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**Edited by Amy-Jill Levine, Dale C. Allison, Jr., & John Dominic Crossan:  
The Historical Jesus in Context**

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## INTRODUCTION

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*Amy-Jill Levine*

Interest in the “historical Jesus” has continued unabated since the Enlightenment. Each year new books and magazine articles appear, the media offer new programs, and since the 1970s, college courses on the topic have been overflowing in enrollment. No single picture of Jesus has convinced all, or even most, scholars; all methods and their combinations find their critics as well as their advocates.

This volume does not offer yet another portrait of the historical Jesus—indeed, we editors each have our own view of Jesus’ agenda, of what can be considered authentic material, of how he perceived himself and how others perceived him (whether our diverse views stem from our training, our ages, our experiences, even our different religious backgrounds, cannot be determined). Rather, this volume provides information on cultural contexts within which Jesus was understood and perhaps even understood himself. This collection explores Jesus’ contexts not only through presenting select primary sources (most in new translations) but also by offering commentary by experts on those sources. By looking directly at the sources from the period—Jewish and Gentile, literary and archaeological—this volume allows readers to construct the setting within which Jesus and his earliest followers lived.

The point of this search is not to find “parallels.” Comparison is often an extremely subjective judgment: where one scholar finds a connection, another finds disjunction. Nor is it to suggest that Jesus simply recapitulates conventional sayings and deeds; to the contrary, had he not said or done some things that proved memorable, distinct, or arresting, it is unlikely we would have records of his teachings. Nor, however, could he have been completely anomalous; were he so, he would have made no sense either to those who chose to follow him or to those brought into the movement after his crucifixion.

All literature, be it historical report, biography, comedic anecdote, religious pronouncement, even deed of property, conforms to set patterns or what biblical scholars typically refer to as “forms.” Those who recorded the stories of Jesus would have presented their materials according to the forms of their time, and in turn their readers would have understood the Gospel accounts in light of these forms. Jesus too would be familiar with both Hellenistic (Gentile) and Jewish

forms: how one prayed and taught; how one was expected to act; how initiation rites such as baptism functioned; when and how one used apocalyptic language; recountings of miracles and martyrs. Further, the repertoire of stories available to Jesus' followers from both Jewish and Gentile traditions, as well as their own experiences, served as a source for adapted and even new stories of the man they considered the Messiah.

We cannot always determine which came first: a historical event or a literary creation. In some cases, Jesus may have been influenced by the scriptures of Judaism (e.g., the miracle-working prophets such as Elijah and Elisha, the suffering servant described by the prophet Isaiah, the apocalyptic "son of man" mentioned by Daniel as well as *1 Enoch*), as well as by Jewish accounts of martyrs, teachers, prophets, sages, and visionaries; yet it is equally possible that his followers, themselves steeped in these accounts, conformed their understanding of Jesus according to these narrative models. In other cases, those who told stories about him may have drawn from the rich traditions of the Greek and Roman worlds, from Homer to Aesop to Apollonius of Tyana and Apuleius of Madauros. In teaching and debating, Jesus would have used forms familiar to his audiences, such as parables and appeals to legal tradition or practice. Further, his audiences would have drawn upon this same repertoire in order to understand him.

Given its focus on an individual, or at least the records of him, this volume in the Princeton Readings in Religions series departs slightly from the focus of the earlier volumes, where the controlling factor has been a geographic region. The shift is not substantial, however. To investigate the context within which Jesus lived and his stories were told is already a focused investigation of both culture and period. The historical man from Nazareth cannot be understood fully if he is divorced from his context; the spread of the Gospel cannot be comprehended unless one appreciates its adaptations to the cultural expectations of its proselytes.

The focused approach of this collection also responds to a situation not addressed directly in the other volumes. A number of scholars working in biblical studies have insisted that we have an "ethical" responsibility to engage in historical Jesus research. Millions of people cite Gospel texts as moral guides. Consequently, it becomes imperative to determine to the best of our ability the situation in which those pronouncements were made. Do Jesus' comments on divorce or the construction of the family, for example, respond to a specific situation, perhaps one that no longer prevails, or are they universal injunctions? Are his comments on eschatology—the end of the present age—to be seen as metaphoric or literal? How are his values, or those of his followers, reflective of the Platonic dualism marking much of Hellenistic society? Did he in fact issue all the statements attributed to him, or were some added by his early followers and attributed to him, just as both Gentile and Jewish writers attributed material to prominent teachers? Are the Gospels to be assessed by criteria distinct from those applied to non-Christian material: for example, are Jesus' miracles "fact," whereas reports of the miraculous deeds of the Rabbi Honi the Circle-Drawer or the Pagan teacher Apollonius of Tyana the airy stuff of legend?

In order to locate the historical Jesus, access is needed not only to the Christian canon but also to the ancient primary sources that may confirm, complement, or complicate the canonical portraits. Today, the noncanonical Gospels and Patristic sources (writings of the Church Fathers) easily are available both in print and online; another volume in this series, Richard Valantasis's *Religions of Late Antiquity in Practice*, offers many of the late first-century and subsequent Christian as well as non-Christian texts. But even with the several source books available, the scholarly community still lacks a comprehensive volume that not only records the sources but also discusses their connections to the historical Jesus. This volume in the *Readings in Religion* series redresses that gap.

### The History of the “Quest”

The so-called Quest for the historical Jesus seeks to understand the man from Nazareth as he was understood in his own context and as he understood himself. Its practitioners can be pictured as located on a spectrum ranging from positivism to skepticism. The positivistic side regards the Gospel accounts as accurate or at least relatively accurate reports, and the burden of proof is placed on those who would claim something attributed to Jesus was not historical (although the demand to “prove a negative” creates a logical fallacy: it is impossible, in most cases, to prove that Jesus did *not* say or do something the Gospels attribute to him). As we move toward the skeptical end, we find questors who presuppose a distinction between the “Christ of faith”—the resurrected Lord, second person of the Trinity, the divine man proclaimed in the pages of the New Testament—and the Jesus of history. The understandings of the man from Nazareth vary according to the investigator's personal interests and also vary depending on the method used, the aspects of Jesus' life highlighted, the construal of Jesus' social situation, even the investigator's theological worldview (e.g., does it accommodate miracles? does it presuppose the biblical texts are inerrant?).

Those interpreters who regard the Evangelists (the authors of the Gospels, known as Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) as inheritors of oral tradition as well as authors in their own right seek to strip away the layers introduced by the Gospel writers as well as by Jesus' early followers to reach the pristine historical core of what he actually said and did. One conventional way of describing this distinction is to say that whereas Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of heaven, the Gospels proclaim Jesus. In this view, not every saying and deed, perhaps fewer than a half or even a quarter, the Gospels attribute to Jesus has a claim to historical authenticity. The materials are regarded as having developed among Jesus' followers, men and women who retrojected their experiences—disaffection from local synagogues, distrust by and of the Roman government, concerns over marriage, debates with other followers of Jesus as well as with both Gentiles and Jews who did not accept their claims—back to the story of Jesus himself. On this side of the spectrum, the burden of proof for claiming something historical rests with

those who regard the Gospel text as reliable. But this procedure requires a skepticism that is not usually applied to comparable texts, such as Suetonius's *Lives of the Caesars* or Josephus's *Antiquities of the Jews*. Nor in either case is it clear what would constitute "proof."

There is a consensus of sorts on a basic outline of Jesus' life. Most scholars agree that Jesus was baptized by John, debated with fellow Jews on how best to live according to God's will, engaged in healings and exorcisms, taught in parables, gathered male and female followers in Galilee, went to Jerusalem, and was crucified by Roman soldiers during the governorship of Pontius Pilate (26–36 CE). But, to use the old cliché, the devil is in the details.

For centuries, there was no "quest for the historical Jesus" per se. The gospels were taken to be trustworthy historical accounts. Although the earliest versions are anonymous, and although no Gospel identifies its author, the traditional attributions of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were accepted as fact. Matthew (Matthew 9:9; the tax collector is called "Levi" in Mark 2:14 and Luke 5:27) was the tax collector summoned by Jesus, and "John" was considered to be the unnamed "beloved disciple" who reclined on Jesus' breast at the Last Supper (see John 13:23). Luke, who wrote both the Gospel bearing his name and the Acts of the Apostles, was considered the companion of Paul, as well as the confidant of the Virgin Mary, and Mark was the companion of Peter. Thus the testimony of the four "Evangelists" (a Greek term meaning "good news bringers"; *euaggellion*, or "good news," is the Greek term underlying the English "Gospel") was credible, resting on eyewitness testimony. The miracles happened as recorded; whereas supernatural events recorded of Pagan, Jewish, or Muslim individuals were seen as merely legends, those accorded to Jesus and his followers were seen as fact.

Discrepancies were noted: Matthew, Mark, and Luke date the Crucifixion to the first day of the Passover holiday (Matthew 26:17–19; Mark 14:12–16; Luke 22:7–13); John, who refers to Jesus as the "lamb of God" (John 1:29), dates it to the day before, when the lambs to be eaten at the festival meal were being sacrificed in the Jerusalem Temple (John 13:1; 18:28; 19:31). Mark 10:1–12 depicts Jesus as insisting there is to be no divorce; the Jesus of Matthew (5:32) states that there is to be no divorce except in cases of *porneia* (the Greek conveys the sense of "unchaste behavior" or "sexual perversion"). Even Luke remarks that whereas others had attempted to compile an orderly account of Jesus' actions, he would present the material accurately (the supposition being that the earlier materials were inaccurate [see Luke 1:1–4]). But apparent discrepancies were easily harmonized by means of allegory, or they were regarded as complementary rather than as contradictory.

Interpreters regarded stories that appeared to be variants of the same incident as accounts of separate events. Thus, Jesus was seen as having "cleansed" the Temple both at the beginning of his ministry (so John 2) and again at its end (so Matthew 21, Mark 11, and Luke 19); Jesus healed a demoniac named "Legion" at Gadara (so Mark 5) and two demoniacs named "Legion" at Gerasa (so Matthew 8). He taught "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (so Matthew's "Sermon on the

Mount,” 5:3) and “Blessed are you poor” (so Luke’s “Sermon on the Plain,” 6:20). Even today, these matters remain debated. For some scholars, Matthew adapted Luke’s “more original” Beatitude to stress personal attitude rather than economic situation; for others, Jesus spoke both Beatitudes, but on different occasions to different audiences.

The “Quest” itself formally began with the Enlightenment’s questioning of both theological dogma and religious authority and in particular with the English Deists. H. S. Reimarus, a German historian whose *On the Intention of Jesus and His Disciples* (published posthumously in 1768 by the philosopher G. E. Lessing) usually is credited for starting the “Old Quest,” although his arguments substantially repeat the idea of the Deists. Reimarus, who viewed the gospels as human products rather than inerrant and noncontradictory “truth,” distinguished between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith. His image of the historical Jesus was of a failed revolutionary whose disciples stole his corpse, as well as invented both the Resurrection and the Second Coming (the *parousia*) to keep their movement going.

Following Reimarus, many scholars concluded that even if the gospels did contain some eyewitness testimony, the stories had been adapted and expanded to fit the needs of Greek-speaking, increasingly Gentile churches. The task was to separate the chaff of legendary development from the wheat of historical accuracy.

Aiding in this effort was the rise of source criticism, that is, the recognition that the first three canonical gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—share a common literary basis; they became known as the “Synoptic Gospels” because they “see together.” But while the connection among the three was acknowledged, the specifics of that connection remained contested. The “Griesbach hypothesis”—named after its first major proponent—held that Matthew was the first Gospel, Luke followed Matthew but added material from his own sources, and Mark epitomized the two. That Luke had access to sources is indicated by the Gospel itself, for as noted earlier, Luke speaks of the “many who had attempted to compile a narrative of the events that have been accomplished among us” (Luke 1:1).

Yet Griesbach’s theory had its challengers. Why, some wondered, if Mark is a summary of Matthew and Luke, are Mark’s individual stories longer (e.g., Mark tells the story of the Gerasene demoniac in twenty verses [5:1–20]; Luke’s version takes fourteen [8:26–39], and Matthew uses only seven [8:28–34])? Why did Mark omit such major materials as the Beatitudes and the Lord’s Prayer? Why are there no nativity or resurrection accounts (Mark 16:9–20, the so-called longer ending of the Gospel, is an addition to the earliest texts)? Numerous other indicators, from grammatical infelicities to errors of fact, also contributed to the weakening of support for Griesbach.

Complicating the scholarship may well have been apologetic interests: did the church really want the first Gospel to be so “Jewish”: Matthew foregrounds Jesus’ Jewish ancestry by beginning with a genealogy that highlighted Abraham and David (1:1–17); Matthew depicts Jesus as insisting that he had “come not to abolish but to fulfill” the “Law and the Prophets” (5:17); Matthew has Jesus restrict his mission to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (10:6; 15:24). Mark, on the

other hand, lacks a genealogy, depicts Jesus as declaring “all foods clean” (7:19), and indicates that Jesus engaged in a Gentile mission (7:24–8:10). By arguing for Marcan priority, scholars could also argue for a more de-Judaized Jesus.

