

Triumph in Defeat: Lost Origins of Jesus' Sayings

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Synopsis

John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth proclaimed the arrival of a new kingdom for first-century Palestine. Both turned away from the violence of Zealots (resistance fighters) and preached a higher way, creating in the process universal ideals. Working together, they launched a transformative moment in human history that is still shaping the world. John offered repentance to enter this newly forming kingdom and Jesus gave the lifestyle injunctions for how to live in it, for both believed that an age of peace and justice was about to begin. As Christianity developed early in the second-century CE, with Paul of Tarsus' message of a completely spiritual kingdom, it appropriated John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth's vision into its own framework and so severely contextualized it. Yet, the teachings of John and Jesus were too dynamic to keep under wraps for long and have tumbled out again and again in new ways. Studies of these origins have significant applications for our time: how words and symbols have the power to inspire throughout the ages, how to sift through a mythology for core truths, the horrors of prejudice when combined with religious ideologies, even of how to approach ancient cultures for a greater understanding. Here I will consider a little of how these teachings originated and a few of those at the center of it.

Key Words

Two Document Hypothesis; the New Covenant; the Old Covenant; the Sayings of Q; Jesus of Nazareth; John the Baptist; James the Just; Paul of Tarsus; Simon the Zealot; the Ebionites; Judaism; Christianity; People of the Way; the Desposyni.

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1. Introduction

Jesus (*Yeshua* in Hebrew) of Nazareth (c. 6 BCE-29 CE) remains the object and subject of intense quests—personal, academic, spiritual, philosophical, literary, historical, or what have you. Jesus is the “palm at the end of the mind,” to use the poet Wallace Stevens’ (1879–1955) expression, seemingly accessible but in reality inaccessible.¹⁾ The energy is palpable because a great mystery seems unanswered, even if only on a non-transcendental level: What has the world missed about this Jew of first-century Palestine? Is it Jesus’ dark sayings in the Gospel of Mark that intend to *prevent* salvation that has ignited such fervent interest?²⁾ Is it the Sermon on the Mount or the Sermon on the Plain that hint at unimaginable social possibilities that only Jesus was aware of?

Jesus is the Jewish Socrates (Bloom 2005:26-27) through his articulation of “spiritual ideals” that have become universal, his aphorisms of wisdom combined with lifestyle injunctions that have transcended time and culture and have tapped into universal longings. Yet Jesus the person is reflected only dimly in those teachings and it is difficult to say anything concrete about him. Socrates (d. 399 BCE) had Plato (427–347 BCE) to tell his story, but there is no Plato for Jesus. The most famous person in history, with more books written about him than any other—and the object of devotion by the world’s two and a half billion Christians—remains the greatest enigma.

Recent scholarship has fittingly focused on Jesus’ interior life: 1) How did Jews in first-century Palestine practice Judaism? 2) Why did Jesus launch his movement and how was Roman occupation connected? 3) How was Jesus’ family part of his movement? These have been extremely difficult to answer—Judaism and Jesus’ family became embarrassing for Christianity as it developed in the second-century and it censored out a great deal that could have provided more definitive answers (Tabor 2007:109–110; Eisenman 1997:52–53). Some tentative responses can be suggested, however.

The New Testament comprises two religions or I should say one a venerable Messianic Judaism—part of Jewish life in Palestine during the late Second Temple period (516 BCE-70 CE)—and the other a nascent Christianity. Those who grew up in Christian cultures are most familiar with the letters of Paul of Tarsus (c. 5 BCE-67 CE) (“Paul” being a Latinized version of his Hebrew name “Saul”) that formed the foundation of “proto-Christian orthodoxy.” Paul had reimagined Jesus as a divine figure, without a history or social context (First Corinthians 2:2), effectively obliterating Jesus’ roots in real space and time.³⁾ The Christianization of Jesus took about one hundred years and the people I will be discussing were *not* part of this undertaking (of course, I am obliged to discuss a little of Paul of Tarsus).

I will use the term “Ebionites” when discussing these groups that followed what Jesus taught, teachings they kept alive for hundreds and hundreds of years. Scholars, who have made division after division of this community as it evolved from James the Just, Jesus’ younger brother, have attempted to distinguish them based on nuance of belief—indeed there was a great deal of diversity among them—but one commonality, among a few others, was that all considered Paul of Tarsus an apostate (Ehrman 2003:182).

We have only a little of Ebionite literature; we know the movement continued from early Church Fathers, who pronounced anathemas against them, derisively calling them Nazarenes, Cerinthians, Elcesaites, Carpocratians, and Sampsaeans, to name a few.⁴⁾ Fortunately the heresiologists quoted from their literature, thus preserving it (Ehrman & Pleše 2014:99–102). “Nazarene” may have been their most common early

designation, reflecting the fact that Jesus' home village, Nazareth, was an enclave of descendants from King David (Tabor 2007:116–117), though some have argued this name is associated instead with an ancient Nazirite oath, from Numbers 6:1–21 (Eisenman 1997:244). Ebionites (*Ev-yōn-im* Hebrew for “Poor Ones”) seems what the group eventually wanted to be known as, and it certainly shows a deep regard for Jesus' teaching that only the poor would inherit the Kingdom of God (Luke 6:20).

The Ebionites have endured, spectacularly, but not by today's standards of success. How Ebionite teachings became part of the Qur'an is a story that has yet to be told (Eisenman 1997:53–54). One may wonder who will really have the last word, with Islam now set to overtake Christianity in this century to become the world's largest religion. What Christians cursed and pronounced heretical, Allah blessed and affirmed.⁵⁾ Here I will discuss a little of the origins of these ideas.

2. Quests for the historical Jesus

As scholarship in every field took off worldwide after the opening up of the People's Republic of China (c. 1980) and the collapse of the Soviet Union (c. 1991), scholars outside normative Christianity, particularly Protestant, also began to enter New Testament studies and this changed the direction of research. From about 1990 scholarship skyrocketed on James the Just, for whom we have more authentic historical information, though little of it reached a general audience, with some notable exceptions (Tabor 2012:25). A great deal of the research on James was purely speculative, as some authors themselves acknowledge (Eisenman 1997:xxii–xxiii), but these studies stimulated fresh perspectives. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the study of James leads to a deeper understanding of the historical Jesus.

This quixotic venture for the historical Jesus began with the Romantic Movement (1800–1850), a time of deep engagement with venerable themes and optimism that “truth” could be uncovered (Berlin 1998:553–560). It began in Germany, launched by Protestant scholars, whose remarkable insights transformed the study of the New Testament.⁶⁾ Yet, as they began to analyze the four Gospels, the quasi-biographical accounts of Jesus' life in today's New Testament, dissecting them as no one had before them, their optimism faded. They concluded that very little “historical” information could be gleaned from them, since for them the literature invariably consisted of mythmaking material for conversionary purposes.⁷⁾ Even renowned critics like Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965) declared the search for the historical Jesus in the Gospels dead (Vermes 2010:3). Critical scholarship, except for the seven undisputed letters of Paul of Tarsus, who was seen as an eyewitness, demurred from taking the rest of the New Testament very seriously for accurate information and this continued for over a hundred years.⁸⁾

Then came the astonishing discoveries of ancient texts—in Nag Hammadi, Egypt (1945) and Qumran, Israel (1948)—inspiring scholars to turn once again to the New Testament as a source. Israeli construction projects also helped. One of the most sensational came in 2003 with the discovery of an ossuary (limestone bone box), dated to the first-century CE, with the Aramaic inscription: *Ya'akov bar-Yosef akhui diYeshua* “James, Son of Joseph, Brother of Jesus” (Shanks 2003:12).⁹⁾ Even the devout around the world had not realized their New Testaments contain writings from two of Jesus' brothers, James and Jude.

Construction projects in Israel, largely unnoticed before James' ossuary, had been turning up other important ossuaries of biblical characters for decades and some of it was deliberately underreported: In 1990 the ossuary of Caiaphas, the high priest who had turned Jesus over to the Roman authorities (Matthew 26:57–67;

Mark 16:62; John 11:49; 18:13–28); in 2002 Simon the Cyrene—the person who carried Jesus’ cross (Matthew 27:32; Mark 15:21–22; Luke 23:36) (Paul even speaks of Rufus, in Romans 16:13, a son of Simon the Cyrene, showing Simon had become something of a legend in his own time); and in 2012 Joseph of Arimathea (Tabor and Jacobovici 2012:184), the Pharisee (and secret follower of Jesus) who with a fellow Pharisee, Nicodemus, took Jesus’ body from the cross, placing it in a newly hewn tomb, and who later brought spices and aloes for burial (John 19:38–42).

Most unnerving of all, however, is a tomb in Talpiot, a suburb of Jerusalem, where in 1980 an apartment construction project found nine ossuaries, all with names relating to Jesus’ family, including “Jesus, Son of Joseph” and “Judah, Son of Jesus” (the last on site investigation was in 2010). Intense research on the patina (the film or residue that builds up on surfaces over time) has tentatively shown that the ossuary of James came from this tomb (the James ossuary was unprovenanced, meaning it was bought on the shady antiquities market, not discovered in its natural setting).¹⁰ All of this remains explosively controversial, perhaps a new frontline in the battle between faith and science, something neither today’s Christianity nor today’s Judaism (nor the State of Israel) welcomes.

People around the world were captivated—even as the devout were taken aback—and younger scholars, untroubled by the lapses of earlier scholarship, began to look more closely at the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles for authentic historical information.¹¹ The process of choosing what is historical and what is myth-making may seem subjective—as indeed it is—yet this literature, when used sensibly and when corroborated with concrete historical information, helps complete a remarkable portrait of first-century life in Palestine as well as the people at the center of the world’s largest religion. It has certainly led in unexpected directions, as I will discuss below.

No writer of the Gospels (*Evangelion* Greek for “Good News”) knew Jesus personally or ever heard him speak, yet the Gospel of John, perhaps written around 90 CE, makes mention of an eyewitness, the “disciple whom Jesus loved,” six times (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7; 21:20). This writer appears to have had a document, now lost, that he drew from for his Gospel, written by someone who had lived through the events. Was the “disciple whom Jesus loved” James, the brother of Jesus, as some suggest (Tabor 2007:206–207), and had James written recollections about it? Since the details in this Gospel are remarkably accurate, particularly the topography of Jerusalem where the final events took place, given in minute detail, one can only speculate about this.¹² An aura of authenticity indeed hovers close to sections of the Gospel of John—despite its extreme Hellenism and its extreme bashing of Jews and Judaism.¹³

Scattered here and there in the New Testament are nuggets from Jesus’ original vision: the Sayings of Jesus, sections of the Gospel of Matthew, the Epistles of James and Jude—even small parts of the book of Revelation (Bütz 2010:125)—reveal a rich Messianic Judaism (a movement within Jewish culture and separate from Paul’s Christ the Son of God teachings). Scholars have called it “Jewish Christianity,” but this phrase shows their deep bias—and outright self-deception—that this movement agreed with Paul of Tarsus in any way (please see *Jewish Christianity* by H.E. Dana 1937 as just one example).¹⁴ It did not (Ehrman 2003:182–185).

