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MISHKAN

A Forum on the Gospel and the Jewish People



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MISHKAN

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MISHKAN

A FORUM ON THE GOSPEL AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE

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Introduction

Dear readers,

Welcome to the spring/summer 2018 issue of Mishkan.

This issue's main topic is about resurrection of the dead in the Torah and in the Bible, and also about how to answer objections to the resurrection of Yeshua/Jesus. Another article deals with the question of Halakha and Salvation.

And as always you will find an update from Israel: "From the Israeli scene."

Happy reading!

Caspari Center staff
Jerusalem, June 2018

Moses and the Resurrection of the Dead According to the Torah

Matthias Morgenstern

Remarks on a debate in the Babylonian Talmud (bSan 90b-92a)

In Hermann Strack's and Paul Billerbeck's *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, in the second part of volume IV, those wishing to access, without major effort on their part, the eschatological thinking of rabbinic Judaism, find an excursion of a length that might fill many a monograph. With admirable erudition, sources are assembled from the ocean of rabbinic literature. Just how hard the authors found it, however, to order and arrange these sources is shown by the gamut of classificatory devices deployed—ranging from Latin and Arabic numerals through Latin, Hebrew, and Greek letters to combinations of various numerals and letters—which, occurring in such confusing profusion, indicates considerable difficulties.¹

At the heart of the matter is, first and foremost, the notion of two eons: one in this world, and one in the world to come. In Strack/Billerbeck, however, this distinction is widened into a tripartite one. "This world" (העולם הזה), we are told, is to be distinguished fundamentally from the preliminary (i.e., still pertaining to this world) time of salvation in the "days of the Messiah" (ימות המשיח); and the final consummation of salvation after the resurrection of the dead in the "future (otherworldly) world" (העולם הבא).

We read:

"The borderline between the two is unalterably fixed: what lies this side of the resurrection of the dead and final judgment belongs in the days of the Messiah; what lies beyond, belongs to the 'olam ha-ba."²

At the same time the reader learns that in some texts the expression "'olam ha-ba" can also include the Messianic time. In which case

"the resurrection of the dead now no longer [lies] beyond this demarcation line; instead, it [is] brought forward, along with the 'olam ha-ba, [positioning it] deep in the days of the Messiah."³

¹ H. Strack & P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, vol. 4, Munich, 9th ed. 1997, 815-976.

² Strack/Billerbeck 818; on this distinction cf. also M. Morgenstern, "Der 'Tag des Herrn' in der Literatur des rabbinischen Judentums. Von der futurischen Halacha zur präsentischen Eschatologie," in: A. Hultgard – St. Norin (ed.): *Le Jour de Dieu. Der Tag Gottes*. 5th Symposium Strasbourg, Tübingen, Uppsala. 11-13 September 2006 in Uppsala, Tübingen 2009, pp. 153-167.

³ Strack/Billerbeck, 819.

But there is a further complication: such a resurrection of the dead in the Messianic eon (which could, in theory, occur *in this world*) is restricted in several texts to pious Israelites.⁴ The resurrection of the dead *at the onset of the world to come* would, in that case, be reserved for the godless and wicked. But how does this train of thought square with the consideration that the expression “‘olam ha-ba” is used not only for the eon of absolute and final consummation of salvation, but also for the heavenly “world of the souls” (i.e., a provisional ‘olam ha-ba, even occurring before the resurrection of the dead)?⁵

As for what is actually meant by Messianic time, in Strack/Billerbeck the chapter “God as harbinger of the messianic eon” is followed by a section, “The messiah as bringer of the messianic eon.” In other respects, too, there is no shortage of contradictions: in the Amidah Prayer (Shmoneh Esreh) and in the Babylonian Talmud (bMeg 17b) we find, with regard to the eschatological events, the sequence “ingathering of the exiles,” “restoration of righteous judges,” “destruction of the sinners and elevation of the horns of the righteous,” and “building of Jerusalem.” A Tankhuma passage⁶, however, would actually seem to presuppose an inverted chronology: First Jerusalem will be rebuilt: only then will the ingathering of the exiles (קִיבוּץ הַגְּלוּיִּים) take place. Are we to conclude that “both events occur more or less simultaneously”?⁷

But that would be to strip the complicated classificatory scheme of its meaning! Evidently the authors of the *Kommentar* have themselves grasped what is unsatisfactory about their systematics. In any event, they note—not without a trace of resignation—that what a given passage in the rabbinic literature really means can only be gathered from the “context.” Should the context “fail,” i.e., prove inadequate, it would be best “often to wholly forgo [making] a decision.”⁸ In this context, a quote by Rabbi Yohanan⁹ warns us about jumping to over-hasty conclusions. This saying, handed down in the tractate Sanhedrin of the Babylonian Talmud (bSan 99a), suggests that the rabbis were, after all, uninterested in the world coming after the resurrection of the dead: “All the prophets prophesied...only in respect of the Messianic era,” i.e., they find in the days of the Messiah their consummation. Of what lies beyond, prophecy can say nothing!

Setting aside the chronological and dating issues,¹⁰ and the fact that a classificatory scheme based on verses from the New Testament is quite alien to rabbinic thinking, what hinders Strack’s and Billerbeck’s compilation is precisely that it disregards the relevant literary contexts. If Talmudic research over past decades has shown anything, it is that no small importance is attached to unraveling the function of the motifs and materials in their respective contexts. There are therefore grounds for supposing that the eschatological notions in rabbinic literature cannot be classed as a *topos* in any Jewish “dogmatics” (comparable, say, to that found in Christian teachings); rather, if such notions are to be properly understood, they should be studied in terms of their *function* in the historical and literary *Gesamtzusammenhang* of the respective compilations, which is as much as to say: taking into account what is specific to the Talmud and Midrash as literary forms. We may suppose then that there is no talk of rabbinic literature espousing any pronounced, i.e., generally recognized, notion of a world to come and the resurrection of the dead.

⁴ Loc. cit., 969.

⁵ Cf. loc. cit., 820. 832f with reference to tPea 4,18 (24).

⁶ TanB Noach 17 – 22b.

⁷ Strack/Billerbeck, 910.

⁸ Loc. cit., 820.

⁹ Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba (a Palestinian Amora of the third generation) delivers this dictum in the name of his teacher Rabbi Yohanan, i. e. Rabbi Yohanan bar Nappaha, the son of the blacksmith (died 279).

¹⁰ Unlike Strack/Billerbeck and the scholars of their mould we cannot operate on the assumption that what we are told about the various speakers in the rabbinical texts (never mind the late redaction of these texts) is historically accurate and that their contents are of ancient provenance.

To assess whether this impression holds water, I shall examine a prominent text that precedes the above mentioned dictum of Rabbi Yohanan's by a few pages, the discussion on the topic of resurrection in the *tractate Sanhedrin of the Babylonian Talmud* (bSan 90b-92a). This text—to be sure a composition from the late phase of rabbinic literature—will illustrate, I believe, that to seize on an isolated rabbinic saying in order to identify fixed (doctrinal) rabbinic teachings is problematic, and this is irrespective of what the prehistory of a given saying or a given text may happen to be. If this *Sanhedrin* text is particularly useful in this regard, it is because (in contrast to other rabbinical texts, where eschatological notions are only mentioned *en passant*) we might have expected such a text to have made eschatological doctrine its cornerstone—after all, it does begin with an eschatological question!

In the Mishnah (mSan 11,1¹¹), the much-cited *Pereq cheleq*, we read:

"The following have no portion in the world to come: he who maintains that the resurrection of the dead is not found in the Torah... (אין תחיית המתים מן התורה)." ¹²

The ensuing Gemarah (bSan 90b-92a)¹³ is an evidently redacted compilation of debates between rabbis of different generations from Palestine and Babylon on this subject. At issue is whether evidence for the resurrection of the dead can be assembled first from the written Torah, and then from the Bible in its entirety (including prophets and Hagiographies). Or should the issue perhaps not be debated Biblically at all, but referred to *everyday experience*?

Right from the outset, the "exegetical" part of the debates makes clear that the rabbis had to grapple with difficulties in endorsing the Mishnaic ruling.¹⁴ The discussants therefore turn to scrutinizing their proof texts for special features going beyond the obvious textual semantics.¹⁵ As

¹¹ In the Jerusalem Talmud this is the tenth chapter; on the variations of the numbering of the Mishnayot cf. Ch. Albeck, *ששה סדרי משנה, סדר נזקים*, Jerusalem 1959, 380.

¹² Cf. I. Epstein, *The Babylonian Talmud*. Seder Nezikin. Sanhedrin II, translated into English, London 1935, 601ff und J. Maier, Jesus von Nazareth in der talmudischen Überlieferung (Erträge der Forschung 82), Darmstadt 1978, 51ff; in older manuscripts the words "in the Torah" are missing; hence, what was originally debated was presumably the categorical denial of resurrection: cf. on this point G. Stemberger, Das Problem der Auferstehung im Alten Testament, in: *Kairos* 14 (1972), 273.

¹³ All quotations from the Babylonian Talmud are taken from the Vilnius edition (1880-1886) (reprinted in Jerusalem 1962/1963); cf. on this text A. Schremer, *Estranged Brothers*, Oxford 2010, 81 and Ch. Hayes, "Displaced Self-Perceptions: The Deployment of Minim and Romans in B. Sanhedrin 90b-91a," in *Religious and Ethnic Communities in Later Roman Palestine*, ed. Hayim Lapin, Bethesda 1998, 267-268.

¹⁴ That this should be so is unsurprising, since passages addressing the issue occur only on the margins of the Hebrew Bible. Cf. Ch. Barth, Die Errettung vom Tode in den individuellen Klage- und Dankliedern des Alten Testaments. Mit einer Bibliographie und zwei Anhängen neu herausgegeben von B. Janowski, Zurich 1987. It is noteworthy that the well-known passages from the 12th chapter of the Book of Daniel are only considered *at the end* of the Talmudic composition (see below). On Dan. 12:2f cf. H.-W. Wolff, Anthropologie des Alten Testaments. Mit zwei Anhängen neu herausgegeben von Bernd Janowski, Gütersloh 2010, 167.

¹⁵ On the hermeneutic devices employed in this text, cf. Ch. Hayes, "Displaced Self-Perceptions: The Deployment of Minim and Romans." Hayes assumes that the rabbis were well aware of the difference between the various exegetical methods they used. In order to circumvent the difficult issue of the meaning of "peshat" and "derasch" or *פשוט דקרא* or *מפשיט* (bSan 100b) in rabbinic texts, she suggests that we talk of "contextual" and "non-contextual exegesis"; in the text she was studying, she finds an expression of deep ambivalence, associated with the fact that the rabbis themselves entertained grave doubts regarding the Midrashic exegetical methods they drew on (Hayes, 255: "extreme midrashic techniques"; 288: "extreme methods of non-contextual exegesis"). This "radical doubt and anxiety on the part of the rabbis themselves" (p. 251) is then unraveled by Hayes in a series of reflections of a psychoanalytic cast. Against this interpretation will be argued, in the following, a rather different thesis, namely, that while the difficulties with Biblical demonstration, as adduced by the rabbis in this section, do indeed attest to "exegetical self-consciousness" (Hayes, 286) on the part of the rabbis, nonetheless, when they confront their opponents—"whether actual outsiders such as minim and pagans, or the rabbis in their own moments of alienation" (Hayes, *ibid.*)—such difficulties do not permit us

José Costa has pointed out, these features that the rabbis read as indicating the resurrection of the dead may be categorized as follows:

- 1) abnormalities or *inconsistencies* in the Biblical text (listed below in column “M” [=methodology] with an “I”);
- 2) redundancies (“R”); and
- 3) striking (i.e., not required by the Biblical context) verb forms in the *future* tense (“F”).¹⁶

On the one hand, the somewhat artificial character of the entire interpretation is thoroughly consonant with standard demonstration procedures as employed in rabbinical hermeneutics. On the other hand, the impression we gain is one of willfulness, if not arbitrariness. Most of all, this is underscored by the rabbis’ reading of Deuteronomy 31:16 (no. 3 in the list below) seeking to link the resurrection of the dead to the fate of Moses. In our Talmudic composition this particular proof text is put forward three times (see also no. 8 and 9 in the list), signaling that it carries special weight for the redactors. It happens that this same Biblical verse also features prominently in earlier Jewish speculations on the fate of Moses after his death¹⁷; it will therefore be closely analyzed in the following.

In the list, besides the “methodological” procedure applied (classified as I, R, or F), the various speakers who voice their opinions are indicated: Tannaim (T) and Amoraim (A), including, where appropriate, a geographic (b = Babylon; p = Palestine) and a generational attribution; also, whether a non-Jewish or a non-rabbinical discussion partner is involved on a given occasion. The eighteen conversation rounds (naturally left unnumbered in the Talmud)¹⁸ can then be categorized as follows:

No	Fol.	Biblical proof text	M	Speaker	Opponents
1	90b	Num. 18:28	I	Rabbi Yohanan (pA2)	
2	90b	Exod. 6:4	I	Rabbi Simai (T5?)	
3	90b	Deut. 31:16 – Torah		Rabban Gamli’el (T2)	Minim (Sadducees?)
4	90b	Isa. 26:19 – Prophets		Rabban Gamli’el (T2)	Minim
5	90b	Cant. 7:10 – Writings		Rabban Gamli’el (T2)	Minim quoting Rabbi Yohanan (pA2) in the name of Rabbi Shim’on ben Yehośadaq (pA1)
6	Ob	Deut. 11:9	I	Rabban Gamli’el (T2)	
7	Ob	Deut. 4:4	R	Rabban Gamli’el (T2)	
8	Ob	Deut. 31:16		Rabbi Yehoshua ^c b. H. (T2)	Romans

to infer uncertainty and anxiety; rather, they are part of a discursive strategy based on the supremacy of rabbinic Halakhah.

¹⁶ J. Costa, *L’au delà et la résurrection dans la littérature rabbinique ancienne*, Paris-Louvain 2004, 144-162.

¹⁷ Cf. Klaus Haacker regarding Pseudo-Philo’s *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* (late first or early second centuries CE), in: Klaus Haacker - Peter Schäfer: *Nachbiblische Traditionen vom Tod des Moses*, pp. 151-156.

¹⁸ Another source (bSan 92a) adduced by Rabbi Yoshiyya, which Costa wishes to include in this series, can for our purpose be omitted from consideration, as it is clearly the case that the composition ends with the Babylonian sages Rabina and Rab Ashi.

9	0b	Deut. 31:16		Rabbi Yohanan in the name of Rabbi Shim'on bar Yohai (T3)	
10	0b	Num. 15:31	R	R. Eli'ezer b. Yose (T4)	Samaritans
	1a	Demonstration by experience		Rabbi Me'ir (T4)	Cleopatra, Emperor, Minim
11	1b	Deut. 32:39	R	Rabbanan	
12	1b	Exod. 15:1	F	Rabbi Me'ir (T4)	
13	1b	Josh. 8:10	F	Rabbi Me'ir (T4)	
14	1b	Ps. 84:5	F	Rabbi Yehoshua ^c b. Levi (pA1)	
15	1b	Isa. 52:8	F	Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba (pA3) in the name of Rabbi Yohanan (pA2)	
16	2a	Deut. 33:6	R	Raba (bA4)	
17	2a	Dan. 12:2		Rabina (bA6)	
18	2a	Dan. 12:13		Rab Ashi (bA6)	

What first engages our attention is that the Mishnah asks for the resurrection of the dead to be demonstrated from the *Torah*, i.e. the *Pentateuch*, whereas the sages go further than that, citing no fewer than seven times from the *Prophets and Writings*. José Costa has suggested that the Tannaim were citing from the Torah *sensu stricto*, whereas the Amoraim included the Prophets as well.¹⁹ Going against such an interpretation, however, are sources 13 and 16. It can be noted that in discussion with the Samaritans (no. 10), who do not recognize the later parts of the Hebrew Bible, the demonstration is taken from the Pentateuch. Among the eleven quotes from the books of Moses, the concentration on Deuteronomy (with seven demonstrations) is noteworthy. Our task will be to show that the scriptural proof from Deuteronomy 31:16—in our list three times without attribution of a hermeneutic category (I, R or F)!—occupies a central position in the overall composition of this passage.

Interesting too is the fact that the few sources (e.g., Dan. 12) likely to be accepted by Biblical scholarship today, in our list without assigning a hermeneutic category, only appear at the end of the segment and date from Late Amoraic times.²⁰ Other possible texts in the Hebrew Bible—Hosea 6: 2, where hope in a resurrection *on the third day* is expressed—were completely ignored by the rabbis. Could the latter text have been omitted because of the three-day timeline, deemed all too reminiscent of the Christian doctrine of Jesus returning from the dead?²¹ Further to be noted is that

¹⁹ J. Costa, *L'au-delà*, 153, note 40.

²⁰ Loc. cit., 153; it may not be unduly speculative to suggest that utilization of a text from the Book of Daniel is at one with the Babylonian *setting* (Amoraic speakers and end redaction of text).

²¹ Thus Costa, 153; the fact that Hos. 6:2 is cited further down in our tractate (in bSan 97a)—albeit in a different context, in which the point at issue is not resurrection but how best to calculate the duration of the successive eons—

the listed speakers defy ready chronological ordering: An Amora of the second generation (Rabbi Yohanan bar Nappaha, the same scholar we met above with his saying on the Messianic time) is followed by a Tannaitic sage of the fifth generation (no. 2) as well as by six Biblical demonstrations from the second generation of the Tannaim (nos. 3-8), with five mentionings of Rabbi Gamli'el followed by sages of the fourth generation of the Tannaim (nos. 10, 12-13), and again (immediately afterwards) by Amoraim of different generations (nos. 14-18).²² It would seem that we have on our hands here an editorial composition that is intended to be read not historically but thematically.

In the following I shall assemble clues indicating that our text, for all its argumentative effort, is remarkably reticent on the hope of resurrection, letting it hang in the balance. Observations on the composition of the text, and on the Biblical demonstrations themselves, will show that the issue is one strand in a complex pursuit of not speculative or dogmatic, but other ends.

The first Biblical quote by Rabbi Yohanan (bSan 90b) is taken from a legal ruling clearly directed at provisioning the priesthood at the time of the Jerusalem temple—a time that, according to the historical fiction of the Bible, still lay far off in the future, but on which the Babylonian Talmud had already been looking back for half a millennium. Numbers 18:28, however, literally reads: “And ye shall give thereof the Lord's heave to Aaron the priests” as if it referred only personally to Aaron, the brother of Moses. It is evident therefore that the Hebrew text, contrary to its literal meaning, is not only binding on the generation to whom the law was given but on later generations as well—hence the *inconsistency* Rabbi Yohanan builds on! Does the text speak of the provisioning of the descendants of the “historical person” of Aaron, who might then be said to have lived on in his children and children's children after his own death? Of course, this would be to radically reinterpret the traditional understanding of the belief in resurrection! Surprisingly, however, we are then treated to yet another conclusion, this one going far beyond what the Biblical text literally says: that the law of tithes continues to apply is justified by the fact that Aaron *himself* will rise from the dead and the people of Israel will *then* hand over the offering to him. This way of reading Numbers 18:28 implies, therefore, that the offering will be handed over *in the world to come*—a notion wholly unconnected with the duty of giving earthly tithes either for the historical Aaron or for the upkeep of the Temple on Mount Zion. This explanation truly astonishes, even allowing that it may reflect the fact that tithes no longer play a role in the time of the Babylonian redactors of the Talmud.

On the one hand, the text obviously does not wish to deny that such a tithe-giving practice *had* once existed in historical time. Can it be, on the other hand, that old feuds lingering on in this connection are in play here? May we assume competitive constellations of more recent date involving a) the rabbis, as successors of the Pharisees, and b) Jerusalem's former priestly aristocracy, the Sadducees, of whom we know that they rejected not only the rulings of the Pharisees, but also their teaching on the resurrection of the dead?²³ A postscript in the Talmud

shows that the redactors of this segment of the Talmud indeed had this text in mind. It is all the more striking, therefore, to find *no* mention being made of Hos. 6:2 in connection with resurrection. On the other hand there is a reference to Hos. 6:2, albeit in SifDev 329 (H. Bietenhard, *Der tannaitische Midrasch Sifre Deuteronomium übersetzt und erklärt* [Judaica et Christiana, ed. by Simon Lauer and Clemens Thoma, Bd. 8] Bern/Frankfurt am Main/Nancy/New York 1984, 800 and R. Hammer, *Sifre. A Tannaitic Commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy*, New York 1986, 340).

²² Costa (loc. cit., 147) toys with the idea of ranking the Biblical evidence in terms of the relative probability of each source: “L'avantage principal de la preuve par 'l'in vraisemblance' est qu'elle tire toute son efficacité de l'existence d'une anomalie textuelle, que tout le monde peut constater en se reportant à la Tora.” Our analysis will attempt to show that the redaction of Talmud proceeded according to other criteria.

²³ See below notes 26 and 28 on the dispute regarding the third to fifth Biblical sources.

(bSan 90b) permits us to discern that this might indeed be the case. Here we read that Aaron was a חָבֵר, knowledgeable (in the rabbinic sense) in the law; Aaron—unlike the Sadducees—*knew* such traditions as were later developed by the Pharisees. This means (in one word) that he was himself *no* Sadducee! In the ensuing discussion this distinction is insisted on, when R. Shemuḥel b. Naḥmani pronounces a prohibition—utterly unknown in the Hebrew text of Numbers 18: 28!—to the effect that a priest unlearned in the law should not be given the offering!²⁴

The *second* Biblical demonstration by Rabbi Simai (bSan 90b) is very much linked to the first. Here we also have to do with the time *before* and *after* the Biblical giving of the land: The promise given to Moses “and I also have established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan” (Exod. 6:4) is, accordingly, aimed not only at those literally addressed—sc. the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (cf. Exod. 6:3)—but at the entire people of Israel in the generations to come. Herein resides the text’s *inconsistency*, from which the rabbinical scholar takes his argument; rather, the promise is also to be read as pertaining to the resurrection of the dead. The offering of the land as promised in the Bible is therefore—for all that it sounds spiritualizing and just as “un-Jewish” as the first Scriptural source—predicated on the “world to come.” Are we glimpsing here, contrary to the Palestinian sages in the Talmud Yerushalmi,²⁵ a typically “Babylonian” position?

In the ensuing set of disputes (*third* to *fifth* Biblical sources) of Rabban Gamli’el with the heretics (Minim),²⁶ the rabbinical side sets out to comprehensively establish their scholarly erudition. Sources drawn from the three parts of the Biblical canon are cited to persuade the obdurate that the Hebrew Bible *as a whole* affirms the resurrection of the dead.

Rabban Gamli’el²⁷ leads off with Deuteronomy 31: 16, a text taken from the first part of the Hebrew canon:

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה הִנֵּה שָׁכַב עַם-אַבְתָּיִךְ וְקָם הָעָם הַזֶּה וְהָיָה אֶתְרִי אֶלֶיךָ נָכַר-הָאָרֶץ (literally:

“And the Lord said unto Moses, Behold, you sleep with your fathers and this people rises up and whores after the strange gods of the land”).

²⁴ This understanding would match the fact that in the Genizah fragments Rabban Gamli’el’s opponents (beginning with the third dialogue) are “Sadducees”; cf. A. I. Katsh, *Genize Talmud Bavli*, Jerusalem: Rubin Mass 1975, vol. 2, 104, l. 20 (see the following note); whether the Sadducee position then would be authentically reproduced is an issue that cannot detain us here; cf. on this point J. Le Moyne, *Les Sadducéens*, Paris 1972, 172.

²⁵ Cf. e.g. yKet 13, 11 – 36b,50-55.

²⁶ On the erratic textual transmission of this passage (“minim” or “Saducees”?) see the previous note and Hayes, 262. Based on the course of the debate thus far, where the *topos* falls well within what is known to have historically divided Pharisees and Sadducees, the reading “Sadducees” seems to be *lectio facillior*. R. T. Herford is of the opinion that these “Sadducees” are, in fact, Christians who derived resurrection not from the Hebrew Bible but from Christ’s return from the dead (R. T. Herford, *Christianity in Talmud and Midrash*, London 1903/repr. New York/ London 1966, 231-234); this implies that the debate might have taken place in Rome, to which city Rabban Gamli’el is thought to have journeyed in the year 95 CE. A historicizing interpretation along these lines, however, can be ruled out in light of contemporary research. On the other hand the point is well taken that the interlocutors were not as purported, but that other opponents might have been (if not fully, then partly) intended, with the exact opponent varying with the historical context of each particular reading. For a probing discussion of the relationship between “Minim” and Christians in the rabbinical literature cf. A. Schremer, *Estranged Brothers*, 49ff. Cf. also, as a New Testament parallel, the dispute between Jesus and the Sadducees in Mark 12:18-27; here the Biblical source Jesus cites for the resurrection of the dead is Exod. 3:6.

²⁷ The debate over whether Rabban Gamli’el I or Gamli’el II is the speaker seems to have been settled in favor of the latter, Rabban Gamli’el II of Yavne, the patriarch of rabbinical Judaism between 80/90 and 110 CE; cf. on this point A. Marmorstein, *The Doctrine of the Resurrection of the Dead in Rabbinic Theology*, in: *Studies in Jewish Theology*, Oxford 1950, 149; W. Bacher, *Die Agada der Tannaiten*, vol. 1, Strasburg 1903, 73; J. Neusner, *The Rabbinic Traditions about the Pharisees before 70*, vol. 1, Leiden 1971, 341.

