Emic or Etic?
Interpreting the Hebrew Scriptures

A tangential issue that must be addressed is the idea that the negative language the gospels direct against Jews represents nothing more than a family squabble, or conflicts between different groups of first century Jews, and does not reflect Gentile Christians speaking ill of Jews. The evidence offered below indicates that the etic readings of Judaism by the writers of the Synoptic gospels were not part of either mainstream Judaism or any identifiable Jewish sub-group of the era. The ideology presented in these gospels is clearly Christo-centric, and the points being made far too often fit a Roman or Hellenistic context to sustain the idea that we are reading nothing more than the saga of some Jews involved in a petty dispute. In addition, the church fathers, who were certainly not Jewish, had no difficulty in using the NT to denigrate Judaism in a most derogatory fashion. This they could do without the necessity of rephrasing as Gentiles what they read in a Jewish New Testament. All they needed to do was to take seriously the NT on its own terms as they read and understood it. As it stood, it fit well with the decidedly non-Jewish world views and cultures of the church fathers.

See Also: *How Jews and Christians Interpret Their Sacred Texts* (Resource Publications, 2014).

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It is common to speak of the Hebrew Scriptures or the "Old Testament" as the sacred text that Judaism and Christianity share as sister religious systems. It is also readily apparent that the *conclusions* presumed to be the true meaning of that common *source* text were radically different in Judaism and in Christianity

[1]My colleague, Dr. Brad Storin, read this paper and offered numerous suggestions and criticisms that made it better. I offer him my thanks, without blaming him for any of my errors.

respectively, differences that resulted in the production of *interpretative* texts as dissimilar as the Mishnah-Tosephta-Gemara ("Talmud") of the rabbis and the "New" Testament of the early Church. My purpose in writing *How Jews and Christians Interpret Their Sacred Texts: A Study in Transvaluation*[2] was to examine the hermeneutical methods employed by early Jewish rabbis (100 BCE-220 CE) and New Testament authors in interpreting their common sacred text in a manner that led to the Talmud and the New Testament respectively.

Attempts to describe exactly how the two religions arrived at such disparate conclusions about the true meaning of the Hebrew Scriptures have yielded a variety of scholarly answers, one of the more surprising of which is exemplified in the theological treatment of Judaism and Christianity by Professor Hartmut Gese of Tübingen.[3] As Gese would have it, Judaism reduced the "old" tradition and initiated a "new" one that contrasted sharply with everything that had preceded it. In the scheme of Gese, it was the Pharisees who enacted a "reduction" of the available written traditions in Judaism by excluding various works from the *Ketuvim* ("Writings") before proceeding to rabbinic/Talmudic reformulations.[4]

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[2]Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock: Resource Publications, 2014. Cited hereafter as *Jews and Christians*.

[3]*Vom Sinai zum Zion.* Munich: Christian Kaiser, 1974, pp. 11-30.

[4]Early Jewish scholars did exclude the deutero-canonical and apocryphal works later accepted into the larger Christian "Old Testament." Christianity also "reduced" the number of gospels and other works (*Didache*, Shepherd of Hermas, Epistle of Barnabas, etc.) it accepted into the NT canon. The very nature of producing a "canon" involves reduction via the process of adverse

By way of contrast, Gese argues, the Old and New Testaments of the *Christian* Bible attest a single closed corpus or continuum of tradition, the New Testament forming the natural completion of the process of divine revelation begun in the Old. That is, whereas Judaism *interrupted* the flow of ideas introduced in the "Old" Testament, Christianity *maintained and completed* the ancient stream of tradition and, despite the name of its own sacred work, contributed nothing "new" methodologically.

The position of Gese is puzzling, and quite contrary to the facts that have faced Jewish expositors of sacred Scripture for almost 2,000 years. Indeed, we might be excused for noting that Jewish students facing the sixty-three volumes of the Talmud would find little solace in the idea that the early rabbis[5] had "reduced" the written traditions of Judaism. Further, these early Jewish scholars certainly did not view their work as a discontinuation of biblical traditions and laws.[6]

Similarly, I suspect that many Christian scholars would find unsettling the idea that the early Church, after reducing the number of available gospels from more than twenty to a mere four, produced a *New* Testament canon containing

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selection. The question is whether a particular work that does not make it "in" thereby creates a shift in the theological focus of the canon as a whole.

[5]The *Tanna'im* (ca. 100 BCE-220 CE) who produced the Mishnah and the Tosephta and the *'Amoraim* (ca. 220-550 CE) who compiled the Gemarah.

[6]As "Step Two" described below illustrates. See note 18.

nothing new![7] The simplistic sketch of Gese falls upon particularly hard times in light of the interpretations offered by Paul regarding *kashrut* (1 Cor. 8:8) or circumcision (Gal. 5:2; 6:11-15),[8] and shatters completely in light of the stunning conclusion that Jews and their "law" (now totally *passé*) were the slave offspring of Ishmael, while Christians were the true descendants of Isaac, who, like his father Abraham, had nothing at all to do with the *torah* (Gal. 4:28-31).[9]

A similar but more common scholarly view is the lip service given by Christian authors of "Old Testament Theology" to the necessity of establishing a straight line link with the New Testament. That such a link is often strained and in fact virtually impossible from the starting point of responsible exegesis is a point well made by Professor James Barr.[10] Yet the difficulty of establishing credible ligatures from Old to New and the uniqueness of the rabbinic reconstruction of biblical Yahwism into nascent Judaism work together to create the perception that the New Testament treatment of the Old Testament is so fundamentally different from the rabbinic reformulation of the same text that two competing *methods* of interpretation must be assumed.

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[7]Apparently Gese's view is that the Church was correct in its choices, while the rabbis were not. This is as ideologically driven a premise as one can imagine. See below.

[8]And see also Galatians 6:12-15. Although Paul discusses very little about the life of Jesus, it is interesting that Paul does not discuss his circumcision, which Luke (2:21) presents as a very significant act. See further below.

[9]I have discussed Paul's treatment of *torah* in *Jews and Christians, 190-195.*

[10]*The Concept of Biblical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999).

This assumption about exegetical methodology is far too simplistic, and is beset by two great difficulties. First, it does not account for the ways in which interpreters of the two sister faiths operated from earliest times with stunning freedom to reach theological positions that suited their own social, religious, and political needs. Second, it does not explain adequately why this freedom always tied itself to canonical sacred literature, virtually the *same* corpus of material for both Judaism and Christianity (!), no matter how ill-suited the ligatures appear retrospectively to the modern mind. In *Jews and Christians*, I have illustrated the manner in which the rabbis and the early Christian authors dealt with specific OT texts to produce the Talmud and the NT.[11] In this article, I wish to address a slightly different question.

