

# THE AUTHENTIC JESUS

**A Guide to Aramaic Idioms, Recent Research,  
and the Original Message of Jesus Christ**

**Lewis S. Keizer, Ph.D.**



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## **A Guide to Aramaic Idioms, Recent Research, and the Original Message of Jesus Christ**

This manuscript is offered to those wishing to delve more deeply into the methodology that must be used to properly understand and interpret all sacred literature. This includes the scholar's skills in higher and lower criticism (form-, redaction-, and tradition-critical methodology used with careful textual restoration), broad knowledge of the history, phenomenology, and comparison of religions, and an aspiration to seek synthetical truth aside from doctrine, dogma, and theological axe-grinding.

I dedicate this manuscript to the future generations of scholars who apply these principles in their exciting search for the Eternal Word in all Scripture, which is inscribed upon the imperishable Scroll of the Human Heart.

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## CONTENTS

PREFACE		6
<u>Introduction</u>		
WILL THE REAL JESUS PLEASE STAND UP?		11
PART ONE:		
	THE RABBINIC TEACHING OF JESUS	17
<u>Chapter One</u>		
THE SPIRIT OF SCRIPTURE	רוח	21
	How Jesus used and interpreted Jewish Scripture	
<u>Chapter Two</u>		
CONDITIONS FOR DISCIPLESHIP	חסד	31
	Jesus taught by the <u>Ruah qodesh</u> . Submission, devotion, perfection	
<u>Chapter Three</u>		
LOVE, SERVICE AND POWER OVER DEMONS	ישוע	41
	Possession by <u>elilim</u> , slavery to Satan, and liberation	
PART TWO:		
	THE PROPHETIC MISSION OF JESUS	53
<u>Chapter Four</u>		
JUDGMENT AGAINST THE RE-IGIOUS ESTABLISHMENT	משפת	57
	<u>The Parables (Mashlim) of Judgment</u>	61
	<u>The "Hypocrisy" of the Religious Establishment</u>	64
	<u>The Fig Tree and the Judgment Against the Temple</u>	66
<u>Chapter Five</u>		
SUBMISSION AND FAITH	אמן	69
	<u>Submission to God's Will (Christian "Repentance")</u>	70
	<u>Faith as Covenantal Fidelity</u>	75
<u>Chapter Six</u>		
THE GATE TO THE KINGDOM	מלכות	85
	<u>The Releasing of Debtors</u>	88

<u>Humility and Exaltation</u>	93
<u>Prayer and Private Spirituality</u>	97
PART THREE:	
THE MESSIANIC MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD	107
<u>Jewish Sainthood and Martyrdom Traditions</u>	107
<u>“Remnant” Communities of the True Israel and Messianic Judaism</u>	108
<u>The Priesthood of Melchizedek</u>	111
<u>Chapter Seven</u>	
THE COMMUNITY OF SAINTS חַבְרֵי	116
<u>The Olam-Ha-Ba or Impending Aeon</u>	118
<u>Life and Communion in the Olam-Ha-Ba: Resurrection or Qimah</u>	125
<u>Chapter Eight</u>	
THE INNER MASTERY אֲבָנָה	136
<u>ABBA: The Saint as Scion of Yahweh</u>	140
<u>The Shalem or “Perfect” Disciple</u>	148
GLOSSARY OF TERMS	
	157
FURTHER READING	
	160
<u>General Works on Christian Origins and the New Testament</u>	160
<u>Research into the Logia and Parables of Jesus</u>	161
<u>Further Guidance in Research</u>	162
<u>The “Son of Man” and Early Jewish-Christian Christology</u>	162
<u>Other Topics of Interest</u>	164
<u>History of Research on Jesus</u>	164
<u>The Jesus Seminar</u>	165
<u>The So-Called Aramaic Version of the New Testament</u>	166



## PREFACE

Twenty-two years have passed since I completed the first draft of this manuscript, and I find that the information presented in it remains valid and relevant, needing only a few annotations. Over these two decades, I have been able to further explore, assimilate, and better understand the teachings of that greatest of all rabbis, prophets, and mystics known to the world as Jesus, and in this 1998 edition I have made additions and changes to reflect current scholarship. Also over the past two decades there has been a flurry of scholarly work on the Jesus of history, such as the Jesus Seminar, in which all the academic premises of this monograph have been validated and established by scholarly consensus. Consequently, there is a huge body of recently published research that the serious student can ferret out and read.

However, the caveats that I give in the original introduction to this book, which follows this preface, must be taken seriously. The best source for valid research about Jesus is not the best-seller list of Amazon.com, but the book store of a non-fundamentalist or "liberal" theological seminary (Episcopal, Presbyterian, Methodist, Unitarian, etc.). For students in the priesthood training of the Home Temple, we offer a full modern bibliography in their correspondence materials. This monograph, however, is meant to be an introduction only.

In *The Authentic Jesus*, I address specifically the literal and historical meaning of Jesus' words. That must remain the primary basis for all spiritual interpretation. But literal and historical structures are only the external forms of living teachings that contain interior and mystic levels of meaning. This manuscript does not attempt to reveal the deeper meanings embedded in the words of Jesus. Again, this is a study we present in the priesthood training of the Home Temple after all of the diaconate materials have been studied and understood.

After all, this book is a survey of what we can know about the teachings of Jesus through valid historical sources. It does not go beyond a simple assessment of what Jesus actually said and meant in the *logia* and parables that have been transmitted to us.

No historical mechanism existed in the Hellenistic world for the accurate transmission of higher spiritual teachings. The words of Jesus that have come to us through canonical and non-canonical scriptures or *memoires* are by-and-large public teachings rather than esoteric private mysteries. The higher mystical teachings of Jesus, which I introduce in the third part of this presentation, are not stated literally. They must be grasped through a series of clues and evidences contained in the public or exoteric teachings.

Simply to note the irreconcilable divergences between the teachings of Jesus and those of the modern Christian churches is not enough. Granted, it is a first step into a higher and more integrated understanding of inner life and spirituality. It confronts us with the great imperative

that each must learn to listen to the interior voice of God's Spirit before we can progress along the path of the Master.

But for one who seriously aspires to follow that greatest of all masters, *Mar Yeshua*, and who intuitively realizes that he was and is a Master of masters--our great Elder Brother in spirit, whose mystical Life is an archetype of the individual life, light and path of all souls--for such a person, the things contained in this brief manuscript are only the flesh and bones, not the soul and spirit, of the Master.

One great promise of Master Jesus to his disciples was that there would come future ongoing revelations and inner guidance to each person. The Spirit of Holiness, that spiritual Mother of souls known in Christian ecclesiastical theology as the (male!) Holy Spirit, would guide future disciples into perfection and full expression in the *shalom* or inner peace of God. This peace under the *Malkuth* or Rulership of God (the so-called "Kingdom" of God in Christian theology) is at hand for all those who will submit their lives ("repent") to that perfect will and intelligence of the Great Elder One or Abba ("Father").

Above all things Jesus demonstrated and exemplified the reality of God, of the individual soul or spiritual being, and of the importance of interior moral decisions as well as physical actions. He spoke in solemn terms of life after physical death, and of the causal relationship between the life lived in flesh and that to be lived as a soul after death. He demonstrated dynamic healing of mind, body and soul, and *constantly* emphasized that most wonderful of all healings which he called "liberation."

That, in fact, was his name--whether conferred upon him at birth or later by himself as part of his spiritual consciousness. Yeshua or "Joshua," was later transliterated as "Jesous" by the gentile Greek Christians, and finally Latinized as "Jesus" by the Roman Christians, whose form of religious philosophy and worship triumphed in the West. The early Western Church, in its negation of Judaism and all things Jewish, veered from the original and potent "liberation" and settled for the Latinized "salvation," a much altered concept limited by dogmatic and ritual requirements.

The attempt to universalize "Jesus Christ" for the gentiles, or all humanity, was done at great cost, because it removed the teachings of the Master Jesus from their original Jewish context and set them into the confines of Roman-Hellenistic institutional and social custom. While it certainly served the social and institutional purposes of the gentile churches, it resulted in the persecution of the more authentic Jewish Christians, the development of fatal anti-semitic prejudices, and the corruption of Christian spiritual thought and practice. Only certain Christian philosophers of Gnostic, Hermetic, and Greek philosophical background like Basilides, Clement of Alexandria, Arius, and Origen were able to grasp the true dimensions of the messianic spirituality taught by Master Jesus, but they were regarded as heretics or mere mystics.

It may seem incredible to most Christians, but *it has been through Judaism, rather than the Christian Church, that Jesus' teachings have been best transmitted through history.* His teachings were, after all, rabbinical and prophetic. They originated within the Galilean-Babylonian "Son of Man" school of Jewish mysticism. Although this form did not prevail in rabbinic Judaism, it left its mark on Jewish mysticism and set the stage for the Kabbalistic mysticism of the medieval period.

Does anyone seriously believe that divine inspiration comes only to members of the Christian Church (or churches--which ones? Western? Eastern? Protestant?) and does not reveal itself to those of other faiths and cultures? Does anyone really believe that Divine and Master Teachings have not come through great saints of Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism or Judaism as well as Christianity? For that was what Jesus taught--the Master Teachings, the Raja Yoga of Life. They have appeared in many ways and in many cultures.

Most of the teachings in the Sermon on the Mount can be found in earlier Jewish writings like the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* and other intertestamental scripture that Christians eventually avoided because it seemed too Jewish, and Judaism disowned because it seemed too Christian. Again, most of the teachings in the Sermon on the Mount are remarkably parallel to those ascribed to Gautama Buddha, who taught many centuries before Jesus. If we are to truly understand the wisdom of Jesus, we must examine it in the greater context of pre-Christian and non-Christian revelation.

The Church has minimized these great Master Teachings in favor of its own doctrines, which center mostly upon the personality and Christology of Jesus rather than what the Master taught. It amazes me that a theologian who can plainly read Jesus in Mark's Gospel deny that he himself is God, and that only God can be called truly "good," will yet go to extreme absurdities to propound that Jesus taught that he was God Almighty! Jesus constantly explained that he was able to do his wonders only by the grace and in sheer imitation of the "Father," yet is considered by Christian theologians to have taught that he himself *alone* is the eternal One God, Uncreated, Omnipotent and Omniscient. This ascription of psychological megalomania to the Master Jesus, as the redactors of the Fourth Gospel constantly do in their attempt to replace the authentic Jewish *gnosis* of the Thomas school with Hellenistic philosophy, is a gross misunderstanding of his teaching that *Divine Reality is the primal origin and final return for all humanity.*

Jesus identified himself with Godhead in the same way that a true mystic of any religious tradition does--Rumi, Gautama, or Apollonius of Tyanna. He returned to Godhead and reunited with God. He became a "son of Godhead." But in no way did he usurp God. In no way did he see himself as equivalent to God Almighty, the great *אֱלֹהִים* of Judaism. The thought would have appalled him as it does any profoundly religious Jew.

Jesus saw himself as what the Jewish mystic would call a "gate" or a pathway. He was a



doorway to Godhead, just as a teacher is an entry way to knowledge. He did not teach people to worship him, but showed them the way to worship God. This was a spiritual way, and not a matter of levitical or liturgical practices. The pathway was interior and individual.

This was what Jesus taught.

Who, then, has been faithful to the inner way? Certainly not the mainstream of Christianity, nor of Judaism, nor of Islam. Western religions, in fact, have renounced the inner way in favor of social and institutional codes. Only their inner mystical traditions, which have been seen for the most part as peripheral or even heretical, have been faithful to the interior way taught by Master Jesus.

Indeed, it has been the diverse traditions of Eastern religion--not Western religion--that have, for the most part, honored the inner way. Granted that many of them are primitive or institutionally traditional, but through the stream of Eastern philosophy a concern for the growth of the individual soul and inner discovery has been transmitted. It is this stream that has so profoundly influenced Western religious thought, beginning especially in the last century

Those who have tried to make a synthesis of Eastern and Western religion are the ones who most closely yearn after the Master Teachings of Jesus. Who are they? The theosophists, spiritualists, rosicrucians, and other "new thought" people following the leads of such figures as Blavatsky, Steiner, Alice Bailey, Edgar Cayce, Yogananda, and a host of minor prophets. I do not speak of the charlatans, the false psychics, the deluded semi-shamans who drown in an ocean of astral visions and inflated desires rooted ultimately in self-magnification. I speak of those minor prophets who serve and have served unselfishly on the cutting edge of need for higher spiritual understanding among contemporary humanity.

None of these people has claimed much of a following. Yet each, in his time and place, has contributed to the grounding of basic elements of the Master Teachings. Will the doors of the churches open to receive the Teachings of the Master? I see evidence that makes me hopeful.

Religion is far too important to be entrusted to the guardianship of small cults organized under charismatic leaders. It must be transmitted by educated and initiated trustees who serve not for self-adulation or to gather a loyal group of followers, but as somewhat anonymous servants of humanity.

Religion belongs in the churches, synagogues, and temples that society has created and supported. May the Master Teachings enter them and be spread upon the earth in all traditions and cultures of religious worship!

Lewis S. Keizer  
Brookdale, California  
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## Introduction

### WILL THE REAL JESUS PLEASE STAND UP?

More books have been written about Jesus than possibly any other subject, and each one has faced the same hazards--subjectivity, lack of historical information and the unconscious influence of Christian doctrine. As Schweitzer observed in his *Quest Of The Historical Jesus*, even the most scrupulous of scholars has tended to fit Jesus into a kind of self-portrait. The romantic French scholar Renan saw Jesus as a barefoot boy of Galilee. The esoteric German Gfrorer saw him as an occult Essene. More recently the maverick scholar Schonfield portrayed Jesus as the maverick revolutionary strategist of a "Passover Plot!"

On an even more popular level we find ourselves dealing with all kinds of different Jesuses, or should I say Jesi? There is Gentle Jesus, the favorite of pacifists and Sunday School teachers. There is also Jesus the Revolutionary, who is the persona grata of Christian social activists and Marxists. One might also mention Jesus Christ Super-Star, whose countenance appears in the trademark for Zig-Zag cigarette papers, and whose teachings all seem to echo the ideas of "hip" society.

But far more serious an issue is the "Jesus Christ" conceived by orthodox and evangelical Christian theology. This "Jesus" is as arbitrary and fictional as any of those mentioned above.

Why is there a lack of accurate and reliable information on the original Message or "Gospel" preached by Jesus? After all, in spite of the impossibility of knowing much about the "historical Jesus," contemporary scholarship has developed the tools to reconstruct the historical teachings of Jesus. We haven't enough historical information to know when or where Jesus was born, how tall he was, what he did during his youth, or even what year he was crucified. But we do have versions of his teachings in the Greek New Testament and other sources, and we have learned a great deal about the composition and transmission of these sources.

Like a geologist, the biblical scholar is able to examine "layers" of history in the top-soil of New Testament tradition. He is able to isolate and assess various strands of early Christian transmission, both oral and written. Just as an archaeologist might come to well-founded conclusions about the history and culture of an ancient city, the biblical scholar discovers factual information about the original teachings of Jesus. What is more, there is a general *consensus of opinion* about these facts--just as there is in other scientific fields.

Actually, there is no lack of accurate and reliable information on Jesus, his teachings, the early Christian churches and a host of related things. Scholars have produced a tremendous volume of critical publications in these areas over the past hundred years. Unfortunately most of their research is published in academic journals or the monographs of learned societies. Much of

it is in French, German and other European languages, and is inaccessible to the lay person

This is not the only problem, however. There is at best an uneasy relationship between scholars and churchmen. Recently the findings of biblical scholarship have been so unacceptable to church traditions that open hostilities have occurred. During the mid-1960's Germany experienced convulsive strife between "modernists" and "conservatives" which caused the banning of scholarly research from the most active German Christian churches (see *Der Spiegel On The New Testament*, pp. 1-24 More recently in the United States, the entire faculty of a Lutheran theological seminary was summarily "exiled" for teaching "liberal" views of the Bible.

The issue boils down to this: the Christian churches are teaching a different "Gospel" than the one taught by Jesus. Christian "theology" has practically no relationship to the Message taught by Jesus!

Competent scholars who work in an atmosphere of intellectual freedom, whether in a seminary or university, have known for half a century that the original teachings of Jesus are incompatible with church theology. Some of them, in the face of this or innumerable other religious contradictions, have simply become cynically inured to the follies of *homo religiosus* and carry on with their eyes closed. Others have fought valiantly to educate their people and interpret Jesus through particular philosophical frameworks, such as existentialist or Tillichian terminology. Still others have quietly withdrawn to their studies in order to pursue a more private religion, maintaining social but not spiritual kinship with other Christians.

The point is, they are not an organized bunch. It is still the Imprimatur of Rome which ultimately decides which works of Catholic scholarship will be made available to the public. Even more insidious is the "conspiracy" of fundamentalist Christianity, which cranks out its own brand of quasi-scholarship as an apologetic answer to the implications of modern research. Here the dogma-mills of Protestant Bible thumpers produce a kind of "anti-scholarship" which is designed to demonstrate the literal infallibility of Scripture. Unfortunately this is not a concern for the spiritual authority of Scripture, but its literal validity as a textbook of geology, history, law, psychology, anthropology and every other field of scientific inquiry. It is a gross misunderstanding of biblical authority.

Perhaps the worst thing about the Bible thumpers is that they listen more to the shrill voices of theological dogma than the inner promptings of Spirit. If one of the Pastoral Epistles of the New Testament transmits a strand of Hellenistic anti-feminism ("I do not allow women to speak in church!"), this is immediately seized upon as a moral injunction straight from the mouth of God! Because they have not studied Scripture in any but a dogmatic and subjective way, they use it to bolster their own prejudices--which we are then told is the "Word of God."

Such persons, then, do not really want to discover what Jesus actually said. They are so afraid of being contaminated by "liberal" biases that they avoid reading the works of objective scholars. True, most good scholars do not uphold such recent articles of evangelical faith as the doctrine that the Bible is a word-for-word literal dictation from a great white-haired Grandfather in the Sky. They may also hold political and moral opinions that could be classified as generally liberal. But that does not invalidate their scholarly research for one who classifies himself as a conservative in these matters. It simply clarifies their biases for him so that he can have better perspective in evaluating their conclusions, which are based in sound scientific method and must be taken seriously by liberals and conservatives alike.

There are three kinds of so-called scholars who publish books on Jesus and his teachings. First are the professional churchmen. These are of two kinds, Roman Catholic and Protestant. The Orthodox generally prefer to publish the writings of their saints.

Both Catholic and Protestant churchmen who write about Jesus are successful and respected members of their churches. With some exceptions they all have axes to grind, theological points to make, and dogmatic blinders which lead them invariably to the familiar doctrines of their particular denominations. Don't expect to learn much about the teachings of Jesus from their publications. They have their own "gospel" to teach.

The second kind of scholar who writes about Jesus is a radical pioneer whose insights are calculated to revolutionize all religious thought. He or she is of two kinds--the eclectic journalist and correspondent, or the maverick academic. One is a traveler and adventurer who has suddenly come upon an ancient manuscript revealing all about Jesus. Somehow this manuscript has mysteriously disappeared or become inaccessible to real scholars. Or perhaps the fellow is a journalist who decides to write about Easter or something equally difficult and significant, which he explains with a few waves of his omniscient pen.

The other is a rebel academic. He has achieved standing among real scholars, but for various reasons has opted out. Several examples come to mind, including the Dead Sea Scroll scholar who began making money on the popular book market and recently produced a theory that early Christianity was a psychedelic mushroom cult. One wonders if this particular fellow hasn't been partaking of the sacred fungus himself! Then there are scholars like Schonfield, whose *Passover Plot* undoubtedly brought him much lucre along with his other popular publications, but had a terrific axe to grind and showed a deplorable lack of scholarly "homework."

In other cases a person with scholarly credentials in one field tries to publish in a foreign field. This can sometimes provide excellent insight and perspective to an ingrown situation. Unfortunately this has not been the case in biblical studies. A classic example is Brandon's *Jesus and the Zealots*, which tried to show the case for Jesus as a social revolutionary. I

made the same case many years ago while in theological seminary. Oddly enough it was during my anti-war days that I chose to see Jesus as a zealot revolutionary, and under the same influences (I am certain) that Brandon had his insights. He is an excellent comparativist of religions, but got in over his head with JESUS AND THE ZEALOTS. It took me, as a biblical scholar, about a year to see through the inconsistencies of this position. Since most other biblical scholars were more advanced in the field than I at that time, Brandon's book made little impact on any but the general public. His thesis, like Schonfield's, stands up only as long as it remains unexposed to the light of data and sources unknown to the superficial researcher, but well known to the specialist.

The same warnings apply to sensationalistic "scientific" writers who have some expertise in one area but now take it upon themselves to become experts in other areas like ancient history and antiquities. Thus Isaac Asimov will explain the Bible to popular readers, and Velikovsky will rewrite history according to his astronomical theories. Others will explain ancient steles as statues of interplanetary rocket ships, and religious architecture as a system of landing markings for space vehicles. Earth may well have been visited by alien intelligences, but *not in the ways suggested by these theoreticians, who totally misunderstand the phenomena and artifacts which they claim to interpret.* The same is true of theosophical writers, who claim to have discovered a "key" or "code" to Scripture. All they have really found is a new way to realize their doctrines by making them "appear" in biblical materials.

With all this complexity, chicanery and even outright fraud, how can a lay person recognize critical research? It is not as difficult as it may seem, because there are many good English publications for the general public by reputable scholars. They are not normally found in local Christian book stores--indeed, they are often systematically screened out of purchase orders. But they can be found in college and university book stores, seminary book stores and libraries associated with institutions of higher education. At times they can be found in good local "secular" book stores as well.

The kind of scholar who writes reliable books on Jesus and his teachings holds a doctorate in biblical studies from a reputable university or seminary, and probably teaches in the same kind of institution. He or she is a member of the Society of Biblical Literature and has published acceptable articles and monographs.

I urge my readers to refer whenever necessary to the final section of this monograph entitled "Further Reading." I have included the information as both a summary bibliography for this book, and a resource tool for the reader who wants to expand his knowledge of the field. It is less a bibliography than a commentary and guide to suitable works in English. Most of the citations are in paperback, and I have included the proper book-numbers so that they can be ordered in paperback editions if desired. Read through this section before starting the book. It

will give you an orientation to the best popular works of serious scholars, and serve as your guide in finding corollary bibliography. There are brief commentaries on recommended books.

Unlike most scholarly works, this book is not cluttered with footnotes. That is because the book is not written for scholars (as most of the "reliable" books and articles are). The purpose of this book is not to argue fine points with other scholars, but to present a comprehensive picture of the historical teachings of Jesus as viewed in the main stream of scholarship. In other words, it is my purpose to introduce the general public to the original teachings of Jesus. Jesus taught a radically different Message than the Christian "Gospel," and I believe that it should be made known.

Jesus did not commit his teachings to writing, like Isaiah or Jeremiah. Instead, and in the highest tradition of Hebrew prophecy, he initiated his hearers into the Dabar, "Thing," or Word of God, proclaiming his Message in both words and deeds. As a rabbi he made disciples and interpreted Scripture to the community. As a prophet he foresaw the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, and he bore the burden of Yahweh's mishpat or Judgment, which he declared against the Jerusalem religious establishment. Finally, as one identified with the Son of Man he revealed the Razim or Mysteries of the Kingdom of God to those who would become shalim, "whole" or "perfect." It is with these three categories in mind that I have divided and classified the teachings of Jesus into rabbinic, prophetic and messianic sayings.

The teachings of Jesus were hidden from the Christian Church in three stages of transmission. First, mehasrim or "messengers" (apostles) like Peter and Thomas had carried their individual interpretations of the Message to Jewish synagogues of the Hellenistic Diaspora in Antioch, Alexandria and the East. Already there was an oral "gospel" according to Peter, another according to Thomas, and so on. Fundamental differences of interpretation had arisen between the solitary ascetics, like Thomas, Bartholomew, Andrew, Simon and Jude, who made renunciation of marriage a basic part of their Message, and Peter, John, James and Matthias, who were more community oriented. New revelation came through Peter and John, and finally Paul opening the Covenant of Israel to the gentile Greeks. So far we can speak of separate Christian churches, each in a different location and with its particular interpretation of Jesus' teachings, according to the various oral "gospels."

But the second stage, in which gentile Greek Christianity overtook the original Jewish-Christian communities and established itself as a new religion with a "new covenant" or New Testament resulted in far more drastic alterations of the Message. Now we can speak of a non-Jewish Christian Church in conflict with synagogue followers of the Way--the original Jewish Christians. Through persecution the conflict became irreconcilable, gentile Christians were expelled from the Jewish assemblies, and the seeds for Christian anti-semitism were sown. From now on the parables which Jesus had directed against the political-religious establishment at

Jerusalem would be interpreted as a castigation of all "Jews," who had (by rejecting Pauline ecumenism and the Greek Christologies of the "Lord" Jesus which sounded too much like Zeus-worship to the monotheistic Jewish Christians) supposedly also rejected Jesus. Jewish and Greek Christians parted ways, and within a few decades the original followers of Jesus in Galilee and elsewhere were designated as "heretics" and "Ebionites" by the Church.

The messianic teachings of Jesus, originally cast in the mold of the Son-of-Man community of Jewish saints and martyrs, became wholly subjugated to the new teachings of the Greek Church. The Gospel of the Kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus was recast in Greek terms as the "Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." No longer was the emphasis upon the Kingdom, but upon the Messenger himself. As the original Aramaic sayings of Jesus were translated into Greek, they lost their life-settings and idiomatic meanings to become part of the Christian theological development.

Finally, the documents of the Greek New Testament were written. In this third stage of transmission the concern was less for what Jesus meant than for *what Jesus means to the Church*. Jesus Christ, in the garb of a Greek hero or demigod, became the central mystery of faith (pistis, "belief"), rather than fidelity (amen). The teachings would become fodder for later theological, soteriological and Christological speculation, finally to crystallize as Church dogma. Jesus the Jewish Son of Man, had been eclipsed along with his original followers.

**PART ONE**

**THE RABBINIC TEACHING OF JESUS**



## PART ONE

### THE RABBINIC TEACHING OF JESUS

Jesus of Nazareth lived and taught as a Galilean Jew of first-century Palestine. He, like the scribes or sopherim of the popular Pharisaic movement, was an interpreter of Scripture. He was known as a Rab ("Great One; Master of Israel") and addressed as Rabbi, "My Master." As a rabbi Jesus accepted disciples, but unlike most of his contemporaries he accepted many women as well as men.

The oral "tradition of the Elders" was the basic legal guide for community life in Jerusalem, but not in Galilee. Pharisees or "Separated Ones," and the wealthy upper-class Sadducees or "Righteous Ones," constituted the official Temple Establishment against whom disenfranchised Zadokite Priests of the Damascus community and Qumran protested. These and other sectarian communities had developed a form of priesthood outside of the Temple using sacred meals, kiddushim or forms of eucharistic oblation in place of animal or blood sacrifice, various mikvoth or purificatory baptisms, Kabbalistic psalm recitation or intoning, and other "reformist" practices that Jesus taught to his disciples. However, when we closely examine the Manual of Discipline and other documents from the Qumran "Dead Sea Scrolls" and other contemporary sources, we find that while Jesus shared some ideals and practices with many sects, he rejected many basic tenets of Qumran Essenism and others. Unlike John the Baptist, who evidences possible Essene ties, Jesus was not an Essene, a Zadokite, or anything else. *He was unique.*

Although the Sadducees numbered only a few thousand, they controlled great political power and wealth. They had sold out to the occupying Romans in exchange for positions of influence and were despised by the amme-ha-eretz or common "people of the land." They were ultra-conservative about scriptural canon, accepting only the first five books of the Old Testament. They had so thoroughly abandoned Jewish culture in favor of Hellenism that the men underwent cosmetic surgery to replace their circumcised foreskins in order to look like Greeks in the gymnasium! Yet they also infuriated the Romans Emperor by refusing to offer the state sacrifices, as the later Christian martyrs would do, thus precipitating the Great Revolt in Jerusalem. Wealthy Sadducees may have joined Essenes to finance and support Galilean Zealots and Jerusalem sicarii or assassins in violent revolution to expel the Roman soldiers and achieve the liberation of Palestine. This may be why the both parties disappeared from history after the disastrous seige of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. The surviving force that finally made an acceptable

accommodation with the Roman authorities and set the stage for the tannaitic or rabbinic Judaism of the early medieval period after the destruction of the Second Temple came from the Pharisaic party.

The Pharisees were the more popular political power in Jerusalem, although their numbers were only about twice that of the Sadducees. It was they who cared for Jewish tradition and culture, and from their ranks that most of the rabbis came. There was constant rivalry between them and the Sadducees in the Sanhedrin, or political assembly of Jerusalem. The Pharisees accepted not only all of what is now called the Old Testament, but numerous pseudepigraphical and apocryphal works such as the *Book of Enoch* (as did the early Christians--cf. Jude 1.14-15). They also accepted a vast body of stories about angels, saints, revelations known as haggadah, most important of which included ideas about one or more messiahs, Resurrection and final judgment. Ultimately tannaitic Judaism would develop the concept of an oral Torah given to Moses on Sinai together with the written Scriptural Torah, or first five books of the Bible. This was the "tradition of men" decried by the Master Jesus--a body of oral interpretation of Torah that Jesus considered to be corrupt and tending to preserve a religious elitism that ran totally counter to the enlightened teachings of the prophets.

The Books of Moses contained laws and traditions from ancient times, some designed for a wandering nomadic society and others for a national community. Many of these laws applied to situations that no longer existed in an urban or agricultural society, and many situations arose during the time of Jesus for which there were no literal texts. It was the responsibility of the scribes or "lawyers" to study Scripture, grasp the essential "spirit" of God's ancient laws, and then offer interpretations which could be applied to contemporary situations.

A large deposit of Scriptural interpretation had been handed down from the mouth of the teacher to the ear of the student for many centuries, both in Babylon and in Palestine. Different schools of interpretation had arisen, such as those of Hillel and Shammai, with differing strictness or emphasis. The rabbi had the authority to "bind or loose," that is, to mandate strict observance of a tradition or relax it. The talmidim or disciples of a rabbi learned the teacher's halakah or "way of walking." The disciples of Jesus were originally called followers of the "Way," or the Halakah of Jesus. Even in the New Testament Jesus is shown confronting his disciples with the command, "Come, follow (halak) me."

The Halakah of Master Jesus was often in strong and direct conflict with the developing oral Torah of the Pharisees. In that distinction lies the root of the eventual split between messianic Jews expecting a political Messiah Ben-David, and the messianic Jews following the Halakah of Master Jesus. Jesus was not a political revolutionary. He was a mystic with a "realized eschatology." He constantly warned the Jewish people about the natural consequences to follow if

Jesus taught against the background of contemporary rabbinic interpretation. Like the scribes, he was concerned to keep the Torah meaningful and relevant by teaching people how to "fulfill" Scripture--that is, to find and apply the true spiritual understanding of ancient Law to the issues of contemporary life. At times he concurred with the conservative school of Shammai (divorce and remarriage). In other cases he upheld the interpretations of the Hillelites (Sabbath regulations). But much of the time he established completely new interpretations, as for example in Mark 12 (with parallels in Matthew and Luke) when he revealed that women are equal to men in the Resurrection.

The halakic and other rabbinic teachings of Jesus account for only a small part of what has been preserved in Christian tradition, but undoubtedly the Galilean school of rabbinic interpretation is what underlies the entire Christian approach to Scripture, with its concern for allegory, typology and revelation.

It should be said that Galilean rabbinic tradition was much different than that of Jerusalem. The Judaeen rabbis were orthodox and legalistic, where those of Galilee were charismatic. Many of them were famous as exorcists and healers. It is said of one of them that he "saw by the Holy Spirit," that is, was clairvoyant, and could also "see" whether God had answered his prayers as he spoke them. Jesus was brought up in this heterodox and charismatic religious environment, and when he came preaching in Judaea he was despised and looked down upon by native rabbis as an unorthodox heretic. Jesus faced little opposition in Galilee, but sparked fatal enmity in Judaea which eventually led to his crucifixion at the urging of the Jerusalem religious establishment, especially the Temple priests.

But even more than a rabbi, Jesus was a prophet and Son of Man. His teachings in these contexts, however, must wait for later chapters on the prophetic and messianic mysteries of Jesus Christ.

## Chapter One THE SPIRIT OF SCRIPTURE

It is important to understand how Jesus himself used Scripture, because his approach to the Scriptures of his time was much different than the attitude taken today by Christian fundamentalists toward the Bible.

Perhaps the most essential element in rabbinical interpretation was the attitude that each individual rabbi took toward Jewish Scripture. If he were a conservative Sadducee or Samaritan, he may have accepted only the first five books of the Old Testament as "inspired." If he were a liberal Pharisee, he accepted not only the Torah, but the Prophets and the Writings, as well as the developing "tradition of the Elders," oral Torah, and Haggadah or legends and stories. The Prophets and the Writings included not only what is now known to Christians as the Old Testament, but the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha as well.

Jesus accepted these writings, and so did the early Christians. That is why the Epistle of Jude quotes two verses from the Book of Enoch and mentions the intertestamental legendary description of the dispute between Satan and the Archangel Michael over the bones of Moses. The Epistle to the Hebrews refers to the intertestamental writing about Abel who continued to speak the praises of Yahweh even after he had been murdered by Cain.

In this chapter we will examine the portions of the Old Testament which tradition indicates Jesus used, and see how and why he quoted them to his hearers. We will find that his approach to Scripture was not at all literalistic, but allegorical, typological and in complete opposition to the "fundamentalist" interpretation of the Pharisaic scribes.

*Jesus loved Scripture and was thoroughly familiar with it. When challenged by Judaeen rabbis, he was skillful in defending his teachings by applying convincing interpretations to sacred texts.*

But his use of Scripture was far more than a facile tool to outwit clever opponents. It spoke to issues in a simple and direct fashion, repeatedly demonstrating that the Laws of Yahweh were inscribed in the hearts of mankind, as the prophet Jeremiah had said.

His school of interpretation was Galilean, which carried on the traditions of the Old Testament prophets rather than those of the Temple priests and levites. Jesus was grounded in the prophetic "religion of the pure heart," which demanded hesed, or covenantal love for God's Word, and amen or fidelity of inner intent. This was not the "believing" faith or Credo of Christian dogma, and was (in fact) directly opposed to doctrinal faith. It could not be demonstrated by liturgies of sacrifice or "works of Torah" prescribed by the Pharisaic rabbis. Liberation (jeshua) or "salvation," as the Christians would later call it, was not a matter of the mind, but the heart and the inner person.

Rabbinic rulings were complex, technical and often arbitrary. Many of them evoked no deep sense of zedek or "justice," and were based more upon legal precedent than a sincere attempt to pierce the veil of God's true intent. But the prophetic teachings of Jesus conveyed the "spirit," essence, or intention of a scriptural text to the heart of the hearer. There was a sense of recognition and interior realization that Jesus was teaching Spiritual Truth, i.e. the Dabar of Yahweh.

For Jesus, the interpretation of sacred scripture depended upon the Ruah Ha-Qodesh or Pure ("Holy") Spirit and Her mediation of the Torah which God had inscribed in the "heart." God could be known with or without the Books of Moses. All that separated mankind from Yahweh was the "stiff neck" or "hard heart," which manifested at its worst among the self-righteous religionists.

THE DAY WILL COME WHEN THEY WILL KILL YOU, he declared, THINKING THEY DO THE WILL OF GOD.

In modern times the situation is no different. The social order is still subject to those who maintain the "tradition of the Elders." Human beings are abused in the name of God, patriotism, law-and-order and Karl Marx by idealists who give priority to the shrill sounds of the mind, instead of the still, small voice of God. As Paul would later summarize Jesus' approach to law and Scripture, "THE LETTER KILLS, BUT THE SPIRIT BRINGS LIFE." The Son of Man had opened the Scriptures to the man who had once sat at the feet of Gamaliel to memorize the traditions of the rabbis.

THE HEAVIEST COMMANDMENT IS THIS: "HEAR O' ISRAEL: THERE IS ONLY ONE MASTER, YAHWEH OUR GOD.' YOU MUST LOVE YAHWEH YOUR GOD WITH YOUR WHOLE HEART, YOUR WHOLE SELF, AND YOUR WHOLE STRENGTH!" THE SECOND IS THIS: "YOU MUST LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF:" NO OTHER COMMANDMENT IS GREATER THAN THESE.

Jesus spoke these words in answer to a question of "binding" and "loosing." Which are the weightiest of the mitzvot or commandments directly from Yahweh, and therefore the most important to keep in daily life? In the Old Testament there are many different speakers--sometimes Moses, sometimes David, sometimes one of the prophets, and in some cases Yahweh Himself. Jesus and the rabbis distinguished between "lighter" and "heavier" portions of the Bible, according to who was speaking. The portions in which Yahweh spoke directly were considered to be the most important, and for Jesus that included the prophetic "Thus saith the LORD."

Paul distinguishes between sayings "from the Lord Jesus" (heavy) , information he

received "by the Spirit" (medium) and "I say, not the Lord" (light)--as in places where he insists that women be silent in church and cover their heads (appealing to an old rabbinical interpretation), or that men cut their hair short in the Roman style (appealing to his personal idea of common sense, "nature," and to reinforce his political hope that Christianity would become a religio licita or legally tolerated religion in the Roman Empire). In these cases, and in many of his other attitudes, Paul conformed to existing social customs and institutions or advocated his personal preferences rather than transmitting words of divine inspiration. Yet modern fundamentalists "weight" these passages as heavily as the words of Jesus, thereby making cultural hair styles into religious issues!

In his ruling on the heaviest commandments, Jesus has emphasized the prophetic term for "love," hesed. This is an eager and ardent devotion, a "true love," which would be shared by intimate friends or lovers. It is the prophet's zeal, with which Jesus was consumed when he cleansed the Temple of sacrificial animals and money-changers. It is a sincere, faithful, and charismatic love. It is single of heart and mind, pure of inner intent. Therefore it cannot serve two masters, but only the Master ("Lord") Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Such a love requires the entire attention and allegiance. It cannot be balanced against desire for money ("Mammon"), fame or sensuality. If so the person becomes "double-minded" (literally, "double-souled, double-lived"), and he cannot be amen (faithful) or shalem (whole, integrated). Jesus interprets God's requirements as first of all a complete and total love, zeal or desire for His way and will, and second after this an unfeigned compassionate affection for all persons. What is more, the two commandments are mutual. There cannot be love of God without love for mankind. Love for God cannot be coupled with cynicism for humanity, nor can devotion to humanity exist without devotion to God's way.

This is transmitted in the teachings of St. John the Elder, who carried on Jesus' interpretation when he wrote, "Whosoever seeth his brother in need, and shutteth up the bowels of his compassion for him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" In many other places he writes that the outward evidence of love for God is love for fellow man. These insights have been carried on into modern times through the beautiful parables of Leo Tolstoy, the legend of the Fourth Wise Man, and other sources.

The great Shema' Israel, "Hear O' Israel," means both to hear with the ears and to obey. The Hebrew word for Lord is Adonai, but the English translation LORD (with all capital letters) is used for the Hebrew Name of God--the great Tetragrammaton YHWH. Most scholars follow the practice of indicating this Name with the word Yahweh, as I have done. The statement is not monotheistic. It does not say that only one god exists. It says that there must be only one Adonai, Master or "Lord," namely Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. That is to say, in a world of many gods, laws and interpretations, there is to be fidelity to the Word of

Yahweh alone.

The "heart" (leb) is a semitic concept underlying a whole system of prophetic language about sincerity, truth, reality, love, worth, life and meaning. It is related to the ancient Egyptian "heart" which is weighed on the scales of Ma'at or Divine Justice in the court of Osiris. In Egyptian a wise man is called a "man of heart," meaning a person of understanding, since the "heart" was the seat of wisdom. Jeremiah prophesied a time when God's Covenant or "Testament" would be renewed with mankind, during which His commandments would be found inscribed in the heart of every person. The scientia cordis or "knowledge of the heart" is constantly championed by Jesus in his teachings, as opposed to the "hard-heartedness" of those who "look and look, but do not see; listen and listen, but do not understand."

The personal "self" is the nephesh or whole character including the physical body. There is no mind-body dualism in the semitic concept of self, and for this reason the early Jewish Christians heatedly opposed the gentile Greek idea that Resurrection was of a bodiless spirit. But again, the body to be raised was not that of the "flesh" or "meat" (basar). It would be a spiritual (pneumatikos) body, which was the flesh, so to speak, of the "inner man," the bar-enash or Son of Man.

To love God with the whole self is perhaps best expressed in the poetry of Job: "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him...and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God." These inspired passages came into the sacred text through a process of textual corruption (Job 13.15; 19.26), and have no connection with the original meanings, but were current proof-texts at the time of Jesus in this form. The purist would call them corrupt, but Jesus and Paul probably loved them because they illustrated the faithful "self," character or nephesh of a saint under attack by the religious establishment.

GO AND LEARN WHAT THIS MEANS: "I DESIRE DIVINE LOVE (hesed) AND NOT SACRIFICE."

This saying is attributed to Jesus only in Matthew's Gospel, and is used editorially to illuminate the situation in which Jesus answers criticism of his association with "sinners." Many scholars would dismiss it as part of the Matthean redactional "proof text," which it undoubtedly is at this point. For Matthew, it emphasizes the "mercy" (eleos, Greek), kindness and compassion of Christ, but as Jesus would have used this, it means hesed.

But Matthew's special material shows strong evidence of a Jewish-Christian scribal school with rabbinical traditions rooted in the teachings of Jesus, and it seems certain that much of the Old Testament usage in the Gospel reflects the usage of Jesus--now altered for the purposes of Christian apologetics.

In this case the sense of "mercy" is derived from the Septuagintal or Greek version of the Old Testament, and was certainly not used by Jesus. Rather, the quotation from the prophet Hosea, 6.6, was an all-purpose exhortation. It was cited as a weighty Scripture (coming directly from the mouth of God) clearly stating that He desired covenantal hesed, love or zeal rather than outward liturgies of sacrifice. In prophetic religion the contrast is often drawn between the ceremonial piety of the royal court and Temple, and the inward purity of the "true Israelite," who is without guile and outward show.

FAITHFULLY (amen) I SAY UNTO YOU, UNTIL HEAVEN AND EARTH PASS AWAY, NOT ONE YOD OR HORNLET SHALL PASS AWAY FROM THE TORAH.

Like the previous saying, this is part of Matthew's special material and reflects Jesus' attitude toward Scripture. His mission was to "fulfill" or interpret Scripture, which to him was absolutely sacred. To "fulfill" a Scripture did not necessarily mean to show how a future prediction had come to pass, or speculate as to how it might come to pass. Prophecy as such had very little to do with foretelling the future in mundane terms. It spoke, rather, of allegorical and spiritual reality in its apocalyptic descriptions of the rise and fall of kingdoms, which were subtle realms of the "powers and principalities" which lay behind the literal world kingdoms and rulers.

In the time of Jesus it was common practice for certain mystic schools of Judaism to use gematria, numerology and other systems of transposition to derive secret meanings. This involved substituting Hebrew words for textual words that had the same numerical value, interchanging the yod (the smallest Hebrew letter) with the waw to make a new word, and other gimmicks. In this way fanciful interpretations could be made which had nothing at all to do with prophetic faith, and were nothing more than mental doctrines of those who considered themselves to be wise and skilled in the occult understanding of God's mysteries. Against such practices Jesus spoke, not to establish primacy of the "letter" over Spirit, but to declare the validity of biblical faith.

As the disciple John told his school, Jesus was the first-loved and favorite of God who remains in the "bosom of the Father," and it was he who properly understood, explained and exegeted (exigisato) the Scriptures (John 1.18).

ISAIAH PROPHECIED WELL ABOUT YOU HYPOCRITES, AS IT IS WRITTEN:  
"THESE PEOPLE HONOR ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEARTS ARE FAR FROM ME. IN VANITY DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE COMMANDMENTS OF MEN." FORSAKING THE COMMANDMENT OF GOD, YOU HOLD FAST TO THE TRADITION OF MEN. HOW WELL YOU PUT ASIDE THE COMMANDMENT OF GOD THAT YOU MIGHT ESTABLISH YOUR TRADITION.



