Steuart Campbell

The Rise and Fall of Jesus
A Complete Explanation for the Life of Jesus and the Origin of Christianity

3rd, revised edition
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Tectum Verlag
'and thou hast the keys of Paradise, oh just, subtile, and mighty opium!'
(Thomas De Quincey, Confessions of an English Opium-Eater, 'The Pleasures of Opium')
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Foreword

In his *Life of Lytton Strachey*, Michael Holroyd tells us that in a letter to her son Lytton, written at a time when he was abandoning such Christian faith as he had possessed, his mother, Lady Strachey wrote that she ‘would not be surprised if the decay of Christianity led to some really interesting appreciations of the New Testament that might stimulate perceptions which, like mine, have been blunted by ceaseless iteration and vitiated by the theological standpoint’. Steuart Campbell’s *The Rise and Fall of Jesus* is just such an appreciation, although one that would have appealed rather more to the son, I suspect, than to the mother. Taking up the torch from where Albert Schweitzer’s *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* left off, Campbell offers a provocative, and what will be for many a deeply disturbing, account of the life, mission, death and ‘resurrection’ of the historical Jesus. Rightly rejecting the views of those who have denied the existence of the historical Jesus, Campbell offers a fascinating and, from what we know today about the genesis of religious cults, a not implausible reconstruction of Jesus’ own view of himself and his mission—a reconstruction which, being the trained scientist that he is, he seeks, in Popperian fashion, to test in the light of such evidence as can be got about Jesus from a critical reading of the Gospels constructed by the early Christian Church. As Campbell notes, for far too long Christians (and Christian sympathizers) have had a virtual monopoly on scholarship relating to the life of Jesus. Campbell, who is well read in nineteenth and twentieth century New Testament scholarship, seeks to break that monopoly by offering a critical reconstruction of the intentions of the historical Jesus which, to the best of my knowledge, challenges all currently available views.

In one of his early works, the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche claimed to be the first European thinker to challenge not just the truth, but the ethical value of the Christian religion, although Nietzsche himself never went so far as to challenge the integrity and ethical teaching of the historical Jesus as such. Campbell, on the other hand,
has no such reservations. Whilst many will be deeply offended by Campbell’s account of the life and death of Jesus, his book offers a serious challenge to much of what has, largely uncritically, been said about Jesus by both Christians and non-Christian admirers of Jesus throughout the ages.

Steuart Campbell’s book is also, if I may say so, a good read, and I trust I am not trivializing it when I say that it has some of the merits of a good detective story. I do not, therefore, intend in this foreword to pre-empt the reading of the book by giving away the plot. That readers must discover for themselves.

This is a book which will, I hope, receive the critical attention that such a labour (I will not say of love, nor, most certainly, of hate, but rather of sheer intellectual curiosity) merits. Campbell has taken much time and trouble to try to come to terms with the historical Jesus. Those who claim to be his followers might repay the compliment by reading his argument and giving it the critical attention that, in my opinion, it most certainly deserves.

James Thrower
Professor of the History of Religions
The University of Aberdeen
November 1995
(Professor Thrower died in 1999)
Preface to the Third Edition

In my youth I was an evangelical Christian (why is another story), but gradually I argued myself out of the faith and in 1970, at the age of 33, became an atheist. But I had spent 17 years following Jesus and needed to exorcize him. If he was not a divine figure, what was he? Who was he and what did he do to create Christianity? Are the Gospel’s accounts reliable and, if not, in what way?

They tell a confusing and nonsensical story. A rabbi who implied that he was the expected Messiah of the Jews, predicted his betrayal, arrest and execution by the Roman governor, but did nothing to stop it happening. Consequently he was executed for sedition. Afterwards his body disappeared, but his followers claimed to have seen him alive afterwards.

The mystery of the life of Jesus and the origin of Christianity is one that has not been completely solved or explained, as I found out when I started on a literature search of those books that deal with the subject.

There are a great many works on the life of Jesus but the most useful ones are those that are critical to various extents of the usual interpretation of the gospel record. Christian writers tend not to see anything except the usual story. So I read all I could find written by critical writers, rationalists and some academics who dared to express an unconventional view. I also relied on the only historian to cover the Jewish history of the period: Josephus. All these sources produced clues as to where to look for the necessary answers but I found no one with a completely believable explanation.

While working as a research architect, I had to write reports and so became used to writing based on thorough research. Consequently I began to write my own book about Jesus. By that time I had the use of a word processing program. In 1983, after about 10 years work, I had a digital text and found a title which, surprisingly, had not been used by anyone else. Another surprise was finding a new solution to the puzzle of Jesus’ life, one that explained more than any previous solution and...
one that seemed likely to be close to the truth. I could not understand why no one had discovered the explanation I had found.

It may be asked how I could arrive at a new solution when so many words have already been written on this subject and when I lack the (theological) qualifications that might have been thought necessary. However, adherence to the Christian faith is a disqualification; Christians cannot remain objective, especially when it comes to examination of the life and motives of Jesus. Consequently no Christian writer could arrive at my conclusions. I found myself in an unusual position; I was a rationalist with the necessary Christian background.

Having found a new hypothesis, one that undermined Christianity, it was natural that I should want to publish it. Surely my discovery deserved to be shared with others. Everywhere Jesus commands respect and he is upheld as an example to mankind. It is felt that he must be worth following as a good man if not as a god. Also many feel that there must be some special and worthwhile quality about a man who has commanded and still commands the allegiance of so many millions of people. Surely I should broadcast the view, not only that Jesus was deluded, but that there is not even any reason to follow his moral teachings. I needed to explain that loyalty to Jesus is misplaced and that most Christians completely misunderstand him. Consequently the book is intended for Christians and non-Christians alike in the hope that both will see that Christianity is irrelevant to modern life. I want them to forget Jesus and to do something useful with their lives. But it is also a book for historians who should learn what I have discovered about this critical episode in Jewish history, one that formed the foundation of Christian civilization.

I also felt the need to counteract the propaganda of the Humanist movement, including most rationalists, to the effect that Jesus did not exist. Humanists appear to have supported the Jesus Myth Theory because it relieves them of debating the complex gospel story. If Humanists wish to offer a rational explanation for the origin of Christianity, they would do better to adopt the hypothesis offered here. Philosopher John Hick advised secular humanists not to identify too closely with 'the eccentric view' that Jesus did not exist. He claimed that it is neither very
probable nor 'at the cutting edge' of research concerning Christian origins (Hoffman & Larue 1986:212).

Without an agent, it was difficult to find a publisher. By comparison, theologians easily find publishers, even when they have nothing to say. Ferguson (1980) admitted his initial poverty of ideas when asked by his publisher to write another book on Jesus. I sent 36 publishers a fair synopsis of the book and some of the text. But I got no encouragement from any. The few replies contained comments like ‘too polemical and not scholarly enough and … speculation … insufficiently supported by facts or arguments’. Also ‘extremely provocative piece of writing’ and ‘lacks the sensationalism … which is sadly much sought after today’. One Edinburgh publisher thought it too shocking, nauseating and far-fetched! Others, after reading all or part of my manuscript, concluded that my hypothesis must be wrong, although it was not explained why that should prevent publication. Most of what is written by theologians is ‘wrong’.

Probably, had I been an academic with a higher degree in a relevant discipline I might have secured publication. But I was merely a former architect with a maths and science degree and no reputation in the field. No one took me seriously. Another problem is that this subject is a minority interest: Christians hardly want to hear that their faith is unfounded and the non-religious are not interested. In the West, more and more people now have no religion. Publishers can see that the market for another life of Jesus is probably small.

Nearly all the so-called experts on the subject are Christians. There are very few non-Christians who know enough about Jesus and his background to assist the rationalist in comment, encouragement or criticism. Indeed, I found few consultants for this work. Perhaps everyone believes that, because the traditional figure of Jesus is so familiar to them, they are experts. It is difficult to change the popular picture of a historic figure, even more difficult than persuading people that he did not exist.

Consequently, in 1996 using a desktop-publishing program, I formatted the book and had it printed and published using the imprint

* Readers who are already convinced that Jesus existed may wish to pass over Chapter 2 where I deal with questions of historicity.
Explicit Books. Without proper reviews, most of the stock ended up being remaindered, although I think some copies can still be found on the internet.

I was resigned to never seeing it published again, but some 10 years later I was introduced to WritersPrintShop (WPS), who agreed to publish a second revised edition, but subsidised by me. WPS print on demand and that edition appeared in 2009. This enabled the book to be advertised and sold on the Amazon website, although sales were disappointing due to lack of marketing and decent reviews. However it did produce one anonymous US review (the only review on Amazon) where the reviewer declared it the best book he had read on the historical Jesus. I also published an ebook version via Amazon, but there were few sales.

Eventually, because WPS proved unsatisfactory and unproductive, I terminated my arrangement with them in 2019. About the same time, I became aware of the German publishing company Tectum Verlag. This was the result of being asked by The Freethinker to review Heinz-Werner Kubitza’s The Jesus Delusion, an English translation of his German original. Tectum was the publisher.

Believing that there was more interest in the historical Jesus in Germany than in the UK or the US, I approached Tectum about publishing a German translation of the book. They offered to do this if I funded the translation, which would have been expensive, but they also offered to publish the book in English as a third edition. I accepted the latter option, even though a subsidy was required. It is particularly fitting that this edition should be published in Germany, where so much of the groundwork on the historical Jesus was produced.

This edition is an improved and corrected version, with some relevant updates and additions. For the first time, it contains this preface, which necessitated some rearrangement. Nevertheless, it remains essentially the same work I wrote 36 years ago.

I have written several articles covering the themes in the book and these can be found listed on my website (www.steuartcampbell.com). I can be seen in a YouTube video giving an illustrated talk about my hypothesis to the Edinburgh Secular Society, of which I am a member. So far that has received 191 views, 3 ‘likes’, but no comments.
This book is a general inquiry into the life of Jesus, but especially it is an inquiry about his motives and intentions. In any inquiry, it is important to ask the right questions. Technical writer Tom Johnson declared that asking questions seems to drive creativity. ‘It cultivates an open mind. The questions we ask lead us to new knowledge. Questions drive us to answers we never thought to consider until we asked the question.’ I have found that to be true.

Most writers on this subject have not asked themselves many questions, usually assuming that they already knew the answers. Some writers ask questions but fail to answer them. This is not in my nature; I do not ask a question without having the intention of answering it. There are about 300 questions in the main text of this book.

Not until chapter 4 do I begin to unravel Jesus’ beliefs, starting with the question of what was meant by calling him a ‘Nazarene’. But before that I felt the need to explore the matter of historicity and Jesus’ origin and background, including what trade he followed. In addition and en passant I divert a few times during the main text to explain various associated matters in glosses. Although these might not bear directly on the main hypothesis, they help to confirm Jesus’ historicity and provide a realistic picture. I have taken the opportunity to clear up many misunderstandings about Jesus. Indeed, there are so many myths that it is little wonder that the real Jesus has remained hidden for so long.

In trying to answer questions about Jesus’ life and purpose it is relevant to consider the views of others. Consequently I record the views of some of those who have commented on aspects of Jesus’ life, whether or not I agree with them and whether or not their views fit my hypothesis. As a result, the book is partly a survey of the ‘lives’ of Jesus, continuing the tradition begun by Schweitzer in his Quest over a century ago. Appendix A reviews the historical search for Jesus and Appendix B is an essay on Schweitzer’s own contribution.

The book is fully referenced by the author-date system, with page numbers where relevant. I hope that readers do not find these references too intrusive. The works referred to are listed in the Bibliography.

The use of the year description AD (‘Anno Domini’) is unacceptable to non-Christians, for Jesus is not their Lord. Consequently, in this work I omit AD for years after Christ (occasionally ‘CE’, Christian
Era) and use BC for years before Christ. This does not imply that there was a Year Zero. Quotations from the Old Testament are taken from the Revised Standard Version (RSV) and quotations from the New Testament are freely made from Marshall’s translation of the Nestle Greek Text. ‘AV’ refers to the Authorized Version of the Bible, sometimes called the King James Bible and ‘NEB’ refers to the New English Bible. Hebrew/Aramaic and Greek words have been transliterated into Roman characters, but note that such transliteration is often an approximation. Initial capitals have been used to denote specific nouns and to distinguish them from the same general nouns. The ‘gospel’ is the substance of the apostles’ preaching, but a ‘Gospel’ is a book. The unknown evangelists are referred to as ‘Matthew’, ‘Mark’, ‘Luke’ and ‘John’ without prejudice regarding their actual identity or whether or not more than one author was responsible for a Gospel. However, I have reason to believe that John’s Gospel is the work of the disciple of that name. Abbreviations for all Biblical books are those used in the RSV, while abbreviations for Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphic books are my own.

Edinburgh, April 2019

Steuart Campbell
Acknowledgements

This work could not have been written without access to many books and articles, some of them rare. I wish to acknowledge the help given by the staff of the following libraries: The City of Edinburgh Public Library (Central), The National Library of Scotland, New College Library (University of Edinburgh) and The British Library Document Supply Centre.

I am grateful for advice and comment on medical matters by Dr Patricia F Hannaford and for advice and comment on ancient languages by Dr A Peter Hayman and to Lawrence Buckley for proof reading and general advice. I also acknowledge the encouragement of Dr Michael Arnheim* and Prof. J A Thrower.

I acknowledge permission to reproduce various illustrations: the British Museum for the boar antefix (plate 1); The Ermine Street Guard (plate 2); The Dean and Chapter of Hereford Cathedral and the Hereford Mappa Mundi Trustees for the drawing of the Mappa Mundi (Fig. 2); and Inter-Varsity Press for the plan of Jerusalem in the time of Jesus (Fig. 3).

1 Introduction

Looking for Jesus

Jesus is probably the most famous person who ever lived. If true, this can only be because of the influence of the Christian Church, which worships him as God. Edwards (1992), attributing the influence to Jesus rather than to the Church, described Jesus as ‘the most influential figure in the history of the world.’ ‘Most influential’ or not, the name of Jesus is certainly better known in the West than either Muhammad or Newton. Influence is not the same as fame, but Jesus was, indirectly, very influential and is now very famous. However, does he deserve this fame?

Since Western society is founded on Christianity, interest in the man thought to have founded the religion is bound to exceed that of interest in any other person. Consequently it is not surprising that nearly everyone seems to have written a book about Jesus; certainly everyone has an opinion about him. It has been estimated that, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, sixty thousand books were written about Jesus (Cross 1970b:17), while Kersten & Gruber (1995) put the total number of monographs on Jesus at 80,000. It is surely true that more books have been written about him than about any other human being.

So why do we need another book? Has everything that could possibly be said about Jesus not already been said? Do we not already know all about the historical Jesus?

Surprisingly, we do not. Sanders (1993:281) concluded that we know who Jesus was, what he did, what he taught and why he died. In fact Sanders’s own book demonstrates that he knew none of these

* According to Michael Hart in The 100 (1993), Jesus is only the third most influential person in history; he is beaten by Muhammad and Isaac Newton.
things. On the whole, there is hardly any greater understanding of Jesus and his purpose now than there was when he was alive.

‘Lives’ of Jesus began to appear in the nineteenth century, proliferating towards the beginning of the twentieth century. Some have alleged that these ‘lives’ appeared when interest in historical research increased and it was believed that such research could discover the truth about Jesus just as it had about other historical figures. However, it has also been alleged that the historical method was first evolved by Christian theologians and only later applied to general history (Hoskyns and Davey 1931:10). Some hoped to find justification for their faith, to find historical evidence that would justify Christianity’s claims. Others, already convinced that the truth about Jesus was concealed rather than revealed in Christianity, attempted to rationalize Jesus’ life. Schweitzer distinguished between rationalist, sceptical, ‘liberal’ and eschatological approaches to the problem, identifying himself as a follower of sceptical eschatology.

Mackinnon wrote that Jesus is ‘the perennial theme for the inquiring, serious mind, and to judge from history, will ever remain so’ (1931:xviii). Not all serious, inquiring minds are interested in Jesus; nor do they wish to undertake the considerable research required. However there will always be a few keen exponents.

Schweitzer thought that there is no historical task that so reveals a man’s true self (he seems to have disregarded women) as the writing of a life of Jesus and the greatest of them are written not with love, but with hate. Not hate of the person of Jesus so much as of the ‘supernatural nimbus’ with which it was so easy to surround him and with which he had in fact been surrounded. Hate sharpens the historical perspective and advances the study of the subject (Schweitzer 1954:4).

Has the study of Jesus advanced? Has the historical perspective been sharpened? Yes and no.

Some modern theologians, recognizing that the quest for the historical Jesus was finding a person, when it found anyone at all, quite unlike ‘The Son of their faith, have concluded not only that next to nothing can be known of him, other than that he existed, but that even the attempt to seek such information is theologically illegitimate for the Christian. They claim that the faith should be based on ‘the existentialist commitment to a Christ proclaimed in the preaching of the
New Testament. In fact believers relegate the historical life of Jesus to a secondary place, retaining it merely as a myth in which their spiritual experiences are focussed (Hoskyns and Davey 1931:151). However Zahrnt (1963:104) alleged that faith is not independent of the process of historical scholarship and that if the latter succeeded in demonstrating without a shadow of a doubt that Jesus was a quite different person from the one believed in by Christians, then the faith would be completely finished.* Davies (1979) also was sure that the Christian faith is founded on history and that doubt concerning Jesus’ existence, nature, purpose or life undermines the faith. It is clear therefore that doubts will not be entertained by committed believers. To them Jesus will always be divine, an incarnation of the Creator. To those who pay lip service to Christianity and who do not hold Jesus to have been God, he is nevertheless an ideal, a wholly good man trying to do his best for his fellow creatures, but who was betrayed and killed by them. In short, Christians and their sympathizers appear to believe that Jesus fell foul of the authorities in Jerusalem simply because he behaved well, not because he behaved badly. This is hardly an encouragement to good behaviour.

If Christians have failed to find the historical Jesus, how have non-Christians fared?

Most non-Christians are not interested in Jesus and, in any case, they do not have sufficient knowledge of the Bible to undertake the task. Non-Christian attempts to find a real Jesus have sometimes produced bizarre conclusions. Jesus was a political revolutionary, a magician, a Galilean charismatic, a rabbi, a Hillelite or proto-Pharisee, an Essene, or an eschatological prophet. He was a homosexual, a hippie preacher high on hallucinogenic drugs, insane, a woman, or an extraterrestrial being. Desperation has driven many to propose extreme solutions.

Most Humanists, because they prefer the view that Jesus did not exist (see chapter 2), do not seek a historical Jesus. But best placed are ex-Christians like me who have the necessary background and interest and yet who have also acquired the necessary doubt.

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* Because there will always be doubt concerning this demonstration, Christianity will never be ‘finished’.
To most writers, Jesus is a mystery. He appears on the world stage making enigmatic prophecies and ethical commands; he preaches love and forgiveness and yet seems to hate the authorities and threatens hellfire to those who do not follow him. He also seems to anticipate everything, even his death, which he does nothing to prevent. He seems to have been certain of ultimate success and yet he predicted his own arrest and death. He made many predictions, some of which appear to have been fulfilled, while others remain unfulfilled. No doubt because their authors could not make sense of Jesus’ life, most ‘lives’ are merely elaboration of the gospel, uncritical accounts of Jesus’ career with some concessions to modern times, perhaps with scepticism regarding accounts of miracles. However, there are a few exceptions, ‘lives’ that form pillars on which the ultimate life of Jesus should be constructed.

Predominant among these ‘pillars’ is the work of Albert Schweitzer; even as a student, he held unconventional beliefs that eventually led to his ostracism. Although he was not the first to do so, Schweitzer realized that Jesus could only be understood in relation to the socio-religious milieu in which he lived, that he was a man of his time not of our time. Schweitzer approached Jesus from the right direction and placed him in the proper perspective. He came closer than anyone else in understanding Jesus’ intentions and yet he failed to understand him completely. He failed to see the clues that reveal exactly why Jesus undertook his mission and how he planned to accomplish it. More important, he failed to see that Jesus cannot have expected to be resurrected by his god.

I have adopted Schweitzer’s ‘thoroughgoing scepticism’ and ‘thoroughgoing eschatology’ and developed it. I pick up where Schweitzer left off and come to a surprising conclusion. It is because no one else has come any closer that I have written this book. Few have taken their cue from Schweitzer. He showed the way, but few have followed. Some recent authors have merely shown their ignorance of the subject and/or their discovery of what has long been known to others.

Despite the pre-eminence of Schweitzer, some other ‘pillars’ should be acknowledged. These include Reimarus and Strauss (German), Goguel and Guignebert (French), Klausner and Cohn (Jewish) and Mackinnon, Murry and Schonfield (British). There are many others,*

*A full account of Schweitzer’s views on Jesus is given in Appendix B.*
too numerous to mention here, but see Appendix A. The story I tell, although based on Schweitzer, incorporates many ideas from other writers. I acknowledge my debt to them. If I have found the real Jesus, it is only because many other writers have left clues and shown me the way.

The problem of Jesus is basically historical, but with associated problems in ancient languages and religions. But these skills are useless without some insight into the mind of Jesus himself. Schweitzer (1954:393) suggested that every life of Jesus remains a reconstruction on the basis of a more or less accurate insight into the nature of the dynamic self-consciousness of Jesus. Murry (1926:211) believed that Jesus can be known only through intuition. Even the historian should make intuitive guesses about the past. Camille Jullian wrote that historians should not avoid making conjectures when necessary to connect the rare details that remain of the past, although they should carefully distinguish between such conjectures and the data to be handled (Goguel 1933:213).

Salibi noted that one cannot tell which elements in any given story are historically correct but happen to have Old Testament parallels and which elements are not correct (1988:37). He tended to dismiss any story that showed such parallels and so overlooked another possibility, which I will explain. However he explained how historians form a hypothesis and then search for evidence to support it (ibid:1). Indeed, to make sense of Jesus’ life it is necessary to cast up a hypothesis and to test it against the Gospels and the history of his time. If the hypothesis accounts for more of the data than does any other hypothesis, then it may be regarded as a close approximation to the truth. I propose that the hypothesis offered here is such an approximation, the nearest we are likely to get to seeing the real Jesus.

I have made out the figure of a real man, not the awesome figure that stood for so many centuries, nor the modern hippy preacher. He is a deluded and desperate Jewish fanatic, typical enough of his time and in the themes that preoccupied him. Yet he appears to have been unique in the degree to which he allowed these themes to control his life. This real Jesus has nothing to do with Christianity, which he did not found. I have put together a picture of Jesus that has not been seen before.
Rising and falling

Christians believe that Jesus rose to life after falling into death. Indeed some believe that he rose to Earth after falling into Hades. Further, they believe that he rose to heaven and some believe that he will yet fall upon the Earth in judgement. It is also believed that his rising wiped out the consequences of the Fall (into Original Sin).

I propose that Jesus rose by his own efforts and that he planned to continue rising. His fall was not expected and was accidental. As he was reaching for the next step on a stair, which he thought led to the world throne, he slipped and fell. But only a few saw his fall; most thought that he had raced away up the stair. Thus while millions believe that he is seated somewhere above on the throne, his remains lie buried in the earth.∗

In the stream of Judaean history, he rose and fell so rapidly, like a leaping salmon, that the water was hardly disturbed. It was the fishermen, as they tried to follow him, who made the waves.

Schweitzer likened the appearance of Jesus, historically, to the sun, at first hidden behind mountains before dawn, but creating suffusing and mystical effects. But after the dawn the blazing sun itself dispels the pre-dawn effects and only itself is seen. In Schweitzer’s time, Jesus was at high noon brilliance (Schweitzer 1925:249). Now he is setting and is falling below the horizon. Sometimes, in the evening sky, one can look straight into the sun, to see the spots and blemishes upon its face. Indeed, at any time, sunspots can be seen by means of optical projection or through special filters. So with Jesus; because he is setting we can see his defects. Through filters or projections that reduce the brightness of his image, he can be seen as he really was: a man with faults like anyone else. We now know much more about both the sun and Jesus; we know that the sun is an ordinary star and that Jesus was a mere man, albeit an extraordinary one.

Interest in the historical Jesus rose gradually during the nineteenth century, rising exponentially at its end (see Fig. 4 on p. 237). Except

* Perhaps at Talpiot in Jerusalem, where some think his bones were found. See Jacobovici’s book, The Jesus tomb.
during the world wars, interest then remained high until the early '80s, when it fell away. Now there are only a few books each year.

‘In the name of Jesus’

It is reckoned that there are over 2 billion Christians in the world, nearly one third of the total human population. They have organized themselves into a great number of sects representing different versions of the faith. The three main sections are the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Protestant Churches. About half of all Christians belong to the Roman Catholic Church, while about 740 million are Protestant.

Even in the former communist countries of Eastern Europe, many are deeply religious. In Russia about 70 per cent of the population are Christian, mainly members of the Russian Orthodox Church. In Poland over 87 per cent are Roman Catholic. If anything, the collapse of the ‘iron curtain’ has encouraged religious belief in Eastern Europe and Jesus is worshipped as the liberator. In the former Yugoslavia, division is mainly on religious grounds. In the USA, although it is falling, the number identifying as Christian is still around 73 per cent. Numbers are also falling in the United Kingdom and are expected to constitute only 45 per cent by 2050. In Germany, it is thought that there are about 50 million (61%) identifying as Christian, although perhaps most only nominally.

In the West, Christianity survives as an anachronism. Strong belief is held by a small minority, while the majority tolerate it, pay lip service to it and allow it to interfere in education and ceremonies. Jesus’ name is invoked at weddings and funerals, state occasions and at inauguration ceremonies. Jesus’ age is used to number years as if he were still alive and the Bible, which continues to outsell every other book, is regarded as a model of truth and honesty and is used in courts to swear in witnesses.

While the membership of the established Churches in Britain (Anglican, Methodist, Catholic, Baptist) is declining at a rate of about 1 per cent per year, this rate of decline has slowed and the smaller Churches experience growth. Membership of the Seventh-day Adven-
tist Church is growing at about 1.5 per cent per year and that of the Pentecostal and Holiness Churches also continues to grow. In these latter Churches, many are black. There has also been a phenomenal increase in the membership of the House Church Movement and growth is also evident in the Free Methodist Church and Free Presbyterian Church. About 11 per cent of the adult British population belong to a Christian Church and about half of those attend church each Sunday.

In addition, young people are attracted to fanatical and bigoted groups such as the Unification Church (Moonies), where they lose all power to reason for themselves. It can be argued that, among young people the Christian faith is not declining; traditional forms of worship have been replaced by modern ones and converts are being made of those who have not even been reared as Christians.

The controversy between creationism and evolution shows how Christians seek to control education and pretend that the Bible is a scientific document. Many Christians believe in the Biblical story of creation because Jesus believed it or because Jesus endorsed Genesis. Thus creationism is founded on the belief that Jesus was who he claimed to be and that he proved it.

In the name of Jesus, Christian Churches claim the right to pronounce on major issues of our time. They believe either that Jesus is still alive, a concerned observer from heaven or that nearly two millennia ago he foresaw the future and was interested in it. Christian ethics, derived from those thought to have been taught by Jesus, are everywhere revered and advocated, even by non-Christians. Would these ethical standards be supported if Jesus were known to have been deluded about his identity? In fact it is already known that Jesus’ ethical doctrine was not original; it did not differ from that of contemporary teachers. Marshall (1977:225) noted that if Jesus’ prophecy regarding the coming kingdom was mistaken then the teaching and exhortations based on it are also mistaken. In other words, if Jesus was wrong in thinking that he was the Messiah and that the kingdom of God was imminent, there is no reason to think that he was right about anything. It will be seen that his moral injunctions were contingent on his eschatological expectations and therefore that they have no relevance to the modern world. Not a single word of Jesus is of any relevance today.

1 Introduction
Christian beliefs

The beliefs of modern Christians are not necessarily those of the early Christians and of Jesus. Indeed, it can be argued that they are necessarily different. Christians believe in the existence of one god (God), an omnipotent and omniscient supernatural being who created the world. Today they are also forced to believe that this God created the whole universe, of which the Earth is but one almost insignificant part. This God is a benevolent father figure who wants all people to worship him. Despite his paternal characteristics, he is believed to consist of or manifest himself in three distinct forms, one of which is the father figure (The Father). The other two are The Son (Jesus) and The Holy Ghost (a divine and permeating spirit being). It is believed that all three exist in one God (The Trinity, an interesting parallel with Hinduism's Trimurti) and that they have always existed. In particular it is believed that The Son was responsible for the creation (John 1:1–5).

Fundamentalist Christians believe that, not many thousands of years ago, God created mankind in the form of Adam and Eve (man and woman). Others, adapting to modern science, believe that God did not interfere in his universe after its creation (the Big Bang, several thousand million years ago). It is believed that, following disobedience, Adam and Eve were punished by being expelled from a perfect environment (The Garden of Eden) and made subject to disease, pain and death, none, apparently, part of the divine plan. This expulsion is known as ‘the Fall’ (from grace) and the disobedience that led to it is known as the ‘original Sin’.

It is believed that Jesus was not just the Messiah of the Jews, who failed to recognize him, but an incarnation of The Son, the Creator Himself. He took human form in order to save mankind from the consequences of the primeval disobedience by the original pair. Salvation is obtained by believing that Jesus was (is) The Son (of God) and that he had a personal interest in the believer’s salvation. Salvation consists of preservation from the eternal punishment reserved for all those without it and offers eternal life (John 3:16). It is believed that Jesus’ death (supposed) was a sacrifice of such a magnitude that it can compensate for all the sins of all the people who ever lived or who ever
will live.* It is thought that Jesus revived from death and demonstrated a resurrection that is offered to all believers. Christians are obliged to live good and peaceable lives, although it is not clear how failure to do so would affect their chances of attaining the after-life. Opinions differ on the relative importance of faith in Jesus and good works.

Christians believe that Jesus is still alive in an ethereal realm called ‘heaven,’ although few are sure of its location, certainly not today when the heavens have been so well explored. While some believe that they will join Jesus immediately after death, others hold that resurrection must await Jesus’ return. This event, usually described as his ‘second Coming,’ is eagerly expected by fundamentalist Christians; they see signs of it every day.

It is a paradox that, while Christians believe that life on Earth is a trial to be endured and that, after death, they will go to a better place, they are not usually in a hurry to go. An exception was the American evangelical sect whose members committed mass suicide in Guyana in 1978. Also possibly the sect, most of whose members died in a fire at Waco in Texas in 1993. Members of the Order of the Solar Temple, a cult rooted in the Roman Catholic faith, who were either killed or committed suicide in Switzerland in 1994, believed that after death they would travel through fire to the planet Sirius (it is actually a star). In 1997, thirty-nine members of an American pseudo-Christian cult committed suicide in the belief that they would go to a ‘higher plane’ on a spacecraft hiding behind comet Hale-Bopp, then visible in the night sky. On the whole however, Christians try to preserve life and deplore its loss, even among their own number.

Christian belief regarding destiny is also paradoxical. Christians pray to God or to Jesus or to Mary his mother asking for help, guidance or intervention in human affairs. If something occurs that answers to their request, then this is taken as proof of God’s existence and his care for the world. If nothing occurs or something occurs that is not desired, then blame is attached, not to God, but to the believer. In short, God is praised for what Christians like, but is not blamed for what they dislike. Some believe that a wicked spirit (Satan) is responsi-

* Despite the fact that a divine and immortal being cannot die.
ble for all evil’, although it is not explained how he came to exist or why he is permitted to exist. Some think that he is an ex-archangel, the original turncoat, although they cannot explain how God could have created a being with such a rebellious nature. Indeed, Christian theology cannot explain why God created beings capable of disobedience or why he tolerated their continued existence when they demonstrated it.

Fundamental Christianity believes that the Bible is true, that every word is – was – ‘inspired by God’. However there is some confusion over whether God inspired only the original authors or whether he also inspired the subsequent translators. In other words, there is a tendency to believe that only the text in one’s own language is ‘inspired’. The many translation errors undermine belief that translations are reliable, forcing some to admit that their Bible contains errors. Few are able to understand the original languages and so are at the mercy of interpreters. Fundamentalists see the danger that questioning any aspect of the Bible starts a process with no clear end and that can lead to them not knowing what they stand for (Stannard 1982:28). Nevertheless Stannard, a scientist, represents a branch of Christianity that believes that it is compatible with modern science. Thus the Genesis accounts are (necessarily) seen to be edifying myths, not to be taken literally, and the New Testament miracles, excepting the Resurrection, are allegorical. He can see the stupidity of refusing to acknowledge the discoveries of science, but he stubbornly clings to the belief that God exists and that Jesus was his incarnation. In this case the questioning must stop at Jesus and belief in his Resurrection. For all Christians, the Resurrection is the pillar of their faith (I Cor. 15:14).

It is evident that Christian beliefs cheapen human life. Christians may be careless with their lives and perhaps with the lives of others who are not Christians, confident that they, if not the others, will live again. In 1993, cult leader David Koresh appeared to be prepared to sacrifice the lives of seventy to eighty people in their compound at Waco in Texas. It is certain that modern Christians do not fear a nuclear holocaust as do non-Christians. Christians can hope that, after incineration, they can be reconstructed and renewed; Jesus is their nuclear shelter. Stannard argued that since God’s purpose was to bring into existence ‘spiritual

* This belief is inherited from Judaism.
creatures’ that would develop a loving relationship with him, it does not matter if one day the Earth returns to its former desolate condition through nuclear war (op cit:43). Those who do not share these beliefs can only hope that the finger on the nuclear button does not belong to a Christian. But it has been observed that (US) President Reagan’s administration contained many millennialists* and that their beliefs may have deterred them from attempting to solve the world’s problems. At the time, it was believed that they might even have acquiesced in a Soviet (USSR) attack on Israel believing that it is a necessary precursor to the Second Coming (**The Sunday Times**, 5 December 1982). Such people may exist in the present US administration. President Reagan himself, apparently influenced by the fundamentalist preacher Jerry Falwell, subscribed to millennialism; he believed that Armageddon would occur during the present generation (**The Guardian**, 21 April 1984).

Christian faith is built on faith in Jesus, who is supposed to have established the religion. If his beliefs were mistaken and/or he was not who he claimed to be, then Christianity is built not upon a rock but upon sand. Some eighty generations of believers have gone to their graves confident that the Resurrection of Jesus is a historical fact and that they will live eternally in his company. The fact that so many believed and so many living still believe that Jesus survived death does not mean that it must be true. The Chinese say that ‘if a thousand people believe a foolish thing, it is still a foolish thing’. Indeed, if the whole of mankind believed a foolish thing, that would not make it a wise thing. Truth does not necessarily reside with the majority.

* Christians who believe that a millennium of direct rule by Jesus is imminent.
**Abbreviations**

The following abbreviations are used for books of the Bible and the Apocrypha:

**OLD TESTAMENT**
- Gen. = Genesis
- Exod. = Exodus
- Lev. = Leviticus
- Num. = Numbers
- Deut. = Deuteronomy
- Isa. = Isaiah
- Ezek. = Ezekiel
- Dan. = Daniel
- Hos. = Hosea
- Mic. = Micah
- Hab. = Habakkuk
- Zech. = Zechariah
- Mal. = Malachi
- Chr. = Chronicles
- Neh. = Nehemiah
- Ps. = Psalms
- Eccles. = Ecclesiastes
- S. of S. = Song of Solomon

**NEW TESTAMENT**
- Matt. = Matthew
- Rom. = Romans
- Cor. = Corinthians
- Gal. = Galatians
- Thess. = Thessalonians
- Heb. = Hebrews
- Jas. = James
- Pet. = Peter
- Rev. = Revelation

**APOCRYPHA**
- Macc. = Maccabees
2 Did Jesus exist?

The argument for historicity

The question of whether the Gospels are based upon myth or history has exercised great minds even since Bauer claimed that Jesus is the product not the creator of Christianity, although Dupuis and Volney both anticipated his views. Later, Robertson, Kalthoff, Jensen, Smith and Drews were to develop their own versions of a mythical Jesus. Conybeare dealt adequately with the views of Robertson, Smith and Drews, while other mythicists have each received their subsequent rebuttal, although not necessarily from the orthodox.*

Klausner (1925) concluded that Jesus did exist and that he lived and died in Judaea under Roman occupation. He claimed that the doubts raised by Bauer had no solid foundation and condemned the ‘conglomeration of pseudo-scientific proofs advanced by Bauer, Kalthoff and Drews’. Goguel (1926) wrote that it would be easy to show how much there enters of the conjectural, of superficial resemblances, of debatable interpretation into the systems of Drews, Robertson, Smith, Couchoud, or Stahl. He went on to state that the argument from silence is unconvincing because, owing to the little that is recorded by secular authors, the silence is not complete and these secular authors were under no obligation to explain the origin of Christianity. Nor, he pointed out, do the Gospels defend the historicity of Jesus, since in those days no one questioned it. He wrote, ‘how did the opponents of Christianity come to neglect the use of so terrible an argument?’ Why did the Jewish opponents of Christianity not undermine the Church by denying Jesus’ historicity? Goguel pointed out that Saul’s persecution of Christianity is a ‘decisive objection against the doctrine that the entire gospel history has been deduced from a theory

* Readers unfamiliar with the writers referred to in this chapter may find it helpful to read Appendix A first.
or from a pre-existent myth’ and he asked how the ‘well established
fact’ that there were, in the Jerusalem Church, men who passed for be-
ing brothers of Jesus ‘according to the flesh’ (Gal. 1:19; I Cor. 9:5), can
be reconciled with the theory that Christ was an ideal personage. ‘The
epistles of Paul’, he wrote, ‘afford precise testimony in support of the
existence of the gospel tradition before him. They presume a Jesus who
lived, acted, taught, whose life was a model for believers, and who died
on the cross’. Goguel concluded that, ‘if there is in early Christianity
any speculation assimilated from pre-existing Jewish and even pagan
elements, it is upon the basis of a historical tradition about the life and
death of Jesus that this speculation has developed. The historical reality
of the personality of Jesus alone enables us to understand the birth and
development of Christianity, which otherwise would remain an enig-
ma, and in the proper sense of the word, a miracle’.

Klausner (1925) considered that Paul is a trustworthy witness to
the existence of Jesus and, in Goguel’s opinion, Paul, the persecutor
Saul, is a witness to the truth of the Crucifixion (Goguel 1933). Weinel
and Widgery wrote that the four chief epistles of Paul are the most cer-
tain witness that we have for the fact that Jesus lived.

Conybeare took great trouble to show how devious and tenden-
tious are the ‘mythico-symbolic’ methods of certain mythicists. A ra-
tionalist, he had no time for those who, through ignorance, embraced
wild theories of mystery plays and solar myths. Comparing Jesus with
such personalities as Solon, Epimenides, Pythagoras and Apollonius of
Tyana, he claimed that the proof of their existence is more tenuous
than that for Jesus and that ‘the historicity of Jesus is much better at-
tested and documented than that of Apollonius …’. Further, ‘of the life
of Plato we know next to nothing, … the only life we have of him was
penned by Diogenes Laertius 600 years after he lived. The details of his
life supplied by Aristoxenus, a pupil of Aristotle, are obviously false.’ If
Jesus is a myth, then Plato is a mere figment of the imagination. ‘The
thesis, therefore, that Jesus never lived, but was from first to last a
myth, presents itself at the outset as a paradox.’ On comparison with
other religions, he pointed out that while, for instance, the votaries of
Adonis and Osiris and all other pagan gods never regarded their divin-
ity as having had an earthly existence, Christians did claim this for
their God. McCabe noted that we have less evidence of the personal
existence of Kung-fu-tse or Buddha than of Jesus, yet no historian doubts their historicity. Klausner (1925) noted Rousseau’s statement that the matters told of Socrates, whose existence no one doubts, rest on far slenderer evidence than do those told of Jesus.

George Bernard Shaw and H G Wells both believed that a real person lay behind the story of Jesus and that it could not have been invented (Rylands), while Mackinnon declared that ‘without the historic Jesus there would have been no Christianity and no Church to found’. He concluded that ‘the myth theory is an absurdity in the face of the evidence of Paul, let alone the Gospels’. Regarding the motives of the mythicists, Wood claimed that ‘doubts regarding the historical existence of Jesus Christ are advanced only by persons who wish to establish preconceived ideas as to the nature of religion or as to the nature of history …’ while Cohn noted that Rousseau ‘gave early warning that denial of the historicity of Jesus is nothing more than reluctance to grapple with the difficulties presented by the Gospel inconsistencies, not a solution of them’. In relation to the lack of corroboration from Talmudic sources, Cohn quoted Klausner that ‘Jesus lived in that stormy period when attention was concentrated on other, more important events, and thus passed through Jewish history almost unnoticed’.

Jewish students of this subject, like Klausner above, have no doubt that Jesus existed. Vermes was at pains to make it clear that Jesus was ‘a real historical person’. He thought that the difficulties arising from the denial of his existence far exceed those deriving from its acceptance (2008;1).

Because the name ‘Jesus’ cannot be used in isolation from the gospel story in which he is the central character, claims regarding his historicity need to be qualified. It is one thing to claim that the picture of a glorified omniscient and omnipotent Christ is false and quite another to claim that there never was a Jewish prophet called Jesus the Nazarene. Moreover, there is a wide difference between the view that there was never such a person as described in the Gospels and the belief that there never existed in first century Palestine a Messianic claimant subsequently known as Christus.

What do people mean when they claim that Jesus did not exist? Some mean that they cannot accept the Church’s view of its founder, some that they find the Gospel accounts indigestible, and others that it
is unlikely that there ever was a historical figure behind the legend. The choice will no doubt be made on the basis of the individual religious background and the relevant importance attached to rejecting all or part of the traditional view.

Therefore, it is necessary to distinguish between these various Christs, to get a clear view of whose historicity is in question. Rationalists are certainly not interested in defending a supernatural Christ, nor would they believe that the Gospels are to be taken at their face value. If Jesus existed, he was neither superhuman nor chosen by God. The fundamental questions are, what in the Gospel record can be taken to refer to a real historical person and, if he existed, what can be known about that person.

Ory identified three rationalist positions, as follows:
1) there never was a man called Jesus and Christianity grew without him;
2) there was a man called Jesus of whom we know very little for certain and who might as well not have existed; and
3) there was a man called Jesus, but not the person of the Gospels.

He claimed that this latter Jesus was a fanatical Jew, a *sicarius* (assassin) at daggers-drawn with the High Priest and that he did not found Christianity. But what does Ory mean by ‘might as well not have existed’? Is his Jesus-2 the originator of Christianity? Why does his Jesus-3 have to have been a *sicarius*? Altogether he over-complicated the matter. Either there did exist in first century Palestine a Jewish teacher called Jesus the Nazarene, whose life and more especially whose death generated Christianity, or Christianity arose without any particular nuclear personality. The issue is whether or not a distinct personality lies behind the origin of Christianity.

This question may be tackled indirectly by examining the Gospels in the light of the proposal that Christianity arose *without* a historical founder. If Jesus did not exist, how did the Gospels, to say nothing of the secular accounts of him, come into existence? If there was no Jesus, Burkitt wondered that the early Christians invented so little; how, for instance, did they fail to invent a statement by Jesus that would have settled a burning question of the Apostolic Age – on what conditions Gentile believers were to be accepted into the Church? The complete mythicist case should show a full and convincing explanation for every
word of the New Testament; indeed, it should explain certain curious silences.

Mythicists should explain how it was that the creators of the myth stated that Jesus came from Nazareth, when every Jew knew that the Messiah was to come from Bethlehem in Judaea. The Birth Narratives were contrived, among other reasons, to attempt to reconcile these two conflicting provenances. But why should the evangelists have created such a difficulty in the first place?*

Goguel (1926) suggested that, since it caused so much embarrassment, Christian tradition could not have placed Jesus' origin in Nazareth. The mythicists, he claimed, were hard put to explain how Jesus was called a Nazarene. I shall show that 'nazarene' does not signify someone from Nazareth, but rather that Matthew and Luke, writing after Mark, who has no Birth Narrative, misunderstood the meaning because of the belief that Jesus came from Galilee. They presumed that it referred to someone from Nazareth. But why Galilee, a rebellious and not strictly Jewish province? Galileans were despised in Jerusalem as uncouth country cousins, without manners or education. Why select this area for the provenance of the Messiah? A mythical Christ who did not originate in Bethlehem could not have been acceptable to Jews.

Wells countered this argument with the help of Lohmeyer, who believed that, at the time the Gospels originated, Galilee was an important religious centre. But it was not explained how this eliminated the need to fulfil the prophecy of Micah (Mic. 5:2). Nor do we see why the evangelist should not place his Jesus in Bethlehem, no matter where the Christian sect originated. His readers were far more likely to know that Christ should come from Bethlehem than they were to know of obscure religious activities in Galilee. Burkitt stated that there were no Christians in Galilee until the days when Christians were to be found in every corner of the Empire (Howell-Smith). The fact that the later authors of Matthew and Luke felt compelled to convince their readers that Jesus was actually born in Bethlehem demonstrates how vital a condition this was to the Jews. If Wells is correct, how is it that Mark failed to realize the importance of this basic foundation for the construction of the myth? Salibi (1988:38) suggested that the account of

* Hugh Trevor-Roper drew attention to this question in The Spectator, 27 Feb 1971.
Jesus’ initial preaching in Galilee was based on Isaiah 9:1; in fact he located ‘galilee’ in Arabia (ibid:99).

Mythicists should also find an explanation for a discrepancy regarding Jesus’ parentage. Although he is given a contrived genealogy, to show his ‘legitimate’ descent from King David, the last link in the line was removed to give him a divine father.* This completely invalidated any proof of descent from the royal line and must have made him an unacceptable Messiah to Jews. Why such confusion in a myth? If the myth-makers were Jews, attempting to show that the expected and legitimate Messiah had arrived, why would they fail to demonstrate his right of inheritance?

If Jesus was invented, was John the Baptist also invented and, if so, why? Craveri wrote that if the beginnings of the public life of Jesus had been otherwise, there would have been no need for the early Christians to devise a Forerunner, whom they then had to relegate to a secondary rank and Borsch was sure that speculation that John the Baptist was Christ (Luke 3:15) could hardly have come from Christians. As Goguel (1933) noted, John’s baptism of Jesus is an embarrassment to the Church and so is probably a historical event. However there is no question about John’s existence; he was mentioned by Josephus (Antiq. 18:5:2). How is it that mythicists do not use John as their terminus a quo? How is it that some place Jesus’ existence at a time when John did not exist? How is it that mythicists do not question the existence of John the Baptist?

Why would the evangelists commit themselves to the forecast, in the words of Jesus, that all his prophecies concerning the end of the world and the dawning of the new kingdom would be fulfilled before the death of those around him (Mark 9:1; 13:30)? If the Gospels were compiled one or two centuries after the time in which the evangelists imagined and placed their Jesus, why would they put into his mouth words that plainly showed the falsehood of his prophecy? At the time of writing, all the apostles were dead and yet the kingdom as forecast by Jesus had not appeared. That such a subversive statement is included in the Gospels surely reveals that the evangelists were unable to ex-

* Tabor claims that the genealogies show Mary to have royal blood.
clude the prophecy, it being thrust upon them by a tradition that faithfully recorded the words of Jesus.

Then there is the problem of the story of Judas’ treachery. Cohn observed that, on the one hand the story is so unlikely and incongruous that it is unbelievable, and on the other hand that it ‘gives rise to so much shame and despair that it could not just have been invented’. Christianity is embarrassed by the existence in the Gospels of this lurid tale, which shows such odious treachery in a disciple and risked impugning Jesus’ ability to assess character. What explanation do mythicists offer for the invention of this episode? Does a story-teller deliberately create a plot that he cannot explain satisfactorily or at all and which in any case subverts his case? Guignebert (1935) expressed the view that the most likely origin of Iscariot is from the Aramaic root meaning ‘deliver up’ (i.e. ‘Judas-the-Betrayer’) and pointed out that this is the best argument in favour of the historicity of the Betrayal. If the Betrayal is historical, then the question of Jesus’ existence is settled. Salibi claimed that Iscariot derives from Askar in Arabia and that it was merely a surname indicating that Judas came from that place (1988:99).

It would be possible to believe that Jesus had been thwarted in his hope of establishing a Messianic kingdom immediately after his entry into Jerusalem, to believe that the authorities had somehow sensed his attempted coup and had removed him before he could do more damage, were it not for the extraordinary account of Judas’ betrayal. If the account is accurate, it prevents any notion that Jesus was taken by surprise and this in turn means that he anticipated, even hoped for, arrest. If the account is invention, why did the author choose such a dishonourable means of putting Jesus into the hands of his enemies; indeed why did he do this at all?

But the most serious conflict arises over the beliefs concerning the death of Jesus. Brandon observed that Christians could hardly have invented the notion that the founder of their faith had been put to death on a charge of sedition and, as Cross (1970b) put it, the Crucifixion is not the kind of story that any Jewish sect would make up about its hero.

* Carmichael (1995:78) thought that the name ‘Judas’ stood for all Jewry and that it was therefore part of an attempt to blame the Jews for Christ’s death.
Guignebert (1935) claimed that if Jews had invented the death of Jesus, they would have chosen some other mode of death than the cross, ‘no one creates difficulties on purpose when they can easily be avoided’.

Mark, the first evangelist (but Powell disagreed), writing for Greek-speaking Christians in the Roman Empire, probably shortly after the capture of Jerusalem in 70, was clearly embarrassed by the story he told. How could he describe the execution of his hero without impugning the character of the Roman official responsible? If, as is evident, he blamed the Jews for Jesus’ death, why did he not give Jesus a Jewish death such as stoning?* Why involve the Roman governor? Mark shows great reluctance to blame Pilate for what appears to be the conviction of an innocent man. His readers would have known that the execution of an innocent was a miscarriage of Roman justice and there was an implied criticism of the Lex Julia or its executors. Because this criticism had to be muted, Mark attempted to show that Pilate was unwilling to condemn. He portrays Pilate as humane, when Philo showed him to have been inflexible, relentless, vindictive, stubborn and cruel (Leg. 38). Why should Mark have to go to all this trouble? Why was he at such great pains to exonerate Pilate when he could easily have attributed both trial and execution to the Jews, that rebellious nation recently crushed by Vespasian?

But an even more difficult question is why the evangelists record the story of a Messiah who failed. Their hero made great and confident predictions, consistent with Jewish eschatological beliefs regarding the establishment on Earth of a new order destined to subdue even the mighty Roman Empire. Where was the promise of this Jesus? If he had been seen since his death, he had certainly not remained on Earth as the scenario demanded. He had not changed the rule on Earth; the Romans ruled as before. All that those who believed in his power could expect was that he would return at some indeterminate time in the future. This does not seem to be a very satisfactory outcome for the myth. In fact the very state of the world in the first century would have prevented Jews from making any claim that the Messiah had come. They had known from their youth that the coming of the Messiah would be accompanied by such cataclysmic events and lead to such a

* Powell thought that Jesus was stoned to death and so blamed the Jews.
revolutionary change in both the physical and political world that no one could fail to notice. No Jew could have believed that the Messiah had come already, that he had been meek, impotent, killed and had gone to heaven. The necessary evidence would have been lacking. He would have asked ‘where is the promise of his appearing? For from the day when the fathers fell asleep all things remain as they were since the creation’ (II Pet. 3:4). That many Jews came to believe the Gospel accounts was the result, not of self-conviction, but of the persistent preaching of the apostles and the conviction with which they preached. But not all Jews accepted the story. If the account was so easy of compilation, so obvious a deduction from Scripture, how is it that it was rejected by so many Jews? Sanders noted the difficulty of explaining how to reconcile the fact that Jesus was executed by the Romans as would-be ‘king of the Jews’ and the fact that his disciples subsequently formed a Messianic movement that was not based on the hope of military victory (1985:294).

Lastly, how does it come about that the evangelists cannot agree on what is meant by ‘the third day’? Matthew stated that Jesus forecast his entombment for three days and three nights (Matt. 12:40), yet how could he write this when he knew or believed that Jesus was resurrected after only two nights in the tomb, on the second day after? If he invented it, how does an evangelist come to have such a glaring discrepancy in his account? In 1744 Annet wrote, ‘if the only sign to be given to the Jews was this parallel with Jonah’s incarceration, then what becomes of the proof of Jesus’ claims when he failed to perform the sign?’

We find that there are a number of statements in the Gospels that are incomprehensible if the whole story is a myth. They are evidence that, although the evangelists manipulated the texts to suit the times in which they lived and the case they wished to promote, they handled basically historical material. There is evidence that they were more prone to add than subtract. It is understandable that they would fear to omit part of what they must have regarded as sacred accounts from Palestine, the Holy Land. But they might not have seen any reason why they should not add their own ‘explanations’. Thus, while we cannot easily distinguish between original and gloss, we can see where the text obstinately subverts the evangelist’s purpose, a subversion he did not fully understand or was afraid to change. Trevor-Roper pointed out
that the fact that the evangelists resorted to explanations suggests a historical basis for the Gospels.* There are serious anomalies in the Gospel texts that are not consistent with the theory that Jesus did not exist and are evidence that real events lie behind the story. The very language of the Gospels reveals their origin in Palestine. Weinel and Widgery noted that Jesus’ mother tongue, Aramaic, permeates the text so plainly that a Hellenized Roman or Latinized Greek of the second century could never have invented such a figure. Jesus is at home and in reality in Galilee, not at the court of the Emperor in Rome of the second century or in the thought of a Hellenistic writer.

Having claimed that Jesus was a historical personality, we are not at all driven to accept the Gospel accounts of his life, character and purpose. But if he existed, the one established historical event is his execution by the Judaean governor on a charge of sedition. Let us be clear that either Jesus did not exist and almost anything may be believed of him or he did exist and was tried and crucified by the Roman authorities. This execution is the only reason he can have any claim to reality; both Paul and the secular authors agree that Christ was crucified. If this is correct we may conclude that Jesus had been found guilty of a capital charge and we are given hints that this charge was claiming to be King of the Jews. At that time in Judaea it is the most likely charge upon which he could be convicted. McArthur noted that a historico-scientific description of the life of Jesus would only be possible in the form of a description of his death, its historical presuppositions and the events preceding and following it. The historical method involves starting at a well-known event and working outwards, forward and backward. But how and why Jesus should have fallen into Pilate’s hands is another story, not necessarily the one told by the evangelists.

Wells’s theory of Christian origins

In 1971 Pemberton Press published a new theory to account for the origin of Christianity, the work of G A Wells, Professor of German at Birkbeck College, University of London (Wells 1971b).

* In The Spectator, as footnote on p. 19.
Wells’s theory is based on the well-aired presumption that Jesus did not exist as a historical person, although Wells pretended not to treat that controversial issue. However, his theory subsumes this belief.

Essentially, his idea was that Christianity is the result of an amalgamation (after 100 CE) of Jewish Messianism and pagan ideas of a historical, suffering redeemer. He believed that the complexity of Christian doctrine had gradually evolved from an original belief that the Messiah had appeared at some time in the recent past. However, Borsch pointed out that, contrary to the usual belief that religious beliefs are at first simple, only later complicated, in fact they are usually complicated at the outset; followers gradually simplify them and eradicate contradictions. As I shall show, Jesus’ original beliefs were certainly complicated and they were followed by the simplistic beliefs of the apostles. Wells asked us to accept that, by the end of the first century, Jewish gnostics had formulated a belief in a supernatural redeemer who would come from heaven. Those who are accustomed to debating this issue in regard to the accepted life of Jesus are at a disadvantage in having to shift ground by at least a century and it is a little disconcerting for Wells to quote Pauline statements as representative of the Jewish view. Naturally, the meaning of Paul’s words will depend upon whether one sees them as the cause or the result of a belief in a historical saviour and they can hardly be accepted as exhibits in this debate.

The Jewish idea of the Messiah up to the end of the second-century can be seen in the Mishnah, a collection of precepts forming the basis of the Talmud, the Jewish civil and ceremonial law and embodying Jewish oral law. According to Klausner (1956), the Messianic concept was a consistent developing theme from patriarchal times right up to the completion of the Mishnah and no dramatic changes are detectable. Indeed, no one can be certain as to the exact periods spanned by particular phases of the belief. Klausner also makes it plain that the Jewish Messiah was essentially of human origin, a man of flesh and blood like all other mortals. He was neither supernatural nor an incarnation. Klausner also noted that the entire activity of the Messiah-ben-Joseph, the first of two Messiahs, had a wholly political significance. Such ideas are hardly consistent with a legendary figure; it is evident that the evangelists attempted to dissociate Jesus from any political activity.
Why would the myth-maker build a Jesus, a Messiah, who did not conform to the traditional picture painted by the Mishnah?

While Wells was aware that there was a belief in two Messiahs, he appears to have seen them both as war leaders slain in battle. He believed that syncretism reduced these two to one suffering redeemer under the influence of pagan religions. But the Jews believed that only the first Messiah would be killed; the second would rule Israel forever.

Wells proposed that the notion of a resurrected redeemer came from pagan beliefs in the first century. As we shall see, the Jews inherited belief in resurrection from Persia. The idea of a resurrected redeemer is one that might have arisen among certain sects of the Jews and that Jesus particularly made his own.

