

# The Quest for the Mythical Jesus



**Eugene D. Mertz**



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Unless indicated otherwise, all biblical quotations come from *The New English Bible*

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## **Foreword**

### **The Mythical Jesus Theory**

The Gospel story was originally a passion drama performed every year by a mystery cult. These ancient sects held spring rites during which a son of god sacrificed himself—usually through crucifixion—to grant eternal life to his followers. At the climax of the drama, the son triumphantly exited the “underworld” cave where he had been interred, thereby signifying his power over death. A transcript of a mystery cult drama was misinterpreted as an account of an actual son of god who offered immortality to those who accepted him as their savior. Believers became a Church intent on eliminating every reference to mystery cults and their embarrassing similarities to the Gospels. They were not entirely successful.

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## **Chapter I**

### **The Quest Begins**

#### **The Resurrected Myth**

The rediscovery of the mythical Jesus was an unintended consequence of biblical research by devout Christians. Near the end of the Enlightenment, theologians began studying the oldest existing versions of *New Testament* books to make certain that translations from the original Greek were as accurate as possible. In the case of the Epistles, the process brought attention to format differences, style variances, and other inconsistencies among letters supposedly written by the same author.

Fourteen of the twenty-one Epistles were originally attributed to the apostle Paul. Examinations of these letters determined that at least half of them had been penned by other writers. Scholars eventually reached a consensus that the first four letters were actually written by the apostle and that three others were probably also his work. The remaining “Pauline” Epistles were imitations (see Table 1.1).

**Table 1.1 – The Authenticity of the Pauline Epistles**

<b>Epistle</b>	<b>Author<sup>1</sup></b>
<i>The Letter of Paul to the Romans</i>	Paul
<i>The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians</i>	Paul
<i>The Second Letter of Paul to the Corinthians</i>	Paul
<i>The Letter of Paul to the Galatians</i>	Paul
<i>The Letter of Paul to the Ephesians</i>	A later writer
<i>The Letter of Paul to the Philippians</i>	Probably Paul
<i>The Letter of Paul to the Colossians</i>	A later writer
<i>The First Letter of Paul to the Thessalonians</i>	Probably Paul
<i>The Second Letter to the Thessalonians</i>	A later writer
<i>The First Letter of Paul to Timothy</i>	The author of Titus
<i>The Second Letter of Paul to Timothy</i>	The author of Titus
<i>The Letter of Paul to Titus</i>	Same as Timothy
<i>The Letter of Paul to Philemon</i>	Probably Paul
<i>The Letter to the Hebrews</i>	A later writer

The discovery of forgeries among the Epistles prompted an in-depth analysis of the first four books of the *New Testament*: the “Gospels” *Matthew*, *Mark*, *Luke*, and *John*. The investigations uncovered a number of editorial additions. Some were revealed by such things as different verb tenses or points of view, but others were conflicting versions of the same incident. For example, there are two resurrection scenes at the end of *Mark* (16:1–8 and 16:9–20). Whenever it is impossible to determine which version of an event is true, neither can be relied upon. This fact is amplified by a comparative analysis of the **five** different resurrection scenes in the Gospels (see Table 1.2).

**Table 1.2 – Mary Magdala at the Empty Tomb**

Verses	Mary Magdala	met	and subsequently
<i>Matthew</i> 28:1–20	and “the other Mary”	an “angel”	“ran to tell the disciples”
<i>Mark</i> 16:1–8	and “Mary the mother of James, and Salome”	a “youth”	“ran away from the tomb, beside themselves with terror.”
<i>Mark</i> 16:9–20	and no one else	“Jesus”	“carried the news to his... followers”
<i>Luke</i> 24:1–11	and “Joanna, Mary the mother of James,” and other women	“two men”	“reported all this to the Eleven and all the others”
<i>John</i> 20:1–18	and “Simon Peter and the other disciple”	“two angels”	“turned around and saw Jesus”

The Gospels go on to recount four completely different descriptions of Jesus's later appearances to the disciples and other followers. These inconsistencies were especially troubling to one of the German theologians who spear-headed the reexaminations. Hermann Samuel Reimarus concluded that Jesus was a failed Jewish revolutionary who actually died on the cross. His posthumous writings, published in 1778, theorized that the Gospel stories were fabricated by the disciples, who must have spirited Jesus's body away in the middle of the night. The hypothesis was too revolutionary for its time and was rejected by his colleagues.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Tübingen School**

The biblical examinations also brought into focus differences between the Gospels and the Epistles. The biographies of Jesus contained quotations from the *Old Testament* and allusions to Jewish traditions. The letters never referred to the Hebrew books, and on those rare occasions when Jesus or Jewish topics were mentioned, they seemed to be afterthoughts. Ferdinand Christian Baur was one of the leaders in the effort to make sense of these differences. During the first half of the nineteenth century, he served as professor of religion at the University of Tübingen near Stuttgart, Germany. He and his colleagues concluded that the discrepancies were caused by an early schism in

the Church, exemplified by the Jewish leadership of Peter in the Gospels, as opposed to the “Gentile” letters written by Paul.

Baur and the other members of the Tübingen School took the position that this was a perfect explication of the “dialectic,” as proposed by the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel.<sup>3</sup> Progress was the result of sweeping conflicts between worldviews which coalesced into two opposing grand theories: a “thesis” and an “antithesis.” Human advancement came about through a melding of the two extremes with the creation of a “synthesis.” It was the fusion of the conservative theology of Peter with the more vibrant faith of Paul that produced Christianity.

In the Gospels and the fifth book of the *New Testament, Acts of the Apostles*, the disciples under Peter were responsible for the day-to-day operation of the Church. In Paul’s *First Letter to the Corinthians*, there are hints of a different structure involving levels of membership (*I Corinthians* 3:1–3):

For my part, my brothers, I could not speak to you as I should speak to people who have the Spirit. I had to deal with you on the merely natural plane, as infants in Christ. And so I gave you milk to drink, instead of solid food, for which you were not yet ready. Indeed, you are still not ready

for it, for you are still on the merely natural plane.

Consider also the different descriptions of the Last Supper. In one of the only instances when Paul quotes Jesus, he describes a communion meal (*I Corinthians* 11:23–26):

For the tradition which I handed on to you came to me from the Lord himself: that the Lord Jesus, on the night of his arrest, took bread and, after giving thanks to God, broke it and said: “This is my body, which is for you; do this as a memorial of me.” In the same way, he took the cup after supper, and said: “This cup is the new covenant sealed by my blood. Whenever you drink it, do this as a memorial of me.” For every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord, until he comes.

In the first three Gospels, the Last Supper is also a communion meal, but it is identified as the Passover dinner (*Matthew* 26:26–29, *Mark* 14:22–25, and *Luke* 22:14–20). The fourth Gospel presents something else entirely. According to *John* 13:1, “It was before the Passover festival.” *John* 13:3–5 describes the meal and its attending ritual as follows:

During supper, Jesus, well aware that the Father had entrusted everything to him, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from the table, laid aside his garments, and taking a towel, tied it round him. Then he poured water into a basin, and began to wash his disciples' feet and to wipe them with a towel.

This ritual cleansing was an ancient ceremony known as an “Agape.”<sup>4</sup> It makes no sense that the Gospel writers differed in their descriptions of the Last Supper or described Passover as a communion sacrament (this is explored in greater detail in Chapter IX – “Mystery Meals”).

Problems with conflicting accounts in the Gospel stories led two of Baur's Tübingen students to abandon the Hegelian approach and search for the original form of Christianity as it existed before the editorial additions. However, they came to very different conclusions about this source. In 1835, David Strauss published his *Life of Jesus* which argued that the Gospels were based on historical fact, but they were given mythical interpretations by later editors.<sup>5</sup> Conversely, Bruno Bauer determined that the biographies must have been based on an ancient myth.<sup>6</sup>

The two views encapsulate the disagreements that have

haunted the quest for the mythical Jesus. Those who assert that the legendary aspects were “layered-on-top” of pre-existing Christianity take the position that the hunt is essentially over. All that remains is to eliminate the extraneous material to expose the underlying faith. Conversely, those who espouse the “foundational” view feel that the search for the mythical source has just begun.

## Chapter II

### The Quest for Mythical Sources

#### The Historical Sources

The “layered-on-top” and “foundational” views of the Christian myth were both bolstered by ongoing textual analysis of the Gospels. For example, there are different birthyears for Jesus in *Matthew* and *Luke* (see Table 2.1).

**Table 2.1 – Conflicting Birthyears for Jesus**

Verse	Result	Birthyear
<i>Matthew</i> 2:19–20	Jesus was a “child” when Herod the Great died in 4 BCE <sup>1</sup>	7 BCE
<i>Mark</i>	No birth scene.	
<i>Luke</i> 2:1–2	During a census “when Quirinius was governor” in 6 CE <sup>2</sup>	6 CE
<i>John</i>	No birth scene.	

Since there was no year zero, a total of 12 years elapsed between the two proposed birthyears. (Church officials apparently split the difference to designate the mid-point as the year one.) The analysis assumes that the “child” in *Matthew* was three years old. A younger age would be considered a baby, and a higher age would just increase the variance with *Luke*. Because the two scenarios conflict, neither can be relied upon and both must be considered editorial inserts.

Another problem with the birth narratives is the location of the event. Bethlehem was an ancient cult center established by Jacob to venerate Rachel after she died giving birth to Benjamin (*Genesis* 35:19–20). The site featured a sacred cave that had been co-opted by worshippers of the son of god Adonis throughout the first centuries BCE and CE, until the Emperor Constantine ordered the pagan center destroyed and a church erected in its place.<sup>3</sup>

Jesus’s birthdate on Christmas also came into question. The calendar commissioned by Julius Caesar designated December 25 as the winter solstice. Celebrations were held on that date to herald the return of the sun from its descent into winter. Sometime during the first or second century, the festivity became known as the “Nativity of the Sun,” the birthdate of the son of god Mithras.<sup>4</sup>

When Christianity was designated the official religion of the empire, it co-opted the event as Christmas. It is entirely possible that the Mithraic devotion to the sun also prompted Christians to observe the Sabbath on Sunday.

### **The Classical Record**

Among all the Greek and Roman documents from the first century there is **not one** verifiable record of early Christians outside the *Bible*. Papyrus and parchment scrolls have limited shelf lives, so the overwhelming majority of the documents that survived the first fifteen hundred years CE were copies of copies produced by Church scribes. Surely, first-century texts that mentioned early Christianity would have been preserved in some reliquary and reproduced. But this never happened.

On the other hand, with the number of editorial insertions in the *New Testament*, it would not be surprising if some documents outside the *Bible* had been modified to add something about Jesus or his followers. As it turns out, there is only one first-century work that shows evidence of later tampering. It is *The Antiquities of the Jews* by the Jewish historian Josephus. This 20-volume history contains two passages that seem to substantiate the *New Testament* narrative. Both have been dismissed

by scholars because they interrupt the flow of the narrative and employ language that is too Christian for a Jewish writer.<sup>5</sup> But the most incriminating evidence against the authenticity of the two passages comes from comparing them with material in the *New Testament*.

The first reference (*Antiquities* 18:63–64) recapitulates the Gospel story in a single paragraph. The most problematic thing about the section is that it uses the word “Christian” to describe the followers of Jesus. The term was not in the lexicon while Josephus was alive. It was first used in *Acts of the Apostles* (on three occasions in 11:26, 11:30, and 26:28), but in the oldest existing recension of the book, from the fourth century, the word is written as “Chrestian.”<sup>6</sup> Even if this alternative form is accepted, *Acts* was not written until the second century.<sup>7</sup> This was years after Josephus’s death.<sup>8</sup> The word “Christian” only appears one other time in the *New Testament*, in *The First Letter of Peter* (4:16), which was penned at a later date by someone purporting to be the disciple.<sup>9</sup>

The other passage from Josephus (*Antiquities* 20:197–203) describes the trial and execution of James, the brother of Jesus. There is no suitable explanation why such a significant event was not covered in *Acts of the Apostles*, which used Josephus as a primary source (see Table 2.2).

**Table 2.2 – Josephus as Source for the Acts of the Apostles**

(“*Ant*” – *Antiquities of the Jews* and “*Wars*” – *Wars of the Jews*)

Subject	<i>Acts</i>	Josephus
Revolt of Theudas	5:33–38	<i>Ant.</i> 20:5 <sup>10</sup>
Revolt of Judas the Galilean	5:33–38	<i>Ant.</i> 18:1, 20:5, and <i>Wars</i> 2:8 <sup>11</sup>
Death of Herod Agrippa I	12:20–25	<i>Ant.</i> 19:8 <sup>12</sup>
Manaen (Herod’s court)	13:2	<i>Ant.</i> 17:1 <sup>13</sup>
Insurrection of the “Egyptian”	21:37–39	<i>Ant.</i> 20:8 and <i>Wars</i> 2:13 <sup>14</sup>
High Priest Ananias	23:1–3	<i>Ant.</i> 20:5 <sup>15</sup>

An early list of Christian books indicates that *Acts* was written by the author of the third Gospel.<sup>16</sup> Luke was obviously well acquainted with Josephus, so his silence concerning the trial and execution of James leads to the inevitable conclusion that the passage was **not** in the original first-century version of the *Antiquities*.

From the early part of the second century, there are only three writers who described Jesus or his followers. Pliny the Younger mentions Christians in a letter written to the Emperor Trajan in the year 112.<sup>17</sup> Tacitus claims that the great fire in Rome was started by Nero, who tried to deflect his involvement by blaming Christians. The conflagration occurred in the year

64, at least 50 years before Tacitus wrote about it.<sup>18</sup> Suetonius references a rumor that the behavior of a man named “Crestus” caused Emperor Claudius to expel the Jews from Rome sometime between the years 41 and 54. He wasn’t able to be more specific because he was relating an event that happened 60 years earlier.<sup>19</sup>

Biblical scholars have never been able to explain the paucity of records concerning the origins of Christianity. There were simply too many Greek, Roman, and Jewish officials present for such a religious groundswell—one that captivated the number of people described in the *New Testament*—to pass unnoticed. In a single instance, three thousand Jews were baptized into the faith (*Acts* 2:41). The fact that the *Bible* was the only first century document that reported the story of Jesus was a major cause for concern. The problems were amplified when theologians began uncovering evidence that the Jewish underpinnings of the Gospel stories were also suspect.

The Gospels and Epistles were written in Greek. Not the literary language of the classics, but the vernacular of the common people.<sup>20</sup> Some theologians hypothesized that this “lower class” language was the result of translating pre-existing Aramaic or Hebrew texts. However, linguists determined that the snatches of Semitic words in the *New Testament* were vestiges from an oral tradition that must have existed long before the stories were

converted to spoken Greek and then committed to writing.<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, the *New Testament* was not translated into a Semitic tongue until the second century, and the language chosen was not Hebrew or Aramaic, but a sister tongue spoken in Syria.<sup>22</sup> Linguistic experts, such as the Rev. John O. F. Murray acknowledged that there could be little doubt that there was a preexisting “Greek text which underlies the old Syriac.”<sup>23</sup> The revelations brought into serious doubt the long-held assumption that Jesus spoke Aramaic.

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## Chapter III

### The Quest for the Messiah

#### The Greek New Testament

The very fact that the *New Testament* was written in Greek is rather compelling proof that it was the language used by the first Christians. If this were not enough, there is the additional evidence provided by the *Old Testament* quotations in the Gospels. Virtually every one of them is a mistranslation of Hebrew scripture. The most famous example is *Matthew* 1:23: “All this happened in order to fulfill what the Lord declared through the prophet: ‘The virgin will conceive and bear a son.’” This is a poorly rendered version of *Isaiah* 7:14. The original Hebrew reads “young woman” instead of “virgin.”

Another well-known misinterpretation is the description of Jesus’s entry into Jerusalem. It appears in all four of the Gospels and is intended to reference the poetic verse of *Zechariah* 9:9:

Rejoice, rejoice, daughter of Zion,

Shout aloud, daughter of Jerusalem;  
For see, your king is coming to you,  
His cause won, his victory gained,  
Humble and mounted on an ass,  
On a foal, the young of a she-ass.

