

# **first light**

Jesus and the Kingdom of God

PARTICIPANT READER BY

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## PROLOGUE LIVING THE QUESTIONS

“Live the questions now, perhaps you will then gradually,  
without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.”  
—Rainer Maria Rilke, July 16, 1903

What, then, are the constitutive questions for this *Participant Reader*? Here is one set of questions. First, why did Jesus happen when he happened? If you reply that it was divinely providential, I rephrase the question: why were at least some of his fellow-Jews ready for that specific providential event at that time and in that place? Second, why did two populist movements, the Baptism movement of John and the Kingdom movement of Jesus, occur in the territories of Herod Antipas in the 20s of that first common-era century? Why then? Why there? And here is another set of questions—to focus that former set even more precisely.

First, since Nazareth was Jesus’ native village and he was always called “Jesus of Nazareth,” why this relocation in Matthew 4:13: “He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea” that is, by the inland Sea or Lake of Galilee? He moved not just from a very tiny village to a somewhat larger one, but he moved from a hillside village to a lakeside one. Why?

Second, why were Jesus’ best-known companions all associated with fishing villages around the north-west quadrant of the Sea of Galilee?

Mary was from Magdala, the most important town on the lake before Herod Antipas built Tiberias around 19 CE. The Hebrew name of Mary’s home-town comes from *migdal*, a tower, that is, presumably, a lighthouse, and its Greek name, Tarichaeae, means salted fish. Peter moved from one fishing village, Bethsaida—in the predominantly Gentile territory of Herod Philip—to live with his wife and mother-in-law at another such village, Capernaum—in the predominantly Jewish territory of Herod Antipas (Mark 1:29-30).

Again: “Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter” (John 1:44). And again: “As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen . . . . As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets” (Mark 1:16,19). And they are called to “fish for people” (Mark 1:17).

Even after the resurrection, at least in John 21, Jesus is back again “by the Sea of Tiberias,” back with boat and net, fishes and fishers. Jesus in Galilee is seldom far from lake and boat and net, fishes and fishers. Why?



*Magdalene*, Georges de la Tour, 1640.



# 1

## THE MATRIX OF JESUS

“As for these four great beasts, four kings shall arise out of the earth. But the holy ones of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever—forever and ever.” *Daniel 7:7-8*

**THE CHALLENGE OF MATRIX.** Jesus was a *Jew within Judaism within the Roman Empire*. That is not just the possibly interesting background but the necessarily constitutive context of his life. We deliberately use the term *matrix* to avoid any idea that you could pass *background* and go straight to *foreground* or even pass *context* and go straight to *text*. By *matrix* we mean everything you must know to understand Jesus in his own time and place before it is possible to understand him in ours. Jesus minus matrix makes gospel equal Rorschach.\*

Would you ever think of discussing Mahatma Gandhi except as an Indian within Hinduism within British imperialism or Martin Luther King, Jr., except as an African-American within Christianity within American racism? So it is also with Jesus as a first-century homeland Jew within Judaism within Roman imperialism. Incarnation is where the transcendental intersects the local, where vision and character interact with time and place, and where matrix is destiny. And our Jesus matrix begins a century and a half before his birth.

**BEAST-EMPIRES OUT OF CHAOS.** After the death of Alexander the Great, his Greek super-empire was broken up among his generals and their subsequent dynasties. By the 160s BCE, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, ruler of the Greco-Syrian mini-empire, sought to consolidate his security against Egypt by bringing Israel—militarily, politically, economically—into tighter cohesion and under tighter control.

Among the aristocratic and high-priestly leadership of Jerusalem, some Jews considered that a desirable operation. But, when other Jews resisted that acculturation, Antiochus launched a religious persecution. Some Jews, led by those we know as the Maccabees or Hasmoneans, fought back militarily and were able to stop the persecution, defeat the Syrians, and expand their own territories under a hundred years of relative peace—before Pompey’s Romans fully and finally arrived in the 60s BCE.

Other Jews resisted non-violently, and it is their vision that gives us the biblical book of Daniel. It was actually written within that same dangerous matrix of the Jewish 160s BCE, but it fictionally imagined its protagonist, Daniel, as a prophetic sage during the Babylonian Exile in the 500s BCE. Our focus here is on a single chapter which picks up the much earlier Greek proposal that human history was proceeding through four great ages towards a fifth and climactic one.

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\* [An ink-blot test reflecting one’s own subconscious desires, feelings, and/or beliefs – Ed.]

Daniel 7 is set within a Babylonian Empire about to fall before the Medes and Persians of Cyrus. It is under Belshazzar, famous for being able “to see the writing on the wall” in Daniel 5, but not, of course, for being able to do anything about it, that Daniel receives a vision in 7:1-14 and then its interpretation in 7:15-28.

The vision begins with Four Beasts arising, one after the other, from the foaming chaos of the sea. The first three were, respectively, “like a lion ... like a bear ... and like a leopard.” The Fourth Beast was “terrifying and dreadful and



*Alexander the Great defeating Darius from a Pompeii mosaic.*

exceedingly strong ... it was different from all the beasts that preceded it” (7:7,19).

The Four Beasts are “four kings” (7:17), that is, the personified embodiments of the Babylonian, Median, Persian, and Greek Empires. But the Fourth Beast, the Macedonian imperialism of Alexander the Great, is “different from all the other” beast-empires (7:7,19,23) because it is able to “devour the whole earth, and trample it down, and break it to pieces” (7:23). Nevertheless, it broke apart

on Alexander’s death into multiple separate “horns” or sub-empires and the Greco-Syrian sub-empire was merely a “little horn” from among them (7:8 & 7:20-21).

**AN END TO IMPERIALISM.** In heaven above, God, the Ancient or Eternal One, had already convened a tribunal of judgment (7:9-10) and condemned to destruction both the world-empire of Alexander and its sub-empire of Syria, both the Fourth Beast and its “little horn” (7:11-12,26). *In other words, imperialism itself—that unjust process whereby one people or nation uses others exclusively or primarily in its own interest—was condemned in all its then-known incarnations and, presumably, in all its future ones as well.* But what was to take its place? What about that ancient Greek tradition of human history’s five great eras, empires, or periods? What about the Fifth Kingdom? What would it be like?

In that same mid-second century BCE, Rome said that it was the long-awaited final and Fifth Empire of human history. But Daniel 7 gives a very different answer, and it is repeated four times; once in the vision and thrice in its interpretation, but with a very significant development across those multiple accounts. Repetition, of course, underlines importance—three times for Alexander’s rule (7:7,19,23) but four times for God’s (7:14,18,22,27).

The Fifth Kingdom, or the Kingdom of God, begins before that judgment-tribunal in heaven: “As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him” (7:13). The great kings personifying and embodying their earthly empires were all “like” this or that beast but this personified embodiment of heavenly rule is “like” a human being—not “like” a beast.

**ONE LIKE THE SON OF MAN.** The King James Version of Daniel 7:13—and many other older translations—read this way: “I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought him near before him.” Why, then, does the New Revised Standard Version read as above?

Just as male-chauvinistic English once used “man” and “mankind” to mean “human beings,” so Hebrew and Aramaic used “man” or “son of man” in a similar chauvinistic manner. Hence that correction from “one like the Son of man” (KJV) to “one like a human being” (NRSV). You can see a similar correction in Psalms 8:4 and 144:3 when “man” and “son of man” (KJV) become “human beings” and “mortals” (NRSV).

We return to that change in translation below but, for now, back to heaven and the destiny of God’s transcendental replacement for earthly imperialism. Read through these four texts and watch how God’s Kingdom comes from heaven down to earth:

To *him* was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed (7:14).

But *the holy ones of the Most High* shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever—forever and ever (7:18).

Judgment was given for *the holy ones of the Most High*, and the time arrived when the holy ones gained possession of the kingdom (7:22).

The kingship and dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to *the people of the holy ones of the Most High*; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey them (7:27).

To understand that process recall that God was first introduced as surrounded by hosts of angels, “a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood attending him” (7:9). Based on that, God’s Kingdom descends from its personified embodiment, probably the archangel Michael (7:14), through those angelic “holy ones” (7:18,22), until it is finally given to “the people” of God here below upon this earth.

That vision imagines that imperialism has been condemned long ago by God and that its replacement has already been created in heaven where it is held in angelic protection until it can appear here below. In all of this, the phrase Kingdom of God is not primarily a question of this place or that place. It is a question of mode, style, and type of rule. It is a transcendental dispute between a beast-like rule from earth and a human-like rule from heaven.

**ESCHATON AND APOCALYPSE.** What type of faith generated and empowered that vision of Daniel 7? Scholars call it eschatological faith and, as we just saw, it clearly condemned imperial faith. *Eschaton* is an ordinary Greek word meaning the “end” or the “last” of something—so “of *what* something” becomes the crucial point.

Israel's *faith* was in a God of distributive justice who created and therefore owned the earth. But Israel's *experience* was of an earth blatantly unjust, be it from kings at home and/or emperors abroad. For Israel, therefore, God would have to conduct a Great Divine Cleanup of the World, an *eschaton* or end, not of the world itself but of its evil and injustice, war and violence, and especially its "beastly" imperial brutality—here below upon a transformed earth. Think of eschaton as end-of-empire. *Eschatology* was never about global destruction, but about global transfiguration—here below upon a recreated earth.

Our English term *apocalypse* comes from the Greek term for *revelation*—hence the last text of the Christian Bible is called both the book of the Apocalypse and/or the book of Revelation. *Apocalyptic eschatology*, therefore, claimed to be a revelation about that Great Divine Cleanup of the World and, in practice, especially a message about its timing. When? How soon? In our lifetime? Imminently? If not now, when? If not now, why?

That transcendental clash between empire and eschaton, specifically between Roman imperial theology and Jewish apocalyptic eschatology, is the absolutely necessary matrix within which to understand Jesus' execution by Rome and resurrection by God. Thereby, of course, and as ever, Israel's God was on a collision course with empire.

## 2 THE ADVENT OF THE MESSIAH

“He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David .... The Holy Spirit will come upon you [Mary], and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God .... To you [shepherds] is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.” *Luke 1:32,35; 2:11*

Before Jesus ever existed, certain streams of Jewish thought had already identified that mysteriously transcendent “one like a son of man” from Daniel 7:13-14 with the long-awaited Anointed One—the Messiah or Christ of Israel. And they also, as in Daniel, combined heavenly individuals with earthly people. God’s Kingdom was to be both the Kingdom of God’s Messiah and the Kingdom of God’s People.

An Aramaic fragment, for example, was found among the Dead Sea Scrolls in Cave 4 at Qumran. It speaks of one who “will be called Son of God, and they will call him Son of the Most High.” But before the arrival of this divine being, an imperial kingdom “will rule several years over the earth and crush everything; a people will crush another people, and a city another city.”

Then, “the people of God arises and makes everyone rest from the sword.” But as the text continues there is a conflation—as in Daniel 7—between the individual Son of God and that collective People of God. It continues like this: “His kingdom will be an eternal kingdom, and all his paths in truth and uprightness. The earth will be in truth and all will make peace. The sword will cease in the earth, and all the cities will pay him homage” (4Q246).



Dead Sea Scroll fragments from the Book of Daniel.

**A PARADIGM SHIFT WITHIN JEWISH MESSIANISM.** In his 1995 book, *The Scepter and the Star*, John J. Collins of Yale University surveys, as his sub-title says, *The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature*. Despite many different understandings of the expected Messiah, he cites this “common core” or “dominant note” at the start and finish of his very helpful study:

This concept of the Davidic messiah as the warrior king who would destroy the enemies of Israel and institute an era of unending peace

constitutes the common core of Jewish messianism around the turn of the era .... There was a dominant notion of a Davidic messiah, as the king who would restore the kingdom of Israel, which was part of the common Judaism around the turn of the era (pp. 68 & 209).

The Davidic Messiah as a warrior king is not, therefore, just one option among many messianic understandings and expectations. It is rather the basic one. And that, of course, raises this immediate problem:

Although the claim that he [Jesus of Nazareth] is the Davidic messiah is ubiquitous in the New Testament, he does not fit the typical profile of the Davidic messiah. This messiah was, first of all, a warrior prince, who was to defeat the enemies of Israel .... There is little if anything in the Gospel portrait of Jesus that accords with the Jewish expectation of a militant messiah” (pp. 13 & 204).

As you can see, those statements frame the book and raise this obvious question. Since Jesus and all his first companions were Jewish, how are we to explain their divergence from the “common core” or “dominant note” or “typical profile” of the Davidic Messiah?

We see that divergence as a *paradigm shift* or mutational swerve within Jesus’ contemporary messianic eschatology. We borrow that term *paradigm shift* from the famously influential 1962 book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, by Thomas Kuhn of the University of California, Berkeley. But, as so many other scholars have already done, we apply the term *paradigm shift* beyond his original application to science.

In all walks of life and not just in science—in art and music, poetry and dance, politics and religion—we usually conduct everyday operations within some basic and foundational paradigm, some ordinary and standard model. As problems, anomalies, and non-fits appear, we usually sweep them under the rug of paradigm-normalcy until the bulge becomes too embarrassing to sustain. Then we are ready for a paradigm shift, a swerve within the tradition, a mutation in the previously dominant model.

The vision of Jesus was a paradigm shift within first-century Jewish messianism and, as we see in greater detail below, it also represented—not surprisingly—one within its wider and more general apocalyptic eschatology. There were, by the way, a lot of other paradigm shifts in that century—from consular republic to imperial monarchy within the Roman Empire at its start and from Sadducean Temple to Pharisaic Torah within the Jewish homeland at its end.

Within both non-Christian and then Christian Judaism, the expected Messiah was a divinely transcendental figure and even a mysteriously pre-existent one. Trailing clouds of glory he would come from God who was his home. They also agreed on a necessary interaction between *him* and *them*, between God’s Messiah and God’s People in God’s Kingdom. Whether as Son of Man or Son of God and whether *he* was imagined as *their* leader, representative, personification, embodiment, or the heavenly counterpart of

their earthly collectivity, *he* and *they* were inextricably linked together in the Great Divine Cleanup of God's World.

But just as clear as those two fundamental agreements was this equally fundamental disagreement. Jesus, as we just saw, was neither “warrior king” nor “warrior prince.” His resistance to imperialism was programmatically non-violent. Do not forget, by the way, that, according to Josephus's *Jewish War* and *Jewish Antiquities* many non-Christian Jews used large-scale non-violent protests against the census of Quirinius in 6 CE (*JW* 2.117-118; *JA* 18.4-9,23-25), the actions of Pilate in 26-27 CE (*JW* 2.169-177; *JA* 18.55-62), and the statue of Caligula in 40-41 CE (*JW* 2.185-203; *JA* 18.261-309).

