

Chapter 4.04 The Early Church 1: Overall

This chapter and the next four, five in all, describe the early Church and the change in the image of Jesus. I do not illustrate with passages from the New Testament because that would take too long; some passages are cited in Chapter 04.07. Earlier chapters summarized what happened after Jesus died. These chapters fill in some details. These chapters are not a history of the early Church. The main goal is to allow you to read more books about the early Church, and to be able to deal with the point of view of the authors.

It is easy to say that the story of the Church is the familiar tale of a great person taken over by an institution. The story is that; but it is also bigger, more interesting, and more important. Please keep an open mind and pay attention to the bigger story.

Agrarian Hero.

For reasons that I do not fully understand, the people in early large agricultural states, such as Babylon, Egypt, India, and China, over 2500 years ago, liked to have a divine or semi-divine hero. Usually the hero is a young man, but sometimes the hero is a young woman, as with Kwan Yim (Jaaw Mae Kuan Im) in China and Japan. The hero rescues the people from everyday life and makes everyday life more meaningful. The hero allows the people access to a better life either in another spiritual place, like heaven or the “Western Lands”, or allows them access to a better life in a future birth. The hero listens to their troubles, and often intervenes in this life to make it better. The hero absolves them of their sins. The hero saves them. The hero performs miracles, often from the time he was a child. The hero mediates between the highest God and the people. Usually the hero is more graceful, kind, and ethereal than the average person or average deity. The hero is a perfect person. Although the hero is noble, the hero relates to the common people more than to other aristocrats. The hero gives the common people their own version of the abundant good life that had been confined to aristocrats. Often the hero has a family and a band of followers who help. Often the hero dies and is reborn, or appears in this life as the result of many previous deaths and rebirths. Usually the hero is killed by enemies of the people and the true spiritual life. The dying and being reborn reflect the seasons and symbolizes eternal good life, as a seed has to die so as to be reborn a young healthy beautiful sprouted plant. The proper attitude toward the hero is faith, devotion, and worship. The proper attitude brings the proper rewards. In Egypt, the family was Isis, Osiris, Horus, and Set. In India, it was mostly Vishnu, his human incarnations, and the figures around him. In Buddhist countries, the hero has been various Bodhisattvas.

Jesus clearly falls into this pattern. Some among the early followers of Jesus gave him some of the attributes of an agrarian religious hero, and later followers eventually added the entire set. Modern states are the heirs of early agricultural states. People in modern states like to believe in a semi-divine hero as much as our ancestors did. Most Christians today know Jesus’ stereotyped attributes more because they adopt this mythic pattern than because they understand theology – just like followers of other religious leaders. Likely, today, people still convert to Christianity as much because they are attracted by these attributes as from any deep understanding.

All religions use these attributes, especially miracles, to argue that they validate their particular hero and their particular religion. If all religious leaders had these mythic attributes then they cannot be used to validate any one leader or religion. Christians call this pattern “mere myth” when it applies to non-Christian religious figures yet say it is literally true when it applies to Jesus.

C.S. Lewis said that Jesus was the only true case of these attributes, and other religious leaders had these attributes through a kind of metaphysical imitation of Jesus, even if they came before Jesus. Atheists debunk this myth as a way to discredit bad thinking and to force people to their views. Whether Jesus really had these attributes is not a question I can answer definitely. I think he did not. I think nobody really had these mythic attributes, but I don't care much. Whether the myth is literally true in any particular case is not very important. Seeing the main message of the religious leader is important.

If these attributes certainly got in the way of the message of great religious figures, then it would be necessary to debunk the myth harshly – Zen does some of that. But I have found that is not the case with most believers. Some people can respond only with devotion and cannot respond much to a deep message anyway, so trying to debunk the myth is useless. Some zealots insist on the attributes for their hero and no others; it is best to leave them alone. We can only hope that devotees and zealots do little harm. Most traditional believers cannot let go of the myth but are receptive to the main message as long as you do not attack the attributes of their hero. That is mostly what I do in this book. Some open-minded believers are curious about the myth, how it has shaped ideas about their leader, and about other religious heroes. Sometimes they can see beyond the myth to the messages. Then it is worth explaining the situation and comparing religious heroes without forcing any conclusions.

This chapter and the next two chapters explain how Jesus got some of the attributes, in particular the ones that are most in contention today such as his divinity. The point, as always, is not to discredit but rather to clarify. I aim to calm people down so they can see the reasons on the other side, and do the right thing. The right thing is the message of Jesus.

Kind Words about the Early Church.

Besides becoming a large institution with the appropriate divine hero leader, the early Christian Church also served as the vehicle that carried Jesus' message, preserved it for us, and made sure that it could be offered to all people. Throughout Christianity, many followers have found Jesus in his message rather than in formal institutions. They could find his message only because the formal institutions carried it. The early Church was run by what we now call radical middle compromisers. The Church leaders took into account reasonable interpretations of Jesus and then sought the middle ground of likely truth, as some people today take into account the reasonable world religions and seek the middle path of truth in them. Within about forty years after Jesus died, most Christians tended to see him as God and to overlook that he was a man. The early Church insisted on seeing Jesus not just as God but also as fully human. This stance would have been the liberal humanist viewpoint of its time. The early Church lost converts and patronage because of this stance but the early Church stuck to it. Modern liberals owe their ability to see Jesus as a man to the stubbornness of the early Church. If you can work through a bit of early Church history (not only in this book) you might better feel Jesus' message even if you do not like what standard Christianity did to him. You have to know what Christianity did to appreciate the Jesus behind the institutions. I repeat this point often because I want to be sure it gets through.

Method and Ideology.

This section prepares you to read other books. The earliest Church was not one thing; it was a mixture of groups, individuals, ideas, and practices. If each group had a distinct signature, a distinct idea or practice or place, then it would be easy to trace the history Jesus' image in the earliest Church. That is not the case. The earliest Church was more like a stew than a neat box of classified chocolates. So, modern scholars developed methods to tell the meat from the potatoes.

Conservatives see the package of the standard orthodox Nicene Church already clearly defined in the earliest groups of Christians. They assume groups that showed later standard dogma got their dogma directly from Jesus while he was alive and that they dominated the early Church from the beginning. They assume that the standard package comes as a whole directly from Jesus via those groups. They dismiss other groups as heretical.

In contrast, liberals see the earliest Church as not dominated by any dogma about divinity but as a diverse movement of people all following the Golden Rule and all working to change society according to modern liberal ideals. Within that early mass movement, a deviant group arose later that stressed ideas such as the divinity of Jesus and deviant practices such as the Lord's Supper and paranormal spiritual gifts. That odd group did not represent Jesus' intent or the true spirit of his all-about but it did come to dominate the movement and the Church. The message of Jesus persisted despite the arising of standard dogma rather than because of it.

I agree with the liberals but the situation is complicated. Ideological battles complicate the story of the Church.

(1) The first battle has been mentioned: Standard Christians feel their package must be taken as a whole or not at all. Any criticism of any part is seen as an assault on the whole. If we deny the right of the Church to interpret the bread and wine, then we deny all Church authority, deny Jesus was God, was resurrected, died, had a message, or even lived. If we say Jesus was only a prophet but not God, then we deny it all. In the same way, if we say Jesus had an important message, then we accept the whole package including the divinity of Jesus, the magic of the birth, death, and resurrection, the democracy of Bishops for the Orthodox Church, the Pope for Roman Catholics, and the rebellion against the Papacy for Protestants. I think we can accept what points we think are true without attacking the whole package of any church and without accepting the whole package either.