Since the arrival at radically different conclusions about the meaning of the same Scriptural canon cannot be explained as the results of different methods of interpretation, the question arises as to what can account for the differences. In case after case, *ideological premises* arising out of the different cultural wombs of nascent Judaism and Christianity hold the key. Conclusions were routinely set forth in advance of textual analysis, and the exegetical work done to support those conclusions is more accurately described as *eisegesis* instead of *exegesis*. That is, the same method used by both sides was that of reading *into* the text what early

[11]See chapters three and four, 55-144.

interpreters wanted, needed, and presumed to be there rather than the dogged reading *out of* the text the building blocks that could be forged into objective conclusions founded on the text.[12]

The rabbis sought desperately to understand the new world in which they were forced to reside, a world without an independent Israelite nation, no king, no army, no Temple and system of sacrificial liturgy. Their treatment of canonical "Scripture" functioned via the use of "*transvaluation*," an attempt to retain the core values of authoritative sacred texts that had arisen in and were bound to specific times and situations. At the same time, they sought to extrapolate from those older texts something relevant to current faith and praxis. In other words, they sought to express their understanding of Scripture by linking back to and reformulating their ancient narratives into a system that could function in modernity as they experienced it.

Although first and second century CE Christianity cannot be described as a single, coherent tradition, no strand within its borders failed to realize early on that it could not define itself as it desired simply by reformulating or reparsing the old

[12]Bart D. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (San Francisco: Harper, 2005) expresses a similar idea in describing the fact that not all NT authors agree: "They had their own perspectives, their own beliefs, their own views, their own needs, their own desires, their own understandings, their own theologies; and these perspectives, beliefs, views, needs, desires, understandings, and theologies *informed everything they said*" (pp. 11-12, emphasis added).

narratives. Indeed, the extensive use of "typology" and "allegory"[13] to interpret the Old Testament was necessary precisely because the old stories as they stood did not provide an adequate foundation for the system early Christian authors wished to erect. The Exodus could not serve as the center of New Testament theology, Jewish law was outdated and needed to be set aside, the Temple could play no role even symbolically, a human political Davidic messiah would need to be replaced, and historical Israel would have to be phased out. Long before the first gospel was conceived or written and well before systematic early Christian exegetical spadework began, a Christ of faith was believed necessary to stand in the place of the Exodus as the paradigmatic narrative of redemption,[14] a once-for-all-time sacrifice of Jesus replaced the repetitive animal sacrificial system of the Temple, a divine messiah headed a kingdom "not of this world," and a new non-Jewish Israel was called into existence to replace the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Clearly, early Christianity took seriously the Pauline concept that "the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death" (Romans 8:2), and undertook the task of creating a people who had been "discharged from the law" (Romans 7:6).[15]

[13]Beginning with Paul himself, as he notes in Gal 4:24. I have discussed Typology and Allegory in *Jews and Christians*, 128-135.

[14]This meant a different theological "center" for the Old Testament and the New, a problem that continuously bedevils scholars who wish to write a Christian "biblical" theology including both testaments.

[15]See further note 24 below.

The manner in which these conclusive interpretations of the shared sacred canon developed is instructive. Historically, both faith systems took four steps along the interpretation highway that led to their "second" sacred texts (Talmud and New Testament) and beyond.

First, a core canon of literature developed over time and was then proclaimed to be authoritative.

Second, an equally authoritative corpus of interpretive reformulations was produced, either proclaiming itself (as the rabbis did with the Talmud) or being subsequently ratified (as the Church did with the New Testament) as authentic explication of the initial core canon.

Third, complicated interpretations of these original reformulations were offered by subsequent commentators whose backgrounds within the faith varied and whose conclusions were tied to regional or their own current cultural customs and practices.

Finally, despite seemingly irreconcilable internal differences within each system, and despite obvious interpretative movement well outside the sphere of the literal or plain sense of an original, sacred text, commentators in both faith systems continued to hold doggedly to the position that their conclusions were not only based firmly upon the initial authoritative text but were in fact a natural extension and continuation of it.

A brief look at the first two steps illustrates the process. To take step one, it was necessary for the thinkers in each faith to agree upon a core "canon" of sacred literature. In Judaism, this step was completed at least by the end of the first century CE, and included three major sections: Torah, Prophets, and Writings.[16] All Jewish "Bibles" since that time have been in agreement about the literature that is "in" and what was "out" of this canon. These parameters set by Judaism appear to have been accepted broadly within Christianity at roughly the same time,[17] as shown by [a] references in the gospels to "the law and the prophets" (Matt. 5:17; 7:12; 22:40; Acts 13:15) or "Moses and the prophets" (Luke 16:31; John 1:45); [b] the reference in Luke 24:44 to "the law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms," plus the frequent citations by both Jesus and Paul from the Psalms, the first, largest, and most prominent book in the "Writings;" [c] the description of the Hebrew Scriptures found in a late pseudo-Pauline epistle that ultimately became a part of the "New" Testament: "Every scripture (*graphē*) is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16). While this definition of inspired Scripture was eventually appropriated to refer to the Christian New Testament as well, at its first appearance late in the first century CE, "There is no doubt that 'Scripture' designates all or most of the

[16]See "The Sacred Texts of Judaism and Rabbinic Instruction," *Jews and Christians,* 1-55.
[17]For evidence that the books of the Apocrypha began to be viewed as lesser in status than the twenty-four book of the Jewish Scriptures before the end of the second century CE, see J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, Revised Edition (San Francisco: Harper, 1978), 52-56.

books we [Christians] call the OT."[18] In other words, these books called "the OT," the Scriptures of the rabbis, also constituted the first canon of sacred Scripture for Christianity.

The second step along the exegetical trail involved the creation of a second corpus of literature designed to interpret the first corpus common to Judaism and Christianity. To take this step, both religions faced an uphill task. As noted above, Judaism was required to read its sacred text in the light of having lost its national independence, its king, its Temple, and the myriad of liturgical practices that attached to Temple worship. The task before the early rabbis was to mine the core principles of sacred writ and then to reformulate those principles into expressions of faith and *praxis* that could remain in dialogue with modernity and the reality of life in a world under Roman domination. Early in the third century CE, in the aftermath of three centuries of rabbinic discussion and debate about how to express these reformulations, the rabbis made an astonishing pronouncement: "Moses received *torah* on Mount Sinai, he transmitted it to Joshua, Joshua to the seventy elders, the seventy elders to the prophets, and the prophets to the men of the great assembly."[19] Of course the astonishing aspect of this statement is that the men

[18]Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, The Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 678.
[19]This is the opening verse of *Pirkei 'Avot*.

making it were the "men of the great assembly." Thus the early rabbis announced that their own work had authoritative status *equal to that of Moses*.