We make no claim that either Jesus or earliest Christianity *invented* non-violent Jewish resistance against Rome. But, by their practice of it, they created a paradigm shift within their contemporary Jewish messianism—and, as we see below, within the entire matrix of Jewish apocalyptic eschatology as well. And that shift was already proclaimed at the start of Jesus' life in the infancy stories of Matthew 1-2 and Luke 1-2. What follows, by the way, is based on the much fuller discussion of those stories as parabolic overtures—each to its own gospel—in the Borg-Crossan 2007 book *The First Christmas: What the Gospels Really Teach About Jesus' Birth*.

**THE DAVIDIC MESSIAH IS BORN.** Both our Christmas stories agree that Jesus is the Davidic Messiah and, to express that status parabolically, both locate his birth in David's city of Bethlehem (Matthew 1:1,20; 2:1,5-6,16; Luke 1:27,32,69; 2:4,11,15). Or, as Paul put it, emphasizing status not city: “Jesus Christ ... who was descended from David according to the flesh” (Romans 1:1-3). Furthermore, both those stories see the advent of Jesus as the messianic challenge from God's non-violent eschatology to Rome's violent imperialism.

**Matthew 1-2.** Jesus is here the Davidic Messiah, but precisely as the New—the reNEWed—Moses. Furthermore, Herod is the New Pharaoh who slaughters male infants to kill the predestined Child, and Israel-under-Herod is the New Egypt from which, rather than to which, that Child escapes. Exodus 1-2 is prototype for Matthew 1-2. But Herod is, by Roman appointment, “King of the Jews.” So the clash of empire and eschaton is set when the Magi arrive—not kings, but sages with the wisdom of the East confronting the power of the West. They ask Herod: “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews?” and he immediately rephrases their question as “where is the Messiah to be born?” (2:1-4). Matthew never uses that title “King of the Jews” again until it appears above the cross of the crucified Jesus (27:11,29,37). Rome-appointed Herod failed to kill the “King of the Jews” just as Rome-appointed Pilate (thinks he) succeeded in doing so. As in medieval art, a crucifix hangs on that birth-room wall.



Statue of Augustus in divine pose (found in Thessaloniki, Greece).

**Luke 1-2.** The angel tells the shepherds that, “to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord” (2:11). The title Messiah is bracketed and thereby interpreted by those other titles of Savior and Lord. But, since Savior and Lord were well-known titles of the then-contemporary Caesar Augustus, this Child incarnates, not Christianity against Judaism, but Jewish eschatological covenant against Roman imperial power.

Furthermore, a whole angelic multitude appears with the transcendental message that “the glory of God in heaven” is reflected as “peace on earth” (2:13-15). Christ is Peace-Bringer—but by what means? Recall that, in Roman inscriptions, the first and fundamental title of Caesar—before *Son of God* or *Divine Augustus*—was *Imperator*. We translate it lamely as Emperor but it means Victor or Conqueror and, when it became Augustus’s titular monopoly, it meant *World Conqueror*. Augustus became Rome’s Peace-Bringer with peace through violent victory but Jesus became God’s Peace-Bringer with peace through non-violent justice. And, as Matthew 1-2 and Luke 1-2 say: to be continued . . .



Inscription at Ephesus, Turkey, proclaiming “Imperator” Caesar Augustus “Son of God” and “high priest.”



*The Holy Family*, Girolamo Marchesi 1490-1531.

### 3

## GOD'S GREAT CLEANUP

“Among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the *Kingdom of Heaven* is greater than he.” *Matthew 11:11*

“Among those born of women no one is greater than John; yet the least in the *Kingdom of God* is greater than he.” *Luke 7:28*

For geology, deep below our physical earth, giant tectonic plates grind against one another and periodically create seismic convulsions on the face of the land. For history, deep below our social world, there are also tectonic tensions that cause seismic surface disturbances.

One such seismic disturbance occurred in the 20s CE around Antipas's establishment of Tiberias and its controlled commercialization of the Sea of Galilee. All the general discussion about human-like eschatology *versus* beast-like imperialism from Daniel 7 and even the more specific one about non-violent *versus* violent Jewish messianism came together along a very localized tectonic fault-line, first in Perea with the Baptism movement of John and then in Galilee with the Kingdom movement of Jesus. Both those movements were different—but profoundly different—visions of the Great Divine Cleanup of God's World.

**THE BAPTISM MOVEMENT OF JOHN.** It will vastly help what follows if you bracket absolutely any Christian connotations of the term “baptism” when speaking of John the Baptist. What exactly was he doing and why?

***Eschatological Vision.*** John was one of those classic apocalyptic eschatologists discussed above. God's Great Cleanup was future but imminent—any day now it would happen. He was, as Isaiah promised, “A voice cries out: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken’” (40:3-5).

Our New Testament accounts, however, have changed his message from one about the imminent advent of God to one about the imminent advent of Jesus. But, of course, what he says of a violent God hardly fits with a non-violent Jesus.

***Divine Character.*** John's God was one of punitive vengeance. Watch his metaphors: “John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, ‘You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire .... His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary;

but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire” (Luke 3:7,9,17). That sounded so negative that Luke himself added a more humane insertion in 3:10-14 before he could call it all “good news” in 3:18.

**Specific Program.** John accepted the theology in which God rewarded or punished Israel according to its obedience or disobedience to the covenant (see, for example, Deuteronomy 28). Since Israel was currently under Roman oppression, a great act of national repentance was needed to deliver it from imperialism.



John’s program was a mighty sacramental reenactment of both the Exodus from Egyptian Bondage and the Return from Babylonian Exile. He brought people out into the wilderness east of the Jordan in Perea; took them through the Jordan and, as the waters washed their bodies, repentance purified their souls; then, once a critical mass of holiness had gathered in the land of Israel, God would surely, must surely come. For why else was God *not* coming except as punishment for national sin?

But what came was not the eschatological deliverance of God but the imperial cavalry of Antipas. “John, because of Herod’s suspicions,” wrote Josephus in his *Jewish Antiquities*, “was brought in chains to Machaerus ... and there put to death” (18:119).

Jesus had started his public life as a follower of John. We are sure that he was one because of the increasing embarrassment about his baptism as you read from Mark’s admission (1:9), through Matthew’s expansion (3:13-15) and Luke’s contraction (3:21b), and on to John’s total omission (1:29-34). Yet, when Jesus found his own voice, he is both very respectful and very different from John. So John died. But Jesus watched, Jesus learned, Jesus changed.

**THE KINGDOM MOVEMENT OF JESUS.** As we saw in the epigraph, “Kingdom of Heaven” is simply a courteous Matthean avoidance of the sacred name in the phrase, “Kingdom of God.” Both terms mean, as the Lord’s Prayer makes clear, the will of God not for heaven—which is in excellent shape—but for this earth—which is not: “Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). “The Kingdom” is Jesus’ special term for what we call God’s Great Cleanup of the World.

**Eschatological Vision.** We return to that messianic paradigm shift represented by Jesus and now find its roots in an even deeper one from Jesus. John said that the eschaton was future but imminent; Jesus said that it was already here: “If it is by the finger of God that I cast out the demons, then the Kingdom of God has come to you” (Luke 11:20). You have been waiting for God while God has been waiting for you. The eschaton is not imminent but interactive, participatory, collaborative.

Jesus created a fundamental paradigm shift within Jewish eschatological expectation *from* an imminent divine intervention *to* a present human-divine

collaboration. And, of course, the messianic paradigm shift simply followed that more basic one. All of that was said already in two episcopal sermons across a millennium and a half and from either end of Africa. Augustine of Hippo in 416: “God made you without you .... he doesn't justify you without you.” Desmond Tutu of Cape Town improved it in 1999: “St. Augustine says, ‘God, without us, will not; as we, without God, cannot.’” Or, less politely: It’s about collaboration, dummy.

**Divine Character.** But what is the character of the God with whom Jesus proclaimed this collaboration in Cosmic Cleanup? You can see the answer of Jesus most clearly in the following sayings where the motivation for human non-violence is quite simply divine non-violence—even or especially when dealing with one’s violent enemies.

In Matthew, Jesus commands his hearers to “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” and the reason given is “so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous” (5:44-45). And Luke’s version says to “love your enemies ... and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked” (6:35).

Furthermore, the conclusion in Matthew is very striking. “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (5:48). That sounds impossible, for how could the human be as perfect as the divine? But, in Greek, that verb “to be perfect” can also be translated as “to be finished”—for example, with Jesus’ dying words, “It is finished,” in John 9:30. In other words, we humans are perfected, finished, fully completed in our humanity, when we are non-violent in imitation of and participation in the non-violent God.

**Special Program.** We summarize this third major difference between John and Jesus like this: *John had a monopoly but Jesus had a franchise.* John was “the Baptist” or “the Baptizer”—that was his nickname in both Josephus and the New Testament. There were not lots of baptizing stations all up and down the Jordan and you simply went to the one nearest your own home. You went to John and to John alone. To stop his movement, therefore, Antipas had only to execute John. It could linger on in memory, nostalgia, denial, and disappointment but, since it depended on John’s life, it ended with John’s death.

On the other hand, Jesus himself does not settle down, for example, in the house of Peter’s wife at Capernaum. Notice Peter’s expectation and Jesus’ withdrawal: “Let us go on to the neighboring towns,” Jesus tells Peter, “so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do” (Mark 1:38). Jesus does not establish himself in one place and send out disciples to bring people to him there as monopolist of the Kingdom of God. Instead, he tells his *companions*—not *disciples*, which mean students—to do exactly what he himself is doing. We will see what that was in the next segment, but for now the



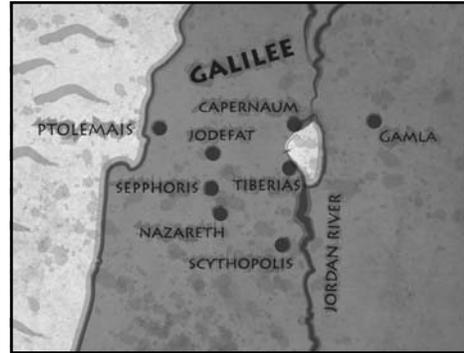
*Ecce Agnus Dei, Dieric Bouts, 1460.*

point is simply that Jesus empowered rather than dominated others because God's Great Divine Cleanup was about empowerment and collaboration, not disempowerment and domination.

**LOCATION AS DESTINY.** Jesus' proclamation of God's Great *Collaborative* Cleanup of the World occurred not just within Roman Empire, homeland Judaism, and Galilean environment, but within one quadrant of the Sea of Galilee, the north-west corner from Tiberias through Magdala and Capernaum to Bethsaida.

His challenge incarnated a clash of divinely transcendental empire *versus* divinely transcendental eschaton. That localized embodiment of Roman Empire *versus* Jewish God involved a time, place, and focus, a person, community, and window of opportunity. Above all else, it involved a charismatic prophet who created a companionship of equality by empowering others to "go and do likewise" (Luke 10:37).

What, then, was the collaborative program for this eschatological community of God's Kingdom? How did it propose to rebuild peasant community from the bottom up in opposition to Antipas, who was building his territorial economy from the top down? How did it set the share-life of eschaton against the greed-life of empire?



*First-Century Capernaum, Balage Balogh, 2000.*

## COLLABORATIVE ESCHATON IN A SHARE-COMMUNITY

“In traditional societies, for instance, health care systems may be *the major* mechanism for social control.”

—Arthur Kleinman, 1980

“In the straitened Mediterranean, the Kingdom of Heaven had to have something to do with food and drink.”

—Peter Brown, 1982

The heart of this collaborative program for the lake-as-world was this: *heal the sick, eat with those you heal, and announce that God’s Kingdom is already present in the gratuity, mutuality, and reciprocity of that share-community.* Notice that communal circularity of *healing and eating with those healed* to create a community of free and open spiritual power (*healing*) and physical power (*eating*). That program is still visible in several different sources but all of them are now layered with later practice, fuller experience, and, unfortunately, with increasing bitterness at rejection.

**SENDING.** The most important texts are the *Q Gospel* (from the late 50s) and Mark (from the early 70s), the two independent sources used by Matthew and Luke. Mark’s version is in 6:6b-13 and copied thence into Luke 9:1-6; the *Q Gospel’s* version is in Luke 10:1-12; and both versions are merged together in Matthew 9:37-38; 10:7-15. We emphasize four points shared in common by both the basic versions

**Mission & Message.** In the *Q Gospel* Jesus says: “Cure the sick who are there, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you’” (in Luke 10:9); and, “As you go, proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons” (in Matthew 10:7-8).

Mark focuses on the Twelve, frames their mission with a double mention of demons (6:7,13a), and says that they “anointed with oil many who were sick and cured (*etherapeuon*) them” (6:13b). They were to proclaim that “all should repent” (6:12) as Jesus himself had done: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news” (1:15).

**Dress & Appearance.** Think of this as a “uniform” that is symbolic for their mission. The *Q Gospel* says: “Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road” (in Luke 10:4=22:35-36); and, “Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a



*Healing of the Paralytic, Netherlandish  
1560.*

staff’ (in Matthew 10:9-10a).

Mark—from a decade or so later—has a striking difference from those instructions. “He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics” (6:8-9). The too-radical demands not to carry a staff or wear sandals—as in the earlier *Q Gospel*—are now withdrawn. Notice that no-staff is a very visible statement of non-violence even of the most basic defensive counter-violence. It is a visible message of peace.

**Acceptance & Accommodation.** The *Q Gospel* emphasizes that mission of spreading peace: “Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house!’ And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide” (Luke 10:5-7a=Matthew 10:11-13).

Mark is much more terse: “Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place” (6:10) but he also forbids moving around. He omits, however, that comment from the *Q Gospel* that “the laborer deserves to be paid” (Luke 10:7b) and “laborers deserve their food” (in Matthew 10:10b). That comment also appears in Paul, “the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:14) and in pseudo-Paul, “The laborer deserves to be paid” (1 Timothy 5:18). But, originally with Jesus, food and even hospitality were not payment but program—a free and equal sharing of the spiritual power of healing and the physical power of eating.

**Rejection and Vengeance.** Mark does not speak of vengeance or punishment: “If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them” (6:11).

The *Q Gospel* begins with that same dust-shaking admonition: “Whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, ‘Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near’” (Luke 10:10-11=Matthew 10:14). But then the *Q Gospel* adds an immediate threat comparing that rejecting town with ancient Sodom (Luke 10:12=Matthew 10:15). It continues with severe woes and bitter condemnations against Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum (Luke 10:13-15=Matthew 11:20-24 relocated). That is not Jesus but an addition from the *Q Gospel* itself.

Finally, when you look back at all of that complex, you can hear the voice of Jesus in the *Q Gospel* with this: “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Luke 10:2=Matthew 9:37-38). The *Gospel of Thomas* has a parallel version: “The harvest is large but the workers are few, so beg the lord to send out workers to the harvest” (14). But, once again, the *Q Gospel* adds a negative saying to that more open and positive one from Jesus himself: “Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves” (Luke 10:3=Matthew 10:16).

