



# **FROM JUDAISM TO CHRISTIANITY**

A brief historical background of Christianity and how the faith emerged from the Judo-Roman conflicts till St. Paul gave the dogma its present shape that developed into the Roman Catholicism

**By**

**Muhammad Ashraf Chheenah**

**I. S. R. C.**

**Interfaith Study and Research Centre**

**Satrah Meel, Murree Road**

**Islamabad-Pakistan**

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Chheenah, Muhammad Ashraf

## **From Judaism to Christianity**

SATRAH MEEL, MURREE ROAD ISLAMABAD-PAKISTAN: I. S. R. C. 2020

Pages: XIII + 236 = 249

Publisher: **I. S. R. C.**, Satrah meel, Murree Road, Islamabad-Pakistan.

Printer: Shirkat Printing Press, Nisbat Rd. Lahore

Title: Haroon Rasheed

1<sup>st</sup> Edition: 2020

Copies: 1,100

ISBN: 978-969-9704-08-6

Price: Pakistan Rs. 1300/-; Overseas US \$ 22/-; £ 16/-

Available Muhammad Ashraf Chheenah., I. S. R. C., SATRAH MEEL,

(In Pakistan): MURREE ROAD, ISLAMABAD-PAKISTAN

Cel. (0092) 03015241813,

Land Line: 092512807012,13,

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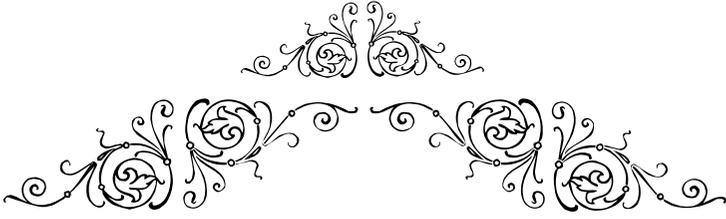
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For Assistance:

Rizwan Chheena : 03005257673

Haroon Rasheed : 03349192488, 03028855430



## *Dedication*

This work is dedicated

Primarily to

*The Almighty Allah*

The All-Compassionate, The All-Merciful

And then to the

Students and scholars engaged in the

Comparative study of the teachings of

Revealed religions.



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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am extremely grateful to the Almighty Allah for His help and beneficence during my ailments to enable me complete this treatise. I frankly admit that without cooperation of all members of my family, it would not have been possible for me to present this book to the readers.

I must also thank Mr. Hafiz Haroon Rasheed for his most valuable help to produce various reference books and also for various excerpts from the internet. He also rendered valuable help for proof reading of the book. May God bless him and all members of my family with long, healthy and prosperous lives on Earth and with generous rewards in the Hereafter.

Muhammad Ashraf Chheenah,  
Chairman,  
ISRC, Islamabad, 2020.

# ABBREVIATIONS

AD/CE	anno domini (Latin), in the year of the Lord, Common/ Christian Era.
Ar	Arab, Arabia, Arabian, Arabic.
B	Bible.
BC	Before Christ; Bible Commentary; Biblical Commentary.
BCE	Before Christian/Common Era.
c/ca	About, approximately (Latin circa)
CE	Common Era: secular form of AD.
Ch	Chapter.
DB	Dictionary of the Bible.
Ed	Editor, edited by, edition.
Edn	Edition.
e.g./eg	for example (Latin exempli gratia).
Enc	Encyclopedia/Encyclopaedia/Encyclopedic.
Heb	Hebrew.
i.e.	that is, that means, namely.
MT/Mt	Massoretic /Masoretic Text of the OT; Matthew; Mount.
NT	New Testament of the Bible Contains 27 books: 4 Gospels, Acts, Epistles (letters), and lastly Revelations. It was originally written in Greek, whereas Jesus Christ delivered his message in the Aramaic language.
op.cit.	in the work already quoted (Latin opere citato).
OT	Old Testament of the Bible Consists of 39 books: The first five are collectively called the Pentateuch or Torah. It was originally written in Heb.
ﷺ عليه وسلم	(pbAh) peace and blessings of Allah upon him.
p/pp	Page/pages.
P	Priestly tradition of the OT of the Bible.
Pbl/pbg	Publisher(s) Publication(s) /Publishing/.
Rvd	Revised.
St	Saint.
s.v.	Under the word or heading.
Tr.	Translator, translation, translated by.
Uni./Univ.	University.
v/vv	Verse/verses of the Bible.
V	Version (Tr.) of the Bible.
Vol.	Volume.
(...)	It indicates that some word, words, sentence, sentences, line, or lines have been left over from the original quotation.
(....)	It shows that a sizeable text has been omitted from the original quotation.
[ ]	The square brackets are used to insert something by the Tr./Ed., which did not originally exist in the quotation.
AV/KJV	Authorized Version/King James Version.
CCB	The Christian Community Bible (Manila: Divine Word Pbln, 1988).
CEV	Contemporary English Version (NY: American Bible Society, 1995).
GNB/TEV	Good News Bible/ Today's English Version -do-.
GNB:REV	Good News Bible (Revised Edn), Minto: The B. Society in Australia Inc. NSW.
LB	The Living Bible (Illinois: Tyndale House Pblshrs. 1976)
MT	The Torah, The Mesoretic Text (Jewish Pbln. Society of America).
NAB	New American Bible, Catholic Bible Association, 1991.

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NASB	The New American Standard Bible, Cambridge Univ. Press 1977.
NEB	The New English Bible, Oxford Univ. Press, 1985.
NIV	New international Version, London, 1984.
NJB	The New Jerusalem Bible, Standard Edn, Bombay: St. Paul's, 1993.
NKJV	New King James Version.
NLTr.	New Living Translation, 1996:
NOAB.	The New Oxf. Annotated B:
NRSV.	New Revised Standard Version:
RSV.	Revised Standard Version.
RBV	Revised Berkeley Version:
Peshitta	The Authorised B. of the Church of the East, 1957.
Knox	Ronald A.Knox, Tr. From the Vulgate, Macmillan & Co. 1957

## Abbreviations of the Books of the Bible

### 1. The Jewish Bible/OT

<b>Abbreviation:</b>	<b>Book:</b>	<b>Abbreviation:</b>	<b>Book:</b>
Amos or Am	Amos	Judg. or Jgs	Judges
1 Chron. or 1 Chr	1 Chronicles	1 Kings or 1 Kgs	1 Kings
2 Chron. or 2 Chr	2 Chronicles	2 Kings or 2 Kgs	2 Kings
Dan. or Dn	Daniel	Lam. or Lam	Lamentations
Deut. or Dt	Deuteronomy	Lev. or Lv	Leviticus
Eccles. or Eccl	Ecclesiastes	Mal. or Mal	Malachi
Esther or Est	Esther	Mic. or Mi	Micah
Exod. or Ex	Exodus	Nah. or Na	Nahum
Ezek. or Ez	Ezekiel	Neh. or Neh	Nehemiah
Ezra or Ezr	Ezra	Num. or Nm	Numbers
Gen. or Gn	Genesis	Obad. or Ob	Obadiah
Hab. or Hb	Habakkuk	Prov. or Prv	Proverbs
Hag. or Hg	Haggai	Ps. (pl.Pss.) or	Psalms
Hosea or Hos	Hosea	Ps (pl. Pss)	
Isa. or Is	Isaiah	Ruth or Ru	Ruth
Jer. or Jer	Jeremiah	1 Sam. or 1 Sm	1 Samuel
Job or Jb	Job	2 Sam. or 2 Sm	2 Samuel
Joel or Jl	Joel	Song of Sol. or	Song of Solomon (=Song of Songs)
Jon. or Jon	Jonah	Sg	
Josh. or Jo	Joshua	Zech. or Zec	Zechariah
		Zeph. or Zep	Zephaniah

### 2. The New Testament

<b>Abbreviation:</b>	<b>Book:</b>	<b>Abbreviation:</b>	<b>Book:</b>
Acts	Acts of the Apostles	Luke or Lk	Luke
Apoc.	Apocalypse (=Revelation)	Mark or Mk	Mark
Col. or Col	Colossians	Matt. or Mt	Matthew
1 Cor. or 1 Cor	1 Corinthians	1 Pet. or 1 Pt	1 Peter
2 Cor. or 2 Cor	2 Corinthians	2 Pet. or 2 Pt	2 Peter
Eph. or Eph	Ephesians	Philem. or Phlm	Philemon
Gal. or Gal	Galatians	Phil. or Phil	Philippians
Heb. or Heb	Hebrews	Rev. or Rv	Revelation (=Apocalypse)
James or Jas	James	Rom. or Rom	Romans
John or Jn	John (Gospel)	1Thess. or 1Thes	1 Thessalonians
1 John or 1 Jn	1 John (Epistle)	2Thess. or 2Thes	2 Thessalonians
2 John or 2 Jn	2 John (Epistle)	1 Tim. or 1 Tm	1 Timothy
3 John or 3 Jn	3 John (Epistle)	2 Tim. or 2 Tm	2 Timothy
Jude	Jude	Titus or Ti	Titus

# PREFACE

The provisional draft of the book had been completed about 4 years ago but its publication had to be delayed in the hope of finding some more details. Unluckily due to certain ailments and eyesight problems, no further work could be done on the subject. The book, therefore, contains the best that could be produced under the circumstances. We hope that even the half-cooked material may help the scholars to produce a developed work from it.



# RELIGIO-POLITICAL BACKGROUND OF ISRAEL

For a proper understanding of the Religio-political circumstances and social environments prevailing in the period prior to the advent of Jesus Christ we need to have a cursory glance at the historical, cultural, religious as well as socio-political background of the Jews starting right from the sojourn of the Israelites in Egypt to the time of advent and crucifixion/ascension of the Messiah. Of particular interest to us is the period starting from the conquest of Alexander the Great and his policy to Hellenize the Lands conquered by him. The Greek as well as Roman strategies to maintain and prolong their effective control on the nations subjugated by them vis-à-vis the continued struggle of the Jews and others for freedom from the foreign rule shall be the focus of our study. We therefore need to study the procedure, the pace and the progress of Hellenizing the Jews as against revolutionary ethos of the Jewish race in Judea, Galilee and other parts of Palestine who were continuing to aspire national autonomy and helplessly awaiting a national savior to restore the kingdom of Israel. We also observe that the purpose behind the Hellenizing policy was nothing else than to establish the superiority of the Greeks and to harmonize the people with rulers so that they could promote unity to preserve peace to prolong their control over the conquered lands as long as they could. The period from the conquest of Alexander the Great to final destruction of the Jewish community of Judea in 135 A.D. has therefore to be studied against the said background showing struggles of the Jews for freedom as against cruelties of Greece and Rome to crush the same. Our study reveals that though the death blow on the Jewish race in 70 A.D and 130 A.D. did eliminate the Jews from Palestine for a long time but in spite of all this, Jewish hopes for revival of their kingdom and their visions for the

savior did not end with numerous the tragic losses including those mentioned above.

Let us start from the time when Brothers of Joseph had sold him to the Ishmaelites/Midianites who sold him again as a slave in Egypt. In due course Joseph rose to the position of the governor of Egypt and called all his family there. Jacob the father of Joseph went from Canaan along with 75 members of his family which included 11 brothers of Joseph.<sup>1</sup> Due to Joseph the king gave them property in the best of the land in the region of Goshen and also near the city of Rameses where they continued to enjoy peaceful and prosperous life for a few decades.

Sometime after the death of Joseph there was a new king in Egypt who did not know Joseph nor had he any regard for the Israelites or their patriarchs. He therefore enslaved the Israelites and, subjected them to hard labor in such a manner that they were put under the slave-drivers who dealt harshly with them. The Egyptians thereafter continued to make their lives miserable by forcing them into cruel slavery extending from three to four hundred years. Eventually the Israelites were groaning under pain and torture inflicted on them by the Egyptians when the Lord heard their prayers and turned to them in a kind manner. The Lord sent Prophet Moses to deliver the Israelites from the bondage in Egypt and to lead them towards the land of Canaan with the promise that they would possess the same. Ultimately in response to prolonged struggle of Moses and Aaron aided by so many miracles as signs of Lord<sup>2</sup> to prove the truth of Moses the pharaoh was compelled to deliver the Israelites. Soon after their release from the Egyptians the Israelites started their journey towards Canaan in about 1462 B.C. They had hardly reached the Red Sea (or the Sea of Reeds) when the king and the people of Egypt realized their mistake and started chasing the Israelites to capture them and to bring them back to serve as their slaves. The king and his army overtook the Israelites just when they were at the sea and

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 7:14.

<sup>2</sup> Ex. 4 to Ex. 12.

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they were trying to wade through the same. It is said that the Lord miraculously provided a dry path to the Israelites through the sea while they saw the king and his army following them drowned or lying dead on the sea-shore.<sup>3</sup>

## **Birth of a nation**

It is pertinent to note here that the Israelites had been serving the Egyptians as their slaves for many generations. The Egyptians had crushed their spirits with hard labor and they were being humiliated through insult and maltreatment by the cruel slave-drivers. Due to prolonged slavery the Israelites had lost all virtues of the free people. They had lost all initiative to do or to accept anything good as their own and refused to do anything unless they were compelled for the same. They usually behaved as stubborn and stiff-necked people who very often complained against Moses and Aaron and rebelled against the Lord. Moses therefore had to make hectic efforts to convince them of the divine favor and the message of hope from the Lord. Under the circumstances the miracles of Moses had the dual purpose of compelling the king and the people of Egypt to obey the word of God and also to convince the Jews that he was a true prophet of the Lord. To start with, the Lord had given Moses miracle of the stick and the hand sparkling white.<sup>4</sup> In addition to above Moses also performed the miracle of blood, frogs, gnats, flies, death of animals, boils, hail, locusts and darkness but the Egyptians continued to refuse the request of Moses to release the Israelites. Ultimately Moses announced the death of the first born of the Egyptian people and also of their animals. It was after the said calamity that the king had no other option except to allow Moses to take along the people of Israel.<sup>5</sup> After crossing the sea through the dry path the Israelites also witnessed the miracle of changing bitter

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<sup>3</sup> Gen. 14:21-31.

<sup>4</sup> Ex. 7:1-12.

<sup>5</sup> Ex. 7 to Ex. 11.

water into sweet at Marah.<sup>6</sup> God also provided them with Manna and Quails for food.<sup>7</sup> At Rephidim Moses struck the rock with a stick and the water came out for the people to drink.<sup>8</sup> By this time the Israelites had witnessed so many signs of the Lord that they had no justification to disbelieve Moses or the Lord.

Eventually when the Israelites reached Mount Sinai the Lord God made a covenant with them and gave them his law including Ten Commandments as core of the covenant. It was the said covenant and the law revealed to Moses at Mount Sinai which persisted as universal legacy and heritage of religious and social reform which was the principle factor uniting the Israelites to give them a particular identification among other nations of the world. By virtue of the said covenant the Israelites became god's people as described in the Exodus:-

**3.** And Moses went up unto God, and the LORD called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel; **4.** Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. **5.** Now therefore, **if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant,** then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: **6.** And **ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests,** and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.<sup>9</sup>

## Disobedience of Israel

Moses wrote down the commandments of the Lord and recited the same before all the people of Israel who heard the same attentively and firmly promised to obey the lord and to do everything that he had commanded. The covenant stood sealed as described in Ex 24:7-11. Subsequently Moses again went up the Mount Sinai to receive further instructions from the Lord, and stayed there for about 40 days. During his prolonged absence the

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<sup>6</sup> Ex. 15:22-25.

<sup>7</sup> Ex. 16.

<sup>8</sup> Ex. 17:1-6.

<sup>9</sup> Ex. 19:3-6 KJV.

Israelites lost their patience. They moulded a golden calf from their ornaments and started worshipping the same as their God. When Moses returned to the camp, he became furious to observe apostasy of the people by clear cut transgression against their covenant with the Lord. As chastisement from the Lord, 23,000 of them fell dead in one day.<sup>10</sup> Although the Israelites deserved more severe punishment for their disbelief and sin of worshipping the calf yet due to timely intercession of Moses the lord did not destroy all of them there and then. They were however told to move away from that place. Subsequently when they were setting up their camps in the wilderness of Paran the Lord instructed Moses to explore the land of Canaan. On return of the spies Moses decided to invade Canaan, but the Israelites with the exception of two or three persons refused to obey him. It is said that the Israelites had received horrifying reports about the size and strength of the inhabitants in the southern part of Canaan. They were therefore terrified to face them. Aside from their refusal to obey Moses they also started complaining against the Lord. Due to their refusal and rebellion the Lord announced the judgment that: "*None of these people will live to enter that land.*"<sup>11</sup> God also told Moses to tell the people that:-

**29. You will die and your corpses will be scattered across this wilderness.** Because you have complained against me, none of you over twenty years of age will enter that land. **30.** I promised to let you live there, but not one of you will, except Caleb and Joshua. **31.** You said that your children would be captured, but I will bring them into the land that you rejected, and it will be their home. **32.** You will die here in this wilderness. **33.** Your children will wander in the wilderness for forty years, suffering for your unfaithfulness, until the last one of you dies. **34.** You will suffer the consequences of your sin for forty years, one year for each of the forty days you spent exploring the land. You will know what it means to have me against you! **35.** I swear that I will do this to you wicked people who have gathered together

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<sup>10</sup> 1Cor. 10:9.

<sup>11</sup> Num. 14:22.

against me. Here in the wilderness every one of you will die. I, the LORD, have spoken.<sup>12</sup>

Everything occurred exactly in accordance with the word of God as stated above. The Lord struck them and they all died in the desert.<sup>13</sup>

After the death of all the people of 20 years or more during 40 years wandering in the desert a new generation grew up to form the nation of Israel. The admonition in consequence of the violation of the covenant at Sinai and punishment due to their subsequent disobedience in the wilderness of Paran had made the new generation realize that they had no chance of existence unless and until they obeyed all the commandments of the Lord and fulfilled their obligations under the covenant with Him. It was therefore the conviction of the Israelites that they were a nation chosen by God to reveal the divine message to the world. They believed that God alone reigns over his people and **if they preserved the covenant the covenant shall preserve them**. They held that obedience to the Lord would rescue Israel from adversity and it will also bring peace and justice to them. They also knew that:-

**37.** The LORD commanded Moses **38.** to say to the people of Israel: "Make tassels on the corners of your garments and put a blue cord on each tassel. You are to do this for all time to come. **39.** The tassels will serve as reminders, and each time you see them you will remember all my commands and obey them; **then you will not turn away from me and follow your own wishes and desires.** **40.** The tassels will remind you to keep all my commands, and you will belong completely to me.<sup>14</sup>

The repeated admonition and punishments inflicted by the Lord on the Israelites made them sufficiently conscious of the fact that **obedience to the law of the Lord was a must for his people in any case**. Since it was only the law that reflected the will of the Lord therefore the Israelites had no way out except to abide by the same. It was due to the said bondage of the covenant that the

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<sup>12</sup> Num 14:29-35 GNB.

<sup>13</sup> Num. 14:38.

<sup>14</sup> Num 15:37-40 GNB.

Israelites called themselves '**The People of Law**' (Torah). Their nation and community was therefore formed solely on the basis of law. They also knew that their salvation depended upon exact observance of the law which was not merely a burden on them but also the only way towards prosperity, peace, and welfare of the people here on earth and in the hereafter. Israelites as such were the only people who were blessed by direct and perfect guidance from the Almighty through Moses, the great prophet of the Lord. Law was therefore the proud possession of the Israelites which obliged them to remember the same as per commandment of the Lord enjoining on them that:

Do not add anything to what I command you, and do not take anything away. Obey the commands of the LORD your God that I have given you.<sup>15</sup>

The Israelites therefore had no doubt about the fact that **their survival as well as salvation depended on loyalty to God who was always ready to save his people whenever they repented and turned to him obediently.**

The repeated disobedience of the Israelites as stated earlier had caused death in the wilderness to the people of 20 years or more. After the period of the said affliction it was a new generation of the Israelites whom Moses started leading towards the Promised Land. Moses gained certain initial victories over King Arad in the southern part of Canaan and also defeated king Sahun of the Amorites and King Og of Bashan. He also arranged an assault against the Midianites, killed all their men and women, but saved alive only the virgins. Subsequently after the death of Moses and Aaron, Joshua was made successor to Moses (Num. 27:15-21) to lead the Israelites towards the land promised to them.

Bible tells us that under the leadership of Joshua the Israelites crossed the Jordan River and conquered Jericho, Shechem, Ai, and also the territories held by five kings of

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<sup>15</sup> Deu 4:2 GNB.

the Amorites. As such substantial parts of Canaan were captured by Joshua due to which Israelites succeeded to have their first stronghold in Canaan since their deliverance from Egypt. Joshua distributed the conquered territories among the twelve tribes of the Israelites.<sup>16</sup> After the death of Joshua in about 1372 B.C. the Israelites were left with no common leader of the nation. They however had certain leaders called *judges* most of whom were military leaders rather than the judges in the legal or literal sense of the word.

During the next 307 years from 1371 to 1065 B.C. the Israelites had judges like Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Gideon, Abimelech, Tola, Jair, Jeptah, Ibzen, Elon, Abden and Samson etc. This was a troubled period for the Israelites during which they had certain victories but very often they met with crushing defeats due to which they remained under the yoke of one nation or another for long spans of time. The Israelites therefore implored the Lord to give them a king to lead them in the war against the philistines and other nations around them.

### **Saul, David & Solomon as Kings of Israel**

During the period of Eli the priest serving as a judge of the Israelites the Israelites met with a crushing defeat at the hands of the Philistines who killed 30,000 soldiers of Israel in the battle field besides taking away God's covenant box representing the majestic throne of the Lord Almighty and the sign of his presence in the camp of Israel. The shock of defeat, destruction of army, loss of the covenant box along with the news of the death of Hophni and Phinehas two sons of Eli brought sudden death to the priest who was already 98 years old.<sup>17</sup> Meanwhile the people of Israel continued to pray to the Lord to save them from the philistines. This was the time when:-

3. Samuel said to the people of Israel, "If you are going to turn to the LORD with all your hearts, you must get rid of all the foreign gods and the images of the goddess Astarte.

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<sup>16</sup> Joshua. 13:8 to 22:10.

<sup>17</sup> 1Sam 4:12-18.

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Dedicate yourselves completely to the LORD and worship only him, and he will rescue you from the power of the Philistines."

4. So the Israelites got rid of their idols of Baal and Astarte, and worshiped only the LORD.<sup>18</sup>

Eventually the Lord heard the prayer of the Israelites and instructed Prophet Samuel to Anoint, Saul son of Kish as the king of Israel. Soon after the anointing of Saul by Samuel as the king of Israel, the ammonites besieged Jabesh, a town in Gilead within the territories of the Israelites. Saul defeated the enemy and rescued the Israelites. Subsequently during a battle at Socoth David son of Jessie a shepherd youth, killed Goliath the Giant of the philistines which made him extremely popular among the Israelites. Saul became jealous of the increasing popularity of David and made several attempts to kill him but the Lord God saved David from each such attempt. Ultimately after the death of Saul, King David succeeded to take over as the King of Judah and Israel in about 1018 B.C. David had many victories against the Philistines and others. He reigned for about 7 years in Hebron. In the seventh year of his reign David took over Jerusalem after defeating the Jebusites and made it the capital of the Kingdom of Israel. From Jerusalem, David ruled Palestine for about 33 years till his death. Jerusalem thereafter retained its central position in Palestine till it stood utterly destroyed by the Romans in about 135 A.D.

David was the person who defeated the Amalekites and the Philistines. He also defeated the Moabites, the Edomites, the Ammonites and the king of the Syrian state of Zoba, Hadadezer son of Rehob etc. David therefore became the mightiest king of Israel who held a vast territory comprising most parts of Palestine with certain parts of Syria and Jordan valley to the east of the Jordan River. Solomon his successor also continued to rule the land conquered by his father for another 40 years. It was during the reign of King Solomon that the magnificent temple at Jerusalem was constructed and dedicated to the Lord during his reign to

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<sup>18</sup> 1Sa 7:3-4 GNB.

serve as the central sanctuary of the Hebrew race. After the death of King Solomon the ten northern tribes separated themselves from Judea and constructed another temple at mount Garizim and made it the central sanctuary for the Northern Tribes of Israel. The temple at Jerusalem however continued to retain its position as focus of the Jewish cult till its final destruction in 70 A.D.

After establishment of two separate kingdoms there had been many kings in Israel and also in Judea. King David however has always been remembered as the greatest leader, hero and a legendary king of Israel representing power, glory and the sanctity of the Israelites as the '*Holy One of God*'. It was therefore King David whom Nathan the Prophet conveyed the message of the Lord that:-

“You will always have descendants, and I will make your kingdom last forever. Your dynasty will never end.”<sup>19</sup>

The said prediction however turned out to be incorrect due to its non-fulfillment since 587 B.C. Any how there is hardly any doubt that the Israelites have always been eagerly awaiting for revival of the golden period of their history on the pattern of the reign of David. Ever since the time of David the Israelites have been dreaming for the restoration of autonomy, strength, unity, prosperity and kingdom of the Jewish race. King David therefore remains the ideal king and the prototype of the eventual Messiah being awaited by the Israelites ever since 721 B.C. to about 1000 years after the death/ascension of Jesus in about 29 A.D.

## **The two Hebrew Kingdoms**

Factually the vigor of David's rule had started showing a decline after the completion and dedication of the temple by King Solomon son of David at Jerusalem. Turbulent Edom in the south became independent. The masses of Israelites felt hard pressed under the taxation raised by Solomon for construction of the temple, the palaces and various other magnificent buildings throughout Palestine.

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<sup>19</sup> 2Sa 7:16.

Soon after the death of Solomon and during the reign of Rehoboam his son the ten northern tribes revolted against the extortionate taxes which eventually led to the separation of those tribes from Judea. As such the 10 northern tribes established a separate kingdom in the name of Israel and made Jeroboam their king. Only the tribe of Judah had remained loyal to David's descendants who continued to rule over Judea till 587 B.C. Bitter animosities occurred between the two kingdoms of the Hebrews and both have been blaming each other starting from the division of the Kingdom in about 970 to 722 B.C. i.e. till the end of the northern kingdom at the hands of Sargon II. Due to severe animosity between them the historians or the writers attached to the royal courts of each of the kingdoms tried to blame the other. Although many accounts of this period might have been true depiction of facts yet we cannot rule out the possibility of false allegations or colored reflection of facts by the historians against their opponents. As such certain accounts pertaining to the depravity of King Ahab, Queen Gezebel and reports about the people attached to the royal house of Israel in the north, might have been distorted reports of the facts. Similarly many allegations against the family of King David, his ancestors and descendants might also have originated merely due to the prejudice of the historians attached to the royal court of the northern kingdom. We therefore need to read with care and caution the story of incest between Judah and Tamar (Gen. 38), Story of Ruth (Ru. 3) The story of David and Bathsheba (2Sam. 11) crime of Amnon (2Sam. 13) and many other stories showing abasement and apostasy of King Solomon and his successors which might have been the product of the historians attached to the royal court of the northern kingdom. Since most of the records including the scripture and the historical writings stood destroyed during the invasion of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar therefore it can be presumed that during the post-exilic period the composers of the Old Testament might also have utilized historical records surviving from the history of the Israelites composed in the kingdom of Israel. Similarly

many allegations against the kings of Israel describing apostasy, transgression of law and animosity against Judea might also have been the product of the Jewish historians residing in Judea after separation of the ten northern tribes from them. A hint to the said antagonism between the people of the northern kingdom and the people of Judea from the date of their separation is also found in the following:-

“Ever since that time the people of the northern kingdom of Israel have been in rebellion against the dynasty of David.”<sup>20</sup>

Although after the death of Solomon the new kings of Israel as well as the kings of Judah had mostly been transgressing the law of the Lord yet it seems that the position in the northern kingdom grew worse than that prevailing in the south. The kings and the people of Israel went far away from the covenant of the Lord. They forgot the Lord and started worshiping Baal and Astarte. Jeroboam the first King of the Israelites made two bulls of gold. He placed one bull at Bethel and the other in Dan and advised the people to worship them. In spite of the admonition of a prophet from Judah Jeroboam did not turn to the Lord God of Israel. Subsequently in about 874 B.C.E. Ahab (874-853) became the king of Israel. Both Ahab and his queen Jezebel went far astray in their evil ways.

## **Prophet Elijah and the Drought**

King Ahab of Israel married Jezebel the daughter of King Ethbaal of Sidon and built a temple to Baal in Samaria and worshiped Baal. Aside from Baal he also placed in the temple an image of the Goddess Asherah (1Kings. 16:29-33). It is said that Both King Ahab and the Queen did extreme injustice with the people. It was during his reign that about a hundred prophets of the Lord were killed. Jezebel was chiefly responsible for systematic extermination of Yahweh worship and promotion of the Baal cult in Israel. (1Ki xviii, 4-13, 19 & xix 10:14) Elijah the prophet of the Lord therefore went to Samaria from Tishbe in Gilead and admonished the king and the Queen to

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<sup>20</sup> 1Kings 12:19.

abstain from their evil ways of worshiping the idols of Baal and Asherah but they paid no heed to his warning. They even tried to kill the prophet. Elijah therefore announced a drought on the land and retired to a place beyond the jurisdiction of King Ahab. The drought was persisting in the land for the last three and a half years when Elijah appeared in Samaria again and challenged 450 prophets of Baal aside from another 400 prophets of Asherah who were supported by queen Gezebel. During open challenge at mount Carmel all the false prophets failed to receive any response from Baal or Asherah to attract fire to burn sacrifices offered by them. They also failed to receive any response to their earnest prayers for rain to end the drought. On his turn Prophet Elijah prayed to the Lord to send down the fire to prove that **Lord is God and the Lord alone is God.** (1Kings 18:39b). In response to Elijah's prayer the Lord God sent the fire down to consume the sacrifice offered by Elijah. After attaining victory over the false prophets Elijah ordered the people to kill all the prophets of Baal. The Lord also sent rain on the request of Elijah to end the drought persisting for many years.<sup>21</sup> This was an absolute proof of the truth of Elijah who worshiped one and the only Lord God i.e. Jehovah the God of Israel. It also proved the falsehood of the divinity of Baal, Ashera and their prophets. As such Yahweh's supremacy and sovereignty over the universe stood spectacularly demonstrated on Earth.

In spite of witnessing the miracles as stated above Queen Gezebel, Courtiers of King Ahab and the people did not turn to the Lord. They on the other hand tried to kill Elijah who had to fly to Mount Sinai to save his life. He was there in a cave when the Lord addressed to him, saying: "what are you doing here? He answered:

**"LORD God Almighty, I have always served you---you alone.** But the people of Israel have broken their covenant with you, torn down your altars, and killed all your prophets. I

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<sup>21</sup> 1Kings 18:45.

am the only one left---and they are trying to kill me.<sup>22</sup>

It is said that due to the preachings of Elijah and Elishah king Ahab felt moved and repented of his transgression. His repentance was however of little effect because queen Jezebel and officers attached to the royal court being influenced by the Queen, did not mend their ways. Eventually the Queen met with her fate foretold as under:-

**21.** So the LORD says to you, 'I will bring disaster on you. I will do away with you and get rid of every male in your family, young and old alike. **22.** Your family will become like the family of King Jeroboam son of Nebat and like the family of King Baasha son of Ahijah, because you have stirred up my anger by leading Israel into sin.' **23.** And concerning Jezebel, the LORD says that dogs will eat her body in the city of Jezreel. **24.** Any of your relatives who die in the city will be eaten by dogs, and any who die in the open country will be eaten by vultures.<sup>23</sup>

After the death or ascension of Elijah, prophet Elishah continued to preach the word of God in Israel. He told the King and the people to avoid the impending disaster of Samaria by turning to Yahweh and by obedience to all his commandments. We learn that all efforts of the prophet failed to bring any positive response from the king or Queen of Israel. Aside from turning away from the Lord both the kingdoms of the Hebrews i.e. Judea as well as Israel continued to pursue their evil ways while bitter animosity against each other also continued to increase. King Amazia of Judea challenged king Jehoash of Israel. In the fight at Bethshames Amazia was defeated and king Jehoash of Israel advanced on Jerusalem, tore down a part of city walls and took away all Gold, silver, temple equipment and palace treasures to Samaria along with many hostages from Judah. Besides showing extreme disintegration of the Hebrew race as stated above people of both kingdoms started on different directions in respect of their faith as well as performance of the religious rites. King Jehoash of Israel sacrificed his own sons as burnt offering to idols. He also committed many other transgressions

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<sup>22</sup> 1Ki 19:14 GNB.

<sup>23</sup> 1Ki 21:21-24 GNB.

against worship of the Lord at the temple violating the traditions introduced by King Solomon in accordance with the Law of Moses. Subsequently prophet Amos father of Isaiah prophesied in both kingdoms up to 747 B.C. i.e. during reign of Jeroboam of Israel and King Uzziah in Judea.

## **Prophet Amos**

Prophet Amos was a shepherd from Tekoa a town about 10 miles south of Jerusalem. He lived during the reign of Uzziah king of Judah (779-740 B.C.). He also went to the northern kingdom during 760-750 B.C. There he reminded the people that Lord God was the only creator of universe who sustains it and controls the destinies of the nations and also wields control over all the forces of the nature. He also stressed the point that Israel being the servant of the Lord was responsible to carry out the will of the Lord. He warned them that God's judgment was likely to fall on them in case they transgressed his law and the commandments. He especially emphasized about morality and righteousness than mere performance of rituals and other ceremonies. Amos declared that injustice, dishonesty and immorality were likely to receive stern retribution from the Lord. His mission however ended in failure because the king and the people of Israel did not pay any heed to his warning. During his preaching in Samaria he had a personal confrontation with Amazia the priest due to which he was expelled from Royal sanctuary at Bethel. Amos therefore left Samaria for Judea but even his expulsion could not save the Israelites from their tragic fate.<sup>24</sup>

As discussed earlier the northern Kingdom and Judea had been at dagger's drawn causing serious losses to each other time and again. As regards faith, the Northern Kingdom had plunged more into apostasy as compared to Judea because its rulers and most of the people had started worshipping the idols of Ashera and Baal instead of

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<sup>24</sup> Am. 7:10-17.

worshiping the Lord God of Israel. W.E.F 727 BC, Tiglith Pilsar, the king of Syria continued attacking Israel again and again. He devastated most of the land around Samaria, the capital of Israel. He also deported to other lands many Israelites belonging to the ten tribes of the northern kingdom. Ultimately in about 722 B.C. Shalma Nezer III destroyed Samaria putting an end to the kingdom of Israel. Aside from wide-spread destruction and massacre, he also deported about 27290 captives of war from Samaria to Gozan, Haraan, Media, Hubab, Nineveh and other places in the south of the Caspian Sea. These were the lost tribes of Israel who went in to the Diaspora from where they had no chance to return to their native land. Judea, however, managed to linger on for about another 136 years in the position of vassalage under one or other great power in the region.

Sargon II in a later period i.e. 716 B.C. also continued planting foreigners into Samaria:

And the king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah Avva, Hammat and Sephar-va'im, and placed them in the city of Samaria instead of people of Israel and they took possessions of Sama'ria and dwelt in its cities.<sup>25</sup>

**Joshiah King of Judea** (640-609 B.C.) was fortunate enough to enjoy some temporary freedom after the death of Asur Banipal of Assyria. He introduced great reforms which are called Deuteronomic because the book of law was received during the renovation of the temple in 621 B.C. and Joshiah made his reforms in accordance with the same. Joshiah died in 608 B.C. while the Egyptians were the overlords of Palestine. The same year Pharaoh Necho of Egypt was defeated by Nebuchadnezzar son of Nebopallasser of Babylonia at Charcheimsh bringing an end to the Egyptian power in Palestine. With this Jehoiakim King of Judea became a tributary to Babylonia. In 597 ignoring the warnings of Jeremiah the Prophet, King Jehoiakim revolted against Babylon. He however died soon after the revolt. Subsequently when the forces of Nebuchadnezzar assaulted

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<sup>25</sup> 2Kings 17:24 (RSV).

Judea to quell the revolt, King Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim surrendered to them forthwith.

## Prophet Isaiah

Prophet Isaiah proclaimed the message of God to Judah and in Jerusalem between 742-687 B.C. during the time when it was being threatened by Assyria. He strongly criticized social injustice and lack of confidence of people as regards protective care of God. The prophet told King Ahaz of Judea that real threat to their nation was not from Assyria or some other nation but from their own sin, lack of trust in the Lord and disobedience to his commandments. He warned the king and the people of Judea that injustice and unrighteousness were sure to bring doom and destruction on them (Isa. 1:2:26). The book of Isaiah repeats the same message of Moses and other prophets of the Lord stressing upon the Israelites that there was no salvation except through exclusive worship of Yahweh and obedience to all his commandments. He therefore conveyed to the Israelites the message from the Lord in the following words:-

**16.** "Wash you, make you clean; **put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; 17. Learn to do well;** seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. **18.** Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: **though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow;** though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. **19.** If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: **20.** But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.<sup>26</sup>

Name *Isaiah* means 'the lord (Yahweh) gives salvation'. The prophet therefore conveyed to the people that **it was only the Lord God who was the savior of the people.** Only He created each and every thing in the heaven and in the earth without any help from someone else.

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<sup>26</sup> Isa 1:16-20.

"I am the LORD, your savior; I am the one who created you. I am the LORD, the Creator of all things. **I alone stretched out the heavens**; when I made the earth, no one helped me.<sup>27</sup>

About forgiveness of the sins the Lord reminded the Israelites that He was the only authority who could forgive the sins of the People to save them. For this the people were required to repent of their transgressions and turn to the Lord obediently. God said:-

"And yet, I am the God who forgives your sins, and I do this because of who I am. I will not hold your sins against you."<sup>28</sup>

The Lord further said that:

" **21.** Was it not I, the LORD, the God who saves his people? **There is no other god. 22. "Turn to me now and be saved,** people all over the world! **I am the only God there is. 23.** My promise is true, and it will not be changed."<sup>29</sup>

Isaiah also conveyed the message of the Lord that:-

**21.** The LORD says, "Israel, remember this; remember that you are my servant. I created you to be my servant, and I will never forget you. **22. I have swept your sins away like a cloud. Come back to me; I am the one who saves you.**"<sup>30</sup>

Since the people of Israel refused to listen to the word of God therefore the Lord told the Prophet to write down the following words:

**9.** They are always rebelling against God, always lying, always refusing to listen to the LORD's teachings. **10.** They tell the prophets to keep quiet. **They say, "Don't talk to us about what's right. Tell us what we want to hear.** Let us keep our illusions. **11.** Get out of our way and stop blocking our path. We don't **want to hear about your holy God of Israel.**"<sup>31</sup>

In response to the resistance and disobedience of the Israelites the prophet told them that **it was not possible for him to change the word of God to please them.** He

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<sup>27</sup> Isa 44:24 GNB.

<sup>28</sup> Isa 43:25.

<sup>29</sup> Isa 45:21b-23.

<sup>30</sup> Isa 44:21-22.

<sup>31</sup> Isa 30:9-11 GNB.

stressed that: "the Word of God endures for ever". God says that: "***I alone am the LORD your God. No other god may share my glory; I will not let idols share my praise.*** (Isa. 42:8). Isaiah also conveyed to them the message of the Lord that: "***and understand that I'm the only God, besides me there is no other God, there never was and never will be. I alone am the Lord the only one who can save you***".<sup>32</sup>

Prophet Isaiah also told the Israelites that:-

"The LORD, who rules and protects Israel, the LORD Almighty, has this to say: "***I am the first, the last, the only God; there is no other god but me.***"<sup>33</sup>

Alas in spite of knowing the commandments as quoted above, St. Paul and his followers have arrogantly discarded the said commandments of the Lord as we find recorded in Isaiah. Instead of bowing before the Lord to do his will, St. Paul and his followers have revolted against the Lord by depending on their own interpretations of certain allegorical or visionary narratives in Isaiah to invent a new theology which contradicts not only the teachings of Moses but also all the commandments upheld and indorsed by all the prophets of Israel including Jesus himself. Whereas Isaiah had continued to tell the Israelites what was right and refused to tell them what they wanted to hear (Isa. 30:10), St. Paul came forward to tell the people of his time what they desired. We also observe that (Isa. 43:10b-11) leaves no chance for St. Paul or others to invent new Gods. Similarly verse Isa. 43:10b tells us that no one can share the glory of God. The said verse leaves no chance for Jesus or the Holy Spirit to become equal partners in the godhead and share the sovereignty or glory with him. According to Isaiah (44:22, 24) the Lord was the only savior who had swept away the sins of Israel. The said assurance leaves no need for any savior other than God.

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<sup>32</sup> Isa. 43:10b, 11.

<sup>33</sup> Isa 44:6 GNB.

Any same person can therefore understand the unambiguous and certified commandments of the Lord quoted above. As such those who believe in the Lord God and his commandments affirmed by all the prophets including Jesus himself, cannot rely on St. Paul's interpretations of certain ambiguous writings in Isaiah or other parts of the Old Testament. Clear cut commandments of God recorded by Isaiah therefore leave no room for speculation or introduction of Gods or savior other than the one and the only Lord God of universe and also the God of all the Prophets since Adam to Mohammad ﷺ.

## Jeremiah

Jeremiah was another great prophet of Israel who preached in Judea with effect from 627 and died probably in about 680 B.C. He told the people to keep their covenant with the Lord and to repent from their sins. He warned Israel that due to their idolatry and sin a catastrophe was to fall upon them. He also told the Israelites that the Lord said:-

"No other nation has ever changed its gods, even though they were not real. But my people have exchanged me, the God who has brought them honor, for gods that can do nothing for them.<sup>34</sup>

God said:-

Jerusalem, wash the evil from your heart, so that you may be saved. How long will you go on thinking sinful thoughts?<sup>35</sup>

The LORD asked, "Why should I forgive the sins of my people? They have abandoned me and have worshiped gods that are not real. I fed my people until they were full, but they committed adultery and spent their time with prostitutes. .... I am the LORD; why don't you fear me? Why don't you tremble before me?..... why they are fat and well fed. There is no limit to their evil deeds. They do not give orphans their rights or show justice to the oppressed.<sup>36</sup>

"The people of Judah have done an evil thing. They have

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<sup>34</sup> Jer 2:11.

<sup>35</sup> Jer 4:14.

<sup>36</sup> Jer 5:7, 22a, 28.

placed their idols, which I hate, in my Temple and have defiled it.<sup>37</sup>

They are always ready to tell lies; dishonesty instead of truth rules the land. The LORD says, "My people do one evil thing after another and do not acknowledge me as their God."<sup>38</sup>

The LORD answered, "This has happened because my people have abandoned the teaching that I gave them. They have not obeyed me or done what I told them."<sup>39</sup>

"I am bringing ruin on these people because they have rejected my teachings and have not obeyed my words."<sup>40</sup>

The Lord also told Jeremiah that he was going to refine his people like mettles and to put them to the test because they abandoned his teachings. In view of the persistence of the Jews in their evil ways God forbade Jeremiah even to pray for them. God said:

**8.** "But they did not listen or obey. Instead, everyone continued to be as stubborn and evil as ever. I had commanded them to keep the covenant, but they refused. So I brought on them all the punishments described in it." **9.** Then the LORD said to me, "The people of Judah and of Jerusalem are plotting against me. **10.** They have gone back to the sins of their ancestors, who refused to do what I said; they have worshiped other gods. Both Israel and Judah have broken the covenant that I made with their ancestors ..... **13.** The people of Judah have as many gods as they have cities, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem have set up as many altars for sacrifices to that disgusting god Baal as there are streets in the city."<sup>41</sup>

It was further said that:-

"I, the LORD, command you to do what is just and right. Protect the person who is being cheated from the one who is cheating him. Do not mistreat or oppress aliens, orphans, or

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<sup>37</sup> Jer 7:30.

<sup>38</sup> Jer 9:3.

<sup>39</sup> Jer 9:13.

<sup>40</sup> Jer 6:19.

<sup>41</sup> Jer 11:8-10, 13.

widows; and do not kill innocent people in this holy place.<sup>42</sup>

God also said to Jeremiah to convey to the people to “call to me, I will answer you. I will purify them from that they have committed against me and I will forgive their sins and their rebellion.”<sup>43</sup>

The tragedy of Israel was that in spite of the repeated confirmation of the said message from the Lord the Israelites often disobeyed the Lord in utter disregard of the admonitions through their prophets like Elijah, Elisha, Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and others. Ultimately due to their persistence in the evil ways they stood uprooted and destroyed through the invasions of *Nebuchadnezzar* who in 597 B.C besieged Jerusalem and inflicted severe punishments on the Jews. He caused loss to the city and its walls and took away to Babylonia about ten thousand of the leading citizens of Judea and Jerusalem including king Jehoiachin, his mother, wives, royal princes, skilled men and all the treasure and gold utensils at the temple. Meanwhile Nebuchadnezzar made Mattaniah the uncle of Jehoiachin the king of Judah who started ruling Judea with his changed name as Zedekiah (2kings 24:17). Hardly ten years had passed that Zedekiah too rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar in 587 B.C. In response to the said rebellion Nebuchadnezzar attacked Judea once again. It led to wide-spread massacre of the citizens of Jerusalem aside from utter destruction of the walls of the city and the temple of Jerusalem. He put the entire city on fire and took away about 70 thousand of the Jews to Babylonia as their slaves. Only the poorest and useless people were left behind in Judea. A Jewish scholar aptly describes the event in the following words:-

“The date is 586 before the Christian Era. The temple of Solomon is burned to the ground. The Land of Judah is ravaged. Thousands of its people are carried off into Babylonia exile by the armies of Nebuchadnezzar. The Jewish memory would never lose the anguish of that hour. And from year to year, from generation to generation, on the ninth day of Av,

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<sup>42</sup> Jer 22:3.

