

Josephus, Pilate and Paul: It's Just a Matter of Time

On the Chronology of Paul and the Identity of Jesus

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Introduction

The study of Paul, the most important figure of early Christianity, has taken on an all-new importance in recent years due to the development of new critical methods. As more research, utilizing those methods, indicates that the search for a historical Jesus of Nazareth, as depicted in the gospels, only leads to negative returns, the focus has turned to Paul. The realization is growing that Paul invented what we know as Christianity today. [1] Perhaps “invented” is too strong a word, since he had a full field of inspiration all around him in the abundant and varied theological speculations of his time. [2] While it appears that “Christian churches” – ecclesia populated by individuals following something referred to as *Chrestus* (Latin) or *Chrestos* (Greek) [3] – existed even before Paul, Paul’s writings influenced those organizations and ultimately became foundational for a particular variation of early Christianity. But that, in itself, poses the important question: If, in the end, we find that there is no “Jesus of Nazareth” – which seems certain – what then are we to make of what Paul was claiming about the Cross of Christ? How and why did Paul come to see a man on a cross as a symbol of triumph over evil powers and principalities?

In order to get a full grip on who Paul was and what he was thinking and doing with such passionate conviction and intensity, we need to dispense with any reference to the later invention of Jesus of Nazareth. The gospels are late documents, probably written in the early to mid second century, close to 100 years after the events they claim to narrate. We need to concentrate on the fact that something moved Paul powerfully and we might want to know what it was. Situating him in an accurate historical context might be helpful in trying to figure out what it was that he was actually saying. And what he was saying may be of paramount importance to Christians and non-Christians alike.

In trying to sort out the problem of Paul, we must also reject the use of Acts, the second-century “historical novel” that presents itself as a history of Christianity after Jesus, following the careers of Christianity’s two most famous apostles, Peter and Paul. As Richard Pervo has made abundantly clear in his detailed studies, [4] it is no such thing. The author picked out some authentic names and events from texts extant in his time and wrote his novel around them, with the purpose of presenting the image that everyone got along in the early church. They didn’t, as we’ll see. Acts is not a historical document, but the letters of Paul *are*. However, even reading them with the genuine history of the time firmly in mind can be problematical, since the conflicts between pagans and Christians often led to wars of words, particularly words written down. The history of the destruction and redaction of texts is appalling. Still, Paul’s letters might help us if we take some care. [5]

The only historian whose works have survived to give us a detailed picture of the times in which Paul lived and worked is Titus Flavius Josephus, who lived ca. 37–100 AD, placing his work about one generation after Paul, who is said to have been active in the late 30s through to the 50s or 60s AD. [6] The problem here has to do with using Josephus as a historical source – both from the point of view of the modern researcher *and* from the point of view of the ancient authors of the gospels and Acts, who could not know that much of what Josephus wrote was embellished or falsified.

Despite problems of editorial redaction and transmission of the text, his first work, *The Wars of the Jews*, published in the late 70s AD, is probably more reliable than his later work, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, published in the mid 90s, since it was written

with Imperial support. Of course, this support strongly suggests that many representations were skewed in favor of the Flavians, Josephus' patrons and the rulers of Rome during his time. At the same time, Josephus was hiding or disguising many of his own doings, effectively writing Jewish and Imperial apology simultaneously; the end result is a so-called history that must be handled very carefully. The most reliable reports would be those items that were generally known to the Greek-speaking/reading public, but one must keep in mind that even those can be "spun", and Josephus was definitely spinning and blowing smoke everywhere while still trying to establish himself in the eyes of his readers as a truthful historian.

Josephus' second work, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, is even more problematical: personal and Jewish apologetics on steroids. Historian Harold Attridge calls it "propagandistic history", which included a loose paraphrase of the Hebrew Scriptures with the aim of presenting Jewish history as "relevant, comprehensible and attractive in a new environment."^[7]

As for his autobiography, *The Life of Josephus*, which serves as a self-congratulatory conclusion to *Antiquities*, it is closer to auto-hagiography, though it may include valuable clues and insights, and a reasonable sequence of events even if heavily spin-doctored. At the end of *Antiquities*, where he introduces his *Life*, he has the chutzpah to say he is one of only two or three Jews to have mastered the "national traditions".^[8]

[NOTE: On the next two sentences, Price says: "I think Strauss comments on it. Following him, I believe I mentioned it somewhere."]

I am amazed that I have yet to encounter a serious discussion of the obvious parallels between a number of gospel pericopes and incidents in the *Life* of Josephus. The most striking is his claim to have been so precocious as to discourse with doctors of the law at the age of fourteen. Naturally, when Jesus did it, he was even younger: twelve. Like the gospels of Luke and Matthew, Josephus' *Life* begins with his illustrious ancestry – a standard feature of ancient biography. His career focuses on Galilee, moving to Jerusalem with a stop in Capernaum. He recounts a shipwreck similar to that described in Acts, and a scene that is startling when compared to the "Sermon on the Mount/Plain". Overall and in general, the tone of the *Life of Flavius Josephus* can be found infused into the life of Jesus of Nazareth.

But it is not just the life of Josephus that finds echoes in the gospels; much of the life and words of Paul is creatively interwoven there as well. Any rational historical approach would recognize influence flowing from Josephus and Paul toward the later gospels and Acts, but that isn't what happens in biblical studies. Biblical scholars tend to give the story told in the gospels and Acts a privileged position, the assumption being that they are histories and not myths, fables or historical fiction. However, if the gospel writers and the author of Acts utilized Josephus to compose their alleged histories – along with other texts and techniques^[9] – we find ourselves already on a double layer of shifting sand. We must take great care to try to crosscheck anything we accept as factual when we use Josephus as our historical source, realizing that efforts would have been made to bring the texts into some sort of harmony.

This realization leads us to reject *any* use of Acts or the gospels as historical checks. Pervo makes this evident in his analysis of the speech put into the mouth of the Jewish Pharisee Gamaliel in Acts. Gamaliel mentions Judas and Theudas, two Jewish rebels discussed by Josephus in *The Antiquities of the Jews*. The author of Acts was rather careless in his use of Josephus, who mentions Theudas first, and Judas second. While the author of Acts *also* mentions them in this order, he does so in such a way as to imply that they acted in that chronological order, but it is clear in Josephus that Judas came first historically and was brought up as a digression. This reversed order was carried over into Acts due to carelessness and reveals the novelizing activities – and one of the sources – of its author. Further studies by Michael D. Goulder, Thomas L. Brodie and D. R.

MacDonald reveal other sources used in the composition of the gospels and Acts.^[10] It seems that creating a religious "history" was quite an industry in the second century and the writers were using anything and everything at hand to do it. All of this makes a good, critical examination of the Pauline texts even more crucial for the understanding of the origins of Christianity as we know it.

Since Paul's letters are arguably the earliest Christian historical documents, we should utilize them conscientiously and effectively. However, using the letters of Paul can be problematical, as the work of Baur, Knox, Lüdemann, Trobisch, Price, Tyson, BeDuhn, Campbell, and others reveal. ^[11] There are still debates over which of the letters are authentic, whether editorial insertions and deletions have been made, and *where* they have been made. Many scholars have rejected several of the letters attributed to Paul as later forgeries, basing their judgments partly on theological and organizational developments that they believe occurred subsequent to Paul's career. Nevertheless, setting aside the theological, Christological, and redactional problems that have invaded the letters to some extent, we can still consider the many of the letters attributed to Paul to be the earliest Christian literature and witness extant. Thus, they are crucial to solving the problems of the historicity of Jesus and early Christian chronology.

[NOTE: Price says on the above: "Given what you just said about them, you need to justify any remaining confidence in the epistles.]"

This study began because I was mainly concerned with a particular problem of chronology. I think that situating Paul accurately within *real* history will go a long way toward helping us understand what he was thinking and doing. However, as the work progressed, it became much more than that, because so many threads were entangled in that problem of chronology that they simply demanded unraveling.

Despite strenuous efforts, scholars have been unable to firmly anchor them to particular times and places using only their own internal evidence. John Knox was the first to attempt making a chronology for Paul using only Paul's letters as sources, but practically all scholars then and since have resorted to using data from Acts and the gospels to anchor their chronology. The result is that they all date Paul's "conversion" from 31 to 34 AD – soon after the alleged crucifixion of Jesus – and Paul's last visit to Jerusalem, upon which he is about to commence in his last letter Romans, 22–25 years later, in the 50s. ^[12]

Although Paul does mention a few things that may be linked to actual historical events or personages, he does so without tying any of these remarks to an *externally* verifiable historical date or personage. In one place only does he mention a historically anchored person, King Aretas IV of Nabataea, the Arab state south and east of Judaea. He says Aretas' governor in Damascus was pursuing him, and that he escaped by being lowered from the city's walls in a basket. It has also been suggested that "The Man of Sin" of 2 Thessalonians – one of the letters whose authenticity is questioned, unfairly in my view – was the emperor Gaius, better known as Caligula (12–41 AD), who planned to erect a statue of himself in the Temple of Jerusalem in the year or so before he was assassinated. If that is the case, then that can give a fairly secure date for the text of 2 Thessalonians of no earlier than around 39/40 AD. ^[13] If authentic, Paul could have been writing this letter as early as the time that the Alexandrian Jewish philosopher Philo was in Rome on his embassy to Emperor Gaius. Tagging 40 AD as the earliest possible time of 2 Thessalonians helps only a little, however, because there are apparently quite a few years of Pauline activity before and after the penning of that epistle; the question is, how many years in either direction? ^[14] And while Campbell anchors the letter to 40 AD, it could have been written later.

Pauline scholar Douglas Campbell has done a thorough job of analyzing the letters for chronological clues, with the interesting result that several letters whose authenticity has been widely questioned and rejected, achieve rehabilitation as authentic, including 2 Thessalonians. ^[15] Using only the letters' internal evidence, Campbell concludes that 10 of the 13 letters included in the New Testament are authentic and places them in this chronological order: 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, Laodiceans (known as Ephesians in our NT), Colossians, Philemon, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians and Romans. (Reading New Testament texts in proper chronological order is an interesting exercise, highly recommended, and gives one a better feeling for the flow and development of ideas.)

Campbell also constructs a relative chronology of all the events Paul mentions about his life, which he anchors using the two references to datable people: King Aretas IV (late 36 AD) and Emperor Gaius (40 AD). The following is Campbell's Pauline timeline:

- Early/mid-34: Paul's apostolic commission, near Damascus
- Early 34—mid-36: Activity in Damascus and Arabia
- Late 36: Escape from Damascus, first visit to Jerusalem to meet the "pillars" of the church, 2.x years after commission [\[16\]](#)
- 37–42: Activity in Syria and Cilicia, missions to Macedonia and Achaia, 1&2 Thess. written
- Ca. 43–49: Missions to Illyricum and Galatia, many sufferings
- Late 49/early 50: Antioch incident, second visit to Jerusalem 13.x years after first visit [\[17\]](#)
- Mid-50: Mission to Asia, imprisonment (possibly in Apamea), Laod./Col./Phlm. written, founding visit to Ephesus
- Spring 51: 1 Cor. written, "super-apostles" visit Corinth, Asian crisis, departure from Ephesus to Macedonia
- Ca. summer 51: Travels through Macedonia, 2 Cor. written, visit to Corinth
- Fall 51—winter 51–52: Enemies arrive at Corinth, Gal. written, imprisonment and capital trial, Phil. written, release from prison
- Spring 52: Rom. written, departure (for Jerusalem)

Campbell's arguments dealing with authenticity and relative chronology are meticulous, acute, and mostly convincing, and they deserve a careful reading. His overall sequence of events is sound, but there is one major weakness: Campbell's use of Josephus as his historical source and yardstick regarding King Aretas IV, which he uses to establish his second chronological hook in 36 AD.

[NOTE: Price adds: "I think a much bigger problem is his retreat to apologetics! The whole thing's circular if he starts by assuming all the letters are authentic. Does he say why Baur (much less Van Manen) is wrong?"]

In *Antiquities*, Josephus tells a story that takes place in the context of 36 AD. It concerns a border dispute between Aretas and Herod Antipas, the ruler of Galilee and Perea, which bordered Nabatea. The reason Josephus supplies for the resulting war is that Antipas had divorced his wife, who happened to be Aretas' daughter, so he could marry someone else. [\[18\]](#) Josephus says that Aretas was ultimately victorious over Antipas. Defeated, Antipas called on emperor Tiberius for help, and Tiberius sent for the Roman governor of Syria, Vitellius, to come to Antipas' aid.

Vitellius had just been on an important mission dealing with a hostile leader, Artabanus of Parthia (in the east, modern Iran). Josephus tells us that Herod Antipas hosted the critical meeting between the Parthians and Rome, and Vitellius was successful in reaching a deal with Artabanus. But, Josephus continues, Herod Antipas upstaged Vitellius by telling the news to the emperor first. So, later, when Tiberius called on Vitellius to aid Antipas, Vitellius held a grudge. Luckily for him, Tiberius died before Vitellius could join the battle. So Vitellius sent his troops to their quarters and took a trip to Jerusalem instead.

Campbell decides that the only time Aretas could have ruled Damascus was during this short interlude in the affairs of Rome versus the Parthians. The border dispute involved the region containing Damascus, so Campbell concludes that Aretas probably took over many cities there, including Damascus. Paul, in his letter, says his escape from Aretas' governor in Damascus happened 2–3 years after his commission, so using Josephus allows Campbell to place Paul's commission in 34 AD. But if we can show that the relevant data from Josephus is unreliable, this will free up the Pauline timeline considerably. If we retain as our only anchor the composition of 2 Thessalonians in 40 AD, we realize that this could have been written at any point in the 13–14 years between Paul's two visits to Jerusalem. The question is, of course, why does this matter?

It matters a great deal because the larger, overarching problem that scholars have is the need to fit the Pauline timeline into

some sort of Jesus timeline, and it is standard that everyone accepts that Jesus was “crucified under Pontius Pilate” – it’s part of the creed, even. Jesus had to have been crucified under Pilate *before* Paul’s “conversion” and the beginning of his ministry. But the conversion can’t be *too late* because of the Aretas problem, which couldn’t have occurred later than around 39 or 40 AD, when Aretas died. Since Paul escaped from Damascus 2–3 years *after* his “divine commission”, the latest date for that commission would have to be at least 2–3 years *before* Aretas’ death – somewhere *before* 36–38 AD – because we have to get Paul out there in the mission field before the writing of 2 Thessalonians in 39/40. If we completely ignore the “Jesus crucified under Pontius Pilate” *as traditionally dated*, and if the only rough anchor we have is 2 Thessalonians, the start of Paul’s career could have been *anywhere between 23 and 38 AD*. [\[19\]](#)

Jesus allegedly started his career in 29 AD (in the 15th year of Tiberius, according to the gospel of Luke). The date of his alleged crucifixion is disputed: anywhere between 29 and 33 AD. So if Paul began his career before or during these years, that would create a serious problem for the accepted “Jesus timeline”. He would have been “converted to Jesus” before Jesus’ death! Even by Campbell’s fairly standard date of Paul’s commission – 34 AD – there’s barely time for Jesus to be cold in his grave (or not) and for any kind of messianic movement to form around him, much less for Paul to be persecuting said movement. It’s not impossible, but if the standard chronology isn’t true, then our ideas about the historical processes taking place in these years may be giving us a very distorted picture of what actually happened. If the crucifixion as such did not happen, or if it happened much earlier, it forces us to rethink this pivotal period of Christian history.

There are two major problems in sorting out the early Christian chronology: the first is the dating of the governor of Damascus’ pursuit of Paul. Relevant to this, but not crucial to argument one way or the other, is the historicity of the Aretas–Antipas engagement. Whether or not that little war happened is actually irrelevant, because, as I’ll show, *we cannot firmly fix the date based on Josephus or any other text*: Paul’s basket case could have happened at any time between 9 BC and 40 AD, the period of the rule of Aretas. That realization unpegs Paul from a definite time window, but that is all.

The second problem is more severe: the timing of the governorship of Pontius Pilate, which is used to date Jesus. I will argue that this was much earlier than tradition holds and that the tradition of the later time period being allotted to Pilate was created and texts were manipulated to support it. Placing Pilate earlier in time opens up the possibility that Paul’s timeline – including his adventure in Damascus – could have happened earlier as well. An earlier date for Pilate – and thus a Jesus character too – means there is time for the development of a following of some sort, time for Paul to persecute that following, and time for Paul to have his commission experience, evangelize widely, write 2 Thessalonians during the reign of Caligula, and more. Further, I will suggest and argue a solution to the Suetonius passage about rioting Jews in Rome and how that may be the earliest, authentic historical reference to the activities of Paul.

Solving these problem by re-dating the governorship of Pontius Pilate has multiple and far-reaching ramifications for all of early Christian “history”. It also frees Paul from the entanglements of the gospels’ “Jesus of Nazareth”, whom Paul had clearly never heard of, and allows us to explore the possibilities of whom Paul actually was talking about and why. [\[20\]](#)

This book has three main sections. In the first, I examine the Aretas problem with emphasis on the fact that we cannot rely on Josephus for the historicity of this event. Making this clear requires a discussion of the Artabanus problem which ran in the background of the tale told by Josephus. Then, in the second part, I take up the issue of Pilate and a chronology for his presence in Judea. This will require a review of some significant events beginning with the death of Herod the Great, moving forward to the alleged time of Pilate. Finally, in part three, I return to Paul and explore his life and ideas and then tie it all together.

Josephus and the Aretas–Antipas Problem

Josephus

Titus Flavius Josephus, circa 37–100 AD, was a Jewish/Roman historian whose most well-known work is *The Wars of the Jews*, published in the late 70s AD. He was a politically savvy apologist for the Jews and the Roman Imperial Dynasty of the Flavians, writing Imperial propaganda after the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

One of Josephus' main tasks was to create a spin-doctored history of the Jewish rebellion against Rome to compete with what was being told by his political rival Justus of Tiberias, of whom we know next to nothing save that *his version of events places Josephus smack in the middle of all the ills of Galilee*. Considering the questionable nature of almost every piece of biographical data Josephus reveals, Justus was probably on the right track. Josephus glosses over both the atrocities committed by the Romans, and the seditious Jewish rebellion, of which he was a part until his ultimate betrayal against his rebel compatriots and his defection to the Romans.

The necessity of a revisionist account of the Jewish War with Rome should be apparent. Roman political philosophy and policy always attempted to seek equilibrium and peaceful coexistence as far as possible. The most important thing to the Romans was tax money. Dead people cannot pay taxes. Rebels are even worse, because they are alive and not paying their taxes. Palestine was to Rome a small part of a larger area of the world that was a source of wealth to the elite. A troublesome little province was the last thing they wanted. What they needed was a convincing narrative to feed the Diaspora Jews to keep them quiet about Rome having to practically wipe out their people due to a pesky rebellion. This narrative would have to be sufficiently Judaized to be acceptable, and all explanations would need to be couched in language that appealed to the Diaspora. That would include many references to the Law, to God, and blaming everything on innovators and rebels – the “lone gunmen” of the time. Josephus consistently presents the rebellion as the work of a bunch of extremists, not as a rebellion by practically the whole “Jewish nation”.

[NOTE: Price adds: “So Josephus was doing the same thing Brandon said Mark was doing! “Nothing to worry about from us Jews/Christians!””]

The Flavians needed Josephus because he was sufficiently morally flexible to betray his colleagues and even his entire people, he was well educated, and he knew who was who in Palestine. They probably cared little for his self-promoting propaganda, found in copious digressions throughout everything he penned. At best it was in and of itself amusing to the Roman elite, who perhaps saw Josephus as both useful and entertaining, with his thrilling tales of derring-do in the rough and barbaric life of a frontier people like the Jews of Palestine. And Josephus clearly understood that his comfortable life depended on his maintaining his story to the bitter end.

On the *Life of Josephus*' influences, Josephus scholar Steve Mason writes: “Josephus offers an autobiography that has many parallels with the social prejudices of Cicero, the military exploits and virtues of [Julius] Caesar, and the stratagems of his Roman contemporary Frontinus.”^[21] Coming after his thoroughly Roman-inspired treatise on the Jewish constitution, *Antiquities*, Josephus turns to a discussion of his own character in his *Life*, on the model of the ideal aristocratic public figure: a patron genuinely concerned for his clients' welfare, constantly hounded by jealous, power-hungry enemies. It says something about the size of his ego that he offers his own life “as the final exhibit in his presentation of the Judean constitution.”^[22] As Mason puts it:

Almost every single paragraph in the *Life* ¼ confirms with no hint of subtlety either his virtues or his opponents' vices. This is clearest in such summary statements as these: “**79** I used to take them along in the trial of cases, and I used to render verdicts in accord with their opinion, being determined not to pervert justice through haste, and to remain pure of any material profit in these matters. **80** I was now living my thirtieth year or so. At that age, even if one puts aside illicit yearnings, especially in a position of great authority it is hard to escape the accusations that come from envy. But I preserved every woman unmolested, and disdained all gifts as unnecessary; I did not even accept the tithes, which were due to me as a priest, from those who brought them.” Since these moral lessons are clear,

whereas the history is thoroughly obfuscated, we should conclude that Josephus' intention has little to do with history and everything to do with his character. [\[23\]](#)

He ends his *Life* with these words: "And this is the account of the actions of my whole life; and let others judge of my character by them as they please $\frac{1}{4}$ " [\[24\]](#) We have, and it's not very flattering.

As for Josephus' reliability as a historian, like many ancient writers, he took liberties:

$\frac{1}{4}$ the *Life* is filled with apparently gratuitous contradictions of the *War*. It seems rather that Josephus expects the same trusting audience that he had for the *Antiquities*, who are prepared to accept what he says without careful investigation. [\[25\]](#)

After opening his *Life* by claiming to have royal and priestly blood, like a good Jewish/Roman aristocrat, he tells his readers they can verify it for themselves in the priestly registers. He neglects to mention that these documents were long-since destroyed when the Temple was burnt to the ground over two decades earlier. Mason comments: "One might easily infer that he does not expect readers with much knowledge of things Judean, who could be critical of his logical leaps." [\[26\]](#)

Not only is he inconsistent and self-contradictory when it comes to details like names, dates, numbers, places, and sequences of events, but he also plays fast and loose with his "historical characters". Commenting on the instances where Josephus counters charges from his enemies that he was a tyrant, [\[27\]](#) Mason argues that "knowing these to be stock charges against political figures, *he crafts them* for his opponents, just as he creates plausible speeches even for opponents in the *War*, to create a plausible narrative." [\[28\]](#) Or was he simply protesting too much, as when he insists that he didn't "betray his country"? [\[29\]](#) Maybe it was both.

Other scholars are more blunt with their criticism. Robert Eisler calls him "the conceited historian", a "vain braggart", a "swindler", a liar, a cheat and a war profiteer; [\[30\]](#) Josephus was "well acquainted with the great art of flattering those who might be useful to him", shameless (he took part in "questioning" Jewish captives), "most anxious to whitewash himself", "insincere and unreliable", "a client and parasite of the Emperor". [\[31\]](#)

The general tone of Josephus' autobiography is that of a man incapable of performing his duties to any consistent degree while demonstrating his total inability to accept responsibility for his failures. [\[32\]](#) He doesn't even compare to the great men of history, say Alexander or Caesar. He commanded no loyalty among his men or subjects; they were constantly trying to kill him, to betray him, or to get him removed from office. All his misfortunes are due to the calumnies and seditious of agitators and innovators who were just too stupid or too evil to see what a fantastically wonderful leader he really was; which is to say he was not, as none among his subjects ever seems to have perceived this greatness he constantly attempted to project. The duping delight [\[33\]](#) he exhibits when recounting the clever way he persuaded his companions to kill themselves so that he could escape is utterly repellent.

One of the most obvious lies of Josephus is that of the precocious child and his three years of study with the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes.

Moreover, when I was a child, and about fourteen years of age, I was commended by all for the love I had to learning; on which account the high priests and principal men of the city came then frequently to me together, in order to know my opinion about the accurate understanding of points of the law; and when I was about sixteen years old, I had a mind to make trial of the several sects that were among us. These sects are three:—The first is that of the Pharisees, the second that of the Sadducees, and the third that of the Essenes, as we have frequently told you; for I thought that by this means I might, choose the best, if I were once acquainted with them all; so I contented myself with hard fare, and underwent great difficulties and went through them all.

Nor did I content myself with these trials only; but when I was informed that one, whose name was Bannus, [\[34\]](#) lived in the desert, and used no other clothing than grew upon trees, and had no other food than what grew of its own accord, and bathed himself in cold water frequently, both by night and by day, in order to preserve his chastity, I imitated him in those things and continued with him three years. [\[35\]](#)

If we are to trust Josephus' account of his childhood, he was something akin to a religious Doogie Hauser, M.D. While that makes good fare for television, and fiction in general, it flies in the face of human psychology. It wouldn't matter how smart he was; no self-respecting High Priest would kowtow to a 14-year-old kid. Such things are common tropes in fiction, and a bit of embellishment is to be expected, but "the high priests and principal men of the city" visiting a teenager *frequently* is simply intellectually insulting.

According to the Alexandrian Jewish writer Philo (ca. 25 BC–50 AD), the Essene sect was supposed to be comprised of "men indeed already inclining towards old age." [\[36\]](#) Even if they were interested in accepting a very young man (unlikely), in order to participate in any meaningful way a person would have to join the community, thus placing all of their wealth into the common purse. [\[37\]](#) According to Josephus himself in *Wars*, [\[38\]](#) they required three full years of preparation before entry into the school. It is unlikely that Josephus had any real acquaintance with them or their customs, as is attested by his many ambiguous descriptions of them. What he does say seems borrowed whole cloth from either Philo's account or common knowledge of the time.

To whatever degree he investigated the Pharisees or Sadducees, it can't have been thorough, as he claims to have spent all of his three years with Bannus, whom he doesn't properly place as belonging to any of the three groups. I suppose this would be equivalent to having a job applicant claim to have pursued a certain degree at university and simultaneously admitting he spent the same span of time as a roadie for the Grateful Dead. Even if we admit to a possible translation error – perhaps he didn't spend those 3 years with "him" but with "them" – Josephus keeps it all fairly ambiguous and non-committal, the mark of any good con man.

Josephus of course is making use of common social and heroic tropes, in line with Roman expectations of a highbrow aristocrat. That would be fine, if it was fiction. We don't mind if the *Odyssey* presents tropes – that's to be expected. But when a historian fills his autobiography with them, we have to wonder where the truth lies.

At 26 years of age, Josephus allegedly traveled to Rome, to secure the release of some priests imprisoned by the procurator of Judea, Felix:

Accordingly I came to Rome, though it were through a great number of hazards, by sea; for, as our ship was drowned in the Adriatic Sea, we that were in it, being about six hundred in number swam for our lives all the night; when, upon the first appearance of the day, and upon our sight of a ship of Cyrene, I and some others, eighty in all, by God's providence, prevented the rest, and were taken up into the other ship: and when I had thus escaped, and was come to Dicearchia, which the Italians call Puteoli, I became acquainted with Aliturus, an actor of plays, and much beloved by Nero, but a Jew by birth; and through his interest became known to Poppea, Caesar's wife; and took care, as soon as possible, to entreat her to procure that the priests might be set at liberty; and when, besides this favor, I had obtained many presents from Poppea, I returned home again. [\[39\]](#)

Quelle surprise – a shipwreck! Josephus doesn't disappoint. The only heroic trope he doesn't seem to make use of is the "abduction by pirates", but perhaps that one had gone out of style by his day. Don't forget Caesar's wife Poppea and her "many presents." I'll leave off before the discussion gets too prurient, but let us add kissing and telling to his list of sins.

Later in his *Life*, Josephus fights a battle against the royal troops:

And I had performed great things that day, if a certain fate had not been my hindrance; for the horse on which I rode, and upon whose back I fought, fell into a quagmire, and threw me on the ground; and I was bruised on my wrist, and carried into a village named Cepharnome, or Capernaum. When my soldiers heard of this, they were afraid I had been worse hurt than I was; and so they did not go on with their pursuit any further, but returned in very great concern for me. I therefore sent for the physicians, and while I was under their hands, I continued feverish that day; and as the physicians directed, I was that night removed to Taricheae. [\[40\]](#)

What a brave soldier! He even makes a point of saying that the physician directed him to a town 10 kilometers from the battle. Oh, he had a doctor's note, did he? Mason's translation says that Josephus "suffered a fracture of the bones in the flat part of [his] hand". Even then, the story reads more like an excuse for deserting the battlefield. He wouldn't have been the first aristocratic "military leader" to save his own skin by abandoning his troops. The fact that his troops "did not go on with their pursuit any further" doesn't really suggest concern for Josephus, but rather a disinclination to be doing what he ordered them to do. Right there we see that Josephus was definitely a rebel leader, one of those brigands, innovators, tyrants that he so detests when talking about the revolt against Rome.

Mason sums Josephus up:

When ¼ Josephus portrays himself as a precocious intellect and youthful devotee of philosophy, a priest serving in the temple, a wise statesman and governor, a judge, a champion swimmer and wrestler, an expert builder, a brave and resourceful general, and finally an industrious writer of history and autobiography, he is only embodying the aristocrat's role in the world. [\[41\]](#)

But he fails at every turn. In trying to present himself as part of the aristocratic crowd, he uses the only plausible events from his life that he can, but it falls flat. His claimed ancestry is dubious at best. And his military career as a rebel "general"? Eisler sums that up nicely:

... he himself ... did not have the faintest notion of the elements of strategy, in spite of his assertions to the contrary. He even has to admit that he did not manage to arm his troops adequately and that he did not have the time to drill his men, important facts which explain the easy victory of the Roman troops, inferior in numbers though they were to the army of patriots. The final paragraph [of *Wars* 2.20.8 (584)] is clearly intended to parry the accusation that *he merely plundered the country with this armed rabble*. [\[42\]](#)

Josephus is a consummate liar and a con man. He is a shameless self-promoter, but is so deluded that he routinely indicts himself for sadism, cowardice, and incompetence. He is quite possibly the most unsuccessful administrator to have ever held political office. He is an indiscreet braggart, and ultimately he is a traitor to his people and their government. Not only is he a traitor; he manages to brag about the favors and wealth given to him by the Roman Emperors as a reward for going "Benedict Arnold" and defecting to the enemy. Such an immoral and flippant coward fast approaches Cicero-like proportions of duplicity and pusillanimity (but that's a subject for another time!).

Can we trust a man who plays so fast and loose with history? Shall we hang any critical point of history on someone who tells such puerile and pointless lies? No, we can't. Every claim he makes should be checked, when possible, with the accounts of other, more reliable historians, and with the archaeological record. When those aren't available, we should be skeptical to the maximum extent allowed by historiography!

Aretas

King Aretas IV of Nabataea was a historical person; there are coins and inscriptions proving his existence. He is the best-documented Nabataean ruler; 80% of surviving Nabataean coins were minted during his reign, which lasted from roughly 9 BC to 40 AD. The title that appears for this whole half a century is "Lover of His People". This was a bold choice: most client kings of Rome used titles such as "Lover of Caesar" or "Lover of Rome". Nabataean art, architecture, pottery and script all developed during his reign. His merchants were active across the Empire, and his administration and military were thoroughly

Hellenized and Romanized. ^[43] He wasn't a lightweight.

While he didn't merit a personal mention of his name by the Roman historian Tacitus, Tacitus did make a reference to "the Arabs" that most likely included Aretas, as well as to a feast given by the king of the Arabs/Nabataeans, who was certainly Aretas. The main literary source for Aretas' life is Josephus, who tells us that he was the most powerful neighbor of Judea. Things were apparently loose enough that he could take part in political affairs by virtue of the fact that there was much intermarriage between his house and the Herodian house ruling Judea.

Josephus relates three main events involving Aretas: how he became king, ^[44] his involvement in the Roman governor Varus' war against the Jews after Herod the Great's death, ^[45] and his war against Antipas. ^[46] He tells us that Aretas was not on particularly good terms with Rome and it was only with great hesitation that Augustus recognized him as king and didn't send the army to depose him. But that "attitude" could be Josephus' spin. What Josephus apparently couldn't deny was that Aretas was acknowledged by Augustus and took part in the expedition of Varus *against the Jews* around 4 BC, putting his considerable army at the disposal of the Roman general. In Roman terms, that would definitely win friends and influence people. Like Herod the Great, the archaeology suggests Aretas was a successful and prosperous client king of Rome.

The only other written source for Aretas is the reference by Paul in 2 Corinthians 11:32–3:

In Damascus, the governor [ethnarch] under King Aretas guarded the city of Damascus in order to seize me, but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands.

Douglas Campbell avers that this could only have taken place during a brief window when Aretas *might* have been ruler of Damascus as a result of a little war between him and Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee and Perea (which shared a border with Nabataea). Campbell summarizes his argument:

1. We know that at some point Aretas IV controlled Damascus (a city bordering, if not in, the region of the Decapolis) through a governor (called an "ethnarch").
2. This is also quite consistent with Nabataean political aims.
3. This is unattested, however, and largely impossible during the reign of Philip over the Decapolis, that is, up to 34 C.E.
4. This is also unattested, and highly unlikely, during the reign of Agrippa, which extended from 37 C.E. past the death of Aretas himself.
5. We know, moreover, that in late 36 C.E. Aretas launched a successful military strike against Antipas, ruler of Galilee
6. This strike seems to have involved the Decapolis, as a telltale comment by Josephus concerning Gamala suggests; a region currently only under indirect Roman control.
7. This was a particularly well-calculated strike on Aretas's part because the Syrian governor was involved at the time in securing the eastern frontier against the Parthian threat by stabilizing its network of client kingdoms, pursuing this aim in a highly conciliatory fashion, and he was also bitterly aggrieved with Antipas. Hence, far from exciting Roman hostility, this action probably anticipated meeting with Vitellius's approval, and indeed seems initially to have done so.
8. It is therefore most likely that Aretas's control over Damascus coincided with his successful defeat of Antipas and probable annexation of the Decapolis region as a whole. ^[47]

I don't have any issue with points 1 and 2, but the rest are highly questionable since reliance is placed on Josephus for his certitude. To show why, we need to understand more about Damascus before and after Paul's time, the politics of the time, and what we really know and don't know based on our sources.

Who Ruled Damascus?

We know that Aretas died in 39 or 40 AD, based on coins and inscriptions from the time. He came into power around 9 BC. We also know that a previous king of Nabataea, Aretas III, had ruled Damascus from 84–72 BC (coins attest to his control for these years), at which point Armenia took it over, occupying the city for approximately 2 years, after which it “maintained a precarious independent presence”^[48] until the Roman general Pompey occupied the city in 64/63 BC.

Coins minted in Damascus depict the Roman emperors Augustus, Tiberius (up to 34 AD), and Nero (starting in 62/63 AD), implying Roman influence of some sort, but we don’t know who was directly ruling the city during those times. The period with no numismatic evidence (34–63 AD) doesn’t necessarily imply anything significant. It could indicate a change in rule or simply that no new coins were minted there in those years.

Explicit mention of rule over Damascus doesn’t enter the historical record again until 106 AD, when it came under Roman control as a city of the province of Syria, *suggesting that it was not under direct Roman rule previously*. Interestingly, Rome *took over Nabataea at the same time*, which became the Roman province of Arabia.

There *are* references to the region south of Damascus: the Decapolis, located between Syria in the north and Nabataea to the south. To the east was impassable desert, so travel and trade were focused along the “King’s Highway”, running north from Nabataea, through the Decapolis, to Damascus. The Decapolis cities were a group of semi-autonomous city-states nominally under Roman protection since Pompey’s reorganization of Syria, and in some way administered by the Syrian governor. Like Damascus, it is not so clear who directly controlled them at various times.

Pliny and Ptolemy both include Damascus as one of the Decapolis cities.^[49] However, Pliny notes that when he was writing in the 70s AD there was confusion as to which cities exactly made up the “Ten Cities” – different writers gave different lists.

Eusebius, a later church writer, doesn’t include Damascus in his list. Nor does Josephus himself.^[50] So it’s hard to even know Damascus’ status in the Decapolis with any certainty.

Josephus makes several references to Damascus in *Wars*,^[51] in the last of which Herod the Great is described as bestowing benefits on *foreign* cities, that is, not within his kingdom:

And when he had built so much, he showed the greatness of his soul to no small number of foreign cities. He built palaces for exercise at Tripoli, and Damascus, and Ptolemais; he built a wall about Byblus, as also large rooms, and cloisters, and temples, and market-places at Berytus and Tyre, with theatres at Sidon and Damascus. He also built aqueducts for those Laodiceans who lived by the sea-side; and for those of Ascalon he built baths and costly fountains, as also cloisters round a court, that were admirable both for their workmanship and largeness. Moreover, he dedicated groves and meadows to some people; nay, not a few cities there were who had lands of his donation, as if they were parts of his own kingdom.^[52]

Further, according to Josephus, two cities of the Decapolis, Gadara and Hippos, were annexed to Herod the Great’s territory by Augustus,^[53] then handed over to Syria after Herod’s death in 4 BC.^[54] At the same time, the region between Damascus and the rest of the Decapolis cities was given to Herod’s son, Philip, which he ruled until his death in 33/34 AD. These regions – Trachonitis, Batanea, Auranitis, and Gaulanitis – had been gifted originally to Herod by Augustus in about 23 BC.^[55] They passed on to Agrippa I in 37 AD, after the death of Tiberius.^[56]

There are two items of interest to note about this shuffling around of territories. First, indeed two cities of the Decapolis were apparently given to Syria, but the region separating them from their alleged “brother” Damascus was given to Philip, then Agrippa I. So they were ruled at a distance, with territories separating them from their ruling province (kind of like how the United States includes Alaska, which borders Canada, but not any of the contiguous states). If Damascus was under the rule of Nabataea, a similar situation would apply: the rule of a city separated from one’s contiguous territory; but Campbell uses this

geographical separation as a reason *against* the idea that Nabataea could have ruled Damascus. But as Campbell himself observes, “the imperial allocation of territory was not always that convenient or even rational”,^[57] and this is a case in point. Even Gaza, far to the southwest, was apparently put under Syrian control with regions between under the rule of various other persons at different times.

So when Campbell says in points 3 and 4 that Nabataean control of Damascus was impossible before 34 AD (when Philip ruled the Decapolis region) and after 37 AD (when Agrippa I ruled it), he doesn’t have any real evidence, nor is the line of force of the available evidence in his favor. Assuming Aretas did control Damascus in 36–37 AD, Campbell concedes that “[Emperor] Gaius might conceivably have left Aretas in possession of Damascus alone [when Agrippa I acquired the Decapolis region], but we have no evidence for this.”^[58] We have no evidence for Campbell’s suggestion either, just a *possible* window of opportunity provided by a dubious story from Josephus that contains no explicit mention of Damascus. It could very well be that Aretas controlled Damascus even while other cities of the Decapolis were ruled by others, and *the evidence appears to point in that direction*.

But let’s assume Campbell is correct that Damascus wasn’t ruled by Aretas before Philip’s death in 33/34 and after 37 AD, when Agrippa I was given control of the territories by Emperor Gaius. The next governor of Syria, L. Vitellius, didn’t arrive until 35 AD, and the previous governor died in 33 AD.^[59] Josephus tells us that the Decapolis region was governed in trust by Syria during this time. As Campbell notes, “It is therefore quite plausible that the actual administration of the area was undertaken locally by trusted client kings”.^[60] Could Damascus have been a part of this arrangement? If Aretas was *not* ruler of Damascus before or after, could *this* provide a possible window of temporary rule for Aretas, i.e. 33–35 AD?

Campbell observes, “Aretas IV is never directly attested to elsewhere as being in charge of Damascus”. Similarly, “it is as difficult to find a period when the region around Damascus was controlled by the Nabataean king as it is to find one when he controlled the actual city”.^[61] This is true, but it is also true that there doesn’t seem to be any direct, explicit reference to anyone *else* ruling Damascus for the period in question, either.

Given the large Nabataean demographics of the Decapolis region (including Damascus), Damascus previously having been ruled by Nabataea, and Damascus’ importance and attractiveness to Nabataea in terms of trade, it might make sense to posit some strong influence or control over the city. But what was the exact nature of this control?

What Is an Ethnarch

Josephus uses the word some 22 times to refer to a Jewish official. So do the books of Maccabees (3 times), and Nicolaus of Damascus, once (fragment 136: “He gave Archelaus the title of ethnarch, and promised that if he proved himself worthy, he would soon make him king. He appointed the other brothers, Philippus and Antipas, to be tetrarchs.”) Aside from these, the word is only used 7 other times in pre-2nd-century sources. And the exact form or function of the title is anything but clear.

So, for example, we have Strabo: “The Romans, as far as they were able, corrected, as I have said, many abuses, and established an orderly government, by appointing vice-governors, nomarchs, and ethnarchs, whose business it was to superintend affairs of minor importance.”^[62]

According to Josephus, Strabo called the leader of the Jewish community in Alexandria “ethnarch”,^[63] but Philo, an Alexandrian himself, called him “genarch”.^[64] Elsewhere, Philo (and others) refers to an ethnarch in generic terms as *simply the founder or leader of a tribe or nation*.^[65] That’s it. Some have suggested the ethnarch mentioned by Paul was only the leader of the Nabataean community in Damascus, a “trade consul” of sorts, similar to the Jewish ethnarch in Alexandria.

(Nabataea had trade colonies in other Decapolis cities, e.g. Gerasa, and Damascus probably had a Nabataean quarter.)^[66] Campbell rejects this idea because the degree of influence and power of the ethnarch mentioned by Paul implies total control over the security apparatus of the city, not merely control over one section of the city. But can we really make that assumption?

As Campbell says elsewhere in his paper, “one cannot rule out the possibility of large bribes”.^[67] We simply don’t know enough about the local contingencies to reconstruct what happened with any degree of certainty. Who’s to say that, by saying “Ethnarch of Damascus under Aretas”, Paul wasn’t saying something of the equivalent of what could be said about certain leaders today, e.g. a reference to Ukraine’s Poroshenko as “President of Ukraine under Obama”, thus implying a known but officially unacknowledged power relationship? Could Aretas have “bought” the ethnarch of Damascus? Or could a local chieftain of the Nabataean community have “bought” the higher-ups in order to sniff out Paul for whatever reason?

Altogether, these uncertainties – the social and political status of Damascus, the exact function or role of an “ethnarch”, the nature of relations between Syria and Nabataea, the status of the Decapolis – don’t help Campbell’s theory. Even *if* the war between Aretas and Antipas took place, there is still no evidence that a takeover of Damascus took place. At the most it provides a plausible window of opportunity, but only *if* it happened, and only if Aretas wasn’t *already* controlling the city. Using the same evidence Campbell uses from Josephus, one could simply argue that Aretas already controlled Damascus and waged a war with Antipas to acquire more of the Decapolis cities. But did that war even happen?

Aretas, Antipas and John the Baptist

According to the Gospel of Matthew (14:3–5) and the Gospel of Luke (3:18–20), John the Baptist opposed the proposed marriage of Herod Antipas and Herodias, which resulted in John’s execution. Josephus says that John the Baptist was executed because he was acquiring too much political clout among the masses and then says that it was because of the execution of John that God brought punishment on Antipas by making him lose the war between him and Aretas, which apparently began over a territorial dispute.

In Josephus, the marriage between Antipas and Herodias occurred just prior to the 36/37 AD war between Aretas and Antipas. This creates a very serious problem for the New Testament. For John to oppose the marriage, he would have to be alive.^[68] But the NT also claims that John the Baptist was executed at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. Both claims cannot be correct. If Josephus is right, Jesus’ ministry would then have to be dated later than 36/37, creating an impossible chronological conflict. How could Jesus begin his ministry that late, be executed even later, and then have Paul in a Damascus ruled by Aretas when Aretas died in 40 AD? Plus, how to have a somewhat developed Jerusalem church for Paul to be persecuting? Thus, again, we see why we simply cannot use the gospels or Acts in any historical or chronological way.

The story in Josephus informs us that the daughter of Aretas was married to Herod Antipas, one of the heirs of Herod the Great. At some point, she discovered that Antipas was planning on divorcing her in order to marry his brother’s wife, Herodias. Herodias was (at the time of this plan) married to Herod II, the son of Herod the Great and Mariamne II. There are a few problems with the story, which follows this summary paragraph:

About this time it was that Philip, Herod's brother, departed this life, in the twentieth year of the reign of Tiberius [i.e. late 33 to 34 AD], after he had been tetrarch of Trachonitis and Gaulanitis, and of the nation of the Bataneans also, **thirty-seven years** [i.e. since 4/3 BC]. He had showed himself a person of moderation and quietness in the conduct of his life and government; he constantly lived in that country which was subject to him; ¼ He died at Julias; and when he was carried to that monument which he had already erected for himself beforehand, he was buried with great pomp. *His principality Tiberius took*, [for he left no sons behind him,] *and added it to the province of Syria*, but gave order that the tributes which arose from it should be collected, and laid up in his tetrarchy.^[69]

This Philip was Philip the Tetrarch, the son of Herod the Great and Cleopatra of Jerusalem, who was one of his several wives. Philip was a half-brother of Herod Antipas and Herod Archelaus (whose mother was Herod's previous wife, Malthace), and of Herod II (mother: Mariamne). Philip was married to his niece, Salome, the daughter of Herodias and Herod II. This Salome appears in the NT in connection with the execution of John the Baptist, and both Mark and Matthew wrote that "Philip" was her father.

Right away we have a problem. Josephus says that Herodias was married to Herod II (son of Herod and Mariamne). Their daughter, Salome, married Philip. But the gospel of Mark says that Herodias, whose dancing daughter (unnamed but widely assumed to be Salome – some Greek manuscripts name her as Herodias) demands the beheading of John the Baptist, was married to "Philip". This has led some NT scholars to propose that Herod II was actually also called Philip. Nikos Kokkinos, in his book *The Herodian Dynasty*, argues that Josephus got it wrong: that Herodias was married to Philip, not Herod II, and that Antipas pursued the marriage with Herodias after Philip's death in 33/34 AD in order to acquire his territories.

If Kokkinos is correct in taking the value of the gospels over Josephus here, a shaky proposition at best, Philip, the husband that Herodias wanted to divorce, would have died in 33/34 AD as described above, before the proposed marriage with Antipas, which would have eliminated the ultimate *need* for her to divorce him. However, in the next chapter of *Antiquities*, Josephus explicitly mentions that Herodias "divorced herself from her husband while he was alive". [\[70\]](#) It is just as possible, if not more probable, that the gospels are wrong and perhaps even based on a misreading of Josephus. As Steve Mason puts it, "the standard hypothesis that Mark was in error is easy to accept, both because of numerous errors in Mark and because Matthew and Luke, which use Mark and frequently correct it, either hedge or omit the connection between Herodias and Philip (some MSS of Matt 14:3; Luke 3:20)." [\[71\]](#)

So the alleged problems that arose between Aretas and Herod Antipas must have occurred around this time (i.e. between Philip's death in 33/34 AD and Aretas' in 40 AD). According to Campbell, the resulting mini-war between them would have resulted in Aretas' *temporary* rule over Damascus. That means that Campbell has to constrain his dating of Paul's story about being let down in a basket to escape the governor of King Aretas to that period, which makes it very close to the alleged time of the crucifixion. Placing Paul's flight from Damascus in late 36 AD would mean that Paul's call to be an apostle happened somewhere between late 33 AD and mid 34 AD. The crucifixion allegedly occurred somewhere in 29–33 AD, leaving a period of anywhere from *less than a year* to perhaps five years for these events (visions of the risen Jesus, growth of the Jerusalem church, Paul's persecution of said church, etc.). Five years might be doable, but less than a year is way too tight. Also, as we've seen above, for all we know, Aretas could have been in control of Damascus for the entire period.

Now, let's look at the story that *follows* on from the above passage about the modest, fair and quiet Philip, brother of Antipas:

About this time [\[72\]](#) Aretas (the king of Arabia Petrea) and Herod [Antipas] had a quarrel on the account following: Herod the tetrarch had married the daughter of Aretas, and had lived with her a great while; but when he was once at Rome, he lodged with Herod [II], who was his brother indeed, but not by the same mother; for this Herod was the son of the high priest Simon's daughter.

However, he fell in love with Herodias, this last Herod's wife, who was the daughter of Aristobulus their brother, and the sister of Agrippa the Great. [\[73\]](#) This man ventured to talk to her about a marriage between them; which address when she admitted, an agreement was made for her to change her habitation, and come to him as soon as he should return from Rome; one article of this marriage also was this, that **he should divorce** Aretas's daughter.

So Antipas, when he had made this agreement, sailed to Rome; but when he had done there the business he went about, and was returned again, his wife having discovered the agreement he had made with Herodias, and having learned it before he had notice of her knowledge of the whole design, she desired him to send her to Machaerus, which is a place in the borders of the dominions of Aretas and Herod, [\[74\]](#) without informing him of any of her intentions.

Accordingly Herod sent her thither, as thinking his wife had not perceived anything; now she had sent a good while before to **Machaerus, which was subject to her father** and so all things necessary for her journey were made ready for her by the general of Aretas's army; and by that means she soon came into Arabia, under the conduct of the several generals, who carried her from one to another successively; and she soon came to her father, and told him of Herod's intentions. [\[75\]](#)

Note that Josephus says that Machaerus was "subject to her father", i.e. Aretas. Elsewhere, he says that the fortress was passed to Herod Antipas on the death of Herod the Great (supposed to have been in 4 BC), and then passed to Agrippa I after Antipas' deposition and banishment in 39 AD, until 44 AD, at which point it came under Roman control. Josephus' other references to it include:

- Wars 1.8.2 (162): "*Machaerus, that lay upon the mountains of Arabia.*"
- 1.16.6 (317), where, apparently, Machaerus is the name of one of the generals of the Romans under Ventidius Bassus, a protégé of Julius Caesar who later followed Antony. [\[76\]](#)
- 3.3.3 (46–7): "*Now the length of Perea is from Machaerus to Pella, and its breadth from Philadelphia to Jordan; its northern parts are bounded by Pella, as we have already said, as well as its Western with Jordan; the land of Moab is its southern border, and its eastern limits reach to Arabia, and Silbonitis, and besides to Philadelphene and Gerasa.*" This places Machaerus within the southern borders of Perea (which border Aretas' Nabataea to the south and east of those borders.)
- 7.6.2 (172), where it is noted that "*it lay so near to Arabia*".

The point is, it is unlikely that Machaerus was subject to Aretas unless he had laid claim to it suddenly. A border dispute in a different region, at the very northern tip of the Decapolis, was the true cause of the alleged set-to, as may be discerned in the next sentence:

So Aretas made this the first occasion of his enmity between him and Herod, who had also **some quarrel with him about their limits at the country of Gamalitis**. So they raised armies on both sides, and prepared for war, and sent their generals to fight instead of themselves; and when they had joined battle, all Herod's army was destroyed by the treachery of some fugitives, who, though they were of the tetrarchy of Philip, joined with Aretas's army. So Herod wrote about these affairs to Tiberius, who being very angry at the attempt made by Aretas, *wrote to Vitellius* to make war upon him, and either to take him alive, and bring him to him in bonds, or to kill him, and *send him his head*. This was the charge that Tiberius gave to the president of Syria. [\[77\]](#)

This Vitellius, "president of Syria" during the reign of Tiberius, is rather problematic, as we will discover further on, so keep him in mind. It is curious that the penultimate sentence of the above passage contains "*send him his head*", considering all the ink (and paint) that has been spilled over the head of John the Baptist, who *immediately enters*, stage left:

Now some of the Jews thought that the destruction of Herod's army came from God, and that very justly, as a punishment of what he did against John, that was called the Baptist: for Herod slew him, who was a good man, and commanded the Jews to exercise virtue, both as to righteousness towards one another, and piety towards God, and so to come to baptism; for that the washing [with water] would be acceptable to him, if they made use of it, not in order to the putting away [or the remission] of some sins [only], but for the purification of the body; supposing still that the soul was thoroughly purified beforehand by righteousness.

Now when [many] others came in crowds about him, for they were very greatly moved [or pleased] by hearing his words, Herod, who feared lest the great influence John had over the people might put it into his power and inclination to raise a rebellion (for they seemed ready to do anything he should advise), thought it best, by putting him to death, to prevent any mischief he might cause, and not bring himself into difficulties, by sparing a man who might make him repent of it when it would be too late. *Accordingly he was sent a prisoner, out of Herod's suspicious temper, to Machaerus*, the castle I before mentioned, and was there put to death. Now the Jews had an opinion that the destruction of this army was sent as a punishment upon Herod, and a mark of God's displeasure to him. [\[78\]](#)

Very odd. First we have the daughter of Aretas fleeing to the fortress of Machaerus, which was allegedly under the control of

her father, then we have a flashback to John the Baptist being sent there for execution because the fortress belongs to Antipas. We have a demand to “send him his head” from Tiberius, followed immediately by the appearance of John the Baptist. John gets executed, but it isn’t said how. This is a very funny business and one can almost see the pieces of the gospels being picked up and pasted together from Josephus. Keep in mind that we are probably in the year 35/36 AD, which is impossible for the Jesus of Nazareth timeline.

Lucius Vitellius and John the Baptist

Most of the information that is regularly repeated about Vitellius, mentioned above, actually comes from Josephus and therefore, in my opinion, must be scrutinized carefully. According to Tacitus, there was a Lucius Vitellius, consul in the years 34, 43, and 47 AD, who was the father of the Vitellius who became emperor, briefly, in 69 AD.

Both Tacitus (*Ann.* 6.28) and Dio Cassius (58.24.1) confirm that, in the 20th year of Tiberius, 34 AD, the consuls were *Lucius Vitellius and Fabius Persicus*.^[79] In the *following year, 35 AD*, Dio records the Parthian putsch for power, which was resisted by local chieftains who sent to Tiberius to ask for a king from among their hostages at Rome to replace Artabanus.^[80] Tiberius sent Tiridates to take the throne, asking Mithridates of Iberia to invade Armenia, thus drawing Artabanus to leave Parthia in order to assist his son there.

Tacitus notes that, *in 35 AD*, Tiberius put L. Vitellius in charge of sorting out the Artabanus/Tiridates/Mithridates business, as *Vitellius was governor of Syria*, his proconsular assignment/reward.^[81] We can assume that Vitellius headed out and the events took place in 35–37 AD. However, of any upset with the Arabs or Aretas, the witnesses external to Josephus *make no mention* and one can hardly imagine Tiberius being concerned with a border dispute between Aretas and Herod Antipas with the Parthians on the warpath. Yet, regarding the Arabs, there is one tiny remark in Tacitus we may make note of:

Yet the withdrawal [of Tiridates to Mesopotamia] had every appearance of flight; and, *a start having been made by the race of the Arabs*, the others left for their homes or for the camp of Artabanus, until Tiridates’ own return to Syria with a few men provided a general redemption from the *disgrace of desertion*.^[82]

In short, it seems that in the years 35, 36 and possibly into 37 AD, while Vitellius was governor of Syria, the Arabs were involved on the side of the Romans. Tacitus is talking about *forces sent by King Aretas to support the Romans’ intention to install Tiridates*. In other words, the Arabs were somewhat occupied already and were unlikely to have been dallying about with Antipas over a border dispute or a daughter scorned. We can only conclude that, for some reason, Josephus is novelizing here. Compare the Tacitean statement about the presence of the Arab forces with the Romans in Syria above with Josephus’ historical fiction below:

So Vitellius prepared to make war with Aretas, having with him two legions of armed men; he also took with him all those of light armature, and of the horsemen which belonged to them, and were drawn out of those kingdoms which were under the Romans, and made haste for Petra, and came to Ptolemais. But as he was marching very busily, and leading his army through Judea, the principal men met him, and desired that he would not thus march through their land; for that the laws of their country would not permit them to overlook those images which were brought into it, of which there were a great many in their ensigns; so he was persuaded by what they said, and changed that resolution of his which he had before taken in this matter. Whereupon he ordered the army to march along the great plain, while he himself, with Herod the tetrarch and his friends, went up to Jerusalem to offer sacrifice to God, an ancient festival of the Jews being then just approaching; and when he had been there, and been honorably entertained by the multitude of the Jews, he made a stay there for three days, within which time he deprived Jonathan of the high priesthood, and gave it to his brother Theophilus. But when on the fourth day letters came to him, which informed him of the death of Tiberius [March 16, 37 AD], he obliged the multitude to take an oath of fidelity to Caius [Caligula]; he also recalled his army, and made them every one go home, and take their winter quarters there, since, upon the devolution of the empire upon Caius, he had not the like authority of making this war which he had before.

It was also reported, that when Aretas heard of the coming of Vitellius to fight him, he said, upon his consulting the diviners, that it was impossible that this army of Vitellius's could enter Petra; for that one of the rulers would die, either he that gave orders for the war, or he that was marching at the other's desire, in order to be subservient to his will, or else he against whom this army is prepared. So Vitellius truly retired to Antioch; but Agrippa, the son of Aristobulus, went up to Rome, a year before the death of Tiberius, in order to treat of some affairs with the emperor, if he might be permitted so to do.^[83]

I think anyone with two firing neurons can see what a load of nonsense the text above actually is and how it was developed from the bare facts of the war between Tiridates and Artabanus to which the Arabs contributed troops in support of Rome. One can hardly imagine Vitellius acceding to the request to send his troops around by another way because the fastidious Jews couldn't bear to look on the Roman standards, or even that he went off to feast with the "principal men of Judea" while at the same time depriving their high priest of his office. Notice also how glibly Josephus gets him off the hook about a war that never happened: he was no longer authorized, so he sent his soldiers into winter quarters. What is actually astonishing is that any sensible individual with firing neurons has ever taken Josephus seriously.

However, we must consider the fact that the above text included the little tale of John the Baptist. Executing him allegedly brought Antipas into misfortune, because Josephus' god is stage-directing everything. Could this be a later Christian interpolation? It doesn't really feel that way to me. Josephus is the most astonishing apologetic embellisher and novelizer, so it is entirely in keeping for him to have spun the above tale just so he could get Vitellius to worship in the Jewish temple and show how friendly the relations between the Jews and Roman imperial family were. Further, from his own autobiography, as already noted, we find Josephus having a relationship with a fellow who may very well be the prototype for John the Baptist. In his *Life of Josephus*, he tells us that he tried out all the three main Jewish philosophies, those of the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes. Then he says:

Nor did I content myself with these trials only; but when I was informed that one, whose name was Bannus,^[84] lived in the desert, and used no other clothing than grew upon trees, and had no other food than what grew of its own accord, and bathed himself in cold water frequently, both by night and by day, in order to preserve his chastity, I imitated him in those things and continued with him three years.^[85]

Josephus suggests that Herod Antipas executed John the Baptist for political reasons, fearing his popularity and rebellion, while the gospel of Mark 6 gives a different but equally political reason: that he was executed because he protested against Herod's intention to divorce, then marry his brother's wife. As we have already noted, this is impossible in the gospel timeline, where John the Baptist was executed at the beginning of the ministry of Jesus while Josephus clearly dates it to the twentieth year of Tiberius and the thirty-seventh year (and death) of Philip. Both claims cannot be correct, because Jesus could not have begun his ministry that late, been executed even later, and still have Paul in Damascus before the death of Aretas in 40 AD. Something is wrong here and I would like to know what.

The number 37 appears in three significant contexts in the works of Josephus. In Chapter 8 of Book 17 of *Antiquities*, the death of Herod is announced:

When he had done these things, he died, the fifth day after he had caused Antipater to be slain; having reigned, since he had procured Antigonus to be slain, thirty-four years; but since he had been declared king by the Romans, **thirty-seven**.^[86]

We will discover further on that this dating of the death of Herod is problematical, so it is curious that it is the first instance of the use of this "code".

At the beginning of Book 18, Josephus tells us:

¼ Cyrenius had now disposed of Archelaus's money, and when the taxings were come to a conclusion [6 AD], which were made in the **thirty-seventh** year of Caesar's victory over Antony at Actium [2 September 31 BC] ¼^[87]

The next mention is the one we are concerned with here, the death of Philip, who had been

... tetrarch of Trachonitis and Gaulanitis, and of the nation of the Bataneans also, **thirty-seven** years. [\[88\]](#)

Of course, Josephus uses many numbers throughout his works, some more than once. But to find the only three uses of this particular number within such a relatively short string of text strikes me as odd. What we have are three events specifically mentioning thirty-seven that are very important to Christian chronology. All three of them are involved in chronological anomalies within the text, too, as we will see. What to make of it? I'll be frank: I don't know. I only know that it sets my BS antenna to quivering and I suspect a later redactor was trying to fix things but only ended up making a muddle. Or, it is possible that a redactor inserted the thirty-sevens as a sort of code to alert the reader that what was being discussed, or what followed, just might be an interpolation or something that had been altered significantly.

[NOTE: The above on 37 doesn't really fit here, but I can't find a better spot for it¼ Also, deleted bits about Origen below. Carrier shows that Origen was quoting Hegesippus, not Josephus.]

Coming back to John, the closest Josephus gets to discussing a John-the-Baptist type in *Wars* is a reference to "John the Essene" in his description of the parceling out of governing authority during the early days of the rebellion against Rome following the Jews' destruction of the army of Cestius in 66 AD:

After this calamity had befallen Cestius, many of the most eminent of the Jews swam away from the city, as from a ship when it was going to sink; Costobarus, therefore, and Saul, who were brethren, together with Philip, the son of Jacimus, who was the commander of king Agrippa's forces, ran away from the city, and went to Cestius. ... Cestius sent Saul and his friends, at their own desire, to Achaia, to Nero, to inform him of the great distress they were in, and to lay the blame of their kindling the war upon Florus ... In the meantime, the people of Damascus, when they were informed of the destruction of the Romans, set about the slaughter of those Jews that were among them ... yet did they distrust their own wives, which were almost all of them addicted to the Jewish religion ...

But as to those who had pursued after Cestius, when they were returned back to Jerusalem, they overbore some of those that favored the Romans by violence, and some them persuaded [by entreaties] to join with them, and got together in great numbers in the temple, and appointed a great many generals for the war. Joseph also, the son of Gorion, and Ananus the high priest, were chosen as governors of all affairs within the city ...

They also chose other generals for Idumea; Jesus, the son of Sapphias, one of the high priests; and Eleazar, the son of Ananias, the high priest; they also enjoined Niger, the then governor of Idumea, who was of a family that belonged to Perea, beyond Jordan. ... Joseph the son of Simon was sent as general to Jericho, as was Manasseh to Perea, and **John, the Essene**, to the toparchy of Thamna; Lydda was also added to his portion, and Joppa, and Emmaus. But **John, the son of Matthias**, was made governor of the toparchies of Gophnitica and Acrabattene; as was **Josephus, the son of Matthias**, of both the Galilees. Gamala also, which was the strongest city in those parts, was put under his command. [\[89\]](#)

We not only see several names that reappear in the gospels; we also find Josephus himself describing his own role in the rebellion, as well as that of his brother, John. And, there is "John the Essene". He comes back to John the Essene in Book 3, Chapter 2:

Accordingly, they presently got together a great multitude of all their most hardy soldiers, and marched away for Ascalon. ... This excursion was led on by three men, who were the chief of them all, both for strength and sagacity; Niger, called the Persite, Silas of Babylon, and besides them John the Essene. [\[90\]](#)

We learn of John the Essene's fate rather soon:

... the fight lasted till the evening, till ten thousand men of the Jews' side lay dead, with two of their generals, John and Silas, and the

greater part of the remainder were wounded, with Niger, their remaining general, who fled away ...[\[91\]](#)

There is another John who gets a lot of attention in *Wars*: John of Gischala who, apparently, is Josephus' sworn enemy. He was everything that Josephus was not: courageous, intelligent, a masterful leader, beloved by the people; Josephus loses no opportunity to slander and defame the man. It could be said that most of *Wars* is devoted to this man who, according to Josephus, became the vilest and most reprehensible of the rebel leaders with his hordes of zealots, and was almost single-handedly responsible for the siege of Jerusalem because of his stubborn resistance against the Romans. John of Gischala was an extraordinary figure and this shines through the text in spite of Josephus' calumnies against him. You have to read the entire text of *Wars* to get the full story of John, because it is essentially his story: John against the Romans. At the end, when Jerusalem falls, he is taken captive and Titus takes him back to Rome, where he apparently ended his life in prison after being marched in the Roman triumph. Josephus' last mention of John:

They were the Sicarii who first began these transgressions, and first became barbarous towards those allied to them, and left no words of reproach unsaid, and no works of perdition untried, in order to destroy those whom their contrivances affected. Yet did John demonstrate by his actions that these Sicarii were more moderate than he was himself, for he not only slew all such as gave him good counsel to do what was right, but treated them worst of all, as the most bitter enemies that he had among all the Citizens; nay, he filled his entire country with ten thousand instances of wickedness, such as a man who was already hardened sufficiently in his impiety towards God would naturally do; *for the food was unlawful that was set upon his table, and he rejected those purifications that the law of his country had ordained*; so that it was no longer a wonder if he, who was so mad in his impiety towards God, did not observe any rules of gentleness and common affection towards men.[\[92\]](#)

I wonder if John the Baptist was a composite character, in which Josephus combined aspects of other characters, and placed in a convenient location in the narrative. Did Josephus exploit, or even create, the figure of John the Baptist for his narrative needs and do to him what he would have liked to have seen done to John of Gischala? Perhaps, for Josephus, the destruction of Jerusalem "came from God, that very justly, as a punishment of what he did against John", Gischala, not Baptist. Or, was Josephus expressing his true feelings about, and agreement with, John of Gischala, whom he had to publicly defame in order to stay alive? Josephus' description of John the Baptist continued:

Now when [many] others came in crowds about him, for they were very greatly moved [or pleased] by hearing his words, Herod, who feared lest the great influence John had over the people might put it into **his power and inclination to raise a rebellion**, [for they seemed ready to do any thing he should advise,] thought it best, by putting him to death, to prevent any mischief he might cause, and not bring himself into difficulties, by sparing a man who might make him repent of it when it would be too late.[\[93\]](#)[\[11\]](#)

What about John the Essene? Did he relate to John of Gischala, the leader of the zealots, in any way? What about Josephus' beloved "Bannus"? If Josephus was novelizing John the Baptist, perhaps he retrojected his Bannus into the past to the approximate time of his own birth. I also find it curious that John of Gischala was described, at the end, as being wicked in the way that the Jews must have seen Paul: "*the food was unlawful that was set upon his table, and he rejected those purifications that the law of his country had ordained.*"

In sum, I don't think we can fully trust the historicity of Josephus' account of John the Baptist. It may include any number of influences: the account of James' execution being blamed for the Jews' defeat, details from the lives of John the Essene, John of Gischala, or Bannus.

Coming back now to Vitellius, Josephus makes no mention of this little war between Aretas and Antipas in *Wars*, nor does he even mention Lucius Vitellius, the governor of Syria, though he makes numerous references to Vitellius the son and temporary emperor. The story of Aretas vs. Antipas is clearly made up, and most likely by Josephus himself to make an opportunity to glorify Jewish and Roman relations, denigrate the Arabs, and serve a mysterious purpose in his little tale of John the Baptist.

I think we must decline to accept this story of Vitellius being sent to take the head of Aretas as factual, *whoever* wrote it, and

thus it offers us no possibility of utilizing it to date the time the apostle Paul was let down in a basket from the walls of Damascus while fleeing from the agents of King Aretas, who Douglas Campbell assumes only had a narrow window of rulership there while being in conflict with Antipas. Of more interest is the conflict of ownership of the fortress, Machaerus, but that takes us away from the present topics.

As Campbell writes in his paper on the dating of Paul's escape from Damascus, "One avenue for undermining this explanation [i.e. dating Paul's escape to a possible temporary takeover of Damascus by Aretas during the alleged war with Antipas] is to criticize [Josephus'] veracity".^[94] And: "So unless Josephus' account is a tissue of fabrications (but nevertheless neatly stitched together^{1/4}), he ought to be followed."^[95] Well, yes. We must criticize Josephus' veracity and point out that a lot of his "history" recounted in *Antiquities* is a "tissue of lies", including – particularly – this incident that persuades Campbell that Josephus "ought to be followed."

There's one final problem with Campbell's theory. In Josephus, the reason Aretas is able to defeat Antipas is because the governor of Syria, Vitellius, delays bringing his aid to Antipas, aid he was instructed by Tiberius to provide; but then Tiberius died in 37 AD, so Vitellius was off the hook. Elsewhere, Josephus provides the "character motivation" for Vitellius' actions: *that Vitellius successfully negotiated an agreement with the Parthian leader Artabanus, with the help of Antipas, in 36 AD.* Antipas then upstaged Vitellius by reporting the success to Tiberius first.^[96] This is supposed to explain why Vitellius was so reluctant to come to Antipas' aid when Aretas attacked: he held a grudge. So, it is here where the Artabanus issue comes to the fore and it cannot be avoided.

The Artabanus Problem

Douglas Campbell writes about the alleged attack of Aretas on Antipas:

... the date of the successful attack by Aretas on Antipas and his territories opens the chronological window, so to speak, within which Paul's escape from Damascus can be anchored.

Several considerations allow us to date the invasion, and the opening of the window with reasonable precision to the year 36 CE. [...]

In the same year as the invasion, Vitellius had presided over a great diplomatic triumph – a successful negotiation of peace with the dreaded Parthian Empire currently gathering in strength under the leadership of the formidable Artabanus. Antipas had played a minor role in these negotiations, having been charged with managing and financing them. However, he had also taken the liberty of writing to the imperial court with a glowing account of their success prior to Vitellius's own report being written and dispatched, and had thereby upstaged Vitellius at the moment of his greatest political triumph (*Jewish Antiquities* 18.96-105).^[97]

He offers a footnote to the above text as follows:

This important negotiation is also noted by Tacitus, *Ann.* 2.58 (although the year is far too early – 18 CE); Suetonius, *Gaius Caligula* 14.3 and *Vitellius* 2.4 (who locates the negotiation slightly more accurately during the reign of Gaius); and Cassius Dio 59.27.3–4 (who also locates it during the reign of Gaius). Josephus is certainly correct, however, in placing it where he does, in 36 CE the last year of Tiberius's reign. His intertwined chronologies of Pilate, Vitellius, and Antipas only make sense here, and yet here they make perfect sense. More detail concerning this claim is provided by my 2002, esp. 293.^[98]

I can only shake my head. Let's take a look at Josephus' version of the Artabanus story that persuades Campbell that Tacitus is all mixed up.

