

Antiochian House of Studies

A First-Century View of Yeshua, the Messiah

A Historical Account of Khristos, the Anointed One

"How the Jewish mouse ate the Greco-Roman elephant"

Robert D. Hosken, M. Min., D. Min.

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INTRODUCTION

The thesis of this present work is not only to portray the Person of Yeshua, the Messiah, but also to explore in greater depth the swirling interplay of Jewish and Greco-Roman spiritual, religious, and cultural forces at work leading up to and including the first century A.D. Secondly, it is to illustrate the way in which this renewed and restored Jewish faith would be delivered from captivity and eventually expand to encompass the whole Greco-Roman Empire and beyond – see Gen. 12:1-3, Ex. 3:4-17, Dan. 2:44-45, and Rev. 19:11-16. Thirdly, it aims to point out the Messiah's three years of doing and training others to do *διακονια* – ministry to “*the poor, maimed, lame, and blind*” who were the central focus of his earthly ministry, as this work will quote from this author's harmony of the Gospels, *The Good News of Yeshua, the Messiah*, to answer the question: What does it mean to be a *διακον* – a deacon?

We as humans tend to perceive what we expect or would prefer to see and hear, and filter out those data that do not conform to our stored experiences. This "confirmation bias" is what all four Evangelists and Paul referred to when quoting Is. 6:9-10 – “*By hearing you will hear, And will in no way understand; Seeing you will see, And will in no way perceive: For this people's heart has grown callous, Their ears are dull of hearing, They have closed their eyes; Or else perhaps they might perceive with their eyes, Hear with their ears, Understand with their heart, And should turn again; And I would heal them.*” We tend to focus on the Lord's Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection because they promise us salvation, but we filter out the parts that tell us about doing hands-on ministry: they do not match up with today's worldview of state-funded social work, welfare and medical care. Let the government pay for it!

The source that has inspired the thesis for this work is "The Old Testament Basis for Christian Worship" – a section in the seminal book on the relation of the Jewish temple and synagogue worship to Orthodox Christian worship: *Orthodox Worship: A Living Continuity with the Synagogue, the Temple, and the Early Church*¹. That book's explanation of early Christianity and its current manifestation in Orthodox worship as being to a great extent a continuation or extension of synagogue worship spurred my interest in the topic. In addition, our home is in a condo/townhouse community built for Jewish people of Pittsburgh: three of our community's residents were victims of the Tree of Life Synagogue massacre on October 27, 2018, heightening my sympathies for the Jewish people and my disgust for the unfair way in which they have been mistreated, maligned, and massacred over the centuries.

This present work is also intended to help the reader overcome the anachronistic way of thinking that projects our current mindset back into the mental framework of the first century, thinking that Christians have always been antisemitic, or that Christianity is opposed to Judaism. This work uses alternatively the Hebrew "Yeshua, the Messiah" and the Greek "Yesous, the Khristos, the Anointed One" to illustrate the bilingual ability of the Gospel writers and the

1 Williams and Anstall. *Orthodox Worship*, 9.

tension between the Jewish and Greco-Roman worldviews. "Yesous" or "Iesous" is simply placing a Greek ending on "Yeshua," and "Messiah" translates into Greek as "the Khristos" which means "the Anointed One." But today, many people tend to think of "Jesus Christ" as a man whose given name is "Jesus" and his surname is "Christ." So we must try to uncover the foundations of our present unconscious biases and restructure our distorted worldview. This work aims to point out clearly the historicity, ministry, and most importantly, the deity of Yeshua, the Messiah, not as we might think of it anachronistically today in the nice, sanitized statements of the Nicene Creed, in our services, and in our prayers, but in the rough-and-tumble of confrontations with the first-century Jewish and Roman authorities.

Other examples of anachronistic thinking are Christ and the Apostles being depicted on the iconostases of Orthodox churches with bound books in their hands, but the bound book, the codex, was not invented until the fifth century A.D.; or the way modern preachers speak – "God says in Deuteronomy 10 verse 5..." as if God gave his revelation already divided up into chapters and verses, but these artificial divisions of scripture were not added until the Middle Ages. This versification leads us to think of God's revelation as a random collection of verses, little sound-bites, rather than a vast panorama, a narrative of human history and destiny. The full canon of the books of the Bible was only ratified at the Council of Hippo (A.D. 393), so for 360 years the Church relied largely on oral teaching being handed down ("traditioned") for the most part orally from one generation to the next: see 2 Thes. 2:15.

Even up into the Middle Ages, Bibles were laboriously copied by hand, each one requiring a year or more of painstaking labor, making each Bible a rare and precious item. Only in the mid-1400s did Gutenberg invent the metal movable-type printing press and Bibles began to be widely circulated. So a century later, when Martin Luther proclaimed his doctrine of "*sola scriptura*" and said that every cowherd and milkmaid could read and understand the Bible, he was thinking anachronistically, assuming that everyone from the first century onward could obtain a printed, bound Bible. But the doctrine of "*sola scriptura*" would have been simply impossible to apply in the first 15 centuries. We all see the world through the filters of our individual and societal experiences, so in that sense nobody can be completely objective, but at the very least we should strive to be aware of our filters in order to try to see the first-century world as it was then, not as if it were our world of today.

Think of the Jewish influence on Greek culture even before the first century: the Hebrew alphabet begins with the letters *aleph*, *beth*, *gimel*, and *daleth* – the same sounds and order as in the later Greek alphabet *alpha*, *beta*, *gamma*, and *delta*. And when this author explained to a Russian Evangelical pastor that the mostly-Greek-based Cyrillic alphabet which Russian uses contains a few Hebrew letters – *tsadhe*, *sin*, and *shin* – for sounds that do not exist in the Greek alphabet, the Russian pastor was shocked, because, as he joked: "*We Russians aren't antisemitic, we just hate Jews!*" Such an antipathy toward the race and culture that gave birth to Christianity is most certainly out of place, especially for Christian ministers. In contrast, the Orthodox Church retains to this day many features of Jewish synagogue worship: the

directional orientation of the building, the menorah, the altar, the chanting of the Psalms, incense, candles, no instrumental music, the bema (ambon) where the scriptures are chanted, and the conciliar form of organization with a structured priestly hierarchy.

This work will cite from print resources and also from several online resources, such as Jaroslav Pelikan's chapter "Praeparatio Evangelica" on pages 11-12 of his book *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*². These resources would then appear in a new browser window. Pelikan writes: "*The very legitimacy of the development of Christian dogma has been challenged on the grounds of its supposed hellenization of the primitive message; the contrast between Greek and Hebrew ways of thought has been used to explain the distinctiveness of Christian doctrine.*" As the reader will see below, perhaps just the opposite is the case: the "judaization" of hellenic culture, as described in the foreword to this author's harmony of the Gospels, *The Good News of Yeshua, the Messiah*³ (this link takes you to the Foreword in that resource), which explains the relationship of Judaism to Hellenic culture, as well as how to access that harmony's various menu items. It is the expanded, English-language version of this author's Russian *Blagaya Vest' ob Iisuse Khriste: Svodnyi tekst chetyriokh Evangelii*.⁴ The Greek word σωτηρια might better be translated as "healing-and-salvation." So the many references to this English-language harmony is an attempt to illustrate the Gospels' emphasis on the very physical nature of Yeshua's healing (σωτηρια) ministry and what ours should be, not merely a spiritual salvation (σωτηρια) by faith that grants us a free ticket to heaven.

The main resource for the above work is Kerr's out-of-print *A Harmony of the Gospels*⁵ that attempts to arrange in historical sequence every event and teaching in Yeshua's life. Kerr points out four Passovers in Yeshua's ministry – Jn. 2:13; 5:1; 6:4; and 11:55 – indicating a public ministry of over three years. At Amazon.com one finds 32 different books called a harmony of the Gospels, some include Kindle editions, and *The Complete Gospel: A Blending of the Four Gospels into One Continuous, Flowing Story* by Gary Wentz, a \$1 Kindle-only edition⁶. This is in addition to books by different titles that are basically of the same nature, such as Pollock's *The Master: A Life of Jesus*⁷, the book *Jesus: A New Translation of the Four Gospels, Arranged as One*⁸ by Moss, and the classic *The Life and Times of Jesus The Messiah* by Edersheim⁹. Another outstanding work is the 1716-page volume, *The Narrative Bible*, that includes a 135-page narration entitled "Jesus the Christ."¹⁰ With so many books available on

2 Pelikan, [*The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition \(100-600\)*](#) 11-12 [select PDF pp. 38-39].

3 Hosken, ed. [*The Good News of Yeshua, the Messiah*](#), Foreword

4 Hosken, ed. *Blagaya Vest' ob Iisuse Khriste*.

5 Kerr, *A Harmony of the Gospels*. Preface.

6 Wentz, *The Complete Gospel*.

7 Pollock, *The Master: A Life of Jesus*.

8 Moss, *Jesus: A New Translation of the Four Gospels, Arranged as One*.

9 Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus The Messiah*.

10 Smith, *The Narrative Bible*.

this subject, one might wonder why another attempt should be made. But hopefully, the above reasons will explain and justify this effort.

PART ONE – HISTORICAL PREPARATION FOR MESSIAH

A. The Old Testament Prophets

The prophets defined the historical narrative, which greatly formed the mental framework of first-century Jews expecting the Messiah. It is estimated that 40% to 60% of the New Covenant consists of direct or indirect references to the Old Covenant. There are 549 links to the Old Covenant in this author's harmony of the Gospels and there are very likely many more indirect references to the Old Covenant that aren't linked, illustrating how the minds of many first-century Jews were filled with Scripture. But this was not always the case: ancient Israel's history is replete with instances of disregarding their calling as a people set apart, so they fell away from the Lord, then the Lord would send a judge or prophet or military leader to restore his people, then they fell away again and again. Their captivity by the Egyptians, by the Philistines, by the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, the Seleucids, the Ptolemies, and the Romans is part and parcel of their history.

The Old Covenant's warnings and prophecies against Israel's unfaithfulness and falling away go back to the Pentateuch, which themes were picked up by Yeshua and his Apostles, relating this to the New Covenant. Here are just a few of the over 500 links between the Old and New Covenants. When Abraham was 75 years old, the Lord's promise was first stated in Gen. 12:2-3, that through his seed all nations of the earth will be blessed. The Apostle Paul cites this promise in Rom. 4:1-5 to gentile converts, calling Abraham "*our forefather*", thus including the Roman Gentile believers in Messiah as members of Abraham's spiritual descendants. This promise is reiterated in Gen. 15:5-14 with a covenant sealed by sacrifices and a warning of Abraham's descendants falling into slavery, and again in Gen. 17:1-14 when Abraham was 99, sealing it with his circumcision and warning that any uncircumcised male in his lineage "*shall be cut off from his people*" (v. 14). But the Apostle Paul explains in Rom. 4:9-12 that the Lord's covenant with Abraham was made while he was yet uncircumcised, thus the New Covenant is for both circumcised and uncircumcised believers in Yeshua. The seal of the New Covenant replacing circumcision for males is now baptism that is inclusive of both males and females – Col. 2:11-12 – and serious violations of the New Covenant may warrant similar excluding from communion.

In Ps. 2:2-9, King David prophesied many details about the Messiah: the anti-Messiah (anti-Christ) rulers of the earth will plot against him but the Messiah will reign on Mount Zion – see Rev. 13:16-18 and 14:1-10. In Ps. 2:7 the Lord calls him his begotten Son – see Jn. 3:16, and in Ps. 2:9 he will inherit the nations and break them with a rod of iron – see Rev. 19:15. Perhaps the most familiar messianic Psalm is 22:10-18, an excruciatingly accurate

description of Messiah's crucifixion... which method of execution was totally unknown at the time David wrote this Psalm! Also, note that in v. 10 David mentions the Messiah's mother and there is no mention of an earthly father, but there is an intimate relationship with God from his birth. In addition, note v. 27: *"All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord. All the tribes of the nations shall worship before you"* – which connects worship of "the Lord" to "you," the Messiah. Another messianic Psalm is 45:6-7 in which the Trinity is intimated: God anoints the Messiah (Yeshua) with oil (the Holy Spirit) – see Mt. 3:13-17 where the Trinity is fully revealed. The main Psalms of David end with Ps. 72 about his descendant who will reign forever, so it is not merely about Solomon, and in verses 11-12 he states that all kings and all nations will bow before this descendant – see Rev. 21:24 – who will deliver the needy and poor who "have no helper" – see Jn. 5:7. In Ps. 110:1 David calls his descendant "my Lord" which Yeshua quotes in Mt. 22:44-45 as referring to himself.

The messianic prophecies of Isaiah are many:

- In Is. 6:9-12 we read of the tragic stubbornness of the Jews that will lead to the wholesale destruction of their cities and their exile into foreign lands: vv. 9-10 are quoted in Mt. 13:14-15; Mk. 4:12; Lk. 8:10; Jn. 2:40; Acts 28:26; and Rom. 11:8. As mentioned in the Introduction, this passage is key to understanding the reaction of many first-century Jews, especially the Scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees, to Yeshua's ministry, his message, his crucifixion, and his resurrection.
- Next, in Is. 7:14 the prophet foretold that a virgin would conceive and bear a son called Immanuel, *"God with us"* – see Mt. 1:21.
- In Is. 11:1-4 we read that the Spirit of the Lord will rest on him – see Mt. 3:13-17 – and the Messiah will slay the wicked with the rod of his mouth – see 2 Thes. 2:8 and Rev. 19:15.
- Then Is. 40:3-4 speaks of the meek Servant who *"will bring forth justice to the Gentiles"* and is quoted in all four Gospels: Mt. 3:3; Mk. 1:3; Lk. 3:4; and Jn. 1:23.
- Again in Is. 42:1-4 we read about the Servant who *"will bring forth justice to the Gentiles"* – quoted in Mt. 12:18-21 where this quote is immediately followed with Yeshua healing a blind and mute person, to which the people say in amazement: *"Is not this the Messiah?"* (v. 23).
- The suffering Servant who is called from his mother's womb is described in Is. 49:1 and 5 to not only restore the remnant of Israel, but also to be *"a light to the Gentiles"* (v.6), which Simeon referred to in Lk. 2:32 and Paul quoted in Acts 13:47.
- And of course Is. 53 is full of prophecies about the coming Messiah, the suffering servant.

