

JEWISH LIFE IN THE GOSPELS

Judaism, which is primarily the post-exilic (late 6th century BC) evolution of a pre-exilic Judahite identity, experiences several formative moments during and after the Babylonian exile. Among many other examples were noticeable Persian influences that found their way into the Hebrew language, as well as revamped celestial (e.g., angels and demons) and dualistic conceptions of the world. With the advent of Hellenism into the east in 333/2 BC with Alexander the Great, Judaism was irrevocably changed in both its incorporation and fight against it. In fact, the complex forces that shaped Judaism between the fourth and first century BC would be foundational to the type of Judaism observed by Jesus and his disciples. As one opens the Gospels, Judaism is especially far removed from the world of the Israelites, and due to various revolts, a small period of Jewish autonomy (140–37 BC), the factionalism of Jewish groups, the entry of Roman might into the east and the force of its imperial hand, Jewish culture in Jesus' day was in the midst of a renaissance and on the cusp of another revolution. Yet, even with these changes there was still a common core to Jewish faith and practice: God, Torah, and temple.

With regard to Jewish life, the Evangelists often assume that their audiences are knowledgeable of it. For this reason, they do not stop to unpack the Jewish world at every turn. When something is unknown, the Evangelists normally provide some explanation: for example, Mark translates for his readers the two occasions where he uses Aramaic terms, signaling that his readers do not know the language (5:41; 7:34). That notwithstanding, the Gospels's depiction of a Jewish pietist from the Galilee naturally betray their role as a source for 1st-century Jewish life.

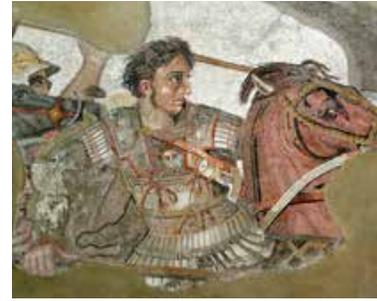
Languages of the First Century AD. The Gospels originate in a trilingual environment, Greek, Aramaic, and Hebrew. Despite being written in *koiné* (“common”) Greek—the *lingua franca* of the eastern Roman Empire—as one moved to a more eastern context, Aramaic and, perhaps, more importantly, Hebrew continued to be spoken within Jewish communities. While both Aramaic and Greek have been staples in New Testament scholarship, Hebrew still lacks equal attention. Yet, there is now a consensus among philologists that Hebrew was indeed alive and well.²² It was not simply a holy language limited to religious texts. This trilingual environment is attested in the Dead Sea Scrolls: the majority of the nearly thousand scrolls were written in Hebrew, especially those that were authored by the community at *Khirbet Qumran*. The next largest collection is an important cache of Aramaic documents that primarily emerge from east of the land of Israel. Finally, there are a relatively small number of texts composed in Greek.

Indeed, some of the sources used by the Evangelists originate in a Semitic environment, Aramaic (see “Ephphatha” [εφφαθα] in Mark 7:34) and

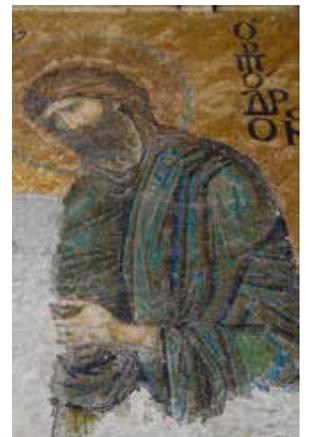
Hebrew. For example, in the narrative of “John’s Preaching of Repentance,” the Baptist states “Bear fruit that befits repentance, and do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up sons to Abraham” (Matt 3:8–9; Luke 3:8). The passage contains a wordplay between “sons” and “stones” that makes the best sense in Hebrew, but also works in Aramaic. In Greek there are differing words for both sons and stones (*lithoi/uioi*: λιθοι/υιοι), but the wordplay is obvious in Aramaic, *bʿnin* and *abnin* (בְּנִין/אֲבָנִים), and Hebrew, *banim* and *ebanim* (בָּנִים/אֲבָנִים), thereby making sense of the Baptist’s emphasis on God’s power to raise true followers.

Some texts cannot be otherwise understood in any other language than Hebrew. Scholars have already noted that the Gospels are full of post-biblical Hebraisms²³—Hebrew syntax or terminology that is present in the Greek of the Gospels—that are not the result of Greek translations, like the Septuagint, or attested in biblical Hebrew. These preserve a style of Hebrew that developed in the Second Temple period. For example, the idiom “flesh and blood,” which is intended to describe a human being, is a phrase that appears for the first time in manuscript A (6r:8) of Ben Sira, “Like flourishing leaves on a spreading tree which sheds some and puts forth others, so are the generations of flesh and blood” (*basar ve-dam*: בֶּשֶׂר וְדָם; *sarx kai haima*: σὰρξ καὶ αἷμα; 14:18, 17:31; also *m. Sot.* 8:1). This terminology is not inherently Greek, and appears so in Ben Sira because it is a Greek translation of a Hebrew original. The same phrase appears again in Matt 16:17, “And Jesus answered him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-jona! For flesh and blood (σὰρξ καὶ αἷμα) has not revealed this to you...’”

Another discernible example of this appears in Matthew 6:1: “Beware of practicing your righteous (*dikaosune*: δικαιοσύνη) before men in order to be seen by them....” Verse 2 defines “righteousness” as alms/charity, “So, when you give alms...” (*eleemosune*: ἐλεημοσύνη). In Greek, however, “righteousness” (*dikaosune*) does not mean charity as it often expresses one of the four Greek virtues (i.e., temperance, prudence, courage, righteousness). In Hebrew, the matter is quite different; by the late Second Temple period, *tzedaqah* (צְדָקָה; i.e., “righteousness”) came to refer specifically to “charity/almsgiving” (see Sir 3:30).²⁴ In the Mishnah, *tzedaqah* is the term used generally for charity (e.g., *gabbai tzedaqah*: גַּבְבָּי צְדָקָה = charity collectors; *m. Dem.* 3:1). This is not the language situation in the early Roman period; there it was still employed to refer to inter-relational “justice” (e.g., IQS 11:5) as it does in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Jer 4:2). It suggests that the Hebrew (Semitisms) underlying some of the Gospel texts does not mimic that of the Bible, but is a witness to the evolution of meaning that one finds in Jewish texts outside of the Gospels.



Alexander the Great in Battle of Issus (from mosaic found at Pompeii) (photo Berthold Werner, via Wikimedia Commons).



John the Baptist, mosaic in Hagia Sophia, Istanbul (photo Maureen Farrell Garcia).



Charity box with “righteousness” (= charity) written in Hebrew (photo Maureen Farrell Garcia).



Birth of Christ, 19th-century lithograph by M. Fanoli, after J. Führich (via Wikimedia Commons).



Cornice of 3rd-century basalt stone synagogue at Chorazin (photo Maureen Farrell Garcia)



Olive press in a cave dwelling at Beth Guvrin (photo Bukvoed, via Wikimedia Commons).



First-century cave dwelling in Nazareth (photo Jeffrey P. Garcia).

The Birth of Jesus and Jewish Home Life. Luke states that as a result of the census of Quirinius, Joseph returned with Mary, who was with child, to his home city of Bethlehem in Judea (2:3). The Evangelist then notes, “and while they were there” (*egeneto de en to einai autous*: Εγένετο δὲ ἐν τῷ εἶναι αὐτοῦς) Mary went into labor (v. 4). The statement regarding Jesus’ birth, “And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn,” has accrued layers of Christian tradition, in particular, due to the translation of the final word “inn” and reference to a “manger” (*fatne*: φάτνη; i.e., an animal trough). Often what is envisioned is a nativity scene that involves a wooden or stone barn that is isolated from family and friends. Understanding the story naturally requires considering how ancient Jews lived in Bethlehem and in other areas of the land of Israel. Excavations have shown that houses in first-century Jewish villages and towns were often built with local stone; for example, the homes and buildings in Chorazin and Capernaum were primarily constructed of local basalt (black volcanic) stone. Some of these basalt homes are in the *insula* style, where several residences are built around a central courtyard. Often these homes were shared by extended families. In Bethlehem and Nazareth, it is clear that homes were completely, or in part, constructed out of interconnected cave systems. Specifically, for Bethlehem, despite the centuries of ornate decorations in the Church of Nativity, pilgrims visiting the traditional location of Jesus’ birth still get a sense that they are walking down into a cave. The same types of homes can be seen, without the church tapestries, under the Church of the Annunciation in Nazareth, as well as in the limestone cave systems at Beth Guvrin/Maresha. These homes were often divided between the hearth or clay oven and livestock on one level—the family’s livestock would provide warmth during the cooler rainy season—and the family’s bedrooms on the upper levels (in the summer families would sometimes sleep on the roofs of the homes).

Awareness of how Jewish communities lived in antiquity helps one to re-address Jesus’ birth story. Again, traditionally, he was born alone, humble, isolated from the rest of Bethlehem—his own people. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph are displaced to a barn be-

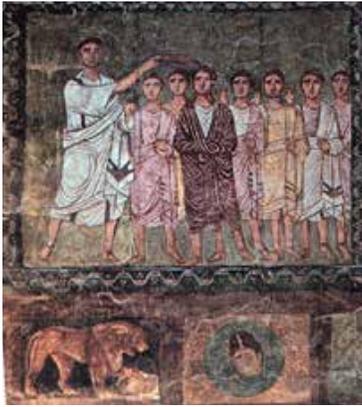


Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. The steps on the left show that the traditional site is located within a cave (photo Darko Teper Donatus, via Wikimedia Commons).

cause the “inn,” where payment may have secured a place to stay, had no vacancies. The problem here is that “inn” is not a proper translation of the Greek word *katalumati* (καταλύματι). Stephen Carlson has already correctly argued that the Greek should be translated, “place to stay.”²⁵ Furthermore, Luke suggests that Joseph needs to return to his ancestral home and is already there when Mary goes into labor. Certainly, Joseph’s return to Bethlehem in light of the census implies that he would have his family’s home to stay. Thus, it is unlikely that they were in need of another place, or *inn*, especially if Joseph’s family received word that he was returning with his betrothed.

