

Robert Eisenman's "New Testament Code"

What is the connection between the two messiah-centered movements that arose in the first century; the one focused on a military messiah who would liberate the Jewish nation from the oppression it suffered at the hands of the Romans; the other focused on a spiritual messiah who would liberate all humanity from the burden of its sins?

Both had profound impacts. The militant opposition to Roman rule ultimately exploded into the largest national liberation struggle of the ancient world, the Jewish War (66-70 C.E.) and continued to reverberate with major and minor uprisings until the Bar Kochba uprising (132-135 C.E.) when the Jews were permanently expelled from their homeland. The spiritual movement, Christianity, gained control of the whole western world, and more recently, with the West's expansion, much of the rest of the world as well.

There are really only two possible answers. The first is that the spiritual movement drew lessons and inspiration from the military movement, but transformed its substance into something more "cosmopolitan", more "universal", and more "spiritual". Or, at the very least, more "Hellenized".

The second is that the archetypal personages of Christianity, John the Baptist, Jesus, Simon Peter, and ultimately James, were in fact leaders of the anti-Roman resistance, but that the record of their actual activities was mostly overwritten, with generally reverse significance, by the enemies who ultimately defeated them, more specifically by the ideological representatives of these enemies.

To the extent that the question of this connection is posed at all, the first answer is almost always given, generally without even allowing for an alternative. In *The New Testament Code*, Robert Eisenman argues forcefully and convincingly for the second. He is not the first to do so. A century ago, Karl Kautsky made a qualitatively similar argument in *Foundations of Christianity*. But Eisenman's argument is far more nuanced and benefits from major archaeological discoveries, in particular *The Dead Sea Scrolls*.

The question is of profound importance. At its core, Western civilization is a synthesis of Hellenic and Judaic cultures. This synthesis is generally viewed as an *ideological* event, a merger of elements of each culture to form Christianity, which then provided the intellectual and practical framework for Western development. But Eisenman's work shows that this viewpoint stands matters on their head. The actual synthesis took place by the most violent struggle, in which Rome (heir to Hellenic culture) defeated the Jewish rebellion, but in the course of doing so, was forced to incorporate many of its elements. Moreover, the profound ideological struggles of that era, which both concentrated the interests of the contending forces and guided their material, ultimately armed, expression, are really only refracted in *The New Testament*. By careful distillation, Eisenman is able to exhume the lost voice of the defeated rebellion, which, while it did leave some traces in the *The New Testament*, now speaks directly and forcefully to us through the *Dead Sea Scrolls*.

1. Parallel Texts

What is most satisfying about the book is that even when Eisenman is working with well-worn material, he is able to throw startling new light upon it by finding parallels between familiar documents and much-overlooked sources.

For example, many scholars recognize that the ideological conflict between James and Paul is the engine that drives the entire *New Testament*. But Eisenman is able to show that this conflict is identical to the one between Jewish nationalists and the Roman-back Herodian state, which erupted into the conflagration of the Jewish War over exactly the same issues debated by James and Paul. In fact, while James and Paul were indeed well-recognized ideological leaders, Eisenman is unique in his ability to uncover their integrated activities, which ranged to political and even military affairs. Paul, in particular, was a political/intelligence operative for the Herodian kings, not only before his famous “conversion” on the road to Damascus, but after as well.

Initial insight into the James/Paul conflict can be gained by examining some familiar Bible stories, together with their parallel treatment in other sources.

1.1 *Paul’s Attempted Murder of James/”Stephen”*

The first is the story of Stephen, the first Christian martyr, told in *Acts of the Apostles*. I should mention at the outset that *Acts* is composed of two radically different sections. The first half is similar to the Gospels in that it is a phantasmagoric, fictionalized narrative constructed by imaginative reworking of a broad melange of historical and literary materials. The second half, beginning in the middle of Chapter 16, is a more-or-less straightforward first-person-plural narrative of events actually experienced by its author (the so-called “We Document”).

The Stephen story is in Chapters 6–7 and so is part of the phantasmagoric section. It classically recounts how Stephen is assaulted and killed by a gang of political thugs as he is debating various theological points from the Temple steps. The organizer of this gang is identified as “Saul” (“Saulos” in the original Greek, a point to which I will return), who later in *Acts* transforms into “Paul” after his famous vision on the “road to Damascus”.

As first pointed out by Stephen H.-J. Schoeps, another document from this period, the *Pseudoclementine Recognitions* covers much of the same material as *Acts* (probably working from the same underlying source), but in place of the “Stephen” story, tells another tale, which is much more plausible. According to the *Recognitions*, it is *James* who is debating points from the Temple steps and who is attacked by political thugs. The leader of the gang is not identified in the text by name: he is simply referred to as the “enemy”. However, in the margins of some extant copies, this “enemy” is identified as “Paul”. James is not killed but suffers a broken leg and is carried off by his supporters to a location “near Jericho” (which plausibly could be Qumrum, where the *Dead Sea Scrolls* were found – more below). His leg is said to be still healing a month later when he sends Simon Peter out on a mission, a level of detail not likely to be invented.

Although this parallel story does not tell us anything we did not previously know about Saul/Paul, it does tell us a few things about James. First, at the time of Saul’s conversion, James is already the clear leader of the movement that Jesus had been part of, which I will initially call “James’s group”. Second, James’s group has attracted the attention of the authorities (of whom Saul is a representative – more below) and must defend its right to speak publicly with force. Third, James’s group is well organized, with some sort of rear position to which it can retreat. Fourth, these parallel stories give us our first hint that James is being systematically written over in (or written out of) the *New Testament*. There will be many others.

1.2 Simon/"Peter" Confronts the King

A second story from *Acts* that is paralleled by another source is Simon Peter's famous "tablecloth vision" from Chapter 10 [It will be recalled that "Peter" (i.e., "Rocky") is a nickname that Simon has acquired, presumably because his support of Jesus was "solid as a rock".] Peter is going to be invited to dinner by a centurion, Cornelius from the Italica regiment in Caesarea, who is improbably described as "fearing God", "giving many gifts to the poor", and "supplicating God continuously" (*Acts 10:1-2*). Peter has a vision in which a heavenly tablecloth descends, covered with various animals, which he is instructed by a voice to "kill and eat. 'Surely not, Lord!' Peter replied. 'I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.' The voice spoke to him a second time, 'Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.' " (*Acts 10:13-15*). Later, Peter summarizes his visit: "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean." (*Acts 10:28*).

Even without knowing the historical parallel of this story, it is one of the most revealing and explosive in the entire *New Testament*. First, it demonstrates unequivocally that the whole "inclusivist message", which is directly attributed to Jesus via innumerable Gospel stories, was in fact completely foreign to Jesus. Otherwise, it would not have been necessary for Peter, one of his closest and "rockiest" supporters, to receive a vision about it well after Jesus's death. Thus, this story, by itself, tells us that vast portions of the Gospels, in which Jesus is pictured as associating and engaging in table fellowship with all kinds of forbidden persons (tax collectors, prostitutes, etc) and dismissing Jewish dietary law in favor of a universalist, humanitarian message ("What goes into a man's mouth does not make him unclean but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him unclean." *Matt 15:10*), are just constructed from whole cloth. In fact, it is astonishing that anyone can remain a believing Christian after pondering this clumsy addendum to the Jesus Gospel stories.

But Eisenman goes well beyond these simple observations. He points out that the "tablecloth vision" is actually a parody of a story that is related by Josephus in *Antiquities of the Jews*, VII, 4. Here, a certain Simon, "who appeared to be very accurate in the knowledge of the law ... got together an assembly [literally 'ecclesia', i.e. 'church']", to accuse the king [Agrippa I, grandson of Herod the Great] of not living holily and on these grounds of barring him from the temple. In this story, it is not a centurion, but the king who invites Simon to his home in Caesarea to see "what is there done in this place that is contrary to the law". It is important to emphasize that this issue, barring foreigners (including the Herodian kings!) from the Temple was central to the outbreak of War in 66 C.E., as I will discuss in more detail below. The confrontation between Simon and Agrippa occurred shortly before Agrippa I died in 44 C.E.

The Josephus story therefore shows that a common set of issues was agitating the Jewish nation for at least 2 decades before the War. The fact that *Acts* has chosen to parody this incident, which must have been extremely well known to, and very much prized by, the resistance movement, already reveals something of its method: a resistance hero (now himself murdered and his movement crushed) is helplessly transformed into an ideological enemy of the very positions for which he gave his life.

Of course, there could be a lot of "Simon's" and evidently the Church scribes whose copies of Josephus we inherit did not recognize the identification of this one with the

compatriot of Jesus – otherwise the story might not have survived. But the parallels in the stories (Simons, invitations to Caesarea, central issues of unclean food) are too close to be ignored. As is *Acts*'s chronology, which places this story in the early 40s C.E., just at when Simon actually did confront Agrippa. So the parody does one important historical function: it identifies Simon Peter with the historical person who first confronted a king over the issue that led to the outbreak of the Jewish War, and it shows that by the 40s C.E., the resistance movement and James's group, the people who will later be called "Christians" are one and the same.

simon/agrippa

In the Josephus version, Simon was unable to find anything traif at Agrippa's home, and the King sent him packing with gifts. Eisenman points out that this vignette might not have ended quite so happily. Josephus was extremely cautious in what he says about the resistance in *The Jewish War* (written in the 70s C.E.), most probably because he feared retaliation from the Romans if he presented the movement's position too clearly. In *Antiquities* (where the Simon/Agrippa story appears) written 20 years later, Josephus was more relaxed on this issue, and so more forthcoming with details, but he was still cautious. However, he may not have been cautious enough: Josephus disappeared from the scene about 95 C.E., the same year the emperor Domitian executed his secretary (and possibly Josephus's publisher of the same name) Epaphroditus as well as many others, including family members, on suspicion of Christianity. *Acts* may be closer to the truth. Immediately following Chapter 11 (most of which is spent by Peter recounting his vision from Chapter 10) *Acts 12:3* pictures Peter as being arrested. Or, *Acts* and Josephus may both be right: Agrippa I, who seems to have been relatively tolerant of the opposition, could have sent Simon on his way. When Agrippa I died shortly thereafter, Simon may well have been snared in the roundups carried out by Agrippa's much more hostile brother, Herod of Chalcis, who succeeded him.

1.3 Conversion/Circumcision and Queen Helen/Candace

The conversion of Ethiopian Queen Candace's eunuch is yet another *Acts* parody of a story prized by the resistance. The eunuch "who had charge of all her treasury" was on the road to Jerusalem and was reading the "suffering servant" passage from Isaiah (53:7–8), when Philip approaches him saying "Do you understand what you are reading?". (*Acts 8:30*). After interpreting the text, Philip convinces the eunuch to declare "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" and immediately baptize himself. That nothing of the sort actually happened follows from the fact that there was no "Ethiopian Queen Candace" at this time, and that the Ethiopian court did not have eunuchs in this period (since it did not have harems).