The last line was a standard device in Hebrew poetry and was meant to enhance the description of the ass in the preceding line.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, it led the Gospel writers to different conclusions about the type of animal used to transport Jesus. *John* 12:15 called it an “ass’s colt.” In *Mark* 11:7 and in *Luke* 19:35, it was simply a “colt.” However, *Matthew* 21:2 describes: “a donkey tethered with her foal beside her.” British theologian Alexander J. Grieve noted that Matthew “curiously misrepresents the poetic description of one animal... by making Jesus send for two, and even perhaps ride upon both.”<sup>2</sup>

The quotations were taken from obsolete Greek versions of the *Old Testament* translated in Alexandria starting in the year 300 BCE.<sup>3</sup> Even worse than the imprecise interpretations of scripture are the inaccurate portrayals of Jewish rites and practices in the Gospels. The most egregious of these is the first of three responses to a group of religious lawyers (or “pharisees”) who asked Jesus (*Mark* 7:6): ““Why do your disciples not conform to the ancient tradition, but eat their food with defiled hands?”” The author of *Mark* apparently assumed that washing

before meals was assiduously observed by all Jews, when it was actually a ceremonial practice only performed by pharisees.<sup>4</sup> The problem of misinterpretation was only made worse when Jesus rebuked his questioners (*Mark 7:7*):

Isaiah was right when he prophesized about you hypocrites in these words: “This people pays me lip-service, but their heart is far from me: their worship of me is in vain, for they teach as doctrines the commandments of men.”

The closest any *Old Testament* quotation comes to matching this is *Isaiah 29:13*, which contains the expression, “honor me with their lips while their hearts are far from me.”<sup>5</sup> However, the rest of the verse is completely different. If the scene was intended to show that Jesus was well-versed in scripture, it achieved the exact opposite result. One can only wonder what real pharisees would have thought when faced with such a garbled interpretation of their sacred texts.

In *Mark 7:11–13*, Jesus then chided his audience for a puzzling practice that allowed grown children to donate to the temple and thereby avoid applying the amount of the gift toward the support of their parents. Mark was obviously unaware that Jewish teaching annulled such payments when the parents were truly needy.<sup>6</sup> So instead of revealing a hypocritical practice by the

Jerusalem clergy, Jesus once more displayed his ignorance of Judaic traditions.

In both of these instances, the Gospel author was attempting to discredit the obscure practices in question in order to explain why they weren't observed by Christians. The third controversy is more significant because it deals with the vexing question of Jewish dietary laws. In this case, Jesus makes no mention of scriptural precedent, nor does he offer any rationale to explain why the rules were not observed by Christians. Instead, in *Mark* 7:14–15 he simply announces that they were no longer necessary. However, in *Acts* 15, the disciples come to an entirely different conclusion. Since these passages contradict one another, neither position can be trusted as valid. (This is covered in more detail in Chapter VII – “The Mystery of Edom”).

### **The Apocalypse**

Zoroastrianism was the religion of the Persian aristocracy. The faith envisioned two competing deities, one good and one evil. In the final battle between these divine antagonists, a messiah would arise to lead the forces of good to victory.<sup>7</sup> Judaism and Christianity both borrowed this legendary hero from Zoroastrianism. However, they had completely different interpretations of his mission. To Jews, he would be a temporal king who would extend the sovereignty of Jerusalem over the entire Holy

Land, as it had been in the time of David and Solomon.<sup>8</sup> To Christians, he was the heavenly redeemer. Jesus's Mount of Olives speech in the first three Gospels (*Matthew* 24:1–41, *Mark* 13:1–32, and *Luke* 21:5–31) attempted to reconcile the two visions.

The three versions of the speech share extended passages that are virtually identical and clearly come from the same source. They all begin with a warning about the impending destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, as exemplified by *Luke* 21:5–6: “These things which you are gazing at—the time will come when not one stone of them will be left upon another.” In *Mark* 13:13, Jesus declares: “All will hate you for your allegiance to me; but the man who holds out to the end will be saved.” *Matthew* 24:23–24 issues a stark warning about the coming days: “Imposters will come claiming to be messiahs or prophets, and they will produce great signs and wonders to mislead even God's chosen, if such a thing were possible.” In the midst of the discourse there is a significant detail, as described in *Matthew* 24:15–16:

So when you see “the abomination of desolation,” of which the prophet Daniel spoke, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must take to the hills.

The parenthetical phrase provides conclusive evidence that the Mount of Olives “speech” was originally a written tract added to the Gospels by later editors. To show that it was not just an oversight in *Matthew*, there is the exact same insertion in *Mark 13:14*. *New Testament* scholar Herbert G. Wood explained “that a Jewish apocalypse” was “edited together with genuine utterances of Jesus, in order to strengthen the faith” of later Christians who “were perplexed by the delay in the appearing of their Lord.”<sup>9</sup>

All of the *Old Testament* misquotations and the erroneous references to Jewish rites and beliefs were added by later editors. However, they failed to address any of the important differences between Christianity and Judaism. The Jews withstood a worldwide diaspora and yet remained faithful to the original tenets of their faith. It stretches incredulity to assume that Christianity underwent a wholesale divergence from a Jewish source. There had to be another explanation.

### **History-of-Religions**

After the Jewish foundations for the Gospel stories were undermined, the thesis argument in Baur’s Hegelian dialectic collapsed. Yet there still had to be some sort of Semitic source. The principal players were identified by Greek variants of Hebrew names and the final scenes took place in Jerusalem. A new dia-

lectic was promulgated by the German “History-of-Religions” school toward the end of the nineteenth century. Christianity was just one of many faiths formed by the melding of Hellenistic thought with pre-existing religious beliefs, a process prompted by the stabilizing influence of the Roman Empire.<sup>10</sup>

Wilhelm Bousset, one of the most influential members of the school, maintained that the new synthesis was a direct result of Paul’s attempts to transform Christianity into a mythical Greek-style religion.<sup>11</sup> This led to widespread heresies in the early Church. Bousset’s defense of the “layered-on-top” view of the Jesus myth has been embraced by many modern academics, even though it ignores the alternative scenario proposed by Richard August Reitzenstein. He suggested that the Hellenistic themes in Christianity came from mystery cults.<sup>12</sup> This is the “foundational” perspective accepted by modern proponents of the mythical Jesus.

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## Chapter IV

### The Quest for the Historical Jesus

#### The First Quest

*New Testament* scholarship took an unexpected turn in 1906, with the publication of Albert Schweitzer's *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*.<sup>1</sup> The author accepted the Mount of Olives "speech" as authentic and portrayed Christ as a religious zealot who truly believed his death would bring about the end-of-times. Church scholars were faced with a dilemma. In order to counter Schweitzer's conclusion, they would have to admit that the apocalyptic content in the Gospels was added by later editors. Instead, they dodged the issue. Rudolph Bultmann proposed that an understanding of Jesus's message of faith (Greek "*kerygma*") was the only thing that mattered.<sup>2</sup>

The complicated arguments of Bultmann and his supporters were eventually christened the "Second Quest for the Historical Jesus" by academics who then proposed a "Third Quest" promoting the view that Jesus was "just a man." The viewpoint was

first set forth by Ernst Käsemann in his 1953 article entitled “The Problem of the Historical Jesus.”<sup>3</sup> This attempted synthesis became the dominant view of Jesus in the latter half of the twentieth century, even though it failed to address the long-held Christian insistence that he was a son of god in a trinity who was crucified and resurrected to grant eternal life to his followers. It also ignores the biblical, archeological, and historical evidence that supports Reitzenstein’s thesis that the original Jesus was the mythical hero of a mystery cult.

### **An Early Religious Revival Movement**

Mystery cults were pre-Christian sects that recounted the death and resurrection of a son of god. The only comparable myth in high school and college mythology courses is the story of Persephone (Latin “Proserpina”), a **daughter** of a god, who was abducted by Hades (Latin “Pluto”) the god of the underworld. After the intervention of the other gods, Hades agreed to allow Persephone to return to the world for half of every year. Her emergence from the underworld signaled the beginning of spring and her re-entry marked the onset of winter.

Christian authorities systematically expunged myths that involved sons of gods because they were too similar to the Gospel story. The effort was made easier by the fact that mystery cult initiates took oaths to keep their rites secret.<sup>4</sup> In addition, those

who attempted to explain their beliefs were relentlessly persecuted as heretics by the early Church.

The original mystery cult worshipped Osiris in Egypt and preached the doctrine of eternal life for his followers. Historians have traced the spread of this notion to the rest of the civilized world during the first millennium BCE. This early religious revival movement co-opted a local fertility god to replace Osiris as the resurrected son in its rites (see Table 4.1)

**Table 4.1 – Mystery Cult Sons of God**

<b>Son</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Description</b>
Osiris	Egypt	Son of Geb and Nut; executed by Set <sup>5</sup>
Horus	Egypt	Possible iteration; son of Osiris and Isis <sup>6</sup>
Tammuz	Babylon	From <i>Ezekiel</i> 8:14; Ishtar's consort <sup>7</sup>
Dionysus	Greece	Son of Zeus and Semele; god of wine <sup>8</sup>
Adonis	Syria	Son of Myrrh; consort of Aphrodite <sup>9</sup>
Mithras	Persia	Adopted by Roman legionaries <sup>10</sup>
Attis	Phrygia	Son of Nana; consort of Cybele <sup>11</sup>
Baal	Canaan	Son of supreme deity El <sup>12</sup>
Bacchus <sup>13</sup>	Rome	Outlawed by Senate in 186 BCE <sup>14</sup>
Asclepius	Pergamum	Shrine dedicated to healing <sup>15</sup>

## **The Passion Drama**

The primary mystery rite was a passion drama held at the spring equinox. The son of god was condemned to death by the god of the underworld or his exemplar, and voluntarily sacrificed himself on the condition that his death would ensure eternal life for his followers. Initiates underwent a ritual death and rebirth through baptism to demonstrate their acceptance of the gift of redemption. In the original Egyptian drama, Osiris was dismembered. In most of the successor faiths, the method of execution was crucifixion. The body of the son of god was interred in a cave, which represented the underworld, and at the climax of the drama, he emerged from it to signify his resurrection.

Jesus offered himself to be sacrificed in order to intercede on behalf of his followers. He traveled into the very heart of his adversary's stronghold in Jerusalem, knowing that he would certainly be arrested. It was in this setting that he confronted the actors who played Herod and his Roman colleague Pilate, with crucifixion the only possible outcome. Their Gospel conversations, and the rather extensive monologues that preceded them, could not have been witnessed by outside observers, which is rather convincing proof that they were originally part of a dramatic transcript.

The birth and resurrection narratives in the Gospels were added at a later date because the original text probably did not portray either event in a way that could be understood by the uninitiated. In many of the mystery cults, a virgin was miraculously impregnated by the supreme deity of a region's pantheon. Examples include the rites of Attis, Adonis, and Dionysus.<sup>16</sup> This was the source of the Immaculate Conception and an explanation for the mistranslation of *Isaiah* 7:14 substituting "virgin" for "young girl."

At some point, the dramatic transcript came into the hands of those who had **not** been initiated into the mystery cult. They became convinced that it was the biography of a risen savior who promised eternal life to anyone who accepted the story as true. Keep in mind that this only had to happen once. From that point on, the story of death and redemption was so seductive that nothing could stop it from spreading.

It was standard fare in ancient accounts for sages to heal cripples and raise the dead. It has been suggested that many of the *New Testament* miracles were borrowed from the legends of other sons of gods, particularly Asclepius, whose shrine in Pergamum was dedicated to healing (refer back to Table 4.1). However, this does not explain the sheer number of such events in the Gospels. There are nearly two dozen separate miracles, ten of which are shared by at least three of the books (see Table 4.2).

**Table 4.2 – Gospel Miracles**

<b>Passage</b>	<i>Matthew</i>	<i>Mark</i>	<i>Luke</i>	<i>John</i>
Unclean spirit		1:21-28	4:31-37	
Leper	8:1-4	1:40-45	5:12-16	
Son of Centurion;	8:5-13		7:1-10	4:46-54
Widow's son			7:11-17	
Mother-in-law	8:14-17	1:29-39	4:38-44	
Unclean spirits	8:28-34	5:1-20	8:26-39	
Paralytic	9:1-8	2:1-12	5:17-26	
Rabbi's daughter	9:18-19 9:23-26	5:21-24 5:36-43	8:40-42 8:49-56	
Bleeding woman	9:20-22	5:25-34	8:43-48	
Two blind men	9:27-31			
Possessed man	9:32-34			
Withered hand	12:9-21	3:1-6	6:6-11	5:1-9
Man possessed	12:22-23		11:14-15	
Unclean spirit	15:21-31	7:24-30		
Deaf mute		7:31-37		
Blind man		8:22-26		
Exorcism of Boy	17:14-21	9:14-29	9:37-43	
Crippled woman			13:10-17	
Ten lepers			17:11-19	
Blind beggar	20:29-34	10:46-52	18:35-43	
Blind men	21:14-17			
Blind from birth				9:1-41
Lazarus				11:1-46

Problems of incredulity arose when the passion story was committed to writing and accepted as historical fact. Instead of conjuror's tricks presented as part of a theatrical production, the incidents had to be accepted as actual miracles. An actor in a mystery presentation could pretend to be possessed by a demon until a laying-on-of-hands cured him. In the Gospel rendition it became an actual exorcism. A player who lay comatose until prompted to awake was now raised from the dead.

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## Chapter V

### The Mystery of the Trinity

#### The Holy Trinity

One of the most perplexing issues facing biblical scholarship is the Holy Trinity. It is never explained in the *New Testament* and there are only two places where the recitation appears in the form recognized in prayer and creed. Both are undoubtedly later inserts. The first occurrence is *Matthew* 28:18–20, which in most *Bibles* reads as follows (**emphasis added**):

Jesus then came up and spoke to them. He said: “Full authority in heaven and on earth has been committed to me. Go forth therefore and make all nations my disciples; baptize men everywhere **in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit**, and teach them to observe all that I have commanded you.”

*New Testament* scholars came to recognize that the recitation of the Holy Trinity was not part of the original passage. Jesus is speaking in the first person singular throughout, and therefore would have directed that the rite of baptism be performed in his name. As theologian Alexander J. Grieve explained: “The command to baptize into the threefold name is a late doctrinal expansion. In place of the words ‘baptizing... Spirit’ we should probably read simply ‘into my name.’”<sup>1</sup> When the rite of baptism was performed by the apostles, it was always accorded a simpler formula: “in the name of Jesus the Messiah” (*Acts* 2:38), “into the name of the Lord Jesus” (*Acts* 8:16), or “in the name of Jesus Christ” (*Acts* 10:48).

The only other place where the Holy Trinity appears in the standard recitation is *II Corinthians* 13:11–14. Its status is questionable because it occurs at the very end of the letter, where it could easily have been appended by a later editor.

Classical historians Timothy Freke and Peter Gandy determined that most mystery cults had levels of initiation that were based on the four elements of antiquity. Earth was excluded, because it was considered the starting and ending points for life. In order to be inducted into the sects, initiates had to be cleansed by water rites. The next two levels were attained through ceremonies known as elemental baptisms.<sup>2</sup> This hierarchy was laid out by John the Baptist in *Matthew* 3:11–12:

I baptize you with water, for repentance; but the one who comes after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to take off his shoes; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Each member of a mystery cult father-mother-son triad corresponded with one of the three elements, and therefore to one of the three levels of initiation. Jesus, who was known by the sign of the fish, was identified with water. Joseph, as the exemplar of God, was the source of fire or divine light. Mary was associated with air, or spirit, which was a Hebrew feminine noun.<sup>3</sup> Emperor Constantine, who would not adopt Christianity until his deathbed, convened a council of Church elders in the year 325 to put an end to the endless debates about the nature of deity.<sup>4</sup> The Nicene Creed was the result. The Holy Trinity was sanctified as the only acceptable way to conceptualize God. However, since “spirit” was originally a feminine noun, the standard recitation should be “Father, Son, and Holy Mother.”

### **A Semitic triad**

The Semitic fertility god Baal is mentioned in several places in the *Bible* (such as *I Kings* 18:19 and *II Kings* 23:4). According to the mythologist James Frazer, an ancient religious center on Cyprus dedicated to “Baal of the Lebanon” observed rites that

were indistinguishable from those of Adonis.<sup>5</sup> This son of god's Greek name was actually a title derived from *Adon* (the Semitic word for "lord"), which is also used by Jews in its plural form, "Adonai," as a substitute for God.<sup>6</sup> Baal was described in archeological finds uncovered in 1928 by Claude Shaeffer at Ugarit on the coast of Syria.<sup>7</sup> Baal's father was El, the supreme god of the Semitic pantheon. Another deity prominently featured in the archives was the virgin goddess, Anat.