Further, these identical ideas were found in a precious document called the Didache (“Teaching” in Latin), also known as the Teaching of the Twelve (please see *The Didache* by Aaron Milavec 2003). Some date it to the last quarter of the first-century, earlier in fact than the Gospel of John and the Gospel of Luke.¹⁵ It has

close affinities with the Gospel of Matthew, perhaps written as early as 80 CE, and may have originated from the same Jewish Messianic community (Mack 1995:241). It shows the unmistakable traces of Jesus' ideas: "Bless those that curse you, and pray for your enemies and fast for those that persecute you" (Didache 1:2-3).

The Didache had been mentioned by Church Fathers but was thought lost to history. In 1873 an Orthodox priest discovered it by accident in the Metropolitan Library of Nicomedia, Turkey. A handbook of instruction for the new follower (of about twenty-one hundred words), the Didache is devoid of Pauline Christianity. Though it has a baptism ritual performed with the phrase "in the name of the father, son, and holy spirit," the blessing of bread and wine (done at every Jewish meal) has no association with Jesus' body and blood (the traditional Eucharist) (chapters 9 and 10). Instead it has a Messianic banquet, similar to the Gospel of John's Last Supper—John has no body and blood ritual either but instead Jesus washes the disciples' feet (John 13:5-9).¹⁶⁾

A greater understanding of Messianic Judaism has come from these spectacular discoveries, but it took many decades for scholars to begin to unravel the ancient works and of course the work is ongoing. Fortunately, much of the new research has come from a younger generation, untainted by entrenched dogmas that had previously hampered a greater understanding. The Gospel of Thomas, among the most important, and part of the cache from Nag Hammadi, lent credence to the theory of a "Sayings Gospel," called the Two Document Hypothesis (1838): The theory that the writers of the Gospel of Matthew and Gospel of Luke used two documents, the Gospel of Mark and a separate collection of sayings, which scholars call the Sayings of Q (Mack 1993:20-22) ("Q" is the abbreviation of *Quelle* or "Source" in German).¹⁷⁾

Unlike the Sayings of Q, however, the Gospel of Thomas was not a patchwork written over decades by different people or groups of people but seems to have been the work of one scribe, writing at the community's behest (Mack 1995:61). Dated to the last quarter of the first-century, it has no biographical information regarding Jesus, nor any Pauline teachings of Jesus' sacrificial death or resurrection or of him as a divine incarnation. About one third of its sayings are found in the Sayings of Q (that Matthew and Luke quoted from), and sixty percent of those are from the earliest sections of the document, what scholars call Q1 (Mack 1995:61).¹⁸⁾ This shows that some among the group had been part of the original followers of Jesus represented in Q, from its earliest time with Jesus in Galilee.

The genealogies from the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Luke, seen by earlier scholars as pious fictions, have also attracted fresh examinations, and even taken at face value. We know from Josephus that the Jewish people ardently preserved their family genealogies (Tabor 2007:52). Jesus' hometown, "Nazareth," contains the root word "Branch" in Hebrew and could be translated as "Branch Town." Since Jesus' mother and adoptive father, Joseph, both descendants of King David (c. 1000 BCE), were from Nazareth, the town may have consisted exclusively of people from the "Branch of David" (Tabor 2007:37-38).¹⁹⁾ The people of Nazareth may have been poor but they were proud of their noble, royal ancestry.

3. Two messianic cousins

John the Baptist, not Jesus of Nazareth, founded the movement that became the Ebionites (Wise 1999:276-277; Bloom 2002:137), with John following patterns of Messianic Judaism that had been part of Jewish culture since the second-century BCE (Talmon 1989:111-137); the four Gospel writers severely edit the fact

that John was Jesus' teacher—John is Jesus' cousin through his mother (Luke 1:36). The Sayings of Q, chopped up and pasted here and there throughout the writings of Matthew and Luke, which scholars have painstakingly recreated, preserves what Jesus said of John, quoted in Luke 7:28: "I tell you among those born of women there is no one greater than John."²⁰

This statement, standing alone, was intolerable for later Christian editors, who added: "Yet, the least in the Kingdom of God is greater than he" (See Tabor 2007:136; 178–180), which reveals an extreme Christian interpretation (bias), widespread today, that the Hebrew Bible (for Christians the Old Testament) is obsolete and is only useful through New Testament interpretations. Since John came *before* Jesus he is part of the Old Covenant and its prophets, making him "less" than even the most humble Christian of the New Covenant. This is certainly not how Jesus saw it.

Jesus also said of John: "For all the prophets and the Law spoke *concerning* him (John the Baptist)." New Testament translations replace "concerning" with "until," but this was not in the original, a Hebrew version of the Gospel of Matthew (Matthew 11:13).²¹ This meant that John, not Jesus, was the fulfillment of Messianic prophecy, according to Jesus himself. Further showing his esteem, Jesus said, "To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things. But I tell you, Elijah (John the Baptist) has already come, and they did not recognize him" (Matthew 17:11–12).

John the Baptist was of a priestly lineage (Luke 1:5), descended from the first Messiah (Anointed One), the high priest Aaron (only Aaron's direct descendants served as priests), from the Tribe of Levi. In Israel of the time, all those of priestly lineage, from thirty to fifty years old (Numbers 4:3), served in the Temple functions on a rotation of two weeks a year. John declined this great honor of Jewish society and instead retreated to the wilderness, probably the area just north of today's Qumran, Israel, to live in the harsh desert, for he felt a calling to "prepare the way" for the Messianic Kingdom he believed was about to come (Tabor 2007:125–126)—this had been prophesied as starting from the desert (Isaiah 40:3).

Scholars have long identified similarities between John the Baptist and the Essene community at Qumran.²² John was celibate, abstinent, and vegetarian—characteristics of the Qumran community (Vermes 2002:29–30)—wearing only camel hair clothing, with a leather belt, and eating nothing but "locusts and wild honey" (Mark 1:6). Later records show, thankfully, that John did not eat "locusts," this was a misspelling of the Greek word, but rather unleavened cakes cooked in olive oil from a plant in the region (Tabor 2007:134). John was reenacting eating the "manna" the ancient Hebrews ate in the desert for forty years during the time of Moses (Exodus 16:35).²³ John's outstanding characteristic, even in truncated New Testament accounts of him—in addition to his complete ritual purity—is his absolute certainty that the Kingdom of God was at hand. People took him seriously: "The whole Judea countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River" (Mark 1:5).

John first articulated the teachings that Jesus later took up. Luke 3:11, perhaps inadvertently, records one of John's sermons: "He who has two coats, let him share with one who has none and he who has food, let him do likewise," remarkably similar to the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7). Jesus' originality, then, was in placing John's teachings, as he further developed them, in a social context for community life. In other words, John called people to acts of repentance and Jesus offered a social vision of life after repentance.

As a Jew, Jesus understood that personal wellbeing is dependent on a just social order—for him in a functioning Temple State with righteous and legitimate leaders (Mack 1993:64–65). Moreover, John, not Jesus,

may have composed the Lord's Prayer. In the reconstructed Sayings of Q, Jesus' disciples asked him to teach them to pray *as John taught his disciples* (Luke 11:1) (please see Note 18). It is likely that Jesus passed on the prayer that he had learned from John. The Q original is sharper (Tabor 2007:137):

*Father, let your name be holy,
Let your kingdom come,
Give us bread of the morrow,
And forgive those who sin against us,
And bring us not to the hour of trial.*

Writings from the Hebrew Bible and from the intertestamental period (420 BCE-70 CE) (especially the book of Jubilees)—including Dead Sea Scrolls—show that people were expecting two Messiahs (Talmon 1987:122-123), one from the House of Aaron (of priestly lineage) and the other from the House of David (of royal lineage) (Isaiah 11, Micah 5, Jeremiah 23:5-6, Zechariah 4; 6:13). Zechariah, a prophet from the sixth-century BCE, had declared: "There shall be a priest by this throne with a peaceful understanding between the two of them" (Zechariah 6:13). A version of Malachi 3:1-2 from the first-century BCE, found among the Dead Sea Scrolls—nearly a thousand years earlier than the Masoretic version the Hebrew Bible today is translated from—uses the pronoun "We" not "I," confirming this dual Messianic expectation (Tabor 2007:144-145):

Therefore behold I send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me. And they will suddenly come to his temple, the LORD whom you seek and the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire; behold he himself comes, says Yahweh of hosts, but who can endure them when they come?²⁴⁾

After John baptized Jesus, Jesus went to Judea between today's Jerusalem and Tel Aviv where springs were plentiful to perform baptisms (John 3:22-24), while John headed north toward Galilee, to Aenon near Salim (John 3:23). Only the Gospel of John records the time from early 26 CE, when Jesus was baptized, to Rosh Hashanah (autumn) 28 CE, around the time when John was arrested. John and Jesus were working in tandem in a baptizing campaign, following a coordinated plan. It was enormously successful, with thousands and thousands listening to them and accepting baptism by them, but it frightened Herod Antipas (20 BCE-39 CE), the Roman puppet king.

Herod understood, according to Josephus, the power that priestly and royal lineage had in Jewish society—something he did not have, nor could ever buy, but which he tried to graft himself into by marrying the Jewish Hasmonean Princess Mariamme 1 (Eisenman 1997:102-103). John had indicted the rich rulers: "The ax is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Matthew 3:10) "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance" (Luke 3:8). "Every valley shall be filled in, and every mountain and hill made low. The crooked ways shall be made straight, and the rough ways smooth" (Luke 3:5)—the "mountains" and the "crooked ways" (the rich) also bear the brunt of Jesus' condemnations (Luke 12:33; 18:25).

Their message to prepare “the way” for the new Kingdom, where righteousness and justice reign, had caught on. In fact, the earliest name for their movement was “People of the Way” (Acts 9:2), for indeed it was a new way to live, on a more selfless, spiritual plain. The baptizing they did, probably complete immersion as it was in a purification ritual before entering the Jerusalem Temple (Eisenman 1997:344), was an outward symbol of the inner purification necessary to be a citizen of this Messianic Kingdom.

Here, reconciliation among people was an absolute priority: “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift” (Matthew 5:23-24). So was fearlessness toward those who challenged them: “Don’t be afraid of those who can kill the body, but can’t kill the soul” (Matthew 10:28).

John’s presence must have been deeply unsettling for the tiny nation. The masses crowded to hear him, including the Jerusalem “priests and Levites,” who even sent a delegation with this question: “Who are you” (John 1:19)? Neither John nor Jesus would answer them directly (both felt they were the fulfillment of Messianic prophecy but it was dangerous to be too open about it). John lighted the fire and Jesus carried the torch during this Sabbatical year (CE 26-27), when the peasantry had the leisure to listen and listen it did (Tabor 2007:142).²⁵⁾

Jesus had abilities John did not have: Jesus was the more versatile and intellectual and he even healed and cast out demons.²⁶⁾ The Sayings of Q also present Jesus’ profoundly philosophical bent and many have seen in Jesus’ sayings similarities to the Greek Cynics (Meier 2016:372), known for their challenges of empty social conventions (Mack 1995:49). In contrast to the Cynics, however, Jesus’ vision was for social transformation, the forming of a more righteous community that began with an inner transformation (Mack 1993:43-49). This would be accomplished through faith, with the love of God and of one’s neighbor, especially of one’s enemy (Rome) (Matthew 5:22); if these qualities are only as tiny as a mustard seed (John 17:20) they will transform the entire world (Carroll 2001:117). Jesus had said: “I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled” (Luke 12:49).