For Christianity, the second phase of exegetical development into canon included several preliminary steps along the way. First came the false steps of Marcion and Montanus before the authoritative declarations of Irenaeus (ca. 180 CE) listing twenty-one of what would become the final twenty-seven books of the official New Testament. Only a short time later, the famous "Muratorian Fragment" (ca. 200 CE) also attested a corpus of Christian writings quite similar to those of Irenaeus. The Council of Nicea (325 CE) appears to signal the completion of the process of debate about the parameters of the New Testament, and the Easter letter of 367 CE from Athanasius (Bishop of Alexandria) issued a list of the same books that would formally become the New Testament canon, finally stated fully and officially at the Council of Trent (1546 CE). The literature of this "New" Testament provides the most comprehensive illustration of the ways in which early Christianity regarded and interpreted the "Old" Testament, i.e., the Hebrew Scriptures.

The most noticeable thing about the Christian NT is the extraordinary lengths to which its authors go in an effort to link their work with the written

Scriptures they shared with Judaism.[20] The rabbis knew the Judaism of their era, began with it, and remained moored to it throughout their deliberations. Then they simply expanded the theological parameters of text after text, and proclaimed their theological expansion mere "repetition" ["Mishnah"]. The New Testament announced a major conceptual break with the biblical salvation stories from the outset,[21] and yet the NT gospel authors were determined to frame the story of Jesus as a continuation of the stories of the prophets and wise men of the earlier Scriptures. It is precisely in this enterprise that their perception of first century Judaism becomes clear.

Christianity's Etic Reading of the Old Testament

One effective way to describe goal of the NT authors is to observe (a) the manner in which they battle for the right to be called Israel, (b) their claim to exclusive ownership of sacred writ, and (c) their presumption that they possess *the* authentic way to interpret the Scriptures. In the course of pursuing their goal, these authors were convinced that their own theological roots were in Judaism. But they

[20]Although the early Church ultimately accepted works other than the twenty-four of the Jewish canon, and while the early church fathers quoted from these works often, the theological framework of the New Testament itself seldom links back to them in its search for authenticity.

[21]The most direct statement is from Hebrews: "Long ago, God spoke to our ancestors in many and sundry ways by the prophets, but in these last days, he has spoken to us by a son" (Hebrews 1:1-2)! However, see also Paul's treatment of the law and Abraham, as well as the Synoptic idea of the casual manner in which Jesus forgives sin without the necessity of repentance, also fall in this category.

also believed that the legacy they had inherited from Judaism had been interpreted erroneously, and that their new interpretation alone held the true key to understanding the Scriptures. To make their case, NT authors relied on a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures that allowed them to express themselves in the idiom of their personal experiences of Roman/Hellenistic culture, and led them down folkways of central importance that were widely accepted among non-Jews. In fact, no matter how loudly or how earnestly the "Jewishness" of Jesus or Paul is trumpeted,[22] the fact remains that the interpretations of Paul and the gospels *in their present form* are anything but a continuation of the Hebrew Scriptures.

This proposition may be tested. First, attempts to interpret NT texts as if they were written by and addressed to Greek-speaking Jews cannot paper over the fact that the fundamental changes demanded by Christianity had no basis either among Palestinian or diaspora Jews. Paul does not call any group in Judaism to negate *kashrut*, circumcision, and the Torah for its own members, but insists that these pillars of Judaism are unnecessary for Gentile converts to *Christianity*. The gospels do not claim to speak for Jews, they simply announce to non-Jews that virtually all

[22]Bruce Chilton's *Rabbi Jesus: An Intimate Biography* (New York: Doubleday, 2000) develops this idea at great length, and states his conviction that "New Testament scholarship has been largely deaf to Judaism, while Jewish scholars regard Jesus as a forbidden topic" (p. xxi). His *Rabbi Paul: An Intellectual Biography* (New York: Doubleday, 2004) presumes the truth of what Acts describes as Paul's training under Gamaliel, but does not address the problem of the great difference in temperament and liberality between the teacher and the student, nor the strange fact that a student wishing to press the worth of his credentials omits any reference to his most famous teacher.

Jews, especially the scholars and theologians among them, had missed the mark in their attempts to understand their own Scriptures. Except from the Sadducees (who were certainly not Jewish Christians!), no Jewish group advances the idea of a complete denigration of "oral torah" (*paradosis* in Matt. 15:3, 6; Mark 7:9, 13). There were certainly different points of emphasis in faith and observance among various Jewish sects, and their differences are legion, exemplified by the competing points of view retained throughout the Talmud. But the expression of competing points of view were part of the process of "oral torah" (*paradosis*), never a denial of its validity. The complete casting aside of such a fundamental element of Judaism is a radical shift that has no parallel in any Jewish group of the period.

Second, an examination of the Synoptic gospels (beginning with Mark), attests not a continuation of but a radical break from the Jewish Scriptures. At the outset, it is clear that Mark was written for a Greek speaking audience, for whenever the writer quotes a simple Aramaic statement from Jesus that an Aramaic speaking Jewish audience would grasp easily, he finds it necessary to translate it into Greek for his readers (5:41;[23] 7:34; 15:22; 15:34).[24] That Mark and his readers lacked a Jewish perspective on the *words* and *actions* of Jesus is

[23]Here the Aramaic used by Mark is grammatically incorrect, using the masculine singular imperative (*qûm*) instead of the correct feminine form *qumî.*

[24]It may be argued that Mark was addressing Hellenistic, Greek-speaking Jews, but this explanation falls short of explaining the following examples.

equally demonstrable, and the book offers numerous instances of the fact that neither its author nor his audience viewed the Hebrew Scriptures in the same way most first century Jews themselves did.

Third, a tangential issue that must be addressed is the idea that the negative language the gospels direct against Jews represents nothing more than a family squabble, or conflicts between different groups of first century Jews, and does not reflect Gentile Christians speaking ill of Jews. The evidence offered below indicates that the etic readings of Judaism by the writers of the Synoptic gospels were not part of either mainstream Judaism or any identifiable Jewish sub-group of the era. The ideology presented in these gospels is clearly Christo-centric, and the points being made far too often fit a Roman or Hellenistic context to sustain the idea that we are reading nothing more than the saga of some Jews involved in a petty dispute. In addition, the church fathers, who were certainly not Jewish, had no difficulty in using the NT to denigrate Judaism in a most derogatory fashion. This they could do without the necessity of rephrasing as Gentiles what they read in a Jewish New Testament. All they needed to do was to take seriously the NT on its own terms as they read and understood it. As it stood, it fit well with the decidedly non-Jewish world views and cultures of the church fathers.[25] The

[25]Whether any scholar, ancient or modern (including the present writer), deems the rabbinic or the early Christian interpretations of the OT to be correct depends largely upon one's ideological

following examples from the Synoptic Gospels contain specific examples of this claim.

The Synoptic Gospels: Mark

Confidence in the reliability of Mark is shaken at the beginning, when the book opens with a citation of Malachi that is erroneously attributed to Isaiah (1:2). Readers schooled in either the Hebrew or the Greek Scriptures, regardless of the Jewish group to which they belonged, would not have missed such a mistake. This feeling of uneasiness continues throughout the book. In his determination to portray Jesus as a hero *nonpareil* and Jewish leaders as his mortal enemies,[26] the author of Mark attempts often to put words into the mouth of Jesus to offer proof that readers are expected to accept as authoritative explication of the Jewish Scriptures. But far too often, these words come out reflecting non-Jewish attitudes. The result is what anthropologists call an "etic" interpretation (imposing one's own cultural interpretation on the culture of another) rather than an "emic" one (understanding a target culture in its own terms).[27] In short, the author of Mark

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commitment at the outset. But two fundamentally different sets of presuppositions are clearly demonstrable.

