

Jesus, An Alternative History

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February 2023

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Dear Reader, at the start of this essay I need to ask you two questions. For each question I have provided you with three choices as to how you might answer.

First, in the most general terms, what is your belief about the various miracles described in the Bible? Here are three choices as to how you might answer.

1. They are all literally and completely true as written in the Bible. That is to say, they actually happened exactly as described in the various Bible stories.
2. They are generally more metaphorical, symbolic, or mythical stories which are useful in helping us to explore the deeper spiritual aspects of our current lived experience.
3. There is no way these things could ever have happened in the material world as we now understand it. The physical world we inhabit simply does not work the way it is described in the Bible.

Second, assuming that you have some interest in and knowledge of the Bible, how would you rate the New Testament as a reliable and accurate document of historical record?

1. The New Testament is without error, containing a completely accurate account of the people and events surrounding the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as well as the development of the early church. In other words, it is a literal chronologically correct, and completely reliable account of the true history of the birth of the Christian church.
2. The authors of the New Testament were much more interested in communicating a spiritual message and in developing a new faith than they were interested in providing a true and accurate account of the events that transpired in the first century of the common era. Modern standards of recording and reporting events did not exist during the time the books of the New Testament were being written.
3. The authors of the New Testament were primarily interested in promoting the beliefs of Pauline/Johannine Christianity in the Greco-Roman gentile world of Asia Minor, and thus they created a set of documents which are pro-Roman, deeply antisemitic, and without much if any historical accuracy.

If your answers incline towards number one, you will not be happy at all with what follows, so you might as well quit here. This essay is meant for those of us who find ourselves closer to the center of number two, or number three. It should be obvious that these three questions cover a range of attitudes and beliefs that run from strict Christian fundamentalism through moderate mainstream religion, and on to contemporary secular rationalism. It is absolutely crucial that we try to understand where we are coming from and how we approach the questions involved before reading this essay. We need to be clear at the outset that the ideas and information presented here, if accepted as reasonable and plausible, could be devastating to a traditional conservative Christian worldview.

While it may prove upsetting to more fundamental readers, this work is an attempt to raise the questions that are at the heart of the political and social questions fueling the crisis facing both our larger society and the broader Christian church today. This crisis takes many forms, but it may best be summed up by the observation that “No Religion” is the fastest growing answer in terms of popularity in most surveys of religious preference in the United States today. While this may not bother folks who land solidly on the number three end of the lists above, it should be deeply concerning to those who find themselves closer one or two.

The objective here is to help us all to open our minds to the realities we find ourselves in as we survey the religious, political, and social conditions of this postmodern era. We can all benefit from a critical examination of old religious paradigms and from our search for new spiritual modes of expression. We can all benefit because, like it or not, our world has been shaped by these old religious paradigms. Here we find some difficult issues to address, such as the unspoken history of Christian anti-semitism, European colonialism, and racial discrimination. This is a painful and ugly history many of us would wish to avoid, but we must face the facts if we are to move toward building harmonious communities. In an effort to cultivate a less prejudiced view of history, this essay aims to show how the origins of many of the social, political, and religious dramas unfolding in the West

today have their roots in a tragic misunderstanding and a more tragic misrepresentation of the real history of the Christian world.

In order to write this alternative history, the author is indebted to the courageous and hard fought work of Robert Eisenman at California State University at Long Beach. To write this I have relied heavily upon his books James the Brother of Jesus, and The New Testament Code. Using Eisenman's historic reworking of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the main corpus of Early Christian source materials I have carefully read through Josephus, Eusebius, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Nag Hammadi Gnostic texts, the Greek new Testament, and the Hebrew Old Testament. Therefore, this essay is an effort to follow in Eisenman's footsteps and to suggest a few interesting questions and possible new directions of inquiry his work may point us to.

What follows is a purely hypothetical construct of the people and events of early Christianity and thus it is presented as theory, or supposition, and not as fact. It is designed to evoke criticism and to raise questions about the traditional narrative of Christian understanding. This is completely the opposite of traditional Christian apologetics which presumes that the traditional narrative is the only truth worth considering. This is also why the traditionalists are likely to be upset by this material if they even bother to read it.

