

The University of Western Australia

Tiberius to Titus:
Redating and Reassessing the Origins of
Christianity

Dissertation submitted for the Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in
Classics and Ancient History at the University of Western
Australia, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
of

Bachelor of Arts (Honours)

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Year: 2025

Word Count: 15,000 words

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Abstract

Most scholars consider Christianity to have emerged during the reign of Tiberius, around the year 30 CE. This paper questions that interpretation of early church history and submits that Christianity may have first appeared some forty years later, predicated upon a rumour that the Messiah had come about the time the temple in Jerusalem was razed by the Romans. Drawing upon theological arguments and those from analogy, this paper suggests a possible alternative inception theory and asks whether in the light of the evidence presented, it is time to rethink the prevailing consensus. In order to shed some light on this question, the ancient historians Tacitus and Josephus are discussed in detail. We show why they seem to have either substituted another narrative or omitted any reference to this phenomenon altogether. The study looks at the sociological underpinnings of new religions and examines other cases when comparable phenomena have arisen in Jewish and non-Jewish contexts, revealing that these types of events can reoccur when similar underlying conditions are present.

“The Jews too, as those to whom the prophets spoke, were well aware that Christ was coming. Indeed, even now his advent is expected by them. Nor is there any other greater contention between them and us, than that they believe the advent has not yet occurred”
(Tertullian *Apology* 21.15)

Introduction

Scholars contend that Christianity arose during the reign of Tiberius (14-37 CE) from the preachments of a Jewish miracle worker and sage named Jesus (Frend 12) but the evidence for this contention rests primarily on texts produced by the early Christian movement itself — documents whose historical objectivity can be justifiably challenged on the basis of their clearly expressed evangelistic aims — as for example we see in John 20:31 (Sanders 3). Probably the best arguments put forward in favour of the traditional position are the alleged mentions of Jesus by Josephus (Van Voorst 81ff) and Tacitus (Van Voorst 39ff). Therefore considerable space is devoted in the following pages to explicate these particular passages in their context. This paper attempts to address two major concerns with the standard thesis. Firstly, the dearth of good evidence for the existence of the religion in the middle of the first century and secondly the related question of how the religion became so popular by the end of the century. There have been several arguments put forward to explain the dearth of secular evidence over the years and these arguments will be discussed in a methodical fashion throughout this paper. Origen declared that the strongest evidence in confirmation of the claims of Jesus was that his coming was predicted by the Jewish prophets (*Contra Celsus* 49) and moreover:

With respect to the birth of Jesus ... there is shown at Bethlehem the cave where He was born, and the manger in the cave where He was wrapped in swaddling-clothes. (51).

In 1904, Thomas Whittaker suggested that the religion arose as a consequence of the first Roman-Jewish War. This crisis, he argued, provided the necessary social and religious impetus for its invention.¹ Whittaker's hypothesis was criticised by G. A. Johnston in a review published in 1916² but since that time his thesis has received minimal scholarly attention. Schweitzer (389) in an amended survey of critical

33 scholarship up to his own day (*The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 1913)
34 discussed Whittaker’s ideas briefly in relation to some of his other views
35 but did not address his core thesis directly. The proposition that the
36 temple’s demise was the catalyst which launched the religion appears to
37 have been systematically neglected in the scholarship for more than a
38 century. While some things in history can be known with relative certainty
39 this is not the case with the subject of this paper and on many points raised
40 herein there is room for some measure of justifiable doubt.

41 **Preliminary Comments**

42 *When the movement emerged, rather than how*

43 For one reason or another this approach seems to have been neglected
44 whereas the corollary or the implication of the thesis — *the possibility that*
45 *Jesus may never have existed as a historical figure* — despite being
46 labelled as a fringe position has attracted and continues to attract a huge
47 amount of scholarly attention (Gullotta 313). From Christian apologists to
48 secular agnostics there appears to be uniform agreement — *Jesus did exist*
49 — and only a lunatic or the seriously misinformed would dare to claim
50 otherwise.

51
52 There is no doubt that Paul believed that Jesus had been on earth and that
53 he had been “born of a woman” (Galatians 4:4). This passage and similar
54 ones are offered as proof that the narrative concerning Jesus is history
55 rather than myth (Dunn 96). It is our contention that Paul who never claims
56 to have met Jesus in the flesh, was mistaken. When he says, “Have I not
57 seen (ἑώρακα) Jesus our Lord?” (1 Corinthians 9:1) he means as an
58 apparition. According to Paul, Jesus was “descended from David
59 according to the flesh” (Romans 1:3-4) but knowing the ancient prophecies
60 (2 Samuel 7:12-16 and Isaiah 11:1-5) Paul would have understood that a
61 true messiah would *need to be a physical descendant of David*.³ Crucially,

62 Paul is adamant that his knowledge was *not gained by interaction with any*
63 *humans* but was obtained solely by divine revelation (Galatians 1:11-12).

64
65 The identification of early Christian texts among ancient papyri fragments
66 could potentially resolve the matter of dating the incipient movement.
67 However, despite much effort being expended on this endeavour, to date
68 nothing has been found that definitively predates the destruction of the
69 holy house. For example some researchers have proposed that P.Oxy
70 42.3057 is potentially Christian in origin but the fragment notably lacks
71 any explicit Christian terminology, theological concepts or clear
72 references to New Testament figures or practices (Blumell 112-113). But
73 even if it could be shown to be a Christian text it would still not invalidate
74 our thesis, as it is not early enough. The same holds for the prayer
75 preserved in P.Fouad inv. 203 dated to the same period. Although it cannot
76 be entirely ruled out that the text is of Christian origin, the contents of the
77 papyrus make it much more probable that it has a Jewish provenance
78 (Horst and Newman 125-127).

79 **Rumours and Comforting Falsehoods**

80 Dio Chrysostom (c. 40-120 CE) observed how readily men were prone to
81 believe falsehoods, especially those that align with their wishes and
82 expectations.⁴ About the same time the Roman historian Tacitus was
83 working on his *Histories*, and noticed that a political or military crisis often
84 accompanied the propagation of these phenomena. In the tumultuous years
85 68-69 CE the empire was shaken by Nero's fall, the legions were restless,
86 and Galba's advanced age necessitated choosing a successor. This volatile
87 situation created fertile ground for hearsay. Says Tacitus in one case:

88
89 Piso had hardly left the palace when a report was brought, vague and
90 uncertain at first, that Otho had been killed in the camp. Presently,
91 as is natural in falsehoods of great importance, some appeared who
92 declared that they had been present and had seen the murder.

93 Between those who rejoiced in the news and those who were
94 indifferent to it, the story was believed. Many thought this rumour
95 had been invented and exaggerated by Otho's partisans who were
96 already in the crowd and spread abroad the pleasant falsehood in
97 order to lure Galba from his palace. (*Histories* 1.34)

98
99 Where there is a dearth of reliable information and information in general
100 circulates slowly due to distance or for some other reason, people's
101 emotional and mental equilibrium can become disturbed — their fears
102 about personal and familial safety or imagining the loss of their property
103 or position make them especially vulnerable. Both from a human and an
104 historical perspective, rumour is a very important and powerful
105 phenomenon, and might have far reaching consequences, even to the
106 extent of bringing about a change of government. In the case of Nero,
107 Tacitus says that he was “driven from his throne rather by messages and
108 rumours than by arms.” (*Histories* 1.89) Shatzman after an extensive
109 analysis of the corpus of Tacitus, concludes: “Almost every event, notably
110 wars, is accompanied by rumours” (544).

111
112 The social researchers Bartholomew and Hassall⁵ categorize widespread
113 societal delusions into two main types: *social panics* and *social*
114 *enthusiasms*. The belief that the Messiah had appeared could have
115 manifested as either a *social enthusiasm* or *social panic* depending on
116 one's position in society. A parallel scenario played out when rumours of
117 the Prophet's coming began to circulate in the Levant in the 7th century.
118 Those yearning for divine deliverance would have greeted messianic
119 claims with jubilation, while others — particularly among the Roman
120 ruling class — would have interpreted such proclamations as dangerous
121 and potentially disruptive of the established order.

Tacitus on Christian Origins

Tacitus is the only near contemporary Roman historian who reports on the origins of Christianity and notably does not say that the religion was the outcome of a rumour. What he does say though is instructive. His account of the origins of the movement is found embedded in a passage pertaining to the emperor Nero and the catastrophic fire of Rome which occurred in the year 64 (*Annals* 15.44). Tacitus says that a “rumour” arose that the fire was the result of an order from the emperor and to dispel the suspicion Nero singled out a new religious sect for collective punishment. This religion originated in Judea, whence the “pernicious superstition” (*exitiabilis superstitio*) after a period of quiescence had spread to the city of Rome “where all things horrible or shameful in the world collect and find a vogue.” So although the historian implies that Christus crucified under Pontius Pilate, was the founder of the movement, the manner in which the religion spread appears to be similar to that of a rumour.

There is an ongoing debate about the credibility of Tacitus as it applies to this passage. One problem is corroboration as no other contemporary or near contemporary author, pagan or Christian, mentions this event. For instance the author of the earliest official history of the church, the *Acts of the Apostles* dated to about 90 CE (Goodspeed 196) does not appear to be cognizant of this dramatic affair and the lengthy letter of *Clement to the Corinthians* anchored fairly securely to the year 96 (Vermès 160) despite discussing recent martyrdoms including that of the chief apostle is equally silent. Shaw argues that the Neronian persecution of Christians is a myth (73, 96) while Cook has responded to Shaw, accusing him of indiscriminate use of the *argumentum ex silentio* (237-264).