[26]This is a determination that grows with each successive gospel, rising often in Matthew (e.g., chapter 23) and throughout John (see especially chapter 8) to the level of vitriol.

[27]See conveniently Headland, T. N., "A Dialogue Between Kenneth Pike and Marvin Harris on Emics and Etics," in T.N. Headland, K.L. Pike, and Marvin Harris (Eds.). *Emics and etics: The insider/outsider debate, Frontiers of Anthropology*, Vol. 7 (Newbury Park, Calif, 1990, Sage Publications).

appears incapable of explaining incidents involving Jews and Judaism in terms of the categories that Jews themselves found meaningful and appropriate, but is able to express his story only in terms that a non-Jew (Roman, Hellenist?) regarded as meaningful and appropriate. The following examples are illustrative rather than exhaustive.

[A] Mark 10:11-12. After the opinion of Jesus that "a man who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her," Mark adds a statement asserting that a woman who divorces her husband and marries another also "commits adultery." This authorial addition added balance to the teaching of Jesus and perhaps made good sense to an audience familiar with Roman law which allowed either the husband or the wife to divorce the other.[28] However, in Judaism,[29] because a woman did not have legal standing to initiate divorce, this teaching of Jesus would have had no credibility among Jews, regardless of which sub-group they followed.[30]

[B] Mark 7:3-4 explains that observant Jews practice hand washing before a meal. Mark uses this explanation to have Jesus offer a teaching about physical sanitation (7:14), unaware that a Jewish audience from any Jewish sect or party would certainly have known about the ritual of hand washing before a meal

[28]See Susan Treggiari, "Divorce Roman Style: How Easy and how Frequent was it?" in *Marriage, Divorce, and Children in Ancient Rome*, edited by Beryl Rawson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 31-46.
[29]As is clear from the entire tractate *Giṭṭin*.
[30]I have discussed Jesus' view of divorce in *Jews and Christians*, 107-110.

without his explanation, and would have found unconvincing the argument that hand washing was about bodily sanitation rather than ritual cleanliness.

[C] Mark 9:12-13, casually and with neither citation nor ascription, assures the reader that the necessity for the "son of man" (Jesus in his narrative) to suffer and be treated contemptuously is "written," and that "Elijah" had already appeared and "they [the scribes[31]] had done to him whatever they pleased, as it is written about him." There is no evidence that the scribes were involved in any way with the death of John at the hands of Herod and his daughter, and in only one gospel passage, written some thirty years later than Mark, is John the Baptist asked specifically whether he is Elijah, and there his answer is an unqualified "No" (John 1:21). Thus this apparent reference to the fate of John the Baptist is strange indeed. Only a writer certain of the inveterate evil of "the scribes" as enemies of Jesus (and presumably also of John) could have imagined a connection. Such a tortuous explanation may have been "a common early *Christian* understanding of the death of Jesus as the fulfillment of the prophetic testimony,"[32] but an audience lacking the same early Christian ideological presupposition could easily recognize that no such statements are part of "the prophetic testimony."

[31]The only possible antecedent to the pronoun "they."
[32]Pheme Perkins, *The Gospel of Mark* in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, VIII (Nashville, Abingdon, 1995), 631, emphasis added.

[D] Mark 10:19. Referring to "the commandments," Jesus cites five of the "Ten Commandments," including murder, adultery, stealing, bearing false witness, and honoring one's parents. But in the same list, he includes a prohibition, "you shall not defraud," that appears in neither Exodus 20 nor Deuteronomy 5. A person familiar with these two lists would have known that the inclusion of "defraud" did not fit with the other five prohibitions chosen by Jesus, and would probably also wonder why five others of the canonical ten were omitted.[33] Particularly surprising would have been the omission by Jesus of the commandments pertaining to the oneness of God and the sanctity of the Shabbat, and first century Jews would also have been aware that the rabbis of their day were in the process of defining the final commandment about "coveting" as "a precept of the heart" (as opposed to an actual misdeed), and often the critical first step that leads to the breaking of the other nine.[34]

The Synoptic Gospels: Matthew

[33]Incidentally, this strange choice and admixture of commandments is followed by advice from Jesus for the questioner to "sell what you own and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven" (10:21). This is certainly an odd requirement from the man who later chastised his disciples for their suggestion that the lady anointing his body with expensive ointment of nard might have sold it and given the money to the poor (Mark 14:3-9), especially the heartless statement that "you always have the poor with you."

[34]A process completed as least as early as the extended discussion of the verbs *la-ḥamod* and *ləhit'avveh* in the mid-third century *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishmael* on Exodus.

The etic viewpoint attested in Mark is not fundamentally altered by Matthew, as two examples illustrate.

[A] The beginning of Matthew is more jarring than that of Mark cited above. After opening with a detailed Abrahamic/Davidic genealogy that leads directly to Joseph and then on to "the messiah" (1:1-17), Matthew immediately assures the reader that Joseph absolutely was *not* the father of Jesus (1:18-25)![35] In other words, as a non-Davidide, Jesus lacked an essential qualification to be a messiah, the title he receives from the first verse of the earliest gospel (Mark 1:1) and retains throughout all four versions of his life.

Immediately following the genealogy, the wording of Matthew is a precise echo of the Mishnaic treatment involving an unmarried young woman. Matthew 1:18 specifies that Mary was unmarried and stresses that she had not begun living with Joseph before stating that, "she was found to be with child." *Ketubbot* 1:9 is a discussion about the legal status of a young woman, "if she is found with child," and Bruce Chilton has noted correctly that in Jewish law, "the conditions of Jesus' conception as Matthew refers to them made him a *mamzer*, no matter what his actual paternity was."[36]

[35]I have treated the concept of the virgin birth in more detail in *Jews and Christians*, 174-177.
[36]*Rabbi Jesus*, 13. According to *Kiddushin* 69a, a child known to be born to an unmarried Jewish mother who either refuses to disclose the identity of the father or claims not to know it is a *mamzer šətûqî* ("silenced one").

Matthew was apparently unaware of the implications of his presentation, and ignores (or does not know) the absolute statement in Deuteronomy 23:3: "No *mamzer* shall enter the congregation of YHWH," a straight-forward statement that would have required at least some explanation about the numerous gospel narratives that open with a statement like, "Then Jesus entered into the synagogue/Temple and taught" (*passim*). Chilton is also correct to note that *mamzer* does not mean "bastard," but rather "a silenced one" (*šətûqî*), i.e., unable to document his paternity, and thus banned from speaking in a synagogue.[37] Yet Matthew fails to address the issue of how a thoroughly Jewish Jesus became the only *mamzer* to be granted such a privilege (without a single Pharisee challenging his right to enter a sanctuary!).