The source material for this story is reported by both the *Talmud* and Josephus. Josephus recounts that Izates, the favorite son of Queen Helen of Adiabene, meets a merchant cum missionary named "Ananias" (identical to the name of the teacher that Saul/Paul meets during his conversion on the "road to Damascus" *Acts 9:9–19*). According to the Royal Archives of Edessa (Antioch-by-Callirhoe), which the early church historian Eusebius claimed to have read and translated from Aramaic into Greek, this same "Ananias" played a key role in the conversion of King Agbarus or Abgarus, "the Great King of the Peoples beyond the Euphrates", who was very likely Izates's father. Adiabene and the

“land of the Edessenes” are hardly distinct and may have been overlapping jurisdictions. Ananias and an unnamed companion (perhaps Paul) convert Helen to a form of Judaism that does not require circumcision. Helen is happy to have such a form available because she is worried about maintaining the loyalty of her subjects if she gets too far into a self-mutilation cult.

In the *Talmud* and Josephus, Queen Helen’s son Izates (rather than Queen Candace’s eunuch) is reading Genesis 17:12 (rather than Isaiah 53:7), which is about Abraham circumcising himself and his extended family, when he is confronted by a more hardcore missionary, Eleazar, who asks the same question “do you understand what you are reading?”, whereupon Izates and his brother Monobazus immediately circumcise themselves. *Acts* even parodies circumcision as castration (as it was legally defined under Roman law at the time *Acts* was written – certainly after 93 C.E., as I will explain below).

Why bother to parody such an obscure story about unknown figures far to the East? Because, in fact, Queen Helen was a big hero for the resistance movement in the period before the War, particularly after she provided major relief to the people of Jerusalem during the famine of 45-48 C.E. (when her “treasury agents” did in fact travel to the granaries of Egypt to secure relief). She also donated heavily to the temple and perhaps to the resistance as well (more below). And her descendants played a very important role in the War itself, her grandson being martyred in the opening battle of the War, in which he drove off Roman reinforcements trying to retake the city. During the War, the rebels destroyed most of the houses and monuments of the rich, but preserved Queen Helen’s, which still survives today. Hence, the conversion of this family was an epochal event. I will deal with the issue of circumcision extensively further below.

1.4 *John the Baptist vs. Paul*

The only *New Testament* parody that is widely known to have a non-canonical counterpart is the spectacular Gospel tale of John the Baptist’s execution, supposedly demanded by Salome in compensation for the lascivious dance she did for her stepfather, Herod the Tetrarch (aka Herod Antipas). The Gospel versions do raise the issue of an illicit marriage, but their treatment of this is quite garbled, whether because they were working off incomplete sources or were just confused. In fact, it was actually John’s agitation against “fornication” and “incest”, in general, and with regard to Herod in particular, that cost him his life. Herod had divorced the daughter of the neighboring Arab ruler Aretas in order to obtain a more advantageous marriage to Salome’s mother, Herodias, who was King Agrippa I’s sister and so his own niece. Niece marriage was an important strategy of the Herodians for extending and integrating power but was regarded by the resistance, and no doubt much of the public, as fornication. Hence, the issue was central to delegitimizing the Herodian family, i.e., helping to consolidate the popular sense that they were foreigners who did not keep Jewish law or customs.

Eisenman keeps a careful eye on this theme throughout his analysis, but the John-the-Baptist parody also leads him to draw quite unexpected connections to another major *New Testament* character, Paul.

Paul is primarily known from the ideological polemics of his letters (some actually written by him, others from his “school”). But even from *The New Testament*, it is clear that Paul was far more than an ideological leader and teacher. He first appears in *Acts* as

a persecutor of Christians in the “Stephen” parody. In reading this, one is already struck that such a young man would be given such wide authority in leading attacks on a dissident group and the attempted murder of the group’s leader, James/“Stephen”. Indeed, his writ seems to have carried substantially beyond persecuting Christians.

Immediately after his attack on James, Paul was engaged in some undercover or intelligence work in Damascus, from which he had to escape by being lowered over the city walls in a basket to escape Aretas (whose daughter had been divorced by Herod to marry Salome’s mother), who was trying to arrest him. Paul’s own brief summary of this escape (2 Cor 11:32–33) is isolated and without context, but the same basket story appears in *Acts 9:25* immediately following Paul’s conversion vision, which occurred on the “road to Damascus” right after the attack on James/“Stephen”. (In accord with its tendentious anti-semitism, *Acts* pictures Paul as fleeing “the Jews”, rather than Aretas.) The quite unexpected connection is that according to Josephus’s *Antiquities*, Aretas had launched a war against Herod the Tetrarch in retaliation for divorcing his (Aretas’s) daughter. Herod’s army was cut to pieces and, says Josephus, the Romans were furious but “[s]ome of the Jews regarded the destruction of Herod’s army as the work of God, who thus exacted just retribution for John, surnamed the Baptist, Herod’s victim. John was a good man who bade the Jews first cultivate virtue by righteousness toward men and piety toward God” [more on these twin commandments below] *Antiquities VI (30)*.

Although the Gospels imply that John the Baptist was executed before Jesus, it can be inferred that John’s execution and this resulting war occurred in 37 C.E., thereby matching Paul’s timeline quite well.

2. Paul: Member of the Ruling Herodian Family

How exactly did Paul acquire such significant responsibilities as an agent for the Herodian family at such a young age? Eisenman adduces substantial evidence that Paul/“Saulos” actually came from this family and, moreover, that these connections were central to his actions before, during, and after his mission.

2.1 Paul Acknowledges Herodian Family Connections

First of all, one of the “greetings” with which Paul customarily closes his letters is to “my kinsman Herodion” (*Romans 16:11*), which immediately follows another greeting to the “household of Aristobulus” *Romans 16:10*). “Herodion” means simply “littlest Herod”, and while this could in principle be the designation of any very young Herod, “Herod” was not all that common a name. At this time, the “littlest Herod” would have been the son of Aristobulus (i.e., the same Aristobulus just mentioned in *Romans 16:10*) and the infamous Salome. This “Herodion” is therefore the grandnephew of one “Saulos”, identified by Josephus as a “kinsman of Agrippa” and brother of Costobarus. I will return to this connection below.

2.2 Paul as Roman citizen

If Paul were from the Herodian family, it would explain a lot. As already mentioned, *Acts*’s Saulos has a commission from the chief priest to arrest “Christians” at quite a young age, and then immediately moves on to some other undercover work in Damascus. About two decades later, in 58 C.E., following Paul’s final confrontation with James in *Acts 21*,

he is attacked by a mob of Jews for bringing foreigners into the Temple (again the same issue). He is arrested in the *mélée* that follows and manages to avoid harsh treatment by identifying himself as a Roman citizen by *birth* (*Acts 22:25*). Roman citizenship was not given out lightly in Judea, but was the *birthright* of the entire Herodian family (granted to Herod the Great's father, Antipas, and all his descendants). In *Acts 23*, Paul's sister's son is able to penetrate the prison and convince the commander to provide Paul with an escort of 470 troops, including 70 cavalry for the trip to Caesarea. So, he is obviously extremely well-connected.

2.3 Paul Chats Up Major Officials and the Royal Family

Paul is put on trial. Although *Acts* does not make very clear the charges, Felix, the governor, keeps him under house arrest (probably actually protective custody). Felix and his wife Drusilla (not identified as such but actually the sister of King Agrippa II) carry on conversations with Paul over the course of 2 years(!) about theological and perhaps other matters. At this point (60 C.E.) Festus succeeds Felix and is pressed by "the Jews" once again about Paul, whom Festus then gives a new trial. Again, the charges are not clear. Paul demands an appeal to the emperor Nero, a request that is granted.

Before he can depart, however, Festus introduces Paul to King Agrippa II and his sister/mistress Bernice, to whom Paul delivers a chapter-long speech recounting his own conversion. The king say "You almost persuade me to become a Christian", (*Acts 26:28*) and says that Paul would have been set free immediately had he not appealed to Nero (*Acts 26:32*).

After many adventures that serve to showcase Paul's prophetic and healing powers, during which he is given special treatment supervised by a centurion who is specifically assigned to him, Paul lands in Rome. Here, he is not treated at all as a prisoner but rather "dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things that concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him." (*Acts 28:30-31*). And there *Acts* ends, in 62 C.E., with no hint as to the fate of its hero, Paul. Other Christian sources say that Paul died in 66 C.E., a very significant date to which I return below. If correct, *Acts* is for some reason completely silent on the last 4 years of Paul's life. The reason cannot be that *Acts* was written before Paul died, as it can be definitively dated as after 93 C.E. (see below). So it is pretty clear that *Acts* has something to hide. And, of course, *Acts* ends in 62 C.E. without mentioning the murder of James in the same year, certainly the most significant event in the early history of the Church.

While Josephus does not specifically discuss either Paul's confrontation with James, nor the multiple attempts by Jews to kill him in its aftermath, nor his several "trials" and contemporaneous hobnobbing with the highest officials in Judea, he does relate a series of parallel events that do much to clarify Paul's extraordinary treatment by King Agrippa II and other high officials. I will discuss these immediately below.

But first I just note that Paul's very privileged treatment through all of these events would be easily accounted for if he were part of the Herodian family and would be difficult to explain otherwise. In particular, *Acts* offers no explanation.

2.4 Parallel Events in Josephus: Dual Power in Jerusalem

Although *Acts* treats Paul's final confrontation with James and the events that follow

without any context, events in Judea at this time (58–62 C.E.) were developing explosively. In modern parlance, we would say this period was characterized by “dual power”. In dual power, the old ruling classes continue to monopolize the organs of state-sponsored violence (army, police, etc) that fundamentally enable their rule, but lose control of the auxiliary institutions by which the masses are normally channeled to peacefully accept the dictates of this rule. Such periods are always unstable, and generally lead either to revolutions (e.g., Russia 1917) or to catastrophic massacres of the incipient mass organizations (e.g. Indonesia 1965).

The primary vehicle for ideological control of the masses at this time was the Temple and its priesthood. The major secondary vehicle was legitimacy of the monarchy, codified by its “Maccabean blood”. By the late 50s C.E., after decades of agitation and organization by the resistance, both were crumbling.

2.4.1 Herod's Principal Ideological Institutions

Herod the Great had established both institutions of ideological control by singular violence. After the victory of his Roman-backed army against the last Maccabean rulers, Herod demanded marriage to Mariamne (“Mary”), the last Maccabean princess, probably as the price for not immediately slaughtering her brother Jonathan. Once Mariamne bore him two sons, Herod killed both her and her brother. Then, after these sons were grown and had children of their own, he killed both of them as well. Kings Agrippa I (37–44 C.E.) and Agrippa II (54–66 C.E.), the grandson and great-grandson of this grafting project, were thereby groomed for legitimate (Maccabean) kingship, while still being so thoroughly embedded in the Herodian family as to preclude any possibility of an independent challenge.