The main alternative to the Griesbach theory, and the one held by the majority of scholars today, is known as the “four-source theory.” This view argues that Mark wrote first, and that Matthew and Luke, independently, used Mark as a source. Needing to account for the material common to Matthew and Luke but absent in Mark, scholars concluded that Matthew and Luke had access to a second source, comprising mostly sayings (such as the Beatitudes, the teachings of John the Baptist, and the Lord’s Prayer). This they labeled Q, which has come to be understood as related to the German *Quelle*, or “source.” Completing the four sources are, along with Mark and Q, Matthew’s special collection (M) and Luke’s unique material (L).

In the early years of the Quest, some optimism reigned in the study of the historical Jesus. Even if Matthew and Luke were late—and John, whose relationship to the Synoptics remains even more a debatable question, was considered even later—at least Mark and Q could provide some purchase on Jesus himself. Thus, the nineteenth century’s “Old Quest” produced a proliferation of Jesuses, each dependent on select citations from the gospels, and each bolstered by idiosyncratic appropriations of noncanonical sources.

Seeds of the Old Quest’s demise had been planted as early as 1835, with the publication of D. F. Strauss’s *Life of Jesus*. Rejecting both the supernaturalism of the literalist reader and the rationalism of the skeptic, Strauss contributed to the study of the gospels the “mythic” view, the recognition that while the gospels are based on historical fact, the facts have been so embellished by Christian teaching that a true “life of Jesus” would be impossible to write.

The optimistic bubble finally burst with the dawn of the twentieth century. Wilhelm Wrede’s *Messianic Secret in the Gospels* (1901) demonstrated that Mark was no more an objective source than Matthew or Luke. Noticing that the Marcan Jesus frequently commands silence from those for whom he has performed a miracle or provided a special teaching (e.g., 1:32, 43–44; 3:12; 5:43), Wrede claimed that the injunctions to secrecy were invented by the early church and retrojected into the story of Jesus to account for why he had so few followers during his lifetime. The real reason for this lack, in Wrede’s view, was that Jesus himself never claimed messianic status (a question that remains debated even today).

In the eyes of many scholars, Wrede’s work fatally damaged claims that Mark provided unmediated access to Jesus, and Albert Schweitzer’s *Quest of the Historical Jesus: From Reimarus to Wrede* (German 1906; English 1910) finally buried the Old Quest. Surveying the numerous “lives of Jesus” produced since Reimarus’s publication, Schweitzer neatly demonstrated how each author had constructed a Jesus in his own image. His warning remains relevant for all those who seek to explain the “real” Jesus or the “historical” Jesus.

The time from the publication of Schweitzer’s text until the rise of World War II is erroneously called the “No Quest” period; for the quest did continue, albeit

with new interests. One stream of scholarship redirected attention away from the “life of Jesus” focus and sought to analyze individual narrative units, such as sayings, healings, controversy accounts, and parables. Influenced by folklore analysis, Martin Dibelius looked to the structure, or form, of the unit (called a *pericope*, from the Greek term for “cut out”). He observed that healings took a set form (i.e., notice of the disease; type of healing; response of healed; response of crowd), as did controversy stories, nature miracles, and so forth. Whereas scholars might not have been able to penetrate through the level of the Gospel writer or the early traditions the Evangelist received to the historical Jesus himself, they were confident that they could locate the *Sitz im Leben*, the “setting in life,” of the individual forms and so come to understand the community that originally told the story. Thus, the gospels could be understood as we might, for example, understand the various versions of the story of “Cinderella” or the recountings of what have come to be known as “urban legends”: we might not have access to the actual event, and there may never have been an actual event, but we do have different versions of the same story.

When faced with similar accounts or what appeared to be variants of the same story, analysts sought to determine which was earlier: did Jesus insist, “All those things which you do not want done to you, do not do to another” (the quotation is found in an early Christian source called the *Teachings of the Twelve Apostles*, or the *Didache* [1:2b]) or “do to others as you would have them do to you” (Q/Luke 6:31 [material seen as belonging originally to Q is listed according to its appearance in Luke])? Is his advice to “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48) or is it to “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:36)? Such concerns created an almost atomistic exegesis, wherein each word was interrogated for historical accuracy. That Jesus could have engaged in his own variations on the story rarely was acknowledged; focus was on the words themselves, with the attendant concern of retrojecting the Greek of the gospels into Jesus’ native Aramaic (whether Jesus could speak Greek, or whether he taught in Greek, still remains an open question), rather than on their import.

The form-critical focus also prompted increasing recognition of how literary templates (may have) provided the origins for stories attributed to Jesus. The early church used Jesus’ sayings as a lens through which to interpret their sacred texts (i.e., the Scriptures of Judaism), but they also used those texts as a resource for interpreting Jesus. These Jewish texts locate the cultural codes available to Jesus and his early followers for describing martyrs, messiahs, divinely appointed figures, heavenly mediators, and miracle workers. For example, in Mark 4:38, the disciples, fearing that they are about to drown, call to Jesus, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” Jesus rebukes the disciples, and then the storm, and so prompts the twelve to wonder, “Who is this who can stop the winds?” Perhaps, suggested the critics, the story is less a historically objective report than a meditation on Psalm 107: “They cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he brought them out of their distress. He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed.”



In like manner, Matthew 1–5 depicts Jesus as a new Moses who escapes the killing of Jewish infants ordered by Herod the Great, the new Pharaoh; like Moses, Jesus participates in a journey to and from Egypt, crosses water in a life-changing experience (the baptism recapitulates the Israelites' crossing the Red Sea), faces temptation in the wilderness for forty days as Israel was tempted to apostasy in its forty-year wilderness journey, ascends a mountain, and, like Moses again, delivers instruction (or "Torah"). John 6:25–59 makes explicit the connection between Moses who provided manna for the Israelites in the wilderness and Jesus who provided the "bread of life."

The Passion narratives (the accounts of Jesus' final week in Jerusalem) in Mark and Matthew can be read as reflections on Psalm 22, whose opening line, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me," the Jesus of Mark and Matthew quotes from the cross (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34). The psalm goes on to describe the narrator's mockers and notes that "they divide my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots." The more skeptical critic logically could conclude that for Matthew and Mark, the narrative of the Crucifixion was based not on eyewitness testimony—a conclusion bolstered by Mark's remark that Jesus' male followers "deserted him and fled" (Mark 14:50) while the women of Galilee only looked on the Crucifixion "from a distance" (Mark 15:40–41) and so perhaps were not close enough to see all the events the Evangelist reports—but on the historicizing of the psalm.

Scholars also noticed that the stories of Jesus resonated with Greek and Roman culture. The "true vine" of John's Gospel, the doer of signs who turns water into wine (John 2), is killed, and then rises, resembles Dionysius; the divine conception had numerous classical antecedents; Socrates died a heroic death as did Jesus; Apollonias of Tyana was reputed to have healed and raised the dead, taught by means of memorable short sayings, was persecuted by his enemies, was killed, and rose again.

The form-critical process did advance the Quest for the historical Jesus, but it also had, like source criticism, inherent problems. Just as source criticism could not, with complete assurance, settle on the question of which Gospel served as the source for the others, so form criticism had its own question of priority: was the *Sitz im Leben* to be understood by the analysis of the forms, or were the forms to be understood on the basis of an anterior setting in life? The argument at best risked circularity. It also left a number of people dissatisfied. The stress on the community setting of the material deflected attention from Jesus himself and onto those who received his teachings, be those first-century Galileans or early twentieth-century Central Europeans. Whereas an existential relationship with the text, as Rudolf Bultmann promulgated, held some attraction, the appeal of history had not gone away.

The Quest regressed during World War II. Some Nazi and Nazi-influenced scholars, led by Walter Grundmann, a professor of New Testament at the University of Jena, worked in the Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Religious Life. Their publications, widely disseminated in

Europe, proclaimed an Aryan Jesus fully divorced from Judaism not only in terms of practice and ideology but also by ethnicity. Whereas the various quests have never been free of bias—no historical reconstruction can be fully objective, for scholars will always need to determine what to mention, to highlight, and to ignore—the Nazi example presents the most egregious instance of such bias. Sadly, proponents of this Aryan Jesus still promulgate their hate-filled messages today; thus, they indicate yet another reason why the study of the historical Jesus includes an ethical component.

At the end of the war, spurred by both historical interest and theological need, Ernst Käsemann began the next stage—variously called the “New Quest” or the “Second Quest”—with his essay “The Problem with the Historical Jesus” (1953). Käsemann first insisted that the jettisoning of history in favor of the ahistorical folktale or a theological existentialism marked by one’s personal encounter with the text (an approach resembling today’s reader-response criticism) was unwarranted. The church itself was interested in history, he averred: otherwise, why write the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles? Moreover, Christians must be concerned with some fact, for otherwise the church rests on a very poor foundation.

To provide such a foundation, Käsemann articulated what have come to be known as the “criteria of authenticity,” the means by which tradition and redaction may be separated and with which scholars could penetrate behind the editorial (sometimes called the “redactional”) level, behind the oral tradition (the level of form criticism’s concentration), and to Jesus himself. Again, a burst of optimism was followed by sober reconsideration.

The criteria of authenticity, refined and described by various names and specifics, are basically three techniques by which the sources can be analyzed. The *criterion of multiple attestation* proffered that if a saying or action attributed to Jesus appeared in two or more independent sources, then its “authenticity” (i.e., its connection to Jesus himself) is comparably more likely. Materials that appear to fit this criterion include Jesus’ institution of a memorial meal with connections drawn between bread and flesh, wine and blood; the commission is attested in the Synoptics, 1 Corinthians, the *Didache*, and probably John 6, the “bread of life discourse.” Paul, Mark, and Q all attribute to Jesus a pronouncement against divorce. John and the Synoptics record Jesus’ relationship with John the Baptist, gathering disciples, and feeding of the five thousand. John and Luke attest that two sisters, Mary and Martha, were Jesus’ close friends.

The problem with this criterion is that we cannot with surety determine which sources are independent. Clearly the Synoptics do not fit the criterion, for they share a common source. The Synoptics and John’s Gospel may be independent, but there is no scholarly consensus. Nor do we know the extent to which, if at all, Paul’s letters influenced the composition of the gospels, let alone what the relationship is between the noncanonical and canonical texts. Further, conformity to the criterion cannot “prove” authenticity; it can only prove anteriority.

The second criterion, that of *dissimilarity*, claims that if a saying or deed attributed to Jesus is dissimilar to first-century Jewish thought and dissimilar or anti-

thetical to the interests of Jesus' followers (e.g., the nascent "Church"), it has a greater claim to authenticity. Each part of the criterion has benefits and debits. Concerning the connection to Judaism, for example, Jesus' supposed preference for celibacy (e.g., Matthew 19:12) is dissimilar to the majority of Jewish thought and practice in the first century, although the Essenes described by Josephus and the Therapeutae/Therapeutrides described by Philo show that it is not completely anomalous. The criterion works less well when we turn to Jesus' own followers. The early Christian literature shows both an ongoing interest in celibacy—such as Paul's own preference (1 Corinthians 7), the reference in Acts 21 to Philip's four virgin daughters, and the 144,000 "virgins" of Revelation 14 who "have not defiled themselves with women"—as well as strong interest in conforming to Roman family values of marriage and children (so 1 Timothy 2).

For an account dissimilar to ecclesiastical interests, the Evangelists' struggling with Jesus' baptism by John appears to fit the criterion. If John is baptizing for the remission of sins (Mark 1:4), why would the incarnate Lord proclaimed by the church need to submit himself to this ritual? Matthew (3:15) states that Jesus is baptized "to fulfill all righteousness." Luke, by providing a nativity story for John as well as making very clear that John, even in utero, recognized Jesus' superiority, avoids the impression that Jesus is subordinate to John. In John's Gospel, the Baptist never actually baptizes Jesus, but he does insist that Jesus is the "one who ranks ahead of me because he was before me" (John 1:30), a line that comports beautifully with the fourth Gospel's insistence on the preexistence of Jesus, the "Word" (*Logos*) who was "in the beginning" (1:1).

Again, the approach is compromised. Not only is our knowledge of first-century Galilean and Judean Jewish thought and practice incomplete, such that what may seem "dissimilar" is an accident of what was preserved and what was lost, but also the method risks deforming our image of Jesus by highlighting what distinguishes him from Judaism rather than what embeds him within his own religious and cultural tradition. Critics of the criterion of dissimilarity, especially in its classical focus of separating Jesus from Judaism, have also recognized the negative repercussions of this process. In light of the Shoah (the Holocaust), the Jewishness of Jesus increasingly has been highlighted (ideological pressure and historical-critical rigor need not be mutually exclusive). However, beyond recognizing that "Jesus was Jewish," rarely does the scholarship address what being "Jewish" means (aside from a connection to Mary's ethnic group—and here we might note, as well, that the entire category of ethnicity is itself fraught with difficulty). The lack is caused substantially by gaps in the training of New Testament experts: few have complete familiarity with the varied Jewish sources of the period (Pseudepigrapha, Dead Sea Scrolls, Josephus, Philo, the myriad Rabbinic texts, Targumim . . .).

