mob, demonstratively getting rid of the dangerous rebel on holiday eve.

The writer was not acquainted with the tradition that Elijah had already come as the Baptist.

27:48 “At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine . . . and gave it to him to drink.”

27:50 says Jesus died immediately following his appeal to God. How did someone have the time to find a sponge, fill it with wine, and so on? The text may be intended to harmonize with John.

27:50 “Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last.”

Death on the cross comes from asphyxia. How can one shout without air in his lungs?

Jesus hanged in the sun from nine<sup>cdxvii</sup> until noon, when the eclipse occurred. The morning was not warm, less so during an early spring. Neither sunstroke nor dehydration would kill Jesus so quickly in mild weather. Peter was warming himself at the fire.<sup>cdxviii</sup> His sudden death is unusual. Asked for Jesus’ body, “Pilate wondered if he were already dead.”<sup>cdxix</sup>

Did Jesus die of strangulation? Raising the arms above the shoulders while the body hangs free causes asphyxia, though in fifteen minutes, not six hours.<sup>128</sup> The Romans knew that and kept victims’ arms at shoulder level. Jesus carried the crossbar to which he was tied and was crucified in that posture.

Neither blood poisoning nor shock would explain death after only six hours. Blood poisoning would have killed him later, shock sooner. Historians often report victims living for days. The Gospel details cannot explain Jesus’ death. More likely he was taken from the cross still alive, in a coma or otherwise unconscious.

Perhaps in reply to such doubts, John has the soldiers stab Jesus with a spear. But since blood was *running*, he was likely—though not necessarily, depending on the wound—breathing. The late third century Gnostic Gospel of Philip tells the same story. Intense beating could explain some pulmonary liquid in lungs, but not so much as it was *running*, and not a meaningful quantity of blood.

The doubts lived on. The Koran asserts, “They said, ‘We killed the Messiah Isa [Jesus] the son of Mary, the apostle of God,’ but they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them [his enemies].”<sup>cdxx</sup> [This was the belief of the Docetists even earlier. What was

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<sup>128</sup> Although a person in good health might live for hours, Jesus had just been flogged.

that deception, is a question. It could be that Jesus didn't die on the cross, or that his twin Judah Thomas was crucified instead of him.

In the Gospel of Barnabas, "God acted wonderfully, inasmuch that Judas was so changed in speech and in face to be like Jesus. The soldiers took Judas and bound him . . . . So they led him to Mount Calvary, where they used to hang malefactors, and there they crucified him."<sup>cdxxi</sup> Although the author means Judas Iscariot, the person "changed in face" was more likely the Twin, or Judah Thomas.

That the Romans crucified common Jewish criminals alive is a matter of conjecture. Josephus finds it abnormal that Antiochus Epiphanes, a Syrian king who captured Jerusalem in the second century B.C.E., crucified people alive. The problem may not have been cruelty but the gross violation of Jewish law, since prolonged execution could mean corpses left hanging at night, explicitly prohibited in the Torah.<sup>cdxxii</sup> Since execution had to come immediately after the trial, crucifixion makes compliance with the law almost impossible.

Crucifixion is not the only manner of death mentioned. According to Acts, Jesus was "put . . . to death by hanging him on a tree."<sup>cdxxiii</sup> Paul is of the same opinion, and most scholars agree that Jesus' hanging appears in the Talmud.<sup>cdxxiv</sup> The procedure is based on the Torah: "If someone is convicted of a crime punishable by death and is executed, and you hang him on a tree . . ."<sup>cdxxv</sup> Hanging was the way of showing the corpse, not the execution proper, though it could be so after the law was adapted to accommodate crucifixion.

The Temple Scroll of the Essenes prescribes execution by hanging (binding to a tree) instead of hanging after execution. That flatly contradicts the Deuteronomic injunction. Other Jews may have used crucifixion. Josephus reports that Alexander Jannaeus crucified eight hundred Pharisees, but only the Essenes provide theological substantiation.

Whether bodies were customarily hung on a tree after stoning is not certain. The Talmud debates ways to erect a pole for hanging, whether it should be vertical with a bar or propped against a wall<sup>cdxxvi</sup> Such difference of opinion on such simple practical matters is evidence of the absence of a real tradition.

Early Christian authors insist that Jesus died a disgraceful death. Crucifixion had no such connotation in Judea,<sup>129</sup> where popular leaders

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<sup>129</sup> After the collapse of the Jewish theocracy, crucifixion was commonly used with criminals. Rabbi Simeon Ben Gamliel wrote, "Woe to us, as we shall be executed as criminals." (A. de R. Nathan 38.)

were crucified and, besides, was illegal. But hanging after stoning was reserved for blasphemers and idolaters<sup>cdxxvii</sup> and was especially disgraceful. The Romans would not have executed that way, but a Roman prefect might have approved the death sentence of the Sanhedrin, then enforced it according to Jewish custom.

The bloodshed involved in crucifixion could be another factor that moved the Gospel writers to substitute crucifixion for hanging on a tree, since blood makes the execution resemble immolation: “For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you for making atonement for your lives on the altar.”<sup>cdxxviii</sup> John in particular describes Jesus’ bleeding.<sup>cdxxix</sup>

Yet the Gentile origin of the crucifixion account is curious, since the Greco-Roman culture saw crucifixion as suitable for robbers and traitors, but not for a deity. Likely two traditions—hanging for blasphemy, crucifixion for rebellion—are joined.

That in the fourth century, Coptic Christians adopted the specific Egyptian cross *ankh*, symbol of life, not the cruciform, as their emblem may indicate that they did not yet believe in the crucifixion, or that there was no accepted tradition of it.

27:51–52 “At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two . . . . The earth shook . . . and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised.”

The passage points to Jewish sectarian authorship. The authors not only knew the judicial procedure in detail, but also the tradition that the souls of the dead sleep in *Sheol*. *Sheol* does not appear in any other authentic Gospel episodes, even those related to resurrection.

“When the Blessed Lord [Buddha] was leaving, there was a huge earthquake, awful and raising hair on one’s head, accompanied with thunder.”<sup>cdxxx</sup> The earthquake is not a sign of anger over the murder of Jesus, but a sign of the holy one leaving the world. The earth shook again at Jesus’ resurrection.<sup>cdxxxi</sup> Earthquake, thunder, and lightning are the standard background of evil events in Greco-Roman culture. The torn curtain also has analogies. Zeus’ garment was torn when blaspheming Athenians put it on the figure of Demetrius, whom they worshipped.

After eclipse and earthquake, the dead rising and the veil ripping, why did not the Jews repent and believe Jesus? Pt7<sup>130</sup> answers that the priests repented and beat their breasts. Why did they not turn to Jesus and stop persecuting Christians?

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<sup>130</sup> The Gospel of Peter

27:57–58 “When it was evening, there came . . . Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.”

Pilate lived in Caesarea, and Jerusalem received him with a holiday feast. Did Joseph interrupt that banquet? Perhaps contemporaries objected to this episode, and Pt2<sup>cdxxxii</sup> corrects it: Joseph asks Pilate for Jesus' body after the sentencing but before the crucifixion.

Jesus' family, not Joseph, should have taken the body. Another tradition specified that those stoned should be buried in a special public lot, after which the family could take the corpse. The bodies of state criminals could be claimed at once, in which case, Joseph would not have to appeal to Pilate. Only if Jesus' mother was not there, contrary to John's account, anyone could claim the body.<sup>131</sup>

The plot of the friends, relatives and freedmen wheedling the body of an executed person was common. In a close example, emperor Galba's body was given to Priscus Helvidius by permission of the new emperor Otho, who had ordered the murder of Galba.

27:59 “So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth.”

Joseph would have to wash Jesus first. Pt6:4 corrects the mistake writing that he did. Usually women prepared cadavers, though none are mentioned at this scene, though they were present at the crucifixion.

Nothing is certain about the shroud. Some bodies were wrapped in narrow cloth bands like bandages. Some were buried in clothes in anticipation of bodily resurrection. Since rich burials were on the verge of pagan rites, the rabbis insisted on shrouds, as recorded late in the century in Rabbi Gamliel's will.

A notion of “clean” cloth is puzzling. Certainly, we do not suppose that Joseph took pains to take Jesus' body and put it in some dirty piece of textile. Perhaps this was the white tunic of mystic initiation ritual.

27:60 Joseph buries Jesus in his own crypt.

Whether burial on Saturday (Friday night<sup>cdxxxiii</sup>) or a feast day was permitted is unsure. The need to bury before sunset probably took precedence. If Jesus died, Jewish custom would have him off the cross and buried before dusk. Nobody would have waited for Joseph.

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<sup>131</sup> This contradiction may be resolved by speculating that enigmatic elderly man Joseph was indeed Jesus relative, his father. This would plausibly explain Joseph's interest in Jesus, and also enigmatic reference in Talmud of Jesus' high standing: “he was close to the kingdom.” The phrase means government connections (cf. Sotah 49b).

The rabbis could have authorized a Saturday funeral for the family, for whom the burial took priority over the feast. Joseph and Nicodemus would have left the work to somebody else. Even if we doubt that Nicodemus was a member of Sanhedrin,<sup>cdxxxiv</sup> he was of high standing.<sup>cdxxxv</sup> They could have put interment off a day to get things ready.<sup>cdxxxvi</sup> Joseph could bury Jesus after six o'clock on Saturday. The writer seems to be unfamiliar with the details of Jewish tradition.

The Sanhedrin managed two cemeteries, one exclusively for those stoned or burned.<sup>cdxxxvii</sup> Since the priests were concerned that Jesus' body would not be stolen,<sup>cdxxxviii</sup> they would hardly let Joseph bury him elsewhere. Burying criminals outside the special cemetery was forbidden if only to avoid desecrating the crypts of proper citizens. A body could be reburied in an ancestral crypt.<sup>cdxxxix</sup> Therefore, Joseph had every reason to leave the burial to the Sanhedrin.

Burial in a cave did not imply humility: Is22:15–16 rebukes the royal servant Shebna, who arrogantly prepared such a crypt for himself.

27:62–64 “The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate . . . ‘Command the tomb to be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him away, and tell the people, ‘He has been raised from the dead.’”

The request for a three-day watch presumes knowledge of the resurrection promise; yet Jesus spoke of it only to his disciples,<sup>cdxli</sup> and even they did not understand it. The priests did not act on the allegory of Jonah. The Pharisees could have heard it from Judas, but the New Testament does not report that. That Pharisees presume Jesus' resurrection would be witnessed by apostles only, a rather unusual assumption, indicates a late hand.

Why does the crowd of priests and Pharisees have to beg Pilate for a minor favor, since Joseph got the body by himself? The priests had the temple guard, whose jurisdiction was probably not limited to the sanctuary, as well as Gentile servants who had no need of ritual purity during the festival. If the Jews took Jesus alive without Roman help, they could have guarded the tomb themselves. The priests would have objected to releasing Jesus' body to Joseph, who could have taken it anywhere. By the next day, the disciples had ample time to steal the body. The disciples had no problems with breaking the Sabbath.

The episode was likely created in response to accusations of theft of the body.

27:66 “So they . . . made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.”

Why sealing the stone if the guard was there? It is problematic to seal a rough stone. The entrance was usually immured with a terracotta slab. Sealing hardly secured the body. In Matthew's version, the cave was not sealed since the body had yet to be prepared. According to John, the body was already embalmed, so the entrance should have been sealed.

At 27:61, the women sat at the entrance; in Lk24:1, they came after the Sabbath to embalm the body. Why would they come, knowing the crypt was sealed?

ScJm4:6 The resurrected Jesus says that he was buried in sand, which was the Egyptian way of mummification. The author of the Secret Book of James knew nothing of the cave in the late second century.

28:2 "And suddenly there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it."

Joseph managed the stone.<sup>cdxli</sup> Why was an angel needed? In the scriptures, angels do not cause cataclysms. An earthquake accompanying a supernatural being is more characteristic of the sectarians and the Gentiles.

The narration would be interesting, had the writer understood the difference between various appearances of angels. Most simple and easily accessible are the dream visions corresponding to the minimal prophetic power. Then there is daydream encounter, and the highest—acting in the waking. The women had to be prophets of exceptional power for the angel to move the rock in their presence. Besides, such show of angelic multitude for women is theologically suspect, as no person besides Jacob<sup>132cdxlii</sup> and the prophets saw many angels. Most probably, the writer belonged to a sect with developed angelology such as Essenes, among whom seeing angels was an allegedly routine practice. Luke mentions an intermediate version, "a vision of angels,"<sup>cdxliii</sup> a daydream's illusion.

28:7 The angel says "Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee.'" The angel does not count Mary Magdalene as a disciple, characteristically of Church, but not of the early Gnostic communities.

Other manuscripts lack "from the dead." The phrase counters Gnostic arguments that the resurrection was a metaphor of spiritual renewal.

Why was Jesus raised only on Sunday? Who was he during the two days: man (his soul was abiding in Sheol) or spirit (that returned in two days to fetch the body along)? An explanation that Jesus was resurrected immediately, but the people saw him on Sunday only, does not square with his prophetic promise of rising in three days.

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<sup>132</sup> He saw a ladder with angels going up and down.

28:8 “So they . . . with fear and great joy . . . ran to tell his disciples.”

The combination of fear and joy is perhaps unprecedented.

28:10 “Then Jesus said to them [the women], . . . ‘Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.’”

But Jesus did not tell a concrete place, did he? The problem was apparent, and 28:16 clarifies, “disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain, to which Jesus had directed them.” The forger has Jesus use the phrase “my brothers,” typical of the later Christianity.

Jesus repeats the angel’s words to the women.<sup>cdxlv</sup> Does not the divine Jesus know about their meeting with the angel? Would the messiah show himself in a backward Galilean village among a population notorious for its ignorance of Judaism? If, however, Jesus were alive and fleeing Roman authorities, he would go precisely there to avoid Jerusalem.

28:11–15 After Jesus’ disappearance, the high priests bribe the guards to say the disciples took the body away. “And this story is still told among Jews to this day,” a phrase indicating late origin and Gentile authorship.

The author does not say how the disciples could take a body guarded by Roman soldiers. If the guards were sleeping, how did they know who stole the body?

If the soldiers saw the angel, would they risk withholding such information from the prefect? Pt11 attempts to eliminate the problem: the soldiers report everything to Pilate, but the priests ask him not to tell Jews who might turn on the priests. Pilate orders the soldiers to keep quiet. But why did Pilate and the priests not then believe in Jesus? The author of Acts did not know of the episode: Peter tells the unbelieving Sanhedrin, “And [only] we are witnesses to these things [resurrection].”<sup>cdxlv</sup>

“When they saw him . . . some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.’”

John records that only Thomas doubted the resurrection, and Jesus persuades him by letting him touch his wounds. Here Jesus makes a declaration on an unrelated subject, which should somehow convince disciples of his resurrection. Paul also reflects the early tradition that Jesus received authority only after the resurrection, analogous to mystical initiation, while John’s Jesus is divine from the outset.

Suppose Jesus was given all the power on earth, like the Son of Man. Why didn’t he use it immediately to reach the objectives of his advent?



28:19 "Make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . . teaching them . . ."

The very late insert came after the doctrine of the Trinity was developed.

Jesus went only to the Jews and refused repeatedly to appeal to other peoples. Only Paul addressed the Gentiles and specifically stressed his uniqueness in that. Acts and Paul's epistles suggest that many if not all the apostles stayed in Jerusalem. If Jesus told them to go preach to other nations, they were in no hurry to obey.

28:20 ". . . and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you."

This is the most interesting question: what exactly did Jesus command? Mt5–6 reflect standard ethical doctrine not perceivably different from Judaism. Thomas and Luke are likewise nothing new but reflect general Gnostic concepts. Most of Jesus' sayings are part of a widespread literary tradition and are frequently mutually contradictory.

28:21 "And remember, I am always with you, to the end of time."

The promise is at odds with others, including that the disciples will be with him at the judgment. After the end of days, in the World that Comes, the divine will abide among the people, and Jesus would be with his disciples especially *after* the end of time.

The particulars of the resurrection vary from one Gospel to another: the number of angels, their position and words, the circumstances of meeting Jesus, his words and instructions, the actions of those present. The problem was acute from very early. Christian theologians invented the harmony, including in it all the accounts. Adherents of this concept believed that the angels were numerous. Out of them, Matthew relates of these angels, John says of the other, and so on; the angels were speaking lengthily, and each evangelist cites only some part of these words. Such an approach can hardly satisfy modern critical reasoning. Or if events were given a mystical interpretation, the details got passed over. Mark's and John's Gospels, the resurrection accounts are incongruous in style and editing. Matthew's and Luke's accounts have almost nothing in common. The Gnostics were great mythmakers. They often substituted the name of Jesus in existing stories. The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus replicate the legends of Osiris and Dionysus, Gnostic favorites.

Gnostics were not shameless falsifiers; at least they cannot compete in that with the Church. They used myths as unimportant background for mystical doctrines. Here, the Gospels expound the concept of removal from the world in favor of spiritual life (allegorized as crucifixion) and initiation, uniting with God (rising). Whereas the Gnostics used myths generically to symbolize mystic doctrine, the Church offers the fables literally, interpolating a historical setting to give the impression of authenticity or it

adapted the Gnostic attempts to conceal the mystical sense from the uninitiated. In any case, the metaphor becomes reality.

Emasculating of metaphors is quite characteristic of the evangelists, especially of Matthew. At the beginning they borrow the allegories, then literally interpret them, and further supplement them with naturalistic details. Finally, an absurd episode claiming historicity replaces the metaphor. The ascension story is typical.<sup>cdxlvii</sup> In Jewish tradition, bodily ascension symbolizes drawing near to God. Stories of rising to the third or to the ninth heaven were popular among the mystics. A symbolic ascension climaxed initiation. The Gospels offer a body rising in mid-air.

The Talmud tells of Rabbi Abahu's argument with the Epicureans,<sup>133</sup> who said that when Enoch was *taken*,<sup>cdxlvii</sup> he did not die but ascended.<sup>cdxlviii</sup> The rabbi counters with various scriptural examples where *taken* undoubtedly means death. The same confusion possibly plagued Gospel sources.

Jesus' ascension is dreadful in Jewish interpretation. God's departure from the world, when he hides his face, is metaphor of him abandoning people. In this sense, Jesus has abandoned Christians, has deprived them of his care and protection. The events surrounding Jesus' advent seemed apocalyptic to some, though they were not uncommon: kings and rulers came and went, kingdoms rose and fell, war, strife, mass slaughter, rampant villains, subjection to Rome. Many teachers interpreted the law and attracted disciples. Pretenders appeared and arranged performances and took people to the wilderness to show signs. Jesus was nothing new in that background.

Jesus' crucifixion, so important for Christians, could have gone unnoticed. Alexander Janneus crucified several hundred Pharisees; Bar Sheta, eighty witches. Josephus describes mass execution of Jewish ecclesiasts and massacres of their followers. No wonder Jesus' execution, even if it took place, did not attract attention.

The Jews' patience was exhausted: Herod put up statues, Pilate tried to bring the emperor's effigy into the city, Caligula attempted to put his own image in the temple, foreigners desecrated the temple, Pilate robbed the temple treasury. Jerusalem's piety was famous. Josephus said the Jews preferred bending their necks to the sword to letting Pilate erect a statue. Jerusalem, unlike Galilee, was the stronghold of the Pharisees, experts in all the ins and outs of the law. Jesus' teachings offended them.

The advent of the divine messiah, not some military leader, is no light thing to believe. Did God really expect the Jews to take Jesus at his

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<sup>133</sup> In the Talmud this derogatory term refers vaguely to freethinkers who challenge traditional scriptural interpretation.

word? Divine rescuing Jesus from the cross would solve the problem of faith. Perhaps belief was required only of future generations. That is not what the Church wants people to believe.

## Mark

According to Christian tradition, the author of this Gospel is Mark, a disciple of Peter, though there is no reference to him in the text and the title was added later. Eusebius mentions the attribution in a discussion of the lost *Interpretation of the Prophecies of the Lord* by Papias, who says Mark recorded everything he heard from Peter about Jesus. Clement of Alexandria agrees.

Papias' assertion fits the chronology ill. The Gospel was compiled a few dozen years at most before Papias embarked on his quest for the historical roots of Christian teaching. "Mark" was alive, or only recently dead, and Papias could have met him. The inability to pinpoint the real author suggests the Gospel is much earlier, which cannot be corroborated, or that its origin is unknown.

Mark is too short to be an ancient eyewitness account and lacks details, concrete descriptions of circumstances which a companion of Jesus would likely include. Further, the separate episodes are not developed, atypical if they were based on conversation—Mark with Peter.

We can hardly presume that Peter carefully screened the information he passed on to his disciple, sticking only to the theological essentials. Peter would hardly give Mark general descriptions or discrete sayings. Nor can we suppose that Mark abridged the narrative. If he spent years recording Peter's words, rather than screen his notes he would have recorded the smallest details or expanded them. Papias quotes the *Elder*, "Mark only cared about one thing: to miss nothing of what he heard."

If Mark's is an eyewitness account of Peter, the lack of a resurrection narrative is puzzling, although the fact that there was no resurrection could explain it. But then why no emphasis on Peter's discipleship?

Christian scholars cite Papias to bolster Mark's credibility but prefer to ignore Papias' warning in the same source (quoting the *Elder*, commonly thought to be John Zebedee<sup>134</sup>) that Peter adapted his teaching to the requirements of his audience and was not entirely truthful. Peter did not understand Jesus much of the time, and,<sup>cdxlix</sup> Jesus called him Satan. Paul and the Gospel writers criticized Peter for hypocrisy.<sup>cdl</sup> Peter's accounts

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<sup>134</sup> Ireneus affirms that Papias was acquainted with John Zebedee. Even if we accept that John lived in Ephesus after the Jewish War, Papias was still a child at that time. Papias could have met the apostle in the second century, if the Gospel events are dated in the 60s, not the 30s.

would hardly become the basis of the officially accepted Gospel, especially with so many other sources available.

Most scholars think Mark is the precursor of Matthew and Luke, a supposition ill matched with Christian tradition. Mark and Luke, respectively disciples of the Church's two antagonistic founders, Peter and Paul, wrote the Gospels. Considering Peter's dubious authority, Luke would hardly choose the Gospel attributed to him as a source from among all the available prototexts. The notion of Mark's priority may have been the only way to preserve him in the canon.

Did the authors of Matthew and Luke consciously falsify events, yet copy Mark's text unaltered, loyalty precluding correction? Of course not. The texts were not yet revered, and tradition did not uphold Mark's authority. Moreover, as a disciple of Peter, Mark's prestige was slight. Luke says he based his work on many sources. He likely did not basely plagiarize Mark. Was Mark already the authority? Neither he nor any other writer. Was Mark known for objectivity? The miracle accounts could not be less credible. Jewish Matthew probably held Mark in contempt.

An important argument in favor of Mark's priority is Papias' mention of it early in the second century; the other Gospels are unnoted until the end of the century. The argument is meaningless if we assume that Mark and the other synoptics composed at the end of the first or beginning of the second century, well before any preserved mention. Moreover, Papias could have meant the mystical *Secret Gospel of Mark*, regarding Matthew and Luke as forgeries, although almost all scholars agree they were available by his time. Earlier mentions of Mark offer researchers little and could refer to a text unlike the Mark known today. The few references to Mark do not elucidate much: similar passages appear in many prototexts. Beside Papias, no dating evidence substantiates Mark's priority.

"The triple tradition" is the principal support of Mark's priority. First, Matthew and Mark often agree without corresponding to Luke. Second, Luke and Mark often agree without corresponding to Matthew. But, third, Matthew and Luke seldom agree unless they both agree with Mark. In other words, Matthew and Luke begin and end with mostly Marcan matter. When there are variances, one of the synoptics usually agrees with Mark.

Things could run the other way. A borrowing Mark would follow both evangelists where they agree and side with one or the other when they disagree. Identical sections in Matthew and Luke could have come from any one of a great many sources other than Mark. Similarly, the coincidence between Mark's and the other synoptics' sequence of events could arise from his copying them.

Over a thousand minor agreements between Matthew and Luke against Mark, both positive and negative,<sup>135</sup> argue that Mark was not their source. How those agreements occur during harmonization is uncertain. First, why was not Mark edited accordingly? Second, was it important to look for and eliminate thousands of variations in Matthew and Luke even though semantic and contextual contradictions remained? Third, only an expert would note many of the agreements; a scribe would not notice them. Independently, Matthew and Luke would not choose exactly the same wordings different from Mark, their supposed source.

Especially odd are the negative agreements. Supporters of Mark's priority say those episodes were added to Mark later, though no evidence supports the claim. Additions usually harmonize with other Gospels or add significant details. The accounts are absent in Matthew and Luke, so harmony was not the goal. The details are usually insignificant.

Some argue that Matthew and Luke used different versions of Mark, but by the end of the first century, a version of Mark existed with more than a thousand variants from the version canonized later. Written texts circulated slowly. The availability of two such dissimilar versions at the dawn of Christianity is improbable. Besides, if Matthew and Luke derived from Mark, their credibility is even less than suspicious version of Mark.

Only the artificial theory of Q, a document from which many sayings were borrowed can explain the minor agreements of more than two hundred pericopes. That source has not survived either as a manuscript or a prototext, nor is it mentioned contemporarily. Matthew and Luke are said to quote randomly from either Mark or Q, but in either case very faithfully, with no deviation from the source. That is completely implausible. More likely, Luke borrowed some episodes from Matthew, while Mark drew on them both.

Both Matthew and Luke show traces of editing lacking in Mark. But Mark has inserts missing in Matthew and Luke. Mark could have borrowed from early versions of Matthew and Luke before they were edited. All three synoptics were subject to late corrections and amendments in different places and to various degrees.

That in several cases of variance Mark's version seems to be the original does not establish its priority. The variants may have been added to Matthew and Luke much later from other sources. Indeed, Mark may have

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<sup>135</sup> Places where Matthew and Luke coincide but Mark differs. There are two options: either Matthew and Luke both have the same text but Mark lacks it, or vice-versa, both of them lack Mark.

clarified passages garbled by Matthew and Luke, since he grasped their mystical meaning. And a later hand could have edited Matthew and Luke.

Mark's conciseness does not prove precedence, supposing the other synoptics expanded it. Matthew and Luke were amended thoroughly in harmonizing, which Mark escaped for unknown reasons. Originally they were about the size of Mark. If the other evangelists included little from the prototexts, there is no reason to wonder at Mark's brevity.

Mark gives the impression of being dashed off. The narrative is not concise, sticking to the basics, but rather jumbled, disparate episodes enveloping one another, insertions of detailed descriptions.<sup>cdli</sup> The welter, the jumping from one theme to another, the failure to mention significant events and the detailed descriptions of minor ones, all characterize Mark. Thus, Mk1:2–20 contains the whole of Mt3–4, and fourteen verses of Mk1 describe healings.

Mark's chapters usually contain many episodes. If written separately, they would include complete, isolated episodes. Only compilation explains such an incoherent text.

In some cases, abridgement left the text senseless. Jesus warns his disciples of the crucifixion: "And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But . . . he rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.'<sup>cdlii</sup> Only if we know from Matthew that Peter urged Jesus to avoid crucifixion<sup>cdliii</sup> is that comprehensible.

Mark looks like an adapted abstract, a simplified manual, which may explain its brevity and emphasis on miracles. The healing with spittle, like a similar moment in the Gentile Gospel of John, was inserted twice, though both Matthew and Luke lack it.

St. Augustine said Mark looks like a narration of Matthew and Luke.<sup>cdliv</sup> If Mark summarized Matthew and Luke, he did it logically, following one or the other where they disagreed. He artificially linked fragmentary episodes by territory or by time: "that evening"<sup>cdlv</sup> links the healing of Peter's mother-in-law to the healing of many. If Matthew and Luke copied from Mark, why did they preserve the text almost precisely but arbitrarily change its arrangement?

Matthew and Luke supposedly eliminate Mark's harsh commentary on the disciples. But if Mark is later, we expect asperity, since he wrote against the background of the sectarian struggle in Christianity. Recall Paul's estimation of Peter. Mark would also be tougher against literalist apostles if he belonged to a fringe faction within Christianity.

In Matthew believers consistently call Jesus *Lord*, while strangers call him *teacher* and concludes that Matthew created a code missing from

Mark. Mark, an unskilled writer, probably ignored it, unnoticed as it is by most Christians even now.

Matthew and Mark misquote scripture identically. Matthew would not have lifted the patently false citations from Mark, but Mark could adopt Matthew's errors, since his mystical sect probably knew little of the scriptures. Likely though, the references were part of an effort to establish scriptural support for Christianity.

Philologists call Mark's style repetitious, brief, simple, not literary, and primitive, *ergo* early. That Matthew and Luke improved Mark's style is implausible; Matthew at least lacked the skill to do so, as is evident from his halting Greek. More likely, Mark damaged Matthew and Luke through inattention. He copied uncritically; he knew little Greek; like many amateur writers, he repeated the words he knew best and ignored synonyms.

That Jewish Matthew and Gentile Luke wrote in reasonable Greek may mean that their sources were well written in language better than Mark's. Language and style would deteriorate when Mark digested Matthew and Luke, especially in a foreign language.

Mark often introduces explanations like "but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin, for they had said, 'He has an unclean spirit.'"<sup>cdlvi</sup> Such elucidations are characteristic of *précis*, not of original texts. The writer copies without amendment, then explains the text abridged beyond understanding in his own words.

Mark often uses present tense, whereas Matthew and Luke use past tense. Supporters of Mark's priority suggest Matthew and Luke edited Mark's style. But Mark jumbles both tenses as if he knew the language but little. John mixes tenses in much the same way. Such mistakes could arise during careless copying.

Unlike Matthew and Luke, Mark often uses the word *immediately*, perhaps to energize their texts. That the editors would purposely weaken Mark by eliminating the urgency is hardly imaginable.

Mark often begins sentences with *And*. Matthew and Luke do not. The usual argument is that they improved Mark's style. But if Mark copied, he may have tried to simplify the text, replacing transitions with *And*.

Many scholars believe Matthew repeatedly added *my Father* to Mark. But a later editor added that title to Matthew; it seems absent in the original. Even if it were initially present, Gnostic Mark had every reason to abandon it, since his sect saw Jesus as no one unique and would not grant him divinity with *my*.

The longer ending of Mark<sup>cdlvii</sup> includes accounts of the resurrection and appearances to the disciples. Missing from the early manuscripts, the



passage is usually recognized as a later fabrication added to primitive Mark. That is doubtful. The resurrection story appeared well before the Gospels were written. Mark's Gnostic origins more plausibly explain its absence. To mystic Gnostics, Matthew's literal resurrection seemed patently absurd, so they left it out of Mark.

Mark could have been a secret Gospel for a narrow circle of initiated Gnostics. Beside the mystical content, they also needed a historical background and borrowed it from the protosynoptics as a setting, not significantly edited. Besides the synoptics, other episodes missing in Matthew and Luke went into the historical environment of ScMk.

We know of the Secret Gospel of Mark from a letter of Clement of Alexandria. The earliest existing copy dates only from the seventeenth century, but its agreement with Clement's style suggests, though by no means proves, authenticity. A scribe acquainted with Clement's epistles could have composed the letter. That forgery would invalidate this explanation of Mark's Gospel origin.

Many Christians learned of Secret Mark, though in a version sanitized to conceal Gnostic mystical notions from sight. As often happened, the public read literal interpretations of mystical concepts and ceremonies. Even such emasculated texts were further simplified and supplemented by fictions to divert attention from the secret meanings. Mark is much shorter than the canonical Gospels, even allowing for their later expansion, suggesting that much of the mystical teaching was excised from it.

The bowdlerized ScMk, the Gospel of Mark, resembles Matthew and Luke, since it has only what was drawn from Matthew and Luke, plus hints of the sublime mysteries. That explains the kerygmatic, nondidactic nature of Mark. The synoptics agree principally on Jesus' miracles and rarely on his words. The Gnostics would not borrow synoptic distortions of their own writings.<sup>136</sup>

Perhaps not only Mark appears in a purged version. In Matthew and Luke, Jesus says he speaks openly to the disciples, but to others—in parables. In the synoptics he addresses the disciples in parables, too, and, unlike in John, reveals almost nothing to them exclusively.

The Gnostics preserved Mark's text with few changes, uninterested as they were in details and with little incentive to correct. When Secret Mark became widely known as the modern Gospel of Mark, the other synoptics were completely edited and polished, Mark escaped alteration and reached us in characteristically primitive shape.

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<sup>136</sup> Recall that many of Jesus' sayings and parables are distorted versions of Gnostic Thomas.

Clement believes Mark added mystical passages to the existing Gospel. The gaps in the narrative left by editing prove that the mystical accounts belonged to the original version and were not inserted. Thus, ScMk2: “The sister of the young man whom Jesus loved was there, along with his mother and Salome, but Jesus refused to see them” came between modern Mk10:46a (“They came to Jericho”) and 10:46b (“When he . . . was leaving Jericho.”). In the existing version of Mark, Jesus arrives and immediately leaves. The original version contained ScMk2. Why it was withdrawn from the public version is a guess. Perhaps Jesus’ refusal to see the women after raising the young man has the mystical sense of preserving ritual purity or emotional control, or perhaps the women complained about the resurrection. The issue was heated, since women came from Bethany to Jericho to meet Jesus, and he avoided meeting them.

There are other traces of the mystical in Mark: the enigmatic young man in the linen cloth in Gethsemane,<sup>cdlviii</sup> the same young man the women see when they come to Jesus’ tomb.<sup>cdlix</sup> ScMk might be centered around the resurrection of that man. Jesus’ teaching is “the mystery of the kingdom of God”<sup>cdlx</sup> and revealed only to his disciples, the initiated.

Whether Mark’s sect was Jewish or Gentile remains a puzzle. On the one hand, he cares little about the scriptures. On the other, he presumed his audience knew Jewish culture well, which resulted in lacunas filled later filled by parenthetical commentary.<sup>cdlxi</sup> He uses numerous Aramaic words, translation added later.<sup>cdlxii</sup> Most important, Mark shows Jesus calling the Gentiles dogs who should not receive the children’s (Jews’) food. Unless the woman’s Gentile origin was interpolated and *dogs* referred to some other trait, not nationality or religion, this suggests that Mark’s mystic sect was Jewish.

1:1 declares Jesus the Son of God. Apparently Mark presumed a prepared audience, hardly the sign of an early text. The other evangelists establish Jesus’ divinity by the facts (Matthew, Luke) or theological arguments (John).

1:9 “In those days Jesus came from Nazareth to Galilee.”

Mark presumes his readers know about Jesus, probably from other Gospels. Nazareth is in Galilee, one of Mark’s many geographical errors.

3:11 “Whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and shouted, ‘You are the Son of God!’”

It is not easy to imagine the crowd watching with keen interest the kneeling shouting demons.

3:21 “When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, ‘He has gone out of his mind.’”

None of Jesus' reported sayings went beyond the wide stream of Judaism. His homilies would not stigmatize him as a madman. The fact that a layperson began to teach would look only a little strange, considering the milieu of credulity and the multitude of preachers.

Jesus probably performed some ritual, perhaps prophesying ecstatically, possibly in a meditative state, in which he seemed demon-possessed. The description of the rite proper would be excised from ScMk.

6:47–48 “When evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. When he saw that they were straining at the oars against an adverse wind, he came towards them early in the morning, walking on the sea. He intended to pass them by.”

Mark says Jesus did not want to frighten the disciples and intended to pass them by unnoticed. Why? Something is missing here.

7:21–22 To the list of evils at Mt15:19, Jesus adds deceit and pride.

Jews used deceit against their military opponents. The pride of the builders of the Tower of Babel brought them to the sky. In less drastic cases, pride is reproached, though not as a major transgression. “A heart that devises wicked plans” and “haughty eyes” are condemned.<sup>cdlxiii</sup> Mark, like Paul, attributes to Jesus common moral injunctions without any theological content.

7:31 “Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis.”

Sidon is in the opposite direction from Tyre; it is impossible to reach the Sea of Galilee from Tyre via Sidon. Decapolis is to the east of the lake, partially in Syria. The same road hardly led from Tyre to the lake and to Decapolis.

7:33–34 Jesus “put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. Then looking up to heaven, he sighed.”

A classic pagan rite. Jesus cures the blind man similarly.<sup>cdlxiv</sup>

9:13 “But I tell you that Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written about him.”

Nothing of the kind could have been written about Elijah who would come to declare the approach of the messianic era, not suffer.

9:24 “Immediately the father of the child cried out, ‘I believe; help my unbelief!’”

The passage might look like Mark's attempt to encourage doubting Christians, but probably it preserves a liturgical formula or some rite, as when the disciples curiously ask Jesus to increase their faith.<sup>cdlxv</sup>

10:24 “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!”

Why would Jesus, no older than his disciples, call them children? The writer worked among developed Christians, to whom Jesus was already a legend, not a neighbor. “Children!” appears often in late John but not in Matthew and Luke. Perhaps the address was a common address in Gnostic communities, relating to children of God.

10:34—35 A ScMk1 episode came 10:34 and 10:35, the raising of Lazarus known from John. The available material does not permit an unambiguous definition of what the mystics meant by the ceremony of allegorical death and resurrection, though probably it was only initiation. In John Jesus takes three days to reach Bethany, though he was nearby. The period might correspond to the length of the initiation rite.

In Chapter 11, Mark’s tone changes abruptly. Confusion and miracles abound. Naturalistic details missing from the other Gospels appear. The text becomes quiet and realistic, as if only Jesus’ time in Jerusalem was the writer’s main concern. That could be expected from a Gnostic if the culmination of the initiation rite, resurrection to new life, is the subject.

14:51—52 “A certain young man was following him, wearing nothing but a linen cloth. They caught hold of him, but he left the linen cloth and ran off naked.”

A vestige of ScMk. In Bethany, Jesus resurrects the young man, who follows him since, wearing the shroud. With the mystical account removed, the young man seems out of context.

14:58 “We heard him say, ‘I will destroy the temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.’”

Christian theologians usually see this as a prediction of Jesus’ resurrection, where he is compared to the temple; but unless we admit the bizarre notion of his resurrecting himself, *I will build* does not make sense.

An echo of the new temple concept popular among the Essenes and possibly others is more probable. The new sanctuary would be the repentant Israelites obedient to the law. Such a temple would not be “made with hands.”

Mk15:40 and 16:1 mention Salome who often appears in Gnostic texts, but not in Matthew, again hinting at Mark’s mystical bent.

15:40 The sudden appearance of three new characters, two Marys and Salome, who follow Jesus everywhere, can be explained either by summarizing or by the removal of passages from Sc Mk.

15:46 “Then Joseph bought a linen cloth, and taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth.”

On Friday evening, especially before or on the second day of Pesach, Joseph could not buy anything in Judea.

16:3 The three women are anxious; they need somebody to remove the stone so that they may enter the cave where Jesus is buried. But in the country, women worked along with men, and three women could move any rock, even placed by several men (the more so in that it is easier to remove the stone than to put it in place). It seems that Joseph put up the stone alone.

16:5 “They saw a young man dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side.”

The episode differs strikingly from Matthew and Luke: the women meet the man whom Jesus raised in Bethany, ScMk1, not an angel.

Scholars recognize 16:9–20 as a late addition missing from early manuscripts. What the forger added is interesting: an appeal to all nations and the concept of salvation through baptism. Jesus did not postulate that, but Christianity needed it.

The Gnostics understood the crucifixion and resurrection as an allegory of initiation and rejected the naturalistic details and the postresurrection appearances to the disciples. To invent a different ending presented problems, so the narrative simply stops. Or perhaps when Matthew and Luke were conflated with Sc Mk, the synoptics lacked the resurrection accounts.

After 16:14, some editions add, “This age of lawlessness and unbelief is under Satan, who does not allow the truth and power of God to prevail over the unclean things of the spirits.”

Even as late as the longer ending of Mark, the Gnostics were still editing.

16:17–18 “They will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes in their hands; and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them.”

The passage is a catalog of Gentile ideas about people with supernatural power.

16:19 “So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God.”

The disciples did not describe that moment in detail, and Matthew does not mention it at all.

## Luke

Eusebius reports Origen's opinion that in his writing Luke was guided by Paul,<sup>cdlxvi</sup> though Paul knew nothing of the events Luke records, never referred to them or to Jesus' words in his epistles. Luke's text, further, is suspiciously close to Matthew. Acts, also attributed to Luke, presents the idealized Jerusalem church and describes the apostles reverently, unlike Paul.

Luke admits that his work is neither revelation nor eyewitness account but rather a compilation of many available texts. He alternates between voluminous quotations and sketchy retelling. Why do Christians attach theological value to such a compilation prepared by someone unacquainted with the people involved or indeed with Jewish culture?

Luke worked largely from Gnostic texts. He closely follows Thomas, whom he edited only slightly. Some of Luke's drawings from Thomas are absent from Matthew, who probably considered their mysticism repellent. Luke presents matter from other sources, absent from Thomas and less developed than in Matthew.

Frequently identical sayings of Jesus appear in different contexts in Matthew and Luke, and Luke's context is generally more suitable. He was a skilled writer. His narration is more dynamic, while Matthew clumsily develops some episodes and leaves others curtailed and frequently illogical. Luke explains many sayings and parables. Matthew's artless interpolations are easier to spot, where the editing is apparent. Luke wove his distortions into the text with considerable common sense. He was neither a prophet nor a theologian.

While some accounts entered Luke from Matthew, perhaps in the process of harmonizing, most episodes came from other sources; Luke lacks Matthew's stylistic peculiarities. Jesus' sayings probably came from certain *logia*, and Luke provided suitable contexts for them.

Although proto-Matthew may be the earliest Gospel, the modern Matthew may be later than Luke. Luke's version of Gnostic matter borrowed from Thomas seems intermediate; he distorts Thomas a bit, but Matthew twists everything still further.

The heretic Marcion strove to establish Christianity as a new religion without Jewish roots. He used his own Gospel, a compilation of Luke and Paul. According to Tertullian,<sup>cdlxvii</sup> Marcion's Gospel lacked accounts of Jesus' birth, childhood, and crucifixion, which is only reasonable, since those events are different in Matthew and Luke and absent from the prototexts. Marcion's followers believed the Church distorted the Gospels by adding matter to root everything in Judaism. The original form of Luke is beyond our reach.

We do know that Luke wrote for a Gentile audience and according to its norms. His style is reminiscent of Greek literary history, full of conventional philosophical notions. To present Christians as authoritative and worthy of respect, he had to find ancient roots in biblical references.

Luke's Gospel extensively distorts the Scriptures. Everyone misquotes, including Mary, who as a woman was unlikely to know the scriptures. Luke uses scripture to claim that Jesus fulfilled ancient prophecies.

I have chosen to pass over most of those distortions to avoid monotony. They are based loosely on the Septuagint, routinely twisted even against that translation, changing the prophecies' sense to suit Christian requirements.

1:1–4 “Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I too decided . . . to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.”

Luke would hardly undertake to compile a Gospel as a manual for a single newly converted Christian. Theophilus appears nowhere else in the Gospel, which is neither an admonition nor a letter. Luke's purpose is literary work, and he takes license. Theophilus is a literary device, as his name, *God-lover*, indicates. Luke depicted him as sponsor; having one was a matter of prestige.

Luke relied on the reports of “eyewitnesses and the servants of the word,” since he did not know Jesus, “handed on to us”—to other Christians, not to Luke. Of himself Luke wrote, “I too decided,” not “we.” His are common legends, nothing exclusive.

Who were those who undertook “to set down an orderly account of the events”? We will not find out. Before the Gospels, myths about Jesus circulated in popular literature. After the Gospels appeared, part was destroyed and the rest lost, since there was no longer demand for it. The official Gospels are based on numerous well-known texts, not on any single source, as the Q hypothesis presumes. Lk actually lends credibility to the accounts on which it is based, tales which arose to fill in the gaps in the first place.

The term “an orderly account of the events” is also interesting, meaning that Luke did not consider them chronicles. He compiled odd, disorderly prototexts, a collection not much to be trusted.

1:5 “There was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife was a descendant of Aaron.”

David farmed out ritual duties to the heads of clans, Abijah among others.<sup>cdlxviii</sup> No one kept genealogical records for six hundred<sup>137</sup> years. Historians can rarely trace the genealogy of antiquity’s celebrities for more than one or two generations. By Jesus’ time, even the descendants of the high priest Zadok, ascending to the Babylonian captivity, had vanished. No one would know whose descendant Zechariah was.

Why did Luke’s source feel the need to make Elisabeth a descendant of Aaron? The Essene doctrine of two messiahs answers the question. John was the spiritual messiah, a descendant of Aaron, who would come before the military champion and be rejected.<sup>138</sup>

1:9 “[Zechariah] was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and offer incense.”

Common priests did not enter the sanctuary. The priests’ basic duties were usually distributed according to merit. There was little sense in drawing lots. “On Saturday the priests of the leaving shift will say to the coming priests . . .”<sup>cdlxix</sup> The shifts changed weekly. Incense was offered twice a day,<sup>cdlxx</sup> fourteen times per shift. Unless there were many worthy priests, the regular rotation was more practical.

Luke may have based his account on Josephus, who described casting lots for the high priest’s office, but calls it an innovation. High priests were routinely chosen in turn from several families,<sup>cdlxxi</sup> as were other priests as well.

Luke calls Zechariah the offspring of Abijah and his wife, Elisabeth, a daughter of Aaron, but it is Aaron’s clan that offered the incense.<sup>cdlxxii</sup>

1:10–11 “Now at the time of the incense offering, the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord.”

The ceremony is censuring a special altar.<sup>cdlxxiii</sup> Luke is confused. The people were outside the temple only while the altar of incense was cleaned,<sup>cdlxxiv</sup> not during the daily censuring. Being outside would not make sense, since the offering was a public ceremony.

Even if the people remained outside, the ceremony would be finished before the morning crowd appeared. People probably could not pray in different places around the temple, both in the hall and outside. If they prayed outside, what were they waiting for? They offered incense

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<sup>137</sup> According to the revisionist scholars.

<sup>138</sup> The military messiah in this sequence was Bar Kochba.



singly, not as a group. At any rate, food sacrifices were more characteristic of Judaism then.

1:15 “Even before his birth he [the Baptist] will be filled with the Holy Spirit.”

Jesus received the Holy Spirit as an adult after being baptized by John. Paul implies that Jesus received the Spirit only after the resurrection. John has a higher status: he had the Spirit from his birth.

1:17 “With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before” the Lord.

Elijah was assumed alive into the heavens and should return at the same age, not as a baby.

1:18–20 “Zechariah said to the angel, ‘How will I know that this is so?’ . . . . The angel replied, ‘I am Gabriel . . . . You will become mute . . . until the day these things occur.’”

Curiously, Zechariah doubts the angel's prophecy. The episode is modeled on the story of Sarai<sup>139</sup> who did not believe she would bear a child. The odd sign of making Zechariah mute would explain why he told no one about the angel—although he could write.

Of the four major angels, Luke and only Luke mentions Gabriel. Although the angels are mentioned often in the Jewish tradition, in Jesus' time they figured mainly in the pseudepigrapha. Gabriel gets little attention in the Scriptures. It is odd that Luke, knowing little of Judaism, mentions such an uncommon figure. Of the sects known to us, only the Essenes had a developed angelology. The mention of Gabriel could derive from them. In the eleventh century, Judah Halevi identified Gabriel with Holy Spirit and Active Intellect.<sup>cdlxxv</sup> That philosophic rationalization of the Judaic angelology could be ancient and known to Luke.

1:21 “Meanwhile the people were waiting for Zechariah, and wondered at his delay in the sanctuary.”

Zechariah's delay would not be noticeable. His conversation with the angel was short; offering incense or cleaning took a long time.

1:23 “When his [Zechariah's] time of service was ended, he went to his home.”

Since the Jews knew nothing of the exchange—otherwise, the fate of Zechariah's son would have been different—they would have thought Zechariah simply afflicted and therefore unfit to minister in the temple even until the end of his current term.

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<sup>139</sup> The wife of Abraham. God later renamed her Sarah.

1:26 “In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to . . . Nazareth.”

Choosing the sixth month of the Jewish calendar puts Jesus’ birth in December, though the traditional date of Christmas was established only in the fourth century. The tradition may have existed earlier. Luke does not allow for Jesus’ birth after only seven months as some early Christian traditions have it. If correlated with Christmas, Luke presumes Jewish New Year in autumn; it is uncertain when the date moved from the original springtime, but probably not before the second century.

Less likely, Luke refers to the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy.

1:31–32 “And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus . . . . And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David.”

Luke wrote not from revelation but from sources. Only from sources could he know of the angel’s appearance to Mary. Hearsay evidence does not generate trust. Similar legends of supernatural visions of mothers, fathers, or even wet-nurses abound in Greek and Roman history and mythology, as well as in Jewish tradition.

The angel proved incorrect: Jesus did not receive David’s throne.

In Matthew, the angel speaks to Joseph, not Mary.<sup>cdlxxvi</sup> Comparatively orthodox Matthew knew no angel would speak to a woman.

1:33 “He will reign over the house of Jacob forever.”

That is, he will come only for Jews.

1:36 “And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son.”

Mary is a relative of Elizabeth, a daughter of Aaron.<sup>cdlxxvii</sup> Here is another echo of the legend of two messiahs: a warrior from the house of David (through Joseph) and a spiritual leader from the clan of Aaron (through Mary).

How were they related? At that time, Galilee was populated by alien converts to Judaism. Zechariah and Elisabeth, direct descendants of the ancient Jews, probably lived in Judea. The chances are slim that Elisabeth had kin in Galilee.

Luke ascribes Aaronic descent to Mary to solve the well-known problem: since she was a virgin, Joseph was not Jesus’ father and has nothing to do with David. Luke was not alone. The concept of Mary’s royal background became so popular that it reached mainstream Judaism: “She was a descendant of sovereigns and governors, but was engaged in debauch

with carpenters.<sup>cdlxxviii</sup> Rabbi Papa implied that she was intimately involved with Joseph while married to a certain Pappos Ben Jehudah.<sup>cdlxxix</sup>

1:39–40 “In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country . . . and greeted Elizabeth.”

That a betrothed woman left Galilee for Judea alone for a three-month visit to her distant relative is certainly implausible.

1:43 “And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me?”

Why would a priest's wife call the child of her cousin *Lord*? The conversations in Luke are a standard device of Greek literary history with little claim to credibility.

1:46–55 Mary recites the hymn (*Magnificat*) loosely based on the scriptures.

Women did not study the scriptures. On the other hand, revelation of distorted and out-of-context quotations is also doubtful.

A number of ancient manuscripts report that Elisabeth spoke, not Mary, which is probable. In the final version, the elder Elisabeth illogically praises the young girl.

The *Magnificat* is better suited to Elisabeth, praising God for a miraculous act: “For he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.” Mary was not low, but the aged Elisabeth was humiliatingly childless. Further, Elisabeth's outburst parallels Zechariah's, pronounced at John's birth. Christians appropriated legends initially connected with the Baptist. Linguistic evidence supports that view: the style of the first two chapters of Luke is different from that of the rest of the Gospel.

The story of the Baptist's birth is modeled upon that of Samson.

1:56 “And Mary remained with her [Elizabeth] about three months and returned to her house.”

After staying in a neighboring country with her distant relative, the girl returns home four months pregnant. Not surprisingly, critics of Christianity called Jesus “the son of a soldier.” Mary is not yet married. That is essential for Luke, since otherwise she would not have been a virgin. Matthew finds a way out by saying that Joseph had no intercourse with her before Jesus' birth.<sup>cdlxxx</sup>

1:59 “They were going to name him [the child] Zechariah after his father.”

Jews did not name sons after their fathers.

1:60–63 “But his mother said, ‘No, he is to be called John.’ . . . Then they began motioning to his father to find out what name he wanted to give him. He asked for a writing tablet and wrote, ‘His name is John.’”

First, the father would have been asked in the first place, not the mother. Second, the relatives surely knew of the amazing revelation and should have known what name to give the child. Third, who would have thought of naming the child without the parents’ consent? Zechariah would not sit passively by waiting to be asked.

1:66 “All who heard them . . . said, ‘What then will this child become?’”

But the angel told Zechariah what John would become.<sup>cdlxxxi</sup> Had Zechariah told no one anything about the miraculous birth?

1:67 “Zechariah . . . spoke this prophecy.”

The orthodox line of the prophets died out around five hundred years before Jesus. Although we do not know what attitude prevailed at the time, Zechariah theoretically would have been recognized as a false prophet and stoned. At any rate, the prophecy is a hodgepodge of misquoted scriptures, more an attempt to interpret the prophecies than to prophesy.

1:69 “He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David.”

Since Jesus was not yet born, Zechariah expected John to become the messiah.

Ps132:17–18 “There I will cause a horn to sprout up for David; I have prepared a lamp for my anointed one. His enemies I will clothe with disgrace.” The psalm speaks of the military victories of the house of David.

1:71 “We should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us.”

How can this refer to followers of Jesus? How could Zechariah include Christians in that *we*? If this messianic text means victory for the Jews—and it does—it cannot relate to Jesus, at least as the Church sees him.

1:74 “. . . that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear . . .”

“*Serve him without fear*” is inopportune. Though Luke means fear of enemies, Judaism stresses the importance of fearing God.

1:76 “And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways.”

Zechariah the priest should call no one Lord except God, certainly not the man Jesus.

1:78 "The dawn from on high will break upon us."

Late manuscripts use past tense to imply that Zechariah does not speak of his son's future deeds but of his birth. A Christian editor preferred to subordinate the Baptist.

1:80 "The child grew . . . and he was in the wilderness until the day he appeared publicly to Israel."

Zechariah and his grateful wife expelled their son into wilderness?

2:1 "In those days a decree went out from emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered."

Josephus says that Cestius wanted to show Nero how numerous the Jews were but conducted the census only in Jerusalem.<sup>cdlxxxii</sup> There would be no need for that census, if the other, which Luke writes about, was taken only a few decades before. Cestius did not conduct a head-count but rather counted the number of paschal sacrifices in the temple and evaluated the population without taking names or making lists of assets. Josephus' account is highly improbable, since the high priests ordinarily conducted the census, prohibited in scripture.

Without the census, Joseph would have no reason to go to Bethlehem. Yet Jesus could not be born in Nazareth according to messianic prophecy. Furthermore, families lived in one place for generations; simply being born in Bethlehem gave Jesus no right to claim descent from the clan of Judah.

An empire-wide census in Augustus' reign is doubtful, since it would have preserved the actual population. Both ancient and medieval authors claim a preposterous population for ancient cities and states. Significantly, no ancient historian documents Augustus' census reliably, reporting wildly varying dates and numbers, unrounded in an obvious attempt to appear genuine. None of the figures even remotely square with the republican census of 70-69 B.C.E. of 910,000.

Luke's fabrication is odd, since his readers knew better. He claims the count took place everywhere in the Roman Empire, and he wrote hardly a century later. Records and memories would contradict him—except in some place not taxed by the Romans—such as Greece.

2:2-3 "This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered."

Josephus knows of a census in 28 B.C.E. or 6 C.E., but that clashes with Matthew's claim that Jesus was born in the reign of Herod the

Great,<sup>cdlxxxiii</sup> dead ten years by then.<sup>140</sup> Either Jesus was born at the time of the census in 6 C.E., or Herod was searching for him before 4 B.C.E. Luke was unaware of the discrepancy. Some editor inserted *first* to indicate yet another census under Herod the Great. But such frequent registrations are improbable, and history ignores this “first” one.

Changing the date does not solve the problem anyway. There would be no Roman census in Judea under Herod (Matthew’s dating); he was a sovereign ruler. For the same reason, there would be no census in Galilee in 6 C.E. (Luke’s dating) because the tetrarch Herod ruled there, not the Romans. Accounts of the census in other Gospels are even more absurd, including Augustus ordering the census only in Bethlehem.<sup>cdlxxxiv</sup> Luke at least attempted to rationalize the myth.

While local kings paid a lump sum protection fee to Rome, a prefect was engaged in tax farming. Thus, Roman emperors had no interest whatsoever in eradicating tax evasion through registration; that was the business of local tax farmers. Rome might use a census to learn the paying capacity of the province as a whole, but an extremely difficult general census would not be needed. A sample would suffice.

Describing Constantine’s tax policy in the fourth century, Gibbons reports that the only empire-wide tax before him was an excise tax on the production and movement of goods. The poll tax was Constantine’s innovation. Josephus dubiously implies that such a tax was levied in Nero’s time.<sup>cdlxxxv</sup> In the same context he claims a ridiculously large population, which he claims to take from Roman documents. Supposing he lived in Rome and had access to reliable documents, there is no explanation for the wildly inaccurate number. He based his account of the population on rumor, just as he based his account of the census on rumor. Josephus also says Coponius audited the great estates for fiscal purposes,<sup>cdlxxxvi</sup> but an accounting of major taxpayers is a far cry from a universal census. An excise tax was the only practical solution in large territories lacking the administrative apparatus to account for everyone’s property.

Considering the unlikelihood of a poll tax, the story of Augustus’ census is suspicious, and even more difficult to explain is why people had to be present. Either the tax was property-based—no need for the owners to be present— or a poll tax—no need to travel; register where you are. And what about people with property in several towns? Joseph probably had no property in another country, Judea. The requirement to register in ancestral

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<sup>140</sup> This is one of the reasons in favor of supposing that Matthew’s editor confused the two Herods, the Great and Antipas. The mention of Herod the Great in Matt 1–2 is obviously falsified, so that conclusion is quite possible.

hometowns would be impossible—which ancestors?—and impractical—mass movement throughout the empire.

Women had no individual property rights; male heads of the family owned practically everything. There was no reason for Mary to go to Bethlehem. Why would Joseph make his wife, about to bear their divine child, walk from Nazareth to Bethlehem? In any case, a census would take a long time; there was no need to go before Jesus' birth.

Surely Luke knew all that. The tradition of Jesus living in Galilee was so entrenched that Luke resorted to the strained explanation that they indeed lived in Galilee but moved to Bethlehem briefly, where Jesus was born.

Likely the episode appeared after Constantine's tax reform which made the poll tax common and offered some scribe a solution.

2:4 "Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David."

In Matthew, Joseph's family lives in Bethlehem and moves to Nazareth after returning from Egypt; in Luke, they lived in Nazareth and just before Jesus' birth set off to Bethlehem. If there was no census, in Luke they had no reason to go to Bethlehem and establish the messianic connection.

"... descended from the house and family of David." Twenty-eight generations separate David and Jesus,<sup>cdlxxxvii</sup> about a thousand years; between David's capture of Jerusalem to its destruction by Titus,<sup>cdlxxxviii</sup> 1,179 years intervened. A remarkable carpenter with such a family tree! After so much time, family ties would be mixed up beyond recognition.

Late in the first century, Domitian searched for David's descendants and found none, though the families of Jesus' brothers would have been known as related to David.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Talmud relates an episode of a rabbi finding in Jerusalem's ruins a genealogical scroll "of a person conceived in debauch," a transparent allusion to Jesus, B. Yebamot 49. This is a mere legend: the scroll has supposedly passed through fires, was not found by robbers (its reverse side could be used to write on), was by accident detected by a rabbi known from Talmud, and incidentally included information on Jesus' illegitimacy. His illegal birth may explain him not married, since he could have married only another bastard, thus adding insult to injury. The Talmudic view contradicts any possibility of Jesus' recognition as a teacher, since the attitude to bastards was very negative.

2:5 “. . . to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child.”

The angel came “to a virgin engaged to a man,”<sup>cdlxxxix</sup> and his message surprised Mary: “How can this be, since I am a virgin?”<sup>cdxc</sup> Betrothal did not include sexual intimacy, to say nothing of traveling together.

Even if Mary told her husband about the angel, few other people believed her. Even Joseph behaved as if he knew nothing of Jesus’ supernatural origin. Mary bears her child not yet wed, thus illegitimately.

2:7 “And she gave birth to her firstborn son . . . and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.”

Christian historians say Joseph had to go to Bethlehem where his property was. Why did not Joseph stay in his own house or at least at a synagogue, which was permitted?

Caravansaries were large and the occupants slept tightly, yet the text says there was no place in there for two people. With the people staying in their hometowns for property registration, how come Bethlehem experienced an unusually large number of visitors? While the apologists claim Joseph’s family wanted some privacy, this concept did not exist, and staying at a caravansary was not shameful.<sup>142</sup> Two-story caravansaries with separate inn and stables were in rich places, hardly in Bethlehem.

What manger does Luke write of? Horses and camels were beyond the reach of the peasants of rustic Bethlehem. Cows and sheep stayed in pens. Stables could have housed donkeys, but the picture is odd. Luke models on his habitual surroundings, where horses were plentiful.

The birth of a godman by a virgin in a cave, usually in presence of shepherds or wanderers, figures in many cults. Inf Jam says Jesus was born in a cave<sup>cdxci</sup> but hidden from Herod in the manger.<sup>cdxcii</sup> Luke “urbanized” the story, placing the events in the shed instead of a cave, but a trace of the old legend remains in the presence of several shepherds, who would naturally stay out of town.

While the Church of the Nativity, built by order of Constantine, is still preserved in Bethlehem, the attribution of the project to him does not add credibility to the story—he just ordered the church built where local Christians would like to have it.

2:10–11 “But the angel said to them, ‘. . . to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.’”

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<sup>142</sup> Characteristically of the epoch, Roman public toilettes were built as large halls, where people sat around the periphery. Expensive frescos confirm attributing this architecture to custom, not to lack of funds.



Luke says the angel confused messiah and lord, presumably God.

2:13 “And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God.”

In Jewish tradition, angels ordinarily appeared in human guise. Gentile angelology included additional creatures. Some sects, *e.g.* the Essenes, borrowed that approach, atypical of Judaism.

The shepherds were not sufficiently impressed by this vision to leave their flocks and follow the child's family.

2:16–17 “So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger . . . [and] made known what had been told them about this child.”

The adoration of strangers is a standard element in stories of “divine” birth. Matthew substitutes the magi for the herdsmen, an ignominious lot in Jewish culture.

2:22 “When the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem.”

Only Mary required purification. The ambiguous text implies that the family came to Jerusalem for ceremonial cleansing, but it is the opposite, they should have come after the cleansing period elapsed: “Her time of blood purification shall be thirty-three days.”<sup>cdxciii</sup> Where did they stay in Bethlehem for a month? In the stable?

Luke found a likely Jewish rule and used it. Frequently bearing women should have to go to Jerusalem almost annually, in addition to the Passover journey, even if not on other major festivals, keeping Galileans on the road a couple of months each year. Jews may have been careful to offer for the firstborn son, however.

2:23 “As it is written in the law of the Lord, ‘Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord.’”

Luke erroneously refers to, “Consecrate to me all the firstborn; . . . of human beings and animals, is mine.”<sup>cdxciv</sup> He does not know of, “Accept the Levites as substitutes for all the firstborn . . . and the livestock of the Levites as substitutes for their livestock; and the Levites shall be mine.”<sup>cdxcv</sup> One could also redeem the firstborn with five shekels of silver.<sup>cdxcvi</sup>

2:24 “And they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, ‘a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.’”

Lev 12:8 “If she cannot afford a sheep, she shall take two turtledoves or two pigeons, one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering.”

If Joseph went to Bethlehem, he had property there; Jesus was playing on the roof of his house.<sup>cdxcvii</sup> Presumably, such roof was not simply of straw, and so the house was substantial. Joseph was not poor. Only the poor could offer the lesser sacrifice.

There should be no need to bring atonement sacrifice for a sinless birth of Jesus.

2:25–34 contains a standard story about an elderly righteous man, who cannot die without blessing “the Lord’s Messiah.” The identical episode is present, *e.g.*, in Buddhism.

2:27 “The parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law.”

If Luke means circumcision, it should have been done earlier, and in Bethlehem, not in the temple.

2:33 “And the child’s father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him [by Simeon].”

Had Mary forgotten what the angel told her at 1:31–33?

2:34–35 “Then Simeon . . . said . . . ‘This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel . . . and a sword will pierce your own soul too.’”

*A sword . . . too* may indicate a different version of Jesus’ execution, but the mention is otherwise enigmatic. More probably, it related originally to John, who was beheaded.

2:36–37 “There was also a prophet, Anna . . . of the tribe of Asher. She . . . lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four.”

Woman prophets are atypical of Judaism, though more common among Gentiles than male prophets. She lived not simply 84 years, but 77 years without husband, and 7 years with him, surely not a coincidental numbers. The same 7 and 77 figures in Mt18:21–22. Dan9:24–27 also mentions seventy periods of seven years. This number was important for Luke: he traces Jesus’ genealogy for 77 generations.

2:41 “Now every year his [Jesus] parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover.”

In Matthew, they were hiding from Herod in Egypt in the beginning, and then avoided appearing in Jerusalem being afraid of Archelaus.

Since Nazareth was about sixty miles from Jerusalem, the family may hardly have made the trip annually, especially with a small child or few children. However, the story appears elsewhere.<sup>cdxcviii</sup>

2:43–44 on their way back from Jerusalem, Jesus' parents lost him and did not see him for a day. Such negligence as regards someone whose divinity was known to them is odd.

2:45–46 “When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. After three days they found him in the temple.”

Where could the parents have looked for Jesus in Jerusalem for three days, if not in the Temple to begin with?

2:47 the parents of 12-year old Jesus return to Jerusalem and find him talking with rabbis in the Temple, “And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.”

We do not know whether Jesus' mother could enter the men's section or whether children under thirteen were admitted. The conversation likely would not take place in the outer courtyard, since he was “sitting among the teachers,”<sup>cdxcix</sup> thus inside the temple.

Characteristically, Luke's knowledge of Judaism was not sufficient to invent what exactly Jesus said to astonish the rabbis. Luke got confused even earlier, “they found him in the Temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.”<sup>d</sup> and “All who heard him were amazed at . . . his answers.”<sup>di</sup> So, was Jesus asking questions or answering them? Even rabbis' disciples had to ask permission to offer interpretations.

Josephus tells a similar story about himself: “At the age of fourteen I received general recognition for my love of letters, so that the chief priests and elders often came to me for precise information on some particulars of our laws.” Though seemingly implausible, Josephus' story may be true. Aristobulus became the high priest at seventeen.<sup>dii</sup> But Jesus was twelve, below the age of *bar mitzvah*.<sup>143</sup> perhaps, attempting to improve Josephus' account, Luke unwittingly turned it from implausible into incredible.

2:49–50 ““Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?” But they did not understand what he said to them.”

After the angel's visit and the virgin birth they did not understand?

2:51 “His mother treasured all these things in her heart.”

But at 2:50 she did not understand and likely disregarded what Jesus said.

2:52 “And Jesus increased in wisdom.”

Could a godman's wisdom increase, or is it absolute from the beginning?

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<sup>143</sup> Son of the commandment, a ceremony by which a thirteen-year old boy becomes religiously of age.

3:1–2 “In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas . . . .”

Luke boosts his credibility by numerous chronological references. Tiberius became emperor in 14 C.E., so the events fell in 28–29, which agrees with the rule of Herod Antipas (4–39) and Philip (4–34).

We know nothing reliable about Lysanias. The ethnarch<sup>144</sup> Archelaus ruled at the same time as Herod and Philip, and other tetrarchs are not mentioned.<sup>diii</sup> Lysanias, son of Ptolemy, lived during the rule of Herod the Great. During the rule of Augustus, when Varro was governor of Syria, Abranitide was taken away from Lysanias and given to Herod the Great.<sup>dvi</sup> Lysanias’ kingdom was given to Agrippa in 52.<sup>dv</sup>

Recently archaeologists excavating at Abilene conveniently found an inscription “tetrarch Lysanias,” which was immediately dated to the required period of the beginning of the first century. Both the finding and its dating raise doubts, and educated historian Josephus hardly erred for seventy years in dating a local ruler. Rather, there is an error in Luke’s account.

The Christian scholars date Pilate’s rule by 26–36 C.E. to agree with Luke; but Tiberius appointed Pilate prefect of Judea at once upon inauguration,<sup>dvi</sup> that is, about 14 C.E., not 26 C.E.

Ananias and Jonathan are mentioned as high priests about the year 52.<sup>dvii</sup> According to *Ant*, however, Ananias, son of Nebedaeus, held office from 47 C.E. to 59 C.E., while Jonathan held office in 37 C.E. Josephus’ report is cast into doubt.

Were there two high priests at the same time? *War*2:20:4 recalls “Sapphias, one of the high priests” in the plural, though not in *Ant*. Luke hardly reserved the title for lifetime for every person who held that office, since there were probably more than two ex-high priests living at any given time. The Gospel account is based on Josephus or his prototext. Probably Luke thought two high priests held office simultaneously.

Caiaphas (18–37) became high priest after his father-in-law Ananias, who held office from 6 C.E. to 15 C.E. Luke’s arrangement suggests he was consulting a written chronology or narrative and mentioned them in the same order.

The names are strange. All other high priests are known by their and their father’s names, *e.g.*, Jesus son of See. Only these two lack the family reference.

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<sup>144</sup> National ruler, inferior to a king.

The chronology of the pericope dates the Baptist's mission, "the word of God came to John son of Zechariah."<sup>dviii</sup>

Unlike Matthew, Luke does not say that Jesus was baptized in John's presence.<sup>dix</sup> Jesus' baptism occurs after John's imprisonment but before his execution, after which Jesus preached either about a year (synoptics) or close to four years (John). If John the Baptist started preaching in 29 C.E., he was imprisoned not before 30 C.E., the earliest possible date of Jesus' baptism.

The NT does not say how long before Jesus' baptism John preached. In 1:21 Pharisees from Jerusalem ask John who he is. "The next day he [John] saw Jesus coming toward him." Probably the Baptist had not preached long before he met Jesus, since the Pharisees had just learned of him, if we trust the evangelist's account. We then suppose Jesus was baptized and started his ministry in 30–31 C.E. The crucifixion came between 31 and 35 C.E.

3:23 "Jesus was about thirty years old when he began his work."

If he began ministering in 30 C.E., he could not have been born in the time of Herod the Great, who died in 4 B.C.E. Other problems also arise, namely the slaughter of the innocents and Herod's meeting with the magi in Jerusalem.

Jesus could not have been born the same year as Quirinius' census in 6 C.E. If he were born that year, he would have started his ministry in 36 C.E. at the age of thirty. Then Pilate, who was in the office only until 36, could not have condemned him, though he could have possibly have done so if Jesus were a little younger than thirty. Matthew's record, however, dates Jesus' birth during the reign of Herod the Great. The lunar data supplied by the evangelists do not suggest the crucifixion in 36 C.E. Working from Quirinius' census in 6 C.E., John was twenty-three in 29 C.E., when he began preaching, though at that age, he would hardly be thought an authoritative teacher.

Jesus was told that the temple had been under construction for forty-six years.<sup>dx</sup> The reconstruction began in 19–20 B.C.E. under Herod the Great, so the exchange took place *ca.* 27 C.E. In John, Jesus was baptized long before; in Luke, he would not be baptized for at least two more years.

None of this is positive evidence. The confusion is strange if the apostles wrote soon after the crucifixion, but quite understandable if a non-Jewish author described events a century old. Luke compared the prototexts, each dating events differently, though in approximately the same period. Contradictions redoubled, chronology was not absolute, measuring time by events—the birth of the emperor, the beginning of John's teaching, *etc.*

In Luke Jesus is *about thirty*, in John he is *not yet fifty*. The evangelists may have drawn on a biblical tradition: “. . . from thirty years old up to fifty years old, all who qualify to do work relating to the tent of meeting.”<sup>dx1</sup> Thirty was the minimum and fifty the maximum age to take up priestly work. Luke chose the lower boundary, John, the upper. John’s view may reflect Jewish sectarians. Consider Ps 55:23 “The bloodthirsty and treacherous shall not live out half their days.” The Talmud concludes they will live thirty-three or thirty-four years.<sup>dx2</sup> Though Gemara<sup>145</sup> appeared much later than the Gospels, a similar commentary on the psalm probably existed long before.<sup>146</sup> Jewish Christians would have said Jesus was older.

Thirty as the age at which mature people undertake a mission is common. That was said of Horus, and Joseph came to power in Egypt at thirty.

3:2 “The word of God came to John son of Zechariah”

Only at this moment, the Holy Spirit empowered John to prophesy and communicate with God and the angels; but “even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit.”<sup>dx3</sup>

3:4—6 Luke quotes Is 40:3—6: “Make his paths straight.”

Besides using a mistranslation, Luke also alters Isaiah for his convenience: “And all flesh shall see the *salvation* of God.” Is 40:5 “Then the *glory* of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it.” Luke replaces *glory*, God’s perceivable presence, with the more Jesus-specific *salvation*.

3:11 “Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.”  
This is an interesting and essential difference from Jesus’ concept. John commands leveling possessions; Jesus recommends giving everything away.

3:23—38 After David, Jesus’ genealogy in Luke differs from Matthew’s.<sup>dx4</sup> Even Jesus’ descent from Solomon is in question. The number of generations is different too: seventy-seven in Luke (from Adam) and sixty-two in Matthew (forty-two from Abraham and twenty from Adam to Abraham).

Luke traces Jesus’ pedigree through Adam to God. He envisages Adam as a Greek godman, the earthly son of a deity, yet another device to prove Jesus’ divinity: he is messiah on his father’s side, on his mother’s side, the incarnation of the holy spirit after baptism, supernaturally born

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<sup>145</sup> The main text of the Talmud, commentaries on the Mishnah.

<sup>146</sup> The Talmudic rabbi may have had Jesus’ age in mind.

from a virgin, and a direct descendant of God. Luke misses that other people are similarly direct descendants of God through Adam.

4:18–21 Jesus reads Is61:1–2 in the synagogue: “The spirit of the Lord is upon me . . . .” Then “he rolled up the scroll . . . and sat down . . . . Then he began to say to them, ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’”

If the prophecy referred to Jesus, the descent of the Holy Spirit at baptism fulfilled it. The scene in the synagogue (“today”) has nothing to do with the prophecy or its fulfillment.

4:14 records that Jesus taught in other synagogues and was known. He visited the Nazareth synagogue often<sup>147</sup> but only that day said Isaiah’s prophecy was (*today*) fulfilled in the people’s hearing. Then what was he doing on all the previous visits? Christians try to ascribe many prophecies to him inappropriately.

Since Jesus was not an official rabbi, whether he could have read depends on when the tradition of six men reading the Torah on Saturday appeared.<sup>dxv</sup> The prophets required interpretation, well beyond an unprepared person’s knowledge. By then the requirement of a two-stage interpretation, with a person to interpret the principal reading, may have been in effect. Jesus could probably read scripture but not comment.

4:22 “All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words.”

Why did Jesus say he was not accepted in Nazareth? In Matthew,<sup>dxvi</sup> Jesus’ teaching scandalized the synagogue. Although Luke tried to clean things up, the original story is still visible in his Gospel. The people of Nazareth did not accept Jesus’ teaching as a manifestation of grace, and they tried to lynch him.

4:23 “Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, ‘Doctor, cure yourself!’ . . . Do here also . . . the things that we have heard you did in Capernaum.”

Luke confuses his sources and breaks the sequence, since Jesus has not yet preached in Capernaum,<sup>dxvii</sup> where he goes only after he is run out of Nazareth. Luke supposes the reader knows what Jesus did in Capernaum, since he knew Matthew’s Gospel or a similar source.

Of what disease Jesus should have cured himself is a puzzle. There is a strong Christian tradition that he was visibly ill, reportedly encountered in an early edition of the Slavonic Josephus, where Jesus is called a hunchback. Isaiah 53, applied to Jesus already by primitive Christians, also relates of him as an ill person. The explanation that *yourself* means *your town* is clearly forced.

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<sup>147</sup> “. . . as was his custom,” Lk 4:16.

The proverb was popular both with Jews<sup>dxviii</sup> and Gentiles.

4:24 “No prophet is accepted in his own town.”

But the people were ready to accept him if they saw the miracles worked in Capernaum. And at 4:16–17, “[Jesus] went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him.” Being allowed to read the prophets on the Sabbath indicates great respect.

4:25–27 “But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah . . . yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.”

Two miracles for Gentiles *versus* hundreds for Israelites. Jesus had just had quoted Is61, addressed to Jews, then changed course and spoke of the Gentiles.

4:33–34 “In the synagogue there was a man who had the spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out, . . . ‘What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?’”

In pagan cult tradition, demons recognize exorcists, but not in Judaism. Luke did not notice the contradiction: a demon must recognize the exorcist, but the exorcist makes him dumb. Curiously, the demon says Jesus is from Nazareth, though he was born in Bethlehem and driven out of Nazareth.

Probably no possessed man could stay in the synagogue.

4:44 “So he continued proclaiming the message in the synagogues of Judea.”

Capernaum was in Galilee. Luke’s mistake was noticed, and some manuscripts contain “in the synagogues of Galilee.”

5:8 Overloaded by the miraculous draft of fish, Simon’s boat starts to sink, and he says, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!”

Simon acts oddly: it would be easier to throw some fish overboard or appeal to Jesus for saving. The episode makes sense if *Lord* is an interpolation. Simon considered Jesus a wonder-worker who did him the favor of catching the fish. But his sins were too big for the divine favor, and in retribution he began sinking. Being concerned with saving the well-wishing preacher, he asked him to jump overboard.

Luke models his account on the story of Jonah whom the sailors threw overboard. Jonah, however, was both a prophet and a sinner (he sailed away instead of going to Nineveh as commanded), and the sailors disposed of him to stop the divine anger. Luke thought incorrectly that



righteous Jonah left the ship, instead of dying with archetypically sinful sailors. Luke, accordingly, wants righteous Jesus to leave the boat into the raging waters, and sinful Peter to stay.

A similar episode with a huge catch of fish is forged at Jn21:6.

5:15-16, “many crowds would gather to hear him... But he would withdraw to the deserted places and pray.”

Jesus, eternally existing beside God, during his short stay in this world with the purpose of turning people to righteousness, oddly avoids communicating with them, and prefers to pray.

6:12 “He went out to the mountain to pray; and he spent the night in prayer to God.”

Matthew lacks this episode. Such long prayer is atypical of Judaism, too long even for sectarians. Even the prayer in Gethsemane lasted two or three hours at most. Luke may have invented the episode to show Jesus' piety. Mt6:7 Jesus criticizes lengthy, verbose prayer.

6:20–22 “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you . . . and defame you on account of the Son of Man.”

Luke writes *poor* instead of *poor in spirit*, *hungry* instead of *hungry for truth* as in Matthew. Luke reduces preaching a spiritual quest to attracting the poor and the hungry with promises of the kingdom of heaven. The elaboration on hatred and defamation is not authentic, since Christians had not yet suffered persecution.

6:24–26 “But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.”

Jesus means the materially rich; the spiritually rich do not need consolation. Perhaps, Luke adapted the original allegory, where *full* meant people content with their knowledge who will later be *hungry* for the correct knowledge of the sectarians.

We do not know which Biblical characters the sectarians considered false. The Sadducees rejected scriptural prophecies, though we do not know whether they thought of their authors as liars.

Matthew set this sermon on a mountain to remind the reader of Moses delivering the commandments. Gentile Luke sets it on the plain.

6:29 “If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also.”

Luke may mean a political, not an ethical, norm taken from the Scriptures: “He hath laid siege against us; they shall strike the king of Israel with a rod on the cheek.”<sup>»dxix</sup> Luke possibly suggests nonresistance against the Romans. He might also refer to sufferings of the servant, a figure prominent with his sect: “I gave my back to smiters, and my cheeks—to hair-pluckers; I hid not my face from shame and spitting.”<sup>»dxx</sup>

7:36—50 A sinful woman bathes Jesus’ feet with her tears and anoints them with oil and dries them with her hair. “‘Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; for she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.’ Then he said to her, ‘Your sins are forgiven . . . Your faith has saved you; go in peace.’”

The logic is off. Supposedly, a righteous man with few sins loves God less than the repentant and forgiven trespasser. If love is to be compared at all, a righteous man shows greater aspiration for God.

Jesus forgives the woman’s sins *because* she loves. But “the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little” means that, on the contrary, love is a *consequence* of forgiveness. Luke confuses cause and effect. Luke implies the women’s love to Jesus, not to God. Luke sees Jesus already divinized.

Luke takes Jesus’ right to forgive for granted. Matthew recognizes that the right is essentially divine, and his Jesus slips out when questioned about it.

8:16 “No one after lighting a lamp hides it under a jar . . . but puts it on a lampstand, so that those who enter may see the light.”

The passage correlates with Mt5:15; But Mt5 is the sermon on the mount, where Jesus delivers the new law of Christianity. Lk8 is parables, a difference indicating that the sermon was compiled, not recorded. Luke had no reason to break the sermon up into separate sayings.

8:23 “A windstorm swept down on the *lake*.”

Jews always call the body of water *the sea*.

8:30 “Jesus then asked him [the demon-possessed], ‘What is your name?’ He said, ‘Legion’; for many demons had entered him.”

In the original Jesus asks the demon, not the man, his name. The demon gives his own name, not the demoniac’s. The device is typical of Arabian cult exorcism. To drive a demon away, one must know its name.

8:31 “[The demons] begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss.”

The abyss is demons’ final abode, and they could not “go back” there. Spirits evidently cannot abide in a free state and must move from one body to another. They ask Jesus not to keep them from moving into another

person. With a kind of black humor, Jesus sends them into the swine to drown.

Jewish culture assumes that demons can live in the desert and would not need to inhabit another body.

8:38–39 “Jesus sent him [the healed man] away, saying, ‘Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.’ So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him.”

In the source, Jesus reminds the man that God worked the miracle. The editor changes the meaning with “Jesus had done.” Luke wrote before Jesus was firmly established as God.

9:12–17 Near Bethsaida “The day was drawing to a close,” and the disciples propose to let the people “go into surrounding villages and countryside . . . to get provisions.”

In Israel, unlike Greece, the dusk is short, and travel was very inconvenient in the evening.

*Bethsaida*, *Beth Zatha* means *house of mercy*; that is, a refuge of lame, lepers, and the like, out of town. This leads to the conclusion of the absence of food there. However, they have to eat something other times, so some victuals were available. People had to go beg for the provisions, which point was obscured in later editions.

Not realizing their error, Christians promptly found Bethsaida, a *House of Fish*, near the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

9:43 after healing “all were astounded at the greatness of God.”

Really, did they expected God to be any less great? The writer was accustomed to polytheism and, accordingly, to comparing gods.

9:52 “On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him.”

Mt10:5 “These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: ‘Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans.’”

Luke may have known Josephus’ story of Samaritans murdering Galileans going to Jerusalem for Passover and has the disciples arrange safe passage. In practice, the problem would have been settled administratively. First, the Romans kept the peace. Second, large pilgrim throngs could not bypass Samaria through Gentile lands. Some general arrangement with the Samaritans would have been reached.

9:54 “His disciples . . . said, ‘Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them as Elijah did?’”

Elijah killed the guards King Ahaz sent after him when they threatened him. When they came the third time without intimidation, he followed them.

A claim of such power by the disciples who could not heal a demoniac is ridiculous. Perhaps they originally urged Jesus to perform the miracle, and an editor later changed the story to avoid a confrontation between Jesus and the Gentiles.

10:1 “After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and send them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go.”

Visiting the Samaritans makes sense only if Jesus was heading to Jerusalem, not if he had many other places to go. Jesus knew how the Samaritans thought and would not go through their land unnecessarily.

Several dozen disciples is more realistic than twelve only. Such a small number would mark Jesus as an unpopular teacher.

The disciples formed 36 pairs; each pair went to a separate town and thus should have stayed in each town on the average 18 times longer than Jesus: not a plausible event.

At 10:1 Jesus intended to visit all the villages in Galilee again, though both he<sup>dxxi</sup> and the disciples<sup>dxii</sup> had already been there. The instructions at 10:3–12 repeat those at 9:2–6.

10:4 “Greet no one on the road.”

Jesus gave the disciples a spirit they had to maintain intact. When Elisha sent Gehazi,<sup>dxiii</sup> that made sense: the message was urgent and Gehazi had to deliver it in spiritual cleanness. The disciples must visit every village and every person, and could hardly worry about maintaining ritual cleanliness or delays with other prospective followers.

There is also a cynical explanation: greeting on the road could grow into a long meal and booze.

10:8 “Eat what is set before you.”

This instruction, missing from Matthew, does not mean permission to abandon *kashrut* and eat unclean food. The disciples were sent only to Jewish villages. Any food offered would be kosher.

The phrase, however, is meaningful in the Essene context. They accepted food without payment only from other Essenes. If Jesus sent former Essenes to the Jews in general, they needed permission to take food from just anybody.

10:17 “The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, ‘Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!’”

The disciples were not to return but to meet Jesus on his way.

If the disciples cast demons out in Jesus' name, why did the Pharisees ask in whose name Jesus drove them out?<sup>dxiv</sup> People would likely avoid exorcism in the name of a person. The Talmud mentions cases where people refused treatment in the name which the sectarians used. Probably 10:17 was interpolated to clear the issue of the healing name.

10:18 "He said to them, 'I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning.'"

What was Satan doing in the heaven in the first place? Did Jesus mean the time before Creation, when he was an angel? There was no sky then. Luke elaborates the Gnostic and dualist concept of the impending fall of the evil ruler of this world.

Lk17:24 "For like lightning, which flashes from one side of sky to the other, so the Son of Man shall be in his day."

Who resembles lightning, Jesus or the devil? Or both?

10:19 "I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions."

Scorpions are passive and sting only in self-defense. They often do not sting even when stepped on. They do not usually run about but hide in the shadow. Desert peoples do not consider them dangerous but sluggish and have traditional antidotes for their bites. These are the words of a Gentile unacquainted with desert life. The connection with Ps91:13 is out of place. Scorpions are mentioned only in the mistranslation.

Lucius Apuleius says of Isis, "You tread death underfoot."

10:20 "Do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

Saving and healing Galileans was evidently no cause for joy.

10:17–20 may be an addition. 10:21 "I praise you, Father, Lord . . . because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants." This has nothing to do with the disciples. Matt 11 the same text follows the condemnation of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum. Lk 10 corresponds up to 10:16. Then comes the added 10:17–20, and then 10:21, which at least somehow relates to 10:16.

10:29–37 "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who . . . beat him . . . leaving him half dead . . . A Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan . . . when he saw him, he was moved with pity . . . He . . . took care of him."

The moral: the neighbor is a person *who* did you a favor. But the lawyer was asking a different question, *whom* he should favor. Luke's view contradicts Jesus saying, "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?"<sup>dxxv</sup>

Matthew omits the parable. He realized its groundlessness. Both the priest and the Levite saw the traveler and passed by, because he looked dead. They avoided touching the dead to preserve ritual purity.<sup>dxxvi</sup> They would have helped were the man alive, but they left the burial to others. Talmud prescribes that priests bury a corpse they found by the wayside if no one else is available for the job.

Since the parable reveals some knowledge of Jewish customs, atypical of Luke, the origin is likely sectarian. Since Samaritans had hardly any business on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, the original character might be an Essene, who was specifically free to help in such cases.

The second book of Josephus' *War* provides a possible source of the parable. Samaritans murdered some Galileans en route to Jerusalem for Passover. The Jews took revenge on Samaritan villages and were executed by Cumanus, the prefect. The affair grew to the extent that the Syrian governor sent both Jews and Samaritans to Claudius for trial. Josephus' account is dubious. The Galileans knew the Samaritans and would have traveled in groups along the crowded road. As if in response to criticism, Josephus changes the story in *Ant*: many Galileans died. Luke possibly inverted the story, showing the Samaritan saving the Galilean.

Luke wanted to show that not only Jews were neighbors, but any one at all.

11:5–8 A man goes to a friend in the night to ask for bread, and "even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will . . . give."

11:9 "Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you."

Can God's will be changed by continuous requests? The saying might be a recommendation to pray more often, although nothing is received. Luke seems to expound the Gnostic 11:9 about acquiring knowledge, which appears elsewhere<sup>dxxvii</sup> as an independent saying.

"Ask, and it will be given to you" contradicts "When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words . . . For your Father knows what you need before you ask him."<sup>dxxviii</sup>

Luke has a similar parable about an unrighteous judge set upon by a widow who importuned him until he restored her right.<sup>dxxix</sup> The moral—"And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and

night? Will he delay long in helping them?"—may be intended to legitimize persecuted Christians' long prayers.

The parable is not Jewish, because it allegorizes God as an unrighteous judge.

11:27—28 "A woman . . . said to him, 'Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you!' But he said, 'Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it!'"

Matthew lacks this saying, present also at Th79:1–2. As a rule, Matthew includes coincidences of Thomas and Luke. Matthew may have avoided sexual imagery.

Th79:3 "For there will be days when you will say, 'Lucky are the wombs that have not conceived and the breasts that have not given milk.'" Luke included the saying in Jesus' apocalyptic prediction.<sup>dxxx</sup>

The late editor of Thomas, following the Gnostic tradition of the crucifixion and resurrection as allegories, may have taken the saying from the apocalypse and inserted it in a suitable context. Th79:2, consistent with and completing the answer to Th79:1, indicates that indirectly.

11:44 "Woe to you [Pharisees]! For you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without realizing it."

A field was unclean, *bet haperat*, if the plow turned up human bones. Walking over a grave made a person unclean.

12:8 "Everyone who acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man, also will acknowledge before the angels of God."

The angels do not administer justice. It is hard to imagine Jesus publicly calling himself "the Son of Man." Clearly, this is a Church enticement to spread the faith.

13:15 Jesus explains why it is permissible to do good on the Sabbath. "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water?"

In hot weather, livestock could not survive a whole day without drinking. The problem of tending animals on the Sabbath was analyzed, solved, given a theological interpretation, and forgotten centuries before. Only Gentiles would find it new.

People devised many ways to keep the ritual rest. On Friday they tied a knife to the sheep to be offered, and on Saturday the sheep carried the knife to the temple. Thus, leading an animal was not considered a work.

13:31 "Some Pharisees came and said to him, 'Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.'" 9:9 "Herod said, . . . 'But who is this about whom I hear such things?' And he tried to see him."

Did Herod want to kill Jesus? Would he have trouble finding a popular teacher?

23:8 “When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had been wanting to see him for a long time, because he had heard about him and was hoping to see him perform some sign.”

14:7–11 “Do not sit down on the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited . . . and the host . . . say to you, ‘Give this person your place,’ and then in disgrace you start to take the lowest place.”

Luke uses a proverb<sup>dxxxi</sup> widely known in Jewish culture<sup>148</sup> but interprets the ethical maxim to condemn Pharisees who took places of honor at the table. At public events like a wedding party, the guests probably sat by seniority,<sup>dxxxii</sup> except for a few especially distinguished people. The ancient custom may have been idealized in the tradition, but seating by honor may reflect Greek, not Jewish, tradition.

In the given circumstances, Jesus statement could only imply that the best seat should be reserved for him, which is even more inappropriate.

This parable demonstrates that newly converted Christians had priority over Judeans (who allegorically took the best seats). An attempt was made to interpolate it in Matthew, but the insert<sup>dxxxiii</sup> had not taken root.

14:28–32 “Which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost? Or what king, going out to wage war . . . does not . . . consider whether he is able . . . to oppose [his enemy]?”

Th98: “The Father’s imperial rule is like a person who wanted to kill someone powerful. While still at home, he drew his sword and thrust it into the wall to find out whether his hand would go in. Then he killed the powerful one.” The parable doubtless seemed coarse to Luke, so he invented two parables of the same sense to replace it.

The Gnostic editor made the parable belligerent; else we would find a reflection of Luke’s original moderate parable in Matthew. That Matthew has nothing like it points to the political unacceptability of parables like Th98.

Th98 speaks of testing one’s own forces and possibly the quality of preparedness, training, teaching, and education. On the one hand, the kingdom of heaven is available to all who aspire to it; on the other, we may have an echo of the concept that “the violent take it [the kingdom of heaven] by force,” and it is not intended for everyone.

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<sup>148</sup> A. de R. Nathan 25, “Take the place in the classroom two or three rows behind the one that is due to you.”



Th97 “The [Father’s] imperial rule is like a woman who was carrying [a jar] . . . . The flour spilled behind her [along] the road . . . . When she reached her house, she put the jar down and discovered that it was empty.”

Th 97 and Th98 suggest to be watchful, know the world and ourselves in order to meet the last day without unpleasant surprises—an empty vessel, a weak hand. Probably Luke and Matthew were wrong in their literal understanding of Th98 as testing one’s own strength.

The abundance of parables<sup>dxxxiv</sup> on the same subject indicates that they belonged to the popular tradition, were created by many writers, and are not authentic.

14:33 “So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.”

Previous parables speak of prudence, not renunciation of earthly possessions, and this conclusion is unrelated to the context.

14:34–35 Jesus tells a parable about stale salt whose taste cannot be restored. The allegory has no relation to its context.

In general, Luke abounds with new parables of a characteristic type: they are short, transparent, straightforward; they tell of everyday events, have distinctive characters, and discriminate between good and evil. Luke probably invented them to illustrate Jesus’ sayings.

#### 15:12 The parable of the prodigal son.

Jewish tradition condemned an owner allotting his inheritance during his lifetime. Even a worthless son could not be disinherited.<sup>dxxxv</sup> In this case his squandered share is restored—at the expense of more diligent brothers.

16:1–13 The parable of the ungrateful steward. A dishonest manager, going to be dismissed, secured gratitude of the potential new masters by changing the invoices to lower their debts.

Jesus himself, cut off the main group of Essenes, may be the steward. The debtors are those who neglect the commandments. Jesus presented this cunning subterfuge to involve people in his movement, despite abandoning some rules (decreasing their legal obligations).

16:8 “And the master commended the dishonest steward because he had acted shrewdly; for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light.” The new meaning is that God approves of Christians because they are cleverer than the Essenes, “the children of light.” Although “children of this age” is usually negative, Jesus ironically praises their realism in “dealing with their own generation.”

Priests are sometimes called *unrighteous servants* in the tradition.<sup>dxxxvi</sup> The parable could just possibly mean that the high priest (the steward) simplifies the law contrary to the demand of the Essenes (reduces the debts) and is somehow remunerated (historical events unknown to us).

16:9 “Make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth so that when it is gone, they may welcome you into the eternal homes.”

In the parable of Lazarus, Luke affirms that poverty guarantees entrance to heaven. 16:9 might be the offer to donate to Church in exchange for the Christians’ intercession in the other world.

This obscure saying seems to suggest devious behavior to gain the kingdom; but can righteousness be achieved unrighteously?

16:11 “If then you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches?” contradicts 16:9, which is probably an interpolation.

The Essenes held all property in common. Anyone could take anything from anyone else with no obligation to return it. Probably some abused the right, especially as the sect disintegrated. Accordingly, Jesus says, “Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much” and requires honesty in communal relations.

The parable’s conclusion—“You cannot serve God and wealth”—is unconvincing, since the master was going to dismiss the steward for neglecting his master’s interests and serving his own before the steward cooked the books. No matter what he did, the outcome would be the same.

16:14 “The Pharisees, who were lovers of money . . . ridiculed him.”

Matthew does not mention the trait, and Luke’s accuracy is questionable. The Pharisees did not condemn money, like some philosophers and Gnostics. Pharisees accepted it pragmatically. On the other hand, the Pharisees set more standards of fairness concerning money and philanthropy than any other culture.

16:16–17 “The Law and the prophets were in effect until John came; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is proclaimed . . . . But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away, than for one stroke of a letter in the law to be dropped.”

Luke apparently uses textual resemblance to join two contradictory concepts about the law: its abrogation and eternity. Unless Jesus saw the Baptist’s appearance as a real cataclysm, why attach such significance to a contemporary? Such exaggerated importance better suits someone who lived long ago, indicating perhaps a lapse of time between Jesus and John. Luke may have borrowed 16:16 from the writings of John’s followers.

16:19–31 The parable of Lazarus and a rich man.

Judaism lacks a doctrine of hell, although some sectarians, including the Essenes, had one. Souls are sent to paradise or hell after the last judgment, not at death.

The evangelical details are entertaining: tortures, fire, and the abyss between hell and paradise, Lazarus keeping company with Abraham, much as in Greek myths. Scriptures are explicit that the dead are unable to communicate,<sup>dxvii</sup> although presence of contrary beliefs can be seen in the prohibition of sorcery and calling the dead.<sup>149</sup>

The rich man goes to hell because “during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things.”<sup>dxviii</sup> Luke transforms hell from a place of punishment to a scene of retribution for earthly abundance. Never mind the gross inequality between temporal pleasures and eternal affliction in hell. Some Christians interpret the parable as retribution for not helping the needy, specifically for not giving him the scraps from the rich man's table that Lazarus longed for. Nothing, however, suggests that he was refused charity. The rich man goes to hell not because he forgot about the charity, but because he already received the good things.

Luke's concept implies a limited predetermined supply of happiness, which a person can draw either in this life or in the next. Considering the latter eternal, it would make sense to abstain from work and keep oneself in dire poverty and starvation. Then, earthly life turns into a stage for torments, much like the hell. This, of course, is a silly notion. It is immoral, too. First, to keep the poor alive by charity, other people have to labor. Thus, the poor can get to heaven by cunningly forcing the rest of population to Hades. Second, it erroneously presumes that paupers and only they are of high ethical standards, which is evidently untrue.

Abraham, with whom poor Lazarus stays in paradise, has owned a lot of cattle, and has been a wealthy man according to the notions of his time. So, why did Abraham's wealth not prevent him from making it to heaven? If it is only personal goodness that matters, why was Luke's splitting between paradise and hell based solely on the richness/poverty criterion? It is more probable that there is no theological ruse here, and the writer mentioned Abraham without due reflection.

Judaism also praises poor people: “Woe to him against whom the poor one appeals to his Lord in heaven, for the poor is the closest to the King,”<sup>dxix</sup> but it lacks an *a priori* assertion of the superiority of the poor,

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<sup>149</sup> These earlier views surfaced again after the break of strict Judaism.

Although seemingly suppressed even by the authors, they reveal themselves in the notion of various heavens or levels in the abode of dead (Is 14:14–19), something clearly irrelevant if the souls are sleeping in tranquility.

often characteristic of Christianity. The poor are closer to God because they need protection more than others. Probably this view spread in Judaism after the collapse of the theocracy, when rabbis, now unsupported by the government, became mostly poor.

16:26 “Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed.”

The abyss was possibly the answer to the apparent question, if the good abide in paradise, how can they leave those in hell to tortures? Hence the concept of abyss: they would like to help, but cannot.

16:27–31 “‘Then, father [Abraham], I beg you to send [Lazarus] to my father’s house . . . that he may warn [my brothers], so that they will not also come into this place of torment.’ Abraham replied, . . . ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’” The saying reflects the Jews’ rejection of Jesus’ resurrection.

There is little relation to Jn11, though. John did not draw on the synoptics, and his depiction of Lazarus’ resurrection shows traces of a mystical rite. His source was not Luke. Perhaps 16:27–31 were interpolated to correlate with John. Lazarus was a popular character in Christian folklore and possibly a real figure. Secret Mark’s Gospel probably centers around his initiation.

17:4 “And if the same person sins against you seven times a day, and turns back to you seven times and says, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive.”

The Talmud constantly emphasizes that repentance is meaningless if we repent with further sin in mind. The Church’s attitude is similar, but not supported by the Gospels.

The emphasis on repentance implies the authority of believers to forgive sins. The evolution is curious: God’s prerogative to forgive religious offences was first attributed to Jesus, then to all the flock, and later usurped by the hierarchy. According to Luke’s concept, each Christian can effectively forgive his own sins by simple declaration of repentance.

17:5 “The apostles said to the Lord, ‘Increase our faith!’”

They may ask him to strengthen their belief in God whom they could not touch and whose existence they possibly doubted. Even when Luke wrote, there was no idea of faith in Jesus.

An appeal for increased faith could relate to healing powers and miracle-working in general, as in Mark.<sup>dxl</sup> *Faith* may be a later substitute for Gnostic *knowledge*, which can be increased.

The formula was present in Judaism and made sense there. Unlike the Christian creed of belief in a single event, Jewish faith encompasses a

wealth of issues. Many found it hard to follow the numerous rules in the Torah. They asked for sufficient faith to observe all those points of the law.

17:6 “The Lord replied, ‘If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.”

If the episode is authentic, Jesus strengthened the disciples’ faith by pointing out its practical use. Matthew’s version demonstrates the possibilities of faith and is irrelevant to strengthening the disciples’ belief.

17:7–10 “Who among you would say to your slave who has just come in from plowing or tending sheep in the field, . . . ‘Take your place at the table?’ . . . Do you thank the slave for doing what was commanded? So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, ‘We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!’”

Untying sandals, washing feet, and preparing food were slaves’ work in Greece and Rome. The rabbis, on the contrary, always insisted on being as kind to slaves as possible. The slaves’ extensive rights were fixed in Torah long before. Most slaves in Judea were Gentiles, and no Jewish master would invite them to his table—nor was that customary in Rome, where slaves lived in separate quarters. Greeks had the habit of eating with slaves.

The saying could be ordinary Christian self-abnegation or a paradox: Since obeying the commandments does not win gratitude (salvation), obedience to them is practically senseless. A Jewish sectarian source is possible: for them, the strict observance of the commandments was a basic duty, not an extraordinary virtue.

Comparing the believers with the slaves is contrary to Judaism. “Rabbi Yohanan Ben Zakkai said, ‘Only free people, not slaves, can serve God.’”<sup>dxli</sup>

17:11 “On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the regions between Samaria and Galilee.”

The way from Galilee to Jerusalem passes through Samaria. Other texts do not mention any place between them. Characteristically, Luke does not name it.

18:31 “We are going up to Jerusalem.” 18:35 “As he approached Jericho . . .” The usual route from Galilee to Jerusalem does not go through Jericho’s sparsely populated terrain. To preach in Jericho, Jesus had to leave the densely populated areas. Bypassing Samaria would contradict Jesus’ appeal to the Gentiles and the Gospel accounts of positive encounters with Samaritans, and, indeed, the notion of his supernatural powers.

19:11 “He was near Jerusalem.” Jericho is hardly near Jerusalem by the standards of the time.

17:12 “As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance . . .”

Matthew lacks the episode, perhaps because lepers theoretically stayed outside a village.<sup>dxlii</sup> The rule was not rigorously enforced then. If lepers could be in a crowd,<sup>dxliii</sup> they were not isolated.

18:9–14 “Two men went up to the temple . . . . The Pharisee . . . prayed thus, ‘God, I thank you that I am not . . . like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.’ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other.”

A typical Christian approach, essentially different from Judaism. Humility is important in Christianity, not good deeds. In the writer’s opinion, the tax collector was justified, and went on sinning, while the Pharisee, who kept the commandments, was not praiseworthy.

Luke may not be correct: only staple foods are tithed, not the entire income.

18:31–32 “He . . . said to them, ‘See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be handed over to the Gentiles.’”

There are no such predictions in the known texts, unless perhaps we interpret “I gave my back to smiters, and my cheeks—to hair-pluckers,”<sup>dxliv</sup> as reference to Persian-style execution, still irrelevant to Jesus. The Gospels emphasize that the Jews condemned Jesus.

19:11–27 The parable of the talents. “A nobleman went to a distant country to receive royal power for himself and then return . . . . But the citizens of his country hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, ‘We do not want this man to rule over us.’ When he returned, having received the kingdom . . . ‘As for those enemies of mine, . . . bring them here and slaughter them in my presence.’”

Some authorities think Luke’s excellent awareness of the situation in Judea shows here, but the passage is an addition, unrelated to the parable. Matthew quotes it with no historical reference.

Mark Anthony made Herod, son of Antipater,<sup>150</sup> a tetrarch, not a king. The Jews appealed to Anthony when Herod seized power in Bethany and Daphna of Antioch, hardly cities in “a distant country.”

Augustus gave Archelaus the title of ethnarch, not king, though he promised him the crown in the future. The Jews appealed his appointment to the emperor. Though Archelaus was famed for his cruelty, he did not kill his enemies when he returned from Rome.

Agrippa was king next, and the citizens did not complain of him to Claudius. There were no subsequent Jewish kings.

The main evidence of Luke's historical competence is weak. Luke knew Archelaus' story from Josephus, though he misquotes it.

19:41–44 “Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you . . . [and] crush you.” Luke builds on Josephus' account of the wall Titus threw up.

The prediction is embedded into a coherent narrative: at 19:37–40, the people greet Jesus; at 19:45–46 Jesus, accompanied by the crowd, drives the traders from the temple; 19:41–44—“as he came near and saw the city”—is connected with the main text. But Jesus got the donkey some 500 meters outside Jerusalem. He could see the city perfectly from there.

19:47 “Every day he taught in the temple.”

In Matthew, Jesus comes to Jerusalem about three days before the execution.

20:46 “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes.”

In the Middle Eastern cultures, many wear long clothes. The comment suggests a European background.

21:1–4 “A poor widow put in [the Temple treasury] two small copper coins. He said, . . . ‘This poor widow has put in more than all of them . . . as an offering to God.’”

The doctrine is not new. Jewish tradition teaches that God does not accept sacrifices procured by sin. “The one who gives a little for philanthropy out of honestly earned money is better than the one who gives much from dishonestly acquired wealth.”<sup>dxlv</sup> Likewise, “The offering of the poor is accepted better than your thousands of bulls.”<sup>dxlvi</sup> An offering's significance to the giver matters, not its size. Intent is also important.

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<sup>150</sup> The name of Antipater is dubious. It probably refers to predecessor (of Herod the Great). A mix of Hebrew and Greek names in royal family is also odd.

Offerings came under criticism in the first and second centuries.<sup>151</sup> Sinners treated the ceremony as a warranty of redemption and offered ill-gotten gains.

Lk21 generally conforms to Matt24 regarding the signs of the end of days. Matthew proposes to “flee to the mountains . . . when you see the desolating sacrilege”; Luke, with the events of the Jewish War in mind, suggests the same on seeing “Jerusalem surrounded by armies.”

21:24 “They will fall by the edge of the sword and be taken away as captives among all nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.” Luke forgets that at Lk20 he told the parable about the vinedressers who killed the master’s son, after which the master ruined them and gave the vineyard to other vinedressers. That is, either the Gentiles captured Jerusalem forever, or the Christian triumph over the Jews is impossible.

“Until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled”: could a writer of that time afford such political liberty? Only a relatively small part of the population was taken captive. Drawing on the Jewish apocalypse is more probable, further evidenced by 21:25: “There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations.”

21:27–28 “Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in a cloud’ with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is near.”

The Gentile writer had little knowledge of Daniel. If Jesus is the Son of Man, then Christians should take the place of the judges instead of waiting for salvation.

Luke lacked theological comprehension that cloud is the demonstration of power and glory, not something external to it.

21:37 Jesus “would go out and spend the night on the Mount of Olives, as it was called.”

In winter and early spring, Jerusalem is too cool for comfortably sleeping in the open. Matthew does not make this mistake, and his Jesus stays with friends.

22:3 “Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot”

Jesus knew about the crucifixion beforehand. Either he knew what the devil was doing, and could not prevent him—then who had the power?—or else he needed the crucifixion—and the devil acted in his favor.

Why did Jesus not exorcise Satan from Judas, as he did for others?

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<sup>151</sup> The relevancy of this issue after the temple’s destruction is puzzling.



22:6 Judas “began to look for an opportunity to betray him to them when no crowd was present.”

No throng would have prevented the authorities from capturing a criminal. What happened to the admiring crowd when the prefect judged Jesus publicly?

22:9–10 “‘Where do you want us to make preparations for it [Passover]?’ . . . He said to them, ‘When you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him into the house he enters.’”

Carrying water was usually woman's work. But Essenes in Jerusalem were celibate, and there were no women among them. A man carrying a water vessel would likely be an Essene.

If we consider Jaubert's hypothesis that Jesus celebrated Passover according to the Essene calendar, he had to do it in an Essene house. Thus, he told the disciples how to find an Essene and his house. Traveling Essenes could stay in houses of the members of their sect and use all their property. Any Essene Jesus' disciples approached could not refuse.

Matthew lacks this episode, not because he thought it unlikely—men did not carry water—but because of his anti-Essene bent.

22:28 “You are those who have stood by me in my trials.”

No disciples were with Jesus during the temptation, trial, or crucifixion, and the Gospels mention no other troubles. The phrase is evidently alien.

22:29 “And I confer on you, just as my Father has conferred on me, a kingdom.”

Christian apologists struggle with this saying. Jesus would not call the evil world a kingdom. He would not leave the kingdom of heaven to the human apostles. There is only one explanation: he initiated the disciples as he was initiated.

22:36 “But now, the one who has a purse must take it, and likewise a bag. And the one who has no sword must sell his cloak and buy one.”

The admonition makes sense if refers to the Essenes: they traveled armed, though they took no possessions with them; however, a purse and a bag—“who has” them—are a rather ascetic set of things. Christians probably could no longer count on the hospitality of Essenes, which forced this minor change.

Mk6:8 Jesus tells the disciples to take a staff. The Essenes may have taken a staff as a weapon; but the notion could come from elsewhere. The Sumerian goddess Inanna was surrounded by demons “who walked in front of her, . . . a staff in the hand; who walked at her side, . . . a weapon

on the loin.” Such a peculiar mix in nearby cults could explain why Christian apostles might carry either a staff or a weapon.

Many scholars, disliking the Essene analogy, prefer to see in this outlook attributes of cynics: staff, cloak, and bag. But Jesus specifically instructs his followers to sell the cloak; thus the connection with cynics is superficial.

22:38 The apostles tell Jesus they have two swords.

Carrying a sword is incompatible with “love your enemies.”

22:47 “Suddenly a crowd came, and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them.”

Judas was already introduced.<sup>dxlvii</sup> Here he is mentioned again as though unfamiliar to the reader. Perhaps the Judas story was interpolated in Luke.

22:53 “But this is your hour, and the power of darkness!”

Allusion to the power of darkness would be natural for the dualist Gnostics and no less so among the Essenes, who called themselves the sons of light and everyone else, the sons of darkness.

22:56–62 Peter denies Jesus three times. “The Lord turned and looked at Peter.”

But Jesus was in the house,<sup>dxlviii</sup> not in the crowded courtyard. Peter followed Jesus at some distance<sup>dxlix</sup> and would hardly be within Jesus’ sight.

23:13–14 “Pilate then called together the chief priests, the leaders, and the people, and said to them, . . . ‘Here I have examined him in your presence and have not found this man guilty of any of your charges against him.’”

He did not examine Jesus *in their presence*, since he called them *then*, after the interrogation.

23:27 “A great number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him.”

Trials usually took place in a stadium or in the square in front of the praetorium, so all comers were allowed. An examination inside Pilate’s house is unlikely.

23:30 “Then they will begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us’; and to the hills, ‘Cover us.’”

The reference is to Hos10:8, but the prophet speaks of the punishment of the Gentiles: “Samaria’s king shall perish like a chip on the face of the waters. The high places of Aven, the sin of Israel, shall be destroyed.”<sup>dxl</sup> Samaria had had no king for some centuries by Jesus’ time.

23:34 "Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.'"

The editor hopes to palliate the Romans. Early manuscripts lack the saying.

23:43 "Truly I tell you, *today* you will be with me in Paradise."

Jesus did not ascend to heaven until after the resurrection, many days later.

23:50 "Now there was a good and *righteous* man named Joseph, who, though a member of the council, had not agreed to their plan and action."

If all members of the Sanhedrin supported the charge, that was regarded as very suspicious, and a criminal could not be condemned. The late interpolator of Matthew did not know that legal peculiarity, and described unanimous voting, thus made the account of the conviction incredible.

Unlike elsewhere in the Gospels, here a rich man can be righteous.

23:55 "The women who had come with him from Galilee followed."

Women at that time likely did not travel without their families. Even widows lived with their children. Probably only outcasts like prostitutes could travel on their own.

24:1 "But on Sunday, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared."

In Matthew, the women came on Sunday to have a look; presumably, they embalmed Jesus' body on Friday evening (Sabbath eve). The difference is not accidental: Luke did not know about the specific permission to prepare bodies with ointments on the Sabbath.<sup>dli</sup>

24:16 Disciples do not recognize the risen Jesus, contradicting the Church's assertion of his bodily resurrection.

Apart from the supernatural, there are two explanations of their failure. In the mysteries, when the initiated returned from the heavenly journey, others pretended not to recognize him, alluding to the idea that inner change brought about facial transformation.

Less likely is the speculative option that it *was* another person whom they met, not Jesus. In order to substantiate messianic claims, Jesus' group could advance a pretender, who by teaching and prophecy convinced other credulous people that he is Jesus. Then he could leave the disciples, just as the Gospels imply, because he could not pretend forever.

24:21 “But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.”

Even after all the miracles, many still doubted.

24:25–26 “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?”

The resurrected Jesus reproaches the travelers’ foolishness, forgetting his own injunction, “If you say [to your brother], ‘You fool,’ you will be liable to the hell of fire.”<sup>dlii</sup>

All Christian attempts to interpret the Hebrew Bible to predict the messiah’s sufferings are strained beyond measure, distort the context, and contradict the traditional understanding. No Second Coming can be found in the prophets. Either Luke invented the episode or referred to sectarian texts alluding to the afflicted messiah.

Since the incarnation is the central event of Christianity—at least in the orthodox version, since some Christian sectarians said Jesus underwent multiple incarnations—why must only his second (or n<sup>th</sup>) advent mark the end of the world? The doctrine of the Second Coming looks logical in the context of Paul’s idea that Jesus became divine only at the resurrection: he was a man like others, blessed by the Holy Spirit, who became divine after his death and might be expected to return in that hypostasis. The approach resembles the Jewish notion about Elijah. If Jesus was divine from birth, the doctrine of the Second Coming is meaningless.

24:27 “Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them all the things about himself in all the scriptures.”

The interpretation of a single proposition could take volumes and long lectures, but Jesus articulates to his foolish<sup>dliii</sup> hearers a huge volume of information in less than two hours on the way to Emmaus.<sup>dliiv</sup>

24:45 “Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures.”

“Opened their minds” implies an exceptionally close contact with the divine. Why did he not “open their minds” before interpreting the Scriptures?<sup>dliiv</sup> If this story is true, then why is the theological reasoning of the apostles in Acts so primitive, and the references to the Bible distorted?

24:46–47 “Thus it is written . . . that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”

No such thing appears in the Hebrew Bible. The NT did not exist then.

Matters are simpler in Judaism: repentance is sufficient for forgiveness without being “in [someone’s] name.” Jesus introduces an additional burden on the road to forgiveness.

24:49 "So stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

But Jesus already conferred the power to heal before he sent the disciples out in his name.

The promise seems hollow in the light of history. What, for example, was the power of Peter who tried to escape from Rome to avoid execution?

24:51 "Blessing them, he departed from them and was carried into the sky."

The second part of the passage is significantly absent from several early manuscripts. The church insists that Jesus was resurrected in his real body, not an illusion. The distinction was critical in antiquity, since belief in ghosts was common, while bodily resurrection was not. The notion of a physical body ascending to a certain height, then disappearing into space is absurd. Although similar events occur in other religions, no reasonable person can take the account seriously.

Furthermore, how can a sinful body enter the heavenly realm, where only souls may go?

Leaving 24:51b aside, the canonical Gospels agree that Jesus specifically removed himself, went away. Recall the absence of proof of his death and the practical impossibility of the "ascension." The odd story of Thomas the doubter and the tradition of Jesus' tomb being in India encourages the conclusion that Jesus, wounded but alive, emigrated from Judea.

24:53 The apostles "were continually in the temple, blessing God."

After Jesus' crucifixion his disciples were allowed to preach in the temple. For Luke, the apostles were distant, legendary figures.

## John

The Gospel of John was written late. Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna at the beginning of the second century, alludes in his letter to the Philippians to practically all the known Christian texts—but not to John. Many of John's concepts were too handy for Polycarp who battled the Christians rejecting Jesus' divinity, to simply refuse John as Gnostic heresy. Justin Martyr was very close to John doctrinally, yet commonly refers to the synoptics and perhaps never – to John. References to John appear only in mid-second century with the Valentinian Gnostic Ptolemy. P<sup>52</sup>, the Egyptian papyrus dated perhaps about 150C.E., is the earliest evidence of John.

John's Jesus was not condemned on the night of Passover. John records several visits to Jerusalem;<sup>152</sup> the synoptics mention neither them nor the publicity connected with them, but describe Jesus' activity in other places at the same time. Jesus no longer demands secrecy for his miracles, nor does he evade questions about his divinity, as he did with the Baptist's disciples in Matthew. Instead, he misses no opportunity to declare it, from household scenes of turning water into wine to theological disputes. By the time John's Gospel appeared, the tradition of Jesus' divinity was established and generally recognized by Christians. John repeatedly stresses belief in Jesus himself, not in his words or acts.

John's Jesus appears from nowhere, acts, teaches, undergoes trial, is executed and resurrected differently from his career in the synoptics. He is an eternal, theologically independent figure, near to Paul's notion, but not to that of the synoptics, who see Jesus above all as a man blessed by the Holy Spirit. John's Jesus has his own power and kingdom.

John lacks most of Jesus' sayings common to the synoptics. Some pronouncements similar to Matthew's don't fit their contexts in John logically. John relates practically nothing about the disciples' communication among themselves, as could be expected if he were one of them.

John knows nothing about the Sermon on the Mount and Jesus' ethical doctrine. He presents the teachings along the way, utterly unlike the synoptics. The synoptic doctrine of love and John's aggressive apocalyptic creed cannot be regarded as two parts of the same philosophy. His book could be justly called "The Gospel of the Last Day," since almost half the text deals with the end of Jesus' worldly mission. In the Gospel, John found convenient background to declare certain eschatological concepts.

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<sup>152</sup> In Matthew, Jesus comes to Jerusalem only once, clearly alluding to the Messianic triumph.

Matthew treats the Gnostic texts literally, whereas John stresses their mysticism, seeks to substantiate them, and usually gets lost among his own eclectic structures. For example, John considers Jesus a divine figure, the *Logos*, if not God. According to John, Jesus participated in the creation of the world. The Gnostics usually asserted that the world was created by the demiurge whose status was obviously lower than Jesus' in John. The idea of a semidivine figure at the creation is not typical of the Gnostics.

John's Jesus is not interested in the commandments but rather in a garbled mysticism resembling the loose fancies of an amateur theologian. John's teaching was not secret; his Jesus has always addressed the crowd. The problem cannot be explained away by showing Jesus as teaching the inner circle. The basic demand is not repentance but belief in Jesus' divinity, strong evidence that John's Gospel came late. John characteristically mentions the Pharisees instead of the Sadducees, who were no longer influential at his time.

John introduces Hellenisms but takes them in stride, unlike Paul. For example, John's Jesus is not the spiritual, but the physical Son of God and heir to his power. Typical of Christian tradition, Jesus calls himself the Son of God, which was hardly possible in Judea earlier. In Matthew, Jesus weasels on the high priest's question during the trial. John wrote for Gentiles, constantly explaining Jewish terms to them.

John is not familiar with Judaism. Jesus reduces his argument with the Pharisees to an assertion of his divine origin. John finds himself in the wrong boat when his Jesus says, "Before Abraham was, I am."<sup>dlvi</sup> In Hebrew, "I am" is the identity of God. First, Jesus did not call himself God. Second, not even the most tolerant Jews would have endured it. Third, Jesus would have been tried for blasphemy, not for calling himself the king of the Jews.