El appears at the end of Hebrew names, such as Rachel and Daniel, and even Israel. A derivation appears in the earliest passages of the *Bible* as "Elohim." As with Adonai, it is a plural form for god. According to the theologian Peter Occhiogrosso, Elohim joins masculine and feminine Semitic words for deity in such a way as to imply procreation. Therefore, Elohim contains the elements father, mother, and child.<sup>8</sup> In a patriarchal society, the offspring would have been a son.

A similar triad was mentioned in a trove of papyrus letters written in Aramaic and dated between the years 400 and 500 BCE.<sup>9</sup> The "Elephantine" scrolls survived for more than two thousand years in the dry climate of Aswan in Egypt and were recovered in the late 1800's by antiquarians. They were written by a group of Hebrew expatriates who were seeking help rebuilding their temple at Elephantine, an island in the Nile river. The documents generally refer to their deity as "Yahu," which

is considered synonymous with Jehovah.<sup>10</sup>

(Latin translations were used to create the first English versions of the *Old Testament*. As a result, many names are spelled and pronounced differently than Hebrew or Aramaic transcriptions made directly into English.<sup>11</sup> For example, “Jehovah” is more accurately “Yahweh.” For the sake of simplicity, the traditional names will be used, except in Chapter XVI – “The Mystery of Jethro,” when a more detailed examination will be required.)

The Elephantine papyri also contain references to “Anat-bethel,” “Eshem-bethel,” and “Herem-bethel.” No acceptable translations have ever been offered for the three names.<sup>12</sup> However, some documents indicate that Anat-bethel is the mother and Eshem-bethel her son.<sup>13</sup> Previously, Anat was identified as part of the Ugarit pantheon, along with El and Baal. The three “Bethel” names apparently constitute a Hebrew trinity that predated Christianity by at least 500 years.

Unfortunately, biblical scholars dismissed this extraordinary archaeological find by labeling it an example of “syncretism.” In other words, they concluded that the Jewish expatriates had been seduced by their association with Egyptian polytheists. Instead of remaining faithful to the one true God, they committed apostasy and started worshipping a triad of pagan idols. This

echoes complaints that are repeated time and again in the historical books of the *Old Testament*.

Before further study could focus on the far-reaching ramifications of this ancient Hebrew trinity, Albert Schweitzer published *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*. For half a century, biblical scholarship was absorbed in the arguments that ultimately gave rise to the Third Quest. While liberal Christians were captivated by portrayals of Jesus as a first-century everyman in *The Passover Plot*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, and *The DaVinci Code*, their conservative brethren were electrified by the discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls.

Starting in 1947, fragments of ancient biblical books and apocalyptic texts appeared on the antiquities market. Most of the scrolls were discovered by Bedouin shepherds and were eventually sold to one of two museums in Jerusalem.<sup>14</sup> It was determined that the documents had been hidden in caves near the Dead Sea by a first-century sect.<sup>15</sup> Many of the faithful hoped that they were the original Christians. This ultimately proved to be unfounded (as discussed in more detail in Chapter XII – “The Mystery of Zadok”), but the scrolls had to be thoroughly researched before the idea was abandoned.

From this point on, little research was conducted in biblical scholarship and the quest for the mythical Jesus stalled. Jewish academics who would have recognized the erroneous portrayals

of their rites and tenets had little interest in the *New Testament*. Fundamentalist theologians who were familiar with the *Bible* refused to entertain any idea of editorial inserts or foundational myths. Christian scholars associated with the Third Quest were aware that there were forgeries and mythical elements, but assumed that they had been layered-on-top of the biography of a Jewish man named Jesus. Archaeologists and historians who were well-acquainted with the myths usually didn't know much about the *Bible*. To uncover the evidence for the mythical Jesus, facts from all these fields had to be correlated and several other mysteries had to be resolved.

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## **Chapter VI**

### **Gospel Mysteries**

#### **Stories and Parables**

The quality and quantity of the parables and other lessons in the Gospels have caused scholars to suggest that the biblical editors borrowed a large number of the teachings from other sages. While this may have been true in some cases, the fact that so many of them appear in more than one book should be seen as proof that the majority were original to the Gospels. However, this fails to explain how anyone had the forethought to write them down as Jesus delivered them.

Of course, there is another explanation. The stories represented the accumulated wisdom of a thousand-year-old sect. The passion dramas lasted for three days around the time of the spring equinox.<sup>1</sup> That means there was ample opportunity to pass along parables and stories perfected over hundreds of years in the telling. And to memorialize them on papyrus (see Tables 6.1 and 6.2).

**Table 6.1 – Selected Gospel Parables**

<b>Parable</b>	<i>Matthew</i>	<i>Mark</i>	<i>Luke</i>	<i>John</i>
The strong man	12:29-30	3:27-30	11:21-23	
Mothers & brothers	12:46-50	3:31-35	8:19-21	
The mustard seed	13:31-35	4:30-34	13:18-21	
Greatest in Heaven	18:1-11	9:33-48	9:46-50	
Lost sheep	18:12-14		15:1-7	
The good shepherd				10:1-39
Little children	19:13-15	10:13-16	18:15-17	
Rich young man	19:16-26	10:17-27	18:18-30	
The vineyard	21:33-46	12:1-12	20:9-19	
Pay Caesar	22:15-22	12:13-17	20:22-26	
Faithful steward	24:42-51	13:33-37	12:32-46	
The good Samaritan			10:29-37	
Mary and Martha			10:38-42	
The prodigal son			15:8-32	

**Table 6.2 – Selected Gospel Lessons**

<b>Passage</b>	<i>Matthew</i>	<i>Mark</i>	<i>Luke</i>	<i>John</i>
Sermon on mount	5:1-12		6:17-36	
Salt of the earth	5:13	9:49-50	14:34-35	
Light of the world	5:14-16	4:21-25	8:16-18	
Turn other cheek	5:33-48			
The Lord's prayer	6:9-15		11:1-4	
Serve two masters	6:24		16:13-17	
Lilies of the field	6:25-34		12:22-31	
Plank in the eye	7:1-5		6:37-42	
Pearls before swine	7:6			
Door shall open	7:7-11		11:5-13	
Golden rule	7:12			
House on sand	7:24-29		6:46-49	
Dead bury the dead	8:18-22		9:51-62	
Fall of sparrows	10:26-33		12:1-12	
Prophet w/o honor	13:53-58	6:1-13	4:21-30	4:43-45
House divided	12:24-28	3:20-26	11:16-20	
Father's house				14:1-31
First shall be last	19:27-30	10:28-31	13:25-30	
Love your neighbor as yourself	22:34-40	12:28-34	10:25-28	13:31-35; 15:11-17

## **John the Baptist**

The fertility gods appropriated by the mystery cults usually came with their own myths. For example, Dionysus and Bacchus were considered gods of wine, and both had a number of legends that grew up around this alternative aspect of their identities. Furthermore, most mystery cults were associated with religious communities domiciled in elaborate worship complexes. The passion dramas made use of the venue for only a few days every year. The rest of the time, the shrines were devoted to gods and goddesses who were often more well-known than the male deities associated with the mysteries.

The sect that led to Christianity may have been one of the smallest of the mystery cults, and there is good reason to believe that it was forced to abandon its religious home and seek refuge in the Greek cities surrounding the Holy Land. It may have committed its rites to writing because they were in danger of being lost. Furthermore, it may not have been the only mystery cult with written records that made their way to outsiders. There is a second passion story in the Gospels, and it involves John the Baptist. In *Luke* 1–3, John's mother joins Mary in a duet celebrating the imminent arrival of their children. They are answered with a long poetic recitation by John's father. The song and speech were evidently performed for an audience (see Table 6.3).

**Table 6.3 – The Passion Story of John the Baptist**

<b>Episode</b>	<i>Matthew</i>	<i>Mark</i>	<i>Luke</i>	<i>John</i>
Conception			1:5–25	
Birth			1:39–80	
Baptizing			3:1–4	
Ministry	3:1–12	1:1–8	3:5–19	1:6–28
Arrest	4:12; 11:2	1:14	3:20	
Disciples	11:2–19		7:18–35	3:22–36
Fame				10:40–42
Son of Man	16:13–14			
Suffering	17:13			
Trial		6:17–26		
Execution	14:1–12	6:27–28	9:7–9	
Entombment		6:29		
Resurrection		6:14; 6:16		

Both John and Jesus were referred to as the “Son of Man.” It is an Aramaic term, clumsily rendered through Greek to English, for “everyman.”<sup>2</sup> It was often used as a synonym for messiah, and has caused a great deal of confusion because it is so similar to the phrase “Son of God.”

There is one major difference between John's story and the Gospel rendition: the method of execution. The Baptist's version culminates with *Mark* 6:16, where Herod says, "This is John, whom I beheaded, raised from the dead." In most mystery cult dramas, a life-size effigy was hung from a tree or cross. The actors in Greek-style theater were masked, so the crucified figure was probably fitted with the head covering worn by the man who played the son of god. After the death announcement, the body was placed in a cave representing the underworld. At the climax of the production, the masked actor emerged to demonstrate that the son of god had been resurrected. It requires a bit of imagination to determine how these scenes were portrayed in the Baptist's drama.

Traditionally, "John" is thought to be derived from a four-syllable Hebrew name meaning something akin to "gracious."<sup>3</sup> The mythologist Joseph Campbell disputed this claim, asserting that the name was originally associated with an ancient Sumerian water god transliterated as "Oannes."<sup>4</sup> Recall that each member of a father-mother-son triad was associated with one of the elements of antiquity. John, as was the case with Jesus, would have been identified with the entry level of water.

A sect known as the Mandaeans revered John the Baptist as its primary prophet.<sup>5</sup> According to historians Timothy Freke and Peter Gandy, the Mandaeans used the term Nazarene to describe their initiates.<sup>6</sup> The fourth century Church scholar Epiphanius

wrote a treatise on heresies entitled the *Panarion* where he used the similar term “Nazoreans” to refer to the earliest Christians.<sup>7</sup> The Gospels seem to go out of their way to give Jesus, who was supposedly born in Bethlehem, the title “Jesus of Nazareth.” Perhaps the designation was borrowed from John, and his scenes were included in the *Bible* by early editors who wished to acknowledge the Baptist’s sect and accept his Mandeans into the Christian fold.

There is also a chance that the name of the fourth Gospel refers to John the Baptist. This could explain the differences between it and the first three books of the *New Testament* (refer back to Tables 6.1 and 6.2).

### **Elemental Rites**

The episodes involving John may have been added to the traditional Gospels because baptism was not covered in the dramatic transcripts. They may have been performed “off-stage” with members of the audience. Water rites were observed by many of the mystery cults.<sup>8</sup> They represented a sympathetic death and rebirth, and were apparently performed after the son of god was sacrificed to instigate his resurrection.

Elemental baptisms by air and fire were also used to induct devotees into higher levels of mystery cults.<sup>9</sup> In *Acts of the Apostles*, Paul travels to Ephesus (*Acts* 19:2–6):

“There he found a number of converts, to whom he said, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?” “No,” they replied, “we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” He said, “Then what baptism were you given?” “John’s baptism,” they answered. Paul then said, “The baptism that John gave was a baptism in token of repentance, and he told the people to put their trust in one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus.” On hearing this they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus; and when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came upon them and they spoke in tongues of ecstasy and prophesized.

This is similar to a curious scene in the fourth Gospel that occurs during Jesus’s first appearance to his disciples after he emerged from the tomb (*John* 20:22–23): “Then he breathed on them, saying, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit!’” If baptism by water occurred after the crucifixion to ensure the resurrection of the son, the air and fire rites may have been performed soon after his reappearance to advance qualified devotees to higher levels in the cult.

## **Chapter VII**

### **The Mystery of Edom**

#### **The Epiphany**

As previously mentioned, an early list of Christian books indicated that *Acts of the Apostles* was written by Luke. The passion drama provided a framework for him to follow in the Gospel story. Absent such a foundation, *Acts* is episodic and suffers from a lack of direction. *New Testament* theologian Cyril W. Emmet summarized the end result: <sup>1</sup>

Luke does not here speak with the authority of an eye-witness; he was dependent either on written sources of unknown origin or on such information as he was able to gather from members of the primitive Church. In either case, we must be prepared to allow for the growth of a quasi-legendary element, and we must refrain from claiming any certain knowledge as to the course of events in the first years of Christianity.

The first half of *Acts of the Apostles* deals with the disciples under the leadership of Peter in Jerusalem. According to *Acts* 4:32–37, “The whole body of believers was united in heart and soul. Not a man of them claimed any of his possessions as his own.” This sounds idyllic, but then a member named Ananias sold some property, and with “the full knowledge of his wife, he kept back part of the purchase-money” (*Acts* 5:1). Peter confronted him: “‘You have lied not to men but to God.’” When Ananias heard these words, he dropped dead” (*Acts* 5:6). A little later, his wife was summoned, and was similarly killed (*Acts* 5:7–10). The murders are not isolated incidents. There are other instances where people are blinded (*Acts* 13:11) or killed by divine vengeance (*Acts* 12: 23).

The narrative shifts to the apostle Paul in *Acts* 9. On the way to Damascus, he has his famous epiphany, and thereafter abandons Judaism and adopts Christianity. However, the episode is questionable because the auditory and visual details differ the two times they are described. In *Acts* 9:7, his fellow travelers “‘heard the voice but could see no one.’” In *Acts* 22:9, Paul says, “‘My companions saw the light, but did not hear the voice that spoke.’”<sup>2</sup>

Luke obviously had access to information about Roman officials. His Gospel mentions the census conducted by Governor Quirinius in 6 CE (refer back to Table 2.1). Throughout the rest-

of *Acts*, he interspersed the names of Roman authorities with characters from Josephus (refer back to Table 2.2). The moment Paul runs into difficulty, he advises the local authorities that he is a Roman citizen, which earns him an audience with the governor or proconsul of the region. When he uses this ploy in Jerusalem, he is taken to Caesarea to await transportation to Rome. On the way, he is shipwrecked. He eventually arrives in the Imperial City, where the story abruptly ends.

### **Circumcision Controversy**

The fifteenth chapter of *Acts* describes a controversy concerning circumcision that is also recounted in *The Letter of Paul to the Galatians*. The fact that the two accounts are so similar may be the major reason *Galatians* is considered a genuine Epistle written by Paul (refer back to Table 1.1). The activities in book and letter match if Cephas is treated as one-and-the-same as Peter. Both names mean “rock,” the nickname that is given to Simon in *Matthew* 16:18.<sup>3</sup> (In the Epistles attributed to Paul, he always uses the Aramaic name, Cephas, even though he wrote in Greek.) Furthermore, the pharisees in *Acts* 15:5 must be considered to be one-and-the-same as the “sham-Christians” in *Galatians* 2:4<sup>4</sup> (see Table 7.1).

**Table 7.1 – Delivering the Verdict**

<b>Action</b>	<i>Acts</i>	<i>Galatians</i>
Paul and Barnabas travel to	“Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders” to adjudicate a dispute (15:1–2)	“Jerusalem” for a “private interview with the men of repute” (2:1–2)
Leaders in meeting	James and “Simeon” (15:13)	“James, Cephas and John” (2:9)
Instigators of meeting	“Pharisaic party who had become believers” (15:5)	“Certain sham-Christians.” (2:4)
Subject of meeting	“Those who were not circumcised” (15:1–2)	Those “afraid of... circumcision” (2:12)
Journey to Antioch by delegation	“Prophets” sent “to Antioch... and delivered the letter” (15:30)	“When Cephas came to Antioch,” Paul “opposed him” (2:11)

In *Galatians* 2:11, Paul voices opposition to the verdict without describing its contents. He asks Cephas, “If you, a Jew born and bred, live like a Gentile, and not like a Jew, how can you insist the Gentiles live like Jews?” The actual details of the committee’s decision are set forth by James, beginning with *Acts* 15:13–15:

Simeon has told how it first happened that God took notice of the Gentiles, to choose from among them a people to bear his name; and this

agrees with the words of the prophets, as Scripture has it.

The first hint that the episode is fictitious is the fact that Simon Peter is referred to as “Simeon.” This is the only place in *Acts* where the archaic form of his name is used. Another hint is provided by the poetic lines of *Acts* 15:15–17 which are added to the middle of the verdict (**emphasis added**):

Thereafter I will return and rebuild the fallen house  
of David;  
Even from its ruins, I will rebuild it, and set it up  
again,  
That they may seek the Lord—all the rest of man-  
kind,  
And the **Gentiles**, whom I have claimed for my own.  
Thus says the Lord, whose work it is,  
Made known long ago.

