

**A REDACTIVE CRITIC**  
**EXAMINES THE THREE “FIRSTS” OF JESUS**  
**IN GALILEE, JUDEA AND SAMARIA ACCORDING**  
**TO THE GOSPEL OF JOHN**

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **THE PROBLEM OF TWO PORTRAITS OF JESUS**

# CHAPTER 1

## THE PROBLEM OF THE TWO PORTRAITS OF JESUS

### The Synoptists and the Gospel of John<sup>1</sup>

In my earlier work *A Backpacker's Journey into the Gospels* I sketched an outline of two portraits of Jesus. The first was drawn from details contained in the synoptic gospels and corroborative texts in the earlier Pauline epistles. The second portrait derived from an examination of the Gospel of John. The two portraits are in most respects antithetical and the task of the New Testament scholar is to explain how such dissimilar pictures could be drawn and how they became combined and synthesised into one appealing image. I outlined my response to this challenging assignment in Chapters 9 and 10 of my book by invoking the concept of a “transitional phase”, which lay hidden and woven into the text of the synoptic gospels.

### The Early Portrait

The earlier portrait of Jesus in the synoptic gospels paints him as a well-credentialed Jewish reformer who preached a message concerning the imminent restoration of the Throne of David and the judgement of the sons of Israel under the theocratic rule of the God of Israel. It was a message that had nothing to do with the gentile world. It was so ethnocentrically based that the followers of Jesus were forbidden to have any dealings with the neighbouring Samaritans or nearby Syro-phonicians. It was so eschatologically based that the followers of Jesus were convinced the impending Kingdom of God was going to dawn in their own lifetime. They were instructed to buy swords and assist with the ushering in of the Kingdom by violence if necessary. For their reward the disciples of Jesus were promised to be made judges of the tribes of Israel. This portrait of Jesus was of a zealous, religious and political reformer who was intent on purifying the Jewish nation by overpowering the contaminating influence of the Herodian appointees of Rome. It is a picture of one who saw himself as the Pretender to the throne of Israel.

In matters of style the synoptic writers depict a Jesus who speaks in aphorisms and parables and has little to say about himself. His public ministry lasts only one year and there is no mention that his first miracle was enacted in Cana of Galilee nor is his most spectacular miracle concerning the raising of Lazarus given a mention.

The cleansing of the temple incident occurs at the end of his ministry. The impending Kingdom of God was about to emerge in the lifetime of those living. Events however proved that these expectations of Jesus were mistaken and he was captured and given a sentence of death by the Romans. Peter, the chief disciple, however remained true to this misguided mission. The politics of insurrection lurk in the background of this portrait drawn from details of the synoptic gospels.

## **The Later Portrait**

The second portrait of Jesus is drawn from the details given in the gospel of John. Here Jesus is depicted as an etherealised Cosmic Christ figure who was destined to be the spiritual ruler of all mankind. He is pictured as a spirit-annointed messiah from the time of his baptism and there is no secret of his messiahship as there is in the synoptic gospels. He is not ashamed of his Galilean origins and he observes no prohibition about conversing with the Samaritans. In the synoptic gospels Jesus performs exorcisms whereas in John he performs “signs”. Rather than speaking in aphorisms and parables he is given to extended monologues. In the synoptic accounts he preaches in synagogues and is thoroughly Jewish. In the gospel of John he begins his Jerusalem ministry by cleansing the temple whereas in the synoptists he concludes his ministry with a cleansing. Above all, the message of Jesus is universalised and not ethnocentrically based. There is no suggestion of a political uprising in this painting. Everything is poetry and theology and John’s gospel is the basis of this portrait.

## **A Re-examination of the Synoptic Portrait**

The synoptic portrait of Jesus is entirely dissimilar to that painted from the Gospel of John. Yet when the synoptic portrait is subjected to “infra-red light” scrutiny it proves to be a composite of an original attempt and an overlay with more recent brushstrokes. The paint used in the overlay is of the same age as that used in the painting from the Gospel of John, and the background has also been altered.

The “original” synoptic portrait is even more dissimilar to John’s than its retouched version. The background of the “original” depicts Jesus among a group of insurrectionists and wearing a headband with the name of “Zerubbabel” printed on it. In the retouched version Jesus is holding a scroll with the words “Mysteries of the Kingdom” printed on it. His headband has been altered to read “Son of David” and the armed insurrectionists have become seated disciples. An unarmed Roman guard is listening intently.

Both of these early portraits differ markedly from that painted from the details of the Gospel of John. In this portrait Jesus is depicted as a heavenly being bathed in an aura of light. Above his head is a dove of peace and his feet rest on clouds. Beneath the clouds there are faces of people from all parts of the world. In his right hand he is holding a book inscribed “The Word” and in his left hand there is an orb symbolising the world.

Thus the synoptic gospels really contain two portraits and the Gospel of John has only one. This may be depicted diagrammatically.

## **Synoptic Gospels** (Matthew, Mark, Luke)

1. Early portrait
2. Later portrait  
(A re-touched Version  
of the early portrait)

## **John's Gospel**

3. John's portrait

The early portrait is highly ethnocentric and is a picture of a political insurrectionist. The later synoptic portrait is of a pacifist teacher who is very law-abiding and more anti-Jewish than anti-Roman. The portrait of the third gospel is of a cosmic saviour who is a mystic and given to reflecting on his spiritual mission in long discourses and internal monologues.

## **The Bible as Literature**

In order for one to reach an understanding of the meaning and message of Jesus, it is necessary to accept Bultman's dictum that "The interpretation of biblical writings is not subject to conditions different from those applying to all other kinds of literature"<sup>2</sup>. One cannot start from the premise that the New Testament is unassailable revelation. One must apply the same hermeneutical principles to the Bible as an historian would to the Koran, the Analects of Confucius, The Teachings of Buddha, The Wisdom of Laotse, the Mahabharata, the Zend Avesta and so on.

## **The Synoptic Accounts and the Fourth Gospel**

The present approach is basically a literary one. The gospels are, at their best, fine literature but very poor history. There should be little wonder at such a statement since we know that Jesus, like Socrates, never left any written records. If we wanted to obtain information about the historical Socrates we would have to glean it from the Memorabilia and Symposium by the historian Xenophon, the Dialogues of Plato, the comedy "Clouds" of Aristophanes and the writings of Aristotle.

In like manner if we want to glean information about the historical Jesus we have to consult the gospels. When we do this we make the discovery that there are decided differences between the first three gospels (the synoptic accounts) and the fourth gospel. We also make the discovery that there is little independence in the first three accounts.

## **Canon Streeter's – "The Four Gospels – A study in Origins"<sup>3</sup>**

Canon B.H. Streeter in his scholarly work "The Four Gospels – A Study in Origins" (1926) summarises some of the findings:

- (i) Matthew reproduces 90% of the subject matter of Mark in language very largely identical with that of Mark.
- (ii) Luke does the same for rather more than half of Mark.

- (iii) Matthew and Luke have, in common material amounting to about 230 verses not found in Mark. The hypothesis that this was derived from a document now lost – commonly called Q is more probable than the view (a) that Luke copied Matthew (or vice versa), or (b) that the common source was oral tradition.

The differences between the synoptists and the so-called Gospel according to St John are too considerable for a discussion at this stage. I will comment about these differences later, and some of the peculiarities of the fourth gospel.

### **The Gospel of John**

The Gospel According to Saint John presents an entirely different image of Jesus to that of the synoptic gospels. Some of the differences have already been alluded to and they will be further elaborated in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. All that needs to be emphasised at this stage is that the Jesus of the synoptic gospels is very Jewish and decidedly ethnocentric. The Jesus of the Gospel of John is no longer Jewish but a cosmic figure who has no ethnocentric shortsightedness. The redactive or editorial process can be discovered in all of the gospels but it is very evident in the Gospel of John where it virtually encompasses the whole work.



**CHAPTER 2**  
**THE FINDINGS OF NEW TESTAMENT**  
**SCHOLARSHIP**

## CHAPTER 2

### THE FINDINGS OF NEW TESTAMENT SCHOLARSHIP

#### The Seven Pillars of New Testament Studies<sup>4</sup>

The field of New Testament studies has occupied the minds of some of the greatest scholars over a period of 250 years. Robert W. Funk and Roy Hoover delineate the seven stages or phases through which such scholarship has proceeded.

1. *Herman Samuel Reimarus (1694-1768)*

Reimarus distinguished between what the authors of the gospels said about Jesus and what Jesus said about himself. He drew a distinction between the historical Jesus and the Creedal Christ.

2. *David Friedrich Strauss (d. 1874)*

Strauss' monumental "Life of Jesus Critically Examined" (1835) led to the separation of fact from miracle and history from myth. It led to the recognition that the synoptists were more concerned with history while John's gospel was more mythic.

3. *The Primacy of Mark's Gospel*

At the end of the 19th century there was general agreement among New Testament scholars the Gospel of Mark not only preceded Matthew and Luke but was incorporated into their construction.

4. *The "Q" Hypothesis as the Solution to the Synoptic Problem*

When scholars such as B.H. Streeter had subtracted the Markan content from both Matthew and Luke they discovered that they still contained about 230 verses in common. This common residue was attributed to a hypothetical source known as Q which is the initial letter of the German word 'Quelle' meaning source.

5. *The Significance of Eschatology in the Message of Jesus*

In his *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* and his "Mysticism of Paul the Apostle", Albert Schweitzer focussed attention on the centrality of the "eschaton" (Greek for the last event) in both the message of Jesus and the teachings of Paul in the Churches. This focus lost its importance during the rise of the neo-orthodoxy of Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann where the emphasis was given to the development of faith not based on history. An even later emphasis focussed more on the non-eschatological elements of the message of Jesus.

## 6. *The Oral Tradition*

The sixth pillar of New Testament studies developed when the focus shifted to the underlying oral tradition which subsequently found its way into the written word. These investigations led to a linguistic description of the rhetorical Jesus and an examination of the differences between an oral and a print culture.

## 7. *Focussing on What Shines Through the Gospel Accounts*

The contemporary phase of gospel scholarship is the elucidation of the Prismatic Jesus.

*“the gospels are now assumed to be narratives in which the memory of Jesus is embellished by mythic elements that express the church’s faith in him, and by plausible fictions that enhance the telling of the gospel story for the first century.”*

p. 5. Funk and Hoover’s *“The Five Gospels”*

### **False Attribution and the Findings of the Jesus Seminar (1985)**

As a result of the Jesus Seminar, Robert Funk and Roy Hoover produced a book that published the findings of the 200 New Testament scholars that participated in its proceedings over a period of six years. That report was published by McMillan in 1993. The name of the book was *“The Five Gospels, The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus, What Did Jesus Really Say.”* The most eye-catching and controversial conclusions of the Jesus Seminar was

*“Eighty-two percent of the words ascribed to Jesus in the gospels were not actually spoken by him.”*

An almost equally eye-catching and controversial finding of the Jesus Seminar was that the Gospel of John did not contain even one authentic saying of Jesus. These findings, even if they are not completely reliable, throw a great deal of doubt on the credibility of much of the teachings attributed to Jesus. For the most part, the words of Jesus represent the teaching of the Church about him rather than the teachings by him.