A similar problem plagues the second part of the criterion. We do not know what the early followers of Jesus would have found embarrassing. Finally, it is likely that Jesus and the early church founded in his name were substantially continuous rather than distinct. Just as the criterion threatens to yank Jesus out

of his Jewish context, so it threatens to sever his connection to those who followed him.

The third criterion, that of *consistency* or *coherence*, depends on the first two. If application of *multiple attestation* and *dissimilarity* assigns a saying or action to Jesus, then similar sayings or actions have, according to this criterion, greater claims to authenticity. Again, problems abound. Not only is “similarity” in the eye of the beholder, one of Jesus’ followers easily could have developed a new story on the basis of the old. It is quite possible that sayings or deeds attributed in the gospels to Jesus originally were spoken or performed by another (perhaps a disciple) and only later attached to the master (a similar case can be made that King David did not kill Goliath [1 Samuel 17]; the Philistine was killed by the soldier Elkhanaan [2 Samuel 21:19; cf. 1 Chronicles 20:5], but the story later became attached to the commander in chief). Attributing to religious leaders additional material is by no means uncommon.

Just as source criticism marked the Old Quest period and form criticism the No Quest phase, so redaction criticism grew in prominence in the decades following World War II. Already the form critics had noted that the Evangelists compiled individual *pericopae* into a narrative of Jesus’ life. Redaction criticism turns to the Evangelist, the “redactor” (editor), first to distinguish between “redaction” (the author’s contribution) and “tradition” (what the author received in either oral or written form). This approach would soon give rise to more literary forms of interpretation, wherein the Evangelists or “redactors” were acknowledged as artists and theologians rather than mere copyists. For example, Mark was seen to stress a “suffering Messiah”; Matthew presented a new Moses characterized by teaching; Luke offered the “champion of the poor”; and John’s Christology, the highest of the canonical Gospels, featured a “man from heaven” and “incarnate *Logos*.”

In the later decades of the twentieth century, historical Jesus studies shifted from its basis in Germany to Great Britain and then to the United States and Canada, and as it moved, so too did its sources. The Quest already had made occasional references to Philo of Alexandria and Josephus, as well as to the collection of so-called Rabbinic parallels from the somewhat tendentious *Commentary* by Hermann Strack and Paul Billerbeck (Strack was the famous scholar whose name appears first on the title page; Billerbeck was a pastor who did most of the work). From the Christian side, the Church Fathers offered a few citations of documents no longer extant, such as the *Gospel of Thomas*.

The publication of two sets of documents changed, if not the pictures of Jesus already available in the scholarly literature, at least the bibliographies of the biographies. Discovered first in 1947, with documents still continuing to surface, the Dead Sea Scrolls provided insight into an apocalyptic, eschatological Judaism disaffected from the Temple. In 1945, a cache of Coptic documents was found at Nag Hammadi in Egypt; these provided copies of many of the texts known only from Patristic citation as well as possible candidates, such as the Gospels of Thomas, Peter, and Mary, for the criterion of *multiple attestation*. For example, is

the kingdom of heaven “like yeast that a woman took” (Matthew 13:33) or “like a woman who took yeast” (*Gospel of Thomas* 96)?

Lack of methodological security continued. Concerning the canon, scholars still typically privilege the Synoptics over John for historical reconstruction, but they do not explain why. Q and *Thomas*—a hypothetical document and a text that may be second-century—are sometimes seen as closer to the historical Jesus than the canonical Gospels. The less skeptical contingent finds this approach to strain credibility; the more skeptical replies that the privileging of the canon is based on religious interests, not historical evidence. Complicating any reconstruction is the lack of autographs: we have no originals of the Gospels. The earliest manuscripts of the full canonical Gospels date to the third century (ca. 200). There are approximately fifty-four hundred copies of all or parts of the Greek New Testament (copies of translations add substantially more to the total) dating from the early second century (a few fragments) to the invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century and even following that time. Moreover, save for a very few fragments, these thousands of texts are not in full agreement.

Although no new major sources have been discovered in the past quarter century, today's Quest has not failed to introduce new methods into the discussion and new categories by which to understand Jesus. The study of the historical Jesus is now accompanied by greater attention to social modeling: comparative peasant economies, scribal communities, millenarian movements, studies of shamans and folk healings, psychobiography, cultural anthropology, political theory, and the like have all been adduced to provide the context for understanding the Gospel accounts. Archaeology, especially the archaeology of the lower Galilee, also stakes a claim to direct relevance, although finding an artifact and determining its import for understanding Jesus remain quite distinct.

- Jesus has been described as a Jewish reformer seeking to prepare his people for the inbreaking of the kingdom of heaven. This is the Jesus who “makes a fence” (the expression is Rabbinic [*Pirke Avot* 1:1]) about the law to prevent transgression: rather than forbid murder, Jesus forbids hate (Matthew 5:21–22). Rather than forbid adultery, he forbids lust. This Jesus insists “not one jot or stroke of the Law will pass away” (Matthew 5:17–18).
- Conversely, there is Jesus the antinomian who “declared all foods clean” (Mark 7:18–20) and dismissed Temple and Torah as antiquated and irrelevant.
- Jesus the Cynic-like philosopher teaches a subversive wisdom and so calls into question the status quo. To those concerned with social propriety, Jesus proffers the image of the lilies of the field. To those occupied by the cares of tomorrow, he asserts, “the cares of today are sufficient” (Matthew 6:34; F. Gerald Downing's study offers numerous citations of Cynic statements with what he finds to be Gospel equivalents).
- Jesus the apocalyptic eschatological proclaimer divides the world into the saved and the damned, the “sheep and the goats” (Matthew 25), as he awaits what some Jews called “the world to come,” for his “kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36).

- Jesus the Rabbi cares about Torah, wears *tzitzit* (fringes) according to the commandment in Numbers 15:37–41, celebrates the Sabbath, and worships in synagogues as well as the Temple.
- Jesus the universalist preaches his Gospel to Samaritans (John 4) and Gentiles (the feeding of the four thousand [Mark 8, Matthew 15]).
- Jesus the nationalist restricts his mission to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 10:6; 15:24).
- Jesus the charismatic wonder-worker in the mold of Elijah (see 1 Kings 17–19, 21; 2 Kings 1–2) and Elisha (see 2 Kings 2–6, 8–9, 13) and comparable to the Jewish figures Haninah ben Dosa and Honi the Circle-Maker heals and controls nature.
- Jesus the magician uses spells and incantations to facilitate cures (Mark 5:41; 7:33–34).
- Jesus the social reformer seeks to inaugurate the economic justice envisioned by the Prophets and the year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25:8–55) by teaching his followers to pray, “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive those who are indebted to us” (Matthew 6:12) and insisting, “Give when you are asked” (Matthew 5:42).
- Jesus the celibate hails those who have “made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 19:10–12) and promotes a new family based on loyalty to him/to God and not on biological or marital connections. This Jesus echoes the prophet Micah (7:6) by announcing, “Do not think I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have come not to bring peace, but to bring a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law” (Matthew 10:34–35).
- Jesus the affirmer of family values reminds his followers, “For God said, ‘Honor your father and mother,’ and ‘whoever speaks evil of father and mother must surely die’” (Matthew 15:4); he teaches, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery” (Mark 10:11–12).
- Jesus the mystic claims esoteric knowledge (see Mark 4:11–12), sees Satan fall like lightning (Luke 10:18), and proclaims himself the “true vine” (John 15) and the “bread of life” (John 6).
- Jesus the near hedonist takes and teaches pleasure in food and companionship; this “glutton and the drunkard” (Luke 7:34) does not fast, and enjoys a woman’s kiss and touch (Luke 7:36–50).
- Jesus the pacifist advises that “if someone strike you on the right cheek, turn the other also” (Matthew 5:39).
- Jesus the revolutionary has a Zealot in his entourage (Luke 6:15) and advises followers to buy swords (Luke 22:35–38).
- Jesus the nonviolent resister teaches, “If a man in authority makes you go one mile, go with him two” (Matthew 5:41; the reference is likely to the Roman custom of conscripting locals to carry their gear, but only for one mile; to carry the accoutrements of the enemy willingly signals the refusal to be victimized), and “If a man wants to sue you for your shift, let him have your coat as well” (and so literally lay bare the injustice of taking a poor person’s clothing [Matthew 5:40]).

And the list goes on.

Whatever model provides the heuristic for understanding Jesus, recourse to primary sources in their historical context is essential. For all readers of the New Testament generally are aware that the texts did not take shape in a vacuum. Understanding of the history of the period is often meager at best (some New Testament textbooks dedicate a few pages in an introductory chapter to “Jewish history” and “Greco-Roman history” and then generally ignore the historical context in discussion of the canonical documents). Thus, before turning to an overview of the primary sources presented in this volume, we first explore the historical context of Jesus and that of his early followers.

### The Historical Context

Judaism and Christianity (as well as Islam) are called “historical” religions because they ground their story in the manifestation of their God in time. At a particular historical moment, God appeared to Moses and through him established a covenant with the people Israel. Jesus of Nazareth, the “incarnation” (literally, “enfleshment”) of divinity (so John 1), “suffered under Pontius Pilate” (the Apostles’ Creed) or, as the Nicene Creed proclaims, “was crucified under Pontius Pilate.” Consequently, to understand the life of the Jew Jesus and the development of accounts concerning him, one must understand the historical contexts in which he and his earliest followers lived. This context is one of cultural struggle and colonial power, regional practice and imperial standards, religious debate and cultic competition.

The background for understanding Jesus begins with what the church would eventually call the “Old Testament” and Jews the *Tanakh*, an acronym for Torah, or Pentateuch; *Nevi'im* or Prophets; and *Ketuv'im* or Writings. Jesus and his contemporaries would have been familiar with the stories of Adam and Eve, Abraham and Moses, David and Solomon. They would have known of the prophets such as Isaiah and Jeremiah, Jonah and Daniel. Moreover, these texts would not have been seen simply as records of past events; rather, the Scriptures were seen as speaking to them in their own time (as the Dead Sea Scrolls make explicit and as Luke has Jesus himself state, “‘Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing’” [Luke 4:21]).

Jesus and his fellow first-century Jews were also heirs to Greek and Roman thought. Galilee and Judea, like the rest of the Middle East, became part of the empire established by Alexander the Great. In 333 BCE, Alexander defeated the Persian empire, and the lands where Jews lived, both the Diaspora (literally, “dispersion”; any place outside of the Land of Israel where Jews could be found) and Israel itself, became permeated with Greek ideas.

Through the synthesis of indigenous and Greek cultures arose “Hellenism,” and it is within the matrix of Hellenism that Jewish life developed. A modern example of such penetration would be the presence of American terms (such as Coca-Cola and ATM) in the vocabularies of most languages today.



In Judea and Galilee, Aramaic remained the vernacular; Hebrew was the language of scripture and liturgy. Yet even within these regions, Greek knowledge continued to increase. By the first century CE, Justin of Tiberius and Josephus from Judea are writing in Greek. In the Diaspora, the Scriptures were translated into Greek (the translation is the Septuagint), and it would be the Greek translation that became the sacred text of the church whose own canon, the New Testament, was written entirely in Greek.

Politically, Judea (the former Persian province of Yehud) was not substantially affected by the transfer of power from Persia to Greece. Taxes continued to be paid; worship in the Jerusalem Temple continued; the sacred texts of the people continued to be copied. During the early years of this cultural synthesis, Jews also continued to produce literature. Canonical today for Roman Catholics, Anglicans, and Eastern Orthodox churches are the Deuterocanonical texts or the Old Testament Apocrypha: books preserved in and in some cases originally written in Greek.

On the international scene, following Alexander's death in 323, Judea passed from one government to another. First, it fell under the control of Alexander's general Ptolemy, who held authority over Egypt. In 190, at the Battle of Paneas, Judea passed into the control of the Seleucids, the family of another of Alexander's generals, this one whose base was in Syria. Hellenization continued, such that by the 170s, many among the upper class in Jerusalem were seeking education in Greek philosophy, participating in Greek sport, and questioning those practices and beliefs of Judaism—circumcision, condemnation of “idolatry,” dietary regulations, and so forth—that made Jews a distinct nation within the wider Greek empire. By the 170s, we find high priests with such Greek names as Jason and Menelaus.