Rarely does John refer to the Hebrew scriptures and compensates for the lack with insipid borrowings from Greek mysticism, like *Word*, *Light*, *Flesh*, and *Blood*. In the attempt to build complicated theological constructions, John falls under heaped masses of concepts, and continuously commits errors of logic. Likely he was unacquainted with the Torah, and used Hellenic concepts and general information about Hindu and Egyptian teachings.

A number of John's secondary concepts match the notions found in the Qumran scrolls. The Essenes were Jews, but their doctrines were rather far from the Judaism as we know it. On the contrary, they were largely Hellenized. Josephus and Philo count about four thousand Essenes, less than a tenth of one percent of Jews living then, and their teachings are heresy.

John abounds in contradictions, more even than the synoptics. Possible explanations include John's noncritical compilation of different sources, irresponsible editing, or even a mystic author's deliberate muddying of the textual waters.

Like the Gnostics, John virtually ignores the approach of the kingdom of heaven and the end of time. The Gnostics taught that the kingdom of God was everywhere, attainable through individual learning. Instead of the apocalypse, Jesus promises to send the spirit of truth and consolation. In the typically Gnostic absence of piety, John usually refers to Jesus by name, not by the traditional *teacher* or *Lord*.

The Gnostics, however, were largely indifferent to John. No extant Gnostic texts can be traced to his Gospel, although many were written later and by writers likely acquainted with the Gospel. Perhaps they recognized his theology as parody.

In the Gospel, John replaces Peter as Jesus' favorite disciple, both before and after the resurrection. His head was on Jesus' breast during the Last Supper, he witnessed the crucifixion, and to him Jesus entrusted the care of his mother. Peter is maligned,<sup>153</sup> he denies Jesus during the trial, and follows John to Jesus' tomb. Yet extolling John does not mean he was the author.

Chapter 21, the resurrection and commissioning of the apostles, is usually recognized as a late inset, yet even there John is not mentioned. The association of the disciple and evangelist is based on tradition, since the author does not mention himself in the main text. The same is characteristic of Matthew, the other Gospel attributed to an apostle on questionable grounds.

The author of John's Gospel was likely not an apostle. Though he more or less knew Judean geography, he was utterly ignorant of the law. He was perhaps a Gentile living in or near Judea, a member of a relatively isolated, odd community, familiar neither with the prototexts nor the other Gospels.

The John of the Gospel has nothing in common with the John of the Revelation. The apocalypse was probably written in Aramaic, while the Gospel is in the Greek of a native speaker. Since the temple is described as existing in the Revelation, John's name was probably attached to one of numerous apocalypses in the Jewish pseudepigrapha. A body of convincing scholarship concludes that the Revelation is an early Jewish apocalypse with Christian overlay, not the work of John the evangelist.

Interestingly, the author of John's Gospel describes himself, like Lazarus,<sup>dlvii</sup> as one whom Jesus *loved*.<sup>dlviii</sup> No other person is so called. An

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<sup>153</sup> Except in the falsified last chapter, and even there the praise is reserved.



unusual ambiguity further suggests this possibility: the Gospel says Jesus loved him but does not name him. A disciple need not hide, but the initiated Lazarus could be considered too holy to name. Quite probably, the initiated (resurrected) Lazarus wrote the exceedingly mystical and tangled Gospel, which like the Secret Gospel of Mark, surfaced in somewhat emasculated form later, leading to the supposition of its origin in the second century as the Gospel of John. A puzzling passage suggests John was nicknamed Mark.<sup>dlx</sup>

The Gospel of John resembles John the Baptist's convoluted reasoning, peculiar images of the cults ("the Lamb of God" is far from Isaiah's "sheep that before its shearers is silent"), his aggressiveness ("viper's brood"), sinister prophecies ("he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire") and appeals to God's abilities ("can create the children to Abraham from these stones").

Since John is so doubtful, why do Christian theologians cling to it so obstinately? The answer is probably to be found far from theology. That a controversial Gospel was included in the canon simply to satisfy the Ephesians is improbable: many other communities had the Gospels by local saints which did not make it into canon. John is the basis of many traditions and dates of the church. Forming a logical circle, John presents ("evangelizes") the already formed by his time Church traditions, and the Church taking his text for authentic, uses it to confirm the tradition.

1:1 "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

John draws on the Egyptian tradition where the beginning is identified with Isis, whom the Greeks identified with the Word. Isis-Word was with the god-Osiris, and was a goddess herself, exactly as in the opening line of John. The Gospel subsequently identifies Jesus with the Light, also reminiscent of Isis, called the *Light of life*, eternal life, salvation. The word of Sumerian deity Enlil is the breath of the wind, reminiscent of the Hebrew *ruah*, the spirit.

Gen1:1-3 "In the beginning . . . God created the heavens and the earth." Only after that came the first word, "Let there be light." In Hebrew, *word*, *thing*, and *action* are all, *dabar*. In the beginning was action in which God manifested himself. Because acts of creation were represented as words pronounced by God, a human way to comprehend divine acts, the acts were eventually identified with the words.

"The Word was God" is incompatible with the concept of the oneness and incorporeality of God, to whom notions of form, size, place, and composition are inapplicable. The doctrine of *Logos* eventually penetrated into Judaism: "God has created the world by means of the word, without labor or effort."<sup>dlx</sup> Hellenized Jews of the time often identified Wisdom or Torah with Word. Recall the known insertion at Sir1:5: "The

source of *wisdom* is God's *word* in the highest heaven, and her ways are the eternal commandments."

*Wisdom* is feminine while Jesus is masculine. To establish a theological allegory, John needed something masculine to compare Jesus with and chose *Logos*, not knowing that the closest analogies of Word in Judaism, Torah and Wisdom, are feminine. Philosophers then naturally preferred to present the divine as masculine or neuter.

Jesus as the incarnation of Word/ Wisdom contradicts other Christian ideas. Wisdom is *sefira*, an emanation of God, lower than the status ascribed to Jesus in the Trinity. Wisdom in Jewish folklore constantly enters the world in at least one person per generation, which counters Jesus' uniqueness. Wisdom does not bring new theosophy, as Jesus' followers claim he did, but urges obedience to the commandments, traditional ethical standards, and common sense.

1:4-9 "In him [the Word] was life, and the life was the light of all people . . . and the darkness did not overcome it . . . He [John the Baptist] came . . . to testify to the light."

Isaiah's, "Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you."<sup>dlxi</sup> The Christians who often cite this passage ignore the continuation: "Foreigners shall build up your walls, and their kings shall minister to you,"<sup>dlxii</sup> clearly not a description of Jesus' time.

The Qumran Isaiah scroll describes the Suffering Servant, whom Christians habitually identify with Jesus: "He shall see light."<sup>dlxiii</sup> The Masoretic edition lacks the word *light*. Did the Qumran sectarians add the word? The Qumran community did not identify Jesus with light but rather thought him blessed by it. So light had a higher theological status than Jesus. Jesus' Trinitarian identity with God puts him above light as a manifestation of God.

John uses a standard Gnostic term. Consider the exchange between the angels and the disciples as they ascend through the celestial spheres: "If they say to you, 'Where have you come from?' say to them, 'We have come from the light, from the place where the light came into being by itself, established itself, and appeared in their image.' If they say to you, 'Is it you?' say, 'We are its children, and we are the chosen of the living Father.'"<sup>dlxiv</sup>

Apologists often adduce Philo as proof that light in Judaic tradition also denoted God. But Philo ransacked Judaism for concepts parallel to certain notions of Greek theosophy and could not bypass light. He saw light as a manifestation of God's presence, *Shekinah*. Onkelos understands Word, Light, Glory, and *Shekinah* as synonyms. John explicitly identifies God with word and light.

A similar mystical tradition now exists in Judaism. In Zohar3:31, a list of the seven kinds of light mentions the messiah's, which resembles John's notion, though a millennium separates them. Even there the light is a manifestation of the messiah, not the embodiment of divine light. The late rabbinic concept of Torah and Word simultaneously embodying the light God created on the first day bears the mark of Hellenism. The *man/light* metaphor was popular in the Hellenic world. Both *man* or *light* are *phos* in the Greek, differing only in accent and gender.<sup>154</sup>

The synoptics link light to knowledge;<sup>dlxv</sup> John personifies light in Jesus.

1:10 "And the world came into being through him."

The concept of Jesus participating in the creation of the world as Wisdom or *Logos*, based on the Gnostic theosophical doctrine of creation not by God but by a demiurge of lower status, is late. Contradictions abound. The creator of the world immolates himself (to whom?) to redeem (from what?) people he created.

Paul identified Jesus with the Holy Spirit which participated in the Creation,<sup>dlxvi</sup> but John did not know of or did not accept Jesus as the incarnation of the Holy Spirit.

1:11–12 "His own people did not accept him. But to all who received him . . . he gave power to become children of God."

Most if not all of Jesus' disciples were Jews; no foreigner could preach in his name in Jewish cities. He gave the power to cure to his Jewish disciples.

In the synoptics, Jesus often says "your Father"; he considers the Jews proper "children of God." He means all his hearers, not just some few. The common qualifier was "Jews," not "believers," since many likely came out of curiosity, not in faith.

1:14 "And the Word became flesh."

The saying develops Paul's or a similar concept of Jesus' appearance "in the similitude of flesh," though not in an actual body. John asserts later that Jesus was never hungry or thirsty. The Gnostics could not accept that ideal spirit could be confined in a body associated with sin.

1:15 "John [the Baptist] testified to him, . . . 'This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'"

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<sup>154</sup> Acute accent in *phos* for *man*, circumflex (*phaos*) for *light*. The words were originally different, but written similarly in John's time.

John the Evangelist expressly speaks of Jesus as deity, *was before*, while the synoptics do not show Jesus calling himself even messiah, even before the Sanhedrin.

1:17 “The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”

Had there been no truth before Jesus? In the psalms of David, the proverbs of Solomon, the prophecies?

John, like Paul, uses the name Jesus *Christ*, atypical of the Gospels, which use only *Jesus*.

1:18 “It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known.”

A number of editions attempt to obscure the reference to Jesus as to a separate deity.

The saying contradicts, “But to all who received him . . . he gave power to become children of God.”<sup>dlxvii</sup>

1:26–27 “Among you stands the one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me.”

Possibly an authentic saying of the Baptist, arbitrarily inserted in the context of Jesus’ appearance. Alone the phrase makes sense, especially if we replace the context-specific *stands* with *is*: John told people that the messiah was yet unknown but very close, maybe already living among them. Then the saying was twisted to suit Jesus.

1:28 “This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.”

Bethany was close to a tributary of the Jordan, not on its bank and several miles distant; not “across” Jordan to the east, but alongside Jerusalem to the west. Someone unfamiliar with Judea might write “across the Jordan” about Bethany. John’s whereabouts are less significant than the fact that the writer erred in the geography. Recognizing the mistake, some manuscripts substituted Bethabar instead, which Origen reported near Jordan.

The story of Bethany is interesting but unclear. John baptized there. Jesus stayed there before his execution. There lived his friends so dear that he risked his life returning to Judea to resurrect Lazarus. The initiation of Lazarus, the only such rite mentioned in the Gospels, and Jesus’ anointing unto death took place there. Clearly, something drew Jesus there often.

Perhaps originally Bethany showed itself in the Gospel narration only once, and other events were connected with it later, as foreign authors

did not know names of the other towns and had to confine themselves to those already mentioned in the Gospels.

1:40–41 The apostle Andrew was a disciple of John the Baptist and left him for Jesus, having also taken his brother Simon-Peter along. Matthew relates a different story. 1:41 “Andrew . . . said to [Peter], ‘We have found the Messiah.’”

But Jesus did not come to bring the kingdom of heaven or a Jewish triumph on earth. Jesus did not call himself messiah in the most authentic synoptic texts.

The messiah was expected to declare himself. The notion of the silent messiah perhaps migrated from sectarian theology of the afflicted savior to rabbinic Judaism, where it merged with another idea, that of an unrecognized messiah living obscurely in each generation. John hardly knew those details but simply did not know that the traditional Messiah was a military leader.

1:44 “Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.”

Only a late writer could say so, when the humble fishermen were revered apostles. The city would hardly have been identified by association with them earlier. Matthew claims that Peter came from Capernaum.

Bethsaida, where the disciples lived, and Bethany are at opposite ends of the country. The Baptist worked near Bethany, but suddenly appears with his disciples at the same time Jesus does near Bethsaida. They must have been in Bethsaida, since they are in Cana less than three days later.<sup>dlxviii</sup>

The idea of the Baptist preaching in Galilee relates well to his persecution by the Galilean tetrarch Herod Antipas, but would have lowered his social status and precluded recognition by the Pharisees and other leaders.

1:51 “You will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

The apostles record nothing of the kind though they could hardly have forgotten such an event.

The image may be a variation of Jacob's ladder,<sup>dlxix</sup> the symbol of man's maximum affinity to God. The image was popular in the tradition and the pseudepigrapha and probably familiar to John as a mystical concept.

2:1–10 The miracle at Cana. Since a nuptial banquet was planned long in advance, the contretemps is unlikely. The presence of a steward indicates wealth. Food and drink, especially wine, were stored in

abundance. Since wine was cheap in Galilee, where vineyards abounded, the wine would not likely give out before everything else.

The mother obviously expects a miracle from Jesus, but he refuses at first: “What concern is that to me?” Jesus’ odd address of his mother as *woman*<sup>dlxx</sup> was not customary among Jews. The rude address is puzzling, especially since John, unlike the synoptics, does not detach Jesus from his family. Jesus travels with his mother, while in the other Gospels he refuses to see her when she and his brothers come for him. Of course, a woman companion, adviser, and helper is characteristic of Greek stories. Jews respected women as mothers but not as companions in men’s endeavors.

2:6 “Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification.”

Only the Essenes considered clay pottery unclean and the water in them unsuitable for purification. The stone jars are another reason to think the first Christians were Essenes.

2:13–16 Jesus cleanses the temple, as he does at the end of Matthew, when he was known. Matthew makes sense. The row could be a reason for Jesus’ subsequent execution.

2:17 “Zeal for your house has consumed me.”

But how about the rest of Psalm 69? “O God, you know my folly; the wrongs I have done are not hidden from you . . . . Do not let those who seek you be dishonored because of me . . . . For they persecute those whom you have struck down, and those whom you have wounded, they attack still more . . . . I will praise the name of God with a song; I will magnify him with thanksgiving.” The man described is obviously not divine.

2:19 The traders demand a sign. Jesus suggests they destroy the temple so he may rebuild it in three days.

Is the saying a peculiar joke? If the Jews destroy the temple, Jesus will restore it; but how can they destroy it? Such paradoxes were popular in Greek culture. Recall Archimedes’ boast, “Give me a place to stand and I will overturn the Earth.”

2:21 “But he was speaking of the temple of his body.”

John may be trying to draw an analogy between the gnostic concept of death and resurrection to earthly life and the destruction and restoration of the temple. If indeed Jesus was speaking of his body, then why did he not appear to the traders after the resurrection?

The context also indicates the temple, not Jesus’ body. He affirms his right to give orders in the temple.

3:3 “No one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.”

The formula is typically Gnostic and unrelated to normative Judaism. He who dies to the world (Jesus' crucifixion, Christian baptism) and is raised in the spirit (born anew) is united with the eternal spirit (the kingdom of God) and becomes part of it.

3:5–7 “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit . . . Do not be astonished that I said to you . . .”

Jews had plenty to be surprised at. John baptized with water for repentance for sins. From the Jewish point of view, that was sufficient for salvation, almost regardless of the sin. Baptism in the spirit is part of the messianic era, when the people will live in the kingdom of God on earth. Does that mean that everyone who lived before the Messiah cannot be saved at all? John meant the mystical kingdom of heaven here and now, being born anew, but he failed to formulate it properly, confusing time-bound and eternal spiritual experience.

3:13 “No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.”

John shows his ignorance of Judaism: Elijah was reportedly taken into the heavens and, just because of that, was expected to return. John's acquaintance with the *Son of Man* concept is impressionistic. The heavenly figure is not expected to descend. John meant that only those possessing the spirit (initiated, “descended from heaven”) could experience the spiritual kingdom here and now (“ascended into heaven”).

3:14–15 “And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.”

John engages his readers' knowledge of the ascension, interpolated late into the Gospels.

Moses put a bronze serpent “upon a pole,” and those who were bitten by snakes survived by looking at it.<sup>dlxxi</sup> That serpent did not *ascend*.

John would not compare Jesus with Moses' serpent, if he have read 2Kings18:4, where the righteous king Hezekiah smote that rod, a symbol of idolatry—unless John wanted to hint at something very unorthodox in Jesus' teaching.

3:18 “Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already.”

Where John fetched this new concept of Judgment, utterly opposed to the Tanakh, is a mystery. Are all Jews before him condemned? Those

who do believe in him, are their deeds now irrelevant? What if someone who believes in Jesus sins?

12:47–48 “I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. The one who rejects me . . . has a judge; on the last day the word that I have spoken will serve as judge.”

Then how can those “who do not believe” be “already condemned”? There is no need for a judge otherwise.

5:24 “Anyone who hears my word and believes *him who sent me* has eternal life, and does not come under judgment.”

In whom does John urge belief? Jesus or the one who sent him? Faith in Jesus is not required here; hearing is sufficient. Interpreting “hears my word” as “follows my instructions,” John considerably complicates the requirement of 3:18. Not only must one have faith in Jesus, but one must also follow his teaching—and what is that?—and believe in the Jewish God. John clearly distinguishes Jesus from the one who sent him, contradicting the notion of trinity.

8:51 “Whoever keeps my word will never see death.” 11:25 “Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live.” Laying aside the apparent incompatibility of these two sayings, ask: what then must the Christians do, believe, listen, or obey? John claims each requirement as sufficient. What happens if they do very those different things? Has no one in two thousand years heard, believed, and kept Jesus’ word? Should such a saint be yet living?

3:33 “Whoever has accepted his testimony has certified this, that God is true.”

Anyone who accepts Jesus as the Christ recognizes the existence (genuineness) of God. But to believe in Jesus as Christ, one must first expect a messiah and, before that, believe in God who will send him. Faith in God cannot be the consequence of belief in Jesus as Christ.

4:1–2 “The Pharisees had heard, ‘Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John,’ although it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized.”

3:22 “After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he spent some time there with them and baptized.”

1:33 “Jesus . . . the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.” The Baptist in Matthew 3:11 says, “I baptize you with water . . . He [Jesus] will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” How indeed did Jesus baptize? Not with water. John says Jesus did not baptize at all! Whom then did John the Baptist mean?



Jn3:22 nothing about Jesus' disciples baptizing. Jews would have hardly accepted their baptism or even taken them seriously. Later the saying would not raise eyebrows, after the apostles were established as priestly authorities. Jesus probably attempted to establish himself as an alternative to John. The text at 4:1–3 then becomes clear: "Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, 'Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John,' . . . he left Judea and started back to Galilee."

The conflicting reports gave Christian apologists trouble. First, they had to harmonize with the synoptics: did Jesus baptize or not? Second, they had to deal with John the Baptist's claim that the one following him would baptize. Third, they had to raise Jesus above John, for which reason Jesus should not do what John did. Possibly 4:2 hopes to reconcile the anomalies: "It was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized."

How John the Evangelist could miss the contradiction between 1:33—the Baptist says Jesus will baptize with the spirit—and 4:1—Jesus and his disciples baptize with water? Likely 1:29–34 (John the Baptist recognizes Jesus as the one who follows him) was inserted to harmonize with the synoptics.

Such a conclusion agrees with 4:1–3: when the news that Jesus was baptizing broke, he and his disciples fled Judea, implying that Jesus baptized illicitly and feared the Pharisees. Yet they would not persecute him if the Baptist accepted him. The saying could be an echo of conflict between Jesus and John the Baptist. The Gospel's account of John's asserting that Jesus became blessed with the Holy Spirit after the baptism might be true—but the Baptist pronounced this over each visitor, not only over Jesus.

Perhaps at the beginning Jesus wanted to deal, like John the Baptist, in a simple, profitable, and conventional business. Failing to compete, he was compelled to leave Judea for some time to Galilee, where he preached to the credulous and unsophisticated locals. When he came back to Judea, people rejected him again.

4:5–15 The Samaritan woman. "Those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."

Th108 "Whoever drinks from my mouth will become like me; I myself shall become that person, and the hidden things will be revealed to him."

Jesus speaks the words of knowledge, "water"; hearers "drink from [his] mouth. John compares Jesus' words with living water, running water, which was believed to have special vivifying properties.

Jer2:13 “They have forsaken me, the fountain of living water.” Ps36:9 “For with you is the fountain of life.” In Judaism, living water from a divine source means life. Jesus speaks of the water he will give to living people, that is, knowledge. Later, as the Jewish tradition Hellenized, life was related with knowledge, allegorized as *living water*, Torah, wisdom,<sup>dlxxii</sup> or spirit. *Water* in that sense lacked theological connotation, was employed as metaphor only, and had no divine source.

Perhaps John was confused by the Gnostic metaphor of baptism: “Living water is body. We must clothe the man who is alive.”<sup>dlxxiii</sup> In baptism the converted acquires a new body symbolized by flowing water in the rite.

The one who drinks living water “will never be thirsty.” John’s metaphor conflicts with the usual concept of cognition as continuous: the one who drinks the water of knowledge is always thirsty for it. Such conflicts are common in John as he juxtaposes superficially similar metaphors and gets lost in them.

In the synoptics, Jesus flatly refuses to communicate with Samaritans.

4:43–44 “He went from that place to Galilee (for Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country).” John suggests that Jesus lived in Judea and exiled himself to Galilee; the synoptics say he lived in Galilee. The myth about Jesus living in Judea could appear later to enhance his status. Probably Jesus preached in Galilee where people were known both for their zeal for Judaism and their ignorance of the law. Galilee was the natural refuge for sectarian teaching, based not on the law but on an appeal to people’s feelings and impulses. The rabbis, on the contrary, tried to undergird faith with intellectual knowledge. They stressed the futility of ignorant belief.

5:1 “There was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.”

Unlike the synoptics, John shows adult Jesus visiting Jerusalem many times. Which is true? Was he a provincial Galilean preacher or a popular teacher in Judea?

Repeated visits to the city deny his messiahship. Matthew knew that, but the Gentile authors of Luke and John did not. In the Jewish tradition, the Messiah will enter Jerusalem triumphantly, but only once. Jesus as devout Jew (Luke) or famous teacher (John) disqualifies himself as messiah.

5:2–9 “Now in Jerusalem . . . there is a pool . . . In these lay many invalids—blind, lame . . . One man was there who had been ill . . . When

Jesus saw him lying . . . he said to him, . . . 'Stand up, take your mat and walk.' At once the man was made well."

John does not notice the disturbance of the concept of Jesus' love. He comes into the premises of many ill people but heals only one of them, and even that one is serving the demonstration of his miracles.

5:17 "But Jesus answered them, 'My Father is still working, and I also am working.'"

Jewish tradition teaches that God completed his work on the sixth day. Some Greek philosophers thought God created continuously.<sup>155</sup> The gamut runs from direct causal control of events to the notion that every atom is created anew at each moment. Even heretical Jewish determinism,<sup>156</sup> soaked in Hellenism, comes nowhere near the concept of continuous creation.

5:18 "The Jews sought all the more to kill him, because he . . . called God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God."

Only a person utterly unfamiliar with Jewish tradition would write that. To call God *father* was normal; several people were called sons of God. The formula does not imply equality with God, but rather the subordination of son to father. In Matthew, Jesus routinely calls Jews "children of God," who is their father.

5:20 "The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing; and he will show him greater works than these."

The future "will show" means Jesus has not yet sounded the depth of God. How does the saying agree with ideas of Jesus' eternal nature? How with the doctrine of the trinity?

5:21 "Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomever he wishes."

The Scriptures report no mass resurrections. John does not mean future resurrection. Jesus speaks of precedent, previous resurrections.

"Whomever he wishes"—does Jesus want to raise only the elect?

5:22 "The Father judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son."

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<sup>155</sup> The concept was later adopted by the *mutakellemim* of Islam and to a degree by Hasidic Jews.

<sup>156</sup> Matt 5:36 "You cannot make one hair white or black." Matt 6:26 "Your heavenly Father feeds them [birds]."

The saying empties the concept of final judgment and John's own claim in 3:17: "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

God and Jesus are distinct; one judges, the other does not.

5:24 "Anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life."

John misconstrues. "Believes him who sent me" means faith in God, which all Jews have. But saying that God sent Jesus, John shifts the object of faith. One must believe that God sent Jesus.

5:25 "The hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live."

They obviously have not revived, though the time "is now here." Matthew links the resurrection of some saints with Jesus' death,<sup>dlxxiv</sup> not with his voice.

Although the "is coming/is now here" pair may be a rhetorical device, more probably John or his editor strengthened the original "is coming."

"The dead" lead a temporal life. Those who accept Jesus will lead a spiritual life. John messed up both concepts; elsewhere<sup>dlxxv</sup> he speaks of physical resurrection.

5:27 "And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man."

The Son of Man receives power only on the last day, after numerous omens, and he is not the judge, according to Daniel. John confuses Son of Man and Son of God.

5:29 "Those who have done good [enter] . . . the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, . . . the resurrection of condemnation."

6:40 "All who see the Son and believe in him . . . have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day." Will Jesus resurrect everyone or only believers?

5:30 "I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge; . . . because I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me."

Jesus says he *cannot*, meaning that he is dispossessed of his own will, at least in the theological sense. Further, he "hears," he is apart from God, of a different essence. Where is his value as a theologically independent figure?

5:21–22 "The Son gives life to whomever he wishes. The Father . . . has given all judgment to the Son." John makes opposing statements.

5:31 "If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true."

How should we regard all Jesus' testimonies as to himself, including this one? "I testify about myself." (8:18)

John does not understand mysticism. Since Jesus was initiated, he had realized his divinity and could testify about himself. The testimony of others is irrelevant, since they could not understand his initiation or judge him.

5:32 "There is another who testifies on my behalf, and I know that his testimony is true."

But "I know" is also a testimony "about myself" and cannot be true according to 5:31.

5:33 "You sent messengers to John, and he testified to the truth."

If they believed the Baptist enough to ask his opinion, why did they not believe him regarding Jesus? Likely, the Baptist did not say anything specific about Jesus.

5:35 about John the Baptist, "He was a . . . lamp."

After John's execution, Jesus could claim an acknowledgement.

5:37 "You have never heard [God's] voice or seen his form."

While the Jews did not see the form, Jesus claims that he did. That is sheer nonsense. God has no form whatsoever, but the author of John was accustomed to pagan deities.

5:38 "and you do not have his word abiding in you, because you do not believe him whom he has sent."

First, is not it too much to expect that the word of God (prophecy) abides in many people? Second, John states that all non-Christians lack the word. That is, the presence of the word is sufficient for becoming a Christian.

6:44 "No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father." Here the same condition is established as a necessary one. In effect, John states that *all* Christians are prophets ("hear the word of God") and there are no prophets except Christians.

5:45 "Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; your accuser is Moses."

Mt10:33 "Whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven."

5:46 "If you believed in Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me."

Jesus refers to God's promise to Moses, "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet."<sup>dlxxvi</sup> Some thought Jesus might be that prophet. The promised prophet, however, was to be "like" Moses, not the divine founder of a new religion.

5:46 "If you believed in Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me."

Jews just demanded a confirmation that Moses wrote about Jesus. John treats an assumption as proven fact, and proceeds from it.

6:1 "After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberius."

A verse before Jesus was in Jerusalem, a relatively long way from Galilee. The city of Tiberius was on the Galilean side of the sea, the *other side* only for foreigners.

6:9 "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?"

Among all the crowd, only one boy had food? John is explicit that others had none.

The unusually close agreement between John and the synoptics here lets us draw hypotheses about the passage's evolution. Matthew's account in chapter fourteen is short; John's is unusually long. John usually skips over details and concentrates on the mystical sense. Here he follows the source. John needs a sign to overcome the doubt expressed in the previous chapter. After the feeding, the people say he is indeed "that prophet that should come." The author borrows that sign from the synoptics. John naturally interpolates the miraculous feeding story in the appropriate context of Jesus as Eucharistic bread.

6:17 The disciples went "across the sea to Capernaum."

Capernaum is on the Galilean side.

6:30–31 "What sign do you give so that we may see it and believe you? . . . Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness."

Jesus offers no miracle and ducks the answer. In the analogous episode in Matthew, he offers the meaningless sign of Jonah. Matthew may have added the account, and with good reason: the failure to answer the central question of Jesus' authority left a gap in the narrative. The quintessentially Jewish nature of Jonah, its bad correlation to the context, and its theological unsuitability betray Matthew's hand.

Manna was not a sign of God's existence or power. The Hebrews feared God had abandoned them, and manna was the evidence of his presence.

6:38 "For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me."

Then how could Jesus execute judgment in place of God?<sup>dlxxvii</sup> How could the Jews listen to "I have come down from heaven" from a man they knew came from Nazareth?

6:39–40 "And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day . . . that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day."

God supposedly granted Jesus power over everything. "All that he has given me" means *all people*. If God wills to save everyone, then everyone will be saved.

Jn6:39 introduces determination: God alone grants salvation, regardless of individual acts; 6:40 denies predestination by claiming *Jesus* will raise believers. If everyone becomes Christian there is no contradiction, but not everyone does.

Jesus promises to raise up on Judgment Day only those who believe in him. But everyone would revive for Judgment.<sup>dlxxviii</sup>

6:45 "It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.'"

"All your children shall be taught by the Lord, and great shall be the prosperity of your children."<sup>dlxxix</sup> *Your children* differs from *they all*—and does not include other nations.

"Everyone who heard from the Father and learned comes to me." But at 5:24, "everyone who hears *my* word." Few have heard God's voice and been taught by him. The statement would sound quite natural among a secluded community of Gnostics.

6:49–51 "Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died . . . This is the bread . . . that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread."

Spiritual death, the impossibility of resurrection, or the assured final condemnation of all the Hebrews who left Egypt ("ate the manna") being out of question, Jesus must mean physical death. Those who ate Jesus' bread would not die in the physical sense, the only way they differ from those who ate manna. Either the prediction did not come true, or Jesus found not a single real follower, including the apostles.

6:51 “I am the living bread that came down from heaven . . . and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

If Jesus’ flesh came to him from Heaven, what is the value of sacrifice? He took flesh with a definite purpose, which he accomplished. He should have been happy to rid himself of the sinful receptacle of his divine nature.

If, more realistically, we suppose that the man Jesus had his own flesh, of what value is human flesh as an expiation for the world’s sins? When the Jews sacrificed sheep and doves, the sacrifices did not cause forgiveness; repentance, culminating in sacrifices, did.

If only Jesus’ spirit “came down from heaven,” its origin is irrelevant, since Jesus’ body and soul, not his spirit, were sacrificed.

Jesus offered his flesh, not his spirit, on the cross. The text then distinguishes *flesh* from spirit, and “eating flesh” does not confer spiritual unity. John probably meant Jesus’ flesh as something spiritual rather than worldly but failed to explain it.

Jesus distinguishes between the *bread he is* and the *bread he will give*. John demolishes his own allegory.

6:53 “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.”

At 6:51 Jesus distinguishes between his spirit and his flesh, defining the flesh as the victim of sacrifice, his mortal body, theologically different from his spirit. What properties of that body enable it to control the lives and spirits of others?

John did not understand Daniel’s concept of the Son of Man as a heavenly figure, without a body and not susceptible to naturalistic allegories.

6:56 “Those who eat my flesh . . . abide in me, and I in them.”

Alongside with the spirit of God, Jesus also encompasses the spirits of all wafer-eating Christians, contaminating his soul with their uncleanness.

6:63 “The flesh is useless.”

Then what is the value of Jesus’ human flesh?

6:57 “I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me.”

Jesus means spiritual food, acceptance of the spirit. The Christian Eucharist features allegories of the physical body and blood.



The Gnostics believed that everyone initiated acquired the spirit and become divine in some degree and equal to Jesus in relation to God. The church categorically rejected such equality. John introduces an intermediary concept: Christians receive the same spirit as Jesus but, unlike Jesus, not directly from God.

“because of me”: Jesus could not have his own spirit, as he lacked, or at least suppressed even his own will.<sup>dlxxx</sup>

6:60 “They said, ‘This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?’”

The words are revealing. Matthew’s Jesus teaches simple, common ethical concepts, but John reflects on complicated mystical doctrines, difficult indeed to comprehend and accept.

6:65 “For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father.” This verse repeats 6:44.

8:19 “If you knew me, you would know my Father also.”

Mt11:27 “No one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.” Does everyone who has accepted Jesus know<sup>dlxxxi</sup> God or only those to whom Jesus wants to reveal him?<sup>dlxxxii</sup>

6:65 and 8:19 form a logical vicious circle: one can know God only through Jesus to whom one can come only through God.

6:70 “Yet one of you is a devil.”

Jesus, who cast out demons, has accepted the devil for his disciple: “I chose you.”<sup>dlxxxiii</sup> The devil ostensibly enjoyed Jesus’ sermons and remained unmoved by exorcism of the fellow creatures.

That John employs *devil* simply as a word of mild abuse, is unlikely and, at any rate, does not correlate with Matthew’s prohibition of calling someone even a *fool*.

According to John, the devil aimed to betray Jesus to the Jews. Jesus knew of the plot yet kept Judas at his side. Why should the Jews be blamed if both the devil and Jesus worked for his execution?

Unlike the synoptics, John makes the revelation long before the end of Jesus’ mission. John is constrained to do so by his early, placement of the last-supper Eucharist. It turns out that the disciples traveled with their devilish colleague for some time with no remorse and no attempt to get rid of him.

6:71 “He was speaking of Judas son of Simon Iscariot, for he, though one of the *twelve*, was going to betray him.”

6:60 “When many of his disciples heard this, they said . . .”

“Many of his disciples” shows that the disciples were more than twelve, their number being fixed later by passages like 6:71. In the early tradition, Judas was not a traitor.

7:3—5 “So his brothers said to him, . . . ‘Go to Judea so that your disciples also may see the works you are doing.’ . . . (For not even his brothers believed in him.)”

Jesus’ brothers and his mother were at the feast in Cana and could not help seeing Jesus turn water into wine. Still they did not believe? Rather, they saw no miracles. Mary knew of her immaculate conception. Did she never hint of it to Jesus’ brothers? This clue was especially needed, since the angel visited Mary before the engagement, and premature birth (seven months in the apocrypha) would have given rise to gossip.

Jesus’ disciples did not follow him and did not see the miracles—a puzzling implication. Even if we forcibly recognize *disciples* as *followers* in general, Jesus still performed enough miracles for everyone to see already.

Perhaps the author meant sectarians, Essenes or mystics, by Jesus’ *brothers*. Note that James *the brother of Jesus* may not have been his relative. At the crucifixion, Jesus entrusted his mother to the care of John, in whose house she lived afterward, a disgrace for any blood brothers of Jesus. Apologists offer that the brothers were Joseph’s children, not Mary’s. It is implausible that a young woman like Mary had no children besides Jesus.

That interpretation makes sense of the moment when Jesus refused to see his mother and brothers, calling his followers his real brothers. There he possibly refused to meet former fellow sectarians, preferring new “brothers” to the old.

7:7 “The world . . . hates me because I testify against it that its works are evil.”

But 5:18 reads: “The Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he was not only breaking the Sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God.” No testimony about the vicious world at all.

In different places, Jesus says he has come to judge *or* not to judge, to save all *or* to punish almost everyone, but not to prove that the world is evil. If Jesus came only to reveal evil, salvation is out of the question: what iniquity did Jesus redeem if vice is permanent?

7:8 Jesus announces to the brothers that he is not going to Jerusalem on the occasion of Succoth.

But in 7:10, he secretly attends the celebration. Christians, starting at least from Paul, condemned deceit—how could Jesus resort to it? John

adheres to Greek ethical values, which praise stealth against enemies, commonly attributing it to heroes.

7:33–34 “Jesus then said, ‘I will be with you a little while longer . . . You will search for me, but you will not find me, and where I am, you cannot come.’”

Th38 “Jesus said, ‘Often you have desired to hear these sayings that I am speaking to you, and you have no one else from whom to hear them. There will be days when you will seek me and you will not find me.’”

The agreement with the passage in Thomas must be mere chance; John is otherwise unacquainted with Thomas. The meanings are different. In Thomas, Jesus addresses the disciples; in John, Jesus addresses the Pharisees.

The saying contradicts “Those . . . whom you have given me, may be with me where I am.”<sup>dlxxxiv</sup>

7:38 “As the scripture has said, ‘Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.’”

There is no such text in the Scriptures nor could there be, since the source of life and knowledge (*living water*) in Judaism is God, not the faithful.

7:39 “Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive.”

This contradicts 6:65, where blessing by the Holy Spirit precedes hearing the word of God, which, according to 6:65, is a precondition to belief in Jesus.

Again, 39 does not explain 38. Say the Jews believe in Jesus and receive the spirit. What rivers flow from the heart? Will each believer become a source of spirit? It has never happened.

7:39 “For as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.”

John agrees with Paul that Jesus was glorified at his execution and only then he became divine. The account in Jn1 of the spirit descending on Jesus at the beginning of his mission could be interpolated.

7:49 “But this crowd, which does not know the law, they are accursed.”

John puts implausibly strong language into the mouths of the Pharisees who curse the officers who have not seized Jesus and seem to include all Jews, as well as the priests who were present. Such belligerent curses are standard for aggressive John.

### 8:3–11 The woman taken in adultery.

In Judea then, only the Roman prefect imposed capital punishment, though the Jews could appeal to him for a sentence under the Torah. So the question was rhetorical, since the Romans considered stoning homicide. For that same reason the reports of attempts to stone Jesus are dubious. Stoning might happen if a crowd got out of control but not as organized event and only when the Romans were not around. Moreover, stoning was strictly regulated,<sup>dlxxxv</sup> even humanized to a certain extent.<sup>157</sup>

Even within the strict framework of the law, the woman was subject to trial. To ask Jesus seems absurd. Either the crowd was going to lynch her and needed no advice, or execute her legally by court order instead of consulting Jesus.

Many in Judea then had slim regard for the ancient law. Thus, “Once in Caesarea there was a judge of the city council who condemned to death the robbers and debauchees. Before he left the bench he was heard to say, ‘Last night I robbed and assaulted a woman,’”<sup>dlxxxvi</sup> although this relates to a Gentile. Execution for adultery was rare; only conjugal infidelity,<sup>dlxxxvii</sup> spoilation of virginity,<sup>dlxxxviii</sup> and some specific cases of incest assured execution. John is not clear whether the woman was subject to punishment, and even if she were, the law was not strict. Suspects were given “bitter water,” a mild laxative, as a test. Since she survived, the verdict was not guilty.<sup>158</sup> At about Jesus’ time, rabbis formally abrogated the test because husbands were also thought *en masse*.<sup>dlxxxix</sup> The tradition was even more tolerant of venality: “It is prohibited to throw a stone at the fallen one.”

Jesus suggests the one without sin should throw the first stone. Judaism required objective testimony almost regardless of the witness’ own sinfulness. The witness, not just anyone in the crowd, threw the first stone. The execution procedure stipulated that the condemned be thrown upon rocks, not that a stones be thrown at him. Those who had violated the law at some point still had the right to punish other lawbreakers. Punishment only by the sinless is impossible and contradicts the practical nature of Judaism. It is bizarre to imagine a guiltless man throwing stones.

The world without fear of punishment is good only in theory. Christians themselves extensively evoked a threat of hell to push the flock

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<sup>157</sup> The crowd was throwing stones only if the denounced was alive after the first witness had thrown him onto the rocks and the second witness had stroke him right at the heart with a stone.

<sup>158</sup> Compare this to Christian Inquisition tests, such as drowning, where the result was predictably positive for the accusation.

into the Church. They never attempted to create a world where only righteous can disburse punishment.

The episode is an insert, missing from the oldest manuscripts but found in many later versions and in Luke. Similar episodes are present in the stories of Krishna and Buddha. In the Judaism, generally both participants of debauch were punished.

The story's absence from the early manuscripts cannot be explained by the Jews' rejection of Jesus' solution. By Jesus' time, adultery was no longer punished by death. Judging from the many allusions to it in the Bible, adultery was widespread. Jesus' words would have been seen as a convenient excuse, not as an appeal to violate the law.

8:12 "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me, will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."

Mt5:14 Jesus says to the crowd, "You are the light of the world."

Who is the embodiment of light, Jesus or the Jews?

8:14 "Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid."

5:31 "If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true." 8:18 "I testify on my own behalf." John's Jesus is torn among *yes*, *no*, and *maybe*.

8:18 "The Father who sent me testifies on my behalf."

5:32–33 "There is another who bears witness about me . . . . You sent to John, and he bore witness to the truth." John heaps testimonies.

8:15 "I judge no one."

8:50 "Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is one who seeks it and he is the judge." 3:17 "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world." 8:16 "Yet even if do judge, my judgment is valid" 5:22 "The Father judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son." 9:39 "I came into this world for judgment." More *yes*, *no*, *maybe* options.

8:16–17 "Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is valid; for it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father . . . . The testimony of two witnesses is valid." Jesus sees himself and God as two different beings, not parts of a trinity. Further he equates both himself and God with human witnesses. Cannot God do without another witness? Moreover, he claims that both he and God (in this order) *judge* in the present tense, now, whenever. What happens then to the final judgment?

8:17 "In your law it is written."

Why *your* law?

8:20 "He spoke these words while he was teaching in the treasury of the temple."

The temple treasury was a separate guarded hall where neither Jesus nor a crowd could be. John perhaps meant the place where alms were collected.

8:21 “I am going away, and you will search for me, but you will die in your sin.”

Does not the search—belief in Jesus—lead to salvation in Christian theology? 8:21 (no one will be saved) contradicts 8:24, “you will die in your sins unless you believe that I am he,” since if they search, they obviously believe.

Perhaps John meant current events. After the Jewish War, the Jews expected the messiah to settle the score with the Romans. Bar Kochba led the revolt of 132–135 C.E. with that purpose. John’s Jesus may allude to the Jews’ rejection of Jesus and their acceptance of the false Bar Kochba.

8:32–33 “And you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”

Hebrews 3 “The Lord is the spirit and where the spirit is, there is freedom.” The beautiful saying was a standard maxim in those times. John adapts it to the practical needs of the slaves who were by then a major part of the Christian congregation.

Zohar1:132 “The one whose occupation is studying Torah is free in both worlds.”

8:34 “Everyone who commits a sin is a slave to sin.”

John uses the famous Stoic maxim: only the good man is free; evil men are slaves to sinful desires. Zeno described freedom as the “power of independent action, whereas slavery is privation of the same.”<sup>dx</sup> Erroneously supposing that no one would transgress of his own will, the evangelist concludes that any evil deed is the forced behavior of enslaved people. Since compelling someone to transgress is itself a sin, no righteous master would make his slave sin. So the master must be evil itself.

Rom6:12 “Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions.” John builds on the popular tradition of sin’s enslaving capacity.

11:35 “But a slave does not abide in the house eternally: the son abides eternally.”

If the devil is the *slave* and Jesus the *son*, then *house* means *world*. John says Jesus has always abided in the world, which brings to naught both the significance of his advent (he is always immersed in earthly life), his rejection by the Jews (he has always been in this world and, consequently, has always been rejected), and his execution (he will still be in the world). Jesus and the devil have coexisted during the whole history of

earth. Either they have lived peacefully or Jesus is impotent or unwilling to destroy Satan. God's immutability and the invariable properties of his emanations mean Jesus' power cannot increase, and he never will be able to save the world from the devil.

If people are *slaves*, then the saying is meaningless. Suppose the *house* is the kingdom of heaven. Its inhabitants *abide* there *eternally*. If *house* means earth, there was no advent and death of Jesus, since he stayed there eternally. Yet another possibility, if *the house* means the universe, the earthly and heavenly worlds together, then "a slave does not abide in the house eternally" means that a person ceases to exist after death; there is neither judgment nor paradise nor hell.

Does a sinner, the slave of sin, abide even temporarily in the house, if we take it for the kingdom of heaven?

8:44–47 "Your father the devil . . . was a murderer . . . . You are not from God."

Will Jesus save the descendants of Satan? John is usually aggressive toward Jews and nonbelievers in general, but we expect less hostility from Jesus.

John, like Paul, insists the people descended from Cain. If so, this is as much a problem for Christians, as for Jews. The rabbinic tradition holds that the forefather of the modern people was Seth, another son of Adam.

8:48 "Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan?"

7:52 "No prophet is to arise from Galilee."

Did the mob not know where Jesus was from? Place of origin was important in Judea, unlike in the cosmopolitan communities to which John was probably accustomed.

8:57 "You are not yet fifty years old."

The age, John suggests is odd. Few then lived to fifty, though "not yet fifty" seems to disparage Jesus. Unusual length of life was attributed to many famous rabbis of the Talmudic tradition.

If Jesus began to preach at thirty<sup>dxci</sup> and continued for twenty years, why would people suddenly take offense?

8:58 "Before Abraham was, I am."

The saying is typically Hellenic. Aristotle believed the heavenly forces to be eternal.

"I am" is a euphemism for God. Jesus should offer a radically mystical teaching to say this.

8:59 "So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple."

Where did they find stones in the temple? Stoning was not allowed in the temple. John's account may be calqued on Josephus' story of the crowd trying to stone Manahem in the temple.<sup>dxcii</sup>

Luke presents the story differently. His Jesus became invisible to escape lynching in Galilee.

9:2–3 “His disciples asked him, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’ Jesus answered, ‘Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him.’”

People believed diseases resulted from sins. Did the divine Jesus also think illnesses appeared because of sins or only for him to cure? Why were not the myriad other blind and sick also unrealized occasions for revealing God’s works?

9:5 “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

Does Jesus, upon his ascension, cease being the light of the world?

9:22 “They were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue.”

“Afraid of the Pharisees,” perhaps, but not “of the Jews.”

Jesus did not call himself the messiah in John, but the Son of God, a higher state.

The synagogues survived the temple, though Jesus could not have known that. John’s threat betrays a writer at work long after the destruction of Jerusalem and the expelling of Christians from synagogues.

9:39 “I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.”

Where are Jesus’ humanity and fairness? Why should people sincerely doing their best to follow the law be made spiritually blind?

10:1–7 “The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out . . . I am the gate of the sheep.”

The shepherd goes in, not the gatekeeper. Jesus says he is the *gate*, not the *shepherd*. Then why listen to him? John mixes metaphors of the way and the guide.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> This mistake serves as a basis for curious Christian tradition. Major cathedrals of Vatican have a door, opened in jubilee (every twenty-fifth)



10:8 "All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them."

All? Does Jesus scorn the prophets whom the Gospels constantly cite?

10:11–12 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand . . . sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away."

Hired by whom? Probably by God, though that explanation may seem presumptuous. Flees what wolf? Since Jesus does not protect Jews from their earthly enemies, the wolf must be spiritual, Satan. But why would anyone hired by God flee from the devil? John is accustomed to the Gnostic theology where evil demiurge is more powerful in the world than God.

The whole parable is dubious. Shepherds did not ordinarily die for the sheep, nor did they leave their flocks without serious repercussions from their employers—of whom they were likely more afraid than of wolves.

10:15 "And I lay down my life for the sheep."

8:58 "Before Abraham was, I am." If Jesus is eternal, what is the value of giving up his earthly life?

10:17 "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life."

Did God not love Jesus before he gave up his life? If Jesus is eternal and a part of the trinity, is not it odd to love a part for obeying the whole? No one thanks his leg for walking.

10:18 "No one takes it [life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord."

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years' Christmas. Passing through this door, symbolizing Jesus, *the gate*, absolves a person from whatever sins he might have. Thus, even repentance is not required. Modern Church put forward a new explanation for this bizarre, clearly idolatrous (connecting religion with earthly objects), ritual, that it is faith that saves, not passing through the door *per se*. This, of course, is a ridiculous attempt at rationalization. If faith is the issue, there is no need to go through the door, sufficient to believe conveniently at home. On the other hand, if everyone participating in the rite is redeemed, then faith is of no importance. Characteristically, even the weak *the gate* explanation was probably advanced to explain already existing procedure of easy, perhaps commercialized, abolition.

Mt 26:39 “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.”

10:28 “No one will snatch them [the sheep] out of my hand.”

Matt 18:6 “If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if . . . you were drowned.” Some of the sheep *will* be snatched. If he addressed Jews in general, a great many were snatched.

10:30 “The Father and I are one.”

“No one can come to me unless the Father draw him.”<sup>»dxciii</sup> “The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing.”<sup>»dxciv</sup> “I can do nothing on my own.”<sup>»dxcv</sup> “The Father who sent me testifies on my behalf.”<sup>»dxcvi</sup> “Whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.”<sup>»dxcvii</sup> Other contradictory passages abound.

10:33–34 “Jesus answered, ‘Is it not written in your law, ‘I said, you are gods?’”

Ps 82:6 means people in general and hardly substantiates Jesus’ uniqueness. Translation obscures the difference, which is quite clear in Hebrew. The psalmist used a homonym, which in this case means *angels* or *divine beings*. According to Maimonides, the psalm describes people approaching God in their comprehension of the divine.

Psalms are not part of the law. Only Pharisees used them as a basis for legalisms. John wrote late enough that Pharisaic views became prevalent.

11:8 “The disciples said to him, ‘Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?’”

Jesus’ disciples were all Jews and accepted Jesus as messiah. They would have described those who wanted to kill him more specifically.

John shows Jesus visiting Jerusalem on a number of occasions, even after conflicts with the authorities, so the disciples have nothing to be surprised at. If they believed in Jesus’ divinity and his miracles, why were they worried at all?

John retrospectively attributes immense popularity to Jesus. After the few minor disturbances depicted in the Gospels, he would hardly become persona non grata in the whole country so that danger lurked even in Bethany.

11:11–13 “[Lazarus] has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him . . . Jesus . . . spoke about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep.”

John suggests the disciples thought Jesus would travel to another town to wake someone from sleep.

11:15 "For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."

Did the disciples need more proof beyond the other, earlier miracles?

"Glad I was not there" is curious. Jesus implies that had he been in Bethany, the disciples would suspect some trick. If his followers could doubt, there must have been rumors. Stories of Jesus as a magician who studied in Egypt support that possibility. Faking Lazarus' death was no problem, even though Jesus was not in Bethany and took three days to get there. He wanted to emphasize that Lazarus was actually dead.

11:16 "Thomas . . . said to his fellow disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.'" The last pronoun is a subject of debate. Did Thomas mean Jesus or Lazarus? Lazarus was mentioned last and is therefore the most appropriate antecedent. All the disciples wanted to participate in the mystical sacrament of dying and being born anew. Still John likely meant Jesus. Since a visit to Bethany was dangerous,<sup>dxcviii</sup> Thomas could be suggesting that the disciples share Jesus' fate.

A similar episode of resurrection appears only in ScMk, with its evident Gnostic and mystical tint. The story was deliberately excised from Mark, perhaps to avoid disclosing the secret initiation rite. John did not so much invent things as he based his account on the tradition of Jesus' mystical teaching. His theology may be more nearly authentic than that of the synoptics, though still a far cry from Church doctrine.

The Lazarus story does not make sense in the synoptic context, where Jesus preached in Galilee and has no friends in Bethany so dear he would risk his life going there.

11:33 "When Jesus saw her [Mary] weeping . . . he was greatly disturbed in spirit and *deeply moved*."

Jesus' perturbation sorts ill with "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory."<sup>dxci</sup> The corresponding Greek word used with a prophet or wizard denotes ecstasy before working a miracle.

11:44 "The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound."

The Egyptians swaddled corpses. Jews were buried in good clothes or in a shroud.

11:47–57 "So the chief priests and the Pharisees . . . said, 'What are we to do? This man is performing many signs.' . . . [They] gave orders that anyone who knew where Jesus was should let them know, so that they might arrest him."

11:48 “If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation.” John does not mean Jesus’ appeals to obey only God, as opposed to earthly rulers. Matthew reports that Jesus approved paying taxes to the emperor. 11:48 refers anachronistically to the destruction of the temple and of Jerusalem.

That people and priests accepted Bar Kochba as messiah, even without miracles, testifies to their readiness to find the savior, though subjective factors could also be in play. Bar Kochba claimed the role of military leader without challenging the priests’ position or the tradition. The Jews would not have denied Jesus from fear of the Romans, had he shown his supernatural powers by miracles. The priests would not have plotted against the divine messenger. They would have done so, however, if they in fact saw no miracles. If Jesus came as a savior, then we cannot presume that the people’s hearts were hardened like the pharaoh’s.

The miracles in John are the evidence of Jesus’ power, not the fulfillment of prophecies as in Matthew.

11:49 “Caiaphas . . . was high priest that year.”

Caiaphas was high priest for nineteen years. John writes specifically “that year,” as if Caiaphas served only briefly. The Roman practice of selling two-year office terms appeared only in 59 C.E. John lived long enough after that to mistake the custom as ancient.

12:3 Mary anoints Jesus’ feet. John mentions the episode at 11:2 before Lazarus was raised: “the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair.”

Matthew sets the moment in the context of the healing of Simon the leper; John, after the resurrection of Lazarus. Did Matthew decide not to test his readers’ confidence, or did John raise the stakes with a more astonishing miracle? In any case, the details coincide: Bethany, the house of the healed, the anointing with myrrh, the disciples’ indignation at the expense.

12:31 “*Now* is the judgment of this world.”

But the last day did not come. The description of judgment in the Scriptures was unlike the situation in Jesus’ days.

12:31 “*Now* the ruler of this world will be driven out.”

Gnostic dualism teaches that Satan rules the world. The prediction did not come true.

12:32 “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw *all* people to myself.”

3:18 "Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe *are condemned* already."

12:38 "This was to fulfill the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah: 'Lord, who has believed *our message*, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?'"

John distorts the sense of Is 53:1: "Who has believed what *we have heard*?"

12:50 "And I know that his commandment is eternal life."

5:24 "Anyone who . . . believes him who sent me has eternal life." 6:39–40 "And this is the will of him who sent me . . . that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life." 6:54 "Those who eat my flesh . . . have eternal life." Keeping the commandments *or* faith in God *or* faith in Jesus *or* partaking in Christian Eucharist—*all* or any (?) guarantee the kingdom of heaven.

13:5 "[Jesus] began to wash the disciples' feet."

Servants usually washed feet. Jesus may be performing a symbolic rite: washing his disciples' feet after their initiation to purity of mind leaves them completely clean from the world.

13:10 "Jesus said to [Peter], 'One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean.'"

POxy840:2:2 "Have not your disciples washed even their feet?" establishes the minimum demand made of Christians: to wash feet ceremonially, if nothing else.

The story makes some sense of Josephus' account of James. Josephus admires James for not washing ever. This would have been unusual and unpleasant to the regular folks, and unacceptable to Essenes. But it seems here that Jesus' sect made nonwashing a matter of principle, to demonstrate their spiritual cleanness.

The Talmud mentions many meek teachers: they opened doors for their disciples, poured their wine, *etc.* A rare late episode shows the mother of Rabbi Ishmael complaining that her son does not let her to wash his feet. The rabbis tell Ishmael, "If this is her will, you must obey her."<sup>dc</sup> The moral: obedience to a mother's wishes takes priority even over protecting her from doing humiliating work.

13:18 "I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But it is to fulfill the scripture, 'The one who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.'"

Ps41:9 "Even the man peaceful with me, on whom I have relied, who ate of my bread, has lifted his heel against me." Jesus did not rely on

Judas. Judas did not eat Jesus' bread, since the disciples collected alms, and many manuscripts distort the text by substituting "eating *with* me."

Jesus ordinarily implies that all the disciples are chosen, yet John says that only some are of the elect.

13:19 "I tell you this now, before it occurs, so that . . . you may believe that I am he."

Still the disciples doubt. John heaps up evidence.

13:23 The disciple "whom Jesus loved" reclines his head on Jesus' breast.

The posture is more typically Greek than Jewish.

13:26–27 "Jesus answered, 'It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread.' . . . He gave it to Judas Iscariot son Simon. After he received the bread, Satan entered into him."

Earlier, before Jesus washed the disciples' feet: "And at supper . . . the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray him."<sup>dci</sup> 6:70 Jesus calls Judas a devil. The evangelist cannot decide when Judas embraced Satan.

13:27–29 "Jesus said to [Judas], 'Do quickly what you are going to do.' Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. Some thought that, because Judas had the common purse, Jesus was telling to him, 'Buy what we need for the festival.'"

Jesus has already pointed at Judas<sup>dci</sup> and said, "One of you will betray me."<sup>dciiii</sup> The evangelist does not keep track of the various episodes he is merging.

What could Judas possibly buy so late the evening of Passover? Even if we admit some scholars' unlikely supposition that Jesus celebrated the Seder early, John's explanation still makes no sense. No matter what Jesus' intent, the disciples could not work on the Sabbath (day of celebration is sabbatical), and shopping is work. The reports of Jesus' disregard for the Sabbath are probably forged. And why keep Passover but break the Sabbath? Moreover, they were already at the table; what else did they need "for the festival"?

13:31 "When [Judas] had gone out, Jesus said, 'Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him.'"

11:4 "But when Jesus heard [that Lazarus was ill] . . . he said, 'This illness . . . is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.'"

12:23 "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." The saying refers to Greeks visiting Jesus. 12:28 "I have glorified it [Jesus name]."

17:1 "The hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you."

17:4–5 "So now, Father, glorify me." 17:5 "The glory that I had in

your presence before the world existed." When exactly was Jesus glorified?

13:33 "Where I am going, you cannot come."

Not "come *now*"; Jesus' meaning is generic: the disciples cannot enter the kingdom. Yet, "Anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life."<sup>dciv</sup> "I . . . will take you to myself."<sup>dev</sup> "Where I am, you cannot come,"<sup>devi</sup> said to unbelieving Jews only. "[I] will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also."<sup>devii</sup> What of the twelve thrones he promised his disciples?<sup>160</sup> Which does Jesus mean?

13:36–38 "Jesus answered, 'Where I am going, you cannot follow me now; but you will follow afterward.'" Following or not following Jesus has just been settled. Why return to it immediately unless the editor wanted to correct 13:33?

Here, as elsewhere in John, Jesus calls the disciples *children*. The Jesus of the synoptics is not so fond of the word. For John, however, Jesus is a legendary, authoritative teacher. The expression is hardly appropriate to Jesus at about thirty speaking to people his own age or older.

13:34 "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another."

John distorts one of Judaism's principal commandments and calls it new. Matthew requires people to love everyone, including their enemies; John restricts the requirement.

Both the tradition and the phrase exist in Judaism. Zohar2:190 "Those who study Torah and do not love each other set themselves on a wrong path."

"Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." However, Jesus loved disciples differently. John put his head on Jesus' breast. To Peter he vouchsafed keys from the kingdom. There is no such dilemma in the traditional Judaic negative formulation, prohibiting from doing evil.

13:36–38 "Simon Peter said to him, 'Lord, where are you going?' Jesus answered, 'Where I am going, you cannot follow me now; but you will follow afterward.' Peter said to him, 'I will lay down my life for you.' Jesus answered, ' . . . before the cock crows, you will have denied me three times.'"

John relates the famous Church tradition differently from the synoptics.

Usually Peter's question, *Domine, quo vadis?* is related to his meeting Jesus on the road, when Peter tried to escape execution in Rome in 67 C.E. John was writing so late that *Quo Vadis* was already in use as apothegm but before the creation of Peter's death myth.

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<sup>160</sup> Twelve thrones near himself.

14:2–3 “In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.”

“In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places” recalls the Egyptian doctrine of the other world, *duat*, divided into compartments. The saying may have meant originally that even the ignorant disciples could enter some parts of that realm. John’s handling of the story is primitively naturalistic.

“I go to prepare a place for you.” The disciples are ready to enter the kingdom, but the kingdom itself is not yet ready. Nothing makes sense.

There are further problems. Jesus says he will take his disciples to himself only when he *comes again*. But “when the Son of Man is seated on the throne of his glory, you . . . will also sit on twelve thrones.”<sup>dexviii</sup> Will Jesus take the throne of glory only after the Second Advent? Did he have no glory before?

John knew the promise did not come true. Jesus did not come back for his disciples. If Jesus meant personal mystical experience, perhaps the disciples will meet him in their meditations.

“Anyone who hears my word . . . has eternal life, and does not come under Judgment, but has passed from death to life.”<sup>dexix</sup> “Whoever keeps my word will never see death.”<sup>dex</sup> Why must Jesus come again for the disciples if they already have heavenly life?

“I will come again and will take *you* to myself” may be connected with “I will raise them up on the last day.”<sup>dexi</sup> Earlier Jesus promised “resurrection of life” to everyone who does good.<sup>dexii</sup>

14:10–12 “Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? . . . The Father who dwells in me does his works . . . . The one who believes in me will also do the works that I do.”

Jesus performs miracles by God’s power, so believers also work miracles by the power of God. Jesus can exercise God’s power, because God abides in him. If believers can also work miracles, God must abide in them as he does in Jesus.

God’s abiding in Jesus and in any believer is essentially the same. Since logic forbids extending the concept of trinity to each believer, we conclude God’s abiding is spiritual in both Jesus and the faithful—which does not mean that God is identical to Jesus or the believer. Once again, John inclines to mystical doctrine. The initiated partake of the universal spirit. Such belief is not unattractive but is inconsistent with the Church’s teaching.



14:15 "If you love me, you will keep my commandments."

John records almost no commandments.

14:16 "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever."

John introduces a new theological figure to defend against Satan. The construct suits Gnosticism beautifully. Satan and the Advocate personify two earthly powers. Earlier Jesus was a judge. "To be with you forever," that is until the end of time, when Jesus will come. But what is the Second Coming for, if the Advocate has already given eternal life? How will the Advocate "be" with the disciples "forever," if they are raised only on the last day?

John generally neglects the concept of the Second Coming. Jesus does not promise to come but to send "another Advocate" instead. Is Jesus not himself the savior? John seems lost. Perhaps we see traces of a completely different theology in the sources, where Jesus was one of many embodiments of the Logos.

After his imminent death, to which he looks forward, Jesus expects to ascend to heaven and, casting aside the evil world, enter the celestial spheres, where he will communicate with the Holy Spirit as an equal and persuade him to bless others or the congregation on earth.

In Jewish tradition, the comforter is God: "The illegitimate suffer in many ways without any fault of theirs. God says, 'I will be their Comforter in the world to come.'"<sup>dexiii</sup>

14:17 "This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive . . . You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you."

John introduces yet another theological being, the spirit of truth. If "the world cannot receive" it, does he send it for the sake of disciples only? Why send it if "he [already] abides with you"?

John's view is that of a small isolated sect. His Jesus deliberately appeals to only a few.

14:18 "I will not leave you orphaned; I *am coming* to you."

Could the disciples be orphaned even for some time, if "he abides with you, and he will be in you"?<sup>dexiv</sup>

14:3 Jesus will *not come* to his disciples until the last day.

14:26 Jesus will send the Advocate *instead* of coming himself.

14:19 "In a little while the world *will no longer see* me, but you will see me; because I live and you also will live."

Will the disciples, like Jesus, live on as eternal spiritual beings?

14:19 “*Will see* me . . .” 16:10 “I am going to the Father, and you will see me no longer.” 16:22 “I will see you *again*.” John cannot sort out the unity of the initiated in the universal spirit and the literal notion of Jesus as a divine being visiting the earth.

14:21 “They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; . . . and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”

14:15 “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” Cause and effect swap places. 14:21 distinguishes between loving Jesus and observing his commandments; they are not the same. The distinction eliminates the contradiction between 15 and 21.

John does not speak of the Second Advent as an apocalypse. The believer can see Jesus: the moment is spiritual, not the physical end of the world.

14:26 “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you *everything*, and remind you of all that I have said to you.”

John’s second phrase contradicts the first; *and remind* . . . was interpolated to ascertain that Jesus taught the future apostles.

15:15 “I have made known to you *everything* that I have heard from my Father.”

What distinguishes the disciples from Jesus after the Spirit enters them? Why did they not call themselves sons of God? Why did they not ascend?

14:28 “You heard me say to you, . . . ‘I am coming to you.’ If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father.”

Like good mystics, John’s sect saw the crucifixion as initiation, a joyful event, not a tragedy.

“The Father is greater than I” contradicts “The Father and I are one.”<sup>dexv</sup> The mystical sense may rule here: the initiated Jesus has the eternal Spirit, but he is also simultaneously a part of it.

14:30 “I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming.”

12:31 “Now the ruler of this world will be driven out.” Who expels whom?

14:31 “Rise, let us be on our way.” Jesus seems to end the meal; but 15:1 continues, “I am the true vine.”

15:3 “You have already been cleaned by the word that I have spoken to you.”

Jesus preached to many, even those who subsequently accused him. Were they cleaned also?

15:15 Jesus—to his disciples, “I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.”

Did Jesus hear so little through eternity?

15:17 “I am giving you these commandments so that you may love one another.”

The sectarian approach is typically exclusive. Judaism's version is far broader: “Love your neighbor.”

In John, Jesus' instructions have neither religious nor ethical sense but rather regulate relations in a self-contained community. They explain how believers should perceive God, their destiny, and so on. Perhaps other mystical commands were later excised from the Gospel.

15:20 “Remember the word that I said to you, ‘Servants are not greater than their master.’”

15:15 “I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends.” It is hard to imagine that Jesus called his disciples *slaves* or *servants*.

15:24 “If I had not done among them the works that no one else did . . .”

John reveals the poverty of his knowledge of Judaism. The prophets, who worked miracles like those of Jesus, did not conclude on that basis that they were of divine origin.

15:25 “It was to fulfill the word that is written in their law, ‘They hated me without a cause.’”

Ps35:19 “Those who hate me without cause . . .” John rarely uses biblical references, especially specific references.

Consider the context: Ps35:23 “Wake up! Bestir yourself for my defense, for my cause, [O] my God.” If the psalm is applicable to Jesus, does he think God forgot him once he came into the world? Ps35:28 “Then my tongue shall tell of your . . . praise all day long.” Shortly before crucifixion, did Jesus expect to continue on the earth?

Ps69:4 “More in number than the hairs on my head are those who hate me without cause . . . What I did not steal must I now restore?” does not refer to Jesus, either.

16:2 “They will put you out of the synagogues.”

Lk24:53 After the Ascension the apostles “were continually in the temple blessing God.”

16:5 “But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’”

13:36 “Simon Peter said to him, ‘Lord, where are you going? Jesus answered, ‘Where I am going, you cannot follow me now.’”

16:7 “it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.”

Could anything be better than Jesus’ presence? “if I go, I will send him to you.” Could not the spirit be sent without Jesus’ personal presence in the kingdom of heaven?

16:8 “And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment.”

The Advocate will act independently, not through the apostles. Supposedly Jesus came with the same purpose, possessing the same spirit. Why must the Spirit wait until Jesus sends it?

Unless we suppose that the spirit came in a preacher like Paul, the prediction was not fulfilled. Given the insistence on another Advocate even more powerful than Jesus, the late Gospel of John could appear to justify a prominent leader of the Church, perhaps, indeed, Paul.

16:12–13 “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears.”

But the spirit has already come—in Jesus. Will the spirit embodied in the apostles explain better than the same spirit embodied in Jesus? Jesus did not speak “on his own”: “I can do nothing on my own.”<sup>dexvi</sup>

16:14 “He [the Spirit] will glorify me, *because* he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

The Gospel the disciples received does not glorify Jesus in the world. If things depended on the disciples, Jesus would have been glorified already. Perhaps the original text referred to all people, not to the disciples only.

How can the incorporeal spirit glorify Jesus independently? Why send it upon the apostles? They would have glorified Jesus anyway. Will the spirit work miracles? Jesus did that. Will the spirit proclaim Jesus the Savior? He did that himself through the deeds of power. Since Jesus and the Advocate are of the same essence, they seem to do all the same things.

Why did the apostles need the spirit if they had already tasted Jesus’ flesh and blood in the Eucharist? Jesus, and likely the spirit as well, already abides in them after the sacrament.<sup>dexvii</sup>

“He will take what is mine.” What can the Spirit take from Jesus? Earlier the spirit descended upon Jesus himself.

16:15 “He will take what is mine . . . . All that the Father has is mine.”

The elaboration is absurd. If the author of 16:4 meant “everything, which belongs to God,” he would have written, “he will take everything,” not “what is mine.”

The saying suggests that the spirit also belongs to Jesus. In that case, why did it fall upon Jesus only after his baptism? Why did Jesus have to ask the Father to send the spirit to the disciples<sup>dexviii</sup> instead of doing it himself?

“. . . he will take what is mine . . . .”: what can the Spirit take from Jesus? Earlier the Spirit itself had descended upon Jesus. The text defies Jesus’ uniqueness. He is a teacher, to be superceded by others, also initiated and blessed by the spirit.

16:24 “Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete.”

Jesus said, “Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”<sup>»dcxix</sup>

John means the quest for knowledge, and an individualist path incompatible with organized religion. The saying is commonly understood to be about faith, but requiring greater faith is absurd if belief is already sufficient to guarantee the request will be granted.

Mt6:8 “Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”

16:26 “I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf.”

14:16 “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate.”

ScJm2:6–7 “No one will enter the kingdom of heaven at my request but if you fill yourself.”

16:32 “The hour is coming . . . when you will be scattered . . . and you will leave me alone.”

16:32 has been inserted into the coherent context. 16:31 “Jesus answered them, ‘Do you now believe?’” 16:33 “I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace.” 16:33 cannot follow the prediction of the disciples’ defection. The insertion coordinates with the synoptic tradition. The contradiction occurs because John depicts events differently. His Jesus is not abandoned, but several women and at least one disciple are present at the crucifixion.<sup>dexx</sup>

There is a third tradition: “‘Let these men [the disciples] go.’ This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken, ‘I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me.’”<sup>dexxi</sup> The disciples did not flee; Jesus sent them away.

17:4–5 “I glorified you . . . So now, Father, glorify me . . . with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.”

The bargain overshadows deals of the Temple’s moneychangers: I glorified you, now you have to glorify me.

Mark the future imperative: “Now . . . glorify me.” Jesus will be glorified not because of works already done but because of the crucifixion yet to come. Paul expounded the same view. What did Jesus’ missionary work mean then? Why are the Jewish priests guilty if they have sent Jesus to glory by sentencing him?

What glory did Jesus have “before the world existed”? In Judaism glory is a form of God’s appearance, a technical term. Jesus considers it something to be acquired and not yet his own.

17:6 “I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world.”

Judaism prohibits speaking God’s name, even those who learn it in the Holy of Holies. Even if Jesus means only the disciples, the NT reports no single case when Jesus speaks the name of God to them. Perhaps John meant to identify the power the disciples used to perform miracles.

14:26 “the Father will send in *my* name.”

“They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word.”

Here may be a trace of polytheistic Gentile culture. One god chooses some people, another chooses others.

“. . . those whom you gave me.” In another version, Jesus chose his disciples himself: “I chose you”;<sup>dexxii</sup> “You do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world.”<sup>dexxiii</sup>

17:8 “For the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth . . . and they have believed.”

The Pauline epistles suggest that the disciples understood very little even after Jesus’ ascension.

17:9 “I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me.”

Must Jesus’ entreat for those already chosen? Do the three persons of the trinity beseech one another? Is Jesus persuading himself? He is

characteristically disinterested in the fate of the world, but jealous for the well-being of his followers.

Elsewhere Jesus implies he could ask God only after the ascension.<sup>dccxiv</sup> He also suggests that the disciples ask for themselves,<sup>dccxv</sup> leaving no need for an intermediary.

17:11 "Protect them [disciples] . . . that you have given to me, so that they may be one, as we are one."

Does the spirit unite the disciples? It fell upon Jesus only at his baptism. Before baptism, then, had he no unity with God?

Pleading for protection vitiates Jesus' prophecy of the grim destiny of the apostles, who will be ejected from the synagogues and killed. Could not Jesus himself defend the disciples after the ascension?

17:21 "That they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us." The trinity turns into a kind of extended family. Mystics would have found the construction familiar.

17:11 "I am no longer in the world."

Jesus was not yet seized and would soon die in the world. The phrase makes sense if Jesus already started preparing for mystical initiation.

17:13 "I speak these things in the world."

17:12 "Not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled."

The Scriptures has no such notion. The forced reference to Ps 109 bears neither textual nor semantic resemblance.

17:15–16 "I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world."

Jesus says the disciples have the same spiritual nature as he does. Why is he praying for them and not *vice versa*? Why were the apostles not resurrected in their time? Why should not they, like Jesus, be taken from the world in due time, if they do not belong to the world?

17:17 "Sanctify them in the truth."

"The words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth."<sup>dccxxvi</sup> "They were yours . . . and they have kept your word."<sup>dccxxvii</sup> Were the disciples bearers of the truth initially, did they receive it from Jesus, or will they be blessed with it in the future?

17:20 "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me."

17:9 “I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me.”

Why should he pray for believers? 6:47 “Whoever believes has eternal life.”

17:24 “Those . . . whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory.”

Jesus earlier promised the disciples twelve thrones,<sup>dccxxviii</sup> but only now makes the request.

17:25 “The world does not know you.”

17:4 “I glorified you on earth.”

18:8–9 “‘Let these men [the disciples] go.’ This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken, ‘I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me.’”

And what of Judas Iscariot? Another (dubious) saying hedges the bet: “Not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled.”<sup>dccxxix</sup>

What is the explanation of many Christians’ martyrdom; shall we admit that they were not chosen for Jesus? This saying appeared to explain the apostles’ abandoning their leader, and the writer did not consider the collision [unclear].

18:13–14 “Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was better to have one person die for the people.”

John wants the high priest to confirm that Jesus died for the people and extrapolate from there that he died to save everyone.

The high priest could demand Jesus’ execution only to prevent riots on the festival day. Jesus already caused trouble by throwing the traders out of the temple, announcing the approach of the kingdom of heaven, and hinting that he was the messiah. In a tense political situation, riots would have brought out the Roman garrison to kill many Jews.

18:16–17 “So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the woman who guarded the gate, and brought Peter in. The woman said to Peter, ‘You are not also one of this man’s disciples, are you?’ He said, ‘I am not.’”

What was Peter afraid of, if the “other disciple” came and went freely?

“Known to the priest . . .”—They were not in the high priest’s house but his father-in-law’s.<sup>dccxxx</sup>

Why was a woman guarding the gate?



18:18–19 “Now the slaves and the guards had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing around it and warming themselves . . . . Then the high priest questioned Jesus.”

Annas was formerly high-priest and maybe father-in-law of the current one. Jesus would be sent to Caiaphas later.<sup>dccxxi</sup>

What was Annas doing at home on the eve of Passover? No priest would enter the praetorium lest he become unclean.<sup>dccxxii</sup> John, mostly ignorant of Jewish tradition, did not realize that priests were also leery of being in the streets or in crowds where they might run into Gentiles or other impure people and be defiled.

18:20 “I have always taught in the synagogues and in the temple.”

In the synoptics, Jesus is a Galilean preacher who came to the temple just before his execution, but in John he becomes a renowned teacher.

18:21–23 “‘Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard.’ . . . One of the police . . . struck Jesus on the face, saying, ‘Is that how you answer the high priest?’ Jesus answered, ‘If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?’”

Blows were forbidden in formal trials. John seems to want to show infringement of due process. The high-priest might have thought Jesus would repeat his claims and elaborate on them. His answer was rude, disrespectful, and evasive.

The synoptics lack the episode, but there is a strikingly similar moment in Paul's trial.<sup>dccxxiii</sup> “Paul said to [the high-priest], ‘God will strike you, you whitewashed wall!’” Since John wrote late, we may suppose he based his account on the known incident with Paul. Jesus' meaningless reply indirectly confirms that guess. He was beaten because he insulted the court and dodged the question with procedural quibbles. The high-priest had the right to ask Jesus' opinion of the charges.

John does not notice that he makes Jews similarly not answering Pilate about Jesus' guilt.<sup>dccxxiv</sup>

18:28–29 “Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate's headquarters. It was early in the morning . . . . Pilate went out to them.”

John mentions no trial at either Annas' or at Caiaphas' homes. There may have been no court session at all, and the Jews who created the sources tied Joseph Caiaphas to this story, because they hated him as a Roman sympathizer. Or perhaps the author of Matthew just wanted to show his knowledge of Jewish court procedure when he told the story.

18:29–33 “Pilate . . . said, ‘What accusation do you bring against this man?’ They answered, ‘If this man were not a criminal, we would not

have handed him over to you.’ . . . Pilate . . . asked him, “Are you the King of Jews?””

Though the priests brought Jesus to Pilate for judgment, they put forward no charge and stubbornly refused to answer Pilate to the point.

18:29–38 Pilate talks to Jesus in the praetorium.

Neither Judeans nor Jesus’ disciples could be present there. In particular, John could only invent the famous text of discussion and use sarcastic Hellenism, “What is truth?” To the latter, Jesus did not answer.

18:38 “Pilate . . . told them, ‘I find no case against him.’”

After saying that, Pilate could not agree to Jesus’ crucifixion without violating Roman law. In a similar situation, the proconsul Gallio refused to judge Paul.<sup>dcxxxv</sup>

The Jews could judge Jesus under their law, but there was no capital offense. To sentence Jesus to crucifixion, Pilate personally had to make sure of Jesus’ guilt under either the Torah or Roman law.<sup>161</sup>

Pilate repeatedly affirms Jesus’ innocence, then has him crucified. The Christian writers shield Pilate from blame.

18:39 “But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover. Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?”

If Pilate thought Jesus not guilty, why ask the Jews’ consent to release him?

19:4 “Pilate went out again and said to them, . . . ‘I find no case against him.’”

That after he turned Jesus over to the soldiers for a beating?<sup>dcxxxvi</sup>

19:9 “He . . . asked Jesus, ‘Where are you from?’ But Jesus gave him no answer.”

An obvious attempt to conform to Is53:7: “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, but he did not open his mouth.” But Jesus answers Pilate at 18:34, 36–37 and 19:11.

19:11 “Jesus answered him, ‘You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.’”

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<sup>161</sup> Our perception of the observance of the laws by ancient Romans is probably exaggerated, at least because modern jurisprudence is based on Roman. Thus, Emperor Alexander Severus was extolled because during his reign not a single Roman (!) was executed without trial.

Typical one-sided Christian determinism. If Pilate's power over Jesus is from above, then the Jews who seized him must also have heavenly authority. If Pilate is guiltless, so should the Jews be too. Strictly speaking, only God could hand Jesus over to Pilate. Who is guilty? The Christian author again seeks to exonerate the Romans.

19:12 "The Jews cried out, 'If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor.'"

No Jew then would have said such a thing. Their kings had authority, they believed, from God. Roman demands to recognize the emperor's absolute power caused rebellions, like the revolt of Judah the Galilean. The Jews refused to honor the emperor as God to Pilate's face and prevented him from setting up effigies in Jerusalem in violation of the commandment.

19:14 Pilate judged Jesus on "the day of Preparation before the Passover; and it was about noon."

Legal proceedings took place at a stadium, before the crowd, not on the steps of the governor's residence. Few Jews, especially the priests, would gather on the festival eve. As people flocked to Jerusalem, the authorities did everything to avoid disturbances. Jesus would have been executed at some other time, unless they expected him to cause trouble during the festival.

Pilate would not have held trial on a holiday. Jesus had to be judged formally, and Pilate would hardly have condemned him on the run.

John wanted Jesus crucified on the eve of Passover when the paschal lambs were sacrificed.

19:21 "Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, 'Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'This man said, 'I am King of the Jews.'"

The priests could not be present at the crucifixion on the eve of Passover, and they would scarcely have argued with the prefect.

The writer's guess was probably correct. Pilate would not write that Jesus only said he was king. That would not have constituted treason, indispensable for Jesus' condemnation.

19:23–24 "The tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top . . . [The soldiers] said to one another, 'Let us not tear it, but cast lots.'"

If the tunic had seams, would the soldiers have torn it? How much could the shreds of a wandering preacher's tunic be worth?

The writer seeks to conform to prophecy.

19:25 “Standing near the cross of Jesus [was] his mother.”

Mary would not likely have traveled unaccompanied to Jerusalem. “And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.”<sup>dexxxvii</sup> Leaving his mother in someone else’s care would have disgraced Jesus’ brothers. In Matthew, Jesus refuses to see his mother and brothers; here she is present.

19:25–26 “His mother, and his mother’s sister Mary . . . and Mary Magdalene.”

How could both Jesus’ mother and her sister be called Mary?

The presence of three women all called Miriam is implausible. The symbol of a man and three women in death-related rites is puzzlingly encountered in diverse cultures.

19:27 “Then he said to the disciple, ‘Here is your mother.’”

7:5 Jesus’ brothers do not believe in him. Would they let their mother live with someone else? Would they let her travel with Jesus?

Some Christian scholars suggest that Mary was not the mother of Jesus’ brothers. If they were sons of Joseph by another marriage and did not care for her in plain contradiction of the law, why do they come together to take Jesus away in the synoptic Gospels?

19:29 “So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop, and brought it to his mouth.”

The writer introduces hyssop, because Israelites used it to mark their doorposts with animal blood during Exodus.<sup>dexxxviii</sup>

He does not know that hyssop is too delicate to hold a sponge full of wine.

19:31 “The Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the Sabbath . . . . So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed.”

The scruple is a bit late, since, according to the synoptics, the execution took place on the first day of Passover in flagrant violation of the law. 19:31 could be interpolated to correlate John to the synoptic chronology. They date Passover differently, and 19:31 at least reconciles the days of the crucifixion (Friday) and the resurrection (Sunday).

Sabbath has nothing to do with any of it. People hung on a tree had to be buried before sunset.<sup>dexxxix</sup> Jesus’ body would have been taken off the cross in the afternoon, regardless of the Sabbath. The prohibition against leaving a body after dusk referred to corpses. If Jesus were alive, he could hang on the cross at night or on Saturday. Though the general prohibition of

work on the Sabbath included torture, the Romans paid no attention and left the crucified to die, regardless of the day.

Executions late in the day, when the condemned would not likely die before sunset, were improbable. The expedient business with the spear or with breaking legs lends credence, the writer believes.

19:34 "Instead one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out."

The blood came out *at once*, that is, Jesus' heart was beating. He was alive. A spear wound is not necessarily mortal.

The spear probably pierced Jesus' lungs. That noticeable amount of liquid accumulated quickly in Jesus' pleura because of beating is not likely. The water may be an allegory of the blessing of the Holy Spirit. Curiously, John seems to know that spilled blood breaks down into blood cells and serum, though not immediately as he suggests, but after some time.

The soldier did not break Jesus' legs since Jesus was already dead. Then why did he spear him? If the soldiers had any doubt whether Jesus was dead or alive, they had to break his legs, as they did to the others. Soldiers knew from experience that dead people do not bleed.

Spears might not be conventional in the Roman army. Machiavelli, one of the best students of Roman military arrangements doubted the few mentions of lances<sup>dexl</sup> and believed that the traditional Roman shield did not allow handling a heavy spear, usually with both hands. Delbruck expressed similar doubts. In the East, where John seems to have written, light cavalry used lances. Josephus does not report about such soldiers, and cavalry would be inoperative in narrow streets.

19:36 "So that the scripture might be fulfilled, 'None of his bones shall be broken.'"

There is no such reference in the Torah. Some cite, "This is the ordinance of the Passover . . . It shall be eaten in one house; you shall not take any of the animal outside the house, and you shall not break any of its bones."<sup>dexli</sup> If, like the Christian theologians, we see Jesus as the paschal sacrifice, then we must explain how he is to be eaten in one house and his flesh not taken outside.

Further, John says Jesus was speared in the ribs, which would certainly break bones. To pass a spear between ribs is almost impossible.

The paschal lambs' bones were preserved not for moral or ritual reasons but as the symbol of the hastiness of the Exodus, when the Hebrews had no time even to finish eating.<sup>dexlii</sup> This symbolism is unnecessary for Jesus.

The "uncrushed bone" may contradict Is53:5, a very important passage for Christians: "But he was wounded for our transgressions,

crushed for our iniquities.” Of all the evangelists, only John does not know Isaiah. The synoptics say nothing about broken bones.

The spear might be an invention designed for transition to 19:37: “They will look on the one whom they have pierced.” John was not satisfied with nail wounds.

Jesus’ crucifixion may not have required nails. Nailing through the hands is the least satisfactory way to secure the victim. The nails had to be placed precisely through the wrists to prevent the hands from tearing and the crucified person from falling. The feet were usually nailed into a notch in the upright, but the victims struggled and would fall if not carefully pinned. More usually the hands and arms were lashed and only the feet nailed. That mode of crucifixion also provided for longer torture.

Even though the cross is traditionally depicted plain, crosses with a prop for the feet appear in many Italian paintings,<sup>dexliiii</sup> apparently to make them realistic.

Zech12:6–7 “On that day I will make the clans of Judah like a blazing pot on a pile of wood . . . and they shall devour to the right and to the left all the surrounding peoples, while Jerusalem shall again be inhabited in its place . . . . And the Lord will give victory to the tents of Judah first, that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem may not be exalted over that of Judah.” John lifts Zech12:10 from its context, which is impossible to relate to Jesus. 19:38–39 Joseph and Nicodemus take Jesus’ body away.

Earlier John mentions only Nicodemus, and Matthew says Joseph took the body by himself. The issue seemed sufficiently significant to the forger to require harmonizing: the two take the body away together.

Theoretically, all the Gospels get it wrong. Convicted blasphemers were buried in public land; relatives could retrieve the bodies after a specified time. The men had no need to appeal to Pilate, if Jesus were executed for treason, since Romans usually did not withhold the bodies.

19:39 “Nicodemus . . . also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloe, weighing about a hundred pounds.”

Where and when could Nicodemus buy such a quantity on Friday night? Shops closed on the Sabbath, especially that one. Buying the balm after Jesus’ conviction but before his death is somewhat odd. Since the sun was going down, there was little time for embalming.

One box of myrrh seemed prodigal to the disciples.<sup>dexliv</sup> A hundred pounds would cost thirty thousand denarii. Even if Nicodemus could afford it, who would keep it in such supply?

Nicodemus is a curiously Greek name for the important personage of Jewish milieu. Though Josephus relates of many Jewish rulers with Greek names, other people routinely have Hebrew names.

19:41-42 "Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified. . . . They laid Jesus there."

The crucifixion certainly took place on public land, not in a cemetery. Jesus had to be buried elsewhere. No traces of burial have been found in the place identified as Golgotha, a small hill with little space for burial caves.

19:42 "It was the Jewish day of Preparation."

John did not understand the Jewish calendar. He did not realize that days began at sundown. The hour he describes here was Saturday as Jews saw it, not Friday.

20:1 "Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb."

Mary came to anoint Jesus' body, though in the Judean climate, even in March or April, nobody would likely rub a corpse two to three days old. John did not know that the corpse could have been anointed on Saturday.<sup>dexlv</sup>

A woman would hardly visit a cemetery at night.

20:1-2 "The stone was removed from the cave. So, she ran and came to Simon Peter and another disciple . . . and told them, 'They took the Lord from the tomb, and we do not know where they laid him.'"

The episode is interpolated. In the synoptics, the women meet angels, who explain everything. In John, Mary sees angels later when she returned with the other disciples. She sees angels again after the other disciples looked inside but saw no one. The interpolation makes the account meaningless: seeing the angels, Mary thinks someone took Jesus' body away and weeps.

Why didn't Mary see Jesus immediately? Why make up a story that she first ran to Peter? The answer could be in the plot borrowing from Egyptian cult. After the death of Osiris, Isis cannot find him and searches the whole Earth, perhaps weeping.

20:5 "[They] saw linen wrappings, lying there."

The wrappings indicate an Egyptian-style burial, practiced also in Syria. There is no shroud.

20:9 "They did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead."

Contrary to Christian tradition, the Scriptures make no such claim.

Even in John's time the traditional view was that Jesus' disciples did not expect his death and did not know his plans. Though John shows Jesus withholding information, the synoptics say he told them everything.

Still rumors circulated that Jesus did not revive. Unable to disprove them, the author of John blames them on the disciples' ignorance. 20:9 could hardly be attributed to John, whose Jesus promises the disciples to send the spirit after he ascends and does not imply his resurrection.

20:14 Mary does not recognize the resurrected Jesus.

John's account parallels the mystic initiation rite rather than bodily resurrection. When the initiated returns from the heavenly journey, he is transformed, and people pretend symbolically to not recognize him. The initiated tells them what he saw in heaven, as Jesus does on the road to Emmaus.

20:17 "Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father.'"

Jesus maintains ritual purity. But the divine essence is always pure. An injured person, like an invalid, is not clean. The episode bears the impress of the Gnostic rite of initiation for which the initiated had to remain ritually clean.

Jesus invited Thomas to put his fingers into the wounds, which would have profaned Jesus no less than Mary's touch. The interpolator possibly thought of women as ritually unclean.

20:23 "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

What about "Do not judge"? What about Jesus' promise to execute judgment himself? In Matthew, Jesus entrusts the power to forgive sins to Peter. The late insert seeks to substantiate the power of Church administrators.

20:25–27 "But [Thomas] said to them, 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my fingers in the mark of the nails . . . I will not believe.' . . . Jesus . . . said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and see my hands.'"

As noted earlier, Jesus' hands were likely not nailed. The wounds of the resurrected Jesus sort ill with the important Christian belief that the dead are raised in a restored body.

The resurrected Jesus' corporeality at 20:25 contrasts with his ability to go through locked doors at 20:26. Also 4:31–32: "The disciples were urging him, 'Rabbi, eat something.' But he said to them, 'I have food to eat that you do not know about.'" The story of doubting Thomas was inserted to support John's belief that Jesus was resurrected in the body. The anti-Gnostic editor naturally made Thomas the Gnostic evangelist the doubter.

20:29 "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."



A late text for Christians living after Jesus.

Similarly, r.Simeon ben Lakish praised proselytes above the born Jews.<sup>dexlvi</sup> The prophet Mohammed says the same, ranking future followers higher than his closest disciples.

21:3 “Simon Peter said to them, ‘I am going fishing.’ They said to him, ‘We will go with you.’”

Immediately after the resurrection, Jesus’ disciples returned to their usual occupations. 20:21 “Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’” No one rushed to preach the Gospel and establish the Church.

21:4 “Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus.”

Why not? Thomas had no trouble recognizing him.

21:10–11 “Jesus said to them, ‘Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.’ So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them . . .”

Archimedes used this number in the formula of fish measurement, a popular Christian symbol until today, better known in antiquity as the Eye of Horus.

21:21–23 “When Peter saw [John], he said to Jesus, ‘Lord, what about him?’ Jesus said to him, . . . ‘What is that to you? Follow me!’ So the rumor spread in the community that [John] would not die.”

Traces of a struggle between John and Peter surface in this episode. John recognizes Peter’s authority at 21:15–17, but establishes an authority of his own to rival Peter’s at 21:21–23. In fact legend says John lived to be very old and was rumored to be still alive as late as the second century, suggesting involvement of the supernatural.

21:24 “The disciple . . . has written them, and we know that his testimony is true.”

Jn5:31 “If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true.”

21:25 “But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.”

How long could it take to write down Jesus’ acts after the resurrection? But John does not want to write explicitly about the event Christians say is the most important in the history of the world. Any witness would describe such event with scrupulous detail.

## The Acts

Acts has almost no authentic references to the Gospels, though strained biblical references abound. Were the Gospels written later? But the point is not the date of composition. The book narrates events certainly known to the apostles. Even without the Gospels, the apostles could have quoted what they heard Jesus say; yet not once does Acts refer directly and credibly to Jesus' life and work.

The book's reputed Lucan authorship is dubious. Someone named Luke could have written Acts before the pseudepigraphic Gospel was ascribed to him. Otherwise, he should at least have been acquainted with his own Gospel. The people in Acts quote scripture endlessly but not Luke's Gospel. The most evident similarity between the Gospel and Acts is their debt to Josephus, who became known among Christians rather late.

Acts is pro-Peter. He is the chief apostle and head of the church, a role eventually assumed by James, perhaps after Peter's death or emigration. Peter or a disciple could well have written the first part of Acts, "the Jerusalem prototext."

The two chief divisions of Acts star Peter and Paul successively, with other smaller prototexts intercalated into the main text. Some sources antedate Paul's epistles; others are as late as the later half of the second century.

The first section is in the first person; the Pauline section, in the third person, though not consistently. The writer at first replaced the third person of the prototext with first, but then reverted for some reason.

Acts reveals traces of the literary license typical of antique historiography, where the author was free to create episodes and compose the heroes' speeches. Acts skillfully bypasses Paul's execution, though Luke mentions it indirectly several times: Paul tells one congregation he will not return, tells his shipmates he is going to face the emperor's court at Rome, where he spent two years. Luke avoids the persecutions and Paul's execution, unwilling to switch to the genre of tragedy.

The author of Acts is unusually civil toward Jews. Luke's hope to fix the Church's origin in the Jewish community explains his respectful posture to some degree. By the time Acts was written, the story of the Jerusalem congregation was a legend; Luke felt free to present it as historiographic literary fiction.

Luke needs Jerusalem at the center of Christianity to validate the religion as ancient, thus authoritative. His Jews, not overfond of Christians, persecuted them at times but were generally tolerant. Empowered by the founder, the apostles head a Church obedient to Jewish law, though Paul obtained a dispensation for proselytes.

Endless misquotation of the scriptures runs alongside crass misunderstanding of Jewish theology. That may reveal a Gentile author slightly acquainted with Jewish texts.

Paul in Acts is hardly recognizable as the Paul of the epistles, where respectful affection for the Jerusalem church vanishes. Attempts to justify the law's strictures in Acts give way to aggressive antagonism in the epistles.

In Acts, Paul first addresses the Jews in each city and then others. In the epistles, he denies the necessity of the law even for Jews. Paul would not have been tolerated preaching in the synagogues that the law was obsolete, should be replaced by belief in Jesus, often unknown to his audience, as messiah—though he brought neither military victories nor the kingdom of heaven on earth.

Luke wrote so independently from Paul that Luke knew nothing of his Paul's views, which is strange, since he knew of Paul's execution. Acts was written or heavily edited long after the events, notwithstanding Paul's change of mind. In any case, why would the inspired apostle change his mind about the principal theological issues?

We cannot clearly say which was written earlier, Acts or the epistles. Probably Acts appeared before the epistles were generally recognized. The writer either ignored or dismissed them as minimally credible and lacking in piety.

Justin Martyr does not mention Acts, perhaps because he considered it a forgery, one among many such. Otherwise, Justin's silence about Acts suggests it did not appear until near the end of the second century, requiring the implausible assumption that the writer surely knew the Gospels but paid them no mind.

Perhaps most of Acts is early, composed well before the epistles or Gospels, even prior to the plethora of prototexts; yet for some reasons, it was not immediately accepted and became famous only later.

1:1 "In the first book I wrote, Theophilus, of all Jesus did and taught."

The writer claims to be an evangelist, presumably Luke, though the book does not quote the Gospel reliably.

The mention of the Gospel or *first book* is an insertion, aiming to show that the early writers knew of the Gospels, whose authenticity was already in doubt, as attested by the later Eusebius. Interpolation is easier at the beginning of a work than in the middle.

1:3 "He presented himself alive . . . appearing to them during forty days."

The Gospel knows no such detail and limits itself to a handful of post-Resurrection appearances. John describes an appearance by the Sea of Tiberius considerably after the resurrection. No evangelist, however, records multiple appearances “during forty days.” Had they known that, the evangelists would hardly have omitted the information.

Forty days is ubiquitous as a formula for “a long time” in the scriptures and the Jewish apocrypha,<sup>dexlvii</sup> known to sectarians. Forty days was the Talmudic standard of memorials for the deceased.<sup>dexlviii</sup> Jacob was forty days being embalmed.<sup>dexlix</sup> That Jesus appeared during this period assures the reader that he was alive.

The writer of Sc Jm, less preoccupied with authenticity, allocated Jesus 550 days between the resurrection and the ascension.

1:4-5 “He ordered them not to leave Jerusalem . . . . You will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now [the ascension].”

Lk24:49, 51 “So stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high . . . . He . . . was carried up into heaven.” Jn20:22 “He breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’” What did the apostles wait for in Jerusalem, if the spirit was given to them before the ascension?

That only the apostles receive the Holy Spirit in Acts contrasts with Paul’s position that all Christians bear the Spirit: “Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.”<sup>dcl</sup>

In John and Matthew, the disciples did not stay in Jerusalem after the resurrection: “Eleven disciples went to Galilee, onto the mountain, where Jesus sent them.”<sup>dcli</sup> How could the disciples of the victim of lynching stay in a hostile place, disregarding Jesus’ predictions of persecution?

Luke may be confused. Perhaps not Jesus’ followers, but some other messianic congregation, headed by James the Just, remained in Jerusalem.

1:6-7 “They asked him, ‘Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?’ He replied, ‘It is not for you to know the times or periods.’”

Mt16:28 “There are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”

1:11 “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up . . . will come in the same way.”

The heavenly messengers are curiously aware of geography; there was no need to tell the disciples they were Galileans. The angels’ reprimand is odd. If Jesus comes “in the same way,” he will descend from heaven.

Thus, the apostles were right to watch. Perhaps the angels meant some other tradition of the advent: violently, with fire, *etc.*, visible so that no one would fail to notice it.

1:12 “Then they returned . . . from the mount of Olives, . . . a Sabbath day’s journey away.”

There was no concept of “a Sabbath day’s journey” in orthodox Judaism. Any travel outside the home on Saturday was forbidden. Only the Pharisees allowed Saturday travel for a short distance. Acts was written after the Pharisees prevailed, and the practice might have been common in Judea. If so, Jesus’ disciples call the doctrine of the hated Pharisees to their aid. In any case, the writer demonstrates knowledge of the particulars of Judaism unusual in a Gentile, who probably borrowed from earlier sources.

1:14 “[The apostles] devoted themselves constantly to prayer, together with certain women, . . . as well as his brothers.”

Material aspects of the section indicate a late origin. Numbers of people abandoned their families, moved to Jerusalem, and stopped working. The community had to provide food for many people, beside their own families. During Jesus’ mission, the disciples lived by begging; Judas had an alms-box. Such a financial arrangement would take time to develop, certainly not at the beginning of the movement.

Women always prayed separately from men, and Jesus said nothing to the contrary. Certainly, they did not pray in the temple together.

The *brothers* are probably just members of the congregation. Otherwise, Jesus apparently had no followers other than the apostles and his relatives.

Such calm confidence among the members of a sect whose leader has just been crucified seems odd. Pt7 says the high priests repented after the eclipse during the crucifixion. 1:14 contradicts Eusebius, who reports Jewish persecution of Jesus’ followers.<sup>dclii</sup>

No authentic sources testify to the existence of the Jerusalem church. Eusebius tries to explain how they survived the siege of Jerusalem. He records oddly that they set off to Pella (Decapolis) at the beginning of the War. But hardly anyone in 66 C.E. could imagine the scope of future destruction. Many pilgrims gathered that year for Passover as usual.

1:16 “The Holy Spirit foretold concerning Judas, who became a guide for those who arrested Jesus.”

The most suitable supporting quotation is in Ps 41:9: “Even my bosom friend in whom I *trusted*, who ate of my bread, has lifted his heel against me.” David speaks of his enemies, not of Judas.

1:20 “For it is written in the book of Psalms, ‘Let his homestead become desolate’ . . . and ‘Let another take his position of overseer.’”

Ps69:21, 26 “They gave me poison for food . . . . May their camp be a desolation.” The saying means many people, not one person, Judas. Ps109:8, 16 “May another seize his position . . . . For he did not remember to show kindness, but pursued the poor and needy and the brokenhearted to their death.” Neither does that description suit Judas.

1:21–22 “So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection.”

But not all the disciples were present at the baptism. Equally few, if any, were at the crucifixion.

Why could not anyone present at the resurrection bear witness? Peter assembles only a select group, which must for some reason be twelve.

1:26 “And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.”

Did they believe so strongly in determinism? Otherwise, Matthias became an apostle on a mere roll of the dice.

Why did they need a twelfth apostle? Possibly, someone felt the need to link the tradition that the twelve disciples represent the tribes of Israel to the story of Judas. Why was not Paul in time put forward as the twelfth apostle? The anomaly corroborates the theory that different people wrote the two parts of Acts.

The writer who supported Peter added Matthias to make the number of the apostles back to twelve and thus leave no place for Paul among the apostles.

2:3–4 “Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages.”

Pagans believed that demons spoke all languages. Demons were humanoid demigods, not necessarily wicked, and comparing the apostles to them would shock some but might attract others. The episode might also result from a mistaken interpretation of early Christian tradition, when “to speak in tongues” meant babbling. Paul insists such inarticulate speech requires interpretation.<sup>dcliii</sup>

The Baptist promised, “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire,”<sup>dcliv</sup> but he meant the Pharisees and the Sadducees, not Jesus’ disciples. And he said nothing of glossolalia, which Jesus never exhibited.

The saying is not related to the Jewish tradition that one blessed with the Holy Spirit blazes like fire: "When the Holy Spirit reposed on Pinchas, his face glowed like flame."<sup>dclv</sup> The idea that the Spirit is available to everyone, however, did not bypass Judaism: "Be it Jew or Gentile, man or woman, male slave or female slave, the Holy Spirit abides in them in compliance with their doings."<sup>dclvi</sup> That contrasts with the selectivity of the Torah: Moses summoned seventy elders on whom God sent the spirit.<sup>dclvii</sup>

Christians, who abandoned Judaism but adopted much of its liturgical calendar, forged the episode to attach new meaning to the Jewish festival of Pentecost.

2:5 "Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem."

The author portrays Jews as a semimythical, legendary people. "From every nation" shows that the writer considered Jews as a sect, not a nation. The reference could not be to the Diaspora, because they were living in Jerusalem.

The Jews are "devout." The custom of blaming the Jews for Jesus' crucifixion arose later.

2:7–10 "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? . . . residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia . . . and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes."

Galileans, Judeans, Roman Jews, and proselytes spoke the same language, Aramaic. What did "proselytes" have to do with anything since they speak no special language?

Extensive foreign trade and diplomatic relations required a universal language. It was Greek. Without it, the foreigners could hardly get to Jerusalem in the first place.

This pericope mentions at least fifteen nations. But there were only twelve apostles, talking among themselves, not conversing with foreigners. Did some use more than one language?

2:15 "These are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning."

Peter speaks Aramaic to the crowd.

If the crowd heard the apostles speaking foreign languages, why would anyone think they were drunk? The speech was clearly the meaningless mumbling known from Paul's writings. 2:7–10 tries to correct the unwelcome detail. By 2:22 the foreigners disappear, and Peter addresses only Jews. The foreign audience was invented in the first place.

Amusingly, Peter proves the apostles' sobriety only by the argument that it is too early to drink.

2:14–21 “This is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: ‘Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy . . . before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’”

Joel2:20–4:1 “I will remove the northern army far from you . . . . You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel . . . . Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh . . . . in those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem.”

The Christian writer picks and chooses among the promises until the prophecy loses its sense. In whatever shape, the quotation does not explain the apostles' knowledge of languages, though it does imply prophecy. The author may have shared the pagan belief that oracles can speak any language.

Matthew uses the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy as a sign of the end of time.<sup>delviii</sup> Acts uses the same text to explain current events.

2:25–28 “I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken; therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; moreover my flesh will live in hope. For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your holy one experience corruption. You have made known to me the ways of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.”

Peter hopes to convince Jews with a distorted Greek translation of a psalm<sup>delix</sup> whose original they know perfectly. The correct version would not have supported his argument. The psalm sings the joy of a righteous mortal man. The body of the crucified Jesus did not rest *secure* (trans. *in hope*).

2:33 “Being . . . exalted . . . and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear.”

Christian writers never seem to know quite when Jesus received the Holy Spirit. It comes to him as a dove at his baptism, though he also ascends to receive it at the end of his ministry. John’s Gospel claims he has had it from the beginning of time, yet also shows it descending at baptism.

The translation of *exalted* is ambiguous and could mean either *ascended* or *being in ecstasy*, the latter meaning reminiscent of mystic rituals.

2:36 “God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus.”



Was Jesus born divine or was he “made” so at some time during his life? And how are Lord—God in the Septuagint—and messiah—a historical figure—made one? The undeveloped concept of Jesus as a man, exalted by God’s will to a divine state, marks this passage as very early.

2:37 “Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what should we do?’”

All Jesus’ miracles did not convince the public, but Peter’s speech does. Attempting to explain this apparent awkwardness, Christian theologians affirm Jesus turned the people to himself after his ascension, while earlier he had been embittering them—similarly to the Pharaoh during Exodus. This absurd concept, clearly intended to explain the rejection retroactively, does not square with numerous attempts of Jesus to attract a following.

2:44–45 “All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.”

6:1 “Now during those days . . . the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food.”

The Church used a kind of Ponzi scheme, involving new believers for a steady supply of funds to support the increasing congregations. Few would be willing to liquidate their wealth on such promises, and the community must have grown slowly.

Rather the claim is a late idealization. James, likely the leader of the community, knew nothing of such matters when he wrote, “If a brother is naked and lacks daily food, and . . . you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?”<sup>dclx</sup>

2:42–47 “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching.”

What teachings did the apostles have then, other than claiming that Jesus was the messiah and that the kingdom was about to break in?

3:15 “. . . whom God raised from the dead.”

The concept of trinity did not yet exist yet. God and Jesus are distinct here.

3:15–17 “And you killed the Author of life . . . I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers.”

The Church had not yet started casting blame for Jesus’ crucifixion. How could the leaders act “in ignorance” after Jesus’ miracles and the prophets’ predictions?

“Your rulers” betrays the hand of a non-Jew or someone who lived much later than the events. He did not consider himself a subject of those rulers.

The theology of 3:15 contradicts that of 2:36. In the former, Jesus is the primordial creator of the world, as in Gnostic theology; in the latter, he is a greatly exalted man. The ideas either belong to different writers or reveal one writer’s incompetence.

3:18 “God fulfilled what he foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer.”

Jews would have none of such nonsense. Christians can find a few prophecies among some, not all, the prophets which can be dragooned to mean Jesus after considerable use of allegory. None very well suits Jesus as messiah.

Christians had problems with the prophets: “His disciples said to him, ‘Twenty-four prophets have spoken in Israel, and they all spoke of you.’”<sup>delxi</sup> Finding exactly twenty-four prophets takes work. Perhaps the writer confused the twenty-four books of the scriptures<sup>delxii</sup> for prophets. Essenes who adhered to peshar should consider every book prophetic.

3:20 “He may send the Messiah appointed *for you*, that is, Jesus.” When this part of Acts was written, Jesus’ mission was still only to Jews.

3:22–23 “Moses said, ‘The Lord your God will raise up for you from your own people a prophet like me. You must listen to whatever he tells you. And it will be that everyone who does not listen to that prophet will be utterly rooted out of the people.’”

The author makes a logical error. Jews do not argue about the proper attitude toward a prophet. The point is whether Jesus was a prophet at all. The quote does not address the issue.

The quotation<sup>delxiii</sup> is distorted. If the writer’s report can be trusted, Peter must have been inspired by the Holy Spirit, as Jesus promised. Peter’s knowledge of the Torah hardly extended beyond the commonplaces. It is doubtful that the Holy Spirit inspired Peter with garbled quotations.

Deuteronomy implies something quite different. All prophets after Moses would receive revelation through an angel, not directly from God, and Jews might doubt their second-hand messages. God is encouraging them to believe the messengers, even though signs, like the cloud above Mount Sinai, disappear.<sup>delxiv</sup>

Jesus aimed not to succeed Moses but at something much higher: being a spiritual, not a physical, savior; being spirit incarnate, not mere prophet.

“But any prophet . . . who presumes to speak in my name a word that I have not commanded the prophet to speak, that prophet shall die.”<sup>dclxv</sup>  
That saying is more appropriate for the executed Jesus.

3:26 “When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you, to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways.”

In the Gospels, Jesus blesses his disciples but not everyone. The reason is clear: the evangelists resented Jews who rejected their message, while the author of Acts tried to present them as reasonable people with a positive attitude toward Christianity.

Jesus did not preach publicly after the resurrection (why?), “turning” people “from . . . wicked ways.” The Gospel apocalypses say Jesus would not save everyone.

4:1–3 “The priests . . . and Sadducees came to them, much annoyed because they were teaching . . . that in Jesus there is the resurrection of the dead. So they arrested them.”

The Pharisees also preached resurrection, yet none was arrested. The argument is an invention.

Did only Jesus’ resurrection trouble the priests, but not his teachings about the Holy Spirit or the Christ? The writer records no problem with Jesus’ other teachings, but the resurrection was significant for him.

Why did the priests let Peter be arrested after he had healed the lame man? Did the miracle impress nobody? How did a handful of Sadducees handle a crowd of five thousand?<sup>dclxvi</sup> Luke’s Gospel paints a peaceful scene: after the ascension, the disciples “continually in the temple blessing God.”<sup>dclxvii</sup>

4:4 “But many of those who heard the word believed; and they numbered about five thousand.”

If Peter was shouting so that five thousand people (or much more, as just five thousand have believed) could hear him, could not he be arrested exactly for disturbing the peace? More probably, the number is exaggerated.

4:5 Annas the high priest.

Josephus records his tenure from 6 to 15 C.E. Caiaphas held the office from 18 to 37 C.E. For some reason, the NT often confuses them.

4:10, 12 Peter healed “by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, . . . for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.”

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Peter should have been infallible; but “we must be saved” shows that Peter expects Jesus to return soon, while Peter is alive. Still, Peter is cautious: the name “given among mortals.” He does not speak of Jesus as God but as messiah, a mortal. The Holy Spirit misquotes the scriptures.<sup>dclxviii</sup>

Why did not Peter use Jesus’ line in a similar situation?<sup>dclxix</sup>

Christians curiously openly use Jesus’ name to work miracles, though he would not say by whose name he healed.

4:16 “It is obvious to all who live in Jerusalem that a notable sign has been done through them; we cannot deny it.”

To deny was hardly the problem; only a few saw the healing. Such healing stories were rampant in Judea then and little trusted. Why did Jesus’ numerous miracles not worry the priests? If they had believed the miracle, would they continue to reject Jesus?

4:27–28 “For in this city, . . . Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, gathered together . . . to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.”

Herod was tetrarch in Galilee and not directly related to the crucifixion. Pilate wanted to free Jesus. No Gentiles were there. The people of Israel persecuted Jesus out of ignorance, as Peter admitted.<sup>dclxx</sup> If they fulfilled God’s plan, what does Peter accuse them of?

4:29 “Grant to your servants to speak your word with all boldness.”

“I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.”<sup>dclxxi</sup>

“For not you will be speaking, but the Spirit of your Father will be speaking through you.”<sup>dclxxii</sup> Did the spirit lose heart in Acts?

4:30 “You stretch out your hand to heal . . . through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”

Does God heal by Jesus’ name?

5:1–10 “Ananias, with the consent of his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property; . . . He kept back some of the proceeds, and brought only a part and laid it at the apostles’ feet . . . Ananias . . . fell down and died . . . The young men came and wrapped up his body, then carried him out and buried him. After an interval of about three hours his wife came in . . . She fell down at his [Peter’s] feet and died.”

“With the consent of his wife”: husbands had the right to dispose of property in Judea; a wife’s consent was not required. It is improbable that the early Christian ethic required such consent.

The first Christians were not less greedy or aggressive, and did not require money less than the subsequent ones. Otherwise, the story is a forgery. Ananias' body could not have been prepared for burial in a couple of hours, a job nobody would have done except his relatives. Women likely prepared bodies for burial, not men. Problems may have arisen when people sold property for the benefit of Christian communities in Judea, since the heirs could argue that the sale was illicit if it favored a prohibited sect. Jesus' followers did nothing like that in his lifetime, but lived on alms. The Essenes held property in common and took over a convert's holdings when he joined the sect.

“. . . at the apostles' feet": for the late author, they were not ignorant fishermen anymore, but authoritative leaders. Earlier, a woman cried at Jesus' feet.

"Ananias," Peter asked, "why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?"

How odd of Satan to give material support to the Christians by making Ananias sell his assets and give the money to the apostles.

Jesus never asked for money: "Jesus said to him, 'If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor.' . . . The young man . . . went away grieving. Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'Truly I tell you, it will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven.'<sup>dclxxiii</sup> He implies no punishment, nor does he bar the rich man from heaven. He says only that it will be *hard*.

What crime killed Ananias—lack of faith or lie? He did not even cheat: he sold only a piece of property, presumably not all of his assets, and would not depend on the congregation for living; he made a gift. Even hiding part of a sacrifice does not generally merit death, and money intended for the whole community cannot be an offering to God.

Since Jesus asked no one to give money, the offering was without theological status. The sect should have been grateful, but meekness was foreign even for the earliest Christians.

It is commonly understood that Christianity first took root among slaves, paupers, and other outcasts. They contributed practically nothing but received something owing to the congregation's sponsors. However, from time to time wealthy people decided to join the community. The idea of disposing of the property was unattractive to them, which gave rise to conflicts like the one depicted here.

5:12 "And they [Christians] were all together on Solomon's Portico."

Did the priests persecute Christians or not?

Josephus describes the temple in detail<sup>dclxxiv</sup> but does not mention Solomon's Portico.

5:13 “None of the rest dared to join them, but the people held them in high esteem.”

Why did no one dare join the Christians? Was fear of punishment greater than faith? Fear of persecution is usually no obstacle for profoundly religious people. Beside, what danger was there, if Christians were free to roam the temple?

The apostles seem to have organized a close-knit group of trusted people. Access to the group was limited, perhaps because it was mystical. Even during Jesus’ life the disciples argued about who was greatest: “Jesus . . . said, . . . ‘Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your slave.’”<sup>dc1xxv</sup>

5:15 “They even carried out the sick into the streets, and laid them on cots and beds, in order that Peter’s shadow might fall on some of them as he came by.”

The story is intended to demonstrate Peter’s power and popularity, but is actually repulsive. If sick people were brought into the streets, why did not Peter heal them? Why could they hope only to touch his shadow? Jesus told his disciples to heal everyone. Never did he refuse to heal Jews. Surely sick people appealed to Peter. The explanation may be more prosaic: talking about healing in the temple and obscure miracles is one thing; healing people in the streets another. “The disciples . . . said, ‘Why could we not cast it [demon] out?’ He said to them, ‘Because of your little faith.’”<sup>dc1xxvi</sup>

In the narrow streets, Peter’s shadow would not be discernable from that of houses or of his company.

Beds were uncommon among poor inhabitants of Jerusalem.

5:26 “The captain went with the temple police and brought them, but without violence, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people.”

Were they not then not afraid to jail them in the first place? Also note a curious mix of *with police* but *without violence*.

The story of a miraculous escape is standard. There is a similar tale about taking the body of Rabbi Akiva out of jail,<sup>dc1xxvii</sup> which did not transform into a resurrection claim.

5:34 “But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, respected by all the people . . .”

Gamliel was the head of the Sanhedrin. Acts likes the Pharisees, an attitude Luke probably adopted from Josephus. The Pharisees have almost Christian views, while differences are largely ignored. The Pharisees come to the Christians’ assistance in the Sanhedrin. Against that background, the Pharisee Paul’s persecution of Christians is odd.

5:36–37 “Theudas came before . . . Judas the Galilean rose up at the time of the census and got people to follow him; he also perished, and all who followed him were scattered.”

The writer builds on Josephus or a similar source but gets confused. Theudas came in 45 C.E., after Judas in 6 C.E., not before him. Acts was compiled late enough that the events of 45 C.E. were sufficiently distant to confuse with the revolt in 6 C.E., suggesting a date of composition no earlier than the second century. The author could not have been Peter's disciple, as tradition has it.

6:1–2 “The Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, ‘It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables.’”

Was it right to make the less spiritually and administratively adept members of the community wait on tables? Jesus and his disciples dealt with mundane matters even when their time together was short.<sup>delxxviii</sup>

The food were scarce, and the repast was short, and would not conflict with praying of the apostles. What word of God were they concerned about? The distorted quotations prove Jesus' disciples did not spend time studying the Bible.

The morals are worth noting. The apostles could not refuse food to the women who came with their husbands. But attitude to the foreign widows was unceremonious. The scandal was not a minor one, if it had reached the foreign Jews.

Widows may have joined the community to get free food and overburdened the community. Another reading, that Gentile women were bypassed in distribution, is less plausible, since there were not many of them in Jerusalem. Yet Jewish tradition put women's needs ahead of men's if there was not enough for both.<sup>delxxix</sup>

The story of Christian philanthropy in Judea raises doubt. The Jews probably provided for their own poor. Christian charities, depending on very small numbers of people, would have been confined to the communities abroad. Luke adapts that practice for the mythical Jerusalem church. Josephus mentions no Christian sect at all, though he is familiar with many different teachings. Surely he would have noticed scandalous Jews who rejected the commandments.

6:3 “Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom.”

Jesus received the spirit in the form of a dove at baptism. Jesus promised the apostles the spirit, the Advocate, after his ascension and

prayed for it specifically: “I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world.”<sup>»delcxxx</sup> Yet all the followers were sanctified with the Holy Spirit. If Acts is earlier than the Gospels, one might suppose that the metaphorical image of the Holy Spirit acquired theological independence in the Gospels and became the distinctive sign of Jesus.

The Holy Spirit was not sufficient for managing the community—wisdom was also required. Such distinguished people could be inferior to apostles only in hierarchy; nevertheless, they were relegated to the work which the apostles despised.

The followers appear sanctified with the Holy Spirit on a mass scale. The metaphorical image of the Holy Spirit in Acts has acquired theological independence in the Gospels and has become the distinction of Jesus.

6:4 “We, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word.”

Should others pray less? Jesus left his disciples an active mission, not a call to prayer and serving the word. “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”<sup>»delcxxxi</sup> “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them.”<sup>»delcxxxii</sup>

Lk24:49 “And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.” Acts 6:3 “Select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit.” The Holy Spirit had long ago embraced not only the apostles, but also their companions, before the apostles set off to preach to other nations. The writer of Acts knew nothing of Christianity’s subsequent expansionism.

6:5 “And they chose Stephen.”

6:8 “Stephen, full of grace and power, did great wonders and signs among the people.” The apostles left menial functions for the sake of prayer. Yet Stephen did it all—prayed, argued in the synagogues, worked miracles, and managed the food bank. Was he abler than Jesus’ disciples?

6:7 “The number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.”

History offers no confirmation of such Christian growth in Judea. Whether priests converted to Christianity is moot. On the one hand, they would have been loath to join a sect that distorted the scriptures. On the other hand, after the temple was destroyed and the levitical tithe was no longer collected, let alone the temple tax, many may have looked for livelihood elsewhere. Some priests may have joined the sects. The writer extrapolates the situation of his time to an earlier period.



The Essenes called themselves priests, and the passage may report their conversion to Christianity. Even Temple priests could have joined the Christian community, if it were a liberal branch of the respected Essenes.

6:15 “And all who sat in the council looked intently at him, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.”

And tried him notwithstanding? How did they know what angels' faces look like? Stories of the luminous faces of people sanctified by the Spirit were common, often used metaphorically in the Talmud. Perhaps Luke recalls Enoch. Other cultures have such stories as well and in various contexts. Strabo, recounting the signs predicting Julius Caesar's murder, said people shone as if aflame.

Although the Christians lived safely in Jerusalem, they frequent the Sanhedrin.