(2) The second ideological battle runs as a theme in the background of recent books on Jesus and the Church: The earlier in the literature we can find some idea or practice, the truer it is to Christianity, the more likely that many followers believed it, and the more likely it came from Jesus himself. If a writer wishes to validate an idea about Christianity, he-she looks for a scrap of evidence that it appeared as early as possible, regardless of other considerations. Unfortunately, this assumption is not true. It would be true only if we had direct access to all of what Jesus said without any filtering by any enthusiasts later. Think of Presidents Kennedy and Reagan, or of dead rock musicians. What devotees thought in the first decade after famous people died is less accurate than the truth that got sorted out later. Many exuberant fans did not even understand stars well but substituted their own ideas of the star's cosmic meaning. The

loudest fans are not always the best representatives of the charismatic dead. We have to take evidence as we find it.

(3) The early followers of Jesus were a mixture of people with various ideas, just like early rock-and-roll. We find Fats Domino alongside Jerry Lee Lewis. We find high divinity along with lowly carpenter. An idea or a practice might be in the early literature but might not represent what early followers of Jesus thought in general and what Jesus thought. The song "Strawberry Fields" is a "psychedelic" song but it does not represent the whole 1960s. The song "Smells like Teen Spirit" by Nirvana might or might not represent 1990s punk revival or Kurt Cobain. Particular ideas come from particular groups of early Christians but those ideas do not necessarily represent what was going on and do not necessarily represent Jesus - even if those ideas later prevailed – but they might. We have to think about what groups were present among early followers of Jesus, and how they imposed their "spin" on what followed.

(4) "The victors write the history". What we see as the practices and ideas of the Church is what survived because the group that prevailed carried them on. They won, so what they thought and did became standard. The winners did not always represent Jesus or the general followers of Jesus. They did not necessarily win because they were like Jesus. In my experience, subgroups that prevail within movements are not at all Jesus-like, and usually are not like the spirit of the original movement. The leaders of the Republican Party now are not like the people that began the Conservative movement and not like Lincoln or Eisenhower. People now think swing music is the core of jazz or bop is the core, but jazz was not those at first. Swing and bop represent jazz to because they prevailed among the public (swing) or hipsters (bop), not because they accurately represent early jazz or because they are better.

(5) The same fuzziness with groups, ideas, practices, and doctrine applies not only right after Jesus but also through the whole history of the Church. Just because the Christians in Antioch around 100 CE were influential does not mean the entire Church followed them and does not mean their ideas and practices are correct – but it might. Just because the church in Rome believed some things in 150 CE and eventually won the war does not mean the entire Church was like that or that those ideas and practices are correct – but it might. Just because grunge jam bands played their way does not mean all punk revival was like that and does not mean original punk was like that or that all punk should be like that.

(6) Not every distinct idea or practice necessarily represents a distinct group. Not every group had its own distinct ideas and practices. Ideas and practices span groups. Punk, heavy metal, and folk rock actually share a lot in common. We have to be careful if we say that a certain practice represents a certain group, a certain group represents Jesus, a certain group represents all of Jesus' followers, a certain group came to impose its will on all followers, or a certain group that used to represent Jesus and his authentic followers died out. Trying to write a history of the early Church is like trying to write a history of jazz without any evidence except a lot of "cuts" on old records from which all the labels have been removed.

In sum, consider four cases made of two options. We can like or dislike an idea, and the idea can be present or absent in the early literature. (A) Just because we like an idea, and it is present in early writings, does not mean Jesus endorsed it or the majority of early followers endorsed it. (B) Just because we like an idea, and it is not present in early writings, does not mean it used to be present, and it did

represent Jesus and his early followers, but some subgroup squelched it later. (C) Just because we do not like some idea, and it is present in early writings, does not mean either that it does represent Jesus and his followers or that some later group imposed it. (D) Just because we do not like some idea, and it is not present in early writings, does not mean it was never there. It might never have been there, or might have been there and got deleted. If an idea or practice is present in early writing, we have to deal with that and any possible links to groups. If an idea or practice is not present, we have to deal with that and any possible links to groups. This is why people want a simple, clear, consistent text such as the idealized New Testament, and a simple roster of clear-cut groups with typical ideas and practices.

Diaspora Jews and Gentile God Fearers.

“Diaspora” means “cast about” as with seeds; “spora” means “seeds”. Applied to Jews, the term means the Jews who moved away from Israel. There were three large Diaspora. The first Diaspora took place over centuries and might have involved the most people. It was just the continual movement of Jews into the Greek and Roman empires, mostly to cities. By the time of Jesus, many Jews lived in cities all over the Roman Empire, and many had adopted some Roman ways. The second Diaspora came after 70 CE when Rome sacked Jerusalem. The third occurred after 130 CE when the Romans overran Israel and forced many Jews out. From then on, most Jews lived away from Israel. Some Diaspora Jews tolerated the ways of non-Jews around them while some were critical. Some did not keep the old Jewish ways while some became even stricter. Some traditions could not be kept while away from Israel, such as animal sacrifice by priests at the Temple. All Jews contributed to the rise of Rabbinical Judaism. Some of them contributed to Christianity.

Almost as soon as Israel was incorporated within the Greek empire after about 300 BCE, some non-Jews discovered Jewish religion, respected it, and tried to follow it. The idea of a single good God goes along with the best ideas of Greek thought. Some non-Jews identified Yahweh with one of their old major gods, such as Zeus, while others left native their religion to practice Judaism as best they could. They followed a less strict version of the Law that is based on rules from Noah rather than Moses. Not many non-Jews fully converted to Judaism and Mosaic Law because to do so required male circumcision. Some converted their children. Non-convert followers of Judaism were called “God Fearers”. How well Jews accepted God Fearers depended on the situation.

When Christians sought converts, they went after Diaspora Jews and God Fearers. Scholars use Diaspora Jews and God Fearers to explain how following Jesus changed into worshipping Christ. Scholars argue that both these groups were already used to the idea of a divine son of (a) god. Both groups played more of a role than Jews in Judea but it is really not clear how much of a role either played.

Defining Crises.

Eleven crises helped define the Jesus movement, and helped build the early Church. As a result of these crises, groups of Jesus’ followers began to use ideas not in standard Judaism as we see now. The next section describes some of the ideas. The crises are in rough time order but not exact time order. Because now we focus on the Church instead of Jesus, I switch from “Kingdom” to “kingdom”.

(1) *Jesus' Death.* Jesus probably did not predict his death although he likely sensed he could get into serious trouble as leader of a movement. If he did anticipate his death, he did not forewarn followers enough so they expected it. The predictions of his death in the gospels were all added later to rationalize his death, the ignorance of his followers, and the impact of his death. Jesus' death was a great shock to his followers, both the fact of his death and the method. Crucifixion was deliberate humiliation. Until Jesus' death, followers would never have believed the messiah could die before he restored Israel or the messiah could be crucified. They could not understand how God could allow Jesus to die, or, if God arranged for Jesus to die, what purpose Jesus' death by crucifixion could serve. It seemed evil had beaten Jesus and God. Jesus' death was a greater shock and greater inversion of good-to-evil to his followers than the change of Annikin Skywalker into Darth Vader was to Obiwan Kenobi. Jesus' followers had to account for the role of Jews and Romans in the life and death of Jesus. They explained Jesus' death by saying it was really part of God's larger plan, a plan that had been secret until Jesus' death revealed it. Followers had to explain how Jews could be the chosen people of God in the long run and yet aid evil in the short run.