Though meek and lowly of heart (Matthew 11:29), Jesus went further even than John, coupling John’s severity for “Yahweh Only” with injunctions for everyone to turn away from anything that enslaves them to this corrupt world, especially personal wealth but even family ties, to prepare for the Kingdom (Mack 2017:62). No doubt this was hard for many to swallow (Mark 10:25; Matthew 10:37; Luke 12:33). Jesus seems to have expected the Kingdom of God in the immediate future, perhaps by the following harvest (Schweitzer 1906:358), autumn 28 CE, after the Sabbatical year.²⁷⁾

Jesus compared himself to John: “For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon.’ The Son of Man (Jesus) came eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners’” (Luke 7:33-34). In fact, Jesus’ brother, Matthew, is a tax collector and “sinners” here are “prostitutes.” Jesus was a friend of the common people in everyday life, especially those looked down on. We might find John the Baptist and Jesus’ brother James the Just praying in the Temple of Jerusalem of that time, but would we find Jesus at the local tavern instead? Jesus had said: “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mark 2:17).

The Gospel of John records that Jesus had chosen twelve disciples to be “apostles,” meaning “sent ones”

(John 1:35–51), a full a year or so before Mark will pick up the narrative (Tabor 2007:142). This title “apostle” shows that part of their Kingdom responsibilities (Matthew 19:28) was to help gather the twelve tribes dispersed among the nations, the Messiah’s chief responsibility (Tabor 2007:163). Though the Gospel writers show great anxiety regarding Jesus’ family, they were unable to edit it out completely: It is clear that four of the twelve apostles are Jesus’ younger brothers: James, Simon, Jude, and Matthew (Eisenman 1997:139; Tabor 2007:162–167).²⁸⁾

Matthew is also called “Levi the son of Alphaeus” (Mark 2:14)—Levi a common substitute for Matthew—as well as “Joseph” (nicknamed “Joses” in Mark 6:3), to honor Joseph, Mary’s first husband, who died before having children with her (Eisenman 1997:830–831). All four of Jesus’ brothers are either Sons of “Alphaeus” or “Cleophas” (sometime translated as Clopas) (Matthew 27:56; Mark 15:40; 15:47; Luke 24:10)—the names in Aramaic (Alphaeus) and Greek (Cleophas) meaning “Substitute,” and these names are interchangeable. Jesus’ half brothers, then, were from Mary’s marriage to Joseph’s younger brother, an injunction from Levirate Law (Deuteronomy 25:5; Ruth 4:5–6), called a *Yibbum* in Hebrew, known also as a “Kinsman Redeemer” in the book of Ruth.²⁹⁾ At Jesus’ crucifixion, a garbled verse appears to show Mary and her sister with the same name, “Mary.” But the meaning after unpacking the verse is unmistakable: Jesus’ mother is also identified as the “wife of Cleophas” (John 19:25).

The Gospel writers, then, were truthful and deceptive at the same time; they said as little as possible of Jesus’ family—through the use of multiple names to disguise the family’s involvement in the movement (these have been very difficult to unravel)—but they could not leave them out completely since people still alive knew about them. Unfortunately, they did not tell all they knew (Eisenman 1997:52–53). Jesus’ family was part of a rival movement by the time they wrote their accounts and they refrained from giving it the credit it deserved in the movement’s formation (Tabor 2012:178–179).

Galilee had been a hotbed of revolt for a generation, with at least five recorded waves of executions of revolutionaries before John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth appeared. Both had learned from the failure of their forerunners (Eisenman 1997:56–57). They absolutely turned away from the violence of the resistance fighters—as Josephus had been—but with a positive and constructive approach addressed the importance of a personal transformation before anything else. Their message could be seen as accommodation, yet it had its revolutionary features, of a higher, more complete revolution. One of Jesus’ brothers, however, is called Simon the Zealot (Luke 6:15)—Simon would lead the Ebionites after James’ martyrdom in about 62 CE. No doubt Simon had been associated with groups that advocated for the violent overthrow of Roman rule.³⁰⁾

Herod Antipas, fearing John would eventually lead a revolt (Eisenman 1997:333), arrested him late in 28 CE—Herod is the person Jesus refused to talk to during his own trial (Luke 23:9)—and later executed him (Mark 6:17–20), which Josephus claims took place at the fortress of Machaerus on the eastern side of the Dead Sea (Josephus 18.8.5). The New Testament offers the story that after Herod promised his wife’s daughter, identified as Salome by Josephus, up to half his kingdom for an erotic dance she performed for his birthday, John’s fate was sealed—her mother, the wretched Herodias (d. 39 CE), wanted the head of John the Baptist for criticizing her for her incestuous ways (Mark 6:22–24), marrying multiple men of the Herod family and divorcing them.³¹⁾

After hearing the news of John’s death, a badly shaken Jesus first left for Galilee and then to a remote area in northern Galilee to Caesarea Philippi (Mark 8:27–30), outside Herod’s rule, to consider what to do next.

Jesus decided to visit Jerusalem for the coming Passover with a goal of proclaiming his Messianic message to the Diaspora pilgrims (those outside Palestine), ending in his arrest and execution in 29 CE. Jesus' final words in the Gospel of Mark ring true: "Father why have you forsaken me" (Mark 15:34)? Jesus uttered this in his native Aramaic from the Hebrew Bible that he knew so well (Psalm 22:1)—a cry of Jews throughout history.

Historians do not take the gnostic Christian and gnostic Islamic traditions seriously that Jesus did not die on the cross—he was too wily and intelligent, too much a sophisticated survivor—to be taken by the corrupt priests and delivered into Roman clutches (Kersten 1994:210). Both traditions say the person crucified was not Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus escaped and later journeyed east, spending years preaching to pockets of Jews in the Diaspora (today's Iraq and Iran), before settling in Kashmir, the outward reach of Alexander the Great's former empire, there to live to a gentle and wise old age as a gnostic Jew, revered as a saint, renamed Yuz Asaf, whose tomb still stands in Srinagar, India (Akyol 2017:153-154).

4. James, the brother of Jesus

How to recover from this horror, the violent deaths of their two leaders whom they believed would restore the Kingdom of David under a just priesthood and king? Yet survive the Ebionites did, though few of their sacred texts survived. The answer is James the Just's leadership. Sharing the noble family's bloodline, his presence as a cultural and royal linchpin centered the movement.³²⁾ Paul's first encounter with the Ebionites, which he says he persecuted (Galatians 1:13), may have been as early as 34 CE, just a few years after its leaders' deaths, so it was thriving and even threatening some sectors of traditional Judaism (at least Pharisaical dogmas) to have so aroused the ire of Paul.

What do we know of James the Just, also identified as "James son of Alphaeus" (Mark 3:18; Matthew 10:3; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:3)? Despite the fact that all the Gospel writers revealed as little as possible of Jesus' family (Tabor 2007:135), we know that James, with his three brothers, was part of the movement from Jesus' baptism by John (Matthew 19:28), as mentioned above.³³⁾ Jesus' first miracle—turning water into wine at a wedding in the village of Cana—may have been James' wedding (Tabor 2007:141), since Jesus' mother seems in charge of it (John 2:3-4). After the wedding, "he (Jesus) went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples" (John 2:12).

The little the writer of Acts of Apostles divulged about James is in keeping with what Josephus and early church historians have said of him: James was a man of deep humanity, sagacity, and piety. In Luke's Acts of the Apostles, James suddenly pops up as the movement's leader, with absolutely no foregrounding, more than halfway through the text in chapter 15—it is also possible that Luke's earlier introduction of James was edited out (Eisenman 1997:119)—faced with the responsibility for deciding a very complex issue: On what basis could "People of the Nations" be allowed to join the Judaic Messianic movement? Both John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth had addressed Jews only, with Jesus frankly saying: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel" (Matthew 15:24). That people outside Judaism might be interested in their movement may not have occurred to them until Paul's proclamation, probably sometime around 37 CE, that God called him to be the "Apostle to the Gentiles" (Romans 11:13).

By the first-century BCE synagogues in the Diaspora had worked out ways for those who were not Jewish to participate in synagogue life without assuming all the Torah obligations that Jews had.³⁴⁾ Jews called them

“God-Fearers” or “Fearers of the Name” (*Yirei Hashem* in Hebrew), a phrase showing high esteem, and asked them only to follow the Covenant of Noah (Genesis 9:3-4), incumbent on all humanity.³⁵ James simply reiterated this as he gave his decision: “Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood” (Acts 15:20).

Why did early Christianity banish the Gospel of Thomas from its literature as gnostic heresy, since it was no more gnostic than the Gospel of John? It may very well have been because of Jesus’ statement regarding James:

The disciples said to Jesus, “We are aware that you will depart from us. Who will be our leader?” Jesus said to them, “No matter where you come it is to James the Just that you shall go, for whose sake heaven and earth have come to exist” (Saying 12, as translated by Bentley Layton).

“No matter where you come,” affirms James as the leader of the movement everywhere. If indeed James was the “disciple whom Jesus loved” that the Gospel of John makes mention of, we find an extraordinary intimacy between the brothers, with Jesus praising him to the heavens, but also with an understanding between them and among the inner circle that if anything happened to Jesus, James would lead the movement.³⁶

In the Epistle of James, James addresses the Twelve Tribes in the Diaspora—exclusively those of Jewish ethnicity—calling the local assemblies “synagogues” (not churches), showing the people he had in mind were devout Jews who participated in Jewish community life. Scholars have been bewildered by the epistle and cannot say for sure when it was written or where it was written (Mack 1995:213-215) and tend to date it to about 90 CE, but this is only an educated guess. It is clear that the translation from Greek we have in the New Testament today is itself a translation of an original Aramaic version (Tabor 2007:274). Whether James himself wrote it, or a son or even a grandson, the epistle contains the unmistakable character of Jesus of Nazareth’s original teachings, with about thirty direct parallels to Jesus’ sayings in this short five-chapter work (Tabor 2007:275).

What strikes the reader right away is the different vision of Jesus from the rest of the New Testament: it is classic Ebionite literature, laid out in elegant, stately prose. Though the author mentioned Jesus twice, with the title “Lord,” this is not the “Lord God” title Paul of Tarsus gave Jesus (Romans 9:5); it is instead akin to “Sir,” showing that Jesus was not a divine figure for the early Ebionites.³⁷ The four Gospels, including the Ebionite leaning Gospel of Matthew, frame Jesus from the Pauline myth, which shows how much ground Paul’s teachings had gained after his death in about 67 CE and after the Roman Jewish War (73 CE).