Rabban Gamli'el then suggests a surprising interpretation, deconstructing the second part of the verse: following the Hebrew word order, the verb “to rise” (קָם) is not to be read as a reference to the Israelites potentially lapsing into heretical ways, but—instead—to the first part of the sentence, as if God had spoken to Moses of *his* approaching death and future resurrection:

“And the Lord said unto Moses, Behold, you [will] sleep with your fathers and [you will] rise up [again] (קָם)!”

May we assume that the Rabbinical scholar has been misled by a difficulty in conjugating the Hebrew verb? As every student of Hebrew grammar know, the third person masculine singular form of the perfect tense cannot, in the case of “hollow roots”, be differentiated from the participle form—is this the *inconsistency* the Rabbi builds on? Was this the reason the Rabbi (or the later redactor of our text) succumbed to a misreading of the syntactic structure?²⁸

This is, of course, not only highly improbable but virtually impossible. The vav perfect (קָם) in the future tense evidently introduces the second part of the verse, which but for the antecedent verbal form (“and [the people] rises up” קָם) would be left dangling in the air!²⁹

In the brief scene depicted in the Talmudic text the “Minim” therefore point to the “errors” in Rabban Gamli'el's reading: they reproach him—no surprise this—for his “extreme” Midrashic technique³⁰ and argue in favor of a “contextual” and syntactically accurate reading: “and the people rises up and whores after the strange gods of the land.” Neither from the mouth of Rabban Gamli'el nor from some other quarter do these “Minim” ever receive an answer to their account, highly persuasive though it is; nor do the editors of the Talmud see the need for any clarifying intervention. Given that the conversation moves on directly to the next Scriptural source, there would seem to be nothing, *prima facie*, to stop us concluding that the rabbinical demonstration has failed with this verse.³¹

The reference to the *fourth* textual source, again put forward by Rabban Gamli'el, seems, at first blush, more promising. But this text too, a passage from Isaiah

“Thy dead shall live” (Is. 26:19)

fails to be convincing because we hear that the prophet might be referring to those among the dead whom the prophet Ezekiel had once (uniquely) restored to life but who had (meanwhile) long since died again.³²

The *fifth* Biblical source, this time from the Hagiographies, runs as follows:

²⁸ Thus קָם could appear to be linked to the participle form קָמֵי, an interpretation that is, however, patently impossible here for both syntactic and semantic reasons; on this Biblical source cf. Hayes, 264.

²⁹ The second part of the verse (“and whores after the strange gods of the land”) would be syntactically impossible and also meaningless without the antecedent (“and rises up”). The Hebrew word order makes it possible to refer “and rises up” to Moses—but only on the assumption that the sentences ends here. In his novellae on the Talmud (Iddushe Maharsha), Rabbi Samuel Elieser b. Juda Edels (1555-1631) points to the fact that the construction קָם should always be interpreted with a positive spiritual meaning and can therefore be read as referring to the first part of the sentence.

³⁰ On this terminology see above, note 17, and Hayes, 255.

³¹ Cf. the arguments by Costa (146, 150f, and 459) on the rabbinical reading of Deut. 31:16, which wholly circumvent the problematic of this interpretation.

³² According to this opinion (the text does not say whether uttered by Rabban Gamli'el or by the “heretics”) which obviously refers to Ez. 37, the prophetic promise had long since been fulfilled, and a single case of a miraculous resurrection, necessitating at some later point in time the death of the resurrected person, cannot be related to the eschatological event envisaged by the rabbis. Reference is again made to this motif below in bSan 92b, possibly an instance of redactional bracketing. There the rabbis concur with the same reading of Ez. 37. See also a similar argument made in bSan 99a where R. Hillel is reported to have said that there shall be no Messiah for Israel, “because they have already enjoyed him in the days of (the king) Hezekiah.”

“And the roof of thy mouth, like the best wine of my beloved, that goeth down sweetly, causing the lips of those that are asleep to speak ” (Song of Sol. 7:10).

In this passage, according to Rabban Gamli’el, “causing the lips of those that are asleep to speak” is a reference to the awakening of the dead. But this interpretation too is easily refuted—why assume more than that the lips moving *in sleep* is meant? But things then take a surprising twist. The opponents, in order to undermine Rabban Gamli’el’s interpretation, quote in their reply a rabbinic authority we have already met: Rabbi Yohanan (bar Nappaha), the well-known Amora of the second generation, who taught in the name of Rabbi Shim’on ben Yehošadaq.³³ This authority is said to have taught:

“When one pronounces a Halakhah in the name of a dead person in this world, then his lips murmur in the grave, for it is written: ,the lips of those that are asleep to speak.’”

Should the verse cited by Rabban Gamli’el therefore be seen as a metaphorical reference to a scholar living on in his pupils? To a “continued existence” reminiscent in a way of the priest Aaron continuing to live in his children, as in the first Biblical demonstration (that had been put forward, as it happens, by the same Rabbi Yohanan we encounter here)? True, the priests in the time of the Talmud played no further role, yet “resurrection” *in this sense* would occur whenever Jews gathered to study the Torah. Were Rabban Gamli’el to accept this “spiritualizing” reading of the doctrine of resurrection, he would have certainly undercut his own earlier position in objecting to the “heretics,” who spurn resurrection no less than they do the oral Torah!³⁴

To be sure, the objection against the rabbinic reading of Song of Solomon 7: 10—“causing the lips of those that are asleep to speak” referring to the resurrection of the dead as an actual event in a world to come—is depicted as coming *from the mouths of the Minim*, but these “heretics” happen to be aware of a good rabbinical practice: reciting a Halakhah in the name of a deceased person!

In her analysis of this Talmudic passage, Christine E. Hayes has pointed out that in this segment the lines are always blurred, terminologically and argumentatively, between the rabbinic position and that of their opponents. The phenomenon of a “rabbinized” depiction of the position of “the others” (“non-Jews ... speak ‘Rabbinese’”³⁵)—which, incidentally, is also attested to elsewhere in rabbinic literature—plus the inconsistencies in the rabbinical position as a result of this, have, be it noted, nothing whatsoever to do with the repressed anxieties suggested by Hayes. Aside from the fact that controversial discussions are inseparable from the oral Torah anyway, what is specific to this text is not the abrupt and, in part, incongruous juxtaposition of the arguments of Jewish sages, but rather the sense we get (from the editorial composition) of the rabbinic argumentation operating *almost intentionally* from a position of inferiority.

³³ On Rabbi Yohanan and Rabbi Shim’on ben Yehošadaq see W. Bacher, *Die Agada der palästinensischen Amoräer*, Straßburg 1892-1905, Vol. 1, 119-123.

³⁴ Mindful of the celebrated formulation by the theologian Rudolf Bultmann that Jesus Christ was resurrected “into the Kerygma” (cf. R. Bultmann, *Das Verhältnis der urchristlichen Christusbotschaft zum historischen Jesus*, Heidelberg 1965, 27), we might perhaps speak of a Jewish resurrection “into the Halakhah.” To be sure, the present composition is not interested in pursuing dogmatic lines to their logical conclusion; thus we find the pupil-teacher relationship being developed lower down (bSan 91b) from a wholly different perspective: if someone withholds from a pupil a Halakhah, it is as if he had robbed him of his patrimony.

³⁵ Hayes, 272, note 52.

In the following it will be argued that what we are dealing with here is an end redaction strategy, which has nothing to do with covert “desires and mental processes of the author”³⁶ but everything to do with the rabbis *deliberately* pursuing their interests. The expression “resurrection according to the Torah” (תחיית המתים מן התורה) should be read in accordance with the *rabbinic* teaching, that is to say, in accordance with the oral Torah. To be clear about this: *how* the expression is to be read is subject to rabbinic (and so ultimately to Halakhic) authority; Biblical evidence is subordinate. In order to get this point across, the Talmud is even ready to undermine a demonstration of resurrection that seems to be positively enjoined by the context, and that over an issue anything but irrelevant theologically! Later in the text of the same tractate (bSan 99a), the rabbis re-emphasize where the red lines lie in their textual exegesis: it is forbidden to read “false interpretations” into Biblical texts, i.e., readings that infringe religious law (גלות פנים בתורה אשר לא (כהלכה). The authority of the sages trumps *in this respect* issues of dogma.

The *sixth* Biblical evidence, again voiced by Rabban Gamli’el, returns to the theme of the giving of the land: the formulation

“the Lord swore unto your fathers to give them the land” (Deut. 11:9)

is, we are told, a reference (conveyed by the personal pronoun for “them”) to the resurrection of the dead—on a literal reading, it is the long-dead fathers who are actually being addressed; however, it is clearly the case that the people of Israel is *meant*. The text should therefore read: “to give you.” Thus—by sleight of hand, as it were—this “demonstration” again represents the land of Israel as a land “in Heaven,” reserved for the fathers after the resurrection.

Of similar demonstrative force is the *seventh Biblical source* (by the same sage), which—addressing the issue of what “this day” might mean in the phrase “you are alive every one of you *this day*” (Deut. 4:4)—boldly concludes that if life is attested for “this day,” then this must also hold for “tomorrow,” i.e., for the world to come.

The next section in this series of dialogues addresses the *eighth* Biblical source and explores the linkage between the resurrection of the dead and the issue of divine providence. The Romans ask Rabbi Yehoshua^c ben Hananya:

“How can we know that the Holy One, blessed be He! will restore the dead to life or that He has knowledge of what will later come to pass?”

In a surprising move, the rabbinic sage then harks back to Deuteronomy 31:16, where the resurrection of Moses was the subject—the same verse that Rabban Gamli’el had “vainly” cited in his attempted rebuttal of the Minim. The sages in both segments—Yehoshua^c ben Hananya (no. 8) and Rabban Gamli’el (no. 3)—were contemporaries, living in the long shadow cast by the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. Is the composition of the text therefore suggesting that

³⁶ Hayes, 251; the fact that the position of the “heretics” is patently a literary construct, that we are not to seek for actual historical backgrounds to such a controversy, does *not* therefore allow us to view the Minim’s position as an “externalization of an internal rabbinic objection to or anxiety over non-contextual exegetical methods” (Hayes, 273, note 53); a psychoanalytically inspired interpretation along these lines, however enticing, seems to me wholly inadequate for understanding this text. In any case, Hayes (loc. cit., 261) is wrong to assume that a Biblical interpretation is, generally speaking, the more “rabbinical” the more it conforms to the “contextual approach,” and all the more unrabbinical—and from a Jewish perspective, “heretical”—the more it distances itself from the latter. Perspectivity of interpretation, deriving its legitimacy from the oral Torah and not tied to the literal meaning, is indeed the core prerogative of rabbinical exegesis! When Hayes states that “the rabbis boldly assert their authority as teachers and interpreters *despite* the fact that their methods can result in interpretations so distant from a contextual reading of the biblical text” (Hayes 282, my italics), her comment is so far wide of the mark as to be only salvageable by turning “despite” into “because of.” Hayes then adds a formulation that—minus its psychologizing tendencies—captures better the *primum mobile* of the composition bSan 90b-92a: “In these texts, anxiety gives way to exuberance as the rabbis confront the vision of their own strangeness, only to embrace it and even celebrate it.”

both attempts at a Biblical demonstration need to be accommodated within a single timeline? But why, we find ourselves asking, had Rabbi Yehoshua^c ben Hananya then not learned his lesson from Rabban Gamli²el's "defeat" in his bout with the Minim? And if so, why did the text redactors bother to inform their readers of the successive "defeats" of both rabbis?³⁷ Both discussions on Deuteronomy 31:16, however, are clearly not to be seen as a *faux pas* best passed over in silence. This is shown by the fact that a third reference to Deuteronomy 31: 16 is represented in the following segment (no. 9) as having been spoken by Rabbi Yohanan in the name of Rabbi Shim'on bar Yuhai (pT3).³⁸

The response of Rabbi Yehoshua^c's opponent—a Roman, and clearly one well versed in the Bible!³⁹—makes common cause with the (as we have seen) "heretical" line of argument in dialogue no. 3, restoring the syntactic context. He asks: shouldn't the passage actually read: "...the people rises up and whores..."? Rabbi Yehoshua^c ben Hananya replies that the other side had, with this suggestion, at least gone halfway to recognizing what they supposedly had denied before, namely that God can predict the future. But does the corollary of this response also imply that the Jewish sage concedes to his interlocutor on the resurrection issue, the *thema probandum*, of being conceivably in the right? We may suppose so. Again, the rabbis seem strangely unable to mount a cogent argument against the objections urged by the other side.

To grasp what divides the rabbis and their opponents in their reading of Deuteronomy 31: 16, a glance at the Biblia Hebraica may prove useful. For one thing, the Atnah after אֲבָהִיךָ, the disjunctive accent sign of the Masoretes, supports the reading advanced by the Minim; the function of this accent is to clearly delimit both sentence halves! For another thing, the Masoretes inserted over the וְקָם, against every syntactical consideration, a bridging sign belonging to the *conjunctivi sive servi* (מַחְבְּרִים טַעֲמִים), i.e., a small *Telishah* (תְּלִישָׁה קְטַנָּה/telisha parvum). Is this to be so construed that exegetes following in the path of the Masoretes—despite their opponents having the advantage of plausibility for their reading—were resolved, at least on the plane of accent signs, to leave the final verdict open?⁴⁰ Was the debate over the proper reading of the text even waged on the level of the Masoretic accent signs? Elsewhere in the Talmud (bYom 52ab) we find a reference to the rule of syntactic exceptions with the express intention of leaving it open whether a given word referred to either the first or the second sentence half. This rule had been formulated not only with our text (Deut. 31:16) but with four more similar Biblical passages in mind.⁴¹ Could it therefore be that the rabbinic demonstration of resurrection hangs on the presence of a stroke, the tiny *Telishah*? Unsurprisingly, neither the "heretics" nor the Romans were prepared to be swayed by such a clearly *ad hoc* hermeneutic rule. We find ourselves then asking: did the rabbis themselves believe that this small Masoretic stroke was able to bear the burden of proof? But then, why was no

³⁷ On the conflict-rife relationship between Yehoshua^c ben Hananya and Rabban Gamli²el cf. Ch. Albeck, Art. Josua ben Chananja, in: *Jüdisches Lexikon* (begr. von Georg Herlitz und Bruno Kirschner), Berlin 1927, vol. III, colm. 357-359 and the same author: Gamaliel II, *Jüdisches Lexikon*, vol. II, colm. 889-892.

³⁸ On Rabbi Shim'on bar Yohai cf. G. Stemmerger, *Einleitung in Talmud und Midrasch*, Munich 1992, 82.

³⁹ The question to what extent the image presented of the "Roman" in this Babylonian text has acquired a Christian layering cannot detain us here.

⁴⁰ It is worth considering whether the rabbis had a dogmatic or theological-historical interest in rejecting a reading ("the people rises up and whores") that accused the people of Israel of idolatry.

⁴¹ There we read "Isi b. Yehuda said: There are five verses in the Bible (חֲמִשָּׁה מִקְרָאִים) the grammatical construction of which is undecided (אֵין לָהֶן הַכְרַע)." The "verses in the Bible" that Isi b. Yehuda (a Babylonian sage from the third Tannaitic generation) enumerates are: Deut. 31:16, Gen. 4:7, Exod. 25:33f, Exod. 17:9, and Gen. 49:7; in the last passage, clearly the concern is to ward off the curse of Simeon and Levi; cf. on this point also MekhJ, ed. J. Z. Lauterbach, Philadelphia 1933, 2, 142-143; also, the parallels in BerR 80,6 (on Gen. 34:7), yAZ 2,7 – 41c, 70-41d, 3; MekhY Beshala¹ Amaleq 1 (179), Tan Beshalla¹ 26 (92b), and ShirR 1,2 (5cd).

attempt made at this point, in pursuing the argument on Deuteronomy 31:16, to elaborate on the post-biblical traditions of the death of Moses in earlier Jewish literature? As a matter of fact, there was no shortage of traditions about him being buried by God, about his hidden grave and his glorification, traditions that fell short of depicting his “rapture” or ascension, even his resurrection!⁴² It may not be far-fetched to speculate that the rabbis were reluctant to invest too heavily in the traditional resurrection of Moses. In a context of dispute with “Minim,” who might well have been Judeo-Christians or Christians, they shied away from “Christologizing” the figure of Moses. Another reason may have been that they felt that talk of Moses returning from the dead was too pale before the message of the resurrection of the Nazarene.⁴³

Into this debate between the sages on one side and the Romans and “Minim” on the other—a debate that has so far, putting it mildly, failed to produce a clear winner—there is now injected from the Talmud, in conjunction with the *ninth* Biblical evidence, yet another rabbinic controversy, this time one with the Samaritans.⁴⁴ To be sure, the order of redactional appearance—first “Minim” (Sadducees perhaps?), then Romans, then Samaritans—makes little sense historically or chronologically. We might suppose, therefore, that what we are encountering here are controversies of a younger date, albeit read back into an ancestral dispute often described as the primordial schism in Judaism. What first springs to eye, in any event, is that the “Samaritans” are accused of having falsified the Torah. In light of the ensuing Biblical source—following directly on from the accusation—one can only describe this contention as bold in the extreme.⁴⁵

Nor does it seem an accident that the selected source (Num. 15:31) is inserted *at this point*. Together with the preceding verse, Numbers 15: 30 (not quoted in the Talmud), it reads much like a condemnation, and not just aimed at the Samaritans, but at the Romans and the “heretics” too:

30) “But the person who does anything with a high hand, whether he is native (אזרח) or a sojourner (גר), reviles the Lord, and that person shall be cut off from among his people,

31) because he has despised the word of the Lord, and has broken his commandment, that person shall utterly be cut off (הַכָּרַת תְּכַרְת); his iniquity shall be upon him.”

The text discusses whether the *figura etymologica* (הַכָּרַת תְּכַרְת), actually the redundant *infinitivus absolutus*, is to be accorded exegetical significance. Rabbi Aqiva, whom we may take as representing those teachers who wish to interpret every last little detail of the Torah, is of this

⁴² On the Assumptio Mosis cf. E. Brandenburger, *Die Himmelfahrt Moses*, JSHRZ 1976, 59-84 and K. Haacker, „Assumptio Mosis – eine samaritanische Schrift“, in: ThZ 25 (1969), pp. 385-405; on Pseudo-Philo’s *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* and its focus on Deut. 31:16 cf. Klaus Haacker, Peter Schäfer: *Nachbiblische Traditionen vom Tod des Moses*, in: Otto Betz, Klaus Haacker, Martin Hengel (eds.), *Josephus-Studien. Untersuchungen zu Josephus, dem antiken Judentum und dem Neuen Testament*. Otto Michel zum 70. Geburtstag gewidmet, Göttingen 1974, pp. 147-174 (here: pp. 151-156). In rabbinic literature, as Peter Schäfer has shown (loc. cit., 170-174) SifDev 357, (Bietenhard, 890) MidrTann (D. Hoffmann, *Midrasch Tannaim zum Deuteronomium*, Berlin 1908, 224) and bSot 13b come closest to developing a n idea of Moses’ living on after his death where Deut. 43:5 (“so Moses died ‘there’”) is explained as meaning that he was “there” with the Lord, “standing and ministering.” Conspicuously, this motif is missing here.

⁴³ Cf. on the anti-Christian thrust of the Sanhedrin tractate Peter Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud* Princeton and Oxford 2007, p. 63-71. One might counter the latter argument by pointing out that post-Biblical traditions on Moses would have had no place anyway in a Talmudic context where the overriding issue was the Biblical demonstrability of resurrection (תחיית המתים מן התורה).

⁴⁴ Cf. apparatus of BHS on Deut. 11:9.

⁴⁵ Is the text suggesting that the heretics (Sadducees?) and after them the Romans (i.e., the Christians?) had also falsified the Bible? If the Samaritans are intended here as a precedent, this could indeed be so—yet nowhere is this explicitly stated.

opinion. According to him, the first “cut off” in Numbers 15: 31 refers to this world, while the second refers to the world to come. Biblical redundancy thus gives him, and us, a Scriptural ground for affirming the resurrection of the dead qua resurrection for the purpose of judgment. His opponent, Rabbi Yishma’el, however, is of the opinion that the *figura etymologica* is simply a locution in Hebrew; it is therefore without theological significance: The Torah had, after all, spoken in the idioms of human speech (דיברה תורה כלשון בני אדם; cf. bNed 3a)!⁴⁶ Therefore, Rabbi Yishma’el counters Rabbi Aqiva’s argument by reducing it ad absurdum. Have we not, his objection runs, encountered the verb “cut off” earlier in Numbers 15:30? Are we then to believe that there exist three worlds, three eons (שלשה עולמים)?

In the end the rabbis remain at loggerheads: With this result, as unsatisfactory as it is surprising, the first round in the demonstration procedure draws to a close. A bit later in the text of tractate Sanhedrin (bSan 99a) the verse Numbers 15:30-31 is, however, revisited, and with characteristic vigor: “... that person shall be cut off from among his people, because he has despised the word of the Lord, and has broken his commandment.” This will be the lot, bSan 99a tells us, of anyone who fails to interpret the Torah after the Halakhah, rabbinic law (מגלה פנים בתורה שלא כהלכה).

Nine pages earlier, in bSan 90b, the result for the rabbis is, at first inspection, nothing if not dismaying. They have proved unable to come up with a single convincing Scriptural source. Not only does one have the impression, as the dialogues move from round to round, that the rabbis are being systematically outmaneuvered by their opponents, but that they are outmaneuvering themselves. Why, we wonder, do they insist on piling up arguments that only at a stretch can be called exegetical, arguments that show them in the worst possible light? Such a strategy only makes sense on the assumption that it is taken for granted from the outset that the rabbis are in the right—and because right is on their side, the more problematic the Scriptural source, the more they can afford to parade this fact provocatively *ad oculos*.⁴⁷ What remains clear, in any event, is that the validity of a Mishnaic sentence (like mSan 11, 1) does not rest on its exegetical demonstration! The sages are not arguing about the *validity* of this Mishnaic ruling (which is simply assumed); they are only arguing whether it can actually be derived from Scripture.

At this point our text breaks off the series of Biblical demonstrations and transitions to a brief narrative segment. Whereas the Rabbis seem to have lost their way in their own Scripture, it falls to a prominent *non-Jew*, Queen Cleopatra,⁴⁸ to help them to regain their bearings. In her conversation with Rabbi Me’ir, the rabbinical sage who now makes his appearance, she just happens to *know* a Scriptural source proving the resurrection of the dead:

⁴⁶ On the hermeneutic divide between Rabbi Aqiva and Rabbi Yishma’el cf. Ch. Hayes, 283-285; also G. Stemberger, Einleitung 245f.

⁴⁷ With Christine Hayes (loc. cit., 282) we might speak of “exegetical exuberance.”

⁴⁸ To get around the anachronism of a Tannaitic scholar from the middle of the second post-Christian century disputing with an Egyptian queen, Bacher has a conjecture of his own: the actual interlocutor of the rabbis was, he suggests, the patriarch of the Samaritans (פטריקא דכותאי), which would fit what is otherwise known, namely that Rabbi Me’ir disputed with the “Kutim”; cf. W. Bacher, Die Agada der Tannaiten, Strasburg 1890, Vol. II, 68. (The anachronism would still exist, be it noted, irrespective of which one of the ancient bearers of the name Cleopatra was intended, even if, in view of the context—a debate with the Romans—the last ruler of the Ptolemaic dynasty must be considered an obvious candidate.) True, no chronological order is discernible at any point in the entire textual composition, and attempts to construct one—if only to gain biographical information on the participating sages—are wholly out of place. But it is worth asking whether the Egyptian queen, if it be she, in view of her *liaison* with Julius Caesar, counts here, perhaps in a cultural sense, as a “Roman.” After all, Rabban Gamli’el, immediately after this scene, debates with “the emperor” [קיסר]. On Cleopatra in rabbinic literature cf. L. Roth, s. v. Cleopatra, in: Encyclopedia Judaica Jerusalem 1971, vol. V, 603f.

“And they [i.e., the righteous] shall [in the distant future] blossom forth out of the city” (Ps. 72:16).

Armed with this “evidence,” she goes on to ask if those returning from the dead do so naked or clad in garments? Rabbi Me’ir is dismissive—putting it mildly—of this Biblical source; he answers with a show of logic and, citing the example of a grain of wheat laid in the earth, an observation drawn from nature:

“You may deduce (the answer) by an *a fortiori* argument from a wheat grain: if a grain of wheat, which is buried naked, sprouts forth in many robes, how much more so the righteous, who are buried in their raiment!”⁴⁹

Rabbi Me’ir’s answer suggests that for the rabbis, in the last resort, resurrection can be demonstrated neither Biblically nor, by the way, by invoking the Mishnah alone; rather it is a fact accessible to anyone able to heed the evidence of his eyes (לא ממקרא ולא ממשנה אלא מדרך ארץ).⁵⁰ The resurrection of the dead, therefore, has to be understood in analogy with natural events. Interpreting it along these lines is more illuminating than any Biblical source. The topic of the resurrection from the dead is not, then, specifically addressed to the people of Israel—so it is not an issue that unduly concerns the rabbis, which explains why they go to no great lengths to present an account free of contradictions.