(2) *Jesus' Resurrection.* The resurrection was both a solution to the problem of Jesus' death and the cause of another problem in itself. It does not matter if Jesus really rose from the dead or not. It matters that some people believed they saw him after death, some people convinced themselves they saw him after death, and other people believed them. Followers had to decide if they believed in his resurrection. Followers that did not believe separated from those that did. Eventually followers that did believe dominated. Followers that believed then had to make sense of his resurrection within the constraints given by the problems below.

(3) *The Delay.* At first, followers who believed in Jesus' resurrection expected other dead people to rise soon and expected the Kingdom to come right away, certainly within a few years. Jesus did not necessarily say the Kingdom would come within a few years but he did make the coming seem soon, and his followers expected it soon. Followers expected that leaders, such as Peter, Thomas, John, Paul, and Jesus' brother James, would not die until the general resurrection had come. As time went by, other people besides Jesus did not rise from the dead, the Kingdom did not come, and the leaders died. Then Christians had to revise ideas about Israel, Judaism, the Kingdom, Jesus, time, history, faith, salvation, and what it meant to follow Jesus. As a result, followers' ideas about the Kingdom differed from Jesus' ideas.

(4) *Not Offending the Romans; the Kingdom.* Because Jewish and Roman authorities killed Jesus as a pretender to the throne of Israel, followers of Jesus made clear they did not want any standard political-military kingdom. Yet they still had to go along with the kingdom language that Jesus had used. So they had to explain how Jesus' followers had a kingdom with a head-and-ruler but the kingdom was not political or military, not populated by resurrected people, and not bounded by any state. The kingdom came to mean many things and still does: community, church, heaven on earth, heaven not on earth, the planet, family values, an internal attitude regardless of the external world, self-control, and the striving for a better world regardless of whether it is achieved.

(5) *Jesus as Human and God.* Some followers did not think of Jesus as any kind of god, and did not want other people to see him that way. Mainstream strict Jews would have resisted seeing Jesus as god way but I suspect some non-Jews also resisted. Some followers thought of Jesus as a minor god, more likely

the son of a god, like Herakles (Hercules) or Achilles. Mainstream Jews would not have thought this way but some non-strict Jews might have. Most people who thought this way were non-Jews. Some followers thought of Jesus as a strong high god, likely in line with Gnosticism and some form of emanation. Most of these followers likely were non-Jews. Some followers thought he was a mix of human and god, high god or otherwise. Some followers thought he was purely god and only used human likeness as a disguise to get the job done while here on Earth. It is not clear what difference these ideas about Jesus would have made in practices and in community relations. Likely some followers with strong ideas about Jesus as not god could not get along with other followers who insisted that Jesus was pure high god, and so the two groups formed separate communities. The early Church eventually had to settle on one consistent version. Ideas of resurrection and of Jesus as some kind of god go together and likely reinforced each other to the exclusion of other options.

(6) Reinterpreting Rites and Making Rites. Christians took over baptism from John. They did not want to be seen as merely an extension of John's movement, so they had to interpret baptism in their own way. They made baptism a secret initiation rite. They also started the ritual of the Last Supper, for which they had two versions. The first version was a communal meal for all followers, and did not stress conversion of the wine and bread into body and blood. The second version was a secret initiation rite too, along with baptism, and did stress conversion. Rituals like this help groups to keep solidarity, especially in the face of opposition.

(7) Salvation. Because Jesus died before the Kingdom came, Jesus did not offer membership in the traditional Jewish Kingdom of God. Yet following Jesus had to offer something. It offered salvation and insisted Jesus was the instrument of salvation. Salvation is the final entering into the non-political kingdom. There are many ideas of salvation and of how Jesus saves, and I do not go into them here. None make much sense to me. Ideas of salvation, resurrection, and have to conform to each other, and do tend to reinforce each other. It is easier to say a god saves than that a man saves.

(8) Growing Importance of Non-Jews. Jesus had aimed his mission at Jews, although he probably did allow minor non-Jewish participation. The important early followers were all Jews, and they aimed their mission at Jews too. Some of the issues listed above prevented Jews in general from going along. Some Jews-in-general did not believe in resurrection at all. Of Jews-in-general that did believe in some kind of resurrection, many did not think that Jesus was resurrected and did not think his life and death were the prelude to a general resurrection. The idea of Jesus' resurrection soon led Christians to give Jesus semi-divine or divine status. Consent to Jesus' resurrection meant also accepting his divine status. That, most Jews could not do. Membership shifted to non-Jews, including non-Jews that were not God Fearers and might know little about Judaism.

(9) Split From the Jews. It would have been possible for Christians to have a movement that did not include Jews, even one based on a Jew, without Christians and Jews being hostile, just as Buddhists split from Hindus but Buddhists and Hindus are not hostile to each other. Yet Jews and Christians did split and become hostile. Why this happened is less important than what resulted. Both groups hurt each other. They demonized each other. Which group got hurt the most depended on which groups was in power. When Christians finally gained the long-term upper hand, they hurt Jews over centuries. The greatest tragedy is that Jews and Christians could not recognize Jesus as a prophet and mutually benefit from his message. The second greatest tragedy is that Christian ideas formed in false opposition to the Jews,

such as denigration of Jewish Law, distorted Christian thinking for centuries.

(10) Eligibility, Citizenship, and Benefits. People understood citizenship and its benefits in the Empire of Rome, the state of Israel, or the Jewish Kingdom of God but people did not automatically understand citizenship and benefits in the Christian kingdom of God. Membership among Jesus' followers also meant citizenship in the Christian kingdom of God. People needed to know what that meant. As long as recruiting was aimed primarily at Jews, and before the rift with Jews, citizenship in the kingdom of God, and the benefits, were not issues. Any Jew was eligible for citizenship and would receive full benefits, whatever those might be. Non-Jews were not eligible unless they accepted God and the pre-eminence of Jews. After resurrection and divinity became key issues, and it was clear the kingdom was not coming soon, then eligibility, citizenship, and benefits became problems. Who was eligible and who not? If a person was eligible, what more did he-she have to do to achieve full citizenship? Were non-Jews eligible without doing anything further such as getting circumcised and without following the Law? Was God Fearer status enough or was more required? Did they have to follow the full Law or only some of it? Before, citizens got the benefit of resurrection and the eternal good life implied by resurrection. Now it was not clear what benefits they could expect. The most common benefit cited was salvation, but salvation has its problems; and other benefits were cited too, such as eternal life, heaven, and abundant life. The various benefits had to be sorted out. Eligibility, membership, and benefits depended on what kind of kingdom followers could expect. That, in turn, depended on who Jesus was, and what his death and resurrection meant.

(11) Multiple Communities: Multiple Interpretations of Jesus and Everything. Various groups of Jesus' followers separated into communities with distinct points of view. Although there was blending, the distinctions were hard enough so they could not be reconciled and so they caused trouble. The next chapters list and discuss the communities. The communities developed their versions of Jesus' life, his status as god or man, and of various rituals such as Baptism and the Eucharist. They used their doctrines and rites as initiation ceremonies, as ways to keep the group coherent, keep others out, and compete with other groups. The controversies in the New Testament are as much between these groups of Jesus' followers as they are between Jesus' followers and Jews. Eventually, one group had to emerge as dominant. That is the group that gave us orthodox Christianity and the Church up to about 1100 CE (AD).

The Church as Solution.

A kingdom needs some order, and real people need a visible organization on this material earth even if the theoretical kingdom is spiritual and even if the eventual reward is in heaven. Whatever organization gives order, controls access, certifies members, excludes non-members, controls relations between members, and gives ideas, becomes the de facto kingdom. By becoming the kingdom on this Earth, the Church settled the early crises.