Perhaps foremost is the prophecy by Ezekiel: *"A new heart also I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and*

you shall keep my ordinances, and do them" (Ezek. 36:26-27) which is echoed in Jn. 20:22 – "He breathed on them, and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit!'"

The Evangelists' minds were saturated with Old Covenant scripture. We will not take the time or space to consider all of the prophets after Ezekiel, but let us consider the 34 texts in just two of the prophets, Daniel and Zechariah, to which the Gospel writers referred. It is worth noting that the majority of these references to the Old Covenant scriptures are in Matthew and John, the two Gospels that are oriented toward Jewish audiences:

- Dan. 2:44 – *"the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed"*: see Mt. 21:44; Lk. 1:33 and 11:20; Jn. 12:34 and 18:36.
- Dan. 7:13 – *"he came even to the Ancient of Days, and they brought him near before him"*: see Mk. 9:12 and Lk. 22:69.
- Dan. 7:14 – *"his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away"*: see Jn. 3:35, 5:27, 12:34 and 17:1.
- Dan. 9:24 – *"to finish disobedience, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity"*: see Lk. 7:19 and 24:26; Jn. 1:45.
- Dan. 9:26 – *"the Anointed One shall be cut off, and shall have nothing"*: see Mt. 26:24 and Mk. 9:12.
- Dan. 9:27 – *"in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the offering to cease"*: see Mt. 24:15.
- Dan. 12:1 – *"at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who shall be found written in the book"*: see Lk. 10:20.
- Dan. 12:2 – *"Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake"*: see Mt. 25:46; Jn. 11:24.
- Dan. 12:3 – *"Those who are wise shall shine as the brightness of the heavens"*: see Mt. 13:43.
- Zech. 2:10 – *"behold, I come, and I will dwell among you, says the Lord"*: see Jn. 14:23.
- Zech. 3:8 – *"behold, I will bring forth my servant, the Branch"*: see Lk. 1:78.
- Zech. 9:9 – *"riding on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey"*: see Mt. 21:3-5; Jn. 1:45 and 12:15.
- Zech. 11:13 – *"I took the thirty pieces of silver, and threw them to the potter, in the house of the Lord"*: see Mt. 26:15 and 27:9.

- Zech.12:10 – "*they will look to me whom they have pierced; and they shall mourn for him*": see Mt. 24:30; Jn. 7:39 and 19:37.
- Zech. 13:7 – "*Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered*": see Mk. 14:27.
- Zech. 14:5 – "*The Lord my God will come, and all the holy ones with you*": see Mt. 16:27.
- Zech. 14:8 – "*In that day living waters will go out from Jerusalem*": see Jn. 4:10.

B. The Emergence of the Synagogue

Where did the synagogue come from? We do not find that word anywhere in the Old Covenant scriptures, but it seems to mysteriously appear in the Gospels out of nowhere. The term "synagogue" is actually a Greek word which means "assembly" or "gathering" or "coming-together" and was translated from the Hebrew *beit ha-keneset* or "house of meeting." The meeting places that would later be called synagogues are believed to have originated during the Babylonian captivity when the majority of Israel's population was deported in 597 B.C. Because the Jerusalem Temple had been pillaged and destroyed, the Jews needed a place to assemble for the reading and exposition of scripture and for prayers. The Book of Ezekiel describes such assemblies, for example Ezek. 11:15-17, where the prophet answers the lament that because of their sins the exiles had forfeited God's presence and protection. After Ezra and Nehemiah led the exiled Jews to return from the Babylonian captivity and rebuild Jerusalem's walls and the Temple, it appears that they also built smaller places in Israel for prayer and the study of scripture, even though the Torah required that the Jews should only worship in one place, the Temple.

Thus the synagogue became a well-established place of assembly, both in the Diaspora and in Israel proper: there was even a synagogue on the Temple grounds. The Talmud (*Ket. 105*) records that Roman emperor Titus destroyed 394 synagogues when took Jerusalem in 70 A.D. The synagogue in Alexandria was so large that those people seated far from the reader could not hear him, so a man was appointed to wave a scarf each time the congregation was supposed to say "amen" to the prayers. By the first century A.D., there were 13 synagogues in Rome and hundreds in other lands, so that when Titus destroyed the Second Temple, it left much less of a spiritual vacuum than the destruction of the First Temple.

Synagogues were usually built on a hill so other buildings would not be higher, and not built near bodies of water. Often they were built outside of town because the rabbis considered cities to be unclean. They should be oriented toward Jerusalem, and those in Jerusalem should be oriented toward the Temple. The architectural form varied, but there was usually the ark (*aron ha-qodesh*) containing the Torah scrolls on the wall facing Jerusalem. The Torah was often decorated with images of lions and eagles, symbolizing strength and majesty. In the center was the reader's platform. As many places in the Book of Acts tell us, the Apostle

Paul usually first went to the synagogue in a given city and began his preaching to the Jews of that city. Eventually many synagogues were later converted to Christian places of worship.¹¹

C. The Greco-Roman Empire

The secular authorities defined the surrounding cultural narrative. This describes the mental framework of first-century non-Jewish culture that was seeping into Jewish culture. Let us first consider the Greek philosophers, especially the Stoics: the early Greeks had been polytheists, worshiping many gods and goddesses. Plato wrote that Socrates had been accused of introducing new divinities and was put to death because *"he did not believe in the gods believed in by the city"* i.e. Athens, that his interrogators *"were ignorant men, and [he] came to believe that he might be the wisest of men since, though he too was ignorant, he at least knew he was ignorant."*¹² This calls to mind the Apostle Paul's sermon on Mars Hill in Athens: *"What therefore you worship in ignorance, this I announce to you."* (Acts 17:22-23, my emphasis). A wise person realizes that he does not know how much or what he does not know, that the sum of all human knowledge is a mere drop in the ocean of ultimate reality.

Plato's *Republic* contains the famous allegory of the Cave, with a man emerging from the realm of shadows into the blinding light of the ideal, the Forms. The Apostle John picks up this theme by emphasizing the glory of Yeshua in his incarnation (Jn. 1:14), his impending crucifixion (Jn. 12:23-24; 13:31-32; 15:8), and his resurrection (Jn. 20:11-29). Plato was followed by the Stoics, the first of whom was Zeno who taught in the Painted Porch, or Stoa, in Athens. Stoics were basically materialists, although they believed that the material universe was not meaningless: *"Pervading the whole of the material order was Reason and Purpose, λογος, itself divine and indeed the only god the Stoics recognized... It was this divine Reason that ordered the regular motions of the heavenly bodies, the rotation of the seasons and the exact performance by natural objects of their appointed functions. Man's duty was to live in accordance with this Reason or Natural Law (κατα λογον); indeed a spark or seed of the universal Reason (α λογος σπερματικος) resided within men, or at least within the best and wisest of them [compare Jn. 1:9]. Like Socrates, the Stoic must obey the divine spark at all times, even at the cost of life itself."*¹³

This λογος, the archetypal idea of Plato or world-reason and the divine spark of Zeno, begins to appear as a hypostasis or personified as "wisdom" in Proverbs ch. 8 and in the deuterocanonical Wisdom of Solomon, subsisting as the *Memra* or Word, as it later appears in the Hebrew Targumim (Aramaic interpretations of the Hebrew scriptures) where it is depicted as God revealing Himself: 179 times in the Targum Onkelos, 99 times in the

11 Werblowsky and Wigoder, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*. 662-663.

12 Barrett, *New Testament Background*. 63.

13 *Ibid.* 65.

Jerusalem Targum, and 321 times in the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan,¹⁴ which indicates a growing Jewish awareness of something that is a part of and yet distinct from God, something of which the Greeks also had an inkling.

In Philo the Jew's name, although he is sometimes called Philo of Alexandria, we see the conjunction of two cultures, Greek and Jewish: "Philo" (Φίλων) is a Greek name given him by his Jewish parents who must have been thoroughly immersed in the Greek culture of Alexandria, a city founded by and named after Alexander the Great, and where the Old Covenant scriptures had been translated from Hebrew into Greek, the Septuagint. And yet, Philo's famous work is entitled *Philo the Jew* (my emphasis): his writing defended his faith that was expressed as being God's chosen people or nation even while living in a pagan environment. The article by Cesar Motta Rios describes it thusly:¹⁵

"Where were the limits of what Philo can consider common with himself? At this point, I am touching the question of the particular and the universal. Ellen Birnbaum approached this theme through a study of the terms Jew (Ιουδαίος) and Israel (Ισραήλ) in Philo's works. While from a supposed Hebrew etymology, Israel refers to the group of people 'who sees God', Jew is limited to the nation, the Jewish people, either to the historic people of biblical narrative or to Philo's contemporary people in the Diaspora and in Judaea. These words are not interchangeable. Not every member of the Jewish group is necessarily part of Israel, and, in theory, not everyone considered Israel is necessarily a Jew. Furthermore, the group of the Jews is not restricted to those who were born as Jews. It was increased by the reception of proselytes."

This corresponds to what the Apostle Paul wrote: *"For they are not all Israel, that are of Israel. Neither, because they are Abraham's seed, are they all children. But, 'In Isaac will your seed be called.' That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as a seed"* (Rom. 9:6b-8). In other words, not all Jews are those who "see God" – of course, the Jews did not believe that anyone could literally see God and live, but they should seek the Lord with all their heart. Not all who are ethnically descended from Abraham are God-seekers. Not Ishmael, but Isaac was the child of the promise, although both were sons of Abraham. The Old Covenant is clear that the promise was carried down from Abraham to Isaac to Jacob to the descendants of Judah, even though these people were involved in some messy or questionable liaisons: Abraham and Hagar, Judah and Tamar, Rahab who later married Salmon – the father of Boaz who married Ruth, David and Bathsheba, Solomon and all his foreign wives. In Rahab we have a prostitute who becomes a proselyte, changing from harlot to heroine. Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba were all ethnically not Israelites. And yet, somehow there was in them a spirit of seeking after God, proselytes who are all listed in Luke's genealogy of Yesous, the Anointed One. In

14 Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*.. 511-512.

15 Rios, "Philo of Alexandria." 4.

the New Covenant scriptures, proselytes are often called God-seekers, many of whom became Yesous-followers.

PART TWO – THE INTERTESTAMENTAL PERIOD

A. The Rise of the Maccabees and Hasmoneans

During and after Alexander the Great's conquest of the Mediterranean world, much was taking place in Israel, which the Greeks and Romans called Palestine. Protestant Biblical scholars tend to call the Intertestamental Period "the four hundred silent years" although for Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholics, parts of the Old Testament scriptures, sometimes called the Apocrypha or the deuterocanonical books, were still being written, so it was hardly a silent time. Of special historical value are the books 1, 2, and 3 Maccabees.

After the death of Alexander the Great, his empire split into four parts with the Ptolemies in Egypt, the Seleucids in Syria, and the people of Israel stuck in between these warring factions. The First Book of Maccabees describes the Seleucid King Antiochus Epiphanes, who greatly persecuted the Jews and defiled the Temple, sacrificing a pig on the altar. This caused the revolt of the Maccabees and after a series of fierce battles against the Syrians, Egyptians, Greeks, and Edomites, Israel enjoyed a brief period of independence and peace with Jonathan and Simon, two sons of Judas Maccabeus, serving as high priests and governors.¹⁶ A detailed account of this bloody period of history full of Jewish revolts and uprisings, patricide, matricide, and fratricide among the Maccabees, founding the Hasmonean dynasty which by a marriage merged into the Herodian (Idumean) dynasty, foreign invasions, etc. is more than we have space for here. See <https://www.algemeiner.com/2015/03/15/kings-of-the-jews-hasmoneans-herodians/> for more information.

In Steve Mason's book *Josephus and the New Testament* we read: "*Jeremiah repeatedly warned of disaster because the people had disobeyed God's commands. Their crimes included worship of other nations' gods (Jer 17:1-4) but also, and equally grievous, carrying water jugs and lighting fires for warmth and cooking on Saturday, the sabbath (17:21-27). In short, the people had not scrupulously maintained the terms of the covenant; these terms occupy the greater part of Exodus through Deuteronomy and include much more than the 'ten commandments.'* When the disaster finally came in 586 BC, and Solomon's temple was destroyed, the prophets inferred that it was God's means of punishing the people for having departed from the worship of the one God of Israel. Ezekiel, Nehemiah, and Daniel all confess that ever since the divine teachings were given to Moses, the people have lapsed from their observance, and that is why Jerusalem and its great temple have been destroyed (Ezek 20:4-44; Neh 9:12-37; Dan 9:4-14)."¹⁷

¹⁶ Smith, *The Narrative Bible*. 1342-1343.

¹⁷ Mason, *Josephus and the New Testament*. 9.

Correlation does not necessarily imply causation, as the above source goes on to point out: just because Yeshua's crucifixion preceded the destruction of Herod's Temple in 70 A.D. does not prove that the former caused the latter. Not only did the prophets and Josephus claim that the Jewish people's failure to keep the Law of Moses caused the Temple to be destroyed, but the Romans claimed that the Jews angering the Roman gods had caused that destruction. In John ch. 8, Yeshua was teaching in the Temple when the scribes and Pharisees brought him a woman caught in adultery, whom he forgave, which upset them immensely because they wanted him to agree that she should be stoned to death – although, like his later crucifixion, the Jews were not allowed to carry out the death penalty, so they had set a logical trap for him (which he didn't fall into): choose either to deny Roman control, or deny the Law of Moses. Then he began speaking to the people and was interrupted by the Pharisees (v. 13) and later by "the Jews" (v. 22). Here and elsewhere the Gospel writers make a clear distinction between the people who often heard him gladly and the religious leaders – "the Jews" – who perceived him as a threat to their position in society and to the social order imposed by the occupying Roman army and rulers with whom they had reached a *modus vivendi*. They did not want an unknown upstart to upset their apple cart. But this upstart would eventually upset the entire Greco-Roman empire.