Herod also slaughtered the whole Maccabean Zadokite (“Righteous” in English; “Sadducee” in *New Testament* transliteration) priesthood and replaced these with his own “Zaddiks”. The original “Sadducees” had been installed by the Maccabees to enforce the extremely strict adherence to Jewish Law that had been the hallmark of their rebellion, celebrated today as Hanukkah, nominally a festival of religious freedom, but actually an episode of bloodthirsty religious intolerance, as documented in the *Maccabees* books in the *Apocrypha* (Catholic bibles only). Herod's new “Sadducees” were the exact opposite of the murdered “Sadducees” they replaced, justifying and enabling foreign rule instead of enforcing xenophobic Jewish self-rule. Hence, the mutual opposition of Pharisees and Sadducees, which had arisen in later Maccabean times when the interests of the increasingly powerful merchant class gave rise to the Pharisees who pushed a more tolerant line, now became two sides of the same coin. It is for this reason that both are treated with contempt by Jesus, who like the whole resistance, was rooted at least ideologically, and perhaps genealogically, in the original Maccabean “Zadokite” line.

Finally, Herod rebuilt the Second Temple as a concrete reminder to the people of his legitimacy. While the above-ground portions of the Temple were almost completely destroyed following the Jewish defeat in 70 C.E., most of the underground portions remain. Only by touring these can one gain a proper sense of the immense scale of this architectural work, which must have been substantially more impressive than even the Roman Forum. One can only imagine the ideological force such a monument must have had on the populace, given that its creator was also the destroyer of independent Jewish rule.

With that background, let us return to the parallels between the *Acts* picture of

Paul's final confrontation with James, and the Josephus picture of developing dual power in Jerusalem. In *Acts 21:20*, James tells Paul, "you see there are thousands of believers, and they are all zealots for the Law", i.e., of the original Maccabean "Zadokite" mindset. According to Josephus, the higher priests (directly appointed by the authorities) had, at this point, lost control of the lower priests who had become fanatical adherents of the Law. How far gone is made clear by the so-called "Temple Wall Affair".

2.4.2 Temple Wall Affair

By 60 C.E. (just 2 years after the Paul/James confrontation), the lower priests were so far out of control that they were able to build a wall to block King Agrippa II from viewing Temple services. As will become clear from the further development of this crisis, this is because they viewed the King as a foreigner who was not living according to the Law. Indeed, as the confrontation between "Simon" and Agrippa I (ca. 44 C.E.) shows, there was already widespread hostility toward Agrippa I on these grounds, and Agrippa I made substantial efforts to appear to be a conforming Jew, whereas Agrippa II did not.

In *Acts 21*, James contrasts the zealously pro-Law environment in Jerusalem with the fact that many are saying that Paul is teaching Jews to forsake the Law, that salvation is possible without it. In *Acts's* account (which one should remember is written by Paul's friend), Paul blatantly lies by denying this (in line with his classic boast of political opportunism: "To the Jews I became as a Jew and to the Greeks I became as a Greek. I was all things to all men" – *2 Cor 9:19*). James then demands that he do penance to demonstrate fidelity to the Law, but after a few days, he is accused by a mob of Jews of bringing Greeks into the temple, and it is this charge that rallies several attempts by very large numbers of people (ultimately requiring 470 soldiers to defend against) to kill Paul.

Thus, the central issue in the Paul/James confrontation, foreigners in the Temple, is the same one that drives the confrontation between the Herodian establishment and the lower priests. In both cases, the anti-foreigner position has tenacious support among the masses.

2.4.3 Appeals to Caesar

Next, in 60 C.E., when Paul was making his "appeal to Caesar" after his second "trial", he was not alone. According to Josephus, at least 10 people connected with the Temple Wall Affair were bound over and sent to Rome to give account of their role in the unraveling situation in Jerusalem. This included the temple treasurer Helcias, who was the husband of Saulos's sister Cypros, and thus Paul's brother-in-law if he was indeed Saulos. [And, if this identification is correct, then Paul's nephew, who arranged his huge armed escort, would be Cypros's son, Julius Archelaus, who is known to have been interested enough in these events to have bought a copy of Josephus's *Jewish War*.] It also probably included Josephus himself, who went to Rome to defend two priests at approximately the same time. Josephus at least met with Nero's wife, Poppea, whom he describes as sympathetic to Judaism (which brand is not clear) and whom Nero kicked to death while she was pregnant a few years later.

2.4.4 Execution of James

These parallels serve to focus the question, already stirred by *Acts's* less than forth-

coming account, of what exactly Paul was discussing with governors Felix and Festus, King Agrippa II, and their princess/wives/mistresses Drusilla and Bernice? Apart from theology, that is? Indeed, what was driving Paul to come to Jerusalem in the first place, in the midst of a rapidly disintegrating political situation in which Paul's well-known line of accommodation with Rome was on verge of losing control not only of the masses but the priesthood? In *Acts* account, Paul is even warned not to go to Jerusalem by a "prophet" named "Agabus" (an obvious conflation of the convert/King Agbarus) not to go there because of the physical danger.

Eisenman argues that Paul is consciously bringing the weight of his mission (which judged by his own apparent economic resources has been at least financially successful) to aid the accommodationist line in Jerusalem both within the Jamesian Church and more broadly in Temple affairs (if these can be fully distinguished at this time). At least from *Acts*'s telling (probably not far off) Paul is still in marginally good standing with the James Church at the outset of his visit. Given this, he must have pushed his line very aggressively to excite such sustained and violent opposition. The only explanation for this in *Acts* is that he brought Greeks into the Temple, which despite *Acts*'s denial is likely to be the case. Given that exclusion of foreigners from the Temple was *the* cardinal issue of the day, this cannot have been an accident. That is, Paul was a conscious stalking horse for Herodian interests, using his position "within" James's Church to test this point. Regardless of the specifics, from the "Agabus prophecy", Paul was certainly aware that his visit could provoke violent opposition, but was determined to carry through with it regardless of cost, in part no doubt because he knew he would have the full backing of the state power.

That is, Paul made a conscious decision to risk his "capital" as a member of the James Church in quasi-good standing, in order to pursue larger aims. From this perspective, the *Acts* account thus chronicles the rapid and complete loss of this "capital", and Paul's transition back into an open enemy of the resistance, his original role, one that he nominally abandoned after his "conversion". It is therefore likely that Paul's extended conversations with Felix, Festus, and Agrippa II, whatever theological excursions they may have contained, were basically debriefing sessions that provided these authorities with invaluable intelligence on the workings of the resistance movement that was spiraling out of their control.

In 62 C.E., at the next opportunity following Paul's departure for Rome, several high officials conspired to conduct a kangaroo "trial" of James and execute him, supposedly for "blasphemy". I will discuss this development more closely when I recount the life of James, below.

2.4.5 Saulos bursts upon scene

Following James execution, "Saulos" organizes riotous attack on the lower priests at the Temple. This sudden activation of Josephus's "Saulos" occurs in the same year as the equally sudden deactivation of *Acts*'s Paul, whose biography simply cuts off with Paul peaceably proselytizing in Rome. "Saulos" goes on to an active role in the early stages of the Jewish War, beginning just a few years later. In 66 C.E., he acts as an intermediary between various powerful people in Jerusalem and the Roman armies outside, with the aim of guiding the Romans into the city so they can drown the rebellion in blood. Saulos

is later called to a debriefing with Nero in Corinth. The answers he gives may not have proved completely satisfactory because after this (the exact year Christian sources claim that Paul dies) Saulos also completely disappears from the scene.

3. The Resistance

3.1 Maccabean Origins of the Resistance

The Jewish War was an immense event, unequaled in its scope and impact by any rebellion up to that time and, in fact, at least up until the French Revolution. The organization and practical military skills required to sustain such a rebellion for 4 years against Rome, at the very apex of her power, are daunting. But first of all (and what concerns us most here), such an undertaking requires a depth of ideological conviction, spread widely among the populace, that can be attained only by decades of ideological preparation closely linked to practical organizational work.

The roots of the resistance were indeed very deep. In every aspect, they trace directly back to the Maccabean revolt, which engaged essentially the same political/social issues, with essentially the same ideology and practical organization as the subsequent revolt against Rome. It therefore served as model, a “proof of concept”, and a direct source of the required tools.

The Maccabean revolt was itself an amazing event. How were a ragtag group of priests able to defeat the Seleucids, who reigned over a significant empire, and to establish a theocratic state that lasted more than a century? Certainly it helped that this empire, one of four competing remnants of Alexander’s conquests, was in decline, primarily due to steady pressure from the Roman Empire consolidating to the west. But this cannot be the whole story: there are no other examples of violent revolutions that reestablished ancient kingdoms in the face of spreading Hellenic culture, even when a particular ruling political formation of that culture was in decline.

As first argued by Kautsky in *Foundations of Christianity*, both the attraction of Hellenism, which threatened to disintegrate Jewish national identity, and the resistance to it, stemmed from one and the same process that placed the Jews at the center of the growing Mediterranean trade networks.

It is often forgotten that the Jewish Diaspora dates from the destruction not of the Second Temple, but the First. When Parthia defeated Babylonia, and permitted Jews to return to Judea, only a small fraction did so. The majority remained in enclaves spread throughout the Near East. Their peculiar customs, as well as the sophistication they acquired from contact with advanced societies during their exile, enabled these enclaves to form and support an elaborate merchant network. That is, Jewish traders could travel long distances, yet be assured that in whatever city they ventured, there would be contacts with whom they shared language and culture, and ultimately trust, and who were bound by peculiar national/religious custom to welcome them, more so than their own neighbors. The stronger and more exclusionary these customs, the tighter the network. And the coherence of these customs was sustained by their physical embodiment in a Jewish state and Jewish Temple. Of course, there was also the opposite model for organizing a trading network: complete openness to all cultures, mediated by adherence to the most universal

and cosmopolitan culture of all, Hellenism. Each model had its own advantages. The universalist (Hellenic) model facilitated easy contact with suppliers and customers, while the exclusionary (Judaic) one favored integrity of the network in the face of the natural centrifugal pressures of trade. The more complex and multilateral trading became, the more the integrity of networks was tested and the more the advantages of the exclusionary model would reveal themselves.

Exactly because the advantages of each model were mutually exclusive, each was driven to accommodate aspects from the other. Down to modern times, universalist traders develop societies of various types that attempt to mimic the exclusivity of a religious sect (with secret codes and rituals, etc.) in order to artificially forge the types of bonds that come naturally to a sect. The Masons are the most famous example. And for their part, the Jewish traders and their ideological representatives developed Pharisaic Judaism, the closest heir to which is modern Rabbinical Judaism. Its highly sophisticated “interpretations” facilitate simultaneous apparent strict adherence to the Law with accommodation to the dominant non-Jewish cultures and customs.

Kautsky’s point was that the peculiar customs of innumerable cultures faced pressure and ultimately dissolution from the spread Hellenistic culture, but in most cases they were defended only by social classes and formations that were in historical retreat: peasants, priests, local oligarchs. For the Jews, these resisting elements were joined by merchants and allied classes, which were among the most dynamic elements in these societies. The alliance of entrenched classes characterized by deeply rooted convictions and traditions, and modern dynamic classes, often lays the basis for radical new social configurations and even revolutions.