The Bible, by contrast, was a terrain the rabbis had to share with Samaritans, “heretics,” Romans—even with the likes of “Cleopatra”! This accords with the observation that from the Bible all manner of things can be shown and demonstrated. So, we might ask, should we not rather be stressing that while Cleopatra, as well as the Minim and the Romans, know the wording of the Biblical text, they have no idea of exegetical (=rabbinic) methodology?⁵¹ Or, going further, does not this circumstance, in rabbinic perception, even lead to a fundamental downgrading of “Scripture” as a body of evidence?

Clearly, then, the point our text is trying to get across is that the decisions that really count will be taken elsewhere. The centrality of Rabban Gamli’el and his contemporary Rabbi Yehoshua^c ben Hananya in the matter of Talmudic composition is, perhaps, a hint that the burning issue here is one of *rabbinical authority*. Should we view this scene through the lens of his quarrel with Rabban Gamli’el, at whose hands he had been severely humiliated? Well known is the story of Rabban Gamli’el, chairman of the Sanhedrin in Yavneh and “Nasi,” who once had obliged Rabbi Yehoshua^c to appear before him wearing his everyday apparel on the same day Rabbi Yehoshua^c had designated as Yom Kippur, but which he, Rabban Gamli’el, in his capacity as chairman of the Sanhedrin, had ruled was a mere working day.⁵² This anecdote, which is all about getting the headstrong rabbi to acknowledge Gamli’el’s Halakhic authority, makes the same point in this respect as does our literary composition about the resurrection from the dead. Both texts are

⁴⁹ Whether “raiments,” in this sense, refers to the physical nature of resurrection must remain an open question.

⁵⁰ Cf. Bacher, 67. The point is to drive home how little the discussed issue matters in Rabbi Me’ir’s eyes. It is precisely here (in the Cleopatra dialogue) that we encounter a thematic source Isidor Scheftelowitz quotes as paralleling the worldview of the ancient Persians (I. Scheftelowitz, *Die altpersische Religion und das Judentum*, 1920, 193), i.e., the image of the grain laid in the earth and the notion of the garments of the deceased. Clearly, picking up on these parallels contributes little, per se, to our understanding of the Talmudic nexus.

⁵¹ Thus Cleopatra, in bSan 90b (end), has to be instructed by the rabbinical scholar on the proper conclusion: *kal wa-chomer*, a *minore ad majus*.

⁵² Cf. mRH 2:8-9 und bBer 27b-28a. As it happened, the people did not forgive Rabban Gamli’el for thus humiliating his colleague: he was removed from office the following year. Potentially sensitive for Yehoshua^c ben Hananya, who in his conversation is confronting a Roman citizen, is the fact that the rabbinic sage, in this scene, is possibly not speaking within the confines of the rabbinical academy; In bChag 3a we find him, for example, in the Galilean village of Peqiin.

literary reflections of the productive tensions coursing through rabbinic Judaism in its formative years.

This piling up of Biblical proof texts now culminates in an *eleventh* demonstration by the Rabbanan, this time based on a Baraita. This source does not turn on eschatological speculation but on the doctrine of God Himself, of Whom it is said “that he kills and makes alive” (Deut. 32:39).⁵³ This verse—the first maybe to actually satisfy from the perspective of contextual exegesis (and also insightful on the theological plane⁵⁴)—is followed by two Biblical passages, one taken from the Pentateuch (Exod. 15:1) and one from the Prophets (Josh. 8:10), both brought forward by the Tannaitic sage Rabbi Me’ir (*Scriptural sources 12-13*).

Finally Amoraic votes bring the sequence of dialogues to a close.⁵⁵ It seems no accident that the movement here proceeds from representatives of Palestinian Judaism—Rabbi Yehoshua^c b. Levi and (again!) Rabbi Yohanan (*Sources 14-15*)—to representatives of Babylonian Judaism (Raba, Rabina, and Rab Ashi: *Sources 16-18*). It falls to these two sages to bring the discussion to a close, uniting as they do between them the forces of tradition and the end redaction phase of the Babylonian Talmud.⁵⁶

The results of our investigation can be summarized in five theses:

- 1) The Biblical sources cited for the resurrection of the dead in the Talmudic segment under study are, in part, contradictory and also, in part, patently wrong philologically (to say nothing of being meaningless historically).
- 2) These “shortcomings” are in no way concealed, but are paraded for all to see—in fact, they may be said to reflect a compositional strategy. They persuade neither Samaritans nor “heretics” nor Romans, nor are they convincing to readers today—nor (this is the point!) are they intended to be.
- 3) These clearly untenable Biblical-theological demonstrations climax over the issue of the resurrection of Moses; here the Talmud, probably because it was not opportune to do so in a dispute with the “Minim,” resists the temptation to elaborate and dwell further on relevant post-Biblical Mosaic traditions.
- 4) The debate on the “resurrection of the dead according to the Torah” is to be seen as part of an inner-Jewish discourse, its purpose being to assure the discursive

⁵³ Against this proof it is argued that the killing might refer to one person, the giving of life to another. On this understanding see also Rashi who supports this counter-argument; on this verse also 1Sam 2:6; Tob 13:2, and SapSal 16:13. Origen (*Contra Celsum* II, 24) discusses this verse in the context of his dealing with the meaning of the death and resurrection of Christ. Cf. also his first homily on Jeremiah (1,16): Origène, *Homélies sur Jérémie*, Traduction par Pierre Husson et Pierre Nautin, Edition, Introduction et Notes par Pierre Nautin, Paris 1967 (*Sources Chrétiennes* 232), p. 232–233; cf. also his homily on Numbers 21,16–23: Origène, *Homélies sur les Nombres* II, *Homélies XI–XIX*, Texte latin de W. A. Baehrens, Nouvelle Édition par Louis Doutreleau S. J., Paris 1999 (*Sources Chrétiennes* 442), p. 98–99. These quotations seem to be a clear indication that this Biblical text (Deut. 32:39) was used in Jewish-Christian debates on the topic of the resurrection of the dead.

⁵⁴ Not many decades after the end redaction of the Babylonian Talmud this Biblical proof is echoed in the Qur’an (2:258) in a disputation that pits the prophet Ibrahim against an unknown opponent. Cf. St. Schreiner, “Gott ist es, der lebendig macht und sterben lässt”. Anmerkungen zu einer geprägten Gottesaussage des Korans, in: idem, *Die jüdische Bibel in islamischer Auslegung*, ed. by Friedmann Eissler and Matthias Morgenstern, Tübingen 2012, 251–261.

⁵⁵ The fact that Amoraic sayings are placed at both the beginning and the end of the composition is an indication of redactional activity: the Amoraic arguments, in a certain sense, embrace the Tannaitic Biblical sources (formally and thematically); speculations as to the extent to which Tannaitic sages (compared with Amoraim) were more open to “anti-Midrashic views” (Hayes 287) are therefore unnecessary, given the redactional character of the overall composition; cf. on the redaction of this text also L. H. Schiffman, *Composition and Redaction in Bavli*, *Pereq Éleq*, in: J. L. Rubenstein (ed.), *Creation and Composition. The Contribution of the Bavli Redactors (Stammam) to the Aggada*, Tübingen 2005, 201–215, cf. esp. 211–215.

⁵⁶ Cf. G. Stemberger, *Einleitung* 103f und 193f.

hegemony of the rabbis in the field of Biblical hermeneutics. This hegemony is halakhically steered, and is not to be referred to dogmatic correctness.

- 5) This purpose enables and permits diverging and even contradictory eschatological ideas (sometimes Jewish, sometimes non-Jewish) to be taken on board and processed.

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The Resurrection of the Dead in Biblical Tradition: A Sketch

Jostein Ådna

Introduction: The Resurrection of Christ and the Future Resurrection of the Dead

The belief in the bodily resurrection of the dead is a firm and undisputed element in the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed,¹ drawn from the unanimous testimony of the New Testament scriptures. The death and resurrection of Christ are the two most fundamental soteriological events (cf. 1 Cor 15:3–4; Rom 4:25) in Christian salvation history. Although Christ's resurrection is seen as a unique and unparalleled event in the history of humankind, nevertheless, the New Testament connects it with the notion of a (more) general resurrection. One example is Paul's statement in his speech to Agrippa in Acts 26:23: "... the Messiah must suffer, and ... *by being the first to rise from the dead*, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles."² Other examples are the designation of Christ in the Colossian hymn as "the firstborn from the dead" (Col 1:18), and the detailed exposition of this matter in 1 Corinthians 15:20–23:

²⁰ But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. ²¹ For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; ²² for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. ²³ But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.

As a matter of fact, in his controversy with those in Corinth who reject the resurrection of the dead, Paul goes to the extreme of claiming that "if there is no resurrection of the dead, then [even] Christ has not been raised" (1 Cor 15:13).³ Hence, according to Paul, the so-far unprecedented event of Christ's resurrection from the dead is futile and merely an unfounded imagination if there is no general resurrection of the dead.⁴

¹ Standard English formulation of this element in the third article is, respectively, "I believe in ... the resurrection of the body" (Apostles' Creed) and "We look for the resurrection of the dead" (Nicene Creed).

² Quotations from the Bible follow the NRSV Anglicized Edition. I have italicized the phrase of special interest to us in the cited verse.

³ The imperative and absolute interconnection between the raising of Christ and the general resurrection of the dead is argued throughout the passage 1 Cor 15:12–19; see, as a repetition or continuation of v. 13, especially vv. 15–16: If there is no resurrection of the dead, "¹⁵ [w]e are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ—whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised.¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised."

⁴ Most likely those referred to in 1 Cor 15:12 as the ones saying there is no resurrection of the dead, hardly intended to dispute the third and fourth element of the christological confession quoted at the beginning of the chapter in 1 Cor 15:4b–5, that Christ "was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve." Apparently, they had a notion of Christ's resurrection that did not correspond to and imply a general bodily resurrection. Probably, they were surprised or even shocked at how Paul fervently connected the raising

The Views of Sadducees and Pharisees

It is well known that there were varying opinions among Jews at the time of the New Testament regarding the belief in the resurrection of the dead. In the New Testament these differences are spelled out only rarely. One of these few instances is found in Acts 23:6–8, where Luke describes how Paul successfully appealed to the Pharisaic position on the resurrection of the dead when he was standing before the council in Jerusalem:

⁶ When Paul noticed that some were Sadducees and others were Pharisees, he called out in the council. ‘Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. I am on trial concerning the hope of the resurrection of the dead.’ ⁷ When he said this, a dissension began between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. ⁸ The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, or angel, or spirit; but the Pharisees acknowledge all three.

The only story about a controversy between Jesus and the Sadducees recounted in the synoptic gospels is about the resurrection of the dead (Mark 12:18–27; Matt 22:23–32; Luke 20:27–38). In order to demonstrate the absurdity of the belief in the resurrection, the Sadducees present to Jesus a story about an extreme case of application of the levirate law in Deuteronomy 25:5–6. As a proponent of the resurrection of the dead, Jesus responds and refutes the stand of the Sadducees by appealing to another text in the Torah:

²⁶ And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the story about the bush, how God said to him, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? ²⁷ He is God not of the dead, but of the living.

(Mark 12:26–27)

God’s self-disclosure to Moses in Exodus 3:6, in which he identifies himself as the God of the fathers, might, at the first look, appear as a weak argument in favour of resurrection of the dead. However, Jesus draws from the scriptural testimony the fundamental theological recognition that God is the God of the living, and from this follows implicitly and with necessity that he will raise the dead.

Biblical Theology versus History of Religions Approach

One of the most conspicuous books in biblical theology published in recent years has taken its title exactly from Jesus’s saying in Mark 12:27: *God of the Living: A Biblical Theology*. This monograph was written in closest cooperation by two professors at the University of Göttingen, Germany: the Old Testament scholar Hermann Spieckermann and his New Testament colleague Reinhard Feldmeier.⁵ Implicit in the title is the claim that God’s character of being God of the living is at the very heart of the Bible’s witness about him, as it is unfolded in biblical theology from the Torah, through the Prophets and the Writings, to the New Testament.

This conviction challenges the widely held *religionsgeschichtlich* position that the belief in the resurrection of the dead is an idea from Persian religion that only at a late stage found its way into some strands of early Judaism. According to this view the only clear evidence for such a belief in the Hebrew Bible is found in the apocalyptic text Daniel 12:2–3:

of Christ from the dead as a salvific event that has already taken place, with the future (bodily) resurrection of the believers.

⁵ Reinhard Feldmeier and Hermann Spieckermann, *Der Gott der Lebendigen: Eine biblische Gotteslehre* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011). The English translation appeared in the same year: Reinhard Feldmeier and Hermann Spieckermann, *God of the Living: A Biblical Theology*, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2011). For their treatment of Mark 12:18–27, see *God of the Living*, 520–25.

² Many of those who sleep in the dust of earth shall awake, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt. ³ Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.⁶

Another prominent proponent of biblical theology who has challenged the notion that the resurrection of the dead is merely a late idea in Judaism imported from outside is the German scholar Peter Stuhlmacher. In his inaugural lecture as a professor of the New Testament at the University of Tübingen in the spring of 1973 he spoke about “The confession of Jesus’s resurrection from the dead and biblical theology.”⁷ Taking the hope for resurrection of the dead in early Judaism not as a speculative imported idea but, on the contrary, as an ultimate expression of Israelite faith in God,⁸ Stuhlmacher traces the inherent traditional-historical links in the Bible that culminate in the belief in the resurrection of the dead.

Tradition History of the Resurrection of the Dead in the Old Testament and Early Judaism

It is Israel’s confession of old that YHWH has power over life and death that from an early stage prepares and paves the way for the belief in the resurrection of the dead. This confession has found a classic expression at the very heart and center of Hannah’s hymn of praise: “The LORD kills and brings to life; he brings down the Sheol and raises up” (1 Sam 2:6).⁹

In the Book of Psalms we encounter statements of firm confidence in the power and will of God to care for those who trust in him in ways that transcend the limitations of this world. An impressive example is Psalm 73:23–26:

²³ Nevertheless I am continually with you; you hold my right hand. ²⁴ You guide me with your counsel, and afterwards you will receive me with honour. ²⁵ Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire other than you. ²⁶ My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever.

Other examples are Psalms 16 and 22. It is definitely no coincidence that they are drawn upon in the New Testament as scriptural proof related to Jesus’ resurrection. In particular, the last

⁶ For a broad history of religion’s approach to the matter see the chapter “After Death: The Destiny of the Individual” in Heikki Räisänen, *The Rise of Christian Beliefs: The Thought World of Early Christians* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 114–33, with accompanying endnotes 349–54. Regarding Daniel 12 and the Persian link he writes: “In Daniel 12 the reference to resurrection life is ambiguous, but it would seem that it will be lived on this earth [...]. Surely this is where bodily resurrection conceptually (and, in its Iranian setting, originally) belongs, even though precisely the corporeal character of the resurrection mentioned in Daniel 12 is controversial” (118).

⁷ Published as “Das Bekenntnis zur Auferweckung Jesu von den Toten und die Biblische Theologie,” *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 70 (1973): 365–403. This article was reprinted in Peter Stuhlmacher, *Schriftauslegung auf dem Wege zur biblischen Theologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975), 128–66. In 2018, forty-five years after professor Stuhlmacher’s programmatic inaugural lecture in Tübingen on biblical theology, his *opus magnum*, *Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, 2 volumes, 1992/1999 (latest editions 2005 and 2012) will finally be published in English: Peter Stuhlmacher, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Daniel P. Bailey (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, forthcoming 2018).

⁸ Stuhlmacher, 383: “[B]ei der Hoffnung auf die Auferweckung der Toten durch Gott (handelt es sich) nicht um eine spekulative religionsgeschichtliche Anleihe, sondern vielmehr um einen Spitzensatz der israelitischen Gottesglaubens.” Many of the biblical texts referred to and cited in the following exposition are mentioned by Stuhlmacher on pp. 383–86.

⁹ See the comments on Hannah’s psalm in 1 Samuel 2:1–10 in Feldmeier and Spieckermann, *God of the Living*, 544–47. See also Deuteronomy 32:39: “See now that I, even I, am he; there is no god besides me. I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and no one can deliver from my hand.”

verses in these psalms—Psalm 16:9–11¹⁰ and Psalm 22:28–32 (ET 22:27–31)¹¹ respectively—are formulated in such a way that they are open to a reception that points towards or even explicitly expresses belief in the resurrection of the dead.¹² Another example of firm confidence in God’s power and care, with a potential for being applied to belief in the resurrection of the dead, is found in Job 19:25–27:

²⁵ For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth; ²⁶ and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then in my flesh I shall see God, ²⁷ whom I shall see on my side, and my eyes shall behold, and not another.

The prophet Ezekiel compares the restitution of the people of Israel with the bringing to life of dead bones filling up a whole valley in the conspicuous vision in Ezekiel 37:1–14. This act of bringing the dry bones back to life is proclaimed as a demonstration of God’s very character that is revealed and recognized in this way:

⁵ Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. ⁶ I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and *you shall know that I am the LORD*.¹³

The biblically significant tradition of God’s kingdom on Zion (e.g., Exod 15:17–18; Pss 48:2–3 [ET 48:1–2]; 99:1–2) is brought to its peak in the wonderful vision of the Lord’s banquet for all nations on Mount Zion in Isaiah 25:6–8.¹⁴

⁶ On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-matured wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-matured wines strained clear. ⁷ And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; ⁸ *he will swallow up death for ever*. Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken.¹⁵

¹⁰ Psalm 16:9–11: “⁹ Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also rests secure. ¹⁰ For you do not give me up to Sheol, or let your faithful one see the Pit. ¹¹ You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures for evermore.”

¹¹ Ps 22:30 (ET 22:29): “To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, and I shall live for him.”

¹² Ps 16:8–11 (LXX 15:8–11) is quoted in Peter’s speech at Pentecost in Acts 2:25–28 as David’s prophecy about the resurrection of the Messiah. The conspicuous ending of Psalm 22, which talks about how the rescue of the “I” in the Psalm, applied to Jesus (see the quotation of Ps 22:2 [ET 22:1] in Mark 15:34 and Matt 27:46), is made known to all nations and generations, past, present and future. Because of its structure and climactic ending Psalm 22 was drawn upon especially by the evangelists Mark and Matthew as a major tool for a biblical interpretation of Jesus’s passion and resurrection. See Jostein Ådna, “Der Psalter als Gebetbuch Jesu nach der Darstellung des Markus- und Matthäusevangeliums: Aspekte biblischer Theologie,” *Theologische Beiträge* 41 (2010): 384–400, esp. 395–400.

¹³ My italics. How God is recognized as “the God of the living” by bringing the dead back to life is repeated in vv. 12–13, where the vision of the dry bones in the valley is transferred to the graves where the people are buried: “¹² Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. ¹³ And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people.”

¹⁴ That “this mountain” (vv. 6, 7) refers to Mount Zion and the Lord’s reign there as king is explicitly stated in Is 24:23: “Then the moon will be abashed, and the sun ashamed; for the LORD of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before his elders he will manifest his glory.”

¹⁵ Hartmut Gese, “Death in the Old Testament,” in *Essays on Biblical Theology*, trans. Keith Crim (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1981), 34–59, distinguishes three stages of the Old Testament in Relation to Death: 1. Deliverance from Death (41–46), 2. Eternal Life (46–53), 3. Resurrection (55–58). Among the biblical texts discussed in the section “Eternal Life” are Ps 73 and Job 19:25–27, and in the section “Resurrection” Ps 22, Ezek 37:1–14 and Isa 25:6–8.

The confidence that God's righteousness will materialize in his victory over death finds strong and moving expressions in the texts about the martyrs of the Syrian persecution in the second century BC (see, *inter alia*, 2 Macc 7:1–23¹⁶ and 4 Macc) as well as in the passages about the suffering righteous ones in the early Jewish wisdom writing, Wisdom of Solomon 2–3.¹⁷

In the opinion of Peter Stuhlmacher, on the background of the biblical tradition history, exemplified in the preceding "review" of Old Testament and early Jewish texts, the belief in the resurrection of the dead appears as the ontologically deepest expression of confidence in the Lord's power and righteousness.¹⁸ Actually, this strand of biblical tradition culminates in the second benediction of the *Shemoneh 'Esreh*, originating in the first century AD:

Thou art mighty, humbling the proud; strong, and judging the violent; thou livest for ever and raisest the dead; thou blowest the wind and bringest down the dew; thou providest for the living and makest the dead alive; in an instant thou causest our salvation to spring forth. *Blessed art thou, Lord, who makest the dead alive.*¹⁹

In his exposition about Abraham as the ancestor of the believers in Romans 4, Paul describes "the God in whom [Abraham] believed" as the one "who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist" (v. 17). At this point there is harmonious continuity between what Paul had believed and confessed as a devout Pharisee and his present Christian position. However, new in the apostle's exposition is the application of this confession to the resurrection of Jesus: We "believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead" (v. 24).

¹⁶ "9 And when he [i.e., the second of seven brothers] was at his last breath, he said: 'You accursed wretch, you dismiss us from this present life, but the King of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life, because we have died for his laws.' ... ¹⁴ When he [the fourth brother] was near death, he said, 'One cannot but choose to die at the hands of mortals and to cherish the hope God gives of being raised again by him. But for you there will be no resurrection to life!' ... ²³ [the mother of the seven brothers speaking:] Therefore the Creator of the world, who shaped the beginning of humankind and devised the origin of all things, will in his mercy give life and breath back to you again, since you now forget yourselves for the sake of his laws."

¹⁷ See esp. Wis 3:1–8: "1 But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them. ² In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died, and their departure was thought to be a disaster, ³ and their going from us to be their destruction; but they are at peace. ⁴ For though in the sight of others they were punished, their hope is full of immortality. ⁵ Having been disciplined a little, they will receive great good, because God tested them and found them worthy of himself; ⁶ like gold in the furnace he tried them, and like a sacrificial burnt-offering he accepted them. ⁷ In the time of their visitation they will shine forth, and will run like sparks through the stubble. ⁸ They will govern nations and rule over peoples, and the Lord will reign over them for ever."

¹⁸ See Stuhlmacher, 385: "Die Auferweckungshoffnung wird also zum ontologisch tiefsten Ausdruck des Zutrauens zu Jahwes Macht und Gerechtigkeit." See also Stuhlmacher, 386–87: "Man kann und darf die Entwicklung des jüdischen Auferstehungsglaubens als einen Weg der Aufweitung des Jahweglaubens verstehen. Auf diesem Weg wird der Jahweglaube nicht etwa mit Hilfe von Anleihen bei der parsistischen Mythologie synkretistisch depraviert. [...] Im Auferweckungsglauben Israels wird vielmehr vom Vertrauen auf Jahwes allumfassende Gerechtigkeit her ein echter theologischer Denk- und Sprachgewinn erzielt, auf dem dann die christliche Theologie fußt und weiterbaut."

¹⁹ This version of the second benediction belongs to the Palestinian recension of the *Shemoneh 'Esreh* and is presented in Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C.–A.D. 135)*, A New English Version, revised and edited by Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar and Matthew Black. Volume II (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1979), 460, as the text version presumably coming closest to the wording of the Prayer around AD 70–100 (italics in Schürer). As "[t]he chief prayer of Judaism," that "every Israelite, including women, slaves and children is required to recite [...] three times a day," (Schürer, 455–56), the *Shemoneh 'Esreh* is strong evidence for the belief in the resurrection of the dead as a quintessential element of Jewish faith. The more expanded Babylonian recension of the second benediction reads: "Lord, thou art almighty for ever, who makest the dead alive. Thou art mighty to help, thou who sustainest the living out of grace, makest the dead alive out of great mercy, supportest those who fall, healest the sick, freest the captive, and keepest thy word faithfully to them who sleep in the dust. And who is like thee, Lord of mighty deeds, and who is comparable to thee, King, who makest dead and alive and causest help to spring forth. And thou art faithful to make the dead alive. *Blessed art thou, Lord, who makest the dead alive*" (Schürer, 456, italics original).

Observing how the belief in God as the one who makes the dead alive (cf. *Shemoneh 'Esreh*, benediction 2) is inextricably interconnected with the confession that he has raised Jesus from the dead in Romans 4, we have come full circle back to 1 Corinthians 15, where Paul argues the imperative interconnection between Jesus's resurrection from the dead as a fulfilled salvific event, spoken of in past tenses, and the (general) resurrection of the dead to happen in the future.²⁰

Conclusion: The Belief in the Resurrection of the Dead is an Inherent Element of Biblical Theology

Although it has not been possible in this short sketch to undertake any detailed exegetical analyses of the pertinent biblical texts or to interact with the innumerable scholarly contributions to the topic, a case is made for the view that Jewish belief in the resurrection of the dead did not originate in foreign, extra-biblical influences, but is deeply rooted in the biblical tradition itself. There is an inextricable, inherent link between Israel's experience of God through the ages, testified in the different layers of biblical texts, and the explicit belief in the resurrection of the dead, expressed in the second benediction of the *Shemoneh 'Esreh* and shared by Jesus and the early Christians. What comes to the fore in the first century AD, runs like a scarlet thread through the preceding biblical tradition, finally reaches its culmination in the belief in the resurrection of the dead.