Indeed, it would have been normal for Joseph’s family to have prepared a marital place for Mary, Joseph, and child—one that was an addition to the home. Middle Eastern customs, up to the modern day, indicate that when a son marries, additions would be made to the house in order to accommodate the growing family. This addition could easily be referred to in Greek as a *κατάλυμα* (*kataluma*; i.e., “lodging/place to stay,” traditionally translated as “inn”). For whatever reason, when the time came for Mary to give birth there was no space in that part of the house. As a result, it was necessary to move to the larger part of the home, the area in the cave where the family’s oven would be, but also where the family would have kept some of their livestock. What separated the animals from the rest of this room were mangers. Therefore, rather than being abandoned to an isolated barn, born among animals with no one but Mary and Joseph, Jesus is born with Joseph’s family not apart from them. While this is not explicitly stated in Luke, the reader must remember that the Gospels, in general, assume that their respective audiences have some familiarity with life in the first century. Taking into account the cultural and linguistic setting of the time, refreshes the traditional reading of the Nativity story.

Jewish Clothing and the Gospels. On three occasions the Gospels make reference to the fringes of Jesus’ garment (*kraspedon*: κράσπεδον; Matt 9:20; Luke 8:44/Matt 14:36; Mark 6:56; [Pharisees] Matt 23:5). This Greek word can simply mean the “hem” or “border” of a garment but is also used in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible to translate *tzitzit* (צִיצִית, Num 15:38–39; see also, *kanfot*: כַּנְפוֹת, Deut 22:12), which are the ritual fringes required in the Torah to be worn on the four corners of men’s garments. As Jodi Magness has noted, Matthew’s description regarding the Pharisees who make their phylacteries broad and fringes long can only be speaking about *tzitzit*. Therefore, the Gospels are not referring to the simple hem of a garment but to these ritual fringes on the four corners of an observant Jewish man’s mantle. That “mantle” (*himation*: ἱμάτιον) was a large square cloth with four corners. Jews who wore *tzitzit*, as Jesus is depicted doing, would have had them attached to this garment following biblical legislation. The mantle was worn over a “tunic” (*chiton*: χιτών; *kutonet*: κῦβητος; e.g., Gen 37:3).



Samuel and David dressed in contemporary-styled mantles (fresco from the 3rd-century synagogue of Dura Europos).

Little can be said about how far wearing *tzitzit* penetrated into first-century Jewish society. In fact, Zeev Safrai has speculated that putting *tzitzit* on garments was not a typical style of Jewish dress. In that sense, there was nearly nothing that outwardly distinguished Jewish dress from other types. It should be noted that the well known *yarmulke/kippah* (skull cap) worn by some Jews was not part of ancient dress but developed in the medieval period. While more evidence is needed, the wearing of *tzitzit* was probably done by those who were particularly cautious regarding the application of Torah commandments to their style of dress.

The Pharisees, Sadducees, and Jesus. The Gospels depict Jesus' engagement with several Jewish groups that we know of from extra-biblical sources. Most of these encounters are the result of questions from Pharisees in response to miraculous acts or perceived breaches of the Jewish law (e.g., Matt 12:1–8; Mark 2:23–27; Luke 6:1–5/Matt 15:1–8; Mark 7:1–9; Luke 11:37–54/Luke 16:14–15). Depending on which Gospel, the Sadducees are sometimes present in those same accounts (cp. Matt 16:1–4; Mark 8:11–13). Sadducees, however—that is, the priestly leadership—do not seem to be frequent opponents in Jesus' Galilean ministry but, in fact, play a much larger role in the Passion narratives as they are responsible for handing Jesus over to the Romans (see Matt 26:3; Mark 15:1; esp. Luke 22:66, 23:4). The Evangelists already assume that the reader knows who these groups are and offer little additional information as to their origins, depicting them as an integral part of Jewish society.

Josephus tells us that there were four philosophies within Judaism. The three main groups were the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes, with the Zealot ideology likely being the fourth philosophy. These groups originate in the Hasmonean period. It is clear, that both the Pharisees and Sadducees play some role in the Hasmonean political spectrum. Josephus speaks of the former supporting the Hasmonean queen, Shelomtzion (Salome) Alexandra (76–67 BC; War 1:110), while her husband, Alexander Yannai (Jannaeus), was a supporter of the Sadducees (see “The Hymn of King Jonathan” [4Q448]).²⁶

The first-century historian also tells us that the main differences between the three groups were their views of fate and free will: the Sadducees believed

that all was left to free will; the Essenes, all was left to fate; the Pharisees attempted to strike a balance (see *Ant.* 18:12–26). The fourth philosophy, which is not a single, or specific, group, developed the idea that Jewish political autonomy should be taken by force from the Romans. The actual size of these Jewish groups may have been relatively small during the time of Jesus, but Gospel accounts and other texts suggest a sustained societal influence in the land of Israel. Moreover, while the rise of rabbinic Judaism is complex and no single line of continuity can be drawn, the Pharisees are viewed, in some regard, as the surviving party from which the rabbis evolve after the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. To complicate matters further, it seems that underneath the Pharisaic umbrella there existed a variation of opinion, e.g., priestly, zealot, and Hasidic (see below).

Pharisees. In the Gospels the Pharisees are generally portrayed as a group of Jewish teachers of the Torah who are identified primarily with their role in engaging Jesus with questions about Torah observance. Scholars have suggested that their name develops from the verb *parash* (פָּרַשׁ, “to separate”; so, *perushin*: פְּרוּשִׁין) because they maintain a strict sense of ritual purity during meals. Their name was not a self-designation, but was a name used by their opponents (*m. Yad.* 4:6). The Apostle Paul (Phil 3:5) identifies himself as one, having studied with another Pharisee known from rabbinic sources, Gamaliel (Acts 5:35). This is likely the same Gamaliel remembered as “Rabban Gamaliel” in the Mishnah (*m. Ber.* 1:1). The Pharisees are partly associated with the Sages of Israel (*chachamim*: חכמים). Josephus describes them as being more religious than other sects and more accurate interpreters of the law (*War* 1:110). For all of the negativity associated with the Pharisees in Christian tradition, readers often bypass Jesus' positive statement about them in Matt 23:2–3: “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; so practice and observe whatever they tell you.” The verse is a statement regarding the Pharisees' authority to teach Torah. Despite Jesus' stinging critiques against them, these criticisms are not necessarily about their teachings but their actions. Moreover, Gamaliel, a Pharisee, is depicted as a defender of the Jesus movement (Acts 5:34) and the Pharisees appear as early members of the nascent messianic community (15:5).



Replica of the Seat of Moses with Aramaic inscription, from the synagogue remains at Chorazin (photo Maureen Farrell García).



Indigo dyed piece of wool which may resemble the kind of color used in *tzitziyot* (ritual fringes), from Cave of the Letters (photo Clara Amit; courtesy of Israel Antiquities Authority).



The Prayer for King Jonathan from Qumran. Jonathan is thought by some to be none other than Alexander Yannai (drawing Ada Yardeni).

Column A

1. Praise the Lord, a Psalm [of
2. You loved as a fa[ther(?)
3. you ruled over [
4. vacat [
5. and your foes were afraid (or: will fear) [
6. ...the heaven [
7. and to the depths of the sea [
8. and upon those who glorify him [
9. the humble from the hand of adversaries [
10. Zion for his habitation, ch[oo]ses

Column B

1. holy city
2. for king Jonathan
3. and all the congregation of your people
4. Israel
5. who are in the four
6. winds of heaven
7. peace be (for) all
8. and upon your kingdom
9. your name be blessed

Column C

1. because you love Isr[ael]
2. in the day and until evening [
3. to approach, to be [
4. Remember them for blessing [
5. on your name, which is called [
6. kingdom to be blessed [
7.] for the day of war [
8. to King Jonathan [

(transcription and translation by E. Eshel, H. Eshel, and A. Yardeni)



This inscription, found in excavations at Caesarea, may reflect the movement of the priestly courses from Judea to the parts of the Galilee after the Bar Kokhba period (AD 132–135) (Carta collection).



Storage jar discovered in the caves of Qumran (Walters Art Museum).

David Stream at the oasis of Ein Gedi (photo source?).



Hasidim (“pious ones”). Historical sources indicate that the *Hasidim* were a group of Jewish miracle workers and a subset of the larger Pharisaic movement. These are, in all probability, not the *Hasidim* mentioned in Maccabees (e.g., 1 Macc 2:42; 2 Macc 14:6). Certain *Tannaim* (earliest generations of rabbi) seem to have connections with this elusive group (e.g., Haninah Ben Dosa; see also, Honi the Circle Drawer; *Ant.* 14:22; *b. Ta’anit* 23a). Sometimes referred to as “Men of Deeds” (*anshei maaseh*), due to their emphasis on the importance of good deeds over Torah study, they are distinguished because of the immediacy by which God responds to their supplications. Close parallels between them and Jesus imply their existence in the 1st century AD. Shmuel Safrai notes at least four parallels between Jesus’ ministry and this group of pietists: (1) miracles; (2) father-son relationship with God; (3) poverty as the ideal state; and (4) emphasis of deeds of loving-kindness and charity.²⁷

Sadducees. The upper class of priestly elites, from whom the high priest was selected. They were responsible for the temple in Jerusalem, setting the prices of various sacrifices and administering the 24 priestly shifts (*mishmarot*) that served at the temple (1 Chr 24). Members of the group were—along with the elders and leaders of Jerusalem—according to Luke, the only ones involved in Jesus’ mock, false trial (Luke 22:15). Annas, a high priest named in the Gospels (Luke 3:2), ascends to his position shortly after Judea becomes a Roman province in AD 6; his five sons served as high priests after him. His son-in-law, Joseph Caiaphas, was high priest, serving in that office for nearly twenty years and played a critical role in handing Jesus over to the Romans.

Qumran Community. Self-identified as the *yahad* (i.e., the community) or the “sons of light,” this group developed from a priestly schism. The initial break with the priests in Jerusalem was a result of opposing interpretations of the Jewish law. Lawrence Schiffman argues that the Qumran view of the Jewish law most resembles what is ascribed to the Sadducees in rabbinic literature.²⁸ Once led by the “Teacher of Righteousness,” the group believed that they had received the true interpretation of the commandments which were revealed by God to the teacher and hidden from everyone else. The texts discovered in the caves near Khirbet Qumran attest to a group that was deeply concerned with ritual purity, supplemented by messianic and apocalyptic hopes that God would respond to their observance and separation by revealing them to be the true Israel and destroying their enemies. The *yahad* of Qumran have a good deal in common with the Essenes, but there are differences as well.

Essenes. A group often associated with the *yahad* of Qumran, although this name only appears in Classical sources (e.g., Josephus, Pliny the Elder). They are described by Josephus as believing in immortality of the soul, made use of several sorts of ritual purifications, and spent time reading the holy books and discussing the prophets. Josephus describes another group of Essenes that held these

beliefs but disagree on issues of marriage (*War* 2:159–160). Pliny places this group at Ein Gedi, a site that lies south of Khirbet Qumran (*His. Nat.* V).

