

From Old to New:  
Paradigm Shifts concerning Judaism,  
the Gospel of John, Jesus, and the  
Advent of "Christianity"

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The twenty-first century begins with a worldwide recognition of massive paradigm shifts. Unfortunately, too many students and scholars tend to use commentaries and scholarly monographs without noting their date of publication. In the process, their own work and insight suffer from failing to perceive that more advances have been achieved in biblical research over the past twenty-five years than in the preceding 250 years. One cannot use scholarly works published from the nineteenth century to the present assuming naively that scholars are examining the same texts with similar methodology, sophistication, and perception.

At least five significant factors distinguish recent work from previous publications. First, we are much more sensitive to the distortions caused by the intrusion of inappropriate philosophy. In the nineteenth century, D. F. Strauss shaped his studies by following Hegelianism. In the twentieth century, R. Bultmann, his School, and even the "New Quest for the Historical Jesus" were marred by viewing ancient texts through the presuppositions of Existentialism. These two examples are focused and limited to Germany. What we learn from these masters is that we must be aware of our presuppositions and methodologies and be more accurate historians of Judaism and cultures influential in shaping ancient Palestinian thought and life.

Second, we have observed that prejudices blind us to what we seek to see. Consider, for instance, how Confessionalism and Anti-Semitism (along with supersessionism) have distorted the re-creations of first-century phenomena, and especially the presentation of the historical Jesus. Too many interpreters are unperceptive of how they have been influenced,

for example, by Kant and Spinoza, both of whom imagined Second Temple Judaism as corrupt.

We bring numerous unexamined assumptions to the text. Too many readers miss the fact that, according to Mark 9:1, Jesus, at least at times, thought the eschaton and the dynamic eruption of God's Rule (the Kingdom of God) would occur in his own lifetime or, at least, the lifetime of those who heard him. Likewise, a perception of the meaning of Genesis 3 and John 3 is often distorted, because of a hatred of snakes and a refusal to explore the meaning of ophidian symbology. The first blindness has been pointed out by G. Theissen and D. Winter in their *Quest for the Plausible Jesus*.<sup>1</sup> The second myopia is demonstrated in my *The Good & Evil Serpent*.<sup>2</sup>

Third, slowly we have grown to realize the tendencies (*Tendenzen*) and anachronisms of what were once our main literary sources: the intracanonical gospels, as well as Philo, Josephus, and early rabbinic and targumic texts. Those who labored on re-creating Second Temple Judaism and Jesus' environment before 1945 were consigned to work on documents and books that were biased and provided a *post facto* mirror of pre-70 Judaism.

Fourth, today, we have hundreds of ancient Jewish documents that are not edited by Christian scribes; and many of them were unknown before the forties. Indeed, recent research has been enriched by the exploration and comprehension of a flood of new and often previously ignored sources: the 65 Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, the Old Testament Apocrypha, the Jewish magical papyri, the Nag Hammadi Codices, and the more than 950 Qumran Scrolls.

Fifth, the explosion of archaeological data that is Jewish and clearly pre-70 has changed the landscape of historical Jesus studies. Henceforth, archaeology will be not only significant but fundamental in re-creating both the cultural and sociological setting of Jesus and also his own life and message.

These few comments indicate that works published after 1980 are of ten paradigmatically different from those issued in the preceding 1900 years. Too many scholars mislead too many students by using scholarly

1. Gerd Theissen and Dagmar Winter, *The Quest for the Plausible Jesus: The Question of Criteria* (trans. M. E. Boring, Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002).

2. James H. Charlesworth, *The Good & Evil Serpent* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, in press).

works published over the past century, as if the early ones are not seriously dated by old perceptions and the paucity of sources. Works published before 1980, the emergence of Jesus Research, must not be confused with more recent informed research; a synchronic malaise obscures not only the development of research but the re-creation of first-century Palestine.

To demonstrate the fundamental nature of this transformation in Jesus Research, we shall examine several specific paradigm shifts in selected areas. It should now be clear that a new and more informed approach to historical questions regarding Jesus from Nazareth is operative in many recent publications.

## Judaism

### *Old Paradigm*

For centuries scholars assumed that Second Temple Judaism was orthodox, monolithic, cut off from other cultures (especially the Greeks and Romans), and defined by four sects: Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and Zealots.