**HEALING.** Is *healing* the same as *curing*? If yes, why do we say after a tragedy that “the healing has begun,” and not “the curing has begun”? If no, could there be healing without curing, curing without healing, neither, either, or both in a given medical situation?

**Medical Anthropology.** Think, for example, of the 1993 movie *Philadelphia* as a graphic illustration of the distinction between healing and curing. Andrew Beckett, played by Tom Hanks, is a homosexual with HIV/AIDS who is fired for that combination by his law-firm. You know as the story unfolds that curing is not possible. There will be no happy Hollywood ending. But the only word for what happens to Beckett is healing—from the love of his partner, the support of his family, and the skill of his lawyer who successfully sues his firm for discrimination. When medicine cannot cure, a community of love, concern, and support can often heal.

That is simply Medical Anthropology 101.

*Sickness* is a coin whose twin faces are *illness* and *disease*, treated respectively by *healing* or *curing*. In his seminal 1980 book, *Patients and Healers in the Context of Culture*, for example, Arthur Kleinman of the Harvard Medical School said that, “A key axiom in medical anthropology is the dichotomy between two aspects of sickness: disease and illness. *Disease* refers to a malfunctioning of biological and/or psychological processes, while the term *illness* refers to the psychosocial experience and meaning of perceived disease” (p. 72).

**Types of Illnesses.** When you look from the *healings* of Jesus backwards to, say, the healing shrines of Asklepios in Greece and Turkey or forwards to, say, those of Mary in Portugal and France, what strikes you immediately is the common types of *illnesses* mentioned. They involve individuals who are blind, deaf, mute, or lame; individuals who have growths or cancers; individuals who have problems of paralysis or difficulties with pregnancy.

Take blindness, for example. Do you need glasses to read this page? If you had no corrective lenses of any type, could you do your job? What about your dignity, family, society? What, then, did “blind” mean in a world without corrective lenses? Jesus did not *cure* blind people whose eyes had been gouged out; he healed blind people whose eyesight was inadequate for work, family, and society. He *healed* them by accepting them into a new family and a new society, that of God’s present eschaton on earth.

Great healers, by the way, are often reputed to raise the dead. Compare, for example, the *testimonials* inscribed for Asklepios at Epidauros in Greece with the *stories* that Zeus killed him for raising too many deceased people. That comes—for Asklepios and for Jesus—from their Department of Public Relations rather than their Department of Medical Records. But you do not get that accolade without being first a great healer.

**Social Strain and Chronic Pain.** Finally, think about those many cases where society not only discriminates against illness and/or disease, but actually



*The Healing of the Blind Man* detail, El Greco, 1541-1614.

causes them in the first place: malnutrition from poverty, disease from bad water, obesity from consumerism, cancer from smoking, bulimia from advertising, etc., etc.

Jesus conducts, for example, an extraordinary number of exorcisms. Why so many demoniacs precisely there, precisely then? In answer notice that striking conflation of demonic possession and imperial oppression in Mark 5:1-20. A single extraordinarily powerful demoniac lives among the dead but has a multiple name “Legion: for we are many.” It/they prefer to enter swine and drown than be sent “out of the country.” That is imperialism as demonism with illness and/or disease as a socio-somatic reality.

Finally, here are two modern examples of illness and/or disease caused by society itself. In *The Illness Narratives* from 1988, Arthur Kleinman quotes a doctor trying to help “an obese hypertensive mother of six.” Her diagnosis: “Hey, what she needs is not medicine but a social revolution” (p. 217). Or, this from *Time* magazine’s “Health Report: The Bad News,” November 4, 1996: “African Americans who must suffer discrimination in silence have higher blood pressure than those who can afford to challenge racist treatment. The finding may explain why blacks as a group have such high rates of stroke, heart disease and kidney failure” (p. 20).

## 5 THE LAKE AS THE WORLD

“At the place called Taricheae [Magdala] the lake supplies excellent fish for pickling.”

—*Strabo of Amaseia, 60s BCE-20s CE, Geography 16.2.45*

The coordinates of matrix are historical time and geographical place. With those cross-hairs in mind, we now fine-focus on the opening questions in the Prologue above. In the last paragraph of his famous 1906 book on *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, for example, Albert Schweitzer said of Jesus that, “He comes to us as one unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lakeside, he came to those men who did not know who he was” (2001, p. 487). It is almost discourteous to interrupt that soaring peroration and ask: what was Jesus doing “of old, by the lakeside”? Why precisely there? Why precisely then?

**THE GENERATION BEFORE JESUS.** During that period Herod the Great undertook simultaneously two of the greatest construction projects in the Roman Empire—world-class operations in terms of vision and scope, quantity and quality.

***Caesarea Maritima.*** On the mid-Mediterranean coast of Israel, Herod created from scratch a new city and a giant port named, respectively, *Caesarea* and *Sebastos*—the Greek word for Augustus, the One-to-be-Worshipped. Construction and dedication began Israel’s linkage into Rome’s imperial infrastructure of all-weather ports, roads, and bridges—an infrastructure by



*First-Century Caesarea Maritima, Balage Balogh, 2000.*

which its legions moved swiftly and securely to wherever they were needed.

The port *Sebastos* was an eighth wonder of the world. It encompassed over 40 acres with giant breakwater-moles extending 800 feet into the sea. They were wide enough to carry large storage sheds, and their north-west opening protected against the south-westerly winds and waves out of Africa—there is the same north-west opening, by the way, in Tel Aviv’s yacht harbor today.

The state-of-the-art foundations for those moles were poured underwater using a hydraulic cement combining lime with volcanic ash from Pozzuoli in Italy (hence *pozzolana*). “The king triumphed over nature,” enthused Josephus’s *Jewish War*, “and constructed a harbor larger than the Piraeus” of Athens (1.410). The city’s water, by the way, had to come by aqueduct from Mount Carmel ten miles away.

**Jerusalem’s Temple.** Herod’s second huge project created a plaza around the Temple, five football fields long by three wide. That Court of the Gentiles would have been difficult enough on a flat surface, but Herod was building on the prow of a hill with valleys on three sides. He was also digging into the rising hill to the north and building up above those valleys on the south.



Temple court, Jerusalem model.

When the Romans destroyed this great temple in 70 CE, they could only toss down its uppermost stones. Layers of great ashlar, fitted in header-stretcher sequence, still stood and stand firm on all four corners. The largest ones are around 175 tons—not the oft-repeated 570 tons. Those stones—visible today in the Western Wall tunnel—were so placed that they could originally be seen by pedestrians on the north-south street beside the Temple. But, especially, they could be admired by aristocrats crossing the bridge from the Upper—by hill and by class—City. They were, in other words, placed for show, not function. It is strange to think of Herod the Great as an apostle to the Gentiles, but he must have intended not just Jewish but pious pagan pilgrims to enter his great new port at Caesarea and ascend to his Temple at Jerusalem.

**What about Galilee?** You will notice, however, that those great constructions all took place in Judea. Herod’s monumental building program skipped Galilee. Here is another indication of that omission: the marbled city of Caesarea Maritima was crowned by a temple to Rome and Augustus, the divine couple at the heart of the New World Order. It was constructed off the city street-grid so that it would face boats entering that breakwater’s opening. It was one of the very first of those temples across the Roman Empire and Herod had two more of them—one at the new city of Sebaste in Samatia and the other at Pnias (later Caesarea Philippi) in the far north. But, as you can see once again, Herod controlled but ignored Galilee.

**THE GENERATION OF JESUS.** In other words, the imperial program of *Romanization by urbanization for commercialization* struck Galilee forcibly, not in the generation before Jesus, but in that of Jesus. It arrived fully there, not under Herod the Great (37 BCE-4 BCE), but under his son Herod Antipas (4 BCE-39 CE).

***The Man Who Would Be King.*** To understand Antipas, whom Luke's Jesus called "that fox" (13:32), you must remember that all his life he dreamed and planned to become "King of the Jews," appointed by Rome, of course, as was his father. He even went to Rome twice—once hopefully and once desperately—to plead his case.

The first time was in 4 BCE before Augustus against the claims of his brother Archelaus. He failed and ended up as tetrarch of Galilee and Perea. His prudent reaction, according to Josephus's *Jewish War*, was to make his capital city Sepphoris "the ornament of all Galilee, and call it Austocratoris" (18:27) after Augustus (*Autocrator* is Greek for *Imperator*). The last time was in 39 CE before Caligula against the claims of his nephew Agrippa. He failed even worse and ended up an exile in Gaul.

But in between the emperors Augustus and Caligula was the emperor Tiberius (14-37 CE). That was when Antipas made his second attempt "inasmuch," said Josephus in his *Jewish Antiquities*, "as he had gained a high place among the friends of Tiberius" (18.36). But to achieve the title "King of the Jews" Antipas needed internal Jewish approval (or, at least, non-resistance) and external Roman appointment.

***Internally at Home.*** When Rome took over the Jewish homeland, it replaced the native-Jewish Hasmonean dynasty with the converted-Jewish Herodians and, although Herod the Great married the Hasmonean Mariamme, he later executed her for treason. Her popularity is clear, by the way, from the number of first-century infant girls named Mary in the Jewish homeland. So Antipas, seeking popular approval at home, divorced his Nabaeen wife and married a Hasmonean princess named Herodias, grand-daughter of the beloved Mariamme, and wife of Antipas's half-brother—whom she in turn divorced.

You can understand, therefore, why Antipas and Herodias would have been infuriated by two popular prophets criticizing that Herodian-Hasmonean marriage alliance. From John the Baptist: "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife" (Mark 6:178). From Jesus: "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery" (Mark 10:11-12). Prophetic resistance was not good for popular approval.

***Externally at Rome.*** How could Antipas persuade Rome to give him the whole country? Maybe, if he could increase his taxes from a mere tetrarchy, Rome might consider granting him a full monarchy, give him the whole country as "King of the Jews"? But how could he increase his taxes from a peasantry living already at subsistence level without risking rebellion? After all, the emperor himself had warned against excessive taxes, according to Suetonius's *Tiberius* 32.2, since "it was the part of a good shepherd to shear his flock, not skin it" (32.2).

So it came to pass that, having multiplied loaves in the valleys around Sepphoris, Antipas planned to multiply fishes in the waters around Tiberias. He built a whole new capital city, named it after the emperor, and built it on the mid-west coast of the Sea of Galilee. The process of *Romanization by urbanization for commercialization* simply expanded from Sepphoris to Tiberias, and was already there by the start of the 20s. You may judge how many people disliked that change by their (unlikely) accusations that the city was built on a graveyard and had forbidden images on its palace walls.

**THE GALILEE BOAT AS SYMBOL.** In 1986 a drought lowered the level of the Sea of Galilee and revealed large swaths of sandy-mud around its shores. A first-century boat was discovered in that receding lakeshore and, since it was then the consistency of wet cardboard or soft cheese, it took an “excavation from hell” and a decade of preservation work before it was—and is—on display at the Yigal Allon Museum in Kibbutz Ginnosar.

This 8x26-foot boat was the typical workhorse transport of the first-century lake. It had mast, sail, four oars, rudder, and could hold around fifteen people. But it had been nursed along by skilled boat-wrights using poor-to-bad materials. There were twelve different types of wood in it; a keel half of good cedar—but cannibalized from an older boat—and half of poor jujube wood; and strakes replaced not by whole planks but by ones cobbled together from bits and pieces.

Then one sad day it could no longer safely float. It was completely stripped of anything salvageable—stem post and sternpost, sail and mast, oars and rudder, every single iron nail—and pushed into the lake to sink in a graveyard of discarded boats—off a Magdala boatyard. It has been called “The Jesus Boat,” but we prefer to call it “The Mary Boat.”

It is a symbol of what Tiberias did to Magdala, and Antipas to Mary, and *Romanization by urbanization for commercialization* did to those other peasant-fishers who were also the first companions of Jesus. Nothing was free any more—not casting a net, launching a boat, or beaching a catch. Antipas’s factories for salting, pickling, and drying fish took precedence and control over private entrepreneurial possibilities.

But was this just, fair, and equitable? Was this the will of God? If God owned the world and especially the land of Israel, did God not own the Sea of Galilee? The lake was microcosm for world as macrocosm. In other words, to adopt and adapt Psalm 24:1, “The lake is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the lake, and those who live around it.”



The author observing the “The Mary Boat,” Yigal Allon Museum, Kibbutz Ginnosar.

## PARABLES AS LURES FOR COLLABORATION

“Jesus told the crowds all these things in parables; without a parable he told them nothing.” *Matthew 13:34*

Why did Jesus speak in parables, that is, create *fictional stories with a theological challenge about the Kingdom of God*? Why indirect parables and not direct sermons? Think, to begin with, about Mark 4, that major source for the standard misunderstanding of Jesus’ parables.

**THE SOWER AS PARADIGM.** The parable of the *Sower* is addressed to “a very large crowd” (4:1-9). It begins with “Listen” and ends with “Let anyone with ears to hear listen!” It is told, in other words, for understanding and not obfuscation. That terminal phrase, used so often by Jesus, means: “Use your head!”

Yet, according to Mark, Jesus then withdraws from the people, and tells his companions that, “To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables; in order that ‘they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand; so that they may not turn again and be forgiven,’” as Isaiah 6:9-10 foretold (4:10-12). But, those framing injunctions to “listen” make any deliberately punitive mystification of this or any other story by Jesus extremely unlikely.

Mark has incorrectly equated parable *with riddle* and while they are alike as two interactive and collaborative modes of discourse, they are otherwise quite unlike one another. A riddle demands a single correct response—and Mark delivers an allegorical one to the *Sower* parable-as-riddle in 4:14-20. But a parable intends application, decision, and action.

In a *privately read written text*, a parable is a lure for personal reflection, imagination, and interpretation. In a *publicly spoken oral text*, a parable is a lure for discussion, debate, and the raising of corporate consciousness. In other words, parable—and aphorism as well—are precisely the modes of collaborative discourse required for a collaborative eschaton.

You can, for example, read that *Sower* story in about half a minute. But give it, say, an hour on the lips of Jesus and allow for constant interaction from the original audience, constant debate not only with Jesus but with one another. Imagine these reactions:

“What a waste of time—we knew all that stuff about the birds, rocks, and thistles.”

“It’s not about sowing at all. It’s about something else.”

“Then why did he tell us about sowing?”

“Whatever it’s about, we are sure it’s not about sowing.”

“Then, what’s it about, if you’re so smart?”

“It’s a parable, dummy!”

Those orally delivered parables demanded and would have received collaborative discussion and corporate argumentation. They were the *perfectly appropriate genre for a collaborative eschaton*. Furthermore, the *Sower* is a parable about the eschaton and also about parabling the eschaton. In any collaborative process, it says, there will be different modes of failure and even different degrees of success. Stay calm, stay patient, stay ready for both.