The issue of the *mamzerût* of Jesus is not a simple matter. A person coming to the gospels with a pre-disposition to read them as fact may accept the divine paternity of Jesus as well as the virginity of Mary, and may believe that the miraculous nature of the conception[38] and birth of Jesus begin the lifelong journey marked by miracles threading their way through all of his teachings and actions. But a Jewish reading of these "facts" *as Matthew presents them* raises issues that Matthew saw no reason to address. His attempt to present Jesus as Jewish makes

[37]*Rabbi Jesus,* 13. The scene in Mark 3:33 would also give a Jewish reader pause, when Jesus asks, "Who are my mother and my brothers?"
[38]And Matthew is absolutely certain of the paternity of Jesus!

sense only from the perspective of a non-Jewish culture, and is the quintessential example of an etic interpretation. This is not to argue that Jesus was not Jewish, but simply to note that Matthew's perspective of what made him Jewish is not typical of the manner in which first century Jewish culture would have regarded him.

[B] A second major issue that would have been understood differently by Jews and non-Jews has to do with the numerous exorcisms performed by Jesus. In Matthew 9:32-34, Jesus exorcized the demon that had rendered its victim mute. Following the successful exorcism, "the one who had been mute spoke," amazing the crowds and prompting them to confess that nothing comparable had ever been seen in Israel. Then Matthew adds the response of the Pharisees: "By the ruler of the demons he casts out the demons." Three chapters later, another victim of demon possession, this one both mute and blind, was cured and rendered capable of speaking and seeing (12:22). Amazement was once again the reaction of the crowds, and once again the Pharisees observed, "It is only by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons, that this fellow casts out the demons" (12:24).

The following verses report a stinging retort from Jesus who, Matthew believes, clearly perceived the statement of the Pharisees and their opinion of his exorcism/healing as negative and hyper-critical. Here the differences between Jewish and non-Jewish attitudes toward magic are readily apparent. Reacting to

"black" magic,[39] Greek philosophers viewed most magic as a superstition that was either useless or dangerous. The Roman *Lex Cornelia de sicariis et veneficiis* of 81 BCE includes the use of incantations as a method of parricide that is punished harshly by execution. The first century Roman historian Tacitus described the use of magic as evidence of "hatred for the human race," and Morton Smith has collected evidence from a variety of Roman sources indicating that the Romans viewed Christianity as "an organization for the practice of magic."[40] In the light of this Greco-Roman disdain for magic in all forms, it may be understandable that Matthew would be sensitive about the response to an exorcism performed by Jesus.[41]

But the Jewish attitude toward magic was fundamentally different. The Hebrew Bible itself contains innumerable instances of magical feats by Moses, Joshua, Elijah, Elisha and many other notables. As Gideon Bohak phrases it, the possibility that a holy man can perform magical feats is "embedded so deeply into sacred Scriptures" that there existed no reason to doubt the claim of a post-biblical magician claiming to perform feats similar to those recorded in sacred Writ: "[Biblical holy men] can cure one patient of an illness or send it upon another,

[39]As seen in the *Tabellae Defixionum* or "Cursing Tablets" from the Greco-Roman world. See A.E. Crawley. "Curses," in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, 4:367ff.
[40]For references, see Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1978), 53.
[41]For a convenient overview of the competing attitudes toward Magic, see Giuseppe Veltri, "The Rabbis and Pliny the Elder: Jewish and Greco-Roman Attitudes toward Magic and Empirical Knowledge." *Poetics Today* 19.1 (1998): 63. *Academic Search Elite*. EBSCO. Web. 24 June, 2011.

bring the dead to life or kill whomever they will, hear faraway voices, divine future events, and stop the rain or restart it, stop the sun and the moon in their courses, make iron float, cure poisonous substances, resuscitate the dead and do away with the living, and so on."[42] It is important to note that the Hebrew Scriptures do not condemn these persons, but sets forth their ability to perform such acts as evidence that they enjoyed a special relationship with God.

Extra-biblical evidence of a positive Jewish attitude toward magic comes from the first century BCE *Wisdom of Solomon* where a telling claim is made by Solomon: "God gave me unerring knowledge" of a wide variety of subjects, including "the powers of spirits" (7:17; 20). In the next century, Josephus expresses his personal pride in Jewish magic, and traces it back to Solomon, whom he credits specifically with techniques for expelling demons and curing illness.[43] Talmudic rabbis also included several worthies who were famous for their magical abilities. In a particularly interesting report, Yehoshua bar Peraḥya,[44] one of the two best-known magician/rabbis of the early Talmudic period (the other is Ḥanina

[42]*Ancient Jewish Magic: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge U Press, 2008) 23-24. Bohak's longer analysis in his chapter, "Jewish Magic: A Contradiction in Terms?" (pp. 8-69) is precisely on point and the references he provides establish his case securely beyond question. Special notice should be given to the biblical invocation of "the name of YHWH" in the performance of various magical acts.

[43]Note especially the assertion that, "God gave him [Solomon] knowledge of the art that is used against daemons, in order to heal and benefit men." The longer discussion of magic is found in his *Antiquities* VIII. 42-49.

[44]See Markham J. Geller, *Joshua b. Perahia and Jesus of Nazareth: Two Rabbinic Magicians*, Dissertation presented to Brandeis University (1974). Available from University Microfilms, Michigan.

ben Dosi[45]), inaugurated the custom of serving a divorce writ against demons in an attempt to banish them from a house or a person.[46] "The historical figure [Yehoshua bar Peraḥya] lived in Palestine in the second half of the second century BCE, and held the dignity of a *nāśī*."[47] But his fame as a magician continued well into Talmudic times. Of particular interest is a text in which he names both the father and the mother (each of whom is also a *lilith*) of the offending demon he is attempting to drive out of a house via a divorce writ.[48] Morton Smith notes correctly that, "'To drive out one demon by another' was proverbial,"[49] but an essential aspect of this practice is the fact that it was necessary for the practitioner to know the correct name of the spirit being controlled. In certain cases, the magician thought it prudent to spell the name of the controlling demon cryptically to make it impossible for his written incantation to be undone.[50]

I believe Matthew and his audience misunderstood the significance of what the Pharisees remarked about Jesus in these two instances. First, it should be noted that the Pharisees offer no hint of thinking that Jesus had not actually performed a

[45]Baruch M. Bokser, "Wonder-working and the rabbinic tradition: the case of Ḥanina ben Dosa," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 16 (1985), 42-92.
[46]See Saul Shaked and Joseph Naveh, *Aramaic Bowl Spells: Jewish Babylonian Aramaic Magic Bowls*, Volume One (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press; 2nd edition 1987 edition) 97-159. There are also numerous examples in my *Corpus of the Aramaic Incantation Bowls*, Reprinted WIPF & Stock, 2008.
[47]Shaked and Naveh, 103.
[48]Shaked and Naveh transcribe and translate the text in *Aramaic Bowl Spells*, 137.
[49]*Jesus the Magician*, 109.
[50]See Isbell, "Some Cryptograms in the Aramaic Magic Bowls." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 33/4 (1974) 405-407.