Indictments of the rich are central to the literature of Ebionite Jews from John the Baptist, with James writing: “Come now you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you” (James 1:5), so similar here to Jesus’ words: “Woe to you rich for you have received your consolation” (Luke 6:24). James goes even further: “Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth eaten. Your gold and your silver have rusted: and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is for the last days that you have stored up your treasure. . . . You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure: you have fattened your hearts for the day of slaughter and put to death the righteous man; and he does not resist you” (James 5:1-6). If indeed James wrote this remarkable sermon, the wound of losing his brother and cousin, founders of the movement, both “righteous men,” still ached long after the

events. It is also possible that a later writer is speaking of James.

James' most chilling indictment, however, is against human vanity, the tendency to discriminate by appearance—a psychic disease from the origins of civilization (James 2:1–5):

For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes and you pay special attention to the rich and say, "You sit here in a good place" and say to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool," have you not made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil motives? Listen my beloved brethren did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?

Many have wanted to purge the Epistle of James from the New Testament canon; it so outraged the Reformation (1517) leader Martin Luther (1483–1546) that he banished it to the very end of the New Testament, where it remains today (Luther called it a "strawy epistle," meaning it had little spiritual value).

Protestant theologians, particularly in the United States, have spent a great deal of energy over many generations attempting to reconcile the Epistle of James with the epistles of Paul. James was deeply troubling to them, for they could not believe that Jesus' brother did not accept the central tenet of Protestant Christianity, the Pauline doctrine of "justification by faith" alone (Rubenstein 2003:288–299): "For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law" (Romans 3:28). Yet reject it James did: "Can faith save him? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself . . . show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works . . . you see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone" (James 2:14; 17–18; 24). James cannot be reconciled with Paul.

Another of Jesus' brothers, Jude, wrote a very short but powerful epistle that by chance made it into the New Testament. According to early church historians Jude took over the Ebionite leadership after the crucifixion of his brother Simon during Emperor Trajan's reign (Eisenman 197:118). Jude's epistle *could* also be an indictment of Paul: "For certain persons have crept in unnoticed . . . ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness" (Jude 4). Had Paul become a dark and menacing figure for the Ebionites? Was Jude challenging Paul's "freedom" from the Law (Galatians 2:4) and under Grace (Romans 6:14)? The "original believers" Jude mentioned (Jude 3) can be none other than Jesus' original followers who received the Gospel directly from Jesus "once and for all" time—before Paul arrived on the scene with his cosmic revelations. That no one can replace the original Gospel seems a direct rejection of Paul.

"The coming of the Lord," which both James (James 5:7) and Jude speak of, is not the Second Coming of Jesus, but the first coming of Adonai Yahweh, the God of Israel, whom Jude calls "our only Savior" (Jude 24). This belief in Yahweh's coming also characterized all Ebionites (Zechariah 14:5; Isaiah 40:10; 66:15).

Surprisingly, Josephus, whose Hebrew name is Josef ben Matityahu, a Pharisee descended from a priestly family, wrote at some length of John the Baptist and James, whom he identified as the "brother of Jesus." Josephus, also from Galilee, may have been related to both men—Mary's genealogy contains six derivations of Matthew (the name Matthew is always associated with the priestly line) (Tabor 2007:164). If James took over the movement's leadership from Jesus' death until his martyrdom in about 62 CE, he had about thirty-three years at the helm and his great skills ensured the movement's survival. We understand from Josephus that James was famous in Israel, known to everyone and highly regarded, even among the leaders of Jeru-

salem.

It is a bitter irony that the son of the high priest Annas (c. 23 BCE-40 CE), who wielded the real power behind his son-on-law, the Sadducean Caiaphus (d. 36 CE) who turned Jesus over to the Roman authorities (John 18:28), is responsible for killing James, also during Passover: the high priest Annas Son of Annas (Tabor 2007:210). Josephus gives some detail of the events (Josephus 20.9.1): After the death of the Roman governor, Festus (58-62 CE), and while his replacement Albinus (62-64 CE) was on his way to Jerusalem, Annas, described by Josephus as an ill-tempered person, held a quick trial of James “and others,” condemning them all to death (we can only assume Annas had deeply resented this popular people’s movement led by James and seized the opportunity to rid himself of what he saw as a challenge to his luster). Some have also suggested that James had set up a kind of rival priesthood (Schonfield 1991:148)—this would be in keeping with the original movement’s Messianic goals of a new Kingdom with a legitimate priesthood and royalty (James was also of priestly lineage, as mentioned).

Hegesippus (110-180 CE), the second-century Jewish historian living in Jerusalem (who also became an Ebionite), praised James effusively as “holy from his mother’s womb” (Eisenman 1997:554) and who like John the Baptist was a teetotaler and vegetarian, always draped in the linen robes of a priest, continually at prayer in the Temple on behalf of his community. His praying was so intense that his knees became as tough as a camel’s skin (Akyol 2017:33-34). Ebionites, then, before the Temple’s destruction, were living as Jews with the Temple central to their worship.

The Church Father Epiphanius (310-403 CE), quoting from Hegesippus, whose work was mostly lost, wrote that Annas, after a quick trial of trumped up charges, first had James thrown over the wall of the Temple that faced the Kidron Valley, east of the Mount of Olives, then clubbed to death by Temple police (Akyol 2017:43-44). James’ gruesome death is close to the area where Jesus was killed some thirty-three years earlier (Tabor 2007:287). The wretched and unjust murder of James so infuriated Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, again according to Josephus, that they personally went to Caesarea on the Mediterranean coast to deliver their complaint to Agrippa II (27-100 CE), last of the Herodian kings, and even sent a delegation to meet Albinus on his way to Jerusalem. Albinus, furious over Annas’ rashness, sent a message demanding that he stop all unlawful court proceedings (Eisenman 1997:553-556). Agrippa II promptly removed Annas (d. 66) only three months into his tenure as high priest, replacing him with Jesus, Son of Damneus (Tabor 2007:285).

Epiphanius adds that Simon Son of Cleophas, Jesus’ half-brother and James’ full brother, was present when James was killed, as James had been present as the “disciple whom Jesus loved” at Jesus’ execution (John 19:26). Simon immediately assumed leadership, taking the group to Pella, following a prophecy from the book of Daniel of the Temple’s soon destruction (Eisenman 1997:803-804). Surprisingly the writer of the book of Revelation, an itinerate named John, wrote of a woman (the congregation of Ebionites) who “fled into the wilderness (Pella) to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days” (Revelation 12:6).

Simon would suffer the same fate as his half-brother Jesus, crucifixion, early in the second-century (the date is unclear) on order from the Emperor Trajan (CE 52-117). Three of Mary’s five sons, all of whom she had named after heroes of the Maccabean revolt (167-160 BCE) who achieved independence from foreign rule, were brutally murdered by a mix of civil and religious authorities. All had only sought the peace of a

Messianic Kingdom.

5. Paul's gospel of resurrection

It is a challenge to make short mention of Paul of Tarsus (c. 5 BCE-67 CE), one of the most influential people in world history. Wayne Meeks, the eminent scholar of early Christianity, called Paul “the Christian Proteus” (Bloom 2002:139), Proteus being the God of the Water. Water makes up seventy-one percent of the earth—a fitting parallel for Paul: Paul is everywhere, among the handful whose transformative ideas changed the course of history: Siddhartha Gautama, Confucius, Aristotle, Jesus, and Muhammad are among the few that vie with him for global influence today. Indeed, Paul flourishes as revival Christianity, his truest heir, sweeps across North America, Latin America, Africa, East and South Asia in wave after wave, freshly germinating even in cultures that have had no prior connection with non-sectarian Christianity. Paul's universalism is staggering and he may yet conquer the world with his gospel, his original intention (Romans 15:20).

Many critics, notably Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), *The Jewish Antichrist* (1888), have seen Paul's influence as an absolute evil, however.³⁸⁾ I will mention here only one aspect of Paul's powerful gospel: The resurrection of Jesus. Ebionite Jews, as mentioned above, flatly rejected this Pauline formulation of a baptism into the death and resurrection of Jesus and we should consider why.

Paul's teachings, based entirely on visionary raptures, are startling and are in stark contrast to the Ebionites who followed what John the Baptist and Jesus had actually *taught* them. Though an eyewitness as events unfolded from about 34 CE, Paul had not seen Jesus himself.³⁹⁾ Certainly the boastful Paul would have proclaimed this in his litany of qualifications he arrogated that made him equal to any other apostle (First Corinthians and Philippians). Paul wanted to be called an “Apostle,” but he did not have the qualifications that all the other apostles agreed were most important (Acts 1:12–29): Paul had not been part of the group from the “baptism of John.” No doubt Paul, who identified himself as a Pharisee from the Tribe of Benjamin (Philippians 3:5), was deeply wounded by this.

The timeframe of Paul's letters are from about 49 to 64 CE, with his Epistle to the Philippians, consisting of fragments of three separate letters (Mack 1995:144), the last the world hears from him. Paul's First Thessalonians is the earliest complete document extant of what was to become Christianity, dated to about 49 CE. The Sayings of Q is considered Jesus' own words—at least the seventeen hundred or so words of Q1—but these were not written down until around 50 CE (Mack 1993:259). Some of Paul's letters that he himself mentioned have been lost (First Corinthians 5:9).⁴⁰⁾ When scanning the seven letters, one immediately notices great differences between Paul, a Hellenistic Jew, and the original followers of Jesus on a simple political level: Paul affirmed Roman rule while the original followers of Jesus did not.

Paul is as baffling as he is inspiring, a person impossible to discuss in an anecdotal way. His verses reach great heights of profundity, written with deep and genuine affection for fellow believers, for which Paul created a language of belonging (Meeks 1983:85–91)—and his Epistle to Philemon and his love poem of First Corinthians 13 are two of the literary jewels of the Greco-Roman era—but these are mixed with his fierce polemics and hatred of those who opposed him. This makes one think of James' words (was James writing of Paul?): “From the same mouth come both cursing and blessing? Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water” (James 3:10)? With Paul this is indeed the case; Paul's malice cannot be denied: In his Galatians letter, after wishing that those who practiced circumcision would emasculate them-

selves (Galatians 5:12), only a few verses later he declared “malice” was part of “the works of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16–21). Paul did not have an introspective nature.

Paul’s “opponents,” whom he railed against in First Corinthians, Galatians, and Philippians, have also aroused intense study for generations—scholars have called them “Judaizers” and they have sifted through mountains of early church documents to try to find this group, but to no avail. Did this group want all Paul’s Gentile converts to convert to Judaism (Galatians 4:17)? Were they trying to take over Paul’s congregations, as he insists? Nothing in the New Testament enlightens us regarding this separate group (only Paul speaks of them). Who were they, really?

Ferdinand Christian Baur (1792–1860), the great German New Testament scholar, may have gotten it right: They were Jesus’ brothers and original followers (Bütz 2005:157), for they loomed threateningly large in Paul’s paranoid mind. If they had become Paul’s enemies from about 52 CE, it was from Paul’s provocations, for he scorned and mocked them in his letters: “But from those who were of high reputation (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—well, those who were of reputation contributed nothing to me” (Galatians 2:6). The “pillars,” as Paul calls James, John, and Peter, certainly went out of their way to accommodate the ferocious Paul, seen in Paul’s own account, for they gave him and Barnabas, his Jewish companion, “the right hand of fellowship” (Galatians 2:9).