The role of miracles in the ancient vs the modern world

Life in the ancient world , especially for people of limited means, was brief, brutal, and often full of misery. Death, illness, injustice, and injury were ever present realities. Stories of miracles, rumors of miracles, promises of miracles, and supposed workers of miracles were all vital nutrients required for coping with the stress of daily living. People commonly believed in miracles because they had to in order to stay sane. Various miracle workers traveled from town to town. Relics of the saints were believed to hold great miraculous power. People would gather in various social and religious contexts, eagerly awaiting an opportunity to share and experience

miraculous events. Where there was common belief and common expectation there was also common fulfillment. One way or another, people found what they were looking for. We should bear in mind that they also had precious little else to look forward to, so reliance upon a faith based on miracles was commonplace.

Another crucial aspect of life in the ancient world was that it was far more collective and far less individualistic in comparison with life today. Identity, meaning, value, and purpose were localized and tribal in nature. The quality of life in the ancient world required belonging to a community. Our status, security, and our entire emotional, and physical condition depended on the group or groups with which we identified. The norms and core beliefs of the groups we identified with were generally non-negotiable. We would live or die for the sake of the community we called home.

Things are different in the modern world. The enlightenment philosopher and mathematician Rene Descartes set the stage for modern individualism in setting forth a concept that came to be known as "*Cogito, ergo sum.*" "*I think, therefore I am.*" Note the use here of the first person singular, "*I think,*" and "*I am.*" This concept, along with the forward progress of civil society allowed us to define our existence in individual terms. In the ancient world, the predominant idea was much closer to "*Cogitamus, ergo sumus*" "*We think, therefore we are.*"

It is useful to remember here that the way we think is totally aligned with our consideration of what is real. In the modern/postmodern world, especially in the Eurocentric West, reality is determined by the individual's experience and cognition, then reinforced, if possible, by affiliation with a group. In the ancient world, as in much of the rest of the world today, reality was and still is determined collectively.

In considering ancient accounts of miraculous events, it is helpful to note that they were experienced collectively as collective validations of collective experience. This way of thinking continues in many parts of the world today. As an example, think of any of the videos we often see on the news

today where a martyr to a sacred cause is being laid to rest with thousands of people crowding around the bier where the deceased individual floats, as it were, upon the loving hands of the collective. For those in attendance at the event in question, this martyr was holy, and his death was of sacred value to the collective. For the thousands who grieve as they witness the passing of the flower strewn bier, this IS reality.

A separate individual, belonging to a separate reality may see something completely different. The deceased martyr may have been shot by law enforcement with probable cause as he presented a real and present danger to other individuals representing a different collective. One reality witnesses the burial of a holy martyr to a holy cause, while another reality witnesses the death of a criminal. This collective/counter-collective understanding of reality is helpful in untangling the competing interests at work in our modern interpretations of ancient miraculous events.

One way of seeing the miracles depicted in the New Testament is to consider them as representing an essential hunger for and a collective gleaning of grace, glory, and security. Originally, before the gentile mission of St. Paul, this hunger and gleaning belonged to the Jewish population of greater Judea/Samaria as they struggled to meet the advances of an enemy collective represented by the Romans and the broader Greco/Roman world view.

We should keep in mind that most of the New Testament is written with a distinctive pro-Roman and anti-semitic bias. Robert Eisenman, in his books James the Brother of Jesus and The New Testament Code points out how many of the miracle stories in the New Testament having to do with the blind, the deaf, lepers, gentiles, feeding the hungry, and casting out demons are mirror reversals of the concerns voiced throughout the Dead Sea Scrolls. According to Eisenman, the Qumran community and the broader “Zadokite, Rechabite, Ebionite, Nazirite, or Essene” collective was fighting to maintain the separation of pure from impure influences. This was a losing battle leading up to the Jewish war and subsequent destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE.

While this battle between what is known in New Testament circles as the “circumcision party” and Roman influences was being waged, Early Christians under the influence of Paul, and John were fighting to establish a solidly pro-Roman, hellenistic faith by composing, promoting and circulating a collection of Greek texts known as the New Testament. The miracle stories presented in the New Testament largely serve to advance the Pauline/Johannine cause over and against the more purity minded Jewish sects represented by James, Peter, and most likely, Jesus.

As modern people, we read these texts and listen to them expounded by various preachers who lead us to expect miracles on a specific individual basis. This message usually falls short since the circumstances surrounding the ancient collective hunger for “signs and miracles” has ended with the more individualistic and practical circumstances of modernity.