As mentioned before, the Gospels suggest that the Pharisees and Sadducees are an integral part of Jewish society. Although there is little evidence to what degree their influence penetrated it, the Gospels surely depict the distinct interest of the Pharisees in Jesus’ interpretations of Jewish law and the Sadducee plot in handing him over to the Romans. No one group was in control of Judaism, although the Sadducean monopoly over the Temple Mount and its machinations were as close as one group could get to having religious control, while the Pharisees may have had greater sway in how the people were expected to actually practice these various observances.

The presence of the *Hasidim* in Second Temple society is implied strongly in Jesus’ teachings (e.g., Matt 6:1–23, see above). The Qumran group, and the Essenes—if they are, or originate as the same group—are referred in Luke and John with the statement: “...for the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light” (Luke 16:8), and “While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light” (John 12:36). The “sons of light” was a common name for the group that resided at Qumran (see *Community Rule* 2:16; 3:13, 24; *War Scroll* 1:1). They also may be referenced in Jesus’ critique in Matt 5:43–44, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, ‘Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.’” The response may directly address a central point of Qumran ideology: “He is to teach them both to love all the Children of Light (Matt: ‘neighbor’)—each commensurate with his rightful place in the council of God—and to hate all the Children of Darkness (Matt: ‘enemy’), each commensurate with his guilt and the vengeance due him from God” (*Community Rule* [1QS] 1:9–11).

The Baptism and Ritual Immersion. John the Baptist’s events (Matt 3; Mark 1; Luke 3:1–21; John 1:19–34) calling upon the Jewish people to repent of their sins and immerse, as an indication of that repentance, reflect, in part, concerns for ritual purity and significance of ritual immersion in the Second Temple period. None of the Evangelists insist on explaining to the audience the ins and outs of ritual purity but assume that their audience(s) are already familiar with this aspect of Jewish life.

In the 1st century AD there was a system of practices which originated and evolved from the laws for ritual purity in the Hebrew Bible. They were based on the idea that the Israelites, and later, the Jewish people, could contract certain impurities from various parts of life (e.g., contact with a corpse or carcasses of living creatures [Num 19:11–12; Lev 11:23–44], bodily discharges, including seminal emission [Lev 15], menstrual flow and childbirth [Lev 12], skin diseases [Lev 13–14], and contact

with sacred objects or space [Num 19:1–10; Lev 16:4, 23–24]), thereby preventing them from participating in particular rituals and functioning in the sacred spaces, like the Temple (CD 11:21–22). Certain types of vessels, utensils, and liquids were also susceptible to ritual impurities. In fact, the Dead Sea Halakhic Letter^a (4QMMT [4Q394] 8 iv 5), makes reference to laws dealing the streams of liquids (5–7; also CD 10:10–13). The laws of purification were intended to rectify these impurities. The process of purification was sometimes related to the degree of impurity contracted. For example, a priest who came in direct contact with a corpse required, among other things, the ashes of a red heifer (Num 19:1–10). In other cases, a period of time had to be observed (Num 19:11) before purification could take place (e.g., a woman’s impurity after childbirth).

Generally, all forms of impurity require, at some point, water immersion, fully body, hands, and feet. These types of immersion take place in, or with, living water (*mayim chayim*: מַיִם חַיִּים; e.g., Lev 15:13), that is, fresh flowing water—from a spring or in a lake—and collected rainwater that has not been drawn by human hands. This indicates that the lake of Galilee and the Jordan river, except perhaps where the Jordan mixes with waters from the Yarmuk valley (*m. Par.* 8:10), could be used for ritual immersion. Accordingly, Matthew, Mark, and Luke depict the Baptist by the Jordan—in an area north of the lake—where ritual immersion was appropriate according to Jewish law. As a result of the concern for ritual purity, collecting pools of living water called *miqua’ot* (sing., מִקְוֵה; e.g., Exod 17:19; see *m. Miqu.*) developed in the late Hellenistic and early Roman periods.²⁹ Many of these have already been excavated at the southern steps of the Temple Mount. These were created specifically to deal partly with the purity needs of the priests, as well the pilgrims that would make their way into the Temple from the south during the three pilgrimage feast days. The discovery of the numerous ritual immersion pools (*miqua’ot*) in homes, towns, and villages throughout the land of Israel, and along pilgrimage routes, suggest that ritual purity was a part of Jewish daily life.

Remnants of a 2000-year-old chalkstone vessel factory in lower Galilee discovered by Yonatan Adler (photo Samuel Magal, courtesy of Israel Antiquities Authority).



Steps leading down to a ritual bath at Qumran (photo Samuel Magal).

Other evidence from the period communicates the importance of ritual purity. First, there is a blossoming limestone (esp., chalkstone) industry due to the fact that it was not susceptible to ritual impurity. Second, Eli Shukron, Ronny Reich, and their team are responsible for the discovery of a clay seal that reads “pure to God,” which was likely intended to indicate objects or products that were ritually purified. Third, purity concerns undoubtedly penetrated various groups in the Second Temple period. In fact, John makes reference to stone water vessels (*lithinai hudriai*: λίθιναι ὑδρίαί) in the wedding at Cana, which are explicitly said to be vessels for Jewish rites of purification (*ton katarimov ton ioudaion keimenai*: τὸν καθαρισμόν τῶν Ἰουδαίων κείμεναι, 2:6).

Ritual impurity, generally, has nothing to do with the sin. The *yahiad* of Qumran innovatively associated ritual immersion with the inward purification of the holy spirit, but ritual immersion completed the process; it did not begin it. After confession and repentance, the spirit would purify the individual and then ritual immersion would take place (1QS 3:1–9). The Baptist, who it has long been debated once belonged to the Qumran community—evidence for which is merely circumstantial—seems to share the idea that ritual immersion was only purifying to the person who had previously confessed and repented. While parallels exist, one should be careful placing John among the *yahiad*. These ideas may have been more prevalent in Jewish society and not an indication of mutual identification between John and Qumran.

Indeed, the Qumran community was invested in maintaining a stringent regimen of ritual purity. Not only were numerous ritual immersion baths discovered but during Roland de Vaux’s excavations, his team also discovered hundreds of plates and bowls. If the Essenes—as described in Classical sources—are the same as the community that resided at Qumran, then the plates and bowls parallel Josephus’s description of the Essene community, who apparently ate with separate ware in order to maintain every individual’s purity (*War* 2:129–131).



Clay seal with the inscription “Pure to God,” discovered near the Western Wall (photo Vladimir Naykhin, courtesy Israel Antiquities Authority).

Second Temple period mikveh from Magdala (photo Jeffrey P. Garcia).





Synagogue inscription from Kursi (Gergesa) (photo Jennifer Munro).



Tefillin (phylacteries) from Qumran that would have been worn during prayer by Jesus and others (Israel Antiquities Authority).

Remains of the 1st-century synagogue at Gamla in the Golan (photo Samuel Magal).



The Synagogue at Nazareth and the Sabbath.

In Luke 4:16, Jesus enters the synagogue in Nazareth. The Evangelists tell us that it was on the Sabbath and was his “custom” (*eiōtha*: εἰωθα). The account brings us into focus with two important features of Jewish life, the Sabbath and the synagogue.

The Sabbath (*sabbaton*: σάββατον; *shabbat*: שַׁבָּת). Sabbath is the day of rest which occurs on the seventh day of the week, from sundown on Friday until sundown on Saturday evening (*yom ha-shabbat*: יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת, Exod 20:8; also, Lev 24:8; Deut 5:12). There are several occasions in the Hebrew Bible where it is commanded that the seventh day be kept holy. Genesis provides the reasoning that God himself rested from his work of creation and blessed the day (2:3).³⁰ The first time that the Sabbath is explicitly referred to as a day of rest is Exodus 16:23. The Sabbath maintains its importance to Jewish observance in the Second Temple period. The book of Jubilees suggests that it is the primary thing which distinguishes the people of Israel from the rest of the world. So sacred is this day that the angels are spoken of as observing it in heaven (2:17). The Sabbath is mentioned no less than forty-five times in the Gospels (some in parallel accounts) and is the reason for many of Jesus’ encounters with the Pharisees (see “Healing of the Paralytic”: Matt 9:1–8, Mark 2:1–12, Luke 5:17–26; Plucking the Grain of the Sabbath: Matt 12:1–8, Mark 2:23–27, Luke 6:1–5).

The Synagogue. A gathering place for the public reading of Torah and the study of the commandments that developed at some point in the Hellenistic period, both in the land of Israel and in the Diaspora.³¹ Several first-century synagogues have already been discovered (e.g., Gamla, Masada, Qiryat Sefer), with the most recent discoveries at Magdala and at Tel Rekhesh in the lower Galilee by Mordechai Aviam. Synagogues were already in place and part of Jewish society before the First Jewish Revolt (AD 66–70). In fact, there is little evidence that destruction of the Temple (AD 70) had any effect on the leadership or direction of the synagogue. It was commonly a place for the public reading of

scripture. It was not a place for prayer, since communal prayer was often associated with the temple. Therefore, Luke’s depiction of Jesus reading from Isaiah in chapter 4 is precisely how the first-century synagogue was utilized. Additionally, it appears that Jewish diaspora communities’ distance from the temple had an effect on synagogal practice. This is perhaps the reason why synagogues outside of the land of Israel are sometimes referred to as a “place of prayer” (*proseuche*: προσευχή; Acts 16:13).³²

Prayer. The Gospels’s representation of prayer reflects the spheres of prayer that are also attested in extra-biblical texts, namely, public meetings, in privacy, and at the temple (Matt 6:5–6/Matt 6:7–15; Mark 11:25; Luke 11:1–4/Luke 2:37). Prayer at the temple was offered twice daily along with the daily sacrifices in the morning and late afternoon. Additional prayers were probably offered during the Sabbaths and feast days. Jeremy Penner has suggested that while set prayers were being established, the cultic sacrifice set a temporal guideline although what was said in prayer was under the control of the one praying.³³ Apart from the temple, prayer was generally a private affair,

And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

(Matt 6:5–6)

Prayers that were set in the Second Temple period include a morning and evening recitation of the *Sh’ma* (Deut 6:4–9; see Aris. 158–160; *Ant.* 4:212; *m. Ber.* 1:1–2). According to the Mishnah, even the morning recitations were structured around functions of the Temple. These morning and evening prayers were accompanied with phylacteries/*tefillin* (Exod 13:9, 16; Deut 6:8; 11:18; Matt 23:5; *tefillin* texts: 1Q13; 4Q128–48; 5Q8; 8Q3), leather pouches with straps containing scriptural texts—likely from Exodus and Deuteronomy—which fulfilled the commandment in the *Sh’ma*, “And you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes” (Deut 6:8). Private prayers likely consisted of a sanctification of God’s name, thanksgiving, and some sort of supplication. These and other elements that we find in the Lord’s prayer (Matt 6:7–15; Luke 11:1–4) are also found in what eventually becomes the *Amidah* (18 benedictions/*shemonah esrei*).³⁴ Evidence for public or communal prayers at fixed times also come to us from the Qumran community (1QS 9:26–10:1; 1QHodayot^a 20:4–11; 4QDaily Prayers).