Paul’s heavenly transports, as he attests to again and again and which he sees as giving him ultimate authority, put him at odds with Jesus’ own family and with what Jesus had in fact taught (Bloom 2002:141). Paul’s reveries could be seen as having more universal appeal: The creation of a new type of person, made possible by “Jesus’ resurrection.” What did Paul mean by Jesus’ resurrection? More to the point: Was Jesus’ dead body resurrected out of the tomb? No, this is certainly not what Paul meant (Tabor 2012:64–65). A physical resurrection would be as ghoulish for that day as it is for ours. The physical body for Paul was a “body of death” (Roman 7:24). Paul had little regard for it, with his strict Platonism (Boyarin 1997:62–63).⁴¹⁾

Jesus’ resurrection for Paul was a spiritual resurrection, in a kind of astral body, as he attempts to articulate: “It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. . . So it is written: ‘The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam (Jesus), a life-giving spirit’” (First Corinthians 15:44). Paul even mentioned that Jesus “died and was *buried*” (First Corinthians 15:4)—this may signify that Jesus’ burial place was well known at the time. Conversely, it would have been inconceivable for Jews (with strict purity codes regarding a corpse) to accept that a corpse could or would be resurrected, a grotesque affront to religious sensibilities—priests were even forbidden to be in the presence of a corpse (Leviticus 21:1).

Yet only Mark among the Gospel writers declined to portray a resurrected corpse (Mack 1989:308–309) (the resurrection appearances were added later): Mark ends his Gospel with the women running away from the empty tomb “because they were so afraid” (Mark 16:5). Even the Judaic writer of Matthew, whose community must have become accustomed to a physical resurrection, wrote resurrection scenes.⁴²⁾ All had completely misinterpreted Paul’s teachings on the subject (with all later Christianity, as affirmed in the 325 CE Nicene Creed).

Jews had believed that after death one went to a “holding area,” called *Sheol* in Hebrew (the word is also translated as *Hades* in Greek—but it was more a vacuum than a place of punishment). The Hebrew concept of a resurrection took place at the end of time, for the Final Judgment, as a spiritual resurrection (Daniel 12:2–3). Paul, then, was dumbfounded that a spiritually resurrected Jesus had appeared to him: “and last of

all he (Jesus) appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born” (First Corinthians 15:8). After this Paul felt he was not to “consult with any human being” but instead he needed to spend three years alone in “Arabia” (probably the Sinai where Paul believed Moses had received the Ten Commandments), pondering what it meant (Galatians 1:16-18).

Why had a “spiritual” resurrection changed everything? Jesus had not gone to *Sheol* but had risen directly to a spiritual realm. Paul felt that Jesus, who must be divine, had changed the matrix of humanity as descendants of Adam—their fall into sin and death broken by a new representative of the human race: “For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive” (First Corinthians 15:22). People with faith now were resurrected immediately, Paul thought, without a Final Judgment, and because of this: “We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life” (Romans 6:4).

Paul’s “New Covenant,” again based solely on these personal ecstasies (Pelikan 1993:48), had overthrown Moses’ Covenant (which Ebionites affirmed was eternally valid). Paul articulated this as *Faith* (the New Covenant) *versus Works* (the Old Covenant).⁴³⁾ Ethnicity, social standing, even gender had lost meaning in these new conditions: “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ” (Galatians 3:28).⁴⁴⁾

Abraham now has new descendants, based solely on faith, and they had replaced his flesh and blood Jewish descendants: “those who have faith (in Jesus) are children of Abraham” (Galatians 3:7). It is a marvelous concept for personal transformation (what so many long for), since humanity had finally been restored to its essential godly nature: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here” (Second Corinthians 5:17)!⁴⁵⁾ Yet, despite these universal transformational horizons, Paul still had to deal with practical matters: How do ordinary people, then, become the new People of God?

James and Jesus’ original followers agreed with Paul that Greeks and Romans who believed in Jesus’ message did not have to become Jews—this had been a synagogue policy throughout the Diaspora for hundreds of years, as mentioned above. Where they disagreed, however, was that Jews themselves were no longer under the Torah of Moses. Nor could James and company accept that those who were interested in converting to Judaism, to be full participants in the Ebionite movement, should be *prevented from* doing so. The Ebionites as a group had never advocated for anyone to convert to Judaism that we know of, which Paul had accused them of (Philippians 3:3); this would have violated the spirit of Judaism from ancient times, but this did not mean that people *could not* convert, if they so chose (Tabor 2012:210).⁴⁶⁾

Acts of the Apostles contains a section that offers insight on this very issue (and may well be historically true): James had interviewed Paul, stating: “They (the Jewish population) have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs” (Acts 21:21). James, then, encouraged Paul to participate in a Temple purification ritual (part of a Nazirite vow) to publicly demonstrate he was a devout Jew (Acts 21:24). By agreeing with James’ suggestion, had Paul in effect denied the accusation, which we know from his letters was true (Galatians 3:25)? Paul’s answer is not given, but he had said he felt no shame in being “all things to all men,” for his only goal was to further his gospel (First Corinthians 9:19-23). Paul may have gotten away with deceiving the Ebionites about this for quite a long time (Tabor 2012:212-213).

From this episode in Acts of the Apostles, which is pro-Pauline literature, we see that Paul, a man of manifold genius, was not of the moral or spiritual caliber of John the Baptist, Jesus of Nazareth, and James the Just. Indeed, Paul was interested in winning a debate and he shielded himself from anything that might thwart this ambition, even with duplicity (First Corinthians 9:24-26).⁴⁷⁾ Paul's focus, then, was radically different from the Ebionites, who honored the poor. In the long history of Christian tradition no one has ever referred to Paul as "Paul the Just:" Paul never mentions the poor, the outcasts, or ill-treated (Bloom 2002: 142).

If we take the most cynical view of Paul, following Nietzsche and George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950), were Paul's teachings of a resurrection a way for him to usurp authority from Jesus' legitimate heirs?⁴⁸⁾ As a Pharisee Paul was comfortable with "argument to dominate" and he rightly intuited that the conflict with James centered on interpreting the mission of Jesus. But how could Paul argue for his vision of Jesus' mission, since those growing up with him were in a better position to know this mission?

Paul, brushing aside Jesus "from a worldly point of view" (which must mean Jesus' family) (Second Corinthians 5:16), declared that God had called him from his mother's womb (Galatians 1:15) (even before God called James?) to be an "Apostle to the Nations" (Galatians 2:8). For Paul Jesus' mission had not been to restore the Kingdom of David centered in Jerusalem, at odds with all we know of Jesus' teachings, but an invitation for everyone to participate in the spiritual Kingdom of God. What, then, were the obligations for this privilege? The "People of the Nations" had *no* responsibility whatsoever in their salvation—Jesus had done it all through his resurrection—they only needed faith. Paul's gospel certainly has been a winner.⁴⁹⁾

Paul also mentioned that a spiritually resurrected Jesus had appeared to the twelve, citing Cephas (Peter) and James by name (First Corinthians 15:6-7) (no one knows exactly what this may have entailed). If they had some sort of visionary experience as well, why could they not accept Paul's formulation of a personal identification with Jesus' death and resurrection? Would this for them be violating monotheism and what they knew to be true about Jesus and his teachings?

Today we tend to see Paul's complicated psyche as sociopathic, yet labels do not do justice to one of the most consequential people in world history. Paul was not accepted during his lifetime: he was too fierce, too fixated, and too Machiavellian. Indeed, a tradition passed down in the pseudepigraphical Second Timothy shows that Paul died alone, with no friends at his side: "At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them" (Second Timothy 4:16). This would be consistent with so polarizing a figure, sad to say. The tradition that the Emperor Nero (37-68 CE) beheaded Paul is probably true, taking place sometime before 68 CE.

Paul's triumph in world history began after the First Roman Jewish War (CE 66-73), which destroyed traditional Judaism centered on the Temple and scattered the Ebionites far and wide, eliminating the alternative message for Paul's new spiritual Kingdom that promised a transformed humanity—even as it began to deny its Judaic roots (the Jewish people were no longer popular in the Roman Empire after the war), but not before it lifted the Hebrew Bible (which became Christianity's Old Testament) to support its own claims to legitimacy (Mack 1995:291). Paul's doctrine spread quickly in this new climate, even in Palestine where the Gospel of Matthew was probably written (Mack 1995:311).

Numerous "Pauline Schools" of a philosophical sort, part of Greek culture, also sprouted up (Meeks 1983:81-84). Intellectuals from these schools wrote the seven New Testament letters in Paul's name, begin-

ning in about 80 CE (Colossians, Ephesians, Titus, Second Thessalonians, First and Second Timothy, and including the Epistle to the Hebrews, though the writer refrained from affixing Paul's signature).⁵⁰ These overwhelmingly brought Paul's message home. With the Gospel of Luke and Acts of the Apostles (which should be called the Acts of Paul), which many have argued persuasively for a date around 130 CE (Mack 1995:147-174; 225-250), Paul triumphed.

Without Paul, Christianity could not have existed, nor would the millennium long quest for the historical Jesus, these valiant attempts to scrape off the layers and layers of doctrinal and mythological varnish. Paul's victory is a victory of meaning from metaphor, for it is indeed compelling that the divine loves people personally and sacrificed for them personally, so they would not have to suffer for all their failings.

6. Conclusion

Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) wrote in the posthumously published *Judge for Yourself* (1876): "Christianity has completely conquered—that is, it is abolished." Kierkegaard zeroed in on the heart of the matter: What is Christianity and what does it mean to conquer?

Some have argued that Christianity (Greek mystery occultism mixed with Hebrew traditions) came about from a Jewish self-surrender from self-contempt—since according to tradition all but one of the New Testament writers were Jewish, in flight from their traditions while intimidated—even dazzled—by their Roman masters (Bloom 2005:22). Its archetype is Josephus. Though of pristine priestly descent, Josephus proclaimed the Roman general Vespasian (9-79 CE) (and later Emperor) the "World Ruler" or "Messiah" after surrendering to him (Josephus 3.8.9).⁵¹ Josephus never retracted this, even after Vespasian's son, Titus (39-81 CE), destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple (70 CE).

Josephus even changed his Hebrew name to Titus Flavius Josephus in honor of Titus' promotion to Roman Emperor, who adopted Josephus into the royal family, though Titus had killed over six hundred thousand Jews according to Josephus' own estimates (Carroll 2001:90). Josephus is a stain on Jewish history, but he also symbolizes the climate in Palestine from Roman domination that gave birth to Christianity. We do not know Paul's Hebrew name, except for his first name, Saul; but the fact that he went by a Latinized version shows his sympathies were in keeping with those of Josephus, another turncoat fawning to Rome, seen in his vicious treatment of Jesus' own family and original followers.⁵²

What more can a people give but their own God, gratis, with all his bountiful promises, even cloaked in language the conquerors could understand? Yet even this was not appreciated in the long term. Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) understood that the long history of anti-Semitism among Christian societies was connected to the crushing moral burden of Hebrew monotheism (Freud 1938:145)—its ideals of social equality, care for the poor (Cohn 1993:194-211), and sexual propriety.⁵³ They detested Jews for this.