While Tacitus cites his sources in other passages (though not consistently), he fails to identify his source or sources in this instance,⁶ and freely acknowledges that his *modus operandi* included the use of unverified

153 rumours when occasion demanded. He says regarding the death of Drusus,
154 for example that:

155
156 ... I have given the version of the most numerous and trustworthy
157 authorities; but I am reluctant to omit a contemporary rumour, so
158 strong that it persists today... (*Annals* 4.10ff)

159
160 In another place he confesses that:

161
162 While I must hold it inconsistent with the dignity of the work I have
163 undertaken to collect fabulous tales and to delight my readers with
164 fictitious stories, I cannot, however, dare to deny the truth of
165 common tradition. (*Histories* 2.50)

166
167 This methodological confession is illuminating (Shatzman 553). If Tacitus
168 as an astute historian was not averse to crediting the folklore (*fabulosa*)
169 that assailed him in his professional setting, it stands to reason that the
170 mass of citizenry would be all the more given to accepting as truth a
171 rumour that the Jewish Messiah had lately appeared in Judea in their social
172 setting. Whether through official duties or in casual conversation, Tacitus
173 in the Neronian passage could be simply restating what in essence was the
174 myth of origins of the cult, which by the time of writing (c. 120 CE) had
175 been assimilated into the collective consciousness of Roman society. It
176 should also be noted that any explanation for the origins of Christianity
177 that showed up the faults or mistakes of the Romans would likely have
178 been resisted. Laying the blame squarely at the feet of a certain Christus
179 punished lawfully by Pontius Pilate would have been a far more acceptable
180 narrative than connecting the cause to any action or inaction by a respected
181 Roman military or civic leader.

182

Pliny the Younger

183

Pliny the Younger says in one of his letters to Trajan (10.96) that he had heard of Christians but was unclear about how to deal with them. Pliny is silent regarding their origins only remarking that they were “accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and sing responsively a hymn to Christ as to a god.” After interrogating some members of a congregation he says that he found nothing “other than a debased and boundless superstition.”

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Pliny was a close friend of Tacitus suggesting revisions to the text of one of his books (Letter 7.20). We do not possess any records of conversations that might have ensued between the two men upon the subject of the incipient movement, however it seems that Pliny reached the same general conclusions regarding the Christians as his friend. Both men it seems craved literary immortality and Pliny warns his friend not to stretch the bounds of veracity to achieve this end.⁷ Perhaps in the case of Nero and the Christians, Tacitus succumbed to the temptation to give credence to hearsay and to calumniate the new sect without looking into it too closely.

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Says David Hume:

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In the infancy of new religions, the wise and learned commonly esteem the matter too inconsiderable to deserve their attention or regard. And when afterwards they would willingly detect the cheat, in order to undeceive the deluded multitude, the season is now past, and the records and witnesses, which might clear up the matter, have perished beyond recovery. ("Of Miracles")

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The writings of both Pliny and Tacitus reveal that during the late first century and early second century, Roman officialdom viewed Christianity as potentially dangerous to Roman mores and the Roman State. Tacitus' narrative in particular bears all the hallmarks of a literary response to a social panic.

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The Critical Event

The works of Tacitus teach us that an insurrection, war or similar crisis is liable to generate comforting rumours and/or facilitate their promulgation. Although there were several major campaigns and significant Roman military losses in the first century an event analogous to the Great War in scope and significance *for Jewry* was without doubt the Roman Jewish War of 66 to 70 CE (or 73 CE if we allow for Masada). This event was certainly in the right place because we know that Christian thought was inspired by events in Judea.⁸ It was also (if we discount the claims that are set forth in the gospels and Acts) at the right time. The question is how this war could have resulted in the invention of Christianity.

During the closing stages of the conflict as Jerusalem was plundered and laid waste by the Romans and the last defenders were either killed or captured, Herod's magnificent temple was leveled; to this day some of the very stones of the great edifice can still be seen as witness to these events (Josephus *Wars* 6.1-270). But more than loss of life and property, this incident had *profound theological implications* for Jewry, for the precinct was desecrated and the priesthood on the orders of Titus were executed (*Wars* 6.322). In addition to its ritual significance, the Temple served as a major drawcard for visitors and religious pilgrims. This influx of people brought significant prosperity to Jerusalem, while the Temple's complex ceremonial requirements generated ongoing demand for livestock and farm produce, providing steady economic benefits to the rural regions around the city (Goldenberg 193).

While Josephus remarks that the building was set ablaze by unrestrained Roman soldiery acting against the orders of Caesar, another tradition, believed to stem from Tacitus, asserts that Titus deliberately ordered its destruction to thwart the spread of Christianity.

243 [They] judged that the temple should be destroyed first of all, so that
244 the religion of the Jews and Christians might be more fully abolished:
245 for these religions, although opposed to each other, had nevertheless
246 sprung from the same authors; the Christians had emerged from the
247 Jews: with the root removed, the stem would easily perish.
248 (*Chronica* II.30.6f.)

249
250 The passage quoted above appears to challenge the core thesis proposed
251 here, as it implies that Christians existed before the Temple's destruction.
252 However, according to our reading, the linking of the two events in this
253 way — the destruction to the emergence of Christianity — would seem to
254 lend support to our argument rather than detract from it. As a *post facto*
255 explanation of Christian origins it would have served a useful purpose in
256 the retelling.

257
258 Jerusalem was not completely razed and denuded of inhabitants as a result
259 of the War. Josephus says that Titus spared some 40,000 of the city's
260 inhabitants (*Wars* 6.386) and no doubt refugees began to trickle back into
261 the city as soon as the Roman forces withdrew. A literal interpretation of
262 Galatians 4:25 would indicate that the enslavement of the city was an
263 accomplished fact during Paul's lifetime, therefore, when Paul mentions
264 visiting the city "after three years" in Galatians 1:18 this could potentially
265 be referring to the year 73. The year 73 also saw the fall of the last Jewish
266 stronghold at Masada, which may have prompted Paul (and others) to
267 finally abandon all hope of the recovery of Jewish fortunes.

268
269 Kraemer declares that when the edifice was destroyed the Jews were left
270 without the classical means to atone for their sins: "Now, in a single
271 catastrophic instant, the entire priestly code was rendered irrelevant and,
272 with it, whatever stability and confidence it provided" (51). Crucially this
273 situation opened the door to innovation and reinterpretation of Judaism
274 Hence we find in the Talmud:

275

276 Once, Rabban [our rabbi] Yohanan ben Zakkai, left Jerusalem, and
277 Rabbi Yehoshua followed after him. And he saw the Holy Temple
278 destroyed. [Rabbi Yehoshua said: Woe to us, for this is destroyed -]
279 the place where all of Israel's sins are forgiven! [Rabbi Yohanan]
280 said to him: My son, do not be distressed, for we have a form of
281 atonement just like it. And what is it? Acts of kindness, as it says
282 (Psalms 89:3), "For I desire kindness, not a well-being offering."
283 (*Avot DeRabbi Natan* 4)

284
285 To this day Tisha B'Av (lit. "the ninth of Av") is commemorated in
286 Judaism as significant for the disaster of the destruction of the First Temple
287 by the Babylonians in 586 BCE and the Second Temple by the Romans in
288 70 CE. Some Jewish sages even claim that *the Messiah was born on Tisha*
289 *B'Av at the very time that the Temple was destroyed* (Midrash *Eichah*
290 *Rabba* 1:51) and that he lives in Rome incognito or invisibly until that city
291 is a ruin. From the *Barcelona Disputation* of 1263 we have the following
292 conversation reported:

293
294 Fray Paul asked me [Nahmanides] whether the Messiah of whom
295 the prophets spoke has come, and I said that he has not come. And
296 he cited an Aggadic book in which it is stated that on the day that
297 the Temple was destroyed, on that very day, the Messiah was born.
298 (Maccoby 110, 117)

299
300 The Jerusalem Talmud at *Berakhot* 2:4 tells a remarkable story of an Arab
301 who explains to a Jew that the Messiah, named Menahem (meaning
302 "comforter"), was born in Bethlehem on the day the Temple was destroyed.
303 The narrative describes a Jewish merchant who sells swaddling clothes,
304 travelling to find the newborn. When he encounters the mother, she
305 initially refuses to buy because "he was born on day the Temple was
306 destroyed," which she takes as a curse. The seller convinces her that "for
307 him it was destroyed and for him it will be rebuilt." By linking the two
308 events, the Messiah's birth with the Temple's destruction, the story

309 illustrates *the psychology of comfort* — a more favorable destiny for Israel
310 than initially apparent (Neusner 189-190).

311
312 While the manner of recording of these traditions and their dating is
313 uncertain, they show that the concept of a messiah appearing during the
314 period of the cataclysm was not foreign to Jewish thought *at some point*
315 and may in fact represent echoes of the initial rumour that initiated
316 Christianity. Given the animosity which the Jews in general bore towards
317 their Christian neighbours in antiquity it seems improbable that the source
318 of these traditions would have been Christianity.

319
320 The destruction of the Temple also coincided with the loss of statehood
321 and the end of Jewish political independence. The Sanhedrin, the supreme
322 religious and judicial council that had served as the central governing body
323 of Jewish law and communal affairs, was dissolved and authority shifted
324 towards the emerging rabbinic academies and local communities scattered
325 throughout the diaspora. The event thus signified not merely a military
326 defeat, but a complete restructuring of Jewish civilization (Whittaker 29).

327
328 The profound impact that the demise of the Temple had on Jewish
329 religiosity is illustrated by the use of dating from the year of the destruction
330 on Jewish epitaphs; examples can be found on tombstones in Zoar
331 (Wilfand 516ff) and until the end of the 9th century in southern Italy (Olms
332 435-436). Many must have reacted to the catastrophe with despair and
333 even total abandonment of Judaism. Goldenberg (198) notes:

334
335 Apostates from Judaism (aside from converts to Christianity)
336 received little notice in antiquity from either Jewish or non-Jewish
337 writers, but ambitious individuals are known to have turned pagan
338 before the war [Tiberius Julius Alexander for one] and it stands to
339 reason that many more did so after its disastrous conclusion.