Modernity has also brought us an ever expanding understanding of the mechanics of cause and effect. Most of the time, most of us understand why things happen the way they do. Our understanding helps us to adjust our actions in such a way as to increase the effectiveness and enhance the security of our lives. We still worry, and we still live with fears, but experience teaches us that many, if not most of our worries and fears are unfounded. Thus, both the demand for miracles and our reliance upon the expectation of miracles are fading rapidly into the past.

We will also observe that attitudes toward miracles in both the ancient and modern worlds can be demarcated along the lines of economic prosperity. In general terms, the more wealthy a person was, the less they needed to rely upon the miraculous to maintain their emotional health. The poor, then as now, relied more on magical/miraculous thinking as a way to cope with the lack of any other options to move forward in life.

Rationality is not for everyone, and so miracle based religions continue, but most of them do not look forward to a future of exceptional growth. Many

of our miracle based religions have given up on modernity and look instead toward the ruin of the secular world as they expect an angry God to descend, rapture all the good people to heaven, and consign everyone else to the outer darkness. While specific eschatological narratives may vary in religious fundamentalism, the absence of commonly held belief in miracles has generated an increase in emotional negativity and apocalyptic expectations.

A Rationalist examines the resurrection of Jesus, the greatest miracle of them all

The resurrection of Jesus is the very center of the Christian faith. As such it has been regarded as completely off limits for rational inquiry. In discourse between the religious and the nonreligious, the basic agreement has been that one would either accept it by faith or not, but we would not try to portray it in any sort of different light or understand it in a different way. The suggestions which follow are not meant in any way as an attack upon the Christian faith. While true believers may regard the following discussion as pure heresy and blasphemy, that is not the author's intent.

For Christianity to work in the future, we need a rationally agreeable Christology. This is our understanding of the nature and person of Christ. Books on the nature and person of Jesus Christ abound, and they cover the entire religious, philosophical, and cultural map. In my perspective this is a nearly literal fulfillment of the ending verse of John's Gospel which says; "*There are many other things which Jesus did, which if written in one place, I suppose the world could not hold the books which could be written.*" (John 21:25) I would encourage the reader, as we approach a rationalistic modernistic interpretation of the historic record pertaining to Jesus Christ, to keep an open mind and to see if such a radical reconstruction of the traditional story might help us to form a useful faith based worldview that fits in with our lived experience today.

In the traditional orthodox view of the life, times, actions, and death of Jesus, he is represented as a Hellenistic God-Man. He was incarnated

supernaturally, and existed as simultaneously fully human and fully divine. The problem with this approach is that most stories of his life and works tend to emphasize the divine side and to obscure or neglect his human side. The story of the controversy surrounding his baptism by John the Baptist provides a good example. This controversy is presented in Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-11, Luke 3:21-22, and John 1:29-34. John the Baptist is also described by the Jewish/Roman historian Josephus in Antiquities Book 18, chapter 5.2 as being a good and righteous teacher, likely an Essene “Teacher of Righteousness” who was put to death by king Herod. If we are to look at Jesus as a historic human being, we must consider the possibility that, as all people do, he needed to have teachers. The idea of having teachers, or being the disciple of a teacher is incompatible with the notion that Jesus, as the perfect God-Man already knew everything by supernatural means, and therefore had no need for either the Essene practice of Baptism or being a disciple of any teacher. Nevertheless, all four Gospels witness to the fact that he was baptized and therefore was a disciple of John the Baptist.

Clearly some events of huge importance happened in the first century of the Common Era. Popular understanding of these events held great importance for the evolution of Western civilization. Our civilization evolved as it did in part because of commonly held beliefs in the miraculous resurrection of Jesus Christ. Today we stand at a crossroads where our previous understanding of issues such as Eurocentrism, white supremacy, colonialism, slavery, antisemitism, and racism desperately need to be called into question. The theory operative here is that a critical re-examination of the resurrection of Jesus as a historic event might point us in the right direction as we seek a peaceful and productive future. This is the case because deconstructing Christian origins will help us to find the roots of most of these social evils.

The author makes no claim to originality here. Most of these observations and suppositions have been tossed around for centuries by a range of marginalized groups and various discredited authors. Our objective here is

to try to assemble a few pieces of the puzzle into some sort of cogent narrative.