7:42-43 “God turned away from them and handed them over to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the prophets: ‘Did you offer to me slain victims and sacrifices forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? No; you took along the tent of Moloch, and the star of your god Rephan, the images that you made to worship; so I will remove you beyond Babylon.’”

Am5:26-27 is different: “You shall take up Sakkuth [Moloch] your king, and Kaiwan [Rephan] your star-god, your images, which you made for yourselves; therefore I will take you into exile beyond Damascus, says the Lord.”

Stephen says the Babylonian captivity was the Jews' punishment for sacrificing to Moloch during the Exodus, not for their idolatry much later.

7:48-49 “Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made with human hands, as the prophet says, ‘Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord.’”

The Sanhedrin would have hardly found the idea remarkable, since the temple was built to carry out God's will, and the Holy of Holies was literally God's abode. The Essenes and perhaps other sects paid little reverence to the Temple, not surprising since they were forbidden to perform their rites there.

7:51 “You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you are forever opposing the Holy Spirit, just as your ancestors used to do.”

Stephen scolds the priests for lacking spiritual circumcision; but, a few chapters further on, Christians are dispensed from circumcision.

7:58 “[They] dragged [Stephen] out of the city and began to stone him.”

Impossible: only the Roman prefect imposed capital punishment, precisely why Jesus was brought to Pilate. The Sanhedrin would have never violated Roman law so brazenly. Josephus describes James' sentencing in the absence of a prefect as extraordinarily irregular.

Everything Stephen said sprang from ignorance and could hardly be regarded as blasphemy punishable by stoning.

8:1 "All except the apostles were scattered throughout the countryside of Judea and Samaria."

Most of Jesus' followers came from Galilee. Why would they settle in Samaria, notoriously hostile to Jews and Galileans? The population of Judea was orthodox, and Christians could not hide there.

Why did not the maltreatment affect the apostles?

8:3 "But Saul was ravaging the church by entering house after house; dragging off both men and women, he commanded them to prison."

Whom was he persecuting in Jerusalem, if *all* were dispersed?

8:4 "Now those who were scattered went from place to place, proclaiming the word."

What kind of persecution let Christians go on preaching? The persecution seems limited to forbidding the Christians to preach in the temple.

The metaphor of word, knowledge, translated in John into the divine Logos.

9:1 "Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest."

Saul could not kill legally without consent of the Romans, and they did not authorize religious slaughter.

The high priest, probably a Sadducee, would not be sympathetic to the Pharisee Saul.

9:2 "[Saul] asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, . . . he might bring them bound to Jerusalem."

The request should have gone to the local authorities, not the high priest. Saul asked for an armed guard for the prisoners. Temple guards could not act outside Jerusalem, certainly not in another country. The high priest's jurisdiction outside Jerusalem was far from absolute.

The Romans would not encourage religious meddling in other states. The high priest had no power in Syria even over Jews. The Essenes and the Gnostics deviated from Judaism no less than Christianity, but lived

peacefully in Edom (Qumran), and in Syria. The Essenes, who revered the sun, lived even in Jerusalem.

Luke knew that a Christian congregation, probably Gnostic and sufficiently important to attract Saul's attention, existed in Damascus. Still the mission would not have been assigned to Saul. Josephus reports that only honored citizens were appointed for foreign missions. Saul was no one in particular: he held the clothes of the witnesses who stoned Stephen. The story is more plausible if *Damascus* is a codename for Qumran, which can be inferred from the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Early Christians called their religion *the Way*, just like Jews, Buddhists, and Gnostics. The existence of a road to perfection meant that Christianity was not yet limited to a single declaration of faith. *The Way* may have referred originally to the procedures of obtaining mystical knowledge.

9:3–5 When Saul “approached Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ The reply came, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.’”

Was there a vision? Paul describes spiritual experience: “But when God, who set me apart before I was born, . . . was pleased to reveal his Son to me . . .”<sup>»dclxxxiii</sup> The question, “Who are you, Lord?” is silly, but might be, *sir*.

How could the writer of Acts know the details of Paul's private talks with his guards, his speech before Agrippa, or his vision on the Damascus road? Revelation cannot account for such detailed acquaintance. If Paul told Luke, why does this story contradict Paul's account?<sup>»dclxxxiv</sup>

Matthew's Jesus says of false prophets, “So, if they say to you, ‘Look! He is in the wilderness,’ do not go out.”<sup>»dclxxxv</sup> Paul claims he heard Jesus in the desert.

Supposing Jesus did not die on the cross, and was indeed skilled in Egyptian magic, he could meet a known group of the Sanhedrin's emissaries on the road and perform tricks with light before them. Jesus' residence in Damascus, although a closely guarded secret, would explain the prominence of the local congregation.

9:6 “Get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.”

The report contradicts Paul's own: “I went away at once into Arabia, and afterwards I returned to Damascus.”<sup>»dclxxxvi</sup>

9:7 “The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one.”

By definition, only the prophets can hear God's voice and that only rarely. Here the crowd heard it.

9:13 “But Ananias answered, ‘Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your holy ones in Jerusalem.’”

This is the first time Christians are called saints. The Essenes also called themselves *the saints of God*.

The episode of Jesus’ appearance to Saul was inserted to substantiate the claims of the Pauline faction. The revelation to Saul should have been unique, assuring his place among the apostles; yet even common Christians like Ananias were in contact with Jesus too.

9:17 “So Ananias went and entered the house . . . and said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’”

Paul was a prophet—he heard God’s voice—before he received the Holy Spirit. The tradition usually runs the other way. The episode illustrates the early Christian idea that the Holy Spirit is available to everyone.

9:28 “[Saul] went in and out among them in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord.”

Were there still Christians in Jerusalem or not? Did they disperse or not?

9:29 “He spoke and argued with the Hellenists, but they were attempting to kill him.”

The writer of Acts shows the typical Jewish religious tolerance; even the Hellenists could preach. Why would they want to murder only the Christian teacher? Philosophic disputes were common in Greek culture, and the adversaries seldom killed each other.

If *Hellenists* are Greek Jews, not philosophers, why did Paul argue only with them?

9:31 “Meanwhile the Church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and was built up. Living in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.”

In other places Acts says the congregations were persecuted.

10:1–2, 22 “In Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian Cohort, as it was called. He was a devout man who feared God with all his household, . . . well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation.”

To Jews, the idea of a righteous Roman centurion would be doubtful. The phrase means a God-fearer, a type of Jewish semiproselyte; such could not join the Roman army with its extensive pagan rites. How could every Jew, even many of them know about a lowly centurion?

10:11–15 “[Peter] saw the heaven opened and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air. Then he heard a voice saying, ‘Get up, Peter; kill and eat . . . . What God has made clean, you must not call profane.’”

The vision marked the abrogation of kosher-food requirements. The story comes in the context of a fable about a devout centurion. There were no witnesses. The saying contradicts Jesus' words, “I have come not to abolish but to fulfill [the Law].”<sup>dclxxxvii</sup> The vision's naturalism distinguishes it from spiritual revelation.

Paul's epistles speak of Peter's duplicity. He disregarded *kashrut* with the Gentiles but observed it with Jews. If his vision was known, why bother? The kosher-food commandment was given by God. Christians seek to cancel it by a legend about the swooning vision of hungry Peter, the most criticized apostle.

The vision does not abrogate the kosher laws; rather it sets a qualitative criterion—“what God has made clean”—but does not say all food is clean. Perhaps the invention originally intended to ease the Essenes' excessive restrictions, that the faithful might eat any food the Torah proclaimed as clean, regardless of its origin, whether brought from other Essenes or from Gentiles.

The Christians see prohibition of eating certain—actually, most—animals as a burden. The idea of the prohibition is, however, very different: murder, even of animals, is a crime. People need animal meat to survive, and the Torah makes a concession, and permits basically four animals for food. The choice of the animals that could be killed may or may not be related to their proverbial dullness. The food prohibitions stringently regulate murder of animals, permit it only when strictly necessary, and remind the people of the sanctity of lives they are taking to feed themselves.

Cleanness is irrelevant to *kashrut*. One cannot eat ritually clean priest.

10:28 “[Peter] said to them, ‘You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean.’”

That nobody is unclean is unrelated to the permission to eat everything clean.

Peter no doubt offended the Roman soldier and his family by calling them unclean.

The writer suggests that Jews cannot communicate with Gentiles, which is not true. In the traditional sects, only the priests observed such strict rules and probably only on the days of service. Matthew shows them

arguing with the Gentile Pilate. The saying makes sense if Luke means the Essenes. They maintained ritual purity permanently and restricted communication even with other Jews.

10:43 “All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

No prophets promised forgiveness to those who believe in the messiah, and certainly none made any human name divine.

11:1–2 “The apostles . . . heard that the Gentiles had also accepted the word of God. So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him.”

What about 2:4–11? The apostles receive the Holy Spirit and speak to people from all over in their own languages—unnecessarily, in fact, since all Diaspora Jews knew Aramaic or Greek if they read the Torah. And “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them.”<sup>delxxxviii</sup>

Why were the apostles worried to learn that the Holy Spirit had fallen upon Gentiles? Did they disapprove God’s choice? Judaism has never denied that Gentiles can be converted. Evidently, the Jerusalem apostles did not take the claim seriously and disapproved of Peter’s venture. The writer imputes very human xenophobia to the apostles who possess the Spirit. Since all the apostles were blessed with the Holy Spirit who should have taught them what to speak, the dispute is bizarre.

11:8 Peter tells about his seeing a cloth with all sorts of animals, “But I replied, ‘By no means, Lord; for nothing profane or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’”

Has not a simple fisherman ever had unclean food? Pharisees reprimanded Jesus for his disciples not washing hands and for their collecting food on Sabbath.

11:16 “And I [Simon] remembered . . . how he had said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’”

Jesus did not make the promise but rather John the Baptist, and to the Jews, not to Gentiles.<sup>delxxxix</sup> The apostles were blessed with the Holy Spirit a few chapters earlier,<sup>dexc</sup> and the promise was already fulfilled.

11:17 “If then God gave them [Gentiles] the same gift [of the Spirit] that he gave us, . . . who was I that I could hinder God?”

Simon went to the Gentiles before the Holy Spirit descended on them. On his way he did not know that “God gave them the same gift.”

The usual theological chaos reigns as the Christians struggle with the Holy Spirit. Acts repeatedly alludes to its universal reception, vitiating Jesus’ claim to uniqueness. If Jesus’ ministry started after he received the

Holy Spirit at baptism, how is he different from other Jews and even Gentiles who also receive it? John uses four tortured chapters—14–17—to describe the Holy Spirit's indwelling of the soon-to-be apostles as something utterly out of the ordinary.

The validity of Peter's argument depends on whether all those people were indeed blessed with the spirit. How, by the way, did Peter know that proselytes had received the Holy Spirit?

11:29–30 At Antioch, "The disciples determined that according to their ability, each would send a donation to the believers living in Judea; this they did, sending it to the elders by Barnabas and Saul."

Everyone sent relief "according to their ability." The Antioch Christians evidently did not hold property in common.

How did a large Christian community survive the persecution in Judea? In Acts, the persecutions cease abruptly upon Saul's conversion. Other Jews were tolerant to the Christian sectarians.

Why would one community support another? These payments, if they existed at all and are not simply interpolated from the later Church practice, likely represented a franchise fee.

12:6 "Peter, bound with two chains, was sleeping between two soldiers."

If Herod so feared the Christians, why did he not send his army against them, as he did to a good many others? Nothing of the kind happened to the Christians.

12:12 Miraculously released from prison, Peter "went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many had gathered and were praying."

Were not the persecuted Christians afraid to gather in a known house?

The writer confuses various people, betraying only superficial knowledge of the Gospels. If he means the evangelist Mark, which is possible, his being alive and mature in the thirties and forties excludes him from publishing a Gospel seventy years later.

12:20–23 The death of Herod Agrippa.

Josephus tells the same story, set in the amphitheater at Caesarea. This account is dubious, since the ambassadors would not have dared offend the touchy Jews by hailing Herod as a god.

13:1 "Now in the church in Antioch there were prophets and teachers . . ."

Such abundance of the prophets in one place is surprising, considering that for a thousand years before there were just a few.

13:25 “And as John was finishing his work, he said, ‘What do you suppose that I am? I am not he. No, but one is coming after me.’”

In the Gospels, those words signal the appearance of Jesus, not the end of John’s work. Perhaps Paul did not know that John the Baptist was executed.

13:32–33 “What God promised to our ancestors he has fulfilled for us . . . by raising Jesus; as also it is written in the second psalm, ‘You are my son; today I have begotten you.’”

Ps2 “The rulers take council together, against the Lord and his anointed. . . . Then he will speak to them in his wrath . . . . ‘I have set my king on Zion . . . .’ He said to me, ‘You are my son; today I have begotten you . . . . You shall break them with a rod of iron.’”

The psalm speaks of a military leader.

13:34 “As to his raising him from the dead, . . . he has spoken in this way, ‘I will give you the holy promises made to David.’”

Is55:1–3 “Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters! . . . Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David.”

The prophecy is about Jews turning to God, not about resurrection.

13:38 “Let it be known to you therefore, my brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.”

Here is Christianity’s hook: faith in Jesus means remission of sins. In theory that seems logical: sincere faith makes a man righteous, and past sins do not matter, provided God is neither judgmental nor vengeful. Yet in practice, the temptation will be to see conversion to Christianity as wiping out sins *ex opere operato*. The Church shelved the notion of once-and-for-all forgiveness in favor of periodical repentance through the rite of Confession.

13:39 “By this Jesus everyone who believes is set free from all [those sins] from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.”

The Torah provides for the forgiveness of any sin, usually after repentance, at times, after death.

Here is a good example of the way Christians co-opt and modify concepts: the “genuine believer” becomes “the Christian convert,” “the one who accepts Jesus’ resurrection.” Belief in a single event replaces a life of faith in Judaism.

Islam took the same tack with Christianity. When the demands of Christianity became too complex, Islam spread to Europe promising eternal life and paradise in exchange for accepting a few very simple conditions.



Without *those sins*, the saying may be a justification for forgetting the commandments. Paul also teaches that faith repeals the law. The writer of the Acts, however, did not know the Pauline epistles. The notion was not original with Paul, who found it in the same source as the writer of Acts.

13:40–41 “Beware, therefore, that what the prophets said does not happen to you: ‘Look, you scoffers! Be amazed and perish, for in your days I am doing a work, a work that you will never believe, even if someone tells you.’”

The text of Habbakuk actually says, “Look at the nations, and see! Be astonished! Be astounded! For a work is being done in your days that you would not believe if you were told. For I am rousing the Chaldeans!”<sup>dexci</sup> Luke’s audience had no reason to fear the Chaldeans, who disappeared long before.

This might be a very early tradition, that Jesus’ story existed only as a myth without historical roots. Thus, the author employs the “if you were told” prophesy, relating it to the circulating stories about Jesus.

13:46 “Then both Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, ‘It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you reject it and judge yourselves to be unworthy of eternal life, we are now turning to the Gentiles.’”

Not even an appeal to the Holy Spirit substantiates their decision. The decision to appeal to other peoples counters Jesus’ insistence that he came only to the Jews.

13:47 “For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, ‘I have set you to be a light for Gentiles, so that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’”

Is49:6 “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” The prophesy corroborates Jesus’ perception that salvation is from the Jews.

Mt15:24 “He answered, ‘I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.’”

13:49–50 “Thus the word of the Lord spread throughout the region. But the Jews . . . stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their region.”

Did Jews have such authority in Pisidia that they could expel the Christian preachers against the will of the local population?

13:51 “So they shook the dust off their feet . . . and went [from Antioch] to Iconium.”

Why should Antioch suffer on the day of trial, if Paul founded a church there and visited it on his second visit to Greece?

14:3 “. . . granting signs and wonders to be done through them.”

Mt10:1 “Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness.” Jesus gave power to work miracles only to his disciples, who had not yet received the Holy Spirit. The miracles are performed not by the Holy Spirit but by some specific authority. Even if Paul and his circle were endowed with the Holy Spirit, Acts does not report them receiving the power to work miracles, as did the apostles. In 5:15 the power to work miracles is specifically and seemingly exclusively Peter’s.

14:9–10 “And Paul, looking at him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed, said in a loud voice, ‘Stand upright on your feet.’”

Jesus healed everyone, even unbelievers, like the blind who knew nothing of the messianic particulars, even those who resisted healing, like the demoniac whose evil spirits ended up in the swine. Paul more realistically heals by suggestion.

14:23 “And after they had laid hands on elders for them in each church, . . . they entrusted them to the Lord in whom they had come to believe.”

Paul’s epistles describe a communal church, where people speak one after another, share ritual meals, and otherwise see to themselves. They had no presbyters, *elders*, to administer them.

Christians borrowed the tradition of laying hands on the heads of the consecrated from the Gentiles who understood it to confer the Holy Spirit.

15:1–2 “Then certain individuals came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.’ And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas . . . were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to discuss this question with the apostles.”

The representatives of the Jerusalem church required the Gentiles to be circumcised and submit to the law, in effect to become proselytized Jews. They believed that Jesus came only to Jews and had brought salvation only to them. Jesus never suggested organizing believing Gentiles into a sect of his worshippers.

15:3 [Paul and Barnabas] “passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria; they reported the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the believers.”

How did they avoid Galilee, the home of so many disciples? Could it be they found support in hostile Phoenicia and Samaria but none in Galilee? Probably the writer of this part of Acts was not familiar with Judean geography—though he knew Greek geography.

15:5 “Some believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees stood up and said, ‘It is necessary for them to be circumcised and ordered to keep the Law of Moses.’”

The writer had the impression that the Pharisees were also Christians, which means the two schools were at one time compatible. Jesus' lax attitude toward the law was invented later. The only difference between mainline and Christian Pharisees was their acceptance of Jesus as messiah.

Paul's calling himself a Pharisee leads to another—however improbable—conclusion. The Pharisees then may have differed greatly from those depicted in the rabbinic texts. They did not observe the law so strictly and, like other sectarians, treated the scriptures more or less loosely.

15:7 “After there had been much debate, Peter stood up.”

Sanhedrin votes on issues of ritual cleanness went from eldest to youngest.<sup>dexcii</sup> James and Peter, the eldest and the most authoritative apostles, should have started the debate. Perhaps the author was confused, since in most other cases the voting started with the youngest to let new members voice their opinions, unintimidated by the authoritative rabbis.<sup>162</sup>

15:10 “Now therefore why are you putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear?”

Does Peter mean neither living Jews nor their ancestors were circumcised? Even if we take “circumcision” to mean the whole law, Paul reportedly strictly obeyed it, and Peter says the same about himself.<sup>dexciii</sup>

15:11 “On the contrary, we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.”

More bait and switch: a Jew hopes for eternal life after judgment if he kept the commandments, radically different from the notion of salvation by the arbitrary grace of Jesus. If the grace results from following Jesus' precepts, say, love to neighbors, then there is no grace at all, but merited prize of salvation. Grace is necessarily arbitrary, unrelated to deeds, as Paul and later Luther recognized. The rabbinic Judaism gets out of the paradox by seeing grace in the possibility of repentance, when even a few good

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<sup>162</sup> This commonsense procedure was so unusual that in Middle Age it was specifically called Venetian, by name of the city where it was accepted.

deeds suffice for salvation. In the Judaism, grace is establishing kind rules for salvation. In the Christianity, grace is applied ad hoc to each person.

15:13 “James replied.”

Though his reply is the cornerstone of the further development of Christianity, Acts does not specify which James. James the brother of John was executed earlier by Herod.<sup>dexciv</sup> Another disciple, James the son of Alphaeus, does not appear as a prominent teacher. The most probable is James the Just, who seemed to head the local congregation, but was not an apostle.<sup>dexcv</sup>

15:15–17 “This agrees with the words of the prophets, as it is written, ‘After this I will return, and I will rebuild the dwelling of David, which has fallen . . . so that all other peoples may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles upon whom my name has been called.’”

AM9:11–12 “On that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen . . . and rebuild it as in the days of old; in order that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name.” Calling God’s name does not turn Gentiles to him but rather subjugates them to Jews.

15:19–20 “Therefore I have reached the decision that we should not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God, but we should write to them to abstain only from things polluted by idols and from fornication and from whatever has been strangled and from blood.”

This speech is the theological basis of the Christian rejection of circumcision and the law, simply because James decided not to “trouble” the Gentiles.

James had no right to make a covenant with the Gentiles by selecting commandments for them arbitrarily. Why keep the bit about blood but cast unclean food and grease to the wind? Why mention idols to which Christian converts may not resort?

The Torah enjoins prohibitions against idolatry, incest, eating blood, working on the Sabbath, and keeping leaven during Passover on aliens living in the land of Israel. Adam and Noah received several commandments which also apply to Gentiles. James’ list includes none of them. Noah was told about “establishing courts, interdiction of blasphemy, ministering to strange gods, murder, incest, debauchery, larceny, and robbery, as well as eating the flesh of an animal which is still alive.”<sup>dexcvi</sup> Did James decide to go easy on larceny and robbery? James’ ruling seemingly dealt only with *kashrut*; he did not imagine abrogation of all commandments.

Paul did not object to Christians eating food sacrificed to idols.<sup>dxcvii</sup> Christians regularly eat rare meat, despite James' explicit prohibition.<sup>163</sup> Some manuscripts omit the prohibition against eating strangled animals' flesh.

James, who urged Paul to observe all the Jewish customs during his stay in Jerusalem, would hardly exclude the Sabbath commandment, which Gentiles in Jewish communities kept.

From James' point of view, converted Gentile Christians became Jews and were obliged to keep the commandments. To say otherwise would mean recognizing that Christianity differed from Judaism. Then Christian James would have to stop being a Jew, which is at variance with the account in Acts. Anyway, to keep the prohibition against blood yet abandon the Sabbath, included in the Ten Commandments, is ludicrous.

The Torah imposes circumcision on Gentiles living in Jewish communities, and noncircumcision is condemned: "Then their uncircumcised heart is humbled."<sup>dxcviii</sup> The covenant is immutable: "But I will remember for their favor the covenant with their ancestors whom I brought out of the land of Egypt."<sup>dxcix</sup>

The apostles say converted Gentiles are not required to circumcise, that after conversion to Christianity there is no difference between Jew and Gentile. Yet James says nothing about relaxing the rules for converted Jews. The norms applied to the so-called God-fearers may have influenced the new apostolic rules. The Pharisees, known for their missionary zeal, may have created that subset who technically were not proselytes and did not keep all the commandments—though they kept the Sabbath. James rescinded the commandments Jesus emphasized,<sup>dcc</sup> even the commandment to love the neighbor. The omission was noted, and the Orthodox Synod version restores the main commandment.

Many Christians think that Jesus' commandment of love superceded all other commandments. Nothing in the NT supports this view. Jesus specifically instructed observance of all the commandments, even including the Pharisaic Oral Law. Jesus mentioned the commandment of love<sup>dcci</sup> only in passing, in addition, not as replacement of others: "*also*, you should love your neighbor as yourself." Even so, Jesus required love only to neighbors, not to anyone. Jesus' overarching commandment in the same episode, a path to perfection, was different and very inconvenient to the Christians: sell your possessions and give money to the poor. James, the

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<sup>163</sup> Puzzlingly, the discussion on meat, supposedly settled fifteen centuries earlier, sparkled again among Christians in sixteenth century; cf. *Russian Chronograph*.

head of the apostolic Church in Jerusalem, did not mention the commandment of love, either.

No civil law relies on simply requiring the people to love others; the conduct is always restricted in some details. Paul was pragmatic, and could not imagine his flock abstaining from crimes and sins just because of love. The instruction to love others was an excuse for abrogating the law, and no more than vague guideline, never actionable.

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, . . . not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>dccii</sup>

“Do whatever they [scribes and Pharisees] teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach.”<sup>dcciii</sup> Jesus both requires obedience to the law and condemns the Pharisees’ hollow observance of it.

Daniel, whom Christians recognize and quote, says that “[The fourth beast] shall wear out the holy ones of the Most High, and shall attempt to change the sacred seasons and the *law* . . . . Then the court shall sit in judgment.”<sup>dcciv</sup> That is, the law is in force until the end of the world.

The Gospels repeatedly allude to Is53, yet the sufferer “was wounded for our *transgressions*, crushed for our *iniquities*.”<sup>dccv</sup> The Hebrew text unambiguously refer to disobedience of the law. Jesus could hardly waive the law.

Mk4:9: “Do not lay down any rule beyond what I ordained for you.” The apostles made special rules for the gentiles.

Paul affirms<sup>dccvi</sup> that at that meeting the apostles imposed no rules for the uncircumcised, which directly confutes 15:19-20. The apostles required only that he help the poor,<sup>dccvii</sup> which the writer probably invented because such a rule let Paul collect alms from gentiles.

James’ offer to write to the gentiles is interesting. Probably Paul’s testimony was considered insufficient, though he could freely testify about Jesus without confirmation.

15:21 “For in every city, for generations past, Moses has had those who proclaimed him, for he has been read aloud every Sabbath in the synagogues.”

What does this observation have to do with disobeying the law?

The traditional synagogue readings were not the Mosaic commandments—everyone knew them—but texts that required interpretation, usually the prophets or episodes from the Torah.

15:30–40 “After they had been there for some time, they were sent off in peace by the believers to those who had sent them [the apostles] . . . . But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch . . . . But Paul chose Silas and set out.” That is, Silas was in Antioch even though he had left. To square this contradiction, some manuscripts insert 15:34: “But it seemed good to Silas to remain there.”

16:3 “Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him; and he took him and had him circumcised because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.”

Greek Jews usually chased Paul away,<sup>dccviii</sup> while the Gentiles often received him. Why was Timothy circumcised?

Paul labeled hypocritical the same action of Peter who observed kashrut with Jews, but not with Gentiles.

16:12, 14–15 “And from there [they went] to Philippi . . . . And a certain woman . . . from the city of Thyatira . . . and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, . . . ‘Come and stay at my home.’”

Philippi in Macedonia and Thyatira in Mysia are hundreds of miles apart.

16:19 When the slave girl’s “owners saw that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the authorities.”

How many owners did the girl have? Enough, evidently, to snatch Paul and Silas away from the Christians and drag them some distance.

It is odd to show violence toward an exorcist who has just worked a miracle.

16:26 “Suddenly there was an earthquake . . . and everyone’s *chains* were loosened.”

16:24 “[They] fastened their feet in the *stocks*.”

16:35–39 “The magistrates sent the police, saying, ‘Let those men go.’ . . . But Paul replied, ‘They have beaten us in public, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens.’ . . . They were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens . . . and asked them to leave the city.”

Paul insists he is a Roman citizen but not that he is a Christian. Paul and Silas lived in Judea. That the Romans granted citizenship to many Jews or to those who were converted to illicit Christianity seems dubious. Acts may seek to legitimize the religion by claiming Roman followers. If Paul

and Silas' parents were not Jews but Romans, then they were uncircumcised, which would make their attitude toward circumcision understandable. On the other hand, Paul was criticized for converting Gentiles, as he was probably taken for a Jew. He calls himself a Pharisee. Why did he and Silas not remember their Roman citizenship when they were beaten?

The prefect Felix kept Paul in prison for two years<sup>deccix</sup> and even tried to extract a bribe from him,<sup>deccx</sup> yet Paul said nothing about his Roman citizenship, which would have gotten him a speedy trial. Moreover, Felix could not send a Roman citizen for what amounted to trial by Agrippa, the local ruler of Galilee, a different territory. Nor would Felix care about the Sanhedrin's opinion in this case. Appealing to Caesar was the right of Roman citizens, and Paul did not need to beg the prefect to send him to Nero. Few Romans were executed for following strange religions. Since Christianity had not yet earned a bad reputation, Nero would have little reason to execute Paul, but he did.

21:39–22:3 “Paul replied, ‘I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia.’”  
22:25–28 “Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, ‘Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who is uncondemned? . . . But I was born a citizen.’” Paul appeals to his Roman citizenship again, when a beating threatens.

23:6 Paul “called out in the council, . . . ‘I am a Pharisee, a son of a Pharisee.’” If Saul's parents were Jews and he was born outside Rome, how did he get Roman citizenship? Perhaps the Jerusalem aristocracy had it but hardly people from Tarsus; how likely is it that a Roman citizen worked for the high priest? The practice of granting Roman citizenship to the residents of cities annexed to the empire was not widespread in the first century.

The story resembles the behavior of Greek heroes, who invent accounts of their past, perhaps to evade persecution. Greek resourcefulness, however, is hardly suitable for a righteous man who pins his hopes on God. Not that the attitude is necessarily bad or unreasonable—faith does not imply passivity—but not what Paul's character should be. The problem of his citizenship is important, since it reflects on his honesty. If Paul lied to the Romans on occasion, when else might he lie? A legend of Paul's execution by sword also depends on his Roman citizenship for whom this mode was generally reserved.

Paul's behavior made sense only from a foreigner's point of view. Jews knew all too well that loyalty to Rome did not mean salvation. Josephus tells of that Gessius Florus, a prewar prefect, crucified Jewish aristocrats, Roman citizens, for a trivial youthful prank. Romans considered provincials as low-life, punishable without much investigation.



Finally, how did one prove citizenship then? There were many pretenders, irregularly executed *en masse*.

17:4 “Some of them [Jews of Thessalonica] were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women.”

How did Greeks get into the synagogue, especially on Saturdays? Forgery also lurks beneath the phrase “the leading women.” Some Roman women were noble, but Greek women were usually dependent.

17:18–19 “Also some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers debated with him [Paul] . . . So they took him and brought him to the Areopagus and asked him, ‘May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting?’”

What did they debate before if only now they ask Paul about the new teaching? Why are the notoriously skeptical Greek philosophers so interested in Paul? Why were they ignorant of Christianity if Acts says churches arose in many Greek cities and attracted many Greeks?

17:26 “From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places they would live.”

Paul shows superficial knowledge of Judaism. Cain appealed to God: “And anyone who meets me may kill me.”<sup>dccxi</sup> There were already people on the earth besides Cain. A Jewish tradition suggests that modern people descend from Noah, while a previous race drowned in the flood; but Paul means Adam, as he repeatedly asserts in the epistles.

“He allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places they would live”: The Torah lacks such prescriptions except in special cases. Determinism is alien to Judaism; on the contrary, Jews believe the world develops by itself according to given laws.

17:27 “. . . so that they would search for God . . .”

Attempts to approach God by methods other than those prescribed in the Torah were punished. While Moses tarried on the mountain, the Hebrews cast a golden calf to worship and were chastised. Paul describes a Greek philosophical tradition of searching for God. Jews believe they had found him in the commandments.

17:30 “Now he [God] commands all people everywhere to repent.” *Now*—yet John the Baptist urged repentance before Jesus, which is why Christian theologians call him the forerunner. 18:3 “Paul . . . because he was of the same trade . . . stayed with them, and they worked together; by trade they were tentmakers.”

The Christian communities were so insignificant they could not provide sustenance even to their leader. This episode casts doubt on the donations to the Jerusalem church.

“The same trade” was unlikely. As a youth, Saul served the high priest, persecuting Christians and later turned to preaching. What skills could he have?

18:5 “When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia . . .” But the Christians were chased out of Macedonia? Probably Paul had to abandon Macedonia because of his argument with the local church. “Urged by the Spirit”<sup>»dcccxi</sup> and fractious, Paul also likely quarreled with his companions.

18:6 “When they [Jews] opposed and reviled him, in protest he shook the dust from his clothes and said to them, ‘Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.’”

Paul had preached to Gentiles before and swore off preaching to Jews before.<sup>dcccxi</sup>

He does not know that Jesus said, “If anyone will not . . . listen to your words, shake off the dust from your *feet* . . .”<sup>»dccciv</sup> and shakes the dust from his *clothes*.

18:12–16 The Jews haul Paul before the proconsul Gallio. They tell him, “This man is persuading people to worship God in ways that are contrary to the law. Gallio said, . . . ‘Since it is a matter of questions about words and names and your own law, see to it yourselves.’”

Paul “is persuading people to worship God in ways that are contrary to the law.” Yet Jesus did not teach deviation from the Torah.

Christians already treated Jesus as a deity; thus a question of names: another name of God.

18:24–25 “A Jew . . . an eloquent man, well-versed in the scriptures . . . had been instructed in the Way of the Lord . . . and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John.”

Apollos knew the teaching of John, which, according to Christians, pointed to Jesus. The educated man knew about John the Baptist but had not heard about Jesus.

18:28 “. . . showing by the scriptures that the Messiah is Jesus.”

Did Jesus actually exist and behave like the messiah, working miracles or winning victories? 18:24–25 shows that not everyone even knew of the existence of Jesus. Was Jesus’ unmessianic life, without final judgment or military victory, merely happenstance, or had the conception of the end of days changed? Over five centuries after the Hebrew Scriptures

were mostly completed, many people fulfilled these or those messianic prophecies; why believe in Jesus instead of the others?

19:2 “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?” They replied, ‘No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.’”

What did they know about Jesus? If they knew nothing of the Holy Spirit, did they know Jesus’ baptism or his promise to send the Comforter to the apostles, or his pledge that the spirit would give them answers? Had they heard nothing of the miracles the apostles worked by the power of the spirit even though Paul and his followers long preached in Greece? Christianity was unnoticeable among other trends.

Although Jesus sent the spirit upon the apostles only after his ascension,<sup>dccxv</sup> Paul says that every Christian receives it at baptism. The church rejected this early concept of the accessible Spirit, which equalized the communities, impeding the hierarchy.

The people Paul is dealing with seem to be close to mainstream Judaism and knew nothing of the Greek concept of the Holy Spirit, central to Christianity. The concept may originate among Gentile Christians or could have been articulated by Paul, who had some knowledge of Greek religion and philosophy.

19:3 “Then he said, ‘Into what then were you baptized?’ They answered, ‘Into John’s baptism.’”

John the Baptist’s sect was likely numerous,<sup>164</sup> but most of his doctrine disappeared without a trace. Yet since his followers expected the messiah to come any day, surely they would have known of his meetings with Jesus and his recognition of him as messiah, the Christ.

19:4 “Paul said, ‘John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus.’”

Paul overreaches with “that is, in Jesus.” Whether the prophets and John meant Jesus is not a settled question.

19:5 “On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.”

Compare the ease of converting sectarians to Christianity with the opposition from orthodox Jews. Apocalyptic sects looking for signs of the last days accepted Christianity readily.

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<sup>164</sup> Matt 3:7 “He [John] saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism.”

The baptism in someone's (Jesus') name means attaching allegiance to another deity. It has nothing in common with baptism as a symbol of repentance and purification from sins.

19:8 "He entered the synagogue and for three months spoke out boldly."

The formal theological bases of Christianity were not yet shaped. What could Paul preach for three months?

How could Paul, not a rabbi, preach in the synagogue? Unlike Islam, Judaism does not let just anyone preach. Paul could argue outside the synagogue or between services.

19:9 "When some stubbornly refused to believe, . . . he left them, taking the disciples with him, and argued daily in the lecture hall."

Precisely. Not in the synagogue.

19:10 "This continued for two years."

Paul did not return to the synagogue, because Jews rejected his teaching. He spent two years in Ephesus with minimal success. One wonders why Paul could not return to Jerusalem or Antioch. What problems did he have with the Jews there?

19:12 "When the handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were brought to the sick, their diseases left them."

The tale adumbrates the superstitious trade in relics,<sup>165</sup> as well as later schemes to commercialize Christianity.

Oddly, Paul was not accepted by Jews in spite of these remarkable deeds.

19:13 "Then some itinerant Jewish exorcists tried to use the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, 'I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims.'"

Even the conjurers had not heard about Jesus and knew nothing of his miracles. If Paul was the source of all information, he was free to invent any story about Jesus. Since Paul never saw Jesus personally, he had to make things up for at least two years.<sup>dccxvi</sup> Later everything he said acquired authority.

19:19 "A number of those who practiced magic collected their books and burned them."

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<sup>165</sup> While Middle Ages are most famous for this trade, it proliferated much earlier: emperor Constantine's mother Helena found in Judea many relics available for sale.

Judaism condemns sorcery: "Do not turn to mediums or wizards."<sup>dcxvii</sup> Why would Gentile magicians pay Paul any attention? If anything, his miracles would have improved the public attitude toward miracle-workers. Abandoning their old spells would be foolish, since only the apostles could work wonders in Jesus' name.

19:22 Before starting to Macedonia, Paul sends two assistants there.

This episode may give rise to the illogical Gospel story of Jesus sending his disciples in pairs to the towns he intended to visit.

19:26 The Ephesian idol makers complain. "This Paul has persuaded and drawn away a considerable number of people by saying that gods made with hands are not gods."

Many philosophical schools taught the same thing everywhere in the Greek world, to no avail. Many of the early Gentile Christians simply added Jesus to their pantheon, which would strengthen, not destroy, the business of sculptors. The Ephesian sculptors were vindicated when the Church created the largest market for idols: sculptures and icons.

20:21 "I testified . . . about repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus."

Repentance was central to the Baptist but not so to Jesus' doctrine.

Paul distinguishes between God and Jesus. The doctrine of the trinity came later. Paul emphasizes repentance before God and faith in Jesus.

20:22 "And now . . . I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there."

Acts 15 suggests a large Christian community in Jerusalem. Had Paul had no contact with them since their last meeting? Perhaps he feared their reaction to him more than he did mainstream Jews, particularly if he invented the apostles' consent to his mission to the Gentiles and his rejection of the law.<sup>dcxviii</sup>

20:23 "The Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and persecutions are waiting for me."

Evidently, returning to Jerusalem was dangerous, quite probably the truth if, as is likely, neither apostles nor community existed. After the persecutions, where did the apostles go? Did Christianity exist only in Greece? Acts 15 says Paul and the apostles decided to let newly converted Christians bypass the law and circumcision in Jerusalem. To what extent may that be trusted?

20:24 “. . . if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the good news of God’s grace.”

Could nobody else preach Christianity in Jerusalem? Was he going to Jerusalem to bring the new faith to the land of its origin?

20:33–35 “You know for yourselves that I worked with my own hands to support myself and my companions. In all this I have given you an example that by such work we must support the weak.”

Did Paul earn enough making enough tents in his free time to support himself, his disciples, and *the weak*? Or did he consider himself and his followers *the weak*? Logically, his example does not suggest others to support the weak.

20:35 “The Lord Jesus . . . himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

The reference is rare; the Gospels report no such saying.

20:36 “he knelt down with them all and prayed.”

This contradicts Jesus’ instructions in Mt6:5–6 “And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners . . . But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret . . .”

21:7–10 “When we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais; . . . The next day we left and came to Caesarea; and we went into the house of Philip *the evangelist*, one of the seven, and stayed with him . . . A prophet . . . came down from Judea.”

The Gospel of Philip was not canonized, despite this early and authoritative mention. The mystical Pauline tradition sorts well with the spirit of Philip’s Gospel. AntiGnostic apologists prefer to date Philip very late, third century, which its mention in Acts precludes. Recall that Papias<sup>decxix</sup> ranks Philip with Peter and Thomas.

Paul implies the existence of seven major Gospels, or perhaps, seven apostles in Jerusalem.

Other than this allusion, the writer of Acts reveals no acquaintance with the Gospels. If so, either the passage was added late, or the Gospels were not yet sufficiently authoritative to cite.

Caesarea was then part of Judea and the residence of the Roman procurator. That Christians lived peacefully in Caesarea but were persecuted in Jerusalem is unlikely. Still, the Jerusalem Christians, if there were any, might show more enmity to Paul than to Philip and other mystics in Caesarea.

21:18 "The next day Paul went with us to visit James; and all the elders were present."

Why were the other apostles not there?<sup>166</sup> The restrained attitude to Paul is peculiar: James received him only on the following day. Other apostles did not even seek to see him—though Paul was already rather known for his sermons among Gentiles.<sup>dcxxx</sup>

21:20 "Then they said to him, 'You see, brother, how many thousands of believers there are among the Jews.'"

Even the number in this highly optimistic report was actuarially insignificant. Josephus describes a false Egyptian prophet who quickly rounded up thirty thousand followers in Judea. "Thousands" were a fraction of a per cent of the population.

21:21 "They have been told about you that you teach all the Jews living among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, and that you tell them not to circumcise their children or observe the customs."

Paul taught that Jesus' advent ended the law, to which later forgers have the apostles assent by easing the rules for Gentiles. Jesus taught otherwise: "For truly I tell you, . . . not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished."<sup>dcxxxi</sup>

21:28–29 "[Paul] has actually brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place. For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple."

The writer of Acts was not familiar with Judaism. Everyone, Gentiles included, came to the Temple to sacrifice except on high holy days. There were inscriptions in Greek and Latin in the Temple.<sup>dcxxii</sup>

21:30 "Then all the city was aroused, and the people rushed together. They seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple, and immediately the doors were shut."

Nothing so petty would arouse *all* Jerusalem, a large city, nor would the temple gates be shut for such light cause.

21:38 "Then you are not the Egyptian who recently stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand assassins out into the wilderness?"

Josephus records the episode shortly before the Jewish war started,<sup>dcxxiii</sup> between 54 and 60 C.E., under Nero and Felix, and more than twenty years after the traditional date of Jesus' crucifixion. This part of

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<sup>166</sup> Acts 15:4 distinguishes elders from apostles, so the elders mentioned are not apostles.

Acts was written even later, and still the author did not know the Gospels or the prototexts.

The episode should be dated from the postwar period. First, “assassins” are *sicarii* in the original Greek text, a group which appeared shortly before the war. Second, Luke, drawing on Josephus, confuses the Egyptian, to whom Josephus attributes thirty thousand followers, and Theuda, who had four hundred or four thousand. Luke does not realize that when the Egyptian appeared, there were no *sicarii*. The confusion stems from Josephus’ mentioning them together. He calls the Egyptian’s followers *dupes*, with no implication of violence. He led his followers not into the wilderness but to the Mount of Olives—yet the wilderness is mentioned near by, which again confuses Luke.

22:5 “I also received letters to the brothers in Damascus.”

For proof, Paul refers to the high priest and “council of elders.” He means the Sanhedrin, which did not consist specifically of elders, as was common among the Gentiles. Relatively young rabbis and, possibly, young aristocrats were members; and large numbers of the rabbis’ disciples attended, which would make the crowd rather young.

22:8 “Then he said to me, ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting.’”

9:5 “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting . . . .” Even in the canonical scenario, Paul does not remember the most important words of his life.

22:9 “Now those who were with me saw the light but did not hear the voice of the one who was speaking to me.”

9:7 “The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one.”

22:12–13 “A certain Ananias, . . . well spoken of by all the Jews living there, came to me.”

9:10 “There was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias.” All Jews would not speak well of a Christian.

22:14–16 “Then he [Ananias] said, ‘The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear his own voice; for you will be his witness to all the world of what you have seen and heard . . . . Get up, be baptized, and have your sins washed away.’”

The report in Acts 9 of the same event contains no such language.

Acts elevate a personage from Damascus by giving him the high priest’s name.<sup>dcxxiv</sup> Pro-Peter author of 5:1-10 gave the name Ananias, a



person important in Paul's biography, to the culprit who cheated Peter and died.

22:17–18 “After I had returned to Jerusalem and while I was praying in the temple, I . . . saw Jesus saying to me, ‘Hurry and get out of Jerusalem.’”

Acts 9 lacks the episode and presents Paul's flight from Jerusalem differently: “He spoke and argued with the Hellenists; but they attempted to kill him. When the believers learned of it, they brought him down to Caesarea.”<sup>”dcccxxv</sup> The Christians, not God, told him to run.

23:2 “Then the high priest Ananias ordered them . . . to strike him on the mouth.”

In spite of the tribune's order to hear Paul and his refusal to scourge a Roman citizen?

20:16 “For Paul . . . was eager to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost.”

Ananias was the most authoritative high priest, especially after the *sicarii* murdered Jonathan. Ananias was in the temple during Pentecost, not sitting with the Sanhedrin. Since Jews from Asia protested the Greeks' presence in the temple,<sup>dcccxxvi</sup> the event likely happened at the festival.

23:3 “Paul said to him, ‘God will strike you, you whitewashed wall!’”

Jesus said, “When they hand you over . . . what you are to say will be given to you at that time; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.”<sup>”dcccxxvii</sup> Would the Holy Spirit squabble with the high priest? We would expect a more distinguished answer.

23:4–5 “Those standing nearby said, ‘Do you dare to insult God's high priest?’ And Paul said, ‘I did not realize, brothers, that he was high priest; for it is written, ‘You shall not speak evil of a leader of your people.’”

Paul just asked, “Are you sitting there to judge me according to the law?”<sup>”dcccxxviii</sup> He knew an authoritative religious figure accused him before the Sanhedrin, and if nothing else the high priest's vestments identified him. Why did the Holy Spirit not tell Paul what to say?

23:6 “When Paul noticed that some were Sadducees and others were Pharisees, he called out, . . . ‘I am a Pharisee . . . I am on trial concerning the hope of the resurrection of the dead.’”

The Pharisees believed in resurrection; the Sadducees did not. Yet the Pharisees in the Sanhedrin were not persecuted. Paul taught a spiritual resurrection;<sup>dcccxxix</sup> the Pharisees expected bodily resurrection, a view Jesus

criticized.<sup>dccxxx</sup> Paul's cunning, not the Holy Spirit, attracted the Pharisees to his side.

Paul calls himself a "Pharisee, son of a Pharisee." Evidently he figured that claim would establish his mainstream views quicker than theological discourse. What does that say about the quality of his argument?

A Christian who offered Gentiles conversion without the law could not be a Pharisee. The cause before the Sanhedrin was different, and the Pharisees knew it: "This is the man who is teaching . . . against . . . our law."<sup>»dccxxxi</sup>

That it took Paul time to recognize some members of Sanhedrin were Pharisees argues against his work for the high priest earlier.

23:11 "The Lord stood near him and said, 'Keep up your courage! For just as you have testified for me in Jerusalem, so you must bear witness also in Rome.'"

Paul made no witness to Jesus in Jerusalem. The Jews from Asia had him expelled from the temple. Then he told the crowd about his conversion, contracting the account in Acts 9, and *then* he told the Sanhedrin he was a Pharisee.

Jesus misses an opportunity for mass conversion by appearing to Paul instead of the crowd. The episode is clearly modeled on the popular story of Jesus' encounter with Peter who was running from execution in Rome in 68 C.E.

23:15 "Now then, you and the council must notify the tribune to bring him [Paul] down to you . . . . And we are ready to do away with him before he arrives."

Only the procurator could execute in Judea. The conspiracy was mutiny, especially in the presence of the tribune. The Sanhedrin would never run such a risk.

Was lynching necessary? Felix, notorious for the wholesale slaughter of the Egyptian pretender's followers whom he called rebels, was governor of Judea<sup>dccxxxii</sup> and would certainly favor punishing Christians preaching release from earthly power, as did the prophet.

24:1 "The high priest Ananias came down with some elders and a rhetorician, a certain Tertullus, and they reported their case against Paul to the governor."

Why did Ananias need a rhetorician, if he and the high priest Jonathan had just appealed to Nero about the uprising in Samaria? There they acted as lawyers and orators in a case far more important than Paul's.

24:2 “Your Excellency [Felix], because of you we have long enjoyed peace, and reforms have been made for this people because of your foresight.”

Judea boiled under Felix, commotions, clashes, and robbers everywhere. “Festus who came to rule after Felix set off against desolators of the country without delay.”<sup>»dcccxxxiii</sup>

Some commentators like to see clever flattery of the prefect in Tertullus' sally. Such a suggestion ignores ancient reality. Felix would have silenced a joker, permanently, without a second thought. It is unfair to take all complying sayings at face value and to treat all wrong ones as sarcasm.

24:5 “We have . . . found this man . . . a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.”

Charging Paul with leading a sect shows, incidentally, that there was no Jerusalem church whatsoever. Otherwise, its true leaders and their opposition to Paul would be known.

24:6 “We seized him, and we would have judged him according to our law.”

The writer does not know that Jews had the right to judge according to the Torah but not to execute without Roman consent.

24:10 “Paul replied, . . . ‘For many years you have been a judge over this nation.’”

Felix was known for arbitrary punishment. Paul overtly flatters him. How honest is he elsewhere?

24:11 “It is not more than twelve days since I went up to worship in Jerusalem.”

Paul did not have to come to Jerusalem to worship. He could worship Jesus anywhere. Why would Paul, who did not observe the law, make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to worship God?

Paul stayed in Jerusalem longer than twelve days. “When we arrived in Jerusalem, the brothers welcomed us warmly. The next day Paul went with us to visit James.”<sup>»dcccxxxiv</sup> One day. “Having purified himself, he entered the temple with them, making public the completion of the days of purification.”<sup>»dcccxxxv</sup> The *days of purification* were at least two and as many as eight. “When the seven days were almost completed, the Jews from Asia . . . stirred up the whole crowd.”<sup>»dcccxxxvi</sup> Nine days. “The next day he released him.”<sup>»dcccxxxvii</sup> Ten days. “In the morning the Jews joined in a conspiracy.”<sup>»dcccxxxviii</sup> Eleven days. “The next day. . . they presented Paul also before him.”<sup>»dcccxxxix</sup> Twelve days. “Five days later the high priest Ananias came down.”<sup>»dcccxl</sup> Seventeen days.

24:12 “They did not find me disputing with anyone in the temple or stirring up a crowd either in the synagogues or throughout the city.”

“He spoke and argued with the Hellenists; but they were attempting to kill him.”<sup>dcexli</sup> “As you have testified for me in Jerusalem . . .”<sup>dcexlii</sup> And what about the speech he is making?

24:14 “I worship the God of our ancestors, believing everything laid down according to the law.”

What about circumcision and kosher food? Paul says the newly converted Gentiles can forget them.

24:25–26 “And as he [Paul] discussed justice, self-control, and the coming judgment, Felix became frightened . . . . At the same time he hoped that money would be given him by Paul . . . and for that reason he used to send for him very often and converse with him.”

Did Felix seek a bribe from fear of the judgment? Paul’s exhortations would hardly frighten such a butcher.

How much could Felix wring out of a poor preacher? Why did the Jerusalem church not come to Paul’s aid? Perhaps the apostles did not want to help him.

24:27 “After two years had passed . . . Felix left Paul in prison.”

The Roman governor would have hardly kept a prisoner so long. Had the Sanhedrin produced convincing proof of his guilt, Paul could be executed. Failing that, Felix would not have held a Roman citizen without cause. The long confinement means Paul had no supporters.

25:1 Festus replaces Felix.

Paul’s imprisonment in Caesarea<sup>dcexliii</sup> seems to be lengthened beyond reason to introduce a new historical figure, Festus. Soon King Herod Agrippa II and his sister Bernice join him onstage.<sup>dcexliv</sup> The author seeks to form a historical background around Paul with as many known figures as possible to authenticate the narrative. So many historical checkpoints do not appear in other chapters.

25:2–3 “The chief priests . . . gave him [Festus] a report against Paul. They . . . requested . . . to have him transferred to Jerusalem. They were . . . planning . . . to kill him along the way.”

First, the writer could not know the high priest’s intention. Second, he could know nothing about the private meeting with Festus. Third, Jews would not risk open conflict with the newly appointed Roman governor. Fourth, they had no need to conspire against Paul, who could not even get up a bribe.

25:10 "Paul said, 'I appeal to the emperor's court; this is where I should be tried. I have done no wrong to the Jews.'"

Again Paul resorts to ruse—or rather to fraud. He knows perfectly that he has offended the Jews by converting Gentiles to Judaism without regard to the law and basing his actions on alleged divine revelation. The Sanhedrin tried him for false prophecy.

25:11 "If there is nothing to their charges against me, no one can turn me over to them. I appeal to the emperor."

Paul decided not to trust divine assistance and evades trial by the Sanhedrin. "I appeal to the emperor": but the charges were religious and entirely within the purview of the Sanhedrin.

25:14 "Festus laid Paul's case before the king."

Agrippa II, King of Trachonitis, came to welcome Festus. If Paul were a Roman citizen, Agrippa could not judge him, nor could he, if Paul were born in Tarsus. Agrippa had no jurisdiction in Judea.

The account may be a prototype of an episode in Luke's Gospel. There Pilate sends Jesus to Herod<sup>dcxlv</sup> for trial. In the end, the Romans try both Jesus and Paul. Luke incriminates everybody he can.

25:16 "I told them that it was not the custom of the Romans to hand over anyone before the accused . . . had been given an opportunity to make a defense against the charge."

The Judaic system of justice provided the accused with a far wider range of defense and more formalized court procedures than the Romans. Paul had due process in the Sanhedrin with the right to defense.

25:21 "But when Paul had appealed to be kept in custody for the decision of his Imperial Majesty . . ."

Why would Paul ask for judgment by the notoriously cruel, mercurial Nero? Though Nero acquitted his mistress Epicharis of conspiracy against him, he would give scant attention and feel scarce compassion for a Jewish troublemaker claiming divinity for an executed state criminal. Nero insisted that *he* alone among men was divine.

Paul could not expect to find much compassion from the emperor in his preaching of violation of Judean Law when Nero's wife Poppea converted to Judaism. Even if Paul pleaded for the emperor's trial before her conversion, she was clearly sympathetic to Jews before, and her influence on Nero spawned at least from 62, before any possible dating for Paul's trial.

Festus was the prefect from 60 to 62 C.E. Paul likely reached Rome in 61 or 62 and lived there two years.<sup>dcxlv</sup> He faced Nero's court in 64 C.E.,

at the height of the disturbances in Judea leading up to the Jewish War, just about the worst possible time to press his case.

This dating of Paul's trial makes his polemics with Peter and James implausible: they were too old for active involvement.

26:3 "I am glad to be able to defend myself today before you; above all because you are a famous expert on Jewish laws and customs."

The author is probably unaware that Agrippa lived incestuously with his sister Bernice, a considerable violation of the law—which the locals surely knew. A suggestion that Paul spoke ironically is not persuasive.

26:10 "With authority received from the chief priests, I not only locked up many of the saints in prison, but I also cast my vote against them when they were being condemned to death."

Acts mentions no case when Paul imprisoned anybody. He was not a member of the Sanhedrin; in what trials did he judge?

26:13 "I saw [Jesus' vision] shining around me and my companions."

9:3 "A light from heaven flashed around *him*"—*only*.

26:14 "We had all fallen to the ground."

9:7 "The men who were traveling with him stood speechless."

26:14 "I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It hurts you to kick against the goads.'"

9:4 "He . . . heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?'"

26:16–18 "But get up and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and testify to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you. I will rescue you from your people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that by faith in me they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among the blessed."

In 9:6 Jesus is less verbose: "But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do."

In the end, Jesus saved Paul from neither Jews nor Gentiles.

Judaism does say Gentiles are in the devil's grip. Christianity, in fact, borrowed the concept of the devil as an active agent of evil from the Gentiles.

Jesus did not say faith in him earned forgiveness. Acts 26 agrees to a some extent with Galatians.

Gall:15–16 “But . . . God, who set me apart before I was born . . . was pleased to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles.” If Paul were set apart before birth, were his persecution of Christians and the scene on the Damascus road afterthoughts? If Paul was born to preach to Gentiles, why did he preach to the Jews in Damascus and Jerusalem?

Other details in Galatians argue with Acts. Gall:17 “. . . I went away at once into Arabia, and afterwards I returned to Damascus.” In Acts, Paul goes straight to Damascus, and from there to Jerusalem. But the most important difference is in Gall:16: “It pleased God . . . to reveal his Son *in* me,” a mystical experience blurred in later manuscripts to “reveal his Son *to* me,” possibly the origin of the roadside revelation account. The Damascus road, incidentally, was busy. Many would have witnessed the divine light.

“By faith in me they may receive . . . a place among the blessed” implies that even then Christians considered the Jews the chosen people. Many translations obscure that: “They may receive . . . a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me” shifts from Jews to Christians. “From your people” was added to the original “rescue you from the Gentiles” for the same reason.

26:21 “For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me.”

Not so. The Jews accused Paul of false prophecy<sup>dcxlvii</sup> and converting Gentiles without regard for the law.<sup>dcxlviii</sup>

Why the writer attributes an evident lie to Paul is puzzling: perhaps to diminish him while superficially respecting him.

26:22 “. . . saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would take place . . .”

The law and the prophets could not determine whether someone was the messiah, though they give some of his characteristics. Whether Jesus was messiah is a matter of faith.

26:23 “The Messiah . . . by being the *first* to rise from the dead, would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.”

Scriptures do not prescribe that qualification. At any rate, prophets had raised people from death before, so Jesus was not the first.

27:38 “They lightened the ship by throwing the wheat into the sea.”

Did Judea export wheat? The climate did not favor that crop, and grain cost more there than in Europe. Moving wheat from Syria to Judean ports would have been expensive. For taxation purposes, it made more sense to sell the wheat in Judea and send the money to Rome, or to buy wheat in Egypt.

28:21 “We have received no letters from Judea about you, and none of the brothers coming here has reported . . . about you.”

Paul was not widely known in Judea and Greece, if rumors about him had not reached Rome.

The Jerusalem hierarchy knew Paul was going to stand trial. Since acquittal would work against them, they would have sent a witness for the prosecution. Yet in spite of Paul’s delayed arrival, no accusers came to Rome to inform the Jewish community. The story is fictitious.

28:26–28 “You will indeed listen, but never understand, and you will indeed look, but never perceive . . . They might . . . turn and I would heal them. Let it be known to you then that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.”

The quotation is extensively distorted, and the writer does not quote everything: “Then I said, ‘How long, O Lord?’ And he said: ‘Until cities lie waste without inhabitant . . . like a terebinth or an oak whose stump remains standing when it is felled.’ The holy seed is its stump.”<sup>dcclxix</sup> That is, the desolation of Judea will last long but not forever. The prophet speaks of physical desolation, not condemning Jews to oblivion, nor forsaking the Jews for the Gentiles.

Paul does not refer to revelation. His words contradict Jesus: “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel . . . It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.”<sup>dccl</sup>

This crucial shift in Pauline teaching occurred unrelated to the Gospels and in Rome, for some unknown reason. We would expect, logically, Paul to quit preaching to Jews after his banishment from Jerusalem, but he did so only when “some” Roman Jews rejected him.<sup>dccli</sup> Rome housed many new Jewish Christian believers, to whom Paul then turned.<sup>dcclii</sup>

The text is only one of Paul’s many “final” rejections of the Jews. Dealing with several prototexts, the writer does not notice that Paul refused to preach to Jews several times, vows to deal only with Gentiles—then tries again.<sup>dccliii</sup>

28:30 “He lived there two whole years at his own expense.” Did Paul really spend all that time in custody? Since the Christian community in Jerusalem rejected him, he went to Rome to find a more accommodating congregation, not to be tried by the emperor.



## The Epistles of Paul

Some few sayings in the epistles appear in the Gospels, more refined and literary than Paul's letters. Rhetoric was greatly valued in those times, especially in Greece and Rome, where Paul preached. That he would have substituted his awkward constructs for the comparatively polished formulations of the Gospels is doubtful. Probably the epistles came first, and the Gospel sayings drawn from them or similar sources were polished up by the Gospel editors.

The epistles are expansive and occupy more space than the canonical Gospels. Thus, from the very beginning, they were seen as theological structures, not mere letters. The late Gospel editors had every reason to draw upon Paul.

The epistles chronically misinterpret and misquote the Scriptures. The sheer number of misinterpretations makes a critique of individual citations impractical here. In fact, Paul never quotes correctly. The mistakes are often visible even in comparison with the Septuagint. Ancients were lax with sources. Philo and Josephus often embellished the Scriptures when paraphrasing. Essenes considerably added to Hebrew Bible. Christian authors, however, massively twisted the citations, the Holy Writ itself – an action unthinkable to Jews who carefully preserved the text.

The epistles founder in false logical structures, attempting repeatedly to prove this or that. Paul's works contradict one another both theologically and factually, and they differ in style. The estimations of authenticity vary from Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon down to only Galatians. Style often differs considerably inside the epistles, suggesting that several writers added to them.

Romans seems to be compiled from several texts of different tendencies. 1 Corinthians obviously contains numerous late insertions. Galatians contradicts the Gospels and Acts, as well as other epistles. The situation does not improve with the other letters.

The earliest Alexandrian list includes Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, and Hebrews. Hebrews, however, is sharply distinguished by its refined Greek and complicated syntactical structures.

The pastorals<sup>167</sup> Titus and Timothy are known forgeries.<sup>168</sup> Three generally accepted sayings in Polycarp, about 135 C.E. coincide with the

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<sup>167</sup> Supposedly Paul's dealing with church organization and rituals.

<sup>168</sup> *E.g.*, Hanson, Houlden, Davies.

pastorals but are not credited to Paul. The pastorals are first mentioned in Ireneus about 185 C.E.

The pastorals present Paul as a recognized church authority, not a struggling preacher; there is no talk of the Second Coming but of life in the present; God's aim to save everyone instead of just the elect.<sup>169</sup> The pastorals' literary Greek bears little resemblance to the crude language of the other so-called epistles.

Marcion (about 140 C.E.), Paul's admirer, does not refer to the pastorals; Tertullian says Marcion knew but rejected the pastorals, possibly because they describe the hierarchical layout of the Church, different from Marcion's communities. The writer of the pastorals does not build doctrine but uses tradition and several rites to corroborate his assertions.

Circular false logic plagues the effort to authenticate Paul's epistles. Galatians is usually taken for an authentic work, because it conforms to accepted ideas about Pauline theology, chosen arbitrarily from the morass of the epistles, and conclusions about Paul's theology and style are drawn from Galatians. Then the style and theology of the other epistles are tested for the agreement with Galatians.

Another reason apologists affirm the authenticity of Galatians is that it contains chronological references.<sup>decliv</sup> In spite of the fact that the epistle's numerous contradictions,<sup>170</sup> the possibility of a chronological anchor is too tempting.

There is absolutely no evidence of any epistle's authenticity. They were written by people with differing views at various times. Apologists first say some belong to Paul, and then use them to prove Paul's historicity, which is circular logic and nonsense. The early church fathers speak of a mythical author of the epistles ascribed to Paul. None provides any reliable information on Paul as a historical figure or mentions acquaintance with him or his disciples. There are legends of Paul's disciples, but they lack even a hint of credibility. Thus, for example, Paul's best-known disciple, Luke, presents doctrine which differs significantly from that of the epistles. Luke describes the details of Jesus' mission, of which the writer of the epistles is quite unaware.

To consider all epistles would take forever. Two representative letters will suffice. Romans is usually accepted and contains Paul's version of the Gospel and his conclusions about the Jews. 1 Corinthians, also commonly considered authentic, is addressed to Gentiles.

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<sup>169</sup> Rom 9.

<sup>170</sup> Gal 3:1 Crucified Jesus was publicly portrayed in Galatia.

***To the Romans***

1:1 “Paul, a slave of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle . . .”

Jn15:15 “I do not call you slaves any longer . . . but I have called you friends.”

1:3–4 “. . . concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared Son of God . . . by resurrection from the dead . . .”

Paul<sup>171</sup> sees the resurrection as the prime evidence of Jesus' divinity. How could the Jews then believe in Jesus before the resurrection? Or after it, if they did not see him raised? They would not trust the disciples, if they did not believe Jesus himself—a position which agrees with Paul's. Judging by Paul's attitude toward the apostles, he did not accept their authority either.

The Gospel descriptions of the resurrection have little in common; most of the details vary. If that is Christianity's principal evidence, then the Church rests on a very shaky base.

“Declared Son of God . . . by resurrection from the dead . . .” What about the miracles, the virgin birth, the transfiguration, the rest? Paul obviously had not heard, because those fables had not yet appeared.

Why should Jesus' resurrection be understood as confirmation of divinity any more than that of Lazarus and other biblical characters?

“Descended from David”: Paul rarely mentions the facts of Jesus' life. The genealogies in Matthew and Luke disagree, and Matthew's pedigree is probably inserted into the narrative, possibly to agree with Paul. Jewish Matthew could not have taken Jesus for Davidic Messiah, a military leader.

Paul considers him a human, *in the flesh* descendant of David, not a godman. Later he modifies that view to the notion that Jesus adopted human form temporarily.<sup>dcclv</sup>

The passage confutes attempts by Christian theologians to show that he was consciously preaching the peculiar concept of the suffering and rejected messiah, such as appears in the Jewish pseudepigrapha. That “messiah” has always been reckoned as a descendant of Joseph by the priestly line, not of David.

1:5 “. . . to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name.”

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<sup>171</sup> Throughout the commentary on the epistles, I call the writer tentatively Paul, unless there is evident interpolation. Critique of the epistles' author thus does not necessary apply to Paul personally.

Jesus did not send his disciples to preach to other peoples—except after the forged resurrection accounts, contradicting everything that went before.

1:10 “. . . always in my prayers, asking that . . . I may . . . succeed in coming to you.”

1:7 “To all . . . in Rome, who are called to be saints.” When Paul wrote his message to the Roman community, he was not in Rome. Acts 28 Paul tells the Roman Jews about Jesus, and they reply, “With regard to this sect we know that everywhere it is spoken against.”<sup>dccclvi</sup> Paul found no local Christians upon his arrival in Rome.<sup>dccclvii</sup>

When Paul came to Rome, no Christian community existed there. To what *saints* did he write then? Trying to gloss the contravention, church tradition supposes that Paul left Rome after his first visit (described in Acts), wrote an epistle to the community he established there, and only later returned and was executed. Acts, however, is explicit that Paul did not leave Rome once he arrived. Further, the epistle was written before Paul’s journey to Jerusalem,<sup>dccclviii</sup> which Acts says came before his first trip to Rome.

1:14 “. . . both to Greeks and to barbarians.”

The contraposition of “Greeks and barbarians” is natural for a Greek. Paul would rather have spoken of Jews (or Christians) and Gentiles.

1:15–16 “. . . hence my eagerness to proclaim . . . in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the Gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greeks.”

Characteristically, Paul does not mention saving Romans: the sectarians were mainly Greeks. Possibly, the careless forger lived in Greece.

Confusion about the audience suggests forgery. The epistle is addressed either to Roman Jews (Paul admits their superiority and praises them in every possible way) or to Greeks (mentioned ubiquitously) or to Gentiles in general.<sup>dccclix</sup>

Faith in Jesus does not bring salvation: “anyone who believes him who sent me has eternal life . . .”<sup>dccclx</sup> “If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.”<sup>dccclxi</sup>

1:17 “For in it [the Gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed through faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The one who is righteous will live by faith.’”

The relevant biblical citation is, “Look at the proud! Their spirit is not right in them, however the righteous live by their faith.”<sup>dccclxii</sup> The prophet meant faith in God, not in Jesus as messiah.

1:18–20 “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth . . . . Ever since the creation of the world his . . . invisible attributes . . . have been . . . seen through the things he has made.”

This is more a reflection of Hellenic, not Judaic, tradition. The concept of seeing God through his creations is Greek and only later was partially adopted by rabbinic Judaism.

In Judaism, God tolerates most sin except idolatry (compare *all . . . wickedness*).

1:23 “And they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles.”

How bizarre for a Christian worshipping God in a human body to accuse Jews of idolatry!<sup>172</sup>

“ . . . *exchanged* the glory of the immortal God for images.” Most Gentiles were never monotheists. The Romans worshipped mostly anthropoid divinities.

“Though they knew God . . . .” The Romans never believed in the Jewish God. A Jew would never say that Gentiles “knew God.”

1:24 “God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves.”

Moral decay accompanies idolatry both in the scriptures and in the pseudepigrapha. Paul groundlessly turns them into cause and effect—though the order should be vice versa: first the trivial sin of concupiscence, then, idolatry—even into crime and punishment.

As Paul will say later, nothing is unclean in itself. How then can uncleanness be punishment?

The Essenes made no distinction between physical and spiritual uncleanness.

1:27 “And in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another.”

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<sup>172</sup> By far the largest body of the contemporary references belongs to Josephus whom Christians could alter to present their Jewish predecessors positively. The staunch adherence to monotheism Josephus relates is at odds with lax attitude known both from ancient scriptural sources and from the later experience. Without external threat, such as later coming from Christianity, observance would be more lax, accommodating and assimilating, rather than rigid.

Homosexuality, forbidden to Jews, was punished by execution and strictly condemned. When the Jews liberated Jerusalem from the Romans, they turned the Roman bathhouses into stables, showing their abomination of homosexuality.

Homosexuality was in no way as widespread among Jews as among Romans and Greeks. The writer describes the situation among Gentiles.

2:1 “In passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things.”

“Do not judge, so that you may not be judged.”<sup>declxiii</sup> Though Matthew dressed the Pauline saying in literary form, the connotation is substantially different. Paul’s idea is the following: since the judge commits the crime he condemns, he condemns himself. Matthew’s idea is that man has no right to judge others, an action which is God’s prerogative.

A Jew could condemn someone for violating the law. Possibly Jews reproached Paul and his supporters and proselytes for disobeying the commandments. If so, Paul was justifying himself, as he does at the culmination of the controversy: his dismissal of circumcision at 2:25–29.

2:7 “. . . to those who by patiently doing good *seek for glory* . . . and immortality.”

Jesus, on the contrary: “So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do.”<sup>declxiv</sup>

2:25 “Circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision has become the uncircumcision.”

Judaism does not expect everyone to obey the law always. Transgressions occur and do not normally constitute a major problem, provided the transgressor sincerely repents. Circumcision is a sign of the covenant, of entering the tribe of the Hebrews and has little to do with obeying the law, since it is done soon after birth to a child who do not observe the law yet.

2:26 “So, if those who are uncircumcised keep the requirements of the law, will not their uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision?”

Keeping the other commandments does not substitute for circumcision. Paul preached against other commandments as well. Why would Gentile converts, ready to keep the rest of the law, balk at circumcision only? Practically speaking, circumcision is less inconvenient than some other commandments.

The Torah makes the concrete, timeless demand: “This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised . . . And it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you.”<sup>declxv</sup>

Paul cannot call Jesus to his side to confirm his view on abrogating the circumcision requirement. Perhaps the Gnostics, who played fast and loose with the texts, provided support in Thomas: "His disciples said to him, 'Is circumcision useful or not?' He said to them, 'If it were useful, their father would produce children already circumcised from their mother. Rather, the true circumcision in spirit has become profitable in every respect.'"<sup>deci xvi</sup> This argument is foolish, since we do not live as we are born. We remove appendices, cut hair and nails, and usually wash the natural dirt from our bodies. We also acquire useful assets by our own labor, like knowledge. Only the Greeks theorized that everything natural is perfect.

Rabbi Aqiva, replying to the governor Turnus Rufus, says he expected the very question. His answer: man is capable of improving himself by developing his natural state. Whether entering the covenant is development, is a matter of choice.

Neither Jesus nor the disciples were interested in the matter. They were all circumcised Jews and never thought of involving Gentiles.

"*Their* father" may mean that the non-Jewish writer meant the Jews.

"Circumcision of the spirit" appears elsewhere as an alternative to circumcision, though its use does not validate the concept. Perhaps the forger of Th53 knew Paul's writings.

Since the time of Abraham, circumcision has been a physical rite. Christians substituted the symbolic "circumcision of the spirit," which is nothing more nor less than to rescind the commandment. To change the commandment requires change of immutable God.

2:27 "Then those who are physically uncircumcised but keep the law will condemn you that have the written code and circumcision but break the law."

2:29 "A person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart."

Paul converts Gentiles precisely to Judaism. Christianity was not yet a separate religion. Converted Gentiles considered themselves Jews. Paul probably did not know of the *God-fearers*, people who acknowledged Jewish monotheism but did not accept the law.

What does it take to be an *inward* Jew? Monotheistic faith? Abhorrence of idolatry? Obedience to the law? Paul's argument boils down to *If you feel Jewish, you're a Jew.*

3:1–2 “Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? Much, in every way. For in the first place they were entrusted with the oracles of God.”

If the circumcision provides spiritual advantages, why refuse it? “Much, in every way”: Paul specifies only one advantage: “They were entrusted with the oracles of God.” This is not entirely true, since pagans like Balaam also received revelations. Elsewhere Paul affirms repeatedly that only Christian faith is efficacious, that Christians have knowledge which surpasses the law, the promise of salvation, *etc.* Paul is flattering his Jewish audience.

Using scholastic exercises, Paul comes to the reverse conclusion: “Are we [the Jews] any better off? No, not at all; for we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin.”<sup>”dclxvii</sup> To Roman Jews, Paul writes about the Greeks, who were probably his real audience. He may pretend to address the Jews to create an aura of objectivity.

When Paul writes to Gentiles, he tells a different story about Judaism: “Now if the ministry of death, chiseled in letters on stone tablets, came in glory so that the people of Israel could not gaze at Moses’ face because of the glory of his face, a glory now set aside, how much more will the ministry of the Spirit come in glory?”<sup>”dclxviii</sup> Paul not only calls the commandments he praised at 3:2, “death, chiseled in letters,” but also asserts that serving Jesus eternally is more honorable. That is, he denies what he says in Romans about the advantage of Jews. He accepts Moses’ glory, yet claims that Christian glory in the spirit is greater—unrelated to any divine revelation or words of Jesus. He suggests replacing a biblical doctrine with a mere guess.

Paul’s argument is irrelevant to the circumcised Jews, and they would see no reason to let new converts remain uncircumcised. On the other hand, Paul’s argument is too Jewish to work with Gentiles, especially Chapter 4. A later writer addressed the Gentiles as he thought Paul would.

3:3 “What if some were unfaithful? Will their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God?”

Paul erroneously assumes that God’s faithfulness, true in relation to every person, means good will to everyone. God’s faithfulness, in fact, appears as he keeps his promises, rewarding the righteous, punishing evildoers. A faithful God punishes the faithless.

3:4 “Although everyone is a liar, let God be proved true, as it is written, ‘So that you may be justified in your words, and prevail in your judging.’”



Neither God's faithfulness nor human falsehood is in question in the quotation which Paul distorts.<sup>dccclxix</sup>

"Everyone is a liar." Judaism is based on the possibility of righteousness. Paul, too, speaks of faithful Gentiles. The Psalter contradicts Paul: "I kept my faith, even when I said, 'I am greatly afflicted'; I said in my consternation, 'Everyone is a liar.'"<sup>dccclxx</sup> Faith under adversity is victorious. The psalmist admits that he exaggerated because he was upset.

Paul characteristically transforms the term to support his argument. Truthfulness of God consists in his justice, not in patronizing sinners. He promised good things only for those who observe his commandments. Faithfulness to sinners consists in punishing them.

3:3 "What if some were unfaithful?" 3:4 "Everyone is a liar." From the unfaithfulness of "some" to the deceit of everyone in a single verse!

3:7 "But if through my falsehood God's truthfulness abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner?"

People must observe commandments, not violate them to offer God an opportunity to reveal his greatness by punishing the transgressors. Indeed, there is no commandment to help God show his greatness. The Pharaoh did not cease to be a sinner because he made a stage for Moses' miracles. A murderer does not cease to be a criminal because his show trial demonstrates that the state system of justice works well.

According to Paul, transgression becomes righteousness. Beside, he just wrote of newly converted Christians who observe the law.<sup>dccclxxi</sup>

Paul knew the argument was weak: "And why not say (as some people slander us by saying that we say), 'Let us do evil so that good may come'?"<sup>dccclxxii</sup>

3:9 "Are we [the Jews] any better off? No, not at all; for we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin."

The posture is typical of sectarian-maximalists who divide the whole world into the righteous and the sinful. The practical absurdity of the approach is evident: the least sin takes away righteousness. From Paul's standpoint, further sins are insignificant.

There is a difference between one sin and many sins and variations in degree among sins. We should not do sins and not wallow in sin after one false step. Beside, the sinfulness of Jews who generally obey the law and that of Greeks who do not accept it are essentially different.

Hebrew scriptures never claim the Jews were chosen for their righteousness.

3:10–18 “It is written: ‘There is no one who is righteous, not even one; there is no one who has understanding, there is no one who seeks God. All have turned aside, together they have become worthless; there is no one who shows kindness, there is not even one. Their throats are opened graves; they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of vipers is under their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. ‘Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery are in their paths, and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes.’”

The quotation consists of distorted fragments lifted from various books: Ps12:1–3, Ps53:1-4, Ps5:9, Ps140:3-4, Is59:7-8, Ps36:1. The biblical quotations demonstrate the sinfulness of some, though far from all, Jews. Not a word about Gentiles. Ps36:2 which Paul quotes explicitly condemns those who do not obey the law.

3:19 “Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.”

But man’s responsibility before God existed before the law. God does not need to resort to subterfuge (the law) to control mankind.

Paul posits a malicious God who invented the law to fill man with guilt, a typical Gnostic portrait of the demiurge. God gave the Jews the Torah as testimony of the covenant.

Paul wrongly concludes that anyone who possesses some mystical knowledge rises above the law<sup>173</sup> and his acts are the law themselves insofar as his soul is united with the divine. Yet Paul often describes the Christian catechumens as indifferent, uncomprehending pagans whose conversion to Christianity was only a gesture. Perhaps they would have done better if they knew the law.<sup>174</sup>

Pragmatic Paul admits that conscience alone may not produce righteousness. He writes that civil authorities are “God’s servants for your good . . . . Therefore one must be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience.”<sup>”dclxxiii</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> This concept rings of the later Maimonides, also subject to the influence of Greek philosophy, reasoning on the idea that the literal text of the Torah is intended for the mob.

<sup>174</sup> *Kashrut* might be given to demonstrate division through the concept of clean and unclean food. What belongs to which is no matter, since the point is the availability of both. Separation leads to awareness of unity through choice. The initiated has come to awareness in his own way and perhaps no longer needs to keep *kashrut*; but Christians were not really initiated and did not comprehend the innermost unity of things. Therefore, the concept of the initiated being free from the law does not apply to them.

3:20 “No human being will be justified in his sight, . . . for through the law comes the knowledge of sin.”

Paul asserts that sin appeared in the world with the law which defines sin. In fact, the law only formulated the notion of sin. Cain sinned generations before the Jews got the law.

Crime is unacceptable in itself, even if no law forbids it. Civil law formalizes the description of crime to eliminate different interpretations. It does not create the crime, as Paul argues. No one would say, for example, that murder is not a crime, so murderers would not feel like criminals or so potential murderers would not be tempted to break the law.

The legal fact of transgression is not important; committing an action forbidden by the law is. The burglar is judged not for flouting the prohibition of burglary, but for *burglary*. In the absence of civil law, burglary is still punishable. Lechery is a sin whether the law forbids it or not. In fact, Paul considers it a sin without appealing to the law. One should not jump from the roof of a skyscraper, not because the sign warns against it but because the jump will kill you—as the sign says.

Paul later comes to a similar conclusion: “Sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law.”<sup>»dclxxiv</sup>

Different origins of Paul's theology may be supposed. A fundamental principle of Roman law—*no crime without the law*—stipulates that people can be tried only for transgressions defined by the law. Paul may have misunderstood that formula.

Compare the words of Jesus: “Whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments . . . will be called least in the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>»dclxxv</sup>

3:21 “But now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed.”

Mt5:17 “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.” Mt19:17 “If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.” Jesus came to turn those who forgot the law. The Baptist urged repentance.

3:22–23 “The righteousness of God [is] through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.”

Different sins are not equal.

The prophets repeatedly assure that God's displeasure with the Jews is temporary. The concept of the messiah is founded on that premise.

3:24 “They are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”

Not as a gift at all but as a quid pro quo for faith in Jesus. Faith means keeping Jesus' words and, thus, the commandments. Jesus said salvation is possible only by keeping the commandments.<sup>dclxxvi</sup>

3:25 "... whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement, . . . effective through faith. He did so to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed."

Paul preaches the mystical sharing in a righteous man's self-sacrifice. Here is a rare clarification as to what sins are forgiven: all previously committed. So easy. Judaism conditions the forgiveness on restitution to the injured.

Normally, repenting sinners bring sacrifices. According to Paul, God brings sacrifice to himself.

3:26 "It was to prove in the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus."

What *is* the meaning of faith in Jesus? What does faith change, whether Jesus was the messiah or not? In what practical way does faith change our lives? The point is to keep the commandments, which Jesus urged.

If one believes in Jesus' divinity, yet commits murder and lechery, is he saved? Surely not. Christians answer that believers should not do such things. Thus, faith in Jesus means keeping at least some commandments, so why not all? Jesus made no exceptions, and Paul is hardly more authoritative than he or the scriptures.

3:28 "For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law."

Paul abandons theology for opinion. Although most scholars interpret *apart* as declaring the law irrelevant, that is not certain. Paul thought of faith as another way, parallel to righteousness under the law.

3:30 "God is one; and he will justify the circumcised on the ground of faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith."

Paul is trying to prove the irrelevance of circumcision. He should show the equality of the circumcised and the uncircumcised in salvation. Instead he simply asserts their equality in salvation and from there—an unproved premise—he deduces the equality of circumcision and uncircumcision.

3:30 is an erroneous conclusion based on the unproven premise that Jews are justified by faith in Jesus.

3:31 "Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law."

Paul misrepresents matters by giving the term a different meaning. Paul means "the law of faith," the obligation to believe in Jesus. He proposes to disregard the law of Moses and to rely on faith in Jesus.

Let us consider the logical structure of Chapter 3.

3:2 Priority of Jews, bearers of the Torah.

3:3 Some of them are not faithful.

3:4 Everyone is a liar (erroneous extrapolation).

3:4 God is faithful all the same (Faithfulness is keeping the promises: punishing the sinners).

3:5 The unfaithfulness of man glorifies the faithfulness of God. (Paul incorrectly implies that faithfulness of God is salvation, rather than justice.)

3:5 God, glorified through the unfaithfulness of man, is not angry. (Contradicts numerous examples in the Torah of God's wrath toward transgressors)

3:7 Then the transgressors do not commit sins. (Non-consequential to the above. Sinners remain sinners, even though they provide a stage for demonstration of the greatness of divine punishment.)

3:8 But one should not do evil on purpose to glorify the faithfulness of God (why not, if it is the direct consequence of the above?).

3:9 Jews and Greeks are equal before God, because both are sinful. (Does not follow from the other statements, and ignores the degree of sinfulness.)

3:27 Jews have nothing to boast of, since forgiveness comes by faith in Jesus. (Conclusion from an unproven premise.)

3:29 God is not the god of the Jews only but also of the Gentiles. (Paul picks up a new line of argument to bolster his opinion at 3:28. He substitutes the fact that God created all nations for the idea that God chose the Jews.)

4:2–5 "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.' . . . To one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteous."

That is, faith is important, but deeds do not matter. Elsewhere Paul "declared . . . that they should repent . . . and do deeds consistent with repentance."<sup>dcclxxvii</sup> What then *is* required: faith in Jesus or good works?

"He brought him outside and said, . . . 'Count the stars . . . . So shall your descendants be.' And he [Abram] believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness."<sup>dcclxxviii</sup> The important point is not

faith in God but rather Abram believed an extremely unlikely promise. And his belief was not absolute: “But he said, ‘O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?’”<sup>”dcclxxix</sup>

Of Abraham’s faith the Torah says, “Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said to himself, ‘Can a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old?’”<sup>”dcclxxx</sup> But his deeds were formidable, even to the readiness to sacrifice his son. Christianity requires unquestionable, unthinking faith is the unproven and highly unlikely story.

Paul’s logic is flawed. Argument by analogy—a *fortiori*—is a standard method of interpreting scripture: if X is true of A, and B is stronger than A, then X is all the more so true for B. Abraham’s faith was reckoned to him as righteousness; consequently, stronger faith or faith under more difficult circumstances is reckoned as righteousness even more certainly. Paul’s conclusion that someone who does nothing is righteous does not work, since we do not know whether the belief of nonperforming Christians in the God of the Torah is stronger than Abraham’s. How else may we compare their faiths if not by external evidence, deeds, which Paul rejects?

Paul often employs a *fortiori* arguments, popular with the Greeks for formulating loose analogies, but he repeats the same error: the conclusion exceeds the premise. As long as X is true for A, X is true for B, though whether A and B are equal or even related remains undemonstrated. Paul usually closes the circle and, erroneously supposing that X is true for B, concludes that B is stronger (better) than A. An example: Jews receive benefits from God; Christians with their faith will receive even more (which does not follow from the previous statement). Consequently, Christian faith is better than Jewish faith (conclusion from the unproven second statement). Add Paul’s habit of changing the meaning of a term during the discussion—compare “faith [in God]” and “faith [in the apostles’ conflicting stories of Jesus’ resurrection]”—and the logic of Christian doctrine turns sour.

James used the same proposition to prove the opposite: “Faith apart from works is barren . . . Was not our ancestor Abraham justified . . . when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? Thus the scripture was fulfilled that says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.’”<sup>”dcclxxxi</sup>

James’ position is clear: “What good is it, my brothers, if you say you have faith but do not have works?”<sup>”dcclxxxii</sup> “But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers.”<sup>”dcclxxxiii</sup> “So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.”<sup>”dcclxxxiv</sup> “Likewise, was not Rahab the prostitute also justified by works?”<sup>”dcclxxxv</sup>

The evangelists also were concerned with deeds, putting these words into Jesus’ mouth: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will

enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who *does* the will of my Father in heaven.” ”Go away from me, you evil-*doers*.” “Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not *act* on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand.”<sup>dcclxxxvi</sup> “If you wish to enter into life, *keep* the commandments.”<sup>dcclxxxvii</sup>

Salvation through faith contradicts Paul’s stand in the Epistle to the Hebrews. The moral demands of the biblical prophets oppose the concept of salvation solely through belief. Paul has to counter the moralizing of the philosophers who urged deeds, not words.

Educated Christians did not rely on faith alone to establish Jesus’ historicity. Beginning with Eusebius, they used Josephus to prove his existence. According to Paul, belief is sufficient, no matter if you believe in a lie.

Paul’s problem is clear. The good deeds could only be defined by a set of rules, such as the commandments. He could not impose Jewish law on Gentile catechumens, and could not justify any other law for them. Paul is compelled to claim that faith is quite enough, works aside.

Paul had no choice. He must attract proselytes to a supposedly Jewish sect but without Jewish requirements, so he must undergird abandoning the law. Now he tries a second approach: the law (deeds) is still in effect but is not essential: if I did not convince you that the law is obsolete, fine; but you may disregard it if you believe what I told you about Jesus.

Disregarding the law, Paul does not merely allow the Christians to abstain from good deeds prescribed by the law, such as observing the Sabbath and *kashrut*. He implicitly allows the evil actions: why abstain from murder or idol worship, if deeds are irrelevant? Rabbi Nehemiah said, “Abraham, our Father, has received this world and the world to come through faith, for it is written, ‘And Abraham believed God.’”<sup>dcclxxxviii</sup>

In Judaism, works and faith are inseparable. Faith is expressed in real life, in practical conduct and actions.<sup>175</sup> They are even more significant than another cornerstone of Judaism, study.<sup>dcclxxxix</sup> Faith in God necessarily leads to observing his rules. The New Testament authors do not agree on what, if any, rules Jesus laid down, and the Christians who disregard the Jewish law have no divine commandments to observe, thus logically their works are unimportant.

The argument about the priority of deeds or faith is meaningless in Judaism. In ancient Hebrew the same word *davar* signifies *a word* (expression of faith), *a deed* and *a thing*. A word is material, inseparable

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<sup>175</sup> Which Herford opportunely called *orthopraxy* as distinguished from *orthodoxy*.

from a deed, not an abstraction. No one who knew Hebrew, let alone received revelations in that language, would write such a thing.

While Christians call Satan Belial, Jews usually refer to him as Bliy'al, *without benefit*, or *useless*. The word also denotes unworthy people. Thus, people not doing good are equated with Satan.

The suspension of *ritual* commandments in the messianic era was not alien to Judaism.<sup>»dccc</sup> People will be so close to God that rituals make no sense; but Paul could not claim by any stretch of the imagination that that era had come, only perhaps that it was about to come. Even so, so near the imminent Second Advent people should obey the law scrupulously.

While Paul freed Christians from the commandments, he did not trouble them to study their religion, unlike the Jewish tradition: "The ignorant person cannot be really devout. The uneducated person cannot avoid sinning."<sup>»dcccxi</sup>

4:4 "Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due."

Paul means that wages are a gift only to someone who does not work, so to reveal God's goodwill, one should stop working and wait for the gift of salvation. He is confused: God does not *benefit* when men keep the law. *Man* benefits. The analogy with paid labor is wrong. Keeping the commandments is the end, not the means.

4:9 "Is this blessedness, then, pronounced only on the circumcised, or also on the uncircumcised? We say, 'Faith was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness.'"

Readiness to obey the law, including circumcision, is a condition of blessedness.

Paul substitutes faith in Jesus' resurrection for Abraham's faith in God.

Jesus did not like Gentiles turning to him: "Let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector."<sup>»dcccxi</sup> But a Christianized pagan who does not follow the law remains a Gentile all the same.

4:10 "How then was it reckoned to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised?"

The requirement of circumcision simply did not yet exist. When God required it, Abraham had himself and his family circumcised. Paul's reasoning would let uncircumcised Gentiles in, then circumcise them.

4:11 "He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith."



Circumcision was not related to Abraham's righteousness: "You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you."<sup>dcxciii</sup>

Paul supposes that faith may replace circumcision, but baby boys are circumcised on the eighth day, when they have no faith, let alone faith in Jesus.

4:12–13 "[Abraham became] the ancestor of the circumcised . . . . For the promise . . . did not come to Abraham . . . through the law but through the righteousness of faith."

God said to Abraham, "You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. I will establish. . . an *everlasting* covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring . . . : Every male among you shall be circumcised . . . . Any uncircumcised male . . . shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant."<sup>dcxciv</sup> How can Paul say circumcision is not necessary? Paul refers to the story of Abraham very selectively: to reward of a covenant, but not to its precondition.

Paul means that Abraham fathered nations that do not follow the law yet later says such people are not his true descendants: "Not all of Abraham's children . . . but 'It is through Isaac that descendants shall be named for you.' This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as descendants."<sup>dcxcv</sup>

4:15 "For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation."

In Judaism, nothing is wrong with God's wrath against sinners. The Scriptures repeatedly call his wrath onto idolaters. No other violation so incurs his fury.

4:16 ". . . in order that the promise . . . be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham . . . . As it is written, 'I have made you the father of many nations.'"

Abraham was not the first man nor the ancestor of every race and tribe. The Greeks, to whom Paul appeals, are not descended from Abraham. By biblical logic, to which Paul subscribes here, they cannot share in the promise given to Abraham.

God promised he would care for the descendants of Abraham only if they were circumcised,<sup>dcxcvi</sup> precisely what Paul says not to do.

4:19–20 "[Abraham] did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead, or when he considered

the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God."

On the contrary: "Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said to himself, 'Can a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old?'"<sup>deccxcvii</sup>

4:22 "Therefore his faith was reckoned to him as righteousness."

The moment which affirmed Abraham's righteousness came much earlier.<sup>deccxcviii</sup>

4:23–24 "Now the words, 'it was reckoned to him [as righteousness],' were written not for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead."

All Jews believed in God. Paul deviously substitutes belief in Jesus' resurrection for that faith. One may believe in God but not in that he or anybody else raised Jesus.

4:25 "[Jesus] was raised for our justification."

Paul asserts without the least proof, then proceeds to subsequent conclusions.

5:6 "At the right time Christ died for the ungodly."

Paul speaks of some abstractly distant time. "While we were still weak, . . . Christ died." The impression persists that Paul speaks not about a historical event but his own personal experience. Jesus' fate is related to every man.

Jesus considered Judeans generally pious, not *ungodly*: "You are the salt of the earth."<sup>deccxcix</sup>

5:7 "Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person . . ."

Rather the contrary.

5:12 "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned."

Despite different interpretations, Paul's position is that all Adam's sons are transgressors. Read on: "If, because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace . . . exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ."<sup>deccc</sup> That is, all Adam's descendants are trespassers; all who believe in Jesus are righteous. See also Rom5:18.

Such predeterminism about sin contradicts free will: everyone, even a Gentile, is free to be righteous, or to sin. Interestingly, the idea of

determinism presupposes free will, because we cannot define a phenomenon without the background of its negation, usually of its opposite. Determinism exists only insofar as some part of man is free to choose, just as free will exists only side by side with certain determinism.

Paul fails to notice that the presumption of absolute sinfulness dictates the need for rules as nothing else could. Wicked thoughts alone justify commandments, laws. Practical, Judaism does not try to extirpate human corruption, in thought or in deed, but only to limit corrupt behavior. Internal perfection is each person's private affair, which the commandments promote by requiring righteousness and prohibiting sin.

Paul's position precludes condemning sinners: why are they guilty, if they sin inevitably by virtue of being sons of Adam? Paul releases Christians from responsibility, the cornerstone of ethics. How can a man be responsible if his deeds are ineluctably evil? The essence of responsibility is the capacity to choose among options.

Probably, Paul at first misunderstood the Judaic concept of Adam's sin and concluded that all his descendants are sinners. Later he saw the need to condemn sinners otherwise unaccountable for their inevitable sins, creating a conflict between determinism and responsibility.

Paul seems to ignore the Jewish tradition that modern humanity are not descendants of Adam, indeed are of a different nature. God created Adam directly and communicated with him. His descendants up to Noah lived very long lives. The flood destroyed them. Modern humanity originates with Enoch, thus his importance in the pseudepigrapha.

Paul calls Jesus "the second Adam" who redeems his ancestor's sin, missing the contravention with Jesus' human *or* divine nature. If divine, Jesus was incomparably superior to Adam; if human, Paul's idea rests on the shaky assumption of Jesus' equality with Adam who was much more than a human. Paul imagined Jesus as neither human, nor divine, but semi-divine hero, thus his parallel to Adam.

If Jesus atoned only for Adam's sin, what about other people's sins? The Torah explicitly releases children from responsibility for their parents' sins, and people cannot be held accountable for Adam's sin, if it was a sin; nor Adam's sin is genetically inheritable. Elsewhere Paul asserts that Jesus expiated the sins of the Jews or of everyone. If Adam's sin entails all subsequent offences, evil is predetermined or at least greatly facilitated, and man cannot be guilty. There is nothing to redeem.

Paul makes the mistake of people who read Genesis carelessly. When Adam and Eve were expelled from Eden, the earth was already inhabited. Cain says to God, "Anyone who meets me may kill me."<sup>dccci</sup> Adam's sin cannot affect everyone but only his descendants.

Christian theology supposes that by his willing death Jesus freed humanity from Adam's sin of disobedience which was punished by death,

the loss of immortality. First, Jesus' redemption came a little late. Second, the Torah did not and could not promise the redemption of sin: the very fact of Adam's descendants is a consequence of his transgression. Third, Jesus did not bring deliverance from death. Fourth, immortality is incompatible with human existence and progress; the earth could not support the population. Fifth, the Christian theologians misinterpreted Adam's punishment, which was spiritual death, internal dualism, and strife, exemplified by his enmity with his wife, a part of himself.

Paul compares with Adam to acquire authority via antiquity. Someone who popped up in Judea a few years back and called himself the messiah would mean nothing to Gentiles. Christians needed to link Jesus to some ancient figure, but only Jews were concerned with most of the biblical figures. There was little choice: Adam, Enoch, or Noah. Abraham, the father of Israel, was inconvenient. Enoch was not suitable: he was often credited with writing the pseudepigrapha and somewhat discredited. Noah was too earthy, and Jesus would have to repeat the flood somehow. Adam was the optimum antecedent for Jesus. Adam was the closest to God of all humankind. It did not matter that Gentiles did not know about Adam; he was recognizably close to Plato's *androgynes*, ancient, and thus a credible prototype for Jesus.

After Jesus was deified, the Church had to go beyond the analogy to Adam: Jesus existed before creation. Nor was that enough: Jesus was on a par with Wisdom and the hero of yet one more parable. After his inclusion in the trinity, there was nowhere left to go.

5:13 "Sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law."

Sin was punished before the law was given: Adam and Eve were expelled from Eden, Cain was cursed, the earth was flooded, and Sodom and Gomorra were incinerated.

As Maimonides explains,<sup>deccii</sup> the outcome of Adam's trespass was the perception of good and evil in the world. People knew how to distinguish between them and how to label everything as one or the other. Since the new Adam redeemed the first Adam's sin, good and evil had to vanish, at least for Christians. Paul, however, hedges the bet: Jesus' crucifixion does not cancel sin. Only rejection of the law accomplishes that.

5:15, 18 "For if many died through one man's trespass, much more surely has the grace of God in . . . Jesus Christ abounded for many . . . Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all."

Adam's punishment extends to his descendants, while Jesus has no known offspring. Grace is not absolute; not everyone is endowed with it. Paul's analogy endows everyone with grace regardless of their deeds.

6:8 "But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him."

If Christians experienced mystical death in Jesus, they assumed they would never die. Davies observes rightly that Paul has to explain himself to the Thessalonians, furious with the deception.<sup>decciii</sup> Paul devises a new concept to explain why Christians were dying: the dead will rise again at the Second Coming and inherit the kingdom of heaven before those still alive.

Paul knew of Dionysus mysteries: "To be in him and he in them." Judaism categorically rejects the identification of man and God, though the notion penetrated Hassidism 1600 years later in the idea of the divine abiding in man.

6:9 "Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him."

*No longer*: did death have such dominion over the divine Jesus before? Paul speaks of a human being who has undergone spiritual metamorphosis, not of a deity.

6:10 "The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God."

Paul thinks Jesus was a sinner like other people.

Paul muddles a popular Gnostic concept: Jesus' crucifixion symbolizes his death for the sake of the sinful world, while the resurrection is the initiation, revival to spiritual life. The problem arises when the allegory is applied to the physical resurrection of a divine being.

6:11 "You [are] . . . alive to God in Jesus Christ."

6:23 "Christ Jesus our Lord."

Paul mixes two irreconcilable concepts. In 6:11, Jesus is the divine mediator before God, like Hermes Trismegistus. In 6:23, Paul gives Jesus the Greek name which denotes God in the Septuagint. Paul hardly meant *Lord* as merely *sir*.

6:2—11 "All of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death . . . so that . . . we too may might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his . . . For whoever has died is freed from sin . . . You also must consider yourselves . . . alive to God."

Paul assimilates Jesus' death to the death of Christians, but they are different: illusory for Jesus and real for Christians. Neither are their "resurrections" similar. Paul means a mystical experience and notes carefully that the death and resurrection of Christians are *like* Jesus', not the same.

Paul wrongly supposes that death frees from sin. If so, judgment is unnecessary, as guiltless people pour into paradise. Judaism believes death annuls sins repented of—and restituted for. Christianity later accepted that view and required a final confession or repentance.

The argument's structure is traditional and can be interpreted according to personal taste. Thus in the Talmud: "The one who has made friends with a Gentile and brought him to Israel, is like the one who has borne him anew [raised for new life]."<sup>dccciv</sup>

6:13 "No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness."

Paul is unaware of Jesus' words: "And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away."<sup>dcccv</sup>

6:14 "For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace."

What is sin for Paul? Only disbelief in Jesus' divinity or historicity, since nothing is formally prohibited or restricted. Then it is clear why he reckons Christians as sinless: they are so by definition.

6:16 "If you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness."

Obedience probably means keeping Jesus' sayings. The only instruction Jesus gave was to keep the commandments, which Paul opposes.

Paul errs also on ethical grounds. Conscious observance of the law and slavish obedience are two different things. Righteousness can spring only from free will, which is inconsistent with abject submission. Righteousness is not just denial of sin. Unlike sin, which can be a sublime animal craving, righteousness is always conscious and always the outcome of choice.

Judeans were not *slaves of the law*.<sup>dccvi</sup> They could convert to another religion or even move to Gentile settlements and sin openly. Their commitment to the law is the result of relatively—adjusted for habit—free choice.

6:23 "For the wages of sin is death."

He means spiritual death, loss of eternal life. Paul is wrong about judgment. History has known only a handful of righteous persons, and even they trespassed. David committed murder by proxy. Judgment consists in defining the ratio between sins and good works, between evil and repentance. According to the Talmud, a few good works outweigh many sins.

7:2–3 “A married woman is bound by law to her husband as long as he lives . . . . She will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive.”

Paul does not know that the law allows a woman to marry another man during an ex-husband's lifetime: “She then leaves his house and goes off to become another man's wife.”<sup>dcccvi</sup>

7:4 “In the same way . . . you have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead.”

After her husband's death, a woman is free to remarry. By analogy, after the death of the law, Christians are free to marry Jesus. But Jesus died, and according to Paul, Christians are dead, too.

7:6 “But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we are slaves not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit.”

Contrast “under the old written code” with Jesus' words: “Until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law.”<sup>dcccviii</sup>

7:8 “But sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness.”

Paul opposes circumcision. Does the commandment motivate him to circumcise more often?

The people of Sodom did not know the Torah and its formal interdictions, but the desire for lechery flourished in them. By analogy, modern atheists, who have no religious restraints, sometimes indulge in lechery all the same. Gentiles do not have the law and still engage in sinful behavior. Pauline Christians themselves commit various sins, as the epistles show, though they do not adhere to the law. The law does not purposefully incite to sin. To suppose that the law made the Hebrews less moral than before is ludicrous.

Judaism of Paul's time had hundreds of prohibitions, like enigmatic prohibition of sewing with different threads. Some Jews argue today that observing them dilutes the sense of ethics, is dubious and burdensome. Paul nowhere mentions those minute restrictions, but the basic commandments of circumcision and clean food. He arbitrarily rejects the tenets of Judaism, not its questionable details.

The Torah does not introduce artificial limitations to invent and instigate sin: “Do not look at a woman's little finger” so everyone will burn to see her pinky. The Torah prohibits carrying into action natural evil inclinations which exist apart from the law. Their purpose may be

understood on social, spiritual, or mystical levels, but no moral system can be offered without imposing restraints on natural desires.

The notion provoking desire by prohibiting it is not alien to Judaism. “Rabbi Jeremiah decided to abstain from wine, but when he took the oath, the interdiction aroused in him the desire to drink. When he cancelled the oath, he did not feel that desire any more.”<sup>dcccix</sup> It is a question of measure. Prohibition may increase desire, but man desires regardless of the ban. Conscience, public morals, rules, or vows may all control desire. Rabbi Jeremiah did not drink even after he foreswore. Paul rescinds the law but establishes no other credible regulation of human conduct.

7:9 “I was once alive apart from the law.”

Acts 23:6 “Paul . . . called out, ‘. . . I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees.’” When did Paul live without the law?

7:10 “And the very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me.”

Which commandment affected Paul so badly? *Do not steal, do not covet your neighbor’s wife, do not commit adultery or do not murder?* Ignorant of the commandments, Paul does not specify.

Once it became dominant, the Church perceived the necessity of regulating social conduct and reduced the commandments to ethical injunctions, usually affected by the time.

Ignoring Paul, Christians returned to keeping the Ten Commandments. Theology cannot explain why the Church sustained some commandments and abandoned the Sabbath (one of the Ten), *kashrut*, and circumcision. The Torah assumes all three, and Christian priests habitually refer to the Hebrew Bible. Jesus in the Gospels did not bind on the moral norms Christians adhere to. His rejection of the Sabbath is evidently forged. The Church cannot appeal to Jesus to justify its picking and choosing among the commandments.

7:12 “So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good.”

Nevertheless, Paul rejects them. 7:13 “Did what is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! . . . Through the commandment [sin] might become sinful beyond measure.”

And how shall *good* be defined, if not by commandments of some kind?

7:14 “For we know that Law is spiritual; but I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin.”



The law was given for “the flesh,” people. Paul does an about-face. Previously, spiritual Christians did not need the law. Now, vice versa, the law is good for those who live according to the spirit but impractical for others. Elsewhere, Paul asserts that most Christians are blessed with spirit—thus should follow the law.

7:17 “But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.”

Paul possibly builds on the mystical concept that a spiritual person's body can trespass without harming his soul. He modifies the concept by introducing what can be called a *twofold soul*, consisting of a *pure me* and a *sinful me*. In Judaism, man is responsible for all his deeds and free to follow either good or evil inclinations. He cannot pass blame to some devil pushing him from the inside.

7:18 “For I know that nothing good dwells within me.”

Paul asserts that since man has not an inner source of goodness, he cannot be coerced to obey the law. But what good is religion if we are not good? The law suppresses malicious impulses and develops kindness to shape man's conduct.

7:20 “Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.”

Is suppressing evil intent and doing good really a manifestation of sin? It might not yet be spiritual goodness, but neither is it sin. Which is better: to resist evil with the will and do good or to do evil without restraint? Paul insists on the apparently immoral answer.

7:22–23 “For I delight in the Law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law.”

The sentence contradicts, “For I know that nothing good dwells within me.”<sup>»deccx</sup>

Paul should opt for amputation, since Jesus said, “It is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell.”<sup>»deccxi</sup>

7:25 “So then, with my mind I am a slave to the Law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin.”

How does Paul's sinful nature keep him from obeying the law yet not hinder him in practicing Christianity? The conclusion is that Christianity is more prone to sin than the law. Paul teaches abandoning the law while living in physical and spiritual sin.

8:1 “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus [living according not to the flesh but to the spirit].”

That is, the flesh remains guilty, but the spirit exchanges servitude to the law for servitude to belief in Jesus' resurrection. What is the advantage?

Paul changes the concept: Christians should keep the law, according to the flesh, but disobedience is not sinful. But to accept the law is to define disobedience as sin.

8:2 "For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death."

That is, faith in someone who preaches keeping the law, but not keeping it.

Even the Gnostics were not so certain: "There is no such thing as sin; rather you yourselves are what produces sin when you act according to the nature of adultery, which is called 'sin.'"<sup>deccxii</sup>

8:3 "For God has done what Law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh."

The law cannot be "weakened by the flesh": the commandments exist to curb action on sinful impulses.

"He condemned sin in the flesh." It follows that the Jews executed not a pure divinity but a model of sin. Why should they repent? What is the sacrificial value of imitation sin, of illusory flesh? Paul is lost in theosophical scheming and contradicts the value of Jesus' sacrifice: the crucifixion was not the vehicle of salvation but an allegory of the condemnation of sin.

"In the likeness of flesh . . ." How could Jesus be the descendant of David "by flesh"?<sup>deccxiii</sup> First he is a man who became divine upon resurrection; now he is a divine figure without a real body who astonishingly embodied sin.

In other places, Paul speaks of Jesus' body as real. Perhaps the editor who caught the anomaly inserted *likeness* later. The sacrificial value of either sinful or illusory flesh is dubious.

The author is hopelessly lost: "Sin came into the world through one man."<sup>deccxiv</sup> How can he bend the concept of Adam's sin to fit the sinful flesh/pure spirit dichotomy? When Adam sinned, his Edenic flesh was not sinful. The overarching question is, how could a good God create anything sinful? Paul did not realize that free will, thought, thus soul are responsible for sin; body is not inherently sinful.

The suggestion may be that when Adam learned to distinguish good from evil, he did not sin but fulfilled God's will. If Adam did not sin, Paul's

allegory of Jesus as the second Adam, bringing life where the first brought death, suffers.

8:4–5 “. . . so that the just requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.”

Paul distorts. Earlier he affirmed that the flesh of Christians is sinful, though their souls are pure.<sup>dcccxv</sup> Now he says Christians live “not according to the flesh, but according to the spirit,” that is, ascetically denying the flesh. Do Christians suppress the flesh or do they trespass through it? Asceticism is more Greek than Jewish. Judaism requires control, not the mortification of disobedient bodies.

In many places,<sup>dcccxvi</sup> Paul says the law is good in itself but leads the flesh to sin. If Christians do not live according to the flesh, they should obey the law.

Paul's primitive theosophy endows the flesh with its own will as apart from the will of the soul. Carnal sin springs from a sinful soul; purity of the soul is out of the question, if the flesh, even under discipline, is sinful.

8:7 “The mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law—indeed it cannot.”

Christians might overcome the hostility by keeping the commandments. The consequences of indulging earthly desires and practicing Christianity appear to be the same: hostility to God's law.

Desires do not necessarily oppose the law. Some desire to keep the law. For example, yearning for food fits within the framework of the law.

Paul supposes that the flesh cannot obey the law, which presumes that God did not know what he was doing.

8:9 “But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit.”

Apologists ignore the Gnosticism here by intellectual prestidigitation. Paul personifies sin in the body and opposes it to righteousness lodged in the spirit.

8:10 “But if Christ is in you, the body is dead for sin.”

The dead body is also dead to virtue. “So then, . . . with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin.”<sup>dcccxvii</sup> Is Paul's flesh sinful or not, if Jesus is indeed in him?

Paul posits that a Christian simultaneously houses both Jesus and the Holy Spirit: “God's Spirit dwells in you.”<sup>dcccxviii</sup>

8:11 “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.”

That is, the flesh of Christians will be restored as some different matter full of divine life. In that case, Christians should admit that either they have not yet received the Holy Spirit or their flesh is able to obey the law.

Note the present tense: “His Spirit that dwells in you.” Thus, Paul wrote to Christians already blessed with the spirit, their bodies renewed. Why does Paul say his own flesh still ministers to sin?<sup>dcccix</sup> And why does he say, “*will* give life”? If the Holy Spirit lives in the body of each (*sic*) Christian, then they are already alive, in the present, and death has no dominion over them anymore.

There is no cause and effect relation here. First, if Christians have the sacred spirit in the same sense as Jesus, then they are no different from him, which is in fact what Paul wants to say. But why then do they pray to Jesus and not the other way around? Second, Jesus was raised not just because he possessed the Holy Spirit but because of his other merits. Third, Christians were not raised the same way Jesus was. Fourth, Paul uses an implausible supposition as a logical premise: “If the Spirit . . . dwells in you . . .”

8:15 “For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ it is that very spirit.”

The law gives not fear but hope. Slavery to the law gives way to faith in Jesus who preached the law. Paul could mean the servitude of postmortem decay,<sup>dccxxx</sup> but how could Christians avoid that?

Paul resembles the evangelist John here, his text saturated with various types of spirit, the spirit of slavery in this case. Both reflect the Greek multitude of demonic forces.

8:18 “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us.”

In this context, *sufferings* mean self-mortification, limitation of the flesh’s sinfulness. On the other hand, sufferings are experienced spiritually. That is, Paul’s soul is tormented by the impossibility to transgress. Therefore, it is soul which is sinful.

Mt10:22 “The one who endures to the end will be saved.”

8:26 “We do not know how to pray as we ought . . .”

Matthew elaborated, “Pray then in this way . . .”<sup>dcccxi</sup>

8:36 “Because of you we are being killed all day long, and accounted as sheep for the slaughter.”<sup>dcccxii</sup>

The Christians were persecuted not for believing in God but for practicing an illegal religion and for causing disturbances, as did many sectarians convinced that the apocalypse was near.

Paul is uncharacteristically precise here. Most likely, the verse was inserted after the legend of the persecution of Christians formed, and actual events were forgotten. When Paul got to Rome,<sup>dcccxxiii</sup> the local Jews knew of Christianity only by hearsay. When Paul wrote the epistle, Christians were not yet persecuted in Rome; they were never persecuted in Judea for believing in God.

9:4 “They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises.”

Paul certainly implies exclusivity. But he wrote to the Roman Jews: “Let it be known to you then that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles.”<sup>dcccxxiv</sup> “My conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>dcccxxv</sup> The Holy Spirit in Paul still cannot decide whether Jesus came to the Jews or the Gentiles.

9:7–8 “Not all of Abraham’s children are his true descendants; but ‘It is through Isaac that descendants shall be named for you.’ This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as descendants.”

Paul means that not all Abraham’s posterity were among the chosen but only Isaac’s descendants, that the Scriptures recognizes only those to whom God promised something. Or, not all Jews will be saved, but only those who believe in Jesus. The Torah does not say that only some Israelites are chosen. Besides, Paul’s argument means Gentiles cannot be Christians since they are not descendants of Isaac.

9:20–21 “But who indeed are you, a human being, to argue with God? Will what is molded say to the one who molds it, ‘Why have you made me like this?’ Has the potter no right of the clay, to make out of the same lump one object for special use and another for ordinary use?”

Paul’s ideas are shaky. 9:16: pardon is at God’s mercy. 9:21: salvation is predetermined. 10:13: each believer—in God or in Jesus?—will be saved. The argument could rest on the theosophical concept that man believes he has freedom of choice, but his “free” actions are in fact predetermined. Paul is evidently unaware of that concept and does not mention it.

Daniel insisted on fate: “But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book.”<sup>dcccxxvi</sup> Thus, man’s conduct is important only to himself and only in this life, but not for his predetermined salvation. That notion is consistent with God’s lacking desire

and exterior driving force. Christians, however, believe their conduct can persuade God to rescue them.

9:20–21 “You will say to me then, ‘Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?’”

The question is in order. The doctrine of predestination involves a contradiction: God determines everything, yet people sin. Judaism teaches that God created the world and the laws of its development, but man has free will. Various religious and philosophical currents argue about the degree of freedom. The Sadducees denied fate, while Daniel assumes the inevitability of the outcome of history. Probably some sectarians inclined to absolute fate from a purely practical point of view: to assure they were destined for heaven.

9:24 “. . . whom he has called, not from the Jews only, but also from the Gentiles.”

Paul shuffles the deck again. Nobody doubts that Gentiles can convert to Judaism. Paul aimed to prove something quite different: “Not all Israelites truly belong to Israel.”<sup>deccxxvii</sup>

9:25–26 “As indeed he says in Hosea, ‘Those who are not my people I will call ‘my people,’ and her who was not beloved I will call ‘beloved.’ And in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ there they shall be called children of the living God.”

Paul distorts the quotation beyond recognition to prove that Jews are not the chosen people, though earlier he affirmed the contrary.<sup>deccxxviii</sup>

Hos1:10 “Yet the number of the people of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, . . . and in the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ it shall be said to them, ‘Children of the living God.’ The people of Judah and the people of Israel shall . . . they shall take possession of the land.” The prophecy has nothing to do with Christians.

Hos1:9 “Then the Lord said, ‘Name him *Lo-ammi*,<sup>176</sup> for you are not my people and I am not your God.” Hos2:23 “And I will have pity on *Lo-ruhamah*, and I will say to *Lo-ammi*, ‘You are my people’; and he shall say, ‘You are my God.” God turns away from the Jews temporarily, though they will again become his people.

9:27–28 “And Isaiah cries out, . . . ‘Only a remnant of them will be saved; for the Lord will execute his sentence on the earth quickly and decisively.’”

Paul distorts a text to show that not all Israel will be saved.

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<sup>176</sup> Heb. *Not my people*.

Is10:12 “[The Lord] will punish the arrogant boasting of the king of Assyria . . . . On that day the remnant of Israel . . . will no more lean on the one who struck them, but will lean on the Lord . . . . A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God . . . . O my people, . . . do not be afraid of the Assyrians.” The prophet speaks of *a remnant* of Israelites to be delivered from the Assyrians.

9:33 “As it is written, ‘See, I am laying in Zion a stone that will make people stumble, a rock that will make them fall, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.’”

The passage is a compilation.

Is8:13—14 “But the Lord of hosts, him you shall regard as holy . . . . He will become a sanctuary, a stone one strikes against; for both houses of Israel he will become a rock one stumbles over.” Is28:16 “I am laying in Zion a foundation stone . . . . One who trusts will not panic.”

Isaiah speaks of God, but Paul ignores the context and sees a testimony to Jesus.

10:4 “For Christ is the end of the law.”

Mt5:17–18 “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill . . . . Until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law.”

Paul also deviates from his own Gnostic theology. He could say that true, conscientious conversion to Jesus ends the law, not just the fact of Jesus' incarnation.

10:6–8 “But the righteousness that comes from faith says, ‘Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’ (that is to bring Christ down) or ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’ . . . But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart’ (that is, the word that we proclaim).”

Deut30:10–14 “When you obey the Lord your God by observing his commandments and decrees that are written in this book of the law, because you turn to the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul . . . . It [the commandment] is not in the heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will go up to heaven for us, and get it for us?’ . . . Neither it is beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will cross to the other side of the sea for us, and get it for us?’ . . . No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe.” The commandments are known; there is no need to seek for them. Obeying them does not require moving mountains.

Paul distorts the sense: instead of advising obedience to the law, he tried to find a way past it in Deuteronomy, the book which establishes it.

10:9 “If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord, . . . you will be saved.”

But lips are part of the flesh, sinful by Paul’s definition. Paul repeatedly urges suppressing the flesh, yet here affirms it as the agent of salvation.

The passage may mark the nadir of Christian doctrine: no works, no faith, just a declaration, pure and simple. Even Islam requires four other pillars of salvation besides saying *Allah Akbar*. Paul enticed new Christians with the ease of gaining paradise.

10:10 “For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved.”

Earlier Paul affirmed that faith is sufficient for salvation but now adds the need to convert more Christians.

10:11–12 “The scripture says, ‘No one who believes in him will be put to shame.’ For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek.”

There is no religious difference between ethnic Jew and Greek, so long as they believe the same. Paul claims there is no difference, even if one is a practicing Jew and the other a pagan.

Paul means Jesus,<sup>dcccxxix</sup> the Hebrew Scripture means God: “Therefore thus says the Lord God, See, I am laying in Zion a foundation stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation: ‘One who trusts will not panic.’”<sup>dcccxxx</sup> *Believes* and *shame* are remnants of bad translation. Isaiah means that faith, concentrated in Zion and articulated in the Torah, is a reliable foundation for righteous people who oppose evil in high places,<sup>dcccxxxi</sup> which will be swept away.<sup>dcccxxxii</sup> The text has nothing to do with Jesus or Gentile Christians.

10:13–14 “For, ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’ But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed?”

Paul substitutes concepts. Isaiah speaks of faith in God, not in Jesus. Note that Christians then did not consider Jesus one and the same as God. Jews believe in God, but Paul urges them to believe in Jesus as messiah, based solely on hearsay about his resurrection or Paul’s telling of his encounter, two different objects of faith.

In similar circumstances, Christians refused to accept Mohammed as a prophet on the ground of his disciples’ testimony and his Koran. Christians do not have any original texts of Jesus, while the Koran is so exquisitely written that its stylistic perfection was used as an argument against nonbelievers because such style is ostensibly beyond man.



In the previous phrase, *for* marked Paul's words. In the absence of punctuation marks, he possibly did not cite the prophecy but used the formula *declaring for him*, with which cities took the side of conqueror or moved for his protectorate.

10:17 "So faith comes from what is heard."

Do we believe everything we hear?

10:19 "Did Israel not understand [about Jesus]? First Moses says, 'I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation; with a foolish nation I will make you angry.'"

Deut32:21–23 "They made me jealous with what is no god, provoked me with their idols. So I will make them jealous with what is no people, provoke them with a foolish nation . . . spend my arrows against them."

"With a foolish nation . . ." The passages refer to the victory of a small people over the Hebrews, because they turned to other gods, not because they refused to believe in Jesus' resurrection. *No people* serves only to provoke make the Jews zealous.

11:1 "I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin."

Born in Tarsus of Cilicia, Paul could not identify himself with the tribe of Benjamin territorially, and his genealogy could not be traced back more than a thousand years.

11:2–5 "God has not rejected his people . . . . So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace."

The passage was written after the Jewish War. By *remnant* Paul probably meant the Jewish Christians in the Diaspora.

11:11 "So I ask, have they stumbled so as to fall? By no means!"

The epistle seeks to ingratiate Paul with the Roman Jews, something he never did in the letters to the Greeks. Paul tries to convince them that they are chosen for Christianity.