This cultural crisis came to a head when the high priests worked with the Seleucid ruler, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, to bring Judea and its Jews fully into imperial culture. The events, recorded by Josephus as well as in the Deuterocanonical volumes of 1 and 2 Maccabees and hinted at in several of the documents associated with the community at Qumran, attest to religious and cultural as well as political struggle. Antiochus arranged for the succession of one of the assimilationists, Jason, to the high priesthood and so replaced the legitimate priest, Onias III.

Meanwhile, in Jerusalem, Antiochus and his local affiliates banned circumcision and sacrificed a pig on the altar of the Jerusalem Temple. According to 1 Maccabees 1:60–61, babies found to have been circumcised were killed and then tied to the necks of their mothers as a sign to all of the fate of those who insisted on practicing their tradition. Leading the revolt against this system was a family from Modein: a local priest named Eliezar, son of Hasmon, and his sons. Under the leadership of one son, Judah, called “Maccabee” or “Hammerer,” these Hasmonians or Maccabees through guerrilla warfare in 165 defeated the Syrian army, rededicated the Temple (“rededication” is, in Hebrew, “Hannukah,” and hence the origin of the holiday mentioned in John 5 and still celebrated by Jews today), and took over the government. Shortly thereafter, they also took over the priest-



hood, a move that caused additional disaffection among several Jewish groups. Likely at this point, a group of Jews led by the “Teacher of Righteousness” (or Righteous Teacher) rejected both the Temple and Jerusalem. Eventually settling at Qumran, by the Dead Sea, they produced their own scriptures as they waited for the redemption of Israel.

The Hasmoneans reigned for the next one hundred years. Consolidating their power, they engaged in expansionist practices that included the annexation of territories both north and south of Jerusalem. By the end of the reign of Alexander Jannaeus (107–76), the borders of Israel were more-or-less equivalent to the territories associated with King David: from Dan (upper Galilee) in the north to Beersheva (the Negev) in the south. Local populations were given the choice: circumcision or death; most chose the former option, including the Idumaeans and Ituraeans. Relations with the Samaritan population to the north, which were never smooth, worsened when Alexander Jannaeus burned their temple on Mount Gerizim (see John 4).

Josephus, our first-century historian, locates during the Hasmonean period the origin of the three major Jewish groups (he calls them *haireseis*, meaning “parties” or “sects”) often mentioned in New Testament introductions. In the context of the high priesthood of Jonathan, circa 145, he notes that there arose three groups “which held different opinions concerning human affairs; the first being that of the Pharisees, the second that of the Sadducees, and the third that of the Essenes. As for the Pharisees, they say that certain events are the work of fate, but not all; as to other events it depends upon ourselves whether they shall take place or not. The sect of Essenes, however, declares that Fate is the mistress of all things, and that nothing befalls people unless in accordance with her decree. But the Sadducees do away with Fate, holding that there is no such thing and that human actions are not achieved in accordance with her decree, but that all things lie within our own power” (*Ant.* 13.171–73). The impact of Hellenism is epitomized by the descriptions, for Josephus has presented the Jewish groups as philosophical schools; he will later compare Pharisees to Stoics (*Life* 12), Essenes to Pythagoreans (*Ant.* 13.171–73), and (implicitly) Sadducees to Epicureans.

The New Testament does not mention the Essenes; whether this group should be associated with the Dead Sea Scrolls and so the group that followed the Righteous Teacher remains, although usually accepted, still not demonstrated by the scrolls themselves. The scrolls do mention a “wicked priest” (1QpHab), an illegitimate figure presiding in the Temple: Jonathan (ca. 152 BCE) as well as his brother Simon (ca. 143/142 BCE) are both plausible candidates. Whereas Josephus indicates that the Essenes lived in groups throughout Judea, Pliny the Elder and Dio Chrysostom locate their community by the Dead Sea. Both views may be correct. The document known as the Rule of the Community (1QS; the number indicates which of the fourteen caves in which the scroll was found; Q stands for Qumran, and the S stands for *Serek ha-yachad*, Hebrew for “Rule of the Community”) notes that the community was composed of celibate men, but the Cairo-Damascus Document (CD), a text that surfaced earlier than the finds at the Dead Sea but that is

clearly associated with the people who composed the scrolls (as we see with the 4QDamascus Document Fragments and other remains), mentions married members with children. Archaeological investigation indicates that the Qumran community itself was inhabited from approximately 140 BCE until 68 CE, when it was overrun by the Roman Legion 10 Fratensis and turned into army barracks.

The Gospels mention the Sadducees in the context of the Passion narrative, and Sadducees are oddly grouped with Pharisees as coming to John the Baptist. The Gospels as well as Acts confirm the Sadducees' lack of belief in the Resurrection.

Jesus is more often portrayed as in confrontation with the Pharisees. Josephus, the Gospels, Paul (see Philippians 3), and the Rabbinic sources can be correlated to provide at least a partial reconstruction of Pharisaic beliefs, such as their "handing down to the people certain regulations from the ancestral succession and not recorded in the Laws of Moses" (*Ant.* 13; cf. *Pirke Avot* 1; Mark 7/Matthew 15). Although never explicitly identified as "Pharisees" in the early Rabbinic documents, Hillel and Shammai are typically seen as representing diverse forms of Pharisaic thought. It is Hillel who is recorded as responding, when asked to summarize the Law while standing on one foot, "What is hateful to you, to not do to others. This is the whole Torah; the rest is commentary. Now go and learn" (*b. Shabbat* 31a). (Given the difficulties of using the various tendentious sources for reconstructing Pharisaic views, a "quest for the historical Pharisees" would be well in order.)

Hasmonean power began to crumble within a generation. Jannaeus was succeeded by his wife, Queen Salome Alexandra (Shlomzion or Shalom-Zion), who according to Josephus reigned with the support of the Pharisees. Her rule would mark the last independent Jewish state until 1948. Under her direction, the Sanhedrin shifted from being an entirely aristocratic organization to a more representative juridical body.

Upon the queen's death in 67 BCE, her two sons, Aristobulus and Hyrcanus II, vied for power. Aristobulus garnered Sadducaic support and so returned to power the group that previously held influence in the court of Jannaeus. Meanwhile, his older brother, Hyrcanus II, not only the heir apparent but also the high priest, attempted to consolidate his own support base. Following a battle between the two forces, Hyrcanus eventually surrendered, and Aristobulus took the throne as well as, likely, the high priesthood.

Aided by, indeed, prompted by, several allies, including Antipater, the son of the Idumean governor appointed by Jannaeus, Hyrcanus made a second attempt at the throne. Both brothers, recognizing that support from outside was required for securing power, turned to Rome. And Rome was more than happy to gain one more holding in the Middle East. In 64 BCE, Pompey brought the former Seleucid territories, including Judea and Galilee, into Roman control. Solicited by both brothers, in 63 Pompey also was petitioned by representatives from the population of Jerusalem, who rather than being ruled by either Aristobulus or Hyrcanus, actually requested direct Roman rule. When Pompey delayed his decision in order to resolve a crisis concerning neighboring Nabatea, Aristobulus

attempted to seize power yet again, this time by occupying the fortress of Alexandria. Pompey then invaded Jerusalem, where Hyrcanus welcomed him by opening the city gates. Aristobulus held the Temple grounds for three months until Pompey finally defeated his forces. The Roman general himself secured the Temple and entered the inner sanctum, the Holy of Holies. The *Psalms of Solomon*, expressing one form of Jewish messianic hope, were written in the wake of Pompey's incursions.

Pompey took formal control over the remaining Hasmonean territories: Judea, Galilee, Idumea, and Perea. He did return Hyrcanus II to his high priestly duties, but the office was stripped of much of its political power. Local power was put instead into the hands of Hyrcanus's Idumean adviser, Antipater. During the war of the First Triumvirate, in 48, Hyrcanus sent troops to support Julius Caesar in Egypt. As a reward, Caesar appointed Hyrcanus "Ethnarch of the Jews," but the position was more symbolic than authoritative.

Antipater appointed his son Herod the governor of Jerusalem in 47, and Rome expanded Herod's rule to include Coele-Syria and Samaria. In 42, Marc Antony, who along with Octavian and Lapidus defeated Brutus and Cassius and so ended the old Republican system, appointed Herod tetrarch of Judea. In 40, Antigonus, the son of Aristobulus II, allied with the Parthians, attacked Judea, captured Hyrcanus (and, by cutting off his ears, prevented him from continuing to serve as high priest; cf. Leviticus 21:17), and gained the throne. The Roman Senate then appointed Herod king of Judea; Herod, with full Roman support, regained complete power in 37 and held it until his death, decades later, in 4 BCE. It was during the latter years of this reign that, according to Matthew's Gospel, Jesus was born.

This combination of local Herodian rule and imperial Roman control provides the context for Jesus' life. The instability in local politics that created shifts in power between Pharisees and Sadducees, the founding of the Qumran community, and the replacement of Hasmonean with Herodian control was mirrored on the international scene. In 36, Herod's patron Antony left his wife, Octavian's sister, and married Cleopatra of Egypt. Five years later, Octavian avenged his sister and gained his own complete power over Rome with his defeat of Antony at the Battle of Actium. Octavian gained the title "Augustus" ("exalted one"; see Luke 2:1) and during his rule (27 BCE–14 CE) presented himself as the people's savior who established (by military means) the Pax Romana, the "peace of Rome," upon all his territories. From 31 on, Herod securely held Judea and Galilee, and Augustus held the throne in Rome. The empire was at peace, and Herod turned his attention to domestic matters.

Herod's building projects changed the face of his territories. He rebuilt Samaria (called "Sebaste" in honor of Augustus), built the port of Caesarea, reinforced the Hasmonean building complex on Masada, and began renovations of the Jerusalem Temple, a project that was not completed until 64 CE during the reign of his great-grandson, Agrippa II. The Temple, whose importance to Judaism has been noted already in connection with the Maccabean revolt, remained central in Jewish thought. For some it was a site of pilgrimage (see Luke 2) and worship (see Acts

1); for others it was a corrupt institution that would eventually be replaced (so from the Dead Sea Scrolls, 11QTemple). Religiously, it was the point of contact between heaven and earth, the dwelling place of the universal God. Economically, it was the national bank. Politically, it represented the relationship between Rome and the Jews, for the high priest could serve only with Rome's approval, and from 6 CE on, following the exile of Herod's son Archelaus from Judea, Rome kept control of the high priestly vestments. The Temple served as the basis of power for the party of the Sadducees; the Pharisees adapted the holiness signified by the Temple altar to the domestic sphere, such that the home became also a locus of sanctity. Jesus' followers continued to worship there (so Acts), a point that complicates any understanding of his "cleansing" of the Temple (John 2, Mark 11, Luke 19, Matthew 21). Did he mean to renew it? Reform it? Predict its destruction? Proclaim its illegitimacy? Did he even engage in an action in the Temple, or did his condemnation of certain Temple practices metastacize through legendary development into a full-blown scene of disrupting Temple activities?

Upon Herod's death, his territory was divided among his three surviving sons; he had executed his others, along with his Hasmonean mother-in-law, her daughter and his beloved wife, Mariamme, and a good many other rivals, both actual and imagined. (Matthew's account of the "Slaughter of the Innocents" [Matthew 2:16–18], although not elsewhere attested and certainly following the story of Moses, is not inconsistent with Herod's increasingly erratic behavior.) One son, Archelaus, ruled Judea from 4 BCE until 6 CE, when he was replaced by direct Roman rule. At this point, Judea and Samaria fell under the jurisdiction of a series of prefects; notable among these is Pontius Pilate, who ruled from 26 to 36 CE.

Another son, Herod Antipas, ruled Galilee from 4 BCE until he was exiled by Caligula in 39 CE. Antipas continued such large-scale construction with the rebuilding of Sepphoris, just a few miles from Nazareth, and the establishment of the new capital city of Tiberias. These two cities—the largest centers of Galilee—are not mentioned in the pages of the New Testament, although their connection to Jesus remains a matter of much speculation. Perhaps Jesus, identified in Mark's Gospel (Mark 6:3; cf. Matthew 13:55) as a "builder" (*tektōn*, sometimes translated "carpenter"), found work in Sepphoris; perhaps he found in Galilee's growing urbanization a depletion of peasant resources and the consequent increase in the disparity between rich and poor, or perhaps the new cities created an economic boom for the local population. Antipas is mentioned in the Gospels for his execution of John the Baptist (Mark 6, Matthew 14, Luke 9; cf. Luke 3). Whether the execution was prompted by John's condemnation of Antipas's incestuous marriage to Herodias (so the Gospels), or whether Antipas had engaged in a preemptive strike against the popular teacher (so Josephus, *Ant.* 18:118–19), the execution does indicate that gathering crowds in Galilee, or speaking of alternative rules to that of Rome and its local representatives, was a very dangerous enterprise. The fates of other "prophets of deliverance" such as the Samaritan prophet who led a crowd to Mount Gerizim (he and his followers were massacred by Pontius Pilate) confirm this point. The Gospel of Luke mentions that Pilate, learning

that Jesus was a Galilean, sent him to Antipas, who had come to Jerusalem for the Passover festival. Finding him innocent, Antipas returns him to Pilate (Luke 23).