340

341 Kraemer suggests that “other Jews, probably relatively few, took the
342 Temple's destruction as evidence of the rupture of the covenant, and turned
343 to a new covenant, tied to the Messiah Jesus, for hope of salvation” (51).
344 And so we find the *Christ* described as *the mediator of a new covenant* in
345 the *Epistle to the Hebrews* (9:11-15).

346
347 In the mid second century Justin Martyr maintained that “these things have
348 happened to you [Jews] in fairness and justice, for you have slain the Just
349 One, and His prophets before Him” (*Dialogue with Trypho* 16).
350 Hippolytus asks, “But why, O prophet, tell us, and for what reason, was
351 the temple made desolate? ... it was because they [the Jews] killed the Son
352 of their benefactor” (*Contra Jud.* 7). It is clear that this interpretation
353 would only have made sense *after the event*, and therefore the notion that
354 the Messiah had come as atonement must have arisen or at a minimum
355 would only have gained traction *after the physical cancellation of the*
356 *previous dispensation*.

357
358 An ancient letter has been found which shows that the Jewish disaster was
359 at some point integrated into the pagan worldview. We cannot say how
360 promptly but at least by the late second century and probably much earlier
361 (Van Voorst 56). The author of this letter was a Stoic philosopher named
362 Mara bar Serapion. In this letter Mara speaks of Jesus as the “wise king”
363 of the Jews, whose killing God avenged by their dispersion and loss of
364 their kingdom, a sentiment echoed in the gospel of John (11:47-48) which
365 is dated early second century (Goodspeed 316).

366 **Josephus**

367 **The silence of Josephus**

368 Josephus was a high ranking Jew who commanded troops during the
369 Roman invasion of Palestine in the year 66, notably switching sides
370 halfway through the war. The *Wars of the Jews*, his first composition being

371 dedicated to Vespasian is reckoned to have been published in Rome
372 between the years 75 and 79 (*Contra Apion* 1.47, *Wars* 7.158). As the
373 period covered in the history and the territory in question was the backdrop
374 to the Christian narrative we would expect Josephus to have recorded some
375 details from the life of the prominent teacher and miracle worker, Jesus of
376 Nazareth as set out in the Gospels or details from the life of the early
377 church in Jerusalem as portrayed in the *Acts of the Apostles* — but there is
378 nothing. The various philosophical groups into which the Jews had divided
379 themselves in the first century before the War are mentioned and discussed
380 by Josephus but Christianity is conspicuously absent from the list.⁹ Justus
381 of Tiberias, a rival to Josephus also wrote a history of the Jews, his work
382 covering the period from Moses to 100 CE. Of this work, says Photius:
383 “Suffering from the common fault of the Jews, to which race he belonged,
384 he does not even mention the coming of Christ, the events of his life, or
385 the miracles performed by Him” (*Bibliotheca*, Codex 23) It seems that not
386 only Josephus but Jewish writers in general were notably silent about the
387 Christ or the Christians, and one might reasonably speculate as to why.

388
389 Bond (*Josephus*) proffers the following explanation for Josephus’
390 oversight: “... he [Josephus] would not have wanted to admit to his Roman
391 readers that many Jews longed for a future figure who would defeat Israel's
392 enemies and help to establish the glorious reign of God” (150-151). On the
393 face of it this explanation seems plausible and Josephus may have been
394 reluctant to point up the Messianic hopes of the Jews to a Roman audience
395 but we are still left with the fact that he makes mention of the *unsuccessful*
396 *careers* of several aspiring leaders and one of them, a certain Jonathan, the
397 Roman military victory notwithstanding, was remarkably active *after the*
398 *War*. Josephus publishes the details of this man’s capture, transportation
399 to Rome and investigation by the emperor himself. The permission granted
400 Josephus was that all these aspirants failed and he could have easily added
401 Jesus to the list without offending Roman sensibilities.

402

403 It should be noted that the Greek word for Messiah lit: the anointed one –
404 Greek: Χριστός (Hebrew: *Mashiach* מָשִׁיחַ) appears 41 times in the
405 Septuagint and of course hundreds of times in the New Testament but not
406 once in *Wars of the Jews*, nor indeed in any of the works of Josephus. (The
407 two references in *Antiquities* (18.63, 20.197) are much disputed. See the
408 following section for an extensive discussion of this matter.) Messianism
409 was a fundamental pillar of Jewish dogma (Dienstag 69). So why did
410 Josephus omit to say anything about it? The answer appears to be that
411 Josephus suffered from post war Messianic disillusionment and together
412 with the faction of Jewish intellectuals formed about this time championed
413 by Rabban Gamaliel II, rejected Messianic idealism. This movement is
414 recorded in the Mishnah's sobering assessment that the fulfillment of
415 Messianic aspirations would not be a good thing for the Jews — indeed it
416 would lead to societal breakdown — the Messiah would not bring
417 salvation but rather upheaval and chaos to Jewish life (Levey 339-40).

418
419 Josephus in *Wars of the Jews* and Tacitus in *Histories* both plainly state
420 that messianic expectations were especially inflated prior to the War:

421
422 What more than all else incited them [the Jews] to the war was an
423 *ambiguous oracle* (χρησμός ἀμφίβολους) likewise found in *their*
424 *sacred scriptures* to the effect that at that time one from their country
425 would become ruler of the world (lit: *someone would rule the*
426 *inhabited world* – τις ἄρξει τῆς οἰκουμένης). This they understood
427 to mean someone of their own race, and many of their wise men
428 went astray in their interpretation of it. The oracle, however, in
429 reality signified the sovereignty of Vespasian, who was proclaimed
430 Emperor on Jewish soil (*Wars* 6.312-314. *Histories* 5.13). [my
431 emphasis]

432
433 It is possible that the text that Josephus referred to as their sacred scriptures
434 was the Sibylline corpus (Evans 324-326) and the passage below, while its
435 precise dating remains unclear might be the ambiguous oracle that sparked
436 the conflict:

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And then shall God send from the East a king,
Who shall make all earth cease from evil war,
Killing some, others binding with strong oaths.
And he will not by his own counsels do
All these things, but obey the good decrees
Of God the mighty. (3.817-825)

The first two lines of this oracle was quoted by Lactantius (*Divine Institutes* 7.18) as applying to the *second* coming of the Messiah. However, if this oracle was extant before the War, it could just as easily have been applied to the Messiah's *first* coming. It is generally agreed that the most ancient and certainly Jewish portions are contained in the third book of the *Oracles*. Dates proposed vary but generally fall within the second century BCE (Schürer, *The Literature* 277).

Elsewhere in *Antiquities* (4.100-131) Josephus draws the reader's attention to the prophecies of Balaam. However he notably passes over the famous star prophecy of Balaam recorded in Numbers 24:17. (“A star shall come out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel...”) In the year 66 a portent appeared in the sky over Jerusalem in the form of a sword (actually Halley's comet) adding potency to the prophecy. This was reported by both Josephus (*Wars* 6.289) and Tacitus (*Annals* 15.47) but Josephus fails to connect this omen with the ancient prophecy. The importance of the star prophecy is borne out by its appropriation by Simon bar Kokhba in the revolt of 132-135 CE. It could also be argued that it was incorporated into the birth narrative in the gospel of Matthew. Here the celestial object guides Magi from the east to Jesus' birthplace in Bethlehem where it stops and hangs like the sword over Jerusalem (Evans 315, 329).

The seventy weeks prophecy contained in the *Book of Daniel* (9:24-27) is alluded to in Matthew 24:15 showing the importance of the prophecy in the eyes of the early Christians. Tertullian investigated the chronology

470 surrounding this prophecy in great detail (*An Answer to the Jews*, 8)
471 concluding that, "... in the day of their storming [that is 70 CE], the Jews
472 fulfilled the 70 hebdomads predicted in Daniel." But while Josephus
473 praises Daniel and his prophetic foresight (*Antiquities* 10.266) he notably
474 avoids discussing the messianic implications of his visions. His treatment
475 of the ambiguous oracle follows the same pattern — he acknowledges its
476 existence and importance but reinterprets it to support Roman hegemony
477 rather than Jewish Messianism.

478
479 During the War or during the troubles that preceded it, is the period when
480 we would expect at least one messianic aspirant to surface but Josephus
481 mentions no one who claimed the title of Χριστός. Was he silent because
482 he did not want to call attention to an innovation which threatened to
483 undermine the very foundations of Judaism at a time when it was
484 particularly vulnerable to radical reinterpretation? Some years later in 132
485 CE Simon bar Kokhba took over Judea and managed to establish and
486 maintain a Jewish state for about three years until crushed once again by
487 the Romans (Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 69.12-14). Even the prominent
488 Jewish scholar R. Akiba was persuaded that bar Kokhba was the promised
489 Messiah (*Jerusalem Talmud* Taanit 4:5:13) but according to Josephus no
490 Messianic figure appeared or was rumoured to have appeared when the
491 first revolt occurred.

492
493 If Christianity had existed prior to 70 we would expect that the burgeoning
494 sect would have interpreted the troubles of that time as heralding the
495 *second coming*. But neither Josephus nor Eusebius writing much later
496 records such a phenomenon, though oddly it seems to be predicted in
497 Matthew 24:3 when the disciples in the context of discussing the temple's
498 destruction ask the lord, "Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the
499 sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"

500
501 Josephus offers many explanations as to the causes of the War, including
502 theological ones (Bilde 199) but notably does not mention that the War

503 and its outcome constituted punishment of the Jews for killing their own
504 Messiah, their “wise king” as attested by Mara bar Serapion. That this idea
505 had currency at that time at least among Christians is shown by references
506 to the theme in both the gospels and Paul's letters. (See for example,
507 Matthew 23:37-38 and 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16) The notion that the Jews
508 who were well known for their cultural isolation were capable of such an
509 enormity would have resonated with the Roman population as we see for
510 example in Cicero (*Pro Flacco* 28) and Tacitus in *Histories* (5.2–5): “[they
511 are] opposed to all other peoples in their ways, hostile and hateful to
512 foreigners.” Josephus in *Against Apion* counters a popular slander that the
513 Jews annually kidnapped a Greek, shut up in the Temple and afterwards
514 sacrificed him according to a solemn ritual (2.91-95).