Moreover, Tiberius sent a letter to Vitellius, and commanded him to make a league of friendship with Artabanus, the king of Parthia; for while he was his enemy, he terrified him, because he had taken Armenia away from him, lest he should proceed further, and told

him he should not otherwise trust him than upon his giving him hostages, and especially his son Artabanus. Upon Tiberius's writing thus to Vitellius, by the offer of great presents of money, he persuaded both the king of Iberia and the king of Albania to make no delay, but to fight against Artabanus; and although they would not do it themselves, yet did they give the Scythians a passage through their country, and opened the Caspian gates to them, and brought them upon Artabanus. So Armenia was again taken from the Parthians, and the country of Parthia was filled with war, and the principal of their men were slain, and all things were in disorder among them: the king's son also himself fell in these wars, together with many ten thousands of his army. Vitellius had also sent such great sums of money to Artabanus's father's kinsmen and friends that he had almost procured him to be slain by the means of those bribes which they had taken. And when Artabanus perceived that the plot laid against him was not to be avoided, because it was laid by the principal men, and those a great many in number, and that it would certainly take effect,—when he had estimated the number of those that were truly faithful to him, as also of those who were already corrupted, but were deceitful in the kindness they professed to him, and were likely, upon trial, to go over to his enemies, he made his escape to the upper provinces, *where he afterwards raised a great army out of the Dahae and Sacre, and fought with his enemies, and retained his principality.*

When Tiberius had heard of these things, he desired to have a league of friendship made between him and Artabanus; and when, upon this invitation, he received the proposal kindly, Artabanus and Vitellius went to Euphrates, and as a bridge was laid over the river, they each of them came with their guards about them, and met one another on the midst of the bridge. And when they had agreed upon the terms of peace Herod, the tetrarch erected a rich tent on the midst of the passage, and made them a feast there. Artabanus also, not long afterward, sent his son Darius as an hostage, with many presents, among which there was a man seven cubits tall, a Jew he was by birth, and his name was Eleazar, who, for his tallness, was called a giant. After which Vitellius went to Antioch, and Artabanus to Babylon; but Herod [the tetrarch] being desirous to give Caesar the first information that they had obtained hostages, sent posts with letters, wherein he had accurately described all the particulars, and had left nothing for the consular Vitellius to inform him of. But when Vitellius's letters were sent, and Caesar had let him know that he was acquainted with the affairs already, because Herod had given him an account of them before, Vitellius was very much troubled at it; and supposing that he had been thereby a greater sufferer than he really was, he kept up a secret anger upon this occasion, till he could be revenged on him, which he was after Caius had taken the government. [\[99\]](#)

Aside from the implausibility of Josephus having access to the thoughts of Vitellius, we note that the “secret anger” seems to reflect Josephus’ character more than that of Vitellius. It is completely juvenile though it is not impossible that it screens and/or misinterprets a historical reality. So it seems that, in order to sort this out, we must take up the problem of Artabanus.

Suetonius mentions Artabanus first in his biography of Tiberius as follows:

¼ he was even attacked by Artabanus, king of the Parthians, who charged him in a letter with the murder of his kindred, with other bloody deeds, and with shameless and dissolute living, counselling him to gratify the intense and just hatred of the citizens as soon as possible by a voluntary death. [\[100\]](#)

There was no love lost between Artabanus and the Roman Emperor, so the idea of Tiberius wanting to make a pact with the guy who has just told him to off himself is absurd. Then, in the biography of Caligula, Suetonius writes:

To this unbounded love of his [Caligula’s] citizens was added marked devotion from foreigners. Artabanus, for example, king of the Parthians, *who was always outspoken in his hatred and contempt for Tiberius*, voluntarily sought Caligula's friendship and came to a conference with the consular governor; then crossing the Euphrates, he paid homage to the Roman eagles and standards and to the statues of the Caesars. [\[101\]](#)

For some inexplicable reason, between the time of Artabanus’ advice that Tiberius should kill himself, and the accession of Caligula, something had changed; obviously, it wasn’t the office of emperor, but who occupied that office. The same event was mentioned by Suetonius in his biography of Emperor Vitellius:

Lucius [Vitellius] attained the consulate and then was made governor of Syria, where with supreme diplomacy having not only induced Artabanus, king of the Parthians, to hold a conference with him, but even to do obeisance to the standards of the legion. [\[102\]](#)

[NOTE: Below, I deleted “and having persuaded Artabanus out of his hatred toward the Roman emperor du jour who was Caligula, not Tiberius”. Where does it say Vitellius is credited with persuading Artabanus out of his hatred of Caligula? From the above, it looks like Artabanus just hated Tiberius, not Caligula, whose friendship he sought “voluntarily”.]

Suetonius firmly dates this meeting between Artabanus and Vitellius to the reign of *Caligula*. We notice also that Vitellius is credited with “supreme diplomacy”. But we notice that Campbell is determined to give Josephus priority of accuracy and says about Suetonius that he “locates the negotiation *slightly* more accurately during the reign of Gaius [Caligula].” Suetonius hints at other dealings with Artabanus in the excerpt from the biography of Caligula so we have to look a bit harder to find what it might be. In his account of the death of Germanicus (*Life of Caligula*) we find:

Yet far greater and stronger tokens of regard were shown at the time of his [Germanicus’] death and immediately afterwards. On the day when he passed away the temples were stoned and the altars of the gods thrown down, while some flung their household gods into the street and cast out their newly born children. Even barbarian peoples, so they say, who were engaged in war with us or with one another, unanimously consented to a truce, as if all in common had suffered a domestic tragedy. It is said that some princes put off their beards and had their wives’ heads shaved, as a token of the deepest mourning; that even *the king of kings suspended his exercise at hunting and the banquets with his grandees, which among the Parthians is a sign of public mourning.* [\[103\]](#)

So, it seems that at the time Germanicus died, 19 AD, the king of the Parthians was a lover of the Romans, but for some reason, between that time and the death of Tiberius, eighteen years later, a whole lot of enmity had grown up between the two heads of state. One wonders if it was because of the death of Germanicus that Artabanus came to hate Tiberius? The king of the Parthians is also mentioned in the *Life of Nero* but in a context that is not really relevant to our topic. Just note that Nero was, apparently, a great favorite among the Parthians too, according to Suetonius.

Dio Cassius (155–235 AD) mentions these events in retrospect during his account of the events of 40 AD, but does not date them explicitly:

The case of Lucius Vitellius is in point. This man was neither of low birth nor lacking in intelligence, but, on the contrary, had made a name for himself by his governorship of Syria. For, in addition to his other brilliant achievements during his term of office, **he forestalled Artabanus**, who was planning an attack on that province also, since he had suffered no punishment for his invasion of Armenia. He terrified the Parthian by coming upon him suddenly when he was already **close to the Euphrates**, and **then induced him to come to a conference, compelled him to sacrifice to the images of Augustus and Gaius, and made a peace with him that was advantageous to the Romans, even securing his sons as hostages**. This Vitellius, now, was summoned by Gaius to be put to death. **The complaint against him was the same as the Parthians had against their king when they expelled him**; for jealousy made him the object of hatred, and fear the object of plots. Gaius, of course, hated all who were stronger than himself, and he was suspicious of all who were successful, feeling sure that they would attack him. Yet Vitellius managed to save his life. [\[104\]](#)[\[J2\]](#)

Again we are told that Vitellius achieved a diplomatic coup and *it wasn’t in the time of Tiberius*. Despite the testimony of these less contentious historians, Campbell notes that Dio “also locates it during the reign of Gaius” and then goes on to make the completely astonishing claim: “Josephus is certainly correct, however, in placing it where he does, in 36 CE the last year of Tiberius’s reign. His intertwined chronologies of Pilate, Vitellius, and Antipas only make sense here, and yet here they make perfect sense.” I guess the better the con-artist, the happier the mark is to be conned. But when the con is passed on, who gets the duping delight?

Coming back to Campbell’s footnote, where he says initially: “This important negotiation is also noted by Tacitus, *Ann.* 2.58 (although the year is far too early – 18 CE)”, I have to point out that this is completely disingenuous.

Tacitus gives a rather detailed account of the Artabanus saga *starting in 16 AD* when legates from the Parthian *chiefs* came to Rome to fetch Vonones, the eldest son of the newly deceased Parthian king Phraates, who had been sent to Augustus as hostage to be brought up in the Imperial court. Apparently, once he got to Parthia, the people there decided they didn’t like

him because his ways were too Romanized. This is where Artabanus first enters the picture, twenty years before Vitellius was sent to bring him to heel. He was of Parthian royal blood also, but had grown up among the Dahae, probably a Scythian tribe. He took control of the kingdom, and Vonones and his band fled to Armenia, which was a hotbed of rebellion and unrest. They were kingless at that moment, so Vonones the refugee was put on the throne.

Shortly thereafter, Artabanus started saber-rattling against Vonones and the Armenians didn't want to support a war, so Vonones was taken into protective custody by the governor of Syria, Creticus Silanus (Q. Caecilius Metellus Creticus Silanus, cos. 7 AD). Tacitus says that it was this disruption out in the East that Tiberius used as an excuse to take Germanicus away from his faithful legions and install him in new provinces where he was not so well known. [\[105\]](#)

In the following year, 17 AD, Tiberius removed Creticus Silanus from Syria "because he was connected to Germanicus by marriage", and installed Cn. Piso, described as "temperamentally violent and a stranger to compliance". [\[106\]](#) Piso and Germanicus finally met at Cyrrus (modern day Northern Syria), the winter camp of the Tenth Legion. They hated each other. And this is where we also find our Aretas mentioned, though not by name:

After this, Piso was rarely on [Germanicus] Caesar's tribunal and, on the few occasions when he sat by him, was glowering and openly dissenting. And **during a party at the residence of the Nabataeans' king**, when golden crowns of considerable weight were offered to Caesar and Agrippina, and lighter ones to Piso and the rest, his [Piso's] voice was heard saying that the banquet was being given for the son of the Roman princeps, not that of the Parthian king; and at the same time he flung away his crown ...

During these events, **legates came from the king of the Parthians, Artabanus**. He had sent them to recall the treaty of friendship, and he desired the pledges to be renewed, he said, and **as a concession to Germanicus' honor he would advance to the bank of the Euphrates**; meanwhile he was asking that Vonones should not be kept in Syria nor use messengers from nearby to draw the aristocrats of the various races into discord. To this *Germanicus replied handsomely concerning the alliance of Romans and Parthians*, and with decorum and modesty concerning the arrival of the king and his courting of himself. Vonones was removed to Pompeiopolis, a maritime city in Cilicia: this was not only *a concession to the plea of Artabanus*, but an insult for Piso, by whom he [Vonones] was extremely favored on account of the very many duties and gifts with which he had bound Plancina [Piso's wife] to himself. [\[107\]](#)

In the above account, it seems obvious that there was mutual respect between Germanicus and Artabanus and it was Germanicus who acted diplomatically toward the Parthian king, engaging his friendship and acceding to his request. We also notice that this was an event where the two met at the river in 18 AD for the renewal of pledges, but it wasn't Vitellius meeting Artabanus – it was Germanicus. This apparent friendship might explain why Artabanus conceived so great a hatred for Tiberius after the death of Germanicus. It was widely thought that Tiberius was implicated in the poisoning of his nephew/adopted son and we have already read how the "king of kings" mourned the death of his friend.

In AD 19, Germanicus traveled to Egypt for a Nile cruise. While he was absent, things started going south.

During the same period Vonones, whose removal to Cilicia I have recalled, after bringing his guards tried to flee to the Armenians and thence to ... his kinsman, the king of the Scythians. ... So it was on the bank of the river that he was bound by Vibius Fronto, prefect of the cavalry; then Remmius, a senior soldier who had been assigned to the king's guard previously, transfixed him with a sword as if in anger. ... **As for Germanicus, on retiring from Egypt he realized that everything which he had ordered in the cases of the legions and cities had been annulled or changed to the opposite**. Hence weighty insults for Piso ... Next Piso decided to leave Syria ... but was detained by Germanicus' adverse health ... [\[108\]](#)

We skip the death of Germanicus later in 19 AD and jump forward to 35 AD where Artabanus appears again in the *Annals* of Tacitus, disingenuously omitted by Campbell:

With C. Cestius and M. Servilius as consuls, Parthian nobles came to the City without the knowledge of King Artabanus. (His dread of Germanicus meant that he had been loyal to the Romans and fair toward his own; but later he adopted haughtiness toward us and

savagery toward his compatriots, relying on the successful wars which he had waged against surrounding nations, despising Tiberius' old age as defenseless, and being greedy for Armenia, where on the decease of King Artaxias he installed Arsaces, the eldest of his own children; and as an additional insult sending men to demand back the treasure left by Vonones in Syria and Cilicia. At the same time he resorted to foolish boasting and to threats, bragging of the old boundaries of the Persians and Macedonians and that he would invade the lands once possessed by Cyrus and later by Alexander.)^[109]

This is about 16 years after the initial Tacitean discussion of Artabanus and his treaty with Germanicus at the Euphrates River. There is some reflection here of what Suetonius recorded about the hate mail Artabanus allegedly sent to Tiberius. Tacitus does mention the respect that Artabanus had for Germanicus, but ascribes it to fear of the latter's military prowess, not his diplomatic skills. In any event, at this point, the Parthian nobles came to ask for a king to replace Artabanus; they wanted another of the sons of Phraates, who was also named Phraates. This son (who probably learned from the mistakes of Vonones) was able to shed his Roman ways, but he died from disease in Syria before he was put on the Parthian throne. In other words, what was going on here was meddling by Tiberius in the affairs of the Parthians, not seeking a rapprochement.

Tiberius, not to be denied his power of picking kings (and certainly aiming to aggravate Artabanus), selected Tiridates, who was of the same family and also related to Mithridates, sent him out east, and ordered Vitellius to be in charge of the preparations to wipe out Artabanus and put the new king on the throne. There was a lot of to-ing and fro-ing of a warlike nature, which Tacitus describes in some detail, and far more reliably than Josephus, and then Artabanus was rejected by his own people, becoming a fugitive. It is at this point that Vitellius has the famous meeting at the banks of the river and the offering of sacrifices to seal the deal.

But, with Artabanus a fugitive and the minds of his compatriots turning toward a new king, Vitellius urged Tiridates to capitalize on his preparations and *led the hard core of his legions and allies to the bank of the Euphrates. During their sacrifices* – since the one was offering the *suovetaurilia*^[110] in the Roman manner, the other had decorated a horse for placating the stream – locals announced that without any violent rain the Euphrates was rising of its own accord to an inordinate level and at the same time was coiling circles of white spray in the shape of a diadem – an augury of a favorable crossing. ...

When a bridge had been made of ships and the army sent across, the first to arrive in the camp with many thousands of cavalry was Ornospades, at one time an exile and a not inglorious adjuvant of Tiberius when he was finishing off the Dalmation war, and for that reason presented with Roman citizenship; ... Vitellius, deeming that a show of Roman arms had been adequate, warned Tiridates and his chief: the former should remember Phraates his grandfather and his foster-father Caesar and the fine qualities in each of them; the latter should observe compliance toward their king, respect toward ourselves, and each his own honor and loyalty. Thereupon he retired with his legions to Syria.

These achievements of *two seasons* I linked together to provide some mental respite from domestic afflictions.^[111]

And so, we are at the end of the year 36 AD – two seasons' events being recounted in Tacitus exactly in the time period where Josephus has Vitellius in Judea involved in an "Artabanus Saga", though it is the end of same, not a treaty with him. In the above account, there is a big meeting and sacrifice at the river, but not a single mention of Herod Antipas and his influence on the negotiations that Josephus described with such delight. It seems to me that Tacitus' detailed account is far more credible. We can note that there are certain elements that appear in both Josephus' account and Tacitus, though the usual blowing of smoke appears in the former. Josephus says Tiberius was afraid and that is why he sent Vitellius to make peace, while Tacitus says that Artabanus thought he could take advantage of an old man and Vitellius went to give him his comeuppance. Now, which does the knowledgeable reader think is most likely? The main difference is that the account of the meeting at the river, the sacrifices, and *who was involved* has changed. And of course, Josephus has a Jewish hero in the scene for good measure instead of the mention of the Dalmatian hero, Ornospades.^[112]

We find confirmation in Philo that Vitellius went to Jerusalem after his successful conclusion of the Artabanus adventure in 37 AD: "When Gaius assumed the imperial power we were the first people in all Syria to congratulate him, Vitellius at that time

being in our city, from whom you [Petronius] received the government as his successor ..." [\[113\]](#)

[NOTE: Deleted much of the below paragraph, because Dio and Suetonius date it to Gaius, in 39AD, not 49AD.]

Tacitus also mentions a third encounter with the Parthians of a similar sort dated to 49 AD. [\[114\]](#) In this later Vitellius affair, during the reign of Claudius, we find a mention of the king of the Arabs, *Acbarus*, who apparently was on good enough terms with Rome to provide support, though Tacitus does suggest that the Arabs were fickle in coming through on their military commitments and at the first possibility would withdraw and head for home, recalling their actions at the time of the 35/36 AD interaction.

To recap: Tacitus places negotiations between *Germanicus* and Artabanus early in the reign of Tiberius (18 AD). Josephus, Suetonius and Dio don't mention the earlier Artabanus appearance; only the later one involving Vitellius. Josephus novelizes the events that occurred late in the reign of Tiberius (36 AD), and Suetonius discusses the similar event that occurred in the reign of Caligula (39 AD). Tacitus *also* discusses Vitellius' later actions in Syria and against Artabanus in some detail. However, his narrative ends with Artabanus a fugitive, no grand negotiations, though there was a great meeting and sacrifice at the river, the boats over which the army crossed, and a significant portent. These are obviously separate events – the early truce between Germanicus and Artabanus, then a later one while Vitellius was still governor of Syria and involving Tiridates – and the earlier truce with Artabanus (18 AD) was later attributed to Vitellius in some sort of conflation of the different, but slightly similar, contexts. Josephus was novelizing freely and in full apologetic mode, including Antipas (whom he characterizes as being on very friendly terms with Tiberius) as a key player in the negotiations, thus also providing character motivation to his Vitellius vis-à-vis his refusal to help Antipas. In response to Campbell's duped delight – "His intertwined chronologies of Pilate, Vitellius, and Antipas only make sense here, and yet here they make perfect sense" – let me just say it only "works" because Josephus *makes* it work and *needs* it to work in order to satisfy his narrative demands!

We notice also from Tacitus that in the time of Tiberius, Germanicus attended "a party at the residence of the Nabataeans' king", i.e. Aretas. Later, a king of the Arabs showed up in an allied context with Vitellius, so the overall tenor is that it is extremely unlikely that the Romans were sent to get the head of Aretas. It's almost certain that Tacitus would have mentioned something like that with all the details he gives. The fact that Roman-Nabataean relations were so friendly at the time of Germanicus, and then, after Tiberius, during the reign of Gaius, would suggest that they remained so until (and after) the death of Aretas who, we must remember, in 36 AD was quite an old man. With such amicable relations, it is altogether likely that Damascus was, indeed, ruled by Aretas throughout that time.

We will leave Damascus in the hands of Aretas between 9 BC and 40 AD and not try to lock Paul into that cramped time window of the alleged conflict between Aretas and Herod Antipas over Herodias. We simply don't know enough about Damascus proper during the time to make any sort of determination and what we do know about various events of the times from more reliable historians, contrasted with the apologetic nonsense Josephus often writes, inclines one to dismiss the breathlessly gossipy soap opera elements of his "history".

Pontius Pilate by Way of Paul

Pontius Pilate is the chronological hook for the entire Christian creation of Jesus of Nazareth. It has always been assumed that his presence in the gospels is proof of their historicity. Further, the chronology has been tied to the statement in the gospel of Luke that Jesus began his ministry in "the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar" (Luke 3:1). If Jesus began his ministry in the

fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar, and was then tried and executed under Pontius Pilate, Pilate must have been governor at that time. According to a remark in Josephus, he ended his term with the death of Tiberius, which we know occurred in 37 AD. Another remark in Josephus says Pilate was there for ten years, so it is simple! Count backwards from 37 AD and you have Pilate coming to Judea in 27 AD, and that gives you the window for the activities of Jesus, which began in the fifteenth year of Tiberius, i.e. 29 AD. It all fits so beautifully! [\[115\]](#) Unfortunately, it isn't that easy.

The crucifixion of Jesus under the governorship of Pontius Pilate is considered a historical fact by almost universal consent. Bible scholar Bart Ehrman states that the crucifixion of Jesus on the orders of Pontius Pilate is the most certain element about him. [\[116\]](#) John Dominic Crossan says that the crucifixion of Jesus is as certain as any historical fact can be. [\[117\]](#) Scholars may agree on the historicity of the crucifixion, but they differ considerably on the reasons and even the exact date, not to mention how historical the gospels are in respect of whether or not Jesus really knew he was going to be crucified. Discussing this crucifixion of a Jesus under Pontius Pilate is a huge industry. It reminds me a lot of something that Egyptologist/archaeologist Donald B. Redford once said about debates over the history of early Israel, and I think it applies here:

Scholars expended substantial effort on questions that they had **failed to prove were valid questions at all**. Under what dynasty did Joseph rise to power? Who was the Pharaoh of the Oppression? Of the Exodus? Can we identify the princess who drew Moses out of the river? Where did the Israelites make their exit from Egypt: via the Wady Tumilat or by a more northerly point?

One can appreciate the pointlessness of these questions if one poses similar questions of the Arthurian stories, without first submitting the text to a critical evaluation. Who were the consuls of Rome when Arthur drew the sword from the stone? Where was Merlin born?

Can one seriously envisage a classical historian pondering whether it was Iarbas or Aeneas that was responsible for Dido's suicide, where exactly did Remus leap over the wall, what really happened to Romulus in the thunderstorm, and so forth?

In all these imagined cases **none of the material initially prompting the questions has in any way undergone a prior evaluation as to how historical it is!** *And any scholar who exempts any part of his sources from critical evaluation runs the risk of invalidating some or all of his conclusions.* [\[118\]](#)

Please take careful note of Redford's comment: "any scholar who exempts any part of his sources from critical evaluation runs the risk of invalidating some or all of his conclusions." The seriousness of this cannot be overstated. The vast majority of biblical scholars are believers who claim to be analyzing and attempting to understand their theology, while most of their efforts actually go toward developing, defending, and propagating it. This is true not only among those scholars who are churchmen, but also, for the most part, among biblical scholars who are members of faculties of theology at universities. They tend to forget that truly historical facts about Jesus of Nazareth are *non-existent*, in scientific history terms, and that their views, long established by cultural norms in which they were born and trained, are not even strong enough to be considered hypotheses.

One of the most historically egregious things that biblical scholars do is to derive hypothetical earlier texts from later ones, and then treat these imaginary documents as if they were real sources. Proper procedure would be to begin with possible sources that are proven to have existed before the gospels. To construct a hypothetical "early oral tradition" based on later texts, or worse, a mythical "Q document", is just simply circular reasoning. I think that many scholars engage in this kind of faulty reasoning because they just cannot accept that there is nothing "behind" Paul that supports the gospels and Acts.

For a trained *scholar* to come right out and say that the existence of a Jewish wonder worker called Jesus, for whose historical reality there is not a shred of evidence, is a more plausible *hypothesis* than a mythical cult figure created by human needs out of the heroic elements of various individuals following a well-understood mythicization process, just boggles the mind.

From a strictly methodological point of view, biblical scholarship – as a rule – does not meet the minimum norms of historical study. Indeed, there exists a logical possibility that a Jesus of Nazareth was real and lived and died at the place and time given

in the gospels, but serious and careful examination of the evidence does not give the statement even a minimum *probability*. That, of course, does not mean that there was not somebody – or several somebodies – in the general vicinity of the place and time doing something significant and whose lives and deeds were conflated following the standard mythicization process.

Part of this process included selecting an appropriate time and place for the setting of the mythical life of the cult figure. It seems to me that the time of Pontius Pilate in Judea was selected for very important reasons regarding one element of the composite character, and then the time period of another of the composite characters was deemed to be very important, and the two were combined resulting in the dreadful chronological muddle we are left with. The problem was noticed fairly early and required some very creative – though sometimes slight – editing of sources, which has only further exacerbated the historical problem surrounding the Jesus question. But that doesn't mean we ought to give up! I think that problem can be solved.

A critical study of Josephus suggests Pontius Pilate was *not* the governor of Judea from 27 to 37 AD, nor was he even there for ten years. I will argue that the text of Josephus indicates clearly that Pilate was sent to Judea upon the accession of Tiberius in 14/15 AD, and that he was there for only around five years probably – being censured at the time that Germanicus was sent to straighten out the affairs of the Syrian province, and recalled in disgrace shortly after. Later Christian redactors/copyists of the Josephan text noticed the problem – a conflict of chronologies – and sought to adjust things by adding governors to the reign of Augustus and a couple of very small but well-placed text adjustments regarding the chronology, which forced the Josephan text into at least partial congruence with the Christian timeline. The John the Baptist problem was not noticed in time and thus slipped through the net.

There are actually more problems with the Josephan text than just the chronology of Pilate: As noted, Josephus was very busy confabulating and writing what he thought was good copy for apologetic purposes. He wrote *Wars* not only to justify his Flavian masters and scare the bejeebies out of anybody else who might think about rebelling against Rome, but also to depict the Jews themselves as victims of ideologues and demagogues whom he refers to regularly as robbers, brigands, tyrants, pirates, and so forth. What he is busy trying to cover up is the fact that *he was one of them*, only the strength of his convictions was less than skin deep. Historian E. Mary Smallwood writes:

[Josephus] was conceited, not only about his own learning but also about the opinions held of him as commander both by the Galileans and by the Romans; he was guilty of shocking duplicity at Jotapata, saving himself by sacrifice of his companions; he was too naive to see how he stood condemned out of his own mouth for his conduct, and yet no words were too harsh when he was blackening his opponents; and after landing, however involuntarily, in the Roman camp, he turned his captivity to his own advantage, and benefited for the rest of his days from his change of side. [\[119\]](#)

It reminds me of lines from Walter Scott's *Marmion*: "Oh, what a tangled web we weave when first we practice to deceive." *Josephus was a deceiver and dissembler from the beginning*. Anyone with a reasonable knowledge of psychopathology will instantly recognize the hallmarks of a con-artist. Nevertheless, *he was constrained by a reading public to use historical facts and events as the skeleton on which he fleshed out his apologetics*, and it is this that makes him useful, as long as controls are in place to deal with his deceptions and confabulations. We've already had a sample of the process I advocate in the discussion of the Aretas, John the Baptist and Artabanus problems. As we have already seen in that debacle, we must acknowledge that, since nobody else really knew what was going on in Palestine/Judea, *Josephus was able to maneuver his characters without disturbing the real history too much*. He borrowed Vitellius briefly to have him make a foray that came to nothing for ridiculous reasons, all the while making much of the relations between Rome and Palestine in *his effort to normalize Jews and Judaism in the face of the terrific anti-Judaism that arose after the Jewish War*. There is a wide and deep field for study of these issues and it is long past time that Josephus was subjected to intense scholarly scrutiny and criticism.

Historiography

When dealing with ancient texts, there are fairly standard and accepted ways of dating them. As Richard Pervo points out, the

most secure external way to do this is to find an explicit declaration by or within a datable author or text that such and such a document exists. For example, in the case of the book of Acts, that evidence is provided by Irenaeus of Lyon, c. 180 AD. He cited Acts as an authoritative book. Therefore, on firm historical grounds, that should be considered the *terminus ad quem* – the latest possible date of composition. If you are looking for evidence within a document, you look for some datable piece of information within the text, and try to make sure it is integral to the text and not a later addition. The *earliest* possible date – the *terminus a quo* – can't be earlier than the latest datable reference in the text. For example, this book couldn't be dated earlier than 2015, because it makes references to works and events from that year.

However, that's not how biblical scholars operate. They push the *terminus ad quem* back as far as the earliest possible allusions to the work in question, which suggest that an author or text may have been familiar with it. But such references may or may not be actual allusions. It's just as possible that the work in question took the material from the earlier source. For example, in the case of Acts, the earliest possible allusion is found in the letter of Polycarp of Smyrna, c. 130–5 AD. The question is whether Acts used Polycarp, or Polycarp used Acts. There's some evidence that suggests Polycarp may have been the author of Acts. Even if that is true, he could have written it either before or after his letter.

Pervo states the principles behind such an operation should be:

1) an explicit, methodologically sophisticated intertextual [the relationship between texts] method, 2) economy, which privileges proposals that require fewer hypothetical sources, and 3) simplicity, where solutions that solve more problems than they create are preferable. [\[120\]](#)

More often than not, that's not how it works in biblical studies. NT scholars seem to make the rules up as needed, creatively in pursuing allusions to the gospels in Paul where there are none, and all because they desperately need the gospel Jesus to have existed before Paul.

Regarding Josephus and the author of Luke-Acts, Pervo notes:

One must decide either that Luke had access to another Jewish historian who nonetheless shared the biases and views of Josephus or deem it highly probable that Luke had access to at least some of his writings. The question does not involve certain cribbed phrases but a *range of shared incidents, views, interests, and techniques*. Again, Luke does not use Josephus as we would. One of the difficulties of this hypothesis is that it removes from the board one author often utilized in comparisons with Luke, since, if Josephus served as one source and a model, he can no longer constitute a parallel. [\[121\]](#)

In other words, you can't declare that Luke-Acts is true because Josephus confirms some aspect of it, because the author *used Josephus* as one of his inspirational sources.

In respect of provenance, or the location at which a document was written, Pervo remarks with some humor:

Previously it was noted that commentators rarely give the question of provenance an entire paragraph. One must now also consider the questions of narrator and viewpoint. Although Dante's *Inferno* is set in Hell and reveals a great deal of local knowledge, critics do not presume that it was written there. An extensive discussion is not called for in the present case. It is quite likely that the geographical perspective of the third-person narrator of Acts is that of the author, from the perspective of Ephesus and/or adjacent regions. ...

The Aegean region is without doubt the center of interest. The "we" narrator emerges in this region. ...

It is from Ephesus that Acts looks toward the future, to post-Pauline conflicts. Ephesus is the navel of the Deuteropauline universe. For this reason it is otiose to argue for Ephesus as the physical location of the author. Ephesus is the center of the Pauline past, the focus of subsequent conflicts, and the hope of a Pauline future. Acts is engaged in the battle for Paul's heritage in Asia. [\[122\]](#)

In short, Acts, the author of which was also the author/redactor of the gospel of Luke, is a relatively late production: early to mid second century. Pervo dates it to ca. 115 AD.

Early “Christian” Documents

One of the problems of biblical scholarship and biblical understanding among the laity is that the books aren’t arranged in chronological order. If early Christian texts were arranged in the proper order without exclusions, it would be possible for people to read them and grow up without the late and prejudicially complete story of Matthew in first place, followed by the earliest of the gospels, Mark, which comes off looking like a poor copy made by someone in a hurry. If the Pauline letters were placed where they should be, first, it would be easy to see how the idea of a crucified savior was first bruited by Paul, and then how other writings developed this idea, adding to it and expanding it as time went by.

If we understand at the outset that *the letters of Paul are primary evidence*, while later texts – primarily the gospels – are secondary or worse, then we have good reason to notice that Paul himself never mentions Pilate. *The name Pilate only occurs in 1 Timothy 6:13, widely acknowledged to be inauthentic and written in the second century.*

If Paul was converted only a few years after the execution of Jesus, then he certainly must have lived during the time of Pilate, but he makes absolutely no reference to Pilate at all. How can this be? Pilate and his doings were so obnoxious that even Philo, in Egypt, one of Paul’s near contemporaries, wrote about him! Philo, too, makes no reference to the crucifixion of a messianic claimant under Pilate in his surviving works, though he does mention extrajudicial executions in large numbers. If he wrote of such an event in his lost works, it doesn’t survive and we have no reference to it.

This evidence, in part, is used by the so-called Jesus mythicists to argue that the original conceptions of Jesus Christ were mythological, not historical, in nature. I want briefly to review some of their ideas and show how this concept has tended to obscure the fact that there was, indeed, a real Jesus – or several of them, in fact.

The late Alvar Ellegård, Swedish linguist and Dean of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Gothenburg, wrote *A Statistical Method for Determining Authorship* in 1962, which he later applied to early Christian texts in order to try to situate them in a historical context and chronology. His methodology has been superseded in the intervening decades, so his results are not perfect, but his work was a good effort to apply scientific historical methods to the problems of Christian historiography. His book, *Jesus: One Hundred Years Before Christ*, is well worth reading if only for the excellent example he sets of how to perform a genuinely scholarly and scientific study of “scripture”, even if his solution to the Jesus question is not entirely satisfactory.

Naturally, the apologetics community went on the attack. One of the most entertaining things I read in criticism of his book was this: “Alvar Ellegard offers a compilation of questionable, unsupported speculations that are tied together into a single thesis, that Jesus (as the title inferred) was not of the first century AD.” One may note the word “compilation” – well, anybody can make a spelling error – but it is followed by the erroneous use of the term “inferred” when “implied” would have been correct. Sad to say, there are biblical scholars whose hermeneutics and epistemology aren’t any more elegant than the above example.

Ellegard was inspired to some considerable extent by the works of G. A. Wells. He writes:

I am certainly not original in holding that the gospel Jesus is largely fictional. The philosophers of the Enlightenment took naturally to that view, and it received strong support from the German theologian David F. Strauss, whose *Leben Jesu* (Strauss 1835) created a sensation throughout Europe. [\[123\]](#) In our own century, prominent propounders of the thesis are Arthur Drews (Drews 1910-11), P. L. Couchoud (Couchoud 1926) and G. A. Wells (Wells 1971, 1975, 1982). None of these three is a theologian. Drews was a professor of philosophy, Couchoud a doctor of medicine turned Bible scholar, and Wells is a professor of German specializing in the history of ideas. Of the three, Wells is by far the most conscientious scholar, with a thorough grasp of the present-day state of the art among the

theologians. [\[124\]](#)

Citing Burton Mack, he notes that the biblical scholar/theologian community has pretty much ignored this type of work, especially that of Wells. It's not a surprise that Wells's work has been subjected to rather vehement criticism from biblical scholars, some of whom accuse him of "anti-religious" intentions. One of their main criticisms is that Wells is working outside his own field of expertise; that is, he is not a "New Testament expert." That argument is patently absurd when one considers that funding for becoming a "New Testament scholar" generally comes from religious institutions and requires belief; those New Testament scholars who, in the course of their studies, lose their faith, often pay a high price professionally and personally. It seems to me that being a "New Testament scholar" should exclude one from being a New Testament scholar! If you *believe* in what you are studying, you've already lost any claim to scientific objectivity.

However, there is actually a growing list of scholars – a number of them of the biblically trained variety – who are coming to similar conclusions and leaving the faith: Michael D. Goulder, Thomas L. Brodie, Gerd Ludemann, Robert Price, etc. But what is equally interesting is the number of non-theologian scholars who have recently turned their attention to this issue, popularly called the "Jesus Myth Theory":

The Christ myth theory (also known as the Jesus myth theory, Jesus mythicism or simply mythicism) is the hypothesis that Jesus of Nazareth never existed; or if he did, that he had virtually nothing to do with the founding of Christianity and the accounts in the gospels. The Christ myth theory contradicts the mainstream view in historical Jesus research, which accepts that there are events described in the gospels that are not historical but which still assumes that the gospels are founded on a basic historical core.

Different proponents espouse slightly different versions of the Christ myth theory, but many proponents of the theory use a three-fold argument first developed in the 19th century:

- that the New Testament has no historical value
- that there are no non-Christian references to Jesus Christ dating back to the first century
- that Christianity had pagan or mythical roots. [\[125\]](#)

The core tenets of the Christ myth theory trace their history back through the Enlightenment to the conflicts in the first Christian centuries.

Despite this there remains a strong consensus in historical-critical biblical scholarship that a historical Jesus did live in that area and in that time period. However, scholars differ on the historicity of specific episodes described in the Biblical accounts of Jesus, and *the only two events subject to "almost universal assent" are that Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist and was crucified by the order of the Roman Prefect Pontius Pilate* (although some argue that "the only thing New Testament scholars seem to agree on is Jesus' historical existence"). Some scholars have made the case that there are a number of plausible "Jesuses" that could have existed, that there can be no certainty as to which Jesus was the historical Jesus.

The beginnings of the formal denial of the existence of Jesus can be traced to late 18th-century France, and the works of Constantin François Chassebœuf de Volney and Charles-François Dupuis. Volney and Dupuis argued that Christianity was an amalgamation of various ancient mythologies and that Jesus was a totally mythical character. [\[126\]](#)

One of my own favorites is German scholar Bruno Bauer:

German Bruno Bauer, who taught at the University of Bonn, took Strauss' arguments further and became the first author to systematically argue that Jesus did not exist. Bauer's writings presented the first use of the threefold argument used in much of myth theory in later years (but often rediscovered independently). Bauer's three-fold arguments are that:

- The gospels were written many decades or even a century after Jesus' estimated year of death, by individuals who likely never met Jesus, and then were edited or forged over the centuries by unknown scribes with their own agendas.
- There are no surviving historic records about Jesus of Nazareth from any non-Jewish author until the second century, and

Jesus left no writings or other archaeological evidence.

- Certain gospel stories are similar to those of dying-and-rising gods, demigods (sons of gods), solar deities, saviors or other divine men such as Horus, Mithra/Mithras, Prometheus, Dionysus, Osiris, Buddha, and Krishna, as well as Christ-like historical figures like Apollonius of Tyana.

Bauer initially left open the question of whether an historical Jesus existed at all. Later, in *A Critique of the Gospels and a History of their Origin* (1850–1851), Bauer argued that Jesus had not existed, and in 1877 in *Christ and the Caesars* he suggested that Christianity was a synthesis of the Stoicism of Seneca the Younger and of the Jewish theology of Philo as developed by pro-Roman Jews such as Josephus. Bauer's work was heavily criticized at the time; in 1839 he was removed from his position at the University of Bonn ... [\[127\]](#)

Following Bauer, there were quite a number of eminent scholars joining the fray (for such it certainly was!); there were a few embarrassments such as the shamanistic cult idea of John Allegro and assorted Jesus conspiracies that keep coming out, all of which make the fatal move of thinking that the gospels and Acts have anything to do with history. When we finally get to G. A. Wells, we find that his work has been acknowledged at least by a couple of eminent theologians: British theologian Kenneth Grayston advised Christians to acknowledge the difficulties raised by Wells, and New Testament scholar Graham Stanton said that Wells presented the most thoroughgoing and sophisticated arguments for the Christ myth theory. Burton Mack has also called attention to Wells' work.

Another of my favorites is Thomas L. Thompson, Professor emeritus at the University of Copenhagen. Most of his work is in OT criticism. When he was a student at University of Tübingen in the 1970s, his PhD dissertation on the quest for the historical Abraham was rejected by his examiner Joseph Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI) since it went against Catholic theology. He was invited to finish his degree at Temple University in Philadelphia where he received his PhD summa cum laude. In his book *The Messiah Myth: The Near Eastern Roots of Jesus and David*, Thompson argues that the biblical accounts of both King David and Jesus of Nazareth are mythical in nature and based on Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Babylonian, and Greek and Roman literature. He doesn't draw a final conclusion if Jesus was real or not, and in a 2012 online article, he strongly rejects Bart Ehrman's misrepresentation of his views and the label "mythicist".

Speaking of Ehrman, he claims that the view that Jesus existed is held by "virtually every expert on the planet". Despite this claim, he is forced to acknowledge that there are "a couple of bona fide scholars" who support the Christ myth theory. (He expends a lot of energy discussing bona fides.)

Another of my favorites is Tom Brodie. He was a Dominican priest and his bona fides are unquestionable: he holds a PhD from the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas in Rome and he is a co-founder and former director of the Dominican Biblical Institute in Limerick, Ireland. After years of academic work, he concluded that Jesus is mythical. See his *Beyond the Quest for the Historical Jesus: Memoir of a Discovery*. In 2013, the Dominican order tried to muzzle Brodie, but it seems they finally came to some agreement: Brodie stays in retirement, more or less, and they leave him alone. They can't control his books since they were not published by the church.

One of the most active new kids on the mythical Jesus block is Richard Carrier, who holds a doctorate in ancient history from Columbia University. He wrote a deservedly rough review of Bart Ehrman's book *Did Jesus Exist* in 2012, and the debate has been pretty hot on the internet ever since.

Earl Doherty's encyclopedic writings on the topic should be mentioned here as well. His view is that "no historical Jesus worthy of the name existed, that Christianity began with a belief in a spiritual, mythical figure, that the Gospels are essentially allegory and fiction, and that no single identifiable person lay at the root of the Galilean preaching tradition." [\[128\]](#) He further notes that none of the major Christian apologists *before 180 AD*, except for Justin and Aristides of Athens, included an account of a historical Jesus in their defenses of Christianity. He further points out that Theophilus of Antioch (c. 163–182), Athenagoras of Athens (c. 133–190), Tatian the Assyrian (c. 120–180), and Marcus Minucius Felix (writing around 150–270) offer no indication that they believed in a historical figure crucified and resurrected, and that the name Jesus does not appear

in any of them. [\[129\]](#)

A thoroughly qualified New Testament scholar and former Baptist preacher, Robert Price, was a fellow of the Jesus Seminar, a group of writers and scholars who study the historicity of Jesus, and a member of the Jesus Project. He, too, thinks that Christianity is a synthesis of Egyptian, Jewish and Greek myths and questions the existence of a living man behind the myths:

He writes that everyone who espouses the Christ myth theory bases their arguments on three key points:

- There is no mention of a miracle-working Jesus in secular sources.
- The epistles, written earlier than the gospels, provide no evidence of a recent historical Jesus; [\[130\]](#) all that can be taken from the epistles, Price argues, is that a Jesus Christ, son of God, lived in a heavenly realm (much as other ancient gods, e.g. Horus), there died as a sacrifice for human sin, was raised by God and enthroned in heaven.
- The Jesus narrative is paralleled in Middle Eastern myths about dying and rising gods; Price names Baal, Osiris, Attis, Adonis, and Dumuzi/Tammuz as examples, all of which, he writes, survived into the Hellenistic and Roman periods and thereby influenced early Christianity. Price alleges that Christian apologists have tried to minimize these parallels.

Price argues that if critical methodology is applied with ruthless consistency, one is left in complete agnosticism regarding Jesus's historicity: "There might have been a historical Jesus, but unless someone discovers his diary or his skeleton, we'll never know." Price argues that "the varying dates are the residue of various attempts to anchor an originally mythic or legendary Jesus in more or less recent history", citing accounts that have Jesus being crucified under Alexander Jannaeus (83 BCE) or in his 50s by Herod Agrippa I under the rule of Claudius Caesar (41–54 CE).

Price points out: "What one Jesus reconstruction leaves aside, the next one takes up and makes its cornerstone. Jesus simply wears too many hats in the Gospels—exorcist, healer, king, prophet, sage, rabbi, demigod, and so on. The Jesus Christ of the New Testament is a composite figure (...) The historical Jesus (if there was one) might well have been a messianic king, or a progressive Pharisee, or a Galilean shaman, or a magus, or a Hellenistic sage. But he cannot very well have been all of them at the same time. ^¼ He writes at the conclusion of his 2000 book *Deconstructing Jesus*: "There may have been a real figure there, but there is simply no longer any way of being sure." He also states: "I am not trying to say that there was a single origin of the Christian savior Jesus Christ, and that origin is pure myth; rather, I am saying that there may indeed have been such a myth, and that if so, it eventually flowed together with other Jesus images, some one of which may have been based on a historical Jesus the Nazorean." [\[131\]](#)

I think Price is correct, and I think we can identify which images came together.

Paul's Jesus

While I disagree with some of Ellegård's conclusions, his linguistic methods applied to the texts of early Christianity provide the clues to the earliest concept of Jesus.

He begins his study with the writings of Paul, which are, as most NT scholars admit, *the earliest unquestionably Christian (as we understand Christianity) writings*. [\[132\]](#) As Ellegård points out, based on the accepted Christian chronology, Paul must have been about the same age as Jesus of Nazareth, so his silence on the life and works of this alleged messiah is quite remarkable. Ellegård tells us that his examination of the texts suggests strongly the following:

Paul's message to his audiences in the Jewish Diaspora was that his and his colleagues' visions proved, first, that Jesus had risen from the dead, second, that he was the Messiah, and third, that the Last Judgement was imminent, at which Jesus, as the Messiah, would save the faithful from death and destruction.

Messianic ideas were rife among the Jews throughout the centuries around the beginning of our era, so Paul's and the others' preaching found willing listeners. But who was Jesus? Paul says very little about him. Evidently his audiences could identify him immediately, since they asked no questions. Moreover, as the main message was that Jesus would soon return and save those who believed that he was the Messiah, the human, earthly Jesus was of little consequence to them.

Paul's only experience of Jesus was clearly through his ecstatic visions. To judge from his writings (1 Cor 15) he assumed that his fellow apostles had had experiences of the same kind. He certainly does not feel inferior to them on that score. But if none of the apostles had ever seen Jesus, the natural conclusion is that Jesus cannot have been contemporary with any of them. This, together with the fact that Jesus was taken for granted in all the Pauline congregations throughout the Diaspora, leads to the further conclusion that he was a well-established figure among them, and presumably one whose activity had been living in their memories for a long time.

Paul had seen Jesus after he had been raised to the heavens, which proved that he had in this sense risen from the dead. But neither Paul nor anybody else said anything about when Jesus' death and resurrection had taken place. It was not an essential question. The chief concern of Paul and his congregations was the imminence of the Day of Judgement. Hence the one thing necessary was to arrange one's life in such a way as to be saved on that momentous day, which was assumed certainly to arrive within the lifetime of those who heard Paul.

But as years and decades passed without the expected catastrophe, it is understandable that many people turned their attention to other aspects of the teaching of Paul and his fellow apostles. We may assume that Jesus was known as a revered teacher. But what exactly had he taught? How had he taught it? To whom? When? What kind of a person was he?

If those who began to ask these questions towards the end of the first century turned to the writings of Paul and his contemporaries, they found little in the way of answers. They had to construct a life of Jesus largely on their own. This is how the Gospels arose ... [\[133\]](#)

Ellegård then lists six texts that he believes were produced by Christian communities in the 1st century in addition to the letters of Paul: the *Pastor of Hermas*, the *Didache*, the *First Letter of Clement*, the *Letter of Barnabas*, the Letter to the Hebrews, and the Revelation of John. The major portion of the latter, he believes, was written right around the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, probably just prior to it, and intended to give encouragement to the rebels to hold out for the coming of their messiah. Ellegård points out that, of course, these texts have been subjected to later editing and additions, but in general, *on linguistic grounds*, they can be situated *earlier than the gospels*. He gives close and detailed arguments for why he dates these texts as early as he does.

None of the early texts that Ellegård has identified ever use the term "Christian"; followers are always referred to as the Elect, the Saints, the Church of God – all terms found in the Qumran texts. Also, they have almost nothing to say about an earthly Jesus or his teaching or theology. Instead they focus on a death and resurrection, though none of them give an indication of this having occurred in a temporal context. None of them ever claim to have seen or heard an earthly Jesus, nor do they claim to know of anybody who did. It seems that their sources were "revelations" that they had from interpreting passages from the Hebrew Scriptures and other literature, such as Enoch and various prophetic works. *In contrast to Paul, who addressed mainly gentiles, the other six documents listed by Ellegård apparently address a Jewish Diaspora audience.* Their arguments are consistently based on the Septuagint version of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Among other clues, the points above lead Ellegard to argue that the early Christian communities began as Essene-type gatherings – ecclesia – all around the Empire. That, of course, connects them in some way to the Qumran community near the Dead Sea. We can get a good idea of how those people were thinking and acting based on their texts: it was all (more or less) about evicting and/or destroying the hated Romans.

Essenes, Gnostics, and Qumran

Before continuing, it will be useful to lay out what has been said about the Essenes by writers of antiquity. Here is Philo's first account:

Moreover Palestine and Syria too are not barren of exemplary wisdom and virtue, which countries no slight portion of that most populous nation of the Jews inhabits. There is a portion of those people called Essenes, in number something more than four thousand in my opinion, who derive their name from their piety, though not according to any accurate form of the Grecian dialect, because they are above all men devoted to the service of God, not sacrificing living animals, but studying rather to preserve their own minds in a

state of holiness and purity. These men, in the first place, live in villages, avoiding all cities on account of the habitual lawlessness of those who inhabit them, well knowing that such a moral disease is contracted from associations with wicked men, just as a real disease might be from an impure atmosphere, and that this would stamp an incurable evil on their souls.

Of these men, some cultivating the earth, and others devoting themselves to those arts which are the result of peace, benefit both themselves and all those who come in contact with them, not storing up treasures of silver and of gold, nor acquiring vast sections of the earth out of a desire for ample revenues, but providing all things which are requisite for the natural purposes of life; for they alone of almost all men having been originally poor and destitute, and that too rather from their own habits and ways of life than from any real deficiency of good fortune, are nevertheless accounted very rich, judging contentment and frugality to be great abundance, as in truth they are.

Among those men you will find no makers of arrows, or javelins, or swords, or helmets, or breastplates, or shields; no makers of arms or of military engines; no one, in short, attending to any employment whatever connected with war, or even to any of those occupations even in peace which are easily perverted to wicked purposes; for they are utterly ignorant of all traffic, and of all commercial dealings, and of all navigation, but they repudiate and keep aloof from everything which can possibly afford any inducement to covetousness; and there is not a single slave among them, but they are all free, aiding one another with a reciprocal interchange of good offices; and they condemn masters, not only as unjust, inasmuch as they corrupt the very principle of equality, but likewise as impious, because they destroy the ordinances of nature, which generated them all equally, and brought them up like a mother, as if they were all legitimate brethren, not in name only, but in reality and truth. But in their view this natural relationship of all men to one another has been thrown into disorder by designing covetousness, continually wishing to surpass others in good fortune, and which has therefore engendered alienation instead of affection, and hatred instead of friendship; and leaving the logical part of philosophy, as in no respect necessary for the acquisition of virtue, to the word-catchers, and the natural part, as being too sublime for human nature to master, to those who love to converse about high objects (except indeed so far as such a study takes in the contemplation of the existence of God and of the creation of the universe), they devote all their attention to the moral part of philosophy, using as instructors the laws of their country which it would have been impossible for the human mind to devise without divine inspiration.

Now these laws they are taught at other times, indeed, but most especially on the seventh day, for the seventh day is accounted sacred, on which they abstain from all other employments, and frequent the sacred places which are called synagogues, and there they sit according to their age in classes, the younger sitting under the elder, and listening with eager attention in becoming order. Then one, indeed, takes up the holy volume and reads it, and another of the men of the greatest experience comes forward and explains what is not very intelligible, for a great many precepts are delivered in enigmatical modes of expression, and allegorically, as the old fashion was; and thus the people are taught piety, and holiness, and justice, and economy, and the science of regulating the state, and the knowledge of such things as are naturally good, or bad, or indifferent, and to choose what is right and to avoid what is wrong, using a threefold variety of definitions, and rules, and criteria, namely, the love of God, and the love of virtue, and the love of mankind. Accordingly, the sacred volumes present an infinite number of instances of the disposition devoted to the love of God, and of a continued and uninterrupted purity throughout the whole of life, of a careful avoidance of oaths and of falsehood, and of a strict adherence to the principle of looking on the Deity as the cause of everything which is good and of nothing which is evil. They also furnish us with many proofs of a love of virtue, such as abstinence from all covetousness of money, from ambition, from indulgence in pleasures, temperance, endurance, and also moderation, simplicity, good temper, the absence of pride, obedience to the laws, steadiness, and everything of that kind; and, lastly, they bring forward as proofs of the love of mankind, goodwill, equality beyond all power of description, and fellowship, about which it is not unreasonable to say a few words.

In the first place, then, there is no one who has a house so absolutely his own private property, that it does not in some sense also belong to every one: for besides that they all dwell together in companies, the house is open to all those of the same notions, who come to them from other quarters; then there is one magazine among them all; their expenses are all in common; their garments belong to them all in common; their food is common, since they all eat in messes; for there is no other people among which you can find a common use of the same house, a common adoption of one mode of living, and a common use of the same table more thoroughly established in fact than among this tribe: and is not this very natural? For whatever they, after having been working during the day, receive for their wages, that they do not retain as their own, but bring it into the common stock, and give any advantage that is to be derived from it to all who desire to avail themselves of it; and those who are sick are not neglected because they are unable to contribute to the common stock, inasmuch as the tribe have in their public stock a means of supplying their necessities and aiding their weakness, so that from their ample means they support them liberally and abundantly; and they cherish respect for their elders, and honour them and care for them, just as parents are honoured and cared for by their lawful children: being supported by them in all

abundance both by their personal exertions, and by innumerable contrivances.

Such diligent practisers of virtue does philosophy, unconnected with any superfluous care of examining into Greek names render men, proposing to them as necessary exercises to train them towards its attainment, all praiseworthy actions by which a freedom, which can never be enslaved, is firmly established. And a proof of this is that, though at different times a great number of chiefs of every variety of disposition and character, have occupied their country, some of whom have endeavoured to surpass even ferocious wild beasts in cruelty, leaving no sort of inhumanity unpractised, and have never ceased to murder their subjects in whole troops, and have even torn them to pieces while living, like cooks cutting them limb from limb, till they themselves, being overtaken by the vengeance of divine justice, have at last experienced the same miseries in their turn: others again having converted their barbarous frenzy into another kind of wickedness, practising an ineffable degree of savageness, talking with the people quietly, but through the hypocrisy of a more gentle voice, betraying the ferocity of their real disposition, fawning upon their victims like treacherous dogs, and becoming the causes of irremediable miseries to them, have left in all their cities monuments of their impiety, and hatred of all mankind, in the never to be forgotten miseries endured by those whom they oppressed: and yet no one, not even of those immoderately cruel tyrants, nor of the more treacherous and hypocritical oppressors was ever able to bring any real accusation against the multitude of those called Essenes or Holy. [The Greek is *essaion en hosioun*, as if *essaion* was only a variety of the word *hosioun*, "holy."] But everyone being subdued by the virtue of these men, looked up to them as free by nature, and not subject to the frown of any human being, and have celebrated their manner of messing together, and their fellowship with one another beyond all description in respect of its mutual good faith, which is an ample proof of a perfect and very happy life. [\[134\]](#)

Philo's second account:

But our lawgiver trained an innumerable body of his pupils to partake in those things, who are called Essenes, being, as I imagine, honoured with this appellation because of their exceeding holiness. And they dwell in many cities of Judaea, and in many villages, and in great and populous communities. And this sect of them is not an hereditary of family connexion; for family ties are not spoken of with reference to acts voluntarily performed; but it is adopted because of their admiration for virtue and love of gentleness and humanity. At all events, there are no children among the Essenes, no, nor any youths or persons only just entering upon manhood; since the dispositions of all such persons are unstable and liable to change, from the imperfections incident to their age, but they are all full-grown men, and even already declining towards old age, such as are no longer carried away by the impetuosity of their bodily passions, and are not under the influence of the appetites, but such as enjoy a genuine freedom, the only true and real liberty. And a proof of this is to be found in their life of perfect freedom; no one among them ventures at all to acquire any property whatever of his own, neither house, nor slave, nor farm, nor flocks and herds, nor any thing of any sort which can be looked upon as the fountain or provision of riches; but they bring them together into the middle as a common stock, and enjoy one common general benefit from it all.

And they all dwell in the same place, making clubs, and societies, and combinations, and unions with one another, and doing every thing throughout their whole lives with reference to the general advantage; but the different members of this body have different employments in which they occupy themselves, and labour without hesitation and without cessation, making no mention of either cold, or heat, or any changes of weather or temperature as an excuse for desisting from their tasks. But before the sun rises they betake themselves to their daily work, and they do not quit it till some time after it has set, when they return home rejoicing no less than those who have been exercising themselves in gymnastic contests; for they imagine that whatever they devote themselves to as a practice is a sort of gymnastic exercise of more advantage to life, and more pleasant both to soul and body, and of more enduring benefit and equability, than mere athletic labours, inasmuch as such toil does not cease to be practised with delight when the age of vigour of body is passed; for there are some of them who are devoted to the practice of agriculture, being skilful in such things as pertain to the sowing and cultivation of lands; others again are shepherds, or cowherds, and experienced in the management of every kind of animal; some are cunning in what relates to swarms of bees; others again are artisans and handicraftsmen, in order to guard against suffering from the want of anything of which there is at times an actual need; and these men omit and delay nothing, which is requisite for the innocent supply of the necessaries of life. Accordingly, each of these men, who differ so widely in their respective employments, when they have received their wages give them up to one person who is appointed as the universal steward and general manager; and he, when he has received the money, immediately goes and purchases what is necessary and furnishes them with food in abundance, and all other things of which the life of mankind stands in need.

And those who live together and eat at the same table are day after day contented with the same things, being lovers of frugality and moderation, and averse to all sumptuousness and extravagance as a disease of both mind and body. And not only are their tables in

common but also their dress; for in the winter there are thick cloaks found, and in the summer light cheap mantles, so that whoever wants one is at liberty without restraint to go and take whichever kind he chooses; since what belongs to one belongs to all, and on the other hand whatever belongs to the whole body belongs to each individual. And again, if any one of them is sick he is cured from the common resources, being attended to by the general care and anxiety of the whole body. Accordingly the old men, even if they happen to be childless, as if they were not only the fathers of many children but were even also particularly happy in an affectionate offspring, are accustomed to end their lives in a most happy and prosperous and carefully attended old age, being looked upon by such a number of people as worthy of so much honour and provident regard that they think themselves bound to care for them even more from inclination than from any tie of natural affection.

Again, perceiving with more than ordinary acuteness and accuracy, what is alone or at least above all other things calculated to dissolve such associations, they repudiate marriage; and at the same time they practise continence in an eminent degree; for no one of the Essenes ever marries a wife, because woman is a selfish creature and one addicted to jealousy in an immoderate degree, and terribly calculated to agitate and overturn the natural inclinations of a man, and to mislead him by her continual tricks; for as she is always studying deceitful speeches and all other kinds of hypocrisy, like an actress on the stage, when she is alluring the eyes and ears of her husband, she proceeds to cajole his predominant mind after the servants have been deceived. And again, if there are children she becomes full of pride and all kinds of license in her speech, and all the obscure sayings which she previously meditated in irony in a disguised manner she now begins to utter with audacious confidence; and becoming utterly shameless she proceeds to acts of violence, and does numbers of actions of which every one is hostile to such associations; for the man who is bound under the influence of the charms of a woman, or of children, by the necessary ties of nature, being overwhelmed by the impulses of affection, is no longer the same person towards others, but is entirely changed, having, without being aware of it, become a slave instead of a free man. This now is the enviable system of life of these Essenes, so that not only private individuals but even mighty kings, admiring the men, venerate their sect, and increase their dignity and majesty in a still higher degree by their approbation and by the honours which they confer on them. [\[135\]](#)

From Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*:

To the west [of the Dead Sea] the Essenes have put the necessary distance between themselves and the insalubrious shore. They are a people unique of its kind and admirable beyond all others in the whole world; without women and renouncing love entirely, without money and having for company only palm trees. Owing to the throng of newcomers, this people is daily reborn in equal number; indeed, those whom, wearied by the fluctuations of fortune, life leads to adopt their customs, stream in in great numbers. Thus, unbelievable though this may seem, for thousands of centuries a people has existed which is eternal yet into which no one is born: so fruitful for them is the repentance which others feel for their past lives! [\[136\]](#)

Josephus' account from *Wars*:

For there are three philosophical sects among the Jews. The followers of the first of whom are the Pharisees; of the second the Sadducces; and the third sect, who pretends to a severer discipline, and called Essenes. These last are Jews by birth, and seem to have a greater affection for one another than the other sects have. These Essenes reject pleasures as an evil, but esteem continence, and the conquest over our passions, to be virtue. They neglect wedlock, but choose out other persons' children, while they are pliable, and fit for learning; and esteem them to be of their kindred, and form them according to their own manners. They do not absolutely deny the fitness of marriage, and the succession of mankind thereby continued; but they guard against the lascivious behavior of women, and are persuaded that none of them preserve their fidelity to one man.

These men are despisers of riches, and so very communicative as raises our admiration. Nor is there any one to be found among them who hath more than another; for it is a law among them, that those who come to them must let what they have be common to the whole order,—insomuch, that among them all there is no appearance of poverty or excess of riches, but every one's possessions are intermingled with every other's possessions: and so there is, as it were, one patrimony among all the brethren. They think that oil is a defilement; and if any one of them be anointed without his own approbation, it is wiped off his body; for they think to be sweaty is a good thing, as they do also to be clothed in white garments. They also have stewards appointed to take care of their common affairs, who every one of them have no separate business for any, but what is for the use of them all.

They have no certain city but many of them dwell in every city; and if any of their sect come from other places, what they have lies open for them, just as if it were their own; and they go into such as they never knew before, as if they had been ever so long

acquainted with them. For which reason they carry nothing with them when they travel into remote parts, though still they take their weapons with them, for fear of thieves. Accordingly there is, in every city where they live, one appointed particularly to take care of strangers, and to provide garments and other necessaries for them. But the habit and management of their bodies is such as children use who are in fear of their masters. Nor do they allow of the change of garments, or of shoes, till they be first entirely torn to pieces or worn out by time. Nor do they either buy or sell anything to one another; but every one of them gives what he hath to him that wanteth it, and receives from him again in lieu of it what may be convenient for himself; and although there be no requital made, they are fully allowed to take what they want of whomsoever they please.

And as for their piety towards God, it is very extraordinary; for before sunrising they speak not a word about profane matters, but put up certain prayers which they have received from their forefathers, as if they made a supplication for its rising. After this every one of them are sent away by their curators, to exercise some of those arts wherein they are skilled, in which they labor with great diligence till the fifth hour. After which they assemble themselves together again into one place; and when they have clothed themselves in white veils, they then bathe their bodies in cold water. And after this purification is over, they every one meet together in an apartment of their own, into which it is not permitted to any of another sect to enter; while they go, after a pure manner, into the dining room; as into a certain holy temple, and quietly set themselves down; upon which the baker lays them loaves in order; the cook also brings a single place of one sort of food, and sets it before every one of them; but a priest says grace before meat; and it is unlawful for any one to taste of the food before grace be said. The same priest, when he hath dined, says grace again after meat; and when they begin, and when they end, they praise God, as he that bestows their food upon them; after which they lay aside their [white] garments, and betake themselves to their labors again till the evening; then they return home to supper, after the same manner; and if there be any strangers there, they set down with them. Nor is there ever any clamor or disturbance to pollute their house, but they give every one leave to speak in their turn; which silence thus kept in their house, appears to foreigners like some tremendous mystery; the cause of which is that perpetual sobriety they exercise, and the same settled measure of meat and drink that is allotted to them, and that such as is abundantly sufficient for them.

And truly, as for other things, they do nothing but according to the injunctions of their curators; only these two things are done among them at every one's own free will, which are, to assist those that want it, and to show mercy; for they are permitted of their own accord to afford succor to such as deserve it, when they stand in need of it, and to bestow food on those that are in distress; but they cannot give any thing to their kindred without the curators. They dispense their anger after a just manner, and restrain their passion. They are eminent for fidelity, and are the ministers of peace; whatsoever they say also is firmer than an oath; but swearing is avoided by them, and they esteem it worse than perjury; for they say, that he who cannot be believed without [swearing by] God, is already condemned. They also take great pains in studying the writings of the ancients, and choose out of them what is most for the advantage of their soul and body; and they inquire after such roots and medicinal stones as may cure their distempers.

But now, if any one hath a mind to come over to their sect, he is not immediately admitted, but he is prescribed the same method of living which they use, for a year, while he continues excluded; and they give him a small hatchet, and the fore-mentioned girdle, and the white garment. And when he hath given evidence, during that time, that he can observe their continence, he approaches nearer to their way of living, and is made partaker of the waters of purification; yet is he not even now admitted to live with them; for after this demonstration of his fortitude, his temper is tried two more years, and if he appear to be worthy, they then admit him into their society. And before he is allowed to touch their common food, he is obliged to take tremendous oaths; that, in the first place, he will exercise piety towards God; and then, that he will observe justice towards men; and that he will do no harm to any one, either of his own accord, or by the command of others; that he will always hate the wicked, and be assistant to the righteous; that he will ever show fidelity to all men, and especially to those in authority, because no one obtains the government without God's assistance; and that if he be in authority, he will at no time whatever abuse his authority, nor endeavor to outshine his subjects, either in his garments, or any other finery; that he will be perpetually a lover of truth, and propose to himself to reprove those that tell lies; that he will keep his hands clear from theft, and his soul from unlawful gains; and that he will neither conceal anything from those of his own sect, nor discover any of their doctrines to others, no, not though any one should compel him so to do at the hazard of his life. Moreover, he swears to communicate their doctrines to no one any otherwise than as he received them himself; that he will abstain from robbery, and will equally preserve the books belonging to their sect, and the means of the angels [or messengers]. These are the oaths by which they secure their proselytes to themselves.

But for those that are caught in any heinous sins, they cast them out of their society; and he who is thus separated from them, does often die after a miserable manner; for as is bound by the oath he hath taken, and by the customs he hath been engaged in, he is not at liberty to partake of that food that he meets with elsewhere, but is forced to eat grass, and to famish his body with hunger till he perish; for which reason they receive many of them again when they are at their last gasp, out of compassion to them, as thinking the

miseries they have endured till they come to the very brink of death, to be a sufficient punishment for the sins they had been guilty of.

But in the judgments they exercise they are most accurate and just; nor do they pass sentence by the votes of a court that is fewer than a hundred. And as to what is once determined by that number, it is unalterable. What they most of all honor, after God himself, is the name of their legislator [Moses]; whom, if any one blaspheme, he is punished capitally. They also think it a good thing to obey their elders, and the major part. Accordingly, if ten of them be sitting together no one of them will speak while the other nine are against it. They also avoid spitting in the midst of them, or on the right side. Moreover, they are stricter than any other of the Jews in resting from their labors on the seventh day; for they not only get their food ready the day before, that they may not be obliged to kindle a fire on that day, but they will not remove any vessel out of its place, nor go to stool thereon. Nay, on the other days they dig a small pit, a foot deep, with a paddle (which kind of hatchet is given them when they are first admitted among them); and covering themselves round with their garment, that they may not affront the divine rays of light, they ease themselves into that pit, after which they put the earth that was dug out again into the pit; and even this they do only in the more lonely places, which they choose out for this purpose; and although this easement of the body be natural, yet it is a rule with them to wash themselves after it, as if it were a defilement to them.

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

For their doctrine is this:—That bodies are corruptible, and that the matter they are made of it not permanent; but that the souls are immortal, and continue forever; and that they come out of the most subtle air, and are united to their bodies as in prisons, into which they are drawn by a certain natural enticement; but that when they are set free from the bonds of the flesh, they then, as released from a long bondage, rejoice and mount upward. And this is like the opinion of the Greeks, that good souls have their habitations beyond the ocean, in a region that is neither oppressed with storms of rain, or snow, or with intense heat, but that this place is such as is refreshed by the gentle breathing of a west wind, that is perpetually blowing from the ocean; while they allot to bad souls a dark and tempestuous den, full of never-ceasing punishments. And indeed the Greeks seem to me to have followed the same notion, when they allot the islands of the blessed to their brave men, whom they call heroes and demigods; and to the souls of the wicked, the region of the ungodly, in Hades, where their fables relate that certain persons, such as Sisyphus, and Tantalus, and Ixion, and Tityus, are punished; which is built on this first supposition, that souls are immortal; and thence are those exhortations to virtue, and exhortations from wickedness collected; whereby good men are bettered in the conduct of their life, by the hope they have of reward after their death, and whereby the vehement inclinations of bad men to vice are restrained, by the fear and expectation they are in, that although they should lie concealed in this life, they should suffer immortal punishment after their death. These are the divine doctrines of the Essenes about the soul, which lay an unavoidable bait for such as have once had a taste of their philosophy.

There also those among them who undertake to foretell things to come, by reading the holy books, and using several sorts of purifications, and being perpetually conversant in the discourses of the prophets; and it is but seldom that they miss in their predictions.