Ultimately Paul cannot explain the situation of the Jews after Jesus. First, he says God has not rejected the nation as a whole. Then, he says only a few Jews, "a remnant," will be saved. Next, salvation comes only through faith, and being a Jew is not the point. Later still, "all Israel will be saved."<sup>dcccxxxiii</sup> Sweating, Paul harmonizes all those contradictions: all Jews will necessarily believe in Jesus, though "a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles has come in."<sup>dcccxxxiv</sup> Paul offers no substantiation, and time has shown his error.

11:6 “But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace would no longer be grace.”

Paul believes grace is unrelated to good works. He has just declared the contrary: “‘I have kept for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal.’ So too at the present time there is a remnant.”<sup>dcccxxxv</sup>

The quote from Elijah plainly says only those who had not turned to Baal were the elect, that is, on the basis of their deeds. Paul calls that God’s grace and contradicts his own statement that election is unrelated to works.

11:7 “Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened.”

A few people were chosen to believe that Jesus is the messiah and be saved. How do we explain the gradual growth of Christian numbers? Did some pretend conversion? What is preaching for, if Christians are chosen beforehand? Neither the Scriptures nor the Gospels confirm Paul’s notion of the predestination of some fixed number of Christians and the assured condemnation of everyone else.

11:8 “As it is written, ‘God gave them a sluggish spirit, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day.’”

Compiled from two sources: “But to this day the Lord has not given you . . . eyes to see, or ears to hear”<sup>dcccxxxvi</sup> (also a common proverb which also shows in *Prometheus Bound*); and “For the Lord has poured out upon you a spirit of deep sleep.”<sup>dcccxxxvii</sup>

“To this day”—Moses’ day— becomes Paul’s time with “down to this day.” Paul misrepresents. The Israelites’ “eyes could not see” before they concluded an additional covenant with God, allowing them to enter the Promised Land. That covenant opened their eyes more than a thousand years before Paul. As in many other cases, the quotation works against Paul, who offers another deity.

11:11 “But through their [the Jews’] stumbling salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous.”

Since salvation will take place only at resurrection, it will be too late to provoke beneficial jealousy.

11:14 “. . . in order to make my own people jealous, and thus save some of them.”

Does Paul think preaching to Gentiles will convert Jews? He affirms the contrary: the number of Jews to be saved is already predetermined.<sup>dcccxxxviii</sup>

11:17–18 “But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place, . . . do not boast over the branches . . . . It is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you.”

Even Paul, “an apostle to the Gentiles,”<sup>»decexxxix</sup> knows that Jesus appealed to the Jews and calls the Gentiles auxiliaries: “Do not boast over the branches.”

Why humiliate the pagan audience you are trying to convert? Who wants a religion that makes you second-rate? The epistle was not a letter but a pseudepigraphic treatise, expounding Paul's views.

11:26–27 “As it is written: ‘Out of Zion will come the Deliverer; he will banish ungodliness from Jacob.’ And this is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins.”

There is no such text in the Bible.

11:28 “As regards election [the Jews] are beloved [of God], for the sake of their ancestors.”

Curiously, the ancient history of Israel is replete with idolatry and mass misconduct, while the Jews at the dawn of Christianity were zealots. The ancestors' merits were hardly a better ground of salvation than the behavior of Paul's Jewish contemporaries.

11:7 “Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it.” The Jews have common ancestors. “For the sake of the fathers” all should have been saved. Paul cannot decide.

11:32 “For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.”

Then why all the fuss about faith in Jesus? Even the disobedient will be saved.

The idea is absurd: God created sin so he could forgive: the more guilt, more God can excuse. God must like sin.

11:34 “For who has known the mind of the Lord?”

Paul himself professes a remarkable acquaintance with God's thoughts and intentions.

11:36 “For all things are from him and through him and to him.”

Th77:1 “I [Jesus] am all: from me all came forth, and to me all attained.” Paul did not know Thomas' sayings. Part of the text at Th77 in the Greek edition actually belongs to Th30 and was inserted by non-Jewish Gnostics.

Thomas goes on: “Split a piece of wood; I am there. Lift up the stone, and you will find me there.”<sup>»deccxi</sup> The saying may be a reflection of Gnostic acquaintance with Hinduism. The ancient Jews strictly distinguished God from the world. The notion that God pervades creation came into Judaism with the rise of Hasidism only recently, notably in the works of Rabbi Shneer-Zalman. It is also present in the *kabbalah*. This is yet another odd instance when the Gnostic teaching of the Gospels concurs with the ideas of Jewish mystics a thousand years later. Perhaps the *kabbalists* are right to claim that their teaching is very old.

12:1 “I appeal to you . . . to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.”

Jesus did not deny the body; he changed water to wine, fed people, and did not condemn the woman caught in adultery. Jesus told his disciples not to worry about their bodily needs but to depend on the people in whose houses they stay.<sup>deccxli</sup>

Paul said earlier that Christians have the same Holy Spirit that descended upon Jesus. He also described Jesus before the resurrection as a man. Thus, Christians are of essentially the same nature as Jesus. His sacrifice is commonly understood as the expiation of sins for Christians. What is their sacrifice for, even if only allegorical?

12:13–17 “Contribute to the needs of the saints . . . . Bless those who persecute you . . . . Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another . . . . Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.”

“Bless those who persecute you” and “do not repay evil for evil” are likely late insertions aimed at establishing Paul’s connection to the Gospels. The sayings, practical instructions for Christian living, are out of place in a theological monograph. The pericope belongs to a later period when congregations were large enough to know internal quarrels.

In Matthew, Jesus teaches says not to care about food and clothing, to pray and do good secretly, not for praise. Paul urges “what is noble in the sight of all.”

12:18 “If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.”

Jesus is more categorical: “Love your enemies.”<sup>»deccxlii</sup>

12:19 “Never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay.’”

Deut32:35 “Vengeance is mine, and recompense, for the time when their foot shall slip.” The text deals with punishing Jews for idolatry, not

revenge as it is understood in human relations. How can God avenge every human offense, especially when both sides are offended?

13:1 "Let every person to be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God."

Here is a significant bit of Christian social philosophy, calling for submission to worldly power, the Romans. In the Hebrew Scriptures, Samuel strongly argued against the monarchy.<sup>dcccxlili</sup>

The idea operates from determinism: worldly power is always from God, regardless of its behavior. Theology usually admits some freedom of will, which suggests that earthly power is not always from God.

Second, Paul must also admit that God is behind both changes of power and resistance to authority. Nonresistance contradicts God's will.

Third, God usually works his will not in miracles but through men's deeds. Therefore, a change in power cannot take place other than through human agency, such as challenging authority.

Fourth, by his own argument, Paul should have submitted to the Roman Empire and stopped propagating a new and illegal religion.

The injunction would sound unnatural to Roman Jews who need not resist the authorities, indirect confirmation that the epistle was not intended for them.

13:3 "For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad."

What about Pilate? Paul obviously knew nothing of Pilate's role.

13:6–7 "For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants . . . . Pay to all what is due them—taxes to whom taxes are due, . . . honor to whom honor is due."

The saying is much like what the editor of Matthew later refined as, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's," attributing it to Jesus.

13:8 "The one who loves another has fulfilled the law."

Paul needed neither perception nor knowledge to summarize the Torah in one sentence. The formula was popular in Judaism, and Paul certainly had heard it.

Placing this argument at the end of the epistle is odd. The argument substantiates abrogation of the law better than all convoluted reasoning throughout the letter. Instead of the laughable distorted quotations from the Scriptures, Paul could appeal to the rabbinic view that the law is based on the commandment of reciprocity. The writer here means a very different law from the rest of the epistle: practical ethics. Paul dealt in the letter with

religious law, mainly circumcision, which is quite irrelevant to love of others. The religious law is based on the first commandment, to love God. The argument seems interpolated in the epistle among other instructions of dubious authorship; the commandment of positive reciprocity is also interpolated in Matthew.

Practically speaking, the rule of reciprocity cannot replace the law; the rule is axiom, while the law consists of theorems. In no country justice is based only on constitution, but also on laws which apply constitutional principles to daily matters. "Love your neighbor" is too flexible to be practical: a Christian can cross himself before committing a murder, but the Jews cannot circumvent the absolute prohibition, *You shall not murder*. People are certainly more reluctant to violate the divine commandment than to bend a flexible guideline.

14:3 "Those who eat [unclean food] must not despise those who abstain, . . . for God has welcomed them."

Correct, provided that God accepts both those who respect *kashrut* and those who disregard it. The scriptures asserts to the contrary, and Paul does not disprove.

The writer addresses here a different audience: Gentile Christians who resent the Jews. His attitude resembles Luke's: since Judaism is the basis of Christianity, the Jews are better respected.

14:4 "Who are you to pass judgment on another man's servants?" Paul himself criticizes non-Christians often. Besides, the question is not man's judgment but God's. Paul strives to avoid discussing the law, because he has no argument.

The Christians were not *servants of another* but of God. The late author considered Christianity and Judaism sufficiently divided, so that the Christians believed in a different deity—Jesus.

14:6 "Those who eat, eat in honor of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honor of the Lord and give thanks to God."

How can someone eating nonkosher food thank God if he breaks his commandments? Thanksgiving after eating unclean food is bad.

14:9 "For to this end Christ . . . lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living."

Did Jesus have no power before the resurrection? Jn8:58 "Before Abraham was, I am."

14:14 "I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean."

The instruction to love each other requires helping transgressors overcome error, not indifference.

Paul contradicts Judaism: *kashrut* is binding even on resident aliens, regardless of belief.

Paul uses the phrase "I am persuaded in the Lord" in the sense of profound conviction, not as a testimony of revelation.<sup>177</sup> Paul is "persuaded in the Lord Jesus" about the ritual purity of food. Why is he not persuaded that God, who gave the commandments Jesus taught, meant what he said about food?

14:15 "Do not let what you eat cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died."

Did Jesus suffer crucifixion so Gentiles could eat nonkosher food, which they did anyway? On the contrary, his death and resurrection were to save Jews and turn them to the law. Faith matters only when it generates action, obedience to the law in this case, since the judgment is near.

14:22 "The faith that you have, have as your own conviction before God."

The saying contradicts the practice of collective worship, which Paul knew of. If the exterior expression of faith is acceptable in this case, why is it not appropriate in the case of *kashrut*?

14:24–25 (16:25–26) "According to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed . . ."

Was the secret that no one need obey the law? If Paul means the mystery of Jesus, why do the Gospels insist that his coming was foretold and no secret?

15:2–3 "Each of us must consider his neighbor . . . For Christ did not consider himself; but, as it is written, 'The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.'"

The reference to the psalm does not fit the context: "Zeal for your house has consumed me; the insults of those who insult you have fallen on me."<sup>dcccxliv</sup> The psalm sings of firm faith, not neighborly love. The offenders are Gentiles or Jews who break the law. Paul aims to curry their favor by waiving *kashrut*.

15:8–9 "For I tell you that Christ became a servant . . . so that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, 'Therefore, I will confess you among the Gentiles, and sing praises to your name.'"

Few sayings are torn from context so crudely as this.<sup>dcccxlv</sup> "You made my enemies turn their backs to me, and those who hated me I destroyed."<sup>dcccxlv</sup> Converted pagans would hardly rejoice to learn that.

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<sup>177</sup> Gal5:10 "I am confident about you in the Lord that you will not think otherwise."

A similar saying appears elsewhere.<sup>dcccxlvii</sup> David glorifies God among the peoples, because, “Foreigners . . . heard, . . . and came trembling out of their strongholds . . . . Exalted be my God, . . . the God who . . . brought down peoples under me.”<sup>dcccxlviii</sup> The song celebrates a Jewish victory over Gentiles, hardly relevant to Paul.

15:10 “And again he says, ‘Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.’”

“Praise, O heavens, his people. . . . he will avenge the blood of his children, and take vengeance on his adversaries; he will repay those who hate him, and cleanse the land for his people.”<sup>dcccxlix</sup> The scriptures call only idolaters *adversaries of God*. That would hardly appeal to Gentiles.

15:20 “I make it my ambition to proclaim the good news, not where Christ has already been named.”

According to Acts, Paul preached repeatedly in the same places. The statement also implies that Rome was already evangelized, although in Acts Paul found no Christians there. Perhaps the saying comes from a later time, when the story of Peter founding the church in Rome had taken hold.

15:21 “But as it is written, ‘Those who have never been told of him shall see, and those who have never heard of him shall understand.’”

As happens with Paul, the scriptures know no such text. Unless Paul invented out of thin air, such allusions may indicate the existence of biblical texts or references in antiquity, perceptibly different from the modern versions. As far as we know, the Jewish Bible was not altered significantly, though sectarians had their own versions of the sacred books.

15:24–25 “For I do hope to see you . . . . At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem in a ministry to the holy ones.”

The writer means the apostles, not Jerusalem’s congregation whose members were presumably not above other Christians. Though Paul calls himself an apostle, here he calls Jesus’ disciples saints. His attitude sharply contrasts with his presumptuousness elsewhere, and may indicate the late origin of this text at a time when the apostles’ immense authority was established. The writer makes Paul to accept that authority.

Paul is ignorant of persecutions of the Jerusalem’s church.

15:25–26 “I am going to Jerusalem, . . . for Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to share their resources with the poor among the holy ones at Jerusalem.”

There is an interesting connotation in “the poor among the holy ones.” Paul implies a large group, not just a few apostles. The multitude of saints cannot be easily reconciled with description of the trip as *ministry* to them. To go from the poor Christian communities in Greece to Jerusalem to



somehow serve poor Christians there is odd. A forger started with apostles in mind, and afterwards switched to community.

15:27 “if the Gentiles have come to share in their [Jews’] spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material things.”

Paul considers Christianity is for Jews, while Gentiles have to pay a franchise fee (*be of service*) for conversion.<sup>178</sup> Because the issue of donations to Jews arose only when Paul decided to visit Jerusalem, there were no Jews in Christian communities in other lands: the religion involved only pagans. Paul’s journey looks then like a pilgrimage to the site of a mythical congregation of Jewish Christians.

16:1 “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae.”

The idea of woman ministers is something new with Christianity. The Torah does not let women serve, and there were no women among Jesus’ disciples mentioned in the canonical Gospels.

16:19 “I want you to be wise in what is good and guileless in what is evil.”

The verse may be the source of Jesus’ “wise as serpents and innocent as doves.”<sup>»dccc1</sup>

16:23 “Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you.”

If the whole community could gather in a single house, the community must have been very small.

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<sup>178</sup> The modern church would hardly agree to such arrangement with Israel.

## *The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians*

1:7 “So that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift . . .”

Rom 12:6 “We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us . . .”

1:10 “Now I appeal to you . . . that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you.”

Twenty to fifty years after Jesus’ crucifixion, opinions concerning him varied greatly even within a community. Prototexts, and then the Gospels, emerged much later on the basis of those legends about Jesus and his preaching that prevailed over the rest and gained more or less general acceptance.

1:12 “Each of you says, ‘I belong to Paul,’ or ‘I belong to Apollos,’ or ‘I belong to Cephas,’ ‘I belong to Christ.’”

The confusion indicates the considerable variance in the earliest Christian teachings with no single story everyone subscribed to.

Paul preached to Gentiles, and the existence of a distinct group of his followers is predictable, as was the largely Jewish group that adhered to Peter/Cephas. But what about an Apollos clique? Recall that he was the follower of John the Baptist who started to preach Christianity after learning about Jesus<sup>decccli</sup> from Paul’s disciples. What did he know about Jesus, and which legends did he create?

The followers of Christ might form an anarchist sect rejecting the institution or authorities in favor of direct communication with divine.

The writers of the four canonical Gospels ignored Peter’s texts or dealt with them in light of Paul’s epistles. Since Paul never met Jesus, his influence on the Gospels vitiates their credibility. In its turn, the Church emasculated Paul’s mystical doctrine.

Paul here does not criticize Peter but concentrates instead on Apollos. Perhaps Peter’s authority was considerable; or perhaps his Jewish followers did not accept Paul. Or maybe Paul was writing to the Corinthians to whom Apollos was preaching then.<sup>deccclii</sup> They knew little of Peter, and Paul could name him to soften a dispute with Apollos.

1:14 “I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius.”

Jesus’ disciples baptized during his life, and he authorized it as preparation for the end of days. John the Baptist said, “One who is more powerful than I is coming after me . . . . He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”<sup>decccliii</sup> Neither the Hebrew Scriptures nor the Gospels (except

for the incredible resurrection narrative) call for baptism after Jesus' death nor that just anyone might baptize.

Why did Paul baptize two persons only? If he founded the congregations, he would have to baptize the first members. *Founding* meant the conversion of only two people who became the leaders and baptized the rest. Paul's contribution, then, was minimal.

1:24 "Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God . . ."

The phrase is often used to show the debt of Paul's theology to Jewish Wisdom mythology, a strained interpretation. Certainly, Paul knew the story line, which was then popular in Judaism, but the same legend was typical of many religions then. He uses the word *power* allegorically, since there was no corresponding figure in the mythology. The same can be said therefore of *wisdom*, and correspondence with the figure of Wisdom is coincidental.

1:25 "For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength."

Pejorative terms cannot be applied to God. People cannot perceive God the way Paul describes him.

1:26 "Consider your own call, brothers, not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth."

What a description of catechumen Christians! What kind of faith, what legends and prototexts could such people create?

1:27–29 "But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise . . . so that no one might boast in the presence of God."

Wisdom does not boast and is pleasant to God; thus Solomon asked for wisdom above every other gift.

The idea developed in the Gospel: "Jesus said, 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants.'<sup>decciv</sup>"

In what way were the wise put to shame? By the foolishness of Christians? By their salvation? They died the same as those who did not believe in Jesus. The wise, of course, doubted the claims that the Christians continued to live in heaven.

2:2 "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified."

Not much of a basis for a new religion: that some person existed and was executed. Paul explicitly states that he knows nothing else about the matter.

2:4 “My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power.”

Not so: “He spoke and argued with the Hellenists”;<sup>dcclv</sup> he adduced an extensive list of messianic passages from scriptures;<sup>dcclvi</sup> “And Paul . . . on three Sabbath days argued with them from the scriptures.”<sup>dcclvii</sup>

2:6 “Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom . . . of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish.”

Paul refers to complex, meaningless theological constructions, like those he presents in the epistles. They passed as wisdom among Christians, but others ridiculed them. So Paul claims a special wisdom.

2:6 contradicts 2:4, where Paul avoids wisdom. Paul never recognizes anybody equal to himself. Who were *the mature* with whom he spoke wisdom?

In a period of stormy political change and astrological speculation, many expected the end of the world. Hence, *this age*. *The rulers* are demonic forces which govern the world, according to the Gnostics. Would Paul, in the clutches of the Romans, write “the rulers of this age who are doomed to perish”? The epistle was written after he visited Greece, probably during his imprisonment in Caesarea or even in Rome. In either case, Paul would not speak against the Romans. Wherever he wrote, there were rulers, and he would not have insulted them.

2:7 “God’s wisdom, which God decreed before the ages to our glory . . .”

Before creating the world, God thought about Christians and how to glorify them. Paul says God’s covenants have expired but not his aim to glorify Christians.

2:8 “None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.”

The writer lived late enough for the prefect, the Sanhedrin, and the emperor to merge in his imagination as “the rulers of this age.” There was yet no tradition that the Jews, not the authorities, crucified Jesus.

2:9 “But, as it is written, ‘What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him . . .’”

“From the ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for him.”<sup>dcclviii</sup> Paul says, “no eye has seen” what God has prepared; Isaiah says no one has seen God.

Th17 “Jesus said, ‘I will give you what no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, what no hand has touched.’ Paul has no reliable parallels with Thomas, so the expression is likely idiomatic.

2:11 “For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God’s except the Spirit of God.”

Logic breaks down here. God surely knows himself. If a spirit knows God better than God knows himself, that spirit is theologically greater than God.

Practically, the saying has no meaning, unless Paul thought he knew the spirit and God through it—which would substantiate his claim to authority. Moreover, if every Christian bears the spirit, then each of them knows God as well as God knows himself (!) and does not need the law. The argument depends on whether Christians are indeed blessed with the spirit.

“Human spirit” further reflects Gentile polytheism and its multitude of spirits. Paul means a spirit distinct from man which knows him, not an internal soul.

2:15–16 “Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else’s scrutiny . . . But we have the mind of Christ.”

Between two spiritual people conflict inevitably arises: each can judge everything and everybody, yet neither can judge the other, since no one can judge a spiritual man. For the initiated, anything is permitted, as in mysticism. In practice, the permissible varied in different cultures. The Essenes, who considered themselves saints, required ceremonial purity and banned stealing—even from Gentiles!

Paul says that not all Christians are perfect.<sup>dccclix</sup> Do they all have “the mind of Christ”?

3:1–5 “And so, brothers, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but . . . as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready, for you are still of the flesh . . . What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants.”

Paul implies several levels of teaching but to the catechumen Christians offers only the simplest, *milk*. Probably Apollos, ostensibly Paul’s convert, preached a more complex, mystical doctrine, and the Corinthians were indignant with Paul. He tries to explain away the discrepancy. Since he cannot defend his own significance, he disposes of Apollos by belittling himself and Apollos equally: they are only *servants*. Belittling is relative; Paul claims both himself and Apollos above the crowd and having special relation with God as his servants.

3:3 “For as long as there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not of the flesh?”

Paul appeals to *those called saints*,<sup>dccclx</sup> the flock with the mind of Christ.<sup>dccclxi</sup> 3:3 does not describe holy people.

What could Christians argue about while Jesus’ disciples were still alive? Or did they not know about the apostles who could relay them Jesus’ instructions?

3:6 “I planted, Apollos watered.”

But Apollos had his own followers, and Paul means them. Apollos was leading Paul’s converts astray.

3:10 “I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it.”

Paul does not so much urge Christians to unite as he asserts his right to Apollos’ flock. He does not advise his followers, who “belong to Paul,”<sup>dccclxii</sup> to join Apollos, though they should do just that, since Paul converted them, and now it is Apollos’ turn to *build* and to *water*. Paul frankly says he does not like what Apollos preaches: “Each builder must choose with care.”

3:16–17 “You are God’s temple . . . . If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person.”

Christian Paul threatens Christian Apollos.

3:20 “The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.”

The forger, who does not expect Christians to check on him, distorts the psalm: “The Lord knows *our* thoughts, that they are but an empty breath.”<sup>dccclxiii</sup> He seeks to back up previous assertions about the uselessness of philosophy.

3:23 “And you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.”

Paul again subordinates Jesus to God and spoils their unity. If Jesus equals God and Christians equal Jesus in the same sense, they are equal to God, which is absurd.

4:3 “But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. I do not even judge myself.”

Jesus never discouraged self-examination: “Why do you . . . not notice the log in your own eye?”<sup>dccclxiv</sup>

4:4 “I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me.”

Does Paul think he is innocent after he persecuted Christians? Elsewhere, he admits sinning.

Jn3:18 “Those who believe in him are not condemned [and not judged]; but those who do not believe are condemned already.” Did not Paul consider himself a believer?

4:5 “Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes.”

Paul ignores Jesus' more categorical maxim: “Do not judge, so that you may not be judged.” Jesus probably envisaged an anarchist commune of self-aware mystics.

4:11–13 “To the present hour we are hungry and thirsty, we are poorly clothed and beaten and homeless . . . . When slandered, we speak kindly.”

Surrounded by his followers, Paul was hardly suffering starvation and thirst. “I am going to Jerusalem . . . for Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to share their resources with the poor among the saints at Jerusalem.”<sup>»dcccclxv</sup> If Paul was taking money to Jerusalem, he himself did not suffer. Nor was he beaten; when about to be flogged, he asserted his Roman citizenship. Paul did not wander about but went preaching from one city to another. “When reviled, we bless.” Compare: “At this Paul said to [the high priest], ‘God will strike you, you whitewashed wall!’”<sup>»»dcccclxvi</sup>

4:19 “But I will come to you soon, . . . and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power.”

Paul means Apollos' philosophizing. Although Paul intended to go to Asia,<sup>dcccclxvii</sup> it is not known whether he risked visiting Corinth. He returned to Macedonia after a certain aggression against him.<sup>dcccclxviii</sup>

4:21 “Am I to come to you with a stick, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?”

Paul threatens Apollos' followers. Elsewhere he denies resorting to punishment, *a stick*. “Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes.”<sup>dcccclxix</sup> “When reviled, we bless, . . . when slandered, we speak kindly.”<sup>»dcccclxx</sup>

5:11 “But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother who is sexually immoral or greedy, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber.”

Paul's list of sins is strange: slander and drunkenness, but not murder? The prohibitions do not match those established by Apostle James.<sup>dcccclxxi</sup>

Jewish tradition condemned slander,<sup>deccclxxii</sup> as well as other moral transgressions that Paul names here; yet they were not sins. Paul proposes to separate people from the community for mild offences.

Paul does not know Jesus' "But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."<sup>deccclxxiii</sup>

5:13 "God will judge those outside. 'Drive out the wicked person from among you.'"

If Christians "drive out the wicked person from among" them, they judge, which is forbidden by both Jesus and Paul.

First Paul got rid of the Jewish commandments, claiming that morally enlightened Christians needed no external control. Now he must fall back on such prohibitions and chooses them arbitrarily and in large numbers. After abrogating the law, he reinvents it piecemeal. Further, traditional Jewish repentance unto forgiveness no longer works. The transgressor is excommunicated and, officially, ceases to be a Christian.

6:1 "Do you dare to take . . . [your grievance] to court before the unrighteous, instead of taking it before the saints?"

How can the saints judge? "You should not judge"?

The text must be late. Paul would not have called the authorities *unrighteous*. Greek Christians had to appear before local magistrates whose decisions were binding. The community judges acted only in nonpolice matters, basically arbitration. There were, of course, no Christian courts.

What cases did Christians refer to the judges? Jesus said, "If anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well."<sup>deccclxxiv</sup>

6:2 "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you . . ."

*By you:* Paul claims all Christians saints, including those not yet exiled for immorality. God passes judgment, not the saints. Even the Gospels give judgment to the apostles, not local saints.<sup>deccclxxv</sup>

6:3 "Do you not know that we are to judge angels?"

Neither the Hebrew Scriptures nor the Gospels say so. Is it possible to judge angels? Curiously, if Paul will judge devil's associates (*sic!*), then they might not be able to perform hellish tortures of Christians' earthly enemies after Judgment.

6:7 "In fact, to have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather be wronged?"

That doesn't work. Avoiding the court wrongs only one party, that which is right and would otherwise win the litigation. If two Christians



abandon their dispute, only the right party is thus wronged, while the wrong party benefits.

One of the most important commandments was to establish courts.

6:15 "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?"

The idea echoes the philosophical concept of the world as a unified living body.

6:16 "Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For it is said, 'The two shall be one flesh.'"

Jesus uses the same maxim<sup>dccclxxvi</sup> to condemn divorce. Paul uses it to separate, Jesus to bind.

6:17 "But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him."

The comparison of God with harlot is very much improper, and demonstrates Paul's lack of comprehension.

6:18 "Any sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself."

Is not the consumption of blood, for example, a bodily sin as well—at least, in the Hebrew Bible? The apostles forbade it,<sup>dccclxxvii</sup> but Paul ignores their prohibition.

6:19 "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you?"

The saying rests on the assumption that every Christian has the Holy Spirit, hardly plausible, since Jesus received the Holy Spirit at baptism and gave it only to the apostles after his ascension.

Paul does not offer a reason to abstain from sin to those who do not possess the Holy Spirit.

7:1 "Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: 'It is well for a man not to touch a woman.'"

The issue must have been hot in Corinth, since the Corinthians posed the question in a letter. Jesus said, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife."<sup>dccclxxviii</sup> Paul says sex is natural<sup>dccclxxix</sup> and disparages eunuchs.<sup>dccclxxx</sup>

Tatian's<sup>179</sup> sermon on celibacy was pronounced heresy and derided by the early Church, particularly by Ireneus. A similar doctrine of Marcion's was also declared heretical, though as part of his Gnostic theology of Jesus as the revelation of a god other than the God of Judaism.

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<sup>179</sup> A disciple of Justin Martyr, member of the sect of Encratites.

Here is the root of the Roman Church's eventual teaching about sex in general and celibacy in particular, thrashed out case by case in response to situations and without much theology. The eventually victorious morbid doctrine of sexuality has left millions of people struggling with the fact of their bodies through the centuries.

If mass religion is to exist at all, it must provide equal opportunities for all in the life to be. Otherwise, it degenerates into a doctrine advantageous for a small group of initiates at the expense of others. Such were the celibate Essenes, who survived on the influx of new converts. If celibacy is good for salvation, then it is the ultimate good, and everyone should practice it; then watch as the sect dies from attrition. A reasonable restriction on adultery was transformed into a ridiculous concept of abstinence, required of most Catholic clergy, and thus an example for every Catholic.

7:4 "For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does."

The argument is recursive: no one is in control of anyone's body. Paul said, "The body is meant not for fornication but for the Lord."<sup>deccclxxxi</sup> No one has authority over his body, even for the noble purposes of marriage?

"No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness."<sup>deccclxxxii</sup> There Paul says people are in charge of their members.

Jesus, too, implied a reasonable degree of control: "And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away."<sup>deccclxxxiii</sup>

If we do not govern our bodies, how can we resist temptation? And what about the unmarried?

7:7 "I wish that all were as I myself am [unmarried]."

Celibacy suits people who look for the apocalypse. Other religions make such demands only of the most spiritually advanced, but Paul means everybody—unless he imagined the end of the world during the life span of the current generation, in which case the apostle was wrong.

Usually theological doctrines are expressed without qualifications, not as something, which might be better observed. Otherwise, a notion of sin becomes diluted. Paul imposes on Christian laity a high-minded philosophical notion which is at odds with the Judaic guideline "Be fruitful and multiply."

The Torah knows nothing of celibacy. On the contrary, "Be fruitful and multiply."<sup>deccclxxxiv</sup> The patriarchs, Moses, David, and Solomon, all had

wives. "A married person may be a true servant to God, because he can aim his mind at the intentions of the spirit, not at his own desires."<sup>dccclxxxv</sup>

Many reject Paul as an apostle.<sup>dccclxxxvi</sup> Why? His powers are hardly disputed; the Jerusalem church made him its ambassador.<sup>dccclxxxvii</sup> Paul's violations of Jewish ceremonial purity would have caused his Gentile followers no anxiety. Perhaps they objected to his marriage.

Paul may have been married: "Do we not have the right to be accompanied by a believing wife, as do the other apostles?"<sup>dccclxxxviii</sup> In, "I have made no use of any of these rights,"<sup>dccclxxxix</sup> Paul is only harping on his not taking a livelihood from the churches.

Paul was no child when he converted to Christianity. He claims to be a bachelor, a rare phenomenon then in Judea. What kept him from marrying? Recall that the well-wishing author of Acts reports Paul in the lowest occupation: he guarded the clothes of those stoning Stephen. If that account is true, and not an attempt at exonerating Paul from execution of a prominent Christian, it might imply his limited job capacity.

7:10–11 "I give this command—not I but the Lord—that the wife should not separate from her husband; but if she does separate, let her remain unmarried."

This injunction appears later in the Gospel: "But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife . . . causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery."<sup>dccxc</sup> To make Paul's original categorical prohibition practicable, divorce becomes adultery, that is, simply a sin. Divorce is effectively forbidden by prohibition of remarriage; but if someone divorces anyway, the second half of the recalibrated law deals with that. The Torah is more practical: "She [a divorced woman] then leaves his [her husband's] house and goes off to become another man's wife."<sup>dccxcxi</sup>

The idea of a woman leaving her husband is curious, since women had no such right. Perhaps such things happened in the unregulated Christian communities; or Christian women may have started leaving non-Christian husbands, thus creating conflict with the authorities.

Paul may have simply described the current situation without a second thought. Christian communities likely drew numbers of single women by offering food, a certain status, and so on. Paul did not want them to remarry, since they would no longer need the sect and would leave, especially if their new husbands objected to their practicing an illegal religion.

7:15 "But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so; in such a case the brother is not bound."

Sinfulness is made conditional: if a man divorces his wife because she becomes a Christian, she is free to remarry; but if he divorces her for any other reason, she may not marry again. Paul opportunistically formulates doctrine to suit practical purposes.

The Gospels made Paul's injunction uncompromising: "But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife . . . causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery."<sup>deccxcii</sup>

7:19 "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing."

"Circumcision indeed is of value"<sup>deccxciii</sup> "What is the value of circumcision? Much, in every way."<sup>deccxciv</sup>

7:23 "You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of human masters."

Circumcision has nothing to do with servitude. It is the sign of the covenant and certainly not a covenant with a human being on the other end of it. Paul tells Christians to ignore those who tell them to be circumcised—like Apollos.

7:32 "The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord."

However, 7:2 says: "But because of cases of sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife." Paul wants it both ways.

7:39 "A wife is bound as long as her husband lives. But if the husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes."

Though Paul refers to Judaic law, he does not know it: a childless widow must marry a brother of her husband.

If a woman is divorced, she cannot remarry; if widowed, she may.<sup>deccxcv</sup> Because she should not cause either death of her husband or divorce, Paul's ethical standards depend on the externalities. A dead husband is better than a live one.

8:10 "If others see you, who possess knowledge, eating in the temple of an idol, might they not, since their conscience is weak, be encouraged to the point of eating food sacrificed to idols?"

What are people who do not worship the idols doing in the heathen temple in the first place? Paul characteristically glosses the fact that his Christians are actually pagans.

Christians may eat food sacrificed to idols—participating in idol-worship ceremonies—but should not do so in order that other Christians will not be tempted. The apostles prohibited idolatry.<sup>deccxcvi</sup> Even Paul later conceded, "What pagans sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God."<sup>deccxcvii</sup>

In other words, do not tempt others by a bad example, though your understanding absolves you. But the others will attain understanding eventually; may they then also eat food sacrificed to idols? Then why bother in the first place? The prohibition becomes a *stumbling block*, a nemesis for Paul.

The formula is hypocritical: the food is acceptable so long as its origin is concealed; but should its origin be discovered, it is no longer acceptable.

Paul could not forbid proselytes from offering sacrifices to the gods they knew before—or if the new religion fails them. He does an intellectual balancing act to reconcile idolatry and Christianity. At the same time, he discourages Christians from visiting pagan temples.

8:13 “Therefore, if food is a cause of their falling, I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause one of them to fall.”

Paul dissuades the newly converted but without condemning idolatry.

9:1 “Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?”

No, Paul did not see Jesus, only light, according to his own report.

Because Paul considers a vision sufficient for qualifying as apostle, he might perceive other apostles likewise: like those who had a vision, especially since he never mentions their personal acquaintance with Jesus.

9:2 “If I am not an apostle to others, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.”

That is, Jesus' disciples did not recognize the self-appointed Paul. He considered himself an apostle, since he was converting people to Christianity. If that were so, there were many apostles.

9:5 “Do we not have the right to be accompanied by a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?”

Earlier, Paul affirms his single state.<sup>dccxcviii</sup> The apologists' attempts to read that he has a right to marry but has not done so is unconvincing. Paul excuses himself on the basis of precedent.<sup>dccxcix</sup>

The early Christian author significantly distinguishes between the brothers, apostles, and Cephas. The first seem to encompass Jesus' disciples, second are authoritative preachers and Church administrators, and why Peter-Cephas is listed separately, is a puzzle.

9:6 “Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living?”

Paul may have been accused of not earning his living. Then his tentmaking becomes understandable.<sup>cm</sup> Soon after, however, he went to take

the Greek Christians' alms to Jerusalem, so the Greek community could have sustained him. Paul seems to need some formal job to avoid the charge of living off the congregation.

9:9 "For it is written in the Law of Moses, 'You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain.'"<sup>cmi</sup>

Paul resorts to the commandments he urges people to reject. But the ox will eat the grain it is treading out, while to the Christian preachers claimed part in the miserable stocks of the churchgoers.

9:10 "...whoever threshes should thresh in hope of a share in the crop."

Was Paul converting to Christianity for payment?

9:11 "If we have sown spiritual good among you, is it too much if we reap your material benefits?"

Elsewhere Paul said, "I coveted no one's silver or gold or clothing. You know for yourselves that I worked with my own hands to support myself and my companions. In all this I have given you an example that by such work we must support the weak."<sup>cmii</sup>

9:15 "But I have made no use of any of these rights."

While he defends his right to Christian alms, the author employs *we*.<sup>cmiii</sup> The change to the singular might point to a change of writers.

How did Paul make his living in the absence of a meaningful job? His only job was tentmaking, and that for short time.

9:15 "Indeed, I would rather die than that anyone should deprive me of my ground for boasting!"

Where are meekness and modesty?

9:19–21 "I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews . . . . To those outside the law I became as one outside the law."

Paul is proud of deeds which constitute hypocrisy. Recall his attack on Peter: "But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, . . . for until certain people came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But after they came, he drew back and kept himself separate."<sup>cmiv</sup>

9:25 "Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one."

"Those who believe in him are not condemned."<sup>cmv</sup> What need is there for abstinence if there is faith? Paul asserts elsewhere that deeds are not critical.

The Jews of Judea avoided sports events because they included pagan sacrifices. That was not the case in the Diaspora: Philo and Paul praise athletes.

9:27 “But I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified.”

Perhaps the statement explains “But I have made no use of any of these rights.”<sup>cmvi</sup> Paul could mean that he took less (food?) from his congregation than his right allowed.

Jesus did not despise the body but respected it: “The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light.”<sup>cmvii</sup>

10:1 “Our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea.”

Paul means the Exodus. “The Lord went in front of them in a pillar of cloud by day.”<sup>cmviii</sup> The Hebrews themselves did not walk under the cloud.

10:2 “And all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.”

Nobody was baptized, especially into Moses. Paul attempts to transform baptism from a sign of redemption to a sign of unity.

10:4 “And all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ.”

Paul recalls Moses striking water from the rock,<sup>cmix</sup> but he misses the point. The rebellion at Meribah was sin; they put God to the test. For giving in to their demands, Moses was denied reaching the Promised Land.<sup>cmx</sup> Allegory cannot replace logic. Why the rock is Christ instead of, for example, Peter-Cephas-Stone? The comparison is an example of the early Christian tradition of likening Jesus to Moses, the New Testament to the Torah, and the birth of Christianity to the Exodus.

10:7 “Do not become idolaters as some of them did; as it is written, ‘The people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play.’”

Consider the context: “Aaron . . . built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamations and said, ‘Tomorrow shall be a festival to the Lord.’”<sup>cmxi</sup> The Hebrews did not want a new god but rather for a new path to God when Moses was away a long time.

“As to the eating of food offered to idols, . . . since some have become so accustomed to idols until now, they still think of the food they eat as food offered to an idol.”<sup>cmxii</sup> Paul allows Christians to participate in

the profane rites, even though he condemns the Hebrews for something only remotely similar.

10:8 “We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day.”

The punishment was not so much for fornication as for the apostasy of some Hebrews to Baal Phegor under the influence of the Madian women. Twenty-four thousand died, incidentally, not twenty-three.<sup>cmxiii</sup>

10:19 “What do I imply then? That food sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything?”

The idols proper mean nothing. Praying to them is significant, forbidden, and punished.

10:20 “No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons.”

Paul has just said idols are nothing; now they are demons. The demonic offerings are surely *something*.

The Hebrew Scriptures have much to say about other gods but never call them demons. Paul, from whom one might expect the religious tolerance typical of the Gnostics, loses his temper in the theological tangle and demonizes them.

10:23 “‘All things are lawful,’ but not all things are beneficial.”

By definition, all things cannot be lawful. Law is a set of rules. Some things comply with these rules, while some do not. Thus, not everything is lawful.

10:25–26 “Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, . . . for the earth and its fullness are the Lord’s.”

Are the commandments not the Lord’s? Paul’s logic would allow cannibalism, since people fill the earth as well. The apostles forbade eating anything strangled.<sup>cmxiv</sup>

11:1 “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.”

Paul is set as the community’s head, mediator between people and Jesus, though he affirms elsewhere that they have the same spirit as he does. Paul may be likened to Christ, but all others could only strive to become like Paul.

11:7–8 “A man . . . is the image and glory of God; but woman is the reflection of man. Indeed, man was not made from woman, but woman from man.”

Human beings resemble God not in their sexual characteristics but in their spiritual qualities. Maimonides treats that likeness, *zelem*, as a



distinctive human quality: the soul.<sup>cmxv</sup> Both men and women were created thus, "So God created humankind in his image, . . . male and female he created them."

*Glory of God* is a technical term meaning his emanation, which is perceived by man as revelation. It is not a male as a corporeal object.

11:14 "Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair, it is degrading to him?"

No one familiar with Judaism would write that: Nazarites did not cut their hair. Greeks and Romans wore it short.

11:20–21 "When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord's supper. For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper."

The key word is *each*. Piety, even as ceremonial gesture, is out of question. Paul's reports of much of the prophesying cannot be true.

11:23–25 "For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took of bread . . . and said, 'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'"

The text loosely resembles the synoptics. John does not report the meal in the context of the Last Supper.

The Greek term *received* means *handed on*, tradition, not a revelation or credible information. Paul implies *he* received the tradition, not any of the numerous other teachers in Corinth. Citation of Jesus is so unusual for Paul that it begs explaining away as interpolation.

11:27 "Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord."

Bread and wine are the body and blood of Jesus only by faith. They are neither body nor blood literally. Therefore if a hungry and not devout Christian sees only food, he is not guilty of the body and blood of Jesus.

11:30 "For this reason many of you are weak and ill . . ."

A curious social base for a world religion, indeed.

11:30–32 "For this reason . . . some have died. But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we may not be condemned along with the world."

Paul has to explain why the flock is suffering and dying, though they were promised deliverance and salvation. He devises a preliminary judgment, chastisement in this world to prepare for the next. Still there are no theologically defined sins for believing Christians who see no reason for punishment.

What about those who died? They cannot repent of their sins.

12:3 “No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit.”

Paul supposes that each Christian is endowed with the Holy Spirit, the same spirit that lets Christians eat food offered to idols and to commit sins.

12:7–10 “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good . . . faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing, . . . to another various kinds of tongues.”

Earlier faith is a condition for receiving the Holy Spirit, not its manifestation. The Holy Spirit enables everyone to speak different languages,<sup>cmxvi</sup> not just some. The gift of healing was promised to all believers.<sup>cmxvii</sup>

12:11 “All these are activated by one and the same Spirit.”

Paul names various spirits in different places: “a spirit of gentleness,”<sup>cmxviii</sup> “the spirits of the prophets,”<sup>cmxix</sup> “a life-giving spirit,”<sup>cmxx</sup> *etc.*

14:9–13 “If in a tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is being said? . . . Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray for the power to interpret.”

Christians, like many primitive religious enthusiasts, spoke unintelligibly, yet claimed to be inspired. Greek culture at times held that prophecy proceeds from ecstasy. Greek oracles were often incomprehensible and required interpretation.

14:14 “For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unproductive.”

The evangelists claimed that neither minds nor some personal spirit but the Holy Spirit speaks through believers,<sup>cmxxi</sup> possibly to justify the believers unintelligible speech.

14:16 “if you say a blessing with the spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say the ‘Amen’ . . . since the outsider does not know what you are saying?”

The *outsiders* did not participate in the services, at least because they were illegal. Paul tricks his fellows into changing their mumbling habits.

14:18 “. . . I speak in tongues more than all of you . . .”

Since Paul quoted Septuagint and communicated with Greeks, he likely knew only that language. At any rate, he did not know more languages than all believers combined. Thus, he also spoke inarticulately, imitating the prophesying.

14:21 “In the law it is written, ‘By people of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people; yet even then they will not listen to me,’ says the Lord.”

The nearest text runs, “Truly, with stammering lip and with alien tongue he will speak to this people, . . . yet they would not hear. Therefore the word of the Lord will be to them . . . in order that they may go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken. Therefore hear the word of the Lord, you scoffers who rule this people in Jerusalem.”<sup>cmxxii</sup> *Alien tongue* means rejection, not the wanton chatter of Christians in ecstasy. Only the rulers are threatened, not all people.

14:26 “When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation.”

Christianity was formed from “revelations” and “interpretations” by pretenders whom Paul likened to the insane.<sup>cmxxiii</sup>

14:31 “For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn.”

That is, the prophets should not interrupt one another.

The task of a prophet is to reveal. Why should he learn? And learn what, if he learns everything in visions?

14:34–35 “Women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.”

A late insert. Paul did not refer to the law and did not forbid the women’s participation in the life of the Church: “. . . but any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled . . .”,<sup>cmxxiv</sup> “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae”,<sup>cmxxv</sup> “There is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”<sup>cmxxvi</sup>

A similar text appears in a pseudepigraphic epistle: “I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent.”<sup>cmxxvii</sup> This was a standard notion: “Silence gives the proper grace to women.”<sup>cmxxviii</sup>

14:37 “[It] is a command of the Lord.”

Paul teaches disobeying the Mosaic commandments, then substitutes his own contradictory injunctions as commandments.

14:39–40 “Do not forbid speaking in tongues; but all things should be done decently and in order.”

Mumbling of the believers was beyond any decency. The instruction is odd, since elsewhere he forbids *speaking in tongues*.<sup>cmxxxix</sup> The practice seems to survive, and the late interpolator only hopes to make it orderly.

15:1 “Now I would remind you, brothers, of the Gospel . . . which you in turn received, in which also you stand.”

If Christians “stand in the Gospel,” why must Paul remind them of it?

*Gospel* means the good news, not a text. There are no credible correlations between Pauline works and the extant Gospels.

15:5 “He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.”

Twelve? Judas was not with them, and neither Paul nor Matthias were apostles at the time of the resurrection. Even by the time of 1Cor there was still no legend of Judas Iscariot and no need to lower the number of the apostles correspondingly.

Like in 9:5, the author implies Peter-Cephas was not among the twelve.

The synoptics count eleven disciples at resurrection, *including* Peter-Cephas,<sup>cmxxx</sup> John, between seven and twelve.<sup>cmxxxi</sup> No Gospel mentions Peter as the first to whom Jesus appeared. Even in the interpolated Lk24:12 and similarly dubious Jn 20:6, Peter sees only Jesus’ cloths.

15:6 “Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time.”

There were hardly so many believers in Judea. The Gospels tell of only a few who saw the resurrected Jesus.

The writer a) had very approximate information about these events; and b) they took place so long before that he could freely invent details, not expecting them to be checked.

15:5–7 “He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve . . . Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.”

Who are Cephas and the twelve? Paul seems to attach a different meaning to the word *apostle*.

15:8 “Last of all . . . he appeared also to me.”

Paul saw only light in the wilderness on the Damascus road.

15:10 “I worked harder than any of them [the apostles].”

Here is a hint of a sectarian struggle, Paul belittling his opponents, or perhaps the forger belittling Jews.

15:13 "If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised."

Christians consider Jesus' revival a sign specifically because it is exceptional, not analogous to anything. Raising a divine creature is not the same as raising human beings from the dead, and the latter does not follow from the former. The saying makes sense if Paul considered Jesus human.

Here Jesus' resurrection is proved by the upcoming general resurrection. Elsewhere, Paul asserts an opposite causation.

15:14 "And if Christ has not been raised, then . . . your faith has been in vain."

If someone was not resurrected, then belief in his resurrection is vain; if A is false, then to believe that A is true is false. To assert the resurrection as a fact whether Jesus was raised or not is a matter of faith. Thus, the author suggests to test faith with faith. In effect, if you do not believe that A is true, then belief that A is true is incorrect.

Why the author attaches such significance to the doubtful fact of resurrection is not clear. Jesus did other miracles as well. Paul, however, does not often mention them, and those legends may have appeared only later. In any case, Jesus' resurrection changes nothing: he preached keeping the commandments, which is necessary, regardless of the resurrection.

15:15 "We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ."

What kind of testimony (an eyewitness account) is this, if the question is belief, not to say credulity?

15:17 "If Christ has not been raised . . . you are still in your sins."

Christian redemption is linked to Jesus' crucifixion and sacrificial atonement for sin, not to the resurrection. Paul explicitly mentions the resurrection as the central event, not as evidence of Jesus' credentials.

15:20 "But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died."

What about those who were raised from the dead by the prophets and by Jesus? If Jesus, unlike them, was resurrected to theosophically different new life, then his resurrection is merely allegorical.

Paul usually speaks of death and resurrection mystically or at least allegorically—"But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him"<sup>cmxxxii</sup>—not physical death and resurrection.

15:22–24 “All we shall be made alive in Christ. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then . . . those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father.”

“The Father judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son.”<sup>cmxxxiii</sup> According to John, Jesus received all power to judge and rule in the Kingdom. According to Paul, Jesus has authority only over Christians, an unhappy thought, since the natural reaction is to repudiate Jesus and choose the rule of God, especially since Paul does not expect him to judge but only to rule a kingdom full of non-Christians. Paul knew nothing of the doctrine of the trinity and of Christ’s coeternity with God.

Paul constantly runs into problems with his eclectic theology. Here he attempts to wriggle out of saying the resurrection is promised to Christians only. The drawbacks are evident. First, the generations before Jesus will not be raised. Second, the Christians are few, and it is implausible that nobody else, even the holy ones, will be raised. Third, sinners and persecutors of Christians will not be condemned to perdition without resurrection.

On the other hand, Paul understands that Jesus can hardly resurrect those who do not believe in him. Hence the solution: Jesus takes care of believers, God resurrects everyone else.

Paul’s Christianity is implacably naturalistic: resurrection happens on a first-come, first-served basis. Theology commonly portrays divine actions as timeless; otherwise God needs time to perform some work, he makes an effort. The creation story is *sui generis*, because of the nature of the work involved and the need to distinguish each kind of work by time. But *days of Creation* is an allegory, since time itself had not yet been created.

15:24–25 “Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.”

Note the contradiction with Paul’s instruction to obey the authorities, whose power is from God.<sup>cmxxxiv</sup> The proclamation probably comes from apocalyptic literature, since the opportunist Paul would not preach rebellion.

Will Christians rise before other people to the dubious pleasure of living through the final catastrophe? Jews, on the contrary, prayed to die before the global cataclysm.

15:28 “When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him.”

Was Jesus not subject to God earlier?

The concept of domination, changing dominion at that, is incompatible with the concept of one God.

15:29 “If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf?”

Paul plays to people's inability to admit mistakes: if you insist on baptizing on behalf of the dead, you have to believe they will be raised.

Paul suggests believers are baptized for resurrection, not because they are believers. The rite expands from a sign of repentance to an assurance of eternal life.

15:32 “If with merely human hopes I fought with wild animals at Ephesus, what would I have gained by it? If the dead are not raised . . .”

Acts ends with Paul's trip to Rome but does not record a bout with wild animals in Ephesus, further evidence that 1Cor is pseudepigrapha based on established legends and written later than Acts.

Paul's decision to fight the animals instead of dying indicates, if anything, his uncertainty of the afterlife. The account makes sense if he calls the local authorities *beasts*.

The theme is old. The lions did not devour Daniel,<sup>cmxxxv</sup> and Paul piggybacks on the story. In an almost identical story, Rabbi Tanhuma won an argument with the emperor and was thrown into a pit of beasts—but not eaten.<sup>cmxxxvi</sup> In practice, evidence that a captured Jew was thrown into the arena with wild animals was sufficient proof of his death.

15:35–42 “But someone will ask, ‘How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?’ Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed . . . But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body . . . What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable.”

Jesus meant his crucifixion and its significance, not resurrection, when he said, “unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”<sup>cmxxxvii</sup>

The writer believes in another, imperishable, body at resurrection, but Jesus was raised with a real body, which Thomas touched. Paul's analogy is weak because fruit is as perishable as seed. Indeed, there would have been no seeds otherwise.

The author did not know about the answer Jesus gave to a similar question: “For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.”<sup>cmxxxviii</sup>

Paul's answer recalls puzzling moments in the Gospels when the disciples do not recognize the risen Jesus, suggesting his body was somehow changed. Perhaps, the original concept of the resurrection was much like Paul's but later became resurrection in the mortal body.

15:45 "Thus it is written, 'The first man, Adam, became a living being'; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit."

The positive attitude to Adam contrasts with Rom5:12, where Adam is a symbol of sin and death.

Jesus was not "the last Adam." There were also other descendants of Adam, Jesus' brothers for example, as well as everyone else. Metaphysically, the parallel between Adam and Jesus is doubtful; Christians assign a higher status to Jesus. If "the last Adam" means *the last messenger*, Adam was not a messenger. To whom?<sup>180</sup>

The idea of Jesus as the last messenger nullifies the numerous Christian prophets after him and even Paul himself—to say nothing of Mohammed.

Paul evidently believes that the first human being's name was Adam, although *ha-adam* is simply *the man*.

15:47 "The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven."

Elsewhere, Paul describes Jesus as no less "from the earth" than Adam, "Christ. . . was buried."<sup>cmxxxix</sup>

15:50 "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God."

Paul formulates his position in the ongoing discussion of resurrection, whether only the soul revives or the body, too. He opts for the soul only. But what about Jesus' arising in a real body, which Doubting Thomas touched? The Church denies that Jesus' body was illusory as the Docetists claimed.

15:51–52 "I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed . . . . The dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed."

Is that a mystery, if Paul tells newly converted Christians, whom he calls sinful and ignorant more than once?<sup>cmxli</sup> More important is Paul's supposition that he and some Christians will not yet die before Judgment Day, but will at that moment be changed. All of them died. Therefore, the beautiful notion is nothing more solid than Paul's point of view.

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<sup>180</sup> We would have to suppose after leaving Eden, Adam brought a message to other people already on earth, those Cain feared. Then he was not *the first man*.



15:54 “When . . . this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled: ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory.’”

“O Lord . . . Cities of ruthless nations will fear you . . . He will swallow up death forever. . . . The Moabites shall be trodden down in their place . . . . On that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah.”<sup>cmxli</sup> Isaiah means the end of death in war after future historical Jewish victories—not Jesus’ resurrection, not anyone else’s.

15:55–56 “‘Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?’ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.”

Even Paul knew the law can cause only spiritual death; but he is never quite sure whether he means spiritual or physical death, especially when he quotes out of context.

16:1—3 “Now concerning the collection for the saints: you should follow the directions I gave to the churches of Galatia . . . . And when I arrive, I will send them with letters to take your gift to Jerusalem.”

The late author presupposes wide knowledge of the instructions to Galatians, hardly plausible in Paul’s lifetime. To whom in Jerusalem did Paul send the alms, given the more than cool attitude toward him there? Only James met Paul in Jerusalem.<sup>cmxlii</sup>

16:12 “Now concerning our brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to visit you with the other brothers, but he was not at all willing to come now. He will come when he has the opportunity.”

Paul probably wrote this epistle in Ephesus: “I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost.”<sup>cmxliii</sup> At that time, “Apollos was in Corinth, Paul . . . came to Ephesus.”<sup>cmxliv</sup> He promised the Corinthians, “I will visit you after passing through Macedonia.”<sup>cmxlv</sup> Soon “Paul sent for the disciples . . . and saying farewell, he left for Macedonia.”<sup>cmxlvi</sup> There is no reason to suggest that Apollos had already left Corinth at that time.

16:12 attempts to vest Apollos with Paul’s authority. Apollos likely did not want to associate with Paul or his disciples.

According to Acts, Paul did not meet Apollos at all,<sup>cmxlvii</sup> and his disciples converted Apollos.<sup>cmxlviii</sup>

## The Letters

### *The Epistle of James*

James contains no references to the Gospels and no reliable citations of Jesus. At the same time, he appeals continuously to the Hebrew scriptures. Such a text is completely improbable coming from someone who knew Jesus. Would James not want to present Jesus' words and confirm his own? To say James ignored Jesus would be strange, since in both Jewish and Greek cultures, disciples remembered their teachers' words.

The forged Chapter 5 stands out, but the text is reasonably coherent and logical otherwise. There is no correlation with the Gospels, which is a problem for Christians who believe James was Jesus' disciple. To say, however, that James was a prominent leader of the early messianic congregation assimilated in the Church's history, but not Jesus' companion, gets rid of the contradiction. The epistle is pre-Gospel and originated in a Judeo-Christian sect. The absence of mentions of Jesus—only natural, since Jewish sectarians considered him hardly more than a devoted preacher—reinforces that conclusion.

1:2 “Whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy.”

Jesus' prayer: “And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one.”<sup>»cmxlix</sup>

1:13 “God cannot be tempted by evil and he himself tempts no one.”

Devil tempted Jesus in the wilderness presumably with God's knowledge.<sup>cmli</sup> “And do not bring us into temptation.”<sup>»cmli</sup>

1:15 “When that desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and that sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death.”

Why does it “give birth to death” if believers are promised eternal life?

1:19 “Let everyone be . . . slow to anger.”

Jesus condemned anger: “If you are angry with a brother, you will be liable to punishment.”<sup>cmlii</sup> James says to go slow.

1:23–24 “For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, on going away forget what they were like.”

James' critique of even so minor vanity as looking in a mirror might be hard to accept for modern Christians. The statement argues with Paul's teaching that faith surpasses deeds.

1:25 "But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, . . . they will be blessed in their doing."

James formulates an interesting idea of freedom, which Jesus lacks. Even the most Jewish apostle leans toward mysticism when saying that believers are free from the law and earthly rules.

2:2 "If a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly . . ."

Why did the rich Christians not distribute their assets?<sup>cmliii</sup>

2:6 "Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court?"

James seems unaware of Jesus' injunction to reconcile before a trial: "Come to terms quickly with your accuser . . . or . . . you will be thrown into prison."<sup>cmliv</sup>

The early Christians curiously frequented the court, probably, because of the debts. James fails to note that the same rich helped poor Christians by lending them before "dragging them into court."

2:15–16 "If a brother is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you . . . does not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?"

Acts presents James as less solicitous: "The Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food."<sup>cmlv</sup>

3:1 "Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers."

If James addresses the problem in his letter, it must have been considerable. The new Christians began to evangelize, though they were not acquainted with Jesus, had no access to his sayings in the yet unwritten Gospels, and were frequently unfamiliar with the law. Their sermons doubtlessly deviated from Jesus' teaching. On the other hand, they were active proselytizers who not only spoke but also wrote. They influenced the formation of the prototexts.

As usual, James does not refer to Jesus, who said to the apostles, "But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher."<sup>cmlvi</sup>

3:2 "For all of us make many mistakes."

Did James think he "made many mistakes"? Did he belittle himself disingenuously? Did he think the other leaders with whom he associated were trespassers?

3:2 “Anyone who makes no mistakes in speaking is perfect.”

Jesus was tougher than James. He said that even thoughts are important.<sup>cmlvii</sup>

3:10 “From the same mouth come blessing and cursing.”

“If you say, ‘You fool,’ you will be liable to the hell of fire.”<sup>cmlviii</sup>

3:14 “But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth.” Not a pastoral community, indeed.

4:3 “You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly.”

There are two different approaches in the Gospels: “Your Father knows what you need before you ask him”,<sup>cmlix</sup> “Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete.”<sup>cmlx</sup> James offers yet another approach, asking correctly.

4:4 “Friendship with the world is enmity with God.”

Jesus did not ask believers to deny the world but to trust and leave worrying: “But strive first for the kingdom of God . . . and all these things will be given to you as well.”<sup>cmlx</sup> He did not bind his followers to abstain from pleasure: “For this reason a man shall . . . be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”<sup>cmlxii</sup>

James’ attitude differs from Judaism, a practical religion which does not reject the world. James, however, is right at home with the ascetic Essenes.

4:5 “The scripture says, ‘God yearns jealously for the spirit that he has made to dwell in us.’”

Not surprisingly, the Scriptures say no such thing, though the reference could be to some lost pseudepigrapha. The mainstream religion did suppose that the spirit dwells in each person. Anyone could become a Jew, though not all were spiritual. James asserts that each member of his congregation is blessed with the spirit.

4:13–14 “Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a town and spend a year there.’ . . . Yet you do not even know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? Instead you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wishes, . . . we will live and do.’”

Jesus suggested making no plans and counting on God. “And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? . . . But if God clothes the grass of the field . . . will he not much more clothe you, you of little faith?”<sup>cmlxiii</sup> The difference is essential. James also disregards planning, but only because God has everything worked out. Jesus implies faith; James suggests determinism.

All of Jam5 is a late insertion. Jam4 ends with “Anyone, then, who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, commits sin”<sup>cmlxiv</sup>—a logical ending for the epistle. Jam5 ends inconclusively: “Whoever brings back a sinner from wandering will save the sinner’s soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.”<sup>cmlxv</sup>

Jam5 is strewn with references to the Gospels; unlike the other four chapters, it quotes Gospel texts exactly. The chapter’s structure differs sharply from the others, too. Its tone is rough, accusatory; its text is a chaos of practical recommendations.

5:6 “You have condemned and murdered the righteous one, who does not resist you.”

The verse has almost no semantic connection with the previous one on wealth. Not only the wealthy cried out for Jesus’ crucifixion but also the general multitude.<sup>cmlxvi</sup>

5:7 “Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord.”

The writer leaps from “you have condemned” in one verse to “beloved” in the next.

5:14–15 “Are any among you sick? They should call for the presbyters of the church . . . anointing them with oil.”

Not much of treatment. Jesus was anointed in order to prepare him for burial.<sup>cmlxvii</sup>

5:15 “The prayer of faith [by elders] will save the sick, . . . and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven.”

The prayer is specifically by presbyters who mediate between commoners and God.

5:16 “Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.”

In Judaism people gathered in small groups once a year to confess their sins. Note just how bizarre it is to confess sins often, and to go on with them after cleansing the soul. Does James mean everyone is sick? What about “The prayer of faith will save the sick”?<sup>cmlxviii</sup> There should be no sick at all.

5:17–18 “Elijah was a human being like us . . . . He prayed, . . . and the heaven gave rain.”

Elijah was not *like us* at all,; he was chosen, and that is why his prayer was effective. His path was peculiar even for the prophets. In recognition of it, he did not die, but ascended to return as the Forerunner.



## *The Letters of Peter*

### *The First Letter of Peter*

The language of this letter is not characteristic of a fisherman, though perhaps the influence of the Holy Spirit may explain the problem away. The sentence structure is atypical of Aramaic and is not repeated in other canonical texts. The sentences are long, complex, and compound for the most part and include complex grammatical constructions beaded onto each other. The sentences, however, are difficult to read, and are often contradictory. The confusion occurs mainly in the theologically replete verses in 1Pt1, though problems recur throughout the whole text. The complex style is not unlike that of the Gospel of John, but distinctively simpler passages appear abruptly here and there.

Peter's theological constructions also resemble John's and, to some extent, Paul's. He also evolves the theological concept of Christ's blood<sup>cmlxix</sup> and the word<sup>cmlxx</sup>. Matthew also writes about the blood,<sup>cmlxxi</sup> but the extensive forgeries in Mt27 vitiate the passage's authenticity.

Peter does not refer directly to Jesus, nor does he quote him, which does not mean the writer lacked authoritative sources. He repeatedly refers indirectly to the Jewish scriptures.

Another suspicious feature of the Letters is the author's seeming distance from Jesus, seen in his calling him Jesus Christ, Christ, Lord, where we would expect *Jesus* from so close a companion, especially since the Gospels usually call him Jesus.

The Letter in different parts is addressed either to Gentiles<sup>cmlxxii</sup> or to Jews<sup>cmlxxiii</sup> or else to Jewish Christians<sup>cmlxxiv</sup> or to the community's leaders.<sup>cmlxxv</sup>

1Peter is generally accepted as pseudepigrapha—a significant conclusion, since 1Pt is practically the only evidence of Peter's stay in Rome.

1:1 "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia . . ."

Why does Peter write to Paul's churches? Peter is unaware of the church in Rome.

Peter addresses the Jews—*exiles*—of the Diaspora, whereas Paul in the same circumstances addressed mainly Gentiles. Acts puts the number of Christianized Jews quite low.

1:1–2 “[To you] who have been chosen . . . to be sprinkled with his [Jesus Christ’s] blood: May grace and peace be yours in abundance.”

The author curiously includes Peter among those sprinkled by Jesus’ blood, though Peter fled the crucifixion.

1:11 “. . . inquiring about the person or time that the Spirit of Christ within them [the prophets] indicated.”

The spirit descended on Jesus only at baptism.<sup>cmlxxvi</sup> How could it be his own, “the Spirit of Christ”?

1:18–20 “You were ransomed from the futile ways . . . with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish. He was destined before the foundation of the world.”

According to Peter, there was a time before creation: boundless, void; no Adam, no Abraham; yet even then God plans to send Jesus to be crucified for sins not yet committed.

1:20–21 “. . . revealed at the end of the ages for your sake. Through him you have come to trust in God, who raised him from the dead.”

People must believe Christian stories about resurrection so much that they would believe in God who supposedly raised Jesus. The confidence placed in men, Christians, is thus greater than faith in God.<sup>181</sup>

2:11 “I urge you . . . to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul.”

Peter does not quote Jesus: “But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”<sup>cmlxxvii</sup>

2:13 “Accept the authority of every human institution.”

“Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s.”<sup>cmlxxviii</sup> Peter probably does not know that dictum. Peter’s statement is much stronger and could hardly appear before Christianity gained some acceptance, if not legality.

2:14 “. . . or of governors, as sent by him [the emperor] to punish those who do wrong.”

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<sup>181</sup> This problem concerns every religion, though to a different degree. Jews have to rely on accuracy of the reports that all people saw the Egyptian plagues and miracles in Sinai.



Peter lived in Jerusalem and would hardly describe the rulers as just. Probably the Letter was written in the Diaspora rather late, when the Jewish kings and their persecutions of the Christians were already forgotten. The writer did not know about Pilate.

Even as late as the composition of 1 Pt, the legend of Pilate's participation in the crucifixion was not widely known, so the authorities are just.

2:16 "As servants of God, live as free people, yet do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil."

1Pt, just as Jam1:25, emphasizes freedom from the moral and religious law. Yet he needs that law in order to define the evil he urges to abstain from. The writer accepts that the government punishes "those who do wrong," but the wrong could be defined only in terms of law which he seeks to abandon.

2:19 "For it is a credit to you if, being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly."

The Christian tradition of exalting suffering has no analogues either in the Mosaic law or Jesus' teaching: "Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also."<sup>cmlxxx</sup> The shift is subtle: Jesus offers nonresistance as the best response to evil, a corollary to disregarding the world. That does not mean Jesus liked seeing people harmed unjustly.

What is "unjust suffering"? Do Christians identify just suffering? Peter misses the contradiction with "Do not judge."<sup>cmlxxx</sup> Establishing justice necessarily involves judging. Besides, Peter just said that all punishment and consequently all judicially imposed suffering are just.<sup>cmlxxxi</sup>

2:21 "For to this [suffering] you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps."

Jesus suffered fairly: the Jews had accumulated no small amount of sins, which he volunteered to expiate by his sacrifice. Thus, his affliction was just, not like the unjust afflictions Peter says Christians suffer.

To what oppression of Christians in Greece and Asia does Peter refer? Judaism was also an alien religion there, and the local people were tolerant. They would hardly persecute Christians more than Jews. The Jews in the Diaspora had no civil authority to hound sectarians.

2:24 "He himself bore our sins in his body to the tree, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed."

Puzzlingly, even this late text relates of Jesus' execution as we know it from Paul: he was hanged on a tree, not crucified.

Peter likely did not notice that he proclaimed all Christians innocent.

3:13 "Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good?"

2:20 "When you do right and suffer for it, you have God's approval." Peter contradicts himself—and Jesus.

3:14 "But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed."

3:14 contradicts 3:13. 3:14 repeats Mt5:10, the only authentic reference to the Gospels in 1Pt. Christianity needed to comment on persecution, which went beyond the framework of 3:13.

3:15 "Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence."

Peter meant the civil authorities and urged reverence to avoid martyrdom.

4:1 "Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also . . . for whoever has suffered in the flesh has finished with sin."

Did Jesus suffer to stop himself from sinning? The very idea that anguish leads to righteousness is erratic. Distress often means abandoning virtue to ensure survival. Buddhism, incidentally, presupposes withdrawal from the world of suffering as a condition of righteousness.

5:1 "[I am] a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as one who shares in the glory to be revealed."

None of the Gospels puts Peter at the crucifixion. Indeed, Jesus said, "The hour is coming . . . when you will be scattered, each one to his home, and you will leave me alone."<sup>cmlxxxii</sup> The late forger did not know even that much of the Gospels.

5:2–3 "Tend the flock of God . . . Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock."

The stratification of Christian communities has begun.

5:13 "Your sister church in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings; and so does my son Mark."

Did Peter live in Rome? He spent some time in Jerusalem,<sup>cmlxxxiii</sup> as did James later,<sup>cmlxxxiv</sup> indicating that the local church was intact.

Peter supposedly disguises the name of the city where he lives. Why call Rome Babylon if everyone knew where the Letter originated? The forger may have replaced the name habitually. On the other hand, the presence of Peter's community in Babylon would explain the unusual attention to Christianity by the compilers of the Babylonian Talmud.<sup>182</sup> The city of Heliopolis, called Babylon-in-Egypt, offers another location of Peter's congregation which could give rise to the Copts.

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<sup>182</sup> Thriving Jewish scholarly community in Mesopotamian province is odd. Babylon could be a codename for other cities, besides Rome, possibly including Alexandria, a renowned cosmopolitan center of education and science, possessing large Jewish community. Later, the cities codenamed Babylon might be lumped together and identified with the place in Iraq.

### *The Second Letter of Peter*

Generally, the canonical 2Pt is recognized as late pseudepigrapha. The author seeks aggressively to prove that Jesus lived, which should be no trouble shortly after the crucifixion. All Peter had to do was present the dates and the facts.

1:1 “Peter, a slave . . . of Jesus Christ, to those who have received a faith as precious as ours . . .”

In “faith as precious as ours,” the author implies a separate though equal religion. Peter would have seen Christianity as the right Judaism, not as a different religion.

2:4 “For if God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of deepest darkness to be kept until the judgment . . .”

The Hebrew scriptures know nothing of the kind, nor do the Jewish pseudepigrapha.<sup>183</sup> The notion probably comes from Hellenic polytheism.

3:3–4 “In the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and indulging their own lusts and saying, ‘Where is the promise of his coming?’”

Christians have a hard time denying this simple argument against their hopes. Later the Church effectively ignored the issue of the Second Advent, which did not take place.

3:6–7 “The world of that time was deluged with water and perished . . . . The present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire, being kept until the day of judgment.”

A curious echo of the belief that the world was and will be destroyed a number of times, each time by different means. The myths of many nations agree that the next holocaust will be by fire. Nothing of the kind, however, exists in normative Judaism.

3:15–16 “So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist.”

Enough time has passed for the Pauline corpus to become widely known and criticized. Interestingly, Paul says little about the apocalypse, at

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<sup>183</sup> Nothing suggests Peter referred to the story of Shemyaza hanged upside down.

any rate significantly less than about other knotty concepts. Considering the rivalry between Peter and Paul, the irenic language could only appear after Paul's adherents got the upper hand and praised their forebear in a letter supposedly written by Peter.

### *The Letters of John*

John continuously uses *Children!* as an address, as Jesus does with the disciples in the Gospel of John.

John is aggressive and blunt, even against the background of the ancient polemic style, less polite than modern rhetoric. His arguments are not logical, and his cause-and-effect relationships are frequently the phantasmagoric creations of a morbid imagination removed from reality.

The first letter bears the impress of an aged writer, not entirely right in his mind. The letter is disjointed, leaping from theme to theme and presenting the same thoughts repeatedly.

1:4 “We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.” 2:1 “I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin.” 2:12 “I am writing to you . . . because your sins are forgiven.” 2:21 “I write to you, not because you do not know the truth . . .”

2:7 “I am writing you . . . an old commandment.” 2:8 “Yet I am writing you a new commandment.”

3:9 “Those who have been born of God do not sin,” is repeated at 5:18, “Those who are born of God do not sin.”

John scrambles the letter’s themes: sin at 1:7–10, 2:1–2, 12, 3:4–6, 7, and 5:16–17; false prophets at 2:18–19 and 4:1, 3; abiding in God at 1:6, 10, 2:5, 23–24, 27–29, 3:6, 24, and 5:10; lies at 1:6, 10, 2:4, 21–22, and 3:20; love for neighbors at 2:10, 3:10, 4:7–12, 17–21, and 5:2.

The letters display John’s characteristic composite theological structures, attempts to explain Jesus’ statements, interpolations from demonic polytheism and Hellenic paganism forced onto the canvas of Judaism. As in the Gospel, the references to the Hebrew scriptures are few, and the synoptics are not mentioned. John’s letters do not refer to his Gospel. The few parallels are inchoate thoughts developed in the Gospel later.

There is no question that John’s personal qualities influenced the canonical texts, but rather of the extent and degree to which the texts’ authenticity has been refracted through the prism of the apostle’s gruesome consciousness.

The Second and the Third Letters of John are short and rational and not aggressive, sharply distinguished in style from the first, suggesting different writers. 1Jn has no addressee, and its intended audience is obscure. Nothing in the letters binds them to real events, which could be expected in a letter.

### ***The First Letter of John***

1:9 “If we confess our sins, [God] will forgive us our sins.”

That is far from the Jewish concept of repentance which requires restitution. Jews seek the forgiveness of the injured party before asking God to forgive their sins.

Even Gentile author of the letter sees no role for Jesus in the forgiveness.

2:1 “I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”

Thus Christians may sin, though all their sins are redeemed. Why do Christians need an advocate if “Those who believe in him are not condemned”<sup>cmlxxxv</sup> and “your sins are forgiven on account of his name”<sup>q</sup><sup>cmlxxxvi</sup>

Why should the advocate be Jesus? He promised to send another intercessor besides himself when he ascended.<sup>cmlxxxvii</sup>

John does not conceive of Jesus as a person of the trinity but rather as a righteous man. Jesus can petition God; ergo, he is not one with God. John's estimate of Jesus evolved later, and in the Gospel he is an eternal being.

2:2 “And he is an atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.”

Jesus said not long before the end, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”<sup>cmlxxxviii</sup>

2:16 “For all that is in the world . . . comes not from the Father, but from the world.”

And from whom does the world come, if not from God? John speaks in the language of the Gnostic doctrine of the demiurge, ruling the evil world. One wonders how such flagrant dualism infiltrated the Christian canon.

2:19 “They [the Antichrists] went out from us, but they did not belong to us.”

John clarifies whom he means: “The one who denies that Jesus is the Christ; this is the Antichrist.”<sup>cmlxxxix</sup> John seems to mean Jews who have not converted to Christianity, or apocalyptic sectarians, like the followers of the Baptist, who did not accept Jesus. The latter is more probable, since John means some group deriving from the messianic movement.

2:21 “I write to you, not because you do not know the truth.”

Is the truth reduced to faith in Jesus? Do all Christians know the truth? Ironically, Jesus did answer the same question from Pilate.

2:29 “If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who does right has been born of him.”

Jesus could have been one among many righteous. There were many righteous people, and they were not the forefathers of all other good people, even in the spiritual sense. The author evidently considers Jesus a figure of old, since his contemporaries are “born of him.”

3:4 “Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness.”

Tautology: iniquity, transgression, is sin by definition.

3:8 “The Son of God was revealed for this purpose, to destroy the work of the devil.”

3:5 “He was revealed to take away sins.”

John probably did not think the idea through. If sins are the devil’s work, then people are not responsible for them, and thus they are not sins. The writer seems to believe that sins are the byproduct of the evil body, which is from God—unless John accepts the doctrine of the demiurge who created the world.

3:8 “Everyone who commits sin is a child of the devil.”

The devil is not in people, but they are his *children*. How can they convert to Christianity? Even those who eventually turn to Christianity come from the evil one.

This claim is unreasonably rigid. Only righteous men do not sin, but they are few, if any. Not everyone who sins from time to time is a child of the devil. Actually, quite the opposite is true: all people are the children of God.

3:10 “The children of the devil are revealed in this way: all who do not do what is right are not from God, nor are those who do not love their brothers.”

Faced with the ambiguity of what is right, John calls his opponents diabolic. Only in John the commandment of love comes naturally; it seems interpolated in Paul and Matthew.

3:12 “We must not be like Cain who was from the evil one and murdered his brother . . . because his own deeds were evil and his brother’s righteous.”



Cain was the son of Adam and Eve. How could he be “from the evil one”? Genesis mentions neither Cain’s evil deeds before he murdered Abel, nor Abel’s righteous deeds.

3:15 “Murderers do not have eternal life abiding in them.”

Moses, Joshua Ben Nun, and David, all generally righteous men, killed people, though whether they murdered is open to discussion. John’s excessive statement negates the possibility of repentance, for either physical or spiritual murder, such as the hostility to Christians implied here.

John holds Gnostic beliefs. His eternal life, here synonymous with the divine principle in general, dwells in almost everyone and not as a special blessing.

3:22 “And we receive from him whatever we ask.”

Jesus said, “When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases . . . for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”<sup>cmxc</sup>

3:24 “We know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.”

John claims that all Christians are blessed by the Holy Spirit.

How could Jesus give the spirit, if he himself received it only at baptism? He does not possess it as his own quality.

4:13 “By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.”

John may mean we are indwelt by only the essence unified with God and identical to God’s nature. But that is Jesus’ prerogative: “Just as the Father knows me and I know the Father . . .”,<sup>cmxcii</sup> “The Father and I are one.”<sup>cmxcii</sup>

Identical with God and the Holy Spirit, Christians are exalted in the same way as Jesus. If so, why do they not pray to one another instead of or in addition to Jesus?

4:21 “The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers also.”

That is, the love of neighbors is the consequence of the Christian’s love of God. To the contrary, 4:11: the love of neighbors springs from God’s affection for Christians: “Since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another.”

5:7 “There are three that testify in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one.”

This statement, absent in the earliest manuscripts, was interpolated to substantiate the doctrine of the Trinity, and to blur the pagan

continuation: “And there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood.”

5:10 “Those who believe in the Son of God have the testimony in their hearts.”

Even Jesus referred to outside testimony, that of John the Baptist: “You sent messengers to John, and he testified to the truth.”<sup>cmxciii</sup>

“Those who do not believe in God have made him a liar by not believing in the testimony that God has given concerning his Son.”

The slant is typical. John condemns anyone who knows such testimony, but does not believe it; yet the testimony is the object of doubt, since it may be false. The question is not whether to believe God’s testimony, but whether there was any testimony at all.

5:11 “And this is the testimony: God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.”

Eternal life from turning to Jesus is the object of faith, is it not? A postulated consequence is no proof. No person alive can validate the argument. Religions, of course, are never verifiable.

5:15 “And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have obtained the requests made of him.”

With almost mercantile reciprocity, John says Jesus leaves not a single wish of his believers ungratified. Christians obviously do not have all their wishes fulfilled.

5:16 “If you see your brother committing what is not a mortal sin, you will ask, and God will give life to such a one.”

But no sin is mortal if the sinner repents; and unrepented sins are not forgiven, regardless of any third-party intercession.

5:18 “We know that those who are born of God do not sin.”

Then what is 5:1 about? “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God.”

### ***The Second Letter of John***

1:10–11 “Do not receive into the house or welcome anyone who comes to you and does not bring this teaching; for to welcome is to participate in the evil deeds of such a person.”

The absence of good (faith in Jesus) does not equal evil. The nonbeliever in Jesus does nothing evil by coming into the house. John’s

demand is senseless and harsh and does not square with Paul's tolerance of interfaith relations.

Such sectarian isolation strongly resembles the Essenes.

### ***The Third Letter of John***

1:7 "For they began their journey for the sake of Christ, accepting no support from nonbelievers."

What of the famous story of Jesus' disciples violating the Sabbath by gathering grain? They were "passing by the field"<sup>cmxciv</sup> which likely did not belong to a fellow believer. At that point, who could "believe in" Jesus? He urged repentance and keeping the law and had in no way claimed divinity.

John probably misrepresents: he concocts a reason for refusing offers that never came. The refusal to take anything from outsiders is characteristic of the Essenes.

1:9 "I have written something to the church; but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority."

Diotrephes was a leader of the church: "He refuses to welcome the brethren and even prevents those who want to do so and expels them from the church." That an obscure local leader disregarded Jesus' disciple demonstrates little piety to the apostles. The reverence increased later when myths were transformed into history.

### ***The Letter of Jude***

1:1 “Jude, a slave of Jesus Christ and brother of James . . .”

It is doubtful that Judah-Thomas was the author of the letter. His Gospel is only a collection of Jesus’ sayings, but the choice of them characterizes Thomas vividly. Surely, the same person did not write this epistle. Further, he was always called Thomas, not Judah.

Matthew mentions no other Judas, except for Iscariot.<sup>cmxcv</sup> Luke mentions<sup>cmxcvi</sup> Judas, the brother of James, instead of Levy called Thaddeus in Matthew, possibly to clear a space for a known teacher with apostolic authority.

1:3 “I find it necessary to write and appeal to you to contend for the faith that was once and for all entrusted to the saints.”

Does Jude call himself holy? Jesus said, “If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true.”<sup>cmxcvii</sup>

An eyewitness would hardly have said, “. . . once and for all entrusted.”

1:4 “For certain intruders . . . who pervert the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny . . . Jesus Christ . . .”

Many Gentile sects practiced licentiousness, and some could have adopted the messianic legend of Jesus. The threat of the coming end of time could be used for ignoring moral constraints.<sup>184</sup>

Lechery was associated with pagan worship. The commandment usually translated *You shall not commit adultery*, actually prohibits defilement through fornication, participation in pagan temple rites of the *hieros gamos* type.

“. . . deny . . . Jesus Christ” could be a late insertion aimed at distancing from the sectarians. If they denied Jesus and thus were not Christians, why would Jude care about them?

1:5 “The Lord, who once and for all saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe.”

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<sup>184</sup> The Epicureans proclaimed, “Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we will die.” However, contrary to the common opinion and their Renaissance followers, they were highly moral people. They enjoyed things readily available, and did not try to create artificial objects of enjoyment in lechery. Lechery recalls the Hindu Tantra teaching of meditation through sexual ecstasy.

Jude alludes to the fact that those who left Egypt at twenty or more did not enter the Promised Land as punishment for complaining. They were not “destroyed” but died naturally at their time.

1:17–18 “You . . . must remember the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Jude does not include himself among the apostles.

1:18 “They said to you, ‘In the last time there will be scoffers, indulging their own ungodly lusts.’”

Jude quotes 2Pt3:3 verbatim. Evidently he lived much later than the apostles and thought the end was near. Even so late, orgiastic sects were sufficiently important in Christianity to warrant Jude’s critique.<sup>cmxcviii</sup>

Among the signs of the last days and the qualities of the false prophets,<sup>cmxcix</sup> Jesus did not include licentiousness. Jude may have seen some of the letters but perhaps not the Gospels.

1:20 “But you . . . build yourselves up on your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit.”

Even so late, Jude did not consider the Holy Spirit as a separate theological being, but supposed that every believer possessed it.

“. . . your most holy faith” shows that Christianity had already become an independent religion.

The letter is generally recognized as pseudepigrapha and draws on 1Enoch.

### *The Problem of the Texts*

In considering the relationship between Jesus and Christianity, the latter has to be defined. How shall we understand “Christianity”? Canonical texts? Orthodox, Catholic, or Protestant? Four Gospels or five? While there can be little reasonable objection to the *Gospel According to Thomas* (though the Catholic Church recently proclaimed it heretical), what about the dozens of other Gospels ascribed to prominent Christian figures like Peter, Philip, James, and Mary Magdalene? What about the *Acts of Peter* and other apostles and the apocalypses of Paul and James? Gospels were compiled by Justin Martyr,<sup>185</sup> his disciple Tatian,<sup>186</sup> and Nicodemus. Christians of various factions created more than two hundred<sup>187</sup> Gospels. Many are no more doubtful than the canonical texts. In a polemical tract, Justin refers to apocryphal texts more than a hundred times but not once to the canonical Gospels.

Moreover, many early texts have been lost. For example, Justin used the *Memories of the Apostles*. The evangelists used lists of citations, narratives of isolated episodes, and even collections of references to the Bible.

The term *gospel* was understood without the modern restricted meaning. Christians used “gospel” (Greek “euangelion”) to refer to any announcement of any good news. Paul called his message to the Gentiles a *gospel*. He called even the homilies of his competitors trying to win the pagans he converted so.<sup>m</sup> He points out the inconsistencies in those *gospels*.

Jesus’ disciples did not write the canonical Gospels in their present form. The tradition only presupposes authorship, though no Gospel is actually signed. Luke and Mark were disciples of the second generation, and did not know Jesus. John is named as author in the interpolated chapter. That leaves Matthew, but his original Gospel, if any, was far shorter than the modern edition and contained nothing distinguishing Christianity from Judaism. Matthew as we know it largely consists of borrowing from Luke who borrowed from Thomas and other sources.

What criteria establish a “Gospel’s” credibility? The *Gospel of Barnabas* reports that Jesus refused his divine origin and called himself a precursor of the prophet Mohammed and that Judas Iscariot was crucified, not Jesus. Although Barnabas is almost universally regarded as forgery, its geographical, cultural, and theological errors, substantiating this conclusion, are not excessive compared to those in the canonical Gospels. Against the assertion that a Muslim wrote Barnabas, the text deviates often

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<sup>185</sup> Defense (usually incorrectly transliterated from Greek as Apology).

<sup>186</sup> Harmony, a synthesis of the known Gospels.

<sup>187</sup> This number is not large compared to the volume of Buddhist texts. Only two canonical Gospels, the synoptics and John, speak of minor literary activity.

from the Quran. Called a parody on the Gospels' style, it may actually reflect the original literary style of evangelical works, before the heavy literary processing of generations of Christian scribes. In any case, the work should not be dismissed out of hand.

The Infancy Gospel of James is a relatively early text, written about the second century, which narrates wondrous events before Jesus' birth and is practically free from theology. This fact-filled text was of little interest to the Gnostics whose writings made no pretense to realism. The argument runs that since the Gnostics did not create this early and widespread Gospel as their characteristic myth, it is a forgery. Why should the canonical Gospel texts reflect reality any more closely? Only tradition says so, and because Christians at that time were not inclined to look at myths critically, the tradition was built on uncritical acceptance of mythological elements.

Egerton's Gospel, a recently found ancient fragment, contains an early text edited by John, yet the later *Gospel of John* is taken as authentic.

The existence of various Christian sects with different theological viewpoints is critical. Although both Gnostic Thomas and the Didache<sup>188</sup> with its clearly Jewish roots date from about the same period, they represent very different trends. The choice among Gnosticism, Judaism, or literalism is subjective and depends on one's beliefs and prejudices.

The *Gospel of Thomas* became popular after its recent discovery. Many people believe it contains original sayings of Jesus, undistorted by the Church. Thomas quotes profound, elegant sayings. Modern people might prefer Thomas' philosophy only because its Gnostic bent recalls popular modern Buddhism, unlike the apocalyptic teachings in John's Gospel. Indeed, our individualistic culture's lack of group attachments predisposes people to mystical doctrines. Whether Jesus' views were such, we do not know.

The Gnostics left many manuscripts; might they not be the more accurate witnesses, subsequently stripped by the church of their mystical content and interpreted literally? The teachings of the Jewish Ebionites and of the Gentile Christians are quite dissimilar. The early doctrines of the Marcionites, the Arian heresy, and other views contradict the canon, too.

The existence of early and authoritative texts with mutually exclusive theological viewpoints greatly complicates the formation of coherent Christian doctrine. Church leaders in the early and mid-second century cite texts resembling the canonical Gospels but seldom mention the Gnostic versions, so the Gnostic Gospels are labeled late forgeries. To expect church authorities to mention them, however, would be like a modern European leader quoting Mao Tse-tung. Why would early Christians quote the enemies with whom they struggled, especially when they did not have much to say in return? Moreover, the isolation of Gnostic communities meant their writings were unknown (or little known) to

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<sup>188</sup> Teachings of the Twelve Apostles.

literalist Christians. That the Church fathers do not cite the Gnostic Gospels does not necessarily impeach the Gnostics' credibility, and they should be treated on the same footing with the canonical works. How, though, can both contradictory views be true?<sup>189</sup>

Christian Gnosticism was not an insignificant backwater sect. The volume of literary creation speaks for itself: the number of Gnostic Gospels far exceeds the canonical ones. The formation of the canon, which stopped the creative activity of the literalists, is no explanation. The flow of Gnostic Gospels dried up about the same time, in the fourth and fifth centuries.

Gnosticism was common in the East until the eleventh century and was encountered in Europe even in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.<sup>190</sup> Later European mystics preserved many Gnostic views. Often dualist sectarians were considered not heretics but exemplary Christians. When the Inquisition persecuted the Cathars, local populations hid and defended them at the risk of their own lives.

Clement of Alexandria<sup>191</sup> confirms the existence of the *Secret Gospel of Mark*, esoteric teachings of Jesus not intended for the rank and file, in a private letter concerning the Christian sect, the Carpocratians. Significantly, he expresses no doubts about its authenticity. Clement viewed the mystic doctrine of Jesus as a matter of fact. Almost nothing is preserved from that teaching. No vestiges remain in the canonical Gospels. Papias, however, mentions the secret Mark early in the second century, qualifying it as close to the authentic sources.

As late as the early second century, Church leaders seemed not to know the canonical Gospels and more often quoted stand-alone *logia*. Are we to believe not one of the early second-century writers whose works survive knew of those landmark documents?

The canonical Gospels are compilations of stories and *logia* ascribed to Jesus and popular among Christians. The existence of the Gospels does not testify to their trustworthiness but only shows that such narratives circulated in the Christian milieu from the late first century on.

As a human science, theology operates on empirical evidence that defies formal definition. The only "empirical" proof in theology is faith. To establish theological hegemony, theologians draw on writings which substantiate faith, but to accept those writings as authentic and authoritative requires an act of faith.

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<sup>189</sup> The Talmud often presents conflicting views of the rabbis, but they merely interpreted the Hebrew Bible. The Gospels, however, relate contradictory doctrines and sayings of the founder.

<sup>190</sup> *Sister Catherine* tractate of German theologian Meister Eckhart, 14<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>191</sup> About 150 to 215. The first important figure of the Church of whom we have considerable information. Even so, his name, Titus Flavius Clemens, is odd: a Greek boasting the name of the recent Roman emperors.



The humanistic sciences resist single correct solutions, unlike mathematics or physics. Several explanations could be usually advanced. Everything eventually boils down to reasonableness. The sheer implausibilities and contradictions which explain many Christian beliefs would disqualify any secular scientist, should he advance anything of the kind. Many of Jesus' miracles could theoretically be carried off by a skilled hypnotist; but what is the chance that Jesus was one?

Christian theologians deny the plausibility of the Gospel of Thomas, principally because it shows traces of Gnostic editing. In many cases, however, the direction of the borrowing from Thomas by Luke and from Luke by Matthew is evident, and the changes along the way are readily explicable. To posit borrowing the other way is in most cases implausible. That the canonical Gospels are built in part on the foundation of Thomas or sources he used is hard to deny.

Any attempt to discover Jesus' original teaching by comparing the canonical Gospels is futile, since it is not possible to elicit the truth by comparing falsehoods. Since the documents have been unsystematically altered over a long time, cross-edited, and harmonized, how does one uncover the original text? A benchmark is necessary, a coherent system of axioms and assumptions about the original text. Such a system is effectively a the particular type of Christian faith which thus predicts the outcome of the supposedly scientific inquiry.

The principle of dissimilarity to establish the original sayings is absurd. The principle's premise is that the Gospel writers would not invent sayings that contradict the overall trend of the Gospel. From there, scholars leap to the conclusion that sayings which contradict the general message are authentic. More likely, editors hoping to "correct" Jesus made them up. Thus, numerous Gentile-oriented statements were inserted into Jewish Matthew. Further, the evangelists were amateur theologians who could readily contradict themselves.

The choice of the benchmark Gospel is critically important. Following proto-Matthew, we conclude that Jesus was a common Jewish teacher; following Mark, that he was a mystic; following John, a Gnostic; and so on with many possible shades. Once the benchmark is set, however, Gospel narratives with another slant are considered unauthentic. No objective criteria successfully privilege this Gospel over that Gospel. The designation of the fundamental, presumably authentic, Gospel is arbitrary, based on subjective views of what Jesus' teaching should look like.

Discussing Christianity without defining the acceptable biblical texts is pointless. Due to the ambiguity of source texts, Christian denominations cannot agree on many doctrinal issues. Jesus was either a man or an emanation, either an illusion or a legend. He was either a wise man, a divine figure, a supreme god, one of the gods, or the hypostasis of God. His coming was either the first, one of many, the last, or not the last. He either created a new religion or urged obedience to the Jewish law. He

either urged repentance or forgave sins or ensured the possibility of forgiveness for sins after his ascension. He justified either the Jews, everyone except the Jews, only Christians, only the initiated; or he saved no one but showed the way. He was Gnostic in John or almost orthodox in Matthew. The list of possibilities is long and provides a set of religious beliefs to suit any taste. I discuss the tradition of the canonical Gospels and epistles not because it is more trustworthy but because today that is what is understood as Christianity. In fact, there is no agreement even on that point: the Mormons have their own text.

Even the synoptic Gospels, considered as an interdependent body, differ considerably from each other much of the time. The descriptions of Jesus' birth, childhood, and resurrection have little or nothing in common. Likewise, the calling and sending of the disciples, whose names vary, differ in every account.

The sayings of Jesus appear in the Gospels in very different contexts. The teaching varies not only from Gospel to Gospel, but also from chapter to chapter within the same Gospel.

The origin of the numerous discrepancies is clear: editing and the uncertainty of the oral tradition, created by credulous and uneducated people. The preservation of even very large narratives by memory was commonplace in antiquity. Oral tradition underlay the immense volume of Judaic tradition written and preserved in the Mishnah. Rabbis dedicated their lives to memorizing and studying the material that was transmitted orally and quite accurately.

The propensity of early Christian authors to merge completely different texts compounds the confusion. The Didache, a collection of fragments dating from the first to the third centuries and considered authoritative among theologians, is an example.

Since the Church's institutional structure and doctrine developed differently among its geographically dispersed communities, an analysis of content is of little help for dating the texts. For example, when some sects admitted Gentiles to the Eucharist, others did not. Are the Gentile-admitting texts ancient and reliable or written by some uninformed member of a distant sect? Stylistic analysis is even less reliable, considering the different educational levels of Christian authors. A primitive style does not necessarily indicate an ancient text.

Textual evolution was uneven as well. Remoteness communities often depended on old manuscripts. When local scribes copied old manuscripts, they did not include recent textual innovations already available elsewhere. A text's lack of innovations may be unrelated to its age. Most of the ancient papyri that turn up are found far from the cultural centers. Their antique dating may be wrong.

A superficial survey of the texts gives the impression that second and third century Christian authors quote the Gospels in their modern form. Yet it is impossible to reconstruct the modern Gospels from those

quotations. Comparatively small textual differences among those citations, especially context, are very important. Matthew and Luke use much of the same material but they differ significantly, especially the contexts in which they set Jesus' sayings. Contextual subtleties not only alter theological meaning and ethical message, but also testify to the texts' imaginative, nonhistorical nature. The works of the Church fathers do not reveal whether they excerpted from the proto-Gospels or from the final versions.

Eusebius contains a considerable number of quotations from the Gospels,<sup>192</sup> but he wrote when the canonical versions already existed. His claim that he used authentic, early sources should be taken skeptically, since his aim was to establish the legitimacy of the Church and its sacred texts.

Eusebius resorts to outright forgery more than once. With Ireneus, he affirms the apostolic succession by tracing the bishops back to the apostles. Yet his account of the succession of Jerusalem bishops breaks off, allegedly due to the lack of data. One effect was to discredit the Jerusalem bishops when questions of precedence were hammered out.

The search for ancient manuscripts does not necessarily produce authentic texts. On the contrary, different versions of Matthew circulated among even the few Christian sects in Judea, the Nazarenes, Hebrews, and others in particular. There were even more versions of Mark.

As the Church and its tradition stabilized and moved to suppress dissent and diversity, many documents were lost. Two or three versions incidentally prevailed and evolved into the canonical versions.

The search for authenticity presents problems at both ends of the time span. In the fourth century and often only after bitter dispute, an arbitrary selection of Gospels, letters, and other tracts was adopted and declared definitive. Before then, especially during the second and third centuries, the documents were so numerous that affirming authenticity was impossible. Still earlier, in the first century and at the beginning of the second, there was a vast array of oral tradition, aphorisms, metaphors and logical formulas, parables, and prototexts. The entire collection of material belonged to religious folklore, the unwritten works of many authors which lacked the stamp of authenticity.

Heated disputes between Jews and Christians from the first through the third centuries evidence the existence of Gospels quite different from the modern ones. Otherwise, the Jews could end the dispute by demonstrating the Gospels' historical, geographical, and scriptural inconsistencies.

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<sup>192</sup> Eusebius (meaning "pious"), about 260 to 339, student and adopted son of Pamphilus, authoritative historian. According to modern notions of ancient Christianity, his works are fantasies, distortions, and outright lies.

The search for orthodox tradition is futile. It is impossible to distinguish authentic Christianity from heresy. Various early texts teach various kinds of theology. The canonical tradition was imposed hierarchically. When state support for orthodoxy in Europe, principally the teaching of the Roman church, weakened during the Renaissance, the Reformation opened the way to a proliferation of sects. There is a Christian denomination for just about any set of theological beliefs that can be wrested from the texts.

The length of the canonical Gospels does not add to their credibility. The pseudepigraphic Gospels, created until diversity was largely defeated in the fourth century, are far shorter. Early protocanonical texts were amended and expanded over time. Further, many texts making no pretence to revelation or historicity are even longer than the Gospels. *The Shepherd of Hermas* and the *Acts of Thomas* are very long, and we may conclude that the longer a text is, the more of it was invented. That is a problem with the long canonical Gospels.

Since early Christians did not have adequate, if any, institutional scribal facilities, proliferation of the long Gospels would be very cumbersome. Likely, they appeared sufficiently late when copying was no longer a problem.

The triumph of Christian orthodoxy in the fifth century and the literalist trend within Christianity in the third and fourth centuries resulted in efforts to finalize the texts before they were distributed. The editors would naturally want to add additional information from other texts they knew.

The Church had struggled with the question of the canon long enough. When the official edition was about to appear, available texts may have been added hastily and without scrutiny so that nothing was omitted.

If the texts were subject to such heavy editing, why are the contradictions so numerous? There are, I believe, two principal reasons. On the macro level, the contradictions between Paul and Acts in history, and also between Luke and John in theology were so great that harmonization was unlikely. Mystical Pauline Christianity, though inconvenient for the Church, was not expunged, thanks probably to its popularity. Second and more important, the editing was done by a multitude of independent scribes and editors. Since harmonization would have required a unified effort, the situation did not allow for it; minor changes and amendments were possible but not wholesale revision. Trying to reconcile interior conflicts in the material usually produced worse contradictions. Each redactor entered his own personal corrections, so that the number of variant readings increased rather than decreased. When the Church accepted a more or less fixed text, the controversies were frozen and enshrined in holy writ.

The canonical Gospels are commonly accepted as credible. But why? Even in the second century, Christian authors, such as Luke in the prologue to his Gospel, report many versions. Origen also mentions various

versions of Gospel texts, as well as numerous corrections, insertions, and cuts.<sup>mi</sup> At the beginning of the second century, Papias described Matthew's Gospel as a collection of Jesus' sayings, a far cry from the modern text and closer to Thomas. The Gospel writers are unknown and authorship ascribed rather arbitrarily. Only John's text actually contains an interpolated claim of the author's discipleship. As late as 160 C.E., Justin Martyr does not mention the names of the evangelists.

That none of the canonical Gospels has a known author is strange, because stylistically they are close to historical narratives, which usually have acknowledged authors. Even pseudepigraphic works usually were attributed to some popular figure in the body of the text. The lack of any authorship whatsoever suggests that a text was so obviously a compilation that contemporaries thought no claim of authorship was needed.

The forgery in the canonical texts is not surprising. Credible evidence about the historical basis of Christianity was scarce before the third century and began to appear only after Eusebius began fabricating Christian history in his fourth-century *Ecclesiastical History*. Some time in the second and third centuries, the canonical texts started to take shape out of the mass of legends, prototexts, and alleged Gospels.

Until the fourth century, every subsequently canonical text was considered by some faction as fabrication. In any case, Christians recognized the Gospels as holy books only toward the turn of the second century, when the story of their origin was largely forgotten.

The establishment of the canon was arbitrary. The bishops of the Nicene Council in the fourth century were far from in agreement about which Gospels should be considered orthodox, to say nothing of precisely which version. Other leading theologians disagreed wholly. In the second century Justin and his disciple, Tatian had favored integrating and harmonizing, several known texts, while Marcion of Sinope wanted only Luke's Gospel—with all the references to Judaism cut out. Those scholars lived nearest the events, and their doubt of the narratives' credibility is critically important. The theological arguments over the texts between badly prepared bishops continued at least until the fifth century and, puzzlingly, blazed up again during the Renaissance. The intellectual quality of the discussion may be seen from Ireneus' argument that the number of Gospels is four "because there are four sides of the world and four main winds."

The best known Gospels were canonized, but popularity bears no relation to authenticity. Versions were only versions, and one was the best known version only among the party that won by a vote and not by any theological or philological superiority. Other parties preferred fundamentally different texts. Even the four received Gospels present incompatible theological doctrines and facts.

Hence the search for the "historical Jesus" is understandably tentative. With no historically reliable facts to guide him, he has nothing to

go on except texts sacred from the point of view of this or that Christian sect. Research needs a text; the text influences the outcome of the research. Matters are even worse for a believer: faith determines the choice of a certain Gospel; then the chosen Gospel determines the nature of faith. Any simultaneous, objective analysis of all the Gospels reveals their contradictions. A theorem cannot be proven if we proceed from a system of mutually contradictory axioms.

No one today trusts the arguments of the most authoritative medieval scientists, to say nothing about those of antiquity. Nonetheless, Christians implicitly trust the opinions of ancient, scarcely educated, possibly deluded theologians who chose the creed and established the canon. The confused nature of their beliefs appears everywhere. After Tertullian criticized the pagans and the Gnostics, he accepted Montanism and criticized the Roman Church.

In the typical argument in favor of the revelations' trustworthiness, "Mary burst into tears and said to Peter, 'Peter, my brother . . . do you think that I have secretly made it up myself or that I am lying about the Savior?'"<sup>mii</sup> Christians often mistake the origin and nature of the Gospels, believing them either divine revelation or an eyewitness record, or at least the narrative of such experience. Actually, the Gospels are typical of ancient literary historiography. The historian usually poses a particular didactic problem, such as proving the connection between a ruler's behavior and his military success or asserting one city-state's advantage over another's. Any such "historical" account argues some point of view. It is not an objective report in the modern sense. The writer is relatively free to invent episodes and to compose speeches of various people in light of his own perception; relying on the Gospel sayings is therefore too credulous. Until the Middle Ages, adapting or distorting quotations to fit one's own views was normal. This practice of "subjective historiography" should inform all study of the Gospels. Even the most orthodox Christian theologians do not deny a mass of insertions and distortions.

Finding the most ancient texts does not solve the problem: as early as in the second century Celsus wrote of Christians continuously changing their sacred texts to answer philosopher's arguments. Second and third century Christian theologians, who read the texts before they became canonical and acquired the aura of holiness, describe them neutrally as anthologies.

Apostolic forgetfulness cannot explain their multiple contradictions, the more so since forgetfulness is incompatible with the life-transforming experience they encountered.

The Gospels' brevity compared to the length of the historical treatises of that epoch is also surprising. Why would the evangelists omit a detailed presentation of the facts? Were there no other events worth describing? One of Paul's letters, Romans, is almost the size of the entire Gospel of Mark.

The Gospels have not been accepted as holy writ as the result of revelation, not even as the result of theological discussions. The choice of texts was dictated by the ability of theologians to persuade the Roman emperor. His support allowed the Church to enforce Athanasius' side against the Arians who rejected Jesus' divinity, and to establish Christianity as a separate religion with its own god. Pagan Constantine<sup>193</sup> supported the concept he understood—of the corporeal deity on earth.

Imperial states commonly accepted new religions<sup>194</sup> without hierarchical infrastructure in their lands, establishing state-controlled religious administration from tabula rasa instead of falling under the sway of existing religious bureaucracy. The Christian creed was scarcely known before Rome adopted it, fertile soil for growing a new theology in the course of the ensuing century. Having borrowed much from the cults originally, Christianity further assimilated many pagan rites and traditions on its way to becoming the official religion in order to attract proselytes.

St. Augustine claimed that the Holy Spirit inspired the textual differences so Christians could search for the real, historic order of events.<sup>miii</sup> This was hardly the evangelists' design.

Justin and Eusebius suggested reconciling the Gospels by combining the characters and events so that all possible versions would find a place in the harmonized results. Thus, the full account is the sum of all the Gospels. It then follows that Jesus attended two different Last Suppers, and after the crucifixion, the women saw somewhere between six and eight angels, and so on at great length. Since one evangelist mentions  $x$  angels at the resurrection and another  $y$ , Eusebius says they totaled  $x + y$ . That does not work. How can one combine two or more different birth accounts, without having Jesus born a number of times? The Gospel texts cannot be synchronized.

Augustine developed a more sophisticated approach. Each evangelist described the same things, he maintained, but in his own manner. Factual differences are superficial, since the Gospels are identical on the spiritual level. Since this concept dismisses the differences in the Gospels a priori, argument is impossible.

John contradicts the synoptics practically point by point. One explanation is that John was Jesus' disciple, hence more reliable than Luke or Mark. But what about Matthew and Thomas, also the disciples? The contradictory Gospel readings are explained as the result of forgetfulness, of poetic license, of the need to see events from all sides. The last is not a

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<sup>193</sup> Constantine was only peripherally interested in Christianity but legalized the religion of his mother Helen, an avid Christian. Constantine was not baptized until just before his death, since only Christianity held conversion to be a condition of salvation. Christians may have invented the whole story of his last-minute conversion anyway.

<sup>194</sup> Likewise Russia accepted Christianity.

joke. Luke reports two angels inside the tomb; Matthew, one outside; Mark, one inside. The explanation is that in each case the witnesses did not notice the other angels—never mind that the evangelists were not witnesses at all.

The New Testament is in no way a continuation of the Hebrew Bible, all of it dated no later than the fifth century B.C.E., except the book of Daniel, written in the second century B.C.E. The lapse between the Hebrew Bible and the NT is from three to seven centuries, during which many biblical interpretations and myths accumulated, some of which resemble NT concepts.

At some point, Jewish and Christian theology diverged. The Mishnah, the Gemara, and the Midrash became the main tradition of the rabbinic Judaism, while the Gospels became the tradition of early Christianity. Both the Mishnah and the Gospels interpret the Hebrew Bible, each in its own way. Consequently, the Gospels should be compared with the Mishnah to define their connections to Judaism, not with the Hebrew Bible, as is usually done.

Scribes carefully copied the Hebrew Scriptures. Variant readings are few and insignificant. The NT often distorts passages to prove the Gospel writers' points.

The Gospels are dated toward the end of the first century on the basis that neither Paul (the 50s or later), nor 1 Clement (not before the 90s) or Acts (90–120) refer to them. Conclusion: they were written after Paul and after the author of Clement. But the authors of the Gospels, in their turn, do not use Paul. Dating the Gospels by the absence of references does not work.

Hermas, the brother of the mid-second century bishop of Rome, Pius I, wrote the extremely popular *The Shepherd*. It was not considered for the canon since many people knew Hermas personally and decided that to rank his work with the Gospels would be improper. According to modern scholarship, however, the synoptics were edited at about the same time, and John probably had not yet been written. Since everybody knew they were contemporaries of Hermas, what explains the different response? Perhaps, the Gospel prototexts were deemed very ancient, despite editing by contemporaries, and enjoyed a reputation for great historical significance. Such an interpretation would be in line with the hypothesis of the Essene origin of some Gospel prototexts.

By the third century, the Gospel stream started to dry up, in part due to the emergence of an extensive literature citing them and making adding to them difficult. Moreover, the Church gradually isolated the Gnostics, the most active Gospel writers. Further, as in any messianic movement, including social ones, enthusiasm tended to fade. Church administrators replaced ecstatic preachers. Theological creativity dwindled. Enthusiasts were little inclined to rational analysis and serious theological exploration, which accounts for the low quality of the texts they passed on. Finally, tradition became petrified and the glorification of Jesus and the



apostles reached such heights that it became much harder to claim that one's writings equal the other Gospels.

Disbelieving prophecies, scholars consider predictions of the destruction of the temple evidence that the Gospels were compiled after 70 C.E. Descriptions of the persecution of Christians move the date yet farther forward. Mistakes in dating Herod the Great's reign and the Roman census probably mean the author lived much later than either event, but the evidence of late insertions in the Gospels argues that descriptions commonly considered historic (and useful for dating the texts) were likely inserted later. Dating prototexts reliably with no historical background is impossible.

For convenience sake, this book preserves the traditional transliteration of personal and geographical names. Modern readers would be confused encountering *Jeshua ha-Notzri*, *Shimon Cefa* and *Shaul* instead of Jesus of Nazareth, Simon Peter, and Paul. The Greek translation *Iesous* of the name *Joshua* is artificial, made to get the hermeneutic value of the name *Jesus* to equal 888, the sum of the numerical values of the letters in the Greek alphabet. Peter's name *Cephas* has the value 729, the number of days and nights in a year.

Many fourth-century texts written immediately before or after the canon closed have been preserved. When we repair to the second century, however, the texts of the few surviving fragments vary noticeably. The variations increased towards the fourth century when three basic types of texts prevailed: Antiochian and Constantinopolitan, Egyptian, and Origen. The distortions became fixed in later editions, and *Codex Vaticanus* differs extensively from the quotations by Christian writers in the second-to-fourth centuries and from recently discovered papyri.

The number of differences is huge: the Joint Committee of the United Biblical Societies (UBS) reports that differences in basic Greek texts<sup>miv</sup> range from 52% in the Apocalypse and 56% in the Gospels, to 77 % in the Pauline epistles. Most are minor discrepancies, yet according to an optimistic estimate, matters of doctrine account for at least 5% of the variance.<sup>mv</sup> Five percent is small but could easily involve an error, which an individual Christian makes today with regard to his salvation. Differences with early second-century texts may be greater. The UBS version was created mostly on the basis of third- to fifth-century texts which appeared after the separation of Christianity and Judaism, after the main heresies were suppressed, and after the canon was closed.

The recently discovered papyrus P<sup>75</sup>, supposedly from the turn of the second century, agrees with the fourth-century *Codex Vaticanus*. The hypothesis that *Vaticanus* was based on one of the popular versions later made canonical and coincides with the P<sup>75</sup> version is quite reasonable. In other words, the mere existence of a text in the third century does not prove its authenticity or that it was unique in the first century. The most that can

be said is that *Codex Vaticanus* was not invented from thin air and is a faithful copy of one or several of the texts available then.

The Western text of the NT cited in Tatian's *Diatessaron* was quite unlike the canonical version. Should we use Tatian's ancient text, perhaps distorted, or a somewhat later one, also distorted compared to the original or the prototexts but closer to the canonical version? Should we prefer the Syrian and Latin translations of the earlier versions to later ones which are closer to the canonical Greek versions? The question is of practical importance, since the Western texts are often notably Judaic.

Thus, each Christian can choose a text suiting his religious taste. Consider that nobody would buy a computer with hundred conflicting manuals. But Christians accept a religion which includes conflicting instructions on reaching salvation. The believers either get accustomed to a particular text rejected by others or formulate their own theology and select a text to match it.

The history of Jewish scripture is different. Even in scholarly publications about the Hebrew scriptures, textual variations are almost entirely absent. With the exception of strange texts like the Samaritan papyrus, no more than 150 varying letters may be counted, and they are often the mistakes of early scribes and noted in the footnotes of the Masoretic edition. A person who turns to Judaism knows the precise texts.<sup>195</sup>

One response to the obvious contradictions in the Gospels is considering Christianity as a mystery gone public, and analyzing only the spiritual meaning of Gospel texts. If that approach is accepted, contradictory texts are no longer a problem, beyond argument and even discussion. Thus, the content of the Gospels loses significance since only the inner, mystical meaning counts, and anyone could imagine any meaning. A universal religion must achieve some consistency if people are to act coherently.

According to tradition, Matthew was written by a disciple of Jesus or by someone who was close to him with respect to cultural and religious fundamentals. The Ebionites, a Jewish sect which probably followed Jesus most directly, used a Gospel resembling Matthew. If Matthew seems doubtful, later texts are more so.

Luke says he did not know Jesus and wrote from texts prepared by others. When comparing divergent accounts and sayings from Luke and Matthew, we should trust the latter more. When Luke coincides with Matthew, there is no need to spend time on Luke.

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<sup>195</sup> It cannot be excluded, however, that there were more variants originally, in the fifth century B.C.E., and only orthodox version was preserved toward the second century B.C.E., from which time the earliest manuscripts possibly date.

John is almost certainly late pseudepigraphy. Chapter 21, which claims the apostle John as author, was written after the body of the Gospel. The Hellenistic features of John make the likelihood of a Jewish author—a disciple of Jesus—slight.

Mark was written a considerable time after the events it depicts by someone who did not know Jesus. The author of Mark was not a Jew and knew nothing of Judaism, Jewish culture and customs, or the geography of the country. Mark's numerous errors with those matters make supposing the rest of his Gospel is reliable difficult. Since Peter would hardly have made such mistakes telling Mark his story, we may suppose that Mark invented many episodes in his Gospel, or borrowed them from doubtful sources. Taking Mark as the source of Matthew would be destructive for Christian tradition. In that case, Matthew was not written by a disciple of Jesus but is a flawed copy of the already distorted Mark, a distorted version of the dubious account of someone who neither knew Jesus nor claimed any revelation of his own.

Paul wrote before the evangelists and in any case irrespective of them. He says nothing about the supposedly historical Jesus except for the most general indication that he was killed somehow. Paul did not develop his theology from Jesus' sayings but made it up from scratch.

Matthew borrows extensively from Luke who in his turn borrows from Thomas, so probably only a small part of Matthew was his own. Later editorial additions filled the text out to the present size of the Gospel.

A little detached from this list of forgeries is the Book of Revelation. Eusebius deemed it false. Today the consensus is that the book is Jewish pseudepigraphy, slightly edited by a Christian scribe. No wonder its events are concentrated around the town of Megiddo, the ancient site of wars between Egyptian and Mesopotamian armies, called Armageddon.

### *The Language of the Gospels*

The original language of Gospels was Koine Greek, with possible Aramaisms explained by borrowing from Jewish sources. The term *gospel*, “good news,” exists both in Greek and Hebrew.

It is not likely that Matthew was written in Hebrew, since he commonly follows the Septuagint, which suggests a Greek author, although a late editor may explain the citations. Other Jewish Gospels, Ebionites and Hebrews, also reached us only in Greek which creates a fundamentally important problem; even taking the Hellenization of those times into account, the population of rural Galilee and Judea were culturally isolated. Assimilation was restricted administratively: the family or students of the Jewish Patriarch Gamliel I needed special permission to study Greek philosophy and language.<sup>mvii</sup>

Nearly all the Qumran scrolls are written in Hebrew and Aramaic, which suggests that Greek was not the language of Jesus or the apostles. Luke has the Roman tribune ask Paul, “Do you know Greek? Then are you not the Egyptian . . . ?”<sup>mvii</sup>

The discovery of Greek coins in Israel is at most evidence of economic relations, not of cultural assimilation. Coins with the *Ivdaea capta* insignia depict two human figures, something Judaism prohibits though the Jews used coins with owl images that represent Athena. During Vespasian’s reign, the Romans did not deliberately confront the Jews even after the war. The memorial coins circulated in Rome and do not prove the use of Latin in private life in Judea. No original Judean coins bear inscriptions in Greek. The bronze *prutah* from the war period has inscriptions in Hebrew.

The Romans stamped their Judean coins, including money supposedly issued by Pilate, in Greek, but he evidently cared little what was written or pictured on the coins. A peculiar jug, *simpulum*, used in Roman religious ceremonies and unknown to Jews adorns one. The words were not significant, either □□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□ (of Emperor Tiberius) or □□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□ (Julia of the Emperor). The Jews did not have to understand.

According to Josephus, Jewish rulers of the time often took Greek names, which, supposing he is correct, proves that the elite knew Greek, not the society at large, since commoners in Josephus’ works almost universally have Jewish names. That rulers gave their children Greek names, however, is puzzling, even if they were under a Roman protectorate. Greek names were not prevalent in Rome. Josephus may not be entirely correct.

Many phrases in the Gospels allow for different interpretations, like “the kingdom of heaven is taken by force” or “coming with violence.” Some meanings are impossible to pin down, like “Give us our daily bread” or “Give us today tomorrow’s bread” or “Give us today the bread for

tomorrow.” The meaning of still other words has changed, affecting how we understand the original text. For instance, the Greek *hupokrites*—which is how the Gospels call the Pharisees—has gone from *interpreter* to *Actor*, to *hypocrite*. A number of words allow for ambiguous translation; the word used to address Jesus as *Lord* may also be translated *sir*.

The Gospels are full of distorted quotations from the Septuagint, riddled with errors, some of them gross. According to legend, Ptolemy ordered seventy-two Jewish sages to prepare it in the third century B.C.E. Christians used it widely through the seventeenth century, and the Orthodox Christians – even now.

The Jews said this about translation: “The day when the Torah was rendered into Greek was a day of mourning for Israel, . . . Because the Torah cannot be translated exactly as it should be.”<sup>mviii</sup> Hebrew word roots consist of only two or three letters and give rise to many homonyms and translation blurs shades of meaning and relations to other words and notions.

The argument for the early availability of Greek translation hinges principally on two documents. One is a letter of a certain Aristeas. Now generally recognized as a fabrication, many scholars believe it reflected a genuine tradition. That is doubtful, since pseudo-Aristeas tells the myth of a pious pagan king who came to the Jews seeking their wisdom for his people. Another is the prologue of the apocryphal book of Ben Sirach. This reference is even sillier, as the author clearly means Aramaic translation of the Hebrew Bible, not Greek. Nothing dates the Septuagint before the late first century when the Christians started referring to it. If the citations of the Hebrew Bible in the Gospels are interpolated, then the evidence for the Septuagint is much later. Paul cited the texts considerably different from the Septuagint. Justin Martyr considered Ptolemy, who ordered the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures supposedly three centuries earlier, a contemporary of Herod the Great. The Septuagint shows fully aspirated Hebrew consonants (Calneh – Halanni), but aspiration is a mark of European pronunciation; among the Semitic languages, Arabic is still largely non-aspirated.

Nor was there much need for translation. Jews traditionally figured Bible translations missed the sacred meanings of the word of God given in Hebrew. Even after the Jews became dispersed among other nations and spoke different languages, they attempted no translation for their own use until modern times, when secular non-Hebrew speaking Jews started to see the Tanakh out of largely historical interest. The Jews in ancient Alexandria spoke predominantly Greek, but hardly abandoned their mother tongue to the point that they could not understand liturgies. There is merit in the suggestion that a translation was needed for proselytes, especially would-be converts to Judaism, but efforts at conversion were short-lived, introduced by the Pharisees at the start of their rise to power late in the first century

B.C.E.—but prohibited in the second century C.E. Why, then, produce a mammoth translation in the third century B.C.E.?