One of Wells’s exhibits is the warning against the heresy of Docetism (I John 4:2–3; II John 7). Superficially these verses seem to suggest that some denied that Jesus had lived on Earth and indeed this was Wells’s understanding. He took this as support for his contention that, during the second century, the invention of the myth created a debate as to whether or not Jesus had really existed. But the Docetic heresy was about the nature of Christ’s body. Docetists claimed that Christ only seemed to be human and was really an ethereal being. This was the reason for John’s warning to his readers to beware of those who would not admit that Jesus had come in the flesh (en sarki). It was not a debate about whether or not Jesus had lived; it was one regarding the nature of his being. Even Docetists would have affirmed that an ethereal Jesus had lived under Pilate and it was naive of Wells to suggest that John could have refuted the Docetists by quoting biographical details of Jesus. These details were not in dispute and John, unlike Ignatius, was not writing to confute Docetists; he had no need to debate Docetism with his ‘beloved’. In any case, the fact that Ignatius confuted the Docetists with biographical details is not evidence, as Wells supposed, that the author of the epistles of John lacked such information.

How did Wells explain the choice by the early Christians of the specific historical period in which their Messiah lived and died? How was it that the saviour was given a historical background in Pilate’s Judaea, including death by crucifixion? Wells suggests that Christians

* Docetism comes from the Greek dokein, to seem.
placed their hero under Pilate because of the latter’s known cruelty to Jews. Having placed Jesus under Roman rule, the Christians would have expected him to have suffered the fate suffered by other Messianic claimants, if there were any. In his second work (1975), Wells exhibited special pleading by suggesting that the early Christians placed Jesus’ death under Roman rule because Jesus was believed to have been crucified. He also believed that Pilate was ‘just the type of person to have murdered Jesus’. Wells acknowledged that ‘when suffering was greatest, the Messiah would be nearest’ (1973), a thought from the Mishnah. But why did he think that Pilate’s rule was considered the period of Israel’s greatest suffering? From the point of view of a Jew living about 100, Israel’s greatest suffering must surely have seemed to have been the time of the Roman War (66 to 70 CE), which culminated in the destruction of the Temple and the nation. But for Wells, this was too late, in that many alive at the time of the (presumed) evolution of the myth could have recalled the War and denied the existence of an ‘invented’ Messiah. He had to find a period beyond the memory of any living Jew. Then why not choose the period of the rule of Herod the Great? Klausner (1925) states that suffering was so great during the tyranny of Herod and the rule of the procurators (prefects) that many false Messiahs appeared. This period extended from 40 BC to the commencement of the Roman War, nearly 100 years. Why, out of this century, did Wells think the evangelists chose the prefecture of Pilate (26 to 36)? If it was because of Pilate’s reputed cruelty, why do the Gospels portray him as a compassionate governor, reluctant to commit Jesus to death? Why select a cruel governor and then make every effort to conceal his cruelty? Worse, why choose a period when Rome itself ruled Judaea? It was foolish to invent an execution of Jesus that laid responsibility on the Roman authorities; either Jesus would be thought a villain justly punished or the Roman power wicked and stupid to have executed a god. Moreover, those propagating this gospel ran the risk of detention and/or punishment for circulating a story that implied Roman incompetence. Reasonable early Christians, looking for a home for their mythical hero, would surely have set him in Herod’s kingdom. Herod was more cruel than Pilate. By causing Jesus to die at his hand, they could have avoided the embarrassment of blaming Rome. Moreover, Herod ruled before Pilate, so putting the myth further out of reach of
living memory. But the Gospels exhibit a clear intention to blame the Jews for Jesus’ death, an intention subverted by the fact that he was crucified, a Roman death penalty. But placement under Herod would have given Jesus a Jewish death penalty, such as stoning or strangulation. That the Gospels place Jesus as crucified under Pilate makes nonsense of Wells’s theory and shows that the evangelists, unlike a time-traveller, were not at liberty to choose the time to which they would go. The record stubbornly points to a historical figure.

Wells believed that the idea that Jesus became an object of worship within a few decades of his death was without parallel, so casting doubt on his historicity. But Renan observed that Jesus would be a phenomenon unparalleled in history if, with the part he played, he had not become idealized. The legends respecting Alexander were invented before the generation of his companions in arms became extinct; those respecting St Francis of Assisi began in his lifetime. A rapid metamorphosis operated in the same manner in the twenty or thirty years that followed the death of Jesus and imposed upon biography the peculiarities of an ideal legend.

Wells (1982) has drawn attention to the possibility that the evangelists constructed accounts of events in the life of Jesus by deducing these events from Old Testament prophecy. However, if an evangelist could see the need for actions that fulfilled prophecy, so could the historical Jesus. It may have been Jesus and not the evangelists who constructed the incidents in question and this is a theme I shall explore.

JOSEPHUS ON JESUS
About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a man. For he was one who wrought surprising feats and was a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. He was Christ [Christos]. When Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standing amongst us, had condemned him to be crucified, those who had in the first place come to love him did not give up their affection for him. On the third day he appeared to them restored to life, for the prophets of God had prophesied these and countless other marvellous things about him. And the tribe of the Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared. [Antiq. 18:3:3].
Did Josephus mention Jesus?

Because of their importance in establishing the existence and worth of the man worshipped by the Christian Church, the brief references to Jesus by the Jewish historian Josephus are called Testimonia Flaviana (Flavian Testimonies).

Jesus’ name may be found twice in Josephus’ Antiquities of the Jews (Antiq. 18:3:3 and 20:9:1). The former (see panel) describes Jesus’ appearance in Jerusalem and how many followed him. It also describes how Pilate crucified him and how the sect of Christians are named after him. The latter is a brief reference to Jesus as the brother of James, the leader of the Jerusalem Church.

Christianity has long treasured these passages as a defence against those who questioned the historicity of Jesus. Consequently it was natural for mythicists to question the authenticity of the Testimonia; Goguel (1926) noted that such questioning began in the sixteenth century.

The oldest manuscripts of Josephus’ work date from the eleventh century, although the original is known to have been published about the year 93 when Domitian was emperor.

Josephus was a Pharisee who sided with Rome on the issue of the Jewish War* and who was highly regarded by Vespasian. He settled in Rome under the patronage of the Emperors and adopted their family name – Flavius. Despite the odium he brought upon himself from fellow Jews, he was at pains in his writings to be fair to his nation and he became somewhat of an apologist for Judaism.

Interest in Judaea probably grew after its capture and the fall of Jerusalem in 70. Consequently his first work was a history of the War, in which he took part. Only later did he complete the twenty books of the history of the Jews, Antiquities.

Josephus wrote under the ever-watchful eye of the Roman state. This probably meant that he had to be circumspect in his writings. Concerned as we are with accounts of the assumed founder of Christianity, it is as well to remember that, at the time Josephus wrote, Christians throughout the Empire were suffering severe persecution.

* The Jews called it ‘the Roman War’.
The name of Christ was everywhere, those who acknowledged it being suspected of subversive activity against the state and its personalized religion. Goguel (1926) pointed out that Josephus had to avoid associating his race and himself with the Christians. The only connection between the Christians and Judaea was Jesus. If Josephus knew or believed that Jesus was a Messianic pretender, then he might have wished to avoid mention of it. In fact he avoided Messianism altogether, only referring to it obliquely when he stated that prophecies concerning the appearance of a world ruler from Palestine were fulfilled in Vespasian, who was proclaimed Emperor while in Judaea. Thus he failed to reveal that the Jewish prophecies anticipated that the ruler would be a Jew. It is clear that Josephus was prepared to interpret history in such a way as to ingratiate himself with the Roman rulers. Goguel concluded that Josephus’ brevity on Jesus and his absolute silence on Messianism was out of prudence and fear, not wishing to compromise either himself or his people. He could not speak of Christianity whilst amputating it from Messianism and so he kept silent. Goguel wrote, ‘how could he speak of the Messianists, and in particular of that group of them which bore the name of “Christian”, without saying that the object of their ardent hopes was the destruction of all earthly empires …?’

Even if we accept that Josephus did not write of Jesus, we should be left with another, more puzzling problem. How do we account for the failure of Josephus to mention Christianity when everyone knew that it had originated in his country? According to Luke, the early Church caused considerable trouble for the religious and secular authorities, not only in Jerusalem but throughout Israel, and it was greatly persecuted (Acts 8:1). It is clear that Josephus avoided both Christianity and Jewish Messianism. In these circumstances it is a wonder that there is any word of Jesus. As Robertson has written (1953), if Josephus’ (alleged) silence about Jesus proves the latter never existed, his silence about Christianity proves that no Christians existed in his time. The Josephan text, while it identifies Jesus as Christos and by implication the founder of Christianity, does not associate Jesus in any way with Messianism or any other Jewish political movement. Perhaps Josephus regarded Christianity as quite divorced from Judaism and outside his scope (Goguel 1926). His brevity certainly cannot be explained by lack of interest; in 93 interest in Christianity and its founder
was high (Klausner 1925). Indeed, some of the Gospels were written about that time. Goguel (1933) noted that Josephus was not the only writer of the period to avoid mention of Jesus or Christianity and that Josephus made no mention of the great Hillel and the Jewish heretical schools. Josephus’ silence on Christianity is more an embarrassment for mythicists than for their opponents, for Josephus is, in the view of the former, silent on both Jesus and the origin of Christianity (Goguel 1926). Wells could object that Josephus was silent about Christianity because in 93 it had not yet been ‘invented’. This is valid only if the Testimonia are shown to be fraudulent interpolations by later Christian redactors.

Wells’s view, that Christianity is a second century invention, was proposed by Rylands in 1935. Rylands also proposed that the first Testimonium is a Christian insertion. Wells’s case against Josephus rests partly on the claim that the language used is un-Josephan and partly on the brevity of the Testimonium (Wells 1971).

We have seen how Josephus’ brevity can be explained by the uncertain political atmosphere in which he wrote. On the question of language and style, while Wells claimed that the description of Jesus is too glowing to have come from the pen of a Pharisee, other learned critics have found otherwise. Corssen argued that such phrases as ‘received with pleasure … the chief among us … wise man’ (his own translation) were typically Josephan and that the last quoted was unthinkable from a Christian (Goguel 1926). Reville urged that no Christian interpolator would speak of Jesus as ‘a wise man’ and so necessitate the further interpolation (the hint that he was not really human at all) nor speak of ‘wonderful works’ (‘surprising feats’) or call his disciples ‘lovers’ or Christians a ‘tribe’, with its nuance of contempt (Klausner 1926). Klausner endorsed Reville’s claim that no Christian would write of Jesus ‘who was called the Messiah’. Although modern translations employ the word ‘messiah’, Josephus used the Greek word Christos, which, as Whiston pointed out, does not mean that Josephus either endorsed Messianism or believed that Jesus was the Messiah; it meant that this Jesus was to be distinguished from the others of that name by being identified by the name by which the readers would know him (Josephus 1866).
Parts of the first Testimonium do seem unlikely to have come from Josephus’ hand; the implication that Jesus was not human and the statement that he appeared again after the Crucifixion in fulfilment of prophecy are clearly candidates for interpolations, although both reflected firmly established beliefs by the time Josephus wrote. While some believe that Christians have edited a Josephan original (e.g. Sanders 1993:50), Harnack, Bole, Kneller and Burkitt all defended the authenticity of the passage (Goguel 1926). Klausner (1925) thought it partly authentic.

It matters little whether or not a Christian has interfered with the text if there remains genuine Josephan material at its core. The briefest authentic phrase from Josephus himself would be sufficient to testify to Jesus’ existence and it does seem that there remain phrases in the Testimonium that no Christian could have written. But they could have been left in by a Christian redactor. Klausner (1925) saw that the residual genuine phrases confirm the existence of Jesus. Feldman summed up the matter by stating that the principal arguments for its authenticity are that it is found in all the manuscripts except perhaps that of Origen, that it is cited by Eusebius, and that the vocabulary and style are basically Josephan (Josephus 1965).

Perhaps realizing that any genuine Josephan fragment undermined his case, Wells argued that the first Testimonium occurs out of context and that its removal leaves an argument that runs on in proper sequence. A fair rebuttal to this would be that, if the surrounding text has no connection with either Jesus or Christianity and if there is an essential and evident continuity between the paragraphs before and after, what perversity made the Christian interpolator insert the Testimonium at this point. Surely he would have avoided inserting the interpolation where his dishonesty would be obvious; he would have sought a natural break in the text. Sanders (1993:50) argued that a Christian scribe would have put the Testimonium adjacent to Josephus’ account of John the Baptist.

Wells’s argument for continuity between adjacent paragraphs is in fact an argument for, rather than against, authenticity. Wells (1971) relied on the opinion of Norden that removal of the passage leaves the text to run on in proper sequence, but he did not cite Corssen, who opposed the idea. Corssen pointed out that, while the preceding para-
graph deals with a difficulty in Jerusalem, the succeeding paragraph deals with a scandal in Rome of no interest to Jews whatsoever. He thought that the whole section was artificially constructed and that it is not difficult to imagine the original to have contained the *Testimonium*, even though it may have been altered later (Goguel 1933). Goguel (1926) considered that, in this dispute, Corssen's view was decisive.

In fact there is no connection between the subjects of the preceding and succeeding paragraphs or indeed between them and the *Testimonium*. Wells claimed that both the preceding and succeeding paragraphs treat Jewish misfortunes, the former where Pilate's troops massacre a crowd in Jerusalem, the latter where four thousand Jews were banished from Rome. In fact the paragraph that immediately succeeds the *Testimonium* deals with 'certain actions of a scandalous nature' about the temple of Isis in Rome. It is the next paragraph that deals with the banishment of Jews. Josephus began the succeeding paragraph with mention of the banishment of the Jews but then proceeded to deal first with the Roman scandal. Wells took the phrase 'another terrible misfortune' (in the succeeding paragraph) to demand the removal of the whole *Testimonium*. Certainly Jesus' appearance was not a great calamity; Josephus must have been referring to the misfortune of the Jerusalem massacre in the paragraph preceding the *Testimonium*. This does not demand the removal of the *Testimonium*. Indeed, the succeeding paragraph begins with the words 'about the same time also …', implying that this was the second time that Josephus had referred to time. Indeed it was; he began the *Testimonium* with the words 'now … about this time, …' Thus the removal of the *Testimonium* would make nonsense of the introduction to the succeeding paragraph. The events of the preceding paragraph occurred about 29, while Josephus believed that those of the succeeding paragraph occurred sometime between 31 and 37. If, as I shall show, Jesus died about 33, Josephus had good reason to associate all these events; he placed them in chronological order.

The historicity of the *Testimonium* was accepted, for the most part, by Vermes (1973), who particularly accepted its position in the text, noting the reference in the following paragraph to 'another outrage'. Robertson (1953) noted a suggestion by Eisler that the original *Testimonium* had been a hostile account of Jesus, ridiculing the rumour of
his supernatural birth by showing how divine conceptions were fraud-
ulently counterfeited. Robertson (1946) also commented that the argu-
ment that removal of disputed passages leaves no visible lacuna is a
dangerous weapon; it could make short work of many passages in
Shakespeare.

In the case of the second Testimonium, we find not only that scholar-
ly opinion is firmly behind its authenticity, but that Wells himself
(1971a) is not convinced that it is an interpolation. There has been no
dispute regarding either language or context and Feldman wrote ‘un-
like the passage on Jesus … few have doubted the genuineness of this
passage on James; … if it had been a Christian interpolation it would
in all probability have been more laudatory of James’ (Josephus 1965).
Goguel (1933) claimed that there is no reason to doubt the authentici-
ty of this Testimonium. While Wells permitted himself doubts that the
arguments against authenticity are ‘absolutely decisive’, he nevertheless
argued that since the first Testimonium (in his opinion) is an interpola-
tion, then the second must be also. On the contrary, the second is evi-
dence of a previous introduction of the name Christos. Goguel (1933)
noted that the first passage must have existed when the second was
written. If it is allowed merely that Josephus made a brief mention of
Jesus that occurs in the second Testimonium, then we have evidence of
Jesus’ existence. But the second Testimonium requires the existence of
the first (in whatever form) and both together, but especially the first,
are solid evidence that Jesus appeared in the stream of history.

Wells (1971) asked, if Jesus was ‘a leader of Messianic pretensions’,
why did Josephus not tell us of his fortunes. He claimed that Josephus
elsewhere described three Messianic agitators: Judas the Galilean,
founder of the Zealot Party in 6 (War 2:8:1 and Acts 5:37), Theudas
(Antiq. 20:5:1), and the Egyptian (Antiq. 20:8:6; War 2:13:5). He
claimed that, if Jesus was such an agitator, Josephus would surely have
devoted as much attention to him as to these three. However, if Jose-
phus regarded these three as Messianic agitators, he was careful to
conceal it. He described Judas as the leader of a sect and author of a
philosophical school (Antiq. 18:1:6). While he admitted that Judas
called his countrymen cowards for paying taxes to Rome, Josephus con-
cealed the political movement that Judas initiated and nowhere associ-
ates him with Messianism. Theudas he called ‘a magician’ and ‘a
prophet’ and once more avoided any hint that he represented a political movement. The Egyptian he called ‘a false prophet’. None of them was described as a Messianic agitator. As we have seen, Josephus was careful to avoid Messianism and if Jesus was also a Messianic pretender then Josephus could not have revealed it. As to the number of words employed in describing each person, the number devoted to Theudas is hardly any more than the number devoted to Jesus. Nothing can be made of the relative length of Josephus’ descriptions, unless it is to wonder that Jesus who, as I shall show, led no open revolt and did not openly threaten the Jewish authorities, merited so many words. Josephus’ knowledge of Jesus can hardly have been any more extensive; it was limited to the knowledge that he had appeared in Jerusalem one Passover, had been arrested, tried and executed by the governor and had, apparently, been seen alive afterwards. Only the evangelists knew more. As Weinel and Widgery have noted, Josephus wished to purge his nation and himself from the suspicion of Messianic and anti-Roman tendencies. Josephus isolated John the Baptist from the Messianic hope that the latter proclaimed and represented him as a Greek philosopher of virtue and temperance. In the same way he converted the politico-religious parties of his people into philosophical sects who disputed concerning fate and free will. It may have been painful to him to mention that there was a Jewish sect whose leader had been executed as a pretender to the throne of Israel.

Josephus’ account of Jesus betrays no hint of the attempt, evident in the Gospels that were written about the same time, to shift blame for Jesus’ death from Rome to the Jews. This is one more reason to regard it as authentic. Surely a Christian interpolator would have taken the opportunity to claim that Jesus was tried by a Jewish court and imply that he was guilty of an offence, not against Roman law but against Jewish Law. This is what the evangelists did. We shall see that what Josephus wrote is consistent with what might have happened. The ‘men of the highest standing amongst us’ were none other than the Chief Priests, although it is curious that Josephus did not reveal this. Although he deliberately concealed matters that, if revealed, might threaten his life and livelihood, Josephus was an accurate historian. It would appear that there is no reason to doubt what he wrote about Jesus and that he was in no doubt that Jesus had existed.
Did Rome know of Jesus?

The works of the Roman historians Suetonius Tranquillius (second century) and Publius Cornelius Tacitus (c. 55 to 120) may contain evidence of Jesus’ historicity. If Christianity had a historical foundation, the debate eventually reduces to the problem of when the new faith reached Rome and whether Christianity began in Judaea or in Rome itself.

Suetonius wrote of a tumult among the Roman Jews, instigated by one ‘chrestus’, which caused the Emperor Claudius to expel the Jews (Rolfe; see also Acts 18:2). Debate continues over the meaning of Chrestus, some claiming that it was the name of a local agitator or teacher, others (Rolfe, Sanders) believing that Suetonius either misspelled Christus or was misinformed. Wells (1971) was prepared to accept the latter view, that Suetonius described a Messianic fervour among the Jews led by someone claiming to be the Jewish Messiah. Klausner (1925) drew attention to the importance of Suetonius’ testimony that there was a Messianic movement during the reign of Claudius. But he also pointed out that, even if we suppose that Suetonius referred to a Christian teacher, the fact that, only twenty years after the death of Jesus, there were to be found in Rome Christian apostles and teachers is itself proof, not only of Jesus’ existence, but also of the important effect of his personal influence. Robertson (1946) noted that Christiani (Christians) was often written as Chrestiani, perhaps a Latinized form of the Greek chrestos (good, kind, benevolent). Stewart noted that the oldest New Testament codex, the Sinaiticus, dating from the early fourth century, describes how the disciples (sic) were first called ‘chrestians’ at Antioch (Acts 11:26). It seems possible that the early Christians were actually first called chrestos (nice person)*, the name also being a pun on the name Christos, which was not originally a noun and was less familiar to Greek-speakers. The plural chrestoi would translate into Latin as chrestiani and this may have been the term originally used in Rome from where it could have spread back to Antioch.

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* Ironically and making fun of their unreasonably pacific nature, especially in face of adversity or hostility.
It is quite impossible for the Jews to have believed in a Diaspora Messiah. They could not have imagined that he would appear anywhere but in their homeland, where indeed the Scriptures foretold his appearance. It is quite unthinkable that any Jew could have thought that the Messiah had appeared in the city that they called ‘the great harlot’ (Rev. 17:1). Goguel (1926) had no doubt that it is generally accepted that, in this passage, Suetonius refers to Christ. If that is so then the use of the name in Rome at that time (c. 49) can only have been the result of the importation of the belief from Judaea. If the Roman Jews were agitated in the name of Christ, then it can only have been as a result of a rumour that their Messiah had appeared in Israel. Wells (1971) believed that Christianity could not have reached Rome within fifteen years of Jesus’ death and that, in any event, it could not have become powerful enough to have caused a revolt by that time. He had no evidence for this view and few historians would support him. Most accept that ‘Christians were at first confused with Jews and in 49 were expelled with the Jews by Claudius’ (Dunan). Christianity was first promulgated by the apostles in Jerusalem during the Feast of Pentecost, probably in 33, in the presence of Jews from all over the Levant, including ‘strangers of Rome’ (Acts 2:10). Luke claimed that in total about three thousand were converted (Acts 2:41) and it may be assumed that many of these converted Jews returned directly to Rome with the new religion. They could have been back in Rome by 34. Every Jewish community in the Empire was fertile ground in which Christianity could expect rapid growth and it is not at all unlikely that Rome became an early Christian outpost. Paul, when he wrote to them in 58, noted that their faith was spoken of throughout the Empire (Rom. 1:8). A dispersion of the Roman Church by Claudius in 49 could easily have brought about this reputation. Luke recorded that Paul met two of the expelled Jews in Corinth (Acts 18:2) and it is understood that they were already converted to Christianity. They were Paul’s fellow-workers by 58 and had already risked their lives for him (Rom. 16:3–4). Their understanding and experience in the faith was so great that they instructed even the great Apollos, a man ‘mighty in the Scriptures’ (Acts 18:24–26).

Wells’s theory demands that, before 100, there was no definite knowledge of a historical Jesus. However Suetonius witnesses to the
fact that in 49 the influence of Christianity was great enough to pro-
voke the action of the Emperor.

In his *Annales*, written about 110 to 120, Tacitus related how Nero
persecuted the Christians in 64 and how they derived their name from
‘christus’ who was sentenced to death by Pontius Pilate under Tiberius
critics, including Drews, had endeavoured to prove that this passage is
an interpolation by a Christian, but that they had not succeeded since
no Christian would have spoken of his co-religionists in such a tone.
Goguel claimed that the authenticity of this passage is certain and ac-
cepted by all philologists. Even Wells (1971) accepted it as genuine.

What is in dispute is the significance and value of what Tacitus
wrote. Did he, as Wells believed, merely record common gossip or did
he have a reference to official documents? Wells himself acknowledged
Robertson’s (1953) opinion that Tacitus is more likely to have recorded
the official Roman view of the origin of Christianity than to repeat ru-
mour, although he objected to Robertson’s lack of evidence for this
claim. If Tacitus merely repeated what some said was the origin of
Christianity, then it is surprising that he did not make this clear in his
history. As Cross (1970b) wrote, ‘his easy acceptance of the fact seems
to indicate that it was uncontroversial’ and Goguel’s (1926) view was
that Tacitus’ words must originate in some documentary source since
they contain no such word as *dicunt* or *ferunt*, indicating rumour, al-
though he could have had no access to secret documents. Goguel
(1933) believed that Tacitus knew a document that was neither Jewish
nor Christian and connected Christianity with the Christ who was
crucified under Pilate and he emphasized how important this conclu-
sion is for the question of historicity. ‘The evidence of Tacitus’, he sta-
ed, ‘constitutes a serious objection to the theory of non-historicity’. He
noted how it had been suggested by Harnack that Tacitus copied Jose-
phus, thus corroborating the latter’s testimony, but that Goetz, Norden
and Corssen had all refuted this idea.

Wells (1971) claimed that Tacitus confused Christians with Jews
and that it was Jews and not Christians whom Nero persecuted in 64.
He found it difficult to believe that a large number of Christians came
to Rome so early. We have already seen how feasible it is that Chris-
Christianity was established in Rome by 49 and Paul’s testimony alone is sufficient to show that there were Christians there in 58. Furthermore Luke recorded that when he and Paul travelled to Rome in 62, they were met by the Roman brothers (adelphoi) in Forum Appii (Acts 28:15). These brothers can only have been Christians. It is scandalous to suggest that Tacitus could not differentiate between Christianity and Judaism, although it is obvious that many if not most of the Christians must also have been Jews. Jews or Gentiles, Tacitus tells us that these people were persecuted for following a person known as Christ. The consensus is that this is a genuine secular testimony derived from sources independent of the Gospels or any other Christian or Jewish literature. It is Rome’s witness to the historicity of Jesus.

Commenting on the question as to why there should be so little said of Jesus by the Roman authors, Goguel (1933) noted how Windisch remarked that the silence is not without parallels. Herodotus spoke similarly of the religion of the Persians without any mention of Zoroaster, Dio Cassius gave an account of the Jewish revolt under Hadrian without mentioning the name of Bar Cochba and, apart from Philostratus, we would scarcely know the name of Apollonius of Tyana.

**The Jesus of Paul**

The silence of Paul regarding the person and life of Jesus has been taken to support the idea that Jesus was not a historical figure. Wells (1975) argued that Christ did not exist because the epistles of Paul display ignorance of the historical Jesus.

It is generally argued that the epistles of Paul were written before the four Gospels and that the figure that emerges in the Gospels has been built up since the earlier time in which Paul wrote. Certainly the dates attributed to the Gospels are later than the dates attributed to Paul’s general and personal epistles. Yet it is generally agreed that the Gospels at least were compiled from earlier, now lost, accounts. One of these earlier sources (Q) is thought to have been a collection of Jesus’ sayings and it appears to have been incorporated by both Matthew and

* Let alone the probability that it reached the capital in 34.
Luke into their Gospels. Both of these Gospels are also known to be based on the Gospel of Mark, which Brandon (1968) has shown to be a reconstruction of a previous account originating in Palestine, his ‘Jerusalem Gospel’. In these circumstances, it seems impossible to argue that there was no Gospel extant in Paul’s time. The fact that we do not possess a document recording details of Jesus’ life and dating from the years not long after his death does not mean that there never was such a document. The available evidence suggests that there was such an early Gospel and it is unlikely that such a Gospel could have emerged without it being based on the life of a real Jesus.

Although Paul did not admit the existence of such a Gospel, he did imply that another Gospel, proclaiming another Jesus, existed (II Cor. 11:4). But even his relative silence on this matter does not prove that such a Gospel did not exist. He may have ignored it deliberately because he did not agree with it. Paul wrote (I Cor. 15:3–7) that he received the gospel, we may suppose by hearsay and seems to have been satisfied with the meagre details he gave of its essentials.

Paul was not really interested in Jesus the man. He became a Christian after Jesus was dead and gone and after a mystical experience. The latter may have been the result of his own intense form of Judaism, strongly influenced as it was by the Messianic zeal of the time. While others were assembling the details of Jesus’ life into a Gospel, partly biographical and historical and partly mythical, Paul went his own way, preaching a gospel greatly influenced by his own understanding of Old Testament prophecy and the Messianic and eschatological beliefs of the Pharisees. He frequently claimed intimate communion with God’s spirit and was guided by this inner feeling. With such divine guidance, what need did he have of the details of Jesus’ life? To Paul, the future was more important than the past; the return of Jesus and the need for each to live in that hope was far more relevant than the biography of his Lord. Schweitzer (1954) wrote that primitive theology had no interest in dating back the Messiahship of Jesus to the time of his Earthly ministry and that Paul shows us with what complete indifference the Earthly life of Jesus was regarded by primitive Christianity. ‘Primitive theology is simply a theology of the future, with no interest in history’. Guignebert (1935) wrote that Paul had deliberately sacrificed Jesus to Christ and that he was not interest-
ed in the earthly life of Jesus. Hoffmann wrote that Paul shows a ‘positive disregard’ for the historical Jesus (Hoffmann & Larue 1986:151). This is the reason we find little of the historical Jesus in Paul’s letters.* The lack of details is not due to the absence of a real Jesus; it is due to a lack of interest by Paul and his followers. In fact Paul may have been relatively ignorant of the details of Jesus’ life, an ignorance he did nothing to remedy. Paul’s preaching consisted almost exclusively of the death and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah.

The epistles written to Jews (not by Paul) display this preoccupation with Jesus as a sacrificial lamb, now raised to a position of power and authority but who is yet to exercise revenge and judgement. But this was the apostles’ understanding of the events that had overtaken them.

It was the early evangelists, but not necessarily any one of the disciples, who began the compilation of Jesus’ biography. While the apostles preached a mythical Jesus, others were recording much of the detail that now makes a view of the historical Jesus possible. The apostles may have disapproved of these attempts to record the daily life of the person whom they then considered to be sitting in heaven. That we have any record and that it makes a coherent account is testimony to the patience and diligence of those unknown early biographers. It is significant that the Gospels all date from a period when all the apostles, with the possible exception of John, must have been dead. It is possible that, while they were alive, they actively discouraged the circulation of written accounts of Jesus’ life. They might have argued that his imminent return made it unnecessary and inappropriate to dwell on the sordid details. Furthermore they had been promised that, when the Comforter came, he would remind them of all the things that Jesus had told them (John 14:26). The certainty of what was believed about him was far more important to them than historical details. Paul, as a self-appointed apostle, would have shared these feelings. The spiritual ‘truth’ of the events was supremely more important than actualities. Furthermore the emphasis Paul and the other apostles put upon faith in Jesus precluded the provision of any historical details that might be taken as proof of Jesus’ real existence, his real death and real resurrec-

* Some of the epistles attributed to Paul were written by others.
tion. If believers were to join the Church on account of their faith alone, what need did they have of the historical evidence? Historical detail was unnecessary; the word of Paul (that the Messiah had come) was all that was required. Converts were not made by showing them any historical evidence.* When the gospel was put before the Jews in Beroea (Acts 17:10–12), they only accepted what Paul said after they had searched through the Scriptures to see if what he claimed to have occurred was indeed prophesied. They did not ask for historical proof or details of Jesus’ life. In a way it did not matter what had happened to Jesus or indeed whether or not he was a real person. It only mattered that what Paul spoke of was forecast by the prophets. In this sense it was more important for Paul to preach a Jesus who could be found in the Old Testament. The Jews already revered their Scriptures. They did not ask for historical proof or details of Jesus’ life. In a way it did not matter what had happened to Jesus or indeed whether or not he was a real person. It only mattered that what Paul spoke of was forecast by the prophets. In this sense it was more important for Paul to preach a Jesus who could be found in the Old Testament. The Jews already revered their Scriptures. They could not fail to take notice if Paul told them that the prophecies concerning the Messiah had been fulfilled recently in Palestine. Their conversion would then depend on whether or not they interpreted those prophecies in the same way as Paul and whether or not they accepted his word that Jesus had in fact fulfilled them. Clearly some did and some did not.

Reitzenstein and Bousset claimed that Pauline thought originated in the Oriental-Hellenistic mystery religions. Paul may have derived his sacramental redemption, his ‘mysteries’, his gnosis and ‘spirit’ from these religions. According to R M Grant, Paul was a man whose spiritual world lay somewhere between Jewish apocalyptic and the fully developed Gnosticism of the second century (Ellis).

Gnostic Christianity rejected the authority of the orthodox Church and with it the story of Jesus’ life told by the Church. The Gnostics claimed self-enlightenment and that spiritual ‘truths’ lay behind the bald ‘facts’ of the gospel story (Pagels). In this sense, the Gnostics had no interest in the historical Jesus.

Clearly Paul had Gnostic tendencies. He only reluctantly accepted the authority of the elders of the Church in Jerusalem and they found it hard to understand him (II Pet. 3:16). Unlike them, he was not a witness to the life of Jesus and yet he claimed to be an apostle. His spiritu-

* They are not made that way today.
alization of Christianity parallels that of later Gnosticism, as does his lack of interest in the historical Jesus.
3 Jesus’ origin

Where was Jesus born?

Only Matthew and Luke describe Jesus’ origins and it is generally thought that they copied a common source. Even so the two Birth Narratives are not identical and may have been embroidered by each evangelist.

Unlike the events of Jesus’ ministry, the circumstances of his birth were unnoticed and unrecorded. Only when he became known and noted as a leader could anyone have shown interest in his background; in fact he was probably dead before anyone thought to enquire.

It seems that Jesus’ mother survived him and it would have been natural for her to give any details of the birth that were sought by the curious. Perhaps this is what happened. Perhaps also her memory was not perfect and she misunderstood what she did remember. It is curious that the disciple John, who is supposed to have cared for Mary after the Crucifixion, records no data about Jesus’ birth in the Gospel attributed to him.

Plainly the Birth Narrative has been written and arranged to justify the faith placed in Jesus as the incarnation of God. At the time the Gospels of Matthew and Luke were written there must have been a great need for a description of Jesus’ origin. As we have seen, it cannot have been Jewish Christians who needed this description. Only Gentile (‘greek’) converts could have wanted to know how their Lord came into the world. But Christians could also read the Jewish Scriptures in Greek and they needed to be convinced that Jesus, as Messiah, had fulfilled the ancient prophecies. As Christianity spread, both in space across the Mediterranean to countries whose peoples knew little or nothing about Palestine and in time away from Jesus’ actual existence, so a need grew for a complete account of his origin. As the disciples died and with them access to eyewitnesses so a written substitute was
required. Later it may have been thought necessary to add an account of Jesus' origin.

To convince the early Christians that Jesus was the Messiah of the Jews and God's personal representative it was necessary to show that his life fulfilled all the forecasts of the prophets. The most obvious requirement was that he should be born in Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2). Apparently this prophecy was well known in Israel and when Jesus appeared his provenance was immediately questioned. When he was introduced by Philip to Nathaniel (John 1:45–46), the latter asked, 'can any good thing come out of Nazareth?'. Surely Nathaniel believed that the Messiah should come from Bethlehem. Again John recorded (John 7:43) that there was a dispute over Jesus on account of his coming from Galilee and that Nicodemus was told to search the Scriptures and see that no prophet comes out of that province (John 7:52).

Despite the popular belief that Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee, there must be doubt that this is correct. Neither the Talmud nor Josephus† make any reference to Nazareth. This has led some to claim that, in Jesus' time, it did not exist. However archaeological excavations show that, in Roman times, Nazareth was a very small village (Crossan). Consequently, while it existed, it does not seem to have been the place described by the evangelists, a town with a synagogue.

There must also be doubt that the Greek words *Nazarenos* (Mark 1:24) and *Nazoraios* (Matt. 26:71) refer to Nazareth. While Moore saw no philological obstacle to deriving both *nazarenos* and *nazoraios* from Nazareth, his view does not look conclusive (Foakes-Jackson and Kirsopp Lake) and Lehmann noted that someone from Nazareth would be called something like ‘nazarethene’. Borsch observed that it is unlikely that Nazorene (sic) was derived from Nazoret or Nazoreth (sic).

Wells noted this discrepancy, but saw it as more evidence that Jesus is a myth. However this begs the question of what was meant by ‘nazarene’ (see below), why it was applied to Jesus and why the term was later made to signify a provenance in Nazareth. Either the evangelists who explained ‘nazarene’ as one from Nazareth really believed this or they did so to conceal another explanation. It is conceivable that

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* This question may be an interpolation.
† Josephus mentioned a large number of towns and villages in Galilee.
readers of the early text, in which Jesus was described as a Nazarene*, not knowing any other meaning presumed that it referred to his pro-
venance. Believing that Jesus came from Galilee, they looked for a place that sounded like the appellation and found the modern town of Nazareth, not realizing that the foundation of the town was later than Jesus’ death. Robertson (1953) noted that the derivation from Nazareth was probably invented by people ignorant of Hebrew and hazy about geography. Alternatively it is not impossible that the evan-
gelists knew the real meaning of Nazarene and deliberately concealed it. It had a significance, as we shall see, that was inappropriate to the purpose of the early Church.†

Whether or not Jesus came from Nazareth, there is no dispute that he came from Galilee. Neither Jesus nor his followers claimed that he came from Bethlehem in Judaea. If Jesus believed that he had been born in Bethlehem, he would surely have made the most of it. He would have pointed to it as further proof of his authority. His silence on this matter indicates that he knew of no connection between him-
self and that town. His Galilean provenance was well known, accepted by him as well as everyone else.

How is it then that Jesus could maintain, in private at least, his claim to be the Messiah? No one seems to have been able to answer this question. Perhaps he understood Micah to have forecast that the Messiah would emerge from Bethlehem on his way to claim his throne in Jerusalem. But it is strange that the Gospels contain no mention of this interpretation.

To explain how it was that, while he came from Galilee, Jesus was yet born in Bethlehem, Luke tells us that Joseph took his pregnant wife from Nazareth to Bethlehem, a distance of 70 miles (112 km). He ex-
plained that this was caused by the Roman enrolment for taxation, which required every man to go to his own city. Luke claimed that Joseph was a descendant of King David and that he was required to go

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* Jesus is described as a/the ‘Nazarene’ 19 times in the Greek text, as follows: Matt. 2:23; 26:71; Mark 1:24, 10:47, 14:67, 16:6; Luke 4:34, 18:37, 24:19; John 18:5,7, 19:19; Acts 2:22, 3:6, 4:10, 6:14, 22:8, 24:5, 26:9. All but two are mistranslated in the AV as ‘Nazareth’.

† Tabor claimed that Jesus was brought up in Nazareth, of royal and priestly descent, and that ‘Nazarene’ derives from that village, whose name means ‘Branch’.
to Bethlehem because it was ‘a city of David’, implying that Joseph’s ancestors came from Bethlehem. Now Luke, when he wrote, well knew that there had been an enrolment in Judaea (Acts 5:37) and he knew that each man, but not each woman and child, was required to enter his own city for the enrolment. But he went too far in claiming that this applied to everyone in the Empire. Helms asked ‘who could imagine the efficient Romans requiring millions in the empire to journey scores of hundreds of miles to villages of millennium-old ancestors merely to sign a tax form!’ (Helms 1989:59). Even as it applied to Judaea, the Romans cared nothing for a Jew’s ancestry, whether he was of this or that tribe. Nor did they want the chaos that would have resulted from each family attempting to reach its ancestral home. Half of Israel would have been on the move. The Romans required only that each head of a family register for taxation at his local town or city. If he lived out of town, then only a short journey would be necessary; wives and children did not need to register. All the Romans wanted was that Jews, in the words of Josephus (Antiq. 17:1:1), ‘gave account of their estates’. This was to determine the amount of tribute money that Judaea would have to pay to the Imperial exchequer. The taxation referred to by Luke took place in 6 when Rome took over direct rule in Judaea. Not only was this (see below) six years after Jesus’ birth, but Galilee, where Jesus was born, was not affected by the taxation. There can have been no reason for Joseph to take his pregnant wife on a hazardous journey to Bethlehem and Luke’s account is fiction. Strauss may have been the first to point out that the journey to Bethlehem was probably contrived to show fulfilment of the prophecy of Micah.

Matthew asks us to believe that, instead of travelling from Nazareth to Bethlehem, Joseph took his wife and newly-born son from Bethlehem to Nazareth. But they had to make a detour via Egypt in order to fulﬁl prophecy (Hos. 11:1) and to indulge the Alexandrian Jews for whom Matthew wrote. No rational person can believe that Joseph took his family on a journey of 450 miles (720 km) into Egypt and back. We are given no reason for the journey, nor any details of its route or precise destination. Clearly it is a fabrication for Christological reasons. Matthew was very concerned to show Egyptian connec-
tions where he could; he probably resided in Alexandria." He had to convince his Jewish readers that Jesus fulfilled many prophecies. The Hosean prophecy is one of five that he mentions in his first two chapters. Not only did he invent a story that appears to fulfil prophecy, he invented prophecy to explain events. His claim (Matt. 2:23) that there was a prophecy to the effect that the Messiah would be called a Nazarene is false; there is no such prophecy.

Thiering believed that 'egypt' was Qumran when it was occupied by Egyptian ascetics and Kersten & Gruber (1995:191) claim that Jesus really was brought up in Egypt by Buddhist monks (Therapeutae). This is the reason, they claim, why little is known of Jesus' youth.

If Jesus was born in neither Bethlehem nor Nazareth, where was he born? It is accepted by all that he came from Galilee and, of all the towns in that province that figure in the Gospels, the most prominent is Capernaum on the north-west shore of the Sea of Galilee (Lake Tiberias). As Sanders has noted (1993:98), Jesus' work was centred on this town. Indeed, it became known as 'his own city' (Matt. 9:1). It may have been so-called because it was his native city. Four of the disciples were fishermen on Lake Tiberias when Jesus called them to follow him. Matthew the former tax collector was probably based in Capernaum. The Roman garrison there warranted the presence of a centurion (Matt. 8:5). Jesus performed many of his 'miracles' in the city (Matt. 11:23) and taught in the synagogue there (Mark 1:21). It seems likely therefore that Jesus was born in or near Capernaum.

Thiering believed that he was born near Qumran in a building called the 'manger'.

It is recorded that Mary named her son 'Jesus'. In Hebrew this name is yeshua (Joshua), the meaning of which is 'yahveh saves'. The English name 'Jesus' is derived from Iesous, a Greek approximation of the Hebrew. Other languages use other forms derived from the Greek. Jesus may have been given the name as a consequence of the fact that the firstborn was dedicated to God. But he was not alone in bearing this name; it was quite common. It is fortunate for Christians however that their Lord's very name revealed him to be the Saviour they be-

* Powell believed that Matthew was written in Rome.
lieved him to be. But perhaps he would not have embarked upon his mission if he had borne any other name.

Kersten & Gruber (1995:145) surmised that ‘Joshua’ may have been an epithet for someone embodying the divinely ordained office of liberator and that it may not have been Jesus’ real name.

**The Birth Narrative**

If Jesus was not born in Bethlehem, what of The Birth Narrative that is centred on that town? What of the Wise Men, the Star and the Massacre of the Innocents? What of the Virgin Birth?

It is plain that in the first century the Church needed to give Jesus a background and origin commensurate with his deification. Because the Birth Narrative gives Jesus this origin it must be suspect. Support for this conclusion comes from Josephus; while he was ready to relate the many atrocities committed by Herod the Great, he made no mention of a mass infanticide in Bethlehem or anywhere else for that matter. Carpenter may be correct in proposing that it was invented to show fulfilment of prophecy. Helms compares it with Suetonius’ story of a decree forbidding the rearing of any male child for a whole year when the Senate heard that Augustus (Octavian) was about to be born.

Kersten & Gruber (1995:83) point to parallels between the story of Jesus’ birth and that of the Hindu god Krishna, who was born while his parents were on a journey to pay taxes, who was born in a manger among shepherds, who escaped infanticide ordered by a tyrant and who was taken into exile.

It has been suggested that the story of the Wise Men (visiting Essenes, according to Thiering) was constructed by Christians from the visit to Nero in 66 by Tiridates I of Armenia. He was accompanied on the journey by Zoroastrian magi. The Church may have wanted to show that its Lord, the future world ruler, was recognized by astrologers. Salibi (1988:36) claimed that the story is inspired by Isaiah 60:3, but this seems unlikely.

Since astrologers watched the skies, it was natural to imagine that the Magi saw signs of Jesus’ birth in the heavens. The phrase ‘his star’ (Matt. 2:2) is an echo of the same phrase in the apocryphal The Testa-
ment of the Twelve Patriarchs (18:3), ‘and his star shall rise in heaven like a king’. The idea that a real star would appear to herald the appearance of the Messiah is a logical development of the frequent symbolism that placed a star for the Messiah.” The Talmud went further and claimed that ‘when the Messiah is to be revealed a star will rise in the east … and seven other stars round it will fight on every side’.

Having no notion of the true nature of stars and imagining them to be lamps set in a canopy, the evangelist had no difficulty in describing how the ‘star’ guided the Magi (just like a lamp) until it came to rest over the stable in Bethlehem. However he is forced to allow the Magi to lose sight of it temporarily, so that they have to approach Herod and ask him where the new king is born. This hiatus is introduced solely to show how Herod learned of Jesus’ birth. Jesus’ status is raised if the contemporary ruler not only recognized a royal threat but attempted to extinguish it.

The story of the Star may also have been borrowed from Mithraism, perhaps in an attempt to usurp that widespread religion. Carter drew attention to the fact that the Mithraic books tell how, when Mithras was born, a star fell from the sky and was followed by Zoroastrian priests called ‘magi’ on their way to worship him.

Ignorant of the symbolism involved, many have wasted time searching for a celestial event that could account for the story. Suggestions have included novae and supernovae, comets and planetary conjunctions, the last because of the astrological interpretation that is possible. However no celestial phenomenon has been found for 1 BC and this has led many to conclude that Jesus must have been born either earlier or later (usually earlier). Attempts are made to link this shift with that which is thought necessary to bring Jesus’ birth within the reign of Herod the Great, who is believed to have died in 4 BC. Hence there has been much interest in the idea that the ‘star’ was the conjunction between Jupiter and Saturn in the constellation Pisces in 7 BC. This idea goes back at least to Johannes Kepler in 1614; it may date from 1285. Even today the idea has its supporters (Hughes). In fact, the conjunction placed the two planets nearly 1° (two Moon diameters) apart in the sky, hardly a spectacular sight worthy of the Magi’s

* As in the Septuagint version of Num. 24:17, ‘a star shall rise out of Jacob’.
attention. Conjunctions between Jupiter and Venus in 2 and 3 BC have also been suggested.

Astronomy has ignorantly attempted to explain a problem that does not exist. There never was a Star of Bethlehem.

Sanders (1993:55) criticized those who tried to match the story of a star that stood over Jesus’ birthplace with the appearance of a comet, which he thought would ‘blaze across the heavens.’*

Even if there had been a celestial phenomenon and its significance had been pointed out to him by astrologers, Herod could hardly afford to be seen to have taken any notice. As magic or sorcery, astrology was forbidden to Jews; augury and witchcraft were condemned by the Law of Moses (Lev. 19:26) and wizards were to be killed (Lev. 20:27). It is to be wondered how Matthew’s Jewish readers reacted to the idea that the Messiah’s birth was revealed by forbidden means.

Luke extends his version of the myth with stories that can be traced to contemporary beliefs. The story of Jesus’ birth in a manger or crib (Luke 2:7) may have been borrowed from that attributed to the pastoral god Hermes, who was cradled in a basket and surrounded by oxen (Robertson 1953). Alternatively or in addition it may be based on Isaiah 1:3 (Helms 1989:60). The shepherds appear to have come from the Mithraic legend where they witnessed the ‘birth’ of Mithras. They told how Mithras emerged full-grown from a rocky cliff after a blinding beam of light from the sky (Cf. Luke 2:9) had carved out his figure (Carter). Kersten & Gruber (1995:83) draw attention to the Buddhist belief that, during Gautama’s conception and birth, a great light shone over everything in the world.

Nor is there any reason to believe Luke when he tells us that Jesus was taken, at a week old, to the Temple in Jerusalem. It may be true that Simeon and Anna hung about the Temple at that or some other time looking for the Messiah. Many believed that the Messiah could be born at any time and they would expect him to be brought to Jerusalem for dedication. Simeon and Anna may have been in the habit of seizing on each firstborn son as if he were a potential Messiah, just to be on the safe side. Since Luke believed that Jesus was the Messiah, he could have presumed that Jesus was taken to Jerusalem and

* A comet’s apparent movement is so slow that it appears to be stationary.
that he was recognized by those who were looking for him. It is possible that Simeon was the priest appointed to conduct circumcision of infants and that he always mentioned the possibility that the male child in his hands was the coming Messiah. In fact Jesus was more probably circumcised in Galilee in his home town by a local Rabbi.

Kersten & Gruber (1995:85) observe that the story has an echo in the story of the newly born Buddha being recognized by the seer Asita. They claim that Luke incorporated the Asita legend, depicting it as a Jewish custom.

The story of the Virgin Birth arises from a misreading of the Old Testament. Matthew asks us to believe that Isaiah prophesied that ‘a virgin shall conceive and bear a son’ (Isa. 7:14). In fact the Hebrew word used by Isaiah was ha-‘almah (the damsel), i.e. ‘The damsel shall conceive and bear a son’, and the context of the original text has no connection with the life of the Messiah. If Isaiah had intended to describe an unmarried girl, he could have used the word betulah (the virgin). The reason that we read ‘virgin’, both in Matthew’s quotation and the AV of Isaiah is that in the Septuagint the Hebrew ha-‘almah has been translated as parthenos (a virgin) instead of neanidas (a damsel) (see S. of S. 1:3; Ps. 68:25).

Mowinckel suggested that the translators of the Septuagint rendered almah as ‘virgin’ because of a popular belief of the time about a supernatural woman who would bear a son whose birth would be an omen of a great and happy transformation. Alternatively he offered the idea that ‘virgin’ was used because of a custom that a goddess was called a ‘virgin’, even though she bore a god’s son. It may be that both these ideas influenced the translators, who must have had some very good reason for not giving a faithful translation. Thiering claimed that Mary was described as a ‘virgin’ because that was the title given to a betrothed Essene nun.

Whatever the reason, Greek-speaking Jews and later Christians, who relied entirely on the Septuagint, were misled into believing that Isaiah prophesied parthenogenesis. Such a misunderstanding was convenient; during the first century there was a common superstition that gods did not have human fathers. Danae the mother of Perseus was believed to have been impregnated as a virgin by Zeus as a shower of gold, Nana was believed to have given birth to Attis after eating a...
pomegranate and the births of Plato, Pythagoras and Augustus himself were explained as the result of divine intervention (Guignebert 1935). Alexander the Great was believed by some to have been the son of Zeus after his mother was hit by a thunderbolt (Lane Fox 1973:214). There can be no doubt that the evangelists needed to show that Jesus was truly a god, not just a Jewish Messiah. Gentiles were unlikely to accept Jesus’ divinity without some ‘evidence’ that his birth was unusual; in fact they would have expected it to have been as miraculous as those of the gods already known to them. Frend wrote that the Virgin Birth had a teleological significance; for people who believed themselves to be dominated by hostile astral powers, the unnatural birth of the Saviour was the chosen way of deceiving the demons.

Clearly belief in Virgin Birth overcame the previous belief that Jesus was a legitimate descendant of King David. To Jewish Christians it was important that the Messiah was born of the lineage of David. All through his ministry, whether or not he had any royal blood, Jesus had been known as a ‘son of David’. If he had no human father he could not have been a legitimate descendant of David.’ However to Gentiles it was important that Jesus was seen to be an incarnation of God, preferably born of a virgin. They had no real interest in the Jewish Messianic aspirations and the legitimate descent from a distant patriarch. The evangelists ended up claiming that Jesus was both the legitimate descendant of David and fathered supernaturally. But these two claims are mutually exclusive. A Jewish Christian would have had to renounce any belief that Jesus was a legitimate descendant; he would have had to cease to be a Jew. Gentile Christians gradually gained power and turned the gospel to suit the world in which they lived, moving even further from Judaism and the beliefs that gave birth to the religion. They took the Jewish Messiah and turned him into an Olympian.

Of course Jesus was human and his origin was that of every other human being. However there will always be doubt that he was legitimate. That Jesus was described as ‘the son of Mary’ (Mark 6:3) suggests that Joseph was not his father and Luke’s statement that Jesus was ‘supposed’ to be the son of Joseph (Luke 3:23) is open to an interpretation other than that given to it by the Church. Stauffer noted that when the

* Except perhaps via his mother, as Tabor claims.
father was unknown a child bore its mother’s name. There is also a legend that Jesus’ father was a Roman legionary named Panthera (panther), a name that may have arisen as a pun on parthenos. Tabor claimed to have found evidence that a Roman soldier with the surname ‘pantera’ was stationed in Palestine at the right time to be Jesus’ father; he found his gravestone in Germany. Salibi explained that ‘ben Pantera’ (son of a she-leopard) was a common insult (1988:42). In Harrison’s story, Jesus was the son of Nicodemus.

It could be argued that the evangelists’ statement regarding Jesus’ parentage arises simply from their claim that he was the direct offspring of God. In that case they could hardly give him a human father, even though such a course allowed others to claim that he was illegitimate. It is doubtful that the evangelists knew anything for certain about Jesus’ true origins.

When was Jesus born?

Those who do not realize the fictional character of the Birth Narrative attempt to date Jesus’ birth from the belief that he was born in the reign of Herod the Great and at the time of a census (taxation). Their problem is then to reconcile the fact that, although Herod died about 4 BC, the census referred to by Luke occurred nine years later. This assessment, necessary when Judaea was made a Roman province, was conducted by the imperial legate of Syria-Cilicia, Publius Sulpicius Quirinius. Rome found it necessary to assume direct rule when Herod’s son Archelaus abused his power and became intolerable to the people of Judaea and Samaria.*

Some, who have supposed that there must have been an earlier taxation in the time of Herod the Great, have propagated the myth that Jesus was actually born in 4 BC, the latest possible year under this scenario. But special pleading apart, the taxation of Luke 2:1 must be the same as that of Acts 5:37; Luke made it plain that this ‘first’ taxation took place when

* Luke overstated the case; it was not all the inhabited Earth (oikoumenos) that was to be enrolled (Luke 2:1), it was only the province of Judaea.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783828873278
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‘cyrenius was governor of Syria’. Quirinius did not become imperial legate of Syria-Cilicia until 6.

Others, whose knowledge of astronomy is greater than their knowledge of history and the vagaries of the evangelists, have concluded that Jesus was born in 7 BC (Hughes). Thiering reconciled this with a birth in 6 by regarding Jesus’ separation from his mother at the age of 12 as his ‘birth’.

These adjustments necessarily impugn the chronology devised in 525 by the Scythian monk Dionysius Exiguus, who devised a calendar with an origin at the birth of Jesus.* His calendar reflected the age of Jesus and the number of the year was ‘the year of our Lord’ (Anno Domini), thought to be still alive in heaven. The calendar has become widespread, at least in predominantly Christian countries, since it was adopted by Bede in the eighth century.

Dionysius is often accused of having made an error in his calculations. However such an accusation is only made by those who believe that Jesus must have been born in the time of Herod the Great. Hughes believed that Dionysius omitted the four years during which Augustus ruled under his own name of Octavian.

Let us try to follow Dionysius’ own calculation. His only data were those contained in the Gospels, in fact two statements by Luke. The evangelist tells us that, at the time of Jesus’ Baptism, he had just turned 30 years of age (Luke 3:23) although, as Salibi points out, this may be symbolic (1988:39). He also tells us that John the Baptist began to proclaim the kingdom of God:

Now in the fifteenth year of the government of Tiberius Caesar while Pontius Pilate was governing Judaea, while Herod ruled as tetrarch of Galilee, Philip his brother ruled as tetrarch of Iturea and Trachonitis country, Lysanias ruled as tetrarch of Abilene, in the time of the high priest Anna[s] and Caiaphas, … [Luke 3:1–2, from the Greek text; Rome had replace Annas by Caiaphas but this was not recognized by the Jews.]

From the calendar, we can deduce that Dionysius assumed that one year elapsed between the time of John’s first proclamation and the Baptism.† Tiberius’ fifteenth year was the Year of Rome (AUC) 780,

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* At the time, the calendar had its origin at the foundation of Rome.
† See table COMPARATIVE CHRONOLOGY OF THE TIMES OF JESUS on p. 58.
which the Christian Era knows as the year 28. Pilate was in his third year as governor and Herod Antipas and his brother Philip were both in their thirty-second year as tetrarch of their respective territories. Lysanias ruled Abilene from about 27 to 28 or possibly 29. Annas was deposed as high priest by the Romans in 15, but he continued to be regarded by Jews as high priest until his death. Joseph Caiaphas, who was appointed high priest by the Romans in 18, held that post until 36.

If Jesus was 29 years old in AUC 781, then he was born in AUC 752, a year the Christian Era knows as 1 BC. Assuming that Luke's data are correct (the weakest point must be the assessment of Jesus' age at the Baptism), the only error that can occur is in the time between the commencement of John's preaching and the Baptism. Dionysius' guess is as good as that of anyone else and probably not far out. There seems to be little wrong with his calculation and no reason to believe that he knew that Herod the Great died before Jesus' birth or that the census took place after it. In any case, Dionysius must have preferred biblical to secular data. He should be acquitted of the charges unjustly made against him.

It should be noted that, on this chronology, Jesus was born (in Galilee) under the rule of a Herod-Antipas. Herod was the royal family name. Matthew did not claim that 'herod the king' (Matt. 2:1,3) was Herod the Great, although that may have been his intention.