**THE VINEYARD WORKERS.** Imagine, for example, how that process worked in an oral delivery of the *Vineyard Workers* in Matthew 20:1-16. It is harvest time in the vineyards and a landowner goes to the marketplace to hire day laborers. But instead of hiring all he needed at once, he went out five times—at 6am, 9am, 12 noon, 3pm, and 5pm. (Are you already sensing a comment on his character in that procedure?)

At the end of the day, all alike are given a silver denarius for a full day's pay. They grumble immediately about the landowner's injustice. And, from Matthew on, we tend to focus on that problem of personal and individual justice or injustice. Was it fair? Was the owner equitably generous or provocatively condescending? And in focusing there, we do not focus elsewhere.

But think about this interchange: "About five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, 'Why are you standing here idle all day?' They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard'" (20:6-7). How would Jesus' listeners—especially poor day-laborers—have responded to that interaction? Would nobody from the oral audience have objected to such a blatant blaming the victim? Would nobody have protested that looking for work all day was not laziness?

What would have happened in such a discussion was a raising of the audience's consciousness on the difference between, in our language, personal and individual justice or injustice as against systemic or structural justice and injustice. Why did it happen mysteriously that, even at high harvest in the vineyards when labor should have cost top denarius, day-laborers were still looking for work at the end of the day? And, of course, the owner knew that situation full well since he had tried all day to have just the amount of labor needed and no more. He knew he could go out as late as 5pm and still find workers. How did things happen just as the landowners wanted?

The audience would have been lured by that story into thinking, debating, and understanding the crucial distinction between individual charity (a denarius for each) and structural justice (no work for all), and in that collaborative process they would—Jesus hoped and intended—begin the collaborative process of eschatological transformation with a God of distributive justice.

**ORAL LURE & ORAL DEBATE.** Commenting on the parables of Jesus is not, therefore, a matter of solving riddles or proposing allegories. It is a matter of imagining—as best we can at this distance—the debate and discussion, argument and counter-argument, increase in awareness and response in commitment among the audience challenged by Jesus' collaborative eschaton.

Imagine the parable of *The Good Samaritan* in Luke 10:29-37, for example, as spoken by the Jewish Jesus to a Jewish audience. Notice what he did and did not say and think about possible audience reactions.

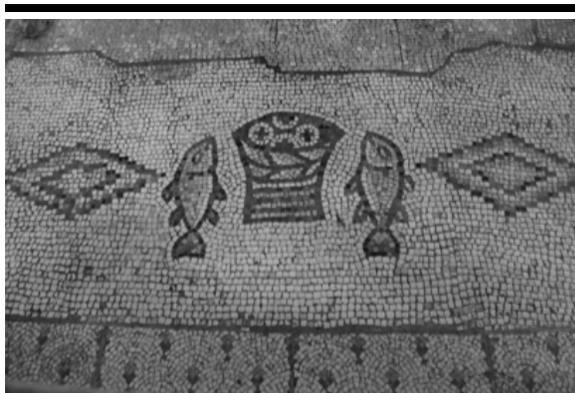
First, he did not speak about four unspecified individuals on the Jerusalem-Jericho road with one “person” in the ditch, two “persons” passing by, and a third “person” offering help. The debate would be about helping somebody in dire need.

Second, he did not speak about four fellow-Jews, one in the ditch, a priest and a Levite passing by, and a fourth Jew stopping to help. The discussion might be about why that specification of the non-helpers as Temple officials. Should you help even if Temple officials do not? And why pick on them as the negative models? Unfair? Gratuitous?

Third, he did not tell it in that preceding manner but had a Samaritan left dying in the ditch and a Jewish lay-person help him. He could have done it that way and kept the rest of the story without further change. The audience debate would be about helping even an ethnic outsider in distress. Yes, of course! No, not a Samaritan!

Finally, there is the story as told by Jesus. It presumes that you should help any person in distress. But why make the helper—and not the helped—an ethnic outsider? How can Jesus’ fellow Jews identify with a Samaritan? What does that do to their categories of who’s in and who’s out? What does it mean if religious leaders do not help a fellow-Jew and the Samaritan does? Jesus’ precise formulation of the story guarantees strong audience reactions because it raises questions—and therefore consciousness—about the standard social paradigm and taken-for-granted categories on which his society rests.

**PARABLES ABOUT JESUS.** We have been speaking about parables *by* Jesus. Few Christians have ever been shocked that Jesus used fictional stories



Mosaic, Church of the Loaves and Fishes, Tabgha, 5th Cent.

to speak of the Kingdom of God. But they are often shocked even to imagine that the gospel writers copied that process by creating parables *about* Jesus. It was, apparently, a bad habit they picked up from him.

We give as an example the parable of the *Multiplication of Loaves and Fishes* from Mark 6:30-44—and, by the way, keep an eye on the parallel but independent version in John 6:1-14.

That Markan story is deliberately chosen from among the multitude of gospel

parables *about* Jesus in order to pick up the *eating* aspect of that programmatic healing-eating empowerment from the preceding session. Notice especially the dialectic of *him* (Jesus) and *them* (the Twelve) as *he* keeps *them* as repeated intermediaries with the crowds in this five-scene mini-drama.

**Solving.** Twin solutions are given to this problem of ordinary everyday hunger. From the Twelve: “Send them away” to buy food and eat. From Jesus:

“You give them something to eat.” And they almost mock him for that suggestion (6:36-37). He *versus* them.

**Seeking.** He then sends *them* to find out what food is available: “Go and see” (6:38). Notice that the parallel passage in John 6:5-6 adapts their common tradition to emphasize that Jesus knew the answer all along!

**Seating.** Once again that core dialectic continues as “*he* ordered *them* to get all the people to sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties” (6:39).

**Distributing.** Despite parallels with desert-exodus and manna-miracle, Jesus does not bring down bread from heaven nor turn stones into bread. He simply takes what is already there among the people and when it passes through his hands, there is more than enough for everyone.

Jesus looked up to heaven and performed not just a miraculous multiplication but a eucharistic distribution of food. Compare, for example the verbal sequence of *take, bless, break, give* here in Mark 6:41 and at the Last Supper in Mark 14:22.

**Gathering.** Only here does Mark lack the explicit *he-they* of Jesus and the Twelve. They are not told to gather up the fragments but they do so in any case (6:43). John, however, has it explicitly “He told his disciples, ‘Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.’ So they gathered them up” (6:12-13).

We interpret that story as a deliberately created parable *about* Jesus. It is not about the multiplication of food *not there* but about the distribution of food *already present*. It suggests that when food passes through the just hands of God-in-Jesus there is more than enough for all. It is about who owns this world and who owns the food that is the material basis of life on this earth.

The parable also suggests that the church (the disciples as leadership or as symbolic entirety?) wants no part of this functional destiny and must be pulled by Jesus (kicking and screaming, as it were) into the middle of that process: Jesus to disciples to people. The disciples: “send them away.” Jesus: “you give them food.” No wonder we prefer to emphasize a miraculous multiplication which we want but cannot obtain rather than a just distribution which we can obtain but do not want.



*Christ in Emmaus*, Peter Paul Rubens, 17th Cent.

## 7 JESUS AS LORD

“I looked, and there was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one like the Son of Man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand.” *Revelation 14:14*

The title “Son of Man” is the most important and also the most misunderstood of all the titles given to Jesus in the New Testament. We are often asked, in interviews and questions, for example, whether Jesus was the “Son of God”—meaning was he divine—or the “Son of Man”—meaning was he human.

On the one hand, in our Christian faith, Jesus was both fully divine and fully human. But, on the other, while “Son of God” certainly means divinity, “Son of Man” does not simply mean “humanity.” The title “Son of Man” is, in fact, even more transcendental than “Son of God.”

Think, for example, of how Mark exalts “Son of Man” over other titles such as “Messiah” or “Son of God” by replacing them with it. First, at Caesarea Philippi, Peter confesses Jesus as “the Messiah” (8:29) but Jesus immediately speaks of himself as “the Son of Man” (8:31). Second, under trial at Jerusalem, Caiaphas asks Jesus, “Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?” (14:61) and Jesus immediately responds that, “I am; and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven” (14:62). You will recognize, of course, that “one like a son of man” and “clouds” from Daniel 7:13.

We stay, therefore, with Mark’s gospel to understand Jesus’ title of “Son of Man” (that is, the truly Human One) as the specific incarnation of that “one like a son of man” (that is, as we saw above, “one like a human being”) from Daniel 7. For Mark, Jesus embodies that Danielic Son of Man under three linked aspects:

*First Aspect:* Jesus as “Son of Man” on earth with heavenly authority (2:10,28).

*Second Aspect:* Jesus as “Son of Man” undergoing death and resurrection (8:31; 9:9,12,31; 10:33,45; 14:21a,21b,41).

*Third Aspect:* Jesus as “Son of Man” returning (*parousia*) with heavenly power (8:38; 13:26,34; 14:62).

We touch next on those first and second aspects, but the second one will receive much fuller consideration in “The Crowd & the Crucifixion” below. Our major focus here will be on that third aspect.

**PRESENT HERE NON-VIOLENTLY.** Mark sums up the message of Jesus in this inaugural proclamation: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news” (1:15). Scholars have long and inconclusively debated whether that “has come near” (*eggiken* in Greek) means “here now and present” or “here soon and imminent.” But Mark’s understanding of Jesus’ message does not depend on that single word’s syntactical interpretation.

As we saw in our opening session on Matrix, the “one like a son of man” in Daniel 7 received the Kingdom of God (7:14) which was to be preserved among the angelic “holy ones” in heaven (7:18,22) until it was brought down “to the people of the holy ones of the Most High” (7:27). If, therefore, Jesus is here on earth as “the Son of Man”—with, that is, simile ceding to title—the Kingdom of God is already present on earth and not just imminent. The paradigm shift from imminent and interventionist eschatology to present and collaborative eschatology has taken place with Jesus as the Son of Man.

In other words, Jesus said that the “Kingdom of God” is already present in our world and Mark concurred by emphasizing that the “Son of Man” is already present on our earth. You will notice, by the way, that Mark used those twin phrases almost exactly the same number of times (14 and 15 times respectively). And despite all the authority of Jesus as Son of Man in that first aspect above, no violence—human or divine—saves him from death in that second one.

**RETURNING SOON VIOLENTLY.** We look now at a second extraordinary feature of earliest Christian faith. The first was the proclamation of a collaborative eschatology and a non-violent Messiah as



*The Last Judgment* detail,  
Michelangelo, 1534-1541.

paradigm shifts within their contemporary Jewish expectations. But the expectation of a *second coming* of the Messiah was another paradigm shift within Christian Judaism. Or, better, expected as *imminent and violent*, it was actually a paradigm anti-shift or retro-shift back towards the older model of an imminent and violent start-of-eschaton. The first and past non-violent Messiah of a non-violent God cedes place to the second and future violent Messiah of a violent God. It was like Darwinism (paradigm shift) countered by Creationism (paradigm retro-shift).

***Imminence.*** A first question: granted that the eschaton’s inauguration was already collaboratively and non-violently present with Jesus, did he also say *not that the start but that the end of the eschaton was imminent*, that is, would happen very soon? Collaborative eschatology would be, in other words, a very short project.

First, and in general, whenever people are confronted with a paradigm shift within any standard normalcy, there is a tendency to

announce it as not that significant a change. The automobile arrives as simply a “horseless carriage” and radio arrives as simply “wire-less.”

On the one hand, then, it would not be surprising if even Jesus himself thought of the collaborative eschaton as an event to be completed within the very lifetime of his audience. On the other hand, the most explicit such statements from the lips of Jesus seem mostly if not exclusively to have been placed there by the ongoing Christian tradition after his death.

In discussing the Kingdom of God, for example, John P. Meier’s on-going and four-volume project, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, concludes in his *Volume 2: Mentor, Message, and Miracles* that: Matt 10:23 is “not from Jesus but from the early church (p. 341); Mark 9:1 is “likewise the utterance of a first-generation Christian prophet” (p. 344); and Mark 13:30 has its “origin in the early church” (p. 348). Meier, therefore, answers negatively his initial question: “Did Jesus Give a Deadline for the Kingdom?” (pp. 336-48).

Second, it is certain that Paul, while he followed Jesus’ vision of an already present, collaborative, and non-violent eschaton, explicitly expected it to



*The Last Judgment* detail,  
Michelangelo, 1534-1541.

be over in his own lifetime. When he wrote 1 Thessalonians, Paul expected the coming of the Lord within his own lifetime: “we who are alive ... will be caught up in the clouds ... to meet the Lord in the air” (4:17). Later, in 1 Corinthians, he had the same expectation: “the impending crisis ... the appointed time has grown short ... the present form of this world is passing away” (7:26-31). Finally, as late as Romans, his position was still unchanged: “you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near” (13:11-12).

It is, in summary, *uncertain* that Jesus but *certain* that Paul expected an imminent conclusion to the eschaton and, of course, anyone who did so was wrong by two thousand years and counting. What is vital, in any case, is that they both believed that the eschaton

had already started as non-violent and collaborative.

**Violence.** We repeat: one of the most extraordinary features of earliest Christianity is not so much the expectation of a second coming of Jesus, but rather the transformation from the first coming of a non-violent Jesus into the second coming of a violent Jesus. That process was consummated, of course, in the Christian Bible’s final text, the book of Revelation. But it had been going on from the very beginning of the tradition about Jesus’ words and deeds.

*One Example.* When Jesus sends out his companions in Mark, he warns them that, “If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them” (6:11). That and no more.

But in the *Q Gospel*, that other source (*Q* or *Quelle* in German) besides Mark used by both Matthew and Luke, that same piece of tradition continues

with fearsome threats of divine punishments in which Chorazin, Capernaum, and Bethsaida would be handled less kindly than Tyre and Sidon, Sodom and Gomorrah (Matthew 10:14-15 & 11:20-24 = Luke 10:10-15). The non-punitive God seen above from Jesus in Luke 5:44-45 has become punitive and violent. (By the way, never confuse internal human consequences with external divine punishments.)

*Another Example.* The return of the Son of Man is told by Mark primarily in terms of divine consolation:

“Then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds [Daniel 7:13 once more] with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.” (13:26-27)

But in the *Q Gospel* it is told primarily in terms not of divine consolation, but of divine punishment:

“Just as it was in the days of Noah, so too it will be in the days of the Son of Man. They were eating and drinking, and marrying and being given in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed all of them. Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot: they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, but on the day that Lot left Sodom, it rained fire and sulfur from heaven and destroyed all of them—it will be like that on the day that the Son of Man is revealed.” (Luke 17:26-30)

As a general principle, the more opposition or persecution a Christian community experiences, the more punitive and violent is its present God and future Jesus.

*Final Example.* Those are but two small examples from a multitude of increasing threats about and punishments from divine and messianic violence leading up to the second coming of Jesus Christ. The book of Revelation is, of course, the great climax and absolute transformation of Jesus from non-violence to violence in this the most consistently and relentlessly violent book in the entire canon of the world’s canonical literature.