Jesus explained how followers were not just waiting for the Kingdom of God but actually lived it while they waited. That is the basis for the communities of followers. Early Christians really lived in communities that were distinct from neighbors and often better. The Church used the-community-of-followers-as-the-kingdom as a way to become the kingdom when it was able to decide who was in a genuine Christian community. At the same time, the Church did urge people to live in the appropriate lifestyle that Jesus

established as typical of the Kingdom of God. That was how the Church perpetuated Jesus' message.

The Church became the New Israel so the "old Israel" was no longer relevant, and questions about the kingdom that revolved about the old Israel were no longer relevant. Because Christian communities were the kingdom, and the Church controlled Christian communities, the new kingdom had, in fact, already arrived; it began with the Church, the New Israel. The Church took the place of Jesus' idea of the Kingdom, as a practical matter for now, a theoretical entity, and long-term institution. The Church defined salvation, and what people had to believe and do to get saved. Membership in the Church was equivalent to salvation, and salvation could not happen apart from the Church. The Church declared that Jesus was God, and was resurrected. The Church asserted that Jesus' life, death, and resurrection did save and did establish the kingdom (the Church). The Church explained why the idealized promised kingdom did not come right away, what the problems were with Jews, and why Christians had split from Jews. The Church explained relations between salvation, heaven, resurrection, kingdom, eternal life, and abundant life.

The Church sought validation retroactively in the sayings and acts of Jesus, in the controversies reported in the New Testament, and in bits of passages from the Tanakh. The Tanakh became the "Old Testament". Church writings, and writings that supported the Church, became the New Testament. The fact that the early Church did all this does not necessarily make it right or wrong, and does not necessarily mean Jesus is God or is not. Just because a formal institution acts like an institution does not necessarily mean it is wrong. The statuses of Jesus and the Church have to be decided on other grounds; see below.

Other Movements.

Other movements besides Christianity have done much the same things as did the early Church, including religious movements such as Buddhism and political movements such as the Religious Right in America and Marxism in Russia and China. That does not make those movements right or wrong either, and it does not make Christianity necessarily suspect just because it is like other movements. No movement is right or wrong because it is a movement. As with the early Church, the correctness of all movements has to be decided according to the substance of their ideas rather than their similar form as human movements.

Political Synopsis.

We need some dates for reference. Followers of Jesus tried to recruit primarily from among Jews during the first 40 years or so after Jesus died, until about 70 CE. They had some success but not much. The New Testament materials from before about 80 CE show arguments of Jesus' followers with Jews about Jesus, particularly the status of Jesus as divine.

After the Romans overran Israel and destroyed the Temple in 70 CE, there was no basis for the traditional Israelite religion centered on the Temple. Samaritans and Galileans became totally irrelevant and eventually assimilated to non-Jews. "Israelite" came to mean only "Judean" or "Jew". There were no Israelites other than Jews. Other Israelites either became Jews or became non-Israelites and non-Jews. Jews needed a focus for identity and religion other than the Temple and the priests, which they found in

Pharisees. From then on, Pharisees were the leaders of Jewish communities, identity, ethnicity, politics, religion, and culture. Pharisees became the basis for later rabbinical Judaism centered on the synagogue.

After 70 CE, Pharisees and Christians became increasingly hostile toward each other. Non-Jews increasingly took over from Jews in the Christian movement. By 100 CE, the movement had few Jews. What had begun as a pro-Israel movement in Galilee-Israel was transformed into a movement among non-Jews with strong tones of hostility to Jews.

The Jews revolted against Rome periodically. After 132 CE, the Emperor Hadrian decided to end the problem. The Romans overran Jerusalem, destroyed it, rebuilt it as a Roman city, renamed it, and forbade Jews to enter it. They forced many remaining Jews out of Israel. From then on, more Jews lived out of Israel than in Israel. Romans took over the territory of Israel, ending Israel as the Jewish homeland until 1948-1950 CE.

The Christian Church grew regularly if not rapidly. By the time of Constantine in the early 300s CE, the Church was a major institution but it was still not the dominant religion; traditional religions such as "Paganism" and Isis worship still dominated most areas. Constantine granted full tolerance to Christianity. Because he was himself a Christian, his decree of tolerance in effect made Christianity the official religion. Through consistent growth among urban people in general, more than because it was the official religion, Christianity became the dominant religion after about 500 CE. By then, the Church long since had the bishops, presbyters, deacons, priests, and formal hierarchical structure that Americans think of as "Roman Catholic", "Eastern Orthodox", or "high church". A series of creeds and statements of dogma after 320 CE, including the Nicene Creed, formalized Church ideas of Jesus as God and human.

Literary Synopsis.

Within a few years after Jesus, people wrote his sayings and doings into lists. None of the lists survive in their original form except as fragments. Jesus' first language was Aramaic (close to Syrian and like Hebrew). Followers composed hymns but scholars have not reconstructed any hymn books; hymns are known from quotations of them in the New Testament. As far as I know, all the sayings that scholars know of are in Greek, so are not as Jesus spoke them. Although in Greek, it is easy to see that some sayings originally were in Aramaic and then translated into Greek. Scholars argue which were from Jesus and which were added later.

Within about three years after Jesus died, probably no later than 40 CE (AD), Saul-soon-to-become-Paul had an intense experience about Jesus, and began his activity in the movement. Paul wrote the earliest material that later became part of the New Testament, his letters to other churches, called "epistles". Paul wrote from about 45 CE to about 60 CE. Paul quoted some even earlier hymns that he did not write. Paul had secretaries who edited his letters. His letters were later edited again as they went among churches. Later people wrote letters in Paul's name so as to use his authority, much as writers attributed words to Jesus to use his authority. About half the letters attributed to Paul were really by Paul. The letters of Paul are among the best evidence for the beliefs of the earliest Christians.

Mark wrote the first gospel, probably after 65 CE but probably before 75 CE. He might have known of

the first destruction of Jerusalem after 70 CE, or might only have suspected great trouble; but he does not make a point of it. He used at least one book of sayings for a source. Mark might have been an associate of Peter, and might have used Peter as an oral (not written) direct source.

Matthew and Luke wrote the second and third gospels independently, around 75-85 CE, after the Romans sacked Jerusalem. They knew of the sacking of Jerusalem and used that in their polemics against Jews. They likely did not know of each other's work. Both knew of Mark and based their work on his gospel. Both also used at least one source book of Jesus' sayings and doings, very likely the same source book, now called "Q". They augmented Mark and Q, and rearranged the events of Jesus' life, both to serve the needs of their particular Christian communities and to get across their points of view. Scholars have been able to recover much of Q from their gospels. Both likely also used a separate source book(s) that he had but they other did not have. Their own particular sources have not survived other than in their gospels. Thus both Luke and Matthew had at least three sources for their work: Mark, Q, and their own independent sources. Luke wrote Acts of the Apostles as part of his gospel. Originally the two books were one book but, for convenience, were split into two and re-edited. The gospels of Mark, Mathew, and Luke are called "synoptic" because they follow the same plan ("are together to the eye").