successful exorcism. If the gospel portrait of the Jewishness of Jesus has validity, the fact that no Jews were offended by his ability to perform successful exorcisms should also be noted. Second, the Pharisees appear to be taking for granted the fact that in order to have been successful, Jesus must have known the appropriate name of the demon involved, and appeal to the "chief of demons" would be the appropriate place to seek control of a lesser demon troubling any person whom Jesus met. The assumption of Jews that such was the case was not an indictment of Jesus, it was merely the recognition of what they knew and believed about battles with forces of the unseen world of demons. For a Jewish teacher to call upon Beelzebul in his capacity as "head" demon would be the normative pattern because only a skilled professional who knew the true name of the head demon would be able to exercise authority over him, and could order him to expel a subordinate demon. In short, for Jewish scholars to have noted that Jesus employed Beelzebul, "the ruler of demons" in his exorcism does not mean they thought Jesus and Beelzebul were on the same team. It means they believed Jesus was exerting his superior authority by requiring Beelzebul to control his subordinates. Using this authority gained from knowing the true identity of the demon ruler, Jesus would be able to command him to order his subordinates to cease and desist. Jews would also understand that if Jesus had been a partner or in league with Beelzebul, his

goal would have been to order demons *into* people rather than out of them.[51] In other words, Jesus was not doing the will of Beelzebul, the demon was being ordered by Jesus to do his bidding, to turn the negative harmful effects of demon possession into a positive healing result—restoring speech, sight, social normalcy, etc.[52] It thus appears that Matthew has recalled an authentic Jewish reaction of "the Pharisees" to the exorcisms of Jesus, but because he misunderstood what was being said, has Jesus rebuke them for it.

Interesting in this regard is the narrative in Acts 19 describing how Jewish exorcists in Ephesus, a noted center of magic,[53] attempted to use the name of Jesus as a formula with which to cast out demons. Although they were successful in their exorcism, they were unable to withstand the assault of the man who had the evil demon. Paul in Ephesus, of course, had been entirely successful in his performance of "extraordinary miracles," including exorcisms (19:11-12). Modern commentators have seen in this triumph of Paul over the Jewish magicians a decisive step in the complete break from magic in early Christianity.[54]

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[51]As noted above, the negative feelings of Greeks and Romans about magic were due at least in part to its frequent use to harm, far different from the prophylactic/healing use Jesus, Yehoshua bar Peraḥya, and other Jewish practitioners made of their knowledge.

[52]See Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic* (p. 385) for the rabbinic formulation, "anything that heals" cannot be forbidden.

[53]The infamous "Ephesian Scripts" are described by F. F. Bruce in *The Book of the Acts, The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, Twelfth Printing, 1976), 391-392.

[54]See Robert W. Wall, *The Acts of the Apostles in The New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), X:268-269.

The Synoptic Gospels: Luke

Final examples of the different premises brought to the Hebrew Scriptures by Judaism and early Christianity come from the Gospel of Luke. The differences between Matthew and Luke are well known, including a difference of more than ten years for the date of the birth of Jesus; two different versions of the first two years of the life of Jesus; two very different genealogies; *inter alia*. The similarity shared by the two gospel versions is the fact that both attest an etic view of Judaism, written by outsiders for outsiders, in the process misunderstanding or misappropriating the supposed Jewish links they both wished to establish with Christianity.

As Norman Perrin has noted accurately, part of Luke's burden was to help his readers come to terms with the necessity of living in the Roman Empire.

> To help his readers do so, the author of Luke-Acts consistently presents Roman authorities as sympathetic to the Christian movement: Pilate finds no fault in Jesus (Luke 23:4), in Cyprus the proconsul 'believes' (Acts 13:12), Gallio, proconsul of Achaia, takes Paul's side against the Jews (Acts 18:14-15), and so on. The Christians' difficulties are not the hostility of Roman authorities but *the machinations of the Jews* (Acts 13:28; 14:2, 19; 18:12, etc.). At the same time the Christian movement is consistently represented as descended directly from, and indeed the proper fulfillment of, Judaism.[55]

[55]Norman Perrin, *The New Testament: An Introduction* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1974), 200, emphasis added.

Although Luke did not frame his perceptions in the format used by Matthew ("You have heard that it has been said … but I say …"),[56] he was as anxious as Matthew to demonstrate that Christianity had its roots in Judaism. But once again, in his effort to present Christianity as "proper fulfillment," Luke expressed a perception of Judaism quite unlike that of the Jews themselves, who not only failed to understand their own Scriptures, but were the authors of the "machinations" against Jesus.

Luke 2:21-52 is a brief sketch of the early years of Jesus from infancy to the age of twelve, leading to the eighteen year period of silence until Jesus began his public ministry at the age of thirty (3:23). Prominent in the sketch is the report of Jesus' eighth day circumcision and naming (2:21), clearly designed to underscore the Jewishness of Jesus. Immediately thereafter, Luke's speaks of "*their* (sic!) purification according to the law of Moses" (2:22), apparently under the impression that both Mary and Joseph were under legal obligation to go through the ritual of after-birth purification.[57] Readers of either the Hebrew or the Greek Old Testament would have known that Levitical requirements pertain to the mother

[56]I have discussed this framework of Matthew in *Jews and Christians*, 104-113. Again, to be noted is the fact that this method of argumentation is also used by the rabbis of the era in their production of the Mishnah. The difference is not in the choice of method but in the preconceived idea about the true meaning of the teachings.

[57]The reading *katharismou autōn* ("their purification") is attested in the earliest and most reliable manuscripts (including א[a], B, D, W), while a few later manuscripts present the reading *katharismou autēs* ("her purification") in an attempt to correct the error. But note that Luke describes the end of the period of purification as "*they* finished everything required by the law of the Lord" (2:39), again assuming the active participation of Joseph in the process.

only, stipulating a seven day period of *tame'* (need of ritual purification) after the birth of a male child followed by a thirty-three day period of ceremonial isolation (Lev. 12:2-6). But what is more surprising in light of the clear statement of Luke 1:26-35 that the Holy Spirit was the father of Jesus, is the description of Joseph as the father (2:48) and Mary and Joseph together as his "parents" (2:41, 43, 48). Even if Luke believed both parents needed to undergo the post-partum period of and rituals for purification, his replacement of the Holy Spirit by Joseph in the process undercut his own earlier description of the patrimony of Jesus, once again leaving Jewish readers puzzled.

