

A DISCOVERY,
THE CRUCIFIED, SIMON, ZEALOTS, AND ESSENES

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While every history of Christian origins rests, admittedly or not, on more or less shaky foundations, the fault is not necessarily attributable to the historian who tries to write that history, but to the condition of the evidence on which he has to base it.¹

Alfred Firmin Loisy

This paper offers several radical hypotheses about the formation of Christianity. First, it suggests that the crucifixion talked about in the New Testament Gospels originally referred to the crucifixion of an actually existing man named Simon. He was a son of Judas the Galilean, who founded what Josephus calls “The Fourth Philosophy.” He had a brother named James, and he headed a large Jewish cult involved in a violent revolutionary struggle against Roman domination of the Jewish provinces of Judea, Samaria and Galilee. Second, I argue that this Simon is identical with the apostle Peter (AKA Simon and Simon Peter). Third, I propose that Christianity originated from the zealous Pharisaic-Essene mass revolutionary movement started in 6 CE by Judas the Galilean. Generally this paper takes the point of view that the details of the four canonical gospels are largely patchwork fantasies and fictions (e.g., a night trial by Pontius Pilate) from multiple sources, however, some incidents found in them (e.g., the triumphant march into Jerusalem) do point towards historical events.

This paper bases itself and starts out from the conclusions of a number of recent scholars and works including Robert Price,²

¹ Loisy, Alfred Firmin, *The Birth of the Christian Religion*, University Books, Inc. From the French *La Naissance du Christianisme*, 1933, English Edition, 1962.

² Price, Robert M., *Deconstructing Jesus*, Prometheus Books, 2000. Price insightfully emphasizes the multiplicity of visions we get when we deconstruct the Jesus stories. It leads him to a justifiable skepticism in finding an historical Jesus. My skepticism aims towards the research methods and their results, not the possibility for an authentic explanation. If we take Kuhn’s “Scientific Revolutions Hypothesis” seriously, a sudden explosion of theories in a field may indicate that a new paradigm is about to take over.

Burton Mack,³ John Dominic Crossan,⁴ Timothy Freke and Peter Gandy,⁵ Earl J. Doherty,⁶ Barbara Thiering,⁷ Pierre-Antoine Bernheim,⁸ and Robert Eisenman.⁹ In understanding generally the development of literature and myths, I rely most on theories by Sigmund Freud (*Interpretation of Dreams*), Claude Levi-Strauss¹⁰ and M.M. Bakhtin.¹¹

³ Mack, Burton L., *Who Wrote The New Testament?*, Harper Collins, San Francisco, 1996. Mack emphasizes the different communities and the slow quantum accretion of layers of texts of the different communities.

⁴ Crossan, John Dominic, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*, Harper, San Francisco, 1994, San Francisco. In this and several other works, Crossan emphasizes the peasant revolutionary nature of Jesus.

⁵ Freke, Timothy & Gandy, Peter, *The Jesus Mysteries*, Harmony Books, New York, 1999. Freke and Gandy emphasize that many of the Jesus stories are quite similar to ancient Greek and Roman religious Literature.

⁶ Doherty, Earl J., *The Jesus Puzzle. Did Christianity Begin with a Mythical Christ? : Challenging the Existence of an Historical Jesus*, Canadian Humanist Publications, 1999. Doherty separates the letters of Paul from the Gospels. Like the chemist who first synthesized hydrogen and oxygen from water, he allows real progress to be made in this field. He deserves credit for creating/pushing a new paradigm in the field.

⁷ Thiering, Barbara, *Jesus and the Riddle of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Harper, San Francisco, 1992. Dr. Thiering represented a negative guide for me. She tried to synthesize too much information and came up with a fascinating story without credible evidence to back up most of her suppositions. Yet, I commend the courage and wealth of knowledge she displayed in doubting so much of the dogmatic narrative of the Gospels .

⁸ Bernheim, Pierre-Antoine, *James, Brother of Jesus*, SCM Press, London, 1997. This book presents clear and convincing evidence of the strong early historical belief that Jesus had a brother named James who led his movement after his death. It shows how this view came into conflict with the Orthodox Church's position that power and authority from God moved from Jesus through Peter to his successors in the Church, so James was systematically demoted in importance. He notes:

The ingenious Jerome found a solution which settled the 'James problem' for more than fifteen centuries in the Roman Catholic Church. By supposing that James was only a first cousin of Jesus, he resolved the question of the kinship between James and Jesus. By identifying him with James, son of Alphaeus, one of the Twelve, Jerome also found an appropriate place for him in the hierarchy of the first Christians. The sources of James' authority were thus defined better, and his subordination to Peter was well established. Jerome's not very rigorous demonstrations were enough to convince those who had no need to be convinced...(p. 272).

⁹ Eisenman, *James the Brother of Jesus*, Viking, 1997. My work may be considered a footnote to Eisenman's monumental work that synthesizes so much knowledge from every relevant textual field.

¹⁰ Levi-Strauss, Claude, *The Raw and the Cooked*, Harper and Row, New York, 1969. Strauss shows how the values within each mytheme within a mythological story can change. He also postulates that myths resolve binary oppositions in

One of the frequent criticisms of those who find an historical Jesus is that the Jesus resembles their own personality and they arrive at their portrait by selecting and emphasizing texts they like and devaluing texts that paint alternative pictures.¹² I hope that my case is unusual in that I have no interest in the Jesus referents I have found. I discovered them quite accidentally through putting together rather obscure, but clear evidence.

A Discovery: Jesus' Birth Year and Death Year

I was actually researching the problem of Gospel dating when I came across this information in Irenaeus' *Against Heresies*, a late second-century (c. 185-200?) work,¹³ "our Lord was born about the forty-first year of the reign of Augustus." Augustus became part of the second triumvirate in 43 BCE, along with Marc Anthony and Marcus Aemilius Lepidus. He became sole ruler in 27 BCE. Thus, the forty-first year of his rule was either 2 BCE or 13 CE.

In the same book, previously in 2.22.6, Irenaeus argued against a group of heretics who claimed that Jesus died after one year of preaching at age thirty. He believes the period was twenty years and concludes, "For the period included between the thirtieth and the fiftieth year can never be regarded as one year."¹⁴

Thus, perhaps the first early church writer to give his opinion on the subject, Irenaeus thought Jesus either lived from 2 BCE to about 47 CE, or 13 CE to 62 CE., depending on how we read his reference to Augustus' rule. In itself, this proves only that there was some doubt among Christians about the years that Jesus

society — raw/cooked for example. The myth of Jesus Christ acts to resolve the tension in the binary opposition of life and death in Christian society. To live peacefully under Roman domination and taxation meant slow ruin and death. To be free from Roman domination, Jews had to rebel, but to rebel meant death. Given no way out, no chance to live, the only option was to fantasize a fantastic glorious life in death.

¹¹ Bakhtin, M.M., *The Dialogic Imagination*, Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1994. He teaches how the construction of the novel comes about from many different voices.

¹² Allen, Charlotte, *The Human Christ: The Search for the Historical Jesus*, New York: Free Press, 1998. Ms. Allen sees clearly that this ancient truism of Xenophanes that we make gods in our own images applies to liberal and radical investigators, but leaves out that it applies also to conservative theological institutions.

¹³ Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 3.21.4.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.22.6.

lived and that at least one of them thought he died a number of years later than the usual 29-33 CE range we find in most current biographies of Jesus Christ.

My surprise came later from reading Tertullian, the next early Church Father who dates Jesus' death. In his work *An Answer to the Jews*, he talks about the fulfillment of a prediction by the prophet Daniel that the Jews will be destroyed in seventy hebdomads. He finds that it predicts the birth and death of Jesus Christ as well as the destruction of Jerusalem. In chapter VIII, Tertullian states that "in the forty-first year of the empire of Augustus, when he has been reigning for XX and VIII years after the death of Cleopatra, the Christ is born."¹⁵ Tertullian agrees with Irenaeus in putting the birth of Jesus 41 years after the start of the reign of Augustus. He clarifies the date further by saying 28 years after the death of Cleopatra. Cleopatra died in 30 BCE, so 2 BCE is the date that he is giving for the birth of Jesus Christ. Tertullian might have been reading Irenaeus, and realized that the date of Jesus' birth was unclear because we can calculate Augustus' reign from either the time of the triumvirate or his sole rule, so he added the time from the date of Cleopatra to clarify it.