This is John’s vision of Jesus: “I looked, and there was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one like the Son of Man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand” (Revelation 14:14). And after that sickle has done its work:

“I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly in midheaven, ‘Come, gather for the great supper of God, to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of the mighty, the flesh of horses and their riders—flesh of all, both free and slave, both small and great.’” (Revelation 19:17-18)

Isaiah 25:6 had promised a Great Eschatological Feast: “the Lord of hosts will

make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear.” The book of Revelation agrees but now it is a Great Final Feast for the vultures and the scavengers.

In response to that transformation of the present and non-violent first coming of Jesus into the imminent and violent second coming of Jesus, we conclude with these questions:

*First Question:* is the Second Coming of Jesus to happen – soon?  
No!

*Second Question:* is the Second Coming of Jesus to happen – violently?  
No!

*Third Question 3:* Is the Second Coming of Jesus to happen – literally?  
No!

The Second Coming of Christ is what would/will happen when we Christians accept the First Coming as the only one and join in its collaborative eschaton.

## SUBSTITUTIONARY ATONEMENT?

“It is not proper for God to pass over sin unpunished .... it is not fitting that God should take sinful man without an atonement .... this cannot be effected unless satisfaction be made, which none but God can make and none but man ought to make; it is necessary for the God-man to make it.”

—*Anselm, Cur Deus Homo?* 1.12,19; 2.6

In 1097, Anselm of Canterbury, monk, philosopher, archbishop, exile, and saint, wrote a two-book treatise, *Cur Deus Homo?* It asked: “for what cause or necessity, in sooth, God became man, and by his own death, as we believe and affirm, restored life to the world; when he might have done this, by means of some other being, angelic or human, or merely by his will” (1.1). His purpose presumed faith, of course, but bracketing it operationally, he sought an answer “by plain reasoning” alone (Preface).

His answer is known as *substitutionary atonement* or *vicarious satisfaction* and it is delivered as a platonic-style dialogue between Anselm and a set-up companion named Boso. Here it is in briefest summary: (1) Human beings had sinned and dishonored God; (2) God’s justice demanded adequate and appropriate punishment; (3) Human beings could never adequately restore God’s honor; (4) Only a *Deus-Homo*, a person at once human and divine, could substitute for us as a vicarious victim, offering God full atonement and satisfaction for the divine dishonor of sin.

Anselm’s experiment was not the wise interaction of revelation *and* reason but rather the unwise subjection of revelation *to* reason. As the most unfortunately successful offering from pre-enlightenment rationalism, Anselm’s doctrine is not found in the New Testament but represents an incorrect equation of sacrifice—which is definitely there—and substitution—which is definitely not there.

Although many sincere Christians accept absolutely that *equation of sacrifice and substitution*, it is profoundly incorrect on levels extending from cross-cultural anthropology to ordinary everyday language. We look at it as bad anthropology and bad language in this section and return to it as bad history and bad theology in the next two sections. Notice, as we proceed, that the problem is not with the words *atonement* or *satisfaction* but with the words *substitutionary* and *vicarious*.

**CROSS-CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY.** How and why—in cross-cultural perspective—did human beings invent the slaughter of domestic—but not feral—animals as gifts for their gods, goddesses, or God? And why do we call what they did *sacrifice*, from the Latin *sacrum facere*, to make sacred? How does killing an animal make it sacred rather than just dead?

Take as an example the case of the Celts, a people pushed by the Romans to the north-western fringes of the European continent. From before

and after the turn of the Common Era we find them depositing iron weapons, silver artifacts, gold ornaments, and slain human beings in bogs where land and water merge and where humanity above interacts with divinity below. Think especially of those human “bog bodies” with their better-than-mummified skin, their aristocratic and well-manicured nails, and the consumed remnants of last suppers still in their stomachs.

Was that about substitution? *Were the Celts thinking*: we should be punished by destruction but, instead, let us destroy these substitutes? Absolutely not. Forget substitution and, instead, think *gift*, for it is the deep human experience of *gift* that grounds and founds sacrifice—for the Celts, the Israelites, and others, cross-culturally over time and place.

***On the human level***, we have two main ways of maintaining or restoring good relations between ourselves and others. The first way is the *gift*, and it stretches all the way from pure gratuity—with parent and child—to absolute reciprocity—with patron and client. Think, for example, of what you



*The Moschophoros* (calf-bearer), Greek, dated to 570 B.C.

probably do if you get a Christmas gift from somebody to whom you did not intend to send even a card. You probably hasten to mail off a return gift as soon as possible and if you could pre-date it, that would be just fine. That is the *gift* as exact and precise reciprocity.

The second way is the *meal* as a special sub-form of the gift. To maintain or restore good relations, I invite you to a festive meal. For that occasion, pita and hummus will hardly be enough; we would need a lamb or even a fatted calf. An animal will usually be killed and

consumed in our common meal. It does not pass totally from me to you but from me to us together. If, of course, your meat comes plastic-wrapped from a supermarket, you might easily forget that your meal involved the shedding of blood.

***On the divine level***, that human experience was presumed cross-culturally and then elevated transcendentally.

In terms of the *gift*: think, for example, of the holocaust or whole-burnt offering in Israel’s Temple. The entire animal is *made sacred* by being given to God as total gift. Did anyone, could anyone, ever think: we should be slain for our sins but let us kill the animal instead?

In terms of the meal: think, for example, of the sheep sacrificed, that is, *made sacred* at Passover in Israel’s Temple. They were given to the priests to be slain and thereby *made sacred*. The meat that was then given back to the offerers had been thereby *made sacred* food that they eat it together with their God. We repeat: did anyone, could anyone, ever think: we should be slain for our sins but let us kill the animal instead?

*In summary*: sacrifice or sacred-making has nothing whatsoever to do

with substitutionary atonement or vicarious satisfaction. It concerns maintaining or restoring relationships between humanity and divinity through the gift and the meal. The animal's bloody death is not substitute for our own but the necessary concomitant of gift and/or meal elevated from human to divine interaction.

**ORDINARY EVERYDAY LANGUAGE.** The term sacrifice is too necessary a word to let it be confused with and then lost to the term substitution as if that were its inevitable concomitant and necessary interpretation. We need the word *sacrifice*, for example, to describe adequately the following act of heroism. On the late afternoon of January 13, 1982, Air Florida 90, an inadequately de-iced and incorrectly piloted Boeing 737, took off in a snowstorm from Washington National Airport and, half a minute later, plunged through the 14<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge into the ice-strewn Potomac River. Only five persons survived from the plane's 79 passengers and crew, but those statistics do not tell the full story.

Six survivors were holding on to the plane's half submerged tail when a police helicopter arrived at the scene twenty minutes after the crash. Hovering dangerously close to the water, it started to drop lines to them. Twice, Arland D. Williams, Jr., caught a line but, instead of tying it around his own waist, gave it first to the flight attendant Kelly Duncan, and then to the severely injured Joe Stiley. By the time all five survivors had been pulled to safety, the tail and "the sixth passenger" had slid beneath the icy water. Williams was the only passenger who died from drowning.

What is the proper term for his action? It is surely not enough to say: *Man Drowns*. It could only be this: *Man Sacrifices His Life*. All human life and death is sacred, but Williams *made* his death peculiarly, especially, emphatically, profoundly *sacred* because he gave it up for others. It is for such acts that we need and must retain the term *sacrifice* or *made sacred*.

**SACRIFICE OF ATONEMENT FOR SIN.** In itself, therefore, blood sacrifice—whether of animals in the Old Testament or of Christ in the New Testament—never entailed Anselm's substitutionary atonement or vicarious satisfaction until he inserted it a millennium later. Just think, for example, of Paul's comment that "our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed" (1 Corinthians 5:7). Did Jews and/or Christians think that the Exodus-Lamb, the Passover-Lamb, or the Christ-Lamb involved a punitive death that substituted for that due to them?

But what about Paul's other assertions that "Christ died for our sins" (1 Corinthians 15:3) or that Christ was "a sacrifice of atonement by his blood" (Romans 3:25)? What, especially, of those repeated claims in the letter to the Hebrews that Christ was, for example, "a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people" (2:17) or "for all time a single sacrifice for sins" (10:12). Or, finally, what about those statements in 1 John that Christ "is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world" (2:2) or that "this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins" (4:10)?

The problem once again, is not with sacrifice, atonement, satisfaction, salvation or even with all of that for human sin, but only and exclusively with any hint of substitution, with any interpretation that explains the death of Jesus as a divine substitution for punishment due to all of us. We see in the next two sections that *substitutionary*—but not sacrificial—atonement is bad history and bad theology. We also see there that that sacrificial atonement for sin was and is a perfectly valid theological interpretation of the execution of Jesus.

But, as epilogue to this section and prologue to the next ones, think about that great parabolic scene at Caesarea Philippi in Mark's gospel. Jesus

announces that, “the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again” (8:31). Next, Peter rebukes him and is in turn rebuked back (8:32-33). Then, instead of reassuring the Twelve and the audience that he dies in substitutionary atonement or vicarious satisfaction for their sins, “He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, ‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me’” (8:34). That does not sound like substitution but rather participation and collaboration.



*The Deposition*, Rembrandt. 1606-1669.

## DEMONSTRATIONS IN JERUSALEM

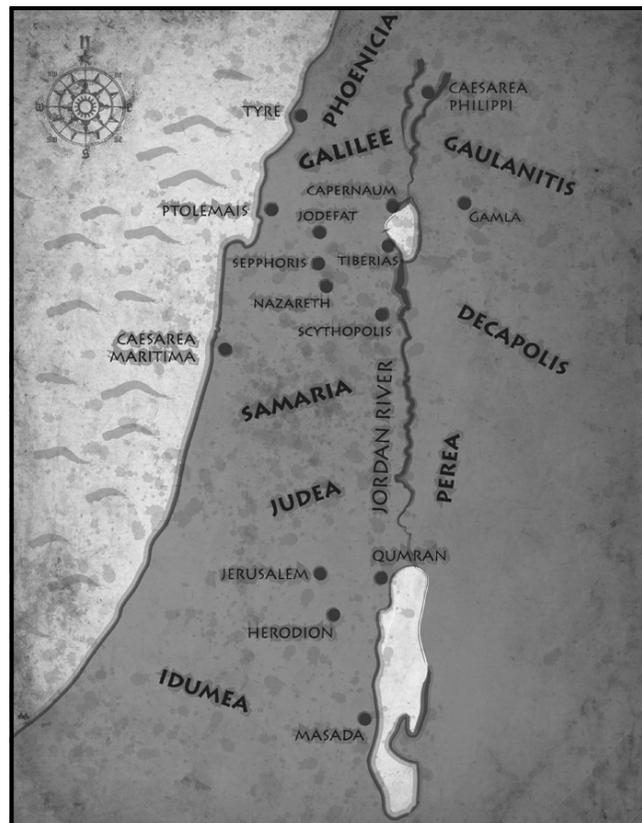
“To whom does the land belong? “The land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants.” *2 Samuel 3:12 & Leviticus 25:23*

“The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it.”  
*Psalm 24:1*

As the venue of Jesus changes from the Lake to the City, from Galilee to Jerusalem, and from the territory of Herod Antipas to that of Pontius Pilate, these are our new guiding questions. On the one hand, if Jesus went regularly to Jerusalem for the pilgrim feasts, what happened this time that had never happened previously? On the other, if Jesus only went there this one time, what was his purpose in making this pilgrimage? Did he go there in a deliberate search for martyrdom—either from human impulse or divine necessity? We will, of course, be judging Jesus’ intention externally from what he said and did, and not internally from any psychological diagnostics.

We begin with our conclusion and then present the evidence for it. *Jesus went deliberately to the capital city of his people to make a double and linked demonstration first against Roman imperial control and then against high-priestly collaboration with it.* In both cases Jesus performs a symbolic action whose meaning is clear against its prophetic background and is also explained by accompanying words—either from the crowd or from Jesus himself.

It is not, by the way, necessary to demonize either Pilate or Caiaphas, but both of them were removed after a decade of cooperation by Rome itself. We should, however, ponder how things might have been different if Pilate—like any other Roman governor—had to deal, not with a high-priestly aristocrat he could hire and fire, but with lay aristocrats within a capital city’s council whose executive committee was always capable of communally denouncing him to Rome. Pilate and Caiaphas played completely into one another’s administrative weaknesses.



**MESSIANIC ENTRANCE INTO THE CITY.** In 332 BCE Alexander the Great, brilliant warlord and paranoid drunk, lunged southward along the Levantine coast, gorged already with two stunning victories over the Persian Empire at Granicus and Issus. Tyre and Gaza fell after terrible sieges and—more wisely—Jerusalem opened its gate without a fight.

Imagine the victorious Alexander entering Jerusalem on his famous war-horse, the black stallion Bucephalus. That, surely, is how a victorious conqueror enters a submissive city. But recall this contrasting vision in the prophet Zechariah as God or God’s Messiah comes down that same Levantine coast past Tyre (9:3) and Gaza (9:5):

Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall command peace to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River [Euphrates] to the ends of the earth.” (9:9-10)

This is the anti-triumphal entrance enacted by Jesus on what we call Palm Sunday. The crowd acclaims him:

“Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!” (Mark 11:9-10).

That was a very deliberate demonstration by Jesus as is shown by the way he sends for a donkey that was prepared and waiting for him: “The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately” (Mark 11:3). The prophetic background is left implicit in Mark but made explicit in Matthew 21:5 with a citation from Zechariah 9:9. But there is one fascinating aspect to Matthew’s version.

In Zechariah those lines “on a donkey // on a colt, the foal of a donkey” are a typical example of Semitic poetic parallelism where the same content is given twice. There is, in other words, not two but one donkey involved. But the single “colt” of Mark 11:2,4,5,7 is changed by Matthew as follows: “find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie *them* and bring *them* to me ... *them* ... *them* ... they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on *them*, and he sat on *them*” (Matthew 21:2-3,7).

It is possible that Matthew is a literalist who does not understand poetic parallelism. It is probably much more likely, however, that he wants two animals, a donkey with her little colt beside her, and that Jesus rides “them” in the sense of having them both as part of his demonstration’s highly visible symbolism. In other words, Jesus does not ride a stallion or a mare, a mule or



a male donkey, and not even a female donkey. He rides the most unmilitary mount imaginable: a female nursing donkey with her little colt trotting along beside her.

Jesus comes in—with his supporters and their branches—from Bethany on the city's east as a living lampoon of Pilate coming in—with his soldiers and their swords—from Caesarea on the city's west. God and Rome, Jesus and Pilate, nursing donkey and war horse. Quite a demonstration, especially if it were timed so that both processions approached Jerusalem on the same day and at the same time.