Then Yeshua had that famous interchange with the Pharisees about becoming his disciples, knowing the truth, and the truth setting them free, to which they replied, "*We are Abraham's seed, and have never been in bondage to anyone*" (John 8:31-36). This was patently false and a logical non-sequitur: the Jewish nation was presently in bondage to Rome and had previously been in bondage several other times. And yet they managed each time to break free and restore their independence, illustrating their spirit of freedom that couldn't be broken. Is this what it means to be truly "Abraham's seed" – to be free in spirit? Their earthly Jerusalem certainly was not a free city – but see Gal. 4:26 – the heavenly Jerusalem is free; also Heb. 12:22 and Rev. 21:2-4. And how many more times will this cycle of bondage and restoration be repeated?

B. The Rise of the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and Zealots

The Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and Zealots arose during the Hasmonean era and later defined the immediate narrative, which partly describes the mental framework of first-century Jews expecting the Messiah. Beginning with the last first, the Essenes were perhaps closest to the later Gospel ideal. Many scholars have proposed that John the Baptist was an Essene and that Yeshua might have been. Although the word "Essenes" is not mentioned in the Gospels, it is difficult to believe that Yeshua and his disciples were unaware of them and their teachings. The term "Essenes" appears to have been coined by Philo: "*those people called Essenes, in number something more than four thousand in my opinion, who derive their name from their piety, though not according to any accurate form of the Grecian dialect, because they are above all men devoted to the service of God, not sacrificing living animals, but*

studying rather to preserve their own minds in a state of holiness and purity."¹⁸ The Essenes seem to have derived much of their philosophy from the Pythagoreans of Greece. The Essenes – called "Therapeuts" by the Jews in Egypt according to Nesbit, lived in communes, mainly in the desert, but some became wandering preachers of their doctrines. They believed in celibacy, forsaking parents, wives and children, entrance to their sect by baptism, pacifism, fasting, the gift of healing, communal ownership of what little property they retained, and giving to and caring for the poor.¹⁹

The above author refers to Mt. 19:21, Mk. 10:28-30 and Acts 4:32-37 as reflections of this ascetical teaching, claiming that Yeshua was merely an Essene. But the same chapter in Matthew contains Yeshua's teaching on monogamy in marriage, the context of the passage in Mark explains that it is difficult but not impossible to possess material wealth if one is to enter the Kingdom of God (see also 1 Cor. 7:30-34). Married people need to possess more things than singles but should not be possessed by the desire for more. A careful examination of the Greek verb tenses in Acts 2 and 4 about having things in common show that these actions were declarative and imperfective, to show beginning, uncompleted actions: descriptive of a point in time, not prescriptive or an imperative for all time. Later in Acts we read how Ananias, Sapphira, and Simon attempted to manipulate the community of believers and were punished by death or blindness. Various letters of St. Paul advocate working with one's hands to accumulate enough wealth to live on and extra to give to those in need. So it seems the above author is cherry-picking passages to uphold his thesis that Yeshua was not divine but was simply an Essene who went to extremes and happened to meet a violent end.

Nesbit's claim that Yeshua was an Essene predates the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. But even after that discovery, various similar theories have been advanced by both scholars and popular fiction authors: Timothy Lim mentions *"Geza Vermes's well-known argument, published in Jesus the Jew (1973), that the man from Nazareth is best seen as a hasid. ...Vermes's Jesus was a charismatic holy man, not an expert of Jewish law."* Lim also tells of *"the novel The Judas Testament (1994) by Daniel Easterman, which vividly describes an imagined conspiracy to suppress information damaging to Christian faith."* Lim mentions yet another book: *"The Dead Sea Scrolls Deception by Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh, published a few years earlier in 1991, however, [that] was not fiction. It claimed to have uncovered the sensational story behind the religious scandal of the century. The blame for the publication delay was laid at the doorstep of the Vatican that was supposedly in control of de Vaux, who was also Director of the Dominican centre of the biblical and archaeological school in*

18 Philo, *"The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged, New Updated Edition.* XII. (75).

19 Nesbit, *Jesus An Essene.* 6-10.

Jerusalem."²⁰ These claims, while easily refuted by Biblical archaeologists and Dead Sea Scrolls specialists, have made lasting negative impressions on the public as to the historical reliability and divine inspiration of the Gospel accounts. People perceive what they prefer to believe, that which confirms their bias, their worldview.

As for the Pharisees, *"compared by Josephus to the Stoics, were in the reformist category of sect, much less at odds with the mainstream institutions of their society, in fact sometimes controlling them. Nevertheless, Pharisaic practice concerning the consumption of food confirmed the boundaries they drew around themselves"* – they practiced regular immersion or cleansing, especially when returning from the marketplace and preparing to eat. In Mk. 7:4 we read about such cleansing, and in Lk.11:38 we see how Yeshua was invited to dine with a Pharisee who was offended because Yeshua did not wash his hands before eating,²¹ a violation of the Pharisees' oral traditions. Yet, because they accepted all of the Old Testament, they believed that a resurrection of the dead is possible: see Job 19:25-26; Prov. 15:24; Eccl. 3:21; Eccl. 12:7.

By the time of the first century, the all-pervasive influence of Greek language, culture and commerce in Palestine brought about a response: *"At this time Judaism was very much on the offensive. The Maccabean era had created a new self-confidence among the Jews, and there seems to have been an increasing flow of converts to Judaism, partly as the result of active Jewish mission. Jesus says to the Pharisees, 'you cross sea and land to make a single convert' (Mt 23:15), and rabbinic sources confirm this picture of active mission among Gentiles. In the first century A.D. many Jews seem to have been convinced that their religion was ultimately to become the religion of all people, and this in a not-too-distant future. Accordingly Judaism had to make itself known in the language of all people: Greek."*²² In this we can see a foretaste of Yeshua's Great Commission (Mt. 28:18-19), the times being fulfilled to gather *"a people for his name"* (Acts 15:14), and most of the New Covenant being recorded in Greek as a part of this reinvigorated Jewish missionary outreach, per this source. Much later in his book, Skarsaune confirms this idea: *"Some early Christian texts expressly say that the Jews took an active part in the prosecution of Gentile Christians, the classic example being the Martyrdom of Polycarp. Is there a historical setting in which these sources make sense? Such a setting would be precisely the phenomenon of 'missionary competition': Jews and Christians reaching out for the same converts. If the Jews saw Christian missionaries snapping their potential converts away from them, they would naturally resent them deeply even if they were Gentiles, and the Jews would do anything legally in their power to stop the Gentile missionaries."*²³

20 Lim, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*. 13-15.

21 Goodman, *Jews in a Graeco-Roman World*. 102-103.

22 Skarsaune, *In the Shadow of the Temple*. 42-43.

23 *Ibid.* 260.

In contrast to the Pharisees, the Sadducees answered Job's question – *"If a man dies, shall he live again?"* (Job 14:14a) in the negative. They were not only disbelievers in the afterlife, in any spiritual realm, or in divine intervention in the present material world (Mk. 12:18 and Acts 23:8), but they also were closely linked with the chief priests and held a majority on the Sanhedrin which ruled Jewish life.²⁴ This explains why the Sadducees, the majority in the Sanhedrin, and the high priests were opposed to Peter and John's preaching the resurrection in Acts 4-5, Stephen's testimony of Yeshua's resurrection in Acts 6-7, and the Apostle Paul's message of resurrection, when he used the antipathy between Pharisees and Sadducees to his advantage while on trial before that council in Acts 23. Their name likely comes from the priest Zadok whose descendants were high priests from Solomon's time. As well as disbelieving in immortality, they did not believe in the Pharisees' notion of binding oral law: only the written Torah was binding, but they strictly enforced the Temple rituals.²⁵ This lack of a reference point beyond this earthly life for their laws and rituals implies circular reasoning: *"do it this way because this is the way we always do it,"* or *"be good for goodness' sake, because it's good to be good"* – examples of the "just so" argument, which is not an answer, it is evading the question.

The Zealots were fierce fighters for Jewish liberation from the Romans who sometimes turned their zeal against their own countrymen. Philo writes that during an uprising in Jerusalem – *"[T]he zealots also thought that unless they prevailed, there would be no punishment so bad, but it would be inflicted on them. So their conflicts were conducted by their passions"* as they fought against robbers and Theophilus ben Ananus, the high priest from 37 to 41 A.D. (Was he the Theophilus to whom Luke addressed his Gospel and Acts?) These Zealots first used clubs in this battle between the priestly sect, robbers, and Zealots, then used javelins, then when the fighting grew fierce they used swords. Those who became wounded would defile the Temple floor with their blood.²⁶ It may seem strange that one of Yeshua's disciples was "Simon the Zealot."

C. Herod the Great, Archelaus, and Antipas

Herod the Great was a vassal king appointed by Rome to rule Judea, which task he carried out with brutal efficiency. He is the Herod who both rebuilt the Temple and slaughtered the innocents shortly after Yeshua's birth. *"Intrigue between his sons in his last days, and even as the old king lay dying, had robbed the country of the most competent members of his family, in particular his two sons by the Hasmonaean Mariamne (both executed in 7 BCE) and an older son (by a different wife), the scheming Antipater, killed unceremoniously by Herod's bodyguards just days before Herod's own death."*²⁷

24 Mason, *Josephus, Judea, and Christian Origins: Methods and Categories*. 335.

25 Werblowsky and Wigoder, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*. 600.

26 Philo, *op. cit.* 952 (956 in the PDF).

27 Goodman, *Rome and Jerusalem: The Clash of Ancient Civilizations*. 379-381.

Caesar is reported to have said that it was better to be Herod's pig than Herod's son. But two sons escaped Herod's crazed condition: in a third will he had appointed Archelaus as his successor but Antipas who had been named as successor in a previous will contested that move, which led to a power vacuum that Jewish rebels attempted to fill. Roman soldiers put down this uprising but also looted and set fire to the Temple. Various other local brigands captured and burned towns and cities, but finally Varus, a Roman official in Antioch, led two Roman legions down to Jerusalem to retake the city, killing thousands of rebels. Archelaus finally returned from Rome to rule over Judea (Mt. 2:22), which ushered in a 70-year period of relative calm.

The next Herod we meet, known as Herod the Tetrarch in the Gospels, is Herod Antipas, who ruled Galilee for over forty years, until A.D. 39. He is the one who divorced his wife so he could marry Herodias, wife of his brother, Herod II Philip (Mk. 6:14-29). Josephus put it this way: Philip *"was born of Mariamne, the daughter of Simon the high priest, who had a daughter, Salome; after whose birth Herodias took upon her to confound the laws of our country, and divorced herself from her husband while he was alive, and was married to Herod [Antipas], her husband's brother by the father's side."*²⁸ Herod Antipas, the Tetrarch, is also the one who, together with Pontius Pilate, was complicit in the crucifixion of Yeshua (Lk. 23:1-12).

PART THREE – BIRTH, MINISTRY, AND DEATH OF YESHUA

A. The Annunciations, Yeshua's Birth and Childhood

Relatively little is recorded about Yeshua before he began his ministry. What we know about Yeshua's birth and childhood is written in Matthew's and Luke's Gospels. Because these early accounts were first passed on orally for thirty to fifty years before being written down, the exact chronological order of events is uncertain, but Luke makes a point of mentioning in the "Prologue to Luke's Gospel"²⁹ – *"it seemed good to me also, having traced the course of all things accurately from the first, to write to you in order"* – that he was trying to record the life of Yeshua in historical sequence as best he could for his Greek-speaking readers. John's Gospel starts out with a profound theological discourse on the pre-eternal existence and incarnation of the Logos.³⁰ The Evangelists Mark and John only begin their historical accounts with John the Baptist's ministry.

The story begins with three angelic visitations: two of them to men and one to a teenage young woman. Both of the men at first could not believe what they were seeing and hearing:

28 Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, Translated by William Whiston. 579.

29 Hosken, *The Good News of Yeshua, the Messiah*. op. cit. #2 (Lk. 1:1-4).

30 *Ibid.* #1 (Jn. 1:1-18)

"Zacharias was troubled when he saw him"³¹ [the angel], so he asks for proof and the angel gives him proof by making him mute until John the Baptist's birth. On the other hand, Joseph who was engaged to Mary³² realizes that she had somehow become pregnant and he would likely be blamed, so he decides to send her away privately, breaking off their engagement in the most discrete and merciful way he can. Then the angel appears to him in a dream and announces that the baby was conceived by the Holy Spirit in a miraculous way that had never happened before, that this child would be called "*Immanuel*" which means "God with us."

But the angelic appearance to Mary is quite different: she neither doubts nor tries to find a way out of the situation. It must have been overwhelming for her to hear the words – "*He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father, David*"³³ (v. 32). Imagine hearing those words: the Son of the Most High God, the

Messiah – the heir to the throne of David, would be born of her! Then she calmly and graciously consents – "*Behold, the handmaid of the Lord; be it to me according to your word*" (v. 38). At that instant, God himself becomes incarnate, takes on human flesh and becomes one of us, except for our sins. Yes, he would be tempted in every way like we are, but without sin (Heb. 4:15). Only a pure soul like Mary's could agree to such a deal. And yet, during her visit to Elizabeth,³⁴ she humbly realizes that she too needs a Savior: "*My spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior*" (v. 47) – "Yesous" means "the Lord is Savior." By this phrase, the Roman Catholic doctrine of "The Immaculate Conception of Mary" is contradicted: it is not needed by Orthodox Christians because we do not have the doctrine of inheriting the guilt of Adam and Eve's original sin [see this paragraph³⁵ in "Part Four – Conclusion" of this work]. Although a pure soul, Mary inherited a tendency toward sin and needs a Savior from death, the result of original sin. But this also bestows on her the title of the first among the saints.