In his argument, he explains Daniel's 70 hebdomad prediction quite clearly. He explains that 437½ years (62½ hebdomads) of the 490 years (70 hebdomads) passed till the birth of Christ and that 7½ hebdomads (52½ years) remained. At this point the chronology gets a little bit confusing and does not match historical chronology. Tertullian allows Christ dies after 30 years, but then suggests that the destruction of the Jewish temple occurred 22½ years later. By leaving out the 13 year reign of Claudius and shortening the reigns of Tiberius, Gaius and Nero, he is able to squeeze the 72½ years from 2 BCE (the birth of Jesus) to the burning of the temple, into 52½ years (7½ hebdomads). The important thing here is that Tertullian believes the burning of the temple took place 22½ years after the death of Jesus, i.e. circa 47 CE. This exactly agrees with Irenaeus. Both agree that he was born in 2 BCE and died circa 47 CE. The problem for Tertullian seems to be that he has to reconcile the contradictory facts of Jesus being born in 2 BCE, and dying in 47 CE, but somehow dying at age 30. He does this by changing the chronology of the Roman Empire to suggest that only 30 years

¹⁵ Tertullian, *An Answer to the Jews*, chapter VIII.

passed from 2 BCE till 47 CE. He was so sure that only 30 years passed from the time of Jesus' birth in the 41st year of Augustus till the time of his death 22½ years before the burning of the temple, that he was willing to believe that the Romans were mistaken about the times their emperors ruled.

Another chronology appears in book I, chapter XXI of *The Stromata* by Clement of Alexandria. This chronology corrects both Irenaeus and Tertullian, ambiguously indicating that the birth of Jesus took place in 2 BCE or 1 CE and he died in 28, 30 or 31 CE. However, this chronology comes at the end of a section entitled "The Jewish Institutions and Laws of Far Higher Antiquity Than the Philosophy of the Greeks." The next section is entitled "On the Greek Translation of the Old Testament." The Jesus chronology interrupts arguments regarding the relationship of Jewish and Greek customs. The name of the Emperor Commodus is mentioned twelve times within one page and not anywhere else in over 500 pages of texts by Clement. The repeated use of the name of Commodus seems a deliberate attempt to set the date of this work. However it leads to numerous problems, for example, why does the author mention early second-century heretics, but ignores late second-century ones? Also, there is a strange discussion of Danielle's 70 hebdomad prediction that seems to indicate Jesus ruled from 63 to 69. I think we should regard some of this chronological material as interpolated and unreliable. Since we do not know who wrote this chronology or how long after Clement, we can factor it out of our considerations.

Irenaeus probably wrote in Lyon, France, and Tertullian probably wrote in Alexandria, Egypt. It is certain that they had not come to their identical conclusions on the same birth year and death year for Jesus by accident. I conclude there was a widespread belief in the late second and early third century in orthodox Churches that Jesus Christ died around the year 47.

Once understanding this, I asked myself the obvious question: who was crucified around this time? Find out who was crucified that year and I thought I might find out who the early Christians had deified. But before getting to that, let me give some additional support to the idea.

Additional Evidence In Support of the Date of the Crucified Man

It is important to note that the first identifiable non-Jewish-Christian source for the date of Christ comes from Suetonius. In his biography of Claudius, he wrote *Iudaeos impulsore*

*Chresto assidue tumultuantis Roma expulit.*¹⁶ usually translated “Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus he expelled them from Rome.” Claudius was active from 41-54 CE. In support of this being a reference to Christ, John P. Meier in *A Marginal Jew* notes:

Two arguments favor a reference to Christ rather than to some Roman Jew named Chrestus: (1) Good Latin style would seem to demand a *quodam* after *Chresto* if some new and otherwise unknown figure were being introduced into the narrative. (2) Raymond E. Brown reports that “among the several hundred names of Roman Jews known from Jewish catacombs and other sources, no instance of *Chrestus* appears (*Antioch and Rome*, 100).¹⁷

Tertullian in *The Apology* chapter 3, seems to be referring to this when he writes, “But Christian, so far as the meaning of the word is concerned, is derived from anointing. Yes, and even when it is wrongly pronounced by you ‘Chrestianus’ (for you do not even know accurately the name you hate), it comes from sweetness and benignity.”

Suetonius wrote probably five years before Tacitus in his *Annals*¹⁸ first points to the death of Christ under Pontius Pilate. This may indicate that the Pontius Pilate tradition is actually later than the understanding that Christ died circa 47.

The canonical *Acts* also gives some weight to the idea that the time of Claudius is the time of first preaching about the crucified man. Luke, or whoever created *Acts*, wrote, “And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome.”¹⁹ This seems to confirm Suetonius’ story about the expulsion of the Jews because of Chrestus. One could argue that Luke is getting this story from Suetonius, but if his audience did not know about the expulsion from Rome, then mentioning it as a time marker (which is how he uses it) would not make any sense.

The chronology of Paul’s travels in *Acts* is not clear, but his arrest in Jerusalem under the Procurator Felix takes place some two years before the end of Felix’s term in 59 CE. Thus his arrest, according to *Acts*, took place in 57 CE. Working backwards and

¹⁶ Suetonius, *Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, 5.25.

¹⁷ Meier, John P., *A Marginal Jew* (Doubleday, 1991), p. 102, n. 16.

¹⁸ Book 15, chapter 44.

¹⁹ Acts 18:2. New American Standard Bible.

tracing Paul's travels before his arrest, we get a date around 50 CE for his encounters with the recently expelled Aquila and Priscilla.²⁰ It should be noted that the term "Jew" is not used to distinguish Aquila and Priscilla from the term "Christian." As Eisenman notes, "the Romans did not distinguish in any way between what we presently call Christians and Jews."²¹

Examining the ideology behind *Acts* will also help us in our dating. *Acts* gives us one of its main points at 15:7:

And after there had been much debate, Peter rose and said to them, "Brethren, you know that in the early days God made choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe..."

In *Acts*, Luke tries to credit Peter with preaching the Gospel to the gentiles before Paul. This attacks the earlier tradition that Paul was the first Apostle to preach to the gentiles. *Acts* contains two main sections. The first section has material that concentrates on Peter as a magician-hero. It is obviously from a community that follows Peter. The second section contains quite different travelogue/historical material that portrays Paul's adventures. It is from a community that follows Paul. Note how the combination of the material emphasizes Peter's priority and superiority. Peter gets the word to preach to the gentiles directly from God (10:15, and 11:9). He travels to, eats with, and converts the gentiles. Only after Peter does this, Paul gets to preach to the gentiles in Antioch in chapter 13.

To make sure everybody gets the point that Peter preached before Paul, Luke puts in a scene of Herod (Agrippa²²) arresting Peter and Peter miraculously escaping. This is a way of introducing Herod who, conveniently, immediately dies at 12:21. Thus

²⁰ Working forwards, the other way, we also get this date by correlating Paul's second trip to Jerusalem (Acts 11:28-30) during a famine under Claudius with the famine described by Josephus (*Antiquities* 20.5) in which Helena sent aid. We can derive from Josephus that this famine was sometime around 44-46. However, *Acts* gives us no reason to believe Paul joined the movement more than a year or two before the famine, i.e., circa 43. It is interesting that in *Acts* Paul does not start preaching about a crucified man until chapter 13, sometime shortly after the famine. Thus we get from *Acts* a date of around 47 for Paul preaching his own gospel of an incarnated crucified Jesus Christ.

²¹ *James the Brother of Jesus*, 67.