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²⁰ Feldmeier and Spickermann have put their exposition of Paul (referring to 1 Cor 5, Rom 4 and other texts) under the heading "The deus iustificans as deus vivificans" (528–33), thus, encapsulating nicely the connection between God as the one "who justifies the ungodly" (Rom 4:5) and "who gives life to the dead" (Rom 4:17). Rightly they point out full correspondence between Paul and Jesus in this regard: "The fact that Paul and (the Markan) Jesus respond to the question of the resurrection by pointing to God as the condition for the possibility of eternal life, and do so with remarkable agreement in terms of content, merits specific emphasis. For both, the ground of hope is the God who is, first, the Creator of life and, second—as the God of Abraham and the Father of Jesus Christ—the God who binds himself to his people. The God attested in Scripture and experienced in the present as Creator and Redeemer will demonstrate himself to his people as the 'God of the living' (Mark 12:27), as the 'God who brings the dead to life' (Rom 4:17)" (532–33).

Answering Objections to the Resurrection of Yeshua the Messiah

Eric Chabot

Without question, though many Jewish people have left a lasting legacy on human civilization, Yeshua is the most influential person who has ever lived—Jewish or otherwise. A variety of opinions have emerged over the centuries about this one person who has had more impact on the world around us than anyone else, though this fact would not be acknowledged by most people. Some think Yeshua was a social revolutionary, an end-times prophet, or a cynic sage.

As in the first century, there are thousands of Jewish followers of Yeshua today who embrace Him as the Jewish Messiah. To study the person of Yeshua is to understand his relationship to Israel. They can't be divorced. Anthony Saldarini elaborates:

Does Jesus the Jew—as a Jew—have any impact on Christian theology and on Jewish-Christian relations? . . . To wrench Jesus out of his Jewish world destroys Jesus and destroys Christianity, the religion that grew out of his teachings. Even Jesus' most familiar role as Christ is a Jewish role. If Christians leave the concrete realities of Jesus' life and of the history of Israel in favor of a mythic, universal, spiritual Jesus and an otherworldly kingdom of God, they deny their origins in Israel, their history, and the God who loved and protected Israel and the church. They cease to interpret the actual Jesus sent by God and remake him in their own image and likeness. The dangers are obvious. If Christians violently wrench Jesus out of his natural, ethnic and historical place within the people of Israel, they open the way to doing equal violence to Israel, the place and people of Jesus.¹

Many Jewish anti-missionary groups assert that Yeshua was a false prophet or one of several failed messianic pretenders in the first century. Of course, there are those that stay busy and choose to ignore the topic all together. The Brit Chadasha (i.e., the New Testament) does not present Yeshua as any ordinary prophet or religious teacher, but rather, as the revelation of the God of Israel.² Anyone who reads through the four gospels can observe that Yeshua made some very challenging statements that call us as humans into account before our creator.³ Therefore, it should come as no surprise that skeptics challenge the reliability of such claims.

Is there a relationship between faith and facts? Or does faith stand apart from the facts? In my own experience, many disciples of Yeshua think it is more spiritual to assert that faith doesn't need any facts. After all, God can only be pleased by faith (Heb. 11:6). However, within the context of 1 Corinthians 15, Paul says in verse 17, *"And if the Messiah has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins."* According to Paul, unless his audience accepts the fact that Yeshua

¹ A. Saldarini, "What Price the Uniqueness of Jesus?," *Bible Review*, June 1999: 17. Print.

² John 1:1; 8:58-59; 10:29-31; 14:8-9; 20-28; Phil. 2:5-7; Col. 2:9; Titus 2:13; Heb. 1:8; 2 Peter 1:1.

³ Matt. 10:33-37; Luke 9:23-24.

rose from the dead in the context of time, space, and history, they are still dead in their sins. Thus, they are to be pitied. It is important to remember that facts are grounded in knowledge or information based on real occurrences.

Therefore, without the facts, there is no faith. It is true that *talmidim* (i.e., disciples) of Yeshua receive assurance that our faith is genuine through the work of the *Ruach Ha-Kodesh* (i.e., The Holy Spirit).⁴ However, people of other faiths boast of personal revelations and religious experiences as well. The Spirit's work also confirms facts that are rooted in historical reality. Both traditional Judaism and Messianic Judaism make claims that can be verified by historical events. But now we can ask a pertinent question: What is history? While various definitions have been given, we propose that history refers to the past or the study of the past; or to put it another way, history can denote both events in the past and verbal accounts of these events.⁵ As Samuel Adams also adds, "The goal of historical knowledge is both to get to the event that happened—what actually took place—and, more importantly, to understand how that event reveals and informs human thinking, both then and now."⁶

There are several approaches to defending the historicity of Yeshua's resurrection. Skeptics and Jewish anti-missionaries⁷ have offered a wide range of natural explanations throughout history to explain away the bodily resurrection of Yeshua. Human existence is dependent on communication. The abundance of methods to communicate attests to this. Clearly, we rely on phone calls, text messages, email, and other forms of communication daily. It makes sense that God would communicate through His creation. Biblical faith rests on knowing what God has allowed to be recorded for us—at the very minimum, knowing the historical truth of Yeshua's resurrection.

Remember, a belief is said to be justified when it is based on a good reason/reasons, or has the right grounds or foundation. Messianic Jews think they are justified in believing Yeshua rose from the dead. However, when we examine the following objections to the resurrection of Yeshua, these objections are what are called knowledge defeaters. Knowledge defeaters are objections that attempt to undermine the legitimacy of a claim to knowledge on behalf of a belief based on certain grounds. Thus, the following objections attempt to demonstrate that Messianic Jews aren't justified in believing Yeshua rose from the dead.

We will now discuss fourteen objections to the claim that Yeshua of Nazareth was buried, rose from the dead in a physical body, and then appeared to His disciples as well as to the Apostle Paul.

#1: Legends Hypothesis

This hypothesis states that the testimonies of the disciples who gave testimonies of Yeshua's postmortem appearances were all legends that were invented much later.

Response

This can't be supported by the evidence. When it comes to written sources, historians look for both primary and secondary sources. A primary source is the testimony of an eyewitness or someone who is a contemporary of the events.⁸ Secondary sources could be "summaries, second-hand accounts, and analyses of events created by someone who did not witness the event but may

⁴ Rom 8:16-17; 2 Cor 2:2.

⁵ V. Phillips Long, *The Art of Biblical History*, vol. 5 of *Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1994), 59.

⁶ S. V. Adams, *The Reality of God and Historical Method: Apocalyptic Theology in Conversation with M. T. Wright* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2015), 175.

⁷ Jewish anti-missionaries are groups who provide resources for the Jewish community to answer objections by Christians and Messianic groups about the claims of Yeshua as the Messiah.

⁸ L. Gottschalk, *Understanding History: A Primer of Historical Method*, 2nd ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), 168.

have read or heard about it. Examples may include: books or articles written on a topic, artworks depicting an event, or letters or diaries recounting a version of events told to the author by another source.”⁹ It is important to use the earliest sources possible, because the further removed a source is from the event itself, the greater the chance for embellishment and distortion.¹⁰

Paul's Letters

The best primary sources concerning Yeshua are Paul's letters, which were probably written from AD 48 to AD 65, and predate even the gospels.¹¹ Paul was a contemporary of Yeshua and an eyewitness to the risen Lord,¹² so his letters are a primary source in addition to being inspired.

Exactly which letters are Paul's? There is little doubt that Paul authored Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians and Philemon—the “undisputed” epistles. Due to space limitations, we can't discuss the issues surrounding the so-called “disputed” letters of Paul. However, we should note there have been adequate responses to support Pauline authorship of all the letters bearing his name.¹³

Can we trust what Paul recorded? He was schooled in the Torah and would have been familiar with the admonition against bearing false witness and the need to confirm everything by two or more witnesses.¹⁴ He also employed terminology associated with Jewish oral tradition: *delivering, receiving, passing on, learning, and guarding*. Remember, Moses had received the Torah at Sinai (i.e., from God) and delivered it to Joshua, Joshua delivered it to the elders, the elders delivered it to the prophets, and the prophets delivered it to the men of the great synagogue.¹⁵ Scripture records this process:

Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to *the teaching which you learned*, and turn away from them. (Rom 16: 17)

For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread. (1 Cor 11:23)

The things you have *learned and received* and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. (Phil 4:9)

For this reason, we also constantly thank God that when you *received the word of God* which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe. (1 Thess 2:13)

So then, brethren, stand firm and *hold to the traditions which you were taught*, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us. (2 Thess 2:15)

⁹ Smithsonian Institution Archives, “What is a Primary Source?” <https://siarchives.si.edu/history/exhibits/stories/what-primary-source>, accessed May 11, 2017.

¹⁰ F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. 2003), 75-79.

¹¹ D. H. Fisher, *Historian's Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (New York: Harper Torchbooks. 1970), 62.

¹² Acts 9:3-6; 1 Cor. 15:8.

¹³ See T. L. Wilder, “Does the Bible Contain Forgeries?” featured in S. B. Cowan and T. L. Wilder, *In Defense of the Bible: A Comprehensive Apologetic for the Authority of Scripture* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), 165-182.

¹⁴ Ex 10:19; Deut 19:15.

¹⁵ P. Barnett, *Finding the Historical Christ (After Jesus)* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. 2009), 102.

Gerhardsson observes that “the church possesses a normative standard which” Paul “refers to as ‘tradition’ or ‘traditions.’”¹⁶ This tradition is then “handed over”¹⁷ and “received.”¹⁸ The young congregations are to “maintain” or “hold fast” or “uphold” these traditions.¹⁹

Paul uses oral tradition terminology in 1 Corinthians 15:3-7, which is one of the earliest records for the resurrection of Yeshua. Critical scholars agree that Paul wrote 1 Corinthians only twenty to twenty-five years after the crucifixion of Yeshua. The late Orthodox Jewish scholar Pinchas Lapide was so impressed by the creed of 1 Corinthians 15 that he concluded, this “formula of faith may be considered as a statement of eyewitnesses.”²⁰ Joachim Jeremias called it “*the earliest tradition of all.*”²¹ Even the skeptical scholar Gerd Lüdemann says, “*I do insist that the discovery of pre-Pauline confessional foundations is one of the great achievements in New Testament scholarship.*”²²

Paul’s usage of the rabbinic terminology passed on and received is seen in the creed:

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. (1 Cor 15:3-8)

Even more significant is that Paul says the information about the resurrection was something he “received.” While the word “received” can also be used in the New Testament for receiving a message or body of instruction or doctrine,²³ it also means “to receive from another.”

This means that Paul received this information from someone else at an even earlier date. How can we know where he received it? There are three possibilities:

- 1) In Damascus from Ananias, about AD 34;
- 2) In Jerusalem, about AD 36/37; or
- 3) In Antioch, about AD 47.

One of the clues as to where Paul got his information is that, within the creed, he calls Peter by his Aramaic name, Cephas.²⁴ Hence, it seems likely that he received this information in either Galilee or Judea, one of the two places where people spoke Aramaic. Therefore, Paul possibly received the oral history of 1 Corinthians 15:3-7 during his visit to Jerusalem.²⁵

In Galatians 1:18 Paul says, “*Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days.*” Here, “acquainted” happens to derive from a Greek word (*hístoresai*) that means “inquire into” or “become acquainted.”²⁶ Interestingly

¹⁶ Paradosis, paradoseis; 1 Cor 11:2; 2 Thess 2:15; 3:6.

¹⁷ Paradidonai.

¹⁸ Paralambanein; 1 Cor 11:23; 15:13; Gal 1:9; Phil 4:9; 1 Thess 2:13; 2 Thess 3:6.

¹⁹ The verbs used are, among others, *kratein* (2 Thess 2:15), *katechein* (1 Cor 11:2), and *hesteknai* (1 Cor 15:1); B. Gerhardsson, *The Origin of the Gospel Traditions* (Philadelphia: Fortress. 1977), 11-14.

²⁰ P. E. Lapide, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A Jewish Perspective* (Minneapolis: Augsburg. 1983), 98-99.

²¹ J. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology: The Proclamation of Jesus*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Scribner’s. 1971), 306.

²² G. Lüdemann, *The Resurrection of Jesus Christ: A Historical Inquiry* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus. 2004), 37.

²³ 1 Cor 11:23; 15:1, 3; Gal 1:9, 12; Col 2:6; 1 Thess 2:13; 4:1; 2 Thess 3:6.

²⁴ 1 Cor 15:3-8.

²⁵ Gal 1:18.

²⁶ T. P. Jones, *Misquoting Truth: A Guide to the Fallacies of Bart Ehrman’s Misquoting Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. 2007), 89-94.

enough, the word "history" also derives from the Greek word "*historesai*." So, the work of the historian is to find sources of information, to evaluate their reliability, to make disciplined "inquiry" into their meaning and with imagination to reconstruct what happened.²⁷ Paul's first trip to Jerusalem is usually dated about AD 35 or 36. Why does this all matter? The evidence indicates that the historical content of the Gospel (the death and resurrection of Yeshua), was circulating very early among the Messianic community. Any attempt by critics to say it was a story that was "made up" at a much later date seems to conflict with the evidence that was just presented. We can say confidently that there was simply not enough time for exaggeration or a legend to develop.

Was Paul's Damascus Road Experience No Different from Mohammed or Joseph Smith?

In Galatians 1:11-12, Paul makes it clear that that there is absolutely no human mediation or tradition involved—he received the Gospel by divine revelation.

For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. (Gal 1:11-12)

Some skeptics assert that Paul's revelatory experience was no different than Mohammed's or Joseph Smith's. Islam's founder was forty years old when he began having visions accompanied by violent convulsions, during which he claimed to receive a revelation from Allah. Smith, the founder of the Mormon Church, maintained that he had received personal revelation from God based on two visions (the first allegedly given to him in 1820, and the second one 1823). Remember, the revelation given by Mormon prophets and apostles, as well as the one Mohammed supposedly received, clearly contradicts the revelation decisively (*once and for all*) handed down by the first-century apostles (Jude 3). Also, though Paul said he received the Gospel by revelation, he was one of several witnesses who had seen the risen Messiah. His experience was *publicly* corroborated by the other apostles. Furthermore, each revelatory claim needs to be studied in its own context. We need to ask three questions:

- 1) What is the claim?
- 2) What is the evidence for the claim?
- 3) What is the religious and historical context for the claim?

#2: The Objection to Miracles

Over the years we have perhaps heard the objection, "You expect me to believe a man rose from the dead?" Even many Jewish people reject the supernatural. Sometimes people will say, "Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence." Skeptics tend to view the claim of miracles as something that was part of the pre-modern worldview. After all, can we as moderns really believe in miracles? The complaint is part of the naturalistic worldview which came to prominence during the Enlightenment. Skeptics view any claim that there is a God who acts in the affairs of mankind as an extraordinary claim.

Response

There is the need for healthy skepticism regarding revelatory truth claims. After all, several faiths claim to be founded on divine revelation. However, phrases like "extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence" need clarification. I have observed a certain line of reasoning:

- 1) Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence.
- 2) The claim that Yeshua rose from the dead is extraordinary.
- 3) Therefore, any evidence supporting it ought to be extraordinary as well.

²⁷ P. Barnett, *The Birth of Christianity: The First Twenty Years (After Jesus, Vol. 1)* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. 2005), 10.

- 4) However, as to my objection, I'm not sure what I mean by "extraordinary."
- 5) However, whatever explanation you try to come up with will never be satisfactory.
- 6) Therefore, Yeshua couldn't have risen from the dead.

If "extraordinary evidence" means that one must provide miraculous evidence for any miracle or so-called extraordinary claim, it would lead to an infinite regress. In other words, if the professing follower of Yeshua would have to keep providing miraculous evidence the objector would most likely keep asking for more evidence. It would go on and on. If an "extraordinary claim" means something that is non-natural, then it must be shown that natural laws are immutable. However, natural laws are not immutable because they are descriptions of what happens, not prescriptions of what must happen. Natural laws don't cause anything; they only describe what happens in nature. While I do agree that the resurrection of Yeshua is not an ordinary claim, the statement "extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence" can cut both ways.

One can't dismiss the historical data for the resurrection simply because it is a so-called "miracle claim." Deductive reasoning is called *a priori* (prior to looking at the facts) and inductive reasoning is called *a posteriori* (after seeing the evidence). It is evident that the objection to the resurrection of Yeshua is mostly philosophical in nature and is *a priori*. As stated in the introduction, "For naturalists, nature is all there is. And if it is not science, then it is nonscience (i.e., nonsense)." Believing that miracles recorded in the Bible aren't possible (because of an *a priori* commitment to naturalism), will impact how they interpret the evidence (after examining it).

Some people may say they are open to Yeshua's resurrection but, in many cases, they set the bar so high that no amount of evidence will ever convince them. However, to assert that the natural world is all there is an extraordinary claim as well. There is a circular argument known as *Petitio Principii* (a Latin phrase meaning "begging the question"). It is circular because of the confusion between *metaphysical* naturalism and *methodological* naturalism. Methodological naturalism is a position that says science should seek only natural explanations and that attempts to find supernatural causes are ipso facto not science. In contrast, metaphysical naturalism starts with the presupposition that all that exists is the natural, or physical, world.

Sadly, when you presuppose that all that exists is the natural, or physical, world and then you use methodological naturalism to prove your point, you've already rigged the rules ahead of time. Thus, when we presuppose there are only non-natural explanations to reality which then leads one to only look for non-natural explanations this leads us to say, "Welcome to the argument of circles." If the method of argument presupposes the conclusion then it's not really an argument but, instead, a fancy way of repeating oneself. Also, to prove that the miraculous events never occur, one would have to have exhaustive knowledge of all the events in the world around us. This is impossible to do. Craig Keener has documented many cases of supernatural activity in various parts of the world.²⁸

Also, Stephen T. Davis has suggested three criteria for assessing whether a miracle remains a potential explanation:

- 1) when the available naturalistic explanations all fail and nothing else on the naturalistic horizon seems promising;
- 2) when the event has moral and religious significance; and
- 3) when the event in question is consistent with one's background beliefs about the desires and purposes of God, as revealed in the religion to which one is committed

²⁸ C.S. Keener, *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts* (2 Volume Set) (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011).

(for example, the event occurred after prayer or as an aspect of an epiphany or incarnation).²⁹

If we take these criteria into consideration, it is evident that the resurrection of Yeshua does have great moral and religious significance. When we examine realities such as the existence and design of the universe, evidence of design in molecular biology, the reality of objective morality, the existence and desire for justice and human rights, the laws of logic, consciousness, human rationality, etc., a personal God provides the most satisfying explanation for these things.³⁰ In the end, Bob and Gretchen Passantino demonstrate that the claim that God does not exist is an extraordinary claim as well:

It is an extraordinary claim to say this vast and complex universe came from nothing and was caused by nothing. It's an extraordinary claim to tell us the incredible order we see throughout the universe was caused by blind chance. It's an extraordinary claim to argue the innate sense of right and wrong that all of us share—even when it condemns our own actions—came about by a non-moral mindlessness or mere human consensus. It's certainly an extraordinary claim to say that a man who has all of the character and credentials to back up his claims to be the Son of God—and who rises from the dead to prove it—is really a self-deluded fool, or worse yet, a deceiver. In conclusion, no, the evidence is far too weak to believe the extraordinary claim of atheism that there is no God behind these things.³¹

#3: The Need for Present-Day Analogues for Miraculous Historical Events

Another common objection was put forth by German sociologist and theologian Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923) who said that since dead men don't rise today, Yeshua couldn't have risen. Thus, if we have no contemporary examples of a dead person being resurrected, we have good reasons for believing that no dead man has ever risen. Therefore, the past can only be known only in terms of what happens in the present.

Response

As ridiculous as this may sound, this is a very common objection. Obviously if we can only believe things happened in the past because they are happening on a regular basis in the present, then we would end up rejecting many things from the past. After all, the beginning of life and the start of the universe were unique, one-time, unrepeatable events. Much of science deals with things in the past that aren't repeatable today. Furthermore, if people were rising from the dead all the time today and never dying again, Yeshua's resurrection wouldn't be unique at all. But that's what a miracle is—a rare event that doesn't happen on a regular basis. In the Bible, we see God doing miracles during specific periods of history for a very specific purpose.

#4: False Testimonies Hypothesis

In this objection, skeptics posit that the disciples deliberately fabricated the resurrection story.

²⁹ P. Copan and R.K. Tacelli, *Jesus' Resurrection: Fact or Figment?: A Debate Between William Lane Craig & Gerd Ludemann* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic. 2000), 75.

³⁰ See W. L. Craig, *Reasonable Faith (3rd edition): Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Wheaton, Crossway. 2008).

³¹ Bob and Gretchen Passantino, "The 2002 Great Debate: Atheism vs Christianity—Testing the Case: Which View Prevailed?" <http://www.answers.org/atheism/debate.html>.

Response

Louis Gottschalk notes that we should ask two questions: Was the author of the document able to tell the truth; and if able, was he willing to tell the truth?³² The Torah stipulated that bearing false witness had serious ramifications.³³ Therefore, it is unlikely that people who respected and obeyed the Torah would deliberately lie. Additionally, the testimony of one witness was insufficient for testimony to be acceptable—it must be established by two or three witnesses.³⁴

As Gregory Boyd and Paul Eddy note, the Sinai requirement for multiple witnesses was retained³⁵ and also used for discipline in the early Messianic community.³⁶ Also, the Brit Chadasha contains many examples of believers giving a true testimony and making a true confession.³⁷ There is no reason to distrust the witness of those who testified to having seen the risen Messiah. People lie or have an ulterior motive for three reasons:

- 1) Financial Gain: In this case, we don't see any evidence for this. The Brit Chadasha shows the disciples/apostles being chased from location to location, leaving their home and families and abandoning their property and what they owned.
- 2) Sexual or Relational Desire: The Brit Chadasha does not say much about their "love lives." There are Scriptures that speak to sexual purity and chastity.³⁸
- 3) Pursuit of Power: While Christianity became a state-sponsored religion in the fourth century and the popes became powerful both politically and religiously, there is no evidence (pre-70 AD), that the early disciples pursue power as they proclaimed the resurrection of Yeshua.³⁹ Just look at Paul's testimony here:

I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. 27 I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. (2 Cor 11: 23-27)

While martyrdom doesn't make a belief true, it can be said that liars make poor martyrs. People die for things they think are true all the time. They can be deceived. But the difference in the case of the disciples is that they proclaimed the message of Yeshua based on the appearances of Yeshua to them at various locations. We will discuss the resurrection appearances of Yeshua shortly. Signing up to proclaim a known lie is a bit odd. In conclusion, while it's *possible* that the first

³² Ibid., 53-54.

³³ Ex 20:16.

³⁴ Deut 19:15.

³⁵ Mark 14:56, 59; John 5:31-32; Heb 10:28; G. A. Boyd and P. R. Eddy, *The Jesus Legend: A Case for the Historical Reliability of the Synoptic Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books. 2007), 287.

³⁶ Matt 18:16; 2 Cor 13:1; 1 Tim 5:19; Ibid.

³⁷ Boyd and Eddy, *The Jesus Legend: A Case for the Historical Reliability of the Synoptic Tradition*, 287; Matt 10:18; Mark 6:11; 13:9-13; Luke 1:1-2; 9:5; 21:12-13; 22:71; John 1:7, 15, 19, 32, 34; 3:26, 28; 5:32; Acts 1:8, 22; 3:15; 5:32; 10:37-41; 13:31; 22:15; 18; 23:11; 26:16; Ibid.

³⁸ Eph 5:31; 1 Thess 4:3-5,7.

³⁹ J. W. Wallace, *Cold-Case Christianity: A Homicide Detective Investigates the Claims of the Gospels* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook Publishers. 2013), 241-247.

followers of Yeshua lied or willfully deceived others about the resurrection story, the question to ask is whether it's *reasonable* to believe such a thing.

#5: The Bias Charge

In this objection, it is assumed that those who wrote about Yeshua were emotionally attached to Him. Thus, because they were overly passionate about the resurrection story, this means they lacked objectivity which could lead to them embellishing the story.

Response

The first thing to do is to clarify what exactly is meant by bias. Does this mean the Gospel authors "invented" or "fabricated" certain aspects of the resurrection event? If so, the burden of proof is on the person who says the authors were biased to show specifically where the authors lied or exaggerated something. However, if bias means one is passionate about telling the truth or has a vested interest because they were very close to the event, and goes to great lengths to tell the story as accurately as possible, then there is nothing wrong with bias at all. For example, the Holocaust survivors had a vested interest in the event and were very passionate about getting their testimonies accurate. After all, they were there, and it happened to them. The same goes for those who testified to the resurrection of Yeshua.

#6: The Resurrection Story Was Invented from Other Dying and Rising God Stories!

In this objection, the story about the resurrection of Yeshua amounts to a bad case of religious plagiarism. Sadly, the internet is full of allegations that the Biblical accounts of Yeshua are borrowed from mythological constructs such as Osiris, Tammuz, Adonis, or some other figure. Those that hold to this position start with the notion that the Brit Chadasha is false. They then claim that the mythological stories are the basis for the resurrection accounts about Yeshua.