The analysis which follows is based on the following suppositions, each to be examined separately:

- 1. Jesus knew that he would die in Jerusalem. He viewed his sacrifice there as part of a larger apocalyptic vision whereby his death would bring about the apocalyptic end of days and his triumphal return in glory.**

Here we can reference Matthew 16:21-28. For convenience, I will translate this text below with commentary. I have chosen not to use inclusive language in this translation as it is an effort to delve into the original meaning as it stood in the original, highly conflicted period when the original words were spoken and the later texts edited and compiled into the Greek New Testament. My translation is in italic and my commentary is in parenthesis.

“From then (after the transfiguration) Jesus began to show his student followers that he had to go to Jerusalem to die and suffer many things from the elders and ruling priests and scribes. (Note the pro-Roman and anti-semitic bias operative here. It would be the Romans who would arrest, interrogate, torture, and execute him.) And be killed and on the third day be raised up. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying; “No way, Lord, This will never happen to you.” But Jesus forcefully turned around and said to Peter; “Get behind me Satan! You are an obstacle in my way. You are not thinking God things, but man things.”

(Here note that this text presents us with an attack on the integrity of Peter, something quite out of place with his portrayal in the Pseudo Clementine Homilies and Recognitions where Peter is presented as an archetypal Essene teacher of righteousness. I see the editorial influence of the Pauline school at work in the composition of this text, especially in the dichotomy

presented between “*God things and Man things*”. This fits in with the conflict between the more spiritualist, pro Roman, Hellenistic, Eurocentric views articulated by Paul and the more practical, conduct, or “works” related admonitions of James and other Essene teachers of righteousness.)

“Then Jesus said to his student/followers; If anyone wants to come after me, let him take up his cross and follow me.”

(Jewish Zealots, or religious freedom fighters were being crucified commonly in Palestine at this time in history. These are the words of a Zealot leader, calling his followers to have courage as they follow him into certain death.)

“For whoever would seek to save his soul will lose it.”

(“*Soul*” and “*life*” are the same word, “*psyche*” in Greek. Salvation will not be won by conciliation or surrender, but by sacrifice, another Zealot/Essene rallying cry.)

“But whoever loses his soul because of me will find it. For what benefit will a man find if he gains the whole world but loses his soul? And what can a man give in exchange for his soul?”

(Here we note the use of “*benefit*” and “*gain*” The word translated as “*benefit*” “*Ophleo*” is used by Paul in his arguments against circumcision in Romans 2:25 and Galatians 5:2. The word translated as “*gain*” is used widely by Paul in discussions of his evangelistic ministry. An excellent example is Philippians 1:21, “*For me to live is Christ, to die is gain.*” There is obvious tension here among the authors and editors of these texts as to which beliefs (faith) and practices (works) place us on the path to salvation.

“For the Son of Adam is going to come in the glory of his Father, with his angels, and then he will give to each according to his actions. Amen Amen

I say to you, there are some standing right here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Adam coming in his kingdom.”

(The original Hebrew meaning of the formula usually translated as “*Son of Man*” is *Bene haAdam*, *Son of Adam*, a designation used in Ezekiel and in Daniel to designate separatist, ultra purist Zadokite/Rechabite/Essene/Zealot followers of the Law working in the context of the people being forcibly mixed with unclean gentiles.)”

This text clearly indicates the apocalyptic and the intentional aspect of Jesus facing death in Jerusalem. If he knew that he would be executed and that his death would trigger the coming of the kingdom, is it possible that he may have sought out certain key individuals who would help him to achieve his goals? The traditional supernatural approach would simply assume that God would do everything without any human assistance, but when have we ever seen anything happen in human events without human mediation? Our assumption here is that Jesus had help, not only in getting himself killed, but also in surviving that nightmare and returning to life.

2. Four historic people carry great significance here. These are Mary Magdalene, Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, and Longinus the Centurion.

Mary Magdalene has received tremendous attention due to the recently published Gospel attributed to her. This gnostic text states that she was a close disciple of Jesus and that she received instruction in the deeper mysteries not commonly revealed to many of the other disciples. In the opening section of the Gospel of Mary, Peter said; “*Mary, Sister, we know that the Savior loved you more than the rest of women. Tell us the words of the Savior which you remember, which you know but we do not, nor have we heard them. Mary answered and said, “What is hidden from you I will proclaim to you.”* This passage introduces the main (Gnostic) exposition of the Gospel of Mary itself. (Translation of George W. Macrae and R. Mcl. Wilson, published in The Nag Hammadi Library In English,

Harper and Row, 1977.) According to John 20:1-18, Mary was the first witness to the resurrection, and the Apostle to the Apostles based on her statement “*I have seen the Lord.*” in John 20:18. In her conversation with the risen Jesus, in John 20:17, Jesus says “*Don’t touch me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father.*” This is the first indication we have that Jesus is in his original body, yet bearing the wounds of scourging and crucifixion. He did not wish to be touched because he was all covered with wounds. See section 5 below. Here we should note the later mythologized accounts of her role in the grail traditions, and her subsequent journey to France to establish the Cathar community there. This mythology is important because of its connection with later Renaissance humanism and enlightenment humanism.