### **Higher and Lower Criticisms<sup>5</sup>**

It is usual for Gospel researchers to lay bare their methodological assumptions when they propose their historical and theological viewpoints. This article derives from a basis which accepts the approaches of modern biblical research. These approaches involve a dependence on the findings of textual, historical, source, form, tradition and redaction criticism. These findings leave much room for disagreement but they at least move the research onto more secure ground than that provided by literalism and fundamentalism.

### **Redactive Criticisms**

While source criticism, form criticism and tradition criticism are basically concerned with disclosing information about the origins and formation of the christian message, redaction criticism focuses its attention on the final stages of the written presentation. Redaction

criticism is concerned with the editing, selection, and arrangement of the material after its original compilation. The redaction critic is particularly interested in the seams between unrelated pericope and the seams between stories spliced together from Mark and Q. He looks for insertions of detail unmentioned in parallel accounts, omissions, breaks in continuity and illogical chronologies and sequencing of material. He speculates about prologues, epilogues and borrowings from sources outside the canon. He is, like the form critic, alert to dissimilarities in the treatments of the same story and he ponders on the uniqueness of presentation in a particular gospel. He is alert to sudden changes of tense and anachronistic phenomena.

The redaction critic accepts the premise that the authors of the gospels wrote from within the circle of faith and that they did not try very hard to separate the Jesus of history from the Christ of their faith. The labours of G. Bornkam, H. Conzelmann and W. Marxen have been useful in baring the pre-suppositions and motivations of the four evangelists as they shaped the structure of each gospel. Their different perspectives make it abundantly clear that a harmony of the gospels was neither possible nor desirable.

### **Redaction Criticisms and the Gospel of John**

The hand of the redactor or editor is written all through the Gospel of John but is especially clear in the Prologue and Appendix and textual displacements. However, it is not simply in the texts themselves that the redactor betrays his editing. It is in the total organisation of his material and the changes of emphasis he has wrought by changing the ethnocentric Jesus of the synoptic gospels into a person whose message had a universalistic orientation from the very beginning of his ministry.

### **The “Gospel of Signs” in the Gospel of John<sup>6</sup>**

We may be certain that the so-called “Gospel According to Saint John” was not written by John the apostle or that it was the handiwork of a single author.

The oldest copies of the four gospels date to about 200 AD. A fragment of the Gospel of John has been dated to 125 AD but this is copied material and not an original text. Current scholarship has proposed that the form in which the Gospel of John has come down through the centuries is a composite work which incorporates an earlier written work known as The Gospel of Signs and editorial material. The Gospel of Signs contains a treatment of the seven signs and miracles (Jn 2:1-12; 4:46-54; 5:2-9; 6:1-14; 6:16-21; 9:1-12; 11:1-44) and some aphoristic material. To this early material there has been woven a Prologue, the “I am” statements and an Appendix.

### **The Question of Authorship**

The question of the authorship of “The Gospel According to St John” has been a topic of continuous debate among scholars from the earliest centuries of the church until the present day.<sup>7</sup> Scholars accept three main contenders: The Apostle John, John the Elder (Author of the Epistles II John and III John), and Lazarus. It is not proposed to cover the ground for each of these three possible authors but rather to adopt the approach of a non-

committed layman who is looking at the New Testament canonical and non-canonical literature for the first time. When this attitude is adopted a discovery is made that the book itself claims to have been written by “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (see John 21.20 and John 21.24). Although this disciple is not named it seems from internal evidence to refer to the Apostle John. Other possibilities have been suggested by scholars. These include Nicodemus, John Mark and The Rich Young Ruler.

In a recent work “*The Book That Jesus Wrote*”, Barbara Thiering has advanced the proposition that the Gospel of John was actually written by Jesus using the pesher technique extensively.<sup>8</sup>

We thus have the curious situation that scholars have proposed that the author could be anyone of seven possibilities!

### **Multiple Authorship/Editing**

Whoever the author was there is also another small and confusing point that the layman notices about the concluding verses of the gospel:

*“This is the disciple which testifieth of these things and WE know that this testimony is true.”*  
(John 21.24)

Who is the “WE”? The lay reader, after reading the whole gospel, is left with the impression that behind “the disciple which testifieth” there is a sub-committee of editors!

**CHAPTER 3**  
**SCRIPTURAL FORENSICS**

## CHAPTER 3

### SCRIPTURAL FORENSICS

#### Rules of Evidence

In courts of law trials are conducted and decided on only after the rigorous application of the rules of evidence. Research into the historical Jesus should also be conducted according to acceptable ground rules or principles. This is necessary because when we start from the basic fact that Jesus left no written records about himself we immediately enter the field of circumstantial evidence. Everything written about what Jesus said and did has come down the ages from copies of texts written many years after the events described. Since there is considerable doubt about whether the original texts were written by eye-witnesses the reliability of the copies is questionable. Furthermore when the gospel records agree with each other is this a matter of collusion or borrowing? When the gospel records disagree with each other (on the same incident) which one is the most reliable – assuming of course that the same incident is a fact?

#### *Examining the Claims and Onus of Proof*

In examining the claims of the New Testament one must distinguish between the claims attributed to Jesus and the claims deduced by the documenters about Jesus. When these claims involve miracles such as a virgin birth, the raising of the dead, a bodily resurrection then one must apply the same rigorous standards as one would apply to other rival claimants.

If the gospel accounts present themselves as objective facts of history then they must be judged on that basis. If they present themselves as poetry or devotional literature then that is how they must be evaluated.

If the gospel accounts claim to speak of matters of salvation, redemption, atonement and judgement then the onus of proof must rest on those making the claims. One would expect claims to such pronouncements would be underpinned with agreement on essential details and verifiable data where such claims intersect with real events.

#### *Agreement with External Sources*

There is little external evidence of any value to corroborate the events described in the gospels. Josephus, a Jewish historian, published his 20 volume “Jewish Antiquities” about 93 or 94 AD. These volumes have survived as copies by Christian scribes. These copies contain editorial additions that are consonant with Christian teachings but such additions are valueless as agreement from external sources especially when referring to Jesus. The Roman historian Tacitus wrote early in the second century about events that occurred in

Rome during Nero's reign in 64 AD. Both Josephus and Tacitus know about the death of Jesus and about the movement that sprang from this teaching.

The Dead Sea scrolls refer to two, possibly three, messiahs; a lay King Messiah of the line of David, a priestly Messiah of the line of Aaron and a prophet Messiah.<sup>9</sup> Some scholars have interpreted "The Teacher of Righteousness" as a title of Jesus. On the other hand Barbara Thiering prefers to interpret it as a title of John the Baptist while "The Wicked Priest" is an epithet of opprobrium of Jesus.

### *Agreement with Internal Sources*

The synoptic gospels have a measure of agreement between each other but very little with the Gospel of John. The agreement between each other is because of borrowing from a common source. Mark's gospel is a prime source from which Matthew and Luke borrow heavily. Matthew and Luke also have a common source "Q" which accounts for another 230 verses of each. (see Chapter 1).

Agreement with internal sources can strengthen the value of evidence but when two or three witnesses are in perfect agreement the prospect of collusion or collaboration is raised. With the synoptic gospels there is no convincing evidence that the authors were even witnesses to the events they describe and their word-for-word agreement on common events is strong evidence of a borrowing from a common source.

### *Agreement in Time and Place*

The reliability of eyewitnesses or written accounts about the same event increases when there is agreement in time and place. In examining the four gospels in regard to their historical reliability there are serious discrepancies between the synoptic gospels and the Gospel of John on chronological sequencing and geographical settings. Within the synoptic gospels there are also minor discrepancies between them.

The time framework of the synoptic gospels encompasses only one Passover during the ministry of Jesus whereas it includes three Passovers in the Gospel of John. The crucifixion occurs on Passover eve in John whereas it occurs on Passover day in the synoptics. Jesus begins his public ministry when John the Baptist is arrested in the synoptics but John the Baptist is still active in the Johannine account. The cleansing of the temple is at the commencement of the ministry of Jesus in John's gospel whereas it is at the conclusion in the synoptic accounts.

Discrepancies in place also occur between the synoptics and John but these are usually explained by assuming a three year ministry instead of a one-year ministry.

### *Anachronistic Detail*

The insertion of future events such as the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple into a predictive discourse may be genuine prophecy. Alternately it may be a ploy by an editor, of a much later date, to give additional authority to a work. The two occasions when the



word “church” appears in the gospels is an example of anachronistic embellishment by a later editor.

### *Quality of Witnesses and Bias*

The quality of the witnesses to the New Testament miracles and stories is not easy to ascertain. The names of the authors of the gospels are usually regarded as pseudonymous. There is a great deal of reportage when there were no eyewitnesses to the words attributed to Jesus and there are numerous examples of differences in the reportage of the same event. There are also examples of attempts to belittle the credibility of key witnesses as “unlearned and ignorant men” (Peter and John) (Acts 4:13) who squabbled over who was going to sit on the right and left of Jesus when he came in his glory (Mt 20:20) (James and John).

The details given about the resurrection appearance are impossible to reconcile. Similarly Paul’s Damascus experience in Acts 9 and Acts 22 contains contradictory reportage of detail. In Acts 9 the witnesses

*“stood speechless, hearing a voice”*

(Acts 9:7)

whereas in Acts 22 the witnesses

*“heard not the voice”*

(Acts 22:9)

and in Acts 26 when Paul recounts the story he does not say the witnesses “stood speechless” but rather

*“we were all fallen to the ground”*

(Acts 26:14)

These details concern events of great importance and the honest inquirer has a right to expect agreement in reportage.

There is nothing detrimental about bias when it is openly declared. It only becomes an issue when bias is hidden and reportage is presented as objective. John’s gospel is openly biased but Luke’s gospel is cast as objective history.

### *False Attribution*

The compilers of the gospels attribute a great deal of narrative material to Jesus that common sense must reject. Examples of these include internal monologues of John’s gospel, word-for-word reportage of the Gethsemane prayer when the only possible witnesses had fallen asleep on three occasions, eavesdropping on the conversations between Jesus and Satan when there were no possible witnesses, reportage of the conversation between Jesus and the Woman of Samaria when the possible witnesses

absented themselves and the conversation Jesus had with the High Priests and Pilate when the possible witness had fled.

Naturally, the transmission of an oral tradition to a written account must concede some latitude to the storyteller. Exact reportage of conversations conducted 30 or 40 years after they happened could not be expected. However, if they involve the miraculous, or are key teachings, they should be faithful to the speaker's word.

### **Aspects of Circumstantial Evidence**

There are a great number of evidentiary considerations that need to be weighed when making judgements about circumstantial evidence. Some of these concern differentiating fact and value, observation and inference and identifying the pitfalls of over-generalisation. If statements are presented without respect to logical form they carry no weight and become mere assertions.

#### *Beyond Reasonable Doubt*

Convictions in criminal cases are decided by juries on the principle that the evidence is beyond reasonable doubt. Where the evidence is based on hearsay or is entirely circumstantial such convictions are difficult to obtain. In the gospel records the evidence is entirely written and there are no eyewitnesses to cross-examine. There is still the possibility of finding internal agreement (or disagreement) within and between the written records themselves. Confirmation of written statements from sources external to the gospels enhances their credibility provided the external sources are unbiased and independent. In making decisions about the reliability and worth of circumstantial evidence one enters into the field of probability.