<sup>43</sup> Jer. 33:3,8.

the descendants of the Jewish exiles would recite the **lamentation for the departed glory of their kingdom.**

By all logic, **the Jews should now have sunk into oblivion** but history does not always follow the voice of logic, and the Jews did not disappear, although for the next five centuries they roamed far and wide over the earth..<sup>44</sup>

## **The Period of Exile & Prophet Ezekiel**

Priest and prophet Ezekiel lived with the Israelites in Jerusalem as well as in Babylonia during their exile. He pointed out to the people that they had been stubborn and defiant against the Lord and refused to listen warnings of the Prophet (Eze 3:6-8). They therefore had become a nation of rebels because they rejected God's commandments and refused to keep the law of the Lord (Eze. 5:6-7). Since the Israelites were following the customs of other nations therefore the sovereign lord had become their enemy (Eze. 6:8). Much before the invasion of Nebuchadnezzar Ezekiel had warned the Israelites that:-

**1.** The LORD spoke to me. **2.** "Mortal man," he said, "look toward the mountains of Israel and give them my message. **3.** Tell the mountains of Israel to hear the Sovereign LORD's word---to hear what I, the Sovereign LORD, am telling the mountains, the hills, the gorges, and the valleys: I will send a sword to destroy the places where people worship idols. **4.** The altars will be torn down and the incense altars broken. All the people there will be killed in front of their idols. **5.** I will scatter the corpses of the people of Israel; I will scatter their bones all around the altars. **6.** All the cities of Israel will be destroyed, so that all their altars and their idols will be smashed to pieces, their incense altars will be shattered, and everything they made will disappear. **7.** People will be killed everywhere, **and those who survive will acknowledge that I am the LORD.** **8.** "I will let some escape the slaughter and be scattered among the nations, **9.** where they will live in exile. There they will remember me and know that I have punished them and disgraced them, because their faithless hearts deserted me and they preferred idols to me. And they will be disgusted with themselves because of the evil

and degrading things they have done. **10. They will know that I am the LORD** and that my warnings were not empty threats.<sup>45</sup>

In addition to the above the lord also told the Israelites that an idol was an outrage to God while the Israelites were working in a room full of images and they had turned their backs to the sanctuary bowing low towards east worshipping the rising son.<sup>46</sup>

It was also made clear to the Israelites that the person who sins is the one who will die. God said:-

**19.** "But you ask, 'Why shouldn't the son suffer because of his father's sins?' The answer is that the son did what was right and good. He kept my laws and followed them carefully, and so he will certainly live. **20. It is the one who sins who will die. A son is not to suffer because of his father's sins, nor a father because of the sins of his son.** Good people will be rewarded for doing good, and evil people will suffer for the evil they do. **21.** "If someone evil stops sinning and keeps my laws, if he does what is right and good, he will not die; he will certainly live. **22.** All his sins will be forgiven, and he will live, because he did what is right. **23.** Do you think I enjoy seeing evil people die?" asks the Sovereign LORD. "No, **I would rather see them repent and live.**"<sup>47</sup>

It was also clarified that:-

When someone evil stops sinning and does what is right and good, he saves his life.<sup>48</sup>

"Now I, the Sovereign LORD, am telling you Israelites that **I will judge each of you by what you have done.** Turn away from all the evil you are doing, and don't let your sin destroy you."<sup>49</sup>

**10.** "And so I led them out of Egypt into the desert. **11.** I gave them my commands and taught them my laws, which bring life to anyone who obeys them. **12.** I made the keeping of the Sabbath a sign of the agreement between us, to remind them that I, the LORD, make them holy. **13.** But even in the desert they defied me. **They broke my laws and rejected**

<sup>45</sup> Eze 6:1-10.

<sup>46</sup> Eze 8:12,14, 16, 18, 20.

<sup>47</sup> Eze 18:19-23 GNB.

<sup>48</sup> Eze 18:27.

<sup>49</sup> Eze 18:30.

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**my commands, which bring life to anyone who obeys them.** They completely profaned the Sabbath. I was ready to let them feel the force of my anger there in the desert and to destroy them.<sup>50</sup>

From a careful perusal of Ezekiel it transpires that there is only one Lord God of the Universe who forgives the sins of those who repent from their sins and do what is right and good. In this respect verses Eze. 18:19-23 are of crucial importance. Those verses leave no room for St. Paul's concept of vicarious sacrifice of Jesus Christ to take on him the sins of others. St. Paul's suggestion of saving sacrifice contradicts the commandments of the Lord. Similarly verse 18:30 also repudiates the theory of judgment of the people by Jesus Christ instead of the Lord.

Although Ezekiel had started warning the Israelites while in Jerusalem yet he stood deported to Babylonia along with others. He is therefore considered as a prophet of exile and major part of his teachings pertain to the same period.

## **Cyrus The Great**

About 48 years after the conquest of Jerusalem by King Nebuchadnezzar, King Cyrus the Great of Persia conquered Babylonia as well as Palestine in the year 539 B.C.E. Cyrus can be considered as the greatest statesman of his time and one of the most remarkable men of the ancient history. He brought a favorable change in the destiny of millions of people by introducing broad based tolerance and bringing a new alignment of nations throughout his empire.

It is said that Cyrus was of royal blood and possessed unusual qualities of leadership. He was a man of 30 years of age in about 559 B.C. when he started rising to new heights and from Vassalage of the king of Anshan in southern Iran, he managed to become head of the vast Median Empire by 550 B.C. He had revolted against his Median over Lord King Astyages whose army mutinied against him and after capturing him handed him over to

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<sup>50</sup> Eze 20:10-13.

Cyrus. This made Cyrus the undisputed King of the Medes. Three years later Cyrus also established himself as king of the Persians. This double achievement made Cyrus master of the Median as well as of the Persian Empire.

Medians were supposed to have descended from Medan the third son of Abraham from his wife Keturah.<sup>51</sup> May be Cyrus too was a descendant of the said Patriarch. Some scholars also believe that Cyrus was a contemporary of Zoroaster who was perhaps a true prophet of the Lord. Cyrus can therefore be supposed a believer having reverence both for the God and the religion of the Israelites. On the other hand, majority of the modern scholars hold that Zoroaster had lived around 1200 B.C. i.e. much earlier than Cyrus. In such a case Cyrus can be considered a follower of Zoroaster having received the teachings of faith from his followers. Since Cyrus proved to be one of history's most enlightened rulers therefore it could be assumed that his righteous conduct reflected moral teachings of some great prophet who could be no one else than Zoroaster. The said assumption however loses its value due to discovery of certain inscriptions of Cyrus deciphered by the scholars in the recent past showing Cyrus as a polytheist who probably desired to please all the Gods.

It seems that Cyrus had earned a reputation of a gentle considerate and humane figure. He was also exceptionally strong and invincible. Consequently when in 539 B.C. he laid siege to Babylon the city surrendered without a fight and gates were voluntarily opened to him by the citizens within. It is said that:-

"This new ruler of the ancient world was indeed an unusual man. he was a maser leader exercising a skill seldom excelled. He appears to have been friendly, frank and extremely considerate of his subjects. Friends and enemies seemed to have been captivated by him. The treatment accorded his subjects, so long in Babylonian captivity, illustrates this generous spirit."

"In modern terminology Cyrus would be called a "Liberal." He was concerned with the welfare of his subjects and freely

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<sup>51</sup> Gen. 25:2

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parted with tradition to accomplish his purposes."<sup>52</sup>

Cyrus the great has been praised by friends and foes because of his magnanimity towards the nations conquered by him.

As against the policy of repression, destruction, humiliation or large scale deportation of the subject people by Shelma Nezzar III, Tigleth Pilsar, Sargon II and Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus introduced a broad-based tolerance and clemency towards the nations conquered by him. He made no interference in the religious practices and creeds of the Israelites. Cyrus and his successors even allowed the Israelites to rebuild the temple and to enjoy freedom in their religious life. Bible therefore portrays Cyrus unambiguously as a righteous ruler and names him '*Shepherd of Yahweh*' chosen by God to accomplish his will. Book of Isaiah calls him a redeemer and '**God's anointed Messiah**' e.g.:-

**1.** Thus saith the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut; **2.** I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron: **3.** And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the LORD, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel. **4.** For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me. **5.** I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me:<sup>53</sup>

Cyrus was so lenient towards the Israelites that he not only gave them the freedom but also allowed them to return to their homeland in addition to that he also gave them full protection to enjoy freedom of worship in accordance with

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<sup>52</sup> H. I. Hester, *The Heart of Hebrew History*, (Missouri: The William Jewell Press, Liberty), p. 296.

<sup>53</sup> Isa 45:1-5.

their faith. The proclamation regarding the famous decree of Cyrus will be of some interest to the readers.

**2.** Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. **3.** Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem. **4.** And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.<sup>54</sup>

Cyrus was therefore the conqueror who is supposed to have fulfilled the biblical prophecies about him. He issued his decree of 538 B.C. allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem and to build their temple with imperial funds (Ezra 1:2-4). Cyrus also gave them back the bowls and the cups of gold and silver and other utensils including the valuables which Nebuchadnezzar had taken away from the temple at Jerusalem (Ezra 9:7-11). In view of all this **Muslim scholars believe that Zulqarnain of the Qur'an (18:83-99) was no one else than Cyrus the Great.**

Cyrus was killed in 529 B.C. fighting against certain tribes towards the east of Caspian Sea. His son Cambyses succeeded him. He too died in Haran on his way home in year 522 B.C. Darius I The grandson of Cyrus became the king who consolidated the empire in an appropriate manner. To exercise a better and effective control over various parts of his empire Darius divided it into 20 provinces. He too continued the tolerant policy of Cyrus and it was during his reign that the foundations for rebuilding the temple were laid in 520 B.C. while the work stood completed by 516 B.C. Successors of Darius I also continued the same policy of tolerance towards the Jews till 351 B.C. Ultimately when Jews revolted against Atraxes III, he after restoring the situation deported about Ten thousand Jews to Babylonia and also to Hyrcania a province of Asia south of Caspian Sea.

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<sup>54</sup> Ezr 1:2-4.

## **Reforms of Jeremiah & Ezra**

We noted earlier that the temple at Jerusalem stood completed in about 516 B.C. i.e. during the reign of Darius I (522-486). Consequently the Israelites started enjoying freedom to worship their God at the temple as per the requirements of the covenant with the God. Subsequently Artaxerxes I (464-424) i.e. the great-grand-son of Cyrus, gave Ezra the formal mandate to teach the Israelites the laws of their own God. It was also perhaps due to some similarity of language and culture between the Persians and the Israelites that the Persian monarchs did not make any interference in their religion or their way of life. As against the practice of Nebuchadnezzar and other conquerors of the world, Cyrus and his army did not show much violence and destruction in the lands subjugated by them. They acknowledged the diversity and autonomy of the conquered people in Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Egypt, Iran, Afghanistan including certain parts of present Libya and Pakistan.

## **Separatist Policy of Nehemiah and Ezra**

Nehemiah an eunuch and former cupbearer of the King was sent to Jerusalem in about 444 B.C. during the reign of Artaxerxes I (464-426) while Ezra reached there about year 397 B.C. i.e. during the reign of Artaxerxes II. They launched a reformation program rigorously. Worship of Yahweh alone and strict obedience to all his commandments as detailed in the law were the main contents of the reforms. Each of the said prophets stressed the point that the Israelites must not mingle with other people around them nor should they adopt customs of other nations in the region. They strictly prohibited marriage of the Jews with the people of other nations. Many other reforms stressed a complete separation of the Israelites from the gentiles. Nehemiah and Ezra were not content even with the said separation. They also went further to draw a sharp line of distinction between the Israelites who stood deported to Babylonia and those who

were left behind. The former they called '*The People of God*' and **the true Israel**. Other Jews who were left behind were named '*People of the Land*' who were refused to take any part in the reconstruction of the temple.

Before proceeding further we shall pause for a while to recall the history of Israel from the time it stood divided into two kingdoms. We observed that the Northern Kingdom took a lead to go astray from the Lord. Many prophets including Elijah, Elisha, Amos etc. took pains to lead them to exclusive worship of no one except Yahweh the Lord God of Israel. The prophets also made it clear to the Israelites that **there was no salvation except through obedience to all the commandments of the Lord**. They were enjoined to follow the traditions of Moses and other prophets of Israel. They were also forbidden to adopt the customs of other nations living around them. The Israelites were warned that in case they continued their Immoralities, injustice and disobedience to the Lord they were doomed to be destroyed. Alas! The Kings and People of the Northern Kingdom refused to listen to the warnings of the Lord through the Prophets due to which after many initial punishments at the hands of Tiglath-Pileser and others they stood utterly destroyed at the hands of Sargon II who aside from a large scale massacre of the Israelites deported the survivors of the ten northern tribes to distant lands as discussed above.

Although similar message was repeated by Isaiah, Jeremiah, and other prophets in Judea yet the Kings and the masses of Israel learnt no lesson from the destruction and elimination of the Northern Tribes. Utter destruction of Judea including the city and temple at Jerusalem, massacre of large number of Jews and deportation of 70,000 Jews as slaves to Babylonia was therefore the natural retribution to the nation bent upon transgressing the commandments of the Lord. In addition to the teachings of Moses, warnings of Isaiah and Jeremiah the message of God through Ezekiel served as preamble to the reformation introduced by Nehemiah and Ezra. They had made it abundantly clear to the Israelites that there was no chance of their survival

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unless and until they worshiped Yahweh alone as their God and obeyed all his commandments diligently. They had learnt from the history of Israel that intermarriage of the Israelites with other nations had always caused a subversion in the religious faith and practice of the Israelites. They therefore strongly prohibited intermarriage between the Israelites and the gentiles. Ezra was so strict at this issue that he exhorted the Israelites to relinquish all marriages existing between the Jews and the gentiles. Jews were also advised to refrain from adopting the customs and religious practices of other nations living around them. We therefore observe that in spite of many shortcomings of the Israelites during the post exilic period the masses have been extremely conscious of the separatist policy introduced by Nehemiah and Ezra. Riots or revolts against the Gentile rulers had been caused primarily due to Roman constraints against the Law of Moses or due to prohibitions imposed by them on the religious rites of the Israelites.



# GREEKS IN THE HOLY LAND

## **Alexander's Conquest & Hellenization of the Conquered Lands**

The Persian Empire founded by Cyrus in 538 B.C. lasted for about 206 years. In about 333-332 B.C. Alexander the Great conquered various lands including Palestine as well as Babylonia where he established principles of imperial government which continued to be followed by his Greek successors and even by subsequent emperors of Rome and Byzantine. The great work of Alexander was to make Greek civilization dominant among the conquered people and ever since his time Greek civilization had its sway over Asia Minor, Syria, Palestine, Egypt etc. till Muslim invasion of the said lands of 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Alexander the Great was the first person who made earnest and conscious efforts to infuse the Hellenistic art, culture and language in the lands subdued by him. It has therefore been observed that:-

“Nowhere is the role of conquest as the vehicle of **cultural transmission** more evident than in the career of Alexander the Great. For this fourth-century conqueror, although born in Pella, was also a child of Athens; his tutor, Aristotle (384-322 B.C.E.) had studied for twenty years at Plato's academy in Athens and after eight years at Pella would return to Athens when Alexander launched his Persian campaign. **Alexander, it is apparent, was well aware of his cultural mission..... He consciously planted the seeds of Hellenism throughout the lands he conquered.**”<sup>55</sup>

As a teenager Alexander had Lysimachus of Acarnania as his first tutor from whom he learnt to love the old Homeric poems, Greek philosophers and traditions of the heroes among whom many were treated as Gods. Lysimachus encouraged him in boundless ambitions even to believing

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<sup>55</sup> Abba Ebban, *Heritage: Civilization & the Jews*, (New York: Summit Books) Pg. 67.

himself a son of the Gods. Aristotle further increased his love for Greek literature, art, beauty, language etc.

Aristotle's impact on Alexander and his policies can also be ascertained from the following:-

Aristotle himself was expert in the study of political institutions none more so in his day nor indeed any as much. The result of all this was that when Alexander set out to conquer the world he was moved not only by the personal ambitions which he owed to Lysimachus, but also by a strong desire to make real those dreams of the **Kingdom of Man** which Aristotle had implanted in him. When his soldiers, either through wounds or through age, could not keep up those tremendous forced marches which were in part the secret of his success he discharged them in groups. The veterans settled where they were discharged, married native women, and raised their families. But each settlement was modeled on the Greek pattern, a small cameo of Greece in a barbarian land. By this means a common culture was established from east to west and down into Egypt, and it was a Greek culture. It came about, therefore, that even though Alexander's empire broke up into many pieces at his death, yet every piece was Greek. It mattered not whether Syrian or Egyptian ruled in Palestine, for both Syrians and Egyptians were **apostles of the Greek way of life.**<sup>56</sup>

The same writer adds that:-

"His conquests are of the utmost importance because they involved the spread of **Greek ideas and Greek culture generally**, and this to an extent that cannot be over-estimated. These ideas formed the basis of the eastern Mediterranean culture which Rome took over from the second century B.C. onwards. **This became the basis of the Roman civilization, and in turn it has formed the framework of our modern western world.**<sup>57</sup>

Alexander had entered the Holy Land as a colonist. He therefore made it a part of his ambition to spread Hellenic culture in the east including the Holy Land. To break the intense cohesion of the Jewish race Alexander and his

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<sup>56</sup> Norman H. Snaith, *The Jews from Cyrus to Herod*, (Surrey: Gateway Books of a Religious Knowledge, 1956), Pg. 23.

<sup>57</sup> *ibid* Pg. 22-23.

marshals embarked on a well-considered plan of emigration from Judea on an extensive scale. For precedence they had before them the traditions of Tiglith Pilsar, Sargon II and Nebuchadnezzar. Tiglith Pilsar had ravaged most of the towns in the northern Kingdom and aside from plundering and assassinating most of the inhabitants he took away the surviving Israelites to far off lands as slaves. In about 722 B.C.E. Sargon II utterly destroyed what remained of the ten tribes of the Israelitish kingdom in the north, and deported the survivors to other lands as mentioned earlier. Such deportees never had a chance to return to their native lands. As regards Nebuchadnezzar most of the 70,000 deportees taken away by him to Babylonia either settled there or at other places adjacent to the same. Subsequently it was the second or the third generation of the Jewish deportees in Babylonia when Cyrus the Great released them from slavery and allowed them to return to Palestine as free citizens enjoying the rights to live in their native land in accordance with the religion and culture of Israel.

Alexander's Policy was exactly opposite of Cyrus. He followed Tiglith Pilsar, Sargon and Nebuchadnezzar. In contrast to them Alexander the Great launched his policy of Hellenizing the east at a great speed and also devised the policy of founding new cities on Greek pattern throughout the lands conquered by him. **As such no less than eighteen new cities were found in his name in different lands** while a substantial part of such cities was formed by the people deported from other lands conquered by him. Alexandria the famous port town in Egypt is perhaps the most conspicuous example of such new cities where Alexander the Great deported a large number of the Jews from Palestine. Subsequently Jews who had previously fled to Egypt from Palestine during the attacks of Nebuchadnezzar on Judea in 597 and 586 B.C. also found Alexandria a suitable place to settle there. The impact of the said policy can be assessed from the fact that in the first century of Christian Era Egypt contained Jewish

population numbering about a million souls. Two of the five quarters into which Alexandria was divided were chiefly inhabited by the Jews. An excerpt from '*The Story Of The Nations*' throws further light on the Jewish population in Alexandria. It also refers to the persecution of the Jews at the hands of the Roman gentiles.

"In the time of Caligula the animosity which existed between the Jewish and gentile sections of the Alexandrian populace culminated in tumult and bloodshed. The Jews were driven out of every quarter of the city except one; their buildings and property were destroyed; **Flaccus, the Roman viceroy, openly sided with the opponents of the Jews,** and cast many of the most eminent Jewish citizens into prison. Caligula made this anarchical state of the things still worse by ordering the Jews **to erect his statue in their places of worship,** and it was not till the accession of Claudius that the Jews regained their privileges and repose. Later on, in the reigns of Vespasian and Trajan, the Jews of Alexandria made common cause with other portions of their co-religionists who had revolted against Roman rule. On each occasion they were unsuccessful, and the **insurrections in which they participated were drowned in blood.**<sup>58</sup>

The presence of a large number of Jews in other parts of Africa may also have been caused due to the same policy of deportation of the Jews by the successors of Alexander the great. The author of '*The Story Of The Nations*' therefore adds that:-

"Cyrene, another town in the north of Africa, contained many Jews, and there are traces of Jewish settlements all along the southern coasts of the Mediterranean. According to Josephus and the Acts of the apostles there were Jews in Crete and Cyprus, and St. Paul in his wanderings found Jewish synagogues in all the important cities of Greece. Jewish inscriptions have been discovered in Athens, and Jewish colonists even dwelt in the small islands which are dotted over the Aegean Sea.<sup>59</sup>

Similarly many other Jews either through forcible deportation or voluntary emigration from Palestine settled

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<sup>58</sup> W. D. Morrison, *THE STORY OF THE NATIONS* Vol. 24 '*The Jews under Roman Rule* 2<sup>nd</sup> Impression, Pg. 381-382.

<sup>59</sup> *ibid* Pg. 382.

in Egypt, Phoenicia, Syria, Coelo, Pamphylia, Cilicia, Bithynia and parts of Asia Minor. In Europe the Jews had their settlements in Thessaly, Boeotia, Macedonia, Aetolia, Attica, Argos, and Corinth etc. Aside from the continents the Jews formed a conspicuous part of the islands such as Euboea, Cyprus and Crete.

Aside from deportation of Jews to other lands, Alexander and his successors also promoted emigration of Greeks as colonists to settle in various parts of the lands conquered by them. These included among others, Syria, Egypt and Palestine. Much later than the deportations by Sargon II, Nebuchadnezzar and Alexander the Great and his successors, Pompeii the Roman general also followed the same strategy of dispersion of the Jews. He carried off many Jewish captives to Rome itself where they started forming colonies inhabited exclusively by the Jewish immigrants. It is said that due to deportation by Sargon II followed by others the Jews had become so numerous in Syria that at the time of Great War with Rome **10 to 18 thousand Jews were massacred in Damascus alone.** Similarly an immense Jewish population inhabited Antioch, the Syrian capital and many parts of the provinces of Asia Minor were densely populated with the Jews. They therefore had their synagogues at Bithynia, Phrygia, Lydia and Pontus and even in Crimea.

### **Ptolemy:**

Ptolemy was the name born by 14 kings of Macedonian Greek dynasty that ruled Egypt from 323 to 30 B.C. Ptolemy I was one of the marshals of Alexander the Great who after the death of Alexander had himself appointed as satrap of Egypt recognizing the nominal reigns of **Alexander's half brother Philip Arrhidaeus and infant son Alexander the younger who had been murdered in 310 B.C.** Subsequently Ptolemy took the title of king of Egypt in 304 B.C. and reigned till 285 B.C. where after each of his successors ruled the kingdom adopting the name of Ptolemy.

Greek was the official language of the kings, chief ministers, armed forces and all bureaucracy during the reign of Ptolemy's. It is said that as a first step to acquaint Jews with Greek language the Hebrew Bible was rendered into Greek during the reign of Philadelphus i.e. Ptolemy II (285-246 B.C.). It received wide circulation both in the west and throughout the eastern region with its new name i.e. Septuagint or Hellenistic Bible. Modern scholars believe that originally it was created for Greek speaking Jews of Diaspora (CA 250-175 B.C.E.) but neither in 72 days nor by 72 scribes each preparing his translation independently yet due to Divine Co-incidence each translation was exactly matching the others word for word. The said fiction of miraculously identical translation enjoys no credibility today. It has also been claimed that the Jewish law was rendered into Greek for the benefit of the Jews of Alexandria and those living in the Greek speaking regions. We have it that Ptolemy II was persuaded to do so by the royal librarian but it can be presumed that Ptolemy after procuring copies of the Pentateuch and other classics of the east got them translated into Greek with the dual purpose of enriching the sources of knowledge for the Greeks and also to drive away the Greek speaking Jews and others from their dependence on Hebrew language, culture and traditions of the old. Another alternative that the Hellenized Jews at Alexandria might have commissioned translation themselves for their own benefit or perhaps to acquaint gentiles about the law and traditions of Israel. In that case it might have involved a period of about 75 years (i.e. 275-150 B.C.) for rendering the old text into Greek.<sup>60</sup>

Aside from translation of books and inauguration of Greek schools the Ptolemies also introduced various games and amusements of the Greek culture to foster Greek pattern of life in the lands conquered by them.

The said policy continued to be implemented without any substantial resistance from the conquered people throughout the eastern provinces except in Judea. Jews resisted the same vehemently. This resistance was due to

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<sup>60</sup> *The New Covenant*, William Barnstone, p 504-5.

the fact that the Jews already had a distinct and well-defined faith guarded by codified law and traditions persisting since a thousand years before their confrontation with the Hellenist culture, thought and traditions. Subsequent to the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. and deportation of about 70,000 Jews to Babylonia, the Jews had become more conscious of the fact that their downfall and destruction had been caused due to their transgression against the commandments of the Lord. The Israelites of the exile and their prophets started realizing their shortcomings due to which they lost their freedom, their glory and the native land with all their possessions. It therefore became evident to them that the **disobedience to the commandments of the Lord was the main cause of their woes** and they had no remedy except to repent about their sins and to resolve to abide by the law of the Lord in their future life. Moses had already warned the Israelites to refrain from the disgusting practices of other nations (Deu. 18:9-14). Same was the essence of the final instructions of Moses such as recorded in Deu. 32:45-47.

The prophets of Israel during their exile had been reminding the Israelites that their downfall and destruction was caused only due to the fact that they did not keep the covenant and aside from various other transgressions some of them worshiped false gods. In the post-exilic period starting from 538 B.C. Nehemiah launched reconstruction of the walls of Jerusalem and also took great pains to reform the Jewish life to conform with the covenant. Ezra joined him subsequently. He is considered by some as the second founder (after Moses) of the Jewish Nation. Both Nehemiah and Ezra emphasized the fact that law of the Lord should be the only guide for the Jews. They must strictly adopt it as a rule of their daily life. Hence after completion of the temple in about 416 B.C.E. Ezra resolved to renew the covenant. He started reading law before the congregation of the Jews while stressing purity of faith, character and purity of race. It is said that when Ezra used to open the

Book of Law all people stood reverently and after listening to the same they usually used to say 'Amen Amen'.

This was perhaps the first time after King Solomon that the temple at Jerusalem became the sole sanctuary of the Jewish race. The temple was revived as the only orthodox seat for the sacrificial worship for the Jews. This was done to strengthen the feeling of unity among the Jews. The temple at Jerusalem therefore continued to enjoy the said sanctity till its final destruction in 70 A.D.

Ezra made extensive codification of the laws including the law pertaining to temple worship and the scriptural canon. In effect Ezra's work set the seal on what Nehemiah had forwarded and at his death Judaism was established distinct, exclusive and separate from the way of life and different faiths of gentiles living around the Jews. The Israelites thereafter were firm in their faith with the perception that **they were the only people of God who could in no case mingle with the gentiles.**

Downfall of Judea, loss of autonomy, destruction of the city and the temple of Jerusalem and even deportation of the Jews eventually culminated in strengthening the sentiments of nationality in the Jews with a strong desire to revive the kingdom of Israel. They cherished the vision of one day dominating the world and establishing a world-wide empire for the Jewish race under the **Messiah who would inaugurate the reign of God on earth** by relieving the people of God from the subjugation by the gentiles. Even during the period of subjugation at the hands of the Greeks and the Romans the Jews always held to the visions for the advent of the Messiah, the long-awaited deliverer of Israel to set them free from the yoke of Rome. To them **Jerusalem was to be the capital of the world-wide kingdom of the Messiah who would purify the Holy Land by exclusion of the gentiles.** During the said reign the Israelites dispersed throughout the world were to return to their home. The Messiah was expected to put the gentiles under his yoke and the Jews would tread on their neck. It was believed that the Golden Age of Messiah would

endure forever with all the blessings of the Utopian Age conceived by various poets and reformers of the antiquity.

Prophets of Israel had their visions which repeatedly offered hope for the future promising restoration of the glory of the kingdom of Israel. James K Hosmer has aptly defined the Messianic concept and hopes of the Jews in the long passage as quoted below:-

“No period, no race, is satisfied with its present condition. There is always a looking back to some golden age in the past, from which there has been a degeneration, and an anticipation of a happy time in the future, when all shortcomings shall be made good. Among the Hebrew race such anticipations were coupled with the vivid expectation of a messiah, a heaven-sent leader, under whose guidance the chosen people were to attain the splendor and supremacy which were appropriately theirs. Many passages in Scripture were believed to foretell the **coming of great national Saviour**. Even in the ancient law it stood written: “ **The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet** from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken.” The desolated holy places were restored, in the expectation that: There should come a prophet to show them what should be done.” According to Isaiah he was to be a rod from the stem of Jesse,“---“a branch of the house of David,“ According to Jeremiah and so again and again until at least seventy scriptural passages were believed to have a messianic character. In the time of Judas Maccabeaus, **it was a great prophet rather than a mighty prince upon whose coming the hopes of the nation were fixed**. As the glory of the Asmonaeans faded, and the Romans were called as arbitrators in their quarrels, the Jews consoled themselves by the hope of a **future king, whose right to the throne of the Hebrews should be undisputed**, and who should magnificently vindicate his race. The expectation became more and more intense some holding that the empire of the messiah to come was to be purely spiritual, while the people generally looked for a **glorious temporal prince**, to be born at Bethlehem of Judea of the house of David.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> James K. Hosmer, *The Story of the Nations* Vol. 2 *The Jews*, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition (London: T. Fisher, 1885) p. 85-86.

In the said background Roman and Greek efforts for cultural and commercial assimilations met with strong resistance from the Jews. Alternates before the Jews were either to stick to the revelation received through their prophets or to make way for the reasoning and the culture of Greeks. While the former stressed strict observance of Jewish austerity and abstention from the proscribed, the later contained frank sensuality, nudity, amusement, delight and indulgences permeating the Hellenistic civilization. Instead of cleanliness, piety and observance of dietary law the Greeks relished the impiety of their theater, lewdness of their festivals and nakedness of their athletic competitions. While the Jews sought perfection through obedience to the Commandments of the Lord the Greeks sought the same through introduction of Greek language and culture and through liberal education, art, athletics, games, amusements as per traditions of the Greeks. In the said background cultural assimilation of Hellenism into the Jewish populace was almost impossible.

Ptolemies the Egyptian Successors of Alexander the Great continued to follow their policy of cultural transmission both by coercion and also with the help of Greek thought and language being introduced gradually. In the late 3<sup>rd</sup> or early 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. Ptolemy I or II changed the name of sea port Accho in the south of Phoenicia about 8 miles from Carmel headland.<sup>62</sup> Subsequently when Seleucids King Antiochus III ousted the forces of Ptolemy V from Palestine in about 198 B.C.E. he started a new era for infusion of Greek and Roman culture as well as the Hellenist traditions in the Holy Land. Factually the Jews of Palestine had extended a helping hand to the Seleucids against the Ptolemy's therefore they expected favorable treatment from their new overlords. Initially the Seleucids showed much laxity towards the Jews because the war had hit them hard, the temple stood damaged while the community had suffered from disruption. Soon after establishing strong hold on the land however, the Seleucid kings started making concerted efforts to promote Hellenization of Judea

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<sup>62</sup>, *The New Bible Dictionary*, Intersivarsity Fellowship, p. 1063 .

along with other parts of the Holy Land. Their efforts however were thwarted partly due to lack of sagaciousness to implement the policy and partly due to certain political misadventures which led to the downfall of the dynasty and independence of the Jews.

It is said that fired by a zeal for asserting Seleucid control over all the territories of the Hellenistic world Antiochus III marched into Greece. The invasion stood repulsed with fatal outcome for him.

“In 192 B.C. Antiochus was driven from Europe and two years later he was forced to give up all Asia Minor apart from Cilicia, along with his war elephants, his navy, many hostages including his own son, and a crippling indemnity. The great House of Seleucids was plunged into virtual bankruptcy.”<sup>63</sup>

Consequently the younger son of Antiochus III had to spend twelve years in Rome as a hostage for the payment of the indemnity. Subsequently it was the same son who became king under the title of Antiochus IV (Epiphanes 175-163 B.C.E) to inherit all the liabilities from his predecessors. It has therefore been recorded that:-

“What remained of the empire had to foot the bill. Tax demands became ever more extortionate; temples were obliged to yield up their treasures and, for all their cultic independence, the Jews of Jerusalem were not exempt. Antiochus III was killed in 187 B.C. whilst robbing an Elamite temple, and his successor, Seleucids IV, attempted through internal Jewish dissension and intrigue to lay hands on private bank deposits in the Temple treasuries.”<sup>64</sup>

## **Antiochus IV & Hellenization of Jews through Persecution**

Antiochus IV Epiphanes (Illustrious or God-manifest) had succeeded his assassinated brother Selucus IV in 175 B.C.E. He sent two expeditions to Egypt. During his second

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<sup>63</sup> John M. Alegro *The Chosen People*, Pg. 18.

<sup>64</sup> *ibid* Pg. 18.

expedition Jason the ex-high priest, learning that Antiochus was dead, made a sedition against the Seleucids. It is said that *"he flew back to Jerusalem, drove Menelaus into Citadel and put number of his supporters --- of the party, i.e. loyal to the Seleucid government --- to the sword."* The news turned out to be incorrect and Jason had to meet with a miserable end. No sooner the king sensed that Judea was in revolt he decided to give Jerusalem a full measure of chastisement.

"Raging like a wild animal he set out from Egypt and took Jerusalem by storm. He ordered his soldiers to cut down without mercy those whom they met and to slay those who took refuge in their houses. There was a massacre of young and old, a killing of women and children, a slaughter of virgins and infants. **In a space of three days 80 thousand were lost, 40 thousand meeting a violent death and the same number being sold into slavery.**<sup>65</sup>

This shows that soldiers of Antiochus let loose to massacre the people and devastated the city entirely. To add to it the king also robbed the temple of all its gold and treasury to relieve his financial difficulties in the same manner in which he had plundered the Syrian temples. Edwyn Beven the author of 'Jerusalem Under the High Priests' reports that:-

"It is difficult for us to realize the Horror which such a profanation would send through the Jewish people, the appalling insistence with which the question would rack them. Why, why the Lord did not defend His own sanctuary? "Wherefore do the heathen say, Where is now thy God?" There were no angels who confronted Antiochus when he went into the Holy Place and took "the golden altar and the candle stick of the light, the table of the shewbread, and the cups to pour withal, and the bowls, and the golden censers, and the Veil, and the crowns, and scaled off the adorning of gold which was on the face of the Temple." It was the sense of abandonment by its God, which made the bitterness of the anguish to the heart of Israel.<sup>66</sup>

It has been further recorded that:-

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<sup>65</sup> 2Macc. 5:12-14.

<sup>66</sup> Edwyn Beven, *Jerusalem Under the High Priests*, p. 81-82.

“Out of hatred for the Jewish citizens the King sent Apollonius commander of the Mysians and the head of an army of 22000 men, **with orders to kill all the grown men and sell the women and young men into slavery.** When this man arrived in Jerusalem he pretended to be peacefully disposed and **waited until the Holy day of the Sabbath, then finding the Jews refraining from work he ordered his men to parade fully armed. All those who came out to watch he massacred, and running through the city with armed men, he cut down a large number of the people.**<sup>67</sup>

As stated earlier, Antiochus Epiphanies had sensed a rebellion against the Seleucid authority at Jerusalem. Here is another description of the revenge taken by Antiochus:-

“In rapid succession during the years 168 and 167, Jews were massacred, the Temple was looted, the practice of the Jewish religion was proscribed. Circumcision became punishable by death, as was Sabbath observance. The ultimate insult came in December 167, when, by order of Antiochus, an alter to Zeus was erected within the Temple, and the Jews were required to sacrifice swine flesh unclean, of course, by Jewish law – to the God of the Greeks.<sup>68</sup>

### ▪ ***The temple desecrated***

Following passages throw further light on the methods of Hellenization adopted by Antiochus IV which desecrated the temple at Jerusalem.

“Where Antiochus could not extend, he could at any rate consolidate. No eastern empire has ever suffered from too much consolidation. **He therefore embarked upon a Hellenising policy as never before.** According to I Macc. I. 4 if, he sought throughout his whole kingdom to impose a common culture and religion. **In the case of the Jews this involved an attempt to stamp out their religion altogether,** and to substitute for it Gentile customs in general and **the worship of Zeus and the Greek deities in particular.** Outside Palestine Antiochus succeeded without

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<sup>67</sup> 2Macc. 5:23b-26.

<sup>68</sup> Abba Ebban, *HERITAGE, Civilization & the Jews*, (New York: Summit Books), Pg. 67-77.

any great difficulty; indeed there is every indication that already a common culture and religion had been established elsewhere. In every country there are always those to be found who will hurry to ingratiate themselves with the ruling power, however alien that power may be. There was a strong and enthusiastic Hellenising party even with Jewry, and this had its central core in the priestly aristocracy, of all people.

It will be seen that there were many influences at work which rendered it both desirable and necessary for Antiochus Epiphanes to set about determinedly to uproot the Jewish religion. He abolished the Jewish sacrifices. He set up heathen altars and caused swine's flesh to be offered on them. He even placed an altar to the Olympian Zeus on the very altar of the Temple itself. Anyone found with a copy of the Law was punished with death. Many Jews submitted, but gradually the opposition grew more and more stubborn. Very many Jews were put to death.<sup>69</sup>

In about 168 B.C. the temple of Jerusalem had become the temple of Zeus where swine flesh was offered on the altar.

2Machabees records that:

"Not long after this the king sent an Athenian senator to force the Jews to abandon the customs of their ancestors and **live no longer by the laws of God; also to profane the temple in Jerusalem and dedicate it to Olympian Zeus**, and that on Mount Gerizim to Zeus the Hospitable, as the inhabitants of the place requested. This intensified the evil in an intolerable and utterly disgusting way. **The gentiles filled the temple with debauchery and revelry; they amused themselves with prostitutes and had intercourse with women even in the sacred court.** They also brought in to the temple things that were forbidden, so that the altar was covered with abominable offerings prohibited by the laws.<sup>70</sup>

#### ▪ **Abolition of the Law**

It was due to the programme of intensive hellenization of Palestine that Antiochus IV took more severe action to wipe out Judaism from different parts of the Holy Land. It has therefore been reported that:

"A man could not keep the Sabbath or celebrate the

<sup>69</sup> Norman H. Snaith, *The Jews from Cyrus to Herod*, Pg. 37.

<sup>70</sup> 2Macc. 6:1-5.

traditional feasts, nor even admit that he was a Jew. Moreover, at the monthly celebration of the king's birthday the Jews had, from bitter necessity, to partake of the sacrifices, and when the festival of Dionysus was celebrated, they were compelled to march in his procession, wearing wreaths of ivy."

"At the suggestion of the citizens of Ptolemais, a decree was issued ordering the neighboring Greek cities to act in the same way against the Jews; **oblige them to partake of the sacrifices, and put to death those who would not consent to adopt the customs of the Greeks.** It was obvious, therefore, that disaster impended. Thus two women who were arrested for having circumcised their children were publicly paraded about the city with their babies hanging at their breasts and then thrown down from the top of the city wall. **Others, who had assembled in nearby caves to observe the Sabbath in secret, were betrayed to Philip and all burned to death. In their respect for the holiness of that day, they had scruples about defending themselves.**<sup>71</sup>

All this shows that Antiochus IV made vigorous efforts to eliminate Judaism or to harmonize it with Hellenistic civilization at any cost. For this he went up to the extent of destroying everything causing hindrance to the infusion of the Greek culture, language or faith. Consequently while returning from his successful invasion of Egypt in 169 B.C.E. he looted the Jerusalem temple. City walls were torn down and citadels were constructed over against the temple enclosure.

Another writer has tried to explain the impulsion behind Antiochus's ruthless enforcement of his plan of Hellenization. It has been stated that in 168 B.C. Antiochus Epiphanies king of Syria was besieging Alexandria when a Roman envoy appeared in his camp and bluntly ordered him to retreat. Antiochus finding himself unequal with the Romans had to abandon his enterprise. The impact of the said retreat can be found in the following:-

Before he could possibly meet the Romans on equal terms the

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<sup>71</sup> 2Macc. 6:6-11.

king saw that it was necessary to weld the different nationalities of which his empire was composed into a homogenous people. The only way of accomplishing this object was to induce his subject to adopt a common form of faith. He accordingly issued an edict to that effect ---- a step which immediately led him into collision with the Jews. Syrian Emissaries were sent into Judea to abolish Judaism and establish the worship of Olympian Zeus. The abomination of desolation was set up in the temple: the sacred scriptures were burnt; the practice of circumcision was forbidden on pain of death, and all the horrors of a religious persecution descended on the land (B.C. 168)<sup>72</sup>

In the footnotes at Pg. 6 it has been clarified that the abomination of desolation was a small altar of Jupiter placed on the high Altar of the temple.

The retreat of Antiochus from Alexandria had taught him that heterogeneous subjects were the cause of weakness while strength can only be attained by welding together different faiths to form a homogenous people with a common faith. Edwyn Bevan therefore says

“He came to the conclusion that it was possible, that it was expedient, to extinguish the eccentric Jewish religion once for all. As far as Jerusalem itself went, the execution of his plans was fairly simple. Already a part of the population, and especially, as we saw, of the ruling class, had adopted Hellenism; the political organization of the state after the pattern of a Greek Republic was carried through by a royal commissioner; **and Jehovah having been identified with the Olympian Zeus**, the Temple service was recast in Greek forms, with **an image of the god, which probably displayed the features of Antiochus himself**. A garrison of the king’s troops occupied the citadel; and under their eye Jerusalem held its new political assemblies, and sacrifices animals forbidden by Moses to its transfigured divinity.”<sup>73</sup>

The emergence of the Persian and Greek Empires had the visible impact of reconciliation and merger of different theologies around the Mediterranean Sea. This led to development of Monotheism in which various local gods

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<sup>72</sup> W.D. Morrison, *The Story of the Nations, Jews Under Roman Rule*, Pg. 5-6.

<sup>73</sup> *Jerusalem under the High Priests*, 1920, p. 82.

were seen as expressions of one supreme being. In Phoenician city states 'Baal Shemem' the Lord of heavens could be identified with Zeus, the God of thunder. Linking of Baal with Yahweh on one hand and Zeus on the other was facilitated with appellation i.e. El-Elyon 'most high one' already being used for Yahweh and Zeus as the supreme Lord of the Greeks. "Legend was current in antiquity that Jewish God was really Dionysus and Plutark describes in detail how the feast of Tabernacles was really a feast in the honor of the Greek God. Dionysus also seems to have been worshipped at Jerusalem and Jews were compelled to walk in processions wearing wreaths of ivy the symbol of the God on his feast day (2Macc 6:7). It is said that Jason the High Priest had no scruples about offering sacrifices to Heracles during Olympic games, who together with the consort Astarte as one of the family triad worshiped at Tyre. Similarly triple identification Zeus, Dionysus, Yahweh was taking a shape. As such introduction of Dionysus worship at Jerusalem was an attempt to replace Yahweh worship with a suitable Greek one. We therefore note that whereas all others failed St. Paul and his followers succeeded in establishing the triad of Father, Son and the Holy Ghost to be worshiped by all throughout the Roman Empire.

Recent studies about the so-called religious reforms of Antiochus IV Epiphanes such as by Hengel reveal that:-

"The temple at Jerusalem was to be turned into a shrine of Zeus Olympius, and its whole symbolic character changed by turning the sanctuary into a sacred grove and erecting a massebah or sacred stone over the altar of incense.<sup>74</sup>

Thus the Yahweh worship regulated by Pentateuchal law was replaced by an older form similar to that which had actually been outlawed by Deuteronomy (Dt 16:21f), but was now reintroduced in a Greek guise as the worship of Zeus who according to primitive Greek custom was also worshipped without a temple on a high mountain. This explains why the new cult could be practiced in 'the cities of Judah' (1Macc

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<sup>74</sup> Macc 6:2.

1:44-51) also, and why the distinctive Jewish way of life which the torah represented had to be eradicated the special relationship between Israel and Yahweh on which that way of life was based was to be abolished for a more universal and natural religion which could support the 'cosmic' aspirations of the Hellenisers.<sup>75</sup>

The policy of Hellenization in Judea continued unabated throughout the reign of Antiochus IV. Another description of the same is given below:-

"Thus, in effect, a Greek polis was established in the undefended city and the temple, became virtually a **city shrine devoted as much to Zeus as Yahweh**. Judaism was fast becoming another Syro-Hellenic cult, organized by the state as part of the trappings of Seleucid imperialism. Real integration of the Jew into his pagan environment was at last becoming established fact and this time **with the active collaboration of a sizeable and influential part of the population, priestly as well as lay**.