Women in Jesus’ Ministry. It has often been thought that Jesus’ direct encounter with women (Luke 10:38–42; John 11:5–16; Luke 8:1–3/Matt 9:18–26; Mark 5:21–34; Luke 8:40–48), or the role that women played in his ministry (Mark 15:40; Luke

23:49/Matt 28:1–8; Mark 16:1–8; Luke 24:1–11; John 20:1–2) was part of the Jesus’ counter-Jewish movement. It is readily, and incorrectly, assumed that Jewish life in the first century was inherently misogynistic and that there was a complete separation of the sexes in both the public and religious sphere. However, the Gospels’s depiction of women’s roles are not representative of a counter-Jewish movement, but rather reflect a core component, and regular part of Jewish life in the first century. The suggestion here is not that men and women lived in an egalitarian utopia, or that negative opinion towards women was lacking (cf. Sir 19:2; also *Wiles of the Wicked Woman* [4Q184])—ancient culture was patriarchal—but transposing the Greco-Roman view of women over to ancient Judaism is misguided. Already in the Hasmonean period, the Jewish people were ruled by a queen, Shelomtzion (Salome) Alexandra, who ruled for almost ten years (76–67 BC). The post-biblical book of Judith depicts a Jewess heroine who defeated the Babylonian envoy, Holofernes, by decapitating him. Additionally, we know from a collection of 2nd century AD texts of a woman by the name of Babatha who inherited a date farm from her father and continued to be its primary administrator. Among the documents from this archive are court petitions against the guardians of her orphan son, Jesus, which indicates that there were women, although small in number, who owned land and had certain rights in the larger judicial system.

While it seems that opinions regarding women differed among Jewish communities, and women did not function in the priesthood or have a Levitical role, according to Tal Ilan married women could testify (*Community Rule*³⁵ 1:10–11), hold leading roles in synagogues, are referred to as “elders” (1Tim 5:1–2),³⁵ and could become full-fledged members of particular sects.³⁶ Additionally, while women may have found a common role in the home, there is no archaeological or literary evidence from the Second Temple period that women were separate from men. Luke offers additional portrayals of women as participants and financial supporters of Jesus’ ministry (Luke 8:1–3). The accounts of Mary and Elizabeth suggest that both were familiar with the text of scripture. First, when Mary is told that she is with child she utters a canticle called the “Magnificat” (Luke 1:46–55), which closely parallels Hannah’s song in 1 Samuel 2:1–10. There Hannah, like many, rejoices for an unexpected child and the opening of her womb. Whether Mary’s song is historical or not, it indicates a willingness of the Evangelist to place a song on the lips of a woman which betrays a knowledge of biblical texts. In Luke, Elizabeth says, “Thus the Lord has done to me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach (*afelein oneidos mou*: ἀφελειν ὄνειδος μου) among men” (Luke 1:25), which bears some linguistic similarity to the miraculous opening of Rachel’s womb in Genesis 30:23, “God has taken away my reproach” (ἀφελειν ὁ θεός μου τὸ ὄνειδος / תִּפְרֹתַי אֶלֶּה־אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים). There is little reason to read these as the creation of the author, since there are not exact quotations and it would



Judith Beheading Holofernes by Caravaggio, c. 1602.

be reasonable to presume that both Jewish women knew the stories of Hannah and Rachel. Indeed, both indicate that Mary and Elizabeth have some understanding of the Hebrew Bible. While the lack of historical sources stops one from saying anything about their education, they may have participated in the communal study of biblical texts.

A Pre-70 Passover Meal, but not a Seder. Matthew, Mark, and Luke portray Jesus having a Passover meal, that is, a meal which involved the blessing of wine (*cos rishon*: כּוֹס רִאשׁוֹן; *m. Pesah*. 10:2), bread, a meal that included the *pesach* (Passover) lamb, and the recitation of the Hallel psalms (Psalms 113–118). The name of the sacrifice, *pesach* (פֶּסַח; e.g., *m. Pesah*. 3:7), was also that of the holiday (*Ant.* 9:271). When Jesus states, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you...” (*epithumia epethumesa touto to pascha fagein meth humon*: ἐπιθυμία ἐπεθύμησα τοῦτο τὸ πάσχα φαγεῖν μεθ’ ὑμῶν...), he is referring to the roasted lamb that now sits on the table. During Jesus’ time, the sanctity of the temple extended to the entire walled city of Jerusalem. Jesus’ preparation for the Passover meal within the walls of the city fits these legal requirements (Matt 26:17; Mark 14:13; Luke 22:10). John’s description, “before the Passover,” indicates that the lamb has yet to be roasted on the temple’s altar and cannot, therefore, be a Passover meal which occurred on



A papyrus document from the Babatha Archive discovered in the Cave of the Letters (via Wikimedia Commons).



Samaritan priests celebrating the Passover sacrifice on Mount Gerizim (photo Flavo, via Wikimedia Commons).

The Last Supper by Simon Ushakov, 1685.



15th-century Haggadah by Israel b. Meir of Heidelberg.



Tyrian half-shekel. (left, obv.) Head of Heracles, AD 15–16; (right, rev.) eagle standing on the prow of a ship. Greek inscription reads “Of Tyre, holy and city and asylum” (photo Hanay, via Wikimedia Commons).

the evening (a new day) after the head of the family offered the lamb that was to be eaten (14th Nisan [sacrifice]/15th Nisan [meal])—this practice occurs on the same days every year.

Some scholars argue that John best represents the historical reality. Others suggest that John’s calendar reflects the *yahad* of Qumran, who based their Passover meal on a solar, rather than a lunar, calendar. The weight of evidence, however, indicates that Matthew, Mark, and Luke have rightly communicated the historical reality. That Jesus and his family were yearly pilgrims during the Passover feast day, and that Jesus is portrayed often as a pilgrim, suggests strongly that he would have participated in accordance with the temple calendar (14th/15th of Nisan). Luke’s additional detail tells us that they all “reclined” (*anapipto*: ἀναπίπτω) to eat the Passover meal; Jesus blessed the wine, then the bread (Luke 22:14–23), and all are depicted as sharing from a common dish (Matt 26:23). All of these aspects are contrary to the manner in which the Qumran community (and even the Essenes) celebrated the feast day: (1) they blessed the bread before the wine; and (2) they did not share dishes, each member was given his own ware.

Aerial view of the present-day Temple Mount, looking west (photo Andrew Shiva).



The one distinction that needs to be made with Jesus’ Passover meal is that it was not a *Seder* (Heb. “order”)—the name commonly used for the Passover meal—and only resembles the modern-day *Seder* in that wine and bread maintain a presence in the ritual (although there are more cups now). The developments that led to the modern-day *Seder*, especially that of the *haggadah*, began in the early rabbinic period.³⁷

Jerusalem’s Temple. The account of the “Cleansing of the Temple” appears in all four Gospels (Matt 21:12–17; Mark 11:15–19; Luke 19:45–48; John 2:13–16). This is perhaps the most compelling account between Jesus and the leaders of the Jewish religious establishment. It answers several important questions about Jesus: (1) how did he interpret the Scriptures; (2) what was the central thrust of his critique; and (3) towards whom was his most stinging critique directed? In general, Luke provides the fullest, most well-balanced portrayal of the temple. In his Gospel, the Evangelist records Mary’s and Joseph’s appearance at the temple after Jesus’ birth (Luke 2:27). It is also the place to where Jesus and his family would make yearly pilgrimages (2:41). In particular, towards the end of his ministry, Jesus spends his days teaching within the confines of the temple (19:47; see also 7:14). In Matthew, Mark, and John, the temple is painted in an increasingly more negative hue. In Matthew, the first time one reads of the temple, Jesus is being tempted by the devil (4:5). The “Cleansing of the Temple” account is the first time the temple is mentioned in Mark (11:11). And in John’s Gospel, the cleansing occurs very early in Jesus’ ministry (2:12).

Temple. The temple was the religious center for Jews around the world. Jewish men were required to pay a yearly tax (a half-shekel) for temple upkeep and maintenance (Matt 17:24; *Ant.* 18:313;



also, Exod 30:15; Neh 10:33–34). It was also the location of three annual pilgrimages, *Pesach* (Passover), *Shavuot* (Feast of Weeks, also Pentecost), and *Sukkot* (Feast of Tabernacles). Both Jesus and Paul are depicted observing some of these feasts (Luke 22:1; Acts 20:16; 1Cor 16:8).

The temple of the 1st century AD was renovated and expanded by Herod the Great (beginning in 19 BC). These architectural upgrades were completed long after Herod's death and shortly before the Temple's destruction in AD 70. Many of these expansions can still be seen today. These enhancements consist, among other things, of the expansion of the temple platform to a size of nearly 145 acres (about 24 football fields). The platform on the southern end was suspended over the southern slope of Jerusalem's eastern hill. Within the open space under the flat platform there were massive amounts of fill and in some places a series of vaults that allowed for several subterranean passages. The temple proper was overlaid with gold and marble. So beautiful was the temple that that rabbis would say, "Whoever has not seen Herod's building has not seen a beautiful building in his life" (*b. B. Bat.* 4a). The platform is now occupied by al-Aqsa mosque (Islam's third holiest site) and the Dome of the Rock (a shrine built in honor of Mohammed's journey to heaven). One of Herod's greatest feats was the Royal Stoa, constructed along the southern wall of the mount. It was a massive portico that Josephus describes in detail:

Now the columns (of the portico) stood in four rows, one opposite the other all along—the fourth row was attached to a wall built of stone,—and the thickness of each column was such that it would take three men with outstretched arms touching one another to envelop it; its height was twenty-seven feet, and there was a double molding running round its base. The number of all the columns was a hundred and sixty-two, and their capitals were ornamented in the Corinthian style of carving, which caused amazement by the magnificence of its whole effect. Since there were four rows, they made three aisles



among them, under the porticoes. Of these the two side ones corresponded and were made in the same way, each being thirty feet in width, a stade in length, and over fifty feet in height. But the middle aisle was one and a half times as wide and twice as high, and thus it greatly towered over those on either side. The ceilings (of the porticoes) were ornamented with deeply cut wood-carvings representing all sorts of different figures. The ceiling of the middle aisle was raised to a greater height, and the front wall was cut at either end into architraves with columns built into it, and all of it was polished, so that these structures seemed incredible to those who had not seen them, and were beheld with amazement by those who set eyes on them.