**MESSIANIC DESTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE.** The second demonstration follows the same pattern as the preceding one. First, in both cases Jesus comes to Jerusalem from Bethany (11:1; 11:12). Second, Mark emphasizes that they took place on two separate days—our Sunday and Monday of Holy Week. Third, the deliberate nature of this second demonstration is emphasized by this: “He entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve” (11:11). Late evening is no time for a demonstration, so Jesus waits for the next morning.

Matthew and Luke, by the way, those first and most careful readers of Mark, eliminate that non-event in Mark 11:11 and replace it with the Temple-action in Matthew 21:10-17 and the weeping over Jerusalem in Luke 19:41-44. Finally, once again, the event involves an action by Jesus and an explicit citation from the prophets.

Mark frames the Temple-action (11:15-19) with the cursing (11:12-14) and withering (11:20-21) of the fig tree and those frames are intended to interpret the central event. It is, in other words, not a “cleansing,” but a destruction of the Temple. But that requires some explanation.

In Jeremiah 7 the prophet was ordered by God to warn those entering the Temple that worship inside did not excuse them from justice outside. Watch the conditional *ifs* in his oracle:

“If you truly amend your ways and your doings, *if* you truly act justly one with another, *if* you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and *if* you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, then I will dwell with you in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your ancestors forever and ever.” (7:5-7)

The threat is that, if they continue to substitute worship for justice, God will destroy the Temple because they have turned it into a hideaway, a safe-house, “a den of robbers” (7:11). Notice carefully that “a den” is not where robbers rob, but where they flee for safety having robbed elsewhere. That is all quite clear and almost costs Jeremiah his life. “Know for certain that if you put me to death,” he says, “you will be bringing innocent blood upon yourselves and upon this city and its inhabitants, for in truth the Lord sent me to you to speak all these words in your ears.” (26:15)

What Jesus does is *to destroy the Temple symbolically* by closing down its

fiscal and sacrificial operations as he “began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves; and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple” (11:150-16). As he quotes



Jeremiah 7:11, he brings God’s threat there symbolically to pass.

That addition of Isaiah 56:7 about the Temple as a “house of prayer for all the nations” comes not from Jesus historically but from Mark editorially. Jesus, standing in the southern porticoes of the great Court of the Gentiles, could never have voiced that complaint, but Mark could and did because of the war with Rome that ended in the Temple’s destruction.

**DOUBLE DEMONSTRATION.** It must be emphasized that Jesus is not acting against Jerusalem, the Temple, the high-priesthood, the blood sacrifices, or even the freely-paid taxes from around the Jewish diaspora (hence money-changing) as such. It is, first, Roman imperial oppression and, second, high-priestly collaboration with it that has rendered Jerusalem and its Temple impure and unjust. This is not Christianity against Judaism but Christian Judaism against Sadducean Judaism.

It is a similar indictment to that made against the four main first-century high-priestly families in the Babylonian Talmud: “They are the high priests, and their sons are treasurers, and their sons-in-law are trustees, and their servants beat the people with staves” (Pesahim 57a). It was always possible for that high-priestly aristocracy to have focused primarily on the Temple and left Jerusalem’s lay aristocracy, gathered as a city council, to deal with Rome and Pilate.

In any region of the Roman Empire, a governor like Pilate would have had to deal with such a collective lay aristocracy. On the one hand, he could not have hired and fired them as he could the high-priest in Jerusalem. On the other, such a lay council could easily have indicted him to Rome for malfeasance in office and he could not have prevented it. When all is said and done, Caiaphas and the other high-priestly families had alternative options for dealing with Roman governors. They never invoked them and thereby sealed their own eventual doom.

**MORE QUESTIONS.** The next set of questions is immediately obvious and they will serve as a transition to our next section. Granted the dialectic of those planned demonstrations, did Jesus also intend to get himself executed? Did he intend—either from human impulse, prophetic design, or divine necessity—to die a martyr in Jerusalem? Having failed to achieve this on Sunday, did he try again on Monday? And, if so, why did he survive until Friday?

One final question: Mel Gibson's 2004 film *The Passion of the Christ* began, not on Palm Sunday morning, but on Holy Thursday evening. Then, on Good Friday, it showed screen-shots filled with Jews shouting for Jesus' crucifixion. So if (some? many? all?) the Jews of Jerusalem (or of all times? and places?) were against Jesus, why was it necessary to pay a traitor for information and arrest Jesus in the darkness of night? Why not do it openly any day from Sunday onwards? Or, as Jesus himself might have asked: Why, "when I was with you day after day in the temple, did you not lay hands on me"? (Luke 22:53).

**ON THE WAY TO JERUSALEM.** Jesus tells his companions exactly what will happen in Jerusalem three times as he travels to that city. That certainly makes it seem that he deliberately goes there to get himself killed as a martyr.

But first, that is simply Mark's way of emphasizing that everything that happened was accepted—not necessarily willed—by Jesus himself. Second, each of those prophecies is part of a complex which explains how the *literal* death-resurrection of Jesus must be at least a *metaphorical* death-resurrection for his companions:

	<i>First Time</i>	<i>Second Time</i>	<i>Third Time</i>
Prophecy by Jesus	8:31-32a	9:31	10:33-34
Reaction by the Twelve	8:32b	9:32-34	10:35-37
Response by Jesus	8:33-9:1	9:35-37	10:38-45

Mark himself created the three prophecies within very specific contexts, and the prophecies must never be extracted or isolated from those contexts. Still, even granted that those complexes came not from Jesus but from Mark, the core question still stands. Did Jesus intend to get himself killed in Jerusalem and, if not, how did he expect to survive those demonstrations?

## THE CROWD AND THE CRUCIFIXION

“Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standing amongst us, had condemned him to be crucified.”

—*Josephus*, *Jewish Antiquities* 18.63-64

“Christus ... had undergone the death penalty in the reign of Tiberius, by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilatus.”

—*Tacitus*, *Annals* 15.44

**JOSEPHUS AND TACITUS.** It is as sure as historical events can ever be that Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate. At the end of the first century, the Jewish historian Josephus, and, at the start of the second century, the Roman historian Tacitus, agreed on four details concerning that execution. There was a *movement* over there in Judea. It resulted in the *execution* of its founder, Jesus or Christ. What followed was not cessation but *continuation*. And, more than that, what followed was *expansion*. You can see the core of that double witness in the epigraphs to this section.

That emphatically does not mean that all the details of the “he said” and “he did” or the “they said” and “they did” were intended historically rather than parabolically in the gospel versions. But, granted the historicity of that execution, we are constrained to work backwards to explain what led up to it. And, in general, the broad outline of Mark’s account is the closest reconstruction presently possible. In it and by it we can see clearly how Jesus almost got away with his twin demonstrations, even or especially at Pentecost.

**THE FIRST CROWD.** Mark emphasizes clearly the sequence of events from day to day, and we do the same using our modern terms for those days. Watch, then, what he underlines about “the crowd” from Sunday through Wednesday of Jesus’ last week in Jerusalem:

**Sunday.** As we saw already, “many people” acclaimed Jesus on that anti-triumphal entry-demonstration on Palm Sunday. That support continued on the next three days. The “crowd” forms, as it were, an impermeable ring around Jesus. And that is how we know he did not go to die but—despite what had happened to John the Baptist—to get away with his double demonstration.

**Monday.** After the Temple-demonstration, there was a clear separation between the high-priestly authority and the crowd: “when the chief priests and the scribes heard it, they kept looking for a way to kill him; for they were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching” (Mark 11:18).

**Tuesday.** Mark repeats that distinction three times. First, concerning John the Baptist, “they were afraid of the crowd, for all regarded John as truly a prophet” (11:32).

Second, after the parable of the Tenants: when “the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders ... realized that he had told this parable against them, they wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowd. So they left him and went away” (11:27 & 12:12).

Finally, Jesus challenges “the scribes” on how the Messiah can be both David’s Son and David’s Lord at the same time, “and the large crowd was listening to him with delight” (12:37).

**Wednesday.** That morning, the high-priestly authorities finally give up. “It was two days before the Passover and the festival of Unleavened Bread. The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him; for they said, ‘Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people’ (14:1-2). That, of course, is why Judas becomes so important in 14:10-11. He promises to locate Jesus for them at night and apart from the protective screen of the crowd.

In other words, and despite an undoubted awareness of the dangers involved, Jesus expected the collective security of “the crowd” to suffice as his protection—and, until Judas, he had succeeded.

Recall, by the way, that for over a hundred years Judeans had been immigrating into Galilee so that, as archaeology has shown from material continuities, extended families were linked between those two regions. Do not think of Jesus all alone or even alone with his female and male Galilean companions. He may well have been invited or even challenged to take his message to Jerusalem (recall John 7:3-4). Furthermore, notice that—as Mark emphasizes in 11:1,11,12 & 14:3—Jesus stays in Bethany around the Mount of Olives out of sight of city and Temple—among his extended family, such as Mary, Martha, and Lazarus?

**THE SECOND CROWD.** It is clear from Mark—the earliest of the four New Testament accounts of Jesus’ death and the source, *most probably*, for that of Matthew and Luke, and, *possibly*, for that of John as well—that we must distinguish that “crowd” on Sunday through Wednesday from the one on Friday. Watch very carefully, therefore, the sequence of verses as Mark introduces this second crowd:

- [1] “At the festival he used to release a prisoner for them, anyone for whom they asked.
- [2] Now a man called Barabbas was in prison with the rebels who had committed murder during the insurrection.
- [3] So the crowd came and began to ask Pilate to do for them according to his custom.
- [4] Then he answered them, ‘Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?’”

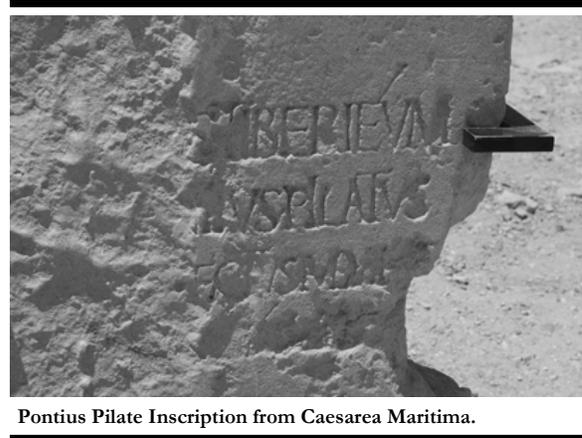
In the logic of that narrative: [1] there is an open Paschal amnesty; [2] Barabbas—freedom fighter for some, murderous brigand for others—is in jail; [3] the “crowd” come up to get him out under that amnesty; [4] Pilate tries to give them the non-violent revolutionary Jesus instead of the violent revolutionary Barabbas. In other words, that “crowd” come up *for Barabbas* and are only *against Jesus* in so far as he becomes a threat to that purpose.

The term “crowd” is always relative to time, place, and situation. How big, then, should we imagine that “crowd” before Pilate on Friday? Our best historical judgment is that the Friday crowd was *between a half dozen and a dozen*

people. Our conclusion derives from three reasons: the situation of Passover, the volatile character of Pilate, and the nature of their request.

First, Pilate transferred his *pretorium* from Caesarea Maritima to Jerusalem for Passover, a festival in which large numbers of Jews in a confined space celebrated deliverance from Egypt then while under Rome now. There were two riots in the Temple during Passover, according to Josephus, one in 4 BCE in which “three thousand” were killed (*Jewish Antiquities* 17.213-218 = *Jewish War* 2.10-13) and another around 50 CE in which either “twenty thousand” (*Jewish Antiquities* 20.105-112) or “thirty thousand” (*Jewish War* 2.223-47) were killed. Passover meant a tinder-box and zero-tolerance atmosphere for any large-scale crowd approaching the governor.

Second, we know more about Pilate than about any other governor in that first-century Jewish homeland—and all of it is bad. Josephus actually focuses specifically on his brutal way with crowds: against two protesting but unarmed Jewish crowds (*Jewish War* 169-77 = *Jewish Antiquities* 18.55-62) and one—probably also unarmed—Samaritan crowd (*Jewish Antiquities* 18.85-89) for which he was finally dismissed from office.



Pontius Pilate Inscription from Caesarea Maritima.

The contemporary Jewish philosopher, Philo of Alexandria, makes Pilate a poster-boy for a bad governor. In his treatise *On the Embassy to Gaius*, he describes him as “a man of very inflexible disposition, and very merciless as well as obstinate.” He cites “his corruption, and his acts of insolence, and his rapine, and his habit of insulting people, and his cruelty, and his continued murders of people untried and uncondemned, and his never ending, and gratuitous, and most grievous inhumanity ... being at all times a man of most ferocious passions” (38.301-302).

Finally, that “crowd” was asking Pilate for the release of somebody who was—from the Roman point of view—a murderous rebel. What if Pilate decided to grab that crowd as, at least, sympathizers if not more of the same? Better keep the group very small, with arms outside their cloaks, and a lot of bowing and scraping. All in all, therefore, imagine something like a very small delegation before Pilate that Friday. So much, then, for the history of that execution; what about its theological interpretation?

**A SACRIFICE FOR SINS?** First of all, Jesus died as a martyr. His life incarnated the non-violent justice of God, and he was executed by the violent injustice of Rome. It took neither prophetic insight nor divine foreknowledge for him to have known—especially after John’s fate—that his life was in permanent danger. The integrity of his life might well involve his death. That is not, emphatically not, the same as wanting or seeking martyrdom which can never be done since every martyr needs a murderer.

But, even granted all that, how is Jesus’ martyrdom a sacrifice or sacrificial atonement for the sins (or better: Sin) of the world? Can “sacrifice

for sin(s)” be understood and should it be understood totally apart from any form of substitutionary atonement or vicarious satisfaction for sin(s)? It can and should, but it helps if, before we continue, you shift the focal meaning of sins from sex unto violence.

Recall, for example, that once we left Eden our inaugural sins in Genesis 4 were not fornication and adultery but murder and fratricide. Thereafter, we scarcely improved at all in our capacities for sex but we have exponentially developed—as, from Cain to Lamech, that chapter warned—our capacities for violence.

Think about that magnificently parabolic scene in John’s gospel where Pilate and Jesus climactically confronted one another, where the Kingdom of Rome embodied in Pilate finally faced the Kingdom of God incarnated in Jesus. “My kingdom,” said Jesus in the King James Version of the incident, “is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.” (18:36) No violence ever, says Jesus, not even to release or save me.

First, the crucial difference—and the only one mentioned—between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Rome is Jesus’ non-violence *versus* Pilate’s violence. Without violence it could not hold its empire against external and internal threats. Without violence it could neither attain nor proclaim its mantra of peace through victory.

Second, Jesus does not even mention Pilate or Rome by name. The violence of Roman imperialism was but an incarnation at that first-century time and in that Mediterranean place of “this world,” that is, of the violent normalcy of civilization itself. Empires come and go, imperialism stays as the veneer of civilization we have overlaid upon God’s creation. Human sin is the normalcy of civilization’s violence which now threatens not only our species, but even our world, that is, all of God’s global creation.

