

JEWS AND CHRISTIANS: A TANGLED HISTORY

Rabba Dr Lindsey Taylor-Guthartz

Session 1: Beginnings

1. RULES OF THE GAME: FIVE USEFUL PRINCIPLES

- A. Avoid disputation
- B. Avoid proselytization
- C. Avoid syncretism
- D. Avoid relativism
- E. Avoid triumphalism

2. DROPPING THE BAGGAGE: CHRISTIAN STEREOTYPES OF JUDAISM, AND VICE VERSA

Catholic Encyclopaedia, 1910

The Kingdom of God as described and founded by Jesus has an historical name. It is the Christian Church, which was able silently to leaven the Roman Empire, which has outlived the ruin of the Jewish Temple and its worship, and which, in the course of centuries, has extended to the confines of the world the knowledge and the worship of the God of Abraham, while Judaism has remained the barren fig-tree which Jesus condemned during His mortal life.

Jewish Encyclopaedia, 1906

Paul, the real founder of the Christian Church ... construed the belief in the atoning death of Christ held by the rest into a system altogether antagonistic to Judaism and its Law, claiming to have received the apostleship to the heathen world from the Christ he beheld in his visions ... he deprived faith, as typified by Abraham, of its naturalness, and forged the shackles of the Christian dogma, with its terrors of damnation and hell for the unbeliever. ... the medieval Church divided men into believers and unbelievers, who are to inherit heaven and hell respectively. With the love which she poured forth as the fountain of divine grace, she also sent forth streams of hatred.

Robert Gordis, *The Root and the Branch* (1962), ch. 4

[Jews must] rise above the heavy burden of historical memories which have made it difficult for them to achieve any real understanding, let alone an appreciation, of Christianity. It is not easy to wipe out the memories of centuries of persecution and massacre, all too often dedicated to the advancement of the cause of the Prince of Peace ... [It is] no easy task for Jews to divest themselves of the heavy burden of group memories from the past, which are unfortunately reinforced all too often by personal experiences in the present. Nevertheless, the effort must be made, if men are to emerge from the dark heritage of religious hatred which has embittered their mutual relationships for twenty centuries. There is need for Jews to surrender the stereotype of Christianity as being monolithic and unchanging and to recognize the ramifications of viewpoint and emphasis that constitute the multicolored spectrum of contemporary Christianity.

3. SOURCES FOR THE HISTORICAL JESUS (AND EARLY CHURCH)

A. The New Testament

Name of book or category	Author	Approx. date	Contents
Gospel of Matthew	'Matthew'	Disputed: late 1st century CE?	Life of Jesus (synoptic)
Gospel of Mark	'Mark'	Disputed: ranges from late 60s to c. 135 CE	Life of Jesus (synoptic)
Gospel of Luke	'Luke'	Disputed: ranges from 36 CE-early 2nd century CE	Life of Jesus (synoptic)
Gospel of John	'John'	c. 90 CE	Life of Jesus
Acts of the Apostles	'Luke'	Disputed: ranges from c. 60-c. 100 CE	Mission of Paul and apostles, spread of Christianity
Pauline Epistles (13)	Paul	c. 49-68 CE	Romans, Corinthians [2], Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians [2]; Timothy [2], Titus, Philemon (letters to early Christian communities and individuals, concerning doctrine and community life)
General (Catholic) Epistles	Apostles or unknown	c. 50-125 CE	Hebrews, James, Peter [2], John [3], Jude (letters by early Christians)
Book of Revelation	'John'	c. 95?	Apocalyptic visions, including of the end of days

B. Non-canonical gospels, such as the Gospel of Thomas (?late 1st-early 2nd century CE), Gospel of Mary, Gospel of Philip; most were written in or after the 2nd century CE.

C. Flavius Josephus, (c. 37-100 CE), *Jewish Antiquities*, 18.3.3 #63: the 'Testimonium Flavianum'

About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a man. For he was one who performed surprising deeds and was a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. He was the

Messiah [*ho christos*]. And when, upon the accusation of the principal men among us, Pilate had condemned him to a cross, those who had first come to love him did not cease. He appeared to them spending a third day restored to life, for the prophets of God had foretold these things and a thousand other marvels about him. And the tribe of the Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared.

D. Greco-Roman literature

1. Tacitus, *Annals*, c. 116 CE

Consequently, to get rid of the report [that he had started the great fire in Rome in 64 CE], Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular.

2. Suetonius, *Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, 121 CE

As the Jews were making constant disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he [Claudius, ruled 49-54 CE] expelled them from Rome.

E. Rabbinic literature

Mishnah (c. 200 CE), Tosefta (c. 250 CE), Jerusalem Talmud (c. 400 CE), Babylonian Talmud (c. 600 CE) -- all too late.

F. Archaeology

No evidence of Jesus the individual, though valuable evidence of the background.

4. THE 'BIG PICTURE' IN THE 1ST CENTURY BCE-1ST CENTURY CE - A PRESSURE COOKER ABOUT TO EXPLODE

Ingredients

Politics

Jewish disunity leads to gradual Roman takeover from 63 BCE; the land is chopped and re-chopped into different districts under different authorities until Herod is appointed king by Rome (40-4 BCE); then under the rule of Roman procurators there are endless revolts and violence till the great Jewish revolt (66-70 CE), culminating in the Temple's destruction.

Economics

Most people were peasants, though there was also international trade, especially through cities on the coast and via inland trading routes; some evidence suggests that land was being concentrated in the hands of aristocrats, and that the number of landless peasants was steadily rising.

Ethnicity

Jews: mainly in central Judaea, Galilee

Samaritans, in Samaria

Idumaeans (south of the Dead Sea): the former Edomites, forcibly converted by the Hasmonaeans

'*Greeks*' (along the coast, in major cities, in Transjordan): some of mixed local descent and others immigrants

Romans (in strategic forts and cities): soldiers and administrators, traders

Religion

Various types of '*Judaism*': Sadducees, Boethusians, Pharisees, Essenes, Therapeutae, Zealots, and probably several other sects, including followers of Jesus, and 'God-fearers' -- non-Jews who came to synagogue

Samaritanism, perhaps with sects of their own (e.g. Dositheans)

Pagan religions, including mystery cults such as those of Adonis, Isis, etc.

Roman official religion, including the cult of the divine emperor

(From c. 40 CE onwards), followers of Jesus - both Jewish and non-Jewish - who are later called Christians (and other names, e.g. Ebionites?)

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