The quotation supposedly translates *Amos* 9:11–12. Luke apparently had access to a poorly rendered Greek translation, because the *Old Testament* verses actually read as follows (**emphasis added**):

On that day I will restore  
David’s fallen house;

I will repair its gaping walls and restore its ruins;  
I will rebuild it as it was long ago,  
that they may possess **what is left of Edom**  
and all the nations that were once named mine.

According to *Jeremiah* 9:26, circumcised peoples included: “Egypt and Judah, Edom and Ammon, Moab, and all who haunt the fringes of the desert.” Edom, a region south of the Dead Sea, was subject to Jerusalem during the reigns of David and Solomon, as were the twelve tribes or “nations” of Israel.<sup>5</sup> They were all circumcised people within the United Monarchy. Only in later times did the rite diminish in importance in the northern regions. This was not the case “long ago” when “David’s fallen house” was still master of these precincts.

Additional evidence that the verdict was fabricated is the simple fact that it ignores the issue it was supposed to address. Even though the preamble indicates that the circumcised Edomites somehow represented all Gentiles, the decision says nothing about the rite itself (*Acts* 15:15–17):

My judgment therefore is that we should impose no irksome restrictions on those of the Gentiles who are turning to God, but to instruct them by letter to abstain from things polluted by contact with idols, from fornication, from anything that has been strangled and from blood.

The points covered by the pronouncement come from an ancient set of laws which religious scholars call the “Holiness Code.”<sup>6</sup> The relevant sections comprise two chapters in *Leviticus* which applied to Jews and “aliens settled in Israel.”<sup>7</sup> It is possible that Luke relied on a Greek translation that identified the quoted categorization as “Gentiles.”

The first aspect of the decision, “to abstain from things polluted by contact with idols,” is another example of syncretism. In *Leviticus* 17:1–7, the prohibition was directed at animal sacrifices that were not conducted by Jerusalem priests and may therefore have honored deities other than Jehovah.<sup>8</sup> The next part of the verdict (“fornication”), compares with *Leviticus* 18, which prohibited sexual intercourse with close relatives, as well as with menstruating women and beasts. The final facets of the decision relate to *Leviticus* 17:10–16, which required that sacrificed animals must be ritually bled, as set forth in *Genesis* 9:4.

Luke obviously had access to the Holiness Code, but not the Jewish dietary laws described in *Leviticus* 11 and *Deuteronomy* 14. The rules regarding the types of animals that could be eaten and the ways they could be prepared would have been addressed in the verdict by James and Peter if they were truly Jews. Luke did not know this, and therefore the entire episode must be considered fictional.

## Mutilation

Until the recent past, the practice of circumcision was limited primarily to the ethnic communities set forth in *Jeremiah* 9:26. It did not become an accepted practice in England and North America until the early part of the twentieth century, where its spread was the result of claims for hygienic benefits than have since been repudiated by medical science.<sup>9</sup>

A close reading of the letters attributed to Paul makes it clear that he had little interest in continuing the rite. In *Romans*. 2:25, he writes: “Circumcision has value, provided you keep the law; but if you break the law, then your circumcision is as if it had never been.” The same sentiment is expressed in *I Corinthians* 7:20 and *Galatians* 5:3. Then the tenor changes abruptly with *Philemon* 3:1: “Beware of those who insist on mutilation—‘circumcision.’” Either this Epistle was not written by Paul, or he had a change of heart, because the quotation expresses the standard Greek viewpoint in opposition to the procedure.<sup>10</sup>

Circumcision is only mentioned three times in the Gospels. The first two are part of the birth scenes in *Luke*, where the rites were performed on the infants John the Baptist and Jesus. Both are considered later inserts.<sup>11</sup> The third reference occurs as part of a discussion about the Sabbath in *John* 7:10–24. Its authenticity is doubtful because it repeats arguments from a rabbinical tract.<sup>12</sup> It is not until the episode in *Galatians* and *Acts* that the

subject of circumcision reappears in the *Bible*. When it does, it is an obvious source of confusion.

Luke assumed that early Christians were former Jews, so they should have vigorously debated whether or not Gentile converts should be required to undergo the rite. However, he wasn't able to create a convincing line of discussion or provide any real solutions to the points of contention. As a result, the *New Testament* failed to address any of the important differences between the two faiths. Christianity's infant rite is baptism, not circumcision. Its practitioners disregard the Jewish dietary laws, recognize Sunday—not Saturday—as Sabbath, observe a completely separate set of rituals and holidays, and worship a tri-partite god.

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## Chapter VIII

### The Mystery of Herod

#### Cerinthus

The last book of the *New Testament* is *The Revelation of John*. It is universally regarded as a work of fiction. It was passed off as another book by the author of *John*, but was actually written by a second-century mystic named Cerinthus.<sup>1</sup> He envisioned a future Armageddon, based on the discredited Mount of Olives “speech” and similar Jewish apocalyptic texts.

The end-of-times was a recurring theme in Jewish literature during the first centuries BCE and CE. In addition to the aforementioned apocalyptic texts, the later books of the *Old Testament* had been translated into Greek and many of them would have been available to Christian scholars. Then there are Josephus’s histories, which portray the City of David as a powder-keg, with periodic uprisings, and aspirants to the title of messiah emerging to lead new insurrections. There were Theudas, Judas

the Galilean, and a rabble-rouser known as the “Egyptian,” to name just a few (refer back to Table 2.2).

In the year 44, the Romans tried to install a statue of Caligula in the temple, and war was averted only at the last minute when the Emperor died.<sup>2</sup> Twenty-five years later, a new governor decided to raid the temple treasury and the reaction was immediate. Within a matter of days, the entire region was in revolt.<sup>3</sup> The legions struck back, and after a two-year siege, captured Jerusalem and killed most of its defenders.

Roman forces returned sixty-five years later after the Zealots took control of Jerusalem during the Bar-Kochba rebellion. Ballistae once more battered down the walls and destroyed most of the buildings. The legions cleared away the rubble and built a new colony on the site, which provoked yet another uprising.<sup>4</sup> This time, the inhabitants of the region were killed, sold into slavery, or forced to flee. The Jewish survivors embarked on a diaspora that lasted nearly two thousand years.

Recall that the Mount of Olives discourse began with a warning about the fate of Jerusalem: “These things which you are gazing at—the time will come when not one stone of them will be left upon another” (*Luke 21:5–6*). Biblical scholars now recognize that when the apocalyptic text was inserted into the Gospels, the destruction of the city was a *fait accompli*. The discourse was actually a “prophecy after the fact.”<sup>5</sup>

## Philip and Antipas

The Holy Land was ruled by seven men named Herod during the 110 years leading up to the first insurrection (see Table 8.1).

**Table 8.1 – The Seven Rulers Named Herod**

<b>Title</b>	<b>Dates of Rule and Death</b> <sup>6</sup>
Herod the Great	Awarded title of king by the Romans. Came to power in 40 BCE and died in 4 BCE.
Archelaus (son)	Inherited half the kingdom (including Judea and Israel) in 4 BCE. Deposed and exiled in 6 CE.
Philip (son)	Inherited a quarter of the kingdom (north and east of Galilee) in 4 BCE. Ruled until 34 CE.
Antipas (son)	Inherited a quarter of the kingdom (Galilee) in 4 BCE. Was deposed and exiled in 39 CE.
Agrippa I (grandson)	Given territory in Syria in 37 CE, and Galilee in 39 CE. Died in 44 CE.
Chalcis (grandson)	Given small territory on the northern coast of Syria in 41 CE. Died in 48 CE.
Agrippa II (g. grandson)	Given territory of Archelaus in 48 CE. Ruled until the destruction of the temple in 70 CE.

Pontius Pilate was procurator from 26 to 36 CE.<sup>7</sup> During his tenure, **not one** member of the Herod line served in Judea. His

sole contemporaries, Philip and Antipas, were based in the region of Galilee. Luke was the only Gospel writer who realized that neither would have had any jurisdiction in Jerusalem, so he has Pilate confer with a Herod who just happened to be in town (*Luke 23:6–8*). However, Pilate was based in Caesarea, on the coast.<sup>8</sup> It's folly to suggest that the Roman governor would have traveled inland to Jerusalem to oversee the trial of a single man. This is additional evidence in favor of the Gospel story as a mystery cult drama. The villains Pilate and Herod could still be cast as prosecuting magistrates in an annual passion play, just as they are every Easter to this day.

There are additional problems with the traditional dates assigned to *New Testament* events. If the early Church was an outgrowth of Judaism and grew as rapidly as described in *Acts of the Apostles*, Christians would have constituted one of the larger factions in Jerusalem and therefore should have been mentioned by Josephus as resident in the city during the siege. The Church historian Eusebius invented an absurd solution to this dilemma when he reported that Christians were alerted by an oracle about the impending attack on Jerusalem and stole away in the middle of the night to Pella, a nearly Greek town.<sup>9</sup>

### **Before God I Am Not Lying**

The Epistles rarely mention Jerusalem. There are only ten references and they appear in just three of the letters. Four of the citations merely refer to the city. The same number indicate that when the letters were written, Jerusalem had already fallen (three deal with collections to benefit its inhabitants and the other one talks about residents living in slavery). The final two references are different. They describe trips Paul made to a thriving community, full of Christians and Jews (see Table 8.2).

**Table 8.2 – Jerusalem in the Epistles**

*(Romans, First Corinthians, and Galatians)*

<b>Reference</b>	<b>Citation</b>
Paul preaches from Jerusalem “to Illyricum.”	<i>Rom.</i> 15:19
Paul: “I am on my way to Jerusalem.”	<i>Rom.</i> 15:25
Paul raises “fund for... the poor... in Jerusalem.”	<i>Rom.</i> 15:26
Paul refers again to “errand to Jerusalem.”	<i>Rom.</i> 15:32
Paul plans to “carry... a gift to Jerusalem.”	<i>I Cor.</i> 16:3
Paul travels “to Arabia” instead of Jerusalem	<i>Gal.</i> 1:17
<b>Paul travels “to get to know Cephas.”</b>	<i>Gal.</i> 1:18
<b>Paul “went again to Jerusalem.”</b>	<i>Gal.</i> 2:1
“Jerusalem... she and her children are in slavery”	<i>Gal.</i> 4:26
The “heavenly Jerusalem... is our mother.”	<i>Gal.</i> 4:27

Although the two visits in *Galatians* supposedly occurred fourteen years apart, they involved the same three primary characters: Paul, Cephas, and James. The second trip, which also included Barnabas, was the one that was shared with *Acts* and resulted in the verdict analyzed in Chapter VII – “The Mystery of Edom.” As previously indicated, the fact that the letter describes the same incident as the book may be the primary reason *Galatians* is considered to be written by Paul. However, since the verdict is fictional, the episode in the Epistle must have been fabricated as well. There is an unsettling protestation (*Galatians* 1:20): “What I write is plain truth; before God I am not lying.” And a troubling assertion (*Galatians* 6:1): “You see these big letters? I am now writing to you in my own hand.”

If the Jerusalem episodes in *Galatians* and *Acts* are fictitious, as the evidence overwhelmingly suggests, the ramifications cannot be overstated. They provide the **only** reports of a first century Christian community in the City of David. There is absolutely no other creditable account in Christian, Jewish, Roman, Greek, or Aramaic writings.

In *Acts*, Luke attempted to reconstruct what it must have been like in the Holy Land after the resurrection. He combined the Jerusalem portrayed in the Gospel passion drama with the tempestuous setting in the histories of Josephus to create his unique vision of a *New Testament* city. From this mixture came

the apocalyptic overtones that haunted the perceptions of the early Church leaders. They had to find a way to combine the suicidal tendencies of the Zealots with the missionary fervor of early Christians. The Mount of Olives speech was a step in the right direction. Then along came *The Revelation of John*, with what seemed to be a perfect blend of the two antithetical viewpoints. That was why it was accepted as doctrine and added to the canon.

### **Stephen**

One of Luke's sources provided a more accurate depiction of what would have happened if Christians had tried to co-exist with the Zealots in Jerusalem. Stephen "spoke Greek" rather than "the language of the Jews" (*Acts* 6:1). He is described as a leader of the Hellenistic converts to Christianity. Unfortunately, he comes to the attention of the wrong men (*Acts* 6:9–13):

But some members of... the Synagogue of Freedmen, comprising Cyrenians and Alexandrians and people from Cilicia and Asia, came forward.... They stirred up the people and the elders and doctors of the law, set upon him and seized him.

The “Synagogue of Freedmen” consisted of foreign Jews. Perhaps they had been dispossessed by Roman agricultural practices or had other grievances against the regime. It was from such groups that the Zealots recruited some of their most ardent followers. Stephen is brought before a priestly tribunal, but before a verdict can be rendered, the Jerusalem crowd “made one rush at him and, flinging him from the city, set about stoning him.” (*Acts 7:58*).

This episode describes the incredible animosity the radicalized Jews felt for anyone of a foreign faith. During the entire time period covered by the *New Testament* histories, Jerusalem was either a hotbed of Jewish resistance, with no possible allowance for any other beliefs, or a pile of rubble. By the beginning of the first century, it was the epicenter of Messianic fervor, with various factions vying for control.

But none of these groups were Christian. The Church’s precursor sect was still putting on its annual passion rite elsewhere. Or perhaps, it was a group gathered around a learned one who read excerpts from the dramatic transcript of a son of god who preached in parables and promised eternal life to anyone who accepted him as their savior and agreed to be baptized.

## Chapter IX

### Mystery Meals

#### Passover

In the first three Gospels, the Last Supper was described as the Passover dinner. However, in each instance, Jesus performed a communion sacrament. The Last Supper ceremony in the fourth Gospel was different, but there is an earlier reference to a meal with bread and wine (*John* 6:22–58). None of the described rituals are anything like Passover.

Passover was purportedly an Exodus rite enacted to avoid the effects of the final plague, the death of the firstborn. However, historians have long recognized that the Hebrews never lived in Egypt during the three-hundred-year period when the pharaohs controlled the Holy Land—the **only** time the Exodus could have occurred. It was the Egyptians who had to leave. In 1191 BCE, the armies of Ramesses III were driven back to the Nile by the “Sea Peoples,” a wave of migrants from the north.<sup>1</sup>

These heavily armed warriors marched south along the shoreline, transporting their families and possessions in boats. The incursion occurred around the time the Hittite empire in Anatolia (present-day Turkey) collapsed, so their migration may have had something to do with that event. They were a coalition of tribes, including the Philistines. Ramesses made the best of the situation by signing a treaty that allowed the invaders to “garrison” the coastal cities they had conquered.<sup>2</sup> As a result, Egypt no longer had any influence over the Holy Land, and the Hebrews were cut off from their former rulers along the Nile.

Since there was no Egyptian saga, there was no Exodus, which means that Passover must have had an entirely different origin. The Hebrew term *pesah* refers to God or his destroying angel “jumping over” every house marked with blood on the doorpost (*Exodus* 12).<sup>3</sup> It was an ancient practice of nomadic people to apply the blood of a sacrificed animal to tentpoles to drive away evil spirits and ensure fertility for the rest of the flock.<sup>4</sup> It was also applied around the entrances of tents to protect inhabitants in time of plague.<sup>5</sup> Passover melded these blood rites with another holdover from the Judean pastoral heritage: the ritualistic preparations involved in moving to new seasonal grazing lands.<sup>6</sup> The pre-departure dinner required roasted meat (originally over an open fire) along with wild or recently gathered bitter herbs for garnish. In addition, the diners were supposed to be dressed for travel.<sup>7</sup>

According to *II Kings* 23:22–23, “no Passover had been kept either when the judges were ruling Israel or during the times of the kings of Israel and Judah.” In other words, not until the reign of King Josiah in 621 BCE.<sup>8</sup> This was thirty-five years before Babylonia overran the Holy Land.<sup>9</sup> (It was at this time that the forces of Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem in a fashion that foreshadowed the previously described demolition by Rome 700 years later.)

*II Kings* 23:21 indicates that King Josiah “ordered all the people to keep the Passover to the Lord their God, as this book of the covenant prescribed.” However, scholars have determined that the “book of the covenant” was actually *Deuteronomy*, which was not written until fifty to a hundred years later, so the episode is anachronistic. (This will be covered in more detail in Chapter XIII – “Royal Mysteries”).

### **The Babylonian Bible**

It had once been assumed that the first books of the *Bible* were written toward the end of the second millennium BCE. Scholars now recognize that this date was 500 years too early. The re-evaluation was prompted by a better understanding of the Babylonian captivity. It was during this time period that the first five Books of the *Bible* (*Genesis*, *Exodus*, *Leviticus*, *Numbers*, and *Deuteronomy*) came into being.