Antiochus determined to press this Hellenization of Jerusalem even further. Perhaps had he waited, exclusive Judaism might have died a natural death and crumbled away as effectively as the broken walls that symbolized her hard won autonomy. But, impatient of pockets of conservatism that resisted his changes; Antiochus decreed that cancellation of the special rights and privileges of the Jews and in effect forbade the practice of distinctive Judaism. **Regular sacrifices were suspended, the observance of the Sabbath and traditional festivals forbidden, circumcision of children made a crime and copies of the Law were ordered to be destroyed**. Pagan altars were erected throughout the territory and **Jews were forced to participate in the attendant rites and to eat swine's flesh**. Later chroniclers saw as the climax to all this sacrilege the introduction in December 167 B.C. **of the cult of the Olympian Zeus into the Temple**, and the erection of **some kind of image, probably phallic, to represent the god** (the "abomination of desolation" of Daniel) within the holy place.

The severity with which these measures were enforced upon Jews, in callous disregard of any scruples of individual conscience crystallized opposition which, in turn, made

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<sup>75</sup> Sean Freyne, *GALILEE, From Alexander the Great to Hadrian*, p. 263-4.

Antiochus even more brutal in his suppression of the Jewish cult. **Groups keeping the Sabbath secretly were sought out and massacred by Greek soldiers; women persisting in circumcising their children brought upon themselves and their offspring an immediate death penalty;** similarly fates awaited those who refused to eat ritually unclean food. Passive opposition centered around a sect known as the "pious Ones" (Hasidim), who for a time resisted pressures to take up arms against their persecutors.<sup>76</sup>

▪ ***Martyrdom of Eleazer & a mother with her seven sons***

Eleazer was a scribe of 90 years who was being forced to open his mouth to eat pork but in spite of coercion as well as enticement by the officers of Antiochus IV he refused to eat pork against the law of the Lord. He therefore suffered from such a torturous death in reverence of law which continued to serve as model of courage and virtue for the survivors. 2Mac. (6:28-31) contains the tragic details of the event. The story preserves an ineffable record of humaneness of the Greeks and their successors who extravagantly continue to boast about climax of civilization of the Greeks as well as the Romans.

It was only on the basis of power and control over many nations in Asia, Europe and Africa that the oppressors successfully continued to transfer their guilt to the oppressed. All nations who had either failed to conquer Greece, Rome or other countries in the west or did not succeed to prolong their control on them were designated as barbarians or brutes while innumerable inhuman and barbarous crimes of the Romans and the Greeks are presented as fully justified acts of the conquerors. So far as humaneness is concerned the same did not extend beyond the citizens of Rome. People in the lands conquered by them had no rights at all. Humanitarian preachers in the west today must therefore have a fresh look on the heinous crimes committed by the Romans against mankind

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<sup>76</sup> John M. Allegro, *THE CHOSEN PEOPLE* (London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd. 1971) Pg. 18, 20.

especially the people in the lands subjugated by the Greeks or the Romans and especially those who were taken as slaves.

The said legacy was upheld by later successors of Rome throughout their colonies in Africa, Australia, America and in other colonies in the East. The slave trade and treatment with the slaves as well as the original inhabitants of the American and Australian continents at the hands of the Spanish, British and the French colonists are well recorded in the annals of history. Perhaps the most glaring example of the atrocities of the Americans and their allies can be found in brutish and indiscriminate bombing and massacre hundreds of thousands of innocent men, women and children throughout Iraq, Afghanistan and its borders. The Americans and their allies tested the most destructive newly invented devices on innocent human beings in the said lands. No human beings believing in any God could have suffocated such a large number of Afghans by transporting them through containers meant for transportation of goods as the Americans did in the Afghan War. The uncalled for invasion of Iraq as well as Afghanistan, destruction of life and property shows an utter lack of human values in them. Similarly, the stories of inhuman torture to the prisoners at Guantánamo Bay will continue to serve as a slur on the face of civilization of the Americans.

Reverting to the forced Hellenization by Antiochus IV we observe that one can hardly find anything more tragic than the story of faith and fortitude pertaining to a Jewish mother and her seven sons. They were arrested by the King who forced them to eat pork. On their refusal to transgress the law of the lord the king ordered his men to have pans and caldrons heated on fire. Meanwhile the king commanded the executioners to cut out the tongue of the first one of the brothers. They scalped him and after cutting off his hands and feet they threw him on the heating pans while others were viewing the same. When the cloud of smoke spread from the pan, the king asked the next one to obey his orders. On his refusal the second one and

thereafter every other brother and eventually their mother were given the option to eat the pork to save their life. It is said that all the eight persons suffered the martyrdom one after the other without submitting before the will of the tyrant. As such we observe that in spite of continued persecution and torture Antiochus IV failed to make the Jews eat pork.

Like Eleazer and the woman with her seven sons, there was another person named Mattathias who along his seven sons refused to participate in the sacrifice of pig on the altar. This ultimately led to rebellion and loss of kingdom of the Greeks. Jews succeeded to reestablish their kingdom called Maccabees in honor of Judas Maccabees one of the sons of Mattathias. Even subsequently we find hundreds of thousands of Jews dying for freedom and restoration of the Law of Moses right from the time of Antiochus IV to the ultimate destruction of the city and temple of Jerusalem with total elimination of Jews from the city in A.D. 70. Survivors were either sold as slaves or they stood dispersed in different parts of the world.

In spite of all the coercive methods adopted by Antiochus IV he could not succeed to achieve the desired results. Pace of hellenization was slow and perhaps disappointing for Antiochus. He therefore decided to take more drastic measures to promote his policy in Palestine. For this he came to the conclusion that he must extinguish the eccentric Jewish religion once for all. He had succeeded only to win a small number of Jews who due to continued persecution on the one hand and inducements on the other had become willing participators to Hellenize the society. Due to their vested interests Most of the ruling class in Jerusalem adopted Hellenism as a way of life. Masses however had a disdain for the religion and the customs of the gentiles. To eliminate Judaism entirely from Palestine Antiochus took additional steps such as narrated below: -

“The political organization of the state after the pattern of a Greek republic was carried through by a royal commissioner; and **Jehovah having been identified with the Olympian**

**Zeus, the Temple service was recast in Greek forms, with an image of the God, which probably displayed the features of Antiochus himself.** A garrison of the king's troops occupied the citadel; and under their eye Jerusalem held its new political assemblies, and sacrificed animals forbidden by Moses to its transfigured divinity.<sup>77</sup>

Consequently many people forsook the city and went to country towns and villages. They were followed there by the Greek officials determined to stamp out Jewish practices throughout the land. They believed that stopping the traditional practices of the Jews including circumcision and dietary constraints as well as doing away with the laws of cleanliness needed to be abolished with more severe persecution including intimidation, torture, death, crucifixion or burning the resilient Jews alive.

A priest named Mattathias son of John usually lamented the ravaging of the land and plunder by Antiochus Epiphanies. He felt extremely perturbed from the abomination of desolation in the city and the temple at Jerusalem. When he saw the sacrileges that were being committed in Judea and Jerusalem he said:- *"Woe is me! Why was I born to see the ruin of my people and the ruin of the Holy City, and to sit idle while it is given into the hands of enemies, and sanctuary into the hands of strangers"*. (1Macc. 2:7)

Being extremely perturbed from the profanity at Jerusalem Mattathias left the city and settled in Modein a village about 20 miles north of Jerusalem. In year 167 B.C. some officers of Antiochus reached there to have sacrifices offered in the Greek style. The officers of the king enforcing the apostasy requested Mattathias and his sons to participate. Mattathias refused to cooperate saying in loud voice that:-

Although all the Gentiles in the king's realm obey him, so that each forsakes the religion of his fathers and consents to the king's orders, yet I and my sons and my kinsmen will keep to the covenant of our fathers. God forbid that we should forsake the law and the commandments. We will not obey the words

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<sup>77</sup> Edwyn Bevan, *Jerusalem under the High-Priests*, (London 1920) Pg. 82.

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of the king nor depart from our religion in the slightest degree.<sup>78</sup>

As against the resolve of Mattathias the officers concerned proceeded with the task assigned to them. A Jew came forward to obey the orders of the officers of Antiochus and tried to offer the sacrifices prohibited by the Law of Moses. Mattathias killed him on the altar along with the messenger of the King and fled to the mountains with his sons. Abba Ebban describes the explosion caused by the retaliation against the rigid enforcement of the Hellenist cult into Jewish traditions in the following words:-

Discontent erupted into rebellion when the agents of Antiochus sought to compel the Jews to take part in pagan worship in the small town of Modi'in, northwest of Jerusalem. Leaders of the Jewish community there were Mattathias the Hasmonean, a man of priestly descent, and his five sons, John, Simon, Eleazar, Jonathan, and Judas, better known to history as **Judah Maccabee**, or "Judah the Hammer".<sup>79</sup>

The retaliation against the continued oppression, profanity and persecution as stated above infuriated Mattathias and his sons to such an extent that they after killing king's officers took to the hills and started harassing the occupying forces through gorilla attacks. Meanwhile due to Antiochus's involvement in the east his deputies in the region failed to take any effective step to wipe out the rebels. **Consequently in 164 B.C.E. Judas Son of Mattathias succeeded in taking effective control of Jerusalem.** The temple thereafter stood ritually cleansed from the profanity introduced by Antiochus IV. The Jewish community started enjoying religious autonomy and the faithful Jews were free again to practice their religion undisturbed. Among other things this success of Judah also had an impact of reviving the **vision of the Jewish kingdom to hold the gentile world in servitude.**

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<sup>78</sup> 1Macc. 2:19-22.

<sup>79</sup> *Abba Ebban, HERITAGE: Civilization & the Jews*, (New York: Summit Books) p. 76-77.

It is therefore evident from the above that during the reign of Antiochus Epiphanies, Mattathias and his sons resorted to arms only to defend their religion and the law. Referring to 1Macc-2/32 therefore, N. H. Snaith says that:-

The insistent attempt of Antiochus Epiphanes to wipe out the Jewish religion and **to destroy every copy of the Law did a very great deal** to ensure a more rigid determination to hold on to these things. Opposition from Hellenisers within Jewry did but increase the resistance of the faithful. So determined were they to observe the law in all its strictness that **they even refused to defend themselves on the Sabbath**, with the result that many of them were massacred, and their women and children with them.<sup>80</sup>

Subsequently Judas (surnamed 'Maccabaeus') was killed during an engagement with the Greeks in 160 B.C.E. but his successors continued the efforts to dominate their gentile neighbors around Judea. Later on Alexander Jannaeus King and high priest 102/101 to 76/75 B.C.E. succeeded to extend his domain till it covered more territories than even David or Solomon had succeeded to dominate during their glory. He conquered Gilead and most of the ammonite country east of Jordan and Moabite country and lands in the south up to the borders of Egypt. This restoration of Davidic principedom was therefore taken as God's sign of approval for the Maccabaeus' as a portent for the **Establishment of a Messianic Kingdom all over the world** being the cherished desire of the Israelites. Unluckily the said **dream of ruling the world** stood shattered soon thereafter with **Pompeii's invasion of Judah in 64 B.C.E.** after which the Jews never had another chance to enjoy the same political autonomy over lands extending far beyond Palestine.

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<sup>80</sup> *The Jews from Cyrus to Herod.* (Surrey: Gateway Handbooks of Religious knowledge, 1956), p. 152-153.

## FROM POMPEY TO HERODIANS

Maccabees continued to rule Judea and other regions from 167 to 63 B.C. Since then, the Romans started controlling Judea and other parts of Palestine. We discussed earlier that the Greeks and especially Antiochus IV had shown extreme brutality to exterminate Judaism and to replace the same with Hellenism. Romans, too, did not lag behind in the said treatment towards the people in the lands conquered by them. Being successors of the Greeks, they too, considered themselves as super-humans while the people belonging to the nations conquered by them were born only to serve them. As such, the main motif of the Romans was to keep subdued nations under their tight control forever. Romans, therefore, adopted the policy of destroying the nations or the individuals who dreamt about freedom from Rome. Keeping everlasting control on enslaved people had, therefore, always been priority of the Romans for which they spared no cruelty whatsoever. Even prior to the conquest of Palestine, their treatment with different nations shows the same. For paucity of time and space at our disposal in the present treatise, however, it shall suffice to quote only two from numerous instances of the inhuman treatment of the Romans with the people subdued or enslaved by them.

Historians of the west eulogize the Roman power and terror which according to them was an idealistic system of polity for the world empire of Rome. They present the Roman system of government and treatment with the oppressed nations with praise. To bring an end to the said tyrannical and inhuman system of keeping other nations under their slavery or control was extremely distasteful and unacceptable to them. The historians, therefore, continue to lament over the sad demise of the tyrannical empire of Rome feted and fattened by sucking the blood, drenching dry the bodies of their subjects and the slaves. By rising to

power, they had the conviction that the Romans were super-humans bestowed with divinely approved rights to rule over other nations of the world for ever. The oppressed people were, therefore, the property of the oppressors who neither acknowledged their humanity nor allowed them any equality in the basic rights. Might is right was the only guiding principal of their polity while law, justice, human rights were all reserved only for the citizens of Rome. The lands, wealth, chattel and the people in the regions conquered by them were simply the property of the Roman conquerors who could keep or destroy the same at their own sweet will. During the said age of power, plunder and oppression, one could hardly conceive of any justice or human consideration for the subjects of Rome.

As a matter of policy, Romans usually killed most of the defeated people on the battle field in the houses or lands while the survivors were at their mercy either to be left on the lands to produce for the Romans or to be deported to other regions as captives of war. Such deportees were either sold as slaves or they were retained to enhance the pool of inexpensive labor in various parts of the empire.

About 7 years after the conquest of Jerusalem, Caesar, Pompey and Crassus renewed an agreement known as '*Trium Virate*' B.C. 56. Crassus thereafter took over government of Syria (B.C. 55-53) from Gabinus. He was already the richest person in the Roman Empire but he did not hesitate to plunder the temple at Jerusalem in violation of his oath. Eventually, the tyrant met with his fate in the arid waste of Mesopotamia where he stood defeated and slain.<sup>81</sup> The plunder of the temple aroused bitter feeling of resentment against Romans which instigated the Jews to cooperate with the victorious Parthians who tried to drive Romans out of Asia. Cassius the brave lieutenant of Crassus somehow managed to lead the shattered legions of Crassus back to Syria. He had hardly 10,000 men with him. In spite of the unfavorable circumstances, Crassus succeeded to suppress the insurrection in Judea. He executed all the leaders of the rebels and sold about

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<sup>81</sup> p. 45, *Jews Under the Roman Rule*.

30,000 of the Jewish warriors in the slave market in about 51 B.C.

It was due to the said policy that right from the inception of the empire, the Romans had started gathering ever increasing number of slaves. A passage from Encyclopaedia Britannica may suffice to throw some light on it:

“Of the number furnished from this source a few particulars from the time of the mature republic and the first century of the empire will give some idea. In Epirus, after the victories of Aemilius Paullus, 150,000 captives were sold. The prisoners at Aquae, Sextiae and Vercellae were 90,000 Teutons and 60,000 Cimbri. Caesar sold on a single occasion in Gaul 63,000 captives. But slavery, as Hume has shown, is unfavorable to population. Hence a regular commerce in slaves was established, which was based on the **“systematically-prosecuted hunting of man,”** and indicated an entire perversion of the primitive institution, which was essentially connected with conquest. The pirates sold great numbers of slaves at Delos, where was the chief market for this kind of wares; and these sales went on as really, though more obscurely, **after the successful expedition of Pompey. There was a regular importation to Rome of slaves, brought to some extent from Africa, Spain and Gaul, but chiefly from Asiatic countries--- Bithynia, Galatia Cappodocia and Syria.**<sup>82</sup>

Individuals owned thousands of slaves. Pliny tells us that Saecilius a freed man of the time of Augustus left by his will as many as 4,116 slaves..... He fixes the proportion of slaves to free men as that of 3 to 1 for the time between the conquest of Greece (146 B.C.) and the reign of Alexander Severus (A.D. 222-235). **The entire number in Italy would thus have been 20,832,000 in the reign of Claudius.** The said policy of keeping the weaker nations and the individuals under subjugation or slavery persisted in the successors of Rome for more than 1600 years after the reign of Alexander Severus mentioned above. Even the

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<sup>82</sup> *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. 20, (London: William Benton Publisher) p. 775.

well acclaimed period of renaissance and enlightenment in the west failed to bring any change in the mental attitude of the colonizers to accept any equality in the human rights for all the descendants of Adam and Eve. The successors of the Roman Empire continued to follow the same policy of enslaving the free people or importing the slaves from abroad. Spain and France were more conspicuous among the nations who held the largest number of slaves. We learn that the western part of St. Domingo, formerly belonging to Spain, had been occupied by Buccaneers who ceded to France at the Peace of Ryswick in 1697. It has been recorded that:-

“So vast was the annual importation of enslaved negroes into this colony before 1791 that the ratio of the blacks to the whites was as 16 to 1. In that year there were in French St. Domingo 480,000 blacks, 24,000 mulattoes and only 30,000 whites.<sup>83</sup>

Although we have no exact details about treatment of the slaves, yet we know that the colonizers for centuries continued to exploit the inexpensive labor force consisting of the slaves who had been the main factor to promote cultivation of the land and for speedy development and industrialization in the American and Australian continents and also in the southern parts of Africa and the south-eastern parts of the Asian continent. Keeping in view the miserable condition of the slaves and the original inhabitants of the lands, mentioned above, one feels that Karl Marx's classic theory of exploitation of the proletariat by the bourgeois is nothing as compared to the woes of the ill-fated victims of the colonizers.

Due to a large number of slaves deported from the lands conquered by Rome during the centuries preceding the Christian Era, the slaves formed the main part of the workforce that ran the economy of Rome. Although the institution of slavery and the system of forced labor has always been imposed by the strong upon the weak in the world, yet Rome was perhaps the only Empire possessing the highest ratio of slaves as compared to their masters. By

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<sup>83</sup> ibid p. 781.

about 150 B.C., the enslavement of foreign population through military conquests had increased to such a proportion that the number of slaves far surpassed the citizens of Rome. While slavery has been considered against human dignity and causing moral deterioration in the society, the immoral effects of the institutions were also disastrous for Rome.

As said earlier, the slaves were not considered as persons but property of their masters. They were treated harshly and oppressively. Owners could abuse, injure or kill their slaves without any fear of legal consequences. Slaves were kept alive only for the benefit of the people of Rome. Their services were utilized in the fields and mines and they were subjected to all type of hard physical labor as per requirements of their masters. Due to high concentration and oppressive treatments with the slaves in the heartland and certain colonies of Rome, they felt depressed and deprived to such an extent that they rebelled against their masters repeatedly. Most conspicuous among such revolts were the first, second and the third Servile Wars which we shall discuss in the chapter *Passion and No Passion*.

In 64/63 B.C., Pompey, visited Damascus where messengers of Hyracanus and Aristobulus, sons of Alexander Jananeus called on him with their offerings. About one thousand of the most respectable Jews represented the case of Hyracanus for kingship. They were led by Antipater (father of Herod the Great) the Idumean. Aristobulus also went there with great pomp and show. After hearing the contestants, Pompeii dismissed the Claimants with the promise that he would personally come to Judea to resolve the quarrel between the brothers. Learning about the intention of Pompeii to visit Jerusalem, Aristobulus departed from Damascus in such a hurry that alarmed Pompey about his designs. Taking notice of unexpected agility of Aristobulus, Pompey took no time to chase him. Aristobulus after departure from Damascus firstly made for the fortress of Alexendrium but soon surrendering the same, he reached Jerusalem and started

preparing for the defense. His nerves, however, broke down as soon as Pompeii's advance party reached Jerusalem. He, therefore, went out of the city and surrendered before them promising open city and money from the temple treasury. When Pompey sent Gabinius to accept the tributes and to occupy the city, he was struck with wonder to find the royalists and other Jews defending the city stubbornly. Pompey was enraged and besieged the city and also deployed his men at various places around Jerusalem. John M. Allegro defines the episode in the following words:

"It was three months before the Romans were able to break through on the temple mount from the north (War I vii 4 149). The honour of being the first to enter the sacred precinct fell to one Faustus Cornelius, closely followed by two centurions and their companies. **They formed a circle round the temple court and systematically butchered everyone therein. The priests, we are told, went on with their sacrifices and other religious rites to the end, being cut down even as they poured the libations and burned the incense, "putting the worship of the deity above their own preservation"** (150) any that did escape the holocaust within the temple area "perished by their countrymen of the opposite faction".<sup>84</sup>

Another writer has described the episode in words reproduced below:

"He took Jerusalem after a three-month siege, slaughtering twelve thousand Jews. He took advantage of the Sabbath day, attacking ferociously when he knew the observant Jews would be less inclined to fight. He and his staff dared to enter the inner sanctum of the Jewish temple---the "Holy of Holies," a small curtained chamber that housed the Ark of the Covenant in ancient times. According to the Torah only the high priest was allowed to enter this room and only once a year on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). In an ironic twist of history Josephus says that Pompey's violation of the Temple fell on the "day of the fast," or Yom Kippur. Perhaps more than any other, this single act epitomized Roman arrogance and

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<sup>84</sup> *The Chosen People*, Pg. 127-128.

power.<sup>85</sup>

Pompey was the first Roman general who after his conquest of Jerusalem entered the temple's innermost sanctuary i.e. 'Holy of Holies'. It is pertinent to note that **he found it empty. There was no image, no statue and no symbolical representation of the deity there.** Pompeii might have, therefore, been wonder-struck to observe the emptiness of the Holy of Holies as against numerous Idol Gods and sculptures occupying full length and breadth of the Roman Pantheon or the temple of Jupiter at the Capitoline Hill in the ancient Rome.

After sacking the city, the Romans deported Aristobulus and his family to Rome as prisoners of war. Hyracanus his brother was reinstated as high priest. During triumphal procession at Rome in 61 B.C., the Romans displayed the Hasmonean prince i.e. Aristobulus to the Roman people along with other prisoners. Alexander, a son of Aristobulus had, however, escaped on his way to Rome. The escaping prince reappeared in 57 B.C. with ten thousand armed soldiers and 5,000 horses. He fortified Alexandrium and Macharus properly but had to surrender before the Romans. Even after his release, he made another venture against Rome but failed to succeed.

Let us not forget that the Romans successors of the Greeks had a vast empire which needed enforcement of unifying factors such as Roman law and Roman power. Abba Ebban throws further light on the same:-

"in addition to the handicap of distance there was the problem of diversity of peoples, tongues, cultures, faiths, thought and conduct. **The problem was how to involve all these people in allegiance to the Roman Empire, thus minimizing the prospects of revolt.**<sup>86</sup>

We, therefore, observe that after the conquest of Pompeii Roman governors continued to Hellenize the Jewish lands

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<sup>85</sup> James D. Tabor, *The Jesus Dynasty*, (New York: Simon & Schuster), p. 95.

<sup>86</sup> *HERITAGE: Civilization & the Jews*, p. 78.

utilizing repressive as well as exploitative measures against them. As stated earlier, Marcus Cassius robbed the temple of a great part of its riches in about 54 B.C. Subsequently, Cassius the governor of Syria, sold 30,000 of Jews into slavery in about 51 B.C. Aside from amassing wealth, the said action perhaps also aimed at depriving the Jews from power and wealth to prevent their resistance in future.

The Greek policy of diffusion of Hellenic thought and culture among the Jews and other nations in the east had already brought an intellectual and spiritual change in the lands conquered by Alexander the Great, but more so in Syria, Palestine and Egypt. Anyhow, the same policy as devised by the Greeks was followed by Roman successors of the Greeks in the areas, subsequently, subdued by them. Greeks already had set on transforming the Jewish theocracy in Greek style which was known as Polis. Antiochus IV fostered the same by introducing his so-called religious reforms which according to recent studies were not from the Seleucid King but from the Hellenized aristocratic party within the Jews. These lawless men had made a covenant with the gentiles (1Macc 1:11f). Mr. Sean Freyne, therefore, records that:-

“That the reform party, centered on the Tobiad family, began their machinations by attempting to dismantle the Jewish theocratic state and establish Jerusalem as a polis, Antioch in Jerusalem, thereby curtailing what was in their view, the repressive control of Jewish affairs by the priestly aristocratic, Oniad family (2Macc 4:7-17). This control was clearly regarded as socially and economically counter-productive: ‘since we separated ourselves from them (the Gentiles) many evils supplant the conservative Onias IV with his brother Jason, but eventually he had to make way for Menelaus, who actually purchased the office from Antiochus IV with an offer of greater revenue than Jason was prepared to pay (2 Macc 4:23-27). With this move the Hellenizing party was at once split and the supporters of Menelaus had effectively shown their disregard for Jewish religious tradition by accepting as high priest somebody other than an Oniad. In order to maintain control of the situation they were now ready to reject the distinctively Jewish way of life represented by observance of the Jewish Torah and the Jerusalem cult, and in this they

had the active support of the king who actually issued a decree outlawing the practice of the Jewish religion, possibly in conformity with a general decree **that 'the whole kingdom should be one people', and therefore, worship the one God.** What is significant in all this is the fact that social and economic possibilities, which were seen by this extreme party to be the advantages of hellenism, had actually led to a **rejection of the Jewish religion and its replacement with another cult that seemed more in tune with the one world, one culture view of both Antiochus and the Menelaus faction.**<sup>87</sup>

The same author continues to say that:-

**"The temple at Jerusalem was to be turned into a shrine of Zeus Olympius,** and its whole symbolic character changed by turning the sanctuary into a sacred grove and erecting a Massabah or sacred stone over the altar of incense (2 Macc 6:2)."

"Thus the Yahweh worship regulated by Pentateuchal law was replaced by an older form similar to that which had actually been outlawed by Deuteronomy (Dt 16:21f), **but was now reintroduced in a Greek guise as the worship of Zeus, who according to primitive Greek custom was also worshipped without a temple on a high mountain.** This explains why the new cult could be practiced in the cities of Judah' (1 Macc 1:44-51) also, and **why the distinctive Jewish way of life which the torah represented had to be eradicated. The special relationship between Israel and Yahweh on which that way of life was based was to be abolished for a more universal and natural religion which could support the 'cosmic' aspirations of the Hellenisers.**<sup>88</sup>

Besides other considerations, the said policy aimed at replacing Yahweh, the deity worshiped by the Israelites with Jesus Christ to be worshiped as front man in the trinity worshiped by the followers of St. Paul. Due to the exaggerated sense of possessiveness, the Israelites claimed Yahweh to be exclusive and the tribal God of the Israelites. The adaptation of Jesus as God among others fulfilled the

<sup>87</sup> Sean Freyne.

<sup>88</sup> Sean Freyne *GALILEE, From Alexander the Great to Hadrian*, p. 263-264.

Hellenist aspiration for 'catholicity' i.e. universal or all embracing faith throughout the Roman Empire.

Roman successors of the Greeks proceeded on the same track of hellenizing the people in the lands conquered by them. They met with great success in other lands while Judea was the exception where they had to encounter an organized resistance from the Jews. Majority in Judea, therefore, opposed the culture of the Hellenists because of their conviction that religion was the very foundation of the national identity of the Jews. They, therefore, continued to defy Hellenization of Judea with an increased stress on maintenance of the strict separatists' policy of the Jews as introduced by Nehemiah and Ezra since the return of the exiles from Babylonia and reconstruction of the temple at Jerusalem. The said background of religious conviction and ethos of the Jews was, therefore, the main cause of failure of the Ptolemy's as well as Seleucids including Antiochus IV to replace Judaism with the faith, culture and lifestyle of the Greeks. Romans, too, were not unaware of the said experiments of the Greeks.

Cicero (106-43 B.C.E.) the famous Roman politician, writer and orator was, therefore, voicing the common sentiments of the Romans pinpointing the separatist attitude of the Jews when he declared that:-

"Even while Jerusalem was standing and the Jews were at peace with us, the practice of their sacred rites was **at variance with the glory of our empire, the dignity of our name the customs of our ancestors**. But now it is even more so, when that nation by its armed resistance has shown what it thinks of our rule' how dear it was to the immortal gods is shown by the fact that it has been conquered, reduced to a subject province, made a slave.<sup>89</sup>

Cicero certainly made no mistake to point out Jewish resilience and defiance of the Roman rule and their aversion against the infusion of Hellenist culture as a precursor to eliminate the religious traditions and law of the Lord. We, however, cannot agree with Cicero's conclusion that the downfall of the Jews was caused due to any apathy

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<sup>89</sup> *Heritage: Civilization & the Jews*, p. 76-77.

of the immortal Gods worshiped by the Romans. Anyhow, no one could ignore the obvious contrast between Greek and Jewish thought, faith and mode of living. Jews were monotheists while Romans being polytheists believed in pluralism of Gods. As against this, we cannot ignore the fact that the history and the cultic traditions of the Jews were based on Torah and the prophets of Israel. The Hellenist thought, traditions and mode of living was, therefore, entirely at variance with the culture of the Jews who had developed the entire structure of their society around the nucleus of their faith as contained in the primary Commandments of the Lord such as quoted below:-

6. I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. 7. Thou shalt have none other gods before me. 8. Thou shalt not make thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the waters beneath the earth: 9. Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me.<sup>90</sup>

This shows that the faith of Jews, as stated above, was inimical to the worship of the mythological Gods of the Hellenists. It had no place for apotheosis of the emperors. Jews, therefore, refused to worship the statue or image of the emperors of Rome or to bow before them. The nudity expressed in the art and sculpture developed by the Hellenists to portray the figures of heroes, gods as well as goddesses of the Romans or Greeks was a profanity for the Jews. They also differed from the Hellenists in respect of personal cleanliness and strict dietary regulations enjoined upon them by the Law of Moses. Many other differences in the socio-political set up and religions traditions and teachings did not allow the Jews to assimilate Hellenist culture or to adopt the way of life of the Romans or of the Greeks. This was so because the Jews were quite conscious

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<sup>90</sup> Deu 5:6.

of the fact that the assimilation of Greeko-Roman culture aimed at elimination of the religion and traditions of Israel. Most of the Jews, therefore, stood aloof from other cultures being introduced by the foreigners in Judea. They stuck to their law and followed the separatist policy introduced by Ezekiel, Nehemiah and Ezra during and after the period of their exile.

Jesus the Jew was the last prophet of the Lord raised among the Jewish race. He was no enemy of the Jews. Like other prophets of Israel he, too, followed the Law of Moses and observed the same till his crucifixion. Jesus never had the idea of introducing a new religion nor did he ever claim divinity for himself. The apostles and the earliest followers of Jesus remained attached to the community while like the other Jews, the temple at Jerusalem was their main sanctuary till it stood destroyed by the Romans and the Jews as well as the Nazarene followers of Jesus were massacred, dispersed and forbidden to enter Jerusalem at the pain of death. St. Paul, a Greek speaking Roman citizen born at Tarsus was then serving as a henchman of the high priest. After persecuting the followers of Jesus Christ for many years, he claimed having seen a vision on road to Damascus. (.....) St. Paul as such was the first person to introduce a theology making Jesus Christ the Son of God and savior of mankind. He had no concern with Jesus the Jew, his teachings or his 'life in flesh'. Discarding the Jewish background and earthly existence of Jesus, he took a start not from a man in flesh or prophet of Israel but from the 'Risen Lord' i.e. the God who revealed himself to St. Paul in the vision. St. Paul, therefore, claimed that he had received the Gospel not from a man (i.e. Jesus in flesh) but directly from 'Lord Jesus Christ' in spirit. St. Paul, therefore, propagated superiority of the Gospel preached by him over any other Gospel preached even by those who were chosen as apostles by Jesus himself and who lived with him day and night from the start of his mission till the end of his life on earth. Theology of St. Paul was, therefore, a diversion from the faith preached by Jesus. Subsequently, certain Greeks writing under the influence of St. Paul composed their Gospels to support or to substantiate the theology of

Paul on the basis of certain traditions of Jesus transmitted through written or verbal sources from Palestine by adopting or emending the same in accordance with the theology of St. Paul. Later on, the fourth Gospel ascribed to St. John made further additions to the theology of St. Paul to complete the basic concepts of the religion which became to known as Christianity. It was, therefore, the theology of St. Paul and the disinformation spread through the writings of the Evangelists which show antagonism of Jesus with the religious convictions of the people to whom he belonged.

Reverting to the resilience of the Jews against the Roman policy of Hellenization of Palestine, we find that majority of the populace remained aloof from adopting the polytheistic culture of Rome. Jews are, therefore, the only community who did not lose their identity even being dispersed throughout the world with effect from 722 B.C.E to the present. Even after about 1900 years of the destruction of their central sanctuary at Jerusalem with disintegration of the community, they refused to bow down before the cultural environments in different regions of the world where they lived. It is, therefore, said that the **“Jew always remained a Jew, marked in garb, in feature, in religious faith, always scornfully asserting the claim that he was the chosen of the Lord.”** They proudly proclaimed that the world was created only for the sake of Israel. They also held that the Jews had been divinely chosen to rule the world. Faithful Jews, therefore, never forsake the law. They have always been ready to give their lives for the sake of their religion and law of the Lord.

### **Strict Observance of the Law**

We cannot proceed further without inviting attention of the readers to certain pathetic and tragic episodes connected with strict observance of Law by the Jews and unethical as well as ruthless massacre of the devout Jews by the Romans. On Sabbath, it was a transgression even to defend one’s life. We, therefore, find that both the Greeks as well

as the Romans took unfair advantage of the said constraint of law on the Jews. They continued to repeat the massacre of Jews on the Sabbath Day time and again ever since the conquest of Alexander the Great till total elimination of the Jews from Judea in about 135 A.D.

In the first episode, Ptolemy I Soter in 321 BC attacked and took Jerusalem on a Sabbath day when the Sabbath law prevented a factual defence. Since the Jews stubbornly refused to defend themselves on Sabbath, therefore, showing no mercy to the devout worshipers of God in the temple, the Greeks massacred a large number of the Jews in the city and the temple while taking away the survivors as captives of war.

The second episode pertains to the period when Aristobulus had been taken as prisoner by Pompey and the former promised to hand over the city to the gentiles. Since the Jews refused to surrender before the invaders, therefore, Pompey laid regular siege around Jerusalem for three months. It is said that:-

“The third month of the siege **on a Sabbath day the temple was taken**. And if we have had great fault to find with the priesthood, it is fair to remember the conduct of courts when the enemy broke in. **they went quietly on with their service as if nothing unusual were happening, and were cut down as they stood.**<sup>91</sup>

The instances quoted above show that the Greeks as well as the Romans never had any human considerations or any veneration for God of the Universe. They never needed any justification to kill or enslave hundreds of thousands of people belonging to the nations conquered by them. As for human considerations, pity, sympathy or forgiveness towards the helpless and the weak, the historians have nothing to report. They also never felt any need to justify or apologize for the barbarity of the Greeks or of the Romans. From 333 B.C. to 135 A.D., the Greeks as well as the Romans killed millions of people in Syria, Palestine, Egypt etc. yet no one ever thought of apologizing for any of the atrocious acts of the oppressors. Crucifixion of Jesus is

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<sup>91</sup> *Jerusalem Under the High-Priests*, Pg. 138.

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the only event where the Greek composers of the Gospels felt some compulsion to apologize for Rome by showing unusual sympathy of Claudia, the wife of Pontius Pilate towards Jesus. Similarly, Roman officials become the first sympathizers and believers in the divinity of Christ. Pontius Pilate seems to be convinced of the innocence of Jesus and he makes all efforts to release him. It was only the evil insistence of the Jews due to which he felt himself under a compulsion to crucify Jesus. Pontius Pilate was innocent in the matter because he had to issue the orders of crucifixion unwillingly. The evangelists have, therefore, done a great service to the Roman oppressors by absolving them of the crime while transferring the entire blame towards the oppressed Jews who were held responsible for crucifying Jesus Christ, the would-be adopted God of the Christian Rome. Jews were, therefore, not blamed for torturous killing of a member of their own race but killing of the God of the race ruling the world. The magnitude and the severity of the crime was such that the Jews have not been able to expiate for the same in spite of continued persecution over 2000 years in the past. They continued to be subjected to hatred, loss of property and life including expulsion from regions ruled by the Christians. Over the times the Jews have suffered from various pogroms and millions of deaths during the holocaust, yet all these calamities inflicted on the Jews have not been able to quench the fire of vengeance against the crime committed evidently by the Romans because they killed him for political crime being a disturber of peace and an insurrectionist as the 'King of the Jews'. It was only due to their power and influence that the Romans could easily transfer their own guilt to the Jews. Most of the credit goes to the Greek Evangelists who absolved the Romans and incriminated the Jews who are made to suffer from the crime committed by the Romans.

## **Herod the Great**

Antipater had succeeded Antipas, his father whom Alexander Jannaeus had appointed as governor of Idumea. Antipater was a shrewd person and the historians call him the 'Idumean Fox'. After resolving the situation in Jerusalem, the Romans under Sacurus had started their campaign against Arritas, the Arab king of Nabatea. Due to shortage of food and other supplies, the Romans were on the verge of withdrawal when at the critical moment Antipater came to Sacurus with substantial supplies of Judean grain to sustain his troops. Subsequently, on the request of Sacurus, Antipater also negotiated truce between him and King Arritas to the benefit of the Romans. He, therefore, succeeded to develop an impression of trustworthiness with Rome. On another occasion, he also rendered valuable help to the Romans during their engagement in Egypt, due to which the Romans further appreciated his loyalty and help for Rome. They, therefore, made Antipater, the governor of Judea while Herod his son was given the charge of Galilee. Hence, with effect from 47 A.D., Antipater continued to enjoy supremacy in the region till his death in 37 B.C. Due to the loyalty of the family with Rome, Octavian i.e. Emperor Augustus decided to declare Herod as the 'King of Judea'. Herod was, therefore, the first of the dynasty of his descendants who continued to rule in Roman Territories from 37 B.C. to 100 C.E.

Herod had married a Jew named Maryam, the daughter of Alexander, the son of Aristobulus II from Alexandra, daughter of Hyracanus II due to which he could be considered a half Jew. In spite of this, it is said that he was Roman at heart. At his coronation, he offered sacrifice to Jupiter on the Capitoline Hill at Rome. In about 22 B.C., to please the Emperor, Herod began construction of the new port city of Caesarea named after Emperor Augustus and dedicated a massive temple to the Goddess Roma. It was, perhaps, due to the said loyalty of Herod towards Rome that the emperor was pleased with him. Herod, therefore, had enormous achievements including completion of huge new structures such as the expansion of the second temple

construction in a magnificent style. Due to the same favor of Rome, he also succeeded in lowering the taxes on the Jews with effect from 20 B.C.E. to his death in 4 B.C.E.

In view of his cruelty and oppression, we can call him Herod the Horrible. Reaching Jerusalem soon after his coronation, he executed 45 of the 70 members of the Jewish Sanhedrin. He continued to be ruthless throughout his life. Josephus tells us that "In Jerusalem a disturbance broke out and two very popular rabbi-preachers there named Judas and Matthias incited their followers to tear down the Golden Eagle that Herod had set up over the Temple Gate as a symbol of Roman Rule. They were arrested with forty of their followers and brought to Jericho, where **Herod had them burned alive following a mock trial at which he presided from a bed.**" (Josephus, *Jewish War* 1.649-50). It is worth noting here that Ptolemaic eagle was the bird of Zeus and like the Greeks, the Romans also retained the same as a symbol of their rule. Josephus or other historians of Rome offer no apologies for Herod's cruel execution of 47 members of the Jewish Sanhedrin and also about burning alive of Judas and Mattathias along 40 of their followers.

Herod had the kingdom forming a vaster dominion than had at any previous time been ruled from Jerusalem. He proved himself fit to maintain order and tranquility because he affectively curbed disaffection and upheld order successfully in the territories ruled by him. Since terror and force were the ultimate and the only sure foundation of authorities in those times, therefore, he did not spare enormous use of the same during his reign.

## **Hellenization of Palestine under Herod**

In spite of all callousness and cruelty ascribed to Herod, he also possessed sagacity and profound capabilities to accomplish the task before him. While he always believed in the effectiveness of torture and terror to maintain peace, yet he was also sagacious enough to appease the Jews by

providing valuable privileges and other immunities from coercive laws of the Romans which they had applied to their subjects in other parts of the Empire. Herod, however, held the Jews in his tight grip through force and through effective administration along with a balanced policy of taxation and laxity related to the religious traditions and service at the temple. It was, therefore, due to the vast potentials of Herod that Emperor Augustus assigned him the task of Hellenizing the people under him. W.D. Morison illuminates Herod's strategy as under:-

"The external unity of the empire had been achieved, but it as yet possessed no internal cohesion, and the only thing which prevented the huge structure from falling to pieces was the **invincible constraint of Roman arms**. Augustus wished to create an internal bond of union among the heterogeneous populations under his sway, and **to attain this end adopted the project of permeating the unhellenized portions of the east with the tastes, habits, and customs of Greece and Rome**. Herod, as far as his dominions were concerned, became a willing instrument of his imperial master, and made vigorous efforts to impart a Roman character to the land. In the Gentile portion of his government he erected splendid heathen temples, and dedicated them to Caesar. Roman spectacles were introduced, Roman theatres and amphitheatres constructed for the amusement of the populace; the military roads were studded with Roman monuments; cities, towns, palaces, and public edifices received Roman names, and especially the names of the imperial family-**Samaria became Sebaste, Straton's Tower became Caesarea**, and the entire country presented the appearance of being thoroughly Romanized. In Judea the king, who knew the temper of the inhabitants, went to work more warily, but even in this province he ventured to build a huge amphitheatre not far from the Holy City, and here the games instituted by Augustus in honour of his victory at Actium were celebrated in a magnificent manner. Contests with gladiators, chariot races, wild beast fights could now be witnessed in the very heart of Judaism on a scale and with a splendour which compelled the admiration of the gentiles themselves."<sup>92</sup>

The writer continues to add that:-

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<sup>92</sup> *THE STORY OF THE NATIONS 'The Jews under Roman Rule* Vol. 24, p. 79-81

People from all parts of the empire were invited to these novel spectacles. **Jerusalem ceased to be a city given up to priests, rabbis, and doctors of the law;** it was unwillingly opened out to the more diversified life of the west. Foreign mercenaries from Galatia, Germany, and Thrace were now to be seen in its streets; foreign envoys and retainers were always frequenting the royal palace, and western habits of life became more and more common and prominent in the capital; **Greek orators, sophists, and historians gave an air of intellectual distinction to Herod's court;** and two brothers, both able men, Nicolaus and Ptolemaeus, of Damascus, held high positions in the administration. Ptolemaeus did not possess the brilliant gifts of his brother, but he was of the utmost service to the king in the practical conduct of affairs, and exercised a wholesome influence on his passionate and suspicious nature. Nicolaus was Herod's confidential agent in his dealing with Augustus and the Roman officials. He was a man of exceptional acquirements, at once a diplomatist courtier, poet, and philosopher; he had also published well-known works on geography and history, and was a naturalist of repute besides. Other Greeks of lesser note also found their way into Herod's favour, some for good and others for evil, **but all of them contributed towards Hellenizing the capital and giving a Western tone to the conduct of affairs.**<sup>93</sup>

The description is not yet complete. While on the one hand Herod took wise steps to win the hearts of the Jews, but on the other, he tried to benefit himself and his family by **arousing Messianic hopes of the people in him:-**

While pursuing this line of policy Herod felt that he was inflicting deep wounds on Jewish religious susceptibility, and in order to allay public discontent pretended to acting in obedience to commands from Rome. To a certain extent this excuse may be correct, for during the supremacy of Antony, he displayed little liking for works of art or Western modes of life, and his new-born zeal under Augustus probably proceeded from motives of statecraft and a desire to please his imperial master. Still, it is also worthy of being

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<sup>93</sup> THE STORY OF THE NATIONS 'The Jews under Roman Rule Vol. 24, p. 79-81

remembered that **Herod was only half a Jew. By education he was a Greek.** During his reign he surrounded himself with Greeks, and openly preferred them to his Jewish subjects. He delighted in their applause, loved to adorn their cities, restore their temples, subsidize their games, and, although his mind was never deeply penetrated by Hellenic culture, he had been taught to regard it as the highest and the best. But with all his Gentile leanings, Herod was too much of a statesman to carry Hellenism beyond the point which his Jewish subjects could endure, and carefully avoided repeating the blunders of Antiochus Epiphanies. On the contrary, **he tried to make political capital out of Jewish beliefs, especially those connected with the Temple and the Messianic hopes. At this period it was a prevalent idea among the Jews that the Messiah when He appeared would erect a far more splendid temple than the one at present in existence;** and the Book of Enoch, then very popular, sustained this belief by prophesying that the Messianic age would be inaugurated by the building of a house to the praise of a great king for ever and ever. **Herod took hold of these expectations and set himself to utilize them for dynastic purposes.** In the fifteenth year of his reign (B.C. 20) he summoned a great assembly of the people, and after delivering an oration to them on the blessings which had accompanied his rule, announced his intention of rebuilding the temple and superseding the old structure of Zerubabel by a far more glorious edifice.<sup>94</sup>

Another writer records that:

"Herod's greatest project, begun around the same time, in 20 B.C. involved a wholesale remodeling of the Temple in Jerusalem and an extensive expansion of its courts. According to Josephus he employed ten thousand workers to carry out the work. He never lived to see it finished but spared no expense to ensure that its extravagant beauty, accented with marble, gold, tapestries, and Corinthian columns, would rival any temple in the Roman world. But more important, **Herod wanted to be remembered as a second "King Solomon," the son of David,** who according to the Bible had constructed the first Temple in the 10<sup>th</sup> century B.C. in a style that became the envy of the region.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> *THE STORY OF THE NATIONS`The Jews under Roman Rule* Vol. 24, p. 81-82

<sup>95</sup> James D. Tabor, *THE JESUS DYNASTY*, Pg. 99-100.