The burgeoning new religion based on Paul's teachings, which Paul wanted to completely turn away from "Israel after the flesh" (First Corinthians 10:18), was pained by its Jewish roots and sought to excise Jewish ethnicity, especially Jesus' family, from its history (Eisenman 1997:33). Indeed, Jesus' family as a normal Jewish family of the first-century threatened its central myths: Jesus as a divine incarnation, sinless, born of a virgin (even Jesus' maternal grandmother became a virgin in later formulations of the Immaculate Conception), without a physical father (seen by the Romans as determining ethnicity and religion), whose only legitimate past was in eternity, and who reluctantly incarnated as a Jew for thirty-six years or so to fulfill ancient

Hebrew Bible prophecy, later ascending back to his rightful place after his resurrection.

As proto-orthodoxy solidified, it became a commonplace that God had sent the Gospel, through Paul, to the non-Jewish world because the Jews had rejected Jesus, also the reason why the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed (Mack 2003:104; 145; 160-161).⁵⁴⁾ In reality, Paul and early Christianity rejected the real Jesus, a Jew of first-century Palestine.

The Emperor Domitian (51-96 CE), after the horror of the First Roman Jewish War, forbade anyone to convert to Judaism. After the Second Roman Jewish War, the Emperor Hadrian (76-138 CE) forbade Jews to practice their religion. The Ebionites also suffered from this double-whammy from proto-Christian orthodoxy, which branded them heretics. These early heresiologists, though, were simply following the cultural norms of the time in condemning the Ebionites, since they were all Jews who practiced Judaism (Vermes 2010:17).

What happened to the Ebionites? We have records that both Vespasian and Domitian searched for those of Davidic bloodline to execute them (Eisenman 1997:119). Two grandsons of Jude, Jesus' brother, were arrested by Domitian and questioned about their political ambitions. Zoker (Zechariah) and Jacob (James) protested that they were merely poor farmers, with no understanding of politics, and so were released. Yet, Hegesippus states that both were leaders among Ebionite communities (Tabor 2007:301-302). Early Christians knew of Jesus' descendants, calling them *Desposyni* (*Desposynoi* Greek for "Those of the Lord"), and many were bishops leading Ebionite communities until the fourth-century (Bütz 2010:26-30). The next traces we find of them are in the Qur'an (please see Note 5).

How a religion that exalts Jesus as divine came to condemn its historic followers, and Jesus' original teachings, deserves more attention; it certainly reveals the ruthlessness of imperialism to determine "truth." For generations after the Nicene Creed to be a Christian was also to be an anti-Semite (Rubenstein 1999:225-26).⁵⁵⁾ Most expressions of Christianity today have left its own anti-Semitic past a blank—with Vatican II (1962-65) a notable exception—and have not been able to come to terms with it. Many are rightly bewildered about this (Carroll 2001:7; 32-36). Since so much of the mythology comes from purging anything Jewish from Jesus, however, the sheer institutional force of all branches of Christendom could not allow any part of its teachings to unravel, for fear this would end Christianity, as we know it. Yet its own history is a witness against it.⁵⁶⁾

Christians today also duck the issue because "different" versions of Christianity, of different times, committed these atrocities, they say, not their own version in their own time. Yet all but non-conformist splinter groups are connected to the imperialistic Nicene Creed and its history of political domination and racial malice (Mack 2017:29). The holocaust may have been "shamanistic" or "pagan" rather than Christian, as many today claim it was, but can anyone deny that the Nazis were acting on ancient prejudices spawned in "Christian" societies (Mack 1989:375)? The denial of this simple fact hinders true growth toward the love of God and the love of neighbor, which the historical Jesus actually taught, for today's multicultural world (Mack 2017:266-274). Certainly, the historical Jesus could help in the healing of its past (and even present) murderous hatred.

Kierkegaard's statement points out that all triumphs may be on the surface only. Can conquering a culture or a people really conquer the heart? What is the standard for success, domination through force and fraud? What if everyone embraced Jesus' standard: "What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet

forfeit his own soul" (Matthew 16:26)?

Notes

- 1) Wallace Stevens, *Of Mere Being*:
The palm at the end of the mind,
Beyond the last thought, rises
In the bronze decor,
A gold-feathered bird
Sings in the palm, without human meaning,
Without human feeling, a foreign song.
- 2) Robert Frost, *Directive*, lines 55-57:
I have kept hidden in the instep arch
Of an old cedar at the waterside
A broken drinking goblet like the Grail
Under a spell so the wrong can't find it
So can't be saved, as Saint Mark says they mustn't.
- 3) Hugh J. Schonfield, *The Passover Plot* (1965), was among the first to offer alternate perspectives to popular culture outside traditional Christian teachings when he attempted to recover Jesus' historicity. Schonfield was also among the first to chastise Christianity publicly for teaching a literal virgin birth and the resurrection of the dead, a disservice to people who were searching for spiritual truths because it denies all sense of rationality (Schonfield 1965:50).
- 4) I will cite one example from Justin Martyr (100-165 CE) of how proto-Christians of the second-century viewed the Ebionites: "They . . . repudiate the Apostle Paul, maintaining that he was an apostate from the law. As to prophetic writings, they endeavor to expound them in a somewhat singular manner: they practice circumcision, persevere in the observance of those customs which are enjoined by the law, and are so Judaic in the style of life, that they even adore Jerusalem as if it were the house of God" (Justin Martyr as quoted by Mustafa Akyol, *The Islamic Jesus*, p. 51).
- 5) There is little in the way of documentation to understand how Ebionite Jews may have influenced Muhammad—Muslims, of course, do not see this as applying to the Qur'an, since all of it is the "uncreated" word of Allah outside of history through the Prophet of God, Muhammad (Khalidi 2001:15). We know that the Arab people of the time already believed they were descendants of Abraham (Peters 1994:121-123), but looking at the Qur'an itself, we see remarkable similarities with the Epistle of James in particular (Akyol 2017:3-5) and here I will only mention a few similarities: 1) Abraham is the founder of the original religion; 2) Moses is the giver of the Torah and greatest of the prophets; 3) Prophets of the Hebrew Bible proclaimed God's message, from Adam to Enoch; 4) Jesus is also a prophet, not an incarnation of the divine; 5) The One God is proclaimed—the Christian Trinity is rejected; 6) The Final Judgment is affirmed in which everyone will be judged for his or her deeds and rewarded or punished accordingly (Peters 2011: 117-118). No doubt this testifies to the growing influence of monotheism in Arabia by Muhammad's time (Peters 1994:107). Jesus (Isa) is mentioned ninety-three times in the Qur'an, twenty-three times as the "son of Mary." John the Baptist (Yaya) is also esteemed as a prophet (Qur'an 19). "O people of the Book, do not be fanatical in your faith, and say nothing but the truth about God. The Messiah who is Jesus, son of Mary, was only an apostle of God" (Qur'an 4:171). Is it possible that Ebionite itinerates made a deep impression on the people of Mecca through their public expositions and these had become etched in Muhammad's mind as being the "truth of God," later revealed through the Angel Gabriel in the Qur'an? I should add that the Qur'an affirms nothing of Pauline Christianity. Indeed, it condemns it (Qur'an 9:30).
- 6) From early in the nineteenth-century, when German scholars began to examine the four Gospels to find out which was first written, they developed a theory of a separate collection of "Sayings." The Gospel of Mark, they decided, was

written first (the writers of the Gospel of Matthew and Gospel of Luke incorporated all of Mark's sixteen chapters into their own Gospels). Both seem to have made use of a separate collection of "sayings" that Mark did not include (Mark did glean some ideas from it, called Q2, but from a different translation or perhaps he translated it himself from Aramaic). In fact, Matthew and Luke used the identical translation from Aramaic into Greek, but Matthew and Luke did not seem to know of each other. Scholars have reconstructed these sayings by closely examining the Sayings in both works (this process is ongoing and the debate about them is often intense).

- 7) Critical scholarship, which became known as "Form Criticism," then concentrated its energies on "pre-gospel" materials (Kloppenborg 2000:410-416) that Mark used: the miracle stories (1995:64-67), the pronouncement stories (Mack 1995:54-60), and the "chreiai" (anecdotes) (Mack 1995:54-55; 59-60). Bart Ehrman elaborates on the goal of "Form Criticism" (2016:63-64): "When they wanted to discuss the 'situation in life' of the stories, the form critics were not asking about a specific story but about the genre, or form, of the story itself. That is to say, what was happening to the Christian community that led them to tell healing stories, or controversy stories, or parables, and so on?" Disappointment had set in, from their severe didacticism, because they felt that so little "historical" information was available—the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles for them consisted solely of "pious fiction" and that extracting what is historical was not possible. Scholars today feel that there indeed is an historical overlay in this material, proven again and again by recent archeological discoveries.
- 8) Scholars from the nineteenth-century believed that the Gospels were completely fictional accounts that followed something of Titus Flavius Josephus' (Yosef ben Matityahu) (37-100) narratives of the *Jewish Wars* (78 CE) and *Antiquities of the Jews* (93 CE). Acts of the Apostles followed the pattern for romance and heroic stories of the Greco-Roman era and so few historians took it seriously (scholars agree that the same person wrote both the Gospel of Luke and Acts of the Apostles). Yet recent archeological discoveries have caused scholars to take a second, closer look at the material, while remembering that purpose of the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles was for conversion to Pauline doctrine. The world has missed a great deal when scholars closed the lid on the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles from historical consideration.
- 9) Israeli prosecutors, after a five-year trial, were unable to prove the ossuary a forgery. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/05/world/middleeast/findings-reignite-debate-on-claim-of-jesus-bones.html>). The discovery of James' ossuary, which many scholars believe has the authentic inscriptions, frightened the Israeli authorities. But the Talpiot Tomb is on a different level of shock altogether. What would it mean for the Christian pilgrims (and tourists) and for Christianity of the discovery of the tomb of Jesus, with Mary Magdalene as his wife and with an ossuary of a son who died young? Indeed, is the world mature enough for this? The Talpiot Tomb remains sealed up today under an apartment complex. Maybe many hope that the world will forget about it?
- 10) Please see *The Jesus Discovery: The New Archaeological Find that Reveals the Birth of Christianity* (2012) by James D. Tabor and Simcha Jacobovici.
- 11) It should be noted, however, that these writers, including the Gospel of Matthew in its present form—much of it considered Ebionite literature—wrote under the influence of Paul's doctrine of the resurrected Christ to interpret the events, so they were suppressing some information they felt contradicted the emerging doctrines.
- 12) Christian traditionalists have felt that "John" was talking about himself and believed "John" was the "disciple whom Jesus loved"—he had previously been a disciple of John the Baptist (John 1:35). None of the authors of these Gospels "signed" their documents because they were commissioned by a community to articulate its own beliefs about Jesus. The names were added later, well into the second-century, based on the people Paul mentioned in his letters and those mentioned in the Gospels (no one knows who wrote the Gospel of John).
- 13) Other materials in the New Testament may also be from an eyewitness. Scholars identify this as the "We Document" of Acts of the Apostles, when the writer suddenly switches to the first person, beginning in chapter 16 and continuing through the rest of the document. No one has been able to identify who this person might have been, but the writer of Acts, as he did in writing the Gospel of Luke, incorporating long passages from both the Gospel of Mark

and the Sayings of Q, seems to have done something similar here. In view of this, scholars pay special attention to this part of the document. Please see Robert Eisenman, *James the Brother of Jesus*, pp. 11; 51; 196; 603–605.