### SHOULD THERE BE A YEAR ZERO?

Some mathematically minded people insist that, between 1 BC and 1, there should be a year 0 (zero) (e.g. King). Unfortunately the concept of the zero came too late to become part of our year-dating system. The years 'BC' have already been allocated without the use of a zero, such that, by the sixth century, it was the general belief that 1 BC was the year of Christ's birth. We cannot now shift all BC dates by one year.

### WAS JESUS JEWISH?

Because of the strong colonies of Phoenicians, Syrians, Arabs and Greeks who had settled in Galilee, causing a racial mix that was not regarded as pure, Galileans were regarded with contempt in Judaea. Consequently, as Renan noted, it is not possible to be sure what blood flowed in Jesus’ veins. Goguel (1933) stated that ‘it is not absolutely impossible that Jesus was not entirely of Jewish descent’. One can imagine the incredulity with which Judaean received the news that the Messiah had come from Galilee. A Galilean could not be sure that he was really Jewish.
### COMPARATIVE CHRONOLOGY OF THE TIMES OF JESUS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of Rome (AUC)</th>
<th>Roman Emperors (their years)</th>
<th>Rulers of Palestine (their years)</th>
<th>Christian Era date and events</th>
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Notes:
1. Owing to different systems of calendars, there can be an error of one year either way.
2. * indicates (Jewish) sabbatical years.
3. "CE" stands for Common (or Christian) Era
4. + ab urbe condita (from when the city was founded).
4 Preparation

Early influences

If ‘The Child is father of the Man’ we can only understand the events and purpose of Jesus’ life by examining the early influences upon him and the circumstances in which he grew up. Jesus was no less a child of his time than any other historical personality and we must ask what world view and doctrines influenced his thinking.

We have already seen how Jesus may not have been legitimate. Psychologists have shown how many notable people suffered some deprivation in their early formative years and that it is attempts to overcome this deficiency that bring them to positions of authority. Such people appear to compensate for the deficiencies of their youth; where illegitimacy is a stigma, an illegitimate child strives hard to prove to the world and to itself that it is as good as anyone else. The effort put into this attempt is often such that the child becomes better than most of those who have no such motivation.

Perhaps Jesus rose to prominence because he felt driven to establish his worth to Jewish society; driven to prove that he was indeed a true son of Israel. For if he was Mary’s son but not Joseph’s, then he was not his father’s firstborn. The firstborn of the father was considered ‘the beginning of his strength’ (Gen. 49:3); he carried great authority in the household, ruled in his father’s absence and stood to inherit twice as much as any other son. However the male firstborn of the mother did not have such privileges if he was not, at the same time, the firstborn of the father; he was considered ‘holy to the Lord’ (Exod. 13:2). If Jesus was indeed such a love child, then he was set apart from his siblings. Furthermore, this difference may have been impressed upon him from the earliest age. He could not have been unaware of it. Upon his ‘father’s’ death, he would have received no inheritance and

would not have become head of the household. Is it likely that, if he had inherited such responsibilities, he would have had time to study the Scriptures and embark upon his mission? The fact that he did undertake this mission surely tells us that he cannot have had domestic responsibilities.

If Jesus knew that Joseph was not his real father and that, as his mother’s firstborn, he had been dedicated to God, it would have been natural for him to seek a father-substitute in God himself. Noack, who believed that Jesus was born out of wedlock, claimed that he could early have taken refuge in his own thoughts, above the clouds in the presence of the God of his fathers. Jesus may have decided to dedicate his life to God’s service.

Luke records (Luke 2:41–52) that, when he was twelve years old, the age at which a Jewish boy becomes a man, his parents took him for the first time to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast, where they lost him. Later he was found talking with the teachers in the Temple. He said, ‘did you not know that I must be about my father’s business?’ He was not talking about Joseph; by then he had come to regard God as his father. Perhaps he took the dedication more seriously than other first-born children and made a virtue out of necessity. The story has a parallel in the story of Prince Siddhartha (Buddha) being lost during an outing with friends; he was later found sitting under a tree, sunk in religious contemplation (Kersten & Gruber 1995:87). Salibi (1988:37) suggested that the story was constructed from I Samuel 2:21, but this seems unlikely.

Jesus was probably only six years old when the Romans instituted direct rule in Judaea. Although this change did not directly affect Galilee, still ruled by Herod Antipas, the shock waves must have been felt even in Capernaum. The Holy City was yet again under Gentile control. As we shall see, this was seen as a sign of the times. Nor could the young Jesus have been unaffected by the revolt against Rome instigated by Judas the Galilean. Although the revolt took place in Judaea, Judas came from Jesus’ own province and he may have inspired many young Galileans with the idea that they had to play a part in the future of Israel. Galileans must have been stirred by the prospect of Judas calling Judaeans cowards for paying taxes to Caesar. Here was a Galilean criticizing the superior and allegedly more pious Judaeans. Ju-
das also founded the Zealots who were to have a fatal effect upon the
destiny of all Israel and who may have had something to do with Jesus’
public life. If it is true, as Mowinckel claimed, that there was a belief
that the Messiah (ben Joseph) would appear in Upper Galilee, then it is
not surprising that a revolutionary movement began in that province.
This belief may have had not a little to do with Jesus’ subsequent ac-
ceptance of the mantle of the Messiah.

Other events caused the Jewish people to wonder if great events
were imminent. Herod the Great began to rebuild the temple in
Jerusalem in 16 BC and its main structure was finished by 9 BC.
Comets had been seen and interpreted as signs of impending disaster;
Halley’s comet appeared in 11 BC and another comet was seen in
about 4 BC.

It is likely that Jesus’ parents and friends took all these events as an
indication that Israel’s destiny was at last about to be fulfilled. Their be-
liefs must have moulded those of Jesus himself.

**Jesus’ trade**

According to English versions of the Gospels (Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3),
both Jesus and his father Joseph were carpenters.* Klausner (1925) ac-
cepted this as a fact and Guignebert (1935) claimed that ‘everyone to-
day knows that Joseph was a carpenter …’. More cautious was Goguel
(1933), who suggested that there is no evidence that Jesus followed the
trade of his father and that he was known as the ‘son of the carpenter’.
Conversely Murry considered that the report that Jesus’ father was a
carpenter may be deduced from the fact (sic) that Jesus had been one.

Some have challenged the traditional belief. For example Mackin-
non called Jesus ‘a builder accustomed to handling heavy material’ and
Stauffer wrote that Joseph was in the building trade and a carpenter.
Case suggested that Jesus worked in the building trade.

In the Greek text, the word translated as ‘carpenter’ is *tekton*. These
are the only two occurrences of this Greek word in the whole New Tes-
tament. However it does occur several times in the Septuagint (II

* Modern language editions repeat the word.
Kings 12:11, 22:6; II Chr. 34:11; Zech. 1:20), where it is associated with the building trade. The word appears to be related to the noun *techne* (art, craft) and the derived noun *technites* (craftsman, builder). The exact meaning of *tekton* seems to be ‘artificer’, but we should take note of the meaning of *archi-tekton* (I Cor. 3:10), which means ‘master-builder’. Daniel-Rops claimed that *tekton* means ‘both carpenter and joiner and in a general sense the builder of houses’, while Craveri noted that *tekton* means ‘builder of houses’, i.e. a worker in both wood and stone. We must therefore take the meaning of *tekton* to be ‘a builder’, in the general sense. Indeed, in modern Greek, a *tekton* is a mason and an altogether different word is used for a carpenter.

Wilson made the mistake of believing that *tekton* attempts to render the Aramaic *naggar*, which he claimed means either a craftsman or a scholar (in fact it means ‘carpenter’). Consequently he believed that Jesus was a scholar (1992:83). In fact, in the Septuagint, *tekton* translates the Hebrew *charash* (craftsman). Salibi considered the possibility that ‘carpenter’ was Jesus’ surname, i.e. ‘Ben Nagara’ and therefore that he was not actually a carpenter (1988:39).

In Palestine in the time of Jesus, ordinary dwellings were constructed of sun-dried bricks of mud or clay on a stone foundation. Rough timbers may have been built into the walls to prevent warping during the drying out of the building after construction. Roofs were constructed of timber beams covered with lathing and plaster, usually flat. The foundation consisted of very rough stones, except for the foundation cornerstone, which was hewn square. In important public buildings, the whole corner of a wall would be built of stone and only temples and palaces were constructed entirely of stone. Thus a Palestinian builder was a craftsman who handled various materials: stone, bricks, timber and plaster and he needed to be both a mason and a carpenter. There was no division of trades as in the modern Western construction industry.

It appears therefore that Jesus was not a carpenter in the modern sense, certainly not a joiner or a carver or wooden objects. He was a builder.

This trade is revealed in his sayings and parables. ‘For which of you’, he asks, ‘wishing to build a tower does not first sit down and count the cost, to see whether he has enough money for completion?’
In case, when he has laid the foundation he is not able to finish and onlookers mock him.’ (Luke 14:28–29). He also told parables about a tower built in a vineyard (Matt. 21:33) and about two houses, one built upon sand and one built on rock (Matt. 7:24–26). Jesus declared that he would build his assembly upon a rock (Matt. 16:18) and that ‘the stone which the builders rejected became the chief corner-stone’ (Matt. 21:42).

Jesus’ dictum about motes and beams (Matt. 7:3–5) derives from the building trade. Builders often carried large beams through the streets on their shoulders. Those passers-by who did not keep a careful watch, perhaps because they were blinded by a speck of dust (mote), might receive the end of a beam in their eye. Powell thought the metaphor ‘physically impractical’ and that the ‘beam’ and ‘splinter’ (sic) were used hyperbolically dealing with Jewish/Gentile relations. Kersten & Gruber (1995:128) assumed that the aphorism is derived from a Buddhist text that urges recognition of one’s own faults, rather than those of others, but in which there is no mention of motes, splinters, beams or eyes.

Ferguson claimed that metaphors and similes from carpentry ‘came readily’ to Jesus, but there is no evidence for this. Jesus’ sayings betray no knowledge of carpentry; they do betray a knowledge of the building trade. Wilson believed that, because Jesus could speak of a beam ‘sticking out’ of the eye (this is not true), he had no practical knowledge of what it was like to work in a carpenter’s shop and that he was not a practical man. This is a fundamental misunderstanding.

How is it then that the AV describes Joseph and Jesus as carpenters? The explanation lies in the nature of domestic construction methods in seventeenth century England, where the translation was made. At that time in that country, nearly all houses were framed in timber and were constructed by carpenters. Since the timber frame was so fundamental and since so little of a house was undertaken by other trades*, the carpenter was the de facto builder. Almost certainly, the seventeenth century translators of the Bible knew that tekton meant a builder. Therefore they translated it into their own equivalent, ‘a carpenter’ (‘one who builds houses’). Unfortunately this word misleads

* Separate trades did exist in seventeenth century England.
modern readers who do not appreciate the socio-economic milieu that prevailed at the time the translation was made and/or do not understand the original meaning of tekton. Modern translations that derive from the AV instead of from the Greek text may also carry this error.

What languages did Jesus speak?

Jesus’ mother tongue was Aramaic, a Semitic language closely related to Hebrew. More precisely he would have been brought up speaking Galilean Aramaic, a dialect that was regarded by Judaeans as coarse. Peter’s manner of speech branded him a Galilean when he spoke to the High Priest’s maidservant (Matt. 26:73).

Did Jesus speak any other language? Did he speak Greek, the lingua franca of the Levant? Craveri thought that debate over whether or not Jesus learned Greek is fruitless. Klausner (1925) saw no hint that Jesus spoke Greek and Guignebert (1935) was sure that he was ignorant of it. However Hudson (1960) wrote that Galilee was a bilingual area and that it is very likely that the disciples and Jesus himself were equally at home when speaking in Greek as in Aramaic. He also suggested that they probably knew enough Latin to get along with official business. McCown claimed that Jesus, like the vast majority of Palestinians, spoke Greek. Thiede thought it possible that Jesus or his disciples could have been conversant in three languages from their childhood on, reading, writing, listening and speaking in Aramaic, Hebrew and Greek (Thiede 1990:21).

In those days almost everyone spoke and understood Koine, the common Greek of the time. It made it possible for people of many different linguistic groups to communicate with each other. Jews in particular had reason to be fluent in Koine. Because they had been dispersed around the Empire, they relied on Koine to keep in touch, especially when those of the Diaspora gathered each year in Jerusalem for Passover. Indeed, so important was Koine to them that the Scriptures were translated into Greek for the benefit of those who did not know Hebrew. This translation is known as the Septuagint (abbreviated as ‘LXX’).
The epistles of Peter indicate that their author (Peter?) was familiar with the Septuagint. Would Jesus be more ignorant of Greek than his disciples? Jesus was literate, perhaps more so than most of his contemporaries. It can have been little trouble for him to learn Koine; he may have been brought up to speak it as a second language. Who knows therefore, how many of Jesus’ sayings may be recorded in the Greek text of the Gospels in the language in which they were originally spoken? When Jesus spoke to Gentiles, it can only have been in Koine.

Although there is reason to doubt the historicity of the story, it appears that Jesus was able to speak directly to a Roman centurion, a person unlikely to understand Aramaic (Matt. 8:5–13). If Jesus and Pilate spoke directly to each other at the trial, then the conversation must have been conducted in Greek. Stauffer, Bouquet and Daniel-Rops all agreed with this conclusion. Pilate would not have bothered to learn Aramaic. A Vatican historian claimed that an interpreter must have been present*, but the absence of any mention of this in the Gospels makes it unlikely. According to the evangelists, Jesus was addressed by the soldiers responsible for his crucifixion. They mocked him in the praetorium (John 19:2–3) and on the cross (Luke 23:36–37). It seems obvious that this mocking must have been in a language that Jesus understood and that language can only have been Koine.

The evidence is that Jesus was as fluent in Greek as in Aramaic.

Jesus’ Scriptures

If Jesus felt that he was dedicated to God, his very name reminding him of the fact, then it would have been natural for him to study the holy books (scrolls) of Israel. Although he worked as a builder, he cannot have had the responsibilities of his father or of his eldest (step) brother. He must have had time to study the Scriptures in depth.

All Jewish children were taught to memorize the Scriptures; in fact this was all they were taught. But Jesus had reason to study them and it is recorded that he discussed the Scriptures with the teachers in the temple. Every year at Passover he would have had the same opportu-

* Guardian 24 October 1968.
nity to test his knowledge and understanding against theirs. The accounts we have of his encounters with the masters of the law and religion lead us to suppose that he was unusually intelligent for his time. Many times in debate he got the better of his adversaries and he seems to have been able to quote endlessly from the Scriptures.

All Jews recognized three component parts of their Scriptures; ‘the law … the prophets, and … the psalms’ (Luke 24:44). ‘The law’ was the so-called Pentateuch, the five books of Moses (see table JESUS’ SCRIPTURES on p. 68). It may be that the Law was not then divided into the five books; Jesus referred to ‘the roll of Moses’ (Mark 12:26). ‘The prophets’ included ‘the former prophets’, which described the dealings of God with his chosen people and ‘the latter prophets’. ‘The psalms’ signified not just Psalms, but all those books called ‘the writings’.

The Old Testament canon also included some books that we call collectively the Apocrypha (hidden). These were not approved for public use in the synagogue, but were valued for private study and edification. Some have been added and some have been altered since Jesus’ time.

In addition, there were some Jewish writings that, although excluded from the Old Testament canon, played an important role during the inter-Testamental period; some would have been familiar to Jesus. These works are today known as the Pseudepigrapha, i.e. writings published under assumed names. Again some have been added and/or altered since Jesus’ time.

If Jesus knew all these books, he was well read indeed. When the Gospels attribute to Jesus a quotation from one of these books, we may take it that Jesus had read the book in question. Alternatively we may conclude that the evangelist has attributed the quotation to Jesus because he (the evangelist) thought it appropriate. It would be naive to imagine that the evangelists invented all the quotations. Here I have concluded that all the quotations are those of Jesus unless there is some good reason not to do so. We may certainly conclude that where allusion is evident, but the evangelist does not draw attention to it, then Jesus himself must have been responsible. For example, it is clear that the ‘birth pangs’ (odinon) of Matthew 24:8 comes from Enoch, a book that was not mentioned by the evangelists, but was used by the early Church (Jude 14). Other Enochian phrases in the Gospels are
those that compare Israel to sheep (Matt. 10:6; 15:24) and the sinister phrase ‘it would have been better for that man if he had not been born’ (Matt. 26:24). Charles noted that Enoch had influenced the phraseology not only of Matthew but that of Luke/Acts, John, I John, Revelation, most of the epistles attributed to Paul and Hebrews.

Of the Pseudepigraphic books, Enoch was probably the most influential upon Jesus’ thinking. Indeed, since the Jews, like the Greeks, thought that truth is proportional to antiquity (Russell), Enoch must have been seen as more important than Genesis. Klausner (1925) called this book, written about 110 to 68 BC, (third century BC, according to Thiering) ‘the Messianic book par excellence of Judaism in the period of the Second Temple’. Schweitzer (1968) noted that it incorporated Zoroastrian ideas such as an underworld of spirits and supernatural events.

It has five main divisions, the second of which, known as the ‘similitudes of Enoch’, consists of three parables dealing mainly with the theme of judgement upon the world, but with assurances to the righteous through the Messianic hope.* The fifth division is a miscellaneous collection of exhortations and other material, of which the most notable is the ‘apocalypse of Weeks’. This divides world history into ten ‘weeks’, the last three being apocalyptic (see Enoch’s Apocalypse of Weeks on p. 69). The author of this work saw his own generation as ‘apostate’ and expected that the seventh ‘week’ would end with the election of the Messiah, followed in the eighth Week by the kingdom of heaven.

Renan drew attention to the importance of Enoch to understanding the thinking and beliefs of Jesus’ time and he noted that the term ‘son of Man’ comes from this work. According to Margaret Barker (Bammel), Enoch is thought to have originated in Galilee.

Thiering drew attention to the importance of Enoch to the Essenes and their belief that heaven sent the great events at significant dates of the calendar.

* Scholars are divided over the authenticity of this division.
**JESUS' SCRIPTURES**

(The books that the Gospels claim Jesus to have known
are shown in bold type)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Law</th>
<th>The Writings</th>
<th>Pseudepigrapha</th>
</tr>
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| The Books of Moses:  
Genesis/Exodus/Leviticus/Numbers/Deuteronomy | Psalms/Song of Solomon/Proverbs/Ecclesiastes/Job/Chronicles/Ruth/Lamentations/Esther/Daniel/Ezra-Nehemiah | Psalms of Solomon/Psalms of Joshua/Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs/Book of Jubilees/Testament of Job/Paralipomena of Jeremiah the Prophet/Book of Enoch/Aristeas/Sibylline Oracles/III Maccabees/IV Maccabees |
| The Prophets | Apocrypha | Book of Enoch/Aristeas/Sibylline Oracles/III Maccabees/IV Maccabees |
| The former prophets  
Joshua/Judges/Samuel/Kings | I Esdras/Tobit/Judith/Additions to Daniel/Additions to Esther/The Prayer of Manasses/The Epistle of Jeremiah/The Book of Baruch/Ecclesiasticus/The Wisdom of Solomon/I Maccabees/II Maccabees | |
| The latter prophets:  
Isaiah/Jeremiah/Ezekiel | | |
| The minor prophets:  
Hosea/Joel/Amos/Obadiah/Jonah/Micah/Nahum/Habakkuk/Zephaniah/Haggai/Zechariah/Malachi | | |
ENOCHE\'S APOCALYPSE OF WEEKS

And Enoch began to recount from the books and said:
'I was born the seventh [from Adam] in the first week,
While judgement and righteousness still endured.
And after me there shall arise in the second week a great wickedness,
And deceit shall have sprung up;
And in it a man [Noah] shall be saved.
And after it is ended righteousness shall grow up,
And a Law shall be made for the sinners.
And after that in the third week at its close
A man [Abraham] shall be elected as the plant of righteous judgement,
And his posterity [Messiah] shall become the plant of righteousness for evermore.
And after that in the fourth week, at its close,
Visions of the holy and righteous shall be seen [in Sinai]
And a law for all generations and an enclosure [Canaan] shall be made for them.
And after that in the fifth week, at its close,
The house of glory and dominion [Temple] shall be built for ever [in one form or another].
And after that in the sixth week all who live in it shall be blinded,
And the hearts of all of them shall godlessly forsake wisdom.
And in it a man [Nebuchadnezzar?] shall ascend;
And at its close the house of dominion shall be burnt with fire,
And the whole race of the chosen root shall be dispersed [Captivity],
And after that in the seventh week shall an apostate generation arise,
And many shall be its deeds,
And its deeds shall be apostate.
And at its close shall be elected
The elect righteous of the eternal plant of righteousness [Messiah],
To receive sevenfold instruction concerning all His creation.
And after that there shall be another, the eighth week, that of righteousness
And a sword shall be given to it that a righteous judgement may be executed on the oppressors,
And sinners shall be delivered into the hands of the righteous.
And at its close they shall acquire houses through their righteousness,
And a house [New Jerusalem] shall be built for the Great King in glory for evermore,
And all mankind shall look to the path of righteousness.
And after that, in the ninth week, the righteous judgement shall be revealed to the whole world,
And all the works of the godless shall vanish from the Earth,
And the world shall be written down for destruction.
And after this, in the tenth week in the seventh part,
There shall be the great eternal judgement,
In which He will execute vengeance amongst the angels.
And the first heaven shall depart and pass away,
And a new heaven shall appear,
And all the powers of the heavens shall give sevenfold light.
And after that there will be many weeks without number for ever,
And all shall be in goodness and righteousness,
And sin shall be no more mentioned for ever.'

From Book of Enoch (I Enoch) 91:12–17; 93:1–10 (Charles 1913:II)
Jesus and the Nazarene sect

We cannot proceed to understand the influence of the Scriptures upon Jesus’ mind without tackling the problem from another direction. Few Jews were familiar with all the books of the Jewish Scriptures. Indeed, one would not expect a family of builders to possess any of the books. Consequently, if Jesus knew these books as well as indicated by the evangelists, he was unusual. Furthermore, we have to ask how he obtained access to the books. Who supplied the books and what did this person or persons teach him about them?

We return to the problem of what was meant by calling Jesus ‘the Nazarene’. According to Luke, Paul was accused of belonging to ‘the sect of the Nazarenes’ (Acts 24:5). The use here of the plural indicates that this was not merely another way of saying that Paul was a follower of ‘the Nazarene’. It is possible that it indicates the existence of a sect that was so labelled quite independently of Jesus. In that case, we may assume that, if Paul belonged to the sect, then so did Jesus.

Some scholars have suggested that the correct interpretation of ‘nazorene’ is that it is connected with an elite religious group such as the Nazareans, an alternative name for the Mandeans (Borsch). Epiphanius claimed that a sect of the ‘nasareans’ existed in Syria and Palestine, that they were Jews who recognized a Messiah and that they used the same sacred book as the Ossaeans (Essenes). According to Gruber, the Nazarenes were a branch of the Essenes, led by John the Baptist (Kersten & Gruber 1994:238). Robertson (1953) suggested that Nasarean (sic) means ‘keeper’, of secrets or of some rules or usages, from natzar (to watch, guard or keep). He pointed out that a pre-Christian sect cannot have been so-called after Jesus the Nazoran (sic), but that Jesus may well have been so-called as a member of the sect.

According to Schonfield (1974), ‘nazorean’ is, in Hebrew, ntsrim, which means ‘keepers’ or ‘preservers’, i.e. those who maintain the true teaching and tradition or who cherish certain secrets that they did not divulge to others. It has nothing to do with Nazirites. The Hebrew root nazar means ‘to separate’ (Lev. 15:31), ‘to become separated’ (Lev. 22:2) or ‘to consecrate’ (Num. 6:12) and is the origin of the word Nazarite (Num. 6:2). Graves and Podro believed that Jesus belonged to a small apocalyptic sect known as Zophim or ‘watchers for the king-
dom’, organized on Free Essene lines. However they derived ‘nazorean’ (sic) from nozrim, ‘the guardians’ who preserved the oral tradition of Jesus’ acts and sayings. They also thought that there was a pun on $\text{n'sar}$, which they claimed is the Aramaic for a saw, which a carpenter uses. If Jesus was not a carpenter, no pun can have been intended ($\text{n'sar}$ is not the Hebrew for a saw). Kersten & Gruber (1995:204) claimed that ‘nazorean’ goes back to the ancient Babylonian $\text{nararu}$ (or $\text{nasiru}$), meaning ‘keeper of divine secrets’ and they concluded that the term appeared to have been brought back to Palestine with the return from exile.

If it is true that the word Nazarene derives from a pre-Christian sect, then it seems that Jesus was a member of that sect. Consequently an understanding of his world view can only come from an examination of the nature and teachings of this sect.

The Nazoreans were a Mandeans gnostic sect that some regard as the forerunner of Christianity. Bultmann believed that Christianity appropriated and reinterpreted a basic gnostic Redeemer-myth and there is evidence for a pre-Christian Nazarene cult adapted to the Jewish milieu. Black showed the suitability of ‘nazarenes’ as a title for the followers of John the Baptist, whose rites the Mandeans claimed to preserve. He suggested that the name Nazarene became applied to the Jesus-movement that arose in the wake of John’s.

The basis of gnostics is knowledge of spiritual mysteries that leads to salvation for those who understand the secrets. In a Jewish context, it must have developed into a more intense form of the hope for the Messiah and the changes that his coming would bring. Therefore one can presume that Nazarenes claimed to hold secret knowledge of the Messiah and/or of his coming and the state of the world after his appearance.

Vickers informs us that the Nazarenes were a kindred sect of the Essenes who, in order to prepare more effectively for the promised heavenly kingdom, went so far as to organize its government. The sect included rich people who retained their wealth only so as to render the community valuable services. Among their beliefs was the notion that those who would be called to sit on the thrones of the kingdom and rule the twelve tribes (of Israel) must necessarily be men of the poorest and humblest condition. Vickers suggested that Jesus and his disciples,
whom he described as ‘galilean peasants’, might reasonably aspire to an elevation in the future world. Certainly there was every reason why poor Galilean Jews should want political change, particularly if they believed that God had promised it and that it was imminent.

On the evidence of II Cor. 8:9, Salibi (1988:11) claimed that Jesus was actually rich. He also noted how Jesus referred to the poor (e.g., Mark 14:7) as if he was not one of them.

The idea that the social order would be reversed in the new age may have come from the Persian and Babylonian solstitial ceremony of sacaea. During the celebrations, masters and slaves exchanged roles. For one day, the slaves were allowed to command and masters obeyed (Carter). It may have been thought natural that what occurred temporarily at the turn of the year would become permanent at the turn of the age.

This fundamental Nazarene ‘law of Reversal’ is plainly evident in the Gospels: ‘but many that are first shall be last and the last shall be first’ (Matt. 19:30, see also Matt. 20:16 and Luke 13:30). The Sermon-on-the-Mount itself appears to be a manifesto promising that those who are poor, meek, hungry and persecuted will become the rulers in the kingdom; they shall ‘inherit the land [of Israel]’ and the kingdom of God (of the Messiah) shall be theirs (Carmichael, 1995:71, saw the Sermon as predicting social turmoil).

It is evident from Matthew 19:28 that Jesus and those around him believed that they would rule the kingdom. Zebedee’s sons believed that they could become Jesus’ right-hand men in the kingdom (Matt. 20:20–24). The Law of Reversal also explains Jesus’ association with slaves, paupers and down-and-outs. He thought that these people would be the rulers of the age to come.

Sanders (1993:196f) misunderstood this Law. He described it as a ‘reversal of values’ and thought that the kingdom would be one where values are quite different for those that prevailed. On the contrary, Jesus made it quite plain that the kingdom’s rulers would hold the same values as the present age. Only the personnel would change; status, not values, would be inverted. Powell also misunderstood the Law; he thought that Matt. 20:16 should read ‘so the last shall be as the first and the first as the last’ and that Matt. 19:30 meant that the last follower will be equal with the first follower.
Vickers deduced that the Nazarenes would have believed, encouraged by certain Scriptures, that the highest person in the kingdom, the Messiah, must necessarily have been the humblest person beforehand and that he must have been ‘a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief’. He suggested that, believing this, Jesus consciously calculated on suffering, either in the way of martyrdom or penance, ‘so as to gain his place in the kingdom’. In order to receive the greatest exaltation in the kingdom, the Messiah should suffer greatest abasement. Jesus said, ‘it is written that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be set at nothing’ (Mark 9:12). The ultimate suffering is death.

It was the belief of the Jews that, at the coming of the Messiah, at the commencement of the kingdom, the living would be translated into the new age by changing their mortal forms for imperishable bodies. At the same time, the righteous dead would be resurrected to join them. However orthodox Jews did not believe that the Messiah himself would have to die before he too was resurrected into the kingdom. Guignebert noted that, despite the claim of the Gospel (Mark 9:12), the Old Testament knows nothing of a suffering Messiah. We shall see that this is not true.

Reimarus explained that the Jews had two different systems of their Messiah. Most expected a worldly sovereign, splendid and glorious. But some said that he would come twice, the first time in misery and suffering, resulting in his death; the second time in glory with unlimited power. According to Reimarus, the Jew Trypho, in Justin Martyr’s Dialogue, acknowledged this two-fold Messiah and it is found in the Talmud and other Jewish writings. He went on to claim that most of the Jews of his own time had developed a belief in two Messiahs, one from the tribe of Joseph who was to suffer and die, the other from the tribe of Judah who would reign. This dichotomy arose from a need to resolve conflicting Old Testament passages that appeared to speak of the Messiah. Klausner (1956) agreed that the conflict was gradually resolved by the emergence of the concept of two Messiahs. The first, Messiah-ben-Joseph of the house of Ephraim, was to be slain as forecast by Zechariah (Zech. 12:10). The second, Messiah-ben-David of the house of Judah, was to be the eternal ruler, the great judge and final king of Israel. The latter would claim all authority and power, but not forgetting the exploits and sacrifice of his predecessor. Klausner be-
lieved this dichotomy to be quite late in Jewish theological development, i.e. later than the time of Jesus, but admitted that no one is certain when it first arose. Arnheim stated that it was precisely in Jesus’ time that the idea of two Messiahs was current, at least in certain Jewish circles. It may have developed first secretly among the Nazarenes; it is known that the Essenes believed that there would be two Messiahs (of Aaron and Israel), preceded by a prophet (Grant 1973). Mowinckel noted Torrey’s idea that the concept of Messiah-ben-Joseph arose from the Messianic interpretation of Isaiah 53; because a dying Messiah could not be a true Messiah-ben-David he must be an antecedent Messiah, coming from Joseph, a tribe that ranked next after Judah. It is curious therefore that Jesus’ father’s name is given as Joseph; this may be a relic of a belief that Jesus was the Messiah-ben-Joseph (Machovec 1976).

According to Mowinckel, Judaism borrowed from the beliefs of other Near Eastern religions, all of which are based on the Babylonian religion. Central to these religions was the concept of creation and of a ‘divine king’, the ‘god’ of fertility. At new year, there was a ceremony of humiliation, even death and ‘resurrection’, after which the king remade the world. Originally the king was killed. Later someone was killed in his place and later still the ‘death’ was merely symbolized. Mowickel noted that, in the Egyptian religion, the dying king (Osiris) became the new king (Horus). ‘Osiris transmits to Horus his entire divine power and sovereignty.’

Vawter drew attention to ‘the criterion of dissimilarity’, i.e. a given teaching is more likely to point to the person of Jesus when it can be shown not to have been extracted from contemporary Judaism nor to correspond with the inventive interests of early Christianity. Thus if the evangelists have attributed to Jesus beliefs that do not agree with those of the orthodox Judaism of Jesus’ time, it does not follow that the beliefs do not originate with Jesus. On the contrary, the lack of agreement points to their origin with Jesus. The early Church had no interest in propagating a belief in two Messiahs; consequently, if the Gospels reveal such a belief, it can only have a foundation in Jesus’ own beliefs.

That Jesus expected another Messiah to follow him is evident from John. According to the evangelist, God would send ‘another Com-
forter’ (parakletos) that he may be with you unto the age, eis ton aiona, i.e. ‘For ever’ (John 14:16; see also John 14:26, 15:26 and 16:7).

The Church regards this as a reference to the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity; indeed this interpretation has evidently been inserted into the text in some places to make that interpretation certain. It was natural that, following the failure of the second Comforter to appear, the Church should interpret the reference in such a spiritual manner. But Judaism knows nothing of such a spiritual being. The ‘spirit of the Lord’ found in the Old Testament was God’s breath (Hebrew ruah).

The Church’s interpretation is not only mistaken; it is illogical. If one Comforter (Jesus) was a man, why should the other not also be a man? The use of the word ‘another’ implies that the second will be similar to the first. Jesus appears to have spoken of the second as if he were a man, one who talks with the disciples just as he does. The term ‘comforter’ comes from Lamentations 1:16 and refers to the Messiah himself (Klausner 1956). Evidently Jesus regarded himself as the first Messiah and expected another to follow him.

An associated problem is the ambiguous way in which, according to John, Jesus refers to the second Messiah. He claimed that the disciples already knew the man and that he would remind them of all the things that he (Jesus) had said, implying that it is another person but not explaining how they would know him. On the other hand, he declared that he himself would return to comfort them and that they would see him again after a short time. For some reason he would have to go away before the other could come (John 14:17–18,26; 16:7,16).

Few have found a rational explanation for these apparent contradictions. It is special pleading to argue that it results from the fusion of two independent traditions. The best that Strauss could offer was that Jesus’ person had to be removed before the material ideas of the disciples became spiritual. If Jesus’ forecast of his return was fulfilled when he appeared to the disciples after the Resurrection, what becomes of the belief that the coming of the Holy Spirit represents his return? Why must he first depart? How is it that the disciples already knew the second Comforter before his arrival? The matter is too complex to have been invented by some redactor; they must be genuine sayings of Jesus. But what do they mean?
Only Machovec has seen the obvious explanation. Jesus saw himself returning as the second Messiah. This is why he had to go away; he had to depart so that he could arrive as the second Comforter. The disciples knew the second Messiah because it was Jesus himself. Evidently he imagined that, after his death, he would be translated into this second Messiah; he would return and become the ruler of Israel. This was the ultimate Nazarene secret.

**Nazarene organization**

The Nazarene sect must surely have been organized like any other sect. In Palestine at that time the leadership of sects and parties was dynastic; it was inherited by blood relatives, usually the son of the previous leader. At the time, the Zealots were led by sons of their founder, Judas the Galilean. Brandon drew attention to the rapid rise to power and authority in the primitive Church of James, the brother of Jesus (Matt. 13:55), a phenomenon that was not explained by Luke. James took Jesus’ place almost immediately, despite the fact that he was not, apparently, among the twelve disciples (Tabor claims that he was one of the Twelve) and Paul claimed that there was a last minute meeting between Jesus and James (I Cor. 15:7). This transfer of leadership to Jesus’ closest blood relative implies the existence of an organization that linked both of them and demanded such a transfer. Clearly James inherited leadership of the Jerusalem Church from Jesus. He must also have inherited the leadership of the Nazarenes. After James’ death, the leadership passed to another relative, Jesus’ cousin Symeon (Eusebius 3:11:1). If James inherited this leadership from the dying Jesus, then Jesus must have been the leader of the Nazarenes. If he had been leader, did he found the sect or did he inherit the leadership from some other person? There is no doubt that Jesus received his instruction and authority from John the Baptist; he often praised him and even claimed that John was the greatest man who ever lived (Matt. 11:11). Were John and Jesus related to each other? Luke claimed that Elizabeth,

* Tabor claims that this was Jesus’ brother Simon, son of Clophas (Jn 19:25), whom Mary married after the death of Joseph, his brother.
John’s mother, was Jesus’ mother’s cousin (sungenis, kindred). Not only were they related, but we also know that John was the only child of elderly parents. It is quite likely that, after the death of his father, John’s nearest male relative was a cousin. Jesus was the eldest sibling of his family and could have been the natural inheritor of whatever authority was vested in John. In fact, it seems likely that John created the sect and passed its leadership to Jesus. Jesus began to preach only after John had been imprisoned (Mark 1:14–15) and so closely did Jesus’ message resemble that of John after John was killed that Herod thought that Jesus was John resurrected (Mark 6:14–16). Wilson suggested that Jesus’ family led the movement he represented and he recognized that Jesus was in touch with people other than the disciples. He also saw that Jesus planned something that the disciples did not fully understand and that he was involved in a series of actions in which his death was seen as inevitable.

Evidently John the Baptist had been leader of the Nazarenes and Jesus inherited the leadership on John’s death. Jesus must have acted as leader while John was imprisoned. Jesus did not found a new religion, nor even a new sect; he merely built on the foundation of John. Craveri declared that, unquestionably, Jesus was a follower of John, rather than the converse and quoted Schoeps (I grandi fondatori di religioni) to the effect that Christianity was born as a ‘splinter from the sect of John’. Despite Gospel silence on this matter, we can conclude that Jesus’ close relatives, especially his brothers, were intimately involved in the Nazarene movement; Jesus’ family ruled the Nazarenes.

**Nazarene interpretation of Scripture**

It is evident from the Gospels that the Jewish scriptures were supremely important to Jesus and the Nazarenes. Many times Jesus quoted or referred to them, chiding his audience for their ignorance or for what he regarded as their mistaken interpretations (Mark 12:24; Matt. 21:42). Most of all, he referred to them as a plan of action, a plan that must be fulfilled (Mark 14:49). The Nazarenes had blind faith in their Scriptures, believing that they were authoritative, accurate and infallible. The same blind faith is demonstrated today by modern fundamentalist...
Christians. The further a sect is from the mainstream of its religion, the more fanatical and literal is its interpretation of the same scriptures that are interpreted liberally by their more moderate brethren. The Nazarenes were not only fundamentalist and fanatical, they were gnostic, confident that they alone had the true interpretation of Scripture and determined to keep it secret. This attitude is evident in the Gospels.

Many have observed that the idea of a Messiah who must suffer and die in order to accomplish the redemption of the people of Israel was totally alien to the Jews. Borsch noted that the mainstream of Judaism at this time had no real place for a suffering Messianic figure. ‘A crucified Messiah was a scandal to most Jews … and a leader who had to suffer could never have been a popular idea during this particular era.’ Strauss observed that the question of whether or not the idea of a suffering and dying Messiah was already diffused among the Jews in the time of Jesus was one of the most difficult points of discussion among theologians and one concerning which they are least agreed. He should have realized that, while it may not have been diffused, it might have been concentrated in one sect or a few sects. It could have formed part of the beliefs of the Nazarenes. These beliefs did not have to be popular or even understood by the public; gnostic beliefs were secret. It was the belief in a suffering Messiah that drove Jesus and the Nazarenes; through them the whole world has adopted their beliefs.

Renan claimed that the Scriptures contain no prophecies declaring exactly what the Messiah should accomplish. However Mowinckel found twenty-two ‘authentic Messianic prophecies’ in the Old Testament and showed that Isaiah 53 speaks of the exceptional resurrection of the Suffering Servant and his vindication by God. He noted that, because, from a Jewish perspective, a suffering Messiah is a contradiction in terms, mainstream Judaism could not see this Servant as the Messiah. Consequently the Nazarenes saw the life of the Messiah revealed in Scriptures that carried no such message for the orthodox.

This belief, that Scripture contains secrets that only a chosen few can understand, has persisted through the ages and is not extinct. Even today some Christian sects believe that the Bible contains a message that is only for them. To understand the Nazarenes and Jesus’ plan we
must examine those Scriptures which they thought showed the future and the Messiah’s fate.

We have already seen that Enoch contains an apocalypse built on a chronology of ‘weeks.’ The Book of Daniel also contains such an apocalypse (Dan. 7–12), the seventh chapter of which describes a vision seen by Nebuchadnezzar. It portrays the future in the form of four great beasts that, according to Koch (Schultz 1971) and Klausner (1925), represent, in chronological order, the Neo-Babylonians, the Medes, the Persians and the Greeks as successive rulers of the Holy Land. Later the last beast was identified with the Roman Empire, so that, by the time of Jesus, it was thought that the period described by the vision was reaching its culmination. The vision went on to describe how this last beast was defeated and killed by the Messiah. Consequently it was expected that the Messiah would shortly appear to defeat the Romans and save Israel.

This much was general knowledge and accepted by orthodox Jews. However, in the ninth chapter (Dan. 9:24–27) there is a quite specific chronology of ‘weeks’. An angel prophesied that seventy ‘weeks’ remained until Jerusalem saw the coming of the kingdom. These prophetic ‘weeks’ were each of seven years. Consequently the prophecy covered a period of 490 years from the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. It consisted of three distinct periods. The first, forty-nine years long, covered the period during which the city would be rebuilt. The second period lasted for 434 years, terminating with the death of the Messiah. The final seven years were to be a period of desolation before final triumph.

The Messiah is described as ‘an anointed-one’ who would be ‘cut off’ and have nothing, literally ‘but [with] no sign of anything for himself’ (Dan. 9:26, but the Septuagint has ‘there is no judgement in him’). This prophecy finds an echo in Jesus’ remark that the Son of Man (the Messiah) would be ‘set at nothing’ (Mark 9:12). Jesus certainly knew this prophecy; he quoted from it (Matt. 24:15), adding the mysterious injunction ‘let the reader understand’, a phrase that implies secret meaning.

Evangelical Christians have long displayed Daniel’s prophecy as one fulfilled in Jesus’ death. However orthodox Christianity takes as
little notice as did orthodox Jewry in Jesus’ time.' Jesus’ own disciples did not appear to know of this forecast of their master’s death. Perhaps only the Nazarenes saw here a forecast that the first Messiah would die and at a specific time (at the end of the sixty-ninth ‘week’). The prophecy has considerable importance for Jesus’ mission and it deserves further study.

The Book of Daniel was not written by the ancient prophet who claimed to have been carried captive to Babylon. It was written pseudepigraphically about 165 BC, shortly after the rape of Jerusalem by Antiochus Epiphanes and it is certain that the ‘prophecies’ are based on events that occurred during that terrible time. This Seleucid king invaded Jerusalem in 169 BC, robbed the Temple of its treasures, stopped the daily sacrifice (167 BC), ravaged the city, burned its finest buildings, built an idol-altar on the Jewish altar and sacrificed swine on it. Severe and hideous sacrileges were perpetrated on the citizens (Josephus, Antiq. 12:5:4).

The most significant element in this catalogue of crime is the sacrifice of swine. Because a pig is an abominable animal to Jews (Deut. 15:8), the sacrilege of Antiochus was described in the Septuagint as an ‘abomination of desolation’ (I Macc. 1:54). Jews could hardly imagine a worse sacrilege; the sacrifice of an animal that their religion abhorred on the altar of their god's temple. The author of Daniel turned this sacrilege into the climax of his prophecy, warning his readers that ‘on the temple [shall be] the abomination of desolations;' (Dan. 9:27, LXX). Jesus himself drew attention to this event as a sign of the end (Mark 13:14; Matt. 24:15).

Few scholars have been able to explain the ‘abomination’ to which Jesus referred. Sanders thought that it probably refers to the threat (in 40 or 41) by Gaius (Caligula) to have a statue of himself erected in the Temple (1993:256). But the reference must be, as Jesus explained, to Daniel and swine. Did the Nazarenes expect that swine would be sacrificed in the Temple? Perhaps they foresaw that something representing a pig would stand in the holy place. It is curious that one of the emblems of the Roman Tenth Legion (Fretensis), which was stationed in Syria in 20 and was in Judaea in 68, was a wild boar (Parker 1958:263). This

* This may have been because the Septuagint translation is inaccurate.
represented the Sabine god Quirinus (see plate 1 below). If the troops that Rome used to control Judaea (from 6) were seconded from the Tenth, then they could have marched under a banner carrying the image of a boar. This could have caused the Roman troops in Judaea to be known as swine. Indeed this is confirmed by the story of the Gadarene swine (Mark 5:1–17). The story is an allegory portraying the hope that the Romans would be swept into the sea by a Jewish army (Robertson 1953:144f). The name of the demoniac was ‘legion’ and the number of his demons (2000) was about that of the number of Roman troops in Judaea. Sanders (1993:23) gives the number of troops as 3000.

Plate 1: There seems to be no extant relic showing the emblems of the Tenth Legion, but the Twentieth Legion also used the boar. This antefix showing the Twentieth’s boar was discovered in Britain and is in the British Museum in London. (British Museum)

Thiering saw that the pigs stand for ‘a class of men’, but she could not identify them and Powell, who saw allegories everywhere else, failed to
see this one. Jewish listeners would have understood the symbolism. The man was Judaea and the demons were the Roman army, whose presence in Judaea was driving the Jews to a frenzy of self-destruction. The Romans could only be removed by the Messiah who could command them to depart (Mark 5:10). The Romans, who were identified on their standards by the image of a pig, turned into pigs. The Nazarenes may have interpreted Daniel's prophecy as a forecast that the Romans, with their 'abominable' standards, would destroy the sanctuary and stand in the holy place. They had good reason. The boar was long regarded as a symbol of the enemies of Israel, moreover the symbol of those who would destroy it. The Hebrew word for a boar appears only once in the Old Testament, in a context (Ps. 80:13) where the land of Israel is compared to a vineyard, with the vines representing the Jews. The vineyard is ravaged by 'the boar from the forest'. Cansdale (1962) noted that the wild boar's main habitat is forest or reed beds and that it is likely that 'the beast that dwells among the reeds' (Ps. 68:30, LXX) is the boar. In fact, the conventional interpretation of the latter verse is that it describes either the crocodile or the hippopotamus, representing Egypt, Israel's ancient enemy. It is curious therefore that the Hebrew version of the same phrase reads 'the company of spearmen' (the original text is obscure). If these spearmen carried a banner (vexillum) bearing the representation of a boar among the spears, they may have seemed to the Nazarenes to be a perfect fulfilment of Scripture: Rome signalling that it was the power that would destroy Israel (see plate 2 opposite).

Some Nazarenes may have seen signs of the times in 6 when Rome took control of Judaea and held a census. The patronymic of the supervising officer, the Imperial legate, was Quirinius (sometimes called 'quirinus'), easily associated with the boar god Quirinus. To the initiates, Rome early announced its identification as the power that would ravage the holy land.

The terminus a quo of the prophetic 'weeks' is a commandment by the Persian king to rebuild Jerusalem and to allow the Jews to return from their captivity. It is not clear which king is indicated. Klausner (1925) thought it was Cyrus, who made such an edict in 537 BC. However according to Nehemiah (Neh. 2:1), the release was made in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes. This may have been 445 BC, when Ne-
hemiah was permitted to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (the prophecy mentions the rebuilding of streets and walls). If the prophecy was dated from 445 BC, it would terminate in 38. Schonfield (1974), while recognizing the uncertainty there is regarding reckoning at that time, calculated that it would terminate in 48 BC, the year Pompey was killed in Egypt. Tabor calculated that it terminated in 33, but his chronology was skewed by his belief that Jesus was born in 5 BC. A terminus ad quem before Jesus’ time makes nonsense of his mission. Plainly the Nazarenes must have believed that the period of the prophecy had not yet expired. The year in which Jesus probably died (33) is only five years away from the terminus ad quem calculated above (38) and only two years away from the end of the sixty-ninth ‘week’ (31).

Plate 2: The Ermine Street Guard marching with the vexillum of the Twentieth Legion. The boar among the reeds?

We cannot be certain what year the Nazarenes took as the terminus a quo, but we can be confident that they believed that the death of the Messiah was imminent. If they believed that Jesus had to die at the end
of the sixty-ninth ‘week’, then they must have taken the terminus a quo as 450 BC, not an unreasonable guess at the time.

The prophecy claimed that a coming ruler would destroy Jerusalem and the Temple, creating seven years of desolation. He would abolish the daily sacrifice after three-and-a-half years (Dan. 9:26b–27a) and establish the ‘abomination’. If Matthew 24 records the words of Jesus, then he understood Daniel’s prophecy to describe a disaster that was about to overtake Jerusalem. If the ‘abomination’ was yet to come, then Jesus could not have understood any previous action as fulfilment. It has been suggested that Pilate’s action in 26 was regarded as the ‘abomination’. However, at that time, the standards had not been taken into the Temple court. Jesus seems to have believed that the final desolation would occur in the ‘holy place’ (topos hagios), i.e. the altar (Matt. 24:15). Indeed, such a violation did occur when the Romans conquered Jerusalem in 70.

It was believed that the Temple would be desecrated and under Gentile control for the remaining three-and-a-half years (‘a time, times and a half’; Dan. 12:7). A year was taken to be 360 days. Consequently three-and-a-half years was equivalent to 1260 days. The extra 30 days constituted an intercalary month in which to cleanse the sanctuary and, possibly, to build the New Jerusalem. The report that Jesus claimed that he would replace the Temple by its heavenly counterpart in only three (Hebrew sheloshah) days (Mark 14:58) may have been a misunderstanding of thirty (sheloshim) days. An extra 45 days (Dan. 12:12) was then added to allow preparation for the celebrations that would inaugurate the kingdom. At the end of the 1335 days, there would be a general resurrection (Dan. 12:12–13).

The choice of a period of three-and-a-half years requires explanation. It may derive from the fact that, at that time, there was a prominent comet with a synodic period of about 3.3 years (Clube). See the gloss on THE JUBILEE PROBLEM opposite.
Seven sabbatical years (49 years) were to culminate in a Jubilee (trumpet), which Leviticus calls the ‘fiftieth year’. This was also to be a fallow year. It seems very unlikely that the Israelites could have tolerated two fallow years in succession, even though they believed that Yahweh had promised that the sixth year would provide enough food for three years (Lev. 25:20f). They were told that they should sow in the eighth year. If this applied at the Jubilee, then the fiftieth year would be the first year of the next cycle. Alternatively, if they observed the fiftieth year as a fallow year, the sequence of sabbatical years would have been broken. A system based on seven would have been replaced by one based on ten times five.

It seems likely that the intention was that the forty-ninth year was to be the Jubilee, an especially sacred sabbatical year and that this was loosely referred to as the fiftieth year. There was a tendency to use numbers, especially large ones, in an approximate sense. It is not known whether or not the Jews kept to this system, although the prophecy of Daniel suggests that they did.

We may ask why the Jews instituted the Jubilee; what was its origin? Only recently has a possible answer emerged. Clube and Napier suggest that in ancient times comets were more plentiful and that one particular comet, which was very prominent and associated with devastation of the Earth, had a close encounter period of 52 years. This is sufficiently close to 49 years to allow the possibility that the Jubilee is derived from some rite associated with this comet.

Matthew 24 makes it clear that Jesus was looking towards the seven troubled years of Daniel 9:26; he warned of the war and strife that marked the beginning of the ‘birth pangs’ (Matt. 24:8). The ‘sorrows’ of the AV hides the Greek word odinon (birth pangs), which is a reference to the ‘birth pangs of the Messiah’ found in Enoch. This time of trouble, which was expected to herald the manifestation of the Messiah, was to bring abandonment of children, miscarriages, separation of families in violence and the slaughter of sons by fathers. This picture of the misery caused by civil war is closely echoed in Matthew 24. Jesus urges the faithful to take heed of the warning given by the ‘abomination’. They should flee Jerusalem and wait for the Messiah to return and destroy the desolators. The analogy with childbirth shows that the coming of the Messiah would not be without pain for Israel.

Another matter that may have had an influence upon the Nazarene chronology is the cycle of sabbatical years. The Law demanded that every seventh year the land was to be left fallow and that, after seven such cycles, a special ‘jubilee’ was to be declared (Lev. 25:2–13). See the gloss on THE JUBILEE PROBLEM above.

The Nazarenes may have seen the 490 years of Daniel’s prophecy as a span of ten Jubilees and that the ‘prophetic weeks’ coincided with the sabbatical cycle. In fact the prophecy must have been interpreted so that its termini coincided with years of Jubilee. If the prophetic period

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**THE JUBILEE PROBLEM**

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terminated in a Jubilee, then Messiah-ben-Joseph must die in the sabbatical year preceding a Jubilee.

There is doubt that the Jews strictly observed the sabbatical system. But whether or not it was observed publicly, it could have been recorded and remembered privately by minority religious sects such as the Nazarenes. There seems to be no record telling which years were known as Jubilee years. However, although for him it was not the year of the Crucifixion, Schonfield (1958) identified 33/34 as a sabbatical year. If Jesus was crucified in a sabbatical year, it may have been because the Nazarenes thought that year to be one that marked the end of the sixty-ninth ‘week’ of the prophecy. It would mean that they expected the final Jubilee and the appearance of the kingdom in 40. Guignebert (1939) noted that the common people widely accepted calculations that claimed to establish a date for the inauguration of the long-desired kingdom and that one such estimate fixed the Great Day about the year 30. Previous sabbatical years (see the COMPARATIVE CHRONOLOGY OF THE TIMES OF JESUS on p. 58) may have been seen as significant. Herod the Great is thought to have died in 4 BC. But what if he had died in the sabbatical year 3/2 BC? In the sabbatical year 5/6 Judaea was put under direct Roman rule. In the sabbatical year 19/20 Valerius Gratus became governor of Judaea and in the sabbatical year 26/27 Pilate took his place. Watchers for the kingdom may have seen these coincidences as significant signs of the times. The Nazarenes might also have made calculations concerning the time that had elapsed since the creation of the world. If Archbishop Ussher could calculate from the Bible that creation occurred in 4004 BC, then the Nazarenes could have made a similar calculation. The modern Jewish calendar places creation in the year 3760 BC, although it is not clear how this date is determined. The Talmud forecast that the world would be destroyed after 4291 years (from creation) and quoted Elijah as saying that the Messiah would appear after a period of 85 Jubilees (Arnheim).

A Nazarene world chronology would surely have taken account of Enoch’s Apocalypse of Weeks. Although Charles was convinced that the ten ‘weeks’ are not definite and equal periods, we need not attribute such scepticism to the Nazarenes. They may have seen the Apocalypse as a revelation of a divine plan, moreover a plan to a sys-
tematic timetable. It can hardly be coincidental that both Daniel and Enoch describe prophetic ‘weeks’, even though the periods of time represented cannot be identical. Can we determine the ‘week’ of Enoch? Enoch’s seventh ‘week’ covers the period from the fall of Jerusalem (587 BC) to the coming of the Messiah, very similar to the period covered by Daniel’s seventy ‘weeks’. Could it be that Daniel’s seventy ‘weeks’ are one of Enoch’s ‘weeks’? It is possible that the author of Daniel chose 490 years for the reason that it was already believed to be a significant period of time. The fact that the period’s factors are two sevens and a ten justifies the view that it held spiritual significance for the Jews. Seven was the number of spiritual perfection and ten the number of ordinal perfection. Based on the above assumption, a chronological table can be constructed as follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Christian era date</th>
<th>age of Earth</th>
<th>factors of Earth’s age</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3390 BC</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>$7^2 \times 10$</td>
<td>Creation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2900</td>
<td>0490</td>
<td>$7^2 \times 20$</td>
<td>Enoch’s birth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2410</td>
<td>0980</td>
<td>$7^2 \times 30$</td>
<td>Flood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>1470</td>
<td>$7^2 \times 40$</td>
<td>Abraham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1430</td>
<td>1960</td>
<td>$7^2 \times 50$</td>
<td>Exodus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0940</td>
<td>2450</td>
<td>$7^2 \times 60$</td>
<td>Edict of Artaxerxes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0450</td>
<td>2940</td>
<td>$7^2 \times 70$</td>
<td>Messiah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0040 CE</td>
<td>3430</td>
<td>$7^2 \times 80$</td>
<td>Resurrection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0530</td>
<td>3920</td>
<td>$7^2 \times 90$</td>
<td>Judgement on Earth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1020</td>
<td>4410</td>
<td>$7^2 \times 100$</td>
<td>Judgement in heaven</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The whole of the Earth’s history, past and future, occupies 4900 years, that period containing one hundred Jubilees. Note that spiritually significant numbers are associated with the principle events in the Chronology. Two, the number of opposition, enmity and division, is associated with the period before the Flood. Four, the number of the Earth, is associated with the inheritance of the Promised Land and six,
the human number, is associated with those, like Nebuchadnezzar, who defied the god of the Jews. But the seventh Week ends in 3430 (factors $7^3 \times 10$), when the Messiah brings spiritual perfection. That year is the seventieth Jubilee. Note also that eight is the number of renewal and resurrection and that, according to Daniel if not according to Enoch, resurrection occurs in the eighth Week. Nine is the number of judgement.