#### *Probability*

Whether a statement or event is probable is greatly dependent on the reliability and number of persons that vouch for its authenticity. Probability decreases when reported statements and events depart from usual experience. Thus the reportage of a miracle diminishes its probability. The reliability of witnesses also diminishes with declared bias and disagreements about time and place.

#### *Arguments from Negatives and From Silence*

Arguments from silence are not permissible in law. However when a written work does not contain material that is germane to a central theme or which might reasonably be expected to receive a mention that omission cannot be totally ignored. For example, the New Testament contains no detrimental remarks about Rome or about Romans. This non-fact assumes some significance in the context of the Roman subjugation of Palestine and the hostility of the zealots – one of whom was a disciple of Jesus. Again, there is only a passing mention of the existence of the Zealots – viz. “Simon called Zelotes” (LK 6:15 and Acts 1:13). The Roman occupation and the intensity of the Zealot resistance form an inescapable backdrop to the life of Jesus and yet this antagonism is not even alluded to!

The reader of the gospels will find many mentions of the Pharisees and Sadducees but no mention of the Essenes. What can the perceptive reader make of this deafening silence?

### *Distinguishing Fact from Value*

To proclaim Jesus as The Christ is to attribute a value to a fact. Logically such an attribution is perfectly legitimate. However, when values are presented as if they were facts then an error of logic is committed. To talk about “Christ” as if it were a synonym for “Jesus” is to fall into error which perpetuates a false theology. Eusebis commits a similar fallacy when he interprets the appearance of the title “The Lord” in the Old Testament as if it applied to Jesus.

### *Arguments from Inference*

There is a verse in the Gospel of John which suggests that the Romans were to be feared and that not all of them were “good guys”:

*“If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and our nation.”*

Jn 11:48

This lone verse is strong circumstantial evidence that the Jewish leaders, at least, believed that Jesus posed a threat to the continuance of the Jewish nation. What could he have done to threaten the continuance of the Jewish nation? This “non-evidence” viz. That Jesus did pose a threat to the Romans is a “give-away” statement. It, too, cannot be ignored.

### *Gratuitous Clues*

When a witness volunteers additional information in excess of that needed it can give the impression of “overstating” for an ulterior motive. The story of changing water into wine becomes outrageous or beyond bounds when the author specifies the quantity as being equivalent to 100 imperial gallons! The compilers of John’s gospel try to enhance verisimilitude by specifying the exact time of day that events occurred. Such exactitude after a fifty or sixty year time interval weakens rather than strengthens credibility. Lazarus is not only reported as being dead for four days but that his body was in a state of decomposition

*“Lord by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days”*

Jn 11:39

This extra information moves the story from the symbolic level back into the actual world. By doing so it does much to confuse the faith of the would-be-believer. The gratuitous extra clue reduces rather than increases probability.

### *Protestations of Innocence and Hidden Motives*

Protestations of innocence prove nothing but when they are gratuitously proffered they alert the perceptive reader to the possibility of an undeclared or ulterior motive. The synoptists go to great lengths to present Jesus as one who never claimed to be the Messiah. It is a claim always made by others. However in John's gospel he openly admits his messiahship to the woman of Samaria. When these conflicting attitudes are brought together considerable doubts are raised about the authenticity of one or both of the stances.

Again, the gospels go to great lengths to make it clear that Jesus did not claim to be "King of the Jews". Why such special pleading? Surely no one would suppose a humble Galilean could be mistaken for the King of the Jews? Maybe, just maybe, he did claim to be the Pretender to the Throne of David. The fact that so much gospel writing is directed to proving that Jesus never claimed to be King of the Jews alerts the scriptural detective to the possibility that there may just be some basis for the accusation.

### *Misplaced Cause and Effect*

When Lazarus was raised from the dead, we are told that this upset the chief priests and the Pharisees. But why should this be so? It is surely a matter of rejoicing, such an incident suggests a false attribution of a motive to get rid of Jesus. A more plausible reason to get rid of him would have been if claimed to have more authority than the chief priests. What should have been said and wasn't can only be guessed at but in applying the tools of a forensic investigator such attributions assume a relevance they might not otherwise have.

### *Exposure of Undeclared Motives*

The compiler of The Gospel According to John declares his bias:

*"But these things are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name."*

Jn 20:31

This openness is admirable and allows the reader to know whether or not he should agree or disagree with the evidence as presented. However, we are also told in the concluding verse

*"there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that could be written."*

Jn 21:25

This means that what has been recorded has been a selection. The writer however does not detail the basis of his selection for each story or each event. We can be sure that in the stories under consideration in this investigation there is nothing fortuitous or haphazard in the selection and order in which they have been arranged. Indeed the purpose of this study is to try and discover the undeclared motives that lie behind this selection and the order in which they have been presented.

**CHAPTER 4**  
**THREE REGIONS OF PALESTINE**

## CHAPTER 4

### THREE REGIONS OF PALESTINE

#### **Canaan or Palestine**

The geographical, ethnographical, political and religious backgrounds of Palestine is required knowledge for any serious student of the gospels. Some aspects of this background become intrusive and even the subject of lessons by Jesus.

The land of Canaan or “The Promised Land” of the Old Testament has had a long and chequered history of war and occupancy by different tribes and nations that extends well before and beyond the time when the Children of Israel (Jacob) took up their residency. The struggle for ownership continues to this day.

Canaan, or Palestine<sup>10</sup> as it was later called, comprised roughly a 75 mile wide strip of land in from the Mediterranean Sea on the western border. The Jordan River formed its eastern boundary. Its northern reaches extended to the Sea of Galilee and its southern extremity was about the Dead Sea. In Old Testament times it stood at the commercial and cultural crossroads of the Mesopotamian and Egyptian Empires.

At the time of the ministry of Jesus the area of Palestine comprised three broad groupings of people: the Galileans to the north, the Samaritans in the centre and the Jews or Judeans in the south. These three groups of people were not on friendly terms with each other.

The ministry of Jesus, however, was at different times concerned with events in each of these three regions. He walked between Galilee and Judea so naturally he had to pass through Samaria or bypass it by crossing the Jordan near Bethabara. This route went through Perea and after recrossing the Jordan it brought the traveller to Jericho in Judea.

#### **Galilee**

##### *Galilee of the Nations*

In Isaiah 9:1 Galilee is referred to as “Galilee of the Nations”. This is most likely a direct allusion to its mixed racial composition following the conquest of ancient Samaria by King Shalmaneser IV (727-722BC)<sup>12</sup>. The Assyrian account records that 27,290 inhabitants of that area<sup>13</sup> (presumably from 10 of the 12 tribes of the Children of Israel) were captured and forcibly taken into captivity into what was then Assyria and later became part of the Babylonian Empire. Many of the 27,290 captives were replaced by Sargon sending in settlers from other parts of the Assyrian Empire. These new settlers mixed their blood with those who remained. Those that intermarried with foreigners were despised by the Jews (from the remaining 2 tribes of Judah) and such despising continued down the years into New Testament times.

### *Galilee of the Gentiles*

In the New Testament the author of Matthew mentions that “When Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee; and leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast, (of the Sea of Galilee) in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim.” (Matt. 4:12-13). The author tests our credulity by claiming quite arbitrarily that Jesus moved from Nazareth to Capernaum

*“that it might be fulfilled which is spoken by the prophet Esais saying, the Land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles.”*

(Matt. 4:14-15)

As Bultmann observes the New Testament writers “do not gain new knowledge from Old Testament texts, but read from or into them what they already know.”<sup>14</sup>

The point of interest in Matthew’s reproduction of the Isaiah text is that he changes the reference from “Galilee of the Nations” to that of “Galilee of the Gentiles”. The Hebrew word for gentile is “goiim” which means unclean. Thus it is a fair inference to draw that traditional Jews regarded Galileans as unclean.

### *The Pseudepigrapha<sup>15</sup>*

Another little known aspect of the Galileans is their peculiar addiction to apocalyptic literature. Apocalyptic literature is a sub-division of the Pseudepigrapha i.e. books written under assumed names. The Pseudepigraphical writings include such works as I Baruch, The Epistle of Jeremy, II Esdras and so on. These writings form part of the Old Testament Apocrypha and are regarded as canonical by the Roman Catholic Church.

Apocalyptic literature such as the Book of Enoch and the Revelation of St John the Divine represent a distinct literary genre.<sup>16</sup> Although the writers used assumed names they fed their readers hope. Jesus, being a Galilean, would have been acquainted with much of this eschatological literature which promised the closing of an age and the dawning of a new era. Indeed, the synoptic gospels have the message of Jesus clothed in apocalyptic dress:

*“And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the Kingdom of God come with Power.”*

(Mark 9:1)

### *The Conquest of Galilee by Aristobulus I in 104-103 BC<sup>17</sup>*

Galilee was forcibly converted to Judaism following the conquest of Aristobulus I in 104-103 BC. As a region it contained many rebellious groups among whom were the Rechabites, the Kenites and the Zealots who were among the leading Roman dissidents. During the life of Jesus, Galilee was ruled not by the Romans but by the Herodian tetrarch Antipas. The Romans only assumed direct control of the region during the period 44-66 AD.

### *The Galilean Background of Jesus*

According to the Gospel of Luke, Jesus was conceived

*“in a city of Galilee, named Nazareth”*

(Luke 1:26)

however he was actually born in Bethlehem of Judea

*“And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea to the city of David, which is Bethlehem.”*

(Luke 2:4)

According to Matthew (but not Luke) after the departure of the three wise men Joseph was warned by an angel in a dream who said:

*“flee into Egypt and be thou there until I bring thee word.”*

(Matt 2:13)

On the other hand, in Luke’s account, we are told that Mary and Joseph remained in Judea for some time and then went to Nazareth in Galilee. There is no mention of fleeing to Egypt. In fact Jesus is circumcised on the eighth day. And when “the days of Mary’s purification were accomplished according to the law of Moses, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord”, i.e. 40 days after his birth! So whether Jesus actually fled to Egypt or whether the story was concocted to fulfil a prophecy of Jeremy (see Matt 2.17) is something the reader will have to judge.

It would seem that the editors of Matthew and Luke took unusual pains to have Jesus genealogically credentialled. This is despite the fact that the two genealogical tables of the two gospels are irreconcilable. Jesus has almost dual nationality or triple nationality if a point needs to be stretched! He was a Galilean because he was conceived in Galilee and reared there after birth. He was a Judean because he was born in Bethlehem in Judea and he was an Egyptian because immediately after his birth he “fled into Egypt”!

The inclusion of the story of the three wise men from the East showing deference to the infant Jesus is an editorial attempt to broaden the basis on which the later and transformed mission of Jesus could be propagandised. Similarly his “dual nationality” meant that he could be easily portrayed as someone who, from birth, had overcome the limitations of race.

Thus Jesus was reared as a Galilean. Presumably a number of his disciples were also Galilean

*“Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven?”*

(Acts 1:11)

Peter’s accent was a subject of derision in Jerusalem (the capital of Judea):



*“said again to Peter, surely thou art one of them: for thou art a Galilean, and thy speech agreeth thereto.”*

(Mk 14:70)

## **Judea**

### *Major Sites*

Jerusalem was the capital of Judea and most of the action of Jesus recorded in John’s gospel takes place in Jerusalem. The synoptists give greater weight to Galilee. Judean towns included Jericho, Emmaus, Bethany, Bethlehem, Qumran and Masada.