- 14) What scholars have called “Jewish-Christianity” is one of the great misnomers of the ages, since it shows a deep Christian bias—of seeing their teachings through the lenses of Pauline Christianity. The underlying bias is that these groups believed in the Pauline doctrine of Jesus’ divinity, with a literal resurrection from the dead—yet they wanted to maintain their Jewish identity. But this is not the case. Even today scholars use the term as a blanket, uncritical acknowledgement that the material of “Jewish Christianity” is different, yet few have asked until recently “why” this material was different. Indeed, it was a different “religion” subsumed by the Pauline teachings. I should add that none of the Ebionite literature shows Jesus as a reformer of Judaism (this was also part of proto-orthodox formulations that put Jesus as an outsider to Judaism). Indeed, the Gospel of Matthew shows Jesus affirming all aspects of Judaism of the day, especially the Mosaic Covenant.
- 15) Approximate dating of the Gospels according to more liberal scholars (Mack 1995:311): the Gospel of Mark (70–75 CE), the Gospel of Matthew (80–85 CE), the Gospel of John (90–95 CE), and the Gospel of Luke (125–130 CE).
- 16) The Eucharist is a formulation from Paul, and from Paul alone, from a vision he said he received from Jesus (Second Corinthians 11:23–26), of the bread as Jesus’ body and the wine as Jesus’ blood. This certainly is not a Jewish formulation, which forbids the eating of blood (Leviticus 17; Deuteronomy 12:23; Acts 15:20). Cannibalism is inconceivable to Jewish sensibilities and so Jesus could not have commanded anyone to eat his flesh as the bread to remember him. Where, practically speaking, did this idea come from? It was part of a Greco-Roman magical rite between the Egyptian god and goddess Osiris and Isis, done to symbolize the union of their love (please see James D. Tabor, *The Jesus Dynasty*, p. 203).
- 17) Christian Weisse (1838) was first to offer a solution to these observations when he theorized that Matthew and Luke had used two documents, the Gospel of Mark and a separate collection of Jesus’ Sayings. Others built on Weisse’s work. Johanness Weiss (1890) called these sayings “Q” (*Quelle* is “Source” in German). Heinrich Julius Holtzmann (1909) worked out the details of the theory that became known as the Two Document Hypothesis. This hypothesis seemed to solve the riddle of the synoptic Gospels, their similarities and differences, and critical scholarship follows the theory that answers the questions (Mack 1993:20–22).
- 18) In 1988, at the *Q Seminar of the Society of Biblical Literature*, John S. Kloppenborg identified three separate layers of Q, added at different times in the life of the community, from 30 to 80 CE. Q1, the earliest, contained the wisdom teachings and radical lifestyle exhortations, written down by 50 CE. Q2, added by 65 CE, changed the earlier tenor. Jesus became an apocalyptic prophet sent by God, in the center of Israel’s epic. Q3, the shortest section at about four hundred words, written and inserted by 80 CE, suggests Jesus as semi-divine, who said: “. . . when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, and you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matthew 19:24). The different groups of materials were spliced into the original Q1 document here and there to make it appear as a single, original document.
- 19) It must have been common knowledge, in an age when there was little privacy, that Mary became pregnant before she married Joseph. Rome occupied Palestine and there was probably little protection for women from Roman soldiers. If indeed a Roman soldier had raped Mary, she may have been as young as fourteen—and already betrothed to Joseph from an even younger age—the age when Jewish women of the time married. But was it really rape and not a mutual relationship? Tiberius Julius Abdes Pantera, according to Origen (185–254), who quoted from the Greek philosopher Celsus (25 BCE–50 CE), a contemporary of events, is the reputed father of Jesus, a theory that the New Testament scholar James Tabor has articulated (please see the chapter in *The Jesus Dynasty*, “An Unnamed Father of Jesus?”). A monument to Pantera was discovered in 1859, in Bringerbruck, Germany, where he died serving in the Roman army, after forty years of service. His names show that he had once been a slave (perhaps he served as a Roman soldier for his freedom). His name “Abdes” (*Ebedi* Aramaic for “Servant of God”) shows that he was from Palestine, in fact from Sidon, and was probably a Jew. Even the Talmud mentions a “Pantera” as Jesus’ father.

- Certainly Jesus was mocked, in the Gospel of John, for not knowing whom his father was (John 3:47). But did Jesus not know who his father was? Critics of this thesis have said that since it comes only from “enemies” of Christianity it cannot be accepted.
- 20) The Gospel of Thomas confirms this, with Jesus saying: “From Adam unto John the Baptist there has been one among the offspring of women who has been more exalted than John the Baptist . . .” (Saying 46, as translated by Bentley Layton).
 - 21) Some controversy remains regarding a Hebrew Gospel of Matthew (the original Gospel) that predated the Greek version in today’s New Testament, with some, represented by Bart Ehrman, saying that it is simply a Hebrew translation of a Greek original, and that the Ebionites cut out the parts from Pauline doctrine (Ehrman & Pleše 2014:108–109). I follow James Tabor: the Hebrew version predated the Greek version and it was preserved by the Jewish people (Tabor 2007:335:14n): “George Howard, *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1995). The Hebrew text of Matthew is embedded in a 14th-century Jewish treatise entitled *Even Bohan*, written by Shem-Tob Ibn Shaprut of Aragon. Howard has persuasively shown that this version of Matthew, preserved in Jewish rabbinic circles, is not a translation of the Greek Matthew contained in our New Testaments. It preserves independent, and I would argue, more authentic readings in a number of crucial places.” This means that the Gospel of Matthew in today’s New Testament is a Paulinized version of the Hebrew original.
 - 22) In contrast to the Essenes, however, John was outgoing and inclusive, claiming that repentance was the order of the day for everyone. The Essenes, seen in its Community Rule, separated from the general population because they considered it unholy, made up of the “sons of darkness.” Jesus of course, as John, had an inclusive message, yet it is difficult to say whether Jesus welcomed those who were not Jewish into the movement. Some have claimed that Jesus had, simply based on the inclusiveness of the Sayings of Q (Mack 1993:214–215). Still, taking the Gospels as they stand, Jesus’ message was directed to those of Jewish descent (with some exceptions) and particularly toward the poor among them.
 - 23) The Greek word for “locusts” *akris* is very similar to the Greek word for “honey cake” *enkris* perhaps represented as “manna” that the Hebrews ate in the desert in the days of Moses, bread cooked in olive oil, made of a desert plant (please see *James the Brother of Jesus* by Robert Eisenman, pp. 164-f).
 - 24) James D. Tabor 2007:145–146: “This ideal vision of Two Messiahs became a model for many Jewish groups that were oriented toward apocalyptic thinking in the 2nd to 1st centuries B.C. The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs (Didache), dating from the 2nd century B.C., puts things succinctly: ‘For the Lord will raise up from Levi someone as high priest and from Judah someone as king.’”
 - 25) These were magical times, for they changed forever world religious consciousness. Beginning in spring 26 CE (Rosh Hashanah from 26 to 27 was a Sabbatical year, so the peasants who usually were toiling now had leisure to listen to the two Messiahs) both John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth captivated the tiny nation of Israel, consisting perhaps of three million people. Mark begins his narrative after John’s arrest, two years after Jesus’ baptism, which Matthew and Luke follow. Only the Gospel of John tells of any details of this earlier period. It truly seemed that miraculous things were about to occur.
 - 26) Jesus, a great genius of the Greco-Roman period on a purely human level, judging by his extraordinary teachings found in Q1, the closest we can come to the person of Jesus, built on the inspiration he first received from John the Baptist. Together, John and Jesus would reestablish the Kingdom of David, a Kingdom based on righteousness, as the anointed King and Priest that so many were longing for. Their outspokenness was an act of great courage, since anyone attempting to undermine the Roman authorities, or their local proxy rulers, risked death. Jesus repeatedly, in the Gospel of Mark, asked that no one say anything (Mark 1:43–44; 8:27–30; Bloom 2005:69). Jesus, a strategic thinker, left even his closest disciples in the dark regarding his ultimate plan. It was better to let everyone believe that they were simply encouraging people to be more pliable and meek with their baptizing campaign, to live more righteous lives, rather than openly advocating for the new Kingdom with them as the head. But, as I mentioned, personal

transformation for them came before social transformation. Their message was that a transformed heart would bring the Messianic age.

- 27) From the Hebrew word *shmita* “release,” every seven years the nation was to allow the land to go “fallow,” unattended, as an agricultural cycle of rest. Leviticus 25:3-4: “For six years sow your fields, and for six years prune your vineyards and gather their crops. But in the seventh year the land is to have a year of Sabbath rest, a Sabbath to the Lord.”
- 28) One of Jesus’ brothers is known as Simon the Zealot (Zealots, no doubt with a death wish, openly advocated for the overthrow of Roman domination). Simon became one of Jesus’ twelve disciples. Jesus’ mother, Mary, named her five sons after Maccabean freedom fighters responsible for overthrowing the Greek Syrian Seleucid Dynasty (323–64 BCE) to establish an independent kingdom that lasted for about eighty years, the Hasmonean Dynasty (140–63 BCE). The Hasmoneans were from a priestly family, not from the royal line of David, and so they were not completely accepted as the rightful rulers, since only those of Davidic descent (from the Tribe of Judah) were seen as legitimate. Things got even worse with King Herod (c. 74–4 BCE), installed by the Romans in 63 BCE, who established the Herodian Dynasty (63 BCE to 92 CE). Though his mother was Jewish, he could not claim to be of Davidic descent. The Romans had absolutely no cultural sensibilities toward their subjects in Palestine. The Zealot movement began in about 6 CE (Vermees 2010:11), with Judas the Galilean (f. 6 CE), which Josephus called the “Fourth Philosophy,” and it would eventually provoke the conflict that led to both Roman Jewish Wars (67–73; 133–135).
- 29) This Levirate practice startles our sensibilities today, but again, as we recover aspects of the Gospels, we encounter the “foreignness” of another culture of another time. Levirate Marriage, where the brother was required to have children in his brother’s name, was honorable and just in that time. Indeed, one could be punished as a worthless person if one refused. For a woman of the time, moreover, it was an honorable way to remember her husband, whose name would continue to live on, from a Substitute (Alphaeus or Cleophas). Indeed, Joseph, according to tradition, was much older than Mary and died before he could have children with her. James, the next eldest, is also called the “Son of Alphaeus” (Mark 15:40). But both legally and officially, all the sons of Mary with Alphaeus or Cleophas are the “Sons of Joseph.”
- 30) From Josephus, Philo (25 BCE–50 CE), and Pliny (23–79 CE) we learn that first-century Palestine had four prominent groups or factions: The Sadducees, or hereditary priests and hated collaborators with the Romans; the Pharisees, a conservative renewal movement; the Essenes, an ascetic anti-political group; and the Zealots, those bent on the overthrow of Rome. Not everyone in Israel was necessarily part of these groups—but everyone certainly knew of each group. The Pharisees had expanded the ideas of ritual purity, with their emphasis on the family as the center of religious devotion, which later became part of rabbinical Judaism (Peters 2007:181).
- 31) Robert Eisenman 1997:104–105: “The popular picture of a Salome dancing at Herod’s Birthday Party is just scriptural tomfoolery, although as always in these instances, not without a seed of historical reality—in this case, the seed is the problem of the Herodian family morals and their sexual practices that were objected to by all these Messianic leaders like John the Baptist and after him, presumably Jesus”
- 32) James’ Hebrew name *Ya’aqov* “Jacob,” becomes *Iakobos* when translated into Greek and *Iacomus* in Latin—from which “James” is derived in an old English translation. This is a round about way of arriving at “James!”
- 33) After Judas Iscariot committed suicide the eleven apostles met to choose his replacement, as recorded in Acts 1:21–22: “Therefore it is necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us—beginning with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.” Notice that the requirement for the new apostle was that he had to have been with them from the “baptism of John.” The lot fell on Matthias (Acts 1:26), his name showing he was of priestly descent.
- 34) *Diaspora* means “Scattering” in Greek. For nearly seven hundred years by the first-century CE the Mediterranean had been settled by waves of Jewish exiles fleeing waves of foreign conquests: the Assyrian in 722 BCE, the Babylo-