Does this plan show a ‘realistic’ chronology from a Nazarene point of view? According to Bullinger, the Old Testament reveals that the Flood occurred in 2348 BC (sixty-two years after the end of the second ‘week’), Abraham was born about 1996 BC (seventy-six years before the end of the third ‘week’), the Exodus occurred about 1491 BC (sixty-one years before the end of the fourth ‘week’), the kingdom began in 1000 BC (sixty years before the end of the fifth ‘week’) and the Captivities ended in 426 BC (only twenty-four years after the end of the sixth ‘week’). Clearly the chronology is compatible with a literal interpretation of events as recorded in Scripture. In fact, apart from the Creation, the chronology is surprisingly accurate. Archaeology dates the Flood (a local Sumerian disaster) to sometime before 2000 BC (Clube and Napier put it at 2100 BC), it dates the span of Abraham’s life to the twentieth to nineteenth centuries before Christ, the Exodus to about 1280 BC (Clube and Napier; 1369 BC) and the kingdom to about 1000 BC. Thus the Nazarenes may have believed that Enoch’s ‘weeks’ did show the plan on which world history was drawn and that it must follow in the future. In particular they could have had confidence that Daniel’s seventy ‘weeks’ were an integral part of the plan and that they ended in the almost magical year 3430 (40 CE). With three ‘7’ factors, it must have seemed the most perfect year, the end of the age.

If the Nazarenes calculated that Messiah-ben-Joseph would die in 33, they could also calculate that sometime in 36/37 (33 + 3.5) Rome would violate the Temple’s inner precincts and bring about Israel’s time of trouble, as follows:
It is ironic that a catastrophe very similar to that envisaged by the Nazarenes did befall Jerusalem, but much later, in the Jewish War, the war with Rome. The sanctuary was invaded by the Romans with their standards, but in 70 not 40. Evidently it is easier to foresee events than to foresee when they will occur.

Some claim that Jesus’ forecast regarding the fate of Jerusalem and its people is the work of the evangelists writing with the benefit of hindsight. This is known as post eventum prophecy; as in Daniel’s ‘prophecy’, past events are described as future events and it is pretended that the ‘forecast’ was written long before the event. Klausner (1925) thought that Jesus’ forecasts for Jerusalem and the great tribulation were impossible in Jesus’ mouth and Goguel (1933), while he considered that Jesus did expect some natural catastrophe to overtake the city, saw Jesus’ prophecy of the fall of Jerusalem as inexplicable in terms of his political foresight. However Jesus’ forecast included that of the end of the world-age and the cataclysmic coming of the Messiah-ben-David. Sanders (1985:71) pointed out that, since the Temple was destroyed by Rome, Christians could not later have composed a threat by Jesus that he would destroy it; nor could they have turned an existing prophecy that the Temple would be destroyed into such a threat. He also asked (1993:182) how the prophecy could be the work of the evangelists when the kingdom Jesus forecast failed to appear? Why would an evangelist invent a prophecy that had plainly proved false? ‘an unfulfilled prophecy is much more likely to be authentic than one that corresponds precisely to what actually happened, since few people would make up something that did not happen and then attribute it to Jesus’ (ibid.). Sanders claimed that not even Jesus’ prophecy about the stones of the Temple has been fulfilled. Many stones still stand as they
were constructed and can be seen today as The Wailing Wall. Furthermore a ‘prediction’ written after 70 would have described the Temple being destroyed by fire (Sanders 1993:257).

Jesus’ prophecies are greatly revered by evangelical Christians as evidence of Jesus’ rightful claim to be who he claimed to be. However, as a Nazarene initiate, Jesus possessed what he thought was a sure forecast of the future. This included destruction of the sanctuary, to which he specifically referred (Matt. 24:2). He expected that the Temple would be destroyed a mere three-and-a-half years after his death. Apparently his disciples were ignorant, not only of the prophecy of Daniel, but of the forecast of the death of the Messiah. It seems that they were not initiated into the Nazarene sect.

Jesus could be sure that the destroying power would be that of Rome, even then in direct control of Judaea, and he must have known how Rome dealt with rebellious cities. Carthage had been razed to the ground and its site ploughed. Thus he could be sure that, in the case of Jerusalem, not one stone would be left on another (Matt. 24:2). This was not the result of prophetic vision, inspired by God; it was the result of careful study of Scripture and intelligent application to the times in which he lived. Nazarenes may have been misguided or deluded, but they were not stupid. It took intellectual power to take the Scriptural prophecies and apply them to contemporary circumstances. Mackinnon thought that Jesus’ foreboding was not at all unlikely and that he had insight into the tendencies of the time. Murry was sure that Jesus’ forecast was not anticipation of Titus’ demolition of Jerusalem and that it was just his interpretation of eschatology as it was seen to affect Palestine. Wilson also saw no reason why Jesus should not have foretold the destruction of the city. Sanders could not completely rule out ‘political sagacity’ on the part of Jesus (1993:256).

Jesus must also have been sure that all the prophecies would be fulfilled within the lifetimes of his contemporaries (Matt. 24:34), indeed within his own lifetime. The Son of Man would come to claim his kingdom before they died (Matt. 16:28). Indeed, he expected this to occur only seven years after his death. He was convinced that great

* It could be argued that these stones, which support the Temple platform, were not the stones to which Jesus referred.
† Indeed, Christians believe that he was more than he claimed to be.
events were imminent and that he and his disciples would live to see them.

There is absolutely no justification for the modern Christian understanding that these prophecies are suspended for thousands of years or that they have been fulfilled in some spiritual manner.

Jesus fully expected an imminent change in the state of the world. Murry claimed that, to Jesus, the world was ever on the brink of a plunge into timelessness. Klausner (1925) observed that Jesus' ethical teaching was conditioned upon the imminent end of the world. Speaking at the Last Supper, Jesus declared that he would not drink wine again until he did so in the kingdom of God (Mark 14:25). As Wood noted, this remark might have been made by one who was expecting not death but a miraculous transformation. In fact Jesus may have declared a vow of abstinence: that he would abstain from drinking wine until the kingdom came. However, he could neither drink nor abstain from drinking if he were dead.

Neither Jesus nor the Nazarenes can have realized that Daniel was pseudepigraphic, although it is not in the Pseudepigrapha. They thought that it really had been written by Daniel in Babylon some 500 years before. That is why a prophecy covering a period of 490 years was acceptable. They did not know that the events forecast by the anonymous author actually took place some 200 years before their time. The events that Jesus supposed were yet to come all occurred before he was born and he was following a false trail.

**Jesus’ philosophy**

Josephus tells us that, in Jesus’ time, there were three main philosophical sects: Essenes, Sadducees and Pharisees, with the Zealots regarded as a possible fourth. These ‘sects’ were really politico-religious parties. However, so as not to offend his Roman masters, Josephus concealed their political purpose.
Essene philosophy

According to Josephus, the Essenes were an ascetic sect that was found throughout Judaea. They were celibate and observed rituals, especially ritual washing. Essenes believed in the immortality of the soul and that it was ‘imprisoned’ in the body. After death the soul is released and flies upward to live in a pleasant land beyond the ocean. Wicked souls were thought to be condemned to a ‘dark and tempestuous den, full of never-ceasing punishments’ (Josephus; War 2:8:11). Josephus also noted the similarity of Essene philosophy to that of the Greeks. Essenes were fatalistic: fate (or God) controls all things and nothing happens unless it is predetermined. Man has no opportunity to control his destiny.

It is thought that only the fully initiated Essenes lived in communities, but not necessarily at Qumran. There is debate, not only as to whether or not there was an Essene community in Qumran, but as to whether or not the Dead Sea Scrolls, which were discovered nearby, were Essene documents.

Sadducean philosophy

The Sadducees were the priestly party, small in numbers and located almost entirely in Jerusalem, although some may have possessed estates in the country. They had no popular support and were represented by the richest class. They denied the authority of all Scripture except the Book of Moses (Pentateuch) and they did not believe in an independent soul, afterlife, rewards and retribution, angels or demons. They considered the idea of resurrection ‘a dangerous novelty’ (Daniel-Rops). They did not believe in fate and thought that mankind was free to choose good or evil, prosperity and adversity being the outcome of mankind’s own actions. They thought that the main purpose of the Law was the observation of ceremonial worship in the Temple.

They were the spiritual heirs of the Hellenists (Klausner 1925) and the ancestors of both the Pelagian heretics and rationalists (Daniel-Rops). Lightley noted that they were conservative in religion, maintaining the faith of their fathers while being prepared to coquette with Hel-
lenic ideas, that they looked for a Messiah from the House of Levi and that they never prayed. They were not in the extreme position where Josephus placed them.

**Pharisaic philosophy**

Unlike the Sadducees, the Pharisees believed that Yahveh’s authority was to be found in all the Scriptures and that the Law was to be fulfilled in a way of life not necessarily centred on Temple worship. Pharisees believed that, while souls are incorruptible, the souls of the good are transferred to other bodies and that the souls of the wicked are subjected to eternal punishment (Josephus; War 2:8:14). After death, the disembodied souls of all men and women are taken into a subterranean world (Josephus gave it the Greek name of Hades) where angels guard certain separated places. The righteous are taken to a desirable place called ‘abraham’s Bosom’, where they await eventual resurrection into the kingdom of God. The wicked are taken to a place of punishment, where they are tortured with the prospect of future judgement and from where they can see the righteous across a deep and wide abyss. In this underworld there is a ‘lake of unquenchable fire’ *(Gehenna)*, ready and waiting for the wicked. At the judgement, the Messiah will cast all the wicked into Gehenna, where they will receive everlasting punishment, without sleep or death. The righteous are resurrected to inherit God’s kingdom (Josephus: Discourse on Hades).

These notions of an underworld and separation between the just and the unjust are unknown in the Jewish (Old Testament) Scriptures. The ancient teaching was that there was no consciousness after death (Eccles. 9:5) and that the dead go to their graves *(sheol)*. Nor did the ancient scriptures mention belief in resurrection. The beliefs of the Pharisees developed in the centuries immediately before Jesus’ time. Belief in resurrection came into Jewish eschatological expectations under the influence of the religion of Zarathustra, the reformer of the Iranian religion (Schweitzer 1968).

Although he had personal experience of all the sects, Josephus was a Pharisee. He gives us the following description of the future age in which his sect believed:
... the heavenly kingdom, in which there is no sleep, no sorrow, no corruption, no care, no night, no day measured by time, no sun driven in his course along the circle of heaven by necessity, and measuring out the bounds and conversions of the seasons, for the better illumination of the life of men; no moon decreasing and increasing, or introducing a variety of seasons, nor will she then moisten the Earth; no burning sun, no Bear turning round, no Orion to rise, no wandering of innumerable stars. The Earth will not then be difficult to be passed over, nor will it be hard to find out the court of Paradise, nor will there be any fearful roaring of the sea, forbidding the passengers to walk on it, even that will be made passable to the just, though it will not be void of moisture. Heaven will not then be uninhabitable by men; and it will not be impossible to discover the way of ascending thither. The Earth will not be uncultivated, nor require too much labour of men, but will bring forth its fruits of its own accord, and will be well adorned with them. There will be no more generations of wild beasts, nor will the substance of the rest of the animals shoot out any more; for it will not produce men, but the number of the righteous will continue, and never fail, together with righteous angels, and spirits, and with his word, as a choir of righteous men and women that never grow old, and continue in an incorruptible state, singing hymns to God, who has advanced them to that happiness, by means of a regular institution of life; with whom the whole creation also will lift up a perpetual hymn from corruption to incorruption, as glorified by a splendid and pure spirit. It will not then be restrained by a bond of necessity, but with a lively freedom shall offer up a voluntary hymn, and shall praise him that made them, together with the angels and spirits and men now freed from all bondage [Discourse on Hades].

Pharisees believed that some actions, but not all, are the work of fate (Providence) and that some are under human control, although ‘liable to fate’. They believed that although fate determines everything, men have freedom to act for good or evil. As Josephus puts it:

Although they postulate that everything is brought about by fate, still they do not deprive the human will of the pursuit of what is in man’s power, since it was God’s good pleasure that there should be a fusion and that the will of man with his virtue and vice should be admitted to the council-chamber of fate [Antiq. 18:1:3].
Elsewhere he explained that ‘to act rightly, or otherwise, rests indeed, for the most part, with men, but in each action fate co-operates’ (War 2:8:14).

Zealot philosophy

It is clear from Josephus (Antiq. 18:1:6) that the Zealots were the militant wing of the Pharisaic party. They were philosophically identical, but with a determination to free Israel from Gentile rule. However this view clashed somewhat with that of the Pharisees, who preferred Roman to Herodian rule. The Zealots were a Jewish political party, but were inactive and quiescent in the time of Jesus (Lightley). One of Jesus’ disciples was called a Zealot (Luke 6:15), although that may refer to his temperament. According to Zeitlin, there was a group called ‘the Apocalypse Pharisees’ (a fifth philosophy), to which he thought Theudas and the Egyptian belonged, who were opposed to violence and believed in divine intervention. They believed that, although the Messiah would be a supernatural being, he would be a scion of the family of David and they called him ‘the Son of Man’.

Because his purpose and actions must be determined by his philosophy, it is important to know to which of these parties Jesus belonged. Evidently he was not a Sadducee. Not only did he not come from the priestly class, he accepted more than just the Books of Moses, he did not regard Temple worship as supremely important and he believed in resurrection, a matter he disputed with the Sadducees (Mark 12:18f).

An association with the Essenes seems possible. Lehmann proposed that, after the Baptism, Jesus became a novice, living in a cave supervised by the Essenes at Qumran. Gruber also believed that Jesus was associated with or even belonged to a sect of the Essenes (Kersten & Gruber 1994:238). Although Jesus’ prohibition against swearing oaths (Matt. 5:34) is an Essene rule, that does not justify calling him an Essene. Borsch (1967:220) was sure that Qumran could not have been the source of any influence on Jesus, Guignebert (1935) claimed that it is impossible for Jesus to have belonged to the Essenes and Stauffer wrote that it is quite impossible for the historian to think of Jesus as a
hanger-on of the Qumran movement. Freedman concluded that Christianity did not originate among the Essenes (Hoffmann & Larue 1986:102).

Some have claimed that Jesus stood apart from the three parties of his day (Klausner 1925). This is very unlikely if not impossible; Jews expressed their Jewishness through one or other of the parties. To which party, therefore, did Jesus belong? This is not a difficult question to answer, although the answer may surprise some. There is much evidence that Jesus was a member of the Pharisaic party (Winter). Khvol’son showed that, in his habits, Jesus was a Pharisee and Klausner (1925) acknowledged that more than once Jesus stood on the side of the Pharisees. Guignebert (1939) noted that the religion of Jesus appeared to be consistent with the general beliefs and even the spirit of Pharisaic religion, though not with its outward form.

Jesus’ Pharisaic beliefs can be seen in the record of his statements on the unseen world and the future age. His parable of Dives and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31) contains all the essentials of the Pharisaic underworld: angels, Abraham’s Bosom, torment and a great chasm across which Dives and Lazarus could see each other. Jesus also spoke of the unquenchable fire of hell (Mark 9:43) and declared that hell’s gates would not prevent the release of his chosen ones (Matt. 16:18), the ‘other sheep … not of this fold’ (John 10:16).

Jesus’ eschatological views were at one with those of the Pharisees. He confirmed the belief that, in the kingdom, the resurrected would be like angels; if the purpose of marriage is to produce children, then no marriage is needed in a world where no one dies (Matt. 22:30). Murry thought that Jesus’ reply to the Sadducees meant that he did not believe in bodily resurrection (1926:218); on the contrary, the reply confirmed this belief. Furthermore, his forecast of the loss of the sun moon and stars and his prophecy that heaven would be opened and that angels would be seen going up and down (John 1:51) conform to the picture drawn by Josephus. Jesus also spoke of Paradise, the court in the centre of New Jerusalem, telling one of his companions in crucifixion that he would join him there after resurrection at the judgement (Luke 23:43). Most of all, Jesus was a Pharisee because he believed in resurrection, the central theme of Pharisaism.
The Gospels give the impression that Jesus was opposed mainly by the Pharisees. However Lightley has proposed that this opposition has been exaggerated to demonstrate the irreconcilable divorce between the Church and Judaism. In fact the Gospels hardly mention the Pharisees without, at the same time, coupling them with the scribes, legalists who claimed that the oral law was more important than the written law. Jesus warned the disciples to beware of the scribes (Mark 12:38). Mainly they belonged to the Pharisaic party and they were sometimes known as ‘the scribes of the Pharisees’ (Mark 2:16), which may be the meaning of ‘scribes and Pharisees’. Khvolsen suggested that ‘scribes’ has been mistranslated as ‘pharisees’ when it meant ‘scribes of the Sadducees’ (Klausner 1925). Doctrinally Jesus must have been opposed to the Sadducees, although, in matters of practice, he may also have opposed the Pharisees. That he accepted an invitation to dine with a Pharisee (Luke 7:36–50) indicates that he had something in common with them.

At heart, Jesus was a Pharisee and an understanding of his mission can only come from an examination of it from a Pharisaic viewpoint.

**This world and the next**

To understand Jesus’ life, it is also essential to understand his view of the world, his cosmic view. Certainly it was primitive. He lived in a society that was ignorant of the true shape of the Earth and its place and movement in space. In fact there is no evidence that the Jews showed any interest in exploration or objective examination of the world around them.

The Jews inherited their cosmology from the Babylonians, who thought of the Earth as a ‘world Mountain’, completely surrounded by sea. The sea was thought to be confined by a great circular embankment that supported the great vault of the heavens. Below the Earth there was a lower vault, the underworld. The Jewish version of this world, conforming with the description of Genesis (Gen. 1:6–10), is shown in Fig. 1 overleaf.
The Jews believed that the Earth was round and flat and surrounded by water. Jerusalem was at the centre of this world (Ezek. 5:5), which contained seven seas and seven rivers. There were seven heavens above and the Earth was formed of seven successive layers (Daniel-Rops). Paul spoke of the ‘third heaven’ (II Cor. 12:2). The heavenly bodies were thought to be mere lights or lamps set in one or more crystal spheres that covered the whole sky and hid Yahveh from human sight. According to Enoch, the heavenly bodies and the winds emerged from windows or doors set in the firmament. According to Josephus, the moon was responsible for rain.

The Jewish concept of the Earth may have resembled that illustrated by the Mappa Mundi (see Fig. 2 on p. 103), a thirteenth century map of the world kept in Hereford Cathedral (England). This was drawn as a defence against ‘heretics’ who said that the Earth was spherical and that there might be invisible lands over the sea. Among...
the arguments advanced for the flat Earth was that, at the Second
Coming, everyone should see the glorified Christ. Only on a flat Earth
could all its inhabitants simultaneously see Christ return (Moir
1955:20). It is believed that the Mappa Mundi was copied from an old-
er map that was, as it were, a descendant of a Roman map drawn in the
fourth century or possibly in the first century. Its margin attributes a
survey of the known world to the emperor Augustus. In older versions
of the map, the centre was in the Eastern Mediterranean and the area
allocated to Palestine was not so large nor so detailed (Crone).

The Jewish cosmology explains how, at the day of judgement, the
sun would be darkened, the moon’s light would fail and the stars would
fall from heaven (Matt. 24:29). The heavenly spheres would roll up like
a scroll (Rev. 6:14) or melt away (II Pet. 3:12) to reveal the Son of Man
waiting in heaven. The lid of the world was to be lifted, allowing heav-
en and Earth to communicate with each other and giving the Earth a
completely new sky, heaven itself. It was believed that, at certain times,
the heavens opened to allow rare views of God and his throne (Acts
7:56) or to allow special divine actions (Mark 1:10).

Heaven was not another world; it was imagined as an ethereal
realm inhabited only by Yahveh and his angels and where the holy city,
New Jerusalem, was prepared ready for its descent to the Earth
(Rev. 3:12; 21:2, 10). Unlike Christians, Jews do not believe in ‘going to
heaven’ after death. They believe that they will be resurrected into a
kingdom of the heavens, i.e. a kingdom on Earth but ruled from heav-
en or by heavenly power. The future world-age is to be a kingdom
ruled by the Messiah on Earth from New Jerusalem, the new capital of
the world at its political as well as its geographical centre. Guigneber-
t (1935) pointed out that the kingdom was to be an external and materi-
al change. It involved a cosmic upheaval and a fundamental rearrange-
ment of the Earth and the laws that controlled it and its inhabitants.
The laws of nature themselves would be changed. Consequently, not
only was there to be a new heaven, there was to be a new Earth (II Pet.
3:13). Jesus taught his disciples to pray for the establishment of this

Although the Earth and its laws would be altered, it would still be
a real physical world, inhabited by real people. This is why the Phar-
isees placed so much importance on resurrection. They could not con-
ceive of life without a body. Consequently they concluded that, if there was life after death, it must be in a new body. Resurrection was a process that gave a soul a new body and the afterlife was nothing if it was not to be enjoyed corporeally. Job wrote of his certainty that he would stand again on the Earth in his own body, seeing God with his own eyes (Job 19:25–27). To enter the kingdom it was necessary to be ‘born again’ (John 3:3), to be given a new ‘spiritual body’ (I Cor. 15:44) that would be incorruptible and immortal (ibid. 15:53). Josephus made it clear that God would resurrect those ‘very bodies’ that were ‘dissolved’ by death. He thought that the particles of which each body was composed would lie in the earth until God caused them to ‘sprout up’ into a glorious new body (Discourse on Hades). Paul, also a Pharisee (Acts 23:6), used identical language to describe resurrection and the resurrected bodies were to be a new type, as different from existing bodies as the bodies of men are from the bodies of beasts (I Cor. 15:35–44). * Clearly all Pharisees saw the growth of seeds, where, although the seed appears to die, a new plant germinates, as a model of resurrection; Jesus himself referred to the model (John 12:24).

Jesus thought that there would be a great gathering of the faithful in the kingdom and that they would feast (Matt. 8:11) drinking wine (Matt. 26:29). Apparently the new bodies would enjoy food and drink, even if they did not need nourishment. He would be joined there by Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the men of Nineveh and the Queen of Sheba (Mark 12:26–27, Matt 12:41–42). The Messiah would judge and reward the just (Matt. 13). He would rule Israel through the twelve disciples, one for each tribe (Matt. 19:28). The faithful would be rewarded by being given control of whole cities, the number proportional to their faithfulness (Luke 19:17–19). Like any dictator, Jesus would hand power to his friends; there was no question of democracy, which was unknown to the Jews.

A river would rise in the centre of the new capital city, which itself would be about eight miles (13 km) square (Ezek. 48:30–35). This river would irrigate all the surrounding land (Zech. 14:8) and cover the Dead Sea (Hab. 2:14), filling the Jordan valley. ‘David my servant’, i.e. Messiah-ben-David the ruling prince, would live in the city (Ezek.

* In fact human bodies are not substantially different from the bodies of animals.
This city is the ‘house’ in which there were many ‘dwelling places’ (John 14:2) and the ‘temple’ that was not made by hands (Mark 14:58).

Arguments have raged over whether or not Jesus accepted the apocalyptic views current in his time. Sanders (1993:169) found it ‘harder to say positively what Jesus meant by ”the kingdom of God”‘. However, as Guignebert observed (1935), the general Gospel silence on this question is hard to explain except on the hypothesis that Jesus held contemporary views. It has been difficult for modern theologians to accept that Jesus held false views on cosmology and some have been very timid in their acceptance (Weinel).
PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM

Jesus often spoke in parables. But why did he do so? When the disciples asked him to explain one, he told them that, although they were privileged to understand the secret of the kingdom of God, the people were to be kept ignorant ‘in case they turn [from sin] and they should be forgiven’ (Mark 4:10–12). This remark has puzzled commentators who have not understood that Nazarene secrets could not be revealed to everyone. Gnostics typically talk in riddles and invite people to guess at their secret meaning; ‘who has ears to hear [the means to understand] let him hear [understand]’ (Mark 4:9). A Nazarene might then blame the crowd for its failure to understand and see its failure, for which he is responsible, as fulfilment of prophecy (Matt. 13:14–15).

Many of Jesus’ parables are concerned with some aspect of the kingdom of heaven. Robertson (1958) noted that parable after parable tells us what the kingdom of God is like, but that nowhere in the Gospels are we told what it is. The reason, he claimed, is that the Jews already knew what it was (to be) like and it would have been unsafe to be too explicit.

They already knew that the kingdom of heaven was to be a glorious new age in which the Messiah would rule Israel and the world. Nor did they really need to be told what it would be like; they assumed that it would be very pleasant. What they wanted to know was when and how it would come and whether they would gain entry. Some parables deal with the speed with which the kingdom would arrive, catching some unprepared (‘for in fact the kingdom of God is [suddenly] in your midst’; Luke 17:21). Some deal with the belief that the kingdom will also bring judgement, separation of good from bad.

The kingdom was to have an insignificant, almost invisible beginning (Jesus himself), but it would grow rapidly to fill the whole world (The Mustard Seed: Matt. 13:31–32; The Leaven: Matt. 13:33). Powell noted that a mustard seed is not particularly small and that it does not grow into a large tree; he thought that a mistake had been made and that the seed referred to was that of the cedar. Carpenter (1980:80) suggested that the latter parable also compared the kingdom’s miraculous appearance with the inexplicable and miraculous action of yeast; no one knew how it worked. The kingdom was also valuable and worth sacrifice (The Treasure Hid in a Field: Matt. 13:44; The Valuable Pearl: Matt. 13:45–46) and would involve judgement and punishment (The Wheat and Tares: Matt. 13:24–30, 36–43; The Drag-net: Matt. 13:47–50).

The parable of The Sower does not describe the kingdom, only the process by which the news is spread and people’s reaction to it. The simile of The Householder (Matt. 13:52) exemplifies those who instruct about the kingdom; they use all kinds of parables to explain it.

Several parables concern the great celebrations that Jesus believed would take place in Jerusalem at the commencement of the kingdom. Some, who thought that they would gain entrance, would find themselves excluded and would be caught unprepared for its arrival (The Ten Virgins: Matt. 25:1–13, although Powell thought the parable concerned conversion). Indeed, those originally invited would refuse to come (an insult) and (other) common folk would be invited instead (The Marriage Feast: Matt. 22:1–14). But some guests would be found to have come in the wrong spirit (Matt. 22:11–12) and would be ejected.

As for rewards, while one parable teaches that all will received the same reward, regardless of the amount of their labour (Labourers in the Vineyard: Matt. 20:1–16), another teaches that rewards will be proportional to faithfulness or good works (The Nobleman: Luke 19:12–25; The Talents: Matt. 25:14–30). These three parables may have been intended to teach that, although all who enter the kingdom will receive eternal life (as a gift from God, Rom. 6:23), their place in the kingdom hierarchy would depend on their activity in working to bring it about. Those who had earned authority would be given it, but those who had not earned it would be stripped of what authority they already had (Luke 19:26; Matt. 13:12). Powell thought the latter verse an interpolation.

Thiering thought that the parable of the talents was a cryptic reference to a Herodian scheme selling initiation into a new form of Judaism and that Jesus, as a descendant of one of the founders of the scheme, tried to overthrow it. Powell thought it concerned the propagation of the gospel and he thought that, in the parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard, those who were hired ‘at the eleventh hour’ represent the Gentiles reached by the gospel at a late stage in salvation history; ‘the missionaries sent to convert the Gentile world deserve equal reward with those who were sent earlier to Israel’. 

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783863863567278

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Fig. 2: How Jesus might have seen the Earth? An English translation of the Mappa Mundi drawn by P G Goodman (copyright Hereford Cathedral).

The footnote describes the size and material of the map, its author and the date at which he probably drew it (c. 1300). It also describes the condition of the map and where it is kept.
If the Nazarenes thought that 33 was a sabbatical year, indeed the year that would see the end of the sixty-ninth week of Daniel's prophecy and the death of Messiah-ben-Joseph, then they must have thought that 26 was also a sabbatical year. In that year, Pontius Pilate became the fifth Roman governor of Judaea. This itself was not significant, but one of the first actions of this notorious ruler was to introduce into the Castle of Antonia, incorporated into the Temple complex, what Josephus called the ensigns bearing Caesar's effigy (Antiq. 18:3:1). Kraeling discussed this incident at length and attempted to identify the signa (standards) to which Josephus referred. He also attempted to discover the reason why the actions of Pilate's troops should have provoked a riot when Rome had occupied the province for twenty years. His conclusion was that Pilate, for the first time, moved an infantry cohort from Caesarea to Jerusalem and because no cohort moved without its signa, these naturally came into the Antonia. Whether the signa were, as Josephus claimed, embossed representations of the Emperor or whether they were theriomorphic images (in animal form), is unclear. Certainly they must have been images of either man or beast or both, either of which could have caused a riot. The emblem of Quirinius, the boar, might have been among these standards. Jewish law prohibited the making of images, human or animal and Jews were outraged that such images should have been carried into the Antonia where the high priests' robes were kept in Roman custody. It led to a very serious confrontation, in which the Jewish leaders dared Pilate to kill them all unless he removed the standards. Pilate capitulated and sent the ensigns, probably with the troops that carried them, back to Caesarea.

Apart from consternation on account of the violation of the law, there was speculation that the event signalled the coming of the Messiah. It was popularly known that Daniel had prophesied that the holy
place would be violated. If the event occurred in a sabbatical year, it may have been seen as very significant, by the Nazarenes if by no one else.

Klausner (1956) noted the belief that ‘when suffering is severest, the redeemer is nearest’ and consequently that, during the tyranny of Herod and his sons and especially during the rule of the Roman procurators (prefects) in Judaea, a whole series of false (sic) Messiahs suddenly appeared and quickly disappeared. Kraeling (1942) suggested that the incident of the ensigns was interpreted as fulfilment of Daniel’s prophecy and that it might have stirred John the Baptist into action.

Bullinger, in his Appendix 99, noted that Matthew’s genealogy breaks into three groups of fourteen, the first from Abraham to King David and the second from David to the Captivity. The third group, starting with the restoration ended with Jesus. Only Ratzinger has seen this as significant, in his case as justification for believing that Jesus was the ‘definitive David.’ He also noted that the numerical value (in Hebrew) of ‘david’ is 14. However, the Nazarenes might have seen this as another reason for believing that the time had come for the appearance of the Kingdom and the Messiah.

Therefore, for several reasons, John the Nazarene might have thought that the age was near its end. If Messiah-ben-Joseph must die in 33, then he was already born and must appear soon. The incident of the standards may have been taken as a sign that Daniel’s prophecy was about to be fulfilled and that the Messiah was ready. If the chronology is slightly wrong and John did not commence preaching until 29, then the partial eclipse of the sun on 24 November may have been seen as a sign of the times (Wells). Daniel-Rops thought that John began to preach in the winter of 27/28; John Robinson (1985) put it in the autumn of 27.

That the Nazarenes had been counting and calculating the time may explain a remark attributed by Mark to Jesus when he began his ministry. Jesus declared that ‘the time has been fulfilled and the kingdom of God has drawn near’ (Mk 1:15). What else could he mean but that the time for the appearance of the kingdom had arrived? How would he know that it was due except by some numerical calculation as explained above?
The Announcer

John preached in the desert east of the River Jordan, near a brook called Cherith, at Beth-nimrah, an oasis some 12½ miles (20 km) east of the Jordan (Graves & Podro). He dressed in a camel skin with a leather belt and ate locust-beans and wild honey. His message seems to have consisted of quotations from Malachi and Isaiah, to the effect that God will send a messenger before the coming of the kingdom and that this messenger’s lone voice will be heard in a desert. He implied that he was the messenger. He maintained that it was time for the kingdom to appear and warned that Israel should repent before it was too late.

The prophets of Israel were always distinguished by their rough clothing, but Klausner (1925) noted that a skin and leather belt were worn by Elijah the Tishbite (II Kings 1:8) who hid himself in the same area. Klausner concluded that John imagined himself to be Elijah; it had been prophesied (Mal. 4:5) that Elijah would return before the kingdom of God could appear.

Who John was, who he thought he was, and who others thought he was, are questions that crop up several times in the Gospels. According to John’s Gospel, John denied that he was either the expected prophet (Elijah) or the Messiah (John 1:21). However he did believe that there was someone to come, whose sandals he was not worthy to carry (Matt. 3:11). But according to Jesus, John was Elijah (Matt. 17:12–13).

It seems possible that John imagined that he was the messenger of Malachi (Mal. 3:1) and that this messenger was Elijah. For this reason he went to preach at the place associated with the prophet, in fact where Elijah was supposed to have been translated into heaven (II Kings 2:7–11). It was reasonable to suppose that Elijah would reappear where he had disappeared.

It is also possible that John was himself looking for Elijah’s reappearance and that he went where he thought he should find him. In that case, he walked onto the divine stage not realizing that only the dramatis personae could appear in public. Believing that pre-ordained events were about to occur, he fearlessly stood up and announced the kingdom. It cannot have occurred to him that his announcement itself would bring about the event he sought – the appearance of the Messiah. He hoped only to prepare the people to face the future. Yet he him-
self precipitated the subsequent acclamation of Jesus as Messiah. Without John’s voice in the wilderness, Jesus could not have found his Elijah. Both men made confident declarations: John that Jesus was the Messiah and Jesus that John was Elijah. They were both desperate to find in each other the figure they sought and of course they saw what they wanted to see. Necessarily Jesus had to place John as his Elijah.

Reimarus remarked that, by their extraordinary actions at one and the same time, John and Jesus furthered each other’s purposes. He wrote, ‘John made use then of representations and inventions to further the design of Jesus, and Jesus was perfectly well aware that he did so.’ The suspicious might argue that John and Jesus, both leaders of the Nazarenes, conspired to elect each other to positions of power. If Jesus thought that he was the Messiah and that he personally would institute the kingdom, he would have to show the people an Elijah; John fitted the description.

Schweitzer (1925) believed that John thought that Jesus was Elijah the Forerunner and did not dream that Jesus had placed him in that position. Schweitzer pointed out that no one except Jesus considered John to be Elijah and that Jesus argued that John must be Elijah because he (Jesus) was the Messiah. As far as we can see, John made no claim to be Elijah or to be any official herald of the Messiah. Both John and Jesus could have seen each other as Elijah, while only Jesus saw himself as the Messiah. Strauss thought it inconceivable that John should ever have held and pronounced Jesus to be the Messiah because John’s asceticism would not have permitted him to approve of Jesus’ indulgence.

Both John and Jesus proclaimed the message, ‘repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near’ (Matt. 3:2). There was a common idea derived from the Talmud that the coming of the kingdom could be hastened by repentance (Klausner 1925).

Kersten & Gruber (1995:90) saw Jesus’ claim that John was Elijah reborn as an endorsement of a belief in the Indian idea of reincarnation, so justifying their belief that Jesus was a Buddhist. However they confused reincarnation with resurrection, a quite different concept. Jesus can only have believed that John was Elijah resurrected, not that he was another incarnation of his spirit.
Carmichael saw John the Baptist as the organiser of a seditious group that Jesus inherited.

**Baptism**

It is not clear how John came to baptize multitudes in the Jordan. It may have been a means to publicize his warnings about the kingdom; those who came to be baptized would hear his message. It may have had something to do with Qumran, where baptism was practised. Perhaps he also hoped that the one he was looking for would be among the visitors and that identification would be by means of some sign.

The Gospels tell us that Jesus came to be baptized by John at the Jordan (in March 29 according to Thiering), but he may already have been among John's followers. If he was related to John and was a Nazarene, then he could already have been in John's company. It may be, as the Gospel of Hebrews asserts, that Jesus was urged to baptism by his family (Klausner 1925); if his life had been dedicated to God, he could hardly avoid responding to John's call.

It is claimed that John demurred to baptize Jesus, preferring to have Jesus baptize him. This may be a Christian interpolation to elevate Jesus. Even so, it is not explained how John could have recognized the Messiah. Could John have deferred to Jesus? Could he have thought it inappropriate for Jesus to be baptized? Perhaps it reveals that John was surprised that one of his followers, especially his own cousin Jesus, should have sought baptism and declared the need to repent. It is arguable that John would not expect his own followers to need the baptism offered to the public. It is also arguable that John would not expect his cousin to need to repent. Jesus' holiness and dedication to God may have been well known to him. But why did Jesus want to be baptized?

In answer to John's demurring, he replied 'let it be so for now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness' (Matt. 3:15). The use of the first person plural suggests that the two were already working together. Jesus' answer implied that the Baptism was necessary to fulfil some essential part of the Messiah's programme. Perhaps he saw it as the ritual washing that preceded anointment (Exod. 29:4). The name
‘messiah’ means ‘anointed-one’ and at some time or other he must be anointed with oil (Exod. 29:7). Was Jesus already sure that he was the Messiah?

It is claimed that John recognized Jesus as the Messiah before the Baptism (John 1:29). However, several times John exclaimed that he did not know Jesus as the Chosen One until after a sign from heaven (John 1:31–33). How can it be that John recognized Jesus before the sign? It seems likely that John did not recognize Jesus as Messiah or as Elijah before the Baptism, but that he did recognize him as his cousin. John admitted that he was looking for the Chosen One and claimed that even then he was standing among them (John 1:26). We may imagine John baptizing daily in the Jordan and searching the faces of all who came to him, wondering how he would recognize the Holy One. Then, as he was baptizing Jesus, some meteorological event occurred that was thought to be auspicious. The text claims that John saw a spirit in the shape of a dove descend upon Jesus and that he heard a voice from heaven. Thunder was thought to be the voice of God or an angel (John 12:29). Perhaps a sudden valley storm occurred just as he baptized Jesus. Perhaps a dove really did land on Jesus. Venturini suggested this explanation for the Baptismal phenomena (Schweitzer 1954). The story reminded Graves and Podro of the hawk, representing solar power, which descended on Pharaoh at his coronation. Perhaps the story was invented to invest Jesus with divine approval. If John looked for a sign, then he may have been more than satisfied by a combination of meteorological and avian events. If he was asked why he could not recognize the face of the Messiah, he could have explained that he was only able to make the identification by reason of the signs.

It is recorded that John, when he first saw Jesus, hailed him as the ‘lamb of God’ (John 1:29), a reference to Isaiah 53:7. In fact the verses of John may be out of chronological order and this greeting may be the same as that which John is recorded as making the following day (John 1:36). By that time, he may have been convinced that Jesus was the Messiah, although later he had doubts (Matt. 11:3).

We have considered the possibility that John and Jesus stage-managed the Baptism to establish Jesus as the Messiah. But we must also consider the alternative, that Jesus submitted to baptism without any
prior belief that he was the Messiah. In that case he took his cue from John, accepting John’s interpretation of the auguries, that he was the Messiah. All his life he had thought of himself as dedicated to God and here he was being chosen by John. Moorcock tells a tale in which a modern man, who goes back in time to search for the Messiah, finds himself cast in the role. Perhaps Jesus went to the Jordan in the hope of finding the Messiah and found that it was himself. Klausner (1925) remarked that the Baptism was the most decisive event in Jesus’ life and that Jesus’ strong dedication led him to believe that it marked divine approval; ‘suddenly there flashed through Jesus’ mind, like blinding lightning, the idea that he was the hoped-for Messiah’. Borsch saw some vital symbolism in the Baptism, where the king struggles against watery chaos and dies, but is revived and born again to claim his kingdom. He suggested that Jesus first grasped the idea at his Baptism – the idea of a suffering Man, an idea that Jesus ‘put to service in historical circumstances’. He drew attention to passages (Luke 12:50; Mark 10:38) where Jesus’ death is referred to as baptism. Salibi (1988:37) thought that the story was told to give a special interpretation of two passages in the Old Testament (Ps. 2:7 and Isa. 42:1), but this seems very unlikely.

Whatever happened at the Jordan, there can be no doubt that Jesus derived his authority from John (Matt. 21:23–27) and was at pains to show that John was the Forerunner (Matt. 11:7–14). His claim to Messiahship must therefore be founded on his Baptism, if not on an identification by John. Hardly anyone doubted that John was a divine spokesman; if John had chosen Jesus then no one could deny Jesus his claim.

Doubt has been cast on the historicity of the Baptism. However, it was an embarrassment to Christianity (Goguel 1933). According to John the Baptist, baptism was a sign of repentance and regeneration; the Church can hardly have been overjoyed to have to explain how Christ needed either. Because Jesus himself did not baptize and it was uncharacteristic of his programme, the account is probably true (Grant 1973). Crossan wrote: ‘Jesus’ baptism by John is one of the surest things we know about them both.’
Temptations

The synoptic evangelists tell us that, after baptism, Jesus retired to the desert for contemplation of the novel situation in which he now found himself. This tends to confirm the idea that Jesus had not expected to be the Messiah. It is imagined that he was tempted by the Devil to use his Messianic power in spectacular fashion.

No one who believed in Jesus as Messiah would have pictured him as being tempted, such temptations playing no part in previous anticipations of the Messiah. However legendary the accounts of the Baptism and Temptation may be, we are justified in recognizing them as historical events and, what is more, as linked events. Furthermore, if the account of the Temptation does not come from Jesus, it comes from a close disciple who intimately understood his mind. The Messianic character of the Temptation is so clearly relevant, not to the life of the Church, but to the life of Jesus (Seeley).

Sanday believed that the Temptation is one of the most authentic things in the Gospels. Craveri claimed that the Temptation of Jesus represented a spiritual conflict at the critical moment of renouncing forever the joys of this world in order to answer a religious vocation heavy with sacrifice and that Jesus may later have described this inner drama in figurative terms that tradition has taken too literally. Few have doubted the historicity of the Temptation, but Salibi (1988:38) claimed that the story ‘expands’ on four passages in the Old Testament (Deut. 6:13,16; 8:3; Ps. 91:11–12), ‘which Jesus is actually made to quote in dialogue with his tempter’. He appears to overlook the possibility that Jesus did in fact quote these passages. However he may be correct in claiming that the 40 days is symbolic, ‘a topos to indicate a full term’ (period of The Flood, manna in the desert, Moses’ time on Sinai).

At first Jesus was tempted to feed himself. If he really was the Son of Man, then he should have command of the whole world or all nature. He should at least be able to command that the stones that lay all about him turn into loaves of bread. But, apart from hunger, he may have had another reason for considering such a command. The word ‘temptation’ is an inappropriate translation of the Greek peirasmos (Luke 4:13), which means trial or testing. In the conventional interpretation, the Devil tested Jesus, to see if he really was the Messiah. It is
more likely that Jesus was tested by his own doubts and that he projected these doubts upon Satan. Jesus may have had doubts about John’s identification and may have wanted to test it. He could have wanted to prove to himself that he was indeed the Messiah; he could do this by working a miracle.

But Jesus also knew his Scriptures; he knew that he was forbidden to test his God (Deut. 6:16) as the Israelites did at Massah. It was believed that, on that occasion, Moses had produced water from a rock to prove that God was with them. Yahveh had since prohibited such tests. So in order to prove to himself that he was the Messiah, Jesus would have to violate the Law of Moses. What a dilemma! Yet if he did not try the power, how would he know that he was the Messiah? Clearly Jesus cannot have had any inner certainty that he was the Messiah. He was an ordinary man who had been told that he was God’s chosen ruler of the whole Earth. Surely he needed some evidence that this was so.

Jesus’ resolution of this dilemma is ingenious. He supposes that the idea of such a test came from the Devil and he concluded that if Satan was that interested in him then he must be the Messiah. He concluded that obedience to God’s word was more important than food, that although the Israelites had fed on manna in the desert, he would feed on the word of God. Neither then nor at any later time did Jesus attempt to invoke supernatural power, even though he always believed that it was available in an instant (Matt. 26:53). His regard for Scriptural authority always prevented him making such a test. Had he tried the test, he would have exploded the myth; he would have found that there was no such power. Jesus claimed powers that he never used or demonstrated, but he was sure must exist.

If he was the Messiah, then perhaps he should make a public declaration and stand on the Temple ramparts where he was expected. He could throw himself off and be borne up by angels. Then he could command the obedience of all the nations of the world, as was his right. Why should he not begin immediately on this great enterprise? Surely he should waste no time in establishing God’s holy kingdom on Earth. It must be clear that Jesus rejected the idea of taking the world by force (Matt. 11:12), not because he did not expect to rule the world, but because he thought that the divine plan required him to follow another course. It was not the end but the means that offended him. He was as
ambitious as anyone and may have relished the idea of being world ruler. Shelley set his sights too low when he claimed that he had reason to believe that Jesus was an ambitious man who aspired to the throne of Judaea; Jesus may have aspired to the world throne, to replace the Emperor in Rome. Such was the inheritance of the Messiah-ben-David.

Lightley suggested that Jesus was tempted by Zealots to seize political power. Certainly some would have made him Messiah (John 6:15). But Jesus may already have learned from the Nazarenes that he was Messiah-ben-Joseph, destined to suffer humiliation and death. If he believed that Scripture forecast such a course for the Messiah, then he could not have abandoned it. He may have been tempted to take a short cut to Paradise, but he knew that it would not be successful. He was sure that success could only be achieved by following the Scriptural programme. Indeed, as we shall see, he was convinced that the divine plan must be followed, would be followed. He put aside any idea of precipitate action and determined to follow the difficult route plotted by the Nazarenes.

The historicity of the Temptation is linked with the historicity of the Baptism. That we can read of this inner conflict is evidence that it was real. How could later myth-makers have thought up the idea of the Messiah debating with himself whether or not to use his power openly for control of Israel and the world?

Kersten & Gruber (1995:156) compared Jesus’ Baptism and Temptation with the Buddha gaining enlightenment after bathing in a river, subsequently facing a decision about whether to use the ‘profound insights’ he had been granted for personal or public salvation. They believe that Jesus made his first appearance among John’s followers and that, with his radical Buddhist teachings, attracted the attention of many who made the pilgrimage to the Jordan in the expectation of splendid events (1995:162).

Who did he think he was?

According to Guignebert (1935), because the evidence produced by the evangelists is distorted by an already developed Christology wholly foreign to his mind, it has become very difficult, if not impossible, for
us to determine what Jesus said of himself and of his relation to the kingdom he proclaimed. But one thing is certain: if Jesus pretended to be or believed that he was Messiah-ben-Joseph, he did not believe that he was divine (Matt. 19:17). Gospel claims to that effect can be ignored. Klausner (1925) has shown at length that Jesus never regarded himself as God. The Jewish Messiah was to be human, an ordinary mortal chosen by God to rule in his place. Judaism knows only one divine figure: its god Yahveh. If the author of I John 4:12 could write that no one has ever seen God, then Jesus could not have been that God and the Church’s belief that Jesus was God incarnate is fundamentally mistaken.

But did Jesus believe that he was the Messiah? A related question is, to whom did he refer as ‘the Son of Man’? Most of those who have considered these questions have not understood that there might have been a contemporary belief in two Messiahs. An exception was Hugh Anderson, who noted a recently expressed view that, in predicting the coming of the Son of Man, Jesus was speaking not of himself but of another eschatological figure (1967:141). Let us not review all the arguments that have raged over the meaning of ‘the Son of Man’, but that it is enigmatic surely indicates that it was not a title invented by the evangelists. The idea that it was an alias for the Messiah would be consistent with Nazarene principles. It would also be a useful codename in an occupied country. Klausner (1925) believed that Jesus used the name deliberately, partially to reveal his identity as Messiah, a hint and a clue to the discerning, while to most it would mean simply ‘a man’; to the learned it would call an echo from the Messianic writings. Goguel (1933) thought that Jesus used the term ‘son of Man’ to conceal his Messiahship from the masses, whose conception of that figure was so different from his, and to Schweitzer (1948) Jesus always spoke of the Son of Man in the third person so that none of his listeners could understand that he himself expected to be clad with this honour. However Guignebert (1935) doubted that Jesus described himself as ‘the Son’ and thought it even more improbable that those around him designated him so. Crossan rejected the idea that the term was a circumlocution for ‘I’ and claimed that it was a reference to humanity in general. Sanders (1993:247) claimed that it is not possible to come to a firm conclusion about Jesus’ use of the phrase.
If they desired to make him king, the Nazarenes had to avoid any outright declaration that would upset the course of events they foresaw. Reimarus noted that Jesus did not deny that he was a king and he supposed that his reticence was due to a wish to make the proclamation in Jerusalem. I will examine this possibility. Burkitt pointed out that because ‘messiah’ meant anointed king, it could not be used of a claimant. In this sense ‘the Son of Man’ may have been Jesus’ term for the Messiah-to-be (herself). Borsch summed up the matter by admitting ambiguity on the part of the Gospels and frustration among those who have attempted to synthesize the two viewpoints; that on the one hand Jesus referred to himself and that on the other he referred to a future eschatological figure. There is evidence for both views. Of Luke 12:8, he asked why it did not read ‘whoever confesses the Son of Man (me) …’

It may be true that Jesus used the term ‘son of Man’ to represent himself, but how are we to resolve the duality of those references, some appearing to speak in the first person and some in the third? Only by proposing that Jesus not only thought that he was the first Messiah, but that he would become the second. Whichever Messiah he thought himself to be, references to the other Messiah are most likely to have been in the third person. At the same time, since he expected to play both parts, he may sometimes have used the first person.

Some have shown insight into this problem. Murry thought that Jesus believed that he was to become the Messiah and that it was Jesus himself not later generations who saw him prefigured in the suffering servant of Isaiah 53. Murry was scornful of those who claimed that Jesus could not conceive this for himself. Schweitzer (1925) also understood the duality of Jesus’ personality, that Jesus was both himself and the coming Son of Man. He described Jesus as a Messiah who, during his public ministry, would not be one, did not need to be and might not be for the sake of fulfilling his mission. He concluded that Jesus’ Messianic consciousness was futuristic. Schweitzer also considered the account of the occasion when John the Baptist questioned Jesus about his identity (Luke 7:18–23); John asked if Jesus was the ‘coming one’. According to Schweitzer, Jesus was in a difficult position, not wishing to admit his Messiahship openly, nor believing that he was the Forerunner. Neither could he deny that he was the Messiah or the Forerunner. So he gave a reply that would be understood by John alone to
mean that he was the Messiah, for the signs he points to could only accompany that man. It was a reply typical of a Nazarene trying to keep his secret from the public, even from John's disciples, while trying to convey a message to his mentor.

That Jesus regarded himself as the Messiah, Klausner (1925) alleged, is proved by the fact that his Messianic claims became a fundamental principle of Christianity soon after the Crucifixion. If he had kept it too dark a secret the disciples could not have proclaimed his priority.

Jesus' beliefs are also revealed by an interesting and intriguing incident recorded by Mark (Mark 12:35–37). Jesus asked how it was that the scribes taught that the Messiah was, at one and the same time, David's son and his Lord and he quoted Psalm 110:1, the basis for this belief. The story appears to imply that what the scribes taught could not be true and was not true. But, as Schweitzer (1925) pointed out, Jesus had no notion of impeaching the Pharisaic dogma. What the scribes taught was correct: only they themselves could not explain how the Messiah could be both the inferior and the superior of David, both Son of David and supernatural. But Jesus could explain it, although it seems that he did not do so. The Messiah is David's son because he is born a human being, a linear descendant of the great king and lives in obscurity; David's Lord because, subsequently, he will be revealed as the Messiah. Of necessity it must be Messiah-ben-Joseph who is David's son and Messiah-ben-David who is his Lord. If the same person played both parts, then he was both David's son and his Lord. Schweitzer drew attention to the fact that, while the Psalms (of Solomon) and the apocalypses of Baruch and Ezra knew only of the Messiah, the books of Daniel and Enoch knew only of the Son of Man. But Jesus, as Mowinckel has noted, combined the thought of the suffering, dying and exalted Servant of the Lord (the Messiah) with that of the Son of Man who will come again on the clouds of heaven. Powell, commenting on the equivalent verses in Matthew (Matt. 22:41–46), thought that Jesus took the opportunity to prove that the Messiah cannot be the son of David.

* We do not know that Jesus ever claimed such direct descent, although Tabor was convinced that it was true. If Jesus believed this, then that may have been the main stimulus for his mission.
Perhaps Jesus was the first person to make this combination; perhaps he inherited it as a Nazarene doctrine. Perhaps the parallel concepts led Jesus to believe that the Messiah might first have to go through existence as a man. Schweitzer (1968) wrote, ‘he may have found hidden in this strange expression for the Messiah the secret that the expected supernatural Messiah must also be born as a son of man’. Jesus saw himself as a man in whom this being had to undergo a completely human existence before beginning his reign in the kingdom.

Borsch believed that the verse implied two Messiahs, one in heaven, David’s Lord and one on Earth, his son. These two Messiahs could not be one and the same person and so Borsch’s proposal does not go far enough in revealing Jesus’ explanation for the conundrum. But if Jesus believed that he was one Messiah, David’s son and that he could become another Messiah, David’s Lord, there is a completely satisfying explanation. But Jesus could not have revealed this explanation, it was another Nazarene secret, a pearl to be kept away from swine (Matt. 7:6).

Vawter had no ‘overriding objection’ to the proposition that Jesus thought of himself as the Coming Son of Man as well as identifying himself in some fashion with an existing and acting Son of Man. However he failed to develop this idea, to see that Jesus, while living the life of one Messiah, one Son of Man, looked forward to living the life of a second Messiah, the second Son of Man.

Some people aspire to greatness, to becoming a heroic figure. Jesus planned to become two heroic figures rolled into one.

**Was Jesus sane?**

The AV of Mark 3:21 tells us that, on one occasion, Jesus’ ‘friends’ considered that he was ‘beside himself’ and this has been interpreted to mean that they thought he was insane. Indeed, the NEB translates it as ‘out of his mind’. Sanders (1993:153) believed that the verse is a remnant of a once larger body of material that depicted Jesus as engaging in erratic behaviour as an exorcist.

The word used in the Greek text, *existemi*, in its intransitive form, appears several times in the New Testament. Usually it means ‘aston-
ished,’ ‘astounded’ or ‘amazed’, but it can also mean ‘confounded’, ‘confused’ or ‘perplexed’. In one case (II Cor. 5:13) it does appear to mean ‘of unsound mind’ or ‘not in one’s right mind’, although that interpretation is inferred from the context. There is nothing in the context of Mark 3:21 to force an interpretation that Jesus was thought insane.

Verses 20 and 21 are an isolated vignette in which Jesus is besieged and isolated by a crowd in a house and has to be rescued by his friends. The circumstances may have caused him to be amazed, even perplexed, but not insane. It seems likely that, trapped in a crush and separated from his friends, he was beside himself with hysteria. The incident is unrelated to Jesus’ general purpose and actions and can have no bearing on the question of his sanity.

Early this century, when psychology and psychiatry were the latest tools of medicine, some tried to show that Jesus was indeed suffering from a mental illness. To most, Jesus seemed to suffer from paranoia, a psychosis whose symptoms are systematic delusions. If Jesus believed that he was the Messiah, the question that arises is whether this delusion was the product of an illness or whether it was a justifiable product of the zealous fanaticism of the Nazarenes. Jesus’ belief was based on a generally accepted eschatological scenario. If his delusion was caused by paranoia†, then many others around him must have suffered from the disease. When a whole society shares a collective delusion, as did the Jews concerning their god and the expected kingdom, it cannot be due to mental illness. Belief in superstition is not a certifiable condition and Jesus was no less sane than any other Jew.

Schweitzer (1948) observed that Jesus’ religious ideas, like those of his contemporaries, while they seem strange to us, may not be considered as diseased. Craveri noted Binet-Sanglé’s idea that Jesus was a ‘theomaniac’, encouraged by his parents’ devoutness. It is arguable that, on this basis, all Jews were theomaniacs; the whole nation was devout and intensely zealous for its faith. Besides, nothing certain is known of Jesus’ parents. Certainly Jesus could not have been mad enough to claim that he was God. Anyone claiming this would have been killed. Indeed, according to John 8:59; 10:31, priests tried to stone Jesus when

* The AV has a part of verse 20 attached to the end of verse 19.
† True paranoia is a rather rare disorder.
they believed that he claimed equality with God. William Hirsch considered Jesus’ case to be one of gradually evolving megalomania (Schweitzer 1948). Here again, if it were allowed that Jesus’ self-esteem was excessive and that his grandiose scheme was out of touch with the general stream of Jewish life, then his condition might be regarded as megalomania. However, given that he had reason to consider himself to be the Messiah and that he belonged to a sect that taught him to believe in the imminent realization of all Jewish aspirations, even to the extent that, as Messiah, he would rule the world, it is not surprising that he held a high opinion of himself. He may have been mistaken in his beliefs, but it does not follow that he was insane.

Schweitzer (1948) concluded that those who believed that Jesus’ state was one characteristic of a mental disease used unhistorical material, misunderstood the historical situation and Jesus’ purpose, and diagnosed incorrectly. Moreover the verifiable symptoms fell short of mental illness. In short, psychiatry was being called upon to explain the gospel, a story that did not make sense. While these writers failed to comprehend Jesus’ motives and mission, they were bound to conclude that the only explanation for his conduct was a mental disease. Holl wrote that we are not required to argue from Jesus’ outsider position, a stance he gave to Jesus, to a disturbed mind and Guignebert (1935) rejected the view that Jesus was ‘definitely unbalanced’; ‘if he was, we do not, and cannot, know it’.

That Jesus believed himself to be the Messiah was not the result of any mental illness. It was the result of the intense conditioning he had undergone, not just as Jew living in first century Palestine, but as a disciple of and successor to John the Nazarene. His delusions had been brought about by circumstances beyond his control and he was a victim of those circumstances.

**What was Jesus’ strategy?**

Having seen the influences that shaped their thinking, we can now ask what plan of action was formulated by the Nazarenes. What was their Messianic strategy? After the trauma of the Baptism and the conviction that he was the Messiah, what did Jesus intend to do? How did he
plan to bring about the full scenario revealed to him by Scripture and especially as it was interpreted by the Nazarenes? Many probably agree with Wilson, who concluded that we can never hope to reconstruct Jesus’ motives for behaving as he did in the last week of his life, and that Jesus’ thought was unsystematic, lacking a coherent metaphysic. I shall show that this view is mistaken.