The final episode in the life of Jesus before age thirty is described in Luke two. Skipping from the forty day old infant to the twelve year old boy, Luke turned to the account of a family trip from Nazareth to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover (2:41-42). After the celebration, the parents traveled homeward for a full day before they discovered that their adolescent was not with them, forcing them to scurry back to Jerusalem to find him. Their anxious search led them back to the Temple where they observed their son "sitting[58] among the teachers and asking them questions" (2:46). The ability to ask pertinent questions was much prized in the Judaism of the day, and was considered a good indicator of youthful promise and intelligence. Rather than interpreting the event as the normal behavior of a

[58]Note that students sat but that teachers normally stood. See my treatment of "The Organization of Education" in *Jews and Christians*, 25-30.

bright and curious young boy, Luke seized the opportunity to underscore the miraculous aspect of the intellect of the young Jesus: "All those who heard him were amazed (*eksistanto*) at his wisdom and his answers." The reader is left with the image of a young man asking questions which he then answered for the older and more experienced Jewish teachers. What is more, Luke was unaware that his description of the paternity of Jesus had created the picture of a *mamzer* who was not allowed to enter or speak in the Temple. Nevertheless, this was the twelve year old boy whom Luke wished to describe as sitting among Jewish teachers as an equal and amazing them with his intelligence.

Luke's use of the OT to describe the adult Jesus continues along the same line. In 7:24.30, Luke has placed a narrative describing a teaching from Jesus after he had been visited by the disciples of John the Baptist seeking his identity on instructions from their own teacher who had earlier baptized Jesus. To cinch the opinion of Jesus that John was "more than a prophet" (7:26), Luke has Jesus identify him in the following verse as "the one about whom it is written: 'I will send my messenger ahead of you who will prepare your way before you'."

But the citation is clumsy at best. While Elijah is named in Malachi as preparing the path of the LORD, "there is no evidence from pre-Christian Jewish sources that Elijah's role was interpreted as the forerunner *for the Messiah* (sic!).

Rather, that seems to have been an early Christian inference"[59] [rather than a Jewish perception]. Indeed, not only is Elijah never depicted as the precursor of a messiah, his role in Malachi is to serve as the one who ushers in the coming of God for divine *judgment*: "Lo, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the LORD arrives (Mal. 3:23 [Eng. 4:5][60] and see also Mal. 3:5).[61]

Perhaps the most interesting example of Luke's view of Jewish belief and *praxis* comes from his story about Lazarus and a rich man (16:19-31). Prior to the opening of the story itself, Luke chronicled an occasion on which Jesus had gone as an invited guest to a Shabbat meal at the home of a Pharisee, a leader no less (14:1). The presence at the meal of a man with dropsy caused Jesus to ask whether it was "lawful to cure folk on Shabbat or not" (14:3). Hearing no answer from his host or other Pharisees who were present, Jesus decided to heal the man. He then began a monologue about places of honor at a banquet table, before his transition to the teaching that, "When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the

[59]R. Alan Culpepper, "The Gospel of Luke," *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville, Abingdon, 2002) IX:164. Note also Culpepper's capitalization of messiah. Although common among modern Christian scholars, this is an ideological presupposition rather than an exegetical judgment.

[60]I have discussed this concept and its liturgical function as a "Haftarah" for *Shabbat ha-Gadol* in *Malachi* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 78.

[61]Because the audience of Jesus knew of John's location in the desert, faint echoes of Isaiah 40:3 may have been heard in the phrase "prepare the way of YHWH in the desert." But Elijah is nowhere present in the passage from Isaiah, and he is not the one called upon to prepare a way in the desert for the Lord. That assignment is given as a plural imperative (*pannû* – "prepare!") to all the Judahite exiles, instructing them that their era of exile and punishment is ended (40:2).

lame, and the blind" (14:13). This will prompt repayment "at the resurrection of the righteous" (14:14).[62]

The following chapter (15) is devoted to parables about a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost son. Chapter sixteen opens two new teachings about wealth framing a pronouncement of "the Pharisees" as people who, apparently with no exceptions, "loved money" (16:14).[63] This de- notation of Pharisees as lovers of money serves to demonstrate the force of the absolute statement that "You cannot serve God and money" (16:13).

With the Pharisees clearly outed as money lovers who cannot therefore serve God, the story of the rich man and Lazarus (16:19-31) caps Luke's critique of wealth that links back to his prophetic "woe" upon people who are wealthy in this life (6:24). The descriptions of the two characters in the story are telling. The unnamed "rich man" wears purple colored and fine linen clothing and also eats to excess. In Roman society, the wearing of purple was tightly regulated. Senators could wear a white toga with a broad purple stripe, while members of the Roman cavalry were allowed a narrow stripe on their togas. But only the emperor could wear an all-purple toga (*trabea*). Since the only other place where one could observe an all-purple toga was on the statue of a deity, the connection of the

[62]But in light of this advice, it is fascinating that once he had healed the man with dropsy, Jesus "sent him away" (14:4), and did not invite him to stay and enjoy the banquet.
[63]16:16-17 on "The Law and the Prophets" and 16:18 on divorce appear to interrupt the flow of the narratives that are all otherwise related to wealth vs. poverty.

Roman emperor with divinity was suggested along with the undertones of extravagance and vanity.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, a different picture emerges. Purple was a highly prized commodity that had to be imported (Ezek. 27:16, 27), but it was a normal part of the clothing of priests (Exod 28:4-6; 39:1, 28-29), and a "capable wife" (*'ešet ḥayil*) was clothed in a garment of purple and fine linen (Prov. 31:22). Additionally, purple combined with blue, scarlet, and linen in the furnishings of the tabernacle (*miškan* in Exod. 26:1). This is far different from the opening assumption about Luke's rich man, whose failure to assist the poor, sickly Lazarus was a major factor in his condemnation, but whose purple clothing and excessive food consumption were also portrayed as part of the reason why he ended in eternal torment.

The crux of the story lies in the final destination of the two characters. The rich man, about whom we know only that he was wealthy and that he failed to care for Lazarus, landed in the next world beset by fiery torture that would never end (16:24-26). Lazarus, about whom we know only that he was poor and sickly, "was carried by angels to the bosom of Abraham" (16:22). Luke did not say that he was an obedient and righteous servant of God who deserved an eternal reward, but noted simply that he was "poor and sickly." Reading about the two men, one is left

with the impression that unshared wealth itself was warrant enough for punishment, while poverty itself merited eternal reward.