In discussing the tenure of Pontius Pilate, Josephus records in *Ant.* 18:

About this time there appeared Jesus, a wise man, if one should even call him a man. For he was a doer of striking deeds and as a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He gained a following both among many Jews and among many of the Greeks. He was the Messiah [Greek: *Christ*]. When Pilate, upon hearing him accused by leading men among us, had condemned him to be crucified, those who had in the first place come to love him did not give up their affection for him. On the third day he appeared to them, living again, for the prophets of God had prophesied these and countless other marvelous things about him. And the tribe of Christians, so called after him, still to this day has not disappeared.

The passage remains controversial for several reasons, including the following: all extant Greek manuscripts are preserved by the church, and the earliest dates to the eleventh century (did pious monks add to a less “Christian” original?); Arabic versions lack this passage (did pious Muslim scribes remove it?); although Josephus sometimes is cited by Patristic writers, this particular passage is not attested in the Patristic corpus prior to the fourth century; Josephus does not in any other writing, including his autobiography, attest to Christian belief himself; his accounting of the death of James, whom he describes as “the brother of Jesus, the so-called Christ” (*Ant.* 20.9.1), still does not indicate that Josephus had become a member of the movement.

Although Josephus typically is regarded as offering the only secure non-Christian testimony to Jesus, the Pagan (or possibly Samaritan) historian Thallus may be not only another source but an earlier one. His account of an eclipse at the time of Jesus’ Crucifixion, an account Dale Allison translated for this volume, may even provide evidence of a pre-Markan Passion story.

Similarly controversial is the Babylonian Talmud’s account of Jesus’ death (to the extent that some Rabbinic experts do not think the reference is to the Jesus of the New Testament!). Tractate *Sanhedrin* (43a) records: “On the eve of Passover they hanged Yeshu of Nazareth. And the herald went before him forty days, saying, ‘Yeshu of Nazareth is going forth to be stoned, since he has practiced sorcery and cheated, and led people astray. Let everyone knowing anything in his defense come and plead for him.’ But they found no one in his defense, and they hanged him on the eve of Passover.” This very confused statement, with its combination of hanging (i.e., on the cross) and stoning (the prescribed penalty for blasphemy [Leviticus 24:14]), reflects Jewish reaction to Christian claims. Accepting the New Testament’s story and so the standard Christian teaching that the Sanhedrin condemned Jesus (there is no Sanhedrin trial in John’s Gospel, but it is mentioned in the Synoptics), the Rabbis provided their own interpretation: Jesus was provided every opportunity for release; the legal process was followed.

The New Testament, as we have suggested, has its own agenda. Jesus’ followers recorded what they recalled of his teachings, whether in direct citation (trans-

lated from the Aramaic or even originally in Greek) or in idea if not exact wording. They recounted those teachings and events that would have had special meaning to them and their communities, and they adapted this material to the needs of their communities (hence, four canonical Gospels rather than just one). As the followers of Jesus spread their message beyond Jerusalem, to Diaspora Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles, again, the message was adapted to changing needs and circumstances. Christian teachers needed to show how Jesus fulfilled Jewish prophecy, but they also needed to be sure that they would not be entrapped by sporadic Gentile hostilities against Jews, such as the social intolerance that marked Alexandria and Antioch and Rome between 38 and 41 CE.

From Philo, the Jewish philosopher from Alexandria, comes additional indication of how diverse, and how precarious, Jewish life was. Philo is today best known for clothing the stories of Jewish scriptures in Platonic terms and speaking of the *Logos*, the “Word,” as the mediating principle between divine transcendence and materiality (cf. John 1:1). He mentions with great approbation a group of celibate Jews, men (*Therapeutae*) and women (*Therapeutrides*), who gather for common meals and worship and who dedicate their lives to philosophical study. Conversely, he condemns the “extreme allegorists” who take the biblical materials only as symbolic and therefore dismiss circumcision, dietary practices, and other activities that mark Judaism’s distinction. Ironically, Philo’s works were preserved not by Jews but by Christians who found his allegorical readings of scripture compelling. Philo’s comments on Jewish orthodoxy and orthopraxy, including his teaching that “what someone hates to experience, he should not do” (*Hypothetica* 8), and his reflections on eschatological hope help to locate Jesus within his broader Jewish context.

Philo is also one source (Josephus is the other) for the events in the 40s that again brought Jewish sensibilities and the Roman state into conflict. In 37 CE, Caligula became emperor and almost immediately began to involve himself in Israel’s politics. A friend of Herod Agrippa I (the grandson of Herod the Great and his Hasmonean wife, Mariamne), Caligula exiled Antipas and Herodias (Agrippa’s sister) from Galilee. He gave to Agrippa not only the tetrarchy held by Herod’s other son, Philip (including Caesarea Philippi), but also Antipas’s Galilee. The population of Alexandria mocked Agrippa I when he visited in 38; Philo’s description of this event bears striking similarity to the mocking of Jesus (Matthew 27:27–31; Mark 15:16–20; John 19:2–3). Similarly, Philo’s description of the scourging of Jewish leaders by Flaccus provides detail on the type of torture Jesus likely endured (Matthew 27:26; Mark 15:15).

But this favorable attitude toward Agrippa, the new “King of the Jews,” shifted in 40/41, when Caligula determined to have his statue placed in the Jerusalem Temple. The Judean population threatened revolt; Josephus recounts, “Many tens of thousands of Jews with their wives and children came” to the Syrian governor “with petitions not to use force to make them transgress and violate their ancestral code”; they state, “on no account would we fight . . . but we will sooner die than violate our laws” (*Ant.* 18; *War* 2; we might compare Jesus’ comments about

nonviolent resistance). Philo's treatment of this same incident offers a detailed description of Pontius Pilate; whether exaggerated or not, this view of Pilate contrasts with the Gospels' more benign presentations. Agrippa did his best to keep the people calm during the crisis. Before his order could be enacted, Caligula was assassinated; he was succeeded by Claudius, who rewarded Agrippa also with Judea and Samaria. Agrippa ruled until 44 (his death is recorded in both *Ant.* 19 and Acts 12). His rule was marked, inter alia, by persecution of Jesus' followers (see Acts 12:1–19).

During the early 40s, as the proclamation that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ began to spread, controversy accompanied the message. The proclamation did not convince the majority of Jews: those who did have messianic expectations expected the messianic age to come with the Messiah (hence Paul's statement that Jesus is the "first fruits of the resurrection" [1 Corinthians 15:20]; the agricultural metaphor indicates that Paul expected the final harvest during the same season). Some Jews found the proclamation not only unbelievable but dangerous: to announce that one followed a new "king" was politically perilous in the Roman Empire. The problem was especially acute in the Diaspora, where relations between Jews—granted special privileges by the Roman government, such as exemption from participating in sacrifices to the gods and serving in the army (a problem for those who insisted on kosher food and who would not march on the Sabbath)—and the local populations were not without difficulties. We already have noted the hatred of Jews manifested by the Alexandrians' mocking of Agrippa I. It may be the struggles between Jews who accepted the Christian proclamation and those who did not that prompted the expulsion of the Jews from Rome. Suetonius (*Life of Claudius* 25.4) reports, "Since the Jews were constantly causing disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, Claudius expelled them from Rome." Or, the otherwise unknown "Chrestus" could have been a local agitator.

In 44, Agrippa I died. Because his son and heir, Agrippa II, was only seventeen at the time, Claudius annexed his territory and appointed over it a series of governors (first "prefects" and then "procurators"). Fadus (44–46) ruled when the charismatic leader Theudas attempted to part the Jordan; his successor, Tiberius Julius Alexander—Philo's nephew—ruled from 46 to 48, the period that witnessed the revolts of the sons of Judas the Galilean. Cumanus (48–52) allowed tensions between Galilee and Samaria to worsen until Judea became involved; only when Agrippa II urged Claudius to take action was Cumanus removed. Felix (52–60), whose personal involvement with Agrippa II's sister Drusilla is noted both by Acts 24:24 and by Josephus (*Ant.* 18–20; *War* 2), put down several inchoate revolts; he also dispersed the followers of another charismatic leader, called by Josephus "the Egyptian," who attempted to set himself up as king. His successor, Festus (60–62; see Acts 25:12), exacerbated local tensions by threatening to raze a wall that blocked the Temple from his view. During this period, persecution of Jesus' followers was sporadic. In 62, between the departure of Festus and the arrival of Albinus (62–64), the high priest ordered the execution of James, the leader of the Jerusalem church. Josephus records, "Ananus called the



Sanhedrin together, brought before it James, the brother of Jesus who was called the Christ, and certain others . . . and he caused them to be stoned" (*Ant.* 20). Josephus does not indicate that James's messianic views prompted his execution; the context of the passage suggests instead that James and the "others" may have protested the high priest's greed in withholding tithes from the Levites.

Meanwhile, Agrippa II, finally coming of age, began his own political career. In 49, Claudius granted him control of the Temple, including the power to appoint the high priest. Indeed, upon receiving complaints by Pharisees against Ananus's execution of James, Agrippa removed the high priest from office. As Rome continued to add more territory to his control, Agrippa continued his fidelity to the emperor. When hostilities against Rome broke out in 66 during the governorship of Florus (64–66), he counseled peace.

Numerous factors prompted the revolt, including inept and voracious procurators, growing nationalism fanned by religious fervor, strife between Jews and Gentiles, economic disasters caused by drought and famine and exacerbated by high taxes, unemployment in Jerusalem created by the completion of the Temple's renovations, and banditry. Several groups promoted the rebellion, including the Zealots (whom Josephus calls the "Fourth Philosophy" [*Ant.* 18], and the *Sicarii*, "dagger men" whose practice was to assassinate Roman officials and their collaborators). Within a year, the rebels took the Temple, and the daily offerings to the emperor were stopped. Although along with Agrippa II others counseled peace, including the scholar Yochanan ben Zakkai, other Jews in Galilee and Judea as well as Samaritans took up arms.

Nero sent Vespasian to quell the revolt. In 67, Vespasian entered Galilee, where the rebel general, our historian Josephus, not only surrendered but also predicted Vespasian's success. Joining the Roman camp, Josephus took the commander's family name, Flavius. By 68, Vespasian reached Qumran. The covenanters, who had expected the "War of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness" (1QM), met the might of Rome instead.

In Jerusalem, Jewish factions vied for power. Simon bar Giora, John of Gischala, and the priest Eliezar ben Simeon each controlled portions of the Temple Mount. Burning the city's store of grain, the groups sacrificed Jerusalem's security in favor of temporary military advantage. Letting the Jews in Jerusalem kill each other, Vespasian secured the rest of the country by 69. During this time, the Pharisaic leader Yochanan ben Zakkai escaped Jerusalem. Late Rabbinic accounts (*b. Gittin* 56b; *Avot de Rabbi Natan* version A ch. 4) suggest that he received Vespasian's permission to establish a school in Jamnia (also called Yavneh); alternatively, Yavneh could have been a Roman prison camp.

In July 69, following Nero's suicide, Rome's armies in the eastern part of the empire declared Vespasian emperor. Vespasian appointed his son Titus to lead the troops in Jerusalem and returned, with Josephus, to Rome. In August 70, the Temple burned, whether by the Roman troops or the local Zealots or by accident remains unknown. Only the western wall (the "Wailing Wall"; the *Kotel*), constructed of Herodian stone, remains. Titus took seven hundred prisoners to



Rome for his victory parade; his commemorative arch depicts the Temple's major symbols, including the seven-branched candelabrum (*menorah*) and the altar table. Rome transformed the two-drachma (half-shekel) Temple tax into the *Fiscus Judaicus*, the "Jew tax," now to be paid by all Jewish men for the upkeep of the temple of Jupiter in Rome. Coins inscribed with "Judea Capta" and depicting a weeping woman celebrated Rome's victory.

The Flavians—Vespasian, Titus, and the younger son Domitian—would rule Rome for the next several decades. Judaism would turn to the successors of the Pharisees and the scribes, the group soon to be known as the "Rabbis" (the term comes from the Aramaic word for "teacher"; see John 1:38) or "Tannaim." Following their time at Jamnia, first under the leadership of ben Zakkai and then Gamaliel II (ca. 80–120), the group would relocate to Galilee. In Caesarea, their successors would codify the oral law in the Mishnah (ca. 200). Christianity would turn increasingly toward the Gentile world, and worship of Jesus would come to the attention of the state.

It is within this fascinating and complex historical setting that Jesus was born, engaged in what would become a world-transforming ministry, was executed on a Roman cross, and was proclaimed the Resurrected Lord by his followers. What he actually said and did, however, remain, as we have seen, open questions for many students of the Gospels. The sources translated and discussed in this volume will allow these students to locate Jesus within history and, perhaps, to find his history as well.