### *Solomon’s Temple<sup>18</sup>*

Jerusalem was captured by David during the reign of Saul (1028-1013 BC). David was denied the right to build a temple at Jerusalem and his son Solomon was given that honour. On the death of Solomon the United Kingdom divided with Jeroboam ruling the northern Kingdom of Israel and Rehoboam ruling the southern Kingdom of Judea.

### *Captivity in Babylon*

The divided Kingdoms of Israel and Judea fell victim to two invasions. The Assyrian invasion preceded the Chaldean. During the reign of the Assyrian King Tiglath-pileser in 732 BC the whole of Palestine was an Assyrian province. Shalmaneser V put the area under siege in 724 BC and Sargon completed the process in 722 BC. A revolt occurred after the death of Sargon in 705 BC. This revolt was crushed by the Assyrian King Sennacherib in 701 BC. Sennacherib claimed to have ravaged 46 fortified cities and taken 200,150 into captivity. He failed to capture Jerusalem but exacted heavy tribute. Jerusalem was finally captured by the Chaldean King Nebuchadnezzar in 597 BC completing the captivity begun by the Assyrians.

The region of Samaria was resettled by Assyrians who intermarried with those not deported thus giving rise to a population of mixed racial stock. This new ethnic group however continued to regard the Torah as their law and even built their own temple on Mount Gerizim near Shechem. This was at a time when Jerusalem had no temple.

### *The Rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple by Zerubbabel<sup>19</sup>*

Zerubbabel was appointed governor of Palestine by Darius around 520 BC and he was responsible for the rebuilding of the original Temple of Solomon. The Old Testament books of Haggai and Zechariah extol Zerubbabel as the expected Messiah of the Jewish people because he was a Prince of the line of David and because he rebuilt the temple. The last verses of the book of Zechariah look forward to the inauguration of the Kingdom of God by proclaiming:

*“In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD and the pots in the LORD’s house shall be like the bowls before the altar.*

*Yea every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto the LORD of hosts, and all they that sacrifice shall come and take of them, and see the therein: and in that day there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of the LORD of hosts.”*

Zech: 14:20-21

### *Egyptian and Syriac Domination of Palestine<sup>20</sup>*

During the post-exilic period the region of Palestine came under the control of the Egyptian Ptolemies who imposed a Hellenised form of control through the third century BC. In 198 BC Jerusalem fell to the Syrian Seleucids and the older forms of Hebraism became choked by the ascending Hellenism as mediated by the Syrian Kings.

### *The Profanation of the Jerusalem Temple by the Syrian King Antiochus IV in 168 BC*

In 168 BC Antiochus IV, known as Epiphanes, took possession of the Jerusalem temple and offered heathen sacrifices on the altar to Jehovah. He also forbade Sabbath observances and the practice of circumcision. These practices and the mere possession of a copy of the Law were punishable by death.

### *The Maccabean Rebellions (175-135 BC)*

The exploits of Mattathias and his son Judas are outlined in the books of the Maccabees. They conducted guerilla warfare against the Syrian occupiers and were eventually successful in recapturing Jerusalem. The temple was purified and the defiled altar was replaced and normal sacrifices were restored. The sons of Mattathias were accepted by popular approval as rightful heirs to the high priesthood. This incurred the displeasure of the Essenes who were obsessed with the mission of restoring the Zadokite or Melchizedek Priesthood.

### *The Essenes<sup>21</sup>*

The Essenic Zadokites were expelled from Jerusalem about 145 BC and established themselves in the isolated region of Qumran by the shores of the Dead Sea. The Essenes accepted the Law and the Prophets as canonical and observed the solar calendar as it had applied in the first temple built by Solomon. This meant that they observed religious festivals on different days and this threw them into conflict with the Maccabean rulers.

In one of the Zadokite Fragments discovered in Cairo in 1896 there are details of their eschatology. They expected a Messiah from Aaron to be preceded by a “Star” or a “Lawgiver” and “Teacher of Righteousness”. This expectation differed from the tradition of a Messiah born from the tribe of Judah.

### *The Roman Occupation*

Judea was nominally a province of Syria until Pompey invaded the country in 63 BC and for the next 100 years it was under Roman rule. Antipater, an Idumean, was appointed as Procurator but he appointed his son, Herod, who became known as Herod the Great.

Herod the Great ruled between 37 and 4 BC.

### *Herod the Great (37-4 BC)<sup>22</sup>*

Barbara Thiering makes out a strong case for the importance of King Herod in establishing a renewed system of Jewish worship which, in a number of key respects, pre-figured the pattern of later Christian worship. According to Thiering, Herod made himself popular by rebuilding Jerusalem and restoring the Jerusalem temple. His building programme also extended to the fortification of the harbour of Caesarea and the establishment of a palace on the rocky cliff of Masada.

His renewed system of Jewish worship depended on the proselyting success of the Jerusalem Jews among the wealthier pockets of Jews of the diaspora. His missionaries preached the establishment of a New Covenant in which animal sacrifices were discarded and baptism preached as a sign of a commitment to the New Israel. At initiation i.e. baptism, members contributed half a shekel as a type of membership fee. As each new member progressed on a yearly basis additional half-shekels swelled the coffers of Herod.

### **Samaria<sup>23</sup>**

#### *Location*

Samaria was situated between Galilee to the north and Judea to the south. The hellenised city of Scythopolis was to its north-west and formed a separate area. Samaria's city of Shechem was near the sacred Mount Gerizim where the Samaritan Temple was built in 335 BC. The Judeans regarded this temple as schismatic. Sychar is usually identified with Askar, eastwards of Mount Ebal. The capital of Samaria was a city also called Samaria. The western border of Samaria was the Mediterranean Sea and the River Jordan ran along its eastern border.

In pre-exilic times the region was commonly designated as Ephraim. The contours of the region are heavily dissected by deeply cut water courses which are usually dry. Thus these highlands are not easily accessible and agriculture is not possible except in isolated pockets.

#### *The Religious Landscape*

The religious scenario of Samaria is as complicated as its landscape. The Samaritans were a mixed population of Israelites and the descendants of Assyrian colonists. They practised a form of Judaism but had deviated from both the Galileans to the north and the Judeans to the south. They broke with the Temple cult at Jerusalem and built their own temple. The

Judeans were openly hostile to them and the Maccabean John Hyrcanus I destroyed their temple in 129 BC. This act heightened the antagonism they held against Jews.

#### *Features of Samaritan Beliefs*<sup>24</sup>

The Samaritans accepted the Jewish scriptures only up until the time of Moses. Michael Goulder cites five features of Samaritan beliefs:

- God is not revealed in history but only through the revelation of scripture
- God's revelation was in the form of 'secrets' and 'mysteries' and formed a 'wisdom' or 'knowledge' of God known only to an elite
- God is a duality
- God manifested himself and stood by Moses as a 'physical incarnation' and
- God would one day send a prophet like Moses.

(Cited from p. 112 of Douglas Lockhart's "Jesus the Heretic".

#### *Evidence from the New Testament of Animus between Jews and Samaritans*

The New Testament does not contain a great number of allusions to Samaria but when these are added to the known historical facts they portray a region whose inhabitants were despised by Jews more than the Galileans. This despising resulted in great enmity between the Jews and the Samaritans. This enmity is reflected in the words of the first missionary commission given by Jesus, the words he spoke to the grateful Samaritan leper and the persistent attitude of Peter. The Gospel of John records the attitude of the Woman of Samaria and the accusation by the Jews that Jesus was a Samaritan "and hast a devil".

(i) The First Missionary Charge.

*"Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not."*

(Mt 10:5)

(ii) The Grateful Samaritan Leper

*"There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger."*

(Lk 17:18)

(stranger = foreigner)

(iii) Peter's Persistent Attitude

Peter to Cornelius:

*"Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come onto one of another nation ..."*

(Acts 10:28)

(iv) The Woman of Samaria

*"How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? For the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans."*

(John 4:9)

(v) Disparaging Epithet

*"Then answered the Jews ... say we not well that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil."*

(Jn: 8:48)

(vi) The Mistaken Zeal of James and John

There is another piece of indirect New Testament evidence that the Samaritans had no great love of the Jews. It is recorded in Luke:

*"and they (the disciples) went and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him (Jesus).*

*And they (the Samaritans) did not receive him...."*

(Luke 10:52-53)

This prompted James and John to ask of Jesus:

*"Wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?"*

(Luke 10:54)

Finally, there would be little point in telling the story of the Good Samaritan if it did not imply that a great deal of animus existed between the Jews and the Samaritans.

*Evidence that Jesus Did not Share the Animosity of Jews to Samaritans*

The New Testament evidence that Jesus did not share in the Jewish animosity towards Samaritans is not strong and rests almost on the Johannine account of his conversation with the Woman of Samaria and the Story of the Good Samaritan. Since a great number of scholars regard the story of the conversation that Jesus had with the Woman of Samaria as not belonging to his authentic sayings but really a mixture of narrative and proverbial sayings which embody later teachings of the church, it is not strong evidence. Its purpose is didactic rather than historical. This leaves the Story of the Good Samaritan which also does not stand close scrutiny.

*The Story of the Good Samaritan*

The Story of the Good Samaritan is one of the most loved and best known of the 'parables' of Jesus, and yet it only appears in the Gospel of Luke which is the most removed from the life of Jesus in terms of time. If Luke borrowed the story from Mark or Matthew he has certainly amplified it. The story illustrates the message that the Samaritan was the only true neighbour to the man who fell among thieves. This conclusion is advanced as an answer to the initial question by a certain lawyer

*Who is my neighbour?"*

(Lk 10:29)

One would have thought that if James and John had heard Jesus tell this story they would not have proposed to command "fire to come down from heaven" to consume the ungrateful Samaritans which is a later incident recorded by Luke (Lk 10:54). Nor does the non-ethnocentric Jesus of the Good Samaritan story explain why Peter persisted in his ethnocentric leanings until the time he (Peter) met Cornelius (see Acts: 10:28).

It is apparent that the story of the Good Samaritan is a story retrojected into the life of Jesus to explain a later teaching stance of the missionary church. The attitude of Jesus to the Samaritans is more likely to be in accord with that advanced by Mark's more authentic account of the meeting Jesus had with the Syro-phonician woman:

*"for it is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to dogs"*

(Mk 7:27)

The story of the Good Samaritan has aspects that are "scoring points" against a "certain priest" and later a "Levite". The mention of these ancillary characters suggests that the story is also making a point about the callousness of the clergy. It is thus a teaching story rather than a historical recounting. It belongs to the transitional phase of gospel reporting and has been inserted into the teachings of Jesus to make his teachings more consonant with John's account of Jesus meeting with the Woman of Samaria.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **THE WEDDING AT CANA IN GALILEE**

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### THE WEDDING AT CANA IN GALILEE

#### Transhistorical Approach

In examining this New Testament story one starts from the premise that the so-called Gospel According to John contains very little history. One also accepts the finding from the Jesus Seminar that:

*“The Fellows were unable to find (in the Gospel of John) a single saying they could with certainty trace back to the historical Jesus.”*

p. 10 Introduction “The Five Gospels” Robert Funk and Roy Hoover

The Gospel of John is best understood as being TRANSHISTORICAL. It transcends history in a manner similar to Greek mythology. The difference between the two is that the Gospel of John pretends to be historical whereas Greek mythology is just mythology. The meaning hidden in this gospel is often a substantive level removed from the stated or declared meaning. Many of the vignettes are actually cryptograms. Among these one would highlight The Wedding at Cana, The Woman of Samaria and The Raising of Lazarus. However, the whole of the 7 miracles are better understood as non-historical. This does not relegate them to the status of fiction. They are in fact highly didactic and they exhibit considerable artifice in construction. Paradoxically, when they are not read as history they reveal a great deal of historical information!