The Septuagint consistently translates *ger* as "proselyte" rather than the correct "stranger." By the time of translation, no aliens were living among the Jews, and proselytes were conceived as the only class of *ger*. Jewish missionary activity started with Pharisees in the first century C.E. or, at most, B.C.E. People of the late first century C.E., when Jewish missionary activity had peaked and aliens overwhelmed the Jews in the Land of Judah, were most likely to redefine *ger* as proselyte. Such translation in the third century B.C.E. is incredible.

The Septuagint was prepared by non-Jews, non-scholars, unacquainted with Hebrew to the extent of misunderstanding the basic meanings taught compulsorily to Jewish boys, probably sectarians with their own agenda, since many distortions seem purposeful. One possibility is that the Essenes or the Christians created the Septuagint and much later than commonly thought, starting in the late first century and slowly continuing for perhaps another three hundred years. This scenario squares well with Josephus' otherwise inexplicable claim that there was no translation<sup>mix</sup> still at the end of the first century C.E. That would explain the Christian authors' unfamiliarity with the context of biblical quotations.

The Septuagint could be a bad translation or a sectarian text. A sectarian Qumran text of Samuel, closer to the Septuagint than to the Masoretic edition, supports the sectarian origin. Other Dead Sea Scrolls closely match the Masoretic version, thus the Septuagint could not be produced by the Qumranites. The Essenes, however, were lax with the texts: many grammatical errors and Aramaisms crept in in their scrolls, and the Essenes possessed a lot of pseudepigrapha. Some of them who joined the Christians might produce the Septuagint.

### *The Chronology of the Gospels*

Accurate dating of proto-Matthew is fairly problematic. To date it after 50 C.E. based only on the absence of references to the Gospel in Paul may be incorrect. Paul refers to nothing, facts or sayings of Jesus, that circulated in the form of oral tradition or prototexts. They would have been available in Judea at least. Probably Paul was not interested in the details of Jesus' life, which may explain his lack of piety toward Jesus as a mythical figure.

Neither does dating Matthew post-70 C.E. only because it describes the destruction of Jerusalem seem likely.<sup>mx</sup> Those passages may be either late insertions or another generic "desolation apocalypse" so abundant in sectarian texts. A quote of the Gospel from the Talmud, giving exile as reason for abrogating the law,<sup>mxii</sup> however, supports a post-70 date for even this early proto-Gospel.

At least a portion of the text may be assigned to the end of the first century C.E. at the earliest, accounting for references to both scribes and Pharisees in the same context. Today we do not know exactly who the scribes (*soferim*, mentioned also in the Talmud), were. Recall Ezra's title, *Scribe of the Law*.<sup>mxiii</sup> The term could possibly mean *compiler of something*, not necessarily implying a professional scribe.

Scribes were literate people who knew the Scriptures and the law and probably acted as paralegals. If the scribes wrote official papers, they would have been disliked. The Talmud accuses court scribes of demanding excessively high payment.<sup>mxiii</sup> If the scribes are to be identified with the Pharisees, we may suppose that by the time the Gospel was written the Pharisees were in power – probably after the destruction of the temple.

The Gospel of Matthew did not appear before 70 C.E., and was well known by the end of the first century. Other canonical Gospels are much later, and dating of Thomas is completely unknown.

### *Logical Fallacies of the New Testament*

Rabbis have criticized New Testament theology for a long time. A host of good books appeared in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, criticizing its historical accuracy as well, and demonstrating the textual falsifications. I prefer a third approach: a demonstration of the New Testament's invalidity according to its own logical fallacies.

As is always the case with humane studies, formal logic is useless due to the inherent absence of an all-inclusive set of axioms and strictly defined terms. We can describe an event but not explain it unambiguously. For any number of facts or empirical observations available, there are several equally plausible explanations. To put it in another way, any fact can be explained more ways than one, and explanations prevail only by their subjective persuasiveness, although subjective perception is based on empirical experience, and so the whole process is more rationalization than pure reason. New information can nullify one, some, or all of the previous explanations.<sup>196</sup>

Judaism has always accepted the impossibility of unambiguous interpretation. Methods of interpretation vary and produce different results. Though theological debates produced only one official opinion, others were studied and respected.

The Gospels require belief in many implausible events. The events purported to prove the divinity are themselves a matter of faith. Trying to cut through that vicious circle, Christianity effectively converted these events to axioms, which can be neither explained nor proven, creating what is known in logic as an excessive set of axioms. That happens when theorems, which should be proven but cannot, are declared axioms uncritically and create a contradictory set of axioms. That is what happened with Christianity: miraculous Gospel events, instead of substantiating faith in Jesus, required a supporting belief of their own, and often belief in one event is not easily compatible with belief in another, such as the virgin birth and the descent from David.

Any religion is based on faith. Judaism, however, reduces issues of belief to a minimal set of axioms, the Ten Commandments, from which the principles of spiritual, private, and public life are deduced logically. Christianity bases even the least statement on faith. Christianity lacks

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<sup>196</sup> Mathematicians understand the principle with ease. Suppose a number of dots is plotted on two-dimensional diagram. We can construct an infinite number of polynomes, each passing through every dot or very near it. The polynomes are the hypotheses that explain the facts.



theorems; all statements are axioms. Such an approach deprives man of the right to think; belief replaces reason and common sense.

Excessive axiomatization leads to inconsistency of axioms, some contradictory of others. If theorems are deduced from a restricted set of postulates, some may be wrong, but the system as a whole may remain valid. By relying only on faith, Christianity made itself extremely vulnerable to criticism based on logic. The great minds like Augustine and Aquinas logically interpreted—often twisted—the Gospels, but did not resolve their internal contradictions.

Faith, accordingly, was proclaimed above logic: “Believe, for it is absurd!” But what is the value of a faith based initially on the contradiction of common sense and all principles of reason known to man? Even Judaism, the most antireductionist religion, still asserts that Torah speaks the human language. While we cannot fully comprehend God, we can – and must – understand the received scriptures.

Christianity may be substantiated using the rabbinic methods of interpretation, except perhaps the trinity with which many Christians also disagreed. Early Christians had nobody to build such proof and were compelled to demand faith in their every affirmation. When Christians, such as Paul, attempted logical reasoning, it was limited to sophism and dependent on arbitrary redefinition of terms. Paul enjoyed another typically Sophistic stunt, expanding some Judaic concept, like Adam's sin, beyond absurdity, then using the absurdity to demonstrate its fallacy.

There are also many plain logical errors in the Gospels, including recursion, statements from unproven premises, and juxtaposition of homographs. Jesus' teaching cannot be isolated from the later corrections without belief in some postulate of what that teaching looked like—which creates a vicious circle. For example, if we believe Jesus was dualist, then the Gnostic Gospels are probably accurate; if we think he was mystic, then Paul's views seem more to the point; if he was a devout Jew, then we should opt for the Gospel of Matthew. In other words, in order to know which texts are true, we need to know Jesus' views, which can be discerned only from these same texts, thus forming a logical circle.

### ***Boiling the Gospels Down***

One need not be a theologian to see that the Gospels are forged. Though their descriptions of main events differ, they coincide in minor episodes and in individual pericopes. The texts were formed by joining separate segments arbitrarily, then interpreted, commented on, and minimally backgrounded by each evangelist in his own way. The Gospels would have been structured differently had a disciple spoken about his saintly teacher. They lack personal details about Jesus and fuller background to clarify events. Memoirs simply are not written in the Gospels' style.

Is the trustworthiness of the texts so important? Christianity made a trap for itself by creating the supposedly historical sacred books: if the reported events are true, a man of sense does not need faith to convince him of Jesus' divinity. Indeed, why rely on faith if the NT is true, since the reliable text is sufficient for a purely logical acknowledgement of Jesus' lordship? Christians have to believe not in Jesus' divinity but that their sacred texts are credible and prove his divinity. The reverse assumption, that faith in Jesus leads to faith in the texts, is odd since we do not know anything about Jesus except what is written in the NT. Extracanonical references are either rejected by the Church, or they are as contradictory and unreliable as the canonical texts.

Assuming the texts are unhistorical, what is there to believe in? In that case we know nothing at all about Jesus.<sup>197</sup> Without the texts we do not know if he existed or what he did. Moreover, even if we believe in Jesus without the Gospels, what are we to do next? Without the Gospels we do not know his teaching. How can such faith be acted upon?

Maimonides correctly argued that faith is possible only together with understanding. If one must abandon the intellect to believe something contradictory to common sense, what is the sense of such faith? Conclusions about religion without understanding are impossible and cannot influence people's conscious conduct. Should faith turn people into thoughtless, mechanical believers, believers in false teachings made up at random?

Perceiving doctrine in Christianity is difficult. The first requirement is faith in the divinity of Jesus. Let us grant that. What next? Shall we wait another two millennia for the Second Advent? Shall we not sin? But what is sin in Christianity? According to Paul, the list of sins is unrelated to

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<sup>197</sup> That the concept of fictitious characters was absent in antiquity is misrepresentation. There was no novella as a literary genre, but fictitious characters were prominent; recall Socrates' opponent in Plato's discourse, the *Laws of Athens*. The concept of fiction was very different from the modern. The writers considered characters of myths and rumors, and ghosts real.

religion, being an arbitrary mix of ethical maxims, some of them questionable; where do sins come from, if there are no requirements, like the Jewish Law to breach which is sin? The earliest Christian congregations, James' in Jerusalem and Paul's in Asia Minor, observed totally different rules: being a Christian, as a practical matter, meant nothing.

The famous commandment to love a neighbor was not invented by Jesus: it is included in the Hebrew Bible. The commandment is mentioned in passing in the Gospels, and not at all - by James. Christians disregard Jesus' explicit instruction to observe Jewish commandments. The commandment of love is unworkable (no person can love everyone) and too flexible to be practical (one can steal out of love for his children). Many reasonable people accept the commandment as guideline; that does not make them Christians.

Faith in Jesus leads to salvation; but faith means accepting and following the commandments, according to Jesus. In Judaism, however, keeping the commandments is sufficient for salvation, regardless of belief in the messianic mission, divinity, or resurrection of Jesus. Thus, Christian conditions of salvation add to the traditional Jewish ones, making obtaining salvation more difficult and excluding otherwise deserving people.

Christianity is not really a religion since it lacks directions for action: observance of some law, meditation, *etc.*<sup>198</sup> It is built on the struggle for faith in Jesus. Beyond that, there is nothing else; hence the proliferation of various sects: as long as one accepts that Jesus rose from the dead in whatever form, any belief that includes that is Christianity.

People of common sense immediately attacked Christian doctrines. The noted early critics were not theologians, but lawyers, since problems of logic appear on the surface.

In a different situation, those doctrines would have been ridiculed and soon forgotten. Christian enthusiasm, however, coincided with the cynicism produced by disillusionment with other cults, the need to unite the huge Roman Empire with one religion, and the need for spiritual renewal as the Romans watched their state decay. Once made the state religion, Christianity suppressed its opponents by administrative methods.

Search for the historical Jesus does the Church an ill turn. Once the miracles and the falsified birth/resurrection narratives are abandoned, we are left with a small-town Judean preacher. A dubious and contradictory supernatural image is better than that. The discovery of the genuine historical Jesus would spell the end of Christianity as a religion.

Only the resurrection can authenticate Christianity, not obscure evidence of a Jewish preacher about whom nothing certain is known. Yet we know of Jesus' resurrection only from the falsified Gospel accounts.

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<sup>198</sup> The Church arbitrarily compensated the lacuna with Code of the Canon Law, Catechism, an so on.

Even Celsus protested that Christianity could not be effectively discussed, since the Christians could not define precisely what they believed. Only in the early fourth century do the foundations of the Christian faith become relatively fixed. Even now controversies about problems greater than the notorious “how many angels can dance on the head of a pin” remain. For instance, Orthodox and Roman Catholics cannot agree about Purgatory, a concept on which many people base their hope for salvation.

When Christian theologians argued the most important aspects of belief—whether Jesus was God (Arius), whether there is one God or Jesus is another (Marcion), whether Christianity is based on Judaism, whether the Gnostic view of the world plunged in evil beyond God’s control is correct—the Church coerced consensus on fundamental issues.

Christianity’s foundations were not postulated by a prophet, but rather by a follower, Paul. Later Christian theologians, like the anonymous Gospel writers and the Church fathers, have even less authority. Paul’s instructions about circumcision, kosher food, Sabbath observance, and Church formation directly contradict the Hebrew Bible, to which Christians subscribe. The changes are profoundly political: simplification and separation from Judaism. Paul built a religion on humility, anguish, and eternal guilt.

One generation from Jesus, when the epistles were composed, not even the Gospel prototexts existed, or Paul would have referred to them. The canonical Gospels in close their present form cannot be dated before the second century, when the events described were mere tales. The Gospels were eventually adapted to the already existing Christian religion and tradition. They do not form a new theology but rather are a compilation of Hellenistic, Hindu, and pagan teachings superimposed on the Hebrew scriptures.

Paul may have heard of the Christian Gnostics, but he lacked first-hand knowledge of their texts. Maybe he preferred Jesus to the rest of the Gnostic pantheon, since he was a Jew himself. Maybe on hearing about Jesus from the Gnostics he sincerely believed the divine incarnation had occurred. In any case, the opportunist Paul discerned a possibility to preach a teaching that was quite new for his audience and at the same time easily recognizable and familiar from Greek myths. An old thing under a new guise often appeals to the crowd. As the saying goes, every new thing is a well-disguised old one.

Subsequent cross-editing and harmonization gradually drew the Gospels closer and provided historical background and tradition and looked like the real thing.

*Disagreements in the Texts*

Birth:

Matthew: born in Bethlehem of Judea under Herod the Great, the slaughter of the innocents, flight to Egypt, return to Nazareth.

Luke: born in Bethlehem during the governorship of Herod Antipas, lived quietly in Nazareth.

John: not born in Bethlehem<sup>mxiv</sup>

Where did Jesus teach?

According to Matthew, Jesus came to Jerusalem immediately before the crucifixion, which corresponds to the predicted triumphal appearance of the messiah.

In Luke, Jesus visited Jerusalem in childhood often, then immediately before the crucifixion.

John's Jesus visits Jerusalem often, and his last visit was triumphal.

What was Jesus?

A descendant of David;<sup>mxv</sup>

Acquired divinity at the resurrection;<sup>mxvi</sup>

The image of God and possibly the creator of the world;<sup>mxvii</sup>

Not a man, but similar to men;<sup>mxviii</sup>

A man who acquired the Holy Spirit only at baptism;<sup>mxix</sup>

The Good Shepherd;<sup>mxix</sup>

The rejected prophet;<sup>mxxi</sup>

The spiritual messiah;<sup>mxvii</sup>

The rejected (crucified) messiah;

The messiah;<sup>mxviii</sup>

The son of God in the spiritual sense;<sup>mxviii</sup>

The Son of God in the literal sense;<sup>mxv</sup>

Someone like a son of man in the sense of the supernatural figure of Dan 7;<sup>mxv</sup>

The Suffering Servant;<sup>mxvii</sup>

An angel,<sup>mxxviii</sup>

The supreme angel,<sup>mxxix</sup>

Someone similar to Melchizedek,<sup>mxxx</sup>

Jn: Light, Word, Wisdom,<sup>mxxxi</sup>

One of the *Advocates*,<sup>mxxxii</sup>

The essence of God.<sup>mxxxiii</sup>

The atonement:

Mk10:45: The crucifixion was a deliberate act of redemption;

Acts13:28: unfair condemnation by Jews;

Acts20:28: to establish the Church;

Rom3:24: the atonement and justification.

The resurrection:

The shorter version of Mark lacks anyone's association with Jesus;

Paul mentions only the legendary details;

Matt28:10: The disciples go to Galilee to meet Jesus;

Jn20:19: Jesus communicates with his disciples in Jerusalem and again later;

Acts1:3: showed himself to many people during a long time.

Coming of Jesus:

Incarnation plus promise of advent on the day of judgement in the synoptics. Second Coming during the life of the present generation.

John presents the divine Jesus as an illusion of a body. No judgment, since believers and unbelievers are already separated. For a long period, the Comforter will be sent instead of Jesus.

Was John the Baptist Elijah?

Mt11:14: yes;

Jn1:21: no;

Lk1:17: resembled Elijah with spirit and power.

To whom did Jesus appeal?

Mt10:6–7: to Israel excluding the Samaritans;

Mt15:24: only to Jews but also to believing Gentiles;

Rom15:8–9: initially to the Jews, but afterwards through grace to the Gentiles;

Jn5:24: to everyone.

Who will be saved?

Hebrew scriptures: those who have turned to righteousness, that is, obey the law regardless of past sins;

Sanh13: Those whose conduct ran between righteousness and evil will be saved, because God's kindness tips the scale (school of Hillel) and even the criminal, if he confesses.<sup>mxxxiv</sup> Rabbi Eliezer, son of Josiah the Galilean, presents a more forceful formulation: salvation shall be provided for, even if the person's righteousness achieves one thousandth.<sup>199mxxxv</sup>

2Ez9:36: Jews who have sinned will not be raised from the dead, even for judgment;

Dan7:13–14: Forgiveness will be granted only on the day of judgment, when the Son of Man will be given the power;

Dan7:10: will be judged according to deeds written in the books;

Mt5:3–12: the poor in spirit, the gracious, the clean-hearted, the peacemakers, and those persecuted for the truth, any one quality being enough;

Lk16:25: the poor;

Mt5:19: Salvation will be graded, and those saved will occupy different places in the kingdom of heaven;

Mt5:19: who keeps Jesus' commandments;

Mt19:17: who keeps the Judaic commandments;

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<sup>199</sup> This is a curious attempt of digitalization, the oldest conceptual one I have encountered. Presumably the main problem of cybernetics is presenting real-world analog events in binary form. In music recording, for example, it led to the increasing sampling rate: every sound is disassembled into a large number of very short intervals, each expressed by logical ones and zeros. The same problem was encountered by theologians, who had to express complex behavioral patterns of people also in binary form, as good and evil. This dissection of a person's merits into a thousand "intervals" is exactly the approach employed by modern computer engineers.

Mt 6:14: those who forgive others;

Mt9:6: present generation of believers;

Mt12:31: All sins will be excused, except blaspheming the Holy Spirit;

Mt18:3: those who are like children;

Mt19:23: difficult for the rich;

Mt19:24: impossible for the rich;

Mt19:29: those who left their homes to wander in the name of Jesus;

Mt25:37: those who practice charity;

Mk16:15–16: those who believe Mark’s Gospel and have been baptized;

Lk21:28: during the Second Coming;

Jn5:24: Christians are already saved and do not come under judgment;

2Cor5:10: Christians come under judgment with the burden of their sins;

Lk22:31–32: believers (the Satan will separate the wheat from the chaff, but Jesus has prayed for the apostles not to lose faith);

Jn3:5: only those baptized with water and spirit, correspondingly, only those alive in the messianic era, or those baptized with water and pretending to possess the Holy Spirit;

Jn3:18: Believers are saved;

Jn 5:24: those who listen to Jesus and believe in the one who has sent him;

Jn5:29: everyone who does good;

Jn6:54: those who participate in the Eucharist, possibly in its mystical sense;

Jn8:51: those who follow Jesus’ instructions;

Acts3:19: those who repent and convert;

Acts13:39: justification by faith, regardless of the commandments;

Acts15:20: It is enough for converted Gentiles to be innocent of defilement by fornication, eating the meat of strangled animals, and drinking blood, as well as doing to others as they would have others do to them;



Acts26:20: repentance and deeds “worthy of repentance”;Rom3:25: Only previously committed sins shall be forgiven;

Rom6:8: resurrection to new life “here and now” as a result of faith in Jesus;

Rom7:17: mysticism: bodily sin does not hinder rescuing the spirit;

Rom10:9: declaring that Jesus is Lord and believing he was raised from the dead;

Mt10:32: those who preach Christianity;

Rom11:7: Only the chosen shall be saved;

Rom11:26: All Israel will be saved, but all Israelites will become Christians. Many manuscripts of 2 Ezra, edited by Christians, add, “And all believers will be saved by their faith.”<sup>xxxvi</sup>

Rom14:10: God will judge, though some manuscripts replace God with Christ;

2Cor5:10: Jesus will judge;1Cor6:9–10: except for debauchees [, homosexuals, thieves, bribe takers, drunkards, boasters, *etc.*;

1Cor9:25: ascetics;

1Cor11:29–30: all but those who greedily eat the bread and drink the wine of the Eucharist;

1Cor11:31: Christians who judge themselves;

Rom14:10: All Christians will be stand judgment, and their earthly judging habits are irrelevant [your addition to 14:10];

Mt7:1: perhaps some Christians who do not judge others;

1Cor11:32: except those punished by Jesus;

1Cor15:2: those who remember Paul's sermons;

1Cor15:22–24: Everyone will be saved, but Christians first;

1Cor15:41: Everyone will be saved differently and glorified in his own way;

2Cor 5:10: only those who have done good;

Gal5:22: those who respected moral standards;

1Thes4:14: only believers in Jesus;

Jm1:12: who endure temptation;

Jm1:12: who love God;

Jm5:9: Christians who do not grumble against others;

Jm 5:12: those who do not give oaths;

Jm5:15: those for whom the Church's elders pray;

Jm5:16: those for whom other Christians pray;

1Pet2:19: those who suffer undeservedly;

1Pet4:17: All Christians should fear the judgment, which will bring them deplorable consequences and worse to others;

1Jn1:7: all Jews or all Christians;

1Jn1:8: those who confess their sins;

1Jn2:2: everyone;

1Jn2:12: all Christians, but only Christians;

1Jn3:15: except murderers;

ScJm2:6–7: those who are full of knowledge;

ScJm7:9: so few that a quarter of the kingdom of heaven is still free;

Did2:2: except those who violated standard injunctions against abortion and sorcery;

Did4:6: those who practice charity.

### Acquiring the Holy Spirit:

In Judaism, the Holy Spirit is granted rarely and then only to individual people and just for a time. As a rule, it appears in prophecies and sometimes in supernatural actions. Man can aspire to approach the Spirit of God but will never be one with it.

Mt3:16: sent to Jesus at baptism;

1Cor15:44–45: acquired by Jesus after the crucifixion;

Jn1:4: Jesus is the embodiment of the spirit;

Jn14:16: The spirit is not identical to Jesus but abides in the heavens and can come independently of Jesus;

Jn16:7: Jesus sends the spirit;

Gal4:6: God sends the spirit, but it belongs to Jesus;

Jn20:22: acquired by the disciples prior to Jesus' ascension;

Acts2:4: acquired by the apostles after the ascension;

Acts5:32: inherent only in Christians who obey Jesus;

Acts6:3: present in many Christians;

Acts9:17: Christians may impart it to others at will;

Rom8:9: inherent in all Christians;

Rom8:10 + 1 Cor 3:16: Jesus is the Holy Spirit;

Rom8:11: The spirit belongs not to Jesus, but to God;

Rom8:16: After conversion to Christianity, holy and human spirits coexist and associate with each other in people;

1Cor6:17: The mystical transcendental spirit pervades both Jesus and Christians;

1Cor6:17: acquired by Christians at the moment of unification with Jesus;

1Cor12:3: inherent in everyone who calls Jesus Lord, regardless of faith.

#### The Kingdom of Heaven

Mt10:7: will soon come for everyone;

Mt24:36: No one knows when it will come;

Mt13:44: a mystery, accessible to everyone here and now;

Mk4:11: a mystery only for Jesus' initiated disciples.

## *Falsification of Classical Texts*

Historical references to the events of Jesus' mission do not necessarily negate the hypothesis that they were fabricated. Doubts about the authenticity of classical texts arise not only in relation to religious writings; historical literature may also be unreliable to a much greater extent than is commonly supposed. Only a small number of works by early authors are extant today. Could some of those works with significance for Christians have been tampered with? Quite possibly.

There were workshops specializing in forged texts. How can we identify forged texts? By the style of characters? Finding one matching ancient manuscripts was easy. Binding? Easy to replicate. Cross-references to other books? Creative scribes could make insertions in different texts step by step and pass the changes on. Style? Some gifted writers were involved; remember the vague claims of Petrarch's connection with the forgery business. Uncovering a good literary forgery is difficult, sometimes impossible. Not all forgers were as clumsy as the author of the Gospel of Pilate (which many people considered authentic), whose story of Pilate's repentance may have been useful to the Church but was totally unbelievable. In those days when books circulated minimally, scribes could easily supplement the texts with paragraphs, episodes, entire chapters, introducing the required content into earlier texts. Thus, much of the historical literature supporting the Christian story may be inauthentic, inaccurate, or outright forgery.

### **Josephus, the Man and His Writings**

Much of early Christian history depends on the writings of the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, which are often the only source of our knowledge of certain details of Judaism in the first century C.E.

First, let us look at the man himself. Who was he? How credible? His biography is puzzling. In *The War* and the *Life of Josephus*, he gives varying accounts of his career. Moreover, providing a detailed narration of one's own life is very unusual for an ancient author. It might have been used to bolster the "historical reality" of a pseudo-author. Josephus makes some mistakes in his own genealogy in his *Life*. He first relates his Asamonean descent by his mother's lineage and then proves it by his father's descent. Considering that his *Life* was written as a polemic against critics of *The War*, we would expect Josephus to clear up earlier errors instead of heaping on new ones.

The mistake in genealogy is curiously reminiscent of a similar problem with the life of Jesus, whose Davidic descent in Matthew is built upon his father's, who theoretically, according to the Virgin Birth myth, was not related to him. Luke, correcting Matthew's error, established his

messianic lineage through the mother. The correlation between Josephus and Luke's Jesus does not end there. As was the case with Jesus in Luke's Gospel, Josephus lectured the rabbis even while a child, although that is implausible.

Josephus claims that Vespasian captured him and took him captive to Rome. Why would Vespasian do that? Josephus says Vespasian did not believe his prediction that Vespasian would be emperor and even forgot it. Did he keep Josephus for a triumph? The Jewish war was more revolt than war, for which he could not anticipate a triumph. Moreover, Josephus was not sufficiently noble to adorn a triumph as a special captive.

If Josephus was held for ransom, perhaps not by Vespasian but by a soldier of lesser rank, he would not have been held long: according to Jewish Law, captives should be ransomed on a priority basis. Josephus was supposedly from a wealthy family and, not important enough for a triumph, would have been bought back quickly.

Although Vespasian and Titus were the most famous members of the Flavius clan, Josephus could have acquired the surname Flavius from other branches of the family in circumstances other than he reported, and later attached his story to Vespasian. Famous Christian writer Clement, a Greek, puzzlingly had surname Titus Flavius.<sup>200</sup> Quite possibly, Josephus could have fashioned his affiliation after the example of Tacitus, who owed his status to Flavii: Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian.

Vespasian Flavius would probably have to be noble to receive command of an army. That Julius Caesar displaced a certain *tribune* Flavius suggests that the clan was not aristocratic.

The Talmud makes not a single reference to Josephus, though it mentions Roman emperors, sectarians, and apostates; and the rabbis would have hardly ignored Josephus out of sheer hatred as someone they considered a military traitor.

Actually, Josephus was not considered a traitor. Many Jews escaped Jerusalem during the siege and came to the Romans. Rabbi Yohanan Ben Zakkai was praised for escaping Jerusalem and approaching Vespasian to ask permission to establish an academy, thus preserving the Jewish oral tradition. Josephus did not appeal to Rabbi Yohanan's example, though he badly needed an excuse for his own behavior. The real author could be unacquainted with the Jewish story.

The notion of treason seems to have developed in the Middle Ages, when the issue of loyalty to newly created artificial entities like city-states was urgent. The ancients largely lacked such attachment by arbitrary affiliation. Greek mythology routinely extols treason as slyness. Josephus approvingly described what we would consider an exceedingly immoral

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<sup>200</sup> A comparative study of Josephus' and Clement's styles would be most interesting, and perhaps revealing.

act: a Roman soldier murdered his friend to survive by deliberately jumping onto him from the burning temple wall and crushing him.

Josephus gained popularity in the tenth century when Jews became acquainted with his works in a Hebrew edition, *Josippon*, which significantly included only sixteen books of *The Antiquities of the Jews*, omitting the historical section. Not that Jewish scholars were not interested in the history of Jesus' time: they read *The War* in the same collection. Perhaps the rabbis doubted the authenticity of Josephus' writings. How else may we explain the omission of such a large part of Josephus' works in the first Hebrew edition?

Josephus' Jewish credentials are doubtful. Contrary to the available evidence that some Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, which Paul regularly cites and which was needed for proselytizing, existed in the first century C.E., Josephus asserts in *The Antiquities* that there was no translation except for the Pentateuch, and closely narrates the Scriptures. Such an act by an educated Jew is inexplicable. Josephus' narration follows the Qumranic version<sup>mxxxvii</sup> and Septuagint, not Orthodox Jewish texts known from Masoretes.<sup>201</sup>

Let us now consider Josephus' manner of writing history and some of the mistakes he makes. Josephus describes the Herod family in detail. Many scholars believe he drew heavily on a source, perhaps the *Universal History* of Nicolaus of Damascus. How could an educated person from the ruling elite be so unfamiliar with his country's history in the preceding hundred years? There were fewer disciplines then, and local history was an important subject, alongside religion and philosophy.

His description of Herod the Great has the plot of a classical Greek tragedy, where events develop in a fateful, nightmarish chain, in which the main characters, perhaps not bad people themselves, are unable to change their destiny.

Josephus writes that millions of Jews gathered in Jerusalem at Passover. Neither the excavations in Judea nor the size of the area defined today as ancient Jerusalem corroborates such a claim. The number exceeds the city's current population, which lives in multi-story buildings in an area much larger than the ancient city. The impossibility of such throngs is clear, not only from archeological finds but from many other arguments; for example, without effective medical treatment, an epidemic would have destroyed the whole population. Such crowds would dwarf Roman army.

Like Luke in Acts, Josephus describes implausibly large Jewish communities in the Diaspora. Only the largest cities of the Diaspora—Antioch,<sup>202</sup> Damascus, Alexandria, Rome—were larger than Jerusalem.

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<sup>201</sup> Luke also followed DSS. Acts 7:14 Seventy-five Hebrews went to Egypt. DSS is same, but Massora numbers seventy people.

<sup>202</sup> The significance of Antioch, now identified with a town of 28,000, may be vastly exaggerated.

Since Jews are described as a large part of the population there, Diaspora Jews outnumbered the population in Judea and the vicinity. If that exodus took place after the Babylonian exile, people would be mostly assimilated by Josephus' time and certainly lose their connection with Judea. If it started with the active Hellenizing of Judea in the second century B.C.E., such a huge number of people could not originate from tiny Judea.

Preposterous exaggerations of population characterize ancient authors generally and some medieval ones, but usually when they describe foreign territories. Josephus, on the other hand, should have been acquainted with Jerusalem firsthand, should have had access to the records of Augustus' census in Judea, provided such a census actually took place. His *Against Apion* confirms the existence of critics. The Romans, who had just won the war in Judea, would hardly have believed that the city was larger than their own. No contemporary writer who knew anything about Judea would have made such exaggerated claims in a work intended for Romans.

Delbruck's calculations permit a good estimate. He proved that the size of the armies Herodotus mention was commonly inflated, sometimes perhaps as much as three hundred times (Xerxes' Persian army) and usually not less than thirty times. Thus, the Jews assembled in Jerusalem for Passover may be estimated at 90,000 at most, relating well to archaeologists' estimates of the city's population of 40,000, and perhaps as few as 10,000 to 20,000 people, not the 2,700,000 Josephus claims.<sup>mxxxviii</sup> Accordingly, the number who died in the siege may be reduced from 1,100,100<sup>mxxxix</sup> to 10,000 or so. Those figures make sense in view of the fact that the large Essene sect numbered only four thousand. Josephus and the early nonmilitary historians await their own Delbruck to reduce vastly inflated numbers to reality.

In the foreword to *The War*, Josephus asserts that its Aramaic original (nonexistent in my opinion) was written for the Parthians and Babylonians. Contemporary history, however, attributes to them no interest in the events in Judea. Why should he write for such a minor audience, if it existed at all, when the saga was evidently so useful as Roman propaganda? The Roman Empire depended on cultural appeal to a great degree and used state propaganda.

Then there is the question of Josephus' style. To assume that the first edition of *The War* was addressed to anyone except a large Greek-speaking audience makes no sense. Would not his poor Greek, euphemistically described as *original*, shock the aristocrats and philosophers for whom he wrote? Can the story of a translation of Josephus' original into Greek have been invented in order to explain the rough language? Could the highly educated Josephus not judge the Greek translation of his own book? Is it not odd that the writing style veers repeatedly from reasonably good to primitive?

Supposing Josephus wrote for a Roman audience, why in Greek and not in Latin? He claimed he read many Roman sources, so he knew the language well. Why was a Latin translation not made immediately?

Josephus' repeated use of the pronoun *their* to refer to Jews—"their holy scriptures," "their country,"—also raises doubts about his origin. If that were a means to distance himself from the Jews, who recently staged a revolt against Rome, he would not have written as an apologist for the Jews. Third-person address was common, but the third person here, as in the Gospels, might also mean that the author was a Gentile. Josephus also called Jews *ivriim*, Hebrews, like Tacitus and Pausanias, though this name was not common among Jews and elsewhere.

The style of *Against Apion* – compilation of references to ancient, often obscure authors – is extremely unusual. Greek and Roman historians rarely consulted written sources. A very similar work, however, did exist – also defending the antiquity of the Jews. The book, *Discourse to the Greeks*, was written by Tatian, a prominent second-century Christian.

Josephus refers to Theophrastus for the proof that Tyrians knew the Jewish oath, *korban*.<sup>mxl</sup> Josephus mentions no other oaths in the context. That oath, which allows to circumvent civil obligations by dedicating the property to the Temple, was severely criticized by Jesus, hardly a coincidence. Theophrastus lived in the fourth century B.C.E., and the Pharisees made the *korban* oath prominent only three centuries later.

With a less significant text, scholars might have long ago conceded that Josephus' work was a compilation from various sources. Could the writings of Josephus in whole or in part be pseudepigrapha from the second and third centuries, probably by a Greek Christian? In that case, we would know practically nothing about Judea in Jesus' times.<sup>203</sup> That would be odd, for we know of other provinces from many independent sources.

The modern view that Josephus borrowed extensively from the extant writings of others indirectly confirms the hypothesis that his texts are spurious. He need not have been an eyewitness, and the author of books attributed to Josephus could just as well have written in the third and fourth centuries, if not even later. A few references by Christian authors of the second and third centuries, and perhaps by Porphyry in the third, even if not forged, do not allow us to ascertain whether the text of Josephus which existed then is the same as the modern one. The earliest extant copy of his writings dates from the ninth century.

Eusebius would hardly have taken the risk of creating such significant interpolations as the *Testimonies* if Josephus' works had been as well known as they should have been among early Christians. Scholars agree about the existence of numerous interpolations in the Slavonic version of Josephus, using the present Western edition as a benchmark. But

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<sup>203</sup> He is the main source even for the famous historians of Jews, like Graetz and Marx & Margolis.



is it plausible that no one in Western Europe wanted to amend Josephus? Likely there were quite a few takers, though there is no redaction with which to compare the standard text to reveal the fabrications. Stylistic analysis does not always pinpoint small insertions in a poorly written, inconsistent narration. Besides, Josephus' various stylistic peculiarities could have been borrowed from lost prototexts and therefore fail to reveal scribal insertions.

Josephus' attitude toward many figures is radically different in *The War* and in *The Antiquities*. Ancient historiography was largely about moralizing, the accounts serving to exemplify certain maxims and present their authors' views. Since the writer's convictions are usually relatively constant, his opinion about historical personages does not normally vary much. We know from the autobiographical *Life* that Josephus had critics who should have picked up on this and numerous other discrepancies immediately.

Stylistic analysis indicates that the author of *Antiquities* did not draw on the *War*, at least not importantly. Josephus creatively invented a description of Herod's reign by consulting sources and recasting them in *Antiquities*, instead of recycling his own account in the *War*. The natural assumption is that two different authors wrote *War* and *Antiquities* independently, based on the same sources. The markedly different language of the two books only supports that view.

Josephus' contradictions violate even the loose standards of Greek historiography. Although we admire the reasonably rigorous Thucydides, most ancient historians fit the facts, their explanations, and especially the speeches to their own views and to the purpose of narration. Massive inconsistency in the same writer's books, however, is quite unusual.

Josephus evidently aimed to rehabilitate the Jews in Roman eyes, ascribing the revolt to the cruelties of Roman prefects. The repression he depicts, however, was not excessive by Roman standards.<sup>204</sup> One need only recall the charges Cicero laid against Verres, Roman governor of Sicily. In defense of Milo, Cicero argued that attacks by robbers in Roman suburbs were common. We have no reason to suppose that things changed for the better toward the end of the first century C.E. Josephus, however, who supposedly lived in Rome long enough to write the books, describes bitter conditions in Judea, where he claims things got so bad that gangs appeared even in rural areas. That explanation of the unrest in Judea would find little sympathy among the Romans.

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<sup>204</sup> Actually, we can only speculate what Roman policies were toward the nations under their control. There are many mentions of abuses, but probably as many of peaceful and relatively tolerant rule, as in Greece and Egypt. The latter policy makes more sense, since the Romans relied on their subjects' cooperation, keeping only minor forces in local colonies.

Josephus claims that eight thousand Roman Jews approached the Emperor Augustus<sup>mxli</sup> when Rome was a small town by modern standards. Jews were not a large portion of the local population. The figure of eight thousand is doubtlessly mythical—a fact that would be evident to his audience. Everything leads to the supposition that Josephus did not know the details of the Jewish War. Put another way, the author of the pseudepigrapha did not know anything about the backwater Roman province and knew little about Rome as well. He was accustomed to some safe area, perhaps a small Greek town.

Josephus tends to justify the Romans, treating the military intervention as a campaign to restore peace in a troublesome province. That explanation morally justifies the aggression, and many ancient historians resorted to it. Thus Strabo lauds Roman aggression against Gaul, thanks to which the Gauls could live in peace.<sup>mxlii</sup> Likely Josephus' account reflects the facts even less than the prevailing moral-historian convention. Even the title of his book, *The Jewish War* seems analogous with Caesar's famous *Gallic Wars*.

Early references to Josephus are almost entirely missing, raising the possibility that second and third century Christian writers' references to Josephus were interpolated to support his authority. Both Origen and Eusebius quote Josephus incorrectly, which confirms his lack of contemporary reputation. Otherwise readers would have spotted the mistakes. Consider, for example, the probably distorted version of the execution of James, the brother of Jesus. According to Origen and Eusebius,<sup>mxliii</sup> Josephus said the destruction of Jerusalem was a punishment for James's death, yet there is nothing of the kind in Josephus. The claim further contradicts Eusebius, who said the Jews' misfortunes started with the execution of Jesus.<sup>mxliv</sup>

Even the fourth century official Latin version of Josephus, attributed to Hegesippus,<sup>205</sup> extensively misrepresents the facts and the author's judgments. No other edition was known, since the contradictions would have been noted. Yet the variant manuscripts were not destroyed after the appearance of Hegesippus, a fact that confirms Josephus' lack of influence and the absence of a commonly accepted version.

Eusebius relates that Josephus' statue stands in Rome, but Eusebius' accounts are not credible. He had good reason to argue *for* Josephus' existence, since so much of the Christian story depended on him and Christians forged the direct testimonial accounts of Jesus in Josephus.

### *Other Roman Writers and Their Relation to Josephus*

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<sup>205</sup> It is commonly agreed that attribution to Hegesippus is incorrect, and the modern reference is to pseudo-Hegesippus. A more or less accepted opinion is that the work belongs to St. Ambrose.

The immensely learned Origen seems unacquainted with Josephus. He asserts in *Contra Celsum* that forty-two years passed between the death of Jesus and the destruction of Jerusalem. From 33 to 70 C.E., however, are thirty-seven years, not forty-two. Significantly, Origen's statement appeared in a polemical tract, where such mistakes would have been spotted immediately.

Hippolytus describes the Essenes<sup>mxlv</sup> as Josephus does and extends him a bit without referring to him directly. Hippolytus had no reason to omit a reference which would accredit his own account. Either he doubted Josephus' authorship or he used the same anonymous source from which a parallel interpolation in Josephus was made.

Tacitus, describing the Jews in *Histories* V, at first reveals no knowledge of Josephus' works, although Josephus wrote only a few years before him and was supposedly famous in Rome. Whether the sources from which Tacitus took his version of the Jews' historical origin were rumors or the works of other authors is not certain, but his views accord with Manetho and critics like Apion. Nothing indicates Tacitus knew of Josephus' extensive rebuttal. Tacitus' pathetic anti-Jewish rhetoric is suspicious. Judaism was respected<sup>206</sup> in those days, with proselytes flocking to it, probably because it closely resembled the Stoics' philosophical notions of an abstract God and a rigorously organized life. The vigorous critique of Judaism more likely came from a Christian editor adding to Tacitus.

Commenting on historical events, Tacitus mentions what is also found in Josephus but gets his data elsewhere. Thus he writes, "The kings were either dead, or reduced to insignificance, when Claudius entrusted the province of Judea to the Roman knights or to his own freedmen"; that is, he doesn't know whether there were kings in Judea alongside the prefects, something he would have known had he known the Josephus corpus—or any other Jewish writer.

Tacitus' description of the Jews is unusual. He describes Titus' military operations in a style radically different from his usual one. The account of Civilis' actions in Germany is stuffed with details. He does not, to the contrary, elaborate on Titus' deeds, only sketches them in a few general strokes. He dedicates one paragraph to Titus at most. The balance is a description of Judea, Jerusalem, and the war, with specific details from Josephus: prophecies of the destruction of Jerusalem, Josephus' predictions of Vespasian's and Titus' ascent to power, *etc.*

Indeed, if we remove this odd and seemingly forged account, Tacitus says almost nothing of the famous war in Judea, so glorious that Titus built an arch to commemorate his triumph.

The fifth book includes a description of Judea, though it would more naturally fit before: the second book previously mentions Judea as a military theater. The topic should have interested Tacitus considerably. In

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<sup>206</sup> Mild contempt and carping, like Horace's, notwithstanding.

*Histories* I he writes that he owed his social status to the Flavius family—Vespasian, Titus, Domitian—exactly like Josephus. The Vespasians should figure extensively, and Tacitus would not have forgotten to describe Judea in the second book. Since he did not, describing the province must have seemed unimportant to him.

Digressing characteristically from his discourse on Titus, Tacitus writes that he is about to relate “the last days of a famous city,” Jerusalem, a description far too high flown for the Roman who depreciates foreign cultures. How could he know, furthermore, that those were the city’s last days—an apocalyptic idiom? When he wrote, Jerusalem, although destroyed in 70 C.E., existed and probably had been rebuilt, as was customary with the frequently destroyed cities of antiquity. Its final destruction in antiquity came after the suppression of the Bar Kochba revolt, and even then it survived as Aetolia Capitolina. The city’s days ended only from the Christian viewpoint; for both Jews and Romans, it lived.

We may conclude that Tacitus or even his late Christian interpolator knew nothing of the events Josephus reported, at least nothing significant. Nor did he know of Josephus or his works.

Add the evident parallels between Luke’s Gospel and Acts and Josephus to the similarity of style, the literary historiography, and the similar motives—praise of Judaism and Jews, in Luke’s case to provide a respectable basis for Christianity, and the historian and the evangelist have more in common than incidental resemblance. Could the same person have written both works? Could the same editor have amended both extensively? That would explain why the Romans knew nothing of the “Josephus” texts, supposedly extant in the second century, while the Christians depended on them.

### *Irregularities in Josephus’ Texts*

Today Josephus is the main, and many times the only, source of information about Judea in those times. Nonetheless, oddities show. One of the strangest is his account of the defense of Masada. The Jewish heroes, entrenched in a well-fortified stronghold, opted for suicide instead of death in battle. Josephus apparently strove to show the Jews to the best advantage, but the Romans would have considered their behavior cowardly.<sup>207</sup> Even in the modern world, where sparing oneself the pain of battle lacks some of its ancient tint of dishonor, Israeli historians describe such behavior during the 1948 War of Independence with contempt. The books of the Maccabees say that Jews honored death in battle.

The story of Masada has parallels in Greek history: the Xanthians committed suicide when Marcus Brutus besieged their city. A still more

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<sup>207</sup> Suicide is irreligious both in Judaism and Greco-Roman philosophical doctrines.

precise parallel, though the event occurred far later, is the siege of the unassailable mountain fortress Montsegur in France, where the army of the Inquisition besieged Cathar heretics after destroying their strongholds in Languedoc. They, too, committed suicide, quite unreasonably. The story of Masada might be literary fiction based on a popular calque.

Committing suicide when facing imminent death or loss of one's honor was, of course, known and respected—recall Cato and Seneca—but for philosophers, not soldiers. Applying that logic to the defenders of Masada, we have to conclude that Josephus or his editor thought of them not as militant zealots but as religious sectarians, perhaps modeled after the early Christians and the behavior Christian martyrs might have displayed in a similar situation.

Taking possession of Masada about 70 C.E., the rebels found Herod the Great's plenteous stores, including oil and wine over a hundred years old,<sup>mxlvi</sup> an important point in Josephus' narration that proved the defenders could have survived a very long time. Masada, however, is not located high enough to permit aseptic food storage.

Another strange fact is that the Hebrew word *mesad*, often joined to a geographical or other name, like *Mesad Hashavyahu*, means *fortress*. Knowing Hebrew, Josephus would hardly employ a common noun as a place name. The author of the Masada episode likely did not know Hebrew and took *mesad*, *fortress*, for the geographical name.

Another puzzle about Josephus' account is how easily the Romans threw up an earthen rampart to get inside the fortress, something Titus did not even *try* at Jerusalem, where he had much larger forces and no steep mountains to deal with.

In many regards, Josephus' account of Jerusalem's destruction poses questions. He tells how the Romans surrounded the city with a siege wall. Jesus predicts just such a tactic in the various Gospel apocalypses.

Even disregarding Josephus' exaggeration of the city's population into the millions, Jerusalem was nevertheless a large place. Erecting a wooden wall around it quickly would have been impossible, and then it could not be guarded effectively, especially since the Romans posted no night watch outside the camp. Rarely did the Romans use not a wall but an embankment, as Antony did at Phraata—but only after gargantuan labors.

The Greeks commonly employed the tactic in their campaigns against small neighboring towns, and the description of the wall could derive from accounts of Greek wars. An analogy appears in a Biblical text popular with Christians, Micah 5, which in the Greek version begins, "Now you are walled around with [a wall]; siege is laid against us; with a rod they strike the ruler of Israel upon the cheek." The tactic was suitable against the small fortresses of Micah's time but not against great Jerusalem. The process of forgery seems clear: a Christian scribe found a suitable prophecy in the Bible, incorporated it in the Gospel as a prediction made by Jesus, supported by historical proof in Josephus.

According to Josephus, the Romans strengthened their large army in Judea with reinforcements from neighboring protectorates. Normally they did not resort to such force. In Britain, for example, Rome had a single legion. A smaller number could besiege a city with a starving population and carry out small-scale local operations. A long siege with hordes of troops would have been economically impossible in a distant province.

The Roman tactics Josephus describes are entirely out of character. The Romans employed long sieges only a few times in their history, only against strategic enemies, and perhaps none as long as that of Jerusalem. No other contemporary account mentions a siege of such magnitude. Romans considered it beneath their dignity to win by starvation rather than force of arms.

Machiavelli cites the long Roman-initiated sieges at Baiae, Capua, and Carthage. The first two were relatively inexpensive, because they were in Italy. Carthage was a strategic enemy, not an insignificant province, and worth the expense. The blockade of Jerusalem is not congruent with Roman military tactics, but long sieges with a blockade wall were common in Greece, because towns were small and easily walled, distances short enough to allow supplying an offensive army from home, the armies small and not so expensive to maintain. A Greek author would invent just such a tale.

A siege of several years is unrealistic.<sup>208</sup> Even a prudent city could not stock more than a few months' food supply, and Jerusalem had no reserves. The nonagrarian citizens earned their living by trade and bought food regularly instead of building up reserves in households—and a great many pilgrims were trapped in Jerusalem without any food whatsoever.

Josephus' claim that the starvation during the siege resulted from the Zealots' obtuse burning of the reserves to force the city's inhabitants to fight does not make sense. The Zealots did, however, lock themselves in the city without trying to assemble sufficient forces for a decisive fight. If hunger led to cannibalism, then it made no sense to enslave the population: not only were they unfit for work, but also most of them would have died soon.

In fact, the Romans did not need to wait for the Jews to starve. Jerusalem depended on water delivered by aqueducts. The wells, if any, were inadequate for a large population. A Gospel mentions people bringing water to Jerusalem in jars. The Romans only had to stop the water to finish the siege in a few weeks.

All that reveals another oddity. How, only sixty years after war decimated the Jewish population and enslaved most of the survivors, could Bar Kochba raise a force large enough for a protracted revolt? After the defeat Josephus describes, any nation would be hard put to assemble the

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<sup>208</sup> The account in 2 Kings 17:5 of Shalmaneser besieging Samaria for three years is dubious.

will and the forces for a new fight in only two generations.<sup>209</sup> Some people would still remember the Roman army's power, and convincing the population to challenge it again would have been next to impossible. To suggest that Bar Kochba raised an army outside Jerusalem is plainly wrong. First, Josephus reports that many country people who came to celebrate Passover were caught in Jerusalem during the siege. Second, if some villagers survived the war, they were probably politically apathetic, and nothing suggests they would have become more active by the time of Bar Kochba's revolt. Further, the Jewish leaders Josephus generally describes as shrewd people opposed the war; yet he says they sanctioned the revolt, which is truly baffling. A common explanation, that the Jews counted on the Asian campaign to distract the Romans is ludicrous. To the contrary, a huge Roman army was just then rampaging in nearby modern Iraq, a considerable discouragement to rebellion. I conclude that Josephus' account of the war is largely fabricated.

Josephus wrote about the defense of Gamla where the citizens died in the Roman assault or committed suicide. Modern excavations discovered the traces of fierce battle in Gamla, but also a synagogue. There were no synagogues in Jewish cities while the Temple stood, since the Bible prohibits communal worship outside the Temple. The destruction of Gamla could only be dated to about 135 C.E., after Josephus' death. Other accounts attributed to Josephus could similarly mirror the events of the 132-135 C.E. war.

After Vespasian was declared emperor, he retreated with his army to Alexandria, and only after some time did Titus return to Judea with reinforcements. In the interim, there were no, or almost no, Roman forces in Judea. Why militant factions did not use the respite to recruit and reinforce the positions is unclear. Still more surprisingly, the Jews did not arrange with Vespasian to lay their weapons down in exchange for alleviating the oppression, standard practice when rulers changed in antiquity, the new ruler needing support for his civil war. Josephus, who was with Vespasian all the time, does not mention a single delegation from Judea, though people would have been more than ready to negotiate a peace. Overall, he shows no acquaintance whatsoever with the Roman archives or any military commander's logbook. His narrative presents no more than could be learned from hearsay.

Josephus' speech to the besieged inhabitants of Jerusalem<sup>mxlvii</sup> is a literary convention, like many in Greek literature.<sup>210</sup> The only reason he gives for the war is taxes. Once the Jews started paying taxes again, the

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<sup>209</sup> Germany, an obvious counter-example, was not invaded and totally destroyed in the World War I.

<sup>210</sup> In Plutarch's *Life of Brutus*, Marcus Brutus similarly persuades the Xanthians to surrender.

Romans would retreat, leaving everything intact. There is no hint of the other reasons for the war he cited previously: the destruction of Cestius' troops by the Jews, local unrest, resentment against the prefects, and the refusal to submit to a mortal ruler. The earlier text did not emphasize taxation as a cause of the revolt.

The Romans would not be content with only the regular tax, as Josephus promises, and would impose a heavy additional tribute on the Jews, which any contemporary reader knew. Then why did Josephus mention taxes specifically? Possibly he alluded to Jesus' view on taxation, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's." Recall that Jesus parallels Judas the Galilean, remembered mostly for his appeal to eliminate Roman taxes. If a Christian forged Josephus' speech, he might make taxes the most urgent issue. That is not to say that taxation was any less plausible a reason for the war as the others Josephus mentions but rather that the account in *The War* is unbelievable.

The Spartan King Nubis started a fire in the city to prevent the Romans from taking it, though Josephus claims they captured the burning Jerusalem—which would have been impossible then. If the city, full of wooden buildings, were fired and no effort made to extinguish the flames, how did so many people survive to be enslaved? How could the Romans demolish the city walls, a tower of huge blocks, and the gigantic stone temple so swiftly?

Josephus lists the signs signaling Jerusalem's destruction: a star in the form of a sword, a comet hovering in the sky for the whole year.<sup>mxlviii</sup> Astronomers identify no comet in the skies over Jerusalem near 69–70 C.E. Comets do not remain visible a whole year in any case. Josephus' version remained unchallenged, however, since probably no witnesses were still alive by the time Josephus' book appeared which is inconsistent with the book's traditional dating.

Were Christians interested in a book about the Jewish War? Surely they must have been. The war was a watershed event for them, the death of the old Israel which cleared the way for the new Israel, the Christian community.

Josephus is strangely convenient for Christians. He evinces enmity for Herod the Great in *The Antiquities* for no apparent reason, yet writes about him respectfully in *The War*. The former book criticizes Herod for disregarding tradition; in the latter he praises his adherence to the Law, a position natural for a Christian scribe hoping to vilify Herod for the slaughter of the innocents in Matthew. Disregarding tradition is a breach of ethics and establishes a pattern of behavior which supports the murder charges. Praising him for keeping the Law lets Josephus appear objective and adds credibility to his criticism in *The Antiquities*. But keeping the Law means nothing to Christians and does not infringe on the notion of Herod as inherently evil.



Oddly enough, in *The War* Josephus alludes to only a few of the Roman prefects of Judea. He mentions Coponius in passing (as does Luke) but omits the next three before writing at relatively great length about Pontius Pilate, the prefect<sup>211</sup> most important to Christians. He also describes the Romans appointed after 48 C.E., when they again became interesting to Christians in connection with Paul, in great detail.

*Against Apion* exhibits anomalies. The work tells of a certain Egyptian, Apion, who moved to Rome in the thirties of the first century C.E. where he criticized the Jews in Alexandria, a criticism that would not interest his Roman audience. The Romans probably paid little mind to the Jews, who were not so important a community in Rome as in Alexandria. *Against Apion* was written about 100 C.E., seventy years after Apion's accusations. Did no one rebut Apion in all that time? Or could Josephus find no more recent anti-Semites? The reaction looks tardy.<sup>212</sup>

### **The Account of Judas and His Sect**

The account of Judas appears thrice in the same book, puzzling for the normally scrupulous Josephus.<sup>mxlix</sup> One passage is inserted inappropriately in the history of Masada, an event considerably removed in time from Judas' revolt. If the story so concerned Josephus, why are there almost no details? Probably the same necessarily short fabrication was included several times as different editors tried to mitigate the risk of discovery. Still, the forgers needed a very good reason to insist so much on the story of Judas.

Josephus mentions the census in 6 C.E. after Archelaus was exiled and Judea became a Roman province.<sup>ml</sup> Recounting the events in a single sentence, he finishes with "as we noted before." Yet *The War* has no detailed description of the census, only a handful of brief references, so the clarification is meaningless. Josephus' penchant for accuracy makes such a blunder improbable.

Another account<sup>ml</sup> does not report Judas' opposition to the census, a religious transgression, but shows him opposing paying taxes to the Romans. *The War* 2:17:8 notes his struggle against Rome. *The War* 7:8:1 is about his opposition to registration. *The War* 2:8:1 describes his resistance to both paying taxes and submitting to Roman rule. The authors of 2:17:8 and 7:8:1 possibly drew on 2:8:1. Quirinius is called either a ruler<sup>mlii</sup> or a censor,<sup>mliii</sup> different offices, which Josephus would not have confused.

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<sup>211</sup> The Christian tradition erroneously calls Pilate procurator; when in fact the Roman governors of Judea held the rank of prefect at that time.

<sup>212</sup> A similarly unnaturally belated response is evident in other authors as well, notably Origen, whose famous *Contra Celsum* appeared only after more than a century. Neither Apion nor Celsus had many disciples, and no literature was built on their writings. The long delay before responding to critics already forgotten cannot readily be explained.

An evident forgery attaches to the census. Registration was extremely unusual then, when people had no identification documents and could hardly be distinguished by the few, very common names. The Hebrew Scriptures expressly forbid it. No doubt, Josephus would pay considerable attention to such an event, especially in his frequent reports of the Jews' willingness to die before transgressing. Instead, he gives it only a few words and that anachronistically late in the book, not in the description of Archelaus' time. Calling that mention authentic is impossible. It was inserted in Josephus to support Luke's story of Jesus' family moving to Bethlehem to be registered at Joseph's ancestral home. Altogether different is Josephus' attitude to Judas in *The Antiquities* (18:1:1): he is a self-serving rebel, sowing discord among the Jews with false arguments. That attitude suits Josephus' overall view well, since he despised rebels. Other accounts which commend Judas are at odds with Josephus.

Yet another feature of *The Antiquities* (18:1:1) supports the hypothesis that other accounts of Judas in Josephus are forged. Here he is from Gamala in Gaulonites. A town with that name also existed in Galilee. A Christian scribe, modeling Jesus' image after Judas, would naturally prefer Galilee to Gaulonites, so Judas became the Galilean, never mind that Galilee had nothing to do with Coponius' census in neighboring Judea, which Judas supposedly opposed.

Bitterly criticizing Judas for political fraud, Josephus suddenly adds that he set up a fourth philosophical<sup>213</sup> school of Judaism which he will describe shortly. Indeed, a few paragraphs later we encounter the description but now it is all praise. The author changes tone suddenly and extols Judas and his followers to an extent encountered elsewhere only in his account of the Essenes. Balanced reporting was uncommon in antiquity.

How could Josephus, a Jew, say commendably that one sect had nothing in common with the rest? Such a claim makes sense only for a Christian scribe distinguishing his own sect from Jews in general.

One must be blind not to see that these are interpolations: a short phrase in *The Antiquities* 18:1:1 and a whole paragraph at 18:1:6 at the end of the chapter where the space allowed. Only Christians would and could amend the text and conceal the forgery for centuries.

Puzzlingly, *Ant*18:1:6 includes Judas in its report of the prefect Gessius Florus (64–66 C.E.), seemingly his contemporary. His rebellion on the eve of war makes sense. Taxation was a major cause of the war, as Josephus says in his speech to besieged Jerusalem. Dating Judas the Galilean by Coponius is artificial. The Christian scribe who added the episodes to Josephus knew Judas opposed taxation. He naturally, but

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<sup>213</sup> Josephus uses the term *philosopher* positively, though in the Jewish tradition the word had negative connotations of freethinking beyond the Hebrew Scriptures.

incorrectly, linked that to the census, which brought him to Coponius. Much more likely is that Judas was active just before the war, which supports dating Jesus at the same time. That dating also agrees with Acts 5:36–37 which puts Judas after Theuda, about 45 and nowhere near 6 and the census, as Josephus has it. Usually thought to be in error, Luke's version may be the right one.

### **The Essenes, the Pharisees and the Sadducees**

Of the chapter's fourteen paragraphs dedicated to the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes,<sup>mliv</sup> twelve deal with the Essenes and only *one* with the rest. Josephus' audience was not sufficiently acquainted with the Pharisees and Sadducees that he needed devote only a paragraph to them. He was writing for Gentiles who knew nothing about Judea.

Josephus' description of the sects is a calque from pagan authors. Pliny the Elder also singles out the Essenes,<sup>mlv</sup> as do the other authors: Dio Chrysostom and later Solinus, Porphyry, and Martianus Capella.<sup>mlvi</sup>

The description of the sects is inserted clumsily into the account of unrest in Judea, where a reader might expect details about Herod the Great's heirs. Furthermore, it contradicts our understanding of Judaism of that time, full of factions, sects,<sup>mlvii</sup> and heresies, rather than limited to only three major groups. Besides the Essenes, the author mentions only the Pharisees and the Sadducees, also mentioned in the NT.

The description of the Pharisees also raises questions. "In their opinion . . . the souls of good people move after their death to other bodies, and the souls of the evil are doomed to eternal tortures."<sup>mlviii</sup> The Pharisees compiled the Talmud where their views are amply presented. The doctrine of reincarnation was not common, if it was current at all.<sup>214</sup> The author of this account is probably mistaken, recording hearsay, something we do not expect from Josephus who wrote about things familiar to him.

Josephus' description of the sects closely parallels the references in the Gospels. He emphasizes the Pharisees' and Sadducees' theology of fate and resurrection. He accuses the Pharisees, the largest and most respected Jewish sect, of hypocrisy.<sup>mlix</sup> Generally, he respects the Pharisees' knowledge of the Law, while distancing himself from them personally.

The description of the Essenes coincides point by point with the way Christians saw themselves. Josephus extols the Essenes over the Pharisees and the Sadducees. A Christian author creating a pseudepigraphic insert in Josephus about his own group, the Essenes, would do exactly that. Josephus, on the contrary, as a Jewish apologist, would not denigrate two sects which upheld the Law so admirably. Likely, a later Christian author ascribed the story of his sect to Josephus. To make things look more trustworthy, he names not the Christians, but the Essenes, their Jewish

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<sup>214</sup> This is a peculiar anti-Buddhist doctrine of reincarnation. Buddhism believes the best people are not reincarnated but enter *nirvana*.

prototype. He might think the similarity evident to the audience, though forgotten later. Even in the fourth century Epiphanius believed Philo called the Christians *Iessaei*, Essenes. Characteristically, Hippolytus named the Essenes first, before the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

The Essenes “are Jews by birth,” Josephus wrote, but “strive for greater sanctity” and “have greater affection for one another.”<sup>mlx</sup> That is exactly what we would expect of a Christian author: the Jews who founded his sect were Jews, but Jews who were different from and better than others.

To argue that Josephus was close to the Essenes and paid them special attention is absurd, since the Essenes admitted no strangers to the sect. The initiation requirements were demanding, and leaving was practically impossible since they swore not to accept food from the impure, that is, anyone else. Thus, Josephus’ claim that he knew the Essene creed personally is a fabrication. Further, however small his attachment was to the other sect, a single paragraph on the Pharisees and the Sadducees together is disproportional.

Another account rebuts his claim to have studied Essene doctrine thoroughly for three years,<sup>mlxi</sup> presumably living with them during that time: during the *same* three years, from sixteen to nineteen, he studied all the sects, not only Essenes. Elsewhere<sup>mlxii</sup> he says he lectured the rabbis and knew Pharisaic doctrine at fourteen. Josephus uses phrases the evangelists use: the “chief priests and elders” came to him for advice. Either he lied habitually or invented the claim of studying three years with the Essenes to give weight to his testimony about them.

In *Life* 12, he writes that he studied with the hermit Bannus (who closely resembles the Gospel’s description of John the Baptist) for three years after he knew all the sects. His dissatisfaction with traditional teaching, Josephus asserts, led him to the anchorite. Yet he praises the Essenes beyond measure, writing that they are so good that everyone familiar with them finds their sect attractive.<sup>mlxiii</sup> After praising the Essenes, he puzzlingly settles with the Pharisees, whom he consistently and harshly criticizes elsewhere—as did the Christians.

This part of Josephus’ biography is fairly standard. Marcus Brutus reportedly studied all schools of Greek philosophy, and was more or less knowledgeable in all, but praised the ancient Platonists most. Brutus took for example Antiochus of Ascalon, renowned for his character and behavior—just like Bannus, Josephus’ mentor. Alexander the Great lectured sages in his youth, as did Cato the Younger at fourteen. Here Josephus’ biography follows the Greek literary mould.

A note in *The Antiquities* 18:2 that certain sects were described in *The War* is unnatural. The books are different, intended for different audiences. The length of *The Antiquities* alone presupposes a more inquiring, more academic reader than *The War*. Books did not circulate widely then, and authors rarely referred readers to other books. Josephus

repeats himself often in the two books or in the same book without referring to the other. A forger, writing and recalling the other interpolation in *The War*, would make a reference, his attention fixed on this small account.

Josephus writes that Essene virtue was unparalleled among Greeks or barbarians;<sup>mlxiv</sup> but he was writing for Jews and Romans who were thus dismissed as barbarians.<sup>215</sup> Josephus was an experienced writer and did not need to extol the Essenes by comparison; but an unskilled forger, flattering his own sect, would. The writer likely lived in a Greek province, where Roman cultural influence was slight, so he lumps them together with the barbarians.

The phrase "Greeks and barbarians," denoting the known world, was common in Greek literature. Paul is fond of it,<sup>mlxv</sup> and the forger may have borrowed it unconsciously.

Another example: Josephus has his hero, the Jewish King Agrippa, ask the Jewish mob, "Are you wiser than the Greeks?" Of course *every* Jew thought himself wiser than a pagan Greek! In the same context, he calls Greeks "the noblest nation under the sun, populating such a great country,"<sup>mlxvi</sup> something no Jew, one of a chosen people living in the Promised Land, would say.

Josephus enumerates the curious reasons why Essenes did not marry or have servants. Contrary to the description in *The War* and to common sense, he says celibacy aimed not to maintain ritual purity but to avoid household quarrels. The editor faced a dilemma: although Paul praised celibacy, Christianity, as any mass religion must, accepted marriage for practical reasons. To admit that the Christians' Essene predecessors thought living with a woman affected ritual purity, as did the Stoics, would mean explaining why Christians marry. Now it was enough for a Christian to claim that he would abstain from quarreling with his wife to defend his decision to marry.

The Essenes were likewise forbidden to have servants, since they inclined a man to injustice. Yet the Essenes bought from outsiders and might reasonably buy the services of hired workers. Moreover, since the Essenes practiced a kind of labor specialization, they could specify functions for servants as well. The Essenes had no servants to preserve the ritual purity of a closed community, but the Christians rejected such asceticism. Hard put to find arguments to invalidate the rule or declare it outdated, the editor invented a deliberately flimsy reason, which was easy to ignore by pretending to treat servants justly. This account was also interpolated in Philo.<sup>mlxvii</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> While Hellenized Romans are often included under the designation *Greeks*, Jews in this statement are *barbarians*. Similar oddity exists in Philo who writes, for example, of "Grecian and barbarian lands" (*De Specialibus Legibus* 2.12.44), thus implying that Judea is "barbarian land."

An important discrepancy between Josephus and the Qumran texts is his odd claim that the Essenes were an ancient sect, like Pharisees and even the Sadducees.<sup>mlxviii</sup> The Essenes originated<sup>216</sup> when their founder was expelled from Jerusalem, so the sect is much younger than the Sadducees and probably than the Pharisees. The crisis likely arose over scriptural interpretation, predictable for the Pharisees but not the Sadducees, who rejected the oral tradition altogether. Pharisees and Sadducees existed when the Essenes separated off. A Christian editor of Josephus might extend Essene history.

The accounts of Judas' sect<sup>mlxix</sup> are foreign to the context. Josephus specifically says there were only three schools in Judaism—the Essenes, the Sadducees, and the Pharisees—yet he lists Judas' along with them. He claims it is both significant and reputable, making its omission from the main list curious. Judas' sect was not ancient and could not be then considered authoritative; authority equaled antiquity.

Both mentions of the fourth sect are closely connected to passages about the Essenes. The author emphasizes that both groups could endure torture, something not pertinent to their religious views.<sup>mlxx</sup> The relationship makes sense, however, when for other reasons we connect the Essenes with the Christians and Judas with Jesus. Since we believe that Christians were an Essene fringe group, they indeed should be described along with them but separately—and the interpolation concerning Judas is significant chronologically. The initial Christian scribe was content interpolating one account of the Essenes. Later, when the division between the Essenes and the Christians grew, another scribe distinguished the fourth school from the Essenes.

Attempts by Gentile scribes, unacquainted with doctrinal trends in Judaism, to situate the fourth sect among the others proved impossible. *The Antiquities*<sup>mlxxi</sup> in its description of Judas' sect is exactly like that of the Pharisees, which the scribe could derive from the synoptic Gospels. At the same time, their teaching is so remarkable that the author will not even talk about it. In *The War*,<sup>mlxxii</sup> the fourth group has nothing in common with the others. Praise for the fourth sect balances the lack of detail. The founder was “a well-known teacher of the Law,” an epithet for *Galilean*, which would have made Jews laugh, since Galileans were synonymous with theological ignorance. Everything reported about the implausibly good fourth sect and its founder is either trivial or contradictory. The story of a fourth sect was invented.

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<sup>216</sup> This is traditional view, but the Essenes could indeed be ancient sect, ousted by innovators, Sadducees and Pharisees. Essene reverence to sun, if related to Ra, suggests ancient roots.

### **The Evidence of the *Testimonium***

Josephus' chief value to Christians lies in two references to Jesus, the *Testimonium*. Apologists for their authenticity argue that a Christian forger would have written about Jesus more pompously (as if the account is not portentous enough); but a forger would do just that trying to ascribe the testimony about his god to a Jew who cannot deify Jesus.

The Arabic version of the *Testimonium* is far less a panegyric, better imitating the objective style of a Jew writing about Jesus. He is called by name, though Josephus follows Jewish tradition of adding a nickname, surname, or a locality. Jesus is "the so-called Messiah," which does not match Josephus' avoidance of messianic allusions which could provoke conflict with Rome. Josephus would never write that Jesus performed miracles and was resurrected three days after his crucifixion.

Among the apologists' arguments is that Josephus blames the Romans for Jesus' execution, although Church tradition blames the Jews; but even the Gospels implicate Pilate. The tradition of blaming the Jews was fixed later, after Josephus was adulterated.

Josephus would surely devote more than a paragraph to a messianic and possibly supernatural figure. A forger, interpolating in a limited space, had to be concise. Josephus would hardly call Jesus "more than a man." He would not write that a man who disregarded the law and broke the Sabbath had "done nothing shameful."

The absence of clear definitions commonly plays tricks with parties to the discussion. Some scholars say the *Testimonium* breaks the narrative, while others think it fits the context reasonably. The question becomes what to call a context. On the macro level, the *Testimonium*, like the adjacent paragraphs, describes the events of Pilate's rule. At the micro level, however, the preceding paragraph ends, "And thus an end was put to this sedition," while the paragraph which follows the *Testimonium* begins, "About the same time also another sad calamity . . ." The interpolation interrupts the narrative. Other apologists agree that it is a digression but only a passing departure from the subject, like a modern footnote. Elsewhere, however, Josephus clearly marks the beginning of an aside and returns to the narration with another marker.

A similar ambiguity in terminology plagues discussion of the style of the *Testimonium*. Apologists say it is like that of Josephus. But there is a significant peculiarity: Josephus rigorously avoids the messianic descriptions in contemporary Judea, hoping to present the Jews as a peaceful people with no interest in a military leader. In that sense, the *Testimonium* differs radically from the rest of Josephus.

Early Christians do not mention the *Testimonium*, not even Justin Martyr in his polemic against Jews who said Christians invented Jesus. The style of the *Testimonium* resembles that of Eusebius more than that of Josephus. Eusebius first refers to the *Testimonium*, and more than a century passed before it was quoted again: dissemination of the forgery took time.

The absence of an established version of the *Testimonium* for some time reveals its cautious formulation. Jerome, who lived in the fourth and fifth centuries, substituted “believed that he was the Messiah” for the *Testimonium*’s “he was the Messiah,” and in the tenth century Agapius made it, “he was perhaps the Messiah.”

That Josephus, who exhaustively notes everything and everybody, contains no credible reference to Jesus presents difficulties for those trying to establish Jesus’ historical reality.

The Slavonic version’s story of Jesus’ execution differs entirely from that of the Gospels. The Jewish leaders go to Pilate, fearing the political clout of the episode’s nameless hero. Pilate interrogates him, finds no fault, and refuses to condemn him. The jealous rabbis bribe Pilate with thirty talents to let them condemn the man. With Pilate’s looking the other way, they crucify the man.

The person referred to taught repeatedly at the Mount of Olives. No Gospel account puts Jesus there for any time. The number of disciples, 140, disagrees with the Gospels and is likely just a standard biblical number.<sup>217</sup> Listing the apostles’ occupations in the other fragment, the author says they were all artisans, though the Gospels makes them mostly fishermen.

Oddly, the scribe, who carefully studied Josephus’ monumental work to make interpolations, did not bother reading the Gospels which the insertions were to support. Perhaps, the nameless figure in Slavonic Josephus is John the Baptist, not Jesus. Later, many details of the popular story of John’s execution were appropriated for Jesus, and John’s execution was transposed to Galilee. Luke, likewise, reassigned much of the Baptist’s birth account to Jesus in his Gospel.

### **The Evidence from *The Antiquities***

Josephus’ most important references for Christians—to Jesus, his brother James, and John the Baptist—appear in *The Antiquities* (18–20), books which lack Josephus’ special coherence and are mostly a collection of facts and stand-alone episodes. What better place for interpolations?

The critical episode represents James the Just, brother of Jesus, as a man of great piety who spends his time in the Temple. His praise of Jesus irritates a new high priest, who passes judgment on him and executes him illegally, taking advantage of the absence of the Roman prefect who must approve capital sentences.

James is called the “brother of Jesus, who was called the Christ.”<sup>217</sup> Josephus knew the meaning of *Messiah* and *Christ*, the Greek translation. He did not use it about his contemporaries, since he believed that messianic expectations caused the rebellions from which he tried to

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<sup>217</sup> E.g., Job lived for 140 years after proving his righteousness to God.



dissuade the Jews.<sup>218</sup> Here Josephus was writing about current events in some contemporary sect. He would hardly have used past tense, "was called." But a later editor, thinking of an ancient Jewish writer, might well have used it.

Apologists believe the equivocal wording of the phrase<sup>219</sup> proves its authenticity since in their opinion, a Christian author would glorify Jesus much more. We reviewed a similar argument in connection with the Arabic *Testimonium*. The editor was not writing freely, since he was impersonating an antimessianic Jewish author and had to restrain his praise, constraints which led to an absurd position, when Josephus mentions the messiah with no comment whatsoever. To mention Christ without comment makes sense only if the reader knows the *Testimonium*, a forgery. The James episode probably was written even later and could not possibly be from Josephus. Some reason precisely the opposite: because Josephus wrote about James (as they believe) and the James story refers to the *Testimonium*, then the latter is in some way true.

The episode, however, is not without peculiarities. The Sanhedrin consisted mainly of Pharisees, but Josephus attributes James' death sentence to the traditional cruelty of the Sadducees, to which sect the high priest belonged. Blaming general Sadducee cruelty seems to undermine Josephus' point of a specific violation of Roman law by a particular person, the high priest. Many of the Sanhedrin were aristocrats and reasonable people who would not violate Roman law even at instigation of the high priest, especially since he was recently appointed and not very authoritative. The Christians, however, hated the Sadducees, who rejected the resurrection, and the editor found an opportunity to attack them.

The Jewish zeal that sent a delegation to the newly appointed, but not yet arrived, prefect to inform on the high priest for sentencing without Roman approval is puzzling. The execution of a sectarian would hardly have prompted such a fuss. Nor can one explain the problem by saying that the Jews tattled on Ananias because they hated him. Ananias' father and four brothers served as high priests in their time;<sup>220</sup> the family was respected. According to Josephus, worthy citizens informed on Ananias, because they disliked the violation of Roman law; but they would have liked James' violation of Jewish Law even less.

It seems that James's name was inserted to replace someone else's. In that case, Josephus criticizes the high priest for sentencing someone to

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<sup>218</sup> A curious belief, since only the later Bar Kochba revolt was messianically inspired

<sup>219</sup> He "was called," not actually was, "the Christ."

<sup>220</sup> Josephus account of five relatives serving as high priests contradicts his statement that high priests were chosen from several families in turn, (*War* 4) as well as his assertion elsewhere that the Romans auctioned the high priest's office to the highest bidder.

death in the absence of the prefect, illegal and disloyal to Rome. Such an interpretation agrees with the context.

It is not credible that Ananias condemned the devout James for violating the law,<sup>221</sup> since Jesus was sentenced for state treason, especially since James is depicted as constantly praying in the Temple, presumably in acceptable fashion. Moreover, the Jews thought he was righteous, impossible had he preached the strange teaching of a small sect. Christians claim that James proclaimed Jesus' divinity, a blasphemy in Judaism, but Jesus was deified much later. That no one had prosecuted James in the thirty years since Jesus' death is further evidence of the accusation's impossibility.

Unlike Jesus, James did not call himself the Son of God, and the law does not prohibit calling another person a "son of God." Anyway, Honi, a famous Jewish wonder-worker, was addressed so.

Calling Jesus the Son of Man was no major concern for the high priest, a Sadducee who did not accept the major prophets, let alone Daniel. A somewhat more plausible cause is not that James said Jesus was the Son of Man originally but that he would soon *return as* the Danielic Son of Man to rule the world. Ananias had every reason to squelch such political propaganda before the new prefect arrived. That interpretation squares with the fact the Matthew's references to the Son of Man are late insertions in the main text, perhaps superimposed on the prototext after James' proclamation.

Persecution of sectarians was virtually unknown in Judea; only a few incidents, like the mass crucifixion the Pharisees, were attributable to political motives. The leader of another Christian sect, John the Baptist, was executed but not for his religious beliefs.

Still another argument against Josephus' authorship is his calling James "the brother of Jesus." I have argued against James' genealogical connection with Jesus. Josephus would hardly have used the technical term, "brother of Jesus," accepted only inside the sect and certainly atypical of a Jew.

The Josephus text claims that the destruction of Jerusalem "seemed for Jews a retribution for the murder of James the Just, . . . for Jews murdered him, disregarding his great righteousness." Although James was pious, there are many similar examples in Josephus. That James specifically is mentioned with reference to "his *great* righteousness," distinguishing him from other simply righteous Jews, is important to Christians. Actually, Josephus emphasizes the high priest's illegal acts and does not blame Jews at large.

Josephus would not have been sympathetic to the view (presented as his own) that the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple were

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<sup>221</sup> The stoning Josephus describes was probably a punishment for blasphemy.

retribution, even for the illegal execution of a righteous person. Josephus disapproves not so much the sentence as the high priest's trickery, taking advantage of the prefect's absence and exceeding his authority by executing James. Such behavior displayed disloyalty to Rome, Josephus reckoned, and could lead to a conflict.

James's story is important for Christians, since it helps explain the roles of both the Sanhedrin and Pontius Pilate and by analogy opens the possibility of gross violation of judicial procedure at Jesus' trial. It also implies loyalty to the Romans, submission to their judgment, and hope that they will tolerate Christians. The episode is insignificant, aside from its benefit to Christianity. The whole text confirms the Gospels and Christian tradition.

Josephus' account became known sufficiently late that Eusebius cites another version of Hegesippus: James was *lynched* when he called Jesus the *Son of Man* during Passover, attributing Daniel's apocalyptic prophecy to him.<sup>mlxxiv</sup> Josephus and Hegesippus have almost nothing in common. The fact that Eusebius offered both versions may or may not point to his being the author of Josephus' account—Eusebius wanted to gain credibility for the interpolation in Josephus by pretending to report the available evidence honestly, even if it is contradictory—but the important thing is that there was no accepted story even as late as the fourth century.

The account attributed to Josephus could arise from a different story, Herod's execution of another James, the brother of the apostle John.<sup>mlxxv</sup> Later the two versions of the same execution could have diverged, giving rise to the enigmatic figure of James the Just.

Let us turn to the description of John the Baptist's execution. *The Antiquities* 18:5:2 reads, "But for some Jews the destruction of Herod's army looked like divine retribution, and certainly just retribution for his treatment of John, nicknamed the Baptist." Josephus would not suggest that many Jews died to atone for Herod's sins. One theory is that Antipas' army consisted mainly of Ituraeans and other non-Jews, so Josephus had no pity on them. They converted to Judaism, however, and were technically indistinguishable from ethnic Jews. Josephus is often sympathetic with converted neighbors. Furthermore, at that time the ethnicity of most Jews could not be effectively traced. Galileans in particular, among whom Josephus held military office, were not pure-blooded ethnic Jews.

Josephus often cites examples of the immoral, lawless behavior of the Jewish rulers, blaming them for the calamities, a curious tendency which also appears often in the Bible. Jewish kings of the old were legitimate, at one with their people, and united to their fate. The Herodian lineage was illegitimate by any measure, and that Josephus, a Jewish apologist, would blame his compatriots for the evil acts of usurpers is inconceivable.

Saying that John's execution caused Antipas' military defeat, Josephus parallels the reason Origen and Eusebius give for the destruction of Jerusalem: it "happened to the Jews to avenge James the Just, the brother of the so-called Christ, for the Jews killed him in spite of his great righteousness."<sup>mlxxvi</sup> Since Josephus does not draw that conclusion in his testimony on James, which appears to be a Christian invention, the same reasoning must apply in the case of John. Even in the fifth century, nobody thought the destruction of Jerusalem was punishment of the Jews for Jesus' murder.

The account of John is suspiciously close to what the Gospels say about him. From John the Baptist's teaching, both Josephus and the Gospels report only the need for repentance and turn to righteousness before being baptized. Further, the description of John the Baptist closely corresponds to the description of the Essenes which was probably interpolated as well.<sup>mlxxvii</sup> Josephus exalts John openly, though he usually criticizes popular leaders who obstruct his aim to present the Jews as peaceful, not prone to rebellion or disloyalty to Rome. He thought such people immoral because they endanger other Jews with their apocalyptic messianic dreams and extreme behavior.

Josephus notes approvingly that John thinks baptism is acceptable to God because "the soul has already been purified by righteousness." Unlike the Christians, however, Josephus did not believe that the people who came to John for baptism were righteous or truly repentant. He is skeptical of the morality of Jews in general and does not hand out the title "righteous" lightly. He believed himself an authority on theology and would have offered his own opinion on the topic instead of reporting John's opinion without comment.

Josephus is certain he is right. "For some Judeans . . . it looked like" is atypical. The evasive phrase resembles the falsified *Testimonium* and casts the author's opinion in the third person. Probably the Christian editor attributed the phrase to Josephus, including Christians in "some Jews."

Josephus uses an unusual nickname for John, the Baptist. Names formed on occupations are not usual in Jewish culture. Family references, such as *bar* someone commonly accompany Jewish names. But in Greco-Roman culture, nicknames derived from appearance, profession, achievements, *etc.* were commonplace. Many accept the epithet *the Baptist* was added later, while insisting on the authenticity of the episode as a whole.

Josephus says that "he [John] was sent a prisoner, out of Herod's suspicious temper, to Macherus, the castle I mentioned before, and was there put to death" on the grounds that *others* came to him. The phrase cannot be explained in the context of the events, for if *others* freely came to John, they had no reason to fear Herod and constituted no threat to him. The phrase gains meaning in retrospect, if the author understands *others* as a

group which he knows later quarreled with Herod or the Jews in general. The author unwittingly imposes his situation on the one he describes. From the Christian editor's point of view, the *others* could be fellow sectarians. To Josephus such a distinction among various Jews would be meaningless. If *others* are Herod's political adversaries, he would not have missed the chance to do away with them all at once, not just their leader.

Since Herod got his office more or less legally, why was he afraid of John? He was under Roman protection, and the Romans regularly restored kings who lost their thrones in a revolt. The Gospel's explanation that John annoyed Herod by criticizing him does not hold water: unlike the Greek democracies, Galilee knew nothing of freedom of speech. John could not accuse the ruler publicly for any considerable time.

The phrase "Macherus, the fortress I mentioned before" is atypical of Josephus. He does not normally refer to previous mentions of the same place, which would turn his works into a tangle of cross-references. The forger has one place in mind, however, and he accentuates that it is not some imagined location but the one he took from Josephus.

Why does Josephus mention an insignificant detail, "sent a prisoner," an injurious act incurring the strong possibility of unrest aimed at releasing John? By the custom of the time, Herod would have been better off killing John while breaking up his followers. Josephus attributes such tactics to the Romans. "Sent a prisoner . . . and . . . put to death" are separated in time, specifically to create a pause for the Gospel's account of Herodias' intrigue against John.

The facts of the narrative do not hold when compared to Matthew. Herod Antipas' first wife ran away shortly before his second marriage or immediately afterward. Her father, an Arab ruler, drew Antipas into a war over an old land dispute. Either John was executed before the end of the war or there is no connection between his death and Antipas' defeat. Then, there was no time for John to criticize Antipas' unlawful marriage and spend time in prison.

Herodias' plot was in fact unrelated to the execution of John the Baptist and not mentioned in Josephus, although foregrounded in the Gospels. In Josephus, the accounts of Herod's marriage and John's execution come together. Matthew's editor mistook two independent accounts for a single story.

Luke, drawing heavily on Josephus, mentions John's arrest but not his execution. Why would Luke omit so important a detail, if Josephus recorded it? We may suppose that the episode of John the Baptist's execution was added to *The Antiquities* later than Luke wrote his Gospel.

The problem of John's execution<sup>mlxxviii</sup> for no apparent reason was clear, so the editor of Slavonic Josephus gives him political ambitions: a kind of protoanarchist, he urged people to reject all authority other than God's, as did Judas the Galilean. On the other hand, the same Slavonic text asserts that John was popular only in Judea near Jerusalem. Why then

would the Galilean tetrarch persecute him? John later moved “beyond Jordan,” probably west, but even then would not have come into Herod’s domain.

Josephus wrote, “They [Herod and Aretas] raised armies on both sides, and prepared for war, and sent their generals to fight instead of themselves.” The last phrase was probably interpolated to align Josephus with Matthew, who puts Herod in the palace at the time of John’s execution.

The interpolation pictures the defeat in the war as Herod’s divine punishment for executing John, when in fact Herod defeated the Arab with Roman help.

The episode ends with “The Jews, however, believed that destruction befell the army to avenge him, God willing to afflict Herod.” But that came at the beginning of the paragraph: “Some of the Jews thought Herod’s army was destroyed, and indeed by the actually just vengeance of God, in return for John the Baptist.” The precise Josephus does not ordinarily repeat himself. The author argues cautiously at the beginning, “and actually just vengeance,” but at the end is bold: “vengeance.” “Some Jews” become “Jews.” The author of a large book would not “warm up” in a single paragraph, but an interpolator would, making his closing statement stronger than the opening one. The phrase “actually just vengeance of God” is atypical of Josephus.

The single paragraph about John is too short a description of the influential leader whom the text presents. The paragraph departs from the narration. Before: “Tiberius, very angry at the attempt made by Aretas, wrote to Vitellius to make war upon him, either to take him alive and bring him to him in bonds or to kill him and send his head. This was the charge Tiberius gave to the ruler of Syria.” After: “So Vitellius prepared to make war with Aretas.”

In the surrounding text, Josephus blames Aretas for illegally attacking Herod on the flimsy pretext that he divorced Aretas’ daughter. The Roman’s reaction to the conflict proves that judgment of Josephus correct. If Josephus thought Aretas’ actions embodied divine retribution for John the Baptist’s execution, he would not blame him.

In support of the John story, scholars note that Origen mentioned it before it appeared in Eusebius. But wasn’t Origen edited to begin with? The argument makes sense only if we suppose Eusebius made up the reference to John; but another editor before Origen could have inserted it. The approach is not without logic: the interpolation started with a relatively minor forgery about John. The episode was helpful in substantiating the Christian story, and that it should appear in Josephus, a Jew writing about a famous preacher, was plausible. When the insertion was well received, a later writer ventured testimony about Jesus, hoping his forgery would be accepted too, especially when supported by an existing account of John’s execution.

A book very similar to *Antiquities* was attributed to Philo. His *Biblical Antiquities* is now recognized as forgery.

### **The Evidence from Pliny the Younger**

When Pliny the Younger, Suetonius, and Tacitus, all of whom wrote at the beginning of the second century, mention Jesus or the Christians, they report only the rumors they heard or what they learned from Christians themselves rather than historically verified information.

The letter of Pliny the Younger, governor of Bithynia, to Trajan, written about 112 C.E., is treated as important proof of Christianity's early spread. Amazingly, the one surviving letter of a huge volume of lost correspondence was just what the Christians needed.

To start with, the letter does not prove much. Pliny writes about some Christians, but there were many such sects, like the followers of John the Baptist. Pliny does not mention Jesus. The Christian teaching he describes—to refrain from deceit, stealing, and adultery—could have been attributed to just about anyone. The author is clearly sympathetic with the values, although he tortured and executed Christians who adhered to them. Pliny says that once a year Christians glorify the *divine* Christ at night and partake of a communal meal. The fact that at the beginning of the second century Jesus was not yet generally considered a god reveals the letter's late origin.

Pliny enumerates some bizarre details: conversion to Christianity was so popular among *all* classes that the temples were deserted, there was no demand for sacrificial animals, even though Christianity did not spread among the upper classes. The author carefully explains that the multitudes of Christians disappeared when Pliny forbade political meetings—although they were preaching only religion—and returned to the old rites under threat of punishment. Pliny's insistence is inexplicable, as the Romans tolerated provincial cults.

The account of the temples' desolation may be modeled on Acts 19, which describes how the silversmiths of Ephesus attempted to lynch Paul, whose teaching cost them orders for jewelry for the temple of Artemis. Acts 19:26 extends the problem to the whole of Asia Minor.

Curiously, apologists take the reference to martyrs as a proof that they believed in Jesus' historicity. On the contrary, to die for a deity would be easier than for a human being. Throughout history, martyrs have gone to their deaths not caring in the least about facts, but about religion or ideology.

Pliny the Younger asks Trajan what he is to do with the Christians, because "who is more capable of guiding my uncertainty or informing my ignorance?" But Pliny himself lived in Rome earlier. If he did not know of Christians either from Rome or Bithynia, he had no reason to assume that Trajan knew anything about them. The evidence was not conclusive, and

Pliny had no reason to persecute them or even to ask the emperor for instructions, especially since they had not violated Roman civil law. A Christian scribe may have unconsciously assumed that Trajan knew about Christianity and proceeded from that assumption to forge Pliny's letter.

Trajan's response is noteworthy. The forger was not sure how emperors might write. The letter is insultingly short and lacks the standard salutations and compliments.

Trajan suggests that Christians who deny their faith "shall obtain pardon through repentance." The concept of forgiveness through repentance, typical of Christians, did not appear in Roman law, which is only natural, since repentance does not lessen the responsibility for civil wrongdoing.

Trajan suggests testing for repentance by having accused Christians worship "our gods." To write that, Trajan would have to have extensive information about Christians, though even Pliny, who was acquainted with them, knew almost nothing of their teaching. The point is that Gentiles were polytheists and would have had no problem bowing to Roman deities also. The test would not prove their apostasy. Trajan would have to know that Christians refused to worship anyone but Jesus. Pliny's letter does not mention that detail. Some Christian author ascribed his own knowledge to Trajan.

Trajan, an evil emperor according to Christians, is made mockingly fond of the "spirit of our age." In Christian literature, that idiom refers to the evil which will overcome the world before Jesus' final advent.

Trajan's reply resembles a letter of another emperor, Hadrian, also about judging Christians, both letters uncharacteristically short, both emphasizing the inadmissibility of an anonymous accusation. Both suggest proving the Christians' guilt before proceeding, although Pliny specifically asked how to determine their guilt without establishing the nature of the crime. Both letters prescribe impossible conditions for sentencing, offering to prove an unspecified crime. Moreover, we know Hadrian's letter only from Eusebius, whose attitude toward forgery was accommodating.

### **The Evidence from Pliny the Elder**

Pliny the Elder describes an Essene sect living in Judea for *thousands of centuries*, but whether he actually considers them Jews is unclear. He describes no other local sect. Philo also describes the Essenes but not the Pharisees or the Sadducees. Philo's attitude is understandable, since Greek-influenced Essenism was not far from his own views. Pliny's is puzzling. By the time he was in the area, the Essenes were not the largest sect, if they existed at all when he wrote the treatise, about 77 C.E. His bizarre account becomes clearer when Pliny's glaring geographical errors are taken into account. He was not personally acquainted with the terrain but relied on hearsay—which probably came from Christians. What other



Jews did he know? He would naturally talk with Christians, the only Jewish sect that did not participate in the war and stayed loyal to Rome. He would, of course, miss subtle differences: they were not Jews but Christians and believed themselves the inheritors of Judaism. What would they tell him? About their predecessors, the Essenes.

Pliny implies a large number of Essenes; archaeologists believe no more than a few hundred people dwelled in Qumran at a time.

“West of the Dead Sea” is meaningless, since all Judea lies in that direction. Other markers are Jerusalem, Engadi, and Masada. His knowledge of the first is explicable, but how could he have known of the other two? Josephus mentions Masada and Engadi in the same place, which increases suspicion that Pliny's account is a forgery based on Josephus.

Pliny did not know the area personally. For example, he says the region about Jerusalem is fertile. It is a desert. Additionally, a number of other cities near Qumran were more notable than Masada. The choice of landmarks is artificial.

In any case, Pliny's description does not necessarily point to Qumran, where the scrolls were found. Epiphanius wrote of a semi-Essene community living somewhere in that region. Perhaps there were others as well.

Although these arguments do not preclude Pliny's authorship, the probability of adulteration is high. A Christian editor might well do so to create authoritative proof that Christianity had ancient, famous, and virtuous antecedents. That may explain why the Essenes are called a *tribe*, a distinction long-lost in Jewish society by then: the editor wanted to conceal their connection with the Jews.

Praising the Essenes immoderately, “remarkable beyond all other tribes in the whole world” while keeping the narration oddly short, only six sentences, points to the forger.

### **The Evidence from Tacitus**

Tacitus (*Annals* 15, about 115 C.E.) wrote that (around 64) Nero wrongly accused the Christians, “who were hated for their enormities,” of setting Rome afire. If the Romans hated Christians, banishing them from Rome for preaching an illegal religion was no problem without false accusation. Paul's epistle to the Romans demonstrate that Christianity was sufficiently distinct from Judaism to lose the umbrella of legality.

The term *Christian* was not common at Rome in the early second century, and historians otherwise uninterested in the sect likely did not know it. Hence, there is the possibility that scribes substituted the word *Christians* for some other, perhaps *Jews*, in which case the text makes sense. Tacitus makes derogatory comments about Jews elsewhere; also, they could not be banished without pretext.

He writes that Arabs hated the Jews with a hatred common among neighbors,<sup>mlxxix</sup> evidently seeing no other reasons for hatred, like immoral behavior. After just a few paragraphs, he describes Jewish traditions with revulsion. Probably unacquainted with them and having no personal opinion, he took the idea from different sources. Or he could have learned from Christians themselves, which would explain the criticism of the Jews based on moral rather than religious grounds, attributing to Jews certain religious concepts more characteristic of Christians, such as the immortality of the souls of martyrs. Tacitus asserts that Jews fast often,<sup>mlxxx</sup> but fasts are rare in Judaism, though common in Christinity.

After enumerating examples of Jewish immorality, Tacitus suddenly refers to their religious beliefs warmly, then just as unexpectedly returns to the claim that the Jewish religion is “tasteless and mean.” Those inconsistencies strengthen the argument that the text is a result of compilation or extensive editing.

Tacitus relates a common canard that the Jews worship the image of an ass in the Temple.<sup>mlxxxi</sup> Shortly after, he contradicts with the account that Pompey found the Temple devoid of images.<sup>mlxxxii</sup>

Tacitus' account includes six theories of the origin of Jews.<sup>mlxxxiii</sup> Antiquity of the Jews was of great importance for the Christians who thus established their own respectability.

The mention of the Christian “hatred against mankind” could be applied to any apocalyptic sect preaching the imminent end of the world or because it met in secret. Tacitus writes that an “immense multitude” was convicted, not a few Christians.

According to Acts, when Paul comes to Rome to be tried by Nero, he found no Christians there. It is hardly possible that the Jesus Christians became many or well known and universally hated in just a few years.

Although Tacitus connects Christians with the *Christus* executed in Judea under Pilate during Tiberius' reign, again he does not name Jesus, and the reference could be to any messianic prototype of Jesus, like John the Baptist or Judas the Galilean. The author would have striven to avoid too close association, which might reveal the interpolation. Instead of naming Jesus, he says Pilate ordered the sect's leader executed, ignoring the fact that Pilate's name meant little to a Roman audience. The prefect of a backwater province, who lived dozens years earlier, was not likely well-known in the capital. Surely, a historian would sooner name the founder of the sect than hint at his identity by naming the man who executed him. The omission of the central figure's name is unusual for the normally accurate Tacitus, who routinely supplies a wealth of details; it is characteristic of sectarian interpolations, like Jesus' execution in Slavonic Josephus and the chapter 53 of Isaiah.

Tacitus writes about Christians as a phenomenon of the past, although he must have known of their popularity. Christian stories would be the most natural source of his information about their sect, if the text is

authentic at all and not inserted by a later scribe. At the beginning of the second century, any Christian knew those stories, and the value of Tacitus' retelling them is nil; he did not get them from independent historical sources. Nothing suggests that Tacitus studied the archives, if any were left after the Jewish War, to learn just who executed the founder of a sect he mentions in passing.

Equally puzzling is the description of Rome as a city "where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their center and become popular." Though it was common to condemn the moral condition of Rome, such are harsh words coming from a Roman historian, not a satiric like Juvenal.

Tacitus possibly knew what the Christians were convicted of, but after introducing the accusation that the Christians set the city on fire, a few sentences later he contradicts himself, saying they were "convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind." That is a significant contradiction, because the false accusation of setting the fire initially linked the episode with the context, which lists Nero's evil deeds. Then he says the Christians were tried justly for offending Roman morality, regardless of Nero's charge. Tacitus is clear that only the Christians of Rome were persecuted, although if Christians had set the city on fire, the prosecution would not be confined to Rome.

A forger would have a harder time imitating the style of Tacitus than that of Josephus, but the style of the episode *is* somewhat different from the rest. Tacitus commonly names his sources, comments on their credibility or the conflicts among them, or refers to the opinion of the majority of historians. He distinguishes between facts and rumors and does not usually quote uncritically. Like other ancient authors, he states his opinion of events forthrightly and not through subtle shadings of language. The lack of any of the above argues against Tacitus' authorship.

An almost a word-for-word transcription of the passage appears in Sulpicius Severus, not otherwise known to copy from Tacitus. The story is not important to Sulpicius' narrative. The episode was inserted in two (or more) books simultaneously to assure its preservation. That brings its date forward to around the fourth century.

### **The Evidence from Suetonius**

Suetonius writes that the emperor Claudius "banished the Jews from Rome because they had been constantly making trouble, abetted by some Chrestus."<sup>mlxxxiv</sup> That is, he was repeating a rumor, a very old rumor. His informants may have known nothing about Jesus' crucifixion in Jerusalem, but Suetonius seems to imply that Jesus was in Rome. The erroneous transcription arose from Suetonius' ignorance of the meaning of the word *christos*, *the anointed one*. Suetonius calls him *Chrestus*, a typical name for a slave, presumably because Christianity spread among Roman

slaves, but also reminiscent of Jesus shrugging at a man who calls him *good* (*chrestos*).<sup>mlxxxv</sup>

Chrestus does not have to be Jesus. Many Jews at that time declared themselves messiahs, and the unrest could have been connected with one of them. That would align Suetonius with Luke, who in Acts says that Paul, arriving in Rome later, found that local Jews did not know of Jesus. Even if that story is inaccurate, one wonders when Paul managed to convert to Christianity, evangelize Greece, go to jail in Judea, come to Rome, wait there for trial about two years, and convert enough Jews to stir into a state of noticeable agitation in time for the unrest to occur during Claudius' reign, *i.e.*, before 54 C.E. Peter, too, stayed in Jerusalem a long time<sup>mlxxxvi</sup> and did not plan to go to Rome, the city with which he is closely associated later. That means that he must have come to Rome not long before the incident, if not well after it, and would not have influenced events.

Chrestus could have been a common man without messianic pretences. Or possibly Simon Magus, John the Baptist's heir, who came to Rome during Claudius' reign and astonished Romans with his miracles. In any case, why was Chrestus not executed if he made trouble?

"Punishment by Nero was inflicted on the Christians, a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition" (Suetonius, *Life of Nero* 16.2). The author implies a considerable group, not just a few sectarians, which is what Christians in Rome were in 64 C.E. Possibly, the scribe committed the anachronism of thinking of larger number of later Christians or even another messianic sect.

The mention of Christians is out of context. Like the interpolation in Josephus, it agrees with the macrocontext, acts of the emperor. Neighboring phrases, however, refer to Nero's actions toward other countries. The reference to Christians is highly condensed. All the surrounding material is more fully detailed and expansive.<sup>222</sup>

Unlike Tacitus, Suetonius does not connect the persecution with Nero's charge that Christians set Rome on fire. While Tacitus lists the accusation among Nero's evil deeds, Suetonius presents his persecution of the strange religion as a laudable achievement. Nero was famously indifferent to cults. Unless they fired Rome, he would not bother to persecute Christians for their beliefs. Tacitus' editor invented the false charge to connect the episode to the context.

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<sup>222</sup> If it were worded like the subjects around it, the episode of Christians would consist of two or three phrases, something like: who were Chrestus and his followers, what was the reason for the unrest, and only later that Nero banished them.

## The Evidence from Plutarch

Plutarch also mentions events in Judea at approximately the same time as Pliny, Tacitus, and Suetonius. Strange religions interested him, as well as anything that revealed public or private morality. Jesus' story would certainly have been of interest, yet he nowhere even so much as hints at it. Considering the extensive persecution of Christians Pliny reports and the abandonment of the temples after the mass conversion to Christianity, Plutarch's silence is revealing.

His depiction of other events in Judea parallels Josephus surprisingly closely. Plutarch mentions a minor detail about Mark Anthony: with Gabinius he quashed the revolt of Aristobulus. The ostensible reason for the inclusion was to mention Anthony's first military operation; but that is incorrect, since Anthony had already campaigned against Alexander, Aristobulus' son. The episodes are joined in Josephus, and Plutarch, known for inaccuracy, could be confused. Similar minor disagreements with Josephus appear repeatedly in Luke.

Plutarch records requisitioning of Herod's palm groves for Cleopatra and Antigonus' execution by Anthony, events Josephus also reports. Both also repeat the odd story of Herod's support of Anthony against Caesar. Recall that Anthony deprived Herod of economically significant groves, which would cause any tributary to support his master's adversary. Further doubts of the authenticity arise when Plutarch lists the rulers who supported Anthony. He names all of them with their territories, *e.g.*, Amyntas, king of Lycaonia, yet singles Herod out as "the Jew," a religious, not a political, attribute.

He again distinguishes Herod, insignificant ruler of a backwater territory, when tells how Anthony learned that Herod and his army were switching sides. He mentions no other king by name. The Christian editor likely inserted the reference to Herod to underscore his moral degradation.<sup>223</sup> The episode is inflated compared with Josephus, who does not mention Herod's military assistance to Octavian Caesar, let alone the size of his legions. On the contrary, Josephus would accentuate Herod's assistance to the victorious emperor as yet another means of showing Jewish loyalty to the Romans.

Perhaps unsure of the interpolation's credibility, Plutarch's editor refers to it later: Anthony dispatches Alexas of Laodicea to dissuade Herod from siding with Caesar. But that is out of place since by then Anthony had surrendered and pleaded for mercy. To spoil things further, the editor has Alexas plead Herod's case to Caesar, even though Caesar had already pardoned him. Caesar does not kill Alexas immediately but sends him to Greece for execution, though to treat an ambassador so was considered dishonorable.

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<sup>223</sup> Plutarch's moralizing is odd, since switching sides was standard in antiquity, notion of loyalty almost nonexistent.

Plutarch reports Roman legions in Judea during Galba's reign, Vespasian's army. He describes the armies in Judea and Syria separately, though Judea was politically part of Syria under the authority of the Roman governor in Syria. Oddly Tacitus also distinguishes between the governors of Judea and Syria, Vespasian and Mucianus.<sup>mlxxxvii</sup> But Josephus' perception was natural for a Jew. In the context of Roman politics, even he did not discriminate between Judea and Syria.<sup>mlxxxviii</sup> During the extensive conflict in Judea, a large, idle army<sup>mlxxxix</sup> in Syria was unlikely. Tacitus mentions only the twelfth legion there during Titus' campaign,<sup>mx</sup> not several, as Plutarch does.

Vacillation from moralizing to fact-filled narrative adds to doubts of the authenticity of some of Plutarch. In his lives of Galba and Otho, he puzzlingly depicts contemporaneous events as if they happened long ago. If we believe he wrote biographies of those two, then how do we explain the absence of biographies of Octavian, Caligula, or Nero, whose lives would have stimulated his moralizing? But note that Galba and Otho especially interested contemporary Roman historians attached to Flavius' clan,<sup>224</sup> since their vanity justified Vespasian Flavius' claim to the throne. The two biographies may be wrongly attributed to Plutarch; they better suit a Roman author sponsored by Flavius emperors.

Many other ancient references to Jews and Judea are suspicious. In defense of Flacco, Cicero shows detailed knowledge of the Jews, and criticize them heavily. But dealing extensively with various theologies in *De Natura Deorum*, he entirely omits Judaism. Cicero derides arrogance of the Jews who has been "conquered, scattered, enslaved."<sup>mxci</sup> That, however, happened 128 years after the Cicero's speech.

Seneca the Younger asserts (*On Superstitions*) that foreigners adopted the customs of the conquered Jews. At the time of Seneca's writing, Romans did not conquer Judea which freely allied itself with Rome. Romans started to rule Judea in 6 C.E., leaving no time for the Jewish customs to spread before Seneca was writing. Seneca, a Stoic, had little theological reason to criticize Judaism. Calling the Jews "the most criminal nation" more suits Augustine who quoted Seneca.

Dio Cassius (Roman History) relates wild stories of Jewish uprising in Cyrene and Cyprus. The Jews, he asserts, ate the flesh of their enemies and committed similar abominations while exterminating hundreds of thousands of local inhabitants. Such fantasies about a recent event would have destroyed Dio's credibility as a historian.

Frontinus asserts that Vespasian defeated the Jews on Saturday when they could not work.<sup>mxcii</sup> At least since the Maccabean revolt, however, the Jews did fight on Sabbath.

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<sup>224</sup> Like Josephus and Tacitus.

Ancient authors who wrote about the Jews singled out their wealth and misanthropy, ridiculed Sabbath, and sometimes admitted steadfastness. Jews are described strikingly different from other peoples: little if anything about Jewish culture, history, or habits beyond the few facts significant for the Christian propaganda.

## The Genesis of Christianity

Some might ask whether it was possible to forge the New Testament and invent the story of Jesus so boldly. Yes, indeed. That kind of literary historiography was known at least since Thucydides, who put his own words into the mouths of the supposedly historical figures. The practice was common at the dawn of the Common Era. Buddha's disciples at least used the qualifier "I heard," honestly admitting that their memory could be far from what their master intended.

Accounts of revelations invented by both upper and lower classes were frequent. Paul describes fellow Christians pretending to deliver revelations. Sulla roused the Roman army to battle with a tale of a prophecy he heard from the statue in the sanctuary of Apollo.

Church historians and missionaries did not shy away from pious fraud. The voluminous evangelical creation between the first and fourth centuries provides evidence of extensive forgery. Even in our time the editors of the *Catholic Encyclopedia* do not feel much remorse about the institutionalized lie. The Christians were ready to achieve their aim by any means. They attracted flocks to the kingdom of heaven with deceit and forgery, forced with threats of eternal punishment, and from the fifth century persecuted other religions, reducing the religious choices in the dependent territories almost to nil.

The canonical New Testament is relatively coherent because it was chosen from among many different versions. Paul mentions sects with teachings altogether different from what became orthodox Christianity. The Gnostics read the Gospels as myths, lacking any historical sense. Many authoritative Christians rejected the credibility of the Gospels. The version we know had to be given the clout it lacked in the beginning.

Analyzing most of the NT is futile, since the evangelists knew neither Jesus nor any credible source. Stories of Jesus' genealogy, Zechariah's vision before the birth of John the Baptist, Jesus' private prayers, *etc.*, are sheer fantasy.

The NT abounds in strained allusions to Hebrew prophecies, so distorted that no one could suggest that the Holy Spirit dictated them.

The evangelists relate personal experiences in bad Greek, one improved by Luke. That such uneducated people could understand and report Jesus' words correctly is not credible, a view supported by numerous NT accounts of the disciples misunderstanding their leader.

The Gospels contain many profound ideas—not peace but a sword, render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, what is truth? the Word came first, anybody raging at his brother, and many others—which create the impression of divine inspiration. But those ideas are the result of compilation. They come from different authors and different religions.



When the Gospels were written, they were part of the theology and folklore of various peoples. Collecting them all into one book does not make that book more authoritative than any collection of aphorisms.

The beautiful apocalyptic formulas and concepts are not the creation of a single genius but were pillaged from various sectarian texts and polished up over the course of three centuries. Hundreds, even thousands, of good writers, clever thinkers, and decent theologians worked on the texts during the process of cross-fertilization. The product of their creative activity turned out curiously.

Apologists often present the Qumran scrolls as evidence that Christianity began in the first century, but those texts are pronouncedly pre-Jesus. They speak of two messiahs without mentioning Jesus' name or any other historical details. The scrolls are based on the Hebrew Bible textually and on Jewish mythology conceptually.

Christianity likely borrowed some prototexts from a messianic sect, like the Essenes. Since we may suppose that not all their scrolls were hidden in Qumran, others may have reached the Christians who inserted certain common concepts and fuzzy textual correlations into them and into Christianity independently, since they used basically the same sources.

In any case, other messianic sects existed, and any of them could trace their beliefs to the Qumran scrolls, which in no way support the historical nature of belief in Jesus specifically.

The popular assertion that Christianity could not have spread, flourished, and endured if it were not true contradicts history: virtuous rulers seldom last and still more rarely win. The same laws of nature apply to Christianity and those who rule Christians. Furthermore, what methods have sustained Christianity?

External events shaped Christian belief. The Christian founder was executed ignominiously; so Christians could not adopt militancy, like Islam. Only humility and forgiveness for enemies were left. The sect's theology seemed ridiculous to learned pagans, its historical assertions indefensible, so they required child-like faith in Jesus' divinity. The first mass following came from the throng; they did not or could not change their behavior. From there came forgiveness through faith, without righteous deeds and sacrifices. Christians aimed to creating a popular religion, whence the concept of the secret becoming public, open communion with the Church instead of veiled initiation. Belief in bodily resurrection provided an advantage over other religions, where souls spend eternity in the underworld. So short was the time horizon of the first Christians that many expected not to die at all, a promise which could not hold for more than a few years. The exaltation of the poor in the kingdom of heaven compensated for the church's inability to improve their state in this world. The martyr's death solved this world's problems and opened the fascinating next, with poor Christians in glory. Martyrdom encouraged steadfastness, though many apostasized in the face of danger, apparently

not entirely convinced of the heavenly prospect, a phenomenon so common that Pliny the Younger mentions it in a famous letter. The Christian god was human, perhaps because pagan deities also resembled humans, with familiar behaviors, aspirations, and habits.

Christians had to exalt their founder higher than the gnostic demiurge and at the same time distinguish him from the God of the Jews. That led to the concept of the trinity. Since denouncing riches and hypocrisy and promoting the simple life were the cornerstones of ethics and philosophy, they not they not surprisingly occupy a central place in the gospels. Christianity appealed to the most destitute outcasts of society, the most prone to conversion. Jesus taught equality, criticized wealth, healed the sick, and caroused with sinners. Christianity fell upon the fertile soil of Roman and Greek religious cynicism<sup>225</sup>. People were disillusioned with gods who were costly to appease, could not help in this life, and promised little in the next. That factor and the conceit of the first Christians were more instrumental than Jewish monotheism in establishing Jesus' uniqueness, which Christians opposed to other deities, refusing to worship them.

Church Christianity is far removed from possible Jesus' teaching. The fundamentals of Christianity do not belong to Jesus at all but were created by Paul.

Jesus, if he existed, could have been a Jewish preacher. He often shows an understanding of the Torah. He said,, "I have come not to abolish [Jewish Law] but to fulfill it,"<sup>mxci</sup> "Therefore, do whatever [the Pharisees] teach you and follow it."<sup>mxci</sup> Accordingly, the New Testament may be analyzed if not for identity with the Torah (which would be unacceptable for believers in the Messiah-Christ with his new teaching), then for a considerable affinity.

Jesus could have been a type familiar in Judea at that time: an itinerant preacher, a messianic charismatic, a wonder-worker. Christianity needed Jesus to declare his own divinity in the gospels in a literal, not mystically spiritual sense in order to make his persecution by the Jews believable and to distinguish him from the numerous demigods of neighboring peoples. Even then Jews half-heartedly contested Jesus' historicity: before the Gospels were written he seemed a common figure. Even the Talmud fits Jesus and his teaching and acts within the historical framework easily.

People like Jesus helped curb Judaism's legalistic trend. They probably did not oppose legalism and the rabbinic bureaucracy on doctrinal grounds but rather because they were not sufficiently educated to confront the Pharisees' minute learning. That may discredit their motives but does

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<sup>225</sup> Recall the unearthed walls of Pompeii, dappled with blasphemous graffiti, which no one cared to remove.

not diminish their importance in preserving the soul of Judaism instead of burying it under a heap of scholastic rules.

Early Christianity resembles the beliefs of other Jewish sects. 2Baruch and 4Ezra were written in the first century and feature a spiritual, not a military, messiah, an apocalypse, water baptism, salvation of only a remnant of Israel, and resurrection.

That does not mean that Christianity descended from Judaism. Jewish pseudepigrapha describe Moses' ascension, his throne in the heavens, and even his existence before the beginning of time (as John wrote of Jesus in the gospel). Like other Jewish sects, Christians deviated from their religion toward Greek philosophy, drawing gnosticism and cosmic-center philosophy from neighboring peoples. Even Gnosticism was not far removed from Judaism, where a direct analogy of dualism already existed or soon appeared: man's good and evil inclinations. Those were not mere moral aspects but at the threshold of becoming independent theosophical essences. Another difficulty in distinguishing Gnosticism from orthodox and sectarian Judaism lies also in the plethora of Gnostic systems, as Ireneus showed in *Against Heresies*. Such teachings competed with Judaism, and second-century rabbis who routinely admitted any interpretation provided the Law was observed, were compelled to introduce a *birkat ha-minim* liturgy into synagogue worship. Literally translated "blessing of the sectarians," it actually cursed all sectarians, not only or even most importantly Christians.

Jesus' image has strong roots in Jewish tradition and in the legends of other religions as well. Much like Wisdom, Jesus participated in the world's creation, underwent incarnation,<sup>mxv</sup> wandered about the earth, was rejected, returned to heaven, and sat with the angels.<sup>mxvi</sup> Like the righteous man,<sup>mxvii</sup> Jesus was disgracefully executed but would judge his accusers in heaven. He expiated his people's sins, as did the seven righteous sons in 4Macc17:21. Jesus smelled or drank sour wine on the cross as in 4Macc6:25.

Besides descriptions of the messiah, there were many myths and true stories about teachers which perhaps formed much of the basis of the accounts of Jesus. We may suppose many sources provided material, since messianic sects were plentiful in Judea then.

One interesting difference distinguishes Jesus from most messianic images: Jesus was not warlike, though suggestions of aggressiveness, like the cleansing of the Temple, appear in the Gospels. That peculiarity may derive from the legend's Greek (Dionysian), not Jewish, roots.

Christian authors likely knew nothing of the historical setting and interpreted some of the then abundant allegorical texts about saviors like Jesus. That is how they got into the Gospels.

Like Paul and the Gnostics, most early Christians saw Jesus as a myth of the indefinite past. Later he may have been identified with "another Jesus," a teacher from Galilee or Judea. The harmonization of the texts—

incorporating Pauline teachings into the Gospel prototexts and vice versa, correcting the texts to counter anti-Christian criticism, freelance editing—made recovering the primary texts and tracking the changes it underwent impossible. That might even be unnecessary, since the mythical texts have next to no theological value. That Celsus and other critics contested Jesus' divinity, but accepted his historicity, may be explained not only by ancient credulity, but also by his being a typical character of religious folklore. Critics knew nothing about the historical Jesus except what Christians told them. The absence of argument is no proof of Jesus' historicity.

Christians often cite Jesus' rejection and execution as a proof of his story's credibility, claiming that no one would invent such an unsatisfactory outcome. But in Greek culture people who offered new teachings or upbraided the immoral populace commonly finished that way with no connotation of disgrace. To the contrary, rejection and death confirmed wisdom and good intent. Many of Zeus' sons were betrayed to such a death.

Another reason is no less important. Followers can form teaching only around the disappeared, rejected hero. Otherwise, inconvenient questions arise: where is evidence of his victory, like the kingdom of heaven on earth, a mass following, acceptance by philosophers and rulers? A victorious hero from the days of old is as good as the one who disappeared: there is no historical record, and all sorts of ideas may be attributed to him. Many cults have ancient heroes. The first mentions of Jesus in the epistles of Paul treat him as a figure of old. But when Jesus' image took on the features of contemporary men, there was no choice: he had to be rejected to avoid explaining why nobody outside the sect knew anything of the deity's accomplishments.

One curious thesis is that the followers of John the Baptist invented the Jesus myth to rectify his promise of the messiah's advent.<sup>mxcviii</sup> Adding Jesus' execution would make him look like the popular John and explain why he was defeated and unknown. If Jesus was intended as unimportant technical personage, then the accounts of him were insignificant, and need not be scrutinized; thus the Gospels are full of inconsistencies.

At the beginning, there were popular legends about Wisdom, a savior, and so forth, while at the same time, the Gnostics, borrowing from other pagans, built their own concept, the Jews built theirs on the figure of the preacher, and Paul built his own, including a little Greek philosophy and mythology. The Gospels appeared later, with Gnostic myths such as the resurrection accepted literally, and went down in history. The Gnostic amendments are apparent in the background of the reconstructed source texts. The Gnostics, Jewish, and Pauline versions are so different they cannot be regarded as branches of one and the same teaching.

The views of heretical sects indirectly support the hypothesis that several almost unrelated versions of Christianity were created. The Gnostics paid no attention to the historical Jesus, just added his name to existing pagan texts. They considered themselves the real Christians and the Church

an imitation. According to Eusebius, Jewish Christians, who later became the Ebionites, considered Jesus simply a teacher. No man accepted as divine would be reduced to such common status; rather, the process went the other way to deify an earthly preacher. Several sects, however, rejected an obvious "divinizing" fabrication.

Jesus' teaching is natural for a mythical hero but odd for a Jewish prophet. Jesus seems detached from time. He tackles no practical issues of the period. What should be done with the altar stones preserved by Maccabees after the banishment of Greeks from the Temple "until a true prophet arises" and says what to do with them? What kind of work is permissible on Saturday? May the Torah be translated or only the Hebrew original used? Rabbis had to answer those and many other questions in the Talmud in the course of the next five hundred years.

The Christians may have derived from the Essenes, who held many views ascribed to Jesus: fate<sup>mxciix</sup>; belief in both military and spiritual messiahs; abstinence from wealth (communal ownership); refusal to take oaths; rejection of evil deeds; immortality of the soul; practicing mercy under any conditions; wearing white clothes (angels, transfiguration episodes in the Gospels). When they traveled the Essenes took nothing with them, as Jesus told his disciples to do, since they could use the common property of their fellows elsewhere. Jesus' harsh prohibition of divorce corresponds to the Essenes concept of marrying only to beget progeny. After the war with the Romans, the Essenes were revered for their struggle against the oppressors.