## Sources

Jonathan L. Reed's selection of archaeological evidence of the emperor cult in the eastern Mediterranean, urbanization in first-century Palestine, and domestic space in Galilean village life establishes the major parameters by which we can contextualize the world of Jesus and his followers. In the public areas of Rome's cities, the emperor advertised his power and that of the state through temples and statues, sacrifices and games. Titles such as "Lord," "Savior," and "Son of God," as well as use of the term "good news" or "good tidings" (Greek: *euaggelion*; English: Gospel) for his acts of public beneficence, show the inextricability of what we today would call "religious" and "political" discourse. There was no "separation of church and state" in the Roman Empire, and that a human being could be seen as "divine" and could be hailed as bringing "Gospel" was by no means anomalous. This imperial cult penetrated even into Jesus' Galilee: the fragmentary Latin inscription that records the name of Pontius Pilate comes from the Tiberium, a structure erected for the worship of the emperor Tiberius, in Caesarea.

However, there was no Roman legionary presence in Galilee at the time of Jesus, and the tetrarch Herod Antipas (who ruled from 4 BCE to 39 CE) erected no Pagan temples and minted no coins depicting human faces. Nor, as Reed observes, were the new cities of Sepphoris and Tiberias "Pagan centers of Hellenization or Ro-

manization.” We might therefore conclude that Jesus’ concerns, at least while he remained in Galilee, focused less on the wider Roman world than on local economic practices, for those new cities certainly would have affected village life.

People residing by the Sea of Galilee lived modestly (at best) in homes of unhewn basalt fieldstone, with walls smeared with mud, straw, and even dung, beaten-earth floors, and thatched straw and mud roofs; in contrast, houses in Sepphoris had mosaic floors, tiled roofs, and walls decorated with frescoes. Reed suggests that to “feed these cities and to pay for their construction, Antipas needed to increase agricultural production across the Galilean valleys, and in the process some farmers would have been moved off their land or become tenants on what was once their land. The Gospel traditions seem to be well aware of such phenomena, which represent the darker side of urbanization.” On the other hand, tenant farmers and peasants are staple figures in preindustrial agricultural contexts; the extent to which the economic demographics in, for example, the environs of Nazareth, Capernaum, or Bethsaida changed in the 20s and 30s remains debated.

Jerusalem was another story. Like Caesarea, Jerusalem witnessed massive amounts of Hellenistic and Roman influence, in particular through Herod the Great’s rebuilding of the Temple. This institution, which functioned as the center of Jewish sacrificial worship as well as the national bank and a tourist attraction, drew visitors from throughout the empire, Jewish as well as Gentile. Further, Roman soldiers were a presence in Judea, and Pilate’s entourage would accompany him to Jerusalem at the pilgrimage festivals such as Passover. Thus, it is possible that Jesus’ message changed as he moved from the villages of Galilee to Jerusalem of Judea.

The entire area was thoroughly marked by Jewish concerns. Throughout Galilee and Judea, in strata dated to the late Second Temple period, archaeologists have located numerous stone vessels (used because they were not susceptible to ritual impurity; see John 2), *miqva’ot* (stepped plastered pools for ritual immersion), and, here a negative example, the absence of pork bones, for pork was considered “unclean” (see Leviticus 11).

Within the rapidly changing cultural setting, as Roman architecture began to mark the landscape and Roman coins to proclaim the power of the empire, Jewish “Prophets of Deliverance,” as Craig Evans labels them, began to appear. Josephus (37–100 CE), whose four extant works provide our most detailed information about Jewish life in the first century CE, records, along with commentary on Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and Zealots, information about public figures who attracted crowds of Jews and who paid for that popularity with their lives. As Evans demonstrates, “Review of the activities of these figures helps us understand better the political tensions and religious hopes of the Jewish people in late antiquity, again clarifying the context in which Christianity emerged.”

Josephus offers a detailed account of John the Baptist that differs somewhat from the portrait painted by the canonical Gospels. Whereas the Baptist in the Gospels is an eschatologically oriented prophet anticipating the messianic king, Josephus em-

phasizes John's interest in purity and his popularity with the crowds (according to Josephus, it was John's popularity, not his condemnation of Antipas's marriage to Herodias, that prompted his arrest and execution). The Evangelists may have sought to harmonize John's role with that of Jesus and so mitigate any sense of rivalry between the two; Josephus, who had his own agenda, may have omitted John's eschatological interests lest he offend the sensibilities of his Roman audience.

Next, Josephus mentions "a certain Samaritan" who led a group of followers to Mount Gerizim (see John 4), likely in the hopes of the appearance of the *Taheb*, the "restorer" who would fulfill the promises of Deuteronomy 18. Following them came Pilate's troops and, because of the ensuing massacre, Pilate was recalled (finally) by Rome. Other such figures—Theudas, "the Egyptian," Jonathan—all suffered similar fates, as Luke also remarks (Acts 5:36–37 mentions both Theudas and Judas the Galilean). That Jesus believed he would suffer and die in Jerusalem would not be unexpected, given the fate of both the prophets according to some Jewish traditions (see Matthew 23 as well as the Pseudepigraphon *Lives of the Prophets*) and the popular leaders such as John the Baptist in his own time.

Jesus' own teachings can even be seen as having a distinct political edge. Mary Rose D'Angelo details how the reference to God as "father" (Aramaic: *Abba*), famous from the Lord's Prayer—"Our Father [who is] in heaven" (Matthew 6:9)—presents a challenge to Rome, for the emperor Augustus and his successors had appropriated from pre-Roman Platonic and Stoic thought the title "Father" (*pater patriae*, "Father of the Fatherland"). Given the recent swing in historical Jesus studies toward a focus on Roman colonialism, the chapters by Reed, Evans, and D'Angelo helpfully provide the sometimes overlooked details concerning both prevailing imperial authority and various reactions to it.

D'Angelo's contribution also helpfully discusses the tendency in earlier "historical Jesus" research to insist upon a distinction between Jesus and "Judaism" (itself tendentiously defined), an insistence supported by the criterion of dissimilarity. "Abba," addressed by Jesus only in Mark 14:36 and cited twice by Paul (Galatians 4:6; Romans 8:15), had been, incorrectly as well as apologetically, deemed "an absolutely new and unique relationship with the deity." Instead, the reference to the Deity as "father" appears in the Dead Sea Scrolls as well as other Jewish texts from the Second Temple period, and it attested to the people's belief in divine providence, power, and justice. To call the Deity one's father was thus both theological affirmation and statement of hope.

To call a god one's father was also a familiar motif in the Greco-Roman world, as Charles Talbert demonstrates in his contribution on "miraculous conceptions and births." "Divine births" fill Greek and Roman mythologies: Achilles is the son of Thetis, and his rival Aeneas the son of Aphrodite; Zeus fathered Hercules and Dionysus; Apollo was the father of Asclepius and Aristaeus; Romulus, the founder of Rome, was the son of Mars. . . . Divine paternity also was accorded to historical figures: Plato was deemed the son of Apollo, and Alexander the Great the son of Zeus. Seutonius speaks of Augustus Caesar as Apollo's offspring; Apollo-

nius of Tyana was, according to his biographer Philostratus, fathered by Proteus, an Egyptian god, and the list continues. Nor was Plutarch alone in recording accounts of virgins impregnated by a god (his skepticism is palpable). Given these narratives, Talbert summarizes what the Evangelists' first readers would have gathered: "The Greco-Roman conviction that a human's superiority can be explained only by a divine creative act is used to establish the prevenience of divine grace in the divine-human relation."

The "miraculous birth" form also was familiar to Jews. Scripture recounts numerous special conceptions, including those of Isaac (Genesis 18, 21), Samson (Judges 13), and Samuel (1 Samuel 1–2) to women considered infertile, and by the Hellenistic period, Jewish tradition conceived new and even more miraculous tales of special births. George Nickelsburg discusses *1 Enoch* and Qumran's *Genesis Apocryphon's* recordings of the miraculous circumstances surrounding Noah's birth, as well as *2 Enoch's* narrative of the birth of Melchizedek (see Genesis 14; Psalm 110), a figure identified with Jesus in the Epistle to the Hebrews (6:19–7:10). Peter Flint's translation of the Qumran text 11QMelchizedek indicates the association of this priestly figure with forgiveness of sins, the announcement of salvation, acts of final judgment, the defeat of Satan (here called Belial), and the year of Jubilee when debts are forgiven, even as it seems to understand Melchizedek himself as divine.

When we turn from accounts of Jesus' birth to the teachings attributed to him, again we find numerous connections to forms well known among both Jews and Gentiles. However, before the formal contextualization can be discussed, we begin with information on how stories were composed and transmitted. David Gowler's contribution on the composition of a *chreia*—"a remembrance of some saying or action or a manifestation of both that has a concise resolution for the purpose of something useful" (Hermogenes 3–4) demonstrates the freedom rhetoricians had in conveying information and thus the potential that any search for the "exact words" or "exact deeds" of Jesus may be thwarted by the Evangelists' rhetorical skills. Gowler explains how ancient authors had "the freedom to change, adapt, and expand" materials.

Among the changes were adaptations from earlier accounts. Stories of Jesus' healings, exorcisms, and control over nature find biblical antecedents in Elisha (2 Kings 4, 5) and Isaiah (Isaiah 38). By late antiquity, as Alan J. Avery-Peck demonstrates in his chapter "The Galilean Charismatic and Rabbinic Piety: The Holy Man in the Talmudic Literature," Jewish sources had fully developed views about disease as well as the ability of select pious individuals to effect cures through exorcism, prayer, or ritual. Yet with the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 and then the disaster of the Bar Kokhba revolt against Rome (132–35), the Rabbis recognized the dangers of claiming direct heavenly commission or revelation. In their view, the age of prophecy was over: knowledge of the divine will would come from study of the Written and Oral Torahs, not visionary experience and not charismatic claims. Consequently, Rabbinic holy men and miracle workers

such as Honi the Circle-Drawer and Hanina ben Dosa are domesticated from charismatic prophets to faithful scholars.

The Gentile world also had its healers and teachers, although their prevalence in the first century CE is a matter of some debate. Whereas Wendy Cotter argues in her contribution on the god Asclepius, the Pythagorean philosophers, and the Roman rulers that stories of “healings, raisings from the dead, exorcisms, and nature miracles” were plentiful in both Jewish and Gentile settings, she also notes that Gerd Theissen claims instead that it was Christianity that created widespread interest in such accounts.

As Cotter demonstrates, Asclepius—child of a divine father, rescued from death, a healer who surpassed his teachers, able to restore life to the dead, and killed himself by the order of Zeus—was the focus of popular devotion from at least the third century BCE onward. Known for his compassion, lack of regard for the social status of his supplicants, and the “absence of any myths of selfishness around him,” he was one model of an early savior figure. The Pythagorean philosophers were seen as having intimate knowledge of and contact with the divine, which enabled them to perform nature miracles such as stilling storms. The first-century CE holy man Apollonius of Tyana was a Pythagorean philosopher known for healings and raising the dead; his biographer Philostratus wrote in order to exculpate him from charges of sorcery. Finally, Cotter adduces accounts of imperial propaganda, such as Julius Caesar’s stilling of a storm and Vespasian’s curing of the blind and the lame.

This world of healers and miracle workers is marked not only by attention to piety but also by a pervasive attention to magic (what one witness would label as “miracle” another might call “magic” and still a third “medicine”: the distinction often had more to do with the forces invoked in the cure as well as its cost than with the process itself). Such interest in accessing the spiritual or supernatural world is epitomized by the Mithras Liturgy, translated by Marvin Meyer. The text speaks of the “ecstatic ascent of the soul” and the opportunity to be “born again,” of purification rituals (baptisms) and sacred meals of bread and cup that symbolize body and blood (of a bull, a “divine sacrifice”), of a god who dies and rises and who, as one inscription reads, “saved us after having shed the eternal blood.” As Meyer trenchantly notes, the resemblance of Mithraism to early Christianity is so extensive that it makes “Christian apologists scramble to invent creative theological explanations to account for the similarities.”

Also demonstrating the pervasive influence of magic is the early second-century CE *Metamorphoses* (also called the Book of Transformations or the *Golden Ass*) of Apuleius. The *Metamorphoses*, as Ian H. Henderson explains, helps “modern readers to imagine historically what Greco-Roman polytheist religion might have been like” and, specifically, how a “magician” would have been perceived. Replete with prayers to the goddess Isis and visionary dreams (cf. Matthew 1–2; Acts 10), purification rituals involving immersion and diet, miraculous healings, and even a trial before a provincial Roman court, the text relies upon its readers’ cultural knowledge to recognize where *realia* cedes to artificiality and history gives way to farce.

Such distinction between history and farce, as well as between the literal and allegorical, leads directly to Gary Porton's detailed study of the parable (Hebrew: *mashal*) in both the Tanakh/Old Testament and Rabbinic literature. Porton begins with a wise caution: "Although the Synoptic Gospels and the Rabbinic collections share the phenomenon of the parable featuring human characters, it is extremely difficult to determine how the parables and the parable form in the Synoptic Gospels related to the Rabbinic corpus." Then follows an extremely helpful overview not only of the Rabbinic corpus but of why such comparisons between the Gospels and Rabbinic literature must be undertaken with enormous care.