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Prudence of Herod to achieve his goals can be assessed from the unique method he adopted during reconstructing the temple at Jerusalem.

“Thousands of priests and workmen were engaged, the materials for the new edifice were collected before the old Temple was demolished and for eight years the great work of re-construction was proceeded with. Huge blocks of marble, which afterwards aroused the wonder of Christ’s disciples, were transported from a great distance to the Temple Mount; the priests were taught masonry, so that no unclean hands should touch the inner courts, and the king himself was forbidden to approach the most sacred portions of the new edifice. At last the great undertaking was completed. Its consecration was celebrated with unequalled pomp and magnificence, and national pride was gratified by the spectacle of its extraordinary beauty.”

In spite of all his efforts to appease the Jews, Herod failed to win their hearts. Jews always took him as **an Idumean ‘a stranger in the gates of Israel’**. They could not set aside their racial antipathy for whom national exclusiveness had become one of the most vital elements of religion and even kinship added bitterness to this exclusive spirit. Jews, therefore, always contrived to see Herod and his successors in a perverted light with a burning desire to get rid of them.



## FROM HEROD TO PONTIUS PILATE

Herod died in 4 or 5 B.C. and Emperor Augustus honoring the will of Herod divided his kingdom between his three sons i.e. Archelaus, Antipas and Philip. Thus Archelaus was Ethnarch of Judea, Samaria and Idumea. Antipas was made Tetrarch of Galilee, Perea and Jewish territories east of Jordan. Philip was Tetrarch of the Area east and north of the Sea of Galilee. Things however did not turn out well for Archelaus because he was unpopular from the first. Even before his going to Rome for his confirmation Archelaus' troops had massacred 3,000 Jews at the feast of Passover. Jews had ardently wished to get rid of the hated Idumean dynasty. It was more so due to tyrannical conduct of Archelaus that they were compelled to send a delegation of about 8,000 Jews to the Emperor at Rome to complain against the barbarity of Archelaus. The Emperor after hearing the complaints ordered to abolish the Ethnarchy and banished Archelaus to Gaul. As such Judea became a Roman province since 6 A.D. to be administered by a Roman procurator appointed by the Emperor.

While complaining against Archelaus the Jews also requested the Emperor to place Judea under immediate control of Rome. After hearing the complaint the Emperor banished Archelaus to Vienne in Gaul. The Ethnarchy was abolished and Judea was made a sub-province of Rome. Meanwhile Publius Sulpicius Quirinius governor of Syria was assigned the task of constituting Judea into an imperial province. Reaching Jerusalem Quirinius started making preparations for taking a census of the population to ascertain the wealth of the province and to find out its capacity for taxation. Jews already had developed an irreconcilable hatred for Rome. The census of population in the Roman manner involved violation of the Mosaic Law which could expose the people to chastisement of God in the manner there was an infliction during the reign of David

who had committed a similar mistake of taking a census. Jews also held that payment of taxes to foreigners was an act of dishonor to the God of Israel. As such the census and the purpose behind it was not acceptable either to the Sadducees or to Pharisees, the two main sects of the Jews. Meanwhile a new party adopting the name of Zealots started taking strong exception to the new arrangement. According to the Zealots, Jehovah was the only supreme ruler of Israel and to him alone was the tribute due. They therefore resolved to resist Roman domination by force of arms. One Judah called the 'Galilean' a native of Gamala in Gaulanitis and a passionate enthusiast, started leading the Zealots. According to him the proposed census was nothing but the first step towards slavery. Due to extreme resentment as stated above an insurrection broke out in Judea in which Judah perished along many of his followers while others were dispersed. This happened in 6-7 A.D. when Jesus might have been about 12 years of age.

Even earlier to that there was a revolt in Palestine with the exception of Samaria. Syrian pro-council Varus was therefore sent to Jerusalem to crush the revolting element drastically. He is reported to have "inflicted severe chastisement upon rebellious districts. Several towns were burnt, many Jews were sold as slaves as a terrible warning to the disaffected. **Two thousand rebels were taken and crucified.**" Varus also ruined many towns and villages in Galilee. The important town of **Sepphoris was reduced to ruins and its inhabitants sold as slaves.** Incidentally the destruction of Sepphoris pertains to the same period when the parents of Jesus returned to Nazareth after his birth. According to James D. Tabor Sapphoris had a whole new set of images added to 'the Christmas story': **"Crucified corpses rotting on crosses, the nearby capital city in flames, and fellow citizens either killed or exiled into slavery"**

Emperor Augustus had always been displaying friendly or reconciliatory attitude towards the Jews. After his death, Tiberius (A.D. 14-37) succeeded him. Incidentally Tibrius had no soft corner for the Jews. In about 19 A.D. Tiberius

banished the Jewish colony from Rome and started persecution of the Jews throughout the Roman Empire. About the Jews at Rome, W. D. Morrison states that:

“In accordance with a decree of the Senate, four thousand Roman Jews fit to bear arms, were drafted into the legions and sent to repress brigandage in the inhospitable island of Sardinia; the rest of the community were allowed a certain time to quit Italy, or abjure their faith.....In fact, it was not the intention of the Caesars to allow the Jews to establish themselves in the Latin-speaking portion of the empire, where their race peculiarities would inevitably stir up the same antipathies as existed in the Greek cities of the East. Accordingly they lost many of their privileges when they migrated westwards, and the immunities which they were permitted to retain, such as permission to plead before their own tribunals and exemption from military service, were granted them as matters of favour and not of right.<sup>96</sup>

This shows that **Tiberius had no sympathy for the Jews nor he felt sorry for driving Jewish settlers from the capital.** The decree of expulsion of the Jews remained in force till the fall of Tiberius’s Minister Sejanus who was an enemy of the Jews. His fall and death occurred in A.D. 31.

We recollect that Judea had been made a province of Rome since 6 A.D. when Coponius (6-9 A.D.) was made the first prefect of Judaea. Three prefects coming after him i.e. Marcus Ambivulus 9-12 AD, Annus Rufus 12-15 AD, Valerius Gratus 15-26 AD seem to have governed the country wisely because we do not find any record of untoward happening till the prefecture of Valerius Gratus (A.D. 15-26).

7 years after the expulsion of the Jews from Italy, Pontius Pilate (A.D. 26-35) was appointed as prefect to succeed Valerius Gratus. Emperor Tiberius appointed him to be the 5<sup>th</sup> prefect of Judea. He had his headquarters at Caesarea. On all festivals the procurator took up residence at Jerusalem and brought additional troops to patrol the city.

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<sup>96</sup> *THE STORY OF THE NATIONS, Jews under the Roman Rule*, Pg. 140.

The procurators had full powers of life and death and could reverse capital sentences passed by the Sanhedrin which had to be submitted to him for ratification. He (Pilate) also appointed the high priest and controlled the temple and its funds. Even the vestments of the high priests remained in his custody which he released only for the festivals.

Although no details are available about the life and character of Pilate yet it is said that he had a profound disdain for the people over whom he ruled. He was a man totally out of sympathy with the Jewish race. Josephus relates that:-

“the Pilate’s first action on taking up his appointment was to antagonize the Jews by setting up the Roman standards, bearing images of the emperor, at Jerusalem: previous procurators had avoided using such standards in the holy city. Because of the determined resistance of their leaders in spite of threats of death, he yielded to their wishes after six days and removed the images back to Caesarea.<sup>97</sup>

Philo also tells how Pilate dedicated a set of Golden shields having inscriptions with the name of the procurator and the emperor. Again representations were made to Tiberius who sensibly ordered them to be set up in the temple of Roma at Caesarea. Josephus and Eusebius Allege a further grievance of the Jews against Pilate “*in that he used money from the temple treasury to build an Aqueduct to convey water to the city from a spring some 25 miles away. Tens of thousands of Jews demonstrated against this project when Pilate came up to Jerusalem presumably at the time of a festival, and he in return sent his troops in disguise against them, so that a large number were slain. It is generally considered that this riot was caused by the Galilaeans mentioned in Luke 13:1-2*”..... Noldius De Vita et Gestis Herodum ccxlix. claims that Herod’s enmity against Pilate (Lk 23:12) arose from the fact that Pilate had slain some of Herod’s subjects. This explains Pilate’s subsequent care (Luk. 23:6-7) to send Jesus to be tried before Herod.

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<sup>97</sup> *The New Bible Dictionary*, (London: Intervarsity Fellowship, 1962) ‘Pilate’ Pg. 996.

Aside from this Pilate always tried to frustrate and ignore the Jews. He tried his utmost to make the people of Jerusalem to tolerate the presence of heathen symbols in the Holy City. Heathen rites were celebrated at the sight of the temple. May be he was doing all that to promote internal unification of the people. Throughout his career he never paid any regard to Jewish sentiments whatsoever. He always continued the attempts to over-ride the religious feelings of the Jews. It is said that Pilate was known to the Alexandrian neo-Platonist philosopher Philo (20 B.C.E. to 50 A.D.). He describes him as *'by nature rigid and stubbornly harsh and of spiteful disposition and an exceeding wrathful man, and speaks of the bribes the acts of pride, the acts of violence, the outrages, the cases of spiteful treatment and **constant murders without trial, the ceaseless and the most grievous brutality of which the Jews might accuse him.**'*<sup>98</sup>

In *Embassy to Gaius* (301-302) "Philo" describes Pilate, whom the evangelists present as a helpless pawn, as a man of 'ruthless, stubborn and cruel disposition,' **famous for, among other things, ordering 'frequent executions without trial'**.<sup>99</sup>

Similarly Mary Smallwood notes in *"The Jews Under Roman Rule, Form Pompey to Diocletian"* (Leiden; E.J. Brill, 1981), "At a time when the Romans in Israel were crucifying thousands of Jews for trouble making and sedition" (164),

Pilate was renowned for his cruelty, venality with regard to Temple funds and other local moneys and abundant killings. The Roman prefect of Judea was recalled to Rome in 36 C.E. to answer for the massacre and executions of the Samaritans at Mount Gerizim.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> *The New Bible Dictionary*, (London: Intervarsity Fellowship, 1962) 'Pilate' Pg. 997.

<sup>99</sup> Pagels, *The Origin of Satan*, p. 10.

<sup>100</sup> Willis Banstone, *The New Covenant, Commonly Called the New Testament*, Vol. 1, (New York: Riverhead books, 2002), p. 549-550,.

This shows that Pilate took stern repressive measures against a great multitude of the Samaritans gathered at Mount Garizim on the call of a religious imposter who promised the people to show them the vessels of the Tabernacle which according to a Samaritan tradition had been buried there by Moses. The Samaritan regarded such a find as a prelude to the advent of the Messianic kingdom. Many people had therefore assembled there in arms. Pontius Pilate scared of the possibility of a revolt dispatched the troops who killed a large number of Samaritans. Ring leaders were taken as prisoners and executed subsequently by orders of Pontius Pilate.

It was the same Pontius Pilate who passed his orders to scourge and crucify Jesus Christ. We however observe that the Evangelists have not reported the incident in accordance with the true background or actual circumstances culminating in the crucifixion of Jesus. As such instead of true depiction of facts, the Evangelists have served as apologists for Pontius Pilate and perhaps more so for Rome. Gospels seem to be written to support St. Paul's perverted interpretation of the tragedy in such a manner that only Jews are to blame for the crucifixion of Christ while they ennoble Pontius Pilate to such an extent that subsequently he stood canonized as St. Pontius in some of the churches in eastern Europe.<sup>101</sup> We shall therefore discuss the distorted depiction of facts in the Gospels subsequently in detail.

During this period Vitallius (35-39 A.D.) was pro council of Syria who enjoyed vast powers from the emperor. A Samaritan deputation went to the pro council with the accusation that Pilate had unnecessarily murdered a large number of loyal and peaceable subjects of the empire. Since Samaritans had always enjoyed reputation as faithful vassals of Rome therefore Vitallius suspended Pontius Pilate and sent him to Rome to justify his conduct before the Emperor. Incidentally before his arrival at Rome Tiberius had died and nothing is known of Pilate since then (*Jews*

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<sup>101</sup> *The New Covenant*, Vol. 1, Willis Barnstone, Riverhead books, New York, 2002.

*Under Roman Rule*, Pg. 152). The Christian historian and bishop Eusebius of the late 3<sup>rd</sup> and early 4<sup>th</sup> centuries however claims that Pilate was obliged to commit suicide during the reign of Gaius Caligula.

Caligula became the Emperor after the death of Tiberius. He seriously imagined that he was a God. At Alexandria he compelled the Rabbis to admit his statue into their Synagogue. Orders were also sent to place his statue in the temple at Jerusalem and to crush out by force of arms any resistance which the Jews might offer at such a step. It is said that it was only a good luck that King Agrippa had given a feast at Rome in honor of Caligula where he succeeded to implore the emperor to stop erection of his statue in the temple. For heathen images placed in various parts of his empire and his atrocities both against the Jews and the Christians he was considered by many as Antichrist. It is therefore said that the hateful monster was assassinated in A.D. 41 bringing some relief to his subjects in the East.

Cladius (41-54 A.D.) was the new Caesar after Caligula. He made Agrippa Ruler over all territories including Judea which had formerly remained under the rule of his grandfather Herod the Great. Like Herod, Agrippa was loyal to Romans but at the same time he was moderate and mild with the Jews. At Jerusalem he lived in accordance with the strict principles of the Pharisees. Agrippa was therefore acceptable to the Jews but he died in 44 A.D. when Claudius the Emperor appointed Cuspius Fadus (44-46 A.D.) as a procurator of Judea. After Fadus, Tiberius Alexander was appointed as procurator of Judea with effect from 46 A.D.

After the death of Judas the Galilean and his companions some of the Zealot survivors had dispersed who continued the mission of Judas secretly. They had been propagating with great success that armed resistance was a must to end the Roman oppression. W. D. Morison says that during the procuratorship of Alexander (A.D. 47) "*a serious revolt of zealots took place. James and Simon the two sons of*

*Judas the Galilian were captured and crucified and when Alexander was succeeded by Cumanus (A.D. 48-52) the situation in Judea had become more menacing than ever.*<sup>102</sup>

It transpires from the above that Jews played an utter lack of capacity to form themselves into a homogenous nationality because the differences between the Pharisees and the Sadducees had produced a condition of disorder in Judea. A "deplorable intestine strife broke out in the reign of John Hyrcanus between the Pharisees and the Sadducees. In the succeeding reigns this strife went on increasing in bitterness, till the Romans stepped in between the rival factions and put an end to their fratricidal war".<sup>103</sup> Aside from ending the internecine war the afore-said Roman interference also brought the downfall of the Jewish independence and an end to the kingdom of the Jews.

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<sup>102</sup> W.D. Morrison, *Jews under Roman Rule*, p. 162

<sup>103</sup> W. D. Morrison, *Jews Under Roman Rule*, p.22.

## DIFFERENT SECTS OF THE JEWS

As discussed earlier, Jews were divided into almost 18 distinct sects at the time of the crucifixion of Jesus by the Romans. Most important among them were the Sadducees, the Pharisees, the Samaritans, the Essenes and the Zealots.

### **Sadducees**

During the reign of Alexander Jannaeus (104-75 B.C.E.) rivalry of Sadducees and Pharisees came to a head. Actually the trouble had started since the reign of his father **John Hyrcanus** when he adopted the title of King. This offended the Pharisees who held that God alone was king. Even Eleazer, a Pharisee asked him to give up high priest hood. He argued that Hyrcanus did not qualify for the high priesthood on the grounds that his mother had once been a captive of Seleucids in the time of Antiochus Epiphanies. This implied that she might have suffered the usual fate of captive women and had perhaps been violated. Son of an impure woman was therefore ineligible for the holy office of the high-priest.<sup>104</sup> Tempers began to rise and hence forth Sadducees started supporting Hyrcanus who with the support from Sadducees expelled the Pharisees from positions of influence in the kingdom.

Morrison also said that: "the advent of this inevitable struggle was hastened by the deplorable intestine strife which broke out in the reign of john Hyrcanus between the Pharisees and the Sadducees. In the succeeding reign this strife went on increasing in bitterness, till the Romans stepped in between the rival factions and put an end to their fratricidal war."<sup>105</sup>

The same author further adds that:

"Henceforth the Sadducees became identified even more

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<sup>104</sup> *Jews from Cyrus to Herod*, p. 46

<sup>105</sup> *The Story of the Nations, Jews under Roman Rule*, p. 22.

closely than before with the cause and fortunes of the Hasmonaeans, whilst the Pharisees fell back exclusively on the people for sympathy and support. Pleading that they were contending for the faith and traditions of their fathers against a ruling house, which was supported by a party notoriously inclined to foreign customs, the Pharisees had no difficulty in arousing feelings of hostility among a fanatical population against the Hasmonaeans, and thus preparing the way for civil war.<sup>106</sup>

Strained relations between Hashmoneans and the Pharisees continued to grow from bad to worse during the reign of Judas Arristobulus son of Hyracanus (105-4 B.C.) and Alexander Jannaeus (104-75 B.C.). Meanwhile the Pharisees became the undoubted leaders of the popular opinion. Eventually at the Feast of Tabernacles the Pharisees saw Alexander pouring the libations on the ground instead of on the Altar as per the custom of the Pharisees. They took it as a deliberate contempt for the Pharisees. Morrison has described the same as under:

“when the assembled worshipers in the temple perceived Alexander pouring the libation on the ground, in accordance with the Sadduceean custom, instead of on the alter, their indignation knew no bounds. They immediately raised a shout that he was unworthy of his high dignity, and at the same time began to pelt him with the citrons which they held in their hands. So great was the tumult that the king would probably have been murdered by the enraged populace **had not the Greeks soldiers in his service come to the rescue and quelled that disturbance. As many as six thousand men fell before the precincts of the temple were cleared.** After this bloody work the Pharisees became the irreconcilable enemies of Alexander, and waited impatiently for the opportunity of heading a rebellion against him.

They had not to wait long. About a year afterwards the king lost his army in a campaign against the Nabataeans and had to return to Jerusalem fugitive (B.C. 94). The Pharisees immediately incited their adherents to revolt, and for six years **a bloody war desolated the wretched country. After fifty thousand men had perished** without leading to any decisive result, Alexander desired to come to terms with his

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<sup>106</sup> *The Story of the Nations*, p. 26.

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adversaries.<sup>107</sup>

The situation was such that the Pharisees had become staunch enemies of Alexander while Sadducees were supporting him. This was the period when the Romans had already launched the policy to bring fresh territories under the domination of Rome. Hence Demetrius III? of Syria invaded Palestine and defeated Alexander who fled to mountains for refuge. The said defeat of Alexander at the hand of a gentile foreigner aroused patriotic feelings of people who had thus far been siding with the Pharisees. Consequently with the collective help of the estranged elements Alexander succeeded to force Demetrius to withdraw. As such Alexander again had an upper hand against the Pharisees who had to flee into exile as stated below:-

The Pharisees, abandoned by a portion of their adherents had to flee into exile **and those who did not succeed in making their escape were crucified in a most barbarous manner** by the victorious prince. He was not molested by the Pharisees during the remainder of his reign.<sup>108</sup>

Alexander had two sons John Hyracanus and Arristobulous but after his death his widow Salome Alexandra (78-68 B.C.) succeeded him on the throne as per his will while his elder son Hyracanus became the High-priest. Salome Alexandra was wise enough to recall Pharisees from exile and to compromise with them regarding religious customs and observance of the rituals. During this time Pharisees started pursuing the policy of revenge against the Sadducees who sought protection of Arristobulous the queen's second son. The queen seized with a mortal illness had grown weary of the yoke of the Pharisees. She therefore delivered the military strength to Sadducees and Arristobulous her son. He took no time to overthrow his brother Hyracanus from the high-priesthood and also

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<sup>107</sup> *ibid*, p. 29.

<sup>108</sup> *ibid* p. 30.

became the king. As such strife between the parties during the reign of Aristobulus (B.C. 69-63) brought the era of Jewish independence to a close making the Romans masters of the Holy Land.

Prior to this due to servile wars and internal strife at Rome Romans had lost many of their possessions during 135 to 88 B.C. This aroused patriotism in Rome to recover the said lands and also to expand borders of the empire. Roman Army led by the genius of Sulla was therefore sent to the scene of revolt in the east. Sulla quelled the insurrection and the Mythradites had to beg humbly for peace. In about 66 B.C.E. Pompeii a former lieutenant of Sulla's arrived in Syria with a large army. While Pompeii was still engaged with the Mythradites a civil war had broken out afresh in Palestine. Meanwhile Antipater (the Idumean) i.e. father of Herod the great induced Hyracanus to dethrone his brother Aristobulus through a deal and seeking help from king Aretas of the Nabateans. Hyracanus therefore fled to Petra with Antipater. As a sequel of the said deal the Nabatean army invaded Palestine and with the assistance of the Pharisees they besieged Aristobulus in Jerusalem. Meanwhile Roman general Marcus Sacurus a lieutenant of Pompeii intervened and decided in favour of Aristobulus. Pharisees and Nabateans had to withdraw. About two years after withdrawal of the Nabateans Pompeii returned from the east and arrived at Damascus i.e. in year 64 B.C. He began the task of restoring order and authority among the chaotic elements.

#### ▪ ***Pharisees***

As against the Sadducees the majority of the Jews superadded traditional or oral law to the written law and took the name of "Chasidim" or pious ones. With the passage of time they became known as Pharisees as against the Sadducees mentioned above. The Pharisees enjoyed much influence among the masses.

The word "Pharisee" has been derived from a Hebrew word meaning 'to separate'. The Pharisees earned the said title due to their superior strictness of avoiding worldly contacts

and mixing with the gentiles. Most of the scribes or teachers of law belonged to the Pharisees who continued to promote the work of Ezra and carried out his teachings. They aimed at controlling the religion of the state. They believed in strict observance of law including the oral law. They were strict about ritual ceremonies and laws of cleanliness. It was due to their strictness for law that they had to suffer heavily under the Hasmoneans, Romans and also under Antipater and Herod. Their adherence to law is evident from the following:-

“They practiced washing and fasting without number, were distinguished by the breadth of their phylacteries (bands of parchment inscribed with scriptural passages, and attached to their garments, or even their faces), and were intolerant toward dissent from their own ideas. They thought themselves defiled by contact with publicans and sinners, observed the Sabbath exactly, paid their tithes with care, and made long prayers in public places.<sup>109</sup>

The same writer adds that:-

“They believed in the resurrection of the dead and immortality, holding in the earlier period the idea of the transmigration of souls. Angels and spirits played a large part in their scheme; they were zealous in making proselytes, to which practice the Sadducees were indifferent. Coverts were, however, never admitted to an equal footing with themselves, since none of Gentile birth could stand with those of Hebrew blood. The Pharisees came to constitute the vital portion and core of the Jewish race, absorbing, as time went on, more and more of its vigor.<sup>110</sup>

## The Zealots

As regards different sects in the Jews, the Sadducees and the Pharisees tried to compromise with the Roman political domination. Most fairly committed Hellenizers were the upper class of the Jewish society and especially the high priests like Jason (Greek for Joshua or Jesus) who had established even a Greek school at Jerusalem virtually

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<sup>109</sup> *The Story of the Nations, Jews*, James K. Hosmer, p. 78,79.

<sup>110</sup> *ibid* p. 79.

under the shadow of the temple. The Sadducees were essentially a political party permeated but still not dominated by Hellenic ideas. The Pharisees were opposed to both the Sadducees and the Romans but they believed in a collective national effort to get rid of the Romans. As against them the Zealots however were the disguised rebels against the Roman authority prowling throughout Judea hitting their targets and vanishing away.

▪ ***Essenes***

It was a Jewish religious brotherhood in Palestine from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC to the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD that lived under austere conditions in communes. They kept themselves isolated from the main stream. They also raised objections to pay tributes to Rome or to acknowledge their emperor as their master. The zealots also propagated that Roman rule was an insult to the Jewish dignity.

As against this, the central thought of the Pharisees was not state but religion. This party was composed of scribes and their disciples who abhorred Hellenism considering it as subversive of the law. It was for God of Israel and His law that the high priests should principally strive. They held that religious leadership of the community did not belong to Hasmonians. Hyrcanus was unwilling to relinquish the central character which was the main source of his authority.

We therefore observe that with effect from 63 B.C.E. i.e. from Pompey's capture of Jerusalem to fall of Masada in 73 c.e. there had been irreconcilable religious, political and social conflicts tearing the Jewish society apart.

This was the period when the cracks were visible in the structure of the cult and the Jews were divided among themselves. Allegro therefore comments that:-

“The faith had been more imperiled by the seductive glamour of Hellenism than had ever been achieved by outright physical persecution. New generations of intelligent Jews found the religion and culture of their forefathers less and less relevant to the modern world. They were not semi-nomads in the deserts of Sinai, nor plunderers of sown lands from across the

Jordan. The Sabbath was nuisance, circumcision a disfigurement and disgrace when they performed naked in the Jerusalem gymnasium. They sacrificed to the Gods of the games, like any civilized Greek, and they wore Greek dress.<sup>111</sup>

Aside from this the Jews also stood divided between themselves due to the fact that the wealthy and upper classes of the Jews were mostly sympathizers with the Hellenists while the most of other Jews stuck to law of the Lord with an earnest desire for autonomy to lead their life freely and without any hindrance to observe the Law. **Jews living in the Holy Land were, therefore, the only conspicuous people throughout the Roman Empire, who were adamant to allow assimilation of the Greek art, culture, thought and language in Judea.** God alone was the king to them. They therefore resisted domination by the Hellenist conquerors. The Jewish religion also had its special affiliation and affinity with the holy land, the city of David and the temple of God at Jerusalem. They had such a devoted attachment to Jerusalem that even during their exile or dispersal far away from the Holy Land they did not forget their God, His law, the Holy Land, the temple and Jerusalem as political as well as the spiritual centre of Judaism. This profound affection of the Jews for Jerusalem and the Holy Land as common religious, spiritual and cultural centre of the race is evident from the fact that even when far away from Jerusalem, Jews never forgot to sing:-

**5.** If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. **6.** If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy. **7.** Remember, O LORD, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said, Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof. **8.** O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us. **9.** Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones,<sup>112</sup>

As discussed earlier the covenant with the Lord bound the Israelites to worship no one except *Yahweh* the Lord God of

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<sup>111</sup> *The Chosen People*, Pg. 19, 20.

<sup>112</sup> Psa 137:5.

Israel. This belief separated them from all the polytheists who had strong and popular hold in the regions around them. Israelites were therefore monotheists in the sense that they worshiped no other God besides Yahweh. The said faith and worship necessarily entailed practical obedience to all the commandments of the Lord. As such they had to abstain from sinful deeds, idolatry, social injustice and all other evils forbidden by the Lord.

Hebrews believed that Moses had received from the Lord Ten Commandments and the main body of law which he wrote down and handed over the same to the Israelites. In addition to the same Moses also received other revelations which interpreted the first revelation and also contained additional precepts. It is believed that Moses recited the said interpretative and instructive law to Aaron, his sons, leaders and grand council of Israel and many others who happened to hear the same. Such oral law continued to be transmitted subsequently from one generation to another, both orally as well as in writing. As is usual with such transmission covering about 800 years, much else that did not properly belong to the original communication became incorporated into the oral law. Prophet Ezra therefore took great pains to codify the law and also to separate the original from the subsequent accretions.

Most of the Jews appreciated the said work of Ezra while a minority neglected the oral code declaring that duty could be fulfilled even by observing the written law. Such people became to be known as "Zadikim" or the "Righteous". Among the canonical books they acknowledged only the Pentateuch and denied the authority of the traditional law, immortality of soul, existence of angels or spiritual beings. They had no belief in resurrection or life after death:-

"In religion the Sadducees are marked for their conservatism. They denied the permanent validity of any but the written law of the Pentateuch. They rejected the later doctrines of the soul and its after-life, the resurrection, rewards and retributions, angels and demons. They believed that there was no fate, men having a free choice of good and evil, prosperity and

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adversity being the outcome of their own course of action.<sup>113</sup>

In spite of being in minority the Sadducees considered themselves as an elite class among the Jews and surpassed other sects in power and wealth. They had kinder disposition towards the gentiles including Greeks as well as Romans. Due to the said compromising attitude of the Sadducees towards the rulers, they became the favorites of the Romans as well as of the Herodians. It was due to the patronization of the Romans and the Herodians that most of the priests and especially the high priests were from the Sadducees and they also held a predominant position in the Sanhedrin. The said alliance with the gentile rulers however deprived the Sadducees from following among the populace of the Jews.

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<sup>113</sup> *The New Bible Dictionary*, (London: Inter-varsity Fellowship), p. 1124.



## MESSIANIC HOPES OF THE ISRAELITES

Word *Messiah* is from Hebrew root verb ma-shahh or Mashiah meaning 'to smear' or 'to anoint'. Messiah or Maschiach therefore means literally '*the anointed one*'. Its Greek equivalent is '*Khir-stos*' (Christos) or '*Christ*'. The person anointed was one chosen by God for the purpose of doing God's will. There is a close connection between anointing and sanctifying. In Num. 7:1 we find that Moses set up the tabernacle, anointed and sanctified it. Later on the term has also been applied to high priests as well as kings. In Zechariah 4:14 we find that **Zerubbabel**, the governor and scion of the house of David and Joshua the high Priest are called '**the two anointed ones**'.

According to the New Bible Dictionary this word is used as the official title of the central figure of Jewish expectation. Messianic belief however is a product of later Judaism. Term '*Messiah*' is therefore found only twice in the Old Testament but it rarely meant a future redeemer. Subsequently the term *Messiah* occurs with regard to the establishment of the kingship in Israel. The first prophet to give a detailed picture of the future ideal king was Isaiah.<sup>114</sup> The *Jewish Encyclopaedia* records that these passages and also those passages in Jeremiah and Ezekiel which give expression to the hope in a Messiah, have been disputed by various Biblical scholars.<sup>115</sup> The same source further asserts that: "*Messiah is inseparably bound up with the **desire for universal domination**, in reality, this feature is not a characteristic of messianic hope until a later stage of its development. **The ideal king to whom Isaiah looks forward will be a scion of the stock of Jesse on whom will rest the spirit of God as a spirit of wisdom, valor, and religion and who will rule in***

<sup>114</sup> 9:1-6, 11:1-10, 32:1-5.

<sup>115</sup> For details Please refer to *Jewish Encyclopaedia*, Vol. 8, p. 506.

***the fear of God, his loins girt with righteousness and faithfulness***".<sup>116</sup>

In the Old Testament the term has also been used for certain kings, priests and prophets. Persian King Cyrus has been called 'the Messiah' because he was a man of God's choice<sup>117</sup> appointed **to accomplish a redemptive purpose towards God's people**. Obviously it was a secular use of the term Messiah-ship. Messiah was therefore a figure of salvation of God's people to establish the Israelites Kingship and Glory here on earth.

Factually before John the Baptist and Jesus Christ, each prophet of Israel had given stern warning to the Israelites to repent and to turn to the Lord. Anyhow, after the admonition and warning, those prophets have always been giving a message of hope for the Israelites. Such a message invariably included the prophecy of a messianic age i.e. the Golden age of peace and prosperity and harmony to restore 'the paradise lost' as was perhaps during the reign of King David. Restoration of social justice, morality and supremacy of the Israelites over other nations had always been the cherished desire of the Israelites pitched on a messiah awaited by them.

The Psalms of Solomon especially Ps. 17, generally recognized to be a response to the crisis of Pompey's takeover, points in that direction, with its longing for the messianic king of David's line: **Behold O Lord, and raise up unto them their king, the son of David**, at the time in which thou seest, O God, that they may reign over Israel thy servant' (v.23) ... but the Davidic king to come shall be righteous and taught by God... for he shall not put his trust in horse or rider or bow, nor shall he gather confidence from a multitude for the day of battle. (vv 32f ).<sup>118</sup>

All this shows that Jews were awaiting for a political messiah to deliver them from the foreign yoke. Oswalt states that the concept of "the anointed one" "*in its own right in the sense of an eschatological messiah occurs*

<sup>116</sup> *The Jewish Encyclopaedia*, Vol. 8, p. 506.

<sup>117</sup> Is 49:25, Isa 45:1.

<sup>118</sup> Sean Freyne, *Galilee*, (University of Notre Dame press), p. 213

only in Daniel 9:25-26. Here the "anointed one" is one who "comes" and is described as *dygn*, which means "ruler or prince". Hence, we find our first note as to the nature of the messiah. **He is to be a ruler or prince.**" Oswalt also says that: Psalm of Solomon possibly written during the time of Herod the Great (37-4 B.C.) speaks of a Messiah that will be a true **son of David, one who will reign as king in Israel** with "power, wisdom, righteousness as well as being a future deliverer. Psalms of Solomon 17:26-32 records:

"He will gather a holy people whom he will lead in righteousness; and he will judge the tribes of the people that have been made holy by the Lord their God. He will not tolerate unrighteousness (even) to pause among them, and any person who knows wickedness shall not live with them. For he shall know them that they are all children of their God. He will distribute them upon the land according to their tribes; the alien and foreigner will no longer live near them. He will judge peoples and nations in the wisdom of his righteousness. Pause. **And he will have gentile nations serving him under his yoke**, and he will glorify the Lord in (a place) prominent (above) the whole earth. **And he will purge Jerusalem (and make it) holy as it was even from the beginning**, (for) nations to come from the ends of the earth to see his glory, to bring as gifts her children who had been driven out, and to see the glory of the Lord with which God has glorified her, **and he will be a righteous king over them**, taught by God. There will be no unrighteousness among them in his days, for all shall be holy, **and their king shall be the Lord Messiah.**<sup>119</sup>

The same author further says that this **Davidic Messiah was to lead a "violent rebellion against occupying forces"** until all Jerusalem is under his control..... **purge Jerusalem from gentiles.** "He will thus be a "national figure using political means and even military power" to accomplish his goals. Hence, we see here **a righteous military messiah**, one who is victorious because of his

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<sup>119</sup> Glenn W. Giles, *The Messianic Movements Of The First Century*, (Indiana: Trinity Theological Seminary Newburgh, 2002).

***trust in God, one who delivers the Jewish people from foreign domination, and rules as king.***<sup>120</sup>

With the passage of time many Utopian hopes of peace and spiritual regeneration to bring about a state of moral and religious perfection for Israel were also connected with the said concept of the righteous King Messiah. Isaiah and many other prophets of Israel had a vision of 'a government which would be in conformity with God's will and be regulated by His laws of righteousness'. Even according to Jeremiah the Messiah will be "a righteous sprout of David" who will establish just judgment and wise government in the country and whose name will be "God is Our Salvation". The *Jewish Encyclopedia* records that:-

In post-exilic prophetic literature the hope in a Messiah is found only in the first two prophets of the post-exilic community. Haggai and Zechariah, and in Deutero-Zechariah, cli ix., which, probably dates from the time of the Seleucids. **Haggai and Zechariah see in Zerubbabel the promised "Sprout of David"** ; but they state merely that he will rebuild the temple and attain great eminence as a ruler" (Hag. ii 23: Zech. iii. 8, vi. 12).<sup>121</sup>

In most of the messianic visions however King David has been a prototype of Messiah who was officially anointed with oil to be King.<sup>122</sup> Besides David we also find other kings like Saul and Solomon termed as anointed of Jehovah. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are also called Jehovah's anointed ones.<sup>123</sup> John also used it.<sup>124</sup> At Daniel 9:25, 26 the term Messiah has been applied exclusively to the coming Messiah i.e. eschatological anointed one as ruler or prince. It is also found in Psalms 2:2.

With the passage of time the Jews started expecting two messiahs i.e. an Ephraimic Messiah who would be the forerunner of the Davidic messiah. This was the reason that there appear among the pseudo-messiahs both those who

<sup>120</sup> *ibid p. 5.*

<sup>121</sup> *Jewish Encyclopedea, p. 508*

<sup>122</sup> 2Sam. 19:21, 22:51, 23:1 & Ps. 18:50.

<sup>123</sup> 1Chr. 16:16, 22.

<sup>124</sup> 1:41, 4:25.

claim to be the Messiah of the house of David and those who pretend to be the **Messiah son of Joseph**. Even the Hasmoneans like John Hyracanus and Alexander Janneaus also had certain presumptions for being the promised messiah as kings of the Jews. Herod the great also aspired for the title which we shall discuss subsequently. After the end of the Hasmonean dynasty, Rome started crushing the independence of Judea severely due to which people started looking desperately for someone to relieve them from the Roman yoke as soon as possible. This gave rise to many deceivers of the people who prevailed on the people and gathered large crowds around them. Instead of bringing any relief, such deluders brought lot of trouble and destruction for the Jews. We shall discuss some of such pretenders subsequently.

It is also said that "The oldest apocalypse in which the conception of a preexistent heavenly messiah is met with is the Messiological section of the book of Enoch perhaps dating between 134 to 64 B.C. The messiah is called 'Son of Man' and described as an angelic being."<sup>125</sup>

In Acts 4:25-27 however the term has been applied exclusively to Jesus Christ. This was perhaps due to the reason that even the Jewish sources had prepared a background for the messiah and the people at that time were anxiously waiting for Jerusalem's deliverance. The *Jewish Encyclopeadea* therefore observes that:-

They yearned for the promised deliverer of the house of David, who would free them from the yoke of the hated foreign usurper, would put an end to the impious Roman rule, and would establish His own reign of peace and justice in its place. In this way their hope became gradually centered in the Messiah. As evidence that in the Roman period the messianic hope, had become universal among the Jews may be adduced. (1) Jesus's conviction that he was the Messiah, a conviction inspired in him by the current belief in a messiah as is shown by the fact that on his entry in the Jerusalem the populace hailed him as such. (2) the testimony of Josephus ("B.J." vi. 5.

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<sup>125</sup> Jewish Encyclopaedia, Vol. 8, p. 509.

& 4), Tacitus ("Hist." V. 13). And Suetonius (Vespasian, iv.) regarding the Messianic belief of the Jewish people at that time: (3) the fact that even in Philo's picture of the future, in spite of its moralistic tendency, the messianic king has a place (comp. "Descendants Praemiis et Paenis." S 16).<sup>126</sup>

Activities alluding to the advent of the messianic era had started with the revolt of Matathias and his sons while the fervor for the establishment of the messianic kingdom did not cool down till the death of Bar Kochiba along with destruction of Jerusalem and massacre of entire community assembled at Jerusalem in 135 A.D. In between the said period figures like John Hyrcanus and Alexander Jannaeus considered themselves performing some messianic role. Similarly many other princes among their successors made repeated and desperate attempts to prove themselves up to the mark. We therefore observe that after the death of Antigonus even Herod the Great wished to be accepted as the messiah of the Jews. One, therefore, observes that from the last days of the Hasmoneans especially with effect from 63 B.C. to 66 A.D. was the period in which we find numerous such figures who appeared as national heroes. Many of them attracted crowds around themselves even as magicians, robbers, plunderers, leaders of the brigands who from time to time deluded the people of Judea.

John the Baptist and his disciples knew Jesus to be the Messiah who will fulfill all the hopes of the Jews:

Also, prior to his ascension, Jesus' disciples held the view that **he would at that time deliver Israel from Gentile domination and set up the kingdom** (restore the reign of the Davidic line) on earth (Luke, 24:21, Acts. 1:6).<sup>127</sup>

We therefore find that conviction of a Messiah to bring relief from the foreign rule started taking practical shape with effect from the revolt of Mattathias and his sons in 169 B.C. and the messianic hopes did not abate till the final death blow on the Jewish nation at Jerusalem in 135 A.D.

<sup>126</sup> Jewish Encyclopaedia, Vol. 8, (New York: KTAV Publishing House, Inc.), p. 508.

<sup>127</sup> *Aid to Bible Understanding*, p. 1147

So far as Jesus is concerned they tried to make him an earthly king<sup>128</sup> but when he would not fulfill their expectations, they rejected him. Anyhow the Jewish hope for the messiah did not die with the death of Jesus. For centuries thereafter the Jews continued to wait for the fulfillment of the predictions. We, therefore, find certain notable figures appearing with different pretensions right from 63 B.C. to 66-70 A.D. subsequently. We shall throw some light on each of the said figures.

It is however pertinent to note that the revolt led by different agitators and reactionary leaders of the Israelites culminated in the destruction of temple, the city of Jerusalem and massacre of the entire population at the hands of the Romans during 69-70 A.D. Even the destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem and elimination of Jews from Judea did not extinguish the messianic hopes of the Jews which stood revived in about 132 A.D. when the priest Akeba identified Bar Cochba as a descendant of King David and hailed him as the Messiah King. The revolt against Rome 132-135 A.D. was quelled by Julius Severus Titus with the utter destruction of Jerusalem and massacre of an unknown number of the Jews purging Judea from them even by banishing their entrance therein on pain of death.

The messianic hopes of the Jews and the historical and socio-political events of Israel from the reign of Antiochus IV (175-163 BC) till the final destruction of Jerusalem in 135 A.D. were the main cause of the appearance of certain devout Jews who continued to make earnest efforts to revive Jewish Kingdom as well as the religious practices, rites and temple services strictly in accordance with the Jewish traditions. Maccabians succeeded to overthrow the Seleucid Rule in about 165 B.C. after which, the said Dynasty known as Hasmoneans continued to rule Palestine independently till 63 B.C. when the Romans became the overlords of the region and any prince thereafter even from

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<sup>128</sup> John 6:15.

the Hasmonean family served as a vassal king under the Romans.

Around 47 B.C. Antipater the Idumean had rendered valuable help to Caesar during his campaign in Egypt. The Romans therefore appointed Antipas the Idumean as governor of Judea. After the assassination of Caesar in 44 BC, Cassius (the murderer of Caesar) occupied Syria. Antipater succeeded to consolidate his position by rendering valuable help to Cassius in his campaign against King Aretas of Nabataea. Unluckily in about 43 B.C. Antipas was poisoned by one of the Jewish notables who hoped to supplant him. It is said that the deed brought no profit to doer because Phasaël and Herod the sons of Antipater became his successors. By this time The East had fallen to the share of Antony who became friendly to the Herodians. Antony therefore deprived Hyracanus the Hasmonean of all political powers and he was left with only the high-priesthood. Subsequently in the year 40 B.C. the Parthian army overran Syria and Judea by defeating and killing Phasaël son of Antipater while Herod succeeded to fly. Antigonus son of Aristobulous the Hasmonean became the King of Judea while Hyracanus was carried off as prisoner to Babylon. The generals of Mark Antony continued their fight against the Parthians in Syria while Herod in addition to assisting them also recovered most of the Jewish territory from Antigonus. Ultimately in 37 A.D. Herod with the help of Roman governor Gaius Sosius succeeded to conquer Jerusalem. As such Antigonus the last Hasmonean King was the first king beheaded by the Romans. Since then Herod ruled Judea as king till his death in 4 B.C. As against this historians agree that Herod died in about 6 B.C. and soon after his death Judea was made a province of Rome to be governed by the procurators appointed directly by the Emperor of Rome. Ever since 6 B.C. the Romans continued to rule the near East including Judea up to 638-640 A.D.

It transpires from the above that subsequent to the persecution of Antiochus IV the Jews had succeeded to restore their kingdom in 165 B.C. where after they

continued to enjoy independence up to 63 B.C. when the Romans became overlords of Palestine and Hasmonean princes served as Vassal kings under the Romans. We however observe that the period between 63 B.C. and 135 A.D. was the turmoil period for the Jews during which they made hectic efforts to deliver themselves from the yoke of the gentiles. The Jews had a burning desire to restore the kingdom of Israel and they were eagerly awaiting a messiah from the house of David to secure independence from the Romans and to sit on the throne of David. This fanaticism for Messianic kingdom during the afore-stated turmoil period did therefore produce many pretenders as prophetic Messiahs of Israel besides appearance of certain plunderers posing as the saviors of the people. During this period many men rose in arms either with the hope of personal gains or out of hatred against the gentiles. They however never had any common cause or a united front while many among them were merely royal aspirants, and zealous for power and wealth. Meanwhile aside from those who could in anyway be connected with the Messianic hopes and movements, there were others who attracted the crowds merely as magicians or miracle workers. Since the crowds gathering around such people could ultimately pose some threat to the Romans by disturbing peace, the vassal kings or the governors had always been vigilant enough to eliminate such dissociating elements as soon as they had any apprehension of threat from them.

What type of messiah was awaited by the Jews is also evident from the following:-

**67.** John's father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit, and he spoke God's message: **68.** "Let us praise the Lord, the God of Israel! He has come to the help of his people and has set them free. **69.** He has provided for us a mighty Savior, a descendant of his servant David. **70.** He promised through his holy prophets long ago **71.** that he would save us from our enemies, from the power of all those who hate us. **72.** He said he would show mercy to our ancestors and remember his sacred covenant. **73.** With a solemn oath to our ancestor Abraham he promised to rescue us from our enemies and

allow us to serve him without fear.<sup>129</sup>

Factually there had been numerous messianic movements around the time of Jesus. Many aspirants for kingship fought against the Romans and met with utter failure or death. Romans therefore had been extremely sensitive to any such move which could create a trouble and they always acted promptly to quell the insurrection as soon as it came to their notice. Josephus says that:

“And so Judea was filled with brigandage. Any one might make himself king (basileus) as the head of a band of rebels who fell in with, and then would press on to the destruction of the community, causing trouble to few Romans and then only to a smaller degree but bringing the greatest slaughter upon their own people. (Antiquities 17:285)”<sup>130</sup>

From study of various movements in Judea one finds that mostly Peasantry was involved in the insurrections against Rome. This was so because the said class was heavily taxed by the Romans due to which they had become desperate and longed for deliverance by overthrowing the Roman oppressors, their governors and Jewish kings committed to protect the Roman interests in their capacity as vassals of Rome.