We should also note that Mary and the other women who followed Jesus are said to have ministered to Jesus and the other disciples “*out of their own wealth.*” See Luke 8:3. This reference to wealth is important in the light of the connection Eisenman draws to Helen the Queen of Adiabene as described by Josephus in the Antiquities, Book 20, chapter 2, as well as her sons Izates and Monobezus and their role in early Jewish Christianity at Antioch. Eisenman makes a convincing case to suggest that Queen Helen was the primary financial supporter of the whole Essene movement and the facility at Qumran. Whatever the connection may have been, it took considerable wealth for the individuals mentioned here to successfully intervene in the execution of Jesus in time to save his life.

Joseph of Arimathea appears in all four gospels. In Matthew 27:57 and following he is described as wealthy. In Mark 15:42-57 he is described as “*an honorable counselor who also waited for the kingdom of God.*” This passage connects Joseph of Arimathea with the whole process of apocalyptic expectation around the death of Jesus. In Luke 23:50 he is described as “*a ruler, a man good and righteous, but not participating in the plot to kill Jesus.*” In John 19:38 he is described as a secret disciple of Jesus. Acting alone in the synoptics, and with Nicodemus in John, he asks Pilot, the Roman governor, to release the body of Jesus. Nicodemus is described as “*a ruler of the Jews*” in the famous dialog of John 3. Making

haste, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus wrap Jesus in linen cloth and carry him to a tomb that had never been used before. They carried him along with a load of spices and various linen cloths which were later found in the cave they had used.

Our suggestion is that this cave was no empty stone cold tomb as represented in Christian tradition, but an improvised dispensary where Joseph and Nicodemus, both skilled healers, swiftly got to work establishing an airway, ventilating, controlling bleeding, hydrating, and generally resuscitating the nearly dead Essene master named Jesus the Nazorean. They were at least partly successful. Our theory is that he lived, but he would never be the same.

Longinus is only referred to as an unnamed centurion, in Matthew 27:54, Mark 15:39, and Luke 23:47. In all three synoptics he makes a confession that Jesus is the Son of God, a statement most appealing to Romans, especially on the lips of a centurion. In John 19:31-37 he is the one who pierced Jesus' side with a spear, causing blood mixed with water to run out. It is in the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus that we find him named Longinus. (XVI.7) In the incident with the spear, which John goes out of his way to swear up and down was not fabricated, we find the start of the fabulous traditions about the Spear of Destiny. It is our theory that Longinus may or may not have had some sympathies for the Jewish cause, but he was happy to accept significant bribes in order to pronounce Jesus dead before he actually was dead, and to testify falsely about spearing him to make certain he was dead. If this is true, it provides a wonderful twist to all the sumptuous stories about the spear of destiny. The great mystical secret is that there was no spear because Jesus was not killed in that way.

3. Jesus spent far less time hanging on the cross than was usual in this form of Roman execution.

Crucifixion normally took more than a day to kill a strong man. According to Mark 15:44, Pilate was amazed that Jesus had died so quickly when Joseph of Arimathea asked for the body, and he sent for the centurion. As previously stated, we wish to suggest that his execution was cut short, just

short enough, after strings were pulled and bribes paid using the combined resources of Mary Magdalene, probably Helen of Adiabene, Joseph of Arimathea, and Nicodemus.

4. Jesus received some substances in a drought prior to and during his execution.

In Matthew 27:34 Jesus was offered “*wine mingled with gall which he tasted but did not drink.*” In Mark 15:23 Jesus is given “*wine mingled with myrrh, though he did not receive it.*” Then, in Matthew 27:48, Mark 15:36, and John 19:29 he receives the “*sponge with vinegar*” We simply wish to point out that a person with the right knowledge could have furnished a drug which may have assisted in the process of Jesus appearing to have died while remaining alive.