Regarding the parables, Porton finds a number of connections in terms of form, but also a number of strong distinctions between those attributed to Jesus and those attributed to the Rabbis. For example, Rabbinic parables often begin with a scriptural prompt and function as biblical interpretation, while those attributed to Jesus do not. This distinction may come from the different settings of the speakers: the Rabbis are scholars who directly engage Judaism's scriptures; Jesus is not operating in the atmosphere of a "school" wherein study of the Law is paramount.

It would be insufficient to see Jesus' parables only in the context of Rabbinic teachings, for the Gentile world made, most famously in Aesop's fables, its own contributions to the genre. Further, Jesus and Aesop share some remarkable connections, including what might be called the "quest for the historical Aesop"; as Lawrence Wills remarks in the opening to his fascinating study, "It is not clear that there ever was a historical Aesop." Aesop's story, as it was recounted, is a "Gospel" of sorts. Wills summarizes: Aesop has a lowly beginning but receives divine favor, he engages in a soteriologically motivated ministry and is despised by many as a result, he faces trumped-up charges of blasphemy, and, after he is executed, a cult dedicated to him begins. However, whereas the stories told about Jesus are generally serious, the *Life of Aesop* is marked by whimsy and satire as well as, occasionally, scatology. In the traditions concerning Jesus, it is in his parables where the whimsy and satire are found, not in the story of his Passion. Nevertheless, perhaps given Aesop's "life" as an intertext, readers may find a bit more humor and satire in the depictions of Jesus in the Galilee.

The Targumim (from the Aramaic for "translation"), Aramaic paraphrases of scripture that combine scholarly exegesis with folktale interests, provide yet another window into early Jewish understandings of their sacred texts. After succinctly detailing the problems of using these texts to recover first-century views, let alone gain access to first-century Galilean Aramaic—indeed, while the Targumim may have influenced Jesus, it is also possible that the teachings of Jesus and his followers influenced the Targumim—Bruce Chilton cautiously explains how, nevertheless, "one may discern in them the survival of materials which did circulate in the time of Jesus, influencing his teaching and/or the memory of that teaching among his disciples."

Chilton categorizes four types of comparison between the Targumim and the Gospels: comparable material with cognate wording and based on the same

scriptural passage; comparable understanding but without the linguistic connections; the appearance of Targumic phrases in the New Testament; and a shared thematic emphasis. To give but one example, Chilton demonstrates that the influence of Targumic usage on Jesus would help to account for one of the most striking features of his theology: his insistence that the kingdom is a dynamic, even violent, intervention within human affairs.

Some scholars would debate the claim that “kingdom of God” has, at least on the lips of Jesus, an eschatological flavor; similarly in question is Jesus’ use of apocalyptic and eschatological language (e.g., Mark 13:24–27, “But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; and the stars will be falling from the heavens, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory; then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the ends of earth to the ends of the heavens”). According to George Nickelsburg, who provides for this volume selections from the Enochic corpus, “The sense that one was living in the end-time was the air that was breathed by the members of the early Christian communities,” although “to what extent Jesus himself subscribed to an eschatological worldview that was apocalyptically oriented is a much debated topic.”

Of particular import to the study of the historical Jesus in the Enochic corpus is its use of “Son of Man,” a title that appears to be Jesus’ preferred self-designation and that appears in all the Gospel strata (Mark, Q, M, L, and John). Again, scholars debate both what Jesus said and what he meant: Did “Son of Man” suggest a heavenly figure such as found in Daniel 7 or *1 Enoch*’s “Parables”? Did he speak of a coming “Son of Man” other than himself? Given the diverse descriptions of the “Son of Man” in early Jewish literature as well as Second Temple Judaism’s diverse messianic speculation, “it is not surprising,” as Nickelsburg observes, “that many Jews did not subscribe to the early church’s proclamation when it applied this Enochic tradition to Jesus.”

Not only Nickelsburg’s study of *1 Enoch* but also Peter Flint’s contributions on the Dead Sea Scrolls and Joseph Trafton’s study of *Psalms of Solomon* dismantle the stereotype held by many today that “the Jews” were all expecting a warrior-Messiah and so did not flock to Jesus’ message of peace. Qumran’s Rule of the Community anticipates the advent of three eschatological figures—a prophet, a priestly Messiah, and a kingly Messiah—even as it speaks of the “Messiah of Israel” presiding over an eschatological banquet (see Matthew 8:11; Luke 22; Revelation 19). It is even possible that this text speaks of God “fathering” the Messiah of Israel. The Apocryphon of Daniel (sometimes called the Aramaic Apocalypse or 4Q246) references a coming “Son of God” who “will be called great” and “Son of the Most High” (see Luke 1:32–35). Another scroll, 4Q521 (the Messianic Apocalypse), offers a list of messianic characteristics, including the ability to raise the dead. Finally, while the Peshier on Nahum (4Q169) does contain a reference to crucifixion, contrary to some popular reports, 4Q285 (a version of the *Book of War*) does not depict the execution of a messiah.



Reacting to the capture of Jerusalem in 63 BCE by the Roman general Pompey and then to Pompey's death in Egypt in 48, the *Psalms of Solomon* anticipate the arrival of an eschatological "Son of David" who will purify the nation. As Trafton notes, "The lengthy description of the anticipated Messiah in *PssSol* 17 (cf. *PssSol* 18) provides the longest such passages in all of Second Temple Judaism." The psalmist also condemns many of his fellow Jews as "sinners" and "hypocrites" (see especially Matthew 23; for the frequent use of this term as well as a discussion of stock invectives, see Johnson's "The New Testament's Anti-Jewish Slander"), accuses them of defiling the Temple (see Matthew 21; Mark 11; Luke 19; John 2), and describes their establishing a non-Davidic king. For the psalmist, however, the expected "Son of David" does not engage a militaristic response to his enemies both local and in Rome. His trust is in God rather than in weaponry, and his roles are king, judge, and shepherd rather than warrior.

This same concern for peace marks Philo's own messianic understanding, as Gregory Sterling notes: following Isaiah 11, Philo offers a vision of universal peace, harmony between humanity and the animals, and—citing Numbers 24:7—the coming of a man. Yet avoiding any hint of this figure's royalty or even connection to David, Philo emphasizes the man's courage, virtue, and strength.

Perhaps the best-known biblical statements concerning peace are Jesus' Beatitudes found in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1–12)/Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:20–49). The beatitude itself is not, however, original to Jesus: it is a well-recognized literary form, familiar from Wisdom literature and, as translated in this volume by Peter Flint, also the Qumran scrolls (4Q525). As Flint explains, the Beatitudes attributed to Jesus follow the same structure and show some similarities in subject to those from Qumran (e.g., a concern for humility and distress).

Jesus shares with Qumran as well a concern for "purity," a category that, like "magic," permeated antiquity. As Jonathan Klawans demonstrates, the topic of "purity" creates difficulties that range from distinguishing between its forms (ritual impurity, such as that created by contact with a corpse; moral impurity, such as that caused by idolatry or incest), to understanding the esoteric sources, to correcting the modern West's frequent lack of familiarity and resultant dismissal of purity regulations as ridiculously quaint, mere superstitions, or even signs of neuroses. Additionally complicating the discussion is a popular view that Jesus sought to replace the Jewish purity system—seen as creating class-based distinctions, filtering funds to the Temple (itself seen as a corrupt institution), marginalizing women (who would be in states of impurity because of menstruation and parturition), and concentrating piety and so power in the hands of the Pharisees—with a system of compassion. This false distinction (the opposite of purity is impurity, and of compassion, lack of compassion) is based on a variety of factors: the equally false distinction sometimes drawn between Law and Grace, the reductive equation of ritual impurity with sin, a presumption that first-century Jews followed the Mosaic Torah fully, literally, and uniformly, ignorance of purity's import to Gentiles, the false assumption that men were not concerned



with and subject to ritual impurity, the equating of purity and class (the high priest can become ritually impure; a peasant or a widow can be in a state of purity), basic misunderstandings of the ancient sources (with materials sometimes taken out of context both historical and literary), and, occasionally, Christian apologetic.

Whereas the Rabbis tended to separate ritual and moral defilement, the Qumran scrolls attest an overlap. Klawans comments: "For the Hebrew Bible and Rabbinic Judaism, the sources of ritual impurity were considered natural, unavoidable, even obligatory, and therefore not sinful. These substances could hardly be less natural for the Dead Sea sectarians, but the sectarians seem to have considered them sinful nonetheless." As for Jesus, Klawans demonstrates how his discussions about purity are not about rejection (Mark 7:19b—"thus he declared all foods clean"—is the Evangelist's editorial comment, not a statement from Jesus). What Jesus did do (if the general discussion about the Law in Mark 7 is authentic, and there are good reasons to believe that the entire scene is a Marcan composition) is merge matters of moral and ritual defilement, as did the Qumran covenanters. But Jesus differed from the Qumran texts as well, for he did not appear to have regarded sin as ritually defiling.

Broadening the discussion from "purity" to the Mosaic Torah, Herbert W. Basser addresses one of the most controversial questions concerning Jesus' teaching. While some scholars regard Jesus as stretching the Torah beyond any other Jew's view of acceptable interpretation (e.g., by dismissing purity regulations and even preaching an incipient antinomianism), others see him as engaging his Pharisaic interlocutors according to the terms of Rabbinic exegesis. Basser argues in his "Gospel and Talmud" not only that Jesus' rhetoric in his approach to Torah conformed to the general standards of first-century Jewish interpretation but also that, according to Rabbinic commentary, his exegetical points were "so good the Rabbis feared they could attract too much appreciation." Basser further argues that Jesus possessed knowledge not only of Torah but also of the means by which it was interpreted, for "had it been otherwise, why would anyone have bothered to pay close attention?" Thus, Jesus was by no means an antinomian and by no means functioned outside the rubrics of Rabbinic thought.

Both the Jesus of the Gospels and the Rabbis of Mishnah and Talmud follow the approach of what Basser terms "literal unacceptable: stretch apt"; this reshaping of a verse's words or structure typically served to alleviate any hardship created by following the more literal sense. Exemplifying this process in the Gospels are the "Antitheses" of Matthew 5 that follow the formulaic structure, "You have heard that it was said . . . But I tell you. . . ." While the interpretation of Matthew 5:44, "But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you," is novel (although Proverbs does insist "Do not rejoice when your enemies fall" [24:17] and "If your enemies are hungry, give them bread to eat; if they are thirsty, give them water to drink" [25:21]), the means by which the Gospel derives this interpretation are not: as Basser observes, the word "neighbor" can be stretched to include "enemy" because the terms in Hebrew share the same conso-

nants; only the pronunciation differs. To this we also might add that Epictetus voiced a similar point: “[The Cynic] must be flogged like an ass, and while he is being flogged he must love the man who flogs him, as though he were the father or brother of them all” (*Discourses* 3).

Basser next turns to John’s use of another technique: “rational arguments based on legal exegesis” of “redundant letters and phrases.” This model underlies John 7, Jesus’ arguments concerning healing on the Sabbath. The third model, one of “debate forms,” appears in the Synoptic Sabbath healings (Matthew 12:10–12; Mark 2:23–28; Luke 13:14–16). Complementing these observations is Gregory Sterling’s contribution on Philo of Alexandria, a Jewish philosopher roughly contemporary with Jesus. Like the Synoptic Jesus (Matthew 22:34–40; Mark 12:28–34; Luke 10:25–28), Philo summarized Torah, engaged in discussion of the Sabbath, and even addressed the *Corban* sacrifice (see Mark 7; Matthew 15).

A fourth approach to Jesus and the Law is through the subject of one specific injunction, that of divorce. Most if not all scholars of the historical Jesus agree that Jesus forbade divorce. Some argue that Matthew’s exception clause—divorce is forbidden except in cases of *porneia* (Matthew 5:31–32; 19:7–9)—is an addition designed to provide an escape mechanism required by the delay of the *parousia* (Jesus’ return), but the majority accept that the absolute prohibition found in Mark 10:2–12 and echoed in 1 Corinthians 7:10–16 is authentic: divorce is forbidden, and those who marry divorced individuals are guilty of adultery. What Jesus said, and meant, are urgent issues for people today who seek to remain biblically faithful but who also are entrapped in loveless or abusive relationships.