The surviving Judeans were slaves captured in warfare, and were therefore the property of the king of Babylon. They were housed in barracks that identified their place of origin, and most were employed on state farms and construction projects, but some served in the temples.<sup>10</sup> Here they would have had access to the ancient fables of Mesopotamia.

The majority of the priests were undoubtedly literate, but few records would have survived the destruction of Jerusalem or the long trek to Babylon. Therefore, most of the source material for the *Bible* came from Hebrew oral traditions, supplemented by whatever was available in the Babylonian temple archives. Old Testament scholar Alan H. McNeile summarized the situation as follows:<sup>11</sup>

Among the exiles were included the... priests, who had become part of the highest aristocracy of Judah by generations of wealth and privilege. Some of them now busied themselves with collecting and codifying, and perhaps shaping for future use, the ritual laws which... had been handed down orally and not committed to writing.... At the same time many minds were imbibing ideas from Babylonian astrology and mythology, which afterwards showed traces widely in Jewish literature.

Some form of Passover may have been observed before the captivity. Perhaps the blood rites and the departure meal had been combined by Judean shepherd families at an earlier date. Some of them may have sought refuge in Jerusalem when the area was invaded, and were among the survivors force-marched to Babylon to live out the rest of their lives in captivity. The ancient observances, which harkened back to their rural homeland, would have been a comfort in the foreign land where they were forced to live. Over time, the rite was apparently picked up by the other exiles and new meanings given to it. The herbs were bitter because of the loss of Judea, and the traveling clothes represented the desire to return.

### **Pilgrim-feasts**

According to *Ezekiel 45*, Passover became a formal annual observance during the captivity, when it was scheduled to precede the first of the ancient Hebrew festivals known as Pilgrim-feasts.<sup>12</sup> The three events coincided with important milestones in the annual plantings and harvest. The rites are the earliest festivals described in the *Bible*. It is possible that they also reoccur in abbreviated form in the Gospels. If this is the case, it would demonstrate the true antiquity of the passion story. Each of the three Gospel meals seems to correspond with one of the Pilgrim-

feasts, as they were observed **before** Passover was added in the sixth century BCE (see Table 9.1).

**Table 9.1 – The Hebrew Pilgrim-Feasts**

Feast	Activities	Gospel Meal
Unleavened Bread (Spring Equinox)	First sheaf (barley) offering ( <i>Leviticus</i> 23:10–11) Sacrifice firstborn cattle/sheep ( <i>Exodus</i> 34:19) Redemption of firstborn son ( <i>Exodus</i> 34:20) Passover ( <i>Exodus</i> 12) not added until sixth century BCE ( <i>II Kings</i> 23 and <i>Ezekiel</i> 45)	First “loaves and fishes” ( <i>Matthew</i> 14:13–21; <i>Mark</i> 6:30–44; <i>Luke</i> 9:10–17; and <i>John</i> 6:1–15)
Weeks (Summer)	First fruits “grain-offering” of leavened bread ( <i>Exodus</i> 23:16 and <i>Leviticus</i> 23:15–18)	Second “loaves and fishes” ( <i>Matthew</i> 15:32–39 and <i>Mark</i> 8:1–10)
Ingathering (Autumn)	“Produce from the threshing floor and wine press” ( <i>Exodus</i> 23:17 and <i>Deuteronomy</i> 16:13)	Last Supper or Communion

According to *John* 6:9, the loaves in the first Gospel meal were barley. This indicates that the bread was probably unleavened, which is the same as the first Pilgrim-feast. The type of

bread in the second Gospel meal is not identified. Therefore, it was probably leavened, which correlates with the second Pilgrim-feast. The third Gospel meal consisted of the communion staples of bread and wine—the final Pilgrim-feast’s “produce from the threshing floor and the wine press.”

The first meal is recounted in identical detail in all four Gospels. It began with five loaves and two fishes, and there were twelve baskets leftover after feeding 5,000 people. The descriptions of the second feeding are virtually the same. They began with “a few” fishes and seven loaves, and ended with seven baskets after satisfying 4,000 people. Arguments abound concerning the exact meaning of the numbers. They will never be resolved because they deal with mysteries.

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## Chapter X

### Mysteries of the Patriarchs

#### Genesis Mysteries

At the same time that forgeries and insertions were being identified through textual analysis of the Gospel stories and Epistles, other scholars were undertaking a similar approach with the *Old Testament*. Their efforts bore immediate results. They determined that many of the earliest biblical tales were strikingly similar to Babylonian-Sumerian myths inscribed on cuneiform tablets, the standard record-keeping device in the ancient cities of Mesopotamia. One was the *Enuma Elish*, a creation fable.<sup>1</sup> Then there was the story of Adapa—the original Adam—and a tree of knowledge, complete with serpent.<sup>2</sup> The *Epic of Gilgamesh* told of the hero Utnapishtim who built an immense boat to survive a great flood, a story that was clearly the source for Noah's ark.<sup>3</sup> The lists of the patriarchs before and after the flood harken to Sumerian kings pre- and post-inundation. In both cases, many had impossibly long lifespans.<sup>4</sup>

Also prominently featured in the first six books of the *Bible* were characters bearing the same names as the Gospel father-mother-son triad. Joseph comes down to us in the same form in both the *Old* and *New Testament*. This is not the case with the mother and son. As previously mentioned, the Hebrew texts were first translated into Latin, so the vowels and suffixes were transcribed differently when they were later rendered into English. That is why they are “Miriam” and “Joshua” in the *Old Testament*. The Greek variants of the very same names in the *New Testament* passed into Latin in a shorter form, to become “Mary” and “Jesus.”

## **Joseph**

The patriarch Joseph is best-known for his “coat-of-many-colors” (*Genesis* 37:3 of the King James *Bible*). He was the protagonist in the last fourteen chapters of *Genesis* (37–50). He was able to interpret dreams and used this gift to foretell his eventual rise to power. His brothers feared that this meant he would be awarded his father’s birthright, even though he was the second-youngest son. To avert such a potentiality, they sold him into slavery. He was passed from owner to owner until he ended up in Egypt. *Old Testament* archaeologist Gary Greenberg identified the source for this part of the story as an Egyptian tale about

a legendary ruler. Herodotus translated the story into Greek and identified the sovereign as Psammetichus.<sup>5</sup>

Joseph's first Egyptian master's wife attempted to seduce him. He declined the offer, but she became fearful that he would tell her husband, so she claimed that Joseph tried to rape her. This story is virtually identical to the first part of an Egyptian epic entitled "The Tale of the Two Brothers."<sup>6</sup>

When the pharaoh was plagued by nightmares, Joseph was called in for a consultation. He determined that the "seven cows" (*Genesis* 41:2) and "seven ears of grain" (*Genesis* 41:6) in the sovereign's dreams foretold seven years of plenty followed by seven years of privation. Joseph recommended that granaries be built, and the threat of famine was avoided. The pharaoh was so grateful that he made Joseph his second-in-command. The storage of grain was an ancient practice and there are references to it on wall carvings in early Egyptian tombs.<sup>7</sup> The element of the seven-year periods may have come from an Egyptian legend involving Imhotep, the architect of the first pyramid.<sup>8</sup>

In mystery cult passion dramas, a magistrate serving the god of the underworld condemned the son of god to death. Joseph seems to fulfill this role in his guise as the Egyptian viceroy. When his brothers arrive to purchase wheat, they do not recognize him. He refuses to accept their payments and demands that Benjamin be brought before him. The dinner Joseph provides recalls the Hebrew "Pilgrim-feast of Unleavened Bread," held at

the spring equinox, the same time that mystery cults observed their rites relating to the death and rebirth of their son of god.

Part of the Pilgrim-feast is the ancient tradition of “buying-back” or “redeeming” a firstborn son (refer back to Table 9.1). The origin of the custom is shrouded in antiquity. It eventually devolved into the practice of paying a monetary redemption fee. When Joseph refuses the grain remittances, it is as if he is rejecting the payment of the redemption fee and thereby demanding the sacrifice of a firstborn son. Even though Benjamin is supposedly the youngest, he is the one who is threatened.

Additional hints concerning an original underlying story can be found in the names of the principles. Joseph is a contraction in which the initial “J” signifies Jehovah and the ending means “addition.”<sup>9</sup> The suffix would convert “God” into a word that could be uttered without breaking the prohibition against speaking the name of deity. Joseph’s Egyptian name is “Zaphenath-paneah” (*Genesis* 41:45). “Nath” suggests a connection with Neith, a virginal Egyptian goddess whose name is also transliterated as Nut, the mother of Osiris, the son of god in the oldest mystery cult.<sup>10</sup> Both are also associated with Anat.<sup>11</sup> Recall that this Semitic goddess has already been identified with ancient Semitic father-mother-son triads.

Benjamin’s name consists of two parts. “Ben” means “son.” “Jamin” is another contraction in which the “J” stands for “Jehovah.” The last part means “right hand.”<sup>12</sup> Therefore, his name

translates as “Son of God’s Right Hand.” The right hand refers to the traditional seat next to the ruler, so the name is a title: “Son of God.”

Then there is Rachel, who was supposedly the mother of the two men. Her name is commonly translated as “ewe.”<sup>13</sup> But it is probably a title as well. There is the added element of the suffix “el,” which represents the Semitic supreme deity. The description of her impregnation harkens to the Immaculate Conception (*Genesis* 30:22): “Then God thought of Rachel; he heard her prayer and gave her a child.” According to *Genesis* 35:19–20, Rachel died giving birth to Benjamin “and was buried by the side of the road to... Bethlehem.” This was the legendary birthplace for Jesus and Adonis—both sons of gods. It may explain why Benjamin was singled out at the banquet and given five times as much food as anyone else (*Genesis* 43:34). Like a “fatted calf” sacrifice (*1 Samuel* 28:24 and *Amos* 6:4).

After the threat to Benjamin’s life, the narrative reverts back to the tale of Psammetichus. The protagonist, having risen to a position of power in Egypt, reconciles with those who sent him into slavery. The death and resurrection of the son of god were the most secret aspects of the mysteries, so the Jewish editors of *Genesis* would not have realized that it should have been the climax of the story. It still found its way into the tale with the rejection of the redemption fee, and in one other way. Benjamin’s father initially refused to allow him to go to Egypt, until one of

the other brothers replied: ““You may kill both my sons if I do not bring him back to you”” (*Genesis* 42:37). This evokes dark memories of ritual sacrifice—of the patriarch Abraham with his knife at the throat of his son Isaac on a blood-stained altar (*Genesis* 22:10–12). According to *Old Testament* scholar Richard Friedman, textual analysis indicates that in the original rendition of the biblical legend, no ram was offered by God to replace Isaac, so he was actually sacrificed by Abraham.<sup>14</sup>

This may be another version of the ancient mystery cult drama with the names of the two patriarchs implying the parts they played. Abraham (originally “Avram”) is the Hebrew word for “father.”<sup>15</sup> As was the case with Joseph, he also serves a secondary role as potential executioner, which may refer to an alternative rendition of the archetypal mystery cult story.

There are three separate versions of the birth of his son, each of which specifies that Isaac’s name has something to do with “laughter.”<sup>16</sup> *Genesis* 17:17 indicates that when God tells him that he will have a son, “Abraham threw himself down on his face; he laughed.” Here the news is joyful. According to *Genesis* 18:14–15, it is Abraham’s wife Sarah who laughs, which displeases God. Then *Genesis* 21:1–7 merely reports the birth with a footnote: “*That is* He laughed.” Because the three verses contradict each other, none can be relied upon. A hint to the true meaning of Isaac’s name can be found at *Genesis* 31:42, which

refers to “the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac.” Here are aspects of deity expressed as a triad.

There is another thrice-told-tale involving Abraham and Isaac in *Genesis* that points to the existence of an additional triad. The first version involves Abraham and his wife Sarah, who are confronted by pharaoh (*Genesis* 12:11–20). There is an almost identical account involving the same spouses with King Abimelech (*Genesis* 20:1–18). The third version names the same king, only this time with Isaac and Rebekah (*Genesis* 26:1–22). In each case, the spouses attempt to hide their marriage from the magistrate. In the context of the mysteries, they are trying to keep the conception of their legendary son a secret from the god of the underworld or his exemplar. Notice that in the first instance, the antagonist was pharaoh, who is also the villain in the *Exodus* saga.

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## Chapter XI

### The Exodus Mystery

#### Miriam/Mary

The names of the heroes in the most famous *Old Testament* story point to their roles in a drama. Mary or Miriam comes from an Egyptian word which means love. It is often transliterated as “meri” or “mere.” Miriam may originally have been “Mere-Amon” or “Beloved of Amon.”<sup>1</sup> (Amon was the supreme deity in one of the oldest Egyptian pantheons.) So instead of a proper name, Mary is a title. The same is true for the other two members of the *Exodus* triad. Moses is the Egyptian word for “son.”<sup>2</sup> Aaron’s name is traditionally thought to mean something akin to teaching or singing.<sup>3</sup> This would point to a role played in some sort of theatrical production. In addition, there are similarities between Aaron and Avram, the original form of Abraham (“father”).

The three are portrayed as siblings. According to *Exodus* 6:20, their father’s name was “Amran,” which is also similar to

Avram. The three principles in the *Exodus* saga probably did not have the same family relationship that was assigned to them by the Jewish editors of the first books of the *Bible*. If they were originally characters in a passion drama, they would have been another father-mother-son triad. This possibility looms larger after the material attributed to outside sources is removed.

Scholars have identified four stories that were used to flesh out the narrative. First was the Babylonian legend of Sargon the Great, who conquered the Sumerians and installed himself as emperor around 2,300 BCE.<sup>4</sup> Sargon's birth was also threatened, so he was hidden in a watertight basket which was found by royalty on a river. The other three sources were Egyptian folk tales. The element of ten separate confrontations with a magistrate comes from "The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant."<sup>5</sup> The apparent agreement and back-sliding by the pharaoh was taken from "The Contendings of Horus and Set."<sup>6</sup> Here, the gods judge a series of disputes in which Horus bests Set. In each case, Set—like the pharaoh—refuses to accept the verdict. Finally, there is the "Admonitions of an Egyptian Sage," which provides a list of plagues with descriptions remarkably similar to the biblical afflictions.<sup>7</sup>

The final plague is an exception, as it was not included in the "Admonitions." In a nod to mystery cult rites, it deals with the death of the "firstborn" (*Exodus* 11:5). It is preceded by another rendition of the Pilgrim-feast of Unleavened Bread. In this case,

it is overlaid with the rituals of Passover. When Cyrus and his Persians conquered Babylon, he ordered all of the foreign peoples to return to their native lands and offered them assistance re-establishing their religious traditions.<sup>8</sup> In order to entice the Jewish people to abandon their residences in Babylon and resettle in the ruins of Jerusalem, the priests wrote the story of an earlier captivity and framed the return to the Holy Land as a religious obligation. This is the origin of the *Exodus* saga.

### **The Hailstone Plague**

Verification of the fact that the Hebrews never lived in Egypt is provided in the *Bible* by examining the hailstone plague. In *Exodus* 9:31, the damage wrought by the storm is described as follows: “the flax and barley were destroyed because the barley was in the ear and the flax in bud.” Egyptian plantings were made in the autumn, so this is the only season when these seedlings could have been destroyed. However, a few days after the hailstorm, in *Exodus* 13, the Hebrews observed the Pilgrim-feast of Unleavened Bread and Passover ordinance. These are spring rites.

During the Babylonian captivity, the Jews adopted their host city’s annual cycle which began in the spring and used it as their Sacred Calendar. However, they also retained an older timetable which started in the fall of the year and is the basis for their Civil

Calendar.<sup>9</sup> True descendants of delta dwellers would have known that the original cycle began in the autumn because that was when the summer inundations of the Nile receded from the farmlands so the crops could be planted.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, spring in Egypt was harvest time. These facts would have been retained in the institutional memory of the Jewish priesthood, if for no other reason than to explain the anomaly of their dual calendars. The only possible explanation is that the ancient Hebrews adopted the Egyptian calendar without realizing its true import. This means they never lived near the Nile. They never left the Holy Land. There were no hailstorms before the harvest—or plagues before the Pilgrim-feast.

There is an even easier way to show that the Egyptian saga was fictional. It is the simple fact that the pharaoh was never identified. The ruler who saved the Jews from starvation is lost to time, and the identity of the tyrant who enslaved their ancestors and chased them to the sea slipped their minds. The reason the pharaoh was not named is that he was originally a stock character in a passion drama. He was the exemplar of the god of the underworld, who opposed the birth of the legendary son to the male and female aspects of deity.