515 Countering Christian claims

516 Josephus in the *Preface* to his work states that his purpose was to counter
517 the false assertions made by others about the War. On a careful reading
518 many of these complaints sound suspiciously like the claims being made
519 by Christians:

520
521 Of these [other historians], however, some, having taken *no part in*
522 *the action*, have collected from *hearsay* casual and contradictory
523 stories which they have then edited in a *rhetorical style*; while others,
524 who witnessed the events, have, either from flattery of the Romans
525 or from *hatred of the Jews*, misrepresented the facts, their writings
526 exhibiting alternatively invective and encomium, but nowhere
527 historical accuracy. [my emphasis]

528
529 We find hatred of the Jews in early Christian texts (1 Thessalonians 2:14-
530 16, Matthew 27:15-26) and we find accusations of sophisticated tales
531 (διηγήματα σοφιστικῶς ἀναγράφουσιν) “edited in a rhetorical style” put
532 about by Christians (2 Peter 1:16 σεσοφισμένοις μύθοις – “cleverly
533 devised myths”). We also find hearsay (ἄκοῆ) promulgated as fact by men
534 not concerned in the affairs themselves. This is not to say that such

535 perceived faults could only be found in Christians but Christian claims
536 could certainly be included in the items that Josephus finds offensive.

537

538 I submit that the reasons for the absence of any mention of Jesus or
539 Christians in *Wars of the Jews* is that the new religion did not exist when
540 the *Gospels* and *Acts* say it did — that is between 30 and 70 CE — and
541 that for the period after 70 when *it did exist* he deliberately omitted to
542 mention it because as a notable apologist for the Jews and Judaism, he was
543 loathe to admit to the world that the impetus for the invention of a universal
544 religion *based on a failure of Judaism*, lay in the Jews' comprehensive
545 military defeat and the loss of their state. As Paget (615) declares:

546

547 It would be wrong to assume that such people simply knew nothing
548 about Christianity, or that they were unacquainted with Christians.
549 Their silence could have been illustrative of their contempt for, or
550 embarrassment about, Christianity, rather than their ignorance.

551

552 There is no doubt that Christianity was regarded by orthodox Jews in the
553 late first century as a damnable heresy. The *Birkat ha Minim* inserted in
554 the daily Amidah prayer at the request of Gamaliel II is noteworthy in this
555 respect. *Genizah* texts of the blessing include a reference to *ntsrn*,
556 commonly identified as Jewish-Christians (Grossman). If it was extant
557 when he was alive Josephus would have known this prayer. The Jews in
558 Josephus' time could have regarded the new movement as a temporary
559 enthusiasm which would fade away of its own accord (as per the alleged
560 advice of Gamaliel recorded in Acts 5:38-39) or else if it prospered, that it
561 would in time be suppressed by the Romans if not extinguished altogether
562 as other foreign cults had been. Josephus himself relates how Tiberius
563 demolished the temple of Isis in Rome and crucified the priests (*Antiquities*
564 18.65). The precedent set by this affair and of the elimination of Druidism
565 in Britain and Gaul under Nero (*Annals* 14.29-30) would have informed
566 Josephus' stance on this point.

567

568 It was not necessary for Josephus to directly refute the arguments of
569 Christians and others — it was just necessary to write an extensive tome
570 discussing a multiplicity of causes for the War and omit the one crucial
571 item; having imperial backing would have enhanced the authority of the
572 document. Furthermore, the immediacy with which Josephus produced his
573 account suggests he was responding to an urgent need — the Christians
574 were gaining ground.

575 The Testimonium Flavianum

576 The two references in *Antiquities* (18.63 and 20.200) which in our version
577 of Josephus mention the *Christ* are much disputed. The latter reference is
578 probably the easier of the two references to explain as it appears to be a
579 scribal marginal note that has been inserted into the text at a later date
580 (Carrier).

581
582 The authenticity of the first reference known in scholarly circles as the
583 *Testimonium Flavianum* has occupied much more scholarly time and effort.
584 (“Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call
585 him a man;...”) The arguments for the passage's authenticity hinge on
586 several key points, on its presence in early manuscripts, Josephus’ known
587 historical methods and the subtle nature of the text itself. Goldberg argues
588 that its similarity with a passage in Luke (24: 18-24) indicates that Josephus
589 was paraphrasing a Christian source. A better explanation for the perceived
590 similarity is that the Christian interpolator knew Luke which appears to me
591 to be more likely than having a Jewish historian copy a Christian text. The
592 most compelling argument for at least partial authenticity comes from the
593 observation that the passage, in its current form, is a blend of what may be
594 Josephus’ original assessment and later Christian modifications (Van
595 Voorst 84-104).

596
597 The arguments against the authenticity of the passage are substantial. The
598 most obvious objection is that the theological content of the passage

599 directly contradicts Josephus' staunchly Jewish worldview. Josephus
600 would not have affirmed Jesus' messianic claims, nor would he have
601 implicitly endorsed the Christian belief in his resurrection, which is hinted
602 at in the phrase "He appeared to them alive again the third day, ..." The
603 fact that the TF aligns so seamlessly with Christian beliefs is highly
604 suspicious for a non-Christian author. If Josephus were genuinely
605 investigating Jesus as a historical figure from a non-Christian perspective,
606 one might expect him to uncover details, criticize or even contradict the
607 partisan accounts found in the *Gospels* and other early Christian writings.
608 Josephus' brevity is also a cause of concern. He dedicates many lines to
609 other Jewish figures and movements of the period which are irrelevant to
610 his main theme (for example the large space dedicated to the Essenes) but
611 if Jesus was as he claims a "wise man" who "performed surprising feats"
612 and gathered such a large following that "the tribe of Christians... has still
613 to this day not disappeared", one would reasonably expect more than a few
614 sentences dedicated to him.

615
616 The placement of the TF within the *Antiquities* is antagonistic to the
617 surrounding text. It is followed by "About the same time also another sad
618 calamity put the Jews into disorder..." which suits the previous discussion
619 but not the TF. Another problem is that the earliest undisputed citation of
620 the TF comes from the Christian historian Eusebius of Caesarea in the
621 early 4th century. While earlier Christian writers such as Origen (early 3rd
622 century) mention Josephus, he is portrayed there as *not believing in Jesus*
623 *as the Christ*, and notably these writers do not cite the TF. Christian
624 apologists earlier than Eusebius surely would have utilized this proof as
625 external corroboration for Jesus if indeed it had existed earlier. The citation
626 in the *Ecclesiastical History* of fraudulent correspondence between Jesus
627 and King Abgar of Edessa (1.13) in close physical proximity to his alleged
628 quotation from Josephus (1.11), calls into question the motives and
629 integrity of Eusebius, and some scholars strongly suspect that the passage
630 in its entirety was the rather clumsy work of the historian himself (Olson
631 322).

632

Other Messianic Heralds

633

If the Messiah in the first century was the literary product of hearsay then logically we would expect to find other instances of this phenomenon in subsequent Jewish history — that is where an imaginary Messiah has been created *ex nihilo* and a herald has appeared to announce this. Maimonides (c.1135-1204) reports on two such figures from the twelfth century. In the first case, a respected rabbi by the name of Moses Al-Dar'i gained notoriety by claiming that it was revealed to him in a dream that the Messiah had come and was due to appear on a certain day. Despite warnings from Maimonides' father, many Jews put their faith in this rabbi, sold their possessions for a fraction of their worth (reminiscent of the alleged response of the first Christians — see Acts 4:32) and awaited the auspicious day. When nothing materialized they were financially ruined, and Al-Dar'i fled to Palestine to avoid the censure of the authorities (Maimonides xix-xx). Note that the early Christians seem to have been shrewder than Al-Dar'i. While they too were presented with ambiguous signs of the Messiah's (second) coming, they were specifically discouraged from trying to predict the exact date of his appearance (Matthew 24:36, 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2).

651

652

Another case described by Maimonides is instructive:

653

654

In Yemen there arose a man who claimed that he was the harbinger of the Messiah, who was supposed to have arrived already in Yemen.

655

656

Many people, both Jews and Arabs, followed him in his roamings in the mountains. Our co-religionists in Yemen wrote me a long letter

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658

concerning his ways, his doings, the innovations he introduced into the prayer book, and his preaching. They asserted that they

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witnessed such and such miracles of his, and wished to have my opinion regarding this matter. I concluded from their remarks as

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662

follows: That poor fellow was an ignorant religious fanatic without any sense at all, and that the miracles he was alleged to have palmed

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664

off upon them were a mere imposition... Finally after a year he was

665 taken into custody, and his adherents fled. When the king of the
666 Arabs requested him ‘Why have you done all this?’ he replied,
667 ‘Indeed, I have done these things in accordance with God's behest.’
668 ‘Can you prove that it is so?’ asks the king. ‘If you sever my head, I
669 shall immediately be resurrected,’ he responded. ‘I do not expect any
670 better evidence than that,’ continued the king, ‘and if that miracle
671 transpires then not only I, but the whole world will acknowledge that
672 our ancestral faith is false.’ Whereupon they immediately killed that
673 poor fellow, may his death be an atonement for him and for all Israel!
674 As a consequence a monetary fine was imposed upon the Jews in
675 many localities. There are still some fools who believe that he will
676 be resurrected soon (Marx 356-357).

677

678 The careers of the apostle Paul, Moses Al-Dar'i and the unnamed
679 Yemenite harbinger followed essentially the same pattern. They all acted
680 as heralds of the Messiah's coming — none claimed to be the Messiah
681 himself. To convince their respective audiences they performed miracles
682 (Paul's ‘signs and wonders’ — σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα: Acts 14:3, 15:12,
683 Romans 15:18-19 and note Acts 19:11-12) and their stated mission was to
684 reform Judaism. (For Paul, see Galatians 2:15, 3:28 and note Acts 18:4-6)
685 Furthermore, all three failed and either fled or were executed by the
686 authorities. What makes Paul stand out from the others is that his message
687 endured, most likely because he widened the appeal to include the *goyim*
688 as per Romans 15:7-12 and his writings were preserved by his followers;
689 while the others' careers came to nought. One could also argue that
690 Christianity had already been invented when these other harbingers
691 appeared and it was a hard act to follow.