²² Luke has gotten Herod the tetrarch mixed up with Agrippa. Josephus tells us that Herod "died in the eighth year of the reign of Claudius Caesar." (*Wars*, 20.5.2) which would be 49. Accepting Herod would destroy the authenticity of the rest of Luke's chronology and put him in contradiction with Josephus' story about Agrippa dying as a result of his God-acclamation.

a reader who knew that Herod died in 44 would know that Peter preached before 44 to the gentiles and soon discover that Paul preached for the first time after 44. A reader who did not know when Herod died could rush to a copy of Josephus' *Antiquities* and at 19:8:2 find that the death of Herod came after he had reigned "three years under the reign of Claudius Caesar."²³ Now, we can conclude that Luke either makes up the tradition that Paul starts preaching about when Jesus was killed under Pilate (Acts 13:14) after Herod's death, or, more likely, he follows an already established tradition. Assuming he is using already established Pauline material, we get a date for Paul's preaching after Agrippa's death (44 CE) but before the Claudian expulsion order from Rome (49 CE?). Additionally, just before preaching the gospel in Antioch, *Acts* (13:7) records that Paul sailed to Cyprus and mentions the name of Sergius Paulus as proconsul. Apparently the name Sergius Paulus was found on a memorial stone in Rome indicating that he became proconsul in 47.²⁴ This places the time of Paul's first preaching about a crucified man to the gentiles right about the time that Irenaeus and Tertullian claim that Christ died.

Now, the point is not to argue that any of this is actual, but only that Luke was following a traditional belief in showing Paul starting to preach around 47. Luke wanted to show that Peter preached to the gentiles before Paul. Luke needed only to show that Peter preached before the death of Agrippa in 44 to establish priority for him as God's apostle to the gentiles.²⁵ If followers of Paul who wrote the Paul-centered material in *Acts* had believed that Paul started preaching in the 30s or early 40s, Luke's narrative about Peter would not have done the job of establishing Peter's priority. So we can strongly suspect that Paul's followers, before reading *Acts*, believed that Paul started preaching in the

²³ "Antiquities," 19.8.2 (351)

²⁴ Seiglie, Mario "The Book of Acts, The Message Spreads," <http://www.ucg.org/articles/gn31/acts.html>.

²⁵ I suspect that Luke writes about 130 or later, but this dating of Luke is not important to my identities hypotheses. In fact, the earlier the date, the more it establishes those identities, as writers closer to the date of the actual beginning of Paul's preaching would be less likely to change accounts of it. Luke's Pauline material only knows the general idea that Jesus died under Pontius Pilate. I assume this rumor/myth came after Suetonius' writing of *Lives* in 110 CE, which makes no mention of Pilate and before the time of Tacitus' *Annals* in 115 CE. If the Paulinist material Luke used was after about 130 it would probably have contained more information about Jesus' death. Yet, one cannot discount that Luke might have been writing much later and using material decades old.

mid to late 40s. Also, importantly, note that after the death of Agrippa in 44, Peter, who was the main focus for nearly twelve chapters in *Acts*, virtually disappears from the narrative, making only a guest appearance at 15:7-11 to reaffirm his priority in gentile conversion. Having demonstrated his point about Peter's priority, Luke has no need to say a single further word about Peter.

Josephus' Wars of the Jews

In *Wars* Josephus speaks very little about the mid-40s. Covering the years 37 to 41, he only talks about Gaius (Caligula) appointing Agrippa as a king and trying to get his statues placed in the Jerusalem Temple. In Chapter 11, he talks about Agrippa doing a good job and his territory being expanded by Claudius when he becomes Emperor in 41. Agrippa dies in 44. For the years 44 through 48, he merely says, "...Claudius made the country a Roman province, and sent Cuspius Fadus to be its procurator, and after him Tiberius Alexander, who, making no alterations of the ancient laws, kept the nation in tranquillity."²⁶

He goes on to describe the beginnings of the Jewish War in 48 under the procurator Cumanus. It seems that Josephus is reassuring us that the period of 41 through 47, the first years of Claudius' reign, were good years. It was only in 48 that "Cumanus began the troubles, and the Jews' ruin came on."²⁷ If we only had Josephus' *Wars* to go on, then the passages I found with the odd material in Irenaeus, Tertullian, Suetonius and Luke suggesting that something significant happened around 47 would scarcely be meaningful. But fifteen years later, writing in his *Antiquities*, Josephus changes his tune and tells us some noteworthy things did happen around that time.

Josephus' Antiquities of the Jews: Book 20

Josephus begins his 20th book with the death of King Agrippa and the coming of the procurator Fadus in 44 CE. He uses a thesis-antithesis structure in this book. He shows what happens to pious men favored by God in the first four chapters and then shows in the following seven chapters what happens to impious men not favored by God. In the first chapter, he relates a story of a successful Jewish embassy to Emperor

²⁶ Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, 11.6.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.12.1.

Claudius to regain control of the holy vestments that Fadus took away. Josephus spends the next three chapters telling about the charmed life of King Izates who converts to Judaism along with his mother Helena and successfully rules his kingdom against multiple threats.²⁸

In the first two paragraphs of chapter five, Josephus covers the period of the procuratorships of Cuspius Fadus (44-45) and Tiberius Julius Alexander (46-48). In these two paragraphs, he tells us about three events, the arrest of Theudas the Magician, the great famine, and the crucifixion of James and Simon, the sons of Judas the Galilean.

The first paragraph describes Theudas, the Magician, a prophet who led people to the Jordan River in order to part it and have them walk across it. Fadus (procurator 44-45) captured him and cut off his head.

Now it came to pass, while Fadus was procurator of Judea, that a certain magician, whose name was Theudas, persuaded a great part of the people to take their effects with them, and follow him to the river Jordan; for he told them he was a prophet, and that he would, by his own command, divide the river, and afford them an easy passage over it; and many were deluded by his words. However, Fadus did not permit them to make any advantage of his wild attempt, but sent a troop of horsemen out against them; who, falling upon them unexpectedly, slew many of them, and took many of them alive. They also took Theudas alive, and cut off his head, and carried it to Jerusalem. This was what befell the Jews in the time of Cuspius Fadus' government.²⁹

Josephus had mentioned this incident in *Wars* 2.13.4. He had not mentioned Theudas by name and gave Felix (procurator 52-59) the credit for stopping it.³⁰ In *Wars*, Josephus blamed

²⁸ *The Antiquities of the Jews*, Chapter 2. The story of the birth of King Izates is extremely interesting. King Monobazus, while asleep, and touching his wife's stomach, hears a voice from God "not to hurt the infant that was therein, which, by God's providence would be safely born, and have a happy life. Although he has other children he calls him "his only begotten son." Perhaps this is an illustration of how Gospel stories mutated from pieces of earlier historical tales which themselves used scriptures.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 20.5.1

³⁰ *Wars*, 2.13.4.

There was also another body of wicked men gotten together, not so impure in their actions, but more wicked in their intentions, which laid waste the happy state of the city no less than did these murderers. These were such men as deceived and deluded the people under pretense of Divine inspiration, but were for procuring innovations and changes of the government; and these prevailed with the multitude to

Cumanus (procurator 48-52) for starting the troubles that led to the Jewish-Roman War. One can only conjecture that he had a motive to shift this bloody incident to a time post-Cumanus rather than pre-Cumanus. Certainly pre-Cumanus, it tends to absolve Cumanus and the Romans of some responsibility for the war.