John wrote the fourth gospel sometime between 90 and 110 CE. The writer was not the disciple John as claimed in the gospel. We do not know the relation between John the disciple and John the writer of the gospel. John the writer might have known the disciple John and/or might have borrowed his name and identity. Although the writer of John likely knew of Mark's gospel, John's gospel is not based on Mark; and the writer of John probably did not know of Matthew or Luke. John's gospel does not follow the same plan as the synoptic gospels. It is not clear if he had independent source books of the sayings of Jesus but probably he did. His account of Jesus differs in sequence and emphasis from the synoptic gospels. For example, the ministry of Jesus lasts for three years rather than one year, the disturbance at the Temple occurs at the beginning of the ministry rather than at the end, and the last supper is not a Passover meal. His view of Jesus is different than Mark, Matthew, and Luke, more philosophical. Somebody other than the main writer of John added the last chapter, Chapter 21.

A person who called himself John wrote the book of Revelations (apocalypse) sometime after 100 CE. It is not clear if this is the same John that wrote the gospel of that name or if it was somebody who wanted to use that name for its fame.

People other than Paul wrote additional epistles around the time of the gospels or after.

Much of the New Testament shows evidence of arguments among Christians, between Christians and Jews, and between Christians and non-Jews. The writers edited the sayings of Jesus and the story of his life to promote their point of view. Mark disputes bitterly with Jews but thinks of reconciliation if they will come over to his view. Matthew and Luke have largely given up on Jews and write mostly for non-Jews, perhaps for God Fearers. Matthew is very angry at Jews, and condemns them. Luke overlooks Jews to aim at non-Jews. John largely overlooks Jews to dispute with at least two groups of Christians: one which saw Jesus as not very divine and one which saw Jesus highly divine and hardly human.

None of the gospel writers, and few of the epistle writers, knew Jesus in person. Mostly the gospel writers relied on the books of sayings and doings of Jesus.

Within a short time after Jesus' death, followers differed in how they understood his life, death, and meaning. Some followers formed distinct communities in which ideas about Jesus were similar within the community but different from other groups. Scholars can reconstruct some of these groups from their writings.

Within decades after Jesus' death, the Church had bishops, elders (presbyters), and deacons. Within a few more decades, it had priests. It developed higher and lower offices along with formalized offices. It is very difficult to recover the organization of any original church before it began to look much like the organized Church. The best view is contained in the Didache (see below).

Besides the now-standard material in the New Testament, other people wrote about Jesus. For instance, there are at least twenty distinct gospels or large fragments of gospels, and fragments of many more. The early Church revered some additional material and the Church almost accepted some of the additional material into the New Testament, such as "Teachings of the Twelve Apostles" ("Didache") and "Shepherd of Hermas". Some additional material is found in the "Apocrypha" that often accompanies versions of the Bible. The New Testament is only a small selection of material from the time. The selection indicates the point of view of the Church, but, on the whole given the alternatives, I think it was a very good selection.

Some other additional material gave a different view of Jesus than the view held by the early Church, such as the Gnostic-Emanation view of Jesus or the view of Jesus as Wisdom-Emanation (Sophia). The early Church eventually condemned most of the other additional material as heretical. Some of the battles over these ideas were really spectacular as far as battles over ideas go, and contributed to the later orthodox view as in the Nicene Creed. Most of the heretical material originated after about 150 CE, well after the material that the Church later accepted as the canonical New Testament; so non-canonical material probably does not represent ideas about Jesus that were current during the time of Jesus. The non-standard material probably does not represent ideas of very early followers of Jesus. It might represent ideas of fairly early followers that were not written down until later, perhaps especially Wisdom interpretations of Jesus. More likely it represents non-Jewish later religious ideas that used the story of Jesus as a focus to be more concrete in their own speculations. Whether or not the ideas of the early Church about Jesus more accurately represent Jesus than such well-developed alternatives as Gnosticism is another issue that cannot be taken up here. In the 1970s to 1990s, the non-standard material received much popular attention because scholars thought it might represent views of Jesus that were more accurate or more compelling than what later became the standard Church view of Jesus. The story of what got into the New Testament as the standard Church view, what did not get in but is revered, and what was rejected as heretical, is too much to tell in this book. Textbook histories of the Church are full of it.

No one single book containing the works that we now call the New Testament appeared until after 400 CE. The works of the New Testament were not bundled as a unit until after 400 CE. Until then, even great scholars used bundles that did not contain all the later canonical books. Their bundles also contained some non-canonical books. The Council of Carthage in 394 produced a list of books that later served as the basis for the Latin Vulgate. At the same time, the similar Eastern Orthodox Church list did not contain Revelations but did contain 1 Clement, Barnabas, and the Shepherd of Hermas. The idea

that the Bible is a self-ratifying unchanging inerrant document on which alone the Church was founded was not current until long after the early Church was firmly established and long after the Church had ratified the Bible. Widespread practices of the Church, and general ideas about Jesus and Christianity fostered in the Church, predated the New Testament. I wish Relations had not been included in the New Testament but the Didache, and perhaps the Shepherd of Hermas, had been included.

The Christian community “routinized” as followers adapted ideas and practices of Jesus to the needs of regular life and politics. People began to believe and to do what made them feel good about their particular families and their particular ways of earning a living. They sought justification for their particular way of life in Jesus and the Church. They standardized ideas of Jesus as a divine or semi-divine hero, and as the patron of various activities that were important to their lives. The Christian community developed formal theology to back up early ideas of Jesus as divine and the development of Jesus as a divine hero. Early offices such as bishop, deacon, presbyter, priest, and monk were elaborated and then standardized. The Church became the organized, centralized, and hierarchical Church that we see today in various denominations. Ever since, it has been closely linked to official power, and has been used to validate and keep government and common order too.

Before and After.

The remaining sections are optional but fun. The phrase “before Christianity” means “before these ideas were developed by some followers of Jesus” while the phrase “after Christianity” means “after that”. The phrases do not imply that Jesus held the ideas. I think he did not. The changes began among some followers a few years after Jesus died but did not take hold until at least twenty years after. The ideas are related and support each other, so it is hard to present them in any order. These changes are typical of the divine hero of early agricultural states. Similar changes occurred when Mahayana Buddhism supplanted Theravada Buddhism.

Before Christianity, Jesus’ message was aimed primarily at Jews and at Gentiles who had adopted a nearly-Jewish way of life. The message had to do with a real this-world Kingdom of God oriented around Israel, with the proper way to live under that Kingdom, and with the proper way to live so as to bring in that Kingdom. After Christianity, the message extended to include everybody. The Kingdom of God was the community of people who understood Jesus and his message. Eventually, though, the Kingdom of God came to be pretty much the same as the Church, and membership was extended only to people who could accept the doctrine and authority of the Church. Still, the ideas of universality and the right behavior for the Kingdom were not lost, and continued to drive the Church, its members, and other followers of Jesus.

Before Christianity, the idea of a messiah was not that important, it did not always mean a particular descendant of David coming to save Israel, and it was not the same as the “Son of Man” in Daniel. After Christianity, it did mean all that, and it meant Jesus; Jesus was all those things. Changing the meaning of “the messiah”, and then making Jesus into the new kind of messiah, was a way to make Jesus special, and to combine his human and divine identities. Many Jews did not accept Jesus because they did not think of a messiah in the way that Jesus’ followers developed the idea.

Before Christianity, Jews had souls but they did not worry about them too much. Life was about what

happens here. Few people were so good or so bad that they expected anything special after death. People did not worry about an entirely spiritual soul that is separable from a body. People did not worry about eternity. People did not worry about eternal reward or punishment. Jesus very likely did have an idea of the soul as a kind of pure person that was very much more valuable than any treasure on this earth, and that could be lost through confusion; he believed in personal integrity; but he probably did not have the idea of a soul that was later developed in Christian theology.