The Scriptures contain several stories of women and their husbands who were miraculously enabled to conceive a baby: Sarah + Abraham, Rebecca + Isaac, Rachel + Jacob, Hannah + Elkanah [notice how Hannah's prayer in 1 Sam. 2:1 is very similar to Mary's], Manoah + his wife, the Shunammite woman + her husband, and Elizabeth + Zachariah. In deep distress of heart, these people called out to the Lord and he answered. These miraculous births all culminate in the miracle of the Virgin conceiving the Messiah by the Holy Spirit, without knowing a man. It is as if sacred history had been preparing us, leading us up to this moment. His birth, the visit of the Magi, his dedication in the Temple, his session as a 12-year-old with

31 *Ibid.* #3 (Lk. 1:5-25)

32 *Ibid.* #7 (Mt. 1:18-25)

33 *Ibid.* #4 (Lk. 1:26-38)

34 *Ibid.* #5 (Lk. 1:39-56)

35 *Ibid.* #4.b.1 (Conclusion) Hosken, "Contemporary Views of Yeshua," *A Historical View of Yeshua, the Messiah*. 65.

the teachers of the Law in the Temple – all point to his being a very special person. But even with all of this, do Mary and Joseph fully understand who he was? Edersheim writes -

*"Apart from all thoughts of the deeper necessity, both as regarded His Mission and all the salvation of the world, of a true human development of gradual consciousness and personal life, Christ could not, in any true sense, have been subject to His Parents, if they had fully understood that He was Divine; nor could He, in that case, have been watched, as He 'grew in wisdom and in favour with God and men.' Such knowledge would have broken the bond of His Humanity to ours, by severing that which bound Him as a child to His mother. We could not have become His brethren, had He not been truly the Virgin's Son. The mystery of the Incarnation would have been needless and fruitless, had His humanity not been subject to all its right and ordinary conditions. And, applying the same principle more widely, we can thus, in some measure, understand why the mystery of His Divinity had to be kept while He was on earth."*³⁶

We have already touched upon Matthew's and Luke's genealogies of the Messiah. The event of the angels announcing the Messiah's birth to shepherds³⁷, people whom others considered as lower-class, is a significant foretaste of his ministry primarily to the poor, despised, and neglected classes of people: the Samaritan woman at the well – Jn. 4:4-42; inviting the poor, maimed, lame and blind – Lk. 14:8-21; the rich man and Lazarus – Lk. 16:19-31; The Samaritan leper – Lk. 17:11-19; the Pharisee and the despised tax-collector – Lk. 18:9-14; the widow's mite – Mk. 12:41-44. All of these people were the despised, the poor, the outcasts of society. An "intelligent" and "learned" person like a Sadducee, a Pharisee, or a Scribe would not bother with those folk.

It requires a hardened mindset of rationalist materialism to avoid the obvious conclusion that these events describe interpenetration of the supernatural into the natural realm³⁸.

We have relatively little information as to the childhood and youth of Yeshua. In "The Flight into Egypt and Return to Nazareth"³⁹ we read that being warned in a dream about Herod's fury, Mary and Joseph flee to Egypt and remained there until Herod died. *"After their brief stay in Egypt, Joseph and Mary return to their home in Nazareth of Galilee, where Joseph resumes his trade as a carpenter. Over the next ten years Jesus continues to grow physically,*

36 Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus The Messiah*. 616.

37 Hosken, *The Good News of Yeshua, the Messiah*. #11 (Lk. 2:8-20)

38 Modern critics attempt to find some natural or psychological explanation, based on the Age of Reason's premise that everything that exists can be explained by human reason, therefore anything that cannot be understood by human reason does not really exist. Yet, astrophysicists today conclude from their calculations that there is something called "Dark Matter" – stuff or a force which makes up at least 95% of the universe that we cannot perceive even with our best scientific instruments. If the smartest among us can only perceive less than 5% of what exists, how can we rely on human reason and its technology for all the answers about our existence?

39 Hosken, *The Good News of Yeshua, the Messiah*. #14 (Mt. 2:13-23)

mentally, and spiritually. There is no further record of Jesus until, at the age of 12, he is taken to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration. At age 12, Jesus had reach the point at which a Jewish boy is soon to become a 'son of the law' [*bar mitzvah*], which law he is expected to learn and obey. But Jesus' understanding of the law is far greater than that of other boys his age. After the Passover celebration is completed, Jesus' parents lose track of his whereabouts until they discover him in profound conversation with the learned rabbis."⁴⁰ See "Yesous Attends the Passover at Age Twelve"⁴¹ for the full Scripture text.

Now let us look at how John the Baptist, the Forerunner of the Messiah, was preparing the way of the Lord: "*You offspring of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and don't begin to say among yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father;' for I tell you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones! Even now the axe also lies at the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that doesn't bring forth good fruit is cut down, and thrown into the fire.'* The multitudes asked him, '*What then must we do?'* He answered them, '*He who has two coats, let him give to him who has none. He who has food, let him do likewise'*" (Lk. 3:7b-10). This is very strong language!

The person for whom John is preparing the way does not fit the image of a "gentle Jesus meek and mild," not the Yeshua, who says – "*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and as a pretense you make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation.*" Then he pronounces six more woes and continues – "*For you tithe mint, dill, and cumin, and have left undone the weightier matters of the law: justice, mercy, and faith. But you ought to have done these, and not to have left the other undone*" (Mt. 23:13-17 and 23). It is not an "either-or" choice: either observe rituals or do justice and mercy, it is a "both-and" proposition. True ministry – *διακονια* – isn't merely performing correctly all of the rubrics of the church services, it is also justice and mercy for the poor, lame, maimed and blind.

B. Yeshua's Baptism, Temptation, and Ministry in Judea

Then John baptizes Yeshua⁴² and says – "*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who is preferred before me, for he was before me.' I have seen the Spirit descending like a dove out of heaven, and it remained on him. I didn't recognize him, but he who sent me to baptize in water, he said to me, 'On whomever you will see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.' I have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God*" (Jn. 1:29b, 32-34). Recall Is. 53:7 referenced earlier, about the Lamb that is led to the slaughter, in that well-known chapter of Isaiah's prophecies (my emphases).

40 Smith, *The Narrative Bible*. 1362.

41 Hosken, *The Good News of Yeshua, the Messiah*. #15 (Lk. 2:41-50)

42 *Ibid*. #18 (Mt. 3:13-17)

If Yeshua the Messiah is here proclaimed to be God's Son and his sacrificial Lamb, why didn't Yeshua immediately go to Jerusalem, be crucified, and rise again? His three years of ministry were necessary to train his disciples how to do διακονια-ministry!

Immediately after Yeshua's baptism, he fasts 40 days in the wilderness and is tempted by the devil⁴³, as described in all three synoptic Gospels. The three areas of temptation parallel the same three areas in which Eve was tempted by the serpent, the difference being that Yeshua, led by the Spirit, withstood the temptations but Eve yielded to them:

Good for food – Gen. 3:6a	Satisfy your hunger – Mt. 4:3	Lust of the flesh – 1 Jn. 2:16a
Delight to the eyes – Gen. 3:6b	Glory of the kingdoms will be yours – Mt. 4:8-9	Lust of the eyes – 1 Jn. 2:16b
Desirable to make one wise – Gen. 3:6c	You are indestructable – Mt. 4:5-6	Pride of life – 1 Jn. 2:16c

C. Yeshua's Galilean Ministry to the Multitudes

When "Yesous Goes to the Nazareth Synagogue"⁴⁴ and is given the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, he opens it and reads – *"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, Because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim release to the captives, recovering of sight to the blind, to deliver those who are crushed, and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."* He thus announces who would be the target audience of his ministry: the poor, brokenhearted, captives, blind, and oppressed. And after his hearers challenge him, he says – *"Most assuredly I tell you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown. But truly I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the sky was shut up three years and six months, when a great famine came over all the land. Elijah was sent to none of them, except to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. There were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed, except Naaman, the Syrian"* (Lk. 4:18-19 and 24-27): he is announcing the central thrust of his earthly ministry: not only to the poor, the brokenhearted, the prisoners, the blind, the oppressed, but to the Gentiles! When the audience hears this last statement, they are so enraged that they try to throw him off a cliff: how dare he suggest Jews should have anything to do with those unclean Gentiles! But this is precisely what his Heavenly Father sent him to do: to extend the blessings of Abraham to all nations of the earth.

Next, as if to underscore his now-announced mission, we see a whole string of healings: a man who had a spirit of an unclean demon (Lk. 4:33), a leper (Mk. 1:40), a paralyzed man on

43 *Ibid.* #19 (Lk. 4:1-13)

44 *Ibid.* #31 (Lk. 4:16-30)

a cot who is lowered through the roof (Lk. 5:17), and the man at the Pool of Bethesda who was sick for thirty-eight years (Jn. 5:5-44). This last healing includes a long discourse with "the Jews" that concludes with his well-known sayings – *"You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and these are they which testify about me"* (v. 39) and *"How can you believe, who receive glory from one another, and you don't seek the glory that comes from the only God?"* (v. 44). In other words, the Jewish scripture-experts are placing their faith and trust in the written Word of God, and right before them stands the Living Word of God. They are using their scripture knowledge as a way to seek glory, status and recognition from men, but not from the one true God in whom they profess to believe.

When the Pharisees complain about "Yesous Forgiving and Healing a Paralyzed Man"⁴⁵ because only God can forgive sins, he replies – *"Why do you reason these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to tell the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven;' or to say, 'Arise, and take up your bed, and walk?' But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins – he said to the paralytic – 'I tell you, arise, take up your mat, and go to your house'"* (vv. 8b-11). Here he claims that he is the Lord who alone is able to forgive sins. Then the "Pharisees Accuse Yeshua of Violating the Sabbath"⁴⁶ by picking grain, he replies – *"If you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. for the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath"* (vv. 7-8). In both of these events, he not only identifies himself as the Son of Man, Yesous here is asserting his divinity. Next, *"The unclean spirits, whenever they saw him, fell down before him, and cry, 'You are the Son of God!'"* (Mk. 3:11) – even demons recognize who he is!

And again, when "Yeshua Heals the Lame Man at the Pool of Bethesda"⁴⁷ on the Sabbath, he says – *"My Father is still working, so I am working, too"* (v. 17), which upsets the Pharisees even more: *"For this cause therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill him, because he not only broke the Sabbath, but also called God his own Father, making himself equal with God"* (v. 18). Clearly they understood: he is claiming to be the Son of God. When "Yeshua Heals a Man's Withered Hand on the Sabbath,"⁴⁸ again the Pharisees complain: for them it would be better to ignore a lamb that had fallen into a pit or a fellow human being who is crippled rather than violate the Sabbath. Then "Yesous Heals the Multitudes at the Sea of Galilee"⁴⁹ – this makes three more affirmations of his mission to "the poor, maimed, lame, and blind."

In the next two events in Yeshua's ministry, "Yeshua Heals the Centurion's Servant"⁵⁰ and "Yesous Raises from Death the Son of the Widow of Nain"⁵¹, we find him ministering to those

45 *Ibid.* [#37](#) (Lk. 5:17-26)

46 *Ibid.* [#40](#) (Mt. 12:1-8)

47 *Ibid.* [#39](#) (Jn. 5:1-47)

48 *Ibid.* [#41](#) (Mt. 12:9-14)

49 *Ibid.* [#42](#) (Mk. 3:7-12)

50 *Ibid.* [#45](#) (Mt. 8:5-3)

51 *Ibid.* [#46](#) (Lk. 7:11-17)

who were "on the edge" of Jewish society. Ancient Israel was commanded to care for foreigners in their midst and for widows. But these commands were needed because people didn't automatically do those actions. Yesous does not merely repeat these commands, he carries out the commanded actions.

In "The Parables of the Kingdom,"⁵² Yeshua describes what hinders people from entering – *"By hearing you will hear, And will in no way understand; Seeing you will see, And will in no way perceive: For this people's heart has grown callous, Their ears are dull of hearing"* (vv. 14-15a); as well as what marks those who enter into his kingdom – *"he who hears the word, and understands it, who most assuredly bears fruit"* (v. 23). Both receive good seed, but some harden their hearts. Next, he speaks about good seed and bad seed – "darnel" that at first looks like wheat, but are deceitful, *"sons of the evil one"* (v. 38b). This warns against those who preach or practice a false Gospel: they do not bear fruit, their lives do not match their words. After several more kingdom parables, he says that at the end of the age, *"angels will come forth, and separate the wicked from among the righteous, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth"* (vv. 49-50). Although we should try to discern the impostors from the genuine, sometimes we simply cannot, so we must exercise caution: in the final analysis it is up to God.

"Yesous's Second Rejection in Nazareth"⁵³ relates that his hometown people could not perceive how the rumors of the preaching of Yesous and the miracles he performed could possibly be true. At the beginning of his ministry (Lk. 4:16-30), he had read in the Nazareth synagogue Isaiah's prophecy about the Spirit of the Lord anointing him *"to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim release to the captives, recovering of sight to the blind, to deliver those who are crushed,"* thus claiming to be the Khristos, the Anointed One, but they had rejected him. Here again they saw in him just a simple carpenter like his father Joseph. They muttered: *"Here are his [half- or step-]brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas. And his sisters too! How can he be any better than they?"* And sadly, Matthew closes this passage with – *"He didn't do many mighty works there because of their unbelief"* (Mt. 13:58). This is another example of people perceiving only what they expect to see and hear, filtering out what does not confirm their biases. In the antimony, God's unlimited power allows itself to be limited by our unbelief.

After teaching the multitudes, confronting the Pharisees, and performing many healings in the presence of his disciples, Yeshua Instructs and Sends Out His Apostles.⁵⁴ They have now been trained by observing and are ready to take their first steps as the "sent ones" – apostles – warning them of the hardships, persecution, and even betrayals by loved ones. Note that he *"gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every*

52 *Ibid.* [#53](#) (Mt. 13:1-53)

53 *Ibid.* [#58](#) (Mk. 6:1-6a)

54 *Ibid.* [#59](#) (Mt. 9:35-11:1)

sickness" (ch. 10:1), just as he has been doing. This is *διακονία* – ministry and apprenticeship, otherwise known as discipleship.