We shall therefore mention such figures and the movements in the following chapter.

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<sup>129</sup> Luk 1:67-73 GNB.

<sup>130</sup> Glenn W. Giles, *The Messianic Movements Of The First Century*. (Indiana: Trinity Theological Seminary Newburgh, 2002), p. 14.

# MESSIANIC FIGURES, PRETENDERS & MOVEMENTS

## **Magicians, Miracle Workers and Sorcerers**

### ▪ ***Simon Magus of Samaria***

He was a sorcerer, magician and a conjurer of Persian origin. Born at village Gitton near Shechem, he educated perhaps from Alexandria. He was half philosopher and half charlatan who claimed intercourse with spirits and demons, through whose agency the diseases were inflicted or cured. Some consider him founder of the mystic creed. Superstitious and credulous people took him as a Divine Deliverer or the promised messiah of Israel. Luke records that:-

**9.** A man named Simon lived there, who for some time had astounded the Samaritans with his magic. He claimed that he was someone great, **10.** and everyone in the city, from all classes of society, paid close attention to him. "He is that power of God known as 'The Great Power,' " they said. **11.** They paid this attention to him because for such a long time he had astonished them with his magic.<sup>131</sup>

Due to his propagation of power of the Great God for himself, **Simon was regarded as the visible incarnation of God.** He perhaps also considered himself 'Omnipotent'. Simon also asserted his claims to represent **Trinity i.e. Father, Son and the Holy Ghost.** He was assisted by his beautiful companion Helena a prostitute whom he represented as a **resuscitation** of the Helen of Troy and mother of all beings whose **first begotten** were the angels and the archangels. Simon also presented the scriptural **doctrine of grace by encouraging unbounded license.** In addition to all his claims he performed certain miracles due to which he became extremely popular with the citizens

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<sup>131</sup> Act 8:9-11.

of Samaria. He was at the peak of his performance in Samaria when Phillip the evangelist went there and performed such genuine miracles which established his superiority over the magician. Impressed by the miracles of Phillip, Simon converted to the faith of the apostle and baptized himself into the new faith. Subsequently when Peter and John visited Samaria, Simon desired to receive miraculous power even in exchange of money or Gold. Being reproved and refused by Peter, Simon reverted to his previous conduct. It is said that subsequently he also went to Rome "the rendezvous for all deceivers of this kind" and succeeded to make himself conspicuous there as in Samaria. A statue was decreed by the senate and erected to him in the city of the Caesars on the island in the Tiber with the dedication "*Simonei Deo Sancto*" i.e. To Simon the Holy God. Nothing definite is known about his end. *The New Bible Dictionary* (Intervarsity Fellowship).<sup>132</sup>

Incidentally it is worth noting here that Simon Magus seems to be the fore-runner of certain concepts forming the basis of the Christian Theology introduced by St. Paul. There is every likelihood that Simon Magus might have imported those concepts from Babylonia and Persia while St. Paul too might have benefited from the same source. We however find that even prior to conversion of St. Paul to Christianity, Simon Magus was propagating the concept of 'Trinity', 'resuscitation' (perhaps resurrection), 'Incarnation' and the 'First Begotten of God' in Samaria. It is also not surprising to observe that Simon's **doctrine of grace by encouraging unbounded license** finds its full expression in St. Paul's assertion that: "*Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But **where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.***"<sup>133</sup>

While St. Paul might have borrowed the second part of the above noted verse from Simon Magus the first part seems to be St. Paul's own contribution to his theology. It is however evident from St. Paul's writings that he enjoyed

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<sup>132</sup> J. R. Macduff, *The Footsteps of St. Peter* (London: James Nisbet and Co., 1876) p. 380-406.

<sup>133</sup> *Rom 5:20.*

liberty only with the Law of God while he dare not say a single word against the Law of the Romans. As such his assertion that: '*law entered, that the offence might abound*' meaning that the Lord introduced law only to increase sinfulness is a blasphemy against the Lord. We however cannot agree with St. Paul that the Lord God or any human government on earth ever introduced any law with the sinister designs as suggested by St. Paul. Taking for granted that St. Paul is correct, human society can qualify for grace and emancipation only by creating a lawless society by setting aside the Law of God as well as the Law codified by the human beings. We however feel that even the Christian governments have found no rationality in the opinion of St. Paul, otherwise they would have annulled the Law. So far as masses are concerned many among them might have felt obliged to indulge in abundance of sin with the hope of reciprocation by the abundant grace of the Lord. Although we have no definite information about the Christian response to St. Paul's theory during 2000 years in the past yet we find two prominent figures pertaining to the twentieth century whom we find reaping full advantage of the said doctrine of St. Paul. First was Grigori Rasputin of Russia (1869-1916) and Bhagwan Shri Rajnesh of India (1931-1990). Both died after leading notorious lives though the later is still being worshiped by many in India.

Our studies about the life and work of Paul reveal that it was his mission to destroy the concept of monotheism and strict adherence of the Jews to their law. He perhaps also desired to deprive them of their superiority based on the covenant making them the holy people of God, and the holiness of Torah, the Land, the city of Jerusalem and the temple dedicated to Jehovah. He aimed at replacing Judaism with Romanism which met with great success although long after his death.

It is pertinent to note here that we are not alone to observe that St. Paul incorporated many concepts of Simon Magus into his theology. An important endorsement we find in the pseudo-Clementine writings. Pope Clement I was popularly

supposed to have been a disciple of St. Peter himself. Christians believe that these writings have been falsely attributed to Clement. Anyhow recent findings differ with the traditional opinion stated above e.g.

"In fact, the core of these writings, as was pointed out by F.C. Baur in the nineteenth century and as most scholars now agree (after an interim of dispute and denigration of Baur's work), is Jewish Christian or Ebionite, stemming from second century Syria. This core shows a staunch adherence to the Torah, and contains an impassioned attack on those who attributed anti-Torah views to Peter. Paul is not mentioned by name, but he is strongly hinted at as the supreme enemy under the disguise of "Simon Magus", against whom Peter is represented as polemicizing. Peter's attack on this lightly disguise Paul is on the grounds that he is a false prophet, that he has spread lies about Peter and, most telling of all, that he knows nothing about the true teachings of Jesus, since he never met him in the flesh and bases his ideas of Jesus on delusive visions. That this 'Simon Magus' is really Paul is now accepted by scholars, despite many desperate attempts to resist this conclusion made by critics of Baur who realized how profound would be the consequences of such an admission. For it shows that Paul, far from being a unanimously accepted pillar of the church, like Peter, was controversial figure, whose role in the founding of Christianity was a subject of great contention.<sup>134</sup>

Our studies show that Simon Magus was neither the first nor the last propounder of the concepts of Trinity, Incarnation, or doctrine of sin. Such ideas prevailed throughout the world since time immemorial. It was only with particular reference to the time period of the advent of Jesus Christ that we refer to Simon Magus and St. Paul as a contrast to the strict monotheist faiths of Moses and all the prophets of Israel including Jesus himself. In view of this we avoid to present a world view of such concepts in the present discussion.

#### ▪ ***Theudas the Magician***

Josephus describes him as under:-

"Now it came to pass, while Fadus (41-46 A.D) was procurator

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<sup>134</sup> Hyam Maccoby, *THE MYTH MAKER*, p. 180-181.

of Judea, that a certain magician, whose name was Theudas, persuaded a great part of the people to take their effects with them, and to follow him to the River Jordan; **for he told them he was a prophet**, and that he would, by his own command, divide the river, and afford them an easy passage over it; and many were deluded by his words. However, Fadus did not permit them to make an advantage of his wild attempt, but sent a troop of horsemen out against them; who, falling upon them unexpectedly, slew many of them, and took many of them alive. They also took Theudas alive, and cut off his head (A.D. 44-46), and carried it to Jerusalem. This was what befell the Jews in the time of Cuspius Fadus's government.<sup>135</sup>

Theudas, who claimed to be a prophet, appeared and urged the people to follow him with their belongings to the Jordan, which he would divide for them. According to Acts v. 36 (which seems to refer to a different date), he secured about 400 followers. Cuspius Fadus sent a troop of horsemen after him and his band, slew many of them and took captive others, together with their leader, beheading the latter<sup>136</sup>

## Prophetic Personalities

### ▪ ***Honi-Ha-Me' Aggel,***

Honi was a charismatic personality who appeared towards the end of the Hasmonean rule i.e. during the period when Aristobolous II and Hyracanus II sons of Alexander Janeus were contesting for the kingship of Judea. People considered him as a folk prophet with ability to work miracles. As a renowned miracle worker he enjoyed great veneration from the people. Talmud records about him that:

It once happened that the people turned to Honi ha-Me'aggel and asked him to pray for rain. He prayed, but no rain fell. What did he do? He drew a circle and stood within it and exclaimed, 'Master of the Universe, Thy children have turned to me because they believe me to be as a member of thy household. I swear by thy great name that I will not move

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<sup>135</sup> Antiquities, Book 20, Ch. 5, p. 523.

<sup>136</sup> *The Jewish Encyclopaedia*, Vol. 10 "Ant." p. 252.

from here until Thou hast mercy upon Thy children.' Rain then began to fall. He said, 'it is not for this that I have prayed but for rain to fill cisterns, ditches, and pools.' The rain then began to come down with great force. He exclaimed, 'it is not for this that I have prayed but for rain of benevolence, blessing and bounty.' Rain then fell in the normal way.<sup>137</sup>

Josephus also refers to him as a Saint and miracle worker. He narrates that:-

When Aristobulus was besieged in Jerusalem by the army of Hyrcanus, his men seized Honi and requested him to curse Aristobulus and his army. Honi, however, prayed, "Master of the Universe, these men are Thy people, and those who are besieged are Thy priests; I beseech Thee not to do what they ask," **and he was thereupon stoned to death.**<sup>138</sup>

#### ▪ **Henninah bin Dosa**

Around the period of the ministry of Jesus Christ we find many mystics or Saintly figures known as 'Hasidim' or the 'pious ones' in Galilee and other parts of Palestine. *"Notable among these Galilean holy men was Jesus' younger contemporary, Hanina ben Dosa, born about AD 20 in the district of Sepphoris ten miles north of Nazareth. Hanina was credited with miraculous cures, sometimes healing patients who were not in his presence but far away, and he himself claimed to have experienced miraculous rescues from death. He was believed to have been commended by a heavenly voice which proclaimed him, in the hearing of demons, the son of God. Moreover, like John the Baptist farther south, he lived an austere life, and like him again was identified with the prophet Elijah whose repentance, as a forewarning of the imminent Kingdom of God, was so confidently expected."*

#### ▪ **Jesus Son of Annaneus**

Jesus was a mystic uttering oracles and attracting crowds around him in Samaria. Before 66 A.D. he continued to

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<sup>137</sup> *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Vol. 9, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. p. 518.

<sup>138</sup> *ibid* p. 519.

make predictions about utter destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem repeatedly. Words of Jesus ben Annaneus were considered blasphemy worthy of death by the Jewish authorities. Some people took him as an instigator against the Roman Establishment. The Romans arrested him and after thorough beating released him because without some accompanying crime he was judged as a roving lunatic or insane mystic wandering in the land. He ended his life through an accidental death during attack of the Romans on Jerusalem. Going round upon the walls he was uttering the same words that he was struck by a stone from the engines of the Romans which killed him on the Spot. To utter surprise of all the people, his predictions turned out to be correct. Josephus therefore describes him as a prophet as detailed below:-

But, what is still more terrible , there was one Jesus, the son of a plebeian and a husbandman, who, four years before the war began, and at a time when the city was in very great peace and prosperity, came to that east, whereon it is our custom for every one to make tabernacles to God in the temple, began to cry aloud, "**A voice from the east, a voice from the west, a voice from the four winds, a voice against Jerusalem and the holy house, a voice against the bridegrooms and the brides, and a voice against this whole people!**" this was his cry, as he went about by day and by night, in all the lanes of the city. However, certain of the most eminent among the populace had great indignations at this dire cry of his, and took up the man, and gave him a great number of severe stripes; yet did not he either say any thing for himself, or anything peculiar to those that chastised him, but still he went on with the same words which he cried before. Hereupon our rulers, supposing, as the case proved to be, that this was a sort of divine fury in the man, brought him to the Roman procurator: where **he was whipped till his bones were laid bare**; yet he did not make any supplication for himself, nor shed any tears, but turning his voice to the most lamentable tone possible, at every stroke of the whip his answer was, "Wo, wo to Jerusalem!" and when Albinus (for he was then our procurator) asked him, Who he was? And whence he came? And why he uttered such words?---he made no manner of reply to what he said, but still did not leave off

his melancholy ditty, till Albinus took him to be a madman, and dismissed him. Now, during all the time that passed before the war began, this man did not go near any of the citizens, nor was seen by them while he said so; but he every day uttered these lamentable words. As if it were his premeditated vow, ---"Wo, wo to Jerusalem!" Nor did he give ill words to any of those that beat him every day, nor good words to those that gave him food; but this was his reply to all men, and indeed no other than a melancholy presage of what was to come. This cry of his was the loudest at the festivals; and he continued this ditty for seven years and five months, without growing hoarse, or being tired therewith, until the very time that he was his presage in earnest fulfilled in our siege, when it ceased; for, as he was going round upon the wall, he cried out with his utmost force, ---"Wo, wo to the city again, and to the people and to the holy house!" and just as he added at the least, ---"Wo, wo to myself also!" there came a stone out of one of the engines, and smote him, and killed him immediately; and as he was uttering the very same presages, he gave up the ghost.<sup>139</sup>

Modern Christian theologians try to underline the authenticity of the tradition quoted above. This suggests that Josephus perhaps invented the same by appropriating certain traditions of the Old Testament and a few episodes from the life of Jesus. We, however, have no convincing argument about their suggestions especially keeping in view the fact that Jesus son of Annanias appeared in Jerusalem soon after the tragic and torturous killing of James the Just. This James was brother of Jesus Christ who served as an undisputed leader of the earliest and the genuine followers of Jesus Christ at Jerusalem right from the death of Jesus up to 62 A.D. As such the appearance of Jesus son of Annanias after the death of James the just shows him a genuine warner to the crowds as well as to authorities responsible for the affairs of the Jews.

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<sup>139</sup> Flavius Josephus, *Wars*, book 6. Ch. 5 pg. 731-732.

## National Heroes, Brigand Chiefs and Plunderers

### ▪ **Hezekiah of Galilee**

Hezekiah was not an ordinary highway man but rather an Arch-brigand who was a Hasmonean supporter. He happens to be the founder of dynasty of national heroes and freedom fighters including Judas his son who also had certain messianic characteristics in him. Hezekiah seems to have adopted Robber Tactics perhaps due to the defeat of Peitholaus. Galilee at that time was the centre of Hasmonean supporters who also drew some help from the Parthian presence in the province. Hezekiah opposed the kingship of Herod the Idumean whom he knew as a commoner and half Jew whereas Hezekiah's family claimed inherited tradition of kingship as well as the priesthood. Hezekiah was subsequently captured by Herod the Great after consistent efforts and he executed him forthwith.

### ▪ **Old Man of Arbela**

This unnamed person can be mentioned among the national heroes of the Jews who refused to accept domination of the Romans or the rule of the vassal kings appointed by them. He therefore preferred to die than to surrender to Herod. He sacrificed his wife and seven sons and then hurled himself over the cliff thus submitting to death rather than slavery. (Ant. 14:429f)<sup>140</sup>

### ▪ **Jesus of Tiberius**

Sean Freyne writes about him that:-

"The most obvious act of zealotism to take place in Galilee was the **burning of Herod's palace at Tiberius with its animal representations**. Josephus claims that as he was cautiously moving to implement instructions from the revolutionary government in Jerusalem **the palace was burned by Jesus son of Sapphias**, the ring leader of the party of the sailors and the destitute classes. Subsequently all

<sup>140</sup> Sean Freyne, *Galilee*, p. 212,

the Greeks in the city were massacred (Life 66f). Apparently, Jesus was prompted by religious zeal which included hatred of foreigners and had a strong social component, for he was a member of the destitute classes, which were also mentioned earlier in the classification of the various factions at Tiberius (Life 35).<sup>141</sup>

▪ ***Judas Son of Hezekiah***

Due to his royal claims, Judas son of Hezekiah appeared almost as a messianic pretender representing himself as a remnant of Galilean Hasmonean aristocracy that had somehow survived from the purge of Herod at Sepphoris and its neighborhood. Judas issued a call to freedom by refusing to pay tribute to the Romans or accepting any man as master because he claimed the kingship of God alone. He incited the people not to tolerate mortal masters because they had God for their Lord. In about 4 C.E. he revolted at Sepphoris in Galilee. This occurred when Archelaus and Antipas were away at Rome defending their respective claims to the throne before Augustus.

Josephus records that:

There was also Judas, the son of that Ezekias, who had been head of the robbers; which Hezekiah was a very strong man, and had with great difficulty been caught by Herod. This Judas having gotten together a multitude of men of a profligate character about Sepphoris in Galilee, and made an assault upon the palace (there), and seized upon all the weapons that were laid up in it, and with them armed every one of those that were with him and carried away what money was left there; and he became terrible of all men, by tearing and rending those that came near him; and all this in order to raise himself, and out of an ambitious desire of the royal dignity; and he hoped to obtain that as the reward, not of his virtuous skill in war, but of his extravagance in doing injuries.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Sean Freayen, *GALILEE from Alexander the Great to Hadrian*, P. 234.

<sup>142</sup> *The Works of Flavious Josephus, Antiquities*, tr. by William Whiston, (Boston: D Lothrop & Co., 1878), 17:11, p. 464.

As discussed earlier, Archelaus stood deposed in 6 C.E. and Judea became incorporated into the Roman provincial system for which it was necessary to take a census of the territory ruled formerly by Archelaus. Judas appeared as a reactionary against the said arrangement pretending himself as a royal messiah opposed to illegitimate human lordship of the Gentiles. Historians are confused about the actual identity of this man while some of them believe that he was Judas son of Hezekiah. If so it becomes a dynasty of Galilean revolutionaries resisting to Rome from Hezekiah executed by Herod the Great to Elezar the Grandson of Hezekiah who stood executed following the sack of Masada in 73 C.E.

Judas has been described by Josephus as a powerful teacher (War 2:433) and his followers known as 'zealots' did always exist between 6-66 C.E. At the Pentecost in 6 A.D. Pilgrims from Judea, Galilee, Idumea, Jericho, Transjordan and other places assembled at Jerusalem and displayed their anger against **Roman General Sabinus who had offended them by raiding the treasury within the temple precincts**. This led to disturbances all over the country. Many Jews including Judas were killed while others escaped. Luke 13:1-4 perhaps refers to the same incident involving Galilean pilgrims took place within the jurisdiction of **Pontius Pilate, who handled the affair with his usual tactless brutality**.<sup>143</sup>

It therefore seems that Luke committed anachronism by assigning the incident of 6 A.D. to the period of Pontius Pilate (26-36 A.D.).

Judas posed himself as a king and desired to be honored in that fashion. He believed to obtain his goal by force. Judas had qualities of the leadership and also had militant nature. He tried to establish social and economic equity among the people and planned to return property to the rightful owners. He resorted to Guerilla war against the Roman

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<sup>143</sup> Sean Freyne, *Galilee*, p. 219,

overlords and the Jewish aristocracy who sympathized with Rome.

▪ ***Menahem***

Maneham was perhaps a son or grandson of Judas of Galilee mentioned above. He became leader of Sicarri and of the zealots comprised of some descendants of Judas and others. They according to Josephus were following 'the fourth philosophy' introduced by Judas son of Hezekiah who proclaimed '**no lord but God**'. During 66-70, Menahem and his followers invaded Masada and plundered weapons from Herod's arsenal stored there. He thereafter became leader of the revolution and proceeded to Jerusalem where he captured the fortress of Antonia overpowering the troops of Agrippa II. Later on, he aroused enmity of Eleazer another zealot leader and met with death as a result of conspiracy against him. He had posed himself as an insufferable tyrant but stood killed by Eleazer. His followers retreated to Masada after his death.

▪ ***Simon The Slave Of Herod***

He was a slave of King Herod who was a handsome man enjoyed preeminence over others due to his size and bodily strength. After the death of Herod, he felt himself free to collect a body of men around him and to proclaim himself as a king. With the help of such brigands he plundered and carried off things from the palace and burnt the royal palace at Jericho. It is said that Simon also took military action against Rome, Roman friendly forces and also burnt many royal residences allowing his fellow rebels to take away everything they desired. Simon also crowned himself as a king. Eventually Gratus the officer of royal troops captured him alive after long fight and chase and cut off his head.

This was an extremely troubled period in Palestine when a large number of armed brigands, deceivers, imposters and aspirants for power and wealth were prowling throughout the region. As such aside from Simon, there were was another group leading men of profligate character who burned down royal palace at Amathus by the River of

Jordan. Although nothing can be said with any certainty yet some people believe that Theudas mentioned in Act. 5:36 was perhaps leading the said group.

▪ ***Athrongis***

He was a shepherd who desired to be a king. He himself put on the diadem and also held a council to discuss various matters. He and his brothers applied themselves vigorously to slaughtering the Romans and the king's men. He desired to be a king of Israel by taking the rule of Israel away from the Romans and the Roman friendly Jewish aristocracy.

Athrongis was a tall man and excelled others in the strength of his hands. He had four brethren who were tall men themselves and were believed to be superior to others in strength of their hands. Each of the brothers ruled over a band of men of their own and collected a large number of men around them. During fight, other brothers fought under the command of Athrongis. They slew a great number of Romans and of the king's forces and managed matters with the like hatred to each of them. It is said that with passage of time they grew more and more cruel towards all men and killed some for material benefits while others they killed from a mere custom of slaying men. After continuing war a long time one of the brothers stood killed by Gratus, another by Ptolemy while the last one surrendered himself to Archelaus who confined him to prison.<sup>144</sup>

▪ ***Tholomaeus***

Tholomaeus was an arch-brigand who around 44-46 A.D. created great trouble in Idumea. His background as Jew or gentile is not known to us. He was a robber chief engaged in plundering the caravans. We however have no information about his motives for a kingship or any efforts

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<sup>144</sup> Antiquities, Book 17, ch. 11, p. 464-465.

to restore the rule of Israel to the Jews. It is said that procurator Cuspius Fadus (41-46 A.D.) executed him.

▪ ***James and Simon Son of Judas the Galilean***

James and Simon sons of Judas were tried and crucified by procurator Tiberius Alexander (46-48 A.D.) on the charge of arousing the people against the Romans.

▪ ***Eleazar bin Denai and Alexander***

Eleazar was a brigand chief who appeared during the procurator ship of Cumanus (48-52 A.D.) who with the help of Alexander started enlisting the Jews at Jerusalem to take revenge on the Samaritans in Gema. It is said that the Samaritans had attacked and killed a large number of Jews coming to a festival at Jerusalem. Consequently Eleazar and Alexander burnt several Samaritan villagers and killed their inhabitants (War 2:235). The rebellion was quelled by Cumanus.

▪ ***An Egyptian***

During the procurator ship of Felix (52-60 A.D.) there appeared one unnamed prophet from Egypt. He gathered about 30,000 adherents whom he summoned to the Mount of Olives in front of the Temple Mount. He promised that at his command the walls of Jerusalem would fall down and he and his followers would enter and possess themselves of the city. His attempt to take over the city failed because Felix the procurator (55-60) attacked them even before their move. The prophet escaped while most of his followers were either killed or taken as prisoners.

▪ ***Eleazer bin Annaneus***

Eleazar bin Annaneus was a temple captain who gave a signal of revolt against Rome. This Annanias was perhaps the chief priest who opposed John as well as zealots. He favored Rome and fell while fighting against Idumeans entering Jerusalem. Eleazer along with some lower priests took control of the temple and its worship outlawing sacrifices for the Romans (War 2-409f). It is said that the chief priests and leading Pharisees at the temple tried to

dissuade them. The Sicariis under the leadership of Menaham entered Jerusalem in force on the feast of wood carrying in 66 C.E. to aid Eleazar and his revolt.<sup>145</sup> Their leader Menaham was perhaps the grandson of Judah the Galilean who had invaded Roman Arsenal at Masada and obtained supply of arms from them. He thereafter went to the temple to pay his devotions like a king arrayed in royal robes and attended by his suite of armed fanatics. Later on after his murder, the Sicarris withdrew to Masada and took no further part in fighting at Jerusalem.<sup>146</sup> It is said that Hezekiah the Arch brigand had not been an ordinary highway man but a Hasmonean supporter. He was the fore-runner of the 'fourth philosophy' as named by Josephus. Instead of masses however Hezekiah had support from upper level of the society who favored the Hasmonians.

▪ ***Eliazar ben Simon***

He became leader of Zealots at Jerusalem during the war with Rome (66-70 A.D). He might have been a Judean priest who came to the forefront after the defeat of Cestius Gallus. Thereafter, he held supreme command during the invasion of Tiberius. The miserable end of the revolt has already been discussed.

There was another person about whom Josephus tells us that he "promised the people "deliverance and freedom from their miseries" if they would follow him to the wilderness. Both leader and followers were killed by the troops of Festus, the procurator (60-62; Ant." Xx. 8, § 10). Even when Jerusalem was already in process of destruction by the Romans, a prophet, according to Josephus suborned by the defenders to keep the people from deserting, announced that God commanded them to come to the Temple, there to receive miraculous signs of their deliverance. Those who came met death in the flames ("B.J." vi. 5 § s).<sup>147</sup>

<sup>145</sup> Sean Freayen, *GALILEE from Alexander the Great to Hadrian*, p. 230,231.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid p. 231,232.

<sup>147</sup> *The Jewish Encyclopaedia*, p. 252, Vol. 10.

**▪ *John of Giscala & Simon bin Giora***

At a culminating point i.e. between 66-70 A.D. we find two important figures i.e. Simon son of Giora and John of Giscala whose failure to win freedom from the Romans brought the greatest tragedy on the Jews.

Simon bin Giora had come from the Judean countryside with his army of ex-slaves. He proclaimed liberty for the slaves and reward for the free. It is said that he harassed the wealthier class while announced privileges to the poor. After the death of Annaneus the high priest he went out of the Jerusalem to stay in the hills of south Idumea for sometime and reentered Jerusalem being hailed as savior and protector of the people.<sup>148</sup>

John of Giscala was a fierce and fanatical chief. As a revolutionary leader of the Jews he aspired for despotic power and desired absolute sovereignty for himself. His hometown had been destroyed by the Romans and the entire population had been driven forth to other regions. In about 69 A.D. armies led by Vespasian and Titus had subdued Galilee by large scale butchery of the inhabitants while 6,000 of the survivors had been deported as slaves to build the Corinth Canal. Such calamities however had no discouraging effect on him. From Galilee he went to Jerusalem where with the help of the zealots he succeeded to get control of the temple. Even many Idumean patriots joined him. As a contrast to John's revolutionary spirit, Annaneus the high priest was inclined towards the Romans and he favored to seek compromise with them. He therefore opposed John as well as the zealots and even resisted the Idumean Patriots entering Jerusalem to defend the city and the temple against the invasion of the Roman armies advancing under the command of Titus son of Vespasian the emperor of Rome. Annaneus therefore fell in the battle while Simon son of Giora took over the leadership of the party of the high priest. Simon had previously joined the brigands who seized Masada from

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<sup>148</sup> *War* 4:353, 510, 574f.

where he made many raids upon the surrounding districts. Josephus writes about him that:

“He, on the contrary, was aspiring to despotic power and cherishing high ambitions; accordingly on hearing of the death of Ananus, he withdrew into the hills, where, by proclaiming liberty for slaves and rewards for the free, he gathered round him the villains from every quarter. Having now a strong force, he first overran the villages in the hills, and then through continual additions to his numbers was emboldened to descend into the low lands. And now when he was becoming a terror to the towns, many men of standing were seduced by his strength and career of unbroken success into joining him; and his was no longer an army of mere serfs or brigands, but one including numerous citizen recruits, subservient to his command as to a king . . . His object was evident: he was training his force and making all these preparations for an attack on Jerusalem (War 4:508-513).”<sup>149</sup>

It is said that during the siege of Jerusalem by the armies led by Titus, Simon son of Giora set aside his differences with John of Giscala and readily established a joint front of defense against the Romans. John usually disagreed with the opinions of his supporters which soon deprived him from their help. Even before the arrival of Titus the Zealots had refused to accept his claims to sovereignty and extremists among them got separated from John. They had seized upon the inner temple leaving John in control of only the outer part of the same. Consequently to take control of the temple, John had to overpower the zealots. The fight for control was so severe that according to reports the temple swam in blood. John thereafter put a strong, prolonged and well planned resistance against the Romans but eventually he stood defeated and captured by the Romans.

Earlier to that Simon had succeeded to capture Idumea and after becoming the master of Jerusalem, he assumed the role of a king of the Jews. He adored himself with purple and his followers obeyed him as a king. Even at the time of

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<sup>149</sup> Glenn W. Giles, *The Messianic Movements Of The First Century*, (Indiana: Trinity Theological Seminary Newburgh, 2002), p. 17-18.

his surrender before the Romans he dressed himself like a King. The Romans took him to Rome as captive of war and during triumphal ceremony at Rome they paraded, scourged and executed him as the 'King of the Jews'.

It has been reported that:-

"All was at length over. John of Giscala died in prison of starvation. Simon, having put on a white tunic beneath a purple robe and surrendered, appeared afterward at Rome in the great triumph of Titus. The city was razed, excepting three towers and part of the wall, which were preserved that all might know how great a city Rome had taken. The soldiers were rewarded with crowns of gold, with spears having golden shafts, with chains and ensigns of silver. Of the Jews, says Josephus, 1,100,000 had been slain, 97,000 survived as captives, of whom the handsomest young men were sent to Rome to grace the triumph of the conqueror; the rest were sold into slavery."<sup>150</sup>

In addition to above we also find a reference to John in the following:-

As for John, he wanted food, together with his brethren, in these caverns, and begged that the Romans would now give him their right and for his security, which he had often proudly rejected before; but for Simon, he struggled hard with the distress he was in, till he was forced to surrender himself, for the triumph, and to be then slain; as was John condemned to perpetual imprisonment and now the Romans set fire to the extreme parts of the city, and burnt them down, and entirely demolished its walls.<sup>151</sup>

Before closing the chapter, we find it necessary to inform our readers that:

In 6 CE Archelaus' tetrachy (Judea, plus Samaria and Idumea) came under direct Roman administration. Judea province did not initially include Galilee, Gaulanitis (the Golan), nor Peraea or the Decapolis. Its revenue was of little importance to the Roman treasury, but it controlled the land and coastal sea routes to the bread basket Egypt and was a border province against the Parthian Empire because of the Jewish connections to Babylonia.

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<sup>150</sup> *The Story of the Nations, Jews*, James K. Hosmer, P. 118.

<sup>151</sup> WARS, Book 6, Ch. 9, p. 738.

The capital was at Caesarea Maritima, not Jerusalem. Quirinus became Legate (Governor) of Syria and conducted the first Roman tax census of Syria and Judea, which was opposed by the Zealots. Judea was not a senatorial province, nor exactly an imperial province, but instead was a "satellite of Syria" governed by a prefect who was a knight of the equestrian order (as was Roman Egypt), not a former consul or praetor of senatorial rank. Still, Jews living in the province maintained some form of independence and could judge offenders by their own laws, including capital offences, until c. 28 CE.

We are, therefore, reproducing the list of Roman procurators governing Judea and Galilee w.e.f 6 to 135 CE to acquaint the readers with the names of the Roman procurators ruling the area on behalf of the Emperor of Rome.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Reign</b>	<b>Category</b>
Coponius	6–9	Roman Prefect
Marcus Ambivulus	9–12	Roman Prefect
Annius Rufus	12–15	Roman Prefect
Valerius Gratus	15–26	Roman Prefect
Pontius Pilate	26–36	Roman Prefect
Marcellus	36–37	Roman Prefect
Marullus	37–41	Roman Prefect
Agrippa I	41–44	King of Judaea
Cuspius Fadus	44–46	Roman Procurator
Tiberius Julius Alexander	46–48	Roman Procurator
Ventidius Cumanus	48–52	Roman Procurator
Marcus Antonius Felix	52–60	Roman Procurator
Porcius Festus	60–62	Roman Procurator
Lucceius Albinus	62–64	Roman Procurator
Gessius Florus	64–66	Roman Procurator
Marcus Antonius Julianus	66–70	Roman Procurator
Sextus Vettulenus Cerialis	70–71	Roman Legate
Lucilius Bassus	71–72	Roman Legate
Lucius Flavius Silva	72–81	Roman Legate

M. Salvidenus	80–85	Roman Legate
Gnaeus Pompeius Longinus	c.86	Roman Legate
Sextus Hermentidius Camp anus	c.93	Roman Legate
Tiberius Claudius Atticus Herodes	99–102	Roman Legate
Gaius Julius Quadratus Bassus	102–104	Roman Legate
Quintus Pompeius Falco	105–107	Roman Legate
Tiberianus	114–117	Roman Legate
Lusius Quietus	117–120	Roman Legate
Gargilius Antiquus	c. 124–?	Roman Prefect
Quintus Tineius Rufus	130–132/3	Roman Legate
Sextus Julius Severus	c. 133/4–135	Roman Legate

## JOHN THE BAPTIST

John the Baptist (Yahya of the Koran) was a prophet and an ascetic figure who was a precursor in preaching but a contemporary with Jesus of Nazareth. He was a Nazarite from his birth and had prepared himself for many years in the self-discipline in the desert. It is said that:-

“And the same John had his garment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins: and his meat was locusts and wild honey”.<sup>152</sup>

John started his preaching about kingdom of heaven or perhaps about the imminence of God's final judgment for the people of Israel.

“And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”<sup>153</sup>

“And he came into all the country about the Jordan, preaching the baptism of penance for the remission of sins.”<sup>154</sup>

It is said that large crowds came to him and confessed their sins to be baptized in the Jordan:-

**7.** Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? **8.** Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of penance: and do not begin to say, We have Abraham for our father. For I say unto you that God is able of these stones, to raise up children to Abraham. **9.** For now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that bringeth not forth good fruit shall be cut down and cast into the fire.<sup>155</sup>

KJV renders the same in following manner:

**7.** But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?  
**8.** Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: And think

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<sup>152</sup> Mat 3:4.

<sup>153</sup> Mat 3:2.

<sup>154</sup> Luk 3:3 KJV.

<sup>155</sup> Luk 3:7-9 GNB.

not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. **9.** And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.<sup>156</sup>

**4.** John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. **5.** And there went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins.<sup>157</sup>

The people asked him what to do?

**11.** He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise. **12.** Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? **13.** And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you. **14.** And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages.<sup>158</sup>

He therefore called the people to repent from their sins and baptized those who came to him. His baptism was however an initiatory rite or symbol of man's repentance and resolve to do good in future.

He advised them to turn to the Lord and be saved.

According to the New Testament John was born about 6 months before the birth of Jesus Christ i.e. in about 7 B.C. Elizabeth the mother of John was perhaps a cousin of Mary the mother of Jesus. Zechariah the father of John was a priest (a Prophet according to the Koran) at the temple of Jerusalem. He was extremely old while Elizabeth his wife was barren and dry due to her old age.

**5.** There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zachary, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name Elizabeth. **6.** And they were both just before God, walking in all the commandments and justifications of the Lord without blame.

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<sup>156</sup> Mat 3:7-09 KJV.

<sup>157</sup> Mar 1:4.

<sup>158</sup> Luk 3:11-14 KJV.

**7.** And they had no son, for that Elizabeth was barren: and they both were well advanced in years. **8.** And it came to pass, when he executed the priestly function in the order of his course before God, **9.** According to the custom of the priestly office, it was his lot to offer incense, going into the temple of the Lord. **10.** And all the multitude of the people was praying without, at the hour of incense. **11.** And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. **12.** And Zachary seeing him, was troubled: and fear fell upon him. **13.** But the angel said to him: Fear not, Zachary, for thy prayer is heard: and thy wife Elizabeth shall bear thee a son. And thou shalt call his name John. **14.** And thou shalt have joy and gladness: and many shall rejoice in his nativity. **15.** For he shall be great before the Lord and shall drink no wine nor strong drink: and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. **16** And he shall convert many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. **17.** And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias: that he may turn the hearts of the fathers unto the children and the incredulous to the wisdom of the just, to prepare unto the Lord a perfect people. **18.** And Zachary said to the angel: Whereby shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years. **19.** And the angel answering, said to him: I am Gabriel, who stand before God and am sent to speak to thee and to bring thee these good tidings. **20.** And behold, thou shalt be dumb and shalt not be able to speak until the day wherein these things shall come to pass: because thou hast not believed my words, which shall be fulfilled in their time. **21.** And the people were waiting for Zachary: and they wondered that he tarried so long in the temple. **22.** And when he came out, he could not speak to them: and they understood that he had seen a vision in the temple. And he made signs to them and remained dumb. **23.** And it came to pass, after the days of his office were accomplished, he departed to his own house. **24.** And after those days, Elizabeth his wife conceived and hid herself five months, saying: **25.** Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he hath had regard to take away my reproach among men. **26.** And in the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God into a city of Galilee, called Nazareth, **27.** To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David: and the virgin's name was

Mary.<sup>159</sup>

Like Jesus, John too was born miraculously in the extreme old age of his parents. His main assignment was to warn the people to repent from their sins to ward off the coming judgment of God. He suddenly appeared in the desert in about 27/28 A.D. and baptized those who agreed to repent. He was therefore a prophet of the imminent last judgment calling all without exception to repentance at the eleventh hour. For this, he started baptizing the people in the Jordan desert and Jordan Steppes from Aenon near Salim near modern Nablus and extending to a point east of Jericho where the Jews from Judea, Galilee, Perea, Tyre and Samaria came to him to be baptized as a repentance from their sins. Like other people, Jesus of Nazareth also went to him to be baptized in the same manner. This shows that Jesus started his career as a disciple of the Baptist and a recipient of his rite of baptism. Initially some people took John as the promised messiah of the Israelites. As regards the good news or the announcement of the approaching kingdom of God the same seems to be an invention of John the Evangelist who turned the warnings of Jesus as well as John the Baptist about the coming judgment of God and the consequent need for repentance to avoid the same. As against this, if Jesus or John had come to pronounce the good news about the approaching kingdom of God, it would have been an occasion to rejoice than to repent.

It is said that there had been perhaps a hundred thousand prophets in Israel between Jacob and John the Baptist. Moses had been the greatest among the prophets of Israel through whom the Lord made his covenant with them. It was during the Exodus that the Israelites were camping at the foot of Mount Sinai. The Lord called Moses up the mountain and gave him His law and the Ten Commandments as detailed in Ch. 19 to 31 of the Exodus. Returning to the camp, Moses called all the people of Israel and read before them the commandments and the Law of the Lord. All the people of Israel heard the Law and promised to obey the Lord and to do everything that he had

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<sup>159</sup> Luk 1:5-27 KJV.

commanded. They solemnly accepted their obligations under the covenant including its first and the most important commandment that the Israelites will worship only the Lord God who brought them out of Egypt and that they shall worship no God but Him alone. Eventually the covenant stood formalized and sealed as described below: -

7. And he (Moses) took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient. 8. And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD hath made with you concerning all these words.<sup>160</sup>

Subsequently the Lord called Moses again up the Mount Sinai to give him further instructions. Moses did not return till another 40 days. During his long absence the Israelites became restless and disturbed. They therefore melted their ornaments to make a gold bull and started worshiping the same. Meanwhile Moses returned to the camp with two stone tablets containing Ten Commandments engraved by the finger of the Lord. When he saw the people worshiping the Golden bull he became so furious that he threw down the tablets he was carrying and broke them. Although the Israelites deserved most severe punishment for breaking their covenant with the Lord yet due to humble intercession of Moses he did not destroy them there and then. They were however ordered to leave Mount Sinai. Subsequently the Lord renewed His covenant with them including certain additional commandments as detailed in the Ch. 33-35 of Exodus. It was emphasized again that: "Obey the laws that I am giving you today"<sup>161</sup> and "**Do not worship any other God because I the Lord tolerate no rivals.**"<sup>162</sup>

Israelites however were such stiff-necked people that even during their move from Sinai towards wilderness of Paran they continued complaining against Moses and the Lord. On instructions from the Lord in the wilderness, Moses selected

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<sup>160</sup> Exo 24:7-8.

<sup>161</sup> Ex 34:11.

<sup>162</sup> Ex. 34:14.

one leader from each of the twelve tribes and sent them to the land of Canaan to explore the same before proceeding to occupy the same as promised by the Lord. The spies with the exception of Joshua son of Noon and Caleb son of Jephunneh gave horrifying reports about the strength and stature of the people living there. The Israelites learning about the people of Canaan refused to invade the land and also became rebellious against Moses and the Lord. Moses again interceded with the Lord for his mercy and forgiveness for the people of Israel. Being implored by Moses the Lord did not punish the Israelites on the spot yet in view of their repeated transgression and obstinate as well as defiant behavior the Lord pronounced His judgment that: *"none of these people will live to enter that land", "They will never enter that land which I promised to their ancestors."* The Lord also said:

**29.** Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, **from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me....** **32.** But as for you, your carcasses, they shall fall in this wilderness. **33.** And your children shall wander in the wilderness forty years, and bear your whoredoms, until your carcasses be wasted in the wilderness..... **35.** I the LORD have said, I will surely do it unto all this evil congregation, that are gathered together against me: in this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die".<sup>163</sup>

Eventually all the people above 20 years of age died in the wilderness while exceptions among the twelve spies were only Joshua and Caleb. After completion of 40 years wandering in the wilderness it was a new generation of the Israelites with whom the Lord renewed his covenant in the land of Moab with certain additions to the covenant at Sinai. Since then Joshua, David, Elia, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezra and Jesus and all the prophets among the Israelites have been obliged to follow the same covenant while the prominent prophets tried to renew or revive the same with the people without any addition or subtraction from the covenant of Moses. All the great prophets reminded the

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<sup>163</sup> Num 14:29, 32-33, 35 KJV.

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people to abide by the covenant and they tried to renew or revive with the people whenever they had an opportunity to do the same. In this respect, efforts of Nehemiah and Ezra are conspicuous regarding revival of the Old Traditions of the Israelites and promulgation of the codified Law of Moses in the community, after completion of the temple at Jerusalem in about 416 B.C. Ezra's efforts to read the law in the congregation and to get the covenant renewed and revived in the Israelites was of such a magnitude that many people call him second Moses among the Israelites.

The review of the history of the Israelites shows that with the exception of the prophets or a small number of the most pious people in Israel, most of the kings and the masses of the Israelites have always been breaking the covenant of the Lord by worshiping gods of other nations around them. The conquest of Palestine by Alexander the Great and his policy to Hellenize Palestine had gradually taken its roots even in the aristocracy high priesthood and the wealthier sects of the society. The said influence continued to increase even under Roman successors of the Greeks. A substantial number of the Jews had turned away from the Lord and adopted pagan cults including worship of the emperors of Rome.

Around the advent of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ the high priests and the aristocracy of the Jews had almost compromised with the sacrifices for Zeus and the emperors of Rome even in the temple or at the altar dedicated exclusively to the Lord God of Israel.

From the reign of John Hyrcanus the Jewish community stood divided between the Sadducees and the Pharisees leading to such an internal strife that was fatal for the existence of the Jewish state. Aside from the said groups there were Essenes who differed from the policies and the conduct of both the Sadducees as well as the Pharisees. There was still another group known as Zealots who were quite radical and active group having seditious designs. The founder of the group was Judas the Galilean who had led an

insurrection against the census of Judea by Quirinus in 6 A.D. The revolt stood quelled and Judah as well as many of his companions stood crucified and the rest dispersed. In spite of all this the movement continued to flourish underground for a long time thereafter. Sicariis (Men with dagger) were another group of radical rebels involved in secret killings of their opponents throughout Judea. There remained only a very small number of the Jews who adhered to the true faith and continued to abide by the Law of Moses with full devotion to the Lord. Except for them there, was a general commotion, unrest and disgust prevailing throughout Judea, Galilee and Peraea. This was the time when John appeared suddenly on the banks of river Jordan to baptize the people for repentance from their sins.

It is said that John spent most of his early life in the wilderness and also perhaps had some association with Qumran community or the Essenes group. Mark being the first one to compose his Gospel in Greek language has presented John merely as a herald to announce the good news of the advent of Jesus as quoted below:-

**1.** The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the **Son of God**; **2.** As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. **3.** The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. **4. John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.** **5.** And there went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, **confessing their sins.** **6.** And John was clothed with camel's hair, and with a girdle of a skin about his loins; and he did eat locusts and wild honey; **7.** And preached, saying, **There cometh one mightier than I after me**, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose. **8.** I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost. **9.** And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Mar 1:9 KJV.