Moreover, there is another order of Essenes, who agree with the rest as to their way of living, and customs, and laws, but differ from them in the point of marriage, as thinking that by not marrying they cut off the principal part of the human life, which is the prospect of succession; nay rather, that if all men should be of the same opinion, the whole race of mankind would fail. However, they try their spouses for three years; and if they find that they have their natural purgations thrice, as trials that they are likely to be fruitful, they then actually marry them. But they do not use to accompany with their wives when they are with child, as a demonstration that they do not marry out of regard to pleasure, but for the sake of posterity. Now the women go into the baths with some of their garments on, as the men do with somewhat girded about them. And these are the customs of this order of Essenes. [\[137\]](#)

Josephus' second account, from *Antiquities*:

But the sect of the Essenes affirm, that fate governs all things, and that nothing befalls men but what is according to its determination. [\[138\]](#) ¼ These men live the same kind of life as do those whom the Greeks call Pythagoreans ¼ [\[139\]](#)

The doctrine of the Essenes is this: That all things are best ascribed to God. They teach the immortality of souls, and esteem that the rewards of righteousness are to be earnestly striven for; and when they send what they have dedicated to God into the temple, they do not offer sacrifices, because they have more pure lustrations of their own; on which account they are excluded from the common court of the temple, but offer their sacrifices themselves; yet is their course of life better than that of other men; and they entirely addict themselves to husbandry. It also deserves our admiration, how much they exceed all other men that addict themselves to virtue, and this in righteousness; and indeed to such a degree, that as it hath never appeared among any other man, neither Greeks nor barbarians, no, not for a little time, so hath it endured a long while among them. This is demonstrated by that institution of theirs which will not suffer anything to hinder them from having all things in common; so that a rich man enjoys no more of his own wealth than he who hath nothing at all. There are about four thousand men that live in this way, and neither marry wives, nor are desirous to keep servants; as thinking the latter tempts men to be unjust, and the former gives the handle to domestic quarrels; but as they live by themselves, they minister one to another. They also appoint certain stewards to receive the incomes of their revenues, and of the fruits of the ground; such as are good men and priests, who are to get their corn and their food ready for them. They none of them differ from others of the Essenes in their way of living, but do the most resemble those Daciae who are called Polistae [dwellers in cities]. [\[140\]](#)

Gabriele Boccaccini implies that a convincing etymology for the name Essene has not been found, but that the term applies to a larger group within Palestine that also included the Qumran community. [\[141\]](#)

According to Josephus, the Essenes had settled "not in one city" but "in large numbers in every town". Philo speaks of "more than four thousand" Essaioi living in "Palestine and Syria", more precisely, "in many cities of Judaea and in many villages and grouped in *great societies of many members*". [\[142\]](#)

The Church Father Epiphanius of Salamis (writing in the late 4th century AD) seems to make a distinction between two main groups within the Essenes: the Ossaeans and the Nazareans. Epiphanius describes each group as follows:

The Nazarean – they were Jews by nationality – originally from Gileaditis, Bashanitis and the Transjordan ... They acknowledged Moses and believed that he had received laws – not this law, however, but some other. And so, they were Jews who kept all the Jewish observances, but they would not offer sacrifice or eat meat. They considered it unlawful to eat meat or make sacrifices with it. They claim that these Books are fictions, and that none of these customs were instituted by the fathers. This was the difference between the Nazarean and the others ... [\[143\]](#)

After this Nazarean sect in turn comes another closely connected with them, called the Ossaeans. These are Jews like the former ... [they] originally came from Nabataea, Ituraea, Moabitis and Arielis, the lands beyond the basin of what sacred scripture called the Salt Sea ... Though it is different from the other six of these seven sects, it causes schism only by forbidding the books of Moses like the Nazarean. [\[144\]](#)

The relationship between the community of Qumran and the Essenes has been disputed.

Norman Golb [\[145\]](#) argues that ¼ the amount of documents is too extensive and includes many different writing styles and calligraphies; the ruins seem to have been a fortress, used as a military base for a very long period of time – including the 1st century – so they could not have been inhabited by the Essenes; and the large graveyard excavated in 1870, just 50 metres east of the Qumran ruins, was made of over 1200 tombs that included many women and children – Pliny clearly wrote that the Essenes who lived near the Dead Sea "had not one woman, had renounced all pleasure ... and no one was born in their race". ¼ Other scholars refute these arguments – particularly since Josephus describes some Essenes as allowing marriage. Another issue is the relationship between the

Essaioi and Philo's *Therapeutae* and *Therapeutrides*. He regarded the *Therapeutae* as a contemplative branch of the *Essaioi* who, he said, pursued an active life. [Philo, *De Vita Contemplativa* 1.1.]^[146]

Shürer accepts the identification as probable.^[147] So, the Essenes were probably a fairly diverse group, ranging from contemplative to militant in ideology, and extending throughout the empire.

The Teacher of Righteousness

Ellegård argues that what was known of the person named as “Jesus” in the Easter visions was related to traditions about the Teacher of Righteousness who figures in the Dead Sea Scrolls, the earliest of which are thought to have been written ca. 100 BC. This individual was known as a revered founder and leader of the cult, but not the Messiah or a supernatural being. The Teacher of Righteousness was someone to whom God had made known all the mysteries of the prophets, and who had been severely persecuted. In view of this, Wells discusses Talmudic references that point to a Jesus who was killed by the Jews in Lud (Lydda) by stoning,^[148] and not by the Romans in Jerusalem by crucifixion. In the Gemara, the body of commentaries on the Jewish codification of Law called the Mishnah, Jesus was said to have been persecuted by King Alexander Jannaeus:^[149]

The Gemara sums up Jesus’ activities by saying (Sanh. 43a) that he ‘practised magic and deceived and led astray Israel’. This man who learned magic in Egypt and scratched charms on his flesh has little resemblance to the gospel Jesus. ... The passage goes on to explain the incident, ‘When king Jannaeus put the Rabbis to death, Rabbi Joshua b. Perahiah fled to Alexandria but later ... came back ... (Sotah, 47a and Sanh. 107b). The persecution of the Pharisees under Jannaeus is well attested. Löw [1858] thought that the Jesus of the Talmud fled into Egypt during this persecution, learned magic there, and later founded the Essene sect, which he says, is named after him. ¼

In sum, if the early Christians were not followers of the gospel Jesus but Jews who believed that the Messiah, named Jesus, had come and would return, and who were otherwise orthodox, keeping the law and attending the temple, then the silence of the rabbinical literature about Jesus and about Christians up to the end of the first century, when the decisive break occurred, is quite intelligible; whereas if there was a historical Jesus who had the career ascribed to him in the gospels, it is not.^[150]

This idea is particularly interesting in view of Birger Pearson’s work *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity*. Pearson adduces new support of Moritz Friedlander’s idea that gnosticism is a pre-Christian phenomenon originating in anti-Law Jewish circles in Alexandria. That is, gnosticism arose among Jews who were exposed to Middle Platonism, but also influenced by the events of their times, i.e. the political facts on the ground, and the evident failure of the promises of their god:

This hermeneutical principle can be described as one of revolt. In the Gnostic reinterpretation the God of Israel, the God of history and creation, is demonized; the Creator and his creation are considered to be the product of a tragic fall within the divine realm; and humanity is seen to be a part of the transcendent God imprisoned by hostile powers in an alien environment. Inasmuch as the Gnostic synthesis reflects the use and reinterpretation of Jewish scripture and tradition, it is apparent that the Gnostic phenomenon itself originates in a Jewish environment as **an expression of alienation from (“orthodox”) Judaism**. As a result a new religion, which can no longer be called “Jewish,” is born.^[151]

However the scholarly dispute ends (assuming that it could or would!), there are a number of striking parallels between some of the Nag Hammadi texts and the texts of Qumran. This suggests strongly that similar speculations were underway both in Alexandria and in Palestine, and one wonders where they began. Is the Talmud correct that the origins were in Palestine in the time of Alexander Jannaeus? Or later, when Pompey destroyed the nationalist dreams of the Jews by taking Judea under Roman control?^[152] The Hellenistically inspired exegetical activities of the two groups advanced in different ways: for the Gnostics, Yahweh/Jehovah became a demon of sorts, and for the Qumran community, one only needed to apply more and better Peshier-izing to get the right combination and understand what was going on and what was going to happen. This is interesting in view of the fact that the Gnosticizers tended to reject the Old Testament (even if they based their myths on it), while later Christian orthodoxy – like the sectarians at Qumran – retained the Old Testament in rejection of the Gnostics and

later Marcionites.

In any event, the Dead Sea Scrolls show that the memory of their founder was treasured a long time after his death. Ellegård proposes that visions of this teacher – long dead – convinced members of the Qumran community and other groups of Essenes throughout the Empire that he was preparing to return to Earth along with the Hosts of Heaven, for the last judgment. Paul, it seems, may have taken this further and become convinced that the Teacher was a supernatural being who, like the character in the Wisdom Literature, had sought an abode on Earth, was rejected, and returned to Heaven. Further on, I'm going to propose a variation on this idea.

The descriptions of the Essenes written by Philo of Alexandria around 20 AD, and later by Josephus, suggest that they were a much more open and innovative group than what the Dead Sea Scrolls say about the xenophobic Qumran community. Perhaps that was because the Qumran group were closer to the scene of the political action and had become radicalized into Zealotry.

What Did Paul Know?

If the earliest Christian documents were addressed to Diaspora communities, and if many of these communities were Essenes, then we can probably assume that these groups held the same individual – the Qumran Teacher of Righteousness – in high esteem. What Paul was intent on communicating to these communities was the Jesus now revealed to him as a supernatural figure, a heavenly judge, and his salvific work was exemplified as “Christ on a cross”. This is a bit of a problem. The idea of crucifixion doesn't mesh with the emphasis on blood. Discussing the Book of Revelation, Wells notes:

... the Jews believed in the efficacy of the shedding of blood as a means of placating God. According to Leviticus, ‘the blood on the altar makes atonement for sins because it is being given for life that has been forfeited through sin. The blood is valid for atonement only when it is poured out on the altar in death’.^[153] And the idea that the blood of the sacrificed animal conveys new life is found in the worship of Attis ... In this cult, a bull and a ram were sacrificed on a grille under which the initiate stood, and he was reborn as the blood rained down upon him.^[154] When the Apocalypse pictures Jesus as a slaughtered lamb who redeemed the elect with his blood, a sacrificial death on the altar is indicated. ... many manuscripts say that the elect are ‘washed’ from their sins by his blood. This implies the shedding of **streams of blood** as in sacrifice on the altar. This image of the slaughtered lamb whose blood was poured out would not be a very apposite way of referring figuratively to death by **crucifixion, which is relatively bloodless**, but could be better applied to someone who had been **beheaded or torn to pieces with knives**.^[155]

“For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but *we proclaim Christ crucified*, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ¼ When I came to you, brothers, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified.”^[156] With these words, Paul makes clear the decisive importance he attributes to the image of Christ on a cross. Recalling the Jesus who was stoned at Lydda, and afterwards hung on a cross, we find that this is the prescribed method derived from Deut. 21:23, which further states that the accursed body ought not to be left hanging overnight so as not to desecrate the land. That is probably where Paul got the idea that the ignominy of the death of Jesus freed Christians from the law. Wells writes:

The argument he gives to show that [the Law] is unnecessary is that a crucified Jesus contradicts the law of Deut. 21.23 that a man whose dead body is hanged upon a tree is accursed of God. Paul quotes this passage and comments: ‘Christ brought us freedom from the curse of the law by becoming for our sake an accursed thing’ (Gal. iii.13). The argument is: the law says that the man crucified is accursed. Jesus was crucified but could not be accursed. Therefore a case has occurred for which the law is not valid. But as it must be either valid absolutely or invalid absolutely, it is by this one case rendered wholly invalid.^[157]

That the blood of a perfectly righteous man can atone for others, and that excess suffering especially can “pay” for the sins others have committed, and is of service to others, goes back at least to the *Wisdom of Sirach* and the books of Maccabees.

But, as Wells notes, while it was possible for orthodox Jews to think of their Messiah as *suffering* to atone for the sins of the world, they did not hold the idea that the Messiah might *die as a bloody, atoning sacrifice*. Paul got that part of his Christology elsewhere. Commenting on how the idea of the suffering servant became associated with the Messiah, Wells writes:

All that was necessary was that this idea [i.e. that excess suffering for the sins of others is of service to others] should be applied to the Messiah. This application was natural enough, since the Messiah was believed to be a powerful and virtuous being, and the idea that suffering gives power and is associated with virtue is almost universal. The Indian Brahmins, for instance, practiced self-inflicted suffering in the hope of attaining supernatural power, and many virtuous men or saints are reported to have endured great suffering. The idea may have arisen from the supposed connection between sin and punishment. Suffering is held to atone for wickedness, and excess of suffering is therefore like the opening of a credit account. [\[158\]](#)

It is fairly easy to suggest that Paul adopted the idea of the dying and resurrecting gods of the pagans, but I don't think it is quite that simple. Wells proposes, based on Frazer, that when the dying and resurrecting agriculture gods were transferred to city life, the objects of their revivification became human beings themselves and the resurrection of the god was thought to ensure that of his devotees. That is, *those who associated with a particular god, and supported that deity by devotion, would also achieve a new life* after the death of the body. All around the empire there were public and private cults focused around such promises. It is suggested that in those times of gross and outrageous vice and inequity on the part of the social elites, a popular reaction developed in the form of rapid development and promulgation of religious groups – ecclesia – in which an ethically pure life was a condition of membership. Mysteries were multiplied, and initiates were submitted to ceremonies, rites, mystical reenactments of the death and resurrection of the god, confession of sins, sacrifices, and so on. The most consistent elements shared across these organizations were baptism, sacrifice, and a common meal that represented not just communion with other initiates, but with the god as well.

Indeed the early Christian communities of the Diaspora had much in common with such ecclesia, but as noted, the “church” in Jerusalem may have been something quite different. What Paul created and taught appears to have been very much at odds with that group. As Wells writes:

Paul wrote of a Jesus of whom no traditions were current save that he was the Messiah descended from David, [\[159\]](#) was crucified, and that his resurrection promised his worshippers immortality. Nothing was known of his doctrines or of when he lived. Thus there is nothing in the earliest Christian documents which would have appeared unacceptable to a citizen of the Middle East at the time, when the idea of the dying Saviour was very widespread. ... Murray has observed that ‘the parts of Christian doctrine which a Levantine pagan of the first century would deny are chiefly the historical statements. Like Paul before his conversion, he would be ready enough to discuss the doctrine of a Hebrew Messiah or a Hellenistic “Saviour”, but would refuse to believe that this supernatural being had just arrived on earth in the person of a certain Jew or Nazarene’. [\[160\]](#) Since it is the historical statements that are lacking in the earliest Christian traditions, it really looks as if Christianity began without them, as one of the many dying-god sects of the time which grew in popularity because of the extent to which it was able to assimilate other myths and rituals. [\[161\]](#)

Paul never mentions John the Baptist; never says anything about a betrayal by Judas or Peter's denial of Jesus. This latter item is surprising since Paul was in direct conflict with Peter and the Jerusalem ecclesia, and would surely have brought up any dirt about Peter had he known about it. There are numerous occasions when citing a saying of Jesus would have settled an issue, but Paul never does that. More than once, Paul contradicts what the later gospels say, but more often, the gospels appear to be putting Paul's words into Jesus' mouth. When Paul says he is giving “a commandment of the Lord”, we note that “the Lord” never said any such thing, and Paul is explicit that he got his instructions via revelation, not from any teachings transmitted by men.

Paul also doesn't write anything about 12 apostles and the one mention of them in the epistles is commonly regarded as an interpolation; but even if it isn't, it contradicts the gospels. [\[162\]](#) Paul only knows Cephas, James and John, the “so-called pillars”, *with whom he is in direct conflict*. Paul taught that all who believed in Jesus would be saved and that the Jewish law was null and void. James appears to have been the one insisting that the law was the only way to salvation. Paul speaks of

Judaizing plots and conspiracies against his converts, and he mentions another gospel of circumcision, rivals who proclaim “another Jesus.” Obviously, Paul’s Jesus was not the Jesus of the Jerusalem ecclesia.

Paul also never mentions or alludes to the idea that any of the apostles had ever been companions of an earthly Jesus. When he refers to James as “the Lord’s Brother”, he most likely means a member of an order of devotees since he also refers to “the brethren of the Lord” [\[163\]](#) repeatedly throughout all his letters. Nowhere does he suggest or hint that Cephas, James and John were taught anything by Jesus; they are simply leaders of a sect in Jerusalem with which Paul is trying to establish some sort of cooperation for reasons that aren’t entirely clear considering the dynamics he reveals.

The Two Jesuses

Both Wells and Ellegard (and more recently, Doherty and Carrier) point out, with example after example, that the earliest Christian documents show no knowledge of the “Jesus of Nazareth” figure, as we saw above with the letters of Paul. With this in mind, Wells argues:

¼ we arrange extant early Christian documents into a chronological series, we find that ... Jesus figures simply as a supernatural personage whom God had sent in human form into the world to redeem it and who was crucified there in unspecified circumstances. These early writers are so vague in what they say about his life that they may well have believed only that he had been crucified in obscure circumstances long ago. I show that such a view is likely to have been suggested to them by the Jewish wisdom literature they knew well and by traditions they must have known concerning actual crucifixions of living men in Palestine one and two centuries before their time. And I argue that they were in fact probably wrong in believing this much of him. [\[164\]](#)

In his book *Can We Trust the New Testament*, Wells somewhat modifies his initial ideas as presented in *The Jesus Legend* (1996) and *The Jesus Myth* (1999):

In my first books on Jesus, I argued that the gospel Jesus is an entirely mythical expansion of the Jesus of the early epistles. ¼ I no longer maintain this position. *The weakness of my earlier position was pressed upon me by J.D.G. Dunn, who objected that we really cannot plausibly assume that such a complex of traditions as we have in the gospels and their sources could have developed within such a short time from the early epistles without a historical basis* (Dunn, [*The Evidence for Jesus*,] 1985, p. 29). My present standpoint is: this complex is not all post-Pauline (Q, or at any rate parts of it, may well be as early as ca. A.D. 50); and if I am right, against Doherty and Price – it is not all mythical. The essential point, as I see it, is that the Q material, whether or not it suffices as evidence of Jesus's historicity, refers to a personage who is not to be identified with the dying and rising Christ of the early epistles. [\[165\]](#)

Despite the fact that the “Q Hypothesis” has come under serious (and reasonable) attack in recent years, it still seems that Wells is onto something when he insists that a supernatural messiah figure (Paul’s Jesus) was overlaid on a real person in Palestine in the 1st centuries BC and/or AD.

In the Gospels, the two Jesus figures — the human preacher of Q and the supernatural personage of the early epistles who sojourned briefly on Earth as a man and then, rejected, returned to heaven — have been fused into one. The Galilean preacher of Q has been given a salvific death and resurrection, and these have been set not in an unspecified past (as in the early epistles), but in a historical context consonant with the date of the Galilean preaching. [\[166\]](#)

As we’ll see, the human figure probably wasn’t “the Galilean preacher of Q”, but he *was* from Galilee.

James, Peter, John and Jude

Now, it is time to turn to the early documents that followed Paul but precede the gospels and Acts. This will be just a brief

survey in order to try to get a feeling for what was going on. But keep in mind most of all that we are looking for Jesus!

The Epistle of James is something of an oddity. The author is obviously writing later than Paul, and he writes with the apparent intention of directly contradicting Paul's theology, but he cites the Old Testament as his witness and never refers to the gospels or to Jesus as an authority (or as his brother!). The author teaches, "swear not, neither by the heaven nor by the earth, nor by any other oath: but let your yea be yea, and your nay, nay: that ye fall not under the judgment". [\[167\]](#) Later, this is put into Jesus' mouth in Matthew 5:34, 37, though James never mentions Jesus as the author of the saying. When he mentions "the Lord", there is no indication that he means Jesus. He writes that healing of the sick can be effected by "the elders", an official body, as opposed to Paul's doctrine that the power to heal could belong to any believer who had that "gift of the spirit". Either this is evidence of the development of an ecclesiastical organization, or it derives from the already existing organization of the Qumran community, or one like it, such as an Essene ecclesia in the Diaspora. The epistle of James is mainly concerned with one thing: the imminent coming of a supernatural being. It shows no awareness of the destruction of Jerusalem, so it possibly dates somewhere between 50–70 AD.

The so-called First Epistle of Peter likewise gives no information whatsoever about any life or times of a *man* called Jesus, whose companion he was supposed to have been. He mentions the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus and the legend of the descent to the underworld, and talks about the ancient prophets who foretold "the sufferings of Christ and the glories that should follow them" and that these prophecies had nothing to do with the times in which they were given, but rather applied to the times of the author and his audience. As Wells points out, that is simply not true. All of the ancient prophets apparently did expect their prophecies to apply to their own time and it is only by torturing the text that the authors of the NT managed to derive a "Life of Jesus" out of the OT. "Peter" does mention Jesus as an example of endurance of suffering, but instead of relating it to recent life events that he ought to have witnessed himself, and for which he could have given powerful testimony if he had, he utilizes the descriptions from Isaiah 53: the "Suffering Servant". Peter has apparently augmented Paul's theology with a bit of Isaiah. At the end of Peter, the author describes himself as an elder and a "witness of Christ's suffering"; however, the Greek term used means "those who give testimony", not an eyewitness.

Regarding the First Epistle of John, Wells writes:

The traditional assumption that I John was written by the author of the fourth gospel is not very plausible, since the second coming of Christ is still spoken of in I John ii.28 as a visible occurrence in time, whereas in the fourth gospel all trace of this eschatology has disappeared and the second advent means the coming of the Holy Spirit into the hearts of believers. ...

The author of this epistle, and also the author of II John, complain of 'many deceivers' who deny that Jesus 'has come in the flesh'. How could anybody have denied this if his activities, as recorded in the gospels, had formed the basis of the cult? And if these canonical writers had known about his earthly life, why did they not meet the denial by giving some of the details, e.g. by alluding to his earthly parentage? [\[168\]](#)

There may have been very good reasons why details were not provided in these letters. If the sectarians of the Qumran community were "evangelizing war with the Romans", it seems that they would not have been explicit in any writings.

Ellegård takes issue with the assumption of pseudepigraphy in discussing the letters of James, 1 Peter and Jude. He points out that biblical scholars assume this because they have a belief in the historicity of the gospel; if the authors of these letters were who they say they are, they would have known details of the earthly life of Jesus, having been his companions in life; therefore, they conclude, the letters must be forgeries. Further, since his companions are described as rude fishermen or laborers, how could they write such fine Greek? Since scholars do not question that one, fundamental assumption – that Christianity had its origin in Jesus, an early first-century Palestinian Jew from Galilee, an assumption that rests on the gospels being historical – they are blocked entirely from the consideration that *these letters just might be written by exactly who they say they are written by*. Imagine that! Ellegård proposes:

We have in fact every reason to believe that at least the leading members of the Jerusalem Church of God, whose 'pillars' Paul had met, were able to write excellent Greek. ... And as, according to my hypothesis, Christianity developed out of Essene Diaspora communities, we have no reason whatever to expect our first-century AD writers to know very much about the life of their main founder and prophet, long since dead. ... Jewishness permeates the whole letter of James ... A clear Essene trait in James occurs in 1:17, where God is called 'the Father of lights', an expression not found, as far as I can see, elsewhere in the Bible, but well in line with the symbolism of light employed by Essenes, Gnostics, and Christians. [\[169\]](#)

Ellegård shows that the First Epistle of Peter is also written by a Jew to Diaspora Jews and gives no evidence of having actually known an earthly Jesus, speaking in consistently theological language. Ellegård points out a very interesting factor in this letter: it appears that it was written to lapsed but now repentant Jews. In 1 Peter 4:3, "Peter" says: "the time past when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries". Ellegård takes the expression "wrought the will of the Gentiles" to represent the pressures that Diaspora Jews might be under surrounded by Gentiles. However, it is also possible, taking the history of Paul vs. Peter into account, that it could be a reference to the time that Peter was under the sway of Paul and enjoyed table-fellowship with gentiles until James pulled him up short, boxed his ears, and made him understand that just eating with "those people" was equivalent to being connected to all their other evil ways. So, when Peter says "we", maybe he means exactly that?

Moving to Jude, Ellegård points out that the author introduces himself as the brother of James. If the author is referring to James, the pillar of the Jerusalem ecclesia, the same one that tradition considers to be the brother of an earthly Jesus, then Jude would also be the brother of Jesus, so why doesn't he say so? Even if the author was not Jude, or the author of James was not really James of Jerusalem – the "brother of the lord", as Paul says – and both letters were written by a pseudonymous author, that author apparently didn't know any tradition about Jesus having brothers or he would have capitalized on it. And if the authors are really James of Jerusalem and Jude, his brother, they also did not know of a Jesus of Nazareth who was their brother according to later tradition. Or, again, we may be encountering the need for secrecy because of subversive anti-Roman activities.

Ellegård believes all three of these letters to belong to the first century, before the destruction of Jerusalem, though there isn't much to go on in respect of dating. Jude complains in rather vehement language that infiltrators have crept into their group and the chief characteristic seems to be sexual immorality, homosexuality being hinted. Perhaps this is metaphoric and refers to Gnostic or Pauline ideas?

In conclusion, regarding the three letters, Ellegård notes that even though they are commonplace, not very long or even theologically deep, early communities obviously kept them for some reason and that reason might be the general awareness that they were written by important members of the early church in Jerusalem.

Letter to the Hebrews

The Letter to the Hebrews is a particularly interesting problem. From very early times, it was attributed to Paul, but Eusebius notes that some expressed doubts about this. [\[170\]](#) In his second remark on the topic, Eusebius mentions Caius, "a most learned man" who "silences the rashness and daring of his opponents in composing new books, [and] makes mention of only thirteen epistles, not reckoning that to the Hebrews with the rest; as there are, even to this day, some of the Romans who do not consider it to be the work of the apostles." [\[171\]](#) Eusebius was probably just repeating the opinion of Jerome, who says that Caius denied the epistle to the Hebrews to be Paul's. [\[172\]](#)

The list of "canonical works" contained in the Muratorian fragment [\[173\]](#) does not include Hebrews. (It also excludes James, Peter and III John.) The anonymous author of the fragment also notes that "Another [epistle] is current with the Alexandrians, forged in the name of Paul, for the sake of promoting the heresy of Marcion, and many other things ..." [\[174\]](#)

The Epistle opens with the solemn announcement of the superiority of the New Testament Revelation by the Son over Old Testament Revelation by the prophets [1:1–4]. It then proves and explains from the Scriptures the superiority of this New Covenant over the Old by the comparison of the Son with the angels as mediators of the Old Covenant [1:5–2:18], with Moses and Joshua as the founders of the Old Covenant [3:1–4:16], and finally, by opposing the high-priesthood of Christ after the order of Melchizedek to the Levitical priesthood after the order of Aaron [5:1–10:18].^[175]

Those to whom the author of Hebrews is writing either have begun to doubt the proclamation of the Messiah *or are just now being introduced to the teaching*. They probably believed that the Messiah prophesied in the Hebrew Scriptures was to come as a militant king and destroy the enemies of his people, and Hebrews is designed to shift their understanding. The argument achieves this by proposing that the Hebrew Scriptures also foretold that the Messiah would be a priest and this proposed Messiah, Jesus, came to fulfill this role, as a sacrificial offering to God, to atone for sins. His role of a king is yet to come, and so those who follow him should be patient and not be surprised that they suffer for now. (They had apparently stopped assembling together, possibly due to some sort of persecution. Since we are seeing the audience as Jewish, we can suppose that it is persecution of Jews, a topic we will come to soon.)

We may sum up our author's Christology negatively by saying that he has nothing to do with the older Hebrew messianic hopes of a coming Son of David, who would be a divinely empowered human leader to bring in the kingdom of God on earth; and that while he still employs the figure of a militant, apocalyptic king ... who will come again..., this is not of the essence of his thought about Christ.

Positively, our author presents Christ as divine in nature, and solves any possible objection to a divine being who participates in human experience, especially in the experience of death, by the priestly analogy. He seems quite unconscious of the logical difficulties of his position proceeding from the assumption that Christ is both divine and human, at least human in experience although hardly in nature.^[176]

To sum up, the author claims to have received the message of salvation from the personal disciples of the Lord. They know the letters of Paul and make no distinction between Jew and Gentile in terms of potential salvation. Wells points out that the apparent purpose of the letter – to demonstrate that Jesus, as son of God, is superior to the angels – presupposes that *there were others who thought of Jesus as supernatural, but not divine*. The author also manages to make Jesus both a royal and a priestly messiah by arguing that the Davidic Messiah has been accepted into an even older and more superior priesthood than that of the Levites, modeled on the priest king Melchizedek, similar to the more recent Judas Maccabeus. It sets before the Jew the claims of Christianity – to bring the Jew to the full realization of the relation of Judaism to Christianity, to make clear that Christ has fulfilled those temporary and provisional institutions, and has thus abolished them. This view is commonly referred to as Supersessionism.^[177] Nevertheless, Jesus doesn't have an earthly biography here, either. The litany of faith never mentions any person or event having to do with the gospel Jesus; again, nothing but the Old Testament is trotted out for review.

New Testament and Second Temple Judaism scholar Eric Mason argues that the conceptual background of the priestly Christology of the Epistle to the Hebrews closely parallels presentations of the messianic priest and Melchizedek in the Qumran scrolls.^[178] We have already noted the relationship between the Melchizedekian ideas of the Gnostics and those of Qumran. This is interesting in view of what sectarian ideas Paul might have opposed and then later been converted to uphold, though obviously with his own spin that wasn't quite what the James people were promoting. Though the writing of Hebrews is elegant and polished, unlike the Pauline epistles, it is clear that *Paul's ideas are being expanded and expounded*, and many scholars now believe that the author was one of Paul's pupils or associates.

Adolf von Harnack,^[179] A. J. Gordon,^[180] Gilbert Bilezikian,^[181] and others argue that the author of Hebrews *was a woman*, and that this is why there is no firm evidence as to authorship – authorship was deleted either to conceal the fact that it *was* a woman, or to protect the letter itself from suppression, or both. Harnack thinks the letter was written in Rome to

the inner circle of Paul's students and cites Chapter 13 to show the author was a "high standing and apostolic teacher of equal rank with Timothy". But the author's name would not have been erased if Luke, Clemens, Barnabas, or Apollos had written it. Donald Guthrie suggested Priscilla ^[182] as the author in 1983. ^[183] A.J. Gordon wrote: "It is evident that the Holy Spirit made this woman Priscilla a teacher of teachers". ^[184] Bilezikian remarks on "the conspiracy of anonymity in the ancient church," and notes: "The lack of any firm data concerning the identity of the author in the extant writings of the church suggests a deliberate blackout more than a case of collective loss of memory."

The use of tabernacle terminology in Hebrews has been used to date the epistle before the destruction of the temple, the idea being that knowing about the destruction of both Jerusalem and the temple would have influenced the development of the author's overall argument. Therefore, it has been suggested that the most probable date for its composition is the second half of the year 63 or the beginning of 64, according to the Catholic Encyclopedia. ^[185]

This late dating is due, once again, to the necessity to lace the Pauline timeline with that of Jesus who was "crucified under Pontius Pilate", allegedly after the 15th year of Tiberius Caesar. In all of these early documents, we have heard not a whisper of this allegation against Pilate.

Clement of Rome

Before heading out for Rome, Paul penned a letter to the already existing ecclesia there. For those who have created the Jesus chronology based on the Galilean allegedly crucified under Pilate, this is a problem. Paul addresses his letter to "all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints ... because your faith is proclaimed in all the world ..." This group is obviously Jewish because Paul then says: "I have often intended to come to you ... in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles." Following this he reiterates his point by adding: "to the Jew first and also to the Gentiles." There are many curious things in this epistle to the Romans, but the most obvious is the fact that *there existed an apparently long-standing Roman church* at all! This is the point that Ellegård argues: that the Roman, Corinthian, and possibly other churches, go back to pre-Jesus of Nazareth times and began as Essene-type communities which were known as "Churches of God", and the members were "saints".

The date of the first letter of Clement, whom Eusebius says was the first bishop of Rome, is much disputed, but most modern scholars date him to post-destruction of Jerusalem, i.e. c. 95 AD or later. The internal evidence, however, suggests an early date. Ellegård argues that Clement was written before the destruction of Jerusalem and, like all other texts from this time, knew nothing of the gospels' Jesus of Nazareth. The latter is certain; Clement shows knowledge of the letter to the Hebrews, as well as Paul's letters to the Corinthians and Romans, but no knowledge of the gospels' Jesus. However, placing the letter before 70 AD is less certain. Regardless, as Ellegård notes, once our suspicions on the accuracy of Eusebius' dating have been aroused, we are better able to see the text as it is, and decipher what it may tell us. ^[186] But, since most biblical scholars, beginning with the apostolic fathers right down to the present day, are constantly engaged in apologetics one way or another, they don't seem to be able to examine texts with scientific objectivity.

[NOTE: In the footnote above, is it Walter Bauer?]

Among the numerous things that Ellegård notes about this text is the fact that Clement refers to the "Church of God" as both individual communities as well as a totality of communities spread around the Empire which kept in touch with one another via letters and "apostles". Most interestingly, he refers to the organization as being like the hierarchy of an army. He stresses the importance of obeying the elders, and we know that Qumran-like communities had a council of 12 elders and 3 priests. Apparently, the reason for the letter is the fact that some elders in Corinth were being ousted by the community and Clement insists that this ought not to be done. Ellegård writes:

In 1 Clement 5 we read, in a section devoted to the dire effects of 'jealousy': 'Let us take the noble examples of our own generation.'

The examples given are first of all Peter and Paul, whose deaths as martyrs are referred to in surprisingly veiled language. ...

The opening phrase of the letter reads: 'The disasters and calamities that have suddenly and repeatedly struck us, have delayed us in turning to your affairs.' The writer obviously refers to very recent happenings ... Further, in 1 Clement 6, after mention of Peter and Paul, there is again a reference to 'our own generation', declaring that 'an immense crowd of the elect ones' have suffered 'terrible and monstrous outrages'. In both cases, the description fits excellently the Neronian persecution of Christians in connection with the great fire of Rome in 64. [\[187\]](#)

On the dating of 1 Clement, Ellegård finds support in the *Pastor* of Hermas. While the Muratorian fragment [\[188\]](#) is often used to date the *Pastor*, Ellegård is not much impressed with it, and re-dates *Pastor* closer to the time of 1 Clement.

... in Vision 2-4-3 an angel tells Hermas: 'make two copies [of what I say to you], one for Clement, and one for Grapte. And Clement will send it to the other cities – *that is his job*' (my italics).

The idea that the Clement mentioned here is Clemens Romanus has been discussed widely but rejected, chiefly, it seems, on the ground that it is contradicted by the Muratori dating ... But ... the Clement mentioned in Hermas forms a perfect fit for the author of 1 Clement. Not only do they have the same name, they also seem to play the same role in their community. ... Keep in mind that it is Eusebius, writing in the fourth century, and referring to late second-century witnesses, who says Clement was bishop of Rome. ... Paul mentions both a Hermas and a Clement as contemporaries in his letters. [\[189\]](#)

Clement describes the Corinthian church as "very firm and ancient" (47:6) and the Roman church is described as being *equally old*, since the messengers are described as having been members *from their youth to old age* (63:3). Clement is either using this language "freely", [\[190\]](#) or he is being literal. If the latter, all of this would be impossible according to the view that Christianity was launched by a Palestinian Jesus crucified by Pontius Pilate around 30 AD. Paul's activity is referred to in 47:2 as "the beginning of the evangelization", in which case Paul would have begun to spread his particular spin on the Messiah message to communities that were already established at the time he was converted. So it seems that these communities had considered their founder as a revered teacher, but were probably not on a messianic trajectory. It was Paul and other apostles who began to teach about a messiah, though obviously Paul had very different ideas about how this was supposed to work from those belonging to the Jerusalem ecclesia. What is striking is that 1 Clement does not mention the "time of Jesus' death" or "the time of Jesus" but rather *dates things from the time of the beginning of Paul's apostolic mission*.

The Jewishness of Clement's communities is beyond doubt. In the address, they are described as 'living as strangers' in Rome and Corinth, respectively. ... Throughout the letter, Clement refers to Old Testament examples. ... Jesus as Christ is the guarantee of salvation and of life after death. His passion and his death are indeed brought out ... they are described in terms of the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22, introduced by the words 'The Lord Jesus Christ says', after which follow direct quotations from Isaiah 53:1–12 and Psalm 22:7–9 ...

Crucifixion is never mentioned which is surely remarkable, in view of Paul's intense involvement in the mystique of the cross, a mystique that he quite likely originated. Clement never goes beyond bare mentions of the 'blood' of Christ, without any concrete elaboration whatever.

Clement tells us nothing about Jesus' life, his disciples, his baptism by John, his betrayal by Judas, his trial and the manner of his death. His resurrection is represented as a fact, not as an event. ... There is no hint as to when and where it occurred. ¼ Clement sometimes calls Jesus 'High Priest', thus emphasizing the connection with ancient Jewish history, and also ... with the Qumran Essenes. Finally, when Clement in 5.1 turns from 'ancient examples from the OT' of the consequences of 'jealousy', and talks of 'our own generation', he mentions Peter and Paul – whose deaths he refers to as recent events – but does not mention Jesus ... [\[191\]](#)

In trying to come to some conclusion about these matters, I've read a good bit of the radical criticism of various letters that has come out of the German and Dutch schools. Since the letters of Clement and Ignatius are the earliest witnesses to the letters and activity of Paul, this is important. Complaints about 1 Clement have been based on the hints of Gnosticism which

are thought to be a later development, but which are clearly very early as Philo himself gives evidence. Pearson (and others) connect the Antiochene, Alexandrian, and Qumran movements together, and Ellegård connects them with Essene ecclesia around the Empire. Philo, Josephus and Pliny all testify to this latter element. That's more evidence than we have for a real, live Jesus! So why is it so generally discounted?

One critic, Volkmar, complains that 1 Clement doesn't get to the point right away. I find it rather astounding that modern standards of rhetoric are being imposed on an ancient writer. The criticism that a much later development, the inculcation of apostolic authority, is the main purpose of the letter, dissolves when it is understood that we are dealing with Essene-like sectarians with an established hierarchy long in existence. The additional criticism is that there does not seem to be any conflict between Jews and Gentiles; that is easily explained by pointing out that Paul's style of gospel was undoubtedly more at home in the Diaspora and it was only because he sought, for reasons of his own that I will discuss further on, to try to bring the Jerusalem sectarians into accord with his vision of unifying Jews and Gentiles under the same god that he came into conflicts with them.

It seems that apostles from the Jerusalem sect were going out to evangelize along the line of uber-Judaism – promoting their coming revolution – while Paul was doing the opposite. It just depended on which apostle was more convincing, as Paul's conflicts evident in his letters reveal. If we can take as fact some of the personal data dropped in the letter to the Romans, it may be that connections also had a lot to do with the way the wind blew in any given ecclesia. So, that's the first thing: I think Ellegård has made a reasonable case and, what's more, it will be seen to fit with further matters yet to be put on the table.

Second, Clement's reference to the recent deaths of Peter and Paul are couched in rather vague terms. First Clement 5:2 says rather specifically: "By reason of jealousy and envy the greatest and most righteous *pillars* of the Church were persecuted, and contended even unto death." If we recall that Paul referred to Cephas, James and John as the "pillars" in Jerusalem, I don't think it is stepping too far out on a limb to say that this sentence may very well refer to the deaths of those individuals. (We may also find those deaths actually recorded in a non-biblical source.) So, having made a statement about the *pillars*, the author then moves on to *apostles*, and here he names Peter first of all. The way this is presented is as if Peter is *not* one of the pillars, which might mean that *Cephas and Peter were not one and the same person*.^[192] "There was Peter who by reason of unrighteous jealousy endured not one not two but many labors, and thus having borne his testimony went to his appointed place of glory." The question here might be: was it Peter who was unrighteously jealous or was he a target of unrighteous jealousy? Who imposed on him the labors he "endured"? It sounds almost like Peter came to an ignominious end.

The next case is Paul, who "by his example pointed out *the prize* of patient endurance. After that he had been seven times in bonds, had been driven into exile, had been stoned, had preached in the East and in the West, *he won the noble renown which was the reward of his faith*, having taught righteousness unto the whole world and having *reached the farthest bounds of the West*; and when he had *borne his testimony before the rulers*, so he departed from the world and went unto the holy place, having been found a notable pattern of patient endurance." I don't think this passage at all conveys that Paul was martyred, but rather that after many trials, his life turned around completely, he hobnobbed with the elite and died an old and honored man, having become notable even to rulers. He may have done this in Spain, which was the the Empire's "farthest bounds of the West", or Rome or both.

So who was Clement? Twenty-five years after the destruction of Jerusalem, 95 AD, a man named Titius Flavius Clemens was consul. Domitian executed him the year after. Syncellus, writing in the ninth century, was the first to call him a Christian, and the earlier accounts of his death suggest Syncellus may have been correct. First there is Suetonius, writing in the early second century:

[Domitian] unexpectedly killed his own cousin Flavius Clemens, [a man] of most contemptible laziness, on a very feeble suspicion, shortly after the end of his consulship.^[193]

Dio, writing a century later, adds more detail:

In the same year Domitian executed among many others, also Flavius Clemens, although he was a cousin and his wife was Flavia Domitilla, a relative of Domitian. Both were **accused of godlessness**, a crime on account of which also many others, who were **inclined to Jewish practices**, were condemned. Some lost their lives, others at least their fortunes. Domitilla was only exiled to Pandateria. [\[194\]](#)

Another century after Dio, Eusebius, most likely quoting a Roman history by Bruttius that hasn't survived, writes:

Flavia Domitilla, a daughter of the sister of Flavius Clemens, a Roman consul at that time, was exiled to the island of **Pontia** because of **her Christian faith**. Many others were exiled too in that year. [\[195\]](#)

Eusebius here confuses things. Domitilla was Clemens' *wife* and *Domitian's* niece. And she was exiled to Pandateria, which was a common place of exile, not Pontia. Oddly, Eusebius (and/or Bruttius) calls Domitilla a Christian, but not Clemens, whereas Dio accuses them of the same crime.

The only other early account is from Philostratus, who probably wrote around the time of Dio in the early third century. He makes Domitilla the *sister* of Domitian, and adds the detail that Domitian also ordered her execution, and her slave made an unsuccessful attempt to save her:

And now the gods were about to cast down Domitian from his presidency of mankind. For it happened that he had just slain [Flavius] Clemens, a man of consular rank, to whom he had lately given his own **sister** [Flavia Domitilla] in marriage; and he issued a command about the third or fourth day after the murder, that she also should follow her husband and join him. Thereupon Stephanus, a freed man of the lady, he who was signified by the form of the late portent, whether because the latest victim's fate rankled in his mind, or the fate of all others, made an attempt upon the tyrant's life worthy of comparison with the feats of the champions of Athenian liberty. $\frac{1}{4}$ [\[196\]](#)

My how details do multiply as time goes by! In any event, note that Dio says the couple was accused of *godlessness* and were *inclined to Jewish practices*. At the time, this charge of atheism would have referred to the refusal to worship the emperor (Domitian in this case) as god. Early Pagan and Christian sources both refer to Christians as "Jewish" (Suetonius, Lucian, Acts, *Acts of Peter*, *Ps. Clem.*), and Christians are repeatedly accused of atheism (attested in the writings of Justin, Tatian, Minucius Felix, Athenagoras, Tertullian, Celsus, Prophyry, Lucian). Roman Christians in particular were called "superstitious". [\[197\]](#) On the other hand, there's no known charge of atheism against Jews in any sources. [\[198\]](#) Based on this evidence, it seems likely that Domitilla *was* a Christian, and that "Dio changed the Christianity of Domitilla to an 'inclination of Jewish customs'". [\[199\]](#)

As for Clemens, Lampe doesn't think he was a Christian, preferring to think that he was executed on suspicion of Domitian that Clemens was planning to have one of his sons (whom Domitian had chosen as successors) take the throne ahead of schedule. But the two are not mutually exclusive, and it seems just as likely that Dio was being truthful by saying they both faced the same accusation.

Was this Clemens the same Clemens Romanum (Clement of Rome), the "first bishop" of Rome and author of 1 Clement? The same Clement mentioned by Hermas as being in charge of Christian correspondence for the Roman church? The same one mentioned by Paul as his fellow-worker? It's possible. But he would need to have been born prior to 30 AD in order to be an associate of Paul by the late 40s. (His cousins Titus and Domitian were born in 39 and 51 AD, respectively, and his uncle Vespasian was born in 9 AD, so it may fit.)

The Pastor, Didache and Barnabas

The *Pastor* by Hermas is described by Ellegård as a sort of allegorical religious novel. It is composed of five visions, twelve

mandates, and ten parables granted to Hermas, a former slave. In parable 5, the author mentions a Son of God as a virtuous man filled with a Holy "pre-existent spirit" and adopted as the Son. Despite this adoptionistic Christology, the text was widely accepted among the later orthodox Christians, which suggests that it had been around so long that no one really paid any attention to that. Also notable is the fact that the author refers to the "Son of God" but never uses the words "Christ", "Jesus", or "Christian". The multitude of angelic figures in the text, presented as incarnations of abstract powers, is typical of gnostic influence such as has been found in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

A number of scholars justify a mid-second century date because the Pastor appears to have used the gospels. However, it is equally likely – if not *more likely* – that the authors of the gospels used Hermas. The text never mentions Paul or any other apostle, though the communities are referred to as the "elect of God" and have the usual collection of "apostles, bishops, teachers and deacons" who welcome guests into their houses. There is no hard hierarchy, so the early period is in evidence. The ecclesia was probably Jewish because the "Parousia" is not the coming of Christ, but of God, the traditional view of the Jews. Overall, the text is very comfortable in a Jewish milieu of the first century.

The *Didache* or *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* is a brief, anonymous pastoral manual, dated by most scholars to the mid to late first century, but Ellegård dates it to before the destruction of Jerusalem. The first line is: "Teaching of the Lord to the Gentiles (or Nations) by the Twelve Apostles". More than any other early Christian book, it shows how Jewish-Christians saw themselves and adapted their Judaism for gentiles. The text has three main sections dealing with ethics, rituals and Church organization, while the contents can be divided into four parts, which most scholars agree were combined from separate sources by a later redactor: the Two Ways, the Way of Life and the Way of Death (chapters 1–6); a ritual dealing with baptism, fasting, and Communion (chapters 7–10); the ministry and how to deal with traveling prophets (chapters 11–15). The final section (chapter 16) is a brief apocalypse: the community is presented as "awaiting the kingdom from the Father".

The closest parallels in the use of the Two Ways doctrine is found among the Essene Jews at the Dead Sea Scrolls community. The Qumran community included a Two Ways teaching in its founding Charter, *The Community Rule*. The *Didache* makes no mention of Jesus' resurrection, other than a prayer of *thanks for "immortality, which Thou hast made known unto us through Thy Son Jesus"* in the eucharist; the *Didache* makes specific reference to the resurrection of the just prior to the Lord's coming.

Significant similarities between the *Didache* and the gospel of Matthew have been found as both writings share words, phrases, and motifs. The old view that the *Didache* used Matthew is being abandoned; rather, Matthew used an early version of the *Didache*, which was "Christianized" in later times, to some extent. ^[200] It seems more evident that the gospels were composed using such early texts, not the other way around. As noted by the *Didache's* subtitle, the text was intended to instruct Gentiles who wished to join the ecclesia. What is evident from both the *Didache* and the *Pastor* is that the Diasporan communities were not as exclusivist and xenophobic as the Jerusalem ecclesia run by the three "pillars" as described by Paul and as is evident from the Dead Sea Scrolls. There appears to have been a universalist tendency among these groups which probably inclined them more to Paul's unifying theology.

The *Epistle of Barnabas* represents a significant sea change in the universalist/unifying approach. Like 1 Clement, it is a theological treatise and not properly a letter. It is cited near the end of the second century but was obviously in circulation well before. In 16:3–4, the Epistle reads:

Furthermore he says again, 'Behold, those who tore down this temple will themselves build it.' It is happening. For because of their fighting it was torn down by the enemies. And now the very servants of the enemies will themselves rebuild it.

This passage indicates that Barnabas was composed after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 AD. J. C. Treat writes:

Since Barnabas 16:3 refers to the destruction of the temple, Barnabas must be written after 70 C.E. It must be written before its first undisputable use in Clement of Alexandria, ca. 190. Since 16:4 expects the temple to be rebuilt, it was most likely written before Hadrian built a Roman temple on the site ca. 135. Attempts to use 4:4–5 and 16:1–5 to specify the time of origin more exactly have

not won wide agreement. It is important to remember that traditions of varying ages have been incorporated into this work. [\[201\]](#)

Considering the general tone of the text, one wonders about this alleged “hope” for the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. It seems that the text is laying blame on the rebels for the destruction of the temple and then implying that the rebels themselves, having become slaves/servants of the Romans, would be required to rebuild it possibly as something else, i.e. Hadrian’s Roman temple. Such an interpretation appears to be quite in line with the polemic of Barnabas directed against Judaism in general.

The writer's name is Barnabas, but scarcely any scholars now ascribe it to the illustrious friend and companion of St. Paul. External and internal evidence here come into direct collision. The ancient writers who refer to this Epistle unanimously attribute it to Barnabas the Levite, of Cyprus, who held such an honourable place in the infant Church. Clement of Alexandria does so again and again (*Strom.*, ii. 6, ii. 7, etc.). Origen describes it as "a Catholic Epistle" (*Cont. Cels.*, i. 63), and seems to rank it among the Sacred Scriptures (*Comm. in Rom.*, i. 24). Other statements have been quoted from the fathers, to show that they held this to be an authentic production of the apostolic Barnabas; and certainly no other name is ever hinted at in Christian antiquity as that of the writer. But notwithstanding this, the internal evidence is now generally regarded as conclusive against this opinion. [\[202\]](#)

Let me just note here that the above statement about the Epistle of Barnabas ought to be recalled whenever any weight is given to the claims and attributions of the early church fathers. That applies as well to this epistle, which claims to quote “scripture.”

Returning to the text itself, the author argues that the Christians are the only true covenant people, and that the Jewish people had never actually been in a covenant with God. His polemics against Judaizing Christians, separating the Gentile Christians from observant Jews, reflect the increase of anti-Jewish sentiment that spread through the Empire following the Jewish War and the concomitant necessity for spiritual messianists to separate themselves from rebel messianists. This is clear from the very first line: “I bid you greeting, sons and daughters, in the name of the Lord that loved us, *in peace*”, followed shortly by: “there are three ordinances of the Lord; the hope of life, which is the beginning and end of our faith; and righteousness, which is the beginning and end of judgment; love shown in gladness and exultation, the testimony of works of righteousness” (1:6). He specifically says “we are in danger, so let’s tighten up our ship” in the following: “Seeing then that the days are evil, and that the Active One himself has the authority, we ought to give heed to ourselves and to seek out the ordinances of the Lord” (2:1), i.e. the ordinances just mentioned.

Barnabas declares that the covenant promises belong only to the Christians (4:6–8). Circumcision, and the entire Jewish sacrificial and ceremonial system, are due to misunderstanding. Jewish scriptures, rightly understood, contain no such injunctions (chapters 9–10). In places, the author comes across as Paul on steroids reinterpreting the Torah:

¼ the prohibition on eating pork is not to be taken literally, but rather forbids the people to live like swine; the prohibition on eating rabbit means that the people are not to behave in a promiscuous manner; the prohibition on eating weasel is actually a prohibition of oral sex, based on the belief that weasels copulate via the mouth. [\[203\]](#)

The bottom line is that author aims at proving that Jewish understanding of the Torah is completely incorrect and can now be considered superseded, since in the author's view the Jewish scriptures foreshadowed a peaceful Jesus and Christianity when rightly interpreted. In a sense, he is justifying the takeover of the Jewish scriptures by the Christians.

The author quotes from the Old Testament and apocrypha. Scholars also claim that he quotes from the New Testament gospels twice (4:14, 5:9). The two passages:

4:14: Moreover understand this also, my brothers. When ye see that after so many signs and wonders wrought in Israel, even then they were abandoned, let us give heed, lest haply we be found, as the scripture saith, **many are called but few are chosen**.

5:9: And when He chose His own apostles who were to proclaim His Gospel, who that He might show that *He came not to call the righteous but sinners* were sinners above every sin, then He manifested Himself to be the Son of God. [\[204\]](#)

I would like to point out that the general agreement of Barnabas with the salvation history of the gospels, and the inclusion of the above references, does not mean that the gospels were already written at this point in time. It is equally plausible that the gospels utilized Barnabas in their composition and when he refers to "scripture", it may very well be the above-mentioned *writings of Essene groups very similar to the Dead Sea Scrolls*. Notice that the author also quotes material that is similar to 4 Esdras (12:1) and 1 Enoch (4:3; 16:5). The closing *Two Ways* section (chapters 18–21), are from the *Didache*, which the author presents as "another gnosis and teaching" (18.1).

Daniel, Enoch, and the Ascension of Isaiah

Barnabas wrote: "I know that the Lord journeyed with me on the way of righteousness, ... considering this therefore, that, if it shall be my care to communicate to you some portion of *that which I received*, it shall turn to my reward for having ministered to such spirits", after which he begins his communication of what he "received" with the three ordinances mentioned above. That is to say, what "Barnabas" is doing is completely in line with earlier exegetical practices. He may also have been following the "inspirational" activities promoted amongst Pauline churches. Wells gives some thought to this problem and I will quote him at length here because his explication is concise:

In the Jewish literature of the period we find a highly developed angelology. The writer of the book of Daniel (c. 165 BC) was the first by whom angels were individualized and endowed with names and titles, and later apocalyptic literature assumed a heavenly hierarchy of stupendous proportions. In Enoch seven classes of angels are distinguished – the cherubim, seraphim, ofanim, the angels of power, the principalities, the Elect One (the Messiah) and the elementary powers of the earth. Josephus tells us, concerning the Essene oath, that the sectary undertook to preserve, without alteration, 'the names of the angels', and the Qumran scrolls refer to them at every turn, calling them also 'holy ones', 'spirits', 'gods' (elim), 'honourable ones', 'sons of Heaven'. The members of the Covenant lived in the company of the celestial spirits all the time, and believed that angels, both good and evil, would join in the final eschatological war between themselves and all the heathen nations.

These angels of Jewish imagination are often represented as occupying different levels in the universe. In the Slavonic *Enoch* the universe consists of a number of tiers; the abyss, then the prison of the dead, then the earth, then the firmament peopled by Satan and cruel invisible princes, then seven heavens. In the centre of each heaven is a 'throne' around which throng principalities, dominions and powers. Above them all is God, surrounded by the celestial beings called his powers, his throne, his spirit, his wisdom, his glory, his name. ...

The terms 'throne', 'principalities', 'powers' and 'dominions' are used to designate celestial beings in the *Testaments of the Patriarchs* (e.g. *Test. Levi* III) and also, as Christian commentators admit (e.g. NBC [\[205\]](#) p. 1046) in the following passages from the NT epistles: ... Coloss. i.16, ... Ephes. i.21, ... Rom. viii.38, ... I Pet. iii.22.

It is clear that Paul not only believes in these angels, but also in the multi-layered universe ... For he tells of a Christian who was 'caught up into the third heaven' and also 'into paradise and heard words so secret that human lips may not repeat them' (II Cor. xii, 2–5, NEB). The continuation shows that this man was Paul himself.

It seems that certain Jews (not orthodox ones, but so-called Gnostics) not only owned the existence of angels but also worshipped them as divine beings. According to the NBC (p. 1044) the basis of Gnosticism is the doctrine that matter is evil, so that in creation, God cannot come into direct contact with it. 'It is necessary, therefore, to posit a number of emanations of deity, a number of spiritual beings germinating, as it were, the first from God, the second from the first and so on until they sink lower and lower and make contact with matter possible. Only thus could God have created the universe and at the same time maintained His holiness inviolate. It follows, then, that these graded beings are in control of the material universe in which man has to live. He must enlist their support.' The sum total of emanations of the godhead is denoted by the Greek word *pleroma*, and these Jewish Gnostics worshipped the *pleroma*.

This is the intellectual background against which the Pauline letters were written, and Colossians (ii, 8, 18) seems specifically to combat this doctrine that angelic agencies are necessary to salvation. Paul shows what their true place is, and asserts that one single privileged

being, called Jesus the Messiah, absorbs the *pleroma* in himself, that he is the first after God, or with God, among all the celestial beings. ...

Couchoud remarks that in the passage from Colossians we have the most primitive idea of Jesus – that of a being who absorbed the *pleroma* in himself. He also notes that clearly, in Paul's view, the death of Jesus redeemed creatures in the heavens as well as on earth. ...

From Phil. ii, 5–11 we learn that Jesus is a divine figure who came down into the material world to suffer an ignominious death. Then he reascended and received a mystic name as powerful as the name of God. Couchoud regards this story of the descent and re-ascension of the divine being as the key to Paul's conception of Jesus and he remarks that we are fortunate enough to possess an ancient Jewish apocalypse which gives the story in greater detail, and so fills out the picture which is merely sketched by Paul. [206] He is referring to the so-called *Ascension of Isaiah*. [207]

Wells then describes the *Ascension of Isaiah* in some detail before explaining what is happening with the *Epistle of Barnabas*:

According to Dibelius ¹/₄ the motive of the author of this whole story is to explain to those who believed in a celestial redeemer, called Christ, how it could happen that this figure was able to reach the earth without opposition; why it was that the angels of the various heavens let their worst enemy redeem man without resisting his passage.

What relevance has all this to Paul's idea of Jesus? Couchoud, and Dibelius some years before him¹/₄, [208] answer that Paul seems to have had a revelation very similar to that here ascribed to Isaiah. In I Cor. ii, 9, he tells that God has revealed marvelous things to him – things, he adds, which pertain to our salvation, to God's gift to us (verse 12). ... The purpose of this descent and re-ascent is given in the passage from Colossians. By the blood of his cross he laid the basis for reconciling all things in heaven and earth to the Father; by his death and resurrection he broke the power of those angels who opposed God, and also put an end to man's dependence on angels, good or bad. Man can now commune with God via Jesus, without other intermediaries. Thus Paul declares that we need no longer be slaves to the elemental spirits of the universe (Gal. iv, 3–5); that no spirits need now separate us from the love of God (Rom viii, 38–9); and that the 'rulers of this world' are declining to their end (I Cor. ii, 6). The reference is to Satan and his angels, and in this passage from Corinthians Paul is thus saying that it is these wicked creatures who crucified 'the Lord of Glory', not knowing who he was. Couchoud compares this with the *Ascension of Isaiah*, ix. 14: 'And the god of that world will stretch forth his hand against the Son, and they will crucify him on a tree, and will slay him, not knowing who he is.' They do not know his identity because at every stage in his journey down he was transformed into the likeness of the creatures at that level. Just as this work goes on to tell how he rose from the dead and punished them by confronting them in his true form, so too Paul describes (Coloss. ii, 15) how they were tricked and vanquished: 'Having put off from himself the principalities and the powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it'. The NEB says he 'made a spectacle of the cosmic powers and authorities, and led them as captives in his triumphal procession'. ...

Paul distinguishes as stages in the winding-up of the universe: first Christ's resurrection, then the resurrection of the dead at his second coming, and finally his destruction of the angels; he will 'abolish every kind of dominion, authority and power'. Then he will abdicate or 'deliver up the kingdom to God the Father', and the celestial harmony will be complete (I Cor. xv, 51 f.)

The later development of Christianity can be understood as an attempt to explain the repeated failure of the final judgment to materialize. ... as Dibelius puts it, 'the centre of gravity of Christian expectations shifted from the future into the ... past' ... And as attention became more concentrated on Jesus' sojourn on earth, biographical details would begin to be invented, and traditions initiated which eventually became fixed in the gospels. Apocalypses and apocalyptic visions would be ousted by biographies. ... Further biographic details could be furnished by interpreting some of the prophecies which referred to a supernatural redeemer in such a way as to make them apply to a human messiah. ...

It was, then, disappointment in Jesus' failure to come in his glory to judge and end the world that led believers to concentrate their attention on what had already been achieved by his first coming, and in this way to invent traditions about the details of his stay on earth. ... Mt. tells how, at the death of Jesus, an earthquake occurred, rocks and graves were split open, and the saints occupying them were resurrected. ... catastrophes such as Mt. depicts were what the Jews expected would occur at the second coming. Mt.'s story was, then, invented in order to show that Christians need not be disappointed at the failure of the second coming to occur, since the phenomena associated with it had, at any rate in part, been manifested at the first coming. Disappointment is being rectified in that the frustrated hopes of a future denouement are replaced by faith and belief in one that had already occurred in a definite historical

situation. [\[209\]](#)

As to the process by which the biography of Jesus of Nazareth was gradually developed, Paul himself described how he did it, and then he said in 1 Corinthians 14:26 ff:

To sum up, my friends: when you meet for worship, each of you contributes a hymn, some instruction, a revelation, an ecstatic utterance, or the interpretation of such an utterance.

That is exactly what the author of Barnabas says he did: *“I know that the Lord journeyed with me on the way of righteousness. ... considering this therefore, that, if it shall be my care to communicate to you some portion of that which I received, it shall turn to my reward...”* As Wells points out:

Paul, obsessed with fears about the powers of the angels in the firmament, found consolation in his visions, which informed him that the redeemer had come down to earth in order to trick and put to shame these beings; and that he had tricked them by suffering an ignominious death at their hands. [\[210\]](#)

But the Messiah did not come and destroy the evils of the world. Instead, the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple, and the march of elite dominance, slavery, oppression of the poor, and myriad manifestations of social inequity and insecurity continued. Nothing got better and a lot of people died in the destruction caused by the drive to absolute power. The same kinds of fears and obsessions that led to the longing for a Messiah would have grown up around the failure of the predicted Messianic arrival and would then have led to those who believed that they were involved in a mystic union with Christ to produce solutions to this problem in their prophetic and ecstatic utterances. Faith in the redeemer is what mattered and what would bring personal salvation since, obviously, the world isn't being saved or transformed.

Already the groundwork had been laid for prophecy to become the purview of an ecclesiastical elite. The *Didache* says in Chapter 13:

Every genuine prophet who wants to live among you is worthy of support. So also, every true teacher is, like a workman, entitled to his support. Every first fruit, therefore, of the products of vintage and harvest, of cattle and of sheep, should be given as first fruits to the prophets, for they are your high priests. But if you have no prophet, give it all to the poor. If you bake bread, take the first loaf and give it according to the commandment. If you open a new jar of wine or of oil, take the first fruit and give it to the prophets. If you acquire money or cloth or any other possession, set aside a portion first, as it may seem good to you, and give according to the commandment.

It was in the context of competing claims of self-described “genuine prophets” that controversies raged during the development of Christianity, and from what we have seen thus far, it wasn't truth and righteousness that prevailed in the end: it was power of persuasion, rhetoric, drama, and playing on the fears of humans adrift in a violent and terrifying reality; and in the end, orthodoxy expressed itself as raw power; “by their fruits, you shall know them”.

So, where are we in our account? Now, after over a hundred years of a Jesus about whom no one knew any details, suddenly we encounter the one detail that locks him into a definite historical timeline: Pontius Pilate.

Tacitus on Pilate

The earliest mention of Pilate in relation to Christians is actually from Cornelius Tacitus. The context of the passage is the Great Fire of Rome that burned a huge portion of the city in 64 AD during the reign of Nero. The key part of the passage reads as follows:

Therefore, to dispel the rumor [that he personally ordered the fire], Nero supplied defendants and inflicted the choicest punishments on those, resented for their outrages, whom the public called Chrestiani. (The source of the name was Christus, on whom, during the command of Tiberius, reprisal had been inflicted by the procurator Pontius Pilatus; and, though the baleful superstition had been stifled

for the moment, there was now another outbreak, not only across Judaea, the origin of the malignancy, but also across the City, where everything frightful or shameful, or whatever provenance, converges and is celebrated.)

The first to be seized were those who confessed, then, on their information, a mighty number was convicted, not so much on the charge of the conflagration as for their hatred of the human race. [\[211\]](#)

In 1902 Georg Andresen first noticed the odd appearance of the first 'i' in "*Christianos*" in the earliest extant, 11th-century, copy of the *Annals* in Florence, suggesting that the text had been altered, and an 'e' had originally been in the text. The alteration was later conclusively shown with ultra-violet examination. According to Robert Van Voorst, it is unlikely that Tacitus himself referred to Christians as Chrestianos, i.e. "good, kind, useful, pleasant ones", given that he also referred to them as "hated for their shameful acts", and many other sources indicate that early followers of Jesus used the term Chrestians by the second century. [\[212\]](#)

For example, while "of Christ" is spelled Χριστοῦ (*Christou*) in Greek, an early Marcionite church in the Syrian village of Lebaba (Deir Ali) near Damascus contains an inscription with the words Ἰησοῦ Χρηστοῦ (*Iesou Chrestou*), dated to 318 AD, making it older than any existing Catholic inscriptions. [\[213\]](#) The Codex Sinaiticus (dated to 330–360 AD) is the earliest manuscript evidence for Acts 11:26 and 26:28, the only instances of the word "Christian" in the New Testament (in addition to 1 Peter 4:16). In all three instances of this word, the Sinaiticus scribe spells the word "Chrestian". There are numerous other examples from manuscripts, inscriptions, and writings of the early Fathers of the Church. [\[214\]](#)

Pilate's rank while he was governor of Judaea appeared in a Latin inscription on the Pilate Stone, which called him a prefect, while this Tacitean passage calls him a procurator. Josephus refers to Pilate with the generic Greek term ἡγεμῶν, *hēgemōn*, or governor. Tacitus records that Claudius was the ruler who gave procurators governing power after Herod Agrippa's death in AD 44, when Judea reverted to direct Roman rule. [\[215\]](#) Much has been made of the fact that Tacitus mislabeled Pilate, but, as some scholars note, it was more common at the time of his writing, half a century after Pilate. It was an easy mistake to make.

Most modern scholars consider the passage to be authentic and I don't see any reason to doubt it myself, considering all the material that has been covered thus far regarding Essene-type ecclesia throughout the Empire and taking into account the possible historical background to 1 Clement.

I will also add that the testimony of Tacitus does not in any way specify the dates that Pilate was in Judea, only that it was under Tiberius. But this will be discussed in some detail below.

Ignatius on the Warpath

Ignatius of Antioch is perhaps the first Christian author to mention Pilate. Ignatius and his letters constitute a whole problem unto themselves. According to Christian legend, he was the third "bishop" of Antioch, a student of John the Apostle, and he penned a series of letters before his martyrdom ca. 110 AD. The surviving letter collection is framed within Ignatius' final days: they are addressed to various churches around the Empire (in Asia Minor, Italy, Syria) as he visits other churches on his way to Rome to be executed.

But modern scholars have brought most of these details into question. While seven letters are judged "authentic", the collection grew over the centuries with numerous forged letters and editorial additions. But even the seven letters contain oddities. [\[216\]](#) While they present themselves as individual letters addressed to individual churches, each letter builds on information in the previous one, suggesting they were designed to be read as a single work. They also contain details that wouldn't have been included if they were written for the stated recipients. For example, they specify that the cities addressed

are “in Asia”, as if the churches there needed to be told that. Such details are clearly for non-Asian readers.

The context also seems fictitious: it’s implausible that Ignatius was free to travel the Empire, write letters and visit churches, while being escorted to Rome under guard. It is very similar to the Acts fiction of Paul doing the same thing on his way to Rome after his arrest in Judea. The letters also suggest some knowledge of Valentinian (a Christian gnostic from the same period) and perhaps Marcion (an early- to mid-second century “heretic” who rejected Judaism and used an early “New Testament” of Paul’s 10 letters and an early, shorter gospel of Luke).

These data suggest the letters may have been composed later than previously thought (perhaps 130–135 AD, perhaps later). Like the Pastoral Epistles (the three letters forged in Paul’s name around the same time), Ignatius’ letters may have been composed after his death as a way to create retrospective legitimacy for a *later* power struggle against “heresy”.

A possible suspect is “bishop of Smyrna” Polycarp (ca. 70–160 AD), another legendary martyr and “disciple of John”, to whom “Ignatius” wrote one of his seven letters. Only one of his works survives, a letter to the Philippians. Polycarp had a role in collecting and publishing Ignatius’ letters. [\[217\]](#) Polycarp was anti-Marcionite, anti-Valentinian, and an alleged associate of Ignatius. [\[218\]](#) If Ignatius’ letters were forged, Polycarp fits the bill as their author.

Bible scholar David Trobisch has argued that Polycarp also collected, edited and published the original New Testament, more or less in the form in which it survives today, somewhere between 155–168 AD. Other writings composed around the same time were brought together in this “first edition”, including the Pastorals and Luke-Acts, which are also anti-Marcionite in nature. [\[219\]](#) They also, like Ignatius, write of false teachings in and around Ephesus. [\[220\]](#) All these texts appear in the same period and have similar agendas: to retroactively reconcile Paul and Peter, combat various heresies, and bring the fledgling church into harmony and under the power of a central authority, i.e. Polycarp and his designees.

If Polycarp published the New Testament – by collecting original first-century documents (Paul’s 10 letters, James, Jude, 1 Peter, Hebrews, Revelation) together with his alleged master John’s letters (1, 2, 3 John), later forgeries produced during his lifetime (the three Pastorals, 2 Peter) and the four gospels plus Acts – the question is: were the Ignatian letters written before or after the gospels? The first explicit awareness and quotation of the gospels as we know them come from the writings of Irenaeus, ca. 180 AD. Before that, we only have probably quotations from Justin (ca. 150 AD), and less probable allusions. Polycarp’s letter contains possible allusions to numerous books in the New Testament, including the first known references to Acts and the *forged* Pauline letters (the Pastorals). So there is nothing against the possibility that the gospels were composed after the publication of Ignatius’ letters; echoes in Polycarp simply reflect his editorial activity and the possible sources of those same passages in the NT.

Whatever is finally decided about Ignatius, we still find there an early, explicit connection between an alleged Jesus and Pontius Pilate:

You must be completely convinced of the birth, the passion and the resurrection which happened under the governorship of Pontius Pilate. [\[221\]](#)

We also find the first witness to the alleged parents of Jesus – God and Mary:

¼ Jesus Christ, who came from David’s seed, who was truly born from Mary, who ate and drank, and was truly persecuted under Pilate, truly crucified, and who died, seen by the inhabitants of the heavens, the earth, and the underworld, who has also been truly raised from the dead ... For if he has only seemingly suffered ... why am I in chains ... Is it for nothing that I deliver myself to death? In that case I am lying against God. [\[222\]](#)

Some people say, “if I do not find it in the ancient records, I do not believe in the gospel.” And when I said, “It is written”, they said,

“That is just the question.” For me, the ancient records are Jesus Christ, the inviolable ancient records are his cross, his death, and his resurrection and the faith which comes from him ... For the most beloved Prophets have announced him, but the gospel is the completion of immortality. [\[223\]](#)

The “ancient records” mentioned, or lack thereof, were possibly the same records that we find missing today: historical documentation proving the existence of Jesus and his execution by Pontius Pilate. But the only records Ignatius can turn to for proof are the “most beloved Prophets” – the Hebrew Scriptures. “The gospel” doesn’t refer to any of the gospel books; it simply means the “good news” that exegetes extracted from their interpretive – or ecstatic – readings of those texts. Paul himself did the same thing; he declares clearly that his revelation came “not beyond what is written” (1 Cor. 4:6). In terms of Christian writings that came before, *this insistence of an earthly Jesus/Messiah seems to be a new thing*. Nobody else in early Christian writings up to this point in time had made this claim. If they thought of Jesus as fleshly at all, they were content to focus on his divine nature.