692

693 There are some obvious differences between the circumstances of the Jews
694 in the first and twelfth centuries however both periods exhibited a crisis
695 for Jewry. In the twelfth century there was widespread persecution of Jews
696 beginning in 1096 when crusader forces launched violent attacks against
697 Jewish communities across several major cities in the Rhineland and
698 Central Europe. The attacks resulted in massacres, destruction of property

699 and forced conversions, with many Jews choosing death or suicide over
700 baptism (Bronstein 1268).

701
702 A renowned non-Jewish example of the same phenomenon emerged in
703 nineteenth-century Persia with the Báb and his followers. Like the earlier
704 figures, the Báb proclaimed the imminent appearance of a messianic figure
705 — the *Qa'im* — while initially concealing the leader's identity. When the
706 “Letters of the Living” departed from Shiraz in 1844 and spread
707 throughout Iran, they taught that the *bab j-imam* had appeared and would
708 soon enter Karbala to fulfill messianic prophecies (Smith 15). Like their
709 predecessors, the Báb and his followers faced persecution and the Báb was
710 executed, though unlike Moses Al-Dar'i and the Yemenite harbinger, the
711 movement known as Bahá'í would survive and remains today as a
712 religious tradition similar to Christianity.

713
714 One potential limitation of the analogies described above is that they could
715 have been influenced by existing Christian traditions, however Jewish
716 eschatology has long maintained that a forerunner in the person of Elijah
717 would prepare the way for the Lord (Malachi 4:5-6 and Sirach 48:10). This
718 belief was so ingrained that even today, a cup is set out for Elijah at the
719 Passover Seder in anticipation of his return. Early Christians believed that
720 John the Baptist whose brief career is described by Josephus (*Antiquities*
721 18.5.116-119) fulfilled this role in a metaphorical sense (Matthew 11:14).
722 Whether Paul saw himself as fulfilling the ancient prophecy regarding *the*
723 *second coming* is a moot point. In 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 he introduces us
724 to the “man of lawlessness” whose spirit is at work in the world and whose
725 evil actions will signal the end of the age but there is someone who now
726 restrains this spirit and will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way.
727 Perhaps Paul regarded himself as that restrainer. We cannot know for sure
728 because the foundations of this teaching, we are told, was conveyed to the
729 Thessalonians orally (v.5).

Sociological Considerations

The coming of a saviour

The immediate post-World War II era witnessed considerable tension between East and West. In addition to the perceived threat from communism, humanity was confronted for the first time in its history with the real prospect of total extinction brought about by a worldwide nuclear conflagration. These circumstances led to the emergence of several UFO cults (Bartholomew and Howard, loc.1988). Studies have shown that people who report contact with aliens are often of the fantasy-prone personality type and we see evidence of this in the literary statements made by the chief apostle; for example that he received a special revelation from the heavenly Christ (Galatians 1:11-12), saw the risen Lord (1 Corinthians 15:8) and on one occasion was “caught up into paradise and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat” (2 Corinthians 12:1-4).

Hardyck and Braden researched a group of evangelical Christians who in 1960 had been led to believe that an end of days nuclear Armageddon would occur on a certain date. Some were disillusioned but the majority saw in the non-fulfillment of the prophecy a test of their faith and a warning to the world (139). Festinger et al (164) noted that for another closely studied group, the non-appearance of an alien visitor on the date foretold prompted the belief that *another miracle had occurred but that this miracle had not been observed due to inattention*. By analogy the first century spaceman, the political Messiah did not appear as required by the ancient prophecies — Psalms 2,110, Isaiah 9:2-7 and Zechariah 9:9-10 and so on — but perhaps another miracle had occurred which the neophytes had inadvertently missed — his resurrection. According to Festinger:

A special case of reinterpreted prophecy along such lines can be seen in the treatment of prophecy in the New Testament ... There was no

761 public fulfilment of prophecy (i.e. clear, unequivocal and
762 demonstrable to the public at large): ... Yet in so far as there existed
763 a small community that believed prophecy had been fulfilled their
764 dissonance had been overcome (216).

765
766 Against all the evidence of their senses the Messiah *must have come* or so
767 it was alleged by the early Christians — *just not in the way expected*.
768 Hence a search was made of the holy books. It is explicitly stated in the
769 apocryphal *Stromata* by Clement of Alexandria (6.15) that the disciples
770 found Jesus *through reading the scrolls*:

771
772 ...but we, unrolling the books of the prophets which we possess,
773 who name Jesus Christ, partly in parables, partly in enigmas, partly
774 expressly and in so many words, find His coming and death, and
775 cross, and all the rest of the tortures which the Jews inflicted on Him,
776 and His resurrection and assumption to heaven ... *we have believed*
777 *in God in consequence of what is written respecting Him*. [my
778 emphasis]

779
780 At his first appearing, they argued, the Christ came humbly — “taking the
781 form of a slave, assuming human likeness” (Philippians 2:5-11). Then after
782 performing his salvific work in obedience to his Father he went back to the
783 heavens, whence according to the divine plan, he is due to return to
784 complete his foreordained and long-awaited political mission. There were
785 no human witnesses to these events¹⁰, the only proof was contained in post-
786 resurrection appearances (1 Corinthians 15:3-8) but believing this, Paul
787 pronounced, will save you (Romans 10:9).

788
789 All the necessary factors were in place in the first century for the rumour
790 of the Messiah’s coming to take hold in Rome. The overthrow of the Jews
791 and the destruction of their Temple were made plain by the magnificent
792 triumph staged by Vespasian and his sons through the streets of Rome in
793 the year 71 (*Wars* 7.116ff); so too the imperial IVDAEA CAPTA coinage
794 issued shortly after the War served as a continual reminder of the historical

795 reality of the situation. In the face of these immutable facts not only the
796 Jews who lived in Rome but also the class of Gentile supporters of Judaism
797 called “God fearers” must have been perplexed and consequently would
798 have looked for answers. Rome features prominently in the account given
799 by Tacitus of the progress of the religion. He says that the superstition took
800 hold not merely in Judea, the source of “the disease” but in the capital itself.
801 The natural bent of the populace in Rome where information of any kind
802 and especially reliable information was scarce, would have been to put
803 aside skepticism and simply to believe.

804
805 The rumour that the Messiah had come was something charismatic and
806 religiously motivated individuals could exploit, and Paul, although later
807 than the other apostles in adopting the new faith (1 Corinthians 15:8) and
808 in arriving at Rome (Romans 1:10), belongs to this class of prophets. Each
809 man believed he had been chosen (1 Corinthians 1:10-12) and each
810 believed they possessed the heaven-sent version of the true *evangelion*
811 (Galatians 1:6-9). As there was nothing substantial behind the rumour —
812 there had not been any definitive teaching from an earthly master, we see
813 divisions and heresies emerging very early in the development of the
814 movement (1 Corinthians 1:10-12, 2 Corinthians 11:4, Galatians 1:6-7,
815 Colossians 2:20-23).

816
817 There is a noteworthy passage in the *Clementine Homilies* which sets out
818 how the *Christus venit* rumour could have been received in Rome:

819
820 A certain report, taking its rise in the springtime [the east], . . .
821 gradually grew everywhere . . . became greater and louder, saying
822 that a certain One in Judea, beginning in the spring season, was
823 preaching to the Jews the kingdom of the invisible God . . . and there
824 was nothing which He could not do... (*The Clementine Homilies* 1.6-
825 7).

826

827 The fact that the message began as hearsay would have been welcomed by
828 those who read the ancient prophecy: “Who has believed what we have
829 heard?” (Isaiah 53:1) This is quoted in John 12:38 as: “Lord, who has
830 believed our message (τῆ ἀκοῆ ἡμῶν), ...” — The word ἀκοῆ is elsewhere
831 translated as *rumour*. (See for example Matthew 24:6)

832 The absence of evidence

833 We have already observed that the earliest papyri records do not support
834 the existence of the religion in the first century. Ehrman admits that no
835 contemporary writers recorded anything Jesus said or did (43). Jesus
836 himself (despite the assertion of Eusebius) wrote nothing. No inscriptions
837 or coins can verify his presence (42). The Dead Sea Scrolls which can be
838 dated up to 70 are equally silent (Sandmel 12). To explain this omission
839 scholars such as Bond (*Historical Jesus*) claim that the movement
840 remained small and localized and thereby escaped public scrutiny (4, 123).
841 “We should hardly expect a provincial of Jesus' status to have made much
842 of an impact on elite circles in Rome” (38) However there is good evidence
843 (for example Paul’s letter to the Romans at 1:15, 15:22) which shows that
844 the religion was well established in Rome long before Paul arrived there
845 and the laity even included members of Caesar’s household (Philippians
846 4:22).

847
848 Historical precedents appear to contradict the view that major religious
849 movements can linger for decades before bursting onto the world stage. In
850 the case of Islam, the non-Muslim *Doctrina Jacobi* discusses the Prophet
851 and the movement he inspired just two years after his alleged death in 632
852 CE (Hoyland 57). The *Book of Mormon* was first published in 1830 while
853 newspaper articles as early as 1840 circulated about the Mormon ‘problem’
854 (Brodie 259). The movement initiated by the Báb in Iran 1844 almost
855 immediately attracted the attention of the religious and secular authorities
856 and by 1848 was being widely condemned and forcefully suppressed

857 (Smith 17). These movements were all socially disruptive, which is the
858 same claim that church historians made about early Christianity.