#### Purpose for Inclusion

When I examined the genealogical tables of Matthew and Luke I found that from an historical point of view they were totally unconvincing and irreconcilable. However, when I approached them by asking the question “what purpose did the authors have in mind for their inclusion?” I was able to deduce a great deal of historical insights. I discovered that they were constructed to answer common objections and to proclaim certain tenets of faith. I have adopted the same strategy in examining the miracle of changing water into wine at the marriage feast of Cana and my results are just as comparable.

#### The Primacy of the Miracle of Converting Water into Wine

The importance given to this particular miracle deserves close scrutiny.

*“This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him.”*

(John 2:12)



It was the first miracle of Jesus and the author of “John’s” gospel recounts it in the very early part of his gospel. It is a little puzzling to understand why John gives it primacy when it does not even rate a mention in the other three gospels. The elements of the events described are arresting and somewhat theatrical. One would have thought it deserved more prominence or even a mention by the synoptists. In some respects it seems to be one of the oddest of the miracles because it is so hedonistic. To have commenced a ministry with healing the sick, or restoring sight to the blind, or restoring mobility to the lame, or casting out a demon, or healing a leper would have established a convincing reputation for altruistic service to the down-trodden. However, to supply extra wine to a wedding party is a most unlikely first miracle.

### **The Location of the First Miracle**

The first miracle of Jesus takes place in Cana of Galilee and not Judea.

I have already indicated in Chapter 4 that Galilee was not held in high regard by orthodox Jewry. By locating the first miracle in Galilee the author is really implying that the religion of Jesus was intended for the gentiles from the very beginning. This is despite the fact that in the earlier synoptic accounts his first missionary commands were not to go to the gentiles! John overcomes this amazing turnabout by claiming

*“He came unto his own but his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God.”*

(John 1:11)

Thus by locating the first miracle in Galilee the author of this gospel is actually correcting a view that the mission and message of Jesus was to bona fide Jews. This correction is supported by further evidence soon after when John has Jesus conversing with the woman of Samaria.

### **Some Other Interesting Aspects of the Story**

#### *1. The Request of Mary*

What business was it of Mary to alert Jesus to the shortage of wine? This is more properly the concern of the host or hostess not a guest. Is the gospel writer hinting that this was at the marriage of Jesus?

#### *2. The Rebuke to Mary*

Another interesting and difficult-to-explain aspect of the story is the rebuke Jesus gave to his mother:

*“Woman, what have I to do with thee?”*

(John 2:4)

Could it be that the commentator is making Jesus disavow his maternal lineage that is so painstakingly delineated in Chapter 1 of Matthew? Mary is a Jewess whereas he is a Galilean. This sentiment is present in Matthew 12 (46-50).

*“... who is my mother? And who are my brethren?  
And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren?  
For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister  
and mother.”*

(Matt 12:48-50)

### 3. *The Significance of New and Old Wine*

It is interesting to note that when Jesus converted the water into wine He made it into the most matured variety.

*“the governor of the feast called the bridegroom, And saith unto him, Every man at the beginning  
doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast  
kept the good wine until now.”*

(John 2:9-10)

This aspect of the story must have the most significance since it is the essence of the miracle. Was the gospel writer obliquely contrasting the life-style of Jesus with that of John the Baptist?

*“For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine; and ye say He hath a devil.  
The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man and a  
winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners!”*

(Luke 7:33-34)

We may suspect that the author is supplying an answer to settle an issue among the followers of Jesus.

Perhaps the author is giving his interpretation of the saying of Jesus found in Mk 2:22 (also Mk 9:17).

*“And no man putteth new wine into old bottles...  
but new wine must be put into new bottles.”*

Luke's elaboration of the Markan account goes on to say

*“But new wine must be put into new bottles; and both are preserved.  
No man also having drunk old wine straightaway desireth new: for he saith the old is better.”*

(Lk 5:38-39)

John's gospel is contrasting the Christian movement with the Judean. He is really saying Christianity can no longer be regarded as a sect of Judaism. Christianity (although new) is really a more mature religion.

#### 4. *The Quantity of Wine*

To have converted water into wine is a miracle in itself and to have converted it into a more mature variety is an additional bonus but to provide so much wine is surely making the miracle more extraordinary!

*“And there was set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece... And they filled them to the brim.”*

(John 2: 6 and 7)

It has been estimated that such a quantity would be equivalent to 100 gallons in the old imperial measure. There must have been wine enough and to spare.

#### **A Parallel Story from Greek Mythology**

The Old Testament provides a story which to some extent parallels the miracle of Cana. It is the story of Elijah's dealings with the widow of Zarephath. In this instance through Elijah's intercession her poverty was miraculously beaten

*“And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail.”*

(1 King 17:16)

However, there is a closer parallel to the story found in Greek/Roman mythology, which concerns wine rather than meal and oil.

The story of Baucis and Philemon was re-told by the Latin poet Ovid who wrote during the reign of Augustus.<sup>25</sup> He recounts the tale of Zeus and Hermes being entertained unawares by the elderly couple, Baucis and Philemon. Out of their poverty they gave generously to Zeus and Hermes but could only provide diluted wine, very like vinegar, for drinks. With their kindness the Gods were well pleased and to their amazement Baucis and Philemon discovered that no matter how many cups were poured from the bowl the level of wine stayed up to the brim.

#### **Jesus a Type of Augustus<sup>26</sup>**

This Greek tale is referred to not because it is necessarily the basis of the miracle of converting water into wine but because it provides some evidence of a 'point of contact' with the hellenised mind. It needs to be kept in mind that during the time of Jesus' mission Gaius Octavius was the Roman ruler. His mythologised life provided the gospel writers with a rich field of mythological allusions. After Caesar's deification in 44BC Octavius was *divi filius*, son of a divine one. He was elevated to Augustus or one who stands between god and man. One month after his death in 14 A.D. he was deified not by adoption or ancestry but in his own right. This religio-political context provides a rich tapestry upon which to weave the deeds of someone who is being promoted as a spiritual ruler. It ought not to be wondered at if a passing reference to a visitation by Zeus (Jupiter) and Hermes (Mercury) forms a thread in this mythological tapestry.

## **The Miracle as a Cryptogram**

The account of this miracle and its positioning at the very beginning of the ministry of Jesus cannot have been accidental even though it is not historical. The author or authors must have had some serious purposes in mind when they devised and positioned it in the gospel. In order to discern these purposes it is first necessary to abandon its literal miraculousness and examine it as a clever cryptogram. If it is understood literally it demeans its central character by having him perform a cheap act of conjuring. However, if it decoded as a cryptogram its significance becomes transparent and its primacy assumes great importance.

The following keys must be applied in order to decode this cryptogram:

### *1. Christianity Not a Jewish Sect*

The writing of this story is actually a stinging rebuttal to Petrine theology which was based on developing Christianity as a sect of Jewry. Peter had remained faithful to the original mission of Jesus. This is implied in Peter's espousal of circumcision and his statement to Cornelius:

*"Ye know that it is unlawful for a man that it is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation."*

Acts 10:28

In the account of this first miracle of Jesus the gospel writer locates the event openly and unapologetically in Cana of Galilee. There is no suggestion that Galileans are unclean or that being a Galilean is a disqualification for high spiritual office. Similarly the conversation that Jesus had with the woman of Samaria is advanced to correct the 'false impression' that had come from Mark's account of the dealings Jesus had with the Syro-phonician woman and with the 'false' views of the woman of Samaria. This woman was labouring under the mistaken view that "salvation is of the Jews" (Jn 4:22) and that "the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans" (Jn 4:9).

Thus the Gospel of John wants to make it quite clear that from the beginning of his ministry Jesus had none of the ethnocentric limitations attributed to him by the synoptists. The new religion condemns racial prejudices.

### *2. Spiritual Lineage Greater than Biological Lineage*

The second key is one which reinforces the first. It is one of the most revolutionary pronouncements ever made. It is that while race has no place in the new order neither does consanguinity. Spiritual lineage is greater than biological lineage. Unfortunately this profound truth is expressed very offensively in the text in the rebuke Jesus gives to his mother.

*"Woman, what have I to do with thee?"*

(Jn 2:4)

This new message is the proclamation that God no longer dwells in a temple made with hands but is above all a God who

*“hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth.”*  
(Act 17:26).

### 3. *Christianity Does Not Prohibit Wine Consumption*

The third key is the distinction made between the asceticism of John the Baptist (and his followers) and the liberality of the new order.

*“John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine..”*  
(Lk 7:33)

One may suppose that John the Baptist was a total abstainer or that he drank only new wine. In this vignette we have the wedding guests being served matured wine as a result of the ‘miracle’. The governor of the feast at the wedding is ascribed the following words:

*“Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk then that which is worse: but thou has kept the good wine until now.”*  
(Jn 2:10)

In the Mediterranean world of the Greeks and Romans a great deal of wine must have been consumed in the course of day-to-day living. In such a social context a prohibition on drinking wine would have been a proselyting impediment. The story of the wedding feast at Cana makes the position of the new religion quite clear on its attitude to the consumption of wine.

### 4. *Prefiguration of Eucharist*

The fourth key to the hidden message of this vignette is its prefiguration of the eucharist. When the guests drank the wine they were symbolically drinking the blood of the Christ who was in their presence. This thought is expressed more explicitly in the sixth chapter of John’s gospel in the statement attributed to Jesus:

*“Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood ye have no life in you.”*  
(Jn 6:53)

The vital clue for this interpretation is given in the production of excess wine for those present at the wedding. This wine is available to all future converts who will later attend the great marriage feast in heaven.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The story of the marriage at Cana in Galilee and the miracle of converting water into wine does not refer to an actual event. It is a teaching device or module used by the author to convey some important truths. These truths are very profound and were revolutionary in their time, as indeed, they are today. Although Jesus did not hold these views himself they

have been attributed to him by the organisation which evolved from his teachings. In a nutshell, the truths are that the Christian religion is non-racist and that the spiritual brotherhood of man takes precedence over family blood-ties.

### **Appendix: What the Author Really Wanted to Say**

Look, I have been surprised in my travels to learn that several issues have not been properly resolved in the minds of the faithful. I want to make the following points absolutely clear.