Ignatius comes off sounding like a schoolboy whose classmate has told him there is no Santa Claus: “Yes there is! He lives at the North Pole, his wife is Mrs. Claus, and he has eight reindeer and tons of elves helping him!” He writes that *true* Christians are:

¼ fully persuaded ¼ that he [our Lord] really was descended from David ‘according to the flesh’, and the Son of God according to the will and power of God; that he really was born of a virgin, and baptized by John ... nailed up [to the cross] under Pontius Pilate and the Tetrarch Herod on our behalf, in the flesh. ...

For I know that even after his resurrection [Jesus] was in the flesh, and I believe that he is so now. When, for instance, he came to those who were with Peter, he said to them, ‘Lay hold, handle me, and see that I am no bodiless demon.’ And immediately they touched him, and believed, being convinced both by his flesh and by the spirit. And this is why they thought nothing of dying, and were found to be about death. After his resurrection he even ate and drank with them, as one of flesh, although spiritually he was united to the Father. [\[224\]](#)

This reveals two aspects of his agenda: to defend against “false” Christians who believed that Jesus was not a flesh-and-blood man, and to provide a rationale for martyrdom. As Jesus mythicist Richard Carrier writes, “Ignatius cannot abide the view ¼ that our bodies of flesh will be discarded and replaced with entirely new bodies of cosmically superior material. Willingness to die, and thus the glory of martyrdom, only makes sense to him if we will live again in the flesh ¼ Thus Docetism [the belief that Christ wasn’t flesh-and-blood], if true, would destroy everything Ignatius *needed* to be true.” [\[225\]](#)

Ignatius is the source of the first known mention of Mary, the virgin birth, and Jesus’ baptism by John the Baptist. He offers no evidence whatsoever other than “the Prophets” of the Old Testament, messianic interpretations of which were inferred or created by exegesis or ecstatic utterances. The “biographical” details sound very much like fictions retrojected into the past, based very loosely on clues he could extract from the life and words of Paul, historical elements from Josephus, the *Didache*, *Barnabas*, Essene writings and prophecies collected by the various ecclesia around the Empire, and with some sort of “wolves” in view. Richard Pervo writes:

The “wolves” (actually feral dogs; [*Ephesians*] 7.1) are out there, but Ignatius says that they have not gained a foothold. In 9.1 he intimates that the representatives of evil teaching are itinerant. ... Nothing specific about the nature and contents of the opposed teaching emerges. Elsewhere the good bishop attacks Judaizers and docetists, probably two different groups. Nowhere does Ignatius address teachings that are particularly characteristic of Marcion. ...

Ignatius, who views himself as did Polycarp and the Pastor as a leader in the mold and tradition of Paul, identifies his readers as, with him, “fellow initiates of Paul” ... [\[226\]](#)

Indeed it seems that the war Ignatius was fighting was simply for dominance, control, and to exclude those pesky itinerant

prophets traveling about, attracting followers and the resulting benefits. Such “prophets” could too easily be in touch with a supernatural messiah and had no need of a historical Jesus for their livelihood – exactly as Paul had been.

The eventual system of bishop, presbyter, and deacon is strongly recommended by Ignatius. In the churches he addressed, the authority of a single bishop was apparently accepted. The images Ignatius employs to illustrate the roles of each order reveal that presbyters have been imposed upon a deacon-bishop structure. He likens the bishop to God or God’s grace (*Magn.* 6.1; 2.1) or commandment (*Trall.* 13.2), to the father (*Magn.* 3.1; *Trall.* 3.1; *Smyrn.* 8.1), to the lord (*Eph.* 6.1), or to Jesus Christ (*Trall.* 2.1). The ... “presbytery council” is compared to the apostles (*Magn.* 6.1; *Trall.* 2.2; 3.1; *Phld.* 5.1; *Smyrn.* 8.1), and the law of Jesus Christ (*Magn.* 6.1; *Trall.* 3.1), and a divine commandment (*Smyrn.* 8.1). Deacons are routinely compared to Christ. The odd group is the presbyters, always characterized as a body, compared to a body, the apostles, and to the function of judgment and rule.

The pattern of bishop/deacon is associated with the *Didache*, which lacks the word presbyter. This may reflect church organization in the region of Antioch before Ignatius. It is also Pauline (*Phil* 1:1).^[227]

Ignatius (or someone writing in his name) appears to have been laying the groundwork for the invention of a list of disciples/apostles. He was fighting a battle against an enemy and *he needed to firmly establish his control over his flock via the apostolic succession, which had to come from a physically existent Jesus*. In the end, it might be said that *this was the ultimate reason for creating Jesus and his disciples: to have a physical power structure from which early church leaders could draw their ineluctable authority to slap down rival prophets*. Jesus to the apostles to the bishops consecrated by apostles.

Even though he is adamant that Jesus came “in the flesh”, Ignatius also includes a surprising detail not found in any of the gospels:

Now the virginity of Mary was hidden from the Prince of this World, as was also her offspring, and the death of the Lord; three mysteries of renown, which were wrought in silence by God. How, then, was he manifested to the world? A star shone forth in heaven above all the other stars, the light of which was inexpressible, while its novelty struck men with astonishment. And all the rest of the stars, with the sun and moon, formed a chorus to this star, and its light was exceedingly great above them all. And there was agitation felt as to whence this new spectacle came, so unlike everything else above. Hence every kind of magic was destroyed, and every bond of wickedness disappeared, ignorance was removed, and the old kingdom abolished, when God appeared in human form [or, in a way perceptible to humans – the Greek is ambiguous] for the renewal of eternal life.^[228]

This is incompatible with the gospel accounts, where Jesus was known to the world and “Satan”, as was his death. Ignatius also shows no familiarity with Matthew’s or Luke’s birth stories for Jesus (Bethlehem, the star in the East, the magi, shepherds, etc.); rather he associates this remarkable celestial event with the resurrection, *after* his death, when he defeats the forces of darkness. Carrier observes: “Ignatius appears to be saying *this is how Jesus manifested to the world: not as a Galilean preacher but as a bright light in heaven*. ¼ This ‘Gospel’ that Ignatius is describing has the very birth and death of Jesus being hidden from the world and revealed only in the bright light demonstrating his triumph ¼ and *that* was the event that granted men eternal life.”^[229]

This account makes it almost certain that Ignatius was *not* familiar with the gospels – at least in the versions we know today – and that the gospel accounts referenced Ignatius. As to when this was happening, Pervo notes:

Recent scholarship tends to move Ignatius’ martyrdom forward from the Trajanic date proposed, without substantive support, by Eusebius (*H.E.* 3.22; 3.3436) to the second quarter of the century, perhaps 130–135. At the time of his letters, the churches of Asia with which he communicates have accepted, with varying degrees of consensus and enthusiasm, the idea that each will have a single leader, the bishop.^[230]

In addition to the fact that what we see here is the first intimation of a historical “Life of Jesus” in the process of creation: we have here also the idea that *the earliest testimony to the connection between Pilate and a Jesus wasn’t very clear as to what,*

exactly, that connection was. That was probably developed during the *later* writing of the gospels, utilizing possibly Ignatius, Josephus, Paul, the texts discussed above, Greek myths and legends, and whatever else came to hand.

Notice very particularly that in the above claims of Ignatius, Pilate is in no way *implicated personally* in the actual events but is simply mentioned as a marker of a period of time, and this marker could easily have been picked up by a reading of Josephus (or Philo). If Ignatius had known more, or had a text to refer to, it seems almost certain he would have declared its authority. We notice in particular that he was obviously not aware of what Tacitus had said, that “Christus ... suffered the extreme penalty *at the hands of ... Pontius Pilate.*” The implication is that the details and timeline of the mythical Jesus were in the process of being worked out independently of possible historical facts at the time of Ignatius; they needed a real, flesh-and-blood guy on their team to validate their claimed god-given authority and, for all we know, it was Ignatius (and/or Polycarp) himself who masterminded the process. What is also clear is that the Christus who suffered at the hands of Pilate referenced by Tacitus was probably not the same Jesus that Ignatius and Polycarp were in the process of creating. On this process, Wells writes:

Sanday has observed that ‘we know that types and prophecies were eagerly sought out by the early Christians, and were soon collected into a kind of common stock from which every one drew at his pleasure.’^[231] And we have already had evidence that the early Christians possessed manuals of OT quotations, on which they drew for teaching purposes. Collections of Messianic passages from the OT would stimulate believers to invent incidents in the life of Jesus which fulfilled the supposed predictions.

All this evidence does not exclude the possibility that there was a preacher who was tried and executed and that his career formed the basis of the existing narratives. ... Sectarians meeting in the second century for some common purpose, e.g. to advocate purer living, would cast about for traditions on which to base their precepts. They would, perhaps, fasten on one particular man of the past who had led a pure life, and being semi-literate, they would not check details, but father all sorts of deeds on him, perhaps many of them performed by other men with whom they had confused him.^[232]

Philo and Josephus on Pilate

One of the troubling aspects about Pilate is that he was an obscure, equestrian class official with a small military unit under his command, ruling over a very minor part of the Roman Empire. An inscription with his name and title on it was discovered at Caesarea Maritima in 1961. It doesn’t refer to anything datable except the emperor Tiberius, who reigned 22 years.^[233] Yet, thanks to the gospels and Pilate’s few hours of alleged interaction with Jesus, Christians have chanted every Sunday for the last 1,500 years or so that Jesus Christ “suffered under Pontius Pilate.” I think we have a gross misunderstanding due to Josephus’ tendency to novelize and apologize and the fraudulent claims of Ignatius fighting his war ^[234] to thank for that falsehood.

Philo is extremely negative about Pilate, and he lived in Alexandria, far away from the “scene of the crime”. Josephus, on the other hand, is less condemnatory, though his descriptions of Pilate’s actions are also quite negative. This creates a big problem when we consider the gospels’ representation of Pilate as the Diet Coke of evil: just one calorie – not evil enough! Poor Pilate is not allowed to let Jesus go because the bad Jews made him do it! That is patently ridiculous, as reasonable familiarity with Roman history will show. The Roman governor was able to release anyone he wanted to in order to implement his decision about their guilt or innocence. Furthermore, the Pilate described by Philo and Josephus would not have brooked any interference from the Jews. The whole story is a pathetic farce.

In a flashback to the time of Tiberius, the grandfather of Caligula, Philo makes an interesting remark about persecutions of the Jews:

¼ at that time things in Italy were thrown into a great deal of confusion when Sejanus was preparing to make his attempt against our nation; for he [Tiberius] knew immediately after his [Sejanus] death that the accusations which had been brought against the Jews who were dwelling in Rome were false calumnies, inventions of Sejanus, who was desirous to destroy our nation ... And he sent commands

to all the governors of provinces in every country to comfort those of our nation in their respective cities, as the punishment intended to be inflicted was not meant to be inflicted upon all, but only on the guilty; and they were but few. And he ordered them to change none of the existing customs, but to look upon them as pledges, since the men were peaceful in their dispositions and natural characters, and their laws trained them and disposed them to quiet and stability. [\[235\]](#)

Philo appears to be saying that Sejanus was responsible for a persecution of the Jews in Italy and elsewhere, and this was only revealed after the death of Sejanus. Probably, this persecution began with the expulsion in 19 AD, which will play a big part in this discussion further on. Sejanus was executed in 31 AD and, apparently, at this point in time, Philo suggests that Tiberius sent edicts around to counter some of those that had been made by his former second-in-command. [\[236\]](#)

Further on in the text, Philo quotes a letter that Herod Agrippa wrote to Caligula, who had planned to erect a statue of himself in the temple, in defense of the Jews, where he includes a flashback to the time of Tiberius:

“What again did your other grandfather, Tiberius Caesar, do? ... during the three and twenty years that he was emperor, he preserved the form of worship in the temple as it had been handed down from the earliest times, without abrogating or altering the slightest particular of it.

“Moreover, I have it in my power to relate one act of ambition on his part ... Pilate was **one of the emperor’s lieutenants**, having been appointed governor of Judaea. He, not more with the object of doing honour to Tiberius than with that of vexing the multitude, **dedicated some gilt shields in the palace of Herod**, in the holy city; which had no form nor any other forbidden thing represented on them except some necessary inscription, which mentioned these two facts, the name of the person who had placed them there, and the person in whose honour they were so placed there.

“But when the multitude heard what had been done, and when the circumstance became notorious, then the people, putting forward the four sons of the king, who were in no respect inferior to the kings themselves, in fortune or in rank, and his other descendants, and those magistrates who were among them at the time, entreated him to alter and to rectify the innovation which he had committed in respect of the shields; and not to make any alteration in their national customs, which had hitherto been preserved without any interruption, *without being in the least degree changed by any king or emperor.*

“But when he steadfastly refused this petition (**for he was a man of a very inflexible disposition, and very merciless as well as very obstinate**), they cried out: ‘Do not cause a sedition; do not make war upon us; do not destroy the peace which exists. The honour of the emperor is not identical with dishonour to the ancient laws; let it not be to you a pretence for heaping insult on our nation. Tiberius is not desirous that any of our laws or customs shall be destroyed. And if you yourself say that he is, show us either some command from him, or some letter; or something of the kind, that we, who have been sent to you as ambassadors, may cease to trouble you, and may address our supplications to your master.’

“But this last sentence exasperated him in the greatest possible degree, as he feared lest they might in reality go on an embassy to the emperor, and might impeach him with respect to other particulars of his government, in respect of **his corruption, and his acts of insolence, and his rapine**, and his habit of insulting people, and his cruelty, and **his continual murders of people untried and uncondemned**, and his never ending, and gratuitous, and most grievous inhumanity.

“Therefore, being exceedingly angry, and **being at all times a man of most ferocious passions**, he was in great perplexity, neither venturing to take down what he had once set up, nor wishing to do anything which could be acceptable to his subjects, and at the same time being sufficiently acquainted with the firmness of Tiberius on these points. And those who were in power in our nation, seeing this, and perceiving that he was inclined to change his mind as to what he had done, but that he was not willing to be thought to do so, wrote a most supplicatory letter to Tiberius. And he, when he had read it, what did he say of Pilate, and what threats did he utter against him.

“But it is beside our purpose at present to relate to you **how very angry he was**, although he was not very liable to sudden anger; since the facts speak for themselves. Immediately, without putting anything off till the next day, he wrote a letter, reproaching and reviling him in the most bitter manner for his act of unprecedented audacity and wickedness, and commanding him immediately to take down the shields and to convey them away from the metropolis of Judaea to Caesarea, on the sea which had been named

Caesarea Augusta, after his grandfather, in order that they might be set up in the temple of Augustus. And accordingly, they were set up in that edifice. And in this way he provided for two matters: both for the honour due to the emperor, and for the preservation of the ancient customs of the city.

“Now the things set up on that occasion were **shields, on which there was no representation of any living thing whatever engraved**. But no, the thing [now] proposed to be erected is a colossal statue. Moreover, *then* the erection was in the dwelling-house of the governor; but they say, that which is *now* contemplated is to be in the inmost part of the temple, in the very holy of holies itself ...”[\[237\]](#)

In this account we see a Pilate who would never back down if he had either condemned or released a prisoner. The entire gospel story of Pilate being such a fair guy and washing his hands is just ridiculous in the light of this *historical* data. However, we can also see how a reading of this account might incline a novelistic disposition to select Pilate as the evil procurator who did in Jesus. But there was probably a more significant reason, as we will see.

It is quite clear that there was an exchange between Tiberius and Pilate and that Pilate came to heel and did as he was told, moving the shields to Caesarea, and this is the probable reason for the existence of the “Pilate stone” in that location. Nor is there any indication at all that Tiberius died before Pilate got his just deserts.

It is in no way possible to date the events in this little digression about Pilate in the letter of Agrippa to Caligula. Some scholars also think that the letter is more or less authentic, because Philo would have had access to it. In fact, since he was there with Agrippa at the time, it is possible that he assisted in composing the document, the memories of the time of Tiberius being his own.

Let’s look now at Josephus’ version of the story:

But now Pilate, the procurator of Judea, removed the army from Caesarea to Jerusalem, to take their winter quarters there, in order to abolish the Jewish laws. So he introduced Caesar's effigies, which were upon the ensigns, and brought them into the city; whereas our law forbids us the very making of images; on which account the former procurators were wont to make their entry into the city with such ensigns as had not those ornaments. Pilate was the first who brought those images to Jerusalem, and set them up there; which was done without the knowledge of the people, because it was done in the night time; but as soon as they knew it, they came in multitudes to Caesarea, and interceded with Pilate many days that he would remove the images; and when he would not grant their requests, because it would tend to the injury of Caesar, while yet they persevered in their request, on the sixth day he ordered his soldiers to have their weapons privately, while he came and sat upon his judgment-seat, which seat was so prepared in the open place of the city, that it concealed the army that lay ready to oppress them; and when the Jews petitioned him again, he gave a signal to the soldiers to encompass them routed, and threatened that their punishment should be no less than immediate death, unless they would leave off disturbing him, and go their ways home. But they threw themselves upon the ground, and laid their necks bare, and said they would take their death very willingly, rather than the wisdom of their laws should be transgressed; upon which Pilate was deeply affected with their firm resolution to keep their laws inviolable, and presently commanded the images to be carried back from Jerusalem to Caesarea.[\[238\]](#)

Again we see Josephus’ tendency to exaggerate, to glorify Jewish devotion to their religion, as well as a softening of Pilate’s attitude: he was “deeply affected” by their firm resolution. No mention of the Judean princes and magistrates being the ones appealing to Pilate, or his fear that they would communicate with the emperor, or of Tiberius stepping in and correcting his behavior. According to Josephus, it was only later, after Pilate attacked a crowd of Samaritans, that *the Samaritans sent a delegation to Vitellius*, who then sent a Marcellus to replace Pilate and ordered Pilate to Rome. Keep the form in mind: the governor of Syria was notified and he called Pilate to him and replaced him. Keep also in mind what Philo said: “And those who were in power in our nation... wrote a most supplicatory letter to Tiberius.”

[NOTE: What is the significance of the last sentence above? Where does it become relevant? It should be deleted and moved there.]

Josephus finishes off Pilate with the following:

So Pilate, when he had tarried ten years in Judea, made haste to Rome, and this in obedience to the orders of Vitellius, which he durst not contradict; but before he could get to Rome Tiberius was dead.^[239]

Following this, we read the glorious account of how friendly Vitellius was with the Jews, immediately followed by the Vitellius–Artabanus story recounted above. While the presence of Vitellius at this point in the narrative would seem to indicate that Pilate *was* in Judea until the mid 30s AD, there is another explanation. However, in order to really examine the conundrum that Josephus presents us, we have to go back in time to get the proper perspective, beginning with the time of the death of Herod the Great, presumably in 4 BC. Remember the reference made earlier to Herod ruling for 37 years since he was made king by the Romans? Well, here we are going to find out that it wasn't necessarily so.

The Problem of the Death of Herod the Great

Prior to the death of Herod the Great, Josephus tells the story of the "Golden Eagle Temple cleansing" by Judas and Matthias, an event that parallels that of Pilate's "shields". Here is Josephus' account of how it came about, quoted at length:

But Herod now fell into a distemper, and made his will, and **bequeathed his kingdom to [Antipas], his youngest son;** and this out of that hatred to Archelaus and Philip, which the calumnies of Antipater had raised against them. He also bequeathed a thousand talents to Caesar, and five hundred to Julia, Caesar's wife, to Caesar's children, and friends and freed-men. He also distributed among his sons and their sons his money, his revenues, and his lands. He also made Salome his sister very rich, because she had continued faithful to him in all his circumstances, and was never so rash as to do him any harm; and as he despaired of recovering, for he was about the seventieth year of his age, he grew fierce, and indulged the bitterest anger upon all occasions; the cause whereof was this, that he thought himself despised, and that the nation was pleased with his misfortunes; besides which, he resented a sedition which some of the lower sort of men excited against him, the occasion of which was as follows.

There was one Judas, the son of Saripheus, and Matthias, the son of Margalothus, two of the most eloquent men among the Jews, and the most celebrated interpreters of the Jewish laws, and men well beloved by the people, because of their education of their youth; for all those that were studious of virtue frequented their lectures every day. These men, when they found that the king's distemper was incurable, excited the young men that they would pull down all those works which the king had erected contrary to the law of their fathers, and thereby obtain the rewards which the law will confer on them for such actions of piety; for that it was truly on account of Herod's rashness in making such things as the law had forbidden, that his other misfortunes, and this distemper also, which was so unusual among mankind, and with which he was now afflicted, came upon him; for Herod had caused such things to be made which were contrary to the law, of which he was accused by Judas and Matthias; for the king had erected over the great gate of the temple a large golden eagle, of great value, and had dedicated it to the temple. Now the law forbids those that propose to live according to it, to erect images or representations of any living creature. So these wise men persuaded [their scholars] to pull down the golden eagle; alleging, that although they should incur any danger, which might bring them to their deaths, the virtue of the action now proposed to them would appear much more advantageous to them than the pleasures of life; since they would die for the preservation and observation of the law of their fathers; since they would also acquire an everlasting fame and commendation; since they would be both commended by the present generation, and leave an example of life that would never be forgotten to posterity; since that common calamity of dying cannot be avoided by our living so as to escape any such dangers; that therefore it is a right thing for those who are in love with a virtuous conduct, to wait for that fatal hour by such behavior as may carry them out of the world with praise and honor; and that this will alleviate death to a great degree, thus to come at it by the performance of brave actions, which bring us into danger of it; and at the same time to leave that reputation behind them to their children, and to all their relations, whether they be men or women, which will be of great advantage to them afterward.

And with such discourses as this did these men excite the young men to this action; and a report being come to them that the king was dead, this was an addition to the wise men's persuasions; so, in the very middle of the day, they got upon the place, they pulled down the eagle, and cut it into pieces with axes, while a great number of the people were in the temple. And now the king's captain, upon hearing what the undertaking was, and supposing it was a thing of a higher nature than it proved to be, came up thither, having a great band of soldiers with him, such as was sufficient to put a stop to the multitude of those who pulled down what was dedicated to

God; so he fell upon them unexpectedly, and as they were upon this bold attempt, in a foolish presumption rather than a cautious circumspection, as is usual with the multitude, and while they were in disorder, and incautious of what was for their advantage; so he caught no fewer than forty of the young men, who had the courage to stay behind when the rest ran away, together with the authors of this bold attempt, Judas and Matthias, who thought it an ignominious thing to retire upon his approach, and led them to the king. And when they were come to the king, and he asked them if they had been so bold as to pull down what he had dedicated to God, "Yes, [said they,] what was contrived we contrived, and what hath been performed we performed it, and that with such a virtuous courage as becomes men; for we have given our assistance to those things which were dedicated to the majesty of God, and we have provided for what we have learned by hearing the law; and it ought not to be wondered at, if we esteem those laws which Moses had suggested to him, and were taught him by God, and which he wrote and left behind him, more worthy of observation than thy commands. Accordingly we will undergo death, and all sorts of punishments which thou canst inflict upon us, with pleasure, since we are conscious to ourselves that we shall die, not for any unrighteous actions, but for our love to religion." And thus they all said, and their courage was still equal to their profession, and equal to that with which they readily set about this undertaking. And when the king had ordered them to be bound, he sent them to Jericho ...

But the people, on account of Herod's barbarous temper, and for fear he should be so cruel and to inflict punishment on them, said what was done was done without their approbation, and that it seemed to them that the actors might well be punished for what they had done. But as for Herod, he dealt more mildly with others [of the assembly] but **he deprived Matthias of the high priesthood, as in part an occasion of this action, and made Joazar, who was Matthias's wife's brother, high priest in his stead.** Now it happened, that during the time of the high priesthood of this Matthias, there was another person made high priest for a single day, that very day which the Jews observed as a fast. The occasion was this: This Matthias the high priest, on the night before that day when the fast was to be celebrated, seemed, in a dream, to have conversation with his wife; and because he could not officiate himself on that account, **Joseph, the son of Ellemus**, his kinsman, assisted him in that sacred office. But **Herod deprived this Matthias of the high priesthood, and burnt the other Matthias, who had raised the sedition, with his companions, alive. And that very night there was an eclipse of the moon.** [\[240\]](#)

Notice this in particular in the tale of Judas and Matthias: ***"two of the most eloquent men among the Jews, and the most celebrated interpreters of the Jewish laws, and men well beloved by the people, because of their education of their youth; for all those that were studious of virtue frequented their lectures every day."*** I would suggest that this little bit of description later went into the NT as part of the story about Jesus with the additional spin of the tale of Josephus advising the doctors of the law when just a lad.

Also note that the people, fearing Herod, *"said what was done was done without their approbation, and that it seemed to them that the actors might well be punished for what they had done."* Again and again one reads in Josephus how the masses supported this or that person, but then "the people" disavow that individual to save their own skins. We find the same problematical behavior in the gospels. At one moment, the priests are afraid to act against Jesus because of his popular support, at the next moment, they are arresting him without fear, and the next, the crowd is calling for his crucifixion and Barabbas' release. Most peculiar behavior, but certainly well represented by the accounts of Josephus.

Notice Joseph, "son of Ellemus," or Heli. Luke, in his faked genealogy of Jesus, tells us that Jesus' father was "Joseph, son of Heli". Also, the odd add-on about Matthias the rebel and Matthias the high priest being two different individuals: with just such an insertion as this a whole context can be changed. And if, ultimately, Josephus proved to be a member of the rebels of his own time, he might very much have wanted to separate them from the priests. Keep in mind Joazar, the high priest who replaces Matthias,

Last, the eclipse: Theologians have placed the alleged birth of Jesus before the spring of 4 BC because of this reference to an eclipse, shortly following which, Herod the Great dies, before Passover. Jesus has to be born before Herod dies or there's no "Wise Men from the East" and "Slaughter of the Innocents". However, by selecting the eclipse of 13 March 4 BC as the chronological hook, they force a whole lot of events into a period of just 29 days. It is well nigh impossible for all the events mentioned by Josephus (not to mention the claims of the gospels and theologians) to have transpired in that short window.

There are two other possible candidates for the right eclipse that would have been visible in Palestine: 15 September 5 BC

(10:30 pm), which could then preserve the 4 BC death of Herod and birth of Jesus, or 10 January 1 BC. The first provides 7 months in which all the things Josephus describes could have happened, with Herod dying the following year. The second gives a little over three months of time before Herod dies in April. Either would work. However, if the latter is correct, then Herod the Great's death has to be moved forward to 1 BC.

Ernest Martin has written a fascinating little book on the topic entitled *The Star of Bethlehem: The Star That Astonished the World*. I've adapted his list of the events that occurred between the eclipse and the death of Herod and his subsequent funeral just to give you an idea of the problem. Following the executions of Matthias and his followers, the following things are recorded as happening in the life of Herod:

- 1) On that night, an eclipse.
- 2) Josephus informs us that Herod's condition worsened the morning after the eclipse. He had already been ill for several months and the people attributed this accelerated decline to the execution of the righteous teachers.
- 3) Herod then tried "one remedy after another" and after these efforts, each of which must have taken some days or a week each, was advised by his physicians to go take mineral baths. He traveled 25 miles to the resort, tried the baths for at least a week before deciding that they were doing no good, and then went back to Jericho.
- 4) Back at home, Herod, knowing his death was getting closer, plotted his revenge on the Jews, who he felt did not love or appreciate him after all he had done for them:

He commanded that all the principal men of the entire Jewish nation, wheresoever they lived, should be called to him. Accordingly, they were a great number that came, because the whole nation was called, and all men heard of this call, and death was the penalty of such as should despise the epistles that were sent to call them. And now the king was in a wild rage against them all, the innocent as well as those that had afforded ground for accusations; and **when they were come, he ordered them to be all shut up in the hippodrome**, and sent for his sister Salome, and her husband Alexas, and spake thus to them: "I shall die in a little time, so great are my pains; which death ought to be cheerfully borne, and to be welcomed by all men; but **what principally troubles me is this, that I shall die without being lamented, and without such mourning as men usually expect at a king's death.**"

For that he was not unacquainted with the temper of the Jews, that his death would be a thing very desirable, and exceedingly acceptable to them, because during his lifetime they were ready to revolt from him, and to abuse the donations he had dedicated to God that it therefore was their business to resolve to afford him some alleviation of his great sorrows on this occasion; for that if they do not refuse him their consent in what he desires, **he shall have a great mourning at his funeral, and such as never had any king before him; for then the whole nation would mourn from their very soul**, which otherwise would be done in sport and mockery only.

He desired therefore, that as soon as they see he hath given up the ghost, they shall place soldiers round the hippodrome, while they do not know that he is dead; and that they shall not declare his death to the multitude till this is done, but that they shall **give orders to have those that are in custody shot with their darts; and that this slaughter of them all will cause that he shall not miss to rejoice on a double account; that as he is dying, they will make him secure that his will shall be executed in what he charges them to do; and that he shall have the honor of a memorable mourning at his funeral.** So he deplored his condition, with tears in his eyes, and begged them by the kindness due from them, as of his kindred, and by the faith they owed to God, and begged of them that they would not hinder him of this honorable mourning at his funeral. So they promised him not to transgress his commands.

Now anyone may easily discover the temper of this man's mind, which not only took pleasure in doing what he had done formerly against his relations, out of the love of life, but by those commands of his which savored of no humanity; since **he took care, when he was departing out of this life, that the whole nation should be put into mourning, and indeed made desolate of their dearest kindred, when he gave order that one out of every family should be slain, although they had done nothing that was unjust, or that was against him, nor were they accused of any other crimes ...** [\[241\]](#)

Notice the elements of the Massacre of the Innocents contained within the above passage. Clearly, there was no such event

as Herod sending around his soldiers to kill babies, but apparently he planned to raise a hue and cry as soon as he was dead by a massacre of innocent citizens! (Not to forget his execution of the youths following Matthias and Judas.)

By any measure of time, considering travel times in those days and Herod's condition, we are well past the allotted 29 days between the March eclipse and the Passover. But there is more.

5) While this was happening, Herod's ambassadors to Augustus returned with letters from the emperor, giving Herod the power to kill or banish his son Antipater. This news "elevated" his spirits:

¼ but as his pains were become very great, he was now ready to faint for want of somewhat to eat; so he called for an apple and a knife; for it was his custom formerly to pare the apple himself, and soon afterwards to cut it, and eat it. When he had got the knife, he looked about, and had a mind to stab himself with it; and he [would have] done it, had not his first cousin, Achiabus, prevented him, and held his hand, and cried out loudly. Whereupon a woeful lamentation echoed through the palace, and a great tumult was made, as if the king were dead.

Upon which Antipater, who verily believed his father was deceased, grew bold in his discourse, as hoping to be immediately and entirely released from his bonds, and to take the kingdom into his hands without any more ado; so he discoursed with the jailer about letting him go, and in that case promised him great things, both now and hereafter, as if that were the only thing now in question. But the jailer did not only refuse to do what Antipater would have him, but informed the king of his intentions, and how many solicitations he had had from him [of that nature]. Hereupon Herod, who had formerly no affection nor good-will towards his son to restrain him, when he heard what the jailer said, he cried out, and beat his head, although he was at death's door, and raised himself upon his elbow, and sent for some of his guards, and commanded them to kill Antipater without tiny further delay, and to do it presently, and to bury him in an ignoble manner at Hyrcania. [\[242\]](#)

It seems reasonable that the above activities would have required a few days' time. But we have just a little way to go before Herod is dead.

6) Herod changes his will. This apparently took a few days to get written up and signed:

And now Herod altered his testament upon the alteration of his mind; for he appointed Antipas, to whom he had before left the kingdom, to be tetrarch of Galilee and Perea, and granted the kingdom to Archelaus. He also gave Gaulonitis, and Trachonitis, and Paneas to Philip, who was his son, but own brother to Archelaus by the name of a tetrarchy; and bequeathed Jamnia, and Ashdod, and Phasaelis to Salome his sister, with five hundred thousand [drachmae] of silver that was coined. He also made provision for all the rest of his kindred, by giving them sums of money and annual revenues, and so left them all in a wealthy condition. He bequeathed also to Caesar ten millions [of drachmae] of coined money, besides both vessels of gold and silver, and garments exceeding costly, to Julia, Caesar's wife; and to certain others, five millions. When he had done these things, **he died, the fifth day after he had caused Antipater to be slain**; having reigned, since he had procured Antigonus to be slain, thirty-four years; but since he had been declared king by the Romans, **thirty-seven**. [\[243\]](#)

7) After Herod's death, a grand funeral was planned and carried out. It probably took some time to organize this. Josephus tells us that the whole army was represented in the funeral, and it would have taken a number of days to summon and assemble them. Then followed a slow procession of the funeral cortege, probably traveling about a mile a day, 25 miles in total, to reach the destination where Herod was to be buried. The public mourning period was 30 days, so Herod would just have been tucked in for eternity by the time this period was over.

8) After Herod's death, Archelaus gave an audience to the people, made changes in the army, gave out promotions, liberated prisoners (Herod's sister and her husband had not followed through on his order to execute the dignitaries – they had been set free upon his death), and sat in judgment on lawsuits. He did all these things "and many other things" *before the beginning of Passover*.

Thus, I think it is safe to conclude that the partial eclipse of 13 March 4 BC was *not* the eclipse mentioned in Josephus. There is absolutely no way possible that all of these events could have occurred between that March eclipse and the beginning of Passover 29 days later. That leads to the next question: which eclipse was it?

The War of Varus featuring Gaius Caesar

Martin's book *The Star of Bethlehem* is largely devoted to figuring out which eclipse actually fits the historical events. One has to filter while reading this work because his underlying agenda is to prove that "Jesus of Nazareth" was born at the time of a dramatic planetary conjunction of Jupiter and Venus (his "Star of Bethlehem") that occurred in 3 and 2 BC. In order to do this, he must have Herod still living at that point, so his targeted eclipse is the one that occurred on 10 January 1 BC. Driven by this idea, he actually did a great deal of excellent work bringing many obscure items to light and showing them in context; he just didn't realize that they really weren't proof that Jesus was born at that time at all, but rather that *the events of the time were attached to the Jesus myth after the fact*. Martin asks this question:

Recognizing that the January 10, 1 BCE eclipse is the one mentioned by Josephus has much historical value in another way. Scholars have wondered for years why Josephus referred only to this one eclipse out of the hundreds that occurred over the generations that he covered in his histories. Why single out this one? Indeed, during the reign of Herod there were at least 32 lunar eclipses visible in Palestine (20 partial and 12 total). There must have been special reasons for heralding this single eclipse associated with Herod's death.

...

Other than the historical importance of Herod's death itself, it should be remembered that it was also the very day following the martyrdom of the two illustrious rabbis whom the whole nation admired and esteemed. This was an important event for commemoration to the Jewish people. But there was a national event even more disastrous than that. The occasion of the rabbis' deaths led directly to 3000 Jewish worshippers at the next Passover being slaughtered in the temple precincts. This massacre, which was ordered by Archelaus (the successor to Herod) resulted in the unusual cancellation of the whole Passover services ...

This was a most extraordinary event. ... Nothing like it had ever happened before. ... This slaughter of the 3000 Jewish worshippers in the temple led directly to a major war between the Jews and the Romans that occupied the whole of the following summer and autumn. Josephus said that this war was no minor skirmish. **It was the most significant conflict to occur in Palestine from the time of Pompey in 63 BCE to the Roman/Jewish War of CE 66 to 73.** In order to subdue this Jewish rebellion, the Romans had to muster their three legions in Syria, plus auxiliary forces (about 20,000 armed men in all), to put down the rebellion that erupted. At the end of the war, 2,000 Jews were crucified and 30,000 sold into slavery. ... and what started it? It was the death of the rabbis associated with the eclipse of the Moon near Herod's death. [\[244\]](#)

Martin's discussion, following the above, points out the obvious: the mis-dating of Herod's death makes the events recounted by Josephus Roman records three years out of sync with the Roman records. He shows convincingly, with excellent evidence, how the records (written and archaeological) can be reconciled. [\[245\]](#) While we cannot pursue this fascinating line of evidence here, there is something that is of some relevance to showing the general environment of the empire at the time, particularly in respect of Rome's relationship to Palestine: the participation of Augustus' adopted son, Gaius Caesar, in the "War of Varus" in Palestine. Gaius was the oldest son of Marcus Agrippa and Julia, the daughter of Augustus. He was Augustus' most favored heir and when he died, at the age of 24 on campaign in Armenia in February of 4 AD, Augustus was devastated. He was then forced to adopt his stepson, Tiberius, who was no blood relation, as his heir. [\[246\]](#) Again, Martin:

So, Gaius, instead of going to Armenia went first to Egypt and hurriedly continued on to Idumaea to bring the war in Palestine to an end. He then went to Jerusalem where he failed to allow the customary devotions to be given "to the Jewish God." (Suetonius, *Augustus*, 93.) From there, he and Varus must have gone to Antioch with two of the legions while one legion was left in Judaea. He would have arrived in the provincial capital of Antioch by late 1 BC or at the beginning of CE 1. He would then have joined forces with the one or two legions he sent to Syria from the Danubian reserves. This would have given him the needed reinforcement he required for his own operations soon to occur against the Armenians. ...

Two other historical documents ¼ now make sense whereas before they were a puzzle to historians. There is an eyewitness account of

the War of Varus which tells about the person who secured the victory. This Jewish writer who lived in Judaea (and wrote a work called *The Assumption of Moses*) said that the war was conducted by a "king" who had come from the west to gain the triumph. The reference has normally been applied to Quintilius Varus because historians up to now have assumed the war mentioned by this Jewish writer took place in 4 BCE. This, of course, was three years before Gaius Caesar arrived on the scene in late 1 BCE. ... Gaius came directly from the west to end the war and he had all the credentials to be called a "king." ...

The next point is more significant. In 1960 an inscription was found in Greece that mentioned these activities of Gaius while he was on his mission to the east. It refers to some splendid victories. Though it does not specify exactly what they were, what was written on this inscription has an important bearing on our question under discussion. The inscription states, "Gaius, the son of Augustus, who was fighting *the barbarians for the safety of all mankind.*" ...

Added to this, we have the Pisan cenotaph (another inscription) which mentions this same expedition of Gaius and it states that Gaius' victories were accomplished "beyond the Roman frontiers." The region of Idumaea in 1 BC would fit the description precisely. The areas of Galilee, Judaea, Peraea (across the Jordan River) and Idumaea were formerly the lands controlled by Herod. Though Herod was associated politically with the Empire in close alliance, his kingdom was technically outside imperial territory. It only became provincial in CE 6/7 when Quirinius assumed the governorship of Syria and Palestine. However, in 1 BCE, Idumaea was still "beyond the Roman frontiers." ...

Besides this, there were other reasons to call the area of Palestine "barbarian" at that time. Rome would have considered the Jewish rebels as fighting against the philosophical and political concepts within the Hellenistic principles that then dominated Roman thinking. If there were any people at the time who would naturally have been against such Roman philosophical thinking and would have been called "barbarians", it would have been the Jews of Palestine after the death of Herod. ...

This belief is further strengthened because the inscription found in 1960 stated that Gaius had been fighting "*for the safety of all mankind.*" The Romans must have considered their victory of great consequence. After all, as stated before, there were *Jews who had messianic convictions at that time scattered throughout the Empire* as well as Parthia. What if all the Jews decided to fight against Rome? This, of course, was an unlikely proposition but the potential for such a thing was always there. There was also the possibility for fifth column subversion by the Jews as well as their active aggression against the Empire which gave Rome concern. Putting an end to the resistance in Palestine must have given the Romans the feeling of having accomplished a major victory ... "*for the safety of all mankind.*"

Such an appraisal is reflective of Roman beliefs at this period. Tacitus, a century later, gave ordinary Roman opinion of the Jews when he said they customarily hated "all mankind." Even the apostle Paul felt that Jewish social beliefs at the time were "contrary to all men." (I Thessalonians 2:15) Josephus records a plethora of Gentile antipathy against the Jews within this period ... The emperor Claudius wrote to the people of Alexandria in CE 41 saying that the Jews and their opinions were "a general plague infecting the whole world." ... If there were ever a people "out of step" with the rest of the world at that time, it was the Jews. It is well within reason that those mentioned on the inscription as being like "barbarians" that Gaius subdued "*for the safety of all mankind*" were the final Jewish insurgents in Idumaea who fought in the War of Varus. [\[247\]](#)

There are a couple of major items in the above quotation, which is only excerpted in part. The first is, of course, the necessity to subtract three years from the timeline leading up to Pontius Pilate, and the second is the fact that Quirinius assumed the governorship of Syria *and* Palestine in 6/7 AD, around the time of Archelaus' exile.

A Closer Look at the Golden Eagle Temple Cleansing

Coming back now to the death of Herod who has just been tucked in for eternity after a long funeral procession. Recall the terms of Herod's changed will:

... he appointed **Antipas**, to whom he had before left the kingdom, to be tetrarch of Galilee and Perea, and granted the kingdom to **Archelaus**. He also gave Gaulonitis, and Trachonitis, and Paneas to **Philip**, who was his son, but own brother to Archelaus by the name of a tetrarchy; and bequeathed Jamnia, and Ashdod, and Phasaelis to Salome his sister $\frac{1}{4}$ [\[248\]](#)

The fact that Herod had previously said he would leave the *kingdom* of Judea to Antipas, but then changed his mind and gave it to Archelaus, while tossing Antipas only Galilee and Perea, set up a serious conflict between the two. Not only was it necessary for Augustus to confirm the terms of the will of Herod the Great; there was also going to be a legal contest about who got the kingdom. Josephus says nothing in particular about Antipas and Philip needing to have their inheritance confirmed; just Archelaus, because if confirmed, he would be a king. According to Josephus, before Archelaus could depart for his "confirmation", things took an ugly turn. In the following excerpt, notice carefully how Josephus spins the two revered teachers, Judas and Matthias (and their followers), whom he had just previously described as *"two of the most eloquent men among the Jews, and the most celebrated interpreters of the Jewish laws, and men well beloved by the people, because of their education of their youth."*

At this time also it was that some of the Jews got together out of a desire of innovation. They lamented Matthias, and those that were slain with him by Herod, who had not any respect paid them by a funeral mourning, out of the fear men were in of that man; they were those who had been condemned for pulling down the golden eagle. The people made a great clamor and lamentation hereupon, and cast out some reproaches against the king also, as if that tended to alleviate the miseries of the deceased. The people assembled together, and desired of Archelaus, that, in way of revenge on their account, he would inflict punishment on those who had been honored by Herod; and that, in the first and principal place, he would deprive that high priest whom Herod had made, and would choose one more agreeable to the law, and of greater purity, to officiate as high priest. This was granted by Archelaus, although he was mightily offended at their importunity, because he proposed to himself to go to Rome immediately to look after Caesar's determination about him. However, he sent the general of his forces to use persuasions, and to tell them that the death which was inflicted on their friends was according to the law ...

So when the king had suggested these things, and instructed his general in what he was to say, he sent him away to the people; but they made a clamor, and would not give him leave to speak, and put him in danger of his life ... they had more concern to have all their own wills performed than to yield obedience to their governors; thinking it to be a thing insufferable, that, **while Herod was alive, they should lose those that were most dear to them**, and that when he was dead, they could not get the actors to be punished. So they went on with their designs after a violent manner ...

Now, upon the approach of that feast of unleavened bread, which the law of their fathers had appointed for the Jews at this time, which feast is called the Passover and is a memorial of their deliverance out of Egypt, when they offer sacrifices with great alacrity; and when they are required to slay more sacrifices in number than at any other festival; and when an innumerable multitude came thither out of the country, nay, from beyond its limits also, in order to worship God, **the seditious lamented Judas and Matthias, those teachers of the laws, and kept together in the temple** ... And as Archelaus was afraid ... he sent a regiment of armed men, and with them a captain of a thousand, to suppress **the violent efforts of the seditious** before the whole multitude should be infected with the like madness ... But those that were seditious on account of those teachers of the law, irritated the people by the noise and clamors they used to encourage the people in their designs; **so they made an assault upon the soldiers, and came up to them, and stoned the greatest part of them**, although some of them ran away wounded, and their captain among them; and when they had thus done, they returned to the sacrifices which were already in their hands.

Now Archelaus thought there was no way to preserve the entire government but by cutting off those who made this attempt upon it; so he sent out the whole army upon them, and sent the horsemen to prevent those that had their tents without the temple from assisting those that were within the temple, and to kill such as ran away from the footmen when they thought themselves out of danger; **which horsemen slew three thousand men, while the rest went to the neighboring mountains.** [\[249\]](#)

Obviously, Archelaus was not off to a good start. But, supposedly, immediately following this massacre, he headed out for Rome. *However*, before he could even get on a ship:

... Sabinus, Caesar's steward for Syrian affairs, as he was making haste into Judea to preserve Herod's effects, met with Archelaus at Caesarea; but Varus [president of Syria] came at that time, and **restrained him from meddling with them**, for he was there as sent for by Archelaus, by the means of Ptolemy. And Sabinus, out of regard to Varus, did neither seize upon any of the castles that were among the Jews, nor did he seal up the treasures in them, but permitted Archelaus to have them, until Caesar should declare his resolution about them; so that, upon this his promise, he tarried still at Caesarea. **But after Archelaus was sailed for Rome, and Varus was removed to Antioch, Sabinus went to Jerusalem, and seized on the king's palace.** He also sent for the keepers of the garrisons, and for

all those that had the charge of Herod's effects, and declared publicly that he should require them to give an account of what they had; and he disposed of the castles in the manner he pleased ...[\[250\]](#)

The Varus in the story is Publius Quinctilius Varus. Varus was a member of a patrician family that had fallen on hard times. Things began to look up for them when Varus became consul in 13 BC. He was governor of the province of Africa from 8 to 7 BC and he hit the jackpot when he was appointed governor of Syria. Velleius Paterculus said that Varus entered the rich province as a poor man, and left a poor province as a rich man.[\[251\]](#) *He was known for his harshness and high taxation.* Josephus, who is blowing smoke over the rapaciousness of the Roman rulers, tries to present Varus as lenient. However, according to a popular TV documentary presentation of that period, the authors of which I haven't been able to track down, at the time of Varus, the Jews, nearly *en masse*, either began to boycott Roman pottery, or could not afford it, because it disappears almost entirely from the archaeological record.[\[252\]](#) If this is true, it is a silent testimony to the cruelty of this man. Coins have been found which show that Varus was governor of Syria in the 25th, 26th, and 27th years after the Battle of Actium (2 September 31 BC), i.e. 7/6 to 4 BC.[\[253\]](#) Later, Varus became infamous for losing three entire legions in the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest, where he committed suicide.

Meanwhile, as already mentioned, Archelaus, Antipas, and the whole Herodian circus are in Rome and Josephus takes some time lovingly describing the alleged debate before Augustus as to who was going to get what, borrowing heavily from the work of Nicolaus of Damascus, Herod the Great's friend and chronicler. Obviously, since Nicolaus' work was available at the time Josephus was writing, he didn't have a lot of wiggle room, but we will soon see how creative he could be with the materials he had to work with.

As Josephus would have it, Archelaus' alleged massacre of 3,000 rebels apparently didn't dampen the ardor of the innovators, as he called them, because he relates two additional revolts: one put down by Varus after Archelaus left for Rome, and another provoked by Sabinus after Varus left for Antioch.

Since Nicolaus of Damascus had also sailed with the Herodian party, Josephus is free to invent things in his absence. The opening line of the following refers to the debate over the inheritance going on in Rome:

But before these things could be brought to a settlement, Malthace, Archelaus's mother, fell into a distemper, and died of it; and **letters came from Varus, the president of Syria, which informed Caesar of the revolt of the Jews; for after Archelaus was sailed, the whole nation was in a tumult. So Varus, since he was there himself, brought the authors of the disturbance to punishment; and when he had restrained them for the most part from this sedition, which was a great one, he took his journey to Antioch, leaving one legion of his army at Jerusalem to keep the Jews quiet, who were now very fond of innovation.** Yet did not this at all avail to put an end to that their sedition; **for after Varus was gone away, Sabinus, Caesar's procurator, staid behind, and greatly distressed the Jews,** relying on the forces that were left there that they would by their multitude protect him; for he made use of them, and armed them as his guards, thereby **so oppressing the Jews, and giving them so great disturbance, that at length they rebelled; for he used force in seizing the citadels, and zealously pressed on the search after the king's money,** in order to seize upon it by force, on account of his love of gain and his extraordinary covetousness.[\[254\]](#)

It sounds to me as if Josephus is trying to "spread the blame" so as to save face for his Roman masters. Notice that *Sabinus* is the bad guy acting, for all the world, like the rapacious Varus. The passage would make more sense as a description of Varus' acts. Notice also that it seems that the revolt occurred *after* Archelaus left – he may have had nothing to do with it. It could take weeks for letters to be sent to Rome and it had certainly taken some time for the Archelaus party to get there, so time is passing here. Martin's description of what was going on begins to make a lot more sense in the face of all this Josephan confusion.

But on the approach of Pentecost [i.e. 50 days after Passover], which is a festival of ours, so called from the days of our forefathers, a great many ten thousands of men got together; nor did they come only to celebrate the festival, but out of their **indignation at the madness of Sabinus**, and at the injuries he offered them. A great number there was of Galileans, and Idumeans, and many men from

Jericho, and others who had passed over the river Jordan, and inhabited those parts. This whole multitude joined themselves to all the rest, and were more zealous than the others in making an assault on Sabinus, in order to be avenged on him; so they parted themselves into three bands, and encamped themselves in the places following:—some of them seized on the hippodrome and of the other two bands, one pitched themselves from the northern part of the temple to the southern, on the east quarter; but the third band held the western part of the city, where the king's palace was. Their work tended entirely to besiege the Romans, and to enclose them on all sides.

Now Sabinus was afraid of these men's number, and of their resolution, who had little regard to their lives, but were very desirous not to be overcome, while they thought it a point of puissance to overcome their enemies; so he sent immediately a letter to Varus, and, as he used to do, was very pressing with him, and entreated him to come quickly to his assistance, because the forces he had left were in imminent danger, and would probably, in no long time, be seized upon, and cut to pieces; while he did himself get up to the highest tower of the fortress ...

So Sabinus gave thence a signal to the Romans to fall upon the Jews, although he did not himself venture so much as to come down ... a terrible battle ensued; wherein, though it is true the Romans beat their adversaries, yet were not the Jews daunted in their resolutions, even when they had the sight of that terrible slaughter that was made of them; but they went round about, and got upon those cloisters which encompassed the outer court of the temple, where a great fight was still continued, and they cast stones at the Romans, partly with their hands, and partly with slings, as being much used to those exercises. [\[255\]](#)

Now, it is not unusual that the Jews were slinging stones at the Romans, but remember this from the rebellion against Archelaus that happened just a bit earlier: “so they made an assault upon [Archelaus’] soldiers, and came up to them, and **stoned the greatest part of them**, although some of them ran away wounded, and their captain among them; and when they had thus done, they returned to the sacrifices which were already in their hands.” One wonders if Archelaus was really the one who slaughtered 3000 Jews? Perhaps it was really Varus and/or Sabinus.

After all, this is the "War of Varus" that we are witnessing here. And it seems rather certain that it was occurring in the late spring/early summer of 1 BC.

And this sort of fight lasted a great while, till at last the Romans, who were greatly distressed by what was done, set fire to the cloisters so privately that those that were gotten upon them did not perceive it. This fire being fed by a great deal of combustible matter, caught hold immediately on the roof of the cloisters; so the wood, which was full of pitch and wax, and whose gold was laid on it with wax, yielded to the flame presently, and those vast works, which were of the highest value and esteem, were destroyed utterly, while those that were on the roof unexpectedly perished at the same time; for as the roof tumbled down, some of these men tumbled down with it, and others of them were killed by their enemies who encompassed them.

There was a great number more, who, out of despair of saving their lives, and out of astonishment at the misery that surrounded them, did either cast themselves into the fire, or threw themselves upon their swords, and so got out of their misery. But as to those that retired behind the same way by which they ascended, and thereby escaped, they were all killed by the Romans, as being unarmed men, and their courage failing them; their wild fury being now not able to help them, because they were destitute of armor, insomuch that of those that went up to the top of the roof, not one escaped. The Romans also rushed through the fire, where it gave them room so to do, and **seized on that treasure where the sacred money was reposit; a great part of which was stolen by the soldiers, and Sabinus got openly four hundred talents.** [\[256\]](#)

Sabinus found himself under siege and the Jewish army of Archelaus (formerly Herod's army), which was supposed to be supporting the Romans, apparently defected to the rebels. However, 3,000 troops under “Rufus and Gratus” sided with the Romans. It is at this point that Josephus reports:

Now at this time there were ten thousand other disorders in Judea, which were like tumults, because a great number put themselves into a warlike posture, either out of hopes of gain to themselves, or out of enmity to the Jews. [\[257\]](#)

He lists and describes a whole crew of messianic contenders and their activities, which are fascinating, but not yet relevant.

The main thing is that Varus received the message from Sabinus and headed out for the war zone. Here we encounter Aretas, keeping in mind that this is supposed to be the same Aretas who later on has the toss-up with Antipas that we discussed at the beginning in relation to Paul and his Basket Adventure:

As soon as Varus was once informed of the state of Judea by Sabinus's writing to him, he was afraid for the legion he had left there; so he took the two other legions, [for there were three legions in all belonging to Syria,] and four troops of horsemen, with the several auxiliary forces which either the kings or certain of the tetrarchs afforded him, and made what haste he could to assist those that were then besieged in Judea. He also gave order that all that were sent out for this expedition, should make haste to Ptolemais. The citizens of Berytus also gave him fifteen hundred auxiliaries as he passed through their city. **Aretas also, the king of Arabia Petrea, out of his hatred to Herod, and in order to purchase the favor of the Romans, sent him no small assistance,** besides their footmen and horsemen; and when he had now collected all his forces together, he committed part of them to his son, and to a friend of his, and sent them upon an expedition into Galilee, which lies in the neighborhood of Ptolemais; who made an attack upon the enemy, and put them to flight, **and took Sepphoris,** and made its inhabitants slaves, and burnt the city.

But Varus himself pursued his march for Samaria with his whole army; yet did not he meddle with the city of that name, because it had not at all joined with the seditious; but pitched his camp at a certain village that belonged to Ptolemy, whose name was Arus, which the Arabians burnt, out of their hatred to Herod, and out of the enmity they bore to his friends; whence they marched to another village, whose name was Sampho, which the Arabians plundered and burnt, although it was a fortified and a strong place; and all along this march nothing escaped them, but all places were full of fire and of slaughter. [\[258\]](#)

One wonders whether this early “invasion” of Aretas, at the invitation of the Romans, was the inspiration for Josephus’ novelized version in respect of Antipas, Herodias, and Vitellius? In any event, continuing to read about the events of this war, we realize that it was quite a rebellion, though Josephus has shifted the responsibility for starting it from Varus to Archelaus and Sabinus.

Emmaus was also burnt by Varus's order, after its inhabitants had deserted it, that he might avenge those that had there been destroyed. From thence he now marched to Jerusalem; whereupon those Jews whose camp lay there, and who had besieged the Roman legion, not bearing the coming of this army, left the siege imperfect: but **as to the Jerusalem Jews,** when Varus reproached them bitterly for what had been done, **they cleared themselves of the accusation,** and alleged that the conflux of the people was occasioned by the feast; that **the war was not made with their approbation,** but by the rashness of the strangers, while **they were on the side of the Romans,** and besieged together with them, rather than having any inclination to besiege them. There also came beforehand to meet Varus, Joseph, the cousin-german of king Herod, as also **Gratus and Rufus, who brought their soldiers along with them,** together with those Romans who had been besieged; but **Sabinus did not come into Varus's presence, but stole out of the city privately, and went to the seaside.** [\[259\]](#)

What a handy way to get rid of Sabinus and send him off into obscurity with the loot when, in all likelihood, it was Varus who got the lion's share of the plunder, as was reported by Velleius!

Upon this, Varus sent a part of his army into the country, to seek out those that had been the authors of the revolt; and when they were discovered, he punished some of them that were most guilty, and some he dismissed: now **the number of those that were crucified on this account were two thousand.** After which **he disbanded his army,** which he found no way useful to him in the affairs he came about; for **they behaved themselves very disorderly, and disobeyed his orders,** and what Varus desired them to do, and this out of regard to that gain which they made by the mischief they did.

As for himself, when he was informed that ten thousand Jews had gotten together, he made haste to catch them; but they did not proceed so far as to fight him, but, by the advice of Achiabus, [\[260\]](#) they came together, and delivered themselves up to him: hereupon **Varus forgave the crime of revolting to the multitude,** but sent their several commanders to Caesar, many of whom Caesar dismissed; but for the several **relations of Herod who had been among these men in this war,** they were the only persons whom he punished, who, without the least regard to justice, fought against their own kindred. [\[261\]](#)

The likelihood of the above whitewash of Varus and this rebellion actually being historical as Josephus has written it is

vanishingly remote to anyone who has a good general grasp of how the Empire operated at the time.

[NOTE: Can you give some reasons above?]

Here is where we come to something rather puzzling, or so it seems to me. In *Wars*, Josephus says:

But now came another accusation from the Jews against Archelaus at Rome, which he was to answer to. It was made by those ambassadors who, **before the revolt**, had come, by Varus's permission, to plead for the liberty of their country; those that came were fifty in number, but there were more than **eight thousand of the Jews at Rome who supported them** ^¼[\[262\]](#)

Nicolaus of Damascus defended the Herodian kingship and Archelaus. Here we have something of a doublet: 1) the argument that was said to have taken place between Archelaus and Antipas for possession of the kingdom according to the two wills of Herod the Great and 2) the argument of the Jewish embassy pleading for a governor vs. Nicolaus pleading Archelaus' case. Which really happened? And if both happened, when?

And we can't forget this:

... letters came from Varus, the president of Syria, which informed Caesar of the revolt of the Jews; for after Archelaus was sailed, the whole nation was in a tumult. So Varus, since he was there himself, brought the authors of the disturbance to punishment...

Notice that the text says these ambassadors came *before* the revolt, yet we are to understand that there was *already* a revolt in progress just before Archelaus left, and another immediately after, the second being due to the nastiness of the Roman governor. So, if that is the case, why would the Jews still want a Roman governor? You see how Josephus blows smoke? What is he hiding here?

In any event, this was the alleged result:

So Caesar, after he had heard both sides, dissolved the assembly for that time; but a few days afterward, he gave the one half of Herod's kingdom to Archelaus, by the name of Ethnarch, and promised to make him king also afterward, if he rendered himself worthy of that dignity. But as to the other half, he divided it into two tetrarchies, and gave them to two other sons of Herod, the one of them to Philip, and the other to that Antipas who contested the kingdom with Archelaus. Under this last was Perea and Galilee ... but Batanea, and Trachonitis, and Auranitis, and certain parts of Zeno's house about Jamnia ... were made subject to Philip; while Idumea, and all Judea, and Samaria were parts of the ethnarchy of Archelaus, although Samaria was eased of one quarter of its taxes, out of regard to their not having revolted with the rest of the nation. He also made subject to him the following cities, viz. Strato's Tower, and Sebaste, and Joppa, and Jerusalem; but as to the Grecian cities, Gaza, and Gadara, and Hippos, he cut them off from the kingdom, and added them to Syria. ... Salome also, besides what the king had left her in his testaments, was now made mistress of Jamnia, and Ashdod, and Phasaelis. Caesar did moreover bestow upon her the royal palace of Ascalon ... but he put her house under the ethnarchy of Archelaus. And for the rest of Herod's offspring, they received what was bequeathed to them in his testaments ^¼[\[263\]](#)

Obviously some of the mud slung at Archelaus stuck and Augustus didn't feel inclined to confirm his father's will or Archelaus' claims.

[NOTE: Suggest deleting the 3 paragraphs below. They don't say much.]

There is some issue here in considering the terms "ethnarch" and "tetrarch". The word tetrarch suggests four rulers ("ruler of a quarter"). Josephus arguably mentions four rulers here: Archelaus as ethnarch, Antipas and Philip as tetrarchs, and Salome, without a title. As a general rule I don't bring in testimony from the gospels. However, Luke refers to Lysanias, tetrarch of Abilene (a small realm on the western slopes of Mount Hermon), in his list of rulers at the time of John the Baptist, alongside Pontius Pilate, Herod Antipas, and Philip. [\[264\]](#) Since it is rather certain that Luke used Josephus as one of his sources, this may be a clue as to what the text of *Antiquities* said before some slight, but effective, editing took place.

According to Josephus, the emperor Claudius in 42 AD confirmed Agrippa I in the possession of Abila of Lysanias (already bestowed upon him by Caligula), which had formed the tetrarchy of Lysanias: *"He added to it the kingdom of Lysanias, and that province of Abilene."*^[265]

In support of the excerpt from Luke, there is a temple inscription found at Abila, naming Lysanias as the tetrarch of the locality and dated to the reign of either Augustus or Tiberius, so there is a good likelihood of the tetrarchy actually being exactly that: four rulers of more or less ethnarchic authority (excluding Salome, perhaps, whose authority Josephus says was under Archelaus' ethnarchy).

In any event, all of the above is a whole lot of goings-on in Judea while Archelaus and the gang were dancing attendance on Augustus. Notice, particularly, Archelaus was *not* really put in charge of things as one might be given to believe, but that in fact, the kingdom *was* put under the ultimate oversight of the Syrian provincial governor, whoever that might be (probably Varus at that moment). And finally, all of this was settled and set in motion at the end of 1 BC and early 1 AD, not three years earlier.

The Ethnarchy of Archelaus

Now, let's look at Josephus' two versions of the ethnarchy of Archelaus. Keep in mind that the version in *Wars* is the one most likely to stick closest to the facts though certainly Josephus felt free to innovate.:

<i>Wars</i> 2.7.3–4 (111–6)	<i>Antiquities</i> 17.13.1–4 (339–52)
<p>And now Archelaus took possession of his ethnarchy, and used not the Jews only, but the Samaritans also, barbarously; and this out of his resentment of their old quarrels with him. Whereupon they both of them sent ambassadors against him to Caesar; and in the ninth year of his government he was banished to Vienna, a city of Gaul, and his effects were put into Caesar's treasury.</p> <p>But the report goes, that before he was sent for by Caesar, he seemed to see nine ears of corn, full and large, but devoured by oxen. When, therefore, he had sent for the diviners, and some of the Chaldeans, and inquired of them what they thought it portended; and when one of them had one interpretation, and another had another, Simon, one of the sect of Essenes, said that he thought the ears of corn denoted years, and the oxen denoted a mutation of things, because by their ploughing they made an alteration of the country. That therefore he should reign as many years as there were ears of corn; and after he had passed through various alterations of fortune, should die. Now five days after Archelaus had heard this interpretation he was called to his trial.</p>	<p>When Archelaus was entered on his ethnarchy, and was come into Judea, he accused Joazar, the son of Boethus, of assisting the seditious, and took away the high priesthood from him, and put Eleazar his brother in his place. He also magnificently rebuilt the royal palace that had been at Jericho, and he diverted half the water with which the village of Neara used to be watered, and drew off that water into the plain, to water those palm trees which he had there planted: he also built a village, and put his own name upon it, and called it Archelaus. Moreover, he transgressed the law of our fathers and married Glaphyra, the daughter of Archelaus, who had been the wife of his brother Alexander, which Alexander had three children by her, while it was a thing detestable among the Jews to marry the brother's wife. Nor did this Eleazar abide long in the high priesthood, Jesus, the son of Sie, being put in his room while he was still living.</p> <p>But in the tenth year of Archelaus's government, both his brethren, and the principal men of Judea and Samaria, not being able to bear his barbarous and</p>

I cannot also but think it worthy to be recorded what dream Glaphyra, the daughter of Archelaus, king of Cappadocia, had, who had at first been wife to Alexander, who was the brother of Archelaus, concerning whom we have been discoursing. This Alexander was the son of Herod the king, by whom he was put to death, as we have already related. This Glaphyra was married, after his death, to Juba, king of Libya; and, after his death, was returned home, and lived a widow with her father. Then it was that Archelaus, the ethnarch, saw her, and fell so deeply in love with her, that he divorced Mariamne, who was then his wife, and married her. When, therefore, she was come into Judea, and had been there for a little while, she thought she saw Alexander stand by her, and that he said to her; "Thy marriage with the king of Libya might have been sufficient for thee; but thou wast not contented with him, but art returned again to my family, to a third husband; and him, thou impudent woman, hast thou chosen for thine husband, who is my brother. However, **I shall not overlook the injury thou hast offered me; I shall [soon] have thee again, whether thou wilt or no.**" Now Glaphyra hardly survived the narration of this dream of hers two days.

tyrannical usage of them, accused him before Caesar, and that especially because they knew he had broken the commands of Caesar, which obliged him to behave himself with moderation among them. Whereupon Caesar, when he heard it, was very angry, and **called for Archelaus's steward, who took care of his affairs at Rome, and whose name was Archelaus also**; and thinking it beneath him to write to Archelaus, he bid him sail away as soon as possible, and bring him to us: so the man made haste in his voyage, and when he came into Judea, he found Archelaus feasting with his friends; so he told him what Caesar had sent him about, and hastened him away. And when he was come [to Rome], Caesar, upon hearing what certain accusers of his had to say, and what reply he could make, both **banished him, and appointed Vienna, a city of Gaul, to be the place of his habitation, and took his money away** from him.

Now, before Archelaus was gone up to Rome upon this message, **he related this dream to his friends: That he saw ears of corn, in number ten**, full of wheat, perfectly ripe, which ears, as it seemed to him, were devoured by oxen. And when he was awake and gotten up, because the vision appeared to be of great importance to him, **he sent for the diviners**, whose study was employed about dreams. And while some were of one opinion, and some of another, [for all their interpretations did not agree,] **Simon, a man of the sect of the Essenes, desired leave to speak his mind freely**, and said that the vision denoted a change in the affairs of Archelaus, and that not for the better; that oxen, because that animal takes uneasy pains in his labors, denoted afflictions, and indeed denoted, further, a change of affairs, because that land which is ploughed by oxen cannot remain in its former state; and that the ears of corn being ten, determined the like number of years, because an ear of corn grows in one year; and that the time of Archelaus's government was over. And thus did this man expound the dream. Now **on the**

fifth day after this dream came first to Archelaus, the other Archelaus, that was sent to Judea by Caesar to call him away, came hither also.

The like accident befell Glaphyra his wife, who was the daughter of king Archelaus, who, as I said before, was married, while she was a virgin, to Alexander, the son of Herod, and brother of Archelaus; but since it fell out so that Alexander was slain by his father, she was married to Juba, the king of Libya; and when he was dead, and she lived in widowhood in Cappadocia with her father, Archelaus divorced his former wife Mariamne, and married her, so great was his affection for this Glaphyra; who, during her marriage to him, saw the following dream: She thought she saw Alexander standing by her, at which she rejoiced, and embraced him with great affection; but that he complained to her, and said, O Glaphyra! thou provest that saying to be true, which assures us that women are not to be trusted. Didst not thou pledge thy faith to me? and wast not thou married to me when thou wast a virgin? and had we not children between us? Yet hast thou forgotten the affection I bare to thee, out of a desire of a second husband. Nor hast thou been satisfied with that injury thou didst me, but thou hast been so bold as to procure thee a third husband to lie by thee, and in an indecent and imprudent manner hast entered into my house, and hast been married to Archelaus, thy husband and my brother. **However, I will not forget thy former kind affection for me, but will set thee free from every such reproachful action, and cause thee to be mine again, as thou once wast.** When she had related this to her female companions, in a few days' time she departed this life.

It's not hard to see the model of the dream of the pharaoh of Egypt interpreted by Joseph in Genesis 41 as the basis of the dream sequence. As you can see, the version in *Antiquities* is somewhat elaborated with many details and flourishes, most interesting being the inclusion of the bit about the high priest aiding the rebellion. The number of years is increased (by only one, so we won't quibble over it but assume that *Wars* is the correct version), the threatening tone of the Glaphyra story in *Wars* is softened in *Antiquities*, etc. The building projects are added, as well as the bringing of water from a distant source to

water palm trees, a theme that we will see again.

As for Archelaus himself, he is only mentioned briefly in other sources. Strabo, writing in the early 20s AD, seems to refer to him without giving his name: "However, [Herod the Great's] sons were not successful, but became involved in accusations; and one of them spent the rest of his life in exile, having taken up his abode among the Allobrogian Gauls, whereas the others, by much obsequiousness, but with difficulty, found leave to return home, with a tetrarchy assigned to each."^[266] Vienna was the capital of the Allobroges. The chronology is not clear; it sounds as if Archelaus was banished before his brothers, Antipas and Philip, entered their tetrarchies.

Dio, writing close to 200 years later, also refers to him, dating his banishment to 6 AD: "Herod of Palestine, who was **accused by his brothers** of some wrongdoing or other, was banished beyond the Alps and a portion of the domain was confiscated to the state."^[267] Dio mentions Josephus, so he probably had access to his works. Either Judea became a Roman province when Josephus says (and Dio implies), in 6 AD, or it happened in 1 BC, and Dio used Josephus' mangled history.