### *New Paradigm*

Now scholars are more critical of inherited assumptions. It is certain that Josephus was wrong to divide Jewish thought into four sects. Most likely, the most important and influential Jewish groups were the conservative Sadducees, the more liberal and politically influential Pharisees,<sup>3</sup> the diverse and learned Essenes, and the pugnacious Zealots, who may have appeared only at the beginning of the First Revolt (66-70/74). But one can now perceive over twenty groups, subgroups, and sects. Obviously, the Samaritans were also Jews, with a Pentateuch almost identical to that preserved in the Tanak. One must also include the Baptist groups, the Enoch groups, and many others, including the Palestinian Jesus Movement.

Some scholars have tended to think about Jewish thought before 70 CE

3. The Pharisees were astoundingly latitudinarius with Hillel, usually disagreeing with Shammai.

as being chaotic; but chaos broke out in 66 CE. Likewise some scholars see disunity and talk about "Judaisms." Other scholars are still too influenced by post-second-century Rabbinic texts and imagine a unified Judaism or "Covenantal Nomism." Such a term is not found in pre-70 Jewish texts, and one might wonder if it is a modern construct that miscasts the world of Second Temple Judaism. Moreover, "covenant" and "Nomism" (which is not clear to me and may represent Torah) were like the Temple cult, often signaling not only unity but also disunity among pre-70 Jews. Most likely, there was a powerful and influential ruling party within Jerusalem; but it was mixed, composed of Pharisees, Sadducees, and most likely other types of Jews (the Boethusians were intermittently powerful). The Shema and the Psalter, in my opinion, helped to check the centripetal forces that eventually produced the ill-conceived Revolt; after all, the Jews revolted against the Roman Imperium without an army and in the midst of what might be labeled a civil war.

This picture of Second Temple Judaism derives from studying sources unknown or unexamined by our grandparents. They examined Philo, the New Testament, Josephus, and especially Rabbinics. These are now exposed as sources needing to be used with caution in light of their *Tendenzen* to distort historical and social realities. The primary sources are clearly pre-70 Jewish documents only recently unearthed, and therefore unedited by later Christian scribes. These documents are the Qumran Scrolls; and the corpus is now voluminous. If 66 books define the Christian Bible, more than 900 documents are now known to be preserved, usually in fragmentary form, within the Qumran corpus. Secondly, in light of these clearly Jewish works, we can examine with new sensitivity the 65 documents in the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha. The Septuagint is now perceived to preserve ancient text types, as well as translation additions and revisions. Studying all of these sources helps place pieces together in the massive attempt to re-create a historical jigsaw puzzle.

## The Gospel of John

### *Old Paradigm*

For hundreds of years, experts approached the Gospel According to John with the presupposition that this gospel was a supplement to the Synoptics

(Matt, Mark, Luke), and since it was not a Jewish composition it should be studied in light of non-Jewish cultures and religion. Before 216, when he died, Clement of Alexandria, according to Eusebius (*Hist. Eccl.* 6.14.7), claimed that "John, perceiving that the external facts had been explained in the (Synoptic) Gospels, . . . being carried along by God in the Spirit . . . composed a spiritual gospel." St. Augustine found the Fourth Gospel attractive; the Evangelist portrayed Jesus weeping (John 11:35), suggesting to Augustine the truth "the Word assumed soul and flesh" (*Tract. Ev. Jo.* 49:18-19). While Luther highlighted the Fourth Gospel, because of the elevated discourses, and while Schleiermacher preferred this gospel over the Synoptics, because it best revealed Jesus' utter dependence on God, the tide was turning against the Fourth Gospel.

In 1835<sup>4</sup> and the following years, in his influential tomes on Jesus' life, D. F. Strauss not only denied the apostolic authorship of the Fourth Gospel, but set up a false paradigm still plaguing some publications; that is, Strauss postulated an orthodox Judaism in Jesus' time and clearly separated "Christianity" from Judaism. In 1853, Strauss's teacher, F. C. Baur, interpreted the Christology of John in a way requiring a "complete disengagement" from any forms of Judaism.<sup>5</sup> Subsequently, in 1913 in *Kyrios Christos*,<sup>6</sup> W. Bousset led the way in seeking the origin and understanding of the Fourth Gospel within Greek and Roman religions. The stage had been set for R. Bultmann to claim, in numerous influential publications, the existence of a non-Jewish source, the *Offenbarungsreden* (*Revelatory Source*) which represented Oriental Gnosticism and which definitively shaped the Christology of the Fourth Gospel.<sup>7</sup> In fact, Bultmann thought the Gnostic source behind the Fourth Gospel was anti-Jewish.