The Nazarenes must have believed that Jesus had to die in 33. Moreover they must have believed that another Messiah would appear immediately thereafter to replace Jesus. They probably believed, like Jesus, that the second glorious Messiah would be Jesus resurrected. But was Jesus prepared to accept death in the belief that God would resurrect him to the throne of Israel? Murry believed that Jesus expected to be transformed into the Messiah before he succumbed to death. However Jesus must have believed that this transformation could only come about through resurrection. If the first Messiah was to die and become the second, then resurrection was the only process known to Pharisees that could accomplish this miracle. Therefore his own resurrection was an essential component of Jesus’ programme. But did he expect God to perform this action? This vital question must be examined in the light of Pharisaic philosophy.

The question of predestination, the notion that future events are already determined by God or fate, is one that has exercised philosophers throughout history. Are one’s actions one’s own or are they bound to fall as they do? Can one determine the future by choice in the present? Is there any real choice?

We have seen that, in Jesus’ day, the three main parties held different views on this question and that Jesus was a Pharisee. Consequently Jesus must have adhered to the beliefs of the Pharisees concerning fate (see chapter 4). These beliefs were so complicated that even Josephus had difficulty explaining them. Pharisees believed that, although every event is predetermined by God, some actions are in the hands of mankind, but only so that what men do turns out to be what God ordained in the first place. Men can act as they wish, but the consequences will be according to the divine plan. There seems to be little difference between this view and that of the Essenes (that everything is predetermined). However, while the Essenes resigned themselves to whatever fate brought, the Pharisees thought that they had some hand
in the matter. In fact it may be that they thought it necessary for mankind to act consciously to bring about what was already determined. If this was not the view of mainstream Pharisaism, it could have been the belief of minority groups such as the Nazarenes. It will become clear that this was indeed Jesus’ belief.

Jesus often spoke of the need for action in carrying out God’s will. He claimed that only those who did the will of God would enter the kingdom (Matt. 7:21) and that God’s will had to be done on Earth as it was in heaven (Matt. 6:10). He said, ‘my food is that I may do the will of the one who sent me and may finish his work’ (John 4:34) and ‘the Son can do nothing of himself except what he sees the Father doing; for whatever things he does, these also the Son does likewise’ (John 5:19). This must mean that Jesus acted to bring about the will of God as he saw it written in the Scriptures. Whatever he saw written there, he tried to bring about on Earth. He saw the Father’s action in the Scriptures and simply followed suit. He said, ‘i always do that which pleases him’ (John 8:29), for ‘the Scripture cannot be broken’ (John 10:35). In fact his actions were his identification; he said, ‘if I do not the works of my father, do not believe me’ (John 10:37). He went on to plead for belief in the works, if not in himself. In other words, he was more concerned that his followers should see the word of God coming true than that they should see him as the Messiah. The fulfilment of Scripture was more vital than the recognition of his person.

Therefore his mission was to act as God’s instrument, to make events turn out as forecast. He was the executor of God’s will, turning the words into action and holding the rather contradictory view that, while all events turn out according to fate (the divine plan), individual human action is necessary to achieve fulfilment. He must have believed that it was necessary for him to arrange to fulfil the Scriptures. I will demonstrate that he did indeed arrange his career so that it complied with Scripture. Most biblical scholars suggest that the evangelists created traditions about Jesus that made him, unconsciously, fulfil prophecy. They appear to have overlooked the more likely possibility that Jesus himself arranged events in conscious fulfilment of prophecy. Baigent recognised that Jesus deliberately played out the role of Messiah (2006:117).
All through his ministry Jesus insisted that Scripture must be fulfilled. When he was in Gethsemane he restrained his followers saying, ‘how then could the scriptures be fulfilled, which say that this must be?’ (Matt. 26:54, NEB); how would he be put to death as the plan required if his followers rescued him at this time?* The evangelist was nearer the truth than he realized when he pronounced that ‘all these things were done that the Scripture of the prophets might be fulfilled’ (Matt. 26:56); Jesus arranged events so that they fulfilled the prophecies. Many times he took great trouble to explain the prophecies so that his disciples would understand how all that happened had to happen. He was fatalistic; if it was written, then he was convinced that it must occur, even if he himself had to make it occur. He trusted the authority of Scripture absolutely and could not have believed that it contained errors or that it was not inspired by God. He was sure that God had ensured its reliability.

Jesus lived a Messianic life only because he arranged it that way. Pharisaic philosophy led him to conclude that, while God’s announced programme would be fulfilled, it would not be fulfilled without human action. In particular, that part of the programme that centred on the Messiah would not be accomplished without strenuous action by the Messiah himself. He could not relax and expect the programme to fulfil itself. If it appears that Jesus went meekly, albeit fearfully, to his death, it was not because he was an inherently meek person; it was because he knew that he had to die. If Scripture declared that the Messiah must die, there was no point in resisting fate; indeed fate required his co-operation. His life displays a fascinating attempt to turn fiction into fact. Jesus took the mythical figure of the Messiah and tried to live out a dream; the word really had become flesh.

So it was that from the Baptism Jesus planned to be taken in Jerusalem and killed. But he broke the news gradually to his disciples and merely hinted that there was a test ahead. ‘Are you able to drink from my cup …?’ he asked the sons of Zebedee when their mother asked privileges for them in the kingdom (Matt. 20:22). Later he told them plainly that he ‘must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed and be

* Powell misunderstood this as a claim that Scripture forecast divine protection.
raised on the third day’ (Matt. 16:21). The disbelief and opposition of the disciples only convinced him of Satanic resistance to this divine mission. This recorded reaction is evidence that Jesus really did make this forecast and that it is not a post-eventum prophecy inserted by the evangelist.

But why did Jesus claim that he would rise from the dead ‘on the third day’? Why not wait the seven years to the end of the age and the general resurrection? We shall see how vital it was that Jesus should rise quickly after his ‘death’ as Messiah ben Joseph. Meanwhile we can only note that there is scriptural support for the notion that resurrection of the Messiah within three days was forecast. He could have understood that God had promised that his ‘holy one’ would not suffer corruption, nor would he be left in Hades (Ps. 16:10). Also he could have understood that the words of Hosea applied to the Messiah; ‘after two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him’ (Hos. 6:2). In those days it was believed that the soul remained near a body for three days before departing for the underworld. Therefore a revival on the third day ensured that the soul did not leave the body and that the person who died could be resurrected in the same body. If Jesus wanted to be resurrected in the same body, he had to achieve it within three days.

Note that ‘after two days’ must also mean ‘after three nights’, a matter that, according to Matthew, Jesus clarified. He prophesied that, as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster (Jonah 1:17), so he would be entombed for the same period of time (Matt. 12:40). He saw Jonah as an archetype for this operation.

Probably because he found neither the means nor the motive, Cohn thought it improbable that Jesus prophesied his death and resurrection. Kamelsky thought that, having uttered such prophecies, Jesus had to make them come true if he was not to be indicted as a false prophet. Sanders (1993:167), exhibiting no curiosity about the number of days and nights, rejected the idea that Jesus referred to Jonah as a sign of his own death and resurrection.

In fact it seems that Jesus was never forced to act by circumstances beyond his control. He made these fateful prophecies because he was convinced that such events were already inscribed in the record of the
world. He had to make them come true because he thought that God expected him to assist fate to fulfil itself.

Jesus must have wondered how he would die and for what cause. As will become clear later, the Nazarenes probably concluded that only a specific form of death in specific circumstances would fulfil Scripture. They could not afford to have Jesus killed at random by an assassin or by a mob. Jesus once fled from a mob intent on killing him (John 10:31). It must have been concluded that, although Messiah-ben-Joseph lived in relative obscurity, his death would need to be public, the more so if it was to lead directly to the appearance of Messiah-ben-David. In fact it would need to be a public execution. If the Nazarenes were convinced that Jesus would become the second Messiah in the same body, there was only one form of execution that offered any hope of success and that was crucifixion. Jewish methods of execution, such as stoning or strangulation, offered little hope of recovery. However crucifixion was in general use by the Romans and Rome ruled Judaea. Since Rome also ruled most of the known world it may have seemed fitting that the future ruler of the world should be executed by the then ruler of the world, Caesar. After all, Jesus expected to replace Caesar.

Vickers listed several cases of revival after crucifixion, including Sandotes (Herodotus 7:194), a friend of Josephus (Life 75) and the French Convulsionaires of the eighteenth century. Jesus might even have found scriptural support for the belief that he must be crucified. The Psalmist wrote ‘they counted all my bones, and they observed and looked upon me’ (Ps. 22:17a, LXX). Strauss thought that this referred to a chase or combat with wild beasts, but modern Christians see it as a forecast of crucifixion. Then Zechariah seems to speak of the Messiah being ‘pierced’ (Zech. 12:10). So while it is possible that the evangelists could have interpolated Jesus’ prophecy that he would be crucified (Matt. 20:19), it is not impossible that Jesus himself made this pronouncement. If Jesus planned to be crucified, he may have announced it.

According to John, the Jews claimed that it was unlawful for them to put a man to death (John 18:31), but there has been much dispute as to whether or not this was true. It has been argued that the ‘supreme power’ given to Judaea’s first governor (Josephus, Antiq. 18:1:1) included the death penalty. Some claim that the Sanhedrin lost the right
to pass sentence of death in 30 (Stauffer; Klausner 1925). But Winter asserted that only political offences were tried by the governor. Graves and Podro believed that, although the Sanhedrin had the power to pass the death penalty, political cases had to be referred to the procurator (prefect). Cohn claimed that the Sanhedrin always retained the power of death over Jews and that the statement in John is untrue.

Evidently we do not know the truth of this matter and we must speculate. It may be that the Romans reserved the death penalty to themselves, not only to maintain their authority and to restrict Jewish power, but also to enable their governor to try and interrogate prisoners. Interrogation was essential for full intelligence of Jewish resistance.

Jesus would have known the law relating to the death penalty and whether or not he had to be arrested and tried by Romans. Certainly he would know that, if he was to be crucified, it had to be by Rome. Cohn argued strongly that the Sanhedrin would never hand over a condemned Jewish prisoner to the Roman governor; he would have been dealt with according to Jewish law. If this is true, it was most important that Jesus avoided arrest by the Jews. He once escaped a crowd who sought to arrest him (John 10:39). Brandon was sure that Jesus foresaw that his mission was such that it could or would embroil him with the Romans and result in his dying the death they inflicted on rebels. This implies that Jesus would have liked to avoid such an outcome. But Brandon did not consider the possibility that Jesus wanted such an outcome. Jesus wanted to be crucified and knew that to achieve this he had to put himself directly into the hands of the Romans.

Not only must Jesus fall into Roman hands, he must make it possible for this to occur. His popularity made it difficult even for the chief priests and scribes to capture him (Luke 20:19). How much more difficult would it be for the Romans? He would have to go out of his way to facilitate arrest by the Roman authorities, to make it easy for them to arrest him. In fact he would practically have to surrender to them and in secret, away from the crowds. Furthermore he would have to give them proper cause for the arrest and see that it occurred at a time consistent with Daniel's prophecy. The Messiah must die, but only at the proper time and in the proper manner.
Jesus understood that, if he did nothing and allowed events to take their natural course, the Scriptures would remain unfulfilled. But he also understood that the Scriptures had to be fulfilled. While all events were foreordained, yet must men labour to bring them about. So Jesus struggles through his ministry, pulling together the threads of God’s great tapestry. He is compelled to produce events that fulfil the prophecies, to live the life (apparently) forecast for the Messiah. He was living at the hinge of history. Soon the world stage would revolve and reveal that other world hidden since the Creation and prepared for the righteous. He had little time left to accomplish the mission on which he believed he had been sent. Before the revolution, the king must die.

Many have attempted to discover Jesus’ strategy. Klausner (1925) thought that Jesus’ one idea was to implant within his nation the idea of the coming of the Messiah and, by repentance and good works, hasten the end. Guignebert (1935) also was mistaken in his beliefs that Jesus expected a crowning miracle entirely discounting human obstacle or danger and that Jesus did not expect or plan to die. More penetrating was Reimarus, who noted that Jesus’ announcement of the kingdom betrayed his intention to awaken interest in a worldly Messiah, a deliverer, and that this message would have been understood in the light of contemporary eschatological belief. He wrote, ‘he could have had no other object than to rouse the Jews in all parts of Judaea, who had so long been groaning under the Roman yoke, and so long been preparing for the hoped-for deliverance, and to induce them to flock to Jerusalem’. In Reimarus’ opinion, it was clearly the intention of Jesus, not to suffer and to die, but to build up a worldly kingdom and to deliver the Israelites from bondage. We have seen that, although this was Jesus’ intention, he first had to suffer and to ‘die’.

Schweitzer (1925) could also claim some insight into the mind of Jesus. To him, Jesus went through a phase of believing that the kingdom only had to be preached for it to appear. As evidence he cited the sending of the Twelve out to the towns of Judaea with the prediction that ‘you will by no means complete the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes’ (Matt. 10:23). When the kingdom failed to appear and the disciples were not persecuted as predicted, Jesus changed his strategy to one requiring his personal sacrifice; instead of all Israel suffering be-
fore the kingdom could appear, he alone would suffer, ‘a ransom for many’. This realization, together with the news of John’s death, which he took as a foretaste of his own, changed Jesus’ mind. Jesus realized that he himself must make atonement, give his life for the kingdom; ‘elijah’ had died at the hand of Herod, but he must die at the hand of the even more powerful Roman authorities. What the suffering and repentance of all Israel could not accomplish, the death of the Messiah must. But he must be executed by the very ruler of the world himself or at least by his representative. Schweitzer pointed out that Jesus was faced with two problems. Why was his ‘elijah’ executed before the dawn of the Messianic age and why did the kingdom fail to appear despite the signs of the times? According to Schweitzer, Jesus’ answer was that God brings about the kingdom without a general affliction and instead required it to be borne solely by the Messiah. We have already seen that Jesus expected the ‘great tribulation’ to visit all Judaea within a few years of his ‘death’; later we shall see that Schweitzer’s understanding of this matter is flawed.

On the matter of ransom (Mark 10:45), Vawter noted that it is ‘the price that must be paid to buy back the pledge, to recover the pawned object or to liberate slaves’. If Jesus did make such a remark, what did he want to liberate? It is naive to imagine, as did Vawter, that ‘the payment … has brought mankind out of the bondage of sin’; Jesus had no concern for mankind as a whole and several times made it plain that repentance of sin was quite sufficient to qualify for entrance to the kingdom. The ‘many’ could be the ‘many’ who would ‘come from the east and west’ to celebrate the kingdom (Matt. 8:11). This group consisted of those righteous dead thought by Jesus to be kept in the underworld, behind the ‘gates of Hades’ (Matt. 16:18). The price of their release was Jesus’ ‘death’.

Schonfield (1965) exhibited an understanding that Jesus manipulated events and people to bring about the Messianic prophecies, as he interpreted them, fully aware that the only outcome could be his arrest and execution. But while Schonfield saw that there must have been a plot to produce this end, he saw no strategy behind it. Sanders considered the view that Jesus plotted his own death (1985:333).

Robertson (1953) drew attention to the hints in Mark that there was an insurrection at the time of Jesus’ ‘bid for power’ (Mark 15:7).
He noted the injunctions to exchange clothes for weapons (Luke 22:36) and the promise that all who leave their homes, families and land for Jesus’ sake should receive a hundredfold of each ‘now at this time’ (Mark 10:29–30). Such rash statements may be remnants of the original gospel, but Robertson’s interpretation is incorrect. Jesus’ death was not the result of a Nazarene attempt to seize Jerusalem.

Winter concluded that the fact that Jesus lived on in history as Messiah proved that an important group among his adherents pursued political aims and assigned to the second advent a political significance. Kubitza wondered if Jesus wanted to be killed, but he failed to explore the implications of that good question.

**The resurrection drug**

Jesus wanted to be crucified, but he also wanted to be resurrected. Did he expect God to revive or resurrect him? Surely not; he could not tempt God by asking him to perform miracles. The self-sufficient Messiah must work alone. Not only did he have to arrange to be crucified, he had to arrange to be resurrected. How could he possibly do this? Surely it was impossible. Certainly it was impossible for a dead Messiah to come back to life. However if the Messiah was not really dead, then he could revive and ‘live again’. Was it possible to simulate death and, if so, would Jesus accept this method?

Today there are many drugs that simulate death. One of those drugs or at least its source was available in Jesus’ time. Seeds of the opium poppy have been found at prehistoric sites and opium has been used as a medicine and depressant of the central nervous system at least since about 300 BC. The opium poppy (*papaver somniferum*) was well known to the ancient Greeks; both Homer and Dioscorides referred to the drug that was made from it. It was also known in ancient Mesopotamia, where it was called ‘lion fat’. It is believed that the original home of the wild opium poppy is the region around the Eastern Mediterranean and even today much opium is grown in Turkey. Consequently it is possible that Jesus could obtain this drug.

Opium has often been taken diluted, as a tincture called laudanum. This produces a soporific effect. But opium can also be taken...
raw, when the effects *simulate* death. Opium consists of twenty alkaloids, including morphine (9%) and narcotine (5%), but its action is largely caused by morphine. A strong dose can produce opium poisoning, a condition that is not easily distinguished from those of alcohol, cerebral haemorrhage and several other morbid conditions. Even today physicians are aware that a strong dose of morphine can make a patient appear to be dead.

A poisonous dose of opium taken by mouth produces, in ten to thirty minutes, the exact time depending upon the state of the stomach, some slight mental exhilaration combined with a quickening and strengthening of the pulse. There may also be some nausea and occasional vomiting. However this state is soon followed by dizziness, heaviness of the head, languor and drowsiness, and an irresistible urge to sleep. Sleep is quickly followed by a narcotic coma, from which the patient may not recover. On falling asleep, the patient experiences a pleasing euphoria with gradual loss of muscle power and diminished sensation; the pulse becomes slow and weak. The comatose patient has a cold, clammy skin, livid lips and ear tips and ‘pinpoint’ pupils. The heart’s action may be feeble, the pulse small, irregular and slow. But the principal action of morphine is upon respiration; it becomes slow, shallow and irregular until, in serious cases, it will cease altogether. Short of cessation, periods of a quarter to half-a-minute may elapse without any respiratory action at all.

It appears that these effects were known in sixteenth century England, at least to William Shakespeare. His plays betray a knowledge of opium and its effects. In *Othello* (III:iii:331) he wrote of a ‘drowsy syrup’ made from the poppy. This may refer to laudanum, but in *Romeo and Juliet* (IV:i:94–107), written in 1595, he described, through the character of a friar, the effect of a drug that must have been opium:

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Take thou this vial, being then in bed,
And this distilled liquor drink thou off:
When, presently, through all thy veins shall run
A cold and drowsy humour; for no pulse
Shall keep his native progress, but surcease:
No warmth, no breath, shall testify thou liv’st;
The roses in thy lips and cheeks shall fade
To palsy ashes; thy eye’s windows fall,
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Like death, when he shuts up the day of life;
Each part, depriv'd of supple government,
Shall, stiff and stark, and cold, appear like death:
And in this borrow'd likeness of shrunk death
Thou shalt continue two-and-forty hours,
And then awake as from a pleasant sleep.

The similarity between the effects of this ‘distilled liquor’ and those of morphine is striking. Juliet appeared to be dead and yet she was not dead. Furthermore it seems that the dose necessary to produce this miracle caused a coma lasting for forty-two hours, a period that includes two days and two nights, no matter when it starts. After *three days and three nights* the patient would be up and about again.

There are signs in the Gospels that rare substances were available to the people associated with Jesus. Expensive spikenard ointment made from a rare Indian plant was used to anoint Jesus (John 12:3). Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus took 100 pounds (30 kg) of myrrh and aloes to the tomb (John 19:39). Evidently the Nazarenes had access to various exotic substances. It can be presumed therefore that the Nazarenes could not only obtain opium but knew of its effects. But surely Jesus would not allow the use of this drug to pretend death. Would he be party to deception?

The answer to that question depends on what Jesus and the Nazarenes understood of its operation. A superstitious people, ignorant of modern medicine must have regarded the effects as magical. Jews must have seen the hand of God in its effects. Jesus cannot have rejected a substance derived from a plant he thought God had created (Gen. 1:29). Furthermore Jesus may have thought that opium caused *temporary* death. The poppy has been a symbol of sleep and of the dead since antiquity. It may have been believed that opium had the curious property of producing a sample of the state of death. The comatose state was not known to the ancients. Consequently they must have interpreted it as a kind of death, but one from which recovery was possible. Although Shakespeare knew that it did not really cause death, the Jews may not have realized this. Therefore Jesus may have regarded opium as the perfect solution to his problem. It was the means by which he could fulfil the prophecies. Evidence that this was his under-
standing can be seen in a curious episode recorded by John: The Raising of Lazarus (John 11:1–46).

The historicity of this incident has been much disputed. Goguel (1933) thought that it was an accretion and did not even discuss it, while Craveri thought the whole story an allegorical myth. Murry believed that the event was a miracle deliberately invented by a religious genius and that Lazarus was an imaginary character in a parable. Hugh Anderson noted that most ‘modern’ scholars considered the account an ‘edifying legend’ (1967:101). Renan believed that the affair was not entirely legendary and that something really had happened at Bethany that was looked upon as a resurrection; ‘it may be that Lazarus, still pallid with disease, caused himself to be wrapped in bandages as if dead, and shut up in the tomb by his family’. He believed that Lazarus and his friends played a charade to ‘prove’ Jesus’ healing power and to fortify his faith in himself. Woolston (1727) also held that it was a pretended miracle; Lazarus contrived to be buried in the grave for four days so that Jesus might have the honour of appearing to raise him from the dead. He called it a ‘contexture of folly and fraud’. Strauss thought the account unhistorical and asked why it appears in the synoptic Gospels. In fact, according to Smith, it does not appear in the secret version of Mark (but see below). Strauss also asked why Jesus waited two whole days beyond Jordan. Delff supposed that Lazarus was buried in a state of trance and Vickers thought that the event was a Nazarene drama. Schweitzer (1954) believed that the story was invented after the time of the evangelists and Mackinnon noticed the inconsistencies in the story. Graves and Podro thought it unlikely to have been invented; according to them, Jesus did not return immediately because he thought Lazarus’ faith so strong that he could not die before the kingdom appeared. But, they assert, Lazarus did die and a later redactor invented the recovery, borrowing from Jesus’ own recovery. Stewart proposed that it was a necromantic rite that required a simulated burial and that it was misunderstood by those who saw it. Salibi concluded that John imported a story about ‘another Jesus’, an Arabian virginity god (1988:165). Helms (1989:94f), who believed that all miracle stories are simply updated versions of Old Testament tales, claimed that the story derived from Elijah-Elisha stories about the resurrection of a dead son: he equates the story with the Synoptic stories.
about Jairus’ daughter and the widow of Nain’s son. He accepted Smith’s view (Smith 1974) that the account in The Secret Gospel (Jesus resurrects a man from a tomb in Bethany after the man’s sister appeals to him) indicates that John or a previous writer based the account on an earlier, simpler version of the Synoptic account.* Helms even showed parallels between the story of Lazarus and the Egyptian myth of the resurrected Osiris. Wilson confused the story with that about the apostle John not dying (John 21:23) and thought that Lazarus was John and that the belief about him not dying arose from his ‘resurrection’ in Bethany. Vermes (2012:35) dismissed it and thought it evidence for the developing faith of early Christianity. Thiering argued that Lazarus was really Simon the Zealot, a magician. After being excommunicated by Herod Agrippa, by being dressed in grave clothes and placed in a cave tomb at Qumran before being sent away, he was released by Jesus when Antipas gained control.

We cannot ignore the possibility that John’s account of the Lazarus affair is genuinely historical. Indeed there is evidence to support this view. If it is fiction, why was it invented? Why would an inventor show Jesus as reluctant to go to Lazarus, callous in his treatment of Martha and Mary, and suffering an emotional breakdown under the strain? Most critics are unable to explain the episode, nor can they explain why it might have been invented. If it is not explicable, it can hardly be an invention.

John claims that this Lazarus and his sisters were very close to Jesus and that he loved them (John 11:5). This might indicate that Lazarus was a Nazarene or merely that Jesus and Lazarus were related to each other; it certainly tells us that Jesus could rely on their co-operation in whatever way he required. They lived at Bethany, a small village to the east of Jerusalem on the road to Jericho where Jesus later arranged for the processional ass to be kept.

It seems that Jesus and his disciples had fled from Jerusalem for fear of stoning and had sought refuge beyond the Jordan where John had baptized. In order to reach this place of retreat they would have had to pass through Bethany. It is therefore inconceivable that Jesus

* Thiede cast doubt on the authenticity of Smith’s Secret Gospel.
did not call on Lazarus and his sisters before continuing towards the Jordan.

When the sisters sent word that Lazarus was dying, Jesus did not go at once to Bethany. This is strange. On every other occasion, he had either started out at once for the sufferer or he had pronounced a cure from where he was. In this case he did neither of those things. It appears that he was not surprised at the news and he remained where he was for two whole days. Assuming that it took one day to travel from Bethany to beyond the Jordan, it was the third day when he set out on the return journey and Lazarus had been entombed for four days or parts of a day. Moreover he had been entombed for three nights and Jesus brought him out on the third day. This timetable is identical to that which Jesus announced for his own entombment and resurrection. It suggests that the affair was a rehearsal for his own ordeal.

While the idea of collusion with Lazarus has often been dismissed, it remains a serious possibility. Indeed it offers the only rational explanation for the episode. For what reason would Jesus wait two days? Surely to allow time for Lazarus to be entombed and emerge on the third day. As it was, the delay appears unnecessary and cruel to the sisters; he must have had very good reason to risk jeopardizing his relationship with them. As it was, Martha rebuked him for not being around when he was needed (John 11:21).

If Jesus had decided upon the use of opium as the means of achieving resurrection, he may have wanted to test it. Perhaps he was unfamiliar with it and wanted to be certain that it worked; he was on a divine mission and could not risk failure. It seems that Lazarus was so devoted to Jesus that he was prepared to try out the drug on himself. Lazarus was entombed because he had swallowed opium at Jesus’ request. They had the opportunity to arrange this when Jesus passed through Bethany.

When Jesus received word of Lazarus’ ‘death’, he made no move, not only because he did not want to return until the effects of the drug wore off, but because he believed that Lazarus was in no danger. He told his disciples that it would not lead to death and that Lazarus was asleep. On the other hand, he declared that Lazarus was dead. These conflicting statements can only be explained by supposing that Jesus knew that Lazarus had taken opium. Jesus thought that Lazarus was
dead, but that it was not normal death; it was a kind of sleep-death from which he would awake. Indeed, he told his disciples that Lazarus would recover.

When he approached the tomb, Jesus displayed great emotion. He wept and groaned in the manner of a mourner and was almost overcome with grief. This account is unique in attributing such emotion to Jesus and it is hard to explain if Jesus knew that Lazarus would recover. If he wished it to be known that Lazarus would recover, why did he not remain calm and confident? One conclusion may be that his demonstration of emotion was artificial, that he made it to impress upon the crowd the idea that Lazarus really was dead. His remarks in front of the tomb support this notion. After a public prayer, thanking God (for what?), he muttered under his breath that he knew all the time that God had heard him and only said this to convince the onlookers that he was sent by God. Why should he need to act in order to convince the crowd that he was the Chosen One? It is all out of character, and yet, if it is out of character, how could anyone have invented it? Why would anyone invent an uncharacteristic Jesus? It appears that Jesus stage-managed the whole affair and was, even as the tomb was being opened, putting the final touches to his act. He was most concerned when the tomb was opened. Indeed, he had cause to be. It was the moment of truth. If Lazarus had died, the smell of death, referred to by Martha, would have been detectable at once. Only when the door was opened and there was no smell did Jesus know that the drug had succeeded. Only then did he thank God and call out to Lazarus.

One reason for a public declaration that the revival of Lazarus was the result of divine intervention was Jesus’ refusal to use the powers he believed the Messiah possessed. If he was forbidden to test God, he was certainly forbidden to try to resurrect anyone. Jesus made it clear that God had raised Lazarus. In fact Lazarus was never dead, merely comatose.

According to John, it was this event more than any other that caused the chief priests and the ‘pharisees’ (scribes?) to seek Jesus’ removal. Schonfield (1965) suggested that this ‘miracle’ was probably ‘the last straw’ as far as the Sanhedrin was concerned. Although I doubt that this was the reason for raising Lazarus, the affair did succeed in angering the Sanhedrin sufficiently to want Jesus removed. To fulfil his
mission, Jesus did need to provide the Romans with cause to arrest him. However, it did him no good to anger the Sanhedrin and the Romans can hardly have wanted to execute him for raising someone from the dead.

In more senses that one, ‘religion is the opium of the people’, for without the use of opium Christianity could never have arisen. It was not Yahveh who gave birth to Christianity, it was Morpheus the god of dreams.
6 Miracles

While John the Baptist’s identification was vital to his claim to be the Messiah, Jesus’ fame was established more than anything by his reputation for performing miracles, especially curing disease or infirmity. He may not have sought this fame. Almost always, as if he wished to avoid publicity, he commanded his patient to tell no one of the recovery.* Reimarus believed that Jesus intentionally ordered the cured to keep quiet so that they would be more eager not to do so, but such a cynical view is not justified.

Klausner (1925) identified five types of alleged miracle, as follows:

1. *Miracles due to a wish to fulfil some statement in the Old Testament or to imitate some prophet.*

He argued that, if Jesus took the place of John, then he must imitate Elijah. ‘If Elijah and Elisha raised children from the dead, then Jesus must raise the daughter of Jairus’ (Mark 5:22–24, 35–43). If Elijah increased the oil of the cruse and satisfied one hundred men with twenty loaves (I Kings 4:1–37, 42–44), then Jesus must satisfy five thousand. Jesus was thought to be greater than Elijah. Schonfield (1974:42) suggested that the story of the raising of the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11–16) was constructed from Elijah-Elisha stories.

2. *Poetical descriptions that, in the minds of the disciples, were transformed into miracles.*

The strong imagination of the simple disciples turned the commonplace into the miraculous. For example, it is suggested that the parable of the fig tree (Mark 13:28) was confused with the case of the barren fig tree (Mark 11:13). The Transfiguration may also fall into this category (see below).

* For example Matt. 8:4, although Powell believed it ‘a patent absurdity’ and an insertion.
3. *Illusion.*
An example is where Jesus appeared to walk on water (but see below).

4. *Acts only apparently miraculous.*
An example is the storm on the Sea of Galilee.

5. *The curing of numerous 'nerve cases'.*
The power of suggestion cured nervous and hysterical disorders.

Sanders (1993) distinguished between healing miracles, exorcisms and nature miracles. He treated the ‘unattractive story’ of the Gadarene swine (Matt. 8:28–34) as ‘the healing of a hopelessly possessed man’, but was ‘at a loss to explain the story in the sense of finding a historical kernel’ and he concluded that the story is not subject to rational explanation. He noted that whether the incident occurred at Gadara (Matt.) or Gerasa (Mark; Luke), neither place was anywhere near water (Sanders 1993:155). In fact it was not a miracle but an allegory.

Humphrey (1995), misunderstanding Jesus’ purpose, suggested that he accomplished his ‘miracles’ by means of the trickery and deception typical of his time and that he may even have believed that he did have supernatural power. Alternatively Jesus may have turned to trickery on finding that there was no supernatural power. Salibi (1988), apparently misled by Matthew 8:17, believed that the healing miracles were interpolated from Isaiah 53:4.

Helms (1989:61) drew attention to the fact that while, in the Synoptic Gospels, ‘faith causes miracles’, in John ‘miracles cause faith’. It matters not, for there were no miracles.

**Sight to the blind**

According to Luke, Jesus was once invited to read from the scroll of the Scriptures in the synagogue of his home town, erroneously identified as Nazareth. This may have been the same occasion as that described in Mark (Mark 1:21). It appears that he chose to read a passage from Isaiah (Luke 4:16–21).

Goulder noted that, if Jesus had to search the roll of Isaiah for himself, it would have taken him at least three minutes to find chapter six-
ty-one and that such a delay would not have been acceptable. In fact he
would have had to search the roll of the Prophets, a much longer task.
Goulder pointed out that the scroll of Isaiah was read, in parallel with
other scriptures, in sequence throughout the year. It may be concluded
therefore that the sixty-first chapter of Isaiah was the ordained reading
for that day. But since Jesus gave the words a new and eschatological
significance, it can also be concluded that he deliberately chose to at-
tend the synagogue that day knowing what part of the Scripture would
be read. He did not choose the reading; it was chosen for him. He did
choose the day to appear, knowing that he would be asked to read.
Goulder states that Isaiah 61 was usually read in the fourth week of the
month Shebat, about the middle of February. This was only seven
weeks before the Passover (the number of weeks may be significant)
and it suggests that Jesus made this announcement in the year in
which he made his last journey to Jerusalem.

It is usually considered that this was Jesus’ first public declaration
of his identity and mission. He claimed that the prophecy was fulfilled
that very moment. Isaiah wrote of someone who was anointed to
preach good tidings to the meek (the oppressed classes), to bind up the
broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to captives, and the acceptable year
of the Lord (Isa. 61:1–2a). It was considered that this was a prophecy
concerning the coming Messiah. Consequently Jesus was declaring
that he was (or was to be) the Messiah.

According to Luke, Jesus added the words ‘and sight to the blind’,
but these words do not appear in the Hebrew version used in syna-
gogues. It may be thought that the evangelist interpolated these words
on account of Jesus’ reputation for restoring sight to the blind. How-
ever, the words do appear in the Septuagint, although it is not clear
how they came to be there. We must conclude that Luke quoted from
the Septuagint and that he did not know that it differed from the He-
brew text. Even so, the Septuagint was well known in Jesus’ time, even
in Israel, and both Jesus and his contemporaries must have been aware
of this difference. Jesus would have known that it was an insertion by
the translators, but others might have thought that it was a forecast
that the Messiah would restore sight. Indeed the phrase might have
been added to the Septuagint because, at the time, there was a popular
belief that great men could heal disease and restore sight. Tacitus re-
ported that Vespasian restored sight and healed a cripple in Alexandria, the very city where the Septuagint was written (Hist. 4:81). It may have been believed that the Messiah could hardly fail to demonstrate powers that Rome’s rulers possessed. There was even a recognized technique for restoring sight. The great man applied a paste made from his spittle and dust to the blind eyes. Vespasian used this technique, apparently with success, and it is reported that Jesus did so (Mark 8:23; John 9:6). Does this make it more or less likely that Jesus used this technique? It does not elevate Jesus to show him stooping to use a popular method of healing. Why would the evangelists believe that Jesus needed a paste to assist him in restoring sight? Did Jesus employ this technique because it was expected of him or did the evangelists invent the story so as to show that Jesus was at least the equal of Vespasian? If the story is true, it raises the question of how Jesus thought the technique could be effective. Indeed it raises the question of whether or not he thought it was effective. He did not claim that the paste had curative properties, although this may have been the popular belief. In this case his explanation was that the man had been made blind (by God) from birth just so that he (Jesus) could demonstrate the power of God (John 9:3). It might also have been a demonstration of the purpose of his mission; to enlighten the poor. In typically Nazarene fashion, he declared that, while the blind would see, the sighted would become blind (John 9:39). The Law of Reversal again. On a different occasion, a blind man was told that he was cured because of his confidence that Jesus could cure him (Mark 10:52). It seems more likely that Jesus placed the responsibility for the cure upon the sufferer. If they believed that Jesus could cure them, then it was likely that psychosomatic responses could indeed effect a recovery. When healing two blind men, Jesus declared ‘according to your faith, let it be to you’ (Matt. 9:29). In other words, whether or not they were healed would depend upon their faith in his power or the power of God. If they were not healed, Jesus would have castigated them for their unbelief as he did Peter when the latter sank into the Sea of Galilee (Matt. 14:31). When a woman touched his robe, he declared that it was her faith that had healed her (Mark 5:34) and he told a Canaanite woman that her daughter would be healed to the extent of her faith (Matt. 15:28). Jesus may have believed that he had the power to heal, but, as we have seen, he believed that the Scriptures for-
bade him to test God’s power by using it. Therefore it is impossible that he could have claimed any credit for any cures that occurred. His disclaimer, that the sufferers were cured by their own faith, is consistent with his fear to use divine power. *

Elsewhere the Gospels exhibit the belief that disease is the result of sin and that Jesus accepted this view (John 5:14). He identified the forgiveness of sins with the release from disease (Matt. 9:5). According to Klausner (1925), this is a reference to the belief that ‘sufferings cleanse a man from all his sins’. It seems likely that Jesus’ view was that, if the sufferer truly regretted his sins and repented, then he would recover. This is consistent with the Pharisaic belief that, to be cleansed, a sinner must himself repent (Guignebert 1939).

Sanders (1993:167) seems to have interpreted Jesus’ reply to John the Baptist’s question (Matt. 11:3) as a claim by Jesus that he had effected the cures (‘the blind see again and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised…’). However it can just as easily be interpreted as an invitation for John to observe that these things occurred, as if they were cures effected by God, not by Jesus. Powell thought that the reply to John ‘did not fit’ and that it was inserted to establish that John was contemporary with Jesus and subordinate to him.

**Water and wine**

Many believe that Jesus’ first miracle was the turning of water into wine at Cana of Galilee (John 2:1–11). This is sometimes regarded as an invention of the evangelist (it is not reported in the synoptic Gospels); Craveri thought it a myth. However, if it was invented, the purpose is not explained. It fulfils no Scripture, nor does John claim that it does so. It seems likely that the account originated with Jesus’ mother, whom John later adopted, and who may have been asked to recall incidents from the past that foreshadowed Jesus’ greatness.

There are many enigmas in the story. Firstly, why was Jesus with his mother? During his ministry, Jesus seems to have abandoned his

* Modern faith healers are not so fearful.
family (Mark 3:31–35). Since Cana was close to Capernaum, this may have been the wedding of a relative or friend of the family. Clearly Jesus was present, not because of his reputation, but by reason of the demands of marriage customs. Joyce suggested that the marriage was Jesus’ own and Baigent et al. developed this idea, believing that the ‘bridegroom’ of John 2:9 was Jesus himself. If this was Jesus’ wedding, it is surprising that this was not explained by the evangelist. For what reason would this ‘fact’ be concealed?

Secondly, why did his mother think that he could do something about the shortage of wine? The provision of food and drink was usually supervised by a steward, who was usually a friend of the bride and bridegroom. That the servants obeyed Jesus indicates that, at this wedding, he was the steward. This is why his mother turned to him when wine ran low. It was his duty to find more wine.

In those days the wine of the common people was a sharp, sour, cheap drink, the ‘vinegar’ of John 19:29. It was always diluted with water. In order to make large quantities of this wine for a feast, it was necessary to mix the wine with water in large pots, from which the mixture was then drawn. Inevitably therefore the servants, on Jesus’ instruction, would need to pour water into the wine pots. What the evangelist did not appear to know is that, before the servants poured water into the pots, they had poured in undiluted wine. Only in this respect did water turn into wine, when the wine became diluted. Any claim that it was a miracle, and in John’s account no one did so, must stem from poor memory and perhaps Jesus’ inexperience or that of the servants. It was normal to produce the strongest wine (less diluted) at the start of a feast. As feasting progressed, the wine was progressively diluted, perhaps to make it go further, a dilution that was not noticed by the guests. In this case, it seems that stronger wine was inadvertently mixed and produced late in the feast. The sudden increase in strength was then noticed and the subject of comment.

Woolston (1727) is the only scholar to have come close to the truth; he suggested that some liquor was poured into the water to give it the taste of wine. Others have not been so perceptive. Neander thought that the ‘miracle’ may be explained by the ‘fact’ that certain mineral spring waters can be more intoxicating than wine. Robertson (1953) thought that it is traceable to a rite performed in more than one
Greek city at the winter festival of Dionysus’ (Bacchus). Stannard thought the story an allegory in which John alludes to the belief of the Church that, at the Eucharist, the wine is transformed into the blood of Christ. Since belief in transubstantiation did not evolve until the ninth to thirteenth centuries, this explanation is incompetent. Based on the significance of water (baptism) and wine at Qumran, Thiering (1992) claimed that the story hides the message that Jesus was breaking with tradition and allowing lower-grade persons to receive communion. For several reasons, this interpretation is also incompetent. Helms (1989:86f) claimed that the story is based on Moses’ transformation of water into blood (Exod. 4:8–9) and that it is related to a characteristic act of Elijah and Elisha in Kings. He also thought that it was influenced by the mythology regarding Dionysus, on whose festival day water turned into wine. He claimed that ‘the story is a fiction and has a clearly traceable literary lineage’. Humphrey (1995) noted Hippolytus’ account of a certain Marcus who had mastered the art of turning the water in a cup red by mixing liquid from another cup while the onlookers’ attention was distracted.

Loaves and fishes

Many Christians believe that Jesus once converted five loaves and two fish into sufficient food to satisfy five thousand people and to fill twelve baskets afterwards (John 6:1–13). However, they do not know how this ‘miracle’ was accomplished. Did the loaves grow in his hands as he broke pieces off or did he distribute five thousand tiny crumbs that subsequently grew into sizeable loaves? If Jesus distributed the bread at the rate of one piece every two seconds, the rate of distribution of communion wafers by a Catholic priest, then the task would have taken over two-and-a-half hours.

Bahrdt suggested that Jesus stood in front of a hidden cave in which huge supplies of bread were stored, while Paulus thought that the rich in the crowd gave to the poor. Burkitt believed that Jesus told his disciples to distribute their scanty store and that their example made those who were well provided share with those who had little. Schmiedel (Encyclopaedia Biblica) thought that the story was a parable.
to teach that truth is not consumed when it is communicated to others, but only serves to awaken in them (the disciples?) new thoughts and an ever-growing power to satisfy in turn the spiritual hunger of others. Robertson (1953) thought that the story was invented to explain Christianity’s common meal, but Schweitzer (1954) was convinced that it must have a basis in history. Helms (1989:75) believed that the story was derived from II Kings 4:42–44, where Elisha is reported to have fed 100 men with 20 loaves. According to Wilson, the story conceals a peace conference at which Jesus made many men of different persuasions ‘sit down’ together ‘to sink their differences’. Thiering (1992), who claimed that there were 12 loaves, thought that the story conceals the message that Jesus was conferring on ‘ordinary men’, by ordination, the power to exercise ministry, ‘to distribute the communion bread’; the fish represented their baptism in sea water.

Paulus was surely correct in believing that it was a feast day, in which Jesus set an example that was followed by the crowd, who then ate their own food (Strauss). It was the Feast of the Passover, which is also the Feast of Unleavened Bread. During the feast, no work was done and the idle population had time to listen to itinerant preachers like Jesus. Crowds get hungry and, if people do not bring their own food, they buy it where they can. In this case, it seems that bakers’ boys were selling bread, if not other food (John 6:9).

Getting hungry, Jesus would have asked where he and the disciples could obtain food. Surely he was not expecting to feed the whole crowd. A bakers’ boy was found who only had five loaves and two cooked fish left and the disciples bought this food. This was probably just enough for their own needs. Jesus broke the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed the bread and fish to his disciples who, like everyone else, would have been lying on the ground. The AV claims that, after this, the disciples distributed the food to ‘them that were set down’ (John 6:11), implying that ‘them’ was the crowd. However, the original Greek text merely states that Jesus ‘distributed to those lying down’, surely the disciples. It makes no claim that he or the disciples fed five thousand people. For some reason, the AV translators believed that the food had fed five thousand and altered their translation to this effect.

Afterwards, to comply with the law that required that none of the Passover food should be left until the following day (Exod. 12:10), Je-
sus insisted that the waste food should be collected. That twelve baskets of food were collected indicates, not that the twelfth was started because the eleventh was full, but that twelve disciples went collecting. We have no information on the size of the baskets and, consequently, no idea of the amount of food waste involved. However, five thousand people eating their own food, might leave a considerable quantity of waste.

The feeding of the four thousand (Mark 8:2–9; Matt. 15:30–38) may be a different account of the same incident. Here there were seven loaves and a few small fish. There is also an unambiguous statement that the food was distributed to the crowd via the disciples. It seems likely that John’s account is more accurate and that Mark and Matthew inherited an account in which it was already accepted that Jesus had performed a miracle.

Kersten & Gruber (1995:98) note that the miracle has a parallel in the story of the Buddha satisfying the hunger of his five hundred disciples and all the inhabitants of a monastery with the contents of his alms bowl. Furthermore, there were twelve baskets of bread left over.

Walking on water

Subsequently Jesus sent his disciples away to Capernaum by ship, while he went alone up a mountain. While they were rowing across the lake against the wind, the wind strengthened and blew them back towards the shore, perhaps near where they had started. It is recorded (Mark 6:48) that Jesus saw their difficulty and that he walked on the water towards them ‘about the fourth watch of the night’. Since the night was divided into four watches, ‘the fourth watch’ was the last before daybreak and the light would have been poor.

Evidently, on seeing that the disciples could not reach Capernaum, Jesus had descended the mountain and returned to the shore. If the disciples were not aware, in the darkness, that they were near the shore, they could have supposed that he was walking on the water. They had last seen him climbing a mountain; yet here he was in the middle of the lake. But Jesus may have been standing on the shore waiting to help them out of the boat. This explanation is supported by the ac-
count of how Peter tried to emulate his master (Matt. 14:28–31). Although the evangelist claimed that Peter walked on water, it seems obvious that he sank as he stepped out of the boat. Then, as he took Jesus’ hand, he rose up and waded ashore, appearing to walk like Jesus on the water.

Alistair Fraser proposed that Jesus only appeared to walk on water because of an ordinary inferior mirage produced by the warm water in the early morning. If he was not less than 800 yards (730 metres) from the disciples’ boat, he could have appeared to stand on the lake while in fact he stood on the shore. Stannard argued that the account resulted from confusion with the incident related by John (John 21) and, wrongly, claimed that the Greek for ‘on the sea’ (Mark 6:48) can also mean ‘on the shore’ (John 21:4). Helms (1989:78f) claimed that the story is based on Jonah 1:4, where Jonah is a type of the Messiah, itself based on Psalm 107. He also thought that some Buddhist beliefs had become incorporated into Matthew’s account. Thiering (1992) placed the incident on the Dead Sea and claimed that Jesus walked on a low jetty to a ship representing Noah’s Ark, onto which villagers, including Gentiles, embarked and were saved. Powell thought that the story was an allegory teaching that Peter’s lack of faith hindered him from crossing ‘the sea’ (the Mediterranean standing for the Gentile mission field) like Jesus.

We might have heard no more of this incident, whatever its cause, if it had not been for the Pharisaic belief that, in the kingdom, the righteous would be able to walk over water (perhaps deduced from Job 9:8, LXX). Many times Jesus’ actions are seen as prefiguring life in the kingdom and there was a belief that what everyone would be able to do in the kingdom the Messiah would be able to do beforehand. It is clear that this story was constructed from this belief and perhaps an illusion at the lakeside. Sanders (1993:166) suggested that the story, perhaps based on Psalm 107:25–30, where God controls the dangerous deep ocean, was invented to show that Jesus exercised sovereignty over nature.

Kersten & Gruber (1995:98) observe that walking on water was one of the Buddha’s accomplishments. There is even a record of an incident in which a religious ascetic was converted to Buddhism after he took a boat to rescue the Buddha. They claim that the two miracles
(Feeding the Five Thousand and Walking on Water) are a pair and that they are borrowed as a pair from Buddhism (1995:100).

Transfiguration

It is recorded that Jesus took his three closest disciples up a mountain, probably Mount Hermon (e.g. Mark 9:2–8). There he was transformed and his garments shone with heavenly brightness. Moses and Elijah appeared to converse with him, while a voice from a cloud declared, ‘this is my beloved son. Hear him’.

Mackinnon called this a hallucinatory experience, but Schweitzer saw it as a poetical account of the sudden revelation to the disciples that Jesus was the Messiah. Vickers suggested that it was a drama by Nazarene actors, a substitute for wall slogans and representation of the human figure, the latter prohibited under Mosaic law. Graves and Podro considered the story ‘iconotropic’, derived in good faith from a misreading of a sacred picture. Harrison proposed that Jesus was walking with two white bears, while Maccoby, building on an idea by Graves and Podro, thought that it was Jesus’ coronation. To Thiering (1992) it was an event at Qumran when Jesus appeared in the vestments of the high priest, claiming to be Moses, Elijah and Christ (sic).

Since Mount Hermon is permanently capped with snow (Klausner 1925), it seems possible that the gleaming whiteness came from the snow, not from the garments (despite the use of the word ‘snow’ in the AV, the Greek text does not mention it).

Vickers’s explanation makes sense if it had become necessary to convince the closest disciples that Jesus really was who he claimed to be. Moses and Elijah represented the Law and the Prophets (i.e. the whole of Scripture), the foundation on which Jesus based his mission. Both Moses and Elijah claimed to have seen God or at least to have heard his voice, on a mountain (Sinai and Horeb respectively) and the grave of neither was known. Both are mentioned in Malachi’s eschatological prophecy (Mal. 4:4–5). Jewish law required two witnesses to bring evidence: two men were seen at the empty tomb, two were seen at the Ascension and the two witnesses of Revelation (Rev. 11:3) were thought to be Moses and Elijah.
The Gospels interpret the healing miracles as showing that, in Jesus, God was beginning the conquest of evil and its consequences, suffering and death. Similarly they interpret the nature miracles as demonstrating Jesus’ power to tame and bring nature to submission (Sanders 1993:166). However, Jesus could not have agreed with this interpretation; he did not believe in using divine power. We have seen that there were no nature miracles. People may have claimed to have been healed by touching Jesus and he may have seen these ‘cures’ as a sign that the new age was at hand, a confirmation of his mission.
7 Implementation

A time to die

I now turn to the events of that week when Jesus had an appointment with a dream. No week in the whole history of the world can have stimulated so much debate as the few days that spanned the arrest, trial and crucifixion, and supposed resurrection of this notorious Galilean. Indeed, Cohn has called them ‘the most momentous events in the life of mankind’.

Jesus may have believed that 33 was the fateful year, the four-hundred-and-eighty-third year of Daniel’s prophecy and the end of the sixty-ninth ‘week’. It may also have seemed significant to him that Herod’s Temple had been under construction for forty-nine years (seven ‘weeks’ of years).

If it was believed that the Messiah-ben-Joseph was to sacrifice his life for Israel, it may have been thought appropriate, even essential, that Jesus should ‘die’ during the Passover feast at the time when the sacrificial lamb was killed, i.e. in the evening of the 14 Nisan (Exod. 12:6). Klausner (1925:426) noted that it was believed that the 14 Nisan would be the first day of redemption in the Messianic age. In 33, 14 Nisan was the day we call 3 April and it fell on the sixth day of the week – what we call Friday.

Although there is a record that he was laying down his life ‘for the sheep’ (John 10:15), Jesus seems never to have identified himself with the sacrificial lamb. However, he did identify himself with the unleavened loaf (Luke 22:19). Evidently he associated the Feast of Unleavened Bread (identical with Passover) with his fate.

But there was a more important reason for arranging Jesus’ arrest and crucifixion in Jerusalem at the time of the Passover. It was during this feast that Pilate made one of his few visits to the city; he brought extra troops to maintain order while the city was swarming with Jews from the Diaspora and perhaps also with rebels. If Jesus had planned
to commit himself into Roman hands for summary execution according to a strict timetable, then he must do it at a time when the governor, who alone could sentence him to crucifixion, was in Jerusalem. There was also the advantage that considerable publicity could be gained by Jesus’ ‘resurrection’ in the midst of the feast. There could be no better circumstances in which to announce the kingdom and the appearance of the future king (Klausner 1925).

From the start, the arrangements betray organization. On previous occasions, Jesus had avoided publicity. Now he enters Jerusalem with great ceremony, creates a disturbance in the Temple and publicly challenges the teaching of the scribes and chief priests. Clearly there was a plan, but evidently it was not known to the evangelists.

**Countdown to the kingdom**

Jesus instructed his disciples to prepare a room where they could celebrate the Passover meal (Mark 14:12). The evangelists claim that this instruction was given on the Day of Unleavened Bread (i.e. the first day of the Feast of Passover), but Jesus was crucified on that day. The evangelists must have meant that he gave the instruction ‘as the first day of the feast approached’, i.e. a few days before the first day of the feast. The feast lasted from 14 to 20 Nisan (Exod. 12:18) but Sanders (1993:250f) notes that, to comply with Jewish law, Jesus and his party would have had to enter Jerusalem on Friday (sic) 8 Nisan, one week before Passover (in fact that day was a sabbath). This was to allow time for the obligatory sacrifice, being sprinkled with purifying mixture (on 10 and 14 Nisan) and bathing (see Num. 19).

It is well known that, while Jesus and his disciples ate their Passover on the Thursday evening, the chief priests had not eaten theirs by the following morning (John 18:28). This discrepancy is compounded by the curiosity that the day of the Crucifixion is referred to as the ‘day of Preparation’ for the Passover (John 19:14).

According to Klausner (1925), the Pharisees declared that, when 15 Nisan fell on the sabbath (Saturday) and 14 Nisan on the eve of sabbath, the Passover was to be sacrificed on the eve of the sabbath, at the moment ‘between the two days’ (i.e. at sunset). Jacobs claimed that,
when 15 Nisan fell on the sabbath, it was the custom of pious Jews (Pharisees?) to antedate the Passover meal by a day and to celebrate it on the Thursday evening in order not to interfere with celebration of the sabbath.

Klausner’s interpretation is unclear. However Jacobs’s explanation is consistent with the notion that the priests celebrated the Passover on the 14 Nisan, even though it fell on a sabbath, while Jesus and his disciples (as Pharisees) celebrated it on the Thursday evening, at sunset. Friday remained ‘the Day of Preparation’ for the priests’ Passover.

According to modern reckoning, whereby dates change at midnight, the Friday contained not only most of 14 Nisan but also part of 15 Nisan. This may have led to confusion. Since the Pharisaeic Passover began at sunset on the Thursday, it would have been during that day (13 Nisan) that the disciples went looking for the Upper Room (see TIMETABLE OF HOLY WEEK in 33 below). Ogg’s claim, that the meal was held on 13 Nisan, would be correct if he thought that the day ended at midnight. For the year of the Crucifixion, see gloss WHEN DID JESUS DIE? on p. 192.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIMETABLE OF HOLY WEEK in 33</th>
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<td>Since Jewish days start at sunset, evening events occur on the following day.</td>
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The Anointing

Either six days (John 12:1) or two days (Mark 14:1) before the fateful Passover, Jesus was staying in Bethany when a woman poured some precious ointment over him. He was in the house of a leper called Simon who was, according to Schofield, Judas’ father. Lazarus, Mary and Martha and the disciples were present. Mark did not identify the woman, but, according to John, it was Mary. The ointment (spikenard) was poured onto either Jesus’ head (Mark 14:3) or his feet (John 12:3). When questioned by the disciples or possibly by Judas as treasurer, Jesus appeared to know the reason for this act, as if it had been arranged. It was done, he explained, in preparation for his burial (Mark 14:8) and the woman had done him a good deed (Mark 14:6). Apparently the disciples made to confiscate the remainder of the ointment, so that it could be sold to give money to the poor. But Jesus restrained them, saying ‘leave her alone … let her keep it for the day of my burial … The poor are always around, but I will not always be here’ (John 12:7–8). Thiering (1992) thought that this event occurred during Jesus’ marriage to Mary Magdalene.

As we have seen, ‘messiah’ is the Hebrew for ‘anointed-one’, deriving from the practice of anointing the ancient kings of Israel with oil; it represented the outpouring of God’s spirit. Jesus believed that he was the Messiah-ben-Joseph, but even this humble Messiah must be anointed. If he was to ‘die’ as Messiah, Jesus must be anointed beforehand. That the evangelists did not claim that the event fulfilled any prophecy or even that it was recognized as the anointment of the Messiah indicates that it was not invented. Either the evangelists did not understand the event’s political significance or they suppressed the obvious interpretation for fear of Rome.

Since Jesus was rarely surprised by events and instead arranged them to conform to the expected life of the Messiah, it must be presumed that this event was not accidental. Mary did not just happen to have an alabaster box of expensive ointment, pouring it over Jesus on impulse. Jesus expected her to pour it over him and was ready with an explanation. That Lazarus’ sister was responsible, suggests that it was arranged by Jesus’ (Nazarene) friends. The Greek text actually states
that Mary ‘did what she had [to do]; she was to anoint my body beforehand for the burial’ (Mark 14:8). In other words, she was told to do it.

This was Jesus’ anointment as Messiah. Consequently the ointment must have been poured on his head, the traditional method of anointment and the hair mentioned by John must have been Jesus’ own, not Mary’s. Mary had indeed done him a good turn; she had prepared him for ‘death’. Now that he was anointed, he could face crucifixion as the Messiah.

Baigent recognised the significance of this event and commented on the fact that it was performed by a woman, whom he thought could have been Jesus’ wife (2006:119).