Response

It must be remembered that Judaism in the first century was not seen as a single "way." There were many "Judaisms" such as the Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes, Zealots, etc. The followers of Yeshua are referred to as a "sect" of Second Temple Judaism.⁴⁰ The different sects did have core beliefs such as adherence to the Torah, belief in one God, and belief in Israel as God's elect people. Also, the Temple was part of the social glue that bound them together as a people group. Would Second Temple Jewish people, who recited three times daily their nation's creed, *Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one*,⁴¹ be likely to base the Yeshua story on mythological constructs such as Osiris, Tammuz, Adonis, or someone else? Let's say Paul and the New Testament authors decided to build the story of Yeshua on some of these figures. Based on each sect's adherence to its core beliefs, any form of religious syncretism is a form of idolatry. The Jewish Scriptures forbid worshiping anyone other than the God of Israel.⁴²

Also, following the exile and the struggles with assimilation, the Jewish people at the time of Yeshua no longer fell prey to physical idolatry, and it is rarely mentioned in the Gospels. But there are warnings against it in other portions of the Brit Chadasha.⁴³ Paul praises the Thessalonians for their turning from the service of idols *to serve the living and true God*.⁴⁴ T. N. D. Mettinger, a

⁴⁰ Acts 24:14; 28:22; 24:5.

⁴¹ Deut 6:4.

⁴² Ex 20:1–5; Deut 5:6–9.

⁴³ 1 Cor 6:9–10; Gal 5:20; Eph 5:5; Col 3:5; 1 Pet 4:3; Rev 21:8.

⁴⁴ 1 Thess 1:9.

Swedish scholar, professor of Lund University, and member of the Royal Academy of Letters, History, and Antiquities in Stockholm, contrasts the dying and rising gods of antiquity with Yeshua:

The dying and rising gods were closely related to the seasonal cycle. Their death and return were seen as reflected in the changes of plant life. The death and resurrection of Jesus is a one-time event, not repeated, and unrelated to seasonal change. There is, as far as I am aware, no prima facie evidence that the death and resurrection of Jesus is a mythological construct, drawing on the myths and rites in the dying and rising gods of the surrounding world. While studied with profit against the background of Jewish resurrection belief, the faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus retains its unique character in the history of religions. The riddle remains.⁴⁵

#7: The Analogical Objection

An analogy is a relation of similarity between two or more things, so that an inference (reasoning from premise to conclusion) is drawn based on the similarity. For example, if the resurrection of Yeshua is known to have certain characteristics, and if another supernatural claim in another religion is known to have at least some of those same characteristics, the inference is drawn that the other supernatural claim also has those other characteristics. If the cases are not similar enough to warrant the inference, then it is a false analogy. After all, if we are to accept that Yeshua appeared to the disciples, what about miracle claims in other religions? Also, what about the several testimonies of people who say that the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to them in Fatima Portugal in 1917?⁴⁶ Also, what about UFO sightings? More examples could be given. It seems that we have eyewitness testimony in these events. Also, most of the people in these situations are sincere. They think they saw something and can trust their physical senses.

Response

Michael Rota has pointed out that the testimonies of those who proclaimed that Yeshua rose stand in stark contrast to the experiences of the founders of many other religions. Rota notes that Muhammad had ten or more wives and was the political and military leader of a new Muslim state in Medina. Joseph Smith (the founder of the Mormon Church) entered into clandestine marriages with upwards of twenty wives and exercised leadership over a local militia numbering in the thousands in Nauvoo, Illinois (then the center of the Mormon religion). More recently, L. Ron Hubbard appears to have gained large financial profits through the Church of Scientology.⁴⁷

When it comes to evaluating any religious claim, we must ask three questions:

- 1) What is the claim?
- 2) What's the evidence for it?
- 3) What's the religious and historical context for the claim?

When we are answering these questions, the messianic claim is that Yeshua was bodily resurrected. On a variety of occasions, he appeared to several people, confirming He was raised from the dead. A follower of Yeshua makes the claim based on the evidence that is seen in the historical records in the Brit Chadasha. The historical setting of the claim is seen in the Second Temple Judaism Period. The entire ministry of Yeshua allows for the proper context. The resurrection coheres with Yeshua's entire early ministry. For example, many parables, which are

⁴⁵ T. N. D. Mettinger, *The Riddle of the Resurrection: "Dying and Rising Gods" in the Ancient Near East* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiskell International. 2001), 221.

⁴⁶ UK Apologetics, "Are Marian Apparitions Comparable to the Resurrection of Jesus?: A Response to Hector Avalos," <http://apologeticsuk.blogspot.com/2013/06/are-marian-apparitions-comparable-to.html>, accessed June 23rd, 2017.

⁴⁷ M. Rota, *Taking Pascal's Wager: Faith, Evidence and the Abundant Life* (Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Academic. 2016), Kindle Locations 2705 of 4845.

universally acknowledged by critical scholars, show that Yeshua believed himself to be able to forgive sins against God. Also, for the Jewish people, the Torah was supposed to transform Jewish life and separate the Jewish people from the rest of the world. The mission of Yeshua was not to overthrow Torah but to fulfill it (Matt 5:17-19). Yeshua never granted Torah as a mediator between humanity and God. Rather, Yeshua understood his own person, not Torah, to be the means of eternal life (Mark 10:17-31). To summarize:

- 1) A miracle is an act of God that confirms a messenger from God.
- 2) Yeshua offered a cumulative case that confirms He is the full revelation of the God of Israel—His fulfillment of prophecy, His sinless life, His messianic actions/messianic miracles, His speaking authority, and His miraculous resurrection.
- 3) Therefore, Yeshua offered several lines of evidence that confirm that He is the full revelation of the God of Israel.

These are just a few things provide the context for Yeshua's ministry. The point is that not all miracle claims are equal in evidential support. We must take them on a case by case basis.⁴⁸

#8: Handling a Rabbi's Objection

Dan Cohn-Sherbock, a well-known rabbi of Reform Judaism⁴⁹ and Jewish theologian, provides his own reasons for rejecting the resurrection of Yeshua. He says:

As a Jew and a rabbi, I could be convinced of Jesus' resurrection, but I would set very high standards of what is required. It would not be enough to have a subjective experience of Jesus. If I heard voices or had a visionary experience of Jesus, this would not be enough. Let me sketch the kind of experience that would be necessary. If Jesus appeared by hosts of angels trailing clouds of glory and announcing all for His Messiah ship to see, this would be compelling. But it would have to take place in public domain. Video cameras, shown on television, and announced in newspapers and magazines worldwide. Jesus' appearance would have to be a global event, televised on CNN, and other forms of the world's media. Further, if as a consequence of his arrival, all the prophecies recorded in scripture were fulfilled; the ingathering of the exiles, the rebuilding of the Temple, the resurrection of all those who died, the advent of the days of the Messiah, final judgment—I would without a doubt embrace the Christian message and become a follower of the risen Christ.⁵⁰

Response

The comments by Rabbi Cohn-Sherbock demonstrate the attitude among many in the modern world today. He also raises some objections based on another traditional role of the Messiah in Judaism. However, there isn't one messianic expectation in Judaism. As Michael Bird notes:

The role of the Messiah is multifarious. There was no single and uniform description of the messianic task. Furthermore, before 70 CE, messianic figures could go by a variety of names such as Son of David, Son of God, Son of Man, the Prophet, Elect One, Prince, Branch, Root, Scepter, Star, Chosen One, Coming One, and so forth.⁵¹

⁴⁸ See D.K. Clark, "Miracles in World Religions," featured in R. D. Geivett and G.R. Habermas, *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Actions in Human History* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press. 1997), 199-213.

⁴⁹ Reform Judaism, which is sometimes known as Progressive Judaism, is a major Jewish denomination that places a lesser stress on ritual and personal observance, and regards the Torah as non-binding.

⁵⁰ G. D' Costa, *Resurrection Reconsidered* (London: Oneworld. 1996), 198-199.

⁵¹ M.F. Bird, *Are You The One To Come? The Historical Jesus and the Messianic Question* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 35.

Also, whether certain passages are about the coming of the Messiah in the Jewish Scriptures will depend upon the preconceived ideas of the reader. What do they believe the Messiah is supposed to do? If a traditional Jewish person says the Messiah cannot suffer and die and rise from the dead, how would we expect them to interpret the Messianic passages? It is also obvious that Rabbi Cohn-Sherbock has unrealistic explications for the evidence of the resurrection. If we were to apply the same criteria to the giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai, we could never know that happened either. After all, the giving of the Torah was not witnessed by multitudes (they saw Moses after he received it), photographed, recorded on video cameras, shown on television, and announced in newspapers and magazines worldwide.

Thus, while Jewish people like to boast of the thousands of witnesses that were at the Sinai event, Messianic Jews can discuss the witnesses to the resurrection. However, in both cases, the testimony of the witnesses is imbedded in a written text. This means we must differentiate between direct and circumstantial evidence. The demand for direct evidence is misguided from the start, because when it comes to antiquity, no one can interview or cross-examine eyewitnesses. We have no access to the witnesses of the event. Keep in mind that this happens all the time with cold-case investigations. Jurors may accept both direct and circumstantial evidence, and many criminals are convicted based on circumstantial evidence. Since we can't obtain direct evidence about the resurrection of Yeshua or for the giving of the Torah, we must build a circumstantial case for both events. Therefore, both Judaism and Christianity/Messianic Judaism are supported by circumstantial evidence.

9: "The Burial Story of Yeshua Can't Be Trusted"

Some skeptics assume that since Yeshua came from a poor family, he would most likely have been disposed of in the manner of the lower classes: in a pit grave or trench grave dug into the ground. In other words, this hypothesis says, although Yeshua may have been placed in a tomb by Joseph of Arimathea on late Friday, his body would have then been moved to its final location—a graveyard reserved for criminals—by Saturday night. From this point, it is argued that the finding of the empty tomb by the disciples of Yeshua resulted in an erroneous conclusion that Yeshua had been resurrected.

Response

Archaeologist Jodi Magness, a non-religious Jewish archaeologist who specializes in the ossuaries at the time of Yeshua, says the following:

Jesus came from a modest family that presumably could not afford a rock-cut tomb. Had Joseph not offered to accommodate Jesus' body his tomb (according to the Gospel accounts) likely would have been disposed of in the manner of the lower classes: in a pit grave or trench grave dug into the ground. When the Gospels tell us that Joseph of Arimathea offered Jesus a spot in his tomb, it is because Jesus' family did not own a rock-cut tomb and there was no time to prepare a grave—that is there was no time to dig a grave, not hew a rock-cut tomb(!)—before the Sabbath. It is not surprising that Joseph, who is described as a wealthy and perhaps even a member of the Sanhedrin, had a rock-cut family tomb. The Gospel accounts seem to describe Joseph placing Jesus' body in one of the loculi in his family's tomb.⁵²

Interestingly enough, Magness goes on to say:

⁵² J. Magness, *Stone and Dung, Oil and Spit: Jewish Daily Life in the Time of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. 2011), 170.

There is no need to assume that the Gospel accounts of Joseph of Arimathea offering Jesus a place in this family tomb are legendary or apologetic. The Gospel accounts of Jesus's burial appear to be largely consistent with the archeological evidence.⁵³

Also, Israeli archaeologist Shimon Gibson concurs by saying:

The idea that an executed Jew would have been chunked into a common burial pit after being removed from the cross is unlikely. It may have been the normal practice for criminals of the lower classes and for slaves elsewhere in the Roman Empire, but it is unlikely to have been practiced in Jerusalem because of Jewish religious sensibilities. The truth is the Roman authorities would have wanted to keep the Sanhedrin and locals agreeable.⁵⁴

Even though Magness and Gibson support the burial account in the Gospels, the question is whether there is any evidence for the practice of moving criminals after a "temporary" burial to a graveyard for criminals. The question is why would Joseph himself want to move the body of Yeshua to a temporary graveyard? There is no way to know if Joseph had known whether some future family members or Joseph himself might die. Thus, he may need the tomb he had utilized for Yeshua for a future purpose? Perhaps this would be a reason to relocate Jesus' body.

Once again, one can assert all the possibilities they want. But the question is whether there is good evidence for such possibilities. We can conclude with the following: All four canonical Gospels state that Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus and, after Pilate granted his request, he wrapped the body of Yeshua in a linen cloth and laid him in a tomb. At best, a skeptic can throw out the relocation hypothesis as a possibility. But even if skeptics want to postulate that his body was buried in a trench grave, it is a worthless apologetic on their part. Why do I say this? Whether Yeshua was buried in a pit or trench grave, or it happens that the Gospels are correct about the burial story, skeptics will still have to provide an account for the resurrection appearances and the entire story. Either way, skeptics end up punting to what we will now discuss in our next objection.

#10: The Disciples Were Sincerely Deceived into Believing Yeshua Rose from the Dead

In this objection, though many scholars may agree the disciples were sincere in their belief that Yeshua rose from the dead, in the end, it can be explained away by a psychological explanation.

Response

Here we must examine the explanation of the resurrection appearances. First, let's observe the list of appearances:

- 1) Yeshua appears to Mary Magdalene (Matt 28:1-10; John 20:14-18).
- 2) Yeshua appears to several female disciples (Matt 28:1-10; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-11).
- 3) Yeshua appears to Simon Peter (Luke 24:34; 1 Cor 15:5; John 21:1-24).
- 4) Yeshua appears to James, John, Thomas, Nathanael, and two others (John 21:1-24).
- 5) Yeshua appears to the eleven disciples as a group (Matt 28:16-20; John 20:19-29).
- 6) Yeshua appears to Cleopas and one unnamed disciple (Luke 24:13-35).
- 7) Yeshua appears to more than five hundred "brothers" at once (1 Cor 15:6).
- 8) Yeshua appears to James (a.k.a. "the Lord's brother") (1 Cor 15:7; compare Gal 2:19).

⁵³ Ibid, 171.

⁵⁴ Shimon Gibson, *The Final Days of Jesus: The Archaeological Evidence* (New York: HarperOne. 2009), 52.

9) Yeshua appears to Saul of Tarsus (a.k.a. Paul) (1 Cor 15:8).⁵⁵

I will go ahead and offer some comments from various scholars and what they say about the appearances and the experiences of the disciples. Keep in mind that I will quote from some who are neither Orthodox Christians nor Evangelical Christians. I want to demonstrate that even agnostics agree that the disciples did have genuine experiences that were believed to have been the resurrected Yeshua. For example:

That Jesus' followers (and later Paul) had resurrection experiences is, in my judgment, a fact. What the reality was that gave rise to the experiences I do not know. I do not regard deliberate fraud as a worthwhile explanation. Many of the people in these lists were to spend the rest of their lives proclaiming that they had seen the risen Lord, and several of them would die for their cause. Moreover, a calculated deception should have produced great unanimity. Instead, there seem to have been competitors: 'I saw him first!' 'No! I did.' Paul's tradition that 500 people saw Jesus at the same time has led some people to suggest that Jesus' followers suffered mass hysteria. But mass hysteria does not explain the other traditions. Finally we know that after his death his followers experienced what they described as the 'resurrection': the appearance of a living but transformed person who had actually died. They believed this, they lived it, and they died for it.⁵⁶

—E. P. Sanders, New Testament Scholar and Former Arts and Sciences Professor of Religion at Duke University

It is a historical fact that some of Jesus' followers came to believe that he had been raised from the dead soon after his execution. We know some of these believers by name; one of them, the apostle Paul, claims quite plainly to have seen Jesus alive after his death. Thus, for the historian, Christianity begins after the death of Jesus, not with the resurrection itself, but with the belief in the resurrection.⁵⁷

— Bart Ehrman, New Testament Scholar and James A. Gray Distinguished Professor of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Ehrman goes onto say:

We can say with complete certainty that some of his disciples at some later time insisted that . . . he soon appeared to them, convincing them that he had been raised from the dead.⁵⁸

Historians, of course, have no difficulty whatsoever speaking about the belief in Jesus' resurrection, since this is a matter of public record.⁵⁹

Why, then, did some of the disciples claim to see Jesus alive after his crucifixion? I don't doubt at all that some disciples claimed this. We don't have any of their written testimony, but Paul, writing about twenty-five years later, indicates that this is what they claimed, and I don't think he is making it up. And he knew at least a couple of them, whom he met just three years after the event (Galatians 1:18-19).⁶⁰

⁵⁵ B. Pitre, *The Case for Jesus: The Biblical and Historical Evidence for Christ* (New York, Crown Publishing Group. 2016), 182-183.

⁵⁶ E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (New York: Penguin Books. 1993), 279-280.

⁵⁷ B. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, (Third Edition New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2004), 276.

⁵⁸ B. Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* (New York: Oxford University. 1999), 230.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 231.

⁶⁰ Ehrman, *The New Testament: An Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 282.

It may be taken as historically certain that Peter and the disciples had experiences after Jesus's death in which Jesus appeared to them as the risen Christ. It seems to be historically certain that Mary Magdalene experienced an appearance of the risen Jesus. The only thing we can certainly say to be historical is that there were resurrection appearances in Galilee (and in Jerusalem) soon after Jesus' death. These appearances cannot be denied. But did the Risen Jesus in fact reveal himself in them?⁶¹

—Gerd Lüdemann, Chair of History and Literature of Early Christianity at University of Göttingen

I know in their own terms, what they saw was the raised Jesus. That's what they say, and then all the historic evidence we have afterwards attests to their conviction that that's what they saw. I'm not saying that they really did see the raised Jesus. I wasn't there. I don't know what they saw. But I do know as an historian, that they must have seen something. The disciples' conviction that they had seen the risen Christ, their relocation to Jerusalem, their principled inclusion of Gentiles as Gentile—all these are historical bedrock, facts known past doubting about the earliest community after Jesus' death.⁶²

—Paula Fredriksen, Historian and Scholar of Religious Studies, William Goodwin Aurelio Chair Emerita of the Appreciation of Scripture, Boston University

The disciples thought that they had witnessed Jesus' appearances, which, however they are explained, is a fact upon which both believer and unbeliever may agree.⁶³ Even the most skeptical historian must do one more thing: postulate some other event that is not the disciples' faith, but the reason for their faith, in order to account for their experiences. Of course, both natural and supernatural options have been proposed.⁶⁴

—Reginald Fuller, Former Biblical Scholar and Professor Emeritus at Virginia Theological Seminary

We see that even skeptical and non-Orthodox scholars agree that the disciples at least were sincere about the fact that they claim they had experiences that seem to indicate they saw the risen Messiah. But if the disciples were deceived into thinking Yeshua rose from the dead, what did they mean by "resurrection" and why did they pick that category? And if they were sincerely deceived, couldn't they have described the resurrection of Yeshua as something else? Let's look at the options that could have been utilized to describe what happened to Yeshua other than a bodily resurrection.

Visions

The earliest followers of Yeshua did experience supernatural visions which are seen in the lives of Stephen,⁶⁵ Peter,⁶⁶ and Paul.⁶⁷ A subjective vision is a specific type of dream or hallucination

⁶¹ G. Lüdemann, *What Really Happened to Jesus?: A Historical Approach to the Resurrection*, trans. John Bowden (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 80.

⁶² Fredriksen's comments came during an interview with the late ABC journalist Peter Jennings for his documentary *The Search for Jesus*, which first aired in July 2000. Emphasis added.

⁶³ R. Fuller, *The Foundations of New Testament Christology* (New York: Scribner's, 1965), 142.

⁶⁴ R. Fuller, *The Formation of the Resurrection Narratives* (New York: Macmillan, 1980), 181.

⁶⁵ Acts 7:55–56.

⁶⁶ Acts 10: 9–20.

⁶⁷ Acts 16:8; 18:9.

in that it has a religious subject. In the end, a subjective vision is really not much different than a hallucination. A subjective vision is “a product of our minds and has no cause or reality outside of our mind.”⁶⁸ It has been quite common for scholars to say the resurrection appearances were visions. For example, Ehrman says:

It is undisputable that some of the followers of Jesus came to think that he had been raised from the dead, and that something had to have happened to make them think so. Our earliest records are consistent on this point, and I think they provide us with the historically reliable information in one key aspect: the disciples’ belief in the resurrection was based on visionary experiences. I should stress it was visions, and nothing else, that led the first disciples to believe in the resurrection.⁶⁹

The good news is that Ehrman goes on to define what he means by “visions” of Jesus. He describes visions as something that are either “veridical” or “nonveridical.” Veridical visions mean people tend to see things that are based in an external reality there, while nonveridical visions are the opposite—what a person sees is not based in any kind of external reality and are simply internal projections of the mind. It is the latter that leads to what is called the hallucination hypothesis. In other words, skeptics assert that nonveridical visions can be attributed to some sort of psychological explanation. The real problem with the subjective visions hypothesis is that the apostles knew the difference between visions and the resurrection appearances. For example, it is commonly asserted Paul had a visionary encounter with Yeshua on the Damascus Road.⁷⁰ The Bible says, “they heard” the same voice Paul did.⁷¹ But they “did not see anyone.”⁷² Notice Paul was physically blinded by the brightness of the light. One way or the other, the experience involved something that was external to Paul. It wasn’t something that was the same thing as a vision that Paul talks about in other places in his writings.⁷³

Furthermore, the phrase “he let himself be seen” (*ōphthē*, aorist passive,), is the word Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 15:7 to describe of his own resurrection appearance as the other ones in the creed. As Paul Barnett says:

It is sometimes claimed that the word appeared (*ōphthē*) means a mystical seeing, as of a vision, and that since this was what Paul ‘saw’ it was what the other apostles ‘saw.’ In other words, after death, Jesus was taken directly to heaven whence he ‘appeared’ to various people, mystically, as it were. This however, is not all the meaning of Paul’s words. First, the word *ōphthē*, ‘appeared,’ is not limited to visionary seeing; it is also used for physical seeing. Moreover, the verb ‘raised’ used in the phrase ‘raised on the third day’ is used elsewhere in combination with the words ‘from the dead’ which literally means ‘from among the corpses.’ Thus, ‘raised’ preceding ‘appeared’ gives the latter a physical not a mystical meaning. Christ, as ‘raised from the dead’ appeared. Furthermore, when Paul asks ‘Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?’ (1 Cor. 9: 1), he is using the ordinary word *horan*, ‘to see,’ for physical sight. If ‘seeing’ the Lord ‘raised from the dead’

⁶⁸ G. Habermas and M. Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications. 2004), pp. 111–112.

⁶⁹ B.D. Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee* (New York: Harper One. 2014), 183-184.

⁷⁰ Acts 9:1-9

⁷¹ Acts 9: 7

⁷² Acts 9: 7

⁷³ 2 Cor 12:1.

qualified others to be apostles, then Paul is, indeed, an apostle. It was no mere subjective vision that arrested Paul en route to Damascus.⁷⁴

There is little doubt that Paul and the other disciples believed that the appearances of Jesus were physical, bodily appearances.

Apparitions

An apparition is a word used for visual, paranormal related manifestations of deceased loved ones. People in the ancient world were familiar with apparitions. Therefore, the witnesses to the resurrection could have described the appearances of Jesus as apparitions. The apparition category is discussed in Dale C. Allison's *Resurrecting Jesus: The Earliest Christian Tradition and Its Interpreters*.⁷⁵ As far as apparitions Allison says, "I am sure that the disciples saw Jesus after his death."⁷⁶ But he concludes that the apparitions of the dead do not explain completely these appearances. He goes on to say: "Typical encounters with the recently deceased do not issue in claims about an empty tomb, nor do they lead to the founding of a new religion. And they certainly do not typically eat and drink, and they are not seen by crowds of up to five hundred people."⁷⁷ So the point is that resurrection is not the same thing as an apparition.

Translation

Translation is seen in Elijah and Enoch: they did not die but were simply translated to heaven.⁷⁸ Translation is defined as the bodily assumption of someone out of this world into heaven. While it may seem that the ascension of Yeshua is similar to translation, the difference is that Yeshua had already died and appeared to various people and groups. There is no doubt that the disciples knew the difference between translation and resurrection.

Hallucinations

We already touched on the subjective vision hypothesis. As we previously said, the hallucination hypothesis is similar to the vision hypothesis. In this hypothesis, skeptics assert that the disciples and followers of Yeshua were so emotionally involved with Yeshua's messianic expectation that their minds projected hallucinations of the risen Lord. The problem is that this hypothesis isn't much different than the apparition category which was previously discussed. As N.T Wright says:

Everybody knew about ghosts, spirits, visions, hallucinations and so on. Most people in the ancient world believed in some such things. They were quite clear that that wasn't what they meant by resurrection. While Herod reportedly thought Jesus might be John the Baptist raised from the dead, he didn't think he was a ghost. Resurrection meant bodies. We cannot emphasize this strongly enough, not least because much modern writing continues, most misleadingly, to use the word resurrection as a virtual synonym for life after death in the popular sense.⁷⁹

Also, while it is true hallucinations do sometimes occur in situations of bereavement (for example, when someone's spouse dies), these hallucinations don't lead to a strong conviction that the deceased spouse has been resurrected. In other words, in case of bereavement, we could more likely call it an apparition. Also, if there was an actual hallucination, we would have to call it a

⁷⁴ P. Barnett, *Jesus and the Rise of Early Christianity* (Downers Grove, IVP Academic. 1999), 183-184.

⁷⁵ D. Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus: The Earliest Christian Tradition and Its Interpreters* (New York: T&T Clark. 2005).

⁷⁶ Ibid, 283-284.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ 2 Ki 2:11; Gen 5:24.

⁷⁹ Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 36.