(*Ant.* 15:413–417)³⁸

The lower courses of the western wall belong to Herod the Great's plans but some parts of the retaining walls were completed after Herod's death. Remnants of one of the largest free-standing arches in the ancient world, discovered by Edward Robinson, can now be seen from a first-century street that dates to just after the time of Jesus. Eli Shukron discovered that this street, fully uncovered in the 1990s, was a later addition above the original street. The system of *miqva'ot* at the, partly restored, southern monumental staircase are still visible and follow the route where pilgrims would have entered the Temple Mount. This is also likely the setting of Luke's story

(top) Scale model of the Herodian temple, looking east, now on display at The Israel Museum, Jerusalem. The Royal Stoa is the red-roofed building in the model that sits south of the temple. (photo Jeffrey P. García).

(above) The Dome of the Rock (photo Maureen Farrell García).

Robinson's Arch (photo Jeffrey P. García).





(top) First-century street along the western wall of the Temple Mount (photo Jeffrey P. Garcia).



(above) The southern steps of the Temple Mount (photo Oren Rozen, via Wikimedia Commons).

Reconstruction of opus sectile flooring from Herod's Jerusalem Temple and perhaps similar to the type of flooring in his Jerusalem palaces, what John describes as the lithostrotos (courtesy Temple Mount Sifting Project).



where Jesus is sitting among the sages when he was twelve (Luke 2:41–52).

Entry to Herod's expanded platform, and the temple proper, occurred through subterranean passages, which are now controlled by the Waqf authority—the Jordanian trust that has jurisdiction over the Temple Mount. More recently, the Temple Mount Sifting Project, directed by archaeologist

Gabriel Barkay, discovered opus sectile tile work—stones, sometimes precious and polished, that were cut into geometrical shapes—which were inlaid into walls and floors and would have adorned the floor in both the open court of Herod's temple (*War* 5:178) and his Jericho palace. Notley has recently suggested that John's use of the term *lithostrotos* (λιθόστρωτος), when describing where Jesus stood before Pilate (John 19:13), refers to these stones, common in Herodian palaces and likely laid in Herod the Great's praetorium (Matt 27:27; Mark 15:16; John 18:28; also Acts 23:25) in Jerusalem.

Priesthood. The priests were a class of men who were responsible for numerous functions, both civic and religious, in the temple. The priesthood, specifically the high priest, reached its pinnacle of power during Hasmonean rule (140–37 BC), in particular the lengthy reign of Alexander Jannaeus (103–76 BC)³⁹ who named himself both the high priest and king. Under Herod the Great and the Romans, the priesthood lost a good deal of its power, but the party of the Sadducees remained at the upper echelon of society⁴⁰ and maintained a heavy hand of control over the temple's internal functions. This authority was solidified by the high priest (Annas) and his family working closely with Rome. In particular, the high priest Caiaphas—Annas's son-in-law—and the Roman prefect Pontius Pilate who were likely in league with one another.

The priestly Sadducean leadership of the Second Temple period is especially known for their corrup-

tion, amassing wealth from the inflation of prices for sacrifices and their oligarchy over the temple. The divisions of priests who worked at the temple suffered as a result of this corruption. Josephus tells us that lower-level priests were starving because they were not receiving the grain from tithes which was rightfully theirs (*Ant.* 20:206–207). Both Jesus and the sages of Israel were openly critical of the high priest and other chief priests (see Luke 19:45–48; 20:9–19; *m Ker.* 1:7).

The high priest was responsible for going into the Holy of Holies once a year on the Day of Atonement. The priesthood—that is, the lower priests—were divided into 24 divisions (*mishmarot*; see 1 Chr 24–26; *t. Ta'an.* 4:2). While a certain percentage of these priests lived in Jerusalem, the others were scattered throughout Judea. Among other things, they would officiate the sacrifices at the altar. They were separate from Levites (see *Ant.* 11:181), who, according to Lester Grabbe, helped the priests with the sacrifices but did not function at the altar.⁴¹ Luke tells us that John's father, Zechariah, was a priest of the division of Abijah (1:5), referenced both in 1 Chronicles (24:10) and the reconstruction of the *mishmarot* listed in the Caesarea inscription.

Crucifixion and Death. With life comes death. Crucifixion was implemented by Rome as a form of capital punishment that helped to maintain control over the empire. This method was also employed by the Hasmonean king Alexander Yannai (Jannaeus) and advocated by the Dead Sea community as punishment for a traitor (*Temple Scroll* [11QT] 64:7–11). Jesus' crucifixion, along with two thieves (Matt 27:33–37; Mark 15:22–26; Luke 23:33–38),



(above) Reconstructed room from one of the priestly homes in Jerusalem's Jewish Quarter that is dated to the Herodian period (photo Deror Avi, via Wikimedia Commons).

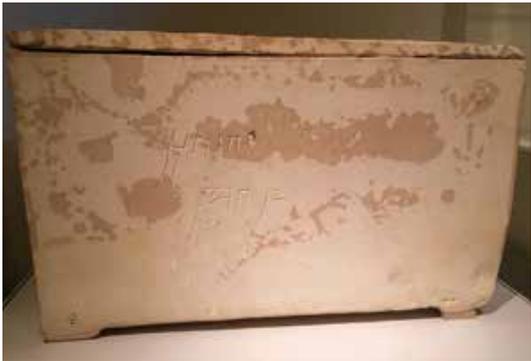
(right) Frescoes like this from a Roman villa were signs of wealth and opulence. Similar frescoes were found in the priestly homes in Jerusalem (photo Jeffrey P. Garcia).





Caiaphas's ossuary, on display in The Israel Museum (photo Jeffrey P. García).

represents only a small number of the Jewish people who were tortured and killed in this way. Josephus tells us that thousands of Jews were killed by being crucified before and during the first Jewish revolt.⁴² So common was crucifixion that the historian tells us of the soldiers who for amusement nailed the rebels in different postures (*War* 5:451). Yet, it seems that affixing people to the cross by “nails” in the land of Israel was a later innovation that occurred just prior to the first revolt. The only archaeological evidence that we have for crucifixion likely comes from this time. In the tombs of northern Jerusalem, at a site called Giv’at haMivtar, a crucified heel bone was discovered in an ossuary inscribed with the name Yehochanan.



Ossuary inscribed with the name Yehochanan and in which a crucified heel bone was found (photo Jeffrey P. García).

Indeed, not much is known about methods of crucifixion in the 1st century AD. One can tell from the Greek terminology for crucifixion, *staurow* (σταυρώω) and *anastaurow* (ἀνασταυρώω), as well as the Hebrew *talah* (תלה; “hang”), that some kind of stake (*stauros*: σταυρός) was affixed to the ground and the victim was somehow hung. Moreover, if the Hebrew *talah* is underlying the Greek terms in the Gospel, it indicates that ropes, rather than nails, were the common method of crucifixion before the first Jewish revolt. Just prior to the revolt Josephus shifts his description of crucifixion and begins to utilize the Greek verb “to nail” (*proselow*; προσηλόω; *War* 2:308). The cross beam could be perpendicular to the stake or just below the top of the stake, creating the well known Latin cross. Sometimes a small wooden seat called a *sedicule* would be affixed to the stake in order to prolong the process. There is no specific standard on the posture of the victim and

our most descriptive narratives of crucifixion in the ancient world come from the Gospels.⁴³

Unfortunately, they too lack explicit detail of the victim’s posture. Of course, a standardized method was not the point; it was intended to kill the victim with humiliating savagery, causing, by extension, psychological trauma to all those who witnessed these events. With crucifixion, the embers and fires of revolt were effectively extinguished. Death could come in a number of ways, including asphyxiation or hypovolemic shock.

Burial of the Dead. Death was an ever-present reality in the first century, and numerous Second Temple period tombs have been discovered, including the family tomb of Caiaphas, the high priest involved with handing Jesus over to Pilate, and that of Helene of Adiabene (*m. Yom.* 3:10). Many of the tombs are *kokhim* tombs, large rock-hewn tombs that consisted of an antechamber to prepare the corpse, and several finger-shaped niches (*kokhim*; sing., *kokh*) where the prepared body was laid and left for a year. After that year, the bones of the person were reburied in an ossuary (limestone receptacle for bones of the dead). This style of burial was for those of considerable wealth and was in existence for a short time (2nd cent. BC–1st cent. AD). Other burial methods included simple dirt burials, sarcophagi, and coffins. Joseph of Arimathea’s request for Jesus’ body, the wrapping of Jesus’ body in linen, placing him in a family tomb (Luke 23:50–56; Matt 27:57–61; Mark 15:42–47), and rolling a great stone in front of it (Matt 27:60; Mark 15:46), closely describes the preparation for burial that occurred in Second Temple *kokhim* tombs that have been discovered throughout Jerusalem and its environs. However, because Jesus is placed in the tomb right before the Sabbath (Matt 27:57/Mark 15:42/Luke 23:54), and the women, who return with spices to prepare the body, show up to the empty tomb *after* the Sabbath (Matt 28:1/Mark 16:1/Luke 24:1/John 20:1), Jesus’ body is never fully buried in the tomb because he is never placed in one of the niches.



Second Temple period *kokhim* burial in the Chapel of Joseph of Arimathea in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem (photo Jeffrey P. García).



Second Temple period *kokh* tomb on the Mount of Olives (photo Jeffrey P. García).

Although 95 percent of Second Temple period tombs discovered were sealed with a square plug, some, like Herod’s family tomb (below) and others, were sealed with circular stones (public domain).



JEWISH STYLES OF TEACHING IN THE GOSPELS

The Gospels preserve first-century styles of teaching that are distinctly Jewish. According to them, Jesus' most prominent styles of teaching break down into three general areas in order of priority: parables, *halakhah*, and biblical interpretation. Parables and halakhic discussions often occurred in public settings (e.g., sermons on the mount and plain), while biblical interpretation occurred in either ("Parable of the Good Samaritan"; Luke 10:25–37).