Herod, the magistrate in the Gospel version of the mystery drama has a back-story that is similar to that of the Exodus pharaoh. Both ordered the massacre of all newborn infants in an attempt to kill the son of god as a baby (Herod in *Matthew 2:16*

and pharaoh in *Exodus* 1:16). This episode may have been part of the archetypal passion drama: the god of the underworld unleashing dark powers against all newborns to destroy the son of god at his birth.

### **Joshua/Jesus**

Since the Exodus never happened, the entire framework of Joshua's *Old Testament* story collapses. There could never have been a reconquest of the Holy Land. If this were not enough, archaeologists have determined that the city of Jericho didn't exist during the period in question. It was abandoned several centuries earlier and its walls were not rebuilt until hundreds of years later.<sup>11</sup> The story of spies infiltrating the city is repeated at *Judges* 1:22–25, and the victory over King Hazor is duplicated at *Judges* 4:1–24. According to the archaeological record, Gibeon and most of the other cities supposedly subjugated by the Hebrews were unoccupied.<sup>12</sup> These inconsistencies have led biblical scholars such as *Old Testament* authority Samuel M. A. Holmes to conclude that the book of *Joshua* was “a medley of contradictory narratives, most of which are unhistorical.”<sup>13</sup>

Joshua's (or Jesus's) real identity can be found in his name. Like Joseph and Mary, it is a title—a Jehovah contraction which means “God's redeemer.”<sup>14</sup> This is the role of the son in the

mystery cult rites. In most ancient pantheons, the god of the underworld was the supreme deity's brother. The birth of the son relegated him to third in the line of succession. His response was to engineer the death of the son, and he dispatched his minions to manufacture charges and arrest him. Rather surprisingly, the son voluntarily allowed himself to be condemned and executed, with the proviso that the lord of darkness relinquish all claims on the souls of his followers. At the climax of the drama, to prove that he had gained power over death, the son of god emerged triumphant from the cave where he was interred.

According to *Joshua* 5:2, "The Lord said to Joshua, 'Make knives of flint, seat yourself, and make Israel a circumcised people again.'" In most mystery cults the son was crucified, but in the oldest passion drama, the Egyptian son of god Osiris was dismembered. The only part of his body that was never recovered was his phallus.<sup>15</sup> The Greek mystic Pythagoras visited Egypt in the seventh century BCE, and was inducted into the mysteries of Osiris.<sup>16</sup> It was at this time that he underwent the rite of circumcision.<sup>17</sup> There are pictures of the ritual on the walls of Egyptian tombs where it was performed with a stone knife.<sup>18</sup>

Male circumcision was originally practiced by the Hebrews at the age of 13 (*Genesis* 17:25). What may have started as a mystery cult initiation rite eventually became mandatory. Dur-

ing the Babylonian captivity, new dictates were enforced, as described in *Genesis* 17:12: “Every man among you shall be circumcised on the eighth day.” In addition, a larger portion of the foreskin was removed.<sup>19</sup>

In order to recover the surviving elements of the mystery cult myths, it was necessary to rearrange the *Old Testament* stories. Purists may object to such an approach. However, this is exactly what the Jewish scribes did to create the earliest books of the *Bible* in the first place. The biblical editors never dreamed that later archeologists would uncover the Mesopotamian tablets, the Egyptian inscriptions, and the other sources that were added to the Jewish oral traditions. Therefore, they felt free to reorganize the material to fit their own vision of the nature of deity.

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## **Chapter XII**

### **The Mystery of Zadok**

#### **The Sun Disk**

Even though there was no Exodus, Judaism still had Egyptian roots dating back to the 300-year period when the pharaohs ruled the Holy Land. Recall that the story of Joseph and the book of *Exodus* were built upon a framework of Egyptian folk tales. Furthermore, the biblical archeologist Gary Greenburg has identified a list of similarities between the myths of Osiris and the tales of the patriarchs.<sup>1</sup> Even Judeans who were not inducted into the mystery cult of the Egyptian son of god would still have heard his legends.

Egypt provided an even more important theological source for the Jewish awakening. The dynasty founded by Kamose (Kamoses or “son of Ka”), included a series of rulers named Thutmose (Thoth-moses), who were the ones that established Egyptian sovereignty over the Holy Land.<sup>2</sup> They were followed by several pharaohs named Amenosis (Amon-moses). The name is

also transliterated as “Amenophis,” or more often as “Amenhotep.” The last of the line was Amenhotep IV, who ascended to the throne in 1377 BCE. Shortly after he died in 1360 BCE, his name and the records of his reign were erased from every monument along the Nile.<sup>3</sup>

He might have been lost to history were it not for the fact that several buildings near the ruins of his temple complex were constructed using its remnants as filler. Archaeologists were intrigued by the fact that the rubble consisted of hundreds of large, uniformly-shaped bricks inscribed on only one side. They were photographed to scale and the images were painstakingly reassembled to re-create the original reliefs.<sup>4</sup> The pictures and the underlying inscriptions helped reconstruct the story of the “heretic king.”

A half a dozen years into his reign, Amenhotep IV converted to a cult that worshipped the sun disk Aten. He changed his name to Akhenaten and decreed that all of the other gods of Egypt should be subordinated to his favorite deity.<sup>5</sup> His beliefs were not monotheistic in the strictest sense because other gods were tolerated. Such a “henotheistic” system was also practiced by the early Judeans. This is verified by the First Commandment (*Exod. 20:3*): “You shall have no other gods to set against me.” The King James translation is probably more familiar: “Thou shalt have no other gods before me.”

Akhenaten’s religion was based on the worship of Amon, the

supreme deity of the Egyptian pantheon, who was associated with the sun. In the years before Akhenaten became the pharaoh, Amon was amalgamated with another sun god, resulting in Amon-Re. Akhenaten's innovation wasn't to replace this new, all-powerful deity. He merely decreed that no name could be used to refer to it or to address it. Aten simply means "disk."<sup>6</sup> Akhenaten also insisted that anyone with "Amon" in his or her name had to change it to something else. This is similar to the Judean insistence that God's name should never be spoken and the employment of Jehovah contractions as substitutes.

Jerusalem was under Egyptian control when Akhenaten was pharaoh, so his beliefs would have been passed along to the religious authorities in the city. A connection that is generally cited is the similarity of Psalm 104 and one of the songs to the sun god inscribed on a tomb wall during Akhenaten's reign.<sup>7</sup> There is another even more important link between the henotheistic Egyptian faith and Judaism. It was forbidden to make anthropomorphic representations of Aten or any other god.<sup>8</sup> This may have been the impetus behind the Jewish prohibition against idols and other graven images.

### **The Priest Kings**

There were Jerusalem rulers called "Zedek" in the earliest biblical references. According to *Genesis* 14:18: "Melchizedek

king of Salem brought food and wine. He was priest of God Most High.” The quotation brings three important facts to light. First, the city was some sort of theocracy at a very early date. Second, the religion was henotheistic; a god “most high” was given precedence over the rest of the pantheon, but the other deities were still accepted. And third, the city’s name included only the final syllables “Salem.” The Jehovah prefix “Jeru” had not been added yet.

In *Joshua* 10:1, the ruler is “Adoni-zedek king of Jerusalem.” The title Adon or Lord has been added to his name, and his city has been updated to a Jehovah contraction. *Joshua* 15:63 and *II Samuel* 5:6 indicate that Jerusalem was a stronghold of a tribe known as the Jebusites. While the meaning of the name is uncertain, it is clearly another Jehovah contraction.

According to *I Chronicles* 12:27, “Zadok, a valiant fighter” joined David’s forces at Hebron. The shift in spelling is curious, because the ancient Phoenician alphabet and its successor Semitic variants did not have distinct vowels.<sup>9</sup> So the name should not be transcribed “Zedek” in one place, and “Zadok” in another.

David appointed Zadok as one of the two major priests in Jerusalem (*II Samuel* 15:17). According to *I Samuel* 23:6, the other priest, Abiathar, was the hereditary high priest of the northern Hebrew tribes of Israel, so Zadok must have been in charge of the southern tribes of Judea. In *II Samuel* 19:9–43 and 20:23–26, and *I Chronicles* 24:6, Abiathar and Zadok were identified

in the royal entourage. After David died, the two priests took opposing sides in the dynastic struggle that followed. “Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet” anointed Solomon “king over Israel” (*I Kings* 1:34). Then “Solomon dismissed Abiathar from his office as priest of the Lord” (*I Kings* 2:27).

Upon Solomon’s death, the regions once more supported opposing candidates for the throne. This time, they split into separate kingdoms. Later, it would be written in *Ezekiel* 44: 15–16: “the Levitical priests of the family of Zadok remained in charge of my sanctuary when the Israelites went astray from me.”

The names for the two Hebrew kingdoms are a source of confusion. **Judea** is a variant of Judah, the largest of the five southern tribes. (Before the split, the other four had effectively ceased to exist as separate political entities.) **Israel** came to refer to the northern tribes, but was originally an alternative name for Jacob (*Genesis* 32:25–33). All of the tribes were named after the sons or grandsons of this patriarch.

Benjamin was one of the sons. His tribe was assigned the region around Jerusalem, which according to *Judges* 1:21, continued to be held by the aforementioned Jebusites. Another son was Joseph. None of the tribes bore his name, but two were named after Ephraim and Manasseh, who were supposedly **his** sons (*Genesis* 48:5). This means that Benjamin and Joseph were superfluous in the context of the tribal designations, which would be expected if they were originally part of a mystery cult triad (see Table 12.1).

**Table 12.1 – The Tribes of Israel and Judea**

(*Genesis* 35:23–26; 46:8–25; 48:5; 49:1–28;  
and *Deuteronomy* 27:11–13; 33:6–29)

<b>Tribe</b>	<b>Kingdom</b>	<b>Location</b>
Asher	Israel	Northwest along coast
Benjamin	Judea	Around Jerusalem (Jebusites)
Dan	Israel	Far northeast
Ephraim	Israel	North of Jerusalem
Gad	Israel	East of Jordan River
Issachar	Israel	South of Sea of Galilee
Judah	Judea	South of Jerusalem
Levi	Judea	Priestly responsibilities
Manasseh	Israel	North central
Naphtali	Israel	Northwest of Galilee
Reuben	Judea	Southeast of Dead Sea
Simeon	Judea	Far south
Zebulun	Israel	Northwest

With Joseph's two sons and Benjamin listed as tribes, the total number is thirteen, not twelve. According to *I Chronicles* 5:12, because he slept with one of his stepmothers, Reuben's entire tribe was eliminated to return the total to twelve.

### **The Zealots**

The last Judean king was Zedekiah. Apparently, he shared the name of the high priest Zadok, but may not have been of his ancestry. After a two-year siege, Jerusalem fell to Nebuchadnezzar. "Zedekiah's sons were slain before his eyes; then his eyes were put out, and he was brought to Babylon in fetters of bronze" (*II Kings* 25:7).

In *I Chronicles* 24:3, Zadok was given a biblical genealogy that went all the way back to Aaron. According to *Ezra* 7:1–4, the line had grown to a total of seventeen men, ending with the Prophet Ezra himself. By the time Ezra emerged as their leader, the Judeans had evolved into a monotheistic theocracy.

Three centuries later, in 167 BCE., Jerusalem and its environs were swept up in a revolt against the Seleucids, the Macedonian regime that had held sway in the Holy Land since the death of Alexander the Great. At issue were attempts to force the monotheists to adopt Greek-style religious practices. The fighting was led by the Maccabee family and was so successful that it ultimately secured a degree of independence for the City

of David.<sup>10</sup> Afterwards, one of the Maccabees became high priest, and their line, which became known as the Hasmoneans, took over the hereditary position from the Zadoks.<sup>11</sup> In 128 BCE, their armies attacked and subjugated the northern Hebrew tribal areas of Israel, and the Holy Land was once again controlled by Jerusalem.<sup>12</sup>

The Hasmoneans managed to hold onto power even after the Romans seized control of the region. The last of their line were seven rulers named Herod (refer back to Table 8.1). Their support for Rome backfired after the Emperor and his governors threatened the sanctity of the temple. When the Zealots took over Jerusalem, their first act was to install a member of the family of Zadok as high priest.<sup>13</sup> The revolt resulted in the destruction of the Herod regime, and ultimately the city of Jerusalem, the priesthood, and most of the population of Judea.

About a quarter of the documents in the Dead Sea scrolls are excerpts from *Old Testament* books.<sup>14</sup> The remaining scrolls are either apocalyptic texts or describe the organization of the first-century commune that hid the texts in the caves. The group was a spin-off from the Zealots and Zadok was the title given to its leader.<sup>15</sup> It was fiercely monotheistic and would have considered Christianity, with its tri-partite God, just another form of polytheism.

## Chapter XIII

### Royal Mysteries

#### King Saul

When the Judean priests assembled the *Bible* in Babylon, the oral traditions they transcribed often used the plural form “Elohim” to describe God. In addition, stories containing references to mystery cult rites were included, even though they were not fully understood or were heavily redacted. The stories of Joseph and Miriam come to mind. The tenth chapter of *The First Book of Samuel* may be another example. Immediately after Saul is anointed, the prophet Samuel foretells that the new king will participate in a series of events, culminating with “the spirit of the Lord” taking “possession” of him.

The first incident is described in *I Samuel* 10:2: “You will meet two men by the tomb of Rachel.” As indicated earlier, Rachel died giving birth to Benjamin (*Genesis* 35:19–20), “and was buried by the side of the road to... Bethlehem.” This was also

the legendary birthplace of the sons of god Jesus and Adonis. Adonis's mother, Myrrh, also died in childbirth, and was turned into the aromatic shrub that bears her name.<sup>1</sup> Something like this may be involved when the prophet mentions the tree that is the source of turpentine (*I Samuel* 10:3–4):

“From there you will go across country as far as the terebinth of Tabor, where three men going up to Bethel will meet you. One of them will be carrying three kids, the second three loaves, and the third a flagon of wine.”

The reference to the terebinth tree may have additional significance because in most mystery cults, the son of god was crucified on a tree or cross. In the Christian tradition, Tabor was the site of the Transfiguration, where Jesus disclosed to his disciples that he was the Son of God.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, this site may have been important to the mystery cult that was the precursor to Christianity.

The kids carried by one of the men may represent “burnt-offering” sacrifices for three days, each to be eaten with one of the loaves provided by the second man. Apparently, one of the meals is to be accompanied by the third man's flagon of wine.

In other words, Saul is to attend a three-day session culminating with a communion meal. The next part of the prediction is described in *I Samuel* 10:5:

“Then when you reach the Hill of God... you will meet a company of prophets coming down from the hill-shrine, led by lute, harp, fife, and drum, and filled with prophetic rapture.”

The name of deity in “Hill of God” is the tri-partite “Elohim.”<sup>3</sup> The ancient Hebrew tribes held their rites at “hill-shrines.” According to *Exodus* 34:14, *Deuteronomy* 16:21, *II Kings* 23:6 and *Micah* 5:14, they erected “sacred poles” on these high places. *Jeremiah* 10:3–9 indicates the poles were fashioned from “timber cut from the forest” and “worked with a chisel by a craftsman.” Each was adorned “with silver and gold,” fastened with “hammer and nails,” and draped “in violet and purple.” This calls to mind descriptions of the trees or crosses used in the rites of Attis and Dionysus, where the effigy of the son of god was displayed to represent his crucifixion. *Jeremiah* 10:5 even goes so far as to compare the totems to “scarecrows,” a crude way to describe the form of a man hung from a cross.

The mystery plays were certainly accompanied by musical

instruments and other dramatic elements. Attendees were profoundly affected by the experience, which is precisely how the prophet concludes his prediction in *I Samuel* 10:6:

“Then the spirit of the Lord will suddenly take possession of you, and you too will be rapt like a prophet and become another man.”

The passages describe a three-day communion rite with a sacred tree on a high place, where attendees were transformed by the experience. In *I Samuel* 10:3, the destination for the men Saul meets is Bethel. The name of this ancient cult center was also the suffix applied to the names of the mother, father, and son in the Hebrew mystery triad described in the ancient Aramaic texts found at Elephantine. Bethel continued to serve as an important northern Hebrew shrine for hundreds of years after Saul’s reign, but was eventually destroyed because it served more than one god.