Josephus writes of a certain countryman Joshua (Jesus) who appeared four years before the war and went around Jerusalem proclaiming day and night, "A voice crying to all people!" especially on festivals. He was punished, made no excuses, and resumed his mission. He was brought before the Roman prefect Albinus where he cried, "Woe to Jerusalem!" He was flogged for refusing to answer the prefect and released. Albinus thought he was insane. During the siege, to his cry, "A voice against Jerusalem and the sanctuary! A voice against all the people!" he added one day, "Woe to me, too!" Soon a catapulted stone killed him.<sup>mc</sup> Whether this story belongs to Josephus or was interpolated by Christians, it is remarkably similar to that of Jesus, especially since that Joshua fits virtually every line of Isaiah 53, the central messianic prophecy. *Joshua* might be a nickname, *savior* in Hebrew: the function expected from Isaiah's character or Jesus. A *countryman* might well refer to a Galilean.

Josephus also writes about the famous false prophet from Egypt who had about thirty thousand followers and fled Judea after the Romans tried to execute him. He aimed to take Jerusalem over with the help of supporters, rather like Jesus' behavior in the Temple. That pretender, like Jesus, led his followers out into the desert and promised to destroy the Temple.

The Church probably distorted the stories of persecution to show that Christianity's importance was evident at once. The Romans persecuted philosophers, ministers of other cults, or astrologers now and then, not intensely but constantly. Sometimes a cult acquired formal recognition. Bacchanals were prohibited before Julius, but later emperors declared themselves Dionysians. Eusebius counts about a hundred Christian martyrs, some undoubtedly invented, in the course of three centuries, which is far from mass repression. Origen mentions no large-scale hostilities. Three emperors—Decius, Valerius, and Diocletian—aggressively persecuted Christians, as well as a few others over a period of from five to eight years.<sup>226</sup>

Julius Caesar granted Jews the right to abstain from pagan rites, and early Christians enjoyed that privilege as Jews. When, however, they were exempted from the fines imposed on Jews, because Christians did not take part in the War, the Romans began to see them as non-Jews and as votaries of a strange, illegal religion.

Pagans often added Jesus to their pantheon and offered sacrifices to him, a tolerance typical of the cults which assured the unimpeded spread of Christianity. Paul complains of newly converted Christians participating in Gentile rites.

Jesus acted like many diviners who often had many followers, so the Jews saw his appearance as nothing extraordinary. The similarities between him and other preachers, on whom the evangelists modeled Jesus' image, are entirely comprehensible. There were many minor movements, each preaching a different messiah (*christ*). Many sects practiced baptism.<sup>mc1</sup> Since they were preparing for the advent of a messiah, they were by definition *christian*, messianic. Later they were erroneously lumped together as followers of one concrete Christ named Jesus.

Many sects preached a coming messiah. They knew John the Baptist's story but often had not heard about Jesus. When Christians proclaimed the messiah's advent, the doomsday sects responded quickly to what they thought was an event of *their* faith, not a new religion at all. Sectarianism was common in the Diaspora, where the most bizarre opinions proliferated in the absence of controlling religious authorities.

The Christian Church included multiple groups waging ideological warfare on one another. 2John reports that a local church did not heed the apostle, and its leader tried to split off. When Paul returned to Jerusalem after years in Greece, only the apostle James received him, and that only briefly and after a day's delay.

From the very beginning, Paul separated Christianity from Judaism. Christianity increasingly attracted more Gentiles than Jews. If Gentile

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<sup>226</sup> Though Christian legends are full of elaborate tortures applied by Romans to the martyrs, the Romans—unlike Persians and later Christians—were not inventive in tortures.

adherents of polytheism could quickly accept a new chief god acting nearby, the Jews would have to abandon monotheism to accept a Christianity with polytheistic leanings. Further, Jews, obliged to study the Hebrew Scriptures, would be hard put to believe Christian theories based on mythology and grossly distorted quotations. Acts describes the militancy of Diaspora Jews who threw Paul out of the synagogues repeatedly. Jews living in their homeland did not have to react so violently to preserve their national identity. After turning to Christianity, they were still Jews, living among their people and keeping the law. For Jews in the Diaspora, accepting Christianity was tantamount to taking part in Gentile rites.

John Chrysostom's *Adversus Judaeos* should not be overvalued. The contacts between Christians and the Jews he severely criticized took place in a very restricted part of the Christian sphere. The preposition *adversus* points to moderate contradictions, though later Christian generations raised in a different culture probably mistook the early texts of Church leaders as manifestations of struggle and applied that struggle to their world. The texts reflect the polemical style of those times that did not imply personal hatred for the writers' opponents. Chrysostom's Sunday flock went to synagogue on Saturday, and he could hardly avoid dealing with rabbis. Similarly, Jerome had rabbi friends, but called them all kinds of names in his writings. The culture, not yet tainted by centuries of Christian hatred, was tolerant, and no one hated anyone else for practicing another religion or another sect of the same religion.

Christians claimed divinity for their founder, and their denial of other religions is exclusivism, not really monotheism. The first Christians worshipped Jesus only, not Jewish God. Only later did Church theologians conceive of the trinity so Christians could worship both at once. Monotheism was never well-established in Christianity, and quickly erode into the worship of saints. Now the Christians pray to Mary essentially the same way as they address Jesus.

Early Christianity needed religious roots for a number of reasons. The Roman Empire permitted only legal religions, which had to be ancient. Christians connected to Judaism as the most suitable legal religion and claimed that Christianity was its true offshoot. There were many cults, many theologies, and yet another god would surprise no one; but monotheist Judaism preaching self-discipline and abstinence was exotic and attractive. The new Christian cult, once based on an old and credible theology, looked traditional and trustworthy.

The usefulness of Christianity's connection to Judaism was short-lived. As Christianity spread, the Church started to deny its Jewish roots, not so radically as Marcion, who abandoned the Hebrew Bible. Another method worked: Judaism was the source, but Jesus' teaching was new and completely changed the old model. The practical result was the same: a separate religion but without Marcion's violence. Now the Church taught an ancient, respected religion.

## What is the Real Meaning of Christian Teaching?

Although a loose, mystical interpretation of the canon eliminates many contradictions, the Church has traditionally rejected it. Origen said textual variations were the Holy Spirit's way of fitting divine inspiration to the various apostles' needs. But how would divine adjustment produce factual contradictions? St. Augustine modified the idea to suggest that the evangelists sometimes meant something different from what they wrote.

The Talmud says, "Historical accounts are given in the Bible only for their interpretation."<sup>mciii</sup> If Christianity derived from Jewish tradition, the Gospels should be approached the same way. That does not mean that the accounts are unreliable or contradictory as we know them, but rather that some of them may have had a mystical sense originally.

Expanding on Paul's thought,<sup>mciii</sup> some Christians believe the Gospels have secret meanings, with prophecies encoded in the text. That cannot be so, since the *peshet* technique applied to the Hebrew Scriptures to decipher their complex interrelated grammatical structures and etymology, is irrelevant to the Gospels, compiled in barbarous Greek. The Gospel parables are usually quite transparent. In any case, the literalists emasculated not only the codes but even the secondary meaning of the common allegories. Any attempt to find hidden meaning in the Gospels is conjecture, arbitrary speculation.

Mystical interpretation can explain anything any way. But even a wonderful mystical meaning does not guarantee the authenticity of the episode.

The Lutheran concept of individual, unaided biblical interpretation allows anyone understand as the Bible as he wishes. Allegory enables one man to see pictures in an oil spot on water, while another sees the same picture in all the spots, and a third sees only spots.

Modern apologists prefer to have the best from both concepts through literal interpretation where possible and allegorical interpretation where a literal one is meaningless. Such an approach is logical if Jesus' teachings are interpreted mystically and historical events literally. That distinction, however, is not observed.

The evangelists and Paul were uneducated and could not discern the subtleties of logic, allegory, or philology about which a great literature now exists. They lacked the modern sense of irony and subtle paradox.<sup>227</sup> Before using a term, none of them analyzed its applications in the Torah, Jewish tradition, or Greek philosophy, nor did they attempt to attach an arcane sense to each word, episode, or logical link. NT authors used many

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<sup>227</sup> Black humor seems present in Mishnah.



words and concepts without much thought, so both contradictions and mistakes abound. To try to resolve them by imagining complicated theological and linguistic structures, is futile.

The Didache refutes the claim that Jesus addressed people directly. Its subtitle is "Teaching of the Lord, given to heathen by twelve apostles," meaning that Jesus addressed only a circle of initiates, who then delivered his teaching to the Gentiles, a procedure characteristic of the mystery religions. The Didache's nonmystical orthodoxy in other matters reinforces that testimony. The writer cannot be suspected of distortion in favor of mysticism.

The Didache's subtitle does not reflect a Jewish homiletic practice where an interpreter accompanies the rabbi. The subtitle appeared much later than the text itself in a pagan environment in which the editor could have known nothing about the custom.

Discussing the Baptist, I raised the possibility that he did not preach traditional Jewish doctrine. Jesus led a faction of John's followers, and his teaching could be close to the cults, too.

According to the Jewish tradition, Jesus studied magic in Egypt. He was executed because he was a "deceiver" and "led Israel astray," charges customary in relation to strange religions.

A yes or no answer to the question of Jesus being a Gnostic is difficult. On one hand, most of the early sayings are evidently Gnostic. On the other hand, their authenticity is far from proven, especially considering the Gnostics' arbitrary attribution of the authorship of their texts. Further, most concepts were borrowed from tradition, philosophy, ethics, or myths, and distinguishing between the authentic and the borrowed is next to impossible. In the long run, not only do we not know which sayings and ideas are *ipsissima verba*, but even the shape of his doctrine is obscure.

That Jewish sectarians accepted Jesus does not mean he was not a Gnostic. The Essenes, for example, leaned to dualism as far as possible while staying within the bounds of monotheism. The Gospels bear the imprint of bowdlerized mystical Gnosticism.

Regardless of what Jesus actually taught, Gnostic and mystic concepts infest the canonical Gospels, emasculated in Luke, bowdlerized in Matthew, always meaningless. If we judge them inauthentic, much of the Gospels and most of Jesus' beautiful sayings are gone.

## *Jewish Axioms in Christianity*

A comparison of Judaism and Christianity is tricky, since both religions are comprised of a host of different, often opposing elements among which different views can be found. What should be compared to what is not immediately apparent.

More or less precise equivalents of practically all Christian ideas and even events can be found in Judaism, true not only of Jewish Matthew but also of Gnostic John. Strack-Billerbeck successfully made such a comparison with the canonical text. The apocrypha and other Christian mystical and sectarian texts also have Jewish equivalents.

The reason is that both traditions involved thousands of different people with various views, cultures, and education over the course of more than two thousand years. Out of such a great abundance of opinions and ideas, one may naturally expect to find equivalents to each in the other.

Comparing only the two canons is not quite right. The victories of Hillel's Rabbinism in Judaism and Church literalism in Christianity were largely accidental, though simplicity and functionality played a part in both cases. The state of religions in the first and second centuries was substantially different from what we imagine today, and we may only guess what Christianity looked like then.

The possibility of several possible approaches to interpretation increases the complexity. The Church's literal interpretation and Judaism's mystical *peshet* are at opposite poles. The rules of proof by means of certain operations with quotations from the Scriptures do not always square with present-day notions of textual analysis, sometimes a word game.

Accordingly, a method to compare Christianity and Judaism must be chosen arbitrarily. Admitting mystic interpretation of the concepts and episodes, I nevertheless apply several commonsense restrictions.

Mystical interpretation must not fly off into the empyrean but should be based on theological concepts ascribed to the author of the text. The exercise of creative thought about any text can reveal the arbitrary and even predefined (by the scholar) meaning.

Quotations should be considered in context. Otherwise, the shorter the quotation, the more extended its sphere of application at the expense of its specific meaning. For example, when Christians refer to biblical prophecies, we should see the contexts in which those prophecies might come true—war or peace, general prosperity, or the triumph of Israel under the Messiah, *etc.*

Phrases detached from their context were used to form the *halakha*, Jewish law, but they do not approach the degree of distortion the Gospels' editors achieved. A favorite method of Christian theologians is to

pull quotations from the Bible, often individual words and short phrases. There are many suitable words in a large text.

Condemning such mistakes, Rabbi Abahu says to a sectarian, "There is difficulty here for you who do not interpret the context; there is no difficulty for us who do interpret the context."<sup>mciv</sup>

The evangelists did not use rabbinic methods of interpretation, since pagans, lacking credible, generally accepted texts, had no need to develop methods of arguing from them. Educated Jews did not participate in writing the Gospels.

Why did Christianity claim theological independence? Jesus' teaching is within the law if some interpretations are at the fringes. Other sects had interpretations just as unusual. The theological abyss between Judaism and Christianity is rooted in the tradition of Church theologians, not in the teachings of the canonical Gospels.

The idea that Jesus preached love while the Hebrew Bible preached malice is especially popular. Jesus' commandment of love is, however, taken verbatim from Leviticus.

Christianity's abandonment of the law finds no substantiation in Jesus' words. James based his abrogation of kosher laws—not other commandments—on personal opinion, not divine inspiration.

Even if Christians think the messiah comes twice, what does that change? Keeping the law and righteousness do not depend on the time of the messiah's advent or whether he has already come or not.

## *The Origin of the Gospels*

It is doubtful that Matthew and Luke derived from a single source, be it Mark, Thomas, or Q,<sup>228</sup> Mark looks like a summary, perhaps an abridged guide for preachers. The authors of Matthew and Luke could hardly invent the historical background without changing Mark. Luke says he based his work on many sources. To suppose that Mark was the best or the main source is unreasonable.

Thomas, the largest repository of Jesus' sayings, accounts for only a small portion of the Gospels' volume. Why would a forger eliminate any of Jesus' sayings in Thomas? Luke did use Thomas. Many pericopes passed from Thomas to Matthew through Luke. Papias calls Matthew a collection of oracles, which constitutes only a small part of the Gospel. That agrees with our supposition that Matthew and Luke were initially compiled from short, one-phrase pericopes. Such collections of teachers' aphorisms, *logoi sophon*, were common then. The ideas were reshuffled and put into contexts often quite different among the evangelists. The background facts were probably taken from oral legends so varied that the evangelists give contradictory accounts of Jesus' life. Collections of stories heard and recorded, were popular then and had their own name *symposiac*, *table-talk*.

The existence of Q seems a speculative hypothesis. Imagine a text so authoritative that the most popular Gospels duplicated parts of it word for word. Christians do not mention it once, though the texts of many less important and clearly forged documents, as well as references to them, have been preserved. The pious attitude toward it is strange: Q is cited *word for word*; yet each new writer amends it.

Q should have existed in the sixties and seventies, its prototexts earlier; but that contradicts the absence of Jesus' sayings in the fifties when Paul wrote. Otherwise, we must explain why Paul missed Jesus' maxims if they could help settle his disputes definitively.

The idea of Q as a unique source contradicts the fact that Matthew and Luke set nearly identical sayings in altogether different contexts. They obviously operated with individual pericopes, a collection of sayings, not a coherent text. That each author decided where to place the sayings independently is clear. The choices came off badly with Matthew, rather better with Luke.

The affinity of Thomas and Q is apparent. Thomas seems closest to the hypothetical Q; But Thomas is known and has been found, while Q is

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<sup>228</sup> German *Quelle*, source, a text, common to the synoptics. According to the Q hypothesis, Matthew, Luke, and Mark copied the prototext, editing and amending it slightly.

unknown and has not been found. The conclusion that Thomas is Q-logia<sup>229</sup> suggests itself. The other part of Q which describes the events may be proto-Matthew, a text close to Mark.

Matthew likely did not draw on Luke. Luke says his Gospel is one of many, so we should move the date of Matthew to well after Luke, an unnaturally late period. Jewish Matthew would not likely use the Gospel of a Gentile with its multiple errors evident to a Jew. That, however, did not prevent late editors from adding many Thomas-Luke sayings and the episodes of birth, crucifixion, and resurrection to Matthew's Gospel.

Luke's trustworthiness depends on our understanding of Jesus. Luke's borrowing from Thomas is intensive and comparatively precise. If Thomas was a late collection of quotations, Luke naturally decided to include him in his Gospel as something new and distinctive. If Thomas reflected the authentic sayings of Jesus and was relatively early, we must agree then that Gnostic Luke is closest to Jesus, with Matthew appearing much later in a form resembling the canonical text.

Luke's other peculiarity is the collection of parables about wicked people—the unrighteous judge,<sup>mcv</sup> the dishonest manager.<sup>mcvi</sup> Just about everything that comes to mind can be found here: sophistic style, paradoxical humor, and a sermon on the salvation of sinners. Luke's authenticity depends on whether those tales reflect the evangelist or Jesus.

Not much time separated Luke from Matthew, but he refers specifically to many earlier texts. Many prototexts apparently existed before Matthew, too. Thus, the contention about priority seems forced. All the Gospels are inauthentic in that they are compiled from the prototexts and oral tradition. To assume that the oral tradition was of Essene derivation pushes the earliest possible dating of the prototexts to the second century B.C.E.

Prototexts and oral tradition eventually gave rise to the Gospels. Proto-Matthew likely came first, at the end of the first - beginning of the second century, while John was last, possibly as late as the end of the second century. Mystics compiled Mark as a secret book of esoteric matters against the background of Matthew and Luke. When the book left the community, the esoteric text was withdrawn, leaving just the whittled away synoptic framework. Later editors added much of Lucan material to Matthew. The editors were not normative Jews, since much of the material is anti-Jewish. Yet, they were close to the Jews, since they softened both Gnostic and pro-Gentile pronouncements. They could be Jewish Christians, sufficiently removed from mainstream Jews. The editors interpolated Matthew's criticism of Pharisees into Luke, and generalized it onto all Jews. Luke, on the contrary, strove to present the Jews as respectable ancestors of Christians.

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<sup>229</sup> A source of Jesus' sayings, common for the Synoptics.

Thomas was compiled after Paul's epistles, but well before Luke who heavily drew on Thomas.

Over time, the Gospels were expanded with dubious stories and myths. Papias notes extensive oral traditions as early as the first and second centuries and quotes common legends. One set of stories was included, another excluded, purely by accident.

None of the evangelists was Jesus' disciple. Papias in the twelfth fragment says John was alive during Emperor Nerva's reign (96–98 C.E.). That is unlikely, considering ancient life expectancy, though it corresponds well with our hypothesis of Christian origins after 70 C.E. By the time the Gospels were compiled, none of the original apostles was alive.

Various texts of the first and early second century demonstrate ignorance of the Gospels. Paul and the author of the *Didache* build their own concepts, explanations, and formulas instead of using the Gospels. Papias' account of events differs substantially from that of the Gospels.

Why do the Gospels not show Jesus urging abandonment of the law, since that matter was important to Christianity? Since the Gospels were written after the epistles, the writers had to consider the problem. Probably the authors of the synoptic prototexts were Paul's Jewish adversaries and opposed his proclamation of the end of the law. They knew the epistles and could use them but reckoned it impossible to dismiss the law. John seems to have no interest in the subject at all.

A cynical explanation is also possible: the Gospel authors had to explain why the Jews were guilty of rejecting Jesus and made their rejection absolutely unreasonable, which would not be the case if Jesus had dismissed the law.

Early Christian authors mention the Gospels little, quote them infrequently, make few references to them, although they ascribed them to the apostles and their disciples. Even when expounding concepts later included in the Gospels, early authors depend on the Gospels hardly at all, either having no idea or taking no notice of them. Meanwhile, the same authors intensively build their own theoretical concepts without appealing to Gospel authority. Only later did the Gospels acquire the aura of sanctity.

Parallels among the Gospels do not prove the availability of common sources. Attempts to correlate them resulted not only in new harmonies but also in the synchronization of the Gospels proper. Traces of such cross-drawing appear in many places, as sayings comfortable in one Gospel are forced into another regardless of the context and theological orientation. The disconnect is especially pronounced when edited Gnostic passages are added to Jewish Matthew; such passages are numerous in Luke, who drew on Thomas and the Gnostic prototexts. A considerable percentage of synoptic parallels stemmed from harmonization, which explains the volume of the canonical Gospels, extraordinarily large compared to the heretical ones, which did not suffer extensive amendment.

The final versions of the Gospels were not derived straightforwardly from one another. Matthew's cross-editing author evidently took Jesus' maxims from Luke, but Luke's editor corrected errors which are still found in Matthew and were probably present in the early Luke: Luke starts Jesus' trial at dawn, not at night, as in Matthew. Consequently, the volume of the amended Gospels doubled or quadrupled.

The "historification" may mean that Jews created the Jesus story. A Gentile writer would not consider it necessary, because pagan accounts of divine cult founders were either mythical or active so long ago that their stories were legendary. But a Jew, used to believe his religious texts are historically reliable, would seek historicity for the founder of his religion. For Gentiles, historicity was counterproductive – authority was acquired through antiquity, even if mythical.

Biography in the modern sense was only beginning to develop as a genre when the Gospels were compiled.<sup>mcvii</sup> The evangelists would not think of creating a historically accurate record of events without attributing their own ideas to the personages or freely forming the background.

If the Gospels have real sources and are not based on fantasy, they were originally a number of short prototexts, most of which emerged in a Gentile environment. Besides errors in geography, theology, and local customs, their Gentile roots are also evident from the few Aramaicisms in the Gospels, originally written in Greek.

The Gospels continuously refer to the Jewish canon, but not to the pseudepigrapha or the mythology immensely popular with Jewish sectarians. In spite of many sayings which reflect the views of the pseudepigraphic writers, there seem to be no direct borrowings from them. The natural explanation is that pagans had access only to the Septuagint.

The Gospels rarely refer Deuteronomy, the principal source of rabbinic legal opinions and the basis of practical application of the religion in general. Christian theologians have to assume that Jesus was not interested in the law, which leads to the conclusion that he cared neither for Jewish social structure nor for individual conduct or relations with Gentiles. Unlike in the mystical Paul, the Gospels do not indicate that faith in Jesus affects such matters. That would be odd.

If we suppose that most references to the Jewish canon came from late Christian editors seeking to establish their religion's ancient roots, everything falls into place. They did not possess the knowledge required to interpret the law and did not try. That is why the references to Deuteronomy are so few.

As to derivation from *logoi Iesou*, the Gospel relates that after Jesus' crucifixion, the disciples sat together recording, each in his own book, what he remembered.<sup>mcviii</sup> The disciples were minimally literate, since Simon Bar Sheta (or the High Priest Ieshua Ben Hamla)<sup>mcix</sup> established a system for teaching the Torah to all Jewish boys in the days of Queen Salome. Probably they were also taught to read and write.

Literacy was widespread in Judea. To copy the book of Esther cost one *zuz*.<sup>mcx</sup> Only a large number of notoriously poor scribes could keep the price down. The fourth Qumran cave held 574 manuscripts—one cave at one dig, far from the main centers of a small nation. The gigantic quantity is evidence of the high literacy rate among Jews.

On the contrary, uneducated people wrote the Gospels. The Talmud commonly keeps scriptural quotations short since readers were supposed to remember the text in full. The Gospels, written by unlearned amateurs for ignorant readers, quote whole pericopes.



## The Qumranites

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls raised the possibility of another origin of the image of Jesus: the Essene<sup>230</sup> community at Qumran.

The Qumranites descend from their Teacher of Righteousness, a priest expelled from Jerusalem. The disciples who followed him were also priests. He started the Qumran Essene sect and created a new theology which the Sadducees rejected. The sect grew and lasted a long time, spreading the new teaching. The Qumran texts and pseudepigrapha suggest no major differences between Essenes and Christians.

The expulsion of the Teacher of Righteousness is commonly dated in the second century B.C.E., convenient for an Essene prototype of Jesus, who would have learned a plethora of myths, which culminated in his Gospel image some time in the first century C.E.

Elsewhere in this book, I argue that dating the Gospel events in the 60s is more probable than in the 30s. The Essenes were probably unusually active in the sixties, when they interpreted the political turmoil as fulfillment of messianic prophecies. Further, the Romans destroyed secluded Essene communities in those years and forced the Essenes to bring their teaching outside and adapt it to living in the open.

The Gospels mention Sadducees, Pharisees, and scribes, but not Essenes. That could be expected if the writer was himself an Essene. He was writing about another people, not about himself.

The Essenes are sometimes identified with the Gospel *Herodians*, though neither Josephus nor Philo use that unusual term. It has the political tint of people close to Herod. If an Essene turned Christian wrote about non-Christian Essenes, he would not call them a religious group, because their theological views were basically the same as his. He would base the distinction on other grounds, like linking them politically to the unpopular Herod.

Puzzlingly, Hippolytus<sup>mcxi</sup> relates the zealots and the *sicarii* to the Essenes, although Josephus says they are separate political groups. If true, the notion makes a lot of sense, since people from both groups were among Jesus' disciples,<sup>231</sup> and his followers at large were Essenes. That would also explain Christian concern in the interpolation about Masada, which was occupied by *sicarii*.<sup>232</sup> Such a cross-reference significantly reinforces the argument that the Christians derived from the Essenes.

Christian Daniel-like apocalyptic prophecies become understandable. The Essenes also based prophecy on Daniel, who wrote

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<sup>230</sup> Oddly, the word Essene is meaningless in Hebrew.

<sup>231</sup> Simon Zealot and Judah Iscariot.

<sup>232</sup> The *sicarii* appear to be Essenes, proto-Christians. Therefore, Christians praised their coreligionists' defense of Masada.

about Antiochus Epiphanes, not the Romans, though his predictions were co-opted for first-century texts.

An Essene origin may account for the Gospel's multiple layers. Each leader of the Essene community was deemed the successor of the Teacher of Righteousness. The image of Jesus could have accumulated in the lives of several generations of leaders. Early Christian theology represents various views from the sect's two-hundred year history. The Christians had a rich collection of material from which to write the Gospels.

The Romans dispersed the sect in 68 C.E., its last leader probably crucified, which the survivors recorded when they wrote history. That mode of execution, natural for a rebel, looks odd in the story of Jesus, charged with religious crime.

Aside from an Essene origin, how do we explain the following coincidence? There was an Essene sect, familiar from independent sources<sup>233</sup> and living in recognizable places—Jerusalem and probably many other settlements—according to both Josephus and Philo, its prominent figures, its teachings and part of its history all known. The community's size may be judged by the huge literature it produced. When the Romans destroyed Qumran around 68 C.E., the sect suddenly vanished into the blue, leaving nothing more to history, neither successors nor teachings. Some rabbis mentioned in the Talmud may be identified with Essenes, but even so they may have been Qumranites who did not accept Christianity. The similar disappearance of the Sadducees is understandable since they were few, concentrated in Jerusalem, and taught an impractically rigid Temple-centered theology. The Essenes were considerably more numerous. The extent to which they spread abroad can be seen in their rule: they traveled with nothing and stayed in the homes of other Essenes. Since they lived in closed communities, they could have had colonies everywhere, none more than a day's walk apart.

About the time the Essenes disappeared, however, another sect, the Christians, appeared from nowhere, its theology, history, founder's name, location, and everything else obscure. Since many people accepted it immediately, Christianity soon counted a considerable following in many communities, so many that the Didache forbids itinerant preachers to take food for more than one day, in the Essene fashion.

In addition, their theology and their leaders are much alike, and the Essenes were banned and persecuted just when the first reliable mentions of Christianity appear. A conclusion suggests itself: *Christian* was just another, new lay term for *Essene*.

Epiphanius said early pagan devotees of Jesus were called *Essenes*, and the Essenes did not call *themselves* Essenes. The conjecture is possible

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<sup>233</sup> Josephus, Philo, Pliny the Elder, Strabo, (perhaps) Posidonius, Nicolaus of Damascus, Marcus Agrippa, Solinus, Dio Chrysostom, Epiphanius, Hippolytus, Eusebius.

that the name *Essenes* is related to the name of the unnamed founder, perhaps Joshua or Jesse. The Greek transliterations *Iesoua*, Jesus, and *Iessaei*, Essenes, are close. The sectarians knew their leader's name, even if they did not want to record it, perhaps for reasons akin to the biblical prohibition of registration, known in some cultures as giving the evil eye. Followers of Jesse could be called Essenes, though they styled themselves after doctrinal features—sons of light, the poor, *etc.*

The Jesus myth was created gradually as the sayings, narratives, and texts accumulated at Qumran or other communities whose books were eventually stored there. When the Essenes were banished from Qumran and other destroyed towns, they left the “iron curtain” of their ritual isolation for the first time, taking their theology, pseudepigrapha, prototexts, and myths with them. Significantly, when the Gospels refer to corrupt biblical texts, the Qumran manuscripts show exactly the same odd deviations.<sup>mexii</sup>

Just as mainline Judaism faced a short-term crisis after the Temple was destroyed, many people took their mature religion, Essenic Judaism, with them as they settled here and there. Under such circumstances, the success of the teaching that became Christianity is plausible.

If so, Jesus was not the faint image of the half-forgotten Teacher of Righteousness; rather he was the embodiment of a vibrant, colorful image, continuously, if eclectically, enriched with new myths, of the ideal Essene, the sect's leader and teacher, a saint close to God, the reflection not of the Teacher of Righteousness himself, but of his image formed from the second century B.C.E. to the first century C.E.

That Christianity flowered among Asian Gnostics is not surprising. Their communities were natural refuges for the Essenes, geographically (they did not want to join the open world), theologically (the Essenes believed in dualism, the fundamental Gnostic teaching), and cosmopolitically (they were theologically eclectic). Here recall that Essene theology drew upon Mesopotamian (Babylonian) theology, and Christianity preserves that kinship.

We have no writings of Jesus, nor did his disciples take his words down. If Jesus was a collective image, that makes sense and even more so if Christians used the Essene texts.

The Essene founders of Christianity apparently abandoned their former sect's rigorous rituals because preserving the old ritual purity in the world would have been difficult. Like Jews after the Temple was destroyed, the Essenes replaced formal rites with spiritual equivalents, just as early Christianity did as it grew out the Essene doctrine.

Christians may have been the ultraliberal wing of the Essenes, a kind of protestant movement within the community. At some moment, the impossibility of sustaining old, overly complex rites became obvious. According to sociology, a group of reformers was sure to arise, demanding radical simplification of the formalities. Hippolytus hints at such a group among the Essenes.<sup>mexiii</sup>

Secrecy and holiness tend to weaken over time. The Jewish menorah, once thought too holy to be depicted, is now sold in shops for household use. The rabbis deliberated how to dispose Torah scrolls desecrated by sectarian marginal notations. Today anyone can buy a *mezuzah*, containing a part of the Torah, and can throw it away. A similar process probably took place among the Essenes over the course of two or three centuries. When the sect was suppressed, pressure increased to simplify the rituals.

Christian descent from the Essenes explains other chronological oddities as well. If we follow the traditionally accepted course of events, the origin of Christianity is a classical example of an enthusiast movement building on its leader's ideas. Such movements usually do not last. If they survive, they develop over several dozens of years, culminating in mass conversions. Their leaders come to power and once the peak of fanaticism passes, the new regime acquires its own bureaucracy. The Church developed that way but with one principal difference: formation continued not for dozens of years, but for the two centuries which separate Christianity's appearance as a popular religion and the Council of Nicaea.

Modern sociology knows no other examples of fanatic movements lasting two or three centuries. Usually enthusiasm decreases and the movement fades much sooner, for the charismatic founder, surrounded by imitators, growing dull, his ideas dropping out of fashion and losing their freshness and relevance.

The Church became bureaucratized and persisted with its own structure and hierarchy. Such institutionalization is not typical. A bureaucratic system usually forms after official recognition is gained. Christianity had such a system, if not comprehensive, well before Nicaea in the fourth century.

The hypothesis of Christianity's Essene origins may explain the Church's comparatively smooth and unusually long development before its recognition as an official religion. Christianity was a branch of a serious, old, respected sect. Its founder was detached from time, his teaching continuously reformed. His earthly way was accepted as allegory. The movement did not obsolesce.

Christianity was not a new religion which had either to attract a mass following quickly or perish. It had been developing for centuries before Nicaea, free of the intense fanaticism that fades with time.

Gentiles were accustomed to the philosophic and theological aspects of Essene teaching, so Christianity expanded. Essene teachings included reverence of the sun, control of the emotions, celibacy, and asceticism in general. The Essenes were ready for self-sacrifice to avoid violating their laws, thus satisfying the Roman ideal of virtue.

If Christians were in fact Essenes, they would have attributed the Essene customs to Jesus and his disciples. This would explain a lot.

All the synoptic references to Joseph, Jesus' father, are evidently either insertions (Matthew) or fiction (Luke). The early texts do not refer to Jesus' father or the details of his family life at all. The visit of the child Jesus' family to Jerusalem which Luke tells in the spirit of the Infancy Gospels is not credible. John made up the story of his trip to Cana with his mother for the purpose of relating certain miracles and notions. There are no credible references in the Gospels to Jesus' family relations.

When Jesus is told that his mother and brothers want to see him, he insists that his disciples and followers are his real family. His refusal to see his mother is significant, since such a thing would be impossible in traditional Judaism where mothers are honored, period.

A tradition may explain this attitude of Jesus. The Essenes did not marry but adopted children and raised them in the community. Mary might have had several children but lived without a husband as a widow, a divorcée, or just not married, and might have sent a child to the Essenes. In that case, Jesus would have considered the community his family.

Josephus says the Essenes accepted only small children. Being fair to the Church, let us assume Jesus was the oldest, since otherwise Mary would not have been a virgin before his birth. She could have sent Jesus' younger brothers to the Essenes, if only for economic reasons. Older children shared the work and might earn something. But Jesus would be only one or two years older than his brothers, at an age acceptable to the Essenes, when Mary could not support her many children. At that point, there would be little economic difference among the children, and she could send Jesus to the Essenes as well as any other of them. There was no effective contraception; she had to bear children willy-nilly. She could have sent Jesus to the Essenes when he was her only child and still have more children. A single woman would do just so, especially if Jesus were illegitimate. It would be reasonable even if Mary had Joseph as her husband. Knowing the child was not his and being a good man, as Matthew says, Joseph let Mary give birth but then discretely delivered Jesus to the Essenes.

Roman Catholic tradition says Mary remained virgin, and the brothers in the Gospels are step-brothers by Joseph's lineage, not Mary's children. Joseph's existence is doubtful, when the relevant passages in Matthew are studied. Matthew shows Jesus refusing to meet with his mother and brothers. In John, his adult brothers do not believe in him. Both references imply blood relation. In ancient culture, step relations were minimally important—though nothing in the texts suggests step relations. Finally, for a married woman to remain a virgin and not bear children would be most unusual.

The Gnostic emphasis on cutting earthly ties can explain Jesus' detachment from his mother. Yet Gnostic John portrays a Jesus close to Mary. Jesus takes her with him to the wedding in Cana.

In ancient times, genealogy was often a key element to succeeding as a group leader. At least the Jerusalem church might expect to be headed by Jesus' family. That is not so, however, except in the case of the enigmatic James the Just. If Jesus had no children, Jesus' brothers' descendants would lead the sect and emerge as the Church's leadership.<sup>234</sup> Eusebius says that did not happen. The Essenes, however, disregarded family ties and chose their leaders by means unrelated to genealogy.

Other explanations are possible. Jesus' mythical character may explain the absence of a hereditary hierarchy, since myths do not have descendants.<sup>235</sup> Even so, Christians would have looked for his mythical relatives, just as Jews were receptive to the messianic claims of David's descendants. Moreover, Jesus' step-brothers' case for leadership would have been strong, since they claimed direct descent from David through Joseph—though Jesus did not, since Joseph was not his father.

To suggest that the sect did not appeal to Jesus' descendants is silly, since the position of sect leader provided relative power and well-being. The apostles and Jesus' brothers were happy to lead the sect.

Jesus did not begin preaching until he was grown, probably not before he was twenty-nine. He was not a Nazorean, a monk, since he drank wine and went about with sinners. Accordingly, he had to be married, though there is not even a hint of a wife or family. Culturally, such a situation was practically an impossibility. Only one explanation is plausible: he was celibate Essene.

That Jesus and his disciples were married people and abandoned their families is practically impossible. They would have been obliged to support them, since women did not work outside the home; otherwise their families would starve. They had a legal obligation to support them.<sup>236</sup> Peter stands somewhat apart in this respect. If his mother-in-law was healed, he had a family. But, first, the episode is doubtful. Second, the evangelists did not like Peter and might ascribe to him the most objectionable behavior for an Essene. Third, Peter's mother-in-law served the table, not his wife, which would not have happened unless his wife was dead and her mother had no other relatives. Perhaps the evangelist wanted to attack Peter, but considered inventing a wife for him over the top and confined himself to an allusion. Centuries later, that episode gave rise to the legend that Peter had a daughter, Petronilla.

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<sup>234</sup> In a similar situation, followers of Ali, son-in-law of prophet Mohammed, formed a sect of Shi'a which has lasted more than twelve centuries.

<sup>235</sup> although many rulers invented mythical predecessors. This was also the case with popes.

<sup>236</sup> Puzzlingly, rabbi Akiva left his wife, even though her parents refused her.

Paul indicates that several of the apostles were married.<sup>mexiv</sup> First, Paul's knowledge of them is doubtful. Second, Paul reported that only for a pedagogical purpose, regardless of the statement's authenticity. (He was inaccurate more than once.) Third, he wrote when the sect's leaders had likely moved beyond Essene celibacy.

Contradictions abound in the Essene texts. For example, in some, members of the community marry,<sup>mexv</sup> while in others they do not.<sup>mexvi</sup> If the differences are authentic, the Essenes may have had different factions, possibly including Christianity.

Christians resemble the Essenes in many respects.

The Teacher of Righteousness had as his antagonist the Evil High Priest; the High Priest Caiaphas initiated the condemnation of Jesus. The Sadducees were rivals of the Essenes and Jesus' main theological opponents.

Both based their interpretation of the Hebrew Scripture on revelation, and both rejected the interpretations of other teachers and any kind of logical system for deducing rules from the sacred texts. The emphasis on revelation is unusual in Judaism, because prophecy based on revelation was thought to have ended five centuries earlier with the minor prophets of Ezra's time,<sup>237</sup> or with Daniel. Rabbis traditionally referred to the opinions of older teachers, though that tradition would change and give priority to the most recent opinion, even though older opinion still holds precedence with respect to the teachings of rabbis of antiquity.

The Teacher of Righteousness was expelled or wounded on Yom Kippur, which is also a more likely date for Jesus' execution than Passover.

The death of the Teacher of Righteousness is never mentioned, while Christians claim that resurrection followed Jesus' death.

After the Teacher of Righteousness died, the Qumran community expanded suddenly around 100 B.C.E. The same happened after Jesus' crucifixion.

The Son of Man is one of the earliest depictions of Jesus, a term elaborated in I Enoch far beyond its nature in the Book of Daniel. I Enoch was found in Qumran but it was not popular among other sects.

The leader of the Essene community was between thirty and fifty years old. The synoptic Gospels suggest the first, while John has people say that Jesus was not yet fifty.<sup>mexvii</sup>

Priests and members of the Essene council had to be over thirty. In John, Jesus calls the apostles *children*, and in the synoptics he speaks to them condescendingly. The culture's emphasis on respect for older people almost necessarily means the apostles were younger than Jesus. People would not accept teenagers as messengers of a popular teacher and miracle-worker, so we may expect the disciples were at least between twenty and thirty, if not older.

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<sup>237</sup> Those ending in the Bible with Malachi.

The Essene council numbered twelve members and three priests.<sup>mcxviii</sup> Peter, James, and John, Jesus' most trusted disciples, were with him at the transfiguration and when he prayed in Gethsemane.<sup>mcxix</sup> The disciples numbered twelve.

The origins of the Essenes are obscure, and the Essenes provide little information except about the Teacher's expulsion from Jerusalem. Paul's epistles indicate that early Christians knew little of the details of Jesus' life, either.

For the Essenes, God or the Teacher of Righteousness (depending on the interpretation) atoned for their sins, while Jesus atoned for the sins of Christians either by his sacrifice or by his righteousness, that is, his obedience to God in sacrificing himself.

Both sects count on God's mercy for the atonement of their sins, unlike Judaism, which emphasizes deeds as the way to righteousness and eventual salvation.

The Essenes, like the Christians, considered themselves under a new covenant, and both of them celebrated the new covenant annually.

Jesus refused to take oaths, but the canon mentions Christians taking oaths. The Essenes avoided oaths, especially in the name of God, but they took twelve vows when they joined the sect, remaining strictly within the Law since they did not swear in vain. Their word was their bond, as Jesus required.

The first two Essene vows were 1) piety to God, and 2) justice toward neighbors.<sup>mcxx</sup> Those were the principal requirements of John the Baptist,<sup>mcxxi</sup> whom the Christians regarded as Jesus' forerunner.

Of all the Jewish groups, only these two gave baptism top priority and insisted on water baptism now instead of spiritual baptism in the age to come.

Essene doctrines in some ways resembled Egyptian beliefs, especially those connected with monotheistic sun worship. Egyptian worshippers of Ra welcomed the sunrise ceremonially, as did the Essenes. In the fourth century C.E. Christians chose December 25—the day of the Roman festival of *the Unconquered Sun*—to celebrate Christmas, the commemoration of Jesus' birth. Tertullian answered the charge that Christians worshipped the sun under the guise of Jesus by explaining why they did it instead of denying the charge. Judaism prohibits sun worship, probably to extirpate the old cult.

Deut21:22–23 prohibits leaving the corpses of executed criminals overnight but offers no restriction for the day. The prohibition recalls reverence to the sunrise (which should not be defiled by corpses), as in Essene practice.

Perhaps the Essenes were not Jewish heretics who assimilated certain Greek concepts and inherited sun worship from the Egyptian monotheism of Pharaoh Akhenaton, whose puzzling cultural revolution marked a brief return to archaic art and monotheistic sun worship. Greek



sun worship could be yet another branch of Egyptian monotheism, like Essenism. All that, however, is speculation.

Essenes made ritual ablutions just before sunrise, as did the Mandaeans who probably preserved very early Christian traditions. The late *Clementine Homilies* say Peter did the same.

Essenes conceived of two messiahs, one military, one priestly. Jesus was in no way military and resembled more the messiah-priest. Of all contemporary sects known to us, only the Essenes abandoned the messianic human ruler concept. Like Christians, they saw the messiah as divine.

Though Gentile Christians, scarcely acquainted with Jewish tradition, traced Jesus' genealogy back to David to fortify their claim that he was the proper Davidic messiah, he resembles the spiritual messiah more. The second messiah the Essenes expected should be a priest of the line of Joseph. The story of Joseph, Jesus' foster father, may reflect an early version of Jesus the spiritual messiah descended from a different Joseph, the father of that tribe, sometimes included among the patriarchs and thus a kind of father for Jesus.

In Luke, Mary is related to Elisabeth, Aaron's kin. The Essenes traced their leader's genealogy through the High Priest Zadok back to Aaron, also an ancestor of the spiritual messiah *Ben Joseph* and hence Jesus son of Joseph' ancestor as well.

Essenes looked for the supernatural messiah but did not think of their most authoritative figure, the Teacher of Righteousness, as messianic. Of all the disciples, only Peter called Jesus messiah—so unusual that Jesus named Peter founder of the future Church.

The Essenes called themselves *poor*; Jesus blessed the poor in spirit. Both sects preached meekness, patience (Jesus' famous injunction to forgive a neighbor endlessly), and rejection of falsehood and lying.

Like Christians, the Essenes were given to praying for their enemies, not hating them.<sup>mcxxii</sup>

Like the early Christians,<sup>mcxxiii</sup> the Essenes called their theology *the Way*.

The Essenes called themselves *children of light*, while John calls Jesus *Light*. Luke calls the disciples *sons of light*.<sup>mcxxiv</sup> The preoccupation with light may be connected to the Essenes' reverence of the sun.

Both Christians<sup>mcxxv</sup> and Essenes called themselves *priests*.

Both believed in the Holy Spirit: the Essenes believed it dwelt in their community; it was sent to Jesus' disciples, thus also abiding in the Christian community.

Essenes called the devil figure not *ha-satan* like the Jews, but Belial<sup>238</sup> (Persian *Belus*), and the Christians at times called him Beelzebub (Baal-Zebub), a related name. Both groups considered the devil a

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<sup>238</sup> Since they understood Hebrew meaning of the word *Belial*, related to *master*, this usage is odd.

theologically independent figure opposed to God, not the accusing (tempting) angel of Judaism. Both groups saw a world full of demons.

In the Gospels, Jesus criticizes the Pharisees, the scribes, the Sadducees, but never the Essenes, at least not directly.

Both were messianic, apocalyptic sects.<sup>mcxxvi</sup>

The Essene hell, a morbid cave of torture, resembles the Gospels' "outer darkness, where there will be crying and gnashing of teeth," more than the usual mythical space external to the world.

Christians and Essenes believed in specific, named angels.

Although Jesus preached love, Christians preached hatred of their antagonists, as in the horrific promises of the apocalypse. The Qumranites hated other (infidel, from their point of view) Jews, but with a rather formal, theoretical hatred. Josephus insists that the Essenes loved one another. Philo took them for pacifists. Essenes seem to have been gentle and generous in their personal relations. For example, when they traveled, they could stay in other members' homes and use their property.

Jesus' liberal attitude to the Law contradicts his rejection of the Gentiles and is doubtful. Jesus often demanded faithfulness to the Law that exceeded that of the Pharisees.<sup>mcxxvii</sup> The Essenes adhered to a rigid, though unorthodox, observance of the Law.

The teachings of both sects were based on the pseudepigrapha and freely interpreted references to the Hebrew Scriptures.

The Essenes were sure that only they knew the true meaning of their rites. Jesus said the Pharisees did not understand the true meaning of the Torah and kept others from knowing it. That way he assumed the authority of a man who *does* understand it.

The Essenes taught a spiritual life expressed by a minimal but reliable and well-designed care of the body. Jesus said the spiritual life means relegating the body to a marginal status.

Both conceived of the Holy Spirit as a separate theological essence, unusual for Judaism then.

The Essenes did not require celibacy for everybody but considered it the ideal way to live. Both Jesus and Paul thought it ideal for those who can manage it. A story about some Essenes marrying<sup>mcxxviii</sup> is probably a late addition intended to justify the abandonment of celibacy among Christians. There was no place in the community for married Essenes to lodge women and they hardly lived apart. The Essenes in communities like Qumran were celibate.

The Essenes studied medicine, while Jesus worked healing miracles, rare in the Jewish tradition.

Both sects were loyal to the authorities since they believed the authorities were from God.

Christians avoided Gentiles, according to Matthew, which fits the Jewish character of his Gospel, but the Essenes were also Jews who thought even other Jews were impure. Secluded groups tend to develop toward

openness. Struggling to replenish their thinning ranks, the surviving Essenes were forced to loosen ritual-purity requirements. Besides, the Essenes may have been no more secluded than other Jews, often accused of misanthropy. The Talmud denounces even trading with sectarians,<sup>mcxxix</sup> while the Essenes permitted trading with Gentiles. They forbade contact with the impure, since they could enter the heavenly realm. Jesus dealt with the impure, but to heal and save them. Either action assumes the necessity of purity to some degree.

The Essenes who survived the destruction of Qumran and their other communities likely abandoned the notoriously tough rules of ritual purity they could not keep except in a closed community, which resonates with Jesus' liberal attitude toward washing hands.<sup>mcxxx</sup> It may account for the simplicity of Christian rites compared to Essene ceremonies. Analogously, as the Church's devotions became more complex, those who preferred simplicity tended to schism.

Determinism dominated both sects' teachings. Josephus describes the Essenes as fatalists.<sup>mcxxxi</sup> The evangelists saw God's will in growing hair and falling birds.

Both sects held property in common. New recruits sold their property and gave the proceeds to the community.<sup>mcxxxii</sup> Early tradition<sup>mcxxxiii</sup> insisted on the community of goods in Christian congregations, contrary to the epistles. The author of Acts probably did not know of the practice firsthand but heard or read rumors of it.

Individual members were arbitrarily assigned various roles in both communities.<sup>mcxxxiv</sup>

Both sects advocate owning one set of clothes and footwear.<sup>mcxxxv</sup>

Members of both sects wore impractical white clothes.

The Essenes took collective meals. Legends of the early Christian communities<sup>mcxxxvi</sup> suggest the same.

The Essenes availed themselves of their communities' hospitality on journeys, as did the early Jewish Christians.<sup>mcxxxvii</sup> In both cases, there were enough communities to offer food and accommodation every night, suggesting that they were no more than a day's journey apart.

Essenes traveled with a sword. So Jesus instructed his disciples.<sup>mcxxxviii</sup> Josephus did not understand why they needed a weapon and guessed they took it "for fear of thieves,"<sup>mcxxxix</sup> which is odd, since they traveled without possessions. Crime was not so bad that travelers feared kidnapping.

Both denounced, indeed practically prohibited, divorce.

The Essenes distrusted women, whom they believed incapable of true faith. Thomas says Jesus told Mary he would make her a man so she could enter the kingdom of heaven.<sup>mcxl</sup>

Both condemned anger and prohibited evil acts.

The Essenes swore an oath that, though they were superior, they would not lord it over their subordinates with fancy clothes, and the like.

Similarly, Jesus condemned the disciples' jostling for place<sup>mcxli</sup> and identified wealth as an impediment to a truly holy life.

Both originally believed in bodily resurrection and shared similar notions of Heaven and Hell. Jesus likened resurrected people to angels, rejecting corporeality, and Paul, too, believed the bodies would be different, spiritual. Later Christians turned to the doctrine of bodily resurrection. Hippolytus asserts late Essenes expected bodily resurrection.

The Essenes made their texts obscure to prevent unprepared people from reading them. Some are coded. The Gospels emphasize Jesus' use of parables to conceal their real meaning from the crowd.

Neither sect developed its founder's doctrines since they were thought to be final revelation, although each advanced some evidently new concepts.

Both sects believed the traditional prophecies applied to their founders and to them. They correlated current events with biblical prophecies, far from accurately.

Despite knowing little about the Teacher of Righteousness, except that he had been a priest and left the Temple with his colleagues, the Qumran community reckoned him the founder of their sect. Jesus' followers knew as little about him, although unlike the Qumranites they filled the lacunae with Gospel forgeries. Sectarians often create legends about their founders, which why neither owned a reliable narrative of its origin or of the Teacher or Jesus. The minimally reliable Gospel accounts of Jesus' life are few, the rest mostly the writers' attempts to create background.

Both sects required initiates to accede to their teachings before joining, which they saw as spiritual formation.

Potential believers who in the end rejected the Essenes community were anathematized as impure and ineligible for Heaven.<sup>mcxlii</sup> Jesus said those who rejected him were lost.

From the outset, Christians claimed unique authority for the Church, preserved in the apostolic succession. Essene leaders were considered successors of the Teacher of Righteousness.

Essene communities had courts. Paul condemned Christians who resorted to Gentile courts.

Both sects strictly regulated everyday life. The Essenes required acceptance of their all-encompassing interpretation of the Law; on no authority other than his own, Jesus asked his followers to abandon family, property, and if necessary life.

The evidence, of course, reveals numerous discrepancies, since we do not know for certain who the Essenes really were. For example, in *Every Good Man is Free*, 76, Philo says that the Essenes lived in villages, not in towns, and in *Hypothetica* 11:1, that they lived in many towns and villages. Josephus says Essenes were in every city.<sup>mcxliii</sup> If even the basic information disagrees, how is it possible to know the interior structure and teachings of

such a closed sect? Josephus may use *Essenes* as a collective name for several small sects with similar views. Epiphanius said they rejected the Torah, not unlike the Christians.<sup>mexliv</sup>

The unusual correlation between various authors is also suspicious. Both Philo and Josephus say the Essenes numbered about four thousand. Would both come up with the same precise number? Differences in their accounts show that both writers did not depend on a common source. How were people in scattered communities counted? The Jews, to say nothing of the Essenes, abhorred a census. Puzzlingly, Josephus also sets the number of Pharisees, the largest group, at 6,000, only slightly larger than the Essenes. Maybe they counted only heads of family or maybe only certain (educated? scholarly?) members, not the whole flock; according to scholarly notions, the Pharisees likely far outnumbered the Essenes.

Which of the Essene maxims were allegories and declarations and which were actually observed? Likewise, Christians do not observe many that appear in the Gospels, such as love of enemies, renunciation of personal property, a ban on divorce. Some of the rigid Essene rules may not have been enforced. Christianity may have adopted the practical but not theoretical provisions of Essene teaching.

Josephus mentions John the Essene, a Jewish military leader, whose existence contradicts at least three points of the preceding description. Not all Essenes lived in closed communities, were peaceful, or loyal to Rome. If John was typical and many Essenes rose up for the last battle against the evil which they personified in Rome, then destruction of settlements becomes more comprehensible.

We do not even know if all the Qumran scrolls belonged to a single sect. It is unlikely that the Temple library was transferred to the safe place before the war – the DSS contain many fringe sectarian texts, often with numerous grammatical errors. Some relation, however, could be there. The tract *Emek ha-Melekh*, published in 1648, mentions the copper scroll of the treasures of the first temple.<sup>mexlv</sup> The Copper Scroll of Qumran lists immense treasures, far more than an obscure community would have, so Qumran may have housed some part of the Temple collection, perhaps the oldest part that the Essenes took when expelled from Jerusalem.

*Ant18* describes John the Baptist exactly as *War2:8* describes the Essenes. John preached piety toward God, righteousness toward neighbors, and virtue. He baptized in water, a common Essene rite. John did not anoint himself with oil, nor did the Essenes. Josephus or his interpolator considered John an Essene. John baptized Jesus, so Christians must be related to the Essenes.

Considering the Essene features of the Baptist, and his enigmatic execution, he might be Josephus' military rebel, John the Essene.

The Baptist's followers may have been related to the Essenes. The Mandaeans revered John but believed their sect, also related to the Essenes, preexisted John. Since John and Jesus taught many similar things, the

Mandaeans may have been a group of Christian Essenes who emigrated in the first century after John's execution and did not assimilate subsequent changes in Christian doctrine.

Is it good or bad for Christianity to claim descent from the Essenes? Probably bad for several reasons.<sup>239</sup>

Christianity cannot claim origin by divine intervention and revelation and thereby becomes just one among many sects which arose from theological speculations. Christianity does not always look Essene and has many non-Essene features of later origin. The Qumran Essene theology was exotic, based on odd pseudepigrapha. If the Christians used Qumran theology, their claim to their own inspired, historic, authentic theology is hollow.

A link with the Essenes weakens the claim of Christianity's Jewish roots. Josephus rightly stresses the similarity between the Essenes and the Pythagoreans.

On the other hand, an Essene origin turns Christianity from a quasi-historical myth into a branch of a very old religion.

Gospels lack the direct references to the Qumran texts, but there are many implicit references. Gospels' references to the Jewish Bible are also few, and mostly late interpolations. Gentile evangelists scarcely knew even the Bible, let alone the Essene texts.

The alleged uniqueness of Essene teaching may be a function of the lack of information about other sects. Many of the specifics of Essenism discussed above may have come from an unknown oral tradition or pseudepigrapha and could have been believed and taught by other sects, too.

Were the Qumranites Essenes? We do not know for sure. Josephus insists that the Essenes did not live in isolated communities like Qumran,<sup>mcxlvii</sup> although he might not have known about small settlements.

There is no hard evidence that the Qumranites were Essenes and not some other brand of apocalyptic dualists. There was no evidence of sun worship at Qumran.

The doctrinal differences between the sects were often minimal and may reflect some particular leader's bias based more on personality than theology. Even the overlapping theologies do not prove that the Qumranites were Essenes. The scrolls do not reveal a coherent theology and could have been brought from elsewhere, which helps explain their large number.

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<sup>239</sup> The question of Christianity's origin among the Essenes is part of a theological paradox. People are interested in historical roots of religion, for without credible historic proof, its story is a mere literary fiction. However, a religion depending on historical derivation, loses something more significant—the claim of miraculous origin—for the credible history is of course silent about miraculous events.

If they were Essenes, the desert Qumranites were the most radical Essenes. Other Essenes were probably closer to Christianity. Taking into account the various and contradictory descriptions of the Essenes, the name could have referred to a wide range of people holding different views.

Two copies of the *Damascus Rule* were found in the *geniza*<sup>240</sup> of a Cairo synagogue, so the Qumran texts may have been used by more than reclusive sectarians.

The rigidity and the apocalyptic aggressiveness in the Qumran scrolls ill suits the life-embracing Essenes in Josephus and Philo.

In any case, the name of the sect from which Jewish Christianity perhaps arose is less important than the contribution of their long tradition to Christianity.

The dating of the Qumran scrolls is important to a hypothesis of Christianity's Essene origins. R. de Vaux, an archaeologist influenced by the assumption of the scrolls' great antiquity, first dated the lamps found in the Qumran cave to the third century C.E., then reassigned them to the earlier Greco-Roman period. The scrolls' canvas wrappers were dated anywhere from 250 B.C.E. to 250 C.E., the maximum accuracy range of radionuclide dating then.

Driver and Teicher date the scrolls at around fifth century C.E.

Solomon Zeitlin finds the phrases, idioms, and stylistic peculiarities of Qumran characteristic of writing from the third through the eleventh centuries. He also notes a possible mention of the Talmud which was not known before the second century. Moreover, *Teacher of Righteousness* is a Karaite term, which could not have appeared before about the ninth century. There are countless other similarities between the Essenes and the Karaites, supposedly separated by a millennium.

The Isaiah scroll exhibits spacing introduced only in the sixth century. As a rule, Jews wrote *Immanu El*,<sup>241</sup> the future messiah's name, separately, but it is one word in the scroll, as it is in Christian tradition, *Immanuel*.

Eleven Xs appear on the scroll near the messianic prophecies. Teicher thinks they are an abbreviation of the Greek *Christos*.

Comparatively recently researchers learned that some of the scrolls were written in red ink. Christian scribes started using red ink in the third and fourth centuries. Red ink is not typical of Jewish scrolls where both script and ink were closely regulated. The earliest known use of red ink in Hebrew religious texts was in the thirteenth century.

At least one fragment, published in the 1990s, contained corrections in the text (the Christian style), not in the margins (the Jewish style). The pericope, "Ask a sign from the father of the Lord God" implies a figure similar to Jesus.

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<sup>240</sup> Repository of worn out scrolls of the sacred texts.

<sup>241</sup> Immanuel, God with us.

That the same Arab herdsman who found the first Qumran cave in 1947 also discovered the ground-breaking Samaritan papyri in 1962 seems strange, not to say suspicious. The peasant's archeological success is amazing considering that treasure-seekers and archaeologists have worked the area for nearly two thousand years.

If the hypothesis that the scrolls are relatively recent is true, several options are possible. If the scrolls belonged to a Jewish-Christian sect and not to the Essenes, the Teacher of Righteousness may be identified with Jesus, and the texts lose any value for the study of Judaism or the origin of Christianity. Several factors, however, argue against that possibility. The Qumran Hebrew version of Enoch, unlike its Ethiopian counterpart, lacks any parables of the Son of Man. Christians might add to, but not repress, that fragment.

A more optimistic view is that Jewish sectarians, whose theology was independent from Christianity, inhabited Qumran between the third and sixth centuries. Both communities could derive from a common tradition, or the Qumranites might have preserved the original teaching when the Christians departed from it.

Yet other facts favor an early date for the Dead Sea Scrolls. Origen mentions finding jars with Greek and Jewish scrolls near Jericho, not far from Qumran. Similar finds in the area were reported in the eighth century.

The dating of a number of documents—the Samaritan papyrus, contracts from Wadi Seyal, a deed of purchase from Murabba'at, and a letter from Khirbet Mird—helped scholars establish a paleographic timeline from the fourth century B.C.E. to the third century C.E. Evaluations based on the data indicate that the Qumran scrolls should be dated before the second century C.E.

Contradictory evidence for dating of the scrolls suggests inadequacy of our knowledge of the period. Unless the scrolls in Qumran accumulated from the second century B.C.E. through perhaps the leventh century C.E., some of the scholarly assumptions used for dating must be wrong.

The Christians, at least the Gnostic Christians, and the Essenes did not split definitively for a long time. Baptismal sects occupying the middle ground between Essenes and Christians existed for centuries. As late as 367, Epiphanius knew of the Sampsaeans living somewhere near Qumran, who followed not Judaism but a book of the prophet Elkesai. Essenes who parted with Judaism and Nazorean Christians lived among them.



## The Chronology of Jesus' Mission

The birth accounts in Matthew and Luke are incompatible. Jesus was born under Herod the Great in Matthew, thus before 4 B.C.E., or during the census in Luke, 6 C.E. The discrepancy is probably greater, since Herod's ostensible reason for murdering baby boys under two years old to get rid of Jesus was that he was born at least in 5 or 6 B.C.E.

*Ebionites* says John the Baptist preached "in the days of Herod, king of Judea." That could be either Herod the Great (before 4 B.C.E.) or Herod Agrippa I (37–44 B.C.E.). According to the NT, John preached and Jesus was baptized in the time of Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee. The Jewish author of the *Ebionites* certainly knew that difference. Jewish sectarians are the most reliable witnesses to Jesus, and we have no reason to doubt Epiphanius' accuracy when he quotes their Gospel. On the contrary, the Christians, needing to redate John, found only one Herod active in the 30s, the Galilean tetrarch who then oddly—though not impossibly—executed John preaching in another country.

Dating John's preaching in Herod I's rule, if we trust Luke that Jesus was the same age as the Baptist, Jesus was born not later than 24 B.C.E. and was baptized at twenty. Pontius Pilate was prefect from 26 to 36 C.E. At the time of his trial by Pilate, Jesus could not have been younger than fifty (24 B.C.E. to 26 C.E.).

The Ebionites say Jesus was about thirty at his baptism, as does the canonical tradition. Then he would have been born in the time of Herod the Great, about 34 B.C.E., baptized at thirty, and died or was executed after 26 C.E. at about sixty.

That makes sense in the context of the Gospel of John, which says that Jesus was not yet fifty some years before the crucifixion. John says Jesus called his disciples "children,"<sup>242</sup> which would be natural for a mature person. Though the evangelists describe a mission of no more than four years, they may describe only Jesus' ministry after he and the Baptist parted ways.

Thirty years of preaching sounds more realistic than one or two. Jesus' teaching must have changed radically or the number of his followers

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<sup>242</sup> Papias in the 8<sup>th</sup> fragment says that the term *children* was used to denote Christians who led a god-like, sinless life. Still others believe it described those baptized (born anew) by someone who addressed them thus. But this looks more like an artificial explanation of a popular term, whose original meaning was already forgotten. Jesus did not baptize all the disciples and probably none of them. He must have had other reasons for calling them *children*.

must have increased dramatically for him suddenly to be so dangerous. His message may have changed after the Baptist was executed.

If Herod is Herod Agrippa I, Pilate could not have tried Jesus since he left Judea a year before Herod took the throne.

In Th46 Jesus offers an opinion of the Baptist, which sounds as if his time has come and gone: “But I have said that whoever among you becomes a child will . . . become greater than John.” Also Mt11:12: “From the days of John the Baptist until now . . .” That implies considerable passage of time between John and Jesus.

Herod Antipas<sup>mcxlvii</sup> and many others<sup>mcxlviii</sup> thought Jesus was John resurrected, which they would not have done were they contemporaneous. Jesus preached well after John’s death—and not *shortly* after, since those who knew John would know Jesus was not John, resurrected or not.

Simon Magus’ visit to Rome during the reign of Claudius (41–54 C.E.) could be another chronological reference. Simon likely came to Rome before he became the new leader of the sect; religious leaders ordinarily stayed put to teach and did not travel around. Magus, who became the sect’s leader soon after the Baptist’s death did not come into his own until some time in Claudius’ reign, not before 41 and possibly after 54 C.E. Then John died in the 40s or 50s. According to the Mandaeans and the *Clementine Recognitions*, John was not executed and may have died much later than commonly thought. Jesus’ mission some years afterward could not have begun before the 60s.

Jesus’ birth descriptions in Matthew and Luke may be borrowed from legends about John the Baptist. John was older than Jesus: stories of John were sufficiently well-known that the evangelists used them to link their own texts chronologically.

There are other traditions besides the Gospels. The Mandaeans, an isolated group of the Baptist’s followers, claimed he lived or preached forty-two years. Slavonic Josephus, though doubtful, supports that view and reflects an early tradition. Correlate that with Luke’s date of John’s birth (about 6 C.E.) or Inf Jm (late) in Herod the Great’s reign, and we can conclude that John’s mission ended before 38 or 48 C.E.

According to Slavonic Josephus, Herodias married Herod after Philip died in 34 C.E. John kept after Herod for some time after and was executed about 36, which agrees with the estimate above.

Accordingly, Jesus’ main activity started after 36–48 C.E. John would have baptized the thirteen-year old Jesus *ca* 36. Jesus would have been born in 23 C.E. and died somewhere around 70 C.E., not “yet fifty,” as John’s Gospel says.

No sane person would try to forge a story about such recent events, but would try to push things back two or three centuries. That distance would not deprive the myth of contemporary significance: the Jewish War started largely because of the memory of the Maccabean victories in the

remote past. Making up stories about things that happened only two or three decades earlier is obviously risky; many accounts of Jesus are certainly made up.

Judah Halevi in a highly polemical tractate sure to be disputed by Christians calls Jesus a disciple of Joshua ben Perahyah, and places the latter a generation before King Alexander Janneus,<sup>mexlix</sup> though the Talmud calls them contemporaries.<sup>mcl</sup> Accordingly, Jesus dates late second (Halevi) to early first century B.C.E.

The historian Thallus<sup>243</sup> supposedly described a solar eclipse at Jesus execution, but according to Eusebius, Thallus' history ends at 109 B.C.E. The episode may refer to some prototype of Jesus, who lived in the second century B.C.E.

Lucian implies that the sect's founder and its lawgiver were different people: "Their first lawgiver persuaded them that they were all each other's brothers after they transgressed once and for all by denying the Greek gods and worshipping that crucified sophist himself and living under his laws."<sup>mcli</sup> First came the crucifixion, then they worshipped the crucified leader, and only later the lawgiver preached brotherhood of worshippers. The sophist's death created the object of worship which the lawgiver expounded. That may explain the double dating of the composite image of Jesus in the second century B.C.E. and in 60s C.E. Lucian may mean Jesus and Paul. Paul described Jesus as a mythical figure of old.

The discrepancies in their accounts show that early Christian authors had many prototexts at their disposal. The non-Jewish population was illiterate, and copying was expensive and time-consuming. The oral tradition is no great help with geographically isolated communities. How could such a volume of prototexts collect in only some dozens of years? Over the course of two hundred years, however, the Essenes could easily have done so.

Paul does not revere the apostles, nor does he seek Jesus' opinion on particular matters from them, as might be expected if he knew they had never seen Jesus. Being an apostle came to mean participation in the succession of hierarchy (rather as the High Priest was considered Aaron's descendent), not personal acquaintance with Jesus.

Eusebius writes, "The names of Jesus and Christ were both known and honored by the ancients,"<sup>mclii</sup> indicating a time before Jesus' appearance.

In their arguments, the earliest Christians and their critics rarely if ever refer to the historical events of Jesus' life, though eyewitnesses of Jesus' mission should have been still alive and Sanhedrin's and Roman documents no older than seventy years were available. To neglect such

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<sup>243</sup> Julius Africanus and Eusebius refer to him.

powerful arguments is beyond explanation, unless everything happened long ago.

According to Josephus, the Romans suppressed the Essene communities around 70 C.E. To date the gelling of Jesus' image about then explains many oddities in Christian history.

Nicodemus, a rich man, buried Jesus in a shroud. There was a custom of burying the dead in rich apparel, which made funerals a hardship for the poor. Patriarch Gamliel put an end to the tradition by choosing to be buried in a shroud. Before that, Nicodemus would hardly have buried Jesus indecently. Mt23:27 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which on the outside look beautiful, but inside they are full of the bones." The editors of the Gospel still remembered the old burial customs. The hint of condemnation here reflects resentment of changing tradition—and Jesus was not alone. He is not arguing, since he knows his audience is with him. Jesus' burial in a shroud, if the account is correct, and his outburst in Matthew push the date of his death toward the end of the first century.

The NT mentions Simon the Zealot among Jesus' disciples. That term<sup>244</sup> appeared just before the Jewish War and referred to a specific rebel group. Judas' nickname, Iscariot, is thought to derive from the name of another group, *sicarii*, which also appeared shortly before the war.

Christian tradition offers the famous story of Peter's execution. When he escaped from Rome, he met Jesus on the road. Answering Peter's question, *Domine, quo vadis?* Jesus said he was going to a new death in Rome. Taking the hint, Peter returned to Rome and execution. The common dating of that episode in 68 is consistent with the hypothesis that the Church originated in 68-70. The sect's leader, possibly Peter, could have been crucified then. The execution of Jesus could have been extrapolated from a myth about the sect's founder.

James the Just was executed in 62 for glorifying Jesus. If James preached Christianity for thirty years after Jesus' death, the punishment seems unreasonable, but less so if Jesus preached about the same time. According to Hegesippus, the scribes and Pharisees asked James to dissuade people from following Jesus,<sup>mccliii</sup> which could imply Jesus was still alive in 62.

Jesus' praise of James likely reflects that James was older than he. If Jesus was born around the turn of the era, and James still earlier, then James would have been over seventy in 62, an unusually old age. James' age is restored to normal, if Jesus was born in 30s or 40s.

A famous sectarian from Cepharsaeta, James, is mentioned several times in the Talmud against the background of early second century

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<sup>244</sup> Greek historians commonly used *zealous* to describe enthusiastic followers.

events as a disciple<sup>245</sup> of Jesus.<sup>mciv</sup> Jesus cannot be dated earlier than the 60s.

In a forged episode, Josephus relates the destruction of Jerusalem to the execution of John the Baptist. Origen and Eusebius relate it to murder of James the Just. These might be traces of the early tradition of Jesus' dying *after* the destruction.

In a letter written around 112 C.E., Pliny the Younger says that some Bithynians were Christians only a few years earlier, while others went as far back as twenty-five years. Apostates from Christianity probably did not stay with it for long. Thus, Christians appeared in Bithynia around 85 C.E. Although Paul did not visit Bithynia, he preached nearby and other Christian preachers would not fail to take the Gospel to Bithynia. Pliny testifies to the effectiveness of the preaching: temples were deserted and people converted to Christianity in droves. If Christianity appeared in 33–34, why did it take fifty years to get to Bithynia? Paul's first missionary journey started only a few years after Jesus' execution. But if the new teaching originated about 70, then fifteen years seems a reasonable time for it to spread to northwest Turkey. The authenticity of Pliny's letter does not matter. Someone, Pliny or a Christian forger, wrote about the known facts, plausible to the readers, and facts, not authorship, count in this case. Mara Bar Serapion wrote a letter after 73 C.E. (how much later is not clear) enumerating executions of famous people—Socrates, Pythagoras (mistakenly), and the wise king of Jews, seemingly a reference to Jesus. Because Mara was a non-Christian Syrian, he did not intend to glorify Jesus. The fact the he included a relatively unknown figure with great people may point to the Jesus story being still fresh, which is understandable if one of his prototypes died around 70.

The recently rediscovered Assyrian legend of Bel, which parallels the account of Jesus' death remarkably, says that the people of the town where Bel was executed rebelled after his death. The earliest Christian authors had already connected the Jewish War with Jesus' execution. If Jesus were executed almost forty years earlier, they would probably have connected his death with some other calamity of the time. It makes sense to assume that not much time separated the destruction of Jerusalem and Jesus' execution. Christianity gained popularity in the religious vacuum which ensued after the Temple destruction. Jesus' followers pushed him back in time to add him tremendous and highly relevant authority of a prophet who foretold the destruction well before the events.

Mt24:34 promises the advent of the Son of Man: "Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things [the apocalypse] have taken place." No evangelist in his right mind would put a prophecy

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<sup>245</sup> The Talmud likely distinguishes James the disciple from other sectarians, followers who did not know Jesus.

into Jesus' mouth which had not come true by the time he wrote, but if the promise were made only a few years earlier, in the 60s, the generation to whom Jesus spoke was still alive. The author was sure that the destruction of the Temple was the beginning of fulfillment.

Early Christians connected Jesus with the Son of Man and the Son of Man with the apocalypse. They seemed yet to have no doctrine of the Second Coming, so the advent of Jesus meant the apocalypse. The thirties were not unusually bad, but the sixties indeed looked like beginning of the end. Had Jesus preached in the 60s, superstitious minds would connect him with the apocalypse almost by reflex.

Mt23:36 "Truly I tell you, all this will come upon this generation." Matthew implies that the generation which executed Jesus suffered the Jewish War, possible only if Jesus was crucified shortly before the war, not thirty years before.

At the same place in Matthew, Jesus calls the murder of Zechariah son of Barachiah the Jews' most recent crime. That event took place more than five centuries earlier and is meaningless in the context. But Josephus describes the murder of Zechariah son of Baruch during the siege of Jerusalem,<sup>mciv</sup> clearly the predecessor of the Gospel account. No forger would have Jesus speak of something that happened thirty years after his death, except as prophecy, and the passage is from an argument. But if Jesus lived during the War, he would know of the infamous event.

Mt27:9 refers to the prophecy of Zech11, where the shepherd (Jesus by extension) leads his flock to the slaughter by the will of God, an unambiguous reference to the war. In Zechariah, the shepherd is commended for his act. The analogy is meaningless in the traditional account, where the destruction is punishment for the execution of Jesus, not an event to which he purposefully leads the people. The prophetic allegory would be suitable if Jesus were a wartime rebel.

Jn2:21 "But he was speaking of the temple of his body." "The temple of the body" recalls Paul's notion of the Church as the body of Christ. There is no connection between the destruction of the Temple and the emergence of the Church in the traditional chronology. If we suppose that Christianity originated around 70 C.E., however, John's saying makes sense. His Jesus predicts the emergence of Christianity just after the Jewish War, exactly what we believe happened.

Jn:23 John lays his head on Jesus' breast, something only a very young person would have done, probably a child. If Jesus was executed about 34, John would have been between eighty and a hundred when he wrote the Gospel. But if Jesus died around 70, a John born not long before 60 C.E. could have written the Gospel in his old age early in the second century.

Manaem, son of Judas the Galilean, was active during the Jewish War, which is hard to square with Judas' earlier popularity during the reign of Quirinius. Father and son were not likely separated by more than sixty years. But Josephus may be right about Manaem, and Judas's rebellion should be properly dated at the end of the 40s or later. That accounts for Feuda who came in 45, but is said to come before Judas. Josephus seems to date him just before the War.<sup>mclvi</sup> Assuming that Jesus is modeled on Judas, that may redate Jesus' birth to the thirties or forties and his execution right at the end of the war.

That a small community of Christians in Jerusalem survived the war is improbable. Church tradition explains the oddity by moving the Christians to Antioch just before the hostilities, which makes no sense, since Jews were persecuted in Antioch and other cities. The locals would not care what kind of Jews they were, and they would not have survived in Antioch, either. The problem vanishes if Christianity emerged after the war.

The Talmud tells of a practical joke Patriarch Gamliel and his sister Imma Shalom played on a Christian magistrate.<sup>mclvii</sup> The judge quotes the Gospel: "From the day of your *exile* the Law of Moses was taken from you, and the Law of Gospel was given." Thus, Jesus' giving the new Law dates from the period just after 70 when the Jews were expelled from Jerusalem. Papias wrote in the eighties or later and mentions numerous encounters with Jesus' disciples and, perhaps, one apostle. He also claims that some people Jesus raised were still alive during the reign of Hadrian (117–138 C.E.). No one would pretend to have been raised a century earlier, but forty to fifty years might seem reasonable. *Disciples* could mean students of the sect's history and theology or perhaps only those studying in a particular community. Probably, Papias wrote much later, since John's Gospel appeared in the second century and Papias communicated with him. He also reported the late legend that the writer of Mark was Peter's disciple. There could have been no apostles personally acquainted with Jesus living at that time. The common translation of Papias that tells of encounters with two disciples does violence to the text, which speaks of numerous meetings. Papias distinguishes eyewitness evidence (*living voice*) from hearsay (*extant voice* of the apostles),<sup>mclviii</sup> and suggests no significant difference between the ages of *witnesses* and the *friends of the apostles*. He took as a matter of fact that many people still alive knew Jesus personally, impossible if Jesus died in the thirties but right on if he lived in the sixties.

The Pauline epistles, the earliest Christian texts we know, indicate the existence of several sects with messianic teaching, something later sources confirm. At the same time, we can also assume that Christians facing a hostile Jewish theocracy would want to confront the challenge together. Schism is more likely to occur in the absence of a strong exterior enemy, which means the Christian sects were formed after the Romans destroyed the theocratic government, authoritative also for the Diaspora

Jews with whom Paul dealt. According to Paul, Christianity aroused factions from the outset, which may be assigned to just that period.

Such a sociological approach finds further confirmation elsewhere. If Gamliel II introduced *The Sectarians' Blessing* liturgy and the Talmud is generally hostile to sectarians, the arguments of the third and fourth centuries are civil by comparison, and the rabbinic attitude to sectarians is relatively attentive and respectful. By then Jewish Christians were no longer a threat to Judaism and could be tolerated in view of the common enemy, Gentile Christianity.

Although this chapter presents several plausible datings of Jesus' birth, birth in the late thirties and activity before and perhaps during the war seem the most reasonable. Inclusion in his image of many features of the Essene Teacher of Righteousness accounts for Jesus' ancient traits.

If Jesus were executed about 33 and no teaching formed around him immediately, he would have been forgotten during the next thirty-five years. The gradual expansion of Christianity seems arguable: any teaching, after an initial drift, attracts followers slowly until the teaching acquires some official status. If Christians were few before 70, the sudden appearance of several factions after 70 is not likely.

The problem may go away if we think of Jesus as a collective image. He came to the world from the Essenes when the Jewish theocracy was weak and messianic sects began emerging from their Essene communities.

Christians had good reason to picture their leader in an earlier, prewar period. A mythical figure in whom the actual leader was still discernible avoided accusations of rebellion. On the other hand, if there was no real prototype of Jesus, the mythical founder could be moved into the recent, but nonverifiable, past.



## Historical oddities

I was always puzzled by how sure historians are in assigning dates in the most remote antiquity. While no longer stating the day and even time of events, as was fashionable with their Medieval colleagues, they still habitually date the events of thousands of years ago with astonishing precision. Imagine knowing the exact years for the pharaohs, David and Solomon, the Babylonian captivity, and the birth of Jesus!

Even with generally preserved modern records, discerning myth from reality and dating events three or four centuries old is often impossible. To date thousands of events and figures pertinent to evangelical history precisely takes courage.

Everything boils down to the game of trust: if you believe A is dated correctly, and you presume certain relations between A and B, then the date of B is more or less fixed. That house of cards is a pure fiction. No tests can offer dating more precise than within a range of a few centuries. Even paleographic samples for various regions are different and can be and were forged by the scribes. Very few documents survived from antiquity, and historical descriptions are often falsified or purely mythical. They do not contain anything like modern chronology. Basically, historians make assumptions about whether such and such events really happened—and this is very ambiguous; recall the case of Troy—and then try to accommodate them all on a certain time scale. The process is highly arbitrary.

The history of the religion has so many problems for theologians that constructing reliable concepts is difficult. Why were the Gospel prototexts unknown to Paul? Why do the Gospels, in turn, almost completely neglect Pauline concepts?

Why did the founders of Christianity prefer the legend of the historical Jesus? To refer, as the promoters of other religions did, to a divine founder who lived a very long time ago and whose story couldn't possibly be verified would be natural. The people who invented the Gospel accounts knew they were fictional and could easily prevent attempts to disprove their story by claiming the events were very old.

Where do the parallels with other religions—in the adaptation of whole episodes, in the theological structures, and in subtle textual details of myths—come from? What was the basis of the seemingly Christian elements of the Egyptian myths about Osiris?

What was happening to Christianity in Rome when the capital was transferred to Constantinople? Is the history of Christianity in Italy during the Dark Ages entirely fictitious?

Is there any connection between the orgiastic practices in India, ancient Greece, and Medieval Christian Europe, conducted officially or

almost officially in monasteries? Specifically, did Christians borrow some practices from *hieros gamos*, the Greek rite of sacred marriage which is sometimes considered temple prostitution, or do they stem from the immoral lust of the throng?

New answers to these and related questions may change our understanding of the history of religion considerably.

Take, for example, Justin Martyr, an early Christian teacher and apologist. Justin lived in the second century, at the dawn of Christianity. Christian doctrine and perhaps even the Gospels were being formed during his lifetime. He could not help knowing that the parallels with pagan myths were indeed drawn from the latter. Instead of correcting or abandoning those parallels, however, he explained them, although with much violence to common sense. One wonders whether the Christian concepts were formed well before Justin, perhaps among the Essenes.

Tertullian wrote at the end of the second century that Emperor Tiberius asked the Senate to legalize Christianity but was rebuffed, although there is no record of that request. According to modern historians, the Romans preserved data on debates in the Senate scrupulously. We know that not only from the narratives of historians and witnesses but also from supposedly authentic records. Less than two centuries after the event, how could Tertullian be sure that his lie would not be checked? (For a number of reasons, historians are sure the account is false.) The eagerness of Justin and Tertullian to falsify references<sup>246</sup> to comparatively recent documents that could be verified is hard to explain. Importantly, both men were writing apologies to address Christianity's critics. Thus they could expect their arguments to be challenged.

Evidence that Gentile Christians were separated from Jesus by a considerable length of time is found in Tacitus: "But the pernicious superstition, repressed for a time broke out again, not only through Judea, where the mischief originated, but through the city of Rome also."

There are several reasons such problems have emerged only comparatively recently. The text of the Bible was not available to common Christians until modern times. The scribes who had access to the sacred books did not worry about being precise when interpolating distorted citations, which probably no one would check anyway. Many important books of early Christianity, the Gnostic Gospels in particular, were discovered only in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

We should also consider the credulity of ancient and Medieval people. Even well-educated people three centuries ago were unable to

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<sup>246</sup> Justin, Tertullian, and other Christian writers with possible exception of the opportunist Paul certainly believed that their religious message is true. As many fanatics, they readily distorted facts to support what they considered truth.

evaluate critically the news they heard, so that the authors of the Gospels included in good faith all the fables they heard is not surprising.

The large number of Roman authors known from the period of the late first century to the beginning of the second is unusual. Extending the period backward to the mid-first century B.C.E., we include perhaps a majority of the famous ancient authors and figures we know of. One can hardly name any other brief period during which so many authors appeared whose fame has survived the trial of centuries.<sup>247</sup> After the establishment of Christianity in the second century, the flow of authors and heroes dried up well after the republic fell, but long before Rome collapsed. In other societies, cultural apogee often occurred immediately before the fall. It is hard not to wonder whether ancient history has been falsified or re-dated to a much greater extent than commonly believed.

The supposedly high literacy in Rome is curious. We know that local elections required a certain level of literacy, because voters actually wrote down their choice, at which moment it was checked by the candidates who bribed them. This is unusual, since credible evidence assures us that literacy was almost nonexistent elsewhere at the time.

Some ancient names are rather puzzling. Consider Caesar, possibly derived from the Latin for one with long hair. Such was the nickname of the Roman dictator Gaius Julius<sup>248</sup> in first century B.C.E. Why, in the age of names and nicknames, anyone would be called by a meaningless, garbled word like Caesar Perhaps, Julius Caesar was a mythical figure, created retrospectively as the ancestor of Roman emperors, the Caesars, and the title was perhaps derived from the word *keser*, meaning *crown*.<sup>249</sup> The many references to him by historians do not constitute proper proof of his existence, as the same historians describe a number of figures matter-of-factly whom we now recognize as mythical. The name of Caesar's murderer, Brutus, meaning brute, dull, stupid—hardly a real name.<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> To be sure, there is higher concentration of writers in modern times, since Renaissance. But we have a lot of information about this period, while information about antiquity is rather scarce, and the list of the then authors we know is certainly incomplete.

<sup>248</sup> Roman names consisted of praenomen or personal name (Gaius), nomen (Julius) which referred to gens (clans), and cognomen (Caesar) which came to denote branches of clans.

<sup>249</sup> How odd is relating famous Roman names to obscure Hebrew roots? Consider another example. Homer is not a common Greek name; derivation from *homeros* for *hostage* or *the not seeing one* is tortured. But it makes perfect sense in Hebrew as *ha-omer the one reciting*. If Hebrew derivation sounds too far-fetched, think of these roots as Phoenician.

<sup>250</sup> The story of his ancestor, Lucius Junius Brutus who expelled King Tarquin the Proud, is certainly mythical.

Romans were commonly identified by name, not by cognomen, at least in the literature that has survived. Actually, any other description would be pointless, because the clans routinely consisted of hundreds of people, all or many of whom bore the same cognomen. Some references to cognomena by historians are due to the fact that, for their readers, personal names were largely meaningless and the clan name more informative. Perhaps cognomens were more convenient for official records, revealing a person's connections and property status, but contemporaries clearly knew famous people by their first names. Similarly, subjects knew medieval and modern European monarchs by their first names, while surnames figure in official documents.

The Roman emperors, beginning with Augustus and including Tiberius, during whose reign Jesus supposedly lived, formally attached themselves to the clan of Julius and received the additional name of Caesar. That is odd, since ancient monarchies lacked the custom of accentuating the continuity of power by using the same surname. Caesar's family was all but unknown,<sup>251</sup> his rule wasn't legitimate, and he wasn't the best Roman general.<sup>252</sup> In Plutarch's *The Life of Galba*, Vitellius takes the nickname of Germanicus after his army's location but refuses to be called Caesar, which implies that by 69 C.E. Caesar was a title, but not important for legitimacy.<sup>253</sup> If Caesar was a cognomen and many people were called so, then for emperors to attach themselves to what was essentially a common surname would not enhance prestige. No aspiring Roman general took the cognomen Scipio. The evangelists clearly employ Caesar as a title, not a surname; a name cannot become a common noun in the same culture in merely a century.

After the rebellion, the Romans renamed Judea "Palestina," meaning "the land of the Philistines." But the Romans did not rename territories. Why would the Romans allude to Jewish texts, if they wanted to eradicate the memory of the Jews? A country's name then was fixed in oral tradition, not on maps. Palestine was not known to its inhabitants by that name as late as the nineteenth century.

Plutarch's claim that Palestine was a separate territory, like Judea, Syria, and Arabia, intensifies the doubt.

Still earlier, the Romans deposed the Jewish king and made Judea a province, though they left a tetrarch in Galilee. The Romans usually left the capital to the ruler but denied him the surrounding areas. One explanation is that Galilee was not an agrarian province as often depicted but a wealthy

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<sup>251</sup> Ceasar reportedly descended from Aeneas (the founder of Rome) and Venus, but every other emperor could have created himself an equally fancy family myth without associating with Ceasar's clan.

<sup>252</sup> *The Gallic Wars*, supposedly his memoirs, is entirely fictitious.

<sup>253</sup> Puzzlingly, the crowd hailed Otho as Nero just after driving the despised Nero from Rome.

cosmopolitan region which the Romans may have taken for an important royal center and left in the hands of the existing dynasty.

Kings were generally deposed after a breach of loyalty, which made sense. The Romans ran a kind of protection racket, which guaranteed their dependents' safety as long as they remained loyal. Removing a loyal dynasty was a dangerous precedent and likely to spoil the Romans' reputation. Such things started happening later with the decline of Roman statesmanship, but when Trajan occupied neighboring Petra in 106, the place was only friendly to Rome, not a protectorate.

Judea was converted to a province for no apparent reason. Josephus' explanation of the lack of legitimate heirs cannot be right, because the Galilean dynasty should have inherited Jerusalem. Besides, in a culture with many children, finding a reasonably close relative should have posed no problem. The ambiguity about Jewish kings is as puzzling as is the fact that Tacitus is unsure: "The kings were either dead, or reduced to insignificance."

Josephus' note that Judea was made a province comes in the thoroughly falsified chapter on the Essenes.<sup>mcclix</sup> Archelaus was displaced for cruelty to his subjects, hardly a concern for the Roman emperor. Josephus' assertion that the Jews asked for direct Roman rule over Judea is utterly inconceivable<sup>mcclx</sup> and his short treatment of these watershed events is incredible.

We may only speculate about the reasons for the possible forgery. Perhaps Roman rule came to Judea only after the war and was extrapolated to the time of Jesus by Christians to accommodate the tradition of his sentencing by the Romans. Since Christian scribes did not copy the books containing other versions of the events in Judea, the interpolation became a historical fact.

Certain early biblical requirements are almost impossible to realize. The sabbatical year is a prime example. The Torah prohibits working the land every seventh year which causes problems with the food supply immediately. Ancient Judea's economy was bare subsistence, not plenty, especially on the barren plains.<sup>254</sup> People worked hard to feed themselves until the next harvest. Grain could not be stored at home for two years. Even if physically possible, the sabbatical year would have been a period of grief and hunger, not joy.

Consider also the so-called Korah arguments.<sup>255</sup> The biblical fiscal system provided for proportional obligations, like the tithe, but also imposed many fixed obligations, like the sacrifice of firstborn animals

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<sup>254</sup> Even if we suggest that the Torah was composed earlier than commonly believed, when the climate in Judea was milder, the level of agriculture then still produced no meaningful surplus.

<sup>255</sup> A critique of Judaic law from a social viewpoint, traditionally attributed to Korah, an apostate described in the Bible.

which were a significant burden on the poor. If someone had only one animal, its firstborn constituted a 50 percent tax (one out of the two animals). Although the poor got community support, the tax burden would have been unbearable.

Judean dry-cultivation agriculture yielded about 5:1, making the tithe and related taxes very heavy, especially since years of drought are not exempt. This tax burden might be conventional with the irrigational agriculture of Egypt, and especially of Sumer where the reported abundance of 30:1 yields in the Ur III period led to 40% of the produce being spent for distilling.

The Torah is full of impossible regulations. In the prescribed test for unchastity the accused was given water mixed with earth, a mild laxative. If she died, she was guilty, otherwise acquitted. No one died from that. For millennia, or at the very least six centuries of practicing the Law before the Romans destroyed the Jewish state, people should have noticed absence of cheating wives in Israel.

The Mishnah's attitude to punishment is curious. The codex does not balk at capital punishment. It was used; judgments were handed down. But since Judaism was barely legal then, the Romans would have never sanctioned execution for religious offences.

Add a peculiar feature of Mishnaic interpretation of the Law: it is litigious at the most basic level, while we expect the Law, practiced for centuries, to be stated matter-of-factly. Who cared about rabbinic arguments if ancient tradition upheld the points of Law in question? The Mishnah contains discussions on the correct Temple procedures where there should have been no room for argument, since people still remembered the rituals.

Commenting on the Passover festival, Josephus notes the biblical requirement that each family bring a sacrifice to the Temple. Even allowing for Josephus' vastly exaggerated numbers, that would mean at least ten thousand offerings. No matter how they split up the labor, so many animals could not be slaughtered in so little time.

Only people from nearby settlements could observe another requirement, of visiting Jerusalem thrice annually during festivals.

All this suggests that early Jewish history may be considerably different from what we imagine.

The Church fathers, popular ancient Christian authors, and even rabbis mentioned in the Talmud, commonly lived to the remarkable age of sixty and even eighty, a long life even by modern standards. Why that is so is not clear. It may be a continuation of biblical tradition, according to which the righteous live long, or it could be exaggeration due to artificially extended chronology, when the events commonly attributed to the first centuries of the Common Era actually happened in a shorter period. Discussing the Essenes, I noted the opinions that the Qumran scrolls accumulated from the third to the eleventh century. Are the errors and

forgeries fortuitous or the consequence of artificially extended dating, pushing Christian origins into antiquity? Scaliger, a sixteenth-century scholar who on scant and unreliable knowledge improved the chronology of the sixth-century monk Dionysius the Small fixed the accepted chronology. Other historical events were later attached to his scale with no attempt to revise it until certain questions arose in the twentieth century. The Qumran scrolls may date after the third century C.E. and belong to Christianity's Essene predecessors. If so Christianity spread much later than is commonly thought.

That supposition agrees with the Church's persecution of Judaism and the burning of thousands of books in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, incomprehensible after a thousand years of coexistence. The Church destroyed its other opponents' books much earlier, but left Jewish writings intact for centuries. In fact, there are only a few references to other books being burned, perhaps in the tenth and eleventh centuries, instead of the fourth and fifth. Having dealt with its Gentile opponents, the Church turned on the Jews immediately, not centuries later. Dealing with them earlier was not expedient, since the Church relied on Judaism's antiquity in its struggle with the Gentiles; it is unusual for ideological struggle to last for many centuries. Vehement debates between Jewish and Christian theologians occurred in the Middle Ages, a flare-up of antagonism strange after a millennium of relative tolerance.

The tolerance was such that when the Christians launched the First Crusade in the eleventh century, Muslims showed no concern whatsoever about the occupation of Jerusalem. They paid the city little attention. The Koran calls it Aelia, the name the Romans gave it. But Dome of the Rock was already there according to the historians, and *jihad*, though faded, was not forgotten. One is tempted to suggest that the crusade legend appeared later and that peaceful coexistence obtained. Only in the eleventh century did the Christians decide to establish their identity at the expense of other religions and launched hostilities against the Muslims.

The Church's intense persecution of Christian heretics in fourteenth and fifteenth centuries makes sense in that chronology: from tenth to the fifteenth centuries, the church fought first pagans, then Jews, then Muslims, then Christian heretics. Jewish actions fit the same time frame: the anti-Christian mythology of Jesus' life, *Tol'doth Yeshu*, dates from the tenth century. Jews made no serious attempts to combat Christianity before then, even while the Christians lived among orthodox Jews. From the tenth century on, many distinguished rabbis wrote Jewish apologies and confronted Christian doctrines.

Another oddity eliminated by redating is that of women's participation in the Church. Although Paul accepted them, women were excluded from the hierarchy from at least the fifth century when St. Augustine and St. Ambrose argued against making women priests. A brief revival of female participation from 1120 to 1160, however, cannot be

explained by the rise of chivalry, common in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries but not the twelfth. If Christianity really became widespread only around the eleventh century, then it makes sense that women's roles were soon dramatically curtailed.

The well-attested religious cynicism of the period may be more evidence of Christianity's late spread. A low point would be strange in the middle of an age of Christiandominance—five to seven hundred years after becoming the official religion, another half millennium before the dawn of its intellectual monopoly—but it is plausible as the starting point of a mass following.

The Star of David was still prominently displayed in many Christian churches from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century, centrally placed in Santa Croce Cathedral in Florence and the basilica of St. Maria Maggiore in Rome. Christians detached biblical accounts from their Jewish roots, but the Star of David, Judaism's premier symbol,<sup>256</sup> makes one wonder whether the church's anti-Semitism may have been less virulent than commonly thought. In the sixteenth century the religious intolerance of Spanish King Ferdinand of Aragon, who banished the Moors, amazed Machiavelli<sup>mcclxi</sup> who thought Ferdinand's attitude was a pretense to create a reputation, not the result of Christian zeal. Even the highly educated Machiavelli did not understand religious persecution.

Questions also arise about the *kabbalah*, the Jewish mystic doctrine of God and the universe which flourished from the eleventh to the thirteenth century, fifteen centuries after similar Gentile doctrines were formed. Jewish theology assimilated many other concepts quickly, not after a delay of more than a millennium. Although many kabbalists claim their teachings are ancient, historical references do not support the claim.

As far back as the tenth century, six hundred years after the establishment of the canon, we find the Paulicians, a heretical sect that believed in a dual god and that Jesus was an angel, not the incarnate Son of God. Is it plausible that they have lasted inside the Church for over a millennium?

The orgiastic practices criticized by Paul and many after him survived into the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Orgies, idol worship, and pagan cultus lingered in Christian Europe as late as the seventeenth century. The church had no time for them, disorganized and scattered and bereft of property, taxes or infrastructure. They did not interfere with the church's business. Yet instead of eliminating traces of paganism at once, the church tolerated them for nearly a thousand years—unless we re-date the spread of Christianity.

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<sup>256</sup> Although the Star became popular among lay Jews and in synagogues only in nineteenth century, Jewish mystics and rabbis attached importance to it long before.



In St. Paul's Basilica in Rome, an extraterritorial possession of the Vatican, Cagoli's painting presents what appears to be Jesus crucified near the wall of a house, contrary to the Gospel account.

The Crusaders must have brought home to Europe a great deal of information about Jerusalem and its environs; yet painters often portray the crucifixion against a background of the sea and ships, something one might see in Constantinople, not Jerusalem. That Crusaders regularly aimed at Constantinople, not Jerusalem, is laboriously explained by the appeal of plunder. But since later travelers related to painters descriptions of Jerusalem which better suit Constantinople, perhaps the Crusaders were not sure about the place as well.

It is commonly thought that throughout the Renaissance the Church exercised control over religious works of art, yet many paintings before the seventeenth century contradict the canon. A canvas from Leonardo da Vinci's workshop exhibited in the Louvre depicts John the Baptist as the pagan deity Bacchus. In the Sistine chapel, Peter is an old man in the midst of young people. The common explanation, that it depicts a scene in Rome not Judea, is unconvincing because the scene clearly reflects the Gospel's account of Jesus' handing over the keys of kingdom to Peter. In Rome's St. John's Basilica, founded in the fifth century and rebuilt in the sixteenth, John appears with a rooster, like a pagan priest. A twelfth-century Church pediment in the Florentine cathedral shows Peter anointing Jesus with oil, though the Gospel says a woman anointed him.

Attempts to explain the anachronistic presence of people like St. Jerome in paintings of the crucifixion are awkward. Neither before nor after did such massive transference of contemporary figures into an ancient setting take place. It seems as if Renaissance people thought of Jesus as almost a contemporary. Is it not surprising that the artists who created paintings for the Church's main cathedrals misrepresented the Gospels? Church frescoes were certain to be inspected by scholarly visitors as the artist worked. Leonardo da Vinci was sued in connection with a painting of a central piece in the Cathedral of San Francesco il Grande where his depiction of Mary and the Baptist was too unorthodox.

In medieval France, where the Church dominated, cathedrals are full of Bacchic images, fauns, and even erotic scenes, but their oldest structures entirely lack Christian symbolism. Pagan symbols cropped up not only in the provinces but also at Notre Dame. The pagan mystical motif of a donkey's head appears on Pala d'Oro columns of St. Mark's Cathedral in Venice.<sup>257</sup> Why were pagan images preserved for more than a millennium,

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<sup>257</sup> Let's venture a hypothesis about the burial sites of saints. Originally, they were faked in large numbers with a few sarcophagi for each; but later, due to some sort of agreement or spontaneous process of alignment, each city preserved only one saint, recognized as its symbol, and the duplicates were forgotten. The process is readily comprehensible: localities defended

in secular buildings as well as in churches? Modern Christians consider this imagery sufficiently offensive that they do not use it in their churches.

A small church in Florence's Piazza del Duomo was reconstructed in the twelfth century from a temple of Mars. How did it survive for seven centuries while Christians were reportedly busy destroying the relics of other religions? Whose idea was it to place a statue of the Greek goddess of war near the bellicose Pope Innocent XI in St. Peter's Basilica? Indeed, Renaissance paintings often feature ancient characters. But here is something different, a pagan statue in honor of the head of Church in the main cathedral.

The accepted succession of popes is based on Ireneus' roll of bishops, but his early edition does not date their reigns. Transforming the bishops of Rome into popes on paper may have artificially extended the length of primitive Christian history, because the former could have been few at a time, not in succession, like popes. Even the list of popes at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome lacks data from 199 to 461.

Santa Maria Maggiore was begun in the fifth century, a bizarre undertaking at a time when the empire, its capital removed over a century earlier, was subject to constant attacks. When people abandoned crop rotation,<sup>258</sup> did they have the skill to create monumental mosaics? The fifth-century mosaics are far superior to later ones done in the ninth century in the Pudentiana and Praxedis Basilica, also in Rome. The dating of ancient buildings is tentative.

The Church claims that many cathedrals were built in the fifth century and were often rebuilt in the sixteenth and seventeenth. Only the ancient mosaics and columns are preserved, though often dissimilar from Roman styles. People took columns from garbage dumps and used them in public and private buildings. The existence of an easily accessible dump more than a thousand years old is unusual. More likely the columns would be used in new construction, not thrown away. They would have hardly been available for restoring cathedrals.<sup>259</sup>

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the authenticity of the remains of the saint who was the city's patron, while not insisting on the credibility of other artifacts. Because large towns rarely had the same patron, conflicts were for most part avoided. Of course, such artifacts are forgeries. St. Mark's sarcophagus in his basilica in Venice is huge even for a modern person, even though ancient people were smaller.

<sup>258</sup> Why, by the way? It is otherwise asserted that lands in Italy were abandoned, so empty land was in abundance and there was no economic pressure to refrain from rotation.

<sup>259</sup> Touching on the dating of ancient cathedrals, I am surprised by extraordinary duration of their construction: two hundred to three hundred years was not unusual. It is hard to imagine such persistence and readiness to continue what someone started long ago and which would be finished by someone else long after. Strangely, architectural taste, city planning and the

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The first known Christian burial places were the Roman catacombs, usually dated between the third and fifth centuries. The catacombs, bereft of corpses, were discovered in the sixteenth century, when many more Christian relics appeared as well. The explanation, that bodies were reburied after Christianity became legal is doubtful. There were no maps of the vault, and finding all bodies to move them would have been problematic. Mass reburial in that culture is unlikely. Further, the children's (small) tombs are few, though we could expect more than two or three per family in that time. Since the Romans usually cremated the dead, the absence of receptacles for ashes is odd. The hope of bodily resurrection, a doctrine still in contention, would hardly have changed the custom.

The main problem is the good state of the frescoes and petroglyphs, which could not have survived seventeen hundred years in the damp catacombs. Vatican publications call it a miracle, but a better explanation is needed.

Adherents to an illegal religion would not have depicted their symbols in a large burial place which could not remain unknown. Before Constantine's Peace of the Church, Christians disguised their faith with symbols, although the so-called Christian symbols could belong to just about anyone and were hardly distinguishable from Egyptian and Mithraic symbols. Thus, the dove, symbolizing an abode of the spirit and love for Jesus, looks more like a raven, popular among pagans and Christians,<sup>mcLxii</sup> symbolizing wisdom<sup>260</sup> and prophetic power.

The statue of the shepherd with a lamb on his shoulders, such as one found in the catacombs, was recognized as a metaphor of equality, but besides Jesus it could be Apollo or Dionysus, or Osiris, each of them *the shepherds*.

Two figures painted on a wall, gray-haired and bald, identified with Peter and Paul, could represent any other two old male people. One of the enigmatic frescoes in the catacombs is a typical depiction of Adam and Eve famous from Dürer's work. To my knowledge, it was not popular before the thirteenth century, while the fresco is dated to the third century.

When ancient Rome was sacked and everything, including the Colosseum and huge stone temples fell into ruins, the arches of Titus and Constantine survived. Both are very important for the Church, signs of the conquest of Judea and the triumph of Christianity, respectively. Rome stood desolate for centuries, and stones and bas-reliefs were recycled in new construction. The chances for survival were worse for fragile arches than for buildings of large blocks, where the elements reinforce one another. It is

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wishes of congregations did not change so long time. In many instances, the construction could have been finished in twenty to fifty years. It is tempting to ask whether the construction time is not artificially extended by chroniclers.

<sup>260</sup> Cicero ridiculed an image of a raven on Philagrus' tombstone.

highly unlikely for an arch to stand two thousand years.<sup>261</sup> Other arches were preserved, but their condition casts further suspicion on the good state of Titus' and Constantine's monuments. The more massive Arch of Septimius Severus is in worse shape.<sup>262</sup>

Another oddity is the anachronistic bas-relief of Trajan defeating the Dacians on the Arch of Constantine. The explanation is that bas-reliefs from the demolished arches of Hadrian and Trajan were used in the construction of Constantine's monument. But why would Constantine be commemorated that way? The arch of Constantine may have been forged much later incorporating some historical errors.

A triumphal arch for the suppression of a rebellious province, so insignificant that its governor lived in Syria, is unusual. Tacitus and Plutarch say the Romans kept a considerable military force idle in Syria throughout the conflict in Judea. That would not have happened if extra force was needed in Judea, only a few days' march away. No chance Syria would have revolted with a large army close by. Titus' war in Judea was not major by Roman standards.

A five-month siege and occupation of Jerusalem by the Roman commander Sosius, after which Herod took the throne, is scarcely mentioned. The Romans prevailed by siege and starvation, which was considered unworthy.<sup>263</sup> Titus did not defeat the Jews in battle.

Other oddities of the Jewish War await further study. For example, the Roman commemorative coins bear the insignia *Ivdaea capta*. *Capio* in this context denotes subjugation by territorial conquest, not putting down a rebellion.

More than a dozen ancient Egyptian steles are installed in Rome. How were they preserved, while buildings were razed, columns demolished, and stone used in new construction? Systematic excavations began only in the nineteenth century. The accepted explanation is bizarre: people dug here and there, found steles, and mounted them in front of cathedrals. One might then expect the extensive modern archeological digs to turn up many more, but the supply seems to be exhausted.

Many churches look odd. For example, the portico of the Cathedral of St. Barnabas in Venice, usually dated from the ninth century, has neither writings nor statues. Some suggest that they were effaced of their pagan content. But there should be no pagans in ninth-century Venice.

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<sup>261</sup> Many reliefs are preserved in Egypt from an even earlier period, but the dry climate and the sand which covered the monuments conserved them perfectly. Additionally, Egyptian cut-in images are much less prone to erosion than salient reliefs.

<sup>262</sup> We do not know the condition of the Arch of Titus before its restoration in the nineteenth century.

<sup>263</sup> Tacitus, *Histories* (5) "It seemed beneath them to await the result of famine."

The Pantheon was built as a pagan temple in the first century B.C.E. and rebuilt in the second century C.E. Its 40,000-pound bronze doors are still extant. Bernini used its bronze ceiling for St. Peter's in the seventeenth century, demonstrating the high demand for bronze even after the Middle Ages. In antiquity, the barbarians stole even the copper alloy locks joining the stones in Roman buildings.<sup>264</sup> If the Pantheon was really built in antiquity, how did its bronze gates survive?

Medieval witnesses found the Greek Acropolis in good condition, so the metal cramps were removed possibly only in the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries. On the other hand, travelers first mention the Temple of Delos, already in ruins, in the fifteenth century. The same ruins should have been found in Rome, where crampons were removed very early, yet many buildings have survived without clamps, despite supposedly fifteen hundred years of earthquakes.

The dome of the Pantheon is typical of Renaissance basilicas, but not of ancient buildings. Fifth century Roman domes were much smaller and supported by multiple naves. Up to at least the sixteenth century, domes were not only smaller but shaped differently: not spherical, but with high vertical walls and a slightly curved roof, a form simpler to construct. The Romans are thought to have adopted domes from the East, so we might expect to find a comparable complexity of structures there. The closest analogue, the dome of St. Sophia, is only half as large as the Pantheon and was built four hundred years later. That the Pantheon's gigantic concrete dome has stood for two thousand years is very strange.

Fraud did not end with the epoch of saints' tears by the barrel. Modern excavations of the fourth-century Constantine ruins in the Vatican unearthed a sarcophagus with the inscription *Petros*, which was immediately attributed to the apostle Peter. According to the tradition, Peter was crucified upside down in the circus Caligula built, which would not call for honorary burial. The bodies of those executed by imperial order were piled, not buried individually. Constantine could have reburied Peter's remains, since his mother Helen scavenged for Christian artifacts. The credibility of Peter's sarcophagus is on a par with her other acquisitions, like the staircase of Pilate's palace, which burned and was rediscovered three centuries later.<sup>265</sup> The brevity, even ambiguity of the inscription on the Peter sarcophagus and the absence of epithets and praise recall the forgery of the Josephus *Testimonium*.

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<sup>264</sup> The ancients usually did not join building stones with cement. The Romans used locks to make the structure somewhat flexible to survive earthquakes.

<sup>265</sup> Helen bought many relics in Judea, which suggests a flourishing industry of fake relics in Judea, where Christianity had close to no supporters.

## Gospel Concepts

### *The appeal to all nations*

Compare the entangled and contradictory third-party reports of Jesus' sayings with the formal Mosaic statement of God's message in the Ten Commandments. If Jesus intended to introduce a new testament, surely he would have done in such a way to prevent its distortion instead of leaving the job to the apostles. Instead, evangelists present Jesus as observant, if somewhat equivocally, Jew who called others to repentance and strict observance.

Jeremiah speaks of a new covenant, Christianity's central idea: "But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: . . . I will be their God, and they shall be my people."<sup>melxiii</sup> Jeremiah means the old commandments; there is nothing about new ones.

A new covenant should be with Jews, not with all peoples. Paul tried to resolve the problem by presenting Christians as a new Israel. But Jeremiah meant the Jewish people and no one else. Since God's promise of turning to righteousness applied to Jews, changing them for a *new Israel* of Christians invalidates that promise. God's choice has been preserved despite frequent and numerous communal transgressions, from which God's prophets repeatedly recalled the Jews. The "new Israel" confounds the prophesies of Israel's victory over Gentiles at the end of time.

Perhaps God changed his mind when he saw how the Jews treated Jesus? But Jesus was ostensibly sent specifically as sacrificial lamb. Jesus claimed to come only "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Christians say the Jews did not repent, but rather the Gentiles who never kept the Law, before Jesus or after him. If Jesus forsook the Jews because they did not keep the Law, why did he appeal to Gentiles who never kept it?

As *God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob* does not mean the God of the forefathers *only*, *God of Israel* is also an allegory. Later formulations, like *the people of God*, grew stricter to indicate service and belonging. But the idea of divine service, keeping the commandments, is absent from Christianity.

Israel was chosen specifically to follow certain rules, the commandments – which Christians abandoned. While Christianity dismisses the Law, Jesus criticized Pharisees for keeping it insincerely.

Perhaps God turned away from the Jews because of their sinfulness? But Christians are not sinless, either. Popes have committed graver crimes than even those ascribed to the high priests, but that did not cause Christians to doubt their belief.

In the end, the Christians and Israel have nothing in common. Christians posit a different God, triune instead of one; they do not keep Israel's laws, arbitrarily retaining a few ethical maxims. Their origin and history both before and after Jesus are different, and their doctrines are incompatible.

In the scriptures, *Israel* does not mean everyone who turns to God. Jeremiah says that in the last days Israel *and* all other peoples will turn to God. The designation of Israel as the chosen people includes an ethnic component. That people called Israelites worshiped idols shows that *Israelite* conveys more than religious identity.

According to the Ebionites, the twelve apostles symbolize the twelve tribes of Israel. That means Jesus came only to the Jews—and, regardless of their behavior, if he came even to Ephraim and Benjamin, proverbial models of sinfulness. Jesus knew the apostles would act after his crucifixion, and choosing twelve means he intended them to preach only to Jews, even after the crucifixion.

The modern Church drifted away from the earlier views, notably abandoning the fundamental concept of Jewish guilt. But if Jesus came to the Jews and they are not accountable, then why appeal to other nations? The evangelists proceed from the assumption of Jewish guilt, and only modern moral norms forced the Church to abandon that view.

## *Attitude toward women*

The main witnesses of the crucifixion and resurrection narratives are women, and the men doubt their reports. That is, women understand Jesus and stand by him. Only the Gnostics gave women such status. Further, except for a few early Pauline congregations, only the Gnostic communities let women participate in the rites equally with men, and the Gospels show them participating in the resurrection part of the initiation rite.<sup>mclxiv</sup> In other religions, women had their own rites, holy days, and deities. The presence of women only at the resurrection could be related to Osiris, Tammuz, and similar traditions, where a goddess calls the deceased deity back to life. The Gnostics actively adapted from those religions. Jesus' approach is obscure: women were among his followers, but probably not on an equal footing with the men. In Gnostic Thomas, Jesus promises to raise Mary's spiritual status to that of a man: "Simon Peter said to them, 'Make Mary leave us, for females do not deserve [eternal] life.' Jesus said, 'Look, I will guide her to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every female who makes herself male will enter the domain of heaven.'"<sup>mclxv</sup>

Judaism also teaches equality: "There were as many prophetesses as prophets in Israel."<sup>mclxvi</sup> But women had little to do with theology. Outside biblical times, only Beruria, Rabbi Meir's wife, was a popular figure. According to the Jewish culture of Jesus' time, women could not have been disciples, much less follow the teacher around. A trail of tradition underlies the facts: from the biblical viewpoint, woman was created not for independence, but to assist man.<sup>mclxvii</sup>

If Christianity originated among the Essenes, mainstream Christians would not have admitted women. We do not know if some women were actually part of the inner circle, or if the Gnostics wrote them in. They offered no explanations or comments on the topic. They accepted the participation of women in mystical religion *de facto*, a matter requiring no elaboration. The allusions often seem out of context in the male-only canonical Gospels, and Jesus' silence on the matter renders them still more suspicious.

Writers as early as Tertullian called women "the gate of the devil" and forbade them to hold Church appointments.<sup>mclxviii</sup> Paul's views about the women<sup>mclxix</sup> were either ignored or rejected. The Church denied women any office, though it accepted them as martyrs, not competing in the Church hierarchy. As martyrdom faded after the Church victory, any involvement of women beyond the most subservient tasks was banished to the remote



past. Recent feminist scholars attempted to show that women played an important role even in the Medieval Church; but that usually means they headed female convents or shrines of female saints.

DiaSav37:2–4: “The Lord said, ‘Pray in a place where there are no women.’ Matthew said, ‘He tells us, . . . Destroy the works of the female; not because there is another birth, but because they will cease [giving birth].’” Gnostics adapted Jesus’ practical recommendation to imply the sinfulness of birth which immerses the soul in the world’s evil. Similarly, in the Gospel of the Egyptians: “The Savior said himself, ‘I have come to destroy the works of women.’”

The apostles upheld the traditional opinion: women should steer clear of religious issues. In Acts6:1–2 they scorn serving women at communal meals. The Gospel of Mary says the disciples denied women access to faith. Jesus was fair and thought women could be believers and disciples. Apostles disagreed.

## *The Apocalypse and the afterlife*

*Apocalypse* does not necessarily mean the world's fiery end but rather *uncovering*, perhaps an opening of the celestial regions and a glimpse of heavenly forces. Apocalypse, a look in from the outside, replaced the biblical prophecies, the reported words of an angel. Apocalypse ordinarily has no message, except the most general kind, such as the triumph of righteousness.

Lacking prophetic authority, apocalyptic writers ascribed their visions to well-known figures, like Ezra or Baruch, his secretary. Apocalyptic literature arose long after the Torah and the prophets and show the imprint of many cults: countless demons, angels with proper names, and anthropomorphic situations in heaven.

Traces of the Gnostic kingdom of God disappear in mainstream Christianity, compared to Thomas' "the end will be where the beginning is."<sup>mclxx</sup> Thomas's *beginning* is here and now, a spiritual state, not mass destruction and reflects the philosophical notion of returning to the divine state unburdened by the body and of the primeval ideal state of being.

There is no way to correlate Jesus' loving-kindness, forgiveness, and refusal to judge with the terrible end of time and final judgment, especially the claim that he controls those events as a hypostasis of God. That said, we should recall that the Torah distinguishes between God's love to people in general and his hatred and judgment of idolaters. But as the Talmud says, "It was different with Yeshu," because he required us to love everyone.

The dismal prophecies<sup>mclxxi</sup> of wars and so on differ drastically in style from Jesus' possibly authentic sayings, which betray no hysterical fear of impending doom. Jesus thinks the end will come but not necessarily soon. Jesus' instructions deal with unhurried everyday life.

The nonauthentic apocalyptic passages in the Gospels are much like Jewish pseudepigrapha: prophesy read into current events, the imminent end of time, the collapse of world order, the world destroyed with fire, eternal punishment for evil, judgment and the triumph of the righteous, always members of the sect and their biblical precursors. As Jewish sectarians ascribed authorship to biblical figures, so Christians put apocalyptic language in the mouths of Jesus and the apostles. Virtually all apocalyptic pseudepigrapha are so schematic and so bluntly forged that speculation about their derivation from divine revelation requires a vivid imagination.

Fringe sectarians needed fear of judgment to spur extra-rigid observance, and there was no shortage of Judaic apocalypses—though they could be called *Judaic* only tentatively. The sectarians figured God was on their side and ergo against their enemies and persecutors. Since most Jews rejected sectarian teaching, God's anger was surely great enough to trigger the apocalypse.

Doomsday teachings slipped into the Christian canon because various messianic factions impatiently waiting for the apocalypse accepted Christianity. Misled by the word *Christ*, they did not notice the abysmal discrepancy between the warrior messiah and the mild preacher of love. How ethical is it to judge people hard on the heels of terrible suffering, when even the righteous may falter?

Many Jewish texts<sup>mcclxxii</sup> warn of terrifying signs preceding the messiah's advent. The rabbis prayed that the messiah would not come in their time.<sup>mcclxxiii</sup> Mt24 presents a traditional apocalypse, the biblical "The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes."<sup>mcclxxiv</sup> Those views are difficult to correlate with Jesus' story, since no catastrophes preceded his birth. For that, Christians needed a Second Coming.

The Church has always had a problem with the Second Coming, which has not yet come. Thinking like Jewish rabbis,<sup>266</sup> Christians ventured that Jesus will not come back until everyone on earth is Christian, a teaching which conflicted with apocalyptic judgment. Non-Christians had nothing to fear unless they all convert and trigger the Second Advent. They, however, were slapped with immediate punishment in Hell, although John's concept of ongoing judgment vitiates the concept of a one-time apocalypse. That led to trouble for average Christians, fearful of immediate judgment after death. They might get off with purgatory, where they would await the Second Coming in reasonable comfort, though heretics would be dealt with immediately. Pushed to its limit, that teaching allowed the worst criminal to confess on his deathbed and escape Hell. None of these arbitrary and self-contradicting notions have any Gospel background whatsoever.

The doctrine of the Second Advent did not exist among early Christians; even in the late John, Jesus promises to send another heavenly figure instead of himself. How are we to correlate Jesus' messianic advent for victory and salvation with the apocalypse? One way is to say there is no correlation, since Jesus was not the linchpin figure of the apocalypse, but a kind of messenger or initiated person. The end of the world was still God's

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<sup>266</sup> They devised a clever way to channel messianic expectations: the Messiah will not come until all Jews are either good or bad, an unlikely homogeneity.

domain. Another possibility is that Christianity originated after 70 C.E. and the destruction of the Temple was seen as the beginning of the end.

If we admit that any esoteric Gospel episode, such as baptism in the Holy Spirit, the miracles, or the transfiguration, is true, then Jesus could well have risen and ascended and seemed to appear after his death. We must, therefore, choose one position or the other—either to accept that at least a scintilla of the Gospels’ esoterica is trustworthy, in which case the postresurrection appearances are trivial, or to call all the miracles fiction, especially the resurrection. To establish a hierarchy of miracles—from the minor healings to the average wonder of Lazarus rising to the marvel of Jesus’ resurrection (which in fact Lazarus equals)—is nonsense. Miracles are supernatural per se and would prove Jesus’ divinity if any of the Gospel stories were true. The resurrection has no special value as proof of Jesus’ divinity.