Hence, long before the conflict between Judaic and Hellenic civilizations broke out in the cataclysm of the Jewish War and seeded the Christian synthesis, it existed buried in Jewish society itself, concentrated in the merchant classes. Each aspect fed and amplified the other. The more trade flourished, the more critical became the integrity of the trading networks and so the greater the value of strict national laws. The greater this trade’s success, the more the traders were drawn into alien cultures to which their peculiar customs were the ultimate barrier.

Jewish history throughout the Maccabean and Herodian periods was dominated by this contradiction. As Roman power spread over the whole of the Mediterranean, creating stable uniform administration, trade expanded enormously, and immense wealth accrued to both Jews and Greeks engaged in trade. For the Jews, 10% of this wealth was tithed to the Temple, concentrating immense wealth in Judea as well. However, the same Roman power that created this stable environment, increasingly destabilized the Maccabean regime, which oscillated between the xenophobic nationalism on which it was founded and Pharisaic accommodation. In 37 B.C.E., Herod’s Roman-backed armies crushed the Maccabean state, as described above, and installed themselves as tax farmers for the Romans.

During the Maccabean period, the Romans were themselves supremely uninterested in trade. To the extent that they took an economic interest in the results of their conquests (and were not singularly focused on the military and administrative aspects), they restricted this interest to slaves. In this period of rapid expansion, Roman wealth was based largely on the *capture* of slaves, who were then worked to death without the over-

head cost of reproduction (since more slaves could be captured to replace them). The wealth extracted from trade was probably modest in comparison.

However, with the onset of Pax Romana, more or less coincident with the conquest of Judea, Rome's slave economy went into crisis because slave capture radically declined while the basic mode of slave production became inefficient when resources had to be set aside to reproduce a new generation of slaves. [This did not apply to the American slavocracy 2 millennia later because it was producing for the world-capitalist market and so could draw from wealth produced in that process as a whole.] Taxes in Judea became oppressive, which gave rise to resistance, first organized by Judas the Galilean in 4 B.C.E. Over the next 70 years, this resistance developed through several stages, inviting harsh reprisals and arbitrary treatment of the population, which fanned generalized resentment and ultimately rebellion.

As this cycle intensified, the core question of whether to pay the Roman tax became generalized into a question of reestablishing national independence and, at a more fundamental level, securing national identity. The resistance that emerged naturally gravitated to the Maccabean ideas and methods that had previously succeeded at essentially the same tasks. And most probably, underground remnants of the Maccabean priesthood regrouped to lead the struggle. That is, the Zadokites at the center of this struggle were probably linked not only ideologically to the old Maccabean priesthood, but genealogically as well.

But the ideology of this new movement, while firmly rooted in Maccabean traditions, went far beyond it. In particular, while it remained acutely nationalistic, the very scale of project of taking on Rome (infinitely more powerful at its peak than the Seleucids were in their decline) forced the movement to seek a wide net of allies, albeit on its own terms. And this in turn led it to a universalist ideology that was able to rally sufficiently broad forces to conduct a serious struggle with Rome, many elements of which were ultimately absorbed by the Hellenic/Judaic "Christian" culture that emerged from that struggle.

3.2 Main Trends of the Resistance

In tracing the origins of any major convulsion, it is best to begin at the end, when the determining features reach their most acute and naked expression, and then to search for threads of these features at earlier times, when they are otherwise often lost under the welter of dross that seems momentarily important at any given time. Of course, there is some danger to this approach: the extreme exigencies of war may generate striking elements that actually have no recognizable counterpart in earlier developments, while genuinely important transitional trends from the incipient stages of a process may leave few traces on the convulsion.

Nevertheless, in the case of the Jewish War, this is really the only scientific way to proceed. So much of our source material from the crucial period before the War is either strictly ideological in character (New Testament), written under the pressure of self-censorship (Josephus), transmitted to us by people with little understanding of the significance of what they were reporting (Early Church historians), written in elaborate code (Dead Sea Scrolls), or several of these, that we would be the helpless prisoners of the many biases of our informants if we failed to anchor ourselves on the incontestable facts of the rebellion.

The War broke out over the refusal of the lower priests to accept sacrifices from for-

eigners, including the King and his family. This is itself an extraordinary fact, upon which Josephus lays great emphasis, claiming (incorrectly) that this refusal was an “innovation” of which “our ancestors were previously unaware”. It implies that the War was fought directly over the question of national identity and control of national institutions, which concentrated national customs. And moreover, that this identity was recognized as completely bound up with adherence to Jewish religious law and the priests who dared, against the armed might of the state and its foreign backers, to stand up for it.

Furthermore, when the War reached its so-called “Jacobin phase” (roughly final two years), when it was prosecuted with real revolutionary vigor, it came under the control of the so-called “Zealots”, i.e., people who were in the words of James (*Acts 21:20*) “zealous for the law”. These two facts already tell us that such “zealousness” and the “Zealots” who carried it, were at the core of the resistance process.

Very significantly, Josephus says of the Zealot fighters that, after capture, they “preferred to undergo any sort of death rather than call any man lord”. As Josephus himself was probably present at some of these excruciating torture sessions, it is a very strong statement, indicating a fanatical attachment not just to the Jewish Law but to the Jewish God.

But when the War erupted, it did so as a much broader alliance of forces. A broad swath of the revolutionary forces, including those with the most advanced military skills, were people whose nationality and ideology lay well beyond the margins of the Zealot Jewish party. Some were professionals from within the Herodian military like Niger of Perea. Some, like Monobazus and Kenedaeus (descendants of Queen Helen), were foreigners who saw themselves as “joining” or “converting” to some form of Judaism, but without the purity demanded by the Zealots. The Zealots ultimately turned on many of these allies, though it is not completely clear why. Finally, there were sections of the ruling classes that nominally joined the rebellion, mostly to stay on top of the situation rather than out of any conviction. Josephus himself may be grouped among these. It was their failure to effectively prosecute the War that led to its Jacobin phase.

3.3 “Peaceful Essenes”

The received version of Josephus gives us a tantalizing account in *The Jewish War* of “four grades” of Essenes, which is transmuted into “four philosophical schools” or “four sects” in *Antiquities*. There are few other historical references to a group of this name, so one suspects that either the group itself was unimportant or Josephus is describing it in code for (seemingly justified) fear of reprisals if he treads too closely to issues deemed explosive by his Roman sponsors. [Philo does describe “Essenes” in a diaspora (Egyptian) context. However, this group may have been only loosely related to, and not nearly so fanatically nationalist, as the native Judean “Essenes” of Josephus. They would then have provided Josephus with a convenient, non-inflammatory code name, which both indicated whom he was actually talking about to those in the know, while avoiding mentioning the true name of a group that had become an anathema. Such dissimulation would have allowed Josephus to present a more favorable, or at any rate balanced, view of this key group than would have otherwise been safe.] Thus, Eisenman points out, it is highly instructive to review the “four groups of Essenes” recounted by Hippolytus, a Church theologian/heresologist from the 3rd century. The very fact the Hippolytus uses the term

“Essene” in isolation from any ongoing historical discussion, together with the detail of material he presents, much of it nearly identical to Josephus, means that he must be dependent on Josephus for his information. But whereas the received Josephus divides the Essenes into four grades of holiness, Hippolytus describes them as “divided into four parties”, who “did not preserve their system of training in exactly the same manner” as “time went on”. These ideas appear nowhere in Josephus, and so would seem odd, except that Josephus reports that he wrote another version of his works (now lost) in Aramaic for his Eastern brethren (in Northern Syria, Adiabene, Mesopotamia, and Parthia), where he might have been more forthcoming about the revolutionaries with the aim of dissuading these populations from attempting to reverse the outcome of the War.

Hippolytus’s first “party” (like the Josephus first “grade”) “will not handle a current coin of the country” because they “ought not carry, look upon, or fashion a graven image”.

“But the adherents of another [i.e., the second, seemingly chronological] party, if the they happen to hear anyone maintaining a discussion concerning God and His laws and, supposing such a one to be uncircumcised, they will closely watch him and when they meet a person of this description in any place alone, they will threaten him if he refuses to undergo the rite of circumcision. Now if the latter person does not wish to comply with this request [they] will not spare him, but proceed to kill him. And it is because of this behavior that they have received their appellation being called ‘Zealots’ [or] ‘Sicarii’.”

For his part, Josephus does refer pejoratively to “Sicarii” (named for a curved knife used for both circumcision and assassination) and from 68 C.E. onwards “Zealots”, but it is far from clear in the received Josephus that these emanate from the Essenes. Thus, while the received Josephus’s Essenes are usually characterized as “peace-loving”, these Sicarii or Zealot Essenes are anything but. Moreover, the fact that the Zealots or Sicarii were known first of all for their insistence on circumcision is not in any way apparent in the received Josephus. In brief, it appears that the Essenes were the most hard-core elements of the resistance, ideologically committed to the law, circumcision in particular, ultimately getting the appellation “Zealots” or “Sicarii”.

It is worth noting, therefore, that several disciples of Jesus, almost certainly his (and James’s) brothers are also labeled this way. Most directly of course, “Simon Zelotes” (i.e., Simon the Zealot) and slightly less clearly “Judas Iscariot” (i.e., Judas Sicarios), the first letters being sometimes reversed in transliteration. This identification is further secured by his designation “Judas [brother of] James” in Luke, as “Judas the Zealot” in Syriac texts.

Hippolytus’s third party of Essenes would “call no man Lord except God even though one should torture or even kill them”, which both overlaps Josephus’s description of Essenes as refusing to “blaspheme the Law-Giver” and parallels his “Fourth Sect of Jewish Philosophy” founded by Judas the Galilean in *Antiquities*.

Finally, Hippolytus’s fourth party have “declined so far from the discipline” that those “continuing in the observance of the customs of the ancestors would not event touch them” and “should they happen to come into contact with them, they would immediately resort to water purification as if they had come into contact with someone belonging to a foreign people.” By contrast, the normative Josephus’s fourth grade of Essenes, while also less concerned with purity, is pictured as being novitiate rather than a hostile party.

Hippolytus concludes his description by commenting (in exactly the same way as Josephus) on the longevity of the Essenes, their temperateness, and the fact that they are incapable of displaying anger. These characteristics are the basis of the modern picture of “peaceful Essenes”. But from Hippolytus’s description, this “peace” is inner peace that has come with fanatical devotion to a most violent struggle. Indeed Josephus does talk of the bravery of the Essenes in “our recent war with the Romans”, that no matter how they were “racked and twisted, burned and broken” they could not be made to “blaspheme the Law-giver” nor “eat forbidden things”.

The second+third parties of Essenes (if they can really be distinguished) and the fourth party are engaged in exactly the same argument, ultimately developing into exactly the same excommunication, as the conflict described in *Acts* and Paul’s letters, between the “party of the circumcision” (i.e., the party of James) and the party of Paul. It therefore seems almost certain that these “Essenes” and the “Christians”, whose final rupture into Jamesian and Pauline wings is recorded in *Acts 21-25*, are one and the same.