“group hallucination.” But this would mean the disciples at various locations all suffer from the same hallucination. Norman Geisler explains the diversity of the resurrection appearances:

There were at least ten different appearances spaced over forty days (Acts 1:3). There was an initial disinclination to believe what they saw, which would eliminate the possibility of hallucination (cf. John 20:25 f.; Luke 24:15 f.; Matt 28:17). Physical and tangible evidence was presented that he was indeed the bodily resurrected Christ. He ate fish, showed his hands and feet, asked them to handle his flesh and bones (Luke 24:39–43), and even challenged Thomas to put fingers and hands into his wounds (John 20:27). Furthermore, Jesus spent much time with them doing “many other signs” (John 20:31), “speaking of the kingdom of God,” and showing “many proofs” of his resurrection (Acts 1:3). He even ate breakfast with seven of them and had a prolonged discussion with Peter (John 20:15f.). He also ate with two other disciples in Emmaus (Luke 24:28 f.).⁸⁰

But the other problem with the hallucination hypothesis is that for a group hallucination to occur, there are three things that are characteristic of a collective hallucination:

- 1) Expectation plays the coordinating role in collective hallucinations;
- 2) Emotional excitement is a prerequisite;
- 3) The people must be informed beforehand, at least concerning the broad outlines of the phenomenon that will constitute the collective hallucination.⁸¹

As far as any expectation in place, there is nowhere in the Gospels that state the disciples were expecting Yeshua to rise again. As far as the disciples being emotionally “excited” after the disappointment of the execution of their leader, we only find grief,⁸² despair,⁸³ and depression.⁸⁴ Thirdly, the reactions of the disciples of Yeshua to the resurrection demonstrate only confusion, fear, and doubt.⁸⁵ Therefore, the experiences demonstrate that the disciples had no expectation of a resurrected Messiah in any sense whatsoever. Therefore, on all accounts, the hallucination hypothesis fails.

Also, even if there was a hallucination, this means there would still be an empty tomb with a body in it which could have been displayed to stop the proclamation of Yeshua’s resurrection in the public square.

Back to Resurrection

It seems that no matter how hard scholars or skeptics punt to subjective visions, apparitions, or hallucinations, the real question at hand is why the early followers of Yeshua movement stuck with the resurrection category. Let’s repeat the clear definition of resurrection that is given by Peter Walker:

‘Resurrection’ (anastasia) in Greek was a word which had already developed a clear meaning. It referred to a physical raising back to life within this world of those whom God chose—‘the resurrection of the just on the last day’ (cf. Matt 22:28; John 11:24). So when the disciples claimed Resurrection for Jesus, they were claiming that God had done for one man what they were expecting him to do for all his faithful people

⁸⁰ N.L. Geisler, *Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: MI: Baker Books. 1976), 348-350.

⁸¹ G. Miller, “Could the resurrection appearances be a case of group hallucination?”, <http://christianthinktank.com/hallucn.html> {Accessed June 28, 2017.}

⁸² Luke 22:62; 24:19; 24:17.

⁸³ Luke 24:19.

⁸⁴ Luke 24:17.

⁸⁵ Luke 24:4; 24:16; 28:11; Matt 28:10; John 21:4.

at the end of time (what Paul refers to as the ‘hope’ of Israel [Acts 23;26:6]. If they had meant merely that Jesus was a good fellow who did not deserve to die and whose effect on people would surely continue beyond his death, they would have used some other word. They would not have dared to use this word, which meant one thing and only one thing—God’s act of raising from physical death. That is what they meant. And that is what they would have been heard to mean.⁸⁶

#11: The Cognitive Dissonance Theory Objection

Another psychological explanation for the resurrection of Yeshua is called cognitive dissonance theory. We see the following features of this theory:

- 1) The phenomenon of cognitive dissonance begins with an expectation (arising out of a deep longing or yearning) for some particular state of affairs that is followed by a disappointment of that expectation.
- 2) The group cannot reconcile itself to the fact that its deepest yearning has been disappointed, and so it perpetuates a state of denial that then provokes it to reorganize its view of reality to conform to this denied state of affairs.
- 3) Suppose the early disciples experienced cognitive dissonance; that is, they really wanted Yeshua to be the Messiah, and they were very disappointed when Yeshua was crucified.
- 4) Being unable to reconcile themselves to this fact, they reorganized their reality to resolve their dissonance and disappointment by projecting His Resurrection into their reality. They further reinforced their perspective by adding converts to their ranks.⁸⁷

Response

We can recall what we just said about the false testimonies hypothesis and other psychological possibilities (i.e., the vision and hallucination hypothesis). For the cognitive dissonance theory to be applicable to the resurrection claim, it would mean since there was no real, physical, raised Yeshua, and out of their deep longing for Yeshua to be the Jewish Messiah, the disciples invented a nonexistent resurrection out of their need to help them cope with their disappointment about the crucifixion of Yeshua. There is no doubt that this takes us right back to the problems with the false testimonies and hallucination hypothesis. Also, why did they pick the resurrection category? If the disciples invented a resurrection story about their Messiah and then wanted to convince their fellow Jewish brethren, it seems they could have said Yeshua was simply “translated” to heaven.

#12: The Gospels Weren’t Written by Eyewitnesses!

In this objection it is assumed that since the Four Gospels weren’t written by actual eyewitnesses, they can’t be used as sources for the resurrection of Yeshua.

Response

When it comes to figures in antiquity, historians look for as many written sources as possible that agree with each other on the major points and, if possible, even the details. Given that the culture at the time of Yeshua was predominately oral, we are fortunate to even have four biographies of Yeshua. The genre (i.e., the type of literature) of the Gospels is *bioi*, an early form of

⁸⁶ P.W. Walker, *The Weekend That Changed the World* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox. 1999), 63.

⁸⁷ R.J. Spitzer, *God So Loved The World: Clues to Our Transcendent Destiny from the Revelation of Jesus: Happiness, Suffering, and Transcendence-Book 3* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press. 2016), 171-172.

biography containing the words and deeds of a historical person. Craig Blomberg notes that the Gospels aren't modern biographies:

Can we speak of the Gospels as biographies? If by that we mean modern, Western biographies, then of course not. Jesus lived in the Middle East, not in the West, and he lived long before the modern era. It would be sheer anachronism and a monstrous injustice to evaluate Matthew, Mark, and Luke by twenty-first-century standards of precision, some of which they probably never even could have imagined!⁸⁸

We have already mentioned the work of Richard Bauckham. He demonstrates that, though the Gospels in some ways are a very distinctive form of historiography, they heavily relied on eyewitness testimony, which was common among historians in the Greco-Roman period.⁸⁹ The Greek word for "eyewitness" (*autoptai*) refers to those who would have participated in the events (direct autopsy). If the authors didn't participate in the events they were writing about, they sought informants who could speak from firsthand knowledge and whom they could interview (indirect autopsy). For example, since it is obvious that Mark relies on Peter as a direct eyewitness, Mark's Gospel is a form of indirect autopsy.

We see in Luke 1:1-4 that while Luke was not a direct eyewitness of Yeshua's ministry, and the information was given to him by those who *from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word*, he also is a form of indirect autopsy. Space prohibits a robust defense of John and Matthew's Gospels, but since John claims to be a direct eyewitness (John 21:20-24) his gospel is form of direct autopsy. Matthew's frequent references to money remind us that he had been a tax collector. It is likely that this role is an example of a direct eyewitness to the ministry of Yeshua as well.

The dates of all four Gospels fall into the period before the end of the first century. Craig Blomberg makes an important point:

Consider, by way of comparison, what we know about the exploits of Alexander the Great, who lived from 356 to 323 BC, dying before his thirty-third birthday after having conquered more of the ancient Middle Eastern world than anyone before him. The oldest existing biographies of Alexander are by Diodorus in the first century BC, Quintus Curtius in the first century AD, and Plutarch and Arrian (the two best works), who wrote in the early second century AD, more than four centuries after Alexander's death. They, in turn, refer to various earlier written sources, sometimes named, on which they relied, but none of these still exists, and we know nothing else about them. Yet, via the standard canons of research, and especially because Arrian regularly names eyewitness sources, historians of ancient Greece can assemble a detailed summary of Alexander's life about which they remain reasonably confident; world civilization textbooks typically rely on these summaries without hesitation.⁹⁰

One of the most common objections to the reliability of the Four Gospels is that the author's name is absent from each Gospel. Thus, skeptics assume the Gospels were written anonymously. In response, Plutarch who happened to be a biographer of the same time period, wrote 60 biographies. It is striking that Plutarch's name is absent from all 50 of his extant

⁸⁸ C. L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the New Testament: Countering the Challenges* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2016), 25.

⁸⁹ Bauckham, 107.

⁹⁰ Blomberg, *Historical Reliability*, 18.

biographies.⁹¹ But there is hardly any skepticism from historians regarding Plutarch's authorship. What's the point? Many classical authors at that time didn't include their names. Therefore, we shouldn't view the lack of an author's name as evidence that the Gospels were not written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Also, just as the manuscript traditions support the authorship of Plutarch's biographies, all the manuscript evidence we have (which is really all we have!) supports the traditional authorship of the Gospels as well.⁹² As Brant Pitre says:

One of the most basic rules in the study of New Testament manuscripts (a practice known as textual criticism) is that you go back to the earliest and best Greek copies to see what they actually say. Not what you *wish* they said, but what they actually say. When it comes to the titles of the Gospels, not only the earliest and best manuscripts, but *all of the ancient manuscripts*—without exception, in every language—*attribute the four Gospels to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.*⁹³

#13: If Yeshua Rose from the Dead, He Still Didn't Bring Redemption to Israel!

David Klinghoffer is an observant Jewish person who has authored the book *Why the Jews Rejected Jesus: The Turning Point in Western History*.⁹⁴ Klinghoffer summarizes Israel's messianic expectation, articulated in the prophets such as Ezekiel, in the following list:

- 1) gathering of Jewish exiles;
- 2) the reign of a messianic king;
- 3) a new covenant characterized by a scrupulous observance of the commandments;
- 4) eternal peace;
- 5) a new temple; and
- 6) the nations recognize God.

Klinghoffer argues that these criteria disqualify Jesus for any messianic claim because none of them was fulfilled during Jesus' lifetime.⁹⁵

Response

Sadly, as said earlier, this doesn't represent the entire scope of messianic thought. And it always leads to the "Heads, I win, tails you lose approach." In other words, "Since Yeshua doesn't fulfill any of the messianic prophecies, we can move on and wait for the true Messiah to come." Thus, when the Messiah comes to bring his kingdom, it is to this world that he comes and in this world that he establishes his reign. Hence, the Jewish expectations of the kingdom what would come would be

- 1) visible,
- 2) all at once, and
- 3) in complete fullness.⁹⁶

We need to remember there is a contingent element to prophecy. In other words, the covenants that were made between God and Israel (i.e., the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants) both have a conditional and an unconditional element to them. Because of the conditional nature of the covenant God made with Israel through the Torah, Israel was judged and sent into exile.

⁹¹ M.R. Licona, Review of Bart Ehrman's book, *Forged: Writing in the Name of God*. <http://www.risenjesus.com/review-of-bart-ehrmans-book-forged-writing-in-the-name-of-god>. {accessed October 11, 2016.}

⁹² Pitre, *The Case for Jesus: The Biblical and Historical Evidence for Christ*, 16.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ D. Klinghoffer, *Why the Jews Rejected Jesus: The Turning Point in Western History* (New York: Doubleday. 2005).

⁹⁵ Ibid, 36.

⁹⁶ G.K. Beale and B. L. Gladd, *Hidden But Now Revealed: A Biblical Theology of Mystery* (Downers Grove, IVP Academic. 2014), 73.

Thus, there is a delay in the blessings. But even Israel's failure to obey God's commands doesn't negate the promise.⁹⁷ Therefore, the prophecy of restoration follows every message about the prophecy of judgment and doom. Hence, there are several passages that speak to the issue of a restoration of Jewish people back to the land.⁹⁸ God always desired for Israel to be a light to the nations. Though Israel has had many messianic figures, Yeshua is the only one that has opened the door for non-Jewish people to come to know the one true God. Just as Israel is called to be a light to the entire world,⁹⁹ the Messiah's mission is also to be a "light to the nations."¹⁰⁰ Yet, because of the finished work of Yeshua, polytheistic idolatrous Gentiles are now enabled to have a relationship with the one true God. Just as the Thessalonians had "*turned from idols to serve the true and living God*,"¹⁰¹ the coming redemption of Israel is still in the future, which is an ongoing theme in Paul's writings. Despite Israel's unbelief in Yeshua, "*God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew*,"¹⁰² and Israel remains God's beloved chosen people "*on account of the patriarchs*."¹⁰³ Paul also says God's gifts and callings to Israel are irrevocable,¹⁰⁴ and reminds us that the "*riches*" Gentiles are experiencing now during the state of Israel's "*stumbling*" will escalate with national Israel's salvation.¹⁰⁵

#14: The Insufficient Evidence Objection

In this objection, it is assumed that no matter how much evidence that is presented for the resurrection of Yeshua, it will never qualify as "sufficient" evidence.

Response

At this juncture, we need to define our terms: proof, evidence, knowledge. Proof or evidence can give us knowledge of things that are highly likely to be true. As we said previously, there are two types of evidence, in fact, that are important for our discussion: direct and circumstantial. Direct evidence is simply unavailable to those of us who are studying historical events in the Bible. We were not present to directly witness the events in the Bible.

Almost all historical evidence, science, as well as cold case investigations, are built on indirect or what is called "circumstantial evidence." In a court of law, both are considered viable and good. In many cases, the words "proof" or "evidence" convey the need to provide absolute certainty regarding the resurrection of Yeshua. Furthermore, a large majority of science, history, and cold-case investigations involve making inferences. Historians collect the data and draw conclusions that provide the best explanation that covers all the data. This is what is called "inference to the most reasonable explanation," which never leads to absolute certainty or exhaustive knowledge. Mathematical propositions like $2+2=4$ are absolutely certain for most people (except for a few philosophers maybe); such certainty is at times required for the resurrection question by skeptics. While some skeptics will say they don't need that level of certainty for the resurrection of Yeshua, many people choose to stay in a stubborn agnosticism simply because they claim they haven't found the sufficient evidence they say they desperately need. A couple more caveats must be made: Remember, whatever someone proposes as an

⁹⁷ Deut 9:24–29.

⁹⁸ Isa 11:10-16; Jer 3:11-20; 12:14-17; 16:10-18; 23:1-8; 24:5-7; 30:1-3, 10-11; 31:2-14; 32:36-44; Ezek 11:14-20; 20:33-44; 28:25-26; 34:11-16, 23-31; 36:16-36; 37:1-28; 39:21-29.

⁹⁹ Gen 12: 1-3; Is 2: 2-4; 60: 2-3.

¹⁰⁰ Isa 11: 1-9; 49:6.

¹⁰¹ 1 Thess 1:9.

¹⁰² Rom 11:2.

¹⁰³ Rom 11:28.

¹⁰⁴ Rom 11:29.

¹⁰⁵ Rom 11:26.

alternative explanation to the resurrection of Yeshua, it must be able to adequately explain all the following data:

- 1) The birth of the Yeshua movement and why it continued after He was crucified. Linguistically speaking, Christianity didn't exist in the first century. Judaism in the first century wasn't seen as a single "way." There were many "Judaisms"—the Sadducees, the Pharisees, Essenes, Zealots, etc. The followers of Jesus are referred to as a "sect" (Acts 24:14; 28:22); "the sect of the Nazarenes" (24:5). Josephus refers to the "sects" of Essenes, Pharisees, and Sadducees. The first followers of Yeshua were a sect of Second Temple Judaism. Why did this sect carry on after their leader died such a shameful and embarrassing death?
- 2) The post-mortem appearances to the disciples. We have already listed the various appearances of Yeshua to various people, at various times and locations. We also discussed the possible alternatives as to what they could have said other than "Yeshua is risen!"
- 3) Why Paul came to believe in the risen Messiah. Paul did not follow Yeshua from the beginning. The language Paul uses in his pre-revelatory encounter with the risen Lord shows how antagonistic he was towards the messianic movement. In Galatians 1:13-15, Paul uses terms such as "persecute" and "destroy" to describe his efforts to put an end to the spread of the early faith. However, Paul is still considered an apostle, though "abnormally born" and "the least of the apostles" (1 Cor 15:8-9). His first years as a follower of Yeshua in Arabia remain a mystery. In many places, Paul discusses his Jewish identity. He says "I am a Jew" (Acts 22:3), "I am a Pharisee" (Acts 23:6), and "I am a prisoner for the sake of the hope of Israel" (Acts 28:20). Notice that Paul didn't say "I was a Pharisee" or that "I was a Jew." So perhaps it is inaccurate to say that Paul switched religions. Hence, it would be more reasonable to say that while Paul did have a radical reorientation about his theology, but he more likely received a "call" rather than a conversion to a new religion.
- 4) The empty tomb of Yeshua.
- 5) The willingness of Paul, a Pharisee to call Yeshua the Lord: Paul's Letters (dated 47 to 65 AD) are the earliest records we have for the life of Yeshua. In several of Paul's Letters Jesus is referred to as "Lord" (1 Cor 8:6-8). Hence, the willingness to place Yeshua in a role attributed to God in Jewish expectation. For a Jewish person, when the title "Lord" (Heb. Adonai) was used in place of the divine name YHWH, this was the highest designation a Jewish person could use for deity.

In some cases, people make up explanations, even though they have no evidence for what they are making up. An assertion is an act of asserting something without evidence. Evidence is facts or observations in support of an assertion. Examples of assertions could be the following: "Maybe aliens raised Yeshua from the dead," or "Maybe the disciples ate some bad mushrooms and hallucinated." The bottom line is that even if a skeptic did receive what they consider to be "sufficient evidence" for the resurrection of Yeshua, it doesn't guarantee they will yield themselves to the Lord. Yeshua illustrates this in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31. In the parable, the rich man is suffering in Hades, and tells Abraham to send Lazarus on an errand. Now Lazarus had been a poor beggar at the rich man's gate to this palatial home, where dogs came and licked Lazarus' sores. So, the rich man wants Lazarus to return from the dead and tell his brothers about this awful place. Abraham's response to the rich man is shocking. He says no. No errand by Lazarus will be made for you, rich man. Instead, his brothers "have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them." And the rich man retorts, saying, "No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent." That's not going to happen either. Abraham closes the conversation when he says, "If they do not hear Moses and the

Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.” The teaching of Yeshua is clear. Even if someone were to see a sign as miraculous as someone coming back from the dead, they could still waiver in unbelief. Yeshua is not, however, denying the use of evidence in supporting belief in God. What he is saying is that evidence has its limits on people. Sometimes, evidence helps people believe. Other times, a person’s will is in a negative disposition such that the presented evidence spatters against the brick wall of a person’s mind like a rotten tomato.

Conclusion

The resurrection was part of the early apostolic preaching and the evidence given that the early messianic faith is true.¹⁰⁶ The first apologists were all Jewish. The apostles’ approach to spreading the message of the Good News is characterized by such terms as “*apologeomai/apologia*,” which means “to give reasons, make a legal defense;”¹⁰⁷ “*dialegomai*,” which means “to reason, speak boldly;”¹⁰⁸ “*peíthō*,” which means to persuade, argue persuasively;¹⁰⁹ and “*bebaioō*,” which means “to confirm, establish.”¹¹⁰

As we previously mentioned, while it is true that there were other messianic revolts at the time of Yeshua, none of them carried on after their leader was killed or executed. In his book, *The Phenomenon of the New Testament*, C. F. D. Moule affirmed that the actual existence of the Nazarenes, which is an event, calls for an explanation. Moule went on to say that the phenomenon was brought about by “a most powerful and original mind and a tremendous confirmatory event.”¹¹¹ We have surveyed some of the possible naturalistic alternatives for the resurrection of Yeshua. We have concluded that the bodily resurrection of Yeshua is the most plausible explanation for the early proclamation by the apostles of such a significant event. Obviously, there will be those who say, “What difference does it make whether Yeshua really is rose from the dead?” In response, if Yeshua rose from the dead, it confirms the God of the Bible is the one true God. In a debate with Gary Habermas, former atheist Anthony Flew (1923-1910) agreed that if it is a knowable fact that Yeshua rose from the dead literally and physically it then constitutes “the best, if not the only, reason for accepting that Jesus is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel.”¹¹² Remember, God’s existence impacts every area of our lives. Thus, God’s existence impacts the way we view reality (Is nature all there is?), how we view origins (How did we get here?), the human condition (What’s wrong with humanity?), and our own destiny (Where am I going when I die?). The question is whether you will take the time and examine such an important event. May you find God’s shalom!

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¹⁰⁶ Acts 2:25-32; 3: 15; 10:39-41; 17:2-3, 18, 31.

¹⁰⁷ Acts 26:2; 2 Tim 4:16; 1 Pet 3:15.

¹⁰⁸ Acts 17:2; 17; 18:4; 19:8.

¹⁰⁹ Acts 18:4; 19:8.

¹¹⁰ Phil 1:7; Heb 2:3; G. J. Deweese, *Doing Philosophy as a Christian* (Downers Grove, ILL: IVP Publishers. 2012), 78-79.

¹¹¹ C. F. D. Moule, *The Phenomena of the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1967, 3, 17); cited in P. W. Barnett, *Jesus and the Logic of History* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press. 1997), 18-19.

¹¹² Gary R. Habermas and Anthony G. N. Flew, *Did Jesus Rise from the Dead? The Resurrection Debate*, ed. Terry L. Miethe (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 3.

***Halakha* and Salvation: A Catholic Approach to Post-Postmissionary Messianic Judaism**

Antoine Levy

Amicus Plato sed magis amica veritas—“Plato is a friend but truth is a greater friend.” That is what Romans who knew Greek used to say. I think Jews would prefer to say: “Plato is a friend and truth is a greater friend.” There is no “but” here; the two things are meant to go together. No true friendship that does not profess an even greater friendship for the truth. This is or should be the basic principle of Talmudic studies at a yeshiva.

Mark Kinzer, the author of *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism*, is a friend. The *Helsinki Consultation*, this international gathering of Jewish theologians from the Messianic world and traditional Christian confessions, grew out of the immediate feeling of human and intellectual kinship that I experienced when I heard Mark speak for the first time. After 8 years of close collaboration with him in the framework of the Consultation, and a little less in that of the dialogue group between the Catholic Church and the Messianic movement, I can say that, at least on my side, this feeling turned into a real friendship—one of these fundamental friendships that, putting the whole of our existences into perspective, we manage to count on the fingers of a single hand. This does not mean that he and I are in perfect theological agreement. As far as I remember, I think we never were. But what I instantaneously recognized in him was not only the capacity to discuss ideas and let people question the ones he favours most, but faith in the virtues of such discussion and great enjoyment in actually having it. Sure, it is not easy to make Mark change his mind regarding a theological point. But I witnessed this miracle happening at least once or twice during these 8 years. After the last meeting of the Consultation in Krakow at the end of June this year, I decided to write a book where I would take on a number of Mark’s arguments. My intention was not and is not—I am still in the process of writing this book—to show that Mark’s ideas are wrong. There are so many ideas that are wrong in this world that I cannot see the point in trying to show that a bunch of them are especially wrong, especially when the ideas I am criticising have nothing especially wrong. In my opinion, many of Mark’s ideas are not *especially* wrong, they are simply wrong—but the goal of my book is not to show that they are. My interest rather lies in what is true, and I am using this discussion of Mark’s ideas as a tool to fulfil it. Today, I will share with you some of the insights of this yet unfinished book. I know it is not fair to criticise somebody *in absentia*. I ease my conscience with the thought that not only did Mark agree to read this book that is still in the making, but he has already committed himself to writing a response that actually might be included in the book itself. Let us therefore take this critique as a slightly twisted way of promoting the book that Mark is going to co-author.

This book deals with Messianic Judaism from a Catholic perspective. One can certainly understand “Catholic” here in the narrow sense of the Roman Catholic denomination. What inspired this book was the hope to see the Church to which I belong welcome Messianic Judaism; that is, make room for a visible and self-aware Jewish presence in her midst. I hope you will not object if I say that this is not the case yet. Despite the reconsideration of the Catholic Church’s

theological and historical attitude toward the Jewish nation—we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the *Nostra Aetate* declaration two years ago—the repeated bans on Judaizing habits, starting with the decisions of the Council of Elvira at the beginning of the 4th century, have not yet been lifted. There are still a lot of prejudices and fears surrounding the few shy attempts of Catholics of Jewish origin to mark Jewish festivals or keep some basic Jewish observances. This situation is strikingly paradoxical when one considers how highly valued are the integration of African or Asian elements into the liturgical life of the Catholic Church! Everything goes to show that the only culture that is more or less ruled out is the one whose religious roots have given birth to Christianity, while elements that have a clear Pagan origin are welcome! As far as I know, a substantial reflection on the theme of a Jewish presence in the Catholic Church is almost non-existent. The only related work that I came across—Fr. Elias Friedman, the founder of the Hebrew Catholic Organization’s *Jewish Identity*—makes the case for the necessity of such a presence. But it is only superficially tackles the concrete modes of this presence; an issue which, I believe, the existence of Messianic Judaism as an independent movement compels us to face.