859
860 One would naturally expect a psychologically appealing religion to expand
861 rapidly from its inception and Christianity was (and still is)
862 psychologically appealing. It is hard to imagine that the persecution
863 suffered by the early church as mentioned in 1 Corinthians (4:11-13), 1
864 Thessalonians (1:6, 3:3-7) and 2 Timothy (3:11) would have occurred if
865 the incipient movement was quietist. The deficit of pagan records of
866 Christian persecution after 70 could be put down to the *damnatio*
867 *memoriae* that Domitian was subjected to after his assassination in 96. In
868 fine, we suggest that a movement that could achieve the visibility
869 evidenced by the 90s-110s CE (as witness Tacitus and Pliny) would most
870 likely have been visible earlier if it had existed earlier.

871 A small local group

872 It is possible that a loose organization of like-minded people formed
873 around a charismatic individual *prior* to the final Roman onslaught. This
874 hypothetical individual could have proclaimed that the *political* Messiah
875 would come and save the Jews from the Romans — especially as the crisis
876 started to build. Perhaps they were encouraged by the doomsday utterances
877 of *Jesus ben Ananias* who, Josephus alleges, was well known and active
878 for several years prior to the destruction but ultimately killed by a Roman
879 projectile (*Wars* 6.301-309). Numbering perhaps in the low hundreds
880 before AD70 these people could not yet be called Christians because they
881 did not at this stage believe in a crucified Messiah. They became Christians
882 when they were (suddenly) convinced that *the Messiah had to suffer first*.
883 This was *the revelation* which set them apart from established Jewry. As
884 part of the 40,000 that Titus released at the end of hostilities, their
885 immediate goal may have been to get to the refuge of Pella (Eusebius
886 *Ecclesiastical History* 3.5) from which place they might have drifted back
887 to Jerusalem when conditions were more favourable. Perhaps they were

888 living there in 73 when Paul met with Cephas on his first visit to the city
889 (Galatians 1:18).

890

891 From the texts we can discern two distinct stages of ideological
892 development of the movement. The period – *pre-revelation* – marked by
893 limited understanding:

894

895 “Let these words sink into your ears (Θέσθε ὑμεῖς εἰς τὰ ὄτα ὑμῶν)
896 The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into human hands.” But they
897 did not understand (ἠγνόουν) this saying; its meaning remained
898 concealed (hapax: παρακεκαλυμμένον) from them, so that they
899 could not perceive it. (Luke 9:44-45)

900

901 ... followed by the period – *post-revelation* – of understanding:

902

903 Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while
904 I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of
905 Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he
906 opened their minds (διήνοιξεν αὐτῶν τὸν νοῦν) to understand (τοῦ
907 συνιέναι) the scriptures, and he said to them, “Thus it is written,
908 [Alt: ... and thus it was necessary] that the Messiah is to suffer and
909 to rise from the dead on the third day...” (Luke 24:44-49)

910

911 According to Acts the full import of the revelation came as the group were
912 assembled in Jerusalem.

913

914 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one
915 place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush
916 of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were
917 sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a
918 tongue rested on each of them. (2:1-3)

919

920 In an ecstatic episode of glossolalia, we are told that they *received the holy*
921 *spirit*. Their enthusiasm was noted by many foreigners who at that time

922 were gathered in the city. (Acts 2:5 and note *Wars* 6.421) Peter in
923 defending the behaviour of the assembly quotes the prophet Joel:

924
925 And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth
926 below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist... (v.19)

927
928 Josephus describes a scene of tragedy that may have served as the
929 foundation for the myth of Pentecost.

930
931 They [the soldiers] then proceeded to the one remaining portico of
932 the outer court [of the Temple] on which the poor women and
933 children of the populace and a mixed multitude had taken refuge ...
934 set fire to the portico from below; with the result that some were
935 killed plunging out of the flames, others perished amidst them ...
936 owed their destruction to *a false prophet* who had on that day
937 proclaimed to the people in the city that God commanded them to
938 go up to the temple court, to receive there the tokens of their
939 deliverance. (*Wars* 6.283-287). [my emphasis]

940
941 Note the elements common to each narrative: an ethnically diverse
942 multitude, a house, fire, violence, prophecy, deliverance. Perhaps Josephus
943 has recorded here not just the source of the myth of Pentecost but *the*
944 *defining moment when Christianity was revealed*... — the primitive
945 Christians recast this tragedy as a triumph, denied their agony and
946 reimagined the horror as the manifest outpouring of God's spirit. This
947 reframing follows a pattern we have seen before — at Thermopylae and
948 Gallipoli, where simple defeat is not seen as defeat but is imbued with a
949 greater and higher meaning and becomes a source of inspiration. If our
950 analysis is correct *there was a record* of the incipient sect but it is oblique
951 and buried in wartime drama.

952

The numbers

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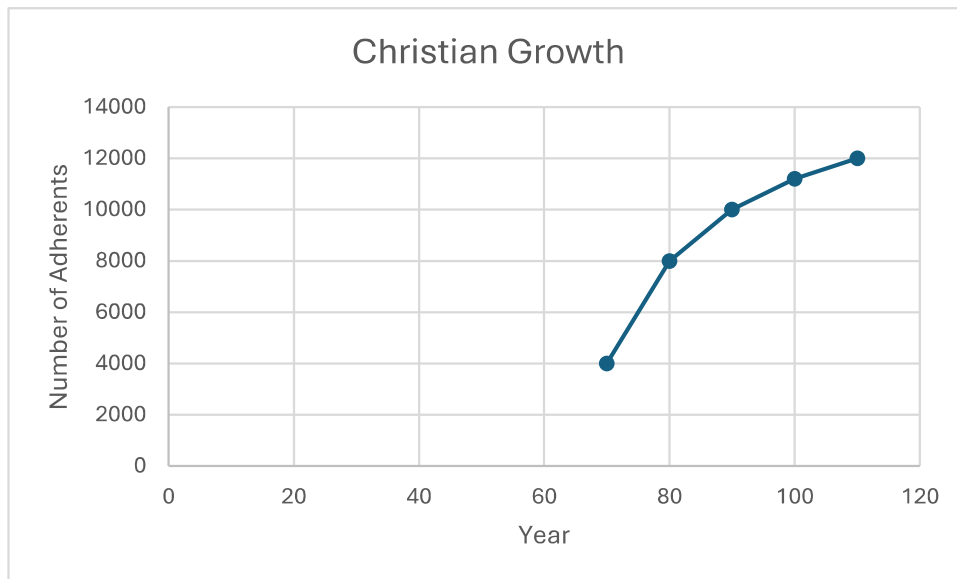
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Regarding the numbers of Christians that constituted the early church, a good guess is all that can be hoped for as accurate records of religious affiliation were seldom kept (Stark 5). Note that there is *no predictable relationship* between a movement's actual size and its appearance in historical records, because (1) historical visibility depends heavily on *who* is involved, not just *how many*, and (2) religious movements often achieve disproportionate attention due to their “strangeness” or disruptive nature.¹¹ Many factors can affect religious affiliation, for example evangelization, natural increase from children brought up in the faith, persecution and government support.

The hiatus in development required by the standard theory of origins (Brandon 249) has been justified on the basis that it took some time for the early Christians to have either the capacity or the inclination to write texts, especially extended narratives such as the Gospels (Robinson 116). Contrary to this position Bernier argues persuasively that belief in an imminent eschaton did not stop Paul from writing and this conclusion stands even without the example of Qumran, wherein *the anticipated end of this world constituted not a barrier but arguably an impetus to writing* (Bernier 21).

The chart below focusses on the first forty years, and shows the possible initial growth of Christianity from the year 70 assuming an initial cohort of four thousand. To get a rough feel for the numbers involved, Paul says that 500 at one time witnessed the apparition of the risen Lord (1 Corinthians 15:6). The book of Acts quotes numbers of catechumens in the low thousands which may be a good guide; assume 4000 as the initial number (Acts 2:41, 4:4).



982
983 Fig. 1. Possible initial growth of Christianity from a starting point of 70CE

984
985 Note that under the scenario proposed here the first flush of enthusiasm
986 subsides after a decade or so but growth continues at a steady pace after
987 the religion settles down. (See the discussion by Stark 3ff.)

988 **Organization**

989 Contra Duling and Perrin (114-129) we submit that factional division
990 within the church (1 Corinthians 1:11-13) and external persecution (1
991 Thessalonians 2:14) compelled early Christianity to organize rapidly.
992 Judaism's diaspora synagogues offered a ready template for Christian
993 gatherings. These meeting places were used for worship, teaching and
994 community organization with established roles suitable for adoption by the
995 new movement. They are frequently mentioned in Acts as being the
996 location where both Jews and non-Jews gathered to listen to and debate
997 with Paul (17:17, 18:4).

998
999 High level meetings and conferences, such as the Council of Jerusalem
1000 (Galatians 2 and Acts 15) enabled early Christian leaders to resolve
1001 disputes and standardize doctrine. Letters from Paul and others sent to
1002 geographically dispersed congregations provided theological guidance and
1003 reinforced authority. By leveraging these established systems, we maintain

1004 that Paul and others (but especially Paul) organized the religion promptly
1005 — probably within a year or two but most definitely within a decade of its
1006 founding, adapting proven structures to the social and theological needs of
1007 the movement, thus ensuring its survival and growth.