FOR MOSES SAID, "HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER," AND, "LET WHOEVER REVILES HIS FATHER OR MOTHER BE PUT TO DEATH." BUT YOU SAY, IF A MAN INVOKES THE KORBAN IN RESPECT TO HIS MOTHER OR FATHER, THEN HIS ESTATE BELONGS TO THE TEMPLE TREASURY AGAINST WHATEVER FILIAL RESPONSIBILITY MIGHT BE OWED. YOU LEGALLY FREE HIM FROM DOING ANYTHING FOR FATHER OR MOTHER--INVALIDATING THE WORD OF GOD FOR THE SAKE OF YOUR TRADITIONS, WHICH YOU HAVE PERPETUATED.

What Jesus meant by the word "hypocrite" will be discussed in the section on his prophetic teachings, but essentially it referred not to "play-acting," pretense, insincerity or falseness (as the Greek word implies), but to self-magnification, selfishness and self-aggrandizement. Hypocrisy is the bloated, egoistic demand for power and privilege which characterizes the "me-first" mentality. It is greed, in the form presented here, for the Korban was a religious vow releasing a pious person from any responsibility to support his parents in their old age. Supposedly one's surplus wealth became the property of the Temple treasury, although undoubtedly there were kickbacks, just as today there are tax breaks for certain kinds of philanthropy. Even without graft, however, the religious person in donating his excess wealth to the Temple was gaining certain merits from God. These "friends" or "advocates" before God (as we find them called in other places) would balance the scales of judgment in favor of the philanthropist after death, something like the indulgences which were sold in medieval Europe. Clearly, then, the inner intent of such philanthropy, especially when it denied necessary support to one's aging parents, was crass spiritual greed.

Jesus points out what the tradition of Korban has done to the weightier mitzvot or Scriptural commandments which come directly from the mouth of Moses. They have been "loosed" in favor of later oral legal traditions which reflect either simple economic convenience or at best an unguided human attempt to please God, for the Korban or "gift" itself could be devotional. It was a practice of the Nazirite. But it was the placing of imagined religious duty ahead of human need, especially familial obligation, against which Jesus spoke. For the same reason another Matthean saying of Jesus advises: "If you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift before the altar and first be reconciled to your brother. Then come and offer your gift."

As always, for Jesus the devotion to God and love for mankind are not separable, and only through a clear conscience and pure intent can one really offer God a "gift." God has no need of gold or silver. Rather, he requires justice and love.

For the same reason the prophet Isaiah cried out against the "vanity" or emptiness of

cultic worship in his time. The Word of God, speaking in the first person, came through Isaiah complaining that, "In vanity do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." Jesus quotes this weighty expression of God's lamentation against Israel to exemplify the greater implications of the Korban abuse. Human ideas have supplanted divine revelation, and the "traditions of the Elders" have usurped the authority of Moses, the great prophet of Yahweh.

Amos cried out against the cultic practices of his time, which included elaborate daily Temple sacrifices, payment of tithes far heavier than those mandated in the Torah, and the smug faith that God would elevate Israel above all other nations. He excoriated the royal priests.

Speaking the Word of God in the first person, he thundered against the religious establishment:

"I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not delight in your solemn assemblies. Though you offer me burnt-offerings and your meat-offerings, I will not accept them. Neither will I regard the peace-offerings of your fat beasts. Take away from me the noise of your psalms, for I will not endure the music of your lutes.

"But let justice roll down like water, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream! Did you bring me sacrifices and gifts, O' Israel, those forty years in the wilderness? No! But now you take up the shrine of your idol king and the thrones of your images, which you have made for yourselves."

The spiritual reality of the "tradition of the Elders," then, was that it constituted a subtle idolatry. No longer were the living teachings of God to be sought out and valued. In their place the religious establishment had developed a complicated system of dogma and duty. It had begun spiritually as an attempt to preserve, codify, and interpret Israel's divine revelation. The revelation, or the Torah, was just and holy. But as it passed through generations of minds, it lost its savor and meaning, finally to stand only as a tool for social control and personal advancement.

Undoubtedly the pious Pharisee was absolutely sincere and did not think in terms of social power or advancement. The same is true for religious persons today. It was simply "convenient" that piety advanced one's social position, business connections and magnified the ego. But Jesus stripped religion bare, exposing its motives and inner, spiritual workings. This was the vision of the prophets, to glimpse the inner realities and call them to task.

HAVE YOU NEVER READ THIS TEXT? "THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED HAS BECOME THE MAIN CORNER-STONE. THIS IS THE LORD'S DOING, AND IT IS WONDERFUL IN OUR EYES."

This use of Scripture comes through the preaching of Peter which Mark used for his Gospel. In Mark it is a messianic proof-text meaning that Jesus, the Messiah ben-Joseph or Rock or Son of Man, who was rejected by the Jews (the "builders") has now (in Christian faith) become the cornerstone of revelation, to the astonishment of all. The rejected prophet Jesus has been "Christed" by God.

This text was probably used by Jesus to illuminate his teaching that the weightier commandments, revelations and teachings of God had been rejected by the Jerusalem religious establishment (the "builders" of orthodox Jewish interpretation). But in the teachings of Jesus the rejected "stone" or the prophetic understanding of Scripture has become the main tenet. In the psalm attributed to the prophet-king David from which this is taken (118.22-23, Christian numbering), there are many lines which Christian tradition has memorialized, such as "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord," and "This is the day which the Lord has made." This shows that Psalm 118 was meaningful in early tradition, and was undoubtedly sung often by Jesus and his disciples. The verses about the rejected stone being accepted by God summarized the hopes of Jesus for recognition of his teachings. As will be discussed in the section on the messianic teachings of Jesus, it also typified the glorification of the prophetic Son-of-Man community and therefore had intense personal meaning as well.

The development of messianic speculation from its roots in Galilean prophetic Son-of-Man tradition to the Christologies of the Greek gospels will be discussed in another section. It is enough now to simply point out that Jesus was not a self-proclaiming messiah who demanded absolute belief in his divinity. This portrait, which we find in John's Gospel, is an "illuminated" Jesus. Here the Church portrays not the Jesus of history, but the Christ of Christian doctrine. As was customary for revelatory discourse, the theology about the deity (Christ) is revealed from his own mouth. This portrait of Jesus Christ reflects what the writers of the gospel thought about him, rather than what Jesus said or thought about himself.

IS IT NOT WRITTEN: "MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL NATIONS?" BUT YOU HAVE MADE IT INTO A DEN OF THIEVES.

In this saying Jesus uses rabbinical methods to prophesy against the religious establishment at the Temple in Jerusalem. Taking up the Spirit of Isaiah, whose complaint was against the very religious evils that Jesus confronted in his own time, Jesus reproached the Temple priests for allowing the commercialization of worship. Great sums of money were spent for the sacrificial animals, which were stabled on the premises and sold daily to pilgrims. The Temple treasury had become an Institution of economic intrigue, and the priestly offices were bought and sold, or bartered for political favor.

The universalism of the prophetic vision, which saw Yahweh as the one God of all people, had been made perverse by the pious religious authorities. To them, God was the personal property of Israel, and Israel (especially the high-ranking religionist) was God's favorite son. The universalism of the prophets was twisted into the exclusivism of the Temple establishment. God's Temple was to have been a house of prayer (not animal sacrifice) for all the goyim or nations, but instead it had been made into what Jeremiah called a "den of thieves."

Even though there are few evidences of Jesus' universalism in respect to gentiles, Peter's tradition includes a story about Jesus and the Syro-Phoenician woman--a gentile. Jesus healed her son once she had indicated her humility, since for Jesus humility was one aspect of amen or faithfulness ("faith"). In other apostolic traditions Jesus heals a Roman centurion's son, declaring that the man has greater amen than he has found in all of Israel. Jesus praises the Samaritan over and against the Judean religionists for his hesed or "love," and reveals a radically positive attitude toward women as well. All these cases show that Jesus was not a respecter of social position, race, sex or religion. He was universalistic because he loved truth, justice and purity of heart, and these things transcended mere Jewish ethnicity. His mission was to Israel, but his Message was for all mankind.

These few examples of Jesus' attitude toward Scripture and his method of interpretation show that he was concerned not to "strain at the gnats" of literal trivia, but to establish the basic principles of spiritual living. He concerned himself less with literal meanings than the "spirit" of revelation itself, yet maintained the primacy and authority of revelation by emphasizing Scripture and Torah.

He had no use for biblical literalism, as his satirization of the pious Pharisees shows. He saw them straining soup, broth or wine through cloth filters to remove the ubiquitous insects which buzz around food in the Middle East. They were doing this not for reasons of sanitation, but to avoid breaking the dietary rules of Leviticus which designate most insects as "unclean," except for locusts, which John the Baptist is said to have eaten.

But the inward reason for this and other ritual practices (such as foot-washing and cup-wiping) was not spiritual but "hypocritical," or self-magnifying. The pious religionist with his strict biblical literalism wanted to publicly demonstrate his superiority to the amme-ha-eretz or great unwashed mass of non-practicing Jews. In the process he would show God how righteous he was, and gain "merits."

Jesus laughed at these antics, and told his disciples that such a person would "strain at gnats, and swallow a camel." The camel, of course, was far more unclean than an insect. The illustration is of a pious Pharisee straining gnats from a broth made of camel bones.

Thus the paradox: By straining at the "gnats" of biblical literalism, or by fulfilling numerous minor pieties as ends in themselves, the Pharisee was swallowing a far more unclean

food than insects. He was making himself unclean in the sight of God with his self-righteousness and condemnation for his neighbor. Where was the compassion, the humility, the purity of heart and intention which Scripture upholds as primary? Instead were to be found self-aggrandizement, greed for "merit" and "respect of persons."

For Jesus, Torah and observations like the Sabbath customs were given for the benefit of mankind. It was perverse for them to be turned against certain persons for reasons of guile. When criticized for breaking Sabbath regulations, and therefore the literal interpretation of Torah, Jesus answered:

THE SABBATH WAS MADE FOR MAN, AND NOT MAN FOR THE SABBATH.

St. Paul carried on the same disputation that Jesus had begun when he said that the Torah itself was good and holy, but that man's response was only to misuse it for condemnation of others, and therefore of self. It had served its time as a "teacher," but now with the revelation of Jesus the Anointed ("Christ") it must be understood in the light of Spirit. No one can keep the "traditions of the Elders" perfectly in every point, says Paul. The laws have grown too complex and cumbersome, and only the most learned and pious could even approach the rigorous demands of the Law. Even then they fail, showing that no one is "justified" by works of Torah before God. Paul speaks with the authority of one who has studied Torah deeply, and spent every waking moment engaged in strict practice.

But Jesus, says Paul, has shown how simple and basic are the requirements of God. In the process God has confounded the wise and entered the hearts of those who are untutored. Those who are "wise in their own conceits" are hard of heart and stiff of neck. They turn away from the sun, and therefore are enshadowed, for God's way is not legal, but spiritual. It does not consist in outer show, but inner fidelity. It is not the "way that seems right to men," in the guile of their minds. Rather it is hidden in their hearts. Thus Jesus could say to the Pharisees who were attacking him:

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS WITHIN YOU (literally, 'inside your heart').

Paul and the early Christians used the methods of Scriptural interpretation developed by Jesus to elaborate the foundations for gentile Christianity. It was not difficult. Jesus was a universalist, as were Isaiah, Ezekiel and many of the prophets. His rabbinic teachings, which showed compassion for the amme-ha-eretz, Samaritans and gentiles, were easily expanded to justify the inclusion of Greeks into the Covenant of Israel.

But again the criticism which Jesus had directed against the Jerusalem establishment, with all of its prophetic Scriptural exegesis, was soon turned against non-messianic Judaism, and finally served as polemic against all Judaism itself.

Already the Christian "tradition of the Elders" had taken root, and Christian use of the Old Testament Scriptures had radically parted company with the Jewish disciples of Jesus in

Galilee and elsewhere. Jesus' emphasis upon the heart, soul and spirit of Scripture had been turned into a charismatic antinomianism that apostolic leaders must do their best to correct. But by the end of the century, all of the original apostles (with the possible exception of John) had been martyred, or had "fallen asleep."

The original Message of Jesus, and his understanding of Scripture, had been radically altered to serve the needs of Greek Gentile Christianity.

**Chapter Two**  
**CONDITIONS FOR DISCIPLESHIP**

Jesus was clearly much more than a rabbi, and the force of his teachings convinced many of the inhabitants of Palestine that he was a great prophet. In addition to his Galilean interpretations of Scripture, he manifested the charismatic phenomena for which the greatest Northern rabbis and saints had been known--healing, clairvoyance, clairaudience, power over demons.

But his rabbinic ministry did not fit any of the established patterns for a Master of Israel. Jesus had not been schooled in the orthodox centers of learning, and he had not apprenticed at the feet of a recognized teacher. He spoke with far greater authority than others of his background and training were allowed, yet "the common people heard him gladly." He had no credentials, and would not indicate the source of his knowledge.

Neither then nor now has anyone been able to discover where Jesus received his training. Some have speculated that he was a member of whatever heterodox sect John the Baptist represented, and that he was originally John's disciple. But unless the New Testament evidence has been thoroughly colored by anti-Baptist polemic (there is evidence for minimization of John's importance), it seems clear that the basic relationship between him and Jesus was only slight. Jesus had responded to his prophetic preaching and come forward for the symbolic "washing" which represented submission to God's will and perhaps a re-crossing of the Jordan into a spiritual Promised Land. Whether Jesus and John were even cousins is dubious, given the fictional character of the Lucan genealogical material. John was the spiritual forerunner of Jesus, but probably not his teacher.

Other speculations have run from a secret esoteric Essene community to mysterious sojourns in Egypt and Persia. This seems unlikely given the specifically Jewish character of Jesus' Message, and the surprise and even rejection expressed by family and townspeople at his preaching. Jesus was known to his contemporaries as the son of Joseph the carpenter. His family thought him mad or possessed when he began preaching to groups, according to the Petrine tradition of Mark's Gospel. All this mitigates against the esoteric wisdom-school theory.

Yet it is hard to understand how a home-town boy could pick up such a great repertoire of scriptural knowledge simply by hearing and occasionally being appointed to read Torah in the synagogue, as the rustic romantics have suggested.

Perhaps we must take seriously what Jesus indicates and John the Evangelist claims, namely that Jesus was taught and guided by God's Holy Spirit. To put this into perspective, let us remember what the phenomenology of religions tells us about tutorial "spirits" and voices.

Most shamans, saints, and mystics follow a general pattern of awakening in their lives

which involves a period of illness or rigor, followed by a mastery or enlightenment which brings communication with tutorial or "teaching" spirits. This phenomenon occurs equally among Arctic Tungas shamans, Hindu mystics, African medicine men, modern mediums and a host of other spiritualists. Socrates had his tutorial *daemon*, which spoke to him. Saints like Joan of Arc experienced divine instruction. Mohammad received his revelations in a cave from the Archangel Gabriel while quivering and quaking in ecstatic fear. Everywhere he turned, the Angel was standing before his view.

Abstracting from these and a huge volume of other examples themselves worthy of many books, it is quite possible to picture Jesus as a man driven into the wilderness by that greatest of all tutorial spirits, the Spirit of God. Thus, in Semitic culture, he would be seen as a "madman," as his family is said to have viewed him. His instruction, then, would not require wisdom schools. It would be an ongoing experience, for the most part hidden from others, which after a final critical "testing" would blossom forth into a charismatic ministry.

Jesus, then, need not have been the disciple of a particular Galilean rabbi, but merely the hearer of many. He need not have been a student of Torah, but must have advanced to the highest degree of learning possible for a boy of his social status, and been a bright student in the synagogue school. There basic literacy was taught using the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings as study texts.

Here, then, was a rabbi taught by God instead of man. His manner and customs were highly unorthodox. Unlike most rabbis he called all persons to discipleship, rather than the select few who were privileged to be chosen. Unlike most rabbis he encouraged and made many women disciples, some of whom (according to the Book of Acts) were still being "discovered" by apostolic missionaries throughout Palestine halfway into the first Christian century. He did not allow his disciples to act as his "servants," in accordance with custom, but actually acted out the lesson of "serving" them in order to show the essence of greatness in God's eyes. He did not require his disciples to fast, as did the disciples of John the Baptist, because for him the true "fast" was that proclaimed by Isaiah:

"Is this such a fast that I have chosen, a day for a man to afflict his soul? To bow down his head as a bullrush, and to spread sack-cloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, and an acceptable day unto Yahweh? But rather, is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free?"

This was the "acceptable day of Yahweh" which Jesus proclaimed, for Jesus was a rabbi who had been taught by God through the great prophets like Isaiah.



Jesus called all persons to discipleship regardless of social position, manner of life, sex, or age. But though many were called, only a few responded or were "elected, chosen." The semitic idiom uses the term for "choice" in a much broader way than in Greek or English. For one to "elect" is for that person to "be elect." In other words, choosing to follow Jesus made one "chosen" (Hebrew "tested, proven").

How differently Church theology has dealt with the idea of "election," which it has distorted into an issue of predestination and "election!" Jesus invited all persons to respond, and when they did he accepted them. The churches often invite all persons to be baptized, but theologizes that only a few are of the "elect." The implication is that all these "elect" are gentiles, which puts the original preaching of Jesus into an absurd double-bind situation. Supposedly he was preaching to his own people only to condemn them!

This, in fact, is always the case with a prophet. His prophecies do condemn the leaders and even the whole people. But they are meant for correction, and even if the teachings are rejected at one time (as in the case of Isaiah) they are given and recorded for a later time. The early gentile churches, however, decided that the prophecies of Jesus against the religious establishment were meant to condemn all Jews, and that God's purpose in sending Jesus was that he might be rejected by his own people in order to open up the riches of Israel to all nations.

St. Paul possibly originated this view of God's purpose, and he certainly writes a great deal about this "mystery." As far as he goes, it is good theology. But other generations and societies of Christian theologians would use the insights of Paul to perpetuate blatant anti-semitisms and dogmas which emphasized the exclusionary aspects of "election." The general idea would be that "our Church" is the true Noah's Ark of salvation, "our people" are the true "elect" of Israel, and all the rest can go to hell!

In fact, Jesus seems to have held out three main conditions for discipleship. The first was obedience to the revealed Word of God, through an understanding of the Spirit of Scripture that could come only by "submission" or (to use the corrupted Latinization) "repentance." This was the condition which John the Baptist preached. Second was the manifestation of prophetic hesed or "love," which most often demanded the acceptance of material ebov or "poverty." Third was shalom or "perfection," which was to be sought in applying the halakoth and haggadoth or "sayings" of Jesus to everyday life.

Perhaps the simplest illustration of these conditions occurs in the Marcan pericope of the rich young man who wanted to know how to inherit the "life of the Age (Olam) to come," or (as it is translated through Greek), "eternal life."

The wealthy young man ran forward, kneeled in deference to Jesus, and asked, "Good Rabbi, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?"

This was an excellent question. "Eternal life," literally "life of the Olam, Aeon or

World to Come," was an ethical-mystical term used by apocalypticists and rabbis to describe the spiritual "walk" or behavior of one who lived according to the standards of God's Kingdom. In a spiritual sense, those who are righteous "shine as the stars," though their glory usually goes unperceived by the eyes of flesh. The idea of "eternity" in this Aramaic-Hebraic terminology is not one of never-ending time, as it is to us today. Rather it means "profundity, absolute validity." The young man was asking Jesus how he might achieve or "inherit" this kind of profound righteousness.

Inheritance is through sonship. Israel was the Son of God, meaning the nation which had the characteristics of God. "Son-of" was an idiom used to describe relationships of affinity. A son of a dog was not someone who had been begotten through bestiality. He was someone who was as crude and low-minded as the half-wild dogs that populated Palestinian cities. By the same token, a son of righteousness was a person who was righteous. To "inherit" the life of the World to Come was to become a son of the Kingdom of God, or a son of God. In other words, to become godly, or like God. Thus the idea of inheritance or "testament," since it is a process of divine begetting or adoption.

Before Jesus was willing to answer the man's question, he wanted to correct a serious error:

WHY DO YOU CALL ME 'GOOD?' NO ONE IS GOOD EXCEPT GOD ALONE.

Regardless of trinitarian theology, it is quite clear that Jesus did not equate himself with God Almighty, as most Christians believe. In other places he revealed clearly how he regarded himself. For example, when rejected by his townspeople he made the following observation:

A PROPHET IS NEVER WITHOUT HONOR, EXCEPT IN HIS OWN HOME AND AMONG HIS OWN PEOPLE.

Jesus considered himself to be a prophet, not the Deity. In the later section on his messianic teachings, I will try to show in what way he considered himself, and all who would follow the Way, to be divine.

So already the seeker has received his first lesson. He must learn that God is good, and no man is God. Jesus continues:

YOU KNOW THE COMMANDMENTS: DON'T COMMIT ADULTERY, DON'T MURDER, DON'T STEAL, DON'T GIVE FALSE WITNESS, DON'T ABUSE TRUST, HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER.

The young man asserted that he had kept all these commandments since he was a child. Jesus looked at him carefully and "loved" him, as the text says. The young man was very close to "election" or "showing himself approved," as the semitic idiom states, and Jesus desired to accept him as a student.

YOU LACK ONE THING. GO ON OUT, SELL WHATEVER YOU HAVE, AND GIVE THE PROCEEDS TO THE POOR, AND YOU SHALL HAVE TREASURE IN HEAVEN. AND COME, FOLLOW (halak) ME.

The rich man was told to make himself poor and live like Jesus. Much has been written about the issue of "poverty" in religious disciplines, and Christianity has long ago rejected the necessity of material poverty for spiritual discipleship. But for Jesus and his disciples it was basic.

The most ancient sect of Jewish Galilean Christians was probably the Ebionites, from the Aramaic word meaning "poor ones." The ebionim or "poor ones" of Jerusalem and Palestine were the original Jewish Christians for whom Paul was collecting money on his missional journeys, since they had experienced a terrible famine. In fact, the whole reason for Paul's second journey was to collect money for famine relief of the ebionim. Undoubtedly there were political considerations for this gesture, since the original Jewish Christians were still seriously divided about the issue of allowing gentiles into full communion with the Jewish Covenant. For Paul to offer famine relief through the charity of fellow followers of the Way who were Greeks -- not Jews--was a good-hearted strategy for reconciliation. It also gave him support in his running battles with Judaizing missionaries, who wanted the new gentile converts to enter the Covenant through circumcision and indoctrination into the Laws of Moses.

The Pauline churches were soon at odds with the ebionim, however, because their traditions from Paul diverged from Jewish Christian practice. Where the original ebionim were followers of the Jewish Scriptures and Torah, practicing the kind of exegesis taught by Jesus, the Greek Christians began to "weight" the epistolary writings of Paul as authoritative. The memoirs of apostolic students were read along with Old Testament Scripture in the Christian assemblies, and received as much attention as the Torah, the Prophets and the Writings of Judaism. At first the memoirs which had been written down in Greek from apostolic sources were designed as a kind of midrash or commentary on messianic Judaism. But soon they were reworked into Christian gospels.

What had begun as commentary on a whole tradition of Scriptural exegesis now became new Scripture itself. What had been the Sacred Bible of Jesus and his disciples now became a kind of auxiliary reference book whose main function was to show how Jesus, as the Christian Christ, fulfilled the allegorical foreshadowings of the Old Testament or Covenant. No more would the Jewish Scriptures be studied for their great moral lessons. They would simply become proof texts for the Christian interpretation of history. The Old or Ancient Covenant would be viewed as the "obsolete" covenant. What Jeremiah and Jesus had called the New (meaning Renewed) Covenant, which was inscribed on the heart, would now become the New (meaning Modern) Covenant.

The original requirement for discipleship with Jesus, perhaps more than any other, was hesed. It was this love, zeal or desire for the Kingdom which had inspired the fishermen of Lake Galilee to put down their nets and follow Jesus. It was this sense of affinity which moved Mary to abandon Martha in the kitchen to sit at the feet of the Master Jesus. The same moving force had caused Levi to stand up and leave his seat at the receipt of taxes and follow the great rabbi.

This inspired zeal was the sine qua non of discipleship, and Jesus had made it a radical demand. His disciples must "hate" their mother and father in comparison with their love for the Kingdom--which is not an injunction to hate parents, as by now should be quite clear: One disciple, wanting to turn back and bury his dead father, was told:

LET THE DEAD BURY THEIR DEAD. AS FOR YOU, COME AND FOLLOW ME.

Another who developed second thoughts was told:

IF A MAN PUTS HIS HAND TO THE PLOW AND THEN LOOKS BACK, HE  
MAKES A POOR PLOWMAN.

(The Greek translation, "he is unworthy," misunderstands the Aramaic sense. The illustration is of a person plowing behind a straight blade which, if not carefully guided at every moment, will be blunted on a stone or will run the furrough suddenly off to another direction. Jesus is not telling the disciple he is "unworthy," but is exhorting him to "look ahead" rather than back because time is short and the task is difficult. Greek "unworthy" translates Aramaic "unskillful.")

If a person were to "follow" Jesus in the literal sense, as well as accepting his halakah, he must first free himself from temporal attachments in order to wander with the great rabbi and learn from him. That is why those who were eventually "elected" to become apostles, or imitators of Jesus, actually gave up their current lives and wandered with him all over Palestine. After a certain time they were then sent out as mebasrim or "messengers" (Greek apostoloi) to preach, heal and exorcise in the "name of Jesus," meaning by virtue of the authority of Jesus.

This commitment meant different things to different disciples. To a married man like Peter, it meant commending his family to the care of father or brother for a certain time, and working as a fisherman during the periods that Jesus sent him back home. For Thomas it meant disassociating from all material attachments or ideas for personal advancement, perhaps selling most of his possessions and giving the proceeds to the poor people around him--of whom there were many. It also meant a renunciation of marriage (for Jesus himself did not marry) and a full-time commitment to homeless wandering.

Of the original apostles we know very little. The best popular paperback on them is probably *The Search for the Twelve Apostles* by W. S. McBirnie (Wheaton, Illinois, Tyndale Press TH-175, 1975). This is because most of them were wandering preachers and rabbis, like Jesus, and considered Galilee to be their home base rather than Jerusalem. Apostles like

Thomas, Philip, Andrew and Bartholomew were unmarried and unattached. They went far to the North and the synagogues of the East. According to some traditions Thomas and Matthias went as far East as India, following the caravan routes in order to bring the Message of Jesus to the Jews of the Diaspora or Dispersion.

The Christian Church is founded on only two or possibly three apostolic lines. The first and main line is from Peter. The second is through John. Some of the teachings of Jude and James are collected in late writings under their names, but these apostles had little to do with gentile Christianity. *All the rest of the original disciples remained connected with the Galilean Ebionite communities or wandered North to Syria and East to Armenia, Persia, and possibly India.* Philip and Thomas may have wandered to Egypt and Ethiopia.

In the beginning of the second Christian century a young Middle-Platonist philosopher named Justin met a wandering ascetic Christian rabbi in Syria. This mysterious rabbi converted Justin to Christianity. Justin eventually established a catechetical or "instructional" school in Rome for those aspiring to become baptized Christians. (Back in those days it was still a three-year discipline!) He was later martyred and is now known as Justin Martyr. His fond reminiscence of the charismatic Syrian wanderer, whose disciple Justin had been, gives us a glimpse of the authentic mebasrim tradition still operating independent of the gentile Church in Northern Palestine.

The important Coptic Gospel of Thomas recently discovered among the Nag Hammadi Gnostic writings in Upper Egypt preserves an independent school of teaching which many scholars believe may be more authentic than those of the New Testament. The reasons for this belief are first, that research has shown the sayings of Jesus in Thomas which duplicate those known in the New Testament to be editorially independent. That is, they were not copied or "remembered" from the Greek New Testament. Second, these common sayings (of which there are many) as well as the independent or "new" sayings all show marked Aramaisms and familiarity with Palestinian institutions, proverbs and mashlim or stories. Third, and very important, many of the independent sayings of Jesus not reported in the New Testament are well known from Christian writers of the first four centuries like Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Irenaeus and other similarly venerated Church Fathers.

The Thomas tradition was much different from that of the Greek Christians. It was ascetic, mystical and deeply oriented to the kind of ideas found in John's Gospel and the more esoteric portions of the Pauline epistles. By the time the school of Thomas had committed his teachings to writing it too, like the gentile Church, had developed dogmas and theological convictions. One has to compare the material of Thomas with other gnostical writings in order to identify its particular theological and redactional tendencies. Once this is done, however, the material in Thomas illuminates much that is only hinted at in John and Paul. It gives us another

check-point for understanding discipleship and messianic mysticism in the original Message of Jesus.

More than anything else, the kind of discipleship illustrated in Thomas is that of the early mebasrim of Galilee. Here the requirements are rigorous: Imitate Jesus! Jesus said,

BECOME PASSERS-BY.

In other words, do not be attached to material things and events. Do not call any place your home on earth, for your home is in the Kingdom.

FOXES HAVE HOLES AND BIRDS HAVE NESTS, BUT THE SON OF MAN HAS NOWHERE TO LAY HIS HEAD.

Whoever would join the Son-of-Man community (later to be called the Body of Christ) must forsake all attachment. He must sell all he has, give to the poor, and follow Jesus.

In the early gentile churches there was no ethnic "community" as there was in the Jewish-Christian synagogues. The Jewish-Christian communities had been built on the same economic base as that of Jewish synagogues. All members contributed their goods and resources to the whole community under the stewardship of an apostolic representative. This primitive communalism was carried to its extreme by the ebionim. The gentile Christian churches, however, never managed to build the same community commitment. Certain kinds of things remained economically communal, such as collections for the ebionim in Jerusalem and the agape meals for the poor among the congregation. But the practice of true ebony or poverty and Jesus' exhortation, "Love your brother with a true heart, and keep him as the apple of your eye," was never realized in Greek Christian assemblies. Instead of being true communities, the gentile churches became "assemblies" (ecclesiai) and secret fraternal/sororal organizations or even mystery guilds.

At the time of Clement of Alexandria, a Christian catechist of third-century Egypt, the "strict" Christians had separated themselves from the "catholic" or liberal Church. They were sectaries such as the Ebionites and other Jewish-Christian groups, or fell under the general category of "enkratites," that is, "inward-masters" or "disciplinarians." They were opposed to marriage, kept strict dietary rules, and were keen for martyrdom. Clement spoke out against their extreme asceticism, wrote tracts in favor of marriage, and emphasized the spirit of Jesus' teachings against those who would "strain at gnats."

But it is instructive to see how far the Church had strayed from the original requirements for discipleship that Jesus had clearly stated, for Clement wrote an exegesis of the very

story we have considered here--the pericope of the young rich man who asks Jesus how he can "inherit eternal life."

In this tract, which Clement calls "The Rich Man's Salvation, or, Can The Rich Man Be Saved?" the great Church Father argues that poverty is not requisite for discipleship. One can have love, zeal and devotion for God's Kingdom without dropping the fishnets, abandoning Martha in the kitchen or otherwise disturbing one's material life.' Needless to say, since this time the Church has been secular, well-grounded economically and generally ruled by the wealthy upper classes. Only the monastic traditions, which existed in various forms from the earliest times of the mebasrim and the ebionim and gained popularity after Constantine brought the Church into the Roman establishment, have taken poverty and non-attachment seriously.

In defense of Clement it must be said that poverty is not really the measure of a disciple's "love." After all, as Paul said in the first Corinthian epistle, one can perform all kinds of psychical charismatic and ascetic acts. But if one does not have agape, "love," all is in vain. Poverty was necessary for the rich young man whose story was remembered by Peter and told to Mark. But the real criterion is hesed—faithful, covenantal, divine love. It is possible to have wealth without attachment, but as Jesus said,

IT IS EASIER FOR A CAMEL TO GO THROUGH THE EYE OF A NEEDLE THAN FOR A RICH MAN TO ENTER THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN. YET WITH GOD ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE.

(The camel is in a merchant caravan loaded with great bundles of goods hanging from both sides. In order to enter the town, the caravan must pass through the small gate-like opening known as the "needle" because of its shape. Before the camel can pass through his bags of goods must be loosed and left behind for others to carry. The camel must be freed of his restrictive goods before he can enter the city, just as the rich man must separate himself from material attachments and selfish desires in order to enter the Kingdom.)

The conditions for discipleship which Jesus established are no different now than they were then. There can be no halfway commitment, no mere interest. Jesus said, "Strait is the Gate and narrow is the Way that leads unto Life, and few there are who find it." Here the word "strait" means "rigorous, strenuous." Gate was a mystic Jewish term like way or path, referring to a whole system of religious interpretation and practice.

As we will see in a later section, Jesus would be satisfied for his disciples to become nothing short of shalem, "whole" or "perfect."

**Chapter Three**  
**LOVE, SERVICE AND POWER OVER DEMONS**

It may seem trite to discuss the love that Jesus had for "sinners" and the main thrust of his public ministry, which was healing and demon-release for the amme-ha-eretz. But the "gentle Jesus" of popular stereotype is not historical, and it is necessary to clarify in what sense Jesus "loved" and served humanity. It has been too easy to make Jesus into a kind of sweet, young Santa Claus.

First it must be said that Jesus was a tough, disciplined man. His body was lean and tanned, regardless of whatever his physical proportions might have been, because he was used to living outdoors under the sun. He was accustomed to long periods of prayer and meditation, and Peter remembered times that he and the other disciples had fallen asleep while the self-mastery of Jesus had kept the man awake and alert.

Jesus had survived stoning on at least one occasion. He was able to fast forty days in the desert, according to an ancient account. He had mastered fear, anxiety and the whole realm of "self." Like the greatest of yogins, his mastery of the inner elements gave him control of the outer realities--wind, rain, water, vegetation--as well as the ability to mediate healing both through contact and at a distance.

Scholars have always been at a loss to understand what they call the "miracle stories" about Jesus. The liberal nineteenth-century interpreters tried to rationalize the accounts to conform to their own experience of reality. Thus the story of Jesus walking on the water was seen as a corruption of language. Supposedly the disciples had seen Jesus walking not "on" the water but "at the edge of" the lake. Again, the story of the miraculous multiplication of loaves and fish was explained in this way: Jesus taught the stingy Jews to share, so as soon as everyone opened up his tunic there was enough food for all!

To one who is familiar with the history, comparison and phenomenology of religions, the stories of healings, exorcism and miraculous natural events are not strange. Such stories are known of great shamans, yogins, saints and masters from all cultures. The past insights of psychology, which tended to relegate such things to the realm of a human collective-unconscious fantasy or mythic process, and the healings of Jesus to a kind of dynamic high-speed psychotherapy, have lost credibility with the development of a new field--parapsychology. There is now an abundant literature on psychic healing, psychokinesis, telepathy, clairvoyance, clair-audience, with a vigorous component of field research into contemporary gifted persons. We find that trees can be "withered," as Jesus is reported doing. We find that human "levitation" is possible. The potentials for psychokinesis are so great that the Iron Curtain governments



invested huge sums for field research in mind-over-matter experiments. If the phenomena associated with poltergeists could be harnessed, the military uses would rival the hydrogen bomb!

Fortunately such possibilities are inherently impossible, due to the wise nature of the psyche. For an individual person to exercise such powers, he or she must have achieved a great measure of self-mastery. These powers are of the inner self, the "inner man," as Paul said, or the inner bar-enash. They can be manifest only by those who have become shalem or whole. Jesus said,

WHICH OF YOU, BY TROUBLING THE MIND, CAN ADD ONE CUBIT TO HIS STATURE?

None of his disciples could do this. Neither could they "number the hairs" of their head, or even cause one of them to turn white! Yet by amen or fidelity, all things were possible. They would one day do the works of Jesus, and even greater things.

But there is another method to achieve psychic power and awesome manifestations, which is through "compact" with a familiar spirit or demonic entity. Here, however, psychic knowledge and power does not derive from the person's own soul but rather through the medium of his soul. The person becomes, in effect, possessed by his "control" spirit, who then is able to work seemingly supernatural miracles through the "ectoplasm" of the medium. These phenomena have been demonstrated extensively throughout the history of religions and documented scientifically during the past century, especially by British and American researchers. There is no agreement upon what the invading "spirits" or personalities really might be. Some feel they are psychological ego-states fragmented from the normal personality. It is also thought that these entities are telepathic ego-states derived from the living personalities of another unconscious mind. I prefer to understand them in much the same way that the New Testament indicates, and that all mystic and religious traditions have seen them. They are "souls" of different kinds. Some are ignorant and malicious beings and some are gnome-like tricksters. Some are persons who have recently died but are unable to find a state of rest. Human beings are one species of these "souls."

The higher and enlightened "souls," which are those of persons who have found rest after physical death, then those who have become saints, then those who are angelic beings, do not "possess" human beings. They may "influence" them, inspire them and work to uplift their spiritual environment. But possession is theft, pure and simple. It is the essence of fascism, slavery and sin or "debt." Jesus makes it clear that,

WHOEVER SINS IS A SLAVE OF SIN.

Possession in one form is the simple acceding to the spiritual impulses of the lower nature. In a more pronounced form it is the conscious, willful promotion of the "way of death,"

which may seem right to the mind. But if considered deeply in the heart, one finds an instinct of doubt or hesitancy. In its most evidential manifestation, possession is revealed for what it really is: the total control of an individual person by a lower entity

Possession, as the classic phenomenon of the New Testament, has been well documented. The best single English text for an overview with hundreds of case histories is T. K. Oesterreich's *Possession: Demoniactal and Other* (Secaucus, New Jersey, Lyle Stuart, Inc., Dell Paperback 6100, 1966). This translation of the German scholar's comprehensive research became available because of its market value in the wake of the money-making movie, *The Exorcist*, which was a hideously distorted and unrealistic portrayal based partially upon a case history. For those who have seen this awful film, I must strongly emphasize that it was designed solely to shock and frighten the public. It was probably the most successful horror film ever made in its time, but absolutely surrealistic in its highly exaggerated portrayal of the victim and her phenomena. (The historical victim was a boy, incidentally.)

For the writers of the Greek New Testament, Jesus cast out "demons." The daimon was a name for a spirit or divine entity which, unlike a theos (god or "setter of boundaries"), inhabited the same space as human beings--that is, the territory beneath the moon. These sublunary demons might dwell under the earth, as the chthonic deity of Delphi did, or pass like wind in the air. They could inhabit stones, trees and mountains, and were often invoked and their aid or protection sought.

Below them were the evil spirits who troubled mankind. This sort was known in Greek as the daimonion or "little demon." All kinds of prophylactic amulets and other devices were used to protect people from this kind of demonic influence, for it was known to enslave certain vulnerable persons and play tricks with them until it tired of the sport. This sort of demon saw human beings as playthings and liked to "ride" them like horses (this is the cause of the "nightmare"). It would possess children in their young teens (a vulnerable age for poltergeists) and dash them to the ground or scream profanities through their vocal cords.

It must be stated here that demon-possession can occur in only two ways, and both are by "invitation." The first is simply to seek a spirit ally. This is the method used by shamans, medicine-men, witches, and certain kinds of trance mediums. It can come through a deliberate seeking, such as that of the *brujo* who wants manifestations of power, like the fictional Don Juan of Castenada, for various motives. Or it can come through ignorant seeking, as in the case of parlor-game seances and experiments with the Ouija board. In either case the person is consciously "inviting" an entity to control him or her, just as a puppeteer controls a puppet. This is the essence of automatic writing and all other forms which either search for "guidance" from an unknown source of "impulses," or actually relinquish voluntary control to an unknown entity.

The second way that demon-possession can occur is not voluntary, but it is extremely rare. Certain persons are mediumistic. That is, for various reasons not related to their stage of spiritual awareness--in fact more related to their bio-physical makeup and type of nervous system--some people are "sensitives." That is, they are far more "open" to spirit forces than normal persons. They are often highly suggestible and easily hypnotized, in the case of those who have little self-mastery, but may be just the opposite if their mediumship is rooted in unconscious spiritual attainment--for those who have served mankind and progressed spiritually will also develop these tendencies. They, however, are not vulnerable to possession, since long ago they have closed themselves to the lower nature and refuse to heed its promptings.

This second type of person will often be bothered by possession-like symptoms with the onset of puberty, when the glands become active and before the spinal notocord has finished its development. Other subtle developments in the nervous system which occur later or earlier in life may also bring an "openness" and vulnerability to this kind of person. The person's symptoms may be relieved by extensive psycho-therapy, which helps victims to "close" themselves and assert their own personalities. They may be helped by religious prayer, which increases their protective aura. Or they may find relief through the services of a reputable spiritualist medium, who can speak to the invading entity and often convince it to leave. But it is rare, at least since medieval times, that the classical Jewish or Christian exorcism ritual is effective. When it does work, it is because of the spiritual strength of the exorcist himself rather than the "magical" repetitions of the ritual. It is a fact that nearly every priest who held the office of Exorcist in the medieval European Church was himself eventually "possessed!"

The reason for this waning of spiritual authority over demons in the Christian Church ought to be obvious by now. Authority over demons was granted by Jesus to his disciples when they became mebasrim or teachers of the Message. These apostolic saints were able to cast out demons "in the name," or by virtue of the authority, of Jesus. As Paul said many times, those who follow Christ will one day judge the very angels. To those who are becoming shalem, "perfect" or "whole," there is a line of help and support from the highest heaven to overcome the "world" or machinations of human minds, the "flesh" or lower nature, and the "devil," Shaitan, the "adversary."

But the Church took the savor out of the salt, and the spiritual meaning out of the Message of Jesus. As the Church grew lukewarm then cold to the original teachings of Jesus, it lost its delegated authority. Spiritual power became hidden, to be found only in the desert places of monasteries, or in the occasional inspiration of a saint who, like Francis of Assisi, was willing to declare allegiance to the Roman See. Whenever there has been a true manifestation of the Message of Jesus, it has been either co-opted or declared heretical by the Church. Thus the battle between Jesus and the worldly establishment never ends.

It is not fair to say, however, that the Church has become the Great Harlot of Babylon, drunk with the blood of martyrs and filled with every foul demon, as Martin Luther would have it. There have been periods of extreme evil in the highest places of the Church, but there have also been many more times of great good. The Church is really the masses of people, and they may not be saints, but they are certainly not "evil" either. Innumerable good works have been done through the Christian churches, and the Christian understanding of Jesus' Message has often been a great light to the world.

Having said these things about spiritistic phenomena and the Greek apprehension of exorcism, let us look at what Jesus was doing in his own context. What was Jesus' approach to demons, healing, and the service of humanity? How did Jesus view human nature, and how did he understand "good" and "evil?"

First we must realize that Jesus was not simply "casting out" these entities. The semitic term means to "bind with an oath, to adjure." The Jewish exorcists of Jesus' time usually used a text of Scripture which "named" or described Yahweh and his covenantal relationship with Israel and the exorcist himself. He would "command" the invading spirit "in the Name of the Rock of Abraham, the Shield of Isaac" to depart from this son of Abraham. He might argue with the demon, yell at it, threaten and chastize it--very much as a modern exorcist might, and often with as little success. All the while he did everything "in the Name" or authority of God, but like modern clergymen he had no assurance of victory.

Jesus did not "bind" the demons with an "oath." He did not call upon the potent Name of Yahweh. Rather, he first commanded the invading entity to give him his name. This, too, was a common practice, for knowledge of the "name" gave one power to address the entity (although not necessarily power over the entity, as some have suggested). But Jesus demanded to know the name by his own authority, rather than through the supposed magical compulsion of a Scriptural text.

The entities often "recognized" Jesus as a "son of the Most High," just as Paul and Barnabas were "recognized" by the familiar spirit (mediumistic "control" entity) of the psychic slave-girl of Philippi (Acts 16.16f.). They knew immediately that Jesus was their master, for he had mastered himself. Instead of reviling him, they "besought" him and begged for mercy. He commanded them to leave, which they always did (even the most stubborn of them), and even caused them to enter a herd of swine on one occasion, so that the stubborn "legion" or cluster of demons would be broken apart through immersion in salt water. One thing such demons fear is water (whether it is "holy water" or not), and Jesus caused the herd of pigs to charge into the sea in order to break apart the powerful "cluster" of demonic entities which had possessed the man of Gadara.

But to the Jew demons were not "little gods," as they were for the Greeks. They were

elilim, or "vanities, nothingnesses." The elil was an invisible and negative force, and that is all. It had personality and individuality, but was not related in any way to divinity. It was not a "shade" or ghost of a person, but rather a dynamic, active self-conscious entity which might perhaps be best understood as a "fragment" of the lower consciousness people experience in nightmares or even normal dreaming.