Musical Priests

On the matter of the high priest, recall that the people petitioned Archelaus at the very beginning to give them back an acceptable high priest and Josephus said he did so. Let's review a couple of details quickly. Herod replaced Matthias with Joazar, Matthias' brother-in-law, as high priest. After describing Matthias' holiness, Josephus says that during his tenure as high priest, Joseph son of Ellemus officiated for a single fasting day, because Matthias had dreamed that he spoke with his wife, which disqualified him for the day. Then he comes back to the immediate concern, which is the burning of the Golden Eagle Rebellion rabbis and their followers:

But Herod deprived this Matthias of the high priesthood, and burnt the *other* Matthias, who had raised the sedition, with his companions, alive. And that very night there was an eclipse of the moon.^[268]

One gets the impression that Josephus "protests too much" when he declares that there are two Matthiases. But there may be more. Martin points out that the *Megillath Taanith* ("Scroll of Fasting", which records festivals, etc.), composed not long after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, mentions two semi-festival days during which no mourning was permitted. One of the days is Kislev 7, which corresponds in most years with December. The other was Schebat 2, which corresponds with late January or early February. An early Jewish commentator who wrote quite some time after the composition of this text added a brief remark to Kislev 7 (December 5th in 1 BC): "The day of Herod's death." This has been disputed by Moise Schwab, who says that Schebat 2 (January 28 in 1 BC) was the day commemorating Herod's death, which, in the retrocalculations, would put it 18 days after the lunar eclipse of that year. But what about Kislev 7, which the early commentator associated with Herod's death? It appears that this date may have been the day of the Golden Eagle Temple Cleansing. Such an event may very well have inspired a commemoration, especially if we keep in mind Josephus' description of the men involved as "two of the most eloquent men among the Jews, and the most celebrated interpreters of the Jewish laws, and men well beloved by the people".

And hasn't Matthias the high priest also been described by Josephus as a man of extraordinary virtue? And didn't Josephus say that Herod took the rabbis captive, along with the youths who followed them, and transferred them to Jericho where they were tried and executed? Why was he afraid to do this in Jerusalem?

The *Megillath Taanith* records an unknown fast day, Tebeth 9 (January 6th in 1 BC). Martin proposes that this was the day of the trial and sentencing, after which, three days later, on January 9th, the rabbis were burned alive on the night of the eclipse.

The people assembled together, and desired of Archelaus, that $\frac{1}{4}$ he would deprive that high priest whom Herod had made, and would

choose one more agreeable to the law, and of greater purity, to officiate as high priest. **This was granted by Archelaus ...** [\[269\]](#)

And now:

When Archelaus was entered on his ethnarchy, and was come into Judea, he accused **Joazar, the son of Boethus**, of assisting the seditious, and took away the high priesthood from him, and put **Eleazar his brother** in his place. [\[270\]](#)

So, we have Matthias, who may actually have been the same Matthias who was one of the leaders of the Golden Eagle rebellion, being deprived of the priesthood, and Joazar – Matthias' brother-in-law – *installed by Herod the Great*. Then, soon after Herod's death, Archelaus replaces Joazar with some unnamed high priest demanded by the people; and then, after Archelaus returns from Rome and enters his ethnarchy, we learn that *Joazar* was high priest during the rebellion all along and is *now* being replaced with an Eleazar who is the brother of Joazar? I guess that makes Eleazar also a brother of Matthias' wife. One feels just a bit vertiginous with all these high priests under the shells being moved about.

Nor did this Eleazar abide long in the high priesthood, **Jesus, the son of Sie**, being put in his place while he was still living. [\[271\]](#)

I don't want to digress onto the problem of the various Jesuses mentioned by Josephus in both *Antiquities* and *Wars*; just note that there is not another mention of anyone named "Sie" anywhere else in the texts, though there were other Jesuses (Joshua/Yeshua) who were high priests, and some of them, in *Wars*, were implicated in the Great Rebellion.

Apparently, when a high priest was appointed, custom had it that he normally stayed in the office until he died. Josephus tells us regarding Herod the Great's first act of this kind:

So king Herod immediately took the high priesthood away from Ananelus ... He was one of the stock of the high priests and had been of old a particular friend of Herod; and when he was first made king, he conferred that dignity upon him, and now put him out of it again, in order to quiet the troubles in his family, though *what he did was plainly unlawful, for at no other time [of old] was anyone that had once been in that dignity deprived of it*. It was Antiochus Epiphanes who first broke that law, and deprived Jesus, and made his brother Onias high priest in his stead. Aristobulus was the second that did so, and took that dignity from his brother [Hyrchanus]; and this Herod was the third, who took that high office away [from Ananelus], and gave it to this young man, Aristobulus, in his stead. [\[272\]](#)

Either Josephus is playing fast and loose with his high priests, or something strange was going on at the time to necessitate such rapid changes in the high priesthood.

Musical Rebels

Now, back to Archelaus who, as Josephus tells us in *Antiquities*, has undertaken magnificent building projects including diverting "half the water with which the village of Nera used to be watered", and drawing off that water into the plain "to **water those palm trees** which he had there planted". [\[273\]](#) Next we have Archelaus marrying his brother's widow and having a dream interpreted by Simon the Essene, **five days** [\[274\]](#) after which "the other Archelaus" finds him and hauls him off to Augustus and exile. Glaphyra then has a dream and dies "a few days" later. This was in the tenth (or ninth) year of Archelaus's government. Archelaus is exiled to Gaul.

There is something odd about Josephus' tale of Archelaus. In *Wars*, he tells much the same story about the trip to Rome, the legal arguments about who gets what from the will of Herod the Great, the decision made, etc. So, since this is in *Wars*, we can assume that it is mostly historical. But then, when we come to the Varus War that apparently had gotten underway in Archelaus' absence, we find a number of interesting items.

We are told that the revolt has begun while Archelaus and the family are dancing attendance on Augustus, who learns of it

from letters of Varus. The following description of the war appears as though it is part of the report of Varus. Apparently, Herod's army that had devolved onto Archelaus deserted to the rebel side. However, here we meet the soon-to-be famous Rufus and Gratus, captains of the men of Sebaste.

There were **also a great many of the king's party who deserted the Romans, and assisted the Jews**; yet did the most warlike body of them all, who were three thousand of the men of Sebaste, go over to the Romans. **Rufus also, and Gratus, their captains**, did the same, [Gratus having the foot of the king's party under him, and Rufus the horse,] each of whom, even without the forces under them, were of great weight, on account of their strength and wisdom, which turn the scales in war. [\[275\]](#)

Now during all this, things were also being stirred up throughout the countryside from many quarters, and the opportunity induced large numbers to [seek] sovereignty. For example, in Idumea 2,000 of those who had once been soldiers under Herod united in arms and fought strenuously against the royalists [i.e. supporters of Archelaus]. Among the latter Achiab, the king's cousin, was giving battle from the most fortified positions, evading the entanglement of the plains. [\[276\]](#)

In **Sepphoris** also, a city of Galilee, there was one **Judas** (the son of that arch-robber Hezekias, who formerly overran the country, and had been subdued by king Herod); this man got no small multitude together, and broke open the place where the royal armor was laid up, and armed those about him, and attacked those that were so earnest to gain the dominion. [\[277\]](#)

This Judas of Sepphoris brings to mind "Judas, son of Saripheus", the greatly esteemed teacher of the law mentioned in *Antiquities*. In fact, earlier in *Wars*, when the story of Judas and Matthias is told, we read:

There also now happened to him, among his other calamities, a certain popular sedition. There were two men of learning in the city [Jerusalem,] who were thought the most skillful in the laws of their country, and were on that account had in very great esteem all over the nation; they were, the one **Judas, the son of Sepphoris**, and the other Matthias, the son of Margalus. There was a great concourse of the young men to these men when they expounded the laws, and there **got together every day a kind of an army** of such as were growing up to be men. [\[278\]](#)

Clearly the Judas of the Golden Eagle Temple Cleansing was *not* burnt alive along with his pal, Matthias. However, we are a bit puzzled to find Judas of Sepphoris being said to be the son of "that arch-robber Hezekias" who, according to *Antiquities* 14.9.2 (159–60), had been executed by Herod *forty-five years earlier*. In the description of the Varus war from Book 17 of *Antiquities*, this same Hezekias is called "Ezekias":

There was also **Judas, the son of that Ezekias** who had been head of the robbers; which Ezekias was a very strong man, and had with great difficulty been caught by Herod. **This Judas, having gotten together a multitude of men of a profligate character about Sepphoris in Galilee, made an assault upon the palace [there,] and seized upon all the weapons that were laid up in it, and with them armed every one of those that were with him, and carried away what money was left there**; and he became terrible to all men, by tearing and rending those that came near him; and all this in order to raise himself, and out of **an ambitious desire of the royal dignity**; and he hoped to obtain that as the reward not of his virtuous skill in war, but of his extravagance in doing injuries. [\[279\]](#)

We will see a son of Judas of Sepphoris/Galilee who does a similar deed in respect of Masada many years further on. The point I wish to make is that we must be extremely cautious about extracting any historical facts from the works of Josephus. He is clearly blowing smoke over who was who, who did what, and when! Continuing with *Wars*, Josephus describes another royal contender:

In **Perea** also, **Simon, one of the servants to the king**, relying upon the **handsome appearance and tallness of his body**, put a diadem upon his own head also; he also went about with a company of robbers that he had gotten together, and burnt down the royal palace that was at Jericho, and many other costly edifices besides, and procured himself very easily spoils by rapine, as snatching them out of the fire. And he had soon burnt down all the fine edifices, if **Gratus, the captain of the foot of the king's party**, had not taken the Trachonite archers, and the most warlike of Sebaste, and met the man. His footmen were slain in the battle in abundance; **Gratus also cut to pieces Simon himself**, as he was flying along a strait valley, when he gave him an oblique stroke upon his neck, as he ran away,

and broke it. [\[280\]](#)

[NOTE: Deleted the sentences about rising from the dead in 3 days. Knohl has changed his position on this: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gabriel%27s_Revelation]

This Simon of Perea is the subject of discussion in Israel Knohl's book *Messiahs and Resurrection in the Gabriel Revelation*. *Gabriel's Revelation*, also called *Hazon Gabriel* or the Jeselsohn Stone, is a three-foot-tall stone tablet with 87 lines of Hebrew text written in ink, containing a collection of short prophecies written in the first person and dated to the late 1st century BC. The unprovenanced tablet was found near the Dead Sea some time around the year 2000 and has been associated with the same community that created the Dead Sea Scrolls. Because the manner of death of the individual is described in the text, and rather closely matches that of Josephus' description of the death of Simon of Perea, Knohl argues that the text shows Simon's death to be "an essential part of the redemptive process. The blood of the slain messiah paves the way for the final salvation". [\[281\]](#)

Knohl's work suggests there was more to this rebellion than Josephus lets on, and he is busy obfuscating who was who and connected to who else and why. With that in mind, let's look at the next "messianic king" that Josephus mentions:

At this time it was that **a certain shepherd ventured to set himself up for a king**; he was called Athrongeus. It was his **strength of body** that made him expect such a dignity, as well as **his soul, which despised death**; and besides these qualifications, **he had four brethren like himself. He put a troop of armed men under each of these his brethren, and made use of them as his generals and commanders**, when he made his incursions, while he did himself **act like a king**, and meddled only with the more important affairs; and at this time he put a diadem about his head, and **continued after that to overrun the country for no little time with his brethren, and became their leader in killing both the Romans and those of the king's party; nor did any Jew escape him**, if any gain could accrue to him thereby. **He once ventured to encompass a whole troop of Romans at Emmaus**, who were carrying corn and weapons to their legion; his men therefore shot their arrows and darts, and thereby slew their centurion Arius, and forty of the stoutest of his men, while the rest of them, who were in danger of the same fate, **upon the coming of Gratus, with those of Sebaste**, to their assistance, escaped. And when these men had thus served both their own countrymen and foreigners, and that through this whole war, **three of them were, after some time, subdued; the eldest by Archelaus, the two next by falling into the hands of Gratus and Ptolemeus; but the fourth delivered himself up to Archelaus, upon his giving him his right hand for his security. However, this their end was not till afterward, while at present they filled all Judea with a piratic war.** [\[282\]](#)

The version in *Antiquities* is more elaborate, but says basically the same things; there is a slight change in the spelling of the name: Athronges. About this fellow's name, we are told:

Rapoport has explained the name "Athronges" by the Hebraized Persian word "orange," or "melon"^{1/4}, and identified it with *Ben Baṭiah*, "Son of the Cucumber" (that is, like a cucumber), the popular hero, the size of whose fist has become proverbial in ancient rabbinical literature (Kelim xvii. 12; Tosef., Kelim, B. M. vii. 2); the form of his hand having, as Rapoport thinks, given rise to both terms. At a later time, legend identified him with the leader of the insurrection, Abba Saḳḳara, the nephew of Johanan ben Zakkai. [\[283\]](#)

Curiously, Josephus doesn't associate this Athronges/Athrongeus with any particular location. We notice his four brothers. We also notice, particularly, that one brother was apparently brought to heel by Archelaus, though this was "a good while afterward", and that Archelaus let him live. Josephus makes no mention of Athronges' fate.

After almost no real details of the "reign" of Archelaus, we are told in both *Wars* and *Antiquities* that complaints were made against him by both Samaritans and Jews and he was banished. As we have seen above, *the same was said about Pilate* in almost the exact same terms.

And now Archelaus's part of Judea was reduced into a province, and **Coponius, one of the equestrian order among the Romans, was sent as a procurator**, having the power of [life and] death put into his hands by Caesar. **Under his administration it was that a certain Galilean, whose name was Judas, prevailed with his countrymen to revolt**, and said they were cowards if they would endure to pay a

tax to the Romans and would after God submit to mortal men as their lords. This man was a teacher of a peculiar sect of his own, and was **not at all like the rest of those their leaders.** [\[284\]](#)

Judas is back again! We notice in Josephus' description of the "Fourth Philosophy" of Judas the Galilean:

... for Judas and Sadduc, who excited a fourth philosophic sect among us, and had a great many followers therein, filled our civil government with tumults at present, and laid the foundations of our future miseries, by this system of philosophy, which we were before unacquainted withal, concerning which I will discourse a little, and this the rather because the infection which spread thence among the younger sort, who were zealous for it, brought the public to destruction. ... of the fourth sect of Jewish philosophy, Judas the Galilean was the author. These men **agree in all other things with the Pharisaic notions**; but they have an inviolable attachment to liberty, and say that God is to be their only Ruler and Lord. **They also do not value dying any kinds of death**, nor indeed do they heed the deaths of their relations and friends, nor can any such fear make them call any man lord. And since this immovable resolution of theirs is well known to a great many, I shall speak no further about that matter; nor am I afraid that anything I have said of them should be disbelieved, but rather fear, that what I have said is beneath **the resolution they show when they undergo pain.** [\[285\]](#)

Notice what Josephus had written about Athronges/Athrongeus: "his soul, which despised death". It is easy to see how Judas of Sepphoris/Galilee could have been conflated with a legendary strong man "the size of whose fist has become proverbial in ancient rabbinical literature". We should also recall the descriptions of the teachings given by Matthias and Judas to the young men who were tasked with the Golden Eagle Rebellion, that it was a good thing to die in the service of their god. Judas the Galilean is certainly Judas the great teacher of the Golden Eagle Rebellion and, possibly, Athronges/Athrongeus, some of whose brothers were captured and killed:

¼ three of them were, after some time, subdued; the eldest by Archelaus, the two next by falling into the hands of Gratus and Ptolemeus; but the fourth delivered himself up to Archelaus, upon his giving him his right hand for his security. However, *this their end was not till afterward ...* [\[286\]](#)

As we've seen, the chronology of this time is tricky. If Archelaus embarked upon his rule of his ethnarchy in 1 AD and reigned 9 years, that would place his exile in 9 AD. [\[287\]](#) However, Dio places it in 6 AD. Getroux resolves this problem by arguing that Archelaus and his brothers dated the beginning of their rule not to the year of their father's death, but to the time of Herod's testament of 4 BC. Herod the Great had done something similar: while he only officially started to rule Judea in 36 BC, after the death of Antigonus, he minted his first coin with "year 3", retrodating his reign back to 39 BC. (He had been made king by Rome in December of 40 BC, but Jewish kings began their reign on Nisan 1 [April] after their accession.)

This whole Archelaus period is furiously vague and suggestive of things that are being covered up and deliberately obfuscated. He is accused by Josephus of being brutal to the point that the people complain about him. But did they complain at the beginning or at the end? There is nothing particular about his alleged brutality that is not also ascribed to Varus and others. In fact, there are a whole lot more details about what the Romans were doing without punishment, so why was Archelaus exiled? Is Dio correct, and if so, what accusations did his brothers bring up against him?

In his *Histories*, Tacitus tells us:

On Herod's death, one Simon, without waiting for the approbation of the Emperor, usurped the title of king. He was punished by Quintilius Varus then governor of Syria, and the nation, with its liberties curtailed, was divided into three provinces under the sons of Herod. **Under Tiberius, all was quiet.** But when the Jews were ordered by Caligula to set up his statue in the temple, they preferred the alternative of war. The death of the Emperor put an end to the disturbance. The kings were either dead or reduced to insignificance, when Claudius entrusted the province of Judea to the Roman Knights or to his own freedmen, one of whom, Antonius Felix, *indulging in every kind of barbarity and lust, exercised the power of a king in the spirit of a slave...* Yet the endurance of the Jews lasted till Gessius Florus was procurator. In his time the war broke out. [\[288\]](#)

Apparently, Simon of Peraea was considerably more important than Josephus lets on, important enough to be known about in Rome. How long did he prevail as king? How long did it take for Varus to "punish" him? Tacitus says nothing about a literal tetrarchy, but rather says that the nation was divided into three provinces under the sons of Herod. He makes no mention of the exile of Archelaus. Was Archelaus-the-evil invented to some degree by Josephus to take some of the blame for Roman incitement to rebellion? Why is Josephus so deliberately confusing about the events of this period? What is he covering up? There are more questions than answers. One is reminded of the interesting findings of Ernest Martin discussed above regarding the participation of Augustus' adopted son, Gaius Caesar, in the "War of Varus".

[NOTE: Either delete the last sentence above, or make the connection to Gaius Caesar explicit.]

Enter Pilate

The period following the exile of Archelaus is covered *very* briefly in Josephus' *Wars*. Above, we saw that "Coponius, one of the equestrian order among the Romans, was sent as a procurator" and immediately faced the rebellion against taxation led by Judas the Galilean. Apparently, while that was going on:

And now as the ethnarchy of Archelaus was fallen into a Roman province, the other sons of Herod, Philip, and that Herod who was called Antipas, each of them took upon them the administration of their own tetrarchies; for when Salome died, she bequeathed to Julia, the wife of Augustus, both her toparchy, and Jamnia, as also **her plantation of palm trees that were in Phasaelis**.

But when the Roman empire was translated to Tiberius, the son of Julia, **upon the death of Augustus**, who had reigned fifty-seven years, six months, and two days, both Herod and Philip continued in their tetrarchies; and the latter of them built the city Caesarea, at the fountains of Jordan, and in the region of Paneas; as also the city Julias, in the lower Gaulonitis. Herod also built the city Tiberius in Galilee, and in Perea [beyond Jordan] another that was also called Julias.

Now Pilate, who was sent as procurator into Judea by Tiberius, sent by night those images of Caesar that are called ensigns into Jerusalem. [\[289\]](#)

It is obvious that *Josephus intends us to understand that, following Coponius, Pilate is the next procurator*. That would fit with the general tendency of things thus far. From 6 AD until the death of Augustus in 14, Coponius was procurator for eight years, replaced by Pilate upon the ascension of Tiberius. That would put Pilate in Judea in 14/15 AD.

However, things are more complex in *Antiquities*. When Archelaus is exiled, we are introduced right away to "Cyrenius", who is not mentioned at this point in *Wars*:

So Archelaus's country was laid to the province of Syria; and Cyrenius, one that had been consul, was sent by Caesar to take account of people's effects in Syria, and to sell the house of Archelaus. [\[290\]](#)

It almost sounds like the strictly fiscal role of Sabinus after the death of Herod the Great. However, Josephus expands on this further on:

Now **Cyrenius, a Roman senator**, and one who had gone through other magistracies, and had passed through them till he **had been consul**, and one who, on other accounts, was of great dignity, **came at this time into Syria, with a few others**, being sent by Caesar to be a judge of that nation, and to take an account of their substance. **Coponius also, a man of the equestrian order, was sent together with him, to have the supreme power over the Jews**. Moreover, **Cyrenius came himself into Judea**, which was now added to the province of Syria, **to take an account of their substance, and to dispose of Archelaus's money**; but the Jews, although at the beginning they took the report of a taxation heinously, yet did they leave off any further opposition to it, by the persuasion of **Joazar, who was the son of Boethus, and high priest**; so they, being over-persuaded by Joazar's words, gave an account of their estates, without any dispute about it ¹/₄ [\[291\]](#)

"Cyrenius" is Publius Sulpicius *Quirinius*. He was consul in 12 BC, when he was 39, so he would have been *57 years old when he came to Syria in 6 AD* after the exile of Archelaus! That is a bit odd. At that age, he should have been retired. Apparently, Quirinius served as governor of Syria with nominal authority over Judaea until 12 AD, when he returned to Rome as a close associate of Tiberius. Nine years later he died and was given a public funeral.

[NOTE: Provide a source for the Roman age of retirement. I can't find a good one.]

The Sons of Judas: Pillars of the Church?

Searching through *Wars*, we find two references to Cyrenius/Quirinius, *both of which just happen to mention Judas the Galilean*:

In the meantime [66 AD], one Manahem, the son of **Judas, that was called the Galilean, [who was a very cunning sophister, and had formerly reproached the Jews under Cyrenius,** that after God they were subject to the Romans,] took some of the men of note with him, and retired to Masada, where he broke open king Herod's armory, and gave arms not only to his own people, but to other robbers also. These he made use of for a guard, and returned in the state of a king to Jerusalem ...[\[292\]](#)

In *Antiquities*, there is a Manahem, an Essene acquainted with Herod the Great, but no mention of a Manahem, son of Judas the Galilean.[\[293\]](#) Two other sons of Judas are mentioned in *Antiquities*:

Then came Tiberius Alexander as successor to Fadus; $\frac{1}{4}$ **the sons of Judas of Galilee were now slain;** I mean of that *Judas who caused the people to revolt, when Cyrenius came* to take an account of the estates of the Jews, as we have showed in a foregoing book. The names of those sons were **James and Simon,** whom Alexander commanded to be crucified $\frac{1}{4}$ [\[294\]](#)

Tiberius Alexander was procurator of Judea under Claudius, from 46 to 48 AD. That puts him there in the period of Paul. In Acts 12:2, the story about James, the brother of John, being executed, and Simon-Peter seized, was perhaps inspired by this passage in Josephus. The way Josephus writes this is as though there were no other sons, but we know he had another Menahem who shows up at Masada at the beginning of the Great Rebellion, as we saw above. We also wonder about this execution in light of the remark made in *1 Clement*: "By reason of jealousy and envy the greatest and most righteous pillars of the Church were persecuted, and contended even unto death."[\[295\]](#)

Were these individuals, James and Simon, two of the "pillars" of the Jerusalem ecclesia? We can note that Cephas/Peter is also referred to as Simon-Peter. Was this son of Judas the Galilean, this Simon, also the "rock" of the gospels? And was Peter someone else entirely, as suggested by the text of *1 Clement* and Paul's letters? Was there another son of Judas, a Jude? If these identifications are on target, they support the other lines of evidence suggesting the whole of the early history of the Jerusalem ecclesia as presented by Acts is a total fraud. Not only does Acts misrepresent facts, as a comparison with Paul's letters shows; it also displaces seed historical events in time, such as the start of the "Christian" movement, the activities of Paul, and the fate of the pillars. If these two are the James and Cephas that Paul met in Jerusalem, that means his second visit was before these executions.[\[296\]](#)

The next reference to Cyrenius in *Wars* is just prior to the siege of Masada in 73 AD, conducted by Lucius Flavius Silva and the Roman legion X Fretensis:

When Bassus was dead in Judea, Flavius Silva succeeded him as procurator there; who, when he saw that all the rest of the country was subdued in this war, and that there was but one only stronghold that was still in rebellion, he got all his army together that lay in different places, and made an expedition against it. This fortress was called Masada. It was one **Eleazar, a potent man, and the commander of these Sicarii, that had seized upon it. He was a descendant from that Judas who had persuaded abundance of the Jews, as we have formerly related, not to submit to the taxation when Cyrenius was sent into Judea to make one ...**[\[297\]](#)

"Descendant"? Does that mean grandson? One of the sons of the sons of Judas executed 25 years earlier during the reign of Tiberius Alexander? Or was he, too, a son? One might wish to note that Tiberius Alexander was second in command to Titus during the Siege of Jerusalem. If he could come back 25 years later, it's altogether possible that this Eleazar was a brother of James and Simon, executed in 48 AD.

Since Josephus regularly refers to Judas the Galilean as the initiator of the revolt against the tax census of Cyrenius/Quirinius, it is clear that this is the same person as the following:

¼ yet was there one **Judas, a Gaulonite, of a city whose name was Gamala**, who, taking with him Sadduc, a Pharisee, became zealous to draw them to a revolt, who both said that this taxation was no better than an introduction to slavery, and exhorted the nation to assert their liberty ¼ They also said that God would not otherwise be assisting to them, than upon their joining with one another in such councils as might be successful, and for their own advantage; and this especially, if they would set about great exploits, and not grow weary in executing the same; so men received what they said with pleasure, and this bold attempt proceeded to a great height. **All sorts of misfortunes also sprang from these men, and the nation was infected with this doctrine to an incredible degree; one violent war came upon us after another** ¼ [F]or **Judas and Sadduc, who excited a fourth philosophic sect** among us, and had a great many followers therein, filled our civil government with tumults at present, and **laid the foundations of our future miseries, by this system of philosophy**, which we were before unacquainted withal, concerning which I will discourse a little, and this the rather because the infection which spread thence among the younger sort, who were zealous for it, brought the public to destruction. [\[298\]](#)

So, we have had a "War of Varus" in 1 BC immediately following the death of Herod the Great, possibly triggered by the actions of Archelaus and Sabinus, or Simon of Peraea. We have Judas the Galilean who seems to be the same Judas of Sepphoris, the great expounder of the law who encouraged the Golden Eagle Rebellion that led to, at the very least, the execution of a group of young Jews and possibly *one* of their teachers, Matthias, whom we don't find showing up again as we do Judas.

Josephus tells us a lot more about Cyrenius/Quirinius than he ever told us about Varus and Sabinus, and that seems odd. But then, we do have more background on Quirinius in Tacitus than on Varus. However, Josephus notes that, despite the fact that Coponius had the authority, "Cyrenius came himself into Judea". So, it plays again along the same model that was set by Varus and Sabinus after the death of Herod the Great (where Varus had the authority, but Sabinus came into Judea).

The period is very mysterious because, during that time, it seems Archelaus was on the scene and was involved in the capture of one of the Athronges gang – and then let them go. I suspect that Athronges was just a folk name for Judas of Sepphoris/Galilee, the warrior, and he then shows up again as "Judas, a Gaulonite, of a city whose name was Gamala" creating the same problems for Cyrenius that he had created during the Varus War. (Gamala overlooks the Sea of Galilee and Sepphoris is also nearby.)

[NOTE: Above, Price says the Athronges/Judas link "seems like just a convenient guess".]

The Mystery Priest

Most amazing of all is that *Joazar, son of Boethus*, reappears as high priest! However, here, instead of fomenting rebellion, he is credited with *quelling* it. [\[299\]](#)

When Cyrenius had now disposed of Archelaus's money, and when the taxings were come to a conclusion, which were made **in the thirty-seventh year of Caesar's victory over Antony at Actium** [i.e. 6–7 AD, 37 years after 2 September 31 BC], he deprived Joazar of the high priesthood, **which dignity had been conferred on him by the multitude**, and he appointed Ananus the son of Seth while Herod [Antipas] and Philip had each of them received their own tetrarchy, and settled the affairs thereof. [\[300\]](#)

Now wait a minute! Our list of priests looks like this:

- Matthias
- Joazar son of Boethus, appointed by Herod to replace Matthias
- Unnamed mystery priest appointed by Archelaus on the demand of the people
- Joazar son of Boethus, accused by Archelaus of assisting the sedition/war
- Eleazar (brother of Joazar), appointed by Archelaus to replace Joazar
- Jesus son of Sie replaced Eleazar "while he was still living"

And now we learn that Joazar, the high priest in office at the time of the arrival of Cyrenius/Quirinius was supposed to have been selected by the multitude? That would mean he is the "mystery priest" and that all that business about changing priests is just blowing smoke.

In any event, earlier we saw that Josephus was born in 37 years after the Varus war. The tetrarch Philip died after reigning 37 years. Herod the Great died 37 years after he was made king by Antony and Octavian (Augustus), and now we have the 37th year of the victory of Octavian over Antony noted as the year of the tax census. It could be a coincidence, but it strikes me as curious:

- After 37 years (since Antony made Herod king), Sabinus disposes Herod's money
- After 37 years (since Antony lost to Octavian), Cyrenius disposes of Archelaus' money

There are a few possibilities:

- 1) Coincidence: both events happened as Josephus relates them. Unfortunately, Josephus is our only source, so his accounts can't be externally verified.
- 2) Doubling: Josephus is "rounding out" his history by doubling up events.
- 3) Redaction: Perhaps the text originally read, "Cyrenius had now disposed of *Herod's* money", and the date was the same as the year Herod died, 37 years after he had been made king by Antony. That would make the coincidence intelligible, but would also require additional tinkering by tying it to Archelaus' exile. Since it comes after a description of Archelaus' career, that whole chapter would also need to be an interpolation.

What if the War of Varus was so destructive that it took quite a few years for recovery? In other words, there wasn't much history to write for the years immediately following Herod the Great's death, and Josephus did his best to fill it up with plausible narrative. Recall the archaeological claim mentioned earlier that there was a considerable period of time when Roman pottery disappears from the record. Taken with the oddities reviewed thus far, along with those to come, these numbers are just too coincidental to blithely assume that there is no prestidigitation going on here.

The doublet factor, which is going to get worse, suggests that a fake history for the period of Herod's death and the reign of Archelaus has been created. Josephus is the only source for Quirinius' census; the relevant years, 6 BC–4 AD, are missing in Dio, who records regular censuses every five years or so. Dio does mention a census in 4 AD when Sentius Saturninus was consul, but he explicitly says that this census was limited to Italy, "for [Augustus] did not compel the poorer citizens or those living outside out of Italy to be listed, fearing that if they were disturbed, they would become rebellious."[\[301\]](#)

The problem of Cyrenius/Quirinius

We do know a few things about Cyrenius/Quirinius, because Tacitus mentions him. [\[302\]](#) Tacitus briefly recaps his career when

his death is mentioned, but never mentions his appointment as governor of Syria. However, his presence there is attested by an inscription, the *Titulus Venetus*, which describes the career of a knight, Aemilius Secundus:

Q[uintus] Aemilius Secundus s[on] of Q[uintus], of the tribe Palatina, who served in the camps of the divine Aug[ustus] under P. **Sulpicius Quirinius, legate of Caesar in Syria**, decorated with honorary distinctions, prefect of the 1st cohort Aug[usta], prefect of the cohort II Classica. Besides, **by order of Quirinius I made the census of 117 thousand citizens of Apamea**. Besides, sent on mission by Quirinius, against the Itureans, I took their citadel on Mount Lebanon. And prior military service, (I was) Prefect of the workers, detached by two co[nsul]s at the "aerarium [The State Treasury]". And in the colony, quaestor, aedile twice, duumvir twice, pontiff. [\[303\]](#)

Unfortunately, it is difficult to date when these events took place. Given that Quirinius would have been old by Roman standards in 6 AD, I suspect that if Cyrenius/Quirinius played this role at all, he did so *in conjunction with Varus*; that Publius Sulpicius Quirinius was Augustus' special taxman and Josephus replaced him in the tale for political reasons. Sabinus may have accompanied him as his legate; he was there at the time that Varus was governor, and the census took place upon the death of Herod, not at the time of the exile of Archelaus.

Archelaus may never have ruled his ethnarchy at all. Perhaps Augustus ruled against him when he was in Rome, based on the testimony of his brothers and the Jewish embassy, and sent him into exile there and then? That's how Strabo makes it sound. However, we can't know for sure; it is only speculation based on the oddities of Josephus' text. One thing seems certain: Josephus didn't know much about that period after which he no longer had the works of Nicolaus of Damascus to rely on, and he wasn't as smart as he portrayed himself in his autobiography, either. Or he knew a great deal and felt it necessary to rewrite history for that period and just wasn't that clever about it.

Samaritans third time around

Just like Sabinus and Archelaus, Coponius has a set-to with the Jews at Passover, only this time it is attributed to Samaritan issues (recall that Samaritan issues brought the downfall of Pilate and Archelaus, according to Josephus).

As Coponius, who we told you was sent along with Cyrenius, was exercising his office of procurator, and governing Judea, the following accidents happened. As the Jews were celebrating the feast of unleavened bread, which we call the Passover, it was customary for the priests to open the temple-gates just after midnight. When, therefore, those gates were first opened, some of the **Samaritans came privately into Jerusalem, and threw about dead men's bodies, in the cloisters**; on which account the Jews afterward excluded them out of the temple, which they had not used to do at such festivals; and on other accounts also they watched the temple more carefully than they had formerly done. A little after which accident Coponius returned to Rome, and Marcus Ambivivus came to be his successor in that government; under whom Salome, the sister of king Herod died and left to Julia, [Caesar's wife,] Jamnia, all its toparchy, and Phasaelis in the plain, and Arehelais, where is **a great plantation of palm trees**, and their fruit is excellent in its kind. After him [Ambivivus] came Annius Rufus, under whom died Caesar ... [\[304\]](#)

The Samaritans just threw dead bodies around? Where did they get the dead bodies? Did they, perhaps, kill people, on site even? Dead bodies being scattered around in the temple *on Passover*? A shadow of the rebellion under Varus and Sabinus/Archelaus? A triplet, now? The story is ridiculous. Also, is that the same plantation of palm trees that Archelaus was supposed to have brought water to? Was Salome, possibly, the other actual ruler? She was given territory – that is abundantly clear; why does Josephus make a special point of saying that she was “under Archelaus”? What if she wasn't? Why did he specifically mention her plantation of palm trees?

[NOTE: Price adds: “[Could this be a story, or an actual event, inspired by the Harmonean prank of defiling the Samaritan temple by scattering dead men's bones in the sanctuary?](#)” But I can't find the source for that.]

Gratus and Rufus, and Musical Priests

Getting back to our procurators/governors with authority in Judea: from *Antiquities*, we have the following list:

- Varus and Gaius Caesar (with Sabinus) – 1 BC/AD
- Archelaus – a shadow, either 9 or 10 years or not at all
- Coponius (with Cyrenius/Quirinius) – 3 years?
- Marcus Ambivius (Ambivulus) – 3 years?
- Annius Rufus – 3 years?
- Death of Augustus – 14 AD

Then we come to **Valerius Gratus**, who is said to have served from 15 to 26 AD (!), to be replaced by Pilate (which opposes what Josephus says in *Wars*, where Marcus Ambivius, Annius Rufus and Valerius Gratus are not even mentioned):

But when the Roman empire was translated to Tiberius... both Herod and Philip continued in their tetrarchies... Now Pilate, who was sent as procurator into Judea by Tiberius, sent by night those images of Caesar that are called ensigns into Jerusalem. [\[305\]](#)

As opposed to:

[Tiberius] sent Valerius **Gratus** to be procurator of Judea, and to succeed Annius **Rufus**. [\[306\]](#)

Now, wait a minute. Where have we seen *the names Gratus and Rufus juxtaposed* before? Remember back during the rebellion against Sabinus that was quelled by Varus, helped by Aretas et al.? Recall that many of the Herodian army went over to the rebels, but with a couple of notable exceptions:

... yet did the most warlike body of them all, who were three thousand of the men of Sebaste, go over to the Romans. **Rufus also, and Gratus, their captains**, did the same, [Gratus having the foot of the king's party under him, and Rufus the horse,] each of whom, even without the forces under them, were of great weight, on account of their strength and wisdom, which turn the scales in war. [\[307\]](#)

Gratus had a number of adventures in *Wars*, including chasing down and killing Simon of Perea, the self-declared king of the Jews, which, as noted, may be the event that was recorded in the “Gabriel Revelation” on the Jeselsohn Stone.

Josephus’ account in *Antiquities* of the Judean governorship of the highly questionable Gratus, who followed the equally highly questionable Annius Rufus, should be read in its entirety:

After him [Marcus Ambivius] came Annius Rufus, under whom died Caesar [Augustus], the second emperor of the Romans, the duration of whose reign was fifty-seven years, besides six months and two days [of which time Antonius ruled together with him fourteen years; but the duration of his life was seventy-seven years]; upon whose death [14 AD] Tiberius Nero, his wife Julia's son, succeeded. He was now the third emperor; and he sent Valerius Gratus to be procurator of Judea, and to succeed Annius Rufus. This man deprived Ananus of the high priesthood, and appointed [1] Ismael, the son of Phabi ... He also deprived him *in a little time*, and ordained [2] Eleazar, the son of Ananus, who had been a high priest before, to be high priest; *which office when he had held for a year*, Gratus deprived him of it, and gave the high priesthood to [3] Simon, the son of Camithus; and *when he had possessed that dignity no longer than a year*, [4] Joseph Caiaphas was made his successor. **When Gratus had done those things, he went back to Rome, after he had waited in Judea eleven years, when Pontius Pilate came as his successor.** [\[308\]](#)

According to this, Valerius Gratus, not Pontius Pilate, was sent as soon as Tiberius became emperor and, at some point – we don’t know when – started playing musical high priests. He appointed four in what seems to be rapid succession over possibly 3 or 4 years and then, apparently, was satisfied with his choice and did nothing else that Josephus considered worth recording. Notice the last bit of text in bold. Even assuming that the list of governors of Judea is not a complete fabrication, it would only require a change in the number of years, or the addition of the whole sentence, to alter the chronology. Josephus also tells us that the proconsul Vitellius deposed Caiaphas sometime around the Artabanus affair already discussed. Nevertheless, if Gratus was sent out in 14 AD and was there eleven years, we would have Pilate showing up in 25. And that is

why there are governors and years added: to make Pilate fit the Jesus timeline.

Besides which, he also deprived Joseph, who was also called Caiaphas, of the high priesthood, and appointed Jonathan the son of Ananus, the former high priest, to succeed him. After which, he took his journey back to Antioch. [\[309\]](#)

If Caiaphas was appointed within, say, five years of the alleged arrival of Gratus, about 18/19 AD, after he had gone through a selection of unsatisfactory high priests, and Caiaphas was then removed from office by Vitellius in 35/36, that would mean he held the high priesthood for 16 years or so. Let's recap our high priests:

- Joazar, son of Boethus, brother of Eleazar – deposed 6 AD
- Ananus, son of Seth – supposed to have been high priest from 6 to 15 AD
- Ismael, son of Phabi – "deprived him in a little time", which sounds like months
- Eleazar, son of Ananus – one year
- Simon son of Camithus – one year
- Joseph Caiaphas – then Gratus departs, leaving him in office

In this extended chronology, it seems that Caiaphas was appointed in approximately AD 18, and he was the high priest who is said in the gospels to have organized the plot to kill Jesus, being Jesus' major antagonist. [\[310\]](#) But the way the text is written suggests that Gratus began changing high priests soon after arriving, and left as soon as he had installed Caiaphas. But that only covers about three or four years, not eleven.

Apparently, neither the alleged Marcus Ambivius nor the putative Annus Rufus saw fit to change the high priests. Or if they did, Josephus makes no remark about it, despite the fact that he's constantly tabulating – or making up – the high priests. All of this is very problematical, especially if we recall how it is presented *Wars*, where there is no account of the revolving-door governors and it is more or less matter of fact that *when the transfer of the Empire was made on the death of Augustus, a new procurator was sent out by Tiberius: Pontius Pilate*.

Dio makes Maecenas give the advice to Augustus not to let any legate of his rule a province less than three years or more than five for so they would stay long enough to know their province thoroughly, not long enough to become dangerous. And this was perhaps the generally observed rule. ... But the exceptions are very numerous. Galba governed Spain for eight years, Sabinus was in Moesia for seven, and we find C. Silius legate in Gaul AD. 14, and still in Gaul ten years afterwards. Sometimes these appointments lasted even for life: *Tiberius in particular was famous for keeping his governors long at their posts*. [\[311\]](#)

That is to say, Tiberius probably sent Pilate immediately upon his accession to power and only disturbing events brought Pilate's rule to an end, as we have already read in both Philo and Josephus.

Who Was Pilate?

According to Philo, Pilate was a nasty piece of work. Josephus agrees more or less, but tends to try to humanize him. The following are two parallel passages about Pilate from Josephus:

<i>Wars</i> 2.9.2–4 (169–77)	<i>Antiquities</i> 18.3.1–2 (55–62)
Now Pilate, who was sent as procurator into Judea by Tiberius, sent by night those images of Caesar that are called ensigns into Jerusalem . This excited a very great tumult among the Jews when it was day; for those that were near them were astonished at the	But now Pilate, the procurator of Judea, removed the army from Caesarea to Jerusalem, to take their winter quarters there, in order to abolish the Jewish laws. So he introduced Caesar's effigies, which were upon the ensigns, and brought them into the

sight of them, as indications that their laws were trodden under foot; for those laws do not permit any sort of image to be brought into the city. Nay, besides the indignation which the citizens had themselves at this procedure, a vast number of people came running out of the country. These came zealously **to Pilate to Caesarea**, and besought him to carry those ensigns out of Jerusalem, and to preserve them their ancient laws inviolable; but upon Pilate's denial of their request, they fell down prostrate upon the ground, and continued immovable in that posture for five days and as many nights.

On the next day Pilate sat upon his tribunal, in the open market-place, and called to him the multitude, as desirous to give them an answer; and then gave a signal to the soldiers, that they should all by agreement at once encompass the Jews with their weapons; so the band of soldiers stood round about the Jews in three ranks. The Jews were under the utmost consternation at that unexpected sight. **Pilate also said to them that they should be cut in pieces, unless they would admit of Caesar's images, and gave intimation to the soldiers to draw their naked swords.** Hereupon the Jews, as it were at one signal, fell down in vast numbers together, and exposed their necks bare, and cried out that they were sooner ready to be slain, than that their law should be transgressed. Hereupon **Pilate was greatly surprised at their prodigious superstition, and gave order that the ensigns should be presently carried out of Jerusalem.**

After this **he raised another disturbance, by expending that sacred treasure which is called Corban upon aqueducts, whereby he brought water from the distance of four hundred furlongs.** At this the multitude had indignation; and when Pilate was come to Jerusalem, they came about his tribunal, and made a clamor at it. Now when he was apprized aforehand of this disturbance, **he mixed his own soldiers in their armor with**

city; whereas our law forbids us the very making of images; on which account the former procurators were wont to make their entry into the city with such ensigns as had not those ornaments. **Pilate was the first who brought those images to Jerusalem, and set them up there; which was done without the knowledge of the people, because it was done in the night time;** but as soon as they knew it, they came in multitudes to Caesarea, and interceded with Pilate many days that he would remove the images; and when he would not grant their requests, because it would tend to the injury of Caesar, while yet they persevered in their request, **on the sixth day he ordered his soldiers to have their weapons privately, while he came and sat upon his judgment-seat, which seat was so prepared in the open place of the city, that it concealed the army that lay ready to oppress them; and when the Jews petitioned him again, he gave a signal to the soldiers to encompass them routed, and threatened that their punishment should be no less than immediate death,** unless they would leave off disturbing him, and go their ways home. But **they threw themselves upon the ground, and laid their necks bare, and said they would take their death very willingly, rather than the wisdom of their laws should be transgressed; upon which Pilate was deeply affected with their firm resolution to keep their laws inviolable, and presently commanded the images to be carried back from Jerusalem to Caesarea.**

But **Pilate undertook to bring a current of water to Jerusalem,** and did it with the sacred money, and derived the origin of the stream from the distance of two hundred furlongs. However, the Jews were not pleased with what had been done about this water; and many ten thousands of the people got together, and made a clamor against him, and insisted that he should leave off that design. Some of them also used reproaches, and abused the man, as crowds of such people usually do. **So he habited a great number of**

the multitude, and ordered them to conceal themselves under the habits of private men, and not indeed to use their swords, but with their staves to beat those that made the clamor. He then gave the signal from his tribunal [to do as he had bidden them]. Now **the Jews were so sadly beaten, that many of them perished by the stripes they received, and many of them perished as trodden to death by themselves;** by which means the multitude was astonished at the calamity of those that were slain, and held their peace.

his soldiers in their habit, who carried daggers under their garments, and sent them to a place where they might surround them. So he bid the Jews himself go away; but they boldly casting reproaches upon him, he gave the soldiers that signal which had been beforehand agreed on; who laid upon them much greater blows than Pilate had commanded them, and equally punished those that were tumultuous, and those that were not; nor did they spare them in the least: and since the people were unarmed, and were caught by men prepared for what they were about, there were a great number of them slain by this means, and others of them ran away wounded. And thus an end was put to this sedition.

You can see how the tale grows in the telling. That is definitely *not* Philo's version of the story! [\[312\]](#) Notice also the repeating theme of building aqueducts or transporting water in some way, which was *a significant feature of the Archelaus tale*, a mystery which may be solved by considering that Salome, the sister of king Herod, owned **"a great plantation of palm trees, and their fruit is excellent in its kind."**

[NOTE: Explain how it solves the mystery. Are you saying that Josephus used an element of Salome's life to create one for Archelaus?]

Now, notice again, in the above passage from *Wars*, there is *no mention of prior prefects or procurators of Judea other than Coponius*, back in Chapter 8 (117), the mention of whom precedes the discussion of the four philosophies, as in *Antiquities*. I would argue that all of these things taken together strongly indicate that **Tiberius sent Pilate immediately upon his taking over the government, i.e. in 14/15 AD**. And, as Philo wrote, his governorship was a disaster and Tiberius was the one who had to order him to remove the shields – not ensigns with images – to Caesarea.

The "Pilate Stone" confirms that Pilate was there as prefect. Tacitus' mention is little help, because it is later hearsay. [\[313\]](#) Philo's discussion of Pilate really sheds no light on the chronology either, because it is retrospective and undatable. Plus, Josephus thinks that army standards were involved while Philo says gilded shields with inscriptions. The most famous Roman infantry standard was the eagle. So we have a sort of hybrid: golden eagles? One wonders if the "Golden Eagle Temple cleansing", followed by the execution of Judas the Galilean actually belongs to the time of *Pilate*, and the reason for the massive rebellion following the death of Herod was simply that Simon of Peraea declared himself king.

[NOTE: Price comments: **"Somebody's going to charge you with rewriting the history to serve a theory/agenda rather in the manner you are suggesting Josephus did."** Maybe you could devote a bit of time in the intro to your method? Maybe add something along the lines of: **Yeah, history is in such a state that we will probably never know the full truth about many events with absolute certainty. Maybe historians should stick to "just the facts". But that won't get us any closer to the truth if the facts are insufficient for telling us what really happened. If we want to get there, we need some speculation, like a detective coming up with plausible stories that can account for the facts we DO have.]**

The Testimonium Flavianum

The Testimonium Flavianum (TF), Josephus' infamous mention of Jesus Christ, comes after his description of the Pilate sedition, which he says was solved because Pilate was awed by either the Jews' superstitions or their courage – and not because Tiberius came down on him and ordered him to make things right – and before the Samaritan debacle that Josephus claims resulted in Pilate being “sent down”, so to say. There's been enough ink spilled on this one to float an aircraft carrier and frankly, if people can't see how completely it disrupts the text and how totally out of character it is for Josephus, in any version, I just don't know what to say. Here it is.

Now, there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works – a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ; and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him; and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day. [\[314\]](#)

I'm not going to discuss the various interpretations about what may or may not be interpolated, or the numerous reconstructions that have been attempted; the general scholarly opinion is that it is not authentic. Even then, many argue that there was something there originally which formed a nucleus that was later subjected to Christian editorial modification. I can agree with that, I just don't think it was what the Christian scholars wish to make of it, nor can I even consider any of their reconstructions as possibly realistic. We need to keep constantly in mind that Josephus, himself, by his own admission, *was a member of the rebel priesthood that initiated the Great Rebellion* and he has what could be said to be a “life or death” interest in modifying anything that might create a consistently understandable history about what was going on in Judea from the time of the death of Herod the Great until the destruction of Jerusalem. Do not forget this. Messianic claimants were robbers, thieves, brigands, tyrants, and every other derogatory term Josephus could come up with.

We also need to keep in mind that there are no manuscripts of Josephus that can be dated before the 11th century. It seems obvious that, since all surviving manuscripts have been preserved by monastic scribes who hand-copied them, there are many deliberate and accidental modifications. Thus, even though there is no doubt among scholars that most (but not all [\[315\]](#)) of the later copies of the *Antiquities* contained references to Jesus, James, and John the Baptist, it cannot be proven that these passages were original to Josephus.

Historian Robert Eisler exerted a great deal of energy to reconstruct the TF using a Slavonic version of Josephus' *Wars*, which apparently included the TF as an interpolation, which is odd, as this passage is from *Antiquities*. This text is now universally considered to have been a production of an 11th-century ideological struggle against the Khazars. A 10th-century Arabic translation was discovered in 1971, and a 12th-century Syriac version by Michael the Syrian, but both of them include versions of the TF and have only added to the process described by Donald Redford that I quoted earlier. Nevertheless, we ought not to be tossing the tub out with the baby and the bathwater. Some early interpolations might very well indicate at least the stages of development of wrong ideas!

Also, we have to keep in mind that during the first two centuries when the passage is claimed to have existed, not a single Christian commentator or apologist ever referred to it! If Josephus had said anything about a messiah, every one of the overly prolific writers such as Justin (mid-2nd century), Irenaeus and Theophilus of Antioch (late 2nd century), Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria (turn of 3rd century), Origen and Hippolytus (early 3rd century), Cyprian (mid-3rd century) Lactantius and Arnobius (late 3rd century) would have been all over it! And, if Josephus had written something hostile about Jesus, you can bet they would have been flaming and rebutting him. Keep in mind that Origen cited Josephus eleven times in different works! We know that Origen had read *Antiquities* because in *Contra Celsum* (1.47) he summarizes what Josephus said about John the Baptist in *Antiquities* 18.5.2 (116–9). However, he notes that Josephus did not recognize Jesus as “the Christ” when mentioning him.

Earl Doherty mentions another interesting reference:

Frank Zindler^[316] has called attention to another Christian commentator who, though versed in Josephus' writings and employing them in his homilies, nevertheless makes no reference to any version of the Testimonium: St. John Chrysostom, who wrote late in the 4th century. In Homily 76, he subscribes to the by now well-established Christian view that Jerusalem was destroyed because of the crucifixion of Jesus. He appeals to Josephus as evidence that the destruction was indeed horrific, something that could only be explained by a deed as monstrous as deicide. Also, he says, there can be no truth to the fantasy that Josephus was actually a Christian believer, "For he was both a Jew, and a determined Jew, very zealous." Yet there is no discussion of any Josephan testimony to Jesus himself by Chrysostom, and certainly not to the question of what the historian might have had to say about Jesus' messianic or 'more than human' status. Other homilies by Chrysostom contain other appeals to Josephus, but none to the Testimonium. *Most striking is Homily 13. Here he says that Josephus imputes the destructive war to the murder of John the Baptist. Nowhere in the extant texts of Josephus is such an imputation to be found, one which also stands in contradiction to statements by Origen and Eusebius that Josephus regarded the destruction of Jerusalem as punishment by God for the murder of James the Just—an allegation, too, which cannot be found in surviving texts.* (Josephus actually implies at one point that the destruction of the war was due to the Zealots' murder of the former High Priest Ananus.)^[317]

Notice what Doherty says above and consider our previous discussion of John the Baptist. Here we have a piece of evidence that places "John the Baptist" at the time of the war against Rome. Perhaps my speculations about Josephus' Bannus, John of Gischala, and John the Baptist are not so crazy after all.

Obviously, the process of arguing over whether or not Josephus wrote something about Jesus could go on forever. I would just like to repeat emphatically that it is unlikely that Josephus would have written anything even remotely like the reconstructions of the TF for the simple reason that no "messianic" claimant *ever, under any circumstances*, gets good press from Josephus. And that is for a very good reason: Josephus is busy as a beaver exculpating the Jews as a whole, and himself in particular, from any seditious inclinations, and all of the blame for the Great Rebellion is repeatedly and consistently put entirely on the shoulders of the messianic types that Josephus contemptuously refers to as robbers, tyrants, charlatans, bandits, and worse. So, the possibility that Josephus wrote anything like "*there was a wise man named Jesus ... a worker of glorious deeds ... thought to be the Christ ... Pilate condemned him ... his disciples continued to love him ... reported that he appeared alive after three days ... prophets of God spoke about him...*", etc., is vanishingly remote; pigs are more likely to fly. Even if such a person had made an appearance, Josephus would have *never* written anything like that, because messianic claimants were authors of sedition. It's absurd for any *intelligent* scholar who has read Josephus, who knows Roman history, to even propose "reconstruction" that is "neutral". It boggles the mind.^[318] What part of what was going on in Judea that led to the destruction of Jerusalem and the deaths of maybe half a million people do they not understand?

Judas of Nazareth: The Dog That Didn't Bark

None of what became the Jesus of Nazareth story as it exists today is easily comprehended. You simply see elements here and there scattered through time and space, and when each of them is picked out and lifted from the period, they fit together like puzzle pieces of story written much *later* that was then claimed to be history. There are even many theological elements in Philo that show up in Paul's thought, as well as some interesting little historical tidbits that one can compare as a corrective to what Josephus wrote.

One of the more sensible ideas to come along since the beginning of this mess is that of Daniel T. Unterbrink in his book *Judas of Nazareth*. He points out the obvious: Jesus was a literary construct replacing Judas the Galilean. Jesus of Nazareth is a *composite* character whose life and deeds are "infused with Paul's new gospel":

Paul of Tarsus [as represented in Acts] is also a composite character, with the life and deeds of the Herodian Saul and Josephus himself rewritten in order to hide Saul's true identity.^[319]

The synoptic gospels succeed in placing Paul's gospel back in time. It is not history, but sheer invention, shaping Jesus from the image of Paul. No wonder some see continuity between Jesus and Paul, but they are looking at the relationship from the wrong perspective.

...

Acts' sloppy history and obvious dependence on Josephus have been widely ignored by scholars. Very few realize that the dates and events in Acts cannot be trusted. In fact, Acts' history is polemical revisionism. In every other historical study the ancient historian would be given more credence than a religious text. But in the study of Christianity Christian history (the gospels and Acts) is accepted as true, even if contradicted by contemporary historians (chiefly Josephus). ... the scholarly community places greater emphasis on the gospels and Acts than on Josephus and the Roman historians. [\[320\]](#)

Unterbrink's point is that there *was* a historical messiah who preached the kingdom of heaven to the Jews – and *only* to the Jews: Judas the Galilean. The Christian Jesus is a rip-off of this noble and heroic character, who would be spinning in his grave at how he has been represented.

[NOTE: Do you really want to say Judas was noble and heroic?]

Jesus of Nazareth is fictional ... this Jesus is a rewrite of a real individual, Judas the Galilean, infused with the theology and life experiences of Paul. ... Judas the Galilean is not fictional! If Judas the Galilean lived, then so did his brothers and sons. Combined, they formed the Fourth Philosophy, a movement that scholars and mythicists have overlooked in their search for the real "Jesus." [\[321\]](#)

Indeed. It is so obvious that the fact that it has been ignored by biblical scholars doesn't make them look very competent (or psychologically healthy for that matter, but I digress into ad hominemism). What is also quite obvious is that Josephus needed to denigrate those he formerly consorted with, and the gospels needed to make sure their Jesus was free of any taint of revolutionary fervor. Unterbrink, however, then goes on a speculation spree that sometimes goes over the edge and beyond what is reasonable. Even so, it's a valuable work that points out some things that are so obvious it is astonishing that scholars haven't noticed them before. Or, if they have noticed, but rejected this obvious solution, that is not just astonishing, it borders on being complicit in criminal fraud.

The Testimonium Flavianum is, in fact, "The Dog That Didn't Bark". [\[322\]](#) Josephus repeatedly refers to Judas the Galilean in various guises throughout his works, but never mentions his death. That is astonishing. Josephus is so interested in this personage that every time he mentions a descendant, he recites the pedigree – even if pejoratively. The life and legacy of Judas the Galilean is the thread of Ariadne that leads one out of the labyrinth of Josephus. The question that Unterbrink asks – which is the obvious question to ask – is this:

Was the spurious Jesus passage a replacement for Judas's death by crucifixion? The death of Judas by crucifixion should not be seriously doubted. Judas fights against Rome, actions punishable by crucifixion. In addition, two of Judas's sons, James and Simon, are crucified a generation later (46–48 CE). [\[323\]](#)

As I said, Unterbrink speculates freely, but his attention to the texts could be said to be more perspicacious than that of most biblical scholars. He adduces a lot of evidence that is convincing, and one of the matters that he takes up is the dates of the birth and death of the alleged Jesus of Nazareth (according to the gospels) and how these are *clues* that lead directly to Judas the Galilean. Using a convoluted (but interesting) set of texts and reasoning, he concludes that Judas was executed in 19 AD. I am arguing the same point, though I am coming at it from a very different angle and for a different reason. The bottom line is that the rebellion (including the cleansing of the Temple), the capture, and the execution of Judas the Galilean is what occupied the space where the anemic Testimonium Flavianum now stands.

Hugh Schonfield is another who sometimes speculates over the edge and is considered to be somewhat controversial in conservative circles. Nevertheless, his speculations often shed light from new angles and are well worth considering. He writes:

It was characteristic of the Essenes, as professed masters of secret lore, that they employed attributes and disguises with reference to particular individuals and groups. This was to indicate that they were representative of qualities and forces, good and bad, as well as of actual people. ... Thus in the texts we encounter the "True Teacher, the Wicked Priest, the Lion of Wrath, and so on. ...

But the Essenes also employed various types of codes and ciphers, largely for didactic and expository purposes, but sometimes as a safeguard to prevent disclosure of a vital secret. [\[324\]](#)

Schonfield cites J. M. Allegro, who reported that some of the Dead Sea Scrolls were written backwards, and using mixtures of alphabets, including an entirely invented one of their own. Schonfield applied the famous Atbash cipher, known to have been used in the Old Testament, to what appeared to be meaningless words in the Qumran "Damascus Document". He achieved some interesting results though I'm not going to pursue that line here. The important thing is to know that this was the kind of activity going on behind the scenes, and Josephus, by his own admissions/claims, was at least on the periphery of these circles, if not actually closer to them at least at some point. So, ciphers, codes and exemplars might be something that Josephus himself would employ; we've already considered this in a way with the discussion of the number thirty-seven.

The Tale of Two Women

It is here, and with that in mind, that I want to turn to the two stories that are included in the text of *Antiquities* immediately following the Testimonium Flavianum. Keep in mind as you read them that the TF space was probably originally occupied by an account of the "demagogue" Judas the Galilean, who led so many Jews astray with his "Fourth Philosophy", possibly including the Golden Eagle temple cleansing that was removed to the time of Herod the Great, and the capture and execution of Judas, followed by a general revolt. The execution of a beloved teacher of the Law, as Judas was described, would have been quickly communicated to Jews in Rome and could have caused unrest there, which is reported by Tacitus for the year 19 AD. With that in mind, let's look at the first story that immediately follows the TF:

About the same time also another sad calamity put the Jews into disorder, and certain shameful practices happened about **the temple of Isis that was at Rome**. I will now first take notice of the wicked attempt about the temple of Isis, and will then give an account of the Jewish affairs.

There was at Rome a woman whose name was **Paulina**; one who, on account of the dignity of her ancestors, and by the regular conduct of a virtuous life, had a great reputation: she was also very rich; and although she was of a beautiful countenance, and in that flower of her age wherein women are the most gay, yet did she lead a life of great modesty. **She was married to Saturninus**, one that was every way answerable to her in an excellent character.

Decius Mundus fell in love with this woman, who was **a man very high in the equestrian order**; and as she was of too great dignity to be caught by presents, and had already rejected them, though they had been sent in great abundance, he was still more inflamed with love to her, insomuch that he promised to give her two hundred thousand Attic drachmae for one night's lodging; and when this would not prevail upon her, and he was not able to bear this misfortune in his amours, he thought it the best way to famish himself to death for want of food, on account of Paulina's sad refusal; and he determined with himself to die after such a manner, and he went on with his purpose accordingly.

Now Mundus had a freedwoman, who had been made free by his father, **whose name was Ide**, one skillful in all sorts of mischief. This woman was very much grieved at the young man's resolution to kill himself, [for he did not conceal his intentions to destroy himself from others,] and came to him, and encouraged him by her discourse, and made him to hope, by some promises she gave him, that he might obtain a night's lodging with Paulina; and when he joyfully hearkened to her entreaty, she said she wanted no more than fifty thousand drachmae for the entrapping of the woman.

So when she had encouraged the young man, and gotten as much money as she required, she did not take the same methods as had been taken before, because she perceived that the woman was by no means to be tempted by money; but as she knew that she was

very much given to the worship of the goddess Isis, she devised the following stratagem: She went to some of Isis's priests, and upon the strongest assurances [of concealment], she persuaded them by words, but chiefly by the offer of money, of twenty-five thousand drachmae in hand, and as much more when the thing had taken effect; and told them the passion of the young man, and persuaded them to use all means possible to beguile the woman. So they were drawn in to promise so to do, by that large sum of gold they were to have.

Accordingly, the oldest of them went immediately to Paulina; and upon his admittance, he desired to speak with her by herself. When that was granted him, he told her that he was sent by the god Anubis, who was fallen in love with her, and enjoined her to come to him. Upon this she took the message very kindly, and valued herself greatly upon this condescension of Anubis, and told her husband that she had a message sent her, and was to sup and lie with Anubis; so he agreed to her acceptance of the offer, as fully satisfied with the chastity of his wife.

Accordingly, she went to the temple, and after she had supped there, and it was the hour to go to sleep, the priest shut the doors of the temple, when, in the holy part of it, the lights were also put out. Then did Mundus leap out, [for he was hidden therein,] and did not fail of enjoying her, who was at his service all the night long, as supposing he was the god; and when he was gone away, which was before those priests who knew nothing of this stratagem were stirring, Paulina came early to her husband, and told him how the god Anubis had appeared to her. Among her friends, also, she declared how great a value she put upon this favor, who partly disbelieved the thing, when they reflected on its nature, and partly were amazed at it, as having no pretense for not believing it, when they considered the modesty and the dignity of the person.

But now, **on the third day after what had been done, Mundus met Paulina**, and said, "Nay, Paulina, thou hast saved me two hundred thousand drachmae, which sum thou mightest have added to thy own family; yet hast thou not failed to be at my service in the manner I invited thee. As for the reproaches thou hast laid upon Mundus, **I value not the business of names; but I rejoice in the pleasure I reaped by what I did, while I took to myself the name of Anubis.**" When he had said this, he went his way.

But now she began to come to the sense of the grossness of what she had done, and rent her garments, and told her husband of the horrid nature of this wicked contrivance, and prayed him not to neglect to assist her in this case. So **he discovered the fact to the emperor; whereupon Tiberius inquired into the matter thoroughly by examining the priests about it, and ordered them to be crucified, as well as Ide**, who was the occasion of their perdition, and who had contrived the whole matter, which was so injurious to the woman. **He also demolished the temple of Isis**, and gave order that her statue should be thrown into the river Tiber; while he **only banished Mundus**, but did no more to him, because he supposed that what crime he had committed was done out of the passion of love. And these were the circumstances which concerned the temple of Isis, and the injuries occasioned by her priests. **I now return to the relation of what happened about this time to the Jews at Rome, as I formerly told you I would.** [\[325\]](#)

Now, certainly, upon reading the above story one might think that it was something that really happened at Rome – aren't we thankful that Josephus has preserved it for us, even if we suspect that he may have embellished only a little? However, if we try to find it by cross-checking with other historians, we have no luck, because, of course, we think we are in the time of Pilate – 27 to 37 AD, according to the *accepted* chronology – and that is where we might be inclined to look. However, this little story is actually more of a problem than just that, because it is so similar in dynamics to an account of a legal case that can be found in Tacitus:

About the same time **Octavius** Sagitta, a tribune of the people, who was enamoured to frenzy of **Pontia**, a married woman, bribed her by most costly presents into an intrigue and then into abandoning her husband. He had offered her marriage and had won her consent. But as soon as she was free, she devised delays, pretended that her father's wishes were against it, and having secured the prospect of a richer husband, she repudiated her promises.

Octavius, on the other hand, now remonstrated, now threatened; his good name, he protested, was lost, his means exhausted, and as for his life, which was all that was left to him, he surrendered it to her mercy.

When she spurned him, he asked the solace of one night, with which to soothe his passion, that he might set bounds to it for the future. A night was fixed, and Pontia intrusted the charge of her chamber to a female slave acquainted with her secret. Octavius attended by one freedman entered with a dagger concealed under his dress. Then, as usual in lovers' quarrels, there were chidings, entreaties, reproaches, excuses, and some period of the darkness was given up to passion; then, when seemingly about to go, and she

was fearing nothing, he stabbed her with the steel, and having wounded and scared away the slave girl who was hurrying to her, rushed out of the chamber.

Next day the murder was notorious, and there was no question as to the murderer, for it was proved that he had passed some time with her. The freedman, however, declared the deed was his, that he had, in fact, avenged his patron's wrongs. He had made some impression by the nobleness of his example, when the slave girl recovered and revealed the truth. Octavius, when he ceased to be tribune, was prosecuted before the consuls by the father of the murdered woman, and was condemned by the sentence of the Senate under "the law concerning assassins."[\[326\]](#)

All the elements of the story concocted by Josephus are there in Tacitus' report of an actual legal case. Of course, we can see that these elements have been creatively utilized rather in accordance with Lévi-Strauss' theories of mythical transposition.

[NOTE: Give a brief run-down of this theory, or a source, or an example.]

But there is a bigger problem here: In Tacitus, the event he recounted *occurred in 58 AD*. One *could* say that the story must have been something of a big scandal and perhaps stuck in Josephus' mind to be pulled out, decomposed and reworked in his own way for his own purposes. After all, Josephus was allegedly in Rome when he was 26 – between 63 and 64 AD – so he certainly could have heard about the case at a distance in his early twenties. That is a reasonable explanation *except for one odd little detail*. When reading the Tacitus text, one can't help but notice that just a couple paragraphs above the tragic murder story, there is an account of other affairs that *includes the name "Saturninus"*.[\[327\]](#) That would suggest that the tale had been obtained from a written work – perhaps an annalistic account? – and the eye of the author had fallen upon, and registered, the name "Saturninus", which was then utilized twice as the husband of the afflicted women.

If that little slip is evidence that the author of the passage had read Tacitus, that means it could not have been Josephus himself, because Tacitus' work was published a number of years after *Antiquities*. More than that, the only "law concerning assassins" that I find on a cursory check is the *Lex Titia* (43 BC), which gave *Octavian*, Mark Antony and Lepidus full powers to *defeat the assassins of Julius Caesar* and legalized the second triumvirate. What is interesting is the use of the name *Octavius Sagitta* in this story that ends with "the law concerning assassins." Also, one wonders about the possible relationship of a woman named "Pontia" and a man named "Pontius Pilate", considering the way Romans named their children. Is Tacitus telling us something in code here too?[\[328\]](#) Or is some unknown author sending a message in a bottle through time?

But before we delve too deeply into that, let's look at Josephus' next tale, since it appears that *they are a pair and go together* for some obscure reason in Josephus' mind. The following tale is about Jews defrauding a Roman noblewoman named **Fulvia**, who is also married to a Saturninus, which only raises the eyebrows even higher:

There was a man who was a Jew, but had been driven away from his own country by an accusation laid against him for transgressing their laws, and by the fear he was under of punishment for the same; but in all respects a wicked man. He, then living at Rome, professed to instruct men in the wisdom of the laws of Moses. He procured also three other men, entirely of the same character with himself, to be his partners. These men persuaded Fulvia, a woman of great dignity, and one that had embraced the Jewish religion, to send purple and gold to the temple at Jerusalem; and when they had gotten them, they employed them for their own uses, and spent the money themselves, on which account it was that they at first required it of her. Whereupon Tiberius, who had been informed of the thing by Saturninus, the husband of Fulvia, who desired inquiry might be made about it, ordered all the Jews to be banished out of Rome; at which time the consuls listed four thousand men out of them, and sent them to the island Sardinia; but punished a greater number of them, who were unwilling to become soldiers, on account of keeping the laws of their forefathers. Thus were these Jews banished out of the city by the wickedness of four men.[\[329\]](#)

Fulvia was, of course, the wife of three of the most influential Populares of the late Republic: Publius Clodius Pulcher, Gaius Scribonius Curio, and Marcus Antonius. All three of her husbands were tribunes and *supporters of Julius Caesar*, which points us back to the *Lex Titia*. All very odd indeed.

These two stories, following just after the Testimonium Flavianum, pose a number of interesting problems. Taken together at face value, they combine a Roman rejection of the Egyptian worship *and* Jewish worship. Tacitus records the banishing of the religions of the Jews and *Egyptians* in the reign of Tiberius, 19 AD, as follows:

Measures were also taken for exterminating the solemnities of the **Jews and Egyptians**; and by decree of Senate **four thousand descendants of franchised slaves**, all defiled with that superstition, but of proper strength and age, **were to be transported to Sardinia**; to restrain the Sardinian robbers; and if, through the malignity of the climate, they perished, despicable would be the loss: the rest were doomed to depart Italy, unless by a stated day they renounced their profane rites. [\[330\]](#)

This bit of text is something of a problem considering the glowing review that Philo gave Tiberius in regard to his consideration of the Jews. We've already noted that persons who adhered to that variation of Judaism that later became known as Christianity were accused of a "vile superstition" or atheism. So are we really seeing here a notice that there were Christians *that early, in 19 AD*? Notice that several essential particulars match between Tacitus and Josephus: the number four thousand is present in both accounts about the expulsion of Jews, as well as Sardinia being the destination, so it is certain that both are talking about the same event since. In Tacitus, it is noted that the four thousand are "descendants of franchised slaves, all *defiled with that superstition*", which suggests that they were *converted* to something, and we suspect it was not the same Judaism that Tiberius was known to acknowledge and at least tacitly approve. Josephus' text is about Romans being converted to Judaism, but *a perverted form of it* being taught by con artists. So, something is definitely being said in these two texts that is not apparent on the surface. They aren't just gossip.