But such a blanket condemnation of wealth is not part of the belief structure of the Hebrew Bible. Abraham, described as "very rich in livestock, silver, and gold" (Gen. 13:2), had gained his wealth via the blessing of YHWH (Gen. 24:1). Solomon also received his wealth as a gift from YHWH (1 Kgs. 13:3), and neither man is automatically perceived as evil simply because he was wealthy. Indeed, YHWH had given the land of Canaan "flowing with milk and honey" to His people following the Exodus (Exod. 3:7), even arranging for their acquisition of silver and gold jewelry and clothing (3:22) on condition that they remember that they had gained such a rich inheritance only with divine aid (Deut. 8:17). Prophetic warnings about the acquisition of wealth via deceit or trickery abound,[64] and greed is condemned outright (Prov. 28:22). But wealth is likely to be the reward for hard work and diligence (Prov. 10:2, 27), as well as a source of security (Prov. 10:5; 18:11) that may even protect life (Prov. 13:8). Only an author who began with the premise that "it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a

[64]See *inter alia* 2 Samuel 12; Isa. 10:3; Jer. 5:27; 15:13;m17:3; Ezek. 7:11; 28; Hos. 12:8; Mic. 6:12, etc.

rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Luke 18:25 and parallels) could have constructed Luke's story of the rich man and Lazarus.[65]

A final example of Luke's misunderstanding of early Jewish beliefs is found in his depiction of the trials of Jesus, especially his insistence that Jesus was deemed worthy of death by the Jewish members of the Sanhedrin despite being found innocent in the courts of Pilate and Herod. The legal reason Luke presents for the verdict of the Jewish Sanhedrin is the claim of Jesus to be the son of God. His presentation is fascinating. Asked by the Jewish examiners if he were "the son of God," Jesus responded, "you say that I am" (22:70), an answer that is a simple way of refusing to verify for his accusers the charge on which they are attempting to indict him. Several trial exchanges are noteworthy.

Immediately before the professed horror of the Jewish examiners, Jesus had referred to himself as "the son of man," a well-known epithet of Ezekiel (*ben 'adam in* 2:1 and *passim*). The Aramaic equivalent (*bar 'enaš*) is used in Daniel 7:13 in contrast to beasts that stand symbolically for the pagan kingdoms of Babylonia, Media, Persia, and Greece. Mark 3:28 uses the plural "sons of men" as a generic reference to "human beings," its same referential function in Ephesians 3:5. That was apparently the way in which Jesus used the term at his trial, for not only did the Jewish examiners fail to respond to the specific designation Jesus used

[65]One cannot fail to note the irony of the fact that Abraham, the central character in Luke's Paradise, was one of the wealthiest individuals in the Bible.

with reference to himself, even his full statement about being "seated at the right hand of the power of God" (Luke 22:69) did not prompt a horrified gasp from members of the Sanhedrin.

It was only following the next exchange that his examiners became convinced of his guilt ("he deserves death" in Matt 26:66 and Mark 13:64). Asked, "Then, are you the son of God?" Jesus parried with the non-committal "you say that I am," and this statement, completely non-responsive to the actual question, convinced the Jewish Sanhedrin that they needed no further testimony: "We have heard it ourselves from his mouth" (22:71). What exactly had they heard?

In two secular tribunals, Luke asserts that Jesus was declared innocent three times by Pilate (23:4, 14-15, 22) and once by Herod, who ridiculed and mocked him but did not condemn him at law (23:8-12; 15).[66] But Luke was determined to lay the death of Jesus at the feet of the Jews—the chief priests and the teachers of the law (23:10), ultimately joined by "the crowds" that had previously followed and been amazed by Jesus. Accordingly, he did not hesitate to note that Jesus was found innocent of the *political* charges against him, for these verdicts paved the

[66]The notation that Herod and Pilate became friends on the day both presided over a trial of Jesus (23:12) is unattested outside of this one verse in Luke, and has little bearing on the narrative as a whole.

way for the mob of angry Jews to sway Pilate, against his own legal judgment, to condemn Jesus to death for what Luke presumed to be *theological* heresy.[67]

Luke was convinced that "the son of God"[68] was the appropriate designation for Jesus from the beginning of his gospel. He first gave Jesus the title at the annunciation (1:35), verified it by the heavenly voice following his baptism (3:22), verified it again at his transfiguration (9:35), had Satan presume its truth (4:3, 9), placed it on the lips of expelled demons (4:41 and 8:28), and finally made it the central charge brought against Jesus by his Jewish foes in the Sanhedrin (22:71). The same expression opens the first gospel (Mark 1:1) and closes the last gospel (John 20:31). But the fact is that nowhere in the Bible or in first century Judaism is such a claim against Jewish law. To the contrary, of course, is that fact that "In Hellenism, Son of God indicated 'possessing divine qualities,' 'exhibiting a divine aura,' or the like."[69] But the supposed basis for a *Jewish* charge of theological heresy or even blasphemy on the part of Jesus exists only in the etic interpretation of a non-Jewish gospel author.[70]

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[67]It is interesting that the latest of the four gospels also has trouble with the fact that Pilate refused to accept a theological basis for his decision to allow the crucifixion of Jesus. In John, Pilate had inscribed on the cross what he regarded as the ultimate symbol of political sedition, pretending to be "The King of the Jews" (John 19:19-22).

[68]Which modern Christian translators regularly capitalize to "Son of God," again betraying an ideological commitment with no exegetical basis.

[69]Perrin, *The New Testament*, 49.

[70]I have treated another etic interpretation from Luke's account in Acts of the Ethiopian eunuch reading Isaiah 53. See my discussion of "The New Testament Messiah and the Suffering Servant of Isaiah," *Jews and Christians*, 187-190.

CONCLUSION

This survey of etic interpretations of Judaism on the part of NT authors has been limited to the Synoptic gospels. The Gospel of John is so fundamentally different as to require a separate study. As to the case of Paul, it should be remembered that his letters, all written within a six to eight year span some fifteen to seventeen years after his conversion, reflect radical movement into the world of Hellenism, far away even from the world of Hellenistic Judaism into which he claimed to have been born and in which he claimed to have been educated. But identifying Paul as a Hellenistic Jew must be seen as only a part of the story of his theological development in light of Luke's argument that he was trained in Jerusalem by none other than the famous Rabban Gamaliel, grandson of Hillel (Acts 22:3). Regarding Paul, the true question is whether any Jew, Hellenistic or Hebraic to the core, would have rejected the most basic elements of Judaism—*torah* as the final authority for all of Judaism, *kashrut* even in modified form, and circumcision in its entirety. No student would have learned such ideas at the feet of even a liberal rabbinic scholar of the stature of Gamaliel.[71] The fact that Paul himself never mentions his famous Jerusalem/Jewish teacher is a problem with

[71]I have discussed Paul and these issues in *Jews and Christians,* 190-196.

which NT scholars have wrestled over a long period of time, and his omission of such an important aspect of his training makes it more difficult to believe that Paul had indeed studied under such a moderate and gentle teacher.[72] But no known group within Hellenistic Judaism would have been the source of such teachings either.

In a future study, I hope to explore additional NT treatments of the OT, especially as they appear in the Gospel of John. But the examples cited here are intended to furnish the basis for open debate about the extent of NT "Jewishness" in general and Synoptic gospel interpretations of Jesus and Judaism more particularly.

[72]There is also cause to wonder how Luke knew what Gamalial had said after Peter and the apostles had been excused from the room during their earlier trial before the Sanhedrin (Acts 5:34).