In these terms, Jesus was understood to be doing the same kind of thing in a cleansing from clilim as in a healing. In both cases he was mastering dark forces and "unbinding the captives," whom Satan had bound. Sickness, possession and "sin" or "debt" were part of the same cycle, and ultimately they led to death. Logically Jesus must overcome the last "enemy," which was death. The Resurrection of Jesus was therefore the final realization of his mastery.

The Jewish exorcist was familiar with a system of angelology and demonology which described and named the "powers and authorities and principalities" which lay just beneath the surface of visible reality. All things were influenced by invisible powers. Evil forces had created manifestations of power in the visible world, and stood behind the caprices of Roman rulers, petty potentates, tax-collectors and every other social authority.

Under these archontic powers were the elilim and other minions, who tormented human beings with disease and misfortune. Mankind were susceptible to their influences because of "sin," which meant "debt" or that which is owed. There were no exceptions. All persons were debtors and had to give Satan what was due. Some actually made themselves a "servant" of Satan instead of God by doing his will.

The will of Satan was easy to abide and his influences abounded, so it was not difficult to be mastered by selfishness, lust, greed, anger and the rest. All persons were under the partial authority of Satan. As Jesus said, the men of Galilee who had been killed by a falling tower were no worse debtors than anyone else. In fact, the servant of God should expect martyrdom in the visible world, for events on earth are ruled by the "Prince of this world," who is Satan. Matthew's prayer of Jesus called for God's will to be done on earth, as it was in the heavens.

The common Jewish way of understanding the process of choosing good or evil was summarized in a traditional rabbinic midrash on Genesis. Here it is said that God created mankind in his own "image" or yetzer. Later on in chapter six, God decides to flood the earth and destroy his creation because the "imagination" or yetzer of the thoughts of man's heart was continually evil.

Interestingly the word yetzer in the first chapter of Genesis was transmitted with an extra yod, being spelled yyetzer, and many of the old rabbis concluded that this symbolized the fact that mankind was created with two yetzerim or "yetzers," one of them divine (being the yetzer or "image" of God) and the other evil. Otherwise, how could man's yetzer have become "continually evil?" Whether the double yod caused the interpretation or was simply symbolic of

it, no one really knows. But by the time of Jesus it was agreed that each person had two yetzerim of the heart, one divine and the other evil. This "image" or "imagination" of the heart is better translated as "impulse, urge." One was born with the evil yetzer, and received the divine yetzer at the age of thirteen, when he (possibly she) began to study Torah. The ceremony of bar-mitzvah (or bat-mitzvah) was a kind of pneumatic initiation into Israel, at which time the good yetzer entered the heart

Needless to say, the attitude toward young children was very negative. It was generally agreed that children were inspired and moved by lower impulses, some of them downright demonic: In view of this, the love that Jesus expressed for children made a stark contrast. He did not want them to wait until they were thirteen years old. Rather, he commanded that they be brought forward to hear his words, and even declared that those worthy to enter the Kingdom of God must become like little children! (Here the Aramaic indicates "little servants," implying house-children.) Jesus did not accept the idea that children were born with only evil impulses.

But Jesus quite clearly defined the human moral dilemma in terms of Jewish doctrines of the two yetzerim and the "Two Ways." For Jesus, the "heart" was a place of evil impulses and good impulses. It was not what went into the belly, but what proceeded out of the heart through words and deeds, that either honored or profaned a person. The constant mandate was to choose the Way of Life or of Death.

Because he cared far more for humanity's moral state than any system of traditional tabus, Jesus transferred the "clean and unclean" terminology of levitical dietary regulations to a higher, more allegorical and ethical focus. He said,

"THAT WHICH COMES OUT OF A PERSON MAKES HIM UNCLEAR. FOR FROM WITHIN, OUT OF THE HEART OF MEN, PROCEED EVIL THOUGHTS, ADULTERIES, SEXUAL PERVERSIONS, MURDERS, THEFTS, GREED, MALICE, DECEPTION, THE EVIL EYE, WANTONNESS, SLANDER AGAINST GOD, SELF-MAGNIFICATION AND NARROW-MINDEDNESS. ALL THESE EVIL THINGS COME FROM WITHIN THE HEART, AND MAKE A PERSON UNCLEAR."

It is not likely that Jesus disregarded the levitical laws. Several pericopes show that he was careful to observe such things as the priestly cleansing after the healing of a large boil (incorrectly called "leprosy" in the Greek New Testament). No charges against Jesus are recorded which indicate that he spoke against the laws of Kosher food. Indeed, the Book of Acts attributes the Christian abandonment of levitical clean-and-unclean laws to visions of Peter sometime after the crucifixion of Jesus. This was the Magna Carta that eventually led to the full acceptance of gentiles into the Covenant, and is the doctrinal basis for many of the Gospel sayings of Jesus that could be interpreted as radically antinomian.

The Marcan-Petrine expansion of Jesus' teaching on the heart (Mark 7.18-19) tries to

find a basis for abandonment of levitical dietary laws by adding a corollary injunction: Nothing which comes from outside a person can make a person unclean, for it enters the belly and is passed out the anus. This was a teaching of Jesus about the difference between prophetic purity of heart and priestly ritual purity. In the Marcan tradition, however, it is used as a rationale for the Petrine relaxation of Kosher laws.

Jesus emphasized that spiritual life did not consist in food and drink, and he separated human tradition (Leviticus) from divine mandate (The Ten Commandments). His interpretations were radically prophetic, and he weighted the demands of Law and requirements of God's will far differently than the rabbinic scribes of the Pharisees. His primary concern was for justice, love, sincerity, and humility, rather than the "smells and bells" of liturgical piety. These teachings were easily expanded by certain of his disciples to a full acceptance of all foods, which could be made "clean" by the intention with which they were eaten. Any food, taken with gratitude and eucharist to God, would be clean (according to Paul, who was still arguing the point a generation after Peter's vision).

For Jesus and his followers the strictures of Torah were ultimately rooted in prophetic devotion or hesed. Jesus would have agreed with Socrates, who asked whether the gods approved of an act because it was right, or was it right because they approved? He concluded that they approved because, as experts on righteousness, they recognized an act to be right. "Righteousness," then, was the basic substance of divine Law, and if an interpretation of divine Torah could be shown to be unrighteous, it would no longer be Torah. The Spirit of Torah was hesed or "love," and love must be the guiding principle in all cases.

The same principle applied to human relationships. Jesus illustrated his idea of "love" with the Parable of the Good Samaritan, although the point of the story is probably prophetic denunciation of priests and Pharisees. Luke has tied it to the command to "love thy neighbor" by having one of the hearers ask, "And who is my neighbor?" as a lead-in to the Parable.

Briefly, the Samaritan traveler comes upon a man who has been robbed and wounded by thieves. He binds up the wounds and cares for the man himself until he can find a "hospital" for him. He leaves money for the man's care and promises to return very soon to check on the patient, to insure the helpless man's safety in his temporary environment.

This is an example of "love" because it involves person-to-person contact. It is not an abstract charity or philanthropy, but requires getting one's hands involved in the welfare of another. First there was a choice to be made: Shall I stop what I am busily engaged in doing to help this poor man, or shall I continue on my way? If I stop, I may also be attacked by thieves, and I will surely be late for my appointments. Someone else will be along in a moment, or will he?

Once the choice was made, following the divine yetzer or "impulse" of the heart, there

was a sacrifice to be made, which included both personal risk and the certainty that one's life would be disrupted. Finally there was the act itself, which meant getting one's hands dirty, staining one's garment with blood and perhaps losing some money in the bargain.

Most important, there was no real spiritual "merit" in such an action, if the scribes were to be believed. Merit with God came through fulfillment of specific laws and customs. Helping a stranger was an act with some merit, since it was mentioned once or twice in Deuteronomy, but really nothing to compare with payment of tithes or sacrificing of animals.

Besides, if the fellow was unfortunate enough to be taken by thieves, that's his own "karma." God rewards the good and punishes the evil, which is why the good people are wealthy and the evil people are poor ignorant amme-ha-eret with no knowledge of Torah. If this man has suffered misfortune, he must have had it coming to him. (Such was the reasoning of the Sadducean scribes, whose Scriptures and ethics closely paralleled the Samaritan's.)

Most of all, then, "love" for Jesus came from the "heart" rather than the intellect. It overcame all objections and responded with compassion for a real person in a real situation--without condemnation, and without self-reservation.

In the thought of Jesus there was a simple connection between love, service, and power over elilim or demons. In each case the evil yetzer must be overcome. Each depended upon self-mastery. In his messianic soteriology, this meant making the heart and the eye "single"--becoming shalem or wholly motivated by the good urgings of God's will. If the evil yetzer, or "lust," is followed (cf. James 1.13-15), it results in "sin" or debt. A debt is a "lack" or negative force, like the elil that possesses human beings. This debt, when it has become primary, brings death.

St. Paul saw two principles warring within himself. The Spirit was at odds with what he called the "flesh" or "meat." One was the ancient Adam, who succumbed to failure during the "test." But the other, the new Adam, the "inner man," was the divine Spirit of the Christ or Messiah who could lead one into liberation. This was the Spirit of the Son of Man the Bar-Enash of Daniel.

Keeping faith with Christ (meaning "fidelity" rather than "belief in") was the solution to this dilemma. By following the Spirit of Christ one would be victorious in the Body of Christ or the community of saints. One must remain and abide en Christou, "in Christ." In earlier terms, one must root oneself in the good yetzer and cling to that only.

In each of his healings, Jesus said, YOUR FIDELITY (amen) HAS MADE YOU WHOLE (shalem).

It was not by "belief" that Jesus was some kind of god that the people were healed. Nor was it by "faith healing," a combination of deception, hypnotic suggestion and hope, and gives results that are only temporary. Rather, Jesus was able to connect with the very soul of a



person because he or she offered a child-like willingness to accept the Message. It was in this act of heartfelt "willingness" that the great Amen was brought forth from each soul. This communion with the great soul of Jesus brought light to the heart and soundness to the limbs. It filled up the "lack," and therefore released the person from "debt." Thus his "sins were forgiven," he was freed from his master Satan and released from the minions of darkness. Jesus warned, however, that a house that had been swept clean could invite the return of its elil with seven more elilim worse than the first! Jesus could sweep the hearth, but it was up to the owner of the house to keep the hearth clean.

Power over the dark forces, then, came directly in proportion to one's love for God's will and active service to one's "neighbor" (literally, "the one who is near at hand"). Love, service, and power are all aspects of self-mastery and grow as one learns to follow the good impulses of the heart.

To summarize the historical rabbinic teaching of Jesus, then, there were three aspects. The first was his approach to Scripture in terms of its divine intent or Spirit. He distinguished between heavier and lighter portions of Scripture, and was keen to isolate the "inspired" portions from the later accretions of human tradition. For him it was the prophets (Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah and the others) who truly comprehended God's righteousness, rather than the sacrificial priests and legalistic scribes. The words of Isaiah, who called for justice and purity of heart, were far more important than the regulations of Leviticus. The Torah was given for mankind, not mankind for the Torah.

The second aspect of his teaching was a new kind of discipleship open to all who would respond, male or female. The basic conditions were submission to the Message ("repentance"), sincere love for the renewed Covenant--which took the place of wealth, home, relatives and worldly aspirations--, and willingness to "follow" Jesus, both in his teachings and his wanderings. Discipleship did not mean running out on spouse and children, but it did mean giving first priority to the Message. Therefore poverty and homeless wandering were common signs of discipleship.

Finally, Jesus taught in the role of a charismatic Galilean "master of Israel." His service to Israel was wholly selfless. He made no charge for his healings or exorcisms. When grateful people insisted upon giving him something he asked only for food and drink. Like Elijah being fed by the ravens, Jesus was given his daily bread by his hearers. When someone left money for him, his disciples would keep it in a common purse and distribute it to the many blind beggars or crippled lepers who populated city streets.

As one who had mastered himself, Jesus was not a deity. He was a Jewish saint. At any time he could relax his vigilance and be overcome by the dark forces. But he remained faithful. Like the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, "he poured out his soul unto death."

With this he invited everyone to join the community of saints. When people experienced healing, he carefully reminded them that it was their fidelity (amen) that had healed them. Physical healing was a sign of spiritual healing. It was not something that Jesus gave to people, like a magical gift or Christmas present. Rather it was each person's response that determined the manifestation of spiritual power in their lives. Discipleship was understood as an imitatio Christi, that is, a sincere effort to follow and become like Jesus. Therefore his disciples would one day do the works that he did, and even greater things.

Jesus was not a sentimental emotionalist. He was a man who could be kind and gentle, but he was not the "gentle Jesus" of Sunday school. In the gospels he is usually found chastising, correcting and even denouncing his enemies, rather than pacifistically allowing them to run all over him. The only time he appears "meek and mild" is during the trial and crucifixion. But this is because his time has come, and God has allowed him to fall into the hands of the Prince of Darkness.

His "love" was a positive, creative and zealous force. It was most often at work in situations of conflict, where he spoke out for the oppressed and stood up for little children. It was an ideal which moved him to action, causing him to "dirty" his own hands and bring light and healing to those who were in greatest need.

Jesus brought many kinds of "service" to the people of Israel. He distributed alms to the poor, healing to the sick, and "good news" to the disenfranchised. His work has been compared to that of the philanthropist, the physician and the social worker.

But the main ministry of Jesus was teaching the Dabar or "Thing" of God. This was done not only as a rabbi, but as a prophet and messianic saint. Thus his midrashic interpretation of Scripture was bound up with the prophetic "religion of the heart," and tied together with the saint's quest for mystic unity with God. This makes it impossible to study the teachings of Jesus in purely rabbinic or prophetic terms, for each category overlaps the other.

But basic to all of them was the great service which Jesus rendered--teaching. Jesus did not keep his knowledge hidden for his own ecstasy. Nor did he exploit it for material gain. He offered it freely to all who would listen.

The world of Jesus must be understood "spiritually," that is, in terms of hidden forces, inner motives and intentions or "urges" of the "heart." There are good and evil moral forces at work within and without each person. When a person gives in to the negative influences, he or she becomes in some degree "possessed" by them--a slave of sin. But as each person learns to follow and nourish the positive and "loving" responses (the good yetzer of the thoughts of the heart), he gains mastery over evil. As he or she masters the inner world of motives and intentions, mastery automatically is achieved over various elilim and other spirit forces. In advanced stages one masters the evil forces in disease and even natural phenomena, like storms,

so that peace and healing can be called forth through expulsion of dark forces. Ultimately even death will be overcome, as it was by Jesus.

**PART TWO**  
**THE PROPHETIC MISSION OF JESUS**

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Jesus was called Rabbi by his disciples, but he referred to himself as a prophet or nabi. The Hebrew term is from a root meaning "to cause to bubble up or pour forth abundantly." The prophets were called nebiim because they were possessed by the Spirit of Yahweh, who spoke, sang, danced and preached through them. The Dabar, Thing, or Word of God spontaneously bubbled forth from them like waters from a spring.

Like the dervishes of Sufism, the ancient prophets celebrated with ecstatic dancing to the lute, tambourine and cymbal. They composed epic poetry and, like the bards and scops of Europe, passed down Israel's history for each generation. Not unlike the shamans of Southern Asia they mediated divine healing and clairvoyant counsel to their people. Like all mystics they composed psalms and odes to the mysterious One God, Yahweh, and spent long hours in meditation and communion with Him. They were the Holy Men of Israel, and the ancient keepers of God's Covenant with Israel. In later tradition women prophetesses, known as Sybils or "bearers of the burden," also arose, although throughout the history of Israel women "judges" or charismatic leaders were known.

Kings like Saul and David were installed into office by an emissary of Yahweh, such as the prophet Samuel. This gave them divine sanction to rule Israel under the will of God. The ceremony took place through anointing the head with oil. One who had been anointed was a messiah, anointed one, or "christ." This might be any king, priest or prophet. It is from this terminology that the Christian idea of a Christ stems. The Greek Orthodox still "christen" their children with oil at baptism, thus anointing them as little "christs."

At the time of Jesus different sects of Judaism held widely disparate ideas about the coming of a savior messiah. Some Judaeen groups hoped for a warrior king who, like Joshua (the Hebrew form of "Jesus"), would conquer Israel's enemies and restore theocratic government on earth. Certain Pharisees and Galilean Zealots seemed to have held to this concept. But the sectaries of Qumran, who may have been Essenes, described at least two messiahs--one a monarch and the other a priest. Yet other groups hoped for one or more even different "anointed ones." The idea was that, as in the time of the Judges when Yahweh raised up anointed ones to defend Israel, now God would act by sending an anointed one or ones to save Israel from Roman tyranny.

As late as a century after the time of Jesus, the Pharisaic party under Akiba officially recognized the Zealot revolutionary guerilla Bar Cochba as the Messiah of Israel, urging all Palestinian Jews to follow him in holy war against the Roman legions. The adventure ended in heroic failure at Masada in A.D. 135. All Jews were banned from Jerusalem, which was razed

and rebuilt as Aelia Capitolina. After this disaster messianic speculative mysticism was forbidden by the rabbis, and medieval Talmudic Judaism became normative.

After the siege of Jerusalem, councils of rabbis for the first time established and closed the canon of the Bible or Old Testament. They omitted all recent messianic and prophetic-apocalyptic books later than Daniel, which contained too much Christian-like material. (By the same token, the later Church would downgrade the same "intertestamental" books from its canons because they seemed too Jewish!) The rabbis declared that the Spirit of Prophecy had left Israel after the Book of Daniel was written, and all later works (especially the Christian writings) were inspired by Satan. Legends refuting the Christian claim of Jesus' miraculous birth were circulated, and he was described as a magician who was born of fornication between Mary and a Roman soldier named Pandarus. Rabbis who accepted his halakoth and legal rulings were ostracized.

Jesus came as prophet during an age when the religious establishment claimed there were no more prophets. When asked by his opponents under what authority he preached, he returned the question to them by demanding to know through what authority John the Baptist preached. If the rabbis had dared to say that John was not a prophet, they would be ridiculed by the people, most of whom accepted John as such. If they agreed that he was a prophet, they would then be forced to accept his prophecies against them, and to make the pilgrimage to the Jordan along with crowds of the amme-ha-eretz in order to "submit" to the Message and be baptized.

In refusing to reveal the source of his authority during this encounter, Jesus was not hiding the fact that he was commissioned and sent out by Yahweh. This fact was evident to everyone, as it was in the case of John the Baptist. Rather, he was pointing to the fact that he, like John, had been anointed by God. Like John, he was a "christed one" or messiah. The conflict that came about in Judaism after the crucifixion of Jesus was the first issue of "belief" that had been raised--was Jesus of Nazareth really anointed by God, or was he a false prophet? Was he a messiah or was he a satan? Those who followed his "way" or entered through his gate declared that he was, in fact, God's messiah. By Paul's time the statement of "belief" had become a kind of faith-name for Jesus-- Yeshua Ha-Hessiah or Jesus the Christ, meaning "Jesus is the Anointed Prophet of God." It did not exclude all the other messiahs of Israel, nor did it imply that Jesus was the last or only messiah. It simply affirmed a belief in the messiah-ship of Jesus, and therefore the authenticity and divine authority of his Message.

Jesus, then, was a divinely appointed Messenger of God. Like the twelve canonical prophets, he was at odds with the religious-political establishment. Just as in the case of Amos, God had shown him that the capitol city would fall because of the wickedness of the rulers. As with Jeremiah, he had seen destruction for the Temple, and "woe" to him if he did not deliver the

burden of his message to the people.

The prophet's burden was like that of the watchman of the coasts. If he saw the enemy coming and failed to alert the people, all their blood would be upon his head. But if he tried to alert Israel to the danger, then he was relieved of moral responsibility for the matter, regardless of the outcome.

Thus spoke Yahweh to Jeremiah, whom he also called "son of man," meaning "human being, creature of dust." From that time forward the title "son of man" was the prophetic self-designation of Jeremiah. It became the humble term for many later saints and martyrs of Israel. As in the time of Ezekiel, all the "shepherds" or religious leaders of Israel had become corrupt. They were slaying the sheep themselves, instead of protecting them from predatory wolves. It was the religious leadership of Israel that Jesus most specifically attacked. They were responsible for the doom that would be coming soon to Israel, when there would not remain one stone of the Temple unturned. The Temple was ruled by wicked men, and built through the charity of "that fox," Herod.

The charge that the Sanhedrin must have brought against Jesus was that he spoke against the Temple establishment and prophesied the destruction of the Temple itself. Later Christians distorted this charge to make it seem that Jesus had been crucified for blasphemy or "making himself equal to God." Such a charge could never have been proved. The blasphemy of Jesus was his prophetic denouncement of the religious establishment and his unflinching declaration that in the near future God would cause the Temple to be destroyed. That is why Jesus did not make an "answer" to the charges against him. They were true!

**Chapter Four**  
**JUDGMENT AGAINST THE RELIGIOUS ESTABLISHMENT**

From the times of Saul, David and the earliest kings of Israel there had been tension between monarchial and prophetic forms of religion. The monarchy invariably compromised with other gods and their laws for matters of state. In conformity to foreign religions, and often in emulation of them, the kings of Israel built and maintained elaborate sacrificial temples with ornately attired priests, occult diviners, choirs, musicians, and all the trappings. In addition they took a census of the people, raised huge armies by conscription, and levied unbearable taxes to support the ruling families.

According to legend, Saul and David had been anointed by the great prophet Samuel. By the time of Solomon's empire, however, kings were to assume their position strictly by heredity. This, of course, led to intrigue and assassination, so that in the generation following Solomon the nation was torn by civil war. Solomon's glory was the result of crushing taxes and veritable police-state tactics, and he was extremely unpopular with the amme ha-eretz. At his death the country was divided into two nations--Israel to the North, with Bethel as the monarchial sanctuary, and Judah to the South, with Jerusalem as the royal sanctuary.

It was generally against the temple establishment of each nation that the prophets delivered their burdens of mishpat, or "judgment." Of the earliest prophets there is little record, other than Nathan, who chastised David for adultery and murder. They often banded together in separated communities outside the main cities, later forming guilds. We hear of the exploits of Elijah and Elisha against Jezebel and her attempt to bring foreign ba'als or "lords" into the sanctuary of Yahweh. By the time of Amos, in the eighth century B.C., the prophetic guilds had lost their moral force, for Amos emphatically declares that he is not a prophet "nor the son of a prophet." He is a simple shepherd and dresser of sycamore trees.

But his prophesies against the Temple at Bethel were remembered and written down, because they came to pass. He said that for the moral and social injustices of Israel, Yahweh would give it over to invasions from the North, allowing only a "faithful remnant" to carry on his religion. The prophet Micah and others took up his theme or "school," and by the last part of the century the dreaded Assyrians sacked and destroyed Israel, fulfilling the prophecy.

Meanwhile in Judah the prophetic Message was starting to take hold. It was being taken seriously by certain rulers, and the Temple priesthood was infiltrated by those of the prophetic faith. An important document claiming Mosaic authorships which radically reinterpreted the religion of Moses according to prophetic faith was supposedly "discovered" in the Temple vaults at Jerusalem soon after the time of the prophet Isaiah, who was an honored member of the royal household, rather than an antagonist living in the desert like the earlier



prophets. It seems to have been the book which we now know as Deuteronomy, and was the basis for the reforms of Josiah. Under the guidance of this more prophetic religion, Judah survived for another century. But the reform was short-lived, and prophets like Jeremiah foresaw the destruction of Jerusalem and Babylonian exile.

The great school of Isaiah continued to flourish during and after the exile, producing the books of Isaiah, Deutero-Isaiah and Trito-Isaiah, in which the vision of the Kingdom or Malkuth of God was first articulated. Soon after this the wisdom tradition was established in the scribal schools, like that of Qoheleth, and the Job writings were produced as a kind of theme for ongoing theosophical speculation (why does the just person suffer?). New psalms and proverbs were collected, and as Palestine was resettled by the families of returned exiles, Judaism began to emerge as not just an ancient national cult, but a powerful personal religion rooted in sacred Scripture. Synagogues appeared and the Mosaic Torah was assembled by the priests.

In the northern territories of Galilee and its surroundings a new kind of prophetism emerged. It was based on the zealous faith of the prophets, but expanded into whole communities of settlers not unlike the puritans of colonial America. It constituted a kind of "Protestant reform" against Jewish monarchy in general. In its extreme forms it led to separated Hasidic or proto-Pharisaic communities like those of Damascus and Qumran. In its militant forms it produced the zealotism of the Maccabees, who through guerrilla tactics were able to defeat the vastly superior Persian armies and establish a Jewish state which lasted for over a hundred years before capitulating to Rome. In its more pastoral forms it produced wisdom schools, highly independent synagogues, and the mystical, charismatic rabbinic traditions of Galilee which Jesus had known. It produced the school of John the Baptist and a host of other baptizing sects who eschewed temple sacrifice in favor of communal meals, symbolic lustrations, and mystic speculation on the theme of Yahweh's Merkabah or Chariot-Throne. It produced the Books and Secrets of Enoch, the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, the literatures of Adam, Solomon, Noah, and a great variety of Jewish mystical schools. Such, then, was the power of prophetic religion in all its forms during the time of Jesus. These varied "heterodoxies" were united in one great principle-- thoroughgoing opposition to the religious-political establishment at Jerusalem, and to the Temple practices.

John the Baptist began his activities during the second decade of the first Christian century. He prophesied against the religious establishment of Jerusalem, whom he likened to a "brood of vipers." Dressed in the garb of a Spirit-possessed desert prophet, he stayed outside the cities calling huge crowds of the amme-ha-eretz to a renewed commitment of faith. He declared that Yahweh would cut down the religious-political leaders of Jerusalem like a man chopping trees or digging up a vineyard which had proven unfruitful. He exhorted the people to "submit" (nacham) to God's mishpat or "judgment," and renew the Covenant or Testament through

symbolic baptism in the Jordan river. It was Joshua who had led Israel through the waters of the Jordan when they entered the promised land of Canaan, and now John was offering a symbolic re-gathering of Israel. Baptism was a special renewalist circumcision of the heart, or a spiritual confirmation of what it meant to be a true Israelite.

Jesus came to hear John preach, and he submitted himself to baptism in the Jordan. According to the legend preserved in the New Testament, it was here that Jesus became Spirit-possessed. John saw the Holy Spirit descending upon him as a vision of a dove, and Jesus was driven into the desert for a final, shamanic testing of his vocation. This is the tradition handed down both through Peter in Mark's Gospel and through the early Palestinian Jewish-Christian community of the "Q" source in both Matthew and Luke.

John's Gospel carries a much different tradition. It, too, traces the "discovery" of Jesus to John the Baptist, but portrays Jesus as a contemporary colleague of the Baptist. The disciples of John leave him to follow Jesus. As disciples of Jesus, they also preach submission to the judgment of God and practice mass baptism of Jewish hearers before John is arrested and executed by Herod. However, since the contradictions of John's Gospel can be explained as apologetic "adjustments" made by the editors of the gospel at a late time, when the second-generation disciples of John were coming into conflict with the Christian Church and it was necessary to minimize his importance, and since the historical witness of the disciple John the Beloved about the early activities of Jesus is questionable because of his extreme youth at the time, it seems likely that the synoptic account is historical. Yet the one part of the Johannine account worthy of further consideration is the editorially altered statement that Jesus and his disciples were baptizing at the same time as John the Baptist. This is consistent with the historical setting and probable origins of Jesus' ministry. Like John the Baptist, Jesus preached nacham and mishpat, and he required symbolic baptism. How, then, did the prophetic preaching of Jesus differ from that of John the Baptist?

This is an interesting question, for in at least one instance different gospels of the New Testament attribute the same sermon to both John and Jesus: "O' generation of vipers..." (Luke 3.7; Matthew 12.34). Both John and Jesus are shown using the same examples (cutting down trees, satirizing the Pharaic claim to be "children of Abraham," exhorting their hearers that "He who has two coats, let him impart to him that hath none," and other similar themes). Jesus preached against the Pharisees and Sadducees, who controlled the Temple and Sanhedrin of Jerusalem, but never against the heterodox zealot schools. He was executed through complicity of the Jerusalem establishment for blasphemy against them and the Temple. His followers were imprisoned and stoned on the same charges. Like John, Jesus was very popular with the amme ha-eretz and had the power to lead a popular uprising.

But the ministry of Jesus differed greatly from that of John. The Baptist was a prophet,

and that only. His mission was to alert the people to God's judgment against the religious leadership and renew covenantal fidelity with the "people of the land." His disciples were rigorous ascetics, like him, and did not pollute themselves by living under the conditions of "civilization." They followed a specific dietary rule, wore rough hair-shirts and made the Roman-Jewish political leadership their main target. They fasted and spent long weeks in desert isolation, but were not known as healers, exorcists or rabbis. The followers of John seem to have been militant religious zealots who were undoubtedly prepared for holy war when the time was right.

Not so with Jesus. He carried the concern for sin and righteousness to every individual, rather than only against the state. He did not separate himself from the "sinners" of Israel but ministered healing, exorcism and rabbinical teaching to them. His disciples did not fast or follow dietary rules. Neither did they prepare for holy war. The great concern was for the Malkuth or Kingdom of God, which was spiritual as well as political, and mystical rather than institutional. The communio sanctorum was not a discipleship of physical rigor as much as it was a path to shalem or perfection. Only in these terms, and with these reservations, can the prophetic mission of Jesus be understood, and the meaning of mishpat or "judgment" against Jerusalem be fully comprehended.

Despite these differences, it seems that there was a common link among the sect of the Baptist, the disciples of James the "brother" of Jesus, and Jesus himself. We postulate this, for lack of any other term, as a messianic Son of Man community or havurah that must have been rooted in Galilee, which was the home of heterodox religious Jewish mysticism and zealotism. We will make reference to this hypothetical Son of Man community many times, even though history does not preserve anything about it, as we cannot link Jesus, James, and John to any of the known communities that existed, such as Qumran.

### **The Parables (Mashlim) of Judgment**

To avoid legal prosecution Jesus pronounced mishpat against the religious establishment by means of the mashal or allegorical example. Instead of saying that Yahweh would take the Temple away from the Pharisees and Sadducees, he told stories about feudal vine dressers or house-stewards who had been entrusted with the master's vineyard or mansion. They refuse to honor the master with the proper tithes, or begin mistreating the house-servants, or otherwise squander his goods. As a result, the master returns and removes, disenfranchises, or even slaughters them and turns the stewardship over to others more worthy of trust (amen, "fidelity" to the master).

In the oral preaching of gentile Christians, however, these mashlim of judgment

against the Pharisees and Sadducees were transformed into predictions of disaster for all Jews. By the time they were collected for use in the New Testament gospels they were being interpreted as prophecies of Jesus that all Judaism would fail, God would reject the Jews as His stewards, and the vineyards and mansions of divine knowledge would be turned over to the Christian Church. Here the term vineyard may refer to the Kabbalistic pardes or paradise of mystical knowledge.

The original Jewish followers of Jesus preserved what they had received from Jesus, but the gentile Greek Christians (under the influence of supposedly Spirit-inspired Christian prophets) were claiming that Jesus was the LORD (Greek Kyrios). This was the Greek name for any high spiritual being, like the Genius of the Emperor, or even Zeus himself. But Greek Kyrios translated Hebrew Adonai, which was the sacred designation for Yahweh Himself, the LORD. The Jews who had followed Jesus knew of no claim on his part to be Yahweh. Indeed, he had emphasized his role as servant, child of God and Son of Man (literally, "human being, creature of dust, mensch").

Jewish apostles like Peter, Paul, and John who mingled ecumenically with gentile Christians helped keep Christological speculation free of polytheistic implications, but most of the original Jewish followers of the Way didn't have enough contact with gentiles to grasp their meaning in declaring Jesus as LORD. They rejected what seemed to them a breach of covenantal monotheism. By rejecting the gentile assertion that Jesus was LORD, they were rejecting Jesus Christ--so reasoned the Greek Christians. Therefore they must be lumped together with Pharisees, Sadducees, all heterodox Judaism including zealotism and Essenism, the amme-ha-eretz, and every other Jew who would not see salvation until he would say, "Blessed is he who comes in the Name of the LORD." That this anti-semitic conclusion had nothing to do with the original Message and intention of Jesus mattered little to the evangelical Christian Church. In a charismatic, Spirit-inspired atmosphere where each LORD'S Day new prophecies are being received under group influence, the medium becomes the message. Those who are most persuasive gain control of group opinion, regardless of the sources of their inspiration. There is abundant evidence for this phenomenon in many contemporary charismatic evangelistic groups, Christian or otherwise.

THERE WAS A RICH MAN WHO PREPARED A BANQUET FOR HIS GUEST-FRIENDS. WHEN THE DINNER WAS READY HE SENT HIS SERVANT TO INVITE THE GUEST-FRIENDS. HE WENT TO THE FIRST AND SAID, "MY MASTER INVITES YOU TO A BANQUET." THE GUEST ANSWERED, "I HAVE CLAIMS AGAINST CERTAIN MERCHANTS WHO WILL CALL TONIGHT. I PRAY TO BE EXCUSED." THE SERVANT WENT TO ANOTHER, WHO SAID, "I HAVE BOUGHT A HOUSE AND AM ASKED TO

INSPECT IT. I WILL HAVE NO TIME." HE WENT TO A THIRD, WHO ALSO EXCUSED HIMSELF SAYING, "I HAVE BEEN ASKED TO ARRANGE A DINNER FOR A FRIEND AND CANNOT ATTEND. I PRAY TO BE EXCUSED."

THE SERVANT RETURNED TO HIS MASTER AND TOLD HIM THAT THOSE BIDDED TO THE BANQUET HAD ALL EXCUSED THEMSELVES. THEREFORE THE MASTER SAID, "GO OUT INTO THE HIGHWAYS AND INVITE THE BEGGARS AND THE POOR, SO THAT THE FOOD DOES NOT GO TO WASTE."

This mashal was later refashioned into the Parable of the Wedding Feast of Matthew's Gospel. It appears with doctrinal alterations in Luke's Gospel and the Gospel of Thomas, but in these latter two sources it is almost unaltered. Luke adds a section justifying the inclusion of gentiles in the allegorical "feast" by finding that when all the halt, lame and blind beggars have arrived (i.e., the amme ha-eretz of Judaism) there is still room. The servant is therefore sent out to bring in anyone he can find (the gentiles). This is undoubtedly the original form of the mashal in the Jewish-Christian "Q" tradition, which accepted the limited inclusion of gentiles into the Covenant of Israel.

The Gospel of Thomas makes all the guest-friends into merchants, and ends with this ringing condemnation of the wealthy class: "Tradesmen and merchants shall not enter the places of my Father!" This is, of course, what we would expect from the ascetic Thomas tradition, although it echoes the prophecies against the wealthy class preserved in Luke's Gospel. John the Baptist, Jesus, and James were ascetic social revolutionaries, but they did not exclude specific social classes from liberation..

Matthew's Parable of the Wedding Feast, however, has combined Christian ecclesiastical theology with the Jewish-Christian mashal of the rich man to produce an entirely new story. In order to contrast Matthew's version one must first more fully understand the original story.

It was common practice in the Middle East for a wealthy land-owner to prepare a great feast for his friends, whom he owed social favors. The "guest-friends" were invited well in advance, and their verbal acceptance secured. When the feast was in the fire-pit, servants were dispatched to remind the guest-friends of their obligation to attend. Even if a guest-friend could suddenly not attend, the social debt was considered to be fulfilled by this arrangement.

As he often does, Jesus puts Yahweh in the role of the master and the prophets are cast as servants or a servant. Here the guest-friends represent Jewish religionists with whom Yahweh has a covenantal relationship--in this case an obligation to provide a feast (using the model of animal sacrifice). Yahweh has fulfilled the obligation by sending his Messenger (Jesus) to invite the religious establishment to a spiritual feast. However each of the guest-friends prefers to give

higher priority to other business.

The judgment, then, is the same one that a Middle Eastern despot commonly made in a similar situation. The feast would be turned out for the poor, so that *it* might not go to waste. Such occasions were well known to the amme-ha-eretz of Jesus' time, who benefited from them greatly. The "love-feast" might come at any time, when it was least expected, and made a great impression on everyone. It was a festive party with plentiful wine and meat, and it remained the topic of conversation for many months after it had occurred.

Jesus was saying that Yahweh had made a judgment against the Pharisees, Sadducees, and all others who claimed they had exclusionary rights to the fruits of God's Covenant with mankind. God was taking their obligatory feast and distributing it freely to all the so-called "non-religious" Jews, especially those known as debtors ("sinners"). Thus the judgment:

AMEN. AMEN I SAY UNTO YOU, PROSTITUTES AND TAX-COLLECTORS WILL ENTER THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN BEFORE YOU DO.'

This free distribution of God's "feast" to the amme-ha-eretz and whoever would listen was the point of departure for the messianic Razim or Mysteries of the Kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus. This was the "free gift" of liberation, which was totally independent of "merit." It marked a "second chance" through Yahweh's blanket release or "forgiveness" from "sin" or indebtedness to all who would respond with "faith" or fidelity (amen). Therefore Jesus was declaring that Yahweh had no exclusive obligation to the religious establishment, and He would renew His Covenant with each individual person who would respond.

Matthew's Gospel has turned this into an allegory of the gentile Christian Church as over and against the Jews, and further made it into an allegory separating the "good" Christians from the "bad" Christians, using the "Church within the church" motif familiar in other parables such as that of the Sheep and the Goats. Here the Jews are those invited to the marriage feast, with the Church as the Bride of Christ. They refuse, so the gentiles are called from all the highways and byways. However, one of these guests (the "bad" Christian) has arrived without proper garments, and so is cast into "outer darkness," which is the gentile Christian interpretation of Gehenna. Later this would be called by the Greek word Hades, and the medieval concept of perpetual torment in an Anglo-Saxon "Hell" would crystallize. In fact, the Christians would end up being almost as hard on themselves as they were on their enemies, whom they later loved to portray tormented eternally in the Lake of Boiling Pus (Gospel of Nicodemus) or by means of other sadistic devices!

## The "Hypocrisy" of the Religious Establishment

The main theme underlying Jesus' radical criticism of the Pharisaic and Sadducaic religious parties was what has been commonly called "hypocrisy." As explained in an earlier section, the Greek New Testament used the term hypokrisis, "insincerity, play-acting," to translate the charge made by Jesus. This worked in nicely with the anti-semitic gentile criticism of Judaism in general--that it was so totally bankrupt and without redeeming qualities that God had decided to remove the Covenant from the Jews.

This, however, was not what Jesus said. His charge was one of self-magnification and partiality, still echoed in the Jewish-Christian traditions of the Epistles of James and John. Here great stress is put upon community love, and serious prohibition of making a "distinction of persons." The term for being a "hypocrite" used by Jesus was nasa beaph, referring to a snobbish attitude of literally "taking" in public, or making a show before the "nostrils" or countenance of others. This means self-adulation, self-aggrandizement, self-magnification. Those who were "takers in public" were respecters of "person," or social rank and economic status. They were those who criticized Jesus for associating "with tax-collectors ("publicans") and debtors ("sinners"--i.e. harlots, thieves, lepers, beggars, and the amme-ha-eretz or general public).

The "self-magnifiers" were concerned to give alms publicly, pray aloud so that others could hear how righteous they were, dress with pretentious phylacteries and other religious symbols prominently displayed for all to see, and to speak using pious religious language. In other words they were like present-day religious fundamentalists of all kinds, Christian and non-Christian, who evangelically "demonstrate" their piety for all to see and hear. They are always "praising God" in public, wearing religious jewelry and symbols, speaking to God in public, and making other "show" consciously or unconsciously designed to give them "merit" in the eyes of God and themselves. More than anything else, Jesus despised this kind of "taking in public" or "hypocrisy."

Why did Jesus hate this kind of thing? Because self-magnification inevitably led to lack of concern for the true glorification of God, which lay in doing His will and discerning His ways. It led to an unbalancing of spiritual judgment, and an eventual tendency to equate liturgies of Torah ("works of the Law") with the imperatives of covenantal fidelity (amen).

WOE TO YOU, PHARISEES, FOR YOU PAY TITHES OF MINT AND RUE AND  
ALL KINDS OF MINOR HERBS, BUT NEGLECT JUSTICE AND THE LOVE  
(hesed) OF GOD!

WOE TO YOU, PHARISEES, FOR YOU LOVE THE UPPERMOST SEATS IN THE

SYNAGOGUES, AND SYCOPHANTIC GREETINGS IN THE MARKET PLACE!

WOE TO YOU, SCRIBES AND PHARISEES, SELF-MAGNIFIERS, FOR YOU ARE LIKE HIDDEN GRAVES THAT MEN WALK UPON UNAWARE THAT THEY ARE BEING POLLUTED BY THEM!

WOE TO YOU LAWYERS (prototypical rabbis), FOR YOU HAVE LOADED THE PEOPLE WITH RITUAL BURDENS TOO RIGOROUS TO BE BORNE, YET YOU RELEASE NO ONE FROM SERVITUDE!

WOE UNTO ALL OF YOU, FOR YOU BUILD MONUMENTS HONORING THE PROPHETS, YET IT WAS MEN LIKE YOURSELVES WHO MURDERED THEM!

WOE TO YOU, LAWYERS, FOR YOU HAVE TAKEN AWAY THE KEY OF KNOWLEDGE: YOU DID NOT ENTER N YOURSELVES, AND YOU HAVE HINDERED THOSE WHO WERE ENTERING!

"When you pray," said Jesus, "do not be as the self-magnifiers, who love to stand on street comers and in synagogues praying aloud, that they may be seen of men...who love to wear long vestments...who say, 'I thank you, Father, that I am not as other men--sinful, adulterous, lawless...' who love to announce their intention of giving alms by having the sacramental shofar blown publicly."

The "hypocrisy" of the Sadducees, Pharisees and their rabbinic scribes and lawyers was not a form of religious "insincerity" or pretense. Indeed, these people were deeply sincere, rigorous and zealous. Rather, it was; a form of spiritual pride, or greed. They felt that they were better Jews than all the others. They were the true children of Abraham, the true Israel. God loved them more than the rest of mankind, and it was their duty to evangelize the sinful masses of humanity by constantly placarding every form of religious display--vestments, alms-giving, prayer, and even the Ten Commandments, which they wore as prophylactic "frontlets" on their clothes or even their foreheads in a grievously literalistic misinterpretation of God's Deuteronomic command to "inscribe" His Laws on their foreheads (i.e., in their consciousness; to be ever mindful of them).

It must be strongly emphasized, however, that this kind of religious "hypocrisy" was an abuse of a religious flowering in Judaism which, on the whole, was classic in its beauty and spirituality. Anyone who has studied intertestamental Judaism knows that the majority of the essential teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount are to be found in the spiritual writings



of Pharisaic saints from at least a century before the time of Jesus. Jewish religion in the time of Jesus had achieved a spiritual splendor unlike anything else in the history of religions. Only such perfection could have produced someone of the stature of Jesus and have prepared human hearts to receive his words. In spite of the abuses which are inevitable in any religious-political framework, the Judaism which Jesus knew and loved was certainly among the higher expressions of cultural spirituality ever achieved in the Middle East.

### **The Fig Tree and the Judgment Against the Temple**

The prophet of Yahweh proclaimed God's Message in many ways. He sang, he danced, he taught, and he acted out symbolic meanings. Hosea contracted marriage with a prostitute and named the children as an extended allegory of God's Message for the people. Jeremiah forsook marriage and performed strange symbolic actions (such as the hiding and retrieving of a linen girdle in a cave by the Euphrates) to illustrate God's judgments against Israel. Josephus tells us that shortly before the infamous siege of Jerusalem, which fulfilled the prediction Jesus had made about the destruction of the Temple, an anonymous Jewish prophet walked the great wall in mourning clothes day after day. The people were so unnerved by his Message that they stoned him.

All this was the Dabar or "Thing" of Yahweh. In order to understand the Message one needed "eyes to see, and ears to hear." The divine actions, as opposed to the prophetic preaching itself, were known as "signs" (othoth), and after a prophet had given his "signs" he would often interpret them publicly in sermons and proclamations. In certain times, however, Yahweh would forbid the prophet to make his meaning clear--as in the case of Isaiah. In those days it would be up to each witness to "see and hear" for himself. If he wanted further knowledge he would approach the prophet privately, for the interpretation would not be made in public. This was the case in the prophetic ministry of Jesus.