In the section "Yeshua is the Bread of Life; Peter's First Confession"⁵⁵ we have the long discourse on what is required to have eternal life: *"Most assuredly, I tell you, he who believes in me has eternal life"* (v. 47). For most Evangelical Protestants, this is all it takes. But Yeshua qualifies it further: *"Most assuredly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you don't have life in yourselves"* (v. 53). What is needed is a spiritual blood transfusion and heart transplant: *"A new heart also I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh"* (Ezek. 36:26). This was too much for many of his would-be followers to grasp: *"At this, many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him"* (v. 66). So Yeshua asks the twelve if they too would leave him, and Peter replies: *"We have come to believe and know that you are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."* (v. 69) – his first confession. Note in his reply that believing precedes knowing – this is not gullible "blind faith" but rather the forsaking of purely materialist presuppositions and the acceptance of the existence of a higher level of reality. Then one is on the way to true knowledge.

D. Yeshua's Galilean Ministry to His Disciples

After that, "Yeshua Heals the Syro-Phoenician Woman's Daughter"⁵⁶, next, "Yesous Heals the Deaf and Mute Man"⁵⁷, and then Yesous feeds the four thousand⁵⁸ – three amazing, miraculous signs of his Messiah-ship. Note that when he healed this deaf-mute man, he could discern that the cause of this person's malady was physical, in contrast to the former deaf-mute man, the cause of whose malady was demon possession: different causes require different cures. Just after Yeshua performed three miracles, the Pharisees and Sadducees demand a sign⁵⁹! Their hearts were hardened against him, they were not merely misunderstanding, like his disciples who thought he was talking about physical bread when he gave his warning against the leaven of the Pharisees⁶⁰. We must discern the difference between hardness of heart and lack of understanding.

Now we come to "Peter's Second Confession that Yeshua is the Messiah,"⁶¹ which reveals the crux of the matter: *"But who do you say that I am?"* (v. 15). This question boils down many of the future Christological disputes and heresies into one central issue: Peter's answer – *"You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God"* (v. 16). The full deity of Yeshua is declared here: the

55 *Ibid.* #63 (Jn. 6:22-71-Jn. 7:1)

56 *Ibid.* #65 (Mt. 15:21-28)

57 *Ibid.* #66 (Mk. 7:31-37)

58 *Ibid.* #67 (Mk. 8:1-9)

59 *Ibid.* #68 (Mt. 16:1-4a)

60 *Ibid.* #69 (Mk. 8:13-21)

61 *Ibid.* #71 (Mt. 16:13-20)

Son of Man is also the Son of God, fully God and fully Man. He is not a created human being who became quite godly (Arianism), nor is he part-human and part-God (Nestorianism), or a god that only appeared to be human (Docetism), or the father-god that transformed into a human-god and then transformed into a holy-spirit-god (Modalism). If the leaders of these heresies refused to repent when brought before a Council, they were anathematized. But people claiming to be "born again" believers in a Jesus who is not the pre-eternal Son of God the Father, or who believe he was only a great moral teacher or even a prophet, are not fully Christian. They may be sincere, on their way to the true faith, but they are not there yet. They should be gently and carefully instructed in "ortho-doxy" – the fullness of the true faith.

Notice that Peter's confession is that Yeshua is both the Messiah – the deliverer from bondage, but also one with God. This is an implicit confession that Yeshua is a distinct divine Person but at the same time one in essence with the Father, not two gods, underscoring the Jewish doctrine that the Lord our God is one: monotheism. On this confession, Yeshua will build up his New Community, the Church, a community of the *πιστις* – faith and *αγαπε* – love that he embodies and teaches. Yeshua forgives the Samaritan woman at the well, the woman caught in adultery, and Mary Magdalene, and accepts them with all sorts of other sinners into his New Community, a Kingdom based on faith, love, and acceptance. It is not polytheism and polyamory, it is monotheism and monogamy: faith in one God and faithfulness to one other. Nor is this to be a community based on abstract notions, a philosophical system suspended from an invisible skyhook, a circular "just so" logic. It is not based on power, deceit, or ethnic superiority. No, this New Community of his is based on the God of heaven who came down to earth, revealing himself in the flesh and sacrificing his flesh for the life of the world.

Note also the phrase *"you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church"* (v. 18): the name "Petros" in Greek is "a piece of rock" and the word in "on this rock" is "petra" in Greek – "a massive rock"; thus, it is not an equality, it is a contrast, a play on words. Secondly, in two of the links after this verse – Acts 4:11 and 1Pet. 2:4 – we see that Peter himself stated that Khristos is the Cornerstone and Rock, and in the other two links – 1 Cor. 3:11 and 1 Cor. 10:4 – the Apostle Paul identifies Khristos as the Foundation and Rock. Further, *"whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven; and whatever you release on earth will be released in heaven"* (v. 19) uses the singular form of the pronoun "you" in Greek, referring to Peter, but the similar texts, Mt. 18:18 and Jn. 20:23, use the plural form of "you" in Greek, delegating this authority to all the Apostles. So these verses deal with the deity and authority of the Messiah as the Son of God, and thus the delegated authority of the entire Apostolate as his representatives, not only Peter. Immediately after this, Yeshua Foretells His Death and Resurrection⁶² and Peter begins to rebuke Yeshua, to which Yeshua replies – *"Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block to me"* (v. 23) – hardly an epithet that future "supreme leaders" would like to bear.

62 *Ibid.* #72 (Mt. 16:21-28)

"The Transfiguration"⁶³ is another high point in Yeshua's earthly ministry, revealing the full Shekinah glory of God in him, only partially revealed at his baptism. Later, Peter testifies about this glorious revelation in 2 Pet. 1:17-18 and John testifies of it in Jn. 1:9 and 1 Jn. 1:1-7 equating the Logos as Light with God the Father and the Son. The Gospel writers leave no doubt that they believe Yeshua/Yesous to be the divine Son of God.

E. Yeshua's Ministry in Perea

When he returns from Galilee in the north to Perea, "Yeshua Teaches at the Feast of Tabernacles,"⁶⁴ going secretly to the Temple (v. 10). The crowds wonder whether he is really the Messiah, and having finally found him, begin to question him. He replies – *"I will be with you a little while longer, then I go to him who sent me. You will seek me, and won't find me; and where I am, you can't come"* This caused the Jews to ask – *"Where will this man go that we won't find him? Will he go to the Dispersion among the Greeks, and teach the Greeks?"* – a hint of the ministry spreading to the Jewish Dispersion and the Gentiles. The chief priests (Sadducees) and Pharisees opposed Yeshua, but Nicodemus stood up for him, hindering them from taking further action against him (vv. 50-52). Nicodemus, evidently a secret disciple, later helped Joseph of Arimethia bury Yeshua (Jn. 19:38-40).

Then we have the encounter where "Yeshua Forgives the Woman Caught in Adultery."⁶⁵ The Scribes and Pharisees bring this woman to him, trying to trick him into denying the Law of Moses, knowing that Jews were not allowed to carry out the death penalty. His response foils their scheme: where is the man who committed adultery with her when they caught her red-handed? And how many of them have not committed that act in their hearts? They all, one by one, fade into the crowd. Nobody is left to accuse her, and Yeshua says – *"Neither do I condemn you. Go your way. From now on, sin no more"* (v. 11). Note that he doesn't excuse sin, saying – *"Go your way and sin some more,"* but rather – *"Go, and sin no more."*

In the long discourse with the Pharisees "Yeshua Preaches in Jerusalem"⁶⁶, they parry back and forth. They accuse him of being an illegitimate child – *"We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father, God"* (v. 41). To this Yeshua replies – *"You are of your father, the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father"* (v. 44). Then Yeshua clinches his argument with the bold assertion – *"Most assuredly, I tell you, before Abraham came into existence, I AM"* (v. 58). He cannot make any clearer claim to his divinity than this, referring to the name of God which was so holy that the Jews would not pronounce it (Ex. 3:14). For this, they try to stone him to death, but he manages to slip away.

63 *Ibid.* [#73](#) (Mt. 17:1-13)

64 *Ibid.* [#79](#) (Jn. 7:10-53)

65 *Ibid.* [#80](#) (Jn. 8:1-11)

66 *Ibid.* [#81](#) (Jn. 8:12-59)

Right after this, "Yeshua Heals The Man Born Blind"⁶⁷ and while the neighbors puzzle over it, the Pharisees try to refute it, and even the formerly-blind man's parents equivocate about it, Yeshua finds him and asks – *"Do you believe in the Son of God?"* He answers – *"Who is he, Lord, that I may believe in him?"* Yeshua says to him – *"You have both seen him, and it is he who speaks with you."* He says, *"Lord, I believe!"* and worships him. Again, John the Evangelist theologizes that Yeshua is indeed the Son of God incarnate, worthy of worship. Then Yeshua says, *"I came into this world for judgment, that those who don't see may see; and that those who see may become blind."* (vv. 35-39). This echoes Is. 6:10 – *"Seeing you will see, And will in no way perceive"* – quoted by all four Evangelists and Paul.

Next, in "I Am the Good Shepherd"⁶⁸ he makes three rapid-fire assertions: *"I AM the sheep's door"* (v. 7), *"I AM the door"* (v. 9), and *"I AM the good shepherd"* (v. 11). John is making the same point here as above: Yeshua is the I AM. He is the door into the sheepfold, his called-out community, the Church. Then he describes false shepherds versus true shepherds – *"The hired hand flees because he is a hired hand, and doesn't care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and I'm known by my own; even as the Father knows me, and I know the Father. I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep, which are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will hear my voice. They will become one flock with one shepherd"* (vv. 13-16). False shepherds are merely working for hire, whereas true shepherds lay down their whole lives for their flock. The "other sheep" are the Gentiles, all nations of the earth who will receive the blessing given to Abraham.

In "The Parable of the Good Samaritan,"⁶⁹ a teacher of the Torah asked what he must do to inherit eternal life, to which Yeshua replies – *"What does the Torah say?"* and the Torah instructor quoted – *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself"* (v. 27). Yeshua commends him – *Very good!*, but then says – *"Do it, if you want eternal life!"* Then he gives us the parable of the two scripture-quoting religious Jews who neglect the poor robbery victim, but the despised Samaritan who actually does what the Torah taught. Here again, Yeshua is making the point that the Gentiles are sometimes better than the super-religious Jews at actually doing what the Old Covenant teaches.

When Yesous speaks about "The Slaughter of the Galileans and the Barren Fig Tree,"⁷⁰ he twice urges the people to repent. Then he utters the prophetic words – *"Behold, these three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and found none. Cut it down!"* (v. 7). He was approaching Jerusalem at the end of his three-year ministry. The fig tree represents the Jewish nation which was so ethnocentric that it closed itself off from the neighboring

67 *Ibid.* #82 (Jn. 9:1-41)

68 *Ibid.* #83 (Jn. 10:1-21)

69 *Ibid.* #85 (Lk. 10:25-37)

70 *Ibid.* #90 (Lk. 13:1-9)

Gentiles. It would soon be cut back, the Gentiles wild branches would be grafted in, but the trunk would remain (Rom. 11:15-23) until the restoration of Israel.

In the section "Yesous Teaches and Journeys toward Jerusalem"⁷¹, he warns the people to "strive to enter in by the narrow door" (v. 24a), or else they would "see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets, in the Kingdom of God, and yourselves being thrown outside. They will come from the east, west, north, and south, and will sit down in the Kingdom of God" (vv. 28b-29), another clear indication of the Kingdom being opened up to the Gentiles.

One time, when dining with a Pharisee, "Yesous Heals on the Sabbath"⁷² a man who has dropsy, the Pharisee can't answer when he asks if it is right to rescue a child or an ox who fell into a well on the Sabbath, so Yeshua gives the parable of the wedding feast – "when you make a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, or the blind" (v. 13), and again – "Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor, maimed, blind, and lame" (v. 21b), and again – "Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I tell you that none of those people who were invited will taste of my supper" (23b-24). Once more, Yesous is emphasizing who are the target audience of his ministry: "the poor, maimed, blind, and lame" – a phrase that is repeated again and again in the Gospels, in Mt. 15:30 and Lk. 4:17-19, quoting Is. 35:5-6, and God's call shifting toward the Gentiles.

When "Yeshua Visits Bethany and Raises Lazarus from Death,"⁷³ he says to Mary – "I AM the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, though he die, yet will he live. Whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" (vv. 25-26). She said to him, "Yes, Lord. I have come to believe that you are the Messiah, God's Son, he who comes into the world" (my emphasis). Then he proves it by raising Lazarus from the dead.

"Yesous Heals Ten Lepers; Only One, a Samaritan, Returns to Thank Him"⁷⁴ is a story of the outsider being in and the insiders being out. Then we have the parable of "The Pharisee and Publican"⁷⁵, another such story. Beware of thinking we are the "in-group" because we go to church, we fast, we tithe, and we say our prayers. Such prayers will simply bounce off the ceiling if we do not say with the Publican – "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!"

F. Holy Week

During the "Triumphal Entry of Yesous into Jerusalem"⁷⁶, the multitude of his followers are shouting – "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest!" (v. 38). The Pharisees in the crowd said – "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!" (v.

71 *Ibid.* [#92](#) (Lk. 13:22-35)

72 *Ibid.* [#93](#) (Lk. 14:1-24)

73 *Ibid.* [#101](#) (Jn. 11:1-46)

74 *Ibid.* [#103](#) (Lk. 17:11-19)

75 *Ibid.* [#105](#) (Mk. 9:30-32)

76 *Ibid.* [#114](#) (Lk. 19:29-44)

39b). They realize that the population was turning en masse toward making Yesous their Messiah-Deliverer from the Romans. This spells revolution, which in turn would bring down on Jerusalem the full force of the Roman legions to quell the uprising: they perceived him as a threat to their position in society. But Yesous saw it from a different perspective – *"If you, even you, had known today the things which belong to your peace! But now, they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come on you, when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, surround you, hem you in on every side"* (vv. 42-43). He is the Prince of Peace, not a military leader, and he knows that a violent revolt will only bring on more violence.

In "The Authority of Yesous Is Challenged,"⁷⁷ the Pharisees question Yesous – *"By what authority do you do these things? Or who gave you this authority to do these things?"* (v. 28). He parries with a question – *"The baptism of John – was it from heaven, or from men? Answer me"* (v. 30). They are caught in their own trap: they dare not answer one way or the other. After the Pharisees challenge Yeshua's authority, he subtly returns the challenge in parables they could not refute: the next three parables – "The Parable of the Two Sons"⁷⁸, "The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen"⁷⁹, and "The Parable of the Wedding Feast of the King's Son"⁸⁰ that also center on the question of authority. He closes the second of these parables with the warning – *"Therefore I tell you, the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and will be given to a nation bringing forth its fruits"* (Mt. 21:43) and the third parable with – *"The wedding is ready, but those who were invited weren't worthy"* (Mt. 22:8b). Again, the focus is turning toward the Gentiles.