In the second paragraph in this chapter, we learn of a “great famine” that occurred at this time:

Then came Tiberius Alexander as successor to Fadus; he was the son of Alexander the alabarch of Alexandria, which Alexander was a principal person among all his contemporaries, both for his family and wealth: he was also more eminent for his piety than his son Alexander, for he did not continue in the religion of his country. Under these procurators that great famine happened in Judea, in which queen Helena bought corn in Egypt at a great expense, and distributed it to those that were in want, as I have related already.³¹

Josephus left out this report of the famine. Yet he thought it so significant that while talking about the divinity of Moses’ legislation in the third book of *Antiquities*, he mentions it:

a little before the beginning of this war, when Claudius was emperor of the Romans, and Ismael was our high priest, and when so great a famine was come upon us, that one tenth deal [of wheat] was sold for four drachmae, and when no less than seventy cori of flour were brought into the temple, at the feast of unleavened bread, (these cori are thirty-one Sicilian, but forty-one Athenian medimni,) not one of the priests was so hardy as to eat one crumb of it, even while so great a distress was upon the land; and this out of a dread of the law, and of

act like madmen, and went before them into the wilderness, as pretending that God would there show them the signals of liberty. But Felix thought this procedure was to be the beginning of a revolt; so he sent some horsemen and footmen both armed, who destroyed a great number of them.

In Acts 5:36, Luke also mentions Theudas, “For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody.” He seems to place him before 6 CE, saying, “After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing...” The way the text ordinarily reads now, it seems an incredible blunder on the part of Luke. However, if one wants to match Luke to Josephus, one can assume there is a mistranslation in the text of Luke, and that the words “after this” refers to the order of Gamaliel’s speaking about Theudas and Judas, and not to the historical order of the men. Using this interpretation, Luke indicates the mid 40’s as the time of Jesus’ death, as the speech must be taking place after the time of Theudas, after 45.

³¹ *Ant.* 20.5.2

that wrath which God retains against acts of wickedness, even when no one can accuse the actors.³²

It is interesting that Josephus kept the news of this “great famine” from us in *Wars*. My conjecture would be that it might be read as pointing towards God’s displeasure with the Jews before the coming of Nero’s Cumanus. Josephus was trying in *Wars* to put the blame for the war indirectly on Nero. The great famine happens before Nero, so he neglected its impact.

So far Josephus has revealed that a popular cult leader arrived earlier than he previously informed us and that there was a severe famine. Then Josephus reveals this interesting new fact:

And besides this, the sons of Judas of Galilee were now slain; I mean of that Judas who caused the people to revolt, when Cyrenius came to take an account of the estates of the Jews, as we have showed in a foregoing book. The names of those sons were James and Simon, whom Alexander commanded to be crucified.³³

First, let us think about the importance Josephus attaches to this event. No doubt, Josephus mentions many other Jewish rebel leaders killed, but he puts this event with the rebellion of Theudas in which “a great number” of Jews died, and a great famine which revealed the extraordinary obedience of Jewish priests to their traditions. It is one of only three events he names over a four year period, from the coming of Fadus in 44 to the coming of Cumanus in 48. It is the only action he associates with Tiberius Alexander who was procurator from 46 to 48. It is followed by a report of a removal of a head priest, the coming of the new procurator Cumanus and the death of Herod. We have to assume that it was a major event on the level of a bloody rebellion, a great famine, a change in priestly and governmental leadership, and the death of a head of state. In other words, the crucifixion of James and Simon was a major event.

There is earlier evidence and later evidence that makes these brothers central to the Jewish revolt against Rome. Before discussing James and Simon, let us examine this evidence.

³² Ibid., 3.15.3

³³ Ibid., 20.5.2

Before Simon and James: Judas The Galilean and the Fourth
Philosophy

Josephus writes about the father of Simon and James in both *Wars* (2.8.1) and *Antiquities* (18.1.1). Immediately after bringing him up, in both cases, he goes into a discussion of the different sects of philosophy of the Jews: the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the Essenes. Only when discussing fate (*Antiquities* 13.5.9), divine revelation (15.10.5), and his decision at age sixteen to make trial of “the several sects among us” (*Life* 1.2) does Josephus mention the philosophical divisions among the Jews. It appears that Judas the Galilean is associated with deep divisions within Judaism.

It is interesting to compare again what Josephus writes in *Wars* with what he writes in *Antiquities*. One can assume they reflect changes in his thinking and political changes in the years from the mid-70s when he wrote *Wars* to the early 90s when he wrote *Antiquities*. In *Wars*, he has generally placed the blame on Nero and the bad representatives he sent to run Judea, Samaria, and Galilee. In *Antiquities*, the main blame is placed on the philosophy of Judas the Galilean. Josephus is extraordinarily eloquent, after writing about Quirinius coming in 6 CE to tax the Jews, he writes:

But a certain Judas a Gaulaonite from a city named Gamala, who had enlisted the aid of Saddok, a Pharisee, threw himself into the cause of rebellion. They said that the assessment carried with it a status amounting to downright slavery, no less, and appealed to the nation to make a bid for independence. They urged that in case of success the Jews would have laid the foundation of prosperity, while if they failed to obtain any such boon, they would win honour and renown for their lofty aim; and that Heaven would be their zealous helper to no lesser end than the furthering of their enterprise until it succeeded--all the more if with high devotion in their hearts they stood firm and did not shrink from the bloodshed that might be necessary. Since the populace, when they heard their appeals, responded gladly, the plot to strike boldly made serious progress; and so these men sowed the seed of every kind of misery, which so afflicted the nation that words are inadequate. When wars are set afoot that are bound to rage beyond control, and when friends are done away with who might have alleviated the suffering, when raids are made by great hordes of brigands and men of the highest standing are assassinated, it is supposed to be the common welfare that is upheld, but the truth is that in such cases the motive is private gain. They sowed the seed from which sprang strife between

factions and the slaughter of fellow citizens. Some were slain in civil strife, for these men madly had recourse to butchery of each other and of themselves from a longing not to be outdone by their opponents; others were slain by the enemy in war. Then came famine, reserved to exhibit the last degree of shamelessness, followed by the storming and razing of the cities until at last the very temple of God was ravaged by the enemy's fire through this revolt. Here is a lesson that an innovation and reform in ancestral traditions weighs heavily in the scale in leading to the destruction of the congregation of the people.³⁴

Josephus is describing a mass movement that starts in 6 CE and continues spreading. He says that "the folly that ensued began to afflict the nation after Gessius Florus."³⁵ So something happened after 44 or 45 that led to the Jewish rebellion that was directly connected to the philosophy of Judas. The only things which Josephus will tell us happened that can be connected directly to Judas are the crucifixions of Judas' sons under Tiberius Alexander.

Josephus writes in *Antiquities* that Judas was the author of "the fourth sect" of Jewish philosophy. This is interesting because in *Wars*, Josephus does not talk about the followers of Judas being a fourth sect, but in *Antiquities*, fifteen years later, he does. This could reflect a nascent postwar split between Judaism and Christianity.

Josephus writes that "The Jews, from the most ancient times, had three philosophies pertaining to their traditions, that of the Essenes, that of the Sadducees, and, thirdly, that of the group called the Pharisees."³⁶ He goes on to say, "As for the fourth of the philosophies, Judas the Galilaeen set himself up as leader of it. This school agrees in all other respects with the opinions of the Pharisees, except that they have a passion for liberty that is almost unconquerable, since they are convinced that God alone is their leader and master."³⁷ One should be careful here not to see the fourth philosophy as being a sect of the Pharisees. In trying to get us to understand about Judas the Galilean, Josephus spends some twelve paragraphs in *Wars* talking about Essenes and only one in talking about Pharisees and Sadducees. In *Antiquities*, he gives one paragraph to each philosophy, but his description of

³⁴ *Ant.* 18.1.1.

³⁵ *Ant.*, 18.1.6.

³⁶ *Ant.*, 18.1.2.

³⁷ *Ant.*, 18.1.6.

“the fourth sect” here (“They think little of submitting to death in unusual forms.”³⁸) closely matches his description of the Essenes in *Wars* “And as for death, if it will be for their glory, they esteem it better than living always.”³⁹

Josephus assumes that we are familiar with his passages from *Wars*. In fact, he writes, “To be sure, I have spoken about them in the second book of the *Jewish War*, but nevertheless I shall here too dwell on them for a moment.”⁴⁰ He is only adding information to what he expects us to know from *Wars*. In that second book, Josephus has identified four groups, the last being an “order” of Essenes:

Moreover, there is another order of Essenes, who agree with the rest as to their way of living, and customs, and laws, but differ from them in the point of marriage, as thinking that by not marrying they cut off the principal part of the human life, which is the prospect of succession; nay rather, that if all men should be of the same opinion, the whole race of mankind would fail.⁴¹

While not very clear, Josephus leaves us with the impression that the fourth philosophy of Judas mixes Essenic and Pharisaic notions with new revolutionary ideas. Later I will show that the Christian writer Hippolytus provides us with a clearer view that the fourth philosophy is the basis for early Christian philosophy.