The doctrine of corporeal resurrection, not the illusion of it, was added with no sound basis in scholarly argument, no credible revelation, no Gospel text behind it. Matthew posits the resurrection of a bodiless soul.<sup>mclxxv</sup> John hints that Jesus did not need to eat, since his body was illusory.<sup>mclxxvi</sup> Paul followed the Gnostics in viewing body as the embodiment of sin. But then the doctrine of Jesus’ atoning sacrifice implies offering *sinful*<sup>267</sup> flesh as a sacrifice for *sin*. Paul tries to reconcile the paradox by saying Jesus came in “the likeness” of a body.<sup>mclxxvii</sup>

Jewish Christians may have intruded physical resurrection into the Gospels. Many shared the doctrine,<sup>268</sup> though the fundamentalist Sadducees denied it categorically.

The Church probably insisted on a literal reading, since many cults used metaphors of resurrection. But bodily resurrection was exceptional. Gentile underworld mythology, where souls behave like bodies and can even return to the world if someone rescues them, also influenced the doctrine of bodily resurrection.

Celsus asked Christians to imagine their kingdom of Heaven: throngs of corpses roaming around. In reply, the Church declared that the resurrected bodies would be as good as new. But restored at what age? Babyhood?

The biggest problem surfaces in the interim between resurrection on earth and the kingdom of heaven. A populist religion must promise paradise immediately after death. Punishment in Hell in some indefinite future is not so terrifying as cooking on the spot. Why would anyone want to be raised that way? The virtuous enjoy Heaven too much to go back to

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<sup>267</sup> Technically, flesh *causes* one to sin.

<sup>268</sup> Recall the example of Elijah, taken bodily into heaven.

earth. The wicked either are not resurrected at all or face the gruesome prospect of still another judgment. Eventually the creed of instant reward or punishment prevailed, and the prospect of resurrection receded. The belief served its time and the victorious Church no longer needs to prove its uniqueness.

The concept of Jesus' resurrection is related to his advent in a material body. But Wisdom is traditionally incarnated in people. The Church needs something bigger for Jesus, and so his flesh has to be divine. If Jesus' body was illusory, then the idea of atoning sacrifice vanishes. Resurrection becomes meaningless. An illusionary body cannot be crucified, and there is no need to raise it. On the last day Jesus' body will still be illusory. In this case, the Christian apocalypse goes from a physical to a spiritual event. If Jesus is bodiless outside this world, then much less can dead people have bodies. The concept of a sizzling Hell is shattered.

After the Pharisees firmly introduced resurrection in the theology, Jewish Christians had no problem with bodily resurrection, since Greek body/soul dichotomy is absent from Judaism.<sup>269</sup>

Mt10:28 "Fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell" contradicts Mt22:30: "For in the resurrection they . . . are like angels in heaven." The writer of Mt10:28 was thinking of bodily resurrection, the writer of Mt22:30, of spiritual resurrection. Both views are Hellenized: the first by dichotomy, the second – by liberation of soul from ballast of body to angelic state. Both views are Judaized: the first by possible destruction of soul, reminiscent of its pre-dichotomical unity with body, the second – by awakening the soul to angelic life after resurrection, not immediately after death.

Hellenistic concept of the immortal soul appears in the Jewish pseudepigrapha, 1 Enoch 39:4 "I saw the dwellings of the righteous . . . with the holy angels." Some enter the kingdom of Heaven at death, just as in Greek philosophy.

Drifting later from Judaism's original austerity, rabbis adopted certain Gentile concepts of the soul and developed the notion of a Heavenly repository of souls, Throne of God, from which souls depart for a short earthly journey and then return.

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<sup>269</sup> Mystical Jewish teachings, like kabbalah, incorporate the concept of soul, and even claim it is hidden in Torah to prevent misrepresentations by ignorant. In my view, perhaps the only suitable text is in Gen 6:3, "My spirit shall not be condemned to abide in people forever, for they are flesh; their days shall be one hundred twenty years." But even this contraposition of the divine spirit dwelling in unworthy body refers only to supernatural Nephilim.

Paul, caught between Judaism and Hellenism, answers equivocally: “With what kind of body do they come? . . . God gives it a body, as he has chosen . . . . Not all flesh is alike.”<sup>»melxxviii</sup> After the resurrection, there will be a new, different body.

Paul’s views on afterlife remained contradictory. “If the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, . . . a house . . . eternal in the heavens.”<sup>»melxxix</sup> “For all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ.”<sup>»melxxx</sup> What is judgment for, if the soul acquires a heavenly dwelling at death?

Col3:4 “When Christ . . . is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him.” After the general resurrection, the Christians already in the heavens will have to return to the earth. Maneuvering among different theosophies, Paul missed the senselessness of his conclusion.

The evangelists confuse Gehenna,<sup>270</sup> Sheol (the place where souls sleep until judgment), Hades (the underground abode of active souls in shadowy nonbodies), Hell in the popular sense, and the abyss, the final abode of demons.

Christians assimilated the Jewish kingdom of Heaven and Greek notions of subterranean punishment, and created an Egyptian-style Heaven-and-Hell system. People were frightened by this eclectic image into religious submission for two millennia.<sup>271</sup> Christian Hell, a place of absolute torture, proved impractically harsh, and Catholicism softened it with Purgatory.

Christianity defines sins vaguely; even mass murders were often religiously sanctioned by love to Christ. People, by definition, repent of what they consider sins. Repented sinners avoid Hell, and the place must be empty.

There are few if any entirely good or bad people. In the absence of absolute good and evil, how can absolute and eternal reward or punishment, Heaven or Hell, exist?

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<sup>270</sup> Gehinnom, by the name of the field beyond Jerusalem intended for incineration of garbage, Jer 7:31; the place of human sacrifices; in mythology, the place of punishment for sins; Zohar 4:290 describes Gehenna as purgatory; Zohar 1:185 as place of fire. Note that among Egyptians, Set was a divinity of chaos, ruler of the burning desert wastes, reminiscent of Gehinnom, associated with swine.

<sup>271</sup> Easy forgiveness of sins by Christian priests made observance or even generic morality unnecessary for salvation; submission to the Church officials sufficed.

If Christians are convinced that those who reject Jesus will suffer eternal torture, why should they persecute heretics and heterodoxy in this world?

If some in a family go to Paradise and others go to Hell, will the righteous be comfortable in Heaven? If resurrected souls are different and would not recognize their earthly companions, then, what connects them to anything earthly? Nothing human remains in such spirits, and they deserve neither reward, nor punishment.

If souls are tried at death, at the apocalypse only the living will be judged. If all souls will be judged simultaneously, then they sleep yet, and the Christian idea that righteous people have already found Paradise is false. Hell is also empty since no one goes there before judgment.

Sinners fry in Hell, and souls live, suffer anguish. Thus, there is no need of resurrection.

Hindu and Greek Pythagorean reincarnation avoids the Christian problem of eternal absolute retribution for temporary ambiguous behavior: the soul is not primordially free, and incarnation is its property; punishment or reward means resettlement in a worse or a better state. The end of the cycle is the ideal, but very rare, goal.

The afterlife of animals presents a curious related problem. They cannot assent to religious doctrine, and sin is hardly applicable to them, so all animals should go to Paradise. That concept is ethically unacceptable to most people. Ingenious solutions have been advanced, including a special afterworld for animals. The Egyptians thought animals follow their owners in the afterlife, much like wives. Even that left the problem of where wild animals end up. The usual solution is to deny that animals have souls and survive death, though animals have feelings which are generally recognized as manifestations of soul.

The traditional Judaic concept of afterlife the Sadducees maintained is rigid: after death souls go to Sheol, where they abide in eternal sleep, righteous and sinful alike. *Sleep* only approximates the state. The experience is more akin to Hindu nirvana, the final state of absolute tranquility. Judgment Day initially seemed to await only the living. The rabbinic tradition emphasized the hope of dying before the advent of the messiah, even more before Judgment Day. Later the tradition had to address an inevitable question: how long do those in Sheol sleep? The Sadducean approach, where righteous behavior springs not from fear of eternal punishment but from the heart, inspires a degree of awe.

Early Christians accepted the Egyptian doctrine that only worthy people may hope for eternal life. They had no doctrine of a hellish underworld for torturing sinners. The doctrine of Paradise and Hell proved unconvincing, and Christians pray, *Requiescat in pace*, reminiscent of Sheol.

## *Redemption*

What did Jesus redeem? Despite numerous controversies in the past, the Christian tradition is clear, encompasses all sins, and claims that redemption comes through faith. But what sins exactly? Christianity rejected the Jewish law but presents no new demands, other than faith in Jesus—that boils down to faith redeeming the sin of faithlessness, an oxymoron.

The Gospels contain a potpourri of guidelines, but many are mutually exclusive and contradict the apostolic commandments in Acts, also forged. Almost nothing constitutes sin in Christianity, though the tradition has borrowed some ethical maxims from Judaism, while inexplicably disregarding the rest. If Christianity takes the Hebrew Biblical commandments as obligatory, it would cease as a distinct religion.

Why should sin be resisted if it has already been excused through mere belief in Jesus' divinity? Recognizing the obvious problem in this concept, explicit in John and Paul, the Church postulated that only those repenting with a firm intention to stop sinning obtain forgiveness. Yet, such intention at the time of repentance does not prevent people from sinning later, especially if tempted. People can believe that Jesus is the Son of God and still sin prodigiously. On the other hand, forgiveness through faith closes salvation to non-Christians, and what then restricts their behavior, including the way they treat Christians? Evidently, Christians are not forgiven through faith, and non-Christians can attain salvation regardless of faith. Indeed, disbelief in Jesus is not sinful: "Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven."<sup>mcclxxxi</sup> Faith in Jesus is, therefore, unimportant for salvation; deeds—or, at least firm intention to do good—matters. That leaves Christianity, for any practical purposes, no different from Judaism.

Perhaps, true faith precludes immorality? It follows then that throughout Christian history there have been only a handful of true believers, since most Christians have gone on sinning fairly regularly. Some gradation of faith—the stronger the faith, the fewer the sins—becomes necessary. Such relativity of belief is absurd. Either a person believes Jesus was the essence of God or not. Many Christian sinners did not doubt Trinity and resurrection.

The concept of human weakness results from the attempt to join the apparently irreconcilable. Weak people believe in Jesus but cannot help sinning; weakness strips them of free choice and thus of responsibility.<sup>272</sup>

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<sup>272</sup> This common syllogism is wrong. Weak people still possess free will. They wish to avoid wicked acts only mildly; their desire to commit such acts is stronger. On the balance, they long for evil and act wickedly, thus



They commit evil involuntarily and will be forgiven, redeemed by Jesus' sacrifice. But that concept does not explain intentional sins, and contradicts the traditional priestly absolution of them. Forgiving sins committed due to weakness tempts to sin. Unintentional offenses are also forgiven in Judaism, and what is the role of belief in Jesus?

The problem did not arise in primitive Christianity, because the doctrine of wholesale forgiveness had not yet formed. One early source took a very practical view: "If you have means, pay ransom for your sins."<sup>mcclxxxii</sup> Redemption depended on Christians' deeds, regardless of Jesus' death. There was no consensus about Jesus' mission: "He did so [died] to show his righteousness";<sup>mcclxxxiii</sup> "Who gave himself . . . to set us free from the present evil age."<sup>mcclxxxiv</sup> According to Paul, "Christ died for the ungodly"<sup>mcclxxxv</sup>—that is, to redeem their sins. The Ebionites argued against redeeming sacrifices: "I came to do away with sacrifices, and if you do not stop sacrificing, you won't stop experiencing wrath."<sup>mcclxxxvi</sup>

Paul's claim that that Jesus forgave previously committed sins<sup>mcclxxxvii</sup> left no benefits to the next generation. To attract converts, Christianity claimed absolution of future sins, too, and devalued the notion of sin.

The doctrine of redemption has been exploited. A particular door at St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican is opened on Christmas every twenty-fifth year, the jubilee year. Everyone who passes through it gets plenary absolution. The Church previously justified the custom by quoting Jesus: "I am the door." Twentieth-century sensitivities pointed out the crassness of the practice, and the Church fell back on the old position: forgiveness comes not from passing through the door, but by faith in Jesus. In 2000, almost twenty-five million Catholics passed through the holy door.

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incur guilt. Paul believed that weakness provokes sin, but does not absolve of it.

## *Symbols*

Christian ceremonies preserve idolatry in the adoration of crucifixes and icons. An icon is a crude idol which depicts God in human form. Judaism forbids idols, “so that you do not act corruptly by making an idol for yourselves, in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female.”<sup>mclxxxviii</sup> It was forbidden even to carry images in Jerusalem. Josephus reports a conflict between the Jews and Pilate on the matter and many similar incidents.

That icons, theoretically, are mnemonic devices does not make them less idolatrous. Savages think of stones and statues as literally divine, but Hebrews hardly conceived of the golden calf just molted before their eyes as divine. The Ten Commandments prohibit images for any use, including mnemonic, and reasonably so: mnemonic devices, whether icons or crystal balls, inevitably acquire their own significance for worshippers. Antropomorphic iconography is equally disgusting and misleads the flock.

Using the cross as ornament is absurd. According to Paul and the Talmud, Jesus was hung. Why not install the gallows, the closest modern analogue, on the domes of churches? Cruciform looked as much offensive for ancient Jews. An important difference distinguishes images of Jesus and Buddha. Buddha was a man in whom the Holy Spirit abode, whose divinity was asserted much later, the common fate of leaders of many religions, with an honorable exception of Islam. Even the Jewish pseudepigrapha divinized Moses, Melchizedek, and others.

## *Miracles*

A theological text would be hard put to reject the possibility of miracles. But granting the possibility of miracles, we find many earthly problems with the Gospel accounts: editing, vestiges of myths, disagreements.

The argument against the NT miracles is the spectators’ response. Why did the thousands fed with five loaves of bread not immediately believe Jesus’ message? Why not those who witnessed the healings and the resurrections? Perhaps because they reacted not to the miracles but to stories about them. Similar reports were common.

If Jesus showed so many signs, why did he refuse to give a sign to the Pharisees, which would have at one stroke solved the problems of faith and conversion, and preclude his crucifixion as messianic pretender?

While common Jews might have missed the importance of the miracles, the priests would not. It is unlikely that the High Priest killed the

messiah who came to save Israel from her enemies so the Romans (the enemies) would not take his advent for rebellion. The priests were awaiting the messiah no less than other Jews. With no demand for miracles, they acknowledged Bar Kochba as messiah only a century after Jesus.

Consistent with Greek culture, healing miracles prevail in the Gospels. Healing is rare in the Jewish tradition. Healing bordered on sorcery and fell under the same suspicion and injunctions in both Judaism and later in Christianity.<sup>mclxxxix</sup> The Torah provides a cure for leprosy, but leprosy is an external disease with no connection to demon-possession, even among neighboring polytheists whose customs Jews unconsciously assimilated, and so did not require sorcery to be healed.

Calling down rain, popular with Jews and others in the Middle East because of the danger of famine following droughts does not appear in the Gospels, which could imply an origin for Jesus' miracles in a culture which had no problems with rain, like Greece.

The rabbis taught that miracle stories are metaphors and should not be taken literally, yet in antiquity most people believed in miracles.

Jesus worked miracles on his own, but Biblical prophets worked miracles according to God's specific instructions and by his power.

The Gnostics may have created the healing stories and never intended them for literal interpretation. "Know, therefore, that he treated you when you were sick, so that you might reign."<sup>mcxc</sup> The writer means healing from the taint of the world, but such sayings can also be taken at face value.

Jesus cured to demonstrate his power: not in his own town, generally not Samaritans and Gentiles. Healing as demonstration of power is incompatible with "he took our infirmities. . . ." Finally, why in loving kindness did he heal only individual people and not everyone?

## The Concepts of Jesus' Image

### *Genealogy*

Both Matthew and Luke say Jesus was of the tribe of Judah, critical to his descent from David, also of the tribe of Judah. But Judah were not priests, unlikely to produce a spiritual leader. The traces of the conflict appear in Hebrews 7. The writer dedicates most of a chapter to explaining that, though Melchizedek was not a Levite, he nevertheless received tithes and was esteemed a priest.

The Essene's tradition specified another, spiritual messiah who would descend from Joseph. Legends alluded to that messiahship by supplying immaculately conceived Jesus with father named Joseph. Both ancestry and parentage were signified with the same nomen, *ben*. Evangelists accommodated traditional messiahship by making Joseph a descendant of David.

It might be that Magus was called *son of Joseph*. The Samaritans, in whose territory Simon practiced, lived in the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, descendants of Joseph, and referred to themselves as *sons of Joseph*. Magus was likely one of them. When some of his features were appropriated for Jesus, Ben Joseph could have been among them.

The notion that Jesus descended from David physically was probably a distortion of earlier views. Did9:2 "We thank you, our Father, for a holy vine of David . . . which you revealed to us through Jesus." The connection is spiritual: the promise of a Davidic messiah was fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus may have been called "a descendant of David" in a figurative sense at first, after which a Gentile missed the allegory and invented the genealogy.

How could Matthew know the part of the lineage after Abihud, eleven generations before Jesus? None of it appears in the Hebrew Bible or the extant pseudepigrapha. Matthew's and Luke's lists differ markedly, leaving little doubt that they are forgeries.

David's line broke off with the Persian conquest six hundred years before Jesus. None of his descendents came forward to claim the throne. Since the claim could not have been contested, there must have been no descendants.

Twenty-eight generations separate David from Jesus. Since consanguinity passed only through the males, and assuming at least two boys in the average family, David's descendants could have numbered 256 million, which exceeds the whole population of Judea. The Babylonian

exile in the fourteenth generation, as well as other disasters, natural causes, and intermarriages (when both spouses were related to David) decreased the number drastically, but David's descendants would have been as many as the whole population.

David's heir could descend only through the firstborn son in the family, only one per generation, yet no one claimed that for Jesus. David's most outstanding descendant, King Solomon, was not his first son, and thus eligible descendants were not limited to firstborns, one per generation.

Matthew traces Jesus' descent from David through Mary's husband Joseph, who was not related to Jesus. Matthew or his editor had little choice, since the messiah had to descend from David through the male line. Luke realized the impossibility of establishing descent through the male line and derived Jesus' ancestry through Mary, irrelevant for royal claim in ancient Jewish culture. Maternal Davidic lineage was also attributed to Hillel, hoping to magnify him while avoiding messianic connotations.

Around the time of Jesus, Jewish discontent with the theocracy started to surface in connection with the failure of the High Priest Zadok's line. The Qumranites and probably other sects rejected the illegitimate dynasty in power and hunkered down to wait for the advent of the Davidic warrior-messiah. If Jesus could prove his descent from David, he would have had no problem being recognized as the messiah, especially with the power of his teaching.

## *The virgin birth*

Conception after intercourse with a god is an integral element of many cults, particularly Greek myths, where numerous virgin maidens roused divine lust. Serious Gentile theologians and philosophers like Socrates ridiculed naïve notions of incarnate gods. Any such conception should have to be spiritual, immaculate, just like in Christianity.

Christians had to comply with the wrong LXX translation of Isaiah's prophecy where messiah had to be born by virgin, not simply young woman, a common image of Israel.<sup>273</sup>

Supernatural conception made Jesus on par with Gentile demigods, important for converts. Some Gnostics also wanted the maximum bang for Jesus, and InfJam posits Mary's supernatural birth, as well. Th15 "Jesus said, 'When you see one who was not born of woman, fall on your faces and worship. That one is your Father.'" While Thomas means spiritually reborn person, the like saying might be interpreted literally to mean the virgin birth.

The claim of virgin birth was not generally known for a long time, especially among the Gnostics. Thomas' Joseph obviously had no idea of Jesus' divine origin when he shouted at his five-year old son for violating the Sabbath.<sup>mcxc</sup>

Paul knows nothing about the supernatural birth when he writes "concerning his Son who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be Son of God with power . . . [only] by resurrection."<sup>mcxcii</sup>

Matthew does not say only Mary knew about her pregnancy;<sup>274</sup> she "was found to be with child."<sup>mcxciii</sup> Her condition explains her marriage to an old man, which was looked at askance, "He who marries his daughter to an old man . . . acts wrongly."<sup>mcxciv</sup> Tradition needed Joseph to be old and die soon to accommodate the silence about him in the later part of the Gospels. Writing later, Luke was acquainted with the matter. He has Mary betrothed when the angel visits:<sup>mcxcv</sup> her odd marriage was not

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<sup>273</sup> It is very odd that Jewish authors of the LXX made such an error, and changed basic prophecy into a common Gentile myth of virgin birth. More likely, this part of the LXX was corrected to comply with the Gospel account.

<sup>274</sup> Why the spirit was so careless as to visit her long before the engagement?

consequential to pregnancy. Virgin birth and Joseph's old age are two ways to explain absence of Mary's husband.

Supernatural conception was a popular trope. Messalina<sup>275</sup> used it. Rumors that Jesus was Mary's bastard by a Roman soldier fueled disputes between Jews and Christians and adorn the Talmudic name for Jesus—Ben Stada, *son of soldier*. Illegitimacy explains Jesus' premature birth at seven months.<sup>mxcxvi</sup>

Alongside his possible Essenism, his illegitimacy may account for Jesus not marrying. Bastards could marry only other bastards or proselytes, and Jesus may have had no choice.

The virgin-birth account is interpolated in Matthew and absent from Gnostic John, mystical Mark, and the reasonably normative Ebionites.

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<sup>275</sup> The wife of Roman emperor, she conceived while he was on a campaign. She said that since he was divine she could conceive remotely.

## *Jesus' origins in Bethlehem and Nazareth*

The story of Bethlehem-Ephrathah is worth notice. Chronicles mentions both not as territory but as the names of descendants of the patriarch Judah.<sup>mexcvii</sup> As a person's name, however, Bethlehem, *House of Bread*, is odd and must have been related to the geography.

Micah's prophecy of the messiah arising from Bethlehem is puzzling. The Hebrew Scriptures are generally unconcerned with the *where*, but insist on the *who*, the messiah's tribe. Since ancient genealogical lines were long lost by the first century, theologians and people in general might have identified the future messiah with the town instead. Judea is not fertile, and the name *House of Bread* seems inept. That may have suggested another homeland in more fertile Galilee, where another town with the same name is known.

Since mentioning a place by two names is uncommon, Micah might mean not *Bethlehem-Ephrath*, but *Ephrath, the house of bread*, an allegorical description of fertility. Where was that town?

Gen35:1–19 “And God said to Jacob, Arise, go to Beth El, and dwell there... Then they journeyed from Beth-El, and when there was still some way to come to Ephrath Rachel's time came . . . . His father named him Benjamin. And so Rachel died and was buried on the way to the Ephrath which is Beth Lehem.” Jacob was returning from Beth-El back to Haran in Mesopotamia, going south to Euphrates. Accordingly, they went away from Bethlehem, not toward it. That makes sense of the name, since the whole fertile crescent is a House of Bread. Only later, Jacob moved to his father in Hebron.<sup>mexcviii</sup>

The problem was evident to scribes, and they resorted to interpolations. In Ruth1:2, they specified the grandfather of David as “Ephratite from Beth Lehem.”

Jacob's family had no reason to go to Bethlehem, a settlement in the future territory of Judea. They left a rich, developed region in Mesopotamia and might more naturally have settled in fertile Galilee, not in the semidesert near Jerusalem.

The Bible writer may well have meant a similarly sounding Persian name, *Beet Allehem*, the modern Bayt Lahm near the Euphrates. It means *House of Flesh*, which might imply sacrifice and an altar and would approximately correlate with the Hebrew Beth Elohim or Beth El, *House of the Lord*.

The Beth El/Beth Lehem confusion might explain the odd choice for the messiah's birthplace, which would have been more naturally in a



town called *House of the Lord* (Beth El) than *House of Bread* (Beth Lehem).

Now, the problem of David's birthplace. In 1Sam16:1—2, the Lord sends the prophet Samuel, fearful of Saul's threats, from Bethlehem to Jesse with a horn of oil to anoint the new king. He pretends he is offering a sacrifice which is strange if Samuel was afraid to anoint David. His pretence was pointless since he would have to anoint him anyway. Why did he think the pretence would protect him?

Samuel was afraid to go to Bethlehem. 1Sam16:4 "The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, 'Do you come peacefully?'" If that was Judean Bethlehem, what did the elders fear? They were Saul's allies against the Philistines. But if it was Bethlehem in Zebulun, then the people had heard plenty about Saul to upset them.

Indeed, why would anyone wish to make a sacrifice specifically in Bethlehem? Perhaps the destination was originally Bethel in Ephraim *House of the Lord* and site of a famous altar, where Saul had made war not long before. The people had good reason to be wary of Samuel.

Bethlehem-Ephrathah may have been mistaken for Bethlehem of Zebulun, near Nazareth and far from Jerusalem.

There are two towns with the Arabic name Bayt Lahm, one near Jerusalem, one in Zebulun. Bayt Lahm is traditionally identified with Bethlehem, and both places existed in antiquity. People may have wanted to present the geography differently before. A map on a wall of the Doge's Palace in Venice shows the Judean Bethlehem, but the Galilean village is Betherem.

The Galilean Bethlehem suits the Gospel account better. In Luke, Joseph's family travels from Nazareth to Bethlehem in Judea just before Jesus' birth to be registered in the census. Matthew also knew the problem. Born in Bethlehem of Judea, his Jesus resettles in Galilean Nazareth after returning from Egypt for no apparent reason. But if there is another Bethlehem in Galilee and Jesus was born there, then Nazareth makes sense. Later editors had every reason to move the birthplace to Judea to fulfill their interpretation of the messianic prophecy.

The confusion between the two Herods may compound the confusion between the two Bethlehems. Luke says Jesus was born in the reign of Herod Antipas, but Matthew's editor says Herod the Great, since probably he knew of only one Herod. Matthew's version is untrustworthy. Antipas reigned in Galilee, not Judea, and Jesus was probably born in his territory.

There are other reasons to locate Jesus' birthplace in Galilee. Pilate sent him to the Galilean ruler for trial, which indicates Jesus was his subject. Recall the numerous parallels between Jesus and Judah the Galilean and that most of Jesus' mission took place in Galilee.

In Matthew, Herod killed all the baby boys younger than two, which makes sense only if he waited a long time for the magi. Otherwise killing only newborns would have done the job. But Judean Bethlehem is only thirty miles from Jerusalem, and the magi did not need two years to go there and return.

Birth in Bethlehem of Judea would shore up Jesus' messianic claim, but he never mentioned it. Many knew he was not born there: "Surely the Messiah does not come from Galilee, does he? The Messiah . . . comes from Bethlehem."<sup>mcxcix</sup> When he entered Jerusalem in triumph, "The crowds were saying, 'This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.'<sup>mcc</sup> If they thought he was the messiah, they would have made sure he was born in Bethlehem of Judah.

Among others, John the Baptist gets transferred to Judea alongside Jesus. His diet of wild honey and his execution by the Galilean tetrarch Herod suggest John taught and baptized in Galilee.

The mystery does not end there. There is no mention of Nazareth in Jewish sources until the Middle Ages. The appellation *Nazarene* could be a misreading of *Nazorean*, monk, but Jesus who drunk was not a monk. Perhaps drinking and sinful behavior was add to Jesus' image to suit pagan tastes.

The name Jesus of Nazareth is largely meaningless, since people in Judea would have known little or nothing of a small town in another province. Judah was called *the Galilean*, a more recognizable designation. Jews ordinarily added a patronymic or a sobriquet, but not a geographical referent. Though Nazareth appears in the Gospel of Barnabas, it is a fishing town on the shore of the Sea of Galilee.<sup>mcc</sup> In Luke, the town is on a hill.<sup>mccii</sup>

The place name *Nazerat* first appeared in the Judean tradition in tenth or eleventh century hymns. The Jesus passages in the Talmud do not mention the town, and Christian sectarians usually collect in Cepharsanai or Cepharsai – Capernaum, where Jesus spent much time and some of his disciples lived.

The problem showed up soon, and someone decided that Jesus was not a Nazorean but lived in some village Nozri, Nazareth. The matter was decided, and Nazareth appeared on the map. From that the evangelists cooked up the story of Jesus' family in Nazareth.

The error is typical. Christians believe that Jesus lived in Nazareth and visit the town. But the fact is, some settlement was arbitrarily declared Nazareth.

Why was the mythical Nazareth "found" near the Galilean Bethlehem and not in Judea? Perhaps Jesus' prototype *was* born in Galilee. The author may have intended to correlate with Jesus' almost exclusively Galilean mission.

Modern biblical scholarship distinguishes various layers of authorship in the Torah, in particular *J* and *E* from Judea and Israel respectively. Could backward Judea have copied Israel and created its own Bethlehem to appropriate the messianic tradition to itself? The Judean version became orthodoxy.

A Galilean author would naturally put Jesus' birth in the local Bethlehem. Later, the Jewish sect or a Gentile author, acquainted only with the Jerusalem version of Judaism, moved it to Bethlehem in Judea, causing the apparent mismatches which later editors tried to explain with the census or the flight into Egypt.

All that makes the narrative more logical. Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Galilee in the reign of Herod Antipas. Luke may have the date right, 6 C.E., the time of Quirinius' census. For some reason Jesus' family went from Nazareth to nearby Galilean Bethlehem, then returned and settled permanently in Nazareth. In that case, Jesus could not claim the messianic authority of birth in Bethlehem of Judea, which is why he called himself a Nazarene and preached in Galilee.

Galilee was an unusual place for teachers. There is a story about a rabbi who lived in Galilee eighteen years during which he was asked questions about the Law only twice. Perhaps it was not incidental that Rabbi Josea was nicknamed *the Galilean*, whereas other rabbis usually bore their fathers' names.

The question looked different to Jews. Lots of people were born in Bethlehem, but that did not qualify them as candidates for messiah. But Jesus was the only person the Gentiles knew who came from Bethlehem, and they figured that fulfilled the prophecy.

## **Baptism**

Did John actually baptize Jesus? Jesus never confirmed it, and, speaking of his death, seems to deny it: "I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed!"<sup>mcciii</sup>

John either baptized Jesus routinely, or in the most implausible story, tried to talk him out of it. He would have acted differently if he saw in Jesus the messiah he proclaimed. The earliest Christians had trouble handling that, since John's followers would have quickly disproved the lie. John's exchange with Jesus hardly qualifies as the high point in John's life, the moment for which he risked his life. John went on preaching and did not communicate with Jesus further. John probably accepted Jesus as a rabbi. If he took Jesus for the messiah, why did his disciples not join Jesus immediately? The problem was evident, and in John some of John's disciples did follow Jesus. But why not all of them, including the Baptist?

That John is forgery agrees with another account: "[John] . . . sent word to . . . him, 'Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?'"<sup>mcciv</sup> He would have hardly forgotten the messiah he had just baptized. Jesus' disciples also saw him as a teacher, and the few exceptions are forgeries.

In the synoptics, the Baptist does not identify Jesus as messiah, although he does in the John episode which even confuses Jesus' various titles: the Baptist calls him the Lamb,<sup>mccv</sup> but the disciples call him messiah.<sup>mccvi</sup> The difference, blurred for modern Christians, was clear to the ancient Jews.

Jesus' baptism by the renowned John may have enhanced his status among early Christians. Later, when Christianity was more confident, the baptism<sup>276</sup> of the sinless, divine Jesus became problematical. John avoids it, only hints at it. An apocryphal account has Jesus refuse baptism for the remission of sins since he considered himself innocent.<sup>mccvii</sup>

There is no requirement that the messiah be baptized, nor that he be a divine incarnation. That Jesus came to John to be baptized reveals his unpretentious earthly nature.

Jesus reportedly started teaching at the age of twelve.<sup>mccviii</sup> If we believe the stories of the virgin birth, the magi, and so on, why did Jesus need to be baptized? He already had the Spirit. The tradition of the Spirit's descent upon Jesus at baptism appeared late; Paul did not know about it and said Jesus received the Spirit at the resurrection.

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<sup>276</sup> For the forgiveness of sins.

Matt3:11 “One who is more powerful than I is coming after me . . . . He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” John portrays an abstract apocalyptic figure who is to come in the near but undefined future—and Jesus baptized no one with either fire or Spirit.

It is difficult to reconcile the Holy Spirit and fire, the first a theological formula, the other matter. More likely would be “with air and fire” or “with wind and fire.”<sup>277</sup> John baptized in water, the quietest element, perhaps an allegory of submersion in the eternal rivers of Paradise.<sup>mccix</sup> He foretells the coming of another who will baptize with the volatile elements of wind and fire those who did not repent in time for water baptism.

Water baptism was considered inferior to purification by fire: “What cannot bear fire should be brought through water.”<sup>mccx</sup> John's baptism purged sins, impurity, and the same line of reasoning applies to it.

Later the Jewish tradition, affected by Greek theosophy and the requirements of literary style, applied the metaphors of the spirit more freely. The face of anyone blessed with the Holy Spirit “burned like a flame of fire.”<sup>mccxi278</sup> The Holy Spirit was likened to the water from a well.<sup>mccxii</sup> The Holy Spirit even acquired a certain theological independence in the late Jewish tradition, influenced by exposure to other cultures.

What about the fourth element, earth? Baptism with earth could symbolize the last day, resurrection, or death, since all the dead are baptized with earth.<sup>mccxiii</sup>

The spirit/fire dyad has profound meaning. Rabbi Josea Ben Halafta compares man to a broken glass vessel that can be glued together (return for a future life) because it was blown in the fire.<sup>mccxiv</sup> John could have meant that the one to come after him would create people anew, meaning either the messiah (the messianic millennium) or God (the end of time and the general resurrection). The latter is more probable since some took John for Elijah, returned at last,<sup>279</sup> and the messianic age concept was yet undeveloped.

As could be expected from people living in a hot climate and respectful of rain, Jews preferred water baptism to confirm the soul's purity and bestow the Holy Spirit. In Gospel language, –27 describes one baptism in water and the Spirit – but reasonably so, by sprinkling.<sup>mccxv</sup> If water symbolizes the Spirit, and men can only hope to be touched by Spirit rather

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<sup>277</sup> *Pneuma* could mean spirit or air

<sup>278</sup> This metaphor was standard. Acts6:15 The glowing face of Spirit-filled Stephen “was like the face of an angel.”

<sup>279</sup> Elijah was taken alive into heaven, to return immediately before the Judgment to prepare the people of Israel.

than immersed in it, then immersion in water is symbolically inappropriate. In Christian baptism, immersion symbolizes death; rising from the water symbolizes rising to spiritual life. Such symbolism does not square with Judaism where death is the source of impurity.

By John's time, ritual bathing in mikvah was common among Jews, and conveyed no special status beside cleansing from impurities.<sup>mccxvi</sup> Baptismal immersion, a central point for Christians, was peripheral for the Jewish teacher John. He called the people to repentance which qualified their sins as inadvertent and subject to remission by sacrifice and bathing. Jesus had no reason to attend, unless he significantly sinned and not repented. John the Baptist was possibly an apocalyptic preacher who baptized with the Spirit, but later, to distinguish between his baptism and that of Jesus, he is shown baptizing with water for the repentance from sins.<sup>mccxvii</sup>

Ezekiel spoke of repentance as ongoing. The Baptist and the early Christians urged repentance because they thought the end was near, a perception which encouraged the conversion of proselytes. The end did not come, and the rituals of Christian repentance transformed, pinpointing baptism as symbolic rebirth and Christian initiation.

The Church preferred infant baptism for administrative rather than theological reasons. Since baptism initially accompanied conversion to Christianity, the tradition maintained it as a rite of Christianizing, although it was an unconscious conversion, unlike in adulthood. Infant baptism drastically decreased competition for the flock from other religions at the age of conscious choice. The Anabaptists reject infant baptism, saying that only repenting adults may be baptized. They also refuse to take oaths, as they noted Jesus did: his view ignored by the Church.

"John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim because water was abundant there."<sup>mccxviii</sup> A rivulet could accommodate a crowd. Why would anyone need *abundant* water? Perhaps the evangelist thought of something like the Eleusinian rite, where people bathed with pigs which would absorb their sins. For that, they needed a lot of water. Baptism was only a part of Greek Eleusian initiation rites, requiring considerable space and organization for theatrical performance. Christianity, not yet legal, truncated initiation to a single ritual.

The Didache deals with practical considerations. Baptism should be in running water, "living water." But if there is none near, standing water will do. If an open pond is too cold, a warm pool is all right. If there is not even a pool, a triple effusion of water on the head is sufficient.<sup>mccxix</sup>

In Judaism, keeping the commandments bestows religious purity. Disobedience is uncleanness and sin. Christians distinguished between faith

and works, and ignored the incompatibility of baptism and abandoning the Law, of symbolic purification in the absence of defined uncleanness.

## *The Second Advent*

The doctrine of the Second Coming opposes common sense. What is Jesus waiting for in the heavens? Is he waiting for the people's appeal to God? But religious enthusiasm comes and goes, and few Christians now look for a physical Second Coming.

More than a thousand years of biblical history preceded Jesus, and twice as much time has passed since his first advent. Has not another atoning sacrifice or example been required during that time? If Jesus attempted to save ancient Jews, how much more he should try again with the greatly increased population of the world! Some believe he will return when the Gospel has been delivered to the whole world. Missionaries and mass media already did that. Should Jesus come at the peak of conversion? This moment was reached centuries ago. Should he come at the worst time, when most people turn away from him? This was the moment after his execution, and it passed. Jesus remarked that future believers would be greater than his closest disciple, since they would believe in him without knowing him personally.<sup>mccxx</sup> Logically, then, the world long needed another revelation of his, but none came.

A possible objection is that divine logic is beyond man's. Most Jews would agree with that. But Christians view Jesus' thinking as human: love-filled, savior, and so on. Otherwise, they would have to contend that they do not know Jesus' purpose. That would greatly afflict the flock, which confidently supposes that Jesus has come to save them and choose them instead of the Jews.



### *Dating the Crucifixion*

Passover is not the principal Jewish festival, though it is more popular than Succoth. The holy day's mass character may have led the Christian writers into error when they tried to attach the crucifixion to what they thought was the most important feast.

The chronology of Passover is easy to derive and refutes the Christian tradition. In particular, Jesus (the lamb) was slaughtered not on the day of immolation (of which he partook at the last supper) but the next day. He may have deliberately ordered up the seder early. But where would he find a ritually slaughtered lamb before the holy day? Besides, the disciples asked Jesus where they should prepare the Passover for him.<sup>mccxxi</sup> They had no reason jump the gun.

John shows Jesus giving Judas Iscariot a piece of bread dipped in the dish. There would have been no sauce for dipping on Passover—but many such dishes on Succoth.

No trial or execution could happen on the Passover. John's late Gospel attempted to correct the synoptic version, likely under fire by then, with execution on the eve of Pesach.

The analogy of Jesus to the paschal sacrificial lamb is dubious. Ordinarily ewes were slaughtered, not male rams. If Jesus is the sacrificed lamb, he is only one among very many. At any rate, this allegory of Jesus as an expiatory offering is off, since the sacrifice for sin was not a sheep but a calf.<sup>mccxxii</sup>

Passover sacrifice could equally be a sheep or a goat.<sup>mccxxiii</sup> Ancient Jews would not compare Jesus to the Passover animal, and modern Christians would not enjoy Jesus' analogy with he-goat.

In Isaiah's "Like a sheep that before its shearers is silent," the Suffering Servant was *sheared*, not slaughtered.

Jesus is allegedly an offering to atone for sins; Passover is a feast of thanksgiving: "It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord, *for* he passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt, when he struck down the Egyptians but spared our houses."<sup>mccxxiv</sup> The sheep's blood on the Hebrews' lintels saved them on the day of the slaughter of the Egyptian firstborn. Jesus' shed blood did nothing good for the Jews.

Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem recalls the autumn Succoth festival, not Passover. The disciples put their clothes on the donkey.<sup>mccxxv</sup> But Jesus demanded that one not take extra clothes.<sup>mccxxvi</sup> In the cool Succoth weather, they would have worn clothes to spare. Pilgrims jammed

Jerusalem at Passover, far more than at other festivals. Yet Jesus found a crowd only when he got near Jerusalem. The people were cutting *lulab* (palm, myrrh, and willow branches) and waving them, a Succoth custom. Traditionally the crowd shouts “*Hosanna!*” at Succoth<sup>mccxxvii</sup>.

Mt12:1 describes Jesus’ disciples plucking and eating grain, which in Galilee was harvested in spring. The grain becomes even minimally edible no earlier than in February. We do not know what kind of grain they were eating, but barley ripens just after Passover, wheat a bit later, before Shavuot. After the episode with the grain, Jesus continued traveling. Since the accounts disagree, we do not know how long, but at least one or two months. He would not have reached Jerusalem in time for Passover that year, but he did not stay in Galilee until the following Passover. The next big festival was Succoth.

At Mt21:19–21 Jesus finds no figs on a tree and curses it – presumably because he expected the figs - whereupon it withers. Figs ripen in late summer and autumn, not in spring.

Eusebius says Jerusalem fell, years later, on the same day of the same month on which Jesus died,<sup>mccxxviii</sup> but Josephus, whom Eusebius read, says the city was destroyed in autumn. Most scholars think Eusebius cheated and changed the date to suit his propaganda. Why not suppose he built on some earlier tradition of Jerusalem’s fall near the day of the crucifixion, namely, in autumn, near Succoth? Eusebius was cornered by the general acceptance of the Passover tradition, so he moved the city’s fall from autumn to spring, despite Josephus.

The Assyrian legend of the execution of Bel, strikingly similar to Jesus’ story, dates events from the New Year.

Jews count New Year from the month of *Tishrei*, though Ex12:2 says the year should start with “this month,” Nisan, the month of the Exodus.<sup>280</sup> The evangelists, knowing that Jesus was executed close to the New Year festival, guessed at Nisan. The recurrence of Passover in that month provided the seemingly perfect date.

The Qumran Temple Scroll<sup>mccxxix</sup> starts the New Year with the new moon of the first month, Nisan. Jews celebrated New Year in that month as late as the third century. All the confusion influenced the redating of the crucifixion in Nisan at Passover.

Our notions of the festival reflect legends more than reality. For example, “And the sages say, ‘In Judea they worked until noon before

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<sup>280</sup> The Jewish calendar contains several annual cycles, much like modern calendar and fiscal years.

Pesach, but in Galilee they did not work at all.<sup>”mccxxx</sup> The account is obviously very old, though the Mishnah was compiled in the second century from earlier material.<sup>281</sup>

The slaughter started after 1:30 p.m. if Passover fell on Saturday or after 3:30 p.m. on other days<sup>mccxxxi</sup> and took a lot of time. Josephus says that more than a hundred thousand sheep were offered, during which worshippers had to make their way through the crowd and haul the carcass home—or eat it on the spot. The events of Jesus' last night with his disciples looked something like this: they slaughtered and roasted a sheep, ate it, went home, walked up Mount Eleon, prayed in Gethsemane, fell asleep three times, saw Jesus taken, followed him to the house of the high priest, saw a crowd gather, heard many false witnesses, and saw Jesus flogged. After more than an hour Peter denied Christ—all before the cock crowed.

Trying to fit the crucifixion into the Passover celebrations produces that implausibly tight timetable. The paschal dinner or any final supper could be one part of the narrative, the night in Gethsemane and crucifixion two others near Succoth, which some editor mistook for one sequence. In John, recall, the meal is not the paschal supper.

Matt27:62 “The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate.” The priests and the Pharisees could not be engaged in business on Saturday, so they could not go to Pilate. According to John, “the day of Preparation” is the day before the festival, but it too is sabbatical, that is, has the same restrictions as Saturday, something the author did not know.

To suggest that the phrase means that the crucifixion took place “a day before the beginning of Sabbath,” that is, Thursday, is forced and does violence to the text: “It [the crucifixion day] was the day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning.”<sup>mccxxxii</sup>

Pt7:3 “We fasted and sat mourning and weeping night and day until the Sabbath,” that is, until Friday evening, and so Jesus was crucified on Thursday. Pt7 tries to improve the situation: the priests and elders went to

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<sup>281</sup> Tons of lamb's blood was poured at the foot of the altar,<sup>281</sup> difficult to imagine today. How did they get rid of the smell? The truth must be different, if the story is not mythical altogether. That is not to imply that such rites could not have taken place. People then had to tolerate a lot of filth and stench. Still, there were not likely so many participants and sacrifices. Some of the most massive sacrifices, by Romans before battle, were much fewer in number and took place in a field, not in a relatively small temple.

Pilate on Friday. But they could not go on Friday either: Saturday starts Friday evening, and Jesus was dead not long before sunset.

Pt7 contradicts other passages in the same apocryphal Gospel. Pt2:3 “And Herod replied, ‘Brother Pilate, even if no one had asked for him, we would have buried him, since the Sabbath is drawing near.’” That would make no sense on Thursday, when there was no rush.

Pt9:1 “Early, at first light on the Sabbath, a crowd came.” That is the first morning after the crucifixion, Saturday, and so the crucifixion took place on Friday.

Why did the women come on Sunday to embalm Jesus’ body? Because Joseph had no time to do it Friday evening. If Jesus were crucified on Thursday, they would have come Friday morning. The original version with the crucifixion on Friday, right or wrong, is consistent with the context.

It is possible that by that time 14 Nisan could not fall on Thursday. Nisan 15 and 21 are always sabbatical days, not to be confused with Saturday as a day of the week, and two Sabbaths in succession<sup>282</sup> would have caused technical problems, for example, in the case of funeral. So an extra day was interpolated in the calendar to avoid this congestion of holy days. That makes the synoptic dating less plausible.

Jn19:14 Pilate judged Jesus on “the day of Preparation before the Passover; and it was about noon.” John’s version is doubtful. The school of Shammai disapproved of working the night before the festival,<sup>mccxxxiii</sup> and the school of Hillel permitted work only until dawn. The evangelists seemed to be aware of the problem, and Jesus was seized at night and judged before dawn: Peter denied Jesus before the cock crowed. Yet the problem was not completely resolved: the priests were dealing with Jesus and Pilate after dawn.

Execution during the festival also presented a number of ritual problems. Fundamental Sabbath rules were violated, especially if the condemned had to carry his cross. The other points are comparatively minor, but note that they could not have offered the traditional wine because of the fast.

The chronology is supposititious. The synoptics put Passover on Thursday and the crucifixion on Friday, which John puts on the Sabbath. The tradition puts the resurrection on March 25, which astronomers say could not have happened on Sunday in the usual dating, 30–35 C.E.

We do not even know if by “Sabbath” John meant the day of week or of the festival, which was often called a Sabbath. It was probably a

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<sup>282</sup> 14 Nisan Thursday, 15—sabbatical Friday, next—another Sabbath.

regular Sabbath, since the synoptics send the women to anoint Jesus' body on the first day of the week.

A point of Law which only Hillel was able to explain (after which he was elected *ha-Nasi*) was that nobody remembered what to do if Passover fell on Saturday. Possibly, the Jews used a different calendar, perhaps preserved by the Essenes, or intercalated a day. At any rate, a Saturday Passover would be unusual, and John's chronology is doubtful.

By the Essene calendar, the paschal meal always falls on Tuesday evening, so Jesus would have been tried on Wednesday. Jesus' trial which lasted three days would agree with Sanhedrin procedure: hear on Wednesday, sentence on Thursday, execution Friday morning<sup>283</sup>—but has no support in the Gospels.

The Essene calendar helps recover the evening's events. The Essenes celebrated Passover earlier than the Jews, and therefore did not go to the Temple to slaughter the sheep.<sup>mccxxxiv</sup> If they prepared the meat at home, something the Torah positively forbade, Jesus had enough time for prayer in Gethsemane, and the high priest could be at the trial, since the Sadducees kept the feast two days later.

The dating of festivals was not certain: "Earlier they had accepted the evidence of full moons from anyone. When the sectarians began to deceive them, they decided to accept the evidence only from the people they knew."<sup>mccxxxv</sup> Arguing with Rabbi Joshua, the patriarch Gamliel inveighs against *your calendar*.<sup>mccxxxvi</sup>

The Talmud records a similar attempt to establish a different calendar of holy days in Babylon.<sup>mccxxxvii</sup> The difference may be connected with the latitude, though the difference is not enough to cause an essential error.

Attempts to date the Gospel events without knowing how the full moon was determined are futile. We know the Jewish practice, but we do not know which calendar the Gospels followed. It might have been one of the sectarian calendars. Obscure court decisions<sup>mccxxxviii</sup> to rig the calendar when the barley crop did not ripen early enough to make all the passover bread sheds little light. None of this makes it possible to define the corresponding modern month on which the first spring new moon fell in that year. Since the date was often adjusted, juxtaposing ancient and modern calendars is inconclusive.

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<sup>283</sup> As a rule, execution was done the day the sentence was pronounced, but that was not practical in the case of crucifixion. The condemned could die during the night, and the commandment forbidding leaving the body hanging overnight would have been violated.

Jn2:13, 6:4, and 11:55 record three Passover festivals during Jesus' mission. Jn4:35 also mentions a spring harvest between two Passovers and some other festival at 5:1. Jesus' mission had to last at least four years in John. Jesus was baptized not earlier than 29 C.E. when John the Baptist started preaching.<sup>mccxxxix</sup> Jesus likely was not baptized immediately in that year, since the Gospels say John was already famous which should take some time after the 29 C.E. The absolute earliest date for the crucifixion is 30 C.E., a year included in the synoptic chronology which starts with the baptism in 29.

Jesus' execution cannot be dated later than 38 if we accept Matthew's account of Herodias' daughter Salome instigating the beheading of the Baptist. According to Josephus, Salome was given in marriage to Philip, who died in 34 C.E., and left Herod Antipas' court some time before that year. So, John was executed before 34. In the Church version, he baptized Jesus, who went on preaching for from one to four years, depending. Thus, Jesus could not have been executed later than 38 C.E.

Since Pilate and Caiaphas ruled simultaneously until 36 C.E., Jesus' execution must have been between 30 and 36. During that period, a Sabbath Passover, which would confirm the traditional date of the resurrection, was possible in 30 and 33, and with bad weather, also in 34 if a month was intercalated to let the crops ripen. Jn18:18 indicates cold weather, so 34.

Considering the Gospels' unreliability, all this is strictly scholastic.

## Prototypes of Jesus

What makes Jesus so special for modern Christians? Why do they pay him so much attention?

Some scholars still defend Jesus as a miracle-worker—on “scientific” grounds. They suggest that any skilled psychotherapist could effect the same cures. None, however, is known to worship his psychoanalyst.

Some “progressive” theologians abandon Jesus’ divinity and see him as an extraordinary preacher. Nevertheless, religion requires the supernatural. Jesus’ teaching was plain and not original. Christian doctrine is more obliged to Paul than to Jesus. Luther transformed Christianity more than Jesus did sectarian Judaism. The Church has had theologians far more talented than its founder.

Jesus’ divinity was taken for granted for the seventeen centuries since the suppression of Arianism, but today we know that the tradition is not founded on the early texts but on Hellenic traditions. In no text with the least claim to authenticity did Jesus claim divine origin.

Early Christians likened Jesus to figures like Adam and Moses, or at most to Wisdom, who participated in the creation. The way Jesus’ status ascended is well known. Greek philosophical schools attached great importance to their founders. Among the plethora of barely distinguishable philosophical currents, the surest way to stand out was to claim descent from a charismatic leader. Christians took exactly that option, because they lacked coherent doctrine. They drove the idea over the edge by focusing their religion exclusively and entirely on its founder.

Such obsession with the leader and other historical details is more characteristic of philosophy than religion. In the latter, the factual framework serves as background. Early Christianity, devoid of theology, stressed ethics. Christians appealed to everyone. These traits better fit philosophical factions. Ancient Church leaders were heavily influenced by popular Greek thinkers.

Jesus did not particularly deserve adoration. We know of many others at least as worthy. His deeds were ordinary. For example, Pythagoras calmed the sea, healed, ascended into the sky, and taught a new theosophy and new ethics. At the time, Pythagoras was a great, possibly the greatest<sup>mccxl</sup> philosopher, not merely an author of the simple theorem he is known for today. Christians elevated Jesus’ status by ascribing him the Pythagoras’ miracles.

Jesus did not start a new religion. Christianity is an eclectic amalgam of concepts wrenched from the context of various other beliefs. Even Christianity's most bizarre concepts—the god-man, the trinity, the atoning sacrifice of the Son of God—were present in earlier religions, albeit in far different, more logical settings. Many important Christian concepts are founded exclusively on the opinions of numerous early writers who often disagreed.

Jesus did not introduce a new morality. All his ethical sayings and doctrines were known in the cultures of neighboring peoples. Some were simply popular maxims.

In addition, Jesus' very historicity is more than doubtful. No authentic records of him exist. Casting away the authority of tradition, how can a modern person accept such an image?

Early Christians were not notably pious toward Jesus. Paul thought him just a man and cared neither for his sayings, the details of his life, nor for the apostles' authority. Luke's farthest stretch is to liken Jesus to a prophet like Moses.<sup>mccxli</sup> All the evangelists freely manipulated his reported sayings.

Indirect evidence that Jesus was not a historical figure, but rather a compound image from ancient stories, appears in a Christian text. Gamliel was head of the Sanhedrin. Luke has him allude to society's short memory,<sup>mccxlii</sup> exacerbated by the absence of ways to store information. Gamliel recalls Theudas and Judah the Galilean whose followers dispersed as soon as their leaders died. If Jesus were just another charismatic teacher who died young, his following would have vanished soon enough.

Paul's epistles show that he reconstituted the long-forgotten teaching of a forgotten man or just created a religion from a potpourri of conventional legends. This chapter discusses several sources for the image of Jesus and points out some inexplicable parallels with later figures.



## ***Moses***

Moses served as the model for the Jewish Jesus tradition.

Both were born two months prematurely.<sup>mccxliii</sup> Forewarned by prophets of their births, Pharaoh and Herod murdered all the male infants. Moses was born in Egypt, Jesus was taken there as a baby. They were both refugees, Moses when he killed an Egyptian, Jesus when Herod wanted to kill him.

According to the Jewish Tol'doth Yeshu, the young Jesus, studied magic in Egypt; Moses grew up in Pharaoh's palace and was "instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians," presumably including magic. The analogy, mentioned in Acts,<sup>mccxliv</sup> was significant for Christians.

Moses' name is meaningless in Hebrew, but means *son* in Egyptian. Jesus is a son of the heavenly father.

Jesus is considered divine. So was Moses. He was given to Aaron "instead of God," spoke with God, and saw him. Philo wrote that Moses became God's "companion-in-arms" and received power over the world.<sup>mccxlv</sup> Neither was originally divine, but acquired that status—Moses on Sinai and Jesus at his baptism.

Jesus is allegorized as a lamb. A Talmudic story tells of Pharaoh's vision of Moses' birth. All the elders of Egypt were on one side of a scale and a lamb on the other. The lamb was a metaphor of Moses.

Moses gave the Law, and Jesus, the New Testament. Jesus preached from a hill, and Moses received the tables on Mount Sinai. Jesus fasted for forty days in the wilderness, where he was tempted, and Moses fasted the same time on Sinai.

Moses rescued the Israelites from Egyptian slavery, and Jesus rescued men from the bondage of sin, a likeness Paul insists on.

Early Christians believed Jesus was the prophet "like him" promised to Moses. Both were divine messengers who spoke a word from God to usher in a new era in Jewish history.

Both were doubted and on occasion rejected, though more often followed. The miracles they performed make the doubt puzzling. Both fed, Moses with manna and Jesus with loaves, and healed. The authorities rejected both: Pharaoh's heart hardened to Moses' signs, and the high priests rejected Jesus' obvious miracles.

While the Bible usually mentions burial places of major characters, Moses' burial place is unknown. Jesus', too.

The Samaritan views of Moses recall the traits ascribed to Jesus. The Samaritans almost divinized Moses, considered him the light of knowledge who brought mystic teaching, a companion in the Creation. Moses is intercessor and restorer who brings salvation.<sup>mccxlv</sup>

### ***Melchizedek***

2Enoch describes Melchizedek's virgin birth. Christians honor Melchizedek who, like Jesus, was a sacred figure but not from a priestly clan. Genealogy was a problem for Christians, and the example of Melchizedek was useful.<sup>mccxlvii</sup>

Melchizedek was supremely close to God. The Essenes worshipped him; he leads the forces of good in the final battle against evil, just as Christians identified Jesus with the Son of Man endued with power to rule in the last days.

### ***John the Baptist***

In InfJm22, Herod orders all the newborns killed—but he is after John, the future Baptist, who he thought was the messiah. Since the account is clear that Herod's people were looking specifically for John, and not for unknown baby, like in Jesus' account, murdering all newborns does not make sense.

When Christian scribe appropriated the story, he could not substitute Jesus for John, because this account of John was widely known—no reason to appropriate it, otherwise. The scribe added Jesus to the existing legend by claiming that Herod ordered all babies younger than two years killed—including Jesus, and not only John. The forger added two years to account for the age difference between John and Jesus. He modeled the story on the biblical version of the same account of Moses—where pharaoh kills all infants to get rid of one.

The Mandaean Book of John, which preserved first century traditions before the Mandaeans<sup>284</sup> left Judea or Nabataea, says that the magi's star stood over Elisabeth at John's birth. When Matthew adapted the myth to Jesus,<sup>mccxlviii</sup> the star would oddly have to follow Mary to Bethlehem, so the evangelist has it lead the magi to her.

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<sup>284</sup> Followers of John the Baptist's followers who migrated to Mesopotamia in the first century and preserved their culture without major assimilation until the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

That was not the only time John's heritage was plundered for Jesus. Many of Jesus' sayings were John's. Even in the Gospel, Jesus<sup>mcclxlix</sup> quotes John.<sup>mccl</sup>

Upon hearing that John was arrested, Jesus withdrew to Galilee,<sup>mccli</sup> odd in the Gospel context, since nobody persecuted John's disciples, though it makes sense if Jesus left after trying to siphon off John's followers after John went down. He may have been alone or maybe with some of John's former disciples. In any case, the account is firm evidence of Jesus' connection with the Baptist's sect: either he belonged to it and feared for his life or he tried to co-opt it.

After the execution of John, "his disciples came, took the body and buried it. Then they went and told Jesus."<sup>mcclii</sup> John's sect continued both in Judea and elsewhere.<sup>285</sup> If John had publicly recognized Jesus as messiah, John's disciples would have joined Jesus.<sup>286</sup> The evangelists needed John's acceptance of Jesus, which means his authority was initially greater than Jesus', enough to enhance Jesus' status. In a forged episode, Josephus refers to an early Christian tradition that John was more popular than Jesus.<sup>mccliii</sup>

Jesus' disciples are repeatedly contrasted to John's on matters of fast and prayer, another indication of the connection between Jesus and John.

John's disciples saw Jesus as John's respected peer but obviously not the messiah; otherwise, they would not ask "why" but stop fasting at once. They behaved differently from Jesus' disciples<sup>mccliv</sup> and routinely dealt with Pharisees who came to John for advice. A few pro-Pharisee John-related passages crept into the Gospels, otherwise hostile to the Pharisees.

John, Mark, and probably proto-Matthew beginning from episode about the Baptist show Jesus and John's special relation. Only Luke concerned with literary plot, opens with Jesus' birth. But why pay so much attention to the forged story of Jesus' baptism? Perhaps to establish Jesus' succession as leader of the Baptist's sect. That or the prototext stories of the Baptist which the Gospellers used opened with John's baptizing ministry and were adapted to make room for Jesus.

Jesus' rivalry with John, Simon Magus, and others informs the church's search for the historical Jesus, since it suggests he really lived. A myth would blur the disagreement.

The discrepancies between Luke and Josephus puzzle scholars and argue against direct borrowing. The consensus is that they drew on a common source. Quite possibly, the Josephus passages in Luke were

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<sup>285</sup> Apollos preached John's baptism in Greece.

<sup>286</sup> We know from Acts that only a few of the Baptist's disciples believed Jesus was the messiah.

originally part of the Baptist's tradition. John's followers were naturally acquainted with events and did not need to borrow from Josephus.

The song of Zechariah to honor John's birth<sup>mcciv</sup> is a messianic hymn. The biblical prophecies in it mean that he was a candidate to be the messiah, probably by priestly descent from Aaron. The late extracanonical *Clementine Recognitions* confirm that. Only later did Jesus' followers usurp the role for him. Consequently, the Gospels belittle John and show him accepting Jesus as Messiah at one point (a forgery) and wondering who he was at another.

Luke took the accepted dating of the Baptist's life, then forged birth stories to link him to Jesus, thereby joining two distinct traditions. He enhances the miraculous character of birth: from the traditional Jewish marvel of elderly parents bearing John to the pagan miracle of Jesus' virgin birth.

That Jesus and John were the same age is doubtful, since by the time Jesus comes to him for baptism, John is already well known. Jesus' obscurity sits a little uneasy with his teaching in the Temple as a child.

Since the date of Jesus' birth in Matthew (Herod the Great) is also artificially connected with John (the slaughter of the innocents), the Gospels present no credible date for Jesus' birth. John does not even try.

The Gospels and Josephus' doubtful accounts report John's execution. The Mandaeans rejected it, nor do the *Clementine Recognitions* mention it when discussing his heirs. The execution story would be useful to clear the way for Jesus without having to wait for John to die of old age. Perhaps, they wanted to give him a martyr's death, since the forerunner, the returned Elijah, could not die unnoticed.

"Herod the ruler heard reports about Jesus; and he said to his servants, 'This is John the Baptist; he has been raised from the dead, and for this reason these powers are at work in him.'<sup>mccv</sup> Only after John was executed did rumors about Jesus start to circulate. Herod was not alone in thinking Jesus was John returned from the dead.<sup>mccvii</sup> The time gap between John and Jesus was sufficiently large that much later the evangelists saw no problem with separating them in time.<sup>mccviii</sup> That contradicts the canonical portrait of them as coeval.

This time gap corroborates the supposition that John was executed soon after Herod's notorious marriage in 5 C.E. The claim that Jesus knew John appeared only when Christians needed to give their founder the aura of authority, which John's witness to him would do.

The "powers at work" in Jesus which Herod mentions are demons which enabled the possessed to work miracles. The evangelist found that so ordinary he does not comment on it. Importantly, the passages indicate that John worked miracles just like Jesus.

Christianity's affirmation that Jesus' resurrection is the central proof of Jesus' divinity looks strange against the resurrection of Lazarus, the raising of the son of the Widow of Nain, or Jairus' daughter, to say nothing of Elisha's regeneration of the Shunnamite woman's son. But pay attention to the Baptist's story. Slavonic Josephus records a curious legend about John: after Herod beheaded him, he walked about as before but as a bodiless spirit. The story makes sense when we recall that the Mandaeans, John's disciples, had no account of his death. Resurrected or not dead, he disappeared without a trace, just like Jesus. This myth in Josephus reflects the views of non-Jesusmessianists, followers of the resurrected messiah John the Baptist. The Jesus Christians inherited the resurrection legend from them. Resurrection was not unheard of and no proof of divinity.

Christians had wildly impressionistic views about John. Though the Gospels say he was a hermit, medieval and Renaissance paintings<sup>287</sup> routinely depict him as Bacchus, usually in the forest with sheep listening to him.<sup>288</sup>

The Renaissance notion of the shepherd reflects Greek notions of shepherds in Arcadian forests, symbolic of wisdom and simplicity, concepts popular with Greek philosophers and Jewish sectarians.

John, not Jesus, was initially known as the shepherd. That sheds some light on the Christian insistence on a forerunner, though none is strictly required before the messiah comes.<sup>289</sup> The messiah may come at any time, and Judaism even developed the concept of a potential messiah present in every generation. The Christians had to make John the forerunner because he was inconveniently popular, preached the same doctrine to the same flock as Jesus, and came before him, literally a forerunner.

*The Clementine Recognitions* depict John not as a hermit but as the leader of a sect. To avoid his overshadowing Jesus, Gospels insist that John had no independent teaching, but only baptized and called to repentance. Otherwise he looks like a popular teacher whose flock Jesus raided.

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<sup>287</sup> Palmezzano, fifteenth century, Ca' Rezzonico, Venice.

<sup>288</sup> If, as commonly suggested, this was allegory of shepherd, why the forest? A field would concentrate attention on the main figure, a technique that the painters knew.

Bacchus was so important that he entered Christian tradition as St. Bacchus, receiving honorary place in many cathedrals, e.g., in St. Mark's in Venice. What exactly was John's connection with Bacchus is unknown, but he was very pervasive deity, a pastoral god, orgiastic and trickster divinity and was assimilated as the patron of Egyptian mysteries.

<sup>289</sup> Elijah is expected before the coming of God to set up his kingdom on earth.

The *Liber Secretum* of the Bogomils<sup>290</sup> preserves traces of Jesus' competition with John. In this version of the Gospel of John, the Baptist is an envoy of Satan who imitated Jesus. But recall that Christians accused many characters who resembled Jesus of diabolic imitation. It was the other way around: Christians highjacked both personal and factual aspects of John for Jesus.

The editor of the interpolation in Slavonic Josephus insists that John did nothing except immerse whoever showed up in a stream, say some prayers, and send them away. That looks a lot like the derogation of John in the Bogomil text. For some reason, Eastern Christians were especially hostile to John, an attitude inherited from the primitive Church perhaps.

John did more than call for repentance and baptize. People could baptize themselves and did not need to go looking for John. Anyway, who would make a long journey just to be told to repent? John had his own teaching. Otherwise, what did his disciples study?<sup>291</sup> Since the teaching was John's alone, it was sectarian doctrine about which we may only guess.

Mandaeans in Iran and Iraq still speak their peculiar language, evidence of minimal social or theological assimilation. They glorify John, reject Jesus, and preach characteristically Gnostic views. They believe their religion came from ancient Egyptians, as did their ancestors. Egyptian Gnosticism was popular in Jesus' time and got into the canonical Gospels. We can reasonably assume the Baptist held such views.<sup>292</sup>

The story of Jesus' family's first visit to Jerusalem might originally belong to John's life. Luke mentions the prophetess Anna whose name is related to the number 777, and reports that she is of the tribe of Asher. The reference to the tribe is irrelevant and implausible, and Luke did not need to introduce it. She might be a prophetess of Asherah, a female deity, and the episode took place not in Jerusalem, but in a less conventional temple.

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<sup>290</sup> An obscure Gnostic Christian sect which thrived in present-day Bulgaria.

<sup>291</sup> If they had studied Scriptures, like with any rabbi, they would not ask Jesus silly questions and would not associate with his transgressing disciples.

<sup>292</sup> John's mother name is disputed. The Greek translation Elisabeth is not directly related to any Hebrew name. In one of the earliest modern attempts to trace its etymology, Weekley believed it derived from Jezebel, an idolatrous queen, killed and thrown to dogs. Mainstream Jews could nickname her so because of John's strange teaching. In fact, the name is not so bizarre, recalling that two famous names symbolizing salvation of Jews, Esther and Mordechai, are likely foreign deities Astarte and Marduk. This derivation being inopportune, other scholars dug out an obscure name Elisheba (God is my oath), wife of Aaron and mother of Levites. This name is unlikely, since oath is little applicable to women, cf. Num30, thus the name would have been an oxymoron.

Jesus' teaching did not transcend John's. Like John, Jesus expected his audience to repent.<sup>mcclix</sup> People routinely confused Jesus with John.<sup>mcclx</sup> Paul met Apollos, who knew only the doctrine of John, but was nevertheless "instructed in the Way of the Lord" and "taught accurately the things concerning Jesus."<sup>mcclxi</sup> The author of Acts adds that Paul's colleagues explained things to him still "more accurately," not specifying what John's doctrine lacked.

The Temple priests asked Jesus by whose authority he did "these things,"<sup>mcclxii</sup> but that seems to be a distortion. More likely they asked by whose authority he put his teaching forward: each piece of the Pharisaic legislation is traced to a specific rabbi. In Matthew, Jesus urges keeping the Pharisaic Law. This could be a rare trace of him preaching something different.

The Egyptian roots of Jesus' Christianity show up in the puzzling peculiarity of Egyptian Christians, who alone in Egypt speak Coptic, derived from ancient Egyptian. They consider Mark, author of the mystic Gospel, their founder. *Tol'doth Yeshu* puts Jesus in Egypt at least long enough to study, perhaps as part of the Baptist's sect, which the *Clementine Recognitions* also place in Egypt.

## Magus

Simon Magus was a famous opponent of Jesus. As late as the third and fourth centuries, there was a tradition of Simon being the heir of John Hemerobaptist,<sup>293</sup> his successor as leader of his sect in Alexandria.<sup>mccclxiii</sup> Very likely that is the Baptist's group, since the leader is called the forerunner of Jesus, and corresponds to evidence in Acts: in Ephesus Paul meets Apollos, a well-versed follower of the Baptist, and he was from Alexandria.<sup>mccclxiv</sup> Another piece of evidence connects Christians to Alexandria. In the Talmud, Christian magistrate quotes from a Gospel, "son and daughter inherit equally."<sup>mccclxv</sup> That rule deviates from the normative Judaism, but Philo of Alexandria confirms it.<sup>mccclxvi</sup>

The lack of reliable references in Josephus to John support the supposition that his followers left Judea. Jesus, Toldoth Yeshu stories say, studied magic in Egypt, and Christianity borrowed from Egyptian cults.

There is evidence of the sect in Egypt: when John died, Simon was away from Alexandria, and Dositheus took John's place. Many Jewish sects thrived in Alexandria, and John's connection to the cosmopolitan city helps explain his popularity among the many in Judea during his short visits.

Simon was a famous Gnostic—Ireneus called him the *father of all heresies*. He proclaimed himself divine and worked miracles of healing, exorcism and resurrection. Simon's career and deeds parallel those of Jesus, and his followers and the Jesus Christians were competing for the same flock.

Indirect evidence of Jesus' competition with Magus may lie in Jesus' identification with the Baptist in the Gospels.<sup>mccclxvii</sup> Jesus could have deliberately spread rumors that he was John resurrected or at least let them go unchallenged to improve his position with John's followers. Jesus and Simon may have divided the territory. Simon was active in Samaria, where Jesus forbade his disciples to set foot.

Christianity is obliged to Magus for its spread in Rome. Simon came to Rome during Claudius' reign, where he worked such wonders that his statue was set in a temple. Since Simon almost certainly called himself the messiah, he, and not Jesus, could be that Chrestus who stirred up the Jews until Claudius banished them from Rome.

Simon studied magic in Egypt and could be responsible for Egyptian themes like depictions of Horus in the Roman catacomb frescoes.

Jesus' Christians could be associated with Magus' followers. The Mandaean considered themselves an offshoot of the sect of Dositheus, who had organized his own sect after Magus replaced him as leader of the Baptist's sect. It would be logical to assume that the Mandaean would hate Magus, but they saved that for Jesus.

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<sup>293</sup> Day-Baptist, a term of unknown meaning, probably referring to the Baptist.



The apostles knew Simon, and Luke criticized him in Acts, charging him with trying to bribe Jesus' disciples to obtain knowledge from them, ironic confirmation that Jesus' disciples did things which would interest a popular magician.

Simon's teaching is not known with certainty and may not have coincided with the Baptist's, but his popularity and magic panache would have furthered his purpose to succeed John. Ireneus and Epiphanius say that his followers were immoral, though that could be slander aimed at the rival.

Josephus does not mention Simon, at least not by that name—which is odd, since the early Christians thought Simon was famous in Rome. But, again, Josephus, who supposedly lived there, pays the local Jews little attention.

## ***Judah the Galilean***

Josephus mentions the Galilean in three places only in the *War*, and those references are certainly inserts. Josephus would have explained all about Judah, not dismiss him as the enigmatic leader of a prominent sect. But the Christian editor was content to leave matters after establishing his historicity and did not trouble himself with more details. His fellow Christians knew all about him anyway. Judah must have been critical in some way for the Christians to add accounts of him in so many places.

Eusebius writes, “Josephus confirms him [Philo], demonstrating that the people’s universal misfortune began at the time of Pilate and the crimes against the Savior.”<sup>mccclxviii</sup> Josephus blames the Jews’ problems on the rise of the fourth philosophical school, the Zealots—and on Judah the Galilean. Unless Eusebius lied about Josephus, then Josephus linked Judah the Galilean and the savior.

Judah, a famous teacher, was executed by the Romans for insurrection. The Romans also sentenced Jesus, and Christians invented the trial before the Sanhedrin later to eliminate the stigma of rebellion. The Gospels say the priests believed they sacrificed Jesus to save the people from the Romans, irritated by Jesus’ mischief. The Romans did not care about Jewish religious issues, and the mischief could be only political.

Judah’s new sect opposed Roman taxation. In order to whitewash Jesus, Luke linked his birth to taxation.<sup>mccclxix</sup> His Jesus was born in Bethlehem because his parents submitted to the fiscal strictures. Jesus was symbolically compliant with Roman tax law from his birth. Yet traces linger: Jesus was accused of forbidding paying taxes to the emperor.<sup>mccclxx</sup>

The famous Gospel dictum—“Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s”—could be an attempt to dissociate Christians from their true founder, the rebel Judah who condemned paying Roman taxes.

According to Josephus, Judah refused to acknowledge any power but God’s. The Gospels contain variations on the theme: “But you do not call anyone” father, good, and so on. The original, following Judah, may have forbidden calling anyone ruler or master, a radical idea which could have evolved later into a less revolutionary one.

Judah’s uniqueness is his call to the Jews to liberate themselves. Slavonic Josephus attributes the same aspirations to John the Baptist. Likewise in Slavonic Josephus, a Pharisee reproaches the Baptist for deceiving the people by telling them to accept no power but God’s, revealing a possible link between the images of Judah and John (and—through John—to Jesus).

The Jews could have replaced *Judah*, a criminal to the Romans, with his nickname, *savior*, *Jesus*. Enigmatic Judah the Twin (Thomas) is prominent in Jesus' circle.

### ***The Egyptian***

According to Jewish tradition in the Talmud and *Tol'doth Yeshu*, Jesus came from Egypt, practiced sorcery, and led people astray. The Egyptian false prophet whom Josephus describes was probably an Egyptian Jew, else why would he go to Judea or how could he speak the language? Somewhat like Jesus, the Egyptian was a prophetic leader with militant anti-Roman aspirations, probably substantiating his claims with sorcery. He finally assembled his troops on the Mount of Olives for an attack on Jerusalem, as Jesus prepared in Bethany. Slavonic Josephus says Jesus taught on the Mount of Olives. The Egyptian escaped alive, perhaps like the injured Jesus, who got away. Dating his activity in the 50s agrees with my suggestion that Jesus' mission came about the same time.

### ***Rabbi Akiva***

A famous Jewish sage, Rabbi Akiva bore a certain similarity to the image of Jesus. In his youth, he was a shepherd, and Jesus called himself "the good shepherd." Yet shepherding was base, the work of ignorant man, and not congruent with teaching. David is specifically described as shepherd in his youth to underscore his ascent to kingship.

The Gospel stories of Jesus' life before he started preaching at about the age of thirty are unreliable. His late start was unusual, since future teachers studied the Torah from childhood on, and Jesus should have been active earlier. Akiva became famous in his maturity, since he began studying as an adult. He even went to school with his son.

The rabbi's father was named Yosef, as was Jesus'.

Jesus' wife is mentioned nowhere, though virtually all adults married. Rabbi Akiva was married young but went so deep into studies that he stopped communicating with his wife, though he met her by chance when he became famous. Jesus met Mary (not his mother) just before the triumphal entry to Jerusalem, and she was close enough to him to touch his feet in public. The Romans executed the rabbi for the political crime of spreading Judaism,<sup>294</sup> the same unusual mix of political and religious accusations familiar from the Jesus account.

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<sup>294</sup> The Romans criminalized teaching of Judaism after the revolt, not in Jesus' time.

### *Much later figures*

Though these people lived long after Jesus, some parallels are striking.

Shabbatai Zevi proclaimed himself messiah, attracted a wide following, and was persecuted by the authorities. Zevi refused messiahship before the authorities. The Gospel of Barnabas relates the same of Jesus, and in other Gospels Jesus refuses to confirm his messiahship before Sanhedrin. Zevi's wife, Sarah, was a former prostitute, as seemingly was Jesus' consort, Magdalene, and Helene, wife of Simon Magus.

Sarah's behavior hints at why pretenders often took harlots along. She was famous for her regal behavior. In the culture with the low status of the female, almost only a woman who mastered control over the males professionally could feel comfortable and generally keep the upper hand during encounters with them elsewhere. Some were pagan priestesses, but that was not possible for Jewish women. Prostitution was a reliable source to look for a woman of the required qualities.

Like Jesus in the Christian tradition, Shabbatai changed the meaning of holy days and rejected much of the Law.

In the sixteenth century Rabbi Isaac "Lion" Luria came from Egypt to Galilee, where the rabbis were expecting a messiah. Rabbi Isaac exercised immensely authoritative leadership of the mystics and promised salvation soon to come. He taught about two years and died in his early thirties, leaving no written records.

The founder of Hassidism, Baal Shem Tov, lived in the mountains until he was thirty-three, when he began to go around the villages healing and working miracles. Some of his parables greatly resemble Gospel parables. He preached a new "way" distinct from formalized rabbinic religion. Hassidism differed from orthodox Judaism no less than early Christianity did. The recorded mentions of Baal Shem Tov appeared dozens of years after him.

## **The Status of Jesus**

Christians created an eclectic image of Jesus that included God (the judge), the Holy Spirit (indwells in Christians), an angel or messenger (brings a spiritual message), Wisdom (rejected on earth; preexisted creation), Word, Light, the messiah (earthly triumph), two messiahs (no military victories), the Lamb of Isaiah (atoning sacrifice), Osiris-Dionysus (virgin birth and resurrection) and more. Fundamentally different traditions were the sources: orthodox Judaism, sectarian teachings, polydemonism, different branches of Greek philosophy, Hellenic myths, Gnosticism and the Eleusinian Mysteries, Mithraism, and even Hinduism and Buddhism. Their unification required queer theological structures: a god-man, the Trinity, the Second Advent, diabolical imitation before Jesus' advent to explain his resemblance to so many pagan deities, and so on.

### ***The Atoning Sacrifice***

When the Church says Jesus went to execution willfully, it ignores both his prayer for deliverance in Gethsemane and his appeal to God from the cross. He evidently did not intend to become an offering.

Is53:7 "He did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth."<sup>295</sup>

According to Second Isaiah, Jesus should have kept silence before the court. On the other hand, if Jesus was to say anything about his nature, he had only that moment. Therefore, he both speaks and refuses to answer.

If Jesus' crucifixion atoned for the sins of the Jews, a period of prosperity should follow, not the destruction of the Temple. Jesus' crucifixion as expiation ill suits the prohibition of human sacrifice. What pleasure could God take in the death of – ostensibly - the best of the Jews? God stopped Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac; animals replaced Israel's firstborn; Jeremiah condemned human sacrifices in the Gehinnom valley, the notorious Gehenna.

In its long history, Judaism has absorbed different traditions to various extents. A doctrine of redemption appears in the late Book of the Maccabees, but not self-sacrifice.

Sacrifice in itself redeems no sins but shows the fear of God which protects him from punishment. Moreover, in Judaism sacrifices are offered

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<sup>295</sup> Prov 7:22 "... goes like an ox to the slaughter . . ." ridicules men who chase women.

only for inadvertent impurities . Offerings cannot redeem deliberate sins. Otherwise, people would just swap sacrifices for the freedom to sin. Judaism requires repentance and restitution to atone for deliberate sin. John the Baptist preached repentance with forgiveness as its consequence, but nowhere do Matthew or Paul require repentance as part of conversion to Christianity. From the Jewish point of view, sacrificing Jesus without personal repentance was senseless.

The Gospel writers did not foresee the redemption of the world by Jesus' death but rather the apocalypse. The Greeks thought a single hero might redeem a city. Paul exaggerates the doctrine of merit to suggest that one man, Jesus, saves all humanity forever.

The principle of redemption first appears in Christianity with Paul, who neither knew nor cared to know "the historical Jesus." He created theological concepts at his whim.

Propitiatory affliction occupied an important place in Judaism after the Temple was destroyed: "They are even better redemption than sacrifices, since belongings are sacrificed, while sufferings touch the man himself."<sup>mclxxi</sup> The grief of individual people or of a generation for all Israel appears repeatedly. Rabbi Abahu said, "The Blessed One has made Ezekiel suffer so he might cleanse Israel's sins."<sup>mclxxii</sup> Nevertheless, no Jewish concept quite approximates the Christian doctrine of universal redemption through one person's suffering.

1Jn2:1 "I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin." John admits that Christians might sin. Which sins did Jesus redeem? Christian ethicists find a way out by claiming that he redeemed only those sins for which the sinner repented sincerely. If so, what was Jesus' role? Repentance automatically brings forgiveness in Judaism. At most, crucifixion merely replaced purificatory sacrifices, and Jesus saved sacrificial animals, not people.

1Jn2:2 "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world." Jesus redeemed the sins of those who do not believe in him. Then what is the use of religion if faithlessness has been redeemed?

The impurities redeemed by sacrifice in Judaism are not sins in Christianity. Jesus redeems his followers from what they do not consider sins.

People won't abstain from sins if everything is forgiven. Christian governments condemned sinners, and Christian priests warned them of hell. Christianity ignored Jesus' redemption of sins, and required individual penitence.



## *Shepherd*

The first shepherd was Abel. Both his attractive character—close to God, righteous—and the fact that he was murdered by his kin would interest Christians.

Christians are fond of calling Jesus a shepherd, though shepherding was base and shepherds proverbially ignorant<sup>mccclxxiii</sup> and probably dishonest.<sup>mccclxxiv</sup> The evangelists insist on it, perhaps, because David was a herder. But the occupation of shepherd was not a merit; rather, it demonstrated the possibility of rising from the bottom of society to its highest point through piety.

The difference in attitude may have to do with climate. In Greece and Rome, people admired nature, to which shepherds were close. So were several gods—Dionysus, Bacchus, the fauns, and so on. Their simple, natural way of life earned shepherds high esteem. On the other hand, Judea's barren hills and desert made herding the work of society's outcasts.

Jesus as shepherd of the lost sheep is incompatible with him as sacrificial lamb. Osiris and Dionysus were shepherds, and in Judea John the Baptist bore the image before Jesus.



### *The Suffering Servant*

Is53:10–12 “Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him [with pain]. When you make his life an offering [for sin], he . . . shall prolong his days . . . and he shall divide the spoil with the strong . . . . He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”<sup>296</sup>

Isaiah's enigmatic prophecy does not fit Jesus. The redeemer will become the military leader (“divide the spoil”). Since executed person cannot prolong his days, rabbis traditionally related the prophecy to Israel, not to a single person.

This redeemer is not divine, as Jesus is supposed to be: “I will allot him a portion with the great, and . . . strong.”<sup>mccclxxv</sup> At the peak of his glory, he will equal only earthly heroes.

There is no biblical substantiation of the Christian concept of the Suffering Servant. Moreover, the continuation of Is54 says God will turn again to the Jews, not to some future group, like the Christians. Further, Chapter 53 is not by the prophet Isaiah but by the unknown *Second Isaiah*.

Christians note, not without reason, the similarity of Jesus to the Suffering Servant; but we do not know to what degree they adjusted Jesus' image to the Isaiah text. Jesus includes an eclectic mixture of the messiah and the sufferer.

Qumran sources mention the rejection and possibly the death of Messiah Ben Joseph, but attribute no merit to suffering, as Christians do. Also unlike the evangelists, Isaiah does not restrict suffering to death by execution.

The concept of an afflicted messiah gained popularity later, when afflictions befell the Jews—the war of 66–70 C.E., the destruction of the Temple, Bar Kochba's revolt, the interdiction on studying the Torah, persecutions in the Diaspora.

The original triumphant warrior messiah gave way to accommodate the nation's changed spirit. Rabbi Shimon Ben Yohai said: “What is then the path leading to the Era to Come? Certainly, you should say, it is suffering.”<sup>mccclxxvi</sup>

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<sup>296</sup> I argue elsewhere that Hebrew text cannot be read as *intercessed for*, it is *attached to*, or *reckoned among the sinners*.

## *The Servant*

Matt12:17–21 “This was to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah: ‘Here is my servant, whom I have chosen . . . He will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. He will not wrangle or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets. He will not break a bruised reed or quench a smoldering wick until he brings justice to victory. And in his name the Gentiles will hope.’” The passage does not relate to the Gospel healing account into which it is inserted.

Is42:1–4 “He will bring forth justice to the nations . . . He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his teaching.”

Isaiah describes not a feeble messiah but one of single purpose who wasted no time on trivia. Jesus, on the contrary, seemed to wander about Galilee with great insouciance.

Jesus did not “establish justice on earth”, and both the evangelists and Paul speak of pending judgment *after* the crucifixion. Neither did the Church bring justice to the world. How does “he will not . . . make it [his voice] heard in the street” apply to Jesus, who preached in the streets and wanted to shout from the rooftops?

## *The Messiah*

Something besides similarities between their beliefs and Christianity made Greeks, Syrians, Egyptians and Romans accept Jesus: the comparatively concrete, historically declared figure of the messiah. As Christianity went from sect to religion, the restricted meaning ceased to satisfy the church’s requirements.

Judeo-Christian groups did not proclaim Jesus the messiah but saw in him an authoritative preacher. Even their names do not reflect messianic pretensions: Ebionites = *poor*, Nazoreans = *monks*, names which point to certain aspects of their ethical teaching.

The term *messiah* was unrelated to divinity; Rabbi Akiva declared Jewish military leader Simon Bar Kochba the messiah.

The Hebrew Scriptures say that the messiah will come just before the end of time: “And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord . . . And they shall live secure, . . . and he shall be the one of peace.”<sup>»mclxxvii</sup> “He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth.”<sup>»mclxxviii</sup> Jesus promised wars and destruction, but after him came Agrippa’s reign of relative peace and prosperity—unless Jesus was active in the 60s.

The end of days can come at any moment, and a messiah lives in every generation, contrasted with Jesus' claimed uniqueness.

The impropriety of calling Jesus the messiah was so apparent to Jews that the prototexts probably lacked the identification. Otherwise, why do neither Matthew nor the Gentile evangelists use it? Gentile Christians likely appropriated the title to Jesus well after their communication with Jews ceased. Without understanding the intricacies, they identified their leader, a Jew, with someone the Jews awaited as the culmination of their hopes, a messiah.

Jesus did not call himself messiah even at the trial. When the Jews asked him to explain his prediction of an ascension, since "the Messiah remains forever," Jesus offered only "While you have the light, believe in the light."<sup>mclxxix</sup>

Traditional messianic images appear mostly in dubious accounts of Jesus' genealogy and birth and his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Descent from Joseph (not his father so possibly an allegorized ancestor), new teachings, suffering and rejection characterize the spiritual messiah who appears in Essene pseudepigrapha. They expected the warrior messiah immediately after the spiritual one, not the case with Jesus.

"One of the sons of your body I will set on your throne. If your sons keep my covenant, . . . their sons, also, forevermore, shall sit on your throne."<sup>mclxxx</sup> "Their sons" means heirs *per stirpes*, not kings related to David by some vague spiritual connection. Jesus, born by virgin, could not be paternally related to David.

The late prophet Micah is closest to what Christians needed: "But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the least clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from old, from ancient days . . . and they shall live secure."<sup>mclxxxi</sup> Micah does not mean an eternal being but a descendant of David. Jesus did not rule in Israel; the Jews did not live safely long after his coming. Jesus didn't even mention the safety of the Jews. His dictum "not peace but a sword" obviates even spiritual tranquility.

Although omnipresent in sectarian teachings, eschatology developed in mainstream Judaism only from the second century. The prophets were read to relate the messiah's advent to real-world exigencies rather than to the last days. A Talmudic position is that apocalyptic catastrophes will accompany his advent<sup>mclxxxii</sup> or at least some unrealizable condition: "The Son of David will not come until the whole generation will be either good or evil."<sup>mclxxxiii</sup>

This shows an unusual feature of Judaic tradition: apparently impossible demands. Ostensibly going along with popular hope of a messiah, the rabbis effectively put a lid on those hopes *and* political unrest.

From then on, messianic claims or contemplated insurrection met a straightforward retort: where are the signs of the messiah's advent?

Other similar rabble-defying constructions appear throughout the Hebrew Scripture and the Talmud. Recall the "bitter water" test for marital infidelity. No one died from the mild laxative, and no one was sentenced, yet the potential punishment looked terrifying. Or the charge of blasphemy for misusing the divine name: someone had to know the name and pronounce it before the Sanhedrin to support the charge. No one knew the name in the first place.

Nothing in the Hebrew Scriptures indicates that messiah will judge the people. Near Jesus' time, the Maccabees and Bar Kochba were called messiahs. Monotheists and generally sensible Jews have never thought of the messiah as an aspect of God. Even the purported messiah Shabbetai Zvi called him the *son* of God.

The messiah should be a man divinely empowered to save the Jews. If he performs miracles, he does so not by his own authority but by God's. His goal is military liberation of Jerusalem and the establishment of a lasting reign of righteousness, a world where the Law is kept and not overturned by Christians.

A supernatural preexistent messiah is described throughout the Book of Enoch. But, then, Enoch himself is declared there both messiah, Son of Man, and even Metatron. Many scholars believe that Christians interpolated messianic references of Enoch, but this need not be so—Christian doctrine might reflect views of Jewish fringe sectarians.

Whether Jesus was the messiah or not is not critical. The messiah comes by God's will to save Jews. What is salvation but coming sinless to judgment? What is sin but violation of the commandments? There are no commandments in Christianity.<sup>297</sup>

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<sup>297</sup> This point cannot be reiterated enough. Most Christians believe they observe the commandments, but they reject at least one of the Ten—the Sabbath, and formally disregard the others. Jesus upheld all the commandments, although tortured them on occasion. Apostle James arbitrarily chose some commandments for Christians. Paul rejected all of them, period.

### ***The Rejected Messiah***

The Christian messiah comes at first to declare the kingdom of God on earth. He discovers to his surprise that people are not yet ready for the heavenly domain and starts to preach a new teaching. Then he sees that the Jews are not ready for the new testament either and waits for the crucifixion, with which he hopes to redeem sins. Then he gives up previous efforts, sends the apostles to preach to other peoples, thus denying the concept of Judaism.

Messianic interpretations of Is53's Suffering Servant slipped into Jewish tradition. Even a rejected messiah eventually leads Israel to victory, not to redemption through faith.

The image of a cast-off, even killed, messiah appears in sectarian texts which adapt Wisdom-rejected-on-earth to the idea of Wisdom's rule in Israel. When Hippolytus claims that Jews believed that the messiah would die in the final battle,<sup>mcclxxxiv</sup> he speaks more of the Essenes than of normative Judaism.

The image of the messiah, if not suffering then near the sufferers, was not alien to orthodox Jews. Sanh98 records the dream of Rabbi Joshua Ben Levi, who found the messiah at the gate of Rome bandaging beggars' wounds.

### ***The Son of God***

The Gospels often call Jesus the Son of God, though Jesus urged everyone to call God *Father*.<sup>mcclxxxv</sup> In Judaism, the term lacks supernatural connotation,<sup>298</sup> used, for example, for miracle-workers. The Talmud normally addresses God as *Father* or *Father in heaven*, thus implying the people are his children. Rabbi Meir was explicit that all Israelites, even the unrighteous, are children of God.<sup>mcclxxxvi</sup> Such a notion ill suited the Christian exclusivism which allows only Jesus to call God *my Father*. In another Judaic example, the soul (*fem.*) of each man was considered a *daughter* of God.<sup>mcclxxxvii</sup> The Essenes, closest to the Christians, called the messiah the *Son of God*.

Jewish mysticism offered somewhat more blurred meanings, especially the use of the epithet *my Son* by the heavenly voice, *Bath Kol*. The sectarians called angels *sons of God*: "Why have they [the righteous] been numbered among the children of God [angels]?"<sup>mcclxxxviii</sup> The Church considered the status of the angelic creature too low for Jesus.

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<sup>298</sup> In Judaism divinity is absolute, excluding any diffused intermediary creatures between God and men. Angels seem to be a late borrowing.

Many myths circulated in the then credulous world. Many gods had innumerable children. The hero of any decent legend was declared a son of some god. Like the Greek concept of the Olympian gods mating with earthly women, Christians related the Son of God with the *demigod* or *divine hero* of Hellenic culture. Greek religious philosophy usually identified the *son of God* with the incarnation of spirit, further substantiation of Christian doctrine.

To say that Jesus called God *abba, papa*, instead of *av, father*, and that this was a sign of his nearness to God is wrong. For one thing, Jews often called God *abba*; for another, the title indicated nothing special even for early Christians; the Copts used it with the head of congregation.

Luke's<sup>mccclxxxix</sup> genealogy of Jesus calls each ancestor the son of the previous—"son of Enoch, son of Seth, son of Adam, Son of God." Only Adam is the Son of God, and Jesus is no more the Son of God than any of his ancestors except Adam.

## *The Son of Man*

Another component of the Gospel image of Jesus is the Son of Man. Christian attachment to it resulted from a curious mistranslation. Daniel describes “one like a human being” receiving power in the last days. In Aramaic, that became “one like a son of man” and passed into Greek as “the son of man.” The Hebrew Bible uses the term only with an altogether different meaning, to denote a common human being, usually with the connotation that he is infinitely lower than God.

Although *adam* is *man* in Hebrew, the word technically refers to another kind of human being. To establish the difference between modern people and Adam, the formula *ben Adam, son (descendant) of Adam*, appeared, only to lose its meaning when translated as *son of man*. In Christianity, the concept developed twofold. After Paul, Jesus was linked immediately to Adam. Later, with Jesus' divinity accepted, *Son of Man* began to mean *representative of all people*, neither of which corresponds to the sense of *ben Adam* in Hebrew.

Scholars generally accept that the first Aramaic translation of the Hebrew Bible appeared in the second century, though the sectarians had the Aramaic text of Daniel before Jesus' time; it was found at Qumran. Use of the Aramaic Daniel supports the hypothesis of Christian connection with the Essenes.

Ps8:4 “What are human beings that you are mindful of them, sons of man that you care for them?” The term is applied here in its most characteristic use, to denote humans. Christian translations substitute *mortals* for the *son of man*, to clear this term for the supernatural use for Jesus.

Daniel's description is contradictory. Dan7:14 “To him was given dominion, and glory, and kingship, that all peoples . . . should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion.” Dan7:27 promises exactly the same powers to “the people of the holy ones of the Most High.” That presented a problem to Christian scholars, who attempted to blur the similarity by translating the passages variously.

Jesus' image shakily combines features of different figures. The *son of man* is identical with neither the messiah nor the Suffering Servant. He does not bring Israel victory, redeem sins, or suffer.

Jewish tradition at times identifies the Son of Man with the messiah<sup>mccxc</sup> as a result of Jewish frustration at waiting for the earthly messiah and hope to find him beyond this world. Waiting for a mystical figure was better than dealing with circumstances which would stop any earthly Jewish leader.

Judaism interprets the image of the Son of Man as Israel fighting the conquerors presented as four beasts. Yet 1 Enoch<sup>48</sup> describes an eternal divine creature waiting in the heavens to be sent to earth at the end of days. The book may have influenced the formation of Jesus' image.

Sectarians could see Dan<sup>7</sup> differently. The righteous, "beaming like stars," have become angels (*angel* = *star* is a standard equation) or like them: "For in the resurrection they . . . are like angels in heaven."<sup>mccxc</sup> The greater the goodness, the higher the rank among the angels. The Essene *Angelic Liturgy* confirms the presence of a heavenly hierarchy. The Son of Man is the chief angel. The sect that brought the image from Dan<sup>7</sup> into Christian eclecticism could take Jesus for that chief angel.

In the Gospels, Jesus refers to the *son of man* somewhat ambiguously in the third person, not necessarily implying himself. He may have referred to the Danielic figure to come in the future.

All the episodes where Jesus is called *Son of Man* seem to be inserts. The forgers did not notice how Jesus' appropriation of Daniel's enigmatic title sorts ill with his refusal elsewhere to call himself the messiah, although the latter rides lower in the theological hierarchy.

Dan<sup>7</sup>:13–14 contradicts the Christian concept of the godman and John's assertion that Jesus had power before the creation. In Daniel, "the one like a human being" receives divinity and authority only on the day of judgment, not after the resurrection, as in Paul.

Early Christians supposed that they would be the judges. Later the Church's life in the world made claiming innocence for all Christians impossible, and the Church admitted that Christians would face judgment.

Daniel is the latest book of the Bible, tentatively dated around 169 B.C.E.,<sup>299</sup> four centuries after the end of the sequence of earlier biblical prophets. While the ancient and immensely authoritative Sadducees rejected the prophets, included in the canon by a Pharisaic innovation, the status of Daniel is even lower: his book is not even considered prophetic in the Jewish canon. Since Daniel seems to describe the persecution of Jews by the Syrian Seleucid Antiochus Epiphanes before the Maccabean revolt, the expulsion of the Greeks from the Temple seemed to be the victory of the righteous which happened two centuries before Jesus.

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<sup>299</sup> Scholars puzzlingly offer odd, precise-looking dates for what are essentially wild chronological conjectures. Scaliger, the founder of modern chronology, provided not only the year of an event but also the day and even the time.



## ***Wisdom***

Even in the loose theology of Enoch, the son of man and Wisdom are different entities, “The *wisdom* of the Lord of angels has revealed *him* to the holy and the righteous.”<sup>mccxcii</sup>

Wisdom's features in Jesus derive from the Greco-Christian concept of *Logos*. Christians needed Wisdom to explain Jesus' existence before creation, his participation in it, and his place beside God, as well as to link Jesus to the existing Jewish tradition of Wisdom. Since Wisdom comes often to the earth and is rejected, the linkage suited Jesus.

The status of Wisdom was inadequate for Jesus, however, since Wisdom was separate from and lower than God. 1En42:1–2 relates Wisdom's wanderings on the earth and her return to the heavens, where she sits with the angels. Christian theologians identified the hypostasis *God the Son* with *Logos*, and settled the controversy.

The name of antiquity's greatest Christian Church, St. Sophia - Basilica of the Holy Wisdom - in Constantinople, shows Wisdom's significance in Christian theology.

## God

Greco-Roman culture regularly divinized people. The Roman emperor automatically became divine upon ascension, his statues erected in temples and worshipped. In Greece, divinizing was a way of paying homage to the ruler.<sup>300</sup> Calling Jesus, the King of the Jews, a god, was not unusual.

Little in the synoptics indicates Jesus' divine origin. Jesus is a mystical figure in Paul's epistles, but before the resurrection he was unequivocally human. Closer to the modern concept, John presents him as the heavenly intermediary *Advocate*<sup>301</sup> or the divine *Logos* or one of God's hypostases—"I am in the Father."

Gradually, the tradition recognized Jesus as god. After the Nicene Council, all other views were pronounced heresy, Arius was lynched, and the discussion within the Church ended.

Making Jesus one of the deities of the pagan pantheon provided insufficient respect, and Christians turned to Jewish monotheism to argue that Jesus is the only god. Monotheist Jews resisted attempts to raise Jesus above the messiah or the angels. The simplest solution was to declare Jesus one of God's essences, a development so successful that a millennium later Maimonides was still explaining the impossibility of a single God without unity.

Christianity applies two inverse attributes to God at once: He is one and yet exists in several discernable essences. To find a way forward, Christian theologians adduced a different concept. Jesus surrendered his divinity to come into the world. The Jews crucified the man Jesus. Questions aplenty arise. If Jesus were not divine, how did he work miracles on his own? To what degree did his godlike nature remain in him, if at all? Was something divine executed at Jesus' crucifixion? But to suppose that the divine nature may be executed is absurd. So what did the Jews do tremendously wrong? They executed a man.<sup>302</sup> The execution could do no harm to Jesus-the-god—either that or admit that a) God may be harmed and b) God needs an earthly envelope.

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<sup>300</sup> It is possible, however, that the statues were not so much actually worshipped in the sense of making requests or giving thanks, but were prayed and sacrificed for.

<sup>301</sup> Implied when Jesus promises to send *another* Advocate.

<sup>302</sup> They even helped him to reunite with his flawless heavenly prime sooner.

How can the whole idea be reconciled with the inaccessibility of God's face? On Horeb he was fire, in the Jewish camp at Sinai he was a cloud, the prophets never saw his face. Yet he turned his face to the Christians?

The doctrine of Jesus' divinity contradicts other ideas of the Church. Jesus must have known of his rejection beforehand. Yet Christians say the destruction of Jerusalem and the other calamities befell the Jews because they killed Jesus. If so, Jesus should have known that his advent was not for salvation but for misfortune, hard to correlate with his declared mission of salvation.

Early Judeo-Christians did not think of Jesus as an essence of God. Did9:2 calls Jesus God's servant, like David. Another term, *holy vine of David*, specifies Jesus' status as derivative of and lower than David's. Paul and Mark both use<sup>mccxciii</sup> about Jesus the technical noun *deacon*, routinely used for preachers and administrators.

Eusebius separated God and Christ, "Punishments pursued them after their crime against the Christ of God."

The realness of Jesus' body leads to the supposition that at each concrete moment Jesus-god was present on earth, he was absent elsewhere. That means he changed his place in space. Yet, one of God's basic features is his irrelevance to the objects he created, including dimensions.

Similarly, Jesus acquired the Holy Spirit at baptism. If his nature changed, how could his spirit be absolutely divine?

Christians believe their god loved humanity so much that he stripped himself of heavenly power, put on an earthly body, and entered physical human history. God cannot strip himself of the power, since that power does not exist beyond him. The pattern was in fact common. The Sumerian goddess Inanna "abandoned lordship, abandoned ladyship, to the netherworld she descended." Like Jesus in the crypt, she spent three days in the underworld. Orpheus went to Hades to rescue Euridice, and Herakles rescued Alcestis.

The Jesus of the synoptics claims no status higher than rabbi. In no reliable passage does he hint at his supernatural origin or call himself Messiah, Wisdom, or Son of God.

Jewish Christians were explicit about his earthly nature: "[Jesus] has been raised from among those who sleep."<sup>mccxciv</sup> They imagined Jesus in Sheol, not in heaven.

The Ebionites and probably the majority of Gnostics believed Jesus was a man who acquired the Holy Spirit, was initiated, at his baptism. At most, he was an archangel<sup>mccxcv</sup> but not the essence of God. The Christian

tradition of Jesus the godman was canonized at the Council of Nicaea after centuries of controversy and intrigue.

## Dualism and Trinity

Christians created Jesus' image with multiple supernatural concepts, which brought them to the concept of divine hypostases, generally realized as a founder god in his earthly embodiment and a female principle, a mother or wife. Some spirit often replaced the woman, unpopular in theology and philosophy and commonly identified with sexual desire and evil nature.

The doctrine of the Trinity was a necessary response to the contradiction between Father-and-Son dualism on the one hand and monotheism on the other. Maimonides put the critique succinctly: something which consists of distinguishable parts or aspects is not one and indivisible.

God cannot be quantitatively limited in any way, so an infinite set of essences or hypostases is possible. The significance of each, like the Holy Spirit, is infinitely small and is reduced to its absence. According to that logic, God cannot have separate manifested, detectable hypostases.

Christianity preaches an anthropomorphic god, the divine Jesus, confined to a human body at a certain moment of time. Trinity cannot be reconciled with incorporeality. If something may be perceived as several parts, then the parts may be separated from each other, if only theoretically. Consequently, the object has exterior signs, some kind of form. But that is just what corporeality implies.

In Christian theology, Jesus is the essence – not merely an emanation – of God and at some moment acquired the image of man. At that moment Jesus did not exist beyond his body, and the god of the Christians became limited in space, corporeal. Further, he became corporeal in a world that included him and is *ergo* larger than he is.

Trinity means that Jesus always and everywhere has the Spirit of God. How then could he have the soul and nature of a child when very young? How could it happen that he was blessed with the Holy Spirit only at baptism, or even later, according to Paul?

God decided to influence himself. For that purpose, he sent himself in the person of Jesus to sacrifice himself to himself. By that sacrifice, he aimed to redeem before himself the sins of the people he created. How can that be? A strange father it is who sacrifices a son to himself. And what was the merit of the son? Not even obedience, because one hypostasis cannot be discontent with the other.

Trinity resembles the three hypostases of Krishna: Brahma, the Father; Maya, the Spirit and Mother; Vishnu, the Son. Quoting Eleazar's address to the defendants of Masada, Josephus refers to Hinduism several times. If even Eleazar's audience of ordinary Jews were familiar with the Hindu teaching—and Josephus assumes they were—the ideas were popular

enough to be accepted as the religion of a new sect in symbiosis with Judaism. Josephus ascribes to Aristotle an opinion that the Jews descended from Indian philosophers.<sup>mccxcvi</sup>

Different forms of trinity were known in Greece, Egypt (Osiris-Isis-Horus), and, probably, Persia. Tribal gods could change forms, but those cults were not monotheistic. The Church fathers set aside that distinction.<sup>303</sup>

Jesus' participation in trinity is an artificial structure not reflected in the synoptics. As late as end of fourth century, John Chrysostom alleged that Jews worship the devil, a view made possible only by distinguishing between the God of the Jews and Jesus.

"God has sent the *Spirit of his Son* into our hearts."<sup>mccxcvii</sup> But Jesus and the Holy Spirit are different aspects of trinity. Jesus does not claim such unity. Matt6:6–9 "Your Father . . . our Father," evidence that he did not see his relation to God differently from that of other Jews. Further, he continuously appeals to God and expects to be heard, implying separation in spirit and physical fact.

"He went out to the mountain to pray; and he spent the night in prayer to God."<sup>mccxcviii</sup>

"The heavenly Father [will] give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"<sup>mccxcix</sup> The Holy Spirit is not the essence of Jesus; he does not dispose of the Spirit but acquired it through God's grace.

"He has granted the Son also to have life in himself."<sup>mccc</sup> We call the Eternal "God," not those to whom he granted life.

"Servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers [Jesus] greater than the one who sent them."<sup>mcccxi</sup>

"If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once."<sup>mcccii</sup> A concrete period of time is indicated—*will glorify*. Glorifying God and glorifying Jesus are not simultaneous acts, and Jesus is not god.

"The Father is greater than I."<sup>mccciii</sup>

"Then comes the end, when he [Jesus] hands over the kingdom to God the Father."<sup>mccciv</sup> For Paul, God and Jesus were not yet one.

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<sup>303</sup> Even modern scholars imagine parallels between Jewish monotheism and Persian dualistic belief in the supreme god Zoroaster, calling that monotheism, too.

## The New Testament Dramatis Personae

### *The Apostles*

Paul was not generally accepted as an apostle. He was not close to Jesus during his lifetime. The Jewish Christians chose Matthias after Jesus' death to replace Judas and to keep the number of apostles at twelve. In the end, Paul became a thirteenth apostle by irregular means and in fact. Paul did not consider himself simply a preacher but compared himself to the apostles: they addressed the Jews; he, the Gentiles. Paul considered himself an apostle exactly as they were: "Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?"<sup>mcccv</sup> He saw Jesus only in a vision, and may have thought the other apostles also saw Jesus not in reality, but in their meditations. Recall that there were no Gospels when Paul wrote the epistles.

Paul's assertion that he alone went to the Gentiles contradicts an ancient Christian source, *The Didache*, an adaptation of two or three Jewish fragments on ethics and a small volume of originally Christian text. *The Didache* obviously appeals to Gentiles. There was no need to explain Jewish ethical norms to Jews who had known them since childhood. *The Didache* circulated among Gentile Christians. Most of the text is very early, around the turn of the first century. Even in the earliest extant tradition, many preachers addressed the Gentiles.

Paul more than once<sup>mccv</sup> uses the technical term *deacon* referring to the apostles, the standard title of common preachers or administrators.

Acts mentions Paul's disciples,<sup>mccviii</sup> no different from Jesus' disciples.

Paul's understanding of the apostles can be confusing indeed. "[Jesus] appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve . . . Then he appeared to James, also to all the apostles."<sup>mccviii</sup> Paul distinguishes between twelve disciples, Cephas (Simon Peter) and "all the apostles," among whom he includes James the Just. Obviously, he does not reserve the term *apostle* for Jesus' disciples only. In his view, apostles are preachers or administrators without specific historical connection to Jesus.

Paul does not hold the apostles who saw Jesus alive in awe. He criticizes Peter severely, characteristically not on the Gospel grounds of denying Jesus, about which he knew nothing.

He mentions several apostles at Iconium,<sup>mccix</sup> though he and Barnabas were the only Christians there—and Paul was not yet considered an apostle. Clearly, the term *apostle* was not exclusive. Any preacher could

be called so. Only later did tradition designate the disciples as the founding apostles.

Paul calls only himself and the Jerusalem leaders *apostles*. That is an intermediary interpretation of *apostle*: a famous preacher.

Tertullian says that Peter nominated Clement as bishop of Rome, but there is no reliable data about Peter's stay in Rome. The early tradition attached no special significance to recording the apostles' deeds.

Apathy toward the apostles contrasts with the piety toward the Church fathers. Polycarp mentions<sup>mcccix</sup> that he collected Ignatius' letters. Nobody, however, collected Peter's works. There is not a single authentic letter of Peter.

The apocryphal and heretical Gospels we possess now derive from various sources and were not edited by a single hand. We should expect some to be attributed to the same author, but that is not the case. Hence the likelihood is that the local Gospels were named for the patron saints, not the other way round. Since the apostles' names were inserted in the Gospels quite late, the local patron founders could be pictured as apostles.

Because Christianity is an outgrowth of Judaism, twelve communities, corresponding to the Twelve Tribes, would be honored along with their patrons. Thus a known group of apostles would arise from retrospective projection into Jesus' time.

The Christian tradition presents the apostles as saints. But so are many deities; recall St. Bacchus and St. Buddha. Possibly, apostles were prominent leaders of other messianic sects or their patron saints. Thus the Gospels repeatedly denigrate the apostles. Not once did they understand Jesus' parables as well as the crowd. Despite numerous hints, they failed to grasp Jesus' destiny; they slept as he prayed in Gethsemane, betrayed and abandoned him at the trial. Though Jesus said he spoke to them openly but to others in parables, he in fact addressed the disciples in parables, too.

The number of the disciples varies with the source. Compare the traditional twelve to Slavonic Josephus' 140. *Twelve* recalled both the Essene council of twelve and the twelve tribes of Israel.

Both Matthew and Luke report twelve apostles. Luke lists Simon and Andrew, James and John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Judah Iscariot, Simon the Zealot, and Judah son of James;<sup>mcccxi</sup> Matthew, instead of the last two, names Simon the Canaanite (perhaps another nickname like Zealot) and Thaddeus.<sup>mcccxi</sup>

DialSav32–33 mentions twelve disciples, including Mary Magdalene.

Pt14, ScJm2 and Didache: there were twelve disciples after the crucifixion, though Judas should have been absent.



Paul distinguished among the twelve disciples, Peter, James the Just, and the rest of the apostles.<sup>mcccxi</sup> Papias pictures Jesus' inner circle differently from the evangelists: "I asked, 'And what did Andrew say? What Peter? What Philip? What Thomas and James? What John or Matthew, or any other disciple of Jesus?'"<sup>mcccxi</sup> He also lists Ariston and a presbyter John among Jesus' disciples.<sup>mcccxi</sup>

The name *Philip* raises a question, since the Jewish aristocracy used Greek names but not commoners. Luke extrapolated from what he knew, namely that Philip was an apostle, and provided background for him.

Simon the *Canaanite* is an odd name, since *Canaan*, Judea's ancient name, is an identification too broad to be meaningful unless perhaps in some faraway place. A Texan would not be called *the American* in Texas but could be in France. Similarly, no one from Judea would be *the Canaanite* in Jerusalem, but could be in Greece.

Consider the names of Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot. Josephus mentions zealots and *sicarii* just before the war, some thirty years after Jesus' traditional end. Hippolytus considers the zealots and the *sicarii* Essene factions.<sup>mcccxi</sup>

## *Paul*

Paul is as mythical as Jesus himself. His conversion from oppressor of Christianity to missionary, his Roman citizenship, his Pharisaic origin, his miracles, his meeting with Jesus himself are incredible.

About 95 C.E., 1Clement says that Paul reached the earth's western edge, taking the message to kings and rulers, a pointedly legendary setting for an itinerant preaching an insignificant religion. The Gnostics picture Paul more as an ancient authority than a recent historical person.

The writer of the Acts says Paul met Herod, prefects, and the emperor, and that he talks often with the apostles. He first brought the new religion to Rome, though his Epistle to the Romans implies the opposite. He worked many miracles. The reports in Acts are odd, since only twenty to fifty years separate them from Paul.

Acts' portrait of Paul is mostly unrelated to the facts laid out in the epistles. Paul does not say that he was born in Tarsus in Cilicia or that he studied with the famous Pharisee Gamliel—even when arguing with the Jews, when that would have lent considerable authority. Paul does not insist on his Roman citizenship as Acts does. The Pauline epistles contradict the chronology of Acts, and even the transparent allusion to his execution in Acts does not square with his own writings.

Paul's image in Acts may have inherited the features of a second century martyr.<sup>304</sup> Paul impolitically asks to be judged by the emperor and that causes him in the end to die a martyr's death. The prefect wants to release him, but Paul insists. Such behavior was common among second and third century Christians, who saw martyrdom as assurance of salvation.

Paul is traditionally depicted with a sword. The apologists explain that Paul was beheaded, but in the end overcame sword, and so holds it. No one will portray a hanged man with gallows in his hand, so why should Paul hold the sword? Moreover, Paul could not be beheaded, for Romans reserved this humane execution for their citizens,<sup>305</sup> and his Roman citizenship is implausible.

Plutarch relates that the citizens of Utica erected a statue of Cato the Younger with sword. It is not likely that the sword represented the weapon of his suicide. The people might so commemorate Cato's preparing

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<sup>304</sup> Paul might even attempt to apply Is53 to himself, writing in Gal4:13 of his infirmities.

<sup>305</sup> However, *War2:12:6* says, some Jews were axed, possibly for expediency or since Judeans considered this execution disgusting, *M.Sanh7:3*, in expectation of bodily resurrection.

the city for the siege. The sword of Junius Brutus' statue, erected in Rome in gratitude for his role in banishing the Tarquins, also was "active" in this sense. Examples of a "passive" role for a sword (someone proudly waving the weapon with which he was killed) are hard to come by.

Christian martyrs were connected in art with instruments of their execution, and even became patrons of the profession whose tools were employed for their murder. However, the process was the reverse. Folklore or pagan patrons of professions were assimilated as Christian saints. Appropriate stories were created for these holy men, ending with a martyr's death. They were made to be executed using tools of the trade. Hence appeared laborious, often bordering on grotesque, stories of execution. Paul was portrayed with the sword before this tradition appeared.

Paul's sword might have the same meaning as the famous sword of the Hindu goddess of death Kali, which implied a spiritual threat to nonfollowers.

Paul's fractious nature hardly reveals the humility he preached. His attempts to establish his authority cast his preoccupation with the end of the world into doubt.

Paul left no theological works; the epistles are of missionary significance. As far back as the second century, nothing certain was known of him. The writer of Acts knew neither the epistles nor the Paul they reveal. Eventually, Paul is treated like Jesus: a legendary figure without historical referents. Paul's preaching mission in Greece and Rome resembles Jesus' missionary work in Galilee, not history but historical background for the legend.

We do not know what Paul wrote. Today only perhaps seven authentic works are attributed to him, a list which tends to shrink. In the absence of any coherent theology, scholars usually mention similarity of style, yet the epistles could well pass that test if they are pseudepigrapha written by any one person. Supporters of the single author hypothesis have yet to explain numerous factual contradictions in the epistles.

James the Just, the leader of Christians in Judea, was executed about 62 C.E., so mass persecutions did not take place before that. The accounts of Paul's harassment of Christians look retroactive.

No Church leader claimed personal contact with Paul in the reliable texts. Luke, Paul's disciple, is a mythical figure and was accepted as author of the Gospel only after the second century.

It is clear that Paul was not a Pharisee and not likely the son of a Pharisee. He quotes the Scriptures mistranslated and bowdlerized. He called himself a Pharisee to gain sympathy among Diaspora Jews, who accepted

his teaching more readily than the doctrines of the Temple-affiliated Sadducees. If the story of Stephen is true at all, Paul's role watching the executioners' clothes shows his inferior place among the high priest's retinue. That Paul is sent to Damascus to arrest Christians is strange, since foreign missions were normally reserved for people of rank. Accounts of his trial and his journey to Rome are full of contradictions and do not correspond to the epistles.

People then ordinarily were named for their father, *bar someone*. In some cases, they got nicknames—Simon Peter, the Rock; Judah Thomas, the Twin.<sup>306</sup> Away from home, geographic identifiers served: Simon the Cyrenean, Mary Magdalene, Judah the Galilean. Proselytes often took Jewish names. The substitution of Paul for Saul suggests changing religion. Contrary to the notion that early Christians considered themselves the proper Jews, Paul understood Christianity as a new religion, and changed his name.

Paul's teaching is not coherent. He continuously refutes himself. Supposedly he covered a huge territory, planting churches everywhere, yet he never quoted Jesus. Philosophical schools were built on the sayings of their founders, then and now. Paul did not try to attribute popular sayings to Jesus but rather preached his own doctrines. Claiming Jesus as his mentor gave Paul's teachings ancient authority, and antiquity then meant credibility. Paul, however, does not rely on Jesus' teachings but repairs to the mystical resurrection which opens a path to new life without the Law.

No other influential author's works are so contradictory to the canon. Paul's Jesus was a human being, he was hanged and not crucified, and he lived in the indefinite past. Paul preached a distorted but mystical doctrine. Only his immense authority explains his works being included in the canon, the authority not of a historical person but rather of the Church's mythical founder.

Paul thought that the Christian teaching appeared by revelation, not that Jesus spoke it to disciples, "the mystery made known to me by revelation . . . has *now* been revealed by the *Spirit* to God's holy apostles and prophets."<sup>306</sup>

Paul refers to Jesus' execution but says the Jews hung Jesus on a tree or a pole, not that Pilate crucified him. Paul does not mention the miracles Jesus performed in the Gospels. He shows no inclination to visit the places where Jesus preached to meet people who had been healed or were present at the trial and crucifixion.

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<sup>306</sup> Aliases and slang are popular now within isolated social groups and it was probably also the case in antiquity, with nicknames much more common among Christians than among Jews in general.

Paul hardly mentions Jesus' miracles, missionary work, or teaching. Before the resurrection, Paul's Jesus was just a man,<sup>mcccxviii</sup> not endowed with the Holy Spirit, and not a miracle worker. The Gnostics believed that initiation bestowed mystic powers.

Paul's Jesus came, was rejected, and died for redemption, a classic pagan image of Wisdom. Paul's Jesus either did nothing else or all his works were subject to the idea of self-sacrifice.

Paul's failure to ask the apostles for information about Jesus' deeds and sayings likely means Paul did not think Jesus lived recently. His only historical reference, to Pilate's judgment, is in the forged pastoral 1 Timothy.<sup>mcccxi</sup> Evidently, the apostles' stories of the living Jesus exasperated him: "From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way."<sup>mcccxx</sup>

In that, Paul was not alone. Witness the *Passover Sermon* of Melito: "The Gentiles adored him. The uncircumcised admired him . . . . Even Pilate washed the hands in his affair." At the end of the second century, Melito was of a legend.