Scholars have pointed out that the words '*Son of God*' used in the first verse quoted above are not found in the oldest manuscripts of the New Testament which shows that interpolation '*Son of God*' for Jesus is a later insertion in the text ascribed to Mark. It also transpires from the text that instead of a statement of facts, St. Mark has preferred to construct the life of Jesus by selecting certain prophecies from the Old Testament and historicizing the same in the name of Jesus. Although during 2000 years since the advent of Jesus Christ, such assertions have become foundations of faith for the Christians yet any impartial study of the Old Testament will reveal that St. Mark and St. Mathew had no information about the events pertaining to the early life of Jesus. Only Mathew and Luke have some narration about the birth of Jesus. Others start directly from the time when Jesus appeared before John at the bank of Jordon to be baptized like others. They however differ between themselves regarding the length of the period of ministry extending 1-3 years. Anyhow, this period has been interpolated with mention of preachings of Jesus in the synagogues or in the open in the Galilee, Tiberius, Peraea, Tyre, Samaria and other places in Palestine. Even here, we find a broad disagreement about the contents of preachings as well as details of the events described by the evangelists differently. Anyhow all have devoted a substantial part of their biographies of Jesus to the last 24 hours of his life to the description of the last supper, arrest and the events pertaining to his crucifixion.

The main part of the second verse has been taken from Mal. 3:1 which talks of a messenger of covenant. No doubt Jesus had been a great prophet whom the Lord sent with the book i.e. Injeel, yet like David and other prophets of Israel he was a follower of Moses and final warner to the people of Israel. He neither introduced a new law nor made any new covenant to replace the covenant of the Lord with the Israelites at Sinai. Jesus did not abrogate even a tittle from the Law of Moses and continued to observe the same being attached to the temple and the community at

Jerusalem throughout his life. Even after his death his genuine apostles and disciples under the leadership of James the brother of Jesus continued to join with the Jewish community to worship the Lord at the temple. Anyhow after the death of James and ultimately after the destruction of the temple at Jerusalem an expulsion of the survivors from Judea his earliest followers stood dispersed obliged to lead an underground life thereafter. As such there is no evidence that right from the advent of Jesus till the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem the Jewish Christians knew anything about a new covenant or Divinities of Jesus or the Holy Ghost. They like other Jews continued to follow the contents of the covenant of God which stood renewed by Moses with the new generation of Israel in the land of Moab. There is no evidence even in the New Testament that Jesus ever made a new covenant either with the Jews or the gentiles till his death. From the history of faith we observe that God never cancelled His covenant with any nation to introduce another. His word endures forever. Anyhow whenever a nation utterly failed to abide by the covenant or they resorted to general transgression of the covenant, a warner was sent to them to repent and to turn to the Lord. Most of the nations who rejected the warners stood destroyed and a chance was given to another people whom the God was pleased to choose for their test and trial. In all such cases a prophet was raised from the same people and he spoke the language of the people to whom he was sent. Although Bible fails to give any account of the nations in between Noah and Abraham yet the Koran has ample reference of different prophets and their nations since Adam to Noah and from Noah to Moses. We therefore find that after the people of Noah the Lord God chose Aad for the test and trial and sent prophet Hud to guide them. Similarly Prophet Saleh was sent towards Thamud. After Lot sent to the People of Gomorrah and Sodom Prophet Shu'aib (perhaps Jethro of the Old Testament) was sent to 'Ashab-ul-Aika'. This shows that the people of Israel were chosen on their own turn for the test and trial by the Lord. After their failure to receive their prophets, the Lord God sent his last

and the greatest Prophet i.e. Muhammad ﷺ in Arabia with his final and immutable message reviving all the essential contents of the covenants of Moses, Abraham, Noah and other prophets of the Lord. As such Prophet Muhammad ﷺ did not introduce any new faith in the world. He was last among the chain of the Prophets of the Lord sent to humankind and came essentially with the same message as delivered to the mankind through all prophets before him. Prophet Jesus too did not differ with any of the teachings of Moses. It is only St. Paul who has diverged from the true teachings of Jesus to introduce two new Gods i.e. Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost to form the Trinity unknown to any of the genuine prophets of the Lord from Adam till Jesus.

Since the Israelites had transgressed most of the commandments of the Lord as per the covenant at Sinai therefore we feel that both John and Jesus were the harbingers of the end period and warners for the Israelites to repent for their sins and turn to the Lord obediently. Due to refusal of the masses to receive John and Jesus there came an end to the prophethood in Israel while the community at Judea and Galilee stood destroyed or dispersed. The venue of the final revelation stood transferred to Arabia while those people succeeded to preserve the words and contents of the Law intact till today and they also proved to be the best community to obey all the commandments of the Lord.

Verse 3 is based on Is 40:3 in which Prophet Isaiah gave the assurance of peace, prosperity and exaltation to King Hezekiah and the people of God living at Jerusalem during the said period. The context of the said verse is such that it has no provision to be applied to far off future of Israel. It also cannot be applied to Jesus and his time in any way because the entire scenario before and after the advent of Jesus was a time of calamity and affliction for Israel instead of anything good for the Jews, the city or the religion of God. The prediction of Isaiah however stood fulfilled with the decree of Cyrus the great granting freedom to the

Israelites with permission to return to Jerusalem and to build the temple and the city of Jerusalem. Zerubbabel and the high priest Joshua reconstructed the temple and the Jews were free to worship the Lord in accordance with the religious traditions of Moses and other prophets of Israel. This was the period when Ezra after completion of the temple renewed the covenant of the Lord with the people. He used to read the Law in presence of all the people of Jerusalem who resolved to abide by the same.

We also observe that Mark 1:3 has tried to construct the life of Jesus by clothing him in the words of Isaiah 40:3. For a better understanding of the prediction it shall be useful to read the said verse in its context, as reproduced below: -

**1.** Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. **2. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem,** and cry unto her, **that her warfare is accomplished,** that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD'S hand double for all her sins. **3.** The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. **4. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low:** and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: **5. And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,** and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.<sup>165</sup>

History therefore bears no evidence to the fact that Jesus spoke comfortably to Jerusalem or welfare of the city was accomplished with his advent. No 'valley' stood exalted nor glory of God stood revealed to the people of Israel who were awaiting the Messiah to deliver them from the Heathen and tyrannical rule of Rome. We therefore feel that the verse saying: "*The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight*"<sup>166</sup> produces only a dramatic effect to the presentation by Mark but it has been applied to Jesus without any justification for the same.

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<sup>165</sup> Isa 40:1-5.

<sup>166</sup> Mar 1:3 KJV.

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It is also pertinent to note here that John was engaged mainly in baptizing the people **for repentance from their sins** and even Jesus advised his disciples to do the same. There never had been any indication that Jesus was either a God or a savior of mankind to take away the sins of man.



## JESUS OF NAZARETH

Jesus was a Jew born in Palestine about 7 or 6 B.C. and died at Jerusalem around 29 A.D. being crucified by Pontius Pilate the procurator of Rome in Judea. His Hebrew name was Yeshua or Joshua but the Christian west prefer to call him Jesus i.e. the Greek form of Yeshua. Perhaps another reason for calling him Jesus or Jesus Christ was to disenfranchise Yeshua of his religion and ethnicity so that his name Jesus may sound like the names of Greek or Roman Gods, heroes and emperors such as Zeus, Ulysus, Hercules, Dionysus, Julius, Augustus, Crassus, Vespasias and others. He is therefore known only as Jesus Christ in the West and Christianity as a faith is named after him. Christians believe him as the first born and the only Son of God. Jesus of the Gospels is worshipped as Savior God of Mankind and the second person in the Trinity formed by God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost.

For Muslims however Jesus (Isa, Esa or Esau) was the last one among the most prominent Prophets of Israel. He however had the distinction to be the last messenger and warner to the Israelites. We know that Moses was the greatest prophet of the Israelites who delivered them from their bondage in Egypt and led them towards Canaan i.e. the land God had promised to the Israelites. Moses was therefore the first and the last lawgiver for the Israelites while all other prophets coming from time to time were followers of Moses. Each and every prophet had during his time attempted to restore and revive the traditions and faith of Moses in its pristine purity. Jesus too was a messenger (Rasul) of God after Moses in the pattern of Elia, David and Jonah etc. He therefore did not come with any new covenant nor did he abrogate even a tittle from the Law of Moses (Mat 5:18). Both John and Jesus started their mission by admonishing the Israelites to turn from their vicious ways and to repent from their sins. They therefore were the last warners from the Lord towards the

Israelites and evidence to the fact that the Israelites were adamant to stick to their evil ways. We may also refer here to an unchanged and everlasting tradition of the Lord that in case of general transgression of a community, God sends a warner to admonish them. In case they pay no heed to the warning they are punished by the Lord appropriately. We also know that the Law of Moses had clearly stressed on the Israelites not to worship anyone except Yahweh the Lord God of the Israelites. Israelites knew full-well that each individual will be accountable for his own deeds and no one will bear the burden of another. The Qur'an too affirms the same word of God and asserts that the Lord does not award final punishment to any nation unless He has sent a warner to them and unless they are given a chance to mend their ways. It has been laid down as a rule that:-

**15.** Whoever goes aright, for his own soul does he go aright; and whoever goes astray, to its detriment only does he go astray: nor **can the bearer of a burden bear the burden of another, nor do We chastise until We raise a messenger.** **16.** And when We wish to destroy a town, We send Our commandment to the people of it who lead easy lives, **but they transgress therein; thus the word proves true against it,** so We destroy it with utter destruction. **17.** And how many of the generations did We destroy after Nuh! and your Lord is sufficient as Knowing and Seeing with regard to His servants' faults. <sup>167</sup>

In view of this the advent of John and Jesus was no exception to the rule. Both started their mission by admonishing the people of their transgression and calling them to repent of their sins. The history of Israel therefore shows that thousands of the prophets came to guide them and to warn them about the torment they may suffer due to their disobedience to the commandments of the Lord. John and Jesus came at the end as last messengers from the Lord. The masses of Israel not only refused to receive them but they on the other hand resorted to kill them. The arrogance and rebellion of the masses against the Lord made it evident that it was useless to send any other

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<sup>167</sup> Al-Quraan 17:15-17.

prophet to the Israelites. Their persistence in the evil ways became a final proof against them to bring an end to the age of Israel. The Lord therefore did not raise any prophet among the Israelites and it took about 40 years after the crucifixion of Jesus that the entire community was afflicted with punishment, destruction and death. The destruction of the city and the temple at Jerusalem and the devastation of the land of Judea was therefore the period foretold by Jacob for scepter and the law giver had to depart from the Jews i.e. from the descendants of Judah:-

The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.<sup>168</sup>

## Birth of Jesus

### The Gospel of Mathew

Mathew's account of the birth of Jesus is as under:-

**18.** This was how the birth of Jesus Christ took place. His mother Mary was engaged to Joseph, but before they were married, she found out that **she was going to have a baby by the Holy Spirit.** **19.** Joseph was a man who always did what was right, but he did not want to disgrace Mary publicly; so he made plans to break the engagement privately. **20.** While he was thinking about this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "**Joseph, descendant of David,** do not be afraid to take Mary to be your wife. **For it is by the Holy Spirit that she has conceived.** **21.** She will have a son, and you will name him Jesus---because he will save his people from their sins.<sup>169</sup>

St. Mathew adds that:

Now all this happened in order to make come true what the Lord had said through the prophet,<sup>170</sup>

The concept of making the scripture true is an oft repeated theme of the Gospel e.g. Mat. 4:14 and 12:17-21. The

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<sup>168</sup> Gen 49:10.

<sup>169</sup> Mat 1:18-21.

<sup>170</sup> Mat 1:22.

concern of the evangelists to make the Gospel true suggests that instead of reporting the verified facts they resorted to reconstruction of the life, the mission and work of Jesus in such a manner that the prophecies seem to be fulfilled in him. They therefore searched through the Old Testament to find out certain assertions and prophecies according to which they characterized the Jesus of their faith fulfilling the prophecies of the Old. The evangelists assigned little importance to any historical evidence and with the exception of Peter, Barnabas and James they did not even mention the name of any Jewish eyewitness or a narrator of facts about Jesus from Judea or Galilee. Thus **instead of Jesus of history we have Christ of faith** as the end product of the evangelists.

As compared to others, Mathew seems to have made more use of the prophecies and assertions from the Old Testament. Hence after showing Jesus fulfilling the prophecies he also has appropriated almost entire Gospel of Mark in his biography of Jesus. No wonder that we find 600 of Mark's 661 verses incorporated in the Gospel ascribed to Mathew.

## **The Gospel According to Luke**

Like Mathew, Luke too utilizes a substantial part of the Gospel of Mark while he also has certain other sources to supplement the same. Regarding the birth of Jesus, Luke quotes prophecy of Zechariah as under:-

**26.** In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy God sent the angel Gabriel to a town in Galilee named Nazareth. **27.** He had a message for a young woman promised in marriage to a man named **Joseph, who was a descendant of King David.** Her name was Mary. **28.** The angel came to her and said, "Peace be with you! The Lord is with you and has greatly blessed you!" **29.** Mary was deeply troubled by the angel's message, and she wondered what his words meant. **30.** The angel said to her, "Don't be afraid, Mary; God has been gracious to you. **31.** You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. **32.** He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High God. **The Lord God will make him a king, as his ancestor David was,**

**33.** and he will be the king of the descendants of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end!" **34.** Mary said to the angel, "I am a virgin. How, then, can this be?" **35.** The angel answered, "**The Holy Spirit will come on you, and God's power will rest upon you.** For this reason the holy child will be called the Son of God."<sup>171</sup>

Incidentally the verses i.e. Mat 1:20c and Luk 1:35 quoted above convey the impression as if the pregnancy of Mary was caused by some sexual intercourse between Mary and the Holy Ghost. Luke quotes it as the reason for designating Jesus 'the Son of God'.<sup>172</sup>

## Son of God or Son of David

We observe that all the gospels have followed St. Paul to designate Jesus as son of God. We have already quoted Mathew 1:18-21 and Luk 1:26-35 in that respect. As for Mark he neither provides any genealogy nor tells us anything about the birth of Jesus but he starts his Gospels with the words:-

**1.** The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; **2.** As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. **3.** The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. **4.** John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. **5.** And there went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins.<sup>173</sup>

Scholars however observe that the words 'Son of God' (Mar 1:1) are not found in the oldest manuscripts, hence, the appellation 'Son of God' cannot be taken from the author of Mark and seem to be interpolated at some later date. As compared to the synoptic Gospels, John introduces Jesus as Eternal Word of God and God (Jn 1:1). He also makes Jesus son of God but same as God (John 1:18). He also calls him

<sup>171</sup> Luk 1:26-35 GNB.

<sup>172</sup> Luk 1:35b.

<sup>173</sup> Mar 1:1-5.

the promised savior son of God. This shows that Paul as well as the evangelists all agree on the point that Jesus was son of God. Anyhow whatever the pronouncement of St. Paul and the evangelists we do not find Jesus declaring himself as a divine figure. Similarly he also did not claim that his death will atone for the sins of mankind.

It however transpires from the New Testament that even making Jesus the first born and the only Son of God did not fully satisfy the needs of the Evangelists. They were under dire necessity to prove Jesus as a Messiah from the Royal descent of King David as the promised deliverer of the Israelites. The Royal Davidic messiah was awaited to rule as a king in Jerusalem to restore the Kingdom of Israel. The composers of the Gospels therefore had no option except to present Jesus as son of David in spite of the fact that they had already designated him as son of God (Mark 1:1, Mat 4:3, Luk 1:27). In view of this both Mathew and Luke exerted a lot to trace the ancestral lineage of Jesus starting from Joseph as father of Jesus and tracing it back to David. Unluckily there are such differences and inconsistencies between the genealogies constructed by Mathew and Luke that both have become incredible and useless for the readers. It was found ridiculous to trace the ancestral line of Jesus through Joseph the husband of Mary while asserting at the same time that Jesus was born of virgin Mary. Her conception through the Holy Ghost creates another confusion (Mat 1:20c, Luk 1:35). The confusion becomes worse confounded when the Christian theologians insist on retaining virginity as an everlasting feature of Mary while at the same time they assert that Jesus had four brothers and at least two sisters born perhaps through conjugal relations of Mary with Joseph. Although Paul was the first person to make Jesus a descent of King David (Rom 1:3) Son of God and resurrected one in power through spirit yet he perhaps found something lacking in his Christ. He therefore devoted the entire chapter of Hebrew 7 to prove perfection in Jesus Christ in the order of Melchizedek described as under:-

Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto

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the Son of God; abideth a priest continually.<sup>174</sup>

St. Paul was perhaps aware of the fact that Jesus belonged to the priestly tribe being a descendant of Aaron. He perhaps did not find the descent from Aaron befitting for his Lord Jesus Christ. Hence he proceeded to reason out that after belonging in the order of Melchizedek it was useless for Jesus to belong to a priestly tribe of Aaron. He therefore says:-

If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron?<sup>175</sup>

The effort to prove Jesus in the order of Melchizedek and indirect negation of his descent from Aaron was perhaps a later thought of St. Paul to detach Jesus from the descent of Aaron in the interest of his assertion Jesus was son of David. Aside from the said puzzle we need to resolve the issue whether in view of his through the Holy Spirit it is appropriate to designate him as Son of Holy Spirit or the Son of God.

It is a well accepted axiom that truth is always one and there cannot be two or more truths about one and the same. Since we find many truths about the son-ship of Jesus therefore it is impossible for us to decide as to which one is correct. Before proceeding further we must also keep in mind that the Qur'an has addressed Jesus as son of *Marium* and has given him no other designation in that respect. Jesus, too, has referred to himself as Son of Man perhaps more than 60 times in the Gospels. The evangelists therefore fail to explain as to why Jesus made an extraordinary repetition of 'son of man' as his confession. The evangelists fail to tell us why Jesus did not call himself son of God or son of David even once throughout his life? His addressing the God as Father was nothing strange for the Jews allegorically addressed God as

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<sup>174</sup> Heb 7:3 KJV.

<sup>175</sup> Heb 7:11.

father and claimed themselves to be the sons of God. Jesus therefore was following the same example of the Israelites while addressing God as father and he never assumed himself to be anything more than a man. His confession as quoted below accords with the verdict of the Qur'an:-

When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?"<sup>176</sup>

All conflicting assertions in the New Testament allude to the fact that the theologians fail to reach an over all agreement about the real status of Jesus. They therefore found it expedient to present Jesus in multifarious ways so that the Jews, the Romans, the Gentiles as well as the Pagans may find something akin to their own faith in him. This aimed at increasing universal acceptance of Jesus as Christ of faith to enhance sale of the newly invented faith in all parts of the Roman Empire. It was for such reasons that many inconsistencies and self-contradictory assertions continue to be retained as foundation of the Christian faith till today.

There is hardly any doubt that the Jews always looked to David as an ideal king of the Israelites. It is said that:-

"It is in David that the more far-sighted of them saw the kingly ideal beyond which their minds could not reach, in the image of which they looked for a coming messiah, who should deliver his people and sit upon the throne of David for ever."<sup>177</sup>

Since Jews were the first addressees of St. Paul therefore to dispel the desperation caused by crucifixion and ignoble death of Jesus St. Paul started converting the frustration into a hope by suggesting resurrection of Jesus in a glorified manner.

First of all he interpreted the despicable rather ignoble death of Jesus in flesh into the Lord risen from death in Glory. The resurrection was therefore presented as a triumph of Jesus over sin and death instead of a punishment for crime of insurrection of the Romans. St. Paul depicted the crucifixion as a self-sacrifice of Jesus to

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<sup>176</sup> Mat 16:13.

<sup>177</sup> The New Bible Dictionary, p. 296.

expiate the sin of man. This he did without providing any evidence from the Context of the crucifixion. Hence, easy salvation from sin and death along-with the promises of holiness, life everlasting and sharing the kingdom of God in Christ were presented by St. Paul as rewards to those who believed in Jesus Christ as Son of God and ultimate savior of mankind. The evangelists composing their Gospels between 70-110 AC found themselves obliged to follow the theology and interpretations of St. Paul. Perhaps the best narrative about the same may be found in Hyam Maccoby's *Myth Maker*, as quoted below:-

The earliest writings in the New Testament are actually Paul's letters, which were written about AD 50-60, while the Gospels were not written until the period AD 70-110. This means that the theories of Paul were already before the writers of the Gospels and colored their interpretations of Jesus' activities. Paul is, in a sense, present from the very first word of the New Testament. This is, of course, not the whole story, for the Gospels are based on traditions and even written sources which go back to a time before the impact of Paul, and these early traditions and sources are not entirely obliterated in the final version and give valuable indications of what the story was like before Paulinist editors pulled it into final shape. However, the dominant outlook and shaping perspective of the Gospels is that of Paul, for the simple reason that it was the Paulinist view of what Jesus' sojourn on earth had been about that was triumphant in the church as it developed in history. Rival interpretations, which at one time had been orthodox, opposed to Paul's very individual views, now became heretical and were crowded out of the final version of the writings adopted by the Pauline Church as the inspired canon of the New Testament.<sup>178</sup>

For further glorification of Jesus as the promised Messiah and the deliverer of the Israelites, St. Paul had no better ideal than King David. It was therefore necessary for him and his followers to prove Jesus as a descendant of David even by hook or by crook. They needed in any case '**great David's greater son**' to make him the Royal messiah awaited by the Jews who could be designated as a king like

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<sup>178</sup> Hyam Maccoby, *Myth Maker*, p. 4.

David in Judea. It was only the dynasty of David that continued to rule Israel and Judea from 1018 to 587 B.C. while an unending kingdom was held in promise for them. The Jews expected restoration of their kingdom only through a descendant of David. This was perhaps the conviction that found its expression in the prophecy that there will always be a king from the descendants of king David and their kingdom will last forever. It was with the same end in view that the Jews continued to look back to David with pride. Like them Paul too had no option except to prove his Christ of faith from the Davidic line.

As followers of St. Paul the evangelists have taken great pains to prove Jesus as descendant of David, they however also felt obliged to record information received from other sources showing clear-cut denial of Jesus about his descent from David. Let us examine the same:

(i) **41.** When some Pharisees gathered together, Jesus asked them, **42.** "What do you think about the Messiah? Whose descendant is he?" "He is David's descendant," they answered. **43.** "Why, then," Jesus asked, "did the Spirit inspire David to call him 'Lord'? David said, **44.** 'The Lord said to my Lord: Sit here at my right side until I put your enemies under your feet.' **45. If, then, David called him 'Lord,' how can the Messiah be David's descendant?" 46.** No one was able to give Jesus any answer, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions.<sup>179</sup>

(ii) **35.** As Jesus was teaching in the Temple, he asked the question, "How can the teachers of the Law say that the Messiah will be the descendant of David? **36.** The Holy Spirit inspired David to say: 'The Lord said to my Lord: Sit here at my right side until I put your enemies under your feet.' **37. David himself called him 'Lord'; so how can the Messiah be David's descendant?"** A large crowd was listening to Jesus gladly.<sup>180</sup>

(iii) **41.** Jesus asked them, "How can it be said that the Messiah will be the descendant of David? **42.** For David himself says in the book of Psalms, 'The Lord said to my Lord: Sit here at my right side **43.** until I put your enemies as a footstool under your feet.' **44. David called him 'Lord';**

<sup>179</sup> Mat 22:41-46.

<sup>180</sup> Mar 12:35-37.

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**how, then, can the Messiah be David's descendant?**<sup>181</sup>

The readers of the Bible will be surprised to observe that the Christians have attached such a super importance to the word of St. Paul that they uphold the same against the word of God affirmed by all the prophets of Israel including Jesus himself. Even the word of Jesus such as quoted above has no importance against the word of St. Paul who said Jesus is 'of the seed of David according to the flesh' (Rom 1:3). Against denial of the concept by Jesus as quoted above from each of the Gospels in the synoptics St. John came to the rescue of St. Paul by introducing the following:-

"I'm the root and the offspring of David" (Rev 22:16)

We therefore feel that as against the synoptics the Rev of St. John quoted herein above has prevailed. Anyhow it will be interesting to know that the Qur'an too has denied the said genealogy attributed to Jesus. It says:-

(i) **When a woman of Imran** said: My Lord! surely I vow to Thee what is in my womb, to be devoted (to Thy service); accept therefore from me, surely Thou art the Hearing, the Knowing (3:35)

(ii) **And Marium, the daughter of Imran**, who guarded her chastity, so We breathed into her of Our inspiration and she accepted the truth of the words of her Lord and His books, and she was of, the obedient ones.<sup>182</sup>

(iii) **27.** And she came to her people with him, carrying him (with her). They said: **O Marium!** surely you have done a strange thing. **28. O sister of Haroun!** your father was not a bad man, nor, was your mother an unchaste woman.<sup>183</sup>

As such, the Qur'an asserts that *Marium* was daughter of *Imrān*. Aaron was either the name of the brother of Mary or she has been referred in that manner because she was from the genealogy of Aaron. Arabs are used to address boys or girls referring to the name of their tribes and they call them brother or sister of such and such tribe. For

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<sup>181</sup> Luk 20:41-44.

<sup>182</sup> Al-Qur'an, 66:12.

<sup>183</sup> Al-Qur'an, 19:27-28.

Muslims therefore the verdict of the Qur'an is the final and immutable word of God.

As regards the Christians they too have a reference in the new testament showing both Zechariah and Elizabeth belonging to the priestly families (Luk 1:5). Elizabeth the mother of John the Baptist was the kinswoman or perhaps a cousin of Mary and from the priestly family of Aaron. As such there is every likelihood that Mary the mother of Jesus was also from the priestly family of Aaron as mentioned by the Qur'an. Although the New Testament has nothing to record about the early life of Mary yet the Qur'an has shown her dedicated to the temple which too alludes to her belonging to priestly family as descendants of Aaron. We shall quote the relevant part from the Qur'an subsequently.

The Jews and the Christians haughtily deny the Qur'an knowing full well that it is an immutable word of God and an ultimate truth. It has no contradictions, no untruth, no discrepancies and nothing against reason and logic. No advancement in knowledge, no modern discoveries of various sciences throughout the world have ever been able to point out any mistake or misconception in the Qur'an. Even then if the Christian west continues to insist on its denial it will be of no effect on the ultimate truth revealed by the Qur'an. The assertion in the Qur'an that *Mariam* was from the tribe of *Imrān* and a sister of the Aaron family therefore exalts her much more than the baseless assertions of the New Testament trying to prove Jesus as son of God, Son of David and Son of Joseph as per their own requirements. The Qur'an simply calls Jesus as son of Mariam while Jesus himself has always preferred to call him as son of man. Nowhere he has ever claimed to be the son of God. It is therefore our conviction that the verdict of the Qur'an supersedes all other statements about the birth, the mission and the faith of Jesus. It has been revealed that:

Surely Allah chose Adam and Nuh and the descendants of Ibrahim and the descendants of Imran above the nations.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Al-Qur'an 3:1.

No doubt the Lord God chose Adam, Noah, the descendants of Adam and the descendants of Imr'an. Jews took lead in depicting Noah as tiller of land, inventor of vine and being drunkard lying buck naked in the tent. Abraham has been shown telling lies deceiving the kings and amassing wealth against the unlawful and despicable exchange of the chastity and nobility of his wife. They also accused Moses for disobedience to the Lord. Aaron was accused of making the Golden calf to be worshiped by the Israelites. Adam seemed to be the only exception who in spite of breaking the commandment of the Lord was not subjected to severe condemnation by the Israelites. Our Christian brothers have however put all the blemish of the world on him by holding him responsible for all the sins of Mankind. We have already discussed the issue in our chapter of creation and need not throw any further light on the despicable remarks of the Christians against the father of entire mankind.

Presently we recall that both Moses and Aaron were sons of Imrān. Moses happened to be the greatest prophet among the Israelites. He was the undisputed deliverer of the Israelites from their bondage in Egypt and the first and the last law giver for them. Aaron too was a great prophet of the Lord and according to the Bible priesthood always remained confined within the descendants of Imran. This shows that the family of Aaron have always remained dedicated to the service of the Lord till the final destruction of the temple at Jerusalem. As against this, Judah and his descendants did not enjoy sanctification like that of the Aaron family. According to the Qur'an David was a messenger (Rasul) and Solomon a prophet (Nabi) of the Lord. There is no mention of any other prophet from the descendants of David. Bible however does not acknowledge David or Solomon as the Prophets. It accuses them with the blames of fornication, apostasy and perhaps moral turpitude. The only credit for David is the establishment of the Kingdom of Israel and our Christian brothers exert to make Jesus inherit the kingdom and glory of David. In their eagerness to prove Jesus a messiah from the royal family

of David they forget that Bible has abundant record of moral turpitude and illegitimacy pertaining to the persons and descendants of both Solomon and David. To start with we find Judah indulging into illicit relations with Tamar his own daughter in law which culminating in the birth to Perez who happened to be the great great grandfather of King David. Second that Boaz the great great grandfather was son of Salmon born through Rahab the ex-prostitute.

Third that Naomy and Ruth the Moabite enticing Boaz the great great grandfather of David.

Fourth that Solomon was born to Bathsheba with whom David had indulged into illegitimate sexual assault giving birth to an elder brother of Solomon who died subsequently.

All these factors show that the Davidic line did not suit for the birth of either the messiah to deliver the Israelites nor to the son of God being the ultimate savior of mankind. We therefore believe that the version of Qur'an must supersede regarding the genealogy of Jesus Christ.

Gospels tell us that the majority of the Jews rejected Jesus as a prophet or a messiah of Israel. They even blamed him of blasphemy against the Lord and accused him of his designs to destroy the temple. Jesus was killed because he was presented as a potential threat to Rome. After accusing Jesus with rebellious designs the Jews continued to pressurize the Roman procurator to crucify him. As for blasphemy, we observe that throughout his life Jesus preached faith as per the Old Testament and he ended his life observing the Law strictly as a follower of Moses. All the twelve Apostles, disciples and earliest followers of Jesus in Galilee and Judea were Jews who took him as a warner, a reformer, a prophet and the messiah of Israel. There is no evidence that Jesus ever claimed to be God or he advised his followers to worship him. It was about 20 years after the death/ ascension of Jesus Christ that St. Paul started projecting Jesus as son of God and very God in the territories far off from the Jewish homeland and the centre of preachings of Jesus in Judea and Galilee.

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It was almost two decades after the crucifixion of Jesus Christ that we observe for the first time St. Paul preaching a faith widely different from the Orthodox theology of the Jews. This he did by interpreting the Old Testament in his own way to accord the same with the Greek myth and philosophy and also with the pagan concepts of the Hellenized society around the Mediterranean Sea. His theology therefore though borrowed and transmuted into new theology was a clear-cut diversion from the faith of Moses and the faith of all the Prophets of Israel including Jesus himself. It is said that St. Paul died or stood crucified at Rome in the year 68 A.D.

It is however on record that soon after the death of Jesus in about 29 A.D. James his brother started leading the followers of Jesus Christ at Jerusalem. Since then he remained an undisputed leader of the Jewish Christian community at Jerusalem for about 33 years whereafter he was killed or stoned to death perhaps by the high-priests of the temple. During all this time the Christian Jews continued to join the congregation of the Jews in the temple and they remained attached to it all along till the utter destruction of the Temple and the Jewish community at Jerusalem by the Romans. This shows that the followers of Jesus Christ had no idea of a new religion nor they separated themselves from the Jewish community up to year 70 A.D. It was with the elimination and dispersion of the Jewish community that Judea ceased to be the capital of Judaism. It is worth noting however that aside from burning the city and the temple the Romans also had destroyed all the books of law and other literature of the Israelites. The centre being destroyed, books and records reduced to ashes while the earliest followers of Jesus either massacred or pushed out to lands far off from the territories ruled by the Romans there survived no one to teach the true faith of Jesus Christ there.

We also know that the Jewish community at Jerusalem at the death of Jesus Christ consisted of a good percentage of literate people aside from their scholars and the scribes.

Most of the apostles, the disciples and the earliest followers of Jesus Christ remained attached to the temple for about 40 years i.e. from the death of Jesus to the destruction of the temple. In view of this it is plausible to assume that there must have been certain memoirs about the teachings and the life of Jesus Christ recorded by the apostles and others. Even Mary the mother of Jesus and other women remaining in his company must have narrated his teachings of faith and other episodes pertaining to his life. Alas we do not find any such records preserved for the benefit of the generations after Jesus Christ. Since the community stood destroyed and dispersed therefore the Records might also have been destroyed. Survivors if any were forbidden on pain of death to visit Jerusalem. They had to go underground or to live in the lands far away from the territories under the control of the Romans. Even if somebody had any memoirs or records with him it was impossible for him to publicize the same or to controvert any wrong preachings by others. All these factors created the vacuum of faith and teachings of Jesus which was gradually filled by the theology of St. Paul duly supported, supplemented and expanded by the writings of the Evangelists.

This was the time when there was a need to compose such books that could promote the new faith in the Hellenized parts of the Roman Empire. Though Paul had already died but he had left behind his epistles containing a theology which was widely different from the teachings of Jesus and all the prophets of Israel including Moses before him. It was therefore natural for the evangelists to be influenced by the theology of St. Paul which was more friendly to the Romans and acceptable to the Hellenized society. Although the composers of the synoptic Gospels must be having with them other sources to write the biography of Jesus yet it was undesirable to record the same on the authority of the Jewish disciples or followers of Jesus from Palestine. This is perhaps the main reason for not quoting any information in the name of the Jewish reporters or writers from Palestine.

The New Testament is arranged in such a manner that we find Mathew as the first composer of the Gospel. According to the present scholarship, however, Mark was the first one to write the biography of Jesus Christ. Both Mathew and Luke have absorbed a substantial part of the Gospel of Mark. Mark has been placed second in the sequence while Luke is the third. After Luke we find the Gospel of John followed by the Acts of Apostles ascribed to Luke. After the Acts we find 14 letters of St. Paul which form a substantial part of the New Testament. Although the redactors have placed St. Paul at No. 6 in the sequence but in order of time and importance the epistles rank first in the New Testament. According to the scholars, Thessalonians 1 and 2 written in 51 A.D. are the earliest writings of St. Paul preceding all other writings in the New Testament. Hebrews though of a doubtful origin has been assigned year 67 A.D. and placed the last of all in the sequence. Since the Gospels have been written during the period 70 to 110, therefore the earliest writings of St. Paul precede the Gospels by 19 to 59 years. No wonder that the Gospels have depended entirely on the theology of St. Paul. We therefore find no contribution of the Synoptic Gospels to develop the new theology. They have differed from the faith and theology of the Old Testament only where St. Paul had taken the lead. Like faithful followers, however they have made full efforts to historicize in Jesus the concepts propounded by St. Paul. St. John though a devout follower of St. Paul has made further advancements to supplement, to complete and to remove the loopholes in the writings of St. Paul. We therefore find that all diversions from the faith of the prophets from Moses to Jesus find its origin in St. Paul. He was the first person to introduce Trinity without naming it. He was the promoter of the idea of son of God for Jesus and the divinity of the Holy Spirit. The concept of resurrection i.e. rising of Jesus from death in the glorified position was the contribution of St. Paul. Similarly he was the first propounder of the doctrine of Sin and Death as believed by the Christians. It was St. Paul who placed the blame of infected nature of entire mankind due to the so-

called Original Sin of Adam. He introduced the idea that sin and death were introduced to all mankind through one man i.e. Adam. Similarly that, mankind will be saved with the saving sacrifice of one man i.e. Jesus Christ. He is the introducer of the idea of new covenant and the abrogation of the law of the Lord. This shows that almost all theology of the earliest Christianity was the contribution of St. Paul with hardly anything from others.

Almost all the difference of Christianity from the traditions of Judaism was therefore due to the influence of St. Paul. The idea of resurrection, the 'Son of God', 'Savior of Mankind', salvation through faith alone and the divinity of the Holy Spirit as well as Jesus himself all emanate from the epistles of St. Paul. The Gospel of John however is the only exception which instead of following St. Paul serves as a supplement as well as a complement not only to substantiate the theology of St. Paul but paved a way for its culmination into the Nicean faith in about 325 A.D.

There being no other records, the gospels ascribed to St. Mark, Mathew, Luke and John are the main extant sources of information about the person, the life, the teachings and the mission of Jesus Christ. Besides the Gospels we find scanty historical writings about him. Although nothing can be said with any certainty about the place of his birth yet according to the Gospels he was born at Bethlehem in Judea. The Christians work out his date of birth about 6 A.D. Michael Grant however says that:-

About the date of Jesus' birth there are equally perplexing problems. The belief that he was born in A.D. 1 only came into existence in the sixth century A.D. when a monk from south Russia living in Italy, Dionysius Exiguus, made a mathematical miscalculation. His birth-date should be reassigned to 6 or 5 or 4 B.C. though some prefer 11 or 7.<sup>185</sup>

According to the massive agreement of the scholars the four Gospels were written in Greek during the period 70 to 110 A.D. i.e. about 40 to 80 years after the death of Jesus

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<sup>185</sup> *JESUS, An. Historian's Review of the Gospels*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1977), p. 71

Christ. The identity of the persons composing the Gospels is not known to us. These Gospels were ascribed to Mark, Mathew, Luke and John in the second half of the second century i.e. perhaps in 180 A.D. It is however certain that none of the composers of the gospels was either from Galilee or Judea nor anyone of them was a disciple or apostle of Jesus. This means that none of them was an eye witness of the events pertaining to life of Jesus Christ nor had they any first hand information about healings, preachings or teachings of Jesus Christ. We can only presume that the evangelists might have before them certain evidence oral or written received from Judea or Galilee yet for reasons best known to them they have preferred not to disclose their sources to us. The first three Gospels i.e. the Gospels ascribed to Mathew, Mark and Luke differ substantially from each other regarding their narrative of events parables and details of the life, teachings, miracles and the events pertaining to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Anyhow being almost synonymous in their theology they are termed as Synoptic Gospels. Although, we shall discuss each of the Gospels in detail subsequently yet it shall suffice for the moment to make a passing reference especially pertaining to the circumstances culminating in the crucifixion of Jesus:

## **BRIEF INTRODUCTION OF GOSPELS**

### **Mathew**

Mathew wrote his Gospel in between 80-90 A.D. perhaps at Ephesus. Some scholars think that it was originally written in Aramaic but nothing is certain about it. Jesus of Mathew is the promised savior, the one through whom God fulfilled His promises He made to His people in the Old Testament. He has made extensive use of prophecies in the Old Testament and has shown Jesus as fulfillment of the same. Main part of his Gospel has been devoted to the Parables, the miracles and teachings especially the Sermon on the Mount. He also refers to Jesus as son of David (20:31) and

describes his triumphant entry into Jerusalem in detail. A substantial part of his Gospel has been devoted to the events pertaining to the last week in Jerusalem culminating in crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

## Mark

Mark starts his Gospel with the words "*This is the Good News about Jesus Christ, the Son of God*". He therefore refers to healings, teachings, parables and miracles of Jesus performed in Galilee and other parts of Palestine. He too refers to the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem and his activities in the temple.<sup>186</sup>

## Luke

Luke was perhaps the only writer of the Gospel who was not a Jew. He too describes Jesus as promised savior of Israel and also savior of all mankind. His Gospel is a good news to the poor whom Jesus assures that 'kingdom of God is yours' (6:20-26). Like John the Baptist Jesus too advises the **people to turn away from their sins** (13:3). Luke too has the reference about triumphant approach of Jesus in Jerusalem (19:38).

## John

The fourth gospel ascribed to John is far apart from the Synoptic Gospels in respect of theology, matters of faith as well as the authority of Jesus Christ. His theology is not based on any certified information regarding the preaching of faith of Jesus Christ. Instead of throwing light on the life and person of Jesus, he describes him as eternal word of God preexistent with the Almighty who became man. He has the specific purpose to project Jesus as the promised savior of mankind and son of God. By identifying word of God with Jesus, he makes him God. Not satisfied with the said appellation, he also resorts to present Jesus as Lamb of God (1:29). Like others, he also refers to the miracles of healing and showing his authority over the forces of nature.

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<sup>186</sup> Mar 11:9-10, 19:45-47.

John too makes a reference to the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. He says:

**12.** The next day the large crowd that had come to the Passover Festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem.

**13.** So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting, "Praise God! God bless him who comes in the name of the Lord! God bless the King of Israel!" **14.** Jesus found a donkey and rode on it, just as the scripture says, **15.**

**"Do not be afraid, city of Zion! Here comes your king, riding on a young donkey."**

He makes people say look whole world is following him. According to him, many authorities of the temple believed in Jesus though they kept the same secret from others.

It is however on record that much before the composition of the Gospels there existed certain communities in different parts of the Roman Empire who believed in Jesus as a reformer, a prophet and a messiah of the Israelites. Important among examples were the so called Christian communities at Antioch and Rome which stood annihilated by Nero by blaming them about setting Rome at fire in about 64 A.D. Shortly after the said bestiality Nero committed suicide and after three or four Emperors succeeding one after the other within a year, Vespasian became the Emperor of Rome. Since Judea was in revolt therefore Titus his son led the invasion against Judea in 70 A.D. The temple and the city stood burnt and destroyed by Titus while all the Jewish community stood massacred or dispersed from Judea. In all probability none of the Gospels was written till after the elimination of the Jewish community from Rome and devastation of Judea in 70 A.D. All the four Gospels were written in Greek by Greek speaking Christians who composed the biographies of Jesus Christ sitting far away from Palestine. They were fully aware of the Roman animosity and contempt for the Jews. The memory of the utter destruction of the Jewish homeland and the community at Jerusalem was fresh in their mind. They also knew full well the age long hatred and bitter feelings of the Jews against the Romans. To preach

new faith in the name of a Jewish prophet was not at all feasible in the Hellenized world. In addition to this the composers of the Gospels being subjects of the Roman Empire did not enjoy any liberty to narrate the bare facts about the mission, the person, the teachings and the events leading to the crucifixion of Jesus by the Romans. They also could not dare to record the events in their proper context. Roman rule had been the harshest and the severest as compared to the rule of Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus and even Alexander the Great. It was not therefore feasible for the Evangelists to risk their lives by narrating the facts in any manner that could annoy their masters. While composing the Gospels, therefore, the writers had to keep in mind the overall interest of the Romans and also the taste of the people in the Hellenized world. On one hand they needed to reassure the Romans that their theology was favorable to the Roman Rule, while on the other they had to record the events keeping in view the specific purpose of attracting more and more people to the new theology. For this purpose they had to keep in view the taste and requirements of the new community. It was therefore expedient for Evangelists to present the person and the missionary activities of Jesus in a dramatic manner to arouse interest of people in the new theology. They also needed to add special attractions such as easy salvation, eternal life and holiness without any burden of law which was unbearable even for the Jews. The Evangelists therefore resorted to emending, interpreting and even creating the events to characterize Jesus in such a manner that many prophecies of the Old Testament stood historicized in him. This is the reason that we find repetition of the words such as "*this happened in order to make the scripture come true*" (John 19:24c). Anyhow such attempts of the evangelists allude to invention or creation of different situations showing Jesus as fulfillment of most of the prophecies of the Old notwithstanding the fact that the context of those prophecies did not allow their application to Jesus while most of those prophecies had already fulfilled at their proper time in the past.

It is also pertinent to note that the Evangelists were Greek speaking subjects of the Roman Empire who composed their Gospel under the obvious influence of the epistles of St. Paul which being a diversion from Judaism were in harmony with the pagan cults of the Hellenists. Romans despised the Jews to such an extent that they and their religion had become intolerable for them. Similarly the Jews considered the Romans and the Greeks as worst enemies of Israel. In such circumstances, the Evangelists could hardly proclaim that '**Jesus has been born a Jew and a Jew he always remained**'. They, however, tried their best to avoid mention of Jesus as a genuine member of the Jewish community or as the last prophet of Israel. Jesus of the Gospels therefore has been disfranchised from his Jewish heritage and a divine figure having no concern with the monotheistic faith and religious traditions of the Israelites.

All the four Gospels have effectively defended the Romans and have absolved them from their involvement in the act of crucifixion. The Evangelists show Pontius Pilate as a stooge who crucified Jesus Christ unwillingly and under compulsion from the priesthood and the masses of the Jews at Jerusalem. The Roman centurion and others seem to be convinced of the innocence as well as the divinity of Jesus. The narrative of the crucifixion depicts it as the exclusive concern of the Jews who mischievously insisted for the execution of Jesus while the Romans being maimed by them seem to be innocent in the matter. Hence Romans were not to be blamed. There is ample evidence on the record about missionary activities of Jesus collecting great crowds around himself throughout Galilee, Peraea, Tyre, Samaria and Judea. His triumphant entry into Jerusalem and his turning the tables of the money exchangers and also driving away the traders in the animals and the birds must have been in the knowledge of the Romans who continued to watch all affairs in and around the temple at Jerusalem. This along with the evidence from the Jewish priests and others might have convinced him that Jesus was in fact guilty of the seditious designs. He therefore

sentenced him to crucifixion by notifying him as '**King of Jews**' which meant nothing but a rebel against the emperor and the Roman Rule. In spite of all this the evangelists by their charismatic writings not only absolve Pontius Pilate as the tyrant responsible for torturous and ignoble crucifixion of Jesus but almost a saint who abhorred unjustified punishments to the Jews. The Evangelists therefore show him washing his hands saying:

**24.** I'm not responsible for the death of this man, this is your doing. **25.** The whole crowd answered, "Let the responsibility for his death fall on us and on our children!".<sup>187</sup>

The Evangelists as such absolve Pontius Pilate and place the entire responsibility for the death of Jesus Christ on the Jews.