1. Christianity is not a Jewish sect even if it started out that way. This fact should be known by all because, as we all know, Jesus and 11 of the 12 Apostles were Galileans. Peter was wrong in requiring circumcision and having no dealings with Samaritans. Why, Jesus often spoke to Samaritans. Christianity is definitely a non-racist religion.
2. Christianity regards spiritual lineage as greater in value than biological lineage. We are first and foremost spiritual brothers and sisters under the Fatherhood of God, and Jesus is our elder brother.
3. John the Baptist is not our role model. We should feel perfectly free to drink wine with our meals.
4. In the new religion there is room for everyone and enough sacramental wine for everyone to partake of the sacred feast.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **THE TEMPLE CLEANSING IN JERUSALEM OF JUDEA**

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### THE TEMPLE CLEANSING IN JERUSALEM OF JUDEA

#### Establishing Jewish Antagonism Towards Jesus From The Outset

While the first miracle is recounted as having been performed in Cana of GALILEE, this story is immediately followed by the Temple Cleansing story which takes place in Jerusalem in JUDEA. I have already alluded to the fact that the synoptists place this story at the end of the Ministry of Jesus and not at the beginning. This misplacement chronologically is, I believe, intentional even if it is deceitful historically. The author or editors of the fourth gospel took pains to demonstrate that the new and modified version of Jesus' ministry sprang from outside Jewish traditions and, furthermore, from its inception it incurred the wrath of the Jewish establishment. Whereas the synoptists have Jesus preaching in the synagogues "John" does not even mention him visiting one. From the beginning of his ministry "John" has Jesus warring with the Jews. Indeed so worried do they become about Jesus that after the raising of Lazarus the Chief Priests and the Pharisees declare

*"If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and our nation."*

(John 11:48)

The author/editor has thus cleverly attributed a motive for "the establishment" to get rid of Jesus.

#### Galilee – Judea Axis

If one attaches special significance to the primacy of the changing of water into wine at a wedding feast in Cana of Galilee then it seems perfectly reasonable to assume that there is probably some special significance to be attached to the next recorded event in the life of Jesus as recorded in the gospel of John. Following the Galilean miracle Jesus went to Capernaum which is north of Cana (but still in Galilee) but he only stayed a few days. Then the geographical scene changes abruptly to Judea.

*"And the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem."*

(John 2:13)

Then John outlines the Cleansing of the Temple story and the instructional material which accompanies it. This story is placed second in the record of John not because it occurred in that historical order or sequence but because it establishes a spiritual counterweight to Galilee and establishes a Galilee – Judea axis along which the story of the life of Jesus can be told. In the gospel of John the first miracle takes place in Galilee and the last manifestation of the resurrected Jesus takes place at the Sea of Tiberias which is an



alternative Roman name for the Sea of Galilee. Between these two events some of the actions of Jesus occur in Samaria but most of them take place in Jerusalem of Judea.

### **The Cleansing of the Temple as the Second Incident**

The account of the cleansing of the Jerusalem Temple is the second incident in John's gospel of the life of Jesus. Its chronological displacement from the end of Jesus' ministry to the beginning is a strong indicator of its transhistorical character. Its placement as the second important event to be recorded betrays an intentionality of construction that lies beyond its manifest content. After the incident (Jn 2:13-17) there follows some explanatory comment and explication of his "cleansing" actions. This commentary (Jn 2:18-22) is somewhat garbled but is meant to be instructive by providing a key to Jesus' behaviour on this specific occasion AND for the remainder of his ministry. The Temple Cleansing story with its hidden meaning is intended to cast a shadow over all subsequent happenings. Unlike the synoptists, the author of John's gospel is not concerned with the historical sequencing of his material. He is more concerned about its meaning and significance.

### **Examining Some Aspects of the Temple Cleansing Story**

#### *The Judean Setting*

The Temple Cleansing Story is in a Judean and not a Galilean setting and there are a number of unstated but assumed facets to the temple setting that provide essential clues to an understanding of the meaning of the story. It is necessary to have some familiarity with the following background details.

#### *1. The Three Jewish Temples*

Jewish history highlights the construction of three Jerusalem Temples:

- Solomon  
The Temple of Solomon was built in about 970 BC and Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 BC.
- Zerubbabel  
The Temple restoration of Zerubbabel (559-513 BC)
- Herod  
Herod's rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple began in about 26 BC and continued through to 26 AD.

*"Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days?"*

## 2. *The Centrality of Temple Worship Should not be Underestimated in Jewish Religion*

In the course of Jewish history each of the 3 temples listed above were desecrated and destroyed. The third temple built by Herod the Great existed during the life-time of Jesus but was destroyed by the time the Gospel of John was compiled. Alfred Garvie, in his commentary on the Gospel of John, explains that:

*“Devout Jews visited the Temple at the three great feasts as often as possible and Jesus, according to this gospel, made a practice of going up at the feasts.”<sup>27</sup>*

p. 1069 The Abingdon Bible Commentary

Each of the gospel writers attempt to attach great significance to the occasion Jesus visited the temple and attempted to purify it of its commercial abuses. However, this fiscal purification is combined with a challenge to the Jewish onlookers that if they were to destroy “this temple” he would raise it up “in three days”. This claim of Jesus is levelled against him during his later hearing

*“We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands.”*

(Mk 14:58)

However both Mark’s and John’s gospel explain that what he actually said was misrepresented. John explains in his commentary:

*“But he speaks of the temple of his body.”*

(Jn 2:21)

Why, it may be asked, was this clarification so necessary to make? One can only suppose it was necessary to make because it was alluding to an event very central to his mission. Jesus and his followers were intent on destroying the Jewish Temple but in the subsequent recasting of history it is explained that he was only speaking symbolically of his own body. This revised interpretation smacks of too much cleverness and is just as convincing as the gospel writers attempts to portray Peter as a buffoon who never really understood the hidden import of the mission of his master.

## 3. *The Use of Midrash in the Temple Cleansing Story*

There are a number of open and veiled Old Testament texts woven into the few verses of the temple cleansing story.

In the Markan account Jesus is given words from Isaiah 56:7

*“Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer?”*

(Mk 11:17)

and words from Jeremiah 7:11

*“but ye have made it a den of thieves”*

(Mk 11:17)

The Johannine account accords with the sense of the Markan account but the Old Testament citation is not from Isaiah or Jeremiah.

*“And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.”*

(Jn 2:17)

John 2:17 is a reference to Psalm 69:9. Both the Markan and Johannine citations use the word “house” when writing about the temple.

### **Veiled Reference to Jesus as a Type of Zerubbabel**

While Zerubbabel is not specifically mentioned in John’s gospel it is difficult to ignore the parallelism of his life and that of Jesus.

Zerubbabel was regarded by the Jewish people as the long awaited Messiah. This was on account of his lineage as a Prince of the House of David and because he cleansed and rebuilt the temple of Jerusalem. Jesus, likewise, is entitled to be regarded as a Messiah because, he too, cleansed the Jerusalem temple and declared that he would restore it within three days if it were destroyed. The author of John’s gospel takes care to explain that the temple that Jesus was referring was not the Jerusalem temple but that of his own body.

These open and veiled references to Old Testament referants seem to be so contrived that they raise doubts about the historical literalness of a temple cleansing at all. The account appears to be more literary than literal, especially when we recognise that it is displaced chronologically in the life story of Jesus.

The Midrashic technique of transcending linear time by making the past and the present contemporaneous allows the gospel writer to make another veiled reference to the destruction of Herod’s temple in 70 AD. While this destruction did not take place in the lifetime of Jesus it did take place during the lifetime of the author of the gospel. The destruction of the temple in 70AD was so complete that only one wall was left standing. This significant event is not alluded to by Jesus in John’s gospel in a direct manner but to propose that if it were destroyed is drawing on an example that would hardly be entertained as a possibility during the time of his ministry. In attributing Jesus with the foreknowledge of the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple is either true to his words or it is a literary device used to enhance his supernatural powers.

### **The Rending of the Temple Veil**

Again the midrashic technique of interpreting events allows for associated gospel references to be assumed in relation to what John recorded. Midrash is an inclusive method of interpretation and sometimes one gospel writer amplifies, or modifies slightly, an event recorded in another gospel. It may be assumed that John was familiar with the

other gospel writers references to the temple and that he was aware of what the synoptists recorded at the death of Jesus:

*“Jesus, when he had cried with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.”*

(Mk 27:50-51)

### **The Mystery of the Veil<sup>28</sup>**

This reference to the rending of the temple veil is not mentioned by John who only refers to his future death and resurrection after three days. However, because of the synoptists mention of the veil being destroyed, it cannot be ignored in the treatment of the incident recorded by John. What then does rending the veil of the temple signify?

#### *Separation of Holy of Holies from the Holy Place*

The veil of the temple firstly signified the separation of the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. None but the high priest could pass beyond the veil and he only on the Day of Atonement.

#### *Day of Atonement and Blood Sacrifices*

The most sacred space contained the Ark of the testimony and on this rested the mercy seat. On the Day of Atonement a blood offering was made. The divine presence was firstly obscured by incense after which the mercy seat was sprinkled with the blood of a bullock.

#### *Zoning of Temple Precincts*

The temple area was zoned into degrees of sacredness and these zones corresponded to the degrees of purity required of those permitted to enter a particular zone. In this spiritual classification gentiles had no status at all. Gentiles were well below bastards, foundlings, eunuchs and those born with deformed sexual features.

#### *“From the Top to the Bottom”*

In the rending of the veil at the death of Jesus the synoptists aver that the process took place “from the top to the bottom” and not the other way. It was a supernatural act.

### **Open Accessibility to the Divine**

Thus it can be understood that in a profoundly symbolic way the rending of the temple veil was in itself the destruction of the temple. The death of Jesus ushered in a new era where the legalistic codes of purity and accessibility to the divine were abolished. At the time of the death of Jesus gentiles now had as much right of accessibility as the ritually cleansed high priest.

## **From History to Mystery**

The fact that the Temple Cleansing story is displaced chronologically by the writer of John's gospel gives a clue that he is not greatly concerned with history. Indeed Jesus is asked for a "sign" – something that he refuses to give on most occasions. Jesus is credited with giving a "sign":

*"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."*

(Jn 2:19)

The Jewish critics are said to have literalised his reply and the commentator then makes the point:

*"But he spoke of the temple of his body."*

(Jn 2:21)

### *The Temple of His Body*

The Cleansing of the Temple story is in the final analysis only an excuse for alluding to the esoteric truth that the real temple is man himself who must destroy his baser nature before he can enter into the spiritual Kingdom of God.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **THE WOMAN OF SAMARIA**

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### THE WOMAN OF SAMARIA

#### The Third “First”

In the overall structuring of the Gospel of John the Story of the Woman of Samaria assumes a special place although this is not immediately obvious. Whether this was due to the original author’s intention or whether it was done at a later date by the editors is beside the point. The Wedding at Cana is given primacy following the prologue and the Cleansing of the Temple is told next even though it is chronologically displaced. These two stories are very strategically placed even though they are not historically accurate. The story of Nicodemus and some references to John’s and Jesus’ baptising then follow. These events are also purposely positioned in the gospel structure. After these references Jesus moves out of Judea and is on his way to Galilee through Sychar of Samaria. The stage is set for his encounter with the Woman of Samaria. This encounter is not third on the list of important events but its early appearance gives it some status and implied significance. The first miracle occurred in Cana of Galilee, the Temple Cleansing and the other two events take place respectively in Judea and his conversation with the woman is located in Samaria. The three stories thus have different geographical and ethnographical settings. The arrangement of these “firsts” can hardly be without some significance. Galilee, Judea and Samaria are selected as three locations for three different but important pronouncements.

#### *Location*

The conversation Jesus has with the Woman of Samaria takes place at Jacob’s Well in Sychar

*“near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave his son Joseph”*

(Jn 4:6)

The exact location is pregnant with symbolism and the site of the destroyed temple of the Samaritans on Mount Gerizim is not far distant.