The triumphal entry

We are told that Jesus arranged to enter Jerusalem riding on a young ass (John 12:14). Indeed, we are told that he did so deliberately in order to fulfil the prophecy of Zechariah that Jerusalem’s king would arrive in this fashion (Zech. 9:9). The details of the arrangement indicate prior planning by the Nazarenes. The ass was provided by an unnamed person in Bethphage, someone known to Jesus but not known to the disciples (Matt. 21:1–2). The disciples were even given a password (Mark 11:3). Woolston (1721) thought that an impostor had ridden the ass to fulfil the prophecy, but Vickers saw that it was arranged by a Nazarene ‘confederacy’. Schweitzer (1925) understood that Jesus himself made these consciously Messianic arrangements in deliberate fulfilment of the prophecy, a view with which Salibi agreed (1988:116) and to which Sanders was inclined (1993:254). Klausner (1925), who had no interest in the prior arrangements, agreed that the Entry was an intentional fulfilment of prophecy, but thought that Jesus did it to announce his claims. Wells thought the Entry apocryphal and asked why the authorities did not intervene. The Romans, who had probably not heard of Jesus at that time, would hardly have stopped someone riding on an ass into Jerusalem. The priests, who probably had heard of him, held their hand for fear of the people. Helms (1989:103) thought that the story was invented to agree with the Zechariah.
According to John, the people who had witnessed the ‘raising’ of Lazarus (John 12:17) accompanied Jesus into Jerusalem, shouted ‘hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the king of Israel’ and scattered palm branches in his path (John 12:13). Matthew and Mark have similar accounts. ‘Hosanna’ is the Greek form of a Hebrew word meaning ‘save now’ or, according to Carmichael (1995:123), it may have been an Aramaic word meaning ‘free us’ (see Ps. 118:25), a common form of wishing safety and prosperity. Robertson (1953) thought that it was a political slogan. Graves and Podro claimed that it was the traditional cry at the Feast of Tabernacles (autumn) and that no palm branches are available in the spring. In fact, the date palm’s ‘branches’ are its very long leaves, which may well survive into the spring.

If some greeted Jesus as ‘king of Israel’, it was a dangerous thing to do and they must have been Nazarenes. Jesus had not published this claim. According to Matthew, those who asked who he was were told that he was ‘the prophet Jesus from Nazareth’ (Matt. 21:10–11). More likely, they were told that he was ‘Jesus the Nazarene’ (see chapter 3). Sanders thought the demonstration was ‘quite modest’, a symbolic gesture for insiders, for those who had eyes to see (1993:256). Schweitzer (1925) suggested that the crowd thought they were greeting, not the Messiah, but the Forerunner.

**Cleansing the Temple**

It is recorded that Jesus drove the money-changers and dealers in sacrificial animals from the outer court of the Temple (Matt. 21:12–13). According to John, whose account (John 2:13–17) is out of place, he used a small lash of ropes. Such conspicuous behaviour, which prompted the chief priests, scribes, and elders to ask what authority he had to behave in such a fashion (Mark 11:27–28), certainly caught the attention of the authorities. He also openly criticized the scribes, condemning their formalism and greed.

Klausner (1925) thought that such actions were intended to attract attention so that he would have an audience for his proclamation. He could see no reason for Jesus to plot against Rome and thought that he
had planned to announce his identity, after which general repentance would establish the kingdom. Both Klausner and Cohn believed that Jesus acted lawfully in ejecting the traders and that the action was popular. Cohn thought that even the Jewish authorities approved. Guignebert (1935) considered it extremely likely that the Cleansing was invented as a Messianic drama, while Joyce believed that the event was really an attempted coup d'état, as did Carmichael. The latter thought the account a remnant of one in which Jesus and his supporters held the Temple, the ‘rebellion’ of Mark 15:7. Sanders (1985:64–6) asked why Jesus would overthrow business arrangements that were necessary if the Mosaic commandments were to be kept and he suggested (1993:257) that the action symbolized destruction of the Temple. Grant (1977) suggested that Jesus’ action was a deliberate attempt to fulfil the prophecy of Zechariah, that ‘there shall no longer be a trader in the house of the Lord of Hosts on that day’ (Zech. 14:21) and that, motivated by the words of the Psalm, ‘for zeal for thy house has consumed me’ (Ps. 69:9), he intended that the action would cause the authorities to proceed against him. Salibi thought that Jesus ‘had finally overreached himself’ (1988:117). Vermes thinks that this incident, where Jesus did ‘the wrong thing in the wrong place in the wrong season’, was the reason he was arrested and crucified (2000:262).

Jesus may well have had the prophecy in mind but in fact the words quoted in Matthew echo parts of Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11 and the words quoted in John, allegedly remembered by the disciples, come from Psalm 69:9. Jesus may well have quoted some Scriptures during this incident, but we cannot be sure what they were. However, it would be typical of Jesus if he masked his intention to draw attention to himself by outwardly justifying the action by an appeal to Scripture.

**The Tribute Money**

Apparently in an attempt to trick Jesus into making a seditious statement, some Herodians (a Jewish party that favoured submission to Rome) asked him whether or not it was lawful to give tribute (taxes) to Caesar, i.e. to the Romans (Mark 12:13–17). An affirmative answer would have undermined his platform and brought his zeal for the Law
into question. A negative answer would have been seditious. But Jesus well knew that money for the Temple had to be paid in Jewish coins (mainly bronze), which carried the image of neither man nor beast. This is why there were money-changers in the Temple. Greek and Roman coins could not go to the Temple treasury because they did carry such images. According to Mark, Jesus asked to be shown a denarius, a Roman silver coin (Mark 12:15). It seems more likely that Matthew is correct in recording that he asked to be shown the money (nomisma) of the tribute (Matt. 22:19). He need not have specified the coin, indeed it is more logical that he did not. If a Jewish coin had been produced, he would have declared that it belonged to God and should not be paid to Caesar. In fact Rome did not accept tribute in Jewish coin (Daniel-Rops).

It seems that he was shown a denarius. This Roman coin bore the head of the Emperor on its obverse side. Such a coin was minted in Rome and was acceptable for payment of the tribute. Jesus’ answer (‘render to Caesar those things which are Caesar’s, and to God the things which are God’s’) avoided the question, although it did imply that it was lawful to pay tribute. (Graves and Podro suggested that Jesus said, ‘render not to Caesar that which is God’s, nor unto God that which is Caesar’s’.) However, it also implied that, since the coin was Roman, he wanted nothing to do with it and that it should be returned to its owners, those who made it. Jesus’ answer implied that all Roman coins should be sent back where they came from, along with the Romans themselves. It was an easy way out of a difficult question. He was fortunate that two different species of coins were circulating in Judaea and that their different functions were clearly understood.

Klausner (1925) believed that the answer lost Jesus popularity and that this was why the people rejected him at the Crucifixion. Wells thought the episode was invented to settle the question of tax payments for Christians living under Roman rule.

### The Upper Room

Jesus sent his disciples into Jerusalem (at Qumran, according to Threring, 1992), to meet and to follow a man carrying a water pot (Mark 7:36).
14:13). They were to follow this man to a certain house where Jesus had arranged for the Passover meal to be eaten. According to Klausner (1925), the Passover had to be eaten in Jerusalem itself.

Here we certainly do find evidence that Jesus had other friends or accomplices in Jerusalem. They must have included some wealthy person, whose house this was and whose servant they were to follow. Vickers was sure that this man was part of a Nazarene confederacy. The disciples were to identify this man, in the best spy story tradition, by something he was carrying – a water pot. Such pots were normally carried by women, but, as Joyce has pointed out, men might carry them if they belonged to a womanless household such as those of the Essenes. He claimed that the Essenes did have a colony in the southwest of the Upper City. Lehmann believed that the man was an Essene taking the disciples to a secret address where the Essene Passover was celebrated. Whether or not he was an Essene, this man was unusual enough to be distinct, but not unusual enough to have drawn the attention of the authorities.

Why did the disciples have to follow this man? Why could they not be told where to go? Tradition tells us that the house of the Upper Room was near the house of Caiaphas in the Upper City (see Fig. 3 overleaf). However, Schonfield (1974) believed that it was in Zion, the ‘nazorean Quarter’. In Jesus’ time, the Upper City was inhabited by the wealthy. Consequently it is unlikely that the disciples would be familiar with it; they would need to have been given directions. But in those days, without house numbering, houses were identified by the name of the owner. Thus Ananias of Damascus was instructed to find the house of Judas in the street called Straight (Acts 9:11). The disciples could not have been given directions without the name of the owner of this house being revealed to them. Clearly the owner wished to remain anonymous. The use of a guide also eliminated the need for the disciples to ask for directions. Such enquiries could have led to the owner’s association with Jesus becoming known. If the owner was not a Nazarene, he was a secret supporter of Jesus. Klausner’s idea (1925), that the pot-carrier owned the house, seems very unlikely; a wealthy man would not be seen carrying a pot.
If the pot was carried on the head, the custom in many tropical and sub-tropical countries, it would have been easy to follow the carrier. The disciples did not have to follow on his heels; they could follow at a discreet distance, seeming to have nothing to do with him. Indeed, they need never have approached him. They must have arranged to meet him at some central place in the city, perhaps the market or the bridge leading from the Temple to the Upper City, where they could
recognize each other across some open space. Once recognition was established, the guide would lead them to the house of his master. The use of such tactics indicates the existence of some secret organization behind Jesus’ mission. That organisation was the sect of the Nazarenes.

Salibi did not believe the story, even though he thought that the Last Supper was held in secret (1988:178/9). Powell thought it ‘a fairy tale’ and that the disciples were told to approach the first person they met. This seems extremely unlikely.

The ‘betrayal’

It is now generally agreed that The Last Supper was a normal Jewish Seder, held to celebrate the first night of Passover (Thiering, 1992, dis-sents). The reclining at table, the distribution of alms (John 13:29) and the use of the ‘sop’ in memory of the Egyptian captivity, all distinguish it as a contemporary paschal feast (Dalman), at which their sacrificed lamb would have been eaten. Klausner (1925) believed that it was the first Seder that Jesus had celebrated in Jerusalem in the disciples’ company.

The meal was distinguished by only one thing; the extraordinary revelation by Jesus that one of the disciples would betray him (Mark 14:18; John 13:21). Could Jesus really have done this? If he did not make this announcement, why would an evangelist invent it? Did an evangelist, faced with the ‘fact’ of the Betrayal, wish to show that Jesus always foresaw events, even if they were not to his advantage? Such an evangelist would then have been faced, as Craveri pointed out (1967:370), with no explanation for Jesus’ failure to prevent the Betrayal. Did the evangelist also invent the later instructions that Jesus gave to Judas, for which there is a perfectly innocent explanation? Thiering (1992) translated the Greek word for ‘will betray’ (paradosei) literally, as ‘will give beside me’, meaning ‘will act as assistant minister’.

As has been noted (see chapter 2), the Betrayal has been, and still is, a distinct embarrassment to the Church and it seems unlikely that the evangelist would compound his problem by claiming that Jesus condoned Judas’ conduct. Christianity has never been able to explain why it, and Jesus apparently (Mark 14:21), condemn the one man
without whom Jesus could not have made his ultimate sacrifice. As Murry pointed out, Christians should be grateful to Judas. The man who hanged himself in sorrow was more of a man than the disciples who left their master and fled, or than Peter who denied Jesus thrice.

Nor have some scholars found the matter any more comprehensible. Cohn thought the affair so unlikely and incongruous as to be unbelievable. Schweitzer (1954) thought it inexplicable and Carmichael (1995:78) that it is ‘inherently senseless’. Wells considered the problem insoluble and thought that the story was invented to explain the ease with which Jesus was captured. Ruling out greed, Renan found Judas’ motives impossible to explain and considered the Betrayal scarcely credible. To Guignebert (1935), the Betrayal appeared wholly useless, inexplicable, purposeless and unintelligible. If the Church and so many distinguished critics cannot explain it, how could it be unhistorical? Keim was so impressed by the unlikelihood of the early Church inventing such an embarrassing and disgusting tale, that he claimed it would ‘lift a very heavy burden from the heart of Christianity if it could be proved that the betrayal of [sic] Judas did not take place, and that it was the product of Christian imagination’ (Cohn).

If we accept the historicity of the episode, we are confronted by other problems. If Jesus knew that Judas would betray him, why did he not prevent the Betrayal and why would he announce the Betrayal but not the Betrayer to the disciples? None of the disciples, except Judas, knew to whom he referred or saw anything sinister in his instructions to Judas. It was thought that Judas, as treasurer, was going to buy food, or, as was customary, to give alms to the poor (John 13:29). Judas was not identified by the sop (John 13:26), since all the disciples would have received a similar morsel (Daniel-Rops); Guignebert (1935) recognized that Jesus cannot have singled out Judas as the traitor. Further evidence of the disciples’ ignorance is given by Peter’s later question at the lakeside: ‘lord, who betrayed you?’ (John 21:20). Clearly Jesus wished to reveal the fact that one of his friends would betray him, but he did not wish to identify him.

The episode provides a most important clue to understanding Jesus’ purpose and methods; the gospel story barely conceals an intricate web of intrigue and planning that, if examined, will reveal Jesus’ tactics. He was desperate to ensure that he would be delivered into the hands
of the Roman authorities. Even more important, he had to ensure that he was arrested at the right time, neither too soon nor too late, and at a place of his choosing. The only way to ensure that the arrest occurred at the correct time and place was for him to arrange it himself. But how was he to accomplish this? Since Scripture forecast that a friend would betray him (Ps. 41:9), it would have seemed appropriate that one of his own disciples should be the one to deliver him to the Romans. This would both fulfil the Scriptures and ensure the success of his plans.

It seems that Jesus had made a prior arrangement with Judas; the latter knew exactly what he had to do when he was dismissed. He was told, ‘go quickly and do what you have to do’ (John 13:27). This apparently innocent command bears a more sinister interpretation if it was an agreed signal. Judas was being told to go and betray Jesus. Perhaps Judas, on Jesus’ instruction, had indeed made an arrangement with the High Priest (Matt. 26:14–15). Jesus would need to have known in advance both that the authorities were eager to arrest him and that they would act on Judas’ information. Consequently Judas’ departure from the Seder was part of the plot to place Jesus on the throne of Israel (Thiering, 1992, claimed that Judas left because he did not drink wine). The Gospel of Judas also concludes that Judas only did as he was told.

According to the Gospels, Judas was an instrument of the devil (John 13:2). This raises the interesting speculation that Satan was directly responsible for the very sacrifice (the Crucifixion) that Christians claim has conquered him. Klausner (1925) speculated that Judas thought Jesus was a false Messiah or a false prophet; Strauss that the motive was greed. Thiering (1992) believed that Judas was motivated by Jesus’ marriage to Mary (sic) and by an ambition to be Annas’ levite. Zeitlin considered that the motive was fear that the disciples would proclaim Jesus ‘king of the Jews’. Schonfield (1965) claimed that Judas acted because he believed that Jesus had betrayed him. Others have thought that Judas wanted to precipitate the kingdom or to provoke a clash that would result in victory. But Mackinnon noted the unlikelihood of Judas turning against his respected master. Surprisingly, Schweitzer (1925) showed no interest in Judas’ motive. Some, such as Joyce and Noack, have seen that Judas was an innocent go-between, acting on Jesus’ instructions. Moorcock, while telling an otherwise pre-
posterous tale, does have Judas taking a message from Jesus to the Romans. Murry had a very clear understanding that Jesus himself organized the Betrayal, although he offered no evidence for the hypothesis. Ehrman thought that Judas turned Jesus over to the authorities so that Jesus could be killed and escape the confines of his body. He thought Judas the greatest of all the apostles.

Why did Jesus choose Judas? Those who believe that Judas’ motive was greed must explain why he was entrusted with the purse. As Strauss asked, ‘who entrusts a purse to one of whom he knows that he robs it?’ Surely to be trusted with money Judas was thought honest and reliable. Perhaps Judas was chosen because he was the most reliable disciple. Klausner (1925) claimed that Judas was the only non-Galilean disciple and that, unlike the others, he was educated. This would be enough to ensure that he was selected. Maccoby thought that Judas was Jesus’ brother, but that is incompatible with him being non-Galilean (Judaean?). Perhaps, as Vickers suggested, he was a Nazarene. Surely Judas would have needed to have known the reason for this extraordinary action. He would hardly have accepted instructions to betray his master without adequate explanation. Thus he must have known the plan that Jesus was following and been shown the Scripture that he was fulfilling. He must have been assured that, if and when it became known that he had betrayed Jesus, the latter would protect him from the wrath of others. It would have been shown how essential his part had been (Murry). Consequently, when Jesus died and his protection vanished, Judas had no means of explaining to others that he had only done what he was told to do. It would not be surprising, in those circumstances, that he preferred to take his own life (Matt. 27:5) rather than face the accusations of his companions. He may have killed himself out of shame and remorse, blaming himself for Jesus’ death. The use of Judas’ name as a synonym for a traitor is totally inappropriate; Judas was perhaps Jesus’ most faithful disciple.

Judas takes a message

It is usually assumed that Judas hastened that night to the house of Caiaphas the High Priest, whose house is believed also to have been in
the Upper City. Indeed, if the Upper Room was in that quarter, then it was conveniently close to Caiaphas’ house. It may have been chosen for that very reason, to speed Judas’ message. Since Jesus and his disciples had to return to Bethany that night, there was little time to warn the authorities.

But if Jesus wanted to put himself into the hands of the Romans, why did he send Judas to Caiaphas? Would that not have led to a Jewish trial and execution?

It is most unlikely that any ordinary Jew had direct access to Pilate who, in any case, stayed in the Hasmonean Palace, which was much further away. Caiaphas was a Roman appointee, replacing his father-in-law Annas, who was still regarded by Jews as the legitimate High Priest. So Caiaphas was dependent upon Rome for his continued position and authority. Furthermore he kept his office for eighteen years under the rule of three Roman governors. That he endured so long tells us that he co-operated with them, making himself useful. As a Sadducee, he believed in maintaining Roman rule. Klausner (1925) called him ‘a wily diplomat who kept in with Procurator and people alike’. Because Caiaphas was prepared to co-operate with the prefects and appease them, although he may have thought that he was acting in the best interests of his country, Zeitlin called him a ‘quisling’. Schofield was sure that Caiaphas did not ‘kow-tow’ to the Roman governors. Nevertheless Caiaphas must have accepted the obvious duty of reporting any signs of rebellion or sedition by his people. Indeed, it may have been his responsibility to arrest political trouble-makers and arraign them before the governor. Jesus must have known that betrayal to Caiaphas was tantamount to betrayal to Pilate.

Thiering (1992) claimed that Judas (in Qumran) sent a messenger on horseback to Jerusalem to offer Pilate (sic) the bribe and to tell him where ‘the wanted men’ could be found (in Qumran).

But what message did Judas convey? According to Carmichael (1995:107), Judas betrayed the hiding place of the leader of an armed revolt. More likely is Schweitzer’s belief that Judas carried the secret that Jesus believed himself to be the Messiah. Murry agreed. It certainly seems that Jesus kept this a secret as far as possible. If it was not publicly known that Jesus claimed to be the Messiah, why did Caiaphas finally ask him outright whether or not this was true (Matt.
26:63)? But how did Caiaphas come to know of this claim? Surely only from Judas. Why was this information so vital? Jesus knew that Caiaphas, who as a Sadducee did not share the Messianic hope, could present the claim to Pilate as a claim to kingship, which in effect it was. Jesus knew that Caiaphas would see his claim as a threat to the security of Judaea and that he would have him arrested and brought before Pilate. The message could not have been conveyed before that night in case Jesus was arrested at a time that did not agree with the plan. Indeed, if Judas told Caiaphas that Jesus was already anointed as Messiah, then the message could not have been passed until after the previous evening, when the anointing probably occurred. Judas must also have told Caiaphas when and where Jesus could be arrested that night, how the party would rest in the Garden of Gethsemane on their way back to Bethany. The Garden was conveniently close to the Fortress of Antonia, where the Roman garrison was installed. But since it was outside the city, it also afforded easy escape for the disciples, whose arrest was not intended. In addition, Judas would have promised to make a personal identification of Jesus with a kiss. Indeed, he had to lead the posse to Jesus, although it cannot have been obvious that he was doing so.

We are told that Judas accepted a bribe of thirty pieces of silver (Matt. 26:15), which Powell believes Judas received before Jesus’ arrest. It seems possible, since he arranged everything else, that Jesus set the amount of this bribe, basing it on Scripture (Zech. 11:12). Thirty shekels of silver was the damages to be paid for injury to a servant (Exod. 21:32), which, according to some, is how Jesus regarded himself, The Servant of the Lord (Isa. 42:1). He could have told Judas to name this sum as the price of his betrayal. The money would be a useful addition to funds after his ‘resurrection’. Caiaphas might have been suspicious of Judas’ motives if no bribe was demanded. Numismatists are agreed that the coin used for the bribe was the Greek stater; since a stater was worth four denarii, thirty staters were worth a labourer’s wage for 120 days (Matt. 20:1–16). Consequently it was a considerable bribe.

These coins cannot have come out of the Temple treasury; it did not contain non-Jewish coins. Consequently they must have come from other funds, perhaps from a fund that Caiaphas kept to finance...
an intelligence network. When Judas tried to return the money, the chief priests appear to have denied that it had anything to do with them (Matt. 27:4). They did not want to admit bribing anyone.
8 Consequences

The Arrest

According to Klausner (1925), Jewish law forbade the party to return to Bethany that night; instead it required them to stay in the district of Jerusalem, which included the Mount of Olives. Whatever reason Jesus gave for going to the Garden, it is clear, as Joyce noted, that he hung about awaiting capture. Indeed, so long did he wait there, praying or pretending to pray, that most of the disciples fell asleep. As Salibi observed, they would not have wanted to spend the rest of the evening ‘in a public park’ (1988:178/9).

Perhaps they were told that Jesus was waiting for Judas to meet them. Jesus may have underestimated the time required for Judas’ information to produce action and for the guard unit to be dispatched. Indeed, he appears to have been anxious about the delay and fearful of the ordeal ahead of him, sweating profusely (Luke 22:44). Because Luke likened the drops of perspiration to drops of blood, Wilson appears to have believed that Jesus actually did sweat blood. Smith proposed that, during the evening, Jesus initiated a new disciple (the naked young man) by baptism. It is not clear what body of water could have been used; the Kidron valley was dry for most of the year. However, this may have been the excuse for being in the Garden at that time of night. Helms (1989:109f) thought the incident a fiction based on the story of Elijah’s flight from Ahab and Jezebel (III Kings 19, LXX). Indeed, because he thought the authorities could have arrested Jesus at any time, Helms thought that the story of the arrest was invented, although, because it was so humiliating afterwards, he allowed that the disciples’ cowardice ‘may well be historical’.

Not only did Jesus wait until the posse arrived, he announced its arrival, neither resisting nor allowing his disciples to resist. Because he wanted to be arrested, he facilitated the apprehension to the best of his ability. He emphasized to his disciples that he must be arrested to fulfil
the Scriptures (Matt. 26:54). Judas either led the arresting party or pre-
ceded it at a safe distance so that he did not appear to be leading it. The
posse consisted of armed officers of the chief priests and Pharisees
(John 18:3) but it was commanded by a Roman officer, whom John
describes as a military tribune (chiliarchos, John 18:12). This was a high
ranking officer, commanding several hundred soldiers. Although John
may have raised this officer’s rank out of respect for Jesus, we are enti-
tled to accept that he was an officer and that he brought Roman troops
with him. Zeitlin believed that the High Priest had a Roman cohort at
his disposal for the arrest of malcontents. It seems most likely that the
posse consisted of Roman troops accompanied by Jewish officers re-
presenting the High Priest. This proves collusion between Caiaphas and
Pilate, although not necessarily for this arrest. The arrest itself must
have been made by the tribune on behalf of Rome; it was not a Jewish
arrest.

On the question of why Mark omitted mention of the Roman in-
volvement, Winter noted that he would have invited opprobrium on
his cause if he had stated that the Emperor’s troops had seized Jesus.
He thought it more likely that Mark would omit reference to Rome
than that John would invent it. Of course it is a mystery why John’s
Gospel, which goes to such trouble to blame the Jews for Jesus’ death,
is the only Gospel to indicate Roman participation in the arrest. Such
discrepancies indicate that a stubborn truth could not be removed.

Winter noted the discrepancy between the statement that the (Jew-
ish) Council dared not arrest Jesus during the feast and the fact that he
was arrested on the eve of it and executed on the first day. He could not
understand why Jesus was arrested or who ordered the arrest. It seems
unlikely that the Sanhedrin, and certain that the governor, did not con-
sider arresting Jesus during the feast. Some believe that the Sanhedrin
desired Jesus’ death on account of blasphemy and that they needed Pi-
late’s help in securing that death. Kamelsky thought that the Sanhedrin
co-operated to deliver Jesus to Pilate so that Jesus’ prophecies could
come true. Linklater suggested that the Sanhedrin wanted Jesus taken
into protective custody for his own benefit and the protection of other
people’s lives and property, but his account is unconvincing. Sanders
(1993:265) thought that Caiaphas had Jesus arrested because of his
prophetic demonstration at the Temple, overturning tables, and be-
cause he feared that Jesus might incite a riot (ibid.:269). Caiaphas was mistaken and Jesus was exonerated at his trial (ibid.:271). Schofield thought that, well before ‘holy Week’, Caiaphas issued a warrant for Jesus’ arrest. Thiering (1996:vii) thought that Jesus was crucified (arrested) because he was believed to be an associate of anti-Roman zealots. It seems more likely that the Sanhedrin had no hand in the matter and that Jesus himself arranged the arrest; he forced the Romans to take him prisoner.

John records that Simon Peter, in an attempt to defend Jesus, cut off the ear of Malchus, the servant of the High Priest (John 18:10). Wilson believes that this servant was in fact Saul of Tarsus. The event is corroborated by the synoptic evangelists (Mark 14:47; Matt. 26:51; Luke 22:50), although Luke added a healing miracle. Powell altered Matthew’s text to show that one of those with Jesus ‘struck the high priest’s servant and snatched his sidearm [not “ear”]’ and that Jesus then told him to return the weapon. Carmichael (1995:102) saw the carrying of swords as evidence for his notion that Jesus led an armed gang that had attempted to control the Temple.

Could Peter have been carrying a weapon? Did the disciples customarily carry arms? Did they need weapons for protection and why, if they were not expecting arrest, did they have weapons with them on that night? The answer lies in Luke 22:36–38, where Jesus told the disciples to buy swords. He told someone who had a purse and a wallet (surely Judas) and someone who had no purse but who could sell a garment (Peter?) to go and buy swords. Indeed two swords were obtained (Luke 22:38). When told of the acquisitions, Jesus said, ‘it is enough’. Enough for what? Enough for their protection? Surely not, and if Jesus wanted to be arrested that night, why did he insist on the purchase of swords?

Jesus himself explained why he needed some disciples to carry swords; he quoted from Isaiah 53 (v. 12), where the Servant of the Lord is ‘reckoned among the transgressors’ and he stated that this Scripture must be fulfilled in him. Indeed, if he regarded himself as that Servant, then he must see that the Scripture was fulfilled. It is clear that he gave instructions, perhaps during the Seder or even before that, with the intention that the Scripture should be fulfilled. But how did the purchase of two swords fulfil the Scriptures? The word translated as ‘transgres-
sors’ (*anomon*) means ‘lawless’ or rather here ‘lawless ones’. A modern interpretation would be ‘outlaw’ or (as in the NEB) ‘bandit’. Law-abiding citizens did not carry swords and to have such swords was a sign of lawlessness. It put the disciples in the company of Zealots (see Josephus’ description of the Sicarii who ‘concealed daggers under their garments’ – War 2:13:3).

It cannot have been Jesus’ intention that the swords should be used. That is why he told Peter to sheath his sword or to give Malchus back his dagger. It was sufficient to have been carrying the swords; by doing so the disciples enabled him to fulfil yet another Scripture. He told them, ‘these words must find fulfilment in me’ (NEB). They must find fulfilment in him if he was the Messiah-ben-Joseph. Mark thought that the prophecy of Isaiah was fulfilled at the Crucifixion (Mark 15:28). In fact the story of the two thieves may have been invented to show fulfilment of the prophecy and in ignorance of its arranged fulfilment by Jesus.

Cohn believed that the Jewish officers asked for and were given custody of the prisoner until shortly before the trial on the following morning. He assumed that the close relationship between Pilate and Caiaphas enabled the latter to learn of the impending arrest, assuming that he did not initiate it, even of Judas’ false charge, very soon after Pilate himself. This assumes that Pilate ordered the arrest and that he either wished to or was obliged to inform Caiaphas. There are some difficulties with this view. Why would Pilate bother to inform Caiaphas at all? As Cohn himself noted, the governor was in no way beholden to the Jewish authorities; his own authority would be threatened by any sign of weakness. But perhaps Caiaphas had spies in Pilate’s *praetorium*. In this way he might learn of the impending arrest. However, the presence of Jewish guards and his own servant in the posse indicates that Caiaphas knew of the arrest and had a right to be represented in it. Cohn was loath to consider Jewish responsibility for the arrest and that Caiaphas instigated it. Part of the agreement may have been that Caiaphas could interrogate Jesus before the trial.
It is popularly believed that Jesus was taken for trial before the Jewish Council (the Sanhedrin). Certainly this is the claim of the synoptic Gospels. However John tells us that Jesus was interrogated only by Annas and Caiaphas, although not at the same time. If Jesus was arrested on a Roman charge, then he could not be tried by the Jews; but he could have been interrogated by the High Priest and other high officials. The latter could have included Annas, and John and Alexander who interrogated the disciples (Acts 4:6). Cohn pointed out that no Sanhedrin was allowed to sit as a criminal court outside the Temple precincts, that it was not permitted to try criminal cases at night and that no such case could be heard on a festival or eve of a festival. Stauffer claimed that, when the Sanhedrin lost the right to pass sentence of death, it was also forbidden to meet in the Temple court, in the Hall of Hewn Stones, and that it met instead in Annas’ Hall on the Temple Mount. If no Sanhedrin could meet outside the Temple, then banning it from the Temple effectively removed its power, although it may have continued to meet for discussion. Klausner (1925) believed that the meeting place was the ‘house of Annas’ at the ‘hill of anointing’ near Gethsemane. If there was such a building going by Annas’ name, probably because, in the eyes of the Jews, Annas was still the legitimate High Priest, then we can understand how John thought that Jesus was taken first to see Annas. Perhaps this building was the official residence of the High Priest (‘the court of the high priest’, Mark 14:54; ‘the house of the high priest’, Luke 22:54), where Annas still lived. Caiaphas and other priests could have gathered there for the interrogation. There cannot have been a full meeting of the Sanhedrin, nor can there have been a trial. Carmichael (1995:87) believed that the account of a Jewish trial was invented to throw blame on the Jews.

Cohn tried to show that the Sanhedrin was hurriedly convened in order to find some way of preventing Jesus’ death the following day. He argued that Jesus was not regarded as a threat by the Jewish leaders and that their prime concern was for their own survival and reputation among the people. They feared criticism if it were known that they had connived to arrest and execute Jesus or even if they made no attempt to save him. Cohn argued that the Sanhedrin saw it as necessary to
seek any means to find an effective defence to the charges already laid against Jesus. He believed that they examined the likely witnesses and found, to their satisfaction, that they did not agree. Since the Roman court needed two witnesses in agreement, it would be unable to convict Jesus. But there was another way in which Jesus could be convicted – if he admitted guilt. For this reason, Cohn claimed, Caiaphas put a direct question to Jesus regarding his claims. When he found, to his horror (sic), that Jesus had no intention of denying the charges, he tore his robe in dismay. With such a willing prisoner, what good was all his trouble to provide a defence? The whole night’s work was wasted and he could see certain conviction. Jesus was doomed and it is in this light that Cohn interpreted the cry of the Sanhedrin, ‘he is liable to death’ (Matt. 26:66). These words were not a verdict, for it was not a trial; they were a despairsing prediction.

Blinded by modern interest in Jesus and attempting to exonerate Jewish implication in his death, Cohn attributed to the Jewish leaders too great an interest in Jesus and motives that are too high-minded. Caiaphas could never have thought the matter required a gathering of the whole Council which, in any case, had no legal power. The evidence of the Gospels is strongly that the chief priests and scribes wanted Jesus’ death. When Jesus’ claims to Messiahship became known to Caiaphas, his natural reaction must have been that Jesus should be silenced. Although it might be a Christian interpolation, the words of John may accurately reflect the attitude of the Sadducees; ‘if we leave him alone all men will believe in him and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation’ (John 11:47–53). In any case, they must have seen the dangers in the Nazarene movement that threatened to throw up a popular king, the Pharisees’ Messiah. It was in their interest to pinch out this bud before it grew out of control.

Cohn showed how the idea that Pilate was expected to ratify a decision of a Jewish trial does not bear close examination. But he overlooked the possibility that the chief priests examined Jesus in preparation for the Roman trial. Caiaphas had the opportunity to interrogate this mysterious Galilean and to learn something of his movement. Klausner (1925) informs us that the Sanhedrin possessed the right of preliminary examination. As we have seen, it must have been Caiaphas who instituted the arrest and claimed the right to examine the prisoner
before he was taken to Pilate. Caiaphas may also have wished to ensure that the charge against Jesus would stick. He must be sure that Jesus would be found guilty and condemned to death. He needed to examine the witnesses to test their stories and to ensure that they agreed with each other.

It appears that Caiaphas did not know how willing Jesus was to be convicted, for he searched that night for witnesses (Mark 14:55). That Caiaphas had to make a search for witnesses and that he could not find two who agreed with each other (Mark 14:56–59), demonstrates how unprepared he was. He had not planned to examine Jesus that night. But Caiaphas’ problem was solved when Jesus admitted that he was the Messiah; the admission was enough to secure a conviction in the Roman court, although it would not have convicted him in a Jewish one (Innes). Upon this admission, Caiaphas tore his robe, a symbolic action permitted by the Mishnah (despite Lev. 21:10) signifying that the prisoner was liable to a death sentence. Truly he did not need the witnesses any more (Mark 14:63).

The synoptic evangelists claim that Jesus was found guilty of blasphemy and that this was the crime for which he was sent to trial. Schweitzer (1925) accepted this. However Jesus appears never to have used the name of God, a major blasphemy (slander) that would have earned the condemnation of the priests. Sanders (1985) claimed that it is likely that the charge of blasphemy was not firmly rooted in tradition. Mowinckel noted that there was no blasphemy in claiming Messiahship, but it was quite another thing for a man to claim to be that Son of Man who was also ‘the Son of the Most High God’ or of ‘the Blessed’. Jesus claimed to be that supernatural being who would rule the kingdom of the heavens and his claim was seen by Caiaphas as a major blasphemy deserving capital punishment. But however slanderous Jesus’ claims were, Caiaphas could not put a charge in those terms to Pilate.

Powell believed that Jesus was convicted of blasphemy for allowing himself to be called ‘the son of God’.

John, who normally seems to have been better informed, reports only that Annas asked Jesus about his teaching. He received an insolent reply (John 18:20–21).
Some ask how we can know what took place at this interrogation. John Robinson (1985:117) believed that John was an important fishmonger (sic) who had access through the tradesmen’s entrance into the High Priestly household and was able to witness the interrogation. It would be simpler to suppose that one or more of those entitled to be present, perhaps a servant, related the events to an early evangelist.

**Trial**

Early the following morning, at cock-crow (John 18:27), Jesus was led back into Roman custody. There is no reason to believe that Pilate knew anything about the arrest or the interrogation by the priests. However he may have been informed as a matter of routine. So far as he was concerned, the prisoner had been arrested the previous evening on a charge arising from information supplied to the High Priest. The transfer from Roman to Jewish guards and back again might have been, as Cohn suggested, a private arrangement between the commanders concerned. It was not a matter of consulting Jewish law or of referring the matter to the Sanhedrin, which was not extant. Pilate held his own court for crimes against Rome; once the charges had been laid and the accused detained, he was obliged to proceed with the trial.

Jesus was now led into Pilate’s *praetorium* (John 18:28), his military and gubernatorial headquarters. We are told that the judgement seat (*bema*) was located in a place called The Pavement (*lithostraton*), which many scholars place at or near the Tower of Antonia, where the Roman troops were garrisoned. Robin Lane Fox claims that the Pavement was a cobbled area outside the palace (1991:246). However Schonfield (1974) believed that the trial was held in the courtyard of Herod’s Palace. Certainly the *praetorium* was wherever the commander-in-chief resided; if he resided in the Palace, then that was his *praetorium*. Grant (1973) was sure that the governors resided in the Palace, where there must have been a ‘pavement’ and a judgement seat, formerly used by the kings of Judaea. Only recently have archaeologists been able to confirm that Pilate’s *praetorium* was in the Hasmonean Palace (Thiede 1990:127).
Cohn pointed out how impossible it was either that the Jewish leaders accused Jesus before Pilate or that they were present at the trial, which was held in camera. If, as he claimed, the Sanhedrin had learned of the futility of attempting to defend a prisoner who was determined on self-destruction, they would have had no reason to wait outside the praetorium. But, to lay a charge, Caiaphas at least had to be present and surely he remained to see a conviction. But Caiaphas could not enter the praetorium for fear of defilement before the Sadducean Passover. Instead, Pilate had to go outside to speak to him.

Wilson thought that the trial scene was invented and Helms (1989:118) regarded the account of the trial as speculative, 'since there were no followers of Jesus present'. Even if this were true, and Helms can have no way of knowing, some of the guards may have reported what took place. Powell thought that the Roman trial was constructed from the trial before the High Priest.

Although Carmichael (1995:77) thought that the account of the trial is 'tendentious', the account in John (John 18:29–19:16) does seem to contain realistic components. Phrases like 'am I a Jew?' and 'what is truth?' are unlikely to have been invented; they seem to come from a real, quick-witted and touchy personality. Pilate must first have asked for the charge (John 18:29). It seems unlikely that he was merely told that Jesus was a criminal, as claimed by John (John 18:30); this response would fit better with the report that Pilate attempted to release Jesus. The Gospels are all agreed that Pilate asked Jesus whether he was 'king of the Jews' (e.g. Matt. 27:11). Therefore the charge must have been in those words. Cohn thought that the charge was 'pretending to be King of the Jews without being appointed or recognized as such by the Emperor'. In fact we may deduce that Caiaphas accused Jesus of claiming to be king of the Jews (John 19:21).

Jesus may have replied, as the Gospels claim, that indeed he was a king or, as we might say nowadays, 'you said it.' (Mark 15:2). Graves and Podro claim that Jesus’ reply (to the High Priest), ‘you say that I am’ (Luke 22:70), is an abbreviation of an Aramaic saying ‘so you say, but I reserve my opinion’. Since Jesus must have spoken in Greek, this seems an unlikely explanation for Jesus’ reply to Pilate; in any case, Jesus was absolutely sure of his identity. John's version, 'do you say this yourself, or have others told you about me?' (John 18:34), seems un-
likely to have been invented and is complex enough to have come from Jesus.

Pilate must then have enquired where Jesus’ kingdom was, although this question is not recorded. Jesus explained that his kingdom is ‘not of this world’, not of the cosmic order that God had created in the beginning and in which they yet lived. His kingdom was the cosmic order to come, the new heaven and the new Earth. So Pilate asks, ‘you are not really a king then?’ (John 18:37), but Jesus’ reply, about truth and destiny, is lost on the prefect.

Pilate may have been cruel and heartless, although there seems to be little evidence for this view, but he must have seen that Jesus was no ferocious rebel. Although he had been in the company of some with swords, he had not himself been armed and he had not, as far as we know, led an armed revolt. He was not known to be, nor did he claim to be, a direct descendant of the Jewish kings. Pilate's first conclusion may have been that Jesus was insane or at least a harmless eccentric. How could he be king of the Jews when the kingdom he claimed did not exist? He laid claim to no existing kingdom. Consequently it is understandable that Pilate may have told Caiaphas that he did not believe that Jesus was guilty of any crime. He may well have ordered a scourging as a token punishment and encouraged his troops to mock the 'king' (John 19:1–5). Wilson believed that Pilate was afraid of Jesus and that, if he had him executed, there would be an uprising. However this view does not seem to be justified.

It may be true that there then followed an altercation between Pilate and the priests, the latter claiming that, according to their laws, Jesus should die for calling himself ‘the Son of God’. In fact Jesus called himself obliquely ‘the Son of Man’, which the priests knew stood for the Messiah, but Pilate would not have understood the term. The priests may also have warned Pilate that his loyalty to Caesar might be questioned (John 19:12) and they declared their own loyalty (John 19:15). Schofield noted that the priests’ cry, ‘you are no friend of Caesar’, was an echo of an earlier request by Herod’s sons over the matter of the votive shields that Pilate should show that he was ‘caesar’s friend’. Caiaphas played the same card against the same opponent. Pilate may have believed that Jesus was harmless, but he was confronted by priests who took the matter so seriously that they threatened to report him to
Rome. On the previous occasion, Pilate had been rebuked by the Emperor; another report could mean the end of his career. If Jesus claimed to be king of the Jews, even a future king, he was technically guilty. So Pilate signed the death warrant, but with a sting that would annoy the priests.

The conclusion that Pilate made no concessions to Jewish demands and that he tried Jesus and found him guilty on his own admission is plainly at odds with the gospel record. However the evangelists’ motive is well known; to protect Christians who read or carried the Gospels, they had to portray the Roman governor as Jesus’ friend not his enemy. Consequently they claimed that Pilate found Jesus innocent and that he tried to release him. In fact, if Pilate had thought Jesus innocent, he could not have sentenced him; ‘the execution of an accused known to be innocent would, in Roman law, be murder for which he [Pilate] would be personally answerable’ (Cohn). The evangelists, in shifting blame from Pilate, risked calling his competence into question and that seems to be little better than blaming Rome for killing a god.

Cohn found the tradition of the release of a prisoner at the Passover entirely an invention; it was not mentioned by Josephus. Schonfield (1974) agreed that there was no such custom. However he suggested that one (Jesus) Barabbas was captured by mistake and that the chief priests released him after the error was discovered and Jesus the Nazarene had been handed over. It is hardly credible that Pilate would willingly release any criminal. Cohn also dismissed the story of Claudia Procula’s dream as a clumsy attempt to introduce a typical supernatural influence that might be expected to convince readers that Jesus really was the Son of God. He noted that ceremonial hand-washing was unknown among Romans; in fact it is a Jewish custom (Deut. 21:6; Ps. 26:6). Procula comes from the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus and should not have been in Jerusalem (Daniel-Rops). Stories about Procula abound, but it is unrealistic to believe that Pilate would react to her attempt to interfere with the course of justice.

The story of Jesus being sent to Herod Antipas (Luke 23:6–11) has the ring of truth, although there is no cause to suppose that Pilate wanted to shirk his responsibility. Jesus’ origin in Galilee was irrelevant; the crime was committed in Judaea. Herod was in Jerusalem for the Passover; indeed he may have lodged with Pilate in the Palace. It
may be that Herod, when he heard of Jesus’ arrest, asked to see him. He may have wanted to see whether Jesus really was John the Baptist resurrected and to see a miracle (Luke 23:8). Lane Fox thought the story more likely to have been invented to appear to fulfil Scripture, as indicated in Acts 4:26, Antipas representing ‘the kings of the earth’ (1991:297).

Pilate probably owed his appointment to Lucius Aelius Sejanus, the ambitious and anti-Semitic Prefect of the praetorian guard who took effective control of the Roman Empire in 26 when Tiberius retired to Capri. According to Grant (1973), Sejanus had nominated both Pilate and his predecessor Valerius Gratus. Certainly Sejanus was cruel and unscrupulous and this may indicate that Pilate was also. Philo called Pilate cruel and remorseless (Leg. 301–3). To Guignebert (1935), Pilate was a man who could stand no nonsense and believed in strong-arm methods, while Klausner (1925) concluded that Pilate’s known cruelty (*sic*) prevented acceptance of all stories of his opposition to the Crucifixion. Morrison was sure that Pilate never deferred to Jewish feelings nor feared representations to Caesar (‘such threats produced no effect on Pilate in the case of the votive tablets’) and that he must have condemned Jesus in a moment of weakness. Stauffer, agreeing that Pilate was a creature of Sejanus, attributed the apparent change of attitude to the death of the latter, who was arrested and executed in 31 (this tends to confirm 33 as the year of Crucifixion). Pilate may not have felt so secure after Sejanus’ death. After a complaint by Samaritans in 36, Pilate was sent by Vitellius to answer charges before the emperor, although Tiberius died before Pilate reached Rome.

Jesus must have been sure that he would be tried by Pilate and that Pilate would find him guilty. However, he probably knew nothing of Sejanus and the effect his death could have on Pilate’s attitude. If Pilate had indeed hesitated to condemn Jesus, then the latter owed the continued ‘success’ of his plans to the persistent Caiaphas. In this respect, Caiaphas also assisted Jesus onto his cross and enabled him to make his great sacrifice. Surprisingly Christians do not sing the praise of Caiaphas or Pilate for that matter; as Wilson has observed, it seems perverse to blame the Jews for Jesus’ death if it brought salvation to the whole world and they did not know that he was the Messiah.
Cohn realized that, if Jesus pleaded guilty to the charge brought against him before Pilate, it need not have been because he was or thought he was in fact guilty; ‘it could well have been because he wanted his prophecies to come true’. In fact he probably pleaded guilty both because he believed that he was the Messiah and because he wanted the prophecies to be fulfilled, the latter most of all. While debate has raged over whether it was the Romans or the Jews who condemned Jesus to death, there seems to be little doubt that it was a self-condemned man who walked from the praetorium to Calvary. Jesus had thrown himself into legal machinery that had no alternative but to condemn him to death. In fact he forced it to do so. More than that, he chose both the method of execution and the time at which he would be executed. By arranging to be betrayed on the Thursday evening, he ensured that he would be tried and executed the following day. But since the approaching sabbath commenced at sunset on the Friday, he knew that such a timetable would necessitate his removal from the cross before that time. He could calculate the length of his agony precisely. If he had been arrested earlier in the week, he would have had to endure several days’ crucifixion and might not have survived. Only by arranging the arrest, trial and execution in his own time could he ensure that the required revival of the Messiah would be accomplished. Jesus presented himself to his judges as a prisoner who had already decided both the crime and the punishment. He used both Caiaphas and Pilate as instruments to achieve his aim; while they thought they were manipulating him, he was manipulating them.

In 2013 a Roman Catholic Kenyan lawyer (Dola Indidis) petitioned the International Court of Justice in The Hague to overturn Pilate’s verdict as a ‘selective and malicious prosecution’, violating Jesus’ human rights. He accused Pilate of ‘judicial misconduct, abuse of office, bias and prejudice’. The Kenyan High Court of Nairobi said that it lacked jurisdiction to hear the case (The Times, 3 August 2013).

Crucifixion

The site of Calvary (Golgotha) has been hotly disputed. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre marks the site of a previous Temple to Venus,
which was understood to have been built over the site of the Crucifixion. But identification of the site was only made in the fourth century by the Empress Helena after a vision. An alternative site was identified in 1882 (Lane Fox has 1885) by General Gordon of Khartoum, who noticed that a rocky outcrop to the north of the city, and known as The Grotto of Jeremiah, resembled a skull. ‘Golgotha’ certainly derives from the Aramaic gulgoltâ, which does mean ‘skull’ (Mark 15:22). Among the explanations advanced for this name, that which sees it as a topographical description seems most reasonable. The hill cannot have been so-named because it was littered with skulls; Jewish law did not permit skulls or any human remains to lie in the open. Lane Fox says that the appearance of a skull is due to modern quarrying (1991:248).

Critical to the choice of site is the line taken by Jerusalem’s north wall at the time. Calvary was outside this wall (Heb. 13:12). If the wall ran along the line of Jerusalem’s present north wall, then Gordon must be correct. If the wall ran along the line of what is called ‘the Second North Wall’, then either site might be correct. Unfortunately archaeology has not yet determined the line of the north wall. But it does seem remarkable that, to the north of the city, the traditional site of executions, there should exist a hill that does resemble a skull. The odds seem to favour Gordon’s Calvary, even though his reasoning is suspect. Klausner (1925) was sure that the traditional site, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, must have been inside the north wall in Jesus’ time.

It is not known exactly how Roman crucifixions were conducted. It is known that the conventional Christian representation, in which Christ hangs by nails through his hands and feet, is impossible. In such a position, the body would fall off the cross. According to Cross (1968), after the victim was beaten with cudgels, he was tied with ropes or nailed or both to a wooden spar, probably by twisting his arms behind the spar. Finally the spar was attached to an upright post already planted in the ground, probably across the top of it, so forming a T-shape. There is no agreement on exactly how the victim’s feet were fastened. Some believe that support for the feet, by means of a foot block or tying, was necessary to allow the victim to breathe by taking the body weight off the arms. Others believe that nailing the feet, either sideways through the heel or in the traditionally portrayed manner,
performed this function, besides restraining them. Many commentators concluded that the feet were not nailed and some believed that not even the hands were nailed (Goguel 1926). If nails were used to secure the arms, then they would need to have gone through the wrists where they would be secure; this would have caused disabling injuries, although Primrose (1949) disagreed. Cross (1970a) noted that tying would have been more effective than nailing and that perhaps both were used. A peg may have been provided to give support between the legs. It is likely, as the Church fathers believed, that Jesus was completely naked (Craveri); the Romans had no cause to spare the sensibilities of their victims. That Jesus risked crucifixion indicates that the method was not necessarily disabling, for survivors.

The victim found the position agonizing and breathing was difficult and painful. Renan claimed that the unnatural position of the body ‘frightfully’ disturbed the circulation and that there were terrible pains in the head and heart. At length the limbs went rigid and traumatic fever and tetanus set in. Traumatic fever is not now considered a medical entity of any significance and since the average incubation period for tetanus is one week it can hardly be the cause of death when a crucified person dies in less than that time. Renan thought that strong victims might die of hunger, but Stauffer suggested that death was normally caused by exhaustion or heart failure. Since people can live for many weeks without food, starvation is unlikely. Nor is there any reason why a previously healthy victim of crucifixion should suffer heart failure. Daniel-Rops claimed that death was caused by ‘increasing asphyxia, the tetanic state of the muscles, hunger and, above all, thirst’. In the (London) Sunday Times of 18 April 1993, Dr R W Penny explained that death eventually came from asphyxiation when the victim was too weak to stand, although breaking the legs brought instant death. One week later in the same newspaper, J Saklatvala claimed that the victim drowns because he is unable to completely empty his lungs of water. The general opinion is that many factors are involved, but that death is due to asphyxiation (Holoubek 1995).

Whatever the cause, death rarely came within 36 hours and could take as long as nine days. Craveri noted that death never came in less than two days. But the Gospels plainly tell us that Jesus expired after only a few hours, the same day that he was crucified. After crucifixion
in the morning, about 9 am (Mark 15:25), he ‘died’ in the afternoon, about 3 pm (Mark 15:34); he had lasted only about six hours. Strauss concluded that Jesus died after hanging on the cross not much more than two hours.

The swiftness of Jesus’ death was regarded as a miracle even in the time of Origen (Craveri). If it was a miracle invented by the evangelists to fulfil prophecy, they failed to quote their Scriptural authority; indeed, the evangelists themselves exhibit no curiosity regarding this anomaly. If it is not a miracle it is a mystery and one that the evangelists could not explain. Why would an otherwise healthy man die after only six hours crucifixion? I doubt that such a thing had occurred before; certainly Pilate was amazed (Mark 15:44). Clearly such an unusual event is unlikely to be an invention of the evangelists. When the Gospels were written it was well known how long it took to die by crucifixion.

Klausner (1925) believed that the speedy death showed Jesus to have been very feeble, but Stauffer countered with the claim that no one would have become a follower of such a man. If he was a builder, Jesus was used to heavy work. Furthermore, had he not fitted the Rabbis’ requirements (that the reflection of God’s presence could only rest on a tall and strong man) he could not have been encouraged to pursue his mission, nor could he have inspired others or believed in himself. Caldwell suggested that Jesus suffered from a mild form of tuberculosis, although this hardly simulates death. Craveri reviewed various causes of sudden death, but produced no real explanation for premature death. In the High Court in London in 1972, an eminent anaesthetist, giving evidence in a libel action, declared that Jesus suffered a faint that simulated death. He had to defend this view in the face of stiff questioning. Joyce suggested that death was feigned by use of a drug, perhaps derived from the opium poppy, among others, an idea also suggested by Baigent (2006:128). Gruber accepted that a drink containing opium was involved (Kersten & Gruber 1994:253). Thiering (1996:vii) thought that it had been arranged to give Jesus poison, ‘as a way of committing suicide,’ but that, later, this poison was purged. While he dismissed any idea of a drug, Wilson ignored all evidence to the contrary and claimed that it would not be surprising if Jesus had died in only three hours: because ‘he must have been near to exhaus-
tion and collapse even before his arrest. Gruber observed that the suggestion that Jesus’ died because of mistreatment before crucifixion is a fairly weak explanation (Kersten & Gruber 1994:245).

A faint or swoon is a popular explanation. However it is unlikely that the Roman execution squad was fooled. Since many might hope to escape death by such means, the squads must have been particularly alert to feigned death. Certainly they must have been able to distinguish between a faint and death. It has been suggested that Jesus was drugged by the wine given to him on the cross. It is known that an association of Jewish women provided an anodyne for condemned men and that this drink was drugged wine. But this drink did not cause unconsciousness; the Romans wanted their victims conscious. It can only have dulled the pain of crucifixion; it certainly cannot have simulated death. Thiering (1992) claimed that this wine was mixed with snake poison (sic), which rendered Jesus unconscious, implying that this state was mistaken for death.

Apparently Jesus refused this drink (Matt. 27:34). But why would he do that? Did the evangelist fear to relate how his Lord bore death in a state of intoxication? Jesus could have had two reasons for refusing the anodyne. Firstly he needed to retain his wits so that he could give the signal for administration of the opium and to swallow it. Secondly a stomach full of wine would dilute the opium and weaken its effects.

The evangelists are agreed that Jesus spoke from the cross, but John and Luke seem to know nothing of the words recorded by Mark and Matthew. Wells suggested that the plea (‘my god, my god, why did you forsake me?’) was inserted by the evangelists to demonstrate the magnitude of the burden assumed by Jesus, but Schmiedel (‘gospels’, para. 139, Encyclopaedia Biblica) included the verse that contains these words in his short list of passages that ‘might be called the foundation-pillars for a truly scientific life of Jesus’. If this cry was theologically important, why did Luke and John omit it? Moreover why did Mark tell us that the bystanders misunderstood the cry as a reference to Elijah? What perversity led a myth-maker to report words that are Christologically significant, but which are misunderstood? Mackinnon demonstrated that this misunderstanding could have arisen if Jesus had uttered the Hebrew version of Psalm 22:1. This, with its Eli (Matt. 27:46), might have been taken as a reference to Elijah (Elias in Greek). If Jesus
had spoken in Aramaic, with its Eloi (Mark 15:34), then he must have been understood by Jewish bystanders. As Craveri noted, it is absurd to believe that Jews could not have understood their own language. Powell saw the passage as a ‘uniquely Aramaic’ insertion, designed to invoke John (Elijah) as a witness to Jesus’ death.

If Mackinnon is right, we have to ask why Jesus would speak in the ‘dead’ language of the synagogue, instead of in his native tongue. Clearly he did not speak, he quoted from the Scriptures. But why did he quote from the first verse of Psalm 22? Schonfield (1965) suggested that the cry was a signal for the administration of a drug. But an equally convincing signal would have been the words recorded by John, ‘I thirst’. Bullinger (undated) pointed out that the words ‘it is finished’ (John 19:30) are the last words of Psalm 22 and he suggested that Jesus might have recited the whole of the Psalm during his ordeal. As we have seen, Jesus thought parts of this Psalm particularly appropriate to crucifixion and it is customarily recited by devout Jews facing death. However, Brandt thought that a crucified man ‘does not affect quotations’ (Klausner 1925). Schweitzer (1954) concluded that the words were written into the Gospels to show that, even at the last moment, Jesus fulfilled the role of the Messiah, but that no thought had been given to the inference that would be drawn. If Jesus was near to a successful conclusion of his mission, why would he cry out in despair? It might be thought that the words ‘it is finished’ referred to the fact that he had swallowed the opium, but that is too simplistic. Jesus would never have been so obvious. Schonfield may be right; his quotation might have been a signal that he was ready for the drug. This would not have been obvious, even to those who understood Hebrew, and its message of despair was completely at variance with its purpose – liberation from death. It also displays the melodramatic quality that seems to pervade all Jesus’ thoughts and actions.

According to Luke, as he was being crucified Jesus said, ‘father forgive them for they don’t know what they’re doing’ (Luke 23:34a). These words are of doubtful authenticity and some editors omit them. Schonfield (1974) claimed that there is reason to believe that the words were borrowed from the dying speech of Jesus’ brother James.