Inside Christian faith, Jesus died *from* that sin of human violence and in atonement *for* that sin of human violence. His non-violent resistance incarnated the character of God, the Kingdom of God, and the collaborative eschatology he had announced as open to all. He gave his life crowned by that death as a gift, that is a sacrifice (*a sacrum-facere*) both to God and to the world. That religious vision offers salvation to the creation-world which “God so loved” (John 3:16).

Outside Christian faith, human evolution has created an animal constrained from killing its own species not by instinct and chemistry but by—at best—law and morality. The cosmic race between justice and violence is now approaching the finishing line. And the ultimate question is whether we are—like the saber-toothed tiger—a magnificent but doomed species. What political vision offers salvation from that escalatory-violence which has been, since the Neolithic Revolution over 6,000 years ago, our global drug of global choice?



## RESURRECTION AS RESISTANCE

“Crucified under Pontius Pilate, and buried; the third day he rose from the dead.”

—*Older form of the Apostles’ Creed & the Nicene Creed*

“Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose from the dead.”

—*Later form of the Apostles’ Creed & the Athanasian Creed*

We begin, as always, with questions from the historical matrix. When, in the century before Jesus, a Pharisee—who affirmed it—and a Sadducee—who denied it—argued about the general *bodily* resurrection, what did they mean and what was at stake in that debate? Then, consequent on that Jewish debate about the *bodily* resurrection of the dead, what did those first Christian Jews mean when they proclaimed that God had raised Jesus from the dead?

Finally, and more basically, why and how did anyone ever conceive of anything so absolutely counter-intuitive as a general bodily resurrection? Immortality or reincarnation of *souls* can hardly be proved or disproved, but everyone knows what happens to *bodies*—embalmed, entombed, or cremated, destroyed by physical disaster, feral attack, or human violence. Why even imagine a general *bodily* resurrection?

**DIVINE JUSTICE AND BODILY RESURRECTION.** For roughly a thousand years before the time of Jesus, his fellow-Jews did not believe in an afterlife. It was not because they had never imagined it—they lived next door to Egypt—but because they considered it a typical piece of pagan impertinence, a human usurpation of divine immortality. It was enough—more than enough—to have ever belonged to the people of God upon this earth and after that there was only Sheol—the tomb-as-end writ large in dust and darkness. And none of that, let it always be remembered, stopped the majesty of the Torah, the glory of the Prophets, or the splendor of the Psalms.

But in the 160s BCE, at the time of the Hasmonean Maccabees, the Syrian mini-emperor, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, launched a religious persecution to force Israel into political, social, and economic subjection to him. Religious persecution meant martyrs, women and men who refused to apostatize and therefore died, or who chose to apostatize and therefore lived. Hence, a new and pressing question.

The question was not about the survival of me or even us but about the justice of God. Furthermore, it was about God’s justice for the *bodies* of martyrs, for *bodies* tortured, brutalized, and executed. Since God was just, theologians argued, there would have to be a day of vindication, a day of general *bodily* resurrection—especially for martyrs and for all those who had lived for justice or died from injustice.

It was a profound paradigm shift within contemporary Jewish faith from those pre-Christian centuries and it was asserted—not argued but asserted as if we had always known it. “Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake,” wrote Daniel 12:2-3, “some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.”

You can see it even more clearly when the Maccabean martyrs assert under torture that God will one day give them back their *bodies* destroyed in persecution. For example: “He quickly put out his tongue and courageously stretched forth his hands, and said nobly, ‘I got these from Heaven, and because of his laws I disdain them, and from him I hope to get them back again’” (2 Maccabees 7:101-11). Or, in even more purple prose, when Razis “tore out his entrails, took them in both hands and hurled them at the crowd, calling upon the Lord of life and spirit to give them back to him again” (14:46). That was biologically crude but theologically clear: since martyrdom was about *tortured bodies*, the justice of God required *transfigured bodies* in the future for those *disfigured bodies* in the past.

Among those Jews who believed in the eschatological transformation or Great Divine Cleanup of the World, some—such as the Pharisees—began to proclaim that the very first order of divine business on that great future day would be a general *bodily* resurrection, a public and forensic consummation involving a vindication of all those who had died for justice and a condemnation of all those who had lived for injustice. There would be, as it were, a great Peace and Reconciliation Commission for all of human history. For how could you believe in the future justice of a God who had ignored the huge backlog of injustice that preceded the Cleanup?

**DIVINE JUSTICE AND JESUS’ RESURRECTION.** It is absolutely within that general Jewish matrix that we must understand the bodily resurrection of Jesus. And we must distinguish clearly the terms (bodily) exaltation from (bodily) resurrection.

**Exaltation.** First, that early Christian Jewish faith does not simply announce bodily *exaltation* but bodily *resurrection*. *Exaltation* would have meant that Jesus had been assumed bodily into heaven and was seated at the right hand of God as heir apparent and Lord of the universe. It would have been all about Jesus and would have come dangerously close to nepotism (or filiotism) with God taking special care of God’s only Son. Any Jew would have noted that Jesus was neither the first nor the last Jewish martyr to have died on a Roman cross. No matter how unique he was, he was never alone, so what about collaborative eschatology?

**Resurrection.** Second, then, the insistence on *resurrection* (and not just *exaltation*) is quite clear with Paul in 1 Corinthians 15—and remember that he was a Pharisaic Jew before he ever became a Christian Jew. Notice, for example, that Paul never suggests—nor could he within the contemporary meaning of the word—that resurrection is a personal privilege for Jesus alone. Instead he argues in both directions: if there is no general-bodily-resurrection, there is no

Jesus-bodily-resurrection; if there is no Jesus-bodily-resurrection, there is no general-bodily-resurrection:

“If Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ—whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised.” (15:12-16)

Paul cannot imagine a Jesus-resurrection without a general-resurrection because—and here is the crucial point—that *Jesus-resurrection is the start of the general-resurrection*. It was never about Jesus’ special privilege, but about God’s general justice.

In other words, we now have three different theological ways of proclaiming the already-presence of God’s Great Cleanup of the World—and John would represent a fourth one:

<i>From Jesus:</i>	the Kingdom of God	is <i>already</i> here
<i>From Mark:</i>	the Son of Man	is <i>already</i> present
<i>From Paul:</i>	the general bodily resurrection	is <i>already</i> begun
<i>From John:</i>	the Logos of God	is <i>already</i> incarnate

But, of course, all of that is still collaborative, still an interaction between the divine and the human. It is, says God, *already* only if you are *all ready*.

**RESURRECTION WEST AND RESURRECTION EAST.** We can now assess, within Christianity, how our western and individualistic understanding of Jesus’ resurrection differs from the eastern and corporate interpretation. And what is at stake for us in that difference. Go to Google, for example, click on Images, and put in “Resurrection of Christ” in the Search slot. Notice that some of the images show Christ coming out of the tomb in splendid isolation while others show him leading (or, better, yanking) others with him.

In the western tradition, in, say, the Averoldi Polyptych by Titian in Brescia, Italy (1520-22) or the Moretus Triptych by Rubens in Antwerp, Belgium (1611-12), the resurrection shows Jesus arising in



*Averoldi Polyptych, Titian, Brescia, Italy, 1520-22.*

well-muscled magnificence. Also, however, within that same western tradition, we have corporate images of Jesus standing atop the shattered gates of Hades and, with Satan cowering in the background, leading out those just and righteous ones who had died before him. You can see that image, for example, from Fra Angelico in Cell 31 of the San Marco Dominican Priory, now a museum, in Florence, Italy.

Here, however, is the point. We call that image either the “Descent into Hell” or the “Harrowing (or Despoiling) of Hell” and, as you can see in the Creeds at the start of this section, we separate it from the resurrection itself. It is, as it were, something to keep Jesus busy on Holy Saturday, in between the horror of Good Friday and the triumph of Easter Sunday.

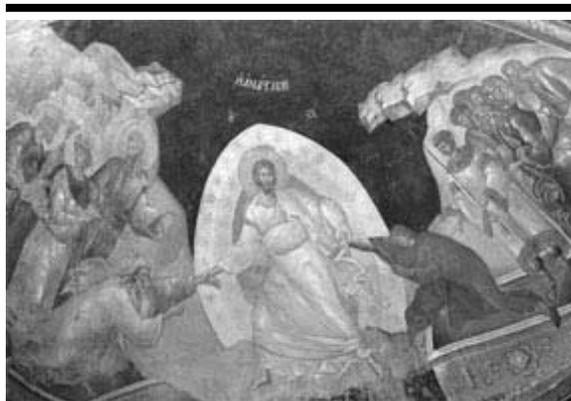
In the eastern tradition of resurrection theology those events have never been separated. What we call the “Harrowing of Hell,” it calls simply “The Resurrection.” That is exactly the Greek term written above those corporate images in frescoes from the Dark Church in Cappadocia to the Holy Savior in Chora Church (now the Kariye Museum) in Istanbul.

In that latter huge and most magnificent vision a beautifully-robed Christ yanks Adam and Eve from their tombs and, along with them, arise large groups led by Abel, the first martyr of the Old Testament on one side, and by John the Baptist, the first martyr of the New Testament, on the other. This is not some separate event before the *individual* resurrection of Jesus but the *corporate* resurrection of Christ. And that, and that alone, is an adequate representation of resurrection as divine justice, as the first act of collaborative eschatology, as establishing justice for the past before promising it for the future.

Finally, there is this striking example. A processional banner hangs inside the tiny traditional site of the tomb of Jesus in the rotunda of the Holy Sepulcher Church in Jerusalem. It is of red cloth with CHRISTOS top to bottom on one side and ANESTH top to bottom on the other: “Christ is risen” it proclaims on either side of a central diamond-shaped image.

In it a robed Christ stands on the shattered gates of Hades with broken locks and bars all around him. In his left hand he holds a slender cross and with his right he reaches out towards four figures: Adam, Eve, Abel (with staff) and John the Baptist (with halo). It is, as it were, that giant image from Istanbul condensed to a small miniature in Jerusalem.

**LITERAL OR METAPHORICAL RESURRECTION?** Was that entire trajectory—from non-Christian Judaism to Christian Judaism—understood literally or metaphorically? We recognize immediately the difficulty in answering—or even knowing how one could answer—that question within a



*The Resurrection, Chora Monastery (Kariye Museum), Istanbul, Turkey.*

pre-Enlightenment world where transcendental wonders were a culturally accepted part of ordinary expectation and normal experience.

On the one hand, that western and individual resurrection can be taken literally far more easily than can the eastern and corporate one. In the former case there would be only one empty tomb near Jerusalem, in the latter case there would have been hundreds, thousands, or, if “Adam and Eve” were also metaphorical figures, even millions.

On the other hand, if Jesus’ resurrection is taken literally, then, presumably, so will our own future resurrection be literal; but if it is taken metaphorically, then ours will also be metaphorical. But whether we take it literally or metaphorically, we are still called in either interpretation to collaboration with it—called, as Paul would say, to lead resurrected lives here upon this earth. In fact, if we do not, Jesus can be imagined as “exalted” but certainly not as “resurrected.” All those visions of an *already-here* eschaton are provisionally dependent on a collaborative interaction between God and ourselves.

Finally, never think of the justice of God as a matter of rewards and punishments from without. God’s justice is about *internally inevitable consequences* and never—despite our repeated insistence—about *externally administered punishments*. If, for example, you jump from the 20<sup>th</sup> floor, do not say that God hit you with the sidewalk as a punishment. Or, as Psalm 82:7 puts it more globally: “all the foundations of the earth are shaken” by human injustice to one another. But, as that eastern tradition of Jesus’ *corporate* resurrection has always proclaimed, God’s justice and our collaboration in the Great Divine Cleanup of the World demand that we look both backward to the past as well as forward to the future.

## 12 AMERICA AS THE NEW ROME

*Jesus Christ to the apostle Peter.* “Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.” *Matthew 26:52*

*Jesus-Aslan to the youngster Peter.* “You have forgotten to clean your sword ... whatever happens, never forget to wipe your sword.”  
—C. S. Lewis, *Narnia 2.132-33*

For over a century and a half we have heard two claims about the manifest destiny of our country. They have been repeatedly emphasized—by liberals sadly and conservatives gladly—in the last two decades.

**AMERICA AS ROME.** First, *America is an Empire*. That claim was given its classical expression by Walt Whitman in his poem, “The Errand Bearers,” first published in *The New York Times* on Wednesday, June 27, 1860:

“I chant the new empire, greater than any before—As in a vision it comes to me;  
I chant America the Mistress—I chant a greater supremacy ....  
And you, Libertad of the world!  
You shall sit in the middle, thousands and thousands of years ....  
The sign is reversing, the orb is enclosed,  
The ring is circled, the journey is done.”

You will notice how, in those final two lines, imperial claims are consummated in eschatological language.

Second, *America is the New Roman Empire*. This came around that same time. In his 1858 book, *The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table*, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr., wrote that: “We are the Romans of the modern world—the great assimilating people. Conflicts and conquests are of course necessary accidents with us, as with our prototypes.” Within a few years both those writers were searching battlefields for, respectively, a wounded brother and a wounded son, but even a terrible American Civil War confirmed that Roman analogy since they too had one on their path to imperial power.

As Americans, therefore, we have come today to face the fact that we have moved steadily across our centuries from a *continental* through a *hemispheric*



U.S. Capitol Building, Washington, D.C.

to a *global* imperialism. In his Henry M. Jackson Memorial Lecture in Washington, D.C. on September 18, 1990, Charles Krauthammer said that, “People are now coming out of the closet on the word ‘empire.’ The fact is no country has been as dominant culturally, economically, technologically and militarily [as America] in the history of the world since the Roman Empire.”

As American Christians, then, we are confronted today with this question: Since the Old Roman Empire crucified our Lord, how must we live in the New Roman Empire? That is a profound enough question to face, but there is an even more profound one advancing behind it. What happens when our very Christianity is used to defend and support our American imperialism?

Maybe, for example, God was so clearly and emphatically against empires—from Egyptian through Assyrian, Babylon and Persian, to Macedonian—in the Old Testament because they were pagan and not Jewish? Maybe God was against the Roman Empire in the New Testament because it was pagan and not Christian? What if God wants a Religious Empire?



*Oath of the Horatii*, Jacques-Louis David, 1784.

**IS GOD VIOLENT?** It is at this point that we glimpse the ultimate question that has been lurking below all the sections of this *Reader*: Is God violent? That is surely our most basic question as Christians. For, if God is violent, if God’s final solution to the problem of evil is to punish and kill the evil-doer, then what is wrong with us operating on that same principle? Indeed, a collaborative eschatology with a violent God necessarily arrives—as did the 7-book series, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, by C. S. Lewis, and the 12-book series, *Left Behind*, by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins—at the conclusion that, respectively, young Christians or adult Christians will participate violently in the Second Coming of a violent Jesus empowered by a violent God. Surely that, all of that, is the sin against the Holy Spirit.