### **King Josiah**

The destruction of Bethel was erroneously reported as part of a series of reforms purportedly enacted by King Josiah of Judea in 621 BCE. (His reign occurred thirty-five years before the Babylonian invasion and was previously alluded to in Chapter

IX – “Mystery Meals.”) The reforms were supposedly undertaken after the “high priest... discovered the book of the law in the house of the Lord” (*II Kings* 22:8). It was brought to the king and read aloud, which caused the ruler to “rent his clothes” (*II Kings* 33:11) and ask for guidance.

Josiah was advised to undertake a series of actions, including the destruction of shrines to “Topheth in the Valley of Ben-hinnon,” “the horses that the kings of Judah had set up in honor of the sun at the entrance of the house of the Lord,” “the chariots of the sun,” “altars made by the kings of Judah on the roof,” “altars made by Manasseh in the two courts of the house of the Lord,” “the hill-shrines which Solomon... had built for Ashtoreth... and for Kemosh the loathsome god of Moab, and for Milcom the abominable god of the Ammonites” (*II Kings* 23:11–14). If this list were accurate, Jerusalem would have housed more polytheistic shrines than any city in the ancient world.

As previously mentioned, scholars uniformly agree that the book of the law (or book of the covenant) was *Deuteronomy*—or a sizable portion of *Deuteronomy*.<sup>4</sup> The priests claimed that the rediscovery—or creation—of the book of the law was a miraculous event. However, since *Deuteronomy* was written later, during the captivity, the episode is certainly fictitious. This is further verified by the fact that the described reforms cannot be proven, are implausible, or are shown to be false by archaeological evidence (see Table 13.1).

**Table 13.1 – The Reforms of King Josiah**

<i>II Kings</i>	<b>Biblical Account</b>	<b>Evidence/Comments</b>
23:1–7	“The king ordered the high priest... to remove from the house of the Lord all the objects made for Baal and Asherah.”	This merely confirms that idols of other Hebrew deities were allowed in the temple before the captivity.
23:8–10	Josiah “desecrated the hill-shrines... from Geba to Beer-sheba and dismantled the hill-shrines of the demons.”	The region was devastated by Babylon, so no archaeological verification is possible. <sup>5</sup>
23:11–14	Josiah destroyed statues and altars that had been erected throughout the city.	Exaggerated and anachronistic. Verses should follow 23:1–7. <sup>6</sup>
23:15–18	“At Bethel, he dismantled the ... hill-shrine itself.”	Bethel was not destroyed until 500 BCE. <sup>7</sup>
23:19–20	“Further, Josiah suppressed all the hill-shrines in the” northern tribal areas.	Implausible. The area was controlled by Assyria. <sup>8</sup>
23:21–23	“The king ordered the people to keep the Passover to the Lord.”	False. Passover was not a formal observance until the captivity.
23:23–25	“Josiah got rid of all who called up ghosts and spirits, of all the household gods and idols.”	Similar to <i>Deuteronomy</i> 18:10–11, which further confirms it was the book of the law. <sup>9</sup>

Many biblical scholars contend that the book of the law was an actual document found in the temple that was later used as the primary source for *Deuteronomy*. This means it was either a forgotten monotheistic scroll hidden away on some shelf that was somehow singled-out and given credence by a high priest who served all the gods in the temple, or it was a text written in secret and planted behind the altar. There is a paradox here. If the priests had memorized the law, they would not have been surprised by the scroll or would have immediately recognized it as a forgery. On the other hand, if they did not rely on memory, the *Bible* could never have been written because the source material was destroyed by the Babylonians when they sacked Jerusalem. This is just further proof that the episode is fictitious.

In any event, the actions supposedly inspired by the text had no lasting impact. The next four kings “did what was wrong in the eyes of the Lord” (*II Kings* 23:32, 23:37, 24:9, and 24:19). The moral lesson is clear: Because Josiah’s monotheistic reforms were allowed to lapse, God punished the Judeans by sending in Nebuchadnezzar’s armies to destroy their city and haul them off into exile until they learned to properly honor Him.

This is another example of syncretism. And once again, it makes no sense. After the Judeans accepted monotheism in Babylon, they maintained their beliefs virtually unchanged until today. The “book of the law” was a wish list compiled by the priests of the changes required **before** the return to Jerusalem.

The entire episode of Josiah's reforms is a story added to the *Bible* to provide a warning of what will happen if there is a failure to adhere to the new monotheistic vision.

However, in the final analysis, it doesn't really matter if the book of the law existed in some form before the captivity or if it was a contemporary morality story. Either way, it marked an important step in the Judaic transition away from henotheism. Other deities had been accepted in the holiest of holies. Now they would not be. When it came time to rebuild the temple, it would be the home of one, and only one, God.

## **Chapter XIV**

### **The Mystery of Leviathan**

#### **The Creation**

Work continued on the first five books of the *Bible* in Babylon even after Cyrus, king of Persia, decreed that the captive peoples could return to their homelands. The first Judean exiles reached the ruins of Jerusalem in 539 BCE, which was 50 years after their grandparents had been deported from the city. The restoration work was so extensive that a second temple was not completed until 515 BCE. <sup>1</sup> Almost sixty years later, in 458 BCE, the prophet Ezra arrived from Babylon with a royal decree that granted him authority over Jerusalem and the surrounding region. He also brought with him the first five books of the *Bible*. He called them the “Torah,” and to give them greater authority, he claimed that they were authored by Moses. <sup>2</sup>

Here was a comprehensive world history penned with a new form of calligraphy. The ancient alphabet of the Phoenicians had

been simplified into block letters using shorter pen strokes similar to Aramaic characters or cuneiform incisions. As an incentive for the rest of the exiles to return to the City of David and help rebuild it, a stirring epic of reconquest became the Torah's centerpiece, and the region was recast as the promised land.

Nineteenth-century *Old Testament* experts Karl Heinrich Graf and Wilhelm Vatke were the first to theorize that the Torah was a patchwork of different oral traditions.<sup>3</sup> Based on such attributes as word usage and writing style, successor scholars eventually identified four distinct sources. In addition, there was universal concurrence that the books were put into final form by a "redactor."<sup>4</sup> Or more likely, by several "redactors." If more than one tradition provided a version of a story, both (or sometimes, as many as three) were included. They were either intermingled, or recorded one after the other, with minor modifications designed to improve the flow of the narrative. This is the source of the twice- and thrice-told tales.

The creation stories are an example. The first (*Genesis* 1–2:4), sets forth a seven-day period during which "God made heaven and earth." In the second (*Genesis* 2:5–9), "The Lord God made earth and heaven," including "a garden in Eden." (This version uses the tri-partite Elohim.)<sup>5</sup> There are vestiges of a third creation fable elsewhere in the *Old Testament* (see Table 14.1).

**Table 14.1 – The Third Creation Story**

Citation	Creation Imagery
<i>Psalms</i> 74:12–14	““But thou, O God... by thy power... thou didst crush Leviathan’s many heads.””
<i>Isaiah</i> 27:1	““On that day the Lord will punish... Leviathan... and slay the monster of the deep.””
<i>Isaiah</i> 51:9–13	““O arm of the Lord... who hacked the Rahab in pieces and ran the dragon through.””
<i>Job</i> 3:8	““Cursed be it by those whose magic binds even the monster of the deep... Leviathan himself.””
<i>Job</i> 26:12–13	““With his strong arm he cleft the sea monster, and struck down Rehab with his skill.””

The third version of creation refers to an ancient legend. A monster of chaos, known as Leviathan or Rehab, was overcome by the Babylonian Marduk or the Semitic Baal to give form to the world.<sup>6</sup> The redactors successfully couched the first two creation stories in monotheistic terms. They did not have an opportunity to edit the later books of the *Old Testament*. Without their intervention, God returned to his polytheistic roots as a legendary Semitic hero doing battle with the monster of the deep to create the world.

## The Golden Calf

Religions are exceedingly resistant to change. The heretic king's henotheism in Egypt was resented so vehemently that his temples and their records were eradicated upon his death. Even after Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, it was still not accepted without fire and sword. The Reformation precipitated centuries of brutal warfare. It took the demolition of Jerusalem and the years of exile in Babylon to destroy Judean henotheism and reconstitute it as Judaic monotheism.

By the time the Egyptian saga was composed, the transition was complete. The deity would no longer be referred to as "Elohim," or "El Shaddai" ("God Almighty"), or any other name that had previously been used (*Exodus* 6:2–3):

God spoke to Moses and said, "I am the Lord. I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as God Almighty. But I did not let myself be known to them by my name Jehovah."

There is a play on words here. Jehovah can be translated "I am what I am."<sup>7</sup> God was now the sum of all existence. From this point on, the biblical narrative condemned the worship of other gods and their idols (see Table 14.2).

**Table 14.2 – Condemnation of Idols**

<b>Citation</b>	<b>Selected Descriptions of “Idolatry”</b>
<i>Exodus</i> 32:3–6 and 32:19–20	“So all the people stripped themselves of their gold.... Cast the metal in a mold, and made it into the image of a bull calf.”  “Moses saw the bull-calf and the dancing, and he was angry; he flung the tablets down and they were shattered to pieces.”
<i>Deuteronomy</i> 13:12–13	“When you hear that miscreants... in any of the cities which the Lord your God has given you to occupy... calling on them to serve other gods... you shall put the inhabitants of that city to the sword.”
<i>Judges</i> 6:25–32	“That night the Lord said to Gideon... ‘tear down the altar of Baal... and cut down the sacred pole that stands beside it.’”
<i>Ezekiel</i> 8:14–15	“Then he brought me to that gateway of the Lord’s house which faces north; and there I saw women sitting and wailing for Tammuz....  ‘But you will see abominations more monstrous than these.’”
<i>Zephaniah</i> 1:2–6	“I will wipe out from this place the last remnant of Baal.”
<i>Wisdom of Solomon</i> 14:12–31	“For the worship of idols, whose names it is wrong even to mention, is the beginning, cause, and end of every evil.”

These are all examples of syncretism. Instead of remaining faithful to the one true God, the people supposedly committed apostasy and started worshipping pagan idols. As mentioned previously, when nineteenth-century theologians first investigated the Elephantine triad, they dismissed the find with much the same sort of complaint. They were predisposed to do so because of the sheer number of times the charge is repeated in the *Old Testament*. Once again, it defies logic to believe that the early Jews could be so easily led astray when their ancestors clung to their faith for two thousand years, even after a world-wide diaspora.

### **Our God is No Concern of Yours**

When the first Judean exiles arrived in Jerusalem from Babylon, a delegation representing the northern Hebrew tribes of Israel offered to help rebuild Solomon's Temple. The overture was rejected because the polytheistic rites of the stay-at-homes were unacceptable to the new Jewish vision (*Ezra* 4:2): "The house we are building for our God is no concern of yours." It probably galled the Jewish theocrats that Samaria, the capital of Israel, had become the largest metropolis in the Holy Land. The authors of the first books of the *Old Testament* responded by focusing the lion's share of their invective against the idolatry of Samaria (see Table 14.3).

**Table 14.3 – Samaritan Idolatry**

<b>Citation</b>	<b>Israelite/Samaritan “Idolatry” (A Selection)</b>
<i>Numbers</i> 25:1–5	“The Israelites joined in the worship of the Baal... and the lord was angry with them.
<i>Judges</i> 2:11–12	“Then the Israelites did what was wrong in the eyes of the Lord, and worshipped the Baalim.”
<i>I Kings</i> 16:29–34	“Ahab.... set up a sacred pole...to provoke the anger of the Lord.”
<i>Isaiah</i> 10:10–12	“(W)hat I have done to Samaria and her worthless god, I will do also to Jerusalem and her idols.”
<i>Jeremiah</i> 10:3–9	“Listen, Israel .... the carved images of the nations are a sham....”
<i>Hosea</i> 8:4–6	“Israel is utterly loathsome.... They have made themselves idols of their silver and gold.”
<i>Micah</i> 1:6–9	“So I will make Samaria a heap of ruins.... I will make a waste heap of all her idols.”
<i>Ecclesiasticus</i> 50:26	“I detest...the inhabitants of Mount Seir (the hilltop on which Samaria stood).”

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## **Chapter XV**

### **The Mystery of Mount Gerizim**

#### **Jacob's Well**

To the Samaritans, the Judeans returning from Babylon were the ones who had committed apostasy. They had abandoned El, and Baal, and Anat, and all the other gods of their ancestors in favor of a fragment of the tri-partite Elohim that had grown so powerful that no one could utter its name. They had created a new history of the world in the five books they brandished—along with a royal Persian writ—to justify taking over the Temple Mount and Jerusalem. They had forsaken the shared legends of the region in favor of a new myth of Egyptian bondage and a previous triumphant return to the Holy Land. They waged a relentless campaign to destroy the ancient shrines and worship centers surrounding the city. And if that were not enough, they openly prayed for a messiah to rise up and impose their vision of deity on the rest of the Holy Land.

The Judeans were particularly resentful of the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim. It had grown into a magnificent religious center during their absence. Passages appeared in the Jewish historical books recounting the defeat 300 years earlier of the Samaritan monarchs Ahab and Jezebel by a rebel named Jehu. *II Kings* 10:18–28 claims that he “pulled down the sacred pillar of the Baal and the temple itself, and made a privy of it.”

Recall that a mystery cult story may have been behind God’s command to Abraham: “Take your son Isaac, your only son, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah. There you shall offer him as a sacrifice on one of the hills” (*Genesis* 22:2). In *I Chronicles* 3:1, the Temple Mount is also called “Moriah,” but this is the only other place in the *Bible* where the word is used. *Old Testament* scholars dispute the designation because the sacrifice site described in *Genesis* was far from civilization. This means it could not have been near Jerusalem, which was already a substantial settlement at the time of the patriarchs.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the Temple Mount was not named in *I Kings*, which was the source for *I Chronicles*.<sup>2</sup>

There is a Gospel account that indicates that the location of Isaac’s sacrifice was Mount Gerizim. Jesus visited “Jacob’s well,” which is located at the foot of this peak.<sup>3</sup> In *John* 4:20–22, a local Samaritan woman advised him:

“Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews say that the temple where God should be worshipped is in Jerusalem.”

Probably the most famous parable in the *Bible* is “The Good Samaritan.” A man is beaten and robbed, and left for dead. A priest and a Levite cross to the other side of the road to avoid his body, but a Samaritan stops to care for him (*Luke* 10:34–36). The story is cited as the archetype for the compassionate stranger from the enemy camp. However, it also castigates a pair of Jewish clerics for failing to stop and lend a hand.

There is no satisfactory explanation for Jesus’s antipathy for the hereditary Judean priesthood (or “Sadducees”), or their desire to capture and condemn him. Nor is it ever clear why he left Galilee, northeast of Samaria, to travel to Jerusalem. He was apparently having tremendous success recruiting followers in the region and was far enough away from the centers of power that he could continue his ministry indefinitely.

The Gospels never define the danger his message posed. He didn’t threaten Rome. He counseled to “pay Caesar what is due to Caesar, and pay God what is due to God” (*Matthew* 22:21; *Mark* 12:17; and *Luke* 20:25). When Pilate did have a chance to judge him, he “washed his hands” (*Matthew* 27:24). From time to time, he argued with pharisees, but many of these confrontations have been shown to be later inserts (refer back to Chapter

III – “The Quest for the Messiah”). The Sadducees tolerated a series of rabble-rousers who urged far greater mayhem than Jesus ever could (refer back to Table 2.2).

His only truly provocative action was the attack on the Temple money-lenders. However, there is good reason to believe that the accounts were later additions to the Gospels because they occur at different times in the four books. The event happened either on the day that Jesus arrived in Jerusalem (*Matthew* 21:12–13); or on the following day (*Mark* 11:15–19); or on an undetermined day during his visit (*Luke* 19:45–48); or even on a date several years earlier, right after he began his ministry (*John* 2:12–25).<sup>4</sup>

The Gospel story indicates that the Sadducees met in secret and conspired to use “secret agents in the guise of honest men to seize upon some word” (*Luke* 20:20), or come up with “a scheme to have Jesus arrested by some trick” (*Matthew* 26:4), or “devise some cunning plan to seize him and put him to death” (*Mark* 14:2). Jesus answered all their tests with parables, but they still arrested him and brought him to trial. In *Matthew* 26:60 and *Mark* 14:57, they allowed witnesses to give “false evidence.” When they asked Jesus if he was “the Son of the Blessed One,” he replied (*Mark* 14:62):

“I am; and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of God and coming with the clouds of heaven.”

With this, he is unanimously judged guilty and sent to Pilate to be crucified. The accounts of the trial in the other Gospels differ to some extent. According to *Matthew* 26:64, Jesus equivocated slightly when asked if he is the “Son of God.” He replied “The words are yours.” *Luke* 22:68 also modified the answer: “If I tell you... you will not believe me.” In *John* 18:24, no questions are even asked of him by the high priest.