4. David Friedrich Strauss, *Das Leben Jesu* (Tübingen: C. F. Osiander, 1835-6); ET: *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* (trans. M. Evans, New York: Calvin Blanchard, 1860).
5. Ferdinand Christian Baur, *Das Christentum und die christliche Kirche der drei ersten Jahrhunderte* (Tübingen: L. F. Fues, 1853); ET: *The Church History of the First Three Centuries* (2 vols.; trans. Allan Menzies; London: Williams and Norgate, 1878-79 [3rd ed.]), pp. 153-83.
6. Wilhelm Bousset, *Kyrios Christos: Geschichte des Christusglaubens von den Anfängen des Christentums bis Irenaeus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1933); ET: *Kyrios Christos: A History of the Belief in Christ from the Beginnings of Christianity to Irenaeus* (trans. John E. Seely; Nashville: Abingdon, 1970).

7. This claim first appeared in Bultmann's *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1941); ET: *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (ed. Rupert W. N. Hoare and John K. Riches; trans. George R. Beasley-Murray; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971).

Bultmann's student, E. Käsemann, who characteristically distinguished himself from his teacher, continued the overwhelming tendency of contextualizing the Fourth Gospel in non-Jewish sources and settings. In his 1966 work *Jesu letzter Wille nach Johannes 17*, Käsemann chose a historical approach to the Fourth Gospel, but the context was perceived to be a Christian intra-church conflict.<sup>8</sup>

#### New Paradigm

Against this contextualizing of the Fourth Gospel in anything but a Jewish setting, a new position is rapidly becoming a near consensus. Scholars around the world are now perceiving that John is a very Jewish work. They claim that this gospel should be studied within Judaism.<sup>9</sup>

To this new paradigm, I now choose to emphasize one point: The Fourth Evangelist is exceptional among the four evangelists for his knowledge of pre-70 Jewish religious customs and especially of the topography and architecture of Jerusalem. Such elements in his narrative pop up intermittently without relevance for the narrative or rhetoric of persuasion.

In the past these details were either overlooked or explained away as theological reflections that were not grounded in historical observation. Space precludes exhaustive treatment; thus, I have chosen to focus only on Jerusalem and limit my comments to five seemingly irrelevant architectural or topographical details. These cumulatively disclose that the Fourth Evangelist is not ignorant of Jerusalem, as many commentators have assumed; he is amazingly cognizant of Jerusalem in 30 CE which ceased to exist after the city's destruction in September of 70 CE.

The first example of the Fourth Evangelist's knowledge of Jerusalem concerns the Pool of Bethesda (or Bethesda) with its "five porticoes" (John 5:2). Interpreters focused only on Johannine theology have pointed out that Josephus and others acquainted with Jerusalem never mention such a major pool. These thinkers, who often have their eyes focused on dogmatics, report that in antiquity no architect constructed a pentagon

8. Ernst Käsemann, *Jesu letzter Wille nach Johannes 17* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1966); ET: *The Testament of Jesus: A Study of the Gospel of John in the Light of Chapter 17* (trans. Gerhard Krodel; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968).
9. See the chapter in this collection by C. Clausen.

which could have five porticoes; hence, they conclude that John could not have known Jerusalem. What then is the meaning of John 5:1-9? It must mean that the five porticoes in which the sick man wished to be healed denote the Pentateuch. Jesus thus provides what was lacking. The man is healed, takes up "his pallet and walked."