According to John, after he cried out in thirst, Jesus was given a drink of the anodyne in a sponge on a ‘hyssop’ (hussopos, thought by
some to be a graphic error for *husso*, a pike). According to Mark (and Matthew), after Jesus had quoted from Psalm 22, ‘one hastened’ to fill the sponge and give it to him on a ‘reed’ (*kalamos*). Joyce suggested that again there had been confusion, this time between the Hebrew *hanith* (*chanith*, a spear) and *kaneth* (*qaneh*, a reed), although this seems unlikely. A spear would have been in the hand only of a Roman guard, but a reed might have been available for administration of the anodyne. Gruber agreed that there has been linguistic confusion and that the drink was administered on a spear, but he thought that the spear was in the hand of the Roman centurion (Kersten & Gruber 1994:253). But why should anyone ‘hasten’ to perform this task? Would a guard hurry himself? If a Nazarene was waiting for Jesus’ signal, *he* might hasten to obtain the sponge and the reed before anyone else could do so. He needed the sponge in which to conceal the opium. The quantity of opium required was small enough to be hidden in a sponge. Both Yerby and Joyce proposed that Jesus was given a drug hidden in the sponge. The cry recorded in Mark (Mark 15:37) could have been an involuntary reaction to the opium.

Since the sabbath and the Sadducean Passover began at dusk, the priests asked Pilate to hasten death and have the body of Jesus and others if there were any removed that evening. It is known that the Romans did sometimes hasten the death of victims by breaking their legs and/or by a *coup de grâce* with a spear. If the cross was provided with a small step or the victim’s feet were tied or nailed to the upright post, then he was able to breath only by pushing himself upwards. If his legs were broken, he was no longer able to do this and he died of suffocation. Although Graves and Podro claimed that *scelocopia* (*crurifragium* in Latin), the breaking of legs, formed no part of the crucifixion ritual and that it was a distinct form of punishment, they suggested that it was done in this case on Pilate’s orders in accordance with Jewish sensitivities. Primrose stated that, far from being a concession to the victims in hastening death, it was a device to prevent the victims from leaving the place where they were thrown down from the cross. It seems unlikely that the execution squad would leave the victims until they were sure that they were dead.

Whatever the purpose of the *crurifragium*, it was a treatment withheld from Jesus; when the squad came to him they found that he was al-
ready ‘dead’ (John 19:33). We can be sure that the squad commander was convinced of Jesus’ death; he assured Pilate to this effect (Mark 15:45). This means that the opium had done its work and that Jesus’ appearance was indistinguishable from that of death. There is no reason to suppose that the squad was familiar with the effects of opium poisoning, surely not a common occurrence.

It has been suggested that the *crurifragium* was invented by the evangelists to show fulfilment of the condition of Exodus 12:46, that no bone of the sacrificial lamb was to be broken (John 19:36). This seems unlikely; it is a known Roman technique and John’s record is unusually accurate in such details. But Jesus would have known the verse and might have anticipated that his legs would not be broken, so fulfilling yet another Scripture.

Only John records that one of the soldiers ‘pricked’ Jesus’ side with a lance and that ‘blood and water’ flowed out (John 19:34). Tradition has it that the lance was handled by the centurion and that his name was Longinus. However this name is derived from the Greek for a lance, *logche* (pronounced ‘long-khé’), and seems to mean ‘the lancer’ (Ravenseft). John thought this event so remarkable that he emphasized that he had seen it with his own eyes and that he was telling the truth (John 19:35). Considering the other remarkable claims of his Gospel, it is surprising that he should make such a comment only in this case. It might be thought that this action was a normal *coup de grâce*. But the commander was already convinced that Jesus was dead. Why would he order the coup to make sure of it?

The notion that the account was introduced solely to show fulfilment of the prophecy that ‘they shall look upon me [him] whom they have pierced’ (Zech. 12:10), as might be concluded from John’s account (John 19:37), is undermined by the fact that the Septuagint version of Zechariah reads, ‘they shall look upon me because they have mocked me’. Only those who knew the Hebrew text would have known the prophecy. Jesus cannot have wanted to be speared and he must have thought that the prophecy was adequately fulfilled by the actions of crucifixion itself, with or without nails. Why would the evangelist feel the need to invent another episode to show fulfilment of a prophecy that was unknown to most of his readers?
Perhaps, as Strauss suggested, the account was prompted by a concern to prove Jesus dead. We have no evidence that there was an early belief that Jesus had not died, but it may have been an attempt to refute Docetism, a doctrine that the second century Church regarded as a grave heresy. Clearly phantoms do not bleed. Nor do corpses, a fact pointed out by Origen, even though he believed that Jesus was dead (Kersten & Gruber 1994:250). But why would the evangelist record the release of blood and water? The water was more likely to convince readers that there was indeed something unusual about Jesus. Wells's argument, that the water and blood show that the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist spring from the body of Christ, is unconvincing. The evangelist did not claim this, nor does he or someone else of the same name refer to the Crucifixion when he writes of water and blood in the first epistle (I John 5:6).

Many critics have stumbled over this curiosity and various explanations have been proposed. Origen could only tell Celsus that it was a ‘miracle’. La Cava believed that the water was lung fluid oozing on account of circulatory stagnation. Strauss believed that what had been seen was the separation of blood into placenta (sic) and serum and he suggested that the water might have come from the pericardium. However, serum is not readily confused with water, nor is it easily separated. Joyce thought that the ‘blood’ was actually wine from the sponge, but he had no explanation for the ‘water’. According to Stroud, the evangelist could have seen crassamentum (clots of blood) mixed with in clear serum, but only if the heart had previously ruptured and bled into the pericardium. He thought that intense emotion or shock could have produced the rupture and that alternative explanations do not agree with the Gospel account. Despite the endorsement of these views at the time by the renowned physician Sir James Simpson, who thought that death by rupture of the heart is accompanied by a piercing cry (this is not always so), Stroud’s views are not acceptable today. Renan thought that Jesus died of a ruptured heart vessel (sic). Strauss and others noted that blood does not flow from a dead body.

An anaesthetist (Primrose) proposed that the ‘water’ was the result of the ‘nervous upset of the blood vessels locally caused by the over-stimulating effect of the scourging by staves’. This, he claimed, results in the vascular system exuding a pale, straw-coloured fluid, which
floods the tissue and seeps into any cavity. This process increases rapidly for five or six hours and then slowly subsides. He believed that the scourging was mainly to the front of the body and that the fluid in the abdominal area drained into and filled the abdominal cavity, floating the intestinal contents upward. He estimated that, after six hours, just over a litre of fluid had accumulated and claimed, correctly, that the consequent dehydration of the rest of the body is always accompanied by thirst (John 19:28). He supposed that the spear was thrust into the lower abdomen and that it was this ‘clear’ fluid (water) that was observed (in fact effusions are yellowish in colour and more or less cloudy). He noted that it would be tinged with blood from the wound, but only if Jesus was still alive, and he claimed that the loss was twice the amount of plasma that blood donors are permitted to give at any one time. Primrose claimed that this spear wound, of itself, was not surgically important and that it would have healed rapidly assuming no septic infection. He thought that the cause of Jesus’ collapse was surgical shock, i.e. circulatory failure caused by loss of fluid. However, this shock had occurred unusually early.

Schulte noted that the event was ‘extraordinary’ and hardly likely to have been invented for theological reasons. He concluded that the likelihood of blood being fluid in the heart and vessels increases with time after death and that if the thorax wall is perforated immediately after death a large amount of blood issues. However, he could not explain the ‘water’. In the (London) Sunday Times of 25 April 1993, J Saklatvala proposed that, because the victim could not breathe properly, the ‘water’ was really water that had accumulated in the lungs.

John is the only Gospel to contain a curious quotation attributed to Jesus as he spoke in the Temple. He said, ‘he who believes in me, as the Scripture says, rivers of living water will flow out of his belly’ (John 7:38). The evangelist immediately added a note explaining that Jesus here referred to the (Holy) Spirit, which believers would later receive. However, several problems arise. First, although it is claimed to be a quotation from Scripture, no such saying is known either in the Old Testament or the Apocrypha. Second, why did the evangelist feel the

* Blood donors give whole blood, a quarter of it plasma.
† The loss of one litre is sufficient to cause such failure.
‡ This is not true; to release a large amount of blood the heart itself must be pierced.
need to comment? Was there a belief in a literal interpretation of this prophecy? In any case, the given explanation is not one that Jesus himself could have accepted; he did not know of a spirit being. Furthermore, according to the text, Jesus said that ‘living [i.e. fresh] water’ would flow out of the belly of the believer, not out of the belly of the Holy Spirit.

If this Scripture did exist, it is possible that it was thought to refer to the Messiah. Such an interpretation would be justified by regarding the rock that Moses struck in Sinai as a type of the Messiah. When the rock was struck, ‘living water’ poured out (Num. 20:11). A belief may have emerged that when Messiah-ben-Joseph was struck down, fresh water would arise from his body. Thus the reference to water in John 19:34 may have been interpolated from the prophecy.

Arguments against this explanation are not only that the prophecy cannot be traced, but that, as it is quoted by Jesus, it does not apply to him as Messiah. Also the evangelist does not quote it where it would make most sense, among the prophecies that he claimed were fulfilled during the Crucifixion (John 19:36–37).

There remains the possibility that the evangelist really did see something like water pour out of Jesus and that he saw it as fulfilment of the unknown prophecy. One of the actions of opium is a general retardation of the loss of body fluids, causing the accumulation of fluid in the stomach. Another result is the loss of saliva and Jesus’ cry of thirst might be understood in this light. If the coup de grâce penetrated the stomach, the accumulated liquid would be released. Perhaps this is what the observer saw. Gruber claimed that ‘blood and water’ is a traditional idiom from the ornate Arabian language intended to emphasize a certain happening, as in ‘sweats blood’. He observed that the German equivalent is ‘sweats blood and water’ but did not appear to realize that this expression may itself derive from the Gospel. He thought that the evangelist was only stating that a great deal of blood poured out of Jesus (Kersten & Gruber 1994:251).

This wound may have been the real and only cause of Jesus’ later death. There was very grave danger of infection in such a wound and death from peritonitis was highly probable within a few weeks. He may also have died from loss of blood. Jesus must have expected that he would be spared the coup; that it was not necessary to ‘kill’ a dead per-
son. But he had not reckoned with Roman efficiency. Perhaps the execution squads were in the habit of administering the *coup* to all those removed prematurely from the crosses, whether or not they appeared to be dead. Indeed, Joseph of Arimathea’s desperate attempt to obtain the body after the opium had taken effect may have been on account of his concern that a fatal *coup* might be administered. But Joseph failed and Jesus was doomed. It was sheer bad luck. A Roman soldier had put a spoke in the wheel of fate. All through his life Jesus had taken care to see that what he did was in accordance with Scripture, even though he had to struggle to ensure fulfilment. But as soon as he swallows the opium, the moment he loses control of events, fate takes a course of its own and undoes all his work. As Schweitzer (1954) put it, ‘soon after that [the appearance of the Baptist] comes Jesus, and in the knowledge that he is the coming Son of Man lays hold of the wheel of the world to set it moving on the last revolution which is to bring all ordinary history to a close. It refuses to turn, and he throws himself upon it. Then it does turn; and crushes him.’ Thirty-three years’ dedication to working out God’s plan have perished at a stroke. This little act ruined his life’s work. Many give reasons why Jesus died, usually some sort of self-sacrifice. The simple truth is that he died as the result of an accident.

The idea that Jesus did not die on the cross goes back at least to Annet (1744), even though, as Renan observed, there is no record that the Jews claimed that Jesus revived. Strauss, faced with the choice that either Jesus was not really dead or he did not really rise again, claimed that rationalism favoured the former. He was scornful of explanations in which Jesus remained conscious and preferred the idea that he revived. However, he was inclined to doubt Jesus’ revival rather than his death. He noted a suggestion by Xenodoxien (unknown) that Jesus’ disciples planned to produce the appearance of death by means of a ‘potion’ and that he would be revived after early removal from the cross.
THE SUPERSCRIPTION

In the Roman Empire, condemned criminals were identified by an inscription placed at their place of execution so that everyone might know both the name of the criminal and the nature of the offence. It consisted of a board smeared with white gypsum on which the words were written in black. It was usually hung about the criminal's neck on the way to execution and subsequently fixed to the cross over his head. Jesus' crucifixion was no exception.

All the Gospels agree that a superscription was placed over Jesus' head and that it included the words 'the King of the Jews'. Matthew adds the words 'this is Jesus' and John the words 'Jesus the Nazarene'. This is consistent with the notion that the superscription consisted of two parts, first the criminal's name and second the offence. In this case the name was 'Jesus the Nazarene', as John claims. The offence was claiming to be king of the Jews, which is how the priests wanted Pilate to phrase it (John 19:21). Pilate, infuriated at having his hand forced by the priests, retaliated by wording the inscription as if Jesus were king of the Jews, thereby showing the Jewish nation how Rome deals with usurpers. Since the priests took the matter seriously, then so did he. Zeitlin speculated that the priests feared that Pilate might use the *titulus* (the offence) against them; it implied that Jesus had been recognized as king.

John tells us that the superscription was written in three languages – Hebrew, Latin and Greek (John 19:20). It is usually believed that the superscription, whatever its form of words, was written out in the three languages. However Winter thought that it was all in Greek. A very large board would have been needed to repeat 'Jesus the Nazarene; King of the Jews' in each of the three languages and it is doubtful that this interpretation is correct.

We are told that Pilate wrote the title (*titulus*) and the implication from the priests' complaint is that he wrote only the offence, 'king of the Jews'. He would have written this in Latin. If part of the superscription was in Hebrew, it was not written by Pilate. We may suppose that the priests were permitted to write Jesus' name and that they did so in Hebrew or Aramaic. If Greek was used, it was surely to translate all or part of the words already written in Hebrew or Latin. Latin was the only language on the superscription that was not understood by the people and it was therefore the only one in need of translation. Consequently someone must have translated the Latin *titulus* into Greek. The result would have been as follows:*

| Yeshua Nazarene [in Hebrew]         | יְשׁוּאָ נָזָארֵה |
| King of the Jews [in Latin]         | REX·IVDÆORVM |
| King of the Jews [in Greek]         | ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣΤΩΝΙΟΥΔΑΙΩΝ |

This layout may account for the differences between the Gospels. Mark records only the part written in Greek or Latin. John records all parts, confirming the view that the Gospel originated with a Jew, possibly the disciple of that name. The Greek text of John (19:20) even has the languages in the above order (the King James text, for reasons unknown, states Hebrew-Greek-Latin). The front cover of this book attempts to show how the Superscription board may have appeared, albeit in white on black.

*Traditional representations of the Crucifixion usually show the Superscription 'INRI', standing for the Latin Jesus Nazaraeus Rex Judaeorum].
WHEN DID JESUS DIE?

This may not seem to be an important question. Surely it is more important to establish what happened to Jesus, rather than when it happened. However, according to Schonfield (1974), we can and must fix the year of the Crucifixion because it has a bearing on the whole course of events in early Christian history down to the fall of Jerusalem in 70. Apart from that, if Jesus and the Nazarenes chose a particular year for the death of Messiah-ben-Joseph, it would be important to know which year that was and why it had been chosen. If it can be shown that the year in question had special significance and was more appropriate than others, then the thesis that the Nazarenes followed a complex and carefully laid plan would be reinforced.

The usual method of determining the year involves the use of astronomy. Accepting that the Crucifixion took place on a Friday, an attempt is made to find a year in which the date given in the Gospels for the Crucifixion fell on a Friday. Unfortunately, while the synoptic Gospels agree on 15 Nisan, John claims that it was 14 Nisan. Astronomy is asked to determine in which of the years between 26 and 36, the duration of Pilate’s governorship, 14 and 15 Nisan fell on a Friday. By making an assumption about when the new moon was first visible, it has been established that 15 Nisan fell on a Friday only in 27, too early, and 14 Nisan only on 7 April 30 and 3 April 33 (Doyle). Klausner (1925), under the impression that the astronomical calculations showed that 14 Nisan fell on a Friday only in 33, believed that the Crucifixion fell on Friday 14 Nisan in 30. He believed that an error of one day had been made. Humphreys and Waddington agreed that the choice lies between 30 and 33 and selected the latter on the strength of a lunar eclipse that, they believed, explained a reference (Acts 2:20) to a blood-coloured moon, but the only lunar eclipse in 33 was on 27 September. However Peter (or Luke) might merely have been quoting from Joel without any knowledge of the eclipse (27 September 33). Renan and Ogg accepted 33, as did Reade. Because he thought 33 made the chronology of the apostolic age ‘almost impossibly tight’, John Robinson (1985) opted for 30, as did Sanders (1993:250). Goguel (1933) believed that the year was 28, supporting his chronology by reference to the death in 44 of Agrippa. However he confused Agrippa I with Agrippa II and ignored the fact that Felix and Festus are also reference points. He thought that the Agrippa of Acts 25:13 was the same Agrippa who died in 44. But the Agrippa of Acts must be he who died in 93. Stauffer believed that Jesus was crucified in 32 and Schweitzer (1968) put it in 30.

Based on the assumption that John the Baptist died in 35, Schonfield believed that Jesus died in 36, the last possible year. He based this assumption on the belief that Herodias’ first husband was the Philip who was the son of Herod the Great and Cleopatra of Jerusalem. This Philip died in 34. However Herodias’ first husband was a Herod, sometimes called Philip, the son of Herod the Great and his third wife Mariamne, the second of that name. We do not know when this Philip died, but it was not before Herodias’ marriage to Antipas. John the Baptist criticized Antipas’ marriage because Philip still lived and had not divorced Herodias. Therefore Schonfield’s chronology is based on false assumptions, which are also made by Lane Fox (1991:33).

We ought to ignore neither the astronomical evidence nor the opinion of Ogg, the acknowledged expert. His conclusion, that the Crucifixion occurred in 33, must surely be decisive. Doyle showed that 33 is the most likely year and that year is accepted by the Vatican. According to Schonfield, 33 was a sabbatical year. This is consistent with the proposition that there was a plan that Jesus should be crucified in that year.
9 Aftermath

Burial

All the Gospels (e.g. Mark 15:43) tell us that the body of Jesus was obtained by Joseph of Arimathea, a mysterious figure who leaps briefly across the stage of this drama. It appears that he was a rich Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin. He was also a secret disciple of Jesus (John 19:38). This may mean that he was also a Nazarene. We already know that Jesus had a rich and powerful friend in Jerusalem. Perhaps it was Joseph’s Upper Room that was used for the Last Supper. Joyce maintained that Arimathea is equivalent to ‘areimeh’ near Capernaum and that Joseph was Jesus’ uncle and the Joseph of the Birth Narrative. Perhaps Joseph was Jesus’ real father and perhaps, as Messiah, he really was ‘ben-Joseph’ (son of Joseph). Harrison portrayed Joseph as a wealthy banker and the father of John the Baptist. Winter claimed that Joseph was a historical person, a member of the lower Beth Din, whose duty it was to ensure that the bodies of executed persons were decently buried before nightfall. However, Craveri thought him an invention to show that Jesus was removed to avoid the curse of God.

It may well have been Joseph’s official responsibility to bury Jesus, but he may also have been a Nazarene and party to the plan. Indeed, if he had such a responsibility, it would have made excellent ‘cover’ for his interest in the operation. Jesus needed someone to ensure that he was removed from the cross to a place of security. What could be more secure than a tomb?

Mark tells us that Joseph approached Pilate to ask for the body and that the latter was amazed to hear of Jesus’ premature death. He had to ask the centurion for confirmation (Mark 15:44). John tells us that the priests approached Pilate to ensure that the victims were killed and removed before nightfall (John 19:31). Now if Pilate had been approached by the priests before Joseph’s request, he would not have been surprised that Jesus was dead. But if the surprise was genuine,
then at the time of Joseph’s request the priests had not yet arrived. But in that event, the *crurifragium* had not taken place and Jesus’ ‘death’ had not been discovered. How then did Joseph know that Jesus was ‘dead’? Wells considered these two accounts ‘irreconcilable’, but without explaining how a myth can contain contradictions.

Surely we have to conclude that both Joseph and the centurion knew of Jesus’ death before either Pilate or the priests. This leads to the conclusion that the Nazarene who administered the opium to Jesus waited until he saw that it had taken effect and then hurried to tell Joseph. How else would Joseph know of the death before it was reported to Pilate by the execution squad? But Joseph cannot have obtained the body before the *crurifragium* or before the priests approached Pilate. Perhaps Joseph went with the priests and asked for the body while they were asking for the victims to be executed. Perhaps, after being informed or after seeing that Jesus had taken the opium, Joseph asked the squad commander for the body and, after he found that he could not obtain it without Pilate’s permission, made the commander go with him to the *praetorium*. Hence it was that the centurion was in the *praetorium* when Joseph made his request. Gruber thought that the centurion was a follower of Jesus and that he was responsible for preventing the *crurifragium* (Kersten & Gruber 1994:248). Later perhaps, the priests arrived to demand execution and removal of the bodies; they had no reason to know of Jesus’ early demise. Joseph may have had to wait until after the *crurifragium* before he could obtain the body. Whatever the sequence of events, it seems clear that Joseph was ready and waiting for the body and that he attempted to obtain it as quickly as possible. Joseph was an essential rung in Jesus’ ladder to the throne of Israel.

It must have been known that a tomb would be available. Gruber suggested that Joseph purchased the garden and built the tomb especially for Jesus’ recovery. He asked why Joseph, who came from Arimathea near the Samarian border, would want to be buried in Jerusalem (Kersten & Gruber 1994:251). Whether or not the tomb was Joseph’s matters less than the fact that it was there and that Jesus, like Lazarus, was entombed. Jesus needed a tomb as a ‘recovery room’. As Gruber observed, what better place for recovery was there than the tomb of a person believed dead (ibid.:243)? It is possible that the
choice of burial in the prepared tomb of a rich man was arranged by Jesus as deliberate fulfilment of the prophecy ‘they made his grave … with a rich man in death’ (Isa. 53:9).

The tomb was in a garden beside the site of the Crucifixion (John 19:41). In fact the ‘skull hill’ site does contain tombs. One such, ‘the Garden Tomb’, was found there about 25 years before General Gordon’s discovery. Graves and Podro claim that it was found in 1849 by one Thenius. Parrot claims that it was discovered in 1867 and Lane Fox (1991:248) says that it was ‘picked out’ by Claude Conder of the Palestine Exploration Fund. It cannot be said that The Garden Tomb is that in which Jesus lay, although it is old enough. There were probably several such tombs. Originally the tomb was partly below ground level, requiring one to stoop to look through the window just as Peter did (John 20:5). It consists of a small antechamber divided from the inner chamber by a low wall, with one loculus complete, a second half-finished and possibly a third. The finished loculus even has a separate place carved out for the corpse’s head (see John 20:7) (Adam).

Joseph was assisted in the burial by another Pharisee and Council member, Nicodemus. He had already met Jesus ‘by night’ (John 3:1–2) and had defended him (John 7:50–51). One may suspect that he too was part of the Nazarene network. He and Joseph brought a large quantity of mixed spices, aloes and myrrh.* Joyce suggested that they also brought medicaments and clothes for Jesus, but see below.

The Gospels claim that Jesus was wrapped in linen or, according to John, ‘in sheets with the spices, as is the custom with the Jews …’ (John 19:40). It is true that such spices were traditionally placed in grave-clothes as a form of embalming and to act as a deodorant and disinfectant. However Gruber (1994) pointed out that it was the custom to wash and oil the corpse, cut its hair and tidy and dress it, covering the face with a cloth. In particular, washing was vital and could be done on the sabbath. He pointed out that there is mention of neither washing nor oiling and that John describes a burial that openly contravenes the custom. He observed that ointments and tinctures of aloe (aloe vera) and myrrh were commonly used for the treatment of injuries and concluded that this is why they were brought. If Jesus was

* The 100 pounds quoted by John is merely symbolic.
still alive, his wounds needed treatment and washing would only have made them bleed. Joseph and Nicodemus were intent on reviving Jesus, not burying him (Kersten & Gruber 1994:237). Primrose thought that the body was not washed because of shortage of time and that the herbs and bandages were not applied. Instead, the shroud was spread with an ointment or paste of aloes and myrrh to ‘cleanse’ the material. This suggestion was evidently devised to offer an explanation for the Shroud of Turin, which Primrose thought genuine. Gruber, also intent on justifying belief in the Shroud, thought that the spices rubbed off Jesus’ body onto the linen.

Because the place where Jesus had been laid was visible from the tomb door (John 20:5), Gruber argued that the burial could not have been completed. A fully prepared body would have been pushed into a recess (kôk) at the rear of the tomb and invisible from the door. He took this as further evidence that there was no intention to bury Jesus (ibid.:231–2). In fact the body may have been left on a ledge awaiting final preparation for burial.

The Gospels show evidence that Joseph and Nicodemus believed that Jesus was not dead, indeed that they did not expect him to be dead and that they were intent on helping him to survive. However, if Jesus had been speared, the wound could have been discovered during treatment and the danger that Jesus was in, if he was not already dead, might have been realized. Perhaps Joseph and Nicodemus thought that they could save Jesus if he were to be treated immediately. But they could hardly remove a ‘corpse’ for emergency treatment. They had to leave him in the tomb. Worse, the approach of the sabbath meant that they could not return for twenty-four hours. They may have departed in despair; Jesus lay dying or already dead in a tomb from which he was supposed to emerge alive.

Mark and Luke both report that Mary Magdalene and Jesus’ mother later brought spices to the tomb and Mark claims that they intended to anoint the body, implying that they also brought oil (Mark 16:1; Luke 24:1). Although both Gospels report that the women observed the burial, the report suggests that they were ignorant of the actions of Joseph and Nicodemus.
The empty tomb

Jesus was convinced that, in order to fulfil prophecy, he must remain entombed for exactly three days and three nights. He believed that this was what Scripture foretold and he arranged for Lazarus to be buried for this period of time. Consequently it must have been essential to his programme that he would emerge from the tomb, revived or ‘resurrected’, sometime on the morning of the second day of the week (Monday). Woolston (1727–30) noted that the ‘third day’ was Monday. Jesus would have been entombed for the nights of Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

We may imagine that the Nazarenes would have gathered at the tomb and opened it with much publicity. They would have unwrapped Jesus and brought him out, proclaiming him as the Messiah-ben-David, the new ruler of Israel and the world. The ancient prophecies and also his own would have been fulfilled and he would have shown that God could perform miracles to accomplish his will. Even death could be conquered and he would have given hope to all his followers that they too would be resurrected in a similar fashion to live again in the kingdom.

However we are told plainly that the tomb was found to be empty by the morning of the first day of the week (Sunday). Moreover, tradition has perpetuated celebration of this day as the day on which Jesus was ‘resurrected’. Jesus can have been in the tomb for only two nights at the most. This discrepancy was first noted by Pearce (1729). Annet wittily observed that ‘two nights and one day can never be three nights and three days, nor can any man make them so, though he preach three days and three nights about it’. Reimarus was also sure that the full period of entombment had not elapsed by the Sunday morning. Annet asked if, as Jesus stated (Matt. 12:39), this sign was the only one that the wicked generation around him would be given before the judgement, what becomes of Jesus’ claims and authority when the sign did not appear?

Some have argued that because of a figure of speech (synecdoche) that allows part to be put for the whole, Sunday was ‘the third day’ (Le-land; Bullinger 1898). Thiering (1992) claimed that ‘the third day’ meant the third day of the week, i.e. Tuesday. Sherlock used this
specious argument. Since Jesus was buried just before dusk on the Fri-
day, a very little of that day may be counted and since he could not
have been removed before the end of the sabbath (Saturday), he could
have remained entombed for a short period on the Sunday. But, except
where he also spoke of three nights, Jesus never forecast that he would
be buried ‘for three days’. Elsewhere he spoke of ‘the third day’, quite a
different matter. Powell thought the verse an interpolation but he failed
to explain why an interpolator would write about three nights when
there was a general belief that Jesus was entombed for only two nights
at the most.

Synecdoche cannot be employed ordinally; it must be used cardin-
ally. The original text of Esther 4:16–5:1 explains that the ‘third day’
of verse 5:1 is after three days, ‘night and day’ (4:16), not ‘night or day’
as in the AV. In I Samuel, one may find ‘three days ago’ (30:13) ex-
plained as ‘three days and three nights’ (30:12). Thus ‘after three days’
must also mean ‘after three nights’ and the third day must follow the
third night. The Jewish ‘day’, which begins at sunset, includes a night.
Sunday has been taken to be the ‘third day’ only because it was be-
lieved that Jesus was resurrected on that day and that he ‘rose’ in ac-
cordance with his prophecy. Bullinger later changed his mind. In his
Companion Bible (undated: Appendix 144), he stated that ‘when the
number of “nights” is stated as well as the number of “days”, then the
expression ceases to be an idiom, and becomes a literal statement of
fact’.

Those who maintain that the Sunday was ‘the third day’, still have
to explain a prophecy (Matt. 12:40) that mentions three nights. They
are forced to conclude that this latter phrase is unhistorical (Strauss).
Nevertheless, some cannot believe that the Church would have made
such a mistake (Borsch). Strauss observed that it is scarcely a tenable
argument that Jesus cannot have spoken of three days and three nights
because he lay in the grave one day and two nights. Goguel (1953)
thought that Matthew 12:40 is the true primitive gospel. Helms
(1989:132) concluded that Matthew imputed the quotation from Jon-
ah, even though it was in conflict with his own resurrection narrative.
That these words are in direct conflict with the evidence indicates that
they are indeed original, that they were really spoken by Jesus. Believ-
ing this, neither the evangelists nor later redactors were prepared to omit them.

However they only make sense if Jesus was removed from the tomb earlier than expected. Matthew tells us that, on the sabbath, the priests asked Pilate to guard the tomb in case the disciples stole the body and pretended that Jesus really had risen from the dead. Pilate refused to let them have Roman guards, but suggested that they use the city’s Jewish guards. Matthew claimed that these guards were later petrified by the Resurrection, which they witnessed, on the Sunday morning. Later the guards were bribed to say that the disciples had stolen Jesus while they slept. They were told not to worry if the matter came to Pilate’s attention, implying that there would be no punishment for their imaginary crime (Matt. 27:62–66; 28:4,11–15).

As the evangelist noted, Jews have, since that time, claimed that the disciples stole the body. Guignebert (1935) concluded that the story was an invention to counter this accusation. Reimarus held the same view, suggesting that, if it was true, the apostles would have used it as evidence. He thought it contradictory that the priests were supposed to know anything about the forecast of resurrection and that they would hardly defile themselves during the feast. He also noted that the women appear to have been ignorant of the guard. However Strauss pointed out that, if the story was invented by the Jews (priests), it was not well thought out. Such a guard would have prevented theft. He concluded that, while Jews had claimed that the disciples had stolen the body, the Church had invented the story of the guards as a counter-argument. Klausner (1925) believed that the account ‘must be early’. It is unlikely that Caiaphas was ignorant of Jesus’ forecast of resurrection; it was his business to know everything about trouble-makers. Moreover Jesus had spoken openly of rising after three days (Mark 8:31–32). As for defilement, the priests avoided this by asking Pilate to meet them outside the praetorium (John 18:28). Since the women lived in Bethany, it is likely that they were ignorant of the guard, if there was one.

If the story is contemporary, one may ask how the priests expected anyone to believe that the disciples had stolen the body if the guards had to claim that they were asleep at the time. How could they be sure what happened to the body? The priests’ explanation is clearly prepos-
terous; they could not have invented such a tale. If the priests could not have invented it, how could the evangelist have done so? However, it is certain that the evangelist did invent the tale in which guards witnessed a miraculous resurrection. Who would believe that Jewish guards who had witnessed such a supernatural event could be bribed to say that the disciples had stolen the body?

Although the priests’ explanation is not credible, there may be some truth in it. If guards were instructed to watch the tomb, who were they and where were they posted? Pilate referred to the guards that were posted at the city’s gates; guard rooms were built into and over the deep, arched entrances through the massive walls (Daniel-Rops). The guards at the Damascus Gate may have been instructed to keep a watch on the tomb, which was about 250 yards (230 metres) away. Surely they did not leave their post at the gate to stand by the tomb all night. During the night, the city gates were closed, with the guards inside, although perhaps able to look out from their rooms. Unless it was cloudy, the tomb may have been visible by moonlight.

Since the guards changed three times during the night, there might have been a failure to pass instructions or perhaps the guards did fall asleep. Surely the latter is credible. Alternatively, since both Joseph and Nicodemus were Councillors, they could have arranged for the guards to be distracted for the brief period necessary to open the tomb and remove Jesus. Whatever happened, it is clear that the tomb was opened and the body removed. It is also clear that the guards had not witnessed the removal.

Now the priests’ worst fears were confirmed and it was necessary to counter rumours that the Nazarene had been resurrected as he promised. Indeed, they would need to bribe the guards to say that the disciples had stolen the body and to compensate them for the loss of reputation in pretending or admitting that they had been asleep at the time. It was a lame story, but the best one available.

It cannot be determined whether or not a seal was set on the stone door of the tomb (Matt. 27:66). Sometimes tombs were secured in this way. However, if such a seal were broken, it was not significant in itself. Those who removed Jesus made no attempt to roll the door back into

* There was a full moon that night.
position. Why should they? If there was a seal, it was already broken. Again, if there was no seal, what purpose was served by closing the door? If there was a need for haste in removing the body, it is understandable that no one bothered to close the door. Haste is indicated by the abandoned grave-clothes (John 20:5–7). Woolston (1721) supposed that there was a pact between the chief priests and the disciples that the seal on the stone should not be broken for three days and that breach of the pact was proof of imposture. Pearce also suspected imposture.

Helms noted that Mark merely told of the discovery that the tomb was open, perhaps because he believed in a resuscitated corpse, for whom the door had to be open. But Matthew told how an angel opened the tomb to show that it was empty, implying that Jesus had some kind of spiritual body for which a closed door was no obstacle (Helms 1989:137). There is no doubt that Matthew elaborated and developed a primitive gospel, but it does not follow that the primitive gospel itself is an invention.

It seems clear that Jesus, alive or dead, was removed from the tomb sometime between dusk on the Saturday, when the sabbath ended, and dawn on the Sunday. Darkness was necessary for such an operation.

Guignebert (1935) noted six possible explanations for the empty tomb: removal by the Jews (Renan and Reville); removal by Joseph of Arimathea (Holtzmann); removal by another disciple (Renan); removal by the women; removal by the owner of the tomb; and revival of Jesus. He thought that Jesus was buried in a common pit and that there never was an empty tomb. Both he and Goguel thought it futile to attempt to explain the empty tomb, although the latter noted that the fact that the body had been stripped argued against theft (Goguel 1953). Annet, Woolston and Reimarus all thought that the disciples were responsible and that they tried to make it appear that Jesus had risen as prophesied. Both Muggeridge and Whitaker believed that common thieves stole the body, although neither explained why the body itself should be thought valuable. Klausner (1925) assumed that Joseph removed the body because he thought it unfitting that one who had been crucified should remain in his ancestral tomb. Thorne had Joseph hide the body in another secret tomb behind the first one and
then plaster up the entrance.* Read told of a hoax that pretended that the Romans (sic) smuggled Jesus’ body out of the tomb hidden in a storage jar and that they built it into a cistern beneath the Temple. Wilson thought that the body was removed and buried elsewhere by Jesus’ own family. Voysey, disagreeing with Reimarus whom he edited, proposed that Jesus revived in the tomb and escaped disguised as a gardener (Reimarus 1879). Both Moore and Lawrence had a similar idea and Thiering (1992) was convinced that Jesus survived into his sixties. Baigent thought Jesus, after recovering from crucifixion, was still alive in 45 and travelled first to Egypt and then to Narbonne, France (2006). Morison, who took unnecessary pains to prove that the tomb was empty, thought that, as a respected member of the Sanhedrin, Joseph would not need to have removed the body secretly and that Jesus could not have been carried far in the dark. Moore had Joseph carry Jesus half a mile (1 km). Moorcock used the idea that some doctors (sic) stole the body in the belief that it might have special properties. Martin suggested that the rescuers expected Jesus to be alive and that they unwrapped him to assist him to walk again. Indeed, why would they unwrap him? If they were in haste, why waste time unwrapping the body? If Jesus was still comatose, he could not walk. Does it indicate that he could walk? In the opinion of Helms (1989:135f), Matthew concluded that the story of the empty tomb was structured on Daniel’s story of the lion’s den. Consequently, Matthew elaborated on Mark by borrowing more from Daniel. But if the evangelist could see a parallel and use it, then so could Jesus and the account could be accurate.

Clearly Jesus could not have opened the door by himself; it took two people and then only from the outside. Nor can Jesus have been conscious. Primrose thought that the cool tomb could have chilled Jesus, producing early signs of recovery like rigor or a shivering fit. He suggested that, if Joseph had seen this, he would have known that Jesus was not dead. He was sure that Jesus could not have survived a night in the tomb and for recovery must have been removed within an hour. Although the opium and the cool tomb are likely to have caused chilling, shivering would have been preceded by other signs of life such as breathing and movements. Rigors are caused by fever, while shivering

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* The 2000 film The Body is based on this idea.
is caused by a drop in ambient temperature. Thiering (1992) claimed that Jesus recovered from the effects of poison and was helped to escape by friends.

It is possible that Joseph and Nicodemus, ignoring the prohibitions of the sabbath, did remove Jesus during the Friday night, but only if the open tomb door was not visible to the public and the guards during daylight on the Saturday. That the tomb was found to be empty on the Sunday morning, does not preclude the possibility that it had been empty since the Friday evening. Few people would have been out and about on the sabbath.

Jesus was most probably removed from the tomb by those who put him into it, by those who knew that he was supposed to recover. But they may have faced a cruel dilemma. To fulfil the Scriptures, they should leave Jesus in the tomb until Monday morning. But if they had seen the wound, they knew that he could be dead by that day, if he was not dead already. A dead Messiah was no use to them. They could not ceremoniously produce a corpse. But if they rescued him in order to save his life, they would ruin the great plan and break the prophecy, the ‘only sign’. Clearly they decided on rescue. Perhaps they could treat the wound and save their master. But dead or alive, Jesus’ mission was finished; the Scripture was broken.

Resurrection?

Jesus’ body cannot have been taken into the city until dawn when the gates were opened. If he was taken into the city, he was probably taken to the house with the Upper Room, which may have been that of Joseph of Arimathea. Did Jesus survive that long? Did he survive at all? Do any of the accounts in the Gospels record genuine encounters with the revived Jesus?

Sanders (1993:278) could not see how to ‘get behind’ the resurrection stories. Others have had less difficulty. Klausner (1925) thought all the accounts were visions. Guignebert (1935) suggested that, after an illusory experience in Galilee, the disciples imagined that they saw Jesus in Jerusalem, but that somehow the latter came to precede the former in the Gospels. Wilson suggested that the person mistaken for Je-
sus was his brother James or another brother. The reports of Jesus being seen near the tomb may be explained, as Morison did, by suggesting that Mary Magdalene (alone according to John) saw the young man who fled ‘naked’ from Gethsemane. Perhaps a Nazarene remained at the tomb to explain to Mary what had happened to Jesus and to encourage the belief that he had been resurrected. Strauss repeated a suggestion that the women had, in the dim morning light, mistaken the white grave clothes for angels. Jesus himself could have been in no condition to walk about Jerusalem, certainly not to Emmaus.

Wells claimed that major discrepancies stamp all the resurrection narratives as legends (Hoffmann & Larue 1986:31); of course they are all legends, but some might be based on fact. He argued that the stories, instead of forming the basis of resurrection faith, all resulted from it (ibid.). On the story of the ascension, Smith noted that it fitted a belief that all the admired Roman emperors ascended de rigueur to heaven after their deaths; he claimed that Augustus’ ascension was attested to by the sworn witness of a praetorian guardsman (ibid.:50). In fact, Suetonius reported the man as having seen the image (effigies) of Augustus rising from the funeral pyre and this was almost certainly interpreted as a sign that his soul was joining the gods. The Romans did not routinely expect bodily ascension without death at this period, not even for emperors.

According to John, the disciples were assembled indoors on the Sunday evening ‘for fear of the Jews’ (John 20:19). Evidently they feared arrest by the priests. According to Mark, they gathered for a meal (Mark 16:14) and Luke tells us that this gathering was in Jerusalem (Luke 24:33). Suddenly Jesus came and stood among them.

While it could be argued that Jesus walked into the room from another part of the house (there were probably no internal doors), there are many reasons to reject the account. John’s version has Jesus speak of The Holy Spirit, demonstrating that it is an invention of the Early Church. Moreover, from John 20:29, it is evident that the purpose of the passage was to encourage belief among those who had not seen Jesus. Then Luke (24:37) speaks of the disciples thinking that they had seen a ‘spirit’, when the Jews did not believe in spirits. If Jesus had appeared, even just from another room, the disciples could have had no other thought than that it was Jesus himself. If fact it is Luke who re-
veals another prime purpose of this passage. According to him, Jesus goes to some trouble to show that he was not ‘a spirit’; he was ‘flesh and bones’ (the Jewish equivalent of ‘flesh and blood’). He even ate some broiled fish (the honeycomb does not appear in the Nestlé text). It is clear that these demonstrations of Jesus’ humanity were made to counter Docetism, the belief that Jesus was a spirit being who only seemed human. To us it is obvious that, if Jesus could pretend to be human, he could also pretend to have wounds and eat. However, the Church must have thought that its resurrection accounts were adequate to counter the heresy. Apart from telling us that it was written in the second-century, this passage shows that the incident is a fiction. Jesus did not appear alive to his disciples in a room in Jerusalem.

Even if he had so appeared, it is unlikely that he delivered the encouraging speech recorded by Mark. This commission to preach the gospel of the kingdom, with its immunity to snake bites, is reminiscent of the commission to the Seventy (Luke 10:1–20) and that to the Twelve (Matt. 10:1–23), of which it may be an echo. However these commissions are of doubtful authenticity. If Jesus had twelve disciples or even seventy it is possible that at some point he sent them out to preach that he was the Messiah and that the kingdom was imminent. However, since he had previously tried to avoid any impression that he could heal the sick, it seems strange that, before his Passion, he would dispatch disciples to do that very thing. Furthermore, their immunity to deadly stings would have been a considerable miracle, inconsistent with his statement that the only sign would be his Resurrection. Since such immunity was expected in the kingdom (Isa. 11:8), an evangelist probably thought that this ought to have happened. Nor, before the Crucifixion, could Jesus have asked the disciples to endure persecution in his name; he would not even have allowed them to broadcast his name. Clearly the commissions owe much, if not everything, to the later need of the Church to have Jesus’ own endorsement of its activities.

Schweitzer suggested that, earlier in his programme, Jesus dispatched his disciples to preach throughout Israel, believing that this would cause the kingdom to appear. When this plan failed, Jesus concluded that only the death of the Messiah (himself) could be the trigger that would release eternity. Whether or not this is a correct analysis, it may be concluded that some phrases in the commission are genuine
echoes of Jesus’ words. The forecasts, that those who remained to the end (of the age) would be saved (to live in the kingdom) and that the Son of Man would appear before the disciples had gone over all the cities of Israel (Matt. 10:23), seem to have more in common with Jesus’ programme than that of the Church. Likewise, a promise, probably intended to be understood in a physical sense, that Jesus would be with the disciples ‘all the days’ until the completion of the age (Matt. 28:20) and the disciples’ question as to whether or not he would, at that time, ‘restore the kingdom to Israel’ (Acts 1:6) seem to be genuine fragments.

However, none of this gives any cause to believe that Jesus was ever seen alive again after the Crucifixion. That the disciples never saw him in Jerusalem can be deduced from their reaction to the person they met at a lakeside in Galilee (discussed below). They questioned him as if they had never seen him (resurrected) before.

Another reason for believing that Jesus did not survive the Crucifixion, even though that was his intention, is the fact that he lay in the tomb for only two nights. Had he survived, he could not have continued with his mission after the discovery that a major prophecy had been broken. Not only would the prophecy have been broken; he would have been broken. Fate, which he thought required human help to accomplish and fulfil prophecy, would have shown itself indifferent to his cause. He would have had to abandon his mission.

Luke describes how Jesus was seen on the road to Emmaus, on the ‘third day since these things happened’. Since the account of ‘these things’ terminates with the Crucifixion, it may be supposed that the day was Monday 17 Nisan, the day Jesus intended to rise again. It appears that the person seen by the disciples was a Nazarene, for he knew that the Messiah had to suffer and the Scriptures that supported this belief (Luke 24:25–27). The disciples did not recognize this stranger (Luke 24:16) and only thought that it was Jesus when he had gone. Clearly this was a case of mistaken identity by devoted disciples who wanted to see their master again.

Did the disciples remain in Jerusalem or did they go to Galilee? Matthew believed that they departed into Galilee, where they saw Jesus on a mountain, ‘but some doubted’ (Matt. 28:16–17). Mark believed that they went ‘preaching everywhere’ (Mark 16:29) and does not men-
tion sight of Jesus again. Luke recorded that Jesus walked out to Bethany, where he vanished into heaven (Luke 24:50–51), leaving the disciples to return to Jerusalem, where they worshipped in the Temple (Luke 24:53). Later, in Acts, Luke declared that the disciples saw Jesus for forty days (Acts 1:3). John, after closing his Gospel at the end of chapter 20, added an account of a meeting in Galilee. His twenty-first chapter is an after-thought, but not necessarily unhistorical on that account. Schofield speculated that the chapter was added by the elders of the Church at Ephesus after John’s death.

Jesus had previously intimated his intention of returning to Galilee. In Gethsemane he had said ‘but after I am risen I will go before you to Galilee’ (Mark 14:28). He meant that he would go there and wait for them to return from their mission of witness, although it is possible that this statement is an interpolation. The young man in the tomb also seemed concerned to make the disciples aware that Jesus was going to wait for them in Galilee (Mark 16:7) and that they would see him there (Matt. 28:7). According to Matthew, Jesus himself said that his ‘brethren’ should go to Galilee, where they would see him (Matt. 28:10), although the account may be confused. Strauss realized that the directions to go to Galilee might be a later interpolation to justify the disciples’ presence in that region when they ‘saw’ him there. However, it seems likely that Jesus did intend to go to Galilee, to wait for the kingdom. Where else would he go? He could not wait in Jerusalem where such terrible events were expected. In Capernaum he could wait in relative safety for the return of the disciples from their tour of Israel. But did he get there?

According to Luke, the disciples stayed in Jerusalem, using the Upper Room (Acts 1:13) and preaching in the Temple (Acts 2:46). Peter in particular was bold enough to begin the mission given them all by Jesus, proclaiming that Jesus was the Messiah and that Israel should repent before the kingdom came. This brought him to the attention of Caiaphas and the priests (Acts 4:6), who interrogated him and only released him after it was clear that no charge would stick. Peter was told to keep silent about Jesus (Acts 4:16–18), but his refusal landed him again in detention (Acts 5:18). This time he was only released after discussion in the Sanhedrin (Acts 5:34–40), to the effect that if God was behind the disciples then it was foolish to resist them. But resist they
did; the priests continued to harass the disciples and their followers, even commissioning special investigators such as Saul (Acts 8:3). Sooner or later the disciples must have remembered that Jesus was supposed to be waiting for them in Galilee. It would not be surprising therefore that some of them went back there. Luke does not record such a visit, although he does tell us that Peter and John went to Samaria (Acts 8:14) and that Peter went everywhere (Acts 9:32). Their homes were in Capernaum or nearby and they must have gone to Galilee at least once.

It is reported that they decided to go fishing. They fished by night, but were unlucky. Near morning, in the half-light, they saw a figure of a man on the shore. This man called out, ‘children’ (a word Jesus never used for the disciples) ‘have you any fish?’ When the man heard that they had caught nothing, he told them to try the right side of the boat. After following his suggestion, they found a great many fish in the net, although the number is surely exaggerated. The similarity of this incident to that described by Luke (Luke 5:4–6) suggests some confusion; perhaps Luke’s account was plundered to enrich the story. John then thought that the great catch was a miracle and that it must be Jesus who stood on the shore. After all, they were expecting such an appearance. His spoken thoughts sent Peter over the side in haste to reach the shore, while the others brought the boat ashore. They found a fire burning, with bread and a fish, and they were invited to bring some fish and eat.

Despite the dawning light and the light of the fire, the disciples still could not recognize their master (John 21:12). Why should they need to ask who he was? Did they not see the face of their own familiar Jesus? While they were convinced that this person must be Jesus, nevertheless they could not recognize him and wanted him to identify himself. But the stranger never revealed his identity and the disciples never dared to ask him outright if he was Jesus.

Guignebert (1935) thought that, of all the ‘appearances’ in the Gospels, that in John 21 is most likely to correspond to a remembered historical fact, but he had no interest in the episode and questioned the identity of the figure by the shore. Strauss, commenting on claims that the phrase ‘you will stretch out your hands’ (v. 18) is a reference to crucifixion, pointed out that such an interpretation is impossible. It comes
before instead of after the girding (binding?) and leading away against the will. He concluded that the words contain nothing more than the commonplace of the helplessness of age contrasted with the activity of youth. Reimarus saw grave discrepancies in the lakeside appearance and nicely pointed out that Jesus himself had warned the disciples not to believe all reports of his reappearance. Goguel (1953) considered the account an amalgam of two separate occasions, one when Jesus ordered a lucky catch followed by a meal, and another when he revealed his nature to the disciples while breaking bread. Lehmann suggested that the evangelist transferred the story to the lake from Qumran, where it was an embarrassment. Van Daalen asked why, if Jesus had appeared to the disciples in Jerusalem and sent them to proclaim the gospel, they were fishing in Galilee. Schonfield (1965) thought that this person was the man charged with delivering Jesus’ message and that he had followed the disciples to Galilee.

After the disciples have eaten a meal with this stranger, he and Peter engage in a strange conversation during which the former says: ‘feed my lambs’, ‘shepherd my little lambs’ and ‘feed my little sheep’. The traditional interpretation of these words is that Jesus was speaking metaphorically, instructing Peter, in line with the commission of Matt. 16:18, to take care of the young Church as a shepherd takes care of his sheep. However there is a simpler explanation. If the mysterious man was not Jesus then he cannot have been talking about the Church, which in any case Jesus did not intend to found. Even though Jesus is occasionally reported to have spoken of people as sheep, a common metaphor, a man talking about sheep unmetaphorically is much more likely to have been a shepherd. He might simply have been taking a break from tending sheep, whose welfare still concerned him. It appears that he had left the sheep a little way off in the hills around the lake and that he was looking for someone to help him care for them. He singled out Peter and asked him if he loved him more than the rest (did). Later, he instructed Peter to follow him, back to the sheep. That the question was thrice repeated and the way Peter reacted only convinces us that here was no Jesus. As Peter pointed out, Jesus already knew the feelings of the disciples and would not have needed to ask such questions. The observation that old age brings incapacity (John 21:18) suggests that the shepherd was elderly and wanted Peter’s help.
because he realized that he would not be able to carry on with the work much longer. He was offering Peter the job, but wanted to be sure that Peter’s heart was in it. Peter was just about to follow the stranger away to the flock, when he turned and noticed John beginning to follow. ‘What about him?’ he asked the person he thought was Jesus. ‘If I wish him to remain here until I come [back], what is that to you?’ replied the shepherd. He intended to return to the fireside after he had shown Peter the sheep.

Two parties, the old shepherd and the young disciples, spoke without either understanding the other. They were entirely at cross purposes and one misunderstanding followed another without any of the participants realizing the confusion that existed. The confusion can have been magnified because of Jesus’ habit of employing the sheep metaphor; encountering a shepherd misled the disciples into believing that this really was Jesus.

Whoever he was, the author of this chapter did admit that there had been a misunderstanding; Jesus had not promised that John would never die, only that he must wait until Jesus returned (at the kingdom?). Schofield suggested that the Ephesian elders added this story and these words in particular to show that John’s death did not break a promise made by Jesus that John would never die, apparently a common belief at the time. However, according to Schofield, the anonymous author did not know the true meaning of the words. Even if the story was not written by John, it may have been told by him and remembered by his disciples after his death. Clearly John understood the words to mean that he would live to see the coming of the kingdom and the return of his master. But his death threw the Ephesian Church into confusion. One of Jesus’ major promises appeared to have been broken. The Church had to calm its members by adding the well-known story to the apostle’s Gospel, with an interpretation that Jesus had not promised that John would never die. However, since John had not remained until the ‘second Coming’, the Church’s explanation is unconvincing.

But one misunderstanding has been replaced by another. Understanding of events can be conditioned completely by the attitude in which they are approached. To the disciples, this was Jesus and everything the old man said made sense to them as the words of their mas-
ter. It shows how obedient they had been and how unquestioningly they had obeyed; they never doubted that their master knew what he was doing. The shepherd had unwittingly stepped into shoes so huge that they hid him completely. The disciples saw only Jesus; they wanted to see only Jesus. The shepherd surely considered that the way the disciples addressed him was rather odd. But he might have attributed this to the reverence for age. In fact it may have been their reverence that prompted the conversation about sheep. The disciples surely asked what they were to do, what service they could perform for their master now that he had returned to them. The shepherd may then have taken this as an offer of help; impressed by their enthusiasm and devotion, he took the opportunity to retire. We can only imagine with what difficulty Peter finally extricated himself from the duties of a shepherd.

It does seem likely that, although Jesus himself had nothing to do with it, John’s account of the Galilean incident is historical. Evidently the Galilean incident was the only occasion on which the disciples thought they saw Jesus alive after the Crucifixion. Consequently it may have been the basis for the other accounts. On this silly encounter is based the Church’s conviction that Jesus rose from the dead. Indeed, we now see that the disciples cannot have gone around Jerusalem just after the Crucifixion preaching Jesus’ resurrection. Only after the encounter with the shepherd can they have become convinced that Jesus was alive and only after that can they have returned to Jerusalem to preach.

**Mission impossible**

The disciples now thought that Jesus had, as he promised, seen them in Galilee. They did not know that Jesus’ intention had been to be with them permanently in Galilee and to wait for the manifestation of the kingdom about 40. They must have thought that Jesus was hiding himself and that the brief encounter by the lake had been for encouragement. They returned to their mission convinced that Jesus was in control and that the kingdom would come before they finished their task. They had been trained to preach the coming kingdom in the name of Messiah Jesus. This they did. The momentum that Jesus generated be-
fore his death was such that the disciples continued with the impossible mission. They continued on the course that Jesus had set even though it was the wrong course and the pilot was dead. He had not intended to die. He had intended to survive the ordeal of crucifixion, to lead the way to the new world, the kingdom of heaven. But he kept the disciples so ignorant of the plan that they could not tell that anything had gone wrong. Furthermore, he was always so confident in his predictions and always so careful to see that his predictions came true, that it cannot have occurred to the disciples that anything could go wrong. They were sure that, puzzling as Jesus’ disappearance was, it must have been intended. All they needed to do was to continue with their preaching and they would see their master in a few years at most. But time went by and nothing happened. Always they would have expected the imminent change that would vindicate their patience. Paul, who regarded himself as being as much an apostle as those whom Jesus appointed, spoke of the day in which God was about to judge the Earth (Acts 17:31) and thought that he would still be alive when Jesus returned (I Thess. 4:14). The author of Revelation, a Jewish Christian called John, but not John the apostle, who wrote in the reign of either Nero or Domitian, was also convinced that the kingdom was imminent. Some modern Christians maintain the same hope of imminent deliverance and have devised some ingenious explanations for the inordinate delay. Bullinger (undated), accepting that Jesus was killed at the end of the sixty-ninth ‘week’ of Daniel’s prophecy, believed that the final ‘week’ is suspended and still awaits its fulfilment. It was thought that we are living in a parenthetical period called ‘the Times of the Gentiles’ (Luke 21:24), in which Jerusalem is under Gentile control. These ‘times’ could be dated from about 587 BC, when Nebuchadnezzar sacked Jerusalem. The 70 ‘weeks’ of Daniel’s vision then cover a period of Gentile domination, the final seven years being suspended for some reason. But such a belief has been impossible since Jerusalem fell to Israeli troops in the 1967 war. The ‘times’ have ended, but the kingdom did not come. As Reimarus wrote two centuries earlier, ‘the openly appointed time for the second coming of Jesus has long passed by, and … consequently, one of the mainstays of Christianity is shown to be utterly worthless …’. However Christians will continue to devise ex-
cuses for the delay and to believe that Jesus is still alive, even though such a belief makes nonsense of his prophecies and purpose.

At first the disciples and their converts must have been called Nazarenes after their ‘dead’ leader. But gradually they came to be known as ‘christians’, first in Antioch (Acts 11:26). Followers of a notable person were usually designated by the addition of the suffix -iani to the name: thus Herodiani, Caesariani. Gradually the term stuck until it was gloried in by Christians themselves and a totally new sect had developed. The Christian Church arose like a phoenix from the ashes of Jesus’ abortive attempt to rule the world. He had no intention of founding such an organization.

### PENTECOSTAL PHENOMENA

As the disciples were gathered in a house (the Upper Room again?) for the Feast of Pentecost, seven weeks after Passover, there was a noise in the sky like a rushing wind and tongues of fire appeared to spring from people in the room. Moreover, they all began to speak in unknown languages (Acts 2:1–4). Who would invent such an account? On the other hand, how can it be explained?

The noise, which indeed could have been the sound of wind, and the flames could be connected if an electrical storm occurred, although only if the people had been in the open. Perhaps there was a whirlwind that was associated with intense electrical activity.