It is only in the context of a mystery cult passion drama that the trip to Jerusalem and the antipathy between the players makes any sense. The Sadducees served a deity who demanded that they recognize no other gods before him. When Jesus disclosed that he was a son of god, his fate was sealed. He was crucified and laid to rest in a cave-like tomb, from which he later emerged resurrected.

### **The Abisha Scroll**

In the sixteenth century, a medieval sect of Jews who were called Samaritans lived near Mount Gerizim. They were the owners of an ancient version of the Torah known as the “Abisha scroll.”<sup>5</sup> The document was thought to be a later rewrite of the first five books of the *Bible* because it contained additional references to Mount Gerizim. In one case, the Samaritan peak replaced Mount Ebal, the worship center named in the Hebrew

standard.<sup>6</sup> The scroll was written in an ancient form of script.<sup>7</sup> And it was the only holy book recognized by the sect.<sup>8</sup>

The writings of the third century Christian scholar Origen referred to “Samaritans and Sadducees who receive the books of Moses alone.”<sup>9</sup> From this, Church authorities deduced that the ancient Jewish sect that owned the Abisha scroll represented the last surviving remnant of the Hebrew northern tribes. The conclusion was erroneous, but it had a long-lasting effect on biblical scholarship. Over time, each of the assumptions embodied in the determination was proved false, but to this day the calligraphy of the Abisha scroll is referred to as “Samaritan.”

The quotation from Origen that was central to the identification of the sect was eventually recognized as unreliable. All of the *Old Testament* books were sacred to the Sadducees, not just the five attributed to Moses. Origen wrote about the subject several centuries after the fact, so he cannot be relied upon as an authority on ancient religious practices in the Holy Land. When he referred to “Samaritans,” he was probably talking about the same Jewish sect that lived near Mount Gerizim in medieval times and owned the Abisha scroll.

It is now recognized that their version of the Torah was written in an antiquated script because it was the original form of text. The sect was an ultraconservative offshoot of Judaism that only accepted the five books in the form they were first written, before Hebrew block script was developed. Their text refers to

Mount Gerizim because Ezra's newer version was the one that had been revised to say otherwise. In a last-bid effort to maintain the fiction that the Abisha scroll was a later recension, conservative theologian William F. Albright advanced the ludicrous theory that the Hebrew block letters of the standard text had been "retranscribed into the archaizing 'Samaritan' script."<sup>10</sup>

After the Maccabees conquered the northern Holy Land and expelled or killed anyone with polytheistic sympathies, the members of this retrogressive Jewish sect relocated near Mount Gerizim because their scriptures recognized it as the supreme site of their faith. They came to be known as Samaritans because that was where they lived. Some biblical commentaries still maintain that this ultraconservative community of Jews are the last living descendants of the northern Hebrew tribes. A pair of biblical verses are used to support this unlikely transformation.

The first refers to the previously mentioned offer to help rebuild Solomon's Temple after the Babylonian captivity (*Ezra* 4:2): "Let us join you in building, for like you we seek your God." Because "your God" was used by the Samaritans, it was assumed that the transition had already occurred (even though this fails to explain why the Jerusalem clerics turned down the offer). A later quotation from the same book of the *Old Testament* quashes the notion of Samaritan monotheism when it summarizes the reasons behind the refusal (*Ezra* 9:1b–2):

The people of Israel, including priests and Levites, have not kept themselves apart from the foreign population and from the abominable practices of the Canaanites, the Hittites... the Moabites, the Egyptians and the Amorites.

The second citation deals with an earlier time period, after the leaders of the northern tribes were sent into captivity and other peoples were moved into their lands (*II Kings* 17:27–28):

The king of Assyria, therefore, gave orders that one of the priests deported from Samaria should be sent back to live there and teach the people the usage of the god of the country. So one of the deported priests came and lived at Bethel, and taught them how they should pay homage to the Lord.

This was taken as evidence that the Samaritans were indeed instructed in the ways of Jehovah. However, the very next verse indicates otherwise: “But each of the nations made its own god, and they set them up within the hill-shrines which the Samaritans had made.” The chapter concludes (*II Kings* 17:41):

While these nations paid homage to the Lord they continued to serve their images, and their children and their children's children have maintained the practice of their forefathers to this day.

Not only was the worship of the tri-partite Elohim continued by the northern Hebrews of Samaria, it was further supplemented by the religious traditions of new arrivals. During the next few centuries, Alexander the Great conquered the Persian Empire, and Greek replaced Aramaic as the language of politics and commerce. Eventually, the Seleucid rulers of Syria could no longer contain the growing military might of Jerusalem. In 128 BCE, the Maccabees sacked the city of Samaria and destroyed the temple complex, scattering those who had worshipped on Mount Gerizim since time immemorial. This cleared the way for a small Jewish sect and its Abisha scroll.

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## Chapter XVI

### The Mystery of Jethro

#### Blood Bridegrooms

In the book of *Exodus*, Moses paid two visits to Jethro in the Sinai desert. In the first, Moses married one of his daughters (Zipporah) and they had a son. Then Moses decided to return to Egypt (*Exodus* 4:24–26):

During the journey, while they were encamped for the night, the Lord met Moses, meaning to kill him, but Zipporah picked up a sharp flint, cut off her son's foreskin, and touched him with it, saying, "You are my blood-bridegroom." So the Lord let Moses alone.

The passage, with a father-mother-son triad, may indicate that a mystery cult drama was its original source, but the text is too fragmentary for an accurate appraisal. Moses is threatened

with death, but is spared when his wife fools God into thinking he was circumcised. Theologians assert that the scene was included in the *Bible* to support the tradition that Moses never underwent the rite.<sup>1</sup> As previously mentioned, the earliest mystery cult, which revered the Egyptian son of god Osiris, may have required circumcision as part of its initiation ritual. However, the quotation indicates that the procedure was a rite of manhood and was apparently required before a marriage could be sanctified. Moreover, the circumcision of the child may have been a justification for the change to an infant rite during the Babylonian captivity.

After the Maccabees conquered Samaria, they attempted to enforce circumcision throughout the region.<sup>2</sup> This should serve as conclusive proof that Christianity was **not** an offshoot of Judaism. Despite the false hopes raised by the verdict in *Acts* and *Galatians*, this mandatory rite would have been continued by the disciples and their first Christian converts if they were Jews. Especially in the numbers recounted in the *Acts of the Apostles*. They would have seen it as an article of faith, and Gentiles adopting the religion either would have been compelled to undergo it, or at least ensure their male children did, in order to become an accepted part of the community.

It is probable that the Hebrew mystery cult that was the precursor to Christianity had already accepted initiation rites similar to those used by the practitioners of Adonis and Dionysus,

and their initiates underwent baptism, rather than circumcision to become members. As previously mentioned, the Greeks considered circumcision a form of mutilation. Their cities on the periphery of the Holy Land would have been havens for those who wished to avoid the procedure after the Maccabean incursion.

### **Jethro and God**

During Moses's second visit with Jethro (*Exodus* 18:12), his host "brought a whole offering and sacrificed for God." This may refer to a communion meal and it may be associated with a mystery cult drama, but once again, there is not enough here to render a determination. However, the next verses (*Exodus* 18:13–27) provide a hint to Jethro's identity. He gives Moses advice about how he should delegate duties rendering judgments on tribal disputes. The text bears a striking similarity to *Deuteronomy* 1:9–18, only in this second instance, it is God who provides the counsel.

This means that Jethro was some sort of stand-in for God. This is further substantiated by his name, which is a contraction, where the first syllable represents "Jehovah" and the rest means something like "abundance."<sup>3</sup> As was the case with Joseph, it may have been a device to allow "God" to be uttered without breaking the prohibition against speaking his name.

Recall that Hebrew did not always match up well with Latin for transcription purposes. Jehovah was actually pronounced “Yahweh,” but the “Y” and “W” had to be rendered using an “I” and “V” (or “Iehovah”). At some point in English, an “I” before another vowel was changed to a “J.” So Yosef became Joseph, and Yitro became Jethro. The sage is also identified by another form of contraction. “Jethro” or “Yitro” in *Exodus* 3:1 is “Reuel” in *Exodus* 2:18. The second name is thought to mean “God’s friend.”<sup>4</sup> However, it doesn’t make sense that two names for the same person should have different meanings, especially when both contain a “god” element.

As previously explained, the suffix “el” represented the name of the Semitic supreme deity. Taking away this ending from “Reuel” and eliminating the “Yi-meaning-God” prefix from “Yitro” would produce the following one-and-the-same analysis:

$$Yi(t) + Ro = Rue + el$$

The “base” part of the two names is essentially the same: “Ro” and “Rue.” They may have been rendered differently at the whim of transcribers since the Phoenician alphabet and its ancient successors had no distinct vowel forms. Also note that the analysis assumes that the “t” in Yitro served as a hard bridge between the soft sounds of the vowel in “Yi” and the “r” in “Ro.”

### **The Elephantine Triad Reconsidered**

A different sort of transliteration problem is encountered with “Aaron.” The name is probably Egyptian, but it has never been properly translated. Once again, he is identified in *Exodus* as the brother of Moses and Miriam, whose names are actually titles meaning “Son” and “Beloved.” If the three were originally members of a mystery cult triad, Aaron would have been the “Father.”

His name should be rendered into English as “Aharon.” Neither Greek nor Latin have a glottal “h,” which is why the first two syllables begin with an “A.” The Hebrew counterpart of this vowel is aleph. It was a consonant pronounced at the very back of the throat. Early on, it evolved into a softer, virtually silent sound. It became customary to transcribe the letter with an apostrophe.<sup>5</sup> So Aaron or Aharon is more accurately transliterated as ’Haron.

This reinterpretation becomes especially important when reexamining the 2,500-year-old Elephantine papyri found near the southern Egyptian city of Aswan. The *Old Testament* theologian T. Witton Davies suggested that the temple referenced in the letters was originally “erected by priests and others belonging to the northern kingdom.”<sup>6</sup> His theory is substantiated elsewhere in the Elephantine scrolls. Letters requesting assistance

with the rebuilding effort were sent to authorities throughout the Near East, but only the governor of Samaria agreed to help.<sup>7</sup>

A different trove of Aramaic papyri discovered near Jericho in 1962 contains references to several gods, including “Yahu,” the same form of deity expressed in the Elephantine scrolls. The Jericho texts have been dated to the year 400 BCE, and were written by officials from Samaria.<sup>8</sup> Here are two compelling pieces of evidence proving that this city, with its history of tripartite deities and its ancient shrine at nearby Mount Gerizim, was the homeland of the mystery cult that gave rise to Christianity.

Recall that Anat-bethel was the mother in the Elephantine triad and her name was probably related to the ancient Semitic goddess Anat. While no acceptable translations were ever advanced for the male names in the trinity, one-and-the-same analyses yield surprising results. This approach is possible even though 'Haron is Hebrew and the Elephantine papyri were written in Aramaic. The two tongues came from the same Semitic root and shared the same basic vocabulary.<sup>9</sup> In both cases, proper names were originally defined by the words used in their formation. The names remained relatively stable, even when the initial meanings of their formative elements were lost or forgotten over time.<sup>10</sup>

Because early Hebrew and Aramaic were written down, linguists could trace pronunciation drift through subtle changes in

the consonants used to construct words.<sup>11</sup> This may explain the similarities between the lead element in Herem-bethel and 'Haron or Aaron. It may also explain why the Elephantine father's name was nearly one-and-the-same as Yahu:

$$\text{Ya} + \text{Hu(rem)} = \text{Ha(rem)} + \text{Bethel}$$

“Hu” could have been transformed to “Hurem” with the addition of an interceding syllable before the suffix “bethel,” or “Ya-Herem” was simply shortened to “Ya-hu.” Other documents in the 2,500-year-old Elephantine trove identified the son as Eshem-bethel. His name can be converted to a Jehovah contraction using one-and-the-same analysis:

$$\text{Y} + \text{Eshem} = \text{Eshem} + \text{Bethel}$$

The result would be “Yeshem” which is remarkably similar to “Yeshua,” or “Jeshua.” If this was not the Mythical Jesus, it was still a son of god worshipped by the Samaritans at least five centuries before the *New Testament* was written.

### **The Samaritan Trinity**

According to this analysis, Jesus, Joseph, and Mary were selected to form the final Samaritan triad. John the Baptist may

have been unacceptable for the son because his Mandeans were too small a sect. Perhaps “God’s Redeemer” won out over “Egyptian son” and “Son of God’s Right Hand” because Moses and Benjamin had already been claimed by the Jews, one as their national hero and the other as a stand-in for the Jebusites, the tribe that occupied the lands around Jerusalem. Similarly, Aaron had been appropriated by Ezra as the progenitor of his Zadok ancestral line. This left Joseph and Jethro, two substitutes for God, in contention for the father, with the former more recognizable than the latter. And Mary, the “Beloved,” was plainly more palatable than some ancient Semitic deity named Anat.

The precursor Christians who fled from Mount Gerizim to the nearby Hellenic cities retained their separate identity through the worship of their own mystery cult. However, the language of the Samaritan rites changed to Greek and the Holy Trinity became the aforementioned variants of Hebrew names. Unfortunately, the second and third century editors of the Gospels did not realize this. They thought the dramatic transcripts recorded the life history of a real Son of God who journeyed to the seat of his religion in Jerusalem. For this reason, they accepted the *Old Testament* as part of their canon. Not the actual Hebrew books, but the imprecise Alexandrian translations.

The *New Testament* editors assumed that Jesus, as a practicing Jew, would have been exceptionally knowledgeable of scripture. Ironically, the *Old Testament* mistranslations they inserted

into the Gospel stories mark them—and Jesus—as Greek-speaking impostors pretending to be Jews.

One belief that the early Christians did take away from Judaism was an unyielding antipathy to apostasy. However, the Church reinterpreted the heresy as worshipping any deity that was not a Holy Trinity. The single God of the Jews was tolerated, but only as a temporary belief system in effect before the advent of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Any religious doctrine that fell outside these parameters was immediately attacked and its practitioners silenced by the threat of death.

All this came about years after the practitioners of the Samaritan mystery cult first interacted with the Mandeans and Nazoreans, who had been baptized and knew the mysteries, but had never attended a three-day rite. They apparently formed an uneasy alliance and the old-timers provided early leadership in the Church. Unfortunately, they could never convince the true-believers that the story of Jesus was an ancient myth, and eventually, anyone who made such a contention was considered an apostate.

It may be hard to accept that the ancients based their religious faith on a dramatic rite, but keep in mind that the presentation became the Christian passion story that continues to captivate millions today. The mystery drama was perfected over centuries to descend into the deepest recesses of the human psyche. It offered timeless ethical messages in the form of parables

and other stories. The presentation allowed attendees to abandon reality and immerse themselves in a stirring pageant that promised eternal life. The mythical climax presented by actors was every bit as meaningful to the ancestral Christians as the Easter rites are to their descendants today.

Recognizing that Jesus was a mythical son of god is not just an esoteric question debated by religious scholars. On the contrary, it is absolutely vital to properly understand and address the appeal of Christianity. While it is easy to dismiss the inconsistencies and the apocalyptic content of the *New Testament*, the same cannot be said for the parables and other stories. Christians erroneously claim that these were the words of a single extraordinary man, when in reality they were accumulated more than two millennia ago by the mystery cult of the Mythical Jesus.

## **Afterword**

### **The Three-Thousand-Year Faith**

The Mythical Jesus theory proposes that Christianity was founded on an ancient mystery cult that promised eternal life to initiates cleansed by water rites. Originally, it was thought that after death, souls of the saved would ascend beyond the dome of stars to reside in a realm of wind and spirit, of fire and divine light. When astronomy proved that such a heaven was impossible, it was replaced in the minds of true-believers by another level of existence that somehow co-existed with reality.

This concept of a shadow-realm is mired in paradox. If there are links between the regions, the alternate dimension would be part of reality and effectively wouldn't exist. If there are no links, the shadow-realm couldn't impact reality, so once again, it effectively wouldn't exist. If there are periodic connections between the dimensions, it would be impossible to know if anything that happened was actual or an intrusion from beyond, and reality wouldn't exist.

Additional levels of existence are still possible in the minds of true-believers. Psychology recognizes different states of consciousness. Dreams, waking dreams, and hallucinations create an enticing illusion of multiple levels of reality, making it easy to assume there is “something more.” After three thousand years, it is therefore still possible to profess faith in an ancient mystery cult and its promise of immortality.

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