Parables. The majority of Jesus' teachings come in the form of parables (*parabole*: παραβολή; *mashal*: מָשָׁל), namely, story parables, which are short narratives that generally involve some sort of comparison. Often the narrative utilizes anonymous characters that present a reality—sometimes an aspect of daily life—which teaches deep, sublime theological matters in a manner that is easily related, palatable, and comprehended. As Brad Young describes, "in finite terms God is beyond human comprehension, but on the other, his infinite majesty may be captured in vivid stories of daily life."⁴⁴ Jesus' parables have often been mistaken for secret telling where those outside of his inner circle are told parables in order to keep them from understanding the secrets of his true purpose. But this is not the point of parables in any body of Jewish literature. In fact, parables, as described by Matthew, are used, "...because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand" (Matt 18:12–13). In other

words, parables are intended to give understanding, not mask it.

Jesus' parables are similar to those that are collected in the literature of the *Tannaim*. The earliest traditions account for more than 450 parables. A fully fleshed-out parable will often be made of two components, a *mashal* (i.e., the story parable) and a *nimshal* (i.e., moral message; application). Notley and Zeev Safrai list seven characteristics of a parable: (1) a statement that defines it as a parable; (2) a narrative that is specifically used to teach a moral; (3) it does not include the name of the Sage, his location, where the story took place, etc; (4) the parable describes a certain "reality" where characters appear without names; (5) it generally does not contain divine visions; (6) the moral of the story is spelled out; (7) the parable is told in Hebrew, even in texts that are predominantly Aramaic. Additionally, "A narrative that has all the characteristics is definitely a *mashal*. Any text that has none of them is not a *mashal* [i.e., parable]."⁴⁵

When compared with the Gospels' parables, the aforementioned rabbinic parables provide important methodological nuances for understanding Jesus' favorite teaching methods: (1) rabbinic parables are always written down in Hebrew and are depicted as being taught in Hebrew by the Sages, even a parable that is surrounded by Aramaic commentary; (2) this implies that in Jewish circles, parables were taught in Hebrew, and for the Gospels—even though they are recorded in Greek—they likely originated from Hebrew originals; (3) moreover, the parables of the Sages shed light on possible debates that lie behind Jesus' own parables. For example, the parable in Luke, "The House Built Upon the Rock," contains a comparison that has close parallels to one in rabbinic literature.

The text in *Avot de-Rabbi Nathan* below is interconnected with a number of other parables that seek to answer a question that reverberated throughout the Second Temple period: which is more important, Torah study or good deeds?

"The House Built Upon the Rock" (Matt 7:24-27)	<i>Avot de-Rabbi Nathan</i> , ms. A, 23
Every one then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And every one who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell; and great was the fall of it.	Elisha ben Abuya says, "A man who has good deeds in him and has studied much Torah, to what is he compared? To a man who builds first with stones and afterwards with mud bricks. Even when much water comes and rises up against them, it doesn't dislodge them. A man in whom there are no good deeds, [even though] he has studied much Torah, to what may he be compared? To a man who builds first with mud bricks and afterwards with stones. Even if there is only a little water, immediately they topple over." ⁴⁶

Overlooking the Gennesar plain from Mount Arbel (photo Jeffrey P. Garcia).



Both the Matthean and Lukan versions, though edited by the Evangelists, begin with a similar statement, “Every one who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like.” The Lukan version reads more like the parables that we find elsewhere with the wording, “what he/it is like” (*tini estin homoios*: τίνη ἐστὶν ὁμοιος; Luke 6:47), which is not unlike, “to what is it compared” (*lama hu domeh*: למה הוא דמה). It can be shown that “like” (*homoios*: ὁμοιος) is a proper Greek translation for “compare, like” (*damah*: דמה; Ezek 31:8).

In both Gospels, the statement hinges on one who not only hears but does what Jesus teaches. At first glance, it appears that Jesus is simply speaking of the dangers posed to his followers who do not obey his teachings. But there is no specificity to which teachings Jesus refers. Is it simply a catchall for all his teachings? Probably not.

The very close parallel shown above states the matter at hand explicitly: which is more important, good deeds or Torah study? For Elisha ben Abuya, the one who builds—in similar fashion to the Gospels—on rock, or, more specifically, builds first with stone and then with mud bricks, secures his building from the rising waters. This is the one who places good deeds before Torah study. To do the opposite puts the building at risk, for when even a little water arises, the building, founded on mud bricks, is easily destroyed. R. Abuya states that this is the one who has studied Torah but has no good deeds. In a similar fashion, Jesus’ parable stresses the importance of “hearing” (study) and “doing” (good deeds). Such a pairing, this time regarding wisdom and deeds, is preserved on the lips of Hanina ben Dosa:

Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa...would say: Anyone whose deeds are more plentiful than his wisdom, his wisdom endures. And anyone whose wisdom is more plentiful than his deeds, his wisdom does not endure.

(*m. Avot 3:9*)

As a *hasid*, Hanina belonged to those in the Jewish community who emphasized good deeds over “wisdom” (which comes from Torah study). He belongs to a group of wonder working, pious men (i.e., the *Hasidim*) who stressed action on behalf of those in need. Sometimes they were referred to as *anshei maaseh* (“men of deed”). But these deeds were not random action, they were occupied with taking care of the needy and the poor. Of course, Rabbi Abuya and Rabbi Dosa are not against Torah study (or the acquiring of wisdom). The question was one of priority. Action on behalf of those in need supersedes other activities. Indeed, there were those among the rabbis who disagreed (*b. Qidd. 40b*).

The connection between deeds and Torah study/wisdom was intricately tied to interpretations of Exodus 24:7: “All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will hear” (*naaseh v’nishma*: נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמָע).⁴⁷ At this point in Exodus, the people of Israel are at Sinai as Moses takes the book of the covenant (*sefer ha-berit*: סֵפֶר הַבְּרִית) and reads it to the people. One would assume that hearing should come before doing, since it is logical that one needs to hear the

instructions in order to know what to do. The rather strange reverse order of “we will do, and we will hear” is precisely what attracts interpreters. It is an intentional marker from which meaning on how to live within God’s covenant can be attained. In fact, *Avot de-Rabbi Nathan* (ms. A, 18) connects this verse in Exodus with Hanina ben Dosa’s statement above regarding wisdom and good deeds: “He used to say, ‘Everyone whose deeds exceeds his wisdom, his wisdom is established. Everyone whose wisdom exceeds his deeds, his wisdom is not established.’ As it is said, ‘We will do and we will hear’” (Exod 24:7). Exodus’s mention of “doing” before “hearing” settles the argument that “good deeds” should take priority over Torah study.

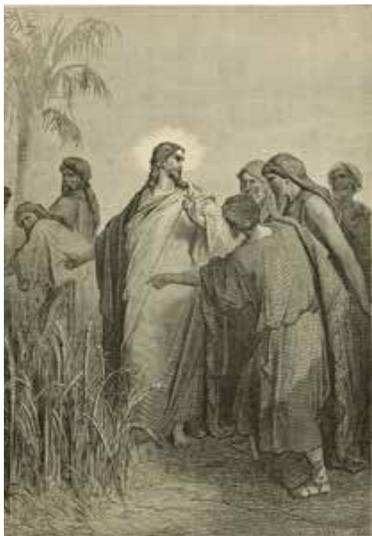
Returning to the Gospels, there are indicators that Jesus’ parable is tapping into this larger debate and that the Gospels presume that their respective audiences are already aware of it. First, the passages in Matthew and Luke uses two verbs, “hear” (*akouo*: ἀκούω) and “do” (*proiō*: ποιέω), which nicely parallel Exodus 24’s two verbs, “hear” (*shama*: שמע) and “do” (*asah*: עשה). Second, it is clear throughout the Gospels that Jesus puts a heavy emphasis on taking care of those in need (e.g., Matt 6:1, 19:21, 25:31–46; Mark 12:41–44/Luke 21:1–4; Luke 10:29–37, 18:22; see more below). The language of the parable and Jesus’ preference for good deeds throughout the Gospels suggests that underlying it is the ancient Jewish debate about which is more important, Torah study or charitable action. Indeed, along with other *Hasidim*, Jesus stressed the importance and redemptive power of charity; good deeds are to be foundational to his followers’ piety and their observance of the commandments. In that sense, Jesus, Hanina ben Dosa, and Elisha ben Abuya agree on the priority of good deeds. Moreover, for Jesus, it is taking care of those that are in need which represents the “rock” that is to be built on, the “rock” of doing.

Halakhah⁴⁸ (Jewish Law/Commandments).

Some Christian tradition has maintained that Jesus’ statement in Matthew, “I have come not to abolish them [i.e., the law and the prophets] but to fulfill them” (5:17), indicates that part of his task was to complete the law perfectly—something that no normal human could accomplish—so that the law would no longer be a burden to the followers of the Christ; this is especially thought to relate to the so-called ritual parts of the law (e.g., sacrifices, kosher laws, clothing, purity, etc.). For some New Testament commentators, the so-called ethical portions are still in play (e.g., love God, love neighbor). However, in ancient Judaism, Jewish law is never divided neatly in two separable halves, ethical and ritual—the Torah, its commandments and interpretations comprise a single whole. The book of James bears witness to this understanding, “whoever keeps the *whole law* (=Torah; *holon ton nomon*: ὅλον τὸν νόμον), but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it” (2:10). The commandments in the Torah are an intricate and interconnected body of rituals and ethics; these



Partially reconstructed wall at Tel Beer Sheva with stone foundation and mud bricks (photo Jeffrey P. García).



Jesus with his followers (from William Foster's *The Bible Panorama or The Holy Scriptures in Picture and Story*, 1891).

two categories are the two faces of a single coin, inseparable from one another. To follow one is to follow all; to break one is to break all.

Further, the problem with reading Matthew as an implication that Jewish legal rituals, or the entire law, will come to an end for the followers of Jesus, is that it does not agree with the rest of the passage, especially 6:19–48, and, in particular, “Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but *he who does them* and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (vv. 19–20). In other words, to teach anyone not to observe the commandments (the entire Torah), however small, poses dangers to those who associate themselves with the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, it is better to translate “fulfill” (Gk. *plerow*: πληρώω) as to give “full meaning.”

The rest of the Sermon on the Mount supports this translation, as it teaches about a number of commandments (e.g., adultery, murder, oaths). These verses have often been regarded as anti-law, and referred to as The Antithesis, namely, showing how the Jewish law is usurped by Jesus’ authority. However, this anti-law position would not fit comfortably in the world of any first-century Jewish sage. As Jewish texts, the Gospels follow in order regarding the law; vv. 21–48 depict an interpretation, not an “abolishing” or usurping of Jewish law. For example, Jesus says, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (vv. 27–28). “It was said” is not unlike what is found in Jewish literature, *neemar* (נאמר, “as it is said,” *m. Pe’ah* 6:5), for the quotation of a biblical text. Jesus’ addition, “but I say to you,” is also similar to the rabbinic, *ani omer* (אני אומר, “I say,” *m. Toh.* 3:7), which introduces an interpretation of a particular law. Reading Matthew in this context suggests that Jesus is giving an interpretation of the law, and not doing away with or usurping the authority of Torah.