4. James: Resistance Leader

As already indicated by the comparison of Paul’s attack on “Stephen” (*Acts*) or James (*Pseudoclementine Recognitions*), James has been systematically written out of *The New Testament*. It therefore requires considerable effort to reconstruct James’s life. Eisenman undertook this in a separate book devoted to *James, the Brother of Jesus*, where he combined deconstruction of *New Testament* text with various non-canonical sources, particularly accounts of early Church historians and the *Dead Sea Scrolls*. In *The New Testament Code* Eisenman further builds on these results.

4.1 James’ Practical Role

James first appears in *Acts 12:17*, without introduction. Given that he will later be treated as a major protagonist in *Acts*’s central drama, this can only mean that he is either regarded as so important as to require no introduction, or that he had already been introduced in an earlier version of the text, which has subsequently been written over. The latter explanation undoubtedly plays a major role.

First, just a few lines earlier, *Acts 12:2* kills off another James (often called “James the Greater”), a largely (or entirely) fictional construct, whose sole purpose seems to be to maintain name-recognition continuity with earlier versions of the text that chronicled the activities of the real James.

Second, from the *Pseudoclementine Recognitions*, we already know that James was in fact the leader of the “Christians” at the time he was attacked on the Temple steps, which corresponds to Chapter 6 in *Acts*.

Finally, in Chapter 1 of *Acts*, there is already a highly suspicious story of an election to fill the “office” left vacant by Judas’s suicide (itself highly suspicious, though not quite rivaling the obviously bogus story of Judas’s alleged betrayal of Jesus.) Judas held no office, he was simply an apostle, and even if one supposes that there had to be 12 apostles (for which there is otherwise no evidence), this was certainly not the most important “office” to be filled following the devastating events that conclude the Gospels. Rather, this “office” would be the leader of the movement, which was vacated not by Judas, but

by Jesus. As we know that James was the leader of the movement at least from 37 C.E. (Temple steps attack in *Acts 6*), to 58 C.E. (final confrontation with Paul in *Acts 21*), it seems very likely that James was elected leader at the very outset, and that the account of this was overwritten by the “Judas office” story as part of the general effort to suppress reports of James.

In fact, Paul’s letters make it clear that James is the overarching leader of the movement, although at times as the leading member of a triumvirate (James, Cephas [probably Peter], and John). Paul is constantly railing against the authority of this leading group. He must suffer agents of James coming down from Jerusalem giving various instructions that he thinks are counter to his mission, and in *Acts 15* and *Acts 21* (perhaps two different versions of the same actual events – one in the phantasmagoric portion and the other in the “We Document”) Paul must go to James personally to appeal his decisions, which are regarded as final and binding.

Finally, the magnitude of James’s role is reflected in his appearance in various non-canonical sources, including Josephus and Early Church historians, the former being particularly noteworthy because Josephus could have no Church-related axe to grind in his description of James. Josephus’s *Antiquities*:

“And now [Nero], upon hearing of the death of Festus [i.e., 62 C.E.], sent Albinus to Judea as Procurator, whereupon the King [Agrippa II] deprived Joseph of the High Priesthood and bestowed this office on Ananus ben Ananus ..., a man rash in temperament and very insolent ... Possessed of such a character and thinking he had a favorable opportunity because Festus was dead and Albinus still on the way, Ananus convened a Sanhedrin of the Judges and brought before them {the brother of Jesus who was called the Christ whose name was} James, and several others. Accusing them of being Law-breakers, he delivered them up to be stoned.” [Braces around section likely to be an interpolation by Church scribes.]

We do not learn from the received Josephus why James was singled out for judicial murder (but see below), but we do get some hint of why it was necessary to act when there was no governor:

“[B]ut those residents of the city considered most concerned with equity and strict observations of the Law, were offended by what had been done. Therefore, they secretly sent to King Agrippa, urging him to order Ananus to desist from any further such actions, because what had already been done was illegal from the start. Some of them even went to meet Albinus, who was on his way from Alexandria, and informed him that it was unlawful for Ananus to convene a Sanhedrin without his consent. Whereupon Albinus, convinced by these words, wrote in anger to Ananus, threatening to punish him for what he had done. At this point, King Agrippa took back the High Priesthood from him, which he had held for three months, and replaced him with Jesus ben Damnaeus.”

That is, Agrippa II and Ananus conspired to kill James during a 3-month interval when they could minimize the obstacles posed by his high standing in the city. Moreover, it appears in fact that the original Josephus provided substantially more insight. Origen and Eusebius, 3rd and 4th century churchmen, both report reading copies of Josephus that attributed the fall of Jerusalem to the death of James. Both took strong exception to this assessment (regarding the fall of Jerusalem as due to the death of Jesus, not James),

and this is probably the reason that this claim disappeared from the received versions of Josephus.

These passages from Josephus (received and inferred) already make clear the enormous authority and respect James carried in his own day. The 4th century theologian Jerome gives us a yet more detailed picture of James's standing. Quoting the 2nd century Hegesippus, Jerome recounts that James "alone enjoyed the privilege of entering the Holy of Holies [inner Temple sanctum], indeed he did not wear woolen, but only linen clothes, and went into the Temple alone and prayed on behalf of the People, so that his knees were reputed to have acquired the callousness of a camel's knees". That is, James was able to function as some sort of Opposition High Priest, which indicates the extreme breakdown of normal authority that I have characterized above as "dual power".

And drawing from what he says are accounts of Josephus and the 2nd Century Clement of Alexandria, Jerome gives additional depth to the received Josephus's account of the trial, saying that "Ananias [sic] ben Ananus, taking advantage of the state of anarchy, assembled a Sanhedrin and publicly tried to force James to recant that Christ was the Son of God". Although this characterization probably involves some degree of normative-Christian interpretation of the events at the trial, it does lead us back, though an account of an earlier incident by Eusebius, to the probable cause of official hostility toward James. Eusebius claims that during Passover, when large numbers of Jews from throughout Judea converged on Jerusalem, the "scribes and Pharisees" became alarmed at the nationalist agitation of the crowds that had gathered beneath the Temple and asked that James mount the Temple to calm them down. In response to the question they demanded of James when he "stood on the Pinnacle of the Temple, 'what is the gate to Jesus the Crucified One,'" James responded "in a loud voice" with an inflammatory prediction of apocalyptic judgment: "Why do you ask me concerning the Son of Man? He is sitting on the right hand of the Great Power and will come on the clouds of Heaven".

It therefore seems likely that James was executed because he lent his immense prestige to the messianic agitation of the masses, rather than trying to calm people down. As mentioned above, James's execution occurred just 2 years after the "Temple Wall Affair", wherein the lower priests (with whom James had great prestige) built a wall blocking the King from viewing Temple services. Hence, James was probably regarded as being responsible, whether by general influence or direct counseling, for this huge embarrassment to the King.

4.2 James' Ideological Role

James appears to have acquired enormous standing, to the extent that he was targeted for judicial murder, and this murder was seen by at least some people as leading to the Jewish War and the resulting destruction of Jerusalem. As this standing was acquired without any official position, it must have been based on the ideas that he propounded and stood for. James was actively battling for these ideas for at least 25 years, from the late 30s until his death in 62 C.E. But what were they?

To some extent, James's ideology is reflected in the *New Testament*, in the *Letter of James*, and by refraction in Paul's letters and in *Acts of the Apostles*. The latter two are extremely hostile to James, but only mildly misrepresent his positions. Their principal shortcoming is that, given their overwhelming emphasis on Paul's mission to the Gentiles,

they one-sidedly focus on James's position regarding foreigners, i.e., people who were drawn to his movement but were not prepared for full conversion to the strict Judaism that he advocated. This question was not unimportant. As mentioned in § 3.1, such foreigners ("nilvim" or "joiners") played a major role in the final struggle with the Romans, and so the evolution of policy toward them had great practical significance. Nevertheless, they were not the defining elements of James's movement and so James's orientation toward them can shed only a skewed light on his ideology.

The *Letter of James* gives a more internally coherent picture of James's views. It contains startlingly direct attacks on Paul, primarily on his ideology but also on him personally. Its very appearance in the *New Testament*, which is overwhelmingly a Pauline document, is therefore quite surprising. Jerome, in the 4th century, already questioned whether James actually wrote this letter because of its high-quality Greek, and this question is still not answered today. Nevertheless, from many lines of evidence, it can hardly be doubted that this letter does represent the views of James.

There are fragments of information, including reports by early Churchmen of documents they had read but that are no longer extant. These also give insight into James's wider positions. However, both the *Letter of James* and these reports suffer from a "selection bias": however, accurately they convey James's views, they were preserved and have arrived at our doorstep because they were of interest to Churchmen, people who in the end shared at most part of James's worldview. They do not organize and present James's thoughts as he would have done himself, and they do not convey the power of his ideas in the context of the upheavals that wracked 1st century Jerusalem.

To pursue this channel, we must turn to the *Dead Sea Scrolls*. A quarter century ago, Eisenman identified James as the *Scrolls's* "Righteous Teacher" in his path breaking monographs *Maccabees, Zadokites, Christians and Qumrum* (1983) and *James the Just in the Habakkuk Peshier* (1986).

The *Scrolls* are startling documents, which give a comprehensive picture of the community at Qumrum (where they were found) including its worldview, analysis of ongoing events, and internal practices. The principal technical problem in their interpretation is that all of the personalities and social forces, without exception, are described using code names. Given the fanatically anti-establishment orientation of the documents, their description of a horrible and heart-breaking invasion, and the fact that the *Scrolls* themselves were deliberately hidden in what were effectively time-capsule containers, the most logical explanation for their coded form is as a precaution against their falling into the hands of the perceived enemies of the community.

As difficult as this technical problem is, however, it is dwarfed by ideological and institutional problems. Even more than other areas of social "science" research, Biblical studies are completely dominated by ideologically driven "investigators", striving to justify their own preconceptions. In the case of the *Scrolls*, the effects of this approach were dramatically amplified by the fact that the documents themselves were kept under the tight control of the "Holy Office" (successor to the Inquisition) for many decades.

The completely unscientific spirit of the "investigators" combined with the general "respect" for orthodox religious positions in the general media, led to absolutely ridiculous interpretations, and even mistranslations of the documents. Eisenman's work, both

liberating the *Scrolls* from captivity, and bringing a rigorous scientific spirit to their interpretation, is a bright beacon in what is otherwise mostly a murky intellectual cesspool.

Eisenman is able to show that the events surrounding James's death, which are documented in Josephus and other sources, are matched perfectly by the account of the demise of the Righteous Teacher in the *Habakkuk Peshet*. This alone is very convincing evidence for his identification. But there are numerous other identifications as well, most significantly that the "Kittim" invaders described in the *Scrolls* is the Roman army on its sweep through Judea as it approaches Jerusalem. The clincher of this identification is that the "Kittim" are said to "worship their battle standards", a practice of the Imperial Roman army (whose battle standards carried portraits of the deified emperor) and no other in this general region and epoch. Once these key identifications are made, many others fall into place. Most notably, the "Wicked Priest", an external ideological enemy of the "Righteous Teacher" is Ananus Ben Ananus, and the "Lying Spouter", an internal enemy, is Paul.