After Simon and James: Menahem, Another Son of Judas,
Begins the War; Eliazar, Son of Jairas, Kin
of Menahem, Ends It.

In *Wars*, Josephus lays the blame for the start of the fighting of the war directly on two incidents:

And at this time it was that some of those that principally excited the people to go to war, made an assault upon a certain fortress called Masada. They took it by treachery and slew the Romans that were there, and put others of their own party to keep it. At the same time Eleazar, the son of Ananias the high priest, a very bold youth, who was at that time governor of the temple, persuaded those that officiated in the divine service to receive no gift or sacrifice for any foreigner.⁴²

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ *Wars*, 2.8.10

⁴⁰ *Ant.*, 18.1.2.

⁴¹ *Wars*, 2.8.13.

⁴² *Wars*, 2.17.2

We gather from this that Eleazar, the son of Ananias the High Priest, and a “very bold youth who was at that time governor of the temple” was following a very xenophobic Jewish group who did not want any foreign sacrifice in the temple. Josephus goes on to talk about how the men of power and the principal of the Pharisees tried to explain to the people that it had always been the custom of the Jews to accept foreign sacrifices and that “they did now irritate the Romans to take up arms against them, and brought up novel rules of strange divine worship, and determined to run the hazard of having their city condemned for impiety, while they would not allow any foreigner but Jews only, either to sacrifice or to worship therein.”⁴³ Josephus describes how the city split into two factions with the “men of power,” the high priests and “the part of the multitude that were desirous of peace” seizing the upper city, while the “seditious” held the Temple and lower part. At this point the fighting in a civil war started. It is important to note that it is at this time that Josephus introduces Menahem:

In the meantime one Menahem, the son of Judas, that was called the Galilean (who was a very cunning sophister, and had formerly reproached the Jews under Cyrenius, that after God they were subject to the Romans) took some of the men of note with him and retired to Masada where he broke open king Herod’s armory, and gave arms not only to his own people, but to other robbers also. These he made use of for a guard, and returned in the state of a king to Jerusalem; he became the leader of the sedition, and gave orders for continuing the siege...⁴⁴

Note that Menahem is one of the leaders in Jerusalem at the beginning of the revolt. He leads a raid on the Roman fortress of Masada. He wins the battle, captures weapons, returns as King of the Jews and becomes the acknowledged leader of the revolution. Reading between the lines, one suspects he considered himself a Messiah. But something unforeseen happened to this Messiah. Josephus tells us:

Now the overthrow of the places of strength, and the death of the high priest Ananias, so puffed up Manahem, that he became barbarously cruel; and as he thought he had no antagonist to dispute the management of affairs with him, he was no better than an insupportable tyrant; but Eleazar and

⁴³ *Wars*, 2.17.3

⁴⁴ *Wars*, 2.17.8

his party, when words had passed between them, how it was not proper when they revolted from the Romans, out of the desire of liberty, to betray that liberty to any of their own people, and to bear a lord, who, though he should be guilty of no violence, was yet meaner than themselves; as also, that in case they were obliged to set some one over their public affairs, it was fitter they should give that privilege to any one rather than to him; they made an assault upon him in the temple; for he went up thither to worship in a pompous manner, and adorned with royal garments, and had his followers with him in their armor. But Eleazar and his party fell violently upon him, as did also the rest of the people; and taking up stones to attack him withal, they threw them at the sophister, and thought, that if he were once ruined, the entire sedition would fall to the ground. Now Manahem and his party made resistance for a while; but when they perceived that the whole multitude were falling upon them, they fled which way every one was able...⁴⁵

So Eleazar betrayed Menahem. The key words here are perhaps “to bear a lord, who, though he should be guilty of no violence, was yet meaner than themselves.” Since Josephus has just told us that Menahem had led an armed raid against Masada, slain Romans, as well as the high priest Ananias and his brother Hezekiah, it is a little odd that Eleazar calls Menahem “guilty of no violence.” He probably means guilty of no violence towards the rebels. The phrase “meaner than themselves” probably refers to a lowly birth. His lowly birth in the eyes of upper class Jews disqualified him from being the Messiah and ruling as king. One can conjecture that the stoning in the temple of this brother of Simon and the fleeing of the followers found echoes in later texts.

Josephus tells us what happened to Menahem and his followers:

A few there were of them who privately escaped to Masada, among whom was Eleazar, the son of Jairus, who was of kin to Manahem, and acted the part of a tyrant at Masada afterward. As for Manahem himself, he ran away to the place called Ophla, and there lay skulking in private; but they took him alive, and drew him out before them all; they then tortured him with many sorts of torments, and after all slew him, as they did by those that were captains under him also, and particularly

⁴⁵ *Wars*, 2.17.9

by the principal instrument of his tyranny, whose name was Apsalom.⁴⁶

Later, Josephus will give Eleazar, kin of Manahem, a wonderful and heroic suicidal speech at Masada. It is the dramatic end of the revolt begun by his ancestor Judas some 68 years before. The torture and torment of the lowly born, would-be Lord and King of the Jews, Menahem, abandoned by all his followers, may find an echo in the canonical gospels.

The Problem with the Names Simon and James

So far, I have shown that four independent ancient historical sources point to an important event in Christian history happening during or around the time of the procuratorship of Tiberius Alexander 46-48: Suetonius (early second century), the author of *Acts*⁴⁷ (I suggest mid-second century), Irenaeus (late second century), and Tertullian (early third century). I have shown that the crucifixion of Simon and James under Tiberius Alexander could be this event. It is certainly possible that I have construed the data to fit my hypothesis, but I believe that the data has clearly led me to the hypothesis. While not overwhelmingly convincing, I think the data are significant enough to warrant further investigation to see if other strong links can be found.

Next, I have shown that this event forms an important link in a series of events that Josephus places great importance upon. Josephus links the crucifixions to the first revolt against Rome in 6 CE (Judas the Galilean), the beginning of the fighting against Rome in 66 CE (Menahem), and to the last military defeat at Masada in 74 CE (Eleazar, son of Jairus).

I will now point out the significance of the names involved. The name Simon is quite common in Josephus. Josephus lists twenty different Simons. If Josephus had written only that Judas had a son named Simon, it would be difficult to be sure he meant the Simon also known as Simon-Peter, referred to in numerous Christian texts as an early leader of the Christian movement. On the other hand, James is rare. Josephus mentions only one other James in *Antiquities* and *Wars*, a brave Jewish fighter named

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ I consider only the material regarding Paul in Acts to be of a somewhat objective historical nature. The material regarding Peter seems largely created for rhetorical purposes.

James son of Sosas.⁴⁸ The name does not exist in Philo's writings. It is not a common name in the period. This obviously contradicts Eusebius' famous assertion, quoted from Hegesippus, "He has been called the Just by all from the time of our Saviour to the present day; for there were many that bore the name of James."⁴⁹ One would like to ask Eusebius and Hegesippus if being "brother of the Lord" would not been enough to distinguish him from other people named James.

One might wonder why two men named James (James, son of Zebedee and James, son of Alphaeus) are listed in the Synoptic Gospels among the Apostles if James is such a rare name at that time. Robert Price suggests the answer:

Perhaps distinguishing "James, son of Zebedee" from "James the Just" was an attempt to create two characters out of one, so as to make all the traditions sound right. John had been split into two characters ("John the Elder" and "John, son of Zebedee") in order to preserve "John" as author of both the Revelation on the one hand and the "Johannine" gospel and epistles on the other. So maybe Mark thought of the James who belonged to the inner circle of Jesus as being one of the three Pillars. Roman Catholic scholars have usually identified the two.⁵⁰

One can add that this same doubling process also appears with Simon who gets split into Simon Peter and Simon the Zealot (Mark 3:18, Matthew 10:4, and Luke 6:15).