As with any sage of Israel, Jesus was tasked with the responsibility of distilling and interpreting the Torah’s commandments for his followers. In fact, in the above example, he is not challenging the validity of God’s commandments, but giving the full meaning, so that his followers would know how to faithfully live in relationship to God and his covenant. The working assumption in the Gospels is that Jesus observes the commandments and expects his followers to do the same. This continues to be the case after the resurrection; that is to say, after Jesus’ reported death, resurrection, and ascension, Peter and Paul both continue to follow Jewish law. In Acts 10, Peter tells Jesus, “No, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean” (v. 14). His character is understood as being obedient to kosher food laws. Peter’s vision in the Book of Acts of the animals and sheet is not intended to correct the apostle regarding his keeping *kashrut*; it is to show him that God shows no partiality (v. 34) among humanity and that the Gentiles were to be accepted

among the early messianic community. Paul, in his observance, ritually immerses and pays for the vows of four Nazirites in Acts 21:23 to show that there was nothing to the controversy that surrounded him, namely, that he was teaching Jews in the Diaspora to not follow the Mosaic law, especially circumcision, the very mark of God’s covenant (v. 21). This act of immersion and righteous act of piety toward the four Nazirites was intended to show that Paul continued to live in “observance of the law” (v. 24).

The Gospels’s literary identity as “Jewish” is attested with the preservation of a number of halakhic (matters of Jewish law) discussions that occur between Jesus and the Pharisees. Scholars have debated them for years. The most popular among them are the so-called *Sabbath controversies*: accounts where questions arise regarding Jesus’ perceived transgression of the commandment to rest and keep the Sabbath holy. The day of rest is an important observance in Judaism (see above). Evidence in the Gospels, and other Second Temple sources, indicate that debates regarding what was allowable on the Sabbath day remained an important part of Jewish life. Thus, the Sabbath controversies are not Jesus’ attempt to claim authority over the holy day, but rather, they arise from his interpretations regarding the Sabbath that differ from popular Pharisaic opinion at the time. As one finds in the famous discussions between the Houses of Shammai and Hillel, the slightest difference in the interpretation of a particular commandment can cause debate (e.g., *m. Ber.* 1:3).

The Plucking of Grains on the Sabbath. One of the more prominent halakhic disputes occurs in the account of the “Plucking of Grains on the Sabbath” (Matt 12:1–8/Mark 2:23–28/Luke 6:1–5). This is the only Sabbath controversy that deals with something other than healing. While the Markan account has been treated as the most ancient of the three, elements of the Lukan account, including its terseness—it is the shortest of the three—suggest that the Evangelist has a slightly earlier, or independent, tradition from those of Matthew and Mark, both of which have considerable additions.⁴⁹ Luke’s reference to the “rubbing” (*psochontes*: ψάχνοντες; Luke 6:1) of grains, rather than just “plucking” and “eating”—as it is in all three Synoptic Gospels—is one significant difference.⁵⁰ The importance of this halakhic discussion at the time is affirmed by the laws regarding the rubbing and eating grain that one finds in the Dead Sea Scrolls (4QHalakha^a 9:1; 4QBlessing^a 5:1) and early literature of the rabbis (*m. Menah.* 6:5).

The Gospels’s accounts are inviting the reader into a contemporary debate regarding plucking/eating grain on the Sabbath. These same discussions occur throughout ancient Jewish literature (e.g., *Jubilees* 50; Philo, *Mos.* 2:2; CD 10:14–11:18;⁵¹ *m. Shabb.* 7:2). The deliberations are a natural part of the Jewish community’s desire to properly observe Torah’s Sabbath laws. In other words, every Jewish community needs to continually readdress how to keep the Sabbath “holy” by defining what

is considered “work,” especially amidst societal and communal innovations. The Gospels are a window into these conversations. Jesus offers his own interpretation—a standard method for any sage of the first century—of what is allowed on the Sabbath. Even more, Jesus provides biblical support for his interpretation referring back to 1 Samuel 21:1–6 when David was hungry and partook of the shewbread. It is not uncommon to find other rabbis utilizing David to support their own legal positions (e.g., *m. Sanh.* 2:2).⁵²

The Lukan account ends abruptly, “The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath” (6:5). Without further explanation, it appears that the Evangelist either did not understand this phrase, or expected his audience to know its meaning. The Markan version adds an important explanatory comment, “The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath,” which is very close to the later Talmudic statement, “it [i.e., the Sabbath] is committed to your hands, not you to its hands” (*b. Yoma* 85b). While the Talmudic statement is written down much later than the Markan account, the meaning is the same. There is a certain amount of authority given to humankind in order to determine what matters are prohibited and which are permissible on the Sabbath. The Lukan statement fits under this understanding, as well, if one reads the appearance of the “Son of Man” in its Hebraic sense, *ben adam* (בן אדם), which, among other things, can mean the “every person”—a general reference to the human being. In other words, according to Luke, as we have seen, the authority to shape allowances and prohibitions on the Sabbath is not a question of Jesus’ authority but one that is within the authority of “every person”/community. The same understanding of *ben adam* appears clearly in Matthew’s version of the “Healing of the Paralytic.”

But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins—he then said to the paralytic—“Rise, take up your bed and go home.” And he rose and went home. When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men.

(Matt 9:5–7)

The Matthean version of the “Plucking of Grains on the Sabbath” has an even more pointed reference to what is allowable on the Sabbath, “I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. And if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of man is lord of the Sabbath” (Matt 12:6–8). Some have suggested that Jesus here refers to himself as “something greater” (*meizon*: μείζον). But this is grammatically impossible. In Greek, as in many ancient languages, nouns have gender and number; Jesus (*ihsous*; Ἰησοῦς) is masculine, singular, while “something greater” is neuter, singular. Matthew cannot be referring to Jesus because the two terms do not agree in gender as Koiné Greek requires. There is another word, however, in the passage above that is both neuter and singular, “mercy” (*eleos*; ἔλεος). The quotation of Hosea 6:6 is

critical to the text; it argues that merciful action takes priority even over the temple. For Jesus, in Matthew and Luke, mercy and deeds of charity are a halakhic, that is, a legal precedent. So too the commandments to love (Deut 6:5; Lev 19:18; 19:34), and the care for interpersonal relationships, take priority over all other commandments. This idea is echoed by the rabbinic statement, “charity and deeds of loving-kindness outweigh all the commandments in the Torah.” In other words, it is the disciples’ hunger and the opportunity to be merciful to them by satisfying it, that take precedence over Sabbath restrictions.

Jewish Styles of Biblical Interpretation.

Ancient Jewish biblical exegesis is often based on uniqueness of Hebrew language in the Bible. Some of these styles of exegesis were known as *middot* and were attributed to Hillel, a sage that lived about one hundred years before Jesus. The seven *middot* of Hillel appear for the first time, unattributed to any sage, in the Tosefta (*Sanh.* 7:11).

	The seven <i>middot</i> of Hillel	שבע מידות דרש הלל לפני זקני בתירה
1	<i>qal v’homor</i> (light and heavy; a <i>minori ad maius</i>)	קל וחומר
2	<i>gezerah shavah</i> (comparison of decrees)	גזרה שוה
3	<i>binyan av mikatuv echad</i> (building a principle from a single text)	בנין אב מכתוב אחד
4	<i>binyan av mishene ketuvim</i> (building a principle from two texts)	בנין אב משני כתובים
5	<i>kelal uferat, uferat ukelal</i> (the general and the particular, the particular and the general)	כלל ופרט, ופרט וכלל
6	<i>keyotze bo mimaqom akher</i> (analogy made from another passage)	כיוצא בו ממקום אחר
7	<i>davar halamed me’inyano</i> (explanation obtained from context)	דבר הלמד מעניינו

Despite the existence of a Greek translation of the Bible in the first century, and, eventually, several Aramaic versions after the destruction of the temple (AD 70), there is no evidence of ancient Jewish interpreters using any text other than the Hebrew one. Although some of these originated in the Greek world, their full adaptation and inclusion among the sages are irrefutable. Moreover, the actual application of these *middot* does not occur often in Second Temple period texts,⁵³ and is far more prevalent in rabbinic texts, specifically within halakhic discussions, with a couple of exceptions (*4 Ezra* 8:42–45; double love commandment, see below).

The Use of Middot in the Gospels. Some of the earliest literary witnesses to these *middot* are the Gospels. Already one finds in Matthew the use of *qal v’homor* (light and heavy). In the “Sermon on the Mount,” Jesus is recorded as saying in regard to the anxieties of life, “But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O men of little faith?” (Matt 6:30). The care of God for the grass of the field, despite its impermanence, is the light matter. If God’s care is true in the light matter, then the more important matter, namely, God clothing the person, is equally so.⁵⁴ As part of



Healing the Man with the Withered Hand (from 11th-century Hilda Codex).

Wadi Qelt, looking east (photo Jeffrey P. García).



the Sermon on the Mount, Matt 6:25–34 provides no explanation for why Jesus’ followers might be anxious. It is true that for many in ancient times, life in general was an anxiety-filled enterprise. In fact, there were other rabbis who taught that their disciples should only be concerned with the remains of the day and not with the coming ones. Another way of unraveling the meaning of this passage regarding anxiety is to see it in light of Jesus’ teaching of charity. Already in Matt 6:19, one reads about “treasure in heaven” as an ancient idiom for giving charity⁵⁵—and the very chapter begins with, “Beware of practicing your charity before men in order to be seen by them...thus, when you give alms...” (Matt 6:1–2). Therefore, the aforementioned anxiety in Matthew may result directly from the degree of charity that Jesus requires elsewhere. As he says to the rich young man in Matt 19:21, “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.” The

St. George’s Monastery sits in Wadi Qelt which leads from Jericho to Jerusalem (public domain).



Lukan version adds the clarifying adjective, “all,” indicating how much is required of the rich (see Luke 18:22, also 4:6). The concept of giving “all” would surely cause a great deal of anxiety, since it appears to go beyond the expected 1/5 ratio of assets to charity that the rabbis established. While giving all is not without parallel in ancient Judaism (*b. Ta’an. 24a*), it was not the common ancient Jewish view of charitable giving—such expectations would have naturally caused concern for one’s own well-being (e.g., clothing, food, etc.). Jesus’ teaching on God’s intimate care for his people and our own anxieties about tomorrow makes the most sense when it is connected to the emphasis on charity that appears throughout the sermon and the Gospels.