Then in "The Pharisees' Question; 'Give unto Caesar,'"⁸¹ they send spies to spring on him what they think is an inescapable trap, in order to then turn him over to the authority of the governor. By asking them to show him a denarius, he subtly proves that they are violating their own laws by allowing onto the Temple grounds foreign money with a human image on it. His reply also clearly delineates the two realms of human and divine authority, giving us a rule that endures to this day. The Pharisees *"marveled at his answer, and were silent"* (v. 26b).

Next, "The Sadducees Question Yesous about Marriage in Heaven"⁸² and he thwarts their riddle by saying that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob *"is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for all are alive to him"* (v. 38), disproving the Sadducees' disbelief in the resurrection of the dead. This time, it is the Sadducees he shuts down: *"They didn't dare to ask him any more questions"* (v. 40).

77 *Ibid.* [#118](#) (Mk. 11:27-33)

78 *Ibid.* [#119](#) (Mt. 21:28-32)

79 *Ibid.* [#120](#) (Mt. 21:33-46)

80 *Ibid.* [#121](#) (Mt. 22:1-14)

81 *Ibid.* [#122](#) (Lk. 20:20-26)

82 *Ibid.* [#123](#) (Lk. 20:27-40)

Then he silences a third group in "The Scribe's Question: The Two Great Commandments."⁸³ The scribes ("lawyers") were another power center among the Jews. In this interchange, the mood changes from confrontation to conciliation: this scribe commends him for his answer that love of God and love of neighbor are the two great commandments. Now, *"No one dared ask him any question after that"* (v. 34b).

In the section "Yeshua's Question: How Is the Messiah the Son of David?,"⁸⁴ he definitively answers the underlying question of authority in all of the above questions: Yeshua has authority because he is not only a son of David, but he is also the Lord, i.e., God. *"No one was able to answer him a word, neither dared any man from that day forth ask him any more questions"* (v. 46): questioning closed.

The focus now turns to his target audience: *"the poor, maimed, lame, blind,"* and the Gentiles – first, he praises the widow who gave two small coins⁸⁵, acknowledging that her giving out of her poverty is a greater gift in God's sight than all those who drop into the Treasury larger sums but much smaller proportions of their wealth. Then he recognizes "Some Greeks Seeking Yeshua, saying 'the Son of Man is glorified',"⁸⁶ signaling the opening up of his Good News to the Gentiles. He now officially confirms "The Unbelief of the Jews and Their Rejection of Yeshua"⁸⁷, quoting Isaiah: *"He has blinded their eyes and he hardened their heart, Lest they should see with their eyes, And perceive with their heart, And would turn, And I would heal them"* (v. 40). Some Jews will later believe, including Nicodemus, Barnabas, and Saul of Tarsus, but for now the Jewish authorities have turned against him.

As they prepare to celebrate the Passover meal, "The Disciples Argue: Who is the Greatest?"⁸⁸ From our vantage point of today, it is hard for us to imagine that at such a decisive moment in human history, they would stoop to argue over such pettiness. But do we fail to see ourselves in this? Then Yeshua begins his example of servanthood: when "Yeshua Washes his Disciples' Feet"⁸⁹, they realize the foolishness of their arguing over who is the greatest. Then Yeshua prophesies about his betrayer and his disciples' denying him⁹⁰: not only Judas, but also Peter betrays Yeshua, the difference being that Peter will repent but Judas only feels remorse that leads to his death: 2 Cor. 7:10. Then "Yeshua Gives the New Commandment"⁹¹ to love one another as if to say – *"If you love one another, you are faithful to me; if you do not love one another, you are being unfaithful to and betraying me."*

83 *Ibid.* [#124](#) (Mk. 12:28-34)

84 *Ibid.* [#125](#) (Mt. 22:41-46)

85 *Ibid.* [#127](#) (Mk. 12:41-44)

86 *Ibid.* [#128](#) (Jn. 12:20-36)

87 *Ibid.* [#129](#) (Jn. 12:37-50)

88 *Ibid.* [#136](#) (Lk. 22:24-30)

89 *Ibid.* [#137](#) (Jn. 13:1-20)

90 *Ibid.* [#138](#) (Jn. 13:21-30)

91 *Ibid.* [#139](#) (Jn. 13:31-35)

It is now approaching sunset, the beginning of the next day. After commanding them to love one another, he establishes his Love Feast: "Yeshua Institutes the Lord's Supper"⁹² This is the marriage feast that unites man to God, receiving the flesh and blood of the God-Man. After this momentous event which will become central to this new faith, "Yeshua Foretells Peter's Denial and the Fleeing of the Other Disciples."⁹³ Note that Yeshua mentions "glorify" five times (vv. 31-32), then mentions "love" four times (vv. 34-35), but Peter totally misses the point, seizing on Yeshua's words – *"Where I am going, you can't come"* (v. 33b) and immediately asks – *"Lord, where are you going?"* – another example of morbid speculation about the future. Then Peter says – *"I will lay down my life for you"* (v. 37b). For these clumsy and boastful remarks, Yeshua rebukes him by saying – *"Most assuredly I tell you, the rooster won't crow until you have denied me three times"* (v. 38b), teaching us that some, perhaps many, will deny him and flee, even after being joined to him in this marriage feast. Social and political pressure is often as powerful as the threat or use of physical persecution. Sadly, I have witnessed this myself while ministering behind the Iron Curtain⁹⁴.

Now we come to "Yeshua's Farewell Discourse to His Disciples"⁹⁵ and "Yeshua's Intercessory Prayer for His Disciples and Other Believers"⁹⁶: his four-chapter-long final discourse (Jn. 14-17) after instituting the Last Supper. Twenty-three times in these sections he stresses the need to love one another because of his love for us, in spite of persecution and ridicule. And the second theme is glory, glorifying him, or being glorified, appearing seventeen times.

"The Betrayal by Judas and the Arrest of Yeshua"⁹⁷ take place almost as if they were an anticlimax, after his foretelling it so many times. Three times he says *"I AM"* (Jn. 18: 5-7), asserting his divinity even while humbly submitting to betrayal and arrest. He does not resist, although he could call down twelve legions of angels (Mt. 26:53), but that would thwart the divine plan.

92 *Ibid.* [#140](#) (Mt. 26:26-29)

93 *Ibid.* [#141](#) (Jn. 13:36-38)

94 From 1970 to 1973, my wife and I worked with groups taking Christian literature behind the Iron Curtain and conducting conferences to train Christian leaders. Many of our contacts there would, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, become leaders of newly-formed democracies. One of our contacts was Cardinal Carol Woytila, who would later become Pope John Paul II. We were also able to help some escape to the West. But we also met false believers who, like Judas, Simon the Magician or Ananias and Sapphira, betrayed the faith and reported our visits to the communist authorities. My wife and I later served as missionaries to Russia from 1991 to 2007, working with the disabled and revising [the Russian Bible](#).

95 *Ibid.* [#142](#) (Jn. 14:1-31)

96 *Ibid.* [#143](#) (Jn. 17:1-26)

97 *Ibid.* [#145](#) (Jn. 18:1-12)

Next, we read of two deaths: "The Suicide of Judas"⁹⁸ – the terrible end of the traitor – and "The Crucifixion of Yeshua, the Messiah."⁹⁹ The former is barely a footnote in history, but the latter is the turning point of all human history. All four Gospel writers describe the Messiah's death in graphic detail – in fact, it is so horribly painful that a new word had to be invented to describe crucifixion: "excruciating." The crowds, the Jewish authorities, and the Roman soldiers all mock him as he is nailed to the cross and hangs there dying. "About the ninth hour," three in the afternoon, he cries out to his heavenly father – "Why?" (Mt. 27:46). This question echoes down through the centuries as suffering people cry out – "Why?" In this very event, however, we have the answer to all human suffering: we all have rebelled against, rejected, and killed God. But "Yesous said, 'Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing.'" (Lk. 23:34). And he does, if we simply repent and ask. When Yeshua says – "It is finished" (Jn. 19:30b), the work of our salvation is accomplished.

G. The Period of Triumph

On "Resurrection Morning: an Earthquake Hits and the Stone is Rolled Away."¹⁰⁰ Some skeptics say that in the Gospel accounts nobody had actually seen the Resurrection. But it is also true that nobody can watch a nuclear explosion: they would be blinded. The power that raises Yeshua from the dead is likewise immense. The lightning-like brightness of the angel causes the guards to become like dead men. Then "The Women Visit the Empty Tomb,"¹⁰¹ wondering how they might be able to wrestle that huge stone away from the entrance, but it is already rolled away. Mary Magdalene runs to tell Simon Peter and "The Other Women See an Angel [or two] at the Tomb"¹⁰² who tells them that Yesous has risen and will meet the disciples in Galilee. Then "Yeshua Appears to the Women Returning to the City"¹⁰³ who tell the eleven disciples, but those men do not believe them.

Now "Peter and John Visit the Tomb,"¹⁰⁴ see the linen burial cloths lying there, and go back. Mary Magdalene apparently returns with them after running to tell them about the empty tomb. Then "Yeshua Appears to Mary Magdalene,"¹⁰⁵ who at first mistakes him for the gardener. When he speaks her name, she recognizes him and he tells her not to touch him yet, but to go back to the disciples and tell them – "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God" (v. 17). It is worth noting that Yeshua meets with women first who believe in him and his resurrection, but the men disciples are more skeptical. Word

98 *Ibid.* [#150](#) (Mt. 27:3-10)

99 *Ibid.* [#151](#) (Mt. 27:31-56)

100 *Ibid.* [#155](#) (Mt. 28:2-4)

101 *Ibid.* [#156](#) (Mk. 16:2-4)

102 *Ibid.* [#157](#) (Mk. 16:5-7)

103 *Ibid.* [#158](#) (Mt. 28:8-10)

104 *Ibid.* [#159](#) (Jn. 20:3-10)

105 *Ibid.* [#160](#) (Jn. 20:11-18)

of the empty grave reach the Jewish authorities, so "The Pharisees Bribe the Guards,"¹⁰⁶ attempting to create an alternate narrative that would cause many of the common people to doubt the resurrection story.

After this, "Yeshua Appears to All the Apostles in Galilee"¹⁰⁷ and issues the Great Commission: even though some still doubted, Yeshua entrusts his mission and message to those eleven disciples, promising them that they will receive power from on high to make more disciples by teaching them to do ("*observe*" in the sense of "*fulfill*," not just "*spectate*") everything he has taught and shown his disciples to do: heal the sick, care for the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind, and cast out demons. This is true *διακονια* – ministry!

At "The Ascension of Yeshua into Heaven,"¹⁰⁸ Yeshua reminds them to wait for the Holy Spirit to come, assuring them – "*you will be baptized in the Holy Spirit not many days from now*" (v. 5). They still do not quite comprehend what is about to happen: even though he told Pilate – "*My kingdom is not of this world*" (Jn. 18:36), they still are expecting him to establish an earthly kingdom of Israel – "*Lord, are you now restoring the kingdom to Israel?*" (v. 6). But his reply is very blunt: the Russian Bible translates the next verse as – "*It's none of your business to know the times or the seasons*" (v. 7a, my emphasis). This often-repeated point tells his followers not to become fascinated with and fixated on exactly when the end-times events will take place, just as Yeshua warned against several times in Mt. ch. 24. Such morbid speculation only leads to sectarianism. Our task is to receive the Holy Spirit and "*be witnesses to [him] in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth*" (v. 8). This is the fulfillment of the covenant made with Abraham: to bless all nations of the earth.

"The Purpose and Conclusion of John's Gospel"¹⁰⁹ explains why the Apostle John wrote his Gospel – "*that you may believe that Yeshua is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life [salvation] in his name*" (v. 31). This is the origin of the fish symbol: the word "fish" in Greek is "*ichthus*". It is an acrostic, so each letter stands for a word: *Iesous Khristos Theou Huios Soter* in Greek, which means "*Yesous Khristos, God's Son, Savior*" in English, a basic early Christian creed. Also notice that Yeshua did many things "*are not written in this book*" (Jn. 20:30) and "*There are also many other things which Yeshua did, which if they would all be written, I suppose that even the world itself wouldn't have room for the books that would be written*" (Jn. 21:25). There are many other healings: by my count, a dozen that Yeshua performed among the unnamed crowds, that are not written in this work, but those described here amply illustrate the fact that "*Savior*" can also be translated as "*Healer*" in Greek. This tells us that his ministry was very physical as well as spiritual.

106 *Ibid.* [#161](#) (Mt. 28:11-15)

107 *Ibid.* [#166](#) (Mt. 28:16-20)

108 *Ibid.* [#167](#) (Acts 1:1-11)

109 *Ibid.* [#168](#) (Jn. 20:30-31)

D. Apostolic-Era Believers' Testimony

In "The Apostle Peter's testimony about the Resurrected Khristos, the Anointed One"¹¹⁰ we see here that *"God raised [Yeshua] up, having freed him from the agony of death, because it was not possible that he should be held by it"* (v. 24) and in five more Scripture texts how Peter testified that the Messiah, the Khristos, whom the Jewish authorities had crucified, has risen from the dead by his divine power, just as Yeshua said – *"I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one takes it away from me, but I lay it down by myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. I received this commandment from my Father"* (Jn. 10:17b-18).

Next, we have "The Apostle Paul's testimony about the Resurrection of Khristos, the Anointed One"¹¹¹: Paul gives us a detailed defense of the resurrection of Yesous, the Khristos: if he did not rise from the dead, preaching it is in vain, believing it is in vain, we are false witnesses, we are dead in our sins, and *"we are of all men most pitiable"* (1 Cor. 15:14-19). It is ridiculous to imagine that the eleven Apostles and hundreds of other people would literally risk their lives to testify that they saw the risen Messiah. In five more Scripture texts we see how Paul testifies that Yesous, the Khristos, rose from the dead. Paul, who was formerly Saul the Pharisee and persecutor of believers in Yeshua, the Messiah, was knocked off his high horse when he received a vision of the risen Lord – see Acts ch. 9. Both he and Peter eventually did lay down their lives for their faith in the risen Messiah: Peter was crucified in Rome upside-down, saying he was not worthy to be crucified right-side-up like his Lord. Paul as a Roman citizen could not be crucified, so he was beheaded by the sword in Rome.