Luke also splits Judas into Judas, son of James, and Judas Iscariot (Luke 6:16). An editor of John's Gospel splits Judas into Judas Not Iscariot, and Judas Iscariot (John 14:22).⁵¹ Even the character Jesus Christ gets split into a freed prisoner named Barabbas (Son of the father). Simon also gets split into Simon of Cyrene who carries Jesus' cross, while Simon Peter flees. John the Baptist becomes John, son of Zebedee. One notices that the way the name Jesus absorbs references (Messiah, Savior, Lord, Son of God, Son of Man, etc.) is matched by the way other names get broken up into multiple references (e.g. Mary, James, Simon,

⁴⁸ Wars, 1.8 and 6.2.

⁴⁹ Eusebius, *Church History*, 2.23.

⁵⁰ *Deconstructing Jesus*, p. 53.

⁵¹ It is also interesting that John also splits Simon into the father of Judas Iscariot (John 6:71, 13:26). Josephus tells us that Judas the Galilean was the father of Simon, and John tells us that Judas was the son of Simon Iscariot. Judas the father gets reduced to the status of brother in the synoptics and to the status of son in John's Gospel.

John and Judas). This indicates how dreamlike (in the Freudian sense) is the evolution of the texts.

Robert Eisenman discovers all these doublings and many more in *James the Brother of Jesus*. Although he does not suggest that Jesus Christ could result from a splitting of the historical Simon into Jesus Christ and Peter, he does suggest:

Nor do we even know that Paul has the right name for the character he is discussing and that, as discussed above, he is not using an esoteric or symbolical name meaning "salvation" for an unidentified agitator crucified some time before he (Paul) came on the scene.⁵²

Since we have basically the same names of the apostles also being used as family names for Jesus' brothers in Mark 6:3 (James, Joses, Judas, Simon) and Matthew 13:55 (James, Joseph, Simon and Judas), one can suggest that the separation of family and apostles is also an artificial device. One can easily suppose that the leadership of the Galilean based Judaic-Christian movement revolved around one family. In reconstructing their history, the gospel writers of the second century placed their own apostolic structure into the narrative.

Regardless of how the New Testament Gospels treat the name, James holds a unique position in all ancient texts. Multiple early Christian texts place him in a leadership role in the early Jewish-Christian movement. Pierre-Antoine Bernheim remarks:

The pre-eminence accorded to James in many Jewish-Christian, Catholic and Gnostic traditions is quite remarkable. These traditions have passed on the lofty image which James enjoyed in the primitive Jerusalem church and in the other communities which had a majority of Jewish Christians. Christian movements with very different and often opposing ideas resorted to the authority and the prestige of James to guarantee the antiquity and orthodoxy of their conceptions.⁵³

Now one can assume that the texts of early Christianity and Josephus do not match and they are talking about two different Jameses and Simons and two different groups. But one would have to explain some extraordinary coincidences. Both groups claim origination in Galilee around the time of the census of Quirinius, and they both had leaders named Simon and James in Jerusalem in the 40s. They both had large followings (Obviously,

⁵² Eisenmann, *James, the Brother of Jesus*, p. 926.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

Josephus would not have mentioned the deaths of Simon and James as the one important event of the three years of Tiberius Alexander's rule if Simon and James led a small insignificant group). Both have leaders crucified by the Romans. Most significantly, Josephus does not mention the Simon and James leadership of the Christian movement and early Christian sources do not mention the revolutionary movement of Josephus' Simon and James. That these sources do not acknowledge the existence of the other, even if only to distinguish them from each other, seems beyond human understanding on the hypothesis that they are talking about two different sets of Simon and James.

One could just as well suggest that at the beginning of the American revolution there was a second large group of revolutionaries led by men named Thomas and George who wanted to start a philosophical revolution from Great Britain, or another group of leaders of the Russian Revolution named Vladimir and Leon, but the difficulties of such an idea are apparent. The leaders of the Judean revolutionary movement of the 40s were Simon and James, and assuming some imaginary dopplegangers leading another mass Judaic-Christian group at the time, while hypothetically possible, seems unlikely to common sense as well as Ockham's razor.

One more important textual question I would like to cover is a second reference to James in Josephus.

Antiquities 20.9.1:

A Christian Interpolation Mentioning James

Our present translations of Josephus contain the following passage:

But this younger Ananus, who, as we have told you already, took the high priesthood, was a bold man in his temper, and very insolent; he was also of the sect of the Sadducees, who are very rigid in judging offenders, above all the rest of the Jews, as we have already observed; when, therefore, Ananus was of this disposition, he thought he had now a proper opportunity [to exercise his authority]. Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he assembled the sanhedrin of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others, [or, some of his companions]; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned...

This passage is sometimes used to support the *Testimonium Flavianum*. As I consider the *Testimonium* an unfortunate distraction to serious study of Josephus, I do not wish to discuss it here. I only refer readers to K.A Olsen's article "Eusebius and the *Testimonium Flavianum*"⁵⁴ which presents strong evidence that Eusebius created it. I present K. A. Olson's summary:

The external evidence for the authenticity of the *Testimonium* is no more impressive than the internal evidence. The Josephan authenticity either of the reference to Jesus in A.J. 20.9.1 section 200 or of Agapius' Arabic text would imply that some form of the passage existed, but both are very suspect as the work of Josephus. Therefore, we have no convincing evidence that Josephus wrote any part of the *Testimonium*.

When we turn to the question whether Eusebius wrote the passage, the situation is very different. No author cites the *Testimonium* before Eusebius, nor does any author cite it for nearly a century after Eusebius. Eusebius himself cites it three times, always to refute pagan attacks on Jesus' character, and we know from other examples that Eusebius incorrectly attributes to Josephus views that support his own. The passage is made up of vocabulary and concepts paralleled in Eusebius' works *Contra Hieroclem*, *Demonstratio evangelica*, and *Historia ecclesiastica*. Complete certainty is unattainable, but we have very good reasons to suppose that Eusebius wrote the *Testimonium*.⁵⁵

I toyed with the idea that the passage 20.9.1 had read originally "brother of Simon" and an early interpolator changed it to "brother of Jesus, the so-called Christ," as that would support the idea of Simon being turned into a Christ figure soon after his death. Since the passage comes only a little after the reference to Simon and James in Book 20, this would make some sense. But I find three strong objections to this. First, the sentencing takes place in 62 CE, when Josephus has already told us that James died during the rule of Tiberius Alexander from 46 to 48 CE. I consider it quite possible that James was executed a year or two after Simon, but not 14 years. Second, the mention of the stoning of James seems extraneous in the paragraph. Ananus delivers James and others to be stoned, but Josephus never tells us why. A reader of second-or third-century Christian literature might know why the Sanhedrin stoned James, but would Josephus

⁵⁴ Olson, K. A., *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, v. 61 no. 2 (April 1999) pp. 305-22

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

assume all his readers to be readers of second-or third-century Christian literature?

My third objection comes from reading the rest of the paragraph:

But as for those who seemed the most equitable of the citizens, and such as were the most uneasy at the breach of the laws, they disliked what was done; they also sent to the king [Agrippa], desiring him to send to Ananus that he should act so no more, for that what he had already done was not to be justified; nay, some of them went also to meet Albinus, as he was upon his journey from Alexandria, and informed him that it was not lawful for Ananus to assemble a sanhedrin without his consent. Whereupon Albinus complied with what they said, and wrote in anger to Ananus, and threatened that he would bring him to punishment for what he had done; on account of which king Agrippa took the high priesthood from him, when he had ruled but three months...⁵⁶

Note that the men who go to Albinus do not say anything about the death of James and others to Albinus, only about Ananus calling the Sanhedrin, and that Albinus replaces Ananus for calling the Sanhedrin, not for killing James or anybody else. In other words, the sentencing of James does not bring about any consequences. For this and the prior two reasons, it seems probable to me that the reference to James here was a marginal note relating to the Sanhedrin, which found its way into the text. Thus I believe Josephus only referred to Simon and James in *Antiquities* 20:5:2.