Another *middah, gezerah shavah*—a comparison or analogy of two rulings that share similar words (sometimes exact forms)—occurs in Matthew. When utilized in rabbinic discourse, it is generally part of halakhic discourse, although evidence exists of its use in non-halakhic contexts. The Gospels utilize them generally in matters having to do with Torah observance. The most obvious example is the Double Love commandment—Deut 6:5 and Lev 19:18.

Deut 6:5: *and you shall love (אהבה) the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.*

Lev 19:18: *but you shall love (אהבה) your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.*

The fusion of these passages is found throughout Second Temple period Jewish sources (*Jub. 20:2, 7; 36:4–8; T. Iss. 5:2; T. Dan 5:3; Philo, Spec. Laws 2.63; Sib. Or. 8:480–82; Did. 1:2*) and was the result of unique phraseology, “And you shall love” (*ve-ahavta: אהבה*). These two passages are Jesus’ response to the question, “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law” (Matt 22:36; Mark 12:28). Of course, by the time of Jesus, Leviticus 19:18’s “you shall love your neighbor as yourself,” had already attained an esteemed recognition among Jewish communities (*Sir 28:2–4; Gal 5:14; James 2:8; cf. Rom 13:9; see also Avot de-Rabbi Nathan B 26; y. Ned. 9:4; Gen. Rab. 9:4*). It is especially highlighted in the famous, but later, talmudic story of “Shammai, Hillel, and the Proselyte” (*b. Shabb. 31a*).

The “Parable of the Good Samaritan” (Luke 10:25–37) details a unique innovation regarding the Double Love commandment. In a similar scenario to the “Rich Young Man,” Jesus is posed a question regarding what shall be done to inherit eternal life (Luke 10:25). In quintessential Jewish fashion, Jesus asks a question, “What is written in the law? How do you read?” The scholar of Jewish law (*nomikos: νομικός*), replies with the double love commandment, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” Yet, in order to correctly understand Jesus’ affirmation of the two commandments, the Jewish scholar poses a logical question, “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus then launches into the story of the Good Samaritan:

A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion, and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; then he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, "Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back." Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?

(Luke 10:30–36)

Jesus has ingeniously flipped the question on its head by depicting the Samaritan as the hero. The potential of this narrative to be controversial is high, especially considering that the relations between Jews and Samaritans were, at best, tense. Adding insult to injury, a Levite and a priest are depicted as having passed by the injured, nearly dead man.

The story may hinge on the legal designation of what it means to be "half dead," that is, near death but not quite there.⁵⁶ One must remember when reading the story that coming in contact with a corpse is the highest degree of impurity, especially for a priest. The depiction of the priest and the Levite may have been a stinging indirect critique against the chief priests who had forgotten their duties to care for the Jewish people, and invested themselves in amassing wealth. Whatever the answer may be, surely the scholar did not expect Jesus to bring a Samaritan into the equation. Yet, it is the Samaritan who does a profound act of mercy to a stranger whose social, ethnic, or national identity are lacking. That this story likely takes place geographically on the well-known road from Jerusalem to Jericho, the very route that Jewish pilgrims would take to avoid traversing through the heart of Samaritan country, is not happenstance. Turnage notes that Samaritans would sometimes harass pilgrims as they made their way to Jerusalem, strongly suggesting that the victim was Jewish.⁵⁷

The more unique departure with this account is that it leads the reader back to the third occasion where *ve-ahavta* appears in the Bible: "The stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself (*ve-ahavta lo kamocho*: וְאַהַבְתָּ לוֹ כְּמוֹךָ); for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God" (Lev 19:34). By the time of the Second Temple, the relative term *kamocho* ("as yourself") comes to be understood, "as one who is like you." In other words, one who shares the same strengths, vulnerabilities, and weaknesses. Certainly, it is beyond coincidence that these passages, which share the same unique language, were brought together; it is not random or coincidental. It purposely upsets expected ethnic and social boundaries, and causes



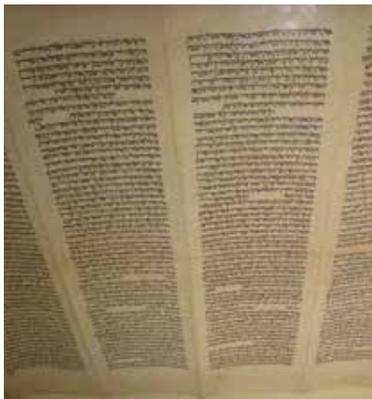
Corinthian pillars of the 4th-century limestone synagogue at Capernaum (photo Maureen Farrell García).

the hearer to come face to face with the dangers of following societal ideologies rather than the commandments to love God, neighbor, and foreigner without exception. In fact, Jesus' response may subtly critique the more restrictive terminology that we find among the *yahad* of Qumran, "Each one must love his brother (אחייו) as himself..." (CD 6:20–21; see also *Jub.* 35:22). The use of "brother" (*ach*: אח) instead of "neighbor" (*re'ah*: רֵעֵךְ) naturally restricts who the Qumran community is expected to love, that is, specifically, those who belong to the "sons of light" (i.e., Qumran community). This idea finds a parallel in another Dead Sea Scroll, the Community Rule, where the "sons of light" are commanded to hate all of the "sons of darkness" (i.e., everyone outside of the community, 1QS 1:9–10). Jesus' interpretation of "neighbor" expands the expectation of merciful actions, and good deeds, beyond communal identity and forcefully challenges these potential limitations by portraying a Samaritan as caretaker of the nearly dead.

The Synagogue at Nazareth and Jewish Biblical Interpretation. While we have several references of Jesus preaching in the synagogues of Galilee (Matt 4:23; Mark 1:39; Luke 4:44), apart from the healings which are associated with lessons, there is only one fully fleshed-out narrative of the biblical content of his preaching (Luke 4:16–30). The parallels to this account in Matthew and Mark do not preserve the teaching, but note that the visitors of the synagogue were astonished (Matt 13:53–58; Mark 6:1–6). Luke reads:



A reconstructed first-century synagogue at Nazareth (photo Ian Scott, via Wikimedia Commons).



Torah scroll not unlike the one Jesus would have unrolled in Nazareth that day (via Wikimedia Commons).

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and he went to the synagogue, as his custom was, on the Sabbath day. And he stood up to read; and there was given to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the book and found the place where it was written, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.” And he closed the book, 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.”

(Luke 4:16–21; RSV)

The Evangelist provides the reader with important details of synagogal practice that Matthew and Mark do not. First, Luke states that going to the synagogue on the Sabbath was a “custom” for Jesus (more on this below). Second, it says, “he stood up to read,” which Shmuel Safrai notes is evidence that Jesus also read from the Torah, as well as Isaiah.⁵⁸ Standing to read the Torah was required, where reading the prophetic portion, that is the *haftarah*, did not necessarily need to be done while standing.

Jesus opens Isaiah and, at first glance, appears to read only from Isaiah 61:1–2. However, the text in Luke does not follow chapter 61 exactly. There are three differences between the Lukan passage and the prophet: (1) the omission of Isaiah 61:1b, “to bind the brokenhearted”; (2) the omission of Isaiah 61:2b, “And the day of vengeance of our God”; and (3) the insertion of Isaiah 58:6, “and let the oppressed go free.” What is interesting for us is the sudden insertion of Isaiah 58:6. It is common for ancient sages to quote terse sections of passages, assuming that the readers were already aware of the complete text. Insertions of a separate text indicates some interpretive ingenuity on the part of the teacher; the speaker moves from quoting and reading to interpreting. The question is, of course, in what manner is this done?

The insertion of Isaiah 58 brings the reader to another interpretive *middah*, as mentioned above, *gezerah shavah*, which interprets one text through another because both share unique wording. Both Isaiah chapters share phraseology that is unique in the Hebrew Bible, *ratzon la-adonai* (רצון ליהוה, will of the Lord). The only two occasions where this appears are in two passages that Jesus brings together.⁵⁹ This style of biblical interpretation is not coincidental, as its use reveals the very core of Jesus’ message. Isaiah 61 speaks about the “Spirit of the Lord” and touches on the expectation that God would bring an end to the perceived enemies of the community at Nazareth. This is not wholly unlike what the Qumran community expected for the “Sons of Darkness” (see the *Scroll of the War of the Sons of Light Against the Sons of Darkness* [1QM]). But Jesus’ quotation in Luke omits the “day of vengeance” (*yom naqam*: יום

נקם) from Isaiah 61:2. In fact, he is challenging this ideology by inserting a portion of Isaiah 58, whose essence is found in verses 6–7:

Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?

(Isa 58:6–7)

Jesus is pushing against the perception that we find at Qumran and elsewhere, namely, that one group of Jews would be blessed, and the other destroyed. The thrust of his message resonates with the story of another *hasid* who lived before Jesus, Honi (Gr. Onias) the Circle Drawer.⁶⁰ Josephus recounts the story of his death. It occurs during the Hasmonean period, when the sons of Alexander Yannai (Jannaeus) and Shelomtzion (Salome) Alexandra, Hyrcanus and Aristobulus II vied for the throne. During Passover, as Aristobulus was held up in the temple due to Hyrcanus’s support from King Aretas III, ruler of the Nabateans, Honi—described as a righteous man and beloved of God—was brought to Hyrcanus’s camp. Knowing full well that God listened diligently to his prayers, he asked that Honi pray a curse on Aristobulus. Essentially, Honi was told by Hyrcanus, a Jewish leader, to curse a fellow Jew—his brother(!)—Aristobulus. Honi responded,

O God, the king of the whole world! Since those that stand now with me are your people, and those that are besieged are also your priests, I beseech you, that you will neither hearken to the prayers of those against these, nor bring to effect what these pray against those.

(Ant. 4:24)

The prayer would be Honi’s last. When finished, he was immediately stoned by the Jews who were present. This is strikingly similar to the end of the Lukan narrative, except that Jesus survives: “When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. And they rose up and put him out of the city, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw him down headlong” (Luke 4:28–29). Compared to Honi, Jesus’ message was even more pointed. Not only did he highlight the misguided judgment of one Jewish community hoping for the harm or destruction of another—as in Josephus—he inserted Isaiah 58 to present a deeper challenge by suggesting that the “day of the Lord”—the time of his favor—is attained by feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and providing a home for the homeless. In that sense, Jesus’ statement, “today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21), is not a self-proclamation of his own messianic self-awareness, but the affirmation that merciful and righteous actions—those matters that identify his movement—are what brings forth the time of God’s favor.



Entrance to the traditional tomb of Honi the Circle Drawer (photo Dr. Avishai Teicher, via Pikiwiki Israel).