The process of receiving and giving a sign was essentially mediumistic. The prophet would be impressed to undertake a certain kind of action. Ezekiel, for example, was told to cut his beard and hair, or to lie on his left side in the main street until he was told to get up--in this case for many days at a time. Often it wasn't until after the prophet had acted out the Message that he understood it well enough to proclaim it. In other words, just as a psychic medium might do a "reading" of another person's soul by receiving impressions in his or her body (i.e., experiencing a feeling of sorrow, an urge to make a military salute or whatever else "brings out" the message), so the prophet mediumistically received God's Message as a series of impulses to act. This, then, made the Message clear to the prophet, as well as to the people of Israel.

For the prophet, God "spoke" in many ways. Sometimes there was the sensation of an actual "still, small voice." But most often the Message came symbolically, through a dream or waking vision, through the attention of the prophet being drawn to a particular natural phenomenon which he then understood as an allegory of God's will through urges to dramatize or act out a sign, or through auditory sensations. In all cases, however, the Message was tied to the moral realities of Israel. Often sensations would be mixed. Amos speaks of the word which he "saw," and the vision which he "heard."

Jesus had been preaching the Message of Yahweh for a period long enough to determine the reaction of the Jerusalem establishment. It was totally negative. God's Dabar had been spurned, and the great messianic invitation rejected by the religious authorities who controlled the Temple. Therefore God ruled that the Temple establishment must be destroyed.

To symbolize this, Jesus approached a fig tree hoping to find fruit. The tree was barren. Therefore he cursed the tree and said,

"FROM HENCEFORTH LET NO ONE EVER EAT OF YOUR FRUIT."

In the company of his startled followers Jesus proceeded to Jerusalem and entered the Temple precincts. He tied together several short cords to make a whip, with many people staring at his action and wondering what it meant. He stood up and with a rush of fury overturned the tables of the merchants who sold animals for sacrifice, freed the birds, calves and lambs, and whipped every man and beast until he had been forced out of the area.

As a prophetic act, the meaning was all too clear. The prophet often spoke as Yahweh, using the first person "I." This was because God was speaking through him, not because the prophet considered himself to be Yahweh. In the same way, it was God who acted out His Dabar, not the prophet. It was not an angry Jesus who was clearing the Temple of man and beast. It was Yahweh, who was saying, "I will cast you all out of my Temple, for you have profaned my Holy Name."

Jesus then returned with his followers to the barren fig tree. God had caused it to wither and die. The divine judgment had been made. Yahweh would destroy the Temple and take the stewardship of the Covenant out of the hands of the Sadducean high priesthood. This was fulfilled in A.D. 70 when the troops of Vespasian sacked Jerusalem, destroyed the Temple, and the Sadducean party ceased to exist. From that point on there was no high priesthood in Judaism, and animal sacrifice came to an end. A remnant of the Pharisaic party transmitted the Jewish faith, codified the oral and written traditions, and founded medieval rabbinic Judaism through the tannaitic and later amoraitic movements that developed from the schools of Hillel and Shammai. By the fourth century the "traditions of the Elders" or oral Torah that Jesus had preached against in its midrashic forms was an article of Jewish faith. It had been given to Moses on Sinai when the written Torah was also given.

Thus both medieval Christianity and Judaism developed complex doctrines based on redaction of oral tradition and Biblical interpretation. But in the case of Judaism they concerned diet and life-cycle regulations, while Christianity continued its initial trend toward theological dogma. In both cases, a professional priesthood, ministry, or rabbinate developed that widened the gulf between laity and clergy. While Temple Priesthood ended in Judaism with the destruction of the Second Temple, it began to develop in Christianity after the triumph of Constantine and the Council of Nicea. Medieval Christianity had its own "Temple establishment" and "tradition of the Elders." Through ignorance and the processes of history, it had severed itself almost entirely from the teachings of its founder, which were better addressed in Jewish mysticism and Kabbalah than in the monastic and mystic traditions of the Church.

**Chapter Five**  
**SUBMISSION AND FAITH**

The Message which Jesus proclaimed was much more than a simple prophecy about the coming destruction of the Temple establishment in Jerusalem. It was a prophetic imperative addressed to each of his hearers which confronted him or her with the radical demands of covenantal fidelity or faith (amen). Jesus proclaimed the "acceptable Day of the LORD," which was a Semitic phrase meaning the "acceptable Way of Yahweh." This was also a messianic phrase pointing to a coming stage in human development when the divine Malkuth would be fully present and visible on earth, as it already was in the Heavens.

From the time of Amos the Hebrew prophets had preached on the theme of the expected Day of the LORD. This was seen as a future time when God would exalt above all others and fill the world with peace and plenty. It was proclaimed by the monarchical priests of the royal sanctuaries as a kind of *Israel Uber Alles* or patriotic myth.

Amos turned the myth around, declaring that the Day of the LORD was not a day of light, but of darkness. It was not a day of peace, but of war, defeat and humiliation for Israel because of its infidelity to justice, truth and brotherly love--that is, to the Covenant of Yahweh. It would be a future time when Yahweh would punish and cleanse Israel through the instrumentality of invasions by the Assyrians. Out of this purification a faithful, purified remnant of the true Israel would be saved.

I have emphasized the concept of the LORD'S Day as a time because in fact Amos was speaking satirically. He was saying that the Day of Yahweh is not a time, but a way of life. However, for those who smugly believe they can forsake justice and "sell the poor for a pair of shoes," there will be a "day" of Yahweh, and it is indeed coming soon. But it will not be the kind of "day" expected by kings and cult priests. It will be a "day" of punishment and purifying suffering.

By Isaiah's time the Day of the LORD had become a far more spiritualized ideal and had taken on its idiomatic meaning of Yahweh's prophetic "way" or will. Still, however, the interpreters of Isaiah's school tried to attach chronological importance to the idea, which became integral to apocalyptic Judaism of the intertestamental period. But even in the time of Jesus the phrase, which underlay many eschatological schemes and schedules for world-events developed by different sects, retained its basic idiomatic sense of "way" or "season." When Jesus proclaimed the "acceptable Day of Yahweh" he was speaking in classical Isaian terms. He was proclaiming the accessibility of God's Kingdom through the gate, way, or "attitude" that would be acceptable to God. This "acceptable Day" was the "way" that Jesus taught, which was the way of prophetic fidelity or faith. As we will see in a later chapter, Jesus was not declaring the

imminence of the end of the world, nor the advent of a cosmic conflagration. He was proclaiming the opening of a "gate" for all who would submit to God's prophetic Covenant.

### **Submission to God's Will ( Christian "Repentance" )**

The basic prophetic proclamation and spiritual message of Jesus was not a declaration of doom for the Temple establishment, but an announcement of God's grace and forgiveness for all who would submit to His will. This Gospel (Anglo-Saxon "God Spell" or Word of God) was the Basrah or "Divine Message." In Greek it became Evangelion or "Good News." The closest disciples of Jesus became proclaimers of the Basrah and were known as mebasrim or "bringers of the Divine Message." In the Greek New Testament they are called apostoloi or "ones who have been sent forth."

The main point of this explanation is to clarify what kind of teaching Jesus was delivering to the people of Israel from their God. It was very literally the prophetic and mystical Word of God, and its main theme (which will be discussed later) was jeshua or "liberation." Jeshua, is, of course, Jesus' name, which was Latinized in Western Christianity to distinguish him from Joshua, whose name was also Jeshua. Like Joshua, Jesus was a liberator. But even the Hebrew-Aramaic word for liberation has been transmitted in Christian doctrine as "salvation," from a Latin root meaning "safety, health."

THE SEASON IS RIPE AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS NEAR AT HAND!

SUBMIT AND KEEP FAITHFUL TO THE DIVINE MESSAGE!

Here the "season" is the mood or cyclic period of Israel's purificatory suffering and God's seeming absence. Precisely because things have never been worse for Israel, the Kingdom or "rulership" of God is present. Why? Jesus said,

BLESSED IS THE PERSON WHO HAS SUFFERED. HE HAS FOUND LIFE.

According to the post-Schweitzerian scholars who have read enough of the intertestamental literature to become familiar with Jewish apocalyptic eschatology, Jesus was saying that the Messiah could be expected very soon because Israel was undergoing the "birth pangs of the Messiah." Before Israel could be saved it would experience terrible travail, like that of a woman in birth. Next on this schedule would be the coming of the divinely anointed Davidic King or Messiah, who would lead his people in holy war against the Romans with invisible angelic armies at his side and reestablish the Jewish Kingdom of David on earth. This would be

the Day of the LORD long predicted by Isaiah.

in fact, the early Greek Christians adopted apocalyptic expectations very similar to this, with two modifications. First, this agenda would begin with the Second Coming or physical return of Jesus, rather than having occurred in the First Coming (which was in suffering and rejection). Second, the messianic event proclaimed by Jesus was connected to the travail of Israel in bringing forth the Christian Church, which was a kind of interim Kingdom of God, and the Second Coming would be a cosmic event immediately preceding the final Day of Judgment.

It is this kind of eschatological schedule which underlies the structure and interpretation of the synoptic gospels as well as the presentation of Jesus' teachings as they appear Matthew, Mark, and Luke. But I must take issue with post-Schweitzerian scholarship. While the apocalyptic agenda pervaded Jewish and gentile Christian interpretation of Jesus' message, it is clear that it did *not* underly the proclamation of Jesus himself. The many indications and evidences to be discussed later shows that Jesus did not have an historical apocalyptic agenda in mind. His was a mystical "realized" eschatology that focused on the here-and-now aspects of spiritual life and their transcendental implications, not unlike what is presented in the writings of Paul, John and the Gospel of Thomas.

Like the ancient prophet Amos, Jesus used the symbology and terminology of popular LORD'S Day theories to press forward his teachings. But he gave new meanings to ideas like the Kingdom of God and the 'Olam ha-ba or World to Come. Here, in this summary of Jesus' Basor preserved in Mark's Gospel quoted above, the "season is ripe." That means the time is now. In another phrase, "now is the acceptable Day of the LORD." It is not in some vague future period that God comes to His people, but *now!* This is the quintessential statement of realized eschatology.

"The Kingdom of God is near at hand," or in exacting Greek, "is drawn near." The idea is not that the Kingdom has ever been far away, but that now its presence is being made known. It is intangible and invisible, but Jesus is declaring its immanence and reality. This is consistent with the dominical teaching in the Gospel of Thomas that God's Divine Malkuth is spread out upon the earth, but mortals do not see it.

"Submit!" This was the imperative of all prophets, and it was the basic requirement of John the Baptist. The concept is embodied in the Hebrew root nacham, which has a great latitude of meaning. It refers to a positive, merciful change of heart that Yahweh can have as well as human beings. It means to loosen up, have pity toward, submit, yield, or change one's attitude toward someone or something. It is a vitally important concept in semitic religion, and the word Nacham one of the names of God in Islam. The word "Islam" itself means "submission" to God's will.

The best overall translation of the concept as used by John the Baptist and Jesus

is probably the imperative, "submit to and keep faith with God's prophetic Word," whether given in Scripture or by living prophets. Most unfortunately, however, the word and its implications have been Latinized in ecclesiastical tradition and translated as "repent," meaning literally to "re-think," fully accept, and intellectually believe church doctrine and mores. This is not too far from the Greek metanoiete of the gentile gospels, "change your consciousness," which appears regularly throughout the New Testament. But a "repentance" means literally a change of mind or ideology, and that is not what Jesus demanded. Nor was he calling "sinners" to a better life by merely moral standards, as the Salvation Army might do. Rather, his was an imperative to *spiritually awaken*.

The whole issue has been even further clouded by the Christian emphasis upon credal and intellectual belief as the content of faith, rather than fidelity to the Spirit of God. The Greek Christians translated Jesus' teachings on amen ("faithfulness, fidelity") with the Greek pistis. The trouble is that while pistis can mean "trust," its main connotation is "belief." Belief became an issue to the gentile Christians, who (unlike the original Jewish Christians) had not been born and raised in a monotheistic faith community. In the transition from Jewish to gentile Christianity, the words that Jesus spoke about covenantal fidelity were interpreted as teachings about theological, and eventually christological, "belief." Thus the imperative of Jesus to "submit (to God's will) and keep faithful to the prophetic Divine Message" soon came to be understood to mean, "Repent (i.e., change your intellectual ideas and accept Christian dogma) and believe in the (Christian) Gospel. This is the way it is still translated by most Christian scholars.

Jesus illustrated the meaning of submission many times. Perhaps the simplest example is in the mashal of the two sons:

A CERTAIN MAN HAD TWO SONS, AND HE WENT TO THE FIRST AND SAID, 'SON GO WORK TODAY IN MY VINYARD.' THE SON SAID, 'I WILL NOT,' BUT AFTERWARD HE SUBMITTED ("repented") AND WENT. AND HE CAME TO THE SECOND SON AND SAID LIKEWISE. THE SON ANSWERED, 'I WILL GO, SIR,' BUT HE DID NOT WORK IN THE VINEYARD. WHICH OF THE TWO DID THE WILL OF HIS FATHER?

In Matthew's Gospel Jesus asks this question to some of the Temple priests, who correctly answer that the first son did the will of his father. Like Feste gently proving Olivia the fool in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, Jesus replies, "Amen I say unto you, tax-collectors and prostitutes go into the Kingdom of God before you! For John came unto you in the way of righteousness (i.e., with the power of God's revealed Word), and you did not keep faith with him. But the tax-collectors and prostitutes kept faith with him, and you, having seen this, still did not

submit ("repent"), that you might keep faith with him (i.e., his prophetic Message)."

Clearly the mashal of the two sons was aimed at the religious establishment. It was intended to point up the great contradiction between the religionists and the amme-ha-eretz. Both the common Jews and the religionists were originally confronted with God's will in his commandments and Laws, just as the two sons were given an imperative by their father. But the "sinners" or debtors, who had originally refused to obey God's will, were now submitting to the preaching of John and Jesus, just as the first son later submitted to his father's wishes. In spite of this the second son, who feigned obedience to the father, never did his will. He is like the religionist, says Jesus, who claims loyalty and fidelity to God's Covenant but never fulfills its true intent.

To "repent, then, meant to cease one's stiff-necked, hard-hearted disobedience to the simple requirements of God's justice and mercy. It did not necessarily involve the 180-degree turnaround of intellectual belief or the violent "conversion" touted by modern evangelical Christians. Rather it was a simple submission to what one already knew deeply within the heart.

For Jesus the will of God was the greatest consideration, and it was inscribed in this prophetic age in every human heart. It transcended not only family ties, but national boundaries and all other human categories, if we are to believe the story told by Peter.

According to this, Jesus was teaching a large crowd of people who were surrounding him in someone's home. His mother and brothers had heard of the strange and wonderful things he was doing and feared that he was possessed or insane. They could not get through the crowd, so they sent a message to him. When the messenger told Jesus that his mother and brothers were outside, he looked upon those gathered and said,

WHO IS MY MOTHER OR MY BROTHER? BEHOLD, YOU ARE MY MOTHER  
AND MY BROTHERS! FOR WHOEVER SHALL DO THE WILL OF GOD IS MY  
BROTHER, OR MY SISTER, OR MY MOTHER.

Matthew's Gospel alters the sense of the saying to make it more restrictive in a Christian way. It says that Jesus looked upon his disciples gathered around him, and pronounced them his brothers, implying that they alone were doing the will of God. But the original meaning was not that whoever made himself a disciple of Jesus was doing the will of God. Rather, it was that *whoever does the will of God has spiritual kinship with Jesus.*

Such a statement has great implications for religious ecumenism in the modern world. It means that a person need not be called a Christian in order to be a brother or sister of Jesus. Rather, the person must do the will of God--and that alone is the criterion for spiritual kinship with Jesus. All such spiritual sisters and brothers are the true "Christians" or "Israelites" of



humanity.

Jesus told many mashlim illustrating different aspects of "repentance" or submission to the will of God. One is the Parable of the Prodigal Son. He leaves his father's house to seek his fortune but eventually finds himself impoverished. He finally realizes it would have been better if he had followed his father's will and stayed at home, and he experiences a nacham or change of heart. He returns home to his father in humility, but is welcomed back in splendor. The "sin" or debt of the prodigal son is forgiven by the father, and this causes the envy of the other brother who has stayed home in seeming faithfulness.

Here the prodigal son is like the amme-ha-eretz who left God long ago but now have returned in humility because of Jesus and John. The jealousy of the other "good" son is like the attitude of the religionists, who felt somehow cheated by the turn of events. After all, hadn't they followed the Torah rigorously? Why should these tax-collectors and prostitutes (and farmers, dyers, weavers, potters, fishermen, etc.) enjoy the same rewards, the same Kingdom, the same banquet?

Jesus told another mashal about a landowner who hired laborers for his field. Some came early in the day, others at noon, and still others in late afternoon, yet at the end of the work-day he paid them all the same wage, which had been agreed upon by the early-comers in advance. When those who had labored all day in the hot sun complained that they should receive more than the late-comers, the landowner replied:

#### IS YOUR EYE EVIL BECAUSE I AM GOOD?

Jesus, of course, was not advocating inequity in wages for farm hands or anything else so literal. He was explaining that God was willing to accept whoever would submit to Him, and that life in the Kingdom was not a matter of "merits," but membership and service. The true "reward" is in the "working," rather than future wages.

The theme of submission is a basic thread which runs throughout the teachings of Jesus. It is the antitype of "hypocrisy" or self-magnification. It is expressed in the motif of humility, which Jesus stressed over and over again, and the motif of the little servant-child. In Christian soteriology it soon became connected to the mystery-motif of palingenesis or "rebirth," and by the time John's Gospel was redacted by the gentile churches of Asia Minor the original semitic concept of submission has been radically transformed. Here one finds a confusion of the "birth from above," which Jesus and the Son-of-Man community saw as part of the inner path of sanctification or sainthood, with the prophetic imperative to submit to God's, which had been a basic "first step" for the general public in the minds of Jesus and John. Baptism, which was the sign of submission to God's will, now became a mystery-ritual of "rebirth." The higher messianic

mysteries of sainthood which the historical Apostle John tried to open for all Christians were eventually interpreted as symbolic rites of initiation or even of empowerment for ordination, like the foot-washing and the exsufflation.

### **Faith as Covenantal Fidelity**

The Covenant, Berith, or Testament of God Yahweh with the Jewish people came through Abraham and was redefined by Moses, according to biblical tradition. This was modeled upon the ancient Near Eastern vassal treaty which was a kind of divine social contract or constitution. One party agreed to do X for the other party, which in turn agreed to do Y for the first party. If Israel did not uphold its part of the bargain, God was not bound to uphold His part.

Enough has been said about the distinction of faith (amen) or covenantal fidelity, which Jesus preached, and faith (Greek pistis) as doctrinal "belief" in Jesus Christ. Of course, nothing needed to be "believed in" at the time of Jesus because Jews all shared a common culture and system of ideas. But later as the Divine Message became the Greek kerygma or evangelistic preaching, traveling through the mouths and minds of gentile Christianity, there were many issues of belief to be met: monotheism versus polytheism; an ethical approach which valued community interest over self-interest; and a whole system of doctrine and language about an obscure Jewish mystic named Mar Yeshua.

To become a Christian meant first becoming a Jew of sorts (theologically speaking), then choosing the messianic type of Judaism transmitted by Jesus, and finally settling on the interpretation of Jesus' Message transmitted by Greek Christianity. That was a lot to swallow at one time for the non-Jew, and therefore the content of Christian faith was resolved more and more as doctrine. Christianity became a system of *belief*, rather than a non-dogmatic path or way within Judaism. After less than a century, catechumens or candidates for Christian baptism required a *three year period* of instruction to prepare them for admission! Greek Christianity never suspected how distasteful its creeds and dogmas would have been to Jesus of Nazareth.

Fortunately for us, Jewish-Christian oral tradition or Haggadah transmitted exemplary tales of "faith" by Old Testament characters which have been preserved in the Epistle of James, the Epistle to the Hebrews, and Paul's Epistle to the Romans. These allow us to see what faith meant to Jesus and the original Christians.

The most complete list of exemplars is found in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. The author (who seems not to be Paul, but perhaps a messianic Jewish priest), like the writer of the Epistle of James, conceives of "faith" *as fidelity in action*, not mere "belief." One aspect of amen is "keeping faith with" or "trusting," and this too is considered to be a work of fidelity. Thus he can say that it is through faithfulness that Christians perceive the truth of the Jewish creation

story--"that the aeons were set in order by the Word of God, and the visible creation came forth from the unseen void."

As we examine the actual exemplars of "faith" which the author uses, and which clearly belong to an earlier tradition (since they appear independently in at least two other sources), we find that in each case the illustration is one of fidelity or faithfulness, rather than theological belief. Some have an element of "trust," but none really mean "belief." In fact, the writers of the New Testament used the Greek phrase pistis eis, literally "trust in" something, showing that even by that stage of Christian development the idea of faith meant something more like "trust" than intellectual belief.

Since it is likely that Jesus used these Old Testament exemplars to illustrate the meaning of prophetic amen, let us examine them. The single point they each make is that righteousness (zedek or "justification" before Yahweh was not by liturgies of Torah (i.e., "works of Law") but through fidelity (prophetic amen) to God's will. The content of faith is not obedience to human interpretations of divine Law (the oral midrashic tradition of the Elders), but inner obedience to the Spirit of God, which comes by means of response to the yetzer ha-tov, the "good impulse of the heart."

Here are excerpts describing "faith" as fidelity from the Epistle to the Hebrews, Chapter 11 (not written by Paul):

"Through his inner fidelity (amen) Abel offered a greater sacrifice than Cain's, and through fidelity his goodness was attested, for his offerings had God's approval. Through fidelity he continued to speak after his death [an intertestamental legend].

"Because of his fidelity, Enoch was taken into the Malkuth without passing through death...

"Through his fidelity Noah, divinely warned about the invisible future, took heed and built an ark...

"Because his of fidelity, Abraham obeyed the divine call to wander to another land...  
"Because of his fidelity Abraham passed the test by offering his son for sacrifice to god...

"Because of her fidelity to the spies of Joshua, the prostitute Rahab escaped doom when the walls of Jericho fell..."

The word "faith" (amen) is from a Hebrew root meaning "to be strong, firm, to persevere." The only way it relates to "belief" is through legal covenant, when the term is used in reference to "keeping" the covenant or agreement. This means being trustworthy and living up to a stated contract, the content of which might be intellectual.

The prostitute Rahab did not "believe" anything. When Joshua's spies came into the city she hid them in her house. For this favor they promised her that when the invasion came the next

day, if she would hang a scarlet cloth from her window the soldiers would spare her household. This bargain was a covenant or amana, and between her and the spies was an emunah or understanding. The fact that both sides lived up to the bargain constituted amen, fidelity, or faithfulness.

The fidelity of Abraham had nothing to do with the fact that he was willing to obey an unseen voice--there is no great merit in that. But the unseen voice he obeyed, was that of Yahweh Himself, and Abraham was able to discern this fact. He was willing to follow the will of Yahweh in spite of intellectual objections, the opposition of friends and family, and even the accusation of insanity or demon-possession. God "reckoned" Abraham's fidelity as zedek or "righteousness" because it required a far greater inner love and trust than simple sacrifice or legal works of Torah. The same holds true for Noah, Elijah, Amos, Jeremiah and all the prophets of Yahweh.

Jesus illustrated "faith" or interior fidelity with many other examples. Let us examine them.

AMEN ("Faithfully") I SAY UNTO YOU, IF YOU ENDURE IN STEADFAST FAITH LIKE A TINY MUSTARD SEED, YOU WILL SAY TO THIS MOUNTAIN, "MOVE OVER THERE," AND IT WILL MOVE. THE PERSON WHO IS FAITHFUL IN THAT WHICH IS LEAST IS ALSO FAITHFUL IN MUCH, AND THE PERSON WHO IS UNRIGHTEOUS IN THAT WHICH IS LEAST IS ALSO UNRIGHTEOUS IN MUCH.

Jesus always prefaced his proverbs with the amen, which indicated that he, like the ancient prophets, was speaking in fidelity to Yahweh. He used the example of the tiny mustard seed because of its unusual properties of perseverance, survival and vitality. It was the smallest of all seeds, yet for its size it grew to the greatest of all the shrubs. It would persevere and grow under the most difficult conditions of weather and soil, and it remained vital even after having been swallowed by birds and brought to earth in their droppings.

For Jesus, faith was perseverance, stamina, vitality. It was an inner commitment to search for God's Kingdom and His righteousness no matter what it cost, and to stay true to the inner promptings of God's Spirit in the face of all odds. It had little to do with belief, but with action. It was, to use Pauline terminology, a "work" in its own right. Therefore Paul stressed that one had to "work out" (ergadzomai) one's "salvation" (soteria, from Yeshua, "liberation"). Even though he was a founding Christian saint, Paul had to keep up the race (agon) like an athlete (askete, "ascetic"), lest he backslide and be lost.

This prophetic faith required a constant interior vigilance. In his parables and sayings Jesus was constantly exhorting his disciples to "watch," which means to "vigil." This is the term Jesus used for *contemplation, meditation, self-examination, and introspection*. On the Mount of

Transfiguration with his closest disciples, Jesus taught them to “vigil” all during the night.

In all mystic tradition it is at night that the veil draws thin between the “ordinary” mind and the spiritual world. It is then, and preferably up on a high place above the valleys of civilization, that the busy minds of humanity and the “human vibration” ebb and are at their least intrusive as the world sleeps. And it was then that the Master Jesus communed and vigiled with the divine Malkuth, including the living spirits of great Jewish saints like Moses and Elijah. Clearly from the many “watch” sayings of Jesus, he strongly urged his disciples to continually meditate, contemplate, and examine their interior thoughts and motives. This was an essential core of inner fidelity and his teachings on “faith.”

It was important to persevere and never give up. One of the best examples in the New Testament is found in Jesus' words on prayer and seeking. The usual English translations fail to bring out the meaning which the Koine Greek still preserves by using the Present Imperative rather than the Aorist Imperative. The Present Imperative has the sense of continued action, or “keep on” doing something, rather than the Aorist “do” something once and it is done. The translation should be

KEEP ON SEEKING, AND YE SHALL FIND.  
KEEP ON KNOCKING, AND IT SHALL BE OPENED FOR YOU.  
KEEP ON ASKING, AND YE SHALL RECEIVE

FOR WHOEVER PERSEVERES IN SEEKING ALWAYS FINDS, THE  
PERSISTENT DOOR-KNOCKER EVENTUALLY GAINS ADMISSION, AND THE  
PERSISTENT ASKER ALWAYS RECEIVES.

Jesus always appealed to common-sense observation, and here he simply states what his hearers already knew. The “squeaky wheel always gets the grease,” or that modern proverbial statement not found in the Bible, “God helps those who help themselves”—a Stoic sentiment more closely allied with the teachings of Jesus than is usually recognized. If these things are so with men, how much more with God, who acts out of love rather than necessity? The conclusion is that each person must persevere and persistently seek God. This single-pointed zeal is what Jesus called amen, faith. It is the very same quality that the Greek and Roman Stoics valued, for the “faith” or fidelity of the mustard seed is its never-say-die *persistence and vitality*.

This kind of fidelity to God's will would eventually lead to such a perfect harmony and alignment with Heaven that the seeker would become an instrument for divine or “miraculous” action. If God willed to move a mountain (metaphorically speaking), the seeker would respond by proclaiming (in the Name of Yahweh) that the mountain would move, and it would come to

pass. If God willed that the Temple at Jerusalem be destroyed, the seeker would respond by proclaiming this thing, and in God's good time it would come to pass.

The Christian interpretation of faith as "belief" made a terrible distortion of the faith taught by Jesus. A good illustration of this distortion occurs in the transmission of the saying about the mountain being moved. The authentic form which I quoted was transmitted through the "Q" source, but in Mark's Gospel it has been radically altered to read: "Whoever shall tell this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and shall not be divided in his heart, but shall believe that it is coming to pass--it will happen for him."

This sounds like a new-age instruction on thelemic decreeing—if you just believe it enough, it will be true. While there are many amazing phenomena related to self-hypnosis, such as successful fire-walking, that undoubtedly do depend upon belief to get results, that is not what Jesus was teaching. This teaching was distorted to fit concepts in Roman-Hellenistic religion current at the time the gospel redactions were made.

Look at what has happened in the earliest Greek gospel. Now the seeker is no longer a servant of Yahweh like the prophets, but a Greek *Theios Aner* or Divine Man. He is no longer the humble prophet, the "creature of dust" who, like Jesus, does only what he sees his Father doing. He is no longer the one who proclaims, "Of my personal self, I can do nothing." Like Moses at Meribah-Kadesh, who struck the rock with his staff to bring forth springs of water for the thirsting people but made it appear that it was he, not God, who had acted--now the seeker takes on the role of a thaumaturge. He becomes a little Greek god himself. It is *his* will, not God's, that becomes primary in the glorification of "belief" as faith.

It is from this point in history that the Christian theosophical concept of faith as a form of personal power gains importance. Soon Gnostic thaumaturges will attract large congregations of those seeking "signs and wonders," and Hellenistic magical tradition will merge with Christianity. Eventually a celibate male Christian priesthood will arise for the manipulation of sacred objects and potent symbols in gross imitation of Greco-Roman and Isian priesthood..

In modern times the idea of "faith-healing" and other uses of personal psychic power has become important. It is quite true that clairvoyance, clairaudience, telepathy, and even telekinesis are real potentials of the human organism. But they do not originate in the separative lower human mind or personality. To the extent that psychic examples have been elicited from non-spiritual "talented subjects" is the exception rather than the rule of psychic development, which takes place slowly like the opening of a flower in the context of spiritual growth. As Mother Jennie used to admonish, forced psychism creates a result like a hot-house tomato—looks good on the outside, but no flavor on the inside.

The human soul, in its full flowering, is an instrument through which divine will expresses itself. This is the only logical truth. Can you imagine yourself with all the powers of

God Almighty for even five minutes? The entire universe would be in shambles! Or can you imagine the fate of planet earth if even only one American and one Russian psychic were able to move mountains by simply desiring or concentrating? The warfare would be over in less time than it would take for a nuclear attack and counter-attack. Thank God these things are impossible for ordinary human beings.

Given, then, that the faith of Jesus was a persistent and loyal love for divine truth, and that the main arena of this activity was the inner world of the human heart, where both divine and demonic impulses were conceived, how was fidelity to be achieved? What conditions ruled one's ability to hear God's will and act on it?

These are best explained in the mashal of the man who went forth to sow seed in a field. Jesus said:

LISTEN: A SOWER WENT FORTH TO SOW HIS FIELD. AS HE SOWED, A FEW SEEDS FELL UPON THE FOOTPATH, AND THE BIRDS ATE THEM. A FEW OTHER SEEDS FELL UPON STONY GROUND WITH LITTLE SOIL. THEY SPROUTED AND BROKE THROUGH THE EARTH QUICKLY BECAUSE THE SOIL WAS SHALLOW, BUT WHEN THE SUN ROSE THEY WERE SCORCHED AND DIED BECAUSE THEY HAD NO ROOT TO SUSTAIN THEM. A FEW OTHER SEEDS FELL AMONG THE WEEDS AND THISTLES, AND AS THEY GREW UP THEY WERE CHOKED OUT AND YIELDED NO FRUIT.

BUT THE GREAT MAJORITY OF SEEDS FELL INTO GOOD, PLOUGHED EARTH, AND CAME TO FRUITION. SOME YIELDED THIRTYFOLD, OTHERS SIXTYFOLD, AND OTHERS AN HUNDREDFOLD OF GRAIN. IF YOU HAVE EARS TO HEAR, THEN HEAR.

The sower intends to plant his field. He sows "broadcast," that is, by using a sweeping motion which scatters seed before him in a wide arc. He walks along a hard footpath through the ploughed field, and a few seeds land on the path, where they will not be planted. A few others fall onto stony earth, or areas which were too hard to plough with the wooden straight-stick. There is a little soil in these places, but not enough to support a crop. A few other seeds fall into the unploughed thistle patches alongside the field, where they are choked out by the brambles. But with these exceptions, nearly all the seeds go where the sower intended--into the good ploughed earth. Here they produce abundantly according to their own strength.

In Mark's Gospel this mashal has become an allegory of the evangelical preacher. He casts forth the Word of God in every direction, and it enters into the hearts of the hearers. However some are stony hearts, and Satan (the birds) plucks the seeds of truth from them.

Others are those who respond with great joy, but when a time of persecution arises for the sake of the truth, they wither and die like the sprouts with no root. Even others are the hearts of wealthy persons who are much encumbered with the brambles of worldly concerns. These choke out the words of truth before they can become fruitful. But a few are the good hearts of faithful hearers. They receive the Word and keep it, making it fruitful, each according to his strength and understanding.

This is a great allegory for the wandering Christian evangelist, but it contains some contradictions. First, the Greek preserves the original distinction between the "few" seeds which fall into bad places and the "great many" seeds which fall into the ploughed field. The Christian evangelical tradition has blurred this distinction by either not making it (the King James says "some...and other"), or by actually using this parable as an illustration of how few hearers in fact bring the Word of God to fruition! But the story says just the opposite. The few seeds which are wasted are probably less than one or two percent of those sown broadcast. The mission of the sower is to waste as little precious seed as possible.

Therefore, if we are to accept the Marcan and early gentile church interpretation of the mashal, we must conclude that Jesus regarded practically everyone who heard his Message to have understood it, digested it, and put it into practice by becoming his disciple. Although it is clear that Jesus had a very positive attitude to the amme-ha-eretz, however, this interpretation of the mashal is clearly not original, especially when it concludes with the imperative, "If you have ears to hear, then hear," a prophetic admonition implying that this was not an easy teaching.

I would propose that the original meaning of the Parable of the Sower is something like this. The Sower is God, and the seeds are the yetzerim ha-tovim or good and divine impulses of the heart that are sent forth from God—as opposed to the evil yetzerim. The prophetic-messianic teachings spoke of an age when the Torah would be imperishably inscribed in the human heart. In preparation for that age, the disciples of Master Jesus must learn to weed the gardens of their hearts so that the good fruits (actions and deeds) of an enlightened heart could come forth.

The various grades of soil represent different kinds of "hearts," as in the Christian interpretation. The "heart" must not be hard and stony, or lacking in depth, or full of worldly concerns. It must be soft, prepared and finely crushed to receive the seeds of truth. That, of course, is the why human beings must "suffer" in order to find Life. Their hard-heartedness must be broken down, like stony ground, through tempest and tears. When they are truly open and humble ("humility," from Latin humus, "soil"—good illustration, but no relation to Hebrew), then they are able to use what God sows deep within in the heart.

Thus the Parable of the Sower is an admonition for the hearers to prepare their hearts to receive and nourish the divine impulses that are continually being sown by Heaven. The means of preparation include acts of mercy, empathy, love, introspection, contemplation, meditation,



and fidelity to the guidance of revealed Torah.

Jesus says, however, the God as Sower takes care to scatter his seeds *only upon the ploughed fields*. In a related teaching, Jesus said:

DO NOT CAST YOUR PEARLS BEFORE SWINE, NOR GIVE HOLY THINGS  
TO DOGS, LEST THEY TURN AND REND YOU.

It is the same with God, who is the Sower. He does not waste his Word upon the spiritually deaf, dumb and blind. Even so, a few "crumbs" from the Master's table" may fall to the stray dogs and a few seeds to the foot-paths and brambles. But, as Jesus showed in his mashal, the earnest seeker must prepare his heart if he desires to receive the seeds of divine truth.

To return to the original question about faith, we again ask what conditions rule one's ability to hear God's will and bring it to fruition? The answer is provided by the Parable of the Sower. One must have a pure heart and a single-minded intent, and the heart must be humble, like that of a servant-child. In other words, it must be prepared by submission of the personal will to God's will.

Thus *submission* of the personal will and mind is the key to faithfulness or fidelity, and it is the process and context through which the heart or inner person is prepared for spiritual maturation. That is why it had such an important place in the preaching of both Jesus and John the Baptist. It is still the *sine qua non* of any authentic religious discipline.

This is not to lose sight of the goal of what might be best called "christhood," which is the full measure of the Divine Image in which humanity is created, and is the messianic context in which Master Jesus would quote the Psalm, "Ye are all Gods."

But as Paul admonished the Corinthian Gnostics who considered themselves to have already achieved mastery as Christs in flesh, we must also warn against spiritual glamour and inflation in his words of chastisement: "Already you are perfected! Already you have become spiritually rich! Without our help you have become kings! And would that you did already reign, that we might share the rule with you!" I Cor. 4:8

As the Master Jesus warned, "None among you can change even one hair of his own head by taking thought." Image of God or not, it is better for us to keep the special kind of perspective that a wise heir to a royal kingdom maintains, known as humility. We are each divine beings, but we are as acorns to a mighty oak. We can commune with Heaven and ask for whatever we need. But in no way is any human being God Almighty.

Paul said to the Corinthians, "Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as spiritual humanity, but as people of the flesh, as babes in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food; you were unready for it. Even yet you are not ready, for you are still of the flesh (i.e., shallow, literal,

and focused upon exterior life)." I Cor. 3:1-3a

One of the interesting paradoxes of Church history was the development of Protestant theology on the content of faith. Calvin, Zwingli and Luther wanted to get "back to the Bible," which they were far more willing to trust than popes and ecumenical councils of bishops—the "traditions of the Elders." For their authority he substituted another source that Protestants would come to regard as absolutely infallible, much as the Jews regarded the written Torah—the Christian Holy Bible.

Martin Luther received what he felt was a divine revelation about Paul's writings on faith by his own personal interpretation of the Bible. The Jews were all wrong because they believed that by doing good works or *mitzvot* of Torah they could please God. Paul said that it is not by works of the Torah but fidelity to the teachings of Jesus Christ that humanity is "justified" before God. But the Pauline "fidelity to the teachings of Jesus Christ" became, in the medieval gentile translation of Martin Luther, "faith (i.e., belief) in Jesus Christ." That is, what really justified humanity before God was *believing the correct theological doctrines about Jesus Christ and His Church*. Faith is belief!

What a perfect indictment of the Roman Catholics, thought Luther. They set up hospitals, leper colonies, orphanages, schools, and did all kinds of "good works," thinking that this pleased God. But this, in fact, must be the reason that the Roman Church had become so corrupt, with its plenary indulgences and other abuses. It thought that faith consisted in good works, that it had power through the priesthood to forgive all sin, that it could further "balance off" the debts with "good works," and was therefore invulnerable to the consequences of its own corruption. But in fact, reasoned Luther, Paul said that faith is really belief in Jesus Christ. That is what saves us from sin.

As the Protestant revolution developed in Europe, it took only a few short steps in this line of thinking to place supreme emphasis upon correct theology. What one must do is formulate the most accurate doctrine about Christ and promulgate it, and this will be pleasing to God, thought the reformers. Faith requires no action on the part of the believer. All it requires is a simple trust in God, and all one's sins will be forgiven!

Soon continental Europe was a hotbed of Christian sects, each with a competing credal statement or "confession of faith." The Protestant revolution tied itself to developing nationalism to become the most potent political force in Europe. Each sphere of emerging national influence began to define its own character and religion as over and against Rome. The Bible was translated into the common vernacular from Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, and it became a formidable weapon against "popery" and Rome.

A great sigh of relief spread over Europe and England as Christians realized that they didn't actually have to *do anything* to please God except give verbal assent to the correct

doctrinal creed. Worship became centered upon group recitation of sectarian confessions and hearing of fiery sermons. Luther condemned the Epistle of James as an "epistle of straw" because it said "faith without works is dead." This, as any good Protestant knew, contradicted St. Paul's entire soteriology. It was obviously a late and spurious idea, probably influenced by Jewish-Christian "Judaizers."

But Luther and the Protestants were dead wrong about Paul's theology. It did not contradict the earlier Jewish-Christian concept of faith preserved in the Epistle of James. Faith was considered by Paul to be inseparable from behavior, just as it was for James and Jesus. It was not "good works" of love and charity that Paul condemned, but the "traditions of men," the oral midrashic Torah of the Pharisees, the straining at gnats to avoid ritual contamination, the tithing of mint, rue and all manner of herbs, the misplaced belief that by fulfilling all the trivial injunctions of the scribes and lawyers one was pleasing Yahweh. These were the "works of Law" that he cautioned did not "justify" mankind before God. This was exactly as Jesus taught.

For James and Paul, faith was not a matter of doctrine or belief, but of inner fidelity and practice. These led, by necessity, to "fruits of the Spirit" or good works of the heart. As James said, fidelity (amen) without such fruits is impossible.

"Prove to me that this 'faith' you speak of is real even though it produces no works," says the writer of James. What evidence can there be of faith if it produces no fruit?

"But by my works I will prove to you my faith: You have 'faith' enough to understand that there is one God. Excellent! The demons (elilim) have 'faith' like that and they tremble! But can't you see, you quibbler, that faith without works is dead? Was it not by his *action*, in offering his son Isaac upon the altar, that our father Abraham was justified? Surely you can see that fidelity was at work in his actions, and that by these actions the integrity of his fidelity was fully proved.

"Here was fulfillment of the Scripture: 'Abraham kept faith with God, and that fidelity was counted to him as righteousness;' and elsewhere he is called 'God's friend.'

"You see then that a person is justified by deeds and not by what you call 'faith' in itself. The same applies to the prostitute Rahab. Was she not justified by her action in welcoming the spies of Yahweh into her house and sending them away by a safe route?

"Just as the body is dead when there is no spirit left in it, so what you call 'faith' apart from works is lifeless as a corpse." James 2:18-26

Martin Luther despised the Epistle of James because it so blatantly contradicted his theory about faith as correct belief. He tried to have it expurgated from the canon of the New Testament. But it remains a clear signpost for the original Jewish-Christian understanding of faith as fidelity, and for its absolute insistence upon "good works" as the vital, visible, and inalienable aspect of faith.

**Chapter Six**  
**THE GATE TO THE KINGDOM**

James the Just, who was called the "brother of Jesus," is a highly important figure in early Jewish Christianity. According to the New Testament he was one of the three "pillars" of the church at Jerusalem, although no reference is made to him in the canonical gospels. Paul mentions a post-Resurrection visitation of Jesus to James the Just, and a second-century tradition from the Gospel of the Hebrews (which is no longer extant) attributes the institution of the Lord's Supper to this event. James the Just had made a Nazirite's vow that he would not eat food or taste the fruit of the vine until he had seen the Risen Christ. Jesus appeared to him and released him from his vow.

In the Gospel of Thomas we find the curious statement of Jesus that when he is no longer in the flesh, "you shall go to James the Just, for whose sake heaven and earth came into being." This is curious because the Gospel proclaims Thomas as its founding saint, and the usual tendency for such a tradition is to magnify the apostolic founder (as it does in logion 13). The Petrine tradition of the synoptic gospels makes Peter the great apostle. The Johannine tradition of John's Gospel makes him the "beloved disciple." The Thomas tradition of the Gospel of Thomas represents him as the peer of Christ, and other Thomas literature portrays him as the twin brother (*didymos*) of Jesus, or his earthly manifestation after the Resurrection.

In fact, the importance of James the Just as the main leader of the Jerusalem church after the Resurrection of Jesus crops up in all sorts of diverse traditions. It is clear to scholars that James was the leader of the Jewish-Christian church after the Resurrection of Jesus. He was probably associated with the so-called Judaizers, as opposed to the Hellenists of Acts. It is also clear that his importance was minimized in the Greek gentile churches after his martyrdom and the flight of the Jerusalem church to Pella (A.D. 62). Thus the Jewish Christians were saved from the siege of Jerusalem, but they lost their central importance to Christianity and withdrew into obscurity, finally to be regarded as heretical by the Church.

I bring this up because it seems likely to me that James was not the literal brother of Jesus, but another saint of the Son-of-Man community (like John the Baptist). He was the "brother" of Jesus in that Jesus declared him to be his spiritual kin, just as Lucan tradition represents John the Baptizer as the "brother" or cousin of Jesus. Like Jesus, James was from Galilee. He was probably not originally a disciple of Jesus because he had his own disciples. He may have been a disciple of John.