During last two thousand years since devastation of Judea and persecution as well as deaths of millions of the Jews they failed to find anyone to wash their hands or even to mourn for them. All credit for crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus as the son of God and savior of mankind goes to the conquerors i.e. Romans and the Evangelists being subjects of Rome. Not only Pontius Pilate stood acquitted of the charges to torture and crucify Jesus but the apologists have assigned such an innocence and nobility to him that he became an object of worship being canonized as a Saint in certain parts of the Christian world. Sufferings of Jesus Christ stand converted in to exaltation as proclaimed by the Christians being fulfillment of the promises of God in the Old Testament. In his life therefore they see God become flesh and crucified Jesus being glorified in resurrection as 'Son of God' and 'Savior of Mankind'. As against this Gospels accuse the Jews for the Deicide and they have not been able to expiate for the same in spite of repeated persecution and loss of the life of millions of Jews at the hands of the Christians since the death of Jesus Christ. The facts stated above reduce the reliability of the Gospels being presented as biased account of the events pertaining to the person, the mission and the crucifixion of Jesus.

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<sup>187</sup> Mat 27:24-25 GNB.

According to Gospels main purpose of Jesus' teachings was realization of the kingdom of God on earth.

Jesus was neither a revolutionary nor an insurrectionist. Factually he led no agitation against the Romans.



## JESUS & JOHN IN THE QUR'AN

As discussed earlier, the Qur'an is a book of revelations from the Lord in the shape of speech, message or directions from the Lord. The word of God addressed to the prophet or to the human beings, believers as well as disbelievers. The book was revealed gradually to the Prophet ﷺ over a term of about 23 years through Jibrael (The Holy Spirit روح القدس) and the revelation was always in the form of specific words dictated to the Holy Prophet ﷺ. Words and contents of the Qur'an have undergone no change since the death of the Prophet till today. The Qur'an, therefore, exists as a final and immutable word of God throughout the world in its pristine purity in words language, diction and arrangement of the verses and the chapters since the time of the Prophet ﷺ. The book is unique in its form because it is neither prose nor poetry nor there exists any other form of writing according to which we could categorize the holy writ. It is also unique in its category and style. The discourses, instructions and messages in the Qur'an are therefore arranged for the purpose of teaching, preaching, worshiping and memorizing by heart the word of the Almighty. It is therefore futile to evaluate Qur'an in the pattern and scheme of any other book, textbook, treatise or other forms of literature. Being the word of God it is impossible for man to transmit exactly either the import or eloquence of the Qur'an into any other language of the world. It is impossible to replace the Qur'an with any of its translations simply because there can be nothing exactly equivalent to the word of the Almighty. Muslims, therefore, prefer to quote the text along with its meanings. Hence, it must be kept in mind that wherever we find only the translation, we cannot equate it with the original Arabic words of the Holy writ. Translation therefore serves only the need for a broad understanding of the subject matter and in no way can it replace the revealed word of God or to compete with the text in the Arabic. Anyhow, in view of the fact that we presently need only to

convey the contents or the meanings of the certain verses about John and Jesus to our readers understanding only English language, therefore, it shall suffice to give only the translation of the verses relevant to our discussion here. For research in the matter it will be advisable to refer only to the original words of Qur'an and also the comments of some eminent scholars of Islam. In view of this we are reproducing only the English translation the verses pertaining to the birth, life, mission, works and the death of John and Jesus by arranging the verses broadly in chronological order.

## **Dedication of *Marium* and Jesus**

Although the Bible is silent about the circumstances leading to the birth and early life of Mary the mother of Jesus yet the Qur'an reveals an essential aspect of the same as under. God says:-

"Surely Allah chose Adam and Nuh and the descendants of Ibrahim and **the descendants of Imrān** above the nations.

**33.** Offspring one of the other; and Allah is Hearing, Knowing.

**34.** When **a woman of Imrān** (Mother of Mary) said: My Lord! surely I vow to Thee what is in my womb, to be devoted (to Thy service); accept therefore from me, surely Thou art the Hearing, the Knowing.<sup>188</sup>

We observe here that the Qur'an has provided no further details except that the mother of *Marium* makes a vow before the Lord in the words quoted above. Since the vow was only from the mother of *Marium* therefore it is conceivable that the father of Mary had already died. Alternatively, it can also be assumed that mother of *Marium* was expecting the child in her old age after a long period of distress and dismay. In such a case the background of her birth can be imagined in the likeness of the birth of Samson and/or the birth of Prophet Samuel. About Samson the Old Testament tells us:-

**2.** And there was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren, and bare not. **3.** And the angel of the LORD appeared unto

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<sup>188</sup> Al-Qur'an, 3:33-35.

the woman, and said unto her, Behold now, thou art barren, and bearest not: but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son. **4.** Now therefore beware, I pray thee, and drink not wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing: **5.** For, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head: for the **child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb: and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.**<sup>189</sup>

About the miraculous birth of Samuel we find Hannah the mother of Samuel saying:-

And she vowed a vow, and said, O LORD of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid **a man child, then I will give him unto the LORD all the days of his life,** and there shall no razor come upon his head.<sup>190</sup>

Samuel was perhaps the first among the Israelites to be designated as a prophet since the death of Moses. It was Hannah, the mother of Samuel, who implored the Lord for a son in her old age and she dedicated him to the Lord as per her vow. Hannah was perhaps the role model before the mother of Mary who in the like circumstances and in an utter dismay was expecting the child and she vowed to dedicate him to the Lord. Her frustration knew no bounds when she discovered that the child was not a male but a female. The Qur'an therefore makes reference to the same anxiety of the mother of Mary in the following words:-

So when she brought forth, she said: My Lord! Surely I have brought it forth a female-- and Allah knew best what she brought forth-- and the male is not like the female, and I have named it Marium, and **I commend her and her offspring into Thy protection from the accursed Shaitan.**<sup>191</sup>

We observe that as per the vow of the mother of Marium, **both Marium and her would-be offspring stood dedicated to the Lord** as quoted above. Since Mary was

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<sup>189</sup> Jdg 13:2.

<sup>190</sup> 1Sa 1:11.

<sup>191</sup> Al-Qur'an, 3:36.

not a male but a female, therefore, it posed a problem not only for the mother of Mary but also for the priests as to who should be assigned the charge of Marium. The Qur'an, therefore, reveals that:-

"This is of the announcements relating to the unseen which We reveal to you; and you were not with them when they cast their pens (to decide) which of them should have Marium in his charge, and you were not with them when they contended one with another.<sup>192</sup>

According to the Qur'an Zechariah was a prophet but the Gospels describe him merely as a priest. He was a very old man without any child till then. According to the New Testament Zechariah was the husband of Elizabeth a kinswoman or a cousin of Marium. According to Islamic traditions of history Elizabeth was a sister of the mother of Marium due to which Zechariah was uncle (خالو) of Marium. In comparison to other priests at the temple therefore Zechariah could be the only natural guardian of Marium and the same stood affirmed even by the draw of lot:-

So her Lord accepted her with a good acceptance and made her grow up a good growing, and gave her into the charge of Zakariya; whenever Zakariya entered the sanctuary to (see) her, he found with her food. He said: O Marium! whence comes this to you? She said: It is from Allah. Surely Allah gives to whom He pleases without measure.<sup>193</sup>

## **Zechariah Prays for a Son**

Zechariah and his wife were childless and they had grown very old. They therefore had passed far beyond the age where one could pray for or expect a child. He being the guardian of *Marium* in the temple used to visit her chamber occasionally. He was wonder-struck to see food and perhaps fresh fruit out of season with Marium. On inquiry from Zechariah, Marium told him that it was from the Lord who can grant without measure anything to whom he wills. Zechariah therefore felt extremely excited to see the miraculous provision of food and out of season fruit with

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<sup>192</sup> Al-Qur'an, 3:44.

<sup>193</sup> Al-Qur'an, 3:37.

Mary. It was therefore a clear-cut sign to him that nothing was impossible for the Lord. Zechariah therefore implored the Lord in an ecstatic mode and with fresh fervor for the mercy of the Lord to grant him an inheritor in the old age. The Qur'an narrates the same in the following words: -

A mention of the mercy of your Lord to His servant Zakariya. (19:2) When he called upon his Lord in a low voice, (19:3) He said: My Lord! surely my bones are weakened and my head flares with hoariness, and, **my Lord! I have never been unsuccessful in my prayer to Thee:** (19:4) And surely I fear my cousins after me, and my wife is barren, therefore grant me from Thyself an heir, (19:5) Who should inherit me and inherit from the children of Yaqoub, and make him, my Lord, one in whom Thou art well pleased.<sup>194</sup>

"There did Zakariya pray to his Lord; he said: My Lord! grant me from Thee good offspring; surely Thou art the Hearer of prayer.<sup>195</sup>

## God's Response to Zechariah

Then the angels called to him as he stood praying in the sanctuary: That Allah gives you the good news of Yahya verifying a Word from Allah, and honorable and chaste and a prophet from among the good ones. (3:39) He said: My Lord! when shall there be a son (born) to me, and old age has already come upon me, and my wife is barren? He said: even thus does Allah what He pleases.<sup>196</sup>

"O Zakariya! surely We give you good news of a boy whose name shall be Yahya (John): We have given that name to no one before (him). (19:7) He said: O my Lord! when shall I have a son, and my wife is barren, and I myself have reached indeed the extreme degree of old age?" (19:8) He said: So shall it be, your Lord says: It is easy to Me, and indeed I created you before, when you were nothing. (19:9) He said: My Lord! give me a sign. He said: Your sign is that **you will not be able to speak to the people three nights** while in sound health. (19:10) So he went forth to his people from his place of worship, then he made known to them that they

<sup>194</sup> Al-Qur'an, 19:6.

<sup>195</sup> Al-Qur'an, 38:3.

<sup>196</sup> Al-Qur'an, 3:40.

should glorify (Allah) morning and evening".<sup>197</sup>

"He said: My Lord! appoint a sign for me. Said He: Your sign is that you should not speak to men for three days except by signs; and remember your Lord much and glorify Him in the evening and the morning." (3:41)

## Birth of John & Blessings of God on Him

And Zakariya, when he cried to his Lord: O my Lord leave me not alone; and Thou art the best of inheritors. (21:89) So We responded to him and gave him Yahya and made his wife fit for him; surely they used to hasten, one with another In deeds of goodness and to call upon Us, hoping and fearing and they were humble before Us".<sup>198</sup>

"O Yahya! take hold of the Book with strength, and **We granted him wisdom while yet a child** (19:12) And tenderness from Us and purity, and **he was one who guarded (against evil)**, (19:13) And dutiful to his parents, and he was not insolent, disobedient. (19:14) And peace on him on the day he was born, and on the day he dies, and on the day he is raised to life.<sup>199</sup>

## Glad Tidings to Marium

"And when the angels said: O Marium! surely Allah has chosen you and purified you and **chosen you above the women of the world.** (3:42) O Marium! keep obedience to your Lord and humble yourself, and bow down with those who bow. (3:43) When the angels said: O Marium, surely Allah gives you good news **with a Word from Him** (of one) whose name is the '**Messiah, Isa son of Marium**, worthy of regard in this world and the hereafter and of those who are made near (to Allah). (3:45) And he shall speak to the people when in the cradle and when of old age, and (he shall be) one of the good ones. (3:46) She said: My Lord! when shall there be a son (born) to me, and man has not touched me? He said: Even so, Allah creates what He pleases; when **He has decreed a matter, He only says to it, Be, and it is.**<sup>200</sup>

"So she took a veil (to screen herself) from them; then We sent to her Our spirit, and there appeared to her a well-made

<sup>197</sup> Al-Qur'an, 19:11.

<sup>198</sup> Al-Qur'an, 21:90.

<sup>199</sup> Al-Qur'an, 19:15.

<sup>200</sup> Al-Qur'an, 3:47

man. (19:17) She said: Surely I fly for refuge from you to the Beneficent Allah, if you are one guarding (against evil). (19:18) He said: I am only a messenger of your Lord: That I will give you a pure boy. (19:19) She said: When shall I have a boy and no mortal has yet touched me, nor have I been unchaste? (19:20) He said: Even so; your Lord says: It is easy to Me: and that We may make him a sign to men and a mercy from Us, and it is a matter which has been decreed." (19:21)

"And **Mariam, the daughter of Imrān**, who guarded her chastity, so We breathed into her of Our inspiration and she accepted the truth of the words of her Lord and His books, and she was of, the obedient ones. (66:12)

## Miraculous Birth of Jesus

So she conceived him; then withdrew herself with him to a remote place. (19:22)

And the throes (of childbirth) compelled her to betake herself to the trunk of a palm tree.

She said: Oh, would that I had died before this, and had been a thing quite forgotten!<sup>201</sup>

Then (the child) called out to her from beneath her: Grieve not, surely your Lord has made a stream to flow beneath you; (19:24) And shake towards you the trunk of the palm tree, it will drop on you fresh ripe dates: (19:25) So eat and drink and refresh the eye. Then if you see any mortal, say: Surely I have vowed a fast to the Beneficent Allah, so I shall not speak to any man today.<sup>202</sup>

Since both John and Jesus were predestined to be the last prophets and warners for the Israelites, therefore, not only their births were miraculous but they were gifted with special qualities right from their infancy. John was given wisdom, book and purity i.e. sinlessness while yet a child. (19:12). Similarly, Jesus, too, had a miraculous birth and he spoke right from the cradle. (19:29). He, therefore, proclaimed his prophethood as well as signs from the Lord.

<sup>201</sup> Al-Qur'an, 19:23.

<sup>202</sup> Al-Qur'an, 19:26.

Consequently soon after his birth he spoke to his people as detailed below.

## Miracles of Jesus

And she came to her people with him, carrying him (with her). They said: O Marium! surely you have done a strange thing. (19:27) **O sister of Haroun!** your father was not a bad man, nor, was your mother an unchaste woman. (19:28) But she pointed to him. They said: How should we speak to one who was **a child in the cradle?** (19:29) He said: Surely I am a servant of Allah; He has given me the Book and made me a prophet; (19:30) And He has made me blessed wherever I may be, and He has enjoined on me prayer and poor-rate (zakat) so long as I live; (19:31) And dutiful to my mother, and He has not made me insolent, unblest; (19:32) And peace on me on the day I was born, and on the day I die, and on the day I am raised to life." 19:33

Incidentally the verse Al-Qur'an 19:32 quoted above dispels the arrogance alleged to Jesus towards his mother. e.g. **"Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come"**. (Joh 2:4). It is however strange to note that 'hour of Jesus' comes as soon as he insults his mother and he turns the water into wine. The verse of Qur'an also refutes the accusation of disavowal by Jesus of his mother and his brothers as asserted by Mathew and Mark:

**33.** And he answered them, saying, Who is my mother, or my brethren? **34.** And he looked round about on them which sat about him, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren!<sup>203</sup>

Mathew conveys the same in slightly different words:

**48.** But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? **49.** And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren.<sup>204</sup>

The arrogance attributed to Jesus by the evangelists contrasts with the usual polite, and courteous treatment of

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<sup>203</sup> Mar 3:33-34 GNB.

<sup>204</sup> Mat 12:48-49.

the prophets with their parents or other members of their families.

It was perhaps due to the enthusiasm of the evangelists that they depict Jesus as a heavenly figure having no concern with his mother and his brothers.

Since Jesus was the last Warner of the Lord sent to the Israelites therefore to attract the attention of the whole nation the Lord God made him a sign even before or soon after his birth. Mary the mother of Jesus belonged to the priestly family of Aaron. She stood dedicated to the temple and was well known for her chastity and devotion to the Lord. Whenever Zachariah her guardian visited her he found with her food from Heaven. Her conception in a miraculous way had aroused suspicion as well as excitement among the masses. Birth of Jesus therefore alarmed the whole community which subjected her to severe taunts and interrogation by the people. When Jesus spoke from the cradle and proclaimed himself as a messenger bestowed with a book from the Lord, the Israelites could not deny his prophethood and also his conception and birth in a miraculous way. Aside from this he also foretold the people about the miracles he was likely to perform at a proper time.<sup>205</sup>

As such the miraculous births of John and Jesus had affirmed their prophethood even from their childhood so that the people of the Israelite might believe them and also in their prophecies about the end of the era of prophethood in Israel. Both these prophet did not marry nor left any offspring which also alludes to the end of the long line of the prophets in the said nation. The Qur'an therefore quotes Jesus as under:-

And (appoint him) a messenger to the Children of Israel, (with this message): "I have come to you, with a Sign from your Lord, in that I make for you out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, and breathe into it, and it becomes a bird by Allah's leave: And I heal those born blind, and the lepers, and I

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<sup>205</sup> Al-Qur'an 19:30-33.

quicken the dead, by Allah's leave; and I declare to you what ye eat, and what ye store in your houses. Surely therein is a Sign for you if ye did believe.<sup>206</sup>

## Preaching of Jesus

Here are the words of God about preaching of Jesus.

Then We made Our messengers to follow in their footsteps, and We sent Isa son of Marium afterwards, and We gave him the Injeel, and We put in the hearts of those who followed him kindness and mercy; and (as for) monkery, they innovated it-- We did not prescribe it to them-- only to seek Allah's pleasure, but they did not observe it with its due observance; so We gave to **those of them who believed their reward**, and most of them are transgressors.<sup>207</sup>

In the verse quoted above we find that Jesus or his Lord had not given any instruction to the Israelites to become Monks. It is said that the same was innovated by some of them but ultimately such people failed to observe it. The Qur'an clarifies another point i.e. there always had been certain rightly guided believers in prophet Isa. It is to those people that the Lord gave the bountiful reward. Anyhow the confession of Jesus is continued as under.

"And when Isa came with clear arguments he said: I have come to you indeed with wisdom, and that I may make clear to you part of what you differ in; so be careful of (your duty to) Allah and obey me.<sup>208</sup>

And surely **Allah is my Lord and your Lord**, therefore, serve Him; this is the right path.<sup>209</sup>

But parties from among them disagreed with each other, so woe to those who disbelieve, because of presence on a great day.<sup>210</sup>

"O you who believe! be helpers (in the cause) of Allah, as Isa son of Marium said to (his) disciples: Who are my helpers in the cause of Allah? The disciples said: We are helpers (in the cause) of Allah. So, a party of the children of Israel believed

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<sup>206</sup> Al-Qur'an 3:49 Yusuf Ali.

<sup>207</sup> Al-Qur'an 57:27.

<sup>208</sup> Al-Qur'an 43:63.

<sup>209</sup> Al-Qur'an 19:36.

<sup>210</sup> Al-Qur'an 19:37.

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and another party disbelieved; then We aided those who believed against their enemy, and they became uppermost.<sup>211</sup>

It is interesting to note that normally the Qur'an bluntly denies the misconceptions regarding faith in the Lord. As such polytheism or worship of any other God besides the Lord is refuted emphatically. In other matters the Qur'an avoids debate or clear-cut refutation of the assertions in the Bible. In all such cases the Qur'an simply narrates the truth to correct the record without highlighting the mistake or the misconception. So far as the case of the earliest companions of Jesus is concerned the Qur'an has vindicated the faithfulness of the genuine followers of Jesus to rectify the disinformation spread by the evangelists. It has therefore reestablished the true position of the apostles and the disciples of Jesus to set aside the incorrect reports aimed at undermining the credibility and faith of the companions and the followers of Jesus. This was a small community of the true followers of Jesus who alone had the opportunity to see, hear and accompany Jesus during his stay or his travels throughout Palestine. All these people happened to be the Jewish followers observing Law of Moses while in the company of Jesus and subsequently up to the desolation of the city and land of Judea during years 70-74. To establish his own authority over others St. Paul resorted to impair the image of the genuine companions of Jesus by one way or the other. St. Paul never had a chance to see or hear Jesus Christ during his life. He was the self-proclaimed apostle of Jesus towards the gentiles who pretended having seen Jesus in a vision. To assert his superiority over others therefore St. Paul invented the doctrine that Jesus had two types of lives i.e. one inferior life in flesh in the pattern of all other mortals.

The second life suggested by St. Paul was of exaltation in spirit as the life of the risen Lord (God). According to the said interpretation the life of Jesus in spirit was much more superior to his life in flesh. This was the ground on which St. Paul denounced the apostles and Jewish followers of

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<sup>211</sup> Al-Qur'an 61:14.

Jesus during his sojourn on earth. This meant that all apostles and followers who saw Jesus only in flesh enjoyed much less authority as compared to St. Paul who had received his Gospel directly from the heavenly Christ through spiritual contact i.e. vision.

## **Denunciation of the Family And Apostles Of Jesus**

The composers of the Gospels therefore tried to vindicate the assertions of Paul especially the contemptuous remarks about the most distinguished apostles of Jesus Christ like Peter, Barnabas, James Thomas and others. As such wherever St. Paul had developed a new theme or passed any remarks about the genuine apostles and companions of Jesus Christ during his life the evangelists found themselves duty-bound to fabricate some event or to introduce some saying from Christ to uphold the contention of St. Paul. They therefore came forward to create historical evidence, reasoning or some exposition to substantiate the verdict of St Paul.

We observe that since Paul had condemned Peter on his face<sup>212</sup> therefore it was necessary to spoil his image as the first and the foremost Apostle of Jesus. Factually St. Paul and his followers left no stones unturned to discredit the apostles chosen by Jesus Christ. Similarly they denounce all the true disciples, the family and the entire Jewish race to whom he belonged. The fountain head for all such degradation was St. Paul who boastfully claimed his superiority over the genuine apostles of Jesus. He pretends to be more authoritative than those "superlative apostles" in the following words:-

**"For though I should boast somewhat more of our authority,** which the Lord hath given us for edification, and not for your destruction, I should not be ashamed.<sup>213</sup>

St. Paul hits directly at Peter, James and also perhaps Barnabas when he says:-

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<sup>212</sup> Gal 2:11.

<sup>213</sup> 2Co 10:8.

"For I suppose I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles".<sup>214</sup>

St. Paul even disregards the words of Jesus Christ narrated by the genuine apostles and his followers. He not only condemns those Gospels but arrogantly calls them as false apostles deceitful workers like Satan:-

**12.** But what I do, that I will do, that I may cut off occasion from them which desire occasion; that wherein they glory, they may be found even as we. **13. For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. 14.** And no marvel; **for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.**<sup>215</sup>

"I am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled me: for I ought to have been commended of you: for **in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles**, though I be nothing."<sup>216</sup>

"Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, which to you-ward is not weak, but is mighty in you."<sup>217</sup>

The arrogance and authoritative stance of Paul knows no limits. He therefore is not content just by denouncing the apostles as false and deceitful like Satan but even an angel from heaven shall be accursed if he dares to differ with the preachings of St. Paul which he names as his Gospel.

**8.** But though we, or **an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. 9.** As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. **10.** For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.<sup>218</sup>

St. Peter the chief of the apostles has been condemned by St. Paul in the following words:-

**11.** But when **Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood**

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<sup>214</sup> 2Co 11:5.

<sup>215</sup> 2Co 11:12-14.

<sup>216</sup> 2Co 12:11.

<sup>217</sup> 2Co 13:3.

<sup>218</sup> Gal 1:8-10.

**him to the face, because he was to be blamed. 12.** For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. **13.** And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; **insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation.**<sup>219</sup>

We therefore observe that St. Paul has asserted his authority much beyond other apostles, the chiefest of the apostles and even above the angels from heaven who stand accursed by him. His remarks denouncing the apostles were therefore the cause and source for the evangelists to invent stories such as prediction about Peter's denial (Mar 14:27-31, Matt 26:31-35, Luke 22:31-34, 13:36-38) and its fulfillment (Mark 14:66-72, Matt 26:69:75 Luke 22:56-62, John 18:15-18, 25-27). The same was the necessity to show Peter at variance with Jesus while he rebukes the Christ and the Christ rebukes him. Reference to Barnabas in an insulting manner, story of doubting Thomas and incapability of the companions of Jesus to understand either the parables or actual teachings of Jesus was also aimed at spoiling the image of the Jewish followers of Jesus. The evangelists therefore show Jesus paying no respect to his mother. John says "for neither did his brethren believe in him" (Jn 7:5). "they said he is besides himself" (Mark 3:21). When the mother and brethren of Jesus come to see him he said:- "who is my mother and who are my brothers."<sup>220</sup>

Verses 7:1-10 of John allude to some enmity between Jesus and his brothers while Jesus himself resorts to an untruth to conceal his visit to Jerusalem from his brothers but soon after that he proceeds to Jerusalem from a different way. Scribes said:- "he is possessed by the devil himself". His mind was unsettled and he needed to be put under restraint. The accusations against the Jews and the earliest Jewish followers of Jesus Christ did not end with the deaths of St. Paul and the evangelists. Ever-since the composition of the New Testament, the tale of lack of faith

<sup>219</sup> Gal 2:11-13.

<sup>220</sup> Mark 3:31-34.

and devotion of the original followers of Jesus Christ has been repeated again and again. Even in the modern times we find scholars like Professor Momerie saying that:

His immediate disciples were always misunderstanding him and his work wanting him to call down fire from heaven, wanting him to declare himself king of Jews; wanting to sit on his right hand and on his left hand in his kingdom, wanting him to show them the Father, to make God visible to their bodily eyes; wanting him to do and wanting to do themselves, anything and every thing that was incompatible with his great plan. This was how they treated him until the end. When that came, they all forsook him and fled.<sup>221</sup>

James who is said to have appointed by Jesus himself as the leader of his followers at Jerusalem does not find mention either in the believers or as an apostle of Christ. In spite of all this he was the most venerated successor of Jesus who continued to lead the Jewish Christians at Jerusalem for about 32 years since the death/ascension of Jesus Christ to his death in 62 A.C. Same had been in the case for Simon, another brother of Jesus.

Judah Iscariot the traitor has not been referred simply as an apostle but he is referred to as 'one of the twelve' which has a subtle hint that others too were like him. This perhaps is a conscious effort to denounce all the apostles of Jesus Christ. Similarly the woman pouring very costly ointment on the head of Jesus arouses indignation of almost all the disciples against him.

**7.** There came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head, as he sat at meat. **8.** But when his disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste? **9.** For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor. **10.** When Jesus understood it, he said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me. **11.** For ye have the poor always with you; but me

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<sup>221</sup> Ameer Ali, *The spirit of Islam*, (Karachi: Pakistan Publishing House, Victoria Road, reprinted 1976), p. 31.

ye have not always.<sup>222</sup>

It has also been alleged that the Jews not only mocked him, scorned him and rejected him but also they attempted to crucify him. Hence it is said:

“He came to his own country, but his own people did not receive him”.<sup>223</sup>

Even the disciples always led him down while the apostles are depicted ignoring the instructions of the master again and again such as Mark 14:37, 40, 41. It has also been alleged that at the time of the arrest of Jesus all his companions (حواریین) fled away deserting their master to be arrested and crucified by the Jews and the Romans.

The culminating point among various charges against the apostles chosen by Jesus himself was the alleged deception by Judas Iscariot. About him we shall discuss in detail somewhere else.

The evangelists went so far in their bias against the Jewish followers of Jesus that they show all of them deserting the Christ. No one of them joins or even follows the procession of Jesus to the Sanhedrin, towards Pontius Pilate, to Herod or to Pontius Pilate again. None of them stands with him as a witness to prove his innocence. Lastly not a single one of them did ever confess that Jesus was the son of God or savior of mankind as professed by St. Paul and his followers. We also do not find any kind remarks from the true companions of Jesus Christ nor any remorse or mourning by them. Masses of the Jews have been shown pressurizing Pontius Pilate to crucify Jesus. The Christians therefore hold the entire Jewish race responsible and accountable for the Deicide. All such allegations against the genuine apostles of Jesus seem to be incompatible with his own certification about his apostles and followers. We therefore find the following:-

**27.** For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God. **28.** I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I

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<sup>222</sup> Mat 26:7-11.

<sup>223</sup> Joh 1:11.

leave the world, and go to the Father. **29.** His disciples said unto him, Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb. **30.** Now are we sure that thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask thee: by this we believe that thou camest forth from God.<sup>224</sup>

**6.** I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word. **7.** Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee. **8.** For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me. **9.** I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine. **10.** And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them. **11.** And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are. **12.** While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled. **13.** And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves. **14.** I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. **15.** I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. **16.** They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. **17.** Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. **18.** As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. **19.** And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.<sup>225</sup>

**24** Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world. **25.** O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me. **26.** And I have declared unto them

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<sup>224</sup> Joh 16:27-30 KJV.

<sup>225</sup> Joh 17:6-19 KJV.

thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.<sup>226</sup>

This shows that Jesus was extremely concerned about his apostles, disciples and followers. He certified their faithfulness and prayed for the love of God for them as they loved Jesus and Jesus loved them. Jesus, therefore, affirms their faithfulness and proper understanding of his discourses. It is, however, in pursuance of the doctrine of St. Paul that the evangelists charge the Jewish followers of Jesus with various flimsy accusations.

As a contrast to the Jews we find Pontius Pilate as the first person to show kindness or to sympathize with Jesus. Similarly the first person to acknowledge him as son of God was the Roman centurion, and or other Roman soldiers under him.<sup>227</sup>

All the afore-mentioned allegations against the family of Jesus Christ are entirely baseless. The Qur'an traces back the piety and devotion of Jesus' family starting from the mother of Marium and linking her to the family of Imran which has been shown among the persons and families of the most exalted prophets of the Lord such as Adam and Nuh and the descendants of Ibrahim and **the descendants of Imran.**<sup>228</sup> As such how could Mary forget the provision of food from the Lord and miraculous conception of Jesus and even various miracles afterwards? In view of this there was no possibility that Mary or brothers of Jesus could disbelieve in him or call him her children if any could neither be ignorant about the mission of Jesus Christ nor about the truth of his prophethood. We therefore cannot reconcile the remarks of John that "not even his brothers believed in him" (John 7:5). It is also strange to note that verses Jn 7:1-10 allude to some enmity between Jesus and his brothers while Jesus resorts to an untruth to conceal his visit to Jerusalem from his brothers. Elsewhere we find the brothers of Jesus referring to him as a lunatic.

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<sup>226</sup> Joh 17:24-26 KJV.

<sup>227</sup> Mat 27:54, Mar 15:39.

<sup>228</sup> Al-Qur'an 3:33-35.

The Qur'an therefore subtly dispels all false allegations against the companions of Jesus by quoting confessions of the disciples and the followers of Jesus who said that "*we are helpers in the cause of Allah*". This means that none of them was either faithless or deceiver as alleged by the Gospels. As a witness to their faithfulness Allah says:-

And when I revealed to the disciples, saying, Believe in Me and My messenger, they said: We believe and bear witness that we submit (ourselves).<sup>229</sup>

The Qur'an has emphatically denied the crucifixion or death of Jesus Christ at the hands of the Jews or the Romans and it asserts forcefully that the matter was made dubious to them.<sup>230</sup> Since it was not Jesus who was crucified therefore it absolves Judas Iscariot from the blemish while the Qur'an in the verses quoted above upholds the fidelity of the companions of Jesus without any exception. Muslims therefore find no credibility in stigmatizing Judas Iscariot as a traitor. He was perhaps a zealot who might have learnt from Joseph of Arimathea, from Nicodemus or from some other source close to the high priests that they had chalked out a plan to kill Jesus. Being a devotee he might have prepared a counter plan to save Jesus by presenting himself as a martyr in the stead of Jesus. Since it was during the night that the men of the high-priests went to arrest Jesus therefore they perhaps stood deceived seeing two persons kissing each other. Possibly it was Judah Iscariot who in response to the quarry of the soldiers replied "*I am he*" and since they did not recognize Jesus therefore they took away Judah Iscariot and crucified him. According to the Gospels none of the Apostles or the followers of Jesus followed the soldiers nor did they witness the crucifixion of Jesus. It is therefore difficult to say with any certainty that it was Jesus who was crucified. Similarly no final verdict on the conduct of Judas can be passed whether he was a traitor or the first martyr among the Christians.

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<sup>229</sup> Al-Qur'an 5:111.

<sup>230</sup> Al-Qur'an 4:157.

The assertion that "*We aided those who believed against their enemy, and they became uppermost*"<sup>231</sup> further verifies the devotion and predominance over the Jews who opposed Jesus.

This alludes to the fact that Jesus, Marium and all the followers of Jesus were saved by the Lord as per his traditions of the Old that whenever there arose a challenging position the Lord always saved the Prophet along with his followers. Apparently this is what happened even in case of Jesus. Subsequently it seems that in between his alleged crucifixion and devastation of Judea and Jerusalem during 70-73 the followers of Jesus had become uppermost in the society. Even after the said period the true believers of Jesus Christ in the lands around Palestine continued to enjoy primacy over the Jews who had denied him. Subsequently most of the Christians in the East converted to Islam. As such the Muslim believers in Jesus Christ became uppermost in the region. This shows that companions or the earliest followers of Jesus were not the type of people as depicted by the writings of St. Paul and the Evangelists composing their Gospels under the influence of St. Paul.

## The New Covenant

St. Paul's assertion about the new covenant through Jesus is without a substance in it. Factually instead of introducing any new covenant, Jesus only affirmed the message of the Lord as per Torah (Book of the Law of Moses) before him. The only new revelation was the good news about the advent of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ (Ahmad)

And remember, Jesus, the son of Mary, said: "O Children of Israel! I am the messenger of Allah (sent) to you, confirming the Law (which came) before me, and **giving Glad Tidings of a Messenger to come after me, whose name shall be Ahmad.**" But when he came to them with Clear Signs, they said, "this is evident sorcery!".<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> Al-Qur'an 61:14.

<sup>232</sup> Al-Qur'an 61:6.

About whom Moses had already predicted in the following words:

**5.** The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, **of thy brethren**, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken; **16.** According to all that thou desiredst of the LORD thy God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not. **17.** And the LORD said unto me, They have well spoken that which they have spoken. **18.** I will raise them up a **Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee**, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. **19.** And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him.<sup>233</sup>

Although we plan to discuss the matter in greater detail subsequently yet for the time being we may point out that God never raised any prophet like Moses in the Israelites.<sup>234</sup> Even John the Baptist denied being '*that prophet*'. (John 1:21). As against clear cut denial of John recorded by the evangelists, they try to provide a roundabout reply of Jesus to the messengers sent by John to know whether Jesus was 'the one' who was going to come or should we expect someone else? The words of Mathew are as under:-

**2.** Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, **3.** And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? **4.** Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: **5.** The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.<sup>235</sup>

We feel that the evangelists have tactfully avoided quoting the actual reply of Jesus in the negative. Finding no reply in the affirmative from Jesus the evangelists have mentioned the miracles of Jesus as if the same were the ultimate proof

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<sup>233</sup> Deu 18:15-19.

<sup>234</sup> Deu 34:10.

<sup>235</sup> Mat 11:2-5.

that Jesus was 'the promised one'. There is, however, no doubt that Jesus never himself claimed that he was 'the promised prophet'. Even the prophecy of Moses did not mention the miracles otherwise prophets like Elijah and Elisha perhaps had better chances to prove themselves the promised prophet simply because they openly challenged the king and the crowds and after defeating hundreds of the false prophets Elijah got them killed. As against this Jesus neither claimed himself to be the promised prophet nor did he perform any miracles when required to do so. It is only the eagerness of St. Paul and his followers to prove Jesus as son of God, God, the word, the lamb, the way, the ultimate savior, the promised prophet, and hundreds of other appellations just by their own words or one-sided interpretation of certain verses in the Old Testament. We have reasons to believe that Jesus knew full well that the promised prophet was awaited in some future time and according to the Qur'an the only good news he ever gave during his life was about the advent of the promised one as quoted above.

Mohammad ﷺ was, therefore, the Prophet promised by the Lord. Jesus clearly foretold about him:

"Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you."<sup>236</sup>

Our Christian friends know full-well that the Paracletus or *the comforter* refers to no one other than the prophet promised by the Lord as foretold by Moses. The said prophet had to be a man and not a spirit or a Holy Ghost simply because the Holy Ghost was not like Moses nor the Lord God has ever sent the spirits to guide the human beings. The verdict of the Lord as given below is final on the subject.

**94.** What kept men back from belief when Guidance came to them, was nothing but this: they said, "Has Allah sent a man (like us) to be (His) Messenger?" **95.** Say, "If there were settled, on earth, angels walking about in peace and quiet, We should certainly have sent them down from the heavens an

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<sup>236</sup> Joh 16:7 KJV.

angel for a messenger.<sup>237</sup>

This shows that Jesus was not a God because the Lord God does not depute a God to guide the Mortals nor He sends a prophet to them. The promised Prophet was therefore Muhammad ﷺ who revived the faith of Moses and the prophets in its pristine purity and certified all the truth contained in the Bible. He also washed off all the baseless blemish against the prophets including Jesus himself.

The Christian followers of St. Paul have however tried to give each and every credit to Jesus including the application of the prophecy pertaining to the 'Promised Prophet' in spite of the fact that Jesus was a prophet like all other prophets of Israel and had no conspicuous likeness with Moses. We shall therefore give our reasons to show that Jesus was unlike Moses in many ways while Mohammad ﷺ and Moses had many points of likeness in them. It is however of utmost importance to note that the Prophet to be raised was not promised from the Israelites but from among their '*brethren*'. As such the advent of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ from the Ishmaelite i.e. the '*brethren*' of the Israelites was exactly in accordance with the promise of the Lord. The said verdict of the lord was not acceptable either to the Jews or to the Christians. Although the Lord God had picked up the Jews from the depth of darkness and humiliation yet subsequently the Lord God favored them in such a way that no other nation was favored as the Jews. Alas! Instead of being thankful to the Lord and bowing in humble submission to the will of the Lord they openly flouted the authority of the Almighty and rejected the promised prophet simply because it was against the wishes of the Israelites. Although the entire chapter Deu 9 pertains to the wickedness and vanity of Israel yet the following specifically stresses the same.

"Ye have been rebellious against the LORD from the day that I knew you".<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> Al-Qur'an 17:94-95.

<sup>238</sup> Deu 9:24.

It was also said that:

“For I know thy rebellion, and thy stiff neck: behold, while I am yet alive with you this day, ye have been rebellious against the LORD; and how much more after my death?<sup>239</sup>

Throughout their history they had never been obedient to the voice of the Lord. Hence, instead of obeying the Lord they tried to conceal or change the word of God according to their own desires.

The stiff-necked and stubborn nation, therefore, rejected Prophet Muhammad ﷺ knowing full well that he was the promised one and no other prophet like Moses had ever been raised among the Israelites. Even Jesus warned the Israelites that the kingdom of God shall be taken away from you:

Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.<sup>240</sup>

## Food From Heaven (*The Last Supper*)

The Qur'an reveals that:

“And when I revealed to the disciples, saying, Believe in Me and My messenger, **they said: We believe and bear witness that we submit (ourselves).**<sup>241</sup>

“When the disciples said: O Isa son of Marium! **will your Lord consent to send down to us food from heaven?** He said: Be careful of (your duty to) Allah if you are believers.<sup>242</sup>

They said: We desire that we should eat of it and that our hearts should be at rest, and that we may know that you have indeed spoken the truth to us and that we may be of the witnesses to it.<sup>243</sup>

“Isa the son of Marium said: O Allah, our Lord! send down to us food from heaven **which should be to us an ever-recurring happiness, to the first of us and to the last of us,** and a sign from Thee, and grant us means of subsistence,

<sup>239</sup> Deu 31:27.

<sup>240</sup> Mat 21:43.

<sup>241</sup> Al-Qur'an 5:111.

<sup>242</sup> Al-Qur'an 5:112

<sup>243</sup> Al-Qur'an 5:113.

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and Thou art the best of the Providers.<sup>244</sup>

"Allah said: Surely I will send it down to you, but whoever shall disbelieve afterwards from among you, surely I will chastise him with a chastisement with which I will not chastise, anyone among the nations.<sup>245</sup>

Although the Gospels have devoted much space to the narrative of the *Last Supper* according to their own taste yet we observe that in view of shortage of funds with Jesus and his companions it was almost improbable that they could have managed to pay for the paschal lamb. Even otherwise due to financial constraints we see no plausibility for any sumptuous dinner or a peaceful gathering of Jesus and the apostles in the face of turmoil and dangerous circumstances prevailing around them. Most probably towards the end of the day Jesus and his disciples were perhaps tired and desperate, hiding somewhere near Jerusalem having nothing to eat. They were perhaps under severe stress and strain feeling utterly disgusted. In such circumstances it was but natural for them to ask Jesus for a prayer to the Lord to give them food from heaven. They needed this not only to invigorate their bodies but also to fortify their faith and to revive their spirits. Although the Qur'an has said nothing specifically about it yet it hints that the request was granted to them. The revelation in the Qur'an therefore has an edge over the assertion about the Last Supper in the New Testament. It elevates the position of Jesus and his followers by a special favor from the Lord. Moreover it may be noted that the narrative of the Qur'an also fits with the circumstances and the needs of the apostles aside from strengthening their faith. The Qur'an therefore exalts Jesus and disciples much beyond the relevant description of supper which besides its incongruity with the circumstances seems to be a mere concoction only to condemn Judas Iscariot and to change the established tradition of the Passover of the Israelites into a Eucharist in the pattern of the rite of worship of Zeus.

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<sup>244</sup> Al-Qur'an 5:114.

<sup>245</sup> Al-Qur'an 5:115.

## Crucifixion of Jesus is Doubtful

The verses of the Qur'an pertaining to the crucifixion of Jesus are quoted below:

"And their saying: Surely we have killed the Messiah, Isa son of Marium, the messenger of Allah; **and they did not kill him nor did they crucify him, but it appeared to them so** (like Isa) and most surely those who differ therein are only in a doubt about it; they have no knowledge respecting it, but only follow a conjecture, **and they killed him not for sure.**<sup>246</sup>

"Nay! Allah took him up to Himself; and Allah is Mighty, Wise."<sup>247</sup>

## Death, ascension or 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming of Jesus

"And We made the son of Marium and his mother a sign, and **We gave them a shelter on a lofty ground having meadows and springs.**"<sup>248</sup>

"And when Allah said: O Isa, **I am going to terminate the period of your stay (on earth)** and cause you to ascend unto Me and purify you of those who disbelieve and make those who follow you above those who disbelieve to the day of resurrection; then to Me shall be your return, so I will decide between you concerning that in which you differed."<sup>249</sup>

"The Messiah, son of Marium is but a messenger; messengers before him have indeed passed away; and his mother was a truthful woman; they both used to eat food. See how We make the communications clear to them, then behold, how they are turned away."<sup>250</sup>

## The Lord Shall Call Jesus to Explain His Position

When Allah will say: O Isa son of Marium! Remember My favor on you and on your mother, when I strengthened you with the holy Spirit, you spoke to the people in the cradle and when of old age, and when I taught you the Book and the wisdom and

<sup>246</sup> Al-Qur'an 4:157.

<sup>247</sup> Al-Qur'an 4:158.

<sup>248</sup> Al-Qur'an 23:50.

<sup>249</sup> Al-Qur'an 3:55.

<sup>250</sup> Al-Qur'an 5:75.

the Taurat and the Injeel; and when you determined out of clay a thing like the form of a bird by My permission, then you breathed into it and it became a bird by My permission, and you healed the blind and the leprous by My permission; and when you brought forth the dead by My permission; and when I withheld the children of Israel from you when you came to them with clear arguments, but those who disbelieved among them said: This is nothing but clear enchantment.<sup>251</sup>

And when Allah will say: O Isa son of Marium! did you say to men, Take me and my mother for two gods besides Allah he will say: Glory be to Thee, it did not befit me that I should say what I had no right to (say); if I had said it, Thou wouldst indeed have known it; Thou knowest what is in my mind, and I do not know what is in Thy mind, surely Thou art the great Knower of the unseen things. I did not say to them aught save what Thou didst enjoin me with: That serve Allah, my Lord and your Lord, and I was a witness of them so long as I was among them, but when Thou didst cause me to die, Thou wert the watcher over them, and Thou art witness of all things.<sup>252</sup>

**He was naught but a servant** on whom We bestowed favor, and We made him an example for the children of Israel.<sup>253</sup>

Jesus came to verify what was before him of the Torah:

And most certainly We gave Musa the Book and We sent messengers after him one after another; and We gave Isa, the son of Marium, clear arguments and strengthened him with the holy spirit, What! whenever then a messenger came to you with that which your souls did not desire, you were insolent so you called some liars and some you slew.<sup>254</sup>

"And We sent after them in their footsteps Isa, son of Marium, verifying what was before him of the Taurat and We gave him the Injeel in which was guidance and light, and verifying what was before it of Taurat and a guidance and an admonition for those who guard (against evil)<sup>255</sup>

"And Zakariya and Yahya and Isa and Ilyas; every one was of

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<sup>251</sup> Al-Qur'an 5:110.

<sup>252</sup> Al-Qur'an 5:116-117.

<sup>253</sup> Al-Qur'an 43:59.

<sup>254</sup> Al-Qur'an 2:87.