Acts ch. 15 tells that at the Council of Jerusalem, some Pharisees who had believed in Yeshua said Gentile believers should be circumcised and follow the Torah (v. 5). But Peter defended his evangelizing among the Gentiles, saying – *"Now therefore why do you tempt God, that you should put a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they are"* (vv. 10-11). Then James, the Lord's brother, gave his summary that Gentiles may simply observe some basic moral laws: *"abstain from the pollution of idols, from sexual immorality, from what is strangled, and from blood"* (v. 20b), letting Jewish believers continue to keep their Sabbath and Torah observances (v. 21). Also, in Gal. 2:7-10 we read that Paul was given the ministry of evangelizing the uncircumcised, the Gentiles, and Peter was appointed to the apostleship of the circumcision, the Jews. Thus the Good News began to spread not only among the Jews in the Dispersion, but also all through the Greco-Roman Empire and beyond, inviting all nations to be baptized into Yesous and become adopted children of Abraham (Gal. 3:27-29; 4:5).

110 *Ibid.* [#169](#) (Ac.2:22-24)

111 *Ibid.* [#170](#) (1Cor.15:1-8)

PART FOUR – CONCLUSION

A. Jewish and Greco-Roman Views of Yeshua

In the Jewish historian Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews*, we read the following about Yeshua: "Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man; for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him; for he appeared to them alive again the third day; as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day."¹¹²

Scholars disagree as to the authenticity of this paragraph: we do not know how much of this text Josephus wrote, or exactly how much later Christians may have interpolated their beliefs into the text. Also, Josephus, who had defected to the Roman armies from his post as a Jewish military commander, must defend the views of his Roman sponsor. But most scholars agree that the following text by Josephus is authentic: "Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he assembled the sanhedrim of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others, [or, some of his companions]; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned."¹¹³ We might ask whether the former quotation's authenticity is questioned simply because it refers to the post-resurrection appearance and prophetic witnesses to it, while the latter is not questioned: does not this indicate a naturalistic, anti-supernatural bias?

Shortly after the first century A.D., the Roman senator and historian Tacitus described the persecution by Nero, who ruled from 54 to 68 A.D., of the early Christians thus: "Therefore, to stifle rumour, Nero made scapegoats of, and marked out for most particular punishment, those whom the masses called Christians, and who were loathed for their abominations. Christus, from whom the name derived, had suffered the death penalty in the reign of Tiberius, by order of the procurator Pontius Pilatus; and the deadly superstition had been temporarily suppressed, only to erupt again not only in Judaea, the home of this evil, but even in Rome, to which all that is dreadful or shameful in the world flows and here is celebrated."¹¹⁴ In this very negative view of Christianity, Tacitus gives evidence that, by way of Nero's crucifying Christians or using

112 Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, Translated by William Whiston. 573.

113 *Ibid.* 645.

114 Tacitus, *The Annals – A New Complete Downloadable Verse Translation* by Anthony Kline. 633.

them as human torches, blaming them for the Great Fire of Rome in 64 A.D., this new faith that had sprung up in Judea was spreading throughout the empire. In spite of Nero's brutal savagery, the citizens of Rome felt compassion for these martyrs, and by this means this offshoot of Judaism would continue to grow until it would eventually supplant the rule of the Caesars in Rome.

A third witness to the early Christians is Gaius Suetonius, the chief secretary to Emperor Hadrian, writing of emperor Claudius, who ruled from 41 to 54 A.D.: *"Because the Jews at Rome caused continuous disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from the city."* These Jewish believers in Yeshua the Messiah, the Khristos, are very likely the same ones expelled that are described in Acts 18:2. Suetonius held the same negative opinion of Christians when describing the reign of Nero: *"Punishments were also inflicted on the Christians, a sect professing a new and mischievous religious belief."*¹¹⁵

And a fourth witness, Pliny the Younger, advisor to emperors Domitian and Trajan, writes from his appointed position as Secundus for Trajan to Greek-speaking Bithynia: *"It is my regular custom, my lord, to refer to you all questions which cause me doubt, for who can better guide my hesitant steps or instruct my ignorance? I have never attended hearings concerning Christians, so I am unaware what is usually punished or investigated, and to what extent. I am more than a little in doubt whether there is to be a distinction between ages, and to what extent the young should be treated no differently from the more hardened; whether pardon should be granted to repentance; whether the person who has been a Christian in some sense should not benefit by having renounced it; whether it is the name Christian, itself untainted with crimes, or the crimes which cling to the name which should be punished."*

"In the meantime, this is the procedure I have followed, in the cases of those brought before me as Christians. I asked them whether they were Christians. If they admitted it, I asked them a second and a third time, threatening them with execution. Those who remained obdurate I ordered to be executed, for I was in no doubt, whatever it was which they were confessing, that their obstinacy and their inflexible stubbornness should at any rate be punished. Others similarly lunatic were Roman citizens, so I registered them as due to be sent back to Rome."

*"Later in the course of the hearings, as usually happens, the charge rippled outwards, and more examples appeared. An anonymous document was published containing the names of many. Those who denied that they were or had been Christians and called upon the gods after me, and with incense and wine made obeisance to your statue, which I had ordered to be brought in together with images of the gods for this very purpose, and who moreover cursed Christ (those who are truly Christian cannot, it is said, be forced to do any of these things), I ordered to be acquitted."*¹¹⁶ The emperor Trajan's reply commended Pliny's actions. This "superstition" and

115 Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*.. 202, 221.

"sect" of mid-first century had grown by the second century to become a "lunatic" threat to the stability of the Roman empire.

Taken together, these references to Jesus, "Chrestus," and Christians all support the life, parables, miracles, crucifixion of Yesous and the later influence he had as far away as Rome, as early as the mid-first century and into the second century A.D. We must ask the questions "how" and "why" it spread like yeast in a lump of dough? The controversy in Acts 6 between the Grecian Jews and the Hebrews spurred the Apostles to select seven Greek-speaking deacons; the stoning of Stephen in Acts 7; Philip's preaching in Samaria and the conversion of the eunuch in Acts 8 [note v. 4 – *"Therefore those who were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word"* – my life verse] who then carried the Good News to Ethiopia; the conversion of Saul in Acts 9; and the conversion of the centurion Cornelius in Acts 10 give us the answer. Peter's vision of a great sheet filled with all sorts of animals, clean and unclean, and the voice commanding him – *"Rise, Peter, kill and eat!"* – repeated three times, then his visit to the home of Cornelius – *"a devout man, and one who revered God with all his house, who gave gifts for the needy generously to the people, and always prayed to God"* (v. 2) – all of this was God's way of overcoming the Jews' natural ethnocentrism and antipathy toward unclean, "outsider" Gentiles. Similar to the centurion in [Mt. 8:5-13](#) and [Lk. 7:1-10](#), we see here a God-seeker who gives gifts to the needy, remarkably as an officer in the occupying army! In fact, in the Lukan version the Jewish elders implore Yesous – *"He is worthy for you to do this for him, for he loves our nation, and he built our synagogue for us."* (Lk. 7:4b-5).

Thus in answer to the complaints of *"those who were of the circumcision"* (Acts 11:2) in Jerusalem when they learned of Peter's eating with and preaching to Cornelius and his household, the Good News was able to jump the ethno-cultural barriers that so often inhibit people, the Holy Spirit being poured out on Cornelius and his household to confirm that *"God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life!"* (Acts 11:18). Then in Acts 11:19-26 we have the quite "spontaneous combustion" of ordinary lay-folk Jewish disciples in Antioch showing and telling their new faith to their Gentile neighbors in the face of oppression that followed Stephen's martyrdom. When the Jerusalem community of Yeshua followers heard of this, they sent Barnabas who then called newly-converted Saul of Tarsus, and the Good News community was organized in Antioch: *"The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch"* (v. 26b). Note that the newly-minted term "Christian" is equivalent to "disciple" in contrast to our modern-day notion that one can be a Christian without being a disciple. No, if one is a real Christian, one must be a disciple, willing to risk one's life for the faith. Here in the span of six chapters, ch. 6 through ch. 11, Luke describes how, by means of martyrdom and persecution, the Good News of Yeshua, the Messiah, was transformed into the Good

116 Pliny, *Complete Letters of Pliny the Younger*; P. G. Walsh, trans. 278.

News of Yesous, the Khristos, the Anointed One of God, breaking out of the Jewish ethno-cultural ghetto into the whole Greek-speaking world and beyond, as Yeshua/Yesous predicted in Acts 1:8 – from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria to the uttermost parts of the earth.

B. Contemporary Views of Yeshua

In *Josephus and the New Testament* Steve Mason writes: "As we shall see, it is almost certain that Josephus' paragraph on Jesus has been edited by Christian copyists, but the editing was done early on, by about AD 300. Consequently, subsequent Christian readers thought that the glowing account of Jesus in our versions of Josephus had been written by the Jewish historian himself. Josephus' descriptions of the Baptist and of James' death seem to have remained intact. Naturally, these short passages were highly valued. Since Christianity had not made a major impression on either the Jewish or larger Greco-Roman worlds in the first century, and since no other writers from that period mention the Christians, these few references were seen as crucial independent testimony to the historical foundations of the church."¹¹⁷ This passage illustrates Mason's thesis that some Christians have misused the writings of Josephus for their own polemical purposes.

Mason continues: "Most early Christians tended to see themselves as the "true Israel," as heirs to the biblical tradition. The church's apologists, therefore, were quick to see the value of Josephus' *Against Apion*, which gently chided Greco-Roman morality and religion while eloquently arguing the superiority of biblical ethics."¹¹⁸ It is not wrong or unethical, however, to quote a non-Christian author for the sake of Christian apologetics as long as the quotation is not taken out of context or manipulated to distort the intended meaning. We do indeed see ourselves as the "true Israel," adopted children of Abraham (Gal. 3:27-29; 4:5). The Mishnah is a prime example of "adding precept upon precept, line upon line" (Is. 28:13) until the original intent is buried in these details. But we as traditional Christians are not exempt from this either.

Mason gives several pages of examples of how Origen, Eusibius, and even Hippolytus, bishop of Rome, and other Christians have misused, misquoted, and even revised Josephus to supposedly "prove" that Jerusalem's destruction and the annihilation of most of the Jewish race was the result of the Jews' crucifixion of Yeshua. Luther, in his tract "The Jews and their Lies" echoes the widely-held view: "the Romans were God's instruments, punishing the Jews for their 'delusions regarding their false Christ and their persecution of the true Christ.' (In that same tract, Luther advocates that Jews be deprived of normal civil rights, that their property and books be burned, and that they be herded together in forced labor camps.)"¹¹⁹

117 Mason, *Josephus and the New Testament*. 10.

118 *Ibid.* 11.

119 *Ibid.* 13.

Mason explains that most Jews in 70 A.D. did not live in Jerusalem or even in Palestine: the majority of them lived in Alexandria, Rome, Damascus, Persia, and other lands. Indeed, Josephus himself claims that the fall of Jerusalem was not because the Jews were "too Jewish" and had crucified Christ, but rather that they were not Jewish enough: *"He wrote, as we shall see, in order to explain Judaism to outsiders and to demonstrate its virtues in a world that was often hostile. But Christian authors took over his most self-critical work, in which he castigates a small number of Jews for their failure to live up to the standards of Judaism, and turned that work against the Jewish people as a whole, thus exactly reversing Josephus' intention.... Accordingly, he attributed the fall of Jerusalem to the people's failure to keep the laws, whereas the Christians charged the Jews with failing to abandon the laws of Moses in favor of Christ."* (my emphases)¹²⁰

But Mason's last point is not quite correct. Neither the Apostle Paul nor James, who presided at the Council of Jerusalem, advocated that Jews ought to abandon the Law of Moses, to be "less Jewish." Rather, we read that Jews should be free to observe the Jewish Law and customs, but Gentile converts to the Messiah could observe just a condensed version of these laws (Acts 15:19-21). When Paul returned to Jerusalem, the disciples there reminded him that *"many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law"* and Paul agreed that he had not taught the Jews to abandon the Law or the Temple, as the Jews accused him of doing (Acts 21:20-28): he himself went back to Jerusalem to worship in the Temple, and his "crime" that he was arrested for in Jerusalem was not for teaching Jews to disobey the Law of Moses, but that he preached the death and resurrection of Yeshua (Acts 24:11-15), whom the Jewish leaders, the Sadducees, did not accept as their Messiah who taught that the original intent of the Law, the "condensed version," is to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, and strength, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Paul wrote: *"To the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law. To the weak I became as weak, that I might gain the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some"* (1 Cor. 9:20-22). This should be our goal as well.

However, like the Jews, we often become so focused on the details and rubrics of our worship services that we ignore these essentials. We *"ought to have done these, and not to have left the other undone"* (Lk. 11:42b). We ought to observe the rituals and rubrics of our services, but not leave undone the acts of mercy and care for the weak, poor, maimed, lame, blind, widows, and orphans, who were the target audience, the central focus, of our Lord's earthly ministry. We also ought to love the Jews for providing us the Messiah, not ignore or persecute them. From a Jewish perspective, *"...the Gospel is irrelevant to them. This perceived*

120 *Ibid.* 20.

irrelevancy arises partly from the way Christianity presents itself, but also from the alienation induced by most New Testament translations. With their Gentile Christian cultural trappings and their anti-Jewish theological underpinnings, they lead many Jews to see the New Testament as a Gentile book about a Gentile god. The Jesus portrayed therein seems to bear little relationship to Jewish life."¹²¹

Although the above was the central focus of Yeshua's earthly ministry, the ordinary Jewish people, the authorities, and even his own disciples failed to perceive this. Their experience of freedom in their recent history under the Maccabees and its suppression by the Roman legions conditioned them to focus on the Messianic prophecies of David's descendant who would *"restore the kingdom of Israel"* – in their minds, driving out the Roman armies that occupied Palestine – as the crowds expected during his triumphal entry into Jerusalem and as his disciples asked him just before his ascension into heaven. Skarsaune quotes Berger and Wyshogrod: *"The central criterion for evaluating a Messiah must therefore be a single question: Has the Messianic age come? It is only in terms of this question that 'the Messiah' means anything. What, then, does the Bible say about the Messianic Age?"* Skarsaune explains that when John the Baptist was in prison and sent followers to ask if Yeshua was in fact the Messiah (Mt. 11:2-6) – *"Notice that Jesus directs the attention of John's disciples to something they can see and hear, that is, something manifest and observable, not to something 'spiritual' and invisible. It is, in fact, a fascinating experience to read through the Gospels from the perspective of the Jewish objection: Where are the signs of the kingdom to be seen?"*¹²² Yeshua's answer to John's disciples was – *"the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them"* quoting from Is. 29:18.