Before Christianity, Jews had few ideas of heaven and hell, and their ideas were not consistent. In Judaism at the time of Jesus, I am not sure what happened to normally (merely) good people or to really good (saintly) people. If you were a bad person, you were discarded after death, symbolized by the smoking garbage pit that was often found outside towns ("Gehenna"). You were not tormented. Ideas of Hell developed after contact with other people, especially Iranians, and were not much developed until about two hundred years before Jesus. After Christianity, you went to heaven or to hell as we know them now.

Before Christianity, sin was a problem for Jews but it was solvable. Jews had recourse through the Law to become clean. After Christianity, sin was much deeper and more corrupting. It was part of human nature. It was degradation of the soul. It could not be cleansed through the Law. It needed something deeper and stronger. This idea of sin was more like the idea of deep confusion and corruption that is a problem for Greek and Hindu philosophers or for Gnostic mystics.

Before Christianity, Jews recognized that all people carried within them tendencies to do both good and to do bad. People can spontaneously do both good and bad. Jews did not expect that either tendency had to dominate. Jews expected that the tendency to do bad could be controlled and the tendency to do good could dominate for nearly all people. The Law, society, friendship, and a relation with God were all forces that could bring the tendency for good to the fore and control the bad tendency. Jews recognized the original sin of Adam and Eve but did not think that it left an eradicable taint on the human soul, it only explained burdens such as having to work for a living and the pain of childbirth. After Christianity, evil was the basic character of people. Christians changed the tendency to do bad into the tendency to do evil. There was no innate tendency to do good. Not even training or the Law could eradicate our evil nature. Only God's grace could control our evil nature while we lived and eradicate the taint of evil after we died. Paul opened the door for this idea through using the original sin of Adam and Eve to explain why Christianity was needed but not accepted, and Augustine developed the idea into what we know now. They blended the idea of original sin with the idea of soul degradation. Now Christians carry an odd and extreme form of guilt. It leads to such odd and bad ideas as that people can never do any good on their own but that all good, even down to feeding the cat, comes only from God. All human action not guided by the grace of God must result in evil. All people are condemned to hell unless saved by the grace of God.

Before Christianity, individual people were not saved and salvation did not mean what it does now. Israel as a nation was already saved through its ongoing relation with God, and would be saved even more when it was restored. Salvation meant the restoration of Israel to its rightful place. After Christianity, individual people were saved, not nations, but, oddly enough, it was not clear what salvation is. The confusion actually makes salvation a more powerful ideology, especially for use by churches. For a few centuries after Jesus, salvation was Resurrection into the Kingdom. Then Salvation was going to heaven after death to be with Jesus forever, much as it is now for many Christians. Then Salvation was about the

right attitude (sometimes faith, sometimes trust in a church, sometimes love, sometimes something else). You could not go to Heaven to be with Jesus if you did not have the right attitude even if the right attitude alone was not enough without God's grace. You had to be justified to be saved. As an attitude, as taught by theologians, salvation is like the idea of enlightenment for Greek philosophers or Persian mystics. It is salvation from deep confusion and degradation of the soul caused by original sin and subsequent sin. To people who could not get this obscure idea, the only path was to do what a church told them to do, and hope to get into heaven with Jesus that way. Although salvation now is for individuals, salvation cannot happen outside a church. Some church always defines what salvation means and who gets it. Only a church can help you approach justification to be saved. Individuals are both independent of institutions (formerly, being Jewish) and yet still deeply dependent on institutions (a church). All these ideas of salvation go far beyond Jesus' (Jewish) idea of the integrity of the self, and seriously distort his idea. I believe the Christian idea of salvation is a fundamental error, Jesus would not understand it, and it has seriously hurt many people.

Before Christianity, Jews had people that were adept, strong, smart, cunning, beautiful, heroic, or nearly sinless under the Law; but Jews did not have the ideal of a spiritually perfect person. That would have been a bit blasphemous because only God was perfect. Even great prophets such as Moses, and great leaders such as David, were not perfect and were not expected to be perfect. Jews did not try to be perfect like God even if they did try to be as sinless as possible and even if they worked toward a kind of perfection under the Law. After Christianity, people carried the burden of perfection. Jesus became a flawless, sinless, perfect man potentially adept at everything. Jesus was more like the philosophical ideal man, like a Buddhist Arahant or Bodhisattva, or the Platonic King, than like a Jewish leader. If you could not be perfect like Jesus then you were not worthy of Jesus and of his salvation. This is part of the taint of original sin. Christians felt a kind of guilt that Jews had not. Progress through the Christian life was idealized as a continual cleansing and perfecting of the soul - but toward a goal that no mere human could ever reach. Christians had forgiveness, but that was not the same as cleansing through the Law, and it did not make up for being imperfect. Christians blamed Jews for trying to reach purity (righteousness) under the Law. Yet, ironically, Christians substituted unreachable spiritual perfection for reachable purity under the Law. Having to work toward an unreachable goal creates mental problems that plague Christianity and are the source of much Western literature. I do know of legendary Jewish guilt, and of the idea that no Jew can ever be good enough for his-her parents. I do not know how Jewish guilt relates to Christian perfection, imperfection, inadequacy, and guilt; but I do not think that it explains Christian ideas.

Before Christianity, the idea that a single person by himself could save Israel was just not available. A single person might act as the instrument of God, but that single person would need an army of Israelites for help, and God would do the actual saving, even in battle. Not even Moses, Joshua, or David saved Israel single-handed. Even before Jesus, peasants around the world often developed the idea of a savior, a "white knight" who rides into the village to clean up the mess and to restore justice and the good life. After Christianity, followers combined in Jesus the idea of the peasant savior with the idea of the messiah. The messiah saved not villages or nations but individuals. He saved them not from corrupt lords or corrupt bosses but from sin and degradation of the soul. Communities of the saved could then form saved communities.

Before Christianity, the idea that an instrument of God saved the whole world rather than the nation of

Israel would have seemed bizarre because the idea of salvation could only apply to Israel. If the world wanted to go along, it could be saved too in a derivative way. If non-Jewish individuals wanted to go along, that was up to them. If neither wanted to go along, that was not the problem of Israel. After Christianity, Israel was no longer at center stage. The whole world was the arena, and salvation had a different meaning. Israel was saved when the whole world was saved.

After Christianity became established, it was not clear what it meant to save the world, especially because salvation applied primarily to the souls of individuals. In Christianity, Jesus inherited the role of a national hero as Jewish messiah, and that role then expanded into the role of global hero, especially after Christianity included non-Jews and Jesus became God. At the same time, Christians wanted to appear non-political to Rome, so salvation, what Jesus did, had to be limited to individuals. It is not easy to put together the two ideas of saving individuals and saving the world. If you want to save individuals, you can save the world, and saving the world means saving everybody in it, then why not first just save the world with everybody in it, and be done with it? That plan goes against free will. If saving the world means giving each individual the chance to be saved one-at-a-time, then we can keep free will and it is possible to put together the two ideas, like Buddha does in Theravada Buddhism. But Christianity wants "saving the world" to be more than plinking down individuals one-at-a-time – probably due to the original "glow" of Jesus being an international hero divinity, rather like a Bodhisattva from Mahayana Buddhism. If saving the world means changing the world into the Kingdom after enough people are individually saved, then it is possible to put together the two ideas (I think along these lines); but a lot of people have already become Christians and the world does not seem to be better enough to say Jesus saved it, and the world does not seem likely to get better enough soon enough. If saving the world means setting up for the final battle of good and evil, then I don't know what to say. Like the idea of individual salvation, the idea of saving the world is confused, the confusion serves institutions while hurting people, and the idea is not what Jesus had in mind. People are better off not thinking of salvation but instead thinking of being useful.