Additionally, what are these stories doing right there in the midst of the governorship of Pontius Pilate, which, according to *Christian chronology*, was supposed to extend from 27 to 37 AD? These two events allegedly precede a banishing of Jewish and Egyptian rites from Rome as well as the exiling of many Jews (or pseudo-Jews) from Rome by Tiberius, something that occurred in 19 AD without question. So why does Josephus begin the TF with "Now there was about this time...", and the following stories with "About the same time also another sad calamity..."? If the TF is authentic it is clearly being placed in the context of the 19 AD event. If it is not authentic – if it is redacted or a replacement text – *it is still in the context of 19 AD!* If there was nothing there at all and the previous section about Pilate's attack on the Jews flowed right into the Paulina and Fulvia stories, it is *still* in the context of 19 AD! Whoever inserted the TF thought that was the right place for it. It was probably only later that the chronological difficulties were realized and a bit of patching was done to bring things more into line; additional governors and years were added.

What does seem clear to me is that whatever stood in that spot originally – assuming that something else did – must have been something that was a "sad calamity" that "put the Jews into disorder", because that is what the lead-in of the next paragraph refers to. Of course, the TF could be removed without any disruption in the flow at all, so it's not necessary to assume that *something else* stood there. There was already a previous sad calamity involving Pilate. However, since the two tales that follow the TF, as far as I can see, have no purpose in that location whatsoever – especially not in historical terms – it might be conjectured that they may originally have been intended to *convey some message about whatever stood originally in the TF spot*. Because, certainly, they taste and feel like Josephan, novelized gossip.

Recall Josephus' confused account of the events following the death of Herod, which he associated with the deaths of Judas and Matthias and their pupils, while Archelaus was in Rome pleading his case before Augustus:

But now came another accusation from the Jews against Archelaus at Rome, which he was to answer to. It was made by those ambassadors who, **before the revolt**, had come, by Varus's permission, to plead for the liberty of their country; those that came were fifty in number, but there were more than **eight thousand of the Jews at Rome who supported them** ^{1/4}[\[331\]](#)

In rather lurid terms, these ambassadors pleaded to have their country joined to Syria and to be given a Roman governor. They wanted no part of Archelaus. But, as we noted, that is not credible. We also noticed the congruence of the second text

following the TF, about the expulsion of Jews from Rome, with the account from Tacitus.

If there were four thousand men among that group of military age and ability, that means there were probably around eight thousand Jews in total, which would match the figure given at the time of Archelaus' trial. So I would suggest that the fifty ambassadors from the Jews supported by the clamor of eight thousand Jews in Rome better reflects the reactions of the Jews to *Pilate* at the time of the execution of Judas the Galilean, and Archelaus has been constructed as a scapegoat. That's not to say Archelaus was anybody's darling, but the doublets and triplets that run through the text from the time of the death of Herod until Josephus' own time suggest that Josephus was quite busy constructing his text along certain lines for certain reasons, including spreading the blame for the revolt(s), putting much of it on Jewish zealots of various sorts, and at the same time, exculpating his Roman masters.

I have already suggested that greater reliance might be placed on Josephus' first book, *Wars*, than his later, blatant apology for the Jews, mainly because it was an Imperially sponsored project designed to be read by a Greco-Roman audience, many of whom knew full well the events of the time. There, we notice that Josephus does not fiddle with the Roman side of things, though he does appear to feel free to invent things on the Jewish side. In *Wars*, it is as plain as it can possibly be that Pontius Pilate was Tiberius' man and was sent to Judea upon Tiberius' accession to power. Philo's digression about Pilate doesn't help with the dating issue, but it helps to know Pilate better and the impression is certainly that it was longer ago than just ten years (i.e. from 30 to 39/40). The tone of Philo's passage makes more sense if he is reminding the emperor Gaius of things that happened twenty years ago (or more) when he was very young and wouldn't be likely to recall.

All of these elements, taken together, argue for the fact that Pilate was in Judea much earlier than biblical "history" suggests – or allows – and that he also left much earlier and in disgrace. One gets the impression that Josephus really knew nothing about the reign of Archelaus and, since his behavior was similar to that reported of Pilate, simply gave him some bits of Pilate's history and said less about Pilate for reasons of political discretion. Interestingly, Eusebius, quoting early apocryphal accounts, stated that Pilate suffered misfortune in the reign of Caligula (37–41 AD), *was exiled to Gaul* and eventually killed himself there in Vienna. [\[332\]](#) One might wonder why this association was made? (Remember, Archelaus was said to have been exiled to Vienna.)

Nevertheless, the looping stories, doublets, and triplets, argue for the fact that Josephus was making up a lot of his material between the death of Herod the Great and his own times. The story of the Golden Eagle rebellion alleged to have occurred during the reign of Herod may very well be a retrojection of the Pilate affair into the past with a multiple purpose: it slanders Herod the Great, makes Pilate less obnoxious, and takes power and authority away from Judas the Galilean. Philo said Pilate brought golden shields into the city. Given his closer proximity to the events in question, and his connections, Philo probably gave a far more accurate version of the events than Josephus. I think that those who attribute fact-finding abilities to Josephus give him too much credit and, perhaps, forget the conditions of Judea in the years before Josephus' birth.

Of course, the Golden Eagle event was said to be the trigger for the rebellion that caused Archelaus to kill 3,000 Jews at Passover, but I have doubts about several aspects of that affair. First, with his craving for the approval of the Jews, would Herod the Great really have been likely to have decorated his masterpiece, the Jewish temple, with a golden eagle? I don't think so. However, it seems rather certain that Varus' war took place. So what really triggered it? For the period in question, this is all that Tacitus has to say:

After Herod's death, a certain Simon assumed the name of king without waiting for Caesar's decision. He, however, was put to death by Quintilius Varus, governor of Syria; the Jews were repressed; and the kingdom was divided into three parts and given to Herod's sons. Under Tiberius all was quiet. Then, when Caligula ordered the Jews to set up his statue in their temple, they chose rather to resort to arms, but the emperor's death put an end to their uprising. The princes now being dead or reduced to insignificance, Claudius made Judea a province and entrusted it to Roman knights or to freedmen; one of the latter, Antonius Felix, practised every kind of cruelty and lust, wielding the power of king with all the instincts of a slave; he had married Drusilla, the grand-daughter of Cleopatra and

[\[333\]](#)

Antony, and so was Antony's grandson-in-law, while Claudius was Antony's grandson.

Simon of Perea, of the Jeselohn Stone, put to death by Varus. It looks like Herod died, Simon declared himself king, and Varus came in to put down the insurrection. Or perhaps Simon declared himself king *because* of the rapacity of Varus and his legates, and Josephus was busy rewriting history for his new masters? Maybe Archelaus was innocent, lived a boring life, and died naturally after being betrayed by his brothers. Or, perhaps he was involved in supporting the rebels, as is suggested by his releasing the brother of Athronges, a cover for Judas the Galilean, and it was for this kind of activity that he was banished to Vienna.

Perhaps the Jewish records of unknown feast and fast days mentioned by Martin relate to the deaths of Judas, Matthias and their students in 19 AD, not earlier. Or, they could commemorate Herod's execution of his son and his own death, or the death of Simon of Perea, which was obviously important enough to some Jews to merit a record associating him with angels.

The bottom line is this: removing Pilate from Judea at the time alleged for the crucifixion of a "Jesus of Nazareth" – and there appears to be a good case for it – destroys the timeline of the Jesuine "history". It also means that billions of people have been reciting a lie every Sunday when they declare their beliefs in the Nicene Creed or the Apostle's Creed.

Time Traveling

When Josephus' history continues in the next chapter (18.4), we come upon an even greater problem: a sudden leap to the Vitellius and Artabanus story that leads into the Antipas-Aretas conflict we began with. Why is this so problematical? Well, notice that the *first* mention of Pilate is at *Ant.* 18.2.2, at the very end of the paragraph: "When Gratus had done those things, he went back to Rome, after he had waited in Judea eleven years, when Pontius Pilate came as his successor."

Now, as we have already noted, this Gratus is highly suspect, and by even a reasonable count of years we are nowhere near 27 AD. But what is telling is that Josephus then recounts the death of Phraates, king of the Parthians (*Antiquities* 18.2.4 [52]). This is also covered by Tacitus in *Annales* 2.2ff., *dated to 16 AD*. Josephus notes, in the same chapter, that Silanus was president of Syria. Tacitus, too, notes that Q. Caecilius Metellus Creticus Silanus was governor of Syria (*Ann.* 2.4.3). So we are tracking well.

The next event reported by Josephus (*Ant.* 18.2.5) is the death of Antiochus, king of Commagene. This was 17 AD. At this point, Josephus notes that the Roman senate decreed that Germanicus should be sent to settle the affairs of the east. Tacitus, too, notes this (*Ann.* 2.42.5), along with the following:

But Tiberius had removed from Syria Creticus Silanus, who was connected with Germanicus by marriage ... and placed in charge Cn. Piso, temperamentally violent ... implanted in him by his father Piso (who in the civil war helped the resurgence of the party in Africa ... against Caesar and then, after following Brutus and Cassius, was allowed to return ...) [\[334\]](#)

Then, at the very end of *Antiquities* 18.2, there is a brief remark about the death of Germanicus due to being poisoned by Piso. When Josephus comes back to Pilate in Chapter 3 (55ff.), it is immediately following his remark about the death of Germanicus, and he appears to be going back to Pilate after a digression to the other matters (the building projects of the Herodians and the Artabanus business, which tracks with Tacitus' discussion of the Vonones/Artabanus saga of 16 AD, which was why *Germanicus* was sent out to the East to begin with).

At this time died Antiochus, the king of Commagne [17 AD] ... So the senate made a decree that Germanicus should be sent to settle the affairs of the east, fortune hereby taking a proper opportunity for depriving him of his life; for when he had been in the east, and settled all affairs there, his life was taken away by the poison which Piso gave him, as has been related elsewhere. [\[335\]](#)

So, now Josephus comes back to Pilate:

But now Pilate, the procurator of Judea, removed the army from Caesarea to Jerusalem to take their winter quarters there, in order to abolish the Jewish laws. So he introduced Caesar's effigies, which were upon the ensigns, and brought them into the city ...[\[336\]](#)

Taken as it is written, without the artificial divisions and removing the authorial asides, it would say: "At this time died Antiochus, the king of Commagene [17 AD] ... So the senate made a decree that Germanicus should be sent to settle the affairs of the east ... But now Pilate, the procurator of Judea, removed the army from Caesarea to Jerusalem."

This would be where the Golden Eagle temple cleansing should fit and it is entirely possible that Josephus himself placed it earlier in the text in the time of Herod the Great and simply created a silly tale about Pilate being nonplussed by the Jews' willingness to die over this matter. If we recall Philo's discussion of Pilate and the affair of the golden shields, we can notice that the princes and magistrates were the ones who confronted Pilate. That seems to be a reflection of the collecting of all the chief men of the country into an arena as Herod the Great was said to have done with the plan of having them all executed as soon as he was dead. Sorry, but I can't believe that Herod did that; Josephus spends way too much energy trying to blacken his name and that's just one of his many slanders. However, based on how Philo described Pilate, as well as what Josephus did include in his account, the whole scenario belongs to the period 18/19 AD:

Pilate was the first who brought those images to Jerusalem, and set them up there; which was done without the knowledge of the people, because it was done in the night time; but as soon as they knew it, they came in multitudes to Caesarea, and interceded with Pilate many days that he would remove the images; and when he would not grant their requests, because it would tend to the injury of Caesar [Tiberius], while yet they persevered in their request, on the sixth day he ordered his soldiers to have their weapons privately, while he came and sat upon his judgment-seat, which seat was so prepared in the open place of the city, that it concealed the army that lay ready to oppress them; and when the Jews petitioned him again, he gave a signal to the soldiers to encompass them routed, and threatened that their punishment should be no less than immediate death, unless they would leave off disturbing him, and go their ways home. But they threw themselves upon the ground, and laid their necks bare, and said they would take their death very willingly, rather than the wisdom of their laws should be transgressed; upon which Pilate was deeply affected with their firm resolution to keep their laws inviolable, and presently commanded the images to be carried back from Jerusalem to Caesarea.[\[337\]](#)

In *Wars*, the story is equally confusing, so it seems almost certain that it was Josephus himself who manipulated the text:

Now Pilate, who was sent as procurator into Judea by Tiberius, sent by night those images of Caesar that are called ensigns into Jerusalem. This excited a very great tumult among the Jews when it was day; for those that were near them were astonished at the sight of them, as indications that their laws were trodden under foot; for those laws do not permit any sort of image to be brought into the city. Nay, besides the indignation which the citizens had themselves at this procedure, a vast number of people came running out of the country. These came zealously to Pilate to Caesarea, and besought him to carry those ensigns out of Jerusalem, and to preserve them their ancient laws inviolable; but upon Pilate's denial of their request, they fell down prostrate upon the ground, and continued immovable in that posture for five days and as many nights.

On the next day Pilate sat upon his tribunal, in the open market-place, and called to him the multitude, as desirous to give them an answer; and then gave a signal to the soldiers, that they should all by agreement at once encompass the Jews with their weapons; so the band of soldiers stood round about the Jews in three ranks. The Jews were under the utmost consternation at that unexpected sight. Pilate also said to them that they should be cut in pieces, unless they would admit of [Tiberius] Caesar's images, and gave intimation to the soldiers to draw their naked swords. Hereupon the Jews, as it were at one signal, fell down in vast numbers together, and exposed their necks bare, and cried out that they were sooner ready to be slain, than that their law should be transgressed. Hereupon Pilate was greatly surprised at their prodigious superstition, and gave order that the ensigns should be presently carried out of Jerusalem.[\[338\]](#)

We know from Philo that the above did not happen; that letters were sent to Tiberius who then ordered Pilate to remove the offending items. We also notice that the above incident is described as taking place in Caesarea, but is then replicated in Jerusalem below:

After this he raised another disturbance, by expending that sacred treasure which is called Corban upon aqueducts, whereby he brought water from the distance of four hundred furlongs. At this the multitude had indignation; and when Pilate was come to Jerusalem, they came about his tribunal, and made a clamor at it. Now when he was apprized aforehand of this disturbance, he mixed his own soldiers in their armor with the multitude, and ordered them to conceal themselves under the habits of private men, and not indeed to use their swords, but with their staves to beat those that made the clamor. He then gave the signal from his tribunal [to do as he had bidden them]. Now the Jews were so sadly beaten, that many of them perished by the stripes they received, and many of them perished as trodden to death by themselves; by which means the multitude was astonished at the calamity of those that were slain, and held their peace.^[339]

What is odd in *Wars* is how the topic then jumps to Agrippa in Rome – “in the meantime” – supposedly at the time that Tiberius is practically on his deathbed.

In the mean time Agrippa, the son of that Aristobulus who had been slain by his father Herod [the Great], came to Tiberius, to accuse Herod the tetrarch [Antipas]; who not admitting of his accusation, he staid at Rome, and cultivated a friendship with others of the men of note, but principally with Caius the son of Germanicus, who was then but a private person. Now this Agrippa, at a certain time, feasted Caius; and as he was very complaisant to him on several other accounts, he at length stretched out his hands, and openly wished that Tiberius might die, and that he might quickly see him emperor of the world. This was told to Tiberius by one of Agrippa's domestics, who thereupon was very angry, and ordered Agrippa to be bound, and had him very ill-treated in the prison for six months, until Tiberius died, after he had reigned twenty-two years, six months, and three days.^[340]

Antiquities mentions Agrippa going to Rome at the tail end of the Vitellius/Artabanus saga:

So Vitellius truly retired to Antioch; but Agrippa, the son of Aristobulus, went up to Rome, a year before the death of Tiberius, in order to treat of some affairs with the emperor, if he might be permitted so to do.^[341]

The only problem with the above is that Agrippa did not make the accusations against Herod Antipas until 39 AD,^[342] and he brought the accusation to *Caligula*, at which point, by either chronology, Pilate was certainly not in Judea.^[343] Caligula exiled Antipas to Gaul – just like Archelaus! – and he was apparently accompanied by the seductress, Herodias. So it looks as if Josephus retrojected this back in time, but he makes a mess of things in the process.

In any event, after his discussion of the effigies that arrived with Pilate, Josephus mentions the Corban/water issue that also was noted in *Wars*. (In *Wars*, it was 400 furlongs, in *Antiquities*, it's 200, but who's counting?) It was allegedly this use of temple funds that caused the next upset and led to Pilate planting sicarii in the crowd. The Testimonium Flavianum follows immediately, and the two tales about the expulsion of the Jews and Egyptians follow that, so despite the prestidigitation of the text, we are certainly still in the temporal environment of 19 AD.

When we pick up the historical narrative in Judea again, i.e. with Pilate, we have yet another disruption due to Samaritans.^[344] Notice that Coponius also had problems with Samaritans (more doubling?).^[345] Pilate apparently killed a number of them and the Samaritans complained to *Vitellius*, who is now, suddenly, governor of Syria when just before, as noted, it was *Silanus*. Vitellius pulls rank on Pilate, sends Marcellus to handle Judea, and orders Pilate to Rome. But, Josephus then tells us that *Tiberius was dead before Pilate could get there!*

That is an absolutely astonishing leap from 19 to 37 AD! Eighteen years, in fact. So, how the heck did that happen?

I would suggest that the text originally said that Pilate was being sent for judgment and/or correction to *Germanicus* – the new co-proconsul of Syria – and it was *he* who was dead before Pilate reached him. That is, after all, in keeping with the whole general context of the surrounding passages.

Let me recap: I propose that Tiberius sent Pilate – possibly at the urging of Sejanus – and Pilate immediately set about doing all the things that Philo described him as doing: “he feared lest they might in reality go on an embassy to the emperor, and might impeach him with respect to other particulars of his government, in respect of his corruption, and his acts of insolence, and his rapine, and his habit of insulting people, and his cruelty, and his continual murders of people untried and uncondemned, and his never ending, and gratuitous, and most grievous inhumanity”.

By the time Pilate sent the shields into Jerusalem, he had probably been there a few years. Maybe there is a seed of history in the tale: he sent the army to Jerusalem for the winter in late 18 AD. At that point, Judas the Galilean and his followers effected the “Golden Eagle temple cleansing” followed by military action on the part of Pilate and his troops, and ultimately, the capture and execution of Judas. (There was a partial eclipse of the moon on the night of 10 January 19 AD.) Following this there were uprisings that probably included an attack on the people at Passover with the killing of many individuals in the temple precincts.

In the meantime, the Jews had appealed to Tiberius and he ordered Pilate to remove the shields to Caesarea. At this point, Germanicus returned from his tour of Egypt to find that Piso had controverted his arrangements, and things were a mess in Judea thanks to Pilate, and so he ordered Piso to Rome but died shortly thereafter in Antioch, probably poisoned. The crimes of Pilate faded into the background in the uproar over the death of Germanicus. It was widely thought that Piso poisoned Germanicus under orders from Tiberius, but Piso committed suicide before he could be tried. Tacitus opined that Tiberius may have had him murdered before he could implicate the emperor in Germanicus' death. More likely, it was Sejanus who was behind it. It was the death of Germanicus that destroyed the regard of the people for Tiberius and created a climate of fear in Rome.

We are told by Josephus that the Samaritans sent an embassy to Vitellius who was suddenly “president of Syria” and that Vitellius sent a Marcellus – about whom nothing is known – to take care of Judea and ordered Pilate to Rome to answer the accusations of the Jews. “So Pilate, when he had waited ten years in Judea, hurried to Rome, and this in obedience to the orders of Vitellius, which he dared not contradict; but before he could get to Rome, Tiberius was dead.”

Twice now we have been told specific numbers of years for the governors of Judea: Gratus and Pilate. And somehow we have skipped from Silanus to Vitellius, some 18 years. Plus, we have jumped from one Artabanus story to another. Is it possible to sort this out and make some sense of it?

The Friends of Germanicus – A Prosopographical Excursus

Let’s take up the problem of this sudden appearance of Vitellius, who had such a fun part to play in the Antipas-Aretas story and who was surely in Judea *later*: in 37 AD.

There are several Vitelliuses in Tacitus but only two would have qualified for proconsular duties: 1) L. Vitellius, consul 34, 43, and 47 AD, who is our Vitellius of *later* adventures; and 2) A. Vitellius, consul in 48 AD, who is too late to consider. *But*, we also find a Vitellius who was a “friend of Germanicus”. We find him in Germany in *Annales* 1.70; in 2.6 he heads off to do a *census* of the Galliae; in 2.74, we find the most interesting mention. It is immediately following the death of Germanicus, and it *takes place in Syria*:

There was next a debate between the legates and other senators who were present as to who should be placed in charge of Syria. And, after only modest exertions from the others, for a long time the issue was between Vibius Marsus and Cn. Sentius. Then Marsus yielded to the seniority and keener contention of Sentius; [\[346\]](#) and he, for his part dispatched to the City [Rome] a woman infamous for poisonings in the province and particularly dear to Plancina, by name of Martina, *in response to demands from Vitellius and*

[\[347\]](#)

Veranius and the rest, who were drawing up charges and accusations as if against persons already cited as defendants.

So, that means that a **Vitellius was with Germanicus in Syria at the time he died**. This Vitellius was drawing up charges and accusations, appears to have been “in charge”, and thus, there is a simple explanation for why Pilate was said to have been sent back to Rome by Vitellius: because he was! *It just wasn't the same Vitellius*. The fact that this Vitellius was with Germanicus in Syria is detailed later in Tacitus, when Piso is being arraigned back in Rome for poisoning Germanicus:

On the next day Fulcinius Trio arraigned Piso before the consuls. Yet **Vitellius and Veranius and the other of Germanicus' companions** maintained that there was no role for Trio; nor were they accusers themselves, they said, but as informants and witnesses of events they would deliver Germanicus' instructions. [\[348\]](#)

Next:

Then Fulcinius embarked on past irrelevancies, namely the fact that Piso's tenure of Spain had been marked by corruption and greed [Piso had been legate there in 9/10 AD] ... After this, Servaeus and Veranius and **Vitellius with like enthusiasm (and with much eloquence on Vitellius' part) cast the charge that in his hatred for Germanicus and his enthusiasm for revolution Piso, by licensing maltreatment of the allies**, had corrupted the common soldiers to such a degree that the basest of them called him “parent of the legions.” Conversely, they said **he had been savage to all the best men, especially to the companions and friends of Germanicus**. Finally, he had annihilated the man himself by curses and poison: hence the rituals and abominable offerings by himself and Plancina, his claiming the state by arms, and – to ensure his appearance as the accused – his defeat in the line of battle. [\[349\]](#)

One cannot help but think that Piso may have been behind the abominable treatment of the Jews attributed to Pilate because he licensed “maltreatment of the allies.” This is followed by another brief mention 3.17, and then:

A few days after Caesar [Tiberius] initiated the senate's granting of priesthoods to Vitellius and Veranius and Servaeus. ... That was the end to the avenging, though **Germanicus' death was bandied about in various rumors not only among those men who lived then but also in following times**. So is it the case that all the greatest matters are ambiguous, inasmuch as some people hold any form of hearsay as confirmed, others turn truth into its converse, and each swells among posterity. [\[350\]](#)

P. Vitellius later committed suicide under indictment for something *in 31 AD*, following the fall of Sejanus. [\[351\]](#) Tacitus' narrative is missing the end of 29, all of 30, and most of 31 AD. That period is, of course, the very period in which Jesus is said to have been crucified in Judea under Pontius Pilate, and might have included some pertinent information that contradicted such a claim. So, we don't know what Vitellius was being charged with – possibly revolutionary actions against Tiberius? Being in cahoots with Sejanus? Being a friend of Germanicus? P. Vitellius' wife, Acutia, was also arraigned on some charge in 37 AD.

Now, also consider that this “Marcellus”, supposed to have been sent to order Pilate to Rome and take over Judea, may have been Vibius *Marsus*, mentioned by Tacitus above. We've seen how often Josephus garbles Roman names (or deliberately obfuscates them as in the case of Judas the Galilean) and this may be such a case. Gaius Vibius Marsus was also sent to summon Gnaeus Calpurnius Piso to Rome to stand his trial. His name occurs again 7 years later in 26 AD, in the debates of the senate; and just before the death of Tiberius in 37 he narrowly escaped his own death, being accused as one of the accomplices of the notorious Albucilla. [\[352\]](#) In 47 we find him governor of Syria. [\[353\]](#) The name of “Gaius Vibius Marsus”, proconsul, appears on several coins of Utica in Africa, struck in the reign of Tiberius. [\[354\]](#)

As to the governor of Syria named Vitellius, as we already know from our discussion above, he was there in 35–37 AD. He is also mentioned in *Annales* 6.41 as sending troops to the “nation of the Cietae”, including the legate M. Trebellius; that was in AD 36. And, we are reminded, in all of the above, that Cn. Sentius *Saturninus* took over as governor of Syria/Judea immediately after the death of Germanicus, so the name could be said to have been handily available for use and not necessarily drawn from the Tacitean tale.

Now, let's look again at the role of Saturninus, who is husband to both Roman women taken in by religious frauds, according to Josephus à la the Walrus and the Carpenter. [\[355\]](#) In addition to the Saturninus who we discovered was a friend of Germanicus, there was a Gaius Sentius Saturninus who was appointed Roman consul in 19 BC. Around 14/13 BC, Sentius Saturninus was appointed the proconsular governor of Africa. From 9 to 7 BC Sentius Saturninus served as *Legatus Augusti pro praetore* (or imperial governor) of the Roman province of Syria. It was his second son Gnaeus – our Saturninus of 19 AD – who replaced Gnaeus Calpurnius Piso as governor of Syria and compelled him to return to Rome to stand trial for the murder of Germanicus.

Tertullian (c. 160–225 AD), the Christian law expert from Carthage in North Africa, wrote that Jesus was born while Gaius Sentius Saturninus was Legate of Roman Syria, i.e. between 9–7 BC. Could it be that he was confusing things? That the “birth of Jewish Messianism” occurred in 19 AD under the influence of the psychological/emotional trauma of the death of Judas the Galilean, compounded by the Empire-wide mourning for the savior Germanicus, and when *Gnaeus* Sentius Saturninus was *governor* of Syria?

We have already seen a Vitellius and now a Saturninus turn up around Germanicus, two names of important characters that show up in Josephus' narrative. Now let's take a look at a few other characters we've encountered so far in Josephus' tale: Valerius Gratus, Silanus and Sabinus.

Gratus Redux

According to the "biblically" understood history, Valerius Gratus was the Roman Prefect of Judea province under Tiberius from 15 to 26 AD. He succeeded Annius Rufus and was replaced by Pontius Pilate. Here is the list derived from *Antiquities* again:

- Varus and Gaius Caesar (with Sabinus)
- Archelaus
- Coponius (with Cyrenius/Quirinius)
- Marcus Ambivius (Ambivulus)
- Annius Rufus
- Death of Augustus – AD 14
- Valerius Gratus – AD 15 to 26
- Pilate

We know who Varus is: Publius Quinctilius Varus is certainly attested, even if the Roman history doesn't exactly fit with Josephus' history due to the misdating of the eclipse. Syme dates him based on the biblical dates that have been imposed on Josephus.

There are a few problems with identifying Coponius. The Coponii were a plebeian family, prominent at Rome during the first century BC. The most famous was Gaius Coponius, praetor in 49 BC and a partisan of Pompey. He was proscribed by the triumvirs in 43, subsequently pardoned, and ended up a respected member of the Senate. *Relying, again, on Josephus*, Syme says: "When Judaea was annexed (AD 6), Coponius, a Roman knight or a respectable family from Tibur, became its first governor." [\[356\]](#) We find that a Marcus, Gaius, and Titus Coponius are mentioned by Cicero. [\[357\]](#) But there is actually no specific mention of this Coponius on the Roman records side. However, since we find this Coponius in Josephus' *Wars*, we have some confidence that he was there (remember, Josephus had a particular target audience for *Wars* and was less likely to fudge about things they could know about themselves).

Syme points out that in the last years of Augustus, 4 to 14 AD, some new names show up, indicating the advancement of *novi homines*, most of them military. The two Poppaei came from an obscure community in Picenum. "The most striking example

of continuous service is afforded by the *novus homo* from Picenum, C. Poppaeus Sabinus (cos. AD 9). During 25 years this man had charge of Moesia, for most of the time with the provinces of Macedonia and Achaia as well."[\[358\]](#) This could possibly be Josephus' Sabinus of Varus war fame, but we notice that he was pretty busy elsewhere for most of his career. Yet, he could have been the legate to Varus before he was made consul in 9 AD.

We know who Cyrenius is: Publius Sulpicius Quirinius.

P. Sulpicius Quirinius (cos. 12 BC) passed through a long career of faithful service to Augustus and to the State. Among his achievements (perhaps before his consulate) was a campaign against the Marmaridae, a tribe of the African desert dwelling to the south of Cyrene. At some time in the twelve years after his consulate Quirinius governed Galatia and subdued the Homonadenses (Tac. *Ann.* 3.48; Strabo, p. 569, 9–8 or 4–3 BC). In AD 2, after the disgrace and death of Lollius, Quirinius took his place with C. Caesar. Three or four years later he was appointed legate of Syria, in which capacity he annexed Judaea after the deposition of Archelaus the ethnarch, introduced Roman rule by ordering a census and crushed the insurrection ... (AD 6).[\[359\]](#)

Here we notice that Syme obtains his dates, again, from the biblical dates that have been imposed on Josephus because of the wrong dating of the eclipse.

We don't find any "Marcus Ambivius" or anything similar. There are hundreds of coins minted in Judea that scholars have traditionally tied to the various prefects, including Coponius, Ambivius and Rufus. However, the only identifying marks on the coins are numbers indicating years in the Roman calendar; the images are neutral images like palm trees or wheat, and the only names present (if at all) are the emperor's. In other words, there is actually nothing on the coins to indicate the prefect or procurator's name. It is simply assumed, *based on the biblically imposed timeline of Antiquities* and its little collection of names that cannot otherwise be attested, that the coin(s) were struck under this or that procurator. In fact, scholars are catching on that the picture is not so simple:

The issue of the absolute dates of the governorships of those representing Roman rule in Judea at this time is the subject of continuing debate. Because there is in fact little agreement among historians about the chronology of many of these governorships, in 2007 the journal *Israel Numismatic Research* took the editorial position whereby governors' names are no longer employed in describing these coins.[\[360\]](#)

No Annius Rufus either. There is an L. Tarius Rufus (cos. suff. 16 BC), who was another *novus homo*, but he is obviously too old to show up in Judaea at the time indicated.

Can we find Valerius Gratus in Tacitus? No, though we do find a number of other Valeriuses. (It is unlikely, with that name, that this alleged prefect of Judea would have been an equestrian and therefore unlikely to be a prefect, which was an equestrian position.) Nevertheless, the first Valerius that would have been eligible in the time period in question (i.e. 15–26 AD, according to the *Antiquities* chronology) would have been Marcus Valerius Messalla Messalinus, who was consul in 3 BC. We learn about him that, at the death of Augustus, during a debate in the senate afterward, "*Messala Valerius added that the oath in Tiberius' name should be renewed annually...*"[\[361\]](#) This Valerius was the son of the famous orator M. Valerius Messalla Corvinus. He (the son) shows up again – surprise, surprise – **around the death of Germanicus!** When Tiberius is dealing with the "vengeance" for the death of Germanicus, Tacitus writes: "*Valerius Messalinus proposed that a golden statue should be set up in the temple of Mars the Avenger...*"[\[362\]](#) Tiberius demurred. There isn't much else of interest. *There is no indication that he was ever in Syria/Judea.*

There is another M. Valerius, consul in 20 AD (five or 6 years too late) and, apparently, the son of Marcus Valerius Messalla Messalinus, consul in 3 BC. There is another possible: Marcus Valerius Messalla Volesus who was consul in 5 AD and had been proconsul of Asia in 11/12 AD. But, as noted, with his rank, he would never have been a prefect of Judea. Anyway, it looks like Valerius Gratus is a bust. We have to remember that many of these names that get tossed around about Judea by Josephus

are thought to have been there *only* because he said so.

Now on to Silanus, governor of Syria, whom Josephus mentions just before his introduction of Pilate. We already know that this is Q. Caecilius Metellus Creticus Silanus, who was consul in 7 AD, and governor of Syria from 13 to 17 AD. [\[363\]](#) Tacitus tells us that another Silanus, C. Junius Silanus (consul in 10 AD), was arraigned in 22 AD for extortion in the cities of Asia. [\[364\]](#) About this arraignment:

C. Silanus, the proconsul of Asia, arraigned by the allies for extortion, was seized simultaneously by Mamercus Scaurus, one of the consulars, Junius Otho, a praetor, and Brutteditius Niger an aedile, and they cast at him the charge that he had violated Augustus' divinity and spurned Tiberius' sovereignty ... The number of accusers was increased by Gellius Publicola and M. Paconius, the former the quaestor of Silanus, the latter his legate. There was held to be no doubt that he was liable on charges of savagery and of taking money ... Tiberius, in order that his intentions for Silanus might be received more justifiably with the help of an example, ordered the documents of Divine Augustus concerning Volesus Messala (likewise a proconsul of Asia) and the senate's decision passed against him to be read out. [\[365\]](#)

The above provides us with a clue that the earlier Marcus Valerius Messala Volesus, who was consul in 5 AD and had been proconsul of Asia in 11 or 12 AD, must have had charges brought against him as well. Anyway, they are all ganging up on Silanus, but Tiberius has a bit of mercy on him at the request of Silanus' sister, "Torquata, a Virgin of old-time sanctity." (According to A. J. Woodman, an inscription was found that attests to her having been a Vestal Virgin for 64 years.) The story is in *Annals* 3.66–70.

There was a C. Appius Junius Silanus who was consul in 28 AD and could possibly have been sent out in 29 or 30. Here's what Tacitus says about him:

With Junius Silanus and with Silius Nerva as consuls, a foul beginning to the year was made with the dragging to prison of the illustrious Roman equestrian Titius Sabinus **owing to his friendship with Germanicus.** [\[366\]](#)

Now, isn't it interesting that there is a *Sabinus* hanging out with Germanicus, too, recalling that there was an alleged Sabinus causing problems by going after Herod the Great's estate when Archelaus headed off for Rome? Apparently, Silanus' prosecution was delayed, and we find him again in 32 AD:

¼ Annius Pollio and Appius Silanus [\[367\]](#) along with Scaurus Mamercus and Sabinus Calvisius were arraigned for treason ... [\[368\]](#)

The name "Annius Pollio" catches the eye. Was that where Josephus got the idea for "Annius Rufus"? I'm just struck by the names "Rufus and Gratus" appearing in juxtaposition as governors after they appeared several other times in Josephus' text as army captains in the rebellion. I don't think Josephus made up additional procurators of Judea; I think a Christian editor did – one who saw the chronological problems of Pontius Pilate's term of office being way too early to fit the Jesus timeline. It seems that it was done by someone who didn't understand the Roman nomenclature or social/political ranking.

Coming back to Sabinus, who was connected to the death of Herod the Great as the agent of Augustus (allegedly) and later, one by that name (Titius Sabinus) as a friend of Germanicus, Tacitus writes of the year 24 AD:

With Cornelius Cethegus and Visellius Varro as consuls ... [Tiberius] was being hounded by Sejanus, who repeatedly censured the fact that the community was split as in a civil war: there were, he said, people calling themselves members of "Agrippina's faction" [widow of Germanicus] ... It was for this reason that *he attacked C. Silius and Titius Sabinus. Ruinous to each of them was their friendship with Germanicus*, but to Silius was also the fact that, as controller of a mighty army for seven years and, after winning the triumphal insignia in Germany, as victor in the Sacrovirian war, he was likely to fall with a heavier crash ... Silius' wife was Sosia Galla, resented by the *princeps on account of her affection for Agrippina*. The decision was made to seize them both, deferring Sabinus for a time ... [\[369\]](#)

In short, this is perhaps either the same alleged person who was the "agent of Augustus" in 1 BC, or his son. But if it was the son, it is odd that Tacitus does not mention the family connection, because he is usually very diligent about those things.

In other words, it looks like Josephus – or a redactor – again has used the name of one of Germanicus' friends/staff/entourage to take some position or other in his rewriting of the tale of the Sorrows of Judea. The bottom line is, however, we are having a hard time lining any of these real people and events up with the novelized version by Josephus. While some of the characters are attested in Tacitus (e.g., Creticus Silanus, governor of Syria), we can't find the alleged governors of Judea whom Josephus (or a redactor) adds into his *Antiquities*: Marcus Ambivius/Ambivulus, Annius Rufus, or Valerius Gratus; it seems that they never existed except in the imagination and only for the purpose of being placeholders. We notice how in *Wars*, Josephus goes from the end of the ethnarchy of Archelaus to the death of Augustus and the sending of Pilate to the end of Tiberius' reign in just a few paragraphs. One gets the distinct impression that something is missing, that something has been removed. And even if we determine that Pilate was there from the death of Augustus to the death of Germanicus, we are still in the dark about what was happening during those years of the leap to 36 AD that are unaccounted for by Josephus or anyone else. That's one of the perils of history: there are some things we will just never know.

Paul

Robbers, Pirates, Brigands and Tyrants

Let's have a short recapitulation before we move on to our next important study. We have established with a high degree of probability that the Testimonium is given in a 19 AD context all the way around. It appears that Pilate came in 14 or 15 and was "sent down" in 19 possibly because of the "maltreatment of the allies" encouraged by Cn. Piso, the alleged murderer of Germanicus. We have also examined the possibility that someone of some importance to the Jews was executed under Pontius Pilate, and that this was described in a text that occupied the place of the TF. Also, that this execution happened in 19 AD. Since we are missing an account of the death of Judas the Galilean, I think that Unterbrink is correct: it belongs there. I have speculated that it takes the form of the account of the Golden Eagle Temple cleansing found at the time of the death of Herod the Great. Did Josephus put it there himself, or did a redactor? I think a redactor did. As we have learned from bits and pieces reported by early Christian writers, the Josephan text they had was significantly different from the one we have now. It seems that the main differences involve those three areas of the text marked by the number thirty-seven, as I have discussed above.

[NOTE: Last few sentences above: delete, otherwise, has to be more firmly established, i.e., list the attestations in church fathers that each of these sections was tampered with. The one about James/JtB is weak, because Origen was probably quoting Hegesippus, not Josephus. The only one that sticks in my memory is the reference to the 49 AD explosion, but that isn't even one of the three areas regarding 37, so I think most readers would need a very short refresher here backing up the claim.]

Josephus refers to the messianists as robbers, pirates, brigands, tyrants, etc., leading people to rebel against Rome and get themselves killed and Jerusalem destroyed. Yet, Josephus has a lot to hide. According to his autobiography, he tried joining the Essenes/Zelots/Zadokites himself when he was young and hung out with a John the Baptist type whose name, Bannus, is reflected in the story of John the Baptist. When the Romans demonstrated that they were going to win the war (or perhaps before), Josephus completely turned and became convinced *that the Jewish god was on the side of the Romans* because the Jews had been so wicked in rebelling. Further, he was convinced, that the Roman emperor was the messiah who was to come out of Judea and rule the world. Or he could have just claimed these things because it was convenient to do so.

Josephus tries to make a clear distinction between the Essenes and the “Fourth Philosophy” of Judas the Galilean, whom he blames most heartily for the revolt (in which he, himself, willingly participated) and the ultimate destruction of Jerusalem and possibly a million Jews. But as noted numerous times, Josephus was blowing a lot of smoke over the whole affair, busily dissembling and covering his own backside while trying to clean up the image of the Jews as a whole and the Essenes and Pharisees in particular, not to forget his Flavian masters. It would be not an unreasonable assumption that Josephus was very familiar with the Essenes and their ideas, and our knowledge of this group has been greatly enhanced by the discovery of the hidden texts at Qumran. When one reads these texts, *it seems that the community at Qumran was rather close in ideology to Josephus’ Judas the Galilean and his Fourth Philosophy.*

So, while he is trying to keep the Essenes clean, he is separating out the revolutionary messianism and apocalypticism and assigning it to a Fourth Philosophy, which I think he just made up as a category to hold the violent elements of the sect. If you read some of the Dead Sea Scrolls, you can feel the incandescent hatred of the brotherhood for the Romans and all they represented. For example, here are some excerpts from the “War of Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness” scroll:

On the day when the Kittim [i.e. Romans] fall there shall be a battle and a tremendous slaughter before the God of Israel, for He has appointed a day for Himself from of old for a war of annihilation against the Sons of Darkness. ¼ On the trumpets of the slain they shall inscribe, “The Hand of God’s Might in Battle to Strike All Treacherous Men Dead.” On the trumpets of ambush they shall inscribe, “The Mysteries of God to Destroy Wickedness.” On the trumpets of pursuit they shall inscribe, “God’s Smiting of All the Sons of Darkness.” (His anger will not return until they are completely destroyed.) ¼

On the blade of the javelins they shall inscribe, “The Lightning Flash of a Spear for the Power of God.” Upon the weapons of the second group they shall inscribe, “Bloody Missiles to Bring down Those Slain by God’s Anger.” Upon the javelins of the third group they shall inscribe, “A Sword Flash Devouring the Wicked Who Are Slain by God’s Judgment.” ¼ they shall defile their hands with the corpses of the Kittim in striking them down ¼ All of these [shock troops] will take up the pursuit [of the fleeing enemy] in order to exterminate the enemy in the battle of God in an eternal annihilation. ¼ When the slain are falling, the priests shall keep sounding the trumpets from a distance, but they shall not come among the corpses so as to pollute themselves with their unclean blood, for they are holy men, and shall not defile the oil of their anointing as priests with the blood of a worthless nation. [\[370\]](#)

Further, one finds that the sect referred to its members as “saints” and “the elect” and its totality as the true “church of god” and “The Way”, all terms that show up in early so-called Christian literature, even Paul’s writings. *That leads to the ineluctable conclusion that the so-called early Jerusalem church was nothing more than the support/recruiting arm of an Essene/Zadokite/Zealot/Sicarii group fomenting rebellion against Rome; and that leads to the idea that what they were doing in their so-called evangelizing was gathering recruits, supporters, and funds to conduct their war, and using messianic hopes to promote it, to gather support, and to maintain the spirits and loyalty of the revolutionaries. Based on the historical evidence, that is the sum and substance of the early so-called Jerusalem church. It was certainly messianic and cultic, but not at all in the way the later Christian myth-makers and apologists imagined. That means that Paul was undoubtedly familiar with the Essenes as well, at least in terms of the chapters scattered around the empire to which Josephus and Pliny give witness. When Paul went to Jerusalem, he probably met the leaders of the coming rebellion: the three “pillars”, James, Cephas/Simon/Peter, John/Jude(?).* [\[371\]](#)

However, the church as understood by the later myth-makers also has a foundation in historical elements. It seems that Paul had very different ideas about what a messiah should be. It is in the context described above that we can gain an understanding of the conflict between Paul and the “Jerusalem James Gang”. The Three Pillars were intent on creating a war and Paul was intent on preventing one. They preached two completely different messiahs, as is clear from Paul’s writings. So how did they get combined?

In the Fifteenth Year?

In order to deal with the question of how a revered uber-Jewish rebel and teacher of the law was amalgamated with the

Pauline figure who was sacrificed to save all of humanity, we need to consider a few other things. First, we should notice that the Lukan gospel has the following:

In the **fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar – when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea**, Herod tetrarch of Galilee [Antipas], his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene ^¼[\[372\]](#)

Many scholars believe the original beginning of Luke's gospel was 3:1 and that the longer intro was added later. In fact, the early heretic Marcion created the first "New Testament", including a shorter version of the gospel of Luke, and 10 of Paul's letters – the same 10 identified as authentic by Douglas Campbell. His version of the gospel was arguably more original than the version that has come down to us in the "official" New Testament.[\[373\]](#) Marcion's version simply began with the words, "In the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar, when Pilate was governing Judea ^¼"

We have in this statement the original combining of the two tales: two completely different times attached to two completely different events combined into one. Based on all the clues I have gathered together here, it seems rather certain that Pontius Pilate was never in Judea in the "fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius". The 15th year of Tiberius would be 29/30 AD, the time traditionally assigned to the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. According to what I am proposing here, that would be 10/11 years after the death of Judas the Galilean. It seems to me that the fifteenth year marks the beginning of Paul's mission, *his* messianic vision of a very different Christ from the one executed in 19 AD by Pontius Pilate

Perhaps after the legend that Jesus had started his ministry in 29 AD had become established, it was noticed that the time was all wrong, so additional years and prefects/procurators were added. Tacitus' remark that Christians are disreputable people who worship someone who was executed under Pilate was simply based on a report about what the Christians of the time were saying themselves. They were messianists who were members of Essene-like ecclesia who knew about the earlier respected teacher of the law, Judas the Galilean, executed in 19 AD under Pontius Pilate.

Regarding this issue of the conflict between the fifteenth year of Tiberius and what we have learned about Pilate – that he was not there then – we find in Ellegård an explanation even if he does not fully realize what he is explaining:

... the Jesus of the Gospels is essentially a myth. The Gospels are largely fiction. They were created around the turn of the first and second century in order to give concreteness and substance to the Jesus who, as the Messiah, had appeared to Paul and his fellow apostles in ecstatic visions. ...

As for the time of Jesus' death the point of departure was one fairly definite date: *the time when Paul and his fellow apostles had received their visions*. They had seen Jesus sitting in the heavens around the year 30. It was therefore a most natural hypothesis that Jesus had been crucified and resurrected shortly before that time. Now, around the year 100, more than half a century and a disruptive internal war later, nobody could or would invalidate that very plausible hypothesis. Accordingly, those who tried to reconstruct a life of Jesus at this time could safely place the Crucifixion at the time of the notorious Roman governor Pontius Pilate.

...[\[374\]](#)

I will agree that the point of departure for the mythical Jesus was the time when Paul had his vision and began his apostolic work, but I will also argue that the messiah Paul preached was very different from the messiah of the Jerusalem ecclesia. The latter actually did have a connection to Pilate, though Pilate was in Judea much earlier and assigning his presence there to the time of the beginning of Paul's mission was the big mistake made by the early gospel writers. Ellegård goes on to say:

Briefly, it is assumed that memories of the historical Jesus, crucified under Pilate, gave rise to oral traditions among his followers, and that these traditions were eventually written down and finally incorporated in the Gospels towards the end of the first century CE. Now if the assumption of a historical Jesus crucified under Pilate is removed, this construction is left without a foundation. Such a complete reversal of the received view would amount to a paradigm shift in New Testament studies.[\[375\]](#)

Ellegård is partly right and partly wrong. There probably was a Jewish messiah-type executed by Pilate in 19 AD. And for ten or eleven years he appeared to his followers in ecstatic visions. The messianic return of Judas the Galilean, of Simon of Peraea, of any number of other messianic types who were coming with god and his angels to destroy the Romans was what the Jerusalem ecclesia – and probably other Essene-type groups of the Diaspora – were all about. Paul came along and, in the fifteenth year of Tiberius, had a vision of a very different messiah.

I am going to propose and argue something of a Jesus-myth hybrid; that there was a real person – or several – who were assimilated to the Jesus story, and that Pontius Pilate did execute one of them – possibly the most important figure to the anti-Roman Jews of that time, but that this character had nothing whatsoever to do with the Christ Crucified of Paul. The messiah of the Jerusalem ecclesia was a completely different type of messiah than the one Paul taught, and in the end, the two were combined in an uneasy amalgamation – a chimera that has left theologians scratching their heads for millennia.

Paul's epistles are almost unanimously agreed by scholars to be the earliest Christian documents, yet Paul shows complete ignorance of the events of the gospels. Indeed, the gospels give strong indications to have been composed using Paul's ideas and words as their foundation and framework. [\[376\]](#)

Based on a careful reading of Paul's texts we learn that there was, apparently, a messianic cult in Judea with headquarters in Jerusalem, with which Paul had a very problematical relationship. Actually, it is assuming to even say that: we don't know what the Jerusalem ecclesia with which Paul had connections was about, though Josephus gives us some idea when he describes the character Judas the Galilean and his Fourth Philosophy and rebel associates. By making the logical connections with the group that left behind what are now known as the Dead Sea Scrolls, we have a more complete picture of these zealots, militant Essenes, Zadokites, sicarii, and so on. We also get the strong impression that Josephus was one of them for a time, or at least wanted in their club. Perhaps they rejected him?

[NOTE: Below is doubtful. Were all the Dead Sea Scroll texts referring to the liar composed and written in the few years before 68, when Qumran was destroyed? Josephus went to Rome in 63, started his stuff in Galilee in 65, was arrested in 67 and wasn't freed until 69. Doesn't seem plausible to me.]

One even wonders if Josephus could be "The Liar" of the Dead Sea Scrolls. He certainly fits the bill better than Paul, who was always far away and had very little, if anything, to do with the Jerusalem activities (though the author of Acts does his damndest to locate Paul there as often as possible). For more than a decade, Paul wasn't even on the James Gang's radar, and he only visited Jerusalem twice. Could he really have been such a thorn in their side? They were probably happy enough with him bringing Gentiles into the fold to get some name brand recognition in the far reaches of the empire, which they thought was helping them to get some new recruits to "make Aliyah" and fight for the cause. But that wasn't what Paul was doing and when the Jerusalem gang found out, things got a bit ugly for Paul.

Paul was off in his own world, for the most part, busily creating his own cult with elements borrowed from many sources. From his fevered Old Testament exegeses, he developed a cult figure who was an atoning sacrifice. From the Hellenistic mystery religions, he developed a divine savior in whom followers can become mystically incorporated, by participating in his death and rebirth. There was, of course, more to it than that, but we'll get there. We have a few things to cover first.

Paul and Josephus

We now have a general idea that there were several Jewish messiah figures who were exactly that – *Jewish* Messiah types, of Jews, for Jews, and by Jews and expected to wipe out the Romans: the Qumran "Teacher of Righteousness", the founder of the sect; Simon of Peraea, the "king of the Jews" slain by Gratus and commemorated on the Jeselsohn Stone; and Judas the Galilean, who appears to have been the most important and influential, because Josephus devotes an extraordinary amount

of text to him and members of his family throughout *Wars* and *Antiquities*. Maccoby^[377] and Hilsenrath^[378] both highlight the fact that elements of these figures made their way into both the gospels and Acts, which tells us that the authors of these texts certainly were aware of what they were doing. Maccoby and Hilsenrath are convinced that the Jewish Messiah was all there was and Paul just perverted it, so they go on to cast Paul in the role of betrayer and mythmaker. As we will soon see, there was much more to it than that.

As those early authors searched Jewish texts – including Josephus – for clues to create their Jesus of Nazareth, they found a number of characters whose actions were incorporated into the tale, including several with the name “Jesus”, the saddest being Jesus, the son of Ananus, whom Josephus identifies as a plebeian and a husbandman and who

... began on a sudden to cry aloud, "A voice from the east, a voice from the west, a voice from the four winds, a voice against Jerusalem and the holy house, a voice against the bridegrooms and the brides, and a voice against this whole people!" This was his cry, as he went about by day and by night, in all the lanes of the city. However, certain of the most eminent among the populace had great indignation at this dire cry of his, and took up the man, and gave him a great number of severe stripes; yet did not he either say anything for himself, or anything peculiar to those that chastised him, but still went on with the same words which he cried before. Hereupon our rulers, supposing, as the case proved to be, that this was a sort of divine fury in the man, brought him to the Roman procurator, where he was whipped till his bones were laid bare; yet he did not make any supplication for himself, nor shed any tears, but turning his voice to the most lamentable tone possible, at every stroke of the whip his answer was, "Woe, woe to Jerusalem!" And when Albinus (for he was then our procurator) asked him, Who he was? and whence he came? and why he uttered such words? he made no manner of reply to what he said, but still did not leave off his melancholy ditty, till Albinus took him to be a madman, and dismissed him.^[379]

It's odd that Josephus appears to restrict his mention of individuals with the name “Jesus” in his *Antiquities* while there are several of them in *Wars*. One suspects that the above individual was neither a plebeian nor the son of Ananus, a husbandman. A close comparison of the various Jesuses in *Antiquities* and *Wars* might produce interesting results.

[NOTE: Expand on the above or delete. What suggests he wasn't any of those things? What was he?]

In any event, with a comprehensive knowledge of the texts of Josephus, it becomes glaringly obvious that the gospel writers had certain knowledge of Judas the Galilean as a messiah figure, and were deliberately and consciously writing their texts with his historical reality in mind, but heavily overlaying it with the Pauline Christ, who was an altogether different figure. It constitutes deliberate fraud and I don't think this realization can be avoided when all the pieces and context of the times are considered. The gospels were rhetorical works consciously designed to be religious propaganda.^[380] What those writers did to both Judas the Galilean and to Paul's Son of God borders on criminal.

Does Josephus have anything to say about Paul? It doesn't look like it, but there *are* some interesting elements that were probably utilized by the author of Acts in his efforts to infuse his composition with verisimilitude. They involve a fellow named Costobarus and his brother Saul.

According to Josephus, in c. 37 BC, Marc Antony appointed Herod the Great as Tetrarch of Judaea; and Herod appointed Costobarus as Governor of Idumaea and Gaza.^[381] Soon afterwards, c. 34 BC, Herod gave his sister Salome in marriage to Costobarus. Not long after, Costobarus got on the wrong side of Herod. Supposedly, Salome issued a writ of divorce (which a woman was not permitted to do under Jewish law), c. 27–25 BC. Salome then informed Herod that *Costobarus was getting ready to flee the country in the company of Herod's own brother Pheroras*, who was out of favor because of his romantic attachment to a slave. Even worse, Costobarus had been hiding some of Herod's enemies for years. These were the “Sons of Baba”, a politically powerful family that led the resistance against Herod at the time of the siege of Jerusalem in 37 BC. Costobarus and the Sons of Baba were, apparently, arrested and executed by Herod c. 25 BC, and that should be the end of that. However, Josephus also tells us that Salome and Costobarus had a son.^[382] In another place, Josephus tries to sort out

the family of Herod, where we learn that Salome had a son named Antipater and a daughter named Bernice, the latter being specifically referred to as a child of Costobarus. Apparently, Herod took his niece, Bernice, as a wife and they had a son. Skip some of the confusion and we come to this passage:

¼ but Herodias, their sister, was married to Herod [Philip], the son of Herod the Great, who was born of Mariamne, the daughter of Simon the high priest, who had a daughter, Salome; after whose birth Herodias took upon her to confound the laws of our country, and divorced herself from her husband while he was alive, and was married to Herod [Antipas], her husband's brother by the father's side ... But these descendants of Alexander, soon after their birth, deserted the Jewish religion, and went over to that of the Greeks. [\[383\]](#)

Now let's look at a short passage from *Wars* that is discussing the early days of the Jewish insurrection. Here, a Costobar, Saul and Antipas called on Agrippa II to send help to fight the rebels. What followed was the Battle of Beth-horon (25 November 66 AD) in which the Jews defeated the Roman general Cestius:

After this calamity had befallen Cestius, many of the most eminent of the Jews swam away from the city, as from a ship when it was going to sink; Costobarus, therefore, and Saul, who were brethren, together with Philip, the son of Jacimus, who was the commander of king Agrippa's forces, ran away from the city, and went to Cestius. ... Cestius sent Saul and his friends, at their own desire, to Achaia, to Nero, to inform him of the great distress they were in, and to lay the blame of their kindling the war upon Florus, as hoping to alleviate his own danger, by provoking his indignation against Florus. [\[384\]](#)

Notice that we have a doublet of sorts: two Herodian women (Salome and Herodias) divorcing their husbands. In the first case, Salome's husband, Costobarus, is planning to *flee* with the *brother* of Herod the Great. In the second instance, another Costobarus is going to *flee* with his *brother* and a friend. And notice the eminent men deserting the Jewish religion. The second divorcing woman, Herodias, is supposedly the woman who was so sharply criticized by John the Baptist, leading to his execution.

Florus was the Roman procurator of Judea from 64 to 66 AD, so it is pretty obvious that this Saul can have nothing to do with the apostle Paul who, by the way, is only referred to as "Saul" in Acts; Paul never indicates or suggests that his real name was Saul. In view of Paul's own statements about his activities and whereabouts at various points, the further parts of the above passage are interesting:

In the meantime, the people of Damascus, when they were informed of the destruction of the Romans, set about the slaughter of those Jews that were among them; and as they had them already cooped up together in the place of public exercises, which they had done out of the suspicion they had of them, they thought they should meet with no difficulty in the attempt; **yet did they distrust their own wives, which were almost all of them addicted to the Jewish religion**; on which account it was that their greatest concern was, how they might conceal these things from them; **so they came upon the Jews, and cut their throats, as being in a narrow place, in number ten thousand, and all of them unarmed**, and this in one hour's time, without anybody to disturb them. [\[385\]](#)

It's suggestive that Paul's own mild statements that he persecuted the "church" were turned into a rather violent sort of activity by the author of Acts, who drew on Josephus. And several researchers, including Robert Eisenman, have read into the story about Costobarus and Saul that this was the apostle Paul, and that he was a Herodian; never mind the extremely late date and implausibility, and forget the fact that none of this is represented in the epistles. This Saul is too late to be our Paul, though it might indicate something of the reason why Paul was persecuted in Damascus: the wives of the Damascenes were quite taken with the Jewish religion and perhaps Paul's teachings didn't go over so well (either with the women themselves, or their husbands!)?

Which brings up the idea of Paul's persecution of a group he later "converted" to. Of what could this "persecution" have consisted? I think we have the answer in Paul's own story of being hunted by the ethnarch of Aretas. The group that Paul had apparently converted to was a group known to be fomenting rebellion against Rome. Paul was busy establishing his bona fides

among them and that is what led to his being chased out of Damascus. The ethnarch of Aretas was having none of that revolutionary stuff going on in his city!

There is a further passage in *Wars* that may have given ideas and shape to the author of Acts in his novelization of the reconciliation of the Pauline and Petrine ideas and activities.^[386] It refers to an individual named Simon, a son of one Saul. I would suggest that this name and the activity of the individual is what attracted the attention of the author of Acts – he thought he might make use of the dynamic in his portrayal of Paul in his former life as an antagonist toward the Jerusalem James Gang.^[387] This Simon ben *Saul* was a “man of reputation among the Jews”, who, for some reason or another, was *at war with his own people* (Jews):

It will deserve our relation what befell **Simon; he was the son of one Saul, a man of reputation among the Jews.** This man was distinguished from the rest by the strength of his body, and the **boldness of his conduct**, although he abused them both to the mischieving of his countrymen; for **he came every day and slew a great many of the Jews of Scythopolis, and he frequently put them to flight**, and became himself alone the cause of his army's conquering. But a just punishment overtook him for the murders he had committed upon those of the same nation with him; for when the people of Scythopolis threw their darts at them in the grove, he drew his sword, but did not attack any of the enemy; for he saw that he could do nothing against such a multitude; but he cried out after a very moving manner, and said, "O you people of Scythopolis, **I deservedly suffer for what I have done with relation to you, when I gave you such security of my fidelity to you, by slaying so many of those that were related to me.** Wherefore we very justly experience the perfidiousness of foreigners, while we **acted after a most wicked manner against our own nation.** I will therefore die, polluted wretch as I am, by mine own hands; for it is not fit I should die by the hand of our enemies; and let the same action be to me both a punishment for my great crimes, and a testimony of my courage to my commendation, that so no one of our enemies may have it to brag of, that he it was that slew me, and no one may insult upon me as I fall." Now when he had said this, he looked round about him upon his family with eyes of commiseration and of rage [that family consisted of a wife and children, and his aged parents]; so, in the first place, he caught his father by his grey hairs, and ran his sword through him, and after him he did the same to his mother, who willingly received it; and after them he did the like to his wife and children, every one almost offering themselves to his sword, as desirous to prevent being slain by their enemies; so when he had gone over all his family, he stood upon their bodies to be seen by all, and stretching out his right hand, that his action might be observed by all, he sheathed his entire sword into his own bowels. This young man was to be pitied, on account of the strength of his body and the courage of his soul; but since he had assured foreigners of his fidelity [against his own countrymen], he suffered deservedly.^[388]

It cannot refer in any way to the apostle Paul, even assuming he was formerly called Saul, because it is too late. But elements of it surely could have been used for novelistic inspiration about Paul and retrojected into the past.

Paul's Mission

This brings us to the problem of Paul and his Son of God Messiah. Paul obviously knew the messiah of the Jerusalem ecclesia, but just as obviously, he wasn't much impressed by them or their messiah. He tells the Corinthians that they appear to be easily taken in by “a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached” and in the next breath, he refers to those “super-apostles” whom he then goes on to excoriate as “false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, *for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.* It is not surprising, then, if *his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness.* Their end will be what their actions deserve.” It becomes even more evident who he is talking about: “Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham's descendants? So am I.”^[389]

No, Paul's Son of God was not Judas the Galilean or any other Jewish figure, despite the fact that later redactors have tried to make it appear that they were one and the same.

In Galatians he announces clearly, “Paul, an apostle – sent not from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father”, and then accuses his readers, “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the

grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God’s curse!” He continues, “I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that *the gospel I preached is not of human origin*. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.” Further on, when talking about his second trip to Jerusalem, he mentions the leaders of the Jerusalem ecclesia specifically, making the side comment: “As for those who were held in high esteem – whatever they were makes no difference to me; God does not show favoritism – *they added nothing to my message*.” His opponents finally come into focus: “When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group.”^[390] I don’t think it’s unreasonable to suggest that these statements, along with Paul’s repeated focus on crucifixion, indicate that the pillars’ gospel did *not* include any focus on crucifixion. If it *did*, their interpretation of it couldn’t have had much in common with Paul’s, because he repeatedly contrasts the two, and highlights their differences.

Based on the way this group spied on Paul, hounded him, interfered with his work and his groups, and the way he responded to them, it is obvious that *Paul was not preaching the same Christ* and the Jerusalem group was becoming more and more hostile about it. It seems fairly clear from what we know so far, that Paul could not have been ignorant of Judas the Galilean and his Fourth Philosophy, or that he – and possibly other dead rebel leaders – was most likely the messianic figure preached by the Jerusalem ecclesia. But *this is obviously not the messiah who inspired Paul*. The real character on whom the Jewish Jesus was loosely modeled was of absolutely no interest to Paul. That, in and of itself, is an astonishing thing. But that realization leaves us free to try to discover exactly what it was that drove Paul, because it is clear he wasn’t myth-making or running a con job; he was utterly devoted to his mission, body and soul. And since Paul is, ultimately, the author of the main Christian theology and Christology, we should very much want to discover what he was thinking.

We have already discussed Wells’ take on Paul’s theology in our discussion of the early documents of Christianity. As he points out, the highly developed angelology of Jewish literature of the time clearly influenced Paul, who not only believed in the angels but also the multi-layered universe. This was part of the intellectual environment of the Middle Platonists, who apparently influenced the development of gnosticism.^[391] Paul was apparently engaged in a battle against these obviously terrifying forces, and his vision was one where a single being could stand against this series of worlds lower than God himself, and act as the defender and redeemer of humanity.

From Phil. ii, 5–11 we learn that Jesus is a divine figure who came down into the material world to suffer an ignominious death. Then he reascended and received a mystic name as powerful as the name of God. Couchoud regards this story of the descent and re-ascension of the divine being as the key to Paul’s conception of Jesus and he remarks that we are fortunate enough to possess an ancient Jewish apocalypse which gives the story in greater detail, and so fills out the picture which is merely sketched by Paul.^[392] He is referring to the so-called *Ascension of Isaiah* ¼^[393]

As Wells notes, Paul seems to have had a revelation similar to that of the author of the *Ascension of Isaiah* (see the section, “Daniel, Enoch, and the Ascension of Isaiah”). Keep in mind the following, quoted by Wells from Paul’s Col. 2:15: Jesus “made a spectacle of the cosmic powers and authorities, and led them as captives *in his triumphal procession*”. It is a clue.

It is in the book of Isaiah that we find what was driving Paul. As many scholars have noted, messiah simply means anointed and could apply to priests, kings, and prophets. Interestingly, in Isaiah we find the only non-Jew in the OT who was identified as the messiah, or anointed one of Yahweh. Isaiah tells us that Yahweh spoke “to his messiah, to Cyrus, whom I [Yahweh] took by his right hand to subdue nations before him” (Isa. 45:1, “Second Isaiah”). It seems clear that, to the author of this text, “Yahweh’s anointed” is something more than a title; it is *a theological construct expressing that this individual is appointed and protected by God, the God of the Jews, for a special role in relation to them*.^[394] Josephus appears to have understood

the term in a similar way, because he was easily able to switch sides and announce that Vespasian was the messiah. Perhaps Paul did something similar?

Paul describes his call to be an apostle in Gal. 1:15–7, where he says:

But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with any human being, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles before me, but I went away at once into Arabia, and afterward I returned to Damascus.

Rainer Riesner points out the clear relationship between the formulation of this passage and Isaiah 49:1: “*Listen to me, you islands; hear this, you distant nations: Before I was born the Lord called me; from my mother’s womb he has spoken my name.*” [395] Riesner also highlights the numerous places where Paul identifies with the Deutero-Isaianic Servant of God and appears to have planned his mission based on this text. He notes:

... the most unequivocal statements of hope concerning the Gentile world appear in the second part of the book of Isaiah (Isa. 45:20–2; 51:4f.; 56:1–8) specifically in connection with the figure of the Servant of God (Isa. 42:1, 3f, 6; 49:1, 6, 22). The promise in Isa. 9:1 belongs to a particular geographic context that was not a matter of indifference to part of Jewish and Christian expectation: “In the former time he [God] brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the coming time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined.” (Isa. 8:23–9) [396]

In Josephus, we learn that the territory of Naphtali extended to Damascus (*Ant.* 5.1.22 [86]), and texts from Qumran reveal a sharp interest in this region (1Qap-Gen 21:28–22:10). Essene groups settled in Damascus apparently because they thought that the messianic age would begin there. Based on the evidence adduced by Riesner, it seems clear that the Essenic type of messianic thinking affected Paul. He came to understand his own revelation as the beginning of the ingathering of the Gentiles.

The theological frame of the Damascus revelation in 2 Cor. 4:6 appears to exhibit similarities in language to the Essene-like *Testament of Levi*, which tells us: “And his star shall arise in heaven as of a king, lighting up the light of knowledge as the sun the day; and he shall be magnified in the world. He shall shine forth as the sun on the earth, and shall remove all darkness from under heaven (18:3) ... And in his priesthood the Gentiles shall be multiplied in knowledge upon the earth, and enlightened through the grace of the Lord” (18:9). Parallels can be drawn to the fictional transfiguration of Jesus, said to have occurred in the area around Mount Hermon, and Gal. 1:15 cited above. In short, it looks like Paul saw himself as a sort of earthly messiah, an anointed prophet chosen before he was born, the Servant of God, whose task was to proclaim the revealed Son to the Gentiles and *begin the fulfillment of the prophecies of Isaiah*. Riesner also proposes that Paul’s itinerary was governed by Isaiah 66:18–21:

“And I, because of what they have planned and done, am about to come and gather the people of all nations and languages, and they will come and see my glory.

“I will set a sign among them, and I will send some of those who survive to the nations – to Tarshish, to the Libyans and Lydians (famous as archers), to Tubal and Greece, and to the distant islands that have not heard of my fame or seen my glory. They will proclaim my glory among the nations. And they will bring all your people, from all the nations, to my holy mountain in Jerusalem as an offering to the Lord – on horses, in chariots and wagons, and on mules and camels,” says the Lord. “They will bring them, as the Israelites bring their grain offerings, to the temple of the Lord in ceremonially clean vessels. And I will select some of them also to be priests and Levites,” says the Lord. [397]

It seems that Paul was convinced that he was living this plan for the Gentiles. Traces of Paul’s exegesis of Isaiah can be detected in Rom. 15:16–24, and the entire chapter is loaded with direct citations and allusions to the OT.

But his redemptive-historical identification as “the servant of circumcision on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs” (Rom. 15:8) demonstrates that without an origin rooted in the ancient Jewish people of God, neither is there any hope for the Gentiles (Rom. 15:8–13). Paul cites Isa. 11:10: “The root of Jesse shall come, the one who rises to rule the Gentiles; in him the Gentiles shall hope” (Rom. 15:12).