Hence, that fundamental question presses above all others for us as Christians. *Is God violent?* And again, we repeat, do not confuse that question with this one: are there inbuilt sanctions for injustice and violence, war and imperialism? *Is the God of our Christian Bible violent or not?*

There are, from Genesis to Revelation, from one end of the Christian Bible to the other, two visions of God struggling with one another. Think, for one example, of the Divine Cleanup of the World imagined as a Great Final Feast for all the nations on Mount Zion or as a Great Final Battle against all the nations near Mount Megiddo (Armageddon). Or think, even more precisely, of that vision of eschatological non-violence in the prophets Isaiah and Micah when “in days to come ... they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks” (2:4=4:3) and compare it with the alternative one of eschatological violence in Joel when “in those days and at that time .... beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears” (3:10).

Which is it: a violent or a non-violent God? Or is it a transcendental cocktail that you create with so many parts of each and mix to taste? Both visions are there and they extend from one end of the Christian Bible to the other. That ancient lie that God was violent in the Old Testament but non-violent in the New Testament, by the way, will only work for those who have never read either. So how do we as Christians decide between those divergent biblical visions of our God?

Once the question is formulated that way, the answer is immediately obvious. *Which vision of God is embodied in the historical Jesus?* If Jesus is the incarnate image of our God, does he incarnate violence or non-violence? Even Pilate, by the way, got the correct answer to that question. But our Christian Bible is therefore a rather unique book. It contains a story whose meaning is in the middle not the end, whose climax is in the center not the conclusion. Jesus as Lord is Lord even of the Book that proclaims his Lordship.

Think about this image. In the apses and domes of countless churches within eastern Christianity Jesus appears as the *Pantocrator*, the All-Powerful One—at a time, by the way, when the emperor was termed the *Autocrator*, the Self-Powerful One. Jesus is depicted with his right hand raised in the traditional Christian teaching gesture with its fingers separated into a twosome for the two natures in Christ and a threesome for the three persons in the Trinity. In his right hand he holds a book—be it the gospel, the New Testament, or the Bible. But here is the point: *he is never shown reading that book*. It is usually closed and clasped or, if open, it is open towards the viewer. God so loved the world that he sent us, not an Inscription but an Incarnation, not a Book but a Person.



**FOUR BASIC QUESTIONS.** All the questions cited so far are based in these foundational ones which are a circular sequence in that the last one turns back to the first one as a theological matrix.

***What is the character of your God?*** This picks up, of course, where we have just ended. Whether you imagine God anthropomorphically or not, what is the character of your vision? Above all else: is your God punitive? How do you distinguish internally-derived human consequence from externally-appointed divine punishments? Is your God just and, if so, violently just or non-violently just? Can even God be violent and just at the same time?

***What is the content of your faith?*** How is Jesus the embodied image or incarnational revelation of your God? Is Jesus punitive and violent—past, present, future? If you confess, for example, that Jesus is Lord and Caesar is not, what exactly is the content-difference between those titles? How exactly is creation different from civilization, the-world from this-world, the eschatological kingdom from an imperial kingdom? No title without content!

***What is the purpose of your worship?*** Does God need your praise and adulation? Is worship for us, for our petitions, our needs, our hopes? Is

there something even more basic than holding our hearts within the shadow of transcendence? Is it about empowerment? Are we like lap-top computers that need regularly if not permanently to be plugged into a power-source? Plugged in, that is, to the very character or spirit of that just and non-violent God?

***What is the function of your community?*** Why do you not worship in individual privacy or even strictly within your family? You could have a God-room like you have a living, dining, or bath-room at home? Imagine asking Jesus or Paul that question. We organize, they would stutter back at us in disbelief, because what we oppose is already organized. Cooperative eschatology must be at least as organized as its imperial alternative—but, of course, organized very, very differently.

Think, in summary, of that great biblical parable in which Jacob wrestled with God through the night and, even if not vanquished, was left limping into the dawn. That is the parable of our Christian Bible itself. In it the radicality of God struggles unceasingly with the normalcy of civilization in a contest where a draw and a limp would be more than enough. Think about it.

**THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH.** This video presentation was intended primarily for discussions in community. Its purpose is not just to change individuals but change individuals-in-community. Its hope is to make each church a beachhead of collaborative eschatology in union with a God of non-violent justice even or especially against a world of violent injustice.

The first imperative, then, is to decide individually and communally before God in Christ—that is, in study and prayer, meditation and contemplation, liturgy and worship, theory and practice—whether the vision it presents is true to that God and that Christ. The second imperative is to incarnate the spirit of that vision until it becomes one's very own. This is what we might call—in honor of Jesus' great apostle Paul—entering the Body of Christ or receiving the Spirit of Christ. And, although that process may be a slow and steady progress across a lifetime, think of it on the analogy of these more-or-less instant operations.

From modern technology, imagine your computer screen offers you the free download of a new operating system for your computer. You open the FAQs and write: thank you very much but, if I download, will I still be able to access everything now on my hard drive? Oh yes, of course, comes the answer, but it will all appear completely different to you. Do you or do you not hit the OK?

From modern medicine, imagine a heart-transplant in which your old heart is completely gone and a new heart has replaced it. If there is no rejection or at least none that is beyond control, that new heart now empowers your life. Think then, on that analogy, of a spirit-transplant or a character-transplant in which your old spirit or character is removed and replaced by another one. What if Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., had offered you a free spirit-transplant at the height of the Civil Rights Movement. You knew what it might do to you—in terms of trouble, jail, or even death. Would you have taken it? Would you take, since it is freely offered to all by God, a Spirit-transplant from Jesus?

## EPILOGUE

### A BI-LINGUAL INTEGRITY

“From the first chipped stone to the first smelted iron took nearly three million years; from the first iron to the hydrogen bomb took only 3,000 years ... The 10,000-year experiment of the settled life will stand or fall by what we do, and don't do, now.”

—Ronald Wright, 2004

It is now necessary for us Christians—most especially in America—to become bi-lingual. On the one hand, we should know completely and internalize fully our own Christian faith and be able to articulate it as sincerely and clearly as possible. On the other, when we talk in the public square we must also be able—with absolute integrity and complete fidelity—to translate that intra-Christian language into extra-Christian challenge.

We must, when necessary and where appropriate, be able to translate our Christian vision into the language of public discourse—whether you call that public language ecumenical or secular or simply American. Just think of these two examples.

From Thomas Jefferson in our Declaration of Independence (1776) through Abraham Lincoln in his Gettysburg Address (1863) to Martin Luther



Abraham Lincoln Memorial,  
Washington, D.C.

King, Jr., in his “I Have a Dream” speech (1963), we have declared that “all men are created equal.” It would almost seem that it is only once each hundred years that we famously hear that all human beings are created equal by God. What if we tried to make that the actual basis of foreign policies and domestic programs?

Or, again, this example: We ask our children on school-day mornings to pledge allegiance (from 1892) to a flag and a country that promises “liberty and justice for all” (and not just all “men,” by the way). Do you actually believe that pledge and, if we do, what are we doing about it?

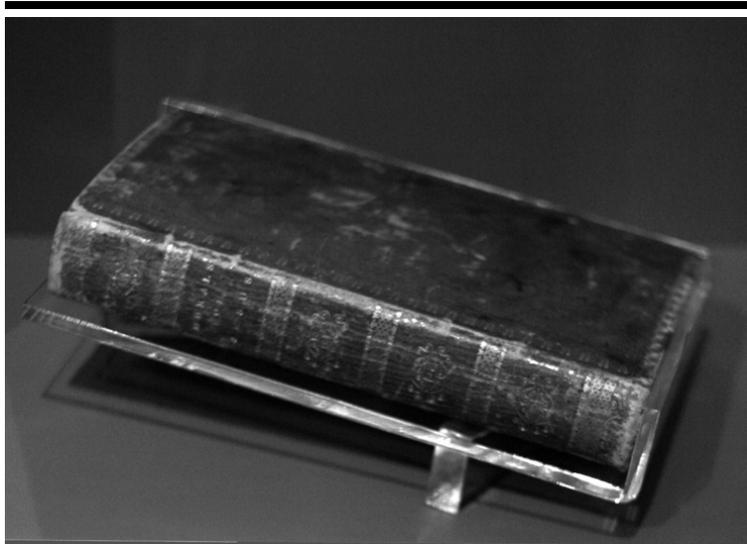
The phrase “under God” was later added (1954) and that allows the contemporary debate on that phrase to avoid—prudently and wisely?—any concentration on “liberty and justice for all.” But if we—or any other nation or all the world—ever established “liberty and justice” for all upon this earth

we would be, whether we liked it or not, “under God” as transcendence has been understood across the world’s great religions.

There is no claim here that we are a “Christian nation.” The claim is that we Christians must be bi-lingual because: first, our Christian faith speaks—as indeed do all the great religions of the world—to humanity’s deepest hopes

and yearnings for an end to oppression and injustice, war and violence; and that, second, our American destiny points in that same direction since the Constitution's Preamble sets out to "establish Justice."

In summary and conclusion, then, as Christians and as Americans, we have changed that ancient blessing, "Go in Peace," to this amended version: "Go in Justice, and Peace will take care of Itself."



*Jefferson Bible*, c. 1820, Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D.C. Near the end of his life, Thomas Jefferson clipped verses from the New Testament to create this work, "The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth."

## NOTES

Arthur Kleinman, *Patients and Healers in the Context of Culture. An Exploration of the Border-land between Anthropology, Medicine, and Psychiatry*. Comparative Studies of Health Systems and Medical Care. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980. Page 41.

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Maps on Pages 12 & 34 by Anthony Rayl.

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A Roman Catholic monk for nineteen years and a priest for twelve years, Dr. Crossan is a former co-chair of The Jesus Seminar and chair of the Historical Jesus Section of the Society of Biblical Literature.



## Additional Resources From *Living the Questions*:

### Living the Questions 2.0 : An Introduction to Progressive Christianity

*LtQ2* is the completely revised and expanded version of *Living the Questions*, the popular video & internet-based small group exploration of progressive Christianity featuring 30 premier religious voices of our day. An open-minded alternative to studies that attempt to give participants all the answers, *LtQ2* strives to create an environment where participants can interact with one another in exploring an emerging Christianity. Comprised of 21 sessions, *LtQ2* may be offered in sequence or as three independent flights of seven units each: *Invitation to Journey*, *Reclaiming the World* and *Call to Covenant*. *LtQ2* includes downloadable and printable leader and participant guides with weekly readings and discussion questions. Each session may be conducted in one hour or expanded to include a meal and personal sharing. The 20-minute video segments include conversations with leading voices of faith, sermon and lecture clips, digital stories illustrating aspects of an evolving faith, and concrete spiritual practices and disciplines. The flexible DVD and resource materials can be used in variety of class, retreat, and other formats.

#### *Invitation to Journey*

1. An Invitation to Journey
2. Taking the Bible Seriously
3. Thinking Theologically
4. Stories of Creation
5. Lives of Jesus
6. A Passion for Christ: Paul
7. Out into the World: Challenges Facing Progressive Christians

#### *Reclaiming the World*

8. Restoring Relationships
9. The Prophetic Jesus
10. Evil, Suffering & A God of Love
11. The Myth of Redemptive Violence
12. Practicing Resurrection
13. Debunking the Rapture
14. Reclaiming the World

#### *Call to Covenant*

15. A Kingdom without Walls
16. Social Justice: Realizing God's Vision
17. Incarnation: Divinely Human
18. Prayer: Intimacy with God
19. Compassion: The Heart of Jesus' Ministry
20. Creative Transformation
21. Embracing Mystery

### **Dream.Think.Do.Be.**

Designed for college age/young adults, *Dream.Think.Do.Be.* is a four-volume overview of progressive Christianity featuring the voices and insights of many of today's religious leaders. Each volume contains five sessions that consider the primary themes of Christianity. Each session includes a 20-minute video with guided discussion questions. The core message, dogma, and practices of the Christian faith are re-evaluated with a love for and relationship with scripture at its center. Each volume is self-standing; together they form a foundation for young progressive Christians in today's world.

### **Saving Jesus**

Join Marcus Borg, John Dominic Crossan, Matthew Fox, Amy-Jill Levine, James Forbes and a host of other leading religious voices for a conversation around the relevance of Jesus Christ for today. The 12-session program includes a printable participant reader and a facilitator guide with discussion questions. The basic format for each weekly 1 - 1½ hour session includes conversation around the readings, a 20-minute video segment and guided discussion.

### **Eclipsing Empire**

A 12-session series on Paul, Rome, and the Kingdom of God. Join preeminent New Testament scholars Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan on location in Turkey as they trace the Apostle Paul's footsteps throughout the Roman Empire. This 12-session DVD and web-based study explores fresh insights into Paul's message of the Kingdom of God, its challenge to Roman imperial theology, and the apostle's radical relevance for today. Participant Guide written by John Dominic Crossan. Filmed in High-Definition across Turkey, Greece, and Italy.

### **Countering Pharaoh's Production-Consumption Society Today**

A study for progressive Christians featuring Walter Brueggemann. Ideal for Advent and Lent, flexible in format, *Countering Pharaoh* can be conducted over four or five sessions. The program includes a two-hour DVD and a CD-Rom with printable written materials. Sessions: *The Way Out*, *The Decalogue*, *Countering Caesar*, *An Act of Imagination*, and *On Not Doing God Any Favors*.

### **Questioning Capital Punishment with Sr. Helen Prejean**

A five-session DVD study featuring one of the world's leading authorities and outspoken critics of state-sponsored execution. Study themes include: *Crossing the Breach*, *What in God's Name?*, *A Change of Heart*, *Radical Forgiveness*, and *Next Steps*.

### **Tex Mix**

Stories of Earthy Mysticism with Tex Sample. You've heard of tall tales—Tex definitely has a few of those. But these tales are more on the order of deep and wide. 20 tales tailored for your teaching, preaching, and devotional use with Tex Sample—the consummate storyteller (including ten stories from LtQ2). The DVD also includes Tex 's introduction to storytelling and a downloadable guide with points to ponder, related Scripture texts and discussion questions. A bonus DVD includes mpegs of Tex's stories licensed for use in PowerPoint or Keynote slideshows to enhance worship and sermons.

### **Matt & Lucy's Version Births Christmas Pageant**

Little did Matt & Lucy know when they agreed to help out with this year's Christmas pageant that the director would give them each a different script and leave them to work out their differences..." *Matt & Lucy's Version Births Christmas Pageant* can be as simple or elaborate as you decide. There are four speaking parts for youth and eight delightfully singable songs for young children (aged 3 and up). The LtQ Equip-kit includes two CDs: a TRAX music CD containing separate instrumental and vocal tracks of the eight musical selections, and a CD-ROM with printable pdf files of the script, production notes and lead sheets (arrangements) of the songs. Written by Rev. Dot Saunders-Perez, with original music by Janet Allyn.