The very existence of this community, which had no obvious means of local support, must have required substantial financial resources, either a large mass base or very wealthy backers. I will argue below that it had both. James's role as ideological leader of such a well-entrenched, fiercely anti-establishment force accords well with his very high standing among an increasingly revolutionary population and his being murdered by the authorities on the eve of the revolutionary war that eventually broke out.

4.2.1 James in Paul's Letters and Acts

Paul's hostile stance toward James and other leaders of the movement veritably leaps from the page in ways big and small all across his letters. One gains a distinct, albeit refracted, impression of James's views from these outbursts. For example, a striking passage from *Galatians 2:1-13*

"Then after 14 years, I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and also took Titus with me. And I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain. Yet not even Titus who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. And this occurred because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage). To whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you. But from those who seemed to be something – whatever they were, it makes no difference to me: God shows personal favoritism to no man – for those who seemed to be something added nothing to me. But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter (for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles). And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. They desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do. Now when Peter had gone to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed. For before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles, but when they came he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the [party

of the] circumcision. And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with hypocrisy.”

Let us set aside Paul’s claim that, at some earlier point, James had acceded to Paul’s approach to the Gentiles and focus on his characterization of James’s final position, both his ideological position and his position of authority.

The first point is that James’s word is final. Even such a major figure of the movement as Peter (likely the same as the triumvirite “Cephas”), when told by James that he must reverse course, does so immediately. And note that Paul bristles at this authority of “those who seemed to be something – whatever they were, it makes no difference to me”. Paul himself, although he credits his decision to visit James to a “revelation”, nevertheless admits that he must make the visit to obtain James’s judgment on whether he “had run in vain”.

Second, James is from, indeed is the leader of, [the party] of the circumcision. His position is exactly that of the Hippolytus’s “Sicarii” Essenes who, if they “hear anyone maintaining discussion concerning God and His laws and, supposing such a one to be uncircumcised, they *will closely watch him* and when they meet a person of this description in any place alone, they will threaten him if he refuses to undergo the rite of circumcision.” Paul describes these as “false brethren secretly brought in who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty [to remain uncircumcised] which we have in Christ Jesus”. And just as Hippolytus’s Law-abiding Essenes “should they happen to come into contact with [the “fourth party of Essenes” who have “declined so far from the discipline”] they would immediately resort to water purification as if they had come into contact with someone belonging to a foreign people” so, on James’s orders do Peter and Barnabas withdraw from contact with Paul and his followers.

Third, James’s directive is to look after the poor. There is no elaboration on this point, but it will turn out to be very important.

According to Paul, Peter (and by extension James) had earlier endorsed, or at least tolerated, his non-Law-abiding mission to the Gentiles. This assertion is confirmed by the very fact that James sends him directives and that he can approach James at all in *Acts 21*. It may well be that James’s original attitude was similar to that of the “Fiddler on the Roof” rabbi when he was asked if there was a blessing for the Tsar: “May the Lord bless and keep your mission to the Gentiles – far way from us”. But, for whatever reason, probably connected with the intensifying conflict in Jerusalem, James’s line hardened to the point that even conditional support was withdrawn. And this accords also with Hippolytus’s account of a chronological development of the Essenes, with excommunication of the type described by Paul in Galatians and by *Acts 21–25*, as part of the *last phase* of Essene development.

In the period prior to Paul’s excommunication, when James and Paul are in uneasy alliance, James lays out 4 conditions for working with “God-fearers” (people drawn to the movement who are not full converts): keep away from pollution of the idols, keep away from carrion, keep away from fornication, and keep away from blood. Although a bit obscure to the modern mind, all were critically important to James’s ideology and to securing reliable allies among the Gentiles. All were directly opposed by Paul in his letters, which is undoubtedly the reason for his excommunication.

4.2.1 *Pollution of the Idols*

First, of course, Abraham's iconoclasm is the central ideological tenet of Judaism. But more specifically, the central point of resistance agitation, and the ultimate cause of the War, was contamination of the Temple by an ideologically corrupt priesthood and the idol worshiping foreigners who enforced its authority. Paul, by contrast, ridicules this position, saying "what is an idol temple to me?", i.e., "who's afraid of the big bad wolf?" This is because Paul was working primarily among idol worshippers, and following from his basic opportunism, did not want to confront them over this.

4.2.2 *Blood and Fornication*

Probably the most inflammatory charge made by the resistance against the Herodian establishment was that they did not keep to Jewish law regarding the overlapping prescriptions on blood and fornication. As already mentioned, niece marriage and unlawful divorce were the central issues in the murder of John the Baptist. Fornication was also probably the central issue in Peter's confrontation with Simon Magus, which immediately followed Paul's attack on James (in the *Pseudoclementine Recognitions*) or on "Stephen" (in *Acts*). Recall that Paul's attack occurred shortly after John's execution. *Acts* tells us nothing about this, but according to Josephus, Simon Magus was a Rasputin-like adviser who helped arrange Drusilla's illegal (from the strict standpoint of Jewish law) divorce and more favorable marriage to Felix. Such divorces, along with "approaching near kin" for sex, and sleeping with women on their periods, were charges leveled against the establishment, which undoubtedly helped galvanize broad support for the movement in the late 30s C.E., and so helped lay the basis for its extraordinary growth by the time of the Temple Wall Affair two decades later. Of course, Paul's doctrine of a "new covenant in the blood of Christ", by which he introduced (if only metaphorically) the Greek-mystery-cult practice of drinking the blood of a human god, must have horrified the hard-core ideologues of James's movement. Indeed, to get slightly ahead of our story, here is what they wrote in the *Dead Sea Scrolls (Habakkuk Peshar)* about the "Lying Spouter" (either Paul or his ideological double):

"[W]ho leads many astray, building a worthless city upon blood and erecting a church upon lying, for the sake of [his] glory, tiring out many with a worthless service and instructing them in works of lying, so that their suffering works [or suffering toil] would be for emptiness."

Actually, without reading Eisenman's books, it is difficult to recognize how loaded this short attack is with "key words" that identify either Paul or the movement and its ideology that he is seen to be attacking. "Many" (used twice) is one of the community's self-designations of its rank-and-file (the other being "the poor"). "Astray" is often contrasted to "Way", the movement's self-designation, which of course also appears as a self-designation for Christianity in *Acts* and Paul's letters. "Building" is central to Paul's self-metaphor as architect of his communities. "Church" (literally "assembly", which is synonymous with "church" in Greek - "ecclesia") needs no explanation. "Lying" and self-"glorification" are repeated charges against the Spouter, charges to which Paul frequently responds in his letters, saying "I lie not", and admitting that he is given to "boasting", while boasting that this "boasting" is justified. "Service" is a repeated self-characterization of the activities of both Paul and the Qumrum community. And, of course, "emptiness" is

James's ultimate put-down of Paul, in the most famous line of the letter bearing his name: "Oh Empty Man, don't you know that faith without works is dead?" (*James 2:20*).

But here, I just note that among this welter of charged words and concepts, the central charge against the "Spouter" is that his congregation is built upon blood, i.e., that the detested idolaters cult of human gods is being conflated with worship of the unapproachable Jewish God.

4.3.3 Carrion

This proscription is perhaps the most obscure to us, but relates back to purity of Temple service and its connection to ritual food purity. In particular, meat could not be eaten if the rituals of slaughter were violated. Indeed, it was probably James's perception that Temple service was impure that dictated his life-long vegetarianism. Of course, carrion is by definition not ritually slaughtered and in particular is not drained of its "blood". Because of this connection with blood, the proscription on carrion was probably regarded as a touchstone, an absolute minimum condition for aliens who were approaching the community. Paul, by contrast, famously mocks ritual purity of all types, saying "eat anything sold in the market place", and even goes so far as to ridicule Jews for washing their hands before eating.

The *Letter of James* gives a richer picture of James's ideology, since it is concerned with a broader range of issues than contact with aliens.

4.3.4 Class Struggle

James clearly pits rich against poor, accusing the former of robbing the latter of their wages and of "killing the Righteous One" (perhaps Jesus, but maybe James himself, if the letter were written by a follower after James's death. James was known as the "Righteous One" ("Zaddik") to the extent that this word was consistently appended to his name or even used in place of it. [In Latin, this is translated as "Justus", which is then often written in English as "Just One" or "the Just".]

4.3.5 Hassid/Zaddik, Piety/Righteousness

James distilled the basic teachings of Judaism into two commandments: piety toward God and righteousness toward men. Or alternatively, loving God and loving one's neighbor. Actually, Josephus claims that John the Baptist was the first to teach this, but it was clearly adopted by James's movement, perhaps even before James came to lead it. For James, these two principles were not a substitute for Jewish Law: he cautioned against "stumbl[ing] on [even] one point". Rather, these principles served to focus understanding of the Law not as a set of individual prescriptions, but as an integrated guide to life, and ultimately eternal life. It seems likely that this distillation is what made Judaism (otherwise an obscure compendium of idiosyncratic rules) accessible to a wide circle of foreigners.

4.3.6 Faith and Works

"Faith and Works, working together" is certainly what James is most famous for, in sharp contrast Paul's ideology that one is saved by "faith alone". Hence, the above quote attacking Paul as an "Empty Man". In fact, this doctrine is exactly the same as the twin love commandments: faith/works = piety/righteousness = loving God/loving men.

5. The Dead Sea Scrolls

The evidence assembled by Eisenman that the *Dead Sea Scrolls* are the work of James's community is overwhelming. Already, in *James the Just in the Habakkuk Pesher*, written 25 years ago, he demonstrated microscopic correspondence between the *Pesher's* description of the destruction of its hero, the Righteous Teacher, and the details of James's murder as described by Josephus. These include the illegal character of the "trial", the fact that associates of James/Righteous Teacher were killed with him, and most tellingly, the fact that Righteous Teacher's nemesis (the "Wicked Priest") was made to "drink the [same] cup of wrath" by which he had destroyed the Righteous Teacher and associates, by the "violent ones among the gentiles", just as Ananus ben Ananus was killed by non-strictly-Jewish allies of the Zealots during the Jacobin phase of the Jewish War, 6 years after James's death.

In *The New Testament Code*, Eisenman undertakes a sweeping investigation of the relation of the *Scrolls* to the previously known materials from this era. He shows, for example that the *Damascus Document*, which defines the strategic orientation of the community, is basically an elaboration on the *Letter of James*. He shows that much of the language of the *Scrolls* is either copied or parodied or countered by *The New Testament* corpus. And he shows that many of the issues that agitate the *Scrolls* writers were current in the run-up to the Jewish War, but not previously.