<sup>255</sup> Al-Qur'an 5:46.

the good.<sup>256</sup>

### **Messiah was not son of God but son of Marium:**

And the Jews say: Uzair is the son of Allah; and the Christians say: The Messiah is the son of Allah; these are the words of their mouths; they imitate the saying of those who disbelieved before; may Allah destroy them; how they are turned away!<sup>257</sup>

"O followers of the Book! do not exceed the limits in your religion, and do not speak (lies) against Allah, but (speak) the truth; the Messiah, Isa son of Marium is only a messenger of Allah and His Word which He communicated to Marium and a spirit from Him; believe therefore in Allah and His messengers, and say not, Three. Desist, it is better for you; Allah is only one Allah; far be It from His glory that He should have a son, whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth is His, and Allah is sufficient for a Protector.<sup>258</sup>

Certainly they disbelieve who say: Surely, Allah-- He is the Messiah, son of Marium. Say: Who then could control anything as against Allah when He wished to destroy the Messiah son of Marium and his mother and all those on the earth? And Allah's is the kingdom of the heavens and the earth and what is between them; He creates what He pleases; and Allah has power over all things,<sup>259</sup>

The Messiah, son of Marium is but a messenger; messengers before him have indeed passed away; and his mother was a truthful woman; they both used to eat food. See how We make the communications clear to them, then behold, how they are turned away.<sup>260</sup>

It beseems not Allah that He should take to Himself a ! son, glory to be Him; when He has decreed a matter He only says to it "Be," and it is.<sup>261</sup>

"Surely the likeness of Isa is with Allah as the likeness of Adam; He created him from dust, then said to him, Be, and he was.<sup>262</sup>

Such is Isa, son of Marium; (this is) the saying of truth about

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<sup>256</sup> Al-Qur'an 6:85.

<sup>257</sup> Al-Qur'an 9:30.

<sup>258</sup> Al-Qur'an 4:171.

<sup>259</sup> Al-Qur'an 5:17.

<sup>260</sup> Al-Qur'an 5:75.

<sup>261</sup> Al-Qur'an 19:35.

<sup>262</sup> Al-Qur'an 3:59.

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which they dispute.<sup>263</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> Al-Qur'an 19:34.



## FINAL DESTRUCTION OF JEWISH STATE & COMMUNITY

Ever since the death of Judas the Galilean zealots were propagating the doctrine of armed resistance to the Roman oppressors. Their anxiety to restore the Jewish kingdom did not allow them to wait any longer for the advent of the messiah to get rid of the accursed heathen rulers. Hateful gentiles and despicable heathen images could no longer be endured by them. Ideas were ripening in them that they must follow the noble example of Matathias and his sons known as Maccabees to win freedom at the point of sword. Death of Tiberius (37 AD) was the first sigh of relief for the Jews. Anyhow the relief was short lived because Caligula became the emperor and proved worse than Tiberius. He was succeeded by his uncle Claudius (41-54 A.D.) who was then 50 years of age. Claudius was inexperienced, weak, timid and irresolute person who was incapable to improve the state of affairs in his empire. Anyhow the only good thing done by him was the appointment of King Agrippa (41 A.D.) as ruler of the territories formerly ruled by Herod the Great. Agrippa ruled Judea with such mildness and moderation that when he died three years later most of the people were stricken with grief and they mourned his death. Cuspius Fadus (44-46 A.D.) became procurator of Judea. In 47 A.D. Claudius appointed Tiberius Alexander the Nephew of Philo as procurator of Judea. Soon after his appointment, two sons of Judas the Galilean led the revolt of the zealots. Both were captured and crucified by Alexander.

Alexander was subsequently succeeded by Cumanus (A.D. 48-52) which happened to be a period of extreme disorder. There was an ever rising tide of popular unrest:

Robbers, brigands, assassins, the malefactor who murdered for hire as well as the honest patriot burning to be free, were all equally welcomed by the Zealots. ... It was not so much the hardness of Romans rule as the fact that they were being

ruled by aliens which was driving the Jews into rebellion.<sup>264</sup>

The position of law and order continued to grow from bad to worse during the procurator-ship of Felix (52-60 A.D.) Villages were sacked and burned down, houses were plundered while peacefully disposed people stood extremely terrorized. People were feverishly looking for someone to deliver them from the chaos. Rumors of supernatural acts would draw multitudes of people ready to follow any deluded visionary proclaiming some regulation or performing some miracle as a sign from heaven. Circumstances were such that anybody equipped with the abilities to mislead the people could immediately find a credulous multitude eager to support him.

Claudius was poisoned at the instigation of his wife Agrippina in 54 A.D. while she succeeded to proclaim Nero (54-68 A.D.) as successor of Claudius. Nero happened to be the most notorious emperor of Rome. Who burnt the city of Rome and blaming the Christians, he subjected a large number of the sect to most torturous death. In about 60 A.D. Nero replaced Felix by Porcius Festus who died in 62 A.D. and Albinus (62-64 A.D.) was appointed as new procurator in place of Albinus. Since it took some time before arrival of Albinus therefore Anus the high-priest assumed supreme authority during the period which was exercised with extreme barbarity. Aside from ruthless and unjustified mass murder by him, he also sentenced James to be stoned. This James known as 'James the just' was a brother of Jesus Christ, who had the honor of serving as an undisputed leader of the Jewish-Christians at Jerusalem for about 32 years since the crucifixion of Jesus Christ in 30 A.D.

We know that the Temple at Jerusalem was the primary religious symbol of Judaism. As such it has always been the house of prayer and school of instruction preserving unity of the Jewish community. The city and the temple at Jerusalem were therefore the core of the Jews throughout the world. Although the Jews detested Roman supremacy

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<sup>264</sup> W. D. Morrison *The Story of The Nations, Jews under Roman Rule*, p. 163.

over them anywhere in the world yet their domination of the temple and religious rites at Jerusalem were intolerable for them. Crucifixion of Jesus and elimination of many other Jewish leaders in between 30 to 66 A.D. had escalated their hatred against the Romans. To them it was an intolerable sacrilege that gentile outcasts may continue to pollute the Holy Land and exercise their supremacy over the Race selected by Jehovah as His own people from all the families of the earth. This was the period when Jews eagerly awaiting the inauguration of the messianic kingdom with its centre at Jerusalem which according to their expectations was likely to burst suddenly upon the world. Expectations had risen to feverish heights. Zealots even believed that messianic Era would be hastened when the Lord saw His people making heroic efforts and sacrificing their lives to deliver themselves. They had the conviction that they will soon succeed to establish the Jewish kingdom extending to entire habitable globe to endure forever. W. D. Morrison refers to the same in the following words:

Among the Jews of the first century religion and the sentiments of nationality were indissolubly interfused; it was not a mere religious sect that the Romans were permitting to exist and associate for purposes of devotion; it was likewise the members of a nation which at that particular time cherished exalted visions of one day dominating the world. It is indubitable that these visions of worldwide empire for the Jewish race were frequently fanned by the teachings of the synagogue. Some of the Jewish insurrections which burst out in several parts of the empire with such uncontrollable and sanguinary fury are to be attributed to the abuse by the Jews of the right of association.<sup>265</sup>

In view of the above the Romans were fully aware of the fact that the ideas, the customs and religious law of the Jews were likely to compel them for independence from the Rule of the gentiles. Domination by the foreigners was therefore intolerable for them and under the given

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<sup>265</sup> W. D. Morrison *The Story of The Nations, Jews under Roman Rule*, p. 386.

circumstances they had no recourse except to overthrow the occupying forces. It is said that:

The Romans learned from experience that the Jews were indifferent subjects that they created a community within the community; that they lived in a state of perpetual friction with their non-Jewish fellow-citizens, and were ready to take up arms against the empire itself in defense of ideas and customs which had little or no meaning to the practical Roman mind.<sup>266</sup>

To avoid insurrection therefore the Romans continued to tighten their grip over the Jews while on the other hand the Jews were looking for the promised messiah to deliver them from the Roman Rule.

Albinus was succeeded by Jessius Florus (64-66 A.D.) who happened to be the last of the procurators. There was an utter disorder throughout Judea and Galilee while people were being plundered and cities being reduced to desolation throughout the region. All this chaos led to increasing distrust of the Romans in the Jews. They therefore started tightening their control over the temple and the city of Jerusalem with increasing vigilance about the Jews seething with fury. All this however failed to avoid the impending catastrophe described in the following.

This mounting anger broke into open revolt in May 66, when the **procurator, Florus, demanded 17 talents from the temple treasury.** The Roman garrison was overrun. Jerusalem fell into the hands of the rebels. The prohibition of the daily sacrifices to the emperor meant an open declaration of war against the Roman world empire. Tiny Jerusalem threw down the gauntlet at Rome's feet and challenged the great Emporium Romanum.

This was the signal for the whole country. Rebellion flared up everywhere. Florus was no longer in command of the situation. The governor of the province of Syria, C. Cestius Gallus, marched to the rescue with one legion and a large number of auxiliary troops, but was forced to retire with heavy losses. The rebels controlled the country.<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>266</sup> *ibid* p. 389.

<sup>267</sup> Werner Keller, *The Bible as History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Revised Edition, p. 407.

First outbreak of revolt took place in Caesarea which stood flared by the act of Florus who had taken 17 talents of gold from the temple treasury.

To quell the revolt Florus killed a number of Jews while many eminent persons belonging to nobility were crucified. As retaliation for his act the zealots succeeded to gain possession of the temple mount confining the Roman Garrison to the fortress of Antonia. Meanwhile Menahem another son of Judas the Galilean succeeded to capture the fortress of Masadah where he put the Roman garrison to the sword. Daily sacrifices for the emperor stood discontinued. Eleazar the son of Annanias the high priest made himself head of the war party in Jerusalem. Zealots were actively propagating that Palestine must be purified from the Heathen for which they did not hesitate to put to death such non-Jewish population who were unable to defend themselves. Consequently in September A.D. 66 Sestius Galus with a force of 24000 Roman soldiers and at least an equal number of auxiliaries arrived at Jerusalem to quell the revolt. He however had to abandon the siege due to the obstinate resistance by the Jews. It is said that his retreat was most disastrous for the army under him while the Jews aside from killing more than 6000 of the soldiers succeeded to usurp his war material, baggage, military chest etc.

This was the situation when Nero commanded general Titus Flavius Vespasianus who had earned great name as a soldier during his fight in Germany and Briton. He was assisted with Titus his son. With an army exceeding 80000 soldiers they started from Galilee where the villages around the lake were the first to undergo the bloody butchery while 6000 of the Jews were captured and sent as slaves to build the Corinth canal. They were there when Nero committed suicide and civil war broke out in Rome. Within a year, three emperors rose to the throne and lost their lives as well as the throne in succession to each other. Ultimately Vespasianus was designated as the Emperor and he left for Rome leaving Titus in Galilee to quell the insurrection. In

the spring of 70 A.D. Titus appeared before the walls of Jerusalem at the time when the holy city was swarming with pilgrims who had come from far and wide to celebrate the Passover.

## **Besiege of Jerusalem by Titus**

We are told that it was the month of April of year 70 c.e. The Roman army numbered fully 1,00,000 men as it advanced on from Caesarea towards Jerusalem. They were having great engines, the rams, the ballistae and the catapults. The super importance of the assault on Jerusalem can be assessed from the fact that Romans had never before made more formidable display of power against any of their opponents. The entire army consisted of soldiers who were well trained in their preparatory exercises. It is said that:

The Romans proceeded with all their tried methods of siege warfare. Their preparations were constantly being sorely hampered by the determined efforts of the defenders to upset them. Apart from wild sorties, no sooner were their wooden ramparts in position than they went up in flames. When darkness set in, the Roman camp was surrounded by swarms of figures who had crept out of their hiding places or through subterranean passages or over the walls.<sup>268</sup>

The Historians like Josephus and others try to apologize for Titus by showing that he perhaps intended to save the temple. In view of the overall circumstances prevailing during the period, we feel that the historians like Josephus have resorted to retrojection merely to appease Romans, their masters. Their apologies can therefore be ranked with the apologies offered by the composers of the synoptic Gospels who show innocence of Pontius Pilate regarding the crucifixion of Jesus.

A proud description of their achievement we find in the following:

Vast as are the multitudes put to the sword and swept into captivity, the well-established character of ancient warfare makes the account of all the ruthless slaughter and

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<sup>268</sup> Werner Keller, *The Bible as History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Revised Edition, p. 410.

devastation entirely creditable. **The whole land was nearly depopulated, and the Jews have henceforth been wanderers without a country.**<sup>269</sup>

No doubt it was a great triumph for the Romans, while the greatest tragedy for the Jews. As a description of the splendid and cruel triumph of Titus, we find:-

Vespasian welcomed with joy his victorious son, and on the appointed day the emperor and the conqueror, coming from the temple of Isis, appear before the multitudes of Rome, crowned with laurel, and wearing the ancient purple habits belonging to their family. Seated in ivory chairs upon a tribunal before the cloisters, without arms, and clad in silk instead of steel, the stern soldiers viewed the streaming pageant, and received the acclamations of the legions, marching past with all possible military pomp.<sup>270</sup>

The triumph was celebrated in such a manner that it had no parallel in the past. A few excerpts from *The Story of the Nations* may elucidate the point.

A crowd of captives, whose costly adornment concealed the cruel wounds received in battle, and the emaciation produced by hunger in dungeons bore along the objects, once the possession of their countrymen, but now the booty of the victors. Great structures rolled forward three or four stories in height, draped and spread with rich carpets and set off with precious metals. Upon these were presented with all possible vividness portraits of war. **There was to be seen a happy country laid waste, entire squadrons slain, the flights of fugitives, the seizure of captives.** High walls were represented overthrown by machines, upon which an army poured itself through the breach, then followed the supplications of enemies, no longer able to defend themselves, the conflagration of temples, the casting down of houses upon their owners. **Rivers, also after they came out of a large and melancholy desert, ran down not into a land cultivated, nor as drink for men or cattle, but through a land still on fire on every side,** --- for the Jews related that such a thing they had undergone during the war."

The same author continues to add that:-

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<sup>269</sup> Werner Keller, *The Bible as History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Revised Edition, p. 121

<sup>270</sup> *ibid* p. 121-122.

Then, after a great number of ships and other spoils had passed, was borne along the booty from the temple. These were the golden table of many talents weight, the golden, seven-branched candle stick, the sacred tablets inscribed with the laws of the Jews. The broken-hearted Hebrews were forced to behold these objects, heretofore preserved in their innermost shrines, and possessed of the utmost sanctity, now exposed to the gaze and touch of the gentile rabble. Rome, however, exulted in the humiliation. Images of victory were carried aloft, following the trophies. When the long train had slowly moved past, Vespasian, Titus, and his brother Domitian, descending from their lofty seats, proceeded after, while all the people shouted for joy. **Vespasian built a shrine to peace, in which were laid the golden vessels and instruments from the Jewish temple: the tables of the law and the purple veils of the Holy Place were deposited in the royal palace itself.** Conspicuous in the great procession had moved the captive Simon, son of Gioras, the brave defender of Jerusalem. No trace of magnanimity appeared in the treatment accorded to him. A halter was set upon his head, --- by way of mockery a train of seven hundred of the handsomest captives attended him, --- as he proceeded he was tormented by his conductors. **He was slain at last at the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus.**<sup>#271</sup>

The utter destruction of the temple being the central sanctuary of the Jews while Jerusalem 'the city of God' stood reduced to rubbles with massacre of about 1.1 million 'people of God' was perhaps the proudest achievement of the Romans to be remembered for all times to come. As such mere celebration of the triumph would not suffice to demonstrate the grandeur and the magnitude of the triumph. They therefore decided to erect a magnificent symbol of their success as an everlasting commemoration of the genocide and devastation of city as well as the land consecrated and sanctified in the name of Jehovah the God of Moses, Jesus, the prophets and of everything in the Universe. J. K Hosmer writing about the same sometime after year 1885 says that:

The arch of Titus still spans the ancient Sacra Via at Rome, at the top of the Velian ridge. Its beautiful proportions make it one of the most interesting monuments of the eternal city. Its

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<sup>271</sup> Ibid p 122-124.

noble sculptures, unfortunately, have not been well preserved, but still within the vault can be traced the seven branched candlestick, the golden table, and the **sorrowful train of Jews, as the captives bear the desecrated relics of the destroyed temple beneath the cruel eyes of their conquerors**. So, after eighteen hundred years, the solemn marble commemorates a tragedy than which calamity was never more complete!<sup>272</sup>

This shows that the first priority of the Romans as well as the Christians had always been the triumph of the Hellenists over others. Moral ethics, humanity, religion or justice were meant only for propaganda while the real target has always been material benefits and supremacy of Greeks or Romans or their successors in the world. So far as veneration of God is concerned it always had a secondary importance for them. It had no real value as compared to the superiority of the Greeks and the Romans over other nations in the world. If they really believed Jesus as son of God they would have venerated God the father also. In such an event, instead of rejoicing over the destruction of the house of the Lord with all the people worshiping him they would have repented again and again and expiated their sin by reconstruction of the said house seeking forgiveness from the Lord.

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<sup>272</sup> ibid p 124.



# PASSION AND NO PASSION

## **Servile Wars**

The first servile war of 135 B.C. lasted for about three years in Sicily. It was led by one Eunus a former slave **claiming to be a prophet** while a Cilician named 'Cleon' was his military general. At one time these chiefs of slaves had gathered around them about 200,000 slaves including perhaps women and children. After some initial victories against the Romans, the slave rebels stood utterly defeated and destroyed by the Roman armies.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> servile war (104-100 B.C.) too was an unsuccessful slave uprising against the Romans on the island of Sicily. Salvius was the leader of this rebellion. He amassed thousands of trained and equipped slaves including two thousand cavalry and 20 thousand infantry along with many men under the command of 'Athenian' from the west of Sicily. The rebellion was quelled by Roman consul Manius Aquilas after great and prolonged effort.

We have no detailed description of the cruelties inflicted by the Romans on the slaves in the first and second servile wars yet we find that the 3<sup>rd</sup> Servile War preserves perhaps the most horrifying demonstration of Roman brutality with the slaves fighting against them. The tragic incident occurred on Via Appia called the 'Queen of Roads' which was constructed in between Rome and Appia in about 312 B.C.

Spartacus (109-71 B.C.) was the most notable leader of the slaves in the third *Servile War*. He was leading the oppressed people fighting for their freedom against slave owning aristocracy of Rome. Spartacus reportedly belonged to nomadic stock of Thrace (present day southwestern Bulgaria, northeastern Greece) He is thought to have been a deserter from Roman army who was sold as a slave to a trainer of gladiators at Capua. Plutarch writes that

**Spartacus's wife, a prophetess of the same tribe** was also enslaved with him. In 73 B.C. he escaped with 70 other gladiators and took refuge on Mount Vesuvius where he was joined by many other slaves increasing their number from 90,000 to 1,20,000 men.

In year 73 B.C. Spartacus and his companions defeated two Roman Armies while in year 72 B.C. they defeated another three armies of Rome. Eventually the Roman Senate sent eight legions i.e. about 40000-50000 of the trained Roman Soldiers led by Marcus Licinius Crassus who succeeded to besiege the renegades and killed a large number of the rebels on the battlefield. Similarly the legions under the command of Ganicus and Caustus separated from the main army killed about 12,300 of the slaves. Meanwhile Pompey's army had returned from Spain and they too intercepted and killed many slaves who were escaping northwards. Eventually Spartacus' forces were routed completely with the vast majority of them being killed on the battlefield. It is believed that Spartacus died on the field but his body could never be found. The story ends in its most tragic part where the 6,000 survivors of slaves stood captured alive by the legions of Crassus who crucified all of them lining all the way from Rome to Capua.

Emperor Hadrian had constructed an Amphitheatre at Santa Maria the real Old Capua. It has been recorded that:

It was near this site that Spartacus, a gladiator-slave, began the slave War in 73 B.C. Marked for death in the arena, he had nothing to lose. He eventually gathered nearly 100,000 runaway slaves and so frightened the Romans establishment that, after killing Spartacus in battle, they set an example that was cruel even for them. Along the Appia, from Capua to Rome, they crucified 6,000 of Spartacus's followers."

Louis S. Glanzman has recorded the heart rending depiction of the barbarity of the Romans vide his painting appearing on Pgs. 726-727 of *National Geographic*, (Washington, June 1981).

The note appearing beneath the painting reads as under:

"Rebellion ended in agony for 6,000 slaves crucified on the

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Appia in 71 B.C. led by the slave-gadiator Spartacus, an army of 100,000 runaways outfought Romans forces for nearly three years. **Legionaries and their slaves strung the captured along the 132-mile route between Rome and Capua--- and left them to rot.**<sup>273</sup>

Isn't it an irony of fate that 2100 years have passed since the incident but with the exception of the depiction given above we find neither a detailed description nor regret or concern of the historians with the greatest tragedy play performed on Via Appia for beautification and commendation of the so-called 'Queen of the Roads'. The tragic display of the gruesome and lamentable naked bodies of the freedom fighters stretched over 6000 crucifixes and left there to rot all along the Road from Rome to Capua found **no Mel Gibson** or anyone else to narrate or display "The Passion" to commemorate the ignoble death awarded to freedom fighters in the most tragic and torturous manner. (Mel Gibson's Film "**The Passion of the Christ**" and the book named "*Mel Gibson's Passion and Philosophy*"<sup>274</sup>

Keeping in view the human aspect of the mass crucifixion stated above one finds that the cruelty of Via Appia far exceeds the cruelty of the "Via Crucis" or the way of the Cross which, aside from the passion has ignited anti-Semitism through political propaganda against the Jews incriminating them as Christ-killers while exculpating the Romans from any indictment.

From the point of view of humanity we find no difference between the victims of the Servile War, the hundreds of thousands of Jews and others killed or crucified by the Greeks and the Romans in the lands conquered by them and the crucifixion of Jesus the Jew and a prophet of Israel crucified by the Romans as a disturber of peace with the death note tied on his forehead reading "The King of Jews". The said note cannot therefore be ignored as an everlasting evidence to the effect that the victims of the servile wars,

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<sup>273</sup> *National Geographic*, (Washington, June 1981), p. 726-727.

<sup>274</sup> Edited by George J. E. Grecia", (Open Court, Chicago and La Salle, Illinois USA 2004.

all the freedom fighters of the Jews and Jesus himself were killed or crucified for the same crime. Since Jesus stood crucified evidently for a crime of political nature therefore the apologies proffered by the synoptic gospels to absolve the Romans of the crime serve only as a smoke screen to hide the true features of the tyrants. Factually, the Romans had subjected millions of oppressed peoples and slaves to torture and death and they never felt ashamed of the same. The crucifixion of Jesus was, however, interpreted as an atonement for their own sins past or present besides the followers of the theology of St. Paul. The Jewish race to which Jesus actually belonged stood condemned for eternal persecution and torment. No notice was taken of the fact that according to his mission, Jesus had been trying to retrieve the lost sheep of the house of Israel till his death. Only the Jews had been the earliest apostles, disciples and companions of Jesus but the Hellenized Christians have always been stigmatizing and persecuting the Jews as the Antichrist.

We also observe that the passion for Jesus is not for a Jew or a prophet who lived and died as a man in Palestine. It is perhaps the tragic death of their God that arouses pity and passion among the Christians being creatures and worshipers of the Christ. Being themselves the successors of Rome they absolve them of the crime by incriminating the Jews and by inflicting various kinds of punishments on them since the conquest of Palestine by Pompey in about 63 B.C. till the recent past.

Human history with perhaps the exception of the Romans can produce no match for large scale torturous deaths which the Republicans engraved over the annals of history as an everlasting legacy of Rome. Although the historians in the West continue to admire the triumph of Rome over helpless human beings who gave their lives fighting for their freedom yet the brutal treatment of the Rome with the oppressed people has no match for its barbarity in the world. No doubt, the display of the dead bodies of 6000 slaves left to rot on cross depicts the dominance of Rome over the world. Cross though the most hateful sign for the

oppressed yet it stands as a symbol of the success of Rome. St. Paul was, therefore, the first theologian to interpret the cross in such a manner that instead of a disgusting sign of torture, curse and ignoble death, it became sanctified to be worshiped as a sign of glory, salvation and life everlasting. In about 313 A.D. with the edict of Constantine toleration was extended to all the followers of different faiths throughout the Roman Empire while the Cross stood venerated and worshiped as a symbol of success and the sign of salvation through Christ.

We also observe that the Hellenized society around the time of Jesus Christ was such that normally they felt no hesitation to adopt or abandon Gods depending upon their expectations of benefits or inflictions from them. Since St. Paul's theology promised extravagant benefits to the converts, including holiness, salvation and life everlasting therefore his followers did not shrink from worshiping the Cross or the crucified figure of Jesus Christ whom the Romans had scourged and crucified in the manner reserved only for punishment of their slaves. The Icon consisting of the Cross and the naked dead body of Jesus therefore became primary object of worship throughout the Roman Empire.

St. Paul had continued to persecute the earliest and true followers of Jesus Christ for many years after his death. Taking a sudden turn thereafter St. Paul started interpreting the events in such a manner that Jesus the victim of Rome failing to avert his ignoble death stood resurrected as God and savior of mankind. Since then both cross and the crucified are being worshiped by the Christian followers of St. Paul.

## **Destruction of Carthage**

Carthage is said to have been founded in 814 B.C. by Phoenician emigrants from Tyre led by mythological princess Dido. After capture of Tyre by the Babylonians in 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Carthage became natural leader of the

Phoenician colonies in North Africa and Spain. Carthage had a prolonged struggle with the Greeks which centered mainly on Sicily. About 540 B.C. the Carthaginians repulsed a Greek attempt to land in Corsica while in 480 B.C. a Carthaginian attempt to conquer the whole of Sicily was defeated by the Greeks in Himera. From middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century to middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. Carthage was engaged in a series of wars with Rome called **Punic Wars**, which eventually ended in complete defeat of Carthage in 146 B.C. The said defeat brought an end to Hannibal's expeditions against Rome. Carthage was plundered and burnt by the Romans while the site stood utterly destroyed and plowed over by the Romans. All human habitation was forbidden for the next 25 years. **Population of Carthage before its destruction by the Romans is said to have numbered over 700,000 which stood either massacred or enslaved.**

In about 122 B.C. the Roman senate entrusted Marcus Fulvius Flaccus with the foundation of a colony on the site of Carthage. Later on, Julius Caesar also sent a number of landless citizens there and in 29 B.C. Augustus made it centre of the Roman Province of Africa. Thereafter it became known as '*Colonia Julia Carthago*' just as Jerusalem after its utter destruction by the Romans and massacre of about 1.1 million Jews in year 70 A.D. by the Army of Tiberius was reconstructed by Hadrian as a Roman city with its new name i.e. *Aelia Capitolina*. (*Encyclopeadea Britannica* and *Hutchinsons* 1996). These instances show at one hand brutality of Rome while on the other their policy to Hellenize the conquered lands by eliminating the original inhabitants and colonizing the same with the Roman citizens. As such destruction of a nation and its capital along with devastation of land has usually been described by the western historians with pride and without any passion narrative for the victims of Rome. Passion narrative, therefore, was reserved only for Jesus Christ to inculcate his own race who continued to be persecuted by the successors of Rome till today.

## Mass Murder & Crucifixion of the Jews

We have already discussed the siege of Jerusalem by Titus. Although he had made good arrangements yet during the nights many people swarmed around the invading forces due to which he had to make further arrangements as detailed below:

To seal off the city hermetically Titus ordered the erection of a circumvallation". Working night and day they constructed a massive high wall of earthwork in a wide circle round Jerusalem, strengthened by thirteen fortified strong points and guarded by a close chain of pickets. If so far it had been possible to smuggle supplies and provisions into the city by night by way of secret paths through tunnels or ditches, the "circumvallation" stopped even this last meager reinforcement.<sup>275</sup>

Even before the final fall of Jerusalem Titus ordered

Titus ordered reprisals to be made against these half starved ghostly figures and against deserters. Anyone caught outside-deserters, raiders or foragers-was to be crucified. **Mercenaries hailed 500 of them every day to crosses just outside the city. Gradually a whole forest of crosses sprang up on the hillsides till the lack of wood called a halt to the frightful practice.**<sup>276</sup>

Tree after tree was sacrificed for crosses, siege ramps, scaling ladders and camp fires. The Romans had come into a flourishing countryside. Now the vineyards had disappeared as had the market gardens, the wealth of fig-trees and olive-trees; even the Mount of Olives no longer provided shade. An unbearable stench hung over the bare and desolate countryside. **The corpses of those who had died of starvation and of those who had died in battle**, thrown over the ramparts by the beleaguered garrison, **were piled beneath the walls by the thousand.** Who had the strength to bury them in the traditional way?<sup>277</sup>

Josephus writes that:

"So the Romans being now become masters of the walls, they

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<sup>275</sup> *The Bible as History*, p. 410-11.

<sup>276</sup> *The Bible as History*, p. 410-11.

<sup>277</sup> *The Bible as History*, p. 410-11.

both placed their engines upon the towers, and made joyful acclamations for the victory they had gained, as having found the end of this war much lighter than its beginning; for when they had gotten upon the last wall, without any bloodshed, they could hardly believe what they found to be true; but seeing nobody to oppose them, they stood in doubt what such an unusual solitude could mean. But when they went in numbers into the lanes of the city, with their swords drawn, they slew those whom they overtook, without mercy, and set fire to the houses whither the Jews were fled, and bunt every soul in them, and laid waste a great many of the rest; and when they were come to the houses to plunder them, they found in them entire families of dead men, and the upper rooms full of dead corpses, that is of such as died by the famine; they then stood in a horror at this sight, and went out without touching anything. But although they had this commiseration for such as were destroyed in that manner, yet had they not the same for those that were still alive, but they ran every one through whom they met with, and obstructed the very lanes with their dead bodies, and made the whole city run down with blood, to such a degree indeed that the fire of many of the houses was quenched with these men's blood. And truly so it happened that though the slayers left off at the evening, yet did the fire greatly prevail in the night; and as all was burning, came that eighth day of the month Gorpheus (Elul), upon Jerusalem; a city that had been liable to so many miseries during this siege, that, had it always enjoyed as much happiness from its first foundation, it would certainly have been the envy of the world. nor did it on any other account so much deserve these sore misfortunes, as by producing such a generation of men as were the occasion of this its overthrow.<sup>278</sup>

Another para from Josephus throws further light about the cruel treatment of Titus with the Jews:

And now, since his soldiers were already quite tired with killing men, and yet there appeared to be a vast multitude still remaining alive, Caesar gave orders that they should kill none but those that were in arms, and opposed them; but should take the rest alive. But, together with those whom they had orders to slay, they slew the aged and the infirm; but for those that were in their flourishing age, and who might be useful to them, they drove them together into the temple, and

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<sup>278</sup> Josephus, WARS, Book 6, Ch. 9, p. 737.

shut them up within the walls of the court of the women; over which Caesar set one of his freed men, as also Fronto, one of his own friends; which last was to determine every one's fate, according to his merits. So this Fronto slew all those that had been seditious and robbers, who were impeached one by another; but of the young men he chose out the tallest and most beautiful, and reserved them for the triumph; and as for the rest of the multitude, that were about seventeen years old, he put them into bonds, and sent them to the Egyptian mines. Titus also sent a great number into the provinces, as a present to them, that they might be destroyed upon the theatres, by the sword and by the wild beasts; but those who were under seventeen years of age were sold for slaves. Now during the days wherein Fronto was distinguishing these men, there perished, for want of food, eleven thousand; some of whom did not taste any food, through the hatred their guards bore to them; and others would not take in any, when it was given them. The multitude also was so very great, that they were in want even of corn for their sustenance".<sup>279</sup>

## Number of Slain in the Siege

Now the number of those that were carried captive during this whole war was collected to be ninety-seven thousand; as was the number of those that perished during the whole siege eleven hundred thousand, the greater part of whom were indeed of the same nation [with the citizens of Jerusalem], but not belonging to the city itself; for they were come up from all the country to the feast of unleavened bread, and were on a sudden shut up by an army, which, at the very first, occasioned so great a straitness among them, that there came a pestilential destruction upon them, and soon afterward such a famine, as destroyed them more suddenly.<sup>280</sup>

It is said that when the Roman army encompassed the city it was crowded with inhabitants because pilgrims had come from far and wide. Josephus tells us that no one was allowed to escape. He says:

Accordingly the multitude of those that therein perished, exceeded all the destruction that either men or God ever

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<sup>279</sup> Ibid.

<sup>280</sup> *The Works of Flavius Josephus*, tr. by William Whiston, (Boston: D. Lothrop & Company, 1878/79) ,p. 737-738.

brought upon the world; for, to speak only of what was publicly known, the Romans slew some of them, some they carried captives, and others they made search for underground, and when they found where they were, they broke up the ground and slew all they met with. There were also found slain there above two thousand persons, partly by their own hands, and partly by one another, but chiefly destroyed by the famine; but then, the ill savor of the dead bodies was most offensive to those that lighted upon them, insomuch that some were obliged to get away immediately, while others were so greedy of gain, that they would go in among the dead bodies that lay in heaps, and tread upon them; for a great deal of treasure was found in these caverns, and the hope of gain made every way of getting it to be esteemed lawful.<sup>281</sup>

All this resulted into extreme shortage of food in the city with extremely terrible effect on the citizens which Josephus describes as under:-

The spectre of famine haunted the city, which was filled to overflowing with pilgrims, and death mowed them down in a dread harvest. The craving for food, no matter of what sort, drove men beyond all bounds and killed all normal feeling.

"The terrible famine that increased in frightfulness daily annihilated whole families of the people. The terraces were full of women and children who had collapsed from hunger, the alleys were piled high with the bodies of the aged. Children and young people, swollen with lack of food, wandered around like ghosts until they fell. They were so far spent that they could no longer bury anyone, and if they did they fell dead upon the very corpses they were burying. The misery was unspeakable. For as soon as even the shadow of anything eatable appeared anywhere and tore from each other the most miserable trifles. No one would believe that the dying had no provisions stored away. Robbers threw themselves upon those who were drawing their last breath and ransacked their clothing. These robbers ran about reeling and staggering like mad dogs and hammered on the doors of houses like drunk men. In their despair they often plunged into the same house two or three times in the one day. Their hunger was so unbearable that they were forced to chew anything and everything. They laid hands on things that even the meanest of animals would not touch, far less eat. They had long sine

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<sup>281</sup> *ibid* p. 738.

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eaten their belts and shoes and even their leather jerkins were torn to shreds and hewed. Many of them fed on old hay and there were some who collected stalks of corn and sold a small quantity of it for four Attic drachmas.<sup>282</sup>

In the said background when John was giving the baptism of repentance on the banks of the River Jordan, great crowds gathered around him believing that he was perhaps the messiah awaited by them. The said hopes however did not last long because Herod Antipas beheaded the Baptist in fort of Maschera. After his death when Jesus started his mission and performed many miracles in the sight of the people, the crowds took him as John risen from death. They started believing that perhaps Jesus would deliver them from the Romans by establishing the Messianic Kingdom of the Jews. Hopes in Jesus also stood frustrated with his crucifixion by Pontius Pilate the procurator of Rome. It is however pertinent to note that the Jewish hopes for revival of their kingdom did not die even with the death of Jesus Christ. During 30 to 66 A.D. numerous figures arrived at the scene with a promise to lead the Jews towards the desired goal. History does not provide us an exhaustive detail of the events pertaining to such aspirants but some sketchy references here and there may suffice to show the perturbed position and efforts made of the Jews freedom fighters in Palestine, Egypt, Cyranica, Cyprus and other lands.

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<sup>282</sup> *Ibid*, p.411.



# THE ULTIMATE TRIUMPH OF GREEKS & ROMANS

## **Triumph through Christianity of St. Paul**

Scholars now agree that Jesus was a Jew not a Christian. It is said that before his death Jesus had himself appointed James his brother as his successor. He therefore remained an undisputed leader of the community i.e. the Jewish followers of Jesus at Jerusalem. As against the short ministry of Jesus for three years James continued to lead the community for about 33 years i.e. with effect from the death/ascension of Jesus in 29 A.D. till the death of James in 62 A.D. According to traditional writings, James was thrown down from the temple pinnacle by a mob who stoned him and killed him by bursting open his head with the fuller's club. Recent research however highlights the fact that:

in reality he only fell from the temple steps during the attack by the enemy (Paul). His head was burst open from the blow of fuller's club".<sup>283</sup>

The traditional story also contains element of headlong fall as a parallel to headlong fall of Judas Iscariot in the book of Acts. Eisenman reports that:-

Having 'bought a field out of the reward for unrighteousness, he fell headlong (this word 'headlong' is approximately the word used in the description of James' fall from the Temple steps in the Pseudo-Clementines, when attacked by the Enemy Paul) and bursting open, all his bowels gushed out; the parallel with the fall James takes, where his head is above, should also be clear.<sup>284</sup>

James and other followers of Jesus were not called Christians at Jerusalem. They remained attached to the

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<sup>283</sup> Robert Eisenman, *James Brother of Jesus*, (London: Watking Publishing, 2002), p. 457.

<sup>284</sup> Robert Eisenman, *James Brother of Jesus*, p. 456.

community, attended the daily services and ceremonies at the temple and continued to observe the Law of Moses till the death of James and even afterwards. This makes it clear that Jamesian Christianity was the very opposite of the Christianity of St. Paul which has come to us.

Friction was growing in Jerusalem between various sects of the Jews and also against the followers of Jesus the Messiah. They happened to be a substantial part of the daily attendants at the temple. Resentment of Jews against the Romans was also increasing day by day. Followers of Jesus Christ could therefore easily perceive riots, revolt or further persecution of the community. Apostles and the believers in Jesus Christ therefore found expedient to disperse from Jerusalem to other parts of Palestine or to other regions towards the borders of the territories under the Roman rule.

Subsequently with the destruction of the temple and the city by the Romans, most of the population of Jerusalem Jews or Jewish Christians stood eliminated or dispersed from Judea to other regions in or outside the Roman Empire. Most of them had to remain under ground to save their lives while others went to far off lands towards east or north. As such they never appeared to controvert the theology of St. Paul which was being propagated through active support of the Romans. The vacuum created by the absence of Jewish scholars or apostles as well as followers of Jesus was perhaps the most opportune moment for the unopposed propagation of St. Paul's version of Christianity. As such St. Paul whom some people call '*Questionable Paranue Paul*' and his evangelist followers such as Mathew, Mark, Luke and John succeeded to promote the theology introduced by St. Paul. Incidentally the new theology was an easy and short cut formula for salvation and eternal life being cherished desire of the Romans as wells as Greeks. The newly introduced faith also had a universal appeal (catholic) because its tenets were friendly both to the Hellenists and to Pagans throughout the Roman Empire.

Judging from the end result we also find that teachings of St. Paul fulfilled the cherished desires of the Romans to

eliminate Hebrews, their religion and their God. In due course Christianity deprived the Israelites from independence, their possessions, and their land, superiority of race, culture and holiness of the people, land, temple and city of Jerusalem. Yahweh stood pushed behind Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit i.e. two newly introduced persons in the Godhead to form the trinity in place of absolute oneness of God. Yahweh and his law had to make way for absolute sovereignty of the Roman despots, the so-called law of Jesus which perhaps was nothing except the law of the Roman Empire.

We therefore observe that in spite of persistent persecution, the Ptolmies, the Seleucids including Antiochus IV, Pompeii and the Roman governors, Herod dynasty and the procurators of Rome miserably failed to destroy the God, his law and the religion of Israel by force. St. Paul and his followers succeeded where they failed. All that could not be achieved through force alone was achieved gradually through the theology introduced by St. Paul by amalgamating Judaism with Paganism, and Mithraism, mystery religions and religions of the Romans, the Greeks and the Egyptians all believing in trinity. The universal religion introduced by St. Paul and his followers had no other background except to serve the purpose of the Hellenist society and to safeguard the interests of the Roman Empire.

We observed that in spite of all their tyrannical methods Antiochus IV as well as the Romans failed to change the dietary regulations of the Jews. The said prohibitions had somehow existed from the time of Noah and Abraham. Prophets of Israel including Jacob, Moses and others had upheld the same through codified and well preserved law. All prophets of Israel from Moses to Jesus upheld the same dietary regulations and also the rituals of circumcision and observance of Sabbath as unchanging word of God. No Jew could therefore think of violating the said commandments of the Lord. St. Paul interpreted the law and traditions of the Old Testament in such a manner that all the practical

and material sides of man's life were given the '*nomenclature of works of flesh*' and made inferior to the supernatural concepts introduced by him. Human responsibility to observe law and obey all the commandments of God in their day-to-day life stood replaced by mystic and ecstatic concepts such as righteousness of peace and joy in Holy Spirit. The supernatural and perhaps more correctly unnatural idea of union with Jesus Christ was introduced for salvation through faith in the saving sacrifice of Jesus Christ the son of God. Paul says:-

**1.** There is no condemnation now for those who live in union with Christ Jesus. **2.** For the law of the Spirit, which brings us life in union with Christ Jesus, has set me free from the law of sin and death.<sup>285</sup>

St. Paul therefore advised his followers to live according to the spirit and not according to human nature.

Those who live as their human nature tells them to, have their minds controlled by what human nature wants. Those who live as the Spirit tells them to, have their minds controlled by what the Spirit wants.<sup>286</sup>

St. Paul and his followers such as St. Luke, St. Mark, Mathew and John succeeded to abolish Sabbath and also annulled the age old dietary prohibitions just with the stroke of their pen. A vision assigned to St. Peter (Acts. 10:9-16, 11:1-18) was enough to destroy the dietary regulations endorsed by all the prophets of Israel including Jesus himself. Similarly when a dispute arose on circumcision (Act. 15:1, 2, 5) the same stood abolished on the basis of a letter assigned to the apostles and elders at Jerusalem resolving that:

**28.** The Holy Spirit and we have agreed not to put any other burden on you besides these necessary rules: **29.** Eat no food that has been offered to idols; Eat no blood; Eat no animal that has been strangled; and keep yourselves from sexual immorality.<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>285</sup> Rom 8:1-2.

<sup>286</sup> Rom 8:5.

<sup>287</sup> Act 15:28-29 GNB.

Similarly through St. Paul's formula of union with Christ (Rom 8:1-2) gentile Romans and Greeks became sons of God who lived according to the spirit and not according to human nature (Rom 8:5). God shared his Glory with them (Rom 8:30) hence they became free people and the true Israel of God. This was the basis on which the descendants of Abraham i.e. the Israelites stood deprived from their ancient pride of race. Through a single stroke of his pen St. Paul changed the genealogy of the Israelites to make them descendants of despised Hagar instead of Sarah. Incidentally in his eagerness to plead the cause of the Greek Gentiles he himself became the descendant of the so called slave girl who's children were being born in slavery. He says:

**21.** Let me ask those of you who want to be subject to the Law: do you not hear what the Law says? **22.** It says that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman, the other by a free woman. **23.** His son by the slave woman was born in the usual way, but his son by the free woman was born as a result of God's promise. **24.** These things can be understood as a figure: the two women represent two covenants. The one whose children are born in slavery is Hagar, and she represents the covenant made at Mount Sinai. **25.** Hagar, who stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia, is a figure of the present city of Jerusalem, in slavery with all its people. **26.** But the heavenly Jerusalem is free, and she is our mother.<sup>288</sup>

The readers will note that the said letter has been addressed to Galatians but it covers Greeks as well as Romans who have been declared free being sons of heavenly Jerusalem. As against this, Israelites the genealogical descendants of Abraham, Sarah and Isaac become the children of Hagar giving birth to children in slavery. For Christians the words of St. Paul as quoted above are enough to falsify the contents of the Old Testament or to change the historical reality that the covenant at Mount Sinai was made with the descendants of Sarah and not with the descendants of Hagar. It is pertinent to note here that the afore-stated words of St.

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<sup>288</sup> Gal 4:21-26.

Paul destroy the pretension of superiority and pride of Israel because it throws back on them the falsely propagated stigma on Hagar's children born in slavery. The words of St. Paul assign slavery to the Israelites by making them the descendants of Hagar while the Gentiles like Galatians became sons of God and free people with the declaration of St. Paul that they were true descendants of Sarah and Abraham.

With the passage of time the theology of St. Paul started gaining popularity with the Hellenist society simply because it had the moral justification for the Greek and the Roman conquerors to usurp the Holiness from the Land, the people, the temple, and the city of Jerusalem. The conquerors becoming rightful possessors of holiness conferred the same on their people, the land, city, the church and the pontiff of Rome. They however made good use of St. Peter by inheriting from him the keys of heaven and the powers to forgive sins or to anathematize anyone disagreeing with the opinion of the church. Consequently, the subsequently used terms such as Holy Roman Empire, Holy Pontiff and the Church of Rome, holiness of the Christians through union with the Lord Christ all emanate from the theology of St. Paul which in turn was based on Roman conquest of Palestine, destruction of the temple and elimination of the Israelites. *Jehovah* seems to be relegated to secondary importance while Jesus Christ comes to the forefront as youthful, effective and compassionate son taking over control from his father who seems to have grown old, ineffective and insolent.

In the new theology Law and sovereignty of the Lord makes way for the law and sovereignty of the Roman Emperors. Keeping in view numerous benefits to the Romans at the cost of the Israelites, some people think that the Christianity of St. Paul was devised only to harmonize various cults of the subdued nations with the religious traditions and the cults of their Roman Masters. In view of the fact that right from the beginning the Christianity of St. Paul has been serving primarily the interests of the Hellenized society. Hence instead of tracing the basis of

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Christianity in Old Testament, the prophets or Jesus Christ himself it may be more useful to study the same as a political device to serve the interests of the Hellenized society and the emperors of Rome.



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