The reign of the Christ over the nations will begin when “by the word and deed” of Paul he “wins obedience from the Gentiles” (Rom. 15:18). Just as Christ became “a servant for circumcision” (Rom. 15:8) in order to put into effect for the Gentiles the promises to the patriarchs (Rom. 15:9), so also does Paul now understand himself “because of the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable” (Rom. 15:15f) ... In the eleventh chapter, the apostle gave the Roman congregation a glimpse into the mystery revealed to him, namely, that the entry of the “full number of the Gentiles” constitutes the condition for the eschatological deliverance of Israel (Rom. 11:25–27). In Isa. 66:19, proclamation of God’s glory among the “nations ... that have not heard of my fame” is the condition for the diaspora Jews being “brought as an offering ... to the holy mountain Jerusalem” (Isa. 66:20). From this perspective, it would not be surprising for Paul to consider it his commission first to win the “full number of the Gentiles” (Rom. 11:25) – a number predetermined by God – to a certain extent as an offering, by “fulfilling the gospel of Christ” (Rom. 15:19) through his geographically expansive proclamation. That was his task; he is silent here concerning the obligation of others to engage in a vigorous mission to the Jews. [\[398\]](#)

Looking closely at Isa. 66:19a, “I will set a sign among them, and I will send some of those who survive to the nations”, we notice two things: the “setting of a sign” – Christ on the Cross – and human agents being obliged to respond to this sign appropriately. And here is where we come up against a conundrum. Going strictly by the instructions in Isaiah, Paul should have evangelized Judaism in its purest form, but that’s not what he did. Judas the Galilean or any of the other Jewish-type messiahs meant nothing to Paul. To him, they were “another Christ” and “a different gospel” preached by “false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ.” For Paul, the Jewish law was no longer of any value because of Christ on the Cross. Wells thinks that this was because Paul had a vision of a *criminal* on a cross, revealed to him as the Son of God and so he had to change his mind about things and thus came to his ideas about the negating of the Jewish law. Wells’ take on it bears reviewing:

The argument he [Paul] gives to show that [the Law] is unnecessary is that a crucified Jesus contradicts the law of Deut. 21.23 that a man whose dead body is hanged upon a tree is accursed of God. Paul quotes this passage and comments: ‘Christ brought us freedom from the curse of the law by becoming for our sake an accursed thing’ (Gal. iii.13). The argument is: the law says that the man crucified is accursed. Jesus was crucified but could not be accursed. Therefore a case has occurred for which the law is not valid. But as it must be either valid absolutely or invalid absolutely, it is by this one case rendered wholly invalid. [\[399\]](#)

I think Wells was going in the right direction, though I don’t think that Paul had a vision of a criminal on a cross. As Wells notes, while it was possible for orthodox Jews to think of their Messiah as *suffering* to atone for the sins of the world, they certainly did not hold the idea that the Messiah might *die as a bloody, atoning sacrifice*. Paul got that part of his Christology elsewhere.

It is fairly easy to suggest that Paul adopted the idea of the dying and resurrecting gods of the pagans, but I don’t think it is quite that simple. Something profoundly moved Paul to think of a man on a cross as a sign: “I will set a sign among them”, not an “accursed” thing, but rather a symbol of triumph: “he ‘made a spectacle of the cosmic powers and authorities, and led them as captives *in his triumphal procession*.’” How did Paul get from 2+2=4 to 2+2=5?

Consider again that Paul’s guide, Deutero-Isaiah, referred to the king of Persia as the Lord’s anointed, a messiah. The entire passage reads:

“This is what the Lord says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armor, to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut: I will go before you and will level the mountains; I will break down gates of bronze and cut through bars of iron. I will give you hidden treasures, riches stored in secret places, so that you may

know that I am the Lord, the God of Israel, who summons you by name. For the sake of Jacob my servant, of Israel my chosen, I summon you by name and bestow on you a title of honor, though you do not acknowledge me. I am the Lord, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God. I will strengthen you, though you have not acknowledged me, so that from the rising of the sun to the place of its setting people may know there is none besides me. I am the Lord, and there is no other. ...

“Woe to those who quarrel with their Maker, those who are nothing but potsherds among the potsherds on the ground. Does the clay say to the potter, ‘What are you making?’ Does your work say, ‘The potter has no hands?’ Woe to the one who says to a father, ‘What have you begotten?’ or to a mother, ‘What have you brought to birth?’

“This is what the Lord says – the Holy One of Israel, and its Maker: Concerning things to come, do you question me about my children, or give me orders about the work of my hands? It is I who made the earth and created mankind on it. My own hands stretched out the heavens; I marshaled their starry hosts. I will raise up Cyrus in my righteousness: I will make all his ways straight. He will rebuild my city and set my exiles free, but not for a price or reward, says the Lord Almighty.” ^{1/4}

“Gather together and come; assemble, you fugitives from the nations. Ignorant are those who carry about idols of wood, who pray to gods that cannot save. Declare what is to be, present it – let them take counsel together. Who foretold this long ago, who declared it from the distant past? Was it not I, the Lord? And there is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none but me.

“Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other. By myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked: Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear. They will say of me, ‘In the Lord alone are deliverance and strength.’” All who have raged against him will come to him and be put to shame. [\[400\]](#)

Cyrus is called God's anointed; he was designed and qualified for his great service by God himself, and we see God condemning those who criticize the fact that he has chosen a non-Jew to do his work: “Does the clay say to the potter, ‘What are you making?’” We find this echoed in Romans 9:20–1:

But who are you, a human being, to talk back to God? “Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, ‘Why did you make me like this?’” Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use?

Isaiah makes it clear that the true God (from Isaiah’s and Paul’s perspective) was unknown to *Cyrus and yet God foreknew him*, called him by name, and that it was *for the sake of Israel* that he was raised up.

Why might Paul and groups of messianic Essenes around the Empire not have made a similar inference about another figure who made a similarly profound impression on the Jews of the preceding century? There was one Gentile leader, also an object of cultic devotion, who was known as a friend of the Jews, and after his bloody assassination, where his body was ripped to pieces by knives, his blood poured out like a sacrifice, Roman Jews stayed for days at the site of his funeral pyre, weeping over his death: Julius Caesar.

The cross element, if not the entire idea of a victorious crucifixion, combined with the announcement of divinity by a great star – a great comet – is so obviously a representation of the death, funeral and apotheosis of Julius Caesar that it is surprising that this is not more widely acknowledged. In order to claim this event for the Old Testament god, Paul finds it necessary to anchor it in OT prophecies. However, it is fully acknowledged by scholars that he gives no historical setting for this event, gives no biographical details of a "real man", and essentially goes to some extremes to actually avoid such. Wells even mentions the solution without realizing it:

The preternatural darkness for three hours (asserted by the gospels) and the earthquake (asserted by Matthew alone) are not mentioned by historians of the time. Gibbon notes [\[401\]](#) that this prodigy of darkness ‘happened during the lifetime of Seneca and the elder Pliny, who must have experienced the immediate effects or received the earliest intelligence of the prodigy’ which is said to involve ‘the whole earth, or at least a celebrated province of the Roman Empire’. ‘Each of these philosophers’, he continues, ‘in a laborious work, has recorded all the great phenomena of nature, earthquakes, meteors, comets, eclipses, which his indefatigable

curiosity could collect. Both the one and the other have omitted to mention the greatest phenomenon to which the mortal eye has been witness since the creation of the globe. A distinct chapter in Pliny is designated for eclipses of an extraordinary nature and unusual duration; but *he contents himself with describing the singular defect of light which followed the murder of Caesar, which 'had already been celebrated by most of the poets and historians of that memorable age'.* [\[402\]](#)

Julius Chrestus

One hundred years before the lifetime of Judas of Galilee, Gaius Julius Caesar was born in Italy – perhaps in Bovillae, the “place of the ox” – a man who was destined to be one of the most remarkable characters who ever lived. After twenty centuries, his name is as well known as it was in his own time. Most people would look aghast at the suggestion that Caesar and Jesus have a lot in common, but if we look carefully we will see that the similarities are profound.

It was while reading Stefan Weinstock's *Divus Julius* [\[403\]](#) that the conviction began to grow in my mind – unbidden I must add – that Julius Caesar was the ultimate model for the figure of Jesus Christ – the Christ of Paul, the Son of God, not the Jewish itinerant preacher or revolutionary. Like most other people, when I heard the name “Caesar”, I tended to think: “politician, conquering general and dictator”. Like most people, I was not aware of the incredibly broad range of interests and abilities that Caesar manifested, nor the roles he played in Rome, including Pontifex Maximus – the religious head of the Roman Republic. I was unaware that he was famous for his mercy, though I did know he had been “deified” after his death. This was a vague concept that seemed rather ignorant and barbaric to me. I knew he had written reports on his wars, but I didn't know he had written a book about grammar, love poetry, tragedies, travel reports, and more.

Obviously, the reason for my ignorance is the same as for nearly everyone else except specialists: Roman history is not taught in any detail in schools anymore, and most people learn their distorted history from comic books and docu-dramas. Also, as mentioned by Gelzer, the word “dictator” in our world tends to elicit a knee-jerk image of Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin. The very word “Caesarism” was coined for this sort of thing, which is a total misnomer and has nothing at all to do with the real Caesar. Now, after five years of intensive study of Caesar and the Roman Republic, I get quite irritated when anyone uses that word.

It's difficult to talk about the life of Caesar due to the massive misunderstandings about him that have grown up following the rediscovery of ancient Rome during the Renaissance. At first, when the writings of Cicero were brought to light, Caesar was seen through his eyes the same way John of Gischala was seen through the jealous, small-minded eyes of Josephus. Cicero, an authoritarian personality type suffering from serious Dunning-Kruger syndrome, portrayed Caesar as a brutal, power-mad, immoral dictator. It was only when the Italian scholar and poet Petrarch discovered the letters of Cicero in the 14th century that Cicero's *true nature* was revealed: he was arrogant, utterly self-serving, paranoid, and a complete hypocrite, none of whose opinions and value judgments could be trusted. But that hasn't stopped countless scholars and lovers of history from adopting his views. Once Cicero's letters, speeches and philosophical writings were published, they were able to influence gullible minds for centuries to come.

I think a person's heroes say something about their own character. There are people who respect and admire figures like John and Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Princess Diana and John Lennon. But there are also people who championed their deaths, and those who idolize people like J. Edgar Hoover, Allen Dulles, Dick Cheney, or Adolph Hitler. They seem somehow constitutionally unable to differentiate these people's characters. Not only that, they seem to identify with those who possess the lowest type of character.

Many figures are controversial, and that's where I think a close reading of the available materials about them, and the context in which they lived, is important. If you grew up in the Hoover household, hating Kennedy, that might color your views. But if after reading as much as you could about the man, what he accomplished, and what he was trying to do you still think it was a

great thing he was assassinated, that says something. I think the same goes for Caesar. And Cicero.

French historian Jerome Carcopino referred to Cicero as “the most odious creature who ever lived.” [\[404\]](#) He was right. Just read his letters. Unfortunately, Carcopino didn’t take that realization the next step and deduce that Cicero’s representations of Caesar were deeply prejudiced. Beginning with Cicero, nearly everything Caesar did has been interpreted and represented by historians according to their own psychological biases, ideological agendas, and inner character. The first historians of Rome were no Howard Zinns writing “people’s histories”; they were rich, upper-class supporters of the status quo. Later historians were little different – what Michael Parenti calls the “gentlemen historians”. These men, like Cicero, were oligarchs, and they shared the same mindset: anti-populist, pro-1%.

Consider those among Caesar’s contemporaries who saw him as a conniving conspirator: the “optimates”, an oligarchy of aristocratic families who dominated the Senate and monopolized state offices in order to profit from the city’s corruption and the ruthless exploitation of foreign conquests. A more rapacious bunch has seldom been seen on planet Earth (though the current crop are certainly running neck and neck with those of the late Roman Republic). They were the 1% of their time, and the fact that they despised Caesar speaks volumes. The most hypocritical of these declaimers of virtue were Cicero and Cato. (Tellingly, these two men continue to be the most idolized by the political and academic establishments.)

In fear that the optimates might lose total control, and thus riches and glory, they blocked the beneficial changes that were proposed by Caesar and previous champions of the people. They stifled anyone who advanced progressive programs or coopted them by violence. Although the state was collapsing under this pathological rulership, the optimates stubbornly resisted any fair resolution of the empire’s problems and claimed that it was they who stood for the Roman tradition – their heritage. These were the views shared by Caesar’s assassins. [\[405\]](#) They made high-profile claims for their Republican sentiments, but that merely meant preserving the club of oligarchs.

In many cases, I think the same thing applies today. Many who see Caesar’s actions simply as steps in a self-aggrandizing power-grab simply can’t understand such a man as Caesar was. Caesar was consistent from the beginning of his life, when he refused to divorce his wife upon the orders of Sulla, even though he had to go on the run for his life, right to the end, when he covered his face and resigned himself to death in the face of the mortal hatred of those he saved and loved. He showed remarkable intelligence, self-control, prudence, courage, creativity, self-discipline, and faithfulness.

Theodor Mommsen, Arthur Kahn, and Michael Parenti are among the historians who seem to really “get” Caesar, and see through the slander penned by that odious creature Cicero. [\[406\]](#) Mattias Gelzer [\[407\]](#) wrote what is still the gold standard account of Caesar’s life. In Gelzer’s view, Caesar was a heroic character who was determined from an early age to overthrow a corrupt aristocracy that fed on the lifeblood of the masses of ordinary people. He notes:

Much has been written about Caesar. The appearance of despotic rulers of quite a different stamp has not always been favourable to the judgment passed on him. A fresh study of the sources has, on the whole, convinced me of the correctness of my interpretation. [\[408\]](#)

Along this line, Mommsen wrote that Caesar’s “aim was the highest which a man is allowed to propose himself – the political, military, intellectual, and moral regeneration of his own deeply decayed nation”:

... The hard school of *thirty years' experience* changed his views as to the means by which this aim was to be reached; his aim itself remained the same in the times of his hopeless humiliation and of his unlimited plenitude of power, in the times when as demagogue and conspirator he stole towards it by paths of darkness, and in those when, as joint possessor of the supreme power and then as monarch, he worked at his task in the full light of day before the eyes of the world. ... According to his original plan he had purposed to reach his object ... without force of arms, and throughout eighteen years he had as leader of the people's party moved exclusively amid political plans and intrigues – until, reluctantly convinced of the necessity for a military support, he, when already forty years of age,

put himself at the head of an army. [\[409\]](#)

Later historians dispute Mommsen's views, but what they cannot deny is that Caesar's measures protected the ordinary people against the selfish policies of the nobles.

Caesar's way of feeling and acting toward his contemporaries – his being – was so remarkably different that his contemporaries could not comprehend it. His character was unique, not just because of his genius – he was certainly that – but also because, in a historical period that was driven by endless wars, vengeance, vendettas, maneuvers for power, glory and dominance, Julius Caesar was preeminently a man of forgiveness; he was famed for his clemency, his mercy. These qualities are what stand out again and again in Caesar's own writings, the *Gallic Wars* and the *Civil Wars*. He pardoned his enemies with the hope that they would make peace with him and each other. His books are a record of his experiments with mercy.

And what was the essence of Paul's Christ? Mercy and forgiveness.

Can we really say that this was something new and unheard of? Indeed, there were traces of such behavior through ancient times, but it was rare. The Romans did tend to pardon their enemies if they abased themselves sufficiently and promised to provide troops and tribute, but in general, when an enemy was defeated, it was usual to make an example of them by gratuitous death and cruelty. Instincts ruled, and they demanded immediate elimination of an enemy. The thinking was: if you pardon an enemy because he promises not to attack you again, to be your friend, he will secretly plot your undoing and you will have to fight him again. That's how people were brought up to think then; it was pretty much part of the cultural landscape, and it was the mindset of Cicero and his "friends".

Cicero wrote to his friend Atticus in December of 50 BC – one month before Caesar crossed the Rubicon and began the civil war – that Caesar "will not be more merciful than Cinna in the massacre of the nobility, nor less rapacious than Sulla in confiscating the property of the rich." [\[410\]](#) Two months later, the Italian city of Corfinium surrendered to Caesar, after a week under siege. Caesar let all the citizens and magistrates go free, and incorporated their troops into his own. One week later, in March 49 AD, Caesar wrote to his colleagues in Rome, Oppius and Balbus:

I am very glad that your letter expresses such strong approval of what happened at Corfinium. I shall be glad to follow your advice, and all the more so, that I had spontaneously resolved to display the greatest clemency and to do my best to reconcile Pompey. Let us try in this way if we can recover the affections of all parties, and enjoy a lasting victory; for others, owing to their cruelty, have been unable to avoid rousing hatred, or to maintain their victory for any length of time, with the one exception of Lucius Sulla, whom I have no intention of imitating. Let this be our new method of conquering – to fortify ourselves by mercy and generosity. As to how that may be secured, certain ideas suggest themselves to my mind, and many more may be hit upon. I beg you to take these matters into consideration. [\[411\]](#)

Cicero's prediction about Caesar's behavior was wrong; he was repeatedly wrong about him, both in predicting his actions and inferring his motivations. But Cicero had been conditioned by growing up amidst the horrors of the 90s and 80s, witnessing Sulla's proscriptions: endless extra-judicial killings and seizure of property. Such experiences only served to make Cicero like those he feared: inconstant, duplicitous and cruel. And that is why it is so extraordinary that Caesar – who grew up under the same conditions and worse, since he had to flee for his life when he was not yet 20 and live in hiding until his name was removed from the list of the proscribed – desired to make mercy a standard operating procedure. Historian Velleius Paterculus expressed what was probably a common Roman reaction at the time: "Caesar, victorious over all his enemies, returned to the city, and pardoned all who had borne arms against him, an act of generosity almost passing belief." [\[412\]](#)

Cicero reveals himself in a remark he once made on Caesar's mercy:

¼ grants made by Caesar himself as absolute master are again within his power to revoke. He has pardoned even Sallustius: he is said to refuse absolutely no one. This in itself suggests the suspicion that judicial investigation is held over for another time. [\[413\]](#)

Cicero could not imagine that Caesar was authentically merciful – he must have had an ulterior motive, planning retaliation for later on – probably because Cicero was guilty of the very things of which he accused Caesar. Cicero was a two-faced fraud, saying one thing in public, and another in private.

Even those who insulted Caesar viciously were treated with gentleness. Suetonius writes:

On the other hand he never formed such bitter enmities that he was not glad to lay them aside when opportunity offered. Although Gaius Memmius had made highly caustic speeches against him, to which he had replied with equal bitterness, he went so far as to support Memmius afterwards in his suit for the consulship.

When Gaius Calvus, after some scurrilous epigrams, took steps through his friends towards a reconciliation, Caesar wrote to him first and of his own free will.

Valerius Catullus, as Caesar himself did not hesitate to say, inflicted a lasting stain on his name by the verses about Mamurra; yet when he apologised, Caesar invited the poet to dinner that very same day. [\[414\]](#)

Caesar describes in his writings how his soldiers sometimes resisted or criticized him for his mercy; they thought he was foolish. Yes, he did have to fight many of those he pardoned a second time. Some he even had to fight a third time. And in the end, some of his pardoned enemies plotted his undoing and assassinated him, including Brutus and Cassius, whom Caesar had saved from death and showered with benefits.

Was he was wrong to be merciful? His successors did not practice his clemency. Anthony and Octavian proscribed and eliminated their enemies – and a few more besides, including Cicero, whom Caesar had forgiven again and again. Cicero wrote to Atticus after Caesar's death that clemency was his undoing: "if he had not shown it, nothing of the sort would have befallen him." [\[415\]](#) Caesar's mercy made its way into Paul's thought and thus into Christianity and changed the world though it certainly did not do away with evil types of varying pathologies. Still, I think our world is a better place for Caesar's sacrifice: "Greater love hath no man than that he should give up his life for his friends."

Cicero mentions that Caesar "even pardoned Sallustius". This must refer to Gaius Sallustius Crispus AKA Sallust, charged with oppression and extortion while governor of Africa. He retired from public life (perhaps on the advice of Caesar) and devoted himself to his gardens and historical research. [\[416\]](#) According to one source, he later married Cicero's ex-wife, who divorced the latter probably because she – and the rest of his family – supported Caesar. Cicero, in contrast, stubbornly lusted after his oligarchic model, which he had put into practice during his consulship, when he rose to ultimate power and his 15 minutes of fame and bloodshed, claiming to "save the country" from what amounted to a false-flag set-up: the Catilinarian conspiracy. In any event, in a book about this tempest in a teapot turned into a hurricane by Cicero, Sallust wrote a famous comparison of Caesar and Cato:

In birth then, in years and in eloquence, they were about equal; in greatness of soul they were evenly matched, and likewise in renown, although the renown of each was different. Caesar was held great because of his benefactions and lavish generosity, Cato for the uprightness of his life. The former became famous for his gentleness and compassion, the austerity of the latter had brought him prestige. Caesar gained glory by giving, helping, and forgiving; Cato by never stooping to bribery. One was a refuge for the unfortunate, the other a scourge for the wicked. The good nature of the one was applauded, the steadfastness of the other. Finally, Caesar had schooled himself to work hard and sleep little, to devote himself to the welfare of his friends and neglect his own, to refuse nothing which was worth the giving. He longed for great power, an army, a new war to give scope for his brilliant merit. Cato, on the contrary, cultivated self-control, propriety, but above all austerity. He did not vie with the rich in riches nor in intrigue with the intriguer, but with the active in good works, with the self-restrained in moderation, with the blameless in integrity. He preferred to be, rather than to

seem, virtuous; hence the less he sought fame, the more it pursued him. [\[417\]](#)

I don't agree with Sallust's take on Cato. Cato's behavior better fits a personality disorder of some sort; the way he killed himself suggests serious mental issues – disemboweling himself, twice! The difference between the two Romans mirrors the difference between the old view of the harsh and inexorable Jewish god and Paul's new view epitomized by his merciful Christ Crucified who gave his life to redeem humanity.

Caesar was kind toward those who were downtrodden. He was known to advance people of humble origins based on merit and he had a soft spot for the Jews at a time when all other writers had nothing but scorn for them. Thus, the Jews of the Roman Empire had good reason to mourn his death. Not only was Caesar tolerant of the Diaspora, he was in every other way undoubtedly *the most remarkable man who ever lived*. He spent years trying to solve Rome's problems via a political solution, and even when it came down to a choice of civil war, he extended the option of compromise right to the very end. Once he was master of Rome, he made many reforms that speak eloquently of his true character: he redistributed land, taking from the rich and giving to the poor; he increased food rations to the poor; he fixed the Roman calendar; he extended Roman citizenship; he began beneficial engineering projects, planned libraries, theaters; provided support for artists and scholars, and more. Caesar was famous for qualities that can only be described as righteous and just and merciful.

I haven't spent much time on Caesar's other attributes, his absolute genius in so many areas, but I hope I have conveyed to some small extent the extraordinary nature of Caesar's character, his mercy, and how strange, how incomprehensible, how divine, it must have seemed to the people of the time. Caesar's brief rule between the proscriptions of Cinna, Sulla and Sulla's successors in the Senate, and the 20 years of civil war and proscriptions that followed with Octavian, must have seemed like a period in which a god had actually come to Earth. Caesar had as little time to do his work as his mythical counterpart, Jesus of Nazareth – about three years.

The Passion of Caesar

The most striking parallels between Jesus and Caesar relate to Caesar's death. Nicolaus of Damascus gives an account of the conspiracy that led to his assassination:

The conspirators never met exactly openly, but they assembled a few at a time in each other's homes. There were many discussions and proposals, as might be expected, while they investigated how and where to execute their design. Some suggested that they should make the attempt along the Sacred Way, which was one of his favorite walks. Another idea was to do it at the elections, during which he had to cross a bridge to appoint the magistrates in the Campus Martius. Someone proposed that they draw lots for some to push him from the bridge and others to run up and kill him. A third plan was to wait for a coming gladiatorial show. The advantage of that was, because of the show, no suspicion would be aroused if arms were seen. The majority opinion, however, favored killing him while he sat in the Senate. He would be there by himself, since only Senators were admitted, and the conspirators could hide their daggers beneath their togas. This plan won the day. ¹/₄

For his friends were alarmed at certain rumors and tried to stop him going to the Senate-house, as did his doctors, for he was suffering from one of his occasional dizzy spells. His wife, Calpurnia, especially, who was frightened by some visions in her dreams, clung to him and said that she would not let him go out that day. But [Decimus] Brutus, one of the conspirators who was then thought of as a firm friend, came up and said, 'What is this, Caesar? Are you a man to pay attention to a woman's dreams and the idle gossip of stupid men, and to insult the Senate by not going out, although it has honoured you and has been specially summoned by you? But listen to me, cast aside the forebodings of all these people, and come. The Senate has been in session waiting for you since early this morning.' This swayed Caesar and he left. [\[418\]](#)

Plutarch's account of the assassination and the events leading up to it adds more detail:

But destiny, it would seem, is not so much unexpected as it is unavoidable, since they say that amazing signs and apparitions were

seen. Now, as for lights in the heavens, crashing sounds borne all about by night, and birds of omen coming down into the forum, it is perhaps not worth while to mention these precursors of so great an event; but Strabo the philosopher says that multitudes of men all on fire were seen rushing up, and a soldier's slave threw from his hand a copious flame and seemed to the spectators to be burning, but when the flame ceased the man was uninjured; he says, moreover, that when Caesar himself was sacrificing, the heart of the victim was not to be found, and the prodigy caused fear, since in the course of nature, certainly, an animal without a heart could not exist. ...

Moreover, on the day before, when Marcus Lepidus was entertaining him at supper, Caesar chanced to be signing letters, as his custom was, while reclining at table, and the discourse turned suddenly upon the question what sort of death was the best; before anyone could answer Caesar cried out: "That which is unexpected." After this, while he was sleeping as usual by the side of his wife, all the windows and doors of the chamber flew open at once, and Caesar, confounded by the noise and the light of the moon shining down upon him, noticed that Calpurnia was in a deep slumber, but was uttering indistinct words and inarticulate groans in her sleep; for she dreamed, as it proved, that she was holding her murdered husband in her arms and bewailing him.

... At all events, when day came, she begged Caesar, if it was possible, not to go out, but to postpone the meeting of the senate; if, however, he had no concern at all for her dreams, she besought him to inquire by other modes of divination and by sacrifices concerning the future. And Caesar also, as it would appear, was in some suspicion and fear. For never before had he perceived in Calpurnia any womanish superstition, but now he saw that she was in great distress. And when the seers also, after many sacrifices, told him that the omens were unfavourable, he resolved to send Antony and dismiss the senate.

But at this juncture Decimus Brutus, surnamed Albinus, who was so trusted by Caesar that he was entered in his will as his second heir, but was partner in the conspiracy of the other Brutus and Cassius, fearing that if Caesar should elude that day, their undertaking would become known, ridiculed the seers and chided Caesar for laying himself open to malicious charges on the part of the senators, who would think themselves mocked at; for they had met at his bidding, and were ready and willing to vote as one man that he should be declared king of the provinces outside of Italy, and might wear a diadem when he went anywhere else by land or sea; but if someone should tell them at their session to be gone now, but to come back again when Calpurnia should have better dreams, what speeches would be made by his enemies, or who would listen to his friends when they tried to show that this was not slavery and tyranny? But if he was fully resolved (Albinus said) to regard the day as inauspicious, it was better that he should go in person and address the senate, and then postpone its business. While saying these things Brutus took Caesar by the hand and began to lead him along. And he had gone but a little way from his door when a slave belonging to someone else, eager to get at Caesar, but unable to do so for the press of numbers about him, forced his way into the house, gave himself into the hands of Calpurnia, and bade her keep him secure until Caesar came back, since he had important matters to report to him.

Furthermore, Artemidorus, a Cnidian by birth, a teacher of Greek philosophy, and on this account brought into intimacy with some of the followers of Brutus, so that he also knew most of what they were doing, came bringing to Caesar in a small roll the disclosures which he was going to make; but seeing that Caesar took all such rolls and handed them to his attendants, he came quite near, and said: "Read this, Caesar, by thyself, and speedily; for it contains matters of importance and of concern to thee." Accordingly, Caesar took the roll and would have read it, but was prevented by the multitude of people who engaged his attention, although he set out to do so many times, and holding in his hand and retaining that roll alone, he passed on into the senate. Some, however, say that another person gave him this roll, and that Artemidorus did not get to him at all, but was crowded away all along the route.

So far, perhaps, these things may have happened of their own accord; the place, however, which was the scene of that struggle and murder, and in which the senate was then assembled, since it contained a statue of Pompey and had been dedicated by Pompey as an additional ornament to his theatre, made it wholly clear that it was the work of some heavenly power which was calling and guiding the action thither. Indeed, it is also said that Cassius, turning his eyes toward the statue of Pompey before the attack began, invoked it silently, although he was much addicted to the doctrines of Epicurus; but the crisis, as it would seem, when the dreadful attempt was now close at hand, replaced his former cool calculations with divinely inspired emotion.

Well, then, Antony, who was a friend of Caesar's and a robust man, was detained outside by Brutus Albinus, who purposely engaged him in a lengthy conversation; but Caesar went in, and the senate rose in his honour. Some of the partisans of Brutus took their places round the back of Caesar's chair, while others went to meet him, as though they would support the petition which Tullius Cimber presented to Caesar in behalf of his exiled brother, and they joined their entreaties to his and accompanied Caesar up to his chair. But when, after taking his seat, Caesar continued to repulse their petitions, and, as they pressed upon him with greater importunity, began to show anger towards one and another of them, Tullius seized his toga with both hands and pulled it down from his neck. This was the

signal for the assault. It was Casca who gave him the first blow with his dagger, in the neck, not a mortal wound, nor even a deep one, for which he was too much confused, as was natural at the beginning of a deed of great daring; so that Caesar turned about, grasped the knife, and held it fast. At almost the same instant both cried out, the smitten man in Latin: "Accursed Casca, what does thou?" and the smiter, in Greek, to his brother: "Brother, help!"

So the affair began, and those who were not privy to the plot were filled with consternation and horror at what was going on; they dared not fly, nor go to Caesar's help, nay, nor even utter a word. But those who had prepared themselves for the murder bared each of them his dagger, and Caesar, hemmed in on all sides, whichever way he turned confronting blows of weapons aimed at his face and eyes, driven hither and thither like a wild beast, was entangled in the hands of all; for all had to take part in the sacrifice and taste of the slaughter. Therefore Brutus also gave him one blow in the groin. And it is said by some writers that although Caesar defended himself against the rest and darted this way and that and cried aloud, when he saw that Brutus had drawn his dagger, he pulled his toga down over his head and sank, either by chance or because pushed there by his murderers, against the pedestal on which the statue of Pompey stood. And the pedestal was drenched with his blood, so that one might have thought that Pompey himself was presiding over this vengeance upon his enemy, who now lay prostrate at his feet, quivering from a multitude of wounds. For it is said that he received twenty-three; and many of the conspirators were wounded by one another, as they struggled to plant all those blows in one body.

Caesar thus done to death, the senators, although Brutus came forward as if to say something about what had been done, would not wait to hear him, but burst out of doors and fled, thus filling the people with confusion and helpless fear, so that some of them closed their houses, while others left their counters and places of business and ran, first to the place to see what had happened, then away from the place when they had seen. Antony and Lepidus, the chief friends of Caesar, stole away and took refuge in the houses of others. But Brutus and his partisans, just as they were, still warm from the slaughter, displaying their daggers bare, went all in a body out of the senate-house and marched to the Capitol, not like fugitives, but with glad faces and full of confidence, summoning the multitude to freedom, and welcoming into their ranks the most distinguished of those who met them. Some also joined their number and went up with them as though they had shared in the deed, and laid claim to the glory of it, of whom were Caius Octavius and Lentulus Spinther. These men, then, paid the penalty for their imposture later, when they were put to death by Antony and the young Caesar [Octavian], without even enjoying the fame for the sake of which they died, owing to the disbelief of their fellow men. For even those who punished them did not exact a penalty for what they did, but for what they wished they had done.

On the next day Brutus came down and held a discourse, and the people listened to what was said without either expressing resentment at what had been done or appearing to approve of it; they showed, however, by their deep silence, that while they pitied Caesar, they respected Brutus. The senate, too, trying to make a general amnesty and reconciliation, voted to give Caesar divine honours and not to disturb even the most insignificant measure which he had adopted when in power; while to Brutus and his partisans it distributed provinces and gave suitable honours, so that everybody thought that matters were decided and settled in the best possible manner. [\[419\]](#)

And so it was, possibly the greatest man this world has ever known was heinously betrayed by those he had forgiven and whom he loved. They attacked him like frenzied vultures, and when it was over, everyone fled away and Caesar was left alone, his blood spreading in a pool around his body. It wasn't until much later in the day that some servants had the nerve to enter the place of death to collect his body and return him home to his wife. On the events immediately following his death, Appian, the second-century Greek historian of Rome, wrote:

Caesar's will was now produced and the people ordered that it be read at once. In it, Octavian, his sister's grandson, was adopted by Caesar. His gardens were given to the people as a place of recreation, and to every Roman living in the city, he gave 75 Attic drachmas [Arkenberg: about \$186 in 1998 dollars]. The people too were stirred to anger when they saw the will of this lover of his country, whom they had before heard accused of tyranny. Most of all did it seem pitiful to them that Decimus Brutus, one of the murderers, should have been named by him for adoption in the second degree; for it was usual for the Romans to name alternate heirs in case of the failure of the first.

When Piso [Caesar's father-in-law] brought Caesar's body into the Forum a countless multitude ran together with arms to guard it, and with acclamations and magnificent display placed it on the rostra. Wailing and lamentation were renewed for a long time; the armed men clashed their shields. Antony, seeing how things were going, did not abandon his purpose, but having been chosen to deliver the funeral oration, as a consul for a consul, as a friend for a friend, a relative for a relative (he was kin to Caesar on the mother's side),

resumed his artful design, and spoke thus: "It is not fitting, fellow citizens, that the funeral oration of so great a man should be pronounced by me alone, but rather by his whole country. The decrees which all of us, in equal admiration for his merit, voted to him while he was alive – Senate and People acting together – I will read, so that I may voice your sentiments rather than merely mine."

Then he began to read with a severe and gloomy countenance; pronouncing each sentence distinctly, and dwelling especially on those decrees which declared Caesar to be "superhuman, sacred and inviolable," and which named him "The Father of his Country," or "The Benefactor," or "The Chief without a Peer." With each decree, Antony turned his face and his hand towards Caesar's corpse, illustrating his discourse by his action, and at each appellation he added some brief remark full of grief and indignation; as, for example, where the decree spoke of Caesar as "The Father of his Country," he added that this was a testimonial of his clemency; and again, where he was made "Sacred and Inviolable," and that **"everybody was to be held sacred and inviolate who should find refuge in him."**

"Nobody," said Antony, "who found refuge in him was harmed, but he, whom you declared sacred and inviolate was killed, although he did not extort these honors from you as a tyrant, and did not even ask them. Most servile are we if we give such honors to the unworthy who do not ask for them. But you, faithful citizens, vindicate us from this charge of servility by paying such honors as you now pay to the dead."

Antony resumed his reading, and recited the oaths by which all were pledged to guard Caesar and Caesar's body with all their strength, and all were devoted to perdition who should not avenge him in any conspiracy. Here lifting up his voice, and extending his hand toward the Capitol, he exclaimed, "Jupiter, Guardian of this City, and you other gods, I stand here ready to avenge him as I have sworn and vowed, but since those that are of equal rank with me have considered the decree of amnesty beneficial, I pray that it may prove so."

A commotion arose among the Senators in consequence of this exclamation which seemed to have special reference to them. So Antony quieted them again and recanted, saying, "To me, fellow citizens, **this deed seems to be not the work of human beings, but of some evil spirit.** It becomes us to consider the present rather than the past. Let us then conduct this sacred one to the abode of the blest, chanting our wonted hymn of lamentation for him."

Having thus spoken, he gathered up his garments like a man inspired, girded himself so that he might have free use of his hands, took his position in front of the bier, as in a play, bending down to it, and rising again, and sang first as to a celestial deity exclaiming, "You alone have come forth unvanquished from all the battles you have fought! You alone have avenged your country of the outrages put upon it three hundred years ago [i.e. the invasion of the Gauls], bringing to their knees the savage tribes, the only ones that ever broke into and burned Rome."

Carried away by extreme passion, he uncovered the body of Caesar, **lifted his robe on the top of a spear, and shook it aloft, pierced with the dagger thrusts, and red with the Dictator's blood.** Whereupon the people, like a chorus, mourned with him in a most doleful manner, and from sorrow became again filled with anger. After more lamentations the people could stand it no longer. It seemed to them monstrous that **all the murderers**, who, save Decimus Brutus, had been made prisoners while siding with Pompey, and **who, instead of being punished, had been advanced by Caesar to the magistracies of Rome, and to the command of provinces and armies, should have conspired against him**, and that Decimus should have been deemed by him worthy of adoption as a son.

While they were in this temper, and were already nigh to violence, **someone raised above the bier an image of Caesar himself, wrought of wax.** As for the actual body, since it lay on its back upon the couch, it could not be seen. **The image was turned around and around by a mechanical device, showing the twenty-three wounds on all parts of the body and the face** – which gave him a shocking appearance. The people could no longer bear the pitiful sight presented to them. They groaned, and girding themselves, they burned the Senate chamber, where Caesar had been slain, and ran hither and thither searching for the murderers, who had fled some time previously. ...

The people returned to Caesar's bier, and bore it as something consecrated to the Capitol in order to bury it in the temple and place it among the gods. Being prevented from so doing by the priests, they placed it again in the Forum, where of old had stood the palace of the kings of Rome. There they collected together sticks of wood and benches, of which there were many in the Forum, and anything else that they could find of this sort, for a funeral pile, throwing on it the adornments of the procession, some of which were very costly. Some of them cast their own crowns upon it and many military gifts. Then they set fire to it, and the entire people remained by the funeral pile throughout the night.

There an altar was at first erected, but now stands on the spot the Temple of Caesar himself, **for he was deemed worthy of divine honors** ...[\[420\]](#)

Here it should be mentioned that the wax effigy of Caesar's body had probably been made from a cast, so it was completely lifelike. It was probably erected on a tropaeum, the cross-shaped symbol of the Roman Triumph. Several of the coins minted by Caesar include Caesar's tropaea, representing his military triumphs. One is reminded of Paul, writing in Col. 2.15: "Having put off from himself the principalities and the powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it". The NEB says he "made a spectacle of the cosmic powers and authorities, and *led them as captives in his triumphal procession*".

The account of Suetonius includes some additional details:

When the funeral was announced, a pyre was erected in the Field of Mars near the tomb of Julia. In front of the rostra was placed a gilded shrine, made after the model of the temple of Venus Genetrix. Within was a bier of ivory with coverlets of purple and gold, and **at its head a pillar hung with the robe in which he was slain**. Since it was clear that the day would not be long enough for those who offered gifts, they were directed to bring them to the Campus by whatsoever streets of the city they wished, regardless of any order of precedence. At the funeral games, to rouse pity and indignation at his death, these words from the Contest for the arms of Pacuvius were sung: "**Saved I these men that they might murder me?**" and words of a like purport from the Electra of Atilius.

Instead of a eulogy the consul Marc Antony caused a herald to recite the decree of the Senate in which it had voted Caesar all divine and human honors at once, and likewise the oath with which they had all pledged themselves to watch over his personal safety; to which he added a very few words of his own. The bier on the rostra was carried to the Forum by magistrates and ex-magistrates. While some were urging that it be burned in the temple of Jupiter of the Capitol, and others in the Hall of Pompey **on a sudden two beings with swords by their sides and brandishing a pair of darts set fire to it with blazing torches**, and at once the throng of bystanders heaped upon it dry branches, the judgment seats with the benches, and whatever else could serve as an offering. Then the musicians and actors tore off their robes, which they had taken **from the equipment of his triumphs** and put on for the occasion, rent them to bits and threw them into the flames, and the veterans of the legions the arms with which they had adorned themselves for the funeral. Many of the women, too, offered up the jewels which they wore and the amulets and robes of their children. **At the height of the public grief a throng of foreigners went about lamenting each after the fashion of his country, above all the Jews, who even flocked to the place for several successive nights.**

... Afterwards they set up in the Forum a solid column of Numidian marble almost twenty feet high, and inscribed upon it, To the Father of his Country. **At the foot of this they continued for a long time to sacrifice, make vows, and settle some of their disputes by an oath in the name of Caesar.**

Caesar left in the minds of some of his friends the suspicion that he did not wish to live any longer and had taken no precautions, because of his failing health; and that therefore he neglected the warnings which came to him from portents and from the reports of his friends.[\[421\]](#)

Virgil wrote in the *Georgics* that several unusual events took place following Caesar's assassination:

Who dare say the Sun is false? He and no other warns us when dark uprisings threaten, when treachery and hidden wars are gathering strength. He and no other was moved to pity Rome on the day that Caesar died, when he veiled his radiance in gloom and darkness, and a godless age feared everlasting night. Yet in this hour Earth also and the plains of Ocean, ill-boding dogs and birds that spell mischief, sent signs which heralded disaster. How oft before our eyes did Etna deluge the fields of the Cyclopes with a torrent from her burst furnaces, hurling thereon balls of fire and molten rocks. Germany heard the noise of battle sweep across the sky and, even without precedent, the Alps rocked with earthquakes. A voice boomed through the silent groves for all to hear, a deafening voice, and phantoms of unearthly pallor were seen in the falling darkness. Horror beyond words, beasts uttered human speech; rivers stood still, the earth gaped upon; in the temples ivory images wept for grief, and beads of sweat covered bronze statues. King of waterways, the Po swept forests along in the swirl of his frenzied current, carrying with him over the plain cattle and stalls alike. Nor in that same hour did sinister filaments cease to appear in ominous entrails or blood to flow from wells or our hillside towns to echo all night with the howl of wolves. Never fell more lightning from a cloudless sky; never was comet's alarming glare so often seen.[\[422\]](#)

Plutarch's account of the aftermath gives evidence of the myths that rose up around Caesar after his death:

At the time of his death Caesar was fully fifty-six years old, but he had survived Pompey not much more than four years, while of the power and dominion which he had sought all his life at so great risks, and barely achieved at last, of this he had reaped no fruit but the name of it only, and a glory which had awakened envy on the part of his fellow citizens. However, the great guardian-genius of the man, whose help he had enjoyed through life, followed upon him even after death as an avenger of his murder, driving and tracking down his slayers over every land and sea until not one of them was left, but even those who in any way soever either put hand to the deed or took part in the plot were punished.

Among events of man's ordering, the most amazing was that which befell Cassius; for after his defeat at Philippi he slew himself with that very dagger which he had used against Caesar; and among events of divine ordering, **there was the great comet, which showed itself in great splendour for seven nights after Caesar's murder**, and then disappeared; also, **the obscuration of the sun's rays**. For during all that year its orb rose pale and without radiance, while the heat that came down from it was slight and ineffectual, so that the air in its circulation was dark and heavy owing to the feebleness of the warmth that penetrated it, and the fruits, imperfect and half ripe, withered away and shrivelled up on account of the coldness of the atmosphere. But more than anything else the phantom that appeared to Brutus showed that the murder of Caesar was not pleasing to the gods; and it was on this wise. As he was about to take his army across from Abydos to the other continent, he was lying down at night, as his custom was, in his tent, not sleeping, but thinking of the future; for it is said that of all generals Brutus was least given to sleep, and that he naturally remained awake a longer time than anybody else. And now he thought he heard a noise at the door, and looking towards the light of the lamp, which was slowly going out, he saw a fearful vision of a man of unnatural size and harsh aspect. At first he was terrified, but when he saw that the visitor neither did nor said anything, but stood in silence by his couch, he asked him who he was. Then the phantom answered him: "I am thy evil genius, Brutus, and thou shalt see me at Philippi." At the time, then, Brutus said courageously: "I shall see thee;" and the heavenly visitor at once went away. Subsequently, however, when arrayed against Antony and Caesar at Philippi, in the first battle he conquered the enemy in his front, routed and scattered them, and sacked the camp of Caesar; but as he was about to fight the second battle, the same phantom visited him again at night, and though it said nothing to him, Brutus understood his fate, and plunged headlong into danger. He did not fall in battle, however, but after the rout retired to a crest of ground, put his naked sword to his breast (while a certain friend, as they say, helped to drive the blow home), and so died. [\[423\]](#)

When Caesar died, so did the Republic. Matthias Gelzer wrote:

The deed was so frightful that it is not surprising if events did not develop as its authors had expected. Instead of the Senate's immediately taking over the government, a numbing terror gripped the whole city and temporarily there was a political vacuum. But from it there later developed, with an inner necessity, the new civil war of thirteen years' duration which Caesar had foretold. On April 7 Gaius Matius made a telling comment on the situation. The problems, he said, were insoluble: 'for if Caesar with all his genius could not find a way out, who will find one now?' $\frac{1}{4}$ [\[424\]](#)

... he had only just started on his task as ruler when the hands of murderers snatched him away. Horrified we see his brilliant figure sink into the darkness of this catastrophe. What a tragedy lies over the life of the greatest genius produced by Rome – to be snuffed out by Romans who imagined that they were acting on behalf of their *res publica*! His demonic genius raised him in every respect above all his contemporaries – through his spiritual and physical vigour, through the faster tempo of his life, through his free-ranging gaze which unfettered by traditional concepts, everywhere discovered new possibilities, and through the masterful way in which he overcame difficulties and realized the most daring plans. Thus, although he was a Roman through and through and intended only to use his rule in order to raise the *imperium populi Romani* to the level of perfection required by the circumstances, nevertheless the flights of his genius lifted him to a lonely eminence where others were unable to follow him. [\[425\]](#)

Some of the parallels between the gospel narratives of "Jesus of Nazareth" and the final years of Julius Caesar are remarkable. First, there is the overall form of Caesar's passion. A great man is accused of wanting to be king, betrayed by one of his closest companions, murdered, displayed on a cross, and raised to the heavens as a god. (His adopted son, Augustus, would later adopt the name "son of god" for himself.)

Even in the details there are curious correspondences. Caesar traces his descent from kings (the Marci reges) and divinity (Venus). In the gospels Jesus descends from King David and God himself. After years in Gaul/Gallia (Galilee/Galilaia?), Caesar

crosses the Rubicon river (the Jordan?) on his way to Rome. One of his first stops is Corfinium, which he liberates (Capernaum/Kapharnaum, where Jesus first performs miracles?). After his triumphal entry into Rome following the civil war, he is increasingly slandered as wanting to be king. Despite his popularity among all classes of society, and his unheard-of policy of clemency, or perhaps because of these things, a relatively small group of reactionary oligarchs conspire to assassinate him. One of his close associates, Decimus Brutus, conspires with Cassius Longinus and Marcus Brutus (among others) to assassinate him. Decimus had served with Caesar in Gaul and during the civil war, and Caesar loved him as a son, including him as an alternate heir in his will.

Caesar eats a last supper with Decimus and others, where they talk of death. There are omens of Caesar's death. At the senate meeting, the assassins strike. One of the stabs come from Cassius Longinus. The name of the soldier who pierces Jesus' side on the cross is given in the *Gospel of Nicodemus* as Longinus (his feast day in the Roman Catholic Church is March 15, the day of Caesar's assassination). Decimus delivers the final blow. Mark Antony displays Caesar's bloody toga to the crowds, and a wax effigy is created, displayed on a cross-shaped tropaeum for all to see the wounds inflicted on Caesar's body. A comet is seen, interpreted as being Caesar's soul raised to the heavens. While he had already received divine honors before his death, the senate makes it official. Julius Caesar is now *Divus Iulius*, the divine Julius.

It's unlikely that worship of Caesar disappeared. It probably carried on among Jews, citizens, slaves, soldiers (with whom he had an exceptional bond), and close associates in the aristocracy, perhaps beginning with Fulvia, who most likely orchestrated Caesar's funeral, and her husband Antony. (Fulvia had arranged a similar funeral for her second husband, Clodius, in 52 BC, displaying his dead body and its wounds.)^[426]

One of Antony's daughters, Antonia (mother of Germanicus), would later be at the center of the Imperial court at Rome, where Herod Agrippa was brought up. Agrippa would later give his support to Claudius and probably had some influence on Claudius' fair treatment of the Jews ca. 41 AD. Antonia married Nero Claudius Drusus, and was mother to Germanicus and Claudius, and grandmother to Caligula. Curiously, there is an inscription from Rome that includes the names "Drusus", "Antonia", "Faustus" (probably a slave), and the words "*lucundi*" (meaning "pleasant", possibly a slave name) and "*Chrestiani*". While the translation and interpretation of the inscription are difficult, some scholars believe this is a reference to the same Antonia and Drusus just mentioned. No one really knows how to interpret the reference to "Chrestians".^[427] In his biography of Caesar, *Plutarch calls Caesar "chrestos"*. The two other men Plutarch describes with this word are Alexander and Caecilius Metellus – all three were deified after their deaths. Chrestos was also a common mystery religion appellation, used to refer to oracles, gods, priests, philosophers and heroes.^[428]

Were these individuals – Fulvia, Drusus, Antonia – "Chrestians"? In his letter to the Philippians, Paul sends his greetings from "all the saints ¼ especially those of Caesar's household" (Phil. 4:22). Perhaps this wasn't just a reference to slaves of the Imperial court spread around the empire. To the Romans he sends greetings from Erastus, the "city treasurer" of Corinth (Rom. 16:23). Were Flavius Clemens and Domitilla, accused of godlessness for their "Jewish" practices, merely followers of a cult that had been popular in one form or another since Caesar's death, but which aristocrats felt the need to keep secret?

Some of the earliest known Christians were Roman women of high rank (Flavia Domitilla under Domitian, and two wives of governors under Septimius Severus); perhaps 20% were freed slaves.^[429] Paul mentions several prominent women in his churches, including an apostle, Junia (Rom. 16:7), as well as several slaves: Onesimus (Phlm., Col. 4:9), Epaphras and Tychicus, whom he calls "fellow-slaves" (Col. 1:7, 4:7), and Fortunatus and Achaicus, who have typical slave names (1 Cor. 16:17–8), among others. He also calls Epaphroditus and Archippus "fellow-soldiers" (Phil. 2:25, Phlm. 2), suggesting the presence of veterans among his churches. Caesar established many colonies for his veterans, including Corinth (Plut. *Caes.* 57.8). Paul spent time in Cilicia (in modern Turkey) during his first mission. After Caesar visited Cilicia's capital, Tarsus, in 47 BC, they took the name Iuliopolis (City of Julius), in Caesar's honor, having sided with him during the civil war (Dio 47.26).

It is possible that many Jews identified Caesar with the Messiah. After all, he had defeated Pompey, the destroyer of Jerusalem, and had done much for the Jews. When the famous comet of Caesar appeared, it could be said that the prophecies about the Messiah were being fulfilled, since a star was to be the sign of the Messiah. The Persian king Cyrus the Great had been recognized as Messiah by Isaiah and Paul was profoundly influenced by the prophecies of Deutero-Isaiah.

Paulina and Fulvia

Now it is time to consider the two extraordinary texts placed immediately after the Testimonium Flavianum. Perhaps we will find an answer in these two tales as to whether or not Josephus knew Paul or knew *about* him and his activity. Considering the time Josephus was writing, and the company he kept, it would be surprising if Josephus wasn't at least aware of him.

The TF is the sore thumb that sticks out, "the dog that didn't bark", which absolutely does not fit the context in which it appears, and this is a red flag that perhaps something else was in that spot in the text and has been effaced and/or covered up. The tales that follow seem to have been interpolated for the direct purpose of conveying the truth not only about the correct timeframe for the TF event, but *also about the end results* of that event. Whatever it was, it appeared to have its beginnings under Pontius Pilate in 19 AD, and Josephus/pseudo-Josephus is both revealing and blowing smoke around it all at the same time.

I think the two tales, which are told in the context of the time of Pilate and his probable execution of Judas the Galilean in 19 AD, may have been intended to convey something about the two messianic movements – that of Paul and that of the rebellious Jews – and to indicate that the two were combined in order to create the Jesus of Nazareth myth spoken of in the TF, and thus Christianity as we know it. In the first story, the author may have been indicating Pauline messianism, and in the second, the James Gang version. It may be that the three men defrauding Fulvia in the second story indicate the "arising of the three pillars of Jerusalem" (Peter, James and John) at that time, touting and tootling their messiah.

The more I think about it the more it seems likely that the text of Tacitus has been involved in some of the redactions of Josephus. In addition to the resemblance to the legal case in Tacitus, in these two tales we have the references to Egyptian and Jewish worship together, and 4,000 Jews being sent to exile in Sardinia. Also, while the stories are seemingly typical Josephus scandal mongering and religious propaganda, the fact that one of them is modeled on a legal case written up by Tacitus certainly gives one pause. Yes, Josephus could have read about it in the Roman archives to which he may have had access at one point in the writing of his history of the Jewish War, but the adjacency of the name "Saturninus" in Tacitus, and its use twice (in both stories), suggest either a coded message, or simply that someone had Tacitus text open before them. Of course, it could be both: someone working from the text of Tacitus to create a coded message. Or it might be that the text that originally occupied the space where the TF is now found discussed the death of Judas the Galilean, the death of Germanicus, and the role of Sentius Saturninus in sending Pilate back to Rome along with Piso. Either Josephus made those stories up to cover up something or to send a coded message, or someone else, writing later, did so. And since the general trend of the stories is such as to indicate Pauline Christianity as we understand it coming down through Paul's letters themselves, it seems quite possible that this was what those stories are talking about: the origins of something that the author couldn't or didn't want to address directly.

If one takes the two tales set adjacent to each other and thinks about them, a few items stand out. The first tale, modeled on the 58 AD event recorded by Tacitus, is about a Roman woman taken in by an individual who is pretending to be a god of the Egyptian cult of Isis. The second tale is about a Roman woman taken in by a "temple cult" of Judaism, so to say.

[NOTE: Below, Price suggests comparing/contrasting your approach w/ Carotta and Atwill]

Notice it is *Paulina* who is cast as being taken in by the Egyptian worship, while it is *Fulvia* who is cast as the one taken in by the Jews. Are these two elements important? Is Josephus telling us that *Paul* himself was taken in by Egyptian rites/mysteries and that it was *Caesar worship* that was taken over by a false sort of Judaism? Because it seems highly likely that it was Fulvia,

the wife of Marc Antony, who was ultimately responsible for the funeral rites of Julius Caesar, which is clearly the model for the Christian passion. Francesco Carotta has suggested that she may even have penned a little commemorative "passion play" that later was redacted into the gospel of Mark. [\[430\]](#) We are reminded here of Paul's impassioned attack on the Galatians:

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? (Gal. 3:1-2)

Given the elements of mystery religion in Paul's thought and practice, [\[431\]](#) and the reference to both auditory and *visual* elements in the quoted text, I think Paul was putting on mystery plays for his converts. [\[432\]](#)

As for *Decius Mundus*, the Decians were a famous plebeian family who gained fame for two of their family *sacrificing themselves for their country* in war in order to secure victory. Publius Decius Mus sacrificed himself in battle through the ritual *devotio* in the 4th century BC. (A later Publius Decius was a colleague of *Mark Antony*.) Mundus means "world" in Latin: world sacrifice?

On the subject of the goddess Isis, we learn from the *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology*:

Her worship in all parts of Greece is amply attested by express statements of ancient writers and numerous inscriptions. ... In the western parts of Europe **the worship of Isis** became likewise established, and many places in Sicily, Italy, and Gaul, are known to have been the seats of it. According to Appuleius (*Met.* xi. p. 262), **it was introduced at Rome in the time of Sulla: at a later time her statue was removed from the capitol by a decree of the senate** (Tertull. *ad Nation.* 1.10, *Apolog.* 6; *Arnob. ad v. Gent.* 2.73); but the populace and the consuls Piso and Gabinius, in BC 58, resisted the decree. **A further decree of BC 53** forbade the private worship of Isis, and **ordered the chapels dedicated to her to be destroyed**. Subsequently, when the worship was restored, her sanctuaries were to be found only outside the pomerium. This interference on the part of the government was thought necessary on account of the **licentious orgies with which the festivals of the goddess were celebrated**. In BC 50, the consul, **L. Aemilius Paulus himself, was the first to begin the destruction of her temples**, as no one else ventured to do so. (V. Max. 1.3.3.) But these decrees do not appear to have quite succeeded in destroying the worship of Isis, for **in BC 47 a new decree was issued to destroy the temple of Isis and Serapis**. By a mistake, the adjoining temple of Bellona was likewise pulled down, and in it were found pots filled with human flesh ... As it had thus become evident that the people were extremely partial to the worship of those foreign divinities, **the triumvirs in BC 43 courted the popular favour by building a new temple of Isis and Serapis** in the third region, and sanctioning their worship. (D. C. 47.15.) It would appear that after this attempts were made to erect sanctuaries of Isis in the city itself, for **Augustus forbade her worship in the city**, while outside of it there seem to have been several temples, which were subjected to government inspection. The interference of the government was afterwards repeatedly required (Tac. *Ann.* 2.85; Suet. *Tib.* 36; J. *AJ* 18.3.4; Hegesipp. 2.4); but from the time of Vespasian the worship of Isis and Serapis became firmly established, and remained in a flourishing condition until the general introduction of Christianity. [\[433\]](#)

Notice the mention of Aemilius Paulus in 50 BC ... Interesting little play on names by the author of this tale, assuming he was aware of the actions of Paulus. There was no destruction of the temple of Isis in 19 AD, though there was a suppression of the worship, as Tacitus reports. Noticing exactly what Tacitus wrote, it is possible that it wasn't just Jews who were among the four thousand transported, but worshippers of Isis as well.

Possibly relevant to the story, the early Church Father Irenaeus (ca. 130–202) protested vehemently against the rumor that Christianity was simply a re-working of the Egyptian rites. He wouldn't have been making this protest if it were not something that was widely thought. The relationship between early Christianity and Isis worship seems to have been connected to the activities of the 2nd-century Christian gnostic theologian Valentinus (ca. 100–160), and he was probably the object of Irenaeus' ire. Now, interestingly, many of the ideas of Valentinian are curiously reminiscent of Paul. (Many early gnostics were followers of Paul, and Valentinus allegedly claimed to have derived his ideas from a disciple of Paul.) [\[434\]](#) This is especially the case in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, which many scholars are pleased to exclude from the Pauline canon as non-authentic

[\[435\]](#)

but which Douglas Campbell insists *is* authentic and perhaps the clearest statement of what Paul taught extant. On that point, I think Campbell may be right.

According to Clement, “they say that Valentinus was a hearer of Theudas, and Theudas, in turn, a disciple of Paul.”^[436] The Valentinians insisted that their unwritten source was the secret teachings of Paul, teachings delivered only in person and never written down by him. Irenaeus struck out against the Valentinians utilizing the epistles to Timothy and Titus, widely recognized nowadays as definitely not Pauline. That is to say, someone had to write them to counter the idea that Paul had secret teachings. There are plenty of strange and mysterious remarks in the Pauline epistles that support the idea that Paul had a lot more going on than what we have in his preserved writings.

In reference to Paul, the Josephan story about Fulvia would also make sense if it was inspired by events during the reign of Claudius, then retrojected to 19 AD. In his biography of Claudius, Suetonius refers to an expulsion of Jews:

Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from Rome.^[437]

Obviously, a lot of ink has been expended on this remark! But, since it is highly unlikely that a hypothetical Christian interpolator would have called Jesus "Chrestus", placed him in Rome in 49 AD, or called him a "troublemaker", the overwhelming majority of scholars conclude that the passage is genuine. However, *all of those pejorative terms could very well have applied to the apostle Paul, based on his own record of events in his missionary journeys and in relation to the Jerusalem James Gang*. That is to say, since we have freed Paul from the fake Jesus timeline, it is possible that he could have been in Rome in 49 AD and some of the events that happened there were later utilized in the fake history of Acts to describe Jews in *Jerusalem* rioting against Paul.

Let's look at Suetonius' remark more closely. The Latin original of this statement can be understood in one of two ways: either Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome because there was a tumult, or he only expelled those Jews that were causing the disorder. The expulsion event Suetonius refers to is difficult to date precisely, because he wrote topically, not chronologically. But, we can say it is after 41 and before 54 AD (the duration of Claudius' reign). Cassius Dio's reference in his *Roman History* says:

As for the Jews, who had again increased so greatly that by reason of their multitude it would have been hard without raising a tumult to bar them from the city, he did not drive them out, but ordered them, while continuing their traditional mode of life, not to hold meetings.^[438]

This is dated to the year 41/42 AD. However, Dio does not mention any Chrestus or exiling of Jews. Notably, he mentions no reason for the action at all! The 5th-century Christian writer Paulus Orosius makes a possible reference to the event, citing two sources:

Josephus reports, 'In his ninth year the Jews were expelled by Claudius from the city.' But Suetonius, who speaks as follows, influences me more: 'Claudius expelled from Rome the Jews constantly rioting at the instigation of Christ [*Christo*, or rather *Xpó*].' As far as whether he had commanded that the *Jews rioting against Christ* [*Christum*] be restrained and checked or also had wanted the Christians, as persons of a cognate religion, to be expelled, it is not at all to be discerned.^[439]

We recognize the citation from Suetonius, but *the quote from Josephus is not present in the extant texts*. It is that which gives the date of 49 AD, the “ninth year of Claudius.” There is a lot of arguing back and forth over this, but we can note that, even if we have eschewed Acts as a historical source, it dates the expulsion with reference to the proconsul of Achaia, Gallio (Acts 18:12). An inscription found at Delphi preserves a letter from Claudius concerning Gallio, dated during the 26th acclamation of Claudius, sometime between January 51 and August 52. Acts says that Paul met Aquila and Priscilla in Corinth, who had “recently” come from Italy, after Claudius ordered all Jews to leave Rome. It isn't any more specific than that, so the author

could have intended them to have left Rome in 49 AD, then Italy any time after that and before 51 AD.

Of course, this does not suggest that Acts is an accurate history or that the apostle Paul had any dealings with Gallio, whose character was probably borrowed to give historical verisimilitude to the novelized version of early Christian history. However, knowing already that the author of Acts was using Josephus as a source, it is possible that the Josephan reference existed, reported on by Orosius and utilized by the author of Acts.

The differences between the event as reported by Dio and Suetonius lead some scholars to conclude that they are two separate events of different natures. It seems likely that this is the case. In 41 AD, Rome's new emperor, Claudius, responded to an embassy from the Alexandrians in response to the violence there between the Jewish and Greek population. This violence probably had its origin around 38 AD, in the last years of the reign of Caligula. Claudius' edict to the Alexandrians (41 AD) happens to have been preserved. In it, we find the following:

Tiberius ¼ to the City of the Alexandrians, greeting.

Tiberius Claudius Barbillus [et al.], having delivered to me the decree, discoursed at length concerning the city, directing my attention to your goodwill towards us, which, from long ago, you may be sure, had been stored up to your advantage in my memory; for you are by nature reverent towards the Augusti, as I know from many proofs, and in particular have taken a warm interest in my house, warmly reciprocated, of which fact (to mention the last instance, passing over the others) the supreme witness is my brother Germanicus addressing you in words more clearly stamped as his own.

Wherefore, I gladly accepted the honors given to me by you, though I have no weakness for such things. [List of various honors accepted.] But I deprecate the appointment of a high priest to me and the building of temples, for I do not wish to be offensive to my contemporaries, and my opinion is that temples and such forms of honor have by all ages been granted as a prerogative to the gods alone.

Concerning the requests which you have been anxious to obtain from me, I decide as follows. ¼ As for the question, which party was responsible for the riots and feud (or rather, if the truth be told, the war) with the Jews, although in confrontation with their opponents your ambassadors, and particularly Dionysios the son of Theon, contended with great zeal, nevertheless I was unwilling to make a strict inquiry, though guarding within me a store of immutable indignation against whichever party renews the conflict. And I tell you once and for all that unless you put a stop to this ruinous and obstinate enmity against each other, I shall be driven to show what a benevolent Prince can be when turned to righteous indignation. Wherefore, once again **I conjure you that, on the one hand, the Alexandrians show themselves forbearing and kindly towards the Jews** who for many years have dwelt in the same city, and **dishonor none of the rites observed by them in the worship of their god, but allow them to observe their customs as in the time of the Deified Augustus, which customs I also, after hearing both sides, have sanctioned**; and on the other hand, **I explicitly order the Jews not to agitate for more privileges than they formerly possessed**, and not in the future to send out a separate embassy as though they lived in a separate city (a thing unprecedented), and not to force their way into gymnasiarchic or cosmetic games, while enjoying their own privileges and sharing a great abundance of advantages in a city not their own, and **not to bring in or admit Jews who come down the river from Egypt or from Syria, a proceeding which will compel me to conceive serious suspicions**. Otherwise I will by all means take vengeance on them as **fomenters of which is a general plague infecting the whole world**. If, desisting from these courses, you consent to live with mutual forbearance and kindness, I on my side will exercise a solicitude of very long standing for the city, as one which is bound to us by traditional friendship. I bear witness to my friend Barbillus of the solicitude which he has always shown for you in my presence and of the extreme zeal with which he has now advocated your cause; and likewise to my friend Tiberius Claudius Archibius.

Farewell. [\[440\]](#)

Claudius' edict is fairly even-handed, assuring certain rights to the Jews in Alexandria but forbidding them from crossing certain lines in the future, e.g. in agitating for full citizenship if they choose to remain religious Jews, or recruiting Jews from other regions to help renew their struggle against the Alexandrians or foment rebellion.

Josephus includes text that purports to reproduce two additional edicts of Claudius, one addressed to the Alexandrians and the other addressing Jews throughout the Empire, issued at the request of Agrippa and Herod of Chalcis (sons of Aristobulus IV and grandsons of Herod the Great).^[441] While he twists the facts in order to make it appear as if the Jews were full citizens of Alexandria, the second edict appears to ring true in certain respects when viewed next to the letter just quoted. In it, he grants the same privileges enjoyed by Alexandria's Jews to Jewish communities in all towns of Roman right (i.e. colonies and cities within and without Italy).^[442]

Additionally, after the assassination of Caligula in 41 AD, Agrippa was involved in the struggle over the accession between Claudius, the Praetorian Guard, and the Senate. Cassius Dio simply writes that Agrippa cooperated with Claudius in seeking rule. Josephus gives us two versions. In *Wars*, Agrippa is presented as only a messenger to a confident and energetic Claudius, which is likely the truest version. But in *Antiquities*, Agrippa plays a central and crucial role, i.e. Josephus is embellishing wildly, as usual.

In any event, Claudius was thankful to Agrippa for support and gave him Judea and Samaria to rule as king, among other honors. Agrippa died soon after, in 43/44 AD.^[443] The biblical description of Agrippa as a cruel, heartless king who persecuted the Jerusalem church, having James son of Zebedee killed and imprisoning Peter,^[444] stands in contrast with Josephus' account of a kindly man. I think there has been some conflation here. We have already noted that it was Tiberius Alexander who executed the sons of Judas the Galilean in 48 AD and that was likely the model for the execution and imprisoning of James and Peter in Acts.

The result of this short survey indicates that there are strong reasons to reject the idea that Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome in 41 AD. It just doesn't make sense in the context of what is said about Claudius, the reality of the edict, and the fact that he was supported by Herod Agrippa.^[445] So, I think we can say that *Claudius was actually being conciliatory toward the Jews in 41 AD*, and the expulsion from Rome did not occur until 49 AD. If the riot in Rome was caused by Paul's appearance and promulgation of an anti-Judaism gospel, it looks like the author of the Paulina/Fulvia texts following the TF may have retrojected aspects from the career of Paul back 30 years to the 19 AD context, possibly as a way to connect what happened then with what happened much later.

Moving on to the second tale, I don't think that Paul ever made his planned third trip to Jerusalem after being hounded by the James Gang in Corinth. This may be part of what is being conveyed in the story of Fulvia and the three Jews who defrauded her. Let's look at this story with Paul in mind:

There was a man who was a Jew, but had been driven away from his own country by an accusation laid against him for transgressing their laws ^¼

This is the slur directed at Paul in Acts. When Paul visits the pillars in Jerusalem, the author has James say to Paul: "They have been told about you that you teach all the Jews living among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, and that you tell them not to circumcise their children or observe the customs."^[446]

^¼ and by the fear he was under of punishment for the same; but in all respects a wicked man.

In Acts, another accusation slung at Paul was that he was "a pestilence, and a stirrer-up of strife throughout the world."^[447] (One wonders, of course, where the author of Acts got that? I'd say he spent some time reading Josephus...) I don't think Robert Eisenman is correct in concluding that the Dead Sea Scrolls' "wicked priest" and "spouter of lies" are references to Paul.^[448] Paul wasn't even on the radar of the James Gang until after the second meeting in Jerusalem when it became known that Paul was preaching a significantly different messiah: one of peace and unification rather than the avenger who

was going to flay and burn the Romans. This meeting probably happened not long before the arrest and execution of James and Simon (sons of Judas the Galilean, who I think were two of the Jerusalem ecclesia “pillars”.) Nevertheless, information could have been transmitted very rapidly in those times, and the Jews in Rome could have been notified of what Paul was up to as well as having been notified of the execution of the pillars in Jerusalem. That could very well have started a riot similar to unrest triggered by the death of Judas the Galilean in 19 AD.

He, then living at Rome, professed to instruct men in the wisdom of the laws of Moses.

It wouldn't be the laws of Moses per se if he was accused of *transgressing* the laws. If Paul made it to Rome after writing Romans, he would have preached *his version* of Judaism, as apostle to the Gentiles. And by all appearances, what Paul taught was *not* your standard Judaism. It was definitely influenced in important ways by Jewish Scriptures, but it was centered on Christ and the Cross.

He procured also three other men, entirely of the same character with himself, to be his partners.

On the one hand, this could be a reference to Paul and his fellow helpers (e.g., Timothy, Titus, Tertius, etc.). On the other hand, it could be a reference to Judas and the three “pillars” (James, Cephas and John). But the presence of 1+3 men is suggestive: Paul and the three pillars of Jerusalem are arguably the most important early Christian figures, so perhaps the author is lumping them together? I tend to think that it refers to Paul and three helpers, but I leave it open since it is all speculation anyway.

These men persuaded Fulvia, a woman of great dignity, and one that had embraced the Jewish religion, to send purple and gold to the temple at Jerusalem ^¼

The last bit sounds like a variation on the collection gathered for Jerusalem by Paul and his Gentile churches. Plus, later legends about Paul (such as those recorded in *Acts of Paul*) depict him as a home-wrecker of sorts, persuading wives to leave their husbands and follow him. For example, the Iconians “complain that Paul beguiled their wives.”^[449] Additionally, the direct mention of Fulvia could be pointing to the transformation of an Essene ecclesia that honored Julius Caesar with an annual passion play written by Fulvia, to a cult based on a Jewish rebel leader. Hard to say. But one does have to try to imagine what was common knowledge to people back then, or even hidden knowledge to specific persons and groups, and what they might write for the “initiated.”

^¼ and when they had gotten them, they employed them for their own uses, and spent the money themselves, on which account it was that they at first required it of her.