The most detailed work on James is to be found in the comprehensive work by Robert Eisenman, *James the Brother of Jesus* (New York, 1997). He argues that James was the physical brother of Jesus and asserts other conclusions that might not be acceptable to many scholars, but

the book overall is the most comprehensive exposition of material on James available in 1997. It makes clear how vital the traditions of original Jewish Christianity were, what they consisted of, and how they were "forgotten" by the early gentile churches. We strongly recommend it.

Hegesippus, who wrote in A.D. 169 and was transmitted through Eusebius of Caesaria, said that James was called "the Righteous One" or the Just because of his rigorous asceticism. He was a member of the "Nazarene" order. This assertion has always puzzled scholars, who usually decide that Eusebius *meant* to write "Nazirite," because Hegesippus explains that as a member of the order he drank no wine, ate no meat except the Paschal Lamb, never shaved or cut his hair, and avoided bathing or cleansing with water. He wore only a single linen garment (like the seamless garment of Jesus) and spent so much time in prayer that his knees became hard as the hooves of a camel. He was considered to be so holy by the people that both Jews and Christians tried to touch his garments as he passed in the streets.

However the Nazirites were not a monastic order, but simply anyone who took a religious vow. Such persons would abstain from wine and meat, and they would avoid cutting the beard or hair until the vow had been made good. Paul records his making a Nazirite vow, and another story in the Acts tells of zealous Pharisees who took Nazirite vows not to cut their hair until they had assassinated Paul.

Jesus is often called the Nazarene. It is usually thought that this refers to his home village of Nazareth, but there is a more likely explanation. The nazor is the messianic "root" of Jesse prophesied in Isaiah and spoken of in other prophetic tradition. The title Nazarene probably refers to the very Son-of-Man community of Jewish saints which I have mentioned must have been important in the background of John and Jesus. This was a Galilean community for messianic Jews--perhaps originally nothing more than an obscure weekly gathering in someone's home. But James the Just, like Jesus, was called a Nazarene, and according to earliest traditions well distributed over the whole spectrum of Christian literature, James was the successor of Jesus as Rabbi of the Jewish Christians. It may have been he who refined the Lord's Supper as a messianic banquet in the name of Jesus the Messiah.

We have mentioned these facts to set the stage for an early and reliable account of the martyrdom of James the Just. According to this, the Pharisees and Sadducees who controlled the Temple plotted to kill James because of his immense popularity. He had come from Galilee after the crucifixion of Jesus and assumed leadership of the messianic party, along with Peter and John, the disciples of Jesus. But he was the elder statesman, and considered by all of Jerusalem to be a great Jewish saint. So highly was he held in awe by the priests and levites that they permitted him to pray in Temple precincts normally off-limits to all but officiating cohenim. His influence had become dangerous, now that guerrilla warfare was bringing Jerusalem to the brink of disaster.

He was asked to participate in a public debate about Jesus and, in order that everyone might be able to see and hear, he was taken to the high wall of the Temple. There he was asked this question:

"What was the gate of Jesus?"

When James began to reply, it became apparent to his opponents that he was winning the approval of the crowd below. Thinking that if they could not gain the people through debate, the same effect would be achieved by killing James as a warning against his form of impiety, they pushed him over the wall. The fall did not kill him, and he stood up on his knees to pray for his murderers. Conspirators in the crowd began to accuse him of blasphemy and stone him. Finally one of them beat him to death with a fuller's club.

It may have been the martyrdom of James that embedded Christian hatred of Pharisaic Judaism into their gospel redactions. Whereas Jesus was executed by the Romans and the despised Pontius Pilate, James was treacherously murdered by the Jerusalem religious establishment. Whatever the case, we must agree with Eisenman's major premise, stated at the end of his *James the Brother of Jesus*: "Who and whatever James was, so was Jesus." (p. 963)

The point of this chapter is to answer the same question posed by the murderers of James: "What was the gate of Jesus?" It is to explore numerous topics of his teaching from sin and forgiveness to prayer, humility and discipleship in general. The "gate" was the "way" or halakic "walk" of a Jewish saint. The question asks about the institutions and haggadic instructions of someone who was regarded as not just a rabbi, but a Jewish mystic. The "gate" was the entrance or pathway to the Kingdom, and the debate with James was supposed to determine whether the mysticism of Jesus the Nazarene was acceptable or impious.

### **The Releasing of Debtors**

The concept of "sin" used by Jesus, as the Greek language of the Lord's Prayer shows, was "debt," from the root hayyab. This was the terminology of the rabbis, and has been preserved in the prayer of Jesus:

RELEASE US FROM OUR DEBTS, AS [because] WE RELEASE OUR DEBTORS.

Jesus carried this idea consistently through every mashal and dabar about sin. The covenantal relationship between God and mankind is reciprocal. Yahweh releases a person from the consequences of his "debts" in the great Message proclaimed by Jesus, but this general amnesty is conditional upon reciprocal response to one's fellow man.

There was a serf who owed an impossibly large debt to a wealthy despot, said Jesus. He

was brought before the despot and begged for mercy. The ruler took pity and released him from payment. But as the man went out he saw a fellow-serf who owed him a very small amount of money. Grabbing him by the throat, he demanded immediate repayment of the loan. The other serfs, having witnessed the event, told the despot. He, in turn, recalled the serf whose payment he had held in abeyance and demanded immediate repayment. Since the serf could not pay, he was turned over to the torturers.

Let us look closely at what Jesus said. First, "sin" is like the debit column of an accounting sheet. Other rabbis emphasized ways of building up the positive column through credits or "merits," as they were called. But Jesus had a different procedure. Human beings, he said, could not build up "merits" in the eyes of one so perfect as Yahweh. Instead, they must concentrate upon doing away with the debits, or debts.

God, in His grace, was willing to hold the repayment of "debt" (i.e., the *consequences* of "sin") in abeyance if his servants would come forward in submission or "repentance" and ask for release from that which has fallen due. But in reciprocation for this reprieve, each servant must also be willing to release others indebted to him.

Notice that we are speaking of a reprieve, and of payments held in abeyance. We are *not* speaking of total release from the debt. Christian doctrine notwithstanding, Jesus never at any time promised that one's debts would be "forgiven," as ministers all over Christendom have claimed.

Look again at the parable. The serf is still a serf, and the despot has the right to enforce a claim against his debts at *any time*, as he in fact does in the mashal after "releasing" the serf. Was the debt "forgiven?" No, it was suspended—not revoked. The debtor was relieved from suffering the *consequences* of his debt, but the actual debt still remained.

When Christian dogma says that by "believing in" Jesus Christ one secures absolute "remission of sins," it parts company with the teachings of Jesus. First of all, as has been earlier stated, "belief" has nothing to do with it. Second, if one "keeps faith with" Jesus Christ, one's debts are not dissolved. Rather, the *consequences* of them, or responsibility for repayment or full rectification of them, will not be required as they fall due in the natural order of events.

Is this not the way a parent deals with a child's transgressions? A child has no means to fully recompense others for the damage or harm he or she might cause. Indeed, a child does not fully understand the consequences of thoughtless actions. We don't hold a child fully responsible, but we do expect him or her to rectify things to the extent of ability and understanding.

A wise old Greek monk was once approached in his mountain hermitage by a notorious thief and ne'er-do-well of the village below. The thief had come to a point in his life where he sincerely wanted to become a better person. He asked the monk,

“I have committed so many wrongs against so many different people, how can I atone for them?”

The old monk thought for a moment, and then he said, “Go bring me a book.”

The man went down to the village, bought a book, and returned.

“What shall I do?” he asked

“Stand by the edge of the cliff and tear each page into several sections. Then scatter it all to the winds,” he replied.

The man did as he had directed, then returned.

“What shall I do now?” he asked.

The old man fixed him with his eyes and said, “Go find and collect all those pieces of paper, tape them back together, and bring me the restored book.”

The man said, “But this is an impossible task! Each piece of paper has blown off the mountain and is scattered for miles around. I couldn’t restore the book if I spent my whole life trying!”

The monk said, “That is true, my friend. And it is also impossible for you to make amends for all the harm that you have caused by your thoughtless and selfish actions. Do you now see how the consequences of one destructive act are practically impossible to undo?”

“Then is there nothing I can do?” asked the man.

“Yes, there is much you can do,” replied the monk, “but you cannot change the past. You must instead make your walk through life honorable. Make your life a blessing for people from now on. Leave the past behind as you did the torn pages of that book. Let God make amends, for you of yourself cannot accomplish the task. But whatever you *can* do to help right the wrongs you have done—do that also.”

The man went away humbled by the enormity of human sin. He resolved to go through life as a blessing to others, and many years later he died a beloved figure in his village.

Jesus made it explicitly clear that each soul is responsible for his or her actions, that God is perfectly just, and that all things are arranged and balanced like weights on a scale. The same had been declared by the prophet Ezekiel against those who claimed that God visited the sins of the fathers upon the sons: “The soul that sins shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, nor shall the father bear the iniquity of the son. The righteousness of the righteous one shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked one shall be upon his own head.”

No more clearly is this stated than in Jesus’ teachings about judging others. He upholds the ancient prophetic declaration, “Judgment (*mishpat*) is mine, says the LORD.” The disciples of Jesus are not to judge other persons—that is, to “bring them to the test.”

Here the concept of judgment is much different than the English word implies. It is



much more than a "condemnation." It is a *critical action* which requires the payment of what is owed, or the restitution and rectification of a covenantal demand. For example, when the unforgiving serf grabbed his fellow-serf by the throat and demanded immediate repayment of his loan, he was "judging" the fellow. When you or I find ourselves in a position to "get back" at someone on our enemies list by doing something that will affect his life or reputation, we are in a position to "judge" him. When Yahweh decides that Israel has gone too far in the Way of Death and allows its government to be destroyed by a foreign power and its priesthood scattered, He is meting out mishpat or "judgment" to Israel. But such a judgment belongs to God, not humanity.

To "judge" is to exercise one's will and authority over another person in such a way as to make all debts immediately payable and to exact full legal satisfaction. In other words, to "even up" the scales, regardless of the preparedness of the other party or his ability to comply. Only Yahweh has the right to do this kind of thing, said Jesus and the prophets.

But what if one goes ahead and does require judgment against another? Then, said Jesus, he must realize that his own debts will be required in a similar way.

JUDGE NOT, THAT YE BE NOT JUDGED, FOR WITH THE SAME JUDGMENT  
YE JUDGE, YE SHALL BE JUDGED. WITH WHAT MEASURE YE METE, IT  
SHALL BE MEASURED TO YOU AGAIN.

For this reason the disciples are told that before they can help or teach any-one else, they must first master what they would teach, lest they become "self-magnifiers" or "hypocrites:"

HOW CAN YOU SEE THE SPECK THAT IS IN YOUR BROTHER'S EYE, BUT  
OVERLOOK THE 'CEILING-BEAM' THAT IS IN YOUR OWN EYE? HOW CAN YOU SAY  
TO YOUR BROTHER, 'LET ME TAKE THE SPECK OUT OF YOUR EYE,' AND, BEHOLD!  
THERE IS A HUGE BEAM IN YOUR OWN EYE?

YOU HYPOCRITE: FIRST REMOVE THE BEAM FROM YOUR OWN EYE, AND THEN  
YOU WILL SEE CLEARLY TO TAKE THE SPECK OUT OF YOUR BROTHER'S EYE!

Everything is just, and everything demands reciprocity. There is an integrity implicit in existence itself which demands consistency and equality, like the Second Law of Thermodynamics. "With what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again."

We have spoken about "sin," or the debit side of the ledger. The "ledger" is an ancient concept going back behind the history of Israel through the Mosaic institutions and into the religion of Egypt, where Ma'at weighed the heart on the scales of justice. For Jesus, the human

condition is one of great indebtedness to Yahweh, the Creator, who upholds the sun in its course, brings the rains, saves mankind from innumerable potential disasters and holds the universe in a living balance. It is God who, in his cosmic mercy, "makes the sun to rise upon the evil as well as the good, and sends rain upon the just and the unjust alike." Thus the ledger is balanced far over on the debit or "debt" side of the column in favor of God's gifts to mankind--infinitely far!

Let us fully understand that man's indebtedness to God is not necessarily a matter of what is called "sin." Jesus was not even slightly concerned with the religious, totemistic concept of what we call "sin and "guilt." For Jesus, everything was a matter of giving and receiving. The human condition is not that man is basically evil. Yahweh proclaimed man to be "good" when He created him. Rather, the human condition is one of absolute dependence upon God's hesed or "mercy," that is, God's divine willingness to share all things with all persons equally, regardless of their moral stature at any given time.

This was the Master's solution to the problem of Job. The good seem to suffer and the evil seem to flourish because God is merciful to everyone. God is merciful because He is good, and the human mind cannot conceive the mysteries of God's good purposes.

#### IT IS BETTER TO GIVE THAN TO RECEIVE.

This logion appears in Paul's writings as a saying of the Lord (meaning Jesus). Now we are dealing with the positive side of the great ledger. We are not speaking of rabbinical "merit," which was the moral credit a person was supposed to receive from Yahweh by dome liturgies of Torah or "works of the Law," like the strict Pharisees whom Jesus criticized. Instead the subject here is one of response to God's mercy. Because God is good to all of us, and allows us time and grace to work through the problems of existence, we should do the same for our brothers and sisters.

God has no "lack." There is nothing we can give Him. He is a Giver, rather than a Receiver. Let us become shalem, "whole" or "perfect" like God. Let us become Givers. The same logic applies to this as to release of debtors:

GIVE, AND IT SHALL BE GIVEN UNTO YOU--GOOD MEASURE, PRESSED DOWN,  
SHAKEN TOGETHER AND RUNNING OVER SHALL OTHERS GIVE INTO YOUR  
BOSOM. FOR WITH THE SAME MEASURE THAT YOU METE WITHAL IT SHALL  
BE MEASURED TO YOU AGAIN.

Since there is nothing man can "give" to God--not lambs, bullocks, first-fruits, "works" of Torah or anything else, in spite of levitical interpretation--then we can please God only by giving

good things to one another. The ancient institutions of sacrifice were, for Jesus, symbols and shadows of a higher spirituality. They were not ends in themselves. God could not be "bought" by priestly offerings; neither could his moral demands be met by praise that came only from the lips, rather than from the heart and the life of a person. The Johannine assertion that Jesus gave a new mitzvah or major commandment is simply a rhetorical way of stating his emphasis upon the "second commandment:" THOU SHALL LOVE THY NEIGHBOR AS THYSELF.

"Beloved, let us love one another," said John. "For love is of God. Everyone that loves is born of God, and knows God. He that does not love does not know God, for God is love."

God has no need of human love. Therefore the disciples of Jesus were told to direct their love to those who had need of it--their fellow human beings. This does not "repay" God or earn "merits" on the credit side of life's ledger for, as Jesus stressed in another mashal, when the servant of Yahweh has completed his work he says, "I am an unprofitable servant, and have done that which it is my duty to do."

There is no merit in releasing others from payment of debt. They will still have to make restitution at some other time and in some other way which neither the creditor nor the debtor understand. There is no merit in loving our fellow creatures, for this is the way of nature, which is rooted in the love of God. There is no merit in giving, serving and sacrificing "self" for the benefit of others, for in actuality such practices benefit the giver himself and bring him closer to divine peace and perfection.

What, then, is the reward of service? Jesus might have answered, "More service." Love and service are a joy to those who truly love and serve, and "forgiveness" is a great release from the consequences of one's own burden of debt!

### **Humility and Exaltation**

The "gate" to the Kingdom is "strait" or strenuous and narrow. It is difficult for a rich man to enter, but impossible for the selfish person. The me-first mentality was the essence of self-magnification or "hypocrisy." It was not limited to the religionists, whom Jesus pointed out as examples. "Hypocrisy" was a constant threat to the disciples and hearers of Jesus. It was easy to observe the moral flaws of others. How about one's own moral faults--the desire for preeminence over others, for public recognition, for praise and flattery, for the confident feeling that one was superior in some way (even through one's inferiority) to others? One way or the other, no matter how complex and convoluted, each person is a self-conscious ego who is the center of his or her world. It is precisely this self-centeredness that Jesus strove to break down in his hearers.

EVERYONE THAT EXALTS HIMSELF SHALL BE ABASED. BUT HE THAT HUMBLER HIMSELF SHALL BE EXALTED.

This theme was as ancient as the prophets of Israel , who praised Yahweh as the One who turned forests to deserts, and transformed the wasteland into vineyards and oases. Everything was in a cycle of change, but God's Way of Life followed the same path at all times-- first chaos, then order; first obscurity, then glory; first patient persistent "faith," then "justification" or restoration and tikkun. Jesus followed this logic--first rejection and suffering, then acceptance and exaltation; first crucifixion and martyrdom, then Resurrection and glorification. This was the "gate" or way of Wisdom, and the path of the Jewish saint and nismri.

It has never been more beautifully stated than in the writings of Jesus Ben Sirach, from the Old Testament apocryphal Ecclesiasticus, which was well known to the Jews and disciples of Jesus. We quote regarding the wise man's search for divine Wisdom, Hokmah, the feminine emanation of Godhead comparable to the Shekinah Who, like Isis of the Egyptians, was the Initiatrix into the Jewish mysteries of God:

"At first She (Hokmah) will walk with him on tortuous paths, bringing fear and cowardice upon him. She will torment him by her discipline until She trusts him, and She will test him with Her ordinances.

"But then She will come straight back to him and gladden him, and will reveal her mysteries to him."

The first part of Her "gate" means suffering, discipline and rigor. It is the "strait" or strenuous way. She torments the seeker with ordinances, dietary restrictions and all kinds of strictness, including what has been called the Dark Night of the Soul, until She "trusts" him. Here the language is ambivalent and may mean, "until he trusts Her." In any case the "trust" is covenantal amen, which is established between the seeker and God through testing and proving in life's initiatic struggles.

This must all come first, but when it has been fulfilled the seeker then discovers the fruits of his search. She "comes straight back to him," for She has seemed to be totally absent, and She gives him joy to replace his pain and reveals the razim or apocalyptic secrets of God to him.

In the path of the Jewish saint, martyr, and mystic (as in all mystic traditions) there were two stages. The first was a humble abasement, a full and total discipleship. The second was exaltation and divine sonship with God. The second stage could not come without the first.

Resurrection cannot occur without crucifixion. This is the "gate" of Yahweh, and the Way of Life.

There is much evidence that Jesus was taught out of a deep knowledge of the Jewish wisdom tradition, as well as being immersed in prophetic thought. The special material of Luke records sayings of Jesus about Hokmah, who is "justified by Her children," and it reports Jesus referring to a Scripture called Wisdom which seems not to be either Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Ecclesiasticus or the Wisdom of Solomon. The majority of teachings in the Sermon on the Mount (or on the Plain, in Luke) can be found in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs and other Jewish mystic and wisdom literature of the first and second centuries B.C.E.

Jewish wisdom tradition derived from ancient Egyptian, Edomite and other wisdom schools. It produced the Job literature, Ecclesiastes, the Proverbs, certain Psalms and a great deal of other written instructions and revelations not included in the canon of the Old Testament. It developed within the Pharisaic and other Jewish community schools of higher education. The Jews, of course, were the first people to develop community-service institutions like public education, public assistance for the poor and disabled, and other works of a similar nature. Jesus might have been exposed to a wisdom-mystic during his term in a synagogue school as a boy.

Whatever the case, Jesus took the prophetic concern for Yahweh's absolute authority over human institutions and developed it in very much the same way we find the Jewish wisdom literature doing. The high are brought low-, and the humble are raised up by God. That which men think is right is shown to be wrong, and what men have rejected is shown to be God's will. Those who suffer poverty and disease, like the poor beggar Lazarus, are not being punished by God for supposed sins, as Job was said to be. Rather, they are being purified in the fires of "the test," which God applies to all those who are humble enough to receive it. At death the rich man, whose crumbs fed poor Lazarus, goes to a place of fiery torment, while Lazarus is taken up into Abraham's "bosom" for rest and peace. The rich and mighty of this world will be the beggars and amme-ha-eretz of the next world. Why?

#### AMEN I SAY UNTO YOU, THEY HAVE HAD THEIR REWARD.

Yahweh is not a "respector of persons." He does not sympathize with the ideas of some persons that they are better than other persons. In God's eyes all are human-the saint and the murderer--and by His standards there is no moral difference. Murder is committed in the "heart," whether it is acted out or not. All human beings are murderers and thieves. The differences between persons lie not in their basic natures, but in their particular circumstances. The King of England, born a beggar, would be a thief. Jesus "knew what was in mankind," as John said.

Given this reality, are there any differences between persons? Of course there are. Each

soul grows and creates its own moral existence. Like the pearl , which is formed by years of slow accretion, the human soul builds itself. Just as the oyster persistently deposits its most precious substance layer by layer upon the growing pearl, so the individual soul becomes great. Like the pearl, the moral life of the soul begins with a tiny grain of irritating reality--life in this world. Indeed, there are differences between individual souls. As Paul said, "Your body is the Temple of the Living God."

But only God can judge the growth and status of the soul. No human being is wise or omniscient enough to correctly assess the spiritual stature of another person. That is why people are often "visited by angels, unawares." The filthiest beggar in the street may be someone whose soul is great. The rich man who prides himself on his philanthropy by giving alms to this poor creature may himself be better off to fall down and beg to become his disciple, according to the wisdom tradition that Jesus knew and loved.

To illustrate his point Jesus used the mashal of the rich man's banquet. This was a very formal affair, and people were always seated according to their rank and standing in the community. (The earliest Egyptian wisdom literature gives explicit directions on how to act in the presence of a royal host. One must not stare him in the eyes, for it is an offense against the Ka or soul.)

When you are invited to such a feast, said Jesus, always take the lowest seat. That way you will be asked to come up and assume a higher position. If you assume too much and take a seat higher than the status accorded you by the host, there will be an embarrassing silence until the host finally asks you to move down to a lower position. In other words, if you humble yourself you will be exalted by the host. But if you exalt yourself, you will be not only humbled, but abased. You will lose face in the community and become the butt of jokes.

This practical illustration drove home the point that it is God who decides the "status" of His people, and not each person himself. That is because only Yahweh is "qualified" to decide who is great and who is small.

LET THE LITTLE SERVANT-CHILDREN COME UNTO ME, AND FORBID  
THEM NOT. FOR OF SUCH IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD. WHOSOEVER  
SHALL NOT RECEIVE THE KINGDOM OF GOD WITH THE SIMPLE  
HUMILITY OF A LITTLE SERVING-CHILD SHALL BE UNABLE TO ENTER IN.

There is an interesting cognate relationship between the Aramaic words for "child" and "servant." Several scholars have shown that Jesus was speaking not of normal free children, but of serving-boys or serving-girls. These children were far more obedient and gentle than the

wealthier children who played noisily on the city streets.

In fact, Jesus compared the self-centeredness of the criticisms made against himself and John the Baptist to a noisy game which the free children played. Here the object was to get the others to dance or mourn by giving charade-like directions to them. When the children had a fight about it, some of them protested, "We piped to you and you didn't dance, and we mourned and you didn't weep!" The Pharisees were like these children, criticizing John for being too ascetic, but then speaking against Jesus for being a "wine-bibber" and a friend of sinners.

None of the prophets was a child-worshipper in the way that contemporary society has become, with emphasis upon perpetual youth and the cultivation of childhood fantasy. In fact one of the prophets was taunted by rude and unruly youths because of his bald head, and a wild bear came out of the woods to attack them. It is important to emphasize that neither Jesus nor the prophets idealized childhood in the way it is idealized by modern society. St. Paul didn't even use the "child" theme in his writings, preferring to exhort his readers to put away the things of childhood, be weaned from the milk and pap of spiritual babyhood and begin to use the "solid food" or "meat of mature discipleship. He said, "When I was a child I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child. But when I became a man I put away childish things."

The servant-child whom Jesus used as an example of the kind of humility necessary for God's approval was not a romping, "innocent" child. He or she was a hardworking, polite, trusting and obedient servant of others. The one really important characteristic that childhood exemplified in this case was a total, sincere lack of anxiety about "self."

The pre-adolescent child is old enough to think, speak and act for himself; but as yet unentangled in the emotional and mental world of the adult. Thus the servant-child works for the pleasure of working without such concerns as wages, living conditions, status in the community, what he will eat or drink, what he will wear, or anything else. He trusts his master implicitly, and it has not occurred to him that the master will someday die. It has not occurred to him that the work he does is too menial for a person of his stature. He is happy most of the time because he knows of nothing really worth grieving about, and anyway it is more fun to be happy than sad.

As Christian tradition developed, much more would be made of the "child" motif. In the Johannine school it would call for a "rebirth" or palingenesis, and confuse this with the meaning of baptism. In the Thomas school it would retain the basic meaning of "humility," but with an emphasis upon an even more radical interpretation of social status. "An old man will not hesitate to ask a servant-child of seven days about the place (topos, a Gnostic term) of Life, and he will live, for...

MANY WHO ARE FIRST SHALL BE LAST (AND THE LAST SHALL BE FIRST)...and they shall become a Single One.

In this example I have capitalized the authentic words of Jesus. The "last-first and first-last" theme was part of Jesus' prophetic denunciation of the religious establishment who failed to respond to John or him, even though the amme-ha-eretz were coming in droves to hear the Message. In the Gospel of Thomas it has become a mystic generalization about the "gate" to the Kingdom. This is just as valid a theological development as the Johannine palengensis motif and preserves the basic original intent with as much integrity.

Humility, then, did not consist of making oneself lesser than other persons. It was not a kind of flagellating self-hatred. Rather, it was the antidote for "hypocrisy," or "taking in public." It was another way of describing the state of submission that Yahweh demanded of His servants. Humility, for Jesus, was the absence of self-consciousness, anxiety about material life, stiff-neckedness and hard-heartedness. Humility was the ego-state of one who was amen or faithful.

### **Prayer and Private Spirituality**

In the teachings of Jesus each person has two aspects. He is individual in that he bears the responsibility for his own soul, and he is corporate as a member of society. Many of the teachings are addressed to "ye," plural. Even the Lord's Prayer is addressed to God from "us" and "we." The ego or "I" and "me" never enters the picture. God is addressed as "Our Father," not "My Father." Clearly the teachings of Jesus emphasize the corporate inter-responsibility of human beings.

LOVE YOUR BROTHER WITH A TRUE HEART, AND KEEP HIM AS THE APPLE OF YOUR EYE, says the Jesus of the Gnostic gospels.

But within this context there is the important realm of individual and private worship which, as the Johannine tradition says, must be:

IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH

The approach to God must be in humility and sincerity. In one mashal Jesus tells of a Pharisee who stood before the public place of prayer at the Temple and called upon Yahweh in thanksgiving for his good life and moral state. He confidently spread out his arms in the Middle Eastern orant position of prayer, which was the norm, standing before the Temple, and prayed aloud, as was the custom.

It should be said that in Middle Eastern and Oriental cultures it was normal for prayer



and reading to be done aloud. People thought St. Augustine strange in fourth-century Hippo when he was found reading Scripture silently to himself without so much as moving the lips. In some Oriental cultures school children still read all their lessons aloud in a sing-song chant. So it was quite normal and acceptable for the Pharisee to pray aloud.

Then a "publican" or tax-collector for the Romans made his way with embarrassment to the place of prayer, but was so overcome with remorse that he stood "afar off." Let us understand that a tax-collector in those days was something like a C.I.A. agent in these times. He was hated and mistrusted by the amme-ha-crcztz. Pharisees, and Sadducees alike. He was the toady of whatever Roman despot was in charge of the Jerusalem territory, and it was his job to investigate and collect payment from everyone. The taxes were crushing and totally unfair. The revenues were used to support armies which kept the people in servitude to the Roman despot, caused them to be conscripted for building palaces, working in mines, and otherwise adding to the strength of their occupying tyrants. As you can see, the tax-collector was not just a pawn. He was an actively evil social force. Legend says that the apostle Matthew was the tax-collector named Levi who, in that gospel, stood up and began to follow Jesus.

The miserable tax-collector stood by himself where he was inconspicuous and made the following prayer: "Be merciful to me, O' God. a debtor." He prayed silently.

Jesus said, I TELL YOU, THIS MAN WENT DOWN TO HIS HOUSE JUSTIFIED  
RATHER THAN THE OTHER.

In Matthew's Gospel this is connected to the logion about whoever humbles himself being exalted, but that could not have been the original point of the story. The publican is not exalted, but simply released from liability for the consequences of his weakness--at least for the present time. The point is that his prayer was acceptable to Yahweh because it was offered with what the prophets liked to call a "contrite heart and a broken spirit."

The publican's prayer was absolutely sincere, and it came out of an inner feeling of deep sorrow and moral conflict. Again, it was a true submission (nacham). His prayer was for God's mercy upon him as a sinner, but there was much more in his prayer than was spoken aloud during that time of stress. As Paul said, the Spirit intercedes for those who pray, with groans and deep sighs. One needn't be articulate or facile with words to utter a meaningful prayer. God does not listen to the words, but to the heart.

Finally, because the publican had turned to God for mercy--meaning help, guidance, light, release from the inner burdens of a man in torment. God now had a medium through which to act. The cry for help never goes unheeded. The publican had opened his inner heart to divine healing, and you can be certain he did not remain a tax-collector much longer under those

conditions. If he did, he became more of an advocate for his people than a toady of the Roman oppressors. Perhaps he acted like the so-called "unjust steward" who made friends with the people by reducing all their debts! In the same way, good deeds become "friends" in the Great 'Olam of Yahweh, as the Master says in the parable of the unjust steward.

All people are equal in the eyes of God, Who (said Jesus) would accept the sincere and humble cry for help of even a treacherous tax-collector. On the other hand, God does not accept the fawning praises of a self-righteous Pharisee, no matter how good a man he may be in his community.

Let us understand that the Pharisee was not characterized by Jesus as bad in any special way. Indeed, he was *not* an extortioner, adulterer, thief, or any other kind of criminal. He gave liberally of his income to support the poor. He observed all he was told of the Jewish religion, and did so in complete sincerity. He felt a deep-seated thanksgiving that his life was so plentiful and his moral state so acceptable.

But he thanked God *that he was not as other men*. That is the crux of the matter. Instead of humility we find an inflated self-importance. This "hypocrisy" was a normal and accepted attitude of life with class distinctions, but to Yahweh it made the prayers of an otherwise righteous man unacceptable. It was the discrimination of one against the other so clearly criticized throughout the epistles of the New Testament as making "distinction of persons." This was one authentic teaching of Jesus that the gentile churches could understand and preserve, at least in the writings of the New Testament, because it was a community of equals—almost communistic in its social structure.

WHEN YOU PRAY, DO NOT BE LIKE THE SELF-MAGNIFIERS, WHO LOVE TO BE STANDING IN THE SYNAGOGUES AND ON THE CORNERS OF THE STREET WHILE THEY PRAY, SO THAT THEY MIGHT BE SEEN BY EVERYONE. AMEN I TELL YOU, THEY ARE GETTING WHAT THEY VALUE! BUT WHEN YOU PRAY, ENTER INTO YOUR INNER TREASURY AND LOCK YOUR DOOR, AND PRAY TO YOUR FATHER WHO IS HIDDEN WITHIN--AND YOUR FATHER WHO SEES THE HIDDEN THINGS WITHIN YOU WILL ANSWER YOUR PRAYER IN AN OUTWARD AND VISIBLE WAY.

WHEN YOU PRAY, DO NOT USE STANDARD RELIGIOUS WORDS AND PHRASES LIKE MOST PEOPLE DO, THINKING THAT THEIR PRAYERS WILL BE ACCEPTED BECAUSE OF RHETORIC. DON'T BE LIKE THEM, FOR YOUR FATHER KNOWS WHAT YOU NEED BEFORE YOU ASK HIM. THEREFORE

PRAY IN THIS WAY:

"OUR FATHER (MAY YOUR NAME BE HALLOWED), LET YOUR MALKUTH COME, AND GIVE US THIS DAY OUR BREAD OF THE MORROW. RELEASE US FROM OUR DEBTS, AS WE RELEASE OUR DEBTORS, AND DO NOT BRING US UNTO THE TEST." [The short Lucan version.]

God dwells within the heart of reality, and is within every soul--even the souls of those who seem "evil" at a given time. Thus Jesus was able to say to the very Pharisees who were his enemies:

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS WITHIN YOU (plural).

[Some scholars have a stake in trying to show that the Greek word entos could, in certain rare cases, be translated "among" rather than "within," so that the implication of the saying would be that Jesus, as himself the Kingdom of God, is standing "among" them. This is a tendentious attempt to avoid the implications of the statement. Greek entos always means "within," and translates Aramaic beqereb "inside of, within."]

Jesus taught that God is hidden and invisible, and his ways and purposes cannot be known. But if God is approached with a humble heart and sincere prayer, He-She will respond. The request or need that is voiced in silent, inner ways will be recognized and answered in an open and manifest way. Prayer must not be mental or verbal, but spiritual. The key to prayer is intent, not articulation. It is not an idle or repetitious recitation, but an intense and heart-felt experience. It requires the same concentration as performance on a musical instrument, or production of a fine drawing. Also, it involves an active listening as well as out-going expression. It can be done at any time in any place, but is best accomplished in silent solitude.

Jesus suggests the kind of things worthy of prayer in the Lord's or Master's Prayer, which is reproduced in its Lucan form as an illustration for the original Aramaic form. The Prayer, which is not intended to become a set, repeated liturgical form but rather a general illustration of prayer, falls into two main sections. The first has to do with the mitzvah to love God. The example illuminates that by attention to His Messianic Kingdom. The second section has to do with the command to love the neighbor, and illuminates that by attention to the releasing of debts.

The first part says Abbana, "Our Father." God is addressed as the Father, and the disciple is the servant-son. But Abba has the sense of "a deeply respected elder," with emphasis upon age rather than gender. Jesus venerated the feminine aspect of Godhead as the Ruah Ha-

Qodesh or Spirit of Holiness (Christian Holy Spirit), comparable to God as Divine Mother. When we recall that the understanding of Elohim in Hebrew—literally plural “gods,” used as the most common designation of Godhead—was always intoned in the most common Jewish kiddushim or blessings as Eloheinu, “our God,” we see the parallel with “our Abba.”

Since the opening of the prayer contains within it an understanding of Godhead as a revered Divine Parent, both Father and Mother, it would be true to the Master’s teachings to address God as “Our Father-Mother God.” In patriarchal Christianity, however, not only was Godhead ultimately understood as masculine, but also the Ruah Ha-Qodesh or Holy Spirit, and the Divine Son, Jesus Christ! The only place for femininity in Christian theology came with the later medieval cults of the Virgin Mary.

But again, in the teachings of Jesus, there are both Father and Mother aspects. In the lost Gospel of the Hebrews, for example, a preserved fragment quotes Jesus as saying, “My Mother, the Holy Spirit, took me by the hair to the top of Mount Tabor.”

It was Godhead as Mother Spirit that was the manifestation of Divine Immanence and Presence for Master Jesus, and it was She as Initiatrix Who descended upon him at the baptism of John and drove him into the desert, where he was tested for forty days.

The emphasis in the so-called Lord’s Prayer is upon “our.” Yahweh is the LORD of all creation. The parenthetical “hallowed be Thy Name” is a common Jewish way of showing love and respect to God, while at the same time pledging to “hallow” His-Her Name or Reputation by following His-Her will and doing His works.

The first petition is, “Let (or Make) Your Malkuth come, and give us our Messianic bread of the morrow.” The second part is a typical poetic semitism restating the first part connected by the Hebrew vav or “and.” Thus “may Your Kingdom come” and “give us our Messianic bread of the Olam” state and amplify the same petition. Paraphrased they mean: “Bring us into communion with Your Eternal Malkuth so that we may, in this present age, partake the spiritual feast of the Age that is to come.”

In the section on messianic razim of Jesus, and in the expanded version of the Master’s Prayer that comes in a separate monograph, we explain the difference between this aeon or Olam and the Aeon or Olam of God. It is vital to understand that for Jesus, prayer was a means of divine communion with the eternal Presence of God’s Shalom, Wisdom, and Rule, and that this eternal state of being is a goal that all humanity approaches in history—both in the history of each individual soul, and in the history of humanity as a whole. It was *not* an expectation that the world was about to end any minute, as it became in the apocalyptic theology of early Christianity!

Matthew’s Gospel has added material to the Lord’s Prayer not present in the version of Luke’s Gospel. He totally misunderstands the Messianic Feast, and makes the following

sequence, inserting a new petition and dividing the original one:

"Thy Kingdom come. Thy Will be done in earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread."

This second petition may reflect an original prayer of Jesus, in which case Jesus was praying that God's will might be done in the present Olam or state of existence, just as it is in the Olam Ha-Ba or invisible spiritual Aeon of God's Kingdom, which is near at hand but unknown to mankind, and towards the manifestation of which all human history moves.

The original second petition prays for release from debt and promises to release one's own debtors. Luke's version of the Prayer says, "for we ourselves also release our debtors," but this doesn't fit the mashal in which the despot (God) released the serf (the servant of Yahweh) first. The scholar Jeremias' translation of the Aramaic is probably closest to the original meaning:

FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS AS WE ALSO HEREWITH FORGIVE OUR DEBTORS.

But the second part of this petition, AND DO NOT BRING US UNTO THE TEST, is connected to the process of forgiveness. Since the petitioner promises not to bring any of his brothers or sisters unto judgment (mishpat) for their debts, he has the right to ask God not to bring him unto the "test."

Here the Hebraic reference is most interesting. The word for "test" or trial in Hebrew is from the root massah, meaning (in reference to God) to prove out men's souls through adversity, or to purify, and (in reference to mankind) to test or (in medieval English) "tempt" God by breaking his laws or trying to force Him to act.

The word in its participial form was given an important religious connotation, however, when the story of Israel's wanderings in the wilderness under Moses was written by the post-exilic priests. Here the word was used to give a symbolic place-name to locate an incident in which Yahweh actually led Israel into the "test" or spiritual trial ("temptation"). The place was called Massah, "Testing." It had been a place where Yahweh had afflicted the people because of their "stiff-neckedness."

But there was another far more important symbol connected with Massah, for it was in that place (also known as Meribah-Kadesh) that Moses committed the sin that caused Yahweh to give the mishpat that Moses could not enter into the Promised Land. He could approach it and look at it from afar, but by the time Israel came within sight of Canaan Moses would be too old to go on, and he would die. It would be Joshua (Yeshua, "Jesus") who would lead Israel across the Jordan into Canaan, because Moses had put Yahweh to the "test" (massah) at Massah.

What had Moses done? It was there that he cried to God for water, since the people

were dying of thirst. Yahweh had told him to strike a large rock with his staff, and a spring would appear out of the rock. Moses did this in the sight of the people, but made it look as though he, Moses, had caused this thaumaturgical wonder to occur. He did a "work" of God without giving the credit or "glory" to God. In Hebraic terms, Moses had both "tempted" God and tested himself. It was Moses who lost out.

"Temptation" or Massah is not something that comes from God, said the writer of the Epistle of James. In what is undoubtedly an original Jewish-Christian interpretation stemming from the teachings of Jesus, it is stated that when a person is tested he should not blame God. For God cannot be tested (meaning "proven" or purified like gold in a furnace), since He-She is already perfect, nor does God test anyone (in opposition to what is said in certain parts of the Old Testament).

Rather, says the Epistle, "Each person is tested when he is drawn away and enticed by means of his own lust (i.e., the evil yetzer or impulse of the heart). Then when lust has conceived it brings forth debt; and this indebtedness, when the ledger has become totally negative, brings forth death." This is Gehenna or Purgatory.

It is not God, but the person himself, who brings his own Gehenna or Hell. Each person swelters in the furnaces of his own making, creating the purifying process which ultimately separates the gold from the dross. Each one serves a sentence of his own choosing in the prison he has built, and in servitude to the masters he has invited to rule his life. Every person builds his own home. Will he build it on the shifting sands of human dogma, or the Rock of spiritual truth? When the wind and waves beat against his home, will it withstand them or succumb? And, as Paul says, let the homebuilder beware that he does not build with stubble, lest all but the foundations be burnt away by the fiery heat of trial and testing!

God did not "test" Moses to see if he would pretend that he was someone great and divine who could work miracles apart from God. It was Moses who tested himself by doing what Jesus called "taking in public." Yet having tried to test Yahweh, and having succeeded in in "proving" himself unworthy, Moses was led by God to Canaan. But as a result of this massah he was not able to survive long enough to enter the Promised Land.

This kind of "temptation" was the worst evil for Jesus and his disciples--the temptation to magnify "sell" instead of God. For this reason Jesus added the final words,

RELEASE US...AND DO NOT BRING US UNTO THE TEST.

Here the word for "bring" means "to lead." It is the same Greek word in the New Testament as the Greek word used in the Septuagintal (Greek) Old Testament to describe

Yahweh "leading" Israel to Massah. Clearly, then, it is most likely that the Aramaic words which Jesus spoke were, "and do not lead us into Massah," with the reference to the "sin" of Moses being well understood by his hearers. In other words, the petition asks for God's release from the consequences of debt, declares Jesus' own release of all his debtors, and asks that since Jesus will not bring judgment against anyone (cf. AM I A JUDGE OR DIVIDER OF GOODS?), God will not lead him into massah where he might fail.

This echoes the prayer that Jesus is reported in the gospels to have made for Peter and the other disciples, that God would keep them from the test, lest Satan "sift" them like wheat. The sifting of wheat, of course, is to divide the good grain from the chaff. Jesus asked for God's protection so that his disciples would not get their "just deserts," or have their souls "required for an accounting" at a time when they were unprepared. Any person would fail such a "test," and Jesus (in the Lord's Prayer) is making this request for himself and his people ("us").

At a time, then, when prayer was common, formal and nearly always done aloud, the Master Jesus demanded a highly spiritualized expression. Prayer was to be private. It was an inner matter between each soul and God, and it took place in the "inner treasury" with the "hidden" God.

The same radical spiritualism applied to other things, such as alms-giving. Jesus said,

WHEN YOU GIVE ALMS, DO NOT SOUND THE RITUAL SHOFAR BEFORE YOU, AS THE SELF-MAGNIFIERS DO IN THE SYNAGOGUE AND ON THE STREETS THAT THEY MAY HAVE THE RESPECT OF MEN. AMEN I SAY UNTO YOU, THEY ARE GETTING WHAT THEY VALUE: BUT WHEN YOU GIVE TO THE POOR, LET NOT YOUR LEFT HAND KNOW WHAT YOUR RIGHT HAND IS DOING, SO THAT YOUR ALMS MAY BE HIDDEN. YOUR FATHER-MOTHER, WHO SEES THE HIDDEN THINGS WITHIN YOU, WILL RETURN YOUR GIFT TO YOU IN AN OUTWARD AND VISIBLE WAY.

Here the idiom about not letting the left hand know what the right is doing is a poetic way of saying, "Don't let even your closest associate know." The emphasis is upon avoiding self-magnification even to one close associate, and the Jungian implications (with the "left" referring to the unconscious mind) could be interpreted to mean, "Don't allow even *yourself* to subconsciously magnify yourself!"

Finally, even a religious fast is to be private. The usual practice was to spread ashes on the face (as Christians still do for Ash Wednesday) and otherwise assume the trappings of funereal mourning. This was an open and public show. Jesus advised his hearers, if they were to fast, to

ANOINT YOUR HEAD AND WASH YOUR FACE, SO THAT YOU DO NOT  
APPEAR UNTO MEN TO BE FASTING.

Again, the inner Father will "reward" them openly.

To summarize the prophetic mission of Jesus, then, it had three aspects. The first was the pronouncement of divine mishpat upon the religious and political establishment of Israel. This is familiar from the writings of the Old Testament prophets.

Second, Jesus went forth to call all of Israel (not the gentiles) to submission and fidelity to the Word of Yahweh. In this he was like John the Baptist and other lesser known Jewish reformers. But at this point his prophetic Message became much more than that of John, for Jesus walked among the common people of the towns and cities. He did not confine himself to the desert places, nor did he spend his days in solitary meditation away from the pollution of civilization. He did not follow Pharisaic rules of cleanliness and liturgical purity. He in fact satirized them as a washing of the outer part of a cup, while leaving the inner part full of filth.