Some of Paul's statements cannot be matched with the Gospels without miracles of intellectual prestidigitation. He writes, "You foolish Galatians! It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly exhibited as crucified!"<sup>mcccxxi</sup> If Paul meant some legend about Dionysus, that makes sense, but Jesus was, by all reports, crucified in Jerusalem.

Paul would not have been disinterested in Jesus' life. On the contrary, his earthly career, his miracles and raisings were superb propaganda. Why did Paul neglect them? While not appealing to the authority of Jesus, he labors to find his own arguments and tortures the Hebrew Scriptures—which he declares obsolete and thus looses Christians from the Law. He needed the authorities, but he did not know Jesus' sayings.

Paul's silence cannot be explained by his audience's familiarity with the Gospels. Paul often spoke of dissension among the communities and differences of opinion on the basic issues. If Christian catechumens knew the NT, why did not Paul refer to it instead of quoting Hebrew Scriptures unfamiliar to them? It is implausible that Paul refrained from quoting the NT because his flock knew it, anyway. He quotes Hebrew Scriptures in Romans, though the Jews whom he addresses knew them.

In several places<sup>mcccxxii</sup> Paul calls Jesus to his side, and apologists are happy to find evidence of Paul using *logia Iesou*. Paul, however, claims a private revelation: "To the married I give this command, not I but the Lord."<sup>mcccxxiii</sup> Paul says he knows what Jesus thinks. The passages do not prove that Paul knew the Gospel prototexts or any other reliable tradition.

“For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you.”<sup>mcccxxiv</sup>  
That sounds more like a vision—“I received”—than text.

“Now concerning virgins, I have no command of the Lord.”<sup>mcccxxv</sup>  
The statement does not prove Paul’s honesty about Jesus’ sayings. Paul already appealed to Jesus’ sayings several times in the epistle, and he has to diversify. He uses the disclaimer to lend credibility to his other references.

Arguing with Paul, neither the Jews nor the Jerusalem Christians appealed to Jesus’ sayings about the Law in Matthew, which Paul had ignored. Either there were no texts or Christians were too few and far between to share Jesus’ sayings and the struggle described in the epistles was extrapolated from later events. Probably both propositions were true to some extent.

If Paul had a revelation in the wilderness which changed his life, why did he receive no revelation when he was writing the epistles, the theological basis of Christianity, leaving him only his own incoherent thoughts? If he was ordered to spread the good news, why did he not also learn what to say instead of making it up as he went along? All accounts of Jesus’ appearance to Paul on the Damascus Road differ.

The epistles portray a man given to passions, a dissembler, perhaps unbalanced, and not acquainted with Judaism. The Holy Spirit preaching through him<sup>307</sup> distorted quotations from a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible and shifted his ground continuously, depending on the circumstances.

Paul’s numerous contradictions make detecting a coherent theology in his works difficult. We can dismiss any view based on his own opinions. The apologists say Paul was a missionary, not a theologian, but that is no excuse. Paul showed the flock the path to salvation, and they had the right to expect that his teaching was authentic. But did the revelation say nothing about keeping the commandments and many other things important for salvation? If Paul was ordered to preach, he should have known what to say and how to support it; yet Paul usually does not refer to the divine voice.

Paul writes that he frequently had visions,<sup>mcccxxvi</sup> yet at the same time says, “No one may think better of me . . . even considering the exceptional character of the revelations.”<sup>mcccxxvii</sup> That is, many Christians received revelations, and Paul claims his were “exceptional.” Paul admits that even ordinary Christians invent prophecies and urges them to do so: “Now I would like all of you to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy.”<sup>mcccxxviii</sup>

Glossolalia was popular among early Christians: “For those who speak in a tongue do not speak to other people but to God . . . One who

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<sup>307</sup> Jesus promised the apostles that how and what to say would be given to them, that the Holy Spirit would speak through them.

prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets. . . .<sup>mcccxxix</sup>

Paul's method differs from the Gospels. Jesus taught "as the one having authority," that is, without referring to other teachers or the Hebrew Scriptures. Paul does not state doctrine flatly but attempts to substantiate it. He would have preferred Jesus' method, had he known it. Before the Gospels, critical Greek culture knew no such method.

Paul's epistles address specific communities instead of offering general teachings. Whether his approach was practical—Paul was writing letters—or whether it reflected the convention of addressing a fictitious opponent is difficult to say.

While proto-Matthew and, at a stretch, the other Gospels can be reconciled with Judaism, Paul flatly contradicts it. He often tries unsuccessfully to interpret Judaism, but more often draws directly from pagan mysticism. In some cases, he retains terms or concepts but alters their content.

While the Gospels indulge in Bible-based *haggadic* moralizing, Paul uses no standard method of rabbinic exegesis—not allegorical, not literal, not mystical, not cross-contextual analysis.

Matthew and James see Christianity as reformed Judaism and believed the Jews should have accepted Jesus, and that Gentiles had to convert to Judaism first. Paul introduces proselytes to a different religion, only nominally connected to Judaism. He hardly considered himself a Jewish sectarian.

His panegyric to the Jews in Romans is tactical. In other places, he says the same of Christians. Hoping to convert Jews, Paul told them what they wanted to hear. He could not say the same to Gentiles.

Paul lost touch with Judea and its Christians. He saw his work with the Gentiles as a separate mission, and never thought of his congregations and the Jerusalem church as one thing. They had different leaders, texts, theology, faith, and practice.

Epiphanius tells us what the Ebionites, the earliest Christians, thought of Paul.<sup>mcccxxx</sup> He was a Greek who came to Jerusalem, wanted to marry a priest's daughter; converted to Judaism, and was circumcised. When the girl refused him, he began arguing against the Law. That would explain Paul's behavior and teaching, but there is a suspicious detail. Theoretically, a proselyte could marry only another proselyte or a bastard, so his conversion to Judaism would not get him the girl. Maybe the rule was not enforced then.

In several places in Acts and the epistles, Paul calls himself a Pharisee and a Jew obedient to the Law, but he is non-observant. Paul lied,

“I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age.”<sup>mcccxxxi</sup>

Paul’s ignorance of the Hebrew Scriptures contrasts with ordinary Jews’ knowledge of it. Queen Salome introduced a system of compulsory education for Jewish boys, who started to learn the Hebrew Scriptures at five. Paul would have a hard time preaching distorted excerpts from the Septuagint to homeland Jews. Even if the Gentile audience needed a Greek translation, which Paul used even when addressing Jews, he could not fail to see its variance with the original. Likely Paul did not read the Scriptures in Hebrew. If born in Cilicia, he might not have learned how. The Diaspora Jews spoke predominantly local languages rather than Hebrew or Aramaic.<sup>mcccxxii</sup>

Even if a Jew, Paul was brought up in the Greek culture of Tarsus, and his religious and philosophical views were a mixture of Greek philosophy, mysticism, and eastern cults, quite natural for the time. Universal view of different religions by Greek philosophers created a religious cocktail ready to giddy unprepared minds. Paul’s faith was just such a mixture, and he preached it ardently.

Since Paul was unfamiliar with Judaism, his nearness to the high priest in Acts seems improbable, although he could have been one of the servants. The writer sought to present Paul as a person of high standing. If he accepted the new faith, lesser lights should do the same and more. The Talmud tries to establish authority the same way, as rabbis advise Roman emperors.

To substantiate his right to live on charity, Paul quotes the Torah: “You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain.”<sup>mcccxxxiii</sup> Indeed, argument by analogy was not popular among Greeks who lacked an absolutely authoritative text to fish for quotations. But the fact that Paul uses the device says nothing about his Pharisaic skills. That form of argument was among Judaism’s most common. Paul could not but be acquainted with it after minimal dealings with rabbis, since they would use it against him in the discussions. Paul seldom used the device and then only referring to the Greek translation. He handles Deuteronomy clumsily. Any rabbi would oppose him with quotations regulating the use of alms which obliged every able person not involved in Temple service to earn his livelihood. Ancient rabbis were not supported but worked for a living.

Paul uses the sad fact that perfect observance of the Law is extremely rare. From there he makes the quantum leap to conclude that the Law is useless for salvation, then affirms the possibility of salvation by faith.

Most Christians would not like their religion judged by the Book of Mormon, the Epistle of Pilate, or even some papal encyclicals: so why



invoke fringe Jewish pseudepigrapha? Likening Paul's teachings to Enoch, Baruch, and 2Ezra is futile. They are too heavily influenced by Greek theosophy to be reconciled with the Torah, especially the eschatology. Even those books do not imagine rejecting the Law, "For we, who have received the law and sinned, we shall perish . . . but the law will last in its glory."<sup>mcccxxxiv</sup>

Having rejected the Law, Paul had little to work with when moral questions arose. As questions arose, and many did, he in various places identifies unacceptable behavior: lechery, eating food sacrificed to pagan gods, homosexuality, theft, gossip, and more instead of applying the Law. His ethical rules are not substantiated scripturally, nor is their relation to salvation clear. They at times contradict other moral *dicta* in Acts and other NT books.<sup>mcccxxxv</sup>

Paul ran up against the fact that most people need authoritative, even compulsory, rules. The rare person who internalizes moral standards does not obviate the need to formulate them for the majority.

The *Law* of Christ is a redefinition of the term and has nothing in common with *halakoth*. The Pauline "law" has few moral conventions, though it includes a few traditional Jewish ethical standards. Worse, no one knows what the new "law" is: Paul and the Gospellers report it differently, and nobody knows which is authentic.

Rabbinic Judaism formulated the concept of natural moral norms applicable to the Gentiles, but Paul does not use them. The prime objective was the prohibition of idolatry (pagan rites), about which Paul is tepid. The amorphousness of Paul's teaching, the disagreements among the various lists of sins, and the dismissal of specifically Jewish sins make any connection between Paul and the Noahide laws doubtful. Making up ethical standards is no particular challenge.

Paul was an amateur in religion and philosophy, knew about as much as could be expected from any alert person who lived in some Greek cultural center, lots of hearsay, but not much study. Education took many years, and we know of no extended period of study, except perhaps the Judaism of his youth, from which he strayed soon enough.

He was born in Tarsus, a center of the Mithra cult, lived in Ephesus (whose tutelary divinity was Artemis), Antioch (Adonis), and Corinth (Dionysus). Christians assimilated the popular Gentile title, "stewards of God's mysteries."<sup>mcccxxxvi</sup> His sayings at times recall Socrates: "Anyone who claims to know something does not yet have the necessary knowledge."<sup>mcccxxxvii</sup> "Then we will see face to face . . ."<sup>mcccxxxviii</sup> is Platonist, not Jewish. Not even Moses saw God's face. "Son in the likeness of sinful flesh . . ."<sup>mcccxxxix</sup> is a typically Gnostic formula for the incarnation of pure spirit. Paul's Christians may be akin to Jesus,<sup>mcccxl</sup> though in Judaism man

can only strive to get closer to God. Paul often uses simple Sophistic methods<sup>mcccxli</sup> to expand the meaning of susceptible terms; the expanded meaning defies common sense and is used to confute the initial thesis.

Another example of Paul's defective logic is starting from a false premise: "Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard?"<sup>mcccxlii</sup> In other words, one need not keep the Law, since faith bestows the Holy Spirit. But Paul assumes that all Gentile Christians have the Holy Spirit, a false premise.

Paul's argumentative style is more philosophic than theological. The culture knew many gods and tolerated them, so he had no need to establish his god's priority or historicity with religious arguments.

Advocating mystical equality in Christ, Paul fought for the leadership and planted his disciples as heads of the communities. He opposed independent Christian preachers like Apollos. He argued about his right to live on the congregation.

Paul advances the concept of salvation and knowledge of the divine through faith without long initiation. Paul might be right in the most general sense: true faith automatically means initiation. But he substitutes the object: he speaks of superficial faith, a mere declaration of belief.

He proposed a very simple path to eternal life, without ceremony or effort, with only a declaration. Primitive Christianity promised neither reincarnation nor judgment or purgatory, but guaranteed eternal life. No wonder the simple way seemed attractive to many.<sup>308</sup>

Clement and others criticized Paul for Gnosticism and splitting Peter's Christian community. When Paul writes of "you who possess knowledge,"<sup>mcccxliii</sup> he means γνώσις (*gnosis*), disguised in translation. He calls Christians spiritual people, where πνευματικός (*pneumatikos*) is a typical Gnostic term, interchangeable with γνωστικός (*gnostikos*).

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<sup>308</sup> Later Islam applied the same method to Christianity. When Christian ceremonies and requirements became unreasonably burdensome, Islam guaranteed salvation by declaring "Allah akbar!" The God is great! Like Christianity, Islam made formal demands, the *five pillars*, but insisted only on conversion. Christian territories accepted the Muslim faith wholesale, which was a factor in launching the Crusades and the Inquisition.

Predictably, Islam later became more complicated and insisted on extensive behavioral details to guarantee paradise. When both religions became weak in the twentieth century, they again loosened requirements and doctrines.

"I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven."<sup>mcccxliv</sup> The concept of multiple heavens is characteristic of the Gnostics. A similar concept of spheres penetrated a Hellenized rabbinic Judaism. For Aristotle, the spheres were astronomical objects, the stars and planets bound to them. The Gnostics saw the heavens as a spiritual state where pure souls abide. Jewish tradition processed both concepts and ended up nearer the Gnostic view of the heavens as the habitat of various creatures.<sup>mcccxlvi</sup>

Paul makes no claim that he is the man caught in the heavens, though he might thereby have earned great authority. Why? The Gnostics described their heavenly journeys vividly, and Paul, unprepared to match them, did not want to risk discovery and hinted at himself in the third person. He may indeed have described someone else's vision, proud that a fellow Christian had the experience which Gnostics knew in the mystical initiation.

Several Pauline concepts—guilt-free sin by default instead of will, the priority of faith over works, abandonment of the Law and regulation—are reserved for the narrow circle of the self-conscious initiated, unacceptable for the mass religion he was creating. Some few deeply convinced people in a community may eschew sin and incline to good deeds toward neighbors with whom they share beliefs and property. Applied to a crowd, however, those doctrines acquit evildoers and posit a divine origin of evil.

Paul's reticence about personal divinity is his compromise with Judaism. He more than once attributes to Christians not only supernatural abilities—knowledge of all languages, prophecy—but also superhuman privileges, such as superiority to the Law and guaranteed salvation.

Greek mysticism strongly influenced Paul: "Declare the mystery of Christ."<sup>mcccxlvi</sup> "In him all . . .";<sup>mcccxlvi</sup> "Christ is in you."<sup>mcccxlvi</sup> "But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him."<sup>mcccxlvi</sup>—Any of those statements makes Pauline theosophy incompatible with Judaism.

Those who adhered to Judaism vexed Paul: they insisted that people should observe the Torah to the letter. He proposed to trust the crowd to learn wisdom, the conscientious following of Torah without keeping the Law, though he claimed he taught that wisdom only to the consecrated.<sup>mccc</sup>

Paul's morality is based not on the Law but on the Holy Spirit, typical of mystics who believed the initiated incarnated ethical standards without external regulation. In Judaism, Spirit cannot replace Torah at least because Torah is the embodiment of the Spirit or Wisdom itself. In Judaism, the Spirit is sent as the consequence, not the cause, of maintaining ethical standards.

Of all the critics of Paul's apparent connection with mysticism, Davies<sup>mcccli</sup> provides the most ample list of arguments.

Arguing against Paul's borrowing from the Greeks, Davies notes that Apuleius wrote the *Metamorphoses* in the second century – after Paul wrote his epistles. The mystical concepts described in *The Bacchantes*, Pythagoras, and the Eleusinian Mysteries are pre-Pauline. It is ludicrous to suggest that Paul's amateurish theological constructions influenced the major doctrines of educated Greeks.

*Christian writers are silent on the mysteries up to the end of the second century* (Davies' theses italicized). Not so, and Davies recognizes it at once though he also says Justin Martyr, Ignatius, and the Didache are not weighty sources, an opinion which not only contradicts the Christian scholarly consensus, but is also senseless in itself. The authority of some writers like Justin is not the point but the fact that they mention the mysteries as familiar phenomena.

*Paul understood unity with Jesus as affinity to the Church, not to the universal spirit.* But that is the impossible QED for confuting Paul's mysticism. Christian communion with Jesus is the Gnostic doctrine of unity with the Spirit. Paul speaks naturally about all Christians, not individual converts, since he transformed mysticism into a mass religion and thinks all believers are initiated. The germs of such a metamorphosis are already in the Gnostics, who sometimes deemed all members of a sect initiated *ex opere operato*.

*For Paul, communion with Jesus is not initiation into the divine.* But the achievement of unity implies that the believer's state has changed, and what does that change lead to if not divine existence? "We have peace [unity] with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace."<sup>mccclii</sup> Paul addressed many people and therefore had certain limitations. The mystics could easily call the few initiated divine. Paul could not call all Christians divine from plain common sense. He adapted mystical doctrine to reality.

*Paul enables a believer to save his individuality in spite of unity with Jesus.* But, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me."<sup>mcccliii</sup>

*Paul describes the historical Jesus, not the mythical Dionysus or Osiris.* Nothing in Paul suggests that he believed Jesus was a real human being who lived only a few years previous to Paul's writing. He did not associate with Jesus' disciples, with those who heard Jesus, or with his family. Compared to the evangelists, Paul is indifferent to Jesus' historicity and probably considers him a mythical hero. Also, Dionysus and Osiris were not mythical figures for Greeks and Egyptians. To suggest they had been invented would have been seen as blasphemy.

*Paul did not preach mystical death and resurrection.* "But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him."<sup>mccliv</sup> Paul did not see the crucifixion and resurrection as only a material process and thought believers could replicate it or partake in it.

*Osiris did not bring redemption.* He symbolizes winter and summer, sowing and harvest, death and resurrection. Jesus did not bring forgiveness of sins but rather redemption for resurrection to a new life. The analogy with Osiris is complete, adjusted for the Jewish concept of redemption through repentance and sacrifice.

*The followers of Osiris paid more attention to his esoteric deeds.* But how many miracles did Jesus work in the Gospels? Did not John say that the purpose of Jesus' wonders was to prove his supernatural descent?

*For Paul, initiation is the outcome of faith, not of ceremonies like baptism or the Eucharist.* Mystics also considered them only rituals, exterior evidence of inner change, akin to faith. Eleusinian baptism, the washing away of sins and initiation, was a dramatic mass event not by chance but to underscore that it was only allegory. In the earlier, strict Egyptian version, only a prepared person was admitted to the rite. Modern Christianity, however, admits the newborn to the Church after the rite, not upon believing. What faith does a baby have?<sup>309</sup>

*The rite of conversion to Christianity differs from the one used in the mysteries.* Christians wanted to differentiate themselves. Both groups immersed to wash away sins and celebrated the Eucharist. Christians had no temples, as the mystics did. Christian conversion at times occurred on a mass scale, and long individual rites of initiation were impractical. Christians were not the first who thought of adapting the mysteries to mass use. Philo condemned the mysteries, writing that if they were true, they concealed some knowledge which could be useful to everyone.

*The mysteries were a secret teaching, while Christianity was missionary.* Secret Egyptian mysticism opened up in Greece: dramatized shows, theological discussions, many disciples and initiated. Mysteries were presented as transparent parables and written down by Gnostic sects, allowing for an influx of converts. The Church took the next logical step and opened (and later imposed) access to the teaching to anyone. Paul also had some secret doctrine: "Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom",<sup>mcclv</sup> "Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else's scrutiny",<sup>mcclvi</sup> "And so, brothers, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but . . . as infants in Christ. I fed

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<sup>309</sup> Jews circumcise babies because the commandment applies to every descendant. Christianity is based not on ethnicity, but faith, a free choice.

you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food.”<sup>mccclvii</sup>  
Emasculating an idea while expanding the audience is typical of history.<sup>310</sup>

Paul calls himself a Pharisee: according to Josephus, they were close to the Stoics. Paul could identify himself with both the popular Stoics and the Pharisees.

Paul was not a Stoic. Although Justin thought the end of world in fire was a Stoic notion, the apocalyptic doctrine was widespread, and Paul’s acceptance of it does not make him a Stoic.

Stoicism’s main postulate is that the whole universe is but one essence in different forms. That would mean unity of all people with Jesus, regardless of their knowledge and faith, which is incompatible with the Church’s objectives. Unlike the Stoics, Paul says that unity with Jesus is not inherent but must be reached through faith.

A similar doctrine entered mainstream Judaism sixteen centuries later, when Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Hassidism, convinced the flock that God may abide in people or just about anywhere.

Leaning to Gnosticism, Paul is compelled to pit spirit against body. The Hebrew Scriptures dwell on the impropriety of the purely temporal way, but the antithesis is the way of Torah, keeping the commandments and leading a righteous life. Nothing implies rejecting the body, only some realistic and practical checks on bodily impulses, restrictions usually included in secular legislation. Judaism fosters a full life in the world, governed by the commandments, not rejection of the world (Paul) or struggle with it (Gnosticism).

The Bible usually speaks of the soul as an allegory of a living being, not a body/soul dichotomy.<sup>mccclviii</sup> Discussions of distinctions between body and spirit entered Jewish culture as allegories (bodily = life without the Law; spiritual = life under the Law), void of independent theological content.

Elements of many concepts teem in Paul, like the Stoic all-pervading universal spirit, mystical concept that all the initiated unite with the divine spirit, that almost all members of Gnostic sects receive the Holy

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<sup>310</sup> Though mysteries officially penetrated Judaism only in the eleventh century with kabbalah, the term is surprisingly Hebrew. Hebrew root *str* refers to secret, and derivative form *mstr* specifically means mystery. The root is related to the name Esther, whose enigmatic book—the only biblical book unconcerned with God—will be the only sacred text read in the messianic era. Esther is, of course, Astarte.

Spirit. In any case, the Pauline “common spirit” is far from the Spirit of God in Judaism, which is bestowed rarely and only individually, but also depends little on man’s search for righteousness and wholly on God’s will.

Paul speaks of the spirit which corresponds to *ruah*, not *shekinah*, the divine presence. *Shekinah* abides in a definite territory, like the Temple. *Ruah* can be sent only to an individual person, except during the messianic era, when it will indwell all Israel. *Ruah* is connected with external manifestations, particularly revelations, which Paul explains by the Holy Spirit. *Shekinah* is passive in relation to man, while *ruah* is active and elicits immediate action.

Paul’s *pneuma*—all Christians in the spirit and the spirit in them—has little in common with *ruah*. *Pneuma* pervades the whole world and may be personified, as in Jesus. *Ruah* is inaccessible to most, descends briefly upon the prophets, does not pervade the world, and does not allow itself to be indwelt.

Greek doctrines penetrated into the rabbinic texts long after Paul, but is it possible to compare Maimonides’ careful “binding” of Greek philosophy to Jewish doctrines with Paul’s contradictory mixture?<sup>311</sup> When the prophets and pseudepigrapha describe Israel’s inclination to sin, they do not conceive of a sinful body and a pure spirit. They hammer on the evil in the heart. No dualism: the Israelites are malicious both in heart (soul) and body. Both heavenly—“Love God with all your heart”—and wanton—“Their hearts are far from me”<sup>mcccclix</sup>—thoughts come from the heart. The Jewish largely poetic concepts of body and soul are not dualism, where the body is always sinful, the spirit always pure.

Judaism has never expected men to abandon evil inclinations (*yzer ha-ra*) but rather to control them with the Law. A man cannot escape evil thoughts, but he can confine their influence to a socially acceptable degree by keeping the Law. Paul unrealistically sought to abandon evil thoughts. Spirit and body are different essences (unlike good and evil inclinations in the heart) and do not come into contact, *ergo* cannot struggle.

The essence which enlivens the sinful body is sinful by definition. The spirit is pure by definition and thus cannot rule sinful flesh. “Man choosing” between soul and body can be neither one nor the other but something above both. Paul ignores the need for the third essence which can establish the priority of spirit or body.

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<sup>311</sup> Figuring out a doctrine in the mesh is mere speculation, and requires assigning Paul the critical approach and knowledge of the modern theologians. But Paul did not know even Septuagint.

Faced with the Greek culture that exalted the body, Paul postulated that the flesh is not sinful itself but is the abode of sin.

Paul lacks a coherent “body/soul” concept. At times, he speaks of the carnal and the spiritual as coexisting hypostases. At others, he says that only death delivers from the flesh and gives life in the spirit: “Both attract me: I wish to get free and to be with Christ, as it is by far better; and to remain in flesh is more needed by you.”<sup>mcccclx</sup> At still others, he requires only an allegorical death: “In the same way, my friends, you have died to the law through the body of Christ .... in order that we may bear fruit for God.”<sup>mcccclxi</sup>

Both Judaism and Paul have a concept of good and evil, righteousness and sin, as does any culture. But Paul and the Jews mean different things by good and evil. The Jews mean keeping the commandments versus neglecting them; Paul means faith in Jesus versus disbelief. The Jewish quest to control reaction to sinful thoughts and Paul’s unrealistic hope of escaping them are different, as are the Jewish belief that sinful thoughts come from God and Paul’s that they come from the devil.

Paul dwells long on Christians as Christ’s body, Christ in man and man in Christ. The tradition treats Jesus as an allegory of the Church to establish the unity of the Church with Jesus and of Christians with the Church. Paul, however, does not even hint at the future institutional Church. He uses the word in the sense of *congregation*.

Christians are ostensibly so close to Jesus, they experience the crucifixion and resurrection with him. Ecstatic Christians convince themselves they feel Jesus’ physical pain. Paul meant something quite different, the doctrine of the communion of the consecrated, personified in Jesus. Luther called the Gnostic communion of a human with the all-pervading spirit *individualism*, meaning that each person is connected with the divine individually, without ecclesiastical mediation.

Davies argues from the biblical description of the Passover celebration: “You shall tell your child on that day, ‘It is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt.’”<sup>mcccclxii</sup> *I* and *me* are all Israel. Yet to feel solidarity with one’s nation is one thing, while unity with God is another. Before the Hassidism, Judaism did not know the latter, a characteristic of Gnosticism. Feelings of group solidarity are common. Paul goes farther and includes God.

Essene writings use a strange term, “the sanctuary of people” or “the sanctuary made of people.”<sup>mcccclxiii</sup> That is probably a substitute for the Temple, which the Essenes thought full of abominations. They mean the final, eternal temple. Hence a logical chain: the Temple> sanctuary of people> communion of the saints> Christian congregations> Church. A purely Christian concept replaces a purely Jewish one.



The apologists say Paul expected the Second Coming soon, promising almost immediate resurrection. Hardly so. Paul was pragmatic, knowing that he had invented many concepts. He was aware there is little, if any, authentic material in Christianity, and no indications of the end of days. He only hinted at it for propaganda. Paul was building Church, not preparing communities of enthusiasts for apocalypse.

Paul speaks of resurrection as a mystical experience gained through faith in Jesus, a Gnostic approach slightly removed from Hellenism where the focus is usually on initiation instead of allegorical resurrection. In Greek theology spiritual resurrection occurs at death, when the soul continues its serene existence. There is nothing in common with the Pharisaic concept of resurrection for judgment on the last day. Even the Gospels say it differently: "I will raise them up on the *last* day."<sup>mccclxiv</sup>

Paul seldom mentions *Logos* and Wisdom, hardly an evidence of his indifference to Greek doctrines. He was establishing a new religion and needed to keep it from disappearing in other cults. The use of *Logos* brings Christianity perilously close to Hellenism, and Paul abandoned it. After Christianity was consolidated, John could rhapsodize about *Logos*.

Besides, Paul was not fluent in the complicated notions of *Logos* to argue with local philosophers. He did better at simple missionary concepts, like redemption and salvation, and especially like the spirit, since the term was sufficiently vague, "the spirit of Christ, God, life-giving."

Paul says those who accept Jesus as Messiah will be saved. Dan7 introduces the faithful remnant, but does not exclude Jews. The saints occupy a special position, but who they are is not apparent. They are likely not the Messiah's followers: the saints sit before God,<sup>mccclxv</sup> while the Son of Man ascends only later<sup>mccclxvi</sup> and separately "with the clouds."

Paul says that Jesus redeemed other people's sins by Jesus, but his doctrine of merit does not stop there. He writes that the patriarchs' merits will save Israel,<sup>mccclxvii</sup> not Jesus' sacrifice. The doctrine of merit is a vulgar invention of sinners whose only option was an appeal to their ancestors.

Universal redemption by Jesus in no way resembles the Jewish doctrine of merit. The pseudepigrapha and the late rabbinic tradition<sup>312</sup> affirm that the righteousness of a few, usually the patriarchs, can save many in Israel, an idea which may have appeared to offer some hope of salvation for notoriously evil Israelites. Similarly, some Jews were worthy to receive the gift of prophecy, but failed because of Israel's corporate sinfulness.

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<sup>312</sup> Note how the fringe view gradually penetrate normative speculation.

In Judaism the doctrine is a metaphor, not a guarantee of salvation based on Jewish nationality. The goodness of some favors the nation but does not guarantee that everyone will inherit eternal life. The merits of individual members affect the attitude of the whole community. An abyss separates that and Paul's concept of guaranteed redemption in Jesus for all Christians.

Asking God not to annihilate the Hebrews for worshipping the golden calf, Moses says, "Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, . . . how you swore to them by your own self, saying to them, 'I will multiply your descendants.'" <sup>mccclxviii</sup> Moses asks God to grant clemency in a particular instance, not to redeem Israel's future sins by her forefathers' merits.

" . . . and through me and my brothers to bring to an end the wrath of the Almighty that has justly fallen on our whole nation." <sup>mccclxix</sup> The speaker does not mean that his death will bring redemption but that Israel has suffered enough. The Jews showed their faithfulness to God with the Maccabean revolt, so his anger may cease—for now, not for previous or future Jews or all nations. The Jews earned pardon by their deeds, not by believing in some redeemer.

The doctrine of merit informs 4Maccabees, though not so sweepingly as in Paul: "Let our punishment suffice for them [the people]. Make my blood their purification, and take my life in exchange for theirs," <sup>mccclxx</sup> "They having become, as it were, a ransom for the sin of our nation. And through the blood of those devout ones and their death as an atoning sacrifice, divine Providence preserved Israel." <sup>mccclxxi</sup> 4Macc is a nonauthoritative, Hellenized book, full of suffering, martyrdom, and human atonement. Some passages could not come from a Jew, for example, "to paint the history of your religion as an artist might." <sup>mccclxxii</sup> Judaism forbids images, and a Jew could not write approvingly of artistry. Reverence toward God is compared to athletic victory, <sup>mccclxxiii</sup> improper since Jews avoided Greek sport events, where sacrifices to pagan deities were offered.

Ezekiel rejected the doctrine of merit: "The righteousness of the righteous must be reckoned to him only, and the evil of the evildoer must be reckoned to him only." <sup>mccclxxiv</sup> Though the statement is evidence of dispute, merit is rejected explicitly. Rabbi Pinchas said, "Thus says the Lord, 'Do not hope for the angels and saints. They have no authority to intercede for you. Hope for me; I am your Father.'" <sup>mccclxxv</sup> Jews believed that a saint (*zaddik*) works only for himself. His merits cannot save others. Past merits are an argument, but not panacea: "If a man does not do good, he cannot count on the beneficences of his fathers." <sup>mccclxxvi</sup> The quotation from the Midrash, the latest part of the tradition, reflects the winning view. The commonly accepted chronology shows the dispute lasted more than a thousand years, at least from Ezekiel to the Midrash.

Even John the Baptist denied the doctrine of merit: "Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham."<sup>mccclxxvii</sup>

The doctrine of merit is essential to Christianity: one person, Jesus, redeems the sins of many. Paul cooked it up without meaningful arguments. He starts with the customary Jewish concept of redemption, but changes the meaning of the term. Judaism requires a personal appeal to God, to righteousness. In Christianity, matters are determined, with future sins redeemed by faith in Jesus. If faith leads to righteousness, then a believing Christian is rarely encountered.

Wholesale redemption by Jesus was not sufficient for the Roman Catholic Church. The concept of purgatory arose from the doctrine of merit but not Jesus' merit. The Roman Church claimed a pool of merit earned by the saints and offered them to offset the deeds of sinners in purgatory. For some consideration, usually money, the monks prayed and fasted people out.

The Church's commercial interests prevailed over the concept of Jesus' redeeming all Christians. Following it, the Church would have to admit that Eucharist is sufficient for salvation. The doctrine of purgatory rendered the salvation power of Jesus' crucifixion insufficient. The concept of purgatory is not entirely alien to Judaism. Judas Maccabeus brought offerings for the sins of those who had just been killed<sup>mccclxxviii</sup>.

The Roman Catholic Church developed indulgences from the doctrine of the merits of the saints. Theoretically, an indulgence was permission to forego a long and dangerous pilgrimage to Palestine or somewhere else to pay for sins. In return for payment, the Church applied merits from the saintly pool to the sinner, and Roman friars prayed and fasted, and sometimes made pilgrimage. Common friars did what neither the redeeming power of Jesus nor the merits of the saints could.

Paul would have to copy the works of Greek mystics, supplement them with records of Eleusinian rites and excise the references to the Hebrew Scriptures for apologists to recognize his direct drawings from Hellenism. Pauline doctrine sometimes resembles Jewish sectarian mysticism, but not normative Judaism.

Christian tradition, in its turn, has considerably changed Pauline doctrine. The plethora of demons, the imminent eschaton, individual cognition of God, spiritual resurrection, law based on initiation and faith, and Jesus' conquest of cosmic forces<sup>mccclxxix</sup> all disappeared together with much more.

## ***Paul on the Law***

Paul adapted himself to his audience, offering religion without the Law to Gentiles and with it to Jews. Whether that was his invention or he followed James, who released only the Gentiles, is an open question.

At times, Paul paints keeping the Law as virtue: "Circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision has become the uncircumcision."<sup>mcclxxx</sup> But consider the following:

"But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive...."<sup>mcclxxxi</sup> Paul calls the Law "the ministry of death."<sup>mcclxxxii</sup>

"Do we then throw the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law."<sup>mcclxxxiii</sup> Either Paul shifts his ground all the time, or he means "the law of faith, belief in Jesus' resurrection." If so, the notion is senseless: faith strengthens faith.

"Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision."<sup>mcclxxxiv</sup> Paul accommodates the audience. Witness: "If you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no benefit to you."<sup>mcclxxxv</sup>

"To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews . . . . To those outside the law I became as one outside the law . . . so that I might win those outside the law."<sup>mcclxxxvi</sup> What true conviction? What is real, not mimicry? Could such frank admission be addressed to the whole congregation? Probably some later writer is explaining Paul.

The Church soon recognized the impossibility of life without rules and religion without deeds and pushed Paul aside. All the rules in Christianity, however, are arbitrary. Paul rejected all the commandments, the apostles, some of them; the Church came to make ethical demands only; but Jesus in the Gospels urges keeping Pharisaic Law in full. The "Christian way of life" is tantamount to practicing basic ethical values and unrelated to religion.

Many Christians believe they observe the Ten Commandments. How about, "You shall not bow down to an idol in the form of anything . . . that is on the earth beneath," and revering icons and statues of Jesus and Mary? Or, "observe the Sabbath day"?

Jeremiah prophesied that a new covenant will be established in the messianic era, and the Torah will abide in people's hearts.<sup>mcclxxxvii</sup> Keeping the Law becomes spontaneous. If Paul releases his hearers from the Law, then his audience is not inclined to keep the commandments at all, and the Torah is certainly not in their hearts.

The evidence in Acts that Paul kept Law himself is untrustworthy. Keeping the Law among Gentiles would have been almost impossible. He saw the Law as damnation, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”....”<sup>”mccclxxxviii</sup> Only the one legally executed was cursed. Jesus was sentenced illegally by the Gentile Pilate. Paul’s argument hinges on Jesus’ being cursed, but then we must assume that Paul thought his execution right and profitable—and that Jesus deserved being cursed.

Paul’s formula lacks logic, since he cannot reason from the Law to the Gentiles. The Law applies only to Law-abiding Jews, not to Gentiles who need no deliverance from it in the first place.

Paul says, Jesus became the curse for Christians as the Law did for Jews. Paul rejects the Law, so by analogy he should have rejected Jesus.

If Christians believe that Jesus was condemned according to the Law, and it was beneficial to humanity, then the Law is good. The Law is the whole Torah, not only the commandments. To break the Law is to reject the Torah and Abraham’s blessing, which Paul highjacks for the Gentiles.

Early Christians explained the reasoning behind abandoning the Law variously. The Epistle of Barnabas offers a popular argument: the Law is a mystical allegory of Jesus and Christianity. How offensive that is to the generations before Jesus who kept the Law only to make way for him! The mystical interpretation proved too dangerous for the literalistic Church, since it endangered its monopoly on Gospel interpretation. Other Christians asserted matter-of-factly that Jesus’ advent ended the Law. Why? The attempts to find any reasonable confirmation in the Bible proved futile.

At one point, release from the Law was an exception for Jesus. The disciples of John the Baptist asked Jesus, “ ‘Why do . . . your disciples . . . not fast?’ And Jesus said to them, ‘The wedding guests cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and *then* they will fast.’ ”<sup>”mccclxxxix</sup>

Paul said to Felix, “I worship the God of our ancestors, believing everything laid down according to the law.”<sup>”mccxc</sup>

What exactly were Christians released from? Why does Paul abandon circumcision and kosher food, yet forbid adultery and murder? Because the observance of *kashrut* and circumcision are specific, while ethical norms are not strictly defined and their violations are hard to prove.

The Judaic law is built on love’s practical quality. The tradition numbers thirteen manifestations, *middoth*, of God. Only one—anger—is not related to grace and is shown only to idolaters. The Torah requires mercy to enemies, slaves, and foreigners. The Jewish society is based on

pragmatic religious cleanness and forbearance. “The Lord is good to all,  
and his compassion is over all that he has made.”<sup>mcccxc</sup>

## Judas

Unlike the synoptics, John calls not Judas but his father Iscariot, Simon from the city of Kerioth.<sup>mcccxcii</sup> A father's full name was used if he was famous; usually only his proper name became the surname. *Kerioth* is a generic word, *cities* in Greek. Judas' father name is considerably similar to that of the enigmatic Simon from Cyrene who carried Jesus' cross.

Even disregarding the miracles, having followed Jesus and listened to his sermons, Judas could not but regard him as a prophet, at least that he was important. Knowing that, would Judas hand him over for a handful of change? John felt the need to explain away the problem and pictured Judas as a money-hungry thief.

Judas' betrayal was symbolic: Jesus was not hiding; he could have been tracked down without Judas' help. Judas might be suspected of betrayal because of the sudden death.

Jesus promised the apostles that they would judge the twelve Israeli tribes.<sup>mcccxciii</sup> Judas' defection raised the problem of the apostles' number, corresponding to Israeli tribes.

The Acts relates choosing a new apostle after Judas' death.<sup>mcccxciv</sup> The apostles did not seek a replacement for Judas while he was alive. ScJm2 speaks about the twelve disciples immediately after Jesus' crucifixion. The Didache reports the same number, and Paul has no credible version of the Judas story, all of which points to the betrayal as a later invention.

The Alexandrian Christian sect of Cainites worshipped Judas because through him the prophecy was fulfilled. Jesus himself has sent Judas to the priests.

Witness the presentation of Judas in the Gospel of John. Originally, the narration went, "Judas Iscariot... said, 'Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to poor?'"<sup>mcccxcv</sup> He seems reasonable and decent even in the late Gospel. But look at the interpolations: "(the one who was about to betray him)"<sup>mcccxcvi</sup> and "(He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief.)"<sup>mcccxcvii</sup> The inserts are so obviously out of context that modern Christians put them in parentheses.

Papias attributes to "Judas the traitor"<sup>mcccxcviii</sup> the most characteristic trait of Judas Thomas: doubtfulness. The two may be related.

Could it be that Jesus entrusted the difficult mission of delivering him to trial to Judas Thomas, his closest disciple? Was the image of Judas, positive for some and negative for others, split in the texts into Iscariot and Thomas to reflect both attitudes? When the authors could have chosen any

name for the culprit, both the most authoritative and the most despised apostles have the same name.



### **Thomas**

The late date of Matthew's list of apostles is indicated by the fact that Judah Thomas Didymus is called Thomas. But his name is Judah, while Thomas and Didymus mean *twin* in Hebrew and Greek, respectively.<sup>313</sup> The other apostles' names and nicknames are given properly. The author of the insert evidently did not know Hebrew.

The Acts of Thomas call him Jesus' twin. A Judah is mentioned among Jesus' brothers.<sup>mcccxcix</sup> Not impossibly, they were twins or looked alike, explaining the "resurrection."

Not impossibly, Judah Thomas was Jesus. Having escaped execution but declared dead, Jesus could present himself as his own twin and leave Judea to preach in Syria or India.

Josephus mentions Judah the Galilean, founder of a new, unusual sect. A number of reasons suggest Christian authorship of the text and that it actually tells about their own sect. Early Christians may have called their leader Judah and ascribed his ideas to Jesus later, perhaps in the Gospel of [Judah] Thomas. There might be disagreement about the name, some calling him Judah, others, savior, Yeshua, Jesus.

### **Matthew**

Matt9:9 "Jesus . . . saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And he got up and followed him."

Lk5:27 "He . . . saw a tax collector named Levi . . . . And he got up, left everything, and followed him."

Luke could have added *left everything* to Matthew or Matthew could have withdrawn the extravagant phrase. Most probably, it was added to Luke late, since acute Luke would not miss the blatant contradiction: two verses later, the penniless Levi foots the bill of a great banquet.

The identification of Levi and Matthew stems only from the similarity of two Gospel episodes which use different names. Conflation is a risky way to coordinate textual inconsistencies. The texts do not support one another and could refer to different stories. The authors of Matthew and Luke could both have used the legend of a converted tax collector, even if there was some confusion about his name. In the Slavonic NT he is called Matthew-Levi to eliminate the discrepancy.

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<sup>313</sup> Another possibility is that this Judah came from the Greek city of Didyma, and later his nickname was translated as Thomas.

The Gospel to Hebrews 5 mentions Levi-Matthias, identifying Matthias and (Levi)-Matthew. Perhaps Matthew is the Matthias chosen to replace Judas Iscariot.<sup>med</sup> Late tradition knew of the evangelist Matthew, a disciple of Jesus, but he was not on the list of apostles. The author of Acts included him instead of Judas Iscariot. The Gospel editors chose another way, substituting Matthew for Levi.<sup>314</sup> Thus the evangelist Matthew got his earthly occupation and life story.

There appeared two Matthews: one—Jesus’ disciple (in the Gospel), another—added after Jesus’ death (in the Acts). To clear the issue, Acts’ Matthew was renamed Matthias.

As the apostles’ status grew over time, Christians did not want to “lose” the apostle Levi, and a number of manuscripts identify him with the unimportant<sup>315</sup> Thaddeus, “Lebbaeus [Levi], who is called Thaddeus.”<sup>medi</sup> In the late corrections, Levi appears alongside Matthew, indicating they were two different men.

By the same process, Luke replaced Thaddeus with the better-known Judah son of James.

*Matthew* might be not a name but a distortion of *mathetes*, Greek for *disciple*.

## **Peter**

Matt16:15–18 “[Jesus] said to them [apostles], ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.’ And Jesus answered him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! ... And I tell you, you are Peter [*rock*], and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.’”

The question is senseless, unless Jesus asked how the disciples respond to locals’ inquiries about him. The disciples decided long ago, and in John they knew immediately that Jesus is messiah. They also knew Jesus is neither John, nor Elijah resurrected.

Simon is called the *rock* just before he denies Jesus. Paul also accuses Peter of hypocrisy: he kept the Law only when it suited him.<sup>medii</sup>

Jesus promised to build “my church” on “this rock.” What did Jesus mean by building the church? A new religion? A new temple? A new sect? He offered none of those. Note the “my” instead of *God’s* to prove the late insertion. The NT abounds with interpolations pro- and contra-Peter.

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<sup>314</sup> Luke mentions Levi before Matthew replaces him on the list of apostles.

<sup>315</sup> Levi has his own moral story, while Thaddeus is not mentioned in the Gospels.

Mt16:19 “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

At Mt18:18 Jesus promises the same power to all Christians. The source is a Jewish liturgy pronounced over new members of the Sanhedrin—“Whatever you proclaim unclean is prohibited, and whatever you proclaim clean is permitted”—related to the rabbis’ judicial and scriptural authority.

*Bind* (tighten) and *loose* (allow) might refer to more or less strict interpretation of the Law.<sup>mcdiii</sup> Tying and untying the knots of the law is Jewish idiom.<sup>mcdiv</sup> Peter could have been the leader, founder, or theologian of the author’s sect and required such credentials. Possibly the insert came after the writing of Acts where Peter abandons the kosher food commandment to substantiate his decision.

The metaphor *keys to heaven* recalls the common Jewish metaphor of *keys* as *comprehension*. Jesus accused Pharisees of locking the kingdom of heaven. Jesus promises Peter knowledge which would elevate him spiritually and allow him to interpret the holy books.

Jesus calls Simon *blessed*. Matt19:17: “There is only one who is good [blessed],” and that is not Peter.

Matt14:33 “And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, ‘Truly you are the Son of God.’” Not only Peter called Jesus divine, and Jesus exceptional praise in Matt16:15-18 is misplaced. Even after the Peter’s declaration, the disciples behave surprisingly normally toward Jesus.

Back to the Matt16, “The gates of Hades will not prevail” is enigmatic. The suggestion that Christians will not go to the hell for sinners is unlikely, because Hades was not especially a place for sinners. It probably means that Christians will not die, which raises the possibility that the episode or at least part of it is early, since Paul had already run across people upset by the broken promise of eternal life in this world. It might be a retroactive attempt to shift the blame for the broken promise to Jesus.

The term may come from the Essenes whose literature depicts a city on a rock cliff (Jerusalem) which enigmatically cannot be uprooted by the gates of hell, probably enemies or sins.<sup>mcdv</sup>

In early Christian tradition, Jesus was called the *stone*, “the stone . . . rejected by mortals,” “living stone.”<sup>mcdvi</sup> Only when Christians no longer had to defend Jesus’ status, was this description applied to Peter.

Paul knew the apostle Simon Cephah<sup>316</sup> but was unaware of the nickname’s connotation when he calls Jesus the *rock*.<sup>mcdvii</sup>

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<sup>316</sup> Hebrew for the *rock*, Peter.

In Jn1:42, Jesus renames Simon *Peter* when he calls him to be an apostle, not during the later episode of Matt16. Ebi2 also indicates that Simon was nicknamed Peter when Jesus called him.

The word might mean palm branch, related to Davidic descent. Jesus thus promised to advance Peter as next leader of the sect. The name *Peter* could refer to territory. Though not widespread among Jews, place-names often identify New Testament figures: Jesus of Galilee, Simon of Cyrene, Mary of Magdala, and so on. There is an ancient Nabataean town called by Greeks Petra, a flourishing town, a prestigious place of origin. The name is not accidental: according to legend, Moses struck water from rock there. The place is full of rocks. The original Simon of Petra may have become a proper name. The allusion to Peter's house in Capernaum is not credible. In John Jesus meets Peter outside Galilee. Recalling the Essene roots of apostolic celibacy, mention of Peter's family could have been intended as a slander. Simon could have been born in Petra and moved to Capernaum later. Medieval maps show a Petrea between Judea and Egypt.

wherein Judaism, God is called the *Rock* of salvation and creation.<sup>medviii</sup> Other meanings include *a stumbling block*. Contrary to the common opinion, Abraham was not called a rock: "Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug. Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you."<sup>medix</sup> The metaphors of rock and quarry are related to man's creation in God's image.

Another sense of the *rock* is *stumbling block*: "You shall not . . . put a stumbling block before the blind,"<sup>medx</sup> that is, tempt the ignorant. "The man cannot understand the Torah before it has become his stumbling block."<sup>medxi</sup> In Jewish tradition the *stumbling block* is Satan,<sup>medxii</sup> "the rock of temptation." Jesus calls Simon Satan when he tempts him not to submit to crucifixion. Simon's detractors could have sarcastically called him that the *Rock*. In due course, the name was shortened, its meaning forgotten and given the new connotation: cornerstone of the Church.

Was there a Gnosticizing dispute between Jesus and Satan about rescuing people, in the spirit of Job: "Simon, Simon, listen! Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail."<sup>medxiii</sup> The saying might be related to the parable of sower:<sup>medxiv</sup> some seeds fell on the road and were trampled, some fell into shrubs and were smothered, some fell on good soil, while some—on the *rock* and did not sprout.

Peter could be allegorically called *rock*, on which the seeds of Jesus' teaching fell and did not sprout. Or, "The ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe only for a while and in a time of testing fall away."<sup>medxv</sup> With the loss of this tradition, new meaning was attached to the rock, the Church's foundation, contradicting the accumulated criticism of Peter.

Translation of *Peter* as *rock* proceeds from the assumption that the word is Greek. But *Cephar*, Hebrew for *rock*, could be a reverse translation, rationalization, not the original name. *Peter* is perfectly meaningful in Hebrew: *firstling*, the first Christian, bishop or disciple. Because the Hebrew word *Peter* has a homophone in Greek, Gentiles misinterpreted it as *rock*.

Simon and Peter may have been different people altogether. 1Cor15:7 “[Jesus] revealed himself to Cephas, then to the twelve . . . . Then to James, also to all apostles . . .” Paul distinguishes between the twelve disciples, including Simon, the apostles, and Cephas.

The tradition arrays Peter alongside Paul, who severely criticized him. Peter and Paul were often in conflict. Both appealed to the Gentiles.<sup>mcxvi</sup> Clement praised Peter and criticized Paul in that regard. In Saint Mark Cathedral in Venice, Paul is shown kneeling before Peter.

Catacomb frescoes, the earliest extant Christian art, show Peter with a gray beard. Iconographic conventions appeared much after the fourth and the fifth centuries when the frescoes were painted. Peter did not live longer than the other disciples, but only he is elderly, even in paintings where the young Jesus is also present.

Legend says Peter lived to a great old age, yet why is he old even in paintings of events which took place in his prime? Peter is thought to have been executed in 68 C.E. and would have been young about 30–34. The Sistine Chapel fresco shows a young Jesus handing the keys of the kingdom to an old, wise-looking Peter. In antiquity, there was no artistic convention of depicting the authoritative people old; Apollo, Jesus iconographic prototype, is always youthful.

Peter seems out of place among the apostles. He is often criticized; in paintings, he looks different from the other disciples. Probably, the figure of Peter is based on some other ancient personage. The statue of Peter in the Vatican resembles Jupiter. The cock, an icon of Peter, often alluded to priests or oracles. White cock was prominent in Pythagoreanism.

The importance of Peter either as deity or famous prophesying priest explains why he, against all odds, was picked to recognize Jesus as the Son of God. The Gospel account is strained: ignorant, weak, even treacherous, Peter plays the central role. The editor needed a compelling reason to choose Peter.

Which cult did Peter come from? The story of Jesus giving him the keys of heaven was made up to link Peter with *keys*. The arch keyholder was Mithra, whose keys symbolized judgment, resurrection, and entrance to the heavenly domain. Christianity often borrowed other deities, and converted them into the saints (St. Bacchus, St. Buddha, for example). Early Christians could similarly incorporate Mithra in their religion as an apostle.

Peter coming from another cult also makes sense of Paul calling himself the only apostle to the Gentiles, though Peter is reported preaching to them, too. For later Christians, all pagans were alike, but not so earlier. The Mithraists formed a church separate from other Gentiles. Paul was perhaps the first to address the Gentiles at large, while Peter addressed only the Mithraists. The Mithraist connection relates well to the fact that the legalized Church inherited much Mithraist property, including its buildings, hierarchical system, and perhaps the priests themselves.

The tradition that Peter was old could have appeared because he *was* old—though not one of the apostles. Paul wrote, “To Cephas, then to the twelve,” distinguishing between them. Mark wrote similarly: “But go, tell his disciples *and* Peter.”<sup>mcdxvii</sup> The nicknaming episode could have been invented to link apostle Simon and Peter. Peter and Paul are commonly portrayed together because they were not among Jesus’ disciples.

An early connection of Peter with Rome, a center of Mithraism, may appear in the Mandaean Book of John. The Mandaeans migrated to Mesopotamia in the first century C.E. They hated Jesus and called him by three names plus the epithet Messiah: Yeshu, Paulis, and the Roman. No other witness ties Jesus to Rome, and deriving *Paulis* from the Persian for *deceiver* is a stretch, since the Mandaeans did not assimilate and still speak their own language twenty centuries later.

Likely the Mandaeans joined Jesus, Paul, and Peter into one figure. A hero with several sobriquets was later taken for a number of different people, and each got his own story.

Jews of the period thought the messiah would appear in Rome, similarly to Moses who was raised at pharaoh’s court. The identification with Rome might be a claim of messiahship.

Unsupported but clarifying is the identification of Simon Peter and Simon Magus, Jesus’ probable competitor for leadership of the Baptist’s sect. Because Magus had many followers, some of whom possibly joined Jesus Christianity later, his image *qua* Peter could claim a central place in the Gospels. The negative attitude lasted, but because Magus’ misdeeds could not be attributed to Jesus’ disciple, new ones were invented, for better or worse.

Magus came to Rome and did so many miracles that he was given a monument. The date of Peter’s death—68 C.E.—could have been chosen to distinguish him from Magus, who died in 67. The Christian-incited riot Suetonius records may refer to Magus, since the Baptist’s sect, to which both Jesus and Magus belonged, was messianic, Christian. Magus had plenty of time—42 to 67 C.E.—to gather a sect. If Magus was the leader of the Roman Christians, then he founded the Church, though Peter got the credit.

Who was Peter's father? In John he is the son of John, while in Matthew, of Jonah. Recall the Gospel writers' attitude toward John the Baptist: he was respected but subsidiary to Jesus. Was Simon Peter the son of John the Baptist?

That correlates with the fact that Simon Peter/Simon Magus succeeded to leadership of the Baptist's sect. In the absence of Simon, Dositheus became leader. According to the tradition, Simon returned and worked miracles, proving himself greater than Dositheus. The same source locates John's sect in Egypt, mother of magic, and no one in the sect would have thought his "miracles" proved divine power. Simon deposed Dositheus for another reason, later explained by his miraculous power: his birthright.

The evangelists insist on an unimportant detail: Peter denied Jesus before the cock crowed. Nowhere else do the Gospels fix time that way. For some reason, Peter was connected to the rooster. One explanation is Peter's role as the herald of Christianity, the bird who calls the dawn. That does violence to the facts, since both James and Paul did more. John the Baptist suits the role of precursor better.

An explanation that Jesus foretold Peter's renunciation before the cock sang is implausible. Why would an insignificant detail be taken out of the context? Peter with cock is depicted lofty and pacified, unlike an apostate. A modern analogy would be depicting Napoleon with watch, proudly hinting at his troops arriving late to Waterloo, causing his defeat, clearly an absurdity. The story of the denial, or at least the cock, seems to be an interpolation aimed at deriding Peter based on his well-known connection with the bird. The cock is an important symbol in many European cultures, particularly Italian, French, and German.<sup>317</sup> The cock was also a symbol of Asclepius—and Jesus' miracles largely consisted of healings.

In Aramaic, *gever* means both *man* and *cock*. Jews practice an ancient ritual of *kaparot* where cocks are sacrificed on the Yom Kippur to atone for each man's sins. Little is known about that rite, but the modern practice of sacrificing one cock for each male and hen for female is unlikely in the antiquity: hens were expensive. Possibly, *kaparot* was practiced with a single rooster for the entire nation. Jewish Christians could view Peter's death in Rome as similar sacrifice.

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<sup>317</sup> The Venetian prohibition on consumption of the like birds: partridges, pheasants, doves, wild roosters might relate to totemism of the cock. While the restriction is often explained by their over-hunting, such concern for nature (on public land, not in private forest) was uncommon.

## ***Pilate***

The name *Pontius Pilate* is odd and does not occur elsewhere. It possibly derives from *pileatus*, *the one wearing the sign of a freed slave*. Yet *pileatus* is not a proper name, either. What Roman prefect would want such a name?

The prefect's office was important. In Rome freedmen occasionally became governors, but usually people from families of high standing. *Pontius* is usually derived from the Roman family of Pontii, but their social status was not high enough to get an ex-slave named viceroy. Another derivation is plausible, from the Latin for *ruler*. Then *Pontius Pilate* becomes roughly "ruler slave," a derogatory epithet, not proper name.

The few mentions of Pilate in Josephus and Tacitus are likely not authentic.



## James

“The disciples said to Jesus, ‘We know that you are going to leave us. Who will be our leader?’ Jesus said to them, ‘No matter where you are, you are to go to James the Just, for whose sake heaven and earth came into being.’”<sup>medxviii</sup> Who was the man Jesus esteemed higher than himself? Jesus’ description is too high-flown for a brother, even in an atmosphere of hyperbolic praise. The evangelist John shows that none of Jesus’ brothers believed in him.<sup>medxix</sup> The Church explains that James converted after Jesus’ death, but Jesus praises him in the Gospels.

The sobriquet “brother of so-and-so” is atypical of Judaism and ancient paternalistic cultures in general.<sup>318</sup> “Brother of Jesus” seems to be an invention, pointing perhaps to membership in a pre-Jesus messianic community. This would explain why, though all Christians called one another *brother*, only James is the *brother of Jesus*.

Jude 1:1 introduces the author as the *brother of James*. *Servant of Jesus Christ, brother of James* most apparently means *Christian of James’ congregation*. Some manuscripts of Acts change the apostle’s name to *son of James* to avoid infringing on *brother of Jesus*. This correction would not be necessary, had Jude been simply a relative of James.

Unreliable Eusebius first identified James the Just with James the brother of Jesus.<sup>medxx</sup> He illogically claims that James received his office from the apostles,<sup>medxxi</sup> though James the Just’s authority was greater than that of the apostles.

James’ authority was immense. Paul carped at Peter, but shied at criticizing James, who undermined Paul’s proselytizing by requiring new converts to keep at least some commandments.

The community’s first leader could have been another James, a famous sectarian from Cephars Sechaniya, mentioned several times in the Talmud—as a disciple of Jesus.<sup>medxxii</sup>

Clement calls James “the head of bishops.”<sup>medxxiii</sup> No brother of Jesus, or anyone who knew him personally, lived long enough to see a developed church, where the title “head of bishops” would mean anything. James must have headed a sect or some important community which existed before Jesus.

Even after the victory of the Roman Church, the genealogies of eastern bishops still ascended to James the Just. Hippolytus relates a different view.<sup>medxxiv</sup> The Naasene Gnostics believed that James the Just

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<sup>318</sup> Only two ossuaries were found during excavations in Israel with inscriptions referring to the “brother of,” one of them, allegedly belonging to James—forged, though it is not clear when.

passed knowledge to Miriam or possibly Magdalene, not to any other disciples or bishops.

The resurrected Jesus “appeared to James, also to all the apostles.”<sup>medxxv</sup> The last phrase can be interpreted against reckoning James among the apostles. Hegesippus notes that James behaved independently from the Christians: he prayed in the Temple alone; the scribes and the Pharisees asked him to dissuade people from following Jesus.<sup>medxxvi</sup>

Peter, James, and his brother John appear in the transfiguration episode.<sup>medxxvii</sup> If the evangelist knew John was James’ brother, he would have known if they were both Jesus’ brothers. Elsewhere, James and John are the sons of Zebedee, while the other James is the son of Alpheus<sup>medxxviii</sup> and not related to Jesus. Thus, neither James Zebedee, nor James Alpheus were likely called “brother of Jesus.” James the Just was not likely the apostle James son of Zebedee, since the former is reported as alive<sup>medxxix</sup> after the latter was executed.<sup>medxxx</sup> Eusebius confirms that they were executed at different times.

When James presided in the community council,<sup>medxxxii</sup> no other apostle is mentioned except Peter, who also possibly belonged to some non-Jesus Christian faction. Further, Jesus’ followers were persecuted in Jerusalem, and no well-known leader would have survived there. That supports the view that James belonged to another messianic congregation, but not that of Jesus. James’ sect was possibly Gnostic, since Gnostic Thomas praises him, unlike the reticent canonical Gospels.

## ***Magdalene***

Although Matt27:56 and 28:7 treat Mary Magdalene as someone already known, she does not appear earlier, which indicates an insert made after the spread of the Gospel of John where she is prominent.

The Talmud reports that Jesus’ “mother was Miriam, the hairdresser” sounds like *Miriam m’gadella nashaya*,<sup>medxxxii</sup> phonetically close to Miriam Magdalene. Since John did not know Hebrew, he took “Miriam-hairdresser” for a new name “Mary of Magdala,” and in due course the figure acquired details.

Mary also obtained territory, the village of Magadan.<sup>medxxxiii</sup> The editors changed it to Magdalan, then Magdala. Besides a home, Mary got lots of notice and even her own Gospel.

As late as the fourth century, neither the Jews who compiled the Talmud and wrote the above passage nor Origen who first corrected the place name in the Gospel knew anything about Magdala. “Magdala” replaced “Magadan” to create the missing region. Christians’ attempts to connect the name *Magdalene* with the fishing village el Mejdal in Galilee are futile.

The place was not known by that name in Jesus' time. Another guess is the Magdolum mentioned in Herodotus, possibly Megiddo.

*Migdal* means *tower* in Hebrew, but no town was called just *tower*; but also some other name, *tower so-and-so*. Jews rarely use geographical markers in their names.

Other women in the Gospels are identified by their relation to a man, a brother, husband, or son. The lack of that in Magdalene's case is suspicious, although women with socially unacceptable professions might want to protect their families.

Women in Jesus' time could not leave the house and follow a teacher. Unrelated men and women did not spend time together. Both the Talmud and the early tradition in Celsus say Jesus' mother was an unmarried woman.

The canonical Gospels do not mention Mary among the twelve, but she enjoyed high authority after Jesus' death in the Gnostic version. The Gnostics preferred Mary for a practical reason: Wisdom, whom they glorified, is female, and could be identified with Mary. The early Gnostics did not deem her wise: in Th114, Jesus promises only to make her the equal of the male apostles. The Gnostics may have played her wisdom up later at the expense of the male apostles, leaders of the competing literalist Church. Miriam the hairdresser may have been Jesus' female companion. Her name could be pronounced differently: Miriam for short, or with *m'gadella nashaya*. That would explain the two Marys, the one without the nickname as Jesus' mother. Because Miriam was somehow connected with Bethany, the third version of her name, Mary of Bethany, was transformed into yet another Mary, the woman who washed Jesus' feet and dried them with her hair, something his female friend could have done but not a stranger.

Almost every god had his goddess. Christians made Magdalene the divine female friend. The triple Mary—Jesus' mother, Bethany, Magdalene—resembles Isis, Osiris' sister, wife, and mother. The image of Mary with a newborn replicates an image of Isis. Statues in Egypt were often painted black, the dominant skin color among southern Egyptians, and there are so-called *black Madonnas*, black statues of Mary. Yet those who made the black statues may have recalled a tradition of Mary's origin in Egypt. According to Jewish tradition, Jesus spent his youth in Egypt learning magic where he might have met a black lass.

Mary's transformation from Jesus' consort, as in the Gnostic Gospel of Philip, into a sinner and possibly a harlot in the Gospel of John shows the early Church's negative attitude toward the female disciple.

The tradition of Mary as a harlot may be interesting. The roots of ancient temple prostitution are not clear, but it was widespread, from the exceedingly old Babylonian *Epic of Gilgamesh* to Middle Eastern temples of Astarte and to Greece. In many legends, harlots save heroes or lure evil

opponents into a trap. In Simon Magus' sect, Simon's companion was Helen the Harlot. Magdalene could have had the same function.

### **Territorial cognomens**

Magdalene brings up the problem of the origin of names which indicate territory—Mary of Magdala, Simon of Cyrene, Jesus of Nazareth. Such names are rare in Jewish literature—Rabbi Jose Galilean, James of Cepharsai, who may have been a Christian.

Such names were common in cosmopolitan Christian communities, and they would have avoided nomenclature that tied them to the old religion. Christians often changed their names when converting to the new faith.

Such names would have been handy for the Essenes, who joined the community from all over. In that sense, their congregation was cosmopolitan, too. They may have used distinctive Gospel bynames.

## Christian Borrowings

### *from Judaism*

Systematizing and recording of the Talmudic tradition began in the first and second centuries, but the Mishnah, the oral tradition, was formed earlier over a period of at least two hundred years. The Christian tradition, including the canonical Gospels, was formed in the first four centuries, simultaneously with the main part of the Talmud.

Our ideas about the dating of that period are approximate. The sequence of rabbis in the Talmud is coherent. Their dates are known and may be compared to one another, but the correlation to secular chronology is doubtful.

The volume of the tradition indicates it was not all oral, especially since most male Jews were literate. The Mishnah likely mirrors the state of the Law during Jesus' time accurately enough.

The Jewish tradition was not adapted to adjust to Christianity. The Mishnah was largely recorded before Christianity spread, And the Jews would see no need to bring their interpretation in line with the Christian view. To the contrary, the rabbis would have been quick to avoid any similarity with Christian concepts.

The Talmud does not argue with Christianity on any meaningful scale. Sometimes satirical, sometimes benevolent, the Talmud views the Christians as allies in the Gentile environment.

The absence of references to Christianity in the Mishnah is troubling. Christianity was known by the time the Mishnah was compiled in the second century. Though the rabbis regulated the minute aspects of Jewish social life, they said nothing about the sectarians who had almost become pagans. The urgency of the problem is visible from Gemara, where the issue of regulating the association with *minim* comes up more than once.

This absence of criticism suggests that Christianity was not significant then. Pagan Christianity, disavowing Jewish roots and the law, was almost unknown in Judea and did not spark opposition. Jewish Christians were cut off the synagogues from the early second century with *Sectarians' Blessings* liturgy, parted with non-observant pagan Christians, and were marginalized.

The discussions between the rabbis and sectarians in the Talmud also show that there were no substantial arguments between them. The

sectarians offer an opinion which the rabbi confutes. The formula ran along the lines of, "If someone said this to me, I would have answered as follows." Since no one offered this or that opinion, they put it in the mouth of the sectarians, creating a straw man.

In the second century, Justin argued with Jews who thought the Christians invented Jesus. The Jews then had no authoritative information about Jesus' existence. The rumors reflected in the Talmud appeared later.

The suggestion that Jews were forbidden to associate with sectarians is unlikely. Judea was colonized after Bar Kochba's revolt, and in the new cosmopolitan society such segregation would have been unfeasible.

The mentions of Jesus in the Talmud come from traditions the rabbis heard from Christians. Ordinarily, Talmudic episodes occur against a background, certain rabbis arguing a topic, but the Jesus accounts present naked facts with no context or connection with history. Even the chronologically challenged rabbis who compiled the Talmud could not gerrymander the events of Christianity into the historical framework. The Talmudic accounts of Jesus do, however, differ strikingly from the Gospels, further proof that most of the Jewish Christian written tradition did not survive, though it reached the compilers of Gemara by hearsay.

Jews accepted Matthew's story of the flight into Egypt, but told it differently. B.Sanh107 says Jesus and his teacher fled to Egypt to escape Alexander Janneus' persecution of the Pharisees and returned during the reign of Salome. That explains Jesus' miraculous power, learned in Egypt and brought back with him; his becoming a sectarian, when his teacher rejected him; and Paul's claim that - like Jesus - he was once a Pharisee.

The Talmudic account cannot be reconciled with Christian tradition, since the persecution of the Pharisees took place almost a century earlier. The Jewish Christians, on whose report the Talmudic passages are based, had no idea when Jesus lived.

Most mentions of Jesus and his followers occur in the Babylonian, not the Jerusalem, Talmud. We do not know exactly why Christians were so important in third-century Babylon. Perhaps the Babylonian rabbis were keen to know about the happenings in Judea, including relations with the Christians, whom the local rabbis avoided mentioning. Maybe Peter did settle there, and Babylon was not a code word for Rome.

B.Sanh43 "They hung Joshua on the eve of Pesach." Babylonian rabbis knew the evangelist John's version of Jesus' execution on the eve of Passover.

B.Sanh67 states that Mary's husband was Pappos Ben Jehudah. The Joseph of the Gospels was not yet known, nor even the approximate date of Jesus' birth: Pappos lived in the second century. B. Sanh107 makes Jesus a first century B.C.E. contemporary of Salome.

B.Sanh43 "And the town crier was walking in front of him announcing, 'He will be stoned because he engaged in sorcery, deceived, and led Israel astray. Anyone who can justify him, come out and speak.' As they found no justification to his advantage, they hung him up on the eve of Pesach." Jesus was not hanged to death but rather exhibited to the public after stoning.

The episode is based on the tradition that : the convict is led to the stoning and subsequent hanging by the town crier who calls his name, the charge, and the witnesses for the prosecution. "If anyone knows the grounds to find him innocent, let him come out and speak for his benefit!"<sup>medxxxiv</sup>

Jesus studied magic in Egypt and later used it to demonstrate his power. That probably meant *sorcery*. Deceit, usually a religious charge, was understood very broadly. In Slavonic Josephus, a Pharisee reproaches John the Baptist for deceiving people with his reckless appeals to reject all authority but God's. Even an honest but impractical appeal was deceit. The Gospels do not relate Jesus' words that led to the charge of deceit.

B.Sanh43 "Ulla said: And do you suppose that for [Yeshu Nazirite] there was any right of appeal? He was a beguiler, and the Merciful One has said: You shall not spare, neither shall you conceal him. It was otherwise with Yeshu, for he was near to the kingdom."

This phrase gave rise to two speculative trends: Jesus was either the descendant of David or a relative of the tetrarch. But "kingdom" is the kingdom of Heaven. Jesus may have been considered a mystic, initiated, near the Heavenly domain.

A more prosaic explanation is that Ulla's *kingdom* meant the power of the Roman prefect, which would explain Jesus' coming to Pilate to appeal the Sanhedrin's decision.

Note an interesting peculiarity. Some criminals were executed not in their hometown but in Jerusalem before the festival.<sup>medxxxv</sup> Such was the punishment for amending the scribes' teaching.<sup>319</sup> A certain Joshua was put to death under the law, but the account reports stoning and hanging,<sup>medxxxvi</sup> though the Mishnah prescribes strangulation.

The rabbis did not know the names of the apostles or their number. The same b.Sanh43 mentions the execution of five of Jesus' disciples All

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<sup>319</sup> The crime was hardly formulated before the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E., when Pharisees triumphed.

defended themselves using puns based on the use of their names in the Hebrew Scriptures, and the judges answered them in kind. What attracts attention in this obviously invented episode is that out of the five names, one (Matthai) resembles Matthew, another, Nezer (*offspring*) is usually identified with Andrew (Greek, *of a man*), Toda, can be tenuously related to Thaddeus, while Nekai and Buni have no analogs in the Gospels.

B.Sanh67 attempts to refute the Christian claim that false witnesses accused Jesus before the Sanhedrin. To reveal a deceiver, one who preached a false faith,<sup>medxxxvii</sup> witnesses hid and overheard his offer to turn away from the God of Israel. Ben Stada (“the son of a soldier”), apparently Jesus, stoned and hung in Lydda on the eve of Pesach, is presented as an example. The Talmud reports no other instances of proving a crime that way.

The rabbis, who were not isolated from sectarian Christians, had no reason to arbitrarily set the crucifixion in Lydda. They reflect Christian traditions. When the Church account of events was canonized, the other versions were abandoned.

The tradition of stoning may be authentic. After the victory of Christianity in the fourth century, there was every reason to substitute crucifixion for stoning, to transform Jesus’ death from a shameful to a political event, from death in the hands of a provincial theocracy to execution for challenging the empire. The Talmud says that Sanhedrin ordered execution of Jesus, and does not mention the Romans.

The Talmud and the Gospels treat the Hebrew Scriptures. A study of Christian originality should compare its premises with Talmudic tradition. Other books, like Zohar, though much later than the Gospels, build on the earlier tradition. The Jews of the eleventh century were in much the same position as Christians of the second—small, outlawed, persecuted. Their mentality, attitudes, and Biblical interpretations had every reason to converge.

1Cor7:38 “He who marries his fiancée does well; and he who refrains from marriage will do better.” Rabbi Isaac: “Is what is forbidden by the law not enough for you that you wish to forbid yourselves also other things?”<sup>medxxxviii</sup>

Matt5:44 “Pray for those who persecute you.” King Agrippa: “Nothing will resist a blow more reliably than standing it: the patience of the offended moves the hearts of the offenders.”<sup>medxxxix</sup>

Matt5:40 “And if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well.” Prov25:21–22 “When your enemies are hungry, give them bread to eat, . . . for you will heap coals of fire on their heads, and the Lord will reward you.”



Lk6:38 "Give, and it will be given to you . . . For the measure you give will be the measure you get back." Prov19:17 "Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and will be repaid in full."

Lk18:25 "Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." Prov11:28 "Those who trust in their riches will wither, but the righteous will flourish like green leaves."

Matt5:34 "Do not swear at all." Deut6:13 "By his [God's] name you shall swear." And Ex20:7: "You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God." The two commandments together amount to the condemnation of swearing.

Matt5:5 "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth." Zohar 2:233 "The meek in this world will be marked in the future world."

Matt5:8 "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." Ber. r. 41:11 "God loves those who are pure in heart."

Matt5:13 and B.Bekorot8 "But if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored?"

Matt5:22 "If you are angry with a brother, you will be liable to judgment." Berakot29 "Do not be angry, and you will not bear sin."

Matt5:22 "If you insult a brother, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, 'You fool,' you will be liable to the hell of fire." Derek Eretz Zuta 1 "If you offend your neighbor in passing, you should reckon that you have heavily offended him."

Matt5:28 "Everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Rabbi Simeon Ben Lakish: "You can indulge in lechery with your eyes."

Matt5:39 "If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also." A story says Rabbi Zeira let someone strike him on the cheek. The offender died soon, and the rabbi said he did not punish him.

Matt5:42 "Give to everyone who begs from you." Ketubot68 "The one who closes his eyes at benefaction is like an idolater."

Lk6:28 "Bless those who curse you." Sanh49 "Be among the accursed, not among the cursing."

Matt7:1 "Do not judge, so that you may not be judged." Hillel: "Do not judge the other one before you have the taste of being in his boots."<sup>medxl</sup>

Matt7:3 "Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?" Shemot r. 25 "Do not forbid to others what you permit to yourself."

Matt7:6 “Do not give what is holy to dogs; and do not throw your pearls before swine.” Tan. Behukotai 3 “Do not offer pearls for sale to those who trade vegetables and onions.”

Matt22:30 “For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.” Berakot 17: “In the World to Come, no one eats or drinks . . . . But the righteous sit . . . and delight in the presence of God.” B.Hag 15 “We are taught that there is no sitting, no fuss, no separation. and no association in heavens.”

Matt15:36–38 the feeding of the multitude. 2Kings4:42–44 Elisha fed a hundred with twenty “loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain.” Centuries before Jesus, Elisha raised the dead.

### ***From Hinduism and Buddhism***

Josephus cites Eliezer's speech before the defenders of Masada, which includes statements akin to Hindu beliefs, and alludes to the Hindu concept of the soul. The episode is fiction, but Josephus was confident that even ordinary Jews were familiar with Hinduism by hearsay.

There were plenty of opportunities for cross-pollination. Buddhist preachers lived in first century Alexandria, with its large Jewish population and many scholars. Hinduism was popular at least among the Stoics.<sup>mcidxli</sup> The plain tastes and the Hindu monks' indifference to sufferings were attractive to them. Christianity took a lot from the Stoics.

A thousand years later, Hebrew philosopher Judah Halevi described a Nabataean book as Hindu work.<sup>mcdxlii</sup>

Jesus' origin has some features in common with Krishna's: conception by the spirit; no association with the mother after maturity;<sup>320</sup> birth away from home; flight in the youth (across a river, Jordan and Jumna) from an oppressor; mission as savior of a world lost in a passion for wealth and power. Both have royal descent by tradition. The spirit descends on Krishna after the encounter with the hermit, on Jesus, after meeting John the Baptist, also an anchorite. The trinity mirrors the three hypostases of Hinduism. John's concept of the word and light reflects Hindu notions. Christians address Jesus in the way that Hindus address Krishna: *Lord*. Krishna says *my heaven*, and Jesus, *my kingdom* and the *kingdom of heaven*.

Jesus and Krishna were similarly transfigured before their disciples. Both preached in villages and found support among the common people.

Both valued the love of neighbor most, and Jesus not only marked that commandment out but also considered it practically the only commandment. They urged returning good for evil and glorified meekness. Jesus called men to love their enemies; Krishna defeated King Kansa but forgave and did not kill him.

Both said that only the Son knew God. Jesus proclaimed himself "Alpha and Omega"; Krishna said, "I am the beginning, the middle, and the end of all beings."<sup>mcdxliii</sup> Both religions rejected the law; Paul believed that the baptized are above the Law; Krishna, "In whatever way he leads life, that one lives in God."<sup>mcdxliv</sup>

They appealed to the Pharisees and the Brahmins and to common people differently. Both preached repentance and came to save the world

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<sup>320</sup> Jesus refused to meet his mother and brothers.

from sin (thus Krishna's title Hari, *the one who takes away*). Their closest followers were distinguished for power, though not physical: the spiritual might of Peter the Rock, and the mastery of Arjuna the archer.

Both had two women clinging to their feet: Jesus' two Marys and Krishna's Niqdali and Saraswati. Both forgave a harlot: the unnamed one in John, and Saraswati in the Bhagavad-Gita. In both cases, the women became their stalwarts. They were thought less guilty than those who accused them. The editor of John thought the episode so important that he felt compelled to add it to the completed text of the Gospel. While Hindu culture tolerates whores, Judaism does not, suggesting uncritical borrowing. A woman in Bethany anointed Jesus' feet with oil; a woman asked to rub sandal paste on Krishna's.

Both Jesus and Krishna demanded belief in themselves as the path to salvation. They preached on the banks of rivers, the Jordan and the Ganges. Krishna spoke about the servitude of evildoers, Jesus, about sin's power to enslave. Jesus slept through a storm in a boat, and Krishna played light-heartedly before battle.

Their ways led them ineluctably to a city: Jesus' to Jerusalem and Krishna's to Madhura. Both repeatedly visited the cities before the culmination but were obliged to abandon them. They entered them as spiritual kings.

Both claimed to be eternal. Before battle, Krishna told Arjuna not only about his own eternity but also about eternity in store for everyone through reincarnation. Christianity offers eternal life through participation in Jesus' resurrection but denies reincarnation, a contradiction which necessitated tortured concepts of future resurrection.

When Jesus was born, king Herod wanted to kill him, as King Kansa intended to kill Krishna in the womb; Kansa ordered the murder of all the male babies. Herodias, Herod's wife, wanted to destroy John the Baptist, and Nizumba, Kansa's wife, wanted to murder Krishna. The Baptist's birth story parallels the birth story of Krishna's cousin through his uncle Nanda. The uncle, who takes care of Krishna, may be related to the image of Nicodemus, who buried Jesus.

Jesus voluntarily accepted crucifixion, and Krishna died voluntarily by an arrow. Both thought they must die to convince their opponents. Jesus' disciples did not understand his talk about his pending death, like the women who accompanied Krishna. Women were present at Jesus' crucifixion and at Krishna's assassination. Both said their deaths would be understood only later. Jesus prayed in Gethsemane before his execution, and Krishna did the same before the archers appeared. Brute soldiers insulted both Jesus and Krishna, beat Jesus and stoned Krishna before they

killed them. Though Krishna was killed by arrows, he was bound to the trunk of a cedar—like the crucifixion.

Three arrows pierced Krishna; traditionally, three nails pierced Jesus. The nails are odd, since victims were usually lashed to the cross.

Both Jesus and Krishna died praying to God during an eclipse. An earthquake marked Jesus' death, a storm, Krishna's. Judas hanged himself, and Krishna's assassins fled. Their disciples buried both.

Other religions do not correlate with Hinduism like Christianity does. The correlation's uniqueness suggests direct borrowing rather than common root.

Some stories of Jesus and Krishna agree in the minutest detail and scarcely noticeable parallels, which raise doubts about the possibility of replication without factual parallels. Subconscious processes also cannot explain the detailed correlation. Whether the Christian parallels with Hinduism are deliberate and excellent forgeries or evidence of a revelation received in several religions, belongs to the sphere of faith. Who knows, Jesus could even escape to India, and Krishna's stories are based on Jesus' legends.

In line with the domestic customs, Krishna stresses reincarnation and sexual delight. Borrowing from Hinduism may explain pagan and early Christian odd orgiastic practices. Hinduism treats sexual meditation as return to primeval male/female unity. No reasonable philosophy or religion allows hard drinking, gluttony, or adultery, flourishing in the temples. Only the initiated could participate in orgiastic practices of Hindu Tantra, while the rest should accept the surrogates, like sweets instead of meat. Pagans expanded the delight to everyone.

Buddha appeared in the fifth century B.C.E., and King Asoka began actively propagating Buddhism two centuries later. He sent missionaries to Syria, Egypt, Cyrene, and Macedonia, and Buddhism continued to expand westward almost until the beginning of the common era. The dates relate to the establishment of the Essene sect, the likely founders of Christianity.

Buddhism becomes historically visible only when it entered China. The first translations date from the first or second century C.E., and the fifth century "old translations" of Kumarajiva are contemporary with the formation of the Christian canon. Buddhism first assumed coherent form in the sect of Tendai only in the sixth century, not far from the consolidation of Christianity.

Like Christianity before it acquired official status in the Roman Empire, Buddhism infiltrated Japan for six centuries, but it was not

forbidden and spread from the upper classes to the masses. Unlike Christian history, there are no reports of a ruler adopting the religion of his slaves.

Before his statues appeared, Buddha's abstract symbol was the wheel of Dharma, a circle with eight radial lines, reminiscent of Ezekiel's *mercabah*.<sup>321</sup> One early Christian symbol, a circle divided by lines, is similar. The wheel is depicted in St. Sophia, one of the great early Christian churches. And the Muslims who converted St. Sophia into a mosque left it.

Dharma means *the Way*, as both Jews and Christians call their religions.

In Chinese and especially in Japanese Mahayana Buddhism, deference is centered upon the figures of founders, and Buddha's importance faded. Christians regard Paul's theology more than Jesus's.

Buddha/Enlightenment/light of Wisdom; Jesus/Light/Wisdom—both are triune. Like Jesus, Buddha is the manifestation of a single, transcendent God without form and attributes, of Dharma.

The Gospel writers could not decide whether Jesus was a military or a spiritual Messiah. Asita predicted that Buddha would conquer the world or become a spiritual savior.

Jesus and Buddha were called Savior of the world. Jesus was the *good shepherd*; Buddha said, "All these ignorant, heedless people are my children; I am the only one who can save them."

Hinayana Buddhism reveres its founder as human; Mahayana Buddhism calls him light and savior. Both concepts mingle in Christianity.

Compassion and loving kindness are the cornerstones of Buddha's teaching. In John, Jesus compassionately promises to send the Comforter in his place. Compassionate people obey the commandment to love one's neighbor, which Jesus said was the basis of other commandments.

Faith takes priority over deeds in both religions.

Jesus said his followers can receive his spirit and share his eternal life. The only difference between Buddha and other people is that he has already achieved the highest condition—but so can they.<sup>medxlv</sup>

For both, earthly death was not the end but the main event, a path to nirvana for Buddha and to divinity for the Pauline Jesus.

Paul's teaching of resurrection in a "transfigured" body resembles Hindu reincarnation.

Buddha's mother was Maya, reminiscent of Mary.

In Luke, both of Jesus' parents guarantee his messianic descent; Buddha's mother and father are from royal families.

Maya conceived supernaturally through revelation in a dream. Buddha's father, Shuddhodana, had no children for twenty years. The same happened with the Baptist.

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<sup>321</sup> This is a prominent symbol elsewhere, even in the odd cults, such as the Irish story of the Queen of Tubber Tintye, who slept in a coach whose gold wheels turned continuously.

Jesus' family oddly went to Bethlehem before his birth to be taxed. Before Maya bore Buddha, she went to her parents' city, according to the custom.

Buddha was born on the way in a garden. Jesus was born in a cave or manger. Both were born away from home.

The Gospels do not mention Jesus' father after the childhood narratives. Siddhartha Buddha's mother died soon after his birth.

Two Marys followed Jesus, his mother and Mary Magdalene. Maya's sister with a like name, Mahaprajapati helped tend Buddha.

Three women were near Jesus. The third woman close to Buddha was his wife.

The Magi followed the star. The hermit Asita saw an aura above the castle. Both prophesied glory for the infants.

Buddha's enlightenment occurred on December 8, close to Jesus' traditional birthdate, and exactly the date of Mary's Immaculate Conception.

Jesus died at about thirty-three and began preaching only shortly before. Buddha was enlightened at thirty-five. Sources lack information about what Jesus did before his baptism, creating a gap with his childhood narrative. Buddha, however, knew the worldly pleasures commensurate with being a prince.

Carnal pleasures tempted Buddha. The devil tempted both Jesus and Buddha by offering the entire world—which presupposes a common doctrine of a devil who claims to rule the world bound by evil.

Buddha left his family with the birth of his child. Jesus rejected his relatives. Except for his Essene education, he would have been married and had children. He might leave his family.

Buddha abandoned his kingly heritage and palace. Jesus gave up his place in Heaven to dwell among men.

Both lived by alms, atypical of Judaism but common in Hindu culture.

Buddha lived an ascetic life on the river bank before enlightenment. Jesus prepared to receive Holy Spirit from John the Baptist near the River Jordan. Buddha's exceptionally rigid asceticism can be compared with John's.

Buddha studied different doctrines but remained unsatisfied with them. Josephus tells the same about himself. Recall that Jesus' image relied on Josephus' biography.

Both respected women, a choice unusual in either culture. The status of females was higher in India than in the Middle East, hinting at the Indian origin of the narrative.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus asks a woman for water, which was almost impossible in that culture. Buddha's companions left him when he took milk from a woman.<sup>mcxlvi</sup>

Jesus remained silent during the trial, which was standard behavior in Buddhism. Buddha's disciple Pindola sat silently with his eyes closed before the king who threatened him.<sup>medxlvii</sup>

Lk9:58 "And Jesus said to him, 'Foxes have holes, . . . but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.'" Buddha lived in a forest.

Matt5:36 "You cannot make one hair white or black." Buddhism stresses conditionality: each event arises from a sequence of events. The conditionality degraded into supernatural determinism.

Both criticized wisdom and proclaimed the priority of faith. Buddha's doctrine is reasonable and coherent: "People cannot be saved by relying on their own wisdom, and through faith they must enter into my teaching." In Christianity, faith in the teaching became belief in Jesus' resurrection, and rejection of the merits of wisdom turned into disregard of deeds.

Both spoke of bodily impurity, sinful desires, unclean thoughts.

Their ethical teachings are practically the same.<sup>medxlviii</sup>

They addressed not righteous men but sinners. Like Judaism, however, Buddhism forbids befriending sinners, as Jesus did. The Gospels' accounts of Jesus' communication with sinners might be interpolated to account for Christian practice; associating with sinners would refuse Jesus any following among Jews.

Primitive Christianity refrained from extreme asceticism, unlike the Greek philosophical schools. Buddhism refutes asceticism as another form of attachment: to the life of self-torture. With that in view, another reason for Jesus' criticism of the Pharisees arises: pride in their way of life was a strong attachment which impeded their grasp of the divine.

Both Jesus and Buddha used many parables and addresses *father* and *children*.

A man's house was burning.<sup>medxlix</sup> His children did not want to escape nor did they care about parental persuasion. But the father was persistent, and when he finally offered them gifts, they left the house. It is not clear which of Buddha's promises are "gifts for ignorant children," perhaps some form of salvation. That could be the correct meaning of Jesus' parable of the importunate neighbor<sup>medl</sup> who knocked at the door until he was given bread: a prophet has to persist and, possibly, even entice the people.

The parables of the prodigal son<sup>medli</sup> and of the faithful servant<sup>medlii</sup> correspond to Buddhist sutra.<sup>medliii</sup> When the Buddhist prodigal son returned, he did not know his house. The father recognized him, accepted him as a servant, and gradually elevated him to manager.

Matthew's parable of the hidden treasure<sup>medliv</sup> is similar to a Buddhist parable, where a friend of a drunkard hides a pearl in the drunk's clothes, so he will not be in need when he wakes up. Since the drunk did not know about the jewel, he remained in poverty until he met his friend



again and learned about the treasure.<sup>medlv</sup> Many Buddhist parables about treasure lost and found symbolize returning to one's true essence. The actions of Matthew's hero, on the other hand, may amount to stealing in Jewish Law.

The parable of the sower<sup>medlvi</sup> also has its Buddhist counterpart.<sup>medlvii</sup> Some people are like letters cut in stone; they hold onto anger. Others are like letters drawn in the sand; their anger fades quickly. Still others resemble letters in water, and anger passes them by. Unlike in the Gospel, oblivion is desirable.

Jesus' disciples suggest sending fire on the Samaritan town whose inhabitants rejected them.<sup>medlviii</sup> The city of Kausambi rebuffed Buddha, but he refused to leave and endured their insults.<sup>medlix</sup> Some story like that probably lies behind the Gospel episode, but the author did not want Jesus to look weak.

The Gospels use the allegory of the stumbling block, which could be a distortion of the Buddhist concept of the wrong way: concerned with worldly things, an impure mind leads men to stumble on the uneven road.<sup>medlx</sup>

Jesus asks who his disciples think he is, and they stutter about his various potentials. The Buddhist analog is the story of the blind men trying to describe an elephant.<sup>medlxi</sup>

"You are the light of the world",<sup>medlxii</sup> "The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned."<sup>medlxiii</sup> In Buddhist doctrine, the darkened mind becomes light and dissolves at that moment.<sup>medlxiv</sup>

"Perhaps people think that I have come to bring peace to the world. They do not know that I have come to cast conflict upon the earth: fire, sword, war. For there will be five in a house, three against two and two against three, father against son and son against father, and they will stand alone." The enigmatic text of Th16 may be clarified by, "In order to fulfill their desires, people will fight each other: king with king, . . . parent with child, brother with brother . . . . They will fight and even kill each other."<sup>medlxv</sup>

Jesus' enigmatic fire is a standard metaphor in Buddhism: faith as fire, annihilating evil in the world. Another Buddhist image sees the world as an omnivorous fire of desire, but the Gospel does not suggest that Jesus was the demiurge, who created the world and filled it with craving.

Matt5:28 "I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Buddhism declares lust the strongest desire.<sup>medlxvi</sup>

Matt7:24–25 "Everyone then who hears these words of mine . . . and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man." Itivuttaka 93 calls those who do not accept Buddhist teaching fools.

Jesus criticized wealth; Buddha, greed. If the doctrines are related, then Buddha's seems earlier, then expanded by Jesus. Buddhism seeks to banish greed, as other desires, since they cause suffering.

Jesus sometimes asked people to give away their property. In Buddhism, abandoning ownership results from perceiving the absence of objective reality. Not even men exist; everything is a game of the mind. A faithful Buddhist cannot crave for illusory belongings.

Rom12:15 "Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep." Compassion is the center of Buddhism: "Your suffering is my suffering and your happiness is my happiness."

Th53 "Neither is good good, nor bad, bad." Buddhism sees no distinction between good and evil in human behavior, but people invent the difference and call things good or bad.

Jesus is mindful of the *little ones*. The potential for Buddhahood indwells even the least people.<sup>medlxvii</sup>

"Do not judge." Two types of desires defile man's true essence.<sup>medlxviii</sup> The first is the craving for analysis, through which people began to judge.

No need to be concerned with daily needs; the lilies are more beautiful than Solomon's raiment. Perhaps the image was once the lotus, a symbol of passivity. Buddhism encourages indifference to the world.

Th3 "Kingdom of God is inside you." Buddha exists in the consciousness of those who sincerely long to be with him.<sup>medlxix</sup>

Rom11:36 "For of him and through him and to him are all things." "Beholds himself in all beings and all beings in himself."<sup>medlxx</sup>

In Paul, Christians have the mind of Jesus. When a person thinks of Buddha, he has Buddha's mind.

Everyone who professes faith in Jesus will be saved. Everyone who repeats Buddha's name in perfect faith will be saved.

Matt5:22 "If you are angry with a brother, you will be liable to judgment." Controlling anger is important in Buddhism to prove the mind's control over external influences. "And if you say *raca* to a brother, you will be liable to Sanhedrin." Buddhism opposes offensive language which can lead to anger and agitation. Indifferent to the world, Buddhists do not resist evil.

Lk6:28 "Bless those who curse you." Dhammapada1:5 "Hatred is not stopped by hatred, but by love in this world."

Lk6:31 "Do to others as you would have them do to you." Dhammapada 10:1 "Think of others as you think of yourself."

Matt6:28–29 "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow . . . . Even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these." Dhammapada 15:4 "Let us live happily, not accruing anything; let us feed on joy as the glittering gods do."

Matt13:44 "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field . . . . Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field." Dhammapada 21:1 "If refusing some pleasures makes him endlessly happy, the wise will leave these pleasures for endless joy."

Matt12:46–50 "His mother and his brothers were standing outside, wanting to speak to him . . . . Jesus replied, 'Who is my mother, and who are my brothers? . . . Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.'" Vinaya, Kulavagga 9:1:4 "The same as the great rivers lose their former names and existence having reached the great ocean, and are called simply great ocean, so the followers lose their former names and families, and become the sons of Buddha's family."

Mk4:39 "He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Peace! Be still!'" Vinaya, Mahavagga 1:20:16 "At this time the rain was pouring, and it resulted in a great flood. Then the Lord made it so that the water retreated everywhere; and he was walking back and forth on the dusty ground."

Matt9:10 "Many tax-collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him." Vimalakirtinirdesha sutra 2 "Bodhisattva visited the hippodromes and gambling-houses, but his purpose was always to bring to reason the people who were attracted by games and excitement . . . . In order to show the sinfulness of desires he even went into brothels. In order to head the drunkards off the wrong way he went into all taverns."

Matt15:36 the feeding of the multitude. Vimalakirtinirdesha sutra 8 "During the famine they [Bodhisattvas] became food and drink."

Mk10:19 "You shall not murder, . . . you shall not steal . . . you shall not bear false witness." Huddakapata 2 "Abstain from murder and from taking what is not given to you. Abstain from sin and untruth."

Matt6:19–20 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, . . . but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven." Huddakapata 8:9 "Let the wise store up goodness: the treasure that cannot belong to the others, that a thief cannot steal; the treasure that does not pass."

Lk12:20 "You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" Udanavarga 1:20–21 "As no one possesses even oneself, what sense is there in 'my children and my wealth'? Truly, this is the law of life; though he accrues hundreds of thousands of earthly things, death overrules him all the same."

Lk6:41 "Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?" Udanavarga 27:1 "It is easier to see the mistakes of the others than your own, because they are screened like straw . . . . It is like a swindler who is hiding his dice and displays the dice

of his opponent, finding out his weak points and continuously inventing how to find fault with him.”

Matt5:45 “For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good.” Sadharmapundarika sutra 5 “The light of the sun and the moon illuminates the whole world, everyone who is doing good or evil.”

Matt15:19–20 “Out of the heart come evil intentions . . . These are what defile a person.” Udanavarga 33:13 “. . . does not become pure from washing.”

Mk7:15 “There is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile.” Sutta Nipada 242 “Larceny, fraud, debauch are impurity. Not eating meat.”

Matt19:21 “If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, . . . and you will have treasure in heaven.” Jatakamala 5:5, 15 “Any property that gives rise to the sin of egoism or does nothing to confirm the wish to reject what you have, is nothing else but return into abomination.”

Matt11:5 “The blind receive their sight, the lame walk.” Lalitavistara sutra 7 “As soon as Bodhisattva was born, the sick were cured . . . The demon-possessed restored their feelings, the blind were returned their vision, and the deaf could hear again. The paralytics and invalids obtained excellent members.”

The devil tried to tempt Buddha when he withdrew from the river. Jesus was tempted in the wilderness when he withdrew from the Jordan.

Matt4:1–11 the devil tempted Jesus in the wilderness. When Jesus did not yield to temptation, the devil left him. Lalitavistara sutra 18 “During six years, when Bodhisattva was practicing abstinence, the devil followed him step by step seeking for the opportunity to harm him. But he did not find any possibility and left upset and doubting.”

Mk6:48 “He came toward them early in the morning, walking on the sea.” Anguttara Nikaya 3:60 “He walks on the water . . . as on the land.”

Jn20:26 “Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them.” Anguttara Nikaya 3:60 “He easily went through the wall.”

Matt24:11 “And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray.” Anguttara Nikaya 5:79 “Untrained monks will lead others, and they will not be able to lead them along the path of the highest dignity.”

Matt17:20 “If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move.” Anguttara Nikaya 6:24 “A monk experienced in concentration can bisect the Himalayas.”

Jn6:60–66 “Many of his disciples . . . said, ‘This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?’ . . . Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him.” Anguttara Nikaya 7:68 “Another sixty have abandoned teaching and returned to the lower life, saying, ‘Hard is the task of the Enlightened!’”

Matt15:14 “Let them alone; they [the Pharisees] are blind guides of the blind.” Digha Nikaya 13:15 “When these Brahmins teach the path, which they do not know and do not see, saying, ‘This is the only direct path,’ it cannot be right. It is the same as a line of blind people who are walking having hold of one another, and the foremost sees nothing, and the one in the middle sees nothing, and the last sees nothing—this is the same as the words of these Brahmins.”

Jn8:12 “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me, will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.” Digha Nikaya 14:1:17 “When Bodhisattva would descend from the heaven, an unmeasured, wonderful light, excelling the glory of the most powerful shining, would appear in the world. And every darkness beyond the world will be illuminated by this light.”

Matt27:50–51 “Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last . . . The earth shook.” Digha Nikaya 16:6:10 “At the leaving of the Blessed Lord, there was a great earthquake, terrible and making the hair stand, accompanied with thunder.”

Promise of a Comforter in John may be compared to Digha Nikaya 26:25 “The Lord will rise in the world, the enlightened Buddha, endowed with wisdom and righteous conduct, enlightened and blessed as now I am. He will teach dharma and proclaim the holy life in its fullness and purity.”

Matt1:18 “Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.” Madjhima Nikaya 123:10 “When Bodhisattva descended to the mother’s womb, she . . . was inaccessible for any man having lecherous intentions.”

Matt13:10–11 “The disciples . . . asked him, ‘Why do you speak to them in parables?’ He answered, ‘To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.’” Madjhima Nikaya 143:15 “Such words about dharma are not intended for the common people in white. Such words about dharma are intended for those who have gone farther.”

Acts1:9 “When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.” Udana 8:9 “The divine Dabba rose from his seat, greeted the Enlightened with his right hand, was lifted into the air, and sitting in the air with his legs crossed, . . . eventually moved away.”

The teachings of Jesus and Buddha share many details:

Forgiveness and rejection of violence;

Love of neighbor;

Love of enemies;

Prohibition of lechery;

Opposition from Pharisees and Brahmins;

Transfiguration as imitation of subsequent death and resurrection;

The founder was inspired at about thirty and began teaching;

Taught the initiated differently;

Initiated reforms in Judaism and Hinduism;

Did not consider himself the founder of a new religion;

The magi at Jesus' birth, and the virgins at Buddha's, predict the child's destiny to his parents and sing hymns;

Both were born of virgins away from home, of royal descent, met an elderly prophet soon after birth who had hoped to see them before he died.<sup>medlxxi</sup>

Born human and acquired divinity;

Jesus associated with sinners and tax collectors; Buddha, with thieves and murderers;

Forgave a debauched woman;<sup>medlxxii</sup>

Performed similar miracles;

Jesus' path—"I am the way"; Buddha's path—his fourth commandment;

Cast troubles aside;

Preached an impersonal god (Judaism), identified with the universe (Paul, Buddhism).

### *From pagan religions*

Eusebius wrote, "That which is called the Christian religion is neither new nor strange."<sup>medlxxiii</sup>

Early Christians not only admitted strong parallels with pagan traditions but used them to substantiate Christianity's legitimacy. Justin's argument in the *Defense* can be reduced to the following: Christians do not have to prove the truth of their religion, because it falls within the bounds of what the pagans themselves believe, for example, both glorify the sun, either as Apollo or Jesus. Justin was inconvenient to the victorious Church which suggested that Justin, a philosopher, was rationalizing. In fact, he could not ignore the parallels.

Could the pagans have borrowed from Christianity? Christianity was a minor, unknown religion, not an established source. The secret mystical rites, published only in the first three centuries, were known in Egypt and Greece centuries before Jesus and were so plentiful that they could hardly have been borrowed from the scanty Christian lore available then.

Jesus was not a close copy of any particular god; but the image is a piecemeal composite of various, often mutually exclusive biographies, myths, and teachings.

Christians borrowed many concepts, miracle stories, and other facts from popular Greek philosophy. Jesus closely resembles Pythagoras and Socrates. Early Christians so revered Socrates that some called Jesus "the new Socrates."<sup>medlxxiv</sup> Influenced by Christians, a certain Mara Bar Serapion ranks Jesus alongside Socrates in his letter.

Socrates, like Jesus, refused to defend himself in substance and submitted to the Laws to be executed. He wanted to die before the world's evils overwhelmed everything, his version of the apocalypse. They both introduced a new religiosity, disguised as new understanding of an old religion: spiritual, cut free from texts and myths. Both were accused of religious innovation.<sup>medlxxv</sup> Jesus was fulfilling the Hebrew Scriptures; Socrates, the laws of Athens. Solon said the laws were divinely inspired. Both were falsely accused and knew their sentences ahead of time.

A council of five hundred condemned Socrates. The Sanhedrin, similar in purpose and size,<sup>322</sup> condemned Jesus. The Athenians comprised twelve tribes, like the Jews.

Pilate offered to release Jesus to honor the Passover. Socrates was given the chance to pay a fine and go into exile. In both cases, people could

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<sup>322</sup> Sanhedrin consisted of seventy-one rabbis and their disciples, possibly amounting to a few hundred people.

avoid the punishment, but they both deliberately headed for execution. Socrates' friends offered to pay his fine of thirty pieces of silver. Judas Iscariot got thirty pieces of silver.

The Tablets of Asshur from the seventh century B.C.E. tell the story of Bel. The text, not always clear and susceptible to interpretation, contains striking parallels with the story of Jesus' execution.

The goddess Ishtar raised Bel. Mary bore and raised Jesus and was thought divine by some, like InfJm, because of her own miraculous conception. Her ancient depictions leave no doubt that believers regarded her divine and prayed to her.

Before the trial, Bel is set on the mount, Jesus prays in hillside Gethsemane.

Someone takes Bel from the mountain. The temple guard takes Jesus from Gethsemane.

Both are tried, not so common in antiquity.

The priest who condemns Bel says, "I am doing this for Asshur," and asks, "What is his sin?" The priests say Jesus must die to save the people from the Romans, upset by his meddling. Pilate asks what his sin is.

After Bel was taken from the place of trial, they brought water and washed their hands. Pilate washed his hands after sentencing Jesus.

A bandit is executed with Bel and two with Jesus.

Their clothes were pilfered.

Bel was wounded before or during execution. Jesus was speared.

Bel was buried in clothes. Jesus was laid in a shroud.

A woman searched for Bel's grave. Women came to Jesus' tomb but did not find the body.

Women wept for Bel and for Jesus.

Among the women mourning Bel was his sister Beltis. Jesus' mother mourned him.

Bel is resurrected and comes out of the mountain. Jesus was resurrected and came out of the tomb.

Inhabitants of the city where Bel was executed rebelled after his death. Jerusalem rebelled against the Romans shortly after Jesus' death.

The events take place in the month of Nisan.

Jesus is often depicted with arms outstretched, recalling the cross and seeming to embrace humanity. Ancient depictions of Isis, which Christians surely knew, are identical.

The image of Mary with her child is identical to depictions of Isis with hers. Exactly this form appears in very ancient Mesopotamian figurines from the Ubaid period, and elsewhere in the world.



Artists until recently almost always pictured Jesus with delicate, non-Semitic features. This convention is borrowed from Apollo, the sun-god and embodiment of Wisdom. Jesus' correlation with Apollo was no incidental, but established Jesus' divinity. The halo around Jesus is from the pictures of Horus, where it represented the sun disk.

Icons are not a late idolatric perversion of the Church.<sup>323</sup> They appear in the earliest Christian art, for example, in Roman catacombs. Gentile Christians were not used to worshipping an abstract God.

The "behavior" of Christian icons and statues is not new, either. While a weeping icon is common in Christianity, sweating statues were common in pagan temples.

Ancient cultures often infused old images with new contents. When a new god appeared, he was identified with some existing figure which then took his name. Old festivals also acquired new meaning, as Christmas highjacked the Roman Saturnalia. St. Peter's Basilica was built on the site of a pagan temple.<sup>324</sup> The Roman Church assimilated the Mithraic hierarchy and temples.

Pagan priests and oracles, like the Delphic Oracle, occupy central places in the artwork of the Sistine chapel. Their ostensible prediction of Jesus is only a lame rationalization for the respect which the Church accorded them. This justification makes sense only presuming they are real oracles, but then their gods, temples, and rites were the right ones.

Justin saw the similarity of Jesus the Word to Hermes Trismegistus "as the announcing Word from God." Plutarch describes Osiris as *Logos*.<sup>medlxxvi</sup>

Osiris is King of the Earth and Good Shepherd, titles later given to Jesus.

Dionysus was the Savior and Good Shepherd. Isis was also a deliverer, probably the first, since she saved the murdered Osiris and the world. Like Jesus, she was also called Light.

People born of gods were common in Greek religion—Herakles, Dionysus, even in some accounts Alexander the Great.

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<sup>323</sup> In a shameful pretense at political correctness, modern rabbinical establishment disregarded opinions of generations of rabbis, and declared icons not idols. Since Christians pray at portraits, at statues, one is pressed hard to see any difference.

<sup>324</sup> Pre-Vatican temple was reportedly built by Caligula on his arena. But why would he build an arena and major temple so far from the city, making it extremely inconvenient for thousands of people to reach it, crossing the river by narrow bridges? There was enough space in the middle of the city where Flavii later built Colosseum.

*Son of God* reflects the natural relation between Zeus and Dionysus, among many others, and was applied, for example, to Pythagoras (said to be the child of Apollo), Plato, and Empedocles. Justin believed Christians use the title rightly, because Jesus was a wise man and God is father of all.

*God the Son*, the hypostasis of God the Father (born of him, one with him), was known in Egypt. Anubis was both the son of Osiris by Neftis and the embodiment of Osiris.

Amon, Ra, and Ptah – three essences of the same god – formed the Egyptian trinity.

Many women conceive by the gods in Greek mythology. Many such cases were virgin births. Perseus' mother was a virgin before encountering Zeus. Myrrha, the mother of Syrian Adonis, has a name like Miriam, the mother of Jesus.

According to the Gospel of Hebrews, Mary carried Jesus for seven months. Dionysus was also born two months early.

An angel foretold Mary of Jesus' divine birth, a pattern found in secular narratives and many myths. Thoth told the divine Isis of the birth of her son Horus.

Jesus' birth is conventionally December 25, and magi or shepherds attended him, as they did Mithra, Tammuz, Horus, and others.

The New Testament does not date Jesus' birth. In the fourth century, Christians settled on the festival of the Unconquered Sun, Saturnalia.

The magi followed the star in the east. A star shone at Pythagoras' birth.

Jesus was born in a cave,<sup>mcclxxvii</sup> like Dionysus and Tammuz, or placed in a manger, like Horus.

Like the slaughter of the innocents, Suetonius' biography of Augustus tells of the Senate taking similar action in connection with a prophecy about the birth of an emperor.<sup>325</sup>

Jesus came to turn people to righteousness. Osiris did the same.

The boy Jesus shocked the Temple teachers with his wisdom. Krishna surprised the Brahmins who taught him.

Jesus taught at twelve. So did even Cato the Younger.

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<sup>325</sup> At the time, Romans opposed having kings or emperors.

Jesus began preaching at about thirty, an age significant in Athens. Only citizens who reached thirty could participate in the Council as adults. Horus' life before thirty is also unknown.

Baptism in water is a Gentile rite to wash away sins and symbolizes death and revival, as in Christianity. The Dionysian initiation was similar: people were baptized naked, then put on white clothes and walked with candles in procession.

Gentile baptism (conversion) involved not only water, but also sulfur (fire) and air (*pneuma, spirit*). John the Baptist promised that his successor would baptize "with the Holy Spirit and fire."

In the shrine of Dionysus at Eleusis the initiated bathed in the sea with pigs, so as to send their sins into the animals. Jesus sent exorcised demons into pigs.

Dionysus turned water into wine at his marriage to Ariadne, as Jesus did at the wedding at Cana.

Osiris is at times depicted as a shepherd with a lamb on his shoulder. The fish was a symbol of Horus and later of the Pythagoreans, precisely like the Christian representation formed by the intersection of two partial circumferences.

Pythagoras and Jesus in John give precisely the same quantity of fish caught by the fishermen. Archimedes used the number, 153, to derive the *fish measurement* formula, the intersecting circumferences of Christian iconography.

Osiris was associated with grain, and Dionysus—with wine. Bread and wine are common sacrifices. Bread and wine are used in Mithraic ceremonies and the Christian Eucharist. According to Justin, the Mithraists used bread marked with a cross and a cup of water and wine. The eucharist of Osiris was associated specifically with the god's body and blood.

The cross appears in many cults, notably in Egypt. It was a symbol of Mithra and Tammuz. Often the cross was T-shaped, like the cross of crucifixion.

Late in the fourth century, Coptic Christians chose for their symbol a cross where the upright above the crossbar is rounded—and does not look like the instrument of crucifixion. The Coptic cross appears in ancient Egyptian pictures as the *ankh*, a symbol of life. The images are older than Christianity or crucifixion.

Asclepius, Pythagoras, and others worked miraculous healings and raised the dead.

Apollonius of Tyana in Cappadocia revived the Roman consul's daughter from afar, precisely as Jesus did.

The Christians criticized Simon Magus, the successor of John the Baptist, for performing miracles of healing, exorcism and resurrection as Jesus' copycat.

Pythagoras is said to have calmed the sea so his disciples could get to him. His disciple Empedocles called himself an immortal god, preached, foretold the future, worked miracles, calmed storms, and raised the dead.

The oracles spoke different languages, as the apostles did. Paul agonizes over the practice of glossolalia. The Delphic oracles required interpretation.

Twelve disciples surround Mithra in the ceremonies, three women accompany Dionysus. Twelve disciples and three women are beside Jesus.

Jesus enters the city riding an ass, and the people greet him with branches in their hands. Dionysus rides an ass. During his festival, people waved palm leaves.

Ancient Greece knew a rite called *pharmakos* during which a criminal took the city's sins and was executed.

Jesus came as the Messiah, the Jewish king. He tried to turn people to righteousness and was executed. Osiris was a king who strove to fill the world with good and was killed.

Babylonian god Marduk sacrificed himself for the benefit of humanity well before Jesus. After his victory over the evil goddess Tiamat, Marduk gave himself to be killed, and people and animals were created from his blood.

Christ dwelt on God's right hand but was sent to the world to be crucified. Zeus vested Dionysus with power, sat him on the Olympic throne, and then killed him.

Dionysus was a foreigner in Thebes. Jesus was an alien in Jerusalem.

Dionysus waited quietly to be seized, the same as Jesus.

Jesus first kept silence in the court, then spoke. Later he was clothed in a kingly robe and crowned with thorns. Plutarch reports that Alexander the Great once saw Dionysius of Messenia sitting on the throne in a king's robe and wearing a diadem. Dionysius first kept silence, then said he had been imprisoned for some crime, but the god Serapis loosed his chains (compare Peter and Paul's escapes), seated him on the throne, and told him to keep silence.

Mary of Bethany anointed Jesus before he entered Jerusalem, though the Messiah should be anointed by the high priest. He redeemed the world by his death, restoring the doomed to life. In the mysteries of Osiris and Dionysus, the god died annually to restore the land's fertility. He was anointed by a goddess and resurrected after three days.

Plato writes that a worthy person should suffer affliction and be executed.<sup>medlxxviii</sup>

Osiris died on the cross. Dionysus, dressed in purple, was bound to a wooden pole and crowned with ivy. Jesus was dressed in purple and crowned with thorns, then either crucified or hung on a tree (following the Talmud or Paul).

Women came to Jesus' tomb, a central role for females alien to Judaism. Women weep over Attis and Adonis and first announce their resurrection.

The eclipse and earthquake at Jesus' execution appear regularly in ancient reports of the death of a king.<sup>medlxxix</sup>

Christians saw the destruction of Jerusalem as punishment for the execution of Jesus. Punishment for a people who unjustly killed a righteous man was a common notion of ancient moralizing. The Athenians suffered famine and plague after Socrates died.

The canonical Gospels attribute superhuman powers to the resurrected Jesus: he can change his appearance, walk through walls, and ascend to the sky. Tammuz in Sumer, Osiris in Egypt, later Mithra in Persia, and Dionysus/Bacchus in Greece were not precisely resurrected but transformed into ghosts.

Like Jesus, Osiris died, descended to the underground, and on the third day arose and eventually ascended into the heavens. Pythagoras appeared to his disciples and ascended into the sky. Most of the mystery initiation rites featured some allegory of death and resurrection.

The Apostles' Creed, though not the Nicene, affirms that Jesus spent the time between death and resurrection in the underworld, like Dionysus, Osiris, and many other deities. Though the Creed's authors intended to prove Jesus actually died, and mention of the netherworld was irrelevant to their argument, important is the belief that Jesus was actually absent from the world—like other deities mentioned here.

Isis attends the risen Osiris, the virgin and Mary Magdalene attend Jesus. Isis can count as two women, both sister and wife of Osiris. Mary Magdalene, *Miriam m'gadella nashaya*, could be a doublet of Jesus' mother, *Mary the hairdresser*.

After his death Mithra is seated beside God as the king of the world and promises to appear as judge on the last day.

Jesus ascended into the sky. Justin mentions many witnesses of emperors ascending there after cremation.

The apostles traveled without money, as did the Cynics.

There were many women among the Pythagoreans and Dionysians and the primitive Church. No women were among Jewish priests.

Confession of sins and love of neighbors and enemies are Pythagorean concepts. Socrates teaches passivity before evil.

Mithraism predicts an apocalypse, the advent of Mithra, resurrection, separation of the righteous and the evil, and the destruction of the spirit of darkness.

Celsus accused the Christians of plagiarism. Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Ireneus, and others said the similarities were the work of the devil, who anticipated Jesus' advent and wanted to confuse believers. No one takes the argument seriously today.

Justin is more honest than some other Christian writers: "There exists not a people, civilized or semicivilized, which has not offered prayers to the Father and Creator of all things in the name of a crucified Savior."<sup>medlxxx</sup> He took advantage of Christianity's resemblance to other cults, said they proved that Christianity is no worse than other religions.

## Epilogue

Christianity was the first religion designed to suit the tastes of its audience. Its preachers consciously offered something for everyone: to philosophers, belief in a single abstract God; to moralists and ascetics, austerity; to the poor, no charge for services (sometimes); to everyone, freedom from responsibility.

Christians had no stable institutions of morally independent leaders who could challenge state authorities. Their insignificance inclined them to accept the role of “associated religion”: Constantine kept heathen rites to the end of his life. He would not hesitate to declare compliant Christianity the official religion.

The choice was incidental. Previous emperors favored different gods: Mithra before adoption of Christianity, Osiris under Domitian, Serapis under Vespasian, Attis under Claudius, and the cult of Dionysus. When Constantinople became the capital, provincial Christianity became the religion of the ruling class. While other religions favored by successive emperors remained tolerant, Christians at once seized the opportunity to suppress other cults.

The birth of Christianity dates more likely from 68–70 C.E. than from 30–34. The Gospel episodes binding the historical situation to 30–34 are not credible.

The war could have caused the dissolution of the proto-Christian Essene sect and the flight of many Jews into the Diaspora. Christianity originated when the Essenes dispersed.

Jesus' followers formed a small messianic sect, one of many Christian currents. Only a few Jews accepted their views. Religious identity became even more important in the Diaspora, and Jews who did not convert to other beliefs clung to orthodoxy. The Essenes had no option but to appeal to the Gentiles.

The Essenes' centuries-old tradition became the foundation of Christianity. Other evidence suggests Jesus' followers collected after a schism in John the Baptist's sect.

Over time, the proto-Christians absorbed a multitude of religious and philosophical concepts from neighboring peoples, especially the Greeks. Later, those concepts and stories passed into Christianity, and the figure of Jesus acquired the features of all those forerunners.

Early Christianity had a significant mystical strain which predictably petrified when the Church went public. Literal interpretation

made the theosophical constructions of proto-Christianity meaningless. The Gospels' interpretations left very little of the original religion, known to us only from passages in Paul, the Secret Gospel of Mark, and John.

Eventually the different lines of Christianity were merged into the intricate, inconsistent, eclectic Gospels. The evangelists' works were distorted and were amended in their turn, layer upon layer. With Gentile mythology and spurious historical background, the Gospels took a form near the modern one, though much editing lay ahead. Early Christians knew why they had no reverence for the Gospels.

Proto-Matthew was written by Jewish sectarians. The Gospel reveals the polemic with the Pharisees (and accuses them of insufficiently sincere observance of Jewish Law), the Sadducees who denied resurrection, and the scribes who preferred learning to Christian faith. The sectarians sided with the Pharisees against the Sadducees.

Luke and especially John reveal the transformation of sectarian doctrine into paganism. The Gospel of Mark is a fossil of mystical discourse.

Whether Jesus existed or not cannot yet be proven. His image combines features of several people. He was an itinerant country preacher. He joined, then left, the Baptist's sect. He has much of the charismatic image of the perfect Essene leader, enriched with moments from the lives of famous Greek philosophers. Who was the immediate prototype, we do not know, but strong evidence suggests Judah the Galilean, a religious innovator and political rebel.

Almost nothing of his evangelical life story is true. Genealogy and birth accounts are fiction, crucifixion may be a misinterpreted rite of initiation, and in any case it could not happen the way the Gospels describe it. The evangelists describe every episode differently. Everyone would like to believe something is true there; unfortunately, we do not know what is.

Jesus image was compiled beyond Judea, in a place where the story could not be verified.

So then, what is there in Christianity? Let us use the *via negativa*.

There is nothing original with the possible exception of Paul's attempts to juxtapose contradicting theological concepts. Any of Jesus' sayings may be traced to Jewish, Greek, Egyptian, or Indian popular tradition, where they occur in similar or identical forms.

Christianity has no authentic texts. The Gospels and the letters are contradictory to the point of mutual exclusion. They disagree not only about



facts but also about theology. The Gospels' original contents before energetic editing, conflation, and harmonization defy identification.

Christianity is not founded on logic. Christian concepts do not arise from a system of axioms. On the contrary, everything relies on faith and presented as postulates. The result is an unusually great number of mutually contradictory axioms.

Christianity lacks coherent theology. The canonical texts are at odds, ambiguous, and arbitrary. They do not support the various competing traditions. While dissent was resisted after the fourth century, the last three hundred years have seen a revival of difference. At present the plurality of opinions lets each Christian understand Jesus and read the Gospels as he likes.

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I referred to the Talmud and sometimes the Midrash cautiously on the presumption that first- and second-century tradition undergirds the final versions, compiled between the second and fifth centuries, contemporaneous with the editing and compiling of the Gospels.

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