However, this does not mean that the well-attested stoning of James came from thin air. Eisenman suggests that the stoning of Stephen in Acts in the 40s and the stoning of James in *Antiquities* 20:9:1 in the 60s are really one event.⁵⁷ I agree with him that this refers to only one historical event, but I think that the historical source is probably the previously mentioned stoning of James' brother Menahem.

Also, we should note that in contrast to the vague description of James' death in Josephus 20.9.1, in Eusebius' quote of Hegesippus in his *Church History* he gives us three different causes of death for James. The Scribes and Pharisees (not Sanhedrin) threw him off the temple pinnacle, they stoned him, and finally an unknown laundryman beat him over the head with a club.

⁵⁶ *Ant.* 20.1.

⁵⁷ *James, the Brother of Jesus*, often, but especially chapter 14.

The aforesaid Scribes and Pharisees therefore placed James upon the pinnacle of the temple, and cried out to him and said: "Thou just one, in whom we ought all to have confidence, forasmuch as the people are led astray after Jesus, the crucified one, declare to us, what is the gate of Jesus. And he answered with a loud voice, "Why do ye ask me concerning Jesus, the Son of Man? He himself sitteth in heaven at the right hand of the great Power, and is about to come upon the clouds of heaven." And when many were fully convinced and gloried in the testimony of James, and said, "Hosanna to the Son of David," these same Scribes and Pharisees said again to one another, "We have done badly in supplying such testimony to Jesus. But let us go up and throw him down, in order that they may be afraid to believe him." And they cried out, saying, "Oh! oh! the just man is also in error." And they fulfilled the Scripture written in Isaiah, "Let us take away the just man, because he is troublesome to us: therefore they shall eat the fruit of their doings." So they went up and threw down the just man, and said to each other, "Let us stone James the Just." And they began to stone him, for he was not killed by the fall; but he turned and knelt down and said, "I entreat thee, Lord God our Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And while they were thus stoning him one of the priests of the sons of Rechab, the son of the Rechabites, who are mentioned by Jeremiah the prophet, cried out, saying, "cease, what do ye? The just one prayeth for you." And one of them, who was a fuller, took the club with which he beat out clothes and struck the just man on the head. And thus he suffered martyrdom. And they buried him on the spot, by the temple, and his monument still remains by the temple. He became a true witness, both to Jews and Greeks, that Jesus is the Christ. And immediately Vespasian besieged them.⁵⁸

The fall from the temple may be based on some historical event, as Josephus describes "Zacharias the son of Baruch, one of the most eminent of the citizens" being thrown from the temple by Zealots and Idumeans,⁵⁹ but it also has an imaginary source. In this case, not only is it a fable, but it is a fable about the father of fables: Aesop.

Aesop came to Delphi, bringing gold from Kroisos, in order to make a splendid sacrifice to the god and to distribute four minas apiece to each Delphian. Thereupon a quarrel broke out with the people of Delphi. Aesop made the sacrifice, but sent the money back to Kroisos, deeming this people unworthy of generosity. But they accused him of sacrilege and put him to

⁵⁸ Eusebius, *EH*, 2.23.12-18

⁵⁹ *Wars*, 4.5.4.

death, hurling him down from the top of this rock. Angered by this crime, the god punished the Delphians with barren soil and all sorts of diseases.⁶⁰

François Lissarrangue notes, “The criticism of false oracles or of wrongful sacrificers is frequent in the Aesopic corpus...along with the affirmation of Apollo’s greatness and glory.”⁶¹ It is interesting that Vespasian plays the role of the avenging god in the Eusebian quote of Hegesippus’s tale of the death of James..

The Essenes, the Fourth Philosophy, and the Christians.

Here I wish to place Simon and James within ideological coordinates in first century Judaism. Eisenman does this by using both Hippolytus⁶² and the Dead Sea Scrolls. As his controversial use of the Dead Sea scrolls may overshadow, I will use only Hippolytus to arrive at his result of an identity of Zealots and Essenes.

Hippolytus, writing in the early 200s, discusses four parties of the Essenes. The first party avoids coins and cities, wanting nothing to do with idols where statues are erected. The second party doesn’t allow anybody who isn’t Jewish (circumcised) to speak about God and his laws. The third party only uses the term “lord” to refer to God. The fourth party, a later party, doesn’t associate with the others. Hippolytus describes them this way:

But here also there are very many of them of so great longevity, as even to live longer than a hundred years. They assert, therefore, that a cause of this arises from their extreme devotion to religion, and their condemnation of all excess in regard of what is served up (as food), and from their being temperate and incapable of anger. And so it is that they despise death, rejoicing when they can finish their course with a good conscience. If, however, any one would even put to the torture persons of this description, in order to induce any amongst them either to speak evil of the law, or eat what is offered in sacrifice to an idol, he will not effect his purpose; for one of this

⁶⁰ Plutarch, *Moralia*, 556F-557A.

⁶¹ Lissarrague, François, “Aesop, Between Man and Beast: Ancient Portraits and Illustrations,” in Beth Cohen, editor, *Not the Classical Ideal* (Brill’s Scholar’s List, Netherlands), p. 144.

⁶² Eisenman assumes that Hippolytus is the author of *Refutation of All Heresies*. For the purposes of this paper we will make that attribution. The argument remains essentially the same no matter who wrote the work.

party submits to death and endures torment rather than violate his conscience.⁶³

One can suggest that this last (in chronological time) Essene group, sounds like Essenes who have been influenced by Cynics. It is the type of group that early Q material and the *Gospel of Thomas* may reflect. The search for longevity is indicated in that Gospel by the opening line, "And he said, 'Whoever discovers the interpretations of these saying will not taste death.'"⁶⁴

It is interesting to compare this paragraph with what Josephus writes:

They are long-lived also; inasmuch that many of them live above a hundred years, by means of the simplicity of their diet; nay, as I think, by means of the regular course of life they observe also. They condemn the miseries of life, and are above pain, by the generosity of their mind. And as for death, if it will be for their glory, they esteem it better than living always; and indeed our war with the Romans gave abundant evidence what great souls they had in their trials, wherein, although they were tortured and distorted, burnt and torn to pieces, and went through all kinds of instruments of torment, that they might be forced either to blaspheme their legislator, or to eat what was forbidden them, yet could they not be made to do either of them, no, nor once to flatter their tormentors, or to shed a tear; but they smiled in their very pains, and laughed those to scorn who inflicted the torments upon them, and resigned up their souls with great alacrity, as expecting to receive them again.⁶⁵

Notice that both Josephus and Hippolytus describe the longevity, diet, temperament and bravery of the Essenes, but Hippolytus leaves out their participation in the war with the Romans. He is attributing these positive qualities to a later group of Essenes whom he tries to disassociate from the earlier Essenes. Yet Josephus, writing in the mid-70s does not see this discontinuity among the Essenes. The Essenes stood up bravely against the Romans.

The Apostle Paul also suggests the identity of the earlier Essenes and the Christians:

With far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I have received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I

⁶³ Hippolytus, "The Refutation of All Heresies," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol 5 (Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), Chapter 21.

⁶⁴ *Gospel of Thomas*, 1

⁶⁵ *Wars*, 2.8.10

have been beaten with rods; once I was stoned. Three times I have been shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brethren; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the churches... At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas guarded the city of Damascus in order to seize me, but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped his hands.⁶⁶

This does not describe a moderate pacific, health-conscious group with members living past the age of one hundred years. It describes the life of a brave member of a known, hated, and persecuted revolutionary organization. Paul's statement that the governor of Damascus called out the militia to capture him indicates that the Christian churches at that time were considered dangerous organizations not protected by the norms of religious freedom that operated in the multicultural and tolerant Roman World. Also recall Paul's admissions of his own international persecutions of the church.