#### **Levels of Interpretation**

There are at least three levels of interpretation of this gospel story viz the substantive or historical level, the symbolic or coded level and the editorial or intentional level.

#### *The Substantive or Historical Level*

On this level the story is taken on face value as a true story and a literal account of what actually happened. The invitation to adopt this approach is enhanced by the attention

given to the details of place and time. There is a “Sychar” and it does have “Jacob’s Well” and nearby there is a “sacred mountain” (Gerizim). The time is given as “the sixth hour” and the visit extends over “two days”. However, doubts about the factualness of the story begin to arise when the consequences of one given detail are examined closely. This detail concerns the inference that there were no eyewitnesses or eavesdroppers to record the conversation. The conversation is recorded in great detail and provides the opportunity for Jesus to proffer didactic material about “living water”, “non-locational” sacred places and of “meat to eat that ye know not of”.

Only after absorbing the surface details does the reader notice that the conversation has no witnesses.

*“(For his disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat)”*

(Jn 4:8)

This piece of information provides a gratuitous clue that the story is not to be taken as factual. Indeed Jesus is quoted as being more concerned with “living water springing up into eternal life”. The Woman of Samaria identifies Jesus as a Prophet after which Jesus openly declares that he is the Messiah. This open declaration he studiously avoids giving in the synoptic gospels. After the disciples return with the meat he rejects their offer and says

*“My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.”*

(Jn 4:34)

We are told that many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him because of what the woman said and many more believed because of his own words.

*“For we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.”*

(Jn 4:42)

### *The Symbolic or Coded Level*

Although the setting and the time-frame are plausible the actual content of the words of Jesus are meant to be understood at the figurative or symbolic level. The scene is at Jacob’s Well and one suspects this is a veiled reference to the day when

*“Israel then shall dwell in safety alone: the fountain of Jacob shall be upon a land of corn and wine; also his heavens shall drop down dew.”*

(Deut: 33:28)

Again, the reference of Jesus to “living water” could hardly have been accidental. It is a phrase which occurs in the Song of Solomon (4:15), Jeremiah (2:13 and 17:13) and in Zechariah (14:8).

*“And it shall be in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem; half of them towards the former sea and half of them toward the hinder sea.”*

(Zech 14:8)



One wonders whether the two seas have been interpreted as applying to the Dead Sea (former) and the Sea of Galilee (hinder). Samaria is certainly situated midway between these two seas.

Alfred E. Garvie's commentary<sup>29</sup> refers to a view that the "five husbands" referred to by Jesus is a coded reference to the five gods worshipped by the Samaritans (see 2 Kings 17:30-34). This interpretation would imply that the Woman of Samaria was a type or a symbol for the whole Samaritan people.

There is a lot of assumed background to this story and important aspects are not apparent to a twentieth century mind, especially a non-Jewish or non-Samaritan mind. For example, the statement of Jesus

*"Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father."*

(Jn 4:21)

carried a lot of information. It is actually referring to the non-relevance of two temples to future worship. The Samaritan temple was "in this mountain" and the Jerusalem temple is to be inferred when the words "nor yet at Jerusalem" are used. This would have been understood by an early reader of this story. In essence, the message Jesus is made to proclaim is the rather revolutionary proposition that shortly ("the hour cometh") when worship of the Father is non-localisable.

#### *The Editorial or Intentional Level*

At this level of interpretation the researcher is required to ask himself:

- What question or questions is this story providing an answer to?
- Was the writer of this Samaritan episode aware of the earlier synoptic accounts of Jesus where he commanded his disciples  
*"Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not."*  
(Mk 10:5)
- Did the writer have an undeclared motive in arranging his material to sequence, the first miracle in Galilee, the second story of the temple cleansing in Judea and then immediately move the location to Samaria? This question needs to be asked because the synoptic gospels make no mention at all of the wedding at Cana and the synoptic gospels have the second story occurring at the end of Jesus' ministry and not at the beginning.
- Since the seemingly simple account of the conversation Jesus had with the Woman of Samaria is actually so full of artifice, it must be asked why did the author of John's gospel go to such lengths to disguise his real intention in writing it and sequencing it where he did?

- Who wrote and arranged the material of these three stories and what were the motives?

### **Questions Being Answered by the Story**

The recording of this story dispels in one powerful stroke that the new teaching is not the same as that of the Jews who had “no dealings with the Samaritans”. It also reinforces the revolutionary message implicit in the “first” miracle story of the wedding at Cana in Galilee viz that spiritual lineage has a higher claim than blood lineage. This story also reinforces the message of the Cleansing of the Temple story. Worship in the new religion is not localisable and is not bound to either a temple in Jerusalem or one in Samaria. Fourthly, the story also intends to dispel any notion that there was ever any messianic secret. Finally, if a simple woman of Samaria could recognise Jesus as the Messiah then everyone else could too!

*Was the Writer Aware of the Command of Jesus That His Disciples Were Not to Enter any City of Samaria?*

It is difficult to imagine that the writer of John’s gospel would not know of this early prohibition. This is especially so when he writes in a manner that claims to be privy to the undisclosed thoughts of Jesus. The author of the story was obviously immersed in the background of Jewish literature and must have known about the rival claims of the two peoples to their respective temples. Whether he had read Matthew’s account of the command of Jesus cannot be known with certainty. If he was one of the twelve he would have known for sure. The essential point of the inclusion of this story in the gospel is to establish beyond doubt that henceforth the distinction between Jew and Samaritan would no longer apply. The story of Jesus conversing with the woman of Samaria represented such a turn-about attitude to that of the synoptic Jesus that the author wanted to give it high priority by telling it early in his account.

*Did the Author of John’s Gospel Have an Undeclared Motive in Sequencing Galilee, Judea and Samaria so Early in the Gospel?*

The answer is almost certainly “yes”. The Changing of Water into Wine at Cana in Galilee is given primacy as the first miracle mentioned by John but is not even given a mention by the earlier gospel writers. The Cleansing of the Temple story is second and this is out of chronological sequence according to the synoptic gospels. This is in Jerusalem of Judea and is another “first” – but in another region. Jesus then moves into Samaria and his conversation with the Woman of Samaria constitutes another geographical “first”. This particular ordering of material strikes the perceptive reader as intentional rather than accidental – the more so when it is also an event not recorded by the synoptists. Thus the divisions and animosity which once existed between Galilee, Judea and Samaria are declared to have no place in the new order. Ethnographic divisions had to give way in the same manner as biological divisions had to give way as a result of the Wedding Feast of Cana in Galilee.

### *Why Did the Author Go to Such Lengths to Disguise His Real Intent?*

The style of the Gospel of John may be labelled trans-historical as distinct from the historical styles of the synoptists. It purports to be history with attention given to time and place but the stories are largely didactic in intent. The so-called “historical” details are sometimes at variance with the synoptic accounts. It is not so much that the historical details are false it is that the message they contain is not dependent on historical accuracy.

The stories of this gospel have a deceptive simplicity. The messages of the three stories in this article are quite profound but they are none-the-less hidden messages. The stories are like cryptograms with their intended meaning hidden beneath one or two layers of superficial detail. It is not clear why the author should have adopted this style. Barbara Thiering makes much of the early Christian community’s love of “verbal puzzles, double meanings and plays on words.”<sup>30</sup> Whether her thoroughgoing pesher has validity remains to be seen but the stories in John’s gospel go to very sophisticated lengths to conceal their messages.

After the destruction of Jerusalem the dispersed remnants of the original restoration movements spiritualised the early message, postponed the day of the restoration and fell under the influence of Paul. The Gospel of John incorporates the reformulation of the original message. The new Kingdom is no longer of this world and it is certainly non-threatening to Rome. It was a non-Jewish Church which no longer required circumcision for admission and, with open rights of admission to all races, it became a useful organisation for Roman political purposes.

It is no easy task to understand why the Gospel of John was written the way it was. Perhaps it belongs to a genre that allowed for levels of interpretation. Whatever the reason, it gave no offence to Rome and declared, by inference only, that the emerging church had forever departed from the more militant and ethnocentric Jesus of the synoptic gospels. The editorial hands that penned the final copy of the Gospel According to St John subscribed to an entirely different agenda to that which motivated the editors of the synoptic gospels.

**CHAPTER 8**  
**SUMMARY OF INVESTIGATION**

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### **SUMMARY OF INVESTIGATION**

#### **I**

##### **The Two Portraits of Jesus**

There are many perplexing difficulties arising out of an investigation even on this small scale. One thing is clear viz that the Jesus of the so-called Gospel of John bears little resemblance to the Jesus of the synoptic gospels. It is also clear that the synoptists borrowed heavily from each other and that their original portrait of an ethnocentric insurrectionist has been toned down by later editorial emendations.

##### **The Portrait from the Gospel of John**

The Gospel of John heralds an entirely different message to the synoptists. Its presentation of the message of Jesus is a complete about-face. It proclaims a non-ethnocentric Jesus from the beginning of his ministry and one who is not ashamed of his Galilean origins. There is no messianic secret to be discovered. His messiahship was evident from the time of his baptism! This new Jesus has been so transformed that one could never imagine him forbidding his disciples to preach in Samaria or speaking so condescendingly to the Syro-phonician woman. One could not imagine this Jesus ordering his disciples to buy a sword or having a zealot as one of his inner circle. This Jesus could never have admitted Peter to be one of his trusted aides because Peter kept preaching that “it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation”. (Acts 10:28).

##### **The Effects of Redacting**

There are several disquieting aspects to New Testament studies and most of these have to do with the processes of redacting and presenting material in a favourable light. There are no bad Romans only bad Jews. There is no mention of the Essenes and only a parting reference to the Zealots. There is no detail of the boyhood years of Jesus and no explanation of why Paul spent three years in Arabia after undergoing the most spectacular conversion on Christian record. The gospels are replete with false attribution and misapplied Old Testament texts. The eschatological Jesus is replaced by a spiritualised Jesus. The authentic Jesus has been transformed into a cosmic Christ and more closely resembles a Caesar Augustus than a Galilean Judas. The Gospel of John presents a sanitised portrait which owes as much to the civil authorities of Rome as it does to his closest followers.

## II

### A Conjectural Sketch of the Early Church

The following brief outline is a conjectural sketch of the main events which ultimately lead to the development of the Romanised Catholic Church.

#### *The Original Followers of Jesus*

The original followers of Jesus were fundamentalist puritans intent on the restoration of the rightful temple priesthood and the ousting of the Herodian quislings. They believed Jesus to be another Zerubbabel Messiah with a rightful claim to the Davidic succession. These followers were intent on the restoration of proper temple practice and were ultra-orthodox Jews. They were not Christians and there was no Christian Church. They were zealots and insurrectionists who regarded gentiles as unclean. They did not even speak to Samaritans or Syro-phonicians and they only sought recruits among the scattered remnants from the House of Israel. They sold their possessions and purchased swords. Peter is identified in the Gospel of John as

*“having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest’s servant, and cut off his right ear.”*

(John: 18:19:

This group of followers were an organised band of zealots and Jesus was their leader. Jesus was arrested not because he wanted to overthrow the authority of the Herodian priesthood but on the trumped-up charge that he wanted to destroy the temple itself!

*“We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands.”*

(Mk 14:58)

#### *Post-Crucifixion Followers*

The post-crucifixion followers of Jesus factionalised into two groups – the orthodox zealots or True-Believers led by Peter and James and the Revisionists.