It has been suggested that textual confusion has arisen between ‘tongues of fire’ and ‘other tongues’ (see Jas. 3:6), although this seems unlikely.

‘speaking in tongues’, glossolalia, is not unknown in the modern world and is the product of intense religious emotion. The ‘tongues’ are always completely incomprehensible and nonsensical.

Luke tells us that all the visitors to Jerusalem, Jews from various part of the Levant, heard the disciples speaking in the language of their own country, although this implies that the disciples, still babbling, left the room and toured the city. It seems more likely that, while the ‘languages’ were not understood, they were thought to be those of other visitors. Thus everyone thought they were understood by someone else, while in fact they were not understood by anyone (I Cor. 14:2).

Other instances of glossolalia are recorded (Acts 10:46; 19:6). Some claimed to be able to interpret these strange languages (I Cor. 12:10) and it may have been thought that they were the languages of angels (I Cor. 13:1).

It is ironic that, in attempting to fulfil a (false) prophecy of Daniel that the Messiah would be killed, Jesus really did fulfil the prophecy. Unintentionally he fulfilled a prophecy that he would die when all the time he had been trying to avoid it. Fate, which he thought so co-operative, seems to have rejected him. There was no resurrection from his real death and no kingdom. For not only did he fail in his self-appointed mission, but he was mistaken regarding both the divine plan and the existence of God. It was all make-believe, a figment of the Jewish imag-
ination. A victim of his nation’s religious delusions, he had attempted to turn a myth into reality, fiction into fact. Even if he had survived, he would only have hastened the inevitable and fatal collision with Roman power. Renan thought that if Jesus had succeeded, he would have effected the ruin of the Jewish people. Jesus certainly would have died in such a conflict.

If Jesus died soon after the Crucifixion, why was this fact not made public by the Nazarenes? Further, why was no hint of the plan, which involved many other persons, released to the disciples? It seems likely that very few people knew of Jesus’ real death; perhaps only Joseph and Nicodemus knew. They must have known that the plan had misfired and that Jesus could not be who he thought he was. But what were they to do with this information? They would not want to tell the chief priests, who would have used it to discredit the disciples. But why would they not tell the disciples? How could they explain the use of opium and the intricate web that Jesus had woven? The disciples would not have believed the truth and would have thought that Joseph and Nicodemus were insane. If Joseph and Nicodemus were convinced that Jesus was in fact a false Messiah, they could not have convinced the disciples of this, at least not without Jesus’ body. Well, where was the body?

It seems possible that Jesus died in Joseph’s house in Jerusalem, perhaps while the disciples were still meeting there and preparing to commence their mission. Would Joseph have been heartless enough to show the disciples their master’s body just after he had, apparently, conquered death and sent them on their great commission? Surely not. It would have been an admission that he too had been deceived and the disciples might have thought that he had murdered Jesus. Better to keep quiet and dispose of the body secretly. Secrecy must have come naturally to a Nazarene, if that is what he was. Perhaps Joseph and his associates thought that, with Jesus dead, the disciples would abandon their work or that they would be deterred by failure or imprisonment. Surely the impetus would fail and there would be no need to worry that there had been a colossal mistake. How were they to know that the disciples had been so well brainwashed that they would convert thousands in Judaea and later millions throughout the world? How were they to know that the world’s most successful religion was just about to
flourish? By the time they saw the success that the disciples enjoyed and realized how many now waited for Jesus to return, it was too late. By Pentecost at least, the body would not have been recognizable and could not have been used to prove their case. Reimarus thought that the disciples deliberately waited until Pentecost for this reason before launching their campaign. By the time that the disciples, in a chance encounter with a Galilean shepherd, received reinforcement for the view that Jesus was still alive, it was certainly too late to produce the body. Nothing could have been done to halt the spread of the superstition.

No one need have thought that there had been a hoax. Lazarus and anyone else who knew of the use of opium may have believed, like Jesus, that it did indeed produce death. They would have known that Jesus had taken it and that he had planned to ‘die’ and revive afterwards. If they thought that he had survived the Crucifixion, they must have thought it impossible for him to die a second time. Apart from Joseph and Nicodemus, who knew that anything was amiss? The enduring belief that Jesus is still alive has been perpetuated by the ignorance of his followers. They were ignorant of the extent to which Jesus had to struggle to construct fulfilment of prophecy and of the fragility of that construction. Mainly they were ignorant of the resurrection drug and the fact that it did not cause death. They were also ignorant of the fact that Jesus really did die. Most of all they were ignorant of Jesus’ self-deception.

It could be argued that Joseph and Nicodemus used Jesus for their own purposes. While they were both Pharisees and may have been associated with the Nazarene sect, they were both members of a political body, the Sanhedrin. Was there then a political motive behind their interest? That rich and powerful men should have backed an obscure Galilean teacher is food for thought. Rabbinical tradition has it that Nicodemus was one of the three richest men in Jerusalem and yet he came to see Jesus ‘at night’. The rich do not spend their money to no purpose. They cannot have hoped for financial gain, at least not directly. But for all their money, they did not have control of Jerusalem or their country. They were in the hands of their rivals the Sadducees, who dominated the Sanhedrin and encouraged Roman rule. Spiritually and politically they were frustrated.
Then came Jesus. Not only did he tell them that the great revolution, the kingdom of God, was about to come, but he confided privately that he was the man who would rule in that kingdom. Nicodemus, at least, seems to have been convinced that Jesus was on a divine mission (John 3:2). Perhaps these masters of Israel were also convinced that Jesus was the Messiah and that he could prove it. He could and did fulfill the prophecies concerning the Messiah and he could even raise the dead. Perhaps they believed all he said and that it would be wise to co-operate with the future world ruler. Since they were rich, their prospects of power in the kingdom were poor or poverty. But if they helped this Jesus, perhaps he would reward them. Surely there would be money in the new kingdom? Better to help him in case they lost all their money and land. Jesus must have promised them something in return for the services they provided. Perhaps they thought that whether or not he was the Messiah, he could help them rout the Sadducees. If Jesus could be produced alive from his tomb after he had so spectacularly been ‘killed’ by the Romans, then they could confound the Sadducees. Not only would Jesus have shown that not even the mighty power of Rome could put him down, but he would have demonstrated that the Sadducees’ claim that there was no resurrection was false. Sadducean influence would fail and the Pharisaic party could seize control. Joseph and his Pharisaic friends might have hoped that, ultimately, they would control Israel, if not the Sanhedrin. With a popular movement behind Jesus, it did not matter what the Sanhedrin did. Jesus could be proclaimed king and be protected by a Zealot army raised in Galilee. Reimarus suggested that, had the people of Jerusalem followed Jesus and joined in proclaiming him king, he would have had all Judaea on his side; the High Court of Justice would have been overthrown and Jesus, together with his seventy chosen disciples, would have been placed in the Sanhedrin instead of the Pharisees (sic) and the learned scribes. It seems doubtful that Jesus really did appoint or send seventy messengers (Luke 10:1–17), but the correspondence to the total number of the Sanhedrin may be significant. Jesus would not have objected to such a scenario. He expected to be king. Nor was he opposed to the civil war that would ensue. ‘Do not suppose,’ he said, ‘that I came to bring peace on the land [of Israel]; I came not to bring peace but a sword.’ (see I Enoch 91:12). He came to divide families
(Matt. 10:34–36). He expected a great conflict, Israel’s time of trouble, before the kingdom came. It would be a conflict between those who stood for him and the kingdom and those who refused to recognize his claims. Among the latter would be the Sadducees and their supporters. He thought that he would bring division and fire to Israel (Luke 12:49, 51).

Jesus rose to fame at a time when it was expected that the Messiah would rise. He rose because he had prepared himself for service to God or because he was prepared by others and because he was in the right place at the right time. He rose because he was, accidentally or deliberately, chosen by John the Baptist and because this convinced him that he was the Chosen One. He thought that the divine lottery had selected him. He rose because he worked hard to make a real Messiah out of the Scriptures. The concept of the Messiah was a pious hope, a ridiculous myth built of centuries of frustration and submission to ‘heathen’ powers. But Jesus nearly made it work. Israel wanted a Messiah and he tried to give it one. No other pretender to this title, if there were any others, came near to convincing the nation that he was indeed the Son of Man. Jesus did his best to achieve the impossible, although he did not know that it was impossible. He was a false Messiah who did not know that he was false.

Jesus fell because he failed. Not only was he not who he thought he was, he was not the person the modern world knows. He was not born in 4 BC, nor in the reign of Herod the Great. He was not born in Bethlehem, nor visited by the Magi. His birth was not heralded by astro-nomical phenomena. He was not born, nor did he live, in Nazareth and he was not a carpenter. He did not walk on water, did not feed five thousand, did no healing, did not turn water into wine and was not transfigured. He did not raise the dead, nor was he himself so raised. Truly the Christ of the Church is a mythical figure, one that Jesus himself would not recognize.

But if Christ is a myth, Jesus is not. Jesus the Nazarene really lived and really died. But where the Church believes him to have been dead (on the cross) he was still alive and where the Church believes that he was alive again (after the Crucifixion), he was dead. Most of what Christians believe about Jesus is a myth and their Jesus is a myth. They do not recognize the real Jesus. Of course Christians are entitled to be-
lieve what they like to believe but they are not entitled to claim that all their beliefs are founded in history. We have seen that sense can be made of a real Jesus, a man who dared to play at God or at least to play at being God’s viceroy. Not only did Jesus have a motive, but he had a method and an opportunity. His motive was to be found in the Scriptures, which told him what ought to happen, and in John who pointed the finger of fate at him. His motive was his duty to God. His method lay in the critical use of opium; he found a substance that appeared as if it had been created for just this operation. His opportunity was given by the Roman presence in Judaea and their habit of punishment by crucifixion.

According to Luke, when the infant Jesus was presented in the Temple, Simeon declared that he (Jesus) was destined to cause the fall and rising again of many in Israel (Luke 2:34). In fact Jesus has caused many all over the world to fall into superstitious beliefs and to rise up, sometimes using force, against those who do not share those beliefs. Indeed it can be argued that Christianity has been and still is a disaster, causing widespread misery and suffering. Whatever good it has done is far outweighed by the harm it has caused. Without Jesus there could have been no Christian Church. Consequently Jesus himself is ultimately responsible for the evil done in his name; he expected to condemn many at the judgement. He rose and fell. Today many are still falling and rising in his name.
Appendix A: The search for Jesus

Many have attempted to solve the mystery of Jesus, to find the man behind the myth, to find who he was and what he did, and how it was that Christianity began. Naturally such questions do not spring readily to the lips of Christians, although some Christians have asked them, and it is understandable that the first questioners were opponents of Christianity. Insofar as the wild accusations of the faith’s opponents forced consideration of the not necessarily more reasonable claims of Christianity, their views constitute the beginning of the search. This search consists of questioning every Gospel statement, breaking it open and reducing it to a kernel, if there is one. According to the Gospels, this search began in the time of Jesus.

The claim that the disciples had stolen Jesus’ body (Matt. 28:15) was surely the first attempt at a rational explanation for the empty tomb, whether it was made at the time or was made later. It was certainly extant by the time Matthew wrote his Gospel. The first critics of the gospel story were Jews.

After Rome officially adopted Christianity, anti-Christian writings were drastically censored. Robertson (1953:89) noted that, to this censorship, we owe the loss of all but fragments of the anti-Christian works of Celsus, Porphyry, Hierocles and Julian. The work of Celsus, a Platonist philosopher, probably of Alexandria and writing between 177 and 180, is now completely lost, but his criticism is known from Origen’s reply (Contra Celsum), although Origen mistook this Celsus for Celsus the Epicurean, a friend of Lucian.

Celsus’ able attack anticipated modern criticism. It pointed out how Christianity was repudiated by Jews among whom it originated and claimed that the founder was a base-born adventurer, dabbling in magic, that passages in the Prophets, said by Christians to refer to Jesus, have nothing to do with him, that the gospel has been revised many times in the interest of propaganda, that the story of the Resurrection had pagan and mythological parallels, and that it rested on the
evidence of crazy women and dreamers, wishful thinkers or plain liars. Celsus also claimed that Christian teachers were mainly poor tradesmen who addressed their propaganda to women, children and slaves, and taught that wisdom is evil and folly good. He indicted Christianity as a secret and illegal society that venerated a recent ringleader of sedition who was disloyal to the Empire (ibid:202–3).

Hierocles, an Imperial governor who is thought to have had access to official sources, attacked Christianity at the end of the third century; he described Jesus as a bandit leader with 900 followers (ibid:93). Porphyry was a neo-Platonist philosopher and pupil of Plotinus who lived c. 223 to 305 and wrote a 15-volume treatise, the title of which translates as Against the Christians. It marked him as a fierce critic of the new religion and it was condemned to be burned in 448. Julian was the Roman emperor Claudius Julianus who ruled c. 331 to 363 and who, educated as a Christian, reverted to ‘paganism’ and attempted to revive polytheism throughout the Empire. His attack on Christianity is known today only in fragmentary citation, but he wrote that ‘the trickery of the Galileans’ had nothing divine in it and that it appealed only to rustics and was composed of fables and irrational falsehoods.

Apart from the apostasy of Julian, the recognition of Christianity by Constantine in 313 stifled all criticism for twelve centuries. During these ‘dark Ages’ the gospel dominated all life and was believed by the people to represent historical events. In fact ‘truth’ was measured by the Gospels, in that they were held to recount the most vital truths of all. The common folk at least believed that nothing in the whole world was more important than Jesus’ death and Resurrection.

It is understandable that, without universal education and access to the Gospels in their own language, the laity would remain unable to question the ‘old, old story’. But it is not so understandable that those who could read the Scriptures did not rebel. But they were indoctrinated during their education and training and corrected ever after if they showed deviation. However, the first recorded modern criticism was raised by clerics. Both Michael Servetus (Miguel Serveto, 1511–53) and Socinus (Laelius Sozzini, 1525–62) were theologians who denied the divinity of Jesus and regarded him merely as a prophet and the founder of a religion. They also denied the Trinity and held views similar to modern Unitarianism. Servetus was burned alive at Geneva on
the orders of Calvin, but Socinus seems to have survived, his doctrine being continued by his nephew Faustus Socinus (1539–1604) in Poland, Hungary and the Netherlands. The latter taught pacifist and anarchist doctrines similar to those of Tolstoy and his beliefs are known as Socinianism. But neither Servetus nor Socinus found any problems in the actual life of Jesus, nor had they discovered historical criticism. Neither during the Middle Ages nor during the Reformation did anyone ask, ‘what is the historical value of the Gospels?’, nor its corollary, ‘what was the historical character of Jesus?’ (Klausner 1925:75).

But the Reformation did produce an atmosphere in which vernacular versions of the Bible could be made available to the laity. So-called ‘heretical’ versions had circulated in Europe during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, although they had always been suppressed by the Church. However Protestant reformers thought that it was important to let people read the Scriptures for themselves and Luther himself led the way with his German version (from 1521). In England an English version was in use in churches from 1539, but it was not until the Authorized (King James) Version was published in 1611 that the British public really had access to Scriptures that they could study for themselves. However it was another century before the impact of this translation produced any vocal criticism.

This criticism arose first in England as deism. The father of deism is Lord Herbert of Cherbury (1583–1648); his work De Veritate (1642) propounds a natural religion without revelation. Deism arose out of the new consciousness brought about by world exploration and astronomy. This showed Christianity to be a local, tribal religion and deists taunted the orthodox with the fact of 300 million Chinese who had not even heard of Christ. Further, imagination was crushed by the revelations of Isaac Newton who was unconscious of the bearing of his discoveries on theology. Astronomy destroyed the Biblical cosmology, while geology destroyed the Biblical creation account and ridiculed the chronology of the Old Testament (Stephen 1902:82). Doubt spread among the laity. Not only could they read for themselves what the Bible said, they could see that it challenged science. If part of the Biblical account was erroneous, how could they tell what was true and what was false? Science began to challenge religion.
Deism proposed a ‘natural’ religion that, although it required worship of God, virtue and repentance in the hope of a future reward rather than punishment, had no room for either Jesus or Christianity. It was a religion without supernatural intervention and was concerned only with the relationship between mankind and God.

Theologians of the period, in England at least, also tried to adapt to the new situation created by science. Protestantism, more easily than Catholicism, accepted the new rationalism and its theologians thought that, by so doing, they were purifying their religion. They did not see the danger that they might vitiate their faith. Protestantism bent to the new wind of change and many great minds in the Church grappled with the problems created by the accusations of incoherent deists. Compared with the works of their opponents, the deist writings were ‘shabby and shrivelled little octavos, generally anonymous’ (ibid:86) and Swift observed that the deists’ ‘literary power would hardly have attracted attention if employed upon any other topic’. But the deists were laymen, not theologians; they were not illiterate, but they did not have the skill with words that came naturally to clerics, nor were they used to years of study before their works were born. Some produced only one work. They were not ‘experts’; they were ordinary folk who saw discrepancies in what the Church taught. Ever since, serious criticism has come from the laity and some of the questions asked by the early deists have remained unanswered to this day.

Deism ridiculed the external appearance of Christianity, the form of the religion and the organization of the Church. In later years the focus shifted to the content, the internal evidence of the New Testament. At first this criticism was limited to the plea that Christianity should not cling to a belief in miracles. Matthew Tindal (1657–1733) urged the absurdity of making Christian teaching depend upon a belief in miracles and belief in miracles on the truth of the Christian teaching (ibid:79). The deists sought to remove the mystery from Christianity so that it might be understood easily by all. John Locke the philosopher (1632–1704), who was not really a deist, called Christianity ‘reasonable’, and John Toland (1670–1722) claimed that it had no mysteries, no nonsense. A religion without mystery is a religion without God, but Toland did not draw the conclusion his beliefs implied; mystery was out, but the unseen God was still in. Locke reduced the Christian.
creed to one article, that all Christ required was acknowledgement that he was the Messiah. Thus did deism attempt to rationalize the outward forms of the Christian religion then in vogue in seventeenth century England; religion was more a way of life that required simplification and rationalization.

Early in the eighteenth century the debate gradually moved into the New Testament, particularly the Gospels. Anthony Collins (1676–1729) showed that the prophecies of the Second Coming of Christ had never been fulfilled, that Christianity was false if the prophecies have not been fulfilled and that it is absurd to show them to have been fulfilled typically. Collins was probably the first to realize that the author of Daniel lived at the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, a view held to this day. Lane Fox claimed that this was first noted by Porphyry in the third century and only ‘rediscovered’ in 1672 and then only accepted generally by scholars in the nineteenth century (1991:337). Chandler, Bishop of Lichfield (1668–1750), was a cleric who tried to keep up with the deists. In his *Vindication* (1728), he claimed that Christ foretold his resurrection from out of the Jewish Scriptures. He does not appear to have realized the implication of that statement: that Jesus could have deliberately modelled his life on Scripture. He also thought that the ‘star’ of Bethlehem was some ‘eccentric meteor or luminous appearance’. Thomas Woolston (1669–1731), who studied the miracles, showed them to be allegorical. He also claimed that the Resurrection did not occur and that it was an elaborate deception by the disciples. For these arguments, ‘poor mad Woolston, most scandalous of the deists’ (ibid:87) was imprisoned and fined.

In time the controversy gradually settled on the question of the Resurrection. Stephen wrote, ‘the fate of Christianity, in short, might be staked on the proof of the resurrection’ (ibid:238) and ‘men were either raised from the dead 1800 years ago or they were not’ (ibid:190). Both Zachary Pearce (1690–1774) and Peter Annet (d. 1768) dwelt on the evidence for and against the Resurrection and Bishop Sherlock (1678–1761) described an imaginary trial in which the witnesses to the Resurrection are examined.

In short, the deists denied the gospel miracles and tried to rationalize them. They held that Jesus did not raise the actual dead but awakened them from a lethargic sleep that had the appearance of...
death or that there was a conspiracy between such as were apparently
restored to life and between Jesus’ disciples, since the latter, seeing Je-
sus’ faith in his Messiahship weakening, wished to revive this faith by
means of the miracles that they engineered. Jesus’ own resurrection
was regarded by the deists as based on a phantom seen by visionaries
and dreamers or as a deliberate invention (Klausner 1925:75).

By 1750 the brief flowering of the deists in England was over. But
they had gravely disturbed the traditional beliefs and faith was never
the same. Conyers Middleton (1683–1750) had the last word by point-
ing out that stories of miracles only prove the credulity of the narrator.
Apologists were bewildered by the attacks and fell back on the Biblical
statements, the very facts that were in dispute (Stephen 1902:251).
Stephen noted that ‘apologists are seldom sufficiently aware to the dan-
ger of a purely defensive line of argument. They think that they can
give a sufficient answer in detail to every one of the objections urged
and they forget that the total impression left upon the mind of the
reader is apt to be that where so much requires to be explained away,
there must be something which cannot really be explained away’
(ibid:234). But they could not explain the miracles, least of all the Res-
urrection, and they were driven to make idiotic repetition of the faith.
The English deists, puny though they were, shook the established
Church in England and represent the first attempt in modern times to
rationalize the gospel; they laid the foundations upon which historical
criticism was later built.

From England, deism passed to both France and Germany. It was
taken to France by Voltaire, a disciple of the deists, who left England in
1728. While Voltaire did not write a life of Jesus, his views are clear
from his philosophical writings. Voltaire’s Jesus was ‘a child of Mary,
born out of wedlock, was sent away by the priest from the ranks of le-
gitimate children in the school and, in consequence, in later years
manifested animosity towards them. Having quarrelled with Judas, he
was denounced by him to the Sanhedrin, taken, stoned and crucified’
(Weinel and Widgery 1914:37).

Because of the doctrinaire attitude of the Catholic Church, no com-
promise between sceptics and clerics was possible in France; there was
outright conflict (Stephen 1902:89). More fertile was the soil of Protes-
tant Germany, where the Enlightenment flourished. It saw the first sci-
entific essay on the life of Jesus by Herman Samuel Reimarus (1694–1768), Professor of Oriental Languages at Hamburg. During his life he wrote a series of essays that are today known as ‘fragments’, because Gotthold Ephraim Lessing published them piecemeal between 1774 and 1778. They were published anonymously as ‘fragments by the Unknown of Wolfenbuttel’. This was and still is a pivotal work. It was the first to explain Jesus as a Jewish Messiah; to prefer the synoptic Gospels to John; to set Jesus in a historical framework; and to emphasize the importance of Jesus’ Messianic claim in relation to Jewish eschatology, future life and the kingdom of heaven. Reimarus had intended to gather the Fragments into a book under a title that translates as ‘an Apology for the Reasonable Believers in God’. This shows his fundamental deism. However, he died before he could arrange publication. It was another six years before his family would allow Lessing to publish seven Fragments anonymously and only in 1814 did Reimarus’s son admit his father’s authorship. His family was ashamed of the Professor’s views and tried to conceal them. Not until 1879 was an English translation available of those Fragments entitled ‘on the Intention of Jesus and His Disciples’ and only in 1971 was an English version available of the remaining Fragment ‘on the Resurrection Narratives’). The entire ‘apology’ of Reimarus has never been published.

Reimarus was the first to deal with Jesus within the context of his historical and national environment and Schweitzer called him the first to recognize the essential eschatology of Jesus’ message. But Talbert noted that, in this latter realization, Tindal and Semler anticipated Reimarus (Reimarus 1971:40). Talbert also noted the influence of the English deists, notably Toland, on Reimarus. He wrote that ‘it is difficult to understand Reimarus’ account of Christian origins without assuming his knowledge of Woolston, Annet and Chubb’ (ibid:16). Talbert claimed that Reimarus came under two influences: English deism and Christian Wolff (ibid:11).

The Fragments exploded like a bomb in Germany, the more so because they claimed that Christianity resulted from fraud (ibid:36). A Lutheran pastor complained that the Fragments upset simple believers and should have been written in Latin so that only scholars could read them (ibid:8). He might have been more vociferous if he had known that the author was neither a cleric nor a theologian. Again we find a
great advance made by a layman, expert only in comprehension of ancient languages and history. Despite the mass distribution of vernacular texts of the Scriptures, it was still thought that interpretation was a matter for the clergy alone (indeed, this attitude persists). The vernacular texts were intended to strengthen faith and the Protestant clergy must have been horrified at the idea that such texts could be used to justify rejection of Christianity. They had handed the people a rod that would eventually be used to beat their own backs.

Schweitzer, ignoring the English deists and all French writers except Renan, chose Reimarus as the terminus a quo for his monumental survey of rationalist attitudes (1954). But many have ignored Reimarus. In 1879 Voysey could write that ‘reimarus is too thorough, too uncompromising, too faithful to his task, to suit the present attitude of mind and heart towards the central figure of orthodox religion’ (Reimarus 1879:iii). Little has changed since then.

Schweitzer reviewed the important German authors of the late eighteenth century and the nineteenth century. These included Reinhard (1753–1812) who believed that Jesus died voluntarily to kill the idea that he preached an Earthly kingdom; Bahrdt (1741–92), who saw the work of a secret society and was the first to suggest the use of drugs in the survival of crucifixion; Venturini (1768–1849), who found a natural explanation for supernatural events; Paulus (1761–1851), whose Jesus fell into a coma and revived in the tomb; Schleiermacher (1768–1834); Hase (1800–90) and Strauss.

David Freidrich Strauss (1808–74) wrote the first real life of Jesus (1835), the most important book about Jesus published during the nineteenth century (Goguel 1926:16). His ‘critical Examination’ of Jesus’ life was not available in English until 1841–44. It is generally believed that this thorough and comprehensive work proposes a mythical Jesus. But Strauss did not believe that Jesus never existed. McCown wrote that ‘strauss left more of the historical Jesus than he admitted; historical were Jesus’ home in Nazareth, his baptism by John, his mission in Galilee, his claim to Messiahship, his rejection at Nazareth and his cleansing of the Temple as narrated in Mark, his trial and crucifixion …’. (McCown 1940:65). In addition, Strauss treated many other issues, such as what part of Jesus’ anatomy is the spear likely to have hit, that have hardly yet been examined in the same detail. Strauss’s con-
troversial work cost him his university appointment and he was forced to leave the academic circles in which he had been brought up. In later life he was persuaded to re-write the book in a more accommodating manner and this appeared in 1864. It drew a picture of Jesus that conformed to liberal theology and retracted the opinions he had offered in 1835. It appeared in English in 1865 as *A New Life of Jesus*.

If Strauss did not propose that Jesus is a myth, others did. The idea of a mythical Jesus was started at the end of the eighteenth century by some of the French *philosophes*, notably Dupuis and Count Volney. In their opinion, the story of Jesus was originally a solar or astral myth; it is reported that Volney’s work influenced the views of Napoleon the First. Peres, a former Oratorian who had been a professor of mathematics and physics at Lyons, mocked the *philosophes* in a pamphlet (first published in 1827) that proposed that Napoleon never existed (Evans 1905). Clearly Peres did not believe that the mythicists’ ideas were justified. But Bruno Bauer (1809–82) was the first person of scholarship to deny Jesus’ existence. He proposed that Christianity arose at the start of the second century out of the confluence of Judaean, Greek and Roman thought (Bauer 1877). This was the first alternative suggestion for the origin of the faith. Jesus, he claimed, was not the creator but the product of Christianity. Unfortunately Bauer’s influence did not match his fame; later propagators of this same idea discovered that Bauer had pioneered the path they were ‘discovering’.

Goguel noted that the Jesus Myth Theory was barely represented in the last twenty years of the nineteenth century (Goguel 1926:21), but with the twentieth century there appeared new works on the subject by Robertson, Kalthoff, Jensen, Smith and Drews. Kalthoff (1902) was the first to suggest that Christianity arose as the result of contact between the oppressed Roman proletariat and the Messianic hopes of the Jews, while there was an explosion of controversy in 1910 on the publication of Drews’s *Die Christusmythe*. ‘Every scholar in Germany who was even remotely connected with theology had to write a brochure with the title ’Did Jesus Ever Live?’; even Kaiser Wilhelm gave the matter his personal attention’ (McCown 1940:69). Drews’s views even influenced Lenin and so contributed to popularization of the myth in the Soviet Union (Robertson 1946:57). Another furore arose in 1924 upon the publication of Couchoud’s mythical hypothesis.
and this only died down after Goguel’s masterful refutation (1925). There has been no such outburst since and scarcely anyone today ventures to suggest that Jesus was not a real, historical person (Hugh Anderson 1967:1). McCown wrote, ‘the problem of the historicity of Jesus no longer troubles any but a few dilettantes …’ (1940:291).

Meanwhile thorough investigation of Jesus and his story continued. In France, Salvador, a Jew, attempted to justify the condemnation of Jesus by the Sanhedrin (1838) and in 1863 the first French life of Jesus appeared. Joseph Ernst Renan’s life of Jesus was so popular that it went rapidly through no less than twenty-three editions and has been translated into almost every language in the world (1864). Klausner praised the elegant style, excellent arrangement and attention to the geography of Palestine (Renan lived there for many years). But Renan’s book was more a historical novel than a work of scholarship (it had hardly any notes and no bibliography) and it was subjective and uncritical. To Goguel it was unoriginal and to Schweitzer it was tasteless. It was aimed at the general public and received little attention from scholars.

From 1863 to 1899, lives of Jesus depressed the eschatological element and looked for a Jesus more familiar to modern man. But in 1890 a new period began, with more attention to Messianic consciousness and eschatology, for which Schweitzer drew the final conclusions (Goguel 1926:19). After the 1880s there were fewer books on general criticism of the Gospels and life of Jesus and more on individual problems, e.g. Weiffenbach (1873) on Second Coming doctrine and Baldensperger (1888) on Jesus as conscious Messiah. 1892 saw the first Russian contribution when Khvol’son wrote (in German) about the Crucifixion and the Passover. He tried to show that Jesus was a Pharisee and that it was the Sadducees who had plotted against him.

It is apparent that the search for Jesus, while long and slow, is occasionally punctuated by bursts of rapid progress. Reimarus produced one such burst and Strauss another. The next was that of Schweitzer (1875–1965), who towers over the search like a colossus. As a student in Strasbourg, he wrote a treatise (Das Abendmahl) that dealt with the Last Supper in connection with the life of Jesus and the history of early Christianity. This was published in 1901, when its author was only twenty-six (Part II of the treatise was published in English in 1925). Schweitzer decided to try to explain Jesus’ life by starting, not at his...
birth, but at his Passion. He emphasized the eschatological influences upon Jesus and claimed that Jesus was forming a new moral society and that we should worship him in that understanding. His aim was to depict the figure of Jesus in its overwhelming heroic greatness and to impress it upon the modern age and upon modern theology (Schweitzer 1925:274). Schweitzer brought forth the very picture that the liberal approach had attempted to avoid; that Jesus was a fanatical futurist who died in vain for his hope in the parousia (Charles Anderson 1969:75). Indeed, Schweitzer’s view was not popular, if only because his Jesus belonged to the first century, not the twentieth. In his later Quest (1906), Schweitzer wrote that ‘the historical Jesus will be to our time a stranger and an enigma’. (For a fuller examination of Schweitzer’s contribution, see Appendix B.)

The first two decades of the twentieth century were spent looking for a non-Jewish Jesus, a process that reduced the historical content to zero. Unsurprisingly the idea that Jesus never existed became resurfaced. An exception was the work of Wellhausen, who sought to demonstrate the influence of the theology of the primitive Christian community on the resultant form of the narratives about Jesus and the form of his sayings. Wellhausen noted that ‘Jesus was not a Christian; he was a Jew’ (1905).

During this time several writers (Lomer, Binet-Sanglé, Hirsch, Rasmussen) embarked upon a psychiatric interpretation of Jesus. Psychiatry had become popular and it was natural to apply its methods to the Jesus problem. Each of them found some reason to conclude that Jesus suffered from paranoia, but, in a thesis offered for the degree of Doctor of Medicine at the University of Strasbourg in 1913, Schweitzer demolished their arguments and refuted the notion that Jesus was insane. This thesis was not available in English until 1948.

Piper suggested that Schweitzer’s conclusion, that one could not find a historical Jesus (in fact this was not his conclusion), had the effect of damping the enthusiasm of German authors. He noted that since 1910 very few ‘lives’ had been published in Germany, yet he found over 350 written in English (1953). Indeed, the search moved away from Germany where it had lodged since 1774 and continued in Britain, France, the USA and, eventually, Israel where it started.
After the First World War, the spate of books on Jesus continued, with some of the most inconsequential and some of the most significant. Barton’s *The Man Nobody Knows* (USA, 1924) is an example of the former: Jesus was a skilled business man, aware of all the latest advertising techniques. Klausner’s *Jesus of Nazareth* (Palestine, 1922) is an example of the latter. First published in Hebrew, it was published in English in 1925. Here again there is rapid progress at the hands, not of a theologian, but a professor of philosophy and Semitic languages. His book is a magnificent, thorough and unprejudiced analysis, greater scholastically than Schweitzer’s, and it is a historical and critical account that cannot be ignored or underestimated. His was the first such work attempted in Hebrew with neither satire nor apologetic bias and it was intended for ‘Jewish-Hebrew’ readers. It offered for the first time the full range of what modern Jewish scholarship had to offer on the subject, superseding Edersheim, Lightfoot, Schottgen and Wetstein. The eight ‘books’ of the volume deal at length with every aspect of Jesus’ life, times and teaching, including sources, although one could wish for more on the question of Jesus’ motives and purpose and less interest in his ethical outlook.

The return of the search to England may be marked by Murry’s *The Life of Jesus* (in the USA, *Jesus – Man of Genius*). Murry, a well-known British editor, critic and novelist and second husband of Katherine Mansfield, thought that Jesus accepted his destiny as Messiah and put himself into his enemies’ hands with the aid of Judas. Case considered that this original suggestion did violence to the records and seriously marred the book, but Murry’s imaginative work had a structural and dramatic unity and was significant in that it proposed that Jesus predetermined his whole public life. Murry noted that all rationalist lives of Jesus are wrecked on this essential predeterminism of the Passion and that generally they see Jesus as the fanatical head of a heretical revolutionary movement who lost his life as a consequence. He wrote, ‘never was there yet a liberal or rationalist life of Jesus that did not end on a note of sympathetic condescension …’ (1926:210).

The early 1930s saw the production of some of the most valuable contributions to the search that have ever been seen. Charles Anderson listed five great biographies of Jesus: Harnack for Germany, Goguel for France, Mackinnon for Britain, Case for America and
Klausner representing the Jewish viewpoint. Of these he considered that Goguel was master (1969:25).

Maurice Goguel was Professor of Exegesis and New Testament Criticism in the Faculty of Free Protestant Theology at Paris; he finished his *La Vie de Jésus* in 1932. It was the first part of a trilogy entitled *Jésus et les Origines du Christianisme* and it appeared in English in 1933. Goguel commands respect for the tremendous authority with which he dissects the Gospels and lets us know bluntly what we may believe and what we may not. Despite his theological background, the work is devoid of partisan opinion and bias, but while it clears up many misunderstandings and explains the relevance of the evangelists’ record, it seems to shirk from interpretation of the record, from attempting to explain Jesus’ purpose and mission. It appears that Goguel could not see the wood for the trees and that, while he could explain a great deal, he could not explain what Jesus was doing. Goguel’s output continued, including the second book of the trilogy (*La Naissance du Christianisme*, 1946), in the first chapter of which he gave his views on Jesus’ burial and Resurrection appearances, and the second edition of his life of Jesus (*Jésus*, 1950), to which he had added a chapter dealing with the history of lives of Jesus.

Goguel’s work was quickly followed by that of another French master, Charles Guignebert, Professor of the History of Christianity in the Sorbonne. His *Jésus* (1933) gave a thorough and sceptical analysis that showed a Jesus of whom little can be known. He claimed that all rationalist critics up to his time had accepted the general outline of the Gospels and had explained the events as if they were accepted facts. First it was necessary to determine what was fact and what was fiction. He rejected the historicity of the essential facts of the burial and discovery of the empty tomb, but this left him with the problem of explaining the origin of these accounts (1935:514). From Guignebert came strictures against using the teaching of Jesus to vindicate modern civilization or to uphold socialism and he warned that the Gospels probably give us the point of view, not of Jesus but of the redactors (ibid:383–9).

James Mackinnon was Regius Professor of Ecclesiastical History in the University of Edinburgh. His *The Historic Jesus* (1931) deserves its place in history for the penetrating analysis it gives of the many detailed problems in the texts. Although written by a Christian, it shows
little prejudice. However Mackinnon’s respect and admiration for Jesus prevented him asking on what mission Jesus had embarked. Both Goguel and Mackinnon assumed that Jesus intended to found the Church.

The 1930s also saw Frank Morison’s curious work *Who Moved the Stone?* (1930), which was so popular that it was issued eight times in paperback and is still in print. It dealt with the last seven days of Jesus’ life and made a valuable study of the many intricate mysteries that exist. It is a pity that his conclusion, that Jesus rose from the dead, is so completely unjustified and uncharacteristic of the main body of the work.

Although the Second World War almost halted the search, it was certain to have an effect on it. Chester McCown, writing on the day Britain declared war on Germany (3 September 1939), was certain that the search would undoubtedly be deeply affected by contemporary events and currents of thought (1940:306). Solomon Zeitlin demonstrated this first in 1942, when he described Caiaphas as a ‘quisling’ because he was prepared to co-operate with the Roman provincial authorities (1964:156). Close parallels could be drawn between the Roman occupation of Judaea and the German occupation of other European nations. Later S G F Brandon observed that the idea of a subversive Zealot movement was not received sympathetically in Britain until after the War when the valour of the resistance movements was recognized (1967:24). The naivety of the nineteenth century was being replaced by an appreciation that the political structure in which Jesus appeared was not all that different from that of the modern world, although Jesus’ concept of the world was completely different.

Theologians had always taken an ambivalent attitude to this search. On the one hand they could hardly ignore it, directed as it was to examination of their Lord, nor could they justify rejection of it. On the other hand they were not pleased with the results, which tended to undermine the traditional picture of Jesus. The discovery that the ecclesiastical Christ was really a human being just like anyone else and that he might have had selfish motives for undertaking his mission has been a shock for many theologians. But, as James McLeman noticed, some have regained their balance with remarkable aplomb: ‘they are prepared to argue that what has happened is providential. It is now ab-
Absolutely clear, they say, that faith in Christ does not depend on what can be known about Jesus. Not only does not, but cannot’ (1967:14). Of course faith is not concerned with facts; faith is belief founded on authority not on evidence. But can a faith be taken seriously if it refuses to face facts? What use is a religion that is completely unrelated to the real world? Some modern theologians have seen the dangers of rejecting interest in the historical Jesus and have undertaken what they call the ‘new quest’. They recognize that something can be known about the historical Jesus and that they must concern themselves with working it out if they do not wish ultimately to find themselves committed to a mythological Lord (James Robinson 1959:12).

However it appears that modern theologians are not good at this work and have left the new search to non-theologians. Bornkamm’s Jesus von Nazareth (1951) is not a life of Jesus and contributed little to the search. More use were Carmichael's Death of Jesus (1963), which portrayed Jesus as the leader of a revolutionary group who occupied the Temple in open rebellion against the occupying powers, and Schonfield's The Passover Plot (1965), which hinted at a plot to enable Jesus to survive crucifixion for political purposes. Also useful were Brandon’s Jesus and the Zealots (1968) and Cross’s Who Was Jesus? (1970). Useless were Allegro’s claim that the Early Church worshipped a hallucinogenic mushroom (1970) and Phipps’s conviction that Jesus was married (1970).

The most useful work of the 1970s was Cohn's The Trial and Death of Jesus (1972). Here, an Israeli Supreme Court Justice examined the Passion’s legal background, defending both Jesus’ historicity and Jewish innocence of the death. His work reflects Jewish sensitivity to the centuries-long accusation by Christians that the Jews were guilty of deicide, Christ-killers. This ignominy was only ameliorated in 1965 when the Ecumenical Council (Vatican II) declared that what happened to Jesus cannot be blamed upon all the Jews then living, without distinction, nor upon the Jews of today. Ignorant of the clear evidence that it was the Romans and not the Jews who tried and executed Jesus, many Jews have attempted to exonerate themselves and their coreligionists from the equally ignorant accusations of Christians. Indeed, in July 1972, Jewish lawyer Yitzhak David petitioned the Israeli Supreme Court in Jerusalem to issue a decree proclaiming that Jesus had not re-
ceived a fair trial. His submission, which claimed that Jesus had committed no crime, was rejected.

After the rise of Marxism, it was to be expected that its methodology would be applied to the problem of Jesus and the rise of Christianity. The first systematic study was that of Karl Kautsky in 1908; the latest is that of Milan Machovec (1972). Marxists see the rise of Christianity as the inevitable growth of a social movement, a proletarian protest against imperial oppression. Jesus is seen as the misunderstood prophet of a new age in which man can progress by his own efforts. Despite these misunderstandings, Machovec did note the ‘stupidity of certain hard-line atheists who state that Jesus never existed’ (1976:24).

But the 1970s also saw the revival by George Wells of the Jesus Myth Theory. A professor of German and a Humanist, Wells was intent on showing that there was no Jesus to find and he resurrected the views of Bauer and Rylands. Wells well represented the entrenched views of the modern Humanist movement (that Jesus did not exist), even though these views had long before been refuted, sometimes by Humanists. Wells rightly received severe criticism, especially from historians, whose views ought to be decisive on the question of historicity. The 1970s Humanists had managed to backtrack in the search and they ‘discovered’ traces that had long been discarded by other explorers. They may have done this because, lacking sufficient knowledge of Christianity and its scriptures, they were unable to debate the problem on equal terms with theologians. One way to avoid the debate is to claim that Jesus did not exist. Wells’s work demonstrates, as does that of believers, that those with prejudice will never solve the problem. Before he wrote a word, Wells must have been convinced that Jesus had not existed; theologians begin with the assumption that Jesus was some sort of divine being who had access to God, also assumed to exist. Such prejudices interfere with objectivity.

As Hugh Anderson noted, writers who are neither professional theologians nor Biblical critics continue to produce books about Jesus (1967:148), although, according to Piper, our time has not so far produced a convincing biography (1953:93). The search continues, but it is those who are not Christians who make the greatest contributions. They can be objective. While the theologian searches for Jesus by the dim light of the ecclesiastical interior, the non-theologian looks for
him in broad daylight. It is ironic that those who come nearest to understanding who Jesus was and what he did are those who do not worship him. But they have nothing to lose; they can consider any possibility. Theologians must limit themselves to explanations whereby Jesus was neither deluded nor a fraud. However very few non-Christians have sufficient knowledge of Christianity and its background to be able to make worthwhile investigations. James Robinson may be right that the Church’s opponents are unlikely to be sufficiently embedded in the Christian tradition to be able to participate in Biblical scholarship and that membership of the intelligentsia no longer qualifies for participation in the quest of the historical Jesus (1959:93), but to those intellectual opponents who are so embedded will fall the honour of finding the real Jesus.

Figure 4 shows how interest in the historical Jesus has risen and fallen over three centuries. It is clear that, despite the valuable contributions of rationalists during the nineteenth century, most books on Jesus have been written in the twentieth century. Indeed, interest was at its height in the first decade of that century. Interest has waned steadily since, although there was a revival in the late '20s and another in the '60s. The effect of the two world wars is evident; book production almost ceased. Since 1972 interest has declined steadily until, at the time of writing, it has reached the level of about two books per year. There will be no more revivals, but interest will not fade away altogether. There will always be a steady trickle of such books and some will continue to search for Jesus.

The late 1980s and early 1990s saw a burst of Jesus books written from various points of view. Kamal Salibi (1988) concluded that the Jesus of the Gospels is a fusion of three different characters, only one of whom was actually crucified in Jerusalem under Pilate. He transferred most of the action to the Arabian desert. Theologian Carsten Thiede (1990) merely repeated the belief that Jesus was not a legend and A N Wilson (1992) ‘discovered’ things long known to others. Most extraordinary was Barbara Thiering’s belief (1992) that the whole drama was played out, not in Jerusalem, but at Qumran on the Dead Sea and that The Dead Sea Scrolls could interpret the Gospels. John Crossan (1991) attempted to examine the time of Jesus (a ‘mediterranean Jewish Peasant’) as if it were an archaeological excavation, but with little insight. In
effect, he lost the real Jesus in the host of contemporary detail he examined. E P Sanders (1985 and 1993) explored many interesting aspects of the accounts of Jesus’ life, but without much insight; he asked questions that he himself could not answer. However he was amazed that so many New Testament scholars write books about Jesus in which they discover that he agrees with their own version of Christianity. ‘After Schweitzer’s devastating exposé of previous scholarship on just this point, one would think that people would be more sensitive to the issue. But it is seldom raised.’ (Sanders 1985:330). Kersten and Gruber (1994) saw much of the evidence that there was a conspiracy to enable Jesus to survive crucifixion, including the use of opium, but not one motivated by Jesus himself and they used it to justify their belief that there is a modern plot to hide the fact that the Turin Shroud is genuine. The same year Enoch Powell, an eminent British politician and Greek scholar, offered a new translation of and commentary on Matthew, which he claimed was the original Gospel. Furthermore he claimed that Jesus was not crucified but was stoned to death by the Jews and that he called on his followers to convert the Gentiles. In 1995, Kersten and Gruber claimed that the original Jesus was really a Buddhist, teaching universal love and forgiveness and, in 1997, Norman Mailer wrote a very silly book (*The Gospel According to the Son*), in which he exhibited many errors and misunderstandings. 2010 saw the publication of Philip Pullman’s *The Good Man Jesus and the Scoundrel Christ*, a somewhat twisted and naive retelling of the gospel story: Jesus has a twin brother called ‘christ’, who creates the Church at the instigation of a stranger. It adds nothing to study of the historical Jesus.
Fig. 4: Histogram showing the approximate number of books on Jesus per decade over the last three centuries
Appendix B: Schweitzer’s Jesus

There is a widespread belief that, although Albert Schweitzer believed in a historical Jesus, he left virtually nothing certain about him. In fact, although he claimed that Jesus would remain a puzzle to the modern world, he believed that he had solved the puzzle and he came to very definite conclusions regarding Jesus’ purpose and mission. Although his most famous work is the Quest (1954), his own views figure only briefly in it. Schweitzer’s conclusions about Jesus are fully expounded in lesser known works, viz. The Mystery of the Kingdom of God (1925) and The Kingdom of God and Primitive Christianity (1968). The former was written as part of a university treatise in 1901, well before the Quest. The latter was not published (in German) until two years after his death. It is remarkable that, despite the span of half a century between the writing of these two books, Schweitzer’s fundamental view, that only an eschatological interpretation can make sense of Jesus’ life, hardly changed. In only one respect did he revise his earlier, youthful outlook: he rejected the idea that Jesus had a concept of his atonement (1968:128).

We must dispose of the impression that the name of Schweitzer may be invoked effectually by mythicists. The Mystery and the Quest were both written about the time that the world reeled to the views of powerful mythicists, at the dawn of the twentieth century. The works of Robertson, Kalthoff, Smith and Drews came too late for Schweitzer to comment on them in the above works and his opinion on the matter did not appear in print until the publication in 1924 of his Christianity and the Religions of the World. With evident incredulity, he pointed out that some had ‘gone so far’ as to cast doubt upon the originality of Christianity and asked ‘how can men who think seriously come to the conclusion that the ideas of Christianity do not go back to Jesus, but merely represent a transformation of ideas that stirred religious circles in the then heathen world?’ Affirming his conviction that Christianity was certainly the creation of Jesus and that the uniqueness of its teach-
ing of a coming kingdom of God could not be traced back to the mystery religions, he declared that ‘the attempt to prove that Christianity is derived from these mystery-religions of redemption does not lead to positive results’ (1924:19).

In the introduction to the third German edition of the *Quest* (in 1950), Schweitzer referred again to the Jesus Myth Theory. He claimed that the book dealt with ‘practically all conceivable arguments against the historicity of Jesus’ (it also gave a brief history of mythicism). To be in any way scientific, he claimed, the mythical theory must not only explain Jesus’ origin, which is difficult enough, but also show how this fictitious non-Jewish figure was introduced into the Judaism of the early Roman Empire – ‘a hopeless undertaking’. He continued to argue that, while previously it was possible to maintain that historical research could produce a credible picture of Jesus only by discarding parts of Matthew and Mark as inauthentic, now that a true understanding of these Gospels was made possible by eschatology, subsequent attempts to disprove his existence would be much more difficult. Nevertheless, while the Jesus Myth Theory had been dealt a death-blows, he expected further attempts to revive it.

D A King drew attention to the fact that Schweitzer was not a Christian in the conventional sense; he rejected all supernatural or transcendental elements in the Gospels and interpreted the phenomenon of Jesus only in terms of its historico-political milieu. Schweitzer was too embedded in the ecclesiastical structure to separate himself from it and he preferred to express his unorthodox views from within the Church rather than outside it. But this made him anathema to everyone; Christians ignored or misunderstood him, while rationalists passed him over as ‘Just another Christian’ (1964).

The *Mystery*, subtitled ‘the Secret of Jesus’ Messiahship and Passion’, was part of a treatise called ‘the Lord’s Supper in connection with the Life of Jesus and the History of Early Christianity’. Schweitzer was convinced that the personality and life of Jesus had become grossly obscured by the rash of conflicting theories put forward by those who thought they were clarifying the life of the man from Galilee and he considered that Christian theology had lost the basic simplicity of Jesus. He suggested that it might be more profitable to examine Jesus’ life
beginning, not at his birth, but at his death. He also addressed the question – ‘why did Jesus keep his Messiahship secret?’

Schweitzer’s great achievement was the discovery that Jesus’ worldview was not ours. Placing Jesus firmly in the beliefs and teachings of his own time, he was able to show that Jesus’ eschatological beliefs coloured every pronouncement. At the time, contemporary liberal theology interpreted Jesus’ life in terms of early twentieth century thought. Schweitzer showed that no sense would be made of the Gospels until it was recognized that they came from another world – a world that expected an imminent end of all things, a world that was created by God in six days and that would be rolled up in an instant. It was a world that anticipated the imminent appearance of ‘a new heaven and a new earth’ – the kingdom of God. Eschatology was the key to understanding Jesus’ life and death. He was not a man born out of his time revealing previously hidden truths to mankind; he was a child of his time brought up in its beliefs and trapped like his contemporaries in the philosophy of his age. Somehow Jesus came to believe that he was or was to be the Messiah of the Jews. Schweitzer recognized in Jesus a dual personality, for Jesus spoke of himself in the third person as ‘the Son of Man’, an Aramaicism for ‘a man’, but also an allusion to the Messiah in Daniel. But this conviction was kept from all but his closest disciples and even they only had a hazy idea of Jesus’ self-imposed mission. In Schweitzer’s view, Jesus, like John the Baptist, proclaimed the imminent kingdom and tried to prepare Judaea for it. But when it failed to appear, Jesus concluded that he himself must bring about the kingdom. Schweitzer claimed that Jesus was stunned by the death of John, whom he secretly believed to be Elijah, whom Jews expected to return before the kingdom, and had to ask himself why this had happened. Jesus’ answer, according to Schweitzer, was that, instead of requiring the whole of Israel to suffer a pre-kingdom affliction, only token sacrifices were required. ‘Elijah’ had died at the hand of Herod, the king of Galilee and Peraea, and now Jesus too had to die, but at the hands of the ruler of Judaea representing the supreme Earthly power. By this course, by suffering on behalf of his people, Jesus would avoid a general tribulation. In fact, at one time he might have believed that his disciples were to suffer on behalf of the people, but when they returned to him unscathed, he concluded that he would have to suffer ‘a ransom for many’,
the ‘many’ being either the disciples or the people of Israel, not the entire world population. Jesus thought that his death would initiate the kingdom and that afterwards he would be resurrected to rule de facto as the Messiah, the Son of Man. From that moment on, everything Jesus did was Messianic; it was part of the pre-determined, but not predestined, life of the Messiah-to-be. He arranged his triumphal entry into Jerusalem as described by the Scriptures, but without explaining to the surprised population who he was, and he invited arrest, trial and execution in a melodramatic atmosphere of secrecy and innuendo. Expecting prompt resurrection to a position of power and authority surpassing even that of Caesar, he saw no reason to explain his mission to those around him.

For a 26-year-old student, this was a remarkable insight into the gospel problem and it would be unfair to regret that he made the mistake of believing that Jesus was condemned for blasphemy, that he made no examination of Jewish and Roman court procedure and that he showed no interest in the reason for Judas’ betrayal. Schweitzer called it ‘a realistic account of the life of Jesus’; it was certainly more realistic than most of those with which he was surrounded. But even as a Jewish aspirant to the Messianic throne, as a man convinced that he was on a divine mission, Schweitzer’s Jesus in the *Mystery* appears as a heroic figure. Stripped of his divinity, this Jesus was still a superman, the author of a new moral order and worthy of mankind’s worship.

While Schweitzer devoted most of his life to medicine at Lambarene, he never completely set aside work on the life of Jesus. Barred by his radical views from preaching or teaching, he nevertheless pursued his own eschatological theory of Jesus’ life. About 1950 he began the Kingdom, which was to deal with the ancient Hebrews’ concept of and quest for the heavenly kingdom on Earth. After his death, the unfinished manuscript was found among his papers, together with drafts of further chapters. The published work covers the Old Testament prophets, Jesus and Paul, but he intended to continue his study into the Roman Empire of the post-Gospel era and into later eras.

This was Schweitzer’s ‘theological testament’, the result of many years’ contemplation of the problem of Christian origins. He traced Jewish eschatological concepts back to Zoroaster, whose ideas were incorporated into the book of Enoch. Touching again on mythicism, he
pointed out that the historicity of Jesus is supported by the fact that the basic gospel does not attribute to Jesus any view different from those of the late Jewish expectation of the kingdom and the Messiah. The trustworthiness of Mark and Matthew, he claimed, is further demonstrated by the fact that they record words and acts of Jesus that of necessity remain incomprehensible to those who heard and saw them and also by the fact that they quote prophecies that were not fulfilled. Contrary to the current view that little in the Gospels is historical, Schweitzer regarded it as a miracle that so true a record of Jesus has been preserved.

Returning to his theme of fifty years before, he emphasized that Jesus’ Messianic consciousness was futuristic; he did not come forward as the Messiah, but as a person who would later be revealed as God’s Chosen One. Jesus, he showed, had solved a problem that late Jewish scribes could not – how was Messiah to be both Son of David and supernatural. Jesus’ ingenious solution was that a man born as a descendant of David in the last generation of mankind would be revealed as the Messiah in his supernatural existence at the coming of the kingdom. According to Schweitzer, Jesus was original in combining for the first time, into one man, the Messiah and the Son of Man. Schweitzer’s Jesus constructed a new Messiah, one who had to go through life as a man before he could reign in the kingdom.

Rejecting his earlier view, that Jesus felt the need to offer his life as a sacrifice on behalf of his people, Schweitzer now concluded that Jesus believed he could bring about the kingdom by suffering death. He scorned the traditional view that Jesus sensed growing opposition and resigned himself to death. ‘In what way’, he asked, ‘did Jesus’ death benefit others or help the cause of the kingdom?’ In itself it achieved nothing, an embarrassing fact that Christianity has tried to avoid for nearly two millennia. But if Jesus believed that he was destined to be the Messiah, the sooner he died the sooner he would be resurrected as the Son of Man and could establish the kingdom. Therefore his Passion was not a noble sacrifice on behalf of millions of future believers nor the antidote to Original Sin; it was an essential step in the progress of his own personal career. This explains Jesus’ resignation in the face of hostility and how, by handing himself over to the authorities, he believed that he was actually advancing the kingdom of God.
That none of Jesus’ hopes were fulfilled, that he was not revealed in glory in Galilee, that the kingdom did not appear, was to Schweitzer testimony as to the reliability of the Gospel accounts. Why would anyone invent such a poor deluded figure? Why would they show that he expected change when no such change occurred? Jesus was no longer a hero to Schweitzer; he was a pathetic victim of religion and its bigotry. Like an author condemned to perform in his own tragedy, he was ignorant of the fact that he played the part of a character who only existed in his imagination. While Schweitzer did not spell out the consequences for Christianity, it is obvious that his Jesus has nothing in common with the ecclesiastical Christ. The unspoken conclusion was that Christianity had grossly misunderstood its founder and worshipped a figure of its own creation.

Schweitzer was a rationalist like those he reviewed in the Quest, especially radicals like Reimarus and Strauss, to whom he owed a great debt. With them he stands above all others who have attempted to make sense of the life of Jesus. Like them he understood that comprehension of a historical figure can only come from an understanding of the beliefs and circumstances with which such a person was surrounded. He made the further discovery, in the case of Jesus, that these beliefs and circumstances explain some Gospel statements that are otherwise inexplicable, so confirming their historicity. Schweitzer’s Jesus was neither mythical nor unknown; he was certain, not only that Jesus existed, but that only by eschatology can we explain his life and death. Schweitzer’s Jesus was a real man caught in the web of Pharisaic Judaism and doomed to follow his own trail. Like a man unrolling a carpet, Jesus trod a path of his own invention, convinced that by so doing he fulfilled prophecy. Schweitzer pushed Jesus back to where he belongs: in first century Palestine. Jesus has no message for the modern world; he has no message for mankind.
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