Again, this is an accusation made against Paul that he refers to in his letters: that he was defrauding members of his churches.^[450] If Paul did not make that final 3rd trip to Jerusalem, this is exactly what they would have said about him. The slander had already been going around before writing Romans that Paul had selfish ulterior motives for the collection. Paul was in a double bind: either go to Jerusalem with the money and risk getting lynched, or continue his mission and have his character sullied.

Whereupon Tiberius, who had been informed of the thing by Saturninus, the husband of Fulvia, who desired inquiry might be made about it, ordered all the Jews to be banished out of Rome; at which time the consuls listed four thousand men out of them, and sent them to the island Sardinia ^¼ Thus were these Jews banished out of the city by the wickedness of four men.^[451]

On the face of it, this is about the 19 AD event recorded by Tacitus. So why does it seem to be a combination of the 19 AD event and the 49 AD event, thirty years apart? And why is it connected to such a bizarre story that seems to be about Paul on one level, but may have more occult meaning? Could this be telling us, in code, about a possible origin event for Christianity – the execution of Judas the Galilean – following which there was an expulsion of restive, unhappy Jews, and how it was

connected to the expulsion of Jews during the reign of *Claudius*, i.e. *Paul's* conflict that followed him to Rome, and which is exposed in his letters? Clement said he had been exiled; well, maybe that was when it happened? Or, perhaps the author was simply trying to indicate what he thought of Christianity in a way that would pass the censors? Maybe he didn't realize that the time indicated was 19 AD? Maybe he thought it was the "right time" of the crucifixion according to later authorities and after other interpolations had already been made to put Pilate in Judea 10 or more years later? It's all very mysterious and I'm just speculating; perhaps someone else can get more out of it.

It seems to me that if the Jerusalem ecclesia was associated with the sectarians at Qumran, and those sectarians were associated with the Dead Sea Scrolls, then that was the ideological inspiration for the rebellion against Rome. Since we have Josephus' testimony about his own involvement in that rebellion – embellished though it may be – he would have known about Paul and his unifying messiah. Based on Josephus' spirited defense of Judaism, and his own peculiar interpretations of God's will working through the Romans in relation to the Jews, his affiliation with Essene-type communities might be assumed to be rather likely – at least early in the game. That, too, would have put him into contact with circles that knew, or knew of, Paul. His whole attitude about messianism almost has to be read in reverse, and perhaps this little story, if it is Josephan, may be either a deliberate coded message, or a fanciful tale in which his subconscious gives him away. Or perhaps it is an interpolation. I leave it to others to work that out if possible.

Paul: It's Just a Matter of Time

In his letters, Paul gives a couple points of reference that help us to construct a relative chronology of his ministry. Between his revelation/call to be an apostle to the Gentiles and his first visit to Jerusalem, there were 2–3 years, during which he worked in "Arabia" and Damascus. After the first Jerusalem visit (which followed immediately after his flight from Damascus), Paul then preached for 13–14 years, with missions in Syria and Cilicia, Macedonia and Achaia, Illyricum and Galatia, before the "Antioch incident" and his second trip to Jerusalem.

After this, constructing the chronology gets tricky. Campbell, using only the internal evidence of the letters, places the two letters to the Thessalonians in Paul's 13–14-year window, and the other eight after the second trip to Jerusalem. As noted earlier, he groups these eight into two clusters. If Campbell's reconstruction is accurate – and he arguably makes the case very well – the period of time between the second Jerusalem trip and the composition of Romans (the last letter written in the second cluster) adds up to just over two years. Because of the uncertainty in Paul's stated numbers of years, that adds up to a total of just over 17 years to one of just over 19 years for Paul's career, from "call" to Romans.

Taking Campbell's relative chronology as basically accurate, but rejecting his date for Paul's escape from Damascus and the first Jerusalem meeting, this is what the chronology looks like:

- 2–3 years: Paul's "call" to be an apostle, followed by activity in Damascus and Arabia, his escape from Damascus and his the first Jerusalem trip
- 13–14 years: Activity in Syria, Cilicia, Macedonia, Galatia, and elsewhere, followed by the Antioch incident and his second trip to Jerusalem
- 2+ years: Travels through Asia, Macedonia, to Corinth – 8 letters (this period of the letters essentially starts at the beginning of a year, in winter, and ends somewhere early in the year, two years later, when Paul writes Romans, assuming Romans was last and not Philippians)

Here are Paul's descriptions of what he was up to during his early career:

[Gal. 1:13](#)—2:1: You have heard, no doubt, of my earlier life in Judaism. I was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it. I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors. But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to

me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with any human being, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles before me, but I went away at once into Arabia, and afterwards I returned to Damascus.

Then after three years I did go up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days; but I did not see any other apostle except James the Lord's brother.

In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie! Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia, and I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea that are in Christ; they only heard it said, "The one who formerly was persecuting us is now proclaiming the faith he once tried to destroy."

Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me.

2 Cor. 1:8–9: We do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, of the affliction we experienced in Asia; for we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death so that we would rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.

2 Cor. 6:4–5: ¹/₄ but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger ¹/₄

2 Cor. 11:22–27: Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. Are they ministers of Christ? I am talking like a madman – I am a better one: with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless floggings, and often near death.

Five times I have received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked; for a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from bandits, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers and sisters; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, hungry and thirsty, often without food, cold and naked.

2 Cor. 11:32–33: In Damascus, the governor under King Aretas guarded the city of Damascus in order to seize me, but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands.

2 Cor. 12:1–10: It is necessary to boast; nothing is to be gained by it, but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven – whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows. And I know that such a person – whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows – was caught up into Paradise and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat. ... But if I wish to boast, I will not be a fool, for I will be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think better of me than what is seen in me or heard from me, even considering the exceptional character of the revelations. Therefore, to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.

Notice the claim above: "three times I was beaten with rods". To be beaten with rods was a Roman punishment that was almost never inflicted on Roman citizens; thus, we can be fairly sure that the claim in Acts that Paul was a Roman citizen was false. It was a plot device to get Paul from Jerusalem to Rome. I suspect that Paul never made the third visit to Jerusalem and the confrontation between the Jews and Paul that is depicted as having occurred in Jerusalem actually occurred in Rome and resulted in Paul being exiled from the city.

I would suggest that, after the confrontations that took place as described in 1 and 2 Corinthians, Paul may have been so hounded that he did not return to Jerusalem with the collection. He and the "pillars" in Jerusalem had presumably come to some sort of agreement: that Paul was free to continue his ministry to the Gentiles, as long as he collected some funds "for the poor" of Jerusalem. But as Paul continued his mission, he was continually hounded, his churches infiltrated and co-opted

by individuals sent out by the very people with whom he thought he was in agreement. In this scenario, by the time he wrote Romans Paul was still considering following through with the trip, even if he feared for his life. [\[452\]](#)

Alternatively, if Philippians is placed after Romans, this suggests a different scenario. Paul wrote Philippians while imprisoned (presumably in Corinth). Something must have happened between writing Romans and then being imprisoned. If so, could it have had something to do with the arrival of the people Paul sarcastically calls “super-apostles” bearing letters of authority from the James Gang? Tellingly, Paul makes no mention of the collection in this letter, perhaps implying he had given up on his plans at this point. Their arrival, and the conflict that led to his imprisonment, might have been the straw that broke the camel’s back.

So, if we place Paul in Rome in 49 AD, he could have written Romans early in the year, travelled directly to Rome and raised hell among the local Jewish population, thus provoking the Urban Prefect to order the expulsion of the anti-Paul agitators and those causing the agitation, i.e. Paul and his companions. That would give him just under a year in Rome, enough time to cause the unrest reported by Suetonius. Using this as our anchor, let’s recalculate our chronology and see how it meshes with other events discussed so far:

- Anywhere from late 29 to early 32: Paul’s call
- Anywhere from late 32 to early 34: flight from Damascus, first Jerusalem trip
- Some time after 38 to 40: 1 & 2 Thessalonians
- Late 46/early 47: Antioch/second Jerusalem trip
- Mid 47: travels through Asia, imprisonment in Apamea, Laodiceans/Colossians/Philemon written, founding visit to Ephesus
- Spring 48: in Ephesus, 1 Corinthians written, starts trip to Macedonia
- Summer 48: traveling through Macedonia, 2 Corinthians written, arrival in Corinth
- Fall 48 to winter 48/49: Galatians written, imprisonment in Corinth, Philippians written
- Early 49: Romans written

Since the publication of the NT, the lynchpin for Christian chronology has always been “the fifteenth year of Tiberius”, i.e. 29 AD. We now see that it could have been the date of Paul’s revelation and had nothing to do with Jesus of Nazareth. Interestingly, it was three years before Paul went to Jerusalem, which is reflected in the implied duration of Jesus’ ministry in the gospel of John. In the end, it was mainly the Pauline church that became the foundation of the Christian church, not the messianic/revolutionary church of Jerusalem. And by the time the gospels were written, the fledgling church was battling “heresies”, including Docetism, one version of which said that there was no fleshly “Jesus the man”, just a spiritual Christ. If Paul, the founder of the church as they knew it, had his history-changing experience around 29–32 AD, the best place to put a fleshly Jesus would naturally be very soon before the most important vision of the resurrected Christ, not 10 years earlier. (A physical resurrection 10 years after the fact would be a messy affair, one would think!)

This naturally telescoped Paul’s persecution of the early church, and led to a conflict with the association between Jesus and Pilate (thanks to Ignatius), a leftover of the memory of Judas the Galilean, who was expunged from Christian history and replaced with a more Pauline “Jesus”. It left us with the Acts story – Jesus dies, his followers see him return in the flesh, Paul has his vision – rather than what the epistles suggest: that all “resurrection appearances” were visionary experiences.

This revised chronology also has the advantage of placing Paul’s flight from Damascus at a time when Syria and the region were ‘governorless’ and thus being ruled by proxy. If Aretas *didn’t* rule Damascus his whole life, this is the only plausible window for him to do so based on the available texts. Around six years later, during the reign of Caligula, there was terrible unrest and persecution of Jews in Alexandria and Caligula had announced his plans to violate their synagogues with his images. By 40 AD, the plan to erect a statue of Caligula in the temple in Jerusalem was underway, inspiring the tradition of the “the man of lawlessness” in Thessalonians.

For the next 15 years, the James Gang became dedicated to making sure they would have revolutionary support. During this time, Paul was out and about, merrily evangelizing. While he was persecuted during this time, possibly because he was suspected of being one of the revolutionaries, it wasn't until shortly before writing the majority of his letters that, all of a sudden, things started to go south. It seems that all of Paul's letters are combative against one thing or another, and while the pressures appear to have been from several sources, the main one was the revolutionary gang that passed as the Jerusalem church.

Then, around 48 AD – perhaps around the time of the conflict in Corinth – James and Simon, the leaders of the James Gang, were executed. As I noted, in Acts 12:2, the story about *James*, the brother of John, being executed and *Peter* (i.e. Simon-Peter) seized, may have been inspired by this passage in Josephus. Paul considered that he needed to disconnect himself from these people and their sicarii-type activities, all of which is well depicted in Josephus. He departed for Rome.

[NOTE: Above, deleted “Peter wasn't killed off in Acts as happened in real life, because the author needed to take him to Rome to stake the claim of the Jewish messiah there so as to displace Caesar completely.” Because Acts doesn't take Peter to Rome. First person to place Peter there is Dionysius, ca. 170 AD, according to Wells.]

I think that Paul went directly to Rome after all the persecutions he experienced from the James Gang in their drive to gain supporters and funds for their revolution. He probably was making the collection to bring the wealth of the Gentiles to Jerusalem so as to fulfill the prophecy in Isaiah, but at some point, I think he realized that it was not going to be possible to fulfill every jot and tittle. Paul was working as hard as he could to reconcile people under the Jewish god via the gentile son of god, Julius Caesar AKA Jesus Christ; perhaps he was consciously trying to prevent the disaster that he could see coming if the Jews stood up against Rome and if the Gentiles continued to perceive the Jews as exclusivist and xenophobic.

There are several correspondences between the activities of Paul and the mythical life of Jesus, only a few of which I've mentioned in this work. If it was actually *Paul* who began his ministry in the “fifteenth year of Tiberius,” 29 AD, we may conjecture that he was about the same age as ascribed to Jesus. If he was born around the time of the death of Herod (1 BC/AD), he would have been 29 at the time of his “call”. He would have been around fifty by the time he made it to Rome. Perhaps he was exiled from Rome for a period as Clement suggests in his brief recap of the career of Paul. Perhaps he did go to Spain. And perhaps he returned to Rome after the destruction of Jerusalem and wrote chapters 9 through 11 of Romans in his grief and despair that his life's work aimed at preventing this tragedy had been in vain. I know that *1 Clement* talks about the death of Paul, and Ellegard proposes that it was written before the destruction of Jerusalem, but it is also possible that it was written after. Otherwise, chapters 9–11 must be an interpolation, in my opinion.

And perhaps the James Gang, the putative apostles of the mythical Jesus of Nazareth, who were actually the revolutionary followers of Judas the Galilean, all perished, along with their delusive hopes of messianic salvation, in the fires of Jerusalem. Sadly, that delusion is one that has survived in Christianity, Judaism and Islam.

[NOTE: Deleted last sentences about Paul continuing to be a persecutor, because they're out of place here. They worked in the earlier MS, but they were in a totally different context.]

The Holy City

The world wanted and needed a powerful, conquering and merciful savior, and that is exactly who Julius Caesar was. His life was glorious from start to finish, and when he chose to go to the senate meeting, despite the portents, it was understood that he agreed to be sacrificed so that he could stand against the powers and principalities and forces in the air that created and sustained the evils of mankind. It was understood that he was a divine being who gave up divine powers to come to earth and be a perfect man in every sense of the word, thereby receiving the holy name of savior: Joshua. Paul only knew the Jewish

god, so in his mind, Caesar was like Cyrus, only much more. Cyrus performed earthly acts; Caesar won all the wars on earth and went on to win all the wars in heaven on behalf of mankind.

As for Judas the Galilean, he, too, was a badass dude like his successor, John of Gischala, and his followers claimed he had been resurrected as the “sky man” who would soon bring the wrath of God back with him to crush the Romans and everyone who wasn’t a perfect Jew. But Paul was working to bring about a very different reality: peace and reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free, man and woman.

Before Jerusalem, Rome was the original Holy City. It was established as such in the eighth century by a caste of holy priests, the “fathers”, whose primary duties were to govern according to the will of Jupiter. Every magistrate was an augur of some sort, and no business was ever conducted, even down to the time of Caesar, without “reading the signs” – taking the “auspices” – to determine the will of the gods. Jerusalem, on the other hand, only seems to have become a “holy city” as a consequence of the Maccabean revolt and reforms in 167–60 BC, when Judas Maccabeus and his Judean rebels fought the Seleucid Empire of Antiochus IV.

According to the most rational biblical scholarship, the Old Testament was produced in the early third century in Alexandria and modeled largely on Greco-Roman literature, from Herodotus to Plato, even borrowing incidents and concepts from Roman History. It seems that among the ideas borrowed from the Romans was the conviction that their god was the one true god, who had endowed them with the character and right to rule over others. For the Romans, it became a reality; for the Jews, it was, at that point, just a dream. Isaiah prophesied that the Wolf would lie down with the Lamb. The Roman Wolf certainly did submit to the Christian Lamb thanks to Constantine, and for the past 1700 years, Rome has been, more or less, “twice holy”, since it was claimed that it became the holy city only after Jerusalem rejected her messiah. But that doesn’t seem to be true at all. Jerusalem did not reject Judas the Galilean; Rome did. Jerusalem rejected Paul’s messiah, while Rome eventually embraced both, though it forgot that the messiah was its own native son: Gaius Julius Caesar.

Since its inception, Rome was ruled by a group of patricians who thought they had the right to despoil and rule the world. They were overthrown more completely by his death than ever could have been possible had he lived. Caesar didn’t want the destruction of the Republic; he wanted to repair and reform it and leave it better than before. When Brutus and the gang struck their blow for freedom, they didn’t realize that it was to be the freedom of the grave for both them and their precious oligarchic republic. Like the Judas character of the gospels, the assassins all suffered ignoble deaths and Dante placed them all in the ninth circle of Hell together. Somehow he must have sensed – or known – that the story about the betrayal of Jesus was actually the betrayal of Caesar.

Caesar extended rights of citizenship and legal protection to the provinces. After Caesar’s model, Christianity extended the rights of citizenship in heaven even to slaves and barbarians. Rome is – and has been since the conquest of Greece in the second century BC - the mystical Acropolis of the Earth, the supernatural *de Civitas Dei*. And it was consecrated by the death and deification of Julius Caesar.

In the years after Caesar’s death, several messianic movements started in the Jewish communities in the Empire. They ranged from violent revolutionaries in Judea to the milder ecclesia in the diaspora. In 1 BC, after the death of Herod the Great, Simon of Perea declared himself king. Varus led the operation to put down the revolt, killing Simon and creating further hostility to Rome in the process.

After Augustus’ death, Tiberius sent Pontius Pilate to govern Judea ca. 15 AD. Pilate insulted the sensibilities of the Jews, prompting a resurgence of rebel activity on the part of Judas the Galilean, who called on the Jews not to pay their taxes, and to take up arms against Rome. Pilate executed him. Their leader dead, the rebels went underground. Sometime in the next 10 years, a Jew named Paul challenged this revolutionary movement. But in 29 AD he had an experience that would change his life, and that of the world. Perhaps Paul witnessed a passion play of the deified Julius Caesar. Whatever it was, it was a

revelation to him, and he realized at once that this was, truly, the Son of God.

At once, his pharisaic mind went into overdrive. He reinterpreted Jewish ideology and texts with the key that put all the pieces together: the crucified messiah. Pulling together elements of Judaism, Greek and Roman thought, he created a religion with the potential to unite humanity, not under coercion, but in fidelity to higher principles of mercy, compassion and love. By dying with and within the Messiah – Divus Julius – we may die to our old selves, and experience new lives in accordance with those higher principles. This is possible because Caesar, the conqueror, has gone before us to defeat the powers of darkness.

But the revolutionary Jerusalem groups were not pleased. They sent agents across the Empire to coopt Paul's ecclesia for their own purposes: a renewed assault on Rome. In response, Paul decided not to make his third trip to Jerusalem. Instead, he headed for Rome, where further conflict resulted in the riots described by Suetonius. From there he headed to Spain, carrying the good news to the limits of the empire.

Twenty years later, the rebel messianists got what they wanted: war with Rome. But their god and their martial messiahs did not descend from the heavens to make them victorious. Instead, the Romans utterly destroyed them.

By the time of Ignatius and Polycarp in the second century, Paul's spiritual Messiah was not enough to solidify the control of the burgeoning church. A clear figure was needed, and the first gospel writer, Mark, created a narrative using elements of Judas the Galilean, Paul, Caesar, and others. The other gospel writers followed suit, each catering to their own theological agendas.

The rest is history.

Ave Caesar.

[1] For recent studies on Paul from this perspective, see Donald Harman Akenson, *Saint Saul: A Skeleton Key to the Historical Jesus* (Oxford University Press, 2002); Gerd Lüdemann, *Paul: The Founder of Christianity* (Prometheus Books, 2002); and James D. Tabor, *Paul and Jesus: How the Apostle Transformed Christianity* (Simon & Schuster, 2013).

[2] For the variety of 'Judaisms' in the 1st century, see Shaye Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah* (3rd ed.; Westminster John Knox Press, 2014). Also, Donald Harman Akenson, *Saint Saul: A Skeleton Key to the Historical Jesus*, Oxford, 2002.

[3] See the discussion further on regarding Suetonius' mention of the figure Chrestus in Rome in 49 AD, and the discussion of Tacitus on Pontius Pilate.

[4] Richard I. Pervo, *Dating Acts: Between the Evangelists and the Apologists* (Polebridge Press, 2006).

[5] Douglas A. Campbell, *Framing Paul: An Epistolary Biography* (Eerdmans, 2014).

[6] Tacitus (ca. 56–117), as well as later historians such as Plutarch, Suetonius and Cassius Dio, also related events during this time, but only Josephus devotes so much detail to Judea/Syria and the surrounding regions.

[7] Harold W. Attridge, *The Interpretation of Biblical History in the Antiquitates Judaicae of Flavius Josephus* (Scholars Press: Missoula, Montana, 1976), p. 181.

[8] *Ant.* 20.11.2 (265), Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from Josephus' *Antiquities* and *Wars* come from the Whiston translation.

[9] See Mary Ann Tolbert's *Sowing the Gospel* (Fortress Press, 1989) for a discussion of the well-known and effectively utilized techniques of rhetoric found in the Gospel of Mark.

[10] Goulder, *Paul v. Peter*; Thomas L. Brodie, *The Birthing of the New Testament: The Intertextual Development of the New Testament Writings* (Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006). Dennis R. MacDonald's 2-volume *New Testament and Greek Literature: The Gospels and Homer: Imitations of Greek Epic in Mark and Luke-Acts* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2014) and *Luke and Vergil: Imitations of Classical Greek Literature* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2014).

[11] F. C. Baur, *Paul the Apostle of Jesus Christ. His Life and Works, His Epistles and Teachings* (2 vols; Hendrickson, 2003 [1845]); Jason D. BeDuhn, *The First New Testament: Marcion's Scriptural Canon* (Polebridge Press, 2013); Campbell, *Framing Paul* (2014); John Knox, *Chapters in a Life of Paul* (Mercer University Press, 1987 [1950]); Gerd Luedemann, *Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles: Studies in Chronology* (Fortress Press, 1984); David Trobisch, *Paul's Letter Collection: Tracing the Origins* (Quiet Waters Publications, 2001) and *The First New Testament* (Oxford University Press 2011 [2000]); Joseph B. Tyson,

Marcion and Luke-Acts: A Defining Struggle (University of South Carolina Press, 2006).

[12] David L. Eastman, "Paul: An Outline of His Life", in Mark Harding and Alanna Nobbs (eds), *All Things to all Cultures: Paul among Jews, Greeks and Romans* (Eerdmans, 2013), p. 52.

[13] See Campbell, *Framing Paul*, pp. 220–9.

[14] As Robert Price put it to me, "It may be that the threat of Caligula prompted some at the time to nominate him as the Son of Perdition just like Antiochus Epiphanes earlier, but when the danger passed, he had left his stamp on the Antichrist legend. It needn't have been front-page news when 2 Thessalonians mentioned it" (personal communication). Campbell admits that placing it in 40 AD is "a rather more tentative judgment" (p. 229).

[15] He also rehabilitates Ephesians and Colossians. Most recently the Westar scholars rejected these three letters. See Arthur J. Dewey, Roy W. Hoover, Lane McGaughey and Daniel D. Schmidt, *The Authentic Letters of Paul* (Polebridge Press, 2010).

[16] Ancient sources counted years inclusively, so when Paul gives a figure of 3 years, the actual amount of time could be anywhere between 2 and 3.

[17] See previous footnote.

[18] Curiously, John the Baptist figures in the story: he strongly condemned the divorce and remarriage, and Josephus says this led to his execution.

[19] *Earliest extreme*: 23 AD: Commission – 26 AD: 1st Jerusalem visit (3 years later) – 40 AD: 2 Thess. written, 2nd Jerusalem visit (14 years after 1st).

Latest extreme: 38 AD: Commission – 40 AD: 1st Jerusalem visit (just over 2 years later), 2 Thess. written – 53 or 54 AD: 2nd Jerusalem visit (13–14 years after 1st).

[20] See Earl Doherty's excellent analysis of all the alleged references to the gospels' "Jesus of Nazareth" in the early Christian epistles: *The Sound of Silence*: <http://www.jesuspuzzle.humanists.net/soundofsilence.html>

[21] Mason (2001), pp. xx–xi.

[22] Mason (2001), p. xlvi.

[23] Mason (2001), pp. xlvii–xlviii.

[24] *Life* 76 (430). All references to Josephus' *Life* come from Mason's translation.

[25] Mason (2001), p. xxix.

[26] Mason (2001), p. xx.

[27] *Life* 50 (260), 58 (302).

[28] Mason (2001), p. xxix.

[29] *Life* 26 (129), 27 (132), 28 (140).

[30] Eisler (1931), pp. 29, 187, 196, 184, 25.

[31] Eisler (1931), pp. 24, 26, 27, 28, 29.

[32] Reading Josephus, I'm continually reminded of the studies of the authoritarian personality by Bob Altemeyer, University of Manitoba, or the more recent ideas of David Dunning and Justin Kruger of Cornell University: the "Dunning-Kruger effect" which is a cognitive bias wherein relatively unskilled individuals suffer from illusory superiority, mistakenly assessing their ability to be much higher than is accurate. Dunning and Kruger attributed this bias to a metacognitive inability of the unskilled to recognize their own ineptitude and evaluate their own ability accurately. In other words, "If you're incompetent, you can't know you're incompetent.... [T]he skills you need to *produce* a right answer are exactly the skills you need to *recognize* what a right answer is." ("Dunning-Kruger Effect", *Wikipedia*: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dunning%E2%80%93Kruger_effect)

[33] "Duping delight" is a neologism coined by Paul Ekman in his book *Telling Lies* (1992) to describe the tendency of some criminal offenders when they manage to get away with a crime or a lie – it gives them pleasure. It is apparently a common feature of the psychopath.

[34] Spelled Banus in another manuscript, probably a play on words of the Latin *balneum* (bath) or the Greek *balaneus* (bath-man). See Steve Mason, *Life of Josephus: Translation and Commentary* (Brill, 2001), p. 18.

[35] *Life* 2 (9–12).

[36] Philo, *Hypoth.* 11.3.

[37] Philo, *Hypoth.* 11.4.

[38] *Wars* 2.8.7 (137–8).

[39] *Life* 3 (14–6).

[40] *Life* 72 (402–4).

[41] Mason (2001), p. xxv.

[42] Eisler (1931), pp. 186–7. Unless otherwise noted, all emphasis in quoted sources are mine.

- [43] David F. Graf, "Aretas", *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. I (), p. 375.
- [44] *Ant.* 16.9.4 (294–9).
- [45] *Ant.* 17.10.9 (287).
- [46] *Ant.* 18.5.1 (109–25).
- [47] Douglas A. Campbell, "An Anchor for Pauline Chronology: Paul's Flight from 'The Ethnarch of King Aretas' (2 Corinthians 11:32–33)," *Journal for Biblical Literature* Vol. 121, No. 2 (Summer, 2002), pp. 297–8.
- [48] Ross Burns, *Damascus: A History* (Routledge, 2005), p. 44.
- [49] Pliny, *NH* 5.74; Ptolemy, *Georg.* 5.14.
- [50] Mason, *Life*, p. 139, n. 1399.
- [51] *Wars* 1.4.8 (103); 1.5.3 (115); 1.6.2 (127); 1.12.1 (236); 1.18.4–5; 1.20.3–4 (362); from Eleazar's speech at Masada in 7.8.7 (368).
- [52] *Wars* 1.21.11 (422–3).
- [53] *Wars* 1.20.3 (396).
- [54] *Wars* 2.6.3 (96).
- [55] *Wars* 1.8.5 (168); 2.6.3 (95); *Ant.* 18.4.6 (106).
- [56] *Wars* 2.11.5 (215); *Ant.* 19.5.1 (274).
- [57] Campbell, "Anchor", p. 287.
- [58] Campbell, "Anchor", p. 299, n. 45
- [59] Tacitus, *Ann.* 6.27.
- [60] Campbell, "Anchor", p. 290.
- [61] Campbell, "Anchor", p. 282.
- [62] Strabo 17.1.13.
- [63] *Ant.* 14.7.2 (117).
- [64] Philo, *Flacc.* 74.
- [65] OGI 616.2; Lucian, *Macrobii* 17 ("Asander, who, after being ethnarch, was proclaimed king of Bosphorus by the divine Augustus ..."); Philo, *Quis rer. div. her.* 56 ("leader of a nation").
- [66] Rainer Riesner, *Paul's Early Period: Chronology, Mission Strategy, Theology* (Eerdmans, 1997), p. 86.
- [67] Campbell, "Anchor", p. 296.
- [68] Robert Eisler, *The Messiah Jesus and John the Baptist* (Dial Press, 1931), pp. 288–94, argues that John's death occurred in 35 AD.
- [69] *Ant.* 18.4.6 (106–8).
- [70] *Ant.* 18.5.4 (136).
- [71] Steve Mason, *Judean War 2: Translation and Commentary* (Brill, 2008), p. 155.
- [72] One assumes that Josephus means "around the time of the death of Philip" as just recounted.
- [73] In short, the two Herods were both in love with their niece who carried the blood of the Hasmoneans through her father.
- [74] A fortified hilltop palace located in Jordan fifteen miles (24 km) southeast of the mouth of the Jordan river on the eastern side of the Dead Sea. In 1978–1981, excavations were carried out by Virgilio Corbo, Stanislao Loffreda and Michele Piccirillo, from the Franciscan Biblical Institute in Jerusalem. The ruins remain in remarkably untouched condition to this day. Archaeology reveals within the fortified area, ruins of the Herodian palace, including rooms, a large courtyard, and an elaborate bath, with fragments of the floor mosaic still remaining. Traceable also, coming from the east, is the aqueduct that brought water to the cisterns of the fortress. Pottery found in the area extends from late Hellenistic to Roman periods and confirms the two main periods of occupation, namely, Hasmonean (90 BC–57 BC) and Herodian (30 BC–AD 72), with a brief reoccupation soon after AD 72 and then nothing further – so complete and systematic was the destruction visited upon the site by the Romans. "Anastylosis at Machaerus," *Biblical Archeology Review*, Jan/Feb. 2015, Vol. 41, No. 1, pp. 52–61.
- [75] *Ant.* 18.5.1 (109–12).
- [76] Plutarch, *Antony* 32–34.
- [77] *Ant.* 18.5.1 (113–5).
- [78] *Ant.* 18.5.2 (116–9).
- [79] Tiberius' reign was counted from August 19, 14 AD. So, for example, Tacitus could refer to the start of the year 23 AD as occurring in the "ninth year

of Tiberius" (*Ann.* 4.1). So also Pliny the Elder (*NH* 33.8) and Philo (*Leg.* 21).

[80] Dio 58.26.

[81] Tacitus, *Ann.* 6.31–7. All citations of his *Annales* refer to A. J. Woodman's translation (Hackett, 2004).

[82] Tacitus, *Ann.* 6.44.5.

[83] *Ant.* 18.5.3 (120–6).

[84] Spelled Banus in another manuscript, probably a play on words of the Latin *balneum* (bath) or the Greek *balaneus* (bath-man). See Steve Mason, *Life of Josephus: Translation and Commentary* (Brill, 2001), p. 18.

[85] *Life* 2 (11–12).

[86] *Ant.* 17.8.1 (191).

[87] *Ant.* 18.2.1 (20).

[88] *Ant.* 18.4.6 (106).

[89] *Wars* 2.20.1–4 (556–68).

[90] *Wars* 3.2.1 (9–11).

[91] *Wars* 3.2.2 (19–20).

[92] *Wars* 7.8.1 (262–4).

[93] *Ant.* 18.5.2 (118).

[94] Campbell, "Anchor", p. 287, n. 26.

[95] Campbell, "Anchor", p. 293, n. 42.

[96] *Ant.* 18.4.5 (104–5).

[97] Campbell, p. 184–185, exc.

[98] Campbell, p. 185, n. 58

[99] *Ant.* 18.4.4–5 (96).

[100] Suetonius, *Tiberius* 66.

[101] Suetonius, *Caligula* 14.3.

[102] Suetonius, *Vitellius* 2.4.

[103] Suetonius, *Caligula* 5.

[104] Dio 59.27.2–4.

[105] Tacitus, *Ann.* 2.1–5.2.

[106] Tacitus, *Ann.* 2.43.2.

[107] Tacitus, *Ann.* 2.57.3–58.2.

[108] Tacitus, *Ann.* 2.68–69.

[109] Tacitus, *Ann.* 6.31.

[110] This sacrifice comprised a boar, a ram, and a bull. (Original footnote to the text by Woodman.)

[111] Tacitus, *Ann.* 6.37.1–38.1.

[112] One gets a crazy vertiginous sensation that Josephus' account of these events relies on Tacitus, even though we know that Tacitus published some years after Josephus. Interpolation? Perhaps.

[113] Philo, *Legatio* 32 (231–2).

[114] Tacitus, *Ann.* 12.12 ff.

[115] Of course, there's the nagging problem of whether the gospels can agree on whether that ministry was one year or three and whether Jesus was crucified in 29, 30, 32 or 33 AD; not to mention that pesky John the Baptist not sticking to the schedule and dying in 35/36 when he's supposed to die before Jesus' ministry begins. Then there is the problem of the almost immediate conversion of Paul, who supposedly was a persecutor of the early "church", which hardly had time to form or grow or spread, and how to fit his chronology in with the chronology of Jesus and Pilate. It's really a mess and the amount of ink that has been spilled on it would float an aircraft carrier.

[116] Bart D. Ehrman, *A Brief Introduction to the New Testament* (2nd ed.; Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 136.

[117] John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (HarperOne, 1995), p. 145.

[118]

Donald B. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton University Press 1992), pp. 301, 258, 260–1, 263.

[119] *Josephus, Flavius: The Jewish War*, translated by G. A. Williamson, introduction by E. Mary Smallwood (Penguin, 1981), p. 24.

[120] Pervo (2015), pp. 126–7.

[121] *Ibid.*, p. 127.

[122] *Ibid.*, pp. 128–9.

[123] In 1835, German theologian David Friedrich Strauss published his extremely controversial *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined (Das Leben Jesu)*. While not denying that Jesus existed, he did argue that the miracles in the New Testament were mythical retellings of normal events as supernatural happenings. According to Strauss, the early church developed these miracle stories to present Jesus as a fulfillment of Jewish prophecies of what the Messiah would be like. This ¼ perspective was in direct opposition to the supernaturalist view that the bible was accurate both historically and spiritually. The book caused an uproar across Europe. The Earl of Shaftesbury called the 1846 translation by Marian Evans "the most pestilential book ever vomited out of the jaws of hell," and Strauss' appointment as chair of theology at the University of Zürich caused such controversy that the authorities offered him a pension before he had a chance to start his duties. ("David Strauss", *Wikipedia*: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Strauss)

[124] Ellegard, 2008, p. 170.

[125] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christ_myth_theory

[126] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christ_myth_theory

[127] *Ibid.*

[128] Doherty Jesus: Neither God nor Man, pp. vii-viii.

[129] Doherty, The Jesus Puzzle, *Journal of Higher Criticism*, Vo. 4. Issue 2, 1997.

[130] Price doesn't fully agree with this point. He **thinks the epistles are late pseudepigrapha but do attest an earlier variety of Christianity that knew of no historical Jesus. (Personal communication with the author, 2015.)**

[131] "Christ-myth theory", *Wikipedia*.

[132] For an opposing view, see Robert Price, *Amazing Colossal Apostle*, and the "Dutch Radicals".

[133] Ellegard, "Theologians", pp. 169-70.

[134] Philo, *Quod Omnis Probus Liber* 12.75—13.91. Available online at: <http://www.earlyjewishwritings.com/text/philo/book33.html>

[135] Philo, in Eusebius, *P.E.* 8.11.1–18. Available online at: <http://www.earlyjewishwritings.com/text/philo/book37.html>

[136] Pliny, *Historia Naturalis* 5.17 or 29; in other editions 5.(15).73.

[137] *Wars* 2.8.2–13 (119–61).

[138] *Ant.* 13.5.9 (172).

[139] *Ant.* 15.10.4 (371).

[140] *Ant.* 18.1.5 (18–9).

[141] Gabriele Boccaccini, *Beyond the Essene Hypothesis: The Parting of the Ways Between Qumran and Enochic Judaism* (Eerdmans, 1998), p. 47.

[142] John Collins' recent work, *Beyond Qumran*, supports Ellegard's conclusions, with discussion of such communities scattered around the empire.

[143] Epiphanius, *Panarion* 1:18.

[144] *Ibid.* 1:19.

[145] Norman Golb, *Who Wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls?: The Search for the Secret of Qumran* (Simon & Schuster, 1996).

[146] "Essenes", *Wikipedia*: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essenes>

[147] Shürer, vol. II, p. 591–7.

[148] Sanhedrin (43a): "Jesus was hanged on Passover Eve. Forty days previously the herald had cried, 'He is being led out for stoning, because he has practiced sorcery and led Israel astray and enticed them into apostasy. Whosoever has anything to say in his defense, let him come and declare it.' As nothing was brought forward in his defense, he was hanged on Passover Eve." That is to say, his dead body was hanged on a gibbet after stoning.

[149] Sanhedrin (107b), cited by Wells, *The Jesus of the Early Christians* (1971), p. 200.

[150] *Ibid.*, p. 202.

[151] Birger A. Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity* (Fortress Press, 2006), pp. 37–8.

[152] It is interesting to note that this was the time that brought forth Antiochus of Ascalon beginning the phase of Greek philosophy known as Middle Platonism. was a pupil of Philo of Larissa at the Academy, but he diverged from the Academic skepticism of Philo and his predecessors. He was a teacher of Cicero, and the first of a new breed of eclectics among the Platonists; he endeavoured to bring the doctrines of the Stoics and the Peripatetics into Platonism, and stated, in opposition to Philo, that the mind could distinguish true from false. he had a school at Alexandria as well as in Syria, where he

seems to have died. Looking into Middle Platonism reveals a rich field of comparative study for emerging Christianity.

[153] Rev. G. T. Manley, *The New Bible Handbook* (London, 1960), p. 140, cited by Wells (1971), p. 282.

[154] H. Hepding, *Attis, seine Mythen und sein Kult* (Giessen, 1903), p. 65 ff., cited by Wells (1971), p. 282.

[155] Wells (1971), p. 282.

[156] 1 Cor. 1:22–4, 2:1–2. At the end of this letter, commenting on Christ's resurrection or ascension, an event associated with the cross, Paul says: "If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain ... and you are still in your sins" (1 Cor. 15:14–7).

[157] Albert Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, translated by W. Montgomery (London, 1931), p. 72, cited by Wells (1971), p. 298.

[158] Wells (1971), p. 228.

[159] Assuming that the reference to the fleshly descent of Jesus is not an interpolation.

[160] G. Murray, *Stoic, Christian and Humanist* (London, 1950), p. 76, cited by Wells (1971), pp. 237–8.

[161] *Ibid.*

[162] 1 Cor. 15:5, where Paul says that Jesus appeared first to Cephas, "then to the twelve". In the gospels, Judas has already betrayed Jesus, so he appears only to "the eleven".

[163] 1 Cor. 9:5.

[164] G. A. Wells, *The Historical Evidence for Jesus* (1988), pp. 217–18.

[165] G.A. Wells, *Can We Trust the NT?* (2004), pp. 49–50.

[166] *Ibid.*, p. 43.

[167] James 5:12.

[168] Wells (1971), pp. 155–6.

[169] Ellegård, pp. 143–4.

[170] Eusebius, *H.E.* 3.3.5.

[171] Eusebius, *H.E.* 6.20.3.

[172] *De Vir. Illus. Voc. Caius.*

[173] The Muratorian fragment is a Latin manuscript translated from Greek, long thought to be the earliest list of canonical Christian books. However, while early scholars dated it to ca. 170 AD, it's now thought to be closer to the fourth century. In other words, it doesn't give a very solid idea of the early Christian canon.

[174] Moses Stuart, Rensselaer David Chanceford Robbins, Mark Mewman, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Vol. I (Codman Press, 1827), p. 123.

[175] Leopold Fonck, *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (1910). Available online at: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07181a.htm>

[176] *The Interpreter's Bible* (1955), TIB XI, p. 588.

[177] "Introduction to Hebrews", *The New Analytical Bible and Dictionary of the Bible (KJV)* (John A. Dickson Publishing Co., 1950), p. 1387.

[178] Eric F. Mason, *You Are a Priest Forever: Second Temple Jewish Messianism and the Priestly Christology of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (STDJ 74; Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2008).

[179] Adolph von Harnack, "Probabilia über die Adresse und den Verfasser des Habraerbriefes," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche* (E. Preuschen, Berlin: Forschungen und Fortschritte, 1900), 1:16–41.

[180] A. J. Gordon, "The Ministry of Women," *World Missionary Review* 7 (December 1894): 910–921.

[181] Gilbert Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles: What the Bible Says about a Woman's Place in Church and Family* (Baker Academic, 1985 1st Edition & 2nd Editions; 2006 3rd Edition).

[182] Priscilla and Aquila were a first-century Christian missionary married couple; Paul was generous in his recognition and acknowledgment of his indebtedness to them (Rom. 16:3–4).

[183] Donald Guthrie, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1983, reprinted 1999), p. 21.

[184] Gordon, *op. cit.*

[185] "Epistle to the Hebrews", Wikipedia.

[186] One must keep in mind that the veracity of Eusebius – or, put another way, the accuracy – has been brought into serious question by the work of Bauer. Read Ellegård for a more thorough critique of Eusebius and dating based on his claims.

[187] Ellegård, pp. 39–40.

[188]

We have already encountered Muratori above somewhat unsatisfactorily. I would suggest that it was written by someone already in full apologetic/true-believer mode.

[189] Ellegård, pp. 40–1. Paul sends greetings to Hermas (among others) in Rome, in Rom. 16:14. Clement is referred to as one of Paul's co-workers (along with Euodia and Syntyche) in Phil. 4:3.

[190] I am grateful to Richard Pervo (personal communication) for reminding me that the language of antiquity could be used quite loosely. Just look at Acts!

[191] Ellegård, pp. 42–3.

[192] Paul usually uses the name "Cephas" ("rock" in Aramaic) in his letters. He only uses "Peter" twice, in Gal. 2:7–8: "On the contrary, they saw that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, just as Peter had been to the Jews. For God, who was at work in the ministry of Peter as an apostle to the Jews, was also at work in my ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles." He never refers to Cephas in the same context, as apostle to the Jews. In fact, in the very next sentence (2:9) he calls "James, Cephas and John" the *pillars*.

[193] Suetonius, *Domitian* 15.1, in *ibid.*, p. 198–9.

[194] Dio 67.14.1f., in Peter Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus: Christians at Rome in the First Two Centuries* (Fortress Press, 2003), p. 198.

[195] Eusebius, *Ecc. Hist.* 3.18.4, in *ibid.*, p. 199.

[196] Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius* 8.25.

[197] Tac. *Ann.* 15.44; Suetonius, *Claudius* 25.3; Suetonius, *Nero* 16.2; Pliny, *Epistle* 10.96.8.

[198] Lampe, *op. cit.*, p. 202.

[199] *Ibid.*, p. 203.

[200] Alan Garrow, *The Gospel of Matthew's Dependence on the Didache*.

[201] *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, v. 1, pp. 613–4.

[202] *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1, Introductory Note to the Epistle of Barnabas.

[203] "Epistle of Barnabas", Wikipedia.

[204] Translated by J.B. Lightfoot, available online at: <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/barnabas-lightfoot.html>

[205] New Bible Commentary, ed. Professor F. Davidson (and others), 2nd edn. (London, 1961).

[206] P. L. Couchoud, *The Enigma of Jesus* (London, 1924), p. 122. Also, Couchoud, *Le mystère de Jésus* (Paris, 1926).

[207] Wells, pp. 288–91, exc.

[208] M. Dibelius, *Die Geisterwelt im Glauben des Paulus* (Göttingen, 1909), p. 201.

[209] Wells, pp. 294–5, exc.

[210] Wells, p. 316.

[211] Tacitus, *Ann.*, 15.44.2–4.

[212] Robert E. Van Voorst, *Jesus Outside the New Testament: An Introduction to the Ancient Evidence* Eerdmans Publishing (2000), pp. 33–5, 44–8. In the Greek of the time, both *christos* and *chrestos* were pronounced the same. (Thanks to Richard I. Pervo for pointing this out to me.) This may suggest that outsiders simply confused the two words. However, the lack of attestation to *Christian* references, and the presence of *Chrestian* ones (see below), in the earliest historical record, may suggest that they got it right.

[213] William Smith and Henry Wace, *A Dictionary of Christian Biography, Literature, Sects and Doctrines*, vol. III (John Murray, 1882), p. 819.

[214] See this website for more evidence (including 13 early manuscript references, 11 inscriptions/graffiti, and references by Church Fathers Justin Martyr, Clement, Tertullian and Lactantius): <http://www.mountainman.com.au/essenes/chrestians%20christians.htm>.

[215] Tacitus, *Histories* 5.9.8.

[216] Hermann Detering, "1 Clement and the Ignatiana in Dutch Radical Criticism", available online at: http://www.radikalkritik.de/Clem_eng.pdf

[217] *Phil.* 13.1; *Mart. Poly.* 10.1.

[218] See "Who Published the New Testament?", *Free Inquiry* 28.1 (2007/2008), pp. 30–33, and *The First Edition of the New Testament* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

[219] Lieu (2015), pp. 293–4.

[220] Acts 20; 1 Tim. 1, 4, 6; *Ign. Eph.* 7–9, 16–7.

[221] *Magnesians* 11:1, quoted in Ellegard, p. 207.

[222] *Trallians* 9–10, quoted in Ellegard, pp. 207–8.

[223] *Philadelphians* 8:2–9:2, quoted in Ellegard, p. 208.

- [224] *Smyrnaeans* 1, 3, quoted by Carrier, p. 318.
- [225] Carrier, p. 319.
- [226] Richard I. Pervo, "Acts in Ephesus (and Environs) c. 115", *Forum Third Series* 4,2 (Fall 2015), p.146, 147, exc.
- [227] *Ibid.*, p. 139.
- [228] *Ephesians* 19, quoted in Carrier, p. 320.
- [229] Carrier, p. 321.
- [230] *Ibid.*, p. 146. See also Pervo's *The Making of Paul: Constructions of the Apostle in Early Christianity* and *The Mystery of Acts: Unraveling Its Story* and "Dating Acts: Between the Evangelists and the Apologists."
- [231] W. Sanday, *The Gospels in the Second Century* (London, 1876), p. 272.
- [232] Wells (1971), p. 111.
- [233] There are also several alleged coins minted by Pilate from the late 20s/early 30s AD. However, the coins do not include Pilate's name. The only reason they are associated with Pilate is because they include the years they were minted, and that association is simply based on the assumption that Pilate ruled during those years. They could have been minted by anyone who was prefect of Judea at the time.
- [234] The issue of heresy is anachronistic at that time, as Pervo and others point out. There was not yet any sort of established orthodoxy against which to claim heretical views; there were only "factions".
- [235] Philo, *On the Embassy to Gaius* (Caligula) 24.159–161.
- [236] Details concerning Sejanus' fall are provided by Cassius Dio. Exactly that portion of Tacitus is missing in all surviving manuscripts.
- [237] Philo, *Embassy* 37.298–39.306.
- [238] *Ant.* 18.3.1 (55–9).
- [239] *Ant.* 18.4.2 (89).
- [240] *Ant.* 17.6.1–4 (146–67).
- [241] *Ant.* 17.6.5–6 (174–81).
- [242] *Ant.* 17.7.1 (182–7).
- [243] *Ant.* 17.8.1 (188–91).
- [244] Ernest L. Martin, *The Star of Bethlehem: The Star That Astonished the World*, 2nd ed. (Associates for Scriptural Knowledge, 1996). Available online at: <http://www.askelm.com/star/star011.htm>
- [245] A more recent work by Gerard Gertoux comes to the same conclusion. See *Herod the Great and Jesus: Chronological, Historical and Archaeological Evidence* (2015): http://www.academia.edu/2518046/Herod_the_Great_and_Jesus_Chronological_Historical_and_Archaeological_Evidence
- [246] Tacitus suggested that there may be been foul play involved in the death of Gaius and that Gaius's step mother Livia may have had a hand in his death. Livia's presumed motive may have been to orchestrate the accession of her own son Tiberius as heir to Augustus.
- [247] *Ibid.* Available online at: <http://www.askelm.com/star/star012.htm>
- [248] *Ant.* 17.8.1 (188–9).
- [249] *Ant.* 17.9.1–3 (206–18).
- [250] *Ant.* 17.9.3 (221–3).
- [251] *Vell.* 2.117.2.
- [252] *66 A.D. – The Last Revolt* (DVD), History Channel.
- [253] Martin presents some evidence that he was reassigned to the province in 2 BC following a two-year governorship of Sentius Saturninus. Gertoux argues that Quirinius was governor during this time, and that he was reassigned later, during the census of 6 AD.
- [254] *Ant.* 17.10.1 (250–3).
- [255] *Ant.* 17.10.1–2 (250–9).
- [256] *Ant.* 17.10.2 (260–4).
- [257] *Ant.* 17.10.4 (269).
- [258] *Ant.* 17.10.9 (286–90).
- [259] *Ant.* 17.10.9 (291–4).
- [260] First cousin of Herod, the one who had prevented him from killing himself during his final illness.
- [261] *Ant.* 17.10.10 (295–8).

- [262] Wars 2.6.1 (80).
- [263] Wars 2.6.3 (93–9).
- [264] Luke 3:1.
- [265] Wars 2.12.8 and Ant. 19.5.1.
- [266] Strabo 16.2.46 (765).
- [267] Dio 55.27.6.
- [268] Ant. 17.6.4 (164–7).
- [269] Ant. 17.9.1 (207–8).
- [270] Ant. 17.13.1 (339).
- [271] Ant. 17.13.1 (341).
- [272] Ant. 15.3.1 (39–41).
- [273] Ant. 17.13.1 (340).
- [274] It was five days after executing his son that Herod died. Later in *Antiquities*, Josephus tells the story of the bird omen seen by Antipas, who only lived five days after seeing it. Ant. 18.6.7 (200). So it strikes me that this five days may be another number cue, if we could only figure out what it meant to Josephus.
- [275] Wars 2.3.4 (52).
- [276] Wars 2.4.1 (55), Mason translation.
- [277] Wars 2.4.1 (56).
- [278] Wars 1.33.2 (648–49).
- [279] Ant. 17.10.5 (271–2).
- [280] Wars 2.4.2 (57–9).
- [281] “Gabriel’s Revelation”, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gabriel%27s_Revelation. See also Knohl, Israel, *Messiahs and Resurrection in ‘The Gabriel Revelation’* (Continuum, 2009).
- [282] Wars 2.4.3 (60–5). Cf. Ant. 17.10.7 (278–84).
- [283] Richard Gottheil, Kaufmann Kohler, “Anthrongs”, *Jewish Encyclopedia*: <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/2088-athrongs>
- [284] Wars 2.8.1 (117–8).
- [285] Ant. 18.1.1, 6 (9–10, 23–5).
- [286] Ant. 17.10.7 (284).
- [287] Curiously, this is the same year that Varus and three Roman legions were destroyed in the Battle of the Teutoberg Forest by an anti-Roman alliance that was led by Arminius, who had acquired Roman citizenship and received a Roman military education
- [288] Tacitus, *The History*, 5.9-10; Trans. A. J Church and W. J. Brodribb, edited by Moses Hadas, Modern Library edition, 1942, p. 663.
- [289] Wars 2.9.1–2 (167–9).
- [290] Ant. 17.13.5 (354).
- [291] Ant. 18.1.1 (1–3).
- [292] Wars 2.17.8 (433–4).
- [293] Ant. 15.10.5 (373–9).
- [294] Ant. 20.5.2 (100–2). Since Judas had a son named Simon, one wonders if he had a brother named Simon also?
- [295] 1 Clem. 5:2, Lightfoot translation.
- [296] As Richard Carrier shows in his book (pp. 337–42), the passage in Josephus that refers to James the brother of Jesus probably refers to a different James, and a different Jesus, and the phrase “who was called Christ” is in all likelihood a scribal interpolation.
- [297] Wars 7.8.1 (252–4).
- [298] Ant. 18.1.1 (4–10).
- [299] Ant. 18.3.1 (3).
- [300] Ant. 18.2.1 (26).
- [301] Dio 55.13.4.

- [302] Tacitus, *Ann.* 2.30.4; 3.22.1; 3.48.1.
- [303] CIL III 6687, ILS 2683, quoted in Gertoux (2015).
- [304] *Ant.* 18.2.2 (29–32).
- [305] *Wars* 2.9.1–2 (167–9).
- [306] *Ant.* 18.2.2 (33).
- [307] *Wars* 2.3.4 (52).
- [308] *Ant.* 18.2.2 (34–35)
- [309] *Ant.* 18.4.3 (95).
- [310] One cannot help but note the similarity of the name Caiaphas to Cephas.
- [311] Dio, *Hist.* 23 ; Tac. *Ann.* xvi. 17. *Ann.* i. 80, vi. 27 ; *Hist.* ii. 65, 97 ; Suet. *Tib.* 63. See: William Thomas Arnold. (2013). *The Roman System of Provincial Administration to the Accession of Constantine the Great*. London: Forgotten Books. (Original work published 1879)
- [312] See his account above, in the section “Philo and Josephus on Pilate”.
- [313] Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44.3, where he refers to Pilate as *procurator*, not prefect.
- [314] *Ant.* 18.3.3 (63–4).
- [315] An ancient Table of Contents of the 18th book of *Antiquities* omits any reference to the passage about Jesus, as does the Josephus codex of Photius. Also notice that Origen’s reference appears to make it clear that the TF did not exist in his copy.
- [316] Zindler, *The Jesus the Jews Never Knew*, p.45-48
- [317] Earl Doherty, Supplementary Articles No. 16: Josephus On the Rocks, <http://jesuspuzzle.humanists.net/supp16.htm>
- [318] See Lester Grabbe, "Jesus Who is Called the Christ: References to Jesus Outside Christian Sources", in Thomas S. Verenna, Thomas L. Thompson, *“Is This Not The Carpenter?”: The Question of The Historicity of the Figure of Jesus* (2013), pp. 61–67. For the most concise and up-to-date treatment of the sources, see Carrier.
- [319] Referring to the Saul/Paul of Acts, not the historical Paul of the epistles. But he is right that Jesus was shaped partly from the words and actions of Paul.
- [320] Daniel T. Unterbrink, *Judas of Nazareth: How the Greatest Teacher of First-Century Israel Was Replaced by a Literary Creation* (Bear & Co., 2014), pp. 241–2.
- [321] *Ibid.*, p. 256.
- [322] In his story, “Silver Blaze”, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle chronicles the mystery of the kidnapping of a prize race horse. Sherlock Holmes concludes “the midnight visitor was someone the dog knew well”, ultimately leading to the determination that the horse’s trainer was the guilty party. Gregory (Scotland Yard detective): "Is there any other point to which you would wish to draw my attention?" Holmes: "To the curious incident of the dog in the night-time." Gregory: "The dog did nothing in the night-time." Holmes: "That was the curious incident."
- [323] Unterbrink, *op. cit.*, p. 269.
- [324] Hugh Schonfield, *The Essene Odyssey: The Mystery of the True Teacher and the Essene Impact on the Shaping of Human Destiny* (Element Books, 1993), p. 7.
- [325] *Ant.* 18.3.4–5 (65–80).
- [326] Tacitus, *Ann.* 13.44.
- [327] Tacitus, *Ann.* 13.43.2.
- [328] Interestingly, one of Caesar’s assassins was named Lucius Pontius Aquila, a tribune of the plebs who refused to stand during one of Caesar’s triumphs and later served under Caesar’s betrayer, Decimus Junius Brutus Albinus.
- [329] *Ant.* 18.3.5 (81–4).
- [330] Tacitus, *Ann.* 2.85.4.
- [331] *Wars* 2.6.1 (80).
- [332] *Historia Ecclesiae* 2:7.
- [333] Tacitus, *Histories* 5.9.1.
- [334] Tacitus, *Ann.* 2.43.2.
- [335] *Ant.* 18.2.5 (53).
- [336] *Ant.* 18.3.1 (55).
- [337]

- Ant. 18.3.1 (56–9).
- [338] Wars 2.9.2–3 (169–74).
- [339] Wars 2.9.4 (175–7).
- [340] Wars 2.9.5 (178–80).
- [341] Ant. 18.5.3 (120–6).
- [342] Rajak, Tessa (1996), "Iulius Agrippa (1) I, Marcus", in Hornblower, Simon, Oxford Classical Dictionary, Oxford: Oxford University Press
- [343] Ant. 18.7.2. Also see Mason, Charles Peter (1867), "Agrippa, Herodes I", in Smith, William, Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology 1, Boston: Little, Brown and Company, pp. 77–78
- [344] Ant. 18.4.1 (85).
- [345] Compare Ant. 18.2.2 (30–1).
- [346] A. J. Woodman, in his translation of *The Annals*, notes in a footnote: "Epigraphic evidence shows that the appointment of Cn. Sentius Saturninus (suffect consul AD 4) was confirmed by Tiberius ¼"
- [347] Tacitus, *Ann.* 2.74.
- [348] Tacitus, *Ann.* 3.9–10.
- [349] Tacitus, *Ann.* 3.13.
- [350] Tacitus, *Ann.* 3.19.
- [351] This was the Sejanus mentioned by Philo as being responsible for the persecution of the Jews in Italy.
- [352] "Albucilla was the wife of Satrius Secundus, and was infamous for having had many lovers. In 37 AD, she was accused of treason, or impiety, against the emperor (Latin: *impietatis in principem*) along with Gnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus, Vibius Marsus, and Lucius Arruntius. As a result she was imprisoned by command of the senate ¼" ("Albucilla", Wikipedia: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albucilla>) Her husband, Satrius Secundus, "was a dependent of Sejanus. He accused Aulus Cremutius Cordus, the historian, of having eulogized Brutus and spoken of Cassius as the last of the Romans, which was considered an offence under the *lex maiestas*, and the senate ordered the burning of his writings in 25 AD. He afterwards betrayed his master, and gave information to Tiberius of the conspiracy which Sejanus had formed against him. Josephus relates that Antonia informed Tiberius of the conspiracy of Sejanus. It has been conjectured that Secundus, unwilling or unable to have an interview with the emperor, had acquainted Antonia with the plot." ("Satrius Secundus", Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Satrius_Secundus)
- [353] Tacitus, *Ann.* 6. 47; 2.74, 79; 4.47, 48; 9.10.
- [354] Joseph Hilarius Eckhel, vol. iv. pp. 147, 148
- [355] This poem by Lewis Carroll is said to be an allegory for eastern and western religions gobbling people up.
- [356] Ronald Syme, *The Roman Revolution* (Oxford, 1939), p. 476.
- [357] *De Oratore* 1.39, 2.32; *Brutus* 52; *Pro Balbo* 53; *Pro Caelio* 24.
- [358] Syme, *op. cit.*, pp. 362, 396.
- [359] *Ibid.*, p. 399.
- [360] Daniel T. Ariel. 2014. Review of David M. Jacobson and Nikos Kokkinos eds. *Judaea and Rome in Coins, 65 BCE–135 CE*. London: Spink and Son Ltd, 2012. *Numismatic Chronicle* 174:385–391. P. 388.
- [361] Tacitus, *Ann.* 1.8.4.
- [362] Tacitus, *Ann.* 3.18.2.
- [363] Tacitus, *Ann.* 2.4.3, 2.43.2.
- [364] Proconsul of Asia in 20–21 AD, according to A. J. Woodman (note to *Ann.* 3.66.1).
- [365] Tacitus, *Ann.* 3.66; 3.67.1; 3.68.1; and 4.15.3.
- [366] Tacitus, *Ann.* 4.68.1.
- [367] This Silanus was, apparently, murdered by Claudius' freedman, Narcissus, in 42 AD, which one deduces from a passing reference at *Ann.* 11.29.1.
- [368] Tacitus, *Ann.* 6.9.3.
- [369] Tacitus, *Ann.* 4.17–19, excerpts.
- [370] William R. Farmer, *Maccabees, Zealots, and Josephus: An Inquiry into Jewish Nationalism in the Greco-Roman Period* (Greenwood Press, 1956), pp. 163–7.
- [371] Galatians 2:9: "and when James and Cephas and John, who were acknowledged pillars, recognized the grace that had been given to me, they gave to Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship, agreeing that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised."

- [372] Luke 3:1.
- [373] See Jason D. BeDuhn, *The First New Testament: Marcion's Scriptural Canon* (Polebridge Press, 2013) and Joseph B. Tyson, *Marcion and Luke-Acts: A Defining Struggle* (University of South Carolina Press, 2006).
- [374] Ellegard 2008, pp. 169, 170.
- [375] Ellegard, (2008), p. 172
- [376] See Goulder and Dykstra.
- [377] Hyam Maccoby, *The Mythmaker: Paul and the Invention of Christianity* (Barnes & Noble, 1998).
- [378] Elaine Hilsenrath, *Jesus, The Nazorean: An Investigation and Analysis of the Origins, Ideology, and Activities of the Community of Jews Who Followed Jesus The Sect of the Nazoreans* (BookSurge Publishing, 2009).
- [379] Wars 6.5.3 (300–5).
- [380] See Tolbert's *Sowing the Gospel*.
- [381] Ant. 15.7.9–10 (254–61).
- [382] Ant. 16.7.6 (227).
- [383] Ant. 18.5.4 (136, 141).
- [384] Wars 2.20.1 (556–8).
- [385] Wars 2.20.2 (559–61).
- [386] Acts is primarily concerned with showing the harmony between the two important early Christian figures: Paul and Peter. However, this agenda overrides concern with the facts, presenting a whitewashed version of both Paul and Peter, almost totally at odds with the data available in Paul's letters. See Michael Goulder, *St. Paul versus St. Peter: A Tale of Two Missions* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), and Pervo, *Dating Acts*.
- [387] While Acts focuses on Peter within the Jerusalem church, Paul's letters strongly imply that James was the church's main leader.
- [388] Wars 2.18.4 (469–76).
- [389] 2 Corinthians 11, NIV.
- [390] Galatians 1 and 2, excerpts.
- [391] Dillon, *Middle Platonists*.
- [392] P. L. Couchoud, *The Enigma of Jesus* (London, 1924), p. 122. Also, Couchoud, *Le mystère de Jésus* (Paris, 1926).
- [393] Wells (1971), pp. 288–91, exc.
- [394] This was undoubtedly a self-interested approach since local priests of other religious persuasions often hailed a powerful ruler with the titles and theologies of their own kings/religions as a diplomatic maneuver. But Paul was not analyzing the text from this point of view; he was going all exegetical and trying to derive meaning that applied to him and his situation and the world around him.
- [395] NIV.
- [396] Rainer Riesner, *Paul's Early Period: Chronology, Mission Strategy, Theology* (Erdmans, Grand Rapids/Cambridge, 1998), p. 237.
- [397] NIV.
- [398] Riesner, op. cit. pp. 246–7.
- [399] Wells (1971), p. 298.
- [400] Isaiah 45, NIV.
- [401] E. Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Everyman edn. In 6 vols. (London, 1960), end of Chapter XV.
- [402] Wells (1971), p. 103.
- [403] Stefan Weinstock, *Divus Julius* (Oxford University Press, 1972).
- [404] Jerome Carcopino, *Cicero: The Secrets of His Correspondence*, 2 vols., (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951).
- [405] See Stevenson's *Transformation of Roman Republic*.
- [406] Mommsen, *History*; Arthur D. Kahn, *The Education of Julius Caesar: A Biography, A Reconstruction* (iUniverse, 2000). Michael Parenti, *The Assassination of Julius Caesar: A People's History of Ancient Rome* (New Press People's History, 2004).
- [407] Mattias Gelzer, *Caesar: Politician and Statesman* (Harvard University Press, 1921, 1968).
- [408] Gelzer (1968), p. viii.
- [409] Quoted in Jona Lendering, "Gaius Julius Caesar", available online at: <http://www.livius.org/caa-can/caesar/caesar10.html>
- [410]

Att. 7.7, trans. Evelyn S. Shuckburgh, *The Letters of Cicero*, 4 vols. (George Bell and Sons, 1908–1909).

[411] Att. 9.7, Shuckburgh.

[412] Vell. 2.56.

[413] Att. 11.20, Shuckburgh.

[414] Suetonius, *lul.* 73.

[415] Att. 14.22, Shuckburgh.

[416] The contrast between his early life and the high moral tone adopted by him in his writings has frequently been questioned, but I see no reason why he could not have reformed. He does seem to have bent a bit the other way when writing about Caesar so as not to be accused of partiality.

[417] Sallust, *Cat.* 54 (translated by John C. Rolfe, Loeb, 1931).

[418] Included in B. K. Workman, *They Saw it Happen in Classical Times* (Blackwell, 1964), p. 112.

[419] Plutarch, *Caesar* 63–7.

[420] “Appian: The Funeral of Julius Caesar”, from: William Stearns Davis, ed., *Readings in Ancient History: Illustrative Extracts from the Sources*, Vol. II: Rome and the West (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1912–13), pp. 154–8.

[421] Suetonius, *Caesar* 84–5, translated by Joseph Gavorse. Available online at: http://www.livius.org/caa-can/caesar/caesar_t10.html

[422] *Georg.* 1.

[423] Plutarch, *Caes.* 69.

[424] *Cic. Att.* 14.1.1.

[425] Gelzer (1968), pp. 329–31.

[426] Like Carotta, Barry Strauss connects Fulvia with Caesar’s funeral: *The Death of Caesar* (Simon & Schuster, 2015), pp. 170, 173.

[427] Erik Zara, “Chrestians before Christians? An Old Inscription Revisited” (2009):

<https://sites.google.com/site/originsofchristianity/romanisation/antonia-minor/Chrestians before Christians - An Old Inscription Revisited.pdf>

[428] See J. B. Mitchell, *Chrestos: A Religious Epithet* (Williams and Norgate, 1880) and D. M. Murdock, “Is Suetonius’s Chresto a Reference to Jesus?”: <http://www.truthbeknown.com/suetoniuschresto.html>

[429] Lampe, p. 352.

[430] Francesco Carotta, *Jesus Was Caesar: On the Julian Origin of Christianity: An Investigative Report* (Aspekt, 2005).

[431] For example, his theology of the dying and rising god, his focus on the ritual meal, and the mystical union implied by the concept of the “body of Christ”. See Wells.

[432] A suggestion made by J. M. Robinson in his *Pagan Christs* (1911), and supported by Wells.

[433] William Smith (ed.), *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology* Vol. II (John Murray, 1880), p. 631.

[434] Elaine Pagels’s book, *The Gnostic Paul: Gnostic Exegesis of the Pauline Letters* (Trinity Press, 1992), analyzes Paul’s letters in terms of Valentinian gnosticism, showing how the letters were read by 2nd-century gnostics and how they could be considered ‘proto-gnostic’ in nature. In other words, the gnostics may have gotten a lot of their ideas from Paul, or Paul at least may have influenced the ideas the gnostics later developed, based on their interpretations of his ideas.

[435] In addition to Romans. Both letters are in the unique position of having been addressed to congregations that had not previously met Paul personally. For all his other letters, we can infer that he did not feel the need to spell things out so clearly that he had presumably already taught in person. Romans and Ephesians were different: he had to formulate his gospel clearly for those whom he had yet to address in person.

[436] Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, cited by Pagels, 1972, Fortress Press, p. 1.

[437] Suetonius, *Claudius* 25.

[438] Dio 60.6.6–7.

[439] Orosius, *History* 7.6.15–16.

[440] A. S. Hunt and G. C. Edgar (eds.) *Select Papyri* II (Loeb Classical Library, 1934), pp. 78–89.

[441] *Ant.* 19.5.2–3 (278–91).

[442] See H. Stuart Jones, “Claudius and the Jewish Question at Alexandria”, *Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies*, Vol. 16, Part 1 (1926).

[443] See *Ant.* 19.8.2—19.9.2 (343–361). Daniel R. Schwartz, in *Agrippa I: The Last King of Judaea* (Mohr/Siebeck, 1990), pp. 108–10, argues that Agrippa died in the period between Sept./Oct. 43 and Jan./Feb. 44, favoring September/October 43 AD, in the third year of Agrippa’s rule under Claudius. He bases this on evidence from numismatics (coins), Josephus, and the times of the games at Caesarea Maritima.

[444] Acts 12.

[445] As mentioned above in the section “The Passion of Caesar”, Agrippa (along with his son and Herod of Chalcis) was brought up at Rome with the Imperial princes and, as H. Stuart Jones notes (*op. cit.*), would have had powerful friends at court. Antonia, the younger daughter of Mark Antony and Octavia Minor (Augustus’ sister), was at the center of this coterie.

[446] Acts 21:21.

[447] Acts 24:5.

[448] See Robert Eisenman, *James the Brother of Jesus: The Key to Unlocking the Secrets of Early Christianity and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Penguin, 1997) and *The New Testament Code: The Cup of the Lord, the Damascus Covenant, and the Blood of Christ* (Penguin, 2006).

[449] Dennis R. MacDonald, *The Legend and the Apostle: The Battle for Paul in Story and Canon* (Westminster Press, 1985), p. 35; see also pp. 28, 36.

[450] 2 Corinthians 12:14–8: “Here I am, ready to come to you this third time. And I will not be a burden, because I do not want what is yours but you; for children ought not to lay up for their parents, but parents for their children. I will most gladly spend and be spent for you. If I love you more, am I to be loved less? Let it be assumed that I did not burden you. Nevertheless (you say) since I was crafty, I took you in by deceit. Did I take advantage of you through any of those whom I sent to you? I urged Titus to go, and sent the brother with him. Titus did not take advantage of you, did he? Did we not conduct ourselves with the same spirit? Did we not take the same steps?” As Campbell writes, regarding the collection for Jerusalem: “It seems to have given rise to accusations of fraud – specifically, that although nobly (or arrogantly) eschewing direct personal support from the Corinthians, he nevertheless intended to abscond with this even larger sum that he was raising ostensibly for the Christian community in Jerusalem” (*Framing Paul*, p. 150).

[451] *Ant.* 18.3.5 (81–4).

[452] The author of Luke-Acts appears to avoid any explicit description of the collection, almost as if he is trying to smooth over a controversy. What reference he does make are so vague that, without knowledge of Paul’s letters, the reader would not be able to know what the nature of the collection was in the first place.

[J1] This quoted paragraph appears a few pages back (page 21).

[J2] Maybe draw a short comparison between this and Josephus’ account on previous page?