Finally, Jesus was a Jewish mystic. His spiritual school was basically prophetic but shows evidence of rabbinical, wisdom-tradition, and Merkabah or Chariot-Throne mysticism. It has been instructive to examine his ideas of "sin" and forgiveness, humility, prayer and the inner spiritual worship of Yahweh. But at this level we soon find an even greater mysticism than prophetism itself had ever conceived. We must now proceed to a study of the messianic razim or mysteries of the invisible Rule ("Kingdom") of God, for these are the greatest and most original teachings of the Master Jesus.



**PART THREE**

**THE MESSIANIC MYSTERIES  
OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD**

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**Jewish Sainthood and Martyrdom Traditions**

At the time of Jesus there was a long tradition of sainthood and martyrdom in Israel. Galilee was the home location for many of the great Northern saints and had a reputation as the most fiercely independent region of Jewish patriotism. It was the territory of the Zealots or warrior-saints who idealized the religious zeal of Judas Maccabeus and his sons. They had single-handedly organized an underground resistance to the despotic rule of Antiochus Epiphanes (known to his enemies as Epimanes, the "Madman"). Among other things, he profaned the altar of the Temple in Jerusalem with the sacrifice of a pig to Zeus in his attempts to support the factions in Jerusalem who wanted to conform Temple worship to that of other Hellenistic nations.

Outnumbered by at least ten to one, the Maccabees had driven the Persians from the land and re-established the ancient Kingdom of David under the Hasmonean line, gradually pushing the borders of Israel to a size larger than that of Solomon's kingdom.

The martyrs of Israel included the legendary Taxo, whose righteous blood Yahweh avenged, and the holy old Eliezar and his people, who resisted torture of the most vicious sort and died with the praise of Yahweh on their lips. Their righteous blood had atoned for the debts of the people, and their souls served as surrogates and "ransoms" for the people of Israel in the language of Temple sacrifice.

Then there were the communities of saints, who isolated themselves in desert cities praying for the restoration of prophetic faith in Israel. They were the "faithful remnant" who carried on the true worship of Yahweh, thus gradually cleansing the land and purifying the people of Israel.

In other places were the learned mystics of Yahweh, the sages (sphcrim) and teachers who ascended to the Chariot-Throne of God under the tutelary spirit of Enoch to hear and record the apocalyptic razim, "secrets" or mysteries of the Ancient of Days. To them was revealed the foundation and order of the shammaim or many "heavens," the shemim or "names" of the spiritual realms and minions, the cycles of the moedim or "seasons" of nations and worldly events, and the great vision of the 'Olam-Ha-Ba, the World to Come--the Kingdom of God. Paul made such mystic ascents in deep ecstasies and meditations into the Third Heaven, and from accounts like that on the Mount of Transfiguration we know that Jesus taught his disciples similar techniques of divine communion.

There are elements of all these varieties of Jewish sainthood and mysticism in the

teachings and traditions of Master Jesus. He explicitly catalogues the martyrdom of the prophets "from Abel to Zechariah" in his indictment of the Pharisees and Sadducees, and in many other ways shows how closely he was linked with the tradition of Jewish saints and martyrs. It is clear, for example, that the linking of his crucifixion with sacrificial atonement was a familiar theme in Jewish martyrdom. A Jewish Christian such as the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews already had a ready-made theology of atonement for the nation that was easily generalized by gentile Christian to atonement for the sins of all humanity.

Jesus himself uttered apocalyptic prophecies to the disciples about the coming destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem, and about the coming Messianic Age. They were in the basic style of the revelations of Daniel, and were later expanded with materials taken literally from the writings of the Trito-Isaian school to form the Christian Apocalypse of John--a late document never really accepted by the Western Church until the fourth century, and only over the strong objections of St. Athanasius.

St. Paul shows that he, as a Jewish Christian, was familiar with Merkabah mystic ascent by telling of "a man" (the mystic regards his "inner man" to be a "not-self") who was taken up into the Third Heaven of Paradise and told unutterable razim (II Cor. 12:2-4). Here Paul's terminology and order of the heavens is exactly the same as that found in the pseudepigraphic First Book of Enoch, which is a revelation of Enoch's ascent through the Heavens, as well as that of the Razim (Secrets) of Enoch. What is more, the Enoch literature is quoted as sacred Scripture by the writer of the Epistle of Jude.

Interestingly there are even Zealot motifs in early Jewish-Christian tradition. At least two of Jesus' Twelve Apostles (Simon and Jude) were called Zealots. At one point Jesus advised his disciples to carry swords. He said that he came not as a peacemaker, but as a divider of men. He came to cast "fire" upon the earth, and a house would be divided, the brother against the father. The disciples at one point ask if Jesus will now bring in the Kingdom upon the earth, and Jesus at another time indicates that if he willed, he could call down fire upon the heads of his enemies (as did Elijah) and summon the host of angelic armies to battle the kings of the world. Paul even quotes a military motif in describing the Resurrection of the dead, casting Jesus (Yeshua) as the legendary Joshua, with an archangel sounding the battle shofar. But most of these things are either symbolic, rather than integral to the Message of Jesus, or represent early literalistic misunderstandings of the messianic teachings of Jesus by those who transmitted them.

#### **"Remnant" Communities of the True Israel and Messianic Idealism**

Whether Jesus was a Nazarene, or had lived in one of the legendary colonies of the Therapeutae or mystic Jewish healers described by Eusebius of Caesaria, it is clear that his self-

designation as Son of Man points to a martyr-saint community of the Daniel or other prophetic school. Here "martyr" does not necessarily mean one who expects to be killed, but simply "witness." The Son-of-Man terminology might reflect any of several possible prophetic schools without the apocalyptic content of Mark 13 and the Passion Narrative. But Jesus clearly connected his messianic interpretation to the Apocalypse or Razim of Daniel and "one like unto a Son of Man, coming upon the clouds of the heavens." Here the word "clouds" is from a Hebrew root meaning "coverings, concealments," and the symbol easily lent itself to mystic interpretation about the actual mode of the Son of Man's coming. The phrase meant, "coming in the mysteries of Heaven."

Again, in Daniel the "remnant" is a martyr-saint community of prophets or Sons of Man. They suffer many things, like the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, and are eventually murdered. It is only after their "sacrifice" that God acts to glorify them in the symbolic person of the Son of Man.

Here, then, is a much different kind of Messiah than the Messiah Ben-Judah or the Messiah Ben-David, who are both warrior-kings and conquer all their enemies. This is a prophet-king, who never wins an earthly kingdom but is glorified after death with a heavenly kingdom, which he brings to earth in the mysteries of Heaven. The Messiah Ben-Joseph was an *haggadic* figure of the time whose mission seems to have been most like what Master Jesus represented. It may be more than coincidence that Jesus was said to be the son of the carpenter Joseph.

Jesus himself is shown in the Marcan narrative demonstrating to the Pharisees that the Messiah could not be the Son of David—the Messiah Ben-David. But paradoxically both Lucan and Matthean gospels try to show a lineage of Jesus back to David—Matthew through his father, and Luke through his mother.

The fact is that there were many different ideas of a Messiah or Jewish leader "Anointed by God" in the days of Jesus. Jesus did not claim to be a Messiah, but a prophet and a saint. It was his followers who tried to fit him into the role of Messiah Ben-David, Messiah Ben-Judah, and Messiah Ben-Joseph all in one person!

But even that did not solve the problem of the Jewish Messiah, because Jesus himself prophesied the coming of "one like unto a son of humanity" to establish God's Malkuth on earth. In Christian thought, this became the Second Coming of Christ which, in *John's Gospel*, was "realized" as the coming of the Holy Spirit or Comforter to get away from the truly eschatological prophecy of a coming Messiah, because this implied that Jesus was not the ultimate Messiah! In Judaism the hope for a coming Messiah was retained. Therefore the teaching of Master Jesus about the coming Messiah was more correctly preserved in Judaism than in Christianity.

Yet the Son of Man of Daniel and the earlier prophetic schools is not really one person,

but a communio sanctorum, a community of tested and proven "holy ones" of Yahweh. It is the sanctified faithful remnant of Israel—the "true Israel." Although the early Christian churches capitalized on the idea of themselves as the non-Jewish "true Israel" and went to great extremes to show that God had taken the covenant away from the Jews because they had rejected Master Jesus, the historical teaching of Jesus was quite different. He taught that the spiritual authority of the Temple priesthood and religious establishment had been taken from them and given to those who had "faith," that is, interior fidelity to the Way and Malkuth of God.

As a radical prophetic reformer of Judaism, Master Jesus joined with the many other heterodox sects and separated communities in their condemnation of the Jerusalem religious establishment and its collaboration with Herodian and Roman rulers. That is why so many of the practices and teachings of Jesus can be found in the Dead Sea Scrolls and other protesting traditions. Jesus was a "protestant" in the general sense of this term, and he shared much with all other opposition groups—Zealots, the Zadokite priesthood, the Qumran and other Essene-like communities.

It is this ideal of community that is reflected in the request of the disciples to sit on the left and right hand of Jesus in his Kingdom. That led to the later idea of the Twelve Apostles ruling over the Twelve Tribes of Israel. This is also reflected in the Johannine remembrances of a Jesus who speaks of many "monastic cells" (Greek monai) in his Father's house. (This has been wrongly translated "mansions," which has very little to do with architecture or monasticism.)

Most important, community underlies the Pauline concept of the Body of the Messiah (Christ), of which each faithful saint is a part. It also serves as the basis for many other Pauline figures which until recently were thought to be Paul's creation, but are now recognized as familiar rabbinical motifs from schools of the period, such as the "armor" of the saint, "justification by faithfulness," and his prophetic attitude toward the interpretation of Torah (using allegory and typology rather than legalistic midrashim).

But he also shared their forms of mysticism. Like the Qumran brothers who conducted all-night vigils in caves, he conducted all-night vigils on mountain tops. Like them, he substituted havurah meals and the bread-and-wine kiddushim for Temple animal sacrifice, and various kinds of lustrations or mikvoth for Temple purifications. Like them, he was part of non-Temple lineage of Jewish priesthood that was traced back not to Aaron, but to Abraham and Melchizedek, possibly through the Kennites and Jethro who had introduced Moses to monotheistic Yahwism.

## **The Priesthood of Melchizedek**

The Book of the Acts reports that shortly after the Resurrection of Master Jesus, a large number of priests joined the new messianic movement. One such priest was the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews (erroneously attributed to Paul), which outlines the theory and lineage of the High Priesthood of Master Jesus. This Priesthood, which became the basis for the Catholic and Orthodox three-fold ministry of Bishop, Priest, and Deacon, and is known as the Apostolic Succession, was in opposition to the Hasmonean Temple Priesthood and traced itself through Aaron and Moses to Abraham and Melchizedek. It is still known in Christianity as the Priesthood of Melchizedek.

James the “brother” of Jesus was considered by many Jews to be the true High Priest of the Temple at Jerusalem. He was allowed to wear the white linen garment and the diadem (nezer or crown), and several sources report that he entered the Holy of Holies once a year to perform the Day of Atonement functions of the High Priest. The term nezer may be related to titles like Nazarene, Nazirite, and others applied to Jesus and James.

Eisenman, in his *James the Brother of Jesus*, devotes a long chapter to numerous literary sources demonstrating that James was not only extremely popular and considered to be the holiest of Jewish saints by the people, *but that the Temple religious establishment was forced to accept him as a kind of popular “opposition” High Priest, and because of popular pressure allowed him to publicly function in the role of High Priest.* They finally murdered him by throwing him from the wall of the Temple in 62 C.E. (A.D. 62) during what was supposed to be a debate with him about the way or “gate” of Master Jesus.

Shortly thereafter the Neronian pogrom was precipitated, in which an estimated 100,000 Jews and Christians were crucified, followed by the Jewish wars, the siege of Jerusalem, and the destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem. Because these events had been prophesied by Master Jesus and the other “prophets” of the early churches, the Jewish-Christian community was able to emigrate from Jerusalem before the final disaster.

It seems to have been in the Neronian programs that Peter and other Jewish Apostles were crucified, thus severing the churches from most of the original Jewish disciples of Jesus and forcing the second generation of Christians to write down what was remembered of their teachings in the form of the Gospels. This completed the alienation of Jewish Christianity from the burgeoning gentile churches. Thus even before the Gospels were written, the most of the human links to the authentic teachings of Jesus had died, with the exception of John, who lived to an old age in Ephesus.

The Johannine communities of Asia Minor produced at least two other “Johns” whose writings are preserved in the New Testament canon (it was customary for close disciples to take

the names of their teachers or mentors). But the Johannine tradition was one of Hellenized Diaspora Judaism, with its own set of non-Palestinian ideas. The Fourth Gospel, or John's Gospel, is unlike the other three synoptic Gospels. It preserves more authentically Jewish material, but it also has created the Hellenized Christology that makes Jesus into a mystery-religion hierophant. Sermons about Jesus are put into the mouth of Jesus, who declares "I am the Way," etc., in an extremely literary and anti-historical framework. There is absolutely no concern for the Jesus of history or his actual words, as there is in the synoptics. The Fourth Gospel is a long "revealer" tractate about the Divine Christ. Only by knowing how to read and interpret it can one "get behind" the Hellenistic philosophy and literary conventions to glimpse the messianic mysticism of Master Jesus. It comes through the filter of his youngest disciple (John was barely a teenager when Jesus lived), transmitted through his own disciples, and then written as a series of liturgical sermons based on the early church year—perhaps by even a third generation of disciples. We can glimpse the mystical philosophy and community of Jesus better through the Johannine materials than the synoptics, but we can reconstruct the Jesus of history and his authentic teachings better through the synoptics.

Since Protestantism lacks Apostolic Succession, its scholars have tried since the days of Martin Luther to discredit and debunk Christian priesthood and substitute the ideal of congregational ministry. In spite of what Protestant church historians would like to believe about Christian priesthood and sacraments—that they developed in imitation of Hellenistic religious institutions, and that Apostolic Succession and Priesthood are later, inauthentic corruptions of original Christianity—the fact is that the Priesthood of Melchizedek was integral to the teachings and practice of Jesus. Sacramental worship and priestly practice had developed outside of Second Temple Judaism and in opposition to animal sacrifice as early as the fourth century B.C.E. Priesthood was a main issue for the Zadokites and their Damascus Community, and in the Qumran Scrolls the development of the "true Priesthood" in opposition to the "wicked Priest" of the Second Temple is a seminal apocalyptic theme.

It was in the lineage of this "opposition priesthood," attributed to Melchizedek because he sacrificed bread and wine instead of bloody animals and was the hieratic teacher of Abraham, that the original Jewish Apostolic Succession developed. The Christian priestly orders of Bishops retained the diadem and white linen garments of the Jewish High Priesthood and eventually developed their own codes, customs, and delegations of authority to priests, deacons, and various subdiaconate orders.

True Priesthood was advocated and practiced by Master Jesus and his "brother" James. The Christian Eucharist or Mass devolves directly from the central sacrament presided over by Jesus in his community of disciples, and by which his disciples were able to recognize him after the Resurrection.

In chapter 24 of Luke's Gospel two disconsolate disciples are walking to Emmaus when they meet with a stranger who, according to the narrative, explains everything to them from the Scriptures about how the Messiah is to suffer and die, then be raised from the dead. They all went to an inn for the night.

"When he was at table with them, he (the stranger) took bread, and blessed it, and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished out of their sight...and he was known to them in the breaking of the bread."

Clearly the so-called Last Supper was in fact a havurah meal that the disciples were used to celebrating with Master Jesus presiding—just as the priests at Qumran and the Zadokites did. It stood in place of Second Temple animal sacrifice and was the prophetic form of priesthood that traced its roots to Melchizedek. In experiencing the stranger performing the priestly meal blessings, the disciples of Jesus recognized the Resurrected Master.

The prophetic communities had always existed outside of Jerusalem in the desert, and they had always opposed the royal Temple establishment. They exercised priesthood within their communities and as an alternative to Temple sacrifice. The prophets valued the "sacrifice of a broken spirit" and of a "contrite heart."

In the period of the Second Temple, their form of bloodless sacrifice, vegetarianism, Kabbalistic praise, and ritual lustrations developed as an alternative form of priesthood. Neither levitical nor hereditary, it was this Priesthood of Melchizedek that the Masters Jesus and James exercised. It was passed on by anointing and lay-on of hands, and it was part of the prophetic commission and Apostolate that Master Jesus transmitted to his closest disciples.

The image of Jesus as a bridegroom and his disciples as "children of the bridechamber" which led to the Pauline and Matthean ideas of the Church as the Bride of Christ, may stem from an earlier Jewish mystic allegory still preserved in the Gospel of Philip. Here each member of the "Body" strives for the highest initiation into the "mystery of the bridechamber," which is a perfect marriage of nephesh or neshama (soul) with yechid or ruach (spirit). In that case all members of the Son-of-Man community would be bridegrooms. Jesus would be, as Paul said, the *first-born of a new Adam or humanity*. He would be the first of a "christed" mankind, an elder brother of the Kingdom, a new Moses or Joshua. But he would not be the only Christ, although Christ as a Body is One. He would be the "head" of that Body (which Paul also declares), but each disciple would strive to imitate the Master Jesus and win His "crown."

This also follows, for the earliest traditions of gentile Christianity speak constantly of a Christian martyr-saint community in the Body of the Christ. It is only later that what has been called "bourgeois ecclesiastical Christianity" begins to emerge, over and against earlier Pauline mysticism. Now the "pastoral" Church comes to the fore, with officers and ranks of functionaries. With the exception of rare persecutions and the eventual rise of the desert saints,



the imitatio Christi fades into obscurity along with Jewish Christianity.

**Chapter Seven**  
**THE COMMUNITY OF SAINTS**

There are two aspects to the messianic teaching of Jesus. The first concerns corporate spirituality, and the second comprehends the individual quest for shalom or "perfect integrity." The theme and goal of both aspects is the Kingdom of God, which is not only a community of saints but a state of individual perfection. In this chapter we will try to understand what Jesus meant by the "Kingdom of God," and in the next chapter examine his illustrations on attaining the Kingdom.

Malkuth ("kingdom") means "rulership, mastery." It does not stem from the kind of linguistic pattern that the English word "kingdom" implies: king-domain. It means something more like the English word "kingship." But again, the Hebrew melek ("king") means "owner, possessor" of land, slaves and riches. In other words, the Hebrew king was a "Master, Lord." Let us understand, then, that the "Kingdom of God" denoted the Mastery of Yahweh. That is why the early Christians referred to themselves in the very terms of the prophets as "servants, slaves" of God, for Yahweh was their Master (LORD).

From now on we will drop the King James Bible images of castles, vassals and purple robes, and we will use the phrase "Rulership (Malkuth) of Yahweh." This does not imply a place or form of government, but a pure relationship to God. In the corporate sense we are exploring in this chapter, it implies a relationship of the Master to His or Her servant-children, and the relationship of the servant-children to one another. The servant-children are to be holy, and live in a community. To the extent that they function as servants, they live on the earth among mankind. To the extent that they are children of Yahweh, they live among an invisible household of brothers and sisters--a communio sanctorum or community of saints.

To clarify things a bit more, let us understand that God's Rulership or "Kingdom" did not mean Heaven. It did not refer to the Church. It was not contained or defined by any specific time, place or institution. It was a raz or "secret."

IF ANYONE SAYS TO YOU, 'LOOK, THE MESSIAH IS HERE,' OR, 'LOOK, HE IS  
THERE,' BELIEVE HIM NOT. OF THAT DAY AND THAT HOUR NO ONE  
KNOWS, NOT EVEN THE ANGELS IN THE HEAVENS OR THE SON OF MAN,  
BUT ONLY THE FATHER.

A confusion has arisen for two reasons. First, Matthew's Gospel changes the Greek phrase of Mark from "Kingdom of God" to "Kingdom of Heaven." This is because in Hellenistic Judaism "Heaven" was a pious way of paraphrasing God's Name, as LORD (Adonai) had been.

In fact, the Divine Name YHWH was never pronounced during readings in the synagogue, but the vowels from Adonai were substituted to remind the reader to say "LORD" or Adonai instead. As a result of misunderstanding this process, Christian churchmen of the 19th century who knew a little Hebrew got into the habit of trying to pronounce what they saw actually written in the Hebrew Old Testament by combining the vowels A-o-ai with the consonants of the Divine Tetragrammaton YHWH. The result was Yahovah or Anglicised "Jehovah." This, of course, is not the Name of God.

In Judaic tradition, Matthew's Gospel has simply substituted the word "Heaven" (literally Ouranos or Uranus, the name of a Greek deity) for the Name YHWH, and this has led lay persons to think that the "Kingdom of God" is "Heaven" or some such abstraction.

Second, the Gospels of Matthew and Luke along with many other gentile Church traditions decided to interpret the "Kingdom" sayings of Jesus as predictions or regulations of Church order. True, the Malkuth sayings were often guidelines for the Son-of-Man fellowship, or community of saints. But they did not predict the rise of Greek Christianity, nor were they intended as ecclesiastical canons for an institutional Church.

As a result of these early tendencies to equate God's Rulership or Malkuth to Church institutions, there arose a common misconception that the Church was in some sense the "Kingdom of God." Soon priests and bishops would be claiming authority for divine moral judgments like the "forgiveness of sins" as vice-regents of God and Christ on earth. They would become intermediaries to Christ, who himself was earlier recognized as a divine intermediary between mankind and Godhead.

Not so. The Rulership of Yahweh or "Kingdom of God" was, simply and plainly, the community of saints. The saints or "holy ones" were those who heard and did the Will of Yahweh. Membership in an organized religious body had nothing to do with submission to God's Malkuth in the teachings of Jesus.

It is useful to read through sections of the Old Testament where the motif of God's "Kingdom" is mentioned, and to substitute the more accurate English words "Rulership," or "mastery:"

Psalm 22.28	"the Rulership belongs to Yahweh."
(Cf. traditional doxology to the Lord's Prayer, "thine is the Rulership...")	
Psalm 103.19	"His mastery ruleth over all..."
Psalm 145.12	"...the glorious majesty of His Rulership."
Daniel 4.3	"His Rulership is an aeonic (eternal) mastery..."

In other places, however, the word malkuth refers to the human or monarchical concept of kingship, such as the Kingdom of David or Solomon.

### **The 'Olam-Ha-Ba or Impending Aeon**

In Jewish prophetic mysticism a favorite theme for visions and divine razim or apocalyptic "secrets" concerned the potential blessedness of Israel and the whole earth under the Rulership of Yahweh. These visions were not predictions uttered in an English future tense, but utopian poems describing the epic Shalem or Peace of God ("which passeth all understanding").

The Hebrew language did not have a past, present and future tense like Greek and English. It used the perfect tense (translated by the Greek or English past or "narrative" tenses) and the imperfect tense (translated by the present, future and "habitual present" tenses). Because of this it is unclear whether a prophet, for example, is speaking of a future event, a present event, or an idealized hypothetical present event. Often the prophetic vision is expressed in the perfect or "past" tense, since it is a narration of an experience the person is now retelling. "I was taken to a high place and shown marvelous things."

But when the prophet is describing the blessedness of a potential or hypothetical condition, age or era, he speaks in the imperfect tense with the sense of a "habitual present" or conditional subjunctive: "Then would the wolf dwell with the lamb, and the leopard lie down with the young lamb, and the calf with the young lion and the young calf together--and a little child shall dance before them." (Isaiah 11.6)

The school of Isaiah carried on the earlier Shalom vision expressed in Micah of a state of blessedness in which Yahweh would exercise His Rulership among all people:

"And they would beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation would not lift up a sword against nation, neither would they learn war any more. But they would sit every person under his vine and under his fig tree, and none could make them afraid, for the mouth of Yahweh Sabaoth (the Master of All) had spoken it. For all people walk each one in the name of his god, but we walk in the Name ('power, authority') of our God unto an Olam and beyond." Micah 4.3-5 (Cf. Isaiah 2.4)

The elaboration of this vision was carried down in the schools of Deutero- and Trito-Isaiah, who were the successors of Master Isaiah and whose writings form the second and third sections of the Book of Isaiah in the modern Bible. The concept of the "Renewed Covenant" of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, which would be "written in the heart" instead of on tablets of stone, injected a hope for a future time of blessedness for post-exilic Israel. There was hope for a "renewed heavens and renewed earth" that was soon translated into the idea of totally new heavens and earth, with a new and immortal Jerusalem.

As Hellenistic Judaism of the Diaspora or dispersed tribes began to translate their Scriptures into Greek, whole new concepts began to emerge and achieve synthesis with ongoing

Palestinian prophetic thought. The Hebrew imperfect tense was translated in a thoroughgoing manner with the Greek future tense, and the visions of the prophets were interpreted as predictions of a future age. This in turn gave rise to the apocalypses of the intertestamental era (third to first centuries B.C.E.), the development of great systems of eschatological or "future" theology, and an overriding popular feeling that the present evil era was about to end and the Day of the LORD soon appear.

With this a significant change in the meaning of Hebrew 'Olam occurred, for it was equated with a whole set of concepts associated with Greek aión or "aeon." You may have noticed that the prophetic writer of the quotation from Micah used a stylized way of affirming his devotion to Yahweh. He said, "we walk in the Name of our God unto an 'Olam and beyond." 'Olam is from a Hebrew root meaning "hidden," and it connotes something that is of such great depth, profundity, or antiquity that it cannot be numbered. It means "infinity," and it is used to express a very profound feeling. It also can refer to a very long era of time.

Lovers make the same connection when they say, "I love you forever, until the sea is dry and the sky is burned away, and even beyond that." The prophet makes the same declaration of devotion to Yahweh, "unto an eternity, and beyond!"

But what is the lover really expressing? He is not actually claiming to predict the future, or to adhere to a certain kind of chronology in the relationship. Indeed, the lovers may be parted in a week, or at least certainly by death. No indeed, the lover is not expressing something about *time* when he professes to love someone "forever." Rather, he is expressing something about depth of devotion, profundity of commitment.

This, too, is what the prophet meant when he spoke of an 'Olam, for it did not mean "eternity" in the sense of the English word, or even the Latin aeternitas. An 'Olam was a "world" or a "universe" of time. It was a condition or estate of existence, as well as a mode of time. As time, it was not chronological, but "immeasurable." As a universe, it was not finite, visible or material, but "profound, divine." For this reason Yahweh was called 'Olam.

The devotional phrases "unto an 'Olam, unto an 'Olam of 'Olamoth (eternity of eternities)," which appears after prayers, visions and Psalmic material in the Old Testament, was soon hypostatized to be a thing in itself. There was this present 'Olam, which was the age or aeon of Israel's suffering and persecution. But there was another 'Olam, Age or Aeon of Yahweh (the Day of the LORD) which would surely hasten to come in the future, for the world was groaning for liberation from the pollution and injustice of this present 'Olam.

From this point on Palestinian and Hellenistic Jews spoke of "olamic" or "aeonic" things versus the things of this present age. The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, for example, which were written a century before the time of Jesus but contain many of the same phrases and wisdom sayings that are found in the Sermon on the Mount, speak of "aeonic life."

This is translated "eternal life," and is the phrase we see so often in the New Testament. In the Greek Christian Scriptures the term aion appears in many different forms, each with a completely different meaning, yet all lumped together in one stylized English translation--"forever and ever," or "eternal."

But look at the differences. Jesus spoke of one event as occurring "ad-Ila-'Olam," meaning "until the World of Yahweh's Rulership appears." This is translated by Greek eis ton aiona, "unto the Aeon." But normal English translations of the New Testament will render it, "for ever."

This can be pretty misleading, especially in a case like that of the "sin against the Holy Spirit." Here Jesus is accused of casting elijim out of people by means of the Prince of elijim, or Ba'alzebul. That is, he is accused of being in leaguc with Satan, and his healings are attributed to magical operations.

Jesus says,

HOW CAN SATAN CAST OUT SATAN? IF A GOVERNMENT IS DIVIDED AGAINST ITSELF, IT CANNOT STAND. IF A HOUSE IS DIVIDED AGAINST ITSELF, IT CANNOT STAND. AND IF SATAN RISES UP AGAINST HIMSELF AND IS DIVIDED, HE CANNOT STAND, BUT LOSES HIS POWER.

NO ONE CAN ENTER A STRONG MAN'S HOUSE AND SPOIL HIS GOODS UNLESS HE FIRST BINDS THE STRONG MAN, AND THEN HE WILL TAKE AWAY HIS POSSESSIONS.

AMEN I SAY UNTO YOU, ALL DEBTS (SINS) SHALL BE SUSPENDED FOR HUMAN BEINGS, AND ALL BLASPHEMIES THAT THEY MAKE. BUT THE PERSON WHO CALLS THE GOOD WORKS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT EVIL CANNOT HAVE THIS OFFENSE SUSPENDED, BUT IS IN SPIRITUAL DANGER OF A CURSE UNTIL THE AEON OF GOD'S RULERSHIP APPEARS."

This is usually translated to mean, "but is risking eternal damnation," a Christian concept of perpetual torture for their (i.e. God's) enemies. But the Greek says literally, "is risking a curse unto the Aeon." There are many other places where Jesus referred to the Aeon or state of God's Rulership--i.e., the "Kingdom of God"--and the Greek and English translators have changed the meaning to the abstract phrases "forever" or "forever and ever." But Jesus never once speaks of "perpetual torment" for debtors or "sinners.". Rather, they suffer "until the Rulership of God appears" for them. In other words, we languish in our own prisons until we decide to change masters.

In the case of a person who is unwilling to recognize an act of goodness, such as the freeing of a child from an evil or the healing of a man's withered hand on the Sabbath "when it is not legal to heal," there is no way his sin or debt can be *suspended precisely because he refuses to recognize that he has sin*. He is so detached from his inner heart that he calls a good act "evil" and projects his own spiritual blindness onto others. Therefore he is unable to receive remission of his debts, because he won't ask.

The "sin against the Holy Spirit" is like a person who turns his back to the light of the sun. Until he turns around, he will always be staring at his own shadow. Unless he turns to the light, he will remain in darkness. But nobody can be so persistently stupid as to stand enshadowed perpetually. Someday, eventually, the person will decide to turn toward the light, and the Aeon of God's Rulership will appear.

There simply was no such doctrine as "eternal damnation" in the teachings of Jesus, who was able to tell even his bitterest enemies that "the Rulership of God is hidden within you."

The concept of "eternal" or aeonic life mentioned so often in the Johannine writings is the same as that found in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs. Aeonic life is what is called "Life" in the Gospel of Thomas and the synoptic gospels. It means the "life of the 'Olam," or the moral and spiritual walk of the person living under the Rulership of God.

Thus "eternal life" has nothing to do with survival after death in a heaven "forever and ever," *per se*. It is not a reference to survival after death or length of time, although these things are implied by the total concept. It is, rather, an ethical-mystical concept of sanctified living which, by its divine nature, transcends the visible age and partakes in the life of the great Olam of Yahweh.

For this reason John's Gospel distinguishes between "this evil kosmos (world, universe; outer appearance)" and the life and light of God. John does not mean that the trees and stones and earth are evil when he says that the kosmos is evil, for this refers to the 'Olam of "this present age," which is under the rulership of Satan and his minions (the Prince of this kosmos). The Greek word for "earth" is Ge, and for John the "earth" is good. But the kosmos is the world of men's minds and machinations, the era of war, politics and natural disasters brought about indirectly through the evil influences of mankind, who tend to choose the Way of Death in preference to the Way of Life.

John says, "Jesus knew what was in mankind," referring to the evil yetzer of the heart. This is the root of the present evil aeon, which cannot be transcended by simply waiting for a chronological *time* when God will rescue Israel from the agony of existence in the kosmos. It can be transcended only through reciprocal love for one another, imitation of Christ, and rebirth into the aeonic life of God's Rulership.

Jesus, then, came into a culture that had misconstrued the prophetic vision of Yahweh's

blessed Rulership. The religionists had made their own cosmic time-schedules for God's earthly acts, had presumed to fathom the depths of His universal architecture, and had developed all kinds of conflicting expectations about the Day of the LORD. (The same is true today of the fundamentalist and apocalyptic Christian churches.)

Although there was no one generally accepted timetable for God's redemptive intervention in human affairs in the days of Master Jesus, it was generally agreed that something would happen eventually. The sectarians of Qumran foresaw a great cosmic battle between the children of light (them) and the children of darkness (Rome). Other groups envisioned a slow sanctification of the polluted land, culminating in a far off "Jubilee" or time of blessedness. Some more zealous groups were ready to fight right now, and in fact committed terrorist assassinations of "traitors" in the crowded streets of Jerusalem, slipping up behind the victim, stabbing, then yelling "help!" They thought that this kind of activism would force Yahweh to bring in the Kingdom of David. (Their attitude was not unlike that of modern-day Islamic terrorists.)

But the one common theme in most of the Palestinian messianic groups was the political reality of the 'Olam-Ha-Ba or Age to Come. It was to be like the Kingdom of David, and would be ruled by the Messiah Ben-David or Son of David. He would scatter Israel's enemies and set up a world rulership over all the gentiles. God's hosts of angels would assist him in defeating all the kings of the earth and, according to one apocalypse current with Jesus, he would live and reign for a period of four hundred years. He would arise out of the "sea," or coastal area.

Thus the great contradiction: Yahweh's Shalom or Peace would supposedly be ushered in by a warrior-king! It was to be a kind of Pax Judaica.

HOW CAN THE SCRIBES MAINTAIN THAT THE CHRIST IS THE MESSIAH BEN-DAVID? DAVID HIMSELF SAID IN THE SPIRIT OF HOLINESS, "YAHWEH SAID TO MY MASTER, 'SIT ON MY RIGHT HAND UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL UNDER YOUR FEET.'" DAVID HIMSELF CALLS HIM MASTER, SO HOW CAN HE BE HIS SON?

Bultmann, Klostermann, Weiss, and many scholars doubt the authenticity of this saying, attributing it to the Christological speculation of the early Church. Jesus is supposed to imply that the Messiah is not David's son, but the Son of God.

This cannot be. The early Church took great pains throughout the Greek New Testament to present all kinds of proofs that Jesus was the "Son of David." That is the whole basis for the fictional genealogies of Matthew and Luke, which trace the family of Jesus back to King David.



The significant thing is that the two genealogies are totally different. Luke makes Joseph the son of Heli, and Matthew has him the son of Jacob. From then on back they are totally independent, and it is clear that they were constructed to counter the Pharisaic accusation that Jesus was the illegitimate son of a Roman soldier.

The usual Christian apology for the difference in the two genealogies is that Luke's is traced through Mary's father Heli, which contradicts the text itself. The point is that in this way and many others the almost fanatical tendency of the early Church was to prove in every way possible that Jesus was the Messiah Ben-David and every other possible kind of messiah—the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, the Messiah Ben-Joseph, the Messiah Ben-Judah, the Son of Man of Daniel's vision, etc..

In spite of this there is not evidence to support the idea. Jesus did not pretend to be a contender for the royal Davidic throne, nor was his concept of messiahship in the military-political tradition of the Messiah Ben-David. Such a contender would be like Bar Cochba, the revolutionary guerrilla leader whom the Pharisees and even saintly Rabbi Akiba later declared to be the Messiah Ben-David, and whose defeat in 135 C.E. resulted in the expulsion of all Jews from Jerusalem and the end of the Jewish homeland.

The legend of the Messiah Ben-David was a product of monarchical Judaism--the very form that was in constant tension against the vision of prophetic religion from earliest times. Prophetic Judaism had no use for animal sacrifice, cultic temples and human kings. "There is no King but Yahweh" was the motto of the prophets. It was the Zealot party of Galilee that came closest to their theology. Israel should be a theocratic state, not a Davidic monarchy. The court chronicles of the Old Testament (Samuel Kings, Chronicles) try to make it appear that the ancient prophets approved and anointed the early kings of Israel, especially David. That may or may not have been so. But it is a fact that for many centuries the community of prophets cried out against the monarchy and its philosophy. It would be a strange contradiction if the prophetic community of Jesus' time had forgotten all of this, as it permeates all of that section of the Ancient Testament known as the Prophets.

The Son of Man (which was the prophetic self-designation of Jesus) was not the Messiah Ben-David, but perhaps another lesser known figure--the Messiah Ben-Joseph. The ancient prophecy of Jacob (Genesis 49.22-26) foretold the appearance of a Branch (Nazor, as in Nazarene), Rock and Shepherd from the tribe of Joseph. The school of Daniel speaks of the Rock (2.34) as a suffering messiah who would be "cut off, with no one to take his part." Like the Qumran Teacher of Righteousness, he would suffer martyrdom.

Since the apocalyptic material associated with the teachings of Jesus was centered in the Book of Daniel, and his self-designation as a Son of Man refers both to the humble term used by prophets and the glorified term used in Daniel for the messiah who is rewarded after death by the

"Ancient of Days," the conclusion is inescapable that Jesus conceived of messianic mission in the terms of a suffering prophet-servant rather than a victorious warrior-king.

The fact that the early Greek Church did not understand the distinction between the Messiah Ben-Joseph and the Messiah Ben-Judah explains its eagerness to demonstrate the Davidic descent of Jesus, since this was the only kind of Messiah that was generally known. But the fact that Mark's Petrine tradition reports a specific pericope in which Jesus *refutes* the idea of the Messiah Ben-David demonstrates that the saying must be an authentic teaching of Jesus. The Church had absolutely no reason to invent it, for it made a point that was obscure and actually contradicted the idea of a Davidic messiahship.

*In this pericope Jesus was saying very plainly that the common ideas about a warrior-king who would fight against the Romans and re-establish the Davidic Kingdom on earth are absolutely wrong. The rest of his teachings, especially his actions, show that he always considered martyrdom to be quite possible for him, and that he never intended to set up any kind of worldly institution--not even a church. It was his intention to pass on the Dabar of God to all who would hear, but not to raise an army or contend for a crown.*

Now it is easier to see how Jesus' Message of the Rulership of God stood over-and-against the popular ideas of the Messiah Ben-David and the 'Olam-Ha-Ba. The 'Olam was not an earthly kingdom that was to be shortly expected, and would result in some kind of "inbreaking" of the armies of Yahweh into the physical plane of the present age. It was not an eschatological event which Jesus felt would happen before his disciples had preached the Message to all the cities of Israel, or which would occur within the span of a lifetime.

When Jesus says, THERE ARE SOME STANDING HERE WHO WILL NOT TASTE DEATH BEFORE THEY SEE THE RULERSHIP OF YAHWEH COMING WITH POWER, he is not speaking of a visible event on the time-schedule of some lost apocalyptic doctrine. He is speaking of a mystical and spiritual awakening. For Jesus the 'Olam-Ha-Ba was already present. It was near at hand, immanent, impending. Like the community of saints and the hosts of other unseen martyrs ("witnesses"), the Rulership of God was a present reality for those who had the eyes to see.

THE RULERSHIP OF GOD COMETH NOT WITH OBSERVATION. NEITHER SHALL THEY SAY, "LO HERE!" OR "LO THERE!" BEHOLD, THE RULERSHIP OF YAHWEH IS HIDDEN DEEP WITHIN YOU...

IF I CAST OUT ELILIM BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD, THEN THE RULERSHIP OF YAHWEH HAS COME UPON YOU.

THE RULERSHIP OF THE FATHER IS LIKE A WOMAN WHO TOOK A LITTLE LEAVEN AND HID IT IN DOUGH AND MADE LARGE LOAVES..

IT IS LIKE A WOMAN CARRYING A JAR FULL OF MEAL. WHILE SHE WAS WALKING ON A DISTANT ROAD, THE HANDLE OF THE JAR BROKE AND THE MEAL STREAMED OUT BEHIND HER ON THE ROAD. SHE DID NOT SEE THE ACCIDENT, AND WHEN SHE GOT HOME SHE FOUND THE JAR EMPTY...

IT IS LIKE A MAN WHO HAD A TREASURE HIDDEN IN HIS FIELD, BUT DIED WITHOUT KNOWING IT. HE LEFT THE FIELD TO HIS SON, WHO ALSO DIED WITHOUT KNOWING IT. BUT HIS SON IN TURN DECIDED TO MAKE THE FIELD FRUITFUL AND BEGAN TO PLOUGH IT. HE FOUND THE TREASURE...

THE RULERSHIP OF THE FATHER IS SPREAD UPON THE EARTH, AND MEN DO NOT SEE IT.. THE RULERSHIP OF YAHWEH IS NEAR AT HAND.

For Jesus, then, the 'Olam-Ha-Ba was not a "World to Come," but a present reality that was invisible to most people. It was his Message to declare its reality and the immanent blessedness which was immediately at hand. It could be attained, however, only through suffering and hesed.

#### **Life and Communion in the 'Olam-Ha-Ba: Resurrection or Qimah**

There is a difference between the Rulership ("Kingdom") or Malkuth of God and the 'Olam-Ha-Ba or Impending Aeon of God. The Rulership is within grasp, so that Jesus could say to a Pharisee who had answered well a question put to him, YOU ARE NOT FAR FROM THE MALKUTH OF YAHWEH.

But the great 'Olam is a different matter. It is the goal and purpose of the "Kingdom," rather than the substance of it, though to submit to the Malkuth is to participate in the 'Olam. To put it another way, submission to Yahweh's Rulership brings freedom from anxiety and peace, but the 'Olam itself is the perfected state of Shalom or the great Peace of God which passes all comprehension. Submission and fidelity are the Way of Life or "gate" to God's Rulership, but the Rulership of Yahweh is the "gate" to the 'Olam-Ha-Ba.

So far these concepts do not differ radically from those of other rabbinical mystics whom Jesus knew. For them, to submit to Yahweh's Rulership was to enter into God's great

Sabbath, or Anapausis, or "Rest." It was believed that those who died "in the LORD Yahweh" continued in this Sabbath.

The Sadducean rabbis ceased speculation at this point, but the Pharisees had extrapolated a mystic teaching from the later prophets which they called the Qimah, or Anastasis, or "Resurrection." The Hebrew root means a "standing up, awakening, being made firm or (by connotation) immortal." In the Gospel of Thomas, which shows many evidences of Aramaic thought-idioms, Jesus is called the Standing One (meaning the Resurrected One).

The Pharisees of Jesus' time believed that a final consummation of this evil 'Olam would bring Yahweh forth as a judge to declare final mishpat upon each soul, and that every person who had ever lived would be resurrected or "caused to stand forth" and render an accounting of debts and merits. Those whose ledgers balanced on the credit side would find that their names had been inscribed in the Scroll of Life by Enoch, who was Yahweh's great Scribe. But those whose ledgers balanced on the debit side would be cast out of the 'Olam of Yahweh--the New Heavens and New Earth, and the New Jerusalem and Mount Zion. It was generally assumed by such Pharisaic mystics that only Israel would be worthy to enter the New Age, and of the Jewish people only those who practiced according to Pharisaic doctrine would be chosen or "elect." Life in the New World would be like that of the present earth, but without disease, famine, war or any other anxiety. Every vine would bring forth a thousand grapes, and each grape a thousand barrels of wine! The vision was not unlike that of other semitic religions, and resembled the Islamic Paradise.

But not so! said Jesus. He taught a different doctrine, although it was in the context of Pharisaic Resurrection. Let us look at what he said.

When Jesus was questioned about the Qimah or Great Awakening ("Resurrection") by certain Sadducean scribes, he was posed a problem which was intended to demonstrate the legal impossibility of Resurrection. The hypothetical case was one of a woman who had married. Her husband died and she was released of her vows, so married his brother. It was custom and Torah that if a man died childless, his widow was to marry his brother to conceive children and thus perpetuate the dead man's "line," for the Sadducees clung to the ancient Hebrew belief that "Resurrection" or Sabbath in Israel consisted in living through one's children (an unfortunate psychological tendency still stereotypical of the "Jewish mother."). This was also an Egyptian belief (cf. the Acts of Paul, and the confrontation with Hermogenes about the nature of the "Resurrection"). In other words, the dead husband would lose his sabbath or "rest" in Abraham's Bosom if he or his brother (an earthly surrogate) did not procreate children to keep his "remembrance" alive. This tradition was based on a Scripture saying that Yahweh will not allow homosexuals, sinners, or eunuchs to remain in Israel but will "cut off" their line. (In later Christian monasticism the prophetic motif of the blessed ascetic or "barren one" who has more

spiritual children than the married person will become important.)

The woman in the situation posed by the Sadducees had married her dead husband's brother, but he also died leaving her childless. She married another brother who also died before children could be conceived, and so on up to seven husbands.