##### (i) *The Orthodox Zealots*

This group of followers remained loyal to the original teachings of Jesus and accommodated themselves to the failure of the insurrectionist mission of Jesus by adopting a policy of deferment. Everything that Jesus preached about was going to happen but it had been temporarily postponed.

##### (ii) *The Revisionists*

The second factional group which emerged after the death of Jesus were those who sought to redefine and spiritualise the teachings of Jesus. They adopted the doctrine of the Comforter and moved much closer to the victorious Herodian priesthood. They began the process of re-defining the life and teachings of Jesus in a manner which was not offensive to Rome. Whereas Apollo championed the

traditional teaching, it was Paul who assumed control of the revisionists. The revisionists admitted gentiles into the New Covenant.

### *Paul and Christianity*

It may be said that Paul, not Jesus, inaugurated Christianity as it came to be known. Paul is certainly a powerful figure on the stage of religious practice in the hellenised world. He is also an enigmatic figure. A Jew by birth and a Roman “free born” Paul underwent one of Christianity’s most dramatic conversions. Following his conversion he spent three years in Arabia (see Galatians 1:18) which is somewhat mystifying in view of the nature of his conversion. Why go to Arabia? A Pharisee of the Pharisees he believed in the resurrection “of the just and the unjust” (Acts 24:15) and developed a brand of Christian mysticism that rivalled Mithraism and Ophism and eventually replaced them.

### *The Destruction of the Temple*

The death of Jesus constituted a decisive turning point in the life of the primitive church that split the followers of Jesus into two separate camps viz the true-believers and the revisionists. Both groups had begun to collect material for the scriptures of the New Covenant and compiled lists of Old Testament texts that substantiated their claims to be the New Israel. With the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple both groups sought to incorporate this event into their written accounts of the teachings of Jesus. In other words they began to retrospectively re-interpret the teachings of Jesus so that this decisive event became the sign of the end of the old order and the beginning of the new order.

### *The Gospel of John*

New Testament scholars regard the Gospel of John as a work which is more devotional literature than historical. This is correct as far as it goes but it is not saying enough about its more essential character as a new doctrinal charter for a completely different organisation than the one to which Peter belonged in Jerusalem.

Jesus did not found a Church at all. He and his band of followers belonged to a sect within Jewry which believed they were living in the death throes of a dying age and that the time was imminent for the restoration of the throne of David and the overthrow of Roman suzerainty. Along with the restoration of the throne of David there was a plot to assassinate the Herodian High Priest appointee and restore the rightful Zadokite or Melchizedek Priesthood. These restoration movements ended in failure. The Roman authorities crucified Jesus and in 70AD Titus destroyed the Jerusalem temple and routed the Essenes and Zealots. The synoptic gospels were formulated at about this period. The gospel of John was compiled some thirty years after the destruction of Jerusalem. Between these two periods the teachings of the Church underwent great changes.

The Gospel of John represents a fresh start for the revisionist faction. Whereas the gospel of Matthew and Luke were attempts to compile a new Genesis for the True-believers, the Gospel of John is an attempt to write a new book of Genesis for the Revisionists. While it

moves away from the earlier historical basis of Christian origins into the realms of theology it nevertheless assumes a familiarity with a great deal of background history.

### III

#### **The Hidden Message of the Three Stories at the Beginning of the Gospel of John**

The Prologue of the Gospel of John seeks to establish its New Covenant credentials by updating the creation story of Genesis. It then wastes little time in moving into the three instructional stories of the new religion.

1. *The Changing of Water into Wine at the Wedding of Cana in Galilee*

This fictionalised story seeks to establish from the outset that the Old Israel has lost its potency and that the New Israel contains the true spirit of religion. This new religion is not ethnocentrically based on Israel nor does biological lineage take precedence over spiritual lineage.

2. *The Cleansing of the Temple*

The hidden message of this story is to attest that the prime aim of Jesus in ousting the illegitimacy of the Herodian priesthood was fully accomplished. The New Israel had broken down the barriers between God and Priest and now proclaimed a new Priesthood after the Order of Melchizedek. In this new order Jesus is

*“Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec.”*

(Heb 5:10)

In accomplishing this mission the church had been willingly assisted by the Roman authorities who sought a replacement for their decadent Mithraism.

3. *Conversation With the Woman of Samaria*

The hidden message of this story is that the New Israel is finally a Universal, non-racist religion in which despised people such as Samaritans have as much right of entry as everyone else.

The fact that the historical Jesus had held few of these beliefs does not bother the author of John's Gospel. He is more concerned with the theology of Christ than the history of Jesus. It is little wonder that once the primitive church followed this path that the church would eventually embrace such doctrines as the Trinity, Transubstantiation, Immaculate Conception and Bodily Assumption.



## NOTES

### Chapter 1. The Problem of the Two Portraits of Jesus

1. See p. 10-11 of Robert Funk and Roy Hoover's *The Five Gospels* for a discussion of this topic.
2. See p. 256 of Rudolf Bultmann's *Essays Philosophical and Theological* 1955, S.E.M. Press.
3. See p. 271-291, B.H. Streeter's *The Four Gospels A Study in Origins* Ch X, The Reconstruction of Q.

### Chapter 2. The Findings of New Testament Studies

4. This summary statement is outlined in Funk and Hoover's *The Five Gospels*, pps 2-5 of the Introduction.
5. See *New Testament Interpretation. Essays in Principles and Methods* for a scholarly introduction to the different forms of Biblical Criticism.
6. See Funk and Hoover's *The Five Gospels*, especially p. 16.
7. See Chapter XV of Streeter's *The Four Gospels* – The Problem of Authorship, pp. 427-461, for a thorough introduction to this topic.
8. See *The Book that Jesus Wrote* by Barbara Thiering for her rather novel account of the authorship of John's Gospel.

### Chapter 3. Scriptural Forensics

9. See *Jesus of the Apocalypse* by Barbara Thiering (p. 16).

### Chapter 4. Three Regions of Palestine

10. See *The Land of Palestine* by Prof. Edwin E. Voigt in The Abingdon Bible Commentary, pps. 52-59.
11. See *Honest to Jesus*, p. 164.
12. See *History of the Hebrew and Jewish People* by Prof. Theodore H. Robinson in The Abingdon Bible Commentary, pps. 60-72.
13. See *The Old Testament in the Light of Archaeology* by Prof. Christopher R. North in The Abingdon Bible Commentary, pps. 114-121 and especially p. 118.

14. See *Prophecy and Fulfilment* by Rudolf Bultmann (an essay) especially p. 187 of *Essays Philosophical and Theological* (2).
15. See *The Literature of the Inter-Testamental Period* by Prof. Leslie E. Fuller pps. 187-194 in *The Abingdon Bible Commentary*.
16. See *A Critical History of the Doctrine of a Future Life in Israel, in Judaism, and in Christianity* or *Hebrew, Jewish and Christian Eschatology from Pre-prophetic Times to the Close of the New Testament Canon*, by R.H. Charles especially Ch. 5, *The Eschatology of Apocryphal and Apocalyptic Literature During the Second Century BC*, pps. 167-246.
17. For a treatment of the history of this period, refer to footnote 12.
18. For a treatment of the history of this period refer to footnote 12.
19. See *Israel's Messianic Hope* by Prof. J.E. McFadyen in *The Abingdon Bible Commentary* pps. 117-186 especially pages 184 and 185.
20. For a treatment of the history of this period refer to footnote 12, especially p. 71.
21. See *The Hidden Scrolls* by Neil Asher Silberman, esp. pps. 59-60.
22. See *Jesus of the Apocalypse* by Barbara Thiering especially Chapter 1, From Herod to Ephesus.
23. Refer to footnote 10.
24. See *Jesus the Heretic* by Douglas Lockhart, p. 112.

### **Chapter 5. The Wedding at Cana in Galilee**

25. This story is recounted in *Mythology* by Edith Hamilton, p. 111.
26. For a discussion of the religious elevation of Augustus see *Jesus A Revolutionary Biography* by John Dominic Crossin, Chapter 1. A Tale of Two Gods (pps. 1-28).

### **Chapter 6. The Temple Cleansing in Jerusalem**

27. See *John*, a commentary by Alfred E. Garvie in *The Abingdon Bible Commentary* p. 1069.
28. For a discussion of details concerning zoning and sacred spaces and purity codes relating to temple worship see *Honest to Jesus* by Robert W. Funk, Chapter 11, pps. 200-206.

## **Chapter 7. The Woman of Samaria**

29. See *John*, a commentary by Alfred E. Garvie in the Abingdon Bible Commentary, p. 1071.
30. See *The Book that Jesus Wrote* by Barbara Thiering, p. 3

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## ***PART II*** ***THREE STORIES***

### **CHAPTER 5 – THE WEDDING AT CANA IN GALILEE**

**Transhistorical Approach**

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## **CHAPTER 7 – THE WOMAN OF SAMARIA**

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### **Levels of Interpretation**

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### **Questions Being Answered by The Story**

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 Did the Author of John’s Gospel Have an Undeclared Motive in Sequencing Galilee, Judea and Samaria so Early in the Gospel?  
 Why Did the Author Go to Such Lengths to Disguise his Real Intent?

## **CHAPTER 8 – SUMMARY OF INVESTIGATION**

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## III

### **The Hidden Message of the Three Stories at the Beginning of the Gospel of John**

1. The Changing of Water into Wine at the Wedding of Cana in Galilee
2. The Cleansing of the Temple
3. Conversation with the Woman of Samaria.

### **NOTES**

### **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

## INTRODUCTION

### The Task

The intent of this enquiry is to elucidate the meaning and message hidden in the account of the first miracle performed by Jesus as recorded in the Gospel According to St John. This miracle concerns the changing of water into wine at a wedding in Cana of Galilee (Jn 2:1-11).

The enquiry is also concerned with establishing a relationship between this first miracle and the subsequent cleansing of the temple story and the conversation Jesus had with the woman of Samaria.

These three stories occur early in the Gospel of John and their settings are in Galilee, Judea and Samaria. The first and third of these stories are not mentioned by the synoptists while the second story, the Temple Cleansing, is displaced by John to the beginning of the ministry of Jesus.

It is evident that the three stories are more literary than literal and that their purposes for inclusion require a literary as well as an historical method of investigation. Consequently the first section of this enquiry is given to the task of laying bare the methodological approach to the task.

The methodological approach begins with a brief summary of the Seven Pillars of New Testament Studies. It then plays homage to the lower and higher forms of biblical criticism and highlights the processes of redactive criticism as being the most appropriate for this study.

The investigator of the Gospel of St John has to proceed as a detective in search of clues. This process has been labelled “scriptural forensics”, and while the rules of evidence must always be borne in mind, the investigator must be prepared to entertain some circumstantial evidence in following leads.

The geographical, historical and ethnographical backdrop of Palestine provides important details to an understanding of the locations in which these stories are set. Galilee, Judea and Samaria have been chosen with intent by the author of John’s gospel. An examination of this background is a necessary pre-requisite to discover the meaning hidden beneath the surface content of the three stories.

This enquiry is only a beginning to the study of the Gospel According to St John. A further study would give attention to the centrality of the story of the raising of Lazarus but that must be held over to a later date. The student of the Gospel of John has no difficulty in affirming that John does not mean what he says and, more importantly, does not say what he means.

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Ngunnawal**