Eisenman's identification is hotly disputed. Nominally, the basis of the dispute is that AMS carbon dating seems to date the *Scrolls's* to around a century before the War. Eisenman's answer to this is two-fold. First, the internal evidence dating the *Scrolls* is overwhelming. Second, the precision of AMS carbon dating is overrated. Both of these arguments are strongly rooted in basic scientific methodology.

In my view, and I think also Eisenman's, the reason that the majority of academics reject this view is not that they have a deep understanding of, and so deep faith in, AMS dating, but that they are afraid to face up to the consequences that follow from the *Scrolls's* true provenance. In particular, admitting that Christianity arose from the ashes of a fanatical Jewish revolutionary movement and that the real Jesus bore no relation to the Gospel character, would undermine not just their scholarship but their *raison d'être*.

The *Scrolls* give a startling picture of James's ideology, one that is free of both self-censorship and the "selection bias" of early-Christian commentators who had more direct access to Jamesian material than we had until the *Scrolls* were discovered. Here I give just a few quotes from the *Scrolls*, which together give some flavor of what James stood for.

5.1 On Holy War

"You will fight them from Heaven ... and the Elect of your Holy People ... are with you in Your Holy abode .. You have recorded for them ... Your Covenant of Peace that You may reign forever throughout the Eternal Ages. And You commanded the Hosts of Your Elect in their thousands and their myriads, together with Your Saints and Your Angelic Army with the authority in war to strike the rebellious of Earth with your awe-inspiring judgments ... And the assembly of Your Holy Ones is in our midst together with the Elect of Heaven for Eternal help. And we shall despise kings and we will mock and scorn the mighty because our Lord is Holy and the King of Glory together with the Saints are with

us. The might of the Angelic Host have visited us and the hero of war is in our assembly and the Hosts of His Spirits are our foot soldiers and our cavalry”. (*War Scroll*)

For the most part, the *War Scroll* is treated as being allegorical, rather than being an order of battle. In view of the fact that a holy war was actually waged against Rome, this viewpoint seems at best implausible. The underlying reasoning is that the Qumrum corpus is “known” to be the product of “Essenes” and the Essenes are “known” to be peaceful, ergo a militaristic Qumrum document is ipso facto allegorical. Of course, it is also known from Josephus that the Essenes were extremely brave fighters in the war, and from Hegesippus that the Essenes were militant fanatics from before the war, but these facts never seem to enter the equation.

5.2 On Separation from the Unrighteous

“They shall separate from Men of Unrighteousness to go into the wilderness to prepare there the Way of the Lord as it is written [quotes Isaiah 40:3, the classic Christian proof text on this subject] ... and which the prophets have revealed by His Holy Spirit.” (*Community Rule*)

This doctrine is perfectly in line with Hegesippus’s characterization of the first three “parties” or chronological phases, of Essenes, separating themselves off from the fourth in order to avoid defilement. It also accords with the treatment Paul and Barnabas received from Peter and John Mark after a ruling by James.

5.3 On Last Judgment and Resurrection

“Then Truth, which wallowed in the Ways of Evil in the government of Unrighteousness until the time of the appointed Judgment, will emerge victorious in the world, and God with His Truth will refine all the works of Man and purify for Himself the sons of men, perfecting all the spirit of unrighteousness within his flesh and purifying it by means of the Holy Spirit from all Evil actions. He will pour upon him the Spirit of Truth like cleansing waters [washing him] of all the abominations of lying.” (*Community Rule*)

“These are the secrets of the Spirit for the earthly Sons of Truth, and the Visitation of all the Walkers in [the Holy Spirit] will be for healing and healthiness for long days ... and eternal joy in a victorious [i.e., eternal] life and a Crown of Glory with the imperishable clothing of Eternal Light” (*Community Rule*).

These passages are loaded with expressions that were prized by early Christians, showing the organic connection between Qumrum and the first Christians.

6. Construction of *Acts of the Apostles*

When I first struggled to read *The New Testament*, I concluded that the Gospels and *Acts* were “mythological” in character. That is, they represented some historical memory of real events that were gradually molded by historical exigencies until, when they were eventually written down, they bore only a marginal connection to the events that were represented. The best analogy would be the children’s game “telephone”.

Eisenman clearly demonstrates that this view is quite wrong. The Gospels and *Acts* are consciously constructed and have more in common with counter-insurgency psywar documents than legitimate reconstructions of oral tradition.

The letters of Paul and others are genuine. While some were written by people other than their purported authors, they all represent genuine theological interpretations from the first (or possibly second) century. The problem with them is just that they are usually interpreted in light of the Gospels and *Acts* under the assumption that the latter are to be taken more or less at face value.

From the standpoint of believers, the Gospels form the core of *The New Testament*. Although people with a scientific spirit generally find these concatenations of magical stories to be mind numbingly unbelievable, the underlying story line is compelling to those credulous enough to believe it. If scientific investigation is attempted, it usually accepts that there is some underlying core of real events that have been “enhanced” with magical elements to increase their power over the credulous.

In fact, while there probably are some elements of the Gospels that are refracted from real events, with a very few exceptions it is essentially impossible to reconstruct what these might be because the basic ideological line advanced by the Gospel’s “Jesus” runs about 165° counter to the known line of James, who was not only Jesus’s brother but also his closest disciple and the leader of the movement for roughly 30 years after Jesus’s death. Kautsky was the first to note one of the few exceptions to this rule: the story in which Peter cuts off the ear of the High Priest’s servant as he is arresting Jesus. This story runs so counter to the basic message of the Gospels that it must be real. The Gospel authors must have felt compelled to include it because popular memory of the incident would render accounts that failed to mention it suspect.

The survival of this story enabled Kautsky to discern a few important facts in 1908, which have only recently been confirmed by archaeological discoveries together with Eisenman’s analysis. First, Jesus’s apostles were armed at least on some occasions. More to the point, they were well-trained in arms: the mere fact that Peter was carrying a sword would not enable him to successfully challenge a trained guard. Peter must have been quite skilled. Then the fact that some of Jesus’s followers were called “Zealots” convinced Kautsky that this was a revolutionary group, intimately connected with the actual revolution that challenged Rome.

But in any case, the key historical events in the origin of Christianity are really not those from Jesus’s time. Jesus may have been an important teacher, but there were others of this period of at least similar impact and with a similar ideological line, such as John the Baptist, as well as a very large number of other teachers with different lines (Josephus called them “impostors” and “deceivers”) who gained followings at least as wide as that of Jesus. The events that made Christianity a world-historical force took place after Jesus’s death, when the movement was under the leadership of James. These events are tracked by *Acts of the Apostles* rather than the Gospels. In this sense, *Acts* is the key document of *The New Testament*.

Until Eisenman exposed the first half of *Acts* as a series of parodies and conscious rewrites, it would have been possible to believe that it was the result of a “telephone”-like process such as I originally imagined. So who actually wrote *Acts*? When, why and how did they write it? As mentioned above, the second half of *Acts*, beginning at *Acts 16:10* was certainly written (or at least recounted) by an actual traveling companion (and likely co-worker) of Paul. There is too much detail and too much material that is embarrassing to

Paul to believe that this document was either a fictionalized account or substantially rewritten. But what about the first part?

We know that this was written after 93 C.E. by one or several people who had no direct knowledge of the events being discussed and who were working off of multiple secondary source materials. Why 93 C.E.? Because that was the year Josephus published *Antiquities*, and unfortunately for the *Acts* authors, they made a mistake that showed *Antiquities* to be one of their sources.

Acts 5:36-37 recounts two executions, first Theudas and then Judas. However, Eisenman points out that this sequence arises from a too-rapid reading of *Antiquities*, in which Josephus also mentions both executions in his section about the famine of 45-48 C.E.. Josephus also mentions the execution of Theudas before that of Judas, but for Josephus, the execution of Judas (Judas the Galilean) takes place many decades earlier and is recounted as “flash back” which is triggered by executions of Judas’s sons, which did occur at the time of the famine. *Acts*’s garbled version of Josephus’s account thus gives us an “earliest date” for its construction. [As a side point, the “Theudas” who Josephus tells us was beheaded during the famine was most likely “Judas Thomas” (literally, “Judas the twin”) brother of Jesus (and so also the brother of James), doubled in Northern Syrian tradition as “Thaddaeus” and at Nag Hammadi as “Theudas”. Eusebius claims pivotal roles for both “Judas Thomas” and “Thaddaeus” (if these can really be distinguished) in the epic conversions of Queen Helen’s family, and this character even reverberates in the Koran as “Hud”. If so, then the execution of “Theudas” did indeed once grace *Acts*’s account of the famine, where it would have said “Then he [Herod] killed Theudas [the brother] of James with the sword” in *Acts 12:2*. But then, during the musical-chairs rewriting process, this became the received version “Then he killed James of John with the sword”.]

Eisenman has basically unraveled how *Acts* was constructed: the second half is essentially a transcription of a legitimate historical account by a participant who, while not completely forthcoming, is primarily interested in giving a living account of his experiences and does not shy away from including material that is embarrassing to his friend, Paul. By contrast, the first half is a series of parodies of actual historical events that chronicle the activities of James’s movement (the real heirs to Jesus’s teaching) interspersed with reconstructions (usually as accurate as the authors’ information permits) of Paul’s activities. That is, the authors always begin with genuine historical materials and generally try to remain true to their chronology, but do not hesitate “create history” when their aims (discussed below) require it. They achieve this through dazzling literary concoctions that, while loosely based on the historical materials at their disposal, radically downgrade the role of James, make it appear that Paul alone understood Jesus’s message, and transform Peter into a vicious anti-semite who repeats the blood libel as least 6 times, and who is ultimately won over to Paul’s viewpoint (contrary to what we know about the real Peter from Paul’s letters).

That said, it is remarkable how valuable an historical guide *Acts* is, once one has deconstructed its method. For example, because *Acts* tries to stick to the underlying chronology of its sources, it allowed us to recognize that Paul’s trip to Damascus was in the service of Herod the Tetrarch in Herod’s conflict with Aretas, following Herod’s divorce from Aretas’s daughter, which triggered the murder of John the Baptist. That is, Paul’s

letter, by itself, told us only that he had been escaping Aretas by being lowered over a wall in a basket, but not when this happened. But because *Acts* tries to stick to its chronology, we learn from it that this incident took place soon after Paul's conversion (although, characteristically, *Acts* does not give the actual reason for the activity mentioned). Thus, *Acts* places this event in the late 30s C.E., when, Josephus tells us, Aretas and Herod the Tetrarch were in a war over this divorce. *Acts* feels confident letting this information slip because it so garbles the meaning of all events that it describes that it assumes the reader will never be able to reconstruct the underlying story. Paul is likewise circumspect in giving away his Herodian ties, and it would have been impossible to guess them from his brief mention of the basket incident in *2 Corinthians*.

Similarly, *Acts* believes that it is being devilishly clever in its parody of Simon Peter's confrontation King Agrippa, thereby making Peter seem like an advocate of Paul's theology. And, indeed, for 2 millennia, this ploy was quite successful. Nevertheless, by retaining key elements of the story, and placing it in the proper sequence (after Paul's conversion but before the famine), *Acts* ultimately lets the cat out of the bag, that Jesus's "rockiest" supporter was the same heroic opponent of Roman rule who first confronted a king over the issue that eventually precipitated the Jewish War.