On the question of divorce, Jesus’ exhortations stand out from their cultural context. According to Thomas McGinn, Roman citizens would have found, from a legal standpoint, no difficulty in divorcing; all that was needed was the wish of either husband or wife to dissolve the relationship. The only problem: disposition of the dowry, which typically was returned to the woman. Conversely, a freedwoman married to her former owner required his consent to a divorce. But despite Rome’s comparably lax attitude, we cannot conclude that divorce was rampant (let alone conclude that Jesus forbade divorce because he disapproved of Roman social policy). McGinn notes, first, that Roman culture placed a high valuation on marriage and found divorce at best a “regrettable necessity.” Second, with the exception of the freedwoman, the question of the frequency of divorce can be applied only to the upper classes. In the data available, only the “most successful politicians of the late Republic and early Empire” approached the two-to-one divorce rate of the United States in the early twenty-first century.

Jewish and Roman views of marital legalities were distinct: Jews practiced polygamy; Romans did not; Jews contracted marriages via the *Ketubah*, a legal writ, and obtained divorce via the *Get*, another legal writ; laws differed on permitted consanguinity. On the Jewish side, whether one could divorce was usually not the question: Deuteronomy 24:1–4 instructs that if a husband found in his wife something “obnoxious” or “unclean” (the specifics, as with the Greek *porneia*,

remain unstated), he is to give her a “bill of divorce.” Although the Rabbis conclude therefore that only the man can initiate divorce (*Gittin* 20a), Jewish women, at least in the Herodian household, did obtain divorces, and Mark’s version of Jesus’ injunctions presupposes that women also could obtain divorce.

Guidelines for social relations in antiquity extended well beyond divorce to other forms of associations. According to Matthew 18:15–17 (see also Luke 17:3–4), Jesus establishes a set of guidelines for rebuking a member of the “church” (Greek: *Ekklesia*; in the canonical Gospels, the term is unique to Matthew). Thus, as John Kloppenborg reveals, the church structure is comparable to that of ancient voluntary societies, those “more or less permanent associations or clubs, organized around an extended family, a specific cult, an ethnic group, or a common profession” that often both “had religious dimensions” and served “social goals.” These organizations, unlike the civic assemblies, were open to women, noncitizens, slaves, and freed slaves. Perhaps Jesus himself was familiar with associations of individuals involved in the fishing industry around the Sea of Galilee. Stronger, however, is the thesis that early Christians, especially in the Diaspora, would have seen themselves and have been seen by others as forming a type of voluntary society or domestic association dedicated to an Eastern deity.

One marker of such groups was the language of “fictive kinship.” Greeting each other as “brother” and “sister,” association members created new social units that complemented, or served as a replacement for, the extended household (Greek: *oikos*) or the biological family. Kloppenborg notes that “for the Jesus groups to extend kinship language to themselves implied sharply heightened social obligation,” an ethos that likely attracted potential proselytes. According to the Gospels, Jesus himself used kinship language: in his new family of faith, his “brother and sister and mother” is the one who “does the will of God” (Mark 3:35).

Whether Jesus sought to establish a permanent or semipermanent community, or whether he anticipated that there would be “some standing here who would not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power” (Mark 9:1) is yet another debated question. It is also possible that Jesus held to both views: prepare for the future, but expect the eschaton.

Although discussions of the “anointed one” most often address Jesus’ messianic self-consciousness or diverse definitions of “Messiah,” the New Testament prompts another discussion of Jesus as anointed. According to Matthew 26:6–13 and Mark 14:3–9, an unknown woman anoints Jesus’ head; according to John 12, this woman is Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, and she anoints not Jesus’ head but his feet and dries them with her hair. Luke 7:36–50 recounts a related story, set not at the outset of the Passion but at the beginning of the ministry, wherein an unnamed “woman who was a sinner” anoints Jesus’ feet, bathes them with her tears, and wipes them with her hair. The anointing of an individual was a common practice in antiquity, but the wiping of expensive oil off someone’s feet by means of one’s hair was by no means a quotidian occurrence.

Teresa Hornsby surveys numerous types of anointings—“ritual anointings, baths, grooming, gestures of hospitality, and the preparations of corpses”—but finds scant connection to the Gospel accounts. Following the work of Dennis R. MacDonald and so complementing his contribution to this volume, “Imitations of Greek Epic in the Gospels,” she does find in the *Odyssey* a woman anointing someone whom she recognizes to be a king. The only other text wherein hair is used as part of the service derives from a homoerotic banquet in Petronius’s *Satyricon*.

Differing in the chronology of the anointing, all four Gospels do situate Jesus’ Passion at the Passover. As noted earlier, according to Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the Last Supper is a Passover meal, a seder (Hebrew for “order,” here as in “order of service”); according to John, Jesus dies on the Day of Preparation, at the time the Paschal lambs are being sacrificed in the Temple. To understand both the rituals known to Jesus for the celebration of the Passover and the details of the seder meal adopted and adapted by his followers, Calum Carmichael reconstructs the Passover *Haggadah* (Hebrew for “story” or “narrative”), the script for the seder.

Carmichael’s study shows both how Jewish tradition influenced the Last Supper and how, possibly, the developing Christian church influenced the *Haggadah*. Further, it offers numerous plausible insights into other Gospel scenes, from traditions concerning Moses’ nativity to an explication for why Jesus refuses the drink extended to him on the cross. Concerning the multiply attested statement in which Jesus equates his body with bread and his blood with wine, Carmichael suggests that the original import of the word *Aphikoman* and its use in the ritual point to the means by which the celebrant, consuming the *Aphikoman*, unites with his mystical redeemer. The one new thing Jesus does is to claim that the Messiah is no longer a hidden, mystical figure, but himself in his own person.

A second text depicting a meal replete with symbolism is the Pseudepigraphon *Joseph and Aseneth*. This story of the conversion of the Egyptian Aseneth and her subsequent marriage to Joseph contains, in Randall Chesnutt’s terms, “formulaic references to the bread of life, cup of immortality, and ointment of incorruption.” Yet Chesnutt disagrees with scholars who see in these passages a “sacred meal” such as those shared by the Qumran community or Philo’s Therapeutae; he finds a reference not “to a special ritual meal but to Jewish scruples about food in general and, by metonymy, to the entire Jewish way of life.” This symbolism could be expected, given the emphasis on meals not only in the Gospels and by Paul (1 Corinthians), but also by the Dead Sea Scrolls, *Havurah* groups, and the voluntary societies. Nevertheless, the expression “bread of life” appears only in one other early Jewish (using the term broadly) text aside from *Joseph and Aseneth*, namely, John 6, and both Pseudepigraphon and Gospel display a realized eschatology.

Several sources provide information on the Roman governor during that fateful Passover. Sterling presents Philo’s brief portrait of Pontius Pilate, an account similar to that offered by Josephus (*War* 2; *Ant.* 18; see also Luke 13:1–2), which describes the governor’s complete lack of consideration for the sensibilities of his subject population. Whether the Gospels improve Pilate’s profile to make him

less a villain, or whether Philo exacerbated Pilate's evil for his own political reasons, or whether both theories have a bit of truth, remains debated.

The correspondence between Pliny the Younger, governor of Bythynia-Pontus circa 110 CE, and the emperor Trajan concerning Christian liturgical assemblies may grant some access to Pilate's legal parameters. Pliny, who interrogated those participating in what he termed a "depraved and fanatical superstition," had the prerogative, as did Pilate before him, to pronounce sentence on members of the local population. Bradley M. Peper and Mark DelCogliano state, "While legal actions were chiefly instigated by the public, the provincial governor alone performed the actual trials (*cognitio extra ordinem*)."

The Pliny-Trajan correspondence raises a second question about the relation of Christians to the state. According to Matthew 10:17–20; Mark 13:9–11; Luke 12:10–11; and John 15:18–27, Jesus predicts that his followers would face persecution from governing authorities; Acts 16, 18, and 21–26 shows Silas and Paul undergoing such persecution (composed at the end of the first century or, more likely, at the beginning of the second, Acts may be contemporaneous with the Pliny-Trajan correspondence). In Rome, Jewish-Christians were caught up in the expulsion of the Jews from Rome by Claudius (49–54 CE), and Christians were persecuted by Nero in 54. Did Jesus predict that his followers would face the empire's representatives, or are Mark 13 et alia, as Peper and DelCogliano suggest, "later retrojections inserted into the Jesus tradition by the Evangelists, who sought to bolster the resolve of their Christian communities when faced with the persecution of individual Christians"?

Included in his contribution on Philo, Gregory Sterling remarks that the Jewish philosopher's description of the mocking of an insane man named Karabas by Alexandrian Gentiles in order to show their hatred of the visiting Jewish king, Agrippa I, in 38 CE is "strikingly similar" to the mocking of Jesus recorded in Matthew 27:27–31; Mark 15:16–20; and John 19:2–3. Such mocking scenes are another well-attested form: Sterling notes examples from Plutarch and Dio Cassius. Philo also provides a description of scourging, the whipping Jesus is described as enduring (Matthew 27:26; Mark 15:15).

Like the miraculous birth, the tradition of the "noble death" was well known in both Jewish and Gentile Greco-Roman contexts, as Dennis R. MacDonald's contribution, "Imitations of Greek Epic in the Gospels," demonstrates. Homeric imitations in the Gospels raise the inevitable question of the extent to which the Gospels report "what happened," and the extent to which they reflect what anyone familiar with Homeric models—MacDonald observes that "narrative poetry" was "the oxygen of Greco-Roman culture" for literate and illiterate alike—presumed happened. According to MacDonald, the Evangelists did not merely imitate; rather, they drew upon earlier stories to show how the Christian message superseded them.

Robert Doran's "Narratives of Noble Death" expands MacDonald's study. Under the rubric "Better to have one man die for the people" (Caiaphas's response in John 11:50 to Jesus' popularity and possible Roman reprisal), Doran offers pas-

sages from Pompeius Trogus, Livy, and 2 Maccabees. Under the rubric “Philosophic deaths,” he translates excerpts from Plutarch, Diogenes Laertius, Philostratus, and 4 Maccabees. From these extensive selections, readers can find numerous connections to the Passion narratives, including “a leader offering himself to death for the salvation of the fatherland” (Pompeius Trogus); the offering of sacrifices and invocations for divine help (Livy); the accepting by “free choice” to die rather than submit to the demands of the Gentile king, and the hope for “resurrection into life” (2 Maccabees).

Along with classical templates, the Evangelists drew upon biblical precedents, especially the Psalms (22 and 69), along with echoes Amos 8:9, Zechariah 9–14, and Wisdom 2, to recount Jesus’ suffering and death. Also influencing the Gospel writers and, quite likely, Jesus himself, were Isaiah’s Suffering Servant songs, particularly Isaiah 53. Ben Witherington translates for this volume both the Hebrew and the Septuagintal renditions of this chapter, and the distinctions are substantial. For example, Witherington notes that whereas the Greek focuses on the “sufferer being justified as a righteous person,” the Hebrew speaks of “him making many righteous”; the Gospels, as opposed to Acts 8, draw primarily upon the Hebrew rather than the Greek, and thus the case that Jesus himself spoke in Isaianic terms becomes stronger. Finally, as Witherington observes, “The historical likelihood that Jesus spoke of shedding his blood in the place of many seems high, not least because Maccabean martyrs [see Doran’s contribution] had conceptualized their roles like this before Jesus.”

Concluding this section on the noble death, Dale C. Allison Jr. provides the report from Thallus, the first-century CE Pagan (or possibly Samaritan) historian who may be the earliest non-Christian witness to Jesus. Thallus mentions an earthquake (see Matthew 27:51) and attendant darkness (see Mark 15:33) at the time of Passover; he also dates the Crucifixion to the day before Passover. Unfortunately, Thallus’s extensive history of the Mediterranean world is no longer extant, and neither is the work by the third-century Christian Julius Sextus Africanus that quotes him. We have only a citation of Africanus by the ninth-century Byzantine historian George Syncellus.

Such source-critical jumps from Thallus to Julius Africanus to George Syncellus may make the idea of understanding Jesus of Nazareth seem much simpler. We do not have to traverse several centuries to move from the Evangelists to Jesus himself. Yet as the movements within the Quest, the history of the period, and the numerous texts that contribute to the cultural makeup of Jesus and his early followers demonstrate, the doing of history necessarily requires not only rigorous investigation, careful translation, and cultural sensitivity but also hope, luck, and imagination.

Understanding Jesus and the Gospels requires appreciation of Judaism and the Pagan world: their history, literature, ethics, and practices. For the first time, this volume presents these variegated sources, almost all in original translations. Some of the contents will prompt readers to a new view of the historical Jesus; perhaps what previously had been seen as authentic will come to be seen as derivative of a

Pagan or Jewish model. Other readers will appreciate the cultural embeddedness of the Christian tradition, how it told its stories and conveyed its teachings in the idiom of the people. And still other readers will come to see how the teachings of and about Jesus would have sounded to those who first heard them, and perhaps, through that echo, come to a new understanding for themselves.

## Bibliography

In addition to the bibliography supplied here, each contribution offers its own set of additional sources, both primary and secondary, and many of these scholars have authored more than one work on the historical Jesus. Readers are encouraged to consult their other publications as well as the myriad (not an exaggerated term) of other books and articles on this ever-fascinating, and perhaps ever-elusive, topic.

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