Hippolytus clearly identifies an earlier "second" Essene group, which seems to be as obsessed with circumcision as the earlier Christians in Jerusalem were. He writes:

if they happen to hear anyone maintaining a discussion concerning God and His laws—supposing such to be an uncircumcised person—they will closely watch him; and when they meet a person of this description in any place alone, they will threaten to slay him if he refuses to undergo the rite of circumcision. Now, if the latter does not wish to comply with this request, an Essene spares not, but even slaughters. And it is from this occurrence that they have received their appellation, being denominated (by some) Zelotae, but by others Sicarii.⁶⁷

Strong demands for circumcision to the point of violence seem unusual. Philo places circumcision under "The Special Laws" defending it against "childish ridicule" as a wise practice among many nations for health and symbolic reasons,⁶⁸ but he does not mention applying it by force. Josephus notes a case

⁶⁶ 2 Corinthians 11:23-33

⁶⁷ "Refutation," 21

⁶⁸ Philo, "De Specialibus Legibus, 1," in C.D. Yonge, *The Works of Philo* (Henrickson Publishers, 1995), p. 534.

where Galileans tried to force it on two rich refugees, but he objected to it as a violation of religious freedom.⁶⁹ In an article, "Forced Circumcision and the Shifting Role of Gentiles in Hasmonean Ideology," Steven Weitzman suggests it was only possibly carried out on a mass basis during a time of Hasmonean expansion, against Idumeans in the last part of the second century BCE. He writes, "From the Hasmonean perspective, as I showed throughout my analysis of 1 Maccabees, forced circumcision was not an act of tyranny but an act of zeal required to restore the social boundaries between Jews and Gentiles in the Holy Land."⁷⁰

The strong demands of this group for circumcision may be read as reflected in Paul's narrative of his struggle with the Jerusalem leadership of his movement over this issue. Paul clearly indicates the violent xenophobic nature of this leadership.

Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. I went up in response to a revelation. Then I laid before them (though only in a private meeting with the acknowledged leaders) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure that I was not running, or had not run, in vain. But even Titus, who was with me, was not compelled to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. But because of false believers secretly brought in, who slipped in to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might enslave us — we did not submit to them even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might always remain with you. And from those who were supposed to be acknowledged leaders (what they actually were makes no difference to me. God shows no partiality). Those leaders contributed nothing to me. On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel for the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel for the circumcised (for he who worked through Peter making him an apostle to the circumcised also worked through me in sending me to the Gentiles), and when James and Cephas and John, who were acknowledged pillars, recognized the grace that had been given to me, they gave to Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship, agreeing that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. They asked only one thing, that we remember the poor, which was actually what I was eager to do.⁷¹

⁶⁹ "The Life of Flavius Josephus," *The Works of Josephus* (Hendrickson, 1999), chapter 23, p. 8.

⁷⁰ Weitzman, Steven, "Forced Circumcision and the Shifting Role of Gentiles in Hasmonean Ideology," *Harvard Theological Review*, 92/1 (1999), pp. 37-59.

⁷¹ Galatians 2:1-10

Especially note how Paul wants to distance himself from the Jerusalem leadership, “And from those who were supposed to be acknowledged leaders (what they actually were makes no difference to me. God shows no partiality). Those leaders contributed nothing to me.” Apparently both Peter and Paul had visions of the God Christ Jesus, but the gospels they preached were quite different.

For the most part, Hippolytus in *The Refutation of All Heresies* pretty much copies what Josephus says about the Essenes’ doctrines. We can assume that he has no personal experience with the Essenes, but he is only copying first-century sources. He does add one important small detail to Josephus’ account:

Chap XXII: Belief of the Essenes in the Resurrection;
Their System a Suggestive One.

Now the doctrine of the resurrection has also derived support among these; for they acknowledge both that the flesh will rise again, and that it will be immortal in the same manner as the soul is already imperishable.⁷²

Compare this to 1 Corinthians 15:53, “For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality.”

In the Greco-Roman world the raising of the soul after death would not be considered controversial. In fact, one could consider it almost a norm. Only the raising of the body after death would be considered an unusual doctrine. Neither Philo nor Josephus mentions it. While it is possible that other groups held this unusual position, it is highly significant that both Paul’s followers and these Essenes held it. It is unlikely that many groups at this time held the identical doctrine of the body rising after death and becoming imperishable like the soul.

Hippolytus tells us more interesting information:

There is then another order of the Essenes who use the same customs and prescribed method of living with the foregoing sects, but make an alteration from these in one respect, viz., marriage. Now they maintain that those who have abrogated matrimony commit some terrible offense, which is for the destruction of life, and that they ought not to cut off the succession of children. However, they make a trial of their betrothed women for a period of three years; and when they

⁷² Hippolytus, *Refutation*, Chapter XXII

have been three times purified, with a view of proving their ability of bringing forth children, so then they wed... they marry not from sexual motives but for the advantages of children.⁷³

This matches Josephus who calls these pro-marriage Essenes, "another order of Essenes."⁷⁴ He only adds that "they do not accompany their wives when they are with child, as a demonstration that they do not marry out of regard to pleasure, but for the sake of posterity." This contrasts with Luke's Gospel account of Joseph accompanying Mary to Bethlehem.

Paul, being diplomatic and trying to keep the Corinthian church from fracturing along married versus celibate lines, does not agree with the Essenes who forbid marriage or the Essenes who demand marriage. He takes an intermediate position on the issue:

If anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his fiancée, if his passions are strong, and so it has to be, let him marry as he wishes; it is no sin. Let them marry. But if someone stands firm in his resolve, being under no necessity but having his own desire under control, and has determined in his own mind to keep her as his fiancée, he will do well. So then, he who marries his fiancée does well; and he who refrains from marriage will do better.⁷⁵

Hippolytus distinguishes the marrying Essenic Pharisees from other legalistic Pharisees: He writes:

But there are also others who themselves practice the Jewish customs; and these, both in respect of caste and in respect of the laws, are called Pharisees. Now the greatest part of these is to be found in every locality, inasmuch as, though all are styled Jews, yet, on account of the peculiarity of the opinions advanced by them, they have been denominated by titles proper to each. These, then, firmly hold the ancient tradition, and continue to pursue in a disputative spirit a close investigation into the things regarded according to the Law as clean and not clean. And they interpret the regulations of the Law, and put forward teachers, whom they qualify for giving instruction in such things.⁷⁶

So one has to be careful in the use of terminology. The legalistic Pharisees described above possibly were the ones that went to Yavne and started Rabbinic Judaism. The marrying Essenic

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ *Wars*, 2.8.13.

⁷⁵ 1 Corinthians 7:36-38

⁷⁶ "Refutation," 22.

Pharisees led to the many branches of Christianity that emerged after 47 CE.

Conclusion

I have presented evidence for the following three identity hypotheses: 1) The crucified man was Simon Peter, 2) Simon Peter was the son of Judas the Galilean, and 3) Christianity was the Essenic-Pharisaic-Zealot “fourth philosophy” that led the Jews to war against Rome. The first proposition I derived primarily from five independent historical sources—Irenaeus, Tertullian, Suetonius, Luke’s *Acts*, and Josephus. The second derives strictly from Josephus and the third comes from matching writings of the Apostle Paul with Josephus’ description of the “fourth philosophy” and Hippolytus’ description of the Essenic movement. While each of these identifications may be individually correct without the other two, they do tend to support each other.

Under the presently orthodox understanding of Christian history, Josephus does not describe the mass Christian movement of the first century, and early Christian literature does not describe the mass movement of the first century philosophy of Judas the Galilean. The problem disappears when we identify the two movements as the same movement with our texts speaking of them from two different points of view. Josephus describes it from the outside looking in at it, and Paul and other early Christian sources describe it from the inside looking out.