Whose husband would she be in a supposed "Resurrection," ask the scribes? Doesn't reason tell you that she must be the husband of only one man, and that God's Torah must be followed to the letter? If so, the kind of situation we have posed would cause Yahweh to contradict Himself. Since this is impossible, the concept of a supposed "Resurrection" is illogical, unscriptural, and illegal according to Torah.

Jesus answered them by showing that Scripture demonstrates the great saints of Judaism are still "standing" or "immortal," for Moses called Yahweh the Lord of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This implies that the ancient patriarchs were living at the time of Moses, which makes sense because Yahweh is the God of the living, not of the dead. There were many other examples that Jesus could have chosen to show that the saints were still living, including the prophetic declaration of Malachi that Elijah would return to the earth before the Day of the LORD. But the Sadducees the prophetic literature (being monarchists and priests).

Perhaps if they had been on the Mount of Transfiguration and seen Jesus transformed and speaking face to face with the living saints Moses and Elijah (as Peter, James and John had witnessed), they might have changed their minds. They might have begun to comprehend that we live and move among a "host of unseen martyr-saints," and that the Rulership of God is truly "near at hand." But they had not experienced such a thing.

On the Mount of Transfiguration (Lk. 9:28-36; Mt. 17:1-8; Mk. 9:2-8) Jesus introduced his disciples to the living Moses and the living Elijah. In "vigil" or a state of meditation and prayer, their eyes were opened to the spiritual reality of the Malkuth of God and the resurrected saints of Judaism who lived in the 'Olam of God. They communed with Master Jesus and advised him from a state of blessedness beyond the grave—much like the saints of Hermes Trismegistus and the later saints of Christianity.

Clearly the teachings of Jesus about the invisible Kingdom of God and Resurrection were based not merely upon biblical exegesis, but upon his own mystical experience and knowledge.

Although it was practically impossible to explain "heavenly things" to those who refused to accept even the basic, moral "earthly things" of his Message, Jesus knew that truth stands on its own. It must be declared, even as a seed must be sown, so that sometime and somewhere it could germinate and bring forth the things of God. The Dabar of Yahweh was like the rain. He sent it forth with a mission, and it did not return unto Him void, but worked His will in hidden ways. So Jesus answered the Sadducees in this way:

THE CHILDREN OF THIS 'OLAM MARRY AND ARE GIVEN IN MARRIAGE. BUT THOSE WHO ARE WORTHY TO BE FOUND IN THE GREAT 'OLAM, WHICH IS THE AWAKENING FROM THE DEAD, NEITHER MARRY NOR ARE THEY GIVEN IN MARRIAGE. NOR CAN THEY DIE ANY MORE, FOR THEY ARE ANGELIC BEINGS. BEING CHILDREN OF IMMORTALITY (i.e., "Since they are immortal"), THEY ARE CHILDREN (literally 'Sons') OF GOD.

First, we are told, the Sadducees were ignorant in thinking that the 'Olam-HaBa is anything at all like an earthly Paradise. For one thing, there is no distinction of persons, and certainly no sexist discrimination between men and woman, perpetuating the human concept that women are property of their legal husbands for all eternity! Second, there is no need of marriage because the primal Adam of the pre-Fall estate has been restored. The "rib" has been regained, and mankind is no longer divided into two "halves" or sexes, but is shalem or "whole." Third, the "Resurrection" is not an estate of being "caused to stand forth" to render a ledger accounting before Yahweh for divine mishpat. Rather, it is the estate of being worthy of the Great 'Olam. The Greek puts it this way: "But those who are worthy to obtain (Hebrew matza, ni. 'be present, exist, be found in') the Great 'Olam--even the awakening from the dead." The 'Olam is in grammatical apposition to "the awakening from the dead," meaning that the two are equivalent phrases for the same condition. This is apparent because in answering the question about the "awakening" he has to speak first of the 'Olam because the two are aspects of the same vision. So the Resurrection or Qimah has nothing to do with Judgment, but is *the spiritual state of the perfected saint*. Since he or she has attained to the same status as an angel (Greek angelos), the saint can no longer die. Being immortal, the martyr-saint is divine, and thus a "Son-Daughter of God." Thus for Jesus, the invisible spiritual world of God includes human saints who have "overcome" and become immortal beings in the greater service of Divine Will. This world can be accessed by people of faith in various states of communion.

Several things are implied about these states of communion by various interlocking strands of tradition preserved in the New Testament. For one thing, Jesus was in direct communication with the great saints and prophets of Israel, like Moses and Elijah (the Transfiguration). For another, Jesus (like Paul) had an outward appearance that was less than prepossessing (cf. the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, who is not "comely, that we should desire to look upon him"), yet also a spiritual or "invisible" appearance of great glory. This was glimpsed in the Transfiguration, when it was as though blinders fell from the fleshly eyes of the disciples and they saw Jesus as he really was under the Malkuth of Yahweh. An indication of this is traced in the accounts of Resurrection appearances in which Jesus was not "recognized" until he spoke

or "broke bread" for the disciples.

Again, Jesus was able to see spiritual events invisible to the disciples, such as Satan being cast out of the heavens. He was, in turn, "recognized" by lower sublunary or astral beings like the elilim, who moaned and cried aloud, "Thou Son of God, have mercy upon us." Later Paul and Barnabas would have similar experiences. Jesus saw "by the Holy Spirit," as it was said. He had clairvoyant perception into the very heart and intention of things.

He foresaw the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, leaving predictions that allowed the Jewish disciples of James the Just to escape before the terrible siege began. In that time of testing, two women would be sitting at a grinding stone and one would escape, so let the disciples collect their purse and money and purchase swords to defend themselves. Society would become lawless and dangerous, with every person having the responsibility to defend himself and his family from bandits and guerrilla soldiers. Such was the woeful prophecy of Jesus concerning Jerusalem, which the early churches transformed into apocalyptic visions of doom for the world at large.

Just like the angels, who are the "hands" or cosmic servants of God and are therefore named according to their divine function (Raphael, "healer of God" etc.), so the perfected martyr-saints assume angelic domains of rulership under God. Jesus speaks of the "rulership" which Yahweh will appoint for him, and of the "rulerships" which will be appointed to his disciples in the great Rulership of Yahweh.

He tells a mashal about servants who are left by their master while he goes away to assume rulership of new territories. The faithful servants are rewarded by him when he returns. In fact, he even makes them sit down while he waits upon them. They join with him in a grand messianic banquet to celebrate the expanded Kingdom which, in the Bridegroom motif, may have come to the ruling dynasty by means of royal marriage.

But the most important point of this species of mashal which Jesus told--and there are many on this theme--is that the faithful servants (or stewards) are rewarded by being given "rulership" over the number of spheres they have proven worthy to manage. They are given "kingdoms" to rule.

This is also reflected in the language of Jesus in other places, where he speaks of the disciples "inheriting" the Rulership of God, and that it is the Father's good pleasure to "give you the Rulership." The whole idea of "testament" in the New Testament is the institution of "inheritance," where the patriarch deeds out portions of his Rulership as particular territories for his sons to rule. Therefore the Children (or "Sons") of God inherit a "kingdom" or domain of rulership themselves.

The community of saints, then, is also a collegial and angelic harmony of "spheres" of divine activity under the responsibility of each perfected being. Just as the angels are in charge of

clouds, rain, the planets, and other cosmical functions, so the saint-martyrs are in charge of the care or "cure" of human souls.

This idea, of course, became the basis for the Christian cult of the saints, where individual persons thought worthy (usually on the basis of such signs as miraculous healings through his relics or at the site of his grave) were called upon for certain kinds of help, depending upon the "sphere" of the saint's rulership. St. Anthony, for example, was supposed to be an expert at finding lost souls. This was eventually degraded in hagiography to make him the magical power one calls upon to help find lost articles, like pins, shoes, and even buried treasure! Poor Anthony. I doubt very much that he maintains an "open door" policy at his office anymore!

St. Paul spoke out against the abuse of these ideals in his letters to the Corinthians. For one thing, many of them had decided that they had achieved the great Awakening without necessity for physical suffering, purificatory testing, and human death. "Already you rule like kings! Already you have become wise!" Paul taunts them in his inimitably satirical way.

He blasts them for their self-magnification and tells them that he preaches Christ crucified. Any other gospel is a lie, even if it comes from a so-called "angel." God raises up the "babes" and humble ones of this age, not the self-proclaimed wise ones. Remember the Cross. That is the key to Life, not esoteric ideas about being someone great here on earth! Over and again Paul calls the Corinthians to account for their claims to be Pneumatics or "Spiritual Ones" (the highest grade of advancement in the terminology of mystery religions).

When they think themselves great because they babble in the glossolalia characteristic of many Hellenistic religions other than Christianity (indeed, glossolalia is a group-phenomenon of most shamanic tribal rituals), Paul tells them that he would rather speak five articulate words with his nous or "higher understanding" than ten thousand in a "tongue." Glossolalia is the least of God's spiritual "gifts," and when it breeds even a tiny bit of self-magnification it is not worth the insubstantial edification it may seem to bring.

This kind of charismatic approach to the Message of Jesus was a constant source of problems in the early Christian Church. The confusion between submission to the Rulership of God, which involved a present "realized" participation in the blessedness of the Great Olam (as in the Johannine tradition), and actual Resurrection or Awakening from the sting of death, which required successful "overcoming" of the kosmos or present evil Olam through fidelity unto physical death, was an issue which divided the Church.

The basic question was this: Was Jesus the Standing One before his Resurrection or afterward? For many the answer was simple. God made Jesus "Christ" in the act of raising him from the dead. The phenomenon of Resurrection was the token of his anointing or "Christing," meaning the accepting of Jesus as an angelic Son of God with a great Rulership of his own.



"Therefore I will divide him a portion with the great ones, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, for he hath poured out his soul unto death. He was numbered with the transgressors of Torah, and forced to carry the debts of many, and yet begged remission for the debts of his murderers."

Jesus had totally fulfilled the mission of the Suffering Servant-Saint (Isaiah 53).

But then what of his original prophetic commission? Wasn't Jesus also anointed "from his mother's womb" (like Jeremiah, the "Son of Man") to preach the Message of Yahweh? In that sense he was conceived and born to his mission. Thus Jesus must have been Christ from the beginning, indeed from the very foundations of the earth.

This was the conclusion that Paul and John reached. Christ (not Jesus) was an eternal Divine Man, the archetypal Imago Dei for Adam and Eve, but as such he was the New Adam—without flaw. He was an aspect of Godhead far higher than the angels. He was equivalent to Hokmah or Divine Wisdom, like the angels an hypostasis or projected emanation of Godhead. In other words, the Christ or Messiah for Paul was the Son of Man in Daniel, and thus also the Coming Messiah.

The subtle difference between Paul's understanding of the messianic Son of Man or Christ and that of Jesus, however, was this. For Jesus in his own self-consciousness, he was a human prophet trying to live up to the Rulership of God and participate in the Great 'Olam. To what extent he may have regarded himself as a pre-existent soul (cf. the Johannine "before Abraham was, I am!"), there is no way to know. He did not preach about himself as someone great, as the Johannine gospel would seem to indicate. But it is not impossible that he regarded himself as having existence before birth. After all, Yahweh was the God of the living.

Paul, on the other hand, equated the human person Jesus totally with the great Son of Man or anthropomorphic Godhead. He spoke not of "Christ" who made himself a servant and humbled himself to death on a cross, but of "Jesus the Christ." Jesus himself is given the divine status that he specifically rejected when he asked the rich man to cease calling him "good Master" because there is only one Master or Lord (Yahweh), and He alone is good!

It was mainly for his profaning Messianic Judaism by opening it to the gentiles and for his advocacy of Jesus as Divine Godhead—in other words, his total Hellenization of the Message of Jesus—that Paul was despised by the Ebionites and other Jewish Christians. In the lost Ebionite Ascents of James, a book of razim or revelatory secrets given to James the Just when he was taken up through the seven heavens to the Throne of Yahweh, accusations are made against Paul that he spoke against the Temple and its sacrifices. It asserts that he was not really a Jew but a son of Greek parents who wanted to marry the daughter of the High Priest and was therefore circumcised as a proselyte. When she spurned him he began to preach against circumcision, the Sabbath, and Torah.

This is an untrue picture of Paul, who studied at the feet of Gamaliel and clearly knew a great deal of rabbinical doctrine. It also shows how false the accusation must have been about Jesus being the illegitimate son of the Roman soldier Pandarus, since it served the same apologetic purposes--to discredit a false teacher and make his teachings invalid. But it demonstrates how seriously Paul and the Jewish Christians differed on basic issues.

According to Eisenman, Paul was an inveterate enemy of James and the Jewish-Christian "Judaizers," and may have even helped precipitate the murder of James. This, however, is an example of a scholar building hypotheses out of inferences and his own biases. But it demonstrates how extensive the evidence is for differences between the early Christian "Hellenists" and "Hebrews" (cf. Acts 6), and how extreme the issues became as the congregations of Hellenized Jews and gentiles outside of Jerusalem began to dominate early Christianity.

The nature of Jesus' Messiahship was perhaps the most fundamental of these issues, and it remains the most important thing that still divides Jews and Christians. Enlightened Jews tend to think of Jesus as a prophet or moral teacher, but know very little of first-century messianic theology. Enlightened Christians realize that Jesus was a Jew, but have nothing other than the Greek ideas of divinity against which to measure his stature as a man.

As gentile Christianity advanced, the original concept of the messianic Son of Man and his corporate community of martyr-saints faded out of the picture. Instead, the Hellenistic Pauline Christology, which stressed the meaning of Christhood (with absolutely no concern for the Jesus of history), brought about a synthesis of ideas that even Paul would not have liked. The man Jesus became the walking incarnate Godhead, so that the Johannine writers could have Jesus say, "If you have seen me, you have seen the Father." Understood in the particular terms of Johannine mystical thought, this makes good Jewish sense. But the Greek gospel was not understood in proper terms, and soon Jesus was seen as God in flesh, with concomitant legends of divine conception and birth.

The Message became subordinate to the Messenger, and Christianity began to conform to prevailing religions and social mores of the Roman-Hellenistic period.

To review and summarize the original Message of the "Kingdom," Malkuth, or Rulership of Yahweh, we find that it had nothing to do with earthly kingdoms. Instead, it was a *submission to divine will which brought the disciple into attunement with the living martyr-saints of God* (such as Moses and the prophets). Again, it was a *communion in the blessed Feast of the Great 'Olam or Shalem of Yahweh*, so that the inner treasures of peace, joy and brotherly love could be fully experienced in this present age. Yet the struggle to become shalem or "perfect" could end in nothing but physical death, and there could be no Standing Ones in the flesh of this age. There would be a new and different "body," as Paul transmits, and no one can attain to

Resurrection without rigor, suffering and crucifixion. Jesus said,

HE WHO IS NEAR TO ME IS NEAR TO THE FIRE, BUT HE WHO IS FAR FROM  
ME IS FAR FROM THE RULERSHIP OF GOD.

The meaning of the petition to "give us this day our bread of the morrow" becomes clear as we realize that this day is the present 'Olam and the morrow the Great 'Olam. That is why in the original Prayer of Jesus it was correlative to "Thy Kingship come," for it was in this sense that the Rulership of Yahweh was to appear--not as a phenomenon of history, but *in the lives of each disciple*.

Very early, however, this "coming" was interpreted to be eschatological and historical. The "Q" source of Matthew and Luke gives garbled evidence of an original saying of Jesus about the historical meaning of his ministry. Matthew's version says "he that is least in the Kingdom of Heaven" is greater than John the Baptist (misunderstanding of the "Kingdom" as an institution like the Church), and it adds: "from the days of John the Baptist until now the Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force." Clearly for the Matthean authors, this all refers to the Church and its persecution, but for Jesus it was a condemnation of Jewish political messianism under the rubric of the Messiah Ben-David.

The same logion appears in Luke this way: "The Torah and the prophets were until John. Since that time the Kingdom of God is preached, and everyone presses into it." This may be more accurate, but again for Luke the Kingdom is the evangelical Church, rather than the Rulership of Yahweh preached by the prophets. Clearly the two versions of the logion have an antecedent which says something about the relationship of John's preaching to Jesus' Message, but the Matthean version has used it to downplay the importance of John (this motif became stronger in the Fourth Gospel) and the Lucan version applies it to an interpretation of the Church as the Basileia or "Kingdom" of God.

I suggest that the original logion might have been this:

THE TORAH AND THE PROPHETS GAVE WITNESS TO THE RULERSHIP OF  
YAHWEH UNTIL THE TIME OF JOHN THE BAPTIST. SINCE THEN VIOLENT  
MEN HAVE TRIED TO SEIZE IT BY FORCE.

Here Jesus made a distinction of historical periods. Until John there were the Torah and the prophets to witness for the Rulership of God. But since the time of John "violent men," meaning various proponents of a Davidic warrior-king, have tried to bring the Kingdom "on earth as it is in heaven." These would be the guerrilla leaders, the sicarii or assassins, various zealous

patriotic groups, and the Pharisaic proponents of the Messiah Ben-David. This kind of activity, as Jesus well knew, could only hasten the coming mishpat upon Jerusalem and the Temple establishment. The Day of the LORD would be, as Amos had cried many centuries before, a time of "darkness, and not light. . .as when a man leans his hand on a wall and a snake bites him." It would be as in the time of Noah, when all the people ate, drank, and married, then suddenly came the deluge.

The distinction that Jesus made between the past time and the present era of violence, however, was translated into the basis for a Christian apocalyptic schedule of events. The "little apocalypse" of Mark 13 simply echoes the prophecies of Daniel about the Son-of-Man community. It is not an original prophecy of Jesus, but a Christian interpretation of history based on the expected Second Coming of Jesus Christ as the Messiah Ben-David! This, of course, is incongruous and inconsistent with the self-understanding that Jesus must have had as a Son of Man, but it was the only way Christianity could reconcile the messianic glorification of Jesus as one who had "overcome" and been victorious. He would have to return and rule on earth in splendor. It was easy enough for gentile Christians to interpret their Greek Scriptures in this way, since already the Sepuagintal version had transformed Hebraic concepts into Hellenistic ones.

Soon all history was divided into two aeons--the old and the new. The old aeon was the period of the Torah and the prophets. The Torah, as Paul said, had served only to make people aware of "sin." It was righteous in itself, but did not bring soteria or "salvation." The new aeon, however, was the Aeon of God. Even now the old aeon was dissolving and the kosmos groaning to be renewed and made pure again. Surely the Great 'Olam' was just around the corner, and Christ would return in glory with his hosts of angels. All the signs of Daniel were plain to see. Weren't the nations rising against nations, and wasn't the "abomination of desolation" standing in the Temple, where it ought not to be (the Greek sacrifices of Titus after the seige of Jerusalem had ended? Jesus prophesied that God would judge the shepherds of Israel quickly. Surely all these things are harbingers of final judgment and the Resurrection of the dead!

After the fall of Jerusalem and the failure of the expected Kingdom of Christ, Christian theology became less explicitly eschatological. Jesus, who had rhetorically declared, WHO MADE ME A JUDGE OR DIVIDER OVER YOU? was now expected to return in some distant age to judge all mankind. A strong resentment against the great respect paid by Apostolic Successors to the original Jewish Apostles—their masters and teachers--led to open rebellion in Corinth (as the Epistle of Clement shows) and even in Asia Minor (as the letters of Ignatius of Antioch indicate). The leaders placed in authority by the Apostles and their successors were seriously challenged by local charismatics. Who needed the Jews, their successors, and their Torah anyway? Hadn't Paul shown that Torah was unnecessary? It was with great difficulty that

Apostolic Successors (Bishops) retained their authority among the gentile congregations.

A wave of antisemitic theology spread through the churches, and extreme Gnostics were ready to make a complete break with the old aeon, prophets included. Marcion called the Yahweh of the Jews a lower deity of justice, but not the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. More extreme Gnostics reinterpreted the Old Testament altogether showing that Yahweh was Yaldabaoth, the ignorant demiurge whose mother, Sophia ("twisdom"), had brought him into existence by error and disobedience. His works throughout history, as recorded in the books of the Jews (especially Genesis), were aimed at imprisoning and enslaving mankind. Sophia (a figure for the Holy Spirit) came from the higher aeons of light to rescue mankind, and finally bring the aeon of Christ into the kosmos.

To demonstrate how far away from the original Message of Jesus the Gnostics went, we have only to examine the Gospel of Thomas, for it is a textbook of gnostical speculation. For example: "His disciples said to him, 'Is circumcision obligatory?' He said to them, 'If it were obligatory their father would beget them circumcised from their mother's womb!'" Circumcision, of course, was never an issue in the ministry of Master Jesus, but now the authentic Jewish followers of Jesus were regarded as "Judaizers." Even more illustrative: "His disciples said to him. 'Twenty-four prophets spoke in Israel and they all spoke about you.' He said to them, 'You have dismissed the Living One who stands before you and you have spoken about the dead.'"

In no way would Jesus have referred to the great prophets of Israel as "dead," especially when he communed with them in the kind of tradition transmitted through the story of the Transfiguration and conference with Moses and Elijah. Moreover, there was no aspect to the teachings of Jesus which indicated that the prophets had all prophesied his coming in figures and allegories. Clearly this is Church apologetic interpretation from a later period. Here the Gnostics have introduced logia of their own "Spirit-inspired" teachers who spoke in the Name of Jesus. The same thing happened in the catholic churches. This is the reason that so much of the original Message of Jesus has been distorted, altered, reworked and used as propaganda for human prejudices and Church dogmas.

There are still many traces of the original spiritual community of resurrected Jewish martyr-saints in the Roman Catholic doctrine of the communio sanctorum, with the idea of a Church Militant (the earthly servants of God) living in juxtaposition and interaction with a Church Triumphant (the heavenly saints who help and assist each soul to progress). This was not only a Jewish and Christian idea, however. The Mysteries of the Egyptian-Hellenistic Hermes Trismegistus are based on the same kind of communio sanctorum known as the Brotherhood of the Ogdoad. The Greek Heroes were also worshipped in this way. Throughout the history of religions many groups and guilds have followed the same understanding. Therefore a basic teaching of Jesus has been carried on in a distorted modality in the Catholic cult of the saints.

The sphere where the Sons of Man and the invisible Sons of God come together in spiritual worship of the One God in Church tradition has been the Eucharist or Mass. There can be no serious doubt that Jesus inaugurated this sacrament of communion as an earthly participation in the mystic Messianic Feast of the Great 'Olam.

It is quite possible that he could have said,

THIS IS MY BLOOD OF THE RENEWED COVENANT, WHICH IS YOUR BLOOD.

[Here the Aramaic idiom "which is to you," meaning "which is yours," was rendered into the Greek huper humon, meaning "which is done on your behalf" to fit the Hellenistic and gentile idea of Jesus as an atonement sacrifice for the sins of humanity. But his original meaning was more like this: "*Let this represent the life that I have poured out for the sake of God's Malkuth, and let this be your covenant to do the same.*" ]

In spite of all objections to the origin and meaning of the Lord's Supper, and the fact that there seems to be a confusion of a bread-and-fish feast with the Eucharist in early Christian tradition, the Messianic Banquet must have been more than a simple havurah kiddush, or a later appropriation from the worship of Dionysus or Mithra. It was portrayed as the final in the synoptic Gospels, but not in John's Gospel, and was infused with the full meaning of a martyr and saint who knew that he was to die. But it was a sacrament that the disciples knew well, and it became the standard Agape meal or Love Feast of fellowship binding all disciples together by covenant. Paul objected to those who turned it into a banquet of food, as it was not originally done that way. It was a Jewish sacrament with the Master Jesus as a priest.

The Eucharist or Thanksgiving is a Greek term from the Hebrew Berakah or "Blessing-Praise" of God. That is what the Lord's Supper was called, as well as the Pascha (Greek) or Pesah (Hebrew "Passover") During the final Passover or Model Seder (depending upon the chronology), Jesus took the cup of Blessing (i.e., Eucharistia), as he always had done, and praised Yahweh, vowing that his life or "blood" would hallow God's Name to renew the Covenant.

This, then, is the meaning of the Eucharist. It is a praise of God by renewing the Covenant of faith, a rededication to the service of Yahweh, and a mystic communion with the victorious holy ones, righteous ones, or zaddikim who have overcome death and entered into the eternal Life of the Great 'Olam.

**Chapter Eight**  
**THE INNER MASTERY**

As Eisenman points out (*James the Brother of Jesus*, pp. 564f.): "In Jewish literature from this period, all 'the Righteous Ones' were considered to be 'the Sons of God,' as several texts, including Wisdom and the Gospels, attest. This is the position, too, of that very important Dead Sea Scroll document known as the Hymns, where symbolic or 'adoptionist Sonship' is a basic ideology. This is also true of the recently published 'Son of God' text...the idea...that Jesus was the Christ, again seems to have been an ideology with more meaning overseas in the Hellenistic world than in Jewish Palestine, since the term does not seem to have any currency in this period in Palestine as far as one can tell. Even the author of the ...Book of Acts...admits that 'Christians' were first so called in Antioch...some time around the 50's."

For Jesus to be regarded as a "Son of God" by his disciples was idiomatic to the period. The term "son of Adam" or "son of man" was a humble self-designation used by the prophets to indicate their abasement before the Throne of God ("And he said to me, 'Son of man, stand upon your feet...' Ezek. 2.1). The Master Jesus called himself a "son of man."

But the Son of Man was also, in Jewish mysticism, a heavenly, aeonic figure. He was a corporate being, like Adam ("Humanity"), Israel (the Jewish people of all generations) and the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53, who represented the martyred prophets of all generations. The Son of Man was the victorious Servant of Yahweh who had poured out his soul unto death. He was the archetypal Sage, Just Person, or Zaddik of the Wisdom of Solomon, who was persecuted unto death by those who had abandoned the Torah of Yahweh for the philosophy of the Greek sophists, as it says:

"Death is not king on earth, for justice is immortal. But godless persons have invited the company of death by means of their words and actions. They have made a covenant with him because they think he is their friend and that they are fit members of his company. Therefore they have wasted away their lives.

"They said to themselves in a delusion, 'Our life is short and filled with trouble. When a person dies there is no remedy, for no one has ever been known to return from the grave. We were born by mere chance, and afterwards we shall be as though we'd never existed, for the breath in our nostrils is but a wisp of air, and our consciousness is a mere spark kept alive by the beating of our heart. When that ceases, our body will turn to ashes and the breath of our life disperse like empty air. Our names will be forgotten with the passing of time, and no one will remember anything we did. Our life will pass away like the dispersal of a cloud. Just as a foggy mist is dissipated by the rays of the sun and caused to vanish by its heat, so will our life cease to exist. Our life is a passing shadow, and the end cannot be postponed. Mankind's fate is sealed,

and none can return from death. Come, then, let us indulge in pleasure while we can and fully exploit nature as though we were still eager youths: Let us have expensive wines and perfumes until we are fully glutted, and let no young maiden keep the flower of her virginity. Let us crown ourselves with such "rosebuds" before they wither! Let none of us miss whatever pleasure he can snatch! Who cares what consequences our revelry brings? This is the life for us! It, rather than Yahwism, is our birthright!

"Down with the poor and simple man. Let us tread him under our feet. We will show no mercy to the widow and no reverence for the gray hairs of old age. For us, let might determine what is right! Weakness has proven to be good for nothing.

"Let us lay a trap for the just man (zaddik), for he stands in our way and tries to restrain us at every turn. He brands us as breakers of Torah and calls us traitors to our heritage. He claims to know God and calls himself the Servant-Child of the LORD. He is a living condemnation of all our ideas. The very sight of him is an affliction to us, for his life is unlike ours and his ways are different. He rejects us as false coins and avoids us and our ways as though we were excrement. He claims that the just die happy, and boasts that God is his Father.

"Let us test the truth of his words and see what will happen to him when he dies! For if the just man is God's child, God will intervene and save him from the hands of his enemies. Let us outrage and torment him, so that we can bring him to the test, measure his forbearance, and learn how his patience will last. Let us falsely condemn him to a shameful death, for if he is right God will protect him!"

"Thus they reasoned, and were totally wrong. Blinded by their own wickedness they were unable to comprehend the subtle ways of God. It never occurred to them that holiness of life would have any kind of recompense, or that innocence could have a reward. But God created mankind for immortality, and formed within him the yezter of His own aeonic self. It was the spite of the slanderer that brought death into the world, and the experience of death is reserved for those who covenant with it.

"But the souls of the just are in God's hand, and torment shall not touch them. In the eyes of foolish men they seem to be dead. Their departure from life is reckoned as defeat and their passing away from us as disaster. But they are in a Sabbath of Shalom. Though in the sight of men they may be ruined, they have an absolute hope of immortality. After a period of correction [ancient concept of Purgatory] they will receive great blessings, because God has found them proven and worthy to be His. Like gold in a crucible he put them to the proof and found them acceptable like a whole burnt offering ['holocaust'].

"In the moment of God's coming to them they will kindle into flame like sparks that run through stubble. They will become judges and rulers over the nations of the world, and Yahweh shall be their King unto the Aeon of aeons." (Wisdom 1.14-3.8)



These are the concepts in Hasidic Judaism that formed the basis for the teaching of the Master Jesus concerning eternal Life, the Qimah or conscious afterlife of a saint, and the Tikkun or Restoration of the Messianic Age to come--which already exists invisible to humanity.

On earth the zaddik, just person, or sage was a servant-child of Yahweh. But in his visions of the night (dreams) the prophet Daniel saw "one like unto a son of mankind" being presented before the Throne of Yahweh and given rulership and glory. In the mystic collective imagery of prophetic Judaism this became a symbol of the saint's reward. The Son of Man came to represent the glorified Suffering Servant in the Great 'Olam, and the saints of Yahweh, as individuals, participated in the aeonic glory of the Son of Man. He was the "Anointed One," Messiah or Christ of Yahweh.

But the Son of Man was not a single person. Like Adam ("Humanity") he was a theological archetype. Although Adam was called the "first man," he was a semitic symbol for mankind. This is demonstrable in two ways. First, the Hebrew word for "a single man" is ish, not adam. Adam is a collective term meaning "humanity, humankind." Second, in the Genesis story Adam and Eve beget Cain and Abel. No others are mentioned. When Cain murders Abel he is sent away to the land of Nod, East of Eden, where he marries a woman *of the tribes there* and begets a whole line of tribes. Thus the Genesis story assumes the existence of *other tribes* contemporary with Adam, who then begets Seth and founds the line leading to Noah. The point of the story is that all humanity descending by connection to Adam (through Cain, who intermarries with agricultural civilizations, or through Seth who, like Abel, was a nomadic shepherd) becomes evil and brings on the Flood. Yahweh chooses to save only Noah and his family, who remain "just" in His eyes.

Adam, then, was not the father of all the peoples of the earth, but was a collective theological figure for the moral frailty of humanity in general. In the same sense the New-Adam mentioned by St. Paul is Christ, or the Son of Man. He is not Jesus per se, but the archetype that emanated through Master Jesus--what the Christians called the Christ. Jesus himself became the "first-fruits" of a perfected humanity. Since he was first, the Resurrected Master Jesus stands at the "head" (ha-rosh) or pinnacle of the Son-of-Man fellowship. Thus "Christ is the head, and the Church is the Body."

The Son of Man, then, was a fellowship, corpus or community of saints who had suffered to hallow God's Name on earth. After physical death God would raise them up, make them perfect, and allow them to enter into His aeonic Rest, or Sabbath, where they would each become rulers with a share in His divine Rulership.

So far we have spoken of submission to the Rulership of Ood and participation in the aeonic communio sanctorum. But the teachings of Jesus went beyond those of the Wisdom of

Solomon, which promised peace and glory after death for the righteous and faithful servant. Jesus declared that the great Peace of God was near at hand, immanent, spread out upon the earth unseen by mankind. The compensation or "wages" of messianic fidelity could be experienced in the present 'Olam as a mystic foretaste of the Great 'Olam. By persevering faithfully, the disciple could become shalem or "peaceful, whole, integrated, at one with himself and God." He or she could participate as an *individual* in the blessedness of the Shalom-Elohim or Peace of God. He could become amittai or "true" by being amen, and learn to perceive the subtle and invisible things of God--the razim or mysteries of the Rulership of God. Here the

Hebrew concepts of truth (emeth) and faith (amen) are from cognate roots meaning "firmness, stability, fidelity, integrity, truth." That is why the intertestamental literature agrees with Johannine terminology in exhorting its hearers to "do the truth," for "truth" like fidelity is *that which stands firm*. The faithful servant-child of Yahweh would experience inner peace and the revelation of God's truth in dreams, by clairvoyance, and through all other forms of the "knowledge of God (Greek gnosis)"

The Parenthood or Father-Motherhood of Yahweh, then, meant much more than the brotherhood of mankind. It signified the relationship each individual "child" enjoyed with God.

#### **ABBA: The Saint as Scion of Yahweh**

In the Hellenistic age of Jesus all symbols of social authority were expressed in male terms. Parenthood, for example, was called "fatherhood," and in most traditions (Egyptian and Greek mysteries excepted, being rooted in ancient matriarchal religion) divinity was regarded as "male." Ever since the time of Pythagorus, masculinity had been associated with philosophical wholeness or completion, and femininity with incompleteness and corruption. That is why it is said in the Gospel of Thomas that Jesus will "lead" Mary and she will become a living "male," in other words, become divine. For the same reason it is said in one of the apocryphal Christian writings that the sect of Dositheus numbered "thirty and one-half souls," the half-souled creature being a woman.

Even though this anti-feministic conception was maintained in bourgeois Church tradition, where women were not allowed to speak in church meetings, it is clear that Jesus was totally feministic. His teachings are preserved in fragments of tradition found in the Pauline corpus, where it is said:

IN CHRIST THERE IS NO MALE OR FEMALE, FOR ALL ARE CHILDREN OF GOD.

Jesus surprised the Sadducees by declaring that the wife of seven husbands would be no one's chattel in the 'Olam-Ha-Ba, but would become like an angel--complete and independent of a man. He outraged the traditional rabbis by accepting female disciples, even women who had been prostitutes or other kinds of "sinners." The Book of the Acts shows how widespread the original disciples of Jesus were, as the later evangelists would find them, and often it is recorded that they stayed in the homes of *women* disciples already living in a Jewish region of the Diaspora.

But the Christian Church in all its manifestations was able to only partially assimilate the radical teachings of Jesus about the equality of men and women before God. After all, wasn't mankind (Adam) "male" in its original form, before God divided it into two sexes?

Many of the early Gnostic Christian ascetics transmitted, in their gospels and tractates, questions supposed to have been asked of Jesus by Salome. "When will death come to an end?" she inquired. "When women cease to bear children," Jesus is supposed to have answered. If this is an authentic logion (and I doubt it), Jesus must have been saying that as long as people are born into the physical world, they will have to die (a tautological observation, and probably intended to be a "snappy comeback"). It was used anti-feministically, however, by ascetic sects who still saw women as the weak temptress Eve. According to the Gnostic Gospel of the Egyptians, Jesus is supposed to have said, "I have come to destroy the works of women," meaning the works of decay, corruption and moral weakness--all of which were understood as "feminine" or lunar things, which had no permanence but waxed and waned with the vicissitudes of time and nature.

The liberalism and universalism of Hellenistic Diaspora Judaism was far more hospitable to the feminism and heterodox Galilean teachings of Master Jesus than Judea. At least a century before the time of Jesus, Hellenistic Judaism had forged some very positive attitudes toward female sainthood. A woman needn't be an amazon like ancient Deborah to please God, nor a submissive hausfrau like Ruth. There is evidence for a school of prophetesses or Sybils of Yawheh in late antiquity whose messianic psalms and visions underlay the extant Sybilline Oracles of Judaism. This was one of the positive effects that Hellenic culture produced in Hebrew religion.

Another was the cultivation of inner life and experience, which inevitably led to the use of feminine archetypes. This was the influence of Hellenic, Egyptian, and Persian mystery religion, which itself was rooted in prehistoric fertility mysticism of ancient matriarchal cultures. As Jewish priests, teachers and sages came into contact with the religious ideas of other cultures in the Hellenistic age, they consciously rejected them, but *unconsciously* assimilated them. Other religions brought up issues that Judaism had never encountered. The Jewish response was not to become eclectic, but to reject the terminology of other traditions while at the same time accepting

a basic issue or problem. A specifically Jewish, Yahwistic solution was then developed to the problem.

The best example, of course, is the Creation story in Genesis. For two thousand years it had been the Creation story of Babylonian culture, preserved in the *Enuma Elish*. When the aristocracy of Jerusalem was taken in captivity to Babylon and confronted with the sophisticated myth and philosophy of the Zoroastrian Magi, the whole issue of cosmic "protology" or Creation was posed to them for the first time. Their response is preserved in the Creation story of Genesis, which is significant not in the fact that it exactly parallels the Babylonian Creation story, but in the ways in which it purposely deviates from it to show the majesty of Yahweh. In the Babylonian myth, light originally emanates from the gods. In Genesis, Yahweh is the One God who calls light into existence out of darkness.

In the same way Iranian ethical dualism influenced the aristocratic Hebrew priesthood, it had its effect upon prophetic thought. The school of Daniel was rooted in the prophetic mysticism of the Babylonian period. Daniel was, in fact, a Jewish saint living in the Babylonian court of Nebuchadnezzar. It was in Babylon that the vision of the Son of Man was given--not in Palestine. Centuries later it would be the Talmud of the Babylonian Diaspora that most strongly influenced medieval Judaism.

It was in this kind of milieu that Jewish mystics first sensed the femininity of the Godhead. The wisdom schools began to hypostatize the figure of Hokmah or Wisdom as the offspring or emanation of Yahweh. She (like the Greek Sophia) was the active Creator of the universe, for was it not through the Wisdom of Yahweh that all things were made? She became the idealized Teacher and Guide of the sage.

Other schools of mystics, such as the Merkabah or Chariot-Throne visionaries of the Enoch tradition, found another hypostasis for the femininity of Yahweh in His Shekinah or Presence. Still other Jews made more literal attempts to understand the femininity of Godhead by simply marrying Yahweh to some kind of Magna Mater, as the community of the Elephantine sanctuary on the Nile did. There is evidence for a female aspect or consort of Yahweh from ancient times, remembered in the haggadic legends concerning the Sabbath duty of Jewish husbands to give sexual pleasure to their wives in imitation of the Heavenly Love Feast of Adonai and his consort, Matronit. The modern pagans and Wiccans promote a similar ideal with their King and Queen deity.

In the era of Master Jesus this creative, glorified feminine aspect of Yahweh had been personified as the Spirit of Truth (cf. Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, where, as in John's Gospel, She is the chastiser and corrector of mankind), or as the Ruah Ha-Qodesh or "Holy Spirit" revered by Jesus. The root for "holy" has the sense of "clean, pure"--a great antithesis to the patriarchal concept of femininity as "unclean, impure." In fact, it would be more

linguistically accurate to refer to Her as the Pure Spirit.

The authors of John's Gospel remembered Jesus as saying,

GOD IS A SPIRIT, AND THOSE WHO WOULD WORSHIP HIM MUST WORSHIP  
IN THE SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH

Since God was perfect and whole, He could beget children of Himself without need of a consort. Godhead was androgynous, not merely "male." There were two functional aspects of God in Creation, then. The one was masculine and patriarchal, but the other was matriarchal. Yahweh was a Mother as well as a Father. As mentioned earlier, according to the Gospel of the Hebrews, Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit as his Mother:

EVEN NOW DID MY MOTHER THE HOLY SPIRIT TAKE ME BY ONE OF MY  
HAIRS, AND CARRIED ME AWAY TO THE GREAT MOUNT TABOR.

In late antiquity, the aspect of Godhead which was immanent and near at hand was considered to be feminine. The masculine was transcendent and beyond direct human contact, but the Shekinah, Hokmah or Pure Ruah of Yahweh dwelt invisibly with the mystic devotee and served as guide and corrector. It was She who mediated between masculine and transcendent Yahweh and His worshipper, and Who provided the instrument Yahweh used to speak through His prophets and prophetesses.

We are told that the charismatic rabbinic healers of Galilee "saw by the Pure Spirit" when they gave clairvoyant information or "truth." Jesus defended the Pure or Holy Spirit by Whom he exorcised the elijim when She was attacked by those who claimed She was Ba'alzebub, and he solemnly warned against that kind of spiritual blindness. This alone, of all "sins," could not be forgiven in the present 'Olam. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit was a double-bind situation, like that of the diver who cuts away his air hose in order to move more freely. It is the Spirit that mediates God's grace, and to deny the Spirit is to refuse God's grace.

The significance of the Aramaic term Abba which Jesus used to address Yahweh was not that he recognized God as a "Father." This relationship had been understood centuries ago in the writings of the prophets, who referred to the Fatherhood of God and Israel as God's Son. We find the reference even in the portion of the Wisdom of Solomon quoted at the beginning of this chapter, which was written perhaps a century before the time of Jesus. We find references to the fatherhood of Zeus in the beautiful discourses of Epictetus and other Hellenistic philosophers as early as Plato. The point of this address wasn't simply the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of mankind--although that is a good point.

Abba was the term used by toddlers to address their fathers, and Imma to address their mothers. It was a term of endearment, trust and respect. It was not, as some scholars have suggested, simply a form of baby-talk, like English Dada and Mama. That is demonstrable from the fact that it was used to address extremely aged and venerated persons of the Jewish community. It was not a diminutive, and it was more formal than English Daddy and Mommy.

Perhaps it can best be compared to the Italian Papa, from which one of the most venerated titles of Christendom derives--Pope. This is a term used by children at an early age, but which also applies to elderly and respected men of the community. We still hear it reflected in the vernacular "Pop" or "Pops."

English-speaking children of today have not been imbued with the same formal respect for parents that Italian and Jewish children were. For that reason terms like Daddy and Dad are far less formal than Aramaic Abba. Since there is no equivalent to Abba in English, it is best to translate it "Father" in the sense of "Parent." While this doesn't transmit as much of the original endearing quality, it at least avoids the misconception that Jesus addressed God as "Daddy!"

Why Abba? Because Jesus saw himself as God's servant-child. As a child he had the immanent familiarity with God to address him as his own offspring, yet as a servant the formal necessity to recognize what a great gulf separated the "I" and "Thou" of Jewish religion. Jesus spoke not as a child to his "Daddy," but as a mature and responsible man would to a great Elder of the community. But how much greater an Elder, for this was the Ancient of Days! The basic tone in Jesus' use of Aramaic Abba was not gleeful familiarity, but deep and abiding respect.

Let us understand, then, that the point of God's Fatherhood was His antiquity and profundity, rather than His "masculinity." To use modern terms, God was a revered Parent--both Father and Mother to Jesus. This is precisely why the Holy Spirit became such an important aspect even to gentile Christianity as to eventually produce the Doctrine of the Trinity. The Godhead of Yahweh as taught by Jesus could not be comprehended and experienced without the Ruah Ha-Qodesh or mystic, immanent feminine aspect of God. God was a Father and a Mother, and the communion of saints became His Son (i.e., "Child").

In earliest Egyptian Christianity this was recognized in the adaptation of the Isian Trinity to Christianity (Osiris, Isis and Horus). Here some of the most primitive Christian artifacts indicate that Godhead was worshipped as Father, Mother and Divine Child. In fact, this is the origin of Maryolatry, or the veneration of the Virgin Mother of Christ, who was portrayed using the same iconography as statues of Isis and the child Horus-Harpokrates.

This historical confusion between the wife of Joseph and the divine figure of the Holy Spirit led to the Theotokos versus Christotokos debates of later antiquity, and the eventual schism of the Monophysite churches and monasteries. Was Mary merely the mother of Christ, or did she incarnate God in her womb (Theotokos, "bearer of God")? The Egyptians could not

understand the patriarchal form of Christianity that had taken the lead through the See of Rome and denied the femininity of the Godhead. The feminine Hebrew concept of Spirit (Ruah) had been superseded by the gentile Greek concept of a "neuter" Spirit (Pneuma), which would eventually replace the true Mother of Christ--the Holy Spirit--in patriarchal Trinitarian theology.