On the other hand, “Catholic” should also be understood in the original sense of the word, the *καθ’ ὅλον* “according to the whole” or “universal” in Greek. Besides the Roman Catholic Church, all Christian denominations that refer to the Council of Nicea (325) as the first authoritative Council of the universal Church would understand Catholic in this sense. As long as they profess the Creed that has been ascribed to this Council, they confess a Church that is not only holy and apostolic but catholic. Most of these Churches would endorse the notion of a unique Church that, ideally, would visibly gather all those who believe in Jesus. After all, the Church of the first apostolic generation, the one that came out of the group of Jesus’ intimate disciples, was one, and there was no idea there ever could be any other. The ecumenical movement is all about the recovery of such visible unity. As I reflect on the possible modes of a Jewish presence in the Roman Catholic Church, I believe it is epistemologically or methodologically decisive to operate within the framework of this ideal of visible universality. Indeed, one cannot reflect on what the Roman Catholic Church is still lacking in her current configuration without referring to her ambition of being truly universal—not only quantitatively universal, as the largest ecclesial denomination, but qualitatively so. Accordingly, in order to define the step she should take in order to come closer to the realisation of her ambition, one first needs to outline what the universal Church should be and then proceed from that understanding. This is the reason why, although being a member of the Catholic Church in the narrow sense of the term, I do not want to argue from the point of view of her tradition and specific teaching. My question is actually identical to the question that Mark Kinzer, being a distinguished rabbi of the Messianic movement, asks; namely: “What kind of Jewish presence in the Church should there be in order for the Church to be truly Catholic—or universal—in the qualitative sense of the term?”

Although the question Mark and I ask is one and the same, our responses to this question differ. But since we both reflect from the point of view of an ideal Catholic Church, the conditions for having a consistent theological discussion are fulfilled.

Today, what I would like to do first is to show in what respect the issue of Torah-observance is decisive when it comes to defining the ecclesiology of Messianic Judaism. I will then proceed to discuss Kinzer’s understanding of Torah-observance in a Messianic context, which I will do drawing on a few texts from the New Testament corpus. Finally, I will try to show how an alternative, non-Kinzerian understanding of Messianic Torah-observance helps us to envisage what a truly universal Church is, should be or could become.

Messianic ecclesiology and the issue of Torah-observance

One does not need to venerate Thomas Aquinas to accept the most elementary principle of his theology—a principle that he himself borrowed from Aristotle; namely, the fact that, in order to exist, something must be something. Something does not exist if one does not have the means to say, based on its defining properties, that it is itself and not something else. The same goes for those corporate entities that we call Churches or religious movements. They cannot survive if there is no real definite purpose to their existence, a reason which each and every member of the congregation can single out and say: “This is it, this is why I and my brethren are here and not somewhere else.” Most of the time, this reason is faith: “I believe in this and I do not believe in that.” However, I doubt this is the case with the Jewish Messianic movement. Of course many Messianic Jews will say that they do not believe in the Pope, in the Virgin Mary, etc. That is enough not to make them Roman Catholics, but hardly to make them Messianic Jews as they share their belief or their disbelief with millions of other Christians who are not Messianic Jews and do not even have the slightest idea about what Messianic Judaism is. In point of fact, the defining property of Messianic Judaism, what makes it what it is, is not faith-related; it is not of a dogmatic nature. What constitutes Messianic Judaism is the decision to found a religious entity on an anthropological reality—the presence in it of Jewish disciples of Yeshua—rather than on an idea about what the correct content of faith should be. At the same time, the Messianic movement is not the only corporate religious entity where there are Jewish believers in Yeshua. In addition to the wider Protestant world, I am well placed to say that it is also the case in the Catholic Church. The same holds for the Orthodox Church, especially in Russia, especially in Moscow, and especially in the group of Fr. Alexander Men’s disciples. Accordingly, if Messianic Judaism has a purpose and, subsequently, a future, it is due to the specific manner in which its structure reflects the Jewish presence in its midst. To put it simply: To what extent can one say of this structure that it is Jewish? It is at this point that the concept of Torah comes into play. Whether one likes it or not, Torah is the concept that has organised, preserved, and carried the life of the Jewish nation throughout almost 2,000 years of Christianity. The notion of oral tradition, *Torah-she-be-al-peh*, a tradition that developed in parallel to the Christian tradition and in deliberate ignorance of it, is integral to the more inclusive and transcendent notion of Torah in Judaism. I do not think that talking of a Jewish religious structure without connection to Torah will work. Sure, Torah has a source in the written books, *Torah bi-ktav*, that is common to the Jewish and the Christian worlds. But making the leap over almost 2,000 years of Jewish history and reflection on this Torah to reclaim the legacy of a Biblical Judaism associated with the existence of a Temple in Jerusalem is not only practically impossible. I also view this endeavour as destructive to the founding insight of Messianic Judaism, a movement whose purpose is to *sof-sof*, give room and honour to the Jewish nation within the Christian world. This is not about a mythological reconstitution of the Jewish nation, but about welcoming this nation of flesh and blood—all those, hidden among Christian masses, who are ethnically whatever be the biological component of this ethnicity—related to the Patriarchs and the Prophets, all those who owe their existence to this concept of Torah from which their ancestors drew the spiritual strength necessary to cope with almost 2,000 years of Christian religious and social discrimination. The tradition associated with this concept will not be replaced with any local or national folklore, *Yiddishkeit*-references, singing of the Israeli anthem, and the like. This would be a bit like decorating religious premises with Christmas trees and simultaneously denying that this has anything to do with celebrating the birth of Christ. I see simply no way in which a Torah-negative Messianic Judaism could be *something* in the Aristotelian-Thomistic sense. A religious entity that presents no structural feature of its own, whether on the dogmatic level or on the ecclesial one, is not something; it is one reality with all the other religious entities that present the

same features. But as soon as a Messianic Jew ceases to be Torah-negative, the question arises: How can a Messianic Jew be Torah-positive? Or rather: How should he/she be so? Here the core problem appears in plain sight, namely, what to make of the stern attitude of Paul regarding the Law? And even beyond the writings of Paul, what are the disciples of Jesus to learn from the harsh confrontations between their master and the Jewish authorities of his time that are related in the Gospels? True, Torah cannot, or cannot exactly, mean what Paul had in mind by *nomos*, Law, since, as we said, the oral tradition, *Torah-she-be-al-peh*, is by and large posterior to the writings of Paul. And, true, Jesus' Pharisees are different from, or let us say not exactly, on the same line as the generations of rabbis that were born out of the semi-legendary meeting in Yavne after the destruction of the second Temple. But this does not solve the problem we just formulated. It is not because a teaching is posterior to another teaching that the earlier teaching is not in conflict with the posterior one. Platonism resisted the development of Aristotelism and its purely immanent view on universals; Hinduism resisted the flourishing of Buddhism with its denial of an Absolute divine reality; Catholicism resisted Protestantism and its...hmm...you know what I am talking about! The question therefore reads: Is there something in the teaching of Christ, the teaching that Messianic Jews profess to follow, that would be incompatible with the Jewish concept of Torah?

As is well known, a number of Messianic Jews are inclined to answer positively to that negative question: "Yes, there is something incompatible." Fair enough. But then comes the next one, and that is when everything eventually collapses: What is incompatible? How does one discern the compatible from the incompatible? In spite of a few attempts to put individual practices in order, it seems that the general motto of Messianic Judaism is freedom in the sense of "Decide it for yourself." Some Messianic Jews "do nothing" as one says in the Jewish world, others light the candles for Shabbat but do not observe *kashrut*, others observe *kashrut* at home but not in Gentile company, etc. More than a Messianic *halakha* or a code of conduct that would combine Christian principles with a definite number of Jewish observances, what is missing is a theological *rationale* for such *halakha*: According to what criteria is this combination operated and why? The absence of such rationale raises an issue of credibility in the most fundamental sense of the word: it becomes difficult *to believe in* the Jewish Messianic Movement as one believes in the articles of the Nicæan Creed. Indeed, would *Ha Shem baruch Hu* not have given clear indications regarding such a combination, preventing it from becoming an utter mess, *mishmash*, or *balagan*, if He had really wanted the Messianic Movement to exist?

There is an alternative to this *mishmash* and it is the Messianic ecclesiology of Mark Kinzer. It claims that a Messianic Jew must integrally abide by the *halakha* of Orthodox Judaism. Of course, what is implied is that there is no incompatibility whatsoever between the teaching of Jesus and traditional Torah observances. As a result, Messianic Judaism appears endowed with a clear structure that definitely establishes it as *something* in the world of ecclesial substances. According to its faith, Messianic Judaism is one with the community of Gentile brethren that shares it. Meanwhile, according to its *halakha* or the way it puts this faith into practice, the Messianic movement designates a community of believers that is distinct from that of the Gentile brethren. Kinzer characterizes this model as a bilateral ecclesiology. It is catholic, in the sense of universal, as it makes room for all disciples of Jesus and also because it claims to rediscover the original structure of the one apostolic *ekklēsia* after the first council of Jerusalem. As pictured in the fresco of the basilica of Santa Sabina in Rome, there is, on one side, the "ecclesia ex circumcisione," a community of Jewish, Torah-observant disciples of Jesus embodied by the Church of Jerusalem led by James, the brother of Jesus; and, on the other, the "ecclesia ex gentibus," all the Gentile converts that follow only basic precepts from the Noachide law.

There is a coherence and a simplicity about Kinzer's model that should appeal to all Messianic Jews that both feel distressed about Messianic *mishmash* and are looking for closer connections to Jewish tradition. I am personally all in favour of theoretical coherence and greater proximity to the Jewish tradition. A Jew is never Jewish enough. The question is whether faith in Yeshua, the Jewish Messiah, is meant to have some impact on the practical, concrete life of his disciples. Because if the *halakha* of these disciples is in everything identical to a *halakha* that dismisses this faith, it seems difficult to claim that it has. And if this faith does not change anything, why did Messiah bother to come to his people Israel *überhaupt*? Kinzer claims that there is some sort of implicit connaturality between Jesus and the Jewish tradition that rejects him. But this only renders the question more acute: Why did Jesus bother to come to his people if he knew they could do just as well without his divine *shekhina* or human presence among them, what Christian theology calls the Incarnation? Skipping this whole adventure could have spared human history a few fairly dramatic moments.

I know I am not the only one to have these questions in mind. I think they are worthy of serious consideration because, as I just explained, they deal with the very *raison d'être* of Messianic Judaism. I take them as an opportunity to contribute to bringing this *raison d'être* forth or at least to discussing it in an open setting. The thing is that they force us to consider the issue's nitty-gritty; namely how the teaching of Jesus, as featured in the Gospels and the writings of the New Testament—essentially in Paul's epistles—relates to a halakhic tradition that derives exclusively from the Law or the Torah given to Moses on Mount Sinai. One will object that biblical research hardly knows of a more extended and enduring topic of discussion. But we must keep in mind that our angle of approach is much narrower and precise. We are asking whether Messianic Judaism has any lesson to learn from this teaching when it relates to a Jewish *halakha* that developed much later on. Moreover, I will focus my treatment of this issue on a single theme. Unfortunately for you, it is the most complicated one: *kashrut* or food purity. But I believe the motto of the Royal Air Force should apply here: *per ardua ad astra*, "through struggle to the stars." Let us take off then.

Law—What Law?

When we ask on what basis should Messianic Judaism be Torah-positive or welcome Jewish *halakha*, the first thing we need to observe is that this question does not have any meaning in the framework of classical Christian theology, in which I include the Fathers of the Church as well as Luther. I skip Aquinas because things are a bit different with him. What I have in mind is the hermeneutical tradition that claims that the New Law that Christ established definitively abrogated the Law of Moses. Right until the middle of the 1960s, a number of prominent exegetes would embrace this classical perspective without real pangs of conscience. I have in mind the work of Edward Schweizer and William David Davies, for example, and their claim that Jesus' proclamation of the "love for the neighbour" and Messianic Torah transformed so radically the tradition handed over by Moses that there is only a remote resemblance left between the two.¹ Indeed, if the teaching of Jesus contradicts or dismisses the source from which the whole Jewish halakhic tradition derives, why bother asking what a disciple of Yeshua should borrow from it? Since the 1970s, however, Christian exegetes have explored other avenues and not infrequently veered toward the other extreme. The works of Jewish New Testament scholars such as Joseph Klausner, Pinchas Lapide, David Flusser or Gesa Vermes, to mention only the names that are best-known, are

¹E. Schweizer, "Matthäus 5:17-20 – Anmerkungen zum Gesetzesverständnis des Matthäus," *Neotestamentica*, Zwingli, Zürich: 1963, p.405; W.D. Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount*, 1964, p.107.

certainly for something in the inspiration that has guided Ed Parish Sanders toward unveiling the multiple connections between Jesus and Palestinian Judaism. The same goes for the proponents of the *New Perspective on Paul* such as Patrick Dunn and Mark Nanos, who describe Paul as solidly anchored in his Pharisaic legacy, if not as a strictly observant Jew. In one line with Kinzer, I think there is a lot of truth in these “Jewish” approaches to Jesus and Paul. I accept the idea that both upheld Moses’ Torah. However, I reject the notion that the practical consequences that Jesus and Paul derived from Moses’ Torah, their own *halakha* as it were, were more or less identical to what standard Judaism of their time derived from the same source. I believe there was something highly original and idiosyncratic in the *halakha* they promoted and asked their disciples to observe. I would like to illustrate this with the controversy regarding *kashrut*, a controversy that is embarrassing both for Kinzer and for me because it seems to imply a straightforward transgression and therefore dismissal of Moses’ Torah on the part of Jesus and Paul.

In Mark c.7, the controversy erupts with the Pharisees asking Jesus why his disciples do not wash their hands before meals (v.5). As Christ lashes out against the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, he teaches that “nothing that goes into someone from outside” defiles. What defile are “the things that come out of someone” (Mark 7:15 NJB), such as “fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, malice, etc.” (Mark 7:21-22 NJB). In my opinion, Kinzer reasonably contends that Jesus’ teaching does not formally exclude the one handed down by Moses as far as the distinction between clean and unclean types of food is involved: “(...) in Mark 7:15, 18–19a, 21–23 Yeshua emphasizes the ‘weightier matters of the Torah’ but does not annul all purity restrictions.”² Unfortunately, the clause that follows immediately thereafter is much more difficult to explain away. In the Bible of Jerusalem it reads: “Thus he [Jesus] pronounced all foods clean” (Mark 7:18-19 NJB). Did Jesus really “pronounce as clean” the type of food that Moses declared to be unclean? E. P. Sanders is so unhappy with this clause that he flatly discards it as a late redactional insert in a footnote that smacks of *petitio a principi*, what the English call the art of begging the question.³ True, the textual configuration of the clause is entangled as some manuscripts read “cleansing” or “purifying,” from the Greek καθαρίζω, with an omega and others with an omicron, so that one may either understand the syntagm as related to Jesus, just as in the translation that we just read, or to the sewer that, according to what Jesus declares here, becomes the receptacle of whatever is ingested. Bravely, Kinzer picks up the fight with the *lectio difficilior*, “Jesus declared all food clean,” and undertakes to prove that it does not contradict Moses’ Torah.⁴ To do so, he relies on a tradition related to reb. Yochanan Ben Zakkai, the founder of Yavne. There, reb. Yochanan explains to his close disciples the real reason behind *kashrut*. According to him, purity and impurity are not properties that belong to the nature of things:

It is not the corpse that imparts uncleanness nor the water that effects cleanness. But it is a decree of the Holy One, blessed be He. Said the Holy One, blessed be He, ‘A statute have I enacted, a decree have I made, and you are not at liberty to transgress my decree: This is the statute of the Torah (Num 19:1).’⁵

² *Post-Missionary Messianic Judaism* (later PMJ), BrazosPress, 2005, p. 54.

³“(…) the saying attributed to Jesus—it is not what goes in that defiles—appears to me to be too revolutionary to have been said by Jesus himself. The significance for the Christian movement of denying the Jewish dietary code was immense, and this saying makes Jesus the direct source of a rupture with ordinary Judaism. The Christian circles which broke with the dietary code surely broke at that very moment with Judaism as it was generally known. (...) In this instance I cannot maintain the assumption which I have made for the sake of the argument: that all the material really goes back to Jesus”; *Jewish Law from Jesus to Mishnah*. p.37-38.

⁴PMJ, p.54.

⁵[12]. Pesiqta deRab Kahana 4:7, trans. Jacob Neusner, Pesiqta deRab Kahana, vol. 1 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1987),p. 65.

According to Kinzer, Jesus would follow Yochanan ben Zakkai in claiming that nothing is impure *per se*. However, expounded in this light, the clause of Jesus sounds even more disparaging in relationship to the Law. If Jesus holds with Yochanan ben Zakkai that the distinction between pure and impure types of food is a matter of divine decrees, how could his teaching not openly transgress these decrees by letting free his disciples to disrespect the rituals meant to ensure this purity? For one thing, Ben Zakkai was certainly not encouraging his disciples to cultivate indifference toward these when his last words to the same disciples on his deathbed are said to have been: “Put the vessels out of the house, that they may not become unclean.”

The truth is that there is no way to explain the *lectio* theologically *difficilior* on the grounds of any received *halakha* of the time of Jesus. Even if common Jews might not have followed the cleansing rituals that characterised the Pharisees' zeal for Torah, they would certainly not have questioned the Mosaic distinction between pure and impure types of food. Still, I maintain that the clause is not necessarily incompatible with a Torah-positive attitude as soon as one gives up the attempt to make it sound like standard Jewish *halakha*. I would draw an analogy with another passage of Mark's Gospel (2:23-28/Matt 12:1-8) where an apparent transgression of the Law requires a reference to its Messianic fulfilment in order to find a justification. Discarding the accusation that his disciples infringed Shabbat regulations by plucking an ear of corn on that day, Jesus evokes King David eating the loaves of bread reserved to the priests in the Holy of Holies. David is Israel's Messianic figure par excellence. The regulations that apply to non-priest do not apply to him. Messiah does not transgress the Law because the Law applies in a different and purely singular manner in his case. In addition—and it is, I believe, the whole point of Jesus' argument here—this Messianic, priestly privilege of David extended to his companions who found themselves with him in the Holy of Holies. In the same way, the Messianic privilege of the one who claims to be the "Master of the Shabbat" (Mark 2:28/Matt 12:8) extends to his disciples so that they might reap the fruit of creation on a Shabbat without further scruple. Going back to our clause in Mark 7, I observe that the verb that is used here, καθαρίζω, "to cleanse" or "to purify," is remarkably infrequent in the Old Testament with the exception of Leviticus, c.14, where it comes back 14 times. This chapter deals with the purification by priests of those who used to suffer from contagious skin diseases. It describes how priests are to offer sacrifices—a lamb, two turtle doves or pigeons—to heal these people and inseparably purify them from their sins:

"The priest will then offer the sacrifice for sin, and perform the rite of expiation for uncleanness for the person who is being purified. After this, he will slaughter the burnt offering (Lev 14:19 NJB)

^{BGT} Lev 14:19 καὶ ποιήσῃ ὁ ἱερεὺς τὸ περὶ τῆς ἁμαρτίας καὶ ἐξιλάσεται ὁ ἱερεὺς περὶ τοῦ ἀκαθάρτου τοῦ καθαριζομένου ἀπὸ τῆς ἁμαρτίας αὐτοῦ καὶ μετὰ τοῦτο σφάζει ὁ ἱερεὺς τὸ ὄλοκαύτωμα.

^{WTT} Lev 14:19: וַעֲשֵׂה הַכֹּהֵן אֶת־הַטָּהָר וּכְפָר עַל־הַמַּטְהָר מִטְּמֵאתוֹ וְאַחַר יִשְׁחַט אֶת־הָעֶלְהָ:

What if Jesus was said to “cleanse everything,” including food, in reference to his dignity of Messianic High Priest? Just as physical diseases, the impurity of food is the consequence of a cosmos disrupted by sin—and in both cases the recovery of integrity rests on the purity of which priests are the agents. Christ is himself the source of *kippur-ha-khataim*, forgiveness of sins (see Mark 2:10). Priests did not abolish the Law that considered as impure somebody who had contracted leprosy when they healed or tried to heal him or her; they were indeed endeavouring to fulfil the Law. Likewise, when Christ, displaying his Messianic privilege, purifies food that is considered to be impure, he is not claiming that what is impure is actually pure; he is claiming *that what used to be impure has actually been purified*, thus leading the observance of the Law to its full

accomplishment. In sum, Christ and his disciples are partaking of the exceptional regime of the Messianic age, an age that does not do away with Moses' Torah but definitely transfigures it.

Interestingly, one reads in Paul's epistle to the Romans 14:14 a declaration that is very similar to the clause of Mark c.7 according to its *lectio difficilior*: "I am sure, and quite convinced in the Lord Jesus, that no food is unclean in itself; it is only if someone classifies any kind of food as unclean, then for him it is unclean." This Pauline echo to Jesus' teaching did not evade Kinzer's attention. He appeals to the same episode related to Yochanan Ben Zakkai to dismiss the glaring contradiction between Paul's statement and the teaching of Moses' Torah.⁶ Paul is talking here about the ontological properties of things, not about what one should do to abide by God's Law. When it comes to practical deeds, Kinzer depicts Paul as a Torah-observant Jew. For instance, the freedom for the Gospel of which Paul boasts in 1 Corinthians 9 does not imply any concrete infringement of standard Jewish *halakha*. When Paul declares that, in order "to win as many people" as he could, he became "as one outside the Law" to "those outside the Law" (v.21), it is an emphatic manner of stating that he did not hesitate to share the company of Gentile disciples by taking advantage of a more lenient *halakha*. According to Kinzer, Paul continued to eat kosher while sharing his meals with Gentiles, that is, in a thoroughly impure setting.⁷ Meanwhile, he found no difficulty embracing the stricter concept of *kashrut* promoted by a number of zealous Jews while sharing their company: "to those under the Law" he became "as one under the Law (...) in order to win those under the Law." True, Paul states here in a clause that he himself "is not under the law." But Kinzer takes it to mean that he does not personally endorse the hyper-strict requirements of a fringe of zealots. The problem with this hermeneutical framework, greatly expanded upon by D. Rudolph in his recent monography on this passage,⁸ is that the whole idea behind Paul's argument ceases to be comprehensible; namely, that Paul has acquired some sort of unique freedom in Christ. Indeed, how could this conviction not be ruined by the concomitant admission that the same degree of freedom would be perfectly legitimate—the adjective that comes to mind is "kosher" of course—in a standard Pharisaic, Yeshua-ignorant, or even Yeshua-negative ambient?

Naturally the problem disappears as soon as one adopts the idea that I just sketched out while commenting on Mark c.7. Paul does not transgress Torah precisely because his Messianic *halakha* stipulates that unclean food has been purified or cleansed in Jesus. But there is more to say about Paul's statement in Romans 14:14. The last segment of this statement is seldom commented on or very poorly so if at all: "(...) no food is unclean in itself; *it is only if someone classifies any kind of food as unclean, then for him it is unclean.*" Contemporary exegesis speaks of the value of what is purely subjective or invokes the enduring relevance in God's eyes of a misguided way of thinking.⁹

⁶ PMJ, p.80.

⁷ "(...) if the Gentiles in question had renounced idolatry and embraced Yeshua-faith, Jewish Yeshua-believers could reasonably assume that their wine was untainted. Therefore refraining from wine at the community meal was not required by the dietary laws or universal Jewish practice. PMJ. p. 78.

⁸ *A Jew to the Jews: Jewish Contours of Pauline Flexibility in 1 Corinthians 9:19–23*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2.304. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011.

⁹ "The subjective reaction of a person colors the conviction about it. Hence one's estimate of such a thing can take on an importance that it does not have *in se*," Fitzmyer, J. A., S. J. (2008). *Romans: a new translation with introduction and commentary* (Vol. 33, p. 696). New Haven; London: Yale University Press; "Because he truly thinks of it in his heart as unclean according to God's own law, his conscience tells him that it would be wrong to eat it. And if he does in fact eat it, contrary to what his conscience tells him, he is guilty of sin. In such a case the sin is not in the eating *per se*, but in the violation of the conscience," Cottrell, J. (1996). *Romans* (Vol. 2, Ro 14:14–15). Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co, V, II, B, 1.

But even if one supposes that Paul has unexpectedly turned into a pupil of Protagoras, how could the realm of pure subjectivity ever validate an action the only purpose of which is to elicit G-d's benevolence? Actually, the Greek verb that Paul uses to describe both the action of considering the food as clean and the effect of this consideration on the subject of this action (εἰ μὴ τῷ λογιζομένῳ τι κοινὸν εἶναι, ἐκεῖνῳ κοινόν) is heavily loaded theologically, especially in Paul's writings. In the Old Testament, λογίζομαι, "to calculate, consider, think for oneself" often means "to be reckoned" at the passive voice—which sometimes is a "passivus divinus," a passive where the divine agent is implied but not formally mentioned. There are numerous instances of this, but the most famous one is certainly that of Genesis 15:6 that Paul takes up in the same epistle to the Romans, c.4, v.22:

:^{NJB} Gen 15:6 Abram put his faith in Yahweh and this was reckoned to him as uprightness, ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ εἰς δικαιοσύνην (heb. נֶאֱמַר וְיִצְחָק בֶּן שָׁנָה יָחַד).