1008 **Dating the movement**

1009 The problem of dating the movement is connected to the problem of dating
1010 the texts as the texts are clearly the works of incipient Christian believers.
1011 Today, the majority of scholars place *all the texts* except the so-called
1012 “genuine” letters of Paul after 70 CE (Duling and Perrin 104-105; Bernier
1013 3, 277). However, Robinson in *Redating the New Testament* argued for
1014 early dating of all the books based on the observation that the fall of
1015 Jerusalem in 70 CE “is never once mentioned as a past fact” in the New
1016 Testament (13). His *argument from silence*, however, is problematic: all
1017 relevant matters having been considered, a phenomenon’s non-existence
1018 cannot be proved by its absence from the documentary record. Barring any
1019 internal evidence, all the texts could have been written later than is
1020 generally supposed. Furthermore, we should not be surprised that the
1021 disaster of 70 CE appears not to be mentioned directly in the writings
1022 because public traumatic events have a tendency to fade rapidly from
1023 literary view, particularly when they involve humiliating military defeats
1024 or disasters. People consciously or unconsciously prefer to forget. The
1025 encyclicals of Pope Pius XI (1922-1939) demonstrate this phenomenon;
1026 the Great War received fourteen mentions in his 1922 *Ubi Arcano Dei*
1027 *Consilio* but only one mention in his much longer 1931 *Quadragesimo*
1028 *Anno*, despite both addressing similar themes. If Paul’s first letter was
1029 written several years after the destruction, this could well explain the non-
1030 inclusion of the event in his letters. Moreover, the *argument from silence*,
1031 if allowed in one instance, must also be allowed to operate in all instances,
1032 and one can therefore legitimately ask the question: If all or at least some
1033 of the letters predate 70 CE, why did Paul never anticipate Jerusalem’s fall?
1034 The absence of such a prediction in his correspondence can be comfortably

1035 accommodated if these events *had already occurred* when the letters were
1036 composed.

1037
1038 On the contrary, substantial allusions in several Canonical works suggest
1039 that Christianity emerged and flourished in a post-Temple world. The
1040 *Gospel of Matthew* for example contains several passages that not only
1041 indicate that the book was composed after 70 but that the religion it
1042 describes arose after that date as well. Jesus's lament over Jerusalem in
1043 chapter 23 reads not as a prediction but as present reality: “Look your
1044 house [the Temple] *is left* (ἀφίεται) to you desolate” (v.38). The verb tense
1045 used here indicates a completed action, not only signifying that the author
1046 was writing after the event, but that Jesus himself “lived” at the same time
1047 as the city was in a state of desolation. The incident of the disciples
1048 plucking grain on the Sabbath provides another clue. (12:1-8) Jesus
1049 responds to the Pharisees’ criticism by asking, “Have you not *read* in the
1050 law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath..?” (v.5)
1051 Why does Jesus say *read* about Temple practices when these practices
1052 would have been readily *observable* before the destruction?

1053
1054 The Temple destruction prediction passages (Matthew 24:1-2, Luke 21:5-
1055 6, Mark 13:1-2) bear clear signs of *vaticinium ex eventu* fabrication, a
1056 literary technique employed in other religious texts such as the popular
1057 *Book of Daniel* (Schürer, *The Literature* 49-54) and also pagan texts such
1058 as the *Sibylline Oracles*.

1059
1060 The argument that Jesus could — with a little foresight or possibly luck —
1061 have predicted the Temple's destruction in such detail *forty* years in
1062 advance does not seem plausible. Until the very last months of the war the
1063 risk of the fall of the well-fortified city of Jerusalem, let alone the
1064 destruction of the Temple must have seemed minimal (Goodman and
1065 Dunn 27).

1066

1067 The authors of New Testament texts often speak as if the Temple is still
1068 standing and its offices still functioning and this fact is often used to
1069 support the claim that Christianity existed prior to 70 CE, however this
1070 argument proves less compelling than it initially appears, as other clearly
1071 post-70 writings speak in the same way. The *Mishnah*, compiled around
1072 200 CE, frequently employs present-tense language when discussing
1073 institutions and practices that had been impossible to perform for over a
1074 century (Schürer, *The History* 523). The late first century letter of *Clement*
1075 *to the Corinthians* (41) speaks as if the sacrifices were still being
1076 performed on the temple mount.

1077
1078 Some non-canonical sources provide additional evidence of post
1079 destruction dating. A reading of Jerome, for example implies that Paul was
1080 active *after the Jewish War*. In his *Lives of Illustrious Men*, he declares
1081 that: “When this [town of Giscalis/Gischala] was taken by the Romans (c.
1082 67 CE, *Wars* 4.84-120) he [Paul] removed with his parents to Tarsus in
1083 Cilicia.” (*De Viris Illustribus* 5) While scholars have attempted to interpret
1084 this passage as referring to an earlier Roman occupation (Murphy-
1085 O'Connor 16-20; Saffrey 314), the following passage leaves little doubt as
1086 to which Roman occupation Jerome is referring to.

1087
1088 They say that the apostle Paul’s parents were from the region of
1089 Giscala in Judea; and that when the whole province was laid waste
1090 by the hands of the Romans, *and the Jews were dispersed into the*
1091 *world*, they were moved to the city of Tarsus in Cilicia. *Commentary*
1092 *on Philemon* [my emphasis]

1093 If we accept the witness of Jerome, our scenario has Paul experiencing
1094 firsthand the effects of the War on himself and his immediate family.
1095 Another near contemporary ancient, Pliny the Younger was seventeen
1096 years old when Mount Vesuvius erupted in 79 CE, an incident that killed
1097 his uncle and would have been deeply traumatic. However, he only wrote
1098 about the event in two letters to the historian Tacitus, approximately 25
1099 years later and only in response to Tacitus’ specific request. In his

1100 extensive correspondence covering daily life, politics and personal matters,
1101 it is noteworthy that Pliny neglects to mention this formative experience.
1102 It should not be surprising therefore to find that Paul in respect of his own
1103 trauma is equally silent. Jerome's testimony written from the safe distance
1104 of three hundred years after the religion's inception seems to be drawing
1105 on an ancient but quite possibly true tradition.

1106
1107 More evidence that the critical year for the founding of the cult was the
1108 year 70 is provided by Jerome in his *Letter to Marcella* (386 CE):

1109
1110 The veil of the temple has been rent [Matthew 27:51]; an army has
1111 encompassed Jerusalem; it has been stained by the blood of the Lord.
1112 Now, therefore, its guardian angels have forsaken it and the grace of
1113 Christ has been withdrawn. Josephus, himself a Jewish writer,
1114 asserts that at the Lord's crucifixion there broke from the temple
1115 voices of heavenly powers, saying: "Let us depart hence." — *Letter*
1116 46

1117
1118 But the holy site was abandoned not circa the year 30 but in the year 70
1119 (*Wars* 6.300). The same idea is expressed by Justin Martyr (*First Apology*
1120 32): "... and after whose [Jesus'] crucifixion the land was straightway
1121 surrendered to you [Romans] as spoil of war."

1122
1123 Robinson and other academics rely heavily on *the book of Acts* for the
1124 chronological underpinnings of their theories, despite substantial doubts
1125 expressed by other scholars who question the book's historical reliability.
1126 The book contains numerous internal contradictions as well as
1127 contradictions vis-à-vis Paul's letters. These include discrepancies about
1128 his visits to Jerusalem, the Council described in Acts 15 compared to
1129 Galatians 2, and three contradictory accounts of Paul's conversion
1130 experience. More significantly for dating purposes, Acts reflects a
1131 distinctly post-70 CE frame of reference. The martyrdom of Stephen (7:1-
1132 53) and Paul's defence before the Athenians (17:22-31) both champion the
1133 idea that God does not dwell in man-made temples — a perspective that

1134 stands in stark contrast to the fully functioning institution prior to the
1135 catastrophe of 70CE. Additional problems with Acts include substantial
1136 differences between the Asension account in Luke's Gospel and that
1137 presented in Acts despite both books claiming to be written by the same
1138 author. As one scholar notes, while Acts accurately describes Roman
1139 administrative procedures which many scholars take as evidence of
1140 authenticity, “many a detective story describes accurately police
1141 procedures in the service of a completely fictitious plot” (Barrett 524-525).

1142
1143 There are no time markers in Paul’s letters except for one passage which
1144 mentions a Nabatean king named *Aretas*.

1145
1146 In Damascus the ethnarch of Aretas the king was watching the city
1147 of the Damascenes, wishing to seize me, and through a window in a
1148 rope basket I was let down, through the wall, and fled out of his
1149 hands. [YLT] (2 Corinthians 11:32-33).

1150
1151 By confidently asserting that this monarch died in 40 CE this passage is
1152 used to anchor Paul’s ministry to a narrow range of years mid first century
1153 (Campbell, *An Anchor* 302). However, it appears that Aretas IV had no
1154 authority in Damascus — an inscription discovered in 2010 listing his
1155 areas of activity omits Damascus (al-Salameen 216). According to
1156 Josephus, the Romans under *Vitellius* and later *Cassius Longinus*
1157 controlled Damascus during this period (*Antiquities* 15.403). Acts 9:23-25
1158 provides a different version of what seems to be the same incident,
1159 crediting Jews rather than the governor with watching for Paul. There is
1160 no mention of *Aretas*. The story is physically implausible due to the
1161 architecture of Roman city walls which for Damascus were most likely 2-
1162 4 metres thick. The account in Acts omits any reference to a window, using
1163 only the ambiguous phrase ‘through the wall’ (διὰ τοῦ τείχους), which may
1164 indicate that a miraculous *passing through the wall* was originally
1165 envisaged by the subscribers to the legend.

1166

1167 The escape of Paul from Damascus and that of Rabbi Yochanan ben
1168 Zakkai from Jerusalem in the year 70 (*Babylonian Talmud*, Tractate Gittin
1169 56a) exhibit striking parallels. Both involved a key leader facing mortal
1170 danger and resorting to subterfuge using a container to bypass rigid
1171 security — Paul in a basket through a wall; Ben Zakkai in a coffin through
1172 a gate. These escapades serve the same purpose: they legitimize the
1173 leader's destiny and provide a foundation myth for the survival and future
1174 direction of their respective faiths. Jerome specifically mentions that the
1175 house from which Paul was let down in a basket was still shown to visitors
1176 in his time (*Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* 1:17) which attests
1177 to the high standing of the tradition close to the chronological point of
1178 origin.