Interestingly, however, there is good evidence that it was the early Egyptians who first fixed the date of Jesus' birth at December 25, and the Epiphany at January 6 of the solar year. These were the dates of the Julian calendar corresponding to dates of the Egyptian calendar for the main celebrations of the year. On Choiak 29 (= December 25) was the celebration of Aeon-Horus, or the Divine Child. In terms of astronomy, that was the winter solstice, when the sun (the Eye of Horus) was "reborn" and began its upward climb on the ecliptic. The shortest day and longest night of the year had passed, and now spring and summer were on their way. At this time there were great religious celebrations, and the giving of gifts was traditional in private families. After the Twelve Days of Horus-Harpokrateg had passed, another celebration was held called the Epiphany (or "Manifestation") of Aeon-Horus. This, too, was the probable antecedent of the Christian Festival of the Epiphany, which commemorates the visit of the Magi in the Gospel infancy stories.

As the religion of Jesus gradually supplanted that of Isis, the legends and stories of Christianity became normative in Egypt. The winter solstice was still a time to give and receive gifts, and still a celebration of the birth of the Divine Child. Only the names had changed. Most important to remember, the Egyptian Christians, regardless of their later Gnostical and ascetical tendencies, preserved a memory of Jesus' original teaching about the Holy Spirit as his Mother. They did this by accommodating to the Isian Trinity with one of their own formulations: Yahweh was God the Father, the Holy Spirit was God the Mother, and Christ (as the Body of all the faithful) was the Divine Child.

My reason for burdening the reader with this information will perhaps now be clear. I have tried to show that first, the Fatherhood of God, as understood by Jesus, was not a patriarchal survival, but a radically new and feministic ideal. Godhead was both masculine and feminine. There are many indications not only in Jewish intertestamental mysticism, but in the sayings of Jesus himself later rejected by patriarchal Christianity, that he considered the Ruah Ha-Qodesh, or Ruah Qodesh, to be his Divine Mother. Second, Jesus' relationship to his Divine Parent had two aspects--sonship and servitude. Jesus as the Servant-Child of Yahweh addressed him as Abba, which was both endearing and respectful, but not flippantly "familiar."

A final point should be made about divine sonship, as it has been called in patriarchal theology. To be accurate, the concept should be rendered scionship, because this more accurately reflects the authentic teaching later repeated by Paul, "in Christ there is no male or female." For Jesus, men and women alike could become "children" of God and heirs of His Rulership. Master

Jesus was radically feminist in that he accepted female disciples—a practice practically unheard of in the Judaism of the time. The issue here is not inheritance through a legal male heir, as it was in ancient society, but scionship, or the relation that genetic offspring have to a parent. That is why Father-Mother is the best translation of Abba in the teachings of Jesus—not “Father.”

As a Son of Man, Jesus was a scion or legal offspring of Yahweh. He was an offshoot or a “branch” (nazor). He had been “born from above,” as the Johannine tradition puts it. His birth was no longer fleshly, but spiritual.

CALL NO ONE YOUR PARENT [Abba], FOR YOU HAVE ONE PARENT ONLY, WHO IS IN THE HEAVENS.

Of Jesus John the Baptist is reported to have said, “I baptize you with water, but there is one to come who is mightier than I, whose sandals am unfit to unfasten (i.e., become his disciple). He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire (i.e., trials and suffering).” This baptism with the Ruah Qodesh had nothing to do with the glossolalia traditions which later developed in the evangelical churches under Peter. Rather, it referred to a highly personal and individual experience of the Divine Mother not unlike that of the wisdom schools. It was an ongoing “cleansing” or guidance by the Pure Spirit (rather than a superficial group ecstasy) that “baptized” the mebasrim of Jesus. The Johannine Gospel speaks of this “baptism” in the following way:

“The Resurrected Jesus said, ‘Shalom be with you.’ and he said, ‘As the Father sent me, so I send you.’ Then he breathed on them, saying, ‘Receive the Ruah Qodesh. If you remit anyone’s debts, they will not be collected. If you bind anything, it will be bound.’”

This does not give the mebasrim a divine prerogative over the debts of others, but explains how the Pure Spirit will operate. First of all, the apostles are expected to forgive their debtors. That is clear from all the other teachings of Jesus. It is not a matter of conditional forgiveness, or a matter of whether or not they choose to forgive. They *must* forgive, and Jesus promises that if they “release” anyone from the consequences of sin in this ‘Olam, they will be released in the Great ‘Olam. By the same token, if they bind anyone or anything (Hebrew root hazaq, to be “strong, prevail over”), such as the elilim, or if they deliver a prophecy of the Spirit against someone or something, it will be effective. The Holy Spirit will teach them “all things,” and She will give them binding prophecies as well as the power to overcome the world and cast out elilim, in this mystical Johannine “remembrance” of what Jesus taught.

A linguistically similar promise of the Spirit is found in synoptic tradition, but it has quite a different meaning. It is expressed in this way:



WHATEVER YOU BIND ON EARTH SHALL BE BOUND IN HEAVEN, AND  
WHATEVER YOU LOOSE ON EARTH SHALL BE LOOSED IN HEAVEN.

In this (probably) more authentic form as an historical logion of Master Jesus, it refers not to forgiving of sins, but to having the rabbinic right to interpret Scripture and create midrashim. That is, to determine which parts of Torah are literally binding, and which can be interpreted allegorically such that people are freed or "loosed" from more ancient and inappropriate concepts. The apostles are given the rabbinic right to determine which mitzvoth are considered binding, and which are non-binding.

This now gives us the clue to understand why the saying is connected in the Johannine Gospel with the Holy Spirit. It was originally a commission given by Jesus to his proven disciples allowing them to "bind" and "loose" their hearers from requirements of Torah. In other words, it was the Holy Spirit which would guide them in their interpretation of Scripture, so that they would know which mitzvoth were "heavier" and which were "lighter." But the right to "bind" and "loose," that is, to rabbinically interpret the will of God, has been expanded to a much greater commission. It includes not only the correct interpretation of Torah, but of all God's requirements of morality. By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the apostles can speak the truth about every kind of moral and spiritual problem. It is this that makes them "teachers" of the Message.

The Motherhood of the Ruah Qodesh was to be the guiding force for the mebasrim after the crucifixion of Jesus. When the apostles were taken before courts or councils they were not to ponder beforehand what to say. This would muddle their minds with all kinds of presuppositions and block the inspiration of the Holy Spirit when it was most needed. Instead, Jesus as the Risen Christ now guiding his community through the mediumship of his prophets, told them to be spontaneous, so that what they said could be inspired.

Historically, Master Jesus commanded his disciples to spread his teaching to all the Jews of Palestine and beyond. But they were not to go door to door, like modern-day evangelicals! They were to dwell modestly in one house in whatever city they chose, and they were to receive the people who were moved to come to them. The Holy Spirit would bring whom She desired to the mebasrim, as there was need and opportunity. They would make their home in every city wherever they saw the Son of Shalem settling in their inspired vision. If the Son of Shalem or "evidence of peace" did not appear to them, they were to move on--all at the behest of the Spirit. She was their Mother and their guide.

This, then, was what it meant to be a child of God. It meant discipline and obedience, but not to outer rules of diet or religious liturgy. Obedience was that of an inner fidelity, an openness to the constant guidance and inspiration of the Divine Mother who was with one at all

times--a "Comforter" or "Strengthened." It was She who would reveal God's razim, reprove, correct, and mediate the vision of truth--whether in Scripture, moral life or in revelation of unseen things. Like Jesus, each apostle must be both servant and child of Yahweh.

### **The Shalem or "Perfect" Disciple**

For Jesus there was never a sense that he or anyone else could be "perfect" on earth. But the goal of his Halakah or Way was God's Shalem or Perfection. Since each disciple was undergoing the rigors of obedience to the Rulership of Yahweh, he was being "perfected" in the flesh. Jesus said,

BE YE SHALEM ("whole, complete, perfect"), EVEN AS YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER IS SHALEM.

The kind of perfection Jesus meant was the ideal of interior peace and wholeness—a psychological, mental, emotional, and spiritual peace based upon confident intimacy with spiritual reality. It is the consciousness that arises from a calm abiding in the knowledge and Presence of God, and of knowing oneself as a true Scion of God. It manifests in simplicity and the instant obedience of a servant-child—but an interior obedience to Spirit and the motions of the divine yczcr. For the disciples of Master Jesus, this meant the acceptance of an inner, spiritual discipline quite unlike that of the disciples of John the Baptist. It was a quest for rulership of the self, or self-mastery

This is the point of departure for a more advanced study of the teachings of the Master Jesus beyond the scope of this book. But let us summarize the general outlines of the messianic mysticism of the Master Jesus.

First, faith itself brings shalem ("wholeness") and yeshua ("liberation"). Jesus constantly reminded those who had been healed or "made whole, shalem" that it was through their own amen or faithfulness this had occurred. The working of the razim or "mystery" of faith was altogether unconscious.

Jesus illustrated this with a mashal about a farmer who cast seed into the earth. In spite of the fact that he did nothing the seed germinated, sprouted up and brought forth fruit. Paul echoed this when he reminded the Corinthians that he had "planted" them, the Alexandrian disciple of John the Baptist named Apollos had "watered" them, but it was God who "gave the growth."

This mystery of faith was best summarized by Jesus in these words:

HE THAT KEEPS FAITH, TO HIM SHALL BE GIVEN. BUT AS FOR HIM WHO LACKS FIDELITY, EVEN THAT WHICH HE HAS SHALL BE TAKEN AWAY.

A second part of the mystery of faith is indicated in several ways throughout the New Testament, but perhaps most succinctly in the figures of the lamp set on a stand (rather than under a basket) and the city on the hill. The disciples are told to be like these things and to let their "light" shine before mankind. Why? Because it is in the manifesting of the Divine Way in one's life that faith works to bring forth fruit

THERE IS NOTHING HIDDEN EXCEPT FOR THE PURPOSE OF BEING REVEALED, NOR ANY SECRET THING DONE THAT WILL NOT BE KNOWN.

It is the mystery of faith to bring forth the good things that lie dormant in the treasury of the heart, and to expose the wicked things for what they really are. Faith is like a lump of leaven that brings everything up. It is like a farmer who let the weeds grow up along with the grain, so that in the harvest each would be manifest for what it really was. In fact, faith was like the Old Testament metaphor of casting your bread upon the water and having it returned to you. It was only by means of an outgoing process of active expression that it could grow. Jesus said,

WITH WHAT MEASURE YOU METE, IT SHALL BE MEASURED UNTO YOU.

In other words, to the extent that the disciple lets his light shine, his faith will grow and he will "have." Again, to the extent that he releases others from the consequences of their debts to him, his own debts to God will not come due.

For the same reason Jesus said,

IF ANYONE TAKES YOU TO COURT TO CLAIM YOUR COAT, LET HIM HAVE YOUR CLOAK AS WELL; AND WHOEVER WOULD COMPEL YOU TO WALK ONE MILE WITH HIM, WALK WITH HIM FOR TWO MILES. GIVE TO HIM THAT BEGS, AND DO NOT TURN AWAY FROM HIM WHO WOULD BORROW FROM YOU.

These are not "wisdom" sayings. Compare, for example, what wise old Benjamin Franklin would advise: "Neither a borrower nor a lender be." Rather, Jesus is saying that in order to be like God, the disciples must have the indiscriminant generosity of God.

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES; BLESS THEM THAT CURSE YOU; DO GOOD TO THOSE WHO HATE YOU, AND PRAY FOR THOSE WHO DESPITEFULLY USE YOU AND PERSECUTE YOU--THAT YOU MAY BE THE CHILDREN OF YOUR FATHER IN HEAVEN. FOR HE MAKES HIS SUN TO RISE UPON THE EVIL AND THE GOOD, AND HE SENDS RAIN UPON THE JUST AND THE UNJUST.

FOR IF YOU LOVE ONLY THOSE WHO LOVE YOU, WHAT MERIT IS THERE IN THAT? DON'T THE TAX-COLLECTORS DO THE SAME THING? AND IF YOU WISH WELL TO YOUR BROTHERS ONLY, WHAT IS THAT? DON'T THE TAX-COLLECTORS DO THE SAME THING? BE YE THEREFORE SHALEM, EVEN AS YOUR FATHER IN HEAVEN IS SHALEM!

In the same vein Jesus tells those who would become shalem that whenever they put on a dinner banquet, let them invite the poor, the lame, and the beggars, instead of using it as an occasion to repay social debts to their friends. That way they will find true merit in God's eyes. This is the way to build positive credits in the spiritual "ledger," for by *giving rather than receiving* one transcends the ledger and becomes like God. The ledger no longer becomes an issue if the disciple is willing to accept a higher kind of righteousness than that of the Pharisees.

DON'T STORE UP TREASURES FOR YOURSELVES ON EARTH, WHERE THE MOTHS AND THE RUST EAT THEM AWAY AND THIEVES BREAK THROUGH AND STEAL THEM. BUT LAY UP FOR YOURSELVES TREASURES IN THE HEAVENS, WHERE MOTHS AND RUST CANNOT RUIN THEM, AND THIEVES ARE UNABLE TO BREAK THROUGH AND STEAL. FOR WHERE YOUR TREASURE IS, THERE YOUR HEART WILL BE AS WELL.

Jesus referred to the inner heart, where the disciple withdrew for prayer, as the "treasury." Who can doubt, then, that for Jesus the Rulership or "Kingdom" of God was within? The final line of this saying might be turned around to say, "For where your heart is, there is your treasury."

The state of shalem was one of "peace, wholeness, integrity." For this reason the disciple must resolve the ever-present dualism that raged within him. We hear mention of this inner struggle many places in the New Testament, and it clearly points to original teachings of Jesus about "singleness" of mind and heart.

Paul speaks of the battle between "flesh (sarx)" and "spirit (pneuma)" that can be resolved only by the New Adam or Christ within each heart. James warns that the person who is "double-souled" or lacks integrity of intent and purpose will never get answer to prayer. Jesus said,

THE EYE GIVES LIGHT TO THE BODY. IF YOUR EYE IS SINGLE (i.e., "healthy, full of integrity"), YOU WILL HAVE LIGHT FOR YOUR WHOLE BODY. BUT IF YOUR EYE IS EVIL (i.e., "diseased, lacking integrity"), YOUR WHOLE BODY WILL BE IN DARKNESS. THEN, IF THE ONLY LIGHT WITHIN YOU IS DARKNESS, HOW BENIGHTED YOU ARE!

In Aramaic there is a pun on the idea of "health" with a word meaning "sincere, simple." This is the same word the Epistle of James uses to describe the state of moral integrity that God Himself exhibits in answering prayer "straightforwardly" in terms of need, rather than human desire. Thus if the "eye" or outlook is honest and straightforward, one sees things clearly. But if the outlook is unhealthy or "evil, looking for the worst in things or contemplating things with an evil intent, then how benighted that person must be!

The key to this Aramaic saying is in the semitic concept of tam, "integrity, wholeness, soundness, innocence," as opposed to ra', "evil." The word means very much the same as shalem, but applies to the uprightness and guilelessness of a person who is tammim or "morally perfect." From this root the Thummim or truth-teller is named (an ancient Hebrew oracle). Thus Jesus was advising his hearers to become WISE AS A SERPENT, AND INNOCENT AS A DOVE, for they were as sheep among wolves. The greater wisdom is accomplished by cultivating interior integrity, "singleness," or wholeness. This greater wisdom does not require education or literacy, but fidelity. Thus a true sage may appear to be a very simple person.

Thus in many ways the disciples were told that they must master the evil yetzer and emulate Yahweh's perfection by learning to become givers rather than receivers, and constantly let go of whatever debts might be owed to them by others. They were to love one another as themselves, and cherish the well-being of others in equal measure to their own well-being. But perhaps the most difficult teaching, and the hardest to master, concerned the overcoming of doubt and fear.

There is a basic existential angst that everyone has about future security. How will I pay my bills? Where will the next meal come from? Who will take care of things when I die?

There is no need to quote the entire text of the sermon concerning the birds of the air and the lilies of the field, how they neither spin nor toil, but have all their needs met by God's providence, and the same will be true for the person of faith. This same sermon is used in Stoic teachings of Epictetus about self-sufficiency, with the emphasis that birds and lilies, like philosophers, are always able to provide for themselves.

These are not contradictory points of view. Just as Master Jesus referred consciously to the proverb of Hillel in his positive restatement of it ("Do unto others..."), so he was also using a standard proverbial illustration with the birds of the air and the lilies of the field. Contrary to Christian interpretation, Jesus is *not* telling the disciples to abandon "spinning and toiling." Rather, he is advising them not to invest all their energy and attention in worldly efforts to make their daily bread. When he calls their attention to how beautifully God arrays the lilies of the field, which are here for only a short time, he points ahead to the ultimate purposes of human life on earth and asks rhetorically, "how much more gloriously will he cloth you [in the 'Olam Ha-Ba], O' ye of little faith?"

He is saying that God doesn't create the world and humanity for failure, but for eventually and ultimate triumph. It is the same kind of point he makes when asked why a man was born blind and answers, "So that [the deep and marvelous spiritual purposes of] God may be glorified in his healing." We are all slowly ascending the spiritual stairway from lowly, wounded, and imperfect states to that which God has prepared for us to eventually grow into—our divine destiny as heirs of the Malkuth, Rulership, or "Kingdom." We are little Godlets in the making.

The sermon on the birds and lilies (Mt. 7:25-34) is an Buddhist-like teaching about the "mind."

DO NOT BE ANXIOUS ABOUT YOUR LIFE, WHAT YOU SHALL EAT OR  
WHAT YOU SHALL DRINK, OR ABOUT YOUR BODY, WHAT YOU SHALL  
WEAR.

It is not simply about "worrying," but about mental agitation (deagah). The Semitic concept is often applied to the waves of the sea. the Psalms at one point draw an extended metaphor between the mind of one who is in terror and the waves of a stormy sea.

The mind is the most difficult inner realm to master. It throws up a constant idle banter which distracts the disciple from the promptings of Spirit, and has the power to paralyze the entire soul with things that are insubstantial and unreal—such as nightmares, fantasies of possible death and scenarios for potentially disastrous events. The mind is supposed to be a channel and instrument of the Spirit, but all too often it becomes a hindrance. It opposes itself to the "heart," and brings up all kinds of objections or doubts about the advisability of remaining faithful to God's will. It is also the author of dogma, creed and the "tradition of the Elders."

Jesus poses a solution to the problem of the mind:

SEEK YE FIRST THE MALKUTH OF GOD, AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Let God's Rulership, which is within the heart, take precedence over mental ideas. Let the "righteousness" or attunement and alignment with Divine Way and Will that comes through the scientia cordis or "knowledge of the heart" take first priority over the shrill arguments of the mind. It is from the "heart" that the still, small voice of God's Spirit emanates--not the mind. If this can be done, then the other problems will resolve themselves:

AND ALL THESE THINGS (food, drink, clothing) SHALL BE ADDED UNTO YOU.

Why? Because those who "have" spiritual fidelity, of which singleness of heart and the ability to keep focussed on true spiritual priorities are psychological manifestations, are the persons who will "get." By definition, they already "have."

There is one more reason not to worry about the future, and that is the fact that most things are not under one's own will and control. As Jesus put it:

DO NOT BE FEARFUL ABOUT THE FUTURE, FOR THE FRIGHTENING THINGS OF THE FUTURE BELONG TO THE FUTURE. IT IS ENOUGH TO BE CONCERNED WITH EVILS THAT EXIST IN THE PRESENT TIME.

To express the idea in another way, one can be effective only in the things that are at hand for him to do. The rest is only speculation and nervous energy. So live and act in the present, or, "Be here now!"

Jesus offered a most useful piece of advice on discerning what is good from what is evil. Nothing is ever a black-and-white issue, and all moral problems, when really probed by the mind, become murkier and less comprehensible. As a yardstick against which to measure moral issues Jesus proposed the metaphor of trees. Some bring forth edible fruit, but others produce only thistles and cones. If you want to know what *kind* of tree it is, you can taste the fruit--a metaphor for experience. There is no better way to tell than by experiencing something, and no more valid form of knowing than first-hand examination.

Also, time reveals the motives and forces that underly things. Even Gamaliel advised the Sanhedran, according to the Books of the Acts, to leave the messianic followers of Master Jesus alone, because if their movement was not from God, it would fade away; but if it were from God, nothing could stop it. He was following the wisdom of "knowing" a thing by its "fruits."

Jesus said:

BY THEIR FRUITS YE SHALL KNOW THEM.

The same applies to the inner motives and intentions of human beings. It is difficult to know whether to trust someone by what he says. The only way to get a good grasp of a person's motives is to look at what he or she actually *does*. The deeds, rather than the words, are what counts. They are his "fruits." If you want to know which politician to elect, look at his previous record as a representative of the people. If you want to hire a musician, listen to his music rather than his sales talk. It is works, not words, that constitute the real moral substance of any issue.

Finally, Jesus indicated in many ways that as the disciple makes himself faithful to the inner depths of his being, he more nearly approaches the fullness and perfection of God. I consider the following logia from the Gospel of Thomas to be essentially authentic.

IF YOU DO NOT FAST FROM THE WORLD, YOU WILL NOT FIND THE KINGDOM, AND IF YOU DO NOT KEEP THE SABBATH EVERY DAY YOU WILL NOT SEE THE FATHER...

IF A PERSON IS SINGLE [i.e., shalem] HE WILL BE FILLED WITH LIGHT, BUT IF HE IS DIVIDED HE WILL BE FILLED WITH DARKNESS...

IF YOU BRING FORTH THAT WHICH IS WITHIN YOURSELVES, THAT WHICH YOU HAVE WILL SAVE YOU. IF YOU DO NOT HAVE THAT WITHIN YOURSELVES, THAT WHICH YOU LACK WILL KILL YOU...

WHEN YOU MAKE THE TWO ONE, YOU SHALL BECOME SONS OF MAN, AND WHEN YOU SAY, "MOUNTAIN, BE MOVED." IT WILL BE MOVED...

IF TWO MAKE PEACE (shalom) WITH EACH OTHER IN THIS ONE HOUSE (the heart of the disciple), THEY SHALL SAY TO THE MOUNTAIN, "BE MOVED," AND IT SHALL BE MOVED...[a metaphor for being able to accomplish anything]

WHEN YOU MAKE THE TWO ONE, AND THE INNER AS THE OUTER, AND THE OUTER AS THE INNER, AND THE ABOVE AS THE BELOW, AND WHEN YOU MAKE THE MALE AND THE FEMALE INTO SINGLE ONE, SO THAT THE MALE WILL NOT BE MALE NOR THE FEMALE FEMALE, AND WHEN



YOU MAKE EYES IN THE PLACE OF AN EYE, AND A HAND IN THE PLACE OF A HAND, AND A FOOT IN THE PLACE OF A FOOT, AND AN IMPULSE (yetzer) IN THE PLACE OF AN IMPULSE, THEN SHALL YOU ENTER THE MALKUTH OF GOD.

All these sayings emphasize the quest to become shalem within and tammim in regard to the community of mankind. Jesus told many mashlim about finding lost coins and lost sheep, to emphasize the care God has for each individual seeker of His Rulership. In the synoptics the mashlim are concerned with God's care for debtors, and in the Gospel of Thomas they are applied to God's care for those whom he seeks for His Kingdom. But perhaps there was not really that great a difference in the original teachings. All are debtors, all are seekers.

In both the synoptics and in Thomas there are many stories designed to show how demanding discipleship was. Jesus compared the decision to seek the "Kingdom" to the decision a king makes whether to fight or surrender. Again, it is like a person who wanted to kill a strong man. He practiced at home until he could drive his sword through the wall, then went out to battle the enemy. The disciple of Jesus must realize that a decision to fight the battle of fidelity means that he will engage in constant struggle with the cosmic and interior Satans. He must become single-minded and prepared if he is to succeed.

But when he does succeed, said Jesus,

OUT OF HIS BELLY SHALL FLOW RIVERS OF LIVING WATER.

Then he will bubble and burst forth with the wisdom of the Spirit-possessed or prophet. The Spirit of God and the Son-of-Man community will draw near to him and manifest themselves to him.

BLESSED ARE THE POOR (ebionim) WHO ARE IN COMMUNION WITH THE SPIRIT, FOR THE MALKUTH OF GOD IS THEIRS.

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO MOURN, FOR THEY SHALL SUBMIT AND HUMBLE THEMSELVES (nacham) BEFORE GOD.

[Here the Greek parakalein is passive for Hebraic-Aramaic nacham in piel, literally "to be submitted," the usual form translated metanoiein, "to repent." The Greek has made sense out of the contrast between mourning and being "comforted," but lost the original sense of Jesus. "Mourning" led to "submission" (cf. James 4.9f.)]

\* BLESSED ARE THE AMME-HA-ERETZ (common simple people), FOR THEY SHALL INHERIT THE EARTH [i.e., become the future generations of the righteous].

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HUNGER AND THIRST FOR JUSTICE, FOR THEY SHALL BE FILLED.

BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL, FOR THEY SHALL RECEIVE MERCY.

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHOSE HEARTS ARE PURE, FOR THEY SHALL SEE GOD [through prayer, vigil, meditation, and contemplation.]

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO MAKE SHALOM, FOR GOD SHALL CALL THEM HIS CHILDREN.

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HAVE SUFFERED PERSECUTION FOR THE CAUSE OF JUSTICE, FOR THE MALKUTH OF GOD IS THEIRS.

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

This brief glossary of Hebraic-Aramaic religious terminology is arranged in alphabetical order according to the English transliteration. The word is listed, then the Hebrew bi- or trilateral root under which it can be found in a Hebrew dictionary, and a brief definition according to its use in the teachings of Jesus.

Abba	אב	Father-Mother; Parent; Distinguished Elder
Adam	אדם	Humanity, Mankind; Archtypal Humanity
Adonai	אדון	God Yahweh as Master, Lord of All
Amen	אמן	Fidelity, strength, reliability; truly, faithfully
Amana		Covenantal agreement
Emunah		Honorable understanding
Amme-ha-Eretz	ארצ	Common people of the land
Bar-Enash, Bar-Adam	בר אנש	Son of Man; humble self-designation
Basrah	בשר	Divine Word, Message of good tidings
Berakah	ברכה	Blessing received; praise rendered to God
Berith	ברית	God's Testament or Covenant with Israel
Dabar	דבר	Word of God, thing, divine act, prophecy
Deagah	דאג	Fear, worry, inner turmoil, double-soulness
Ebion	אבני	Poor person; a religious keeper of poverty
Eboy		Material poverty
Elil	אל	Nothingness; invisible sublunary demon
Elohim		Gods, Godhead; ancient plural form
El		God; a god—pre-Yahwistic Name
-el		Suffix meaning “-of God” used in naming of angelic functions of God
Emeth	אמת	Truth in the sense of a righteous deed
Havurah	חבר	Jewish prayer and fellowship group
Halakah	הלכה	Walk, way of life; rabbinic rules of life
Haggadah, Aggadah	הלכה	Recitation; stories of saints and martyrs
Hayyub	חיב	Moral debt; “sin”
Hesed	חסד	Love, zeal, devotion; mercy
Hokmah	חכמה	Wisdom (feminine) of God; equivalent to Sophia and Logos of Hellenistic Judaism

and		Gnosticism
-im, -oth		Hebrew and Aramaic plural suffixes
Yeshua	ישוע	Liberation; Joshua, Jesus; Yehoshua
Malkuth	מלכות	Rulership, mastery, kingship, (of God)
Mashal	משל	Story, allegory, pericope, parable
Mar	מר	A human spiritual master, "Lord;" confused by gentile Christians with Hebrew <u>Adonai</u> and applied to Jesus as Greek <u>Kyrios</u> as to Lord God Almighty
Massah	מסה	Trial, test, "temptation"
Mebasrim	בשר	Divine Messengers, Apostles, prophets
Messiah	משיח	One anointed or appointed by God for a great spiritual mission; Greek <u>Christos</u>
Midrash	מדרש	Interpretive commentary on Scripture
Mishpat	משפט	Judgment; justice rendered
Mitzvah	מצוה	Divine commandment
Nacham, Naham	נחם	Submission (to God's rule); "repentance"
Nasa Beaph	נשא באפ	Self-magnification in public; "taking;" spiritual <u>hubris</u> or pride; "hypocrisy"
Nazor	נצר	Root, branch; messianic scion of Yahweh
Nebi	נבי	Prophet, one overflowing with Spirit like a bubbling spring; inspired shaman of God
'Olam	עלם	Age, aeon; universe, world; state of being
'Olam-Ha-Ba		The Messianic Age to come both after personal death of the righteous and eventually upon earth for all humanity in the remote future
Qimah	קימה	Resurrection or Standing Forth after death of the righteous; continuity of consciousness and personal identity as angelic being and arisen saint who invisibly assists the incarnate righteous in Divine <u>Malkuth</u>
personal		
Rabbi	רבי	"My great one;" master, teacher
Razim	רז	Divine secrets, mysteries of God
Ruah Qodesh, Ha-Qodesh	רוח קדש	Holy Spirit of God, Pure Spirit (feminine)
Sabaoth	צבא	Hosts, great numbers; all sentient beings

Sabbath	שבת	Rest; state of harmonious peace, pleasure, and bliss; holiday (“holy day”)
Shalom	שלום	Peace, harmony, holistic integrity
Shalem		Whole, perfect, integrated
Shekinah	שכינה	Immanent Presence of God (feminine)
Shofar	שופר	Ram’s horn, liturgical trumpet
Tam	תם	Whole, upright, righteous, just
Tammim		Those who have perfect integrity
Yetzer	יצר	Internal image, impulse of the heart; the Divine <u>Yetzer</u> is the Image and Guidance of God within each heart, the Way of Life; the evil <u>yetzer</u> is the Way of Death within each heart that tries to rule each soul
Yahweh	יהוה	The unpronouncable Tetragrammaton or Name of Yahweh revealed to Moses
Zedek	צדק	Uprightness before God; theological “righteousness, justification” by faithfulness

## **FURTHER READING**

There are many non-technical books available in the English language for a general audience which have been written by competent scholars. I commend these books to the interested student. Usually they can be found in stock only at theological bookstores, university libraries, or quality general bookstores. They are well worth the effort of locating, even if it means going through the reference publication called Books in Print (for the current year) and writing the publishers for copies. It is unfortunate that these excellent writings meet with so little commercial support, sometimes suffering an open boycott at church related bookstores.

### **General Works on Christian Origins and the New Testament**

THE NEW TESTAMENT: A historical Introduction to the Earliest Christian Writings. B. D. Ehrman (NY, 1997)

This is the text we use in the Home Temple studies for Diaconate. It is nicely illustrated, easy to read, and is based on the most recent scholarship. I recommend this for the serious student who wants a good general introduction.

THE EARLIEST GOSPEL. F. C. Grant (New York, Abbingdon Paperback H-3, 1943) This excellent work by one of America's foremost scholars is a series of studies of the oral evangelical traditions at the point that they were crystallized into written documents of the early gentile (Greek) churches. There are twelve studies, each on issues of interest to the general reader, which distill the insights of biblical scholarship in many areas. If I were to recommend a single book for a general reader, this would be it.

FROM TRADITION TO GOSPEL. M. Dibelius (New York, Scribner Library Paperback SL 124)

The classic work which deals with the modes and factors influencing oral transmission of the Message of Jesus in the first two generations of disciples. The school of criticism which arose in the wake of Dibelius' work applied source criticism and "form" or "tradition-history" criticism to the New Testament, and produced the modern understanding that the Christian scriptures must be intelligently interpreted rather than slavishly accepted in literal detail. Good English translation, but the subject material is somewhat technical. Worth the effort of reading or skimming.

JESUS IN HISTORY, H. C. Kee (New York, Harcourt, Brace & World Paperback, 1970)

This is the best and most easily understood overview of contemporary scholarly consensus up to 1970 about the relationship of the historical Jesus to the New Testament. It summarizes the origins and characteristics of each gospel explains source criticism, "form" criticism and the most recent addition to analysis called redaction criticism. Good introductory text.

JESUS, H. Conzelmann (Philadelphia, Fortress Press Paperback, 1973, 1975)

This is a translation of Professor Conzelmann's excellent article for general readers which appears in the definitive German Protestant encyclopedia Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart. It outlines the history of modern scholarship for the past century, what is known of the life and times of Jesus, the Aramaic-Hebraic Galilean religious idiom, and his original preaching or Message. Current to 1975. The book has been augmented with a complete and useful bibliography of important scholarly works on all topics which are available in English. Well worth the price, and less than 100 pages in length.

### Research into the Logia and Parables of Jesus

REDISCOVERING THE TEACHING OF JESUS. N. Perrin (New York, Harper & Row Paperback, RD 151)

This is a comprehensive modern classic for the general reader, and deals with large segments of Jesus' teaching, saying by saying. It contains an excellent annotated bibliography with copious commentary on each work cited. Unfortunately Perrin is not an exciting or imaginative writer. He, like so many others, is a compiler and encyclopedist. He also brings with him an almost unquestioning acceptance of what might be called "scholarly dogma" that rules out the possibility of the kind of syncretical interpretation that I have attempted in this volume. However, any serious student of Jesus should possess Perrin's very useful book as a reference work.

THE PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM. C. H. Dodd (New York, Scribner Library Paperback SL 125. 1961)

THE PARABLES OF JESUS. J. Jeremias (New- York, Scribner Studies in Biblical Interpretation Paperback 4-4055, 1963)

PARABLES OF JESUS: INTRODUCTION AND EXPOSITION. E. Linnemann (New York. Harper and Row, 1966)

These are the classic general works on the parables of Jesus. C. H. Dodd, the great English scholar whose many excellent books are all worth reading, opened up the field in the mid-1930's when he showed that the parables must be understood in the context of the issues to which Jesus spoke, rather than in the context of interpretation for which they were used in the Greek New Testament. Jeremias took the insight much further and published the first really syncretical interpretation of Jesus' teaching. For the first time scholars began to realize how different the Message of Jesus was from that proclaimed in the New Testament. Ms. Linnemann's doctoral dissertation on the parables became a classic work of interpretation, and carried research on the parables into its contemporary state.

THE PRAYERS OF JESUS. J. Jeremias (London, SCM Press Studies in Biblical Theology, Second Series #6, 1967)

Jeremias is one of the great scholars of the Aramaic background to or Words of Jesus



(i.e., literal sayings of Jesus as opposed to his insights in this volume are most valuable, especially on the Aramaic Abba, "Father-Mother." Another of his books on the Eucharistic Words of Jesus is in English. The entire SCM series is excellent, as are the SPCK Publications

THE WORDS OF JESUS, G. Dalman (Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1902)

This still stands as a classic and definitive work on the Aramaic language and thought idiom underlying the teachings of Jesus. It was translated into English by D. M. Kay and distributed in New York by Scribner's Sons. Look for it in large academic libraries and make a copy of it if you can. Even though it may seem quite technical, it is filled with definitive interpretation.

#### **FURTHER GUIDANCE IN RESEARCH:**

DER SPIEGEL ON THE NEW TESTAMENT, W. Harenberg (New York, Macmillan Paper back #08541, 1970)

Excellent guide to the issues of research, with broad bibliography and clear presentation of scholarly views in opposition to fundamentalism.

#### **The "Son of Man" and Early Jewish-Christian Christology:**

A good bibliographical summary of research to the mid-1960's can be found in Norman Perrin's REDISCOVERING THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS (see above). He describes the importance of Todt's THE SON OF MAN IN SYNOPTIC TRADITION and the ensuing discussions of Hahn, Jungel and Higgins, as well as the disagreements of Vielhauer, Colpe and others. How authentic are the "Son of Man" sayings? Todt's school of thought, which culminated in Teeple's "The Origin of the Son of Man Christology," Journal of Biblical Literature 84 (1965), had concluded that these archaic sayings which characterize the lost "Q" source or common material used by Matthew and Luke are not original with Jesus. The title "Son of Man" is supposed to have been an early Hellenistic Jewish-Christian (perhaps Palestinian) messianic designation for Jesus--a supposed "fossil" of an early Christology.

However, with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Nag Hammadi Coptic Gnostic library, and other advances in knowledge about heterodox Judaism of the period, scholarly opinion has begun to abandon the idea that the Son of Man sayings are secondary. A more informed school of thought recognizes the authenticity of the title. Perhaps one of the earliest insights into

the Son of Man tradition was articulated by the British scholar C. F. D. Moule in his review of Todt's book. He said,

"The Son of Man, in the only document known to have been available then (the Book of Daniel), stands for a loyal martyr-group who are brought to glory and vindicated through suffering." (Theology LXIX, 1966, p. 174.)

Thus what had been discovered about the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, and the murdered wise-man or Son of God in the Wisdom of Solomon, and other Jewish saint-martyr figures of heterodox Judaism, also applied to the Son of Man tradition. Namely, such figures were always collective representations of Israel or the communio sanctorum of a particular group. Participation in the Son-of-Man community of saints explains where the Pauline ideas of being "in Christ" and being part of the "Body of Christ" originated. Thus Jesus could speak of himself as the Son of Man in both present and future tenses, as could all members of the "body."

THE CHRISTIAN AND GNOSTIC SON OF MAN, F. H. Borsch (Studies in Biblical Theology 14, Alec R. Allenson, Naperville, Illinois, 1970)

This excellent new monograph shows that the title "Son of Man" could not have been the secondary creation of a Hellenistic Jewish-Christian community. It suggests that C. Colpe, whose article on Jewish sources of the Son of Man tradition was published in Theologisches Wtlrterbuch zum Neuen Testament and described by Perrin as "unconvincing," is correct.

THE CHRISTOLOGY OF EARLY JEWISH CHRISTIANITY, R. N. Longenecker (Studies in Biblical Theology 17, Alec R. Allenson, Naperville, Illinois, 1970)

An excellent comprehensive review of research into the messianic motifs of early Jewish Christianity. See pages 92-93 for discussion of the Son of Man problem and his well-founded conclusions supporting the interpretations I have used in this book. (All the Studies in Biblical Theology monographs are top-quality discussions of interesting subjects, usually comprehensible to English-speaking lay persons.)

#### **OTHER TOPICS OF INTEREST:**

Purchase Conzelmann's JESUS (see above) and use the excellent English bibliography, which is divided according to topic and augmented with a general selection of English works.

#### **History of Research on Jesus:**

To become familiar with the work of great scholars leading into the 20th century, read Dr. Albert Schweitzer's QUEST OF THE HISTORICAL JESUS. This will take you through the achievements of researchers from earliest times, including the modern 19th-century scholars like Lietzmann, Harnack, Strauss, Bauer, Resch, Bousset, Schjrer, Dalman, Weiss and Wrede.

In simplest terms, Schweitzer's book helped bring about the consensus of modern scholars that, given the characteristics of the sources (mainly the Greek New Testament), very little can be accurately known about the Jesus of history. It also helped to establish the "eschatological" view of Jesus which has dominated modern German and American scholarship, and constitutes the basic data which Professor Rudolph Bultmann has tried to interpret in his existential "demythologizing" school of thought.

Bultmann has simply tried to make spiritual sense out of the Schweitzerian Jesus, and has done an excellent job of it. After all, there is very little that can be done with a Jewish prophet who believed fanatically that the world was commg to a violent end, and armies of angels would shortly conquer the hosts of Caesar to establish a Jewish theocracy--and who, as Schweitzer points out, was simply "wrong" about history.

But Schweitzerians and Bultmannians are not the only qualified scholars, and there has been a wide range of well-founded opinion which disputes this view of messianic eschatology. Many English-speaking scholars, such as C. H. Dodd and E. R. Goodenough, anticipated the recent insights of scholarship in their emphasis upon the "realized eschatology" or thoroughgoing mysticism of Jesus. Others saw that underlying the literal Parousia or "Second-Coming" expectations of the early churches were concrete misinterpretations of originally abstract religious terminology used by Jesus. The expectation of imminent apocalyptic world-change implied in the Jesus of the Gospels reflects the attitude of the Church, rather than the Jesus of history. The Greek-speaking Church has given literal meanings to allegorical symbols of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel and other artifacts of Jewish apocalypse, reconstructing them in light of their

theological understanding of Christ and history. As a result, the New Testament writings contain many competing Christologies and theologies of history. New apocalyptic figures appear, such as the Anti-Christ and the Man of Lawlessness, none of which have anything to do with the original teachings of Jesus.

### The Jesus Seminar

In the past decade a great deal of work has been done by the so-called Jesus Seminar of liberal scholars, whose work is detested by religious fundamentalists and other conservatives. Although it is very "strong meat" that seeks to destroy all of the comfortable fictions that make up so much of the fabric of modern religion, and although it is definitely not research that seems to build up and inspire "faith," it is an excellent exercise of scholarly debate based upon the best data religious scholars have about Jesus and his teachings.

The academic conclusions of the Jesus Seminar fully support what I have presented in *The Authentic Jesus*. Which I wrote many years before the Jesus Seminar convened its first meeting. But much of what the public hears or reads about the Jesus Seminar is sensational journalism or misrepresentation. I strongly recommend books written by the scholars of the Jesus Seminar, even though I might not agree with their personal biases, their views on Resurrection, or whatever, and even though I might not find their conclusions supportive of my personal spirituality. Their scholarship is preferable to Christian dogmatic theology and it opens the door to a better way for those who depend not upon the "shrill voices of the mind," but the eternal knowledge of the heart.

Here are some newer publications that I recommend:

### LIBERATING THE GOSPELS : Reading the Bible With Jewish Eyes : Freeing Jesus from 2,000 Years of Misunderstanding by Bishop John Shelby Spong (SF, 1997)

This book shows the purposes for which the Christian canonical Gospels were written. They were not "eye witness" histories of Jesus, but documents used in proselytism and weekly ritual for the emerging gentile churches. John's Gospel especially was a canon of sermons based upon the Jewish cycle of the year and applied much like modern churches and synagogues use a cycle of scriptural selections and *parashath* readings coordinated with weekly church and synagogue year services.

### THE JESUS LEGEND by G. A. Wells, R. J. Hoffman (NY, 1996)

Again, this book is suggested not for spiritual inspiration but for historical perspective. It is vital that we build our spiritual perspective upon truth, not fiction. This book walks the reader

through the historical realities of Christian origins, the Jesus of history, and the Gospels.

**The So-Called Aramaic Version of the New Testament:**

For further readings on the Aramaic background to the teachings of Jesus in the Greek New Testament, I recommend the following scholars: Matthew Black, Gustav Dalman, C. F. Burney, A. Dupont-Sommer, Joachim Jeremias, Franz Rosenthal, and their associates or students.

Do not be taken in by Lamsa's so-called "Aramaic" version of the New Testament, which is available in many bookstores. This is no more than a translation of the Syriac New Testament, which resulted when early Church scholars translated the Greek Testament into Syriac for Syrian Christians. Lamsa's translation of the Syriac New Testament is useful, since many of the original semitic idioms which disappear in Greek can be recovered in Syriac, which is a language cognate with Aramaic. Unfortunately, however, Lamsa has made an uncritical translation which suggests several rewordings that are simply wrong. It is of little use in discovering the original teachings of Jesus.

Also, do not believe the claims of Szekely, who has published what he represents to be translations of 3rd-century Aramaic gospels written by Essenes. The Essenes were slaughtered by the Romans in the first century of the Common Era and, like the Sadducees, Zadokites, and Zealots, disappeared from history. He has never been willing to place such manuscripts at the disposal of the academic world for examination. If they are, in fact, real manuscripts they are not in Aramaic but Old Slavonic, and do not date from the 3rd century but the 7th. They may have value as artifacts of a specific Gnostic Christian group in the early medieval period, but are not ancient Aramaic writings which illuminate the teachings of Jesus.

During the 1930's there was a strenuous attempt to "get behind" the Greek New Testament to find hypothetical Aramaic originals. The research was thorough and exhaustive. It showed without doubt that the writings of the New Testament were composed in Greek--at least the writings now extant which we call the New Testament. Perhaps future archeology will unearth the original Hebrew gospel said to have been used by Matthias, or other authentic Aramaic records of the teachings of Jesus. But as it stands, no such documents have been found and verified. Do not accept the claims of sensationalists who publish documents like the Essene Gospel of Peace. Instead, keep in mind what I have said in my introduction about the three kinds of "scholars."

Make an attempt to discern what is reliable and accurate. Do not be disappointed to find that there is disagreement among contemporary scholars. Such disagreements are the essence of free inquiry, and they lead to a basic consensus. But watch for the hidden "axes" to grind and make your own assessment of the evidence presented.