Before Christianity, the idea of a devil had already developed but not all Jews had fully accepted the idea or used it to explain all evil. Stuff happened. In the Tanakh, Satan was usually a plot device to move along considerations of the human condition and of God's role. Jews did not need to find an explanation for all the bad in the world. After Christianity, the world was not just bad sometimes but infected with evil, the evil had to be explained, and the devil was the source of all evil. The savior had to defeat the devil in order to save individuals, nations, or the world.

Before Christianity, Jews had trust in God, had ways to express trust in God, and had acts to express the relation to God. After Christianity, Christians had faith in the person of Jesus. That faith alone was supposed to be enough. That faith had many chores to perform. In theory, in dire straits, faith alone has to be enough. In practice, faith alone is not enough, so practice has to conflict with theory; but that sequel belongs to the history of Christianity rather to contrasts with Judaism.

Before Christianity, Jews worshipped God and had a relation with God. The relation was based on mutual respect, as when Abraham bargained with God for the lives of the good people in Sodom and Gomorrah. After Christianity, Christians worshipped Jesus, were devoted to him, and sometimes had a relation with him. The character of any relation changed. After Christianity, the relation was more like the devotion an employee has to a charismatic CEO, a faithful henchman has to his-her gang leader, a fan

has to a rock star or movie star, or the devotion some confused lovesick person has to somebody who loves the devotee as a friend but “not that way”. It is like the devotion toward a god that Hindus feel in “bhakti” worship or like the devotion some Buddhists feel toward a favorite Bodhisattva.

Before Christianity, instruments of God did not necessarily have to die to serve God or to achieve their goals. In fact, most of the major figures of the Tanakh lived to old age and had a fairly successful family life, including Moses. The story of Abraham not sacrificing Isaac teaches that death for God is not usually required. Living for God is better. After Christianity, the instrument of God achieves his success through dying. The martyr becomes the model for the instrument of God, a problem that plagues us to this day. Followers have to explain how the martyr’s death succeeds in carrying out the mission from God.

Before Christianity, the idea that a death in itself was effective would have seemed a bit weird. Jews understood the idea of willingness to die for a cause or a people. There was no shortage of heroes among Jews; Samson is a good example because he made it into the movies. Death as a self-sacrifice would not by itself be effective, especially since God ended human sacrifice after he had Abraham release Isaac. There were no ideas available as to how a death alone could be effective. Even the idea that the death of the messiah could somehow automatically save the world did not make sense unless it was the first step in a general resurrection – and that interpretation had to be dumped when a general resurrection did not happen. After Christianity, Jesus’ death and resurrection somehow themselves saved the world. Christians had to explain how Jesus’ death and resurrection saved the world. Christian theologians have never solved this puzzle and still do not agree. This problem is why C.S. Lewis uses “magic” for the saving ability of Aslan’s death in the Narnia books.

Christians had to explain how Jesus’ death and resurrection defeated evil and defeated the devil, especially since evil continued on after Jesus’ death and resurrection, and people in general were not resurrected. In part, Christians said people would have eternal life in another world, but that explanation did not always make sense and did not always satisfy people. It might be that some people have an eternal good life in some other world but why did Jesus have to die and be resurrected for that to happen? Theologians still have not settled this issue either. This problem is one reason why the idea of an Armageddon caught on after Jesus; the devil is still not fully defeated, and must be fully defeated at the end in a real battle. Even in the Narnia books, even after Aslan is resurrected, saving Narnia and defeating the Ice Queen requires a real battle with real weapons and real blood.

Before Christianity, Israel and the Kingdom were external. They were about birth, the annual rituals, the Law, accepting the authority of the priests or rabbis, and sometimes about conversion. After Christianity, Israel and the kingdom were largely internal. They were about beliefs and attitudes. External situations or acts could signal allegiance or rebellion but they were only signals. What really mattered was what went on in your soul. As we will see, running an internal kingdom in this world is quite difficult, and so the ideal internal kingdom was soon externalized.

Christians had to reconcile the idea of salvation as an inner thing with the idea of Jesus defeating the devil and evil. Really, the question here is free will. If salvation is internal, then what difference does defeating the devil make? If defeating the devil makes a difference, then how can salvation be internal?

To explain his death and resurrection, some followers of Jesus reinterpreted his life in terms of his death

and resurrection. His death is what his life was really all-about. His death and resurrection became more important than his life and teachings. Those followers subsumed his life and teachings into his death. His life prepared for his death and resurrection, made his death and resurrection more effective, and gathered a core group of people to carry on. God staged all this as a roundabout way to defeat evil and to instigate good. Some other followers likely did not interpret his life in terms of death and salvation, and tried to stick to his moral message as most important, but those other followers did not leave lasting texts and a lasting church.

The ideas that Jesus' death and resurrection somehow automatically save, and that his life and message were really a preparation for his death and resurrection, are more convincing if believers think of Jesus as divine. Thinking that way allowed believers to connect Jesus to other strains of thought such as emanation, Wisdom, Gnosticism, dying-and-rising gods, one-with-God mysticism, and types of Platonism. The problem of Jesus' death stimulated ideas of Jesus as messiah, suffering servant, sacrifice for atonement of sins, dying-and-rising god, Son of God, second Adam, remover of original sin, and non-political King of Jews and of the world. Early Christian writers combed the Tanakh for validation for this point of view. Eventually the group of followers that thought along these lines came to dominate Jesus' followers.

Before Christianity, the idea of a dying-and-rising god was known to Jews but not very popular. It did not fit in with ideas about Yahweh. The Egyptians had a version in the myth of Isis and Osiris, and the Greeks had a version in Dionysius, whom the Romans called "Bacchus". The dying-and-rising god represents the annual cycle. A symbol of the dying-and-rising god is the seed, which must die and be planted in the ground like a corpse, before it can come to life again and rise again. Death automatically causes salvation and getting better. Unless some person is willing to die for the sake of others, like a seed, the world cannot come to life again, renewed and better. Later philosophers used the idea of dying-and-rising-again-even-better as a metaphor for the spiritual journey. Many charming versions occur in the books of Joseph Campbell. C.S. Lewis uses this idea in Christianity when he says that people have to give up bad habits, vices, and short-term kicks to progress spiritually. Bad habits have to die for good habits to be born. After Christianity, followers of Jesus had a dying-and-rising god whose death automatically saved, brought eternal life, and brought abundant life. They still had to come up with explanations for how it worked but at least they could fall back on the basic myth that it did work even if we do not understand how.

Before Christianity, the idea that an instrument of God would remain celibate throughout his-her whole life, and could be pure only by remaining celibate throughout life, would have contradicted the basic idea of living life here as life is here. Jews sometimes did remain celibate temporarily to be ritually pure temporarily, which was sometimes needed to carry out a duty like burying a relative or to carry out a special mission such as battle. But ritual purity was not expected to last beyond temporary need. Even a person whose life was dedicated to God, such as Moses or Joshua, was not expected to stay ritually pure in that sense, and to stay celibate. A person might choose to be celibate for personal reasons but that was a personal choice and not a condition of being an instrument of God throughout a lifetime. After Christianity, celibacy became the ideal, and the celibate martyr for God became the model.

Before Christianity, the reward of being a faithful Jew was being a faithful Jew, feeling confident in the favor of God, and having a reliable relation with God. The punishment for not being a faithful Jew was

cutting the relation, as happened to David in his old age. Sometimes the reward was a rich and happy life now. Sometimes the punishment was making a person sick, poor, and alone. After Christianity, the reward was an “abundant life” but “abundant life” could not mean the same relation with God as Jews had, and did not mean being rich and normally happy. Christians knew that many fellow Christians were poor and so could not hold up the expectation of wealth as a normal part of the Christian life, as some mega-churches do now. The new abundant life had to be filled with something else that was good-in-itself and made life worthwhile. That something else is not so easy to specify but eventually Christians settled on a multi-tier approach.

Theologians settled on the idea of a close relation with God. Normal people began to understand the reward as being in heaven with Jesus. Some Christians began to expect the reward here as a good family life, early “family values”. Some Christians did expect wealth and comfort, as in mega-churches now. Some Christians expect the abundant life to mean the ability to do supernatural things here on earth, such as prophecy, heal, exorcise, and speak in tongues – like getting their dose of “the Force”. See below. Even now, Christians disagree on what abundant life means.

This paragraph specifies some of the changes that happen when the Church becomes the Kingdom of God. Before Christianity, the Kingdom of God was centered on Israel. Israel was the Kingdom of God and other nations were vassal states. After Christianity, no actual state or nation was the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God was made up of believers in Jesus’ divinity. Israel was no longer Israel. “Israel” was now the people that believed. The people of God were no longer the Jews. They were the people that believed in Jesus. Membership no longer depended on birth or conversion. Membership depended on belief and practice, and in the willingness to go along with what previous members taught. Anybody could become a member as long as they believed properly, acted properly, and accepted the authority of previous members.

Before Christianity, Jews had special people with special spiritual gifts, including healing and prophecy, but these gifts were not expected for Jews in general and were not part of the idea of a good life. People that claimed the gifts were restricted to a community of prophets, and sometimes had to undergo tests to prove the gifts were genuine. People that had the gifts were better than other people in some sense but they were also under a heavy burden because of the gifts. They were not generally better. They did not necessarily expect greater wealth, power, or approval. Some prophets lived miserable lives. Some lesser prophets did benefit from these gifts, and some people did try to claim these gifts as a way to improve their fortunes. But it was not something that the people in general sought or needed. After Christianity, the average Christian did expect access to spiritual gifts. The average Christian seemed to think that having spiritual gifts proved he-she was a real Christian, and that being a real Christian entitled some Christians to “Jedi powers”. The average Christian got the idea that gifts were part of the abundant life. Spiritual gifts made people better than others. People sought gifts so that they could feel better than other people and so that they could feel saved. These ideas still prevail among some Christians now. The early Church fought hard both to allow the possibility for the gifts but not to make gifts part of expectation for the abundant life and to limit expression of gifts so that order was maintained in the community. Paul’s letters have some funny passages on this problem.

All these changes amount to a great reinvention of a religion. Jesus became the focus of a devotional religion of dualism, fallen evil, salvation, justification, redemption, revival, worship, and gifts. If the new

religion had not arisen by scuttling Judaism, it would be a magnificent artistic achievement.

Might Be True.

Long before Jesus, long before Judaism was standardized around worship at the Temple, Judaism was not one thing but a mixture of ideas, practices, opinions, and subgroups. Hebrews shared many similar ideas with related neighbors, such as the flood and the god El, and they borrowed some ideas such as the dragon ("Tiamat") as the reigning monster of the deep and the symbol of chaos. El was not originally alone but had a wife and son, and probably he chaired a community of gods ("Elohim"). Yahweh originally was a storm and warrior god who was more powerful than other gods, not the only God. Only gradually did El and Yahweh merge. Only over time did the merged God Yahweh-El become the only God rather than the most powerful among gods. During most of their history, Hebrews were not strict monotheists as Jews are now. Original Hebrew religion changed into Judaism over time; I could do a "before and after" with Judaism as I did above with Christianity. I do not think Jews would argue that this invalidates Judaism. I agree. We take Judaism as it is now, as a final religion, and consider its truth in that form. Buddhism arose from, and vastly changed, Hinduism; yet I do not think Buddhists would argue that invalidates Hinduism or Buddhism. Because Christianity changed some elements of Judaism, Christian ideas were similar to ideas of some non-Jews, and Christians made a church, does not mean Christianity is wrong. Christianity argues that Jesus had ideas about himself as God that would have been quite odd for a Jew, but even that does not necessarily mean Christianity is wrong. Even more strongly: just because Christianity might have changed the status of Jesus to something he would not have understood himself while alive, into God, does not mean Christianity is wrong. You have to take ideas and practices as you find them, and judge for yourself.

New Israel.

Suppose a powerful group of people that are not of British stock decide that they will become the New Britain. They decide that nobody can be British by birth any more. All "old" British immediately lose their citizenship, so, if you were born old British, you in particular cannot become New British. You have to call yourself something else now. The New British are the people that love what they think is important about Britain. They select what they think is peculiarly British such as Arthur, Celtic folklore, and a strong sense of fair play. Only the New British can carry out those practices and ideas with purity and success. Any other group might have a pale imitation of those ideas and practices but their version cannot be true, full, lasting, and satisfying. Another group might have a sense of fair play, but not like the New British. Not even the Old British can live up to the way of life that they created. The New British pick a new regent. Almost anybody except an old Britain can become a citizen of New Britain if he-she memorizes what is important about the identity of the New British, does what a New British person is supposed to do, and swears allegiance to the new king or queen. Most New British live in America but they do not have to. They can live anywhere as long as they join New Britain. New Britain is an ideal country rather than a real country limited to a real place. Still, to make sure old British do not form a counter movement to New Britain, the Old British must leave the British Isles to settle anywhere else, maybe in old British colonies such as India, where, hopefully, they will be absorbed into local culture and disappear as a race. New people move to live in the British Isles, some of whom are New British but most of whom are just people of any non-British stock looking for an available place to live easy. The British Isles get filled with people

from Jamaica, Haiti, Norway, Lebanon, Thailand, and Crete. Now imagine that Russians do this to France; that Palestinians do this to Lebanon; or that Muslims, Asians, and Africans do this to America. That is about what Romans and Christians did to Israel.

This is a dismal story. The bad effects go beyond the Christian Church usurping the identity of old Israel. Using this logic, a series of countries in the West claimed to be the New Israel, and claimed the right to conquer and to oppress their neighbors. Using this logic, Europeans claimed the right to conquer and civilize the world. Americans fall back on this logic when they exert power. In effect, Muslims claim to be the New Israel when they claim to have superseded Jews and Christians, claim to fight Satan all over the world, and wish to impose their idea of proper life all over the world.

To avoid seeing this story as only dismal, I rationalize and romanticize. This romanticizing is not a way to re-assert New Israel under a different gloss but it is a way to salvage some good out of the situation. Allow that the Jews really are the people of God if not the only people of God. It makes sense to say that a person is a person of God not because his-her parents were people of God but only because he-she is worthy through his-her own actions. That is a core message in the Book of Ezekiel. Even Jews say that a person who does not act like a Jew is not a true Jew, as American Blacks say that a person who does not "act Black" is not really Black, and Americans say a person that does not act American is not American. A true follower of Jesus, a true Christian, is not somebody who got sprinkled with water once but who acts on the message of Jesus. It is wrong to call even true followers of Jesus the "New Israel"; it is an insult to Jews. We should stop doing that, and should stop thinking with that ideology. But we should not give up the idea that Christians, followers of Jesus, or anybody who acts on ideas from the prophets, is a real person of God regardless of nominal religion. People that call themselves the people of God have to act like true people of God, and have to never use the labels "New Israel" or "People of God" as an excuse to do harm.