1179
1180 Several passages in letters attributed to Paul suggest knowledge of the
1181 Temple's destruction as a *fait accompli*. In 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16 we
1182 read: "... but wrath has overtaken them [the Jews] at last" ἔφθασεν δὲ ἐπ'
1183 αὐτοὺς ἡ ὀργὴ εἰς τέλος referring to a finality of divine punishment for the
1184 crime of killing the Messiah. Despite scholarly attempts to explain this as
1185 referring to earlier upheavals under procurator *Ventidius Cumanus* (44-49
1186 CE) or to dismiss it as a post-70 CE interpolation, the language strongly
1187 suggests knowledge of the catastrophe that befell the Jews in 70 CE
1188 (Bockmuehl 25-30).

1189
1190 Early dating relies heavily on the questionable reliability of Acts and the
1191 misuse of the *argument from silence*. Many passages when carefully
1192 analysed and rightly contextualised support later composition. As
1193 Christianity like Judaism is a text based religion and relied on its unique
1194 texts for validation, dogma and liturgy, this material supports the
1195 hypothesis that Christianity arose not from historical events in the 30s but
1196 from later events, specifically and most probably religious innovation
1197 generated by the Temple's demise in AD70.

1198

1199 If we accept that the religion arose later than the timeline alleged in the
1200 gospels and Acts then the inventors of that timeline were given a free hand
1201 to place Jesus at any point in history postdating the prophecies in Daniel
1202 (164-165 BCE) and more recently as the first two books of the Maccabees
1203 had recorded Jewish history to about 63 BCE. However the presence of a
1204 rival cult, that of John the Baptist (Josephus *Antiquities* 18.116-119)
1205 determined the timeline more specifically. John’s career cannot be dated
1206 with certainty but from the context in *Antiquities* John was probably
1207 executed in the early to mid 30s as the military defeat of Herod Antipas —
1208 put down to Herod’s execution of John — occurred in the year 36.
1209 Disciples of John are mentioned at Matthew 9:14 and 11:2-3. Acts 18:24-
1210 25 and 19:1-7 has individuals who “knew only the baptism of John”
1211 (probably primitive Mandaean) being converted to a deeper
1212 understanding of the faith. The Christians were able to leverage the
1213 popularity of John by claiming that the Baptist was the prophesied
1214 harbinger, the “Elijah” of Malachi 4:5. This teaching is conveyed directly
1215 at Matthew 17:11-13. First century disputes between followers of John and
1216 followers of Jesus are documented obliquely as imagined conversations
1217 (for instance John 3:25-30) and concocted familial relationships between
1218 the two men, as we see in Luke chapter 1. These considerations would
1219 place the historical Jesus squarely in the period when Pontius Pilatus was
1220 the Roman governor of Judea (26-36 CE), likely a faint memory in the year
1221 70 and far enough in the past that any potential eyewitnesses would be
1222 deceased or were now untraceable due to the chaos and confusion caused
1223 by the War. Also being most probably Jewish these potential eyewitnesses
1224 could have been summarily dismissed by the Christians as being inherently
1225 unreliable.

1226 **General Discussion**

1227 Frend declares that the sub-apostolic period beginning in 70 is “confused
1228 and difficult to disentangle” (120). Contrariwise we submit that, when
1229 viewed through the lens of Whittaker’s messianic rumour hypothesis, it is

1230 actually quite easy to understand. Stress and anxiety can lead people to
1231 believe comforting fiction when such fiction fits the prevailing *zeitgeist*.
1232 This fiction is prone to elaboration after its initial manifestation because
1233 more detail adds credibility. (Bell and Loftus 677) See for example how
1234 the miracle of the Gerasene demoniac is amplified in Mark (5) compared
1235 with Matthew (8) and Luke (8). Research has shown that people are
1236 reluctant to let go what they doubt or even know to be false especially if it
1237 means a loss of psychological comfort for themselves or others. Repeated
1238 exposure to assertions for which there is no evidence increases the
1239 likelihood that people will believe those assertions. Once such beliefs are
1240 formed, people have considerable difficulty undoing them, and under some
1241 circumstances people will believe assertions that are explicitly labelled as
1242 false (Gilbert et al 222).

1243
1244 The trauma of year 70 was real. We suggest that some Jews (certainly not
1245 all) saw in the events of that year a clear and reassuring message from God.
1246 The physical structure of the Temple was taken away but the Messiah had
1247 come to replace the physical structure with something better — the Church
1248 (Ephesians 2:19-22, 2 Corinthians 6:16) and in his role as heavenly high
1249 priest the Messiah would stand in for what was lost in the Temple ritual
1250 and indeed improve upon it by providing a means of *universal* absolution
1251 (Hebrews 4:14-16). The rumour of the Messiah's appearance quickly
1252 spread beyond Judea, reaching Jewish communities throughout the Roman
1253 Empire. These communities, already familiar with messianic prophecies,
1254 would have been eager to believe that he had come and gone and was about
1255 to come again. Meanwhile the Jewish historian Josephus omitted any
1256 mention of Jesus or Christians in his literary works because he did not want
1257 to legitimize the rumour (highly offensive to Jews) that the cause of the
1258 War was the Jews' impious crime of killing their own Messiah.

1259
1260 Rather than reawakening what has been described as a *hiatus* in Christian
1261 growth (Brandon 249) we posit that the crisis of 70 CE was the spark that
1262 set the world ablaze. In the diaspora, in Judea and in Rome itself were

1263 heard reports about a Messiah (L: *Christus*) coming to Judea. Later to be
1264 amplified by missionary zeal and fortified by apologetic rationalization, it
1265 was this rumour, rather than the preaching and execution of a Palestinian
1266 sage around 30 CE, that was *la source principale* of the movement.
1267 Christianity, initially a breakaway reform Jewish sect, was rapidly
1268 transformed by Paul into a worldwide phenomenon... and “the whole
1269 world was turned upside down...” (Acts 17:6).

1270 **Conclusion**

1271 This paper’s thesis rests on a number of core principles. We have applied
1272 skepticism to any document with a religious agenda and we have taken the
1273 question of the absence of evidence seriously. However, due to the factors
1274 which constrain every endeavor to find out what actually happened in
1275 ancient times — the lack of sources, incomplete or doctored
1276 documentation, wanting archaeology, the ravages of time and so on — and
1277 in this particular case what appears to be deliberate obfuscation employed
1278 on behalf of the early church in order to establish and defend its fledgling
1279 myth of origins, much of what is proposed herein remains, *al fine* educated
1280 conjecture. Even Eusebius in the fourth century, so much closer to the time
1281 than we are, with a vast library of resources at his disposal admitted that
1282 the result of his efforts to compile a history of the early church was flawed
1283 and incomplete; he says he found it “a lonely and untrodden path.”
1284 (*Ecclesiastical History* 1.1) And so despite our best efforts the *precise*
1285 history of early Christian community formation remains elusive. Exactly
1286 where and how and when and by whom the religion was invented remain
1287 the subject of further enquiry. But these hurdles should not be regarded as
1288 insurmountable. Rather, they reflect the honest limitations of the discipline
1289 and invite future scholars to continue refining, challenging and
1290 reimagining this pivotal moment in human history.

1291

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Endnotes

¹ “We know both from Josephus and from Tacitus that prodigies were reported to have taken place before the fall of the Temple. A voice louder than human was heard proclaiming the departure of "the gods." But few, says Tacitus, interpreted this in the sense of fear: most were persuaded that it was contained in the ancient scriptures of the priests that at that time the East should wax strong, and that men going forth from Judaea should possess the world...*Let a rumour go forth that the Messiah who was to suffer, and then to triumph, had already appeared and undergone that which was foretold by the prophets.* Would not this gain instant credence with many? And here is such basis as may be found for a myth.” (Whittaker and van Manen 30). [my emphasis]

² “The basis of the myth, says Mr. Whittaker, was a rumour. There were certainly many rumours in Palestine. But why did the Jesus-rumour prevail?” (Johnston 428)

³ Matthew in 12:23 and 22:42-45 is equally intent on establishing this point.

⁴ “[Men] are deceived only too readily ... For the truth is bitter and unpleasant to the unthinking, while falsehood is sweet and pleasant.” (*Trojan Discourse 1*)

⁵ “Most rumours arise spontaneously in a cauldron of uncertainty and fear that typify times of financial crisis, political turmoil, and war. The construction and circulation of rumours provides a degree of certainty which reduces tensions. Humans can deal with just about anything, but they cannot cope with uncertainty” (290).

⁶ Examples of professed sources include Pliny the Elder, named as a source for German affairs (*Annals* 1.69) and for information about Nero's reign (*Annals*, 13.20, 15.53); Cluvius Rufus, mentioned along with Pliny and Fabius Rusticus in discussing Nero's potential incest with his mother Agrippina (*Annals*, 14.2); Fabius Rusticus, named particularly in the context of Nero and Agrippina (*Annals* 13.20, 14.2); and Agrippina the Younger, mother of Nero (*Annals* 4.53).

⁷ “... I am not demanding that you exaggerate what really happened. History must not go beyond the truth, and for honourable deeds the truth is enough.” (7.33.10) See also Edwards 75.

⁸ *Annals* 15.44 already discussed and from Galatians 1:17ff.

⁹ *Wars* 2.119-166. Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes.

¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 2:7-9 (my translation) “but we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, which had been hidden that God foreordained before the ages for our glory, — which no one of the rulers of this age had known, for if they did know, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; but according as it had been written: ... — ἦν οὐδείς τῶν ἀρχόντων τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου ἔγνωκεν (Perfect) εἰ γὰρ ἔγνωσαν (Aorist) οὐκ ἂν τὸν Κύριον τῆς δόξης ἐσταύρωσαν (Aorist) ἀλλὰ καθὼς γέγραπται: ...”

¹¹ In 1984 a Toronto magazine claimed that there were 10,000 Hare Krishna members in that city. But when Irving Hexham, Raymond F. Currie, and Joan B. Townsend (1985) checked on the matter, they found that the correct total was 80 (Stark 5).