This is problematic and reveals a lack of attention to Johannine theology. There is no tension between Moses and Jesus in this gospel. The history of salvation is "grace upon grace"; the Fourth Evangelist emphasizes that the Law was "given through Moses" and "grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (1:16-17). While some theologians imperceptively imagine an adversative connective between the protasis and apodosis, the two parts of the sentence in 1:17 are an example of asyndetic contiguity, whereby the connection is immediate and not separated by an otiose conjunctive: "The Law through Moses was given; grace and truth through Jesus Christ came." As the appositional genitive denotes identity — as in *Bath Zion* denoting "Daughter Zion" — so asyndetic contiguity (the lack of any connective) usually denotes similarity; thus, God has revealed through Moses God's will (the Torah) and through Jesus God's grace and truth. The Fourth Evangelist presents no antithesis between Moses (or the Pentateuch) and Jesus (or the Good News about the incarnation of God's Son). Hence, the five porticoes cannot be a metaphorical reference to the Pentateuch.

In fact, the pool of Bethzatha does exist, although only the Fourth Evangelist mentions it. Archaeologists have unearthed this pool. It is situated precisely where the Evangelist states: north of the Temple Mount and inside the Sheep Gate (5:2). It has five porticoes, because there are two pools, arranged from the north to south so as to catch the rain water that runs from the hills to the northwest. Porticoes are on the north, east, south, and west . . . and also through the area that separates the two pools. These two pools even seem to be noted in the *Copper Scroll* found in Qumran Cave III. We begin to perceive that saluting the Fourth Evangelist as a brilliant theologian does not mean he is a misinformed historian.

The second example of the Fourth Evangelist's exceptional knowledge of Jerusalem concerns the Pool of Siloam and *mikvaot*<sup>10</sup> (John 9:1-12). New Testament scholars, dogmatists, and theologians have rightly pointed out that the Pool of Siloam honored by the Byzantines as the place where

Jesus healed a man born blind is not Herodian. It does not date from Jesus' time and is rightly to be dated to Hezekiah's building projects in the eighth century BCE. Having discredited this false "Pool of Siloam," they then pointed out the deep theological profundities of John 9. The man has been in darkness since his birth; but Jesus proclaims that he is "the light of the world" (9:5). Jesus then spat on the ground, made clay from the spittle, and anointed the man's eyes with the clay. Surely, here is an allusion to Jesus being the Anointed One. There is more: Jesus tells the blind man with Jesus' spittle on his eyes, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" — and the Evangelist provides all the meaning one needs: "which means Sent" (9:7). This is the meaning of the pericope: since Jesus is one sent from God, Christology is perceived to define the Pool of Siloam, "which means Sent."

Such theological reflection may be insightful, but it presumes we are reading only a christological story. The Evangelist would not be pleased, since he has stressed the Incarnation (1:14) and depicts Jesus as very human. Jesus sits on a well, because he is exhausted. Jesus requests water from a woman, because he is thirsty. Jesus weeps, because Lazarus, whom he loved, has died. Is there no Pool of Siloam from Jesus' time? Are we left with theologoumena devoid of historical reality?

No. The Pool of Siloam from Jesus' time has recently been unearthed. An attempt to repair a large sewer pipe demanded the removal of soil. Beneath the soil was revealed a pool with long and numerous steps. The pool is south of the Temple Mount, where Jesus met the man born blind (John 9:1), and it is the largest *mikveh* discovered in ancient Palestine or anywhere. Ronnie Reich and Eli Shukrun showed me the pool and stressed that the construction is clearly Herodian, meets the requirements of a *mikveh*, and would have been used only when the Temple cult was active. Pilgrims stopped here to purify themselves so that they could enter the temple to worship. The destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE buried the ancient *mikveh*; the pool was not used and was unknown to those living nearby until a sewer pipe needed to be repaired.

A third example of the Fourth Evangelist's precise knowledge of Jerusalem concerns Herod's expanded Temple area and oxen within it. The following account is full of details found only in the Fourth Gospel: "In the temple he (Jesus) found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers at their business. And making a whip of cords, he drove them all, with the sheep and oxen, out of the Temple" (John 2:14-15). This account may seem fanciful and legendary, until one

10. A *mikveh* (plural, *mikvaot*) was a Jewish pool for ritual cleansing. A number of *mikvaot* have been discovered, including at Qumran, at Masada, and on the Temple Mount.

learns that Herod the Great expanded the Temple Mount to the west and to the south. The action depicted here occurred in the southern section of the Temple mount. The expanded area was part of the Temple Mount, but not part of the sacred space within it. If oxen had been moved within the southern extended area of the Temple Mount, and some think this occurred just before 30 CE, then the corridor leading from the so-called Solomon's Stable to the steps inside the Hulda Gate would be where Jesus saw these large animals (and their droppings) and could have fashioned a "whip" out of the "cords" used to tether the large animals.