5. Some of the resurrection accounts in the New Testament suggest that the Risen Christ was seen in a physical body. He showed the pain of recovery, the wounds of crucifixion, he ate, and later, he looked different than he had previously.

We have already described how Jesus did not want to be touched by Mary Magdalene following the resurrection, likely due to the pain from his wounds. We also have his appearance to Thomas in John 20:24-29 where he specifically shows his wounds. A very difficult question for us to ask of the orthodox doctrinal accounts of the resurrection would be as follows; “What became of that wounded but healing body?” Did he just jettison it when he returned to heaven, did that body go with him in his ascension? Or, did that body remain on earth inhabited by the spirit of a terribly wounded Jesus until he died of other causes years later?

Also of interest is the statement John makes regarding his appearance by the sea of Tiberias shore in John 21:1-14. This is where, seemingly as a stranger, he serves breakfast beside a fire, and points out a miraculous catch of fish for the disciples. In verse 12 John says; “*None of the disciples*

dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord." We can assume here that some time having elapsed following the resurrection, he looked different. Pain will do that to a person.

A Few more assumptions

If Jesus survived the crucifixion, his resurrection would have been a life changing experience for some of those he encountered. His physical and mental condition did not permit him to act as the savior king people were hoping for who would galvanize the people to rise up against Rome. Instead, things took a different and unexpected turn. Some people would identify closely enough with his death and resurrection to experience self actualizing transformation, the mystical experience of the Holy Spirit Jesus promised to deliver following his resurrection. These people would come to worship him and to see him as the very essence of God incarnate and ascended. These were the early Christians, who would face torture and death themselves before they would deny what they had seen, him risen from the dead. These were the true stones upon which the church was built.

Others, including the Essene Jewish apostles James and Peter would remain firmly attached to the Torah and continue to call for separation from the gentile Romans until they were martyred themselves in the time leading up to the Jewish war.

In order to remain alive in his torn but resuscitated body, Jesus could not still be himself, but needed to assume another identity. In all likelihood he suffered from the post traumatic stress of his near death. He may have suffered brain damage and lost sanity. In order to tidy things up, his most ardent followers constructed an ascent into heaven along the lines of Elijah.

Paul was the last one recorded to have met with this risen Lord, something that must have happened well beyond the 40 days orthodoxy permits to exist between the resurrection and the ascension. In order to be as devoted as he was, Paul, formerly Saul of Tarsus, must have met with the

man himself. However, by that point, things were getting mixed up. Paul was a Pharisee, a brilliant rhetorician, and a compulsive liar. (The evidence for this is outlined by Eisenman as previously mentioned.) His meeting with the Risen Lord led him to promote a very Hellenized, pro-Roman Holy Spirit driven faith which was anathema to the Jewish Apostles.

John was the youngest of the disciples, He proudly outran Peter on the way to the tomb that first Easter morning (See John 20:4). He was the one whom Jesus loved, a little brother whom Jesus kept close to his breast so as to keep him safe in all the craziness and killing of those days. John made the crossover and followed Paul, likely based on some garbled guidance from Jesus after he had seen and done it all. Then came the Jewish war which John managed to survive. In old age he became one of the final authors of the New Testament.

How He finally died A story found in Josephus, Jewish War Book 6, chapter 5

In the years leading up to the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE Josephus introduced a character into his narrative known as **Jesus Ben Ananus**. Here we must compare Ananus with Ananias who brought a blind Saul of Tarsus to the Risen Lord prior to his conversion in Acts 9:10, and Ananias who brought the letter of Jesus to King Agbar as described in Eusebius. Ananias was active in the conversion of King Agbar, Helen of Adiabene, Monobezus, and Izates all of whom played major roles in Josephus' description of events leading up to the Jewish war. Ananias appears in a lot of conversion stories, in the New Testament, Josephus, and Eusebius.

Jesus Ben Ananus was an older man, somewhere around 70 years of age. Josephus tells us that he repeatedly survived being scourged, and showed great resistance to the pain of this form of punishment. He no longer screamed and cried under the whip because of the nerve damage he had already suffered from previous floggings. This Jesus delivered a warning of impending disaster against Jerusalem which bears much resemblance to the prophecies of the Biblical Jesus as presented in the New Testament.

He died by being hit by a stone from a Roman catapult on the walls of Jerusalem during the final Roman siege in 70 CE.