Knowing *how* its authors constructed *Acts* immediately tells us *why* they did so, at least in the narrow sense. Their overriding goal was not to convey genuine historical data but rather to create the impression that Paul was the legitimate heir to the Christian movement. Paul did play a role in this movement, but it was minor compared to the electrifying impact John the Baptist and Simon Peter had through their confrontations with Herod the Tetrarch, Simon Magus, and Agrippa I, which must have aroused the imagination of all Judea. And at the core of this movement stood James whose stature was such that he could serve as Opposition High Priest, was regarded as alone capable of quieting the masses, and whose murder for failing to do so was broadly blamed for the outbreak of the Jewish War. *Acts's* goal, therefore, was to graft Paul's ideology onto the stature of this movement, a stature that Paul did not remotely achieve. As Eisenman points out, this grafting project was the ideological reflection of Herod's grafting of his family branch onto the Maccabean tree. And *Acts* has been quite successful in achieving its goal.

But this still begs the question of why *Acts's* authors would bother to undertake such an elaborate construction. It might seem plausible to assume that as Paul's communities continued to grow and prosper after his putative death in 66 C.E., their members craved a history that would directly link them to Jesus and his immediate followers, whose exploits still reverberated in the popular imagination. I think this is possible, but unlikely.

From Paul's letters, it is clear that he knew absolutely nothing about Jesus (apart from his crucifixion), which of course reflects the intrinsic limitation of direct communication with supernatural beings as a means of learning historical facts. Hence, Paul's communities were not trained in any aspect of Jesus's teaching, either real or imagined, but rather were fed a barely refurbished Hellenistic mystery cult based on drinking the blood of a human God. To the extent that Paul's communities flourished, they did so without any reference to the real Jesus or the historical process of which he was a part. Hence, it seems unlikely to me that these communities themselves would call forth the literary creations of *Acts* or the

Gospels. Moreover, I do not know of any evidence that Paul's communities did organically grow into the post-Jewish-War Christian movement, which soon began contending for ideologically control of the Roman empire.

What we do know is that almost immediately, there were Christian cells high up in Roman society, including right in the Emperor's household and, indeed, his immediate family. Recall that Domitian murdered a fair number of these in 95 C.E., and was himself murdered 2 years later, probably in retaliation for this. Thus, it appears far more likely that *The New Testament* was created by would-be "philosopher kings", who consciously followed the path advocated by Plato in his *Republic* of creating a set of religious myths that would enable the ruling classes to maintain ideological control over the masses.

Of course, one might imagine another scenario, in which *Acts* (as well as the Gospels, which I am not thoroughly reviewing here, but which Eisenman dissects in great detail) were written as literary exercises by people with access to revolutionary documents captured in the War and too much time on their hands (perhaps because they were relieved of their administrative positions by the War itself). Eisenman appears to favor this explanation, at least for the Gospels, but I don't buy it.

There is a huge "gospel" literature, produced over several centuries (much of which has been lost), and yes, this is a plausible scenario for creating some of it. However, such literary efforts, no matter how skilled, could not hope to generate the level of internecine conflict in the imperial household that actually occurred just 25 years after the War ended. This level of conflict would require that matters of state be at stake. That is, multiple murders and counter-murders would generally imply acute disagreements on how to run the empire.

In brief, key people at the highest level of the Roman state concluded that the situation urgently called for fabrication of a new state religion, undertook to create such religion using Pauline "Christianity" as their anchor point, and made enough headway in establishing this religion to 1) invite immediate retaliation, and 2) ultimately prevail.

7. Jewish War on the Big Canvass

Once (the first half of) *Acts* is decoded as a consciously fraudulent history of the pre-War Christian movement that was written several decades after the War, and once it is recognized that the resulting fabricated religion immediately penetrated the highest levels of the Roman court, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that this fraud was a "philosopher king" scheme for consolidating ideological control of the Roman state.

But for this to be believable would require that sufficiently powerful people within the Roman state would become so obsessed with the need for a new state religion that they would risk (and for some, ultimately give) their lives for it. And this would require that in the wake of the Jewish War, the ideological crisis in Rome was extremely advanced, to the point that it objectively threatened Roman rule and that this threat was urgently perceived by at least some of Rome's leaders.

At a surface level, the response of Rome to its victory over the Jews was one of macabre celebration: a victory parade immortalized by an arch that still stands in the Roman Forum, which features a candelabra donated by Queen Helen; the huge Roman

Coliseum, financed by captured treasure, built by Jewish slaves, and scene of demented “games” wherein captured fighters were publicly tortured.

But viewed from the larger sweep of history, this victory was the beginning of the end of Roman power, which expanded no more. When Rome fought Parthia in 116-7 C.E., its rear lit up in rebellions that echoed the Jewish War. In 132-135 C.E., the defeated Jews, launched a second war against Rome, the Bar Kochba revolt. After that, there were steady incursions of “barbarians” and eventual collapse.

The Jewish War and the rebellions that reverberated from it did not cause this decline, but they did bring into sharp relief the ideological decay that reflected the deep contradictions in the Roman order. For the first time, Rome met an enemy that it could defeat but could not break, who saw beyond torture and death to a future not reducible to their individual existences. And distilling these shocking stories from the front, Rome’s more farsighted representatives must have pondered how their vast empire could be governed and ultimately survive if its enemies possessed such powerful gods, while they themselves worshiped emperors and Olympians. It couldn’t and it didn’t. 2000 years later, the hulk of the Colosseum stands as a depraved monument to the tyrants who built it, but Roman civilization is gone, and among the millions of tourists who come to see Titus’s Arch of Triumph, the majority are the ideological heirs to the bound captives it depicts being marched through Rome. Understanding, or at least sensing this future, some tackled the problem head on.

Of course, these would-be philosopher kings did not have to craft a new state religion from whole cloth, nor would it have been possible to do so. They started with Paul’s worked out theology, which happily was both fanatically pro-Roman and viciously anti-semitic, and which had the additional advantage of having been forged in the practical struggle of proselytizing. But they also recognized that by itself this fairly abstruse warmed over mystery cult would be accessible to only a rather thin stratum. To attain the kind of visceral power of Jamesian “Christianity”, they did two things. First, they created a powerful story of the Jesus man-god at the center of Paul’s theology, working up a broad variety of source materials to create the Gospels. Second, they grafted Paul’s meager tale onto the much more compelling story of James’s group, transformed by literary magic into an echo chamber for Pauline theology.

Obviously, their project did not immediately achieve full success. But the power of their creation, rooted at bottom in the power of Jamesian ideology (as well as the bankruptcy of official religion), did enable them to sink roots quickly and did prepare complete success in just 200 years. Ultimately, this required a rather bitter struggle, in which Christianity drew strength from both its high-level connections and the indigenous communities distributed throughout the empire that dated from the first century, communities on both sides of the James/Paul divide. To galvanize all of this strength required bringing the *Letter of James* (as well as a few other like-minded letters) into the canon, even though this document is completely hostile to Paul.

There is one final question that bears a closer look. How was James’s group able to sustain its work over many decades under a murderous dictatorship that routinely executed anyone remotely regarded as subversive? Undoubtedly much of their organization was secret, while their roots among the people were deep enough that these executions (e.g.,

of John the Baptist) could just as easily strengthen the movement as cripple it. This made the state cautious in its application of power, alternating between the tolerance of Agrippa I and the bloody repression of Agrippa II. But another factor was the international situation. James had a very strong following to the East, and some Jamesian groups (like the Iraqi “Marsh Arabs”) actually survive until this day. Indeed, an entire kingdom came over to the Christians, perhaps more in the Pauline wing at the beginning, but definitely siding with James and ultimately participating in the rebellion at the end. These allies, though outside Judea, were undoubtedly a real reservoir of strength, and it is likely the Queen Helen provided financial support for James’s movement.

Eisenman focuses on one major reason for James’s strong support in the East: that Abraham and Noah came from this region and large numbers of people in it could therefore be rallied to a religion that took Abrahamic and Noahic teachings seriously. But there may be another factor as well. These kingdoms to the East were in effect buffer states between Rome and Parthia, not fully controlled by either but influenced by both. Certainly Parthia would have had an interest in undermining the stability of Rome and might have subtly, or not so subtly, encouraged Queen Helen and others in their support of James. Indeed, when push came to shove in 116-117 C.E., Parthia benefited greatly from dissension within the Roman provinces. No one can say how Parthia would have fared vis a vis Rome if there had been no Jewish War, no uprisings in 116-117, and no Bar Kochba revolt.

Timeline

4 B.C.E. – 7 C.E.: Revolt of Judas the Galilean

~**37 C.E.:** Herod Antipas divorce, Murder of John the Baptist, Herod/Aretas War (Josephus); Paul’s attack on “Stephen” (*Acts*) or on James (*Pseudoclementine Recognitions*); Paul’s conversion and escape from Aretas (*Acts*, Letters).

44 C.E.: Simon goes to the house of Agrippa I to enforce separation of clean from unclean (Josephus) or to the house of the “pious” centurion “Cornelius” to learn that it is not necessary to do so (*Acts*).

45 –48 C.E. Famine in Judea. Queen Helen (head of self-circumcising convert family and grandmother of resistance heroes) sends treasury agents to Egypt and Cyprus to provide relief (Josephus), or “Queen Candace’s’ eunuch” who “controlled all her treasury” converted by “Philip” to Pauline Christianity on road from Egypt (*Acts*)

58 C.E. Paul/James final confrontation. Paul attacked by Jewish mobs for bringing foreigners into Temple, declares he is Roman citizen by birth (*Acts*).

58 – 60 C.E. Paul under house arrest for 2 years, chats up governor (Felix), his Princess/wife (Drusilla), King (Agrippa II) and his Princess/sister/mistress (Bernice) (*Acts*).

60 C.E. Temple Wall Affair blocking King’s view of services because he is foreigner, several key officials, priests etc. bound over for “appeal to Nero” (Josephus), Paul bound over for “appeal to Nero” (*Acts*).

60 – 62 C.E. Paul preaches unimpeded in Rome (*Acts*).

62 C.E. James tried in Kangaroo court. Executed. (Josephus). *Dead Sea Scrolls’s* leader “The Righteous Teacher” tried in Kangaroo court. Executed. (*Habakkuk Peshet*); *Acts’s* Paul/Saulos “deactivated”, i.e., *Acts of the Apostles* ends without saying what happened to Paul (or James, for that matter) (*Acts*), Josephus’s Saulos “activated”, organizes riotous

attacks on lower priests (Josephus).

64 C.E. Rome burns, Nero blames “Christians”.

66 C.E. Jewish War erupts over foreign control/presence in Temple (Josephus); Saulos works unsuccessfully to bring Romans into city, sent to report to Nero in Corinth, never heard from again (Josephus), Paul executed (Christian sources).