A fourth example demonstrating the Fourth Evangelist's exceptional knowledge of Jerusalem pertains to the different locales in which Jesus is interrogated after his "arrest" in the Garden of Gethsemane. The author independently, but accurately, refers to Gethsemane as a garden "across the Kidron Valley" (John 18:1). The band of soldiers and the officers of the Judean authorities (= *Ioudaion*) take Jesus first to Annas (18:13). Apparently Annas, the father-in-law of the reigning high priest Caiaphas, was living in the house of the high priest. The description of "the court of the high priest" (18:15) is detailed, disclosing intimate knowledge of the area (18:15-18, 25-27). Annas subsequently sends Jesus to Caiaphas. The author assumes Caiaphas is nearby, perhaps elsewhere in the complex of buildings controlled by the high priestly families; but the oblique references are frankly obscure and give the impression the Evangelist may be working from his own memory of the topography and architecture of pre-70 Jerusalem.

Next, Jesus is led from "the house of Caiaphas" (18:28) to "the praetorium" (18:28). The author provides the irrelevant theological detail that "it was early" (18:28), without any aside to the Johannine light-darkness paradigm, and adds that the Judean leaders "did not enter the praetorium, so that they might not be defiled, but might eat the Passover" (18:28). Hence, Pilate was forced to go out to them. Pilate returns to the praetorium and calls for Jesus. A conversation is recorded between Pilate and Jesus (18:33-38). As most commentators have seen, it is difficult to ascertain the source of this dialogue, since no follower of Jesus is described as present. Then Pilate goes out again to the Judean authorities, informing them he can find no fault in Jesus. Finally, Pilate acquiesces to the Judean authorities (which for the Evangelist includes "the chief priests and the officers," 19:6), scourges Jesus, and the soldiers mock him.

How should the historian assess such remarkable details? The Fourth Evangelist seems to know how to get around Jerusalem, how Annas's house

and Caiaphas's house and Pilate's praetorium are geographically related; and he intimates an eyewitness view of "the court of the high priest." Was the Evangelist an eyewitness of these events? Was he informed by an eyewitness (perhaps the Beloved Disciple)? We are not confronted with a narrative devoid of surprising architectural and topographical detail. However we may answer such questions, we should admit that the Fourth Evangelist knows Jerusalem intimately, and he assumes his readers can fill in what he has only outlined. Reading and re-reading chapters 18 and 19 provides the impression that the author assumes his readers share with him a rather intimate knowledge of Jerusalem. I often hear asides or assumptions; for example, when the author describes the "court of the high priest," he seems to mention "the maid," as if the reader already knew that she "kept the door" (18:16). Likewise, the irrelevant theological detail that the servants and officers had "made a charcoal fire" (18:18) suggests the reader might know, surmise, or remember that "it was cold" that evening (18:18).

How should a historian and a New Testament exegete evaluate and explain such details? I would think it forced to dismiss such irrelevant details as serving Johannine rhetoric. The Fourth Evangelist seeks to demonstrate that Jesus is from above (*anōthen*) and is returning to "the Father" who has sent him into the cosmos. Rather than created solely to serve rhetoric, the topographical and architectural details we have examined may indicate a keen memory and reliable knowledge of Jerusalem.

The Evangelist seems to assume his implied readers are familiar with a great amount of historical detail. To what extent are we confronted with oral tradition and eyewitness accounts? In any case, we now perceive that much of the detail can be verified archaeologically.

The fifth and final example I would highlight concerns Pilate's Judgment Seat. Alone among the Evangelists, the Fourth Evangelist refers to this public area as *Lithostrōtion* in Greek and *Gabbatha* in Hebrew (John 19:13). The Greek designates a large paved area or "Pavement." The Hebrew is not a translation of the Greek; it means an elevated place. The Evangelist seems to have exceptional and precise knowledge of the place in which Jesus was brought before Pilate who had taken his authoritative chair or "the judgment seat" (John 19:13). Massive stones have been disclosed in and near the area of Herod's palace, Pilate's praetorium and Judgment Seat. Apparently, the Fourth Evangelist, or his sources, knew intimately this area of Jerusalem.