The following is a quote from William Whiston's translation of Josephus, Wars of the Jews, Book 6, chapter 5. I believe this text is significant enough to be quoted in total. (My comments are in parenthesis)

“What is still more terrible, there was one Jesus, the son of Ananus, a plebian and a husbandman (a rustic and a shepherd), who, four years before the war began, and at a time when the city was in very great peace and prosperity, came to that feast whereon it is our custom for everyone to make tabernacles to God in the temple. He began a sudden cry aloud, “A voice from the east, a voice from the west, a voice from the four winds, a voice against Jerusalem and the holy house, a voice against the bridegrooms and the brides, and a voice against this whole people!” This was his cry, as he went about by day and by night, in all the lanes of the city. However, certain of the most eminent among the populace had great indignation at this dire cry of his, and took up the man and gave him a great number of severe stripes (scourged him) yet he did not either say anything for himself, or anything peculiar to those who chastised him, but still he went on with the same words which he cried before. Hereupon our rulers supposing, as the case proved to be, that this was a sort of divine fury in the man, brought him to the Roman procurator where he was whipped till his bones were laid bare; yet he did not make any supplication for himself, nor shed any tears, but turning his voice to the most lamentable tone possible, at every stroke of the whip his answer was, “Woe, Woe to Jerusalem!” And when Albinus for he was then our procurator asked him who he was, and whence he came, and why he uttered such words; he made no manner of reply to what he said, (Compare Matthew 27:14!) but still did not leave off his melancholy ditty, till Albinus took him to be a madman, and dismissed him. Now, during all the time that passed before the war began, this man did not go near any of the (Roman, or proper) citizens, nor was seen by them while he spoke; but he every day uttered these lamentable words, as if it were his premeditated vow, “Woe, Woe, to Jerusalem!” (Compare Matthew 23:37) Nor did he give ill words to any of

those that beat him every day (Compare Matthew 5:38-39) nor good words to those that gave him food; but this was his reply to all men, and indeed no other than a melancholy presage of what was to come. This cry of his was the loudest at festivals; and he continued this ditty for seven years and five months without growing hoarse, or being tired therewith, until the very time that he saw his presage in earnest fulfilled in our siege, when it ceased, for as he was going round upon the wall, he cried out with his utmost force, "Woe, woe to the city again, and to the people, and to the holy house!" There came a stone out of one of the engines, and smote him, and killed him immediately and as he was uttering the very same presages, he gave up the ghost. "

Some reflections by the author

I chose to write this essay because, over 40 years of public ministry I have come to appreciate the pain and sorrows we still experience as we hunger for miracles in a world where such things simply do not happen as they do in comic books and movies. Certainly, someone can win the lottery and call it a miracle, but what actually happened is a statistical anomaly. In our daily lives, miracles do not happen in the dramatic and supernatural fashion as depicted in the scriptures. Most likely they never did happen that way, especially as measured by the standards of modern rational inquiry. What does happen is that human beings continue to suffer and to seek grace and divinity within the confines of their suffering. Miracles do happen in the lives of individuals of all faiths, but these experiences are subjective and deeply personal in nature.

I believe that the alternative history presented here can empower our humanism. Humanism is a faith that always puts people ahead of doctrine or dogma. Humanism must suffice in a world where everything God does must be mediated and manifested by human beings.

When the Christian faith promoted by Paul and John took hold and spread through Europe, it came to be crystalized within a Magisterium starting with Constantine and moving forward through history. This pro-Roman and

toxically antisemitic faith brought us to witness all the atrocities of doctrinal supremacy, including, first and foremost, antisemitism, racism, colonialism, and other collective horrors. I wrote this essay in honor of the Nazarite Essene Zealot named Jesus who survived a Roman Cross. I would be remiss to fail to note as well that the only other person I know of who survived crucifixion was Jaques de Molay, the last Grand Master of the Knights Templar. It is amazing to me to note as well that, according to some modern scholarship, de Molay was wrapped in a linen shroud after being taken down from the door to which the Inquisition had nailed him. That shroud is said to have become the shroud of Turin. This is the haunting image Eisenman used on the cover of his New Testament Code, a book which unpacks and reveals how the shared vocabulary of the New Testament and The Dead Sea Scrolls belong to the same, hostile and violent collision between competing worldviews. I devote this essay to all the other men and women who have served in their own ways as enlightenment humanists to help guide us all out of the dungeons of Dogma and Doctrine.

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