- nian in 597 BCE, and the Greek under Alexander the Great from 332 BCE. Six to seven million Jews were living in the Diaspora by the first-century CE, more in fact than in Palestine (Meeks 1983:33) (estimated by some as high as three million). All the large cities in the Eastern Mediterranean, including Alexandria, had a Jewish population of between ten to fifteen percent. Antioch's Jewish population may have approached fifty-percent. This was crucial for the development of Christianity, as Paul, with generations of others, blended the religious ideas of two cultures.
- 35) Genesis 9:1-6: "Everything that lives and moves about will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything. But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it."
- 36) Robert Eisenman 1997:53-54: "It (Jesus' statement of James) represents nothing less than the lost tradition of the direct appointment of James as successor to his brother. It is upheld by everything we know about groups that were expelled from orthodox Christianity in the years prior to and following Constantine's adoption of it as the official religion of the Roman Empire in the fourth-century. Many of these groups dispersed into a variety of sectarian groupings in the Syrian and Iraqi deserts, leading to a plethora of theological movements in the areas of Northern Mesopotamia and Syria. Some disappeared into Arabia only to re-emerge as Islam, in particular, as time went on, into its Shi'ite embodiment."
- 37) In contrast to earlier Ebionite teachings, found both in the Epistle of James and the Didache, where Jesus is an ordinary human being with an extraordinary vision—in essence the bearer of new interpretation of what it meant to be Jewish or a new application of Torah teachings for current times, the Qur'an places Jesus a bit higher, as a kind of angelic being, who indeed was born of a virgin (Qur'an 19) and who did not die on the cross (a substitute replaced him) and so was called to heaven directly without going through a mortal death (Qur'an 5:117). Yet, Jesus was not to be worshiped.
- 38) Friedrich Nietzsche: "Paul is the incarnation of a type which is the reverse of that of the Savior; he is the genius in hatred, in the standpoint of hatred, and in the relentless logic of hatred. And alas what did this antichrist not sacrifice to his hatred! Above all the Savior himself; he nailed him to *his cross*. Christ's life, his example, his doctrine and death, the sense and the right of the gospel—not a vestige of all this was left, once this forger, prompted by his hatred, had understood in it only that which could serve his purpose. . . . What he wanted was power; with St. Paul the priest again aspired to power—he could make use only of concepts, doctrines, symbols with which masses may be tyrannized over, and with which herds are formed" (italics in original) (Friedrich Nietzsche as quoted by Meeks 1972:291-295).
- 39) Paul says precious little about the historical Jesus and can be summed up as follows, from Bart Ehrman, *Jesus Before the Gospels*, p. 104: Jesus was born a Jew (Gal. 4:4); he was descended from the line of King David (Romans 1:3); he had brothers (First Corinthians 9:5), one of whom was named James (Galatians 1:19); he had twelve disciples (First Corinthians 15:5); he taught only among Jews (Romans 15:8); he had a last meal with his disciples before his arrest by the authorities (First Corinthians 11:23); Paul knows two things Jesus said at this last supper (First Corinthians 11:23-25); Paul knows two other teachings of Jesus: that people should not get divorced (First Corinthians 7:10) and that they should pay their spiritual leaders (First Corinthians 9:14); Jesus died by crucifixion (First Corinthians 2:2).
- 40) Dating, according to more liberal scholars, of Paul's seven authentic letters (Mack 1995:311): First Thessalonians (49-51 CE), Galatians (52-53 CE), First Corinthians (53-54 CE), Second Corinthians (parts of five letters combined) (55-57 CE), Romans (56-58 CE), Philemon (60-62 CE), and Philippians (60-62 CE) (parts of at least three separate letter fragments).
- 41) Second Corinthians 4:16: "Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. . . . So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." Paul's extreme duality, where nothing temporal and of the body is of value, provides no better evidence for a completely "spiritual" resurrection in his gospel.
- 42) Matthew, with John, wrote some of the most anti-Semitic sections in all the Gospels. While John probably used the term "Jews" to refer to "Judeans," Matthew (or probably later revisionists) went a bit farther, writing, after Pilot

- proclaimed, "I am innocent of the blood of this Righteous One," that the Jews shouted: "His blood be upon us and our children" (Matthew 27:24-25). This sanctioned later persecution.
- 43) Paul's message was that Judaism is a religion of "works" (not grace) through such passages as Romans 3:28. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The foundation of Judaism is love as an absolute with a wholehearted turning to the divine—as we have seen with the campaigns of John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth. The "works" that Paul described are not "works" at all, but devotion to the covenant. Paul may have felt this devotion was hypocritical—but Jews felt Paul was hypocritical. Paul indeed was masterful in making Hebrew ideas comprehensible to a Greco-Roman audience.
- 44) I will quote from Harold Bloom, *Genius*, p. 142: "Paul's genius was his powerful originality as a misreader of the Jewish Covenant with Yahweh, which ceased to be a mutual agreement and became an unilateral expression of the will of God."
- 45) In reading Paul's letters, one has the question: If Jesus had done away with the sins of the world through a physical death and a spiritual resurrection does it not mean that no one will be held accountable for the wrongs one has done? Is there no longer any moral accountability, in the ultimate sense? It is very possible that Paul believed everyone was already redeemed (how could this not be the conclusion?), but in order to experience this Paul established his churches—Paul called this "the first fruits unto God" (Roman 8:23), where people needed to believe. But is faith necessary if everything was accomplished, whether one believed in it or not?
- 46) Some, however, have affirmed Paul's position, based in part on some documents from the Dead Sea Scrolls, that in order to enjoy the full benefits of community life, one should first convert to Judaism. I quote from *James the Brother of Jesus* by Robert Eisenman, p. 160: "It is also clear that in some sense circumcision and observing the Law were considered *sine qua non* for full-fledged or bona-fide members of the early Movement or Community. . . . This absolutely accords with the literature we have from Qumran, which in so many ways parallels these materials (Paul's epistles), that is, first one had to *convert to Judaism*; then one could make some claim to being *heir* to its traditions" (italics in original). Eisenman's view would be the minority view, since Judaism has no historical analogues for the active conversion of others.
- 47) Some may rightly point out that there were deep cultural differences between Jews in the Diaspora and those living in Palestine. What Paul was teaching of Jesus—of him as a preexisting divine being—other Jews in the Diaspora had also articulated, deeply influenced as they were by myths from Greek culture. Philo of Alexandria (25 BCE-50 CE) had taught that the Logos was an intermediary supernatural being, similar to a separate person embodied by Wisdom in the book of Proverbs (Proverbs 9), which the writer of the Gospel of John had adapted for presenting Jesus' divine entrance into the world (John 1). Philo would become an important philosopher for later Christian exegetes.
- 48) George Bernard Shaw: "He (Paul) does nothing that Jesus would have done, and says nothing that Jesus would have said. . . . He is more Jewish than the Jews, more Roman than the Romans, proud of both ways, full of startling confessions and self-revelations that would not surprise us if they were slipped into the pages of Nietzsche, tormented by an intellectual conscience, but always hopelessly in the toils of Sin, Death, and Logic, which had no power over Jesus" (George Bernard Shaw as quoted by Meeks 1972:296-301).
- 49) George Bernard Shaw, writing in a preface to his *Androcles and the Lion* (1913), compared Paul to Karl Marx (1818-1883), since both erased moral responsibility from the human race (please see *Jesus and Yahweh* by Harold Bloom, p. 55).
- 50) Again, dating by more liberal scholars (Mack 1995:311): Colossians (78-80 CE), Ephesians (90-95 CE), Hebrews (90-95 CE), Second Thessalonians (95-100 CE), First Timothy (120-130 CE), Second Timothy (120-130 CE), and Titus (120-130 CE).
- 51) Robert Eisenman 1997:169: "Josephus and a colleague, he confides somewhat conspiratorially, *drew the short straws* (to be the last to commit suicide). They then proceed to dispatch all the others in the typical pre-arranged suicide pact characterizing these 'Fourth Philosophy' resistance strategies and, in one of the most brazen betrayals ever boasted of

- in literature, personally surrendered to the Roman Emperor-to-be Vespasian then commanding the Roman troops in Palestine" (italics in original). In other words, Josephus and his companion purposely avoided suicide, even as they witnessed the suicides of fellow soldiers, before fawning to Vespasian. This brings treachery to a new level!
- 52) There is a firm tradition that Paul even physically assaulted James at one point, according early church documents, called the Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions, which may have been written as early as the second-century (Eisenman 1997:278).
- 53) *Moses And Monotheism* by Sigmund Freud, p. 145: "They have not overcome their grudge against the new religion which was forced on them, and they have projected it on to the source from which Christianity came to them. . . . The hatred for Judaism is at the bottom hatred for Christianity."
- 54) Jews today mourn for the destruction of the Temple on Tisha B'Av (summer), a day of fasting.
- 55) I should quote from *A Myth of Innocence* by Burton L. Mack, p. 375: "The sorry plot lies at the very foundations of the long, ugly history of Christian attitudes and actions toward Jews and Judaism. . . No thinking person can justify this long history (of anti-Semitism), nor doubt that the Gospel has justified it in the eyes of Christians . . . from the time of the early church, through the *adversus Judaeos*, to the Crusades, reactions to the plagues, Catholic doctrine, Luther's pronouncements, German tracts of the nineteenth and early twentieth-century literature [with] the anomaly of anti-Semitic attitudes that emerge throughout the third world wherever the Gospel is read today. The Nazi enactment of the final solution forty years ago may have been tainted by pagan desires. But the rational was Christian. The holocaust was also a Gospel event."
- 56) Many have advocated for a "death and resurrection" within Christianity, beginning with the acknowledgement of its own ruthless history of prejudice and bigotry. Please see John Shelby Spong, *Why Christianity Must Change or Die* (1999).

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