

THE NAZARENES

A speculative enquiry into Christian origins

"When you see the Torah is forgotten in Israel and not everyone pays attention to it, you gather it in."

Hillel the Elder

circa 50 BC/BCE - 10 AD/CE

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PREFACE

This work is an attempt to make an objective enquiry into the beginnings of the Christian religion before anyone had thought to call it such. As an enquiry it is concerned mainly with speculative history rather than any form of particular religious belief which has developed from that history. History, it has been said, is written by the victors, yet at the very beginning of the story of the Nazarenes, immediately after the crucifixion of the Nazarene teacher, it seemed to his followers to have been a failure, as the gospels themselves record. *Its* survival depended upon the truth of reported events concerning *his*, through resurrection of the dead, however that may be interpreted, and about which there is dispute to this day.

Religious truth is not however about history, even though history may give it a number of ways by which it may be expressed and understood. The title Christ, which means "anointed" in the sense of being set apart by God, was given both to Jesus, the Nazarene, who as a human being did not live to hear himself described by this Greek word, and to the universal church (if such there be) which still claims to function "in his name". The religious truth that he taught remains, I believe, just as he taught it, though what that is can also be a matter of dispute.

One thing is certain: many of the doctrines taught by later churches claiming to speak on his behalf would be totally foreign to him. The writings of an unknown fourteenth century Christian mystic who, I believe, understood the essence of the Nazarene teaching begins thus:

Ghostly friend in God, thou shalt understand that I find, in my boisterous beholding, four degrees and forms of Christian men's living: and they be these,

Common, Special, Singular, and Perfect. Three of these may be begun and ended in this life; and the fourth may by grace be begun here, but it shall ever last without end in the bliss of heaven. [The Cloud of Unknowing, edited by Evelyn Underhill. John M. Watkins, London 1956.]

In the late twentieth century, I have taught much the same thing, though not perhaps in the same way.

Down the centuries "Christian" followers have fought, argued, and excommunicated each other with a vigour of which only human frailty and - dare I use the word? - sinfulness is capable. None, however bitter the quarrel, has dared to tamper with the *essential elements* of the simple "communion" rite, and all, I am sure, have in their own way experienced the same spiritual reality that I and others have experienced when we have done the same.

The only thing that is certain in this transitory life is the certainty of change. The spiritual experience of the unknown mystic of the fourteenth century, of the unknown number of Nazarenes and Christians long dead to this world, and to us in this temporal and temporary dwelling is the same experience of the same spiritual fact. It matters not who is on the throne of any nation, or presiding at its head, nor who is hailed as the spiritual leader of any particular sect or denomination or which political philosophy governs the thinking in any part of the world; the *spiritual* truth remains the same truth brought by Moses from Sinai, delivered by Jesus in Galilee, and followed by an unknown hermit in fourteenth century England. The language and the method of approach may vary from age to age, as needs it must, but the truth remains the truth - if we wish to change the world, then we must begin by changing ourselves.

Bristol, January 1st 1989.

Important Note

Many of the ideas offered in this work are controversial. Whilst, as a seeker after truth - and facts - I deem it a duty to ask the questions one is not supposed to ask, it does not follow that speculative answers I may offer are necessarily answers that I personally believe or accept, only that I think they are worthy of consideration, hopefully by those better qualified on the one hand than I am to investigate the possibilities, and on the other, who are at least reasonably free from religious doctrinal, as distinct from scholarly bias. It is my sincere hope that some such rare person or persons may find something in this work to fire their enthusiasm for further research.

Alan Bain, August 1996.

NAZARITE, NAZARENE, and NAZARETH

In the gospel according to Matthew we are informed that:

'And he [Joseph] went and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled: "He shall be called a Nazarene." [Matt. 2:23].'

The question has exercised a number of Christian theologians as to which of the prophets was being referred to, as there exists no such sect or grouping identifiable as "Nazarenes" in any of the prophetic writings of the Old Testament. Marginal references in printed New Testaments often refer to Isaiah 11:1, which states:

'And a rod proceeds from the stump of Jesse, and a branch will bear fruit out of his roots.'

The second verse, which is no doubt intended to establish the justification for the reference back to Isaiah reads:

'And the spirit of [YHWH] shall rest upon him; the spirit of Wisdom and Understanding; the spirit of Counsel and Might; the spirit of Knowledge and the fear of YHWH.'

The text following these verses makes it clear why this statement in Isaiah can be taken as a "prophecy" relating to a Jewish Messiah, and thus Jesus. Unfortunately, the entire idea rests more upon the desire of the author of Matthew's gospel to find in the writings of the prophets some form of prefiguring of the future advent of Jesus as Messiah in order to add prestige and stature among potential Jewish converts to Christianity, and in later centuries, where the Church has wished to show its roots in the greatest and most authentic antiquity.

The justification for the reference back rests upon the apparent identity between the Greek rendering "Nazarene" and a Hebrew word in the prophets of similar sound or pronunciation. In Isaiah this word would be "branch" which is spelt [Nun, Tzaddi, Resh] and would most nearly be pronounced "Natzir" rather than the softer sound of the Greek "Z". Even if a correspondence is admitted, any connection with Jesus remains very remote, and falls in the area of wish-fulfilment rather than a clear and unmistakable portent of things to come.

A more obvious reference would be to those individuals (and perhaps sects) known to the Jews of the time of Jesus, as well as from the records of their own history, by the term "Nazarite". If however, interpreted in the light of the common

understanding from both ancient and later Jews, Jesus had been a Nazarite, various factors in the reported life of Jesus in the gospels would have been to say the least incongruous. The Jewish Nazarite was someone who had taken a solemn vow, much as the apostle Paul is reported as having done in Acts, [21:23-4] where Paul accompanies four men into the Temple who, having been under just such a vow, were now to shave their heads and purify themselves, thus ending the obligations associated with the presumably Nazarite vow, which required, among other things, that the hair should not be cut whilst under the vow. Other things forbidden to Nazarites were the drinking of wine, or becoming polluted by contact or association with dead bodies. As, it is reasonably argued, Jesus is clearly reported as having done both, drinking wine at the Last Supper (and on previous occasions) and in raising Lazarus from the dead, he could hardly have been a Nazarite - at least, not in the conventional sense, though he may well have been a "vow-taker" in some other manner, as we may venture to speculate in due course.

Apart from other considerations to follow, it does not seem to have been common among the Jews, then or earlier, to take perpetual vows, as for example a modern Christian monk might do; rather they were taken for a specific period, or for a specific reason. Once the period of the vow was ended, then purification was required, and cutting the hair to indicate that the avowed period was now over, as exhibited in the case of the apostle Paul and the four men under a vow reported in the book of Acts. [21:23] In other words, under normal circumstances Jesus would not be bound by any "Nazarite" prohibitions, but only at such times as he, like any other Jew, chose to take such a vow under the circumstances usual in such cases. which are enumerated in some detail in chapter six of the Old Testament book of Numbers.

One exception would seem to be that of the Essenes, although their form of vow was of a different order, but still emphasizing their consecration to God. Uncommonly, but seemingly on occasion, a child could be designated or nominated a "Nazarite" from birth, and this is clearly the inference in Matthew 2:23, especially when we know, as modern investigation and archaeological research has shown, that there may have been no geographical town or city called Nazareth in the days of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus.

A further complication appears when we come to consider the origin of the term "Nazarite" itself. The word does not exist in Hebrew, but is clearly an idiomatic rendering of the actual term which is used in the Old Testament. [Numbers 6:2ff; Judges 13:5,7, 16:17; plural in Lamentations 4:7 and Amos 2:11,12)]. The Hebrew, or possibly Aramaic word rendered by the translators as "Nazarite" is the word Nazar (NZR). The "Z" is a soft sound, as in the last letter of the English

alphabet. The plural form in Hebrew is Nazarim. Of equal significance is the fact that the use of the term "Nazarite" does not occur at all in the Greek New Testament, not even by way of interpretation. What does occur in the Greek are references to Jesus' origins as being "of Nazareth". This is rendered in Greek in two ways, either "Nazareth" as transliterated directly into English, or "Nazaret", the word ending in either a Greek theta or the equivalent of the English letter "t".

One thing is certain. In recording and transmitting the information relating to the life and teaching of Jesus, the Greek texts are passing on information about a person (Jesus) and his followers from Galilee and Judea who spoke not Greek, but probably Aramaic. At that time Hebrew was no longer the spoken language of the people of the region, having become reserved almost entirely for scriptural and possibly legal use. Aramaic is very similar to Hebrew in many ways. Its alphabet has the same number of letters, and it can be written in the same square characters as printed Hebrew, but more commonly - especially in its modern form - resembles the kind of script common to Arabic-speaking peoples, and Arabic is likewise a descendant of the same Semitic tongue. Aramaic is also commonly called Syriac, no doubt from its standard usage in the regions in and around ancient Syria, of which Galilee was one, being north of Judea, and close to Syria as we still know it today. The territory originally known as Aram, from which the word Aramaic derives, at one time extended from the north right down the coast of the area later known as Aram-Syria, and later still as Palestine.

In his book, *The Syrian Christ*, [Andrew Melrose, London 1927] Abraham Rihbany recounts (p.12):

"... the mother and the father vow that the child shall be a "nedher"; that is, consecrated to the saint who made the promise to the mother. The vow may mean one of several things. Either that a sum of money be "given to the saint" upon the advent of the child, or that a child be carried to the same sanctuary on another zeara with gifts, and so forth, or that his hair will not be cut until he is seven years old, and then cut for the first time before the image of his patron saint at the shrine, or some other act of pious fulfilment."

"The last form of a vow, the consecration of the hair of the head for a certain period, is practiced by men of all ages. The vow is made as a petition for healing from a serious illness, rescue from danger, or purely as an act of consecration ."

A little later on (p.13) the author goes on to state:

"The last service of this kind which I attended in Syria was for a cousin of mine, a boy of twelve, who was a "nedher", or as the word is rendered in the English Bible,

a Nazarite."

He refers elsewhere to the word for "vow". This word he renders "Nezer". As is clear from these passages, the ancient Jewish practice has continued among Syrian Christians in much the same form, even down to very recent times, and the modern word "nedher" remains, in spite of the passage of many centuries, very close in pronunciation to the form most certainly known in the time of Jesus. It is equally probable that the earliest oral tradition which was handed on by the Greek-writing authors of the New Testament and Acts would have been received by them initially at least partly, if not largely in Aramaic rather than Greek, whether directly or indirectly from the followers and witnesses of Jesus himself.

As we have seen from the above, the modern Syrian word is very similar to the ancient Hebrew "Nazar". The same word exists in Aramaic, but is closer in pronunciation to the Hebrew, and spelt in the same way, although, so far as can at present be established, with a rather more explicit reference to someone under a vow than the Hebrew term as used in the Old Testament, where it can indicate more than one kind of "setting apart" though usually in a religious context or consecration. [The term Pharisee also has a similar connotation].

Aramaic grammar however is different from Hebrew, and can take two plural forms. In the case of a masculine noun, such as "Nazar" the plural form could be either "Nazarin" or "Nazarah". It is known from New Testament references that the speech of Jesus and his disciples was less precise than that spoken further south in Judea and Jerusalem, and it would not be unreasonable to suppose that Galilean speech was rather similar, analogously, to a country dialect, as distinct from that of a city. This is clear from Matthew 26:73, in the scene where Peter denies Jesus:

'After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, "Certainly you are one of them, for your accent betrays you."

Given the peculiarities of dialect and accent, a number of quite real possibilities ensue. If the earliest disciples came largely from Galilee, then their Aramaic dialect would likely have featured largely in the transmission of the story. In passing from mouth to mouth, so to speak, variant Aramaic pronunciations would not have been at all unlikely; if written down in that language, it does not follow that the writers would have written perfect Aramaic any more than an average English person would write perfect English.

Feminine Aramaic nouns, like Hebrew nouns, more often than not end in an "ah" sound, rather like one of the Aramaic plural forms mentioned above. An Aramaic-speaking dialect might well have added this guttural "ah" - rather like adding an

unnecessary "h" (or dropping one) occurs among less well-educated English. Another Aramaic speaker, of a different dialect or accent, might interpret this word, incorrectly perhaps, as a feminine noun. Rendering the same word as the feminine plural (in both Aramaic and Hebrew) would add a terminal letter "th". The resultant word, whether spoken or written, would then appear as "Nazareth" or "NZRWTh" [The Hebrew-Aramaic letter vau is rendered in this work as "W"] The Greek alternative spelling of "Nazaret" would merely reflect a similar tendency to that exhibited today even by Hebrew-speaking Jews, where a final Hebrew letter "Tau" may be pronounced (and transliterated) either way. We can see from these considerations just how simply and how plausibly the idea of a possibly non-existent place called Nazareth could have found its way into the New Testament accounts, especially if at the time of writing or editing the actual documents of our received texts such a place had indeed come into being. [Modern archaeology, I understand, places the earliest evidence for human habitation at the site of the present-day Nazareth somewhere in the third century - the same period from which our actual Greek documents mostly date].

Another possibility is that the term could refer not to a town or city, but to a district. These actual documents are historically quite late in relation to the events and history which they seek to describe, though it is clear that they contain material which, in itself, clearly dates from a time much closer to the events and circumstances concerned. What we cannot be certain of however is how much of the primitive tradition and oral transmission has been retained as originally given, and how much has been added, possibly in good faith, by later editors and scribes. A great deal of New Testament literary criticism does in fact address itself to this very problem, but as long as this work is undertaken primarily by Christian or religious believers alone, who inevitably, even if unconsciously, are likely to be biased in their findings due to the nature of their own religious beliefs, then such findings cannot be said to be 100% reliable. The search for truth needs to be as objective as humanly possible.

[NOTE: Bias in translation. This work began as a series of notes on a theme, so to speak, with the consequence that not as much attention was paid to certain matters of detail which seemed less important at the time than the general concept and its possible conclusions. In compiling relevant data, I originally contented myself with taking the references to Nazareth verbatim from Strong's Concordance. This, while being the most comprehensive English concordance to the Bible, can easily lead one into a false sense of security. All Strong's references are given in the English of the King James, or Authorized Version of the Bible. As a direct consequence of this I may have been a little unfair to the original Greek texts upon which it is based. On checking the references to Nazareth against the Greek text as given in

the Interlinear Bible, I found that very few refer to Nazareth by this name, and that the majority consist of various Greek renderings of the word "Nazarene".

This strongly reinforces the argument, and further highlights the problem of scripture translation being biased by the religious affiliations of the translators. In modern times a number of revised versions of the New Testament have appeared. They all vary according to the religious and theological perspectives of those who have produced them, a fact which in the eyes of a totally impartial observer would, I conjecture, render them all suspect in some measure.]

For some years now the Revised Standard Version first produced in 1946 has been accepted by most (religious) authorities as the one most faithful to the Greek New Testament, and has even become the agreed basis for the ecumenical "Common Bible" first published in 1973. In the course of quoting the longer texts in this work, I therefore went to this version in large measure for my references. All of those referring to "Nazarene" translated by the King James Version as "Nazareth" are repeated there. According to the Greek text, Pilate had inscribed above the cross, JESUS THE NAZARENE, THE KING OF THE JEWS. The recorded teaching of this same Jesus the Nazarene has guided a major portion of the people of the world for over nineteen centuries, among whom I count myself. To, in effect, tell lies about him in the interests of theological "purity" - as it seems to me - and to perpetuate them, is a major insult to millions of Christians, living, departed, and yet to come.

Within the constraints imposed by just such problems, modern scholarship has established fairly reliably that of the four Gospel authors, who alone among the New Testament writings mention Nazareth, the version of Mark is the most primitive, and is therefore most likely to reflect a more accurate transmission of the original accounts. Also, in the light of what has been said above. Mark may not have mentioned Nazareth at all. (The book of Acts, which also mentions Nazareth specifically, is generally agreed to be the work of the author of Luke's Gospel).

Matthew mentions Nazareth as a city only once, in the passage quoted earlier, and Luke perhaps three times. In Mark, as in John, where the inference of a place may be implied, it is not described specifically as a town or city, nor is this the case in Acts. Let us first consider the few references to a city that there are. These are (a) Matthew 2:23, (b) Luke 1:26, (c) Luke 2:4, and (d) Luke 2:39:

(a) And having come, he dwelt in a city called Nazareth.

(b) Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee called Nazareth.

(c) Joseph also went from Galilee, out of Nazareth city to Judea.