As is well known, the idea that God rewards with justification those who act according to their faith in Him is one of Paul's quintessential insights. We find it, still in the same epistle, applied this time to Gentiles that obey the prescriptions of the Law without knowing it, because the Law is somehow inscribed in their hearts:

:^{NJB} Rom 2:26 And if an uncircumcised man keeps the commands of the Law, will not his uncircumcised state count as circumcision, οὐχ ἡ ἀκροβυστία αὐτοῦ εἰς περιτομὴν λογισθήσεται?"

I believe the same type of reckoning is applied to Yeshua-believers of Jewish origin in Rom 14:14. To a certain extent, this situation is symmetrically opposite to the previous one. In Romans 2, Paul claims that God values the good deeds of Gentiles even if they fall short of the precepts of the Law destined to Israel. Conversely in Romans 14, Paul teaches that God values the legal observances of the Jewish disciples of Jesus even if they ignore the Messianic interpretation of the Law that makes it accessible to Gentiles. In both cases, what God fundamentally reckons as righteousness is the faith that inspires the actions of Gentile—as well as Jewish—disciples of Yeshua. Still, there is a difference between the two. In the case of Jewish disciples of Jesus, Paul emphasises the character of personal or private vow associated with the decision of Jewish disciples to observe *kashrut*: "(...) *it is only if someone classifies any kind of food as unclean, then for him it is unclean.*" Good deeds—the much-emphasized by Paul obligation to fraternal communion, for instance—are not optional. Whatever the difficulties that the disciples of Jesus, Gentile and Jews alike, experience as they strive to carry out these good deeds—foster communion among themselves, for instance—they know that these deeds are mandatory to all the disciples and supersede any other rule or observance. As the teaching of Jesus goes in Matthew 5:23-24:

if you are bringing your offering to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you,

²⁴ leave your offering there before the altar, go and be reconciled with your brother first, and then come back and present your offering

The observances connected with Jewish-identity markers such as the rules of *kashrut* seem to pertain to a wholly different genre or logic. Jewish disciples are left free to observe them or not; but if they choose to observe them with the right intention, *kavanah*, these actions will be reckoned to them.

Kinzer derives the mandatory character of present-day Jewish *halakha* for contemporary Jewish disciples of Jesus from the attitude of Jesus and Paul toward the Jewish *halakha* of their time. Modern Jewish *halakha* is the most direct heir to the *halakha* of Jesus' time, claims Kinzer. But what if the attitude of Jesus and Paul toward this *halakha* was very different from the one described by Kinzer? What I see is a Messianic interpretation of the Law that, while carefully

avoiding transgressions, leaves the standard *halakha* of its time far behind. True, this does not amount to a wholesale dismissal of this *halakha*. But it modifies it when it comes to the very point that Kinzer would like to promote among the contemporary Jewish disciples of Jesus. Jewish observances no longer seem to be mandatory. If they exist, they exist on the mode of a private decision, as a personal and externally unconstrained vow. Clearly, such commitments of Jewish disciples to perpetuate the observances that characterise Israel come in second after the commandments of an ethical nature that apply to all disciples, Jewish and non-Jewish alike. Although I have no time to elaborate on this, I think this understanding provides the background to the so-called incident of Antioch (Gal 2:11-14) which sees Paul blame Peter for withdrawing from the meals with Gentiles under the pressure of Israel-observances hard-liners from the Jerusalem community. Peter is welcome to practice a rigorous form of *kashrut*, but not when it imperils the communion of the Church. In the framework that I am describing, Torah is enlarged to the Gentiles as to its ethical content while it is practiced in a new mode as far as the commandments specifically destined to Israel are concerned. Moses' Torah is never transgressed or abrogated, but it is interpreted in a radically idiosyncratic—Messianic is the word—manner. Let me now show how this alternative reading of Jesus' Messianic *halakha* reflects on Kinzer's catholic—in the sense of universal—ecclesiology.

Jewishness as a mark of the Universal Church

The essential merit of Kinzer's ecclesiology is to be what it is: a Messianic ecclesiology. I have not come across any other attempt of the kind. It seems that most Messianic leaders and theologians do not even see the need for such a theological exercise. If the movement they represent is the true one, why bother with ecclesiology? There will always be a need for organisation and people in command will never be perfect—but why on earth should the forms of this organisation become an object of theological investigation? Still, if there is no substantial difference between the faith of Messianic Jews and the faith of a number of churches of the Protestant world, then as I have argued at the beginning, the only element that can give its *raison d'être* to the Messianic movement as such is ecclesiology. In addition, there is an issue most Messianic leaders would rather not face directly. If Messianic Judaism represents an alternative to Gentile Churches, as one often hears, what about the presence of Gentile faithful in its midst? Bluntly closing the doors to Gentiles amounts to confessing that Messianic congregations are not part of the true Church in the apostolic sense of the word, the Church shaped by the decisions of the first Jerusalem Council. But keeping these gates wide open entails that, with the rate of intermarriages, the Messianic Movement runs the risk of becoming different only in name from the Gentile Churches it professes to abhor within less than five generations. It is only ecclesiology that can guarantee a future to the Messianic movement in that respect. There must be room for some sort of clear structural distinction between Gentile faithful and Jewish ones within the Messianic movement, otherwise no Jewish identity will be able to endure and perpetuate itself within its boundaries. Such structural distinction cannot be established without valid theological reasons, which is precisely the task of ecclesiology to provide; that is, of a reflection on the form that the Body of Christ is meant to have according to the will of G-d. As I said, Kinzer formulates this distinction on the basis of the orthodox form of *halakha* adopted by all the Jewish disciples of Christ in contrast to the Noahide laws that govern the rest of the faithful. And as I pointed out, Kinzer goes to great lengths to establish that there is nothing in the teaching of Christ that would be incompatible with the adoption of such a *halakha* by the Jewish disciples. This is because he holds that Christ is committed to perpetuating Jewish identity in his Body and because he claims that what defines this identity is the commitment of the Jewish nation to abide by Moses' Torah—which makes it mandatory for every single Jewish believer in Yeshua to abide by it. The whole question is

whether the mandatory character of Torah should translate into the mandatory character of Jewish Orthodox *halakha* in its present form. After all, if what I have tried to argue is true, Gentile believers are integrated into Torah through Christ without having to follow present-day Jewish *halakha*. In Christ, Gentile believers gain access to the fullness of Torah's ethical dimension. True, what Kinzer has in mind are the duties that, in Torah, are specifically associated with the identity of Israel as a nation—circumcision, *kashrut*, Shabbat, festivals, and the rest. Kinzer emphasizes that the ethnic heirs to those who committed themselves to following these precepts at Mount Sinai are under the obligation to keep the promises of their forefathers, which they can only do by adopting the halakhic tradition that derives from these premises. To quote the words that Moses, according to Deuteronomy 29:13-14, addresses to the Jews assembled at Mount Sinai:

Not only on your behalf am I today making this covenant and pronouncing this solemn curse,

¹⁴ not only on behalf of those standing here with us in the presence of Yahweh our God today, but also on behalf of those not here with us today.

This leads Kinzer to apply to the Jewish disciples of Jesus the same criteria of righteousness and sinfulness as standard orthodox *halakha*: neglecting a mitzvah, like lighting the candle for Shabbat, let alone transgressing one, like eating pork, is sinful. Of course, Kinzer admits to attenuating circumstances, as when a Jewish believer was raised in a total ignorance of standard Jewish *halakha*, but that still makes of a saint like Edith Stein, who was raised Jewish in her childhood, a terrible sinner from the moment she embraced Christ onwards. And what about Paul declaring in Romans 14:17 that “the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit”? What about his dread of brothers going around boasting about their achievements on matters of observances and Israel-faithfulness?

¹³ Even though they are circumcised they still do not keep the Law themselves; they want you to be circumcised only so that they can boast of your outward appearance.

¹⁴ But as for me, it is out of the question that I should boast at all, except of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

¹⁵ It is not being circumcised or uncircumcised that matters; but what matters is a new creation. (Gal 6:13-15 NJB)

That Yeshua's messianic interpretation of Torah brings with it a radical shift regarding the criteria of sinfulness and holiness, rendering the experience of salvation akin to “a new creation” that, as Paul writes here, encompasses both circumcised and uncircumcised, Jews and Gentiles, seems totally overlooked by Kinzer. As a result, the bilateral Church that Kinzer envisages appears very much split in two. If the devotion of the Jewish disciples of Yeshua is entirely articulated within the universe of *mistvot* that are specific to Jews, if each side of this bilateral Church has an organisational structure of its own, what room is there left for a spiritual life experience shared between Jews and Gentiles? The reality of communion between them seems reduced to a few fraternal or liturgical initiatives. I avoid the term “parties.” In sum, everything in Kinzer's model tends to reverse the logic of the incident of Antioch, at least in our reading of it: instead of rebuking Peter for placing Israel-Torah faithfulness above the requirements of communion with Gentiles, Paul, according to Kinzer, would have had a better time encouraging Peter to place Israel-Torah faithfulness above all other considerations and, as a Jew, to try to limit the moments of fraternal interaction with Gentiles.

As useful as Kinzer's ecclesiology is, I believe it suffers from a serious flaw, and that this flaw has to do with the notion of the mandatory character of Jewish Orthodox *halakha* for all the Jewish

disciples of Yeshua. Attached to this mandatory character are a notion of sinfulness and a rigid separation from Gentiles that are foreign to Jesus' Messianic interpretation of Torah. I would contend that the way Kinzer defines this mandatory character does not even conform to the Jewish tradition that it claims to express. Indeed, what makes *halakha* mandatory for all Jews, or rather in what manner is it considered mandatory?

I do not think that the commitment of our Jewish ancestors to observe the Law at Mount Sinai can oblige their descendants to observe the Law lest they sin. Because this commitment was entirely free, it cannot contrive anyone in the generations that follow to make the same commitment. What it obliges them to do—and this is true of every generation among the children of Israel—is to make the same free choice of upholding the Torah. This is the fundamental meaning of the bar *mitsva* ritual. In the presence of the whole *kahal* Israel, I freely commit myself to upholding the Torah of Moses. Refusing to uphold the Torah of Moses is certainly a sin, but it cannot be a sin related to a vow that has not been made. Here, the mandatory character of the Torah of Israel has to do with its moral content. Refusing to do the right thing is wrong—it is a sin.

Take now the Jewish disciples of Christ. Do they refuse to do the right thing? If they accept Jesus' messianic interpretation of Moses' Torah, if they are like Paul “ἐννομος Χριστοῦ” (1 Cor 9:21), “in the Law as regards Christ,” they *ipso facto* make their own its high moral standards just as their Gentile brethren. Edith Stein was a perfect example of faithfulness to Torah from this point of view.

For that matter, it does not mean that the commandments pertaining to Israel qua Israel lose their value for the Jewish disciples of Christ. Jesus is not Messiah of Israel for nothing. As Card. Lustiger, referring to the etymology of the word “catholic,” wrote in *The Promise*, Jewish identity and the perpetuation of the Mystery of Israel are essential to a Church that would be truly universal:

The Church (...) is ‘according to the whole’ because she is composed of both Jews and pagans. She fulfils the mystery of the salvation of all nations because she brings together the two groups according to whom history is divided: those who participate in the Election, Israel, and those who had no right to it, the pagans. For both groups, salvation is given as a grace, and a grace unmerited. (...) This Church is ‘according to the whole,’ since this ‘assembly of God’ is formed from among both Jews and pagans. She can exist as a Church only within the mystery of the grace given to Israel.¹⁰

Just as any child of Israel, a Jewish follower of Jesus faces the challenge of taking up the *mitsvot* related to the Mystery of Israel within the Church. But I see three essential differences with the way Jews that are not in the Church experience this challenge. The first one is that this choice is no longer a moral obligation, since the whole sphere of morality is assumed in the universal Law of Christ. To some degree, this choice undergoes a *sanatio in radice*, a purification of its very root: there is no other reason to comply with the *mitsvot* connected with the existence of Israel than to celebrate the love of God for Israel, a love out of which the Salvation of the whole world came forth. I would follow Yeshayahu Leibowitz on this point: “(...) the so-called ‘reasons for the *mizvot*’ (taamei ha-*mizvot*) are a theological construct and not a fact of religious faith. The only genuine reason for the *mizvot* is the worship of God, and not the satisfaction of a human need or interest”—interests which, according to Leibowitz, include the whole ethical sphere.¹¹

For a Jewish disciple of Yeshua, this decision has the structure of the vow as described earlier when discussing Romans 14:14. This brings us to the second difference. This choice is no

¹⁰Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger. *The Promise*, Eerdmans, 2007, Kindle eEdition (Locations 111-116.)

¹¹ *20 Century Jewish Religious Thought*, A. A. Cohen & P. Mendes-Flohr, eds., The Free Press, New-York: 1971,p.71.

longer a collective obligation with a content common to all those who make it. Committing oneself to a Jewish form of *halakha* is the personal choice of each Jewish believer, and this choice also deals with the manner in which he/she personally intends to implement it. In this manner, nobody can boast or condemn for purposes that are absolutely wrong from the point of view of Jesus' Messianic interpretation of Torah. I cannot say that I am more righteous than this Jewish brother who is less Israel Torah-observant than I am. I cannot say that this Jewish brother is a sinner because he neglects all Israel Torah-observance. Let us keep in mind Jesus' *mashal* in Luke 18:

¹⁰ 'Two men went up to the Temple to pray, one a Pharisee, the other a tax collector.

¹¹ The Pharisee stood there and said this prayer to himself, "I thank you, God, that I am not grasping, unjust, adulterous like everyone else, and particularly that I am not like this tax collector here.

¹² I fast twice a week; I pay tithes on all I get."

¹³ The tax collector stood some distance away, not daring even to raise his eyes to heaven; but he beat his breast and said, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner."

¹⁴ This man, I tell you, went home again justified; the other did not. For everyone who raises himself up will be humbled, but anyone who humbles himself will be raised up.' (Lk 18:11-14 NJB)

The third difference is that the vow of Israel Torah observance cannot have precedence over the duties of fraternal communion with Gentile brethren. When Jesus declares in Matthew 22:40 that the whole Law and the Prophets hang on the two commandments of love for God and for the neighbour, I really take the verb used here, *κρεμάννυμι*, to indicate a condition of logical validity as in "the implementation of this decree hangs upon its approbation by Congress." The validity of Torah observance hangs upon whether it is ultimately inspired by the love for G-d and for one's neighbour which, in the context of the Church, includes communion with our Gentile brethren.

Where does that critique of Kinzer's notion of mandatory *halakha* leaves us in terms of ecclesiology? For one thing it becomes impossible to establish a rigid line of separation between a Gentile segment and a Jewish one of the Church on a free, personal vow that should always be compatible with the duties of communion between Jewish and Gentile brethren. But a bilateral ecclesiology, in the sense expounded by Kinzer, is not the only way in which one can conceive of a collective Jewish expression in the Church that would in one way or another rely on traditional Jewish *halakha*. Let us remember that in Galatians 3:28, when Paul evokes the destruction of the wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles, he draws an analogy with the separation between men and women as well as between free citizens and slaves. In no Christian Church do men and women, let alone masters and slaves—employers and employees to use an easy analogy with the modern world—exist as two actually separate and almost autonomous sub-communities. This would be understood as sexual or social discrimination since there is always one part of the two that is considered weaker than the other. At the same time, this does not mean that there can be no specific arrangements for women or even organisations of women for women in the Church. The same goes for Church organisations designed for employees or workers. Here distinction can go along perfectly well with communion. Rather than a bilateral Church in the sense of Kinzer, what I am envisaging is a bi-dimensional Church. The communion between Gentile and Jewish brethren should not exclude a communal reality that would be specific to Jews and accordingly imply a structural distinction with the non-Jewish component of the Church.

From this point of view, I must say that I cannot help being struck with the similarity between this model and the normative Christology expounded at the council of Chalcedon (451).

Christ is one according to the Person, hypostasis, but this one hypostasis subsists in two natures: *fuseis*, divine and human. In the same manner, the reality of the communion between Jewish and Gentile disciples of Christ, *ecclesia ex circumcissione* and *ecclesia ex gentibus*, is what makes the Church one. But this one universal Church subsists or should subsist in two distinct communal realities, the Jewish and the Gentile ones, the basis for such distinction being a relationship to Torah and Christ's revelation that cannot be identical for both. One may even push this analogy with Christology a step further. Post-Chalcedonian Christology speaks of a *περιχώρησις τῶν ἰδιωμάτων*, "circumincession," in the very being of the Saviour. It means that divine nature assumes human properties without ceasing to be divine while the symmetrically opposite occurs with human nature: it assumes divine properties without ceasing to be human. The human hands of Christ are endowed with divine power while his divine nature becomes the receptacle of human suffering and death. I think the same type of mysterious exchange is at work with the Jewish and the Gentile dimensions of the Church. Card. Lustiger shortly characterizes this unceasing movement of communication between these two dimensions in the passage of *The Promise* that I just quoted:

The pagans have to recognize a gift which is freely given to them, through no merit of their own. Reciprocally, by recognizing God's gift to the pagans, Israel has to acknowledge that what it has received is not its due, but a grace of God. In this mystery of reciprocal recognition of God's freely given grace, each party bears witness to the other.¹²

The experience of Jews in the Church is one of universalisation: without ceasing to be Jews, they come to discover, hidden in their own religious legacy, a wisdom that goes far beyond the existence of Israel because it is destined to all the peoples of the earth. Meanwhile, the experience of Gentiles is that of particularisation: without ceasing to be Gentiles, they are grafted on the specific and singular legacy of the people of Israel. The history of Israel's patriarchs, kings, and prophets becomes theirs. This circumincession between the nations and Israel, from the particular to the universal and conversely, is actually a single movement: that of the hidden glory sealed in the legacy of Israel and released by Christ radiating down to the furthest ends of the universe. For these reasons, I believe that one should assign Jewishness to what the Catholic theological traditions call the marks of the Church, the most fundamental ones being listed out in the Nicene Creed: the Church is one, catholic and apostolic. These are the properties that help us to check whether a movement or a congregation belong to the Church founded by Christ. A congregation that is not in harmony with the teaching of the apostles is not part of the true Church. In a similar way, a congregation that is not anchored in the mystery of Israel is not part of the true Church.

Let me now add a few words by way of conclusion. What I have tried to argue here is that one can truly conceive of a Torah-positive ecclesiology that would be compatible with the teachings of the New Testament. Simply, it cannot be built on the mandatory character of present-day Jewish orthodox *halakha*. This would amount to a denial of the religious revolution that is the whole point of Yeshua's ministry among the sons and daughters of Israel. Logically enough, this would lead to the constitution of a type of organisation that is averse to the greatest and most precious fruit of this revolution; that is, the concrete reality of the communion between Jews and Gentile disciples within the Body of Christ. Messianic Judaism is often presented as a movement of Jewish believers who want to preserve Jewish identity and tradition as Yeshua-believers. But I would contend that this is only a contingent and negative aspect of it. Considered according to its positive essence,

¹²*The Promise* (Kindle Locations 116-117). Kindle Edition.

Messianic Judaism is about the long-anticipated discovery by Jews of their Messiah and the joy of receiving a teaching that is not simply the product of the Jewish tradition, beautiful and wise as this tradition might be, but the very Word of G-d made flesh. In the light of this Messianic teaching, Jewish tradition is not lost or belittled but is freely taken up by these Jewish disciples. This observance is credited to them, in the sense of the Pauline “reckoning,” as long as it is exerted in accordance with the imperative of communion within the Body. In a paradoxical manner, I do believe that Jewish practice and communion with Gentiles are meant to go together and reinforce each other. Communion is the criterion of a relevant Messianic *halakha* and the existence of such a *halakha* is beneficial to the growth of communion. This implies the existence of what I called a bi-dimensional ecclesiology that simultaneously builds on a true sharing of all the disciples in the various aspects of Church life and gives room to a specifically Jewish expression of this common faith, be it in organisational, liturgical, or other terms. Finally, I deem such a Messianic ecclesiology to be not only a possibility but a necessity that derives from the catholic character of the Church. If this universality, understood in its qualitative sense, rests on the communion between Jews and Gentiles, then the Catholic Church cannot truly be what she claims to be without a bi-dimensional ecclesiology of this sort. As far as the Catholic Church in the narrow denominational sense of the word is concerned, there is still a long way to go before she grants to Jewish believers the freedom of expression and dignity they are entitled to in the name of Israel’s Messiah. But the Messianic movement in its current configuration has also some distance to cover before it realises the categorical necessity of conceiving its existence in catholic or universal terms. What might help is the thought that this movement from both sides might hold the yet invisible key to the visible unity of all the disciples of Christ scattered on the surface of the earth. The Body of Christ has only one way forward, and it is about coming back to its point of origin.

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Messianic Movement as a Part of 70-Year-Old Israel

Some days ago Arnona, the little neighbourhood in Jerusalem where I live, became the stage for global events. It has been 70 years since the state of Israel was founded, and on May 14, 2018, the United States moved its embassy to Jerusalem, emphasizing the city's nature as a capital of Israel. The security arrangements were massive, streets were closed, and media reported demonstrations next to the Embassy. The general atmosphere during the last few weeks has been tense.

Israel has not seen many peaceful years since it was established—everything started with a war and now, 70 years later, the threat of war is in the air again. Not everyone in and around Israel is equally happy about her existence. Despite the challenging conditions, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) recently reported that Israel's economy is one of the strongest globally. According to OECD Acting Chief Economist Alvaro Pereira, the Israeli economy has grown faster and more consistently than nearly any other in the OECD for the past 15 years.

Despite the disputed status of the Jews believing in Jesus, these 70 years of Israel have also offered the Messianic movement a home to grow. Everything started very modestly. According to Gershon Nerel, before 1948 there were about 250 Jewish believers in the Land. Many of them escaped the country before the independence, because the circumstances were extremely hard. During the British Mandate, most of the believers still identified themselves as Hebrew-Christians. Zionists considered them betrayers of their own Jewish "race" and accused them of cooperating with the British government. Hebrew-Christians didn't seem to have any future in the new state. However, some Jewish believers stayed here through the years of turmoil, and waves of new immigration brought more of them to live in Israel. Based on the Caspari Center survey in 1999, there were about 5,000 Messianic Jews in Israel. Most of them were not born here, but the number of *Sabras* was gradually growing. At the moment, the most common estimation of the number of Messianic Jews is around 15,000.

During these 70 years the general understanding in Israeli society has been that a believer in Jesus is not a Jew anymore. This attitude still widely rules in Israel, and anti-missionary organization Yad L'Achim works diligently to expose all the dangers that missionizing organizations and individuals cause. At the same time, the secular society demands religious freedom and tolerance. Religious pluralism creates tension between Israel's rabbinate and the liberal streams of Judaism. Messianic Judaism is sometimes part of these disputes. Paradoxically, the secularization of the society can work for the benefit of Messianic Jews.

For now, Jewish believers are still facing challenges. In August 2017, a Jewish wedding was denied to a Messianic couple, who openly confessed their faith in Jesus, even though both were born Jewish. This decision was made by a rabbinical court. There are, on the other hand, encouraging cases where secular court has decided in favour of the Messianic party, and the religious authority has been forced to submit into that. Six years ago Pnina Konforti, owner of a bakery, filed a claim against the Religious Council, the city rabbinate, and Yad La'Achim, arguing

that they damaged her reputation and revoked her Kosher certificate because she is a Messianic Jew. In the end she won her case, after fighting for years.

The policies of the Ministry of Interior have also lately been challenged by Messianic Jews. This spring the media reported on a case of a Jewish-Gentile couple. The Ministry of Interior denied the citizenship to the non-Israeli spouse and opened an investigation about the *aliyah* of the Israeli spouse, claiming that the spouse had lied about his faith earlier in the immigration process—this happened after 15 years of citizenship in Israel, as well as his serving in the army. The court ruled in the couple's favor, saying that the MOI cannot give any weight to religious beliefs when conducting an interview for family reunification requests.

In February 2018 Itzhak Rabihiya, a journalist who has previously worked as a spokesperson for the Israeli Labor Party (Avoda), wrote some quite remarkable ideas in several media. He says it is evident that President Trump's move to recognize Jerusalem as a capital of Israel was to keep his promise to his most staunch group of supporters, conservative Evangelical Christians. The support of this Christian community has always been extremely important for Israel, too. The socioeconomic resilience of the State of Israel would be much weaker without its faithful Christian friends, who have donated billions of dollars to social and humanitarian projects and also kept tourism alive through the difficult Intifada years. Now Evangelical Christians are filling influential positions on Capitol Hill. The best friends and allies of these Christians are the Messianic Jews in Israel. Christians fund businesses and NGOs, and employ local Messianic Jews in their executive leadership. The small Messianic Jewish community has become very influential and important to Israel's security and diplomatic standing. Messianic Jews are good citizens who contribute to the society. Yet, instead of embracing them, the Israeli government treats them with disdain and the Ministry of Interior refuses to recognize them. Rabihiya argues that it is not possible any more to "hug Evangelicals" who support Israel, and at the same time, stab the Messianic Jews in their backs. He concludes: "In view of the deep relationship between Evangelical Christians and the Messianic community, perhaps the government of Israel should start viewing Messianic Jews as diplomatic assets rather than a religious threat."

We can agree or disagree about the excellence of Trump's actions—including the relocation of the US Embassy. However, if they cause, even indirectly, improvement in the status of Messianic Jews in Israel, that is surely something we want to heartily welcome!

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