C. Augustine's Fatalistic View of Yeshua's Message

But how then did it come about that by the fourth century, many Christians had turned away from their essentially Jewish roots? Rabbi Daniel Boyarin quotes a letter that St. Jerome wrote to Augustine of Hippo – *"The adherents to this sect are known commonly as Nazarenes; they believe in Christ the Son of God, born of the Virgin Mary; and they say that He who suffered under Pontius Pilate and rose again, is the same as the one in whom we believe. But while they desire to be both Jews and Christians, they are neither the one nor the other."* He was describing those who believed in the Nicene Creed but *"prayed in synagogues, kept the Sabbath, and adhered to dietary and other rules."* Jerome could not fathom how this could possibly be, so he decided they must be neither. But Boyarin argues that some Hassidic Jews today believe Yeshua is the Messiah and other Hassidic Jews do not, yet both are still

121 *Complete Jewish Bible*. xxxvii.

122 Skarsaune, *op. cit.* 302-303

considered Jews, just as Catholics and Protestants today are both considered Christians. They are not two opposing categories but one complex category.¹²³

Edersheim finds what appears to him to be a contradiction between Philo's and the Apostle Paul's views of original sin that is central to the thesis of this work: *"This leads us to the great question of Original Sin. Here the views of Philo are those of the Eastern Rabbis. But both are entirely different from those on which the argument in the Epistle to the Romans turns. It was neither at the feet of Gamaliel, nor yet from Jewish Hellenism, that Saul of Tarsus learned the doctrine of original sin. The statement that as in Adam all spiritually died, so in Messiah all should be made alive, finds absolutely no parallel in Jewish writings. What may be called the starting point of Christian theology, the doctrine of hereditary guilt and sin, through the fall of Adam, and of the consequent entire and helpless corruption of our nature, (my emphases) is entirely unknown to Rabbinical Judaism. The reign of physical death was indeed traced to the sin of our first parents. But the Talmud expressly teaches, that God originally created man with two propensities, one to good and one to evil (Yetser tobh, and Yetser hara). The evil impulse began immediately after birth. But it was within the power of man to vanquish sin, and to attain perfect righteousness; in fact, this stage had actually been attained.*

"Similarly, Philo regarded the soul of the child as 'naked' (Adam and Eve), a sort of tabula rasa, as wax which God would fain form and mould. But this state ceased when 'affection' presented itself to reason, and thus sensuous lust arose, which was the spring of all sin. The grand task, then, was to get rid of the sensuous, and to rise to the spiritual. In this, the ethical part of his system, Philo was most under the influence of Stoic philosophy. We might almost say, it is no longer the Hebrew who Hellenises, but the Hellene who Hebraises"¹²⁴ (my emphasis).

Edersheim goes on to describe Philo's view of salvation as turning away from sensuousness to knowledge, then asceticism, and finally to divine philosophy. How very Orthodox! But his argument that the Apostle Paul's views are "contradictory" is actually adopting a misinterpretation by St. Jerome and Augustine of Hippo.

It is only from an Augustinian theological viewpoint that there is any contradiction: Augustine's mistaken doctrine of "hereditary guilt" and total depravity, the "entire and helpless corruption of our nature" is not found in the original Greek of Paul's writing, the verse on which Augustine based his doctrines of inherited guilt, total depravity, and predestination of the elect: Rom. 5:12 – *"Therefore, as sin entered into the world through one man, and death through sin; and so death passed to all men, in that all sinned"* (my emphases). Jerome, in his Latin Vulgate translation, rendered the end of this verse as *"...death passed to all men, in whom (in Adam) all sinned."* (my emphasis) The word translated as "whom", however, cannot refer to Adam, because it is neuter ("that") in Greek. So Augustine, who

123 Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ*. 16-17

124 Edersheim, *op. cit.* 514-515.

knew less Greek than did Jerome, made this mistranslation the basis of his early teaching the idea that all sinned in Adam and are guilty of Adam's sin. Orthodox Christian teaching, based on the original Greek text of Rom. 5:12, is that human nature is weakened by the Fall, predisposed to sin and subject to death, but not guilty of Adam's sin. The phrase "*For if by the trespass of the one the many died*" in v. 15 teaches that the result of Adam's sin is not all mankind's guilt but rather our death. The doctrine that all mankind is subject to death (but not guilt) because of the Fall is repeated in 1 Cor. 15:22 – "*For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive*" (my emphasis).

Thus we can agree that the Apostle Paul teaches it is not the Hebrew who is Hellenised, but the Hellene who is Hebraised, and that the Apostle Paul's doctrine of original sin does not contradict his training in Rabbinical Judaism, but rather fulfills it: death is indeed due to the sin of our original parents, but both Pauline and true Orthodox teaching agree with the Jewish doctrine that mankind was created with free will and thus with the ability to choose either of two propensities, to do good or to do evil, to obey God or to disobey, to follow the desires of the flesh or the leading of the *logos*, the divine spark, within us. And contrary to Augustine's doctrine of total depravity, mankind still retains the ability to choose the good, although man now is predisposed toward gratifying the flesh. The eastern half of the Greco-Roman Empire carried forward more than the western half this Jewish idea of the Church as a synagogue – a "coming-together," a gathering, a community of imperfect people who are striving toward sanctification in the fear of God (Heb. 12:14-16). The notion that sin and guilt are passed from generation to generation by means of procreation has done untold damage to the western Church, as shown by so many of its clergy pretending to be holy while secretly yielding to disordered desire. The idea that all sexual intercourse is inherently sinful is contradicted by St. Paul's dictum – "*Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the bed be undefiled: but God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterers*" (Heb. 13:4). So the real issue is not a dualistic "the spirit is good but the flesh is evil" and equating that with light and darkness; rather, that the *logos* in us must have priority over the flesh.

Why is this rather long excursus over the translation of one Greek word, "that" versus "him", in Rom. 5:12 so important? First, although most English Bibles including the Roman Catholic Revised Challoner-Rheims New Testament¹²⁵ have corrected Rom. 5:12, yet the Augustinian doctrine of original guilt persists in many parts of Christianity. This mistranslation still persists to this day in the Roman Catholic online Douay-Rheims Bible: "*death passed upon all men, in whom all have sinned*"¹²⁶ (my emphasis). But even more important is its pervasive influence on all forms of Christianity, including the Russian Synodal translation, the most common Russian Orthodox Bible: "*smert pereshla vo vsekh chelovekov, potomu chto v niom vse*

125 Catholic Scholars, *The New Testament of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*. 281.

126 Douay-Rheims Bible, Rom. 5:12.

sogreshili", in English – "death passed into all men, because (supplied word) in him all have sinned" (my emphasis). This may reflect the "Latin captivity" influence on Russian Orthodoxy during the late Middle Ages when there were no Orthodox seminaries in Russia, so theology students from Russia had to study in the West.

This all-pervasive influence also persists to this day in Protestant theology, for example, by Dr. Wayne Grudem, B.A. – Harvard University, M.Div. and D.D. – Westminster Theological Seminary, Ph.D in New Testament studies – University of Cambridge, and biblical theology professor for 20 years at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (TEDS), where he was chairman of the department of biblical and systematic theology. He grew up in the same church my wife had attended as a child, I sat on his ordination committee in 1973, and I did most of my first master's degree studies at TEDS. He served as general editor for the English Standard Version Study Bible and authored the highly-influential *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, in which he wrote: "**1. Inherited Guilt: We Are Counted Guilty Because of Adam's Sin**" [that author's bold emphasis]. Even though Grudem's ESV translation of Rom. 5:12 – "Therefore... sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned"¹²⁷ corresponds to the correct Greek text, his interpretation is highly influenced by Augustinian and Calvinist theology of inherited Adamic guilt. He continues on this topic and "inherited corruption" for four more pages!

Another prominent Evangelical theologian, also a former professor at TEDS, Provost and currently Distinguished Professor of Apologetics at Veritas Evangelical Seminary as of publication date of his book *Chosen But Free* is Dr. Norman Geisler. In this book he wrote: "Indeed, we sinned in Adam (Rom. 5:12)" which posits as axiomatic, not requiring any argument, that all mankind is guilty of of Adam's sin¹²⁸ by using "in him" (Adam) rather than "in that". But of even greater importance is the doctrine of God that is implied by this mistranslation and misinterpretation of Rom. 5:12 – a god that arbitrarily predestines some to be the elect and others the non-elect, a few to be granted eternal life entirely by that god's whim, while the others, the vast majority of humanity, are predestined to burn in hell for all eternity – that god is not an Old Covenant judgmental god and a New Covenant God of mercy, a pagan Yin-Yang, a mixture of good and evil. It is not a god that prefers "us" – the more powerful, the more intelligent, the healthier, the younger, our chosen and elect ethnic group, rather than "them" – the weaker, the intellectually or physically inferior, those "other" ethnic groups, or the elderly. Ageism is just as much a subconscious bias as is racism. As Jaroslav Pelikan wrote – "But the Augustinian doctrine was not merely novel and heretical, it was finally heathen. It was a 'fatalistic' theory [fatalis persuasio]. It spoke a great deal about grace, but 'in the name of grace [Augustine] preaches fatalism.' Predestination was simply a euphemistic way

127 Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. 427.

128 Geisler, *Chosen But Free: A Balanced View of God's Sovereignty and Free Will*. 54.

of reintroducing a pagan notion of fatal necessity. The Augustinian doctrine appeared to be epitomized in the thesis that 'by God's predestination men are compelled to sin and driven to death by a sort of fatal necessity.' But fatalism, even under the guise of the [un]Christian doctrine of predestination, would lead to conclusions that any Christian would find repugnant."¹²⁹ This may explain why Pelikan, that great Lutheran scholar, became Orthodox. In his chapter "*Jesus Kept Kosher*" Rabbi Daniel Boyarin explains that for the first two centuries of the modern era, the Messianic movement can be thought of as "*as part of the ideas and practices that we understand to be the Judaism of this period. The ideas of Trinity and incarnation, or certainly the germs of those ideas, were already present among Jewish believers well before Jesus came on the scene to incarnate in himself, as it were, those theological notions and take up his messianic calling.*" The Gospels, Rabbi Boyarin writes, should not be thought of as a radical break from the "*legalistic and rule-bound*" Judaism of that day, but rather a fulfillment of the prophecies Boyarin described in his preceding two chapters.¹³⁰ It was the Pharisees' notion of binding oral law, not the Law of Moses, that Yeshua objected to.

So then, what is the real meaning of the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob being God's chosen people, and by extension the New Covenant followers of Yeshua being "the elect"? Is it some sort of racial or ideological superiority? That leads to the Nazi philosophy of a super race and genocide of the inferior, less-than-fully-human beings. We have witnessed especially in the past century but throughout many centuries how such an idea has been turned against the Jews as "Christ killers." We should no more blame today's Jews for Christ's death than we should blame today's Italians, descendants of the Romans, the ones who actually crucified the Jews' Messiah. And more widely, that idea carries over to the notion of white European civilization being superior and white people predestined to be enlighteners of darker-skinned peoples, the black Africans, the Asians, and the native Americans, or the notion of males being superior to females. No, "*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Khristos Yesous. If you belong to the Anointed One, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to promise*" (Gal. 3:28-29). We Gentiles, believers in Yesous the Khristos, the Anointed One, are adopted children of Abraham.

The true significance of being God's chosen people is not to be an elite, but rather to be an example to all nations of the earth: "*He [the Lord] says, 'It is not enough for You to be My Servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the protected ones of Israel. I will also make You a light for the nations, to bring My salvation to the ends of the earth.'* Thus says the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, and his Holy One, to Him who was despised and abhorred by the nation, to the Servant of rulers: '*Kings shall see and arise; princes, and they shall worship; because of the Lord who is faithful, even the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you*'" (Is. 49:6-7, Berean Study Bible, my emphasis). It is an enormous responsibility to be an example and guide to all peoples of the earth. Why then is the Church shrinking? It is because we have

129 Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*. 320.

130 Boyarin, *op. cit.* 102-103.

allowed the state to usurp the Church's ministry to "the poor, lame, maimed, and blind," so the state has changed it into "social services" and has gradually convinced Christians to accept this as the new normal. Christian leaders need to equip the saints (laypeople) once again to do the work of *διακονία* - ministry that will again build up the Body of Christ ([Eph. 4:11-12](#)). Note that the above Isaiah passage also mentions the restoration of "*the protected ones of Israel*" - the remnant. At the very start of Isaiah's prophecies, we read - "*Unless the Lord of hosts had left to us a very small remnant, we would have been as Sodom; we would have been like Gomorrah. Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom! Listen to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah!*" (Is. 1:9-10, my emphasis). Isaiah says that the nation of Israel - "Sodom and Gomorrah" - had fallen into empty rituals of sacrificing bulls, lambs, and goats, while ignoring the oppressed, orphans, and widows (vv. 11-17). The remnant are those who realize what is the real meaning of being a chosen, holy, called-out people and who strive to fulfill this calling of *διακονία* - ministry to "the poor, lame, maimed, and blind."

As Emperor Constantine said when he realized the truth of this new faith:

"You have conquered, O Galilean!"

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