(d) They returned to Galilee, to their city, Nazareth.

All four references have one thing in common: they occur in the birth narratives of Matthew and Luke. The chief and glaringly obvious characteristic of these stories of the early life of Jesus is that both versions end abruptly, leaving an unexplained gap between these accounts and the start of Jesus' ministry. If these accounts are set aside as belonging to a different and incomplete strand of the original oral tradition, possibly based upon originally separate documents, [The genealogies of Matthew and Luke, for example, are different] then all four of our gospels would begin at exactly the same point, namely the appearance of John the Baptist and the baptism of Jesus. All other references to "Nazareth" in English translations are of a different order, and it to these that we shall now give our attention:

[The two references marked ** are rendered in other recensions by the term "Nazara". All of the remainder can be rendered "Nazarene" except for Matt. 21:11, Mark 1:9, John 1:45 and 1:46.]

** ... having left Nazareth he lived in Capernaum [Mt. 4:13]

Jesus the prophet, the [one] from Nazareth of Galilee [Mt. 21:11]

This one was also with Jesus of Nazareth (or Jesus the Nazarene) [Mt. 26:71]

Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee [Mk 1:9].

What [is it] to us and to you, Jesus of Nazareth? (or Jesus the Nazarene) [Mk 1:24]

Having heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth (or Jesus the Nazarene) [Mk 10:47]

You were with Jesus of Nazareth (or Jesus the Nazarene) [Mk 14:67]

You seek Jesus of Nazareth (or Jesus the Nazarene) [Mk 16:6]

** And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up [Lk 4:16] (We shall return more fully to this text).

What [is it] to you and to us, Jesus of Nazareth (or Jesus the Nazarene) [Lk 4:34] (identical to Mk 1:24 above).

They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth (or Jesus the Nazarene) is passing by [Lk 18:37]

Concerning Jesus of Nazareth (or Jesus the Nazarene) [Lk 24:19]

Jesus the son of Joseph from Nazareth [Jn 1:45]

Out of Nazareth can any good be? [Jn 1:46]

They answered him, "Jesus of Nazareth (or Jesus the Nazarene)" [Jn 18:5]

And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth (or Jesus the Nazarene)" [Jn 18:7]

Jesus of Nazareth (or Jesus the Nazarene), the King of the Jews [Jn 19:19]

Jesus of Nazareth (or Jesus the Nazarene), a man from God [Acts 2:22]

In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth (or Jesus Christ the Nazarene) [Acts 3:6]

By the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth (or Jesus Christ the Nazarene) [Acts 4:10]

This Jesus of Nazareth (or Jesus the Nazarene) ... [Acts 6:14]

Jesus from Nazareth ... God anointed with the Holy Spirit [Acts 10:38]

I am Jesus of Nazareth (or Jesus the Nazarene) [Acts 22:8]

Contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth (or Jesus the Nazarene) [Acts 26:9]

Of these references, only two give a specific sense of location. The first of these is that of Mark, who refers to "Nazareth of Galilee". The second is Luke 4:16, to which we said we would return. A fuller extract reads: 'And he came to Nazareth (Nazara), where he had been brought up; and he went to the synagogue, as was his custom, on the Sabbath day. And he stood up to read: and there was given to him a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He ... found the place where it was written, "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to release the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind; to set free those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." And he closed the scroll, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.'

And he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

In an unpublished manuscript by Fr. C. Ramon Allee, the author writes:

[*The Dead Sea Scrolls, The Essenes, and Early Christianity*. Fr. Ramon is a

member of the American Academy of Religion.]

"It has generally been assumed that in each of the cities of Palestine at this period there was a synagogue in each city, of which all the inhabitants who wished to do so made use ... the primary (meaning of the word) is that of an assembly rather than a building.

"Where then did Jesus go when he went to the synagogue? Was it to a synagogue of the Pharisees? It seems hardly likely. He was sharply opposed to the Pharisees and criticized them freely ... it is all but certain that he went to a meeting place of an Essene order - indeed, the very community where, to use Luke's phrase, he was brought up."

The significant fact for us here is that in his work Fr. Ramon establishes a link between Jesus and the Essenes, and possibly the sect of Qumran, where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found. What we now have to consider is the likelihood of this in the light of our present considerations.

The most notable feature of the Essenes of the Dead Sea community (or assembly, or synagogue) was the fact of their separation both physically and doctrinally from the Pharisees and Sadducees who, according to the Gospels, were the frequent subjects of Jesus' condemnation. And the very essence of the Hebrew word "Nazar" means precisely that. In the Hebrew and English *Lexicon of the Old Testament* [Brown, Driver and Briggs, Oxford 1978] the root verb is given as:

"Dedicate, consecrate, separate, in religious and ceremonial sense ... Aramaic (nedher): vow."

Like Christian D. Ginsberg in his essay on the Essenes, [*The Essenes, The Kabbalah*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1956] Fr. Ramon establishes beyond reasonable doubt an Essene connection on the part of Jesus, of whose teaching, if not his practice, a large part is almost identical with what is known of Essene teachings generally, rather than those of the Dead Sea sect exclusively.

Following our own considerations, and allowing for an all too possible, if slight distortion in the original transmission of the story of Jesus and his ministry from an oral/written Aramaic tradition predating our Greek documents by some two centuries, then, to adopt the New Testament term, the ancient Hebrew vow-takers or "Nazarites", the followers of Jesus (and especially his brother Jacob, known to us as James, who is specifically recorded as having taken a vow) and Jesus himself

were all "Nazarenes". And Jesus, if coming from such a background is "of the "Nazarenes" in the same sense as Paul is spoken of in Acts 24:5:

"For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and agitator among the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes."

Certainly, in the sense of the original Hebrew verb, the ancient practices of the Jewish People, and even, as Rihbany [*Op. cit.*] has shown, among modern Eastern Christians in Syria, together with the Essenes of Qumran and elsewhere, as reported by the Jewish Historian Josephus, Pliny the Elder, Eusebius and Hippolytus, all were Nazirim, i.e., consecrated, dedicated, and set apart for the service of God.

In *A History of the Jews in Babylonia; 1. The Parthian Period* [Brown Judaic Studies 62, Scholars Press, Chico, California] the author, Professor Jacob Neusner states:

"According to Tannaitic tradition, a Parthian embassy was sent to the court of Alexander Jannaeus (104-78 b.c.e.). The embassy was not mentioned by Josephus. The source is as follows:

"It was taught, Three hundred Nezirim came up [to Jerusalem] in the time of R. Shimeon b. Shetach. For one hundred fifty of them he found a means of freeing them from their vow of Nezirut"

The source is given as *Pal. Talmud Berakhot 7.2, Nazir 5.3*. The *Aramaic* text which is all we have been able to consult renders "Nezirim" as "Nazirin" but does not contain the reference to the vow of Nezirut. What is nonetheless of immediate interest, assuming Prof. Neusner has an alternative recension, is the use of terms which reflect a definite use of such terminology applied to Jews in the first century before the advent of Jesus, [of the Nazirin of Nezirut!]

To sum up, the original history as first recorded by the Aramaic-speaking disciples of Jesus, slightly distorted in its transmission, and ending up in Greek documents of the third century, probably spoke in their own tongue not of "Jesus of Nazareth" but of Jesus of (the) Nazarin(es). In the same language, the Dead Sea sect would also have been "Nazarenes" as would any Jew (like James, and probably themselves) who had taken a vow to serve God in a special and unique way. Nazarites, Nazarenes, and Nazareth are most probably, in generic terms, one and the same kind of people, all with a single religious purpose of dedication to the one true God of Israel, "Jehovah" - the "Eternal Being" or "That-which-is" of Exodus 6:

"And YHWH said to Moses, "Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh; for with a strong hand he will drive them [i.e., the sons of Israel] out from his land." And God spoke to Moses and said to him, "I [am] YHWH; and I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty (Heb. Al Shaddai), and by my name YHWH I never made myself known to them."

We shall now return to the reference in Matthew 2:23, "He shall be called a Nazarene." As previously noted, the usual reference back is to Isaiah 11:1, which, however, uses no such words.

Given the apparent, and even in some instances obvious ignorance of early redactors and editors of the Greek New Testament writings, it is not at all improbable that like many Christians today, they did not make or were unaware of the traditional view of their own scriptures - our Old Testament - taken by the Jewish people themselves, who referred to them (and still do) as the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. To many Christians even today, the Old Testament is a book of prophecy, primarily concerned with predicting the future advent of the saviour of the world, i.e., Jesus, or in Jewish terms, the Messiah of Israel.

Sad though such ignorance may be, it is less astonishing in the earlier centuries of the common era, when all documents had to be copied by hand, and information was spread among the ordinary people largely by word of mouth. To many a Greek copyist or editor of documents and transmitter of traditions not his own, it may well have seemed that anything written in the Old Testament was the writing of "The Prophets" - especially if the copyist or editor was primarily one of the "new" Christians whose only living contact with his religion was among fellow Greeks, and among whom a knowledge of Jewish tradition and Law may well have been regarded as of little account other than for its value in bolstering his own church's claims.

Added to this is the fact of early Christian prejudice which blamed "The Jews" for the crucifixion of Jesus, notwithstanding the fact that Jesus and his disciples were themselves of "The Jews".

Where then, in the Old Testament, might such a Greek editor have looked for a source which could be used to claim that a "prophecy" existed which foretold that "He shall be called a Nazarene."? Not to the Hebrew scriptures, but to the Greek translation of them known to scholars as the Septuagint (so-called because it was said to be the result of the work of seventy Jewish translators).

[Many scholars believe that this version rests upon an earlier Hebrew foundation than the form in which we find the Hebrew texts today].

In the received Hebrew text of our Old Testament there are twelve references to either "Nazarite" or "Nazarites", In the Greek text, however, the Hebrew word is rendered literally (by transliteration) only once. All other eleven references are translated into the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew, i.e., consecrated, dedicated, separated etc. This single reference is to be found not in the books of "The Prophets" but from the Book of Judges [13:5]:

"For behold, thou art with child and shall bring forth a son; and there shall come no razor upon his head, for the child shall be called a Nazir to God from the womb, and he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines."

As in the birth stories about Jesus, an angel appears to the mother of the unborn child. This child was Samson, who was, in his time, a saviour of Israel (Jesus = Joshua = "Saviour"). Samson destroyed the house in which the Philistines had met to worship their own god by pulling down the pillars of their temple around them, giving up his life in the process. A parallel with the Jesus story is clear here, if anyone cares to see one. At the crucifixion of Jesus the veil of the Jewish temple was said to have been "torn in two", and not too many years later the temple itself was totally destroyed, and has never been rebuilt. Might not this have seemed to a Greek scribe or editor a veritable "type" or "prophecy" relating to his own Messiah, his own Christ, Jesus of the Nazirin of Naziruth?

Whatever else the man Jesus may or may not have been, he was a Jew, he was dedicated to God, and he was separate, both in his life and his teaching, from the majority of the Jewish people of his time. He was, in short, a Nazir.

"The "Hebraists" or "Hebrews of Acts would ... provide the general connection between the movement and tradition of non-conformist baptizing Judaism and the Primitive Church. A closer connection still would be through the so-called "sect of the Nazarenes" of Acts xxiv.5, if there is a historical foundation for Epiphanius's Jewish Nasarenes of Trans-Jordan. On the whole, the cumulative evidence seemed to support Epiphanius. The oldest roots of the Christian movement were certainly in Galilee and the North; and one of these may well have sprung from a group of dedicated Nazirites, sectarians who continued the ancient Israelite institution of the life-long Nazirate. There would then be the closest of connections between John the Baptist and the Galilaean movement; and a similar close tie would exist with the priestly "Nazirites" of Qumran. There is certainly a Nazirite element in Christian origins, as is witnessed, for instance, by Matthew ii.23.' - ("... that what was said by the prophet might be fulfilled: he shall be called a Nazarene.")"

From *The Scrolls and Christian Origins*, Matthew Black, Scholars Press 1983 reprint of 1961 edition (Nelson and Scribner)

NAZARETH IN MATTHEW 2:23

"And having come, he dwelt in a city called Nazareth; thus to fulfil that spoken by the prophet: A Nazarene shall he be called."

and in Greek:

"Kai eltheon, katokesen eis polis legomenen Nazareth; opos plerothe to pethen dia propheton oti Nazaraios klethesetai."

According to Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament [Baker, Grand Rapids, Michigan; p. 421/2, under Nazaret] the Talmud refers to Jesus as Ben Natsar (not Nazar or Nazir). This may be because the author of the talmudic text(s) in question has adopted the existing Christian polemical reference back to Isaiah 11:1 previously mentioned. Other connections with Hebrew relate it to the Hebrew word for sentinel or watchtower. Apart from the likelihood that the name has an Aramaic, rather than a Hebrew origin, this would seem unlikely for reasons already discussed. It would be interesting to know whether any Jewish scholars have made the connection with Nazir rather than the theologically conventional association with Natsar in Isaiah.

The Greek word *polis* is frequently used in relation to a city, and our own word, metropolis, is derived from it. The primary sense of the word however is that of a dwelling place, which need not carry the connotations of "city" in the sense that we would understand the term today. It is also used in the Greek Septuagint for two Hebrew words which can carry connotations of nakedness, bareness, as well as of hide or skin, being used in the latter sense concerning the covering of the tabernacle, itself a kind of dwelling place, as in Exodus 25. Another sense is that of a desert waste, such as the area north of Engedi, home of the Qumran sect, or still further north in Galilee. The second Hebrew word, less frequently rendered as *polis* can mean a gate or entrance to a meeting place - hence again, a dwelling of sorts.

Variant readings in ancient times were more likely than now, as the later guide to Hebrew pronunciation, and thus meaning (known as "pointing") was not to be developed for many centuries. Returning to the specifically Greek *polis*, it is not impossible, owing to the nature of the transmission of information in ancient times being largely by word of mouth, that *polis* could be an error for the alternative term *polus*. This word relates to the sense of numerous, or many. As we know from the Dead Sea Scrolls, "The Many" is a term that occurs in the Qumran

material in connection with the Essene sect.

I do not think it can be emphasized enough that in dealing with comparatively late Greek documents which give accounts of matters which took place some two centuries earlier than the probable date of the documents themselves; of events in a non-Greek land in which the common language was neither Greek nor Hebrew, but Aramaic, then the likelihood of just this kind of misunderstanding, compounded by the fact of much of the original story having been transmitted originally in the same Aramaic, such conjecture is altogether a most reasonable line of enquiry. That it may not "fit in" with the neatly dovetailed expositions of often theologically biased scholars does not render it invalid, and the real history of people and events is never such a neatly defined affair, as we can see even in our own time, when the histories of the Eastern and Western nations give quite different and often totally opposite versions of the same historical events. It is important for just such reasons to bear in mind that in dealing with the writings of scripture we are looking at the results of partisan renderings on the part of Jewish (in the case of the Old Testament) and Christian (in the case of the New) editors of original texts who have left us, in the form in which we receive them, documents whose purpose is primarily theological, and not historical. An interesting example of "prophetic" theological writing occurs in the book of Ezekiel, 8:14, where an angel shows him a vision:

"And he brought me to the opening of the gate of the house of YHWH [i.e., the Temple] which was towards the north; and behold, women were sitting there, weeping for Tammuz. And he said to me, "Have you seen, son of man?" [Note the use of "Son of man" in a Jewish context here].

Whether the author of this passage in Ezekiel is using the "vision" method of warning the Israelites of the dangers of paganism as a literary convention, or he truly had such a vision, the inference and purpose is clear enough: it is an attack upon a perceived and (to Ezekiel) very probably present threat to the monotheistic worship of YHWH. Tammuz was himself a god, the son of the Ancient Near-Eastern Mother Goddess Astarte or Ishtar, and after whom one of the Hebrew months (corresponding roughly to July) is still named. Reading, as one often must, between the lines, it seems likely that the worship of the more ancient Hebrews was far less monotheistic as people commonly suppose, and much of the Old Testament writings reveal this conflict between the religion of Moses and that of the ancient world. Some of the adventures of the legendary king Solomon suggest a less than perfect devotion to YHWH than later expositors would have us believe.

Returning from this digression, it is clear that earlier sources from which we might derive a more accurate form of the original tradition are likely to be found not in

Greek or Hebrew texts, but in Aramaic/Syriac versions. Some of these, even if late, contain tantalizing references to otherwise little-known traditions. A work called *The Teaching of Addai* mentioned by Eusebius in his History [1.10] finds the emissary of Abgar, king of Edessa, visiting Jesus in Jerusalem, finding him at the house of the famous rabbi Gamaliel, teacher of the apostle Paul. (In the Syriac text, but not in Eusebius) [*The Teaching of Addai*, George Howard, tr.; Scholars Press, 1981]. It could be that we still have a great deal to discover about the origins of Jesus, the Nazarene of Galilee.

NAZARENES OF GALILEE

The first Christians were not, in their own time and place, called Christians at all, but like their founder were known, as the accusation against Peter has shown, as Nazarenes. This was not their only common feature, they were equally, if not more so, known as Galileans, and it is interesting to wonder if there might have been other kinds of Nazarenes who came from elsewhere, and whose "vow" might have been of a different order. Our texts speak of both Jesus and his disciples as Galileans, and of Jesus himself coming from "Nazareth of Galilee". If a city or town, as we would understand it, did not exist at that period, then what or where is this place

"Nazareth" from which the gospel writers seem to be agreed that he came? Was it perhaps a *district* rather than a specific location? If so, where was this district?

One thing is clear: if such a district or area existed, it was not further south, in Judea, but in northern Galilee or thereabouts, and it is to this area we must look for any indication of possible descriptions of the place of his origin. We do not have to look far; no further in fact, in the light of our conjectures, than the same gospel accounts, which we can place in the same context as the accounts themselves, i.e., Galilee.

Galilee is the name of the sea or lake by which the entire territory was known. In more ancient times this water was known by a different name, but by the time of Jesus it had also acquired the title of the Sea of Gennesaret. Exactly when this name was first bestowed we do not know, but the earliest reference to it in scriptural writings seems to occur in the first book of Maccabees, where the RSV "Common Bible" gives it this name. In the Greek Septuagint it is rendered as "Gennesar".

If, as we have done earlier, we consider not so much the literal word, but rather the sound it expresses - and speech or sound always comes before its written expression - it is not a large step from "Gennesaret" (sometimes spelt

"Gennesareth") or "Gennesar" to "Nazaret", "Nazareth" or "Nazara". Hebrew and Aramaic contain many letters whose pronunciation is of a guttural kind which can sound to foreign ears like a number of alternative letters in their own tongue. Allowing, as is clear we must, for such differences of rendering, the Hebrew-Aramaic sounds which fall into this category, together with differences in local dialect such as already mentioned in the case of Peter, it is not unreasonable to postulate that Nazareth and Gennesaret are one and the same place. We know that a town or city called Nazareth may not have existed in Jesus' day, but we do know that Gennesaret *did*.

Was Jesus an Essene from Qumran? This is really two questions, not one. Although the greater part of his teaching may have considerable affinities with that of the Qumran sect, it was also far more liberal and tolerant. This is one reason to reject Qumran as his place of origin, as also is its location. Qumran was to the south, in Judea; Jesus came from Galilee, in the north. Could there have been another, more liberal sect of Essenes in Galilee? Philo of Alexandria, a Jewish writer who lived in this period wrote (in Greek):

"Palestine, and Syria too, which are inhabited by no slight portion of the numerous population of the Jews, are not barren of virtue. There are some among them called Essaioi - in number more than four thousand ... because they are worshippers of God ... they in the first place live in villages, avoiding cities ... some of them cultivate the earth, others are engaged in those diverse arts which promote peace." [In Ginsburg, *The Essenes; The Kabbalah* - Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1956].

Philo goes on to enumerate the many virtues of the Essenes which are recounted elsewhere. The Jewish historian Josephus, another contemporary writer tells us that "They have no separate city." Elsewhere he says:

"There is also another order of Essenes, who, in their way of living, customs and laws exactly agree with the others, excepting only that they differ from them about marriage."

The Qumran sectarians were a group who did not allow marriage, [though female remains have been found on the site] and although Jesus stresses the absence of the institution in heaven, he has definite advice to offer about divorce in this, our less exalted territory. If indeed he was an Essene, it may well have been as a member of the "other order" mentioned by Josephus, especially when we consider, putting Christian theology aside, that he appears in the gospel accounts complete with mother and brothers. His earthly, if not his heavenly father appears early in the story with Mary and Jesus as coming from "Nazareth of Galilee". It is not therefore

beyond the bounds of possibility that the entire family, including his brother Jacob (our "James"), head of the first Nazarene community in Jerusalem, may have come from the ranks of just such an Essene group.

To return to the possible association of Gennesaret with Nazareth, what have the gospel writers to tell us?

"And crossing over, they came to the land of Gennesaret, and drew to shore; and when they came out of the boat, immediately the people recognized him." [Mark 6:53].

"And having passed over, they came to the land of Gennesaret, and having recognized him, the men of that place sent to all the surrounding country, and brought to him all those who were diseased." [Matt. 14:34].

... and he was standing by Lake Gennasaret. [Luke 5:1].

These are the only three references to Gennesaret in the gospel accounts, which in itself is interesting, particularly as the place was clearly well known at that period by this name. When mentioning the lake, it is more often referred to as the Sea of Galilee. This reinforces the suggestion that since the time of the Maccabees the use of the name had passed from the lake to the district immediately surrounding it. Luke uses the older term for the lake, and the authors or editors of Mark and Matthew are almost certainly drawing upon an identical source, or as is often suggested, Matthew is using Mark as his source.

In any event, both the Mark and Matthew texts speak of the land of Gennesaret, which in this one basic account is clearly a district (*polis*) in the immediate vicinity of the Sea of Galilee, which is precisely the area allocated to the supposed "City of Nazareth". The connection, in terms of our current speculation, is obvious.

Let us suppose that this is the true starting point for both the life of Jesus, as well as the district wherein might have been found one of the more liberal Essene communities spoken of by Philo and Josephus. As remarked earlier, when the birth stories concerning Jesus are set aside as part of another strand of the tradition [there are no other references to this tradition anywhere else in the New Testament] then all four gospels begin with John the Baptist preaching a doctrine of repentance, and baptizing in the river Jordan, which flows into the Sea of Galilee in this very region. The allusions concerning John taken from Isaiah 40 could have been taken verbatim from the writings of the Dead Sea sect further south in Qumran, but John is baptizing in Galilee, not Judea. Could he too have come from the ranks of this "other order" of Essenes to the north? When we read

the accounts of the baptism of Jesus - which suggest, unhappily for later Church doctrine, that Jesus had sins to repent of - there is a sense that these two men already know each other, which comes across in the reported interchange of words between them. In suggesting to Jesus that the baptism should really be performed the other way round, i.e., that Jesus should baptize John, the conversation, even in translation, is almost casual.

What do we know of this Galilean area that might suggest it as a possible site for a more liberal-minded Essene group, in contrast to the more ascetic Qumran community?

"The physical characteristics ... are principally two: (a) abundance of water, and (b) fertility of soil.

"Large quantities of water are collected during the rainy season among the higher slopes and plateaus, and are thence dispersed by the rivers and streams over the lower-lying tracts, where they become stored in springs and wells.

"The Galileans were thoroughly and patriotically Jewish during the first century of the Christian era.

"There does not seem to be any sufficient ground for the dislike and contempt in which they were held by their religiously stricter brethren of Judea. Possibly they were less exact in their observance of tradition. But they were devoted to the Law, and their country was well supplied with synagogues, schools, and teachers. If they were less orthodox, from the Pharisaic viewpoint, the Messianic hope burned brightly in their souls, and they crowded to the ministry of Jesus. They were certainly more tolerant and open-minded than the Judeans..." [*Dictionary of the Apostolic Church*, T. & T.Clark, Edinburgh 1918, p. 438.]

All the ingredients were there. Patriotism: the Qumran Essenes actually had a "War Rule". Devotion to the Law: an indispensable requirement in Qumran. An abundance of water: this was clearly essential for Essene practices, which required frequent lustrations. Finally, the "Messianic hope" is the constant theme of the stricter Dead Sea sect. Given the predominately Essene nature of much of the teaching of Jesus, coupled with his more liberal attitude in respect of the stricter observances of Israelite religion, the likelihood of such a community existing in the Land of Gennesaret - or Nazaret - is strong. True, the evidence is circumstantial, but given that we know nothing whatever of the many groups of Essenes who, according to our ancient authors were so widespread, it is more than we might otherwise hope for.

We do know from the documents found at Qumran that this group had a "Damascus Rule" which differed somewhat from their own "Manual of Discipline". It seems more than likely that there was, at some period, an Essene group in the area of Damascus to which this document specifically applied, and which varied in some important respects from that of the Dead Sea sect. Its most notable feature is its reference to a "New Covenant" which was made "in the Land of Damascus". "New Covenant" is of course synonymous with "New Testament".

Geographically, Damascus is roughly a similar distance from Gennesaret or Nazaret as the latter is from Qumran. In ancient times the entire area would have been known as "Syria" or "Aram-Syria" and is the region in which the Aramaic language finds its roots, traces of which remain to this day. If the Nazarene disciples of Jesus, as well as Jesus himself, could and did travel as far south as Jerusalem, it is quite possible that at an earlier or even during the same period, Damascus Essenes could have travelled a similar distance to their brethren by the Sea of Galilee.

There seems to be little or no trace of an Essene group in the area of Damascus itself, although who knows what archaeological and other research may yet reveal. It may even be that the Essenes in Damascus moved south to the rich and fertile area of Gennesaret- Nazaret, where all the requirements of their particular disciplines could more readily be met, and that Jesus and his disciples were a slightly later generation or those mentioned in the Qumran related document. It may even be that the New Covenant of Damascus was essentially the same as that which later gave its name to the Christian scriptures. What might the chances of this be? An almost final "clincher" comes from professor Geza Vermes' translation of *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*: [Penguin Books, London 1987 (3rd edition) p. 71.]

"There are, to my knowledge, no writings in ancient Jewish sources parallel to the Community Rule, but a similar type of literature flourished among Christians between the second and fourth centuries, the so-called "Church Orders" represented by the *Didache*, the *Didascalia*, the Apostolic Constitutions etc."

In this translation of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the members of the Community refer to themselves as "saints" - which is precisely the term of reference used by the apostle Paul in his letters to the various Nazarene communities, viz., "All the saints greet you." [2. Cor.13:13].

The probationary period during which a potential Essene had to prove himself and receive the necessary tuition in the tenets of the Community lasted, in total, for a period of three years, only after which period was he admitted to the full rights and

privileges of the order. Exactly the same probationary period was employed in the Christian communities of the early Church, a fact well attested by the writings of the Christian Church fathers.

In Jerusalem, the very first "Church" or Community of the Nazarenes, only later to be called Christians, we find not Peter, as we might suppose from the high position accorded to him in later Church tradition, but Jacob, or James the brother of Jesus, at the head of a community so important to the sect that after a number of years working without any official supervision even the great apostle Paul feels it necessary to go there to gain official approval of his own version of the teaching, and ratification of his own even more liberal attitude towards Gentile converts from the mother house of the order, as we would say of a modern Christian religious community. The head of this Jerusalem "mother church" was already famous for his holiness and piety, and is known to have taken the "Nazarite" vow. And in early twentieth century Syria we find similar versions and identical vows, even down to the language used to describe them, as regular features of Christian communities in the very same "land of Damascus," its present-day capital.

All Christian denominations, even in the divided state of Christendom today, agree on the utterly basic Law of Ancient Israel upon which they base their common faith, namely the two "Great Commandments" which are quoted in the Christian "New Testament", either by Jesus or by one of his questioners, namely to love God and neighbour as oneself. This Law is found in the "Old Testament" in Deuteronomy and Exodus. Whether we take it from the Old, or from the New Covenant, it is prefaced with the same words:

HEAR O ISRAEL, YHWH YOUR GOD, YHWH IS ONE.

GAMALIEL, PHARISEES, SADDUCEES & ESSENES

In The Teaching of Addai already mentioned, the archivist of King Abgar of Edessa, on arriving a second time at Jerusalem in search of Jesus, finds him at the house of Gamaliel, who is described as "a prince of the Jews". [Addai is identified as one of the seventy apostles sent out by Jesus in Luke 10:1. He is mentioned by the Church Father Hippolytus (170-236 a.d.) as number four in the list: "Thaddeus, who conveyed the epistle to Abgarus."] This Syriac-Aramaic document, dating from around 400 is not the first to mention Gamaliel in connection with Jesus. He appears in the New Testament scriptures themselves. References to him appear in the book of Acts:

"But a certain one, having risen in the Sanhedrin, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the Law, honoured by all the people, commended the apostles to be put

outside for a short while. And then he said to them [i.e., the members of the Sanhedrin], "Men, Israelites, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do to these men. For before the present days, Theudas rose up, claiming to be someone himself, to whom were joined a number of men, about four hundred; who was taken away, and as many who obeyed him were dispersed and came to nothing. After this, Judas the Galilean rose up, in the days of the registration, and drew many people after him; and that one perished, and as many as obeyed him were scattered. And now I say to you, draw back from these men, and permit them [to continue]; because if this counsel [of the apostles] be of men, or this work, it will be destroyed; but if it is from God, you will be unable to destroy it, otherwise you could be found to be fighters against God." [Acts 5:34-9].

And in a later passage:

'Paul signalled with his hand to the people. And much silence having taken place, he spoke in the Hebrew dialect saying, "Men, brothers and fathers, hear my defence now to you." And having heard that he spoke in the Hebrew dialect, they remained quiet. And he said, "I am indeed a Jew born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but having been brought up in this city [Jerusalem] at the feet of Gamaliel; having been trained according to exactness of the ancestral Law, being zealous for God, even as you all are today.'" [Acts 21:20-22:3].

What else does Paul himself have to say either as reported elsewhere or in his own letters - all of which most certainly predate the account in Acts - that may have a bearing on this?

'Paul cried out in the Sanhedrin, "Men. brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. I am being judged concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead!" [Acts 23:6]. "I am ... a Hebrew of the Hebrews; according to the Law, a Pharisee.'" [Philippians 3:5].

Paul was a Pharisee, which, it is significant to record, he does refute or reject even after his conversion, even though it appears that he no longer accepts nor understands the Law in a conventional Pharisaic manner. As a student of the Law under Gamaliel we may reasonably infer from Christian sources alone that Gamaliel, a "teacher of the Law" was also a Pharisee, and as such, a rabbi [i.e., teacher]. Like Paul, and Christianity, the Pharisees had a doctrine concerning the resurrection of the dead. The question that obviously interests us here is whether it is feasible that the Rabbi Gamaliel could have known Jesus, who, in a general sense if the gospel accounts are to be taken at their face value, does not seem to have had much time for the Pharisees at all. Yet Paul, another Pharisee, and one of Gamaliel's own pupils, has been described as "The First Christian" by more than

one student of Christian history, largely because it is from Paul and the churches founded or supported by his doctrines that the later Western and non-Jewish church developed.

If however Jesus, himself a teacher, and called "Rabbi" in the gospels, was not merely an itinerant teacher and healer, but an Essene from a Jewish community well known in Galilee and Judea in his own day, it might be less likely, but not impossible that he knew or had met Gamaliel, especially if, as opponents of the Christian Church as well as its own scholars have noted, much of the source material relating to the early Church as it has come down to us contains editorial and doctrinal additions (and subtractions) made at a later date. In his book on the Jewish Wars, the Jewish author Flavius Josephus (Joseph ben Matthias) who was born in the year 37, and had been, according to his own account, at one time a member of an Essene community, writes:

"There are three sects of philosophers among the Jews. The followers of the first are called Pharisees, of the second, Sadducees, and of the third, who really seem to practice holiness, Essenes." [Quoted in Ginsburg [*op.cit.*]. See also the Penguin Books translation, *The Jewish War*, Penguin Classics, 1985 reprint].

Josephus, described as a Jewish general fighting the Romans in the conflict which led to the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in the year 70, is said to have gone over to the Romans at some point, and his accounts are written in Greek. This is important to our understanding. In our New Testament documents, also in Greek, we find frequent (and always unfriendly) references to Pharisees and Sadducees, but never Essenes. Whilst this can be seen to reflect the possibility that neither Jesus nor his followers are likely to attack a group to which they themselves belonged, it is also important to note that scriptural Hebrew has no such word as "Essene" (Greek *Essaio*) in its language. The Greek terms Pharisee and Sadducee with which we are familiar can be derived from known Hebrew words, but there is no clear evidence for any of the three named sectarian parties, known by such names, in the Christian Old Testament either. This is because the Old Testament canon was more or less fixed well before the time of Jesus, and the sectarian differences in first-century Palestine must have been a fairly recent development. [The Qumran sect seems to have been established in the late second-early first century b.c.e.]

We have established that, in their own terms, the Essenes would and indeed maybe could not have used this name for themselves or their teachings, if the extant Qumran writings are any guide, where they refer to themselves as "saints" or possibly "the poor". [cf. The saying of Jesus, "Blessed are the poor"]

The word "Pharisee" most probably originates in the Hebrew-Aramaic word *pharosh*. This word relates to "making distinct" in the sense of a division of some kind between parts of a whole, and while this may suggest a form of separation from, say, the "establishment" view of things, it is clear that neither the Pharisees nor the Sadducees regarded themselves as offering an alternative to the Judaism of the day, but rather alternative points of view which might be legitimately held within it. Likewise, "Sadducee" is probably a Greek rendering of the Hebrew Zadok or Sadoc, a word which does occur in the Old Testament, as it basically means "righteous" or "holy" one.

What Hebrew-Aramaic term, then, might be represented by the word "Essene"? A likely candidate according to many is the word *Hasid*, meaning "pious" or "godly" and is used in Judaism to denote just such a kind of holiness among Jews and Jewish sects. It does not satisfactorily meet our needs, however, as it is too general a term to be used in regard to a sect as such. There were no doubt members of both the Pharisee and Sadducee parties who could, like Gamaliel perhaps, have been so described by their fellow Jews.

Another aspect of Jewish tradition we have not considered is what is sometimes known as the "Kabbalist" tradition of mystical or metaphysical Judaism, which has certainly produced, down the centuries, a number of *Hasidim* or holy ones. The word *Kabbalah* derives from a Hebrew word meaning "reception" and is used in the sense of an oral, rather than a written tradition, and is viewed askance by most orthodox Jews, whose religion seems to have disposed of the problems associated with such claims to the possession of an "oral Law" or "oral Torah" by declaring that all such teaching eventually found its way into the two Talmuds of Palestine and Babylonia, a simplistic and convenient way of dealing with traditions which, for any religion, are at least embarrassing, and likely to be viewed as divisive or heretical.

Mysticism, and metaphysical interpretation in particular, can be extremely difficult to define. Nevertheless, a Jewish concept of a "secret" oral tradition of Kabbalism survives to this day, and its schools have existed within Judaism throughout the ages, however described. A modern Jewish researcher has, in recent years, actually visited such schools in this, our twentieth century, notably in Spain and Germany in his study of this particular tradition. In the "Line of Reception" appear such notables of Judaism as Hillel, Shammai, Akiba, and in the year 32, Gamaliel. The original line is said to have ended with the completion of the Talmud in the fourth century. In even more ancient times we find the names of Elijah, Isaiah, Amos, Jeremiah and Habakkuk. Isaiah and Elijah feature in the New Testament writings, and a scroll of Habakkuk was found at Qumran. Both the Qumran Essenes, as well

as the conjectural Damascus community of the New Covenant, believed in the advent of a Messiah, or in Greek, a Christ.

The Pharisees were probably so called by virtue of the differences they exhibited from other shades of Jewish philosophical opinion, being "separate" after a particular manner from (say) the Sadducees. A simple example suffices: Pharisees believed in a general resurrection of the dead; Sadducees did not. The Nazarite vow-takers, or in another form, the Nazarenes, also owed their description to another Jewish word describing separateness in the specific sense of consecration to God, i.e., Nazar or Nazir.

All three, Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes were, in their various ways, righteous, pious, and godly. All three had their own schools, such as that of Gamaliel attended by Paul, and their own teachers or rabbis.

To this day there is nothing more delightful to a pious Jew than to meet, whether in the synagogue or elsewhere, to debate and discuss "The Law, the Prophets, and the Writings." At the time of Jesus, Judaism was certainly less formal in its divisions than it later became, and it is more than probable that the rabbis of the day enjoyed nothing more than getting together for discussion and debate in much the same way.

The likelihood of the Rabbi Jesus - or Joshua, as he would have been known in his own language - visiting the house of the Rabbi Gamaliel for just such discussion may not be as strange as it might at first appear to Christians conditioned by Church dogma and anti-Jewish exegesis.

In the gospel accounts of the life and teaching of Jesus there are a number of contradictory elements, from a later Christian doctrinal point of view. In a number of instances Jesus quite clearly not only advocates a strict observance of the Jewish Law, but in general terms quite clearly followed it himself. It becomes necessary therefore to distinguish between Jesus the Nazarene Rabbi on the one hand and the later Church interpretation of him as both Son of God and God himself. In the search for Christian origins, it is a distinction that must be made if there is any hope of genuine light being shed on so vital a question.

It may be that the resolution of some of the difficulties lie in the interpretations of the "Kabbalist" mystery tradition, but this is an area beyond the scope of this present enquiry, where we will later take a much closer look at the writings and ideas of the Pharisee, Nazarene, and Christian Apostle Paul.

Whatever the historical facts concerning Jesus the Nazarene of Galilee may

eventually turn out to be, his life and teaching has made an impact which has reverberated down the centuries, and continues to do so. It is an impact, furthermore, which has at times split the world asunder, setting nation against nation, people against people, and even Christian against Christian. To woefully understate the problem, this simply will not do. If we can understand, and perhaps learn to practice the way of life of the saintly James of Jerusalem, whose knees were calloused from so much prayer, or the way of life of such integrity that led the Rabbi Jesus to his death on a cross in testimony of it, and the way of life of the first Jewish and Gentile Nazarenes, called saints, who followed his example in their thousands in the early centuries of our era, then just maybe a new "salvation" will emerge - maybe another "New Covenant" - to guide modern humanity towards the light; the same light promised, according to the author of John's gospel, which Jesus promised to his true disciples, a light not directly his own, as some later Christian theology has presented it, but a light, presence, or *Shekinah* which we may call the Holy Spirit from God, which according to John, "shall guide you in all truth." [John 16:13].

NOTES: A very full treatment of the historical Jesus is to be found in *Jesus the Jew* by the Jewish historian Geza Vermes. [Latest edition by SCM Press].

GAMALIEL (Hebrew: "Reward of God") was the grandson of one of the most famous of liberal Jewish Rabbis, Hillel, and is recorded in Jewish sources as having been president of the Sanhedrin. Rabbinic tradition records him as being the first of seven teachers to receive the higher status of *Rabban*, a title applied (as "Rabboni") by Mary Magdalene to Jesus. [John 20:16]. Hillel, according to Falk [*Jesus the Pharisee*, Paulist Press, New York 1985] is especially remembered for his teaching concerning love for his fellow humans, his humility and warm relationship with Jew and Gentile alike.

Origin of the Word "Essene"

A common, but not very satisfactory explanation of the origin of this designation is that it derives from the Hebrew word *Hasid* or "pious, holy". This is such a general term which could be applied to any number of people (and has so been) who were by no stretch of the imagination any kind of Essenes. Considering that the sect so described arose at a time when Aramaic was the everyday language of the people rather than Hebrew, then it is to that tongue that we must look.

If we are to find an Aramaic (or even Hebrew) word from which from which the word has been transliterated into Greek, then once again it is to the possible sound rather than the Greek equivalent letters that we must direct our attention.

The Aramaic/Syriac word "HZIA" means "seer" in the sense of one having a vision, i.e., a kind of prophet. An equivalent Hebrew word with similar connotations in one form means a mental vision, or even a revelation. The Qumran Essenes, and no doubt the Nazarenes of Galilee had just such a "revelatory" vision, namely of a Messiah of Israel. Essenes were also especially noted for their abilities in the realm of seership or prophecy. The plural of the Aramaic word could very easily be rendered *Ezene*, as could the Hebrew *'Hzon* mentioned above. In the latter case it is a fairly simple matter to look for examples of its use in the Hebrew text of the Old Testament books.

Old Testament uses of "Essene"

(Italicised in the quotes following)

Isaiah 1:1 opens with this word: The *vision* of Isaiah, son of Amoz.

22:1: The burden of the valley of *vision*.

22:5: The YHWH of Hosts in the valley of *vision*.

Lamentations 2:9: Her prophets have not found a *vision* from YHWH.

Ezekiel 7:26: And they shall seek a *vision* from the prophet.

13:16: The prophets of Israel to Jerusalem, and who see for her a *vision* of peace.

Daniel 1:17: Daniel had understanding in all *visions* and dreams.

9:21: Gabriel, who I had seen in the *vision*.

Hosea 12:10: I have also spoken by the prophet, and I have multiplied *visions* and the prophets use parables.

Amos 7:12: *Seer*, go flee!

Micah 3:6: And the *seers* shall be ashamed.

Habakkuk 2:2 And YHWH answered me and said, "write the *vision* and engrave it on the tablets."

These references are all from the later sections of the Old Testament (in the order of the books in Christian bibles) and are from the books of the prophets. There is often misunderstanding on the popular mind concerning the nature of "prophecy" as used in both the Christian and Jewish religions. Certainly the term includes the

idea of foretelling the future, as in the instances of "seership" in Amos and Micah, where our root word is used in this sense. However, "prophecy" also embraces the concepts of (a) interpretation of the written Law, as previously revealed by God, and (b) direct interpretation of the seer's or prophet's own "conversation" with YHWH.

Some other uses are:

Numbers 24:4: The saying of him who sees the *vision* of the Almighty.

Numbers 24:16: almost identical to the above.

1 Samuel 3:1: And the child Samuel was serving YHWH before Eli; and the word of YHWH was rare in those days: there was no open *vision*. [See again below].**

2 Samuel 7:17: And by all *vision* so spoke Nathan to David.

2 Samuel 24:11: The word of YHWH came to Gad the prophet, the *seer* of David.

1 Chronicles 17:15: According to all this *vision* so Nathan spoke to David.

1 Chronicles 21:9: And YHWH spoke to Gad, the *seer* of David.

2 Chronicles 19:2: Jehu the son of Hanani the *seer*.

29:25: Gad, the *seer* of the king.

32:32: Behold, they are written in the *vision* of Isaiah the son of Amoz the prophet.

** "And the child Samuel was serving YHWH before Eli; and the word of YHWH was rare in those day; there was no open *vision*. And it happened at that time that Eli was lying down in his place, and his eyes had begun to be dim: he was not able to see. And the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of YHWH, where the ark of God was. And YHWH called to Samuel, and he said, "I am here!" and he ran to Eli and said, "I am here, for you have called me." And he [Eli] said, "I did not call; return and lie down." And he went and lay down. And YHWH again called Samuel, and Samuel rose up and went to Eli and said, "I am here, for you have called for me." And he said, "I have not called, my son; go back and lie down." And Samuel did not yet know YHWH, and the word of YHWH had not been revealed to him. And YHWH again called Samuel the third time, and he rose up and went to Eli and said, "I am here, for you have called for me." And Eli understood that YHWH was calling the child. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and if you are called, say 'Speak, O YHWH, for your

servant hears'." And Samuel went and lay down in his place."

[There then follows an account of YHWH calling Samuel, after which Eli realises that Samuel has been chosen by YHWH in a special manner.]

"And Samuel grew up, and YHWH was with him, and did not let any of his words fall to the earth. And all Israel knew, from Dan even to Beersheba, that Samuel was confirmed to be a prophet to YHWH." [1 Sam. 3:19,20].

This fairly well known story is echoed in the sentiments of Psalm 8. It suggests an interesting sidelight on the Jewishness of Jesus, who also refers to this psalm:

"But the chief priests and scribes, seeing the wonders which he did, and the children crying out in the Temple, saying, "Hosanna to the son of David" - they were incensed. And they said to him, "Do you hear what these say?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes. Have you never read, "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings you have perfected praise?" [Matt. 21:15,16].

The Jewish historian Josephus, in his *Antiquities of the Jews* [In Ginsburg, *op. cit.*, p.50] gives us a good example of an Essene "seer":

"There was a certain Essene named Menahem who was celebrated not only for the uprightness of his conduct, but also for the foreknowledge of the future proceeding from God. When once he saw Herod, as a boy going to school, he addressed him by the name, "King of the Jews."

According to the account of Josephus, Menahem, after Herod had indeed become king, told him that his reign would last some thirty years. In fact it lasted a few years longer. Harvey Falk, in *Jesus the Pharisee* [Paulist Press, New York 1985] describes Menahem as living in the first century b.c.e., serving the Sanhedrin under the great Rabbi Hillel. Menahem is said to have left with a hundred and sixty scholars or disciples of Hillel on a mission to the Gentiles, when Shammai, an opponent of Hillel, replaced him around the year 10 of the present era. Virtually nothing appears to be known of the fate of this mission, but it is within the bounds of hypothesis that they may have been originators of Gentile Essene communities in the Greek-speaking Gentile countries, the existence of which is implied by the ancient authorities writing on the Essenes, such as Philo, Pliny, and Josephus, taking the Aramaic word for "seers" - such as Menahem himself - with them into the Greek language, which would explain the transliterated form of *Essaio* used by Josephus, Hippolytus and others. If we grant that this Greek word originates in the Aramaic word relating to seership and prophecy, we can perhaps understand a little better what the apostle Paul may have understood when he wrote to the

Corinthians:

"Pursue love, and desire spiritual things, but rather that you should prophesy; for he who speaks with a tongue [Paul is here referring to the phenomenon of "Speaking in tongues"] does not speak to men, but to God. For no one hears, but in spirit he speaks mysteries; but he prophesying for men speaks for the building up and encouragement and comfort that the community may build up." [1 Cor. 14:1-5].

LOAVES AND FISHES

Nazaret-Gennesar(et): This could originate from two Hebrew/Aramaic words for Garden (*Gen*) and Righteousness (*Azur*). The latter is used metaphorically in Isaiah 11:5, "And righteousness shall be the encircler (*azur*) of His (YHWH) loins, and faithfulness the encircler (*azur*) of His Heart." Hence, "Garden of Righteousness" though this may be stretching the original language somewhat, as this does not appear to be a common Old Testament usage of *Azur*.

Essene-Nazarene Asceticism

The description of Gennesaret-Nazaret as a fertile place, practically brimming over with everything needful for a contented material existence does not, on the surface, appear to equate readily with the general isolationist and ascetic tendencies reported of Essenes, at least insofar as they may have been exemplified by the Qumran community.

Running counter to this is the description of John the Baptist appearing from out of the desert or wilderness in probably this very area. We must ask therefore whether there was, in the near vicinity, a site of the kind which an Essene or similar group, even if more liberal than those at Qumran, would still need in order to isolate themselves from the worst pollutions (as they saw them) of secular society.

In order to reconcile conflicting geographical evidence arising from the feeding of the five thousand at Bethsaida, where, according to Luke, the event occurred, some authorities place a second Bethsaida (Bethsaida Julius) near the north-eastern shore of the lake. It is from this area that Jesus and the disciples have returned when they arrive on the shore of the "Land of Gennesaret". From the present point of view, the question of the place name is not of vital importance, but the suggestion of a "desert place" [Luke 9:10,12] north east of the lake could provide a possible site both for the perambulations of John the Baptist, and even for some kind of Essene community. If Jesus and the disciples were indeed some sort of Essenes, or similar, they might well "report back to base" from time to time

One of the faults of western interpreters seems to be a failure to appreciate the rich symbolism and metaphor of Eastern expressions. An Arab, for example, might well beg a thousand pardons for causing some minor offence. For an Englishman, "Sorry" suffices. As other writers have pointed out, bread is often used as a synonym for any kind of nourishment, including spiritual "food" - as for instance in the celebration of the Last Supper and its representation in the Christian Eucharist, or "Holy Communion". "Loaves and fishes" to feed "five thousand" could simply refer to an occasion when the Nazarene Rabbi Jesus gave instruction to a larger than usual number of people, far less than thousands perhaps, but still enough to form a fairly large assembly. Josephus numbers the total of Essenes at around four thousand. Being both "Romanized" and to some degree Hellenized, he was perhaps less liable to such exaggeration.

Again, the number of loaves and fishes could well have a symbolic purpose less dramatic than that of a physical miracle in which the laws of nature are abrogated. Even in modern English we sometimes speak of an event as being "miraculous" when all we intend to express is our amazement or astonishment at some remarkable but otherwise quite feasible occurrence. Perhaps, on this occasion, the teaching of Jesus was of a very high standard, affecting his audience powerfully, wonderfully, or "miraculously". In Luke's account there are five loaves and two fishes. Matthew [14:33ff] repeats the reference to a deserted place, agrees on the number of loaves and fishes, and enlarges the number of people by adding an unknown number of women and children to the five thousand men. Matthew and Mark relate another similar event, also in a desert place, where the number of loaves is given as seven. John 6:1-13 places the occurrence "into the mountain" and repeats the *motif* of five loaves and two fishes. The general consensus would seem to be that there were twelve baskets of fragments left over after the "meal". John's version states:

"And when they were filled, he said to the disciples, "Collect the fragments over and above, that nothing may be lost." Therefore they collected and filled twelve baskets from the five barley loaves which were left over ..."

As in the other accounts, the disciples soon afterwards depart by boat in order to return to Capernaum. Only one boat is mentioned, so the number of disciples cannot have been very large - in which case, what did they do with twelve baskets full of breadcrumbs? What happened to the five thousand or more people? Did they hang around in the desert after the disciples and Jesus had gone, after (according to the story) having followed Jesus there? Maybe they did "follow" him there, but not in a literal sense. Maybe this was simply the place where Jesus' followers lived. It may seem more than reasonable to assume that this large

assembly of people were already in the vicinity, and that rather than following him there from somewhere else, they merely gathered around him when he appeared among them. Among the ancient authorities the Essenes are described as very numerous, and often living in villages away from the main centres of population. This area meets those requirements well.

Immediately following this story we get the account of Jesus "walking on the water" - suitably embellished in one account by Peter trying to emulate the feat. John does not make much of this, except to tell us that the boat was suddenly delivered from the jaws of the storm to the shore, which although usually presented as another "miracle" would not have been particularly odd in the Sea of Galilee.

Accounts of the nature of this region describe the sudden and violent storms which can occur there, and it may well be that such a "miracle" landing, while being a bit rough on the passengers, may not be that uncommon. In addition, while the usual translation of John's account states that Jesus is seen "walking on the sea", it is true that the Greek words used, *epites* may have this literal interpretation, but there is ample precedent for the reference meaning merely that Jesus walked *by* the sea, i.e., along the shoreline, which is of course above the water line. In England we do not suppose that the Stratford-on-Avon of Shakespeare actually floats on the river itself, or that Newcastle does the same on the river Tyne, any more than the French expect one day to see Boulogne-sur-Mer float off into the English Channel.

We might also like to speculate on what Jesus had been doing while the disciples were making their way to the boat without him, and how long an interval had passed between the feeding of the five thousand and their respective departures. If Jesus had, as seems a reasonable possibility, chosen to take the scenic route around the lake rather than take to a boat, it might well have been some time.

Let us consider the fact that all these events took place among a people steeped in the teachings and scriptures of what we know as Judaism, and were themselves all Jews of one kind or another. And let us also concede, for the moment, that the original stories from which the gospel accounts derive were almost certainly told by Jews, to Jews, for the edification of Jews. Might they not have understood the symbolism in a far simpler way, one that would simply not occur to a later Gentile audience who had little or no knowledge of such matters? As Jewish "Essenes" or "seers" deriving perhaps from a Damascus group rather than Qumran, might they not simply have seen and understood immediately the symbolic connection between two fishes - the Old and New Covenants; five loaves - the five books of the Law, or of Moses, known as the *Pentateuch*; and the gathering of the "fragments" into twelve baskets a reference to the need to gather the twelve tribes

of Israel together once more within the safety of the selfsame "New Covenant, made in the Land of Damascus" from which very expression the later Christian scriptures have derived their name?

BETHSAIDA-JULIUS

This place, spoken of by Josephus as a "city" as distinct from a village, was renamed Julius by Antipas, having formerly been known as Bethsaida ("House of fishing"). In *The Jewish War* [Penguin Classics, 1985, p. 138] Josephus writes:

"Antipas founded Tiberius in Galilee and a city called after Julia in Peraea."

This site was to the northeast of Lake Gennesaret, on the other side of the river Jordan, where it flows into the northern end of the Lake. The area known as Peraea is not without some interest in the investigation into the nature and development of the early Church. According to Josephus the population of this area was composed of a mixture of Jews and Syrians. In the same work just quoted [p. 192] he states, comparing Peraea to Galilee

"Peraea though much greater in extent is mostly a stony desert, too wild to produce cultivated crops. Some parts however have workable soil that can bear crops of every kind, and in the plains grow trees of many species, those chiefly being planted being the olive, vine, and palm. The country is watered by mountain torrents, and by perennial springs that suffice even in the dog days when the torrents dry up." [The dog days were in late August, when Sirius, the dog star rises].

The exact limits of Peraea in the time of Josephus are difficult to define. He places its eastern limit in the region of Philadelphia, and its western limit as the Jordan. The southern limit was in the region of Moab, at Machaerus, roughly opposite to Engedi (near where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered). A biblical atlas of 1890 shows the northern limit at the time of Jesus as being a little below Gamala, which was some six or seven miles south of Bethsaida-Julius. Josephus however was not born until a few years after the crucifixion, and so is writing about a slightly later period, when already dubious boundaries may have shifted somewhat.

The battles which Josephus recounts in *The Jewish War* ended with the capture of Jerusalem by the Romans and the massacre of the Jews of Masada in the year 73. By the beginning of the next century the growing Christian communities had fled into this very region of Peraea which, however its boundaries may have changed over the years, had been a place of refuge from early times, offering a host of

hiding places and inaccessible areas.

From the point of view of our enquiry it is clear that the northern area was mostly desert, or as the gospels record, "a deserted place". Again we find, following the account of Josephus, the usual requirements of an Essene or Nazarene community - a supply of water, even in drought, coupled with comparative isolation from the more densely populated areas of civilization. It is from somewhere in this desert or "wilderness" area that we first encounter John the Baptist calling upon the people to "make straight the way of the Lord" and with whom the whole Christian ministry begins with the baptism of Jesus in the same river Jordan. If, as seems possible, John was a member of some kind of Essene community, he may well have been following a familiar discipline:

"And when these become members of the Community in Israel according to these rules, they shall separate from the habitation of ungodly men and shall go into the wilderness to prepare the way of Him; as it is written, "Prepare in the wilderness the way of make straight in the desert a path for our God." [From the Qumran Community Rule or Manual of Discipline, Vermes translation in *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English* p. 73, and Isaiah 40:3].

Jesus the Essene?

One of the predominant features of those Jews known as Essenes was clearly a gift of "seership" as in the example of Menahem, of whom we shall have more to say. Such a term might well have been used among the ordinary people with far less precision than modern, or for that matter, ancient scholars. Many of them, just as in our own day, would have equated prophecy with its more dramatic form of foretelling the future, even though - as also today - the better informed would have understood prophecy to have been equally important, and probably more so, in its sense of interpreting the spiritual teachings of religion, by virtue of its possessing the attribute exemplified in the Old Testament prophets of having "the knowledge and conversation of God". The Christian scriptures certainly depict Jesus acting in the latter way, though he is also represented as a seer, as in the instance of his foretelling the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple.

Hippolytus [*Refutation of all Heresies*, in *Ante-Nicene Christian Library*, Vol.VI, T. & T. Clarke, Edinburgh 1868] repeats the information given by Josephus that there were four classes of Essenes, among which were those who allowed marriage, as mentioned earlier. Among the others, Hippolytus classes the Zealots and *Sicarii* ("cutters") and we cannot fail to note that one of the twelve disciples is described as Simon the Zealot. Hippolytus seems to have regarded the *Sicarii* as a kind of extreme subdivision among the Zealot party rather than as one of the four

main Essene classes. The other two seem to have differed only in the degree of enthusiasm - some might say fanaticism - with which they regarded the rules concerning ritual purity.

If Jesus was any kind of Essene, to which of the four classes might he have belonged? He was clearly no stickler for strict adherence to rules and regulations, as is shown by his response to criticism of his disciples plucking corn to eat on the Sabbath. And in view of the seemingly aggressive attitude of the Zealots, especially the *Sicarii*, who seem to have employed political assassination, his teaching directly refutes such behavior. And yet we are also told that he recruited at least one Zealot, Simon, who presumably abandoned his militant attitudes, while his former allegiance remained in peoples' memories.

The views of Jesus, compared with those of most of the religious groups of his day were decidedly liberal, which would suggest the class of Essenes who allowed marriage, rather than the strict celibacy for which the Essenes seem to have gained a reputation for among some of those who have recorded information about them. Against this we must set ideas of religious celibacy which are found in the writing of Paul, and on the lips of Jesus himself in Matthew 19:10ff:

"His disciples said to him, If there is so much scandal between man and woman, it is not good to marry. But he said to them, All men cannot receive this saying, save those to whom it is given. For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it."

While there may be some circumstantial evidence for Essenism on the part of Jesus, it is by no means conclusive; there are too many other factors to take into account. For the moment, the most we can say with any confidence is that as a Jew and a Rabbi of some kind, his teaching was more liberal than most, which would place him closer in thought to the more liberal of the Pharisees, such as Gamaliel and Hillel. We also need to beware of the danger of falling into the trap, as others seem to have done in their enthusiasm to ascribe a positive and identifiable Essenism to Jesus by (a) glamorizing the Essenes, and (b) projecting back onto Jesus the attitudes and beliefs of a later Church, some instances of which may even be found even in the gospel accounts themselves.

An important consideration to be taken into account is the involvement of John the Baptist in the account of the life and ministry of Jesus. There is similar but inconclusive evidence to suggest that John may have been some sort of Essene, and some have gone so far as to suggest that he was a member of the Qumran sect.

In the gospel of John we read:

"And this was the witness of John [the Baptist] when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem, so that they might ask him, "Who are you?" [1:19]. And those who had been sent were from the Pharisees. [1:24]. John answered them, saying, "I baptize with water; but there stands in your midst one whom you do not know. He it is who is to come after me, who has the right to go before me." [1:26]. These things took place in Bethabara across the Jordan, where John was baptizing." [1:28].

[Most theologically conventional translations read Bethany here, but some Greek texts read as above. Bethany, as is clear from other gospel passages, is only a mile or two from Jerusalem, near the Mount of Olives, and about eighteen miles from the Jordan, in whose waters John performed his baptism.]

Bethabara is described as one of the principal north fords of the Jordan, just to the east of the river, roughly on the border between Samaria and Galilee, about twenty miles from the modern Nazareth, about thirty miles from the "Land of Gennesaret" and less than fifteen miles from the southernmost point of the Sea of Galilee. It is at least seventy-two miles from the site of Qumran and about fifty five miles from Jerusalem. These distances are as the crow flies; in terms of practical travel, they would be somewhat further.

This places John quite close to Galilee, and places the entire event in a location consistent with the report in John's gospel, where on the following day Jesus recruits Andrew and Peter, both Galilean fishermen. From John again:

"On the next day Jesus decided to go out into Galilee; and he found Philip, and said to him, "Follow me." And Philip was from Bethsaida, of the city (Gk. *poleos*) of Andrew and Peter." [1:43].

This again is consistent with the location of Bethabara as against somewhere near Bethany, many miles further south. We remain in the territory of Galilee, principal site of the ministry of Jesus, and in the same area as the "Land of Gennesaret". The Bethsaida mentioned by John could even have been the "desert place" of Luke's account, also related in John 6:1-13. John talks of them "going into the mountain". Bethsaida-Julius is sited at the southern end of a mountainous range extending from the Sea of Galilee in the south, some 690 feet below sea level, to Mount Hermon in the north, nearly ten thousand feet higher. To the east and south are the now famous Golan Heights. Caesarea Philippi is roughly halfway to Mount Hermon and over four thousand feet above sea level. Could this area of Bethsaida-Julius have been the home base of one of the more liberal, marriage approving

"Essene" groups? And could it be from this community that both John the Baptist and Jesus emerged?

The suggestion that John may have been following a prescribed Essene rule is based on the Qumran *Manual of Discipline*, but he may have been following a more general Essene practice. *The Damascus Rule* or *Damascus Document* however is alone in mentioning a "New Covenant", and it is not impossible that a north Galilean group based their religious tradition and practice on this, for them, primary source. If the variations between descriptions of the various types of Pharisee, Essene, and Nazarene already noted were to some degree interchangeable (at least one ancient author describes the Essenes as a sect of the Pharisees, and all, after a manner, took "Nazar" vows) then may not such a group have given birth to the Nazarene New Covenant from which Christianity was later to develop?

[It is worth considering the probability that terms such as "Essene," "Nazarene," and "Pharisee" may not have been used in ancient times with the exactitude that modern intellectual thinking likes to employ to describe categories. Essenes were seers, Nazarenes were vow-takers, and Pharisees were set apart. But some Pharisees took vows, some Nazarenes may have been seers, and all three groups can be regarded, and would have regarded themselves as set apart.]

This theory is both attractive and in many ways appealing, but there may be complications to such a theory, such as already noted in the question of celibacy and marriage. A good indication

of some of these arises out of the visit of the priests and Levites "sent from the Pharisees" mentioned in John 1:19-24.

Jesus the Pharisee?

Harvey Falk, in investigating the Jewishness of Jesus, seeks to associate him with some kind of Pharisaic connection, and is worthy of consideration for a number of reasons, not least among which is the scene at the river Jordan, where, to quote John 1:26 again:

"... one stands in your midst whom you do not know. He it is who comes after me, who has the right to go before me."

In general terms, this text is often seen by Christians as implying that Jesus was among the crowd assembled for baptism by John, but there is nothing specific in the account at this point to suggest this. In fact it goes on to say:

"The next day John saw Jesus coming to him, and said, "Behold the lamb of God."

This could suggest that Jesus was not present on the earlier occasion, else why not point him out then? Another assumption often made is that John is addressing the crowd in general, but the obvious reading of the text suggests rather that he is replying to the Pharisees and Levites who had been sent from Jerusalem, whose concern was with the Baptist and the Baptist alone. A literal reading could take us to the other extreme, and actually imply that Jesus was a member of the delegation, which whilst not impossible, would seem to be a remote likelihood. It is put forward here simply to illustrate that the realm of inference and conjecture is not the best of research tools, and yet it is widely used by scholars in the field of scriptural research - not because they intend to deceive, or to exhibit bias, but simply because in the case of the gospels (for example) the actual writings are often far from explicit, and to get anywhere at all, some inference has to be drawn. "One standing in your midst" could well be an idiomatic way of saying that there is someone among the Pharisees generally who fulfils the promise spoken of by the Baptist. So is there anything elsewhere in the Christian scriptures which might support such a view?

"As he [Jesus] was speaking, a certain Pharisee asked him to dine with him, and having entered, he reclined." [Luke 11:37].

"The same day certain Pharisees came, saying to him, "Go out and go on from here, for Herod desires to kill you." [Luke 13:31].

"And it happened on his going into a house of one of the Pharisee leaders on a Sabbath to eat bread ... " [Luke 14:1]. [Gamaliel, perhaps, as in *The Teaching of Addai?*]

Clearly we must note that the general view of many Christians that Jesus totally opposed anything to do with the Pharisees cannot, on the basis of actual Christian records, be sustained. If we look more closely and more objectively at these records we shall see very quickly that much of the polemic of Jesus against the Pharisees is directed towards those who actually approach him during various episodes of his ministry, or that they could be references to the same people made in discourses following such visits. It would be a mistake to suppose that all Pharisees held to some kind of "party line". They were in fact noted for their love of debate, a healthy legacy which survives in the Judaism of today.

The term Pharisee, as we have constantly noted, is used to describe someone "set apart", and is quite clearly applied to a specific party or school of thought among the Jews at the time of Jesus. We must acknowledge however that in a wider sense Jesus himself was "set apart" from the ordinary people of his time. In this sense, the Essenes, and even the Nazarenes, could have been regarded in general terms as

kinds of Pharisees.

It should be noted that some Pharisees, and notable ones at that, were involved in various ways with Jesus, and it may be that the earliest Christian sources, before the divorce between church and synagogue, may have wished to emphasize these connections. In the reported discourse with Nicodemus we find Jesus explaining to Nicodemus, an important Pharisee, his teaching on regeneration and rebirth. The account concludes with Jesus rebuking Nicodemus by telling him that as a teacher in Israel, Nicodemus should have known these things. The likelihood is that Nicodemus knew them quite well, and an earlier version might have presented the discourse as a typical rabbinical debate. The suspicion therefore is that a later Christian editor with an anti-Jewish approach was anxious to show the superiority of Christian teaching compared with that of the Jews.

When a strong bias occurs in such matters, it was no less common in earlier centuries for doctrinally inconvenient documents to be conveniently "lost" than it is among propagandists today, as we shall see when we return to Rabbi Falk's observations regarding the activities of Menahem the Essene, in

which the follow up to Menahem's original mission seems to be entirely absent from all extant Jewish records, of which there is no shortage.

Another important Pharisee who is recorded in the gospel accounts is Joseph of Arimathea, who takes more than a passing interest in the burial of Jesus after the crucifixion - and of course there is the fascinating glimpse of a connection with Gamaliel in the Syriac *Teaching of Addai* already referred to.

Was Jesus then a Pharisee among Pharisees, in the strict sense of the term? Was he an Essene Pharisee making public a hitherto exclusive or esoteric doctrine? Was he some combination of the two?

The indications so far, from the evidence available, must suggest a negative answer to all three possibilities, though this does not mean that connections and friendships did not exist between Jesus and various religious Jews of his time, nor that he might at some time in his life, prior to his own ministry, actively belonged to a recognised Jewish sect.

During the period of his active ministry, as recorded in the gospels, he was clearly neither an Essene nor a Pharisee, certainly not in sectarian terms. The zeal with which Essenes applied themselves to ritual washing and bathing to avoid pollution is well attested by Josephus and others, and we find the Pharisees in Luke 11:37 amazed that Jesus did not wash his hands before eating, a story repeated in both

Matthew and Mark, which suggests that it was a matter of some significance in early Christian circles. This episode is in fact followed by the well known discourse of Jesus in which we are told that it is not what goes into our mouths that defiles us, but what comes out of them, a simple and practical observation as true now as then, and no doubt one of the many factors that has contributed to the appeal of Christianity to millions of people down the centuries.

The essence of the story and ministry of Jesus is that of total obedience to God and the Law of God as he perceived it. We may justly conclude that this particular Jewish Rabbi was called "The Nazarene" because of his evident lifetime vow of obedience, "even unto death". A Nazar from Galilee, he was, like the Pharisees, "set apart" for this work, and much of his teaching has points

in common with that of the Essenes, while yet reflecting some of the attitudes of liberal Pharisees such as Hillel and Gamaliel. Like Nicodemus, he was a teacher in Israel.

We may not be quite finished with the Essenes, however, and there remains the interesting part played in the proceedings by John the Baptist and his disciples, many of whom, together with some Pharisees and Essenes, later joined the Christians, still known as Nazarenes, after the death of Jesus himself.

JEWES OR ISRAELITES?

So far we have used the familiar term "The Jews" in the way in which it is commonly understood today. To have introduced the present speculation earlier would have entailed introducing too many qualifications to the basic arguments, and diverted attention from the main issues. As has already been noted, references to the Jews vary in quantity and location in the Greek received text of the New Testament. Now we shall endeavour to consider just who, or which people are referred to by the term during the first century of our era.

We first encounter Jews in the Old Testament, which will surprise no one, but the context is slightly different. The people known by this name are in fact the descendants of Judah, or are of the "tribe" of Judah, or simply "Judaeans" by virtue of living in the southern part of Palestine know as Judaea. The people from whom they sprang, in general racial terms, were largely Hebrews and Arameans (or "Syrians"). [Syria was also known as "Aram-Syria," and it seems probable that Aram is the oldest known name for this part of the world]. In a religious sense, in that the people we now know as Jews are upholders of the Law or Torah of Moses, they were and are the Children of Israel. "Israel" can mean "upright (true, straight) of God" and was first given, according to the Old Testament, to an individual

Hebrew, formerly called Jacob in Genesis 32:28, and the name was transferred to his descendants, as well as in a general sense to all people who owed allegiance to the same Mosaic Law. In an earlier period, Palestine was divided into just two regions - Israel in the north, and Judah in the south. Judah became our Judaea, though somewhat smaller, and by the time of Jesus what had been Israel was divided, with Galilee in the north, and Samaria lying between it and Judaea in the south.

The Greek word used for Jews throughout the New Testament is in fact the direct equivalent of Judaeans. Although the distinction may be more clearly expressed in languages other than English, most non-Jews (in the modern sense of the term) have little or no idea of the nature of Jewish religion, and similar misconceptions probably operate among all Gentiles today, whatever word is used. In the case of first century Greeks and Nazarenes we could be very mistaken in transposing to the first century the understanding and concepts of our own, and it is likely that this is often done, even by theologians and scholars not directly addressing the matters of our enquiry.

When therefore the Christian scriptures speak of the Jews, they are quite possibly talking about Judaeans, if we read them in their own time and place rather than through the spectacles of later Christian apologetic and theological debate. We have already observed that apart from some form of allegiance to the Law of Moses, the majority of the inhabitants of what we know as Palestine or the Holy Land seem to have had varying views concerning the proper use and application of the Law and correct religious practice. The Qumran Essenes clearly had their own strongly divergent opinions, and the schismatic Samaritans had their own, separate place of worship and their own version of the scriptural canon of the time. On the philosophical level the variety was probably even greater.

Let us reiterate what was said earlier - at the time of Jesus there was no such thing as a single religion of the inhabitants of Palestine which we may designate as Judaism in the sense that this may be done today. The three main schools of thought seem to have been just that, concerning themselves mainly with interpretation of the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. All may be regarded as belonging to "Israel" in a generic sense, but not in a geographical sense. The debate may have been engaged, but its outcome had not been decided. [For a fuller account see article, *"Israel": Judaism and its Social Metaphors* by Jacob Neusner in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, LV/2 pp. 331-361].

If we had lived in that part of the world in those days we would most probably have been either Galileans, Samaritans, or Judaeans. Jesus and his twelve disciples were all, or nearly all, Galileans. In the gospels, Jesus speaks of going "to the lost

sheep of the house of Israel" - not to the Jews, or Judaeans. It may well be, in a number of passages in the New Testament, that references to the Jews are actually references to Judaeans, i.e., inhabitants of Judaea, and to Judaeans opponents of the Nazarenes. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that references to the Jews in many places are used in the way in which the followers of the Law of Moses might have used the term Israelites. This could indicate that the Greek-speaking world of the first century, from which our "official" versions of the New Testament derive, had the same lack of understanding concerning Israelite religion as the Gentile world of the twentieth.

If this conjecture is valid, it would assist us greatly in the very complicated task of trying to decide how much of the Greek New Testament is an authentic record dating from original eye-witness sources, and how much is anti-Jewish polemic of a later church which wanted to distance itself from Israel as much as possible for political and evangelical reasons. We know that from the Council of Nicea in 325 for example such councils began to be called not by the church itself, but by Roman emperors, as Christianity had by then become an important and recognised religion. A plea for acceptance within the Greek-speaking Roman Empire underlies much of the writings of early Church Fathers well before this date.

There, for the moment, we must leave this short digression, but it is likely that the issues which it raises and the questions it poses are unlikely to go away. The scope of this work does not allow for any detailed discussion on a text by text basis, fascinating and necessary as such a task might be. At best we can draw a large outline, ask some pertinent (or impertinent) questions, and put forward some ideas and thoughts which may help some sincere Christian-minded people to discover the religious essentials and truths which lie at the heart of a religion which, though it may not appear to be so, has been steadily and slowly digging its own grave for about a thousand years. Where, on the face of it, we would expect to see Christian embracing Christian the world over, we have in fact seen church attacking church, Christians cursing Christians, and Christians fighting and murdering each other in the name of a man who preached love and goodwill. It is still going on. I can almost hear Jesus saying to many of today's alleged Christians, "Woe to you hypocrites!" And I can well imagine a latter-day Paul writing a general letter to the churches of the twentieth century along the lines of 1 Corinthians 1:10ff:

"Now I beseech you, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to be of one accord, and let there be no divisions among you; but be perfectly united in one mind and one thought. For I have been informed that there are disputes among you. I say this because there some among you who say, "I am a follower of the Pope," and some who say, "I am a follower of Luther," or "I am a follower of Chrysostom," - or

Canterbury, or Ian Paisley.

"What? Is Christ divided? Was the Pope, or Ian Paisley, crucified for you? Were you baptised in the name of Chrysostom, or Luther, or Canterbury?"

"It is written, "He who glorifies, let him glorify in the Lord." Who then is the Pope, or Ian Paisley, or Canterbury, other than ministers through whom you were converted? Each is gifted as the Lord has given him. I have planted, the Pope, and Chrysostom, and Canterbury have watered, but the increase is given by God.

"Let no man deceive himself; whoever among you thinks that he is wise in this world, let him consider himself a fool, so that he may become wise, for the wisdom of this world is like foolishness to God. Let no one exalt himself over his fellow man on account of another man!"

I can easily imagine Jesus, too, saying to the churches, as in Mark 7:7f:

"Well did Isaiah prophesy concerning you, hypocrites, saying, "This people honours me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. In vain they worship me, teaching as doctrine the commandments of men."

It is a desire to sort out the difference between the commandments (and opinions) of men and the Law of God that has prompted this present undertaking, to which we shall now return, except that where it seems appropriate, we shall use the terms "the Jews" and "Judaeans" when referring to Greek New Testament sources in the sense in which it is suspected the original of the source may have intended.

PAUL THE APOSTLE

We have seen that concessions were made to Gentile converts in the matter of observance of the Mosaic Law, and that "we joined in writing" to that effect. Paul himself refers to this event in his letter to the Galatians: [*The New Testament According to the Eastern Text*, George M. Lamsa, A.J.Holman Company, Philadelphia 1968].

"And when they knew that the grace had been given to me, then James, Cephas, and John, who were considered to be pillars, gave to me and to Barnabas the right hand of fellowship; that we might labour among the Gentiles, and they among the people of the circumcision." [2:9] [Note here the use not of "the Jews," nor even of "the people of Israel," but "those of the circumcision."]

Paul does not mention anything being put in writing, though that does not mean that it was not, and a version of the letter appears in Acts 15:23ff. It is interesting

to note that the dispute to be resolved is raised "by some of the men who had been converted from the sect of the Pharisees." [Acts 15:5] This is in a part of Acts that is not among the "we" sections mentioned earlier, and appears to be an enlargement of the "we" account in the later chapter.

The whole of the letter to the Galatians is of interest for our enquiry, as it is certainly one of the earliest of the letters of Paul that has survived. The letter was clearly written to a community in which the requirements of the Mosaic Law concerning circumcision were in dispute, i.e., whether male converts to the new movement should be circumcised. It is also a letter which brings to light in a fairly clear way the difference between "Jews" and "Judaeans." In 1:13 Paul writes:

"You have heard of my way of life when I was in Judaism, that I zealously persecuted the church [Greek *ecclesia*, assembly] of God, and ravaged it, and progressed in Judaism beyond many contemporaries of my people, being entirely zealous for my ancestral traditions."

As a disciple of Gamaliel he was certainly "in Judaism." In chapter two of Galatians we find the well known account in which Paul takes Peter to task for siding with the "Judaising" party when their representatives came to Antioch, where both apostles were at the time:

"For before some came from James, he ate with the Gentiles; but when they had come, he drew back and separated himself, being afraid of those of the circumcision." [2:12].

It would seem from this account that the wholehearted support of the "pillars" in Jerusalem may not have been as enthusiastic as we are led to believe, for Paul states that "even Barnabas" was swayed by the Jerusalem party. Paul claims that they are not acting according to the truth of the gospel, [note that there is no reference to the letter mentioned in Acts, only to the gospel] but this appears to mean that Paul's version of the truth no longer requires even the Israelite converts to be circumcised, which was clearly no intention of the Jerusalem agreement reported in Acts. Either Paul's position has changed, or he was less than honest while in Jerusalem himself.

Another almost self-evident fact is that even in Antioch, and now, as the letter shows, in Galatia, the issue of circumcision was still a matter of argument, and even a cause of dissension. It is possible that the actual conversation recorded with Peter in 2:14 may be a later addition, for if we read the text as a continuous narrative, it appears that Paul's discourse immediately following is a continuation of the speech to Peter, which does not make sense in context, especially as it could

represent Peter as a Judaeon, when we know he was a Galilean. Additionally, it is the only section of the letter which contains any other references to "Jews" other than a single reference in 2:15, which could even belong to the suspect passage. Either way, we see another example of Peter showing vacillation and weakness, as in his denial of Jesus during the period before the crucifixion. On the face of New Testament testimony, it is difficult to believe that Jesus actually placed Peter at the head of the Nazarene community, and, as we have seen, in practice we do not find him occupying this position, which clearly belongs to the brother of Jesus, Jacob or James.

Not only do we see from this letter that the issue of circumcision is still very much in dispute with regard to the Gentile and communities, but that there is still a marked division between Israelite converts and Gentile converts. Elsewhere we can discover that among the nations, i.e., the Gentiles, there was already a fairly large proportion of people attached to the synagogues who stopped short of circumcision, but otherwise accepted the general traditions and laws of Israel. These were known as proselytes, "God-fearers," or hearers of the Law, which latter term transferred itself into the later Christian church, and remains there in some Eastern churches to this day, even if its rules are not always observed in practice.

Circumcision or the lack of it was not the reason for the later Christian distinction however, but baptism. In the letter to the Galatians we are, as is the case with all of Paul's letters, in the formative period between the crucifixion of Jesus and the later general dispersion of the Jews [Judaeans] and Nazarenes alike, for at this time the Temple still stood in Jerusalem, and a Nazarene community under James still flourished there.

Paul's position was quite clearly that all converts to the gospel of Christ should be on equal terms, and that rather than have all gentiles circumcised according to Mosaic Law, the spiritual children of Israel should no longer be required to accept it. This was shrewd, and perhaps even necessary politics, no doubt based upon Paul's experience and observation of his own people among the nations (gentiles) and he was better qualified for an objective approach than any native of Judaea or Palestine, having himself been born among the nations and brought up at Tarsus, in Cilicia (now in modern Turkey). A practical consideration was quite possibly that in the case of native-born Israelites, children were circumcised on the eighth day after birth, as is recounted concerning Jesus, and a fairly simple affair. For adult converts however, such a prospect must have been alarming, to say the least, certainly very painful, and even dangerous. Had Paul not, in the end, won the day, it may well be that Christianity might have become nothing more than an obscure Jewish sect.

What, however, we must ask ourselves, was the attitude or teaching of Jesus upon which Paul's claim was made, not with the matter of circumcision in particular, but with the suggestion of a mission to the Gentiles which did not require strict observance of the Mosaic Law? The matter of circumcision does not arise in the four gospels, the only references being to the circumcision of Jesus in Luke, and one speech in John 7:22ff, where Jesus says:

"Moses has given you circumcision, not that it comes from Moses, but from the fathers, and on the Sabbath you circumcise a man. If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath, in order that the Law of Moses is not broken, are you angry with me because I made a complete man healthy on the Sabbath? Judge not according to appearances, but judge a just judgement."

This is a very slender text upon which to hang a complete doctrine, and the only thing that could commend it is the apparent reference to his accusers as "you," which could be taken as an indication that Jesus considered circumcision as a practice which mattered to others, but no longer to him. The purpose of the story is clearly to demonstrate, as in many other places, that Jesus accused his contemporaries in religion of following the letter of the Law while neglecting its spirit, and it is fair to observe that this would seem to be the main purpose of Paul's attitude in Galatians and elsewhere. Paul, it can be argued, is concerned, like Jesus, with the spirit of the Law above all else. Unlike Jesus however, he seems to approve of the abrogation of the old Law in favour of a new Law to accompany the New Covenant.

Alternatively, Jesus' own idea of fulfilling the Law may have been expressed obliquely in his frequent condemnation of the adherence only to the letter of it, in which case he might well have been in full agreement with Paul - a claim in fact made by Paul himself:

"But I want you to know ... that the gospel I preached is not from men. For I did not receive it from man, but through the revelation of Jesus Christ." [Galatians 1:11f].

This claim depends upon acceptance that he was enlightened by the risen Christ. Whether we accept the literal truth of this or not, the church itself depended upon a similar claim, especially as exemplified in the command of the risen Jesus in Matthew 28 to go and make disciples of all nations ... in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; i.e., to evangelize the Gentiles, the Nations, which is what they did. Their interest in doing this obviously increased after the destruction of the Temple in the year 70, and the nascent missions and churches cannot but have been reinforced after the final revolt in 135, when the Holy City of the Israelites

was completely overcome by the Romans, and its people dispersed throughout the known world. The developments that took place after the year 70 however are beyond the scope of this present enquiry.

Much has been made, as mentioned before, of Nazarene-Essene connections, and there are similarities. The Essenes had the equivalent of a central committee of twelve members under a president, and we find Jesus adopting exactly this structure for his own organisation. As late as the middle of the second century a similar organisation still existed in Alexandria in Egypt, whereby the twelve actually elected their own Patriarch, a practice which ceased on the death of the Patriarch Julian. [Bigg, *The Christian Platonists of Alexandria*, p.39, Oxford 1886]. In other matters however, the differences are far greater than the similarities. Jesus did all the "wrong" things, even by Pharisee standards, especially with regard to the observance of the details of the Law.

The Essenes seem to have been noted for their frequent ritual ablutions and austere asceticism, at Qumran at least, and even the most liberal Pharisee washed his hands before eating. On the other hand the liberal attitude to such matters on the part of Jesus and the first Nazarenes was clearly extreme, even among the customs of his own people. His call to repentance and absolute obedience to the spirit of the Law was, on the other hand, probably greater than any of them. But - apart from or as well as from God - from where did it come? To adapt his own parable, if the sower receives a revelation from on high, by whatever means, the seed he sows needs fertile ground in which to germinate; soil so fertile that his teaching was able to convert even Galatian Pharisees, and perhaps one of the staunchest Pharisees of his day, the apostle Paul.

MYSTERIES

The ancient Christian churches in the East did not refer to the rites of Baptism and Eucharist as Sacraments, as they became known in the West. They spoke, and often still do, of celebrating the Divine Mysteries. "Mysteries," as a religious term, has become associated in the West with the pagan religions which predated Christianity, and to some modern ears can easily suggest "occult" connotations, particularly as a fashionable non-Christian or anti-Church trend appears to be seeking to make respectable the Gnostic churches of the early centuries, all of which were condemned (often at very great length) by the early Church Fathers. The word "Gnostic" simply means "knowledge," though used in a particular sense by such sects, and much of the Christian gnosticism of the early centuries claimed to possess a mystic knowledge received directly from the risen Christ, or from an equivalent spiritual being of the same name and ethos. Lengthy and often absurd "conversations" are recounted as having taken place between the Gnostic disciples

and Jesus, and a strange (and unlikely) document published by an American, Edmund Bordeaux Szekely, as *The Essene Gospel of Peace* actually has Jesus giving detailed instructions for giving oneself an enema by doing strange things with a gourd!

A number of Church Fathers, in attacking this kind of literature, described it as "Gnosticism, falsely so-called." They went on to claim that Christianity offered the only true gnosis. This particular activity took place after the period we are considering, but it is interesting in that it shows a mystery element in the early church for which there is some support in New Testament scripture.

In *Judaism in the beginning of Christianity*, (SPCK London, 1985, p.41) Jacob Neusner writes:

" ... after 70 C.E. ... we witness the beginnings of the active construction of a new mode of being. The decision is to exercise freedom.

"It is a seeking of the world, not outside this one, but different from and better than the one formed by ordinary history ... a quest for eternity in the here and now, an effort to form a society capable of abiding amid change and storm."

It is probably true to say that this is the main underlying factor in religion today; so much so that people seem to take it for granted. As Neusner has shown, such a perception - apart from some of the Greek philosophers - did not form part of the standard religious ethic of the ancient world, whose people applied their religion very much to this world and the very ordinary benefits that might be obtained through the intercession of the gods. The Mosaic Law prescribed formulas for regulating almost every aspect of human life in the world, and its focus at the Jerusalem Temple was primarily to ensure the goodwill and favour of YHWH for the people of Israel. To love YHWH, and one's neighbour as oneself was, we may suspect, seen as applying to a supreme benefactor who had saved his people from the Egyptians, and provided an earthly, rather than a heavenly kingdom for them to inhabit.

Among the Pharisees, but not the Sadducees - who controlled the Temple at the time of Jesus - there was clearly a certain, even strong element of mysticism, but this seems to have been something offering exclusive access for a favoured few; in short, it was an esoteric philosophy, or

even a gnosis. A mystery - in the sense of a puzzle - occurs in another letter of Paul, his second to the Corinthians [12:2-3]:

"I knew a man in Christ more than fourteen years ago, but whether I knew him in the body or without the body, I do not know: God knows; this very one was caught up into the third heaven. And I still know this man, but whether in the body or without, I cannot tell: God knows; how that he was caught up into Paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." [Lamsa translation].

Not only is Paul telling us that he knows someone, but that he does not know the manner in which he knows him - is he perhaps disembodied? God knows, and apparently only God. Was Paul subject to some kind of hallucination in which he was unable to distinguish material substance with certainty?

Is he describing what we would call an out of the body experience? It may be that a scribe who copied this passage from an original Aramaic version did not know what this passage meant, for the Greek text can be taken to indicate that the uncertainty regarding the bodily state relates to Paul's acquaintance specifically; in other words, Paul was not sure whether his friend went to the third heaven in or out of it.

What is this "third heaven?" It is fair to infer from the text that the third heaven is effectively the same place as Paradise, where unspeakable words may be heard, and which it is not lawful to repeat. How many of these "heavens" are there? Three, at least. And what law prevents someone from repeating what has been heard? Is this a reference to the oral or unwritten Law of Moses claimed by the Pharisees - of whom he was one?

But Paul is writing to the Corinthians, and there is a historical context. The story takes up just two verses, and there is no explanation. This can only mean one thing: *it was not a mystery to the Corinthians.*

The quest for an "eternity here and now" which developed after the year 70, like the Nazarene movement before, must have had some foundation upon which to build. In the Greek-speaking world a ready-made foundation was already to hand in the Platonist philosophy, which from being a teaching belonging to a philosophical elite came to underlie a considerable area of Christian expression, especially in Alexandria. Later it led to the confusion and bitter debates concerning the nature of the person of Jesus as Christ. By the time of the Council of Chalcedon in the fifth century the conflict had caused most of the earliest Church Fathers to be effectively

condemned as heretics, if not directly, then through the condemnation of their writings and opinions.

None of this, on the surface, would have been of much concern to Jesus - or would it? He often refers to his Father in Heaven. [This is the usual translation, but the word used is plural, i.e., heavens. The same is true of the Hebrew equivalent term in Genesis]. In fact the Greek word is in the plural - Father in the heavens. Maybe Jesus had a "secret doctrine" concerning a number of "heavens," and some very early Jewish and/or Christian writings deal with a doctrine of "seven heavens." A small but significant hint of just such a possibility occurs with the conversation with the thief on the cross:

"Today you shall be with me in Paradise." [Luke 23:43].

The only other New Testament reference to Paradise is in the book of Revelation:

"He who has ears, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches: To him who overcomes I will give to him to eat of the Tree of Life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God." [2:7].

This would seem to be a reference back to the Tree of Life in Genesis, which stood in the Paradise of Eden, from which the first humanity [Adam] was expelled. The author of Revelation is holding out the promise of a return to the original human condition before the disobedience and fall from divine favour and grace; and here we find a common thread. This is also the claim and the purpose of the ministry of Jesus, of the preaching of Paul, of the apostles, and of all the Nazarenes: the opportunity for "salvation." At least one author has dismissed as naive the suggestion that the whole story could be represented as a kind of rescue mission, but if there is any truth, however puzzling or paradoxical, in the Genesis account of the fall of humanity, then that is precisely what it was, or intended to be.

Humanity, through disobedience to the spiritual, not the literal Law, had been expelled, not from the heavens (or heaven) but from Paradise, the proper place of its original creation. Here then was rescue, a means of restoration to divine favour, not through "works of the Law" - though these would help - but through a new obedience, available through a new covenant with God; and obedience to the spiritual, hidden, or oral teaching to which even Moses had been admitted. [Cf. Acts 7:22. "And Moses was trained in all the wisdom of the Egyptians]. In modern idiom, the apostles and evangelists were saying to the new communities and converts, "Okay folks, we've got the tickets, and we're going home! Here's what you do to get yours "

By whom, during our period, might such a "hidden" teaching have been preserved and developed? The answer is clear - among Essenes and Pharisees. The Nazarenes seem to have had connections with both, while belonging to neither. Was there some kind of esoteric "freemasonry" among its adherents? Once again the tantalizing glimpse of Jesus at the house of Gamaliel ["House of Gamaliel" in Hebrew/Aramaic would be Beth Gamaliel - the usual designation for a Rabbinic School] darts across our vision. Some New Testament references deserve our attention:

"Jesus spoke ... to the people ... in parables ... so that it might be fulfilled what was said by the prophet ... "I will bring out secrets hidden before the foundation of the world." [Matt. 13:35ff].

"And he did not speak to them without parables; but to his disciples, among themselves, he explained everything." [Mark 4:34].

"Now I entrust you to God, who will confirm you in my gospel which is preached concerning Jesus [the] Christ, in the revelation of the mystery which was hidden since the world began." [Romans 16:24].

"But we speak wisdom of God in a mystery which has been hidden, which God predetermined before the ages for our glory." [1 Corinthians 2:7]. [Including a doctrine of 3 or 7 heavens?]

All through the gospel accounts Jesus is acknowledged as a rabbi; himself, like the Pharisee Nicodemus, "a teacher in Israel." A teacher of parables to the people, but of secrets to his disciples. A revealer of mysteries "hidden before the world began." Was his offence that he broke the rules of the hidden oral tradition claimed by the Pharisees? [According to relatively modern rabbinic tradition, the oral Torah was written down in the early centuries of our era in the shape of the Mishnah and the Talmud. Modern students and exponents of the mystical tradition in Israel would vigorously dispute this]. Were the Nazarenes a sect which concurred in this, and following the crucifixion, continued it? Something of the sort could well be possible.

Certainly the Corinthians had received teaching from Paul of this kind, as the extracts from his two letters to them indicate. At the same time, it seems that much, or even most of the oral tradition and teaching remained secret. Jesus and his disciples had some influential friends that we know of: Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea and Gamaliel are a few who are named. All were Pharisees. Maybe there were others. It was the Pharisees, as Neusner has shown, who would take the religion of Israel into the new era, including the oral tradition, the hidden teaching

received from unnamed masters, the "Kabbalah." The Nazarenes may well have done the same. If, however, we hope to recover any of it, we will have to find our own source of the oral tradition; we shall have to "search the scriptures," for it is plain that while the "wisdom hidden in a mystery" is explicitly mentioned there, *it is not explicitly explained there.*

There is no absence of later evidence that this is a possibility, but it is not to be found directly in the period of Nazarene formation, but much later in both Christian and Jewish branches of the study of the mysteries of God. It is unlikely that we shall find it in books, though like the scriptures, they may offer us glimpses and clues, even keys perhaps. Ultimately, however, as with the first discoverers of the truth, it will be found in the secret places of the heart and mind, the inner recesses of the soul, and even deeper, as it is written in 1 Corinthians:

"But as it is written, "Eye has not seen and ear has not heard," nor has it risen up into the heart of man "the things that God has prepared for those that love him." But God has revealed them to us through the Spirit, for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the mind of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? So also no one has known the things of God except the Spirit of God. But we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, that we may understand the gifts that are given to us by God."

APPENDIX

THE JERUSALEM CHURCH

In view of the fact that Christianity developed from the religion of Israel, we need to consider whether the original Nazarenes were in fact Christians as we would understand the term today, or, for that matter, as the term was understood within a hundred years of the crucifixion.

As we have already observed, it is most unlikely that there was not already in existence a foundation, whether an organised movement or merely a sympathetic inclination among the populace, upon which Jesus built when establishing his teaching ministry. Further, we have seen that there must have been at least some form of rudimentary organisation in Jerusalem itself, a fact attested to by the pre-arrangement for the collecting of an ass or colt for Jesus' symbolic entry into the city, and the advance provision of the upper room in which the last supper was celebrated.

As soon as we begin to enquire into these matters we come across one of the

puzzles concerning the earliest Nazarene community that has never been adequately explained - at least, from a later Church doctrinal viewpoint. This puzzle centres round the fact that at the very beginning of Christian expansion and mission we find a church in Jerusalem headed, not by Peter, the apparent first choice of Jesus, but by James or Jacob, "the brother of the Lord," i.e., Jesus' brother. It may be that "brother" in this context should be seen in a religious rather than a family sense. If this is the case, however, it is odd to say in the least that little mention or importance is assigned to James in the gospel accounts. It is equally odd that if he were literally a blood relative (or even a step-brother, as some have supposed) that he should have risen to such prominence so early on.

What we do know of James from tradition all attests to his sanctity and holiness, and the single letter attributed to him in the New Testament canon has a very Judaic flavour, in keeping with one who spent so much time in prayer in the Jerusalem Temple that his knees were calloused.

If the miraculous origin of Jesus' birth in the beginning of the gospels attributed to Matthew and Luke are set aside, there is nothing in the New Testament writings to suggest that the immediate family of Jesus are anything other than his mother, brothers, and sisters, in the same way as the immediate family of anyone else, though he is presented as showing little regard for them. The impression fostered in the gospels seems to be that the family of Jesus were (a) indifferent to his activities, (b) puzzled by them, (c) anxious about his sanity, or even (d) relatively hostile. When Jesus is told in Matthew 12:46-50 that his mother and brothers want to see him he is depicted as using the occasion to foster a wider sense of family and community in which his own followers become "mothers and brothers" to him, while his actual relations are, apparently left waiting or ignored. In Luke 14:26 Jesus is even made to advocate "hating" one's father and mother in the furtherance of the spiritual ideal, a notion that is impossible to square with the same Jesus who "has come not to destroy, but to fulfil" the Law of Moses, which explicitly requires honouring one's parents. To be sure, this saying is usually, and probably rightly so, interpreted as being symbolic of a higher devotion, but one cannot help wondering if there might have been a more tactful way to put it.

However we look at it, there is no doubt that Jesus had close relatives, among whom may have been James of Jerusalem, known to later history as James the Just. James, furthermore, is discovered heading the Jerusalem community within a very short time after the crucifixion, and is said by Paul in 1 Corinthians [15:1f] to have been the recipient of one of the resurrection appearances. Regardless of the attitude or opinion of James towards Jesus and his teaching prior to the crucifixion, we should not be surprised were we to discover that Jesus' family supported him in

various ways (such as, perhaps, arranging for the provision of an ass or colt and the use of the upper room in Jerusalem). Then, as now, it is quite reasonable that family feelings and loyalties would have been important.

Throughout history families have characteristically supported and protected even the blackest of their black sheep, even when they deplored the behaviour of the person concerned, and we have no firm evidence to suggest hostility towards Jesus and his teaching on the part of his family. Indeed, in Matthew 12:46, mentioned earlier, his mother and brothers seem to have been either actively concerned in his activities, or at least concerned about them. It is unlikely they would have interrupted him in his work just to tell him that his dinner was ready. Whether, after his speech concerning the more important "family" relationship enjoined upon his disciples they actually got to see him, and if they did, what then transpired, we are not told.

It is reasonable to conjecture therefore that James, or James and others, were involved in the establishment of the first "Christian" or Nazarene community in the holy city of Israel itself. Quite early tradition attributes to James the Nazarite vow, seemingly, in his case, permanent, and he is portrayed as worshipping daily in the Temple at Jerusalem, later dying a martyr's death for his convictions. What the difference may have been between a Nazarite and a Nazarene vow, if any, we do not know (although what most Christians would regard as a horrifying conjecture is to be found in Matt. 19:10ff). It may be, that were we to discover some ancient and authentic gospel or epistle in Aramaic or Hebrew, we should discover that they were the same thing, or different forms of the same thing. All early images or icons of Jesus show him with uncut hair, which is at least one certain indication of Nazarite practice, though we do not know that men of his time necessarily wore their hair short.

The point to be made here is that we can by no means be certain that the first Nazarene followers of Jesus and the later Christians represent exactly the same thing. The same must also be conjectured of the first communities, and the very first community of which there is any firm record is that of Jerusalem, a community headed not by Peter, as the chief disciple (if indeed he was) but by James, "the brother of the Lord." Furthermore, it seems to have been an exclusively Jewish community, bound by the Law of Moses, and following the Mosaic Law in its worship and practice. It seems to have had its own "synagogue" or assembly, and to have made regular and continuous use of the nearby Temple. In the language of a later age, it was the first Jewish-Christian church. It was not the only such. Not too much later we come across what a later Church considered as the first schism, and perhaps heresy, in the shape of the Ebionite Christians,

who, while accepting Jesus, nonetheless retained the entire Mosaic Law, and retained, as Jews, the practice of circumcision, the adherence to which practice was to raise major problems for Paul and his Gentile ministry.

THE COUNCIL OF JERUSALEM

At what is often called the Council of Jerusalem, a well-known author states:

"... it was resolved, against some opposition, that circumcision should not be required." [For Gentile converts]. [*Men and Movements in the Primitive Church*, p.38. F.F.Bruce, Paternoster Press, Exeter 1979].

This assumption made by a number of authors and scholars in the course of Christian exegesis warrants closer investigation. As Paul tells us in his letter to the Galatians [2:1f] he went with Barnabas and Titus to Jerusalem about fourteen years [some scholars reckon seventeen years] after his own conversion to obtain the decision of the Jerusalem church on this very issue, and here for once the New Testament accounts are not wanting in information. Paul states:

"I went up according to a revelation, and I put before them the gospel which I proclaim in the Nations ... but not even Titus, being a Greek, was required to be circumcised."

Paul goes on to relate that he stood firm against "false brothers" to whom "not even for one hour we yielded in subjection." In the same letter, Paul is clearly more than a little upset by the activities of these "false brothers," but our copies of the letter fail to tell us precisely why they were to be so regarded, or in what their falsity consisted. We may safely presume from the context however that it was concerned in no small measure with the vexing question of circumcision. This is a text where we might reasonably suspect that the hand of a later editor has been at work, not to rearrange the account, as happens elsewhere if textual criticism is to be taken into account, but simply to delete the details of the conflict, so that all we have left at this point is Paul's anger, but not that the debate may have been far more vociferous, and far less harmonious than the existing account in Galatians would have us believe. Who were these "false brothers?" We may safely assume that they were the opposition mentioned in the above quotation.

Fortunately, we do not have to rely on Paul's account alone, for the entire episode is also recorded in the book of Acts, where more information is given. There are actually two accounts, one of which occurs in the "we" section of Acts. Although it may seem that two visits are referred to, it may be that we are reading two versions of the same event from two different original sources, namely the record as handed

down by the early church, and the record made by those who were actually present, possibly the author of Luke's gospel and others, including Paul, who sought the decision of the mother community in Jerusalem. One crucial fact is clear from the entire episode in whatever version - the Jerusalem community was the central authority at this time, and James, not Peter, was considered the head of the entire Nazarene movement, although Peter was clearly present, and has a speech attributed to him. We shall consider this speech shortly, but first we will seek to establish the identity of the "false brothers" or "opposition" previously mentioned. Happily, what the letter to the Galatians fails to tell us, one of Paul's travelling companions does - they were Pharisees. According to Acts 15:1ff, which may be regarded as the church's account,

"But some men came down from Judaea and were teaching the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." And when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem [from Antioch] to the apostles and elders about this question ... but some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to charge them to keep the Law of Moses."

Paul it seems was not the only Nazarene Pharisee, and again the shadow of the famous Gamaliel hovers on the edge of the first-century scenario, and we will permit ourselves a small digression in order to show why we have made such frequent reference to him.

According to *The Teaching of Addai*, [page 7. Trans. George Howard, with Aramaic text. Scholars Press, U.S.A. ISBN 0-89130-490-8]:

"Abgar wished that he himself might cross over and go to Palestine and see with his own eyes everything that the Messiah was doing. But because he could not pass over a district of the Romans that was not his, lest this occasion should provoke bitter enmity, he wrote a letter and sent it to the Messiah by Hanan the archivist. He went out from Edessa on the fourteenth of Adar, entered Jerusalem on the twelfth of Nisan on the fourth day of the week, and found the Messiah in the house of Gamaliel a Prince of the Jews."

Admittedly this Syriac/Aramaic source dates from circa 400, but it may well be that like other early documents it nonetheless transmits a genuine tradition based upon actual events which were considered at the time of their occurrence to have been of especial significance. In this case the significance was relevant mainly to the church in Edessa, [modern Urfa, in Turkey] which sought to preserve the record of its own foundation and heritage. Apart from the interesting details about

the dates and the day of the week, the reference to Gamaliel is brief, and almost of a passing nature. A shrewd Christian apologist, we might suspect, could have made much more of the discovery of Jesus in the house of Gamaliel, especially as he features in Acts, speaking on behalf of the apostles. The opportunity would have existed to place in the mouth of Gamaliel words of commendation of Christian doctrine adapted, perhaps, from his speech in Acts, but the writer fails to take advantage of such a golden opportunity. The very fact of the statement being, as it were, a "throw-away line" tends to argue in favour of its veracity as a historical recollection. We can begin to see that a Pharisaic connection with the early Nazarenes may have been greater than the anti-Pharisaic sentiment placed in the mouth of Jesus in the gospels is clearly intended to suggest.

According to the same book of Acts, the first Jerusalem church contained "believers who were of the party of the Pharisees," thus bespeaking another original tradition. It is also in Acts, as we have noted, that the same Gamaliel speaks on behalf of the accused apostles after the crucifixion, when they were engaged on their own missionary activity. To anticipate the possibility to which this discourse may be leading, it may be that there was, in the very earliest days of Nazarene formation, more than a little Pharisee support for Jesus and his teaching, both before and after the crucifixion. We have already noted the involvement of other leading Jews in the gospel accounts. Could it be that in mentioning such luminaries as Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, and Gamaliel, the first Nazarene scribes merely noted some of the prominent Pharisees involved, although there were also in fact a number of less significant personages associated with the followers of the new covenant?

We may infer from the reference in Acts to Gamaliel that by the time of the arrest of the apostles which gave rise to his speech in their defence that he at least was no longer, if ever he had been, a "follower" or supporter of Jesus. We find little in later Christian tradition that relates to Nicodemus, but legends concerning Joseph, not without support, persist in Britain to this day.

That Gamaliel might at one time have supported or associated with Jesus is by no means impossible prior to the year 70, when Jewish thought and speculation was, as Neusner has shown, far less structured or clearly defined (in sectarian terms) as is often supposed. We know from the gospels, in similar "throw-away lines" to that of the Edessa story, that Jesus was on at least two occasions invited to eat at the home of a Pharisee. Added to the present line of speculation, we may be obtaining some very real, if fleeting pointers towards the genuine Jesus, the Nazarene, before he became known to history as "Jesus the Christ, the Messiah of Israel."

CIRCUMCISION

Having considered the letter to the Galatians, and the Church's own account of the Jerusalem Council in Acts, we will complete the picture with the record as it appears in the "we" section of Acts, as told by those present, and incorporated into Luke's account in Acts 21:17ff.

"When we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. On the next day, Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders came. Having greeted them, he related one by one the things that God had worked among the Nations [Gentiles] through his ministry. Having heard him, they glorified the Lord, and said to him, "See, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and all are zealous for the Law. And they were told about you, that you teach the Jews among the Nations to forsake Moses, telling all the Jews among the Nations not to circumcise their children, nor to follow the customs. What then is this? They will certainly hear that you have come. Therefore do what we tell you: there are four men with us who are under a vow; take these men and be purified with them, and pay their expenses, so that they may shave their heads. This way all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself walk in an orderly manner, keeping the Law.

"And as to the believing Gentiles, we have joined [together] in writing, judging them to observe only to keep themselves from what has been sacrificed to idols, from blood, and from what has been strangled."

First then, the elders draw Paul's attention to the fact that a large number of Jews ("myriads") had become part of the new Nazarene movement in Jerusalem, but are seriously disturbed by stories that Paul had been advocating that Jews of the dispersion, i.e., outside of Palestine, did not need to be circumcised nor to follow the Laws of Moses. We know from Paul's own letters that these charges were certainly true in certain instances or at a certain period, [it is possible that some of these matters were advocated by Paul after the Council of Jerusalem and its doubtful success in real terms] though to what extent the complaints were justified at the time of the Jerusalem Council we cannot be certain. We are bound to be wonder though if Paul may not have dissembled a little, for we know also from his own writings that "for the sake of the gospel" he favoured acting as a Jew when among Jews, and as a Gentile when among Gentiles, being "all things to all men." The important consideration here though is the judgement of the elders of the Jerusalem church. We can compare the above account with the decision of James as recorded in the speech ascribed to him in the other section of Acts [15:19-21]:

"... I judge not to trouble the Gentiles who turn to God, but to write to them to hold back from the pollutions of idols, from fornication and things strangled, and from blood. For Moses has had those who preach him in every city from early

generations, for he is read in the synagogue on every Sabbath."

The next section of Acts [15:22-29] then goes on to give the text of the letter, which repeats the decision. It is significant however that although Paul and Barnabas are mentioned as accompanying the letter, it is in fact sent in the care of one Judas (called Barsabbas) and another companion, Silas, who are to repeat the decision verbally. According to the "we" account, however, Paul would have been unable to accompany Barnabas and the others, having been arrested in Jerusalem as a consequence of the disturbances caused by his appearance in the Temple with the four men, which was to lead to his going eventually to Rome as a prisoner, from where the letter to the Galatians, significantly, is said to have been written.

We can see that the Jerusalem elders under James are seen to have acted with considerable subtlety. They may well, as Paul tells the Galatians, have offered the "right hand of fellowship" to him and Barnabas. but they were not going to trust the delivery of the letter to them. Not only this, but Judas and Silas have instructions to convey the decision verbally in addition to the letter. The only logical inference has to be that they did not trust Paul or Barnabas in this matter, and may have suspected that the letter might not arrive in the form described, or at all. If, as it appears on the surface, and as claimed by Paul, they accepted that Gentiles need not be circumcised, what need could there have been for such precautions? One important fact should be noted:

The decision as recorded does not mention circumcision as all - but this was the matter directly in dispute. Again, the possibility arises that the accounts are not complete; in short, a later Church authority may well have "cleaned up the story" for Gentile consumption - but maybe not as thoroughly as might have been desired. Let us examine again the final part of James' speech:

"For Moses has had those who preach him in every city from early generations, for he is read in the synagogue on every Sabbath."

This was certainly true, both among the "early generations" and also during the period in which James is exercising his office as head of the Jerusalem community, and especially so in the Jewish synagogues "among the Nations." We know however that although the word of Moses was preached to Gentiles in Jewish synagogues, they were not considered to have become Jews. This they could only do by accepting the whole of the Law of Moses, including circumcision.

Such uncircumcised converts were known as "hearers" or "God-fearers," and were accepted by the synagogues outside of Palestine (and maybe also in Jerusalem) as worthy of commendation. In order to acquire full membership of the spiritual, as

distinct from the temporal Israel however they had to undergo a lengthy period of instruction, which if successfully completed allowed them into full participation in the Mosaic covenant, a covenant which could be sealed only by the act of circumcision.

We know that in the later Church Paul's rejection of the observance of the letter of the Law of Israel won the day, but we also discover that the long period of instruction remained, often lasting as long as three years. Instead of a successful novitiate being sealed by circumcision however, the later Church effected the same sealing, now in a new covenant, by the act of baptism and anointing. Indeed, it was the act of anointing - "Christing" in Greek - which had much to do with the very name of "Christian." When James handed down the decision of the Jerusalem community, this name had yet to be invented, and the new communities were still known as either "Followers of the Way" or "Nazarenes."

The fact of the matter is clear: prior to the year 70, the precise nature, practice, and probably the doctrine of the developing movement had yet to achieve anything like a unified system, and in the matter of the circumcision dispute, it may not have been required of Gentile converts if they could be regarded as being in the same case as the "God-fearers" and "hearers" already present in some numbers within more "orthodox" synagogues. In fact the Christian Church was not to achieve any real semblance of universal agreement until the first so-called ecumenical council of Nicea in 325, and then largely because the emperor Constantine issued dire warnings to the disputing bishops if they failed to reach a form of doctrinal agreement.

In many ways we do not need to employ the full apparatus of textual and other scholarly critical methods, useful as these disciplines are, in order to highlight the problems faced by the first Nazarenes, for even the edited versions of the New Testament scriptures as they have come down to us reveal the various inconsistencies quite clearly, as we can see when we consider the speech attributed to Peter in Acts 15:7-11:

"And after there had been much discussion, Peter rose up and said to them, "Men, brothers, you know that in the early days God chose those among us that through my mouth the Nations [Gentiles] were to hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, giving to them the Holy Spirit in the same way as he did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, having purified their hearts by faith. So why do you tempt God by putting a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we believe ourselves to have been saved in the same way as them."

In Galatians 2:9 Paul states quite clearly that he and Barnabas were declared to be the apostles to the Nations [Gentiles] while James and Peter [Cephas] should be responsible for the people of the circumcision, i.e., "The Jews." Peter, however, in the speech attributed to him, is stating equally clearly that he is the apostle to the Nations, and we might wonder if this could account for the fact of James being head of the exclusively Jewish community in Jerusalem. In practice though we discover from other accounts that Peter and Paul went to Jew and Gentile alike, yet it is noteworthy that Paul and his party, in their various travels, seem always to have gone first to the synagogues, and only after that to Gentile communities outside the particularly Judaic environment. We may suspect that Peter did the same.

And what, we must seriously wonder, does Peter mean when he refers to "a yoke upon the necks of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?" Is he referring to the yoke of the Torah, the Law of Moses? If so, how is it that James, in his letter, does not abrogate obedience to this Law, but seems merely to allow the concessions that would obtain in any case for any Gentile "God-fearer?" And does not Jesus himself, in the gospel account, enjoin observance of the Law, which he has "come to fulfil? Could this "yoke" refer to something else? If Peter did indeed make such a speech, it would hardly have gone down well with the Nazarene Pharisees mentioned in the dispute. It may well be that Luke, or his editor, when writing or editing the sources for the book of Acts, may have introduced some later doctrinal concepts which would not have been likely to exist in the Jerusalem community during the period we are considering. Equally, it may be that a similar editorial or redactional amendment of the text may have been introduced by a later scribe.

This is not the only inconsistency concerning the events surrounding the circumcision debate. In the "we" account of Acts 21, Paul does not get to return to Antioch after the judgement of James and company, as he is arrested while attempting to fulfil the conditions placed on him with the four men under a vow, when he actually goes with them into the Temple. In Acts 15 however he returns with Barnabas to Antioch, and sets forth upon a number of other adventures. As it seems unlikely that the Jerusalem community would not only have handed the same decision twice, but also written the same letter twice, then the only inference is that Acts 15 and 21 are different versions of the same events. If the letter to the Galatians was indeed written from Rome, this would tend to support the "we" version in Acts 21, and it seems likely that the source for Acts 15 has got his chronology mixed up.

There is one factor in the speech attributed to Peter which does however indicate

the primary significance of there having been a Nazarene community in the first place. If the Jerusalem church were exclusively Judaic in their observance of the Torah, the practice of circumcision included, and in their regular and presumably conventional use of the Temple, in what way did they differ from their fellow Jews? In particular, how did this affect the Pharisees in Jerusalem who did not support the new movement represented by James? The answer which suggests itself, mentioned in Peter's speech, is the fact of the Nazarene claim to have received the Holy Spirit, the most prominent and most important expression of it, as emphasised in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians - prophecy.

Prophecy, as understood in the early church, did not refer primarily to foretelling the future, though it might include this gift, but the ability to interpretations made available to both individual disciples and also to entire communities. It was this gift, and probably only this gift, which in the earliest days, characterised the entire movement, and gave it the power and charisma to become, in due course, the source of a new and vibrant religious movement which would eventually outlive the Roman Empire itself, though it would become much changed in the process. If perhaps it had not divorced itself entirely from its roots in the religion of Israel, severing completely the connection between "Jew" and "Gentile" - even to the extent that a later Christian Church would actually begin "missions to the Jews" - then all the ancient prophecies concerning the Messiah of Israel who would save the "Upright of God" from their sins, and personified in, or symbolised by the person of Jesus the Nazarene might have been fulfilled, and we might even now be seeing the approach of "a new heaven and a new earth."

Alas, the divorce became total and bitter, and both parties, in their various ways, paid the alimony of persecution, torture, and death. There is little to choose, in terms of horror, between the persecution of Christians under Nero and Diocletian and that of the Jews under Hitler. By whatever grace both parties survived their persecutors, though recollection of the more recent events may distort our perspective of history. The God of Israel is, nonetheless, also the God of the Christians.

Jew and Christian both agree that the whole of the Law may be summed up in the commandment to love God, and to love one's neighbour as oneself. Is it not time that this love was shared, not just in the rarefied air of mystic prayer, but right here on earth?

"Rabbi Tarfon ... would say: It is not your job to finish the work, but you are not free to walk away from it." [*Pirke Avot*, translated by Jacob Neusner. Rossel